



SkillsFuture has provided the infrastructure for lifelong learning, but training cannot truly substitute for the redesign of jobs. Reskilling without job redesign is like renovating a house without addressing its structural foundations, says the writer. ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

Raising retirement age shouldn't mean lowering expectations at work

We need to rethink how jobs are structured and that applies well beyond senior workers.

Christopher Gee

At Tan Tock Seng Hospital, nurses used to have to manually check patients at regular intervals for falls. This put quite a physical and administrative strain on the nurses, particularly senior staff. But the hospital introduced a monitoring system that uses thermal imaging and smart analytics to predict patient falls – freeing up senior enrolled nurses in their late 60s to focus on clinical judgment and patient care.

This is an example of effective job redesign that allows experienced workers to continue to thrive in tasks they are best placed to contribute.

Job redesign is something Senior Minister of State for Manpower Koh Poh Koon touched on when the Government announced on March 3 that the retirement age will rise to 64 and the re-employment age to 69 from July 1.

Dr Koh said Workforce Singapore will work with partners to scale up career guidance for later-stage careers, but noted that employers also have a part to play by having conversations with their workers to plan for job redesign, identify skills needed for future opportunities, and adjust work arrangements.

If re-employment up to 69 only means keeping seniors in the same role but with reduced responsibility, the legislation will have moved the retirement and re-employment age thresholds higher without shifting the underlying reality. That is, are we truly making the most of what such an experienced worker can offer? And recognising that many older workers want to keep upgrading and reskilling, and are capable of it?

Singapore needs to cultivate an approach to employment where job redesign is understood as a continuous organisational responsibility – not as a reactive response to the demographics of

a rapidly ageing workforce, but an ongoing discipline of ensuring that roles are structured to make the most of human capability at every life stage.

LOOKING BEYOND THE TAKE-UP FIGURES

With the latest lift in age for retirement and re-employment, Singapore moves one step closer to the 2030 targets of 65 and 70 that were first announced in 2019. The policy architecture supporting the shift, such as the Senior Employment Credit, the CPF Transition Offset, and the legislative framework requiring re-employment offers of at least one year for eligible workers, is now well-established.

More than nine in 10 seniors who wish to keep working are successfully offered re-employment, and labour force participation rates for those 60 years and above have risen over the last five years to almost 60 per cent. By these measures, then, the system can be said to be working.

But what exactly is working? If the measure of success is the formal offer and take-up of re-employment, the picture is encouraging.

However, there is much less evidence on whether the work that older workers are re-employed to do is genuinely satisfying, skill-building and oriented towards meaningful contribution.

This distinction matters, not just for older workers, but for Singapore's entire workforce at a time when automation and artificial intelligence are reshaping what it means to be productively employed at every stage of a career. After all, one thing all workers have in common is that each one is ageing.

WHY JOB REDESIGN MATTERS FOR OLDER WORKERS

The Retirement and Re-employment Act (RRA) protects eligible seniors from dismissal solely on grounds of age and requires employers to make reasonable re-employment offers. What cannot be legislated, though, is the quality or the nature of their work.

If re-employment in practice

means simply continuing existing responsibilities within the same job, perhaps on a contract basis, or with reduced hours, rather than a fundamental rethinking of what experienced workers in their 60s might be best positioned to contribute, then we are failing to leverage their true value.

This matters because the motivational underpinnings of continued engagement in employment go beyond a senior worker's income security. Re-employment that simply continues existing responsibilities without asking whether the role itself remains the right one may boost the quantity of labour market participation amongst seniors, but does little to improve the quality and sustainability of that employment.

Are firms genuinely redesigning jobs, or are they just extending contracts as a box-ticking exercise? Effective job redesign requires a fundamental re-assessment of what the role entails: an understanding and updating of what the worker does, who with, and how, in the context of the employer's evolving business model.

The reskilling that enables the worker to perform the redesigned role would also need to be part of this assessment. And instead of applying a one-size-fits-all

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