

Redundancy and retraining research

A rapid research project about opportunities to support over 50's made redundant from the manufacturing and automotive industries in the West Midlands

05 May 2021

Shift

Please Note

Some information has been removed from this slide deck due to being sensitive in nature.

This presentation contains unpublished research which is not yet in the public domain.

Therefore please treat this slide deck as a confidential part of the tendering process.

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Project background

The Centre for Ageing Better, commissioned by Barclays, are working on a project which aims to adapt existing employment support services so that 150 over-50s who have been, or are going to be, made redundant from the manufacturing and automotive industries in the West Midlands are able to access fulfilling work.

Project background

As part of this, Shift was commissioned to conduct a rapid research project to identify and prioritise opportunities to give direction to the upcoming 12 month co-design phase.

The intention is that these opportunities are directly informed by an understanding of:

- The experience of over 50s navigating redundancy and existing support provision in the West Midlands. Specifically, what works well and what are the pain points.
- Existing redundancy and retraining support provision for over-50s. Specifically identifying any bright spots and gaps in meeting the support needs of over-50s.

What we did

Methodology

Evidence download

To understand what knowledge and evidence already exists about current service provision and the experience of over 50's.

- We did a rapid evidence review
- We hosted 2x lightning talks

Lightning talk participants

Emily Andrews, Senior Evidence Manager, Ageing Better, 'What are the barriers to accessing and using redundancy services for over 50s?'

Ploy Suthimai, Innovation and Change Officer, Ageing Better, 'What have over 50s experiences of formal and informal support been in Greater Manchester?'

Kim Chaplain, Associate Director for Work, Ageing Better, 'What are the needs and motivations of over 50s who are currently or have recently accessed redundancy training and support? How are these different to other age groups?'

Evidence download

Adam Titchen, Business Development Manager, Invest in the West Midlands, ‘How do you expect the industry to change in 2021, and what will this mean for over 50s workers?’

John Hall, Programme Manager, West Midlands Combined Authority, ‘What are the known gaps in service provision for meeting the needs of over 50s experiencing redundancy?’

Clare Hatton, Head of Skills Delivery, West Midlands Combined Authority, ‘What is the role of retraining in supporting over 50s experiencing redundancy in getting back to fulfilling work?’

Ifor Jones, Head of Partnerships, Pioneer Group, ‘What less-formal types of support might over 50s be using, e.g. informal services or relational networks?’

Luke Ezard, Operations Manager - Employment & Progression, Prospects, ‘What are types of skills and experiences are currently in demand with employers in the West Midlands?’

Sherene Morris, Service Innovation Lead, DWP, ‘What services does Job Centre Plus offer in the West Midlands?’

Corin Crane, Chief Executive, Black Country Chamber of Commerce, ‘What transferable skills do people have working in the manufacturing sector in the West Midlands?’

Provision Mapping

To build a view of service provision that exists in the West Midlands and where the bright spots of support and gaps might exist for supporting the needs of over-50.

- We built a starter-database of provision in the West Midlands including 150+ services
- We interviewed 5 service providers

User research

To understand over-50s experience of redundancy and their awareness, trust and use of support or services mapped out in the service provision database.

- We had 9 x depth conversations with over 50s over the phone
- We wrote up the stories and journeys of all 9 people we spoke to and ran a storytelling workshop

Opportunity definition

To develop and prioritise opportunities to give direction to the 12 month co-design phase.

- We did a collective analysis of evidence, service provision and user research to identify key insights
- We flipped insights into 6 opportunities

What we learned

Insights

Insights

The comfort zone

Insight

The comfort zone

We know that jobseekers aged 50+ from these industries see themselves as 'grafters' and are typically loyal, staying in workplaces 10+ years and doing work they're comfortable and confident with. Redundancy can come as a shock, and a blow to self esteem tied into work. Jobseekers often default to looking for the same or similar work where they can build on their existing experience and skills, and maintain a similar lifestyle.

Having only 10-15 years left in the workforce also means they are resistant or unsure about the ROI of exploring or retraining beyond this comfort zone in which they feel relatively confident - even though this is likely to result in more work options.

Insight

I rely on myself

We have found that jobseekers tend to job hunt independently. There is a mentality of 'relying on myself'. Many are capable of finding jobs quickly themselves, via agencies and Indeed.

Despite this sometimes success, many of these jobseekers haven't had to look for work in years and new online recruitment practices can be a challenge. They often find themselves leaning on informal help from family and friends to navigate them.

They can sometimes apply for lots of jobs and struggle to find a role. They don't know 'what works' for finding work in a new jobs market and can end up feeling frustrated, low on confidence and wanting to know what they're doing wrong. Support with basic CV writing and interview techniques is proven to provide this kind of reassurance, but isn't accessed, often due to self reliance.

Insights

It's not for me

Insight

It's not for me

Although we initially assumed job seekers would access support services, we discovered that they were mostly not aware that any were available to them beyond the job search services like Indeed.

If they had heard of support services, they were generally seen as 'not for me'. This is largely due to support and training currently being targeted towards those with little to no experience, or groups that aren't 50+.

Some jobseekers also fall 'through the gaps' in accessing support due to ineligibility from informal redundancies or not being financial support recipients.

There can be a stigma attached to services like the Job Centre, which are seen as for people who don't work.

Insights

Trusted relationships

ageing-better.org.uk

Insight

Trusted relationships

Where support IS accessed, trust and existing relationships play a huge role. Jobseekers are far more likely to reach out to and engage with local services with local people, those they already know (eg. housing services), those recommended by family and friends and those they have seen directly result in work for themselves or others in the past, such as agencies.

Employers can also play an important role in signposting to support and services early, especially with the Rapid response scheme and executive support built into settlements.

Where jobseekers have received good quality support, they are keen to pass it on and share their knowledge with others, making the most of the trust to spread the word.

Insights

Short termism

Insight

Short termism

For many jobseekers there is a real urgency to get a job quickly, driven either by financial need to pay the bills, or a desire to fill time. This urgency, which isn't fulfilled by existing statutory services, can cause rash choices.

Sometimes relative financial security from redundancy payouts gives jobseekers more time, but they often find themselves waiting until they are running low to take action.

Insights

Taking stock

Insight

Taking stock

Despite this urgency, redundancy for those aged 50+ can also result in grappling with new options and changing needs.

Jobseekers need to consider big changes to their pension pot and longer term plans, changing health, and training options offered to them. It can be overwhelming and difficult to navigate. We know that support to take stock and reflect on their options at this point can result in better quality, better paid work or a rebalance of life priorities, however people often just 'want a plan' asap.

Insights

Social support

Insight

Social support

Relationships are at the core of working lives and job hunting. Daily contact with peers at work is an important part of many 50+ year olds social lives. When redundancy happens people can be left suddenly feeling alone. More often than not contact with former colleagues is lost or, in the case of settlements, they are unable to speak about their experiences.

We know that tapping into social support, either informal or formal, can help both with wellbeing through sharing stories and feeling someone is rooting for you, and with accessing work via personal networks - which is one of the most common sources of new jobs. However jobseekers spoken to often needed help or encouragement to tap into their social networks.

Insights

Coaching works

Insight

Coaching works

The evidence, and the experiences of jobseekers we spoke to tells us that coaching works. It can help identify aspirations and make sense of the 'taking stock' moment. It can also help jobseekers to feel seen and valued after the blow of redundancy.

'Good' coaching is often delivered by a peer in age or experience, that participants can relate to. It's a tailored and ultimately human experience, which centers the individual and their experience; in contrast to many commonly used job search tools and agencies which send seemingly 'random' jobs irrelevant to skill sets and experience.

Insights

What is a coach anyway?

Insight

What is a coach anyway?

Despite work coaches being a commonly offered and sometimes effective service, the quality and efficacy is variable. We've seen local charities and specialist services offering motivating, person-centred coaching and industry specific advice. We've also seen work coaches who focus more on monitoring or diagnostic approaches which can make jobseekers feel like they're on a 'conveyor belt'.

Most jobseekers do not get the type of intensive individual support via their coaches which actually enables them to find high quality work.

Insights

Training isn't a job

Insight

Training isn't a job

These jobseekers are looking for a job, not an education, and see training as a young person's game - sometimes because that is how it's marketed. Training is only viewed as a viable option for jobseekers if it comes with guaranteed work or an interview at the end of it.

Sometimes job seekers are offered free training during the redundancy period, but without help to understand how the courses available could translate into specific jobs, they often don't take advantage of what's available beyond known licenses - missing out on a widening of opportunities and their employability prospects, which they can regret in hindsight.

Insights

The skills gap

Insight

The skills gap

Many manual jobseekers are aware of their existing skills being dated or lacking up to date qualifications, and in particular a big gap in their basic computer/software skills. There is a lack of confidence in their ability to learn fast or enough to be useful, especially related to tech and a sense that they might not be relevant to employers any more. When jobseekers do take computer training, it's often inappropriate for their sector.

At the same time, although they are increasingly employing digitised processes, employers are facing a skills shortage in engineering and high skilled manufacturing as the workforce retires and younger workers don't see the long term value in those skills. There is a resulting skills gap emerging for blended roles, where jobseekers need to update their skills but lack the impetus or the appropriate courses to do it.

Insights

Space for a funding shakeup

Insight

Space for a funding shakeup

Publically funded support and services all stem from similar and shared funding pots, resulting in a lack of competition and less motivation to innovate.

Most publicly funded provision is universal and seems to be designed for the lowest common denominator, so less able to provide appropriate support for experienced over 50s, who already have qualifications and skills to build on.

The focus of funding is in the majority of cases numbers through the door and into jobs, with little incentive to support jobseekers to find fulfilling work, or take time to reflect on their options. Commissioning in WMCA is not currently promoting support which is person centered or tailored to the 50+/industry specific audience.

What we discovered

Opportunities

Design principles and criteria

Based on the research insights and project intentions, we've generated some design principles and criteria to frame the opportunities that have developed.

Principles

All opportunities we consider should:

- Focus on finding fulfilling work
- Build on existing skills and experience
- Avoid substantial drops in pay
- Make services easier to access (People aren't hard to access, orgs are)

Criteria

All opportunities we consider must:

- Target 50-65 year olds made redundant from the manufacturing and automotive industry in the West Midlands over the last 12 months
- Focus on WMCA central conurbation (Birmingham, Black Country, Coventry, Solihull)
- Be delivered by or with partners, influencing best practice
- Have potential for replication across industries and geographies

Emerging user groups*

New job, fast

I want a new job, fast. Ideally the same type of job but I'll do anything really, I'm not fussy. If I have to get a license or do a bit of upskilling on the job, I will.

- Typically manual workers.
- Typical barriers:
 - Potential for a significant drop in pay if it means getting a job, fast
 - Lack of basic computer and software skills preventing them from being eligible for similar jobs
 - Declining physical health can make manual labour harder and riskier
 - Being turned down for jobs because of an urgency to apply without acknowledging some practical steps that could help

*caveat: we only spoke to 9 people
ageing-better.org.uk

Emerging user groups*

Look at my options

I want to step back and look at my options. I had a plan up to retirement and now I want a new plan that builds on my aspirations and life. I've got a lot of experience and transferable skills. I'd train if it was tied to my goal job.

***caveat: we only spoke to 9 people**
ageing-better.org.uk

- Typically managerial staff, higher skilled engineers, office executives.
- Typical barriers:
 - Feeling isolated, with no one to talk to and overwhelmed by options
 - Reduced confidence and self esteem means they need help to recognise the value of their experience and skills
 - Urgency to have a plan can result in rushed decisions and lower quality outcomes: less pay, less fulfilling work, work that doesn't fit into their life holistically
 - But for those with short term security from payouts, there is also potential to delay facing up to finding work, causing people to dip into pension pots or retire early - and ultimately have less money for later life.
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Opportunities

Design around trust

Opportunity 1

Design around trust

We know that formal service provision isn't used by many. Jobseekers either aren't aware or think "it's not for me". We know that there are services that are trusted and used by over-50s'. In our research, this included examples like employment agencies, websites like Indeed and, sometimes, local community organisations. They're known about and trusted - it's where friends and industry colleagues go to get work.

What if we partner with the services that are already trusted and used by over 50s?

Opportunity 1: In practice

Design around trust

How could this work in practice?

An example. Partner with agencies.

The business model of agencies is to fill jobs as fast as possible to get their commission. This means over 50's jobseekers take pay cuts to get a new job asap following redundancy. There's little or no attempt to understand the potential value of jobseekers' skill and match them with jobs closer to their previous wage.

Could we come up with a way for agencies to better understand the value of jobseekers experience and skills so they get paid more? Within the agency business model in mind, a higher wage for jobseekers would mean a higher commission for agencies.

Which user group would this target?

New job, fast / ~~Look at my options~~

Opportunities

Design for self-serve

Opportunity 2

Design for self-serve

We know that post-redundancy, many over 50s job hunt independently or with the help of close family or friends. We also know that people recently made redundant are not always familiar or confident with current-day recruitment practices which can lead to delays in finding work and issues like accepting lower pay.

What if we better support the many over 50s who are confident and comfortable job hunting independently?

Opportunity 2: In practice

Design for self-serve

How could this work in practice?

An example. An online self-serve hub.

Many self-serve resources exist to help over-50s secure work again after redundancy.

Things like CV writing guides and interviewing skills. As well as guidance on things like tapping into your network to identify job opportunities and planning for your pension.

Could we create a tailored online hub for over 50s recently made redundant bringing together and curating the most useful resources? We could build awareness through digital marketing campaigns, advertising on Indeed, agency websites and other trusted and used places.

Which user group would this target?

New job, fast / Look at my options

Opportunities

Design for aspirations

ageing-better.org.uk

Opportunity 3

Design for aspirations

We know that many over-50 jobseekers have aspirations for the next 10-15 years of their career. They have valuable experience and skills to offer and continue building on. We know that redundancy can leave people out of work with a real knock to their confidence. Those who are lucky enough to access effective career coaching as part of their redundancy package have an opportunity to step back, look at options and make a new plan. Those who don't, which is most, can risk rushing into a lower paid job with a sense of urgency or taking an early retirement which leave an unplanned gap in pension contributions.

ageing-better.org.uk

What if every job seeker who wants to step back and look at options for a continued fulfilling career can access effective career coaching?

Opportunity 3: In practice

Design for aspirations

How could this work in practice?

An example. Career coaching.

Career coaching, when done well, can be immensely valuable to jobseekers. It can help to identify aspirations, highlight valuable skills and help make sense of options for long-term, fulfilling and well-paid work. It can also make jobseekers feel seen and valued.

Could we partner with an existing coaching provider to offer high quality coaching to 150 over-50s recently made redundant; to have direct impact and learn what works best for these groups? Or test volunteer-led models that have the prospect of replication?

Which user group would this target?

New job, fast / Look at my options

Opportunities

Design to fill market gaps

Opportunity 4

Design to fill market gaps

We know that with trends like automation, partial-automation and evolving industries, there are both skills shortages and demands for new skills across automotive and manufacturing industries in the WMCA. With some upskilling or retraining, over-50s made redundant could fill these job roles, stick within the category of 'similar work' that they're looking for and, possibly, maintain a similar or better wage. A bit like sector-based work academies.

What if we surface the jobs that, with some upskilling or training, would be perfect for over-50s wanting to build on their previous experience?

Opportunity 4: In practice

Design to fill market gaps

How could this work in practice?

An example. Upskilling on-the-job

Those working in manual jobs recognise a need to upskill in basic computer skills to apply for 'blended jobs' that require a mix of human dexterity and skills to operate computer software. They strongly prefer training that's linked to a specific role and would ideally train on-the-job.

Could we work with employers to set up on-the-job training programmes to upskill jobseekers for 'blended' jobs that come with a guaranteed job or interview at the end?

Which user group would this target?

New job, fast / ~~Look at my options~~

Opportunity 4: In practice

Design to fill market gaps

How could this work in practice?

An example. Training to transition

There's currently a skills shortage in engineering and high skilled manufacturing. People are retiring out of these jobs and because there's only a 10 year life-span remaining in these roles, younger workers aren't filling them.

Could we organise a recruitment drive dedicated to over-50s wanting to transition careers where there are skills shortages, and offer training with a guaranteed job or interview at the end?

Which user group would this target?

New job, fast / Look at my options

Opportunities

Design for one-stop

Opportunity 5

Design for one-stop

We know there is support that exists that can help jobseekers over 50 find work after redundancy. We also know that most jobseekers are not aware of formal services or see it as 'not for me'. That's largely because support is packaged up and targeted towards young people, those 'disadvantaged' or those with little to no experience or skills.

What if we joined up and rebranded existing support and services so that over-50 made redundant know about it and see it designed as for them?

Opportunity 5: In practice

Design for one-stop

How could this work in practice?

An example. Place-based hubs.

Jobseekers are more likely to be aware of, trust and use services if they're physically local or run by local people.

Could we create single, local entry points to services and support which already exist, that are entirely branded and targeted towards over-50s who have been recently made redundant? It could be as simple as one local person who could create a tailored support plan for each jobseeker - helping to choose local and online courses, training and support to help them get their next job.

Which user group would this target?

New job, fast / Look at my options

Opportunities

Design for when help is needed

Opportunity 6

Design for when help is needed

We know that post-redundancy, jobseekers often assume they'll find work quickly and apply for a lot of jobs. When they struggle to secure a role, their confidence is low and they feel frustrated. They wonder 'what am I doing wrong' and want somebody to help them figure out what they need to do differently.

What if every job seeker had someone to turn to that they know could help when they're feeling stuck and like they've tried everything?

Opportunity 6: In practice

Design for when help is needed

How could this work in practice?

An example. Job clinic

There are many examples in the existing provision of job clubs and similar services who promise to help people find work. But jobseekers usually aren't aware of them or don't see them as being designed for them.

Could we build a new type of job club - one explicitly designed for over-50's to help them get unstuck in their job search? It doesn't have to be 'new' but could make use of existing service infrastructure. Jobseekers could book an appointment when they feel stuck, meet locally or online for a couple of hours to quickly triage and come out with a planned path forward.

Which user group would this target?

New job, fast / Look at my options

Contact us

If you have any questions about this research in conjunction with our Invitation to Tender please email: responses@ageing-better.org.uk