



## การใช้ประโยชน์จากแรงงานสูงอายุในภาคการผลิต

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### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเรื่องนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาข้อมูลสภาพการจ้างงาน ศักยภาพของแรงงานภาคอุตสาหกรรม การผลิต 2) ศึกษาปัญหาและอุปสรรคในการทำงานของแรงงานผู้สูงอายุในภาคอุตสาหกรรม การผลิต และ 3) วิเคราะห์บทบาทของแรงงานผู้สูงอายุในภาคอุตสาหกรรม การผลิต เมื่อออกจากระบบการจ้างงานเป็นการศึกษาข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพเฉพาะพนักงานที่ทำงานในอุตสาหกรรมผลิตเฟอร์นิเจอร์ ผลการวิจัยจากการสัมภาษณ์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพพบว่าสภาพการจ้างงานเป็นไปตามข้อตกลงระหว่างพนักงานกับบริษัทที่ไม่มีนโยบายเกษียณอายุงาน เน้นทักษะการทำงานและความพร้อมทางด้านร่างกายของพนักงานเองและผู้บริหารส่วนใหญ่ระบุว่าพนักงานสูงอายุมีศักยภาพในการทำงานด้านความอดทน ความตั้งใจและมีความผูกพันต่องานสูง ปัญหาในการทำงาน

ที่พบคือไม่ยอมปฏิบัติตามกฎความปลอดภัยเท่าที่ควร และใช้เวลาในการเรียนรู้เทคโนโลยีใหม่ในการทำงานช้ามาก หรือไม่ยอมเรียนรู้เลย ศักยภาพของแรงงานสูงอายุเมื่อออกจากระบบการจ้างที่มีต่อระดับชุมชนอยู่ในขั้นที่ช่วยงานหรือนำประสบการณ์มาพัฒนางานได้ ผลที่ได้จากการศึกษาครั้งนี้จักเป็นข้อมูลเบื้องต้น ในการเตรียมความพร้อมการรองรับและการจัดการกับแรงงานสูงอายุที่ขาดการวางแผนอนาคตหลังเกษียณตลอดจนจัดทำข้อเสนอแนะเชิงนโยบายในการใช้ประโยชน์แรงงานสูงอายุที่พบว่าสามารถทำงานในอุตสาหกรรม การผลิตเฟอร์นิเจอร์ได้ถึงอายุ 75 ปีเพื่อเพิ่มขีดความสามารถทางการแข่งขันของประเทศต่อไป

**คำสำคัญ:** แรงงานสูงอายุ การใช้ประโยชน์ อุตสาหกรรม การผลิต

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## Utilization of Elderly Workers in Manufacturing

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### Abstract

This paper aims to: 1) study employment conditions and competence of manufacturing laborers 2) study problems and obstacles at work of elderly workers in manufacturing; and 3) analyze roles of elderly workers in manufacturing of while leaving the employment system. This qualitative research specifically investigated employees working in furniture manufacturing. Interview sessions found that employment status was in accordance with the agreements between employees and companies that there was no retirement policy. Work skills and physical fitness of employees were emphasized. Most executives stated that elderly workers were patient, determined and highly engaged in their work. Problems

found were their incompliance with safety rules; taking much time to learn new technologies, or unwillingness to learn at all. The capacity of elderly workers who were no longer hired involve providing assistance to workgroup members and applying their experience for work development. Findings of this study shall be primary data used to manage elderly workers who do not have a retirement plan. In addition, recommendations will be given on utilization of elderly workers who can work in furniture manufacturing until they turn 75 years old in order to increase the country's competitiveness in the future.

**Keywords:** Elderly Workers, Utilization, Manufacturing Industry

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## 1. Introduction

A report on trends of labor demands during 2010-2014 studying employment conditions in 2008 and reflecting future labor demands of the Labor Market Research Division, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor revealed that in 2008, the demand of 40-49-year-old laborers was the highest (24.7%), followed by laborers aged 50-59 years (15.9%) and laborers aged 35-39 years (13.3%). Statistics from 2004 showed an increasing number of laborers aged 40-49 years. In 2007, the number of laborers aged 50-59 years increased the most (5.7%), followed by laborers aged 60 years and more. It can be seen that there are more and more elderly workers in Thailand. In manufacturing, labor demands are high in manufacturing of food and beverage, clothing, furniture, wood and wooden products, textiles and radio, television and communications equipment. Overall labor demands during 2010-2014 are expected to increase, 38.2 million workers, 38.8 million workers, 39.5 million workers, 40.3 million workers and 41.4 million workers, respectively [1]. The national demographic structure has changed due to a decreased population growth rate during the past 20 years as a result of birth control policies. Furthermore, better public health care enables people to enjoy longer lives turning Thai society into an elderly society. The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board predicted that in 2025, 20% of Thai population would be people over 60 years old [2]. This will be inconsistent with the population structure and industrial labor demands. An increase of elderly workers in industries is pronounced. A study of the Directorate for Employment, Labor and Social Affairs (DELSA) on working in labor markets of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in 2005 showed

that less than 60% of people aged 50-64 years had jobs. Most working people were 25-49 years old. It is therefore predicted that in 2050 only one old worker approaching retirement will be hired. As a result, the number of workers in the European labor market will decrease by 15% during the next 50 years and in Japan the figure will be 30%. [3]

Moreover, DELSA found five factors that did not support elderly workers: 1) negative attitudes of employers towards elderly workers; 2) high labor costs; 3) inappropriate labor protection laws; 4) no additional financial support; and 5) outdated knowledge and skills of elderly workers.

The above research results could be used to predict situations of the elderly in the labor market and their departure of the Thai labor market. A subsequent question was "How can the government cater to the needs of the elderly who come out from the labor market and become consumers in the way that yields social and economic benefits to Thailand?" Economy is slowing down and competition is gaining momentum. Industries have to create value to products and add diversity and quality to the products by utilizing skills and technologies. Laborers especially elderly workers are at risk of being let go. Thus, competence and roles of elderly workers in the manufacturing industry were studied. Primary data from the study was used for utmost utilization of elderly workers and increased competition of the country.

### Objectives

1. To study employment conditions and competence of manufacturing laborers.
2. To study problems and obstacles to work of elderly workers in manufacturing.
3. To analyze roles of elderly workers in



manufacturing after they stop working.

#### Definitions

1. Elderly workers mean full time employees who work in furniture industry and aged 45 years old or more.

2. Manufacturing refers to the furniture manufacturing industry.

## 2. Related Documents and Researches

The United Nations stated that the elderly around the world was one of the three main challenges the world would face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century apart from global warming and terrorism. The research on the elderly in Asia Pacific of Watson Wyatt Worldwide stated that 64% of high-level employers in Asia Pacific believed that if elderly workers were not taken care of, there would be a shortage of them and social security costs and employees' benefits would increase. This is a challenge for employers in regard to human management in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a great demand of quality laborers while the number of skilled laborers reduced. Therefore, the majority of employers from developed countries in Asia Pacific need to adjust themselves to "elderly workers" by adding trainings and prepare them for retirement. Otherwise, developed countries in Asia (Japan, South Korea, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore) will be in need of a lot of laborers. In China, where the number of growing number of elderly people increases rapidly, the problem of insufficient skilled workers is solved by focusing on efficiency of technologies. Watson Wyatt Worldwide concludes that in Asia Pacific, employers are required to extend the mandatory retirement age and increase medicare benefits for their employees [4]. Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) indicated impacts of elderly workers in

manufacturing and found that incongruity of labor force and educational quality and demands in the labor market. This obvious problem leads to another educational reform at present. Moreover, it was found that changing demographic structure impacted productivity of the industry. Likewise, the study of Attaporn Buapim [5] indicated an increasing number of elderly people and a decreasing number of babies because people get married late and have fewer children. Medical advances help people live longer.

Thailand had paid more attention to elderly people considering that they should receive the same social assistance as children and the disabled. Elderly workers are protected and given right of survival under the Older Persons Act, B.E. 2546. However, elderly workers still receive less protection than other groups of people in society. Employers had negative attitudes towards elderly workers regarding them as liabilities rather than assets. Consequently, elderly workers are discriminated against. Attaporn Buapim [5] pointed out four issues regarding elderly workers.

First, elderly workers are defined as people over 60 years old by the Older Persons Act, B.E. 2546, which is not appropriate because elderly workers are not sufficiently protected. The retirement age in Thailand is 60 years of age. Therefore, employees 45 years of age and older should be defined as the "elderly workers". Their health starts to decline and they need more medicare benefits to support them to work until until they retire at age 60.

Second, employers discriminate against and try not to hire elderly workers because they think that those workers are not familiar with advanced technologies so after hiring them, they have to provide them with training. Besides, those workers will not



stay with them for a long time. Since the Thai laws on discrimination against elderly workers and their rights are not comprehensive. It is suggested that there should be laws directly addressing discrimination against old applicants, in accordance with the provision set forth in convention 111- "Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)" of the Constitution of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Third, protection for elderly workers in workplaces was not in place so they are slandered and discouraged from working. Flexible time should be applied to elderly workers such as full time work, part time work, reduced work hours, etc., so they are treated equally. Laws on elderly workers' protection should be enacted so employers are not discriminated against. Elderly workers should have the rights to ask for a flexible work schedule to suit their physical conditions.

Lastly, there are problems of protecting terminated elderly workers. Employers may terminate workers' employment giving the reason that they are too old, inefficient. Employers in private companies can be dismissed because of their age because there is no law protecting them and stating the exact retirement age. Employees' employment can be terminated any time so they do not have job security. It is suggested that when terminating employment of an employee, an employer must have solid reasons for that. Moreover, an exact retirement age should be stipulated. In case an employee wishes to continue working with an employer, the employer should give him/her a chance and right to request to work after retirement.

### 3. Research Procedure

Qualitative data were collected from two sample groups. The first group comprised of 23 salaried

employees aged over 45 years working in companies manufacturing furniture made of one of these materials: 1) wood manufacturing; 2) plywood manufacturing; 3) plywood and veneer board manufacturing; 4) plywood piece manufacturing; 5) wood base fiber; and 6) furniture and household furnishings. The second group comprised of six executives working in furniture manufacturing companies and salaried employees aged over 45 years. The research is divided into four phases: 1) exploration of primary data; 2) studies of employment conditions from executives; 3) studies of employment conditions from elderly workers; and 4) analysis for recommendations.

### 4. Research Results

4.1 Employment conditions and competence of elderly workers: results of interviews with 23 employees over 45 years showed that they were 45-57 years old, with the average age of 49 years (standard deviation = 3.35), 73.9% of them had grade-six education. The number of people holding certificates (vocational certificates and vocational diplomas) was equal to people with high school education (grade 9-10). Their average work experience in their current company was 10 years (standard deviation = 5.3). They worked nine hours a day, 8.00-18.00 hrs. with one-hour lunch break and the first Saturday of the month from 7.45 hrs. to 17.45 hrs. They are eligible for five-day annual leave, 30-day sick leave, 90-day maternity leave, six-day vacation leave and additional 1-4-day annual leave based on their tenure. Ninety-five percent of the employees stated that they were satisfied with their current employment conditions. Regarding competence of employees, it was found that elderly workers were well competent and skillful. They showed



more prudent, responsible, dedicated and patient than younger employees. They were also committed to personal development. For example, they tried to equip themselves with computer skills. However, they were not aware of long-term employment promotion plans of the company they worked for. Quality of Life: from the viewpoints of employees and executives, it can be concluded that their quality of life was at a high level in accordance with agreements between employees and the company. Nonetheless. Employees had suggestions on salary raises and bonuses.

4.2 Problems and obstacles to work of elderly workers in manufacturing: the problems found were that they had to remember types of woods. Overall work related problems were receiving products that were not ordered, machinery breakdown, inability to catch up with work due to a small number of employees and problems with supervisors. Executives or employees found that obstacles for elderly workers were their working behaviors such as not listening to supervisors orders, not observing safety regulations of the company and learning at a slow pace or not leaning new technologies. Problems or obstacles that were difficult to solve were that seniors seem unwilling to pass their knowledge on to young employees.

4.3 Roles of elderly workers in the industry when they quit being employed: most employees (17) planned to go back home and take care of their grandchildren, practice meditation, do social work (become volunteers). Other employees planned to become merchants selling vegetables in their hometowns. The rest planned to continue to work at the same company because they did not want to be burdens of their children and society. Interviews with the executives revealed that they saw competence of elderly workers. When these employees

retired or wanted to quit their job, they could be of great help to their organization in developing the country's economy. They could take jobs home, complete and send them back to the company. They could also train other employees. If they needed to go back to their hometowns, they could implement their knowledge to creative work in their communities.

## 5. Discussions

Results of in-depth interviews with employees and executives are as follows.

5.1 Employment conditions and competence of elderly workers in manufacturing: it was found that they worked nine hours a day, 8.00-18.00 hrs. with one-hour lunch break, which exceeded eight hours according to the Labor Protection Act. The extra hour was overtime with consent from the employees but that could affect their overall health. Elderly workers were highly skilled because they had worked in the companies for over 10 years. They were highly engaged in their work and more loyal to their organizations than other employees. They were also more prudent, responsible, dedicated and patient than other younger employees. They were also committed to personal development. For example, they tried to equip themselves with computer skills. This was consistent with a study on older workers in America, which found that older workers as a group spent more time than young adults on all products and services. It was also found that work ethics, loyalty and experience were among the traits of older workers as demonstrated in employee surveys. [6] This group of workers was also found having very high quality of life under the agreement between the employees and the company. However, the employees suggested raising salaries and bonuses



because they only had primary-school education. With low salaries, they did not have savings to fall back on after retirement. On the contrary, elderly workers in Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Australia are protected by laws promoting quality of life of the elderly namely laws on elderly welfare, care for parents over 60 years old, etc.[7] Companies did not have policies on retirement. If they could still work, they could continue working. Elderly workers who are over 60 years old and have good health are still considered employees entitled to all workers compensation benefits of social security laws. The employers did not provide them with provident funds and did not inform them about their employment promotion policy allowing elderly workers taking jobs to do at home. Executives should communicate this policy to all employees especially elderly workers.

5.2 Problems and obstacles to work: elderly workers spent too much time learning new technologies or did not learn them at all. However, companies still found that they tried to improve themselves so they educated and trained them so both employees and organizations were successful. Stephen Billett stated that ‘workers normally learn through their work, and older workers are no exception. They report possessing and demonstrating the capacity to engage with new tasks, novel work practices and emerging technologies as part of their work.’ [8] Apart from this, there were problems and obstacles difficult to solve. Most elderly workers did not want to share their knowledge and work techniques with younger employees because they still wanted stability and respect from young employees. It might be possible that they wanted to hold on to their superior knowledge to compensate for their slow learning of new technologies. Hence, the government should

consider adjusting employment policies so they align with Thai society and circumstances of elderly workers.

5.3 Roles of elderly workers in the industry when they quit being employed: most employees planned to go back home and take care of their grandchildren, practice meditation. Executives found that elderly workers could help develop the country’s economy. They could train new employees. The government should help them in their career such as issuing an employment policy allowing them to work until they are 75 years old. This is consistent with Nongnuch Sunthornchawakarn who found that the government had to create job opportunities for the elderly and change the attitude towards working until people turn 60 [9]. Otherwise, the government should fund a group of skillful people teaching the youth of interested people to help create jobs for the unemployed in the Thai labor market.

Nonetheless, issuance of policies of utilization of elderly workers and creation of job opportunities after they quit working is an urgent issue because at present the demand for elderly workers over 60 years old increases by only 2.5% whilst the number of elderly workers increases by 5.38%.

## 6. Recommendations

6.1 The government should promote job opportunities of elderly workers by making private companies aware of their competency and applying flexible retirement age.

6.2 The government should help elderly workers earn income from selling and community-based manufacturing.

6.3 Groups of skillful elderly workers should be established to train the youth and interested people.



6.4 Cooperatives should be established to receive jobs from private companies and pass them to elderly workers who can create their strong point such as “Products from the Elderly, Environmentally-friendly”, etc.

6.5 The public or private sector should train elderly employees and give them guidance upon their retirement.

6.6 Private organizations should reward or give incentives to elderly employees interested in receiving training on new skills and technologies.

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