What motivates older employees to be physically active at work? Using the Experience Sampling Method

Mirka Evers, LS van Velsen, MMR Vollenbroek Hutten, ST Boerema, HJ Hermens
Roessingh Research and Development, Enschede, The Netherlands
Contact: m.evers@rrd.nl

Background
Increasing retirement ages brings the challenge to keep our older employees sufficiently physically fit to perform their work. As a first step in the development of preventive strategies, this study investigates current (physical) activities, satisfaction and energy levels of older employees during working hours.

Methods
Six older employees were asked to wear an activity sensor for a working week to objectively track their physical activity. Additionally, we used the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) on a smartphone. Via this method we asked the participants every hour to elicit their (work) activities, the level of energy obtained from performing this activity and to rate their daily level of satisfaction. Afterwards, semi-structured interviews were conducted for further understanding.

Results
On average, participants rated their overall level of satisfaction (7.20 ± 1.44) and obtained energy (6.2 ± 0.59) over the day higher when being more physically active (≥ 108 min.) compared to the days that they were less physically active (≤ 107 min.) (satisfaction 6.77 ± 1.68) (energy 5.80 ± 0.70). The top three activities on days that participants where physically active is: 1) face-to-face meetings, 2) answering e-mails and 3) (lunch) walks. On the less physically active days: 1) face-to-face meetings, 2) writing reports and 3) answering e-mails. The interviews revealed that interventions to support taking sufficient breaks and to prevent sitting, might be most needed.

Conclusions
Being physical active during a work day is related to higher levels of satisfaction and obtained energy. Being physically active seems to be achieved by (lunch) walks and is indicated as needed by older employees. These are important starting points for developing supportive strategies.

Key messages:
- ESM provides an in-depth understanding of people’s activities and associated feelings
- Physical activity supports the feeling of satisfaction which is hypothesised to be related to work-ability