

Collaboration: Extending Working Lives Partnership Building Workshop

The Need

This three day event was designed to begin collaborative research projects and was designed collaboratively with the Medical Research Council and the Economic Social Research Council to bring together academics and employers to explore issues of Extending Working Lives.

The event was multi-disciplinary and there was a ratio of about 3:1 academics to employers so a mix of activities had to be used to engage the different needs of all of these groups. It was important to keep the atmosphere relaxed to facilitate dialogue and to balance this with a focus on the theme so that the employers were kept engaged in a pragmatic discussion. We needed to allow space for participants to challenge conventional thinking about the extension of working lives and to hear the concerns of employers and employees so that the research proposals were pragmatically focused.

After the event the information gathered would be collected together in a report on the theme which would be used by the Research Councils to frame subsequent research funding in this area.

The Event

This was a three day residential event which was attended by 40 participants from academic, policy and employer groups.

We choose to use techniques which would ensure that the activities were rooted in reality so that we did not disengage the employers and so opportunities were provided for quiet reflection and the development of ideas.

The main objectives were to

- Build new partnerships and collaborations between academia and public/private employers and policy makers who would not normally interact.
- Gain a deeper understanding of employer and policy needs related to older adults participation, health and wellbeing in a workplace or policy environment.
- Discuss the research landscape.
- Explore opportunities for innovative research to address identified needs.
- Work collaboratively with the two research councils to gather feedback on the theme to shape the subsequent summary report

The Results

“The structuring of the sessions and the mixing of the groups were excellent tools to generate new collaborations. The facilitators made it clear that the 3 days were about building collaborations and gave the meeting a real sense of focus”

“The research councils didn’t have to worry about keeping everyone to time or engaged in the task so we were able to concentrate on what was being said or ideas for the next session. A wonderful bonus was having all of the sessions recorded – and recorded so intelligently. This made drafting the report so much easier”

“There were several occasions when we all met up and decided to change the plans for the following sessions based on how well the attendees were responding to the sessions or the speed at which the collaborations were developing. The facilitators were not only able to change tack in advanced planning but even change the very next session in response to feedback from the research councils”

Janet Valentine, Head of Public Health and Aging, Medical Research Council



Comments

“Both Christine and Clare were really helpful in the review session following the workshop in identifying the key messages for the report and how these could be presented”

“The facilitators were intelligent, organised, personable, flexible and extremely hard working”

“the friendly but professional tone they adopted was just the right level to relate to both researchers and employers”

“not only may alliances formed at the meeting result in grant applications but the Workshop has stimulated networking beyond this call and partnerships in other areas”.

More Information on THE PROJECT

<http://www.mrc.ac.uk/Utilities/Documentrecord/index.htm?d=MRC008936>