Forget your password again?
Teasing apart potential causes of cognitive and behavioral changes in older workers.

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Welcome!

Disclosure: The presenter of this webinar has no known conflicts of interest or monetary incentive related to the content of this presentation.

Today’s Learning Objectives

• Describe the differences between normal and abnormal cognitive aging in order to recognize warning signs in employees.
• List the primary cognitive domains impacted by aging and be able to apply that knowledge during employee evaluations.
• Be able to assess an employee with interview and/or mental status exams in order to make useful referral decisions.
What is neuropsychology?

- The Study of Brain-Behavior Relationships
- Assessment of Brain Function
- How Functioning Translates to Daily Living

Aging American Workforce

- 2010 – 19% of workers 55 or older
- 2020 – 25% of workers 55 or older (projected)

More individuals are working past the age of 65
Normal Course of Aging

Rapid development/changes through childhood
- procedural learning (skills)
- crystallized/semantic knowledge

Rapid development/changes through childhood
- cellular growth and death
- synaptic pruning
  - a process of axon/dendrite elimination that occurs between early childhood and puberty
  - no new neurons created?
Normal Course of Aging

Learning from adolescence into adulthood
- continued with vast knowledge acquired
- brain structure is more fixed
- efficiency of learning continues into the 3rd decade of life
- after this point, certain skills begin a slow decline

Types of Intelligence

- Fluid intelligence
  - less dependent on prior learning
  - mental flexibility
  - speed
  - problem solving

- Crystallized intelligence
  - semantic knowledge (what a person knows)
  - dependent on prior learning, education, and experience
**Types of Intelligence**

- Fluid intelligence tends to decline with age
- Crystallized intelligence remains stable or increases with age
Impact on Memory

Impact on Attention

Impact on Attention

Impact on Attention
Super Agers

• Cognitive Reserve in those with higher IQs and education
• Is all cognitive aging abnormal?
• Consider the individual!

Non-Normal Aging

Key Concept:
Cognitive decline that is beyond what is expected in a healthy individual is considered abnormal and signifies the presence of additional influencing factor(s)
Organic versus Non-Organic

• Organic factors are those tied to some physiological condition.
• These can be neurological or non-neurological.

Non-Normal Aging
Impact of Injury and Health Conditions

Traumatic Brain Injury
Epilepsy
Stroke
Dementia
Mild Cognitive Impairment
Impact of Aging

WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR?

• Timeline
• Age
• Onset
• Course
• Insight
• Physical appearance
• Speech
• Interpersonal interactions

Non-Organic Influences

• Psychiatric conditions
• Substance use/abuse
Cognitive Domains

Complex Attention
Work Efficiency

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Cognitive Domains

Executive Function
Learning and Attention
Work Efficiency

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Cognitive Domains

Learning and Memory

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Cognitive Domains

Social Cognition

It's a Joke...Get It?

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Putting This Knowledge To Work

- Timeline
- Age
- Onset
- Course
- Insight
- Physical appearance
- Speech
- Interpersonal interactions

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Example 1 - Margaret

- 55-year-old woman who has been with the company for 14 years.
- Problems emerged in the last year and gradually worsened over time.
- Early symptoms included changes in personality, being somewhat disinhibited and saying inappropriate things to coworkers.
- In the last couple of months, she also has had more trouble learning a new computer system, not seeming to "get it" despite being coached numerous times.
- She has made some bad judgment calls, has left her computer unattended and posted the password on the monitor, and she has had trouble articulating her thoughts clearly.
- She denies anything is different and instead blames her supervisor for purposefully setting her up to fail.

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Example 2 - Joe

- 59-year-old man who has been with the company for 3 years.
- Over most of this time, he has shown variable performance. He can be argumentative some days but easy going on other days.
- His work attendance has been spotty, sometimes taking days off for no apparent reason or coming in late without explanation.
- At times he has slurred speech but this is inconsistent.
- Very defensive about these problems when brought up to him by his supervisor.
- He is able to perform the assembly tasks he normally does, but during some shifts he is slower to finish, makes more mistakes, and his coworker expressed concern about “unsteady hands.”

Example 3 - David

- 50-year-old man with 18 years of solid employment.
- In the past week, his performance has dropped off considerably and he has had noticeable problems expressing his thoughts and understanding others.
- His memory seems to be very poor.
- His handwriting has also become illegible and he seems confused.

Example 4 - Emily

- 55-year-old woman with 11 years at the company.
- She has been given awards for strong performance but periodically her performance declines considerably.
- More recently, she has appeared disheveled and she is not getting her work done. She is withdrawn and has trouble keeping track of her workload.
- She can respond to questions appropriately but her speech is limited in output.
- Her coworkers notice that she easily distracted and unfocused on her work.
- While this has happened in the past for about a month or two, the current presentation is more significant and company management has concerns.
Example 5 - Reginald

- 60-year-old man who has 5 years with the company.
- In the past four months, he has been coming to work a bit late.
- He is missing details in his work, making mistakes, and having trouble finishing his tasks on time.
- Although less outgoing, his personality is not much different than before.
- During meetings, he tends to zone out, sometimes not responding to questions.

Example 6 - Marcus

- 60-year-old man who has 5 years with the company.
- In the past four months, he has been coming to work a bit late.
- He is missing details in his work, making mistakes, and having trouble finishing his tasks on time.
- Although less outgoing, his personality is not much different than before.
- During meetings, he tends to zone out, sometimes not responding to questions.

EAP interactions with employee

- Meeting with employee
- Use of collateral information
- Discrepancies between info sources
Mental Status Exams

- Mini Mental State Exam (or Folstein)
- Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA)

Caveats

- Age discrimination
- Diagnosing based on symptoms
- Understanding sensitivity/specificity of MMSE
Summary of Objectives

• Describe the differences between normal and abnormal cognitive aging in order to recognize warning signs in employees.
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THANK YOU!