

## NAVIGATING CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN A YOUTH-DRIVEN BUSINESS LANDSCAPE: A CASE STUDY ON INTER- GENERATIONAL MANAGEMENT DILEMMA WITHIN SOCIAL CHANGE

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**Abstract:** *In recent years, the business world has witnessed a significant shift as younger leaders ascend to positions of power and experienced professionals find themselves reporting to these new, dynamic bosses. This phenomenon, driven by rapid technological advancements, innovative business models, and a globalized market, presents both challenges and opportunities for organizations. This paper explores the intricacies of intergenerational cultures in this evolving landscape, focusing on strategies to harmonize the diverse perspectives and skill sets of a multigenerational workforce. It examines the cultural and operational adjustments required to foster mutual respect, effective communication, and collaborative innovation between young leaders and seasoned employees. Key areas of focus include the importance of adaptive leadership, the role of mentorship and reverse mentorship programs, and the implementation of continuous learning environments to bridge generational gaps. By leveraging the strengths of both youth and experience, organizations can cultivate a resilient and agile workforce capable of thriving in a rapidly changing business environment. Ultimately, this study aims to provide actionable insights for companies looking to navigate the complexities of this generational shift, ensuring sustainable growth and competitive advantage in the modern marketplace. Lifespan development theory which is guided by the assumption that development is a lifelong process that does not stop in adulthood was the theoretical approach selected for the study. We intend to expand the study at a national scale but only limit it to one sector. The future study shall be based on a nation-wide scale to determine the number of workers that fall into the age-cohorts identified and how many of the bosses/managers are young. The young inter-racial managers shall be interviewed to establish their perceptions on older workers.*

**Key words:** *Intergenerational, workplace, transformation policy, Lifespan Development Theory.*

### 1. Introduction

A generation is „a cohort of similarly aged people who experience common historical and socially defining events” (Costanza et al., 2012:376) that significantly shape the experiences of the individuals living around that time. South African businesses face two challenges in the quickly changing business environment of the twenty-first century: socioeconomic inequality and sustainable workplace transformation. On their own, both transition processes are taxing for businesses. Therefore, when both must be done simultaneously, the amount of complexity increases (Hofmann et al., 2023). Companies



with higher proportions of older workers typically prioritize enabling older workers to leave early rather than providing accommodations or development, indicating that retention is not a top concern for these companies (Fleischmann, Koster, & Schippers, 2015; Van Dalen et al., 2015).

### **1.1 Current situation of the South African workplace**

The South African workplace results is racially, gender-, age-, and generationally unequal. In terms of the labour force's gender distribution, in 2021 and 2022 there were more males than women employed (Khuluvhe, 2023). In terms of race, White people have the highest absorption rate (i.e., the proportion of employed working-age individuals) while African people have the lowest. These differences are part of the reason why black South Africans and women experience disproportionately high unemployment rates (Valodia & Ewinyu, 2023). Furthermore, higher-skilled workers are generally characterized as predominantly white and male, as they are preferred over the declining need for semi- and low-skilled workers (Valodia & Ewinyu, 2023). Also, these workers have the opportunity to receive higher earnings.

South Africa's racial gap in education and the labor market has significantly narrowed as a result of initiatives meant to address historical injustices and increase access to education. In spite of this, White South Africans still have the highest levels of education and occupy the majority of management- and high-skilled positions (Valodia & Ewinyu, 2023).

The need for skilled labour has changed, but there are other variables that have also had an impact on the adolescent labor market. It seems that the rate of job creation has lagged behind the number of new workers entering the workforce (Kraak, 2010). In addition, the average age of the employed population has increased.

Future workplaces will unavoidably feature a wider range of age demographics, whether it's because of a lack of workers or the need to pay for longer lifespans. Organizations have to change. These generational or age-based bonds are strengthened when coworkers are of the same age or generation. Organizations have realized in recent years that they must adjust to an aging workforce (Taylor, 2002), and as a result, certain of their policies are now directed exclusively towards their senior employees. A greater variety of generations are now actively engaged in the workforce at the same time due to a population that can live and work longer (Shah, 2011); this is based on Lancaster and Stillman (2002:11).

„For the first time in history, we have four separate and distinct generations working shoulder-to-shoulder and face-to-face in a stressful, competitive workplace”.

An issue that many organizations are starting to face is the retirement of some senior employees „early“. This may result in firms losing access to a group of workers, many of whom will have relevant business knowledge and solid experience. Aside from this, there is a growing divide in our societies and workplaces along a number of other dimensions, including race, gender, and generation, making them more multipolar than multilateral. Even depending on their favourite sports team, people are divisive and dislike one another. Societies have never been this divided or this complex.

Conflicts can occur when divergent perspectives on work-life balance, meeting methods, and performance standards collide.

This generational friction is further exacerbated by a dwindling working-age population, a trend that is hitting companies hard, particularly those that have chosen to replace their seasoned employees with a younger, less expensive workforce.

According to the Harvard Business Review, companies are feeling the pinch of this decision. The seasoned employees who were let go possessed a wealth of knowledge and a deep understanding of the business. Their younger replacements, while less costly, lack the necessary skills and numbers to fill the void left behind. The context of the study is one where socio-political decisions, organisational practices and regulations have to be created to make them quite favourable and flexible so that people's employment aspirations can be better realized at older age. Younger managers have to navigate the landscape of providing support measures for older workers who are still working, some of whom have younger dependents and older partners that they care for (Pit et al., 2021).

### **1.2 Communication differences in the workplace.**

Rickwood et al (2024) find that communication styles in the workplace are changing. Younger workers prefer digital communication, abbreviations and texts, while older workers favour face-to-face or telephone conversations. This is not necessarily a reflection of digital capability but rather how different age groups engage with another person.

### **1.3 Generation specific issues in the workplace**

Generations-specific issues include relationship between unemployed young people and crimes, unemployment and drug abuse caused by family breakdown, etc., (ii) skills and qualifications macro-parameter includes leadership skills such as communication and effective decision making, nurturing leadership in the young generation, job-specific skills, training, and more. (iii) Employment sectors include parameters such as changing workspaces, remote and hybrid work, recruitment sector, family businesses, entrepreneurship, and more. (iv) Consumer Industries include celebrations and events industries, the retirement industry, band marketing, energy sectors, and the entertainment industry. (v) Employment Issues include mental health and others. We also discover and elaborate on labour market-specific characteristics and preferences of the multi-generational workforce such as increased use of music consumption among Generation X and Y, a high likelihood of a criminal record among unemployed Generation Z, a focus on mental health among Generation Z, and others.

### **1.4 Generation specific or shared values**

Jonck, van der Walt, and Sobayeni (2017) found that Boomers and Millennials share more work values than Boomers and Gen-Xers or Millennials and Gen-Xers. Both Boomers and Millennials exhibited similar values regarding authority, creativity, risk, and social relationships. A surprising finding was that Millennials valued authority as much as Boomers, contrary to common belief. Additionally, only Millennials placed significant importance on cultural identity, highlighting their higher level of diversity and appreciation for it compared to Boomers and Gen-Xers. Statistically significant generational differences were observed in values such as aesthetics, risk, social interaction, altruism, creativity, cultural identity, personal development, prestige, and variety, with Gen-X valuing social interaction the most. No significant differences were found among the generations for the other thirteen values.

### **1.5 Families and Intergenerational Relations**

In many nations, family businesses are extremely important economically, emphasising the necessity for – and importance of – a smooth transition from one generation to the next (Urban & Nonkwelo, 2020: 3). Across the world, new family businesses are formed but only selected handful businesses manage to succeed from generation to generation



(Chirapanda, 2020:58). Multigenerational family structures remain prominent in South Africa, where over 75% of older adults live with children or other family members (Stats SA, 2017).

## **2. Study motivation**

The field of workplace interventions is still in a developmental stage and more research in real-world workplace settings is needed. Given the changing landscape of the workplace, making assumptions about or creating a team or workforce based on generational or age-based ties is limiting (North & Fiske, 2015). This changed dynamic and increased age diversity raises the potential for non-traditional team structures including younger managers supervising much older team members. Additionally, there is a greater likelihood of a larger age-span within a team as those in their 20s or 30s may find themselves working with someone in their 60s or 70s who is not their manager. As such, the necessity of enhancing, within management studies, interdisciplinary understandings of how middle- and older-age employees are perceived and treated at work is pressing (Ryan & Gatriell, 2022:2).

Following Chi, Maier and Gursoy (2013:42), it is important to understand older employees' perceptions of their younger managers or managers from younger generational cohorts because those perceptions may have significant impact on employees' motivational, organizational and productivity outcomes.

### **2.1 The study setting**

South Africa is diverse and her people grow old in a variety of settings, with a wide and unequal range of opportunities, capacities, well-being and life expectancies. While many older persons live in poverty and ill-health, others enjoy wealth, influence or robust health.

### **2.2 Problem statement**

South Africa stands has a high youth unemployment rate reaching 59% in 2023 (Stats SA, 2024), a number whose magnitude strikes even more when compared to the global youth unemployment of 16% (ILO, 2024). Due to democratic government's emphasis on socio-economic transformation of every sector of the country, organisations are experiencing a shift in the dynamic landscape of intra and inter-organisational gaps where youths are the bosses of older people which is viewed as a complex environment. As a result, many companies are filling black economic empowerment (BEE) managerial positions with workers who are significantly younger while the majority of upper level managerial positions are still being held by Baby boomers, and partly by Generation X'ers.

There is a perception that some younger bosses, in South Africa, have no insight or empathy when it came to those who were about to retire, and lacked insight into the fact that older people were a precious resource (Schroeder, 2023: 44). Older workers, who were once admired for their knowledge, work ethics, and skills, are now being pushed aside to make way for a younger, more technologically advanced generation of workers. Some other organizations are aggressively recruiting and hiring older workers to decrease the number of unskilled and unqualified workers in the workforce (Taylor & Earl, 2016). Generational differences in the workplace are often a challenge, but dealing with a younger boss is perhaps the most difficult (Knight, 2015). This study seeks to confirm or negate this belief.

### **2.3 Research method**

Nevertheless, perhaps for lack of a more mainstream alternative, scholars do often adopt age brackets when attempting to compare generations across cultures (Prabhu et al.,

2017). Alaq, Alqurashi and Mehmod (2023) identify macro-parameters representing five different views on multi-generational labour markets. This study adopts five generational cohorts as follows:

Generational Cohort			Characteristics & Work Preferences	Communication Styles	Motivational Factors	Technological Adaptability
A	Born 1959-1969	Generation X				
B	Born 1970-1979					
C	Born 1980-1989	Millennials 1980-1996				
D	Born 1990-1999					
E	Born 2000-2009	Generation Z 1997-2012				

#### 2.4 Research questions

Research Question 1: Are there any significant differences in general older-workers or older employees' perceptions of their younger managers across generational cohorts?

Research Question 2: Are there any significant sectoral differences in older-workers or older employees' perceptions of younger managers across three generational cohorts.

#### 2.5 Data collection technique

In a time of rapidly changing landscape of workplace generational diversity, this exploratory study attempts to extend our knowledge and understanding of issues surrounding generational diversity by analyzing responses from a large group of companies' line-level employees and managers regarding their perceptions of their younger managers.

In this study, younger managers are defined as general managers and department managers who were born between 1989 and 1999, inclusive of GenX and Millennial generational cohorts. Older workers are defined as workers who were born between 1959 and 1979, including in the Baby boomer generation cohort only. A number of companies in each industry will be sampled across South Africa. Data on workforce demographics will be collected so as to determine the prevalence of age cohorts in each company.

### 3. Generations in South Africa

Watershed moments in South Africa can be identified from which different generations have been shaped over time (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, & Seekings, 2010). Of most



significance in the South African context are the political events leading up to the eventual release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, and the subsequent first democratic elections in 1994 (South African History Online, 2012). South Africans born from 1980 onwards experienced the lifting of international sanctions on South Africa, and the meeting between FW de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, who was later freed in 1990, after 27 years in prison (South African History Online, 2016). This generation experienced the precursors and after-effects of major social and political change. The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was formed in 1983, which sought to end compulsory military service; and by 1993 the end of conscription took effect (South African History Online, 2013). This meant that individuals who would now form part of the late Gen-Xers were the last to perform compulsory military service, and therefore no member of the Millennial generation ever had to do so. Additionally, the sporting sanctions that banned South Africa from competing in international events, such as the Olympic Games, were lifted in 1992; resulting in South Africa hosting and winning both the 1995 Rugby World Cup and the 1996 African Cup of Nations (South African History Online, 2011; 2012). Millennials in South Africa consist of a group... who are old enough to be part of the old regime, but not old enough to have participated in it, and a new generation... born into a new South Africa. This „born free” generation is largely black and has grown up in a world different to that of their parents” (Martins & Martins 2014:131).

### **3.1 Generations in the South African workplace**

Workplace Literature suggests there are currently six generations in the workplace: Silent Generation/Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z/Nexters. These categories are Western constructs and may not apply in other regions (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Ng & Perry, 2016; Van Der Walt et al., 2016). Most research on generational differences has been conducted in Western contexts like the United States, leading to a bias in adopting American definitions (Festing & Schäfer, 2014). However, this bias can negatively impact assumptions about non-Western cohorts (Lappeman et al., 2020). Research from non-Western countries has identified differences in generational characteristics due to unique national contexts (Parry, 2014). Thus, future research should move away from simplistic American categorizations by considering the social and historical conditions of the nation under study (Ng & Parry, 2016; Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

### **3.2 Generational diversity in the workplace**

Organizations in South Africa are having challenges embracing age diversity in the workplace. It is commonly believed that different generations develop a unique, shared „generational consciousness“ influenced by significant formative events, a concept rooted in the classic sociological theory of Mannheim (1928/1952). In the workplace context, scholars suggest that these generational cohorts bring their distinct values to their jobs, leading to differences (Joshi et al., 2010, 2011). Some researchers argue that generational categories significantly shape workplace outcomes, pointing to evidence of notable differences in workplace behaviours and attitudes between groups such as „Boomers“ and „Millennials“ (Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Martocchio, 2010; Joshi, Dencker, & Franz, 2011).

According to Bloemen-Bekx et al. (2019: 645), of all the adults who can influence the next generation, parents hold the most important position and serve as the best role models. Gimenez-Jimenez et al. (2021: 741) state that when generational connections are positive, professional objectives are in line with the family business. Successors have a high internal locus of control and succession is more likely to occur. Reined and Roach (2010: 405) state that parental identification is where children learn the parents’ characteristics and feel

similar to the parents. Fathers have a higher impact on the career of their male children and mothers have an impact on female children (Thomas et al., 2012:6). Parents serve as inspiration if their actual behaviour is identified by adolescents as what they need in their childhood (Wiese and Freund, 2011:223). In a family business, a person may be associated with a family business that was typically started by their parents (Whetten et al., 2014:481; Schroder et al., 2011: 308).

### **3.3 In terms of age as a predictor of Life Stage**

Lifespan development theory is guided by the assumption that development is a lifelong process that does not stop in adulthood (Baltes et al., 1999)—posits that people progress through a series of key stages, each comprising a personal crisis to be resolved.

Popular narratives continue to emphasize the idea that workers of different birth cohorts differ in their values. In this situation, it's essential that senior executives and managers know what's required for older and younger workers to effectively and harmoniously work together for individual and collective benefit. In this context, Smith (2023) has argued that it is important to know that the Boomers are loyal employees with a strong work ethic and extensive knowledge and experience. They are handing their leadership roles over to Generation X, and this generation's qualities are really shining through.

„They are resilient, adaptive and innovative problem solvers. They're happy to get feedback and have also been around since technology emerged and this gives them the ability to learn and adapt to digital very quickly.”

Generation X is exactly the right leadership to take companies through turbulent and uncertain times, which is precisely what's happening, globally, today. They are then supported by the millennials who bring with them the deep knowledge and innate understanding of the digital natives and a clearer line around the work-life balance.

Millennials want a seat at the table – they want to be heard, respected and they bring a unique and fresh perspective that makes their contributions invaluable.

„Millennials also value ongoing learning, which is why many have a wide range of skills instead of just a single area of expertise,” says Smith. „Generation Z are very new to the workplace. They dealt with online learning, the pandemic and digital isolation so they're very keen to enter a formal, face-to-face environment and really connect with people.“

Erikson (1963) posited that younger adults reconcile their relative place in society and relationships (identity vs. intimacy); then, middle-agers ponder how to make their mark on their external environment (generativity); and finally, in older age, people come to terms with their life and relative place in the world (ego integrity). By the same token, organizational scholars suggest that work motivations shift over time, from early career challenge and advancement, to mid-career stability and maintenance, to late-career decline and disengagement (Super, 1980).

„This generation is laser focused on economic, social and environmental challenges and value collaboration and teamwork. They've grown up with unlimited information on the internet, have a wide range of skills and, despite their young age, are often business saving and intrapreneurial.”

### **3.4 Every generation is important**

Every generation is important. The diversity in talent and expectations and skills make it increasingly important to set aside preconceived ideas about age and instead look to how each generation can learn from the others. By listening to each other and working together,





it is possible for people to turn their generational weaknesses into learning opportunities, and this will strengthen the organisation.

Where Boomers may be hesitant to ask for help, Generation X will constantly ask for help and give feedback. Millennials and Gen Zs will force companies to remain digitally competitive and aware of the importance of a work-life balance.

„They all have different ethics and values, but they all share accountability within the organisation,” says Smith. „Each succeeding generation fixes a vital weakness or deficit from the one before. For example, Boomers were highly focused on work and had a poor work-life balance. Generation X advocated for a more balanced lifestyle and being more adaptive to change.

„Generation X and Boomers are more likely to remain loyal to one employer whereas millennials continuously seek new jobs to improve their lifestyle. Both millennials and Gen Zs want their jobs to contribute to their wellbeing.”

The worsening and uncertain situation with the economies and labour markets globally calls for increased research in this area. For instance, research in labour markets is needed to understand the evolving nature of labour (skills, education, generation-specific trends, and preferences, etc.) and employers (industry trends, priorities, ESG (Environment, Social, and Governance), compliance to various regulations, and Triple Bottom Line (TBL), etc.). Research in labour markets is also needed to understand the role of evolving societies in labour markets and comply with national and global priorities such as UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Research in these areas is urgently needed to develop new labour economics and labour markets for sustainable economies and societies. Additionally, understanding various generations in workplaces or societies (silent generation, baby boomers, generation X, millennials, generation Z, and generation alpha) is very important in the current climate.

#### **4. Literature review on perceptions of younger workers on older employees in the workplace**

Theorists tend to posit that older adults face „age” prejudice, and related discrimination, (North & Fiske, 2015) primarily due to later-life-stage concerns: perceived lack of ability, health, and deservingness. However, stereotypes of older people include the feeling that they are an expensive group, responsible for the inequalities experienced by younger generations (Hurley et al. 2017).

Older worker stereotypes are not necessarily negative. For example, older workers may be seen as highly skilled and experienced; being high in warmth; having a positive attitude; more reliable; more dependable; and going beyond their job requirements (Ng & Feldman 2012; Zheltoukhova & Baczor 2016). However, in the main the research base draws attention to the negative stereotypes surrounding older workers – although it must be noted that employers and managers may at the same time hold both positive and negative views (Dordoni & Argentero 2015; Kroon et al. 2016). These include beliefs that older workers are less motivated; are less keen to participate in training and/or development opportunities; are less adaptable; are resistant to change; are less.

##### **4.1 Impact of generations on perceptions of older workers about younger managers**

Chen and Choi (2008) identified a hierarchy of work values that run across three generations (Baby boomers, GenX and Millennials). They revealed four dimensions of managerial work values that significantly impacted employee recruitment and retention



across the three generational groupings: (1) comfort and security, (2) professional growth, (3) personal growth and (4) work environment. Recently, Gursoy et al. (2013) identified seven dimensions of frontline employees work values across three generations in the hospitality industry. This is confirmed by Van der Walt, Jonck, and Sobayeni (2016) who also identified both similarities and differences in work ethics among generational cohorts. They found that of the seven dimensions of work ethics, leisure and morality were important to all three groups. This aligns with Twenge's (2010) findings, which suggested that leisure is preferred over work across all generations.

Differing in workplace expectations of employees across different generations (Hu et al., 2004; Herzberg, 2003) may trigger generational differences which are likely to have a significant impact on employees' perceptions of co-workers and managers. Studies suggest while Baby boomers' life rotates around work, for both Millennials and Generation X, work is something to be done for sheer survival—life outside of work is far more important than anything at work. Because of these differences some of the Baby boomers may view co-workers from Millennials and Generation X generation as slackers. On the other hand, older employees are likely to admire younger employees' willingness and eagerness to learn (Gursoy et al., 2013).

#### **4.2 Impact of job position on perceptions of older workers about younger managers**

There seems to be significant relationships between position and status in the organization with workers' overall organizational commitment (Bai et al., 2006). Studies suggest that organizational commitment level tends to increase as the employees age and position in the organization improves (Brooke and Taylor, 2005). Bai et al. (2006) argued that workers in supervisory/managerial positions are more committed to their organization than those in line-level job positions.

#### **4.3 Mobile youth livelihoods across South African spaces**

The multiple spaces across which South African youth generate livelihoods can be envisioned as one mainstream and two trans-local sub-fields, operating between physical settings that include Central Business Districts, urban informal settlements and rural areas. Poor households typically inhabit a range of connected places, drawing on various resources. A field refers to a set of power relations with common 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1990, 2000, 2005)), however, translocal sub-fields are local sites of exchange and practice where resources are utilised, linked to other separate spaces.

In South Africa, a mainstream economic field predominantly operates in urban areas, in suburbs and Central Business districts and two trans-local sub-fields play out in townships formerly reserved for Black people and rural areas where homelands or Bantustans were situated during apartheid. Settler colony type institutions were forged in areas demarcated for white people, while indirect rule occurred through dubious deals with local chiefs and other individuals in rural areas designated for various 'indigenous' groups (Mamdani, 1996). A mainstream post-apartheid economic field has developed on the back of this particular form of settler colonialism, concentrated in urban areas, consisting of a few large conglomerates that dominate most sectors with cartel like behaviour, making it very difficult for smaller players to survive (Philip, 2018; Hart and Padayachee 2013). Poor Black South Africans have generally been relegated to the peripheries of this mainstream economy and often make a living in townships and rural areas, where other, peripheral sub-fields formed, connected through migrant labour. The mainstream economic field and each



of these sub-fields needs to be explored in more detail to understand how youth make a living in and across these places.

Youth livelihoods have become increasingly precarious and diverse worldwide since the 1970s, as flexibilised capitalism has reorganised sites of production (Snyder 2016).

### **5. Policy matters: Managing older persons in the workplace**

McGregor and Gray (2002) research has shown that according to employers, older workers are: reliable, loyal, committed to the job and willing to stay longer in the job. Older workers are also ostensibly valued for their experience (Pitt-Catsoupes et al., 2007).

On the other hand, research also shows that such job characteristics as computer experience, innovation, creativity, enthusiasm are the least typical for older workers. Today's older generations are however healthier and better educated than previous. They are more active, and aim to stay at work much longer.

A person's willingness to continue working may be affected by other personal factors or work-related factors that may have an impact on her/his energy, overall vitality and zest for life. Therefore, supportive attitudes from youthful employers and colleagues could play a more prominent role in changing older workers' decisions to stay in working life, increasing their further labour force participation (Carlstedt et al., 2024).

#### **5.1 Education and skill levels of older people**

It is essential for young Managers to appreciate that the level of education and skill level influence the participation of older workers in the workforce and retirement decisions. Older people who possess a higher education qualification tend to postpone retirement, and older workers are likely to possess more soft- than hard skills compared to their younger colleagues (Eiffe et al., 2024). It is very much the case that older workers face challenges in adapting to new job demands due to their lack of skills. When older workers are unable to meet technological requirements, employers tend to reassign, but economic downturns often lead to job loss or premature retirement for these individuals.

#### **5.2 Older workers and innovation.**

Older workers; productivity, creativity, health, ability to learn, ICT skills, and openness to new ideas and different cultures, however, are lower compared to younger workers (Conen et al, 2012; Kadefors and Hanse, 2012).

#### **5.3 Older workers and health**

Söderbacka et al, (2020) suggest that in order to retain older workers in the organisation, employers should prioritise considerations of older workers' health, especially by making intervention when those employees are young. The World Health Organization (WHO), (2010) recommends policy measures prioritising health promotion on the workplace. More specifically, workplaces should concentrate on three main prevention categories:

- Enhancing healthy lives and the physical work environment, and combating unhealthy lifestyles
- Early chronic illness identification and treatment
- Supporting persons who are afflicted by chronic diseases via treatment and rehabilitation.

#### **5.4 Household composition and family obligations**

It is found that very often that when older employees leave the labour market (prematurely), it is often influenced by household compositions and family obligations. In many European countries such as in Bulgaria, Greece, and Latvia, older female workers particularly those living with a male partner preferred early retirement in 2020. Literature

likewise adds to the clear push factor household composition and family obligations tend to be. For example,

Tur-Sinai and Spivak (2022) found significant disparity between male-headed- and female headed households in the decision to take early retirement. They found that the proportion of men staying in employment when the female household head retires was 50%, while the proportion of women staying in employment when the male household head retires is 28%.

### **5.5 Reverse Mentoring**

As it is generally accepted that older employees lack computer skills, it may be a good personnel management practice of younger bosses to see the situation as an opportunity for reverse mentoring (Fore, 2012). Being millennials, and having sound knowledge of technology, younger bosses can implement a reverse mentorship relationship that will enable them to teach older employees on how to better utilize technology to improve work efficiency (Lester, 2011).

## **6. Concluding remarks about workplace policies: Intergenerational knowledge transfer practices**

Intergenerational relations have often been identified as sources of difficulty and conflict.

### **6.1 Differences are not absolute**

Differences in goals and purpose across generations add value, but only if the different generations are prepared to listen and to learn. It is critically important that companies create spaces that allow for these differences to be celebrated and respected. The strengths of each generation will help grow and push people to achieve more and gain a richer understanding of their own strengths and limitations.

It is also important to recognise that the concept of generational differences is not absolute. Some people are keen to change, try new technology, do new things, some are entrenched in what they do and who they are, regardless of their generation,” concludes Smith. „Older or younger, people are going to either be excited about new things, or not.

What’s key here isn’t how to pigeonhole people but rather how to focus on openness that allows for every individual within the business to thrive, regardless of generation or inclination. That is the inflection point.

### **6.2 Transformation policy changes elsewhere**

Some organisations in Malta are focusing on providing employment services for older workers by establishing three policy measures: i.) they provide employment services that consider the diversity of older workers as well as specific features which age imposes on their career paths., ii.) organisational managers are being adequately trained in order to meet the requirements of older workers and minimise premature exit from the labour market and iii.) organisations which are providing employment services should tackle unemployment amongst individuals aged 50 years and over acknowledging that they are highly susceptible as they tend to be either under-skilled or over-skilled given the jobs in demand.

Genesis Analytics (2020:9) advises that private sector organisations need to institutionalise digital skills development by mainstreaming work readiness and on-the-job training for entry-level candidates and developing industry-wide mechanisms for digital re- and up-skilling of existing employees. Though the digital skills of some older workers are



sometimes being underestimated, it is however clear that in many organisations, it is relatively commonplace, that many older workers, particularly those on low incomes, may lack digital skills and might be facing retention challenges in their places of employment. A solution therefore may be to develop and offer free training to older workers, where necessary, to develop and accredit such skills.

Young managers may have to consider implementing measures to allow older workers to operate at lower levels (e.g., reducing physical requirements), maintaining the current level of functioning (e.g., flexible arrangements), or helping workers use their potential (e.g., changing tasks).

Human resource managers should manage older people currently working by having a greater focus on inclusivity, not marginalising older people, ensuring that they have access to training, and that they received equal benefits (Schroeder, 2023: 57). As older workers approach retirement, HR managers should enter into a conversation with them and provide them with retirement assistance.

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