



Changes and Choices

The Rapidly Evolving Business Cases for Employing Mature Workers

America's baby boomers have dramatically reshaped everything they have touched, from child rearing to health care, housing, and education. Their changes have been particularly apparent in the workplace, where they have pushed companies to harness their talent on a scale previously unthinkable.

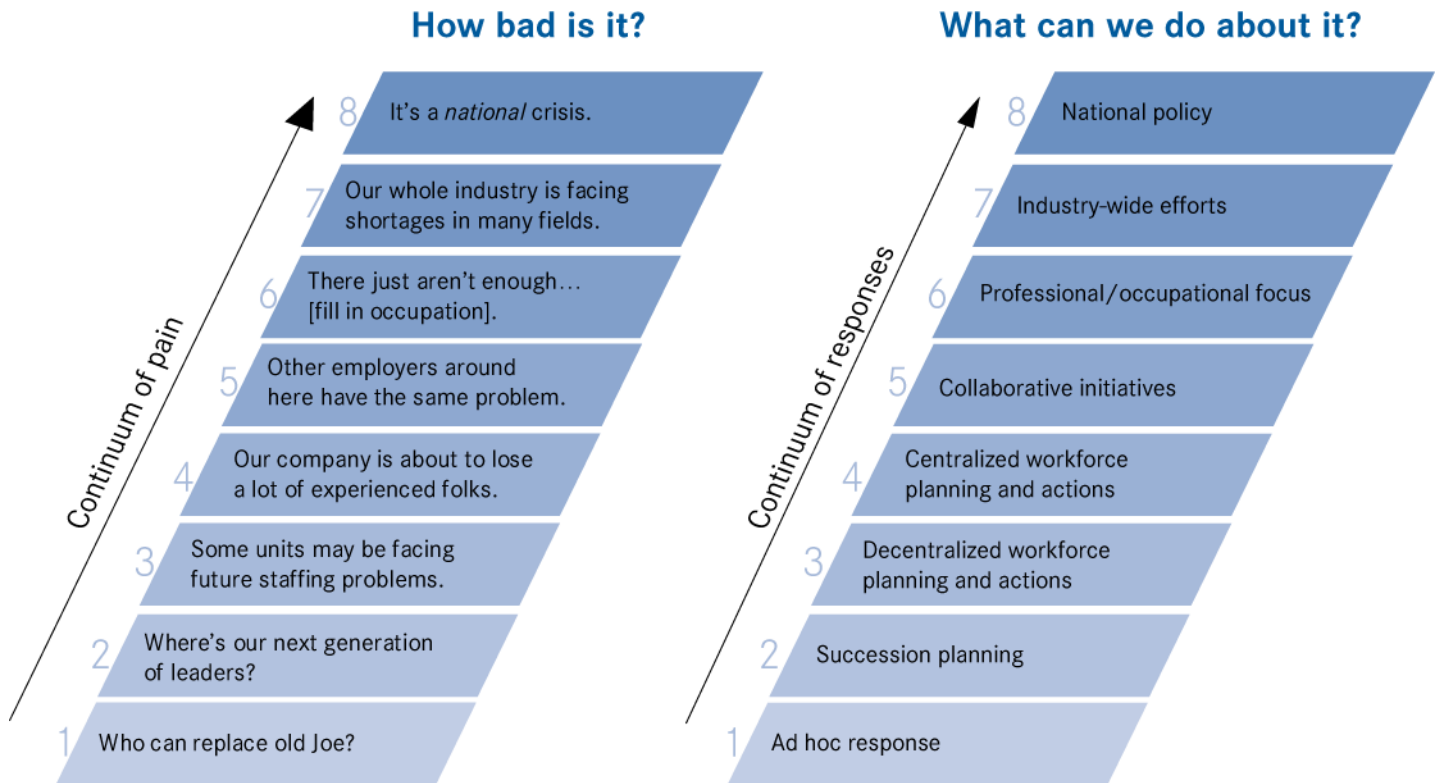
In 2006, the oldest of the 78 million baby boomers turned 60. If this group of workers behaved like the preceding generation, most would be well-settled in retirement plans by now. But boomers are determined to once again do things their way: They intend to remain very active, on the job, and involved in community service.

The continued presence of these mature workers presents both opportunities and challenges for employers. In 2005, The Conference Board began exploring this issue to help U.S. business leaders and policy makers better understand the importance of engaging mature workers in employment and community service.

With the support of the Atlantic Philanthropies, The Conference Board launched the [Mature Workforce Initiative](http://www.conference-board.org/matureworker/) (<http://www.conference-board.org/matureworker/>), which incorporated a combination of conferences, cross-industry professional groups, and research working groups to examine key questions surrounding older workers. It produced a wide range of research to educate employers on the best ways to retain the commitment, skills, and knowledge of mature workers; explore new models for their retirement; transition their corporate skills to use in the nonprofit world; fully involve mature workers in a multigenerational workforce; and recruit and attract them when needed.

This research shows that making a one-size-fits-all business case for hiring and retaining mature workers is not possible. Depending on their industry, leadership, customers, and corporate culture, some companies will make greater use of mature workers than others. While a number of enterprises want to learn from and profit by boomers' accumulated experience, others do not see the need. For organizations that have already completed strategic workforce planning, The Conference Board's research offers a look at implementation methods and pitfalls. For companies that have not analyzed their workforce demographics but have begun to experience the "Continuum of Pain" of boomer retirements, this research provides insight into effective planning.

Corporate America's assessment of baby boomer retirements and how it intends to manage those retirements varies widely.



Report credit: Mary Young, with Diane Piktialis, and Anna Rappaport, [Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce](#), The Conference Board, Research Report 1409, p. 14-15, 2007.

Companies have other obligations as well, most notably to effectively manage their workforce regardless of age. That means using planning and performance review tools they already have at their disposal. The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) provides businesses with information to make a better financial analysis of the costs and benefits of their older workers—in essence, to create their own business case.

The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) offers the inescapable conclusion that public policy makers still have work to do. The Pension Protection Act of 2006 made much-needed changes to the disbursement of retirement funds to older workers, making phased retirement a reality. Similar changes need to be brought to other areas, such as the laws and contract language on overtime. In a competitive global economy, overtime is a critical planning tool and The Conference Board's findings show that age and overtime are not an impossible combination.

The research holds important conclusions for employees as well. Older workers need to actively manage their careers, participate in a multigenerational workplace, and assiduously acquire necessary skills to remain attractive to their employers. This focus on employee responsibility in addition to employer needs sets The Conference Board's research apart from other studies on mature workers.

This initiative offers a new framework to examine the social contract between older workers and their employers, including pensions and retiree medical benefits. The expansion of the U.S. budget deficit, increased pressure on Social Security funding, and impending changes to health insurance all call for a frank discussion of expectations and possibilities. The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) research can be a valuable resource in these discussions.

Changes to the social contract may also portend changes to nonprofit service by boomers. Many mature workers feel an obligation to give back to society, and their spirit of volunteerism has been a boon for nonprofits. As full-time employees, many participated in corporate social responsibility projects and outreach that introduced them to the possibility of switching to the nonprofit sector.

Boomers' interest in nonprofits could be opportune because the sector is facing both looming retirements from older members of this generation and a growing demand for social services to aid them. In 2007, the [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) found that nonprofits lag the government and private sectors in recruiting and retaining mature workers. Nonprofits have since made great progress in this area, but their efforts can be hampered by funding restrictions. Many funders will support only the services nonprofits provide, not infrastructure or operating costs. This leaves the nonprofits unable to create the human resources functions that could serve internal needs and effectively recruit from the outside.

Despite difficulties brought on by the current economic climate, mature workers will continue to play an important role for employers in the future. Many boomers view traditional retirement age not as the end of their productive years, but as the beginning of a new application of their skills. The youngest of this cohort will not turn 65 until 2031, and in that year, there will still be nearly 58 million living boomers¹. The far smaller size of the age cohort behind them is a prescription for gaps in the labor market over the next two decades.

Answers uncovered through the [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) dispel myths and lay groundwork for a reexamination of the role mature workers can play in modern corporations. This report guides employers through research produced for the [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) by theme. It also points out to employers which issues still need exploration as mature workers help rebuild the global economy.

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/006105.html

A Roadmap to Research

Dozens of subjects were explored to produce the reports, action alerts, and guides that form the heart of the [Mature Workforce Initiative](#). Some topics are the main focus of one single report, while others resonate across several publications. The bulk of the research, however, revolves around nine key themes:

- [Creative Staffing](#)
- [Employee Productivity](#)
- [Engagement](#)
- [Leveraging Experience](#)
- [Knowledge Transfer](#)
- [Multigenerational Workforce](#)
- [Strategic Workforce Planning](#)
- [Talent Management](#)
- [Health and Wellness](#)

The Conference Board website has additional information on each of these topics, as well as examples of corporate practices related to mature workers in its Employer Practices Locator.

Making the Case for Older Workers

Writing one business case for hiring and retaining mature workers that makes sense for every company is impossible. But the findings do raise questions that companies can ask to make their own case for engaging older workers:

1. What are the issues and opportunities facing this business or division?
2. How will a mature workforce initiative meet those needs?
3. Which knowledge and skill sets will be the most affected by boomer retirements?
4. How long do we have to address the gaps that boomer retirements will bring?
5. What can we do to help mature workers transfer their knowledge?
6. What role could phased retirement play?
7. Will a mature workforce initiative benefit other generations in the workforce? How can it be designed to do so?
8. Should we recruit mature workers? For which positions?
9. How do we find and attract those workers?
10. What will happen if we fail to engage our mature workers?
11. What resources do we need to carry out a mature workforce initiative?
12. What results can we expect to see? When? And how can they be measured?

Creative Staffing

Perhaps more than ever before, employers need flexible approaches to hiring, training, and retaining key employees. They want innovative ways to use contingent workers, retirees, and alumni to keep businesses operating at peak efficiency.

The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) investigated the public policy framework and use of flexible staffing arrangements for older workers, along with the trend toward phased retirement. It looked at ways to capture both the knowledge that mature workers have accumulated at their jobs, as well as their spirit of volunteerism and civic engagement to see how these traits can extend employers' community outreach. Companies discovered that strategically planning for the use of their workforces and enabling workers to fully plan their careers and retirement as they mature is beneficial for employees and, more importantly, the bottom line.

[Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce](#) is the leading piece of research by The Conference Board in the area of creative staffing for the mature workforce. It provides approaches for companies to assess whether their aging workforce is a threat or an opportunity, and case studies of organizations that have successfully managed their staffing needs, such as Abloy Oy's "Agemaster" program and Bon Secours Richmond Health System's (BSRHS) tiered retirement program. During the research, a BSRHS executive said: "We don't look at anyone as too old to work." The case studies also feature CVS Caremark, which has been recruiting older workers so its workforce more closely matches its customer base.

No discussion of creative staffing would be possible, however, without understanding the Pension Protection Act of 2006. In [Phased Retirement After the Pension Protection Act](#), published in 2007, the Mature Workforce Initiative looks at how the act allows companies to pay pension benefits to employees aged 62 and older who are covered by a defined benefit plan, even if they continue to work.

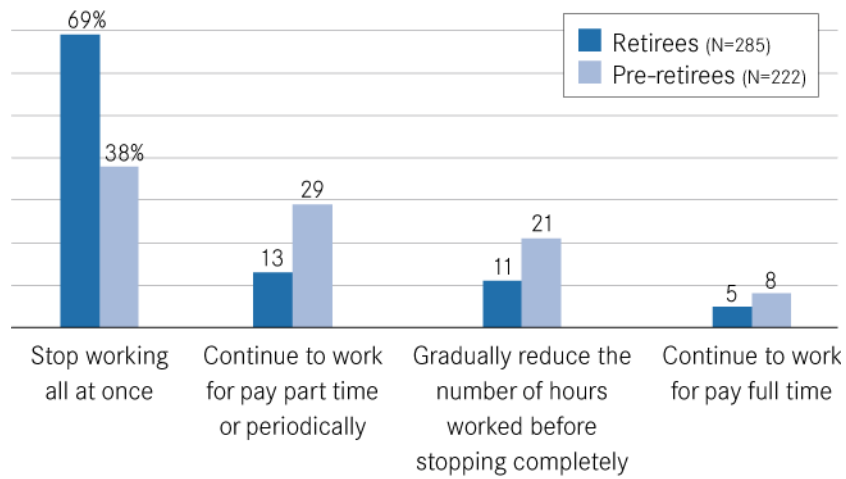
Yet even these changes may not be sufficient. "[Can Continuing Changes in Pension Management Provide a Secure Retirement?](#)"—an Executive Action paper issued by the Mature Workforce Initiative in 2008—notes that seven out of 10 people surveyed want to continue working in retirement. In addition, 59 out of 69 participants in a webcast poll indicate their company would likely have a phased retirement program within three years.

When the two pension-related documents were published, however, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service had not issued the final regulations relating to this act, raising the possibility that U.S. pension structures and funding alternatives would not be structured to match interest in phased retirement. While the regulations have since been issued,² companies must now assess how retirement desires will change in the wake of the current economic downturn.

² The final regulations were published in the Federal Register on February 24, 2009. <http://www.irs.gov/retirement/article/0,,id=165131,00.html>).

Phased Retirement among Retirees and Expected Phased Retirement among Pre-retirees

Mature workers are keenly interested in phased retirement.



Source: 2005 Risks and Process of Retirement Survey, Society of Actuaries

Report credit: Anna Rappaport and Mary Young, [Phased Retirement After the Pension Protection Act](#), The Conference Board, Research Report 1402, 2007, p. 21.

Employee Productivity

Can mature workers be counted on to contribute as much to their company's bottom line as younger hires? It's a simple question, but one that has too often been shrouded in myth, not fact.

The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) examined employee productivity, including the roles of cognitive and physical fitness, and the value of experience. It looked at the role cognitive fitness and physical health play in doing a job well, and ways companies can assess which is most important to the positions they need to staff.

Managing mature workers well can improve their productivity and optimize their contributions. Several case studies in the report [Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce](#) highlight the importance of managing mature workers effectively instead of leaving them alone to "retire in place." The Conference Board also looked at how companies can, and indeed must, stay age-neutral when evaluating and regularly assessing employee productivity. The initiative tackled one of the thorniest issues in the employment of older workers: overtime. Findings in the Executive Action "[Can They Take It? What Happens When Older Employees Work Overtime](#)" put to rest misconceptions about extended hours and mature workers. The research goes beyond mere statistics on injury rates, exploring how mature workers' well-developed knowledge of risks in particular tasks can help them avoid dangers. Since economic recoveries have historically relied on overtime, this study provides helpful guidelines for companies looking to rebuild their output without demolishing the bottom line.

Assessing and developing employee productivity is also a key focus of [Putting Experience to Work: A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce](#). This handbook features role-playing examples, guidance on training and accountability at all stages of a worker's career, and sobering reminders of the dangers of mismanaging these tasks. It also offers methods for taking ageism out of performance reviews to objectively assess a mature worker's capacity to contribute to his or her employer's growth.

Older Employees and Adverse Consequences

Characterizing the Evidence

Age is only one variable among many that can affect productivity.

<i>Outcomes</i>	<i>Aging Alone</i>	<i>Working Hourly</i>	<i>Overtime Salaried</i>
Health			
Physical health	XX	X	O
Mental health	O	O	O
Disease count	XX	O	O
Safety			
Acute work injuries	XX	XX	O
Musculo work injuries	O	O	X
Other work injuries	O	X	O
Short-term disability episodes	XX	O	O
Productivity Limitations			
Presenteeism/non-physical	XX	XX	O
Capacity: bend & twist	XX	O	O

XX = Evidence for adverse consequences is strong

X = Evidence for adverse consequences is modest

O = No evidence for adverse consequences

Report credit: Harris Allen and Christopher Woock, [“Can They Take It? What Happens When Older Employees Work Overtime,”](#) The Conference Board, Executive Action 289, 2008, p. 5.

Engagement

What motivates the mature worker? How does an employer harness its commitment for the good of its broader workforce and the company's bottom line? Does engagement change as an employee contemplates retirement and, if so, how does that change affect his or her work and the greater goals of the company? What can be done to maintain a positive level of engagement?

Whether employees are young or old, they need to feel their skills have meaningful impact—at their jobs or through social service.

For mature workers, engagement in the workplace can also be defined in terms of what they teach younger colleagues. But differences in learning styles may impede the knowledge transfer companies need to thrive. [*Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace*](#) shows companies how to effectively share expertise across their workforces while avoiding ageism. It is designed to help them understand generational learning styles and preferences, and choose the best transfer methods for their needs.

Engagement is not just a one-way street, however. The [*Mature Workforce Initiative*](#) found that companies can enhance the commitment of older workers by continuing to actively manage them, which many fail to do. A member of the research working group assembled for [*Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce*](#) sums it up: "We don't hold mature workers accountable, and we don't develop them." The report's case studies provide strategies to increase engagement among this key worker cohort.

Bon Secours Richmond Health System implemented a strategy to actively monitor employees' challenges and offer solutions. Its combination of flexible work and retirement options combined with wellness and career development programs has dramatically lowered turnover. And a note of caution: Companies that equate advancing age with diminished interest in the workplace do so at their peril. [*Putting Experience to Work: A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce*](#) looks at why companies need to offer continued training to all workers, as well as when—and how—to discuss retirement.

Leveraging Experience

With time in the workplace comes experience—experience that an employer must capture to succeed. How does a company evaluate that experience and see that it is valued across the organization? How does it ensure that it does not foster a climate of ageism?

The Conference Board research found that mature workers are often the first to take advantage of their own experience. According to the 2008 Executive Action paper [“Can They Take It? What Happens When Older Employees Work Overtime,”](#) longer company tenure brings an understanding of what does and does not work in creating products and services. Armed with this knowledge, older workers can maximize operational efficiencies—for their companies and themselves. The paper, which focuses on what happens when older employees work overtime, finds that while mature workers may not be able to work physically harder, they may have the capacity to work mentally smarter. Thanks to their experience, they better understand the demands associated with certain tasks and temper them to avoid the risk of physical injury.

Even while their physical and mental capacities remain strong, mature workers do contemplate retirement. While companies understand that they risk losing experience when older workers leave, few have a systematic plan for capturing that experience and communicating it to a new generation of workers. But in [Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce](#) and [Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today’s Multigenerational Workplace](#), The Conference Board highlights several companies that cultivate, capture, and pass on experience.

Prominent among them is Deere & Company. The construction and agricultural equipment company has traditionally expected workers to find lifelong careers in its operations. Therefore, it actively helps employees take on new assignments. “There’s no letting up because you’re getting close to retirement,” a company executive told researchers.

The same report also highlights GlaxoSmithKline’s strategy. The pharmaceutical giant has affinity groups that support its mature workers’ efforts while enabling them to mentor and develop younger workers. These groups have two target audiences: mid-career and older employees, and early career employees. These groups cross-mentor, with mature workers guiding young professionals, who, in turn educate older employees on current technology and social networking. Although these groups have target audiences, they are open to workers of all ages, making them an effective tool for addressing multigenerational issues in the workplace.

Comparing Generational Learning Styles

To capture and extend the experience of older workers, employers must understand the role that personal dynamics and learning styles play.

Comparison of Previous vs. Current Learning Styles	
Characteristics, Dominant Learning Style of Previous Generations (Digital Immigrants)	Characteristics, Dominant Learning Style of Virtual Generations (Digital Natives)
Linear acquisition of information	Nonlinear (hyperlinked) logic of learning
Focused mainly on facts and knowledge acquisition	Focused more on deutero-learning (learning how to learn)
Guided learning	Autonomous learning
Learning in specified time periods	Learning 24/7
Face-to-face learning	Interactive virtual learning
Learning as duty	Learning as fun
Rote learning	Analogical learning

Report credit: Kent Greenes and Diane Piktialis, [*Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace*](#), The Conference Board, Research Report 1428, 2008, p. 11.

Knowledge Transfer

While mature workers regularly leverage their knowledge on the job, there comes a point where they must pass it on to other workers. The Conference Board research examines capturing and extending the mature worker's expertise through mentoring programs, knowledge transfer, participation in a multigenerational workforce, and innovative phased retirement.

[Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace](#) shows companies how to effectively share expertise across their workforces while avoiding ageism. It is designed to help them understand generational learning styles and preferences, and choose the best transfer methods. The report distinguishes transfer methods by user need, context, type of knowledge, level of experience, as well as identifies the approaches that best suit each need category. It also points out three key incentives for knowledge transfer and the prerequisites for making that transfer happen.

In addition, it offers concrete examples of how strategies have been used by a variety of employers, from engineering and construction to utilities. A research working group member from Northeast Utilities explains the company's knowledge transfer plan, and shows how it supports the organization's five-year plan for talent and leadership development. Northeast Utilities' commitment to capturing and transferring knowledge is as important as maintaining its electricity and gas networks.

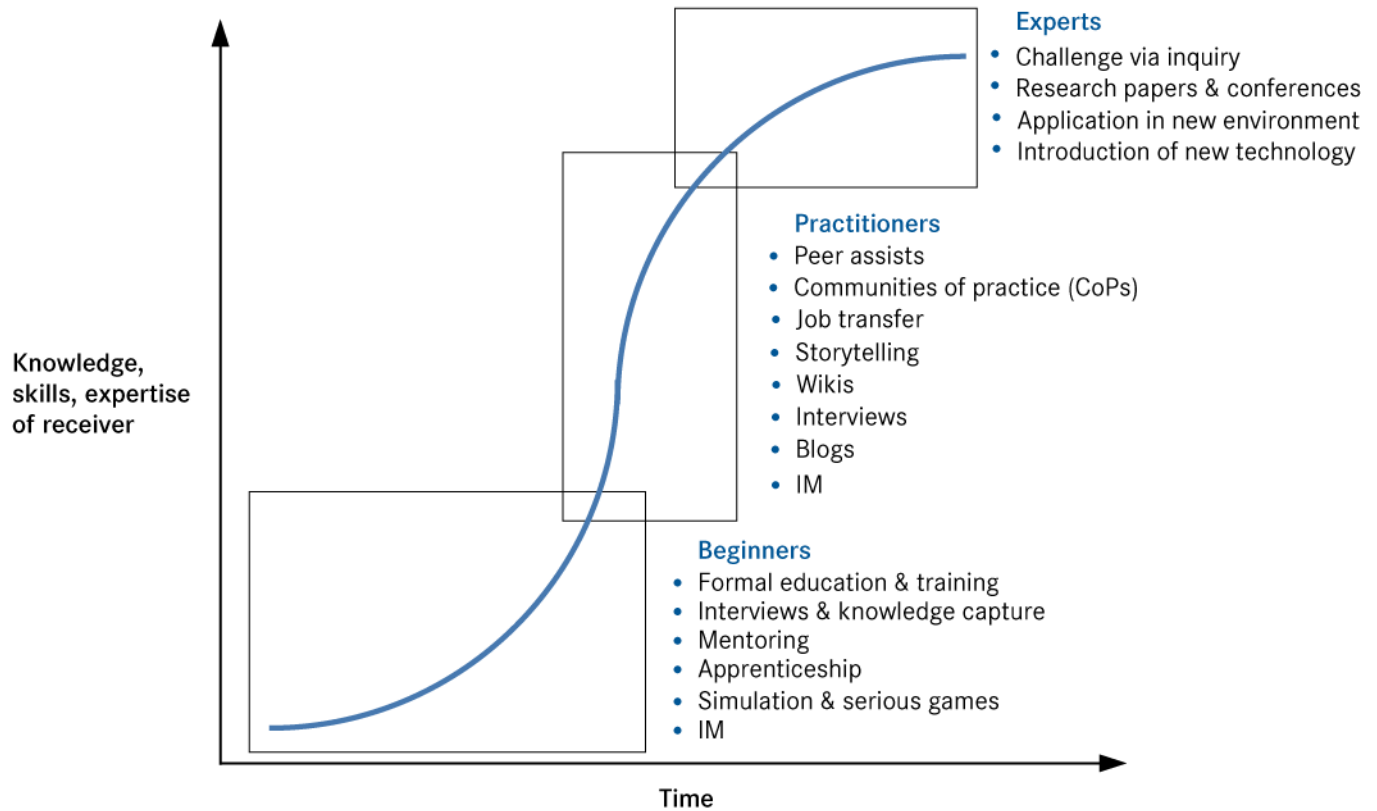
[Bridging the Gaps](#) also describes programs at Black and Veatch and American Express for building knowledge transfer into phased retirement. Doing this through job redesign or formal transfer allows mature workers to stay with the firm as they unbundle responsibilities and helps companies rationalize succession planning.

The research on knowledge transfer also suggests high potential for emerging practices, such as "reverse mentoring"—when a younger employee teaches new technology to an older worker. This practice brings reciprocity into knowledge sharing and generates cross-generational trust.

The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) also includes a wealth of resources in *[Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace](#)*. Developed as part of The Conference Board Multigenerational Knowledge Transfer Research Working Group, this report provides strategies for disseminating expertise from older to younger workers and across like generations; solutions that use technology, such as blogs and instant messaging; and best practices for off-line interviews and informational events to share knowledge in ways that will be accepted and applied by younger generations.

Knowledge Transfer Methods and the Learning Curve

By understanding workers' current level of experience, employers can identify new methods of education.



Report credit: Diane Piktialis and Kent Greenes, *Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace*, The Conference Board, Research Report 1428, 2008, p. 23.

Multigenerational Workforce

No organization can thrive on the talents of one generation of workers, alone. But having a multigenerational workforce is not a guarantee of success either. Companies can and should leverage the strengths and skills of all workers, and build bridges for cooperation between the generations.

The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) found that some companies focus on the multigenerational workplace rather than on mature workers, even when the latter was their initial priority. The report [Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce](#) includes case studies from GlaxoSmithKline and other companies that want to avoid the perception that one age group gets special treatment. GlaxoSmithKline acknowledges generational differences and provides inclusion through training for managers and supervisors, as well as age-related affinity groups created and run by employees.

[Putting Experience to Work: A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce](#) is a legal and managerial guide that dispels myths about mature workers, beginning with the view of what constitutes “old.” Its hypothetical scenarios look at the need for succession management at all ages, and offers practical guidelines for helping multiple generations in the workplace interact with each other.

Identifying generational learning styles and preferences can be the first step in building on the strengths of a workforce that spans age groups. [Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace](#) compares and contrasts these styles, and shows how the gaps between younger and older workers are far narrower than many people assume.

Generational divides may also exist in the nonprofit sector. The report [Boomers Are Ready for Nonprofits: But Are Nonprofits Ready for Them?](#) examines the leadership gap that will result from retirements in the arts and social services fields, as well as the growing demand for employment in nonprofit fields such as health care. But as nonprofits recruit baby boomers transitioning from corporate employment, they must also take care not to block the aspirations of younger leaders.

The research for the sequel [A Perfect Match? How Nonprofits Are Tapping into the Boomer Talent Pool](#) finds the benefits of working in a multigenerational environment outweigh the challenges and help mature workers make the transition from other sectors.

Strategic Workforce Planning

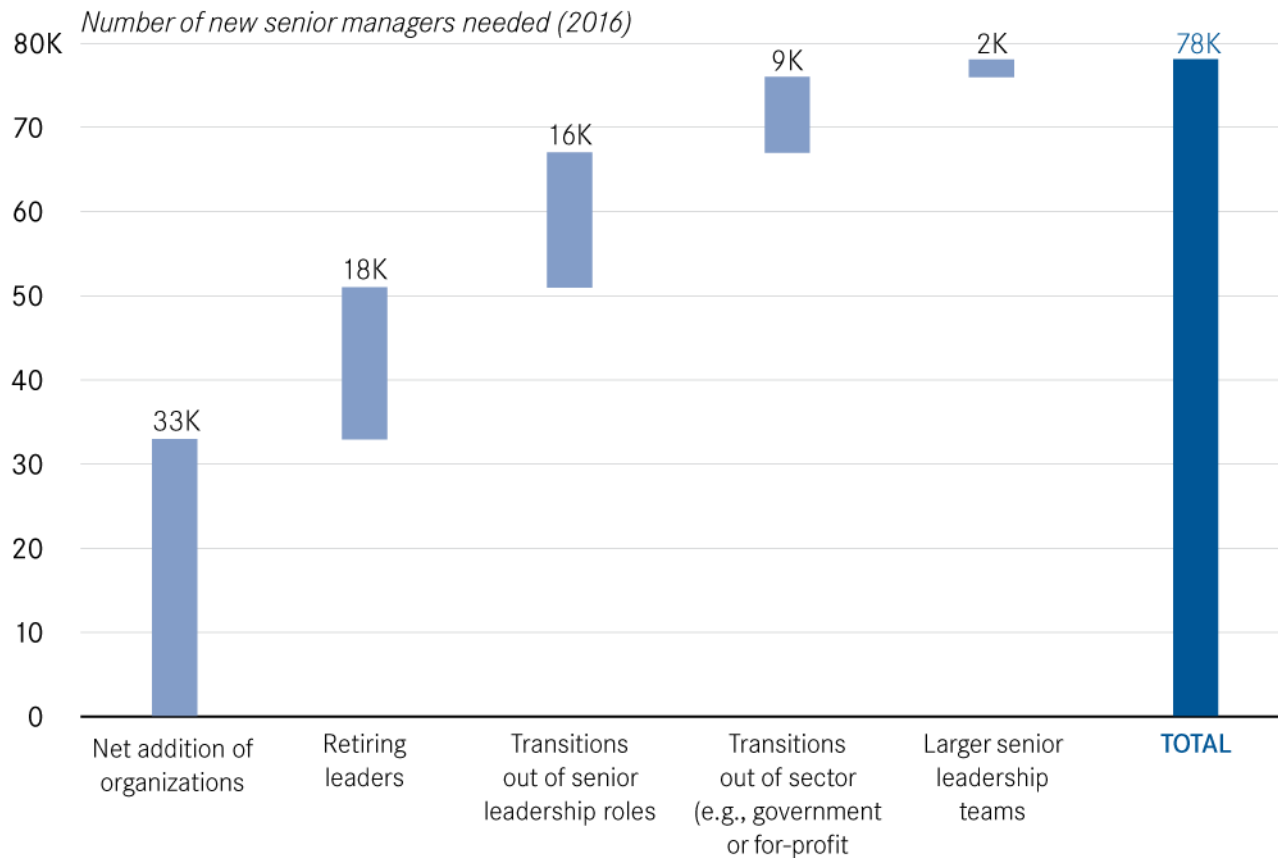
The Conference Board research on strategic workforce planning describes how companies analyze and plan the talent they will need to meet future business objectives.

Prior to the current economic downturn, several studies predicted companies would face looming disaster from projected baby boomer retirements. The Conference Board investigated how organizations use a relatively new process called strategic workforce planning to project where, when, and to what extent they will be affected by employee retirements. Only by analyzing their own workforce data, as opposed to data from the labor force overall, can employers determine whether retirements present a threat, an opportunity, or a non-issue to their operations. Like all workforce projections, those that focus on age and retirement eligibility need to be revisited regularly to adjust for changes in business strategy or the operating environment (such as the current recession).

The need to project retirement plans and fill the resulting gaps isn't limited to for-profit companies. In its report [*Boomers Are Ready for Nonprofits: But Are Nonprofits Ready for Them?*](#), The Conference Board found that nonprofits need strategic workforce planning as well—but aren't often doing it. That could exacerbate projected leadership shortages as the nonprofit sector expands over the next decade.

The nonprofit sector will likely need nearly 80,000 new leaders in 2016

Leadership shortages in nonprofits will worsen as baby boomers retire and the social service sector expands.



Note: Transitions out of senior management positions include EDs and senior managers that have left their current position to become a consultant or to take an unpaid volunteer or board governance role. Transitions out of the sector include EDs and senior managers that have left their current position for a job in the government or for profit sector. Senior management is defined as the most senior tier of management that could include the COO CFO CDO, Head of Human Resources, Head of Marketing, Head of Programs.

Source: National Center for Charitable Statistics data; Bridgespan analysis in Thomas J. Tierney, *The Nonprofit Sector's Leadership Deficit*, The Bridgespan Group, March 2006, p.3.

Report credit: Jill Casner-Lotto, *Boomers Are Ready for Nonprofits: But Are Nonprofits Ready for Them?*, The Conference Board, Research Report E-0012, 2007, p. 11.

Talent Management

As with every component of their workforces, companies must evaluate and manage their mature workers, and plan for the transition of the roles they fill. Demographic trends have also driven some industries to actively recruit mature workers. The Mature Workforce Initiative looks at assessment, succession, managing, and recruitment, as well as ways in which employers may avoid ageism.

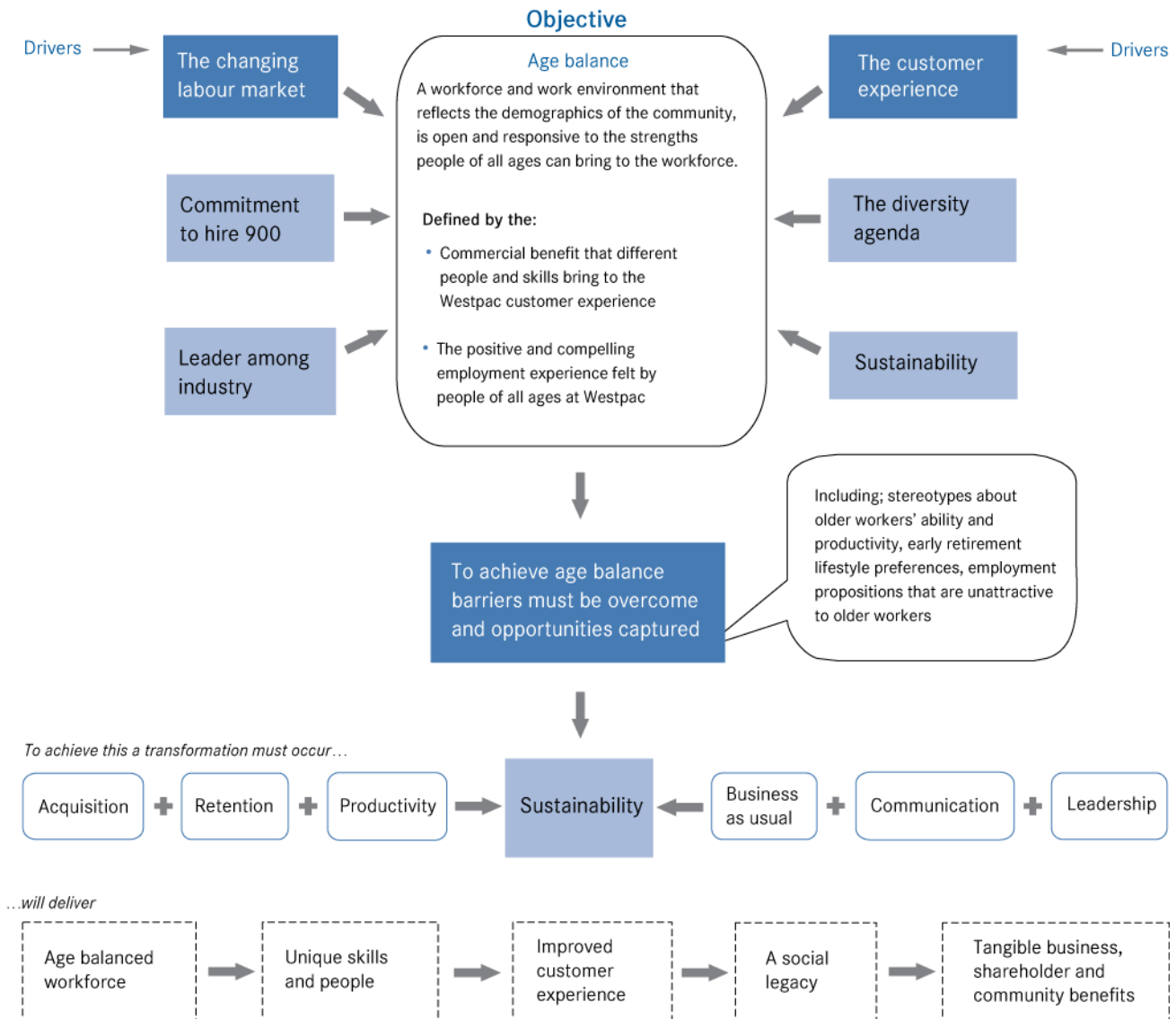
According to the 2008 Executive Action paper [“Can They Take It? What Happens When Older Employees Work Overtime,”](#) age alone is not a risk in overtime assignments. Older workers can neutralize or even reverse the risks of working longer hours because they are able to better assess the difficulties of an assignment and avoid them.

The report [Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce](#) contains multiple examples of companies that have found productive ways to manage their aging workforces. To succeed, organizations must show respect for older workers, listen to them, and meet their needs. Companies that want to learn how to successfully implement phased retirement should look at the report’s case studies on Bon Secours and contracting firm Your Encore, which specializes in providing client companies with highly skilled retirees on a project basis. These employers understand what it takes to keep retired or retirement-eligible talent working.

The report also suggests ways for businesses to recruit and retain mature workers, such as partnering with other companies, government, and nonprofits to identify mature workers who fit their needs. Case studies illustrate the recruiting efforts at Busch entertainment, CVS Caremark, and Westpac Banking. “One of the biggest mistakes we made at first was focusing on an acquisition-based strategy,” says an executive at the Australian banking giant. “We learned that to get age balance in our population, we need to consider retention of our current employees.”

The legal guide produced in conjunction with the [Mature Workforce Initiative, Putting Experience to Work: A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce](#), stresses that not managing older employees is not an option. Companies that fail to build comprehensive records of employee performance or that simply give mature workers a “pass” are not managing their workforces to their full potential. If they are not careful when they later assess their workers, they could find themselves accused of attempting to weed out older workers.

The Framework for Age Balance



Report credit: Mary Young, with Diane Piktialis, and Anna Rappaport, *Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce*, The Conference Board, Research Report 1409, p. 73, 2007.

Health and Wellness

The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) aims to dispel misconceptions about mature workers' mental and physical fitness. Far from being worn out by their first careers, they remain interested in and committed to active participation in society. The Mature Workforce Initiative recognizes these shifting expectations, and researched methods companies can use to assess and improve the cognitive fitness of older workers, how older workers work smarter than their younger colleagues, and support systems organizations can provide to keep workers of all ages performing optimally.

[*Your Brain at Work: Making the Science of Cognitive Fitness Work for You*](#) was produced in conjunction with the Dana Foundation, one of the leaders in researching neurological functions. This guide and its companion website update, [Your Brain At Work: Learning How You Learn Best](#), offers tips to help workers of all ages build their brain power and keep it strong as they age. Recommendations range from lifestyle issues to helping workers understand the way they learn best. Employers have much to gain from reading [*Your Brain at Work*](#) as well.

The [Mature Workforce Initiative's](#) legal guide [*Putting Experience to Work: A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce*](#) offers a stark reminder that assuming an older worker is not healthy enough to work can send an employer down a dangerous path. This guide reiterates, through clear language and hypothetical examples, an employer's obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family and Medical Leave Act.

The Work Ability Model

A Building with Several Floors

Work ability is built on the balance between a person's resources and work demands. In the model below, work ability is described as a building with several floors, each floor supporting those above it.



Source: Adapted from Ilmarinen (2005) *Towards a Longer Work Life!*, Finnish Institute for Occupational Health, page 132.

Report credit: Mary Young, with Diane Piktialis, and Anna Rappaport, [Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce](#), The Conference Board, Research Report 1409, p. 43, 2007.

Unanswered Questions

Over the past three years, The Conference Board [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) has looked at many issues surrounding the hiring, training, motivation, and retention of older workers. But an almost equally large number of questions remain to be answered, including how to change ageism in a corporate setting. Some gaps in employers' understanding of mature workers were apparent before the onset of the global recession; others have surfaced only with the vast changes that have occurred in the world's economies.

Questions include issues surrounding technology. Do older workers lag behind younger counterparts in their knowledge and use of office technology and Internet-based research and services? How do they view the business applications of social networking sites and how are smart companies using social networking to foster teamwork and build their businesses? If gaps exist in older workers' understanding and use of technology, can they be closed by training, and what form should that training take?

The research already completed by The Conference Board [Mature Workforce Initiative](#), in particular the study of cognitive fitness done in partnership with the Dana Foundation, suggests that mature workers are acutely aware of the need to maintain their cognitive fitness and their capacity for learning remains strong. The research on knowledge transfer suggests "reverse mentoring" has the potential to improve mature workers' technology skills. At the same time, it brings reciprocity into knowledge sharing and generates cross-generational trust.

Questions of technical capability and training are also prominent in discussions about the effects global economic change will have on older workers, particularly in emerging "green" businesses and the restructuring of the auto industry. What role can mature workers play as their employers emphasize environmentalism and sustainability? Are old skills transferable to new industries? Do older workers have a personal commitment to environmentalism that could help cement the creation of a stronger multigenerational workforce?

In the auto sector, tens of thousands of auto workers—often mature workers—are losing their jobs as the industry retrenches. In the wings, however, is a new generation of auto entrepreneurs looking to build sustainably powered cars. Can one group help the other? How can the skills and strengths of auto workers be transferred to these and other industries? What are the stumbling blocks to finding new jobs for former auto workers? How many earlier auto retirees will seek to rejoin the workforce as their retirement benefits are cut back? Additionally, the restructuring of the U.S. auto industry may necessitate changes in pension laws and management. What will the fallout be for other industries?

As we consider new issues, we must remain mindful of the evolution of subjects already addressed in the [Mature Workforce Initiative](#). The reports produced to date look at when current workers were expected to retire, and how much work they wanted to do postretirement. Given the turmoil of the recession and the magnitude of retirement savings that have been lost as a result of the financial downturn, how have those attitudes changed? What new expectations do boomers have of their retirement years? How do their current—and future—employers need to adjust?

Researchers may want to revisit the role of corporate social responsibility in the aftermath of the recession. Many companies developed social responsibility and community outreach programs over the past decade—programs that some saw as a way for mature workers to transition to nonprofit jobs. How has that bridge been affected by the recession? What will be the role of social responsibility programs as the economies of America and the world rebuild?

Opportunity and Optimism

Mature workers have become an important segment of the world's labor markets and will remain so for many years to come. The youngest members of the baby boomer generation will not turn 65 until 2031, and in that year, there will still be nearly 58 million living boomers. Though laws have sprung up in many countries to protect the rights of older workers, smart employers recognize they are a resource for growth too valuable to be wasted.

On the whole, mature workers have much to offer their employers. Their experience and industry knowledge allow them to quickly solve problems and pursue additional opportunities. Their cognitive fitness remains strong and pliable, enabling them to grasp new tasks and technologies. They expect that their performance will continue to be reviewed and welcome the chance to share their skills with younger colleagues.

The [Mature Workforce Initiative](#) has uncovered many strategies to capitalize on the strengths of older workers. Its research demonstrates there are many effective ways of hiring, motivating, managing, and retaining these valuable resources for growth.

- The age that individuals classify workers as being “old” or “mature” varies from person to person.
- Employees believe that employers classify younger workers as being “old” at younger ages than they would and that employers treat older workers differently than younger workers.^{XI}
- Employers should not label employees as “older” or treat older workers differently.
- Mature workers are no more likely to leave their jobs than younger workers.

Report credit: David Micah Kaufman and Deborah Weinstein, [Putting Experience to Work; A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce](#), The Conference Board, 2007, p. 16.

Publications and Related Resources

Publications

Summary Report

- [*Changes and Choices: The Rapidly Evolving Business Case for Employing Mature Workers*](#)

Research Reports

- [*Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace*](#)
- [*Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce*](#)
- [*Managing the Mature Workforce*](#)
- [*Phased Retirement After the Pension Protection Act*](#)
- [*Boomers Are Ready for Nonprofits: But Are Nonprofits Ready for Them?*](#)
- [*A Perfect Match? How Nonprofits Are Tapping into the Boomer Talent Pool*](#)

Guidebooks

- [*Putting Experience to Work: A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce*](#)
- [*Your Brain at Work: Making the Science of Cognitive Fitness Work for You*](#)

Executive Action Reports

- [*"Can Continuing Changes in Pension Management Provide a Secure Retirement?"*](#)
- [*"Capturing Butterflies and Making Them Talk: Overcoming Four Critical Challenges of Transferring Knowledge Across Generations"*](#)
- [*"Can They Take It? What Happens When Older Employees Work Overtime"*](#)

The Conference Board Review Article

- [*"We've Studied Older Workers to Death. How Come We Know So Little about Them?"*](#)

Related Resources

Online

- [*Your Brain at Work: Learning How You Learn Best*](#)

Webcasts

- [*Can They Take It? Productivity, Overtime, and the Mature Worker*](#)
21 July 2009 | 3:00 PM ET [15:00]
- [*When the Thaw Comes, How Different Will Your Workforce Be?*](#)
18 June, 2009 | 03:00 PM ET [15:00] | KnowlEdge Series | Freeze and Thaw: Managing Human Capital Through the Downturn while Preparing for the Upturn
- [*No One is Leaving! Lack of Natural Turnover and Workforce Composition, Morale and Effectiveness*](#)
11 June, 2009 | 03:00 PM ET [15:00] | KnowlEdge Series | Freeze and Thaw: Managing Human Capital Through the Downturn while Preparing for the Upturn

- [Confronting Survivor Syndrome: Building Engagement through the Downturn](#)
04 June, 2009 | 03:00 PM ET [15:00] | KnowlEdge Series | Freeze and Thaw: Managing Human Capital Through the Downturn while Preparing for the Upturn
- [Putting Experience to Work: Managing Mature Workers without Running Afoul of Employment Laws](#)
19 June, 2008 | 11:00 AM ET [11:00]
- [Managing a Mature Workforce for Competitive Advantage](#)
30 January 2008 | 3:00 PM ET [15:00]
- [Making Phased Retirement Work: Practical Issues and Innovative Solutions for Employers and Mature Employees](#)
26 June 2007 | 2:00PM ET [14:00]

Research Working Groups*

Implementing Strategic Workforce Planning
Managing an Aging Workforce in the Nonprofit Sector
Mature Workforce Challenges
Multigenerational Knowledge Transfer
Strategic Workforce Planning in Global Organizations

*The work done by these research working groups has been completed.

Councils

Council of U.S. Diversity & Inclusion Executives
Council of Talent Management Executives
Council on Global Diversity & Inclusion Executives
Work Life Leadership Council
Advisory Council on Human Resources Management
HR Executive Leaders Council
Council on Executive Coaching
Leadership Development Council
Council on Compensation

About This Project

About the Mature Workforce Initiative Team

Linda Barrington, PhD, is the former managing director of human capital at The Conference Board. Barrington directed global workforce and human resources research offerings at The Conference Board. Her research projects included benchmarking top executive challenges, and assessing trends surrounding the maturing workforce, workforce readiness, and other related issues. Before joining The Conference Board, Ms. Barrington was on the faculty of the economics department at Barnard College of Columbia University. There she published several articles on gender economics, poverty measurement, and economic history. Ms. Barrington received her B.S. in economics from the University of Wisconsin and her PhD in economics from the University of Illinois.

Lorrie Foster, M.P.A., is vice president of councils for The Conference Board. In this capacity, she oversees 85 peer-networking groups and the design and implementation of collaborative corporate research initiatives on topics related to organizational effectiveness and the global workforce. Foster was co-project director of the mature workforce initiative. Prior to joining The Conference Board, Foster was executive director of the World Trade Institute at the World Trade Center in New York and held management positions at AT&T International. Foster was awarded an A.B. in diplomacy and world affairs from Occidental College and a M.P.A. from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University where she concentrated in Business and Government.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Ms. Foster: Managing the Mature Workforce: Implications and Best Practices (2005).

Jeri Sedlar is a senior advisor to The Conference Board on mature workforce issues, business owner, speaker, and author of the highly acclaimed books, *Don't Retire, Rewire!* and *On Target: Enhance Your Life and Ensure Your Success*. Sedlar has more than 20 years of experience in the consumer marketing and professional services arena. As the former editor-at-large of *Working Woman* magazine, she motivated audiences into recognizing and eliminating the physical and psychological issues that are perceived barriers to their success. She also served as director of corporate affairs for the Working Woman/Working Mother Group, where she worked on such key issues as work/life balance, female entrepreneurship, and flextime in conjunction with the Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Labor.

Mary B. Young, PhD, is principle researcher in human capital at The Conference Board. Ms. Young leads The Conference Board program of research on strategic workforce planning and has been a major contributor to its research on the mature workforce. Trained in organizational behavior and organizational development, she has studied strategic workforce planning's emergence and evolution as a business process in more than 70 companies. Drawing upon skills as a long-time journalist, she has completed 20 case studies describing how companies implement strategic workforce planning and presented her research findings at scores of corporate meetings in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Asia-Pacific, and Europe. She received her doctorate in organizational behavior from Boston University's Graduate School of Management. She earned a M.Ed. in organizational development at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and a B.A. in English from Case Western Reserve University.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Dr. Young: Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce, Phased Retirement after the Pension Protection Act, Old Questions (for The Conference Board Review magazine) and a related report, Strategic Workforce Planning: Forecasting Human Capital Needs to Execute Business Strategy.

Diane Piktialis, PhD, is a research working group and program leader at The Conference Board, where her work focuses on multigenerational and aging workforce issues. She has more than 30 years of experience in program and product development. Ms. Piktialis was formerly work-life product director and an expert on mature workers at Ceridian Corporation. Prior to that, she was vice president at Work/Family Directions where she created the first U.S. corporate elder care program. She is past director of policy and program development for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts, and past assistant secretary at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. She has published widely in such journals as *Business and Health*, the *Journal of Aging and Social Policy*, *Benefits and Compensation Solutions*, *Compensation and Benefits Review*, and *HR Executive*, and is past chair of the Business Forum on Aging of the American Society on Aging.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports authored and contributed to by Dr. Piktialis: Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace, Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce.

Susan Stewart, M.A., is a writer and editor at The Conference Board. She is also a freelance writer and critic whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *TV Guide*, *GQ*, *Southern Living*, and many other publications. She has written columns for four newspapers, including *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Philadelphia Daily News*, and the *Detroit Free Press*. Ms. Stewart has an A.B.J. from University of Georgia and an M.A. from the University of Virginia.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Ms. Stewart: "Capturing Butterflies and Making Them Talk."

Christopher Woock, PhD, is a researcher in human capital at The Conference Board. His research explores the links between human capital and business performance, including the link between employee practices and innovation; evaluating business' investment in the skills of its current and potential workforce; and issues surrounding a multigenerational workforce. Woock received his PhD in economics from the University of Kentucky.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Dr. Woock: "Can They Take It? What Happens When Older Employees Work Overtime"

Harris Allen, PhD, is principal of Harris Allen Group, LLC, an independent consulting firm in Brighton, Massachusetts, that promotes strategy development and performance improvement in the area of health and productivity. He is also a lecturer in the department of epidemiology and public health at the Yale School of Medicine and is a senior scholar at Jefferson Medical College, Thomas Jefferson University. He serves as an expert lecturer for the Institute for Health and Productivity Management and its training arm, the Academy for Health and Productivity Management. He has previously held director, scientific, or managerial posts at Coopers &

Lybrand L.L.P., New England Medical Center, Aetna Life and Casualty, and The Rand Corporation.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Dr. Allen: "Can They Take It? What Happens When Older Employees Work Overtime."

Jill Casner-Lotto is a writer and research consultant with over 20 years' experience in human resources and labor management issues. Previous to her consulting work with The Conference Board, Ms. Casner-Lotto was senior vice president for policy studies at Work in America Institute, a nonprofit workplace research and membership organization that focused on improving productivity, labor management partnership, and quality of working life. She has directed numerous national policy research projects, working in conjunction with business, labor, and academic leaders to anticipate workplace trends and undertake new fields of research aimed at improving both business results and employees' quality of working life. Her research has been funded by The Ford Foundation, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, U.S.-Japan Foundation, and by major corporations and labor unions.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Ms. Casner-Lotto: Boomers Are Ready for Nonprofits; But Are Nonprofits Ready for Them?

Kent A. Greenes is program director for The Conference Board Learning and Knowledge Management Council and an internationally recognized expert on knowledge management. His recent clients include Save the Children, the U.S. Army, NASA, Northrop Grumman, and the Defense Intelligence Agency. Prior to starting his own consulting firm, Mr. Greenes worked as chief knowledge officer at SAIC, whose clients included Unocal, Frito Lay, and NORTHCOM. Prior to that, he worked for 17 years at British Petroleum, where he started as a geophysicist and eventually became head of knowledge management. He initiated and directed BP's global Virtual Teamwork Program. Mr. Greenes is executive in residence at George Washington University, a faculty member at California State University at Northridge, and on the advisory board of several companies and organizations, among them Tomoye, KMPro, and the U.S. Army Battle Command Knowledge System.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Kent Greenes: Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace.

David Micah Kaufman is a senior consultant in the Weinstein Consulting division of The Weinstein Firm. Mr. Kaufman has spent over nine years in human resources consulting and another 10 years in private enterprise. His consulting experience includes working for several years with the late Philadelphia labor legend and management guru, Dr. Edward B. Shils.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Mr. Kaufman: Putting Experience to Work: A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce.

Anna Rappaport is an internationally recognized expert on the impact of change on retirement systems and workforce issues. Following a 28-year career with Mercer Human Resource Consulting, Ms. Rappaport established her own firm, specializing in strategies for better retirement systems. Prior to working with Mercer she spent the years from 1958-1976 in the life insurance industry. Ms. Rappaport has helped many organizations develop their strategies with regard to retirement benefits. She has written extensively on these issues for the Society of Actuaries and various academic and research organizations. In her organizational participation,

writing and speaking, she brings forward important issues to ensure that decision makers can act on the best available information, strongly driven by facts and thorough analysis.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Ms. Rappaport: Gray Skies, Silver Linings: How Companies Are Forecasting, Managing, and Recruiting a Mature Workforce, Phased Retirement after the Pension Protection Act.

Deborah Weinstein is founder and president of The Weinstein Firm. She has been a respected litigator, counselor, and thought leader in the area of employment law for more than 17 years. Formerly a partner in the labor and employment law department at law firm Eckert Seamans Cherin and Mellott, LLC, Ms. Weinstein developed a national reputation for her forceful courtroom presentations; sound preventative advice on workforce issues to business, law, and consulting firms as well as entrepreneurs; and her ability to work with employers to prevent workplace disputes from escalating into protracted litigation. Ms. Weinstein is a lecturer in the Legal Studies and Business Ethics Department of the Wharton Business School of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and writes regularly on workforce issues for a variety of publications.

Mature Workforce Initiative reports by Deborah Weinstein: Putting Experience to Work: A Guide to Navigating Legal and Management Issues Relating to a Mature Workforce.

Virginia M. Citrano has been an editor and writer at business publications and websites for more than two decades, including *The Wall Street Journal/Europe*, *Crain's New York Business* and *Forbes.com*. She is the author of *Changes and Choices: The Rapidly Evolving Business Cases for Employing Mature Workers*.

About the Mature Workforce Initiative

The Conference Board Mature Workforce Initiative is committed to helping employers engage and develop mature employees within the rapidly changing multigenerational workplace. The Atlantic Philanthropies provided underwriting of The Mature Workforce Initiative. The Atlantic Philanthropies is dedicated to bringing about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people through grant-making. The Atlantic Philanthropies focuses on critical social programs related to aging, disadvantaged children and youth, population health, and reconciliation and human rights.

About the Conference Board

The Conference Board creates and disseminates knowledge about management and the marketplace to help businesses strengthen their performance and better serve society. Working as a global, independent membership organization in the public interest, we conduct research, convene conferences, make forecasts, assess trends, publish information and analysis, and bring executives together to learn from one another.

The Conference Board Mature Workforce Initiative is committed to helping employers engage and develop mature employees within the rapidly changing multigenerational workplace. The Mature Workforce Initiative is led by Linda Barrington, managing director of human capital. A former member of the economics department at Barnard College of Columbia University, Ms.

Barrington's current research projects include benchmarking workforce diversity, analysis of the relationship between productivity and workforce diversity, and assessing issues surrounding the maturing worker and other workforce challenges.

To learn more about the Mature Workforce Initiative, contact Katherine Solis at 212-339-0482 or katherine.solis@conference-board.org.