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AGE-FRIENDLY ORGANISATIONS: THE ROLE OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND THE PARTICIPATION OF OLDER WORKERS

Population ageing is a global phenomenon that has become prominent in international discourse over the past few decades. This discussion is often coupled with the economic implications of population ageing through reduced workforce participation of the older age group, increased government spending on health and pensions and reduced government income from taxes. A means of mitigating the economic costs of ageing is to lift the proportion of older individuals in the workforce and prolong working lives. This brings to the forefront an important point regarding the need for organisations to undertake changes so as to better enable the employment of older individuals and to cater for an ageing workforce. This article critically reflects on age-friendly organisational practices that can have an impact on the recruitment and retention of older individuals. It further contends that there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of factors that constitute an organisational culture geared towards the older demographic, in order for strategies and practices directed at older workers to be effective. Through this argument, the authors consolidate the literature on age-friendly organisational practices and propose a conceptual model of an age-friendly organisational culture, drawing from both functionalist and interpretivist paradigms.

Keywords age-friendly; ageing; organisational culture; change; workforce

Introduction

Population ageing is a global phenomenon that has become prominent in international discourse largely over concerns that if increased numbers of older workers leave the workforce through retirement, this would result in a decline in real economic growth due to reduced GDP per capita, reduced government income from taxes and increased government spending on health care and social benefits. It is for this reason that the governments around the world have made plans for increasing official retirement ages. However, this strategy simply removes incentives to leave work, rather than increase incentives to stay.

A critical means of mitigating the economic costs of ageing is to increase the proportion of older people in the workforce. Studies have shown that older workers

have lower absenteeism, fewer accidents and are more loyal to an organisation compared with younger workers (Maurer *et al.*, 2008, Billett *et al.*, 2011). Older workers tend to stay with an organisation for longer and therefore incur fewer costs for recruitment and training. Indeed, companies are starting to acknowledge a need to adapt to an ageing workforce in order to retain key skills and talent within their organisations (Wuestner, 2012).

To attract and retain older workers, we need to examine the organisational factors that can facilitate their integration and participation. This paper therefore serves to identify and discuss organisational practices within the literature deemed as 'age-friendly' in order to facilitate the move towards more age-friendly organisations and help with change.

Who is the older worker?

There is no absolute agreement about what age one becomes an older worker. This is because ageing is a multidimensional process that is difficult to adequately reflect in a single definition. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) categorises mature workers as people aged 55 years and over. The Commonwealth Age Discrimination Commissioner in Australia classifies workers and job seekers as old at age 45, alongside the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO). Some writers refer to older workers as those aged over 40. The general consensus appears to be in the range of 45 years and over as being older at work (Australian Institute of Management, 2013).

What is meant by age-friendly initiatives?

The term age-friendly emerged in the mid-2000s and is a relatively new expression in the ageing literature, being mostly associated with communities and cities with only some references made towards organisations. With regard to age-friendly cities, the concept is built on an 'active ageing' framework developed by the World Health Organization (2002). Active ageing is the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age (World Health Organization, 2002). The term age-friendly in essence refers to practices, features or factors that reinforces the WHO's active ageing framework to enable the social inclusion and participation of older individuals in a community or organisation.

With regard to the employment of older individuals, the literature on age-friendly organisations have been mainly in the form of discussion papers outlining age-friendly practices (Žnidaršič & Dimovski, 2011, Broughan, 2013), qualitative research using case studies (Martens *et al.*, 2006, Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013) and studies conducted with HR professionals and managers (De Cieri *et al.*, 2008, Preissing & Loennies, 2011).

Age-friendly practices within organisations

Only a handful of studies have specifically investigated building age-friendly organisations. Studies have indicated that age-related HR practices are particularly

important in influencing older worker's decisions to continue working (Claes & Heymans, 2008) and also in attracting retirees back to the workforce (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008). A review of the literature has identified factors that are relevant to creating an age-friendly workplace. These factors will be named and discussed below.

A flexible workplace

Flexibility regardless of age is a preference in today's workforce. Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that the availability of flexible work options in an organisation is a key aspect in attracting, engaging and retaining older workers. Older individuals who would like to remain employed are less inclined to favour traditional fulltime roles for a number of reasons including (1) they have accumulated enough savings to retire but may still need a small income to sustain their standard of living; (2) they would like to continue to contribute to meaningful work, but not on a fulltime basis; (3) they may have the responsibility of caring for a family member with a disability or illness, but would still prefer to work on a more flexible schedule; (4) they would prefer to retire in phases rather than fully retire in one go; or (5) physical disabilities prevent them from working full-time or travelling to work. Employment strategies may include (1) a compressed working week, (2) flexible hours, (3) job sharing, (4) the availability of transition to part-time work, (5) teleworking and (6) career breaks or unpaid short- and long-term leave (Eversole *et al.*, 2012).

Research has provided evidence for a preference of flexible work options and its significance in attracting and retaining older workers. For example, a study by Armstrong-Stassen *et al.* (2012) in Canada demonstrated that individuals aged 50–65 years who were in post-retirement jobs after having retired from a variety of industries in both public and private sectors were drawn to organisations that provide flexible work arrangements. In addition, a conference board survey in the United States indicated that one out of four older workers denoted that they continue to work because their company provided them with needed flexibility, and nearly half said that more flexibility would prevent them from retiring (Christensen & Pitt-Catsoupes, 2005).

However, there are still factors in the workplace that may be preventing employers from developing plans that would support the flexible employment of older workers. Christensen and Pitt-Catsoupes (2005) suggest that the development of flexible policies may be inhibited by (1) the rigid design and structure of full-time jobs that reflect the priorities and needs of a younger workforce; (2) attitudes and stereotypes that stigmatise older workers; (3) an overemphasis on the 'bottom line' thinking, such as focusing on the costs of recruiting and retaining older workers, rather than the cost savings that they can provide. On its own, the presence of flexible workplace policies in an organisation may simply not be enough. Facilitating the development of flexible workplace policies needs to be accompanied with a full change of culture within organisations to support and value older workers. Flexibility for older workers should not be mistaken for a casualisation of work that erodes job security and results in insecure work, but instead should enable the contribution of older workers to the workforce.

Promotion of health through job design

Poor health and disability has been a main reason for premature exit from the workforce. Those who are forced to leave the workforce before retirement age due to health reasons, often experience long-term unemployment and consequent upsets to their social well-being (Robroek *et al.*, 2013). Organisations that employed health promotion interventions were able to reduce health risks and improve productivity in the workplace (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). This was particularly true for interventions that addressed both psychosocial and physical aspects of health.

Older workers see having health checks, health awareness practices, and health counselling as positive strategies for health promotion. Other factors associated with health promotion are having a positive working environment, good relationships with supervisors and co-workers and developing skills through training (Crawford *et al.*, 2010). These aspects are important for maintaining good health in the workplace, and have also been linked to other factors identified in the literature that are beneficial for mature workers. This reinforces the idea that factors that are associated with an age-friendly workplace are related, and therefore when considering one aspect of an age-friendly workplace, one must also take into account other factors that can impact on the feature under consideration. In essence, a reflection on organisational culture to achieve successful health promotion interventions in the organisation may be needed.

Another aspect of health promotion involves designing jobs to be low stress. Work stress has been identified as a predictor of reduced workability (one's perceived mental and physical capacity to work) (Wilson, 2000), reduced well-being (Herzog *et al.*, 1991) and early retirement (Reskin, 2000) among older workers. There are a number of job design-related predictors of work stress including role overload, role conflict, role ambiguity and a lack of control over work, which ultimately impact on workability and intentions to retire (Blackburn, 2007). This may be because the combination of high demands at work and low control can provoke distress and activate a negative evaluation of coping at work until retirement.

A Swedish intervention study by Eversole *et al.* (2012) attempted to change the work environment of an organisation to improve workability among older workers. However, despite training given to employees and managers regarding work and workability, after 1 year, there were no improvements to staff workload, satisfaction and workability. Findings such as this indicate that strategies to change the work environment cannot encompass superficial initiatives that focus on one aspect of the organisation. Changes must be driven deeper, to gain organisation-wide acceptance and to reach all levels within an organisation. Work design changes may need to be accompanied by cultural changes to ensure modifications are not temporary, and to enhance the effectiveness of desired outcomes.

Ageism/attitudes towards older workers

Much of the research conducted on ageism within an organisational context has examined the existence of different types of age-related stereotypes (Hassell & Perrewe, 2006, Poulston & Jenkins, 2013) and the influence of age stereotypes on employment practices (Conen *et al.*, 2011; Cheung *et al.*, 2010). To successfully manage older employees, employers need to first change the culture and

environment of the workplace and have specifically identified policies to address ageist practices.

Work culture can set behavioural expectations within an organisation and set the framework for the construction of assumptions related to a particular subgroup (Green, 2005). Becoming an age-friendly organisation requires challenging assumptions and attitudes towards mature workers. A culture of inclusion needs to be encouraged, where perceptions of performance are not attached to age or recognise age-specific skills and contributions. As culture itself can be changed to influence attitudes and policies within an organisation, creating a diversity-valuing culture would be useful in challenging existing age stereotypes within organisations. A series of guidelines and policy advice are available from agencies such as the Australian Human Rights Commission (2012).

A culture of inclusion/valuing older workers

Inclusion and diversity are emerging concepts in the organisational development literature, aimed at including minority or disadvantaged groups such as women, certain ethnic groups, and those with disabilities, to which is increasingly added ageing. Shore *et al.* (2011) define inclusion as the degree to which an employee feels that he or she is an esteemed member of a work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness or uniqueness. Barak (2000) proposed that employee perception of inclusion reflects the degree to which they feel part of critical organisational processes, such as access to information, connectedness to supervisors and colleagues and the ability to participate in decision-making.

This culture of inclusion is based on highlighting the potential benefits of individual differences and generally enriching the set of experiences that comprise the work environment. In a culture of inclusion, differences are valued and the organisation listens to the views of employees and communicates with them on issues that are relevant to them (White & Mackenzie-Davey, 2003). Perceptions of inclusion in an organisation have been associated with increased job satisfaction, well-being, task effectiveness and organisational commitment (Barak, 2000).

Implementing inclusive practices that can enhance an older worker's sense of empowerment and autonomy helping in their retention within an organisation (Productive Ageing Centre, 2010), especially when perceptions of being valued enhance the integration of older workers into an organisation (White & Mackenzie-Davey, 2003; Armstrong-Stassen, 2008). Armstrong-Stassen's (2008) study, conducted among individuals aged 60–65 years who were either retirees, individuals who returned to work from retirement or individuals who remained in the workforce, demonstrated that all three groups rated recognition and respect as the most important HR practice in influencing decisions to remain in, or return to the workforce.

Supportive workplaces

In a European study conducted by Taylor and Walker (1998), they listed four main 'guidelines for good practice' in creating age-friendly organisations. Two of the four guidelines related to having a supportive workplace (i.e. senior management and the work environment). Perceived organisational support indicates a general belief among

employees that their organisation values their continued membership, is committed to them, and is concerned about their well-being (Green, 2005). Supportive workplaces can promote both worker satisfaction and motivation, hence promoting employee well-being and retention. The culture of an organisation can be responsible for creating a workplace environment that is either supportive and satisfying for older workers or is inhospitable and hostile for them (Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013).

In a sample of older Canadian nurses, Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel (2009) found that respondents who felt that their organisation was providing its employees with training and development opportunities perceived their organisation to be more supportive than those not engaging in these practices. In addition to this, a study by Van Solinge and Henkens (2007) identified a lack of social embeddedness (social relationships between colleagues and supervisors), which is an antecedent of perceived organisational support, as important for explaining perceptions of involuntary retirement. A lack of supervisor support has also been strongly associated with reduced workability in a nationally representative sample of 8000 individuals aged over 30 in Finland (Christensen & Shu, 1999). These studies provide evidence of the importance of organisational support in creating age-friendly organisations, as well as link perceived support with other aspects of an age-friendly workplace (training and development, social relationships/inclusion).

Training and development

Training is the planned effort by an organisation to convey job-related information to learners (Lynton & Pareek, 1990). Access to training and development is an important component of recruiting and retaining older workers. However, older workers often miss out on opportunities for training and development. For example, a study by Ilmarinen *et al.* (1991) found that organisations were not aware of the ageing workforce, were not engaging their older employees in training and developing activities and did not customise training methods to suit older workers.

Studies have found that access to training and development for older workers improves self-efficacy, employability and motivation to remain working (Claes & Heymans, 2008). Women, in particular, site training and development opportunities as important for their continued work after retirement. For example, a study by Zemke *et al.* (2000) demonstrated that compared with retired men, retired women were significantly more likely to believe that providing older adults with opportunities to update their skills would entice them out of retirement. They also strongly perceived that out-dated skills and experience were major barriers to gaining employment. This may be because older women are less likely to have access to training and development opportunities than older men and therefore perceive themselves to be less employable.

Attempts have been made to increase access to training opportunities for the older age group (such as the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 in Australia); however, attitudes in the workplace are still preventing ageing workers from gaining fair opportunities for training and development. Myths that older workers have difficulty learning and are not motivated to learn (Ranzijn *et al.*, 2002; Lockwood, 2007) continue to persist, hence limiting their opportunities for training. Eradicating these misconstrued assumptions will allow for more training opportunities for older workers. Creating an

age-friendly organisation may mean that opportunities for training and development will be based on performance, irrespective of age.

Several researchers contend that when training opportunities are offered to mature employees, training designs and methods need to be tailored to allow for the learning styles and experience of older employees (Ilmarinen *et al.*, 1991, Pless & Maak, 2004). In addition, Lockwood (2007) argues that workplace training programmes are often not aligned to older workers because they frequently emphasise abilities that are typically superior in younger workers, such as motor speed or the use of information communication technologies. Training practices for older employees may need to take a 'hands-on' approach, be self-paced and take a practical learning approach. Therefore, not only engaging older workers in training and development activities but also tailoring the activities to be aligned with older workers' needs and capabilities are important for creating an age-friendly organisation.

Consolidating the literature on age-friendly practices

This review of the literature has identified a number of age-friendly organisational practices/strategies that are relevant for the recruitment and retention of mature-aged individuals. These studies have provided evidence of policies such as flexibility, tailored training and development programmes for older workers, modifications to job characteristics and design, in order to boost workforce participation of older individuals. However, these studies have mainly been in the form of cross-sectional and self-report designs without due consideration to how these practices can be implemented in an organisation. Many of these studies have also predominantly focused on employees with higher qualifications in white-collar jobs. Furthermore, from the literature reviewed, studies have examined solely one aspect of an age-friendly HR practice without due consideration to a range of HR practices that help and complement each other.

The literature suggests that a systemic approach is needed, as the existence or effectiveness of one age-friendly practice cannot be successful, without the existence of others. For example as Thompson *et al.* (1999) point out, the existence of flexible workplace policies cannot in essence be used if there is no support from senior managers in using them. Another example as found in the study by Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel (2009) is that older workers feel supported if they are provided with training and development; however, training and development will not be provided to older workers if they are not valued in the organisation. Similarly, ageism in the workplace can inhibit the modification of jobs to better suit older workers, can prevent training and development being provided to these workers (Lockwood, 2007), and can impact on perceived fairness, recognition and the inclusion of mature-aged individuals in the workplace (Pless & Maak, 2004). This reiterates the need for organisations to take a comprehensive approach regarding age-friendly practices by targeting a range of factors, rather than just individual factors.

Nonetheless, studies on older workers have not taken into account a systemic approach as such in examining how to better enable their recruitment and retention. A key theme that is evident in the reviewed literature, but has not been explicitly examined, is the need for organisations to implement a culture that will enable age-

friendly HR practices to exist and flourish. As Ilmarinen (1995) state, organisational culture is an integral tool for successful implementation and uptake of HR strategies geared towards an older workforce. Seike *et al.* (2012) also contend that a key to maximising the motivation and thus retention of older workers is through organisational culture. Essentially if organisations wish to enhance the value gained from older workers and maintain competitiveness in the future, they will have to undertake culture change initiatives to gear themselves towards an older population demographic (Taylor & Walker, 1998). This will also aid in breaking down barriers that are currently preventing mature-aged individuals from gaining and maintaining employment.

Despite this, a review of the literature has produced no empirical results of studies that look to specifically identify the dimensions underlying an age-friendly organisational culture. Comprehending the dimensions of an age-friendly culture can help with providing a framework to guide organisational culture change. Therefore, this review will seek to propose a cultural framework that integrates the literature on age-friendly practices, in order to help with change. However, in order to develop a framework of this sort, the concept of organisational culture must be explained, as methods of identifying the dimensions of culture are dependent on the paradigm in which it is located.

What is organisational culture?

The concept of organisational culture, which evolved out of the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, gained popularity within the business and psychology literature and encompasses a number of definitions (Pettigrew, 1979, Schein, 1985). Smircich (1983) drew attention to two basic perspectives on the meaning and application of culture. The first perspective regards organisational culture as a variable in the form of an external constraint or an internal control mechanism, which can be manipulated by the management. The second perspective presents culture as a root metaphor whereby symbols and images can be studied as a way of understanding organisations.

The culture-as-a-variable perspective is located within the functionalist paradigm of organisational culture and is defines culture as 'a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration' (Schein, 1992, p. 9).

According to Schultz (1995), functionalism encompasses a universal framework for culture, which depicts different levels and is applicable to all organisations. Cultural elements are therefore grouped according to the categories/levels within which they fall, and the researcher's task is to find the relations between them.

Within the functionalist paradigm Schein (1992) proposed a three-layered model of organisational culture. This model is layered from the most visible or superficial to the most intangible or profound. Artefacts (technology, symbols and rituals, shared behaviour patterns) consist of the first layer. Values (discussable beliefs about why things are the way they are) form the second layer and are the observable manifestations of the inner most layer, which is underlying assumptions. Underlying assumptions (implicit taken-for-granted ideas about the nature of reality and truth of

human nature, activity and relationships) is the most important layer of culture and is what makes up the organisation's paradigm and deepest structure (Schein, 1992).

A contrasting perspective to functionalism has been described as interpretivism, which originates from the social-constructionist paradigm and views culture as the creation and re-creation of meaning, specific to the organisation and its context (Schultz, 1995). According to this perspective, Frost *et al.* (1985, p.17) proposes a definition of culture to be 'talking about the importance for people of symbolism – of rituals, myths, stories and legends – and about the interpretation of events, ideas and experience'. The goal of theory building within interpretivism is to generate descriptions, insights and explanations of events so as to reveal the structuring and organising of processes and to give meaning to behaviour within the organisation (Gioia & Pitre, 1990).

Integrating functionalist and interpretive paradigms to understand age-friendly cultures

In order to facilitate the move towards age-friendly organisations, an understanding of what this culture encompasses must first be developed. When it comes to building theory around culture, interpretivism and functionalism offer differing perspectives. Functionalism searches for uniformities in culture in order to test, predict and control (Gioia & Pitre, 1990). It carries an orientation towards a managerial perspective and is concentrated on measurable and controllable variables that comprise an organisational culture. This perspective is appealing for practitioners as it views culture as a facet that can moulded, shaped and changed.

The interpretivist perspective of culture on the other hand is concerned with describing and explaining culture in order to diagnose and understand. It is useful for constructing theory around age-friendly cultures, understanding perceptions and the factors that contribute to it. This epistemology can harness information on unconscious thoughts, beliefs and assumptions, which form the core of organisational culture. Data collected through this perspective are rich and meaningful, and are inclusive of important contextual factors that may be missed using solely a functionalist approach.

However, findings within interpretivism have been criticised for being overly homogenous, differing in interpretations, being less structured and more difficult to measure (Schein, 1992). Schein further argues that findings using this paradigm cannot be generalised or standardised across organisations, is harder to conceptualise and can be arduous for managers to understand and use. This is because information collected within this paradigm is focused on interpretations, symbols and other factors that are more difficult to quantify and change. In the case of changing organisational cultures, situating the study within a functionalist paradigm is arguably more beneficial.

Although functionalism also has its criticisms of being too superficial with a tendency to ignore culture as a diverse and rich element, the quantification of culture has opened up what is otherwise a black box of cultural factors (Williamson, 2002). Approaching culture from the functionalist paradigm provides objectivity and the precision of nomothetic methods to organisational studies and is of most use to practitioners who wish to diagnose and implement an age-friendly organisational culture. Nevertheless, the weaknesses of a pure functionalist approach cannot be ignored.

A number of authors advocate for the benefits of using multi-paradigms particularly for the study of organisational culture. A multi-paradigm stance on organisational culture can be more useful for theory building by providing a more comprehensive stemming of the truth from different worldviews. Using both functionalism and interpretivism in building theory around the factors that constitute an age-friendly culture can lead to a deeper understanding and enable the analysis of values and assumptions that drive behaviour within organisations. Interpretivism can help with generating theory around an age-friendly culture, whereas functionalism can help to validate this theory and translate it to a more practical setting, and therefore creates the opportunity to help with change.

Changing to an age-friendly organisational culture

An integrative understanding of what constitutes an age-friendly culture can help with engendering change and can provide a framework for organisations to aspire towards. Within the existing literature, emphasis is placed on the importance of leadership in developing shared values, that over time become the basic assumptions guiding organisational action (Demers, 2007) also, that every organisation has a culture which many management teams deliberately cultivate (Schein, 1992). This intentional cultivation of culture is aligned with the company's goals and philosophies to achieve organisational outcomes. Changing an organisation's culture is always difficult, and Carnevale and Stone (1995, p. 93) state that 'in most organisations, valuing and managing diversity requires nothing less than cultural transformation'. It requires a change in basic assumptions, values and artefacts.

The different levels of organisational culture (artefacts, values and assumptions) often work together and reinforce each other. However, there may be instances where inconsistencies can exist between the different levels. There may be, for example, a commitment by management to hire older workers as part of the second level of organisational culture (values). This commitment however may not be reflected in the first level (underlying assumptions), which as a result is not reflected in the third level (artefacts) (Schur *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, tools that can assess age-friendly elements within all three levels of organisational are more beneficial for cultivating change rather than tools that are specifically focused on HR practices/policies and that neglect an assessment of underlying assumptions, which are core for cultural transformations.

On this note, a hypothetical framework of an age-friendly organisational culture, located within the functionalist paradigm of Schein's (1992) model of culture, while drawing on the strengths of the interpretive approach is proposed in Figure 1. This framework integrates concepts of organisational behaviour and sociology in relation to ageing workers, while taking into account all three layers of organisational culture. Consideration of all three layers will provide more robust results for culture change.

This framework in figure integrates the literature on age-friendly practices and the three layers of artefacts, values and strategies, plus underlying assumptions, in line with Schein's model of organisational culture. Artefacts include the visible and tangible aspects of an age friendly culture. These would include factors such as the deployment

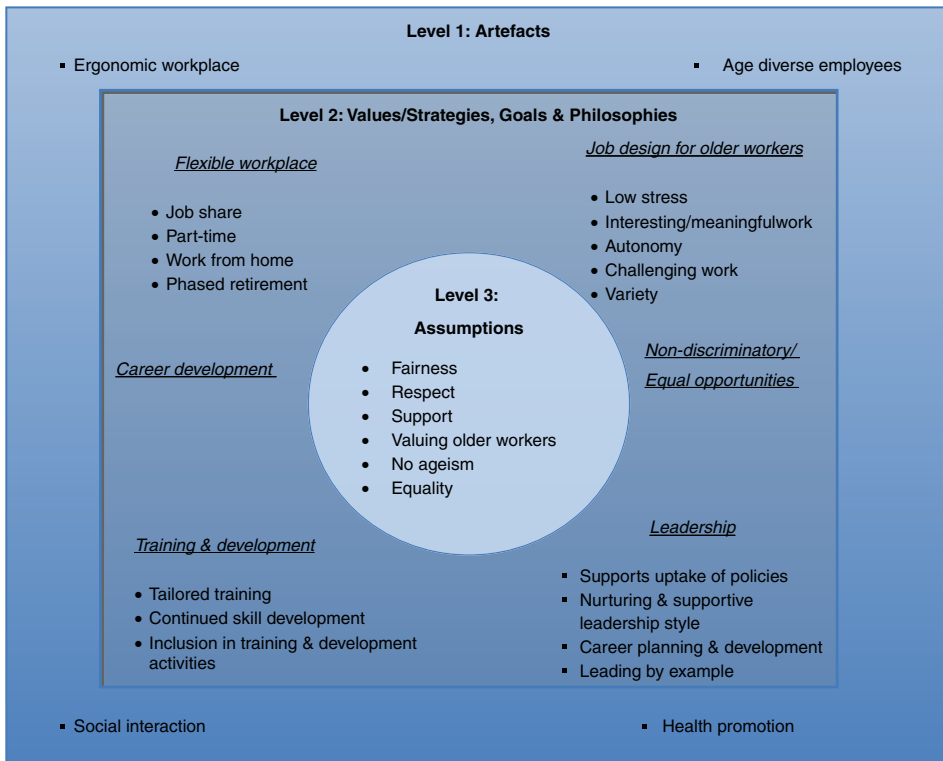


FIGURE 1 A framework for an age-friendly organisational culture based on Schein's (1992) model.

of ergonomic design, workplace layout, furniture and equipment. The second level of the model includes strategies, goals and philosophies that the organisation employs as directed towards its ageing workers. These include offering flexible work, designing jobs that are suitable for older workers, continued training and development opportunities for older workers, and other manifestations of a formal culture of age friendliness. The final level of the model refers to the taken-for-granted and often tacit attitudes or behaviours within the organisation that are relevant to older workers. These would include notions of age-related fairness, respect, value given to older workers, an absence of ageism, age-neutral behaviour, as well as the promotion of age-specific capabilities.

Although this framework is primarily located within the functionalist paradigm, exploring and testing this framework using both interpretive and functionalist perspectives would be useful for refining the model into one that can eventually be used for culture change. The interpretive perspective would help generate theory through the use of qualitative methodologies so as to inform the framework and provide a more insightful description of an age-friendly culture and bring to the surface tacit assumptive realities that are shaping the social construction of the older worker and workplace conduct. The functionalist perspective will allow for the idea of changing culture and the generic use of a framework across organisations. Hopefully, the framework can provide a practical mechanism through which organisations can strive to be more age-friendly.

Conclusion

This review of the literature has put into perspective the context of the ageing population and the need for strategies to prolong working lives and break down barriers that are preventing older individuals from working. Furthermore, the review identifies practices within organisations that can have an impact on the recruitment of older individuals and their motivation to continue working. A gap in the literature is acknowledged pertaining to the lack of research specifically investigating age-friendly work cultures. Building and changing cultures to be more age-friendly is discussed within both interpretive and functionalist paradigms, and it is ascertained that integrating both perspectives can help form a more comprehensive understanding of what this culture is. It is further suggested that by developing a framework of an age-friendly work culture that can be generalised across organisations, this will be of immense use for practitioners and can provide a basis for culture change initiatives. With this in mind, an initial framework of an age-friendly culture is proposed using Scheins (1992) model of organisational culture and integrating concepts of management, organisational behaviour and sociology in relation to mature workers. Although this framework provides an initial step towards assisting organisations to be more age-friendly, it requires further validation to be of more relevance. Based on an understanding that work culture can maximise the process by which organisations support and integrate older workers, it can be concluded that research into assessing and creating age-friendly organisational cultures is necessary given the context of our ageing population demographic. However, in order to create or change cultures to be more age-friendly, the dimensions of it must first be identified and tested.

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