BRAVE STARTS

UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF AN AGEING WORKFORCE

How organisations can better leverage, engage and support the ageing population opportunity

PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

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ABOUT BRAVE STARTS

We help people in the mid and later stages of their career plan and enjoy fuller, longer working lives.

The ageing workforce is the most significant opportunity businesses have yet to realise. We've helped organisations in the domains of recruitment, workforce transition and outplacement. We are proud of our values:

We're **not for profit** driven by purpose. We give more than we take: we're small, but we've raised over £7000 for micro businesses and over £2000 for charity.

We're **evidence-based.** We combine the best evidence from psychology and ageing research to build content. If we can't back it up we don't share it.

We're a **community**. Humans learn best socially: we create opportunities to learn together via meetings, online events, webinars and job shadowing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The biggest driver for people in their 50's + is doing work which offers them a sense of 'purpose'.

- The biggest barrier people face when planning for their working future, is simply 'not knowing what to do next'. This factor alone was almost **twice** as significant as any other.

- What people need and want most from organisations are chances to learn more about what opportunities are open to them next and to have **time** to learn about them. This is best understood via encouraging **career conversations.**

- The need for flexible work will continue to rise as we age.

- The majority of practical steps an organisation needs to take can be achieved with little or no cost.

- Organisations need to recognise the value of age and actively support the career planning process of employees as they get older.

- With an ageing workforce the entry point into organisations needs to extend from being 'graduate' only to include more **career changer schemes.**

- Ageism is widely felt as the second biggest barrier faced when trying to find work.

REPORT AIMS

Organisations are not prepared to fully embrace the value of an ageing population. Over 75% of people over 50 are **anxious and worried about their future** with good reason: they live in an ageist society; they face a pensions crisis; only 20% of organisations are strategically considering and 'talking' about age, and fewer are constructively doing anything to support employees.

According to Aviva, (1) more than 60% of employees are planning career changes - up from 53% last year. This is not isolated to the pandemic. In 2014, a report by the London School of Business and Finance similarly found more than 50% of those living in London and 47% of people nationally were planning a career change (2).

The reality for many is when a career span lengthens and people are not able to stay in one job for their whole life, they need to more proactively manage their career.

In a world with no 'ageing blueprint', those over 50 have a harder job making changes. They are at greater risk of redundancy and are by no means financially secure. Many find their best efforts to transition are met with unrelenting levels of rejection.

Over **6130** people over 50 have told us what they need from employers. Only 10% of our sample were self-employed: the vast majority being employed 61.8% and another 20.6% looking to be employed. This report gives you the rare opportunity to learn about the needs of this age group from their perspective. We combine this with the best psychological insights and evidence to provide constructive and helpful ideas for your consideration.

Talking about the ageing population has been done. Now is the time to take the Brave and Bold actions needed to move the conversation forward. In short - we all need to take a Brave Start.

(1) Aviva How we Live Report 2021: https://www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2021/04/number-of-uk-workers-planning-career-changes-as-a-result-of-pandemic-rises/
(2). https://www.lsbf.org.uk/blog/opinion-features/lsbf-survey-finds-nearly-50-of-uk-workers-want-to-change-careers

ABOUT THE SURVEY

- We started recruiting respondents to the survey between November 2020 - June 2022
- The total number of respondents stands at **6130** but with the exception of asking for the age of the respondents, we made answering these final questions optional. We include the figures of the completion rate for each question.
- Data has been collected through our website through a survey link on Typeform
- We advertised the survey through our social media channels (mainly Facebook) and we do a monthly newsletter in which this has been regularly featured.

Age of respondents

61-65
13.2%

41-50
6.3%

51-55
44.6%

56-60
35.5%
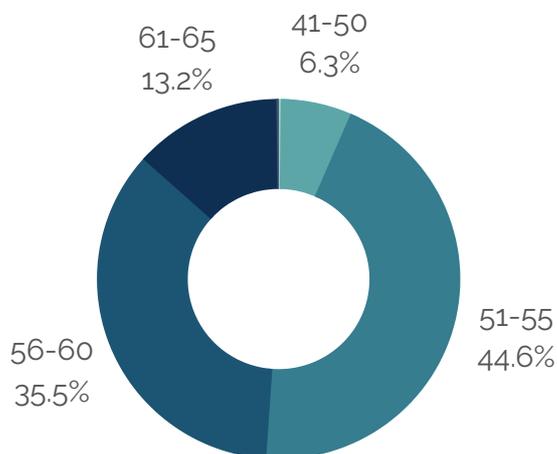
All 6130 answered this question. **93.3%** of all respondents were aged between 51-65.
Not shown: (population size too small to illustrate)
Respondents under 40: 0.2%
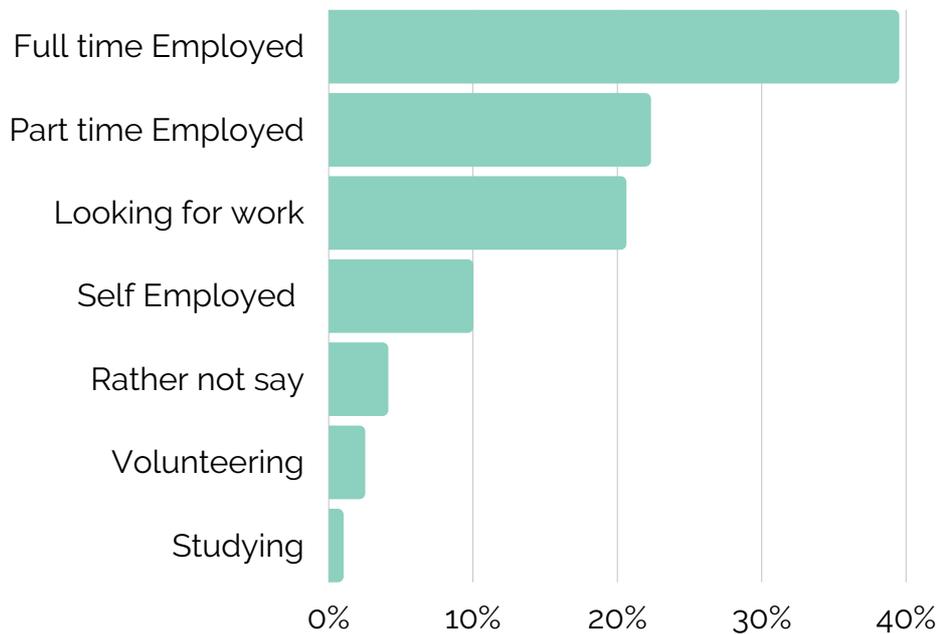Respondents 65+: 0.2%

Gender

Prefer not to say
1.1%
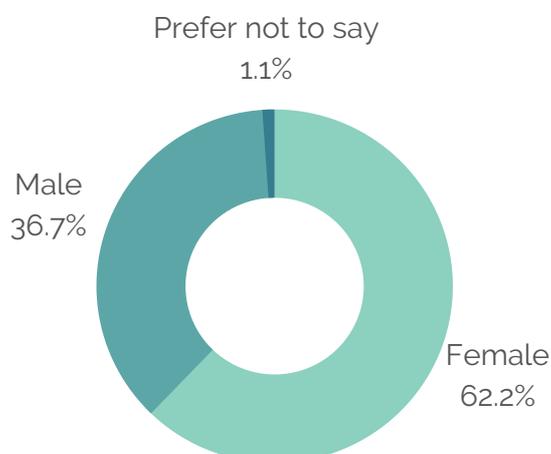
Male
36.7%

Female
62.2%

5253 people shared their gender data. 62.2% were female and 36.7% were male.

Employment status

61.8% of all respondents were employed by organisations
10% were self employed.

A large proportion (20.6%) were looking for work - but this possibly reflects the large and disproportionate degree of people over 50 who have been made redundant through Covid19. It should be remembered, the nature of our site and our work attracts those seeking career guidance and support. It is rare for organisations to hear from the intentions of employees when in a stay/leave position. **For organisations keen to consider how to keep and retain valuable employees, this is a perspective into employees at a critical moment in their decision making process.**

This question was answered by 4992 respondents.

Ethnicity /disability/ sexual orientation data

We did not include questions on these areas. To do so would have extended the length of the questionnaire to a level where we were concerned respondents might 'drop out' and not submit their results. We were also keen to ensure the focus of what we were looking at was very much on the ageing agenda.

NEEDS & VALUES

"What factors are important to you when thinking about exploring new work options?"
All **6130** people answered this question.

What drives people is complex, so we allowed respondents the chance to select the three factors most important to them now. This gives a better picture of how important these factors are relative to each other:

Purpose:

The most significant driver for people as they age is a desire to work in a way which gives them a greater sense of purpose (indicated by 3700 - **60.3%** respondents). As people age, what they need and want from work changes from being acquisition focused to being more about what they can learn, share and 'give back'. (3) This supports the values work by psychologist Shalom Schwartz (over 220 articles and studies across 80 countries) which shows a relationship with age and our personal values: in general, as people get older, they tend to become "less preoccupied with their own strivings and more concerned with the welfare of others". (4) The fact people care more about the 'greater good' as they age would appear to offer significant value to organisations.

(3) Lawrence, P.R. and Nohria, N. (2002). Driven: How Human Nature Shapes our Choices, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
(4) Shalom H. Schwartz 2003: A Proposal for Measuring Value Orientations across Nations. Shalom H. Schwartz

'We can view latter working years as the years of 'worth'.

Flexibility:

2700 people **(44.1%)** indicated the need to find work which offers them flexibility. Rising life expectancy means people need to continue working with increasing levels of physical disability. Living longer means dealing with the reality of ageing, elderly parents - in fact, 3 in 5 people will end up with caring responsibilities. In 2019, 1.4 million people were providing over 50 hours a week of unpaid care to elderly relatives (5). It could be positioned that **not** providing the flexibility needed could amount to **indirect discrimination** on the grounds of age because the peak time for caring responsibilities falls on those between the ages of 50-64.

The silver lining of Covid19 is that for many jobs, the argument not to offer some degree of flexible working has been significantly weakened.

The drive to learn something new:

The longer people are in a role, the more they are likely to experience boredom and decreased job satisfaction (6). Despite wanting investment in their development, those over 50 receive the least support of any age demographic (7.) Learning needs at this stage of life are not orientated towards progression or promotion but are focused on learning for learning's sake and sharing what they know with others. Not only do they want to lift themselves up - they want to life others up too. We've worked with more than 100 people in career transition. The majority of learning needs are simply having more time to indulge a desire for learning - things like building a 'side hustle', writing a book, volunteering, working as a trustee etc. **We've never had call to help anyone learn about or make a move towards an organisation in competition with the one in which they currently work.** Allowing people to engage with learning (even if not 'directly' related to the job) reinforces the message people need to invest in their own lifelong learning. It helps people keep their skills up to date therefore enabling their 'employ-ability'.

(5). Facts_about_Carers_2019.pdf (carersuk.org)
(6). Time and Job Satisfaction: A Longitudinal Study of the Differential Roles of Age and Tenure. Shoshana Dobrow Riza, Yoav Ganzach, Yihao Liu, 2016
(7) Fuller Working Lives: a partnership approach - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Implication for organisations?

- As people age, building up opportunities to **mentor, volunteer, train, and coach** will likely have more meaning for this age demographic. This experience and insight combined with a desire to help others can help elevate organisational capability if leveraged. According to the latest Aegon research on retirement, older people do not want the traditional 'cliff edge' retirement - they want an easier transition towards a work life balance which better suits their needs: "Half (49%) of UK workers over 50 years of age and earning upwards of £20k would ideally like to transition into retirement by blending work and retirement." (8)

- The alignment of organisational values with personal values is a link which has been demonstrated through numerous studies. (9) Recruitment and selection which places more emphasis on **values** is a good opportunity to ensure higher levels of engagement and job satisfaction whilst also ensuring you are hiring in line with what is important to your own organisation. This approach would likely help **redress the ageism bias** in recruitment recently reported by 55Redefined. (10)

- The importance of **time out for exercise** in order to maintain a healthier longer lifestyle will become increasingly urgent.

- Reflecting the fact nearly 60% of people will have caring responsibilities at some point in their life, means organisations need to put in place a **'carers policy'** which outlines what is expected and offered. Here is a free template

- Allowing people time to direct their own learning does **not have to cost the organisation anything.** One fast growing fintech organisation offers a '30 days off a year unpaid' benefit for employees to develop skills (which can be completely irrelevant to their current work: e.g pasta making course etc...) This sends a message: lifelong learning is supported (yet it costs the organisation nothing).

- Encourage 'next step' **career conversations.** Very few people at this stage in life want to join a competitor. Planning and having a better idea about how people want to develop a longer, more sustainable working life gives organisations time to succession plan and support a 'glidepath' for employees to plan and build towards their next step whilst giving the organisation a better chance of ensuring skills and knowledge are transferred to others. Brave Starts is developing a template for managers to facilitate these conversations. The basis of the funding is that this is shared freely on a not-for profit-basis. We hope to launch this in January 2022. If you'd like to stay in touch with us about this, email lucy@bravestarts.com

(8). Half of UK workers 50+ shun 'cliff edge' retirement, Aegon Press Team Wednesday, 9 January 2019
(9).) S Arieli et al 2020 Values at Work: The Impact of Personal Values in Organisations. Applied Psychology, An international Review. 69 (2), 230–275
(10). https://www.55redefined.com/drafts/shut-out-forced-out-and-overlooked-an-ageism-report

THE BARRIERS OLDER WORKERS FACE

"To what extent are the following factors stopping you from making a career change now?"
A total of **6130** people answered this question

Respondents could indicate up to 3 choices so we can evaluate relative to each other the importance of different factors.

Strikingly the biggest barrier people face is not knowing what to do next. 4600 people **(74.5%)** of respondents indicated this as a problem. Age and experience helps people to identify what they no longer wish to do - but that doesn't necessarily clarity next steps. Without this clarity, commitment to action (e.g. retraining) is low. When options are overwhelming (like a job market) the chance of making a decision is reduced - 'the paradox of choice' effect (11). The ensuing paralysis means people get 'stuck', not knowing if a job will really suit them.

Traditionally people are expected to 'know' what role they want and to apply off the back of a job description. This finding supports the idea of giving people more opportunities to learn more about roles so they are in a better position to work out if a role might be right for them. We provide some constructive ideas around this in the next section and on p14.

(11). The Maximization Paradox: The costs of seeking alternatives. Personality and Individual Differences 2009. B Schwartz et al, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0191886909000075

Previous surveys looking at ageism have reported levels as high as 46%. (12) This survey found this was a factor indicated by 2500 people **(40.8%).** Our finding doesn't necessarily mean things have got better - it simply means when presented with other options, ageism may not have stood out as significantly relative to other options (such as lack of flexibility, being financially trapped and not knowing what to do next). Sadly, we suspect if we had simply asked 'have you ever experienced ageism' the response may have been higher.

Ageism is a fact - it exists and we live with it, but we don't discuss and crucially we don't examine, adapt or challenge the status quo. In the 55Redefined report (10) what is painfully clear is younger HR recruiters are 39% more likely to screen out older workers than those HR professionals over 46. The DWP back in 2015 made loud and big moves to try and move the conversation on age forward, but in our opinion, the debate is still too focused on the 'business case' for doing it, rather than accepting (like the equality movement) there is a moral duty. What is needed now is action - and we trust that action will prove the business case.

Being financially trapped is a barrier - **31.4%** indicated this as a barrier - but it's worth putting some context around this. Many people 50+ are prepared for a drop in salary (e.g. by dropping to 3 or 4 days a week) but often this isn't felt to be an option. 1900 people **(31.6%)** have said lack of flexibility is a problem: many lament the 'all or nothing' approach and it is suggested this is one of the main reasons around half of older workers leave work prematurely. (13)   If people were able to access more options to work flexibly we'd hypothesize fewer people would complain about being financially trapped.

As we age, the level of illness and disability experienced increases. A failure to adapt and allow for more flexibility at this stage in life could be challenged on the grounds of indirect discrimination on the grounds of disability as well as age. With an increase in legal cases on the grounds of discrimination on the basis of age jumping by 79% in the past year alone, (14) the imperative to act must surely be felt.

The very low scores from people indicating they haven't the energy to learn anything new simply gives more weight to the observation they can and want to learn.

(12) https://www.hr-inform.co.uk/news-article/yougov-poll-calls-for-more-to-be-done-to-tackle-age-discrimination
(13) Poll shows UK employers unprepared for managing ageing workforce | Centre for Ageing Better (ageing-better.org.uk)
(14) Age Discrimination Complaints in Employment Tribunals up 74% in a Year - Rest Less

Implication for organisations?

- **Make it easier for people to change jobs and move around internally.** Employees (depending on the complexity of a role) will get bored and according to Monster (15) can be expected to change roles every 4.1 years. In an article by Gartner, they report only 27% (16) employees felt organisations make it easier for people to move around internally. Some ideas:

  1. Encourage managers to allow staff to move to other roles and if they do, reward them in some material way. Public recognition for a start, but keeping an employee and not having to recruit externally is likely to save significant expense.
  2. Encourage networking. It can be difficult for people to build their network and keep in touch with the market if they are penalised for doing so. Allowing and supporting this by making it part of how people are appraised and managed sends a strong signal to maintain and be responsible for staying 'current' and in touch.
  3. More internal secondments? Coca Cola have famously used secondments over the years to generate more internal mobility whilst boosting levels of engagement, retention and wellbeing (17)

- **Support managers.** The assumption managers will automatically know how to support and manage the needs of an ageing workforce is false. The answer appears **not** to be unconscious bias training (18) but to focus on changing behaviour at the critical points where it plays a role and bake awareness into existing processes (e.g recruitment, performance management etc.) **Age needs to be a more prominent part of the D&I strategy.**

- **Conduct an age audit.** By comparing your organisation against established benchmarks of being friendly, you'll gain a better understanding of where you can make improvements. The charity Pro Age can help.

- **Challenge the narrative.** Highlight and share recognition for your ageing workers. Invite people to nominate those who project positive ageing and with their permission, invite them to share their experience of ageing at work.

- **Flexibility is critical.** Covid19 has made the case that flexible working is possible. There are obvious exceptions (police, paramedics) but the world has forever changed. There is not scope here, to share in depth implementation plans - for this we refer the reader to the CIPD. Our survey results show little doubt that enabling flexible working will remove a significant barrier to older workers and is therefore critical to the ageing agenda to implement.

(15).How Long Should You Stay at a Job? | Monster.com
(16) https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/make-easier-employees-change-jobs-internally
(17) https://www.atlassian.com/blog/teamwork/what-is-secondment-benefits
(18) Research-report: Unconscious Bias Training. As assessment of the evidence for effectiveness. Equality and Human Rights Commission 2018. research-report-113-unconcious-bais-training-an-assessment-of-the-evidence-for-effectiveness-pdf.pdf (equalityhumanrights.com)

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS BEST SUPPORT YOU IF YOU'RE THINKING OF MAKING A CAREER CHANGE?

This question was answered by 3161 people (we added this question in February 2021 hence fewer respondents compared to the other questions)

If the greatest problem is people having 'no idea what to do next', then it stands to reason that the support most needed is the time and space to understand their options (indicated by **57.7%** respondents). The lack of a blueprint and clear 'path' to follow is unnerving. Without the confidence to know if something is possible, the fear of change is significant. People need to feel greater levels of confidence (an issue felt by **44.8%** respondents) before they feel able to make a change.

Work shadowing is a surprisingly under-utilised tool for recruitment or internal mobility despite the fact **44%** of respondents would like it and evidence suggests it not only increases commitment to apply but crucially increases levels of confidence (19). In our own work, people have made more informed decisions about what career path to take next after they've experienced time shadowing it.

(19) Bringing clarity to job shadowing Morell, Detty Gin, 2016 Nursing Management (lww.com)

The relatively low level of demand for wanting access to a training budget supports the earlier observation that this doesn't solve the 'problem'. People engage with training when there is a clear purpose (e.g those wanting to drive will commit to learning how to do so). The type of learning people engage with as they age is more personal and typically orientated towards skills outside of their immediate job. The 24% surge in mature students observed by UCAS [20] in the past year supports this notion. Some context however - the disproportionate number of people over 50 made redundant through this pandemic will no doubt also help to explain some of the surge witnessed. [21]

When organisations offer a mid life MOT, it is a popular benefit and one we advocate. Facing a pensions crisis [22] any work to raise awareness and increase commitment to saving and preparing financially for the future is welcomed .

When this option is however suggested alongside others, it is less popular. On reflection this makes sense: left to our own devices people often do not invest the cognitive effort to explore and understand their pension arrangements unless wider life context prompts this.

Redundancy, divorce, a career change - these are the context triggers that engage people in these conversations because they are driven by need and relevance.

(20) https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/surge-of-mature-applicants-sparks-calls-for-additional-support/)
(21). https://www.ier.org.uk/news/over-50s-hardest-hit-by-covid-redundancies/
(22) Average Pension Pot UK - What is a good pension pot? (telegraph.co.uk)

Implication for organisations?

- **Encourage lifelong learning.** If organisations can't provide a 'job for life', it needs to be easier for employees to develop the skills and knowledge to remain 'work-agile'. Advocate and build into the real and psychological contract allowance for employees to remain current and up to date with developing skills in line with their **next** job. Restricting learning opportunities to those only immediately relevant to one job in one organisation reduces the chances for employees to remain more widely employable. This may explain some of the age stereotypes of older people being reluctant to learn (which as we've found is clearly untrue). We are not calling for organisations to fund more training - merely to publicly acknowledge and allow employees to spend time learning and developing the skills for their next role. This offers the dual benefit of also serving to make your organisation **highly attractive as an employer whilst costing nothing.**

- **Confidence is built through experience.** If employees want to feel more confident about making an internal move, they need experience of it. Increasing opportunities to move internally will only work if people feel they can take them up. Baking in rotations, secondments or chances to spend time shadowing other departments has been the mainstay of the hotel industry. Even if employees realise they never want to work in a given department, the insight they gain is valuable: knowing the pressures and parameters others work within and being more aware is never a bad thing.

- In our own programmes where we have been able to facilitate job shadowing **men are more likely to shadow a day and realise it's not the job for them. Women are more likely to shadow a job and wonder why they've waited 5 years.** This supports research indicating women are less likely to apply for a job unless they feel they can 'tick' all job requirements (23) Allowing people to engage with a role before applying will dramatically help redress issues across the diversity spectrum. Recruitment is built on the misguided premise the recruiter has the power to make the selection decision. This much is true, **but the power to make an engagement decision has always resided with the employee** and the two need bringing closer together.

- **Create career changer alternative entry points.** If people are going to retrain several times in their lives and job performance doesn't suffer with age (24), it stands to reason we should have several entry points into organisations. Graduate schemes exist, but why not offer more 'career changer' schemes.

- Encourage Brave Starts membership. **Our basic membership level is free.** We provide career development support to people as they get older. Making it available sends a powerful message you support ageing better whilst also demonstrating your commitment to your Environment and Social Responsibility **(ESG)** objectives

(23) Why Women Don't Apply for Jobs Unless They're 100% Qualified, Tara Mohr 2014
https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified
(24) The relationship of age to ten dimensions of job performance, Thomas W H Ng 1, Daniel C Feldman 2008
Journal of Applied Psychology.

FUTURE STEPS

1.   Recognise the opportunity

The over 50's demographic represents a huge opportunity within organisations to leverage and realise the benefits of an ageing population. The drive to learn is undiminished but comes with the self awareness and perspective that comes with age.

This is a demographic that have a good idea of what they do and don't like.

Their power to make a more informed choice about what to do next is based on years of experience of what has and hasn't worked for them. Whilst they may not know what 'job' to do next, they know a lot about the conditions, values and people they'd like to work with. This feels like a goldmine of opportunity for the open minded organisation.

2.   Understand it

You can't manage or track what you don't know or understand. Examine your own employee data and their age profile. Create a 'baseline' from which to assess and evaluate the impact of any work you may share or messages you may communicate.

Conduct your own (ideally anonymous) survey exploring people's future intentions.

3. Audit and accreditation

Audit of your policies and HR processes. Whilst the legal angle can be considered the 'stick' the opportunity to take advantage of this growing market should be the biggest driver.   If employees are ageing, so are your customers... For more information on auditing your policies and processes, 55 Redefined offer a professional accreditation process (they are not sponsoring this report) and Pro Age (a charity) can help prepare your organisation, support a wider audit and help any issues which need addressing .

 Similarly Experients can also help support an audit. For clarity and transparency, no company or organisation mentioned has been involved with or is sponsoring this research.

4. Prioritise what you need to change

Every organisation is different and whilst some offer flexible working options as a default, there are many services where this is very challenging. Within your own assessment consider where possible what you can do to increase opportunities for:

- Flexible working
- Part time working
- Job shadowing

- Self directed learning
- Recognising/ showcasing your ageing talent

- Build alumni/mentoring networks
- Challenge the narrative

5. Offer help

It is extremely challenging to navigate a discussion around age. Managers often feel ill equipped at the best of times, let alone with employees who in many cases are older and more experienced. It is an area where people readily admit a lack of experience and need some support and guidance. Organisations such as Pro Age and Brave Starts work to help you build internal capability with both your managers and the ageing employees themselves.

6.   Communicate and celebrate

Share changes made. If you enable people to drop to 3-4 days a week, celebrate and talk about those doing it. If internal job moves are enabled through an internal job shadowing scheme, share the case studies. Reward the managers who facilitate internal moves. Receive the recognition your organisation deserves for making moves towards being more age friendly.

Final Comment?

Age is the one box we all tick. It is arguably speaking the most inclusive of any D&I agenda. The blueprint on how to help employees to age well and live fuller working lives isn't clear **but we do know the key to moving forward is more action.** If you are the sort of professional who wants to make a difference, please connect with us.

Whatever issue you'd most like to address, take heart we probably know someone who has been there done that and is willing to help. This is our mission, our purpose and our passion. Wheel reinvention isn't clever - so let's work on it together.

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CONTACT

If you'd enjoyed this report, let us know. Questions and comments are appreciated. We also welcome your suggestions and your comments.

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