Aging and Beneficial Purpose in the 21st Century

THE NEW LONGEVITY DIVIDEND

Report and recommendations from the 2014 Successful Aging Innovation Summit: Work, Productivity, and Beneficial Purpose
Transforming policies and practices, and ultimately culture, is difficult, and our mission to change aging requires more than a compelling narrative. It requires conviction and ongoing collaboration with a group of like-minded individuals and institutions. We are fortunate to be part of such a community, and the Successful Aging Innovation Summit was and is a community effort.

Let me first acknowledge the vision and leadership of the John Templeton Foundation and thank its exceptional staff, including Barnaby Marsh, John Seel, and Ericka Peterson. Thanks to our talented Summit participants for their time, thought leadership, and daily efforts to improve lives and society at large. We recognize the many individuals committed to reforming the culture of aging who were unable to be with us for the Summit, and we look forward to their ideas and input as our work progresses. Finally, my gratitude to Rita Beamish for her writing prowess, Jane Lee for her visual craft, and Betty Baboujon for her skillful editing.

Paul Irving
Santa Monica, Calif.
Population aging is one of the great global developments of the 21st century. The vast potential of longer lives, made possible by remarkable advances in medical science and public health, demands fresh thinking and action. A new human capital resource is available to the world, courtesy of the demographic shift. Can we—will we—capitalize on that opportunity?

The Milken Institute and the John Templeton Foundation share the conviction that it is time for a culture change, recognizing the new face of aging and its promise for people and planet. The experts and thought leaders at our Successful Aging Innovation Summit: Work, Productivity, and Beneficial Purpose came together in May 2014 to share ideas and aspirations, address impediments, and lay important groundwork to move us toward that culture change.

We believe that encouraging and enabling purposeful lives has never been more crucial, for both individual and societal benefit. The growing aging population provides fertile ground to realize this goal. By engaging older people in constructive work, volunteerism, and civic contribution, we can enrich lives and promote a better future for all.

Effecting culture change and harnessing this human resource are complex issues found at the intersection of business, health, education, communications, and philanthropy. The Templeton Foundation’s motto, “How little we know, how eager to learn,” underpins our desire for open-minded and informed dialogue among scientists, business leaders, policymakers, journalists, educators, theologians, and the public for insights and solutions to this historic challenge. The Milken Institute’s mission—to improve lives by advancing innovative economic and policy solutions that create jobs, widen access to capital, and enhance health—fuels our commitment to encourage engagement, productivity, and beneficial purpose among older people.

We offer this report from our Successful Aging Innovation Summit in the spirit of spreading important information, urging nonpartisan solutions, and realizing impact. We seek to transform ideas into action, re-framing aging, encouraging intergenerational cooperation and collaboration, and changing lives across the United States and aging societies around the world. Recognizing the economic, political, and social significance of the older population, we are confident that the conversation started here will spur fresh thinking and innovation.

Now is the time to move this work to the next level, acting together to seize the many opportunities presented by the new face of aging.

Paul Irving          Barnaby Marsh
President           Executive Vice President
Milken Institute           John Templeton Foundation

Our challenge is to engage, activate, and continue opportunities for people throughout their lives, for their benefit and the benefit of others and the broader society.

Paul Irving
MILKEN INSTITUTE SUCCESSFUL AGING INNOVATION SUMMIT

Summit participants
April 30 – May 1, 2014

*Special contributor
The key tools for this productivity lie in extended longevity and healthier aging, delivered largely by advances in bioscience and medicine, technology, and smarter lifestyles. Yet the media and popular imagery continue to perpetuate stereotypes that ignore the vibrancy and potential of today’s older people. Discrimination persists in the workplace despite evidence that aging workers bring valuable skills and perspective to intergenerational teams. And despite the burgeoning of the aging cohort and the related potential of a massive longevity economy, everything from infrastructure to appliances has been designed around youth.

The new older age is an open landscape. Aging adults themselves are discarding old patterns that set retirement in a specific time frame and trigger a downward trajectory. Yet while many plan to stay in the workforce full- or part-time and take up a variety of other activities, they worry about what employment options will be open to them, how they will maintain financial security, and what outlets they will have for making their lives more meaningful.

The Successful Aging Innovation Summit began to plot a road map that redefines assumptions and expectations about older people. The map leads to treasure—a culture shift that will open hearts and minds and ultimately transform policies and practices.

The purpose of the Summit, and this report, is not to solve the undeniable problems of aging. The impacts of disease and financial insecurity, as well as housing, transportation, and a range of other challenges are critically important issues for our aging populations that must be addressed. Our focus is on the connections among aging, work, productivity, and beneficial purpose. We seek to spur action that will enable the combination of longevity and purpose to enrich society and all generations.

This report reflects the themes that emerged during the Summit and the participants’ recommendations.
The world today holds a great untapped resource—a ballooning population of mature people. Thirty additional years of life expectancy since 1900 means that what was once considered “elderly” is now merely a prelude to decades of potential productivity and contribution. This is the new face of aging. With perceptiveness, experience, wisdom, and motivation among its attributes, the aging generation’s ability to contribute to society deserves an affirmative narrative. A new framework must be developed to realize that opportunity.

With the maturation of the baby boom generation into the largest-ever cohort of older people, the U.S. population over 65 will eclipse that under 15 by 2032. By the time the last baby boomer turns 65 in 2029, one in five Americans will be members of that cohort. Worldwide, the age wave is washing over countries from Japan and Italy to Russia and China.

This unprecedented longevity is the upshot of innovations in bioscience and medicine, technology, improved sanitation, and healthier living—as declining birth rates also give older people greater presence within the population. At the individual level, it means that a child born in 2030 is likely to enjoy almost a decade more of life than one born in 1980. More broadly, it presents society with a tremendous opportunity—the expansion of productivity, creativity, and contribution in many spheres.

As the prospects for healthy longevity expand, this opportunity will become more accessible. At the same time, skyrocketing obesity rates and the dangers of tobacco threaten to impede progress, Alzheimer’s presents terrible family and societal costs, and the unpredictable risks of infectious diseases and even pandemics loom large. Of course, the decline of physical and some mental abilities with advanced age cannot be discounted. Yet this is a historically relative issue. In the last half-century, each birth cohort has enjoyed better health in old age than the one before.

Older adults always have been society’s link to the past. They remain a valuable bridge to what went before. They are guardians of civil society. What is changing is the great promise the older population offers for institutions that have the vision to invest in it as a force to shape a better future. This is the new demographic dividend: Older people in an aging society are not just an outcome of past investments, but an asset that pays forward when society recalibrates to harness their virtually untapped potential.

Linda Fried
Demographers define the first demographic dividend as the economic growth that derives from lower fertility and mortality rates, with the labor force growing more quickly than the younger, dependent population. A second dividend is generated as the growth of the working population slows but mature workers fuel the economy by accumulating wealth and investing for their futures.

In today’s age of longevity, we hear fears that older people’s needs will strain the economy. But the third dividend, the new “longevity dividend,” recognizes that with healthier older lives, later years can be as productive as other times of life. Realizing this opportunity, however, means a new way of looking at age. It requires a culture shift in how we feel about and characterize older adults and how society values the attributes and potential of people in the traditional retirement years.

Anachronisms and Misperceptions This cultural shift starts in a world awash in the glorification of youth, used metrics that underlie policy considerations are based on easily disproved assumptions: that all old people are dependent, for instance, or that everyone between childhood and “retirement age” is in the workforce and productive. The failure to modify such calcified methodologies and beliefs over time keeps doors closed, to the detriment not just of individuals but of societies across the globe.

Nor is this clouded vision limited to young minds. Aging adults themselves can fail victim to self-underestimation. Many pre-retirees are never encouraged, or enlightened, about what they can and should aspire to and achieve in the coming years. They must opt for a new way of thinking, taking a proactive and realistic view to create a productive and fulfilling future.

Our culture often touts a “retirement” dream that is no longer the norm nor a realistic aspiration, since most aging individuals intend to age in place and work well into those years and beyond. One survey found that only a small minority want to retire at the traditional age. Despite that expectation, too many fail to undertake the planning to make it happen and lack backup plans in case the work scenario they envision falls through. One of the most misleading concepts is the “dependency ratio,” which assumes that virtually all older people are a drain on the economy while only the young are contributing and productive through their jobs and economic participation. Contemporary reality hardly conforms to that view. The 65-and-older share of the American labor force, which had dropped in the 20th century until 1980, now stands at more than 40 percent, a level not seen since the 1960s.

The years to come will see more individuals of traditional retirement age in the workforce. In fact, 72 percent of workers over 50 say their ideal retirement includes work in some capacity. Hardly a drain, these people are contributing to the economy, paying taxes, consuming, investing, and engaging in purposeful activity.

Our institutions, however, do not encourage these talents and motivation, either for individuals or in the collective sense. In a national survey, nearly half of baby boomers said their communities offered few job opportunities for people their age.5

Finding the Upside The upside of aging is no longer a pie-in-the-sky idea. But the concept does require a culture change to align with 21st-century realities. The new model builds on the last century’s legacy of longer lifespans. The advances leading to longer lives were propelled by commitment and investment on the part of governments and institutions, individuals, and communities. Dire rates of infant mortality—in 1900, up to 30 percent of babies in some U.S. cities died before their first birthday—and diseases that swept through populations unchecked are only bad memories today.

The Rise of Longevity in the U.S. ...

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*Projected Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Milken Institute

... Is Part of a Global Trend

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*Projected Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Milken Institute

An increasing number of people in the U.S. are age 65+ (in millions)

Aging of the world population (in millions)
The new reality of aging seeks to capitalize on that investment, calling for a similar commitment to integrate this redefined stage of life into our institutions and society. And the call to action demands that aging adults themselves step up to the possibilities. They must take charge of maximizing their own potential.

This mutually beneficial approach engenders learning and self-awareness. It spurs character development and cultivates a sense of well-being that can blossom with creativity, curiosity, generosity, joy, diligence, gratitude—in short, lives that have the power to “make a difference.”

As the philanthropist Sir John Templeton wrote of character development, “When you rule your mind, you rule your world.” Yes, we must commit to change institutions, attitudes, and social norms. But, while recognizing the potential for productive and purposeful aging across society, we must also change our own minds about ourselves and aging’s “new normal.”

**An Economic Byproduct** From an economic standpoint, enormous opportunities loom in this culture shift. Older adults are seeking products and services from an economy that lags behind their wants and needs. Older consumers demand policies, technologies, and a third of those over 65, use social networking sites.7

“Boomers didn’t just eat food—they transformed the snack, restaurant, and supermarket industries; they didn’t just wear clothes—they transformed the fashion industry; they didn’t just go to work—they transformed the workplace; they didn’t just go to the doctor—they transformed health care; and they won’t just grow old—they will transform aging itself and the marketplace that serves it.”

Still, too few businesses are exploring the demographic transition. They continue to focus on youth-centered culture and hew to decades-old marketing models in the adult sphere. What they overlook is that adults over 50 represent half of all discretionary spending in the United States. Importantly, older people are using the Internet at a rising rate. Further, more than half of people aged 50 to 64, and a third of those over 65, use social networking sites.7

Security, real estate, recreation, education, entertainment, dating, food, travel, technology, financial services, and disability.10 Older people who do paid or volunteer work are found to have significantly lower levels of depression.11

Numerous studies have demonstrated similar positive results. Among them, a French study revealed strong evidence of a link between retirement postponement and decreased risk of developing dementia;12 and Rush University Medical Center researchers found that a purposeful life slows cognitive decline by 30 percent and cuts in half the risk of Alzheimer’s.13 As well, another study found that people with purpose in life are as much as 57 percent more likely to live longer.14

This quality of well-being is associated with greater self-reliance and less need for costly health and social services. In a win-win loop, it circles back to enable older people to further expand the productivity that perpetuates this very sense of wholeness, the essence of successful aging.

It’s time to embrace this new frontier in ways that tap the social capital of older adults and generate the new demographic dividend. It’s time to seize the opportunities for purposeful productivity that enrich older adults and their communities. Rather than declare defeat, it’s time to recognize that this process will expand possibilities and improve society. In redesigning the environment for older people, something beneficial to all will be constructed.

**Marc Freedman**

**A Purposeful Life Slowsm Cognitive Decline by
30%**

**People With Purpose In Life Are More Likely To Live Longer By As Much As
57%**

**“We’re Interested Not Just In Leaving A Legacy, But Living One. So How Do We Create Cultural Norms, Social Policies, And Pathways To Help People Live Productive Lives?”**

**“Older Adults Need To Do Things They’re Passionate About. If They Don’t Feel Drawn To A Volunteer Activity, They Join The Attrition Rate, Which Is Tragic.”**

Stephen Post
The importance of language should not be overlooked in the culture-change mandate.

Older people don’t necessarily think of themselves as old, let alone “elderly.” Many prefer not to be referred to by age at all. This is especially true of the baby boomers, who continue with essentially the same activities they pursued in so-called middle age: working, supporting families, vacationing, involving themselves in their communities, enjoying recreation, and socializing. Typically more vibrant than earlier generations at the same age, they do not necessarily see themselves in need of age-specific services—or references.

The language around aging fails to account for these new realities. Our lexicon, which helps shape perceptions, also blurs the distinct differences among the groups along the continuum of age. The verbiage used for mature life stages is based on concepts rooted in biological and cultural norms of prior generations, when people aged 50, 70, and beyond carried physical and cultural characteristics quite different from those of today. These concepts predate the attributes and longevity of today’s older adults.

Our vocabulary feeds media images, entrenching the stereotypes and decline. It can affect the way older people see themselves and the way society treats them. Perhaps it’s not surprising that stereotypes and sensitivities around defining the new older adult create discomfort with a wide range of traditional terminology. We are all familiar with “senior citizen,” “senior,” “retiree,” “elderly,” “elder,” “geriatric,” and an assortment of less flattering descriptors. Because aging itself has changed, the old terms are now considered ill-fitting for the group, leaving policymakers, writers, and experts in the field verbally adrift.

The language has to catch up, from job advertisements and consumer marketing to everyday conversation. Even institutions that work on age-friendly issues find themselves trapped by outdated and often counterproductive vocabulary, including such loaded phrases as “dependency ratio” and “silver tsunami.” Just as we update school textbooks to reflect new knowledge and we improve our diets with expanding insight into health, our terminology must be modernized.

Old definitions of concepts like “working-age population” are symptoms of language standards that have outlived their relevance. Human resources terminology, for example, could integrate job posting references like “experience-based position” to signal institutional attitudes that truly value experience rather than penalize age.

As a part of the culture shift, a new 21st-century vocabulary can serve to acknowledge and engage older people while burying alienating, pejorative labels.

“Don’t Call Them Old

The Outmoded Vocabulary of Aging

Don’t Call
Them Old

I HATE READING ABOUT DEPENDENCY RATIOS THAT ASSUME ALL THE BOOMERS ARE GOING TO LAY AROUND IN HAMMOCKS. I DON’T KNOW ANY BOOMERS WHO PLAN TO LAY IN HAMMOCKS. BOOMERS WANT TO DO THINGS.

Tamara Erickson
Expectations for the later years have changed dramatically.

A life of leisure and disengagement was the retirement dream at one time, representing a retreat not only from work but in many cases from family and broader engagement in communities. Today’s aging adults anticipate longer working lives—for financial need, yes, but for other deeply felt reasons as well. They aspire to more time to enjoy being alive, perhaps an encore career that is personally satisfying and challenging, and opportunities to contribute their time and talents to worthwhile causes. They are interested in learning, mentoring, sharing their expertise and experiences, and connecting with younger generations.

They seek out activities and people who really matter to them, and they are less distracted by what is trivial. Indeed, they seek beneficial purpose. In the volunteerism realm, older adults tend to focus more on places and issues that are near to them—their religious institutions, local mentoring opportunities, and the well-being of their neighborhoods. And as they get involved, they transform those institutions and communities.

A Kindergartner in Chicago was told, ‘Why are you here? You’re a loser.’ An Experience Corps volunteer was the only person in that child’s life saying, ‘I believe in you and will work with you.’ Through that exchange and others, the child and the older adult are thriving.

Lester Strong
These aspirations reap double-sided rewards. Science has shown that purposeful experiences and feelings of fulfillment have a protective effect on our physical health. Beyond that individual effect, societies also reap the fruits of older people’s engagement, which can become the core of thriving communities. Mature people are more likely to volunteer their time and make philanthropic contributions. And today’s older Americans volunteer at higher rates than did their counterparts of previous generations.17

Religious organizations already are immersed in this conversation. They see aging adults searching for connection and deeper intergenerational relationships. Faith communities provide natural networks to spread messages of beneficial purpose and productivity and enable people who care about these issues to join hands.

Embracing the Desire for Purpose Existing institutions must be more open to this expanded view of the “retirement years.” Society must move away from expectations of disengagement and integrate aging into thinking about meaning and productivity. Older people’s prospects for engaging in service are virtually limitless, whether through religious institutions, in the civic arena, or in charitable projects organized by employers. So are the benefits to societies that build this social capital.

The potential of older people to engage with children, for instance, promises personal growth and enrichment far beyond the one-on-one level. The psychosocial theory of Erik Erikson, known as generativity, recognized the power of guiding the next generation as an antidote to the stagnation that can burden us during adulthood. Intergenerational involvement benefits both young and old in significant ways—and that synergy is the key to success. There’s a bonus too. When older people are engaged with and invested in youth, they see greater reason to make commitments to future generations in the form of quality education, public health, and preservation of the planet.

In Georgetown, Texas, for example, a retirement community called Sun City makes up a third of the population of 47,000. The city promotes an intergenerational mindset with numerous programs. Many are run with the local school district, including tutoring by older adults, joint performances by the Sun City and high school choirs, recognition of war veterans at school ceremonies, and bringing the Sun City Booster Club to high school sports events via school shuttles.

The town’s intergenerational investment appears to have had a broad impact. In 2010, Sun City voters overwhelmingly supported a local school bond when the measure failed in other central Texas districts.18

A Culture of Giving Intergenerational involvement is a powerful approach to reducing intergenerational competition and conflict. Further, by working to build a better future, mature individuals convey to young...
Classroom Experience: Purpose in Action

Experience Corps, a 20-year-old program now operated by AARP, is one successful model of engagement. It harnesses the social capital of 50-and-over Americans by sending them into elementary school classrooms as tutors. A commitment to children, and the profound feeling of helping them succeed, becomes a meaningful focus for the older people, about 2,000 of whom have contributed their efforts. In addition to elevating children’s lives, it has the salutary side effect of promoting the tutors’ own well-being through increased physical, mental, and social activity.

One San Francisco boy’s pairing with an Experience Corps tutor offered a poignant example of the multidimensional possibilities for both students and tutors. When the boy completed kindergarten, no one from his family came to see his graduation. But his tutor, a retired chef and restaurant manager, did show up to applaud him, the only person who came through for that child.19

Studies link Experience Corps with academic progress. One study involving six urban schools found substantially higher scores on a standardized third-grade reading test in those with Experience Corps tutors. Office referrals for classroom misbehavior decreased by about half in those schools but remained steady in the control schools.20

Experience Corps programs at 23 schools in Boston, New York City, and Port Arthur, Texas, also showed academic results. Low performers who were referred to Experience Corps, most of whom had about one session with a volunteer tutor per week, achieved 60 percent more progress on sounding out words and reading comprehension, and 40 percent more on reading skills, than the untutored groups.21

Such models such as Experience Corps (see box) demonstrate the possibilities that can emerge from remapping this stage of life. It remains a challenge, though, to identify and scale up existing models that work. Facilitating a variety of vehicles that enable older people to contribute should be a priority. Showcasing those approaches would help older people themselves become aware of the possibilities.

In turn, aging adults must seek out ways they can use their abilities in “giving back.” In so doing, they will enrich themselves.

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The Successful Aging Innovation Summit recommends a service and advocacy project to fuel the culture shift. The experts at the Summit envisioned a “Boomer Corps” to engage major social issues and challenges. Importantly, the corps would include an intergenerational focus. A community of committed older people would be mobilized for mentoring and opening career paths for young people, for example, or tackling health and environmental advocacy. It could organize volunteerism of all kinds. The volunteer corps could lead the charge on intractable problems, including complex transnational issues. In this realm, the mature mind, with its psychological and problem-solving capabilities and perspective, can be a valuable resource. And by expanding channels for the contributions of older people, we can dispel the dependency stereotype.

DO WE HAVE A FUTURE IN WHICH THE BROWN AND THE GRAY, AS I CALL THEM, ARE LOCKED IN PERPETUAL CONFLICT, OR IS THERE A POLITICAL SPACE THAT SHOWS THEIR SHARED INTERESTS, WHICH ARE VERY STRONG? RIGHT NOW, OUR POLITICS IS REALLY ABOUT PUSHING THEM FURTHER APART.

Ron Brownstein
A Catalyst For Productivity and Independence

Bringing out the best in the older population isn’t a piecemeal process but a holistic endeavor, especially in regard to living environments.

A safe environment, one that offers multifaceted support while recognizing the importance of self-reliance and the desire to contribute, is inherent in this goal. If older people have opportunities to work and volunteer but no access to transportation, they are unlikely to step outside their homes. If city policies impose restrictive zoning, aging parents may not be able to live in a small unit on their children’s property, and thus will lose their independence. If housing and the larger communities are not conducive to social interaction, older people become isolated.

This goal extends far beyond mitigating inconveniences. It entails re-envisioning and redesigning the infrastructure and social landscape as an enabling force for purposeful lives.

Most people will live in their own homes for all or most of their lives. The older population is far from monolithic, however, and the very elderly and infirm will need services, perhaps institutional facilities, that don’t apply to those at the younger end of the aging spectrum. Still, all can benefit from housing and community dynamics designed with an aging population in mind.

Aging adults will retain their independence with the benefit of accessible public transportation and services, modifications in housing, neighborhood safety features, physical activity, and opportunities for economic, educational, and civic engagement.

An Environment for Aging. Considerations extend to diversity of housing, traffic patterns, street planning and accessibility of services, recreation, and amenities, all of which factor into well-being, social integration, and independence. City planners can help create these conditions by taking into account the interwoven needs and abilities of the older population. Furthermore, these are aspects of the worldwide “age-friendly” cities movement. On a national basis, the Milken Institute’s “Best Cities for Successful Aging” report measures, compares, and ranks the performance of U.S. metropolitan areas in promoting and enabling successful aging. Internationally, the World Health Organization’s Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities is fostering creative ideas and best practices.

Many communities and public institutions are also developing an array of age-friendly policies and practices, among them accessible public transportation, collaborative policing, education and cultural initiatives, health programs, and outreach to keep older people involved."
It Takes a City for All Ages

By Henry Cisneros

People want to age at home. Visions of institutionalized care often spark fear and resistance among older people, and not without cause. Well-being is tied to the environments in which we live. Physical and social surroundings can support or inhibit health, engagement, productivity, and purpose as individuals get older. Fortunately, policies and practices to promote age-friendly communities can influence age-associated decline.

The front lines for the challenges of healthy, productive aging are in our cities, where most older people live. Urban planners have identified and named a growing phenomenon—NORCs, or naturally occurring retirement communities, neighborhoods where the population is aging along with the infrastructure. We must ensure that such environments optimize the opportunities for people to remain engaged in their communities and to realize purpose and well-being in their later years.

The World Health Organization states, “An age-friendly city encourages active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms, an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities.”

The goal should be physical and social environments that promote healthy and active aging, whatever the cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

Cities around the world are beginning to recognize and adopt policies and features that promote these attributes. But too often we see piecemeal approaches when what is needed is cross-agency, holistic thinking—an integrated approach to services and infrastructure. Walkable streets will not be enticing if poor lighting leaves people fearful at night. Health-care services lose impact if people don’t have convenient transportation. Affordable housing will be less attractive if interior features are not age-friendly.

Agencies from law enforcement to zoning departments must take up the challenge of coordinated age-friendly policies and attributes. Private industry, retail, and education must be encouraged and incentivized to collaborate.

Notably, age-friendly features benefit people of all ages. Narrower streets, barrier-free buildings, and safe neighborhoods are important to the disabled and people with small children as well as older residents. Streets with managed traffic and conducive landscapes reduce stress for all residents. The community at large wins when older people’s talents are employed in workplaces and the volunteer arena. Local economies benefit from the patronage of older consumers. Younger residents benefit from intergenerational connection.

The humane values underlying age-friendly cities are what make our communities places where people of all ages can work, learn, gather, and live with dignity and meaning.

The age-friendly-cities effort recognizes that urban environments foster—or impede—the meaning in older people’s lives. Urban settings provide numerous opportunities for age-friendly planning because, while they may lack the social and family networks of smaller communities, they offer a wide array of accessible resources.

Insightful planning can promote health, which is adversely affected by crime and violence, infrastructure decay, and the financial stresses of unemployment, to cite just a few conditions. A neighborhood designed for mobility—with access to transportation and appropriate lighting and shade, for instance—and offering accessible health-care and shopping options can make a world of difference.

Living environments with options for social interaction, employment, and volunteerism are also key to successful aging. In turn, the communities benefit from the stability, productivity, and anchoring nature of an older population.

Considering the scope of the massive change needed, current age-friendly efforts are fledgling and scattered. Concepts for broad strategic planning are gaining traction, but in embryonic form. No U.S. city has yet implemented an overall, comprehensive strategy to reconfigure policy, basic services, and land use to align with its aging population’s needs, capabilities, and aspirations. Well-intended efforts tend to be patchy, designed by an assortment of agencies and organizations on an ad-hoc basis.

The Successful Aging Innovation Summit recommended that the Milken Institute undertake a pilot project to assist, advise, and promote an inspiring age-friendly city. The majority of the world’s aging population lives in urban settings, which are ideal incubators for policy and developing collaborations that can serve the older population while tapping their own ability to serve their communities.

This initiative would enlist the Milken Institute’s expertise and relationship network and employ best practices to enhance the engagement of older residents. It is envisioned as a long-term project serving as a model to other communities, and spotlighting the productivity and value that can emerge from older populations.

The World Economic Forum’s 2012 report “Global Population Ageing: Peril or Promise?” notes that most efforts are unfolding in developed economies, while there remains a great need to address aging environments in less developed nations. Comprehensive overall planning, aimed at full social, physical, and financial well-being, is the route to creating an environment where the social capital of older people can thrive, and with it the community as a whole.

The income gap and racial-ethnic gap in many ways correspond to the generation gap. We’re trying to enhance the contributions and life opportunities of older, largely white Americans, but we have to do it in a way that’s going to help close those other gaps as well.

Steven Knapp
Reconceptualizing Aging and Work

A ROLE FOR EVERYONE

Aging, in the 21st century, no longer means the end of work.

Most people will continue in their professions or seek new ones, and they’ll work differently. They want the flexibility to be employed part-time or full-time, to change careers, to start businesses, and to participate in the civic and nonprofit sectors. One survey finds that more than half of baby boomers expect to continue working at least part-time even after they do “retire,” and 65 percent envision working past the age of 65 or not retiring at all.\(^23\) In fact, older workers are the only segment of the labor force whose participation has been rising substantially, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports. In 2000, the 55-and-older group accounted for 13.1 percent of the workforce. By 2010, it had leaped to 19.5 percent. The bureau expects older workers’ share to reach 25.2 percent in 2020.\(^24\)

The trend is rooted not just in longevity, but in the realization that continuing income will help sustain these later years—especially as employer pensions recede into the past. But there is a larger framework for extended working lives. Older people are more likely to say that working is a matter of choice for them rather than simply a necessity.\(^25\) This is the new narrative for later life: aging people seeking and choosing purpose, stimulation, engagement, and fulfillment.

Even while extra money may motivate people to remain in the workforce, many have at least some financial flexibility thanks to Social Security, pensions, and personal savings. That flexibility becomes more meaningful with families grown and mortgages paid. Thus, many people can incorporate life-work balance into their schedules, pursue entrepreneurial ambitions, and devote their energy to civic and charitable activities. A large-scale survey by Merrill Lynch and Age Wave finds that it’s not just money that motivates older workers, but drive, altruism, and a desire for balance.\(^26\)

The baby boom generation is pioneering a course in which working, leisure, and purposeful activity are not mutually exclusive. They are trying out job possibilities that support their need for quality-of-life time away from the workplace. That may partly explain why workers over 65 clock 25 percent fewer hours than younger workers.\(^27\)

Older people also tend to explore opportunities that contrast with what they did during their earlier careers. Nearly three of five “retirees” enter a new line of work, the Merrill Lynch survey found. They cite staying mentally and physically active, making social connections, and maintaining a strong sense of self-worth as more important reasons than money for working in their later years.\(^28\)

While the spotlight typically shines on youthful Silicon Valley tech entrepreneurs, the urge to start a business is

THE VAST MAJORITY OF TODAY’S WORKERS ENVISION A TRANSITION THAT INVOLVES EITHER SHIFTING FROM FULL-TIME TO PART-TIME WORK OR TAKING ON AN ENCORE CAREER—SOMETHING DIFFERENT AND MORE PERSONALLY SATISFYING.

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The New Angle on Older Workers

By Laura Carstensen

Reliable. Committed. Skilled. Conscientious. The attributes generally exhibited by mature workers are paramount to the success of any enterprise. But age discrimination in the workplace long has disadvantaged not only older individuals but also the organizations that could benefit from their talents. Negative stereotypes portraying older workers as slow and out of touch not only are off the mark but also miss the benefits that older adults bring to intergenerational settings. With people over 55 on track to account for one in four U.S. workers by 2025, up from 13 percent in 2000, it is important to reorient this outdated thinking.

We now know that the aging mind has many attributes to commend it in the workplace and beyond. Among them, enhanced perspective and practicality are highly useful characteristics that allow older people to view complex problems from multiple viewpoints, to apply their lifetime experiences and practical wisdom in problem-solving. As cognitive processing slows in some areas, years of accumulated knowledge and specific expertise, along with organizational abilities, can compensate for processing declines. Experience can make mature workers more efficient—to the benefit of the business bottom line. Emotional stability also improves with age. Regulating emotions clearly is a plus when facing complex or high-pressure work situations, and some businesses are taking notice. Companies like John Deere & Co. and Deutsche Bank intentionally create age-diverse project teams, realizing productive results in the intergenerational exchange of knowledge. Home Depot hires thousands of retired construction workers and plumbers, who bring their life and work experience into the retail setting. Company managers turn to these veterans to train and mentor newcomers.

While young people clearly bring technological wizardry and perspective, we need look no further than the National Institutes of Health for proof of older adults’ continued creativity. NIH realizes valuable research from its older scientists by offering them incentives to stay on the job.

In another testament to the vibrant potential of older workers, the entrepreneurial arena finds people aged 55 to 64 are starting new businesses at a faster rate than any other age group. They represent nearly a quarter of new startup founders.

As role models alone, mature workers are a plus in intergenerational settings. Most take pride in their work and tend to be more punctual, detail-oriented, and committed to a job well done than their younger counterparts. Imparting these values to young workers, they serve as mentors not only in skill areas but in work ethics.

Welcoming the potential of older adults in intergenerational organizations offers unprecedented opportunities—for companies, communities, and the broader society. The aging mind, imbued with emotional balance, improved perspective, and better mental health, is a resource to be embraced and engaged for the benefit of all generations.

For much of human history, older people were valued for their sagacity and leadership. However, the mature workforce today, while better educated and healthier than generations past, is frequently the subject of anxiety and debate about dependency and costs to society. The social capital that aging people offer is little noted. Expectations are minimal. Insidious age discrimination and bias persist in hiring and promotion decisions as well as training incentives to stay on the job.

The Advantage of Longevity

Discriminatory practices, whether subtle or overt, clearly overlook the value that older employees bring to the workplace and other productive endeavors. Contrary to assumptions, job performance does not by definition decline with age. In fact, some capacities improve, such as focused intelligence and cumulative knowledge. Not only do older workers serve as repositories of knowledge for both colleagues and customers, they are more reliable and less likely to miss work than their younger counterparts. The World Economic Forum’s “Global Population Ageing: Peril or Promise?” notes the depth of knowledge that characterizes older age.

“This capacity to engage in problem solving and critical thinking at work with customers and co-workers also marks older workers as vital contributors, reliable partners, committed leaders, and mentors. Their strengths far outweigh their vulnerabilities, and their efforts are needlessly undervalued.”

Pinchas Cohen

Mandatory retirement and other disincentives to productivity dampen society’s potential to benefit from the experience, skills, and perspective of older workers that are critical to a successful intergenerational workforce. Such policies and practices are unproductive and discriminatory, and should be retired.

Missing the Boat

Both workers and businesses, however, remain ill-prepared to realize the new "realignment" that combines productivity, leisure, and purpose, the Merrill Lynch survey found.

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The United States may even be on the cusp of an entrepreneurship boom thanks in part to the older demographic, which has expanded its role in the startup arena. The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation found that people between 55 and 64 accounted for more than 25 percent of the entrepreneurs who launched companies in 2013—far more than the 19 percent of 2003 and the 14 percent of 1996. Research suggests that older entrepreneurs also tend to be more successful in keeping their ventures alive.

Policies and practices should encourage these ambitions. Societies should open doors to the aspirations of older people and their desire to build a better future, not just for themselves but for the people touched by their efforts.

SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES EXIST—FROM TELECOMMUTING TO THE MEDICAL TECHNOLOGIES—that will extend our health span and allow people to remain productive for many years.

Pinchas Cohen
promotes innovation and supportive workplace practices in mature workers,” the report states. “In addition to this relational aspect of their skills, mature workers have diverse social networks and social resources they have accumulated across their lifespans, which organizations can leverage productively.”

**BMW’s Success** Despite biological changes—balance, vision, hearing, memory lapses—that can occur in later stages of life, the value of aging employees has been empirically demonstrated, notably by the German automaker BMW. Worried that the average age of its workers at a particular plant was on target to hit 47 by 2017, the company launched an experiment. It staffed one production line with 42 people whose average age was 47 and made modest accommodations such as better lighting, ergonomic workstations, and more forgiving floor surfaces—70 changes in all.

The pilot line produced rear-axle gearboxes and was one of the most labor-intensive lines in the factory. With the adjustments, the line increased its productivity by 7 percent in a year, bringing it on par with areas of the plant filled with younger workers. The lesson was clear: A setting designed for young people alone hinders that this giant human capital resource is mobilized and maximized rather than wasted.

**The Multigenerational Workplace** The advantages of age diversity are in fact gaining recognition from some companies that see competitive advantage in attracting and retaining employees who bring skills, experience, and perspective as well as the know-how to mentor younger people. In addition to physical adjustments, age-friendly environments include:

- Training opportunities to update skills and facilitate advancement.
- Flexible work times.
- Removal of disincentives, like promotion opportunities or job descriptions that target only younger candidates.
- Policies that allow for the transition from full- to part-time.
- Education programs about opportunities for community engagement and volunteerism.

**Reconceptualizing Work** As models of working continue to evolve, they should align with the talents and desires of aging people. New roles should harness their motivation and capabilities, their psychological stability, and their problem-solving skills, and develop ways to match mature talents with the needs of the marketplace and service projects.

Governments also can encourage and incentivize companies to employ people beyond traditional retirement ages. Recognizing the growth of the demographic and its deepening economic influence, public agencies can develop policy frameworks to ensure that this giant human capital resource is mobilized and maximized rather than wasted.

**Older Adults as Entrepreneurs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 20-34</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ages 35-44</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ages 45-54</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ages 55-64</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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Sources: Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Milken Institute

**Building a Culture of Success** To re-imagine work and spur culture change, the Summit encouraged universities and business schools to teach case studies addressing the value of older workers. This pedagogy would highlight organizations with transformative strategies, exploring why they took specific steps and what benefits they accrued or didn’t accrue in productivity, morale, and culture.

Such a curriculum would establish a framework within which the next generation of business leaders can shift their views on aging and the potential of older people. Business schools can play an even broader role by involving companies in awareness-building outreach and initiatives such as competitions.

Philanthropy can also play a role by sponsoring research, supporting new models, and helping them move to scale. A small number of visionary philanthropic organizations appreciate the magnitude of the changes at the intersection of aging, work, and purpose. But we need more involvement and resources to make the case, expand the conversation, and scale and spread the message.

With a concept of work that matches the aspirations of older people and the needs of a changing society, we can imagine new responsibilities and roles that enrich both individuals and the world.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Successful Aging Innovation Summit recommends a project to reconceptualize work and reclassify jobs. This initiative would include a supply-demand analysis leading to a blueprint for harnessing the practical knowledge and strengths of older people.

The project would look at job categories for which age is a negative, as well as those that treat age as a plus or a neutral factor. It would consider the benefits of intergenerational teams and the skills of older workers, where they add value and where they don’t, and match those findings with the demand side. The resulting map and linkages would indicate where opportunities lie for older people in work and volunteerism.

The reconceptualization also would help to build a new human resource vocabulary and update perceptions about the potential contributions of older people. It would explore ways to value work that typically has been little recognized but in fact is among the most purposeful of all careers—the caregiving universe, where so many older people are involved as workers, consumers, and volunteers. These professions are too often minimized, even demeaned. The new view of aging supports resources, understanding, and collaboration in this expanding field.

"**MANY PEOPLE HAVE CONSTRUCTIVE PURPOSE RIGHT NOW. THEIR PURPOSE IS TO PAY THE RENT, OR TO CARE FOR THEIR GRANDCHILDREN OR THEIR OWN AGING PARENTS. A PURPOSE-DRIVEN MOVEMENT ALREADY MAY EXIST OUT OF NECESSITY. OUR EFFORTS CAN TAP INTO THEIR NEEDS, ALLOWING THEM TO DEFINE PURPOSE IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES.**"

Freda Lewis-Hall
Reaching for the Longevity Dividend

HOW WE ALL WIN

Population aging clearly presents both challenge and opportunity. Older people are a resource for families and communities, for economic growth and entrepreneurship, for our quality of life today and tomorrow. They are a repository of knowledge, experience, and perspective. With a change in culture and the road map envisioned by the Successful Aging Innovation Summit, the potential of the aging population looms large.

Culture change takes time and hard work. To achieve culture change means reinventing the mindset around aging, a shift in the way we think and operate. This reinvention is not just about the evolution of the population, but how society—including all private and public institutions—must change to embrace the purposefulness and productivity of this stage of life.

Casting off stereotypes about what it means to age, educating people to recognize and honor this vital stage of life, using the great untapped resource of older minds to meet existing and emerging needs, connecting young and old in ways that defy the “dependency ratio”—these are the elements of culture change and the new longevity dividend.

We recognize that the Successful Aging Innovation Summit was but one step in a long and challenging journey of change. For decades, forward-thinking leaders have alerted us to the implications of an aging society: the costs and risks, and the possibilities and promise for a growing human capital resource. With the massive demographic shift now upon us, it’s time to accelerate our response. The journey of change must continue—and at a much faster pace.

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A CALL TO ACTION

The longevity dividend is within our grasp, but only if we act together. It’s time for forward-looking policies and practices. It’s time to confront bias. It’s time to create opportunities. It’s time for new models. While aging’s health, economic, and other challenges are not to be ignored, the Successful Aging Innovation Summit makes the case for an urgent, new, and positive narrative. This narrative links aging and beneficial purpose for the good of older adults and people of all ages across the United States and the aging world.

It’s hard to translate ‘zikna.’ Some read the word to mean ‘one who has acquired wisdom.’ The question is, how do you apply the wisdom that you have acquired to the rest of your life?

Rabbi Laura Geller

Paul Irving
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