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The social construction of retirement and evolving policy discourse of working longer

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Abstract

This article is concerned with the evolving social construction of older workers and retirement. Evolving and competing 'worldviews' from public policy and social advocacy are described and critiqued. Contradictions and disjunctions in terms of public policies aimed at changing employer behaviour towards older workers are identified. It is argued that present representations of older workers have serious flaws that provide a weak basis for policy development, and may not only undermine the prospects for overcoming prejudicial attitudes towards older workers in society but may in fact strengthen them. It is argued that the mainstreaming of issues of older workers' employment is justified, with directing them towards market-driven mainstream programs being cognisant of negative attitudes towards ageing and not trapping them in employment placements sheltered from labour market competition.

Introduction

Historically, the political discourse concerning the employment of older workers has shifted depending on economic conditions, so in the 1950s and 1960s, a period of strong economic growth and labour scarcity there was an emphasis on their labour market integration. More recently, during periods of economic recession and job scarcity, early retirement was promoted as being good for older workers and society as a whole, on the back of efforts to re-distribute work to the young. During this latter period a range of mechanisms emerged aimed at removing older workers from the labour force (Kohli and Rein, 1991), some via formal early retirement schemes and others making use of unofficial unemployment and

disability pathways out of the workforce (Oxley, 2009). Presently, and interestingly, despite historically high levels of youth unemployment in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, a pushing out of the age of final labour market withdrawal is still considered essential by industrialized societies grappling with the potential effects of population ageing on social welfare systems. The policy discussion has shifted dramatically from being about early exit to the identification of pathways into late career work (Phillipson, 2009). There appears to have been little serious recent debate concerning the re-introduction of early exit pathways as means of creating employment opportunities for the young. As a consequence such pathways have been gradually closed, or access severely restricted, and they have been replaced by measures aimed at the integration of older workers in to the labour market. Moreover, while until relatively recently retirement was characterized as a foundation of the 'moral economy' of Western society (Kohli, 1987), current narratives of working longer are imbued with a sense of obligation on the part of the older worker who should avoid becoming a 'burden' on society. Indeed, the concept of retirement is in the process of being transformed from being a reward bestowed by societies on individuals at the end of their so-called 'productive' years to something more akin to a kind of unemployment. In this regard it is notable that the term 'productive ageing' has been popularized to refer to fully maximizing the potentiality of older people. This approach obscures the idea of a retirement by transforming the years that used to be considered a time for well-earned leisure and recreation at the end of a career or working life into a time for continued labour force participation which, in some cases, is actually a time of late career unemployment or underemployment. It is in this sense that we assert the emergence of a new narrative focused on working longer that describes the years formerly regarded to be retirement as productive and centred on employment. Presumably, those regarded to be 'unproductive' are viewed as not fully contributing to society.

This new narrative of late career productivity is built from an understanding that ageing is socially constructed. According to Powell and Hendricks (2009) a 'theoretical model emphasizing the social construction of ageing highlights the contention that ageing has no existence independent of social interaction and power relationships in society. In other words, the meaning of ageing derives not from innate biological processes but is socially determined. Indeed, the 'constructedness' of ageing is made invisible by the normal workings of social life, so that it appears 'natural' rather than 'artificial' (p. 85). They go on to argue that by 'attending to the interplay between social context and individuals, the social construction of ageing can be defined as the systematic study of the taken-for-granted assumptions that are created by societies that filter through to shape personal attitudes about ageing as played out in light of the relationships between institutions and individuals' (p. 86). We apply this perspective to policy narratives concerning the role of older workers and the nature of retirement which have, in relatively short period of time, passed from being based on their exclusion from the labour market to present efforts aimed at their continued economic activity. Considering, in particular the Australian case, we examine such narratives, arguing that disjunctions and contradictions therein have resulted in a weak foundation for policy development, with the consequence that ageist attitudes and behaviours may have been encouraged and older workers' labour market position undermined. The following section, firstly, outlines the recent changes that have taken place in the relationship between older workers and the labour market and, secondly, considers how this social construction of older workers has evolved in response to changing economic and demographic circumstances.

The shift from early exit to working longer

Until relatively recently, public policy and, by dint of this, much of the relevant research literature was focused on the 'early exit' of older workers from the paid labour force. While

care needs to be taken not to overgeneralize, across the industrialized nations the broad picture in the 1970s through to the 1990s was one of the increasingly early labour market withdrawal of older workers, much of this underpinned by public policy, facilitated by use of a range of institutional arrangements for aggregate labour market management, and viewed by the social actors as one of the “bloodless” ways of coping with unemployment’ (Kohli and Rein, 1991: 11). This approach was given strong impetus by ‘cultural norms and public opinion stressing both the responsibility for full employment in society and the belief that, given a scarcity of jobs, priority should be given to younger workers’ (Kohli and Rein, 1991: 13). However, the discourse on ageing and work underwent a profound shift in a relative short period of time, as indeed an era of early exit was immediately preceded by efforts to promote the employment of older workers against a backdrop of economic growth and labour supply concerns in the 1950s and 1960s (Kohli and Rein, 1991).

Recent public policy thinking in Australia exemplifies a shift evident in other industrialized countries, as early retirement is regarded to no longer be tenable if economies are to remain competitive and to respond effectively to the ageing of populations (The Treasury 2010; OECD 2012). Along with this have come new public policies aimed at closing off early retirement pathways and promoting longer work lives (The Treasury 2012). Quickly, older workers have passed from being viewed as blockages who should make way for younger labour market entrants to active agents in the labour market with capabilities and, moreover, the obligation to continue to contribute economically. This new narrative of retirement reflects a shift from what was understood as a time to enjoy later life and make way for the next generation to a time to continue contributing productively either through paid employment or volunteering. Notions of productive, healthy and active ageing have come to the fore, each with an emphasis on, where possible, continued labour force participation (Oxley, 2009; WHO, 2002). In fact, practical applications have often focused on

labour force participation, to the detriment of other spheres. As noted by Walker (2009: 85), 'for nearly a decade of a conception of active aging based on participation and well-being across the life course, the policy instruments still focus primarily on employment'. Moulaert and Biggs (2012: 35) go much further, arguing that active ageing has come *to mean* the 'legitimate "conduct of the self" as social engagement through the job market. The result is perhaps a new form of ageism, which requires an almost indefinite continuation of work and work-like activity as the new legitimacy for a mature identity'. In the next section we explore the prevalence of ageist discourses in the labour market and present social constructions of older workers as the basis of a further discussion of approaches to overcoming labour market age barriers.

Labour market social constructions of older workers

While there has been a marked public policy shift in favour of prolonging working lives it is apparent that negative age stereotypes remain pervasive and influence behaviour. The pervasiveness of age stereotyping of workers has received much attention in the literature. Research has consistently found that employer attitudes to older and younger workers are stereotypical. Studies have identified consistently the perceived values employers ascribe to older workers as, on the one hand, loyal, dependable, experienced, knowledgeable, having wisdom, a good temperament, a strong work-ethic, corporate knowledge, commitment to an organization, job satisfaction, and stability and, on the other, a perceived inability to be flexible, adaptable and technologically competent. By contrast, employers value younger workers for their enthusiasm, innovation, technological savvy, pace-setting, ambition, risk-taking, desire to learn, openness to change, collaboration, and understanding of social media and technology (Hedge et al., 2006; Kreab and Gavin Anderson, 2014). Such stereotypes fail to recognize that workers of similar ages may have different experiences, skills and attributes and, conversely, that workers of different ages may have similar

experiences, skills and attributes. The simplicity of stereotypical views also offers employers an excuse to overlook the needs of different employee groups.

In a social policy and management discourse in Australia, two broad, contemporaneous and conflicting narratives of older workers can be identified. We consider both to be reductive fictions, making selective and inaccurate use of evidence that is only applied to certain sub-groups of older workers. On the one hand, a dominant *vulnerability* fiction describes older workers as highly disadvantaged: ageism is 'endemic in our society' (COTA, 2013), age discrimination is 'rampant' (Heymann, 2014), and ageing has predominantly negative connotations (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013). This fiction is widely disseminated despite evidence, for instance, that only a minority of older people report age-attributed age discrimination in the labour market (Adair et al., 2013). On the other hand, an alternative newer and less well-developed fiction of *productivity* describes older workers as being sought after by employers for their knowledge and experience (Kreab and Gavin Anderson, 2014). Such fictions are widely across the society, particularly via the mass media.

The mass media plays a role in the social construction of older workers in that it conveys stereotypical images of ageing widely. Older people are under-represented in the media, reflecting that they are often ignored or treated with disrespect, and when they are represented, they are often portrayed poorly or unfairly as victims or as vulnerable. In Australia, media reports of older workers regularly rely on stereotypes. Such perceptions of age masquerade as fact when reports refer to research studies, it is argued, that demonstrate older workers are considered 'dinosaurs' by co-workers and face immense hurdles when looking for work (Horin, 2011).

In the next section some present efforts aimed at fomenting attitude and behavioural change regarding employers are described and critiqued. We argue that such approaches are manifestly grounded in ageist assumptions about both older and younger workers and as a consequence, significantly undermine their own case for the establishment of human resource management practices that are free of age barriers. Moreover, evidence is presented that the case for older workers is being made on the basis of arguments with which employers are likely to agree, but which are unlikely to encourage them to engage with issues of older workers' employment.

Policies aimed at the labour market integration of older workers

A shift in public policy towards older workers in industrialized nations has been underway for some time, with measures now aimed at the prolongation of working lives (Phillipson, 2009). Particular efforts are being devoted to fomenting attitude and behaviour change among employers. This is logical given that firms have significantly contributed to early exit aimed at the rejuvenation of workforces (Peiró, Tordera and Potočnick, 2012) and studies have consistently pointed to the persistence of age discrimination in the labour market, much of it practiced by employers.

Exemplifying efforts to shift attitude and behaviour change among employers, in recent years Australian governments have implemented a raft of measures targeting the employment of older workers, including those aimed at changing employer attitudes and behaviours. Notable has been the emergence of policies focusing on older workers specifically, singling them out as a labour market group in need of particular attention.

Drawing on the *productive* representation of older workers the Rudd-Gillard Labor Government of 2007-2013 introduced the Experience+ Corporate Champions program which formed part of a wider suite of measures with the Experience+ nomenclature (Department

of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2013). This program provided support to employers committing to implementing best practice in the recruitment and retention of workers aged 45 years and over. Eligible employers received tailored support and assistance valued at up to AUD\$20,000 provided by an industry expert. Participating employers could receive a range of support including:

- a professional assessment of workforce strategies, recruitment and retention practices
- practical help developing an action plan using an Investing in Experience Tool Kit
- support to access Australian Government financial assistance including the Experience+ Jobs Bonus
- advice on positive age management, superannuation, occupational health and safety, career planning, training and age discrimination

Employers of all sizes were potentially eligible to receive support through the program which was delivered by a number of expert providers who worked with employers in both regional and metropolitan areas of Australia. After the Abbott Coalition Government came to power in 2013 it retained the Corporate Champions program, but dispensed with the Experience+ nomenclature and most of the other measures.

Popular among policy measures targeting employers internationally have been wage subsidy programs and successive Australian governments have similarly regarded them as a valuable tool in persuading industry to countenance older labour. A recent review of European public policy identified that subsidized employment been the most popular measure implemented among Member States (Vargas et al, 2013). This review gave such measures a favourable evaluation, although evidence from Australia points to such measures having limited impact (Sydney Morning Herald, 2013). In Australia the Rudd-Gillard Government allocated AUD\$10

million for the introduction of an AUD\$1,000 Experience+ Jobs Bonus, from 1 July 2012 as an incentive for 2,500 employers per annum who recruited a jobseeker aged 50 and over who was retained for at least three months (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2013). After the change of government, the Abbott Coalition Government extended the employment participation plan of an AUD\$10,000 worker employment incentive payment for employers that hired mature age workers aged 50 or older from 1 July 2014 (Department of Employment, 2014). Currently labelled Restart, this employer bonus is limited to older workers who are an eligible mature age job seeker registered with the employment services, Job Services Australia, in an ongoing full time or part time (minimum 15 hours per week) position who started work on or after 1 July 2014 (Department of Employment 2014). The intent of Restart is overcoming workplace barriers to the employment of older workers. Drawing on notions of older workers as *vulnerable* and needing a 'helping hand' but also deploying arguments based on their supposed *productivity*, these employer subsidy measures provide short term resources as wage supplement incentives to a limited number of individual employers. In promoting the employment of older workers to business, the Department of Employment (2014) posits a business case that contains a number of contentious and seemingly factually inaccurate statements:

- Mature age workers can bring something special to your business; a lifetime of experience and knowledge that they can pass on to other workers and your customers.
- Experienced workers have built up knowledge and skills during their time in the workforce. Committing to positive workplace practices will also help you to retain your mature age workers and provides benefits in maintaining corporate knowledge and critical skills.

- Generally, mature age workers are less likely to take days off due to illness or to care for others, and are less likely to experience work-related injuries than other workers.
- Staff who have both 'work' and 'life' experience are valuable assets to a business.
- Mature age employees are reliable, take pride in their work and are keen to make a positive contribution.
- Employee loyalty saves money on absenteeism, training and recruitment. There is evidence that workers aged over 55 are five times less likely to change jobs compared with workers aged 20–24.

According to Loretto, Duncan and White (2000) while the 'origin of the concept of ageism has meant that, in policy terms and in public discourse, the phenomenon is still mostly associated with prejudice against older age groups. In recent times, however, this association has begun to loosen as evidence mounts that age prejudice in employment can be experienced at any age.' By this widened definition, the Australian approach to promoting older workers to business is ageist with the potential to encourage age discriminatory practices against the young. Observable is the apparent deployment of one set of age stereotypes in order to challenge another. So in support of mature age workers, their 'experience', 'reliability' and 'loyalty' is promoted over, presumably, that of young people who are considered less so. Additionally, while reliability as an employee attribute may be viewed by employers as positive for repetitive and predictable tasks in a routine, it may be perceived negatively for flexible, innovative and creative employees. Emphasizing experience and reliability based on stereotypes of older workers formed in the Fordist industrial age can confirm broader social perceptions that they are less capable to meet modern labour market demands and hence are less productive than younger workers. In fact there are at least two ironies here. First, there is an association between ageism/age discrimination and older ages in the minds of both advocacy organizations and policy

makers. Arguably insufficient attention has been paid to ageism/age discrimination affecting the young. A further irony and perhaps more invidiously is the issue of whether industry is much interested in reliable, loyal or experienced older labour: Do such characteristics have negative or positive connotations in the minds of employers? Roberts (2006) argues that in the new capitalism such characteristics have shifted from being a positive to a negative condition. Loyalty and reliability might be taken to mean that an older individual is a better or more productive worker, and it might also mean that the older worker would remain with the firm for longer, as some research shows (Brooke, 2003), although the meaning of this is unclear. Or it may reflect greater genuine loyalty to the firm or, on the other, mobility constraints on the part of older workers. Researchers have examined perceptions of age-based attributes of workers, according to whether the attributes are applied to younger or older workers (Steinberg et al., 1996; Bittman, Flick and Rice, 2001; Ranzijn, Carson and Winefield, 2005). In one study reliability of older jobseekers was the most preferred job related attribute that was also perceived as an attribute of older workers (see Ranzijn, Carson and Winefield, 2005). This would be a positive, possibly, if the firm values long tenure, and is concerned about high turnover, but it would constitute a negative if the emphasis instead is placed on quick turnover of staff bought in for a specific short term purpose. Reliability, loyalty and experience might also become a negative if taking on associations such as being set in their ways or not open to change. Sennett (2006: 61) makes the point that 'Cutting-edge organizations want to attract entrepreneurially minded young people' who are more pliant, and lack family and other commitments that make them 'sticky'. Likewise, it is far from clear that some so-described advantages of older labour fit with new approaches to managing human resources where, for instance, according to Lyon, Hallier and Glover (1998: 58), 'employers would tend to expect the earlier work allegiances and experiences of older employees to evoke a greater reluctance among them to endorse new managerial values... Hence their exclusion, unfair treatment or dismissal mainly stems

from being tainted by the length and diversity of their work histories'. Critically, research indicates that older workers are rated more highly on qualities that are considered less important by employers. Van Dalen, Henkens and Schippers (2010) found that employers primarily perceived the advantages of workers aged over 50 as being in terms of their soft qualities, whereas those of younger workers were primarily in terms of their hard qualities. Hard qualities included flexibility, physical and mental capacity and the willingness to learn new technology skills, whereas soft qualities included commitment to the organization, reliability, and social skills. Notably, hard qualities carried greater weight than soft qualities in evaluations of productivity. This has potentially important implications for efforts to overcome age barriers in the labour market, particularly those aimed at awareness-raising among employers. It indicates that not only are older workers being promoted in terms of qualities that employers are already more likely to ascribe to them, such qualities may be given a lower weighting in terms of employment decisions if ratings of productivity influence these, which seems likely.

Wage subsidy schemes are also potentially problematical in another, related sense in that, by drawing employer attention to the disadvantaged status of older workers they may reaffirm ageist attitudes and encourage discriminatory behaviours. An illustration is the example of Japan where successive governments have introduced measures aimed at the extension of the mandatory retirement age, known as Teinen. One such measure: 'The subsidy for promotion and establishment of continued employment' is available to employers who increase Teinen age or implement a continued employment scheme to age 65 or over (Oka, 2008). While it appears that employers have responded positively to the policy, evidence points to potentially adverse consequences for older workers. Thus, wages tend to drop significantly while duties usually remain the same and employment is almost exclusively irregular, with the majority of employees employed on fixed term contracts with

relatively low pay and few fringe benefits. Moreover, selection criteria to the scheme that are applied by most employers may act as barriers to the participation of older workers. Oka (2013) describes this policy as publicly subsidized low pay work that encourages age discrimination as the principle of equal pay for equal work is not observed.

Thus, the risks with such an approach aimed at fomenting behavioural change is that it appears to be grounded in ageist assumptions, has the added potential to devalue the contribution of older workers and may actually encourage discriminatory behaviour on the part of employers. Efforts to point to some so-called 'qualities' of older workers in an effort to galvanize employer interest might prove counter-productive with such a simplistic solution potentially adding to the difficulties faced by this segment of the workforce. Added to this the age based discourse underlying policies based on chronological age may ultimately restrict opportunities by sheltering older workers in discrete niches away from mainstream employment. The discourse of age-segregated employment policies risks capturing older workers in marginalized employment with little prospect of escape.

Resistant factors to building 'quality' working lives – deficiencies in notions of the productive older worker

The language of 'early exit' from the labour force has all but disappeared from the policy lexicon. However, a propensity to focus on the reintegration of older workers may have resulted in the neglect of those for whom, for a variety of reasons, a prolongation of working life is problematical. It is relatively easy to point to gaps in arguments concerning the merits of blocking off early exit pathways and instead exposing older workers to the labour market via promoting re-entry and retention. For instance, although amid reforms aimed at prolonging working lives older workers may nowadays be somewhat more attached to the labour market than they once were, their employability, due to factors such as a lack of up-

to-date skills, is often poor (Phillipson, 2009). 'Activation' in terms of the 'right' to work when there is no work to be had due to age based discrimination, a lack of skills currency, or physical and/or mental health issues may be condemn many to labour force participation, without meaningful employment opportunities. Some unemployed older workers will 'retire' as a face-saving status (Walker, 1985), while others must maintain economic activity for financial reasons, preventing withdrawal from the labour market despite their limited prospects. It is to some of these choices that we now turn.

In their discussion of early exit, Kohli and Rein (1991) describe the transition to retirement as becoming 'fuzzier' (p. 22), with the emergence of a range of in-between statuses between paid work and full retirement. Referring specifically to early exit they consider the legitimacy of different institutional pathways and their potential for 'stigmatization or social respect' (p. 27), with implications for wellbeing. Such an analysis may similarly be applied to present efforts to prolong working lives. In this regard a scaling back of labour force participation in the form of reduced working hours – commonly referred to as gradual retirement – has long been promoted by advocacy groups, commentators and policy makers as approaches that have strong appeal to older workers as they transition to retirement. There have been strong arguments in favour of gradual retirement, with proponents positing a case based on supposed individual, organizational and societal benefits. According to Delsen and Reday-Mulvey (1996: 9) it 'constitutes a flexible extension of working life and should be promoted as such'.

However, the desirability of reduced working hours for a significant proportion of older workers has been questioned (Bell and Rutherford, 2013). Many older workers appear to find their work choices restricted, their productive potential underutilized. For instance, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) some 244,000 people aged 45 and

over were classified as underemployed part time workers. Older people had a longer duration of underemployment than younger people. Among those underemployed part time workers aged 45 and over working hours of 35 or more were the most commonly preferred option. Moreover, there is the propensity for 'occupational downshifting' among older jobseekers who take on roles that underutilize their skills and experience (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). This is not, however, acknowledged within narratives of productive ageing where any working is considered beneficial.

Added to this, although policymakers may point to the individual benefits of working for ageing productively, if the work available is not quality work then working may reduce the prospect of a healthy and secure life for older people. As noted by Phillipson (2009) many move into bridging forms of employment in contingent or non-core areas of the workforce. However, rather than dwell on the potential health and other risks associated with precarious or poor quality employment, emerging narratives of working longer from a healthy ageing perspective have ignored such issues. For instance, a recent OECD report concerned with healthy ageing identified the need for policies aimed at increasing labour market activity among older workers, but without reference to the quality of employment opportunities (Oxley, 2009). While the work context can optimally enhance functioning, relative health benefits depends on the kinds of work available for older people. The emerging narrative promoted by policymakers and advocacy groups socially constructs any type of working longer as being beneficial. A recent Australian Human Rights Commission (2012: 6) report argues that there are benefits when older people remain in the workforce, arguing that 'working is a protective factor against physical ill-health and poor mental health'. However, it is known that the extent of this varies with employment situation. For instance, Strandh (2000) examined psychological wellbeing and new employment status after unemployment and concluded that a return to permanent employment appeared to

result in a larger increase in wellbeing than one to temporary employment or self-employment.

Older worker identity and late careers - deficiencies in notions of the vulnerable older worker

Equally deficient is the 'vulnerable' proposition as it fails to acknowledge the diversity of older workers' capacities and experiences and imposes a construction that may undermine a person's efforts at maintaining a work identity. As noted by Riach and Loretto (2009: 104) in relation to unemployed or economically inactive older people 'many of the current policies make assumptions about "disadvantaged" individuals, homogenizing both their experiences and their social or economic position'. In this regard Riach and Loretto report findings from a study of non-employed older workers who described difficulties escaping imposed non-worker identities and their conscious efforts at contesting these. Added to this was the perception that certain jobs were considered suitable for an older worker, with respondents referring to their experiences of being offered low skill or poorly paid jobs that did not take account of their professional skills or experiences. Returning to an earlier theme, this may reflect ageist assumptions regarding the age appropriateness of particular forms of work.

Concluding comments

Presently, the prolongation of working lives is considered essential if nations are to respond well to the ageing of their populations, but recent constructions of ageing have had little to say about the terms of older worker engagement with the labour market, seemingly premised on the notion that *any* form of labour force participation is an individual and societal good. As Moulaert and Biggs argue that work has come to *mean* active ageing we further argue that strict limits are, in fact, also being placed on the roles older workers are

expected play in the labour market. Individual preferences are seemingly subjugated as many older workers are directed to peripheral work roles.

In attempting to represent the labour market status of older workers both the vulnerability and productive narratives we identify are deficient, with a risk that much of the present public discourse obscures proper consideration of issues surrounding their employment, reinforcing, on the one hand, existing negative age based perceptions concerning their capacities and potential economic contribution, and on the other ignoring gaps in their potentiality which place limits on the extent of their labour force attachment. As a consequence, both narratives may undermine the status of older workers and contribute to greater social inequality, economic insecurity and reduced wellbeing, with potentially adverse consequences for successful transitions to retirement. Policymaking is required which counterbalances the language of aspiration to prolong working lives with practical policies that are cognisant of the vulnerabilities of some older workers. This includes a recognition that, for those with severe impediments to working, some form of 'early exit' may represent a legitimate pathway, affording a measure of social respect, in defiance of what is arguably the dominant construction of active ageing.

Further, we argue that the current propensity for age-based policymaking segments the labour market in a way that is unwarranted. Present policy approaches to the prolongation of working lives also appear to draw upon ageist assumptions about both younger and older workers and do not acknowledge the considerable diversity of the latter. In response Brooke and Taylor (2005) have argued that policies directed at older workers alone ignore the age and age group dynamics that inform workplace practices. In a similar vein Roberts (2006: 81) proposes that 'older workers were accommodated most successfully within collective inter-generational structures'. This points towards public policy and advocacy approaches that

take a broader approach to the management of age in workplaces. Age-segregated labour market programs may reinforce perceptions of disadvantage rather than create the potential for mobility and transitions. Directing older jobseekers towards market-driven mainstream programs is cognisant of the existence of negative attitudes towards ageing but does not trap them in employment placements sheltered from labour market competition.

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