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Multigenerational organisations: A challenge for technology and social change [☆]



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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses demographic and organisational trends associated with an ageing workforce and introduces the articles in the special issue of *Technological Forecasting and Social Change on Ageing2Agility: Multi-stakeholder Technological Forecasting for the Multi-generational Challenges in the Organisation*. It is argued that the impact of ageing on organisations is both inherently interdisciplinary and relatively neglected compared with other fields such as demographics and economics. Organisations throughout the world must address the issue of integrating fast-growing Generation Y populations into workforces led and managed by people with very different (often more traditional cultural) life experiences. Addressing these issues presents challenges for technological forecasting and opportunities for innovation. Organisations will have to adapt to both ongoing technological development and social changes such as an ageing workforce and customer base.

First the context of ageing is explored with a particular focus on the demographic and social changes faced by organisations. Five 'myths of ageing in organisations' are discussed followed by three areas where research is relatively underdeveloped: the concept of a 'multi-generational workforce'; the market opportunities offered by ageing; and the linkage between ageing and technology. The contributions of the papers in this special issue are outlined, followed by a conclusion on the need for new directions in research that link technological and social factors related to ageing in organisations.

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1. Introduction

This special issue of *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* focuses on the impact of ageing on organisations, a field which is both inherently inter-disciplinary and relatively neglected compared with other fields such as demographics and economics. Organisations throughout

the world in private, public and non-profit sectors are facing the challenges of employing a workforce that is ageing in a world that is ageing (Mahon & Millar, 2014). They must address the issue of integrating fast-growing Generation Y populations into workforces led and managed by people with very different (often more traditional cultural) life experiences. Addressing these issues presents challenges for technological forecasting and opportunities for innovation. Organisations will have to adapt to both ongoing technological development and social changes such as an ageing workforce and customer base.

This special issue explores new ways of forecasting (i) the technological trends that are emerging and their relevance to ageing, as well as (ii) the specific technological and social

[☆] A new inter-disciplinary research agenda is required on 'multi-generational organisations'.

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innovations that ageing will require from organisations. While some trends are certain or can be explored through established forecasting methods, others are much more uncertain and challenging. Hence it is timely and appropriate to gather areas of research on which academics are focusing. In this introduction to the special issue, first the context of ageing is explored with a particular focus on the demographic and social changes faced by organisations, including the public policy and financial drivers of an ageing workforce. The five ‘myths of ageing in organisations’ are then identified, followed by the three areas where research is relatively underdeveloped: the concept of a ‘multi-generational workforce’; the market opportunities offered by ageing; and the linkage between ageing and technology. The contributions of the articles in this special issue are then outlined, followed by a conclusion on the need for new directions in research that links technological and social factors to ageing in organisations.

2. Demographic and social change

A starting point is to understand population trends around ageing. While increased longevity in almost all countries implies that people are living longer throughout the world, this does not mean uniform population structures, uniform behaviour, uniform markets, as at the same time there is a broad trend for the birth rate to decline with rising prosperity and urbanization. The consequence is that throughout the world projections show a very different population structure from that of the past. This is illustrated in Fig. 1 which analyses World Bank (2014a,b) population projections by country income level on a global basis. Taking 60 years or higher as the key indicator of ageing, globally the proportion of population aged 60+ is predicted to grow from 11% to 21% with higher income countries reaching 30%, middle income 22% and low income 11% by 2050.

So while ageing is a global trend, its impact will be highest in higher income countries. Focusing at a country level, a wider variety of population trends can be seen, as illustrated in Fig. 2

which takes six selected countries. This illustrates a wide range of likely developments over time. Taking a snapshot in 2010 and another in 2050 shows that both the highest and lowest proportion of population above 60 have grown by 10%. However the nature of change differs. Japan and Germany remain the ‘oldest’, underlining some of the greatest challenges – as analysed for Germany in the article by Bierwisch et al. below.

China shows the most dramatic increase in older people, rising above the UK and USA, in part the long term impact of the ‘one child’ policy of the late 20th century. Indeed while there will still be substantial impact in the UK and USA, likely inward net migration partially offsets ageing of the existing population. While the proportionate change is higher in India, South Africa and Saudi Arabia, again there are substantial differences. Most notably, in Saudi Arabia the 60+ population increases by a factor of around 4. Hence in terms of ageing, population forecasts indicate both a strong global trend and substantial differences between countries.

In economics and public policy, the implications of these changes have been explored. Traditional measures such as crude age based dependency ratios show dramatic, though potentially misleading data, such as the predicted ‘dependency ratio’ in high income countries where the World Bank (2014a, b) foresees that each working age adult will support two dependents in the population compared with one today. However such an age-based calculation, being the ratio of ‘dependents’ (defined as people younger than 15 and older than 64) to the ‘working-age’ population (defined as ages 15–64) will become more and more misleading over time as higher education expands and both people and organisations look to a working life beyond 65. Hence to understand population changes, it will be important to forecast both the potential of technology as well as social change – to which this special issue contributes, for example the article by Harms et al. on ‘grey entrepreneurship’ as a positive choice for older people. These technological and social changes are mediated in turn by

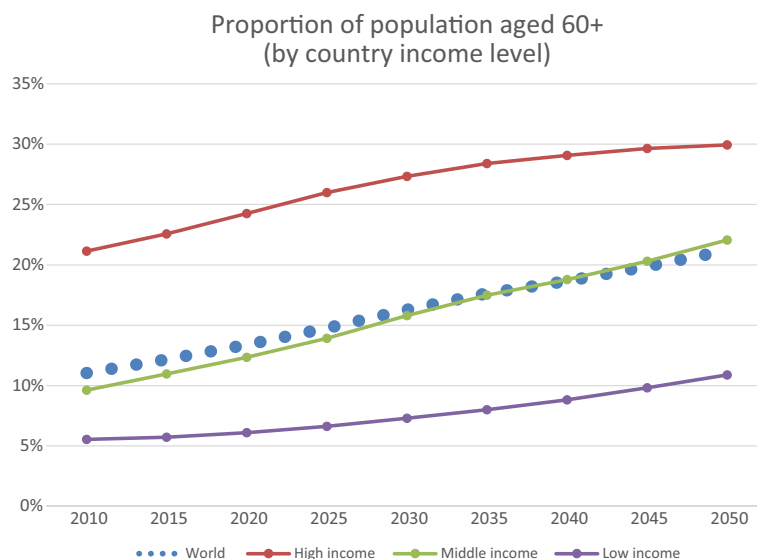


Fig. 1. Proportion of population aged 60 or more by country income level, 2010–2050.
Source: Authors' analysis of data from the World Bank (2014a,b).

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