

## ***ILR Review* CALL FOR PAPERS**

### **A Special Issue on *Organizational Perspectives on an Aging Workforce***

#### *Guest Editors*

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#### **Summary**

We invite submissions to a special issue of the *ILR Review* on the role of organizations in the aging workforce. We seek papers that assess the variety of age-related practices across employers, industries, and countries and assess individual, organizational, or policy outcomes that stem from organizational action regarding older workers. Given the rapid changes in digital technology, we are particularly interested in how implementation of various forms of technology shapes the work experience of older workers. We welcome empirical papers from all disciplines that are based on a strong theoretical framework or contribute to theoretical development in the field. Papers are not restricted to any one methodological approach but must clearly justify the methodology chosen.

Interested contributors should first submit an extended abstract (2,000 words) via email to Peter Berg at [bergp@msu.edu](mailto:bergp@msu.edu) no later than **January 31, 2026**. Abstracts will be reviewed for participation in a virtual workshop in **March 2026** before submission of full papers to the *ILR Review* special issue is considered.

#### **Background**

Populations and workforces are aging across the globe. Two-thirds of the world population live in countries with below-replacement fertility rates, and lifespans continue to grow across the world (Sciubba 2022). Increased life expectancy leads to higher population ages, and better health associated with higher life expectancy means that people can work later into their lives. In addition, fertility rates fell throughout the second half of the 20th century across developed economies (Bloom and Zucker 2023). The decline in fertility is a long-term trend that will have real economic consequences for decades and is not easily reversed. The working-age population (ages 15–64 years old) across developed economies is declining, from a peak of 70% in 2010 to 67% in 2025 (Madgavkar et al. 2025).

Macroeconomic estimates strongly suggest that population and workforce aging will be a detriment to high income economies through lower productivity growth, increased public pension costs, and decreased growth in labor supply (Aiyar and Ebeke 2016; Maestas et al. 2016; Madgavkar et al. 2025). However, the severity of the economic and social consequences of aging depends in large part on how organizations, nested in different institutional contexts, respond to the aging workforce.

Organizations are key actors that shape the work environment for older workers. The focus of this special issue is on the role of organizations in responding to workforce aging. Organizations are the link between the macro/policy institutional environment and the micro level/individual experiences of older workers. Organizations and their managers/leaders are also the main social actors that translate national policies into organizational practices that set the stage for workforce participation, engagement in work, and retirement decisions. Organizational practices such as training, hiring, restructuring and redesigning work, flexible work options, elder care support and leaves, and incentives to extend working lives beyond pensionable retirement age can alter the economic effects of aging. Workplace practices shape the incentives and opportunities for older workers to remain productive and engaged. Thus, understanding how organizations are responding to an aging workforce is critical to grasping the economic impact of aging.

Despite the importance of organizations, much of the aging literature is focused on individual older workers and their decision to work or not. From lifespan psychology and sociology research, we understand quite a bit about what happens to individuals cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically as they age (e.g., Tucker-Drob 2019; Salthouse 2019; National Academy of Sciences 2022.). We know from management research how these changes affect many dimensions of employees' work attitudes and behaviors, how human resource practices and work design shape these relationships, and how these relationships vary based on individual characteristics like gender and socioeconomic status (Rowe and Kahn 1997; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, and Sherraden 2001; Fahle and McGarry 2022; Berkman and Truesdale 2022).

However, this research represents only a fraction of the issues associated with workforce aging. While we know what motivates individuals to work or retire as they age (i.e., what factors determine the supply of older workers in the labor market), we know much less about what makes organizations want to hire and retain older workers or shed their older workers (i.e., what organizational factors determine the demand for older workers in the labor market) and how this translates to policies and practices across organizational actors. This special issue will help fill this gap in research and theory by encouraging papers that center on organizational strategy, practices, and outcomes related to older workers.

The literature examining the organizational response to an aging workforce (the demand side perspective) is limited. Traditional strategic HRM literature views older workers as value-adding contributors and argues that this contribution is the key determinant of how an organization responds to workforce aging. Organizations can ignore older workers as a strategic resource, manage workforce aging by developing workers' human capital, or simply let—possibly even encourage—older workers to leave the establishment through retirement. The latter two

strategies have been described as “active” and “exit” strategies (Turek et al. 2020) or, following a similar approach, “conservation” and “depreciation” models (Yeatts et al. 1999). The active and conservation approaches focus on practices that engage older employees and develop their human capital, whereas the exit and depreciation approaches emphasize the decline in human capital relative to wages as workers age and, therefore, facilitate exit.

Boehm and colleagues (2021) argue that age-related HR practices are shaped by various inputs, antecedents, and boundary conditions across society, firm, and employee levels. Their conceptual framework recognizes the complexity of the organizational environment in determining how to respond to workforce aging, but few empirical studies assess outcomes across these three levels or explicitly examine or theorize about the *interests* of organizational stakeholders.

Offering an alternative perspective, research on organizational logics has suggested organizations may consider factors such as strategy, what their competitive peers are doing (i.e., benchmarking), and legal or union requirements (i.e., compliance) in formulating their response or lack of response to workforce aging (Ollier-Malaterre et al. 2013).

Research suggests age bias and stereotyping may also affect how organizations engage with older workers. Older workers are often stereotyped as unproductive, resistant to change, and unwilling to learn new forms of digital technology (Henkens 2005; Posthuma and Campion 2009; Posthuma et al. 2012). While these stereotypes are not supported by empirical evidence, to the extent that they have proliferated to senior managers, they may inform an organization’s broader approach to older workers.

Another recent framework from Baird et al. (2024) maintains that employers are not just challenged with an older workforce but with managing a multigenerational workforce, in which employees are drawn from an increasingly diverse set of points across the life course. Managing a multigenerational workforce means recognizing the transitions, life events, and roles employees experience at different stages. A multigenerational workforce approach shifts the focus from just meeting the needs of older workers to recognizing that workers of all ages have different skills, experiences, and interests, that these often vary by gender, and that mutual gains are possible from managing these differences in positive ways (Baird et al. 2024: 6–7). In managing a multigenerational workforce, employers have a variety of tools across a “policy ladder,” such as statutory regulation, collective bargaining agreements, formal HR policies, and informal practices. These policies and practices can help not only meet employer needs for skill building and knowledge transfer but also improve employee well-being.

In addition, Berg and Piszczek (forthcoming) argue that an effective way to understand organizational demand for older workers is through an employment relations approach that emphasizes the role of multiple stakeholders, interests, and institutions. This approach reveals relationships and influences that would be missed without considering the nesting of management responses within industry and institutional contexts. It also recognizes multiple stakeholders in the employment relationship and accounts for their different interests and strategies for managing workforce aging. Stakeholders include managers and supervisors, unions

and works councils, employees, and government agencies. The age-related strategies and practices these stakeholders develop are shaped by a variety of moderators including technology, institutional environments, and the gender composition of the workforce.

### **Aims and Scope of the Special Issue**

We invite papers that examine the role and response of organizations and their stakeholders in relation to the aging workforce. While papers are not restricted to organization-level data and analysis, organization-level considerations should be a key element of framing for submissions. We seek papers that examine the variety of age-related practices across industries and countries and assess individual, organizational, or policy outcomes that stem from organizational action regarding older workers. We welcome empirical papers based on strong theoretical frameworks from all disciplines that use various forms of data and methodological approaches. Papers must be analytical and contribute empirically and theoretically to our understanding of the role of organizations in the aging workforce.

Potential topic areas include:

- **Organizational Strategy**
  - What explains variation in organizational strategies to an aging workforce—particularly across similar occupations and industries?
  - How do international, national, or industry and workplace institutions, such as retirement policy, working time regimes, collective bargaining systems, labor and employment law, skills or training systems, and professional associations affect organizational strategic decisions?
  - How and why do these organizational strategies differ across sectors: for example, between private and competitively exposed sectors compared to public sector organizations and sectors?
  - To what extent are employers facing labor shortages and how has this changed their approach toward retaining or recruiting older workers? How does this vary by industry and country?
  - What practices have proven to be successful in the recruitment and retention of older workers?
- **The Role of Workers**
  - How are labor unions, worker representatives, and workers seeking to build collective power to shape age-related practices within organizations?
  - Where and how have unions been successful in implementing practices that meet older workers' interests?
  - How can organizations and nations leverage worker power as a source of strength and strategic advantage in developing age-related practices to meet the interests of workers and employers?

- Technological Change
  - How do organizational decisions regarding different forms of technology impact older workers? How do these impacts differ by age?
  - What practices are particularly important in mitigating or enhancing the effects of technology?
  - To what extent does the implementation of digital technology lead to the displacement of older workers into other jobs or industries?
  - To what extent is the accrued knowledge and wisdom of older workers seen as an asset for high tech jobs.
  - To what extent is age-specific training about digital technology effective in maintaining older worker productivity?
- Workforce Diversity
  - How does the gender composition of workforces across industries shape organizational strategy and practices related to older workers?
  - To what extent are the different work interests and non-work demands of women considered when organizations formulate age-related practices?
  - What role do labor unions play in advocating for women's interests when negotiating age-related practices at the workplace?
  - What strategies have been successful in reducing age bias and discrimination at the workplace? How do they vary across stakeholders?
- Public Policy
  - In what way is national public policy shaping organizational age-related practices? And how have organizations responded?
  - How is national policy evolving to meet the interests of organizational stakeholders?
  - What countries are further along in shaping organizational practice and why?
- Stakeholder Interests
  - What are the implications for alignment or misalignment of interests between management and workers in their approach to workforce aging?
  - How do power and hierarchical differences in organizations affect the adoption and enactment of age-related policies and practices?
  - What is the impact of varied organizational approaches to workforce aging on society?

Interested contributors should first submit an extended abstract (2,000 words) via email to [bergp@msu.edu](mailto:bergp@msu.edu) no later than January 31, 2026. The abstract should clearly outline the research question or purpose of the proposed paper, a brief description of relevant theory and literature, as well as how the paper contributes to our understanding of organizational responses to an aging workforce. The abstract should also include a detailed description of the empirical analysis

and/or any preliminary results. Questions or any other communication about the purpose and process of the special issue should be directed to any of the guest editors via email. However, we will not provide editorial assistance for the extended abstracts.

Guest editors will then choose a subset of abstracts to participate in a virtual workshop to provide further editorial guidance to authors and an opportunity to gain feedback on ideas and work in progress. The virtual workshop will be held in March 2026. Participation in the workshop will not be a guarantee of acceptance of the paper for the special issue of the *ILR Review*. While participation in the workshop is not a requirement for consideration of a paper for the special issue, invited contributors are strongly encouraged to participate.

**The deadline for submission of full papers will be August 31, 2026. Details for the online submission process will be provided when papers are invited.** All invited papers submitted by this date will undergo double-anonymous review by two reviewers. Note that there is no guarantee that invited papers will be accepted for publication. Based on the reviews and extent to which the papers meet the aims and scope of the special issue, a subset of invited papers will be selected for the special issue.

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