

Employers can't afford to ax mature workers, say researchers

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In a new article in the *Australian Journal of Management*, researchers warn employers not to make hasty decisions in either dismissing or discounting the input of older workers.

"Employers are well known for targeting mature workers when downsizing their [workforce](#)—but this might be a costly mistake," says Dr. Valerie Caines.

She notes that governments can also overlook the value of [older workers](#), as shown by the SA Government recently pulling its funding to DOME (the Don't Overlook Mature Experience training organization), which provided valuable support services to mature job seekers.

"A common mistake is to think of mature workers as all being the same," says Dr. Caines. "There is huge variation among mature workers' motivations, capabilities and needs. Their experience is especially valuable now, because mature workers can offer considerable value to an organization during a crisis and play an important role in helping a business progress to the 'next normal.'"

Dr. Caines says older workers may also hold the solution for filling employment gaps in organizations, due to diverse skill sets they have developed through their working life.

"Mature adults demonstrate considerable resilience," she says. "The aspect of role modeling resilience is an especially important influence on younger workers. It includes mature coping strategies, emotional intelligence and empathy—and these attributes have never been more important in the workforce."

Dr. Caines says such resilience represents a key capability for workers engaged in the Fourth Industrial Revolution with the accelerating embrace of Artificial Intelligence, robotics and automation.

She emphasizes that mature workers can adapt to new work environments and there may be unexplored opportunities within organizations as they re-configure their workforce after COVID-19

disruptions. Addressing such changes may help provided clarity for mature workers wanting to know how they fit into the workforce in the future.

Another significant employment change in times of economic downturn is that entrepreneurship increases, especially among older people. Dr. Caines believes it is likely that many retrenched mature workers will look to [self-employment](#)—but she also believes that such entrepreneurial endeavor should be harnessed within a company's workforce.

"Now, more than ever, organizations need intrapreneurship to find and address unseen opportunities," says Dr. Caines. "That knowledge and spark of inspiration may well come from older current employees, or older potential employees."

Dr. Caines says the employment sector must initiate greater planning and more structured policy that recognizes and specifically includes older workers.

"Our research is focusing on the ever-growing numbers of older workers and possible considerations for workplace practices and policies that make the most from the qualities older workers bring," she says.

To achieve such an improved use and retaining of older workers, more organizations need to have meaningful conversations about how older workers can contribute to the organization, and how best to accommodate individual needs.

More information: Valerie Dawn Caines et al. Older workers: Past, present and future, *Australian Journal of Management* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0312896220918912](https://doi.org/10.1177/0312896220918912)

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