The world of work has changed drastically in the past few decades. But what will the future look like – and where will older people fit in? This was the issue at hand for the panel “The Future of Work and Markets: Technology and Innovations to meet 21st Century Social Needs.” Gone are days of going to the factory or the mine, and even going to the office on a daily basis is starting to wane as more people work from home, for themselves, or in the more informal “Uber” economy. Far from further excluding the older generation from the workplace, these changes could potentially (re-)include them into the workforce.

A greater number of older people are healthy enough to work – and willing to continue working. Although “fluid intelligence” (e.g. cognitive function, speed, and flexibility) declines as we age, “crystalline intelligence” (such as knowledge and experience) increases. Thus, older workers may be less productive than younger workers (if productivity can truly be measured), but their experience should still prove valuable.

Greater flexibility of working hours and location should better allow for workers’ changing levels of productivity, allowing them a “soft landing” rather than retiring from work entirely. This greater flexibility should also be offered in terms of tasks; routine has been found to be a key reason for falling productivity. Rotation schemes within companies may help maintain versatility.

More lifelong learning or “upskilling” should be encouraged, either in the workplace (enabling companies to retain skilled workers for longer) and outside, enabling workers to shift careers if needed. As businesses are unlikely to support workers in acquiring non-task-related skills, for which they will see little-to-no return-on-investment, considerations need to be made regarding who will pay for this training—individuals or governments?

This shift in careers is also likely to become a greater trend as “jobs for life” become much more scarce. The “portfolio of careers” will become the norm, and “wisdom workers” should be highly valued. More mentoring schemes and the introduction of “Chief Elder Officers” into businesses, especially start ups, could help greater intergenerational knowledge exchange.

For those workers who wish to stay in their workplace, rather than work from home or for themselves, these workplaces should become more “age-friendly,” some participants suggested. However, such suggestions were met with the counter-argument: by making our workplaces more comfortable and easily accessible, we have also developed a more sedentary workforce – making workers less healthy and thus more likely to retire early through ill-health. The unintended consequences need to be more carefully considered!
Sharing ideas at the Knowledge Café

In addition to the panel-led discussions, country/region-focused team work and thematic dialogue groups, participants in Salzburg also took part in a “knowledge cafe,” with six Fellows leading discussions on a variety of topics and participants cycling around several tables.

Samir Sinha, director of geriatrics at Mount Sinai and the University of Health Network Hospitals in Toronto, Canada led conversations on how to move “From Ideas to Strategies for Action.”

At another table, UK-based international policy advisor Ann James addressed “Aging Societies: Applying Human Technology Approach to Critical Issues.”

Idea exchanges around “Generational Gaps and Conflicts” were led by Moon Choi, assistant professor of aging and technology in the Graduate School of Science and Technology Policy at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST).

Associate professor at Nanjing University’s School of Business, Maoliang Bu asked his table of Fellows: “How can the silver industry potential be better used for China?”

Stanislawa Golinowska, professor at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland held a table discussion on “Health Promotion and Prevention of Risk-Actions for Seniors.”
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Join in online!
If you’re interested in writing either an op-ed style article or a personal reflection blog post whilst you’re here this week, please let Salzburg Global Editor, Louise Hallman know or email your submission directly to lhallman@salzburgglobal.org.

If you do intend to write for your own organization either whilst you’re here or after the session, please make sure to observe the Chatham House Rule (information on which is in your Welcome Pack). If you’re in any doubt, do not hesitate to contact Louise.

We’ll be updating our website with summaries from the panels and interviews with our Fellows, all of which you can find on the session page: www.SalzburgGlobal.org/go/540

You can also join in the conversation on Twitter with the hashtag #SGSaging and see all your fellow Fellows on Twitter via the list www.twitter.com/salzburgglobal/lists/SGS-540

We’re updating both our Facebook page www.facebook.com/SalzburgGlobal and our Flickr stream www.flickr.com/SalzburgGlobal with photos from the session during this week and also after the session. (If you require non-watermarked images for your own publication, please let Louise know.) We will also be posting photos to Instagram www.instagram.com/SalzburgGlobal, and we encourage you to do so also, using the hashtag #SGSaging.
Better retention, retraining and recruitment of older workers is good for our economy and for older people. Retaining workers requires companies to understand that our motivation to work changes as we age. Reward in old age might be as much about job satisfaction as pay.

In most countries older workers tend to have fewer formal qualifications than younger. Providing lifelong learning is key to ensuring people continue to be productive in the workplace. A lack of confidence can act as a barrier to older people to apply for a new job. We must ensure that job application processes are accessible and not discriminatory.

David Sinclair
Director, International Longevity Center, UK

“I think it is important to enable older people to choose other things that they want to do. Sometimes you start working for a company, in Brazil’s case for example, and stay there for 20 or 30 years and never ever go to another place. You can do this in your own place, in your own organization, or maybe you can switch your job and go to another one. But for this, you have to change the mentality of the human resource managers first, and also you need to change the image that society has of older people.

The other thing is some people want to retire but they want to continue to communicate with people. They can be useful as a model in school, for young people who are choosing their profession. They could listen to them, their experience, and why they did that. This would be a very good thing. I think this is a good way of changing the image of the elderly and some of the prejudices, with the school teachers, with the students, and also to put gerontology — aging issues — in universities, because one day, regardless of your profession, you’ll be faced with this situation: to work with aging as a professional, to be in the aging process, or to deal with older people.”

Lucia Franca
Professor, UNIVERSO – Salgado de Oliveira, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

“[Employers] need to recognize the skills and experience of what I’m calling “wisdom workers.” These are people who have almost like a portfolio of careers. They have judgments and they’ve seen situations before. I think as we are looking to how the work environment is changing in the next few decades, the 21st century corporation is going to be very much more of a portfolio-of-careers-type of place. It’s going to be much more sort of Uber-ized, with people developing their own jobs and becoming their own employers of record. And I think as we recognize the experience and the skills of older people, there will be some very tactical things we can do, for example focusing on trust and making it really clear and easy for how we can share trust … So I think going forward we’ll see a much more nuanced corporation that recognizes the need for flexible working conditions and allows people much more entrepreneurial career paths that they are more in control of, and I think having recognition that experience and judgment is going to be increasingly necessary in tomorrow’s more complicated fragmented working environment will actually play well into the helms of experienced workers.”

Stephen Johnson
Co-founder, Aging2.0, USA

“Providing lifelong learning is absolutely essential for fostering employability and labour force participation of older workers. However, it needs to be carefully designed in order to facilitate genuine career changes.”

Eric Thode
Director, International Forums and Trends, Bertelsmann Foundation, Germany

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