

Mature Age

Workforce Resource 2015



A framework of recommendations for the management and retention of mature talent in local government.

COMPANION REPORT

Practitioner Learnings:

The Process of the Development of the Resource and Possible Challenges and Limitations to Implementation

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This Report is designed to be a companion guide to the Resource. It outlines the consultations and other processes that led to the release of the Resource, as well as some of the lessons and recommendations from the survey that was conducted of the councils that participated in the consultations and pilot phase, ahead of the release.

1. PURPOSE

The Mature Age Workforce Resource is designed as a guide for Australian councils to proactively support the implementation of a corporate framework, policy and set of aligned, recommended actions towards the engagement, support and retention of older workers. It is intended to reflect global best practices in managing an age-diverse workforce, with particular emphasis on the older workforce. The Resource has been designed to provide guidance to progress mature age initiatives in a planned and structured way through the inclusion of key policy development actions and performance indicators to proactively address the changing composition of the workforce.

The Resource was released in late 2015 to the local government sector across Australia, and this Report is designed to be a companion guide to the Resource. It outlines the consultations and other processes that led to the release of the Resource, as well as some of the lessons and recommendations from the survey that was conducted of the councils that participated in the consultations and pilot phase, ahead of the release. The Resource is an initiative of Local Government Professionals Australia as consortium partner of the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government.

2. INTRODUCTION

Australian councils are keen to be seen as preferred employers to ensure that they can attract the best employees to subsequently deliver the best service to their communities. In order to do that, they want to make their employment offer very clear to current and potential employees. One aspect of this is the way in which a council outlines its commitment to its mature age workers. This project is designed to assist in achieving that aim.

This report is a companion guide to the Resource, identifying and exploring some of the practitioner identified challenges and limitations that exist in the workplace cultural landscape that might be obstacles to implementation of a Mature Age Workforce Resource such as this. Practitioner responses unpack some of the issues around the extent to which this Resource will be implemented by councils and act as a catalyst for action in maximising its mature age workforce.

3. BACKGROUND

The Resource has evolved over the last few years. Much of the initial content came from a paper which included extensive academic-based research, with the final edit and structure of the Resource being carried out by a former council Organisational Development manager with significant experience in the field. He re-aligned and re-worked the existing content and the Focus Areas contained within it. In doing so, he also created the Toolkit incorporating the Key Focus Areas, the Resource Support documents, the Context Statement and all the other associated parts of the current Resource.

At the start of 2015, the first iteration of the re-worked Resource was presented to a small focus group at LGPro in Melbourne, and then to a larger focus group at the 2015 National Congress and Business Expo in Darwin. Both practitioner groups were very positive in their overall appraisal of the Resource, but suggested small changes to make it more accessible, and to ensure its broader appeal and ease of integration with related workforce processes.

Once practitioner feedback was incorporated into the Resource, it was sent out online to over 100 targeted councils across the country. Of these, 35 agreed to be part of the pilot phase, where they had preliminary access to the Resource, were able to review it online in draft format, and then provided feedback through a specially designed phone survey. The Resource as it is currently presented has again been slightly altered and amended to reflect the broad enhancements that the survey respondents suggested. The information gathered from the consultations and the phone surveys forms a large part of the rest of this report.

4. THE CONSULTATIONS

Before launching the Resource, LG Professionals Australia wanted to ensure that it underwent comprehensive, multi-faceted consultations with practitioners in the local government sector. So with the LG Professionals Australia national office based in Melbourne, and with the Resource editor also based in Melbourne, the first consultation took place at LGPro in Melbourne – the Victorian Federation partner of LG Professionals Australia. Seven practitioners participated in the consultation, mostly managers of Human Resources (HR) or Organisational Development (OD) – the target groups for whom this Resource is designed.

When conducting the consultations, it was important to ensure that there was always a mix of participants from different sized councils across different jurisdictions. The Australian Classification of Local Governments (ACLG) ‘categorises local governing bodies across Australia using the population, the population density and the proportion of the population that is classified as urban for the council’. There are a total of 22 categories and each council is categorised by the ACLG according to size and location. Of the seven councils that participated in the Melbourne consultation, two were considered to be large rural councils, whilst the rest were urban and large or very large.

The second face-to-face consultation took place at the 2015 National Congress and Business Expo in Darwin in May, the flagship event of LG Professionals Australia, bringing together many councils from around the country in a different location each year. Although the consultation involved only nine participants, they came from a representative cross-section of councils, from five different states. According to the ACLG categorisations, the nine participants came from councils that were large and urban, small and urban, urban fringe, rural and small, and rural and large. Most of the participants were again involved in HR or OD, and there were also two CEOs and one Councillor. So the sample size may have been small, but the diversity of people was great, thus providing valuable feedback.

Both consultations began with a quick walk-through of what the Resource was intended to be and how it was intended to work. Since the intention was for the Resource to be online and at that point it had not yet been uploaded, it was a little difficult to show how it would look, but the Context Statement and one or two elements of the Toolkit were printed off and distributed to allow participants to get a sense of the content. More importantly, since none of the participants had seen or known anything about the Resource up to that point, the purpose of both consultations was to get an overall sense of mature age workforce issues and to see if practitioners felt that such a Resource would be worthwhile and useful to their councils.

‘The Resource provides widespread coverage of all facets of the mature age workforce’ – consultation participant

Details of the consultation process

The consultations began by discussing the issue of an ageing workforce. All participants said that they have an ageing workforce in their councils and that this is beginning to be an issue of concern, especially for outside workers. All said that the issue was critical and very timely. Some talked about the 'physical capacity' of their outside workers, and the possibility of 'no longer being able to fulfil the requirements of the role', which could lead to Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) issues. Preventing injury and 'finding suitable roles for those whose current roles are labour intensive', whilst at the same time ensuring that mature age employees who aren't yet ready to retire continue to 'add value to the organisation' was another related concern. Some said that bringing up the subject of retirement with their mature age workers 'was not always an easy subject to discuss', especially if those employees 'have few interests outside of work'. Others mentioned the 'increased expectations for flexible working arrangements as employees get older', whilst almost all of the participants in some way talked about the transfer of knowledge, the loss of intellectual property, mentoring of younger staff or succession planning. All of these are crucial elements of the Toolkit and very relevant.

After seeing the structure of the Resource, the Context Statement and two elements of the Toolkit, participants were asked about their thoughts and impressions. Everyone said that they felt the structure, purpose and samples that they had seen seemed very relevant. One small rural council said that 'without an HR Manager in our council, anything that can help line managers is relevant'. Another participant from an urban council with a long career in HR said that it appeared as though the Resource 'provides widespread coverage of the facets of the mature age workforce', whilst another added that it 'will provide good guidance for us to develop some policies'. Whilst everyone saw it as relevant and necessary, one said that whilst 'the focus is good, perhaps more emphasis on health and wellbeing would be good, as well as ageing'. Element 2.2 of the Toolkit is on *Job Design and Healthy Work Environment*, though the focus of the Resource is on ageing rather than on health and wellbeing.

Participants from all but one of the councils involved said that they do not currently have a policy or a strategy that focuses specifically on their mature age workforce, though even the one that said they do have a policy, said that it is new and could nonetheless benefit from a Resource of this kind. Some said that 'the mature age workforce is acknowledged in our EEO policy', or that council helps 'older employees to transition to retirement at a time that suits them', but this is not a formal arrangement, and a Resource that provides recommendations and suggestions would be very useful. In fact, all participants said that they would be very interested in seeing and using the final product. When asked to provide any suggestions to inform further development of the Resource, most said that it was a little hard to provide concrete suggestions without seeing all of it, but that it should be 'less prescriptive' and should be as practical as possible for all concerned.

From a small but targeted and diverse sample size, the two consultations showed that the Resource was on track. All the comments suggested that such a Resource was relevant, necessary and would be of value. This conclusion was shared by all the councils involved, from the large urban ones, to the small rural ones. With that in mind, the Resource was amended to reflect the feedback, and was then uploaded in draft format so that it could be viewed in full online.

5. THE PILOT PHASE

Two face-to-face consultations where participants only saw a few elements of the Resource were a good start, but comprehensive feedback in the form of a phone survey from a representative cross-section of pilot councils who had preliminary access to the whole Resource online, was necessary to ensure that the Resource would have genuine wide appeal and would be of value once released.

The initial email inviting councils to be part of the pilot study was sent to 113 randomly selected councils, covering all the classifications of the ACLG in all states and the NT. From the outset, the intention was to include no more than 40 councils in the pilot phase, as long as there were a cross-section of councils based on the classifications, from a cross-section of jurisdictions. Within a couple of weeks of sending out the email inviting councils to participate, 49 councils responded. Altogether, 14 responded in the negative. Some were simply too busy or under-resourced and could not spare anyone to read the online Resource and then to participate in the survey. Others had recently implemented a new mature age reform or policy, or were in the process of doing so and didn't feel that participating in this study would assist us or them. Still others felt that they would have little to contribute to the pilot phase due to their remoteness, 'level of organisational maturity' or 'staffing complexities'. Most still indicated that they would be interested in the Resource once it is released and would be keen to read it and see how it might fit in with their council in the future, but not during the pilot phase. It is unfortunate that these councils were unable to participate, as the issues they raised for not being able to participate are some of the exact reasons why this Resource was created. Hopefully those councils will now be able to use the Resource and will benefit from it.

Some demographic details of the pilot councils

Almost 30 councils responded within a few days to indicate their interest, and survey times were set up accordingly within a two week period in late August / early September 2015 giving them enough time to view the Resource online in advance. A few more councils responded some time later, and by the end of the interview period, 35 councils from across Australia were surveyed, ranging from some of the smallest to some of the largest councils. One of the first questions was about total number of employees in the council, though specifically focussing on full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers. Based on that, the largest council surveyed had around 1,300 FTE staff, whilst the smallest had just 25. Altogether, the 35 councils represented 14,200 FTE employees, or an average of 406.1 staff per council.

Mature age is considered to be 45 years and over because that is the earliest point at which employees start to think about their impending retirement.

According to the World Health Organisation, the United Nations, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and others, mature age is considered to be 45 years and over because that is the earliest point at which employees of any sector start to think about their impending retirement, and the age from which someone can be considered of 'mature age' for the purposes of this Resource. Moreover, the median age of council employees in Australia is 45 years. So with that in mind, councils were asked how many of their FTE staff are aged 45+, and the average across all 35 councils was 48.8%, though this ranged from around 20% in some councils, to over 80% in others. Clearly, at an average of nearly half of all staff considered mature age, this is an issue that needs to be dealt with, though

surprisingly, 3 of the 35 councils said that they had no mature age issues in their councils that might require any kind of strategy or resource, even though they were not the ones with the smallest percentages of mature age staff.

None of the capital city councils participated in the pilot phase, but of the 35 councils that did participate, 22 were urban [(UD_, UR_ or UF_ classification) including 6 from NSW, 8 from VIC, 3 from QLD, 3 from WA, 1 from SA and 1 from TAS]; whilst 13 were rural [(RA_ or RT_ classification) including 3 each from NSW, VIC and WA, 2 from NT and 1 each from QLD and SA]. All the respondents had responsibility for HR, OD, People and Culture and / or Risk, but two were CEOs from smaller councils who also looked after HR matters. Of the 35 respondents, 25 were female, and between them, the 35 people had been in their current roles for a total of 186 years, or an average of 5.3 years, and had worked in the local government sector for a total of over 400 years, or an average of 11.4 years. The longest serving respondent had been in the sector for 44 years and in their current role for nearly 28 years, whilst the shortest serving had only begun in the sector a few months earlier. It was clear that a diverse group of people with varied experience and a diversity of opinion had participated, thus fulfilling our requirement to survey a cross-section of people from a representative cross-section of councils across Australia.

6. INITIAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

Having the right cross-section of people was one thing, but asking the right questions was quite another. Doing the survey over the phone rather than online allowed the responses to be immediate and more natural. It also allowed respondents to be less guarded about what they said or how they said it. The initial questions of the survey, after the first few questions about the respondents and the demographics of their councils (see above), were designed so that the responses could be used to amend and adapt the Resource, allowing the final version – that is currently online – to reflect the majority of the responses of the pilot councils, who in turn represent a cross-section of councils from across the country. That is specifically why this survey was done ahead of the release of the Resource.

The average user-friendly rating of the Resource from the 35 respondents was 7.3 out of 10. Most described it using words like practical, timely, useful, comprehensive, detailed, user-friendly, accessible and/or thorough.

All 35 respondents had looked at the Resource online in its preliminary format prior to participating in the survey, and overall, the average user-friendly rating from the 35 respondents was 7.3 out of 10. Whilst most found it generally fairly logical and easy to navigate, some found the pilot version a little too wordy, or a bit complicated to get into initially, though others commented that it followed the employee lifecycle and HR practices, making it a useful tool. Most described it using words like practical, timely, useful, comprehensive, detailed, user-friendly, accessible and/or thorough. Some also described it as ‘very robust’ and said that ‘it captures the broad spectrum of mature age requirements making it easy to follow’. Some of the respondents also acknowledged that ‘essentially we are getting older and there are very few other tools to deal with this issue. It is therefore very good and relevant, and raised our awareness of things that we are not doing. We didn’t previously think of knowledge transfer or succession planning’. One respondent summed up succinctly the views of many others, by saying ‘the degree of thoroughness of this Resource makes it very appealing, and implementing it means you don’t just rely on the knowledge or experience of HR staff, but have a full guide to consider, which is a very methodical and deliberate approach’.

Whilst some liked the design and the grouping of the documents and elements of the Toolkit, others were a little frustrated by the set-up of the documents and were less enamoured with it.

With the Toolkit being the crux of the Resource, and with the Toolkit having practical Focus Areas within it, one of the questions asked if the respondents had trialled any of the elements contained within the Toolkit. After all, using and adapting the elements of the toolkit to suit each council is the main point of the Resource once it is released. During the pilot phase however most of the respondents had not used or trialled the Toolkit per se, but some had read parts of some elements, or had prioritised which were most relevant to them for future use. A few respondents had chosen two or three elements and had looked at them in detail, but even they had generally not yet put any of the recommendations into practice. Some had chosen one or two elements to see how they match up with work already being done in their councils, whilst others had downloaded or printed a few of the elements, eager to incorporate them into current plans. Some had looked at them simply for context, whilst others were very keen to use and trial them.

'The degree of thoroughness of this Resource makes it very appealing, and implementing it means you don't just rely on the knowledge or experience of HR staff, but have a full guide to consider, which is a very methodical and deliberate approach' – pilot phase respondent

Acknowledgement of existing policies and broader application

It is acknowledged that many workplaces will already have in place a range of human resource management policies and it is not the intention of this framework to conflict with those policies. Rather, it can add value to the operations of the organisation by being used as a stand-alone resource or integrated into existing policy and procedures. It adopts an organisation-wide approach to age and employment of the workforce, and the documents contained within it and the approaches identified have specific application to mature age workers and management, and staff responsible for workforce planning, workforce development and operational management of the mature age workforce within the organisation. It is also acknowledged that a number of the suggested actions and strategies within the Resource may have application to the broader workforce and, where appropriate, could be applied to ensure fair and equitable work conditions and opportunities for all staff.

A number of respondents in the pilot phase picked up on these points. One said 'it is timely as there is a desperate need for something to address these issues across the sector. Something like this, where much of the work has been done for us, is beneficial for all, and the tools are essential, even if everyone uses them differently'. Another said, 'what I particularly like about this Resource is that it provides a consistent national approach, which certainly has not previously existed', whilst another added that it 'could act as a step-by-step guide to address many of our mature age issues. We might not use every element, but it is certainly on the right track for us'.

A LOOK AT THE DATA

With all the participants in the consultations – and all but three of the participants in the pilot phase – claiming that there are mature age issues in their councils that need to be addressed, it would be useful to look at the data on mature age issues in Australian workplaces.

Overall, according to *An Ageing Australia: Preparing for the Future* report¹, released by the Productivity Commission in 2013 and updated in 2014, 'Australia's population will both grow strongly and become older. Population ageing is largely a positive outcome, primarily reflecting improved life expectancy. However, population growth and ageing will affect labour supply, economic output, infrastructure requirements and governments' budgets. The population aged 75 or more years is expected to rise by 4 million from 2012 to 2060, increasing from about 6.4 to 14.4 per cent of the population'. Local governments acknowledge that, like the rest of the population, their workforces are getting older but as the report says 'slow but profound shifts in the nature of a society do not elicit the same scrutiny as immediate policy issues. The preferable time to contemplate the implications is while these near inevitable trends are still in their infancy'.

The 2015 Intergenerational Report released by the Treasury², reiterates the point about population growth. 'Not only will Australians live longer, but improvements in health mean they are more likely to remain active for longer. As Australians live longer and do so in better health, more Australians will continue to lead an active lifestyle and participate in the workforce after they reach traditional retirement age. Participation rates among those aged 65 and over are projected to increase strongly, from 12.9 per cent in 2014-15 to 17.3 per cent in 2054-55. This represents a significant opportunity for Australia to benefit more from the wisdom and experience of people aged over 65'. From a local government workforce perspective, it is also a challenge that councils need to be aware of.

Some of the issues addressed in this Resource conform to the issues outlined in the *Age Management Toolkit* produced by National Seniors Australia³. Though the toolkit doesn't specifically focus on the local government sector, it focusses on issues that are very relevant, saying that 'due to the large cohort of baby boomers being close to retirement age, it is critical for employers to provide and promote awareness raising around effective age management strategies to attract, manage and retain mature age workers. Many employers could benefit from practical advice and tools to assist in the implementation of sound age management initiatives in order to avoid the premature exit of mature age employees from the labour market'.

The practical advice and recommendations contained within the Mature Age Workforce Resource are designed for that purpose. The National Seniors Australia toolkit goes on to say that 'efforts towards training and re-training older workers are likely to be valuable in filling projected skills gaps within the current workforce. Many older individuals want and need to work longer as there is an increasing reliance on individuals to fund post-employment lives. However, the process of retirement is often determined by a combination of push and pull factors that are heavily influenced by financial status, the physical and mental ability to work, and the desire to work'.

With Australia's population rising and ageing, the local government workforce is also ageing, and 'on average, is older compared with other government and industry sectors. According to the last Australian Bureau of Statistics census, 37% of the local government workforce is aged

¹ <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/ageing-australia#key-points>

² <http://www.treasury.gov.au/PublicationsAndMedia/Publications/2015/2015-Intergenerational-Report>

³ <http://www.nationalseniors.com.au/be-informed/research/age-management-toolkit>

50 years or over, compared to the Australian labour force average of 29%. Correspondingly, the proportion of local government employees aged less than 35 years is much lower than the Australian average'.⁴ The 2014 *Profile of the Local Government Workforce* report produced by ACELG 'found over 50s were concentrated in the occupations of CEO or general manager, labourers or plant operators, bus drivers, home care and community services, child care, works and infrastructure managers and finance/payroll. Occupations with the lowest proportion of those under 50 working in local government were: communications and media, urban planners, community engagement, lifeguards, greenkeepers, fitness instructors, IT and arts/culture.

'The ageing cohort of CEOs and general managers suggests local government needs to be thinking about how to develop, attract and retain the next generation of senior leaders' – 2014 ACELG Profile of the Local Government Workforce report

'The practical implications of these statistics are serious. The report identifies a loss of corporate memory, skills and knowledge as people retire as well as problems with this knowledge not having been properly managed and transferred to those coming up through the ranks. The report said: "The ageing cohort of CEOs and general managers suggests local government needs to be thinking about how to develop, attract and retain the next generation of senior leaders." Ten per cent of councils also said that they were spending more money adapting workplaces and tools or machinery due to the physical incapacity of an ageing workforce'.⁵

7. MATURE AGE ISSUES

As we already knew, 3 of the 35 respondents said that they had no mature age issues in their councils that they needed to deal with. Yet that still meant that 32 councils have pressing issues, and since we were talking to them about a proposed solution, we wanted to know if they already had some kind of policy, program, structure or resource to deal with their issues. After all, our Resource is intended to be used in concert with existing solutions, and to be adaptable and all-encompassing. Almost all of the respondents said that they do not have any methodology to deal with their increasing mature age issues. Many acknowledged that something needs to be done in the next few years – maximum within a decade – but many also suggested that most councils generally only deal with something when it is urgent, not when they know it will be urgent.

For most councils, the most pressing concern is transition to retirement and the retention of older staff and their institutional knowledge, as they start to think about and prepare for retirement. So some councils have engaged consultants to assist them in this regard, whilst others deal with these issues as they come up in an ad hoc kind of way. Many councils have workforce plans or similar strategies, and mature age employees are mentioned within those, but usually those plans are for the whole workforce, so there are very few targeted interventions for any one specific cohort. In some cases, mature age employees are targeted in OH&S policies, specifically with relation to outside older workers, but most of these are not specific and not comprehensive. Many said that as a result of this Resource, or simply coincidentally, they are currently either developing their own

⁴ <http://www.themandarin.com.au/19755-local-government-real-economic-workforce-powerhouse/?pgnc=1>

⁵ <http://www.governmentnews.com.au/2015/02/local-government-workers-theyre-not-getting-younger/>

mature age plans, or updating their existing plans to tackle some of the mature age issues. Many also said that they look forward to the final release of the Resource, as that will assist them with this process and will save them a lot of the legwork.

For most councils, the most pressing concern is transition to retirement and the retention of older staff and their institutional knowledge, as they start to think about and prepare for retirement.

Most respondents said that they had fairly high percentages of employees aged 45+, but even higher percentages aged 55+ or even 65+. Some of these employees are outside workers who can't afford to retire, but equally can no longer do their jobs as they used to be able to. On top of that, though they know they need to prepare for retirement or at least transition, some are not comfortable talking about or confronting that reality. Some of the respondents said that they need to get to a level of comfort and understanding before they can even think about developing or implementing any kind of resource. They did however say that this Resource will assist them in getting to that point. And one way of getting to that point is by creating options for staff to continue working, but in new and innovative ways (see Focus Area 2.2 of the Toolkit), so that they still feel useful, whilst making decisions about how to proceed in their careers.

A few of the respondents said that they identified that they had issues in this area, and thus either applied or were selected to receive government funding or programming to deal with their issues. Some have been part of pilot programs organised by other organisations, whilst others received information or consultations on how to improve elements of their mature age policy. Most of these have been useful and beneficial, but not comprehensive. They focussed on one element, like knowledge management, or health and wellbeing, or transition to retirement. Despite participating in such programs, even those respondents said that they will be able to use our Resource as it is a lot more comprehensive and fundamental. Yet having said that, some were unsure if the Resource was targeted to the mature age employees themselves, as some of these programs were, or to the HR personnel within council. Hopefully this point has been clarified in the final version of the Resource.

Before finishing this part of the survey, most applauded LG Professionals Australia for pursuing this and bringing some of the issues to the attention of councils. Some added that whilst they think the Resource is a good idea and is generally a well-constructed guide, each council will have to prioritise it in order for it to be properly used and implemented. For some, simply being part of this pilot study or finding out about the Resource has been enough impetus to already make it a priority. Now that the Resource is available online, hopefully this will be the case for those councils that were not part of the pilot study.

8. THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A secondary advantage of conducting the surveys over the phone was that it allowed us the opportunity to ask respondents about how they intended to address any of the issues or problems related to their mature age workforces, and if the Resource would be able to assist with that. Though respondents may have been unaware, the survey was actually split into two sections. After the questions around the utility of the Resource and the broad issue of mature age in their councils, this second section was more subtle and was designed to elicit intentions and beliefs rather than ratings and opinions. The second half of the survey used a research methodology known as the

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), otherwise referred to as the ‘reasoned action approach’. First developed by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975, it has subsequently been updated and re-formulated but continues to be used by many researchers ‘to predict human behaviour’ (Ham, et. al. 2009). As Ajzen (2006, p. 1) puts it, the TPB recognises that:

[H]uman behavior is guided by three kinds of considerations: beliefs about the likely consequences of the behavior (behavioral beliefs), beliefs about the normative expectations of others (normative beliefs), and beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behavior (control beliefs). In their respective aggregates, behavioral beliefs produce a favorable or unfavorable *attitude toward the behavior*; normative beliefs result in perceived social pressure or *subjective norm*; and control beliefs give rise to *perceived behavioral control*. In combination, attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perception of behavioral control lead to the formation of a behavioral *intention*. As a general rule, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger should be the person’s intention to perform the behavior in question.

The questions that make up the TPB methodology are essentially predetermined based on the theory, but for each survey, they need to be directed towards a fundamental question or behavioural statement. In this case, the statement at the crux of the questions was **‘whether or not councils would be prepared to undertake measures to address the issues or problems related to their mature age workforces by using the elements of the Resources within the next 12 months’**. Each of the subsequent questions in the survey therefore had to come back to this core statement.

9. RESPONSES TO THE TPB QUESTIONS

9a. Behavioural Beliefs

The first series of questions based on the TPB were around behavioural beliefs, to determine the advantages and disadvantages of a particular action. In this case, the first question was about what would be the **‘advantages of adopting this Resource in your council’**. As with all questions, the answers varied, but there was definitely a common thread. All the respondents recognised that an ageing workforce has implications for the service delivery of the council, and thus a resource to address the issues associated with an ageing workforce could be very beneficial. Most also acknowledged that they don’t have a methodology to deal with these issues, even though they know the issues exist. Many respondents said that the greatest advantage of this Resource is that a lot of the work has already been done, and that ‘it gives us a starting point so we are not starting from afresh’, ‘it would reduce our workloads because if we were to develop our own resource, it would be very time consuming and this provides us something we can build on’, and that ‘it seems robust enough for everyone to take what is relevant to them’. This was an opinion shared by many, along with the fact that ‘it provides strategic links based on systematic implementation’, as one put it, and that ‘it is proactive and useful, meaning that the hard work has already been done for you, since most HR people spend a lot of their time doing reactive work’, as another put it. Many also said that ‘this is an issue that is facing all councils, and if there is a clear strategic framework, then that is good and could be very useful’. Moreover, ‘if all councils have access to this Resource, then there would be a foundation, a consistency, and given that the Resource is comprehensive, all the issues would be considered, making it standard across all councils’.

It was clear from the responses that the size and location of a council had an impact on what the respondents said about what the advantages of adopting the Resource might be. For instance, one small rural council said that ‘our ability to attract and retain managers of any age is very difficult. If this helps us make approaches to mature age people, then it can be a greatly beneficial opportunity for us and them’. Another small rural council continued on the same theme: ‘We have a limited workforce base and therefore many of the people we recruit are 45+ since they are the only ones that apply for the roles or can do the jobs. We want to show them, maybe by using this Resource, that we are a good place to work, that we can cater to their flexibility requirements, and that their age is not a factor in them being able to do the job’. Another small rural council said that having a Resource of this nature ‘would make the planning process more robust. Planning for our ageing workforce is important, but it’s in addition to 100 other important things’. As the survey confirms later, bigger urban councils can choose to put off planning for their ageing workforce, but sometimes in smaller rural councils, the choices are made for them.

‘If all councils have access to this Resource, then there would be a foundation, a consistency, and given that the Resource is comprehensive, all the issues would be considered, making it standard across all councils’ – survey respondent

The other advantages that some respondents identified were the fact that this Resource is forward thinking, looks to the future and could provide councils with knowledge of issues they know little about. For instance, a respondent from a small rural council with a small HR team said that ‘this resource is particularly good for people who are not HR professionals or people who don’t know the issues it addresses’. Meanwhile, another respondent said that ‘the Resource would help our workforce planning, as we could plan around some of the gaps we may have, and could re-design some of the roles for both younger and older staff. It would help with succession planning and knowledge management, and would align with all our different ways of thinking’. And another respondent added that ‘if the Resource is managed and implemented properly, then it will assist with continuously improving our practices and lead towards best practice’. That of course is the ultimate goal of the Resource.

The second of the behavioural beliefs questions was about what would be the disadvantages, or in this case, the **‘consequences of not adopting the Resource in your council’**. The majority of responses to this question were that the consequences ‘would be the same as now’, in most cases meaning that ‘we would continue to deal with these issues on an ad hoc basis like we do currently’, and ‘there would be, as there is currently, less attention on the ageing workforce issues in our council’. Some mentioned that without addressing the issue, whether with this Resource or more broadly, the consequences could potentially be dire for outdoor staff in particular, ‘especially with regard to injuries and OH&S issues’ because most councils seem to have ‘men in their 60s or even 70s doing labouring jobs that their bodies are no longer up to’. Without this Resource or something else to address the issues, ‘knowledge and skills would be lost’, as well as ‘a lot of experience’. For the most part, whereas the advantages of adopting the Resource are systemic, the consequences of not adopting the Resource are more related to organisational culture, as one respondent put it so succinctly: ‘If you have an ageing workforce who don’t feel they want to come to work but force themselves to, it can be a de-motivator and rubs off on the rest of the workforce as well’.

9b. Normative Beliefs

The second series of questions were around the injunctive norms associated with normative beliefs, to determine the positive and negative influences of a particular action. In this case, the first question was ***'who would be the people in your council who would approve of or encourage the implementation of the recommendations and actions contained within the Resource?'*** Unsurprisingly, every respondent said that the people that would have to approve implementation would be the leadership team. And though that differs slightly in each council, it invariably includes the council executive staff like the CEO or General Manager, various directors, often the HR Manager and/or Corporate Services or People and Culture Managers, and in some cases, councillors.

The opposing question around normative beliefs, to determine the negative influences, was ***'who would be the people who would disapprove of or discourage the implementation?'*** Again, the responses were not surprising as the majority response was that if it is sold and promoted appropriately then no-one ought to disapprove of or discourage the implementation of such a necessary and relevant resource. Moreover, many added that as long as the executive team is on board, there shouldn't be any disapproval. However, some respondents said that 'if any resistance would come, it would be from the staff' and that the 'existing mature age workers might get protective'. The way to overcome that would be ensure buy-in from the executive and from the staff when initially promoting the Resource. The overriding opinion was that no-one would actively seek to undermine the implementation of the Resource, especially if it has been approved by the executive, but making it a priority and ensuring it is implemented is another story entirely.

9c. Descriptive Norms

The third of the four series of questions were around descriptive norms, to determine the broader influences outside of the immediate zone of influence. Rather than simply a positive and then a negative question, the first of the questions was simply about influence, in this case, ***'who, in another council or elsewhere, would you look to for assistance and advice regarding the use or implementation of the Resource?'*** As is the accepted trend, local governments like to learn from each other, and thus the most common response was that of neighbouring councils. Most respondents said that in general, they are in contact either with the councils in their immediate vicinity, or other councils outside of their region, but ones that are similar in either size or location to their own. Some have formally established and long-standing regional associations or HR groups, whilst others simply chat or collaborate on an ad hoc basis depending on the issue. Some also have sister councils in other parts of the country, or particularly for small councils, a big brother council that they look up to and seek advice from. In this case, for a program that is so all-encompassing and thorough, most said that they would at the very least bring up this Resource at one of their conversations, if not actively seek advice about its implementation. This highlights the importance of regional associations and again reiterates that though it often appears that councils work in silos, when presented with a national framework that is designed to be implemented across the board, they tend to collaborate and share knowledge. And furthermore, whilst they rely on each other, most respondents also said that they would likely consult with or seek advice from their state-wide local government association.

The second and third questions in this series were more directed. The second question, framed in the positive, asked ***'who of them do you think would be most likely to use or implement a mature***

age resource like this one?’ Whilst the third question, framed reflectively, asked **‘and who of them to you think would be the least likely to use or implement such a resource?’** The purpose of these questions was to see what kind of impact the influence mentioned above might have. Not unexpectedly, most of the respondents were not able to predict who would be most likely to implement the Resource, and even less likely to predict who would be least likely to implement it. Many however offered opinions on who should implement it, or gave reasons about why some would or would not implement it. For instance, one respondent said ‘a lot of councils should implement it as it is a major topic that needs to be addressed’, whilst another added that ‘it depends on the priorities of councils and their budget restraints. Larger councils are probably more likely therefore to implement it, at least initially’. However, this point was challenged in several other responses. Though most agreed that it does indeed depend on priorities, budget restraints and HR resources, some said that the smaller councils would be most likely to implement it initially because they would see this as a greater priority, whilst others suggested that larger councils with greater resources would be able to better include it in their priorities. Overall though, the consensus from many was that the smallest or most remote councils were the ones that need this most, but might also be the ones that are least likely to implement it due to lack of financial and human resources.

9d. Control Beliefs

The final series of questions was around control beliefs, to determine internal factors or circumstances, both positive and negative. In this case, the first of the questions was **‘what factors or circumstances would facilitate the implementation of the Resource in your council?’** Coming back to the normative beliefs, most respondents said that the first factor would be a supportive CEO and/or executive. Without their approval, as we saw earlier, there is little chance of implementation. But for most respondents, the support of their executive was either a given or would be relatively easy to obtain. The most critical factors for most centred on the budget, the time to implement it and having the right people to do so. As one respondent said, ‘I think the key thing is having staff available to lead and run it. Even for this trial that was a challenge. So internal staff resources are the biggest factor. Also, the budget is often an issue although we’d be trying to do it within the existing budget. But it would help if we could find a budget for it’. Others also said that all of these factors could potentially be overcome if and when the council identifies this as a priority issue. Having the support of the CEO is one thing, but as one respondent said, ‘we have a large percentage of our workforce in the mature age category, so we need to start thinking about this as a real issue and need to engage the council to support it’, whilst another added ‘we generally manage issues in a reactive way, but need to try to be more proactive and pre-emptive. Often our actions are determined by complex OH&S considerations, and this isn’t quite in that category yet’.

‘We generally manage issues in a reactive way, but need to try to be more proactive and pre-emptive’ – survey respondent

On the flipside, the last question was about blocking factors, in this case, **‘what factors or circumstances would inhibit implementation of the Resource in your council?’** Some respondents continued where they left off on the previous question, say variations of the following: ‘if it is not of high importance to the senior management or if there are not sufficient resources then it won’t be implemented’. Most respondents essentially answered this question the same way they answered the previous one. The factors that would facilitate implementation would be the same factors that would inhibit implementation if they didn’t exist, and those would be a supportive CEO

and executive team, appropriate human resources to implement it, a budget or at least a lack of financial burden, time, and most importantly, recognition of this as a need and priority in the first place. The only other factor that might inhibit implementation would be potential resistance from the mature age employees themselves, as one respondent put it, 'staff don't like change, or feel like they can still do what they used to do 20 years ago, especially the outside staff, so they might not want to be part of it. Often the ones impacted by change are the most resistant to it'.

10. LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From all the responses to the survey questions, the general consensus was that the Resource would most likely be implemented if the senior executive of the council were behind it and if the issue was prioritised and seen to be urgent. If those two elements were taken care of, then the council would find the time, the money and even the appropriate people – whether from inside the council or externally – if they didn't already have them.

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All the survey respondents seemed keen and enthusiastic about the Resource and were eager to see the finished product, despite some having reservations about its implementation and potential usefulness and viability. Some were unclear about who the Resource is directed at or how they were supposed to incorporate all of the elements into their current work plans and practices. These concerns were taken into account and appropriate changes incorporated before the final release of the Resource, and it is hoped that this has been addressed and is now clear. On the homepage of the Resource is a section titled 'Who Should Use The Resource?' which says that it is 'a guide to be used by HR/OD practitioners and leadership teams in Australian council organisations', and that it 'is a generic, broad resource that HR/OD practitioners can make specific and locally relevant as you apply it to organisation development in your own council organisation. It is designed to be an adjunct or stimulus to the development or application of a comprehensive HR/OD strategy that includes all employees, but can now focus certain aspects on the Mature Age Workforce'.

The creation of the Resource assumes that councils recognise the importance and urgency of the issue and intend to do something about it. As we discovered from the survey respondents, nearly half of all staff in the 35 councils surveyed are aged 45+, though some are significantly older, even into their 70s. Moreover, though three of the respondents said that there are no mature age issues in their councils, when probed further, it became clear that though they might not see the issues as being currently urgent or pressing, they too have mature age employees and could equally use a Resource of this nature.

One way to draw attention to this issue would be to mention it regularly in council newsletters or other internal publications, and to discuss it at team meetings. Another recommendation would be to highlight some of the data mentioned in this report, and to conduct an age audit in the council so that the executive and everyone else can see in no uncertain terms how many employees are in each age bracket and what their job functions are. If, as we heard from some survey respondents, that the outdoor staff are unequally represented in the higher age brackets and that this might affect their ability to do their jobs and thus might affect the overall productivity of the

council, then the executive and the rest of the council might be spurred into action. This is especially so if, as many indicated, councils are generally more likely to be reactive than proactive.

Now that the Resource has been released, the intention is that LG Professionals Australia also continues to be proactive by conducting another survey, most likely with a new cohort of councils in a year or so, to determine how the Resource has been used and if any of the circumstances or obstacles to implementation mentioned in the survey were accurate, and how to further remove some of the barriers. The secondary purpose of the follow-up survey would be to make any potential amendments to the Resource now that it has been broadly released.

Finally, the Resource is intentionally broad, general and thorough. But as we heard from some of the survey respondents, not all councils are interested in all aspects of the Resource. The Toolkit within the Resource is made up of 11 Key Focus Areas. Though they are all part of an all-encompassing framework, each Key Focus Area is designed to be a stand-alone element and can be used independently. Therefore councils are encouraged to identify the areas within the mature age framework where they feel they might require some assistance or guidance, and then use those elements of the Resource in a systematic way and include them within existing plans and procedures, keeping in mind that the Resource is made up of the Toolkit as well as documents and templates as part of the Resource Support.

11. CONCLUSION

The Mature Age Workforce Resource is an online tool to assist councils to become employers of choice so that they can attract and retain the best employees, all of which is designed to deliver the best services to their communities. The Resource is thorough and multi-faceted, and has gone through two face-to-face consultations, and a series of phone surveys using an established research methodology, with a representative cross-section of councils from across the country as part of a pilot phase. Whilst the majority of respondents were positive about the purpose and necessity of the Resource, a few were hesitant about its implementation and usefulness in their councils. No-one however doubted the figures as the statistics speak for themselves, and without action in the near future to address the mature age issues that are so prevalent in councils across the country, the situation in many councils will become dire and much harder to fix.

This Resource is not the only framework that councils can use, and not every element of it will be relevant to all councils, but it is one that can be used in conjunction with existing plans, resources and other tools to ensure that the issue of mature age employees and their impending exit from the local government workforce is addressed in the best possible and most efficient way.

We commend it to councils across the country, and remind them that it is available at:
<http://www.lgprofessionalsaustralia.org.au/mature-age-workforce-resource.html>