

# Six ways to embrace an ageing workforce

Many of today's 10-year-olds could well live to be 120 and it's not a stretch therefore to expect them to still be working at 100.



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Richard Andrews, managing director of Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy Inspiration Office, said workplace demands will change as people live and work longer and that the best time to adapt is now.

“We are beginning to see clients asking questions on how to future proof workplaces so they remain appealing to an older and extremely valuable workforce that is rich with know-how.”

Here's how companies can adapt their workspaces:

## Make the workplace age-neutral

Whether it's training on office technology or a slick ergonomic overhaul, companies can help their older employees remain at the top of their game by making the workplace more comfortable. Said Andrews: "The workplace's demand of say, a 20-something single person, vary greatly to that of a married person in their mid-50s with kids at home."

Simple changes can be made without catering to just one group. "Rethinking of colours, making sure acoustics and audio technology makes provision for those harder of hearing and introducing and allowing easy access to mother's rooms are some of the easy wins which won't impact the office overall but will cater to an ageing workforce."

## See all that experience as a boon

Instead of viewing older employees as a burden, consider seasoned, experienced employees as a boon for your business. "More older employees means more skills and wisdom in the workplace, which means more potential mentors for younger employees who'll be inheriting leadership roles when older workers retire," said Andrews. "If a company truly wants the best team for the job, the most effective teams are age diverse, especially when it comes to innovative ideas and ways to tackle challenges."

Andrews noted that in addition to experience, older workers often tend to be more reliable, more loyal and have the confidence to speak their minds to senior people.

## **Be more flexible**

In recent years, employers have become increasingly flexible about when and where employees are working. However, studies show they've tightened up when it comes to employees working less than full-time.

"But a fractionalised work week and phased retirement options would likely better suit a greying workforce. We need to be able to decelerate like we accelerate the work life. Like you climb up the corporate ladder, you should be able to climb down the corporate ladder," Andrews noted.

## **Offer training**

Training is not only important for helping older workers learn new skills and master new technologies, but also for supervisors managing employees of varying ages. Creating cross-generational teams and encouraging collaboration can help to diffuse age bias. Collectively, this could improve culture in the workplace, while also helping older employees maintain a high level of performance.

## **Identify employees' wants and needs**

Said Andrews: "Use focus groups and outside consultants to conduct a comprehensive review of your company's demographics and whether the workplace meets the ergonomic and cultural needs of your employees."

This is good practice for companies in general, as employees sometimes find it difficult to speak up to managers for fear of being singled out or being seen as troublesome. But finding out certain age-specific needs will bring benefits beyond just helping older workers manage the more physical aspects of their jobs.

## **Plan Ahead**

"By studying your workplace demographics and planning ahead, you can develop policies that meet the needs of your workforce," said Andrews.

"For example, if you have a large population of retirement-age employees who would like to keep working in a lesser capacity, then you might consider instituting flexible options that allow workers to ease into retirement. Additionally, this will help you get succession plans in place for when workers in leadership positions do begin to retire."

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