

Project Summary for IAL Website

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Project Title:	Battling Ageism, Myths, Misperceptions of Mature and Older Workers and Learners: Breaking Barriers, Mitigating Precarity, and Finding Fulfilment in Late Adulthood
Project Number:	GA21-05
Year of Approval:	2021
Funding Source:	WDARF
Objectives and intended outcomes of the project:	To understand the (1) outcomes of lifelong learning (LLL), (2) participation and engagement in LLL and work, and (3) improving the ecosystem of LLL and work for mature and older workers
Project Team	
Principal Investigator (PI), Co PIs, and Collaborators	Mr Poon King Wang, Dr Thijs Willems, Ms Susana Concorde Harding, Dr Su Aw, Ms Jocelin Lam Ying Feng, Dr Norazrina Muhammad Mustafa, Ms Lim Sia Hoe, Dr Cynthia Chen
Summary of Project (up to 300 words)	
<p>Mirroring that of global trends, mature and older workers in Singapore are being displaced or pushed out of employment. Perennial ageist perception has been cited as a factor attributing to mature and older workers being considered less favourably for employment despite evidence that they are as effective at work as their younger counterparts. With an ageing workforce and longer life expectancy and need to stay employed as workers aged, it is imperative to uncover ageist beliefs. While lifelong learning (LLL) is necessary for lifelong employability, societal and self-inflicted ageist beliefs can have an influence on participation, engagement, and outcomes of LLL for mature mid-career and older workers/learners.</p> <p>Recognising this, our research study adopts an ecosystem/whole of society lens to understand ageist beliefs and proposes ways to breakdown these perceptions. Additional aims are to understand how mature/older workers plan for and transit into different phases of learning, work, and retirement as they experience change in priorities, health conditions, financial circumstances, and life aspirations, and how LLL enriches them so that they continue contributing to the economy and positively influence society.</p> <p>Using a mixed methods design, we will recruit mature (aged 40-54) and older workers (aged 55 and above) for comparative understanding to assess (1) the extent to which LLL and experiences of ageism and perceptions of ageing impact employment outcomes and understand (2) mature and older workers' motivation and expectation as they participate and engage in LLL and work. Lastly, we will engage and conduct a landscape analysis of how key employers, trade unions, LLL providers, state agencies such as Skills Future Singapore can better work together (3) to strengthen the ecosystem for work and LLL for mature and older workers. Findings from this research seek to work towards a more inclusive society in the area of work and learning.</p>	

Summary of Project Findings, Deliverables and Impacts (up to 500 words)

This mixed-methods project examined how ageism, lifelong learning, work engagement, and perceptions of ageing shape the employability and fulfilment of mature and older workers in Singapore. It combined a quantitative survey of mature and older workers with qualitative interviews, focus groups, landscape analysis, and action research. The project also included a Community Researcher Initiative, where older adults were trained and engaged as research partners to support survey work and generate deeper insights into the lived experiences of mature and older workers.

The project found that ageism remains a stubborn barrier to lifelong employability, but that it should not be understood only as a matter of chronological age. A central finding is that self-perception of ageing is a stronger predictor of reported workplace age discrimination than actual age. Participants who viewed themselves as “older” were 2.48 times more likely to report experiencing discrimination than those with more positive perceptions of ageing. This highlights the need to address both external ageist practices and internalised ageist beliefs that may affect confidence, learning participation, work engagement, and career planning.

The project also identified the 55–59 age group, together with its immediately adjacent age groups, as a “Crossover Generation”. This group sits at the point where Singapore’s workforce is shifting from an older workforce historically dominated by non-PMET roles to a future older workforce with a much larger PMET profile. Yet this group reported ageism and post-training employment outcomes closer to those aged 65 and above, rather than to younger workers. This suggests that existing approaches need to be complemented by more targeted interventions for workers bearing the brunt of this structural transition. Through its mixed-methods and action research design, the project translated these findings into five recommendations. First, it developed a Self-Perception of Ageing tool to help individuals and organisations identify and reframe negative perceptions of ageing. Second, it proposed a time-limited Crossover Generation Package to encourage organisations to retain and hire mature workers based on performance and productivity rather than age. Third, it designed and piloted flexible, meaningful work models through the Community Researcher Initiative, showing how older workers can contribute expertise while balancing life-stage needs such as caregiving. Fourth, it recommended Life Course Roadmaps for Lifelong Employability, helping individuals and organisations plan career longevity alongside health, finance, learning, and life transitions. Fifth, it proposed AI-enabled whole-of-society coordination to support cross-sector collaboration among government, employers, training providers, and worker advocacy groups.

The project deliverables include the final research report, strategic recommendations for decision makers, deep-dive annexes for scholarly development, the Self-Perception of Ageing framework and tool, the Community Researcher pilot, and prototype ideas for AI-supported lifelong employability roadmapping. The project’s impact is threefold. Conceptually, it reframes ageism as a systemic, generational, organisational, and personal challenge. Practically, it offers tools, pilots, and policy ideas that can inform more inclusive employment and lifelong learning interventions. Societally, it supports Singapore’s transition towards an age-agnostic, human-centred, and performance-based workforce by helping mature and older workers remain valued, employable, and meaningfully engaged.