LOTS TO SAY BUT LITTLE TO SEE:

MANAGING THE AGEING WORKFORCE

Dr Tui McKeown

Department of Management, Monash University, Clayton Vic. 3800

Email: tui.mckeown@buseco.monash.edu.au

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes pilot research into one discrete segment of the Australian labour market to investigate what is being done to maintain, retain and sustain an ageing workforce. While it is commonly assumed that the main challenge the baby boom generation poses for society is in terms of services such as healthcare and superannuation, there is another less tangible but no less real challenge: the loss of critical organisational knowledge and skills. Combining interviews, document analyses and focus groups, the results of the pilot study reveal a high awareness of the external economic perspective of the ageing population but low awareness within their own workforce. The results imply that we have a long way to go proactively managing older workers.

INTRODUCTION

Like many other western economies, Australia's population is greying and we face major social, economic and political consequences as a result. But, because the rate of ageing is occurring relatively slowly and over a long period of time the 'real' impact can be difficult to see. In this paper we provide some insights into two major dimensions of this impact with specific reference to the ageing workforce. Beginning with the first dimension, we provide an overview of the some if the economic ramification of Australia's ageing population. This overview establishes the context for the second dimension, the loss of organisational knowledge and skills. This second dimension is the key focus of the paper and forms the basis of a research investigation into how organisations within one discrete industry sector are determining and responding to the threat of an ageing workforce.

To begin with, what is the size of the problem? The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2004) predicts that the proportion of the population aged over 65 years of age will increase from 12 per cent in 1997 to between 24 to 26 per cent by 2051. These figures reflect the movement of the group known as 'baby

boomers' (generally defined as those born post World War II, from 1945, to the early 1960s), into age cohort known as old age. Despite the gradual nature of the change, ABS (1997:11) predicted nearly a decade ago that:

> *In one 12-month period of 2025-26, the population aged 65 years and over is projected to increase by 120,000, or 2.7 per cent. In the decade to 2028, the population aged 65 years and over is projected to increase by more than a million people; nearly a 30 per cent increase ...During the early 2020s, the numbers of children in the population is projected to fall below the number of people aged 65 and over.*

It is a scenario that, when combined with the increasing life expectancy we now enjoy, is putting increasing pressure on the services and support systems that were created to care for the elderly. As in many Western nations, Australia's system of aged care was developed when life expectancy was much shorter and involved individuals being supported on pensions and superannuation for a relatively short period of time after becoming eligible. The economic repercussions of our ageing population will become increasingly visible in areas such as health provision, social security, housing and retirement income provision.

Another perspective to Australia's ageing population is the shrinking proportions actively involved in the workforce bearing the increasing burden of supporting a growing proportion of older non-employed people. Demographic trends leave no doubt that fewer workers are in line to replace retirees. Even as workers have been aging, birth rates have been declining. While some may see this as a 'freeing' up of resources due to a decline in child dependency, this will be more than countered by the need for the working age population to care for ageing parents (Ross & Tulpule,1994). Acknowledgment of the different perspectives on ageing from the ageing worker to carer or taxpayer highlights the critical importance for policies on ageing to be considered holistically and with the longer term in mind. Often, policies and actions implemented in one area will impact directly on the numbers of older workers in the workforce. With this in mind, the aim of this paper is to give an overview of management strategies as

they relate to an ageing workforce, as well as look to some of the possible responses that may be considered appropriate as a result of these findings.

Focusing in on the ageing worker reveals two critical issues which most clearly emerge for organizations, first is an accurate profile of current and future workforce needs and second, strategies for retaining and sustaining an increasingly ageing workforce. In the words of Australian Federal Employment and Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrew, "We need to recognise we have an ageing workforce but create an ageless workforce, where workers are valued – and employed – for their skills, not judged or penalised because of their date of birth" (Human Resources Magazine, 2004). A review of some of the major reports worldwide by organisations such as the ILO and the OECD reveals consensus on the possible policy options. These include encouragement for individuals to remain in the workforce for longer periods of time; access to more/better information about ageing and retirement issues to enable better choices; increased workforce participation rates through additional employment opportunities for the elderly through to additional resources geared to encourage lifelong learning, volunteering and an active approach to ageing (synthesised from Buck & Dworschak, 2003; Hirsch 2003; McIntosh 1998; OECD 2005; Samarodov 1999; Sheen 2001; Srikanth, Benton & Herrera, 2005). The focus explicitly moves from the notion of the ageing population being an economic burden to one where there is explicit value which needs to be tapped into.

The options above find resonance in the academic literature on the Resource Based View (RBV) of Human resource Mangement (HRM) which originated with Penrose's (1959) recognition of the importance of human resources and the suggestion that internal resources are more important to organizational performance then external competitive forces. Later writers such as Boxall and Purcell (2000) and Barney and Wright (2000) have translated the RBV into specific HRM organisational policy and practices in recruitment, performance management, learning and development and initiatives such as mentoring, career transitioning and sabbaticals. In particular, the need for transition options to retirement,

such as downshifting, temporary or part time work and the provision of quality information emerges strongly in a number of large scale studies. In the UK for example, see Vickerstaff, Baldock, Cox and Keen (2004); Hirsch, 2003; Arthur 2003: for European studies, Buck & Dworschak (eds) 2003; Ekanger, 1997 and US/Canada see Lawson & Lewis, 2003; Vernon, 2005. Vickerstaff and Cox (2005) explicitly place retirement within career planning and performance management and thus capture the crucial feature of the concern with losing ageing workers, their human capital and within this, the knowledge they possess.

Consideration of these factors moves us from the general management of an organisations' workforce to a more sophisticated, interlinked view of the role of people within the organisation. As Patton (2006) suggests, it is a move which sees age profiling of the workforce as the starting point for an organisation managing the knowledge of their workforce through initiatives such as succession planning, mentoring and lifelong learning. The strategic approach implicit in these practices fits well with calls from groups from the Council of the Ageing (Australia) for specific policies designed to encourage older people to stay in the workforce or rejoin the workforce (Sheen, 2001). The question for this research project is, to what extent are Australian employers adopting strategic approaches involving a holistic view of ageing into their management strategies? Against this background, we present the results of an exploratory study into the strategies being employed within Victorian Local Government. Reducing common themes from the studies noted above, three research questions (RQ1-3) identify specific variables which investigate these management strategies in detail. These are:

RQ1 - the level and type of workforce planning initiatives being undertaken;

RQ2 - current initiatives on the recruitment, retention and maintenance of the ageing workforce;

RQ3 - planned initiatives for recruitment, retention and maintenance of the ageing workforce.

The synthesis of the responses to these questions is interpreted in the discussion in terms of the implications for both individual organisations and the industry a whole to retain, maintain and sustain an ageing workforce.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

As a clearly distinct segment within the service industry, this exploratory study was carried out in early 2005 within the Victorian Local Government sector. In terms of high level awareness of ageing workforce issues, this is a relatively well researched industry sector with two major industry wide surveys having being carried out in the last few years; the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) in late 2004 and a 2006 Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) discussion paper, Workforce Planning in Local Government. Made up of 79 councils in total, Local Government in Victoria employs just under 30,000 employees, females represent 58% of the workforce and, in terms of age, approximately 30% of workers are aged 45 and over. This last factor identifies a key reason why this segment of the service sector was chosen. The urgency with which it could be expected that this industry is dealing with ageing is further enhanced by the fact that ABS (2005) predicts that by 2020, 50% of the current workforce will have retired. There is an important corollary to the above in that the data reported only refers to Local Governments direct workforce and not their large external population of temporary agency staff, contract, sub contract and volunteer workforce.

Methodology

This exploratory study aims to move beyond the strategic policy views documented in reports (such as the ALGA (2004) and MAV (2006) reports), to investigate what is actually being done at the individual council level. Given the diverse context of ageing and the exploratory nature of this study discussed above, a mixed methods study was adopted to test the research questions and to explore results in the context of different HRM strategies. The results draw on data from interviews with Human Resource managers from five councils ranging from inner metropolitan to rural locations, 2 industry based focus groups and the content analysis of 10 Annual Reports. Results are presented from the document analysis and then, from the industry and focus groups and follow the framework provided by the three research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A stratified sampling design was applied to both the selection of Annual reports and the subsequent interviews with half the organisations supplying these to ensure data provided a comprehensive spread of the industry within Victoria. Three central themes formed the basis of analysis tasks: an examination of current workforce planning initiatives, current management initiatives specifically focussed on the ageing workforce and thirdly, any planned future management initiatives. The five HR managers interviewed differed according to title, reporting arrangements, gender, age, tertiary qualifications and years of experience. All however, were responsible for the development of organisational HR-related policies and procedures as well as the provision of regular reports on HR matters to senior management. The two focus groups were conducted to provide a broader picture. The first utilised an existing grouping of seven HR managers from Local government who meet regularly to discuss a variety of issues. The second was an invited group of five senior local government officials, participants from MAV and the Victorian division of Local government.

Annual Reports

Ageing was discussed in all ten annual reports but almost exclusively dealt with as an issue for the client base they offer services to. Little evidence of workforce planning was in evidence with information on the age profile of the ten organisations' workforces provided in only two annual reports. These two did reveal dominance by the 45 to 50 years plus group. The lack of workforce breakdown in the eight other annual reports is surprising given that this data is supposedly cited in the ALGA (2004) and MAV (2006) reports. Also, for the workforce data that is reported, it should be noted that it refers to the *internal* workforce encompassing individuals who have a direct employment relationship with their organisation but other data also indicated that a range of services are contracted out. What is clear is the limited information about the *externalised* workforce. This segment of the workforce comprises contingent workers who have a contractual rather than employment arrangement - such as agency temps and individual contractors and

volunteer workers. The absence of data on this important segment of the workforce creates a void that this research attempts to reduce. Similarly, data on RQ 2 & 3 (current and planned initiatives) was not reported.

However, while pictures of the ageing workforce were either missing or poorly reported, all ten reports provided some detail as to the composition their workforces, generally on four key dimensions of gender, employment status (full-time, part-time or casual); position held and work group or department. For this sample of 10 organisations, the total number of employees covered was 6,778 but the number of employees ranged from 286 to 1,219. Gender breakdown of total employees revealed 62% were female while, in relation to employment status, 52% were full-time employees, 31% are employed on a part-time basis (predominantly females) and 17% were casual employees. There was also some evidence of redundancy payments. Overall, the annual report data suggests an industry workforce diverse in employment numbers and configurations. Broadly speaking, organisation employees are likely to be female and employed part-time or full-time in a position requiring either low level or specialist skills and were classified and paid accordingly. Organisation employees are also likely to be members of a small workgroup operating within a larger department and aged 45 years or over. Although summarising the workforce into one broad sweeping statement is appealing, the lack of homogeneity in this workforce limits its value. This point is the fact that the ageing of the customer/client is seen as more of an issue than the ageing of their workforce and this is reinforced in the interview data.

Interviews

As illustrated in Table 1, the five HR managers interviewed differed according to title, reporting arrangements, gender, age, tertiary qualifications and years of experience. All however, were responsible for the development of organisational HR-related policies and procedures as well as the provision of regular reports on HR matters to senior management.

Table 1: Profile of sample of HR Managers (HR 1 to HR 5) interviewed.

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	HR1	HR2	HR3	HR4	HR5
Position Title	Manager OD & Governance	Manager HR	Manager OD	Manager OD	Manager People & Performance
Reports to	CEO	CEO	CEO	Thru GM to CEO	CEO
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male
Age group	50-54	50-54	50-54	35-39	35-39
Professional qualifications	MBA and DBA	BEco, Master of Business (HRM)	BEco	BPsych/Mgt	BBusAdm, Grad Dip in HR/IR
Years in HR field	15	34	30	4	10
Years in Local Government	3	10	15	4	17
Employee cost as a % of total revenue	34%	22%	TBA	21%	27%

The two focus groups (FG1 and FG2) were conducted to provide a broader picture. FG1 utilised an existing grouping of HR managers from Local government who meet on a regular basis to discuss a variety of issues. FG2 was a purpose designed group covering senior local government officials as well as participants from MAV and the Victorian division of Local government. Moving to RQ1, while all of the HR managers were aware of the ageing workforce a social issue, only three actually had some idea of the proportion of their employees who qualified as 'older' workers. HR2 was one of the few able to provide some detail:

> *The workforce is getting older and our workforce is relatively old, but it hasn't been a problem to us but ... at the moment 57% of our total workforce is aged 45+ and I think that includes ..volunteers ... we haven't got historical figures so we can see how the trend is going but clearly, it's an issue.*

HR3 knew about half their workforce was aged 45+ years but acknowledged that "look, it is something that we need to do a bit about and we haven't done enough." As Table 2 shows, the only other HR manager with any idea about the age profile of their workforce was HR5 but this was embedded in more general information about the Australian workforce as a whole. As with the annual reports, all HR managers identified ageing as a client/customer issue related to the provision of services to an ageing

population. Both focus groups however, were very conversant with ageing as an issue for local government employees as workers as well as in their service provision.

Table 2: Issues of an Ageing Workforce

	Have/know the data?	Customer/ Client	OH&S/ Risk	Skill Shortage	Knowledge loss
HR1	X	✔	✔	✔	X
HR2	✔	✔	✔	✔*	X
HR3	✔	✔	✔	✔*	X
HR4	X	✔	✔	✔*	X
HR5	✔/X	✔	✔	✔*	✔
FG1	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
FG2	✔	✔	✔	✔	X

*but not specifically linked to <u>their</u> ageing workforce

When asked in more detail about what the issues of an ageing workforce were, all HR managers and focus groups unanimously concentrated discussion on the financial/risk management aspects. HR 1 summarised the position taken:

> *..the ageing workforce is always a concern but not so much a recruitment issue as an occupational health issue because of the risk that is actually involved. With our HR resources, we have got almost 0.8EFT devoted to managing workers comp, the rehab process, maintaining relationships and communication with people who are off to keep our active number of people on WorkCover down to about five to eight who are typically over 50 years*

While the language of ageism was carefully avoided by all, it was the general flavour of the conversations and is well captured by HR4s' statement that:

> *As an organisation, we don't have an issue employing people over the age of 45 or even 65, it is really just not an issue for our organisation. We employ people well over those ages, depending on the risk. Quite often the difficult conversation with people is, look if you continue to do this sort of work you are going to become permanently disabled, or your gross motor skills are going to be impaired, or you are going to be in pain*

This mix of awareness but lack of action was further seen in results for RQ2 which focussed on of skill shortages as a key challenge and, as the flowing quote from HR2 typifies, never explicitly linked to the need to retain older workers:

The attraction and retention of staff has been an objective for a few years, because I think there are shortages there that have not hit us yet. ... The other issue that we have become involved with more recently is the ageing workforce ... Basically, though the issue of skills shortages is a very live one for us and puts everything in the shade.

This lack of awareness was most vivid in comments by HR5 who admitted, "I didn't even think about issue until your email." Despite this, HR5 was also only one of the two interviews (FG1 was the other), where the knowledge loss aspect was noted, particularly in terms of the attitudes of the past where the downsizing, noted by all interviewees was referred to as an active strategy of the 1990s consolidation within the industry:

I saw a lot of local knowledge and expertise just walk out of organisations. I've seen it in quite a few organisations and it was a huge loss and nobody appreciates the loss and it is difficult to include that intangible knowledge loss or cost in financial terms your tender documents.

The issue of knowledge management emerged in RQ2 to reveal a much lower level of sophistication than expected, most of the interviews focussed on the basic issue of access to data. As Table 3 shows, questioning revealed that while most had computerised human resource systems in place (CHRIS), actual utilization was largely transactional and limited to payroll and management of leave aspects. As HR5 stated, their CHRIS was "for budgeting monitoring, monitoring turnover and leave and WorkCover." The strategic HRM literature, specifically that focussed on RBV approaches, suggests that one proactive use of information is to conduct exit interviews with retiring employees to understand why they are leaving and to determine what needs to be done to better attract and/or retain workers. While most organisations made some attempt to do exit interviews, Table 3 reveals that none aimed this specifically at older employees or used it as a tool to feedback into recruitment and selection. Again, the common theme of the interviews was that recruitment was focused on younger end of the spectrum and, as FG1 summed up:

You will see sometimes you have people at the bottom end, young people being recruited which would be a good thing, and see you have that middle age group being recruited who have got the

experity and the qualifications but not the older workers, you see very few older people being

recruited into [the industry]. If they don't want to recruit them, do they really want to hang onto

them?

Table 3: Proactive Approaches to an Ageing Workforce

	Have a CHRIS	Use HRIS for HRP	Track Ex/Past employees	Mentoring	Feedback 45+ employees
HR1	X	X	X	✓	X*
HR2	✓	X*	X	X*	X
HR3	✓	X*	X	X	X*
HR4	X	✓	X	X	X
HR5	✓	X	X	X	X
FG1	✓	✓*	X	✓*	✓*
FG2	✓	✓	X	✓	✓*

*Have or will be implementing

This returns us to the RQ2 theme of how organisations were preserving valuable knowledge. A common

response suggested by all HR managers was to establish a mentoring program but, as Table 3 shows, only

one organisation had done so. Even here, the focus of this mentoring program was on assistance to

younger workers rather than retaining and passing on knowledge from older as well as being a career step

for older as they move to a mentor role. This neglect is further amplified in the lack of knowledge capture

from employee surveys or other forms of formal feedback from the 45+ group.

What then does all this say about the way organisations actually perceive the employment of older

workers? Table 4 shows the confusion between old and elderly, elderly and frail, permeated all the

interviews – with some even noting aspects such as senile dementia! Superannuation was seen as a key

deterrent for older workers actually wanting to remain in employment. HR1 noted the superannuation

problem very clearly:

our biggest problem I guess with employing people that are older is that superannuation legislation

really doesn't enhance their decision about keeping on working beyond 65. It is more attractive to

leave and in fact people who previously worked for the Commonwealth it is far more attractive to

retire about 57 because actually that is when they are better off. … The other thing is beyond 60 or

65, people haven't got workers compensation cover at all, so workers comp legislation is an issue. Until such time as State and Federal Government legislation changes to smooth out those bumps to support this, it makes it extremely difficult for us.

Members of the focus group also felt that:

there are some disincentives for older people to continue working too. Superannuation, a lot of the older employees are in the defined benefits superannuation fund and many of them will have reached the point where there is no value, they have reached the maximum and they are still paying but they will not get any more out of it. … Another one is WorkCover. Once you have turned 65 you are still covered for medical and you are eligible for 12 months initially, but once you are over 66 or 67 or whatever it is, there is no compensation for loss of wages.

Table 4: Organisational Views of an Ageing Workforce

	The Negatives of Ageing Employees			What Older Workers Want		
	Frail & Elderly	*Superan.*	*WorkCover/ OH&S*	*Flexibility*	*Sabbaticals*	*HomeWkg*
HR1	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✓*	-
HR2	✓	-	-	✓*	-	-
HR3	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-
HR4	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
HR5	✓/X	✓	✓	✓*	-	-
FG1	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✓*	✓*
FG2	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✓	-

*Have or will be implementing

Countering this negative view of older employees were some ideas about expressed in answer to RQ3 about future plans for how older employees could possibly be retained in the workforce. As Table 4 shows, offering flexibility was the key option identified by all HR managers and both focus groups. Just what was meant by 'flexibility' varied a great deal. HR2 talked of flexibility in terms of "They may find that working full-time is too much and they want to work part-time... But there will be part-time work and changed employment conditions. At the moment are what we call family friendly policies are really geared towards people's requirements in relation to children." HR3 presented a slightly more negative view with the suggestion that:

I think we need to think about sabbaticals and how we actually introduce that notion and what the cost impact is that needs to be carefully looked at... There are some that we'd be trying to retain and there are some I know that are a workers comp risk, so they're the sorts of decisions unfortunately that you have to make.

As Table 4 reveals, only a few councils were actually acting on any of these options and the range was very limited. Overall then, the results to RQ2 and RQ3 reveal a lack of HR initiatives to capture and retain knowledge where they do exist; they are limited in effectiveness as they appear to have been uncoordinated responses to one or another specific consequence of workforce aging. This is despite HR1 passionately declaring "If you put all the security issues aside that people perceive as a major threat to this country or any western country, I think this is one of the biggest single issues that will affect sustainability of the country and its prosperity into the future". The question arises from these results, how can there be such a divergence in rhetoric and reality in a large, well-organised and well-scrutinised industry sector? The focus groups provided the most telling responses with FG1 suggesting that "Lack of proactive action reinforced by traditional response of industry to 'outsource' or 'contract' out the problem through the use of temporary contract agencies, contractors etc." The sector has clearly relied for a long time on a workforce that supplements what they see as their employees – not just the temporary and contractors noted above but also the large volunteer element which provides a wide range of essential but unpaid services. This view was strongly supported in FG2, though from quite a different perspective as they saw the reliance on these groups as strength because "Contracting is good. It means it is no longer our problem and we can get on with the job." The reliance on contractors is supported in both the MAV (2006) and ALGA (2004) reports but, as HR2s' response to the question of whether an ageing contractor/consultant workforce was of interest to management to his organisation, suggests, the official view also seems to be "No, we are only interested in whether they can do the job. It may be an issue for them, but I just don't think the effect has really been felt yet." In fact, HR 3 typified all 5 organisations when asked about the age profiles of contractors/consultants by "The only way we can draw data out is I go to Accounts and say give me all the invoices for McArthurs and Premium and Workforce Solutions and whoever else".

Similar disinterest and lack of knowledge about the ageing volunteer base was also found, as HR5 said, **"I don't know if we have mapped the age of our volunteers. I would assume that most of them probably are or are likely to be in the 60+year's group."** Overall, more detailed questioning revealed that all respondents were aware of the capability of a CHRIS, or even a HRIS, as a basic tool to allow organisations to develop a clear picture of its human capital strengths and weaknesses and develop a holistic strategy tailored to its particular needs. Yet, only two councils captured age profile data, only one actively used CHRIS as the basis for investigation of both present and future workforce requirements. Not even the focus groups seemed aware of the ability to use it to identify the skills and competencies most at risk as workers retire or develop strategies on how to retain, capture and transfer the associated knowledge. We had anticipated discussions such as those seen in the MAV (2006) and ALGA (2004) reports but the concepts discussed in both these documents and widely touted in international studies and reports, were not even on the radar in our research populations.

In summary, the interviews revealed a more general awareness of the ageing issue as both client/service provision and a workforce issue than did the annual reports. But, due to the lack of data analysis/proactive use of CHRIS, HR managers relied on anecdotal rather then statistical evidence. The greatest concern appeared to be with the 'risk' associated with employing older employees rather than the knowledge, skills and abilities they have to offer and that may be lost on their exiting the organisation. While skill shortages were seen as a key problem the solutions identified were explicitly linked HR practice focused on the recruitment of younger workers. Similarly, mentoring was aimed at career development of younger employees rather than knowledge transfer and development of older workers. The high levels of awareness and rhetoric were further evidenced in the lack of control over retirement and the fact that voluntary redundancies were still operating in some councils. Added to this was the general view that staff turnover is seen as something to reduce but not necessarily to understand. Overall, there was little

evidence of actions being taken to recognise skills of older workers and to actively retain, maintain and sustain them in the workforce.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Victorian councils operate within an environment of complex legislative, financial, competitive and environmental requirements. Councils plan for and manage the demands of diverse and often conflicting stakeholders, provide an expanding range of services to an ageing community and review their services in accordance with best value principles. Consequently, they require flexible, efficient and effective workforce arrangements to meet the challenges of the contemporary industry sector context. The results to RQ1,2 and 3 confirm the existence of a diverse *internal* and *externalised* workforce within this industry sector which provides a mosaic of employment, contractual and unpaid arrangements which underpin the provision of their services. One result is that efforts to address an ageing workforce in this industry have been piecemeal. In conclusion, there are four key challenges which emerged for human resource management in local government. The first is in terms of recruitment and selection where there is a clear need to broaden in scope to ensure a focus on merit and the skills and abilities a job requires rather than what appear to be age inherent biases. Second is the need to use existing systems such as performance management in a way that incorporates aspects such as career planning and link to this to the third challenge; lifelong learning and development. This area needs to combine business and individual needs and differences to bring in options such as mentoring, sabbaticals. The fourth key challenge to emerge is dealing with redundancy and retirement. While there were clear barriers imposed by superannuation scheme requirements, there is a need to rethink early exit and voluntary redundancy options as well as consider a range of transition to retirement options such as part time work, job sharing and phased retirement and access to high quality pre-retirement or pre-redundancy counselling. Attention to these four recommended areas of HRM provides the basis for a comprehensive approach and recognition of the fact that, if an organisation's human resources are truly its most important asset, then dealing with the impending loss of those resources must be the organisation's highest priority.

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