

Beyond Advocacy – a strategic approach to engaging business in addressing the challenges of an ageing workforce

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Internationally there is no shortage of research, analysis and reports describing the ageing of the population, the changing shape of the workforce and advocating the value of older workers.

The dominant paradigm framing research and government policy, informing the position taken by consumer groups and shaping the practices of consultants is one based on advocacy for older workers and the promotion of anti discriminatory policies. After all the evidence is that if a person loses their job after the age of 45 the chances of gaining further employment diminishes considerably. There is also no shortage of anecdotal stories and complaints lodged by older workers of discriminatory practices.

While the need for advocacy should never be minimised and anti-discriminatory employment practices must be non-negotiable, this rarely engages those responsible for the governance and day-to-day management of business.

This presentation will describe an emerging paradigm based not on advocacy but on the engagement of business at a strategic level to own and address the risks and challenges they face from the ageing of their workforces. It is a framework that constructs an alternative discourse that is strategic, rigorous and focused on their business imperatives. The methodology used is educational, engages key stakeholders and provides a platform for interventions that address real business issues with the aim of driving cultural change.

Over the past two years this evolving approach has been applied in over twenty large and small organisations in sectors as diverse as transport, aged care, education, human services, health, central and local government and utilities. The presentation will contrast the two paradigms and illustrate the emerging paradigm with case studies from New Zealand and Australia. It will also discuss some of the major business risks companies have identified along with the strategies and interventions they are implementing.