

BOSTON COLLEGE

**GLOBAL WORKFORCE
ROUNDTABLE**

Engaging Baby Boomers in the Workplace

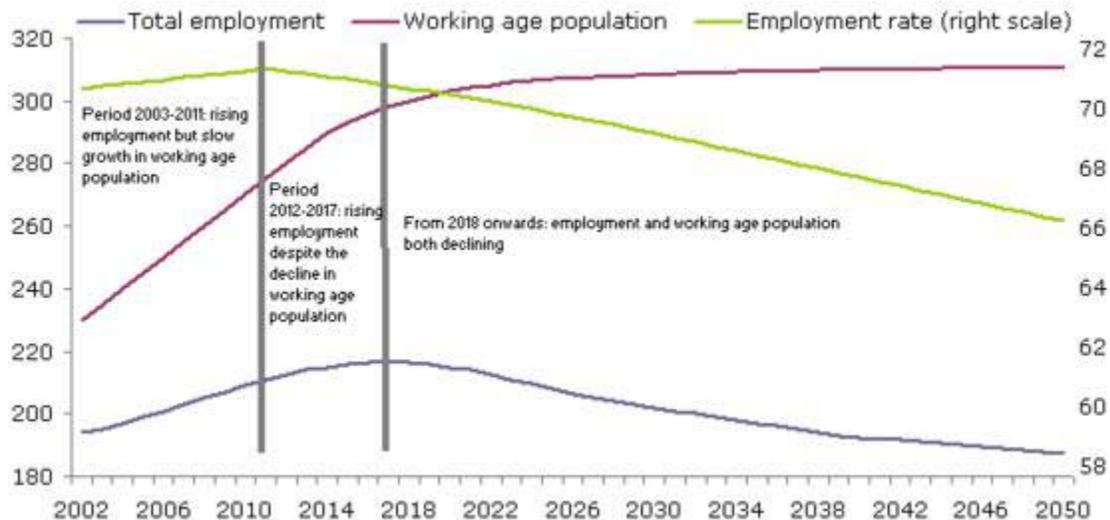
Prepared by the Boston College
Center for Work & Family

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Changing Demographics:

- There are three important trends in the modern workforce's demographics that concern the Baby Boomer generation ([Brown et al. 2011](#))
 1. There is a greater percentage of older adults (65+) participating in the workforce than there used to be
 2. Overall, people tend to retire at a later age
 3. A greater number of individuals are reentering the workforce after retirement
 4. Baby Boomers make up between 48%-57% of the modern workforce ([Deal 2011](#))

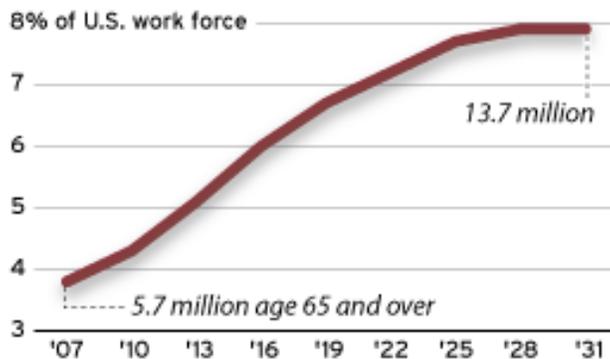
Projected working age population and total employment, EU25, 2002–2050



Source: European Commission, 2007

The aging of the U.S. work force

By 2028, the percentage of workers over the retirement age of 65 is projected to rise to 7.9 percent.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics
MSNBC

The Strengths of the Baby Boomer Generation ([Bell and Narz 2007](#); [Huggins 2011](#))

- Positive attributes that have helped Baby Boomers succeed in the workplace:
 - Long-term experience
 - Career-oriented future planning and goals
 - Independence in their decision-making
 - Less commitment to authority and a workplace hierarchy than their parents
 - Team-oriented work collaboration
 - Competitive nature due to career advancement goals
 - Easily adapting the working patterns of different generations such as the use of smartphones ([Steelcase 2009](#))

The Challenges of the Baby Boomer Generation

- Challenges that face Baby Boomers and their employers:
 - Intergenerational conflicts ([Koeppel 2011](#)):
 - Incoming Millennials prioritize work-life balance over career development goals characteristic of the Baby Boomer generation
 - The perception that Baby Boomers' delayed retirement prevents the success of other employees
 - Different outlooks on the importance and acceptability of technology in the workplace
 - Becoming the "Sandwich Generation" ([Dolgen 2013](#)). Baby Boomers feel the economic and emotional strain of taking care of both children and parents
 - Prone to workplace burnout ([Lancaster 2004](#))
 - Tend to oppose or disvalue feedback opportunities
 - Competitive nature can lead to conflict

How to Engage Baby Boomers in the Workplace

Make sure employees have a choice: Workers must feel that they have a choice – whether to retire or whether to stay. The option to choose is a retention tool.

Provide Opportunities for Flexibility; Learning and Development:

- In Italy, research demonstrates that employees are less likely to want to retire if they have the opportunity to continue to learn on the job, reduce their hours, and enjoy the company of their supervisor and co-workers (in Shultz & Henkens, 2010).
- In Holland, employees were more likely to retire early if they worked long hours, had high workload, had heavy physical work, or lacked challenge in their jobs (in Shultz & Henkens, 2010). Therefore employees will be less inclined to retire if they control their schedules, are challenged by the work, but not overtaxed, and are physically capable of successfully accomplishing the tasks. Further, Conen et al. (2011) indicate that employers in the Netherlands have become more willing to retain but not to recruit older workers, although both retention and especially recruitment of older workers decline in times of recessions.
- In the US, researchers find that job flexibility and adaptability of jobs to older workers' needs and a supportive work culture are among the most important retention strategies used by employers (in Szinovacz, 2011).

Support the difficulties of the “Sandwich Generation” ([Coughlin 2010](#))

- Researchers argue that employers can do four things to help with the growing economic and emotional difficulties of providing for two different generations:
 - Provide Information: Help your employees learn about the benefits and services that will aid them. Acknowledging their struggle as a wider phenomenon is important.
 - Provide Flexibility: Caretakers schedules need to incorporate the needs of their families—being flexible is important so that they don't feel strained between providing at work and home.
 - Provide Financial Training: Provide employees with financial training that ensures their economic future while also allowing them to meet current financial burdens.
 - One study found that after financial training, 80% of Baby Boomers reported that they felt prepared for their retirement needs after previous anxiety.
 - Provide Support: Caregivers use work as a respite from the challenges at home so both formal and informal support groups through work that allow them to make meaningful connections lead to a greater sense of well-being.

Understand what motivates Baby Boomers ([Barry 2011](#))

- Baby Boomers strongly identify with their occupational success
 - They are more motivated by acknowledgement and recognition than by feedback
 - They feel comfortable and useful in mentoring positions
 - These mentoring positions can be useful segues into intergenerational training programs
 - They want post-retirement opportunities and connections through the workplace for those opportunities
 - There has been a national growth in the number of individuals doing freelance consulting after retirement ([Schawbel 2012](#))
 - Provide networking opportunities that encourage these professional connections

Top Values by Generation

| Silents (1925-1945) | Early Boomers (1946-1954) | Late Boomers (1955-1963) | Gen Xers (1964-1980) | Millennials (1981-2000) |
|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| family 46% | family 45% | family 64% | family 67% | family 73% |
| integrity 46% | integrity 32% | integrity 29% | love 32% | love 49% |
| love 26% | love 27% | love 29% | integrity 24% | spirituality 28% |
| spirituality 25% | spirituality 21% | spirituality 23% | happiness 20% | happiness 25% |
| self-respect 22% | self-respect 21% | happiness 18% | spirituality 17% | friendship 25% |

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Understand what frustrates Baby Boomers

- Because Baby Boomers tend to question authority, workplace decisions need to be transparent and inclusive whenever possible ([Barry 2011](#))
- Being perceived as replaceable by a younger worker discredits the experience Baby Boomers value highly in themselves
 - Focusing on retention combats losing too much experience too quickly in the workforce. Baby Boomers tend to be motivated by monetary incentives and flexible schedules as well as workplace commitment to continued education ([Houlihan 2011](#))
- Being stereotyped ([Blauth et al. 2011](#))
 - Nearly 1 in 3 Baby Boomers dissatisfied with their job report that they have experienced age discrimination ([The Associated Press 2011](#))
 - Popular stereotypes of Baby Boomers include
 - Being micro-managers
 - Being ruthlessly competitive
 - Being technologically challenged
 - Being inflexible towards new methods
 - Research shows that the higher the managerial level of an employee, the more likely they are to use age-based stereotypes in their decision-making
 - Training across all levels and all generations has to take place in the workforce for employees to effectively work together
 - Additionally, providing Baby Boomers with training opportunities communicates that they are viewed as an investment-worthy employees

Best Practices for Managing Generations in the Workplace

- Companies that are successful in both recruiting and retaining across generations ([Murphy and Greco 2003](#))
 - Research their own employee demographics
 - Match their workforce to their customer base
 - Make intergenerational boards and councils
 - Support continued education
 - Reward successful retention

- Offer horizontal movement
- Offer a wide selection of personalized benefits
- Have mentoring programs
- Have flexible schedules
- Examples of companies implementing these practices ([Roundtree 2012](#))
 - The MITRE Corporation offers their employees phased retirement with increased flexibility
 - CVS Caremark allows employees to transfer to different regions based on seasonal conditions (i.e. snowbirding).
 - Cornell University provides post-retirement workshops on topics like consulting and volunteerism
 - Additionally, employees are kept “on-call” to volunteer insight based on their experience at the request of current employees
 - Central Baptist Hospital restructured succession planning so that it not only included early and mid-life career but late-life career planning as well so that they could retain older employees for a longer period of time
 - GE pairs senior leaders with junior leaders for meetings each week to share knowledge and information
 - LVM and Lufthansa offer multi-media training to all employees, regardless of age.
 - Siemens offers job rotation through its People-ShareNet database that is used to worldwide deploy experts company wide, thus fostering knowledge transfer.
 - Michelin, the French tire manufacturer, implements a practice called “doublage”, which refers to an advanced model of succession planning where those employees who hold specific valuable knowledge about a product are allowed to choose their own successors and mentor them over a period of time.