

Challenging the stereotypes surrounding older workers

An employer assumes that an older worker is too difficult to train and, in any event, is “riding it out to retirement”. S/he is given performance reviews that do not meaningfully identify strengths and areas where there is room for improvement. Skills are not relevant anymore, s/he cannot work on improving the weaker areas and is less motivated to work hard. S/he is not a valued worker, is not expected to perform and will never be recognised for his/her contribution.

This scenario shows that assumptions and stereotypes about older workers who remain active in the labour market are all too prevalent in workplaces. But, are such stereotypes factual?

Various research studies show such assumptions about older workers are simply myths that are not borne out by evidence. In fact, there is significant evidence that older workers are highly-productive, offer considerable on-the-job experience, do as well or better than younger workers on creativity, flexibility, information processing, accident rates, absenteeism and turnover; can learn as well as younger workers with appropriate training methods and environments; do not fear change but rather fear discrimination.

Many older persons want or need to carry on working. Official statistics provided by Eurostat show that in 2016, 19.0% of the total Maltese population were elderly (65 or over) - an increase of 7.7% when compared to 10 years ago. In 2016, 5.8% of the elderly aged 65 to 74 years in Malta were economically active. In view of these figures, addressing pertinent issues that affect older persons, including those who choose to remain active in the labour market, is considered as highly important.

Various studies highlight how older workers should be treated as individuals, assessed on their own merits and offered the same opportunities as everyone else in hiring, training and promotion. In fact, underestimating the capabilities of older workers and treating them differently as a result can actually hinder them from maintaining their productivity and value. On the other hand, studies show that treating older workers on par with the other employees allows employers to utilise a valuable resource.

This is resonated in the theme chosen by the United Nations for this year to mark the International Day of Older Persons that focused on the pathways that support full and effective participation in old age, in accordance with old persons’ basic rights, needs and preferences.

In this regard, as part of its remit, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) works to safeguard equality for older persons in employment, education and vocational training as well as in banks and financial institutions. Equality on the basis of age curbs negative age-related stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards older persons and instead highlights the invaluable contribution of older persons at the workplace and in society at large.



NCPE receives and investigates complaints of persons who deem that they are discriminated due to their age in the labour market, in education or vocational training or in banks and financial institutions. NCPE can be contacted on 25903850, equality@gov.mt or on Facebook.

Renee Laiviera
Commissioner - NCPE