

*Older workers' experiences of adult education and workplace
training in an Irish manufacturing facility – insights from an
exploratory study*

*Warren Brennan
13110489*

*Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning
Master of Arts in Educational Practice
2021
National College of Ireland*

Older workers' experiences of adult education and
workplace training in an Irish manufacturing facility
– insights from an exploratory study

A Thesis in the Field of Adult Education
for Master of Arts in Educational Practice

Warren Brennan

National College of Ireland

Submitted to the National College of Ireland, July 2021

Abstract

This research was conducted to investigate the experiences and perceptions of older workers in an Irish manufacturing facility towards adult education and workplace training. Research was carried out using semi-structured interviews with eight interviewees. The purpose of the research was to examine the reasons why older staff choose to participate in or abstain from adult education and what their reasons are. It seeks to establish if their previous experience in education shaped their current attitudes and looks for their opinions on how to improve the opportunities available to them. The research and interviews were conducted during the Covid 19 pandemic, so the research also sought to incorporate the experience of older workers adapting to the migration of most of the training to online technologies due to social distance measures. The Covid experience was factored in as some research claims that *older 50+ workers might even be more affected by the pandemic than younger workers* (Ayalon, et al., 2021).

Several different theories related to the experience and perception of older workers to training opportunities were studied to devise a series of questions devised around the literature. The main subjects covered in the questions were motivation to train, barriers to participation, previous experience in education and experience of training during the pandemic. Erikson's theories regarding the 8 Stages of Psychosocial Development were considered as a framework to use when considering what questions to ask in the interview process, in particular his findings on generativity vs stagnation. The research was carried out using semi-structured interviews with eight interviewees.

The findings showed that the main subjects covered in the interview questions were major factors impacting upon participation or abstention from education, however there were also factors discovered such as the perception that they had a lack of access to comprehensive information regarding the availability of course funding and what the procedure was to apply for training.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
Research Students Declaration Form
(*Thesis/Author Declaration Form*)

Name: Warren Brennan

Student Number: 13110489

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MA in Educational Practice

Title of Thesis: The experiences and perceptions of older workers in an Irish manufacturing facility towards adult education and workplace training – an exploratory study

Date: 31 07 2021

Material submitted for award

A. I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself.

B. I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

C. I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online open access repository NORMA.

D. ***Either*** *I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

Or *I declare that the following material contained in the thesis formed part of a submission for the award of

(*State the award and the awarding body and list the material below*)

Dedication

To Linda for all of your love and patience and
to my mother and father for all their encouragement and support.

Acknowledgments

To all my lecturers for their help and encouragement and in particular to

Dr. Yvonne Emmett for her encouragement and support.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Dedication	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
Chapter I. Introduction	11
The Company	15
Chapter 2 Literature Review	18
Motivation to participate in training.....	26
Barriers to participation.....	31
Benefits of Educational Participation.....	36
Previous educational experience	37
Conclusion.....	37
Chapter 3 Research Methodology	39
3.1 Introduction	39
3.2 Research Philosophy & Strategy.....	39
3.3 Participant Selection and recruitment	41
3.4 Data Collection.....	42
3.5 Data Analysis	43
3.6 Quality Considerations.....	44
Limitations	46
3.7 Ethical Considerations.....	47

Chapter 4 Interview Findings and Discussion	49
Demographic Questions	51
Experience in education to date	52
Importance placed on training.....	55
Opportunities to learn.....	59
Motivation to participate	60
Barriers to participation.....	62
Future training intentions	64
Training cohort preference	64
Perception and experience of online training	65
Perceived benefits	67
Opportunities	69
Potential improvements.....	70
Chapter 5 Conclusions	73
References	77
Appendix A Interview Questions	94
Demographic Questions	94
Experience in education to date	94
Opportunities to learn.....	94
Motivation	94
Barriers to participation.....	95
Future training intentions	95
Training cohort preference	95

Perception and experience of online training	95
Perceived benefits	95
Opportunities	95
Potential improvements.....	95
Wrap up	95
Appendix B Interview Transcripts	96
Matthew Interview	96
Mark Interview	110
Kate Interview	120
Liam Interview	134
Sue Interview.....	147
Luke Interview	159
Michelle Interview	172
Tony Interview	178

Chapter I.

Introduction

The aim of this research was to look at the perceptions of “older” workers in an Irish manufacturing facility towards adult education and workplace training and how they have experienced education in their life and careers to date.

For this research, “older” workers are defined as aged 45 and over, as the definition varies across research.

The starting point of this research was the researcher’s own experience in education, having left school at 16 to enrol on an apprenticeship and returned at 40 to study for a business degree and the fact that he was of the age demographic that the study concerned.

The research was initially going to look at the generational differences and attitudes towards training, however, research such as the writing of Zane L. Berge which pointed out the overriding generational similarities caused a change of tack. Berge argued that people have the same values, regardless of age, all people want to learn, all people want to feel valued and significant and that everyone wants respect. (Berge & Berge, 2019).

When the researcher began his career in manufacturing, technical skills for manufacturing were delivered through the apprenticeship system based on the assumption that there was pool of knowledge that would be handed down to the next generation from experienced craftsperson to apprentice. There has been a major change since then, however, due to the rapid advances in technology in the interim. This skillset and knowledge resource can rapidly become outdated, as evidenced in particular in digital

technology where older workers are often now being taught by younger employees. The pace of progress and change have also meant that older workers can no longer rely on the skills gained in the initial part of their career as was the case with an apprenticeship but must now train continually to stay relevant and up to speed with change.

Organizations are required to manage an increasing number of older workers alongside younger workers in organizations with flatter structures and often, fewer career paths

The notion of lifetime employment is now often replaced by career flexibility.

No longer can it be assumed that an older worker is more advanced in their career than their younger colleague (Hess & Jepsen, 2009).

The focus of this research was to understand the experience of the older cohort in the workplace and gain an insight into their perception of training opportunities and seek their opinions on potential improvements. The research and the interviews that were held were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and this phenomenon, it's resultant lockdowns and its impact upon the way older people had to adapt to online training and meetings were also used to frame the questions and research.

The subject is an important one for several reasons. In the developed world, people are living for longer while birth rates are falling. In the UK, there was a 51% increase in the numbers of people aged 65 and over between 1961 and 2001 (Fuller & Unwin, 2005). Consequently, people are working for longer than before.

An ESRI report of 2019 stated that policies designed to retain older workers should be considered as a possible form of protection... Access to training and life-long learning opportunities are also important so that the skills of older workers do not become

obsolete, making them more vulnerable to job loss. (Privalko, Russel, & Maitre, 2019)

As technology advances and the labour market changes, the pressure grows on older workers to keep skills up to date through training, on the job learning, mentoring and job rotation. The share of people aged 55 years or more in the total number of persons employed in the EU-27 increased from 11.9% to 20.2% between 2004 and 2019. (Eurostat, 2020). This research sought to identify training needs and opportunities available to experienced workers. Research on the relationship between age and job performance has shown that older workers are as productive as younger workers and that when it comes to aspects of workplace behaviours such as mentoring, age is positively related to performance (Borman & Motowildo, 2007). The research examined if those interviewed felt less inclined or motivated to train and improve their skillset as they got older and if their remaining length of time in the company impacted on their goals. The barriers to participation were also examined in depth, including external factors such as time, family commitments and financial shortcomings. The research also examines Erikson's theories on generativity vs stagnation to establish if stagnation had impacted upon those interviewed.

Generativity versus stagnation is the seventh of eight stages of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which usually takes place during middle adulthood

Generativity is how a person creates and accomplishes things to improve their environment. Amongst the characteristics of generativity are:

- Family relationships and commitments
- The mentoring of others and passing on of knowledge to the next generation

On the other hand, stagnation occurs when a person fails to find a way to contribute. In a work context, this manifests itself by workers withdrawing and becoming disconnected and disengaged from the work environment. Some characteristics of stagnation include:

- Self-centredness
- Withdrawing from involvement and engagement with others
- Reduced productivity
- No efforts to improve the self
- Selfishness

The research will examine if this effects the motivation of the interviewees. It will also examine if the traits of adult learners as discussed in the existing literature hold true.

Self-directed

Adults want to be responsible for their life decisions and included in this is their learning.

Results-oriented

Adult learners prefer relevant need information that can be immediately useful in a professional context. They also like to know why they are learning.

Life experience

Adult learners like to reference and link their learning with past experiences and like to discuss and share these experiences in class. These theories will be examined as part of the interview process

The Company

The methodology employed by this study is single phenomenon case study approach.

The environment concerned is a multinational manufacturing company in Dublin City, Ireland, employing over 100 staff at the selected site and 400 staff in Ireland. The company's international network extends to 34 countries and includes c. 50 principal manufacturing facilities, 32 sales and distribution operations and 3 research & development centres.

The organisation's stated aim is to have a winning, engaged, and empowered team, class leading sustainability and growth through innovation.

Although the research looks at the topic from the perspective of the employee, it also seeks to find solutions and recommendations for engagement and training initiatives borne out of the interview discussions.

Good practice from an employer's perspective means ensuring that older workers are not neglected in training and development, that opportunities are offered throughout the working life and that positive action is taken where necessary to compensate for discrimination in the past. Examples of policies and practices designed to achieve these ends include the creation of a learning environment at the workplace; ensuring that training is available regardless of age; and making training 'older worker friendly' by tailoring it to the learning methods and experience of older employees or by providing special courses to redevelop the ability and enthusiasm to learn (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission), 2020).

The research is structured as follows.

Chapter Two is a literature review that explores the previous research into the perception and experience of older workers of adult and workplace training provision. It looks at the existing literature and provides the most common themes that frame the questions for the interviews discussed in chapter Four.

Chapter Three looks at the research methodology employed to research the topic and what topics and questions were asked, based upon the literature. It explains the data collection methods, namely semi structured interviews. Having devised a conceptual model, the research used this model to frame the questions that were asked in the eight interviews with people currently employed in the Irish print industry.

Chapter Four examines the interview process; the answers and topics that arose during the interview process and examines them against the literature and the research to date.

Chapter Five concludes the research with an overview of the findings and Appendix A and Appendix B detail the questions asked during the interview stage and transcripts of the interviews.

The research uncovered many findings of interest and some which are worthy of further research. Many of the barriers that people encountered were due to time limitations, financial issues, a difficulty in obtaining the necessary information from the organisation that would allow them to investigate the possibility of further training. Family responsibilities seemed to feature more in the responses of the female interviewees. Many of those interviewed were in a position to go to college before they entered the workplace, but a common theme was that their family circumstances prevented them from doing so. Many would have been the first in their families to go to third level

education but felt that as there was not a culture of progressing to third level amongst their peers, they struggled to source the appropriate career advice to allow them to do so. In contradiction to a lot of the previous literature on the subject, none of the interviewees had any qualms about training with a different age cohort, in fact the majority welcomed it as a positive, fresh input on the subject matter in hand.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The aim of this research was to look at the perceptions of “older” workers in an Irish manufacturing facility towards adult education and workplace training and their experiences of same during their career to date. This literature review looked at previous research conducted about how older (age 45+) employees perceive and experience the opportunities and barriers to participating in workplace training.

The focus of this review was to understand the experience of the older cohort in the workplace and gain an insight into their perception of training opportunities and seek their opinions on potential improvements.

Only studies published in English (the researcher’s language) and those published since 2000 were considered. The reason being that the researcher wanted studies that coincided with most of the participants career period to date and the time frame was also relevant to reflect the advances in teaching technologies that are under discussion. A systematic search was conducted of peer reviewed journals and books on the NCI library using databases such as EBSCO, Wiley and British Journal of Educational technology.

Searches of these databases were conducted using the key search terms “workplace education”, “older workers”, “stagnation”, “generativity”, “Eriksson”, etc. Having read the abstract, if the article or book was considered relevant to the research it would be

downloaded and printed out to read. The references were then copied to the citation section of the thesis and, whilst reading the printouts, items of note were highlighted and copy / pasted to a work in progress Microsoft Word file.

This information was then studied for themes and patterns and these findings were used to formulate the interview questions.

The purpose of the research is to examine the subject from the viewpoint of an older cohort. This age group was chosen for several reasons. People are living longer than ever before, the age at which people can receive the state pension in Ireland has raised considerably over the past number of years and consequently people are having to work longer to fund their retirements.

During the next thirty years, the number of older people in the EU is projected to rise steadily, peaking at 130 million people by 2050, with their share of the total population expected to reach 29.4 % of the population by 2050.

Eurostat predict that there will be only two people of working age (15-64) in the EU for every person aged over 65 years by 2060, compared to a ratio of four to one in 2012.

It is no longer possible to sustain a career over 40 to 50 years with the same set of skills that you entered your profession with and therefore people are required to adapt and hone their skills throughout. Erik Erikson proposed that the life stages can be broken down into eight stages. Generativity versus stagnation is the seventh of eight stages posited in his theory of psychosocial development, a stage he said occurs between the ages of 40 and 65. Generativity, he stated, causes adults to attempt to leave their mark on society and leave a legacy that will outlive them by making a positive change in society or their environment. The alternative state to generativity is stagnation, although they're not

mutually exclusive states of being. Stagnation occurs when people become withdrawn and disconnected. From a work-related perspective, they can lose interest in productivity, career progression and self-improvement.

Some research (Visser, Lössbroek, & Lippe, 2020) has claimed that older employees who received training are more satisfied with their job than those who did not. Even the availability of training serves as a positive. Moreover, in departments where co-workers participated in training, older employees who did not receive training are more satisfied than those in departments where training is unavailable or in which training is offered, but not used.

The report concluded that providing training to older workers is a fruitful HR strategy for employers to stimulate job satisfaction among their older employees and facilitate longer working lives.

The research seeks to look at the experience of this older cohort in conjunction with Erikson's theory to see if its findings hold true.

The research will compare perception versus the existing literature under several categories, such as

- Motivation to take part in education and training
- If previous experience in education is a factor in willingness to train
- Benefits of training, both to employee and company
- Barriers to participation in training
- Training with different age groups
- Experience of online training and preferences to methods of receiving training

- Attitudes
- Opportunities to improve the provision of training
- Whether a decline in cognitive skills is a factor

The researcher feels that generativity and stagnation are not mutually exclusive and that there exists a lifelong tension between the two states. This is reflected in the findings of the interviews conducted, with all interviewees professing a willingness to continue their lifelong learning journey, whilst simultaneously expressing a suspicion that it may be used to increase their workload. Some felt that training would “only” be for self-actualisation as their opportunities to progress were limited in the organisation due to low staff turnover.

Education and training are key factors for successful work performance. Continuous improvement is now an embedded feature in all successful organisations, and workers are required to be agile and adapt to these changes accordingly. Because of this constantly evolving workplace, lifelong learning is now considered by many to be essential.

Older workers maintain and update their knowledge and skills by participating in training, which should make it easier to continue working until older ages. Training increases their job and personal resources, which makes them more equipped to handle high job demands (Visser, Lössbroek, & Lippe, 2020).

Formal qualifications and conventional training models are no longer deemed sufficient to deal with the changing demands of the modern employee, both inside and outside the workplace. Education and training are now considered key to engaging people and

lifelong learning is crucial to prolonging careers by updating knowledge and skills continuously (Dehmel, 2005)

Lifelong learning is vital for people of all age groups, but the take up of older staff for lifelong learning needs to be heightened, as their participation is much lower than that of younger employees. 63.4% of people surveyed in Ireland aged 25-34 had participated in lifelong learning in the previous twelve months compared with only four in ten 40.5% aged 55-64 (CSO, 2018).

Lifelong learning has been described as “the continuing development of knowledge and skills that people experience after formal education and throughout their lives” (Encarta, 2008). This learning allows participants to build on their previous learning and expand their knowledge and skills.

The basis of lifelong learning is that people do not gain all of the knowledge and skills they need for their lifetime and so they must look to enhance their skills throughout their lifetime.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy report stated that the ageing of our population will represent one of the most significant demographic and social developments that Irish society has encountered that will pose challenges but will also bring great opportunities (www.gov.ie, 2013).

Life expectancy has risen in Ireland from 66.9 years in 1950 to 82.8 years in 2021.

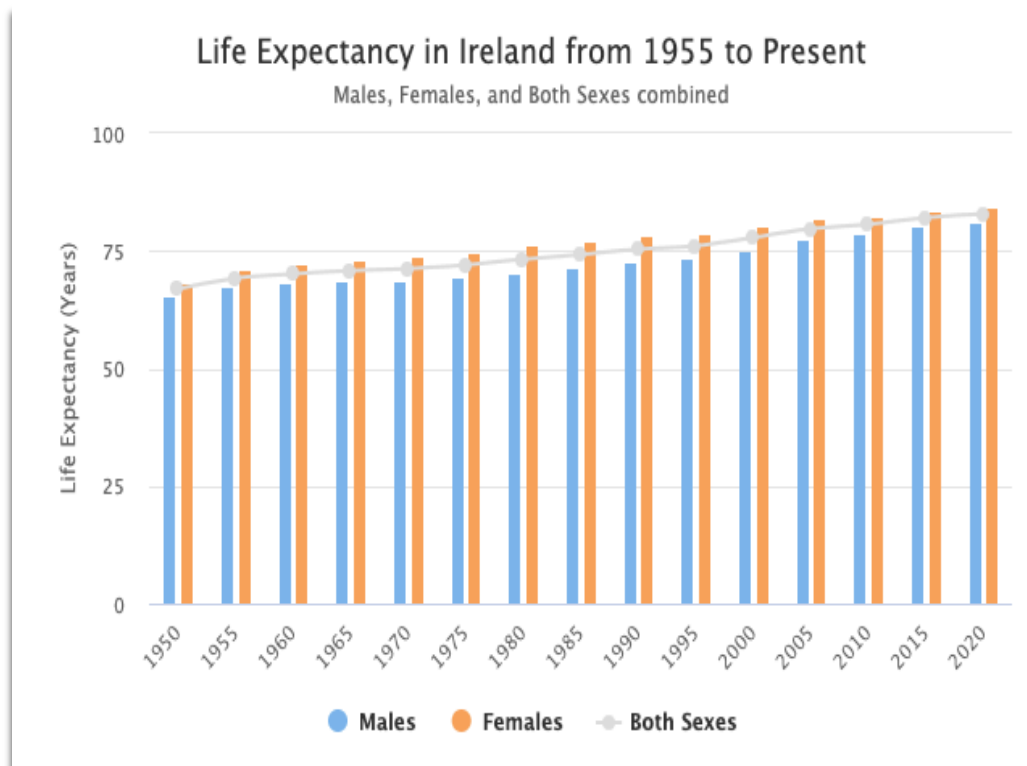


Figure 1 - Life expectancy in Ireland 1950-2021

To reduce the financial cost to the state, many EU countries are increasing the age at which people are eligible to draw the state pension, meaning people are remaining in the workforce for longer.

The total number of adults employed in the EU rose overall by 11.1 % between 2004 and 2019, however the number of those employed between 55-64 years of age increased by 89.8 %.

This older workforce must adapt to changing technology, altered work practices, a possible slowing in cognitive and processing skills as well as the possible prejudice and ageist policies of others.

The Third Age group in the UK have suggested several solutions to counter these difficulties.

Companies should recruit, train, and compensate their staff on merit, irrespective of their age. All staff should be encouraged and empowered to take responsibility for their self-improvement, particularly as the necessity to upskill in skills as technology increases.

Employers should be mindful of the external familial commitments of older workers and make suitable accommodations for those required to care for elderly relatives.

Anti-ageism policies should be pursued and promoted throughout the organisation

(European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1998).



Figure 2 - Older persons in employment by age class (Eurostat 2020)

In Ireland, a survey conducted by the CSO in 2017 reported that over half of the adults they questioned (53.9%) had participated in lifelong learning (formal and/or nonformal) in the previous twelve months.

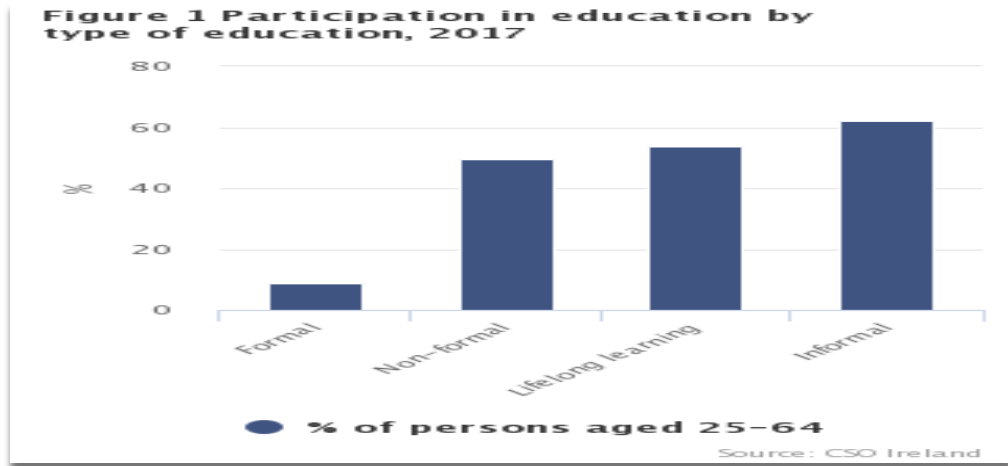


Figure 3- Participation in education by type of education, 2017

8.6% of adults had participated in formal education in the previous year. The unemployed were three times more likely to take part in formal education than their counterparts that were working, however, employed people were more likely to have participated in nonformal education than those that were unemployed.

In 2019, pre-COVID-19, Irish adult participation in learning at 12.6% was above the EU average. In the first 6 weeks of lockdown, the unemployment rate quadrupled. Half of adults risk exclusion from the workforce due to a lack of digital skills. Only 55% of adults in Ireland have basic or better-than-basic digital skills (Eurostat, 2020). With the COVID-19 crisis, and the migration of most teaching and learning to an online medium, people with poor technological skills will now face the additional hurdle of accessing

education and training via computer, rather than in person, something that needs to be borne in mind with older, possibly less tech-confident employees.

Motivation to participate in training

According to the literature, people have various reasons for participating in adult learning but the most common are their own personal development and a desire to improve their job skills. Many also report that workers feel that their jobs are changing constantly and that they require to upgrade their technical and general skills (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) , 2020).

If we look at the reasons for participating in training, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a beneficial theory to assess. Maslow published a psychological theory comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often illustrated as a pyramid.

From the bottom up, these needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging needs, esteem, and self-actualization.

The needs at the bottom of the pyramid generally must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up.



Figure 4: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

The research will look at the motivations of the participants to examine if they are looking to achieve self-actualisation and improve their esteem and status within the organisation and amongst their peers.

Some research states that work motivation does not decline with age, but that age may negatively affect the motivation to train. One reason suggested is that older workers may be less motivated to participate in training because incentives are lower than for younger employees and the social pressure to participate in training may be lower than for younger employees (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) , 2015). It is also claimed, in some research, that the motivation for training declines with age because a reduction in fluid cognitive ability slows learning (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) , 2020).

Malcolm Knowles theories of andragogy attempt to provide a theory predominantly for adult learning. His theories say that adults are self-directed and make their own decisions. His theories are based upon the following assumptions on learning design for adults.

- Adults need to be given a reason for learning something
- They need to learn experientially
- They see learning as a way of problem-solving
- They learn best when they can put their learning to use at once

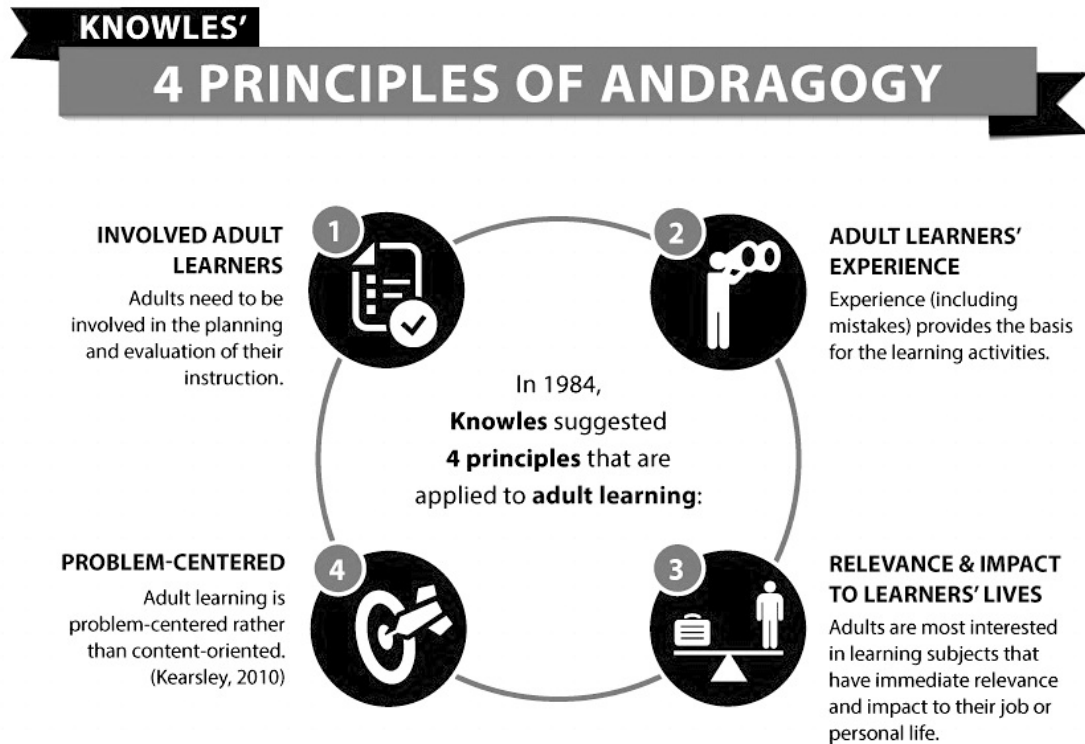


Figure 4 – Knowles principles of andragogy

The research sought to see if this was reflected in the experiences of the interviewees.

In practical terms, andragogy means that instruction for adults needs to focus more on the process and less on the content being taught. Strategies such as case studies, role playing,

simulations, and self-evaluation are most useful. Instructors adopt a role of facilitator or resource rather than lecturer or grader.

Research also showed that the worker's age was not linked to how stimulating workplaces were experienced as learning environments, or to assessment of learning attitudes and motivation, except for memory and speed of learning. The more marked variation was to be found between different organisations and modus operandi (Tikkanen & Nyhan, Promoting lifelong learning for older workers An international overview , 2006).

Another factor for people to participate in workplace and adult education was increase their possibilities of getting a different job. Amongst the personal reasons that people give for taking part, some of those listed include a wish to gain knowledge for everyday life and a wish to formalise their skills and abilities with formal certification. (See figure 5).

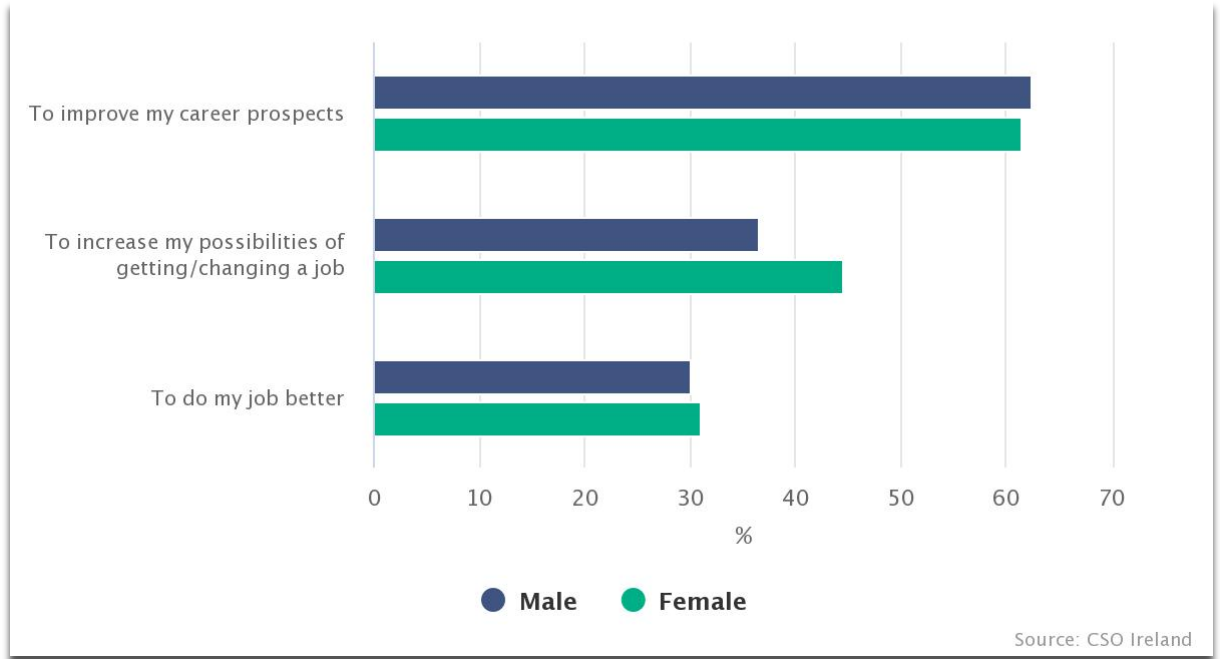


Figure 5 – Job related reasons for participating in adult learning CSO

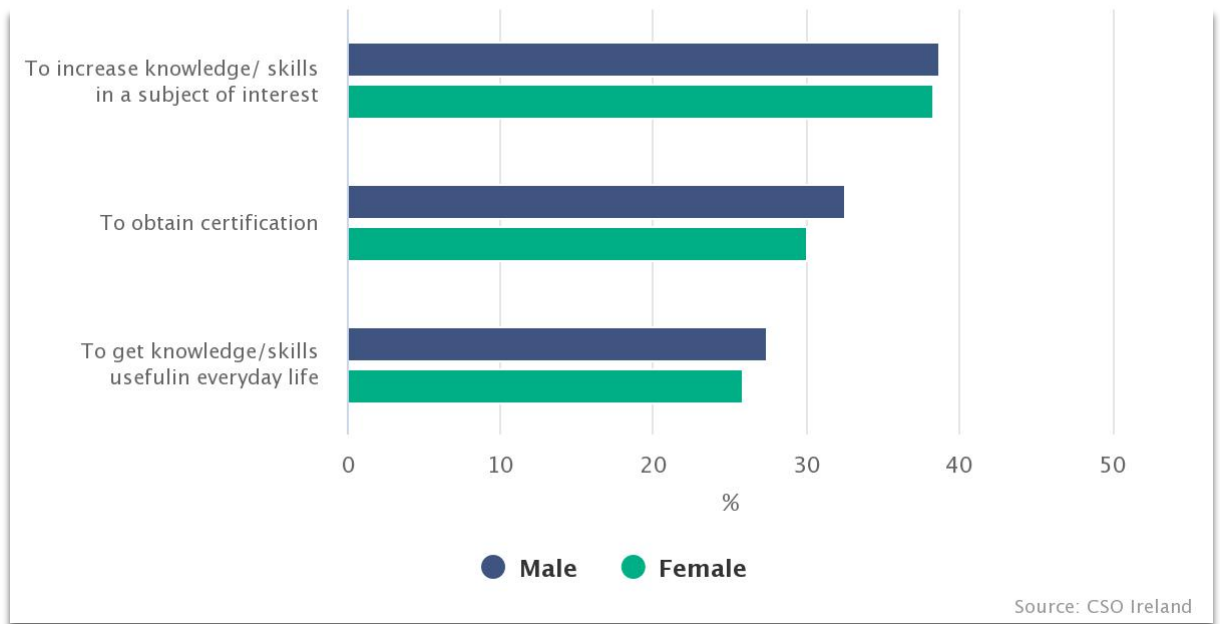


Figure 6 - Top personal reasons given for participating in adult education

One report found that, although workers increasingly see training and education as a necessity, they do not deem the trade-off of time and effort vs reward to participate as enough of an incentive.

Failure to participate is frequently not down to a lack of motivation, but of incentive.

People acknowledge that personal development can improve their career prospects and vice versa, however the incentive and reward for participation needs to be tangible and achievable (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2020) Taking part in training for no palpable progression can ultimately be counterproductive and serve to demotivate those that made the effort for no discernible reward.

Barriers to participation

The main barriers to participation in workplace and adult education in the literature included lack of time, difficulty in funding the course and conflicts with work schedules (see figure 6 below). Other factors that arose in research included occupational status, orientations to work and learning, trajectories of participation, and labour market position influence how (different groups of) older workers perceive and respond to workplace change (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2015). Workload, family obligations, low self-esteem, HR policies, lack of opportunity and difficulty in gaining access to information and guidance are among the main barriers highlighted.

In the CSO survey of 2017, not having time due to family responsibilities impacted more on female respondents (39.9%) compared to one 21.6% of males.

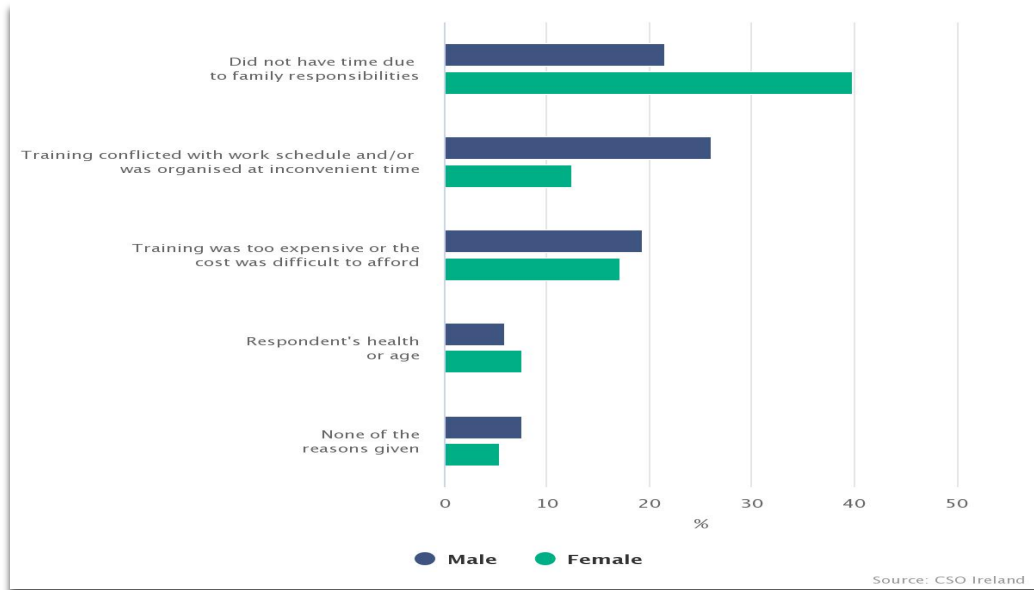


Figure 7 - Barriers to participation in education CSO report 2017

Some other barriers identified are classified by Picchio as economic, attitudinal, and institutional (Picchio, 2015)

He writes that human capital theory shapes the organisational and individual decision making whether to invest in knowledge by comparing expected returns and costs, both monetary and non-monetary components, such as psychological costs and motivational returns. People will take part in training when the discounted returns outweigh the costs. Similarly, companies see training in the same way.

As older employees have a shorter expected lifespan in the company until retirement, workers and employers will have less time to apply and profit from the benefits of training. Training older workers, using this logic, offers a lower return on investment to both employer and employee.

Picchio also claims that training performance is worse among older workers than younger ones, so firms will find it makes more economic sense to invest in training younger workers from a productivity standpoint. (This theory is arguably contradicted however by the likelihood that a younger person is more likely to leave the organisation).

He also claims that older workers are less motivated to train without a proportional change in earnings.

A negative perception of older workers potential to train is also flagged, with the claim that employers commonly consider older workers to have lower learning potential. This bias can in turn cause some older workers to lack confidence in their own ability to learn (Picchio, 2015). To counter this, a report on training older workers found that job competence of older workers was generally highly valued.

Negative attitudes towards older workers and the view that they lack competence and that their skills are dated, was not supported. On the contrary, mature workers bring a range of knowledge, skills, experience, and positive attitudes to the workplace, complementing those of less experienced workers. Older workers who gained valuable knowledge and skills through training may transfer some of the acquired knowledge and skills to their colleagues, who then benefit from this training in a comparable way as the workers who participated in the training themselves, albeit likely to a smaller extent. Even if the new knowledge and skills are not transmitted to colleagues, workers who have participated in training are more likely to help their co-workers (Visser, Lössbroek, & Lippe, 2020).

Differences in competence among workers were ascribed to individual characteristics rather than to age, particularly among management (Tikkanen & Nyhan, Promoting lifelong learning for older workers An international overview , 2006).

Another barrier to participation from older staff is the length of training courses. The longer a course runs, the nearer to retirement an older employee is and consequently the less benefit they will derive from it.

The time until retirement has been shown to be a factor in whether a person participates in training. By way of example, a study in the Netherlands found that an increase in the retirement age led to an increase in training participation from older workers.

Finally, the attitude of employers toward older workers and their training is another factor to be considered. Employers should consider the benefits of age diversity in the workplace. Some research recommends organising the work organisation is to develop a favourable environment for workplace learning, by assembling teams of diverse age groups to take advantage of younger workers' theoretical knowledge and familiarity with new technologies and older workers' wide-ranging knowledge of work processes and experience in problem-solving (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2008).

This research recommends a three-pronged approach from the employer to the training of older employees. Firstly, it recommends increased investment in lifelong learning at mid-career to stimulate the motivation to learn, and to enable staff to cope with changes in technology. Secondly, to make training more relevant and appealing to older workers, it recommends adapting teaching methods and content and validating prior learning.

Employers should, it states, be mindful of the barriers that may exist outside of the organisation to prevent participation in training, factors such as the necessity to care for an elderly relative, for example. Thirdly, it suggests recommending a later retirement

date for people so that this may in turn encourage employers to invest in staff that will be longer in the organisation (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2008)

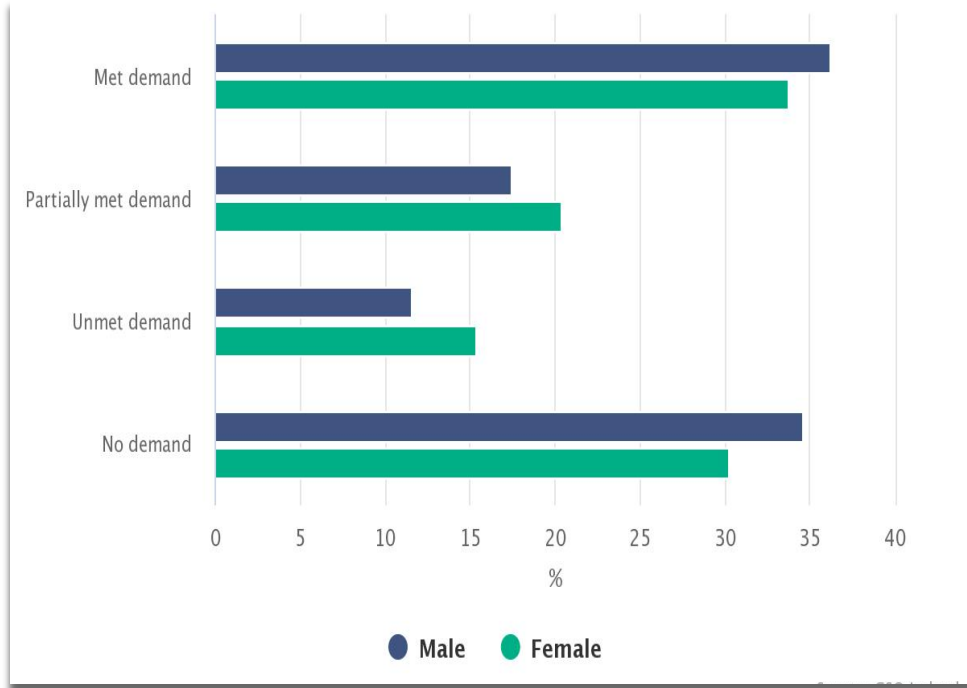


Figure 8 - Demand for lifelong learning by sex - CSO report 2017

Figure 7 above highlights a disparity between sexes in terms of their demand for training being met. Female respondents being the higher scorers on both partially and unmet demand.

Figure 9 Percentage of persons aged 25–64 who participated in lifelong learning in the last 12 months, 2016

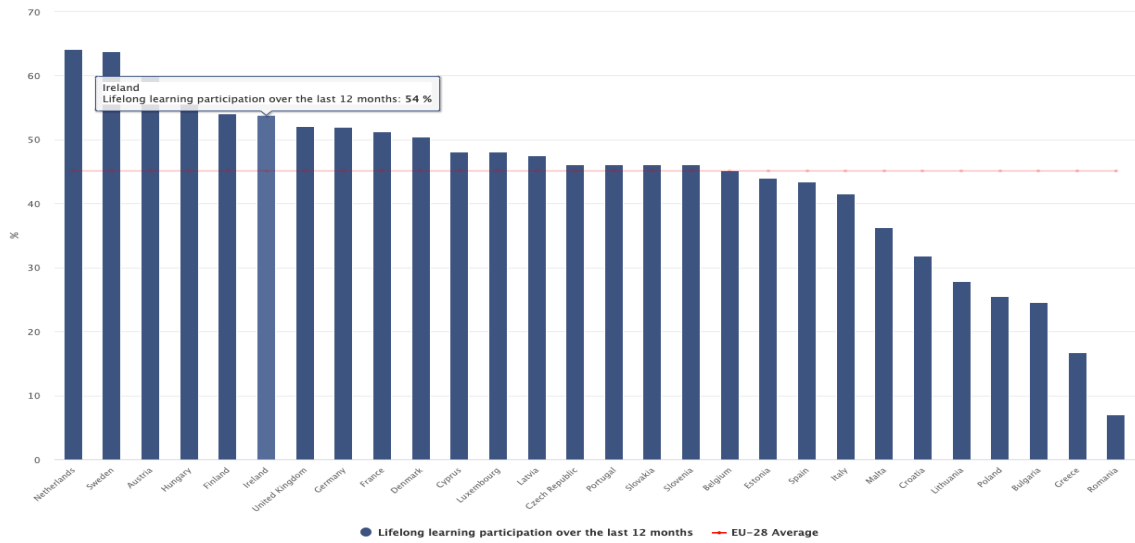


Figure 9 - Ireland's participation rates in lifelong learning vs EU28 - CSO

Benefits of Educational Participation

Training of older staff has many benefits, for employee and employer but also for the economy and society in general.

By allowing older staff to train and extend their working careers in a meaningful sense, this extended career helps to alleviate the pressures the national health and pension systems and to improve individual quality of life and wellbeing (European Parliament and Council, 2011).

Affording older staff the opportunity to continue to train and refine their skills allows them to preserve and improve their skills and abilities. These improved skills have also been shown to allow for a smoother transition to retirement, as the participants are better equipped for changes in technology. Older employees also bring a knowledge and wisdom to a workplace borne out of experience and past problem solving.

Previous educational experience

The CSO survey of 2017 found that the higher a person's level of education attained increased so did the participation rates in lifelong learning; only a quarter (24.7%) of those who had attained primary level or below were participating in lifelong learning while the corresponding figure for those who had attained third level honours degree or above was 71.7%.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed offered up many possible topics that will be used frame the research question. The research was a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews and covered the main topics highlighted in the literature. The research will seek to establish whether Erikson's theories on generativity vs stagnation hold true in the context of workplace learning. There are many examples in the literature that the researcher encountered claiming both differences and similarities in the generational differences in work attitudes and learning preferences in the workplace. However, rather than seek to highlight these and compare them, instead the research will focus on the one older cohort to investigate their experiences and perception of training and education. The literature shows that continuous learning and training are key to successful organisations and employees, improving production and the work experience.

From a staff perspective, training allows you to maintain and improve your skillset and improve your employability.

The opportunity to participate in training for older workers can lead to greater engagement and a sense of feeling valued and appreciated.

Conversely, there has traditionally been a mindset in many organisations that older workers should impart knowledge to younger workers, rather than requiring training themselves. This stagnation of ideas can lead to a sense of disconnect and an unwillingness to train when the opportunity arises.

The main areas of note covered in the literature, motivation to participate, reasons to abstain, is previous educational history an indicator of intent, the barriers to participation, the ways to improve delivery, experience of online training etc will all be covered in the research piece.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Methodology is the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Having devised a mind map to plot the main issues for consideration, (as shown below) the research used this model to frame the questions that were asked in eight interviews with people currently employed in a large Irish multinational manufacturing facility.

The term methodology refers to the overall approaches & perspectives to the research process as a whole and is concerned with the following main issues:

- Why certain data was collected
- What data you collected
- Where and how you collected the data
- How the data was analysed

3.2 Research Philosophy & Strategy

The methodology employed by this study is single phenomenon case study approach.

Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity. and

researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2012). The questions asked at the interview stage all focussed upon the recurring themes that appeared in the existing literature and research, as outlined in Chapter 2.

The purpose of the research was to establish the reasons why some choose to participate in training. For example, career advancement, self-actualisation, financial reward, intellectual stimulation, gain a new skill etc. It sought to establish what the reasons were for non-participation and what the barriers were for non-participation. The research utilised qualitative research, i.e., semi-structured interviews with eight candidates to gain insight into their experience of education both before and during their work life. The interviews considered the subject from the perspective of Erikson's theories of generativity and stagnation in middle age to examine if this may play a part in non-participation. Through phenomenology, the research sought to find patterns and shared experience in the discussions. Phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants. Understanding the lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2012). Given the nature of the subject matter, motivation and the previous studies in this area, a qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate to address this research question.

The main themes for discussion, as outlined previously were;

- Motivation to participate
- Barriers to participation
- Generativity vs stagnation
- Outlook on training with different generations
- Previous experiences in education
- Intentions regarding future training
- Suggestions for improvement
- Experience and perception of online training

In conjunction with the conceptual model these themes formed the basis of the interview questions and sought to explore if these are indeed the factors which influence the interviewees perception & experience of adult training or if there are additional factors that have not yet been covered.

3.3 Participant Selection and recruitment

Purposeful sampling was used. The logic and usefulness of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases to study in detail. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling. The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study (Patton, 1990).

The participants were drawn from the researcher's organisation. They were informed of the nature and purpose of the research, and it was explained to them that their identities will be anonymised. The participants were not direct reports of the researcher to ensure that they did not feel under any obligation or pressure to partake. Those that were interviewed were all above the age of 45 and had been with the organisation for at least 5 years. (The average length of service of those interviewed across the 8 participants was in fact 23 years.) This length of service was chosen as a criterion because it allowed sufficient time for the participant to have sufficient knowledge and experience of the opportunities to train within the organisation and to have formed an opinion on same.

3.4 Data Collection

The interviewees were asked a series of questions in a semi structured interview to discover their opinions and insights into the topics under discussion.

The interviews were carried out in the boardroom of the factory in question. This office was chosen as it's quiet, possible to reserve, has a lockable door to ensure that the interview would not be disturbed and is comfortable, spacious and air conditioned. The interviews were recorded on both the researcher's laptop and phone (as a precautionary backup in case either should fail over the course of the sessions).

The semi structured interviews took place by appointment and the participants, having been provided with a plain language statement, were reminded that they were free to leave the process at any time. The interviews, with consent, were recorded. An hour was allowed for each interview, to allow time for expansive discussion. The recordings were stored safely on a removable hard drive until transcription and then deleted.

3.5 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed, and the responses were studied in the context of the existing literature and previous research on the topic to see if the replies aligned.



Figure 10 Model of the key factors regarding the perception and experience of those interviewed

This model outlines the most common themes discussed in the research to date in this area. Derived from the literature, it is exploratory in nature and as such the researcher feels that it is appropriate to adapt a qualitative approach to the research.

Qualitative methods are increasingly accepted in business research as this branch of enquiry differentiates itself from a scientific positivist paradigm. Human behaviour and organisations are difficult to hold still and isolate, since they change constantly and can offer different dimensions of themselves to different audiences. (Greener, 2008)

3.6 Quality Considerations

In general, quantitative research answers the how questions, whereas the why questions are left to qualitative research (Biggam, 2011). Given the purpose of the research is to consider the perception and experience of workplace and adult training from the employee's perspective a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate. In depth, semi structured interviews were carried out to allow the interviewer to react to answers and probe further in response to the respondent's initial replies. It was also felt that by asking open ended question the discussion may uncover different viewpoints that had not previously been thought of and that the conversational flow would steer the discussion on to hitherto unconsidered topics. The process of interviewing also allows the interviewee to think out loud on subjects they may not have given much consideration to previously and consequently this can potentially lead to collecting a rich and comprehensive set of information. It is necessary to be mindful of the way questions are asked so that interviewees are not directed to a set line of answers. The semi structured nature of the interviews ensured that a thematic approach, derived from the literature formed the corner stone of the interviews and thereby ensured a consistent approach. In the experience of this researcher, managers are more likely to agree to be interviewed, rather than complete a questionnaire, particularly when the interview topic is interesting

and relevant to their work. A face-to-face interview provides them with an opportunity to respond and expand upon their thoughts without the need to submit responses in writing. Participants may be reluctant to complete questionnaires for several reasons. They may not feel comfortable providing sensitive and confidential information to someone they haven't met. They may have concerns about the way their responses will be used. They may have difficulties in interpreting or understanding the questions, a problem that can be overcome when asking the questions in person. Personal interviews, therefore, can achieve a higher response rate than using questionnaires (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009) and again, for this reason qualitative research was deemed most appropriate. Qualitative research is more suited when the questions to be asked are either complex or open-ended and/or the order and logic of questioning may need to be varied. In this instance the nature of the research is more suited to the semi-structured interview process. When the topics for discussion are complex, unclear, or large in number, the time that would be required to complete a questionnaire may mean that an interview is a better alternative. The aim is to obtain the data necessary to answer all the research questions, whilst allowing for the right of participants to decline to respond to any question. A semi-structured interview, conducted in the right manner, is more likely to achieve this than the use of a self-administered or interviewer-administered questionnaire (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

The researcher adopted a thematic approach to the research, seeking to identify and pinpoint key themes within the interview responses and identify patterns accordingly.

The 3 main sampling methods used in qualitative research are quota, purposive and snowball sampling. In qualitative research, a selection or subset of the population is selected to research. Those chosen are determined by the objective of the research and the size and diversity of the population. This research sought to interview 8 participants who were purposively selected based on certain criteria.

The criteria used to select the most suitable and relevant interviewees was as follows:

- Full time employees
- Aged 45 and up
- Employed in the company for 5 years or more (the reason for this was so that they would have been there long enough to have been offered the opportunity to participate in training)
- Role or seniority was not a consideration.

The interviews were conducted over the course of a fortnight in a quiet, soundproof office and subsequently transcribed over the following fortnight. The interviews were then studied in the context of the themes that had arisen in the interviews and previous research and existing literature to find similarities and / or differences.

The data derived from the individual, semi-structured interview recordings was transcribed to analyse the written script in greater detail and search for a development of themes and ideas, both from the literature, for testing in a data-deductive approach and from the data itself (inductive approach).

Limitations

One of the limitations of the research is that it was a small sample size, with eight participants interviewed for their opinions on the topic. It was a self-report study, i.e., an interview that asks a participant about their feelings and beliefs. One of the criticisms levelled at self-report studies is that interviewees may exaggerate or under-report their problems and can misunderstand the questions asked.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The interviewees were drawn from a multinational Irish manufacturing company employing over 600 staff in 4 different locations nationwide. Care was taken to ensure when approaching potential candidates that participation was entirely voluntary and in no way obligatory. This was action research as the researcher was an active participant in the organisation under study. The researcher sought to explore and understand the organisation of which he is a part to establish a better understanding of the concerns and thoughts of staff on the matters in hand. At all stages before, during and after the process, participants were informed and reassured that their participation was entirely on a voluntary basis, that they could stop at any time and that their contributions would be anonymised. It was explained to the interviewees what the purpose of the interview was, what was intended to happen to the information. They were also given an option to read the study upon completion. They were also given an explanation of the Code of Ethics outlining the steps taken to protect their anonymity, how their information was going to be stored and categorised, how their details would be anonymised, and how their data will be protected.

	Gender	Years of Service
Matthew	Male	23
Mark	Male	27
Kate	Female	33
Liam	Male	24
Sue	Female	31
Luke	Male	21
Michelle	Female	5
Tony	Male	20

Figure 11 Participants in interview process

The conclusions are also drawn by the author and are subjective, dependent on the perception of the answers given and context, rather than a straight quantitative survey. Although the answers do not allow for generalisation and definitive answers, they do set the foundation for future research.

Chapter 4 that follows takes an in-depth look at the interviews and the responses in the context of previous research and literature.

Chapter 4

Interview Findings and Discussion

Those interviewed were from diverse departments within the organisation, including administrative roles, manufacturing, health and safety and finance. All of those that were interviewed had at least 5 years' service in the company. This length of service was chosen as a criterion because it allowed sufficient time for the participant to have sufficient knowledge and experience of the opportunities to train within the organisation and to have formed an opinion on same.

The main questions can be divided into these main topics

- Motivation to participate
- Barriers to participation
- Generativity vs stagnation
- Outlook on training with different generations
- Previous experiences in education
- Intentions regarding future training
- Suggestions for improvement
- Experience and perception of online training

Some of the key findings were that the majority of those interviewed had wanted to continue in education when they were younger but were unable to for a variety of reasons, most frequently a lack of financial stability and a consequent necessity to enter the workforce post-secondary school. They felt that the career advice given to them was poor and inappropriate, and the three that had advanced to third level education were all

the first in their family and peer group to have done so. Previous experience in education appeared to have no real bearing on people's willingness to continue in education, however there was a recurring theme of pragmatism from people who expressed a frustration that they were training and improving their skillset with no conceivable career path open to them. The low rate of staff turnover in the print trade had narrowed the path of progression for them and equally it was felt that the length of their service in the company had made it difficult for them to leave without being made redundant, a state one interviewee described as "**golden handcuffs**".

For these interviews the research focused on what were the experiences of the interviewees in education throughout their life and what their perception of workplace and adult education was. It looked at their motivations for participating in training and what barriers to taking part they have experienced. It also used the research of Erikson and his theories on generativity and stagnation to establish if these applied to those interviewed. Those who were reluctant to commit to training were taking a pragmatic approach in response to the lack of progression opportunities available to them, rather than a lethargy or sense of stagnation.

Demographic Questions

Q. Can you begin by describing your role in the company please?

Those were a variety of staff interviewed with various roles in the company, including print, finance, quality control, IT and health and safety. These roles were at varying degrees of seniority within the company and entailed working various shift patterns, some 9-5 and others on double day shift.

Q. How long have you been with the company?

The longest serving employee interviewed was with the company 33 years and the shortest service was 5 years. On average, across the 8 employees they had 23 years' service.

	Gender	Years of Service
Matthew	Male	23
Mark	Male	27
Kate	Female	33
Liam	Male	24
Sue	Female	31
Luke	Male	21
Michelle	Female	5
Tony	Male	20

Figure 12 Participants

Q. How do you describe your gender?

There were five males interviewed and three females.

Experience in education to date

Q. How would you describe your overall educational experiences in general to date?

If you can talk me through primary school, secondary school, what you liked, what you didn't like...What were the factors that made you stop when you did?

Of those interviewed, one left school post Inter Cert (now known as Junior Cert), five left post Leaving Cert, one completed a PLC course and one proceeded to master's level (in their native country).

In general, most had wanted to proceed to third level education but were unable to due to financial constraints or a lack of knowledge of how to proceed to higher education.

Regarding careers advice and the perception that college wasn't a door that was open to them, Matthew explained, "college wasn't as advertised as much as it could have been back then, and the idea really was...Either it was... it's terrible stereotypes, but **the girls went to be hairdressers and the fellas went to work with factories.**" Similarly, Sue explained that she had left education after secondary "I left school then probably around the 70s, and at that stage it was about getting a job.

...even in secondary school it was like "get them through this, get them to do their Leaving" and that was it. **There was no guidance, career guidance, nothing like that**".

A lack of appropriate school guidance counselling regarding options on continuing education was also cited by Luke. He explained that, although he was in the highest of the streamed grades, he felt that the pupils that were going to pursue apprenticeships were

given more appropriate advice. “They were given so much more hands on advice in terms of trades in terms of encouragement, in terms of career guidance and stuff like this, whereas **we were very much pushed academically yet, but not given any guidance in terms of well...What are your talents?**

What are your skills? What would you like to do? How would you like to develop yourself? It was all about the results of the exams at the end of the day.”

Tony, had a similar viewpoint on the subject of inappropriate and unsuitable career guidance, saying, “at the time **there was no real guidance for me at that time to say this is what you need to do.** This is a CAO. This is how you get into college because there was nobody around me that was going to college at that time. We had this career guidance guy.... He just kept coming in and talking about having to study six hours a day to become a doctor. No relevance. He should have known what level our school was at.

You weren’t going to get doctors out of our school at that time. We were like the Bash Street Kids.” Mark stated that in his area as a child, “I left at the age of 15.

At the time it wasn’t too common to progress into doing your Leaving Cert. As a matter of fact, **there was only three in the class that went on to do the Leaving Cert.**”

Financial pressures to begin work straight from school and bypass college was a very common issue amongst those interviewed. Sue was one who had wanted to go on to college but said at that time, “**you got a job and then that path was chosen for you**”.

Liam was another who had intended to attend college and had a course lined up, as she explained, “when I was leaving school my thing to do was going to be accounting technician in Whitehall and that was going to be starting in September, but I got a

summer job and just never left. College came and went, and I never left. I was getting money. I was getting paid overtime. I was working every weekend and I just didn't, it just didn't happen. **It wasn't even discussed. You had a job, you don't leave a job at that stage, it was, you know, back in '88, you didn't.**" (It is perhaps worth noting that in 1988 unemployment and interest rates in Ireland ran into double figures and emigration reached the high levels of the 1950's). Luke was another that was prevented from attending college due to financial hardship. As he explained "I always did well on exams...college was a concern because there was nobody I knew that went. I had an older brother and sister and neither one of them had gone to college. They literally come out of school when they finished and went straight to work. **Eight of us living with mam and dad at home and there was a lot of pressure on just to get some money in and try to help pay the bills and stuff.**" Tony was similar in that he gained enough points in his Leaving Cert to go to college but had to abstain because of an inability to fund it. He was offered a place but "**I couldn't take it because it cost money** and I remember at the time I didn't even tell my Mam and Dad I was going for this because it wasn't an option." Finally, one other recurring theme that arose in the questions concerning the participants experience in education was the difficulties that they encountered when they did make eventually make it to college. Luke studied at night whilst working in a hotel and found the balance of full-time work and study very difficult. He found that the hours worked had a very detrimental effect on his ability to concentrate effectively on his studies. "The effect that had on your learning was that you were constantly in the state of fatigue... if I'm honest **I didn't do as well in the exams as I would have liked...Purely because** you are in a constant state of battle weariness. Even in the days leading up to my

exams, **I was constantly working** and that's not ideal preparation." The necessity to work full-time, sometimes working three or four jobs concurrently through college also impacted negatively upon Tony, who also had a baby in year 2 of his studies, as he explains

"I had two jobs... I even had three or four jobs around Christmas at one stage.

In that third year I failed my exams. And that wasn't my lack of ability. That was just your too much going on. Those breaks that I had really set me back. **If I had been able to go from my Leaving Cert straight into college with no break and didn't have to go to work, fantastic. I probably would have flown it.**"

Importance placed on training

Q. What importance if any do you place on workplace learning & adult education?

All of those interviewed felt that it was very important to continue to learn throughout their career, for several reasons. Some felt that it was important to continue to challenge yourself, others enjoyed completing bespoke, niche courses that allowed them to perform quite specific aspects of their role more effectively.

Mark felt that it took him a lot longer to progress in work than had been attending college when younger and consequently felt that it was important to avail of opportunities to train when they arise.

Several interviewees noted that the rate of change in printing technology necessitated constantly updating and renewing your skillset, with one observing "the technologies are always changing... the job that my sister trained up on no longer exists.

My dad retired from printing when he was 63, he was lucky enough because he scraped

the last few years out of his trade. It just went from hands on, to ...computerised. Trade gone.”

Another, Luke, spoke of the satisfaction that he gained from passing on his new learnings on to his team. “I love trying to help and educate people and harness their learnings and try and give them the support. Be a mentor where possible...it’s good to be able to positively encourage and educate people and learn from them too.”

Q. When did you last participate in workplace related training, on site or externally (part time courses etc)?

The majority of those interviewed had recently participated in workplace related training or adult education. The courses that they took part in varied from 4-hour online auditing courses to longer, more comprehensive Yellow and Green Belt continuous improvement initiatives, that lasted for weeks with assignments due upon completion.

Q. What positives and or difficulties if any did you have with it?

The positives reported by the interviewees were many. They stated that they enjoyed training with people from different departments and locations of the company as it gave them an opportunity to engage with people that they wouldn’t usually engage with. A break from their normal routine and the opportunity to challenge themselves was welcomed. They felt that it was an opportunity to network as well and allow their name to be more widely known throughout the organisation, particularly if the training course had participants from different sites and countries. Mark summarised the positives for himself and the organisation thus, “it’s a combination of **self-actualization**...to improve your own confidence and your own education and then also get work related

qualifications as well as to develop your own skills within the workplace”. Tony came at the question from a slightly different angle because he is both a trainee and a provider of training within the organisation. He saw the positives for those he trains and explained it thus, “I won’t spend time training people unless I thought was going to offer a time saving for them or give them better, faster information. If I’m training you, I’ll say, I know the way you do things now. You think that this is more work for you because you’re looking at it as completely new. I guarantee you though, once we finish the training it will be faster for you, and you won’t look back.” The positives to be gained from training were perhaps more evident to him as he is involved from both sides of the desk.

The difficulties that the interviewees had with training centred around several main themes. Communication from the organisation, poor engagement from their trainers and the inability to focus and engage with online training were key themes.

Many felt that they were pressganged on to training courses without their consent or anyone having taken the time to explain the benefits and purpose of the training to them in advance. Matthew describing his experience of a recent course said, “I found it was possibly someone was ticking a box somewhere else to say people did it because I never expressed any interest in doing it, **it felt like a wedding that I got invited to because someone else declined.**”

Poorly structured lessons were another bone of contention. Liam highlighted a housekeeping issue that caused problems for many participants of online training.

“The comfort breaks weren’t highlighted to us in advance. You couldn’t judge how many slides were left in a particular part and then he’d go we’re going to finish this section and

then we'll take a break. You weren't given the PowerPoints beforehand now so you couldn't tell where you were." Another housekeeping issue, that was highlighted by Matthew was that he discovered halfway through the course that the other participants had been provided with the notes and slides beforehand. As a result, he felt that he was constantly playing catch up and prevented him from focussing on the course content as he was note taking throughout. Most of those questioned had reservations about the effectiveness of online training that I will refer to later. Their main complaints centring around the lack of engagement with lecturers and fellow students and general technical difficulties. Attempting to train whilst on site without being disturbed was another issue that people had. Sue explained,

"I had to do the course in my office...there were people coming in and out. And there was an issue, and the customer was ringing, and the customer was emailing me and then my boss came in a bit of a flap, and I said, "do you want me to come off the course then?" So, I had to leave." Similarly, Luke said, "You can put a sign on your desk, and you will not be left alone, and this is a huge problem... if you're on site, there are other things going to be leaning on you. E-mails popping up which are going to be constantly pulling your attention away, and it pulls your focus." Liam related "the interruptions.... **if you're doing it in an office and people mouth "I know you're busy"** and they're putting stuff in front of you, even though you've got your headset on!"

The main bone of contention that people had regarding training was the lack of communication beforehand explaining the purpose and benefits of the training. Several expressed a cynicism that the course is a Trojan horse that will be used to add to their workload. As Sue explains,

“I’m sceptical as well when I get brought onto a training course, I find myself asking Well, why am I being asked to take part in this? **It’s just going to add to my job, isn’t it?**

Sometimes it’s an underhand way of...well you’ve been trained on this now, off you go and do it. Whether you want to or not.” Tony, agreed with the sentiment, although coming at the problem from the perspective of one that also teaches. He said, “a lot of the issues are communication...communication of not explaining to people the purpose and the benefits for them of training and looking at things differently... people that have been assigned to train are not engaged or don’t see the benefit in it.

But that’s because, they’ve been told to go on the training. They haven’t been told why. The benefits haven’t been explained. So, **they rock up thinking this is going to end up with me being given extra work to do at the end of it. When the opposite is true.**”

Opportunities to learn

Q. *Do you feel that there are opportunities in the organisation to develop your skillset?*

There was a mixed response to this question. Many felt that there were opportunities, albeit there was confusion as to how to avail of them, how they are funded and what criteria are used to select those eligible. Mark observed that “there are opportunities there to learn. Maybe not opportunities to progress but opportunities for learning certainly”.

The printing industry in general has a very low staff turnover rate (as evidenced by the length of service of the interviewees) and consequently people can find that they upskill but cannot make career advancement. Liam also referred to the ambiguity around what courses are available to people, saying “it’s not really getting out it there in your face

saying that like we want you to do this, will you do it. It's basically up to yourself to use your own initiative." However, he did add the caveat, "If you're willing to step up, you're pushing on an open door". Some felt that there was too much training and not enough of a focussed approach to it i.e., the training courses were too generic and broadly targeted to all employees of a certain pay grade, regardless of what benefit they would gain from taking part. As Sue said, "Too many courses, regardless of your role or workload." which in turns leads to fatigue. Another major issue that people had with training is that they felt, once completed, they were not giving the time or support to implement the potential changes in practice or methodologies they garnered from training. Sue again, "You learn new methods, but when you come back here, you're not going to get the resources to do what you want to do. So that serves to demotivate you a little bit. You've got the training and but then it just withers. **You're able to get the training, but you can't implement the change.** There's no follow up."

Luke agreed that training was encouraged but that it was difficult to follow up and utilise the training in a day-to-day setting. He also made the observation that the more pressing demands of production can take precedence over the training, "I've seen it with guys on the machines who are not allowed to take part in certain courses that we offer purely because we can't have that machine down.... if we constantly stay in that deadline of the day mindset we're never ever going to advance."

Motivation to participate

Q. What is your main motivation for taking part in workplace training, internally or externally to the company?

This question prompted perhaps the most varied responses. People were very mindful of the fast rate of change in print technology as well as the vulnerability of their job security and therefore felt it necessary to keep up to speed with advances and changes. The general opinion was that they were happy to continue to work in print and had no intention of changing industry willingly but felt that they needed to be prepared for the possibility of a closure at worst.

Matthew said, “so much is changing in the printing industry, **you always get the feeling that any place could close** and then you need to be able to go to another printers.” Luke said, “it’s always beneficial to have some extra kudos in your back pocket in case something goes wrong... **businesses close** and you know this kind of thing happens, so **it’s better to have more qualifications to stand to you.**”

On a similar note, Mark was motivated to train to stay ahead of his peers, in the eventuality that there would be redundancies. He said “working in a small department most of us can do the same thing. I felt that by getting... another notch in the belt... **if it was a situation down the line and there were redundancies at least you had something else to offer rather than your fellow colleague**”.

Another motivation for people to train was to gain formal accreditation for the roles that they feel that they were already fulfilling. Kate said that although she is carrying out the duties that a formal qualification would qualify her for, she feels that she “wouldn’t even probably get an interview with somebody because I wouldn’t be able to put down on my CV that I’m qualified.”

All said that they wanted to train to be able to carry out their role more effectively. As

Matthew said, **“Generally, your motivation is so you can do something that you’re not able to do in work to try and fix it.”**

The possibility of financial reward and promotion all featured heavily in many of the replies to this question. Self-actualisation was also a major factor. Many stated that their main motivation was a desire to learn more and an appetite for education. Intellectual stimulation was a big motivator for all. Some also wanted to use their training to improve others. Luke stated “For me it’s **self-improvement**. It enables me to help improve myself and others”.

Q. What factors would encourage you to participate in workplace education?

The main factors that encouraged the participants were self-actualisation, having the time to devote to it, job security, a consequential career path borne out of training and increased pay. The concept of an increased skillset making you more appealing to other employers only really featured in the eventuality that they were to be made redundant by their current employer.

Barriers to participation

Q. What is the main factor stopping you from taking part in workplace training / external training?

The main barrier that featured for people, regardless of age or their position in the hierarchy of the company was a lack of time. Of those that felt there were barriers, most reported that family commitments, unsuitable shift patterns and financial concerns were the main barriers to their pursuit of further education. They also felt that there was not

enough information available within the organisation regarding the availability of courses and funding. It was felt that by funding courses it would help to foster loyalty from employees. One employee, for example made a point that covered several of these topics **“I don’t earn enough to to pay for it, and I don’t earn too little to get a grant for it.** So, if there was something that could help employees bridge the gap. But rather than just go cold into an office and ask for funding, if there was some sort of Employee Assistant program you just contact to find out is there funding available for this type of course?... it would help loyalty if you knew your company was paying for the course you are doing for five years. You won’t be going anywhere then.” Liam raised similar concerns about how courses are funded and who to ask for assistance. “You look at a course and think What’s it going to cost me? ... And if I wanted to ask them to pay towards it, who do I ask? Is there a fund? ... What percentage would they pay, if at all? Does it have to be work related? And ultimately, what will I get out of it? **Am I better off asking for a raise instead of funding?**”. Sue explained that her biggest barriers were familial. The company were actively encouraging her to take part in external training and were willing to fund it, but she had to decline due to family pressures. “It was going to be financed...but, at the time I had two kids in school, one was coming up to doing her Leaving Cert. And I just felt no, for me to be out of the house...Maybe two nights a week at college and at the weekend. **I’d be studying in the evening when I needed to be focusing on my children’s education and their careers.**” Family considerations and pressures were cited more often by female participants than male although, admittedly, it was a small sample.

Time constraints however were the biggest barrier for most, across the board. Tony's comments highlighted the fact that even when funding isn't an issue, the time is an issue... **"The main block for me would be time.** So that's down to my own time management. It's not financial, it's purely time."

Future training intentions

Q. Do you currently participate or are you due to participate in any external educational activities / learning?

Four of the eight interviewees were due to participate in training although not all those courses were work related. One employee made a point regarding the changes in his role and the fluid nature of training and adaptability required during the COVID 19 pandemic. "My training is usually ongoing. It's constant. Now we're doing some training on risk assessments from working at home, which is a whole new area for a lot of us because of COVID. how do you do it? You can't go to somebody's house, so you've got to do these kind of remote risk assessments for a workplace, but it's in the person's home. You can't go in. That's a whole new field. If someone had suggested doing that two years ago, you would have dismissed it as far-fetched."

Those that had committed to further training all did refer to the necessity of juggling their work / home balance.

Training cohort preference

Q. Would you prefer to learn with your own age group, mixed or do you mind?

None of those interviewed expressed any negative sentiment about training with a different age cohort than their own. Four said that it didn't matter to them and the other four said that they preferred a mixed age group. Amongst the reasons given for their preference for a mixed grouping were the thoughts of Liam, who said "younger and older people, all have different ideas, so... you get a wide range of what people are thinking. I always felt that **when apprentices came back, they had a different way of looking at things, but also different methods that they would have picked up...**

They're more inclined to ask questions? Why do you always do it that way?"

The general feeling expressed was that a mix of ages is preferable as it brings a variety of experiences and attitudes and helps to prevent groupthink.

Perception and experience of online training

Q. *Have you engaged in online training? Has the move to remote learning / online meetings etc since the pandemic impacted upon you? Do you prefer this method now or did you prefer face to face?*

There were mixed feelings about the advent and adoption of online learning, particularly as many felt that the introduction of online courses and meetings was very sudden due to social distancing measures introduced as a response to the COVID 19 pandemic. People saw the benefits of being able to participate in training with colleagues from different cities and indeed, countries, without having to leave your desk. However, they were also very critical of the technological difficulties, the lack of engagement and the impersonality of classes. Matthew appreciated the efficiencies and truncated manner of online training and appreciated the fact that online training tended not to be dominated by

individual voices in the way that classroom lectures can be. He said, “sometimes you have people who trying to make an impression on other people at the thing and it doesn’t really happen online, so you just get the facts... you’re really at a meeting just to say what you know, what needs to be heard and that’s all you need.” Some preferred the relative anonymity that online classes afforded, giving them the confidence to speak up in classes that they did not have in a classroom. The ability to bring classmates together online from different countries was greatly admired by many interviewees, with the caveat that they only really engaged with their classmates on a very superficial level. All found it very difficult to stay engaged for long on an online class unless the lecturer was especially interactive. As Michelle said, “**online, it’s very easy to disengage unless your lecturer is constantly asking questions...**If someone is giving you a stream of PowerPoint, it’s very easy to switch off.... you’re sitting there and you’re watching the emails coming in and your work mounting up.”

Liam gave his thoughts on a recent course he had attended, “it was seven lads and one girl scattered all over Europe, one in Spain, one in France.

The logistics and cost of bringing all those people together to a single site. You feel as though you know the people in the room on a superficial level, but you don’t really know them as if you had all met each other.

There was very little small talk in the group. Whereas if you went to a site, you’d have maybe half an hour lunch break, you might stay in the canteen together and learn a bit more. You won’t do that online.”

Similarly, Sue agreed, **“the breaktimes, if you’re off site...That’s when you might speak to your opposite number in another company. And that’s when you do some of your learning face to face and you’re doing a bit of networking as well.”**

Tony was already very familiar with training through MS Teams and welcomed its widespread adoption. Prior to the pandemic his role had necessitated a lot of travel and consequently he welcomed the roll out of online training. He explained, “these aren’t new technologies. A lot of people just needed to be forced into using them. **It does make you think how much time was spent travelling, trying to organize the logistics of people from all over in the one room.** The cost. The sheer effort.”

He also was enthused by the newfound familiarity people had with the technology. He explained “they’re using the technology as a matter of routine because it’s been forced upon them by the pandemic. It’s the only positive outcome from the past year and a half in a sense.” However, he was still aware of the communication barriers that online teaching entailed, particularly with translation difficulties. “Body language is a big thing. I deal with a lot of non-English speaking countries. **In person, you can gain a better understanding of how people are developing.** People are more willing to stop and ask a question in a classroom. Online, they’ll let it slide.”

Perceived benefits

Q. What do you feel are the main benefits to participating in workplace training?

The interviewees felt that there were many benefits to participation. They felt that it improved your ability to carry out your role more effectively, that it served to increase your self-confidence and that it afforded them an opportunity to mix and engage with others, on an equal footing, that they may not have had an opportunity to do outside of an

educational setting. The participants said that they enjoyed bringing their learning back to the workplace and implementing change based on what they have learned. It was also felt that increased skills can lead to greater job security and the possibility of pay increases and promotion. Liam noted that, on a workplace training course, status and hierarchy are of less importance and that it also gave him an opportunity to mix in circles that he would not usually on a day-to-day basis. "I found that it's a way of getting yourself more known in the company. You get your name out there... and it gives you more confidence. **You see somebody's job title on a course with you and you think they are much higher up in the firm than you. You assume they're more intelligent than you or have better skills than you, then you realize we're all in the same boat.** We're all kind of at the same level especially if they're coming at it cold... the majority people were all just like myself all going in, didn't know what to expect, you know, yet we all had the same ideas, writing about the same thing and all learning at the same speed. That's pretty good. It's reassuring." Kate noted that, by cross training and developing her skillset across different disciplines, she had perhaps made herself more valuable to the company and increased her own job security. "I suppose the fact that I'm here 33 years as well through so much tumultuous times, **I probably have given myself job security with the cross training.** Maybe unknowingly." Enhancing your skills to leave the firm did not feature highly although one did observe, "You would have that personal extra experience that if you did leave the company went somewhere else, so they're investing in you, it's not costing you anything, so it's a win-win for you ". A desire to keep learning was a common factor for many, for self-actualisation as much as for the company's benefit. As Michelle said, "If I find something that I'm interested in, I will always try to find out

more about it. I might never use it, but I want to see how it's done. I always tell my kids you can't be bored; we have a shelf full of books."

Opportunities

Q. Do you feel that there are sufficient opportunities in the organisation to develop your skillset?

In general, people felt that there were opportunities to train, with the caveat of the barriers that have been outlined previously, such as time, the inability to participate due to work distractions, shift patterns, financial issues, family pressures etc. However, while discussing opportunities, one interviewee, Liam made some very interesting and valid points concerning a disincentive he felt to continue additional training.

He felt that the company would not sponsor him to train in a subject that was not pertinent to his role. "There's no point in me choosing something that doesn't relate to my job or my duties day to day". The print industry notoriously has a low staff turnover rate as can be evidence by the length of service of the participants (this is echoed throughout the company in question), and he felt that even if he were to continue to train the opportunities to progress were not there for him. "I feel that there's a lack of opportunity, so it kind of discourages you. Like I'm at a situation where not that I don't want to continue. I don't want to stop, but...I've done a leadership and management course for a year. It was quite intense from my perspective... leaving school at 15 and so on. **But I feel at this stage now that the fact I've done that and what's the point in going and doing anything else? all the years I've been working here I could count on**

my hand the opportunities that have come up. At this stage I've probably 15 years left of working... do I want to put myself through a degree and put myself through this?

What doors will it open for me? Yeah, because certainly the last 10 years I can probably only see that it was only once that an opportunity came up for promotion. That's one in 10 years, which is very, very low.

Potential improvements

Q. *How do you feel the workplace training opportunities could be improved?*

This was a question that prompted a lot of responses. The main suggestions focussed on clearing up the ambiguity around what funding is available, what courses are eligible to apply for, who decides whether a course is appropriate, what the path is to apply etc.

Matthew suggested taking more of a helicopter view of the organisation. For example, looking at all the graphics departments in Ireland and the UK, running a gap analysis to determine the areas of training that require most attention and tackling them *en masse*, as trying to organise training for just a couple of individuals in a company may prove to be economically prohibitive. He continued, "much more training has gone online, so your geographical location, the logistics of it, doesn't really affect it."

On the confusion regarding what courses are available, Mark said,

They're great at advertising different things. But when you come to look at educating yourself... **I feel that we lack that kind of advertisement from the company.** Yet, if you go and use your initiative and look for something yourself, the company will actually encourage you to do so."

Kate concurred with the sentiment, saying, “there’s a kind of a mystery about it... if we go and ask them to pay for this course, will they pay for it? They could advertise it better. People see a course advertised and say... Is it just a box ticking exercise or are they looking for people to step up and progress?”

I think part of the problem is that there’s so little staff turnover here.”

The difficulty that people have with a lack of communication when they are forwarded for training was another issue that many felt needed to be improved. People felt that it was not explained in advance to people why they have been enrolled on a course and what the benefits will be for them. It was felt that more effort should be made to sell and explain what the training entails in advance, rather than just notify people by email that they should attend. This was an area requiring improvement it was felt. There was also a feeling that some of the training was too generic, i.e., a course being rolled out to all managerial levels regardless of its relevance to their role. As Sue explained, “training is too generic and isn’t communicated properly. As in, the reason why you’re doing it. You’re put on a course. You don’t know why; you don’t know what the benefit is.” As Michelle said, **“It’s just communication. If I do a course, and it’s been chosen for me to do it, I’d like to know why.** What do you want me to get from it? I’ll always do it but what is the bigger picture? Why am I doing it. Communication.”

Another common theme was that people felt that there were not allowed implement the changes they wish to upon completing their training. Time is allowed to participate in the training, but the resources are not allocated to utilise this training. Luke explains, “When you go off site for few days to do a course you end up getting this project work that you must try and do and when you get back, you were not given the time to do it,

you're not given the resources. Sometimes it seems to be more lip service than a genuine commitment." The time allocated for training should be seen in its entirety, it was suggested, allow time beforehand to explain the purpose of the course and training, allow the time for the training itself and then allow people the time and resources to make the improvements that they have been trained for.

To conclude, Tony made some very pertinent suggestions on how to improve communication on training. He said, "**Your staff are your biggest asset.**

Have a regular meeting with everyone. Tell them what's available. Let them opt out if they want. But demystify it... it's money well spent in my opinion, particularly if people participate by choice. You'll get your reward in more engaged, more loyal, more capable staff. But take them on the journey. Don't impose it on them and they don't know to what end they're doing it. Nobody benefits from that. It's a waste of time for all concerned."

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The interviews conducted were extremely informative and the interviewees were very frank and open with their opinions and experiences. The findings shed a lot of light on how people viewed and experienced workplace training opportunities and initiatives and what they perceived to be the barriers to participation. There were five male and three female participants interviewed, all above the age of forty-five and all with at least five years' service in the company.

Older learners are motivated to participate in educational and training activities and to sustain that engagement through a combination of some or all the following factors,

- Intellectual stimulation
- Improved self confidence
- Self-actualisation
- Career advancement
- Keeping their skillset relevant
- A curiosity and desire to continue learning throughout their career
- The desire to safeguard their position and protect against redundancy

Although the majority of those interviewed had left school in the late 1980s and early 90's, there was a high incidence rate reported of people that were qualified at the time to proceed to third level education but were unable to due to financial pressures and the necessity to begin work. They also referred to a lack of information and advice available to them at the time regarding how to apply for college. All were, or would have been, the

first to attend third level education in their family and peer group and consequently they struggled to gain the necessary information about the college application process.

Regardless of the level of education attained prior to commencing work, all interviewed placed great importance on career long training and education. There was no stagnation that Erikson had identified in subjects of a similar age group.

Despite some of the findings in previous research, none of the participants had any difficulty with training with a different generational cohort, in fact most welcomed the opportunity to gain fresh perspectives, different insights and prevent the possibility of groupthink. This coincides with the findings of Stanton, who wrote on the need to resist the stereotypes of generational cohorts in the workplace, *managers need to learn more about individual employees rather than relying on stereotypes of generational cohorts when communicating with employees. Learning about individuals is simple and can foster more effective communication, which will enhance employees' job satisfaction and engagement, and ultimately employee retention* (Stanton, 2017)

The main barriers that people said that they experienced to prevent them from participating in training concerned a lack of time, a lack of finance, inflexible shift patterns and family commitments. Family commitments featured highly, most often for the female interviewees in particular. This tallies with the findings of the CSO survey of 2017 which highlighted the barriers for female participants (see Chapter 2).

One employee highlighted a barrier that the researcher had not encountered prior to his interviews. The interviewee had willingly participated in training both in the company and extra-curricular, however, the nature of the industry and the organisation was one of very low staff turnover and high staff retention. He felt that, regardless of qualifications

attained, there was no career path available due to low staff turnover. He adopted a pragmatic approach and continued to train but purely for self-actualisation purposes rather than with a prospect of attaining promotion.

None of the participants had an issue with the adoption of online training that related to their age or a difficulty with technology. Their difficulties were universal ones that related to lack of engagement, the lack of focus in class, the difficulties of participation without interruption and the inability to forge a bond with classmates that they have only encountered and interacted with online. The technology itself was not an issue with many praising the ease in which they could train and communicate with colleagues from other countries without the need to travel. There was no hesitancy to adopt technology, the consensus was though that teaching needs to be very interactive to maintain focus and engagement.

All participants saw the benefits of continuing to train throughout their career, to stay up to speed with technology, to enhance their career prospects (albeit that the low staff turnover rate may limit these opportunities). Many welcomed the opportunity to progress that was not open to them when younger and all saw the importance of continual improvement.

Regarding improvements to the training, many felt that communication was a major failing in the provision of training. The reasons to participate and the benefits of a course were not explained to them beforehand and instead they received notification that they were due to complete training. This in turn leads to suspicion and cynicism that their role and duties will be added to by stealth. Another bone of contention was that, having completed a course, they were not allotted the time or resources to implement the

changes or improved methodologies derived from the teaching. It was suggested that the time allotted for training should be broadened to include a briefing on what it entails beforehand and the potential benefits, the training itself and then a grace period afterwards to allow for the implementation of the knowledge.

The research suggests that educators should strive to engage more closely when teaching online, as this was a common complaint amongst interviewees. They felt that the classes that worked best were those where they felt that they could be asked a question at any time. A one-way delivery from a teacher left the students disengaged and struggling to focus.

To finish, as the researcher was nearing the end of writing up the research, the organisation in question introduced a comprehensive online learning portal to all employees that wished to avail of it. The portal, similar to Moodle, is a resource for training resources on a variety of subjects such as project management, communication, performance management, change management etc with users gaining points for each module that they complete. It is a self-learning resource and participation is entirely voluntary so the researcher will monitor its progress and rate of adoption over the coming year.

Further research on the barriers to participation, particularly from female participants should seek a larger research group and look for solutions to the factors that are preventing them from taking part.

References

- Çaran-Moroşan, A. S. (2010). The Costs and Benefits of Education - a Brief Review. *Studies in Business & Economics*, 286–293.
- Alan Walker, E., & Taylor, P. (1998). *Combating Age Barriers in Employment A European Portfolio of Good Practice*. Dublin, Ireland : European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions ; [Luxembourg : Office for Official Publications of]. Dublin: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Allen, D. G., Bryant, P. C., & Vardaman, P. C. (2010). Retaining Talent: Replacing Misconceptions With Evidence-Based Strategies. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 24(2), 48.
- Avis, J. (2010). *Teaching In Lifelong Learning: A Guide To Theory And Practice: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. New York: Open University Press.
- Bakker, A., & Demerouti, E. (2009). The crossover of work engagement between working couples: a closer look at the role of empathy. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 24(No. 3), 220-236.
- Barrett, G. R. (2019). Ageing and skills: The case of literacy skills. *European Journal of Education*, 60-71.

- Baumgartner, L. M., Caffarella, R. S., & Merriam, S. B. (2007). *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Beatty, J. E. (2009). Finding Our Roots: An Exercise for Creating a Personal Teaching Philosophy Statement. *Journal of Management Education*, 115–130.
- Beauregard, T., Adamson, M., Kunter, A., Miles, L., & Roper, I. (2020). Diversity in the work–life interface: introduction to the special issue. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 465-478.
- Benson, J., Brown, M., Glennie, M., O'Donnell, M., & O'Keefe, P. (2018). The generational “exchange” rate: How generations convert career development satisfaction into organisational commitment or neglect of work. *Human Resource Man. Human Resource Management Journal*, 524-539.
- Berg, S., & Chyung, S. (2008). Factors that influence informal learning in the workplace. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 229-244.
- Berge, Z. L., & Berge, M. B. (2019). The economic ABCs of educating and training generations X, Y, AND Z. *Performance Improvement*. May2019, Vol. 58 Issue 5, p44-53. , 44-53.
- Biggam, J. (2011). *Succeeding with your Master's dissertation* (2nd Edition ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Billett, S., & Choy, S. (2013). Learning through work: Emerging perspectives and new challenges. *The Journal of Workplace Learning*, 264-276.

- Bogdan, R. C. (2007). *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Boston: Pearson.
- Boone, J. B. (2019). Retooling for Change: Theories for Workplace and Higher Education in a Connected World. *Business Journal for Entrepreneurs*, 15–35.
- Bowne, M. (2017). Developing a Teaching Philosophy. *The Journal of Effective Teaching*, 59-63.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1990). *The Skillful Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bryan, C., & Clegg, K. (2007). *Innovative assessment in higher education*. New York: Routledge.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bussin, M., & Diez, F. (2017). *The Remuneration Handbook : A Practical and Informative Handbook for Managing Reward and Recognition*. Randburg: KR Publishing.
- Caesens, G., Stinglhamber, F., & Luypaert, G. (2014). The impact of work engagement and workaholism on well-being: the role of work-related social support. *Career Development International*, 19(7), 813-835.
- Carlsten, T., & Olsen, D. (2019). Lifelong learning among older professionals: How competence strategies and perceptions of professional learning affect pastors' participation. *European Journal of Education*, 93-102.

- Cartwright, S., & Cooper, C. L. (1993). Of Mergers, Marriage and Divorce: The Issues of Staff Retention. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 8(6), 7-10.
- Caughlin, D. E. (2014). Enhancing Your Teaching Experience: Developing Your Teaching Philosophy, Course Syllabus, and Teaching Portfolio. . *TIP: The Industrial-Organizational Psychologist*, 94-99.
- Chalofsky, N., & Krishna, V. (2009). Meaningfulness, Commitment, and Engagement: The Intersection of a Deeper Level of Intrinsic Motivation. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 11(2), 189-203.
- Clutterbuck, D. (2003). *Managing Work-life Balance: A Guide for HR in Achieving Organisational and Individual Change* (1st Edition ed.). London: CIPD Publishing.
- Coetzer, A. (2007). Employee perceptions of their workplaces as learning environments. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 417-434.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2009). *Business research: a practical guide for undergraduate & postgraduate students* (18th ed.). Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cranton, P. (2002). New Directions For Adult And Continuing Education. *Wiley Periodicals*, 63-71.

- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research - Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Boston: Pearson.
- CSO. (2018, January). *adult education survey 2017*. Retrieved from cso.ie:
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/aes/adulteducationsurvey2017/>
- cso.ie. (2019). <https://www.cso.ie/en/index.html>. Retrieved 2019, from
<https://www.cso.ie/en/index.html>
- Dawson, C. (2002). *Practical Research Methods - A user-friendly guide to mastering research techniques and projects*. Oxford: How To Books Ltd.
- Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (2001). Edward L. Deci, Richard Koestner, & Richard M. Ryan. (2001). Extrinsic Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation in Education: Reconsidered Once Again. *Review of Educational Research*.
- Deery, M. (2008). Talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(7), 792-806.
- Dehmel, A. (2005). *The role of vocational education and training in promoting lifelong learning in Germany and England*.
- Desjardins, R. (2019). The relationship between attaining formal qualifications at older ages and outcomes related to active ageing. *European Journal of Education* , 30-47.
- Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission). (2020). *Education and Training Monitor 2020*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

- Driscoll, M. (2005). *Psychology of Learning for Instruction*. Toronto: Pearson.
- Drucker, P. F. (1999). Knowledge-Worker Productivity: The Biggest Challenge. *California Management Review*, 41(2).
- E. Herman, R. (2005). HR managers as employee-retention specialists. *Employment Relations Today*(32), 1-7.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: WW Norton.
- Erikson, E. H., & Erikson, J. M. (1997). *The life cycle completed*. New York. New York: W.W. Norton.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) . (2011). *Working and ageing: guidance and counselling for mature learners*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) . (2015). *Increasing the value of age: guidance in employers' age management strategies*. Luxembourg: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) . (2020). *Perceptions on adult learning and continuing vocational education and training in Europe. Second opinion survey – Volume 1. Member States*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). (2008). *Innovative learning measures for older workers*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). (2011). *Learning while working: success stories on workplace learning in Europe*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Union.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). (2015). *Job-related adult learning and continuing vocational training in Europe: a statistical picture*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.
- European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). (2020). *Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 2: Cedefop analytical framework for developing coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. (1998). *Combating Age Barriers in Employment: A European Portfolio of Good Practice*. Luxembourg : Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Eurostat. (2020). *Ageing Europe Looking at the lives of older people in the EU : 2020 edition*. Luxembourg: Publications Office Of The EU.
- Farrell, K. (2001). Human resource issues as barriers to staff retention and development in the tourism industry. *Irish Journal of Management*, 22(2), 121.
- Farrow, R. I. (2020). Farrow, R., Iniesto, F., Weller, M. & Pitt., R. (2020). *The GO-GN Research Methods Handbook*. Open Education Research Hub. The Open University, UK. The Open University.

- Fleming, T. (2018). Critical Theory and Transformative Learning: Rethinking the Radical Intent of Mezirow's Theory. *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology*.
- Flowers, V. S., & Hughes, C. L. (1973). Why Employees Stay. *Harvard Business Journal*.
- Francis, T. &. (2007). International Journal of Lifelong Education . *An update of transformative learning theory: a critical review of the empirical research (1999–2005)*, 173–191.
- Gash, H. (2014). Constructing Constructivism. *Constructivist Foundations*, 302-310.
- Gering, J. a. (2002). A strategic approach to employee retention. *Healthcare Financial Management*, 40.
- Gialuisi, O., & Coetzer, A. (2013). An exploratory investigation into voluntary employee turnover and retention in small businesses. *Small Enterprise Research*, 20(1), 55-68.
- Gibson, J. W., Greenwood, R. A., & Murphy, E. F. (2009). Generational Differences In The Workplace: Personal Values, Behaviors, And Popular Beliefs. *Journal of Diversity Management*, 1-7.
- Goddu, K. (2012). Meeting the CHALLENGE: Teaching Strategies for Adult Learners. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 169–173.

- Goffee, R., & Jones, G. (2015). *Why should anyone work here?: what it takes to create an authentic organization*. Boston, Massachusetts, (1st Edition ed.). Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Gordon, V. N., & Steele, M. J. (2005). The Advising Workplace: Generational Differences and Challenges . *NACADA Journal* 25 (1), 26–30.
- Govaerts, N., Kyndt, E., Dochy, F., & Baert, H. (2011). Influence of learning and working climate on the retention of talented employees", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 23 Issue: 1, pp.35-55. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 23(1), 35-55.
- Gratton, L., & Scott, A. (2020). *The 100-Year Life: Living and Working in an Age of Longevity*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Greener, S. (2008). *Business Research methods* (1st Edition ed.). Ventus Publishing.
- Griffeth, R. W., Hom, P. W., & Gaertner, S. (2000). A Meta-Analysis of Antecedents and Correlates of Employee Turnover: Update, Moderator Tests, and Research Implications for the Next Millennium. *Journal of Management*, 26(3), 463–488.
- Gunnigle, P., Heraty, N., & McDonnell, M. (2017). *Human resource management in Ireland* (5th Edition ed.). Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Havens, J. (2015). *Us vs. Them: Redefining the Multi-Generational Workplace to Inspire Your Employees to Love Your Company, Drive Innovation, and Embrace Change*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Hayes, A. (2006). *Teaching Adults*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Heckman, J. J. (2018). The Nonmarket Benefits of Education and Ability. *Journal of Human Capital*, 282-304.

Hess, N., & Jepsen, D. (2009). Career Stage and Generational Differences in Psychological Contracts . *Career Development International*, 261-283.

Holocher, T., & Fabian, C. (2010). Motivation in collaborative workplace learning : Can participatory methods increase motivations for learning ?

<https://www.learning-theories.com/>. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.learning-theories.com/>.

<https://www.learning-theories.com/constructivism.html>. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.learning-theories.com/constructivism.html>: <https://www.learning-theories.com/constructivism.html>

Huselid, M. (1995). The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity and corporate financial performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, 635-72.

ilevel.ie. (2018). *Irish Newspaper Circulation July-Dec 2018 Island of Ireland Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.ilevel.ie/media-blog/print/irish-newspaper-circulation-july-dec-2018-island-of-ireland-report/>

Intergraf. (2019). <https://www.intergraf.eu/about-print/industry-statistics>. Retrieved 2019, from <https://www.intergraf.eu/about-print/industry-statistics>

- Jitka, N., Jitka, P., & Pavlna, K. (2018). Teacher's Concept of Constructivism in Real Conditions of School Teaching . *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 133-138.
- Johennesse, L.-A. C., & Chou, T.-K. (2017). Employee Perceptions of Talent Management Effectiveness on Retention. *Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal*, 9(3).
- Juvova, A., Chudy, S., Neumeister, P., Plischke, J., & Kvintova, J. U.-3. (2015). Reflection of Constructivist Theories in Current Educational Practice . *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 345-349.
- Kaminska, R., & Borzillo, S. (2017). Challenges to the learning organization in the context of generational diversity and social networks. *The Learning Organization*, 92-101.
- Kaye, B., & Jordan-Evans, S. (2014). *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em* (5th Edition ed.). (M. B. Associates, Ed.) California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Knapp, M., Harissis, K., & Missiakoulis, S. (1981). Predicting Staff Turnover. *Management Research News*, 4(1), 18-20.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2014). *The Adult Learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*. San Diego: Routledge.
- Kranz, G. (2012). Well-Trained Managers Can Curb Attrition. *91.4*(36).

- Krau, E. (1981). Turnover analysis and prediction from a career developmental point of view. *Personnel Psychology, Vol. 34(4)*, 771-790.
- Kriegel, J. (2016). *Unfairly Labeled: How Your Workplace Can Benefit From Ditching Generational Stereotypes*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Lieb, S. (1991). *Principles of adult learning*. Phoenix: Vision-South Mountain Community College.
- Lin Y-Y, S. L. (2012). *Toward a New Motivation to Learn Framework for Older Adult Learners*.
- Loftus, S., & Higgs, J. (2010). Researching the Individual in Workplace Research. *Journal of Education and Work*.
- Loon, M. (2016). *Professional Practice in Learning and Development : How to Design and Deliver Plans for the Workplace*. London: Kogan Page Ltd.
- Lu, L., Allan, C. C., Gursoy, D., & Neale, N. R. (2016). Work engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions: A comparison between supervisors and line-level employees. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 28(4)*, 737-761.
- Lyons, S., & Kuron, L. (2014). Generational differences in the workplace: A review of the evidence and directions for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* , 139-157.
- Mello, J. A. (2015). *Strategic human resource management (4th Edition ed.)*. Stamford: Cengage Learning.

- Midtsundstad, T., & Nielsen, R. (2019). Lifelong learning and the continued participation of older Norwegian adults in employment. *European Journal of Education*, 48–59.
- Murray, R. (2016). *How to write a thesis*. New York: Open University Press.
- Nduna, N. J. (2012). The relevance of workplace learning in guiding student and curriculum development. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 232–248.
- Neto, M. (2015). Educational motivation meets Maslow: Self-actualisation as contextual driver. *Journal of Student Engagement: Education Matters*, 18-27.
- O'Connor, B. (2004). The workplace learning cycle: A problem-based curriculum model for the preparation of workplace learning professionals", *Journal of Workplace Learning*. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 341-349.
- O'Leary, Z. (2004). *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*. 2004: Sage Publications.
- Parija, S. C., & Kate, V. (2018). *Thesis Writing for Master's and Ph.D. Program*. Pondicherry: Springer.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (1st ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Picchio, M. (2015). Is training effective for older workers? *IZA World of Labor*.
- Privalko, I., Russel, H., & Maitre, B. (2019). *The ageing workforce in Ireland, working conditions, health and extending working lives* . Dublin: ESRI.
- Ramaley, J. (2013). Educating for the 21st Century. . *Metropolitan Universities*, 27-39.

- Reece, I., & Walker, S. (2008). *Teaching, training and learning: A practical guide*. Tyne & Wear: Business Education Publishers Limited.
- Rees, G., & French, R. (2016). *Leading, managing and developing people*. (5th Edition ed.). London: CIPD.
- Rocco, T., Stein, D., & Lee, C. (2003). An exploratory examination of the literature on age and HRD policy development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 2(2), 155-180.
- Rupcic, A. (2018). Intergenerational learning and knowledge transfer—challenges and opportunities. *The Learning Organisation*, 135-142.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 54-67.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research Methods for Business Students* (5th Edition ed.). Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Schullery, N. M. (2013). Workplace Engagement and Generational Differences in Values. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 252-265.
- Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms. *English Language Teaching*.
- Shuck, M. B., Rocco, T. S., & Albornoz, C. A. (2011). Exploring employee engagement from the employee perspective: implications for HRD. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol. 35(4), 300-325.

- Singh, D., & Schwab, R. (2000). Predicting turnover and retention in nursing home administrators' management and policy implications. *The Gerontologist, 40*(3), 310-319.
- Smith, J., & Macko, N. (2014). Exploring The Relationship Between Employee Engagement And Employee Turnover. *Annamalai International Journal of Business Studies & Research, 6*(1), 56-69.
- Spencer, B. (2002). Research and the pedagogics of work and learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 298-305*.
- Sprinkle, T., & Urick, M. (2017). Three generational issues in organizational learning: Knowledge management, perspectives on training and “low-stakes” development. *The Learning Organization, 102-112*.
- Stanton, R. (2017). Communicating With Employees: Resisting the Stereotypes of Generational Cohorts in the Workplace. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 1-17*.
- Stewart, G. L., & Brown, K. G. (2011). *Human resource management : linking strategy to practice* (2nd Edition ed.). New Jersey: Wiley & Sons.
- Svensson, L., Randle, H., & Bennich, M. (2009). Organising workplace learning: an inter-organisational perspective. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 771-786*.
- Tighe, E. L. (2013). Defining Success in Adult Basic Education Settings: Multiple Stakeholders, Multiple Perspectives. *Reading Research Quarterly, 415-435*.

- Tikkanen, T., & Nyhan, B. (2006). *Promoting lifelong learning for older workers An international overview* . Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities .
- Tikkanen, T., & Nyhan, B. (2006). *Promoting lifelong learning for older workers: An international overview*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Tortorella, G. N., & Sawhney, R. (2019). How do different generations contribute to the development of a learning organization in companies undergoing a lean production implementation?". *The Learning Organisation*, 101-115.
- Urick, M. (2017). Adapting training to meet the preferred learning styles of different generations. *International Journal of Training & Development*, 53-59.
- Wallach, D. F., & Mackenzie, M. L. (2012). The Boss-Employee Relationship: Influence on Job Retention. *Proceedings of the Northeast Business & Economics Association*, 340–344.
- Weisbrod, B. A. (1962). Education and Investment in Human Capital . *The Journal of Political Economy*, 106-123.
- Wendover, R., & Gargiulo, T. (2006). *On Cloud Nine: Weathering the Challenge of Many Generations in the Workplace* . New York: Amacom.
- Wilkinson, A., Redman, T., & Dundon, T. (2017). *Contemporary Human Resource Management: Text and Cases* (5th Edition ed.). London: Pearson PLC.

www.gov.ie. (2013). *National Positive Ageing Strategy*/. Retrieved from www.gov.ie:
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/737780-national-positive-ageing-strategy/>

Yeung, A. K., Ulrich, D., Nason, S. W., & Von Glinow, M. A. (1999). *Organizational Learning Capability: Generating and Generalizing Ideas with Impact* (1st Edition ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yoders, S. (2014). Constructivism Theory and Use from 21st Century Perspective.
Journal of Applied Learning Technology, 12-20.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

- Q. Can you begin by describing your role in the company please?
- Q. How long have you been with the company?
- Q. How do you describe your gender?

Experience in education to date

- Q. How would you describe your overall educational experiences in general to date?
If you can talk me through primary school, secondary school, what you liked, what you didn't like...What were the factors that made you stop when you did?
- Q. What importance if any do you place on workplace learning & adult education?
- Q. When did you last participate in workplace related training, on site or externally (part time courses etc)?
- Q. What positives and or difficulties if any did you have with it?

Opportunities to learn

- Q. Do you feel that there are opportunities in the organisation to develop your skillset?

Motivation

- Q. What is your main motivation for taking part in workplace training, internally or externally to the company?
- Q. What factors would encourage you to participate in workplace education?

Barriers to participation

Q. What is the main factor stopping you from taking part in workplace training / external training?

Q. Have you encountered barriers in the organisation to workplace or external training? What do you feel are the barriers to participating in education here?

Future training intentions

Q. Do you currently participate or are you due to participate in any external educational activities / learning?

Training cohort preference

Q. Would you prefer to learn with your own age group, mixed or do you mind?

Perception and experience of online training

Q. Have you engaged in online training? Has the move to remote learning / online meetings etc since the pandemic impacted upon you? Do you prefer this method now or did you prefer face to face?

Perceived benefits

Q. What do you feel are the main benefits to participating in workplace training?

Opportunities

Q. Do you feel that there are sufficient opportunities in the organisation to develop your skillset?

Potential improvements

Q. How do you feel the workplace training opportunities could be improved?

Wrap up

Q. Is there anything else that you would like to add?