

*The Talent Revolution: Longevity and the Future of Work*, By  
Lisa Taylor and Fern Lebo (2019) Toronto/Buffalo/London:  
University of Toronto Press, 228 pages. ISBN 978-1-48750-082-5

Catherine Glee-Vermande

Volume 75, numéro 1, hiver 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1068725ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068725ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Glee-Vermande, C. (2020). Compte rendu de [*The Talent Revolution: Longevity and the Future of Work*, By Lisa Taylor and Fern Lebo (2019) Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 228 pages. ISBN 978-1-48750-082-5]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 75(1), 183–186. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068725ar>

make cooperation between management and labour the concern of their work to reduce competition and hatred. I could see why people who lived and wrote between 1856 to 1949 would fear war. The characteristic of a top historian is empathy—the ability to understand the viewpoint of those people in which we disagree. One just wishes that Hanlon combined his insight of worker resistance with a more empathetic view of management. However, despite its limitations, Hanlon's work is worth a read. It could inspire scholars to examine the labour issue from both the perspective of labour and management history. Both approaches have much to offer each other. I believe Hanlon's work can begin the process of bridge forming.

**Jeffrey Muldoon**

Associate Professor  
School of Business  
Emporia State University  
Emporia, Kansas, USA

**The Talent Revolution: Longevity and the Future of Work**

By Lisa Taylor and Fern Lebo (2019) Toronto/ Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 228 pages. ISBN 978-1-48750-082-5.

In an era where organizations are facing big issues related with demographic questions, it is interesting to read a book which advocates for the aging workforce, as the current technological revolution leads organizations to put the emphasis on millennials and to frequently forget boomers.

In three parts and thirteen chapters, the authors support the idea of demographics longevity as “the single greatest opportunity on which smart organizations can capitalize” and boomers, called “a mature workforce” as revolutionaries building a rich and underused resource of talents for organizations.

The first part, based on studies and theoretical frameworks, makes a sort of “zoom out” to place the debate in the big picture and to go behind common preconceptions

and stereotypes. Big picture means that we currently are facing a social revolution with huge consequences on work inside and outside organizations.

The point is to replace today's demographic change as part of a long, revolutionary cycle, not to minimize but to put in perspective the notion of “revolution” and to explain that workplaces have experienced revolutions before and probably will after! However, understanding what is at stake in this revolution may deliver an early competitive advantage. In this context, the whole world of work is dramatically changing with employers and employees facing the same issues, which are: demographics, career ownership, freelance economy, the rise of platforms and the impact of AI and robotics. The authors argue that what is coming first, as driver, and explaining the dynamic of all the others drivers, is demographics, because longevity does have an impact on the workforce by setting new norms and expectations.

The social revolution is taking place in the fourth wave of the industrial revolution called “a tsunami” and described as “driven by technology, fueled by competition and characterized by massive changes in the workplace”. For the authors, if we are considering this point just as a change in our working environment, we will be aiming towards what we want. Quite the reverse, we need to be aware that it's not less than a paradigm shift and act accordingly which means: thinking about managing a “talent revolution” and not a technological or a demographic one.

The early stage of the talent revolution, as it is for each revolution, is characterized by instability, chaotic situations, precarious employment and it affects all workers of all ages. Focusing on demographics diverts from the real issues and challenges.

This is why we need to capture things that we know for sure and which are that, according to the authors, organizations

must adjust to new career realities. They must be aware that the older workforce has similar expectations to those of millennials, that boomers and millennials are sharing a common lifestyle vision. What the technology revolution pushes to front stage is that individuals are controlling their own careers and that, after a long time where organizations were controlling and defining career paths, it's now the turn of employees, whatever their age, to take control of their own next step in today's more fluid and precarious environment. Consequently, organizations need to move from a "career management" perspective to a "talent management" one. According to the authors, talent management takes a company-first approach to the way employees support organizational goals. In this perspective, organizations must think about talent programs that consider the value of an aging workforce too. If not, they will miss a great opportunity for innovation, contribution, productivity ... because workers over the age of sixty, thanks their professional expertise, continue to make important contributions to their organizations. Not only does the mature workforce represent currently the most undervalued and underused corporate resource, but, more than that, the authors believe this underestimated group is "both primary cause and solution for much today's workplace disruption".

They claim that the "real" revolution organizations have to face in a global environment day after day, more and more competitive, is the talent revolution. The technological revolution paradoxically has enabled a more human revolution where talents and the development of all the talents for all employees—whatever the position, the age, the gender—is the key point for organizations to succeed and for individuals to fulfil their expectations. We need to be aware of these new career realities to take advantage of untapped opportunities for growth and profit.

Through demonstration, using the notion of "broken escalator", the authors argue that definition of an "older worker" is not yet precisely established. There is no agreement for what could be an appropriate definition but ageism is still insidious and stifling in today's world of work and spoiling the debate. Whatever the definition, all the mental representations and visualizations are negative. This is why the authors are choosing to speak about "mature" workers because maturity does have a positive meaning when "old" or "aged" does not.

An important part of the book is dismissing, with the support of data and figures, the main argument and strongest presentations, which present millennials as the only ones who will be able to successfully face the challenges of future of work (impact of AI, robotics, rise of platforms...). The authors also advocate for changing the focus, currently on demographic and generational differences, with evidence coming from research and studies demonstrating that millennials and boomers have several traits in common. So, the point is not to have a multigenerational approach which seeks to identify and isolate all the working generations based on their differences, but to prefer an intergenerational model inside which all cohorts are valued and considered. Organizations, when becoming intergenerational organizations, shaped cross-generational programs to allow employees of all ages to benefit and to develop their talents because that's what makes their competitive advantage.

A meaningful image used by the authors is the "broken talent escalator". This notion helps to understand why it is a mistake to "forget" boomers. When organizations frequently fail to use the entire workforce effectively, talents either stagnate or leave, because missing talents at the end of the escalator does have an impact on talents at the entrance of the escalator. Youth employment rises when "older" work-

ers are engaged appropriately. On the other hand, when millennial's arrive in an organization where they objectively can observe some of the employees (boomers) stuck on the top step, a factor which is affecting the whole culture, they experience an uncomfortable dissonance which leads them to quit rapidly (reinforcing the stereotype about millennial's unable to stay in a job!). Youth employment, in fact, rises when older workers are engaged appropriately. This broken escalator, of course, has costs, one of which affects the organization's brand: when millennials and generation Z see a company mistreating or ignoring any of their employees, they deduce that this is not a place they want to stay. So, aware that the challenge for organizations in the global environment is the way to attract and retain talents, it's time to look at the entire escalator for significant changes from top and bottom, and no longer be focused on the wrong end. Consequently, organizations need a new career-path model that is in accordance with both the demographics, and the demands and expectations of today's workforce. Thus, today's workforce is not to be embraced as "multigenerational" but as "intergenerational". An efficient way to do that is to destroy all the myths and untruths that ageism conveys, that is the topic of part two.

The authors analyse myths present in North American organizations that employees are sharing, especially:

- Money myths: Older workers cost more than younger workers did, but demonstration is made that companies are frequently badly or not informed about the real costs of their workforce and studies show that it is not older workers who are expensive, because they are not, but misuse or underuse of them is.
- Peak performance myths or, "best before date" myth: The assumption, in our society, that employees have a limited "working life expectancy" at

around age sixty that created a norm about age-based limitations, which perpetuate ageism and ageist policies in way that does not serve either individuals or organizations. On, the contrary, productivity is rarely age-dependent. Major influence on it is coming from employer attitude not from the actual output from the employee. It is the way the manager is treating older employees that is critical to productivity and engagement, leading them to be involved and efficient or not. The authors are also questioning boomers 'informal role', explaining that it is a key connector unfortunately frequently overlooked. Last, they reveal that the productivity of mature workers often exceeds that of younger employees, because of their experience, wisdom, judgment, and soft-skill mastery.

According to the authors, it is time to move on from these myths to smart strategy! They give the following advice to the reader:

- Forget age as a business driver and foster an intergenerational approach to identify issues all generations can help to address. By using this discriminatory and unfairly based perspective, companies are creating an intergenerational divide that does not exist in "real life".
- Recognize that the workplace requires everyone to adapt to new cultural norms, so identify tools you can leverage from your multicultural workforce to help employees of all ages without expulping anybody.

The last part of the book presents tools and approaches that different actors in organizations can use:

- CEO's must think long term and embrace longevity as a competitive advantage. That will occur thanks to an inclusive culture.
- HR leaders need to step forward and take a strategic role because they have

to think and implement the right talent infrastructure to turn an aging workforce into a competitive advantage. They must be aware that employees are part of their talent value even after leaving the organization.

- Frontline managers have the right place to identify hidden needs and provide education to all employees of all ages. Doing this, they will be able to address workforce issues with “creativity and grace”.

Authors conclude on the future of work where talent revolution should ignite new and different conversations for individuals who are navigating work, life and their own career potential. This is why we need to challenge deeply ingrained myths and to prepare for meaningful career development. In this context, leaders, if they want to profit from the untapped source of wealth in their teams, have to see longevity as their “single greatest competitive opportunity”.

The argument in favour of mature people in working environment is really well done and makes sense in our western countries totally immersed in the myth of eternal youth, a myth that is almost becoming a tyranny. The authors analysing modernity also criticize this way of thinking. Bauman (2007) portrayed our western life as a “consuming life” in which individuals are apprehended in a “best before date” perspective. Nevertheless, the book misses other societies such as those of Asia or Africa in which culture is very different and where older people are highly valued and respected. To rediscover the value of factors like wisdom, experience and taking time (for reflection, for sharing and cooperation), in our western countries—mainly focused on “speed” and “competition”—is healthy. It can help us to think about inclusive organizations, inclusive societies, able to face the terrible human challenges (global warming, massive immigrations, poverty and exclu-

sion...) with a different point of view where the dignity of each person, as part of the humankind, is preserved and protected.

**Catherine Glee-Vermande**

Associate Professor in OB-HRM  
iaelyon School of Management  
Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3  
Lyon, France

**The Personality Brokers: The Strange History of Myers-Briggs and the Birth of Personality Testing**

By Merve Emre (2018) New York, Doubleday: Penguin Random House, 336 pages.  
ISBN: 978-0-385-54190-9.

When Francis Galton posited individual differences existed based on genetics, he turned the world on its head. Philosophers could no longer claim people were blank slates. Rather, they had ingrained traits that were difficult, and even impossible, to change an insight that troubled society for over 130 years. Psychologists were eager to jump on this new idea, proposing various tests and methods to measure these traits. These assessment techniques became the basis for the emergence of the modern world and were quickly adapted by various modern organizations: the military, government agencies, corporations, educational systems, and medical organizations. It is like the world has become one big test. Testing made the world fairer, but at the cost of losing the uniqueness of the individual or the belief that mind, character, and personality were not fixed by nature, but adaptable.

With this in mind, Merve Emre, an Oxford University professor, has written an interesting and thought provoking book about one of those tests, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a well-known model of assessing one’s type or personality. More than two million people take the MBTI in a year. Mostly, Emre has written the story of the two women attached to that model, Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers. Although both were