

ESREA Network *Education and Learning of Older Adults* (ELOA)

14th ESREA ELOA Conference 15-17 January 2025

***Learning and aging in organizations:
transformation and transitions***

University of Upper Alsace

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Mulhouse, Alsace – France

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1. Conference Topic

Learning and aging in organizations: transformation and transitions

The organizational phenomenon is an anthropological constant. It most likely appeared with the increase in the complexity of human coexistence and production, thousands of years ago in the Neolithic. Today, people spend a significant portion of their lifetime within or interacting with organizations. They take on various roles, such as active participants, employee of companies, engaged users (like students in schools or patients in hospitals), or simply clients of the services provided by these organizations. The organizational phenomenon is integral and concerns all areas of life and human activities such as work, leisure, culture, civil engagement, etc. The individual involvement in organizations can be shorter or longer, but either way, the active implication offers individuals learning opportunities and naturally, the time spent in organizations goes hand in hand with the ageing process. In this sense, ‘learning and ageing in organizations’ covers a broad range of topics.

The theme of the 14th ELOA conference aims to maintain this **broad focus on learning, aging and organizations**, regardless of their objectives, legal and organizational forms, or the areas of activity. The focus is on people engaged as participants and active actors within organizations with a special emphasis on two complementary aspects: **transitions** and **transformation**. While the first one can be seen as the passage from one state to another, the second one refers to a more general perception of indefinite change of form entailing an uncertain outcome.

Within the organizational context, the people concerned may be individuals and/or collective entities, both learning and evolving. Furthermore, organizations need to continuously adapt their structures to fit new situations, whether they be changes inside the organization or in the context (Mintzberg, 1979). This adaptation process can be perceived as a learning process – occurring on two levels: individual and organizational. To demonstrate this, a model has been suggested to conceptualize the notion of ‘Learning Organization’. It includes five essential ‘disciplines’: personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, system thinking (Senge, 1990). Beyond the debate on the validity of this idealized approach (Tsang, 1997), one can at least acknowledge the presumably widespread acceptance of the empirical reality of organizational learning.

The learning phenomenon within organizations exists in various forms. They can be regrouped under the umbrella term Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) (Zegwaard et al., 2023). Besides the economically related work being done in organizations, there is also work in educational contexts, and, in principle, non-monetary activities can also be included. To categorize the manifold learning situations within organizations, an Australian research-group suggests a classification of the pedagogic practices in eight broadly defined sets (Billett et al., 2012). The model is constructed on the basis of three variables: the social configuration (individual, dyad or group), the type of support (self-directed learning, with peers, by more experienced people) and the methodological approaches used (autodidacticism, dyadic processes, self or guided learning in groups, active pedagogy, facilitation of work processes, lectures). The model opens the view to the different forms of learning that are used, quite naturally but not necessarily consciously, and/or intentionally, by the actors in organizations.

As already emphasized, the conference is interested in all possible forms of organizations. Nevertheless, one could refer to specific works, such as those on older workers, to further deepen our understanding of these issues. In 2006, an “international overview” established a link between lifelong learning and older workers and summarized the problem as follows: “*there is no blueprint for the way forward. Each community and organisation must find its own pathway based on a dialogue with all stakeholders, listening, in particular, to the views of the older workers themselves*” (Tikkanen & Nyhan, 2006, p. 4). It would be interesting to subject this conclusion to a reality check today, nearly two decades later.

As far as Lifelong Learning is concerned, it can surely be said that this topic has become increasingly widespread in society over the last years. The same is true for “ageing”. Even if age discrimination (Butler, 1969) is still widespread (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018), one can hope that general knowledge on the diversity of the ageing process is steadily extending beyond the realm of expert circles and penetrating society in general and actors of all levels in organizations. For example, resource-aware approaches like the development of reserves over the life course pointing the importance of interaction with the environment (‘use it or lose it’ paradigm) are purposeful (Cullati et al., 2018). It is about adapting organizational procedures and management to the increasing diversity in terms of age and other important factors. The stakes are high, both for organizations and for the employees. In fact, workplace conditions directly impact employee turnover rates.

It is true, that, beyond work, management and organizational situations, the legal-judicial context also plays a role. In French Universities for example, the median age of professors is 55 years (male 55, female 54) and the average retirement age is 66 years (Female 65,5, male 66,1) (Direction générale des ressources humaines, 2023). As University professors have the status of civil servants with reduced professional mobility, they often spend several years, even decades, aging within the same organization. In this sense, one could say that scholars are an ideal typical research subject for ‘aging and learning in organizations’. The presumed privileges of this population contribute to their uniqueness: they typically hold the highest university degrees and remain engaged in cognitively demanding activities, such as research and teaching, until the end of their careers.

However, as for actors of all ages in all types of organizations, job seniority raises the question of maintaining and developing competences throughout the life course. It is worthwhile to gain insight on how “transforming experience into knowledge, skills and attitudes” by being aware that ‘habitualised responses’ can hinder new learning (Jarvis, 1990). From an organizational perspective, the aim is to create a working environment that promotes sustainable working life (AGE, 2023). All dimensions are affected, such as the organizational structure, the culture, the management methods, the recruitment, the systematic professional development of employees, teams as well as the entire organization.

Digitalization has become an unavoidable topic in recent decades. It significantly impacts organizations and individuals in their daily lives, shaping work processes and influencing both learning processes and needs. The rapid spread of generative ‘artificial intelligence’ applications further underscores the growing importance of digitalization and also its risks. Given its profound influence on personal and organizational strategic development, it is crucial to focus on sustainability, social compatibility, and desirability.

Learning and growing older in organizations is not entirely a new reality. However, against the current backdrop of increasingly non-linear careers, accentuated demographic change and rapid technological development, transformation and transitions are taking on a new and perhaps decisive significance. Submissions should revolve around the aforementioned topics with a focus on transitions that aim to contribute to transformation.

1.1. Some of the questions that will be addressed in the conference are the following:

- How are transitions shaped – individually, collectively and/or at an organizational structure level?
- What role is assigned to learning? What are the goals of learning? What role does the learner play in the process and how are they perceived?
- What significance is attached to the chronological age of the learners or their seniority within the organization?
- How are the learning processes organized and how are the learners accompanied (didactics, methods)?
- What transformation is to be expected and/or desired? What are the prevalent risks and what measures are put in place to prevent them?
- What does responsible digital development mean in this context in terms of environmental, social or individual impact?

1.2. Conference proposals may also include these topics:

- Scientific statements and analyses on transitions that integrate or are based on learning and ageing in organizations.
- The importance of learning and ageing in organization transformation.
- The relationship between transitions to the transformation of organizations with regard to learning and ageing processes.

2. Proposals and submission of papers

Participants wishing to present and share a research paper or disseminate results from projects are invited to submit an **abstract** (*Times New Roman, 12; 300 words*).

Please send your proposals as a separate sheet with your name, affiliation, institution, address, e-mail, and a short biographical description of yourself in the third person (max 100 words for each author) to e-mail florence.puech@uha.fr

Accepted papers and abstracts will be published in the conference electronic proceedings.

The conference will be held in English. There will be no remote presentations.

The conference organizers plan to publish a collection of selected and peer-reviewed papers after the conference.

3. Important dates and dates for submission

13 October 2024	Deadline for submission of paper proposals and abstracts
9 November 2024	Acceptance of abstracts will be confirmed
17 November 2024	Deadline for early bird registration (If the payment has not been received by this date, the higher fee will be applicable)
3 January 2025	Final deadline for registration and payment of the conference fee
15-17 January 2025	Date of the conference

4. Committees

4.1. *Scientific committee*

Dubois Jean-Marie, Céreq, Marseille

Durat Laurence, Université de Haute Alsace

Eneau Jérôme, Université de Rennes

Forestier Germain, Université de Haute Alsace

Formosa Marvin, University of Malta

Fragoso Antonio, University of Algarve

Gavens Nathalie, Université de Haute-Alsace

Gilg Marc, Université de Haute Alsace

Kennel Sophie, Université de Strasbourg

Kern Dominique, Université de Haute-Alsace

Luppi Elena, University of Bologna

Many Holly, Université de Haute-Alsace

Massou Luc, Université de Lorraine

Meyer Marie, Université de Haute-Alsace

Mocquet Bertrand, Agence de Mutualisation des Universités et Établissements (AMUE)

Mohib Najoua, Université de Strasbourg

Puech Florence, Université de Haute-Alsace

Schmidt-Hertha Bernhard, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Wilhelm Carsten, Université de Haute Alsace

4.2. Organization committee

Head of organization committee:

Dr. Florence Puech, Research engineer Multidisciplinary Chair “Responsible Digital Transformation” florence.puech@uha.fr

5. Draft program

15th JANUARY - WEDNESDAY

12h00-14h00	Welcoming
14h00-16h00	Opening: Welcome Keynote speech 1
16h00-16h30	Coffee-break
16h30-18h30	Session 1
18h30-20h00	Aperitif dinner

16th JANUARY – THURSDAY

8h30-9h00	Welcoming
9h00-10h30	Keynote speech 2
10h30-11h00	Coffee-break
11h00-12h30	Session 2
12h30-13h30	Lunch
13h30-15h00	Session 3
15h00-15h30	Coffee-break
15h30-17h30	Keynote speech 3
18h00-19h00	City tour (optional)
19h00	Conference Dinner (not included in conference fee)

17th JANUARY - FRIDAY

8h30-9h00	Welcoming
9h00-10h30	Session 4
10h30-11h00	Coffee-break
11h00-13h00	Conclusions Announcements
13h00	End of Conference

6. Conference Fees

ESREA members *early bird* (17 November 2024): 80 €

ESREA members after the 17 November 2024: 100 €

Non-ESREA members *early bird* (17 November 2024): 100 €

Non-ESREA members after the 17 November 2024: 120 €

Students: 50 €

=> Conference fee includes the digital Conference Proceedings and refreshments

Conference Dinner: **20 €** per person, the 16th January (Thursday)

The registration form with the payment information will be available from the end of September 2024 at the address florence.puech@uha.fr

7. Key-note speakers

Stephen Billet, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

Dr Stephen Billett is Professor of Adult and Vocational Education at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia. After a career in clothing manufacturing, he was a vocational educator, teacher educator, professional educator and policy work in Queensland. Since 1992, he has researched and published widely in fields of learning for occupations, vocational education, workplace learning, work, higher education and conceptual accounts of learning for occupational purposes. He was a Fulbright scholar (1999), National Teaching Fellow (2009-11), ARC Future Fellow (2011-16) recipient of honorary doctorates from Jyväskylä University, Finland (2013) and University of Geneva (2020), elected Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences of Australia (2015), research fellow at Oxford University (2019-22), adjunct professor at University of Stavanger, Norway (2019-23) and University Väst, Sweden (2019-2023). His current projects are on: the standing of vocational education, integration of work experiences to promote employability, alignments between learning and innovations at work, resilience in healthcare workers, worklife learning, continuing education and training, developing adaptability through internships in Singaporean post-secondary educational institutions, wisdom in practice and widening access to mature ages students. He is the founding and editor in chief of the journal *Vocations and Learning*, and the *Professional and practice-based learning* book series.

Matthias Kliegel, University of Geneva, director of the University of Geneva's Interfaculty Center of Gerontology (CIGEV)

Prof. Matthias Kliegel is a cognitive aging researcher who has received his PhD in psychology from the University of Heidelberg in 2002 and his habilitation from the University of Zurich in 2005. In 2007, he was appointed Full Professor and Chair of Lifespan Developmental Psychology at the University of Dresden. Since 2011 Matthias Kliegel has been working as Full Professor and Chair of Cognitive Aging at the University of Geneva, where he also is the director of the University of Geneva's Interfaculty Center of Gerontology (CIGEV). In 2017, he was elected president of the

Swiss Psychological Society. His research is concerned with healthy aging and the development and plasticity of higher order cognitive functions such as learning, intentional behavior and cognitive control as well as their neuro-cognitive mechanisms across the human lifespan. He has received numerous awards (e.g., Vontobel Aging Research Award, Leenaards Prize), research grants (e.g., from the Swiss National Science Foundation, German Research Foundation or Australian Research Council) and has published more than 400 research papers. Alumni from Matthias Kliegel's research group hold academic positions all over Europe and in North America.

Tarja Irene Tikkanen, University of Stavanger, Norway

Tarja Tikkanen is Professor in Education at the University of Stavanger, Norway. She gained her PhD in 1998 from the Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, with her Minor in Social Policy. She became full professor in 2011. She has a long experience in research and development broadly within the topic of lifelong learning, when it comes to job-related skills and competence development in working life as well as in the context of the digital transformation and technology-rich work environments (organizational learning and leadership from a learning organization perspective). She has been exploring these issues from different perspectives and within different sectors (private and public enterprises, such as kindergartens, schools, also trade unions). Her current work in RDI is related to digital transformation in society in the context of education, particularly in the areas of technology-enhanced learning as well as skills and competence in teacher education and schools. This work involves dynamic collaboration with a wide network of Nordic and European researchers and educators, aiming at contributing to quality development in higher education in general, and in teacher education and training in particular, to support teacher educators' development of their Professional Digital Competence (PDC, defined as PfdK in Norway).

8. References

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