

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You are listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators and decision makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Workers over age 50 will soon represent 25% of our nation's workforce. Yet, few reskilling and upskilling programs are built to meet the needs of older workers and connect them with employers.

Earlier this month, WorkingNation collaborated with CWI Labs and the Center for Workforce Inclusion on the Equity Summit 2023, a daylong event addressing the workforce needs of midcareer and older workers.

In this panel, we discussed connecting older workers with the resources that empower them to pursue sustainable economic opportunity in today's workplace. Here's that conversation.

Diana McFail, Center for Workforce Inclusion chief of staff:

I am Diana McFail, the Chief of Staff for the Center for Workforce Inclusion, and it's such a pleasure to have you all here with us, both in person and those of you joining us on the live stream. I must say I am thoroughly impressed by the caliber of speakers and panelists we had this morning, and I'm very excited for what's to come this afternoon. I'd like to take a minute to thank our sponsors who helped make today possible, the Aries Foundation, Indelible Solutions, and to our title sponsor, T-Mobile. Thank you to each of these organizations for their valuable support.

Now I have the privilege of introducing our next panel, a discussion co-produced by WorkingNation, the premier media and journalism organization for workforce issues, and CWI Labs, the sister organization of the Center for Workforce Inclusion and its Innovation Lab.

The topic of the next panel is recruiting, training, and retaining, an age-inclusive workforce. Workers aged 55 and above will represent more than 25% of our nation's workforce by 2028. However, there's a gap when it comes to re-skilling, up-skilling, and employment programs tailored to the needs of older workers. AARP found that fewer than 4% of firms have committed to programs that help integrate older workers or support a multi-generational workforce.

Our next panel will explore potential solutions to this gap, including successful skill development programs aimed at empowering older workers to discuss sustainable economic... Excuse me, to access sustainable economic opportunities in today's workplace. Please join me in extending a warm welcome to our moderator, Ramona Schindelheim, along with our distinguished panelists, Dr. Mona Mourshed, Taylor McLemore, and Hector Mujica.

Ramona Schindelheim:

Thank you, everybody. I really appreciate all the people here today and all those people out watching on the live stream, because I think this is a very important topic that many of us in this room or watching are very invested in, but one of the things that we hope to achieve is to get more people to talk about this, because as Diana mentioned and we heard earlier today, our workforce is getting older. We're living longer, it's getting older, and we want to make sure that they are prepared. So my panelists today have delved into some of this in some of their work and as they work to re-skill our population.

Right here to my left is Mona Mourshed, Generation's Global CEO. Taylor McLemore. We have an inside joke. I called him Tyler once before. So Taylor McLemore-

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

I'll respond to anything basically.

Ramona Schindelheim:

We're just all going to mangle our names today just so we can, it doesn't matter, investor who has invested in entrepreneurs of different ages in the tech space. And Hector Mujica, Google.org's head of philanthropy for the Americas, and Hector actually sits on our WorkingNation advisory board as Mona does, so very proud to have them all here.

The first thing I want, I would like them to talk a little bit before we go into the questions and say a little bit more about their interest in this area, and I'll just start to my left with Mona.

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

Sure, so delighted to be here. So I lead Generation, which is a global nonprofit that supports adults to achieve economic mobility. And we initially focused on youth, and then in about 2018-2019, we realized just the massive demand from mid-career and older workers for transitioning career, and so we began serving them as well.

Ramona Schindelheim:

Can I just interrupt and ask, mid-career, what do you talk, 45?

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

So age 45 plus, but we support learners well into their 60s and beyond. And then we additionally also engage in global research on how to support mid-career and older workers to transition careers, and we actually just last week launched a new report in partnership with the OECD.

Ramona Schindelheim:

And we will jump into that momentarily.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

Very excited to be here as well. Taylor McLemore, I invest in companies at this intersection of career-connected learning and employer solutions, because I believe it is one of the most critical ways to unlock human potential. And I really start there because it's unlocking human potential through work and learning that allows us to talk, at least for us at Future State, the firm that I've built that is focusing on this, to think about economic mobility, which is absolutely critical, we need more of that, it's in decline. But also to think about, what is the journey of the individual, to say, what is their gifts and talents, and what do they care about, and how do we think about their self-actualization through that process? Because I think the ultimate achievement would be economic mobility that makes people happier to contribute to their lives, their families, and their communities.

So try to really think it holistically from the individual out.

Hector Mujica, Google.org head of economic opportunity for Americas:

Everyone happy to be here with you all. Hector MUjica. I'm partially here because I can't say no to Ramona.

Ramona Schindelheim:

Thank goodness.

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

Neither can any of us.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

None.

Ramona Schindelheim:

And we appreciate

Hector Mujica, Google.org head of economic opportunity for Americas:

It. I have the privilege of leading Google.org for the Americas, particularly focused on all of our work around economic mobility and opportunity. And at Google.org, we're thinking about economic opportunity and mobility. We're really thinking about a couple of things. One, we're thinking about education, K-12, K-16, how are we ensuring that this population has equitable access to CS, to digital skills, to ensuring that they're going to be exposed, particularly marginalized populations that lack that access, they're going to be exposed to role models and to the technology that they need to ultimately fill the jobs of tomorrow. Then we also have a body of work, probably the biggest body of work, around how do we ensure that individuals who have either gone through traditional pathways of education, really looking at what we call STARs, individuals that are skilled through alternate routes, individuals for whom a traditional four-year college education was not the right pathway, how do we ensure that these individuals have an equitable shot at also participating in the digital economy, at gaining the right skills, and at ultimately landing the right jobs that have upward mobility?

And then we also have a body of work on the small business side of the house, on the access to the capital side of the house, and that, of course, that ties well together with the employment side because these are the employers, so the folks that are going to ultimately be employing a majority of these folks. And we do this work globally. I look after the work that we get to do across the Americas, U.S., Canada, and Latin America, and I'm really excited to be diving in with you all.

Ramona Schindelheim:

Mona mentioned that Generation and OECD just put out a new report called the Mid-Career Opportunity. And first, I love the title because it is an opportunity, whereas a lot of people are concerned, as we are, that there's not enough attention being paid to that mid-career worker, that older worker. So your report talks about the opportunity, but first I thought it was really interesting that what employers are looking for in terms of training and up-skilling is different than the way the mid-career and older worker sees it.

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

Very much so. So just to put it in context, so we surveyed thousands of mid-career and older workers who successfully switched careers, those who want to switch careers but haven't jumped yet, and those

who are unemployed, and so from age 45 to age 65. And then we also surveyed thousands of employers across eight OECD countries, including the US. And here's what we found. So first and foremost, let me just put some numbers to some of the sentiments that we heard during the morning session. So 60% of the potential switchers and those that had successfully transitioned careers said that age was their greatest barrier to switching careers. So even if you made it, 60% still said that age was their biggest barrier.

Okay, so that puts some numbers on the discussion this morning, but then when we asked employers, so when you look at candidates from all these different age brackets, what would be your likelihood of giving them an interview?

By far, the age bracket that is least likely to be interviewed are those who are age 45 plus, and it's even lower when it's age 55 plus. Okay, so then we said, all right, well, why? What is driving this? And again, we found plus 40% of employers would say that, "It's because we think that they will not learn as fast. We feel that they will not be able to adapt to new technology, et cetera." Again, some of the sentiments that were mentioned this morning. But then we asked them, all right, well, of those mid-careers that you happen to have hired in your company today, how are they actually doing on the job? And it turns out that 86% of them are performing as well, if not better than their younger peers. We're like, okay, that's one juxtaposition. So now we then said, all right, so now let's better understand what is it that you value.

And we shared with them two mock CVs, if you will. So they have two candidates who have nearly identical technical experience, nearly identical competencies in behavioral skills, et cetera. But one of them had five years of work experience, and the other had 25 years of work experience. So we did not give age, but you can intuit age. Nearly identical willingness to interview.

So what's happening is that the valuing of someone with five years and 25 years of experience was nearly the same. So now you get into, now why do we see this? What we found is that employers value much more training that candidates go through than actually mid-careers with regards to work experience. So mid-careers value their past work experience at a much higher level than employers do. Employers value the training that they go through. Now that's at a threshold. Now that's assuming that you have at least three, four, five years of work experience. And then we also found that mid-careers and older workers, they have engaged in less training, job-relevant training, over the last three years than their younger peers. So there is a mismatch there. And so those are some of the things that we found.

Ramona Schindelheim:

So maybe you guys weigh in on this. I'm curious, do you think employers, and you work with a lot of employers, Hector, do you think they are afraid of the cost? So if somebody young comes in with the training, which they seem to value more, they don't have to train themselves?

Hector Mujica, Google.org head of economic opportunity for Americas:

I think there's maybe to take a step back, I think what employers are likely responding to, and I don't have data to support this, is just my intuition, is the fact that technology is evolving at such a rapid pace that historic track record, I mean there are certain skill sets that I think are going to be in the continuum, that are going to be built upon, and having 25 years of experience is going to be invaluable from a teamwork, a leadership perspective, and so on, intuition, but at the same time, from having technical skills, a technical set of technical skill sets that were valuable 25 years ago are completely obsolete

today, by and large across industry. And I would imagine that might be a factor that's playing out in this scenario.

And in our case, Google as a company puts tremendous, tremendous amounts of resources at the hands of the employees when it comes to upskilling and re-skilling, from the acknowledgement that those technical skill sets are going to be evolving rapidly, and they put a lot of resources at our hands in terms of ensuring that we're going to be tapping into both internal resources for upskilling, external resources for upskilling, and so on, so it's tremendous, tremendous privilege. I think it's incredibly important for companies to be addressing that upskilling gap, because beyond that, you're going to always be falling short of what's happening on the technical side of the house.

What I will say, to your point, Ramona, whether it's too expensive or why are they not doing it, I think the data does point to the fact that employers that are investing in upskilling are not just creating higher skill aptitude in-house, but they're also going to increase retention rates. Folks that are getting skilled within companies have a higher likelihood of loyalty to that company, a higher predisposition to stay in the workplace, so there is a high return on investment, even though it might be costly, there is a high return on investment for the companies to be investing upfront on upskilling on the technical side of the house.

Ramona Schindelheim:

In my own experience, I've been a journalist since I was 20 and worked for a lot of different companies, I went through the typewriter to the computer, ripping the wires off of that machine that you always see in the movies making noise, so now everything comes in on a computer, but the companies taught us how to do it, so to your point, it made a lot more sense than just getting rid of everybody and hiring a whole new batch of people. What are your thoughts?

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

I think the trends that we're discussing make a lot of sense to me. The thing that I would say is that it's really critical to think about it sector by sector and type of employer, because you just used yourself as a great example. Journalist is different than person working online and advanced manufacturing, and I think this is playing out in lots of different ways in lots of different sectors, and so thinking about it at that level of how do we make sure that we see the inventory of skills that are embedded within experience is really hard. How do you truly list 25 years of experience in skills? It's possible, but most employers haven't figured out how to truly make that part of their process yet, and I think that the more that we figure out these ways that education isn't just this big chunk at the start of a lifetime and that this continuing education that occurs really gets captured, all of a sudden, hopefully, because I mostly try to look to the future, maybe those are the ways that we tip the behavior of employers to say 25 versus five. Hopefully we look at all the candidates, but 25 is really impressive. What does it have to offer, and how do we quantify that?

Ramona Schindelheim:

The idea that mid-career worker does bring that experience, that institutional knowledge, that ability to be a leader, those are valuable skills that I'm not sure, and I'm not trying to dump on employers, but I'm not sure they value those when they're just trying to get day-to-day work done, because you only have so many managers and then you have worker bees. I'm going to use that term, I guess. But people getting their jobs done on a daily basis. How do you get that advancement? How do you encourage that employer to invest in those folks? I know we've talked that it's a good idea, but how do you get that encouragement? How do you get them to do it?

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

Can I just piggyback on something that Taylor just said right now? Which is that you do have to look at it sector by sector. We work across 40 professions, and I will say to you, when it comes to health care, green jobs, skilled trades, there is great value that we at least see with our employers with regards to mid-career and older workers. Tech is much more challenging. And so we do need to break it down sector by sector and also be very clear about organizations do things for a reason. They don't do something for a [inaudible 00:17:26], they do it for a reason, so unless we peel back what that reason is and what's getting in the way of offering sufficient training, despite the fact that there is such a rapid pace of change, Hector, I very much agree with you. I think we're at a point now where the pace of change in the workplace is nearly unprecedented.

So to me, this is now much broader than our mid-careers alone. If you're an employer, you have to train up everybody to be able to use the volume of tools that are coming forward. So it's how do we make sure that there is an equity in that opportunity and also equal uptake of that opportunity across employees?

Hector Mujica, Google.org head of economic opportunity for Americas:

And if I can build on Mona's point briefly and maybe also slightly challenge it, I hesitate with the premise of placing tech as an independent industry merely from the fact that technology is profusely taking over a majority of industries, whether it be healthcare... I was just reading an article last week around the level of automation that is taking place in surgeries. They're just having machines cut you up and fix you up and stitch you up and with great efficacy, which is just mind-blowing. And, technology is slowly creeping its way into a majority of industries and is playing a larger, larger, more profound role in a majority of industries. And I think we need to embrace this as an opportunity, but also, also at the same time be ensuring that we're tapping into that wealth of experience and historic knowledge and what, that only people can bring.

And I think we're also likely going to be entering a new paradigm where some of those life skills or leadership skills or workplace skills become much more valuable because those are the ones that machines can't replicate. So I think there might be some tendencies that might be shifting in the not too distant future. Or another one, to Taylor's point, being shifting that paradigm of education being confined to just four years or a two-year master's or a doctorate program and really being a continuum throughout an individual's lifetime. Because, again, technology is going to be evolving so quickly that if we're not addressing education in bite sized ongoing matters, people are just going to get left behind.

Ramona Schindelheim:

The idea that, I've focused on the employers now, but to your point from your report, the worker themselves, the mid-career person, also puts more value on their experience than the training. Do you think it has anything to do with awareness of what's out there? Because I don't think enough people, we're all doing good work in this room and watching. But I don't think it's something that's emphasized in the media, we were talking about this at lunch, to tell people where those opportunities are. So how does someone who wants that training, who says, I think I do need this. I don't know how to do X in Salesforce or something. I know if I had that, I might be able to get a better job. So how do we get that awareness that awareness to the mid career worker?

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

So I would say two things. One is that we have to recognize that particularly for mid-career and older workers who did not have a and who faced many systemic barriers along the way in their life, maybe their education experience was not great. They did not enjoy that classroom experience. So to say, you know, training is almost synonymous with going back to school and who wants that? And so we also have to just reformat what we are saying training actually is. It's not this one year program. It's not like even a three. I mean, it's literally to your point, it's these bite sized pieces that can help you to learn how to use specific tools that are going to help you to engage with this next opportunity. Or it could be, you a training over a set of weeks or whatever it might be. So that's one part of it.

I will say we find, so we have about 100000 graduates now, it is often harder to recruit mid-career and older applicants until we start using what we call trusted channels, which are organizations that are respected and viewed as credible by mid-career and older workers. And we are also very clear that with our Learners Like Me campaign so that they see people who look like them. I should say people who look like us because I'm now past 50. So those two things are really important to bring them in.

And then we also just have to realize people have daily needs. Right. And so the idea of taking time off and doing training when you've got hungry mouths to feed like that's not a happy coexistence. And so we have to be very mindful of any program offering to meet that need to.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

So building on that point, if you look at education as something that we deliver, it's been mostly shrinking for the past few decades, big four year degrees where now in this age of micro credentials for everything, if you go on credential engine, there's a million plus credentials out there and like it's there's a proliferation, which is good in certain ways, hard in certain ways. But smaller is better, but not just like inherently because it's small. It's better because it offers the opportunity for just in time integration into work. And so building on Mona's point, the future for this continuous education, training, whatever language we use that I hope for is that it almost becomes invisible. It's not, hey, I go work over here and then I get trained over here. It's that they integrate so seamlessly that it's not like I couldn't keep doing my job today because I didn't know how to do the thing.

That part of the training that you needed showed up when you needed it so that you could keep being productive so that you could help your team advance, your company advance. And then honestly, you're fulfilled too, because you're able to get the job done.

And so we are at the earliest innings of that despite having lots of technology and this atomic unit shrinking, but that integration to me is the part where we no longer compartmentalize the concept of education separated from work.

Ramona Schindelheim:

So Google has a lot of certification programs out there. And I think in four main fields right now, you're digital or have you gone you've grown.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

We've grown.

Ramona Schindelheim:

Yeah. So talk talk about that and how they're offered and what people can... And I want to make it really clear. There's no age barrier on this. Anybody who wants to do it can do it. So it's open to everybody. But talk a little bit about the programs.

Hector Mujica, Google.org head of economic opportunity for Americas:

Yeah. And maybe I'll reflect also on the on the wraparound support point that that Mona made. So yes, Google has and a lot of companies have put these into the ecosystem now, credentials, that are what we call employer credentials. In the case of Google, these are in fields that are high demand for a company like Google, but also for many of our peer companies in the ecosystem. And they're training people not just on Google tools, but training them for to be job ready and to be applying some of those skills to your point, Taylor, in the immediacy across IT support across project management, UX design, cybersecurity, a lot of the jobs in the careers that are quite timely, quite relevant and growing. And that's all been curated and developed with curriculum from in-house. This is the same curriculum that we use to upskill and reskill Google employees and engineering talent within the company.

In fact, we use all of our credentials in-house, everything that we put outside. We're also using internally that the train folks. And I think what's probably one of the most special and relevant components with these credentials is how we deliver them, less so what's in the curriculum itself. It's great curriculum, it's technical, it's excellent and it's deployed in a thoughtful way. But how how we how we pair it up with the right wraparound supports, I think it's what makes all the difference in terms of what populations we're ultimately able to. And Mona your point, I think we all miss we often miss the fact that time is a luxury, time to go learn time to dedicate even a few hours to study a new curriculum or take a new credential, that's a luxury that not many people have. And if we're not being really intentional about picking in the right wraparound supports to ensure that these individuals that need these credentials the most have a living stipend so that they can afford to not have to work multiple jobs and can actually take this three or four hour course a day and potentially child care or transportation credit or connectivity.

We also take that for granted often. If we're not ensuring that all those wraparound supports as we call them are also being delivered adjacent to a technical curriculum. We also tend to miss a part of the population. So that requires a lot of intentionality.

Ramona Schindelheim:

Yeah, I think people forget that after a certain age and actually many young people who help support their families, they can't just stop what they're doing to take that training. And the wraparounds are very important.

Before we move on, I do want to bring up to the Goodwill Digital Career Accelerator, WorkingNation was very honored to be able to tell that story. And we have a beautiful film that's on our website workingnation.com or workingnation.org wherever you want to go. But it tells the story of three women who walked into Goodwill. And this is available around the country. And they got the Google training that they needed. And they could do they could learn the digital skills they needed. And I think all three of the women are now they were single mothers, different ages. All three are now I.T. specialists. See, it makes me cry just talking about it.

Hector Mujica, Google.org head of economic opportunity for Americas:

It's a beautiful piece. And I would highly recommend folks check it out. It's quite moving and powerful. And it's a testament to the great work that our partners do like Goodwill Industries International. They are embedded in community. They are trusted partners. And these are folks that that have opened their doors. And many of us think of Goodwill as the place where we go leave our clothes that we're not no longer wearing. But but beyond that, they're also the largest workforce training provider in the United States. Something like 80 or 85 percent of the U.S. population lives within a 10 or 15 mile radius of a

Goodwill training facility. It's huge, tremendous reach. And what we've been able to do with them is provide the funding and the support and the technical curriculum through the career certificates for them to be able to deploy what they call the Digital Career Accelerator. So inherently, again, acknowledging that over two thirds of careers are going to require digital skills within the next few years.

How are we ensuring that the populations that Goodwill is serving, which is usually populations that are highly marginalized, both socioeconomically, racially, gender and otherwise, how are we ensuring that these populations are gaining access to the right curriculum with the right wraparound support and ultimately being led to the right pathways and the right on-ramps into careers that can be transformative, which was the case in the case in the lives of these three women. One of them ended up working at a Google data center, two of them went to work at Accenture in the IT practice, transformative.

Ramona Schindelheim:

Yeah. And also Generation is doing similar work. I was telling Mona a story from a story I did a few years ago in Louisiana where a young man, he was 21, never thought he was ever going to break out of the cycle of poverty that he was in and he took a training program through Generation and a partner down in Louisiana. His mother saw what happened and she was like in her early 60s, she took the same program and now they both are like, you IT specialists. And I do get emotional about these things because I think the human part of these stories often go unreported. And these are these are programs that are changing lives. So tell us a little bit more about Generation's programs.

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

Yeah, so our goal is to support an unemployed or underemployed adult anywhere in the world, including in the US, to be trained and placed in a new career within three to six months and to have durable personal and financial wellbeing. And so we very much are focused on how do we help to achieve economic mobility through the career. And so we started in 2015. We're now in 17 countries. We have 100,000 graduates. Our graduates will reach a really important milestone by the end of this quarter. They'll have reached a billion dollars in wages, cumulatively. And it's all them. I mean, they are the superstars.

And so what we do is we mobilize employers. So we have about 14,000 employers across the world with whom we work across 40 professions. We then recruit our learners. They experience profession-specific boot camps that used to all be in person, now it's all fully online or blended. We offer social supports in parallel. And then once they complete the program, they then interview with our employer partners. And we make sure that these are demonstration-based interviews so that they can really show the skills that they have as opposed to you're having a traditional conversation over a resume. And then once they're on the job, the mentorship continues. And then we track their progress up to five years post-program completion.

And it's just every day you just see these amazing stories. Like there was one individual, he was an electrician, working in the informal sector. And now he is a solar panel installer working in the formal sector. And he had been unemployed for two years prior. I mean, it's just similar to the story of the three women. I mean, it's just every day you just see these amazing heroes who just transform their lives. And I think we're just lucky to be a part of the journey with them.

Ramona Schindelheim:

And Taylor, you've spent your career investing in different people who were starting their own businesses. And it goes to that idea that this older worker is trained in maybe a certain field, they have an institutional knowledge, they've got some leadership skills. And the stat that I got from the Small Business Administration was that most new businesses are started by people who are 40 and over. So that's an option for people who are saying, what am I going to do now? How do I take what I have? They may have to build on it a little bit more.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

And I think that's a beautiful parallel of the truth about older workers and all they have to bring, that's also true in entrepreneurship. We are given a lot of these stories and images through media of the Silicon Valley, college dropout. And it's not that those stories don't exist and that they're untrue, but it gets cast across all forms of entrepreneurship. And the stats show, older entrepreneurs have a higher probability of success, build companies with greater impact both in terms of to society, also economically. And to me, when we're talking about these problems, we're talking about human problems. We're not talking about, there are colleagues of Hector's that are doing computational stuff that's the bleeding edge of AI and those things. What we're talking about is how do we use those tools to solve human problems? And so when I invest in a company, the number one thing I look for is does the lived experience of that founding team give them a competitive advantage because they understand the problem deeply.

And honestly, I constantly look for founders who are trying to say, how do we address the fact that we have this broad spectrum in the labor market and the older workers are not being appreciated. And there's a lot of work to be done there. And it's honestly hard to find founders that are focused on it. But it's like, that's what I'm hopeful for is that there are founders with that proximate lived experience that can help drive the solutions.

Ramona Schindelheim:

I also want to direct folks, if you haven't already seen it, CWI, Center for Workforce Inclusion, CWI Labs, they also have their digital certification program that targets older adults who are in the CSEP program, giving them those skills that they need to be a part of the modern workforce. It is supported, I would say, educationally by the Department of Labor. And it's something that they are hoping to roll out a little bit further as well to a broader sector. Right now, I think it's still CSEP, but check that out too, because this is, again, targeting people who could really use that help.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

Can I share.

Ramona Schindelheim:

Yeah, go ahead. Yeah, please.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

Can I just share one idea that really stands out from hearing the great work that Google.org's done and the Generation's does? Is that I think the big opportunity for us is to challenge this narrative we have in society that there's one path to success and it's college. Everything we just discussed was not go get a four-year degree. And it's not that that isn't a meaningful path. I benefited from that path. It's a great one. But 65% of Americans will not get an undergraduate degree or higher. And you don't get to put

that on a billboard and just say, stop believing that there's only one path to success. The way that we actually move society forward is the examples that we're talking about here. It's that your neighbor went through that transformation. Oh, they did it, I can too. People from my community. And so I think that's a critical piece.

And that we also so commonly hear that story told from the perspective of the young person deciding whether to go to college or not versus the statement that like, well, what about the narrative to the older worker? Is it just that we left you behind? No, there's tons of opportunity. And that's the part that I think we really needed challenge as a social narrative.

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

Can I also add as well? So very much agree with that. And I would also say just what brings all of us here today with regards to mid-career and older workers.

Hector Mujica, Google.org head of economic opportunity for Americas:

Besides Ramona.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

Yes.

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

Besides Ramona, very important caveat. So we've been gifted another 30, 40 years of life. And so it's important to frame the fact that I think all of us are grappling with how do you make the most of this now renewed longevity. Age is something that, it's one of the few things that happens to everybody. So what does that mean for us individually? I think employers, on the one hand, yes. I mean, are there ageist practices? Yes, but I think also they just genuinely are also struggling with, well, what does all this mean? And they haven't necessarily seen the gift quite yet. And so I think that we also just need to give each other some grace as we figure this out. And to embrace the experimentation because that is the only path. It took us a while and I could argue we're still in the journey of recognizing that there are paths other than college.

It's going to take us time on this front too, but I would just encourage all of us in whatever part of the quadrant we're in to be able to trial new things and lobby, advocate, whatever it may be, because it's going to take us probably another 10 to 15 years to figure out how to do this right.

Ramona Schindelheim:

The number of programs, somebody had the number earlier, was 10% are targeted to older workers, specifically. So I think to your point, employers are probably missing out on such an opportunity because any given month, what is it? Nine to 10 million open jobs in this country and the employers are signaling in many different ways whether it's through Fed reports or just talking to people on the street. They can't find enough people with those skills. So being able to find that and taking advantage of this group, it's bad business not to. So any employer out there listening, it's bad business if you don't do it.

So we have just a few more minutes. I just want your final thoughts on, we've really talked about a lot of this but what is your final thoughts on what we should be doing here, and how can we get everybody on board?

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

Happy to start.

Ramona Schindelheim:

You can start. Yes, Mona is going to start.

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:

So I would say to all of us individually, proactively invest in your own training and development because honestly, learning is the best job security out there right now. That's point one. And then to employers, open the aperture. Be very intentional and deliberate and look at how the hiring process is happening and who's getting selected from filter to filter, because that in and of itself will be very illuminating versus the applicant pool.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:

I'll hit the point of I think employers and Mona you said this well, like we got to give grace. This is hard work. I'm going to borrow a quote from Andy Grove, one of the people that built Intel which is what gets measured gets managed. And measuring this stuff is hard. So I think there is a fear of imperfect measurements being criticized. And if we all give a little more grace so the employers can try to measure this, the business cases can be built, the investment will flow. It'll be more clear to the people that are building these new solutions of work and training pathways where to aim and actually hit employer demand debt. Because if we don't do that, we risk what I think we've done a lot of for the past few decades, which is building educational bridges to nowhere. And that doesn't work. So we need to open up like a more transparent safe dialogue for employers to let the market meet them, for let the learner to meet them. That's what I really hope for.

Hector Mujica, Google.org head of economic opportunity for Americas:

A theme that I've heard in this conversation that feels really salient right now is re-imagining work and learning. And I think just all of us really approaching that with an open mind and trying to bust a lot of the bias that we bring. Myself coming in as someone that has a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, it takes a little bit of effort for what I'm hiring to try to suspend the judgment of thinking that whoever I'm going to hire for my team needs to also have a similar pathway to mine. It also takes a little bit of effort for me to acknowledge that there's other learning pathways for me to gain skill sets that are valuable beyond a traditional classroom. And I think having the humility to acknowledge that and also the open mindedness to try to imagine different pathways and different avenues to learning and different avenues to hiring and different avenues to work is incredibly important, especially in this moment in time.

I'm going back to the opening sentiment that I had around how quickly technology is evolving today at a faster, way faster pace than it ever has before. And if we're really going to acknowledge and lean into that reality, we also have to acknowledge that if we look at the industrial revolution, we went from a seven-day work week where we're all working in farms and working in agriculture to a five-day work week. We might be entering a new type of revolution, a new type of technical revolution with AI and what have you where we're going to likely have to renegotiate what our social contract with the nature of work and the nature of learning looks like. And I would just encourage all of us to have a very open mind as we're entering that process.

Ramona Schindelheim:

And I will add, and you used the phrase earlier, skilled through alternative routes. And I proudly say this to whenever I am in front of a group, I'm skilled through alternative routes. I went to college, first one in my family, first generation go to college. I never finished it. I ran out of money. So I went to work, never went back. So I'm a STAR, as they like to call it, skilled through alternative routes. And I did took that to heart. It's like learning as you go, it's a continuous process. I learned some stuff in college, I learned a lot more on the job and a lot more taking classes or going online and learning things.

So yeah, we have to open that door because there are people out there who have skills and they're just not being utilized, so.

I want to thank Hector Mujica from Google, Taylor McLemore from many different companies including Techstars. And your new one is?

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:
Future State.

Ramona Schindelheim:
Future State, and Mona Mourshed with Generation. So I just want to thank everybody.

Taylor McLemore, Future State partner:
Thank you.

Dr. Mona Mourshed, Generations CEO:
Thank you.