

# STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS PROGRAMS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** *According to the latest population projections issued by Eurostat, the percentage of employees aged 55-64 has been rising rapidly as a percentage of the total working population, and will continue to do so. As direct consequences of these transformations, the organizations will need to keep employees longer in service and will need to rely on ageing employees for innovation, change, development and capacity building. Early retirements, underutilization of older workers and loss of critical knowledge will be major problems in many parts of the economy in the EU, especially in education, health and in industry. In SME's and other family-owned businesses it will create problems around succession issues. The challenge becomes now to find ways to retain and reuse critical knowledge for the organization while at the same time providing learning opportunities for older workers to remain learn productive, motivated, innovative and employable.*

*Within this framework the overall aim of project SILVER (Successful Intergenerational Learning through Validation, Education and Research) is to contribute to the development of the European Union as an advanced knowledge-based society by helping organizations implement lifelong intergenerational learning in order to capitalize on ageing workers' capacities. The main purpose of this paper is to present some of the findings of the first phase of the SILVER project in terms of identifying the most significant stakeholder awareness programs and interventions done in each of the project partner countries.*

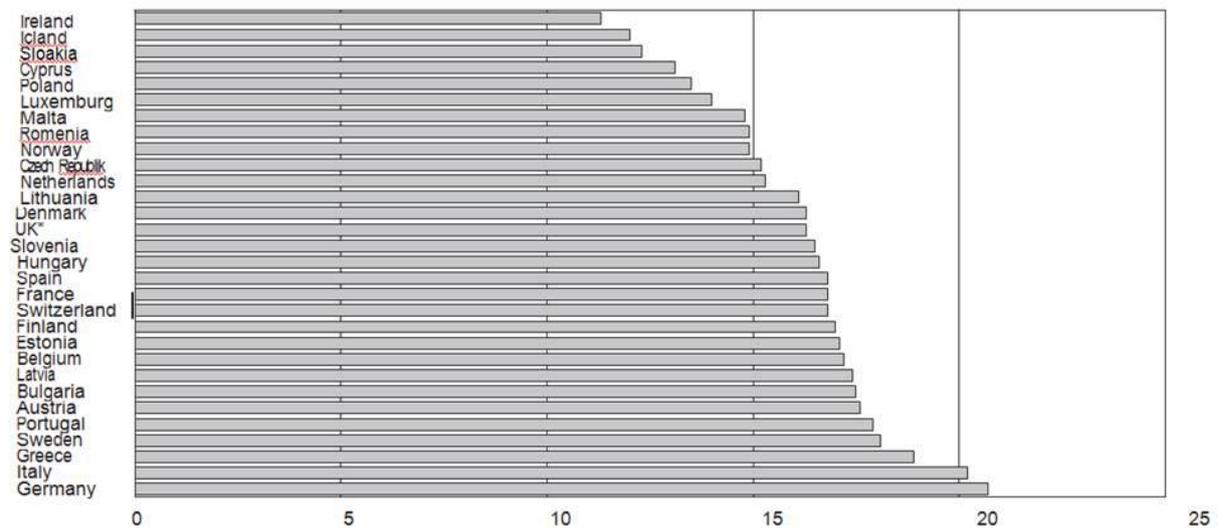
**Keywords:** ageing societies, intergenerational learning, lifelong learning, stakeholder awareness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world is in a constant change and the latest trends also reveal a change in the world's population structure. According to projections, across the globe, by 2050, one in every five people will be aged over 60 with a life expectancy of 76 years. There will be as many older people as children under age 14 and, in many countries, older people will outnumber the young (UN, 1999). Early retirement and increased longevity have escalated the need for new thinking patterns from everyone throughout the world, resulting in an increase need for social workers and practitioners in the aging field and increased lines of budgeting and policies from the governments. Conscious that the ageing of the world's population "*represents an unparalleled, but urgent, policy and programme challenge to Governments, non-governmental organizations and private groups*", the United Nations General Assembly decided that the year 1999 be observed as the International Year of Older Persons, reminding the world that a "solidarity between generations" must be built (UN, 1999).

In line with the trends in the world's population structure, the European Union's (EU's) population structure is changing and becoming progressively older, too. In 2010, there were slightly more than 87 million persons aged 65, representing almost 17.4 % of the total population of the EU-27 (figure 1). These figures can be compared with data from 1 January 1985, when there were 59.3 million persons aged 65 and over in the EU-27 (12.8 % of the total population) (Eurostat, 2011).

The EU's current population structure is characterized by a particularly high number of people born in the decades following the end of the World War II. This generation is often referred to as the *baby-boom generation* and comprises the population cohorts that were born between the mid-late 1940s and the late 1960s (Orzea & Bratianu, 2012). Eurostat population projections (2011) foresee that the number of people aged over 60 years will increase by around 2 million persons per annum in the coming decades, while the working age population will start to decrease, thus resulting in an increasing number of old persons (aged 80 or over) and fewer young persons.



**Figure 1.** Proportion of population aged 65 and over, 2010 (% of total population)

Source: Eurostat, 2011

As a result of the demographic changes new views and beliefs about working in old age are emerging. The traditional way of viewing ageing workers as employees with deficits that should exit the labor market is making way for an approach where ageing workers are seen as a true resource. The traditional allocation of learning to the phase between childhood and labor-market entry, complemented by regular further education and continuing training activities during the career is no longer sufficient to fulfill future labor-market requirements.

Within the aforementioned framework, the SILVER project (Successful Intergenerational Learning through Validation, Education and Research) (2011 – 2013) aims to develop a unique holistic and inclusive approach for intergenerational learning among knowledge workers, by addressing the difficulties of implementing it in an organization, thus contributing to the development of the European Union as an advanced knowledge-based society by helping organizations implement lifelong intergenerational learning in order to capitalize on ageing workers' capacities. The main purpose of this paper is to present some of the findings of the first phase of the SILVER project in terms of identifying the most significant stakeholder awareness programs and interventions done in each of the project partner countries.

## 2. INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING AS THE SOLUTION TO AGEING SOCIETIES

Older employees are often seen as problematic, rather than crucial in organizational development processes and thus are underutilized. Negative stereotypes contribute to older worker alienation and exclusion from lifelong learning and development activities. Because of their age, the elders are often seen as a lesser alternative. Studies (Palmore, 1990 cited in Fletcher, 2007) have identified as specific stereotypes of the elderly being unhealthy, asexual, ugly, cognitively impaired, useless, isolated, lonely, poor, and depressed. Another problem is that critical knowledge leaves with the retiring employee. In a knowledge-based economy, where managing and reusing knowledge is the biggest challenge, this is a major threat to organizational effectiveness as well as to creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit.

Early retirements, underutilization of older workers and loss of critical knowledge will be major problems in many parts of the economy in the EU, especially in education, health and in industry. In SME's and other family-owned businesses it will create problems around succession issues. The challenge is to find ways to retain and reuse critical knowledge for the organization while at the same time providing learning opportunities for older workers to remain learn productive, motivated, innovative and employable.

One way to help these problems is to assure that organizations are able to promote lifelong learning and innovation between the generations, or intergenerational learning (IGL) (Ropes, 2010). In the framework of European project SILVER ([www.intergenerationallearning.eu](http://www.intergenerationallearning.eu)), *IGL is the process of knowledge building, innovation and knowledge transfer that takes place through lifelong learning among the different cohorts found in an organization.* IGL is a form of adult learning in the workplace, often of a non-formal or informal nature. Lifelong IGL allows organizations to foster and prosper from the knowledge and experience of all four generations and at the same time assist people from a vulnerable group (older workers) by providing alternative opportunities to access non-formal and informal adult education. IGL captures the process of learning that builds from marrying the diverse knowledge bases of workers with different level and types of work and life experiences. Thus, IGL supports innovation by facilitating novel forms of knowledge combination for the realization of ideas, and by unlocking knowledge that may have become overlooked in and individual's or organization's memory (Tempest, 2003). IGL as a lifelong learning tool

may be very supportive in promoting creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit.

But literature, complemented by practice, shows that successfully implementing lifelong IGL in organizations is difficult because it requires a change in attitude and behavior of all employees; changes that may be hampered by many factors, including lack of awareness and lack of information on the costs and benefits of IGL; or particular opportunities IGL might offer those involved. Successfully implementing IGL in organizations requires change in complex ways; organizational culture, cultural differences between generations, cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe, learning styles and preferences of different generations and of course sector-related differences. Also, management often has no strategy for successful implementation of IGL, especially since success might be co-dependent on the variables sector and national culture. Finally, managers must know beforehand what the tangible benefits will be for their specific situation before they consider investing time and effort in implementing IGL.

In order to address the problems described above, project *SILVER (Successful Intergenerational Learning through Validation, Education and Research)* aims to develop a unique and holistic approach for IGL. The research project is coordinated by Inholland University of Applied Sciences, Center for Research in Intellectual Capital, Haarlem, the Netherlands, in cooperation with five other universities in Europe: Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Finland, Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus, Germany, South East European Research Center, Greece, Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest, Romania, and University of Strathclyde, Center for Lifelong Learning, UK.

Therefore, the main focus of the project is on making IGL work in the difficult circumstances of the daily practice of work in organizations. This has never been done before in a systematic way. It will help end-users (such as HRD/M trainers, knowledge workers, managers) design and implement successful IGL practices tailored to their specific contexts based on available scientific evidence. Results will help managers decide on the most effective ways of implementing IGL. It will help policy makers and sector organizations develop policies for facilitating IGL in different sectors of the economy. And the project will provide data for Lifelong Learning researchers on the effectiveness and mechanisms of IGL practices.

The project is also innovative as it concerns IGL among highly qualified knowledge workers - an important but often neglected group. Implementation of IGL among this group requires a novel approach. For knowledge workers the aim of IGL is on acquiring key competences such as learning to learn, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and the ability to innovate, change and adapt; all which in turn increases employability – crucial to ageing workers. Thus, the project's aim is to develop a unique holistic and inclusive approach for IGL among knowledge workers, by addressing the difficulties of implementing IGL. In order to do this innovative methods have been designed to assure ease of transferability of the project's results. This will include the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning as the innovative practices will be digitally codified into a Stakeholder Awareness Program, a 'Doing IGL Toolbox', including an implementation manual and a cost/benefit evaluation framework, and a web-based game for practicing IGL that can be contextualized accordingly. The entire toolbox will help to improve pedagogical approaches for intergenerational learning and the change management angle of the Toolbox will help improve the management of adult education organizations. The train-the-trainer approach to testing and dissemination of the Toolbox will take the form of in-service training courses for adult education staff in the participating organizations.

### **3. INCREASING STAKEHOLDERS AWARENESS REGARDING IGL**

Successfully implementing IGL in organizations leads to a reduction in negative stereotypes, expansion of networks, feelings of inclusion, learning among others. More than that, implementing IGL within the organization can also have the following outcomes, that lead to an improvement in employee, and in turn organizational capability (Ropes, 2011): reciprocal competence development, transfer of tacit knowledge, enhanced productivity of employees, time savings, applying knowledge in novel ways, but, also, increased social capital, which can further on improve internal processes as communication, knowledge exchange or the capability to innovate.

Most studies on organizational based learning programs such as IGL point to the importance of conditions favorable to creating and maintaining a positive learning climate (Argyris & Schon, 1996 cited in Ropes, 2011). But, in an organization both management and individuals play a critical role in creating a positive learning climate, and for IGL in an organization to be successful, a number of stakeholders need to be involved. Each of these stakeholders needs to be aware of the issues related to intergenerational learning. To raise the level of awareness of the actors involved in the lifelong IGL process stakeholder awareness programs can be designed within the organization.

*Stakeholder awareness programs are campaigns and tools that are used by various actors to influence the level of awareness of stakeholders in organizations with the aim of building an understanding of the values of IGL.* In organizations, important stakeholders in the implementation of IGL are:

- Top-management, including owners/directors, CEO's, CFO's HR officers etc.;
- Staff managers including HR personnel and trainers;
- Middle management;
- Team leaders;
- Knowledge workers.

Actors that develop these campaigns or use these tools can be European, national or regional government agencies, consultants, universities, pressure groups like unions or employers' organizations, top-management, staff managers, including HR personnel, middle management, team leaders as well as fellow knowledge workers.

Stakeholder awareness programs can be classified in several ways. The first classification distinguishes between various topics of awareness:

1. General awareness about the fact that the work population is ageing.
2. Awareness about the consequences of the ageing population for organizations in general and for their own organization.
3. Awareness about increasing diversity and its consequences in organizations in general and age-diversity in particular.
4. Awareness about the goals, benefits, conditions for and potential barriers of intergenerational learning with the aim of motivating the stakeholders to implement IGL.

Another way to classify stakeholder awareness programs is by looking at its source, e.g. the actor that can apply the program. Here one may differentiate between actors within and from outside the organization (broad categories) or differentiate between more detailed groups of actors, such as governments, public funded projects, institutions (outside the organization) as well as the top-management, HR-officers, team leaders or an individual (within organizations). The last way to classify stakeholder awareness programs is by the target group, e.g. the persons within organizations that need to become aware. Here the stakeholder groups mentioned above are the classification categories.

Based on these classification approaches, in the following section we would like to provide an overview of what is currently being done in the field of stakeholder awareness programs in some of the partner countries of the project. The information is largely based on the research activities of each partner country, who has conducted desk research and, depending on the amount of information available, made interviews with experts of different fields.

In Greece, there is only one project that has been realized to raise awareness and to promote IGL. This involves the outcomes of a Grundtvig project entitled "European Generation Link" (2009-2011) that aims to inform citizens about intergenerational and intercultural learning. The "Tandem project" focused on five work sectors (agriculture, construction/building, tourism, manufacturing and retail, health and social services). The aim of the project was to raise interest and motivation among education providers, employees, and social partners regarding intergenerational and intercultural learning, and to promote such educational concepts and to use them in the work life. The main target groups and organizations of the project were VET teachers, teacher trainers, guidance counselors and stakeholders in Europe. The results of the Tandem project reveal successful implementation of raising awareness to all citizens in promoting social inclusion and minimizing xenophobia in European countries.

In the Netherlands, the research revealed a number of stakeholder awareness program tools. An example of such tool is the Decision support tool of Dutch Central Bank. The HR department of the Dutch Central Bank has a high degree of awareness that ageing can lead to a possible loss of knowledge. To create awareness among the middle management about the consequences of knowledge loss when employees leave and of the ways to retain this knowledge for the organization, a decision support tool (figure 2) was introduced. This decision tree is distributed to the middle management. The decision tree focuses on staff that retires or otherwise leaves the organization.

The decision tree asks in a number of steps the opinion of the line officer about the importance of certain knowledge of a departing employee and the extent to which this knowledge is documented or otherwise shared. Depending on the importance of the knowledge, a number of measures are suggested. There is a "code red" (urgent knowledge transfer) when knowledge is not documented and is essential and not shared by others. In this case, planning for the transfer of knowledge to more than one person has to be done.

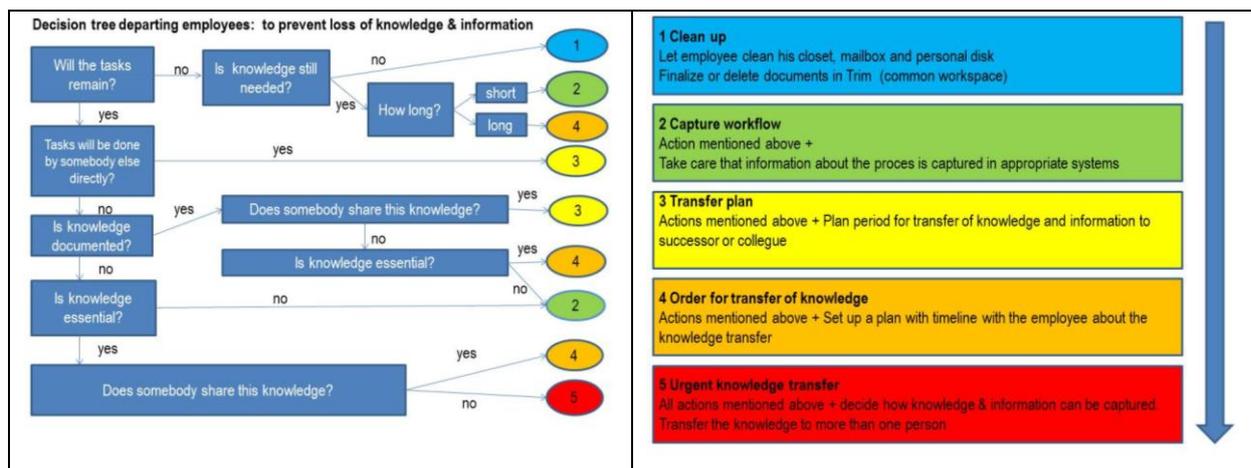


Figure 2. The Dutch Central Bank's Decision Support Tool

Source: SILVER Project

A project in 2007 at the Dutch producer of radar equipment Thales produced a quick scan of the crucial knowledge needed for the future of the company. The reason for starting the project was that the company was worried about the effects of aging on the retention of knowledge. Part of the scan was an analysis of the critical knowledge in the company and of the employees carrying that knowledge. This information was combined with the age of these employees and the date of their retirement. This allowed for the development of a scenario in Excel that showed the loss of key knowledge over time. Using some strong visual images of this knowledge loss, this scenario gave a vivid impression to managers of the need for knowledge capturing and intergenerational learning.

The Dutch consultancy company Blik-opener (“Can opener”) developed a workshop to introduce participants to the perspective of “generations”. The idea is that this perspective is useful for solving certain policy issues and organizational problems. The workshop is set up as a first step in breaking down the barriers between generations in organizations. The workshop can be used as an in-company training session for between 12 and 40 participants. The workshop works best when all generations are present (Baby boom, Generation X, Y and Z).

During the 2-hour workshop several interventions take place:

1. Participants introduce themselves by describing their favorite movie or television series from when they were 15-25 years old. The idea is that every movie mentioned will trigger recognition from members of the same generation. This will create a feeling of community among generation members.
2. A presentation is given presenting all four generations and their characteristics.
3. Then 4 flipcharts are placed in the middle of the room; each flipchart representing one generation. The participants are randomly split in four groups and walk by these flipcharts. There they need to write down what they think:
  - Is there added value of this generation for the organization;
  - Are points of attention of advice for this generation.
4. In the next round participants are asked to join the flipchart of their own generation and discuss the comments:
  - What do they recognize?
  - What advice will they take into consideration?
  - What aspects of their generation are missing?
5. Next, every generation presents their findings to the rest of the group. Others respond and a discussion takes place.
6. During one last round participants discuss what the benefits can be of the generation perspective for their organization.

Another example of a tool developed in Netherlands regarding IGL is the checklist that managers can use to identify which method for capturing knowledge should be used, developed by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs. The choice of method is determined by the type of knowledge that needs to be captured. The checklist distinguishes between the following types of knowledge:

- General knowledge about particular files.
- Historical knowledge about policy-making processes. What has happened in the past?
- Specific knowledge about risks and opportunities around particular files.
- Policy theories.
- Stakeholders involved in particular files.
- Connections between files.
- People that can act as knowledge sources.
- Ways of working within the Ministry.
- Skills for handling certain situations.
- General procedures.
- How to operate certain software.

In addition, the checklist provides an overview of several methods that can be used to capture and transfer knowledge. Each type of knowledge is associated with one or more methods:

- After action review.
- Video recordings.
- Learning histories.
- Network scan.
- ROCK interviews (Retention Of Critical Knowledge).
- Max Herold Modelling Method.
- File transfer meeting.
- Competence teams.
- Master class.
- Knowledge sharing incentives.
- Good practices or best practices.
- Knowledge market.
- Sharing day.

- Community of Practice.
- Critical Incident Method.
- Intersession meetings.

The checklist can be used by managers to decide what tool to use when the knowledge of employees that retire or otherwise leave the organization needs to be captured.

The program developed in the direction of lifelong learning and intergenerational learning within the Romanian environment is: European Network for Intergenerational Learning – ENIL (2010-2013). The European Network in Intergenerational Learning responds to the need identified among practitioners to offer a platform and incentives for fostering ideas and new developments in IGL across Europe, and to provide the infrastructure for the on-going exchange of expertise, good practice, news, research and developments in the field in order to support and improve IGL activities at different levels. The main target groups are: practitioners in adult education, policy makers, learners of all ages, practitioners for whom IGL is a totally new approach, educators and learning providers. The main aim of the Network is to promote IGL by bringing together and supporting sustainable, effective practices in the field, by facilitating the exchange of ideas and expertise beyond individual projects, and by creating a mechanism for practitioners to influence policy and practice.

## CONCLUSIONS

In an ageing Europe, intergenerational learning could be a solution for reducing critical knowledge loss in organizations and making better use of the older knowledge workers. That is mostly important in the knowledge intensive organizations and activity sectors. Intergenerational learning is a highly contextualized process and is based on motivational managerial systems. Initializing, developing and implementing intergenerational learning programs need clear and well-sustained stakeholder awareness programs.

The topic of intergenerational learning becomes more and more present throughout Europe, but the topic of stakeholder awareness programs for intergenerational learning is still not very present or very well studied. Nowadays the interest grows because some of the stakeholders realize that implementing IGL only after the problems resulting from demographic changes became present may not be the best way. Building awareness to motivate organizations to proactively invest in intergenerational learning becomes necessary.

Stakeholders' awareness of ageing, critical knowledge loss, and the importance of intergenerational learning as a possible solution is a rather complex and intangible process. After processing the information and knowledge obtained through a comprehensive literature and field research, the end result of the first phase of the SILVER project is the ability to assess the degree of stakeholder awareness and to identify some organizational barriers in implementing intergenerational programs. Thus, the results of the first phase contribute directly to the design of effective knowledge strategies for developing and implementing intergenerational learning interventions in the partner countries.

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