

The Affective Economy of the Business Case for Mature Aged Workers

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This article draws on Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective economies as a means of critically exploring the nature and consequences of the 'business case for mature aged workers': a framework that underpins recent government and corporate policy focusing on extending working lives. Contra to the claims of the business case as wholly rationalistic 'common sense' and logical, the article argues that the business case operates discursively by drawing on latent but potent circuits of emotionality. Drawing on a range of government 'best practice' resources for employers, we show how the 'rippling effects' of emotionality result in particular systems of valuation pertaining to mature aged workers and later life working. In situating these dynamics as important to a broader affective political economy, we argue this may inadvertently undermine current initiatives seeking to promote the retention and recruitment of mature aged workers.

Keywords: Affective economies, ageing, age discrimination, business case, emotions at work, older workers.

Introduction

Recent reports by the Australian Government such as the *4th Intergenerational Report* (The Treasury, 2015) and the Productivity Commission's *An Ageing Australia: Preparing for the Future* (Productivity Commission, 2013) emphasise a national commitment to tackling the 3Ps: population, productivity and participation. Such documents highlight awareness in government, executive and corporate circles of the key role of the mature aged workforce (a government term) in ensuring a secure and sustainable future for all Australians. To operationalise such reports' recommendations to manage the 3Ps in a fiscally and organisationally prudent manner, policy settings have been adjusted and government incentives introduced over the last five years to encourage employers to proactively recruit and retain a mature aged workforce. A central pillar in government appeals to corporations and other large organisations is the language of 'the business case': that employing and retaining mature aged workers will make a positive contribution to the financial bottom-line. The business case has thus become an incentivising logic underpinning policy settings seeking to prolong working lives, as well as a feature of the success narratives of organisations that engage in this policy space. Organisational older worker policy and practice is seen to be good business sense – a win-win for employer and older employee alike – appealing to the instrumental rationales that characterise corporate Australia.

However, in this article we suggest that the power – and possible fallacy – of the business case lies less in its appeal to rational instrumentalism, and more in the manner in which it operates as a powerful discursive mechanism that constitutes and reproduces certain emotional dynamics surrounding ageing and growing older. These emotional dynamics – often fearful and negative – linger around, but often out of view, from the upbeat and positive tenor of the business case. In this paper, we explore this ‘emotionality’ that permeates the business case in organisational older work policy and practice, using Ahmed’s (2004) concept of ‘affective economies’. Affect can refer to a range of ‘basic emotions such as anger, joy and fear’, as well as ‘more ineffable and fleeting affective experiences of . . . apprehension, pity, disappointment, shame, excitement or hope’ (Sointu, 2015: 1). What distinguishes Ahmed’s work on affect from conventional psychological understandings of emotions is her refusal to locate emotion ‘inside’ a human subject, as if anger, joy and fear were purely a private disposition. Instead, ‘the nonresidence of emotions’ (2004: 119) – which still binds human subjects, even as it refuses to reside solely within them – is the basis for Ahmed’s ‘economic model’ of emotions. This is because it is the circulation of emotions that creates valuation or denigration. This economic relationship has important implications for understanding the consequences of business case-led policy, especially in an emotive setting such as ageing and employment.

We do not wish to question the benevolent intentions behind the business case approach to mature aged workers. However, we are proposing that the effects associated with policies and practices underpinned by the business case are better analysed as charged with emotionality rather than rationality. Specifically, we argue that ‘ageing’ as an organising concept is shot through with emotionality – the movements or associations of feelings within institutions, cultures and markets (Ahmed, 2004: 120) – as suggested in seminal accounts of ageing outside of the workplace produced by sociological scholars (e.g., Keith, 1977; Oliver, 2012). These emotional aspects of ageing provide conditions and valuations that explain both the non-rationalistic drivers of the organisational desire for age-specific work practices, and the reasons why such business case driven policy and practices might fail.

In this paper, we draw upon textual data from existing Australian mature aged worker policy, government initiatives and public awareness campaigns, specifically from organisations heralded by the government as ‘Corporate Champions’ of mature aged workers under the ‘Experience+’ initiative (Web Archive, 2016). In applying Ahmed’s concept to that data, we seek to show how the business case relies on the latent flow of emotionality surrounding ageing that may not only challenge but also inadvertently become complicit in reproducing, age inequality. Ahmed’s work offers a lens to both understanding this dynamic, and in drawing attention to the affective economy in which the business case operates, offers new vistas for conceptualising policy and practice pertaining to mature aged workers.

The paper is organised into four sections. The first section provides background and critical discussion of the rise of the business case framework and its importance in government and corporate policy on mature aged workers. The second section introduces Ahmed’s work in more detail, and applies three specific aspects of her concept of affective economies to examples underpinned by the business case. A third section specifies how the affective economy of the business case relates to the political economy, and is followed by a conclusion.

The business case for age inclusion

The 'business case' is a market-based rationale for mature aged worker retention and recruitment that emphasises advantages for the competitive and strategic success of organisations and in doing so, 'confer[-s] universal, positive benefits' (Duncan, 2003: 108) for employers and employees alike. For employers, these benefits include access to wisdom and experience, a pool of loyal, reliable and flexible workers, and cost reductions associated with lowered staff turnover; for employees, access to income, workplace interaction and social support, and the positive health benefits of work are attractive. The business case ethos strongly aligns with contemporary organisational approaches to managing workplace diversity. This evolved from equality approaches that focus on creating a level playing field through legislative compliance (associated with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws), to celebrating and valuing differences through diversity management (associated with the notion of age diversity), to the most recent focus on (aged-based) inclusion (Oswick and Noon, 2014). Underpinned by a business case rationale, diversity becomes the cultural ethos within organisations, while inclusion focuses on how business can proactively harness and leverage 'differences' (such as gender, age and ethnicity in their workforce) through policies, practices and mechanisms that align with their overall business strategy and promise to deliver future success, knowledge acquisition and operational capacity. As a voluntaristic response to pro-equality or pro-opportunity considerations (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998; Holvino and Kamp, 2009), such an approach to the mature aged workforce has been heralded as best practice in extending working lives, and it has even been suggested that 'age management can take the place of age discrimination' (ILO, 2011: 4).

To operationalise this business case framework for age inclusion, age management toolkits are typically used to focus on particular parts of the business, including areas traditionally considered as 'hot spots' for differentiation, such as recruitment and retention, training, flexible working and culture change, and incorporating aspects such as health and well-being, compliance with the law and knowledge transfer. This employer response is vital in the Australian context where the national government has followed similar initiatives in other OECD (2005) countries by proposing an extension to the eligible pension age to seventy years by 2035 (Australian Government, 2014), and putting in place other labour market inducements to expand the pool of mature aged workers. In the latter regard, the government's turn towards employer-focused policies was signalled by the discontinuation in 2014 of a budget for the Experience+ Work Ready scheme (Web Archive, 2016) that provided a range of services to older job seekers such as career counselling and training. In its place came a \$10,000 Restart Wage Subsidy (DofE, 2014a; a rebranding of the Experience+ Jobs Bonus) that seeks to incentivise employers to recruit those aged fifty and over who have been unemployed for six months or longer. In addition, organisations can access \$20,000 to buy in programmes from a list of approved providers that help improve their practices surrounding their forty-five plus employees through the federally funded Corporate Champions programme (DofE, 2013a). This approach has been supported by broader campaigns and initiatives, including the Power of Oldness campaign (AHRC, 2014), to tackle stereotyping of ageing workers that may act as a barrier to employment, and the production of best practice resources to help organisations large and small to become older age-friendly work environments (e.g. Australian Government, 2015a). More recently, we have witnessed the creation of the position 'Ambassador for

Mature Aged Employment' in 2015 and a current 'Willing to Work' National Inquiry into age discrimination in employment (AHRC, 2015).

All the initiatives above are strongly predicated on a business case for mature aged workers. Despite the putative advantages of aligning mature aged worker recruitment and retention with business objectives, the criticisms of the business case approach to age inclusion are similar to those charged at diversity management (see Wrench, 2007). For example, there are question marks about how effective such initiatives are, how their claims of business impacts might be measured and attributing causality between productivity and the presence of such policies (Groenveld and Verbeek, 2012; Riley *et al.*, 2008). Labour process debates also suggest that taking a business case approach may work *against* older workers: 'commercial rationality', as Duncan (2003: 107) notes, does 'not preclude the presence of age prejudice'. In terms of a more radical critique of diversity, business scholars informed by psychoanalysis and post-colonialism suggest that market based pro-equality policy and practice are driven less by 'rationality', and more often by unconscious or latent desires, fantasies and political interests (Gabriel, 1999). For example, documented instances of male backlash to diversity initiatives, and the continuing realities of racism in organisations despite diversity policies, point to a complex set of ambivalent emotions surfacing as organisations attempt to manage workforce diversity (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Prasad, 2006).

Given these critiques, we suggest that the rational *and* the emotional are better considered mutually imbricated within policies and practices underpinned by the business case for mature aged workers. Yet it is precisely the emotional dimensions (positive and negative) of age-related organisational policy that remain unacknowledged, and exorcised from the picture. To further explore what these aspects of emotionality may be and how they operate, we turn to Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective economies.

Affective economies and the business case

Despite the oft-encountered economistic portrayal of managerial behaviour as purely 'rationally driven', age and employment scholars have already highlighted the important role of emotions, typically at the individual level of analysis. For example, emotions have been shown to play a key role in older workers' continuing motivations to work, or their propensity to retire (Sargeant *et al.*, 2011; Loretto and Vickerstaff, 2013). Beyond naming certain emotions as motives for labour market behaviour, however, there has been little space to consider how either the prolificacy or ambivalence of emotions surrounding ageing and work are more broadly experienced. Though rarely discussed in relation to organisational diversity (an exception being Zanoni, 2010; Zanoni *et al.*, 2010), social scientists in disciplines such as sociology and geography have already demonstrated that the creation, circulation and translation of emotions have significant and mutual effects on national societies and their economic relations (e.g., Thrift, 2004; Tarlow, 2012). Emotionality, then, can be considered a characteristic of human institutions (not solely a possession of the individual) that is diffuse across a series of societal networks, discourses and modes of exchange.

Sara Ahmed's work seeks to develop such an idea of emotionality, notably in her 2004 essay on 'affective economies'. In it, she presents a psychoanalytically informed (though she also calls upon Marx's (2004 [1867]) M-C-M formula¹ from *Capital* Volume 1) theory of *emotion as economy*, rather than the more common idea of emotion as a psychological

disposition that 'resides' in the individual. Although her substantive concern in the essay is with racialised and racist emotions circulating through individual and collective bodies, key aspects of Ahmed's theoretical framework can be usefully applied when exploring the emotional dynamics of the business case. Specifically, her thesis focuses on bodies and (linguistic) signs: core concepts that can be applied in exploring how the business case framework is constituted in organisational documents in an array of visual, chronological and biographical identifications that tell us how to feel and think about mature aged workers. Arguing that bodies and linguistic signs become organised and thus 'effected' through emotions, emotionality is constitutive (rather than simply an outcome) of mature age worker policy and practice.

This concept of an affective economy recognises that the *location* of emotions is diffuse and relational (covering the social, the cultural, as well as the psychological), not private or purely individual. Emotions are thus created and transformed in the movement and communication of different ideas and practices across various spheres (such as policy, government campaigns or organisational practices), rather than simply being a *response* to different ideas and practices contained within an individual psychological disposition to an object. Indeed, the potency of this type of emotionality comes from the fact that emotions do not 'positively reside in a subject or figure, [but] they still work to bind subjects together. Indeed, the non-residence of emotions is what makes them "binding"' (Ahmed, 2004: 119). In other words, latent emotionality makes us feel in particular ways about constructed groups of people through the 'rippling effects' (Ahmed, 2004: 126) of emotionality between policies, practices, ideas and people.

Such a perspective is potentially valuable for critically analysing the business case framework for mature aged worker policy and practice in the wider context of government policy and associated campaigns. Specifically, we explore three aspects of the affective economy of the business case, drawing upon a range of policy and practice documents. These include case studies of companies upholding mature worker 'best practice' through the Government Corporate Champions programme (DofE, 2013a) and ReStart Initiative (DofE, 2014a), and resources promoting the recruitment and retention of the mature age workforce.

Aspect 1: the business case as an economy of ambivalent emotions

The first dimension of an affective economy analysis highlights how emotions are an *intrinsic* part of any market or organisation; they are muddled into, and spring forth from, behaviours, valuations and practices related to the pursuit of organisational and policy goals. Crucially though, from Ahmed's perspective, emotions are not bounded temporal (i.e., existing prior to action) or spatial (i.e., 'within' the individual) phenomena waiting to be cynically drawn upon when needed, and ignored at other times, by the 'calculating' manager. Instead, emotions are produced relationally as an effect of their circulation in institutional settings (e.g., between government initiatives and organisational practice). They work dynamically and often unconsciously across the psychic and the social domains, provisionally adhering certain bodies (or objects) to certain cultural representations with material effects. Through circulation, emotions garner *different valuations* and salience in relation to the institutional interests of the economy in which they ebb and flow.

For example, the rationale for engaging with the mature aged business case is predicated on expressions of fear or anxiety which cut across references to the ageing demographic. As an illustration, policy documents refer to 'the ageing workforce as a potential business risk' (DofE, 2013b), or high numbers of older workers as presenting 'a business continuity risk' (DofE, 2013c). Policy language intensifies this fear and anxiety (as noted by Degnan, 2012; Oliver, 2012) by presenting such an ageing-related risk as a two-fold certainty: socially in terms of having to 'support' an ageing population; and, personally, through the inevitability of our own older age. It thus operationalises, through what Ahmed (2004: 12; working with Heidegger) calls the 'futuraity of fear', an impending demographic time-bomb where fear responds to that which is approaching rather than already here. Reflective of this, organisational narratives typically refer to the development of a 'pre-emptive and proactive approach with its mature-age workers' (DEEWR, 2013a). This is not simply a response to a 'fact'. Business case language has the effect of creating a sense of urgency and fear, of bringing into being the demographic time-bomb and in turn making possible material developments. These manifest as a commodity exchange; specifically, the labour of mature aged workers as commodity.

Statements and disclosures (sometimes revelations) by CEOs about not being prepared for this eventuality further circulate these emotional effects. As one CEO said: 'When I did the demographics and saw the age distribution of my staff it was a surprise, it was a bit of a wake-up call' (DofE, n.d.a). Emotionality surrounding growing older (as a psychic phenomenon), and fear of an overburdened economic system (as a social phenomenon) are thus linked through business case narratives and associated policy, coalescing to produce particular expressions of collective anxiety, denigration or incapability. In this way, the business case both emits and contains 'rippling effects' (Ahmed's phrase), transmitting cultural messages and material practices that are infused with emotionality across multiple policy and work-related spheres.

An example of the material practices associated with this rippling effect is the way in which the business case presents the possibility of 'managing' age, rendering it a phenomenon that can be controlled and commodified. This has important managerial benefits, allowing organisational ageing policies to exist in a packaged form that can be communicated and shared across the organisation. For example, one health services provider case study (DEEWR, 2013b) suggests that: 'Relevant training represents a real springboard to unlock ageing workers' potential'. Such a statement positions management intervention as a successful catalyst for garnering an organisational benefit. Similarly, there is repeated discussion about transferring knowledge, such as considering: 'how best to transfer knowledge and skills from mature age workers to younger and less experienced staff' (DofE, n.d.b). Such statements position knowledge as an objective fact that can be passed on to others, rather than tacitly embedded in one's experiential skill-set or located between people. In attempting to fully package these business advantages, the fecundity of ageing is effectively flattened as it is conflated with, and reduced to, a set of bounded ideas or variables (e.g., defining age in terms of chronological markers of time). The result is that certain groups become the focus of age management practices, in ways with which they themselves may not identify, such as being the object of 'targeted conversations' (DEEWR, 2013b) with management.

Aspect 2: the business case as a nodal point in multiple circuits of emotionality

The second key aspect of affective economies is their multidimensionality. The emotional elements underpinning the business case do not work in and of themselves. Instead, they are reliant on an interdependent *network of ideals*: feelings surrounding what work, the market and ageing should be. Together these actively create or 'surface' individual and collective bodies through reference to the ageing worker and the ageing workforce. Business case narratives can thus be considered a nodal point in a multidimensional psychic, social and material economy through which emotions 'circulate between bodies and signs' (Ahmed, 2004: 117). Crucially, the government's case study examples show how this network of ideals invoked in the business case is value-laden, serving to position the organisation as a benign or compassionate social actor. For example, one manufacturing case (DEEWR, 2013a) refers to 'keeping jobs in the region and not losing business overseas', positioning mature aged workers as a welcome alternative to job losses or relocations towards other economically efficient sources of labour. Similarly, an engineering company's case study emphasises that 'adding value includes value for clients, the community and the lives of employees' (DEEWR, 2013c), while another transport company (DofE, n.d.c) refers to 'the moral responsibility employers have'. In doing so, ideals of community help to configure the organisation as paternalistic and compassionate, even though many cases suggest their initial engagement with the mature aged workforce was about resolving an 'initial issue' such as managing 'worker compensation issues' (DEEWR, 2013a). This positioning of organisations as a benign (and at times evangelical) complicit player in the business case is vital in justifying and bringing together a space where governmental focus on the three Ps can be realised through mature aged workforce policy.

The business case as a benign entity itself also relies on circuits of emotionality pertaining to the theme of care and caring. For example, one manufacturer (DofE, 2013d) suggests that in 'exploring strategies to attract and retain its mature workforce and maintain the company's leading edge', they have reviewed their policies for 'age friendliness'. Others have undertaken an 'analysis of age-friendly policies and practices' (DofE, 2013b) or note how a "'like-family" community' (DofE, 2014b), or fostering mature aged employees (DEEWR, 2013a) is integral to their business case approach. On the one hand, the benevolent positioning of the organisation as a friend or family defines mature aged workers primarily in terms of their age (as opposed to their other identity markers), assured of a warm welcome and positive workplace environment. On the other hand, this language also operates to bound, or to offset, the negative emotionality that mature aged employees may experience in workplaces. As such, there is no space to consider deliberate acts of age inequality – somewhat ironically exemplified in the increasing popularity of the 'unconscious bias' concept in policy and organisational narratives where people 'accidentally' or inadvertently discriminate against 'non-ideal' workers (older, female) on the basis of imperceptible prejudices. For instance, reference to education and training in relation to "'unconscious" age-related discrimination' (DEEWR, 2013b) or confronting 'unconscious age bias against older workers' (Ryan, 2013) evokes the subliminal, thus reframing discrimination away from an unpalatable act of conscious hate, disgust or abuse directed at another, to a more 'palatable' version of age relations at work.

Aspect 3: the material consequences of business case emotionality

The final dimension of affective economies at play in the business case framework pertains to its material consequences. These consequences are important in evaluating the effects of policy, and, in particular, in shaping the possible and desired ascribed identities of mature aged workers. Returning to Ahmed's (2004: 126) writing on the role played by fear in the workings of racism, she argues that its rippling effect 'both envelops the bodies that feel it, as well as constructs those bodies as enveloped, as contained by it, as if it comes from outside and moves inward'. Similarly in regard to age (and ageism), emotions create the visceral surface of older bodies that make us relate to that body in a particular way. Through symbolic means, policy constructs, marks out and distances older bodies from others. Older worker bodies are contained in a particular symbolic and material space as part of an identifiable group, restricted from moving to other parts of that same space.

In situating particular groups, the emotionality of the business case works through conscious and unconscious acts of signification, and relationships of difference and displacement – in the case of the mature aged worker, being either a burden or contributor to the economy. In this respect, emotionality often involves ambivalent elements, such as the co-existence of inclusion and exclusion, or capability and incapability. For example, while the business case encourages positioning older workers as having unique skills, this sits somewhat paradoxically alongside the notion that such skills can be easily passed on through mature age knowledge transfer strategies – two aspects often sitting side by side within the Corporate Champions case studies (2013a). A further case in point is the juxtaposition of older workers as an integral part of the workforce, yet requiring specialised training or reskilling (e.g. DofE, 2013e). Both examples demonstrate emotionally-produced ambivalence: the mature workforce is simultaneously 'wanted' while also positioned as a necessary but secondary choice, underpinning one transport company's (DofE, 2013f) suggestion that they turned to mature workers after experiencing 'the high turnover of younger staff leaving to work in better-paid industries relating to the mining boon'.

Ahmed (2004: 119) suggests that strategies of 'adherence' and 'coherence' are used by social actors to align particular bodies in creating the material distinctions noted above. Adherence (the sticking of things or people together) is particularly potent when comparing 'young' and 'old', giving rise to an effect of coherence that makes a recognised group. For example, one featured transport provider (DofE, n.d.c) states that: 'focusing only on recruiting younger drivers is not the solution to upcoming skill shortages'. Such a statement within a case study focusing on the mature aged workforce creates two opposing subject positions (younger and older). Creating these distinctions allows the business case to make certain emotional temperaments 'stick' to the mature aged working population such as being loyal to their employers, calmer or more 'reliable, tak[-ing] pride in their work and are keen to make a positive contribution' (Australian Government, 2015b). In this way, the older workforce becomes a recognised collective, which encourages their valuation through particular (limited) modes of recognition.

Emotional referents may also have the effect of overlooking or negating other realities of work. For example, one facility services company (DofE, 2014b) that provides outsource services in 'cleaning, support, property, catering, security and facility management' suggests that 'mature workers are the best cultural fit for service delivery positions'. Here

the alignment of older workers with organisational culture connects them to a broader emotive idea of what the company stands for, backgrounding specific attributes that characterise the often low-skilled and low paid work associated with the aforementioned jobs. Similarly, one transport company suggests that the requirements of the job may suit 'those who have previously held high-powered white-collar jobs' (DofE, 2013f). Only later do they mention certain conditions of the job, including the retention of 'staff on casual contract and low hourly rate'. Such conditions reproduce the figure of the post-career mature aged worker who does not require financial stability as part of their current job conditions.

The political affective economies of mature aged work

Given the importance of the economy in mature aged worker narratives, we now consider how these three elements of an affective economy link to the market economy, or what we might in common parlance think of as 'the real economy'. An affective economy is not a separate entity from the workings of the 'real economy' – the idea of a supposedly abstract and mechanical system for the production, distribution and circulation of goods and services that magically reproduces itself without human hand (sic). Nor is it a metaphorical representation thereof; that is to say, the real economy as *if it were* an affective economy. Rather, the real economy *is* an affective economy. Yet this reality is rarely acknowledged, perhaps unsurprisingly given the dominance of 'rationalism' and cool calculation as highlighted in the business case. Our interpretations of the business case and policy documents on mature aged workers above demonstrated a full gamut of ambivalent emotions. However, given this themed section's emphasis, how might our analysis suggest that similar circuits of emotionality are present in mature aged worker policy more broadly? Given the key social actors involved in proliferating the business case (state, business, labour), could we argue that mature aged worker policy is part of a political affective economy?

Within this political affective economy frame, the role of the business case (as well as government incentives and campaigns) is ideological. That is to say, emotionality, and the manner in which emotions circulate and connect individual and collective bodies, has ideological effects and material consequences that contribute to the sustenance and reproduction of a neoliberal economic system. The key ideological effect is the production and distinction of an 'ideal' older worker, constituted through a raft of competing emotions as discussed above, which included: the future fear and associated risks of the ageing time-bomb about to explode; the contradictory positioning of ageing workers as valuable, yet also a second choice or potentially deficient and in need of training; the use of adherence and coherence strategies to minimise diversity amongst older workers; and, the development of age management practices to produce inclusive and friendly work environments, masking age discrimination and inequality. Inspired by Ahmed's use of Marx's M-C-M formula, we argue that the 'mature aged workers' being mobilised through the business case and government policy can be considered examples of *affective commodities*. In other words, by putting into circulation mature aged workers' affective value (commodified and embodied in their skills, physical capacities, aesthetic and emotional labours and even using the characteristic of 'mature' to define them), employers are then able to extract surplus value. In this way, emotions and affect are

a form of capital (Ahmed, 2004: 120) as their circulation serves to produce particular valuations and positions that pertain to mature aged workers.

That said, the hegemony of such a political affective economy is not uncontested, nor uncontestable. There are risks for employers and government in overlooking the machinations of the affective economy in which the business cases and related policies circulate. For one, we have demonstrated an ambivalence of positive and negative emotions surrounding older workers. These may also manifest in policy messages that simultaneously advocate integration (e.g., through accessing all the benefits of the 'rest' of the workforce) and distinction (e.g. through targeted policies) of older workers. For example, the rejection in April 2013 of the extension of worker's compensation beyond eligible pension age is an example of a policy decision that flies in the face of the positive language of the business case for extending working lives. Such tensions may generate mixed messages for mature aged workers, perhaps undermining how valued, welcome or equal they are in the contemporary workplace.

The narrow idealisation of the mature aged worker emerging from a political affective economy may also encourage a building of mature aged policy which is either too stigmatising or too aspirational and unrealistic. For example, much of the case study material assumes 'happy' older workers either have 'successfully' and rationally planned their life course (and work for social rather than financial reasons), or 'vulnerable' employees needing to be educated about basic financial planning and retirement through paternalistic organisational interventions. While these two positions are likely to be relevant to some, it may not speak to the multiplicity of what older workers want, need, prefer or desire in their final decade/s of work, and what will subsequently make them feel they want to stay in the workforce.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, not acknowledging the power of emotional circuits can mean that only 'marketing-friendly' benign and positive emotions such as age-friendly and inclusive work environments are forefronted (albeit latently) in the mindsets of policy-makers, smoothing over the lived realities of mature aged working. For one, there needs to be recognition that the emotions within success stories underpinned by the business case may work in tandem with 'darker' emotions that lead to ageist bullying, demeaning or marginalising behaviours. Situating age discrimination as an afterthought or not fully embedded in mature aged worker policy is likely to have less impact on reconfiguring how people feel about mature aged work and workers. Moreover, emotions surrounding belonging, inequality and free choice are likely to be experienced very differently depending on whether one is being recruited or retained, and yet are often conflated within policy discussion of mature age participation.

Conclusion

Ahmed's theory of emotion as an affective economy helps to articulate the multilevel and circulatory workings of emotion, and the manner in which they inform the creation, interpretation and consequences of the business case for mature aged workers. Our reflections have highlighted both the latent emotionality within the business case approach, and how the circulation of emotionality may have consequences for policy, possibly undermining the best intentions of initiatives or campaigns trying to extend working lives. In focusing on the emotionality of the business case, this short article has begun to show how 'social policies are as much related to emotions, such as

anger, contempt, disgust, shame and sympathy, as they are, for instance, to the state of the economy' (Grover and Piggott, 2013: 370). The emotionality of the business case circulates in particular ways that have consequences both for those on whose behalf it intends to advocate, and how organisational stakeholders think and feel about the mature aged workforce. Taking such an affective economies approach may thus generate important broader questions surrounding the population, participation and productivity policies and practices focusing on mature aged workers. For example, how might the designed effects of other age-related policies be shaped by the dynamic processes of emotionality? What does mature aged worker policy enable and constrain by way of our understandings of ageing and ageing workers through emotion? Do ageing policies speak and connect to all employees or stakeholders or only to particular bodies? Such questions are important when an aim of policy is to provide democratic and effective solutions to contemporary organisational issues. Future researchers may wish to address these policy-related questions, while also considering the affective economies of ageing across the career life course, and not just the later stages.

Note

1 Marx's M-C-M formula from Volume One of Capital explains how relationship between money (m) and commodities (c) serves to generate surplus value. Through circulation via commodities, money acquires more value, or is considered 'valorised'.

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