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Preparing Leaders for a 100-Year Life: Why Business Schools Must Act Now

The Overlooked Megatrend in Leadership Education

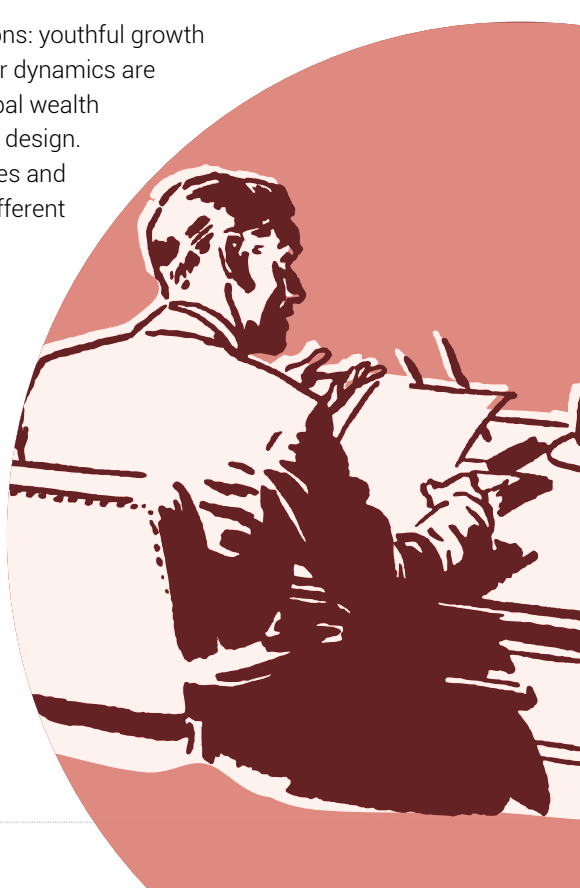
Business schools have spent decades equipping leaders to navigate digital transformation, globalisation, and artificial intelligence. Yet one of the most predictable and pervasive transformations of all—global ageing—remains largely absent from leadership education. Longevity is not a marginal issue; it is a structural shift already reshaping economies, organisations, and individual careers.

Across the world, populations are ageing as fertility rates decline and life expectancy increases. This transition is already visible in Europe and Japan and is accelerating across Asia and beyond. Despite its scale, longevity is still often framed as a social policy or healthcare issue. In practice, it represents a systemic economic and organisational shift with implications for strategy, innovation, talent management, and market positioning.

Why Longevity Changes Economic and Organisational Fundamentals

The implications of longer lives extend far beyond pension systems or healthcare costs. At the national level, ageing populations are altering the balance between workers and dependants, placing pressure on productivity and long-term growth. Governments are responding through policies encouraging later retirement, lifelong learning, and increased migration.

At the organisational level, many business models rest on outdated assumptions: youthful growth markets, abundant early-career talent, and linear career trajectories. Consumer dynamics are also shifting—individuals aged 50 and above represent a growing share of global wealth and purchasing power, yet remain underrepresented in marketing and product design. Within the workforce, longevity is driving multistage careers, creating challenges and opportunities in how organisations attract, develop, and retain talent across different life stages.



The Leadership Capability Gap

Despite these structural shifts, longevity is rarely treated as a strategic priority. It is frequently positioned within HR or diversity initiatives rather than embedded in core strategic decision-making. Many leaders lack a clear understanding of demographic trends, limiting their ability to anticipate changes in markets and talent pools. Organisational cultures often reflect implicit age biases, hindering effective integration of multigenerational workforces. Addressing these gaps requires a shift from viewing longevity as peripheral to recognising it as a central strategic variable.

From Insight to Action: A Longevity Leadership Framework

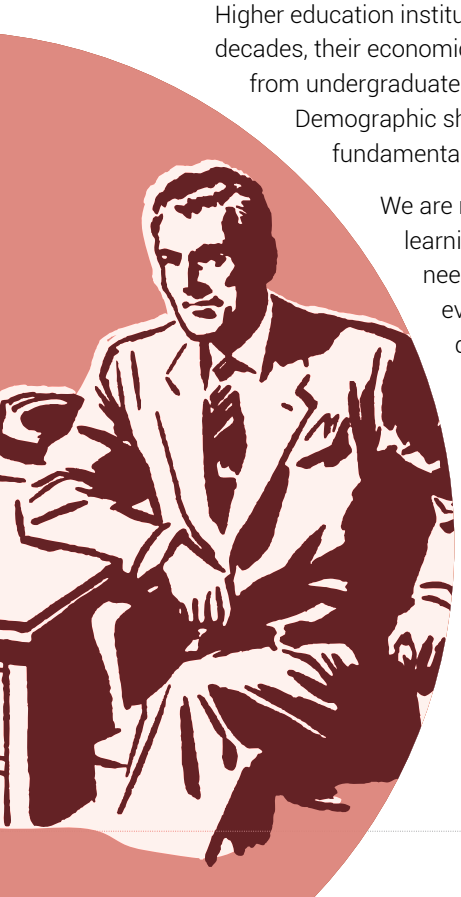
Moving from awareness to action requires a structured approach. Longevity Leadership provides such a framework across five dimensions:

- Measure impact and potential: Integrate age-related data into strategic analysis to understand how demographic change affects markets, workforce composition, and talent pipelines.
- Build leadership literacy: Develop a shared executive understanding of longevity trends and their organisational implications.
- Evolve organisational culture: Recognise the value of contributions across all life stages and address biases that limit inclusion.
- Rethink markets and customers: Adapt offerings and engagement strategies to reflect the needs of longer-lived consumers.
- Redesign talent systems: Evolve career models, learning systems, and work structures to support longer, more flexible working lives.

Taken together, these steps reposition longevity as a driver of growth, innovation, and resilience.

Higher Education at a Structural Inflection Point

Higher education institutions, and business schools in particular, are facing a structural inflection point. For decades, their economic model has relied heavily on a predictable pipeline: young students progressing from undergraduate to graduate degrees in a relatively linear fashion. That model is no longer sufficient. Demographic shifts, longer working lives, and the accelerating pace of technological change are fundamentally reshaping who needs education—and when.



We are moving from a 'front-loaded' education system to a lifelong learning economy. As careers extend and evolve, individuals will need to reskill and upskill multiple times over the course of 40- or even 50-year professional lives. Institutions that remain overly dependent on traditional student cohorts risk financial fragility; those that embrace a multi-generational model can unlock more stable and diversified revenue streams.

Older learners—mid-career professionals, senior executives, and retirees seeking intellectual engagement—represent a significant and underdeveloped market. These audiences bring not only purchasing power but also rich professional experience that enhances peer learning. However, they require different formats: shorter, modular programmes; flexible delivery (hybrid or online); and highly applied, immediately relevant content. This calls for a rethinking of programme design, faculty incentives, and brand positioning.

40-50 years

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Business schools are particularly well placed to lead this transformation. Executive education has long demonstrated the viability of alternative revenue models, but it often remains peripheral rather than central to institutional strategy. The next step is to integrate lifelong learning into the core mission—designing stackable credentials, subscription-based learning journeys, and alumni re-engagement platforms that accompany individuals throughout their careers.

Ultimately, diversifying beyond young degree-seeking students is not simply a financial imperative; it is a strategic repositioning. Universities must evolve from being places people attend at the start of life to becoming enduring partners in personal and professional development. Those that succeed will not only strengthen their economic resilience but also reaffirm their societal relevance in an age defined by continuous transformation.

The Role of Business Schools and the EFMD Community

Are business schools equipping leaders to operate in a world of longer lives? At present, longevity is rarely addressed as a core theme within MBA programmes or executive education. This represents a significant opportunity. By integrating longevity into curricula, research, and executive education, business schools can help organisations anticipate and respond to demographic change—embedding longevity into core strategy modules, developing interdisciplinary research, and designing programmes focused on multigenerational leadership.

A Programme for a New Leadership Reality

In response to this need, the Longevity Leadership Programme was developed at Católica Lisbon as a dedicated executive education experience. The programme adopts a systemic perspective, examining the implications of

Conclusion: Towards a New Longevity Leadership Literacy

Longevity is a defining feature of the 21st-century economy—not a temporary trend, but a long-term structural shift that will continue to shape economies and organisations for decades to come. For the EFMD community, this presents a clear opportunity: by integrating longevity into management education, business schools can equip leaders with the capabilities required to navigate longer, more complex careers and markets. In a world where 100-year lives are becoming increasingly common, leadership itself must evolve. Business schools will play a central role in shaping that evolution.

longevity across countries, companies, consumers, talent, and strategy. Participants engage with international faculty and applied case studies, translating demographic insight into practical organisational responses.

A tailored edition will be delivered for the EFMD community in October, led by Professor Céline Abecassis-Moedas and Avivah Wittenberg-Cox, developed in collaboration with Simon Chan of NEXEL. This edition explores how longevity can be integrated into teaching, research, and institutional strategy.

Why This Matters Now

Talent shortages are intensifying in many sectors, even as experienced workers remain underutilised. Consumer markets are shifting toward older demographics, requiring organisations to rethink segmentation. Organisations that fail to adapt risk declining productivity, reduced competitiveness, and missed growth opportunities. Conversely, those that recognise longevity as a strategic driver can unlock new value by aligning talent strategies, market approaches, and organisational design with longer life trajectories.

About the authors

Céline Abecassis-Moedas is Professor at Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics and founding Director of its Centre on Longevity Leadership — the first of its kind in Europe. She co-directs the Longevity Leadership Programme and leads research on the organisational implications of longer lives.

Avivah Wittenberg-Cox is CEO of 20-first, a Forbes contributor, Thinkers50 Hall of Fame member, host of the 4-Quarter Lives podcast and writes a weekly longevity update called elderberries on Substack. A leading voice on longevity leadership, she co-directs the Longevity Leadership Programme at Católica-Lisbon and also teaches at Saïd Business School Oxford.