



Journeys of Strength: An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore

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Abstract

It is projected that by 2050, large parts of Asia will have the highest percentage of the world's older population. Developed countries in Asia, such as Singapore, Japan and South Korea, will experience workforce shortages due to aging populations. In Singapore, the local workforce is expected to plateau from 2020 onward, indicating that there will be little or zero growth in the local workforce based on current employment and retirement rates. Singapore is an illustrative case study as it remains at the forefront of the global economy despite its lack of natural resources, small geographical size and a rapidly aging workforce. Although credited for their contributions, Singaporean older workers are perceived by many employers as liabilities and thereby confined to secondary labour markets. As such, the working lives of older workers warrants closer examination. This research study aims to challenge prevailing narrowing attitudes towards older workers above the age of 50 by discovering their appreciative factors through the involvement of key stakeholders in Singapore's employment sector. It will contribute to transforming how older workers are perceived and envision a more inspiring and positive future for them by informing future training initiatives and policy formulation.

Using a qualitative research design, this study adopted the Discovery and Dream phases from the appreciative inquiry methodology. Forty appreciative interviews and 10 focus group discussions with 20 older workers and 20 industry experts, employers and adult educators were conducted in Singapore. Guided by concepts drawn from the theory of flourishing, the S-BIT theory of fulfilling work and critical gerontology, the concept of 'dynamic-grit mindset' was developed from a detailed thematic analysis of data. The findings indicated that older workers were disadvantaged by the systemic inequities within Singapore's workforce. These inequities could be attributed to ageist attitudes within (1) human resource policies, (2) workplace contexts, (3) government policies and (4) other

contextual barriers. The findings also revealed that older workers in Singapore are assets to the nation and use the dynamic-grit mindset to mitigate and overcome the pressures of these systemic inequities within the workforce.

Dynamic-grit mindset in this study refers to a style of thought, a way of seeing life and a habit of coping with work rooted in eight key factors. Having this mindset enables older workers to flourish and experience a sense of fulfilment at work. The concept of dynamic-grit mindset is also a useful heuristic tool to extend the findings from this study and provide further insights for reforms of employment policies, workplace practices and training initiatives.

Keywords: dynamic-grit mindset, older workers, appreciative inquiry, flourishing, positive psychology, wellbeing, Singapore

Statement of Original Authorship

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree. I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time. I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Mohamed Fadhil

25th February 2022

Date

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Adaptability	Adaptability refers to an individual's ability to respond and cope with changes and unpredictability in unique situations and novel challenges in work contexts.
Aging	Aging is a lifelong process of becoming old and an ongoing biological process occurring since birth.
Ageism	Ageism can be defined as stereotyping, prejudice and/or discrimination against older people based on their chronological age or the perception of them as old.
Character strengths	Character strengths are unique characteristics that allow us to be at our best, to deliver our best performances at work while feeling engaged and energised.
Commitment	Commitment refers to an agreement and dedication to a purpose or long-term goal.
Competency	Competency refers to the technical knowledge, skills and underlying attributes required of a worker to perform effectively at work and has been used to describe both individual and organisational competencies.
Critical gerontology	Critical gerontology refers to a broad area of scholarship concerned with identifying possibilities for enabling social change, including positive ideals for the last stage of life, and was developed from critical theory.
Discipline	Discipline is a prescribed pattern of behaviour, which refers to working in a controlled manner by complying with specific expectations and standards.
Dynamic	Dynamic is defined as being constantly mobile, active and adaptable in mitigating the constantly changing demands of the workforce and economy and refers to positive traits such as being industrious, visionary, passionate, mindful and driven.
Emotional intelligence	Emotional intelligence refers to a person's ability to be aware of their own feelings and those of others, to motivate ourselves and manage emotions effectively to handle different situations
Employability	Employability relates to an individual's (perceived) ability to obtain and maintain employment throughout their career and move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment.
Empowerment	Empowerment here refers to an individual having self-determination, control and positive influence over their environment or that of others in a work context.
Engagement	Engagement refers to a high level of motivation, commitment and passion in acquiring knowledge and picking up new skills, particularly those specific and relevant to workers' industries.
Flourishing	Flourishing has been defined as an ideal state of wellbeing and functioning in individuals demonstrating high levels of hedonic and eudaemonic wellbeing.

Term	Definition
Gainful employment	Gainful employment refers to an employment situation where the employee or worker enjoys employment security and a sustainable source of income that facilitates self-sufficiency.
Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning has been defined as consisting of all stages of learning from any period in a person's life and encompasses the entire gamut of formal and informal learning in different contexts.
Meaning	Meaning here refers to finding a purpose, fulfilment and satisfaction in the work done and is related to wellbeing.
Passion	Passion in this study refers to strongly identifying with a line of work that an individual feels motivated to engage in and derives positive effects from doing.
Perseverance	Perseverance is the ability to show steadfastness and keep working on something despite encountering challenges and complexities in accomplishing the final objective or goal.
Positive relationships	Positive relationships refer to the good relations and connections people develop with others around them; some signs of having developed a positive relationship include respect and trust.
Problem-solving	Problem-solving in this study refers to the process of analysing challenges and seeking solutions to difficult or complex issues in relation to work.
Resilience	Resilience refers to the ability to recover or overcome some form of adversity and subsequently experience positive outcomes despite an undesirable incident or challenging circumstance.
S-BIT theory of work	The S-BIT (strengths-based inclusive theory) of work is a theory in organisational psychology that underlines the experience of fulfilling work predicting positive wellbeing.
Vision	Vision refers to having a purpose and the ability to think about and plan for the future to fulfil that ultimate purpose
Wellbeing	Wellbeing is diverse and fluid, respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change intertwined with individual, collective and environmental elements, which will continually interact across the lifespan underpinned by positive notions.
Work culture	Workplace culture refers to the shared values, belief systems, attitudes, way of working and assumptions to which workers in a workplace share and adhere.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Significant increases in the number of older persons in our society pose a challenge for biology, social and behavioural sciences, and medicine (Sierra, 2019). A more recent definition of aging describes it simply as a lifelong process of becoming old and a process occurring all the time since birth (Ambika, 2020; Pfenninger & Singleton, 2019). Despite the many negative undertones the word ‘aging’ is associated with (Wynia-Baluk et al., 2020), the term ‘successful aging’ is not an oxymoron (Fogle, 2020). Successful aging is a multidimensional concept (Bülow & Söderqvist, 2014; Keating, 2022) encompassing wellbeing, avoidance of disease and disability, sustaining high physical and cognitive function, and continued engagement in social and productive activities, including work (Reich et al., 2020; Ryff, 1989; Teater & Chonody, 2020; Visaria & Dommaraju, 2019). The stage is set for research studies to improve our understanding of aging populations (Zhao et al., 2021) and transform negative perceptions about aging (Heidrich & Ryff, 2021).

1.1 Aging

The Commission on Global Aging highlighted that aging is a major concern in many of the developed economies in the world, such as in Japan, the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany (University of Manchester, 2017). This is one concern that would impact the wellbeing of the global economy and alter societies as the percentage of the working population in these societies are reduced, resulting in increasing economic and societal considerations to care for an elderly population while attempting to sustain their economies (Petit, 2021; Phillipson, 2019). Goerres et al. (2020) and Kottow (2019) assert that the world is now confronted with the harsh reality of having to manage aging populations while grappling with expectations for economic growth and stability (Goodhart & Pradhan, 2020, Hsu, 2020). In 2019, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia were home to the largest share of the world’s older population (37%), and this is expected to remain until 2050 (United Nations

[UN], 2019). Therefore, this study considers the term ‘aging’ as not only as a biological process (Cohen et al., 2020) but a phenomenon affecting many countries (Grigoryeva et al., 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] & World Health Organization [WHO], 2021; Visaria & Dommaraju, 2019), including Singapore (Michel et al., 2021; Rozario & Pizzo, 2021; Wahl, 2020).

Although an assumed aspect of our lives, aging has generated much research interest (Ameratunga et al., 2019; Aronson, 2020; Chang et al., 2020; Hebblethwaite et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). The science of aging has evolved over the years as longevity in many developed societies has improved dramatically (Keating, 2022; UN, 2019). The study of aging involves the amalgamation of several disciplines to understand aging and explore how older people may optimise their functioning both at work and in their social lives (Ferraro & Carr, 2021; Flatt & Partridge, 2018). There are two main bodies of research involving aging. The first addresses the science of the biological and medical aspects of aging (Melzer et al., 2019), and the second discusses aging as a social process and experience (Baars, 2016; Sugar, 2019). The current research study delves into the latter to explore and understand the lives of older workers.

Between 2010 and 2050, significant demographic shifts are expected to continue taking place in many countries globally, including those in Asia (Wang, 2020; Zubiashvili & Zubiashvili, 2021). There are projected to be 1.3 billion people aged 60 years or older residing in Asia by 2050 (Keating, 2022; UN, 2019). Based on current demographic patterns, this indicates increasing numbers of older workers. To sustain economic growth and manage future developments and disruptions caused by technological advancements, many governments around the world have undertaken policy preparations for their country’s aging workforce (Atsuji, 2019; Yang et al., 2020).

Currently, Asia accounts for one-half of the world’s older population, and this number is expected to increase (He & Kinsella, 2020; UN, 2019). However, research suggests

developed countries in Asia, such as Singapore, Japan and South Korea, will experience workforce shortages due to their aging populations (Higgins & Vyas, 2018; Komazawa & Saito, 2021; Roy, 2022). In Singapore, the local workforce is expected to plateau from 2020 onward (Ministry of Manpower [MOM] Singapore, 2019). This indicates that there will be little or zero growth in the local workforce based on current employment and retirement rates (MOM Singapore, 2019). With this forecast in mind, the working lives of older workers warrant closer examination and deeper understanding. This study strives to document and understand the lived experiences of older workers and inform the workforce of older workers' value and inherent potential to contribute positively to the workforce.

Older people lament that they are merely counting their days and lead unappreciated lives (Cohen-Zimmerman & Hassinab, 2018; Serrat et al., 2020). Similarly, in the employment market and workforce, many face discrimination and are ostracised in relation to recruitment, employment policies and even career opportunities (Crăciun, 2019; Drydakis et al., 2017; Higgs & Gilleard, 2020). In addition, some are relegated to secondary labour markets in developed economies because competitive labour markets are more inclined towards gig economy workers, most of whom are young, fresh graduates (Kuitto & Helmdag, 2021). These older workers face a multitude of challenges in navigating these labour markets and sustaining themselves (Calvo-Sotomayoret et al., 2020; Velardi, 2018) despite being described as having grit and the ability to age successfully as a result (Rhodes & Giovannetti, 2021). However, having grit alone may not be sufficient for older workers in Singapore to be considered assets.

The challenges faced by older workers during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the prevailing, narrowed attitudes towards older people globally (Gu & Feng, 2021; Jamaluddin et al., 2022; Karayianni et al., 2021). It is time for society to approach and understand the issue of aging through an appreciative lens instead of one that diminishes, problematises and discriminates against the older generation (Casanova et al., 2020; Ohs &

Yamasaki, 2017). The working lives of our older generation are indeed a significant part of Singapore and its future, as many important lessons can be drawn from them. These lessons are crucial in envisioning a desired future for older workers in Singapore. Therefore, older workers' role, influence and impact are significant for Singapore.

1.2 Singapore: A Nation State, Progress and Policies

Despite being a small nation state in Southeast Asia, Singapore is now considered a leading economic power in Asia in terms of per capita income (Goh, 2017; OECD, 2018). As a gateway between the East and the West, the city-state has long been a territory for global traffic in ideas, images, cultures and capital (Chia, 2011; Quah, 2018). Singapore has been referred to as the 20th century's most successful development story, partly due to its economic prowess (Quah, 2018; Yuen, 2011).

Given its strategic location along the Straits of Malacca, Sir Stamford Raffles, from the East India Company in 1819, immediately recognised the significance of Singapore's location for the British to challenge Dutch influence and trade monopoly in the region (Liao, 2020). Singapore developed into an important trading port during colonial rule (after 1963), and its role as a trade hub continues to feature heavily in Singapore's economic development to this day (Alagirisamy, 2019). Although the island's administration was taken over once again by colonial rule in 1945, an upsurge of nationalist sentiments led to a transitional period of self-governance in Singapore from 1955 to 1963 (Thum, 2019). This was a tumultuous time in Singapore's history, marked by riots, the pressure of communism and the rise of the People's Action Party (PAP) led by Lee Kuan Yew (Thum, 2019).

In its political campaign, the PAP promoted equality for all races and religions (Chua, 2007). Meritocracy, as expressed by the ruling government, continues to be one of the pillars of an independent Singapore (Tan, 2021; Tan, 2008). In 1965, the newly formed government had to attend to urgent developmental and domestic challenges, such as national security, widespread unemployment, housing projects, water resources and a young nation's education

needs with limited natural resources (Bellows, 2009; Hamnett & Yuen, 2019). As the first step, the Singapore government established the Economic Development Board to plan and carry out a measured and careful economic development plan for the country (Deyo, 2019; Schein, 1996). The Economic Development Board aimed to attract foreign investments to facilitate employment and drive industrialisation with a key focus on developing crucial sectors such as port services and manufacturing (Deyo, 2019; Modeja, 2017).

In addition, a robust and contemporary education system was developed, firstly by establishing English as the primary language (Tan et al., 2021) and secondly by focusing on mathematics and science to prepare and equip the future workforce (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008; Maneejuk & Yamaka, 2021). Singapore's government realised that its national strategy would have to centre around its population (Green et al., 2021; Le Queux & Kuah, 2020; Osman-Gani, 2004). Over the past four decades, Singapore's strong and steady performance in economic growth and development has been driven by the government's relentless strategic drive into globally relevant industries and sectors, including its airport and seaport (Modeja, 2017). Further, it invested heavily in promptly setting up housing, healthcare, education and public infrastructure during its post-independent years (Huff, 1995). This enabled Singapore to rise through the ranks of developed nations based on their gross domestic product (GDP), the standard of living and national literacy rates, empowering the future generation of Singaporeans to enjoy peace, prosperity and stability (Jones, 2015). However, in this drive towards economic progress and prosperity, the nation's attention might have detracted from the very resource primarily responsible for this success, their workforce (Yap & Gee, 2014). During development years, members of Singapore's workforce formed the bedrock of the country's economic progress. These members have now matured, and most are above 50 years of age and referred to as 'older workers' (Harris et al., 2018; Hui & Toh, 2014; Mathews & Lim, 2019).

Rogerson and Stacey (2018) explain that one of the biggest challenges faced by Singapore, like most countries globally, is an aging population and a declining workforce. As a nation-state with a dense population, Singapore is confronted with a workforce comprised of post-war baby boomers, many reaching their 60s and 70s (Thang et al., 2019). Another factor is a shrinking workforce exacerbated by a very low birth rate (Tam, 2021; Wong, 2016). Singapore faces an urgent need to look after an increasing number of senior citizens while ensuring sustained and positive economic development—a challenge faced in other developed countries such as Germany, Japan and South Korea (Rozario & Pizzo, 2021; Teerawichitchainan, 2017). An increasingly aging population means the percentage of taxes allocated towards managing elderly care and services has to increase, while economic development and progress may taper off (Bloom, 2019).

Another challenge older workers in Singapore face regarding employment is competition from an influx of foreign professionals (Paramartha et al., 2015). As a centre for multinational corporations seeking to establish and develop emerging markets in Asia, Singapore has attracted a large number of foreign talents to the country (Mok & Chan, 2020). However, despite the dynamism and success they bring to Singapore's economy, this influx of foreign professionals has resulted in the local population perceiving foreign talent as competition for employment, education and other national resources (Gomes, 2019; Kwon, 2019). Despite the success of this policy in addressing the talent deficit in the workforce and keeping it robust and economically competitive, it has also presented many challenges for the domestic workforce (Chia, 2011; Waring et al., 2019). Many locals argue that this incursion has inadvertently diluted national identity and pressured efforts to assimilate all strata of Singapore's workforce as a single, unified community (Kwon, 2019; Paramartha et al., 2015). The introduction of foreign workers was received with a mix of resentment and contempt by Singaporeans (Ahmed et al., 2021; Gomes, 2019). Although the government has assured Singaporean workers they will be prioritised when it comes to employment (Thian, 2019),

there exists a sense of disquiet among workers, particularly older ones, about being treated as equals concerning recruitment and equity of resources in the workplace (Ko, 2018).

Meritocracy is a foundational concept in Singapore and a hallmark of its education system (Harney, 2020; Tan, 2008; Teo, 2019). Although central to the Singaporean education system's success due to its stratification (Teo, 2019), it creates a gap between educational qualifications and the income of the population (Lee & Gopinathan, 2020; Lim, 2016). In addition, unskilled locals face a harsh test when seeking employment due to the presence of low-cost migrant workers who come to Singapore in search of a better fortune (Chia, 2011; Thian, 2019). Without the safety net of a minimum wage scheme, these Singaporeans face further financial and social pressure (Dhamani, 2008; Mukhopadhaya, 2004) in a country with cities considered among the world's most expensive to live in (Carrière et al., 2020) where workers are usually paid based on a competitive wage structure. A failure to address these issues could result in persistent social disquiet and resistance to government policies concerning economic growth and societal progress (Koh et al., 2020b; Wah, 2012). Therefore, amid adapting and navigating through a rapidly changing, interconnected and multifaceted global environment, Singapore struggles with an increasingly aging workforce (Rogerson & Stacey, 2018). Faced with unintentional discrimination and competing candidates in the job market, the aging workforce in Singapore contend with a unique set of challenges.

Based on current employment and retirement rates, the incoming local workers will only be enough to replace the retiring workers, meaning the local workforce will not see any increase in numbers (How, 2019; Xu et al., 2021). Over the past decade, Singapore's older worker employment rates have risen considerably and compare well with OECD countries such as Australia, South Korea and the UK (Callan et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2017; Hui & Toh, 2014; Mehta, 2020). Singaporean seniors' education, income and occupation profiles have also improved (Maulod & Lu, 2020; MOM Singapore, 2019). With this consideration, it is certain that older workers have now acquired greater potential than before to contribute to

society and the workforce (Hundt & Uttam, 2017; Starke et al., 2013). Another more familiar solution to address this deficit is attracting and including foreign talent as part of the workforce. However, this would be counterproductive and exacerbate the challenge of assisting the local population with employment, some of whom have either lost their jobs or are now struggling to gain employment due to the COVID-19 crisis (Oh, 2020).

1.3 Aging: A Social Process

One of the most pronounced challenges of this new decade is the dramatic demographic changes occurring in many parts of the world (Crăciun, 2019). Advancements in medicine and public health have led to increased life expectancy, leading to rising percentages of aging populations (Buseh, 2017). As a result, many industrialised economies have rapidly aging populations and are now grappling with the harsh realities this demographic presents (Portillo, 2019; Wolff et al., 2018). Some challenges brought about by aging populations include a decline in the working population, increased health care costs, unsustainable government pension commitments, and a dependence on the working population to pay for publicly funded programs (Crăciun, 2019; Shafik, 2021; Street & Léime, 2020). Consequently, these challenges could significantly undermine the high living standards enjoyed in many developed economies (O’Sullivan, 2020; Thalassinou, 2019). At a national level, new retirement policies have been fashioned to accommodate the growing number of potential retirees in appropriate roles and positions in the workforce (Formosa, 2019; Koh et al., 2021b). In Singapore and elsewhere in Asia, policies are legislated to encourage older people to work after their official retirement age, and many national initiatives and strategies are devised to keep older people in employment (MOM Singapore, 2019).

Perceptions of aging vary according to contexts (van Leeuwen et al., 2019) and are often subjective depending on the life experiences of different individuals. Ageism is not only an internal experience (Phillipson, 2003); it is also manifested in various understandings, settings and contexts in our societies (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017). It is a concept that has

taken on and is still taking on many different definitions and understandings (van Leeuwen et al., 2019) in various conditions in different parts of the world. Over centuries, many cultures have understood and articulated aging in ways that reflect cultural-age expectations of social norms and nuances (Velastín, 2019). In some cultures, aging represents a process symbolising wisdom and leadership (Grosch et al., 2019). However, in the current economic climate inundated with employment uncertainty, political upheavals and rapidly changing population demographics, it has been argued that aging more often than not carries a negative connotation (Gullette, 2018). Although aging is regarded in many societies as a negative phenomenon (Crăciun, 2019), this does not necessarily point towards a nation's inevitable macroeconomic demise. It is a phenomenon that can be mitigated and managed with well-designed public policies in the same way the opposite may be true (Murwani, 2020).

In many societies, aging comes with a negative stereotype, which could be attributed to a variety of reasons, some unique to local contexts (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017; Bae et al., 2018). Studies indicate that aging has suffered from obstinate, time-entrenched erroneous beliefs, even in developed economies, that economic value reduces with age (Crăciun, 2019). As such, an increasingly aging population might be an ominous sign of economic and employment challenges that require appropriate measures to mitigate its detrimental effects (Amin, 2019; Randall & Haruki, 2019). Another concern with an aging population is the country's need to make up for the shortfall in the workforce by introducing workers and professionals from other countries (Gammage & Stevanovic, 2019). Both developed and developing economies in Asia, such as Singapore, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, and some countries in Europe and the Middle East, have resorted to adopting this measure to mitigate the shortfall in their workforces in terms of numbers, experience and expertise (Withers, 2019).

One way to engender policy change and inspire development in aging initiatives is by promoting fresh perspectives of old age (Naskali et al., 2019; Voľanská, 2018). Adopting

fresh perspectives of aging transforms how aging is perceived and managed. Although this is sensible and laudable, it is an undertaking dotted with intricacies and complexities as aging is considered differently in various societies (Wolff et al., 2018). Thus, countries must use calibrated and contextualised approaches to address this phenomenon appropriately (Rudnicka et al., 2020). Aging is a natural phenomenon involving older people who have contributed significantly to the progress of societies and expect to be treated with dignity during their retirement years. It is imperative that negative perspectives of aging in Singapore are addressed and considered a natural phenomenon that offers the country many positives.

Many older workers in Singapore seek to stay active and be meaningfully engaged through work (MOM Singapore, 2019). Population aging has regularly been on the Singapore government's agenda since the first Committee on the Problems of the Aged was convened in June 1982 (Yuen & Kong, 2018). The strategic objectives of this committee included addressing concerns associated with negative perceptions of aging and transforming workplaces to encourage employment opportunities for older adults (Yuen & Kong, 2018). In addition, employment rates for older workers have improved significantly and rank well with other OECD countries such as South Korea, Japan and the United States of America (US) (MOM Singapore, 2019). There has also been significant development and improvement in education and occupation profiles (Yuen & Kong, 2018). As of 2020, Singapore has a 97.5% literacy rate (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2021a). At least 221,300 of this population, aged 50 and above, are university graduates performing executive roles (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2021b).

In 2018, the MOM Singapore formed the Tripartite Workgroup on Older Workers to prepare Singapore's aging workforce for the future. One of the central aims of this workgroup was to create an inclusive workforce and progressive workplaces that value older workers (MOM Singapore, 2019). The need to develop inclusive and progressive workplaces has never been more pronounced. Zaniboni et al. (2019) conclude that older workers are unfairly

deprived of job opportunities due to age stereotypes in hiring decisions and recruitment practices. Further, several studies highlight that many workplaces practice discriminatory hiring practices or have workplace policies that fail to consider older workers and their contributions to the organisation (Beier et al., 2019; Iparraguirre, 2019; Wainwright et al., 2019). To compound this issue, there are instances of organisations that discriminate against older workers implicitly, despite having inclusive workplace policies (Iparraguirre, 2019; Oliveira & Cardoso, 2018). This could be attributed to deeply held stereotypes of older people by the recruitment team or organisation members, some perhaps doing so unknowingly (Vodopivec et al., 2019). In sum, it is clear that societal attitudes towards older people can be a pervasive influence on how older people are perceived and considered, particularly in continuing employment and education. However, societal attitudes are difficult to prove compared to deterministic concepts in the sciences. Many organisations may not consider such attitudes as influential or significant in affecting older worker' work lives and careers.

1.4 Economy of Aging

A pronounced and significant population trend affecting many countries is a rapidly increasing aging population (Bussolo et al., 2015; Feng et al., 2018; Grigoryeva et al., 2019; Vanleerberghe et al., 2019). The proportion of the world's population over 60 years is expected to nearly double, from 12% to 22 % by 2050 (WHO, 2021). However, there is a corresponding decline in the working population in developed countries such as Australia, Korea, Japan and Singapore (Kaine & Ravenswood, 2019; Kwon, 2019). This worrying phenomenon would expectedly place immense financial stress on government spending and consequently drive the economy towards an increasing dependency on older workers to sustain economic growth and stability (Francis-Pettway, 2019; Katagiri et al., 2020). The harsh realities of dealing with an increasingly aging population now confront many of these economies while grappling with demands for economic growth and sustainability (Lee & Qian, 2017; Mehta, 2020; Parliamentary Budget Office of Australia, 2019). With this

consideration, it is important to consider approaches that mitigate material deficits and economic losses associated with old age and also those that reinforce strength, adaptation, transformation and psychosocial growth (Daniele et al., 2019). To achieve this, variables such as changes in the global workforce, local economic needs, changing needs of an aging workforce and how older people could optimise their functioning at work should be consolidated and analysed (Flatt & Partridge, 2018; Rozario & Pizzo, 2021).

Singapore's human capital is considered one of its critical resources (Li, 2019; Maholtra et al., 2018). Despite enjoying sustained and remarkable economic growth in the last couple of decades, many of Singapore's older workers may have been unwittingly removed from this economic success (Ko, 2018). Steeped in Confucian values of diligence, integrity and responsibility, Singapore's society subscribes to the philosophy of self-reliance and accountability (Dimmock et al., 2021; Tan, 2012), so the government only provides financial support to those in dire need. This philosophy facilitates such recipients' self-reliance through reskilling programs and employment assistance (Teo, 2015). In the last decade, the national agenda in Singapore has been largely fixated on promoting older workers' inclusion and reintegration into the workforce and lobbying for fair wages to ensure they have adequate financial resources in retirement (Ko, 2018; MOM Singapore, 2019). In 2012, the government legislated that employers can re-employ workers upon reaching the retirement age of 62. In 2017, this age limit was raised to 67 for older workers deemed fit for work and employed by the organisation for more than three years (MOM Singapore, 2021). Alongside the aim to reduce reliance on foreign workers (Woo, 2018), the current government policy strategically focuses on maintaining the employability and productivity of an aging workforce (Maholtra et al., 2018), including the employability of increasing numbers of workers aged above 45 years (Ko, 2018).

In Singapore, an older worker refers to someone above 50 years of age employed on a permanent basis or contractual terms for a minimum period of 12 months (Davies et al., 2017;

Harris et al., 2018; Maholtra et al., 2018). Although Singapore ranks well compared to other OECD economies in terms of full-time employment, efforts to improve the employability of older workers are consistently exercised (MOM Singapore, 2019). Despite two decades of a proactive approach towards older workers, more is needed to mitigate the effects of having an older working population. To do this, Singapore's leaders have outlined a detailed initiative to turn the country into one they termed 'a nation for all ages' (MOM Singapore, 2019). This initiative reflects the urgent need for Singapore to integrate older workers as part of its economic future and wellbeing. However, from an economic perspective, older workers are liabilities (Axelrad et al., 2021; Pirog, 2018). Therefore, it is critical and timely to study older workers through an appreciative lens to consider how best to integrate them into Singapore's workforce.

Gebben (2021) and Ramu (2020) identify an urgent need to supplement a declining global workforce. However, while trying to do this, one challenge Singapore's employment sector faces is ageism (Macdonald, 2018). This is also true of Singapore broadly, as ageism is one of the least recognised forms of prejudice due to a lack of quantifying its ramifications in economic terms (Donizzetti, 2019; Levy et al., 2018). For example, ageism alone costs the US economy \$63 million annually (Levy et al., 2018). In addition, prevalent ageist attitudes are also hurting the economic potential of many countries, thus hampering their efforts towards achieving economic sustainability (Pirog, 2018). Turner (2019) highlights that much of the age discrimination employees face is rooted in misleading assumptions and stereotypes, often perceived by younger generations, about workers aged 40 and over. As such, ageist perceptions of older workers are hurting the coffers of even developed economies. In some developed countries, this is due to older workers being sidelined in employment in key industries (Mackenzie & Marks, 2019). They are subsequently relegated to secondary labour markets merely to pay credence to enforced recruitment and employment policies (Centre for Research on the Economics for Aging [CREA], 2018). Further, such attitudes are anathemas

to inclusive workplace and employment policies established by many governments in developed economies (Nachmias & Caven, 2019) and severely impede their successful application.

This situation necessitates a more nuanced investigation to understand why many economies are still besieged by a severe deficit in their workforce while struggling to manage an older working population who are increasingly segregated and regarded as policy challenges to economic sustainability and progress (Checcucci, 2019). Despite employing various instruments and strategies to create a more robust and inclusive workforce (Heok, 2021; Walby, 2018), ageist attitudes in Singapore's workforce still exists (Xu et al., 2021). Therefore, one key consideration when studying older workers is to avoid placing them into negative constructs as problems to be solved for the economic wellbeing of the nation. Rather, it is important to approach them as instrumental to the future economy and workforce, not as problems to be solved or simply a policy consideration to gain political traction and support.

1.5 Older Workers and Employability

Since the establishment of the Singapore Workforce Development Agency in 2003, employability skills have been officially endorsed as a core approach for reskilling and upskilling workers to improve work performance and income mobility (Sung et al., 2013; Varaprasad, 2021). Across the globe, the average investment in reskilling is about \$1,000 per person (Kuehner-Hebert, 2019), and Singapore's government has invested heavily in reskilling and upskilling workers (Fung et al., 2021). For example, the National Silver Academy (NSA) was set up for older workers to support Singapore's lifelong learning initiatives and overcome the barrier of affordability when upskilling. This training institution has benefited at least 15,000 seniors since 2015 (MOM Singapore, 2019). Besides reskilling and upskilling older workers, several other established initiatives help Singapore's older workers extend their working lives and reduce workforce deficits (Fung et al., 2021). One such initiative is the Workpro scheme, where workers are put through a job-matching and

career upskilling program (MOM Singapore, 2019). However, the reskilling and upskilling of older workers may only be addressing part of Singapore's challenge in reducing the deficit in its aging workforce. Simply acknowledging this problem as a skills gap that can be mainly mitigated through a national reskilling and upskilling program may be myopic and oversimplifying a complex problem.

Currently, the prevalent assumption is that individuals, particularly in developed economies such as Singapore, are expected to take ownership of their working lives and plan their careers (Peters et al., 2019). However, it is equally crucial for government agencies, self-help organisations and workplaces to share the responsibility for training workers and supporting them as they manage their career pathways (Lands & Pasha, 2021). Active and equal involvement from all stakeholders is necessary to alleviate challenges faced by declining workforces to motivate disadvantaged workers—such as older workers above 50 years of age and those working in lower-skilled jobs—to extend their working lives and enjoy fulfilling careers without sacrificing their quality of life (Turner, 2019). However, despite government agencies' concerted efforts to reskill and upskill older workers and promote fair employment practices (MOM Singapore, 2019), age-related discrimination still subsists regarding the productivity levels, reliability and adaptability of older workers (Heok, 2021; Peters et al., 2019).

1.6 Rationale and Significance

Older workers have been a fundamental part of the labour force for decades and are now increasingly relegated to secondary employment markets in many developed economies due to ageist and discriminatory attitudes as well as constrained perspectives (Fideler, 2021; Rudman & Aldrich, 2021). Further, the focus on economic and employability policies when studying older workers has resulted in attention shifting from older workers to the materialistic, political and labour concerns of the state (Böttcher et al., 2018).

Although Singapore has developed a continuing education and training credentialing system to cater to the changing needs of the workforce (Tan et al., 2017; Varaprasad, 2021), Billet (2011) suggests it is necessary to monitor the progress and success of this system, particularly concerning attitudes towards older workers. Subramaniam et al. (2019) highlight that it is crucial to conduct further research on successful aging from the perspectives of older workers in Singapore (Owens et al., 2019). This is significant given there are currently no appreciative studies on older workers (Francis-Pettway, 2019; Reed, 2010). The current research study is the first application of an appreciative inquiry framework in Singapore to examine older workers and is, therefore, very significant given the current climate of austerity and change in the employment and economic sectors (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). It is critical to consider the conditions necessary for older workers to remain an essential part of the workforce and encourage their reintegration back into the workforce if they have been made redundant due to their seniority. With this consideration, older workers may have an important role in addressing the needs of Singapore's workforce (Ko, 2018). Therefore, this appreciative study challenges prevailing narrow attitudes of older workers by demonstrating how they are key to the nation's wellbeing and indeed assets to Singapore.

Another importance of approaching older workers from an appreciative position is that it gives fresh perspectives on how the appreciative factors of older workers enable them to be assets to Singapore's workforce by reshaping and reforming attitudes about older workers. Thus, it is necessary to approach research on older workers through a positive psychology lens (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Vella-Brodrick, 2017) to build the transformation needed based on a foundation of strengths instead of deficit-based and problem-solving approaches (Askew et al., 2020; Lewis, 2016). It is crucial to consider a more humanistic approach to understand the lives of older workers from an appreciative position (Owens et al., 2019) and not situate them as challenges in policymaking and economic development. Therefore, this thesis illustrates the dynamic-grit mindset of older workers that underpins the

concept of a flourishing worker in Singapore. It demonstrates the core role of the dynamic-grit mindset in determining the optimal functioning of the older worker and how using human-centric approaches can overcome the challenges of systemic inequities in societal and work contexts.

1.7 Thesis Overview

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the context of the study and identifies the problems brought about by an aging population in relation to Singapore's economy and workforce. It establishes the research problem and argues the significance and rationale of the study. It highlights the intricate relationship between older workers and employability and explains the various initiatives introduced by the Singapore government to mitigate this problem. Chapter 2 examines the body of academic literature on this issue and concludes that many older workers in Singapore and around the world suffer from ageism. It discusses the various definitions of an older worker and describes how ageist attitudes result in older workers being perceived as liabilities. It also summarises the effects of such attitudes: reducing employment opportunities for older people, dismissing them as liabilities, and hampering their potential to contribute to the nation. Finally, this chapter highlights the role of character strengths in organisations and discusses wellbeing concepts and definitions.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework used for this research. It discusses the rationale behind the theories and explains how the framework is used as a foundation to guide the data analysis. The theoretical framework (see Table 3.1) combines several theories. First, it uses critical gerontology theory to understand taken-for-granted assumptions and explores models of aging through a critique of social meanings and assumptions of older workers (Bengtson et al., 1997). Second, it applies a combination of two theories under wellbeing: the theory of flourishing, which facilitates an understanding of the factors that allow older workers to flourish (Huppert & So, 2011); and the S-BIT (strengths-based inclusive theory) of

work, developed from concepts in organisational psychology to facilitate analysis of factors utilising workers' strengths. Chapter 4 describes the application of appreciative inquiry as a conceptual framework that frames the methodology adopted for the study and describes the procedures used for data collection. It outlines the qualitative approach and explains the application of the first two phases of Cooperrider and Godwin's (2012) appreciative inquiry methodology. It justifies the data collection methods used for the two phases and describes Braun and Clarke's (2014) thematic data analysis method employed in this study.

Chapter 5 presents the findings and establishes relationships between the appreciative factors of the older workers through the theoretical framework using Huppert and So's (2013) concept of flourishing, Owens et al. (2019) S-BIT theory of work and concepts within critical gerontology. Chapter 6 discusses the main findings from the data analysis and argues for a consideration that older workers are assets to Singapore's workforce. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the study with a summary of key findings and explains the study's significance, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review is structured to identify the different definitions of older workers, the relationship between lifelong learning and employability, factors related to employment policies concerning older workers; the role of work in influencing the wellbeing and mental health of older workers; and an examination of employer and societal attitudes towards older workers. This is followed by an analysis of factors that account for ageist attitudes in workplaces. A discussion of the motivations of older workers, character strengths in organisations and wellbeing concepts concludes this chapter.

2.1 Introduction

A scoping literature review was undertaken to analyse studies concerning older workers and factors relating to their employability. A scoping review is a rigorous approach to map out the body of research, specifically regarding the volume and type of research and key findings in a particular area or topic (Munn et al., 2018; Tricco et al., 2016). This approach to the literature review facilitates a broad and systematic identification of core and significant trends in a particular field of research (Purssell, 2020). It allows gaps in the research area to be uncovered through a summary of existing knowledge and key findings (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; O'Brien et al., 2016; Pham et al., 2014; Stenberg et al., 2016). The five steps in a scoping review framework include defining the study's purpose, study identification, filtering and selection process, data extraction, and collation and summarisation of data. This form of review is most appropriate to this study because it applies a broad and structured search of the literature to optimise the findings in the body of literature, replicates the results from the data presented and decreases potential bias from flawed implementations (Smith et al., 2016).

Therefore, this review highlights gaps in scholarship and explains the need to conduct more research (Templier & Paré, 2018; Vellaichamy & Jeyshankar, 2019), situating itself

within the field of older workers and employability in Singapore. The key search terms include ageism, character strengths and motivations of older workers, lifelong learning and employability relating to older workers, the mental health of older workers, active aging and employment policies involving older workers. The databases accessed include: ERIC (ProQuest), ERIC (US Department of Education) Elsevier (CrossRef), Goggle Scholar, Informa—Taylor & Francis (CrossRef), JSTOR Archival Journals, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses: Global Taylor & Francis Online—Journals, and Wiley Online Library found in the digital libraries of the University of Adelaide as well as Google Scholar, including an extended search of the bibliographies and reference lists identified in the literature sourced, published between 2000 and 2021.

2.2 Definition of an Older Worker

Biological factors linked to the socio-economic status of countries influences how aging is defined and, similarly, how a person is defined as a senior is different in diverse contexts (Sharma, 2020). Age norms and age expectations echo socially defined time, and these definitions are important in understanding adaptation patterns of people in different age groups (Meinertz, 2018; Werth & Brownlow, 2018). The topics of aging, older workers and employability have become defining concerns of our time (Czaja et al., 2020). However, discussions and dialogues on aging and work are often stymied because it has been difficult to define (Canham et al., 2017; Slay et al., 2018) what is meant when referring to older workers and deciphering societal definitions of older workers. This is because terms such as older workers, mature workers, senior workers, and experienced workers are used interchangeably (McCarthy et al., 2014; Weber et al., 2019). This section will discuss the various definitions of an older worker and the contributing factors to these definitions.

One underlying reason for using interchangeable terms is the meaning of aging has changed over time and gained new perspectives (Brie, 2019; Cox, 2020; Mori, 2020). In the next decade, it is expected that the number of healthy older adults will work past the

traditional retirement age (Vanajan et al., 2020). Some of these baby boomers find they need to work for sustained financial security (Choi et al., 2018; Cox, 2020), while others continue to work to stay engaged and be physically and mentally active (Crăciun, 2019; Neary et al., 2019). Currently, there is no clear consensus about the definitions that should be applied when referring to individuals who have moved from mid-career into the later years of work (Nachmias, 2019; Sewdas et al., 2017). An equally significant consideration is that the threshold for becoming an older worker is inconsistent and not clearly demarcated in many societies (Georgantzi, 2018). One reason for this obscurity is that older workers exist within various contexts, each one enveloped by unique conditions, dynamics and needs (Resnick et al., 2018). As discussed in Chapter 1, many economies around the world have a substantial population of older workers. However, it is important to clarify and describe the characteristics that define older workers in Singapore.

The working age of the global population is defined as those aged 15–64 (OECD, 2020). This indicator measures the share of the general working-age population in the world. However, currently, there is no consensus about the ideal description of an older worker (Yeves et al., 2019). The perception that ‘50 is the new 40’ suggests a changing public perception of aging (Chappel, 2018; Machado & Sousa, 2019), and the age of 50 is at the cusp of the aging process where a worker is considered an older worker. Recently, in the US and Brazil, more researchers are defining older workers as those who are at least 55 years old, partly because this is currently the fastest-growing segment of the workforce (Amorim et al., 2019; Salka, 2019; Wandner et al., 2018). A quantitative study in the US examining workplace discrimination defined older workers as workers above the age of 50 (Choi et al., 2018). Similarly, older workers were defined as being above 55 years of age in a study in Slovakia (Krajňáková & Vojtovič, 2017). In the UK, an empirical study referred to older workers generally as those above the age of 55 (Taneva et al., 2016), although a government report and another study on older workers in the UK utilised the term for employees aged 50

and over (Egdell et al., 2020; Neary et al., 2019; UK Department for Work and Pensions, 2017). Likewise, McCarthy et al.'s (2017) study measuring the mental health of older workers in Ireland defined older workers as those aged 50 and above. This definition was observed in a report on the aging workers in Korea (Lee et al., 2018), a study on the effects of retirement in Japan (Wels & Takami, 2020), and research on the mental health and cognitive functions in older Croatian workers (Bjelajac et al., 2019). However, in Singapore, there is no agreed age or definition of an older worker (Maholtra et al., 2019).

Although the expected retirement age in Singapore has been considered and shifted several times (Lee & Qian, 2017), the description and demarcation of an older Singaporean worker have not been defined clearly and coherently in relation to the local workforce (Rogerson & Stacey, 2018). Scholars have sought to problematise the conventional concepts and orthodox measures in the academic literature concerning aging (Egdell et al., 2020; Gietel-Basten & Scherbov, 2020). However, one distinct failure is not considering the different life expectancies in diverse contexts, forming narrowing perspectives of old age and misrepresenting comparisons between these contexts (Klimczuk & Tomczyk, 2020). Therefore, it is vital to consider the prospective number of years an older worker is expected to live and be active in the workforce in a particular context (Carstensen et al., 2019; Gietel-Basten & Scherbov, 2020). Fong (2021) identified older people as those above 50 years of age in his study on the physical activities of older people in Singapore. A government report from Singapore's MOM (2019) refers to older workers as around 45–55 years old, while academic research centre CREA refers to older Singaporeans as aged 50–70 in a survey exploring key variables affecting older people's financial adequacy in Singapore (Malholtra et al., 2018). The NSA (2021) in Singapore—an organisation that aims to encourage and support seniors in lifelong learning by expanding their learning options and breaking down contextual barriers—provide subsidies for Singaporean seniors, referred to as those aged 50 and above.

The current study considers all these age ranges and subsequently refers to older workers as Singaporean workers above the age of 50.

Research on the aging workforce is multidisciplinary, integrating economic, sociological, psychological, vocational and political aspects (Harris et al., 2018; Poulos et al., 2021). Traditionally, discussions involve age stereotypes, discrimination and how organisations support and retain older workers (Armenta et al., 2018; Lössbroek & Radl, 2019; Whiting & Pritchard, 2020). Most studies on older workers are quantitative, with samples often derived from a single organisation or industrial sector (Blomé et al., 2020; Chen & Gardiner, 2019; Murthy et al., 2019). Moreover, research surrounding aging workforces tend to focus on some industry sectors, particularly those directly impacting that country's economy (Rouzet et al., 2019; Sanders, 2018). Further, recent research in aging workforces around the globe have been conducted in relation to economic progress, state needs and workforce challenges (Calvo-Sotomayor et al., 2020; López-López et al., 2020; Stough et al., 2018). Another notable area of research involving older workers is concerned with the physical and psychological health of older people and successful aging (Flett & Heisel, 2020; Ha & Kim, 2019; Halaweh et al., 2018; Newmark et al., 2020).

It has been documented that older people change physically and psychologically with age (Bates et al., 2020; Koochek et al., 2018; Miller, 2019), observed through their behaviours (Sanders, 2018). However, these changes cannot be attributed to aging only but also other factors such as lifestyle, genetic disposition, support system and work environment (Dijkman et al., 2019; Ediev et al., 2019; Jecker, 2020). Several studies find that many of the ill effects of aging can be mitigated through a supportive environment (Lotvonen et al., 2017; Nagarajan et al., 2019; Vanajan et al., 2020; Yuen et al., 2020). Another mitigating factor is the assumption that older workers suffer from declining cognitive abilities (Carr et al., 2020; Oppert & O'Keeffe, 2019; White et al., 2018), although this is usually compensated by workers' knowledge and experience (Vasconcelos, 2018). However, Formosa (2019),

Nagarajan et al. (2019), Vanajan et al. (2020), and Y. Kim (2020) all argue that aging may not necessarily affect cognitive function, particularly if the older person is in gainful employment and mentally active. Further, being active in the workforce and having an opportunity to contribute to the workforce results in older workers observing significant improvements in their mental health and wellbeing (Kooij, 2020; Neary et al., 2019; Söderbacka et al., 2020).

Besides physical and cognitive transformations, older workers may experience changes in personalities and perspectives on life (Hussenoeder et al., 2019). Studies demonstrate that older workers are much more open to change than younger workers (Windsor, 2020; Shultz et al., 2019), but at the same time are more self-regulated, accepting, conscientious and willing to learn (Frøyland & Terjesen, 2020; Kroon, 2019; Johnson, 2019). Barnes and Weller (2020) and Kollmann et al. (2020) also found that older workers exhibit an openness to new experiences and, contrary to popular belief, motivation levels to perform well at work does not decline with age (Lössbroek & Radl, 2019; Wilson, 2019). However, workers' priorities also change with age and throughout their careers (Egdell et al., 2020). Older workers are likely to attribute more importance to intrinsically rewarding job features, the social aspects of work such as workplace culture and interactions with colleagues, and feeling valued and involved (Eppler-Hattab et al., 2020). Conversely, they are less likely to feel motivated by extrinsic rewards, career progression (Yeves et al., 2019) and striving for more demanding job roles and higher positions within the organisation (Anxo et al., 2019).

One notable similarity threaded throughout the lives of older workers in different parts of the world in diverse contexts is precarity (Bates et al., 2019; Calvo-Sotomayor et al., 2020). Here, precarity refers to politically and environmentally induced conditions in which certain population groups suffer from failing and disjointed social and economic networks, job insecurity and lead a precarious existence (Motakef, 2019; Veldstra, 2020). With this definition in mind, older workers are one segment of Singapore's population that could suffer from a precarious life. Older workers generally suffer from various insecurities, including

circumstances brought about by floundering economies reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Eikhof, 2020). Yet, even before the pandemic, older workers were considered a vulnerable group within the workforce (Cox, 2020; Ghilarducci & Farmand, 2020) and, in most contexts, suffering from insecurities, particularly in terms of employment and work skills (Amundson, 2019; Wandner, 2018). Older workers are also not given adequate and careful consideration when governments craft employment and training policies (OECD, 2019; Vasconcelos, 2018; Westwood, 2019), although this may not be the case completely in some countries such as Singapore and Australia (Ní Léime, 2020; Subramaniam, 2019). However, there are also concerns regarding the success of these policies and whether their effects permeate all levels of society (Egdell, 2020; Foweraker & Cutcher, 2020; Gekara et al., 2019; Lössbroek & Radl, 2019). As such, further research is needed to fully understand the impact of such policies and whether they address the issues concerning older workers. Therefore, in the current study, older workers in Singapore are referred to as workers in gainful employment aged 50 years and above.

2.3 Employability of Older Workers and Lifelong Learning

The concept of employability has various definitions as researchers from different fields study the topic differently (Monteiro et al., 2020). Römgens et al. (2020) reviewed a scope of different definitions and settled on defining employability as ‘an individual’s (perceived) ability to obtain and maintain employment throughout his/her career and move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment’ (p. 2589). This definition provides a starting point to understand how older workers’ employability and lifelong learning are considered in different contexts and environments. Conversely, lifelong learning is defined as consisting of all stages of learning, from any period in one’s life and encompasses the entire gamut of formal and informal learning in different contexts (Niu et al., 2019). Lifelong learning opportunities and inclusive labour markets are essential to ensuring workers of all educational backgrounds have the possibility

of extending their working lives (Midtsundstad & Nielsen, 2019; Sung & Freebody, 2017). Several studies (Böttcher et al., 2018; Fleischmann et al., 2015; Noone et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2016; Teichmann et al., 2019; Tikkanen & Billett, 2014) have explored factors that enhance the employability of older workers. These include how various agencies such as workplaces, vocational institutes and governments could contribute towards improving the older workers' employability.

Research on aging, employability and lifelong learning is now vital for many industrialised countries with a rapidly greying population such as Singapore, Australia and Japan. Scholars have found that older workers are more likely to be involved in highly demanding productive professions and job roles, such as executive and managerial positions, given the severe deficits in skilled labour in many developed economies (Choo, 2014; Harteis et al., 2015). The studies highlight various factors that influence older workers' employability, including age management policies, flexible working conditions and the psychosocial work environment, but find that extending the pensionable age does not affect employability.

The advancement of many societies in a technologically driven, fast-changing knowledge economy means that the workforce is expected to upskill themselves constantly throughout their working lives. The ability to learn and adapt to new skills and training is core to remaining relevant and ensuring sustained employment (Ashford et al., 2018; Hirschi, 2018). Other studies (Fleischmann et al., 2015; Morrow-Howell et al., 2020; Turek & Henkens, 2020; World Development Report, 2019) have similarly reiterated the arguments made earlier that in contemporary workplaces, older workers who choose to stay employed need to develop new skills to adapt to new work environments and job demands. Three similar studies conducted in the Netherlands found that older workers generally reported a much better self-rated employability than younger people and preferred to retire later in life (Hennekam, 2015; Pilipiec et al., 2021; Van Der Klaauw & Van Ours, 2013). Various agencies improved the employability of these workers through lifelong learning initiatives

(Ilori & Ajagunna, 2020). One of the many definitions of lifelong learning refers to the continuous building of skills and knowledge during one's life, both through formal and informal experiences (de Grip et al., 2019). Recent definitions recognise lifelong learning as an enabler for workers to develop their capacities, enhancing productive aging (Tatiana-Gabriela, 2019; Thang et al., 2019). Although it is clear that older workers are an important part of the future workforce, it is notable that a series of initiatives and policies are necessary to support them in remaining employed and ensure sustained employment (Bernstrøm et al., 2019).

Other studies highlight the role of lifelong learning in the work lives of older workers (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2018; Desjardins et al., 2019; Froehlich et al., 2016; Lejeune et al., 2018). They explored the relationship between aging workers' learning and employability and found an absence of consistent empirical findings to account for any connection between a workers' age and employability and age and work-related learning. However, one finding confirmed that lifelong learning was fundamental for sustained employment in an ever-changing employment landscape. Another study in Malaysia highlighted that lifelong learning programs for professionalisation among industrial workers was crucial to productivity. Further, most workers felt that lifelong learning programs provided personal satisfaction and facilitated promotion opportunities and salary increments (Kassim et al., 2019). Although some older adults have the necessary competencies, experience and current workplace skills, barriers such as institutional, societal and personal factors may constrain their participation in training and recruitment activities to increase their chances of gainful employment (MOM Singapore, 2019; Raemdonck et al., 2015). One qualitative study used a series of interviews to explore the experiences of a group of underprivileged older jobseekers as they participated in training and job-search activities. It indicated a discrepancy between participants' preferred ways of learning and the delivery modes in their training programs and training activities that did not necessarily translate into

employment (Meyers, 2016). Singapore has several government assistance schemes to assist older workers and support them during retrenchment exercises and crises such as COVID-19 (MOM Singapore, 2019). However, the above study questions the value of training and the effectiveness of current provisions in the job search and hiring process in many countries, including Singapore.

Thus, these studies show that chronological age may not be the most critical determinant in improving employability but learning to adapt to new roles and work environments is most necessary for sustained employment (Zhu & Zhang, 2019). Further, one study in Norway correlated having more education, which increases employability, with more time spent being actively involved in the workforce. The study also found that acquiring more transferable skills in training facilitates career mobility and creates more value for the worker's current employer (Midtsundstad & Nielsen, 2019). Other studies on employability similarly found that lifelong learning is essential for enhancing older people's employability; however, heterogeneity pervades its rhetoric and practice, which may impair effectiveness and success (Dengler, 2019; Osborne & Borkowska, 2017). Yet, these studies focus on understanding and establishing the relationship between older workers' employability and lifelong learning, as well as other factors impacting employability. The studies are largely quantitative, with most of the findings discussing problematic areas between employability and older workers' learning and suggesting ways to resolve these. Lastly, these studies' approaches primarily address fundamental pedagogical concepts affecting older adults, limiting the scope of their application to enhancing their learning experiences and degree of employability.

2.4 Employment Policies for Older Workers

The proportion of people working is expected to fall in many developed economies due to aging populations affecting their economies adversely (Kabir & Ahmed, 2019; Pfeffer, 2019). This concern casts a spotlight on older people's participation in employment and their

potential in reviving and sustaining economies (Lössbroek et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2021). Currently, there is no consensus on the chronological age that defines an older worker, although researchers generally refer to older workers as 45–65 years old, which largely coincides with statutory pension provisions in different parts of the world with minor differences in retirement ages (McCarthy et al., 2014). In Singapore and some other regions, an older worker is generally defined as being above 50 (Armenta et al., 2018; Desmette & Gaillard, 2008; Malholtra et al., 2018; NSA, 2021). Researchers, labour representatives and policymakers are worried about employment participation, age discrimination, qualification levels and training needs (Lopina et al., 2019; Stypińska & Nikander, 2018). Studies in Singapore, Europe and Australia (Mau & Sanderson, 2020; Noone et al., 2018; Phillips & O'Loughlin, 2017; Yeandle & Buckner, 2017; Yuen et al., 2020) emphasise that inattention to the social impacts of a rapidly aging population can adversely affect society.

Six other studies on older workers (Heidkamp & Van Horn, 2020; Lewis & Ollivaud, 2020; Oh, 2019; Rouzet et al., 2019; Turek & Henkens, 2020; Van Dijk et al., 2020) encourage initiatives to develop more proactive policies to involve senior citizens in the workforce and provide them with career guidance and care. The studies promote policies that would ease the increasing social burden of population aging and involve senior citizens in economic growth. Similarly, in China and Malaysia, studies (Liu et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2017; Subramaniam, 2019) found that policies and determinants of successful aging, particularly educational attainment, are severely lacking, thus impairing the wellbeing of older workers.

Conversely, two other studies (Andrew & Simon, 2018; Subramaniam et al., 2019) in Singapore contend that effective policymaking has largely been able to successfully mitigate the ill effects of aging on both the individual and the nation. Subramaniam et al. (2019) suggest conducting qualitative research in Singapore to better understand successful aging from the older adult's perspective and longitudinal studies to explore the behavioural determinants of successful aging in Singapore. Similarly, Brooke (2016) and Thang and Hong

(2015) examined the relationship between discourses on successful aging, physical activity and employment in Singapore and how local seniors embody these in their everyday lives. They questioned if senior citizens should predominantly do menial work with small salaries and whether this constitutes successful aging. The studies also discussed the measures adopted by the state to encourage, enable and enhance the employment and re-employment of older workers and if these measures have been successful (Brooke, 2016; Thang & Hong, 2015).

Similarly, Martin et al. (2014) and Sung et al. (2013) observe that the original concept of linking employability skills to job readiness is no longer viable. They contend a reformation on employability skills policies is needed to adapt employability skills to organisational performance outcomes, leading to the modification of workforce development training in Singapore. This finding was substantiated by an analysis of government and labour policies in Italy and Malaysia, which highlighted that training is the most commonly applied policy in dealing with ageism challenges (Aziz & Ahmad, 2019; Lazazzara & Bombelli, 2011). Lastly, the authors suggested that one significant challenge policymakers and institutions face in their attempts to address aging-related employment market challenges is the absence of historical examples to advise decision-making (Barrena-Martínez et al., 2019). The provision of education and competency training for older workers may afford governments both successful generational transitions and sustainable economic revenue (Rouzet, et al., 2019; Vilčiauskaitė, et al., 2020).

One of the core features of Singapore's employment policy involves the re-employment legislation, which requires employers to offer re-employment contracts after the age of 62 for at least 12 months, which can be extended up to age 65 (Higgins & Vyas, 2018). According to the 2012 Retirement and Re-employment Act, if an extension is not possible, eligible employees must be offered a one-off Employment Assistant Payment if they are unable to find suitable jobs within the same organisation after a review is completed (Higgins

& Vyas, 2018; MOM Singapore, 2013). Supported with a series of financial and training initiatives, the Singaporean authorities embarked on a balanced approach. They aim for employers to see older employees as a source of a quality workforce and recognise the value of making the workplace age-friendly, and employees to see the benefit of staying employable and being flexible and adaptable to continue contributing to the organisation (MOM Singapore, 2019).

To conclude, the policy studies discussed in this review involving older workers largely focus on solving employability challenges and developing successful aging programs by identifying problem areas in older workers' employment and re-examining outdated employment policies (Hovbrandt et al., 2019). These policies aim to optimise the employability of older workers and meet the needs of the workforce and economy. One argument is to develop better public policy from more critical and socially embedded research that recognises older workers' heterogeneity and motivations (Chung-Yang & Cheng, 2020; Taylor et al., 2016).

2.5 Role of Work in Older Workers' Mental Health and Wellbeing

In many developed economies around the world, such as Japan, Singapore and the US, many workers now consider the need to work longer due to better life expectancy and increasing living costs (Galiana & Haseltine, 2019). However, in some countries, such as Australia, Croatia, Finland and Singapore, statutory retirement ages may deny older people free access to the labour market (Bjelajac et al., 2019; Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas, 2018; Shupe, 2019). The effects of the global financial crisis in 2007 forced some countries to propose increasing the retirement age, but the implications for population health are unclear (Chodorow-Reich, 2014; Maimaris et al., 2010; Waring & Lewer, 2013).

Globally, mental disorders are the leading causes of disability affecting older workers (Briggs et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2020; Gray & Collie, 2018). Expectedly, policymakers are concerned about the effects of mental disorders on society, the workforce and the economy

(Braw et al., 2018; I. Baumann et al., 2020; OECD, 2012). However, four studies (De Tavernier & Aartsen, 2019; Léime et al., 2015; Maimaris et al., 2010; Poscia et al., 2016) found that exclusion from employment negatively impacts older people's mental health, which is consistent with activity theory. These studies show that prolonging retirement has a statistically significant positive effect on a range of mental health outcomes. Consequently, it has been suggested that working beyond traditional retirement ages may indeed be favourable for the mental health of the elderly. Further, a study in Japan indicated that retirement worsened mental health and higher-level functioning capacity in people aged 65 and over and observed a significant deterioration of their mental health (Baxter et al., 2020). It is possible to argue that the findings from these studies are consistent with the notion that prolonging retirement and being in sustained employment is beneficial for older workers and can help preserve their mental health (Gao et al., 2021).

However, it has also been shown that work can be detrimental for older workers. Using data regression analysis, a study in India revealed that mental fatigue and psychological distress negatively impacted working women's health status. Specifically, the results indicated that mental fatigue rather than physical fatigue is crucial to health and stress experienced while at work is detrimental (Trama & Nitisha, 2013; Wong et al., 2020). However, this study is limited to contexts involving working women in India only. Studies in Korea and Europe reveal that older people generally face structural constraints that affect their later life. They struggle to find roles in other activities if they are not working and only work as a form of reconciliation that is restricted to a context of limited choice and control (Crăciun, 2019; Yang, 2012; Hinrichsen, 2020; Tuohy & Cooney, 2019). Further, studies conducted in China and India suggest work is necessary for developing economies and therefore not considered as having any form of impact on older workers' wellbeing due to the demands of needing a livelihood (Hu & Das, 2019).

Besides this, studies have claimed (Munro et al., 2019; Oba et al., 2020; Puente-Martínez et al., 2021; Purser & Lonie, 2019) that older people naturally experience physical, mental and cognitive changes as they age (Gutierrez & Michaud, 2019). However, Vasconcelos (2018) argues that it is in both employers' and employees' interest to optimise these older employees' knowledge and experience and manage employees according to individual attributes and capacities rather than depending on unproven assumptions due to their age. The recommendation was to adopt a more positive approach towards older employees and drive research on older workers from a positive perspective (Attuyer et al., 2020; Chiesa et al., 2016; Cinderby et al., 2018; Gutierrez & Michaud, 2019; Jimenez, 2020; Patel et al., 2018; Peeters & van Emmerik, 2008). Moreover, a study conducted on older workers in Croatia found that good mental health improves the cognitive functioning in older Croatian workers who are employed, have more education, live with a partner in the household, and are healthier. These findings highlight the importance of employing broader social policy strategies addressing challenges in employment, education and health of aging workers (Bjelajac et al., 2019). Older workers could become a valuable part of the workforce if these challenges are mitigated and simultaneously improve their health and wellbeing.

It is complex to consider the role of work in the wellbeing of older workers. To a large extent, most studies highlighted that work is indeed beneficial for older workers' wellbeing, although the underlying factors behind these benefits have not been fully explored. In addition, although work may appear more beneficial than retirement, older workers may be doing it solely for survival. In this case, work may be detrimental to the older worker rather than improving their quality of life. An appreciative approach is needed to fully understand the older worker's position, rather than situating them as a challenge in policymaking and economic development.

2.6 Employers' and Societal Attitudes Towards an Aging Workforce

This section highlights some of the key issues surrounding age discrimination in the workplace and within society involving older people. Ageism can be defined as stereotyping, prejudice and/or discrimination against older people on the basis of their chronological age or the perception of them as being old (Armenta et al., 2018; Dobrowolska et al., 2019; Flores-Sandoval & Kinsella, 2020; Haggas, 2019; Kim & Mo, 2014). Essentially, research in this area can be divided into three broad but overlapping categories: 1) policies concerning the employment of older workers, 2) factors behind age discrimination, and 3) understandings and perspectives of ageism. This section will discuss these categories and their influence on employers' and societal attitudes towards older workers.

A review of employment policies by the OECD (2019) supports greater labour participation to foster employability and job mobility for older workers. The OECD (2019) report was crucial in answering the challenges of labour shortages. Despite the growing proportion of older adults globally and various policies advocating for their participation, ageism and prejudiced practices are prevalent and have facilitated discriminatory behaviour against older workers in various workplace settings (Button, 2020; Davies et al., 2018; Kahana et al., 2018). A comparative study conducted in Japan and Germany (Taylor & Earl, 2016) examined human resource management policies in both countries and found that ageist assumptions dominate hiring policies in organisations. The authors argued that it is both an ethical concern and poor economic rationality for these assumptions to plague the workforce, especially considering older workers are very much needed in a globalised world with aging populations (Blackham, 2017; Khan, 2019).

Population aging is a profound challenge for training institutions and employment systems (Lee et al., 2021; Nagarajan et al., 2019; Neumark et al., 2018). A common and prevalent response by governments includes encouraging older workers to remain in employment longer to extend the period of productive life (Ng et al., 2021a; Xu et al., 2021)

so they continue to be economic assets. This strategy depends on a range of micro-level adjustments, about which relatively little is known in terms of reforming employment policies and effectively managing ageist attitudes in workplaces (Cebola et al., 2021; Hachem et al., 2017; OECD, 2018; Ugheoke et al., 2021). Further, older workers can face difficulties in acquiring another job if they lose their current ones, with many employers reluctant to hire older workers. For example, young workers in Germany and North America have a much higher chance of re-employment than older workers due to contextual barriers and ageist attitudes (Berger, 2021; Lippmann & Brown, 2016; Rudman & Aldrich, 2021). Despite many organisations establishing and implementing anti-discrimination policies (Bal et al., 2011; Crăciun et al., 2019), even hiring managers responsible for designing and implementing age-related policies can hold stereotypical views of older workers (Czaja et al., 2020; Chung & Park, 2019; Miller, 2019; Parry & Tyson, 2009).

It is suggested that cultures also influence and shape ageist attitudes. Three studies (Luke & Neault, 2020; Naegele et al., 2018; Wainwright et al., 2019) report a multitude of factors behind ageist attitudes towards older workers in organisations, including societal and media misrepresentations and deeply entrenched societal attitudes towards the elderly. Francis-Pettway (2019) and Kolhs et al. (2019) found it is challenging for older workers to deal with the uncertainties and insecurities experienced at work. Five studies conducted in various parts of Europe, Australia and the US (Bratt et al., 2018; Black et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2018; Gonzales et al., 2018; Hovbrandt et al., 2019) argue that despite policy shifts, older workers face barriers at their workplaces and challenges in sustaining satisfactory work and being productive. Over time, perceived age discrimination and ageist attitudes are expected to lower job satisfaction, affect older workers' health status and elevate depressive symptoms (Ilişanu & Andrei, 2018; Petery et al., 2020). It is unlikely for these workers to continue working past their retirement ages due to the detrimental effects of perceived workplace age discrimination on older workers' mental and overall health. (Marchiondo et al., 2019).

Marchiondo et al. (2020) report longitudinal data showing that older workers suffered from workplace incivility due to ageist attitudes, which negatively affected their wellbeing and severely impaired their perceptions of life satisfaction. Therefore, it can be assumed that in a positive work culture with fair employment practices, older workers may be encouraged to remain in the workforce.

Similarly, ageist attitudes dominate many workplaces in Asia, although fewer incidences of discrimination against older workers exist because of the norms and values that admire and respect elders (Billett, 2011; Yunus & Hairi, 2020). Yunus and Hairi (2020) argue that the media plays an influential role in countering ageism through more positive portrayals of older adults, giving audiences a more realistic view of aging and old age. Given the unprecedented rate of aging in the Asia Pacific, combating ageism is perhaps more pertinent in this region. However, this assumption is inconclusive and cultural differences in ageism are more nuanced than previously thought (Ng et al., 2021b; Rudolph, et al., 2021). It has also been suggested that the older Asian generation are an interim generation and, despite their old age, are usually without substantial personal resources and considered a liability. Therefore, older workers are often caught between the state's policies and unsupportive work environments (Lain et al., 2019; Zhan et al., 2019). Concerningly, most of the perceptions of older workers are generally negative (Perron & McCann, 2018) regardless of the context. Despite the policies enacted to change this negativity, time-entrenched perceptions are obstinate and challenging to transform.

Several studies to understand perceptions of older people suggest the media and academic research are culpable for frequently presenting older people in a negative light, thus shaping negative perceptions of older workers (Koskinen et al., 2014; Kroon et al., 2019; Mosberg & Monika, 2019; Rovner-Lev & Elias, 2020; van der Heijden, 2018). The research also frequently identified poor public and self-images of older persons (Jose et al., 2021; Mosberg & Monika, 2019). However, other studies on ageism (Bratt et al., 2018; Chasteen et

al., 2021) present unique findings and argue for more research to address ageism, considering the different forms of ageism experienced by people at different life stages and ages and not restricted to older workers (Chung & Park, 2019). Further compounding this issue, an Australian survey reported that intergenerational competition is responsible for ageist attitudes and is a challenge that needs to be resolved. These attitudes principally stem from beliefs over the succession of enviable resources in organisations (Healy & Williams, 2016). Rego et al. (2018) show that despite expressing positive attitudes towards older workers, a significant number of managers prefer younger workers even when the older worker is more productive. The authors added that it is important to develop clearer understandings of how attitudes influence recruiting and promotion decisions. Consequently, competition for resources and economic advantage can exacerbate ageist attitudes already prevalent in many modern societies.

As discussed, ageism is a debilitating phenomenon that in itself is a profound challenge to many governments around the world (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018) and can be attributed to several factors. First, many economies highlight increasing healthcare costs straining government expenditure and blame this largely on the older population (Seah et al., 2019; Tovel et al., 2019). Second, some governments attribute the strain on the workforce to the increasing percentage of older people retiring from work combined with very low fertility rates, such as in Singapore's case (Peng, 2019). Third, many of these negative stereotypes are deep, time-entrenched beliefs that have remained obstinately unchanged for decades (Teater, 2018). Despite many of the world's economies embarking on different initiatives to remedy the situation, it remains defiant and very much unaffected by most of the initiatives (Nagarajan et al., 2019). The last factor is the intergenerational conflict occurring at workplaces where the divide between older people and younger workforce entrants has been fraught with testy encounters and engagements (Arranz et al., 2019; Truxillo et al., 2012;

Wijayanti, 2018), particularly when resources such as training opportunities and promotions are in contention.

Ageism is one of the biggest obstacles confronting older workers in training and employment. Ageism has subtly manifested itself in many workplaces (Nachmias, 2019). Worryingly, ageism is a major barrier preventing older workers from becoming valuable workforce members (Stypińska & Nikander, 2018), and it is prevalent in many organisations (Naegele et al., 2018). It could simply be an absence of policies to transform ageist attitudes and perceptions in some instances; in others, it could be situated in time-entrenched cultural norms. Additional isolated sources include the negative media portrayal of older people even in children's programs (Rovner-Lev & Elias, 2020) and the prevalent trends in research studies and human resource policies that present older workers in inimical terms (Zaniboni et al., 2019).

2.7 Ageist Attitudes in Workplaces

Ageism can be defined as stereotypes, bias, or discrimination against a group of people because of their chronological age (Fletcher, 2021; Lee et al., 2020). Although the practice of ageism and ageist policies can be directed towards people of different age groups, current research has identified that ageism occurs more frequently with older adults (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017; Solem, 2020). Ageism falls into two distinct groups: personal and institutional (Horhota et al., 2018). There are also instances of older people themselves subscribing to these negative stereotypes, assumptions and beliefs that most older people are weak, stubborn, unadaptable and even senile (Burnes et al., 2019; Carstensen & Hershfield, 2021). Indeed, it is troubling that older adults internalise these negative labels as it can adversely affect their functioning, beliefs and health (Marquet et al., 2018; Palmore, 2015).

Organisational ageism can be negatively defined as dismissive attitudes towards aging, undervaluing elderly workers and disfavours their inclusion in the workforce (Czaja et al., 2020; Francioli & North, 2021). One common and frequently used definition of ageism

refers to the process of systematically stereotyping and discriminating against people through age, affecting decisions on employment and social policy (Frøyland & Terjesen, 2020; Nelson, 2016; van Dalen & Henkens, 2019). Consequently, younger members of the workforce subscribe to ageist attitudes as they perceive older workers as ill-fitted to manage the complexities amid the changing demands of a competitive working world and, therefore, undeserving of gainful employment and its associated benefits (Hiu & Rabinovich, 2021; Ho & Yeung, 2021). Discrimination against older workers can range from recruitment bias to dismissal, particularly when an organisation needs to shrink its workforce (Bengtsson, 2019). Despite efforts to limit discriminatory behaviour through national employment policies in Europe and elsewhere, ageism remains prevalent in organisations and affects older workers' job opportunities, promotions and performance evaluations (Naegele et al., 2018). As a result, organisations suffer from poor recruitment, affecting their overall organisational performance and, ultimately, the economy's growth (Nachmias, 2019). Organisations now have to reconcile rights and opportunities for workers of all ages and provide a constructive working environment to remain competitive (Nachmias, 2019; van der Heijden, 2018). Therefore, it is critical to identify factors that foster and trigger ageism in the workplace, as it impacts not only the older workers but also organisational performance as well as the economy and society.

One underlying reason to account for ageist attitudes at workplaces, particularly among young adults, might come from their limited interactions with older adults (Smith et al., 2017). The absence of interaction or factors to stimulate interactions is identified as one of the main reasons these ageist attitudes exist (Leach, 2019). A cross-sectional study on nursing students found that those tasked with providing care to older people during their education and having lived with an older relative demonstrated reduced notions of ageism (Toygar & Karadakovan, 2020). The study also proposed revising the curriculum for healthcare courses to reduce ageism among healthcare professionals. Henry et al. (2019). found that

understanding people's worldviews contributes significantly to understanding underlying factors behind ageist attitudes. Today, the importance of dealing with intergenerational relationships in society is becoming particularly relevant and essential (Vořanská, 2018).

Another factor blamed for exacerbating ageist attitudes is social media, due to users who more often than not assume a sense of entitlement in dismissing and placing older people into defined negative and prejudiced constructs (Gullette, 2017; Machado & Sousa, 2019; Stypińska & Turek, 2017). Many such social media users are digital natives whose interactions with the older generation may have been limited and impaired (Ball et al., 2019). In addition, the portrayal of older people in social media is largely negative, presenting them as vulnerable, in communities in need of help, and situated as a policy challenge (Kroon et al., 2019). Lastly, untruths in social media and popular media such as drama serials, commercials and soap operas further aggravate discriminatory perceptions of older workers through the negative dramatic portrayal of older people over the last few decades (Kovács et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2007; Loos & Ivan, 2018). For example, Markov and Yoon (2020) found that portrayals of more than half of older adults in popular US primetime television series included at least some elements of age stereotypes. These forms of aggravation or misrepresentations amplify manifestations of ageist attitudes in society (Edström, 2018).

Oliveira and Cardoso (2018) found through structural equation modelling that older workers respond to negative age-based stereotypes through threats, hostile reactions and undesirable work attitudes. Hence, this clearly demonstrates that age threats impair the relationship older workers keep with their organisation and work, creating a vicious cycle within the organisation (Singh & Ramdeo, 2020). Another consideration for ageist attitudes at the workplace is discriminatory human resource and recruitment policies. Ilişanu and Andrei (2018) explain that older applicants for a vacancy are often perceived and considered negatively because of their age, and this form of evaluation can often be attributed to age-based stereotypes. Further, in several Nordic countries, older workers are seen as a

heterogenous group and suffer from polarisation, and ambivalent attitudes towards them hold firm when it comes to worker retention (Frøyland & Terjesen, 2020). A study on nurses in Germany revealed that age stereotypes in the workplace typically manifest in management decisions and leadership behaviours. Older nurses were assumed to be more competent and affable but less adaptable than their younger counterparts (Ilişanu & Andrei, 2018; Kleissner & Jahn, 2020). Some of the commonly held stereotypes related to older workers present them as having poor and slow performances, showing stubborn resistance to organisational changes, unable to acquire new skills, suffering from a lack of interest during training programs, and being distracted at work by health or family issues (Chiesa et al., 2019).

Thus, older workers are hampered from the start, drastically reducing their chances of job interviews, formal consideration for a position or promotion, and upskilling and training opportunities (Harris et al., 2018; Nachmias, 2019). Further, older workers are sometimes employed solely to fulfil government initiatives and observe employment regulations, which has been the case in Singapore (Wong, 2019). Moreover, there are many reported incidents of older workers experiencing discriminatory behaviour at the workplace when employed under such policies, despite good intentions (Ko, 2018; Wong, 2019). This situation necessitates a more detailed study to fully understand a multifaceted problem compounded by complexities in policymaking, deeply ingrained societal attitudes, newfound challenges brought about by globalisation and the digital age, and a world besieged and inundated with crises (Street & Léime, 2020).

2.8 Motivations of Older Workers

Older workers have different motivations for work than their younger counterparts (Kollmann et al., 2020; Vasconcelos, 2018). These can be grouped into four areas: 1) humanistic reasons and connecting to others, 2) to gain acknowledgement and personal satisfaction, 3) financial reasons to support their livelihood, and 4) a desire to share and pass skills and knowledge to younger generations (Sterns & Harrington, 2019). The new dynamics

of the workplace in a global market subject older workers to diverse issues, pressures and challenges (Findsen, 2015; Principi et al., 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to understand what motivates older workers to remain in the workforce to explore the factors that have supported navigating the tumultuous employment landscape.

Scheibe et al. (2021) suggest that age-related factors are important in understanding older workers' motivation to continue to work. Factors such as declining health and career plateaus are genuine concerns reflected by older workers and issues for human resource policies to address (Piszczek & Pimputkar, 2020). Consequently, these concerns may diminish motivation to remain in employment. Other studies highlight that older workers are less likely to receive training opportunities than younger workers, despite being the ones in need of the training (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2011; Fialho et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2016; Vasconcelos, 2018). Turek and Henkens (2020) also assert that the lack of training opportunities affects older workers' career mobility and weakens their motivation to develop new competencies to adapt to the changing needs of the workforce. Oude Hengel et al. (2019) found that older employees are motivated by a desire to improve their financial situation and remain active. They prefer flexible working arrangements and value the importance of fair treatment at the workplace (Edge et al., 2017; Wrocławska, 2020; Zitikyté, 2020). The findings from the studies discussed here suggest there is a myriad of motivating reasons older workers want to continue working beyond their retirement ages. However, most findings suggest that despite health concerns, career stagnation and discriminatory workplace practices, older workers are still inclined to remain active and continue working.

For Yeung and Ho (2020), older workers with proactive personalities are more motivated and oriented by their professional goals (Bertolino et al., 2011; Parker & Andrei, 2020). Results from another study support this observation, finding that a proactive personality positively influences transfer intentions partially through its influence on motivation to learn (Roberts et al., 2018). A Taiwanese study revealed that older workers with

lower educational attainment have a higher tendency to be poorly motivated, particularly towards their learning (Lin., 2020). Similarly, den Boer et al. (2021) and Henkens and van Solinge (2021) found that developing active aging policies for lower-educated older workers focused on work redesign rather than training or improving older workers' mental health. Specifically, redesigning work characteristics is a vital initial step forward in developing sustainable jobs for lower-educated older workers. Hence, it is evident that education levels strongly influence older workers' motivation, but policies for older workers with lower qualifications could shape job redesign rather than training or upskilling to keep workers relevant in the workforce.

Another form of motivation often overlooked is older people's character strengths (Kristjánsson, 2019; Rashid & Seligman, 2018). Studies (Baehr, 2017; Fouracres & Van Nieuwerburgh, 2020; Harzer, 2020; Huber et al., 2021) suggest character strengths can be an effective form of intrinsic motivation (Höge et al., 2020; Lin, 2020) and an important factor in determining the wellbeing of older workers (Schutte & Malouff, 2019). It is unlikely implementing a single policy or training approach will address older workers' employment and training needs entirely (Cohen-Zimmerman & Hassin, 2018; Meyers et al., 2010; Thrasher & Bramble, 2019). However, these factors foreground the need to more deeply and comprehensively understand older workers' diverse needs and motivations (Alcover & Topa, 2018).

2.9 Character Strengths in Organisations

In times of adversity and opportunity, it is important to explore the capacity of character strengths (Mayerson 2020; Niemiec, 2018; Niemiec, 2021; Park et al., 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; White & Waters, 2015) to address some of the challenges many modern societies face, including the challenge of addressing ageist attitudes. However, it has been largely an area of study limited to specific groups of people and subject matter experts (Bergen, 2019). Character strengths are unique characteristics that allow us to be at our best

(Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Park et al., 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) to deliver our best performances at work while feeling engaged and energised (Meyers et al., 2020). Lee et al. (2021) and Peterson et al. (2007) suggest that character strengths are one of the domains in flourishing, a useful predictor of wellbeing. Thus, it is necessary to consider the context of a strengths-based approach in organisations and workplaces in addition to the more known approaches in education and personal development. Therefore, character strengths are a significant consideration when attempting a transformation in the workforce and employment landscape.

To facilitate transformation, cultivating the components character strengths is vital to efforts to achieve an appreciative and positive transformation (Bergen, 2019; Ghielen et al., 2018; Peterson et al., 2007). Good character is not something that exists in isolation; rather, it is an interconnected family of positive traits exhibited through a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Kraft, 2018; Kryszynska, 2019; Niemiec et al., 2012; Peterson et al., 2007). Character strengths are positive traits or characteristics valued across different cultures that are fulfilling and aligned with positive outcomes for oneself and society and intrinsically connected to leading a fulfilling and happy life (Niemiec, 2018; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Ruch & Proyer, 2015). Character strengths can lead to developing a roadmap or the groundwork of optimal lifelong development and thriving (Cheryl, 2018; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Van Zyl & Rothmann, 2019; White & Waters, 2015). Research shows that character strengths closely relate to important aspects of individual and social wellbeing, although different strengths typically lead to different outcomes (Park et al., 2004; Peterson, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Wagner et al., 2021). In addition, six research studies (García-Castro et al., 2019; Kashdan et al., 2018; Macfarlane, 2019; Pang & Ruch, 2019; X. Cheng et al., 2020) highlight character strengths as a scientifically validated strategy to help individuals improve their personal lives, work and relationships.

One significant role character strengths could play in workplaces is transforming negative narratives and perceptions. Chiesa et al. (2016) suggest it is crucial to focus on the positive characteristics of older workers and lessen the incidences of negative age stereotypes in the workplace, with the intent to leverage and amplify the occupational self-efficacy of older workers. Hertel et al. (2013) and Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017) observe that older workers have more inherent strengths than their younger counterparts in motivational and stress-related work competencies. Thus, it is vital to astutely understand these potential strengths and their subtleties to successfully leverage them in modern workplaces (Ghielen et al., 2018; Yolcu & Sari, 2018).

Awareness of character strengths and their appropriate application at the workplace can help increase productivity and engagement and improve morale (Baer, 2015; Bakker & van Macfarlane, 2019; Woerkom, 2018). Several studies (Bakker et al., 2019; Harzer, 2020; Heintz & Ruch, 2020; Ruch et al., 2018; van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019) highlight how identification, application and support of character strengths facilitated and improved job satisfaction and work performance as well as initiated personal growth (Allan et al., 2019a). One study examined various occupational subgroups, including healthcare professionals and educators, and their signature strengths. The authors found that several strengths—zest, hope, curiosity, love and gratitude—correlated with overall job satisfaction (Heintz & Ruch, 2020). Another study observed that strengths such as prudence, hope, love, perspective and zest similarly predicted meaningful and satisfying work experiences (Allan et al., 2019b; Pang & Ruch, 2019). Further research (Ding et al., 2020; Ghielsen et al., 2018; Green et al., 2017; Meyers et al., 2019) acknowledges that organisational support for strengths use, significantly indicated by age, enhanced work performance. The awareness and application of character strengths at work have consistently been associated with desirable feelings, attitudes and functioning (Strecker et al., 2020). Therefore, character strength awareness and application are crucial, as they significantly impact many workplaces, particularly in times of economic

austerity and a tumultuous COVID-19 employment landscape (Niemiec, 2020; White & McCallum, 2021).

Besides workplaces, leaders in organisations should utilise their teams' pertinent character strengths. Using strength interventions enhances job satisfaction and work engagement, thus improving performance outcomes such as increased productivity and customer satisfaction (Peláez, 2020). An analysis of academic literature published between 2011 and 2016 indicates that applying strengths interventions to promote wellbeing by facilitating strengths identification and supervisors' support can increase strengths used for the staff involved (Greenstein, 2015; Inceoglu et al., 2018; van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019). Other studies (Bengtsson, 2020; Draper, 2021; Haas, 2020; Lavy et al., 2017; Niemiec, 2018; Peláez et al., 2020) corroborate this finding and highlight the potentially unique role of supervisors and managers in triggering employees' strengths by treating them with dignity and giving them recognition at work. Further, character strengths have significantly influenced and impacted work teams in organisations (Ruch et al., 2018; van Woerkom, et al., 2020). It is evident that character strengths encourage engagement at work, but they also serve to motivate employees and facilitate the coherence of work teams in organisations.

In relation to recruitment, character strengths can be a useful predictor of work performance during the hiring process. One of an organisation's most important objectives when recruiting is to attract individuals who would likely perform well in future and be of value to the organisation (Cherkowski, & Walker, 2019; Harzer & Bezuglova, 2019). As discussed earlier, the concept of character strengths involves positive traits that significantly contribute to a positive work life (Höfer et al., 2020; VanderWeele, 2021). However, the recruitment process is another crucial aspect of the working context that needs careful consideration. Research focusing on the recruitment process highlights that it can be a daunting experience for the worker and affect their wellbeing (Hulshof et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Saunders, 2018; Synard & Gazzola, 2018). Further, Ellis et al. (2017) assert that the

recruitment process is an instrumental yardstick for the organisations to select the best applicants who would be assets to the organisation in future. With these considerations, it is relevant to consider character strengths during the recruitment process and the wellbeing of applicants during the job searching, application and hiring process, particularly for vulnerable groups such as older workers.

Research based on wellbeing and character strengths also take centre stage (Halliday, 2018; Machado & Davim, 2019) in intervention initiatives in organisations (Pang & Ruch, 2019; Ruch et al., 2020). The recognition and application of character strengths can predict wellbeing and optimal functioning (Botha, 2020; Niemiec, 2018; Silton et al., 2020; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For example, Huber et al. (2020) found that awareness of character strengths and their application in a workplace context predicts positive wellbeing for both the worker and the organisation (Dolev-Amit et al., 2021; Wagner et al., 2021). Another notable example is a longitudinal analysis involving medical students examining the relationship between the applicability of signature character strengths and increased feelings of wellbeing, which found a positive correlation between them (Kachel et al., 2020). Further, Littman-Ovadia and Freidlin (2020) purport that the optimal use of character strengths leads to positive outcomes, and Bechler (2020) reports on the significant association between the appropriate application of character strengths and life satisfaction and wellbeing. Character strengths predicted increased mental health and subjective wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017; Waters, Algoe et al., 2021; White, & McCallum, 2021). Similarly, Boe et al. (2020) affirmed that character strengths could positively impact wellbeing during challenging times and crises. The recognition and application of character strengths have been shown to help older people overcome mental health challenges (Waterworth et al., 2020) and are significant for their life satisfaction (D. Baumann et al., 2020; Weziak-Bialowolska et al., 2021). Research studies (Gander et al., 2019; Höfer et al., 2020; Pang & Ruch, 2019; Qi & Wang, 2020; Schutte & Malouff, 2019;

White, 2019; X. Cheng et al., 2020) consistently indicate an intricate and connected relationship between wellbeing and character strengths.

2.10 Wellbeing Concepts and Definitions

Wellbeing is a complex construct to understand and can be challenging to situate in public policy, but it is certain that it is essential in every aspect of human life (Watanabe et al., 2020). Historically, wellbeing has been difficult to define (Cresswell-Smith et al., 2019; Dodge et al., 2012; Fisher, 2019; McCallum & Price, 2016; Powell & Graham, 2017; Svane et al., 2019) and sometimes used interchangeably but erroneously with the term ‘wellness’ in organisations (Gordon & Adler, 2017; Magnavita & Garbarino, 2017). Seligman (2011) first promoted the elements of authentic happiness and wellbeing as pleasure, engagement, meaning, relationships and accomplishment. Wellbeing is more than just the absence of illness and includes life satisfaction, healthy behaviours and resilience (McCallum & Price, 2016). Keyes (2002) provides another definition of wellbeing that combines hedonics and eudemonics, integrating positive emotions with the full functioning of an individual. Alternative theories of wellbeing as having a sense of coherence utilise Antonovsky’s salutogenic approach to support human health and wellbeing, where one enjoys an enduring attitude in which life is comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (Dunleavy et al., 2014; Eriksson & Lindström, 2006; Smith et al., 2013). Meanwhile, Ryan and Deci (2017) apply self-determination theory to understand the concept of wellbeing through self-actualisation and self-regulation.

Wellbeing can also be understood as a term that encapsulates wellness, coherence in health, positive mental health, happiness, character strengths and human flourishing (Bosch, 2020; Disabato et al., 2016; Lawn et al., 2019; Macaskill & Denovan, 2014). Although it can be defined in several different ways (Bosch, 2020; Gatt et al., 2014; McCallum & Price, 2016; Spratt, 2017), the definition of wellbeing selected for application in the current study takes into consideration its comprehensive, fluid meaning and ease of application:

Wellbeing is diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It encompasses intertwined individual, collective and environmental elements which continually interact across the lifespan. Wellbeing is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected. Our role with wellbeing education is to provide the opportunity, access, choices, resources and capacities for individuals and communities to aspire to their unique sense of wellbeing, whilst contributing to a sense of community wellbeing. (McCallum & Price, 2016, pp. 5–6).

This definition suggests wellbeing is a multifaceted construct that encapsulates positive emotions, best experiences and optimal functioning (Brown et al., 2021; Pfund, 2020). Grant and McGhee (2021) and Ryff et al. (2021) note that wellbeing research can be categorised into two approaches: the hedonic approach, which defines wellbeing as obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain (Joshnloo & Jovanović, 2021; Lambert et al., 2020) and the eudaemonic approach, which focuses on meaning and self-realisation and describes wellbeing in terms of how well a person is fully functioning (Chalofsky & Cavallero, 2019; Huta & Waterman, 2013; Mikus et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Based on the idea that experiencing less pain and more pleasure leads to happiness and life satisfaction, hedonic concepts are founded on the notion of subjective wellbeing (Sirgy, 2021), a term commonly applied to mean ‘having a good life’ (Zeng & Chen, 2020, p. 1). Conversely, eudemonic wellbeing is similar to Maslow’s concept of self-actualisation (Fabian, 2020; Pritchard et al., 2020) and Carl Roger’s notion of the fully functioning individual (Joseph, 2020; Mikus et al., 2022). Thus, eudemonic happiness is based on the premise that people feel happy if they experience life purpose, challenges and growth (Peiró et al., 2021). Eudemonia has also been defined as the condition of human flourishing and functioning well (Sirgy, 2020). It considers the satisfaction and happiness of an individual over the course of their life (Segall, 2020), including the various factors that contribute to their life satisfaction and happiness (Pancheva et al., 2021). In this study, flourishing refers to the ‘experience of life going well’ (Huppert & So, 2011, p. 838)—a combination of eudemonic and hedonic wellbeing (Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2016) and indicative of positive wellbeing and mental health (Adler & Seligman, 2016).

Individuals functioning optimally and living a good life can be considered flourishing (Pancheva et al., 2021) and likely to achieve life satisfaction (Ryff, 1989) and actualise their aims and ambitions (Rothmann et al., 2019). People who flourish report more positive emotions than those who are not and better use their strengths (Corey, 2002). Keyes (2002) found that individuals who are flourishing experience positive mental health. This observation is supported by a recent study (Fassih-Ramandi et al., 2020) on older people in Iran that affirms flourishing is related to positive outcomes for physical and mental health and participants' overall wellbeing. As such, flourishing is one outcome within the concept of wellbeing (Dahl et al., 2020) and is important for individuals to live life well.

In addition to being predictive of wellbeing, flourishing is crucial in times of difficulty and austerity, such as global societies suffering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Koh et al., 2021a; Vasileiou et al., 2021; White & McCallum, 2021). Sharma-Brymer and Brymer (2020) highlight the applicability and practicality of eudemonic wellbeing and flourishing to sustain the holistic health of global human societies. Further, given the ageism many older workers face in the workforce while employed or seeking employment, scholarly engagement with flourishing is more pressing (Abid et al., 2020; Alikaj et al., 2021). Thus, flourishing is an important outcome of wellbeing (Przybylko et al., 2021) and fundamental to the wellbeing of older workers.

Research in wellbeing has increased exponentially over the last few decades (Murdoch & Stewart-Oaten, 2018; Potgieter et al., 2019) and is a significant concept with an important impact on older workers (Mikus et al., 2022). Flett and Heisel (2020) report that being concerned about older workers is essential for their mental health and wellbeing. Further development on how they are intertwined in employability and training is fundamental to improving our understanding of how older workers can function as vital and valued members of the future workforce and not simply considered a challenge in policymaking and burden in economic progress.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has identified the various definitions of older workers, discussed the relationship between lifelong learning and employability, described factors related to employment policies concerning older workers, and explained the role of work in influencing the wellbeing and mental health of older workers. An examination of employer and societal attitudes towards older workers followed. This line of argument was developed further by highlighting how ageist attitudes can impair the work performances of older workers and diminish their crucial role in Singapore's workforce. Factors underlying these ageist attitudes were examined to understand how such attitudes emerged and their impact on older workers in the workforce reviewed. The motivations of older workers were explored, and the chapter concluded with a discussion of the character strengths of older workers in organisations and concepts and definitions in wellbeing.

The review of the literature revealed that character strengths and wellbeing are significant in improving older workers' work performances. It highlighted the precarious situations of older workers due to ageist attitudes dominating society and hiring processes and employment practices in many organisations in Singapore. As discussed, the very people who formed a fundamental part of the labour force for decades are now increasingly relegated to secondary employment markets in many developed economies due to ageist and discriminatory attitudes and constrained perspectives (Rudman & Aldrich, 2021). Further, the focus on economic and employability policies when studying older workers has paradoxically resulted in shifting attention from older workers to the state's materialistic, political and labour concerns (Böttcher et al., 2018; Fidler, 2021).

Although Singapore has developed an ongoing education and training credentialing system to cater to the changing needs of the workforce, Billet (2011) advises that it remains necessary to monitor this system's progress and success, particularly in relation to attitudes towards older workers. This is significant given there are few appreciative studies on older

workers (Francis-Pettway, 2019). Subramaniam et al. (2019) also recommend further research on successful aging from the perspectives of older workers in Singapore (Owens et al., 2019). The current study is the first application of an appreciative inquiry framework in Singapore to study older workers and one that is crucial given the current climate of austerity and change in the employment and economic sectors (Gössling et al., 2020).

This chapter demonstrated the plight and precarious situation of older workers in many parts of the world, including Singapore. This appreciative study will challenge prevailing narrow attitudes of older workers by demonstrating that they are indeed assets to Singapore and key to the nation's wellbeing. The post-COVID-19 era will continue to debilitate this precarious situation, making it vital to mitigate the ill effects of COVID-19 on older workers in organisations (Manzi et al., 2021). This can be achieved by 1) attempting to remedy the ageist attitudes in many workplaces and 2) highlighting older workers' strengths and their potential in addressing the deficit in Singapore's workforce. The next chapter will describe the theoretical lens used in this study to analyse these issues in depth.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Theory plays an important role in explaining phenomena. At its simplest, a theory is necessary to justify developing explicit descriptions and interpretations to account for empirical findings (Kislov, 2019). Theories help structure what is already known about the subject matter and explain the intricacies and nuances behind the data (Haugan & Eriksson, 2021). Although qualitative research studies may not be hypothesis-driven (Leeming, 2018), it is still crucial to apply theory inductively when interpreting results and facilitating an objective understanding of what the data reveals (Alley et al., 2010; Collins & Stockton, 2018; Stefan & Iddo, 2012). This chapter discusses theories from the fields of critical gerontology and wellbeing. These theories guide the interpretation of the data and facilitate the discussion of the findings.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Given that Singapore's workforce is multicultural and multigenerational (Teo, 2019), using a framework of different theoretical perspectives from critical gerontology and wellbeing is practical and relevant to facilitate the interpretation and understanding of multifaceted perspectives of an aging workforce (Bengtson et al., 1997; Gordon & Adler, 2017). While the processes and effects of aging, work and organisations have been studied from different theoretical perspectives—such as critical gerontology and theories of flourishing and fulfilling work (Alley et al., 2010; Tannistha, 2017; Thuesen et al., 2021)—a degree of overlap is evident in the theories describing the aging process across various disciplines (Thuesen et al., 2021; Walsh et al., 2019). Considering the context and nature of this appreciative study on older workers, these commonalities are well-suited within an integrative theoretical framework (Bengtson et al., 1997; Moustaghfir et al., 2020; Stephan et al., 2016). Thus, it is important to understand the relationships between these theoretical

perspectives, particularly regarding the impact of aging in the workplace (Cvenkel, 2020; Thuesen et al., 2021).

In a review of social science theories of aging, Lowry et al. (2019) and Malterud (2015) identify the bridging perspectives of these theories (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2019) as most appropriate for a measured interpretation of a complex and dynamic phenomenon (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Inceoglu et al., 2018). The study of older workers in Singapore provides a conducive context for utilising the intersections of various theories of aging because it represents an environment in which the impact of many facets of aging is experienced. The next section discusses and elaborates on using an integrated theoretical framework (Liu et al., 2021) to facilitate analysis and interpretation of the data.

The theoretical framework outlined in Table 3.1 combines three theories: one found in social gerontology (Bengtson et al., 1997) and two from the field of wellbeing. First, in this theoretical framework is critical gerontology theory, which addresses taken-for-granted assumptions and explores models of aging through a critique of social meanings and assumptions of older workers (Bengtson et al., 1997; Kelly, 2017; Tannistha, 2017). Next are two theories under the concept of wellbeing. First, Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing facilitates an understanding of the factors that allow older workers to flourish (Hone et al., 2015; Huppert & So, 2011) in various workplaces and industries. Second, Owens et al.'s (2019) S-BIT theory of work, developed from concepts in organisational psychology, allows a thorough analysis of factors utilising the strengths of workers while ensuring the existence of promotive contexts to enable workers to flourish and thrive in their respective job roles (Allan et al., 2019a; Owens et al., 2019). Therefore, the integrated theoretical framework, as illustrated in Table 3.1, acts as a theoretical lens to guide the selection and interpretation of data and suggest explanations for relationships and commonalities inherent in the data (Mojtaba & Sherrill, 2019). The next three sections describe the application of

these concepts in more detail and how they facilitate the development of this study's integrated theoretical framework.

Table 3.1: Theoretical framework for older workers in Singapore

Theory	Description	Key Concepts
Critical Gerontology Theory	Focuses on human dimensions of aging; understanding subjective and interpretative dimensions of aging as well as the processes of practical change.	Positive Models of Aging and Critical Discourses on Social Meaning of Aging
Wellbeing Theory	Focuses on factors which enable an older worker to flourish both in their professional and personal lives. Gives a clear indication of their wellbeing. Highlights factors for a promotive work context and one which capitalises on workers' strengths.	Wellbeing, Character Strengths, Flourishing and S-BIT Theory of Work

Note. Adapted by author from Bengtson et al. (1997).

3.2.1 Critical gerontology theory

According to Mortimer and Moen (2016), human behaviour and interaction are developed by human understandings and social interactions (Song et al., 2020; Tognoli et al., 2020). In contrast, biological essentialist orientation describes human behaviour as determined by biological influences (Doheny & Jones, 2020). Although aging is a biological process (Moskalev, 2019), the meanings, understandings and attitudes to being young, old or of a certain age are socially constructed, not a biological trait or concept determined by a person's genetic makeup (van Dyk, 2016). Despite socially constructed roles and expectations being necessary for the organisation and functioning of any society, group or organisation (Gil-Lacruz et al., 2020), in many instances, these roles and expectations are inaccurate and based on stereotypical assumptions (Chiesa et al., 2019; Weber et al., 2019). Harris et al. (2018) assert that knowledge and understanding of the world are not absolute—they are framed by discourses reflecting the ideas and perceptions of the dominant and influential groups in society, and usually disadvantage vulnerable groups and underprivileged

individuals (Katz & Calasanti, 2015). The theoretical lens of critical gerontology is applied in this study to understand the challenges and complexities older workers in Singapore face.

Critical gerontology is a broad area of scholarship concerned with identifying possibilities for enabling social change, including positive ideals for the last stage of life (Katz, 2019). Critical gerontology is derived from critical theory (McAllister, 2010), which uses a neo-Marxist approach to critique social structures and stimulate reforms (Hill, 2019). The neo-Marxist approach considers economic structures the root cause of social manifestations and challenges (Bengtson et al., 1997). The main goal of a critical gerontology perspective is to identify wider social influences on the problems individuals experience (Norella et al., 2005; van Dyk, 2016). A critical perspective contends that as long as social problems are defined in individual terms, change may not happen. This challenges researchers and policymakers to evaluate the applicability of existing research, policy and programs to emerging elderly populations. Consequently, there is a need to examine the social structures, embedded knowledge and perceptions and consciousness that shape social policy on old age and older workers.

The critical gerontology theory encourages research on aging and its related policy and practices (Moody, 1992). For example, Estes and Phillipson (2007) questions the concepts underpinning traditional assumptions before the biomedical model of aging (Biggs et al., 2020) and take a sociological approach to challenge the belief that older people are a burden on society (Baars et al., 2016; Butler 1980). Critical gerontology theory also argues that the challenges associated with aging should not be attributed to individual decline and disabilities, rather the social structures that limit older people's ability to express their strengths and continue contributing to society as assets (Moody & Sasser, 2018). Adopting a critical gerontology position is crucial to understanding and unravelling the complexities and challenges in the lives of older workers in Singapore.

Three theoretical concepts characterise critical gerontology theory (Estes & Phillipson, 2017). First, political economy claims that aging cannot be analysed separately from societal forces and contextual influences (Baars et al., 2016). Aging is designed by social construction and influenced by the norms, cultures and attitudes of the society in which it exists, including stereotypes and assumptions (Estes & Phillipson, 2017). Second, moral economy examines aging through beliefs, norms and moral values in a given setting (Gordon & Longino, 2000; Hill, 2019; Polivka, 1999). Third, humanistic gerontology addresses larger questions of meaning in older people's lives, including their lived and work experiences (Baars & Dohmen, 2013; Portacolone & Herd, 2018; Skinner et al., 2015). The following paragraphs elaborate on these three concepts.

Critical gerontology theory has been applied in at least six areas of research, including aging, healthcare, politics and governance, retirement and economic challenges (Biggs et al., 2020) in qualitative and quantitative studies (Weil, 2017). The key principles of critical gerontology were developed from seven of the initial works in gerontology studies (Chaiklin, 1999; Kastenbaum et al., 1992; Katz, 2008; Kennedy & Minkler, 1998; Minkler, 1996; Phillipson, 2003). These studies advocate interdisciplinary approaches in gerontology, particularly foundational theories involving the sociology, psychology and political economy of aging. Several other studies have also applied the theoretical lens of critical gerontology to argue against imperialistic notions of anti-aging driven by consumerism and societal perceptions (Ellison, 2013; King & Calasanti, 2006; Ojala et al., 2016; van Dyk, 2014; Vincent, 2006). Aner and Kricheldorf (2017) and Rozanova (2010) interrogate stereotypes of successful aging by drawing on insights from critical gerontology and argue the notion of successful aging is subjective and dependent on contextual circumstances.

Besides studies on aging stereotypes, critical gerontology theory has been applied to analyse challenges older people experience in workplaces and professions, which revealed they were overlooked for job promotions and experienced difficulty when seeking

employment (Blackham, 2017; Foster & Walker, 2015; Lotherington et al., 2017; Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). In healthcare and social work, Cox and Pardasani (2017), Flores-Sandoval and Kinsella (2020), and Hachem et al. (2017) utilise critical gerontology as an instrument to facilitate critical reflection and educate society about older adults oppressed by socio-economic challenges. These challenges are expected to worsen due to demographical changes in the population, chronic governmental neglect, institutionalised ageism and a lack of societal awareness. Meanwhile, critical gerontology has also been used to question and challenge public policy involving the older population, although these studies are confined to Europe and the US (Baars et al., 2016; Moody & Sasser, 2018; Paris, 2018).

Critical gerontology is also applied to research in the field of employability and organisational psychology. Research studies (Bal & Jansen, 2016; Estes & Phillipson, 2017; Halford et al., 2015; Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011; Zacher, 2015; Zacher & Rudolph, 2018) have applied this theory to highlight the importance of workplace flexibility and embracing diversity to accommodate older workers and recognise them as valued members of the workforce. In addition, Caines et al. (2020), Eppler-Hattab et al. (2020), and Sharit (2020) propose age-friendly workplaces through a critical gerontology perspective (Zacher & Rudolph, 2017) to help older workers to perform better in their jobs. This theory has also been used to study how workers in organisations perform (Flores-Sandoval & Kinsella, 2020; Zacher & Rudolph, 2017) in different contexts around the globe. While largely limited to Europe, Canada, and the US (Formosa & Galea, 2020), the studies found that appropriate and consistent support for older workers is crucial in helping them perform well at work.

Existing theories that explain, describe and justify various concepts in aging and older people (Alley et al., 2010, Bengtson et al., 1997; Hendricks et al., 2010) include Baltes's (1999) lifespan theory, Havinghurst's (1963) activity theory, Ryff's (1989) successful aging theory, and Cumming and Henry's (1961) disengagement theory (Bengtson et al., 1997; Hendricks & Powell, 2009; Marshall & Clarke, 2007). However, none fully address the

complexities older workers in Singapore face. Despite addressing the narrow, negative societal attitudes and perspectives of aging, these theories cannot fully capture the challenges faced by older workers from political and societal structures, attitudes and influences coming from the entire employability ecosystem.

3.2.2 Wellbeing theories

The science of wellbeing has evolved from the early years of measuring wellbeing using a country's GDP, and the development of wellbeing measures and concepts have continued to thrive (Lambert et al., 2020; Miranti et al., 2022). The emergence of the positive psychology movement in 2000, as proposed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), saw a shift towards empirical studies of human wellness, wellbeing and optimal functioning (Hone et al., 2015; Imran et al., 2020; Lo-oh, 2019). Before this, the focus in psychology and psychiatry had been on the absence of negative pathologies and challenges rather than the presence of positive ones such as human flourishing and positive mental health (Germann, 2020; Huppert, 2009; Huppert & So, 2011; Slade, 2010). However, research has challenged this idea (Cieslik, 2017; Van Slingerland et al., 2021; Zumstein & Riese, 2020), arguing that mental illness and mental health should be considered separate concepts (Cieslik, 2017; Keyes, 2002). Jahoda (1959) first promoted and defined the idea of positive mental health as one component of wellbeing (Oades et al., 2020; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Wellbeing is now a concept lying at the opposite end of a spectrum to common mental disorders and challenges, such as anxiety disorders and depression (Huppert & So, 2011). Governments in Australia, Singapore and the UK (Gomes, 2020; Joseph & McGregor, 2020; Siok-Kuan & Jiu, 2011; Tan & Tambyah, 2016; Wallace, 2018; Yap & Yu, 2016) recognise the importance of wellbeing and see subjective wellbeing as an indicator of progress and economic prosperity (Appau et al., 2020; Bache & Karen, 2018; Carabelli & Cedrini, 2011; Pillay, 2020). Measures of subjective wellbeing garner substantial attention in economics as quantitative approximations of individual and societal welfare (Odermatt & Stutzer, 2017).

This is because higher subjective wellbeing is associated with good health and longevity, better social relationships and improved work performances (Diener et al., 2018; Okun, 2022). As such, the analysis of subjective wellbeing serves as a complementary analytical tool for policy evaluation and economic development (Nikolova & Popova, 2021). Despite the growing debate on how to measure wellbeing (Hone et al., 2015; Rao et al., 2018; Tomaselli et al., 2021), there is a clear consensus that there are indeed many ways to describe and measure wellbeing; a concept gaining increasing importance and attention in many societies (Mercado, 2018; Pillay, 2020). Measures of wellbeing are vital for governments, the leadership and policymakers in organisations, and the public (Burns et al., 2020; Hone et al., 2015; Oades et al., 2021). Four recent studies reflect this significance (D'Ambrosio et al., 2020; Sujarwoto, 2021; Tanaka & Tokimatsu, 2020; Ugur, 2021). The surveyed population rated pursuing happiness above having wealth, indicating that policymakers should prioritise wellbeing when developing public policies (Bache & Karen, 2018). The concept of flourishing and the S-BIT theory of fulfilling work, which addresses wellbeing in workplace contexts, will be discussed in the next two sections.

3.2.2.1 Flourishing

One outcome of wellbeing is human flourishing (Bruns et al., 2022; Cieslik, 2017; Huppert & So, 2011) (see Section 2.10), which includes an understanding of all the relevant underlying mechanisms and predictors of human flourishing (Fink, 2014; Imran et al., 2020). The need to understand and measure human functioning on a large scale has resulted in different conceptual frameworks of flourishing as a concept (Hone et al., 2015). Notably, it is increasingly applied and central to influencing the progress and conditions of different segments of the population in various workplaces and institutions (Bache et al., 2016; Pillay, 2020).

Although various definitions and measurements of flourishing exist (Levin, 2020; Marsh et al., 2020; Keyes, 2002), there is no consensus on its application in research or

policymaking (De la Fuente, 2017). Different researchers have theorised and operationalised flourishing in distinct ways, but the key difference is how each researcher frame the combination of components that constitute this concept according to varying thresholds (Hone et al., 2015). Flourishing refers to the ‘experience of life going well’ (Huppert & So, 2011, p. 838), consisting of a coherent combination of positive emotions and effective functioning, combining hedonic and eudemonic aspects of wellbeing. It is ‘synonymous with a high level of mental wellbeing, and epitomises mental health’ (Huppert & So, 2011, p. 838). One important component of human flourishing is its application and significance in real-life contexts (Erum et al., 2020; Jeffrey, 2019; Huppert, 2009). In a quantitative study conducted in the Netherlands, Schotanus-Dijkstra et al. (2016) define flourishing as an optimal state found in individuals with high levels of hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Indeed, researchers agree that wellbeing is a multidimensional construct and flourishing refers to high levels of wellbeing and functioning (Adler & Seligman, 2016; Diener, 2009; Huppert, 2009; Keyes, 2002; Prendergast et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011).

For wellbeing outcomes to influence and shape policymaking in a meaningful and effective manner, methodical assessment must use reliable, valid and responsive measurement tools and representative population samples (Diener et al., 2010). To understand the characteristics of flourishing, it is necessary to study the concept in its entirety, not merely as an absence of mental illness and disorder (Bell et al., 2019). One of the largest studies on flourishing was conducted by Huppert and So (2011), which used a representative sample of 43,000 respondents from 22 countries in Europe. Due to its large volume, representativeness and wide-ranging coverage of wellbeing, Huppert and So’s (2011) operational definition of flourishing was primarily based on the factorial structure of the data (Hone et al., 2015), which enhances reliability. Huppert and So (2011) designed the conceptual framework for flourishing based on the internationally agreed-upon methodology used in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and the

International Classification of Diseases (WHO, 1993). Both classifications necessitate the presence of opposite symptoms to major and known mental and psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety disorders. By identifying the opposite symptoms of these major disorders, Huppert and So (2011) developed a list of 10 positive characteristics, as listed in Table 3.2. Based on factor analysis, inter-item correlations and data distribution, a ‘categorical diagnosis for flourishing that required a strong endorsement of positive emotion’ was designed (Huppert et al., 2013, p. 841).

Table 3.2: Features of flourishing and indicator items from the European Social Survey

Positive Feature	ESS (European Social Survey) Items used as indicator
Competence	Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do.
Emotional stability	Emotional stability (In the past week) I felt calm and peaceful.
Engagement	I love learning new things.
Meaning	I generally feel that what I do in my life is valuable and worthwhile.
Optimism	I am always optimistic about my future.
Positive emotion	Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?
Positive relationships	There are people in my life who really care about me.
Resilience	When things go wrong in my life it generally takes me a long time to get back to normal.
Self-esteem	In general, I feel positive about myself.
Vitality	(In the past week), I had a lot of energy.

Note. Adapted by author from Huppert & So (2011).

An individual is thought to be flourishing when these dimensions are present. To accurately capture the characteristics of flourishing, Huppert and So (2011) observed, identified and characterised segments of the population who display the flourishing. The first factor is positive, which is considered a measurement for life satisfaction. Huppert and So (2011) explain that life satisfaction as a factor was present in most surveys measuring happiness and wellbeing. Second, they added five dimensions of hedonic wellbeing: emotional stability, vitality, optimism, resilience and self-esteem. An individual who fulfils any four of these dimensions is identified as flourishing. Third, one is also considered to be flourishing if they meet three out of the four dimensions of eudemonic factors: engagement,

competence, meaning and positive relationships (Huppert & So, 2011). Therefore, the concept of flourishing is indicative of a person's overall wellbeing. This means it is a suitable measure of the appreciative factors of older workers in this study and representative of their overall wellbeing due to these factors' presence. Further, flourishing is a concept that has been applied in many areas in relation to the workforce (Crawford, 2019; De Crom & Rothmann, 2018; Ertac & Tanova, 2020; McKenzie et al., 2020), which affirms its suitability for measuring the wellbeing of older workers in Singapore.

Measurements of flourishing have also been applied in healthcare (Dadich et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2021; Levin, 2020), education (Bosch, 2020; Joseph, 2015; Kristjánsson, 2016; Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015) and the study of workers and organisations (Abid et al., 2018; Mercado, 2018; Kuntz et al., 2016; Marques, 2021; Mohamad Ibrahim et al., 2021). In all these areas, when flourishing among students and workers was observed, it led to positive changes and outcomes for the participants, institutions and organisations involved. Evidently, flourishing is a concept that creates awareness about the wellbeing of a group of people within the population, facilitates positive transformation and mindfulness (Ivtzan et al., 2018; Howells et al., 2016; Joseph, 2015; VanderWeele et al., 2019), and promotes sustainability in the professional lives of workers (Erum et al., 2020; Mercado, 2018). Thus, the concept of flourishing provides an essential foundation for those engaged in health promotion in organisations and policymaking to increase the number of people who are flourishing in Singapore's workforce.

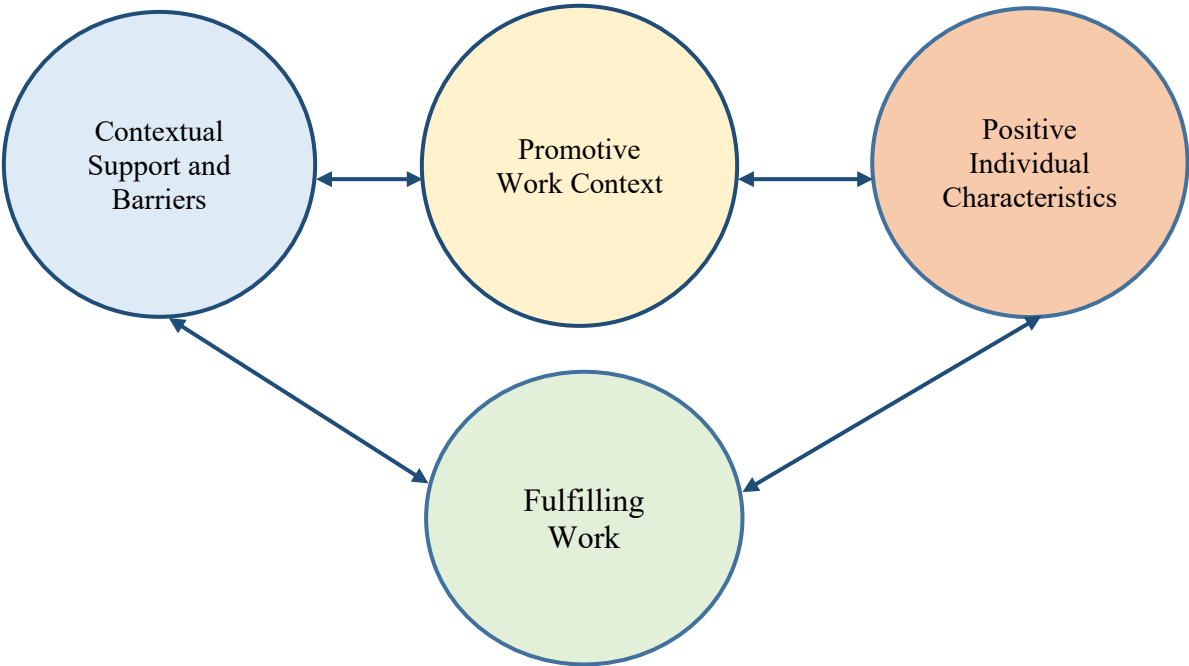
3.2.2.2 S-BIT theory of work

The S-BIT theory of work is a theory in organisational psychology that underlines the experience of fulfilling work (Owens et al., 2019). Fulfilling work can be defined as the 'complete, integrated, and comprehensive experience of wellbeing in the work context' (Owens et al., 2019, p. 224). S-BIT theory of work is vital for achieving fulfilling work and predicts positive wellbeing (Allan et al., 2019b). Although there may be other equally

important outcomes, such as earning a salary and meeting basic needs, focusing on fulfilling work enhances the wellbeing of the worker and the organisation (Dik et al., 2013; Norcross & Farran, 2020). This section elaborates on the significance of the S-BIT theory of work and its application in this study.

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, the S-BIT theory of work consists of three core components that form and guide its conceptual framework (Owens et al., 2019), leading to fulfilling work. First is contextual supports and challenges, including access to resources, employment and promotion opportunities and systemic inequities. Next is a promotive work context with elements such as support for workers and value alignment with these workers. The final component is positive individual characteristics, including the strengths that allow these workers to flourish while working (Owens et al., 2019). Allan et al. (2019b) argue that a coherent relationship between these components is necessary to create work that is fulfilling for the individual, which results in their wellbeing.

Figure 3.1: S-BIT theory of work



Note. Adapted by author from Owens et al. (2019b).

There are four main theoretical propositions in the S-BIT theory of work (Owens et al., 2019). First, workers with better work context, support and less contextual barriers will most likely enjoy promotive work contexts and experience fulfilling work. The S-BIT theory of work proposes that this can be achieved by providing better access to resources and opportunity structures and removing systemic inequities. Here, access to resources refers to economic and social capital that helps workers develop their knowledge base and competencies, while opportunity structures refer to growth and development in their careers (Allen et al., 2019). Conversely, this theory also highlights the importance of removing structural barriers, such as social inequities prevalent across many economies (Allen et al., 2019). Systemic inequities include the discrimination and marginalisation of certain segments of the population regarding access to opportunities and resources in work contexts (Owens et al., 2019).

The second proposition is that promotive work contexts are crucial in creating fulfilling work and meaningful work contexts (Allan et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2019b). Here, meaningful work contexts refer to work environments where workers feel supported and valued for their work, and their values align with those of the organisation (Owens et al., 2019). Several studies suggest that when workers' values align with their organisation's values and work contexts, they experience components of fulfilling work (Boikanyo & Heyns, 2019; Kuijpers et al., 2020). This theory suggests that such work contexts include environments that preserve workers' dignity by respecting them and valuing their work, ensuring fair treatment for all workers.

Third, positive individual characteristics are important in the work context and influence positive work outcomes. High levels of wellbeing are observed in workplaces with inclusive and supportive organisational policies (Anderson, 2018; Hyatt et al., 2016; Snell, 2018). This suggests contextual supports and promotive work contexts foster interconnected, positive individual characteristics that facilitate positive work outcomes (Allan et al., 2019a).

The S-BIT theory of work incorporates four variables to represent the positive characteristics applicable to a diverse range of participants in different work contexts: hope, strengths, adaptability and empowerment (Owens et al., 2019). Hope is an essential characteristic all workers have throughout their life span and describes a person's capacity and motivation to seek ways to achieve their goals. Strengths refer to positive traits that promote optimal functioning. Adaptability is an individual's ability to respond to and cope with changes and unpredictability in unique situations and novel challenges in work contexts (McLoughlin & Priyadarshini, 2021). Finally, empowerment is an individual having self-determination, control and positive influence over their (or others') environment in a work context (Islam & Irfan, 2020; O'Donoghue & van der Werff, 2021). Having a higher degree of empowerment also describes a higher level of efficacy (Allen et al., 2019; Owens et al., 2019).

As already stated, workers with better contextual support and lesser contextual barriers will likely enjoy fulfilling work (Allan et al., 2019b). The last proposition in the S-BIT theory of work suggests that workers with positive individual characteristics can help maximise these contextual supports and positively influence the work context. This facilitates their journey in a challenging and dynamic world of work, which in turn improves their wellbeing. Although some factors are clearly beyond the influence of an individual worker (Allan et al., 2019a), it is evident that an individual worker could influence their work contexts to a certain extent if they are flourishing and exhibiting positive functioning while at work (Ariza-Montes et al., 2019; Longo et al., 2016; Owens et al., 2019).

The S-BIT theory of work posits that workers who experience a set of overlapping positive emotional states and experiences, and have access to opportunities for professional growth and actualisation, can lead to work engagement and a holistic state of wellbeing while in employment (Allan et al., 2019b; Oades & Dulagil, 2017). However, different people understand, perceive and experience wellbeing in varying ways and place different values on the various aspects of wellbeing over others (Abdi et al., 2018; Daniels et al., 2018).

Therefore, based on the concepts from S-BIT theory, it can be inferred that establishing promotive work contexts that align with the worker's values and having a supportive work environment will create fulfilling work. In turn, this will ensure workers' wellbeing and sustain their employability.

Allan et al. (2019b) consider fulfilling work as achieving a holistic and complete sense of flourishing in the work context. This theory of fulfilling work encompasses assets of diverse but connected positive experiences that ensure the psychological needs of the worker are met. Further, it refers to a connected combination of positive experiences and emotional states that is dynamic and influenced by changing work circumstances (Norcross & Farran, 2020; Thomas, 2019). As such, workers experiencing fulfilling work will feel a sense of gratification, actualisation and fulfilment (Narvaez, 2018). As discussed in the previous section, scholars have conceptualised and operationalised wellbeing in diverse ways based on different theoretical foundations on what constitutes life satisfaction and 'a good life' (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Owen et al. (2019) contend that at a fundamental level, people with fulfilling work experiences generally experience a sense of contentment at work and enjoy positive emotional states, which is significant for their overall wellbeing.

As work occupies a significant portion of people in employment's lives, it is indeed important to investigate the factors that constitute meaningful work. Rosso et al. (2010) propose work meaningfulness refers to the level of purpose and meaning that work holds for a person. This is particularly significant as going to work may just be an ordinary job for some people, while for others, their work may be a calling and a meaningful endeavour (Michaelson, 2021; Oades & Dulagil, 2017). Aguinis and Glavas (2019) explain that workers are proactive and intentional agents who search for and find meaningfulness through work in various ways. However, there may be instances of workers not seeing their work as having any meaning other than a means of livelihood (Alliger, 2019; Matz-Costa et al., 2019). In these instances, the work contexts they are in will still influence and contribute to a

meaningful life overall (Graham et al., 2017; Haar et al., 2018), and the circumstances inherent within these contexts are significant for their overall wellbeing (Oades & Dulagil, 2017).

The core experience of fulfilling work may vary across individuals and communities in different situations, and so must its conceptualisation and operationalisation. With this consideration, the current study will apply the integrated theoretical framework for older workers as its primary theoretical lens.

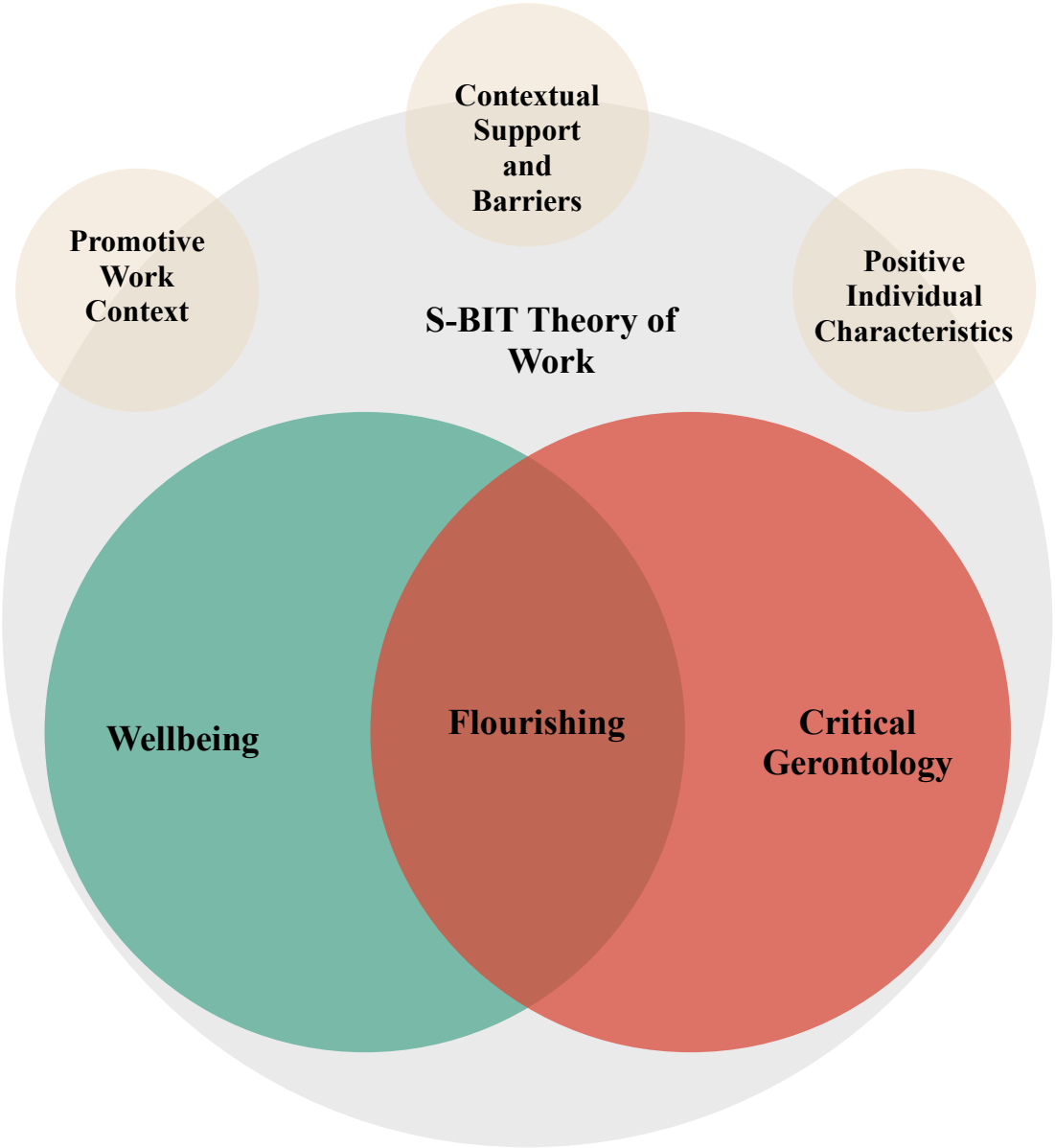
3.3 Significance of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to guide the data analysis in this study is illustrated in Figure 3.2. This framework combines two different theories into a single, integrated framework. It combines theoretical concepts in critical gerontology with wellbeing. In this framework, wellbeing is comprised of two separate theories: the theory of flourishing and the S-BIT theory of fulfilling work. The focus in this framework is not only on the concepts found in each of the theories but also the relationships between them and how each influences the other. These three theoretical concepts are combined into an integrated framework to facilitate a comprehensive and complete analysis of the entire ecology of work involving older workers in Singapore.

First, critical gerontology theory is used to understand taken-for-granted assumptions and explores models of aging through a critique of social meanings and assumptions of older workers (Bengtson et al., 1997). Second, the two wellbeing theories are combined. The theory of flourishing facilitates understanding the factors that allow older workers to flourish (Huppert & So, 2011). The S-BIT theory of work, developed from concepts in organisational psychology, serves to analyse the factors that utilise the strengths of workers to enable them to flourish. Both theories are needed to understand the different facets of wellbeing in older workers. While the theory of flourishing enables an understanding of appreciative factors

leading to their positive wellbeing, the S-BIT theory helps clarify the different conditions and factors needed to create a work environment in which workers thrive and succeed.

Figure 3.2: Theoretical framework for examining older workers in Singapore



Note. Adapted by author from Bengtson et al. (1997), Huppert and So (2011) and Owens et al. (2019)

There are many perspectives on what wellbeing means in diverse contexts and for different groups of people (Dooris et al., 2018; Li et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019). Consequently, two theories are used to address the notion of wellbeing for older workers (Atkinson et al.,

2020; Pescud et al., 2015). Given that the focus is on the older workers in Singapore, it is necessary to use a critical gerontology theory to understand the underlying factors of how older workers are perceived and labelled (Klausen, 2019; McKelvey, 2009; Phillipson, 2019) in Singapore and how this labelling relates to work contexts and cultures. It is also important to evaluate whether older workers are accurately portrayed or if this is merely the result of social construction (Resnick et al., 2018). By analysing the relationships between critical gerontology and wellbeing, the inter-relations between how assumptions of older workers influence workplace contexts and how systemic structures can contribute to challenges for older workers can be observed and understood.

Conversely, the theory of wellbeing (Huppert & So, 2011; Owen et al., 2019) serves as a theoretical lens to understand the enabling factors that allow older workers to flourish in their respective workplace contexts and experience fulfilling work. Empirically tested on a large sample in Europe (Huppert & So, 2011), the theory of flourishing lends rigour to this effort. The underlying factors that facilitate workers flourishing in work contexts or systemic factors will also be analysed. The intersection between critical gerontology and wellbeing relationships will reveal the factors responsible for the flourishing of older workers in Singapore. The flourishing of the older workers is indicative of their positive wellbeing. Further, the relationship between critical gerontology, wellbeing (Huppert & So, 2011) and fulfilling work (Owen et al., 2019) is correlated, making it equally important to understand how workers who are flourishing and showing positive, functioning wellbeing influence and transform their work contexts. The flourishing of the worker can therefore act as a mitigating factor against systemic challenges explained by critical gerontology theory.

Factors within the work context encapsulate and enable the flourishing of older workers in different workplace contexts. These factors include promotive work culture, contextual support and application of workers' strengths to create a positive work environment. They influence and enable the flourishing of a worker in the workplace context

and indicate their wellbeing. As defined in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.10), wellbeing ‘is diverse and fluid’ and comprises ‘intertwined individual, collective and environmental elements which continually interact’ (McCallum & Price, 2016, pp. 5–6). The three factors contained within the S-BIT theory of fulfilling work incorporate individual, collective and environmental elements that interact together to determine a worker’s wellbeing. Within the S-BIT theory of fulfilling work, the positive individual characteristics factor reflects the individual elements, the promotive work contexts factor reflects the collective element, and the contextual support factor reflects the environmental element in an individual’s wellbeing. Although the S-BIT theory of work is yet to be tested empirically (Owens et al., 2019), it has the potential in this study to capture the nuances and meanings within the work ecology of older workers in Singapore and offers a new perspective in understanding the flourishing of older workers in Singapore.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework that guides this study and clarified the relationship between two different theoretical concepts, critical gerontology and wellbeing. This framework is significant because it deviates from the traditional focus on deficit-based and problem-solving approaches to identifying factors that positively affect and enhance the wellbeing of older workers. This approach has the potential to influence policymakers and organisations to undertake strategies and implement initiatives that address optimal functioning and wellbeing of older workers, leading to positive outcomes.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research approach for this study. It describes the reasons for using a qualitative approach and an appreciative inquiry methodology. The research design, sampling strategies and ethical procedures observed during participant recruitment, data collection, analysis and management of the data are explained. Data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the processes and procedures involved are detailed. This includes considerations due to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the lockdown periods and restrictions in Singapore and the steps taken during the data analysis process.

This study's main aim was to challenge prevailing narrowed attitudes towards older workers by discovering the appreciative factors through the involvement of key stakeholders in Singapore's employment sector. To achieve this, the primary research questions devised were:

- 1) What are the appreciative factors and enabling influences behind these factors for older workers in employment in Singapore?
- 2) How would these appreciative factors inform employment and training policies?

The objectives that guided this study were to:

- evaluate the appreciative factors in the working lives of 30 older workers from four different ethnic groups (i.e., Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) in Singapore.
- analyse the perspectives of 10 adult educators and 10 employers or industry experts on the appreciative factors of older workers in Singapore.
- critique government policies on older workers in the last five years (2017–2021).
- synthesise the appreciative dialogues of older workers, adult educators, employers and industry experts and collectively envision a desired future for older workers in Singapore.

4.2 Qualitative Perspective

The purpose of this study was to extract and document real-world knowledge about the mindsets, attitudes, behaviours, social structures, experiences and shared values of a specific group of people (Ryan, 2018). To fully capture, understand and interpret the appreciative factors of older workers, the entire issue was studied in its relevant contexts (Hong & Cross-Francis, 2020). Qualitative research is a methodological approach to develop an understanding of social phenomena or human actions (Creswell, 2018; Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020). A qualitative methodology allowed a deep and detailed understanding of each older worker, which a quantitative study may not be able to achieve (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Given these considerations, this section argues why a qualitative study was most suited to this study's purposes and how it facilitated the application of an appreciative inquiry philosophy.

First, qualitative methods are typically used to answer research questions about experiences, meanings, understandings and perspectives from the standpoint of the research participants (Hyde, 2020). Data collected in quantitative research is amenable to counting or measuring (Hammarberg et al., 2016; Meunier-Beillard, 2017) and, therefore, ill-suited for this study. It would also be counterproductive as the aim here was to closely examine the lives of older workers and extract transformative factors within them rather than acquire a generalised view of their circumstances. It was also crucial to consider the study's philosophy, which clarified that a qualitative study would help facilitate the application of transformative characteristics in appreciative inquiry (Donovan et al., 2008; Mallory, 2020; Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). As Phoenix (2018) has highlighted, qualitative methods are important and relevant to understanding the lived experiences of people, demonstrating the value of using qualitative methods to shed light on the muddle and messiness of challenges in aging and complexities faced by older people (Warren-Findlow, 2013).

Second, qualitative methods were applied to understand and reveal the lived experiences of a particular group of people (Storr & John, 2018). Interviews and focus group discussions enabled the researcher to understand the circumstances of these workers (Cruz & Tania, 2017), leading to policy improvements (Chandra & Shang, 2019). Further, when a population cannot be identified—such as workers who have been underemployed, laid off or retrenched—a qualitative approach with widespread publicity could reach out to potential participants who would not typically volunteer for research. Such participants could reveal their thoughts and attitudes about their lives and the possibility of a positive transformation to remove anonymity with retrospective effect (Tulle & Palmer, 2020). Further, when participants shared reflections of their experiences in qualitative research, they revealed much more than the researcher set out to discover (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In describing their personal appreciative factors, participants also shared about people and structures that allowed them to thrive because of these factors and demonstrated different hidden societal constructions and relationships (Ben, 2019). Moreover, an appreciative inquiry conceptual framework necessitated using a qualitative methodology (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) as it gave this study the required methodological structure without comprising the fluidity and dynamism necessary for the co-construction of knowledge. As a result, the study maintained clarity and coherence through the 4-D cycle in appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012).

Third, the methods in qualitative research procedures included focus group discussions and narrative interviews. These modes are appropriate and effective for investigating values, extracting beliefs, understanding attitudes and concepts of normative behaviour and capturing the reality of lived experiences (Petty et al., 2018). Bostrom (2019) and Adams et al. (2019) affirm that qualitative research makes it possible to understand the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of any issue or complexity (Xu et al., 2020). Both of these methods were

significant and crucial in this study as they allowed rich data to be collected and meanings extracted from the experiences of older workers (Clarke et al., 2017).

Next, as Liamputtong (2019) explains, the purpose of qualitative research is to capture a complete picture without distorting its comprehensiveness or being distracted by statistics and numbers. Qualitative research allowed this research study to be conducted in a natural setting with few restrictions, which facilitated capturing data from participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2018). In qualitative studies, the researcher encourages and empowers research participants to share their stories and experiences (Creswell, 2018; Liamputtong, 2019). Denzin (2017) further argues that research questions dealing with complex human phenomena and subjective topics, as in this study, are best answered using qualitative methods. Thus, the issue can be explored in-depth based on interactions and discussions that investigate participants' experiences, attitudes and feelings regarding the subject under study.

Researchers have highlighted the suitability of qualitative research underpinned by an appreciative inquiry philosophy (Jakubik, 2017; McSherry et al., 2018; Naidoo et al., 2018; Ravalier et al., 2019). A qualitative approach is most practical when requiring a unique, forward-looking yet flexible approach to analysing copious and rich data (Cassell & Bishop, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). In addition, a qualitative research design is crucial in contesting positivist regimes and empowers those affected by social stereotypes and deficient policies (Haider, 2022; Kerrigan & Johnson, 2019). Its approach gives voices to groups who have been placed in the margins of policies or are not often heard and challenges a methodological hegemony that privileges a neoliberal paradigm (Kerrigan & Johnson, 2019). Thus, a qualitative approach was a suitable complement for applying appreciative inquiry in the current research study.

Quantitative studies with a strict procedural collection of data generally use standardised measures and statistical analysis (Bruce et al., 2018; Le Roux, 2016). Conversely, qualitative studies involve the systematic collection, organisation and

interpretation of textual, verbal or visual data (Nowell et al., 2017). Given this difference in approaches, it was necessary to have a set of guidelines and targeted criteria for assessing the qualitative research (Ben, 2019; Pratt et al., 2019). Although qualitative research has been used broadly in a myriad of contexts to fulfil different research objectives (Liamputtong, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017), there are different criteria for evaluating its rigour or quality (Laumann, 2020; Smith & McGannon, 2017). In the current study, the researcher adopted social constructivist and appreciative angles to analyse and interpret older workers' experiences, emotions and attitudes. Through appreciative dialogues, perceptions were understood and meanings constructed. Therefore, this study adopted an evaluative criterion to ensure rigour and reliability.

Overarching principles of rigour were also adopted, including effectiveness, credibility, trustworthiness, transferability and reflexivity (Hanson et al., 2019). First, it was relevant and practical as it fulfilled and reflected the ethical efforts for positive change through the research participants, researchers and readers. The research topic and methods of analysis struck a chord with many within Singapore's policymakers and the local community, thus making it applicable and transferable (Majid & Vanstone, 2018) to other similar contexts. Second, it was credible as it produced reasonable and well-founded arguments based on responses from stakeholders (Xu et al., 2020). Third, the study was defensible and trustworthy due to the transparency of methods, including the participatory accountability through a rigorous process of acquiring ethics approval (see Section 4.5.1) (Northcote, 2012). The appreciative inquiry approach gave this study the required methodological structure without comprising the fluidity and dynamism necessary for the co-construction of knowledge (Stavros, 2018) by the research participants. The study maintained clarity and coherence through the 4-D cycle in appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987, Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010), which made the research design transferable and reflexive. The main aim of this study was to extract and document contextual

real-world knowledge about the mindsets, attitudes, behaviours, social structures, experiences and shared beliefs of a specific group of people, which was best achieved through a qualitative study (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012; Ryan, 2018). Thus, the design and philosophy used in this study were most appropriate and practical in fulfilling the study's research objectives.

4.3 Appreciative Inquiry

In an unpredictable global business environment, it is tempting and very practical to approach a challenge with specific goals, primarily to mitigate threats and address only the root causes (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Els et al., 2018; Pitichat, 2020; Sweeney, 2018). However, Brunelli and Di Carlo (2019) emphasise the importance of analysing all aspects of the issue to uncover underlying factors that might have gone unnoticed. More often than not, a challenge or issue's positive aspects and strengths are not considered, and their roles are not fully appreciated (Wingerden & Stoep, 2018). Scholars have affirmed that appreciative inquiry, as a strengths-based approach (Cooperrider et al., 2008), possesses the potential to transform lives positively (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020; Morton, 2019; Myer, 2017). Appreciative inquiry is an approach within organisational development that focuses on the positive elements inherent in a system, rather than identifying problems and solving them (Burbach & Amani, 2019; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012). Drawing its core principles from social constructivism, appreciative inquiry equates organisations as organic institutions (Nortjé, 2019; van Schaik, 2019) and perceives them as meaning-making systems, where social reality is continuously created and recreated through social interactions (Lalka, 2020; Marsden, 2020). One way of effecting change, particularly when attempting to transform perceptions and create a collective consciousness, is through distinct research methodologies. In the past decade, one such methodology used by many organisations has been appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2013; Jakubik, 2017; Lewis, 2016; Stavros, 2018). This section demonstrates how positive inquiry, collaboration and a strengths-based

approach were applied through an appreciative inquiry methodology that framed and provided direction for this research study's methodology. It explores how appreciative inquiry could positively transform older workers in Singapore to challenge prevalent ageist attitudes in Singapore.

From its earliest articulation, appreciative inquiry adopted a metaphorical position that human systems are not inert machines or mechanistic problems (Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987; Cooperrider et al., 2008). To perceive human systems as processes and inert entities usually led to deficit-based interventions, often resulting in unresolved challenges and confounding complexities (Sharp et al., 2018). Instead, appreciative inquiry sees human organisations as organic living systems, viewed as relationally alive (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). Appreciative inquiry is a strengths-based approach that seeks to initiate change through a positive and transformative revolution (Cooperrider et al., 2018). It provided an opportunity for participants to draw on their strengths and constructively engage in a change initiative (Cooperrider et al., 2008) to effect positive transformation at workplaces or even social change in the community (Cooperrider et al., 2013; Lewis, 2011; Ravalier et al., 2019). Appreciative inquiry has been successfully applied in areas such as strategic organisational change, global change initiatives, organisational culture reforms and leadership development (Buckham, 2019; Cooperrider et al., 2013; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). To effect change successfully and achieve an ideal vision for older workers required approaching the issue from a positive perspective and transforming the collective consciousness of all stakeholders in Singapore's workforce.

Appreciative inquiry is an approach within organisation development that focuses on the positive elements inherent in a system rather than identifying problems and simply solving them (Harris, 2018; Sekerka, 2022). It is underpinned by a philosophy of change that embraces the concept of transformation during the harshest conditions and most challenging times (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cojocaru, 2012; Noumair & Shani, 2017; Watkins et al.,

2011). Appreciative inquiry argues that people respond and transform when forced to change during the darkest times, utilising an ecology of their strengths and available resources (Niemic, 2018). This methodology seeks to engage members in an organisation or group to envision and realise the desired future. Notably, this approach has been growing considerably both in academic status and practical application in the recent decade (Buckham, 2019; Cooperider et al., 2013; Cooperrider et al., 2008).

In the words of its initiators, appreciative inquiry was never designed to merely act as an organisational process or a conventional strategic procedure. Rather, it is meant as an adventure to unleash change where a positive lens is maintained from inception through to the ultimate completion of its application (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012; Lewis, 2011). This unique paradigm of change envelopes its participants in an undertaking to recognise their strengths and use these to underpin a positive revolution (Cooperider et al., 2013). Indeed, despite its uniqueness, the main consideration for applying appreciative inquiry as a change instrument is that it encourages the involvement of all stakeholders so positive change can take place from the very first step of its application. Cooperrider et al. (2008, p. 37) explained that forming a ‘positive core’ by asking ‘unconditional positive questions’ allows an organisation to synthesise its energies effectively to achieve its fullest potential. One particular characteristic of appreciative inquiry that made it appropriate for the current research study was the approach’s intention for discovery, analysis, understanding and fostering revolutions and being life-centric (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cooperider et al., 2013).

Introducing the concept of change from an appreciative and transformative angle was essential and practical, particularly for a group of people in a specific context (Lewis, 2016; Whitney, 2010). Although attempting this was not entirely esoteric, it facilitated an understanding of the challenges older workers in Singapore faced from all angles and aspects. With this consideration, appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987) appropriately enabled the exploration and understanding of the appreciative perspectives of older workers

and the underlying factors and motivations behind these factors. This method was certainly fitting given its strengths-based approach rooted in postmodern constructivist theory (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012). It reflected the values of the researcher and their constructivist epistemic stance by giving a voice to the older workers in Singapore and allowing them to construct and transform their own realities (Cooperrider, 2017; Sekerka et al., 2006).

Constructivism is a view in philosophy that defines knowledge as a human construction (Fedyk & Xu, 2018; Hyde, 2020; Milanović & Pitt, 2018). It focuses on how humans make meaning and construct knowledge and develop understandings of their realities (Antonio, 2011, Jung, 2019; Priest et al., 2013). These realities are constantly redefined, reinterpreted and rearticulated (Brännmark & Brandstedt, 2019; Chiari, 2020). Thus, how participants' experiences, attitudes, emotions and thoughts were interpreted was key to achieving a positive transformation through appreciative inquiry. Through the art and methodical practice 'of asking unconditionally positive questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential' (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 8), this study evaluated the appreciative factors in the working lives of older workers in Singapore and analysed the perspectives of adult educators, employers and industry experts on the older workers' appreciative factors. It also provided a critique of government policies concerning older workers, synthesised the appreciative dialogues of older workers, adult educators, employers and industry experts and collectively envisioned a desired future for older workers in Singapore.

Marsden (2020), Sidman-Taveau and Hoffman (2019), and Zijlstra-Shaw and Jowett (2020) maintain that the central principles of appreciative inquiry inspire positive inquiry and collaboration. Although predominantly employed in organisational development, the very core of appreciative inquiry is initiating and facilitating positive change (Frerich & Murphy-Nugen, 2018), making it an attractive and relevant methodology in a globalised, rapidly

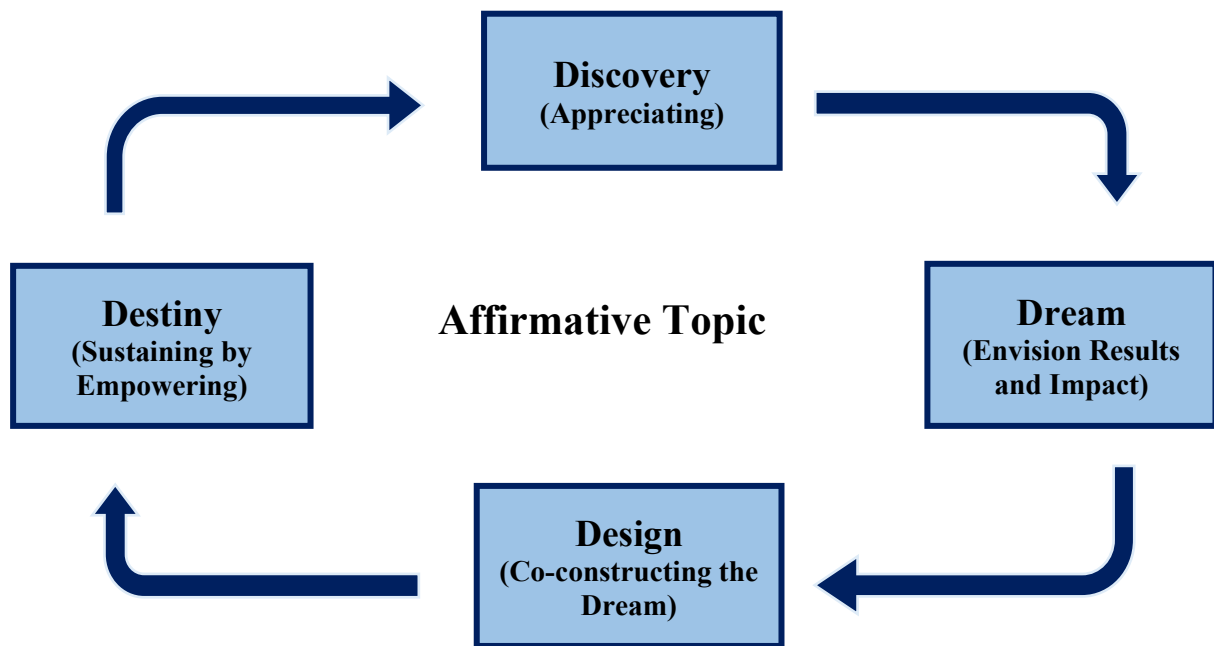
changing and competitive employment market. It has exposed society's worldviews and the underlying factors shaping them (Stavros, 2018). It simultaneously created an opportunity for the research participants to assume and construct a completely new worldview that may transform their lives and others for a long time to come. This is because appreciative inquiry involves an artful yet disciplined way of asking questions that utilise the ecology of strengths and positive potentials to elevate a system's capacity to achieve shared goals and collective objectives (Heaton, 2018; Thatchenkery et al., 2010). In addition, appreciative inquiry views practitioners as active agents who are afforded the opportunity to influence and shape their realities through collective thinking and dialogues (Bager & Mølholm, 2020; Hung, 2017). In the current study, this entailed constructing appreciative questions and involving all stakeholders in mutual collaboration and co-creation (Cooperrider et al., 2008) via face-to-face, Zoom or a virtual platform (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). Therefore, understanding participants' experiences and analysing them through appreciative perspectives exposed how ageist attitudes that plagued the lives of older workers in Singapore could be countered.

London et al. (2019) contend that appreciative inquiry presents itself as a challenge to other methods that tend to adopt a deficit-based approach by identifying problems to be solved. It involves the groups of people in the organisation in dialogues of appreciation and asks questions to help them understand their own organisations' strengths and stimulate a positive transformation (Thornton, 2019). While a problem-solving approach appears practical and logical, it usually fails to consider an organisation's strengths and how these could help the organisation and even form the foundations of an entrepreneurial venture (Sekerka, 2002; Stavros, 2018). A dynamic and flexible methodology, appreciative inquiry is capable of applying itself successfully in organisational development, team building, organisational transformation (Cooperrider et al., 2008), and the more specific and recent issues of diversity, globalisation and conflict in many other different fields (Grieten et al., 2018). Given its flexibility of application and unique strengths-based approach, it was

practical to employ appreciative inquiry as a methodology to consider and conceive a unified vision for quality of life for older workers in the Singapore context.

An appreciative inquiry methodology was fitting and practical for the current study as its application facilitated the in-depth understanding of the lived work experiences of older workers in Singapore's workforce and dialogues with all stakeholders in this workforce. Moreover, as it is flexible and agile, this methodology allowed for ease of application depending on the context and purpose (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Cooperrider et al., 2008). The main reasons for applying the appreciative inquiry framework were its flexibility of application and transformative nature rooted in its philosophical underpinnings (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Moreover, this study was not merely an exercise to understand the lived work experiences of these workers but to use these experiences to envision a better future for them and challenge prevalent ageist attitudes in society. Successful application of an appreciative inquiry within a qualitative approach meant that such a transformation could potentially be replicated in other societies around the world (Wall et al., 2017). The application of the 4-D cycle, as illustrated in Figure 4.1, is the main intervention model in appreciative inquiry (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987; Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Figure 4.1: The 4-D cycle—Elements of appreciative inquiry



Note. The 4-D cycle is adapted from Cooperrider & Godwin (2012)

The first and most important step after establishing the affirmative topic in the 4-D cycle (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012) is the discovery stage. This stage is critical as it involves collecting data through individual narrative interviews. After determining the affirmative topic in the current study, the core steps were to identify the appropriate stakeholders, choose the topics that initiated the dialogues during the interviews, and identify the values and experiences shared through the narrative interviews. This established a platform for the next step of the appreciative inquiry process, the dream phase.

Only the first two phases of the appreciative inquiry cycle were conducted in this study. First, both phases were well-suited to address the research questions and answer the research gap. The discovery phase (Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987; Cooperrider et al., 2008) evaluated the appreciative factors of older workers in Singapore and analysed the perspectives of adult educators and industry experts on older workers. The dream phase synthesised the participants' dialogues (Cooperrider et al., 2008) and used this to inform policymakers and

stakeholders in Singapore's employment and training sectors. Second, the first two phases formed the blueprint for this study, which could be extended by applying the findings to complete the last two phases in the 4-D cycle. By completing the last two phases, the findings from the first two phases could be operationalised to lead a positive transformation for older workers in Singapore. Several existing studies (C. Gordon, 2020; Moore et al., 2017; Ogude et al., 2019; Schmied et al., 2019; Watkins et al., 2019) have applied the first two phases of the 4-D cycle successfully to achieve a positive transformation or an intervention in a selected group of the population. The time needed to operationalise the findings and evaluate their effectiveness would likely exceed the timeline and scope of this study. The set of core principles underpinning this methodology (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom 2010), which were applied in the current study, are presented in the next section.

4.3.1 Principles of appreciative inquiry

The appropriateness of appreciative inquiry as a methodology for this study partly lies in it evolving from a research method for making grounded theory-building more generative (Cooperrider & Srivastava, 1987; Watkins et al., 2011). Appreciative inquiry is a means of systematically identifying assets and utilising these as building blocks to achieve a specific group of people's common, collective dream (Stavros et al., 2018). It does not attempt to ignore the challenges present. Instead, it is a systematic process that seeks to direct inquiry towards the objective vision's desired direction by focusing on growth through assets instead of attending to existing deficits. The application of appreciative inquiry as a methodology in organisational development has been highlighted by Grieten et al. (2018), Mallory (2020), Sim et al. (2018), and Woo and Paskewitz (2021). These studies emphasise the transformative role appreciative inquiry has played in developing and improving organisational leadership and creating a conducive and safe work environment (Gallagher et al., 2019; Waterford et al., 2020).

Stavros et al. (2018) list the main principles of appreciative inquiry, including some emergent ones as originally designed by Cooperrider and Godwin (2012), which are presented in Table 4.1. This table demonstrates how appreciative inquiry principles were embodied in this research and how appreciative philosophy was applied. This entire appreciative research process enabled all stakeholders to become involved in the dialogue. Establishing mutual ownership of the outcomes from the start resulted in collaborative processes to facilitate the co-creation of knowledge and policies for the future of older workers. The internalisation of positive aspects of a situation developed the belief that the participants could manage the reality of constant and relentless change and also shape it for their desired future (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Table 4.1: Principles of appreciative inquiry

Principle	Descriptions	Application
Constructivist	Reality and identity are co-constructed; Different elements are deeply interconnected; Words create worlds where reality is constructed through language.	Participants interviewed through strategic, strengths-based questions. Participants shared their perspectives of reality through the narrative interviews.
Simultaneity	We live in a world our questions create; The unconditional positive question is transformational; Change begins when we ask a question.	The strategic questions asked during the interview were designed for participants to reflect. The transformative change in fact took place in tandem with the interviews and reflections.
Poetic	Life experiences are rich; Develop an appreciative eye; What we focus on grow.	Reflections focused on positive and peak experiences in participants' lives. The areas of growth were ones given specific attention.
Anticipatory	Create vision before decisions; Positive images create positive futures; Big changes start small.	Participants afforded opportunities to envision ideal contexts, situations and environments.
Positive	Positive emotions broaden thought and construct; Necessary to identify strengths and leverage upon them.	Participants experienced positive emotions from the outset. Positive emotions set the tone for the narratives shared during the interview.
Wholeness	Wholeness encourages more expansive thinking than reductionism; Formation of an emerging whole.	The interviews involved three groups of stakeholders: older workers, adult educators and industry experts. All stakeholders played a part in the creation of a better and improved whole.
Enactment	Embodying the dream; The self-fulfilment of a vision.	Participants were given the opportunity of living the future, making the dream a possible reality through envisioning an ideal future during the narrative interviews.
Free Choice	The Freedom of clarity allows us to pursue life freely; Freedom liberates people and gives them control.	Participants were given freedom of expression. Encouraged to reflect towards achieving better outcomes out of their own volition.
Narrative	We construct stories about our lives; Stories are transformative.	Through the provision of narrative interviews, participants were given opportunities to reflect on peak experiences in their lives.
Awareness	Practice cycles of action and reflection, where we act, reflect, and act with awareness; Be conscious of underlying assumptions.	Participants became more cognisant and engaged when afforded the opportunity to reflect and share their life experiences, particularly positive ones.

Note. This table is a summary of the description and application of the appreciative inquiry principles in this study. The principles are adapted from Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010).

The application of the principles of appreciative inquiry was necessary, first, to allow transition from a problem-solving perspective to one that is vision or possibility centric (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Next, the constructivist principle states that human knowledge and experiences are interwoven with their destiny (Watkins et al., 2019). Organisations and communities are therefore living human constructions, capable of fashioning fresh discourses and crafting conceptions of knowledge through dialogue and envisioning positive images of the future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Cooperrider et al., 2008). This dialogue occurred through the second principle in appreciative inquiry, the simultaneity principle, whereby the seeds of change are rooted in dialogues between stakeholders. This dialogue formed the seeds from which changes flourished, and transformation took effect. Third, the poetic principle suggested that people's focus determined the direction of growth; therefore, if the discussion adopted an appreciative lens, the growth leaned towards improvement and positive change (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney, 2010). To execute these principles effectively, the anticipatory principle should be considered, as it encouraged utilising positive imagery as an impetus to effect positive change. In addition, the dialogues were enveloped with positivity, and this attitude was encouraged throughout the conversations that enabled the development of transformative ideas and effecting change towards what was envisioned (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Next, another principle crucial to the appreciative inquiry process is the wholeness principle. By engaging the different groups of relevant stakeholders, the sum of these parts formed a cohesive and ideal whole (Andrus, 2010). This wholeness reflected the collective dream of all relevant stakeholders; also, how common strengths can form the core foundation of what they envision and hope to achieve (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Watkins et al., 2011). In addition, the enactment and free choice principles allowed participants to enjoy the freedom to consider their future, as people must have the freedom to decide in order to envision and work towards their desired future (Stavros et al., 2018). This relates to the awareness

principle, as people with the freedom to decide became acutely aware of the underlying factors driving and influencing their lives. Lastly, the narrative principle allowed participants to reflect and share their life stories through the narrative interviews (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

To conclude, these appreciative inquiry principles were personified within the data collection process and consonant with the 4-D cycle of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Cooperrider et al., 2008). The application of these principles facilitated data collection from the first two phases of the appreciative inquiry cycle. Through this process, the study sought to evaluate and analyse the appreciative factors of older workers in Singapore and how they informed employment and training policies to facilitate transformation in these workers' perceptions.

4.4 Research Design and Procedure

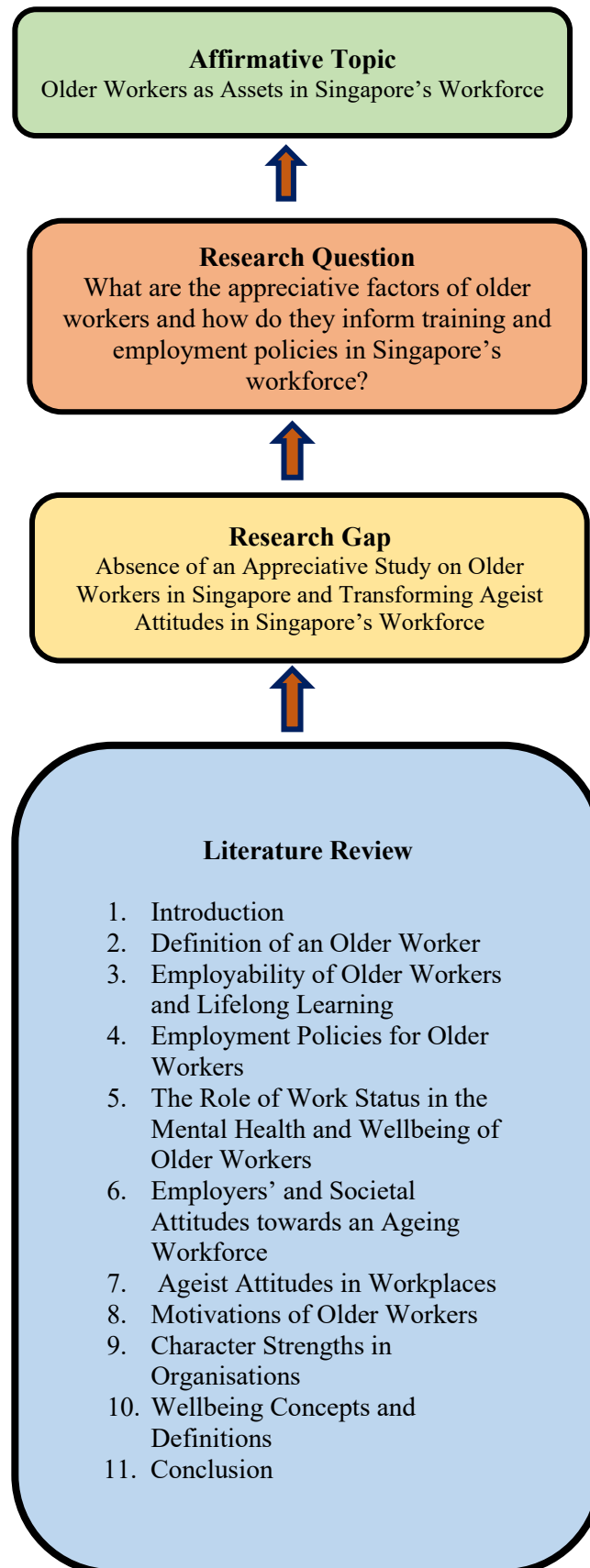
The 4-D cycle consists of four phases, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. In the current research study, the first two phases of the 4-D cycle were implemented in the order presented in Figure 4.2. The first and most important step after establishing the affirmative topic (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012) was the discovery stage. This stage was the most critical part of the inquiry as it involved collecting strengths-based data through individual narrative interviews. As explained in Section 4.3, the main steps after determining the affirmative topic were to identify the appropriate stakeholders, choose the topics to initiate the dialogues during the interviews, and share values and experience through narrative interviews to establish a platform for the next step of the appreciative inquiry process—the dream phase. The next section outlines the process of establishing the affirmative topic for this research study.

4.4.1 Affirmative topic

The first step in applying the appreciative inquiry framework was establishing the affirmative topic (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The affirmative topic stems from a challenge an organisation seeks to solve or a negative state of affairs it would like to transform (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000), which is crucial in determining the direction of the topic studied (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). As such, affirmative topics should focus on what the organisation or society would like to see grow and flourish (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Cooperrider et al., 2013; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). This topic was fundamental to the study as it defined the direction of the transformation process and laid the groundwork for the data collection procedures central to the appreciative dialogues and discussions (Whitney, 2010) that shaped this study. The desired outcome of the current study was to transform stakeholders' perceptions of older workers as assets and acknowledge their contributions to Singapore's workforce. It sought to envision a more positive future for older workers and transform societal perceptions of them.

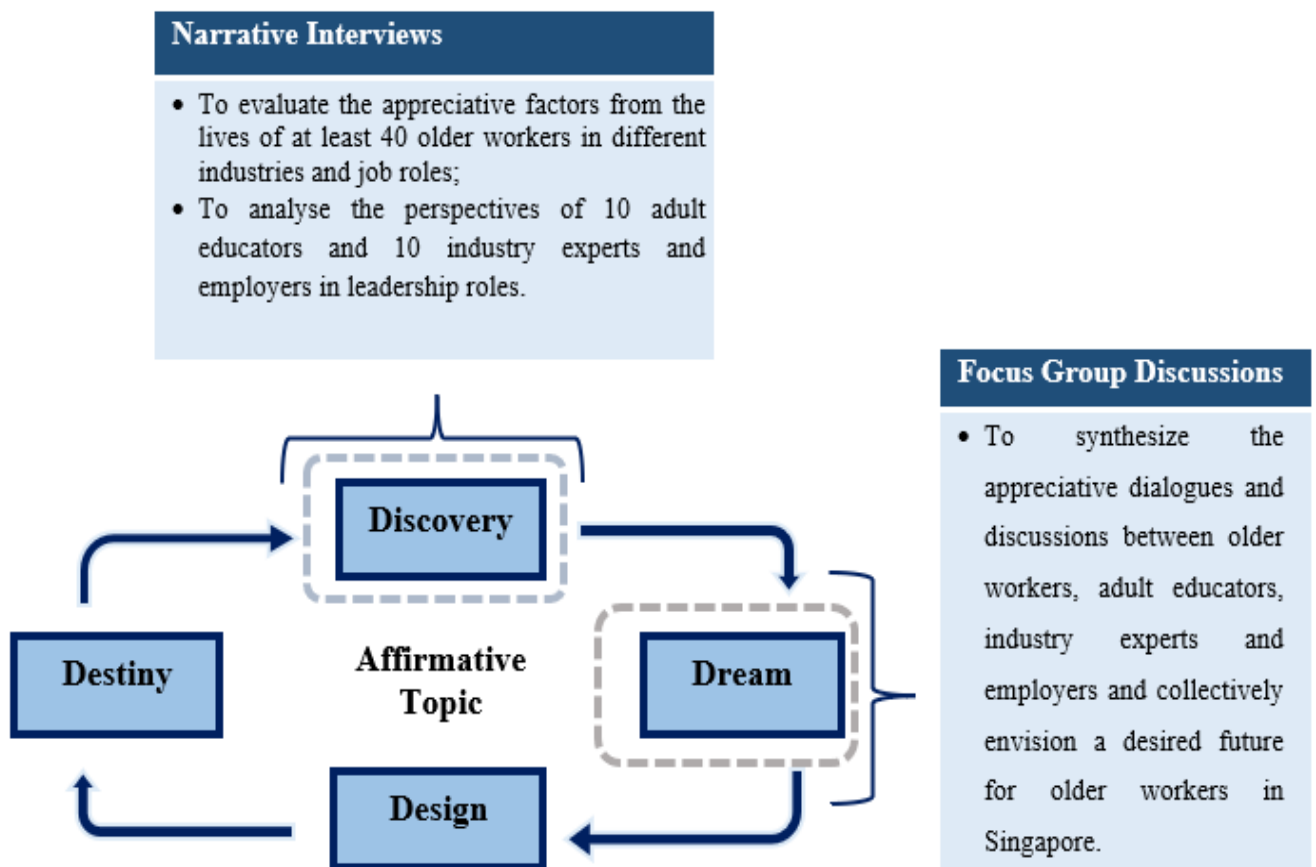
The study's main objectives were to evaluate the appreciative factors of older workers and apply them to inform training and employment policies. Another objective was to use these factors to transform the perceptions of older workers by having all stakeholders involved in appreciative dialogues. To start this process, the affirmative topic was established. In this study, the affirmative topic was for older workers to be considered assets to Singapore's workforce and for policymakers and stakeholders to be informed by the appreciative factors of the older workers in Singapore. Figure 4.2 illustrates the process of establishing the affirmative topic in this study.

Figure 4.2: Establishing the affirmative topic for this study



After the affirmative topic was established in the study, the first two phases of the 4-D cycle in appreciative inquiry were carried out. Figure 4.3 illustrates how the research objectives for this study were encapsulated in the first two phases of the 4-D cycle. It contributes to transforming how older workers are perceived and envisions a more inspiring and positive future for older workers by informing future training initiatives and policy formulation.

Figure 4.3: Conducting the first two phases of the 4-D cycle in appreciative inquiry



Note. The process of conducting the first two phases of appreciative inquiry in this study. Adapted from Cooperrider and Godwin (2012).

4.4.2 Phase 1 (Discovery phase)

The cornerstone of the Discovery phase in the 4-D cycle for this study were the appreciative interviews (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). As part of the appreciative inquiry process, narratives provided a window into developing and constructing the participants' identities (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Narratives is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Sools, 2020; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) by incorporating experiences, social contexts and evaluations about these experiences to form a coherent story (Bolkan et al., 2020). Moreover, narratives have been commonly used as a data collection method in several studies utilising appreciative inquiry as a conceptual framework (Butani et al., 2019; Ogude et al., 2019; Stavros et al., 2018).

These narratives can influence how the narrator considers their life and incite decisions that transform possibilities into realities (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The questions asked during the narrative interviews were designed to evoke personal reflections of participants' peak experiences and journeys of strengths to initiate dialogues about future possibilities and ideals during the dream phase (Cooperrider et al., 2008). As the first phase, this process was foundational and provided the platform for the next step in the data collection process: the focus group discussions in the Dream phase.

4.4.3 Phase 2 (Dream phase)

For the Dream phase (Cooperrider et al., 2008), the participants attended one focus group session after completing their narrative interviews. During this focus group session, participants collaborated and developed their dreams based on a focal topic (Cooperrider et al., 2013). Silverman (2014) and Sim et al. (2018) define focus groups as a qualitative approach seeking to learn population subgroups with respect to psychological and sociocultural characteristics and processes. This definition is relevant as participants worked together to share positive experiences and envisioned common ambitions during this phase

(Jakubik, 2017; Stavros, 2018). Each group consisted of a heterogeneous mix of participants; most comprised two older workers, one adult educator and one industry expert or employer. The focus group sessions were organised as detailed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Procedures for the Discovery phase

Discovery Phase	Procedure	Data Collected
Narrative Interviews	i) Participants were checked for suitability and availability to participate in the research study. ii) Researcher arranged for a suitable date and time to conduct interviews (face-to-face interviews but converted to Zoom interviews upon the enforcement of lockdown restrictions in Singapore). iii) Participant information sheet and consent form sent to participant via email. iv) Researcher interviewed participants and recorded the interviews. v) Researcher uploaded recordings onto University's box and labelled recordings appropriately using pseudonyms to de-identify participants before commencing transcription. vi) Researcher deleted audio recordings from recording device. vii) Transcription stored in the University of Adelaide's box after completion. viii) Transcription labelled appropriately and uploaded into NVivo's data set for coding.	Interview Transcripts

4.4.4 Research procedure

The research procedures undertaken in this study for both data collection methods are summarised in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3. As detailed in Table 4.2, the first phase included collecting data on the experiences, achievements and reflections in the participants' lives that they are proud of and invoke strong positive emotions (Dent, 2019). In the second phase, as shown in Table 4.3, dialogues took place between the stakeholders, and results envisioned a desired future for older workers in Singapore depicted through developing opportunity maps.

Table 4.3: Procedures for the Dream phase

Dream Phase	Procedure	Data Collected
Focus Group Discussion	<p>i) Participants were contacted and checked for suitability as well as availability to participate in a focus group discussion.</p> <p>ii) Researcher arranged for a suitable date and time to conduct the focus group session via Zoom.</p> <p>iii) Session commenced with a brief summary of the ethical protocols observed to protect participants' confidentiality and security (e.g., such as not having to turn on their cameras on Zoom).</p> <p>iv) The discussion is initiated through a question about the strengths of older workers observed during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions.</p> <p>v) The discussion is conducted with the researcher as the moderator. Moderator ensured that all participants given fair and equal opportunity to share their perspectives and opinions.</p> <p>vi) Researcher commenced the second part of the focus group session with a brief recap of the first session on dream dialogues after a short break.</p> <p>vii) Researcher uses a mind map drawing software to document the mind-maps of initiatives and policies as proposed by participants based on the dream dialogues.</p> <p>viii) Researcher uploaded recordings and pdf copies of the mind maps onto University's box, labelled them appropriately using pseudonyms to de-identify participants before commencing transcription.</p> <p>ix) Researcher deleted audio recordings from the computer.</p> <p>x) Transcriptions stored in the University of Adelaide's box after completion.</p> <p>xi) Transcriptions and mind maps are labelled appropriately and uploaded into NVivo12's data set for coding.</p>	<p>Focus Group Transcripts</p> <p>Opportunity Maps</p>

As detailed in Figure 4.3, the second phase was about challenging the current contexts and circumstances the participants were in and reflecting upon the positive foundations of the narrative interviews and dream of desired states in the future (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Stavros et al., 2015). Cooperrider et al. (2013) explain that this phase involves a distinct mapping of higher impact opportunities, where the participants work collectively to identify common aspirations and develop a sense of how practice and contexts could be shaped in the future (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Grietan, 2018). This phase was conducted in the current study through focus group discussions. The findings and presentation from each group were

thematically analysed and consolidated using NVivo 12 software. The main findings from this phase were used to shape and develop policies, strategies and a public campaign (see Section 7.4).

The final two phases for the appreciative inquiry process are the Design phase and the Destiny phase, which focus on developing the social infrastructure to turn the dream and aspirations into a foreseeable reality (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Dent, 2019; Watkins et al., 2019). These two phases address the essential elements needed to design and achieve the aspirations of the participants, as discussed in the Dream phase. Some of these elements include government agencies, leadership and management structures, processes and policies, and public perceptions and relationships (Frerich & Murphy-Nugen, 2018; Watkins et al., 2019). Relevant recommendations are presented in Chapter 7 to suggest an extension to this study through the last two phases of appreciative inquiry.

4.5 Ethics, Participant Recruitment and Sampling

This section presents the ethics approval for the study and describes the sampling strategy and steps taken to recruit suitable participants.

4.5.1 Ethics

This study was approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (H-2020-005) (see Appendix B) on 8 January 2020 and deemed to be low risk, in accordance with the conditions in the university's HREC requirements as it applies an appreciative inquiry methodology without any intent to elicit sensitive and confidential data. Although the data was collected in Singapore from Singaporean citizens, there was no requirement to acquire ethics approval from the government of Singapore. As such, the University of Adelaide's ethical protocols were strictly followed. This study conforms to all ethical guidelines of the University of Adelaide and the National Statement on Ethical

Conduct in Human Research (2018) (National Health and Medical Research Council & Australian Research Council, 2018).

Due care was exercised to ensure participants were clear about the purposes and benefits of the research project and that their participation was voluntary. The participants were given time to read through the information before signing the consent form and had the right to withdraw from the project at any point. Participants were informed that they were audio recorded but de-identified in the interview transcripts and data analyses. This research was undertaken solely in Singapore and did not require ethical clearance from any local institution before data collection. Apart from their time to be interviewed, there were minimal potential risks or burdens to the study participants. Collected data were kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this study in a password-protected hard drive accessible only to the researcher and supervisors. The participants were provided with the option of seeking redress with the University's ethics committee if they were concerned about the information or confidentiality of the interview process.

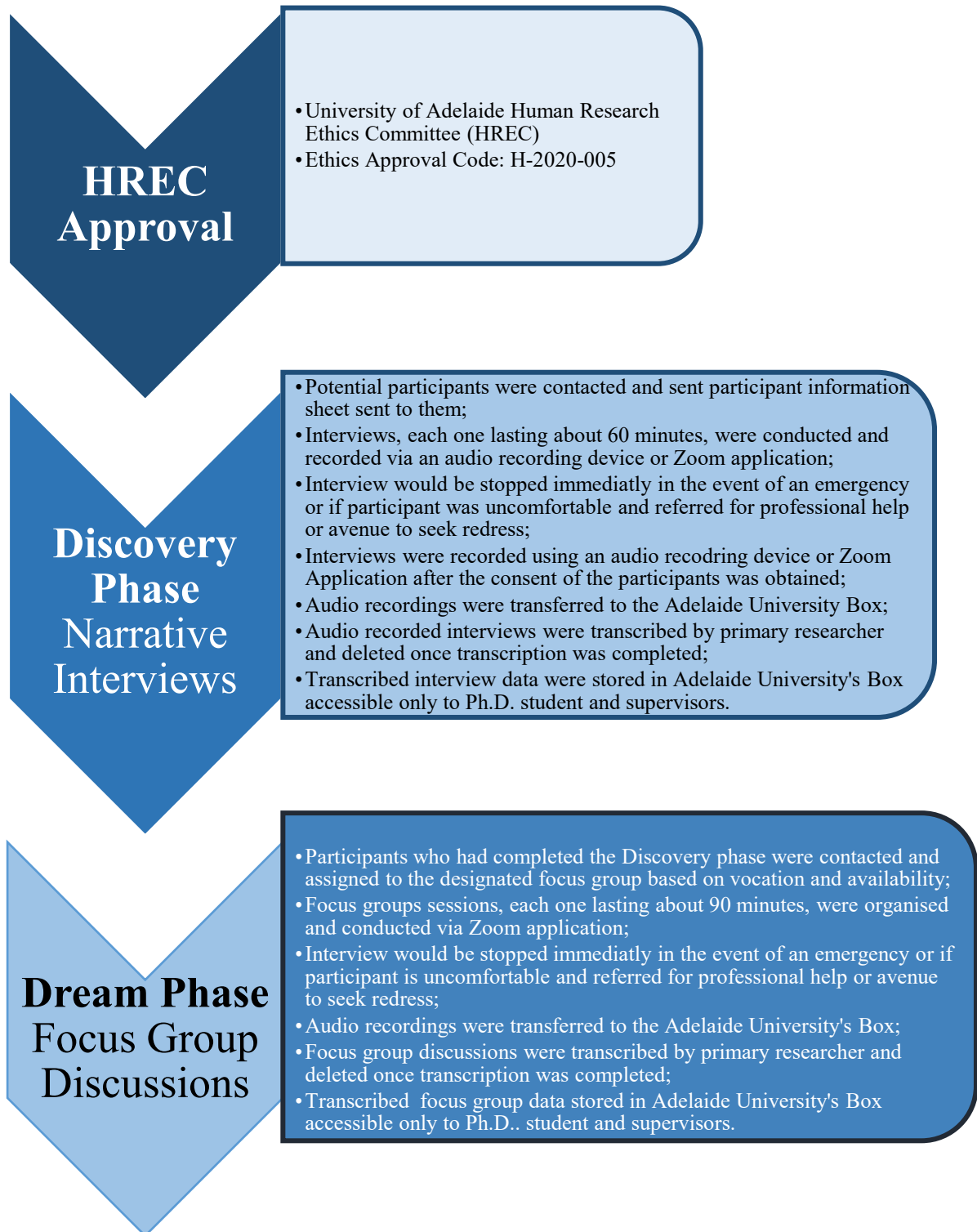
Data collection took place between January 2020 and September 2020. To mitigate any burden or inconvenience for taking part in the interview and focus group sessions, and protect participants' physical health, mental health and privacy, support and wellbeing strategies were put in place under careful ethical considerations. Most of the face-to-face interviews took place between January 2020 and March 2020. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Singapore government imposed strict lockdown measures in March 2020 (Singapore Statutes Online, 2020). A variation to ethics was approved (see Appendix C) to accommodate the changed circumstances, and subsequent data collection was conducted on a virtual platform via Zoom.

The participants were informed that the interviews (see Appendix E) would be conducted via Zoom. At this point in time, many parts of the world went into lockdown, and Zoom became the most commonly used communication platform in many industries,

including healthcare, the courts and education (Puddister & Small, 2020; Roy et al., 2020; Singhal, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Sloan and Quan-Haase (2017) and Sy et al. (2020) had already suggested the practical use of synchronous communication applications and virtual platforms for data collection and research communication. Indeed, several studies have successfully completed data collection using the Zoom application (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020; Upadhyay & Lipkovich, 2020). Some three years earlier, Lobe (2017) highlighted that data collection has evolved and expanded with technological advancements and improvements. Online focus groups have become increasingly used to support or even substitute face-to-face research interactions with technologically mediated ones.

Focus groups, which aim to get the most out of team dynamics, are predicated on getting different groups of people together to gather different perspectives on a subject matter (Gill & Baillie, 2018). As such, physical distancing poses unique challenges for this method (Archibald et al., 2019), and focus groups are likely to remain impacted for an extended period during lockdown restrictions, specifically in Singapore, where gatherings are not permitted (Singapore Statutes Online, 2020). Therefore, the notion of collecting data using online focus groups was a feasible and practical method (Archibald et al., 2019; Stancanelli, 2010; Sy, 2020). However, adjustments, such as reduced numbers, were required to facilitate effective moderation and interaction within a virtual environment (Gill & Baillie, 2018; Sobel & Reily, 2020; Taylor et al., 2017). Thus, the focus groups were capped at four participants for each session in this study. Moreover, it was actually safer and more ethical for participants to attend interviews and focus group discussions in their own homes and at their convenience during the pandemic. The virtual sessions ensured their wellbeing and safety were not compromised. Figure 4.4 details the ethical considerations for the study based on the two stages of data collection and describes how ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the data collection process.

Figure 4.4: Summary of ethical protocols for data collection



4.5.2. Participant recruitment and sampling

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 individuals, all of whom are conversant in English, including 30 older Singaporean workers aged 50 years and above from six different industries in Singapore; representatives of national industry bodies, policy advisers, representatives from training providers, workplace supervisors, human resource professionals and adult educators in Singapore. Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were used to recruit the research participants. The three ways of conducting purposive sampling are referrals, network contacts and snowballing (Jones & Masika, 2020; Naderifar et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2020). The current study used all three methods to increase the chances of identifying suitable research participants. The primary recruitment method was through personal networks and official channels of communication to potential participants over emails. Care was taken to ensure the participants recruited were representative of the four main ethnic groups in Singapore (i.e., Malay, Chinese, Indian and Others). After initial contact was established with some participants, a snowball sampling method was applied. This sequence of methods has been applied in several studies using the appreciative inquiry methodology (Frerich & Murphy-Nugen, 2018; Gallagher et al., 2019; Jones & Masika, 2020; Lawless & Chen, 2019; Naidoo et al., 2018).

A pre-interview phone call or email was conducted to ensure each research participant reflected the inclusion criteria (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Before the interview, the consent form was sent to the participants via email together with the project information and ethics approval (see Appendix D). The project details were described again before commencing the narrative interview, and the consent form was reviewed. These interviews were followed up with a focus group discussion. The setting for each of the narrative interviews was decided by the individual research participant with a strict consideration for maintaining their privacy and confidentiality. During the recruitment process, homogeneity was never the sole intention for

generalisability but the deep exploration of shared experiences (Sim et al., 2018). The following criteria were used in an effort to achieve homogeneity (as far as possible):

- 1) older workers who are in active employment either full-time, on contractual terms, freelancing, or business owners
- 2) older workers who fulfil the first criteria and are 50 years of age and above
- 3) adult educators who are involved in training older workers for at least 10 years
- 4) human resource practitioners who have been in the human resource industry and continuing adult education sector in Singapore for at least 10 years
- 5) industry experts who have been involved in the employment sector for more than 10 years
- 6) career counsellors who have been involved in the retraining and re-employment of older workers for more than 10 years.

Due care was taken to ensure the participants were clear on the purposes and benefits of the research project and that their participation was voluntary. They were also informed that they were free to exercise their right to remove themselves from the project anytime. Further, they were free to express and raise their concerns at any point within the period of participation or withdraw from the study without consequence. For this study, with the strict application of the ethics protocol, there were no occurrences of adverse events or incidents of participant dissatisfaction and withdrawal.

4.6 Data Collection

The methods selected for this research were those most suited to answer the research questions (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Narrative face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (Bolkan et al., 2020) were conducted with older workers from various industries performing different job roles in Singapore's workforce.

First, the interview questions sought to consider and appreciate the current circumstances of workers aged over 50 in Singapore through accounts of their employment experiences and the underlying factors behind the sustenance of their employability. The design of the interview questions was led by a pilot interview conducted with two test

participants. These pilot interviews aimed to improve the appreciative interview questions and the interview structure. Second, it identified perspectives and understandings that can inform policies and practices to improve recruitment policies and workplace practices and, most importantly, create awareness of ageist attitudes. Further, it sought to establish a coherent connection between older workers, their workplaces, policymakers, training institutions and the government. For these reasons, data was gathered in the first phase through interviews and then, in the second phase, through the provision of focus groups involving stakeholders in Singapore's workforce, including adult educators and industry experts, to triangulate the data to include a wider cohort of stakeholders. This naturally assessed and validated approaches to improve personal practices and opportunities for promoting older workers' employability and quality of life. Lastly, through the focus group discussions involving all relevant stakeholders, an integrated vision of what would be ideal for the older workers was shaped through the development of progressive government policies in the near future.

Data collection from multiple sources in this study served to increase the validity of the data collected (Holmbeck et al., 2002; Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). Besides increasing the validity construct of the study (Gundry & Deterding, 2018), it increased the likelihood of reaching data saturation (Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). In this study, the three sources of data collected were the narrative interviews, focus group discussions and the opportunity maps developed by the participants. The credibility of information shared in this research was enhanced by evidence collected from multiple sources and the various stakeholders involved. The following section provides a more exhaustive insight into the data collection methods for this study, including the pilot interviews conducted before the main data collection process took place.

4.6.1 Pilot interviews

Narrative interviews offer an opportunity to gain rich details and perspectives from the experiences of a selected group of people (Taeger & Yanchar, 2019). However, an interview

for the discovery phase of the appreciative inquiry methodology might be challenging to conduct the first time (Ismail et al., 2017; Williams-McBean, 2019). Piloting for the actual narrative interview is an integral and valuable aspect of the process of conducting qualitative research, as it facilitates the improvisation of the narrative interview protocol (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The pilot interview was conducted with two older workers in Singapore's workforce: one worked in the aviation industry and the other in the social work industry. Some advantages of conducting these pilot interviews included 1) reviewing the criteria for selecting potential participants, and 2) improving the interview protocol (see Appendix E), specifically the appreciative interview questions to make them more coherent and relevant to the research study's objectives (Majid et al., 2017; Malmqvist et al., 2019).

4.6.2 Narrative interviews

The narrative interview is a flexible method that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time (Taeye & Yanchar, 2019) and considers the relationship between individual experiences and cultural contexts (Mueller, 2019). Narratives are practical means for someone to construct a coherent plot about their life, providing a rigorous means of integrating past experiences into meaningful learning to foreshadow the future (Petty et al., 2018). Narratives incorporate experiences, social contexts, complications and evaluations about these experiences (Bresler, 2020), which threads together to form a coherent story with the narrator in the driving seat as an active agent (Marriot et al., 2019; Mueller, 2019; Shotton, 2019).

In this study, as part of the appreciative inquiry process, narratives provided a window into developing and constructing participants' identities (Mildorf, 2019). Through the provision and unfolding of narratives, individuals form and re-form who they have been, are presently and hope to become, thus affording them long-term reference points to replicate, live up to or evolve into (Bresler, 2020; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004). These narratives can influence how the narrator considers their life and incites decisions that transform possibilities

into realities (Ebert et al., 2020). The questions asked during the narrative interviews were shaped to evoke reflections of personal experiences of participants' peak experiences and journeys of strengths to initiate dialogues about future possibilities and ideals during the dream phase (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Cooperrider (2017) describes appreciative questions as dialogues creating new worlds—an apt description of the hopes encapsulated in this study for the older workers in Singapore.

The process of collecting data was fully dependent on meticulous time management, discipline, resoluteness and problem-solving skills. Despite careful and painstaking steps taken to prepare for adverse situations and unexpected events, the catastrophic outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was one incident the researcher could not have conceived or prepared contingency measures to mitigate its effects. The face-to-face interviews for this study commenced in January 2020, upon receiving ethics approval. There were no restrictions on meeting anyone in public areas or academic institutions in Singapore at this time. There were also no border restrictions or lockdown restrictions enforced (Gov.sg, 2020). However, this complexion changed drastically as the COVID-19 pandemic extended its deadly reach around the world. The Singapore government imposed strict lockdown measures (Gov.sg, 2020) in April 2020, and social gatherings and face-to-face discussions or meetings were not allowed, even in training and research institutions. Therefore, about 10 of the face-to-face interviews were conducted via Zoom. As these restrictions continued into the year, the focus group discussions for the second part of data collection were also organised online.

4.6.3 Focus group discussions

Focus groups offer insights into the sentiments and underlying motivations for different groups of people (Nyumba et al., 2018; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). This can be particularly valuable when determining the needs and hopes of a particular group of people or attempting to determine how a transformation for this group may occur (Carter & Wheeler, 2019), such as the process in the appreciative inquiry methodology. Duerlund et al. (2019)

and Nyumba et al. (2018) define focus groups as a qualitative approach seeking to learn population subgroups with respect to conscious, semiconscious and unconscious psychological and sociocultural characteristics and processes. This definition is particularly relevant to the current study. During the Dream phase, participants were afforded the opportunity to work closely together in different focus groups and identify common aspirations and related shared positive experiences and reflections. Watkins et al. (2011) assert that it is not an exaggeration to observe that collaborative, innovative and strengths-based processes readily emerge when people immerse themselves in appreciative dialogue. Through this platform of understanding, participants share and highlight how their lives and futures could ideally be shaped together. For example, an appreciative inquiry approach to co-develop knowledge and practice in a medical unit of a large hospital in Canada used 36 focus groups to bring participants together to co-vision and co-develop person-centred care (Hung et al., 2018). Further, Moore et al. (2017) highlight how focus groups were effective in eliciting families' strengths and positive experiences to engage them in the design of a weight management intervention for adolescents.

In the current study, participants were assigned to a group for the focus group sessions. Care was taken to ensure that each group consisted of participants performing different job roles (i.e., older workers, policymakers, adult educators, human resource practitioners) in different industries. Next, the groups were presented with the main findings of the individual narrative interviews. Using these findings, each group held a discussion led by a moderator. Upon completing this discussion, each group presented their thoughts and ideas based on the main findings of the thematic analysis presented to them earlier. Next, opportunity maps were developed via MindMup, a password-protected online mind-map application with real-time feedback. The findings presented here indicate the completion of the Dream phase. Table 4.4 summarises the data collection methods, the relationships between the data, and the research objectives and appreciative inquiry phase.

Table 4.4: Summary of the first two phases in appreciative inquiry

Research Objectives	Appreciative Inquiry Phase	Research Question Part 1	Research Question Part 2	Data Collection Method	Data Collected
To evaluate the appreciative factors of older workers	Discovery Phase	What are the appreciative factors of older workers in Singapore that influence positive changes in stakeholders' attitudes?	How do these factors inform the development of future training initiatives and policy formulation for older workers in Singapore?	Appreciative Interviews	Interview Transcripts
To analyse the perspectives of stakeholders in Singapore's workforce					
To synthesise the appreciative dialogues of stakeholders	Dream Phase	Not applicable	How do these factors inform the development of future training initiatives and policy formulation for older workers in Singapore?	Focus Group Discussions	Focus Group Discussion Transcripts
To critique government's employment and training policies	Dream Phase	Not applicable	How do these factors inform the development of future training initiatives and policy formulation for older workers in Singapore?	Focus Group Discussions	Training and employment policies in Singapore
To develop initiatives and policies informed by the appreciative factors of older workers			How do these factors inform the development of future training initiatives and policy formulation for older workers in Singapore?	Opportunity Maps	Opportunity Maps

4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was separated into two parts: 1) a thematic analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2006) of the narrative interviews, and 2) an analysis of the focus group discussions and opportunity maps developed after the discussions. All the data collected except for the opportunity maps were analysed using NVivo 12 (Bazeley, 2013; Park, 2021).

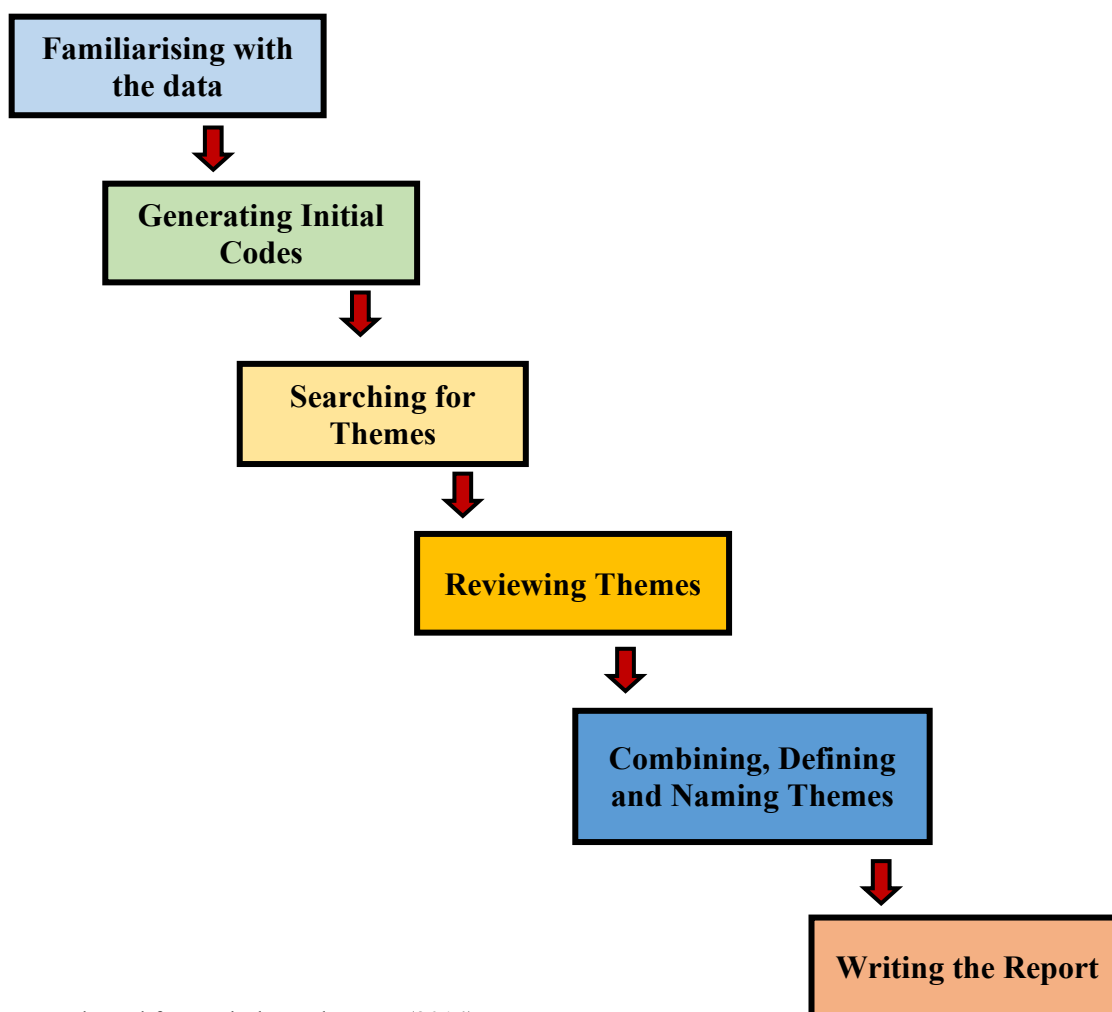
The data from these narrative interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed (Kubátová, 2018) through the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Further, thematic analysis recognises patterns within datasets and allows flexibility of analysis without being constrained by theories, the availability of multiple sources of information, or perspectives (; Braun & Clarke, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017). It caters for patterns in the data to be described in rich detail and interpretation of different facets of data and provides rigour in producing an insightful analysis to answer explicit research questions in a specific context (Braun et al., 2019; Hoon, 2013). This data-driven approach, based on analysing and coding inductively, ensures the data collected is consistent with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2014). This methodology was most appropriate for the objectives and purposes of the current study, given its flexibility and ability to provide rich descriptions in relation to the research question. Two reflective qualitative studies successfully applied thematic analysis to outline the necessary processes aimed at restoring staff confidence and improving care levels in hospitals in the UK in appreciative inquiry studies (Jefford et al., 2021; McSherry et al., 2018).

The data from the narrative interviews during the Discovery phase were analysed using broad themes (Lochmiller, 2021) developed from the social gerontology theoretical framework. Thematic analysis recognises patterns within datasets (Clarke et al., 2017). It caters for patterns in the data to be described in rich detail and interprets different facets of data to produce an insightful analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). This data-

driven approach based on analysing and coding inductively ensured the data collected in the current study was consistent with the research question (Lochmiller, 2021).

Next, the main findings from this analysis formed the ‘positive core’ for the Dream phase (Cooperrider et al., 2013). This positive core of strengths, experiences and career highlights were used during the Dream phase to facilitate the focus group sessions (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Using transcriptions from the audio recordings, the focus group discussions were analysed via the NVivo 12 software (Bazeley, 2013). The opportunity maps were analysed, and themes extracted from these maps were integrated with the themes from the focus group discussions. Government policies involving the employment and training of older workers were also critiqued as part of the data analysis, as illustrated in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Summary of the thematic analysis process



Note. Adapted from Clarke and Braun (2014).

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has described this study's research approach and methodology and explained the significance of using appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2008) underpinned by a qualitative approach. This was followed by a description of the research design, sampling strategies and ethical procedures during participant recruitment, data collection, analysis and management of the data. The chapter also described the considerations made due to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. An appreciative study allows for the internalisation of positive aspects of a situation and shapes it for the desired future (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Sekerka et al., 2006). One key consideration in this study was that the older workers, policymakers, employers, adult educators and other stakeholders were part of the shared process and co-constructed experiences in appreciative dialogues in the focus group discussions (Gallagher et al., 2019). These dialogues will potentially create foundations to develop an environment for older workers to continue being engaged in sustained employment, each in their own unique way, while enjoying a reasonable quality of life in their golden years. To conclude, it is expected that the processes and findings of this project—particularly the choice of the appreciative inquiry methodology (Cooperrider et al., 2008)—may be generalised to other industries and fields of research in Singapore in the near future. The next chapter presents the results from the data collected during the first two phases of appreciative inquiry.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed how the first two phases of the appreciative inquiry methodology were carried out. The data presented in this chapter were collected from face-to-face appreciative interviews and focus group sessions and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2016) six steps of thematic analysis. The data analysis process is explained in Section 5.3 and the themes that emerged from the analysis are presented in Section 5.4. In this chapter, the data collected covers broad examples of the different professions and industries in Singapore. The results indicated how older workers in Singapore suffered from the impacts of systemic inequities, such as difficulty getting employment and Singapore's aged labour force. The results also explained how the dynamic mindset observed in all the older workers in this study is a significant factor that mitigated these challenges within Singapore's workforce and made them flourish at work. This chapter begins with the participants' demographics.

5.2 Participant Demographics

There were three main groups of participants in this study:

- **Group One: Older Workers.** The criteria for selection were: 1) the worker must be Singaporean and 50 years and above, and 2) the worker must be employed in an organisation in Singapore for a minimum of 12 months (see Table 5.1).
- **Group Two: Adult Educators.** These educators and facilitators have been involved in training older workers in Singapore, particularly through the Work Skills Qualifications (WSQ) Skillsfuture training framework. The selection criteria were: 1) the adult educator must be a Singaporean and have conducted training involving older workers for at least 10 years, and the adult educator must also be gainfully employed in an organisation for at least a year (see Table 5.2).
- **Group Three: Industry Experts.** This group includes industry experts who have been involved in the management, employment and career progression of older workers in the different industries in Singapore. The selection criteria for suitable participants were: 1) industry experts who have been involved in Singapore's employment sector for more than 10 years, and 2) employers who are actively involved in the recruitment and re-employment of older workers (see Table 5.3)

The breakdown of the older workers, adult educators and industry experts according to age, gender, ethnicity, qualifications and their respective industries are presented in Tables 5.1–5.3.

Table 5.1: Demographics of the older workers

Age Group	Gender	Ethnicity	Qualifications	Industries
50–59	Female (4)	Chinese (2)	O-Levels* (3)	Aviation and Maritime (3)
	Male (3)	Malay (2)	A- Levels** (1)	Training and Higher Education (1)
		Indians (3)	Diploma*** (1)	Public Education and Conservation (1)
			Degree and Above (2)	Security (2)
60–69	Female (4)	Chinese (6)	O-Levels (2)	Tourism (3)
	Male (7)	Malay (3)	A- Levels (0)	Social Work and Counselling (3)
		Indians (1)	Diploma (1)	Training and Higher Education (2)
		Others (1)	Degree and Above (8)	Food and Beverage and Retail (3)
				Public Education and Conservation (2)
Above 70	Female (1)	Chinese (1)	O-Levels (0)	Public Education and Conservation (2)
	Male (1)	Malay (0)	A- Levels (1)	
		Indians (0)	Diploma (0)	
		Others (1)	Degree and Above (1)	
Total (20)	Female (9)	Chinese (9)	O-Levels (5)	Aviation and Maritime (3)
	Male (11)	Malay (5)	A- Levels (2)	Training and Higher Education (3)
		Indians (3)	Diploma (2)	Social Work and Counselling (3)
		Others (2)	Degree and Above (11)	Public Education and Conservation (3)
				Food and Beverage and Retail (3)
				Tourism (3)
				Security (2)

* The Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O-Level) examination is an annual national examination taken by school and private candidates to facilitate entry for tertiary studies.

** The Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A-Level) examination is an annual national examination taken by school and private candidates to facilitate entry into the university.

*** The diploma in Singapore refers to three-year specialised courses that offer certification in areas such as maritime, optometry, business studies and engineering.

Table 5.2: Demographics of the adult educators

Age Group	Gender	Ethnicity	Qualifications	Training Domain
Below 50	Female (1)	Chinese (1)	Degree and Above (1)	Employability Skills and Digital Literacy (1)
50–59	Female (2)	Chinese (4)	Diploma (1)	Employability Skills and Digital Literacy (4)
	Male (5)	Malay (2) Indians (1)	Degree and Above (6)	Psychology and Emotional Intelligence (1) Work Safety and Health (1) Adult Education (1)
Above 60	Male (2)	Indians (2)	Diploma (1) Degree and Above (1)	Financial Literacy (1) Security (1)
Total (10)	Female (3)	Chinese (5)	Diploma (2)	
	Male (7)	Malay (2) Indians (3)	Degree and Above (8)	

Table 5.3: Demographics of the industry experts and employers

Age Group	Gender	Ethnicity	Role	Industry Domain
Below 50	Male (5)	Chinese (2)	Employer (2)	F&B and Retail Employer
	Female (1)	Malay (2)	Industry Expert (3)	Cleaning and Facilities Management Employer
		Indian (1)		Health and Aging Thought Leader CEO (both an industry expert and an employer) Social Worker for Family Service Centre Instructional Designer for E-Learning Solutions Organisation and Management Change Consultant
50 - 59	Female (1)	Chinese (1)	Employer (1)	Business Consultancy and Coaching
	Male (2)	Malay (1) Indian (1)	Industry Expert (2)	Member of Parliament and Director for Low Wage Workers Union Social Psychologist/Counsellor for Older Workers
Above 60	Male (1)	Chinese (1)	Industry Expert (1)	Employability and Career Coach and Consultant (1)
Total:10	Female – 2 Male - 7	Chinese – 5 Malay – 2 Indians – 3	Industry Experts :7 Employers:3	

5.3 Coding Process

Three methods used to collect data in this study were face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and opportunity mind maps from the focus group sessions. Forty face-to-face interviews and 10 focus group interviews with the participants were conducted. The interviews took place at the Institute of Adult Learning Singapore before the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in April 2020 (Ministry of Health Singapore, 2020); the remainder of the interviews and the focus groups were conducted via Zoom. The entire data collection process took place over a period of nine months, from January 2020 to September 2020.

Data saturation was achieved at participant 35, as the data became repetitive according to the thematic analysis method (Clarke & Braun, 2014). However, five more interviews were conducted as a precaution to ensure the perspectives of varied industry experts were fully captured. Each interview transcript was read carefully for familiarity; a second reading was done to create broad codes. After familiarisation with the data and creating broad codes, the coding and thematising process was carried out as illustrated in Table 5.4, which shows the steps taken to derive the broad codes from the data and reduce these codes into specific themes. These themes were then abstracted to form the main findings for this study (see Table 5.5), where sub-themes were grouped together to form the main themes of the data analysis. Table 5.6 illustrates the abstraction process of the data collected and analysed during the focus group interviews during the study's Dream phase (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Table 5.4: The coding and thematising process

Codes	Frequencies	Sub-Themes
Ageism	31	Ageist Attitudes in Different Contexts
Factors for Ageist Attitudes	17	Contextual Barriers
Implications for Ageist Attitudes in Society and Employment Market	24	
Contextual Support and Barriers	37	
Differences between the Older and Younger Generation	25	
Resilience	83	Huppert and So's (2011) Factors of Human Flourishing
Meaning	70	
Engagement	49	
Competence	104	
Positive Relationships	42	
Grit	42	Grit and other Supporting Factors (Determinants) for the Flourishing of Older Workers
Commitment	8	
Discipline	7	
Vision	7	
Passion	10	
Perseverance	12	
Emotional Intelligence	17	Emotional Intelligence and Problem-Solving
Problem-Solving	27	
Contextual Barriers	63	Work Culture and Supportive Management
Promotive Work Contexts	69	

Table 5.5: The abstraction process

Sub-themes	Main Themes
Ageist Attitudes in Different Contexts	Systemic Inequities
Barriers in a Workplace Context	
Huppert and So's Factors (2011) of Flourishing	Five Factors of Flourishing in Older Workers Grit (Five Components) Other Determinants
Grit	
Emotional Intelligence	
Problem - Solving	
Promotive Work Contexts	Work Culture and Supportive Management

Table 5.6: The abstraction process—Dream phase

Sub-themes	Frequencies	Main Themes
Consultancy Roles / Mentoring	15	Work Roles
Multigenerational Teams	12	
Buddy systems for Older Workers.	18	Wellbeing Strategies
Wellbeing Initiatives	24	
Flexible Hours	11	Benefits and Compensation
Fair Compensation	10	
Work from Home	8	

5.4 Main Themes

This section presents the results from the thematic analysis conducted on the data collected from the first two phases of the appreciative inquiry methodology through narrative interviews and focus group discussions. The first part of this section argues that the systemic inequities experienced by older workers hamper their flourishing in Singapore's workforce. The second part explains the factors that enable and facilitate the flourishing of older workers in Singapore, and the last part describes the organisational factors that would support the flourishing of the older workers in their professions.

5.4.1 Systemic inequities

The data analysis revealed that the older workers in Singapore faced systemic challenges and encountered ageism in different forms and contexts. One of the first themes developed from the data analysis was ageist attitudes experienced by older workers in different contexts. These have been organised into four categories: human resource policies, work contexts, government policies, and contextual barriers.

5.4.1.1 Ageism in human resource policies

Ten of the older workers experienced challenges at the workplace due to ageist attitudes. Older Worker 8 explained the challenge *'is not really about Covid-19. If they are not in a job already, it is very difficult for them to get a job'*. Older Worker 20 similarly shared her challenging experience of applying for work and attributed this challenge to ageist assumptions: *'applied for service ambassador position, three times. I like the job because I enjoy meeting people but I did not get it. Maybe because of my age'*.

A common aspect of ageist attitudes in human resource policies and the recruitment process was misleading assumptions about older workers. When asked about the ageism in the workforce, Older Worker 19 reflected and responded *'because they think that- because of my age and my experience in a particular area for 42 years, I will never be able to change my style of thinking; that's number one'*. Older Worker 17 lamented that *'they [organisation] don't see it that way. When it's time for re-employment, they do not extend the contract'*. This was confirmed by Older Worker 11 when she explained that *'especially in middle management, they do have this thing about older people. Like, even the older person who really works well. And it's very hard for me to get over this barrier'*.

In Focus Group Session 8, Older Worker 14 highlighted a core aspect about the workforce that has to be changed and the problems associated with older workers not having employment:

If these older workers are not employable, it means someone else has to support them. We end up having a deficit in the workforce. A deficit means they need to get foreign professionals. And that also creates some kind of discomfort. We need to change the employers' mindset.

Five of the adult educators interviewed reflected and shared that older workers faced many challenges seeking work and getting promoted even if they are in employment. Adult Educator 1, who has worked in human resources, explained:

Being in HR [human resources] for a while, we tend to be a bit ageist. We are looking at people who are so much younger. And young people [in HR] have this certain misperception that the older workers are slow and stubborn.

Adult Educator 2 added that this could be attributed to unfounded assumptions:

Young friends in HR actually told me when they review resumes of people who are above 40, they put it to the side. At 40, normally they earn more, and are looking for higher salary, and are sometimes stubborn. I say, that's not true.

However, Adult Educator 4 highlighted the plight of older workers in Singapore and argued:

In many areas we have contributed. So why are we being, sidelined.? Why do we doubt the old people that we cannot perform, although the fact that we've been performing for the past few years?

Further, Adult Educator 8 sought to explain the reasons why ageist attitude persists in recruitment, and suggested it is about the return on investments (ROI) and perceiving workers only as a commodity:

A normal company would look at ROI. Now if I were to invest in this person, and in a few years' time he isn't in the company anymore, how much would I get from this person?

She reasoned that the ageist attitudes in organisations to human resource policies were based on economic practicality prioritising ROI:

Today HR is not about personnel development but about strategically moving with the company. But many companies want quick returns—it's very difficult as they [older workers] need some sort of time for them to build up their resilience in the new environment. (Adult Educator 8).

Adult Educator 1 attributed the ageist attitudes to biased hiring cultures in Singapore when asked about human resource policies. She admitted that ageist attitudes are prevalent in human resource policies in Singapore: *'HR tend to be a bit ageist. We are looking at HR who*

are so much younger and young people have this certain perception saying that older workers are slow and stubborn difficult to teach' (Adult Educator 1). Adult Educator 7 explained the changes in human resource policies that have exacerbated ageism in recruitment:

But the things have shifted already, but then in the old days, you want to hire someone younger versus someone older, because you think that the person can contribute longer period, you can develop the person for a longer period. But now our context has changed with all this disruption, HR no longer look at loyalty as an asset anymore. Loyalty is actually now a liability.

Employer 3 revealed an observation about why ageist recruitment policies persist in many organisations in Singapore:

The HR people now are very young people. So you can imagine, the perception of the older people are that they are slower, they are not willing to learn, they have a very fixed mindset and they are not equipped with the current trend then there is this barrier for them to even consider the older workers.

Employer 2 confirmed this experience:

One of the main concerns is always, their age. It is not so much of the experience. Mostly say that, when they apply for jobs, they have to fill up application forms, they go for interviews, their vibe is that they [the organisations] do not want older workers. And when I ask them why because they always feel, the minute they mention their age, somehow, they do not get any positive response. But when they do not mention it, they can be shortlisted.

Conversely, Adult Educator 10 suggested that one factor in recruiters' reluctance to employ older workers could be the high salaries of older workers:

They started off with a much lower salary, worked up the ladder, getting a much better pay, but, when they go to another company, they are competing with the younger ones and even other matured workers. The company might not want to offer them the salary that they have currently.

Older Worker 7 reflected on this challenge faced by older workers, organisations and a country with a rapidly growing aging population and explained:

I think, to be fair to the organisation, it is about the bottom line, ROI. They need to raise their own funds. Because Singapore, aging population is growing at a very fast, rapid pace, you know? Very difficult!

However, Industry Expert 4 argued:

I think at the end of the day, a lot of companies, look at their bottom line, if they can get a younger person to actually do the job of what a higher paid older worker is doing, then they might prefer to have younger. And what we do to

mitigate this is to incentivise to make it more competitive and attractive for the company to continue hiring these older workers.

This section has shown how ageism in recruitment policies and misleading assumptions hamper older workers' employment opportunities and provides suggestions to address this deficit in Singapore's workforce. The next section discusses how ageism exists in workplaces in Singapore and restricts older workers from flourishing.

5.4.1.2 Ageism in work contexts

In relation to work contexts, six older workers shared how they experienced ageism in different workplace contexts:

That's how they look at us, older folks. It's the decisions they make. They think that you—when you grow older—they're not going to retain you. They can employ the younger ones. (Older Worker 17)

The organisation itself where the worker is may give you some form of excuse you know to get you out of that job and replace with a younger one. So, if the government can think of certain safeguard, although they set the policy but the organisation can find a loophole to kick them out [the older workers]. (Older Worker 5)

Older Worker 11 added that most human resource departments would claim that *'for older workers there's nothing to safeguard them you know because they are very vulnerable. The common excuse, "This person cannot perform to the nature of the job", which he believes is merely an excuse to get rid of the older worker.*

During Focus Group Session 1, Adult Educator 1 observed that the *'elderly may encounter problems using technology to communicate and complete their work'*. However, to her surprise, the older workers were *'able to figure their way out due to their excellent communication skills'*. Industry Expert 5 agreed with this observation:

Because they are elderly, in workplaces but there's always the challenge of under- you know, knowing how to use technology in order to communicate. But surprisingly, I find that many of the participants in the senior category had no issues. Because they have good communication skills already.

Adult Educator 10 confirmed the observation that older workers might struggle with digital technology, but if taught in the right way, they would be able to use such technology in workplaces:

The things that I see at the workplace is that young people are fast. They are good with IT. They said they “[older workers] are so slow. I teach them today, tomorrow they forgot.” The older workers are frustrated because they are not taught properly.

Older Worker 6 complained that the younger workers ‘are arrogant and are used to being spoon fed’. He claimed that this attitude has led to conflict at the workplace. However, ‘older workers had to work their way up and get very upset when their experience is disrespected’ (Older Worker 6). Yet, Adult Educator 5 argued:

I think it’s not treating older workers fairly, because they have a wealth of experience. But let’s say the company still recognise uh... the number of years they have put in and the experience that they have and not cutting the pay is pleasurable for them. They would want to be part of that team and contribute as much as possible, because now the company still recognise my effort over the years.

Due to misleading assumptions, ageism in workplaces can hamper employment opportunities for older workers and diminish their chances to flourish. The next section discusses how ageism in Singapore’s government policies can weaken older workers flourishing.

5.4.1.3 Ageism in government policies

During the first focus group session, when asked about the primary challenge plaguing older workers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, Older Worker 9 highlighted:

That’s the main question. Because the fear is I’ve been applying but you know, it’s all negative. Even after I went through interviews, I can’t get any job because of my age. I can take up so many courses but if there’s no job, I still have to pay my bills.

In the same session, Older Worker 3 foregrounded the added complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic for older workers to get gainful employment:

The pandemic has complicated matters for older workers. Before COVID-19, they faced difficulty in getting work and some of them were encouraged to make way

for younger workers. With the pandemic, businesses suffered and many organisations have retrenched their workers while several went out of business. Older workers are the first to be asked to leave during retrenchment.

However, Industry Expert 2 rationalised that to manage this challenge at a national level is very complicated:

We look at how we can optimise older people's functioning in healthcare because a lot of the complaints from employer are based on health challenges. But it does not make sense after you cross 60 years old, all of a sudden, your productivity drops. I think the age marker does not make sense. However, there are definitely declines from a human physiological perspective. The question is how do we manage that properly.

Similarly, Adult Educator 3 shared his concerns about older workers being forced into jobs they are ill-prepared for simply to gain some form of employment:

That it is very important to be able to identify things that the older folk like. Now the government, say that, all older workers have to go and learn about IT skills, the coding, the analytics, these are the in-thing now, the sunrise jobs. They are forcing these older workers to go into these types of jobs now, is it fair?

When asked about ageism inherent in policies, Adult Educator 8 responded:

I would say it's unfortunate that HR people are generally very young and they do not see that value [in older workers]. They want instant value or profit to generate so it's not straightforward.

Conversely, Adult Educator 4 claimed the government might not fully comprehend the challenges and complexities on the ground regarding older workers, rendering the policies ineffective:

They are looking at numbers, plugging in numbers. Are they on the ground? Because if they are, I don't think they are really coordinated. So those of us who have actually been through all this hardship right as much as we love the country, there's this very uneasy feeling that the government don't know what is going on really on the ground.

Industry Expert 4 suggested that a combination of policies would be necessary to mitigate the challenges of ageism:

I think mindset change is the hardest and the slowest. We cannot rely simply on mindset change to get companies to offer employment opportunity to older workers. It has to be a combination of policies.

There also appeared to be confusion and inherent ageism within the government's policy on retirement. Older Worker 16 noted the ageism that exists in the application of this policy:

It's different from what the policy says. Cause the government say as long as you're healthy, we offer you a job. But later, they give excuses that there's no more posts for you. They cover it up by offering to give you courses, you go networking, you can go find other jobs. But this is not same as what the policy is about.

He further explained that the confusion was due to misapplication and interpretation of government policies and suggested a solution for this problem: *'If they stick to the policy and don't give excuses. Follow through, use clear guidelines, then they won't have all these lapses. Everyone will have a job.'* (Older Worker 16). Older Worker 16 went on to describe the consequences of ageism in this policy implementation:

The government policy may say one thing, they may enforce something to follow, but what the employer do is totally different. They don't give you opportunity to work until 62 years old, but the actual fact is that when you nearly reach the retirement age, they don't really encourage you to go ahead. The older workers have all these experience and connection, the younger ones don't have it. The older worker will say since I'm going to retire and they don't treasure me, it's not worth it to share my experience with the younger ones.

Adult Educator 1 shared ageist mindsets she observed in younger workers:

Young people have no patience, to teach. So likewise at the workplace, if you have a co-worker who is young, they may not tolerate the older workers. Because it's all mindset! Because a lot of older workers, they don't have a degree. They rise through the rank. Unfair for older workers. Their experience is not respected.

Adult Educator 7 commented on the incoherence between government policies in skills upgrading for older workers and employment opportunities:

There is a part about the older workers themselves, you know, which I believe is not a skills gap ah. Although, the government is doing a lot, there is a skills mismatch. I have known people who come for programs and they show me all the WSQ certificates from different subject areas, they just do nothing but collect all these certifications, hoping they will find a job.

Older Worker 17 felt it was better and safer for older workers to be around to ensure that work processes are done correctly while the younger workers take over the helm:

Mistakes will occur with the younger worker when they take over. When the young staff takes over, there will be a lot of problems faced. If the older worker were to remain, it limits all these problems.

Besides the ageism within work contexts and government policies, other forms of ageism act as barriers, reducing opportunities for older workers and hampering their chances of flourishing in their lives and at work. These are presented in the next section.

5.4.1.4 Ageism and contextual barriers

Eight of the adult educators and industry experts and three older workers mentioned having experienced challenges because of ageist attitudes related to factors outside the workplace. These include the unique work culture in Singapore and factors outside the workforce, such as familial support and a communication gap between older and younger generations.

When asked about older workers having support from their family members, Adult Educator 6, who conducts financial literacy training, shared his observations about the lack of support from older workers' family members due to ageist assumptions:

They want to submit the resume online and I suggested that get your children to teach you. They replied that the children mentioned that 'I am slow, don't want to teach me!' Even children have less patience with them.

Adult Educator 8 suggested reasons why older workers are reluctant to ask their family members for help: *'They don't ask the children at home or the younger people to teach them. because don't want to get a scolding for not knowing or for picking things up slowly.'* Adult Educator 6 attributed this to the younger generation not being good at sharing new ideas and working in a team. He explained: *'In terms of working style, the older generation they always tell me that the millennials are vocal and have good ideas, but sometime not so willing share'* (Adult Educator 6).

Echoing this concern, Adult Educator 2 attributed the conflict to miscommunication, and the younger generation's misguided perceptions of older workers:

I have asked some of the younger people who came to the class. They said that the older people are being stubborn, not that they themselves are impatient. One

party feels that you should be more patient with me and then the other feel that actually it's the older workers who are stubborn.

Adult Educator 5 clarified that although the younger generation may be digital natives, they might not be able to translate their digital savviness into effective workplace processes:

The younger generation can be misleading because they are savvy as they are digital natives but in terms of the workplace, whether they know how to use this to enhance their work maybe, may not is not there. They may not know how to use some functions to help them with their work.

Industry Expert 1 raised the challenges inherent within Singapore's workforce system and traditional work hours, which may work against older workers:

That means you have a job which now can be done by two people including older workers. If you do job sharing, for the perspective of the human resource department, they're going to deal with more people. When you look at productivity models, humans are only productive about six hours of the day which would be practical for older workers.

In Focus Group Session 2, Older Worker 13 shared the challenges older workers faced regarding the stigma associated with menial jobs and how these jobs are often taken up by foreign workers for very low wages:

People are respected for their profession [in Australia]. And you see, they have no age discrimination. You have older workers working in Australia in all these jobs, technicians, plumbers and what. We have passed on these jobs [in Singapore]. Our shipyards used to have welders; various technicians were all apprenticeships. They were all trained from young and were very well paid. Now those jobs have all gone. I think Participant 3 brought up a good point, if you compare salaries, if you pay \$900 to a Singaporean to work in a shipyard, he can't feed his family.

Industry Expert 3 explained the work culture in many organisations in Singapore:

From my industrial organisation experience, normally companies who are doing very badly, younger workers and older workers have stayed for a long time. Their turnover rate is not too high or too low. This cultural change of older workers as being poor workers is false because everyone starts of young and then they become old. It cannot be everyone turns bad right? It is about the work culture and renewal.

Adult Educator 4 elaborated on the work culture in Singapore:

The work culture is always pushing, I will use the local term that is 'kiasi' [local vernacular meaning afraid to die]. We scared to die, so we push ourselves very hard, we started to build stuff and all that. We are always constantly reminded

that if we don't work hard, we're going to die or we fail. This has become a stigma inside our heads.

He explained the reasons for the rather unique 'afraid to lose' work culture in Singapore, which he felt was very detrimental to workers:

The 'kiasu' attitude [not wanting to lose out] is in our culture, so we keep on pushing and to make matters worse, our generations have already been conditioned right, we also use this conditioning to impose it on our children, and then the government, keeps reminding of this threat. Because of that we have this mentality that we must push like hell and work until the day we die. It's very negative. (Adult Educator 4)

Industry Expert 4 described what he felt was needed in Singapore's workforce:

I think mindset change is the hardest and the slowest. We cannot rely simply on mindset change to get companies to offer employment opportunity to older workers. It has to be a combination of policies. We have tightened our foreign manpower policy and increase the number of locals that you need to hire before you can hire foreigners.

Older Worker 18 observed that training opportunities are merely allocated for the human resource department to meet their targets rather than a staff improvement initiative, and commented on this culture being detrimental to the organisation:

If the training involves my work, I would be keen, things like that. But basically, the courses that I attend, honestly, it's not really that I go back to work and I use it to my work. This course will be sent by HR to make sure people go for courses, for clocking the hours.

She explained that she felt unsupported at work, and this affected her wellbeing:

During the lockdown period, it's tough for me, because even the weekend I have to work and then at the same time, during this time two of my colleagues are actually on long medical leaves. I have to cover my work and two other persons work, so it's like a three-person work. No support at all so a lot of my times are taken, so sometimes I work very late. (Older Worker 18)

The data presented in this section highlighted that ageism is inherent across various aspects of the workforce, such as within the recruitment policies in organisations and the application of government policies. It also showed that older workers experienced ageism within constrained work cultures and external factors such as a lack of family support. Expectedly, these factors have negatively impacted older workers, affecting their employment opportunities and hampering their opportunities to flourish at the workplace.

5.4.2 Older workers and wellbeing

An adult educator highlighted the lack of attention given to the appreciative factors of older workers. Adult Educator 1 described some of these factors she has observed in older workers:

Our strengths, we look at our attitude that is unseen. Our perseverance, our resilience which is a strength. We can say, strengths, can be your education, can be your skills, but what about innate, something that you can't see? Like resilience.

The findings indicate that older workers have strengths that form the dynamic-grit mindset. The dynamic-grit mindset accounts for the flourishing of older workers in this study and is indicative of their wellbeing. Adopting this mindset has enabled them to thrive in their professions in a workforce plagued by systemic inequities, imbalances and inadequacies in work culture and management. However, this is a strength that has gone unnoticed.

The dynamic-grit mindset comprises grit and five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing. Two other determinants—problem-solving and emotional intelligence—were also found to encourage the flourishing of older workers. The findings also indicated that management's support and positive work culture were crucial in enabling the dynamic-grit mindset of older workers. This section begins by presenting the five components that make up the concept of grit in this study: discipline, commitment, perseverance, passion and vision.

5.4.2.1 Grit in the dynamic-grit mindset

Data presented in this study extend Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing through the dynamic-grit mindset. The dynamic-grit mindset is indicative of the flourishing of older workers in this study. Grit is a key concept in the dynamic-grit mindset, consisting of five components: discipline, commitment, perseverance, passion and vision. Table 5.7 presents a selection of quotes to demonstrate the factors underlying the concept of grit observed in older workers in this study.

Table 5.7: Components of the concept of grit

Components	Selected Quotes
1 Discipline (n = 7)	<i>I have the discipline to go through all the challenges.</i>
2 Commitment (n = 8)	<i>I must do the job with wholeheartedness and commitment.</i>
3 Perseverance (n = 12)	<i>Their determination to succeed despite the challenges is evident.</i>
4 Passion (n = 10)	<i>I got this desire, passion and strong interest to do well in my job.</i>
5 Vision (n = 7)	<i>I think the seniors (older workers)—they are visionary and able to see ahead.</i>

The following three quotes summarise the factors presented in Table 5.7 and represent the grit observed in older workers:

I was on a course last year. I found the interest, the commitment, the passion of the older participants compared to the younger ones that were on the course also, were a lot more. The older ones are disciplined and are forward-looking, they take notes diligently and are always punctual. Their determination to succeed is evident. (Older Worker 17)

I think they slog for many years, are very disciplined and consistent. I think that is one of the good strengths for the older ones. Besides, they can handle tough situations and demanding work. Not so much of younger people but the older folks. The grit in them makes them see things differently. (Adult Educator 5)

The older workers, they know they came through life the hard way. They value every job and they stay committed in the job. They are passionate about their job and compassionate with their colleagues. They are very determined to complete their work although some can be slow but they have grit and are willing to handle tough work without complaint. (Employer 2)

The quotes summarise the components of the concept of grit observed in the older workers in this study. Grit is a significant part of the dynamic-grit mindset in older workers. During the second focus group session, Older Worker 3 and Industry Expert 5 agreed that grit was a quality clearly observed in older workers. Adult Educator 5 shared that she also noticed this valuable trait: ‘*There’s a lot of grit in them, especially their attitudes when I see them during training in the digital literacy class and towards work*’. Data analysis indicated that grit in older workers consisted of a combination of five different components—discipline, commitment, perseverance, passion and vision—occurring in the older workers’ different contexts.

Discipline

Discipline was observed in older workers and demonstrated their grit. Discipline is a prescribed pattern of behaviour, which refers to working in a controlled manner by complying with specific expectations and standards (Hagger et al., 2021). Older Worker 20 displayed her grit mindset through her passion and discipline when she shared that *‘having a job is not all about money. I like the job because for me, to know a job is my passion. I do it well and have the discipline to go through all the challenges’*. Employer 2 described the positive attitude of the older workers in his team: *‘the older people here, the plus point this is one thing, their work attitudes, means their punctuality, discipline and timing’*. Adult Educator 10 also described older workers as lifelong learners who show passion for what they do and discipline when pursuing their dreams:

Older workers are more disciplined. As compared to their younger counterparts. The younger ones may be fast, may be IT-savvy, but in terms of discipline and commitment I am not too sure. Older participants are very determined and have a clear purpose of what they want.

Older Worker 6 observed the discipline of older workers where she worked in the retail industry in Singapore:

I think strength they have, because they’ve been many years on the job. They would have seen the company through bad and good times and have helped build the foundation of many of the services we enjoy now. Now most of the younger people would not want to work in the retail as they feel that it’s a very tough job, with long hours. They don’t have the discipline and tenacity of older people. The older workers have grit and can grind out the hours.

Older Worker 17 considered the core strengths of older workers in the healthcare industry from her experiences mentoring them:

In healthcare, people or patients can be very demanding, and beside taking care of patients, healthcare professionals have to address the concerns of the family members. To do this on a daily basis while remaining professional require discipline and commitment. It requires a certain grit to survive in healthcare particularly now in the pandemic.

Industry Expert 2 described older workers as lifelong learners with a passion for what they do and very disciplined when pursuing their dreams:

Older workers are more disciplined. I know of an older worker who has never been late for work and her discipline is exemplary. Older participants are very determined and have a clear purpose of what they want. They have the discipline to keep going until they achieve what they set out to do.

When asked if he regretted his decision to complete the required hours to become a counsellor without pay, Older Worker 13 highlighted how his discipline helped him achieve his ambitions:

No. I enjoyed thoroughly every moment of it. I'm somebody who is disciplined and cannot leave things. I don't want it to be halfway. I like my work to be done correctly and make sure I meet that deadline. They trust me so I have to perform and produce good work.

This section demonstrated the grit in older workers and how it enabled them to flourish when they showed discipline in their work and pursued their ambitions despite facing difficulties.

Commitment

Commitment to work was described as another constituent of the concept of grit in older workers. Commitment refers to an agreement and dedication to a purpose or long-term goal (Damon & Malin, 2020). Older Worker 19, a maritime auditor and captain of a cargo vessel, exhibited the dynamic-grit mindset through his mantra while at sea:

Fulfilling. Sacrifice. That's always been my attitude, whatever you set out to sea, you must do it with wholeheartedness, with commitment. It's the sacrifice, it's the grit. The only way to survive and succeed in our profession. We carry this commitment with us throughout our lives.

Older Worker 10 reflected on his days as a military officer and explained that his commitment to serving the nation:

In the military, I like to believe that I have to spend a lot of time with my soldiers especially since these are the NS men [national servicemen serving the country]. Even after office hours I have to be around with them. That's always been my attitude, whatever you do, you must do with wholeheartedness. It's the sacrifice being away from family and friends. Our commitment to the nation.

Adult Educator 6 observed that older workers are diligent and very committed to their organisations:

One thing I admire about these older workers, they are very hard working, and most of them are very loyal to their company. They work for the same

organisation for many years and in fact, 90% of them worked for only one organisation their whole lives. I see them as determined and gritty despite challenges with recessions and pandemics.

Adult Educator 3 saw commitment as a core strength he observed in older workers:

I think matured workers are very hardworking, especially the much older one, I think they are the one who are the stepping stone for Singapore, and I think one of the strengths would be loyalty to their organisation and profession.

Adult Educator 10 compared the attitude of the older workers to that of young millennials:

I think they look at job security and they are loyal because they have a supportive management. The older workers are very committed when the management value them and trust them. They would not quit but for the younger millennials now, I don't think they are concerned by commitment and hard work. The next person gives me a better opportunity or salary, I will just jump. It is about me first not the organisation.

Employer 3 highlighted older workers' persistence and commitment to their organisations:

Because he feels he is accountable for the company as he is part of it. He regards the people in the company like his family. They would not leave their family just like that. Their values are aligned with that of the company and they are committed to seeing the company through ups and downs with the same people.

Industry Expert 2, who has recruited and worked with older workers, revealed his observation of them:

Why are they loyal to the company? Because they feel accountable for the company, over the 40 years, they experience the organisation growing and evolving. The older workers treat the company like their life. Their commitment to the success of the organisation is invaluable.

Employer 2 similarly described the discipline and grit she saw in older workers:

They came from the hard way; they will value of every job and they stay in the job. They work well together because they have these kinds of synergies between their team members. The other beauty is that the sincerity towards their punctuality, their commitment. They are you know kind of steely, determined to work and can overcome challenges.

This section demonstrated older workers' commitment and how it enabled them to thrive in their work due to dedication to their jobs and organisations.

Perseverance

Perseverance is another core strength identified in the older workers in this study and one of the key components of the dynamic-grit mindset. Adult Educator 7 shared that older workers are optimistic and demonstrate perseverance: *‘Older workers have a sense of belief that they can persevere and pull through no matter how tough the situation is. They tend to be more positive about turning things around’*. Employer 3 found older workers to be *‘people who are really self-driven. Their perseverance brought them far in life because they have this attitude of just not giving up. This is their mindset and makes them valuable to the workforce’*. Adult Educator 2 added that older workers *‘can take hard work, particularly in the retail and cleaning industry. Most of them are above the age of 50. Singapore depends on them to contribute as the younger people won’t want to do such work’*.

Employer 1 revealed his preferences during the recruitment process for his food and beverage operations:

For an example, ah, got one young person or young guy, and one elderly. I will prefer to take the elderly. In long term-, it will benefit for the company. So- elderly people will not be changing job so easily. Young people, they tend to change after two or three years. Older workers are very disciplined, and are able to take on challenges without giving up.

Industry Expert 2 observed the commitment of the older workers to their organisations from his years of recruitment and working with them:

Older workers have self-motivation because they take a long journey to attend the training centres. Some are even cancer patients. They told me that that does not stop them. They are resilient and show tremendous perseverance. They show that life is really not over until it is over.

Industry Expert 4 described his observations of older workers and their strengths:

It’s sheer determination. Most of them they share the same thing, they have the same traits. They have gone through a lot of hard knocks so this is just another challenge for them. It’s the determination to survive being the breadwinner and the thought that—if I don’t improve my skills or if I don’t get a better paying job—my family will suffer. They keep going forward no matter the odds.

Having a sense of belief was one of the underlying factors to explain perseverance observed in older workers. For example, Older Worker 13 explained that he did not give up

and persevered to achieve his ambition of becoming a certified counsellor and addiction therapist:

I didn't give up and kept believing in the dream! I told myself—I'm going to invest in myself. I did one year of volunteering without any pay, just going and doing counselling to clock the hours. I remembered even when I went to do volunteering, nobody would let me counsel anybody. They would ask me to move the tables, clean the chairs, do all kinds of manual work That is not easy being a sixty-year-old former bank director. But I had no problem! I persevered and knew that by volunteering I would get the number of hours I needed.

Another older worker recalled his challenging experience of training to become a pilot and described the obstacles he had to overcome before his flying licence expired:

I was unable to get a flying job for about four years, until one company in the UK started to set up an operation in Singapore that is an air ambulance company and they found me suitable. However, not many people knew about air ambulance operations, so the aircraft was on the ground most of the time and once in a while they called me just to do the hand flying on the aircraft and clean the aeroplane and complete some operation work at Seletar airport. However, I persevered and kept going and knew I would become a full-fledged pilot one day. (Older Worker 12).

Industry Expert 5 echoed the perseverance he observed in older workers:

But if I look at the older workers, they are a bit different, if you treat them well, offer them job stability, they will be committed to you. The reality is that many of these workers who are above 50, it is not easy for them to go into another profession or another industry. One of my key reasons I have employed older workers, is because they do not job hop and will be very determined to succeed and do well for the organisation. I admire their perseverance.

Industry Expert 7 explained the crucial role of older workers during uncertain times and how they give stability to organisations they work for:

The older folks in the organisation are most clear about the purpose as they ones who have been there the longest of time. They have persevered with the organisation through tough times and provide that sense of stability and grounding every organisation needs to sustain itself in uncertain times.

Finally, Adult Educator 1 stated that she had noticed the determination in older workers who attend training: *'The seniors who attend training have this determination in their eyes. Although they find some of the training challenging, they always persevere and work together to overcome these challenges'*. This section discussed the perseverance in older workers and demonstrated how it forms part of grit in this study.

Passion

The next component of the concept of grit is passion. Passion in this study refers to a line of work that one feels motivated to engage in and derives positive effect from doing (Chen et al., 2020). Passion was observed in Older Worker 13's journey to becoming a professional counsellor and addiction therapist, despite facing many challenges:

The main concern was 'nobody would give you that chance' because I was 59 years old then. Everywhere that I went to knock on the door and say 'I want to be a counsellor, I've got a post graduate in counselling'. I got turned away. My passion kept me going, no turning back.

He was passionate about helping people suffering from substance addiction and dreamed of supporting their recovery from addiction once he gained certification as an addiction therapist:

My new role as a therapist gave me a new perspective of things. Although I got a lot of media publicity about my book on addiction my aim is not so much about focus on myself, but to focus on the problem that society is facing with alcohol, with drugs, and the book is simply to propel knowledge about that problem and how people can solve it. The aim was not to get self-publicity. I am passionate about helping people, not getting publicity. (Older Worker 13)

When asked about the enabling factors of his successful career in the maritime industry, Older Worker 19 answered:

I love the sea since young. Because it is my passion, being out at sea. Everybody had a success story; passion to me is important for success. I use this passion I have to keep on going towards my dream and was successful to be able to captain a large vessel.

Adult Educator 7 revealed his observation about the effectiveness of older workers:

The older workers I realised have high levels of personal effectiveness and passion. They put 110% into the job and do a fantastic job. When you do a fantastic job, people will be fighting to get you. It's no longer about your age already. Organisations they want you because of your reputation, because you're good and how you are passionate about the job.

Employer 2 suggested reasons for the passion he observed in older workers:

They know they came from very tough times in the past. They will value of every job and they stay in the job despite the challenges. They are passionate about their job and to them, good work done is reward itself. You can't get such people now; they are one of a kind. They are passionate because they know the value of good work. This is the beauty of these older people.

Older Worker 14 explained how his passion for squash facilitated his journey to becoming an umpire and eventually led to his role as an employment mediator for the Singapore MOM:

Squash has been my passion and my love from the mid-70s and I got involved in squash in Singapore initially and I rose from an ordinary committee member of the Singapore Squash Rackets Association to become the Director of Referees for the whole of Asia under the umbrella of the Asian Squash Federation. This passion brought me even further beyond Asia to the world when I became a World International Referee and led me to my current portfolio as an employment mediator due to my experience as an international referee and mediator.

Older Worker 4 prepared contingency plans involving the work he is most passionate about:

In the event of a recession, what saved me was actually another passion. I like to meet and talk to people. I thought maybe when I retire, I can actually go into tourism become a tour guide. I took the licence and I love the job as it is my passion even when I do it part-time.

When asked about her progress in a male-dominated security and enforcement industry, Older Worker 20 replied:

I did really well in the security industry. Although most officers are male, I work hard with passion and love for the uniform. I was handpicked to be a supervisor. The reason mentioned was I am passionate and dedicated. I love to engage and meet people. That is why I stayed with PSA port services police force and SATS airport security for a long time dealing with port workers and passengers. The passion I have for the job keeps me going and makes me want to do well.

Adult Educator 3 had a passion for work that created value for the older worker. He argued that when older workers enjoy their work, they would flourish and perform well and subsequently create value in themselves:

As an older worker, when you enjoy what you're doing, you don't see time! You'll give more than what you're required to do. Because you love your job! When you love your job, you are working not because of the money only, you working because it gives you personal satisfaction. And when you are performing uh, you don't need to worry about looking for jobs anymore, jobs will be hunting you down instead. When you do a fantastic job, people will be fighting to get you. It's no longer your age already. (Adult Educator 3)

This section described the passion in older workers and demonstrated how it forms part of the concept of grit in this study.

Vision

Vision is an important quality that demonstrates grit in older workers. Vision refers to having a purpose (Damon & Malin, 2020) and the ability to think about and plan for the future (Pyle et al., 2020) to fulfil an ultimate purpose (Johnson & Suskewicz, 2020; Hamdan et al., 2020). Older Worker 4 demonstrated his vision in his preparation for the future as he shared his contingency plans in the event of an economic recession by reflecting on his passions and preparing for retirement by getting a taxi licence:

Just in case, I actually got my taxi license about 18 years ago. Actually, I wanted this to be for my retirement or prepare for an economic downturn. Having this is a useful skill and I love meeting people anyway. Now, as you see, we suffer from the COVID-19 pandemic, I hope my licence will come in useful.

Adult Educator 10 describes older workers as lifelong learners with passion, discipline and vision:

I have participants who just come here just because they are motivated by certain rewards but I have people who does not come for the rewards, solely because they just want to have some self-actualisation that needs to be met. They have a clear purpose and vision of what they want.

Adult Educator 3 highlighted the grit she observes in older workers when they go for workplace training.

They never adopt the mentality that because they are old, they should stop learning. I think they see life in a very different perspective. They have vision despite their advanced ages and are very optimistic that there is always something there out there to aim for.

Further, she referred to the core strengths of older workers:

I think the word vision and grit comes to mind. The older ones are roles models for the younger ones. They can be examples on how younger workers should view work for example and life. The older workers have a vision of what they want the direction that the organisation should head towards. They have to tenacity to achieve the vision. (Employer 3)

Employer 2 had employed older workers for several decades in his facilities management and cleaning organisation and described them as people with grit and vision:

Their upbringing and the challenges of post-independence days made them develop the vision of what they wanted for Singapore. Failure was not an option

for them. They persisted despite the challenges to achieve the vision they had for Singapore ... Singapore is now a first-world nation.

Industry Expert 3 shared his perspectives on recruiting and managing older workers in his role as the chief executive officer (CEO) of an e-solution organisation:

Older workers who worked here, we realised have a lot of foresight and insights, which is helpful for the team. And even though they have been in the industry for many years, they have the vision to know where they want to end up before retiring. Sometimes, we recruit them because of the vision they have and we know they will work hard to achieve this vision. This is something our organisation needs. The vision they have, drives the team forward despite the challenges we face in a competitive business world.

Older Worker 16 had vision and hope for older workers in Singapore and considered them assets to the workforce, a group to forge Singapore's economy in turbulent times:

I would like to see older workers actively engaged and contributing in areas they are competent in for Singapore's workforce. Older workers are in the last- last leg of their lives and should be doing work that they enjoy doing. They should be doing things that give them a sense of meaning and purpose in life. My vision is that the society ought to give older folks a chance to do things that those people aspire to do but never had an opportunity to do so when they were much younger., If we let older workers realise their vision, I believe Singapore will benefit from the valuable wisdom and experiences of these older workers without needing much foreign expertise and change the negative perceptions of society towards them.

Meanwhile, Industry Expert 7 observed the following mindset and strengths of older workers in organisations she had worked for:

From their wealth of experience, the way that they infer, the way that they interpret the situation today, their wisdom and insights. They have this perspective and this history that they carry with them that shapes their values. And inter-related point, I suppose the grit to stay in the profession and support their families. I think seniors are also very visionary which comes with the grit. They are more forward-looking than the young. They have the vision and a sense of centredness which they are traversing, bridging the chasm between the past and the future to achieve this vision.

This section presented data for all the components encompassing the concept of grit in this study. The next section details the five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing that recorded the highest coding frequencies, which are resilience, competence, meaning, engagement and positive relationships.

5.4.2.2 Five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing

The five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing that recorded the highest coding frequencies are resilience, competence, meaning, engagement and positive relationships.

Resilience

Resilience is a key factor in Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing that was observed in all the 20 older workers in this study. Here, resilience refers to 'the ability to recover or overcome some form of adversity and as such, experience positive outcomes despite an undesirable incident or challenging circumstance' (Vella & Pai, 2019, p. 233). To highlight the importance of resilience in the working lives of older workers, Adult Educator 4 shared that *'it's a mindset thing. You must also have this resilient part and optimism, and this is something that you and I cannot solve.'* Almost all the older workers displayed this characteristic despite not using the word 'resilience' explicitly. However, 12 adult educators and employers interviewed explicitly described the older workers as resilient. This data was further organised into the following categories: resilience due to work experiences, resilience due to life challenges, resilience due to economic recession, and resilience due to career progression.

Resilience due to work experiences

One way the older workers in this study developed resilience was through their work experiences. Employer 3 described one outstanding strength she observed in older workers:

I think willingness to learn and change. I think they are very resilient. I mean they have applied for jobs; they were not successful but they never gave up. Always able to overcome challenges.

Adult Educator 10 described the resilience he observed in older workers in more detail:

One is their resilience, as a worker. I find that they are disciplined, resilient and don't give up easily. They have this thing in their head, 'I must try, I must do it, if not I'll be left behind. If I want to stay employable, I need to do this'.

Another older worker demonstrated self-awareness and resilience to deal with challenges faced in the workplace:

Ups and downs actually it is all in you. Normally I listen to music or (spiritual prayers). I bring back myself. You yourself are the challenge if you do not know the job but if you know the job, I do not see any challenge really. (Older Worker 20).

Older Worker (#17) shared the importance of having resilience in the healthcare industry:

I persevere and I always want to do the best and I don't give up easily. There are many challenges in healthcare and. I may not always do it correctly the first time but I am the kind of person that I really don't give up. In a healthcare environment, this is crucial to be able to continue working.

Meanwhile, Older Worker 8 expressed her challenges as a tour guide in Singapore after retiring as a lawyer. She explained that to carry out the job well is *'firstly to have tolerance. I mean, tolerance and secondly, resilience are always crucial when you deal with demanding tourist groups. It's absolute hell and a test of character* (Older Worker 8). Older

Worker 18 explained how she manages challenges in her role as a supervisor:

As a supervisor, I have the mentality that I need to know more about my staff and my work. I always have to be better and handle challenges. Being resilient is important for our health.

Older Worker 20 showed resilience when faced with challenges at work as a security officer. She recollected her thoughts out loud and explained:

Actually, my duty is to help everybody, not just security. Sometimes, I can feel irritated and tired because people ask many questions. I have to manage this challenge and keep on doing my job well even if it is tough. It helps our mental health. (Older Worker 20)

Older Worker 10 demonstrated resilience in his new role as a facilitator and explained how he managed challenges with his team:

Of course, we will face 1 or 2 ill-disciplined people but to me this is life. We must manage it well. In the army it's not a problem. We just keep going. A resilience mindset is key in the military.

During Focus Group Session 4, two participants agreed that resilience is core to the flourishing of older workers at work:

We [older workers] kind of have gathered certain experience and adopt a certain resilient mindset. I think, as an older worker we have seen things happen and we are no longer that surprised and know what to and how to react. We have resilience to handle all these challenges over time. (Adult Educator 5)

The older workers because they've gone through disappointments, they've gone through tough challenges at work and the fact that they survive those setbacks, it gives them the strength, the resilience to say- we can handle this, solve, redo and rebuild. (Older Worker 5)

This section has demonstrated how the resilience of older workers facilitated their ability to perform well, overcome systemic challenges and thrive at work.

Resilience due economic crises

Besides developing resilience from work and life experiences, older workers also demonstrated resilience when faced with unexpected challenges, such as economic crises, recessions and even the COVID-19 pandemic. Older Worker 5 shared his recollection of retrenchments in various industries due to economic recessions before he became a social worker:

After being in an industry in logistics for 5 years, I was retrenched twice and as a man, it wasn't easy. I even worked as a cleaner., It was very bad. I think, there's not one thing alone helped me. Many things such as wife, religion and spirituality. I think because of my fighting spirit, I want to get out get out of poverty, the vicious cycle of being jobless, and my ego, everything out. I want to move from all that.

After being jobless for some time, Older Worker 5 accepted a position as a healthcare assistant in a nursing home, and this experience taught him resilience:

In the process working in the nursing home, it helps me to see the benefit of helping people. It developed an interest of helping others. This pushes me on. I realised helping people, it's a therapy. It helps me become resilient. No Singaporean usually wants to work in a nursing home and take care of these people, clean them and change their diapers.

When asked about an outstanding strength of an older worker, and how they have navigated the tumultuous challenges over the last several decades, Industry Expert 4 answered:

Their resiliency, because most of them have gone through economic recessions and suffered from pay cuts, so this is another big challenge which they have to survive economically. The crisis acts like a trigger for their resilience to kick in.

During Focus Group Session 5, Older Worker 4 also shared that older workers appeared unfazed during economic crises: *‘During crises, older workers appear unfazed and in fact, their survival instincts and resilience become very obvious as they seek opportunities to ride through the crises’*. Industry Expert 4 added that *‘the older workers appear to thrive during economic recessions as they are resilient and know how to survive and use their network to get back into the workforce during challenging times’*. Industry Expert 5 also observed how the resilience of older workers becomes evident during challenging periods:

Their resiliency, because most of them have gone through economic recessions and suffered from pay cuts, so this is another big challenge which they have to survive economically. The crisis acts like a trigger for their resilience to kick in.

This section described how older workers embodied resilience during financial crises and explained how their resilience helped them flourish in their jobs.

Resilience due to career progression

Older workers have developed resilience in the pursuit of their career progression. Older Worker 7 explained how resilience can help you achieve your ambitions: *‘I mean, to me, it is about having a goal and being resilient. It’s how you build resilience and keep going until you achieve your ambition’*. Adult Educator 5 commented on the resilient attitudes of older workers when attending training:

They are resilient, they are determined get things done, but when it comes to technological era, this may probably be a new field altogether, so they really need to embrace this digital technology by utilising on their strength. They never give up, always wanting to learn and keep on progressing. I truly believe that older workers will be able to thrive in this digital era.

Adult Educator 2 also observed their resilience to complete their digital literacy training:

They are resilient, to complete their training well. get things done. They willingly embrace digital technology by utilising on their strength. They never give up, and with their resilience, older workers will do very well in this digital era.

Older Worker 2 shared her experiences as a contract staff member early in her career. During this challenging period, she demonstrated resilience and explained how she was entrusted with some major responsibilities:

They could see me managing quite a number of incidents when I was there. My training manager somehow has to leave the company, and the training department made me handle everything although I was just a temporary staff. Because of my performance and resilience, they gave me a permanent position.

Older Worker 14 showed resilience to get used to the changing demands of his new job role despite having to learn basic administrative tasks. He explained how he adapted and acquired basic administrative skills in his new job:

In the past, I had people doing administrative work for me. But now, I need to do my own scanning, copying and printing because there is no assistant that I have below me. I must have resilience to pick up these skills and succeed in my new role. (Older Worker 14)

Older Worker 19 described the importance of being resilient to do well in the maritime industry:

Resilience is important in maritime. If you aim to be a chief officer, you need to go out to sea for at least 12 months. Just think positively and be resilient, clock your sea time and then you come back, you go for your further studies and gain the promotion. If you notice, all our old captains are very resilient. That is the key to success.

Finally, Older Worker 13 described his arduous journey of achieving his ambition in becoming an addiction therapist:

Because to be a counsellor, you had to have about 800 hours of practical experience and that would bring me to the subject of “nobody would give you that chance. Because I was 59 years old [chuckle], everywhere that I went to knock on the door and say “I want to be a counsellor, I got a post graduate in counselling, could I get a chance to get a job as a counsellor? But nobody would give me that. Because they would say you’re overqualified. You’re overqualified, because you come from the business world, you have held these kinds of positions, you will never be able to do this job. I got turned around, turned off by so many people, who would not give me a chance to practise. But I was resilient, and kept going till eventually I became a certified counsellor.

The data presented in this section demonstrated that resilience is a core strength older workers have when their careers were observed. This section has presented the resilience of older workers at work, during economic crises and in their career progressions. The findings demonstrated how various forms of resilience in older workers act as a key contributor to their flourishing.

Competence

Competence was observed in all 20 older workers. Competency refers to the technical knowledge, abilities, skills and underlying attributes required of a worker to perform effectively in a specific work context and has been used to describe both individual and organisational competencies (Salman et al., 2020). Expectedly, given their vast experience, older workers have accumulated various competencies and have in-depth organisational and industrial knowledge. The competencies of the older workers have been organised into four categories: technical competencies, organisational competencies, industrial competencies, and wisdom and mentoring.

Technical competencies

To illustrate the importance of having technical competencies, Older Worker 15 explained the importance of having the right technical competencies in his role as a mediator:

As a mediator, you cannot lose your head you know, I have to be on top of the situation, know what you are saying. A mediator trusted by the commissioner by the Minister of Labour to give you the power mediate independently without the minister being present, so you jolly well carry out this duty diligently.

In Focus Group Session 7, both Industry Expert 6 and Adult Educator 9 agreed that older workers are subject matter experts, given their wealth of experience. Industry Expert 6 detailed the strengths he observes in the older workers he employs in his organisation:

In terms of the strength, it is really their experience in the narrative and in the curriculum. That's something that you know older workers have at the back of their heads or at their fingertips whenever you need content.

Adult Educator 9 agreed with this observation and added: *'They are truly subject matter experts in their areas ... they have in-depth knowledge of their industry'*.

Older Worker 14 described older workers' wisdom:

Mediation is not an exact science but you need the technical knowledge to carry out the role. Our success rate is so high, that we settle the case and not do not bring anyone to court whereas the younger mediators will find that many cases go to court. There is no right or wrong, it is that you fail to pick up a number of issues an experienced mediator, given his knowledge would have done, and therefore prevented a lot of wastage of time of the country's resources.

Older Worker 3 added that her competencies and experience enhanced her reputation, and many organisations consider her very reliable and competent:

They don't use me unnecessarily but only when there's a VIP group minister in town because of my experience. It is not possible to get a two-year-old guide to tell these people all about Singapore. The need for an experienced guide is important. If they were to look between an old guide and young guide, the older one is safer.

Industry Expert 4 shared the benefits of having older workers working together with their younger counterparts:

The experience in which we have acquired over the years during the job that you are doing. Quite a lot of experience, abundance of wealth of experience to share to the younger ones and they are very positive in terms of you know even when faced with challenges and problems. With their worth of experience um and the skills that they learn hands-on, I mean you can't just take this from the textbook or the internet.

Older Worker 13 explained that his experience enabled him to develop a useful skill, which is to adopt a strengths-based approach to help people:

I had realised that I had another skill that I had not tapped on. I could actually motivate, encourage people; get them to see a different point of view and get them to see a lot of strengths in themselves. In counselling, you work I try to get them to see the kind of strengths they have, and solve little problems in their life. Just making small little incremental changes in people, enough for them to see. The whole purpose of counselling is to get people to see a resolution to their own problems.

This section has presented the technical competencies observed in older workers that make them effective and competent in their respective jobs.

Organisational competencies

Besides having technical competencies, Employer 1 described the reason he prefers recruiting older workers:

The older workers can take tough work because they're experienced. They are also more patient than the younger people at work and are familiar with the requirements set by the organisation.

Older Worker 3 explained how she developed competency through understanding the challenges associated with her job as a tourist guide on cruise ships and her drive to keep doing better each time:

I am very good at time management. I must know if time is running out, and all the requirements of the cruise presentation. I will rehearse every slide each time to keep up with the expectations of the organisation.

Older Worker 15 shared his thoughts about the vision and experience of older workers:

I think experience ah and their presence ah. To guide the organisation through the uncertain years. To show them the way of how to do the work. The path, that is very important, they learn, so they can impart to the new one, younger people. They will have to respect what we tell them because why we have been through.

Older Worker 16 highlighted the crucial role of older workers in terms of the knowledge they have of the organisation and the industry:

Certain officers, they will have a lot of ah- networking connections. If you lose them, the young ones will have to start afresh. the relationship with other agencies. It creates difficulties in the certain transactions, problems, in- in their daily work. Some of them will share the knowledge, the process, the procedure, everything. All at the fingertip. They don't need to go through documents, they can just let you know, oh- what should be done, what should be done, but there are some- there are some not willing to share because they know are going off. They are not being taken care of, they know they're going to retire, so they don't share. We will lose all the knowledge and networks.

This section described older workers' organisational competencies due to their years of experience and how these competencies facilitated their flourishing.

Industrial competencies

Older workers possess another vital set of competencies: industrial competencies, which refers to skillsets they have developed over the years working in a particular industry. During Focus Group Session 7, Older Worker 10 and Industry Expert 6 shared the industrial competencies of older workers. Industry Expert 6 shared his observations of the strengths of older workers he worked with:

The older workers I have worked with, I realised they have an in-depth knowledge of the industry and they know the ebb and flow of how the industry will move in that sense. It is like a form of clairvoyance to be able to predict trends within their industries. The connections and implicit knowledge older workers have will disappear with them when they leave the workforce. This is detrimental and a great loss to the industry.

Older Worker 10 agreed, adding: *'It is not only their skills but also they know the industry they work in well, the trends, the movements and the direction'*. Older Worker 7 explained how he improvised tours using the different competencies he had to make them interesting:

I like to meet people and to make friends and share. I use anecdotes and personal stories to describe the historical buildings. On a walking tour in Chinatown, we saw a lot of opera houses. I brought them to a small gallery of opera exhibits. I sang to them (Chinese Opera) to demonstrate. No one in the industry does this. They(tourists) were so captivated.

Adult Educator 5 revealed his perspective on measuring and quantifying the experience of older workers as something tangible and relevant to organisations and the national workforce:

Because of the experience that they have, their operational knowledge is there. It's just a matter of how do you quantify and qualify this as a criteria. Their experience is tremendous, they also know the people in the industry and to discount all that it will be a biggest disservice to any industry and to Singapore's workforce.

Employer 2 expressed similar sentiments and explained how an organisation can benefit from older workers' organisational knowledge, even if it is from a completely different industry:

These older workers ah they come with a lot of experience, and it can differ, it can be in shipping line you know because of their retrenchment, they come into, from the, from the aerospace, they come from other industries and they will share their best practices with you to improve your organisation.

Adult Educator 8 explained that *'collaborative networks developed by older workers are important for the organisations they work for'*. In addition, Older Worker 17 highlighted that:

All these relationships, connections and networking within the industry are important. Especially in this current crisis, in healthcare you need the support of your colleagues from other hospitals. Relationships are intangible, you develop them over time.

Industry Expert 4 summarised his observations of the strengths of older workers he worked with in his role as the director of the low-wage workers union:

For the older workers working for me, I think I value their experience, and as long as the worker wants to work, we must let them work. They have intangible knowledge of the industry, of people and of life. They have the right connections and know how to get things done efficiently.

This section described the industrial competencies of older workers due to their years of experience and how these facilitated their flourishing.

Wisdom and mentoring

An outstanding trait older workers in this study have shown is their wisdom, crystallised over years of cumulative working experience. Older Worker 14 described the importance and benefit of having wisdom and knowledge of the industry in addition to technical and linguistic competencies:

Forgetting about all the vast knowledge of the industry, technical skills and the competencies that I have. I also have the ability to, the ability to foresee all possible outcomes in a situation, to see what is behind the corner. In other words, a sixth sense so that I can advise both parties accordingly. Because of this intuition, I avert a deadlock between both parties. This is a really unquantifiable quality which you cannot teach and very few people have.

Adult Educator 1 shared that besides having the competencies and industrial knowledge, older workers also mentor and coach their younger counterparts:

With the experience they have, it comes with a lot of insights, where they can actually uh, mentor the young people. You cannot buy wisdom and experience. However, the older workers can use it to mentor the younger ones.

Adult Educator 9, who trained older workers seeking certification to become security officers, noted how older workers manage challenging situations:

I think they are fair, very level-headed. They try to help and they handle situations right. They have this wealth of knowledge and experience. How to deal with people, how to manage a situation. How to de-escalate a very tense situation. They have this experience dealing with people.

Industry Expert 3 highlighted the competency that makes an older worker different is their insight and ability to manage challenges and solve problems:

One of the key elements of having older workers in my line of work as an instructional designer is more of insights. I think that is where all this implicit knowledge, it is not something you can find on textbooks or you can on um, you know, written somewhere. They are able to foresee and anticipate problems as they have so much wisdom and experience.

Industry Expert 4 commented on the importance of having older workers as mentors:

The older worker is important just as how you still need a teacher to guide you through and mentor you, so um in terms of getting someone experienced who has

industry experience to share with someone who is a fresh graduate Doing this accelerates the learning curve of the younger generation.

Years of experience have made the older workers in this study very competent workers, with a vast knowledge of the industry and in-depth understanding of organisational processes and nuances. In addition, older workers have the ability to mentor and coach their younger counterparts. This section has demonstrated how the technical, organisational and industrial competencies and wisdom have enabled the older workers to flourish and contribute to the workforce.

Meaning

Another factor from Huppert and So's theory of flourishing with a high coding frequency in the current study was 'meaning'. Here, meaning refers to finding a purpose, fulfilment and satisfaction in the work done and is related to wellbeing (Rothausen & Henderson, 2018). Older workers found their jobs meaningful and fulfilling, and with the presence of other factors, they were flourishing and doing well at work. The factors underlying meaning are organised into three categories: meaning due to career ambition, meaning in job role and responsibilities, and meaning due to alignment of values.

Meaning due to career ambition

In addition to developing resilience, another crucial role of career ambition is finding meaning in the job roles the older workers perform. Older Worker 4 explained the reasons for his success in finding meaning as a casual trainer in Singapore despite his wife's concerns:

My wife was a bit disappointed and found that as a trainer, the income is not stable. But I like the job and I told my wife to give me two years. If within two years I cannot make it, I better go back to becoming an engineer. I succeeded because I put in effort. I like the job, and I want to do it better not just for the money but I found meaning in helping people.

Older Worker 1 similarly found meaning in his role as a service crew member in a fast-food restaurant and revealed:

I feel that every time I look forward to go and work at MacDonald's. Not like the previous company where I had lot of stress. I thought of taking sick leave and it

took away my energy. But at MacDonald's, I feel very happy even when I work extra hour. I find my work has meaning.

Older Worker 9 explained her passion for the job and how she found meaning in her role as an eco-conservationist and animal trainer:

I worked as a guest relations officer handling customers doing guided tours for school groups or guest VIP. I loved it very much there and that's where I was given another opportunity to become a marine mammal and dolphin trainer. It was very meaningful for me being an animal lover.

This section demonstrated how older workers flourished when they found meaning in career paths and ambitions.

Meaning in job role and responsibilities

One factor observed in the data was that older workers were motivated when they found meaning in their respective job roles. Older Worker 20 explained that loving their job was a source of motivation, ensuring success and enjoyment of sustained employment:

To learn to love your job, do not love the money. You come here to job, you got the money and you have got to love the job and you will be successful. The money is always there but the young people now, they love the money but not the job. There is no job stability and you cannot specialise in one industry.

Older Worker 6 shared the importance of seeking meaning in work and that being happy is a lot more important than financial independence:

I think at the end you to take a step back. Whatever you achieve you need to learn how to let go because happiness isn't money alone. It is more about your mind and heart. If you aren't happy then you work or whatever you're doing won't be smooth. When I love what I'm doing I don't hop around and change unnecessarily.

Meanwhile, Older Worker 12 described the meaning she found in her role as a guide reflecting on the tragedies of World War II with students:

I have about 20 books on World War II at the moment. I think that's my speciality. I find most meaning doing the war tours for our country. Although I feel sad so many died, I think I am more comfortable and happier doing history tours.

This section has demonstrated how older workers found meaning in their job roles and responsibilities and flourished.

Meaning due to alignment of values

During Focus Group Session 4, Adult Educator 5 highlighted the dynamism of older workers and how they flourish at work when their values align with the organisation:

It is all about their proactiveness and their willing to compromise and thinking how to add value to the company which is the main thing. This will help them find meaning in their work. Older workers bring their experiences and create value.

All the participants in Focus Group Session 4 were found to agree with this point. Older Worker 20 revealed how she found meaning in her job, which is why she has done well in it:

I feel good and happy even if I do overtime. It is about me; it is about the job. When I work here, I do my best. I try to dress smart and helps others. You have to love the job because the money is always there in any other job.

Older Worker 5 described his experience of finding meaning in his job in a nursing home assisting elderly stroke patients:

Somehow, it's a blessing that my retrenchment, that directed me, towards working with people. Dealing with feelings, emotions, that's a special set of skills. It gave meaning to my work. When I help a stroke patient, it is fulfilling! I feel so happy.

Older Worker 3 expressed why she enjoyed her role as a national tour guide and how she found meaning that enabled her to flourish:

I look forward to meeting different people and preparation is key for me. I feel responsible and am very willing to learn. If you say you need assistance, I'm there and pay has never crossed my mind because to me it is an honour you know, to do such tours for Singapore.

Similarly, Older Worker 1 explained the significance of finding meaning and having a sense of purpose about his work and volunteering role in the worker's union:

I volunteer and serve the union to help unfortunate workers. The older workers realised if you are a job hopper, you cannot get the benefit but if you are satisfied with your job, you will not go for another job or company. Now, youngsters who are not happy resign and go other company and explore.

Older Worker 15 described his approach to providing the best service:

This what I want to do. We are not there to pretend to work, but to work with our hearts out. Since I join the food and beverage industry, I will go beyond my limit to see what I can do for people. It means a lot to me to help and give the best service. I look forward to doing my work well.

He further shared his perspective of finding meaning in his role as a service ambassador in a fast-food restaurant despite his meagre salary:

Not just because of the amount of money, but you know, it's the job. When you put in effort, people can see and you reap the rewards. The meaning in your life is there. You find meaning at work making people happy. (Older Worker 15)

Older Worker 13 explained how he found fulfilment and meaning in his new role as a therapist, even though he is able to retire comfortably:

There was a year of soul searching. I had made up my mind that I could contribute in some meaningful way. I came to the conclusion that the area where I could help is using the resources, I already had with me in terms of my finance and business knowledge and also people skill to counsel and motivate people out of their life problems. I found meaning in the two books I wrote about fighting alcoholism and substance addiction.

Older Worker 10 displayed his patriotic instincts when he explained how he found meaning in his role as a conservationist:

Most of us Singaporeans, we take things for granted because the government has looked after us so well. I think it's only right that we protect what we have got. Water is a very crucial item to survive and I found meaning in educating younger students about the value of water to the country. I know I can contribute. This is what motivates me in my work.

Meanwhile, Older Worker 19 shared how his past experiences shaped his perspectives when training younger cadets on the ship:

Because, I always went through the tough during my younger days, so, I want people to you know, not [clicks tongue]- to be successful in their own career and whatever endeavours that they embark on. that kind of advice is important you know, to any person. So, I would like to play the same role as that guy to give the correct advice yeah. So, that whoever, student or trainee that I come across that they seek my advice, or guidance, I will be willing to give them yeah in my job now.

This section has described how a coherent alignment between older workers' values and their organisations leads to flourishing. The data presented shows that finding meaning in their job is an intrinsic reward for older workers and a key contributor to them flourishing at work. It demonstrates how the alignment of values in older workers and their work gave them meaning in their jobs. Finding meaning in their jobs makes them dynamic and passionate members of the workforce.

Engagement

Engagement was another factor observed in all of the 20 older workers. They displayed profound interest in and passion for acquiring knowledge and developing new skills, particularly those relevant to their work. Engagement in this study refers to a deep interest and passion in acquiring knowledge and developing new skills (Ensour et al., 2020; Guillory, 2020). This dynamic approach towards remaining relevant in the workforce helped the older workers flourish in their job roles. Their forms of engagement have been organised into three categories: engagement due to job requirements, engagement due to personal growth, and engagement due to changing economic demands.

Engagement due to job requirements

Six older workers highlighted how their job requirements facilitated engagement with learning and attaining new skills. Adult Educator 2 shared her observations of the enthusiasm towards learning of older workers who attended the courses she conducts:

The older workers that I've met, are keen to learn even though their English may not be that good. One of them is a 65-year-old lady- But she is so IT savvy and has shown to me that, uh, that you do not need to be at a young age in order to be IT savvy. She learnt a lot of things on her own. Independent and passionate learner.

Older Worker 13 reflected on how he was continuously engaged in learning throughout his career and how this passion afforded him the opportunities to excel and progress in his career:

If you ask me, what is the one thing that allowed me to move from a bank clerk to become a regional director, I'd say it was non-stop, in my whole career and even up till today. I enjoy the learning process. It was a continuous growth process; growth as an individual, but also- growth in my profession due to the changing needs of the organisation.

Older worker 3 revealed her love for learning and explained how she never attaches a monetary value to her learning experiences or the courses she attends:

Every three years, we [tourist guides] must attend a 21-hour professional development course [PDC] before I can get the renewal for the licence. I am very willing to learn. If you say you need assistance, I'm there and pay has never crossed my mind because to me it is an honour you know, National Gallery. 10 months of training. We pay \$200, and the National Gallery said after the 10 months training, if you have fulfilled a certain number of hours given back, will

return you \$200 about \$100 was returned. No thank you, I am happy to learn! [laughs].

Older Worker 12 reflected on his mistakes and shared how he kept progressing by learning from his mistakes with a dynamic attitude towards self-improvement:

When I see a failure or a mistake, I tend to reflect on it and make sure I don't go back to it. In aviation, I always have to keep learning and moving forward to improve my flying.

Older Worker 18 described her passion for learning while on-the-job and how this passion allowed her to flourish at work:

I would always go to my senior colleagues and ask, about the problem and how do I solve this problem. I'd write down in my own notebook. The notes are very important as it helps me do my work better once, I know the correct thing to do.

Older Worker 6 revealed what she thought was the core strength of older workers. She explained that in addition to having experience, older workers are passionate about learning new skills and welcome opportunities to remain active in employment:

Experience. Because we are the baby boomers, when we were growing up. We never had the opportunity to learn things that were available nowadays. You know, maybe because of the lack of money, the courses are not available. Now that the opportunity is given to ask despite our age, we'll just take it. When I do sales pitching, I am very passionate and I always engage in learning new ways to do this and improve. (Older Worker 6)

This section presented the findings that highlighted the engagement of older workers with learning due to work requirements.

Engagement due to changing industry and economic demands

Older workers are also engaged when they adapt to the changing demands in their industry or economic demands. Industry Expert 7 explained how she observed that older workers are lifelong learners, able to integrate knowledge with work experience to perform better at work:

The ones that are within this context that I do admire, is also their capacity to want to learn. That lifelong learning intention and that capacity to be able to marry the both the past and anticipate the future as well. Because of this knowledge is like a bridge and older workers can traverse between what they have learnt and experience before with what they are learning currently. The older workers can as such, cope with changing demands.

Employer 3 described the steely determination and attitude of older workers towards learning:

I feel that older workers will progress in life because they have this attitude of learning. That is a mindset that I am never too old to learn. And I want to be able to be able to learn something that I may find that it may help me in my life. I learned something about getting old, that it is never too old to learn and as long as our minds are still working.

Adult Educator 4 commented that older workers are very driven when it comes to acquiring new knowledge and skills, making them very dynamic workers:

I think older workers are much more capable than that. They search for stuff and predict what are the trends in their industries. From there they start climbing and start learning and pick up skills and move along from one thing to another right. I'm always learning and that's where I am today. They are never contented with knowledge always need to keep going.

Meanwhile, Adult Educator 10 shared his observations of older workers from his years of experience as a career and employability coach:

But I think many of them are willing to learn, so you give them a chance to I think it is about opportunity or whether do the mature workers know the trends, where to find and what to learn. When they knock on the door, the employers open doors for them.

Older Worker 13 displayed his engagement with learning and research work, which helped him complete two books on substance and alcohol addiction:

Almost every knowledge that I've had probably right from the banking days to the counselling skills, all the knowledge is useful. I use this knowledge and a lot of research work to write the book on addiction. Whatever I said had to be factual because I am impacting people's lives and their futures. The most wonderful thing is I got people to share their stories in the book. Learning not only makes me alive but allows me to predict trends and the continuous engagement with knowledge helps me in my research and allows me to achieve my ambition.

Older Worker 19 commented on how learning benefited his health and his belief in learning for all workers, even junior members of his team:

I also learn the work completed by those who are reporting to me because shipping is an industry that is vast. I do not feel embarrassed to learn from even my juniors. It is impossible to know everything. If I learn something today, this knowledge that I learn today, can be useful for me one day especially these days with different trends in technology and the way people work. Engaging in learning is good for health also.

Older Worker 2 revealed her love for learning and how she tried to encourage learning among the older workers who attended her training:

As I share knowledge, I put it into practice. The more I share, the more expert I become. Whatever I share with you, you share with others, which you think they can learn. Having this mindset will help us survive in a competitive workforce.

The data presented in this section showed the dynamism of older workers and their positive engagement with acquiring new skills and knowledge. Older workers are keen learners and dynamic in their approaches and outlook to work. One significant reason older workers flourish at work is their attitude to acquiring new skills to progress in their jobs.

Engagement due to personal growth and passion

Three older workers were observed to be engaged with learning due to their love for acquiring knowledge and skills in relation to their personal growth and passion. Employer 3 described the learning attitude of older workers she observes attending workshops at her training consultancy: *'I have an 82-year-old man, a former director in a company who is retired.? These are not the type of people that come in for the money but merely the learning experience'*. Similarly, Older Worker 11 expressed her love for learning and sharing and explained how this improves her wellbeing:

For me, it's my passion to learn. And with the knowledge, I can share with others, who finds that this knowledge is useful. I always try to learn through networking, learning from people who are much better than me, and people who are willing to share with me. For me, that is knowledge. That is education. Education for most people, is getting a degree but it's more than that. It's about life, about applying it when working. Education is also how to talk to people, , how to enrich people. Learning and sharing. It gives me energy; I feel alive and well when I learn and engage with people.

Employer 3 described the learning attitude of older workers:

This old lady I know. At work, she will underline every word, and even use google translate when I speak. Even though she was not proficient in the language, she will then go back and seek the assistance of her children to help her. She takes learning out of the classroom, that really marvelled me.

Adult Educator 5 revealed the enthusiasm older workers have towards learning:

I think one of the common strengths amongst older workers is their desire to learn and they are not afraid to ask questions, even to the point that during breaks they

will come and approach you. To reinforce understanding and I will probably ask the person who asked the question during the break to share what he or she learned from that quick discussion during tea break.

Adult Educator 8 similarly shared her observations that older workers are very diligent and disciplined when learning:

One thing I notice about the older workers is they just want to absorb whatever you say and they will tend to take notes diligently and they will write down points and all that to make sure they don't forget what they learnt. Which, to me, is very good, because they are very positive and taking ownership of their own learning. Their approach towards learning is a reflection of their wellbeing.

Both Older Worker 2 and Older Worker 9 demonstrated their engagement and passion for learning when asked about training opportunities:

I'm a willing learner. I never give chance, when learning is concerned, I go all out! And 'It's my passion. I love learning about new culture or pick up new skills. (Older Worker 2).

I did exactly what he [the mentor] did. Each time when I am not working, I will be in the forest just taking photographs and then go back to do identification. I record sounds, locations so the next time I come across it, I will be able to identify confidently all the plants, birds and animals. This keeps me engaged, this form of outdoor learning. (Older Worker 9)

This section has demonstrated the engagement of older workers with learning. Their engagement with learning has helped them flourish in their work, adapt to the changing economic demands and encourage their personal growth. The next section highlights how positive relationships have helped older workers flourish in their professions.

Positive relationships

The final factor from Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing observed in the data with a high coding frequency was positive relationships. Eleven of the older workers and four adult educators expressed that developing and maintaining positive relationships significantly influence their work. Positive relationships in this study refer to the good relations and connections people develop with others around them. Some signs of having developed a positive relationship include respect and trust (Albers & Salomons, 2021). The older workers' dynamic approach towards work remained relevant in developing positive

relationships with colleagues and peers in the workforce, helping them flourish in their professions. Two forms of positive relationships were observed in the older workers in this study: positive relationships for workplace needs, and positive relationships for organisational and professional learning.

Positive relationships in the workplace

Older workers have established positive working relationships that help them fulfil their job responsibilities well, allowing them to flourish. Adult Educator 9 explained why developing positive relationships is crucial in the security industry:

When it comes to conversation at work and, it is actually the most important thing in the security industry. You have to interact and manage people, develop a relationship. Positive relationships make it easy for security officers.

Older Worker 20 explained how she handles challenges at her workplace when faced with demanding members of the public:

That is the reason to reach out to the delivery guys. Explain to them, make friends. In the end of the day, all the delivery guys (food delivery) are my friends. It is good to develop the relationship. Because of this attitude, I received the service excellence for CEO service excellence.

Older Worker 3 described how the ability to develop positive relationships with people helps to flourish at work:

During the WTO [World Trade Organization] and IMF [International Monetary Fund] meetings, I was engaged to be the spouse liaison officer. That means when the ministers go for meetings, we look after the spouses. I was attached to the wife of the chief of Switzerland's Central Bank. We went on a whole adventure around Singapore. The Chief wrote me a thank you letter and she is in touch till now with me. I am very happy building such wonderful relationships.

Older Worker 6 explained why positive relationships positively impact older workers and the organisations they work for:

I like to communicate and engage with people. It's in my character. When you doing something, you like, then you won't feel tired and in fact, it makes you feel happy. Building good relationships with people helps me do better at work and this positive environment ensures a low turnover rate.

Older Worker 15, a 65-year-old service ambassador at a fast-food restaurant, explained how he develops positive relationships with customers, which helps him flourish at work:

Before they come, I must be observant. I develop a relationship with them and communicate with them to make them feel at home. When they visit again, they are your friends already. You develop a bond with them.

Meanwhile, for Older Worker 10's role as a military officer, creating positive relationships was key to establishing a coherent dynamic among the men under his care:

The important thing you have to impress on them is the relationship between me and them. To be visibly present more and to listen to their needs so their needs are being met I will be with them in whatever they do. I was beside them every step of the way during boxing competitions and preparation. I actually care about them sincerely and they would reciprocate by doing their best. It was a positive but disciplined environment.

Older Worker 17 described the positive relationships she has developed over the years acting as a mentor for junior nurses in hospitals:

I try to get to know the students, people better now. I'm in also 30 years of nursing, the camaraderie among the nurses is extremely good. Now you know with the COVID-19 situation, I think you really feel for each other. Interpersonal relationships are important in healthcare to relieve the pressures and intensity of the healthcare environment. We support each other during this challenging times.

Older Worker 18 shared how showing empathy helps in developing positive relationships at work and therefore helps her to flourish at work:

I put myself in their shoes. I try to help with the pilot roster, and remember that I need to learn about the flying crew, then good relationships will develop. When we show care, the crew will also help you during an emergency because of our good working relationships.

Older Worker 13 explained how developing positive relationships presents new opportunities and creates a support network; moreover, such relationships help older workers flourish at work:

I tell me peers till now building work relationships is crucial and helps create opportunities. I think that's more important than having all the certifications. Although I agree that you need good qualifications, the professional relationships help to facilitate the entry to the industry and create new opportunities. Your peer network will open the doors for you.

Positive relationships developed by older workers in this study at work have allowed them to flourish at work. The professional connections they made enabled them to do better in their respective jobs by sharing knowledge and job opportunities.

Positive relationships for organisational and professional learning needs

Besides developing positive relationships in the workplace, older workers also develop relationships that aid their professional learning needs and improve team dynamics in their organisations. Older Worker 14 shared that having diversity in a group helps create positive relationships and working environments:

This diversity and teams are an advantage, firstly to have positive working relationships. Secondly, I have also learned from the others because of the diversity in our group including the young people particularly software skills.

Older Worker 11 explained her focus on building positive relationships:

I love the chance to go out, meet people of a different calibre, different lifestyle, learn from them. I just love the history guide fraternity because they are people like me, same wavelengths, similar passion. We deal with people, and we want contribute to the world by sharing knowledge. It's amazing the relationships in this industry.

Meanwhile, Older Worker 12 described the camaraderie he had with his peers during his cadet training days:

The learning journey was tough yet exciting. With great help from colleagues, it was exciting times, but I pulled through. I kind of suffered yet I enjoyed the camaraderie. All my friends, they were all out to help each other, we were all out to help each other. Wonderful relationships.

During Focus Group Session 4, Adult Educator 8 revealed that one of older workers' strengths were their networks:

That is the strength. I would their network. They have been connected to a massive network of people, [hand gestures] experiences. If you can train them within companies to act as a mentor, build collaborative networks in the industry, it would be good for the organisation given their network contacts.

Adult Educator 9 shared his perspectives on older workers attending training due to industry requirements:

What we observed is the close knitted community in the security industry supporting one another. Relationships is an important function, when they go for their security certification. They help each other prepare for the assessments and want each other to do well. One of the contributing factors to change this whole mindset in this industry is to establish support networks and good relationships between the different stakeholders.

Finally, Adult Educator 5 observed that older workers during training develop positive and lasting relationships, which he felt was beneficial for Singapore's workforce:

The strengths of our older workers are that they communicate well and develop relationships fast unlike the younger millennials. They always contribute during discussions and are willing to help one another which helps the learning process. They also share job opportunities open with one another during training and the best practices they know about. This creates a positive environment for everyone.

Older workers developed positive relationships at work, which facilitated them learning and acquiring new skills to flourish at work. This section demonstrated how positive relationships have helped older workers flourish at work through establishing connections within their industry and acquiring new skills. This enabled them to flourish at work. The next section presents data that illustrates the older workers in this study's skills, contributing towards the dynamic-grit mindset.

5.4.2.3 Problem-solving and emotional intelligence

In the previous two sections, the data indicated that the concept of grit and five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing form a significant part of the dynamic-grit mindset and are central to older workers in Singapore flourishing. However, the data analysis also yielded two other determinants that are significant to the dynamic-grit mindset: problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence. The data for these two determinants are presented in Tables 5.8 and 5.9 and demonstrate how older workers' problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence enable flourishing.

Problem-solving

Table 5.8 presents a selection of quotes demonstrating the problem-solving skills observed in older workers in this study. Problem-solving in this study is defined as the process of analysing challenges (Sinha & Kapur, 2021) and seeking solutions to difficult or complex issues in relation to work (Hanschke et al., 2021). Here, it is categorised as problem-solving and competence, and problem-solving and resilience.

Table 5.8: Problem-solving and related factors

Factor	Quotes
1 Problem-solving and Competence (n=5)	<p><i>‘With maturity now, I look at the challenge from a different perspective. Using my experience, I explore how I can develop better solutions This problem-solving skill comes with maturity’ (Older Worker 19).</i></p> <p><i>‘Older workers carry a lot of information and can actually guide the organisation and younger workers. For these older workers, in any role they are in, when a youngster comes and join, they can be a good mentor’ (Adult Educator 7).</i></p> <p><i>‘The older workers have a lot of operational experience. They can give you solutions, because they have seen such problems before and know how to handle them. They share the best practices in the industry that we can incorporate this and improve our current processes’ (Employer 1).</i></p> <p><i>‘A very key aspect of work that young people should learn from older workers is problem-solving because they have gone through it, they have experienced it and they will come up with the solution faster and more effective than anybody else (Industry Expert 3).</i></p> <p><i>The younger workers will not have the ability to then pick the relevant parts of it, and-and then implement them to solve a problem. We may have all the theories, but for older workers, we are talking about actual practitioner’s knowledge and experiences which is so powerful because it is a marriage of both theory and practice’ (Employer 1).</i></p>
2 Problem-solving and Resilience (n=5)	<p><i>‘At 62, as an older worker, the abilities, the experience, the life skills, dealing with people and turning things around are invaluable skills that you cannot just train someone within a day’ (Older Worker 1).</i></p> <p><i>‘I believe that when it comes to working, there are many unknowns, nothing is certain. You cannot train for every situation. Older workers besides their experience are able to solve challenges not only because of their experience but also their resilience to turn things around, even in unknown situations, no matter the circumstances’ (Industry Expert 1).</i></p> <p><i>‘The young nurses come from underprivileged backgrounds and I have to teach them from scratch, step by step, let them internalise and prepare them for the hospital environment. It is not straightforward as I need to solve problems they face in their lives before their classes. Resilience is also key in this situation’ (Older Worker 17).</i></p> <p><i>‘There is so much stress at work now in global organisations. However, we, older workers have to use the stress to our advantage. Based on my experience, we have different tricks to solve problems in our bag. We need to combine this with resilience. This ensures that we would not be overwhelmed that we cannot function and overcome the challenge’ (Older Worker 14).</i></p> <p><i>‘Older workers have the ability to think on the spot because of their wealth of knowledge. They do not panic and have the resilience to keep on solving different challenges. They are unfazed in what we call the VUCA [Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity] environment of the global economy’ (Older Worker 19).</i></p>

The data presented in Table 5.8 indicates that older workers’ problem-solving skills have contributed to their flourishing by 1) developing their competency to manage challenges

and solve problems at work, and 2) developing their resilience to manage challenges at work after years of experience facing and managing different kinds of challenges.

The problem-solving skills of the older workers have greatly contributed to their flourishing and are a core component of the dynamic-grit mindset. The data presented in this section indicated that problem-solving was a skill that worked in tandem with older workers' competencies, making them very effective problem-solvers at work. Their problem-solving skills also developed their resilience. They are aware of their problem-solving skills and use these to overcome challenges and turn things around without letting drawbacks affect their work performances and quality.

Emotional intelligence

Table 5.9 presents the data illustrating the relationships between emotional intelligence, managing challenges in the workplace and building positive relationships. Emotional intelligence in this study refers to the ability to comprehend, apply and manage emotions in positive ways to communicate effectively, empathise with others, overcome challenges, resolve conflicts and relieve stress at work (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2020; Cui, 2021).

Table 5.9: Emotional intelligence and related factors

1	Factor	Selected Quotes
	Emotional Intelligence and Managing Challenges (n = 6)	<p><i>‘When mediating, I do not have to spend too much time, but I simply suggest what I think is the best way forward. I have to very quickly summarise and give a quick assessment of where each party stand. It helps that I have got grey hair, as I guess they know it is coming from someone who has been in this practice for a long time. The biggest challenge here is to get both parties to agree simply by having the right emotional quotient [EQ] and using the correct language’ (Older Worker 15).</i></p> <p><i>‘I have my own ways of handling the demanding tourists. We must use our EQ and experience to manage demanding situations without offending anyone. You adapt different to every single situation, definitely would need to use EQ and the right approach’ (Older Worker 11).</i></p> <p><i>‘Depending on the job they are doing, their customer service skills, the soft skills they have can be a useful resource in managing a conflict or a crisis which can be impossible to teach in classes’ (Industry Expert 4).</i></p> <p><i>These are life skills, coming from life experience and a bank of knowledge of dealing with problems and people. Very unique to older workers. Their EQ is</i></p>

Factor	Selected Quotes
2 Emotional Intelligence and Building Positive Relationships (n = 5)	<p><i>quite unrivalled</i>' (Older Worker 6).</p> <p><i>'When it comes to conversation and handling people, it is actually the most important thing in security industry. They have to engage people, respective whether young or elder people. They know actually, the right communication strategies. They know how to size up people, and handle demanding situations. The older workers have the experience of dealing with people from their previous jobs. Their strength is in their emotional intelligence and handling challenges</i>' (Adult Educator 9).</p> <p><i>'I think in the hospital environment I see many of the older nurses being excellent communicators. They use EQ to help patients and coax them to take their medication. They are also excellent when handling demanding family members of the patients and are able to pacify them.'</i> (Older Worker 17).</p> <p><i>'I think the other thing, the ability to read the situation. The way the older workers communicate, share ideas, influence other people. Their soft-skills, problem-solving, identifying disconnects, and empathy. The ability to communicate, influence others, when to speak up, when not to speak up can be helpful building connections and business relationships'</i> (Industry Expert 3).</p> <p><i>'I can manage this role well- and emotional intelligence is key in managing the flight roster according to legal requirements. However, I also need to ensure that the wellbeing of the pilots is considered carefully. I told the flying crew that I'll try to help whatever I can. By building positive relationships with them, I can construct the flying roster faster and more efficiently without bending the rules without anyone feeling unhappy'</i> (Older Worker 18).</p> <p><i>The key to being effective is really the human connection, and if people feel connected – things get done much faster. For older workers, it is not about the salary, but because they enjoy being with the people at the workplace. The positive connections, assurance and the sense of security with their peers is what the older workers value. Many organisations I feel need the emotional intelligence of these older workers'</i> (Adult Educator 7).</p> <p><i>'Older people get together, and then share each their work and best practices with each other. They support each other, and even attend training together. Through their network, the older workers can get together to share employment or training opportunities. They use their emotional intelligence and set up a network of collaboration to help out each other during very difficult periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic'</i> (Older Worker 6).</p> <p><i>The older workers can handle the customers and all kinds of complaints very well. Some of the older workers will go around and talk to the guests and ask for some feedback, and try to make them happy. His communication and connection with people are really good'</i> (Employer 1).</p>

The data presented in Table 5.9 shows how older workers' emotional intelligence enabled them to flourish. Older workers can mitigate challenges using their emotional intelligence by getting help through their social networks and organisational connections.

Further, their emotional intelligence has enabled them to establish positive relationships within their industry, which helps them thrive.

This section has illustrated how emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills are vital determinants in helping older workers flourish at work. This can be observed by their strengths in communication, managing people and difficult situations and their wealth of experience, which endows them with valuable problem-solving skills. These strengths have been very useful for older workers in their respective workplaces and are interconnected and indispensable components in the dynamic-grit mindset of the older workers.

5.4.3 Work culture and management

The data analysis showed that organisations with a positive work culture and supportive management are important in enabling the flourishing of older workers. The findings indicated that older workers thrive in positive workplace contexts and when supported and empowered by the management. These factors enabled the dynamic-grit mindset of the older workers. This section presents the data that highlights the importance of having a supportive workplace context to allow older workers to use their strengths to flourish. It demonstrates how positive workplace environments are advantageous to organisations that employ older workers.

5.4.3.1 Supportive work culture

Work contexts that enabled the flourishing of older workers in this study included family-like workplace settings. Industry Expert 6 described a work context that enabled the flourishing of older workers in the education and training industry:

I think having a family-like atmosphere could actually be something beneficial across the board. The older workers might appreciate it more than the younger workers but having a nurturing environment, a supportive workplace, that workers can learn and grow. It is beneficial for everyone., I would definitely like to see if we can put wellbeing at the heart of how we measure success.

Industry Expert 7 highlighted the potential benefits of having older workers at the forefront of positive workplace contexts and how it is important for organisations not to measure and view success purely in economic terms:

The older workers are the ones that ought to be leading the way and the younger ones just coming along for the ride. Where there is opportunity for them, and there is encouragement to say that they have a wealth of experience. To be able to create and be given the space within the organisation. This has to be predicated upon the culture of the organisation. To empower the systems and structures to grow for the more mature workers. It is not just how we perform, not only dollars and cents but also how we are creating meaning for everybody. It is how can we sustain our living environment, our resources, and unleash hidden potential in these workers.

Adult Educator 9 shared his observation of older workers during training:

They [older workers] prefer to work in groups, they prefer to work in teams. Actually, the course is tailored in such a way that there are activities where they are working alone, sometimes working in pairs, or sometimes even working in groups. The workplaces are tailored towards people working alone, which is not realistic or conducive for older workers.

Employer 3 argued that HR policies need to set standards and establish appropriate contexts to allow older workers to thrive:

I have HR personnel attending my courses. I would encourage them to relook at their SOPs, in hiring selection, retention and work culture. A diverse group of workforce or strength in the company actually helps the company to be more productive. I think the reason why is because the older workers have the experiences that you could actually allow them to share their thoughts and ideas during the sharing sessions. Stories, success stories that can inspire and motivate the team. It is essential to create such a work culture.

She suggested the steps are needed to set up a positive culture and establish an appropriate context for work:

Why is the staff orientation important? It gets to get them to see the culture. It involves the management coming down to meet the people. Getting together for 2 to 3 hours, eating together, mingling around, getting to immerse them with you, getting the connection with you. I think that is an open-door policy whereby the management can tell them that if you have any issue, you can just come to see me. In Singapore, it is a glass ceiling kind of policy whereby we have to go through the hierarchy, a very negative work culture. (Employer 3)

Employer 1 questioned the decision-making at his workplace regarding the hiring and onboarding process:

My question to HR is that do they want to keep the people that they are hiring or if the new staff do not fit, simply go and do hiring again. We all know that hiring process is a long and expensive process. I believe that coaching should be part of this process to close the gap. I personally feel that HR should also have a role for the other group of people who has been in the company to do a buddy system. Another aspect I always try to introduce to them is actually what I termed the 'work culture department' because a lot of organisations does not have this department. In this time of a global pandemic, this is important and will create a very healthy work environment and with good employee engagement especially for older workers.

Industry Expert 1 suggested a positive work culture could be established by initiating volunteering and corporate social responsibility initiatives to transform the work culture:

Corporate volunteerism is one way of improving work culture and giving the workers an illusion of choice. People who volunteer are certainly helping out a group of people without having any expectations of themselves or pressure, the mindset changes. They now become more open to actually sharing. They'll take the learning that they got from the volunteering working with the team and take it back to work. Because of this MERE effect. MERE effect is essentially unconscious learning, even when you don't want to learn but you're exposed to it for long enough, you'll still remember and use it back at the workplace.

Employer 2 shared why he emphasises establishing a positive workplace culture and its importance for his organisation:

The culture and community at the workplace are very critical. As the management, I had to mingle with them you know and you had to eat together with them, you know sit with them, do the work together with them. All these are part and parcel of learning, you don't learn this from school or college or university. By doing this, I was able to establish a supportive workplace culture.

He further explained how his organisation exercises care in its recruitment processes:

For example, a cleaner comes in for an interview, we will assess them using our capability matrix. For example, what skillsets you have to have, what training you have undergone, what was your background, why you left the job. This will allow me to put them in a job that fits their abilities and experience well. Once you are happy in what you are doing, you will go far. This is why when I interview any of my staff, I remind them don't come here for just for pay, you must come here for happiness. When you are happy, you perform very well. And you make your employer happy and your customers happy. (Employer 2)

Meanwhile, Industry Expert 2 described the system he set up to support older workers during their initial months with the organisation:

You need to do a buddy system with them, find out if they are coping with work and feeling comfortable. This is the first critical thing we need to ensure when workers come on board. The workplace culture is a very important fundamental.

We don't treat people as digit but we treat people as assets so that they can see the real value coming from them.

Older Worker 10 defined the work culture that allowed her to thrive and enjoy her job:

I enjoy working there and everyone there was just so fun to work with, it was just a whole different environment compared to my previous job. Everyone as part of a team. We bonded. We became family. Really very different from your fashion industry. It became work is home and not going back home itself. I will spend days and days just staying there. Everyone is passionate; the people that we work with. We all preserved as a family, go through challenges and solve problems. Even the manager himself, he would come out and mingle with us and do all the things that we do to.

Industry Expert 4 explained how to create a supportive work culture and counter discrimination against older workers:

It is important in this pandemic period for a company to embrace older workers. We always believe that you should not discriminate any worker on the basis of age. If you see the worker has good potential, then you must give the worker the opportunity. It requires a lot of adjustment, on both sides, on the part of the millennial generation, younger workers you have to see the uh older workers in having the experience that you can learn from them, then on the part of the older workers, you need to understand the psyche of your younger colleagues. The management, likewise, also need to create an environment, conducive for older workers to work in. One way is to use appreciative inquiry to get people to change their attitude.

Lastly, Industry Expert 7 suggested that appreciative inquiry could be applied as a transformative tool to change the work culture:

The idea is that in the process of building a shared vision for the organisation, we should use appreciative inquiry. To be able to get the stories, to be able to engage and every older worker n in the organisation. Moving from the best of the past, high point story, and then building on to the strengths of individuals, the treasures of the organisation. Explore the work culture they want to conserve and using this to move forward. To create an appreciative work culture.

The data presented in this section indicated that setting a positive work culture would enable older workers to flourish. The findings showed that despite older workers being able to mitigate challenges caused by systemic inequities due to their dynamic-grit mindset, having a positive work culture would enable older workers to use their strengths and flourish.

5.4.3.2 Management styles

This section presents data that demonstrates how supportive management enables the dynamic-grit mindset in older workers. It highlights the importance of establishing the right conditions to support older workers and provide opportunities to flourish. With a positive work culture and supportive management, older workers can become assets to their organisations.

Industry Expert 4 suggested that managers must provide feedback to build a positive work culture:

Feedback has to be given in a certain way that builds a resilient mindset. It has to motivate the older workers not make them feel irrelevant or simply dismiss all their experience. The language used and the manner the management does this is crucial. The feedback has to be seen as a positive instrument to support, not a way to mark workers down.

Older Worker 1 described his positive workplace environment where he flourishes:

Working there is quite happy and all are the crew staff, very helpful and will not say we are new, they bully us, last time I work, the management like to bully the new guys. We work like a family, all family members. Very supportive management and friends. I can work very well and feel healthy.

Employer 1 described the type of work environment older workers thrive in:

Elderly people sometimes they need to, how to say, they need to take care of their partners, their husbands or their wives, they need more time. They are only able to work for six hours per day. The management ought to be flexible and support them. For each one week, provide two days off, flexible hours and supportive management. I think this system will encourage them into staying with the company longer.

Employer 2 revealed his management philosophy that creates a work environment to allow the older workers to flourish:

The other first thing I launched was the three 'R's system. It is the first in this business, first you need to 'respect' the people who are working with you, your, working under you, working above you, working together with you. The second 'R' stands for recognise what they are contributing to the organisation. The third 'R' stands for reward. I told them these are the three important things I would like to have we are equally we are all, you are also a human being, I am a human being. This must be driven down to my team. I know it is a small thing but it matters a lot to the older workers on the ground.

Further, he tries to lead by example to create a supportive workplace culture and demonstrates support for his staff:

In one of the facilities, the client called me and told me that there is an act of honesty by one of the cleaners, and “I think you must be very proud of it”. I personally went down early in the morning, and issued a certificate to her. Although this is something I could have delegated to my HR to do, but as a CEO early in the morning, I do it myself, then they would know that I really care for my workers. To tell them that they are a part of the family. (Employer 2)

Older Worker 3 considers trust from her employer as motivation to help her flourish at work:

They go with me and trust me to solve problems and handle the tourists well. But they are not comfortable employing a new one. They want the seniors to manage the big-ticket events because seniors can handle any problem. Their trust makes me want to do even better.

Similarly, Older Worker 20 revealed how feedback, trust and support from the management helped her flourish at work:

The management, and supervisors are cornerstones. They always try to help you do better and not there to punish. It is to make the work environment safe. Not scolding or suspend you. At least they know that I am working, they support and trust me. When they see I took feedback, they are happy and even entrust me with more roles. Very helpful for older workers like me.

Employer 1 (also in Focus Group Session 6) agreed with him and added that ‘a step-by-step approach will make them comfortable. This makes them feel at home. We create a safe environment for them to learn and use their experience’.

To maintain interest and motivate older workers, many of whom are rank and file workers in his organisation, Employer 2 suggested using a job rotation strategy:

One strategy is to use job rotation in different cleaning roles so that the worker is exposed to all kind of environment and acquire new skillsets. This will not make them feel that their work is monotonous. We believe in job rotation, job uh upskilling, reskilling, re-deepening the knowledge base. It’s helpful for them to learn the skillset, for example using apps on their phone, For example if they can use this to help them with their work, monitor their health and to update the management. This helps the management monitor the workers and also their security and safety. It will enhance our productivity and capabilities as an organisation.

Older Worker 18 explained that the management was critical in ensuring that the staff’s values align with the organisation and their role in creating a conducive environment for flourishing by providing opportunities and recognising effort:

Basically, I love the organisation, I serve so many years and even at this period we should like work together, stand together and support the company. I started as a temporary staff but the manager saw my potential and asked me to become a full-time staff. He gave me opportunities and encouraged me to do well. His belief and support made me thrive in my department.

Older Worker 14 reflected on how a supportive manager and cohesive work culture enabled him to flourish at work and made him feel like a valued member of the team:

It was quite a cultural shock for me. It was not an English-speaking environment; it was Chinese speaking. And that got a bit of getting used to because when I work for a multinational company, we were all English speaking. I was the first non-Chinese in that group, yet they were conscious to this fact. They made sure everyone spoke English, the camaraderie, the fact that I had a boss who was backing me up all the way, even without questioning how I arrived at my decisions. The supportive work culture and the team was respectful because of my age. They made me feel valued as a part of a team.

The data presented in this section demonstrated that positive work cultures and supportive management are vital in enabling the dynamic-grit mindset of older workers and positively influencing their flourishing. The data indicated that a positive work culture that considers older workers' strengths and where the staff work closely in 'family-like teams' helps them thrive. In addition, supportive management is imperative to create this 'family-like' work culture and provide appropriate support to older workers to help them do well at work and experience longevity in their professions.

Section 5.4 described various forms of ageism that led to systemic inequities within the workforce and their detrimental effects on older workers. It demonstrated that in a workforce driven by economic practicality and demands, the older workers in this study flourish due to their dynamic-grit mindset. This section presented the different components of the dynamic-grit mindset consisting of grit and five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing. It explained how older workers' problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence were vital in facilitating their dynamic-grit mindset. This section described the desired work contexts where a positive work culture and supportive management help older workers flourish and become assets to their organisations.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the demographics of the study participants and described the coding process during data analysis. It presented the study's main themes: systemic inequities, older workers and wellbeing, and work culture and management. The chapter also reported data demonstrating how ageism causes systemic inequities and affects older workers and their wellbeing. The data analysis revealed that a dynamic-grit mindset was identified in many older workers in this study, and this enabled them to flourish in demanding work contexts in Singapore plagued by systemic inequities. The findings also indicated that older workers with the dynamic-grit mindset flourish, and having this mindset helped them mitigate the challenges brought about by ageism. The findings also showed that a positive work culture and supportive management created desired work contexts that enabled the flourishing of older workers in this study.

The next chapter discusses the concept of dynamic grit in more detail by relating this concept and comparing it to other similar constructs of grit and wellbeing. Most importantly, it highlights how the concept of the dynamic-grit mindset is significant to older workers, making them assets to Singapore's workforce.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on the data from the Discovery and Dream phases of the appreciative inquiry process, as presented in Chapter 4 (see Sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.3), and discusses the analysis of these data. The data provided in the previous chapter argues that older workers in Singapore display a dynamic-grit mindset that underpins the concept of a flourishing worker in Singapore. Dynamic-grit mindset refers to a style of thought, a way of seeing work, a habit of living and working, a work attitude rooted in six key factors and two determinants. The six factors are grit, resilience, meaning, engagement, competence and positive relationships, while the two determinants are emotional intelligence and problem-solving.

This chapter argues the case of how having the dynamic-grit mindset facilitates the flourishing of older workers in Singapore and mitigates the challenges of systemic inequities in work contexts that are primarily based on economic practicality rather than human-centric approaches. As such, this thesis extends Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing in several ways. First, it argues that Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing is limited in fully explaining the flourishing of the older workers in this study. Second, it proposes the dynamic-grit mindset as an extension of their theory of flourishing. The findings show that a dynamic-grit mindset captures the flourishing of older workers in Singapore and is indicative of their positive wellbeing. Third, it explains how systemic inequities inherent within the workforce due to ageist attitudes hamper older workers' flourishing and how establishing supportive workplace cultures and contexts can contribute to flourishing. Characteristics and the role of the dynamic-grit mindset are explained further in this chapter. The breakdown of all participants and their respective ages, genders, professions and employment are listed in Appendix A, Tables A1–A4.

This chapter discusses 1) challenges and consequences that stem from ageism in Singapore's workforce, 2) older workers' dynamic-grit mindset and how this positions them as assets to their organisations and Singapore's workforce, and 3) work contexts and management styles that contribute to a conducive work environment for older workers, enabling them to utilise their strengths and flourish.

6.2 Systemic Inequities

This section explores the systemic inequities inherent in Singapore and their multiple negative impacts on older workers, suggesting that employment opportunities can be hampered and flourishing limited. The inequities experienced by the older workers in this study demonstrate how ageism is systemic in Singapore's workforce and society. The discussion is organised into four main themes: human resource policies, work contexts, government policies and contextual barriers.

6.2.1 Ageism in human resource policies

One core aspect of any workforce is its human resource function (Cooke et al., 2020; Dhanpat et al., 2020; Reina & Scaroza, 2021; Wall, 2022). It is a vital cog in ensuring that an organisation performs well and stays ahead of the competition (Mihardjo et al., 2020; Shet et al., 2021; Wright, 2021). In doing so, many organisations prioritise economic gains, focusing on their ROI (Linsi, 2020). As such, the focus of the human resource department is recruiting workers who can contribute most to the organisation's productivity (Abbasi et al., 2020; Wright & Constantin, 2021). In Chapter 1, the importance of Singapore's workforce to its economy was highlighted. Yet, Singapore faces a deficit in its workforce due to a rapidly aging population and a low birth rate (Chacko, 2020; Nam, 2020) and addresses this by recruiting foreign professionals and specialists (Kwon, 2019; Yeoh et al., 2021). Many older workers in Singapore claim they are either forced to retire upon reaching the retirement age (Börsch-Supan et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021) or unemployed, finding it nearly impossible to

gain employment despite their years of experience (S. Gordon, 2020). In Singapore, employment is viewed as a valued commodity (Subramaniam et al., 2019) and having a job is seen as imperative for survival in a society with a high standard of living (Rajah, 2019). Older workers in this study describe the challenges they face due to ageist attitudes in human resource departments. Many do not view them as valuable assets and, therefore, undeserving of a place in the workforce. As detailed in Chapter 5, Older Workers 7, 8 and 20 explained that although they have many years of experience in different industries, they found it challenging to find a job and attributed this to being overlooked due to their age. These challenges are not completely new and have also been observed in Hong Kong and Europe (Cristea et al., 2020; Higgins & Vyas, 2018).

In relation to age discrimination, Adult Educator 1 stated that they normally put aside the job applications of applicants above 40 years of age, preferring to select younger applicants. Burnes et al. (2019) and Miller (2019) highlight how ageist attitudes are stumbling blocks for older workers, and subsequently limit their employment opportunities. Employer 2 and Adult Educator 2 also mentioned that age was a limiting factor for older workers being considered for employment. They suggest the reasons for this are simply misleading assumptions and stereotypes that depict older workers as liabilities should they be employed.

The literature review in Chapter 2 discussed the importance of using workers' strengths for the wellbeing of an organisation (Owen et al., 2019; van Woerkom et al., 2020). However, Adult Educator 7 argued that practices have changed and older workers, whose strengths include being loyal to the organisations they work for, are no longer considered assets. In the current age of disruption, this may be due to human resource professionals now seeing loyalty as a liability instead of an asset (Dhir et al., 2020) and considering positions in the organisations as mobile institutions (Cooke et al., 2020). Employer 3 revealed that many human resource professionals are young and perceive older people as slow and not familiar with current organisational trends. Further, ageist attitudes in workplaces could be attributed

to young adults experiencing very limited interactions with older adults (Egdell et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2017). Therefore, it would not make sense for them to provide opportunities to older workers.

An important concept within the critical gerontology theory is the political economy of aging (Estes, 2020; Hendricks & Leedham, 2020). This concept states that aging cannot be analysed separately from societal forces and contextual influences (Baars et al., 2016). Aging is a process designed by social construction and influenced by the norms, cultures and attitudes of the society in which it exists, including stereotypes and assumptions (Estes & Phillipson, 2017). Analysis through a critical gerontology theoretical lens reveals society's perceptions, driven by economic reward and relentless consumerism. Adult Educator 8 revealed that organisations currently in a volatile global environment see older workers as an investment and consider them declining assets. Adult Educator 8 added that most organisations are impatient and want quick returns, so they cannot afford an older worker the opportunity to adapt and build up their resilience in a new environment. Older Worker 7 highlighted the pressure organisations are under to meet their ROI, which does not afford the time and space to allow older workers to flourish in the organisation. Industry Expert 4 confirmed this and explained that this situation is why the government has to incentivise organisations to employ older workers. Therefore, societal attitudes exist towards older workers when it comes to employment opportunities.

6.2.2 Ageism in work contexts

Within critical gerontology theory, the concept of humanistic gerontology addresses the meaning of work in the lives and experiences of older workers. Understanding their work experiences explains the ageism that exists in the workplace. Ageism permeates nearly every part of the workforce and is also observed in workplace contexts (Francioli & North, 2021; Tonelli et al., 2020). During the third focus group session, Older Worker 5 highlighted the challenge of organisations circumventing government policies to safeguard older workers. He

explained that organisations would rather hire a younger worker and find ways to exploit loopholes in government policy. In the first focus group, Adult Educator 1 explained that typically, many organisations claim older workers do not have the required skillset and cannot perform the job. Industry Expert 5 added that older workers face the challenge of not utilising technology effectively but found this assumption misguided and inaccurate. Philips (2019) purports that while older workers may be slow to adapt to technology, they can become very proficient in carrying out their work using technology given the right support (Tams et al., 2021; Caines et al., 2020). It is also important that older workers are given the time and space to use their strengths to apply technological infrastructure to their work (Petery et al., 2020; Schlomann et al., 2020; Seifert et al., 2020).

Another misconception in the workplace due to ageist assumptions relates to digital technology. When discussing the use of technology in workplaces, such as utilising software applications for work purposes or managing work documents digitally, Adult Educators 5 and 2 pointed out that although younger workers may be digital natives and IT savvy, it does not necessarily mean they can use digital technology effectively for work. The older workers are the ones who are familiar with work processes and understand the nuances within the organisation and industry. An important consideration here is that organisations should be critically aware that older workers need to be afforded the opportunity and time to adapt their work to digital technology (Parker & Andrei, 2020), unlike the digital natives who are more familiar with digital technology. Moreover, older workers require training tailored to their needs to address the needs of their organisation. For example, Older Worker 18 lamented that sometimes the human resources department would send them for training to simply clock in the required training hours, but it may not be relevant to her work. One benefit of aligning the training to the organisation's unique needs is that older workers' organisational knowledge will be retained but adapted to new digital processes.

However, Adult Educator 10 explained that although it may be true that older workers are not very proficient in utilising technology, they are not supported well in the workplace to apply technology for work appropriately. At the same time, Older Worker 6 argued that older workers are not treated fairly, and their wealth of experience is simply being ignored and not considered valuable due to the increased use of technology in many workplaces. The S-BIT theory of work proposes that positive, individual characteristics are important in the work context and can influence positive work outcomes (Allan et al., 2019a). High levels of wellbeing were observed in workplaces with inclusive and supportive organisational policies (Anderson, 2018; Hyatt et al., 2016; Snell, 2018). The workers, including older ones, also performed well and contributed more to organisations with inclusive wellbeing policies (Caines et al., 2020; Gigauri, 2020).

In addition, Older Worker 6 explained that he found his younger counterparts at work arrogant and used to being spoon fed as they grew within the organisation. He argued that this was unfair to the older workers, who were much more resilient and had to work their way up the corporate ladder, yet they were disrespected and cast aside in favour of their younger counterparts. Older Worker 17 suggested that it would be ideal to have older workers mentoring younger colleagues in the workplace due to the older workers' organisational and industrial knowledge. Doing so will help the younger generation learn important work processes and build their support network within the organisation and industry (Parker & Andrei, 2020). These points suggest that workers who are provided support and opportunities for professional growth and actualisation would feel engaged and experience a holistic state of wellbeing (Allan et al., 2019b; De-la-Calle-Durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021; Oades & Dulagil, 2017). However, different organisations value different aspects of wellbeing over others (OECD, 2019; Daniels et al., 2018; Abdi et al., 2018; Tan & Tambyah, 2016). This is seen in the emphasis and focus on economic wellbeing and productivity in many organisations in Singapore (Kuan, 2022).

It is evident that older workers seek to contribute to Singapore's workforce and be recognised as a valuable asset to their organisations, as pointed out by Older Worker 6. For this to happen, they need support from the people they work with and fair opportunities from their organisation. Most importantly, as Draper (2021), Bengtsson (2020) and Niemiec (2018) highlight, older workers want to be treated with dignity and be recognised for their experience and potential to contribute to the workforce.

6.2.3 Ageism in government policies

Many governments are grappling with a deficit in the workforce. Governments in OECD countries such as Australia, Germany, Japan and South Korea have attempted to encourage older workers to continue being part of the workforce (Egdell et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2020) to simultaneously address the challenge of a high unemployment rate and stem workforce deficits (Earl et al., 2017; Turek et al., 2020). However, despite the Singapore government mooted similar measures, the subtle age discrimination in implementing these measures highlights the incoherence between government, policies and stakeholders. Older Workers 9 and 16 found that the policies were ineffective, as Older Worker 9 was unable to get work despite attending numerous courses to upgrade his skillset. These are courses designed by the government to help workers stay relevant and gain employment if they are retrenched under the WSQ program (Gog, 2019). Older Worker 16 explained that the policy was implemented very differently from its original intention (see Section 5.4.1). He argued that government policies to encourage older workers to continue being part of the workforce were rendered useless due to organisations circumventing them due to their ageist attitudes.

When considering the challenges described earlier, older workers are demoralised by the efficacy of the policies despite the good intentions of the government to help these workers. For example, during the first focus group session, Older Worker 9 explained that she has failed to land any job due to her age and argued that no matter the number of certifications she has, she is overlooked because she is an older worker. Older Worker 3 agreed, adding that

the economic challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the situation for older workers. Adult Educator 8 pointed out that policymakers and human resources professionals are usually young people unable to realise the value of older workers, as they tend to opt for short-term solutions to produce quick or instant results. Adult Educator 1 highlighted that younger counterparts are unlikely to help and accommodate older workers, as they see them as outdated and less qualified, despite their years of experience.

Further, there appears to be a dissonance with the policies implemented to help older workers in Singapore. Empowerment is identified in the S-BIT theory of work as a positive influence in a work context and allows for a higher level of efficacy (Allen et al., 2019; Owens et al., 2019). Yet, this is something not afforded to older workers. It appears policies are designed to accommodate older workers rather than empower and recognise their potential. Adult Educator 4 claimed the policymakers are unaware of the realities on the ground and unable to empathise with the sacrifice of the older workers. He observed older workers' discomfort, suggesting the government are not sensitive to the challenges they face in Singapore's workforce. Adult Educator 7 suggested there may be a mismatch between the skillsets older workers have and the jobs available, and a clear upgrading plan needs to be enacted. Similar challenges are reported in Europe, where governments are struggling to create effective policies to address the challenges faced by older workers seeking employment (Zaniboni et al., 2019).

However, Industry Expert 4 proposed that a mindset shift was needed to appreciate older workers as assets, but achieving this shift would take a long time and be challenging. He reasoned that to mitigate this challenge would require a combination of policies to help older workers. Xu et al. (2021) assert that no single policy can effectively address this complex challenge; rather, for positive transformation to take place, several policies would have to be applied in tandem (Ackerman & Kanfer 2020; Manzi et al., 2021; OECD, 2019; Posey, 2021). Industry Expert 2 added that many organisations claim their reluctance in employing older

workers is due to diminishing health, but this is misplaced and unwarranted. Although he expects a certain degree of physiological decline as people get older, he believes it is illogical to contend their productivity suddenly drops once they reach a certain age. As discussed in Section 2.5, the literature indicates that being employed facilitates good mental health, which improves older workers' cognitive function. Additional research studies (Straussner et al., 2020; Vasconcelos, 2018) found no cognitive decline in older workers and determined they were as productive at work as their younger counterparts. To conclude, there are challenges in developing and implementing government policies concerning older workers.

6.2.4 Ageism and contextual barriers

Older workers face contextual challenges outside the workplace and experience discrimination beyond human resources and government policies (Rudman & Aldrich, 2021). Two contextual challenges emerged in this study: the work culture unique to Singapore, and the lack of family and social support. Adult Educators 6 and 8 both indicated that some older workers' families do not support them in seeking work or using digital technology. Adult Educator 8 explained that the children of these workers are usually digital natives and have little patience in teaching their parents how to use technology appropriately. In the previous section, conflicts in communication between the older and younger workers in the workplace led to misleading assumptions. Three studies interrogate the communication gap between younger and older generations, finding it leads to ageist assumptions and acts as barriers to the inclusion of older people in society (Burnes et al., 2019; C. Gordon, 2020; Schroyen et al., 2018). Older workers are often caught between the state's policies and unsupportive work environments (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018; Mehta, 2020).

Critical gerontology theory (see Section 3.2.1) has also been applied to analyse challenges older people experience in workplaces and their professions (Blackham, 2017; Lotherington et al., 2017). Ageist attitudes dominate many workplaces in Singapore (Xu et al., 2021), although fewer incidences of discrimination against older workers are expected

because of the norms and values that respect and revere elders (Billett, 2011; Yunus & Hairi, 2020). These attitudes are partly due to most of the older generation in Singapore being without substantial personal and retirement resources due to the high cost of living (Koh et al., 2021b; Mehta, 2020) and thus considered a liability. Adult Educator 2 confirmed this reasoning, elaborating that such challenges can be detrimental to integrating older workers into the modern workplace. Moreover, there is ageist stigmatisation with certain job roles in Singapore. Older Worker 13 explained during the second focus group session that craftspeople such as plumbers and shipyard workers are highly valued in other countries, but the work is considered menial in Singapore and subsequently poorly paid. Hence, many older workers in Singapore avoid such professions due to stigma (Visser et al., 2020) and are aware they would struggle to keep up with the rising costs of living in Singapore on low salaries.

Singapore's work culture was identified as a barrier to integrating older workers into a workforce that values them. Industry Expert 4 suggested work culture and poor organisational renewal plans are responsible for the barriers older workers encounter when trying to continue to be part of the workforce or get reemployed. Adult Educator 4 further explained the *kiasi* [afraid to die] attitude and described its prevalence in Singaporean work culture. He observed that this attitude had permeated all levels of Singapore society since independence. People are always striving hard to survive and avoid failure at all costs, even to their detriment. A factor attributed to Singapore's economic success is its aggressive drive towards economic prosperity (Harris et al., 2018; Mathews & Lim, 2019) (see Section 1.2). Due to the absence of natural resources, the government impresses upon its citizens that the nation has to work diligently and relentlessly for economic survival (Chiong & Gopinathan, 2020). This relentless drive, he claimed, has led to the development of a very demanding work culture and work-life imbalance in Singapore (Jones et al., 2020; Sandberg et al., 2012).

Industry Expert 4 asserted that the '*biggest challenge to this issue is a mindset shift*' required in society. He felt that the tightening of government policies allowing foreign labour

has improved the situation but more must be done to improve the employment situation for older workers through a combination of policies. The most important factor was the mindset shift that older workers are indeed valuable assets to the workforce.

This discussion has described ageism inherent within Singapore, including the recruitment policies in organisations and the application of government policies. It has highlighted the plight of older workers suffering from ageism within constrained workplace cultures, recruitment and government policies, and external factors such as a lack of family support.

The existence of entrenched, systemic forms of ageism in Singapore can be explained through Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Xu et al., 2021). This concept refers to how societal norms are legitimised through an interaction of agency and structure (Asquith, 2019). Habitus explains how society becomes entrenched in individuals through lasting dispositions or structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways (Bonello et al., 2018). It is created through social rather than individual processes, which lead to sustained patterns that are enduring but fluid, adapting from one context to another (Costa et al., 2019). Ageist attitudes in workplaces and biased representations in the media have led to discriminatory behaviour in Singapore's workforce, thus turning it into a norm (Lewis et al., 2020).

Ageism has affected older workers, not only in terms of their employment opportunities but also by diminishing their roles and value in Singapore's workforce. However, some older workers are able to transcend beyond systemic inequities and enjoy sustained, successful careers. The next section explores enabling factors for their flourishing and success through the dynamic-grit mindset.

6.3 Older Workers and Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a diverse and fluid construct respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change (McCallum & Price, 2016, pp. 5–6). The flourishing of an individual in a specific

context is an indicator of wellbeing (Giangrasso, 2021; Lomas & Lomas, 2019), as it captures the thriving of an individual in unique contexts and under specific circumstances (Schwartz, 2019; VanderWeele, 2021).

The central attention in psychology and its related fields usually focuses on the absence of negative pathologies and complexities instead of recognising positive factors such as human flourishing and exhibitors of positive mental states, which could be more telling in determining the wellbeing of a person (Dahl et al., 2020; Huppert & So, 2011; Prinzing, 2021). Flourishing is defined as an ideal state in individuals demonstrating high levels of hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing (Oades et al., 2021; Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2016). Researchers generally agree that flourishing refers to high levels of wellbeing and functioning (Diener et al., 2010; Huppert & So, 2011; Klausen, 2019; Seligman, 2011; Wissing et al., 2021), which is the definition applied in this study.

The flourishing of the older workers in this study can be attributed to their dynamic-grit mindset. Analysis of the data in this study found that the dynamic-grit mindset incorporates the concept of grit and five factors from Huppert and So 's (2011) concept of flourishing (see Figure 6.1). The analysis also indicated that two determinants—emotional intelligence and problem-solving—are significant skills that enable the five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) work. These constructs are discussed independently, including how they combine to form the dynamic-grit mindset in older workers. The key role of the dynamic-grit mindset in the flourishing of older workers and how this mindset extends the concept of human flourishing are also examined. Further, the transformative nature of this mindset as an instrument to alter negative perceptions of older workers are explained, and the dynamic-grit mindset and its core constructs are defined. Within the concept of wellbeing is Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing (see Figure 3.2). The findings from the current study extend Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing and suggest that older workers' flourishing in Singapore includes grit as a core constituent and the two other determinants

(problem-solving and emotional intelligence) encapsulated in the dynamic-grit mindset illustrated in Figure 6.1.

6.3.1. Grit in the dynamic-grit mindset

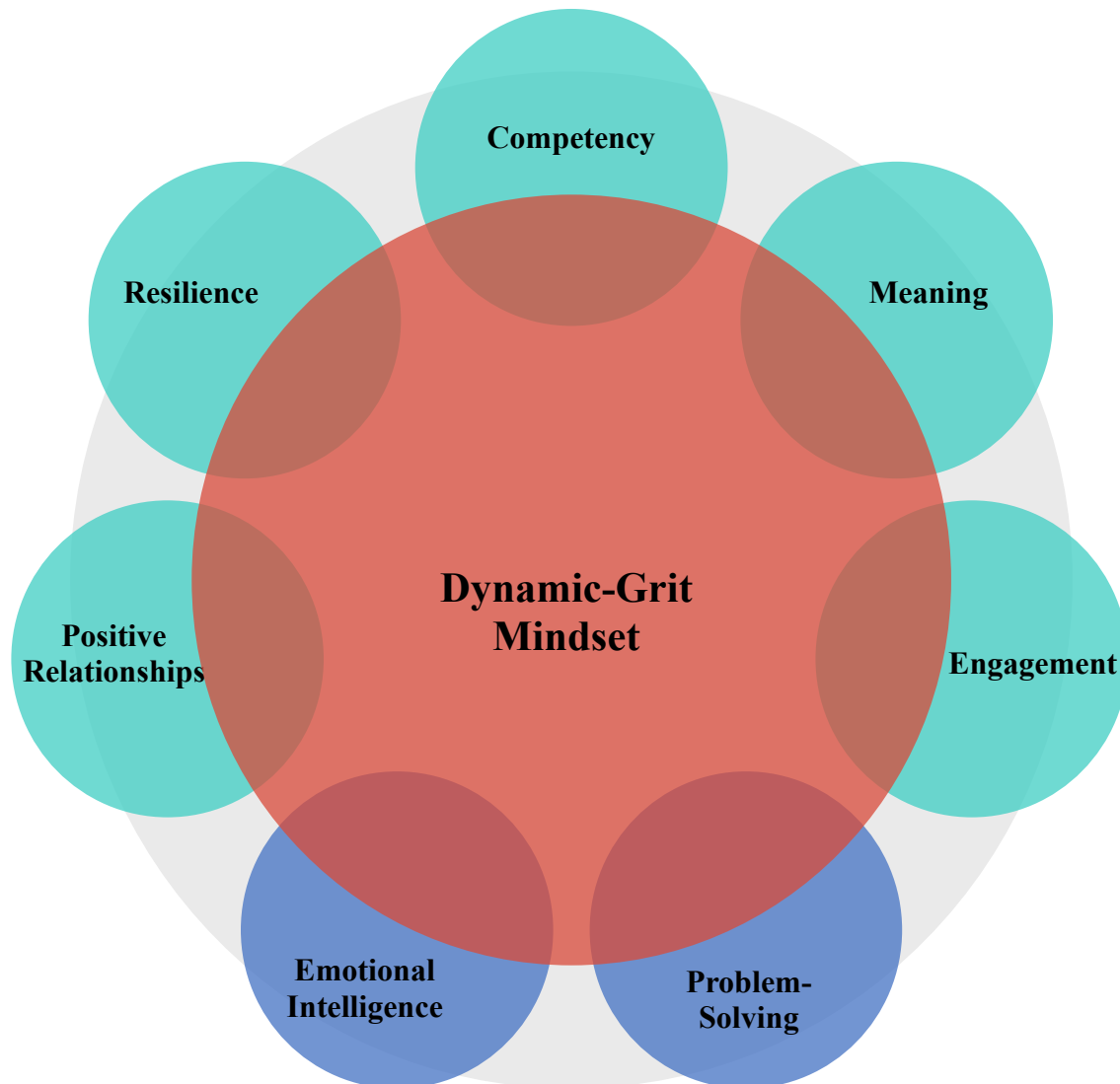
The dynamic-grit mindset is a completely new construct based on the data in this study (see Figure 6.1). This mindset sets older workers apart from their younger counterparts in Singapore's workforce and accounts for their success in their respective careers and employment history. The dynamic-grit mindset encapsulates the appreciative factors present in older workers in this study and comprises seven different components. Integrating these individual components—including five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) 10 factors of flourishing—forms the core of this mindset and predicts success factors for older workers in Singapore's workforce.

The first key component in the dynamic-grit mindset is the dynamism observed in the older workers in this study. 'Dynamic' means being constantly mobile, active and adaptable in mitigating the constantly changing demands of the workforce and economy (Schulze & Pinkow, 2020). It refers to several positive traits, including industriousness, vision, passion, mindfulness and drive. Existing studies similarly describe dynamism and refer to it as a positive trait necessary for success (Kooij, 2020b; Rossi et al., 2021; Takashi & Mana, 2020). The current study considers dynamism an essential trait for older workers to remain relevant in a competitive economy and enjoy sustained periods of employment. This construct forms the first part of the dynamic-grit mindset, and its presence in the older workers in this study manifests itself in several forms (see Figure 6.1).

First, dynamism could be seen in the constant upskilling and reskilling of older workers to improve their competencies to adapt to the needs of the workforce. Second, it was observed in the way they engaged in learning new knowledge and new skills to adapt to changing work environments, and third, how they found meaning in their work lives. Lastly,

dynamism was visible in the older workers expanding their professional networks by establishing and maintaining positive relationships in their professional lives.

Figure 6.1: The components of the dynamic-grit mindset



As Figure 6.1 illustrates, the dynamic-grit mindset consists of the concept of grit, five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing, and problem-solving and emotional intelligence. In this study, the concept of grit is extended according to the older workers in Singapore's context and shifts from the well-known and traditional concept of grit defined by Duckworth et al. (2007). In their seminal work on grit, Duckworth et al. (2007) developed the Grit Scale based on their definition of grit as a construct consisting of

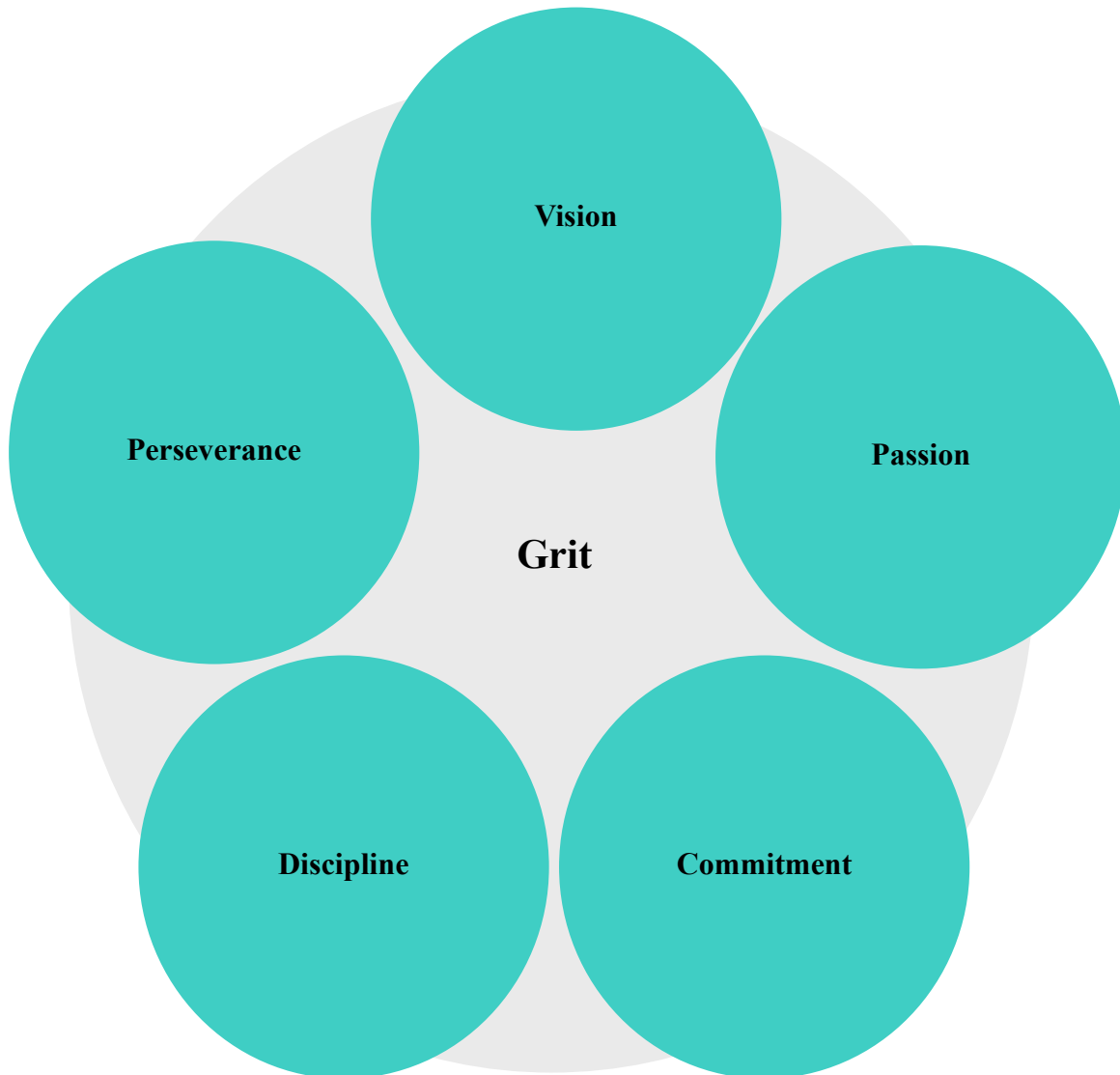
perseverance and passion. Duckworth (2019) found that grit not only consists of sheer perseverance (as commonly assumed) but also includes having a passion for what you do. As Huéscar-Hernández et al. (2020) and Jachimowicz et al. (2018) clarify, in Duckworth's discussion of grit, perseverance must exist in tandem with passion for an individual to flourish.

Similarly, Teimouri et al. (2020) refer to grit as having a significant positive correlation between perseverance and passion, noting that social psychology has found grit an important predictor of success across different populations. However, other definitions of grit describe it as a more complex construct, not easily defined (Loftesnes et al., 2021), although Richardson et al. (2020) broadly refers to it as a positive quality indicative of the likelihood of success. Park et al. (2020) suggest that having grit and a growth mindset predicts effort and accomplishment in the face of difficulties. Grit may also be considered a trait indicative of human flourishing necessary for success (Singh & Chukkali, 2021; Southwick et al., 2019; Suppawittayaa et al., 2021). Rhodes and Giovannetti (2021) assert that grit in older adulthood may serve as a protective factor that promotes active adaptation to the challenges of aging. Consistency and assuming an adaptive role play a part in all facets of successful aging, including positively affecting older adults' physical and emotional wellbeing. The data in this study indicated that five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing accounted for the flourishing of the older workers; however, grit is also central. The coding frequencies for these components are presented in Table 5.1.

As already noted, the analysis revealed that the concept of grit in this study encapsulates five components: discipline, commitment, perseverance, passion and vision. Figure 6.2 depicts these components in the current study. To date, no research studies have explored the concept of flourishing and grit in older workers in Singapore. This study is the first to suggest the dynamic-grit mindset as a predictor of positive work performance and an

indicator of flourishing for older workers. Moreover, it is the first to propose the concept of grit as comprising the five components, as illustrated in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2: The components of grit in the dynamic-grit mindset



Grit is a key component in the dynamic-grit mindset. It is a construct that has received a lot of attention from media, wellbeing practitioners and policymakers; however, there is still no agreed definition of this construct nor its role in predicting success and wellbeing (Morell et al., 2020). As noted earlier, Duckworth et al. (2007) developed one of the most accepted and known definitions of grit in psychology. As a concept, grit builds on early positive psychology research and describes an individual's tendency to persistently pursue long-term goals despite challenges or obstacles (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Gross, 2014;

Schmidt et al., 2017). To measure grit, Duckworth et al. (2007) developed and validated a self-report questionnaire, which was intended for use by teenagers and adults in pursuit of specific goals in different domains (Duckworth et al., 2007; Karlen et al., 2019; Singh & Chukkali, 2021). Building on Schmidt et al.'s (2017) construct, grit involves working persistently towards overcoming challenges, sustaining concerted effort and interest over years, despite these challenges or suffering from stagnancy at times during this process (Duckworth et al., 2007; Morton & Paul, 2019; Tang et al., 2021; van der Vaart et al., 2021).

Surveys conducted in Duckworth's (2009) study indicated that grit accounted for the success of Ivy League undergraduates, cadets at the US Military Academy West Point and participants in the National Spelling Bee (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Duckworth et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020). Grit proved the validity of success measures over and beyond IQ and conscientiousness (Allen et al., 2021; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Southwick et al., 2019). Yet, although these studies suggest the accomplishment of goals while overcoming challenges and complexities requires sustained effort and focused application of talent and skill over time, grit alone may not fully capture the contextual nuances and circumstances to explain why older workers in Singapore flourish despite systemic challenges or personal adversities. Further, as discussed in Chapter 3, flourishing captures the wellbeing of an individual in a specific context—here, the concept of flourishing is extended to include several determinants unique to Singapore's context found in the older workers in this study.

Four studies on grit support the claim that passion and perseverance are two key components within grit (Credé et al., 2017; Huéscar-Hernández et al., 2020; Jachimowicz et al., 2018; Verner-Filion et al., 2020). However, several others (Allen et al., 2021; Datu, 2021; Disabato et al., 2019; Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Guo et al., 2019; Rhodes & Giovannetti, 2021; Whitfield & Wilby, 2021) contend that grit is more than just passion and perseverance. Indeed, Duckworth and Quinn (2009) theorised the construct of grit as passion and

perseverance and developed a Grit Scale, which became a phenomenon in psychology. However, Duckworth et al. (2021) recently reviewed their earlier work (Duckworth et al., 2007) and reported that it was not possible to define a theory accurately through statistical answers, and the argument for grit as a compound of related but distinct dispositions should not have relied so heavily on the optimal factor solution for a questionnaire devised to assess grit. As such, Duckworth et al. (2021) suggest that the components forming the concept of grit are likely to be interchangeable depending on the contexts and cultures in which it sits. Although Morell et al. (2020) had similarly defined grit as passion and perseverance for achieving long-term goals, they argue there are differences in the nature of grit in different groups and found that perseverance of effort is more significant in achievement than the consistency of interests. Muenks et al. (2018) and Schimschal et al. (2021) and also affirm that perseverance appears to be a more significant factor in grit and is, to some extent, a significant predictor of success.

Alhadabi and Karpinski (2020) highlight that grit is a trait that predicts positive academic performance, while two other studies report that grit has shown a strong correlation with job satisfaction, work engagement and career success (Popoola & Karadas, 2022; Singh & Chopra, 2018). Hollis-Sawyer (2018) posit that grit was instrumental in extending the work lives of older workers in the US, where they enjoyed successful and prolonged careers. Although it is argued that the significance of grit remains unclear, and despite extensive media attention and research recognition, it remains a construct considered an important trait for workers and a predictor of positive work performances (Jordan et al., 2019).

Cormier et al. (2021), Maddi et al. (2017) and Shamshirian et al. (2021) identified grit as an important component in the success of young students and talented individuals in schools, military academies or elite competitions (Rhodes & Giovannetti, 2021). However, there has not been any research on grit exploring its role in older workers—specifically, its significance to the work lives and wellbeing of these workers. Further, studies show that grit

may be a dynamic construct made up of different combinations of components when observed in different contexts, although most studies agree that passion and perseverance are cornerstones of grit (Battle, 2020; Caza et al., 2020; Dormer, 2021; Hudson, 2020).

The current study reveals that grit is a significant factor in the flourishing of older workers in Singapore. The findings indicate that besides the known components of grit—perseverance and passion (Duckworth et al., 2007)—three additional components are evident in the grit observed in older workers. Older Worker 21 shared that older workers are disciplined and have *‘the determination to succeed’*. Their commitment and passion were much more apparent than their younger counterparts. During the first focus group session, Employers 3 and 4 found grit was evident in older workers. Adult Educator 5 added that older workers *‘can handle tough and demanding work’* and that *‘the grit they have makes them see things differently’*. Employer 2 revealed that *‘older workers have grit and can handle tough work. They are passionate about their jobs and treat their colleagues with compassion’*. The data in this study showed that grit in older workers is a construct encapsulating five components, including perseverance and passion. The five components are discipline, commitment, passion, perseverance and vision, and are presented in the following sections.

6.3.1.1 Discipline

Seven instances in this study identified older workers exhibiting discipline. Discipline is a prescribed pattern of behaviour, which refers to working in a controlled manner by complying with specific expectations and standards (Hagger et al., 2021). It is a quality strongly connected with grit (Rhodes & Giovannetti, 2021; Şimşir & Dilmaç, 2021) and an indicator of positive performance at work (Maryani et al., 2021; Parashakti & Ekhsan, 2020).

The older workers who have the dynamic-grit mindset exhibit discipline in their work lives. Older Worker 20 explained that because of her passion for her job, she wants to do well and is disciplined to go through all the challenges in her line of work. Employer 2 and Adult Educator 10 agreed that discipline is a quality they have observed in older workers,

particularly in terms of their punctuality and self-control regarding work attitudes and expectations. Older Worker 6 shared that older workers have the grit and tenacity to ‘*grind out the hours*’, both during easy and difficult times with the organisation. Older Worker 17 revealed that it takes ‘*a certain degree of grit, discipline and commitment*’ to manage the demands in the healthcare industry overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Industry Expert 2 reiterated that older workers are ‘*very disciplined*’ and ‘*have a clear purpose of what they would like to achieve*’. Older Worker 13 claimed he is ‘*disciplined and determined to do his work well by the stated deadline*’. Discipline is an important quality in organisations, particularly in core industries affected by timeliness (Mukminin et al., 2020; Sitopu et al., 2021). Four additional studies affirm that workers with discipline tend to perform well and are more conscientious with their work (Moore, 2018; Sugiono & Efendi, 2020; Topino et al., 2021; Young et al., 2018). Discipline is a quality that facilitates older workers flourishing and forms part of their repertoire of positive traits encapsulating the dynamic-grit mindset.

6.3.1.2 Commitment

Commitment is another component found in the concept of grit in this study. The data includes eight instances of older workers displaying commitment to their organisations and work—an evident quality in the older workers in this study. For example, Older Worker 19 described his stint as a captain on board a cargo vessel as one of ‘*sacrifice, wholeheartedness and grit*’, and Older Worker 7 described his career with the military as one of ‘*wholeheartedness and commitment*’. Both older workers shared that to do well and flourish in their professions, it was important to be committed to the job, which involves some degree of sacrifice. Many successful entrepreneurs and leaders credited commitment as being key to their success (Ashraff et al., 2020; Aujla & Mclarney, 2020). Further, Hennekam et al. (2020) report that having commitment to a purpose improves workers’ mental health and indicates an individual’s positive wellbeing (Pfund & Lewis, 2020).

Adult Educators 3 and 6 observed that older workers are '*hardworking and very loyal to their organisations*'. They '*have been through ups and downs*' with their organisations and '*remain committed*' to see through their careers with the same organisations. To remain committed is partly about having grit (Lovell, 2020; Shamshirian et al., 2021), as a worker may always be tempted to move to another organisation with better prospects or switch industries during challenging times but older workers in this study remained committed to their organisations.

Adult Educator 10 noted that younger workers are not as concerned about job security as older workers: they '*would jump at the next best opportunity and merely see the organisations as a stepping stone in their careers*'. However, older workers value their work environment and relationships with colleagues and are grateful to the organisation for providing employment during Singapore's post-independence days. As such, the older workers see commitment as something valuable and are willing to go through tough times with the organisation. For them, grit is an asset that benefits them and their organisations.

Employer 2 contended that older workers remain committed to their organisations because they '*consider the people within the organisation as family*'. They thrive when working in 'family-like work environments' and consider their colleagues family members, so they are reluctant to switch jobs or organisations. Industry Expert 2 clarified that older workers feel obligated to their organisations because they provide them with employment for many years. During challenging periods, they remain steadfast and give their best to the organisation as their way of showing gratitude. In addition to demonstrating grit, this commitment highlights that these older workers are valuable assets to the workforce. Employer 2 added that older workers' commitment reflects their grit, as they come from harsh backgrounds and have had to work their way up. They are '*steely and have developed synergies with their colleagues*', making it important for them to flourish at work. Given such

a work environment, they feel at home and can perform well, which in turn helps them develop a positive wellbeing

6.3.1.3 Perseverance

Perseverance is the ability to show steadfastness and keep working on something despite encountering challenges and complexities in accomplishing the final objective or goal (Gerhards & Gravert, 2020; Sha, 2020). In this study, having perseverance is significant in allowing the older workers to flourish. It helped some older workers gain employment opportunities. Industry Expert 2 shared that older workers have *'self-motivation and showed tremendous perseverance'* even in the wake of facing multiple challenges in life. Industry Expert 4 added that the older workers *'have the determination to survive'* and have persevered through *'a life of hard knocks'* in the workforce. Adult Educator 7 shared that older workers demonstrate *'a strong sense of belief and persevere'* in challenging situations and *'are more positive in being able to turn things around'*. Employer 3 thought older workers are able to go far in life because of *'their attitude of not giving up. This attitude makes them valuable to the workforce'*. Adult Educator 2 added that older workers *'can persevere and take hard work'* and are willing to work in challenging industries such *'as the cleaning and retail industry'*, which are not favoured by the younger workers in Singapore. Employer 1 confirmed that older workers *'represent long term benefits'* for the organisation because of their ability to *'be disciplined'* and *'take on challenges without giving up'*.

Older Workers 12 and 13 epitomise the quality of perseverance. Older Worker 13 fulfilled his dream of becoming an addiction therapist and counsellor upon retiring from the banking industry. To achieve this, he had to overcome multiple challenges, including volunteering at a counselling centre for a year and getting the necessary certifications to become a recognised counsellor. He explained that many were not convinced he would succeed in his endeavour upon his retirement, as he had to fund his own studies while volunteering. However, he revealed that he had no regrets and clearly showed a dynamic-grit

mindset to succeed and pursue his passion. Similarly, Older Worker 12 shared that to realise his dream of becoming a pilot, he had to persevere through many challenges and kept going despite finding it tough to get work during his initial years as a cadet pilot. Feng and Papi (2020), Di Fabio and Gori (2020) and Singh and Chopra (2018) all correlate having perseverance with an impetus to persist despite facing challenges or when confronted with dire expectations of failure in a challenging job. Perseverance is also proven to increase the chances of success in working adults (Jachimowicz et al., 2018; Zannat et al., 2021).

Older workers are also known to show perseverance as a form of gratitude to their organisations. Industry Expert 5 admitted that he preferred to employ older workers as they *'don't job-hop'* and are *'determined to succeed despite the odds against them'*. Industry Expert 7 felt older workers have maturity and wisdom: they are *'clear about the purpose of the organisation'* and *'have persevered with the organisation'*. He summarised the value of these older workers as providing *'stability and grounding that every organisation needs to sustain itself during uncertain times'*. Adult Educator 7 observed that *'older workers have determination in their eyes and always persevered and work together to over challenges'*. Perseverance is a quality organisations value (Teriba & Foley-Nicpon, 2021) and need to sustain, particularly with competing economies around the world disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bag, 2021; Song & Zhou, 2020).

6.3.1.4 Passion

Like perseverance, passion is another core component of Duckworth et al.'s (2007) theory of grit observed in the older workers in this study. Here, passion refers to a line of work a person feels motivated to engage in and derives positive effects from doing (Chen et al., 2020; Duckworth et al., 2007). Older Workers 13 and 19 had a passion for their careers, which helped them realise their career ambitions beyond mere financial gain and succeed at work. Older Worker 13 kept looking for opportunities to realise his dream of becoming a counsellor despite having retired comfortably from his banking job. He authored books on

addiction therapies and described them as the culmination of *'his passion and not for publicity'*. Similarly, Older Worker 19 explained how his passion for working out at sea led him to pursue a career as a seafarer, eventually leading him to become a captain of a cargo vessel. Several studies purport that having a passion for the job without prioritising material gain can have many long-term benefits (Chen et al., 2020; De Clercq & Pereira, 2020; Hao et al., 2018; Toth et al., 2021; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2019).

Adult Educator 7 explained that when older workers are passionate about their jobs, they develop a sense of personal effectiveness that improves competence and experience. This makes older workers much sought after due to their performances, and age would no longer be a barrier or hamper their employment opportunities. Employer 2 reflected that some older workers come from harsh backgrounds, especially considering they started work in Singapore's developing economy post-independence. The workers Employer 2 described are *'one of a kind'* and *'passionate as they appreciate the value of good work and loving what they do'*.

Passion is also a factor in sustaining older workers' employability when preparing for retirement or other contingencies. Older Worker 14 revealed how his passion for squash, coaching and umpiring led to his post-retirement job as an employment mediator. He explained that *'his passion led him further'* in his career where he was headhunted to become an employment mediator due to his mediation and coaching skills. Conversely, Older Worker 4 recounted how he took up a tour guide licence in the event he faced retrenchment from the engineering sector. He explained that since he enjoys talking to people from diverse backgrounds, he would enjoy a stint in the tourism sector upon retirement. Older Worker 19 clarified that although she worked in a largely male-dominated industry, she was determined to perform well and continue working in the security industry because of her passion for engaging and meeting people. Thus, passion is an important quality that is a vital part of grit,

but it also ensures sustained interest for older workers to continue doing something about which they are passionate.

Passion is essential for older workers to provide them with sustained employment and create opportunities for them to flourish in the workforce. As Adult Educator 7 summarised:

Older workers who are passionate about their work are usually flourishing at work and much sought after by organisations because they are exemplary workers or specialist in their respective industries.

6.3.1.5 Vision

The last construct underpinning the concept of grit is vision. Vision refers to having a purpose (Damon & Malin, 2020) and the ability to think about and plan for the future (Pyle et al., 2020) to fulfil an ultimate purpose (Hamdan et al., 2020; Johnson & Suskewicz, 2020). Having a purpose helps trigger older workers' strengths and enables them to flourish in their respective professions. Older Worker 4 had contingency plans in the event of an economic recession or retrenchment. Although he had a stable job, he took up a taxi licence as a backup. He had no qualms about doing this because he is passionate about meeting people, and this step helps him ensure continuity to his income. Adult Educators 10 and 3 observed that older workers have '*clear purpose and vision of what they want to achieve*' and sought '*self-actualisation*', not extrinsic rewards. Older Worker 19 added that older workers generally have a vision, and they '*have the resilience to see things through*' and '*realise the vision*'.

Employer 3 observed that older workers '*have a vision of what direction the organisation should head towards*' and they '*have the tenacity to achieve this vision*'. Employer 2 noticed that older workers in his organisation developed the '*grit to survive and achieve the vision*' for Singapore during post-independent, and '*failure was not an option*' for them. Having a vision or a purpose to work towards brings out a worker's inherent strengths and has a positive reciprocal effect on the older worker and their organisation (Mayerson, 2020). Older Worker 16 explained that older workers '*are in the last leg of their lives*' and '*ought to be doing work they enjoy to realise their vision or purpose in life*'. He added that if

they are allowed to do this, Singapore will benefit from their wisdom and experience and, consequently, the negative perceptions of older workers could be transformed.

6.3.2 Five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing

The dynamic-grit mindset plays a vital role in the mental health of older workers and has ensured sustained employment for older workers in their respective industries. Further, the dynamic-grit mindset is unique to the older workers in Singapore in this study and accounts for their flourishing. The discussion surrounding the dynamic-grit mindset in this chapter has shown that older workers are valuable assets and could address the labour deficit in Singapore's workforce. The dynamic-grit mindset incorporates five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing—resilience, competence, meaning, engagement and positive relationships—which are presented in this section.

6.3.2.1 Resilience

Resilience was a key appreciative factor observed in the older workers. Resilience is a term that has taken on several definitions (Hosseini et al., 2016; Villora et al., 2020) reflected in different contexts (Golan et al., 2020). Employer 3 and Adult Educator 10 observed resilience in older workers facing difficulties during job applications or managing challenges at work and in life. Here, resilience refers to the ability to recover or overcome some form of adversity and experience positive outcomes despite an undesirable incident or challenging circumstance (Vella & Pai, 2019, p. 233). Danesh and Shahnaazari (2020) and Masten et al. (2021) affirm that although resilience is a quality seen in varying degrees in different individuals, they are more pronounced in older people who have experienced different challenges in their lives (Corbett et al., 2020; Rodríguez-González et al., 2020). Further, resilience is one of the factors responsible for their flourishing. The discussion of resilience is organised into three categories: resilience due to work, resilience due to economic crises, and resilience due to career ambitions.

Resilience due to work experiences

The older workers in this study have demonstrated that resilience is an important trait when working in a competitive economy. As noted in the introductory chapter, the economy in Singapore is driven by the government's relentless ambition in globally relevant industries and sectors (Green et al., 2021; Modeja, 2017). Older Workers 17 and 30 both expressed that to remain employable and relevant to the workforce, they must exercise self-awareness and resilience. In a competitive economy, organisations are constantly evolving to stay ahead of the competition (Dahlgaard et al., 2019), and employees are expected to keep up with the demands and pressures of this competition. Infurna (2020) confirms that resilience is one trait that is essential for survival and continuity in many developed societies (Schutte & Mberi, 2020). Resilience is key to enhancing employability and improving job sustainability in demanding and rapidly changing global economies (S. Cheng et al., 2020; Visser et al., 2020).

Studies (De Tavernier & Aartsen, 2019; Léime et al., 2015; Poscia et al., 2016) agree that being excluded from active employment can negatively affect workers' mental health. Moreover, higher-level functioning is affected when workers retire (Fonseca et al., 2021; I. Baumann et al., 2020), as they no longer need to show resilience in the face of managing workplace challenges or handle pressing issues and solve problems at work. As detailed in Chapter 3, the S-BIT theory of work is a vocational theory defined as the experience of fulfilling work, considered a complete and integrated experience of wellbeing in the work context (Owens et al., 2019). Although experiencing too much stress at work can be detrimental (Chung et al., 2020), not having access to fulfilling work and not being afforded opportunities can affect the mental health and overall wellbeing of older workers (der Kinderen & Khapova, 2021).

In a work environment, resilience is crucial for older workers' wellbeing and mental health (Crane et al., 2020; Forbes et al., 2015). Brunetto et al. (2020) found that employee resilience improves job satisfaction and the wellbeing of these employees. Older Workers 18

and 20 highlighted that having resilience is crucial for them to manage challenges at work, especially in critical environments such as in the military and security industry. In addition, during Focus Group Session 4, Adult Educator 5 and Older Worker 5 mentioned that having resilience allowed them to anticipate potential challenges at work and not be negatively affected by them. They added that managing and surviving such challenges is advantageous for their wellbeing. Demonstrating the ability to bounce back from challenges faced at work and not be negatively affected is indicative of someone who is flourishing and experiencing a high degree of wellbeing (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2017; VanderWeele, 2021).

Resilience due to economic crises

Economic crises and recessions can damage the workforce, workers' wellbeing (Godinic et al., 2020) and the economy. The global economy and many workers have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Pak et al., 2020). However, many older workers have expressed optimism and explained that they had bounced back from economic crises several times in their work lives. Older Worker 5 described how he went through two retrenchments and had to work as a part-time cleaner, even though he was previously in management. The retrenchments were due to economic recessions, and he shared that many workers were affected. However, Older Worker 5 refused to be trapped '*in a vicious cycle of poverty*' and used his '*fighting spirit*' to keep going and get out of this cycle. When asked about the '*fighting spirit*', he explained his resilience and '*stubborn refusal*' not to be deflated by a '*self-defeating mindset*' and mired in difficulty and backwardness. Here, '*fighting spirit*' is understood as grit, a core concept in the dynamic-grit mindset that sits alongside resilience. Raetze (2020) found that workers refer to resilience as '*having fighting spirit*' and it is a key trait in determining success and wellbeing at work, particularly during challenging periods (Baskin & Bartlett, 2021; Rangachari & Woods, 2020).

The survival mode of older workers to support and ensure the wellbeing of their families developed their resilience and turned it into a wellbeing strategy. In this instance,

crises serve as a trigger of resilience in older workers. Older workers have developed resilience over the years, particularly during Singapore's post-independent years (see Section 1.2), which manifests to ensure the wellbeing of the older workers during trying times. Resilience allows individuals to recover quickly from challenges faced during crises. This quality is vital for the wellbeing of both the older worker and the organisation (Crane et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2020). S-BIT theory (see Section 3.2.2.2) explains that workers with positive individual characteristics can positively influence their wellbeing and their workplace. Resilience in older workers is also seen when older workers encounter economic crises, which is discussed in the next section. It is a significant factor crucial to reducing the causes of workplace stress, enabling workers to cope with challenges, be more engaged at work and increase job satisfaction (Kašpárková et al., 2018; Malik & Garg, 2020).

Resilience due to career ambitions

Older workers are also resilient when pursuing a vision. Adult Educators 2 and 5 explained that due to the increasing use of digital technology in organisations, many older workers unfamiliar with such technology find digital literacy training very challenging. However, she revealed that these older workers were very likely to be successful given their determination and resilience to complete their training. Resilience is one quality observed in many older people (Caines et al., 2020; Henseke, 2018); despite their advanced ages, their resilience often facilitates their drive towards success in their professions (Huisman et al., 2017; Tay & Lim., 2020; Zacher et al., 2021). Resilience is a necessary quality when facing challenges that also helps older workers realise their hopes and ambitions.

Resilience is also essential in the workplace when older workers are challenged by an unexpected opportunity. Older Worker 2 explained that she was entrusted with additional responsibilities even though she was a temporary staff member at that time. Despite feeling overwhelmed, her resilience enabled her to keep going and fulfil the added responsibilities, as she was determined to do well. Due to her successful efforts, she was offered a full-time

position. Similarly, despite having retired comfortably, Older Worker 19 was determined to become an addiction therapist. He encountered many challenges but his resilience carried him through, and he was able to complete his certification and write two books on managing addictions. Older Worker 14 also shared that despite being able to retire, he wanted to continue using his experience and contribute as an employment mediator. However, he found that despite being a very competent mediator, he also had to handle all the administrative work himself. Instead of simply giving up, he was resilient and willing to acquire the relevant administrative skills to fulfil his role successfully. In this case, his resilience empowered him to attain the necessary skills to fulfil his role despite his seniority and experience. The examples given demonstrate resilience as a significant factor for older workers to actualise their ambitions and ensure their economic and overall wellbeing. As demonstrated by the older workers in this study, resilience empowers older workers to overcome challenges. Resilience is also indicative of a person's wellbeing, as discussed in Huppert and So's concept of flourishing (see Section 3.2.2.1), and positively impacts the overall wellbeing of older workers.

This section has identified how resilience enables older workers to navigate challenges in their workplaces and crises, keeping them steadfast in the pursuit of their career ambitions. Besides being indicative of their wellbeing, resilience is also a key enabling factor that allows older workers to flourish at work and consequently enjoy sustained employment.

6.3.2.2 Competence

Competence is another factor observed in the older workers in this study. Competence refers to the technical knowledge, abilities, skills and underlying attributes, required of a worker to perform effectively in a specific work context and has been used to describe both individual and organisational competencies (Salman et al., 2020). Older workers have vast work experiences in different industries, have acquired various competencies and display valuable organisational and industrial knowledge spanning several decades of work

experience. This section discusses: technical competencies, organisational competencies, industrial competencies, and wisdom and mentoring.

Technical competencies

In this study, older workers showed they are accomplished in the skillsets required due to their vast experience. Technical competencies refer to having the necessary skillsets to perform a specific job role and fulfil the required job responsibilities (Gauthier, 2020). During Focus Group Session 7, both Industry Expert 6 and Adult Educator 9 shared that older workers are content matter experts and have the technical knowledge of their respective industries at their fingertips. Older workers have picked up valuable knowledge about the technicalities of their job roles over the years—knowledge that cannot be simply taught or passed down in education institutions (De Mauro et al., 2018; Khalaf et al., 2021)—resulting in their confidence to perform well at work. Competencies at work allow older workers to flourish in their professions and contribute to positive wellbeing.

There are some job roles where only workers with substantial experience are allowed, and these are roles usually afforded only to competent older workers who have already accumulated different competencies to perform well. Older Workers 3 and 14 both highlighted how having sound technical knowledge is important for them to flourish in their respective industries, as the organisations would be impacted by a loss of time and resources if the work was poorly managed. Studies conducted on older workers in Europe and Australia affirm that older workers can fulfil the expectations of the job efficiently due to their vast technical knowledge and competencies (Johnson et al., 2017; Turek & Henkens, 2020). Older Worker 3 added that in her role as a national tourist guide, she observed older guides to be better than younger guides due to their rich work experience. Further, she is usually selected for more crucial projects and receives higher wages due to her proven track record.

Industry Expert 4 shared that due to the technical competencies older workers have, they have the confidence to guide their younger counterparts in the workplace and can

manage challenges. Older Worker 13 added that it is important to have the essential counselling skills as an addiction therapist, but it was more important to know how to utilise this skillset to help others. Similarly, Older Worker 14 asserted that besides having technical competencies as an employment mediator, such as the knowledge of employment law and mediation skills, he also needs to know how to apply these skills effectively and efficiently. Research studies confirm that having technical competencies alone is insufficient to survive in the global workplace; it is equally important to have insights into utilising these skills in the best way possible, which is referred to as having practical wisdom (Blockley, 2020; Van Minh et al., 2017).

Organisational competencies

Although the technical skills of older workers are vital for them to perform well in their jobs, having the appropriate organisational competencies is just as crucial for them to enjoy career longevity. Organisational competency is the competencies needed for the organisation to excel and remain competitive (Biagioli et al., 2018). The competencies provide an inventory of required behaviours, skills and attitudes of the workers in the organisation for it to succeed (Jaradat et al., 2017; Jernsittiparsert & Wajeetongratana, 2019). One example shared by Older Worker 3 was how being mindful and having good time management helps her in her job. She explained how being prepared, including contingencies for challenging situations, is crucial and ensures she can do her work well as a presenter on a cruise ship. Being experienced has not only developed the necessary competencies she needs, but it has also ingrained a sense of mindfulness and preparedness for adverse situations on cruise tours. These traits evidently come with experience and act as a form of meta-competency to become an essential part of the required competency for older workers.

Employer 1 added that older workers are able to take on challenging work and are more patient than their younger counterparts. Raab (2020) contends that older workers with higher levels of work ability and lower perceptions of age stereotypes tend to perform better

and remain in employment longer. This establishes older workers as assets to the workforce given their vast experiences, competencies and positive attitude towards work (Posey, 2021) despite suffering from prevalent ageist attitudes. Older Worker 15 also described the presence of older workers in the organisations as '*providing them with stability*'. This is because older workers have been through challenging periods with the organisation and can provide direction and level-headedness when confronted with difficulties. Older Worker 16 further explained that due to their years of experience, older workers had developed valuable connections within the organisation and the industry. However, if these older workers are not valued or retire without mentoring younger counterparts, their implicit knowledge is lost, affirming that older workers are assets to their organisations.

Industrial competencies

Industrial competencies are the competencies and level of performance, including the workforce characteristics and skillsets needed for success in a particular industry (Celarta & Esponilla II, 2021; Topcu, 2021). During Focus Group Session 7, Older Worker 10 and Industry Expert 6 highlighted that older workers are content experts in their respective industries and have the relevant industry knowledge. Industry Expert 4 added that older workers have an intimate knowledge of the industry and how to navigate challenges, as they appear to have a certain clairvoyance about industry trends. Older Worker 10 agreed, highlighting these workers' knowledge about industry trends and directions. Employer 2 added that some older workers may have worked for other organisations and industries before and have acquired the best practices from these organisations and industries. One advantage of having older workers in the organisation is that they bring the best practices in the industry and can adapt these in their current organisation (Caines et al., 2020; Principi et al., 2020).

Older workers also have a passion for the industries in which they work. As a result, this passion drives them to do even better and learn new skills, which makes them accomplished workers within their respective industries. Older Worker 7 highlighted that

being passionate about their work helps them flourish; for example, he revealed that he once *'sang for a group of tourists during a visit to the opera house in Singapore to create an authentic experience for them'*.

An important contributing factor to the older workers being competent is their network connections (Popkova & Zmiyak, 2019). Industry Expert 4 added that older workers' knowledge of the industry is entrenched in these connections. In this instance, industry knowledge refers to the assumed work processes, the implicit knowledge of doing things, the potential pitfalls of competing for the work required and the relationships between organisational and industry partners (Mokhtarzadeh et al., 2021). During Focus Group Session 4, when asked about the strengths of older workers observed in organisations, Older Worker 17 revealed that in the healthcare industry, one significant strength is their network and connections. These industry connections were particularly important during the pandemic (S. Kim, 2020) when resources were stretched and support from different hospitals was needed to manage the influx of COVID-19 cases in Singapore (Wong et al., 2020). Both Adult Educator 5 and Industry Expert 4 highlighted that older workers *'have the right connections'* and *'also know the people in the industry'*. This network of connections and entrenched knowledge foreground that older workers are assets to their organisations and industries. Industry Expert 6 explained that *'the connections'* and *'implicit knowledge older workers have will disappear with them when they leave the workforce'*. He argued that this *'would be detrimental'* and *'a great loss to the industry'*. Older workers' implicit knowledge and professional networks are advantageous to the wellbeing of their organisations (Berraies et al., 2020; Tang & Martins, 2021).

Wisdom and mentoring

Older workers have practical wisdom. Older Worker 14 explained that besides having *'a vast knowledge of the industry and all the technical skills, they have developed a sixth sense, the ability to foresee all possible outcomes in a situation'*. He suggested that having

this foresight and practical wisdom give older workers confidence in their competencies and strengths. Similarly, Adult Educator 9 described older workers in the security industry as ‘*level headed*’ and ‘*having the ability to manage and address challenging situations*’. The wisdom and foresight of older workers equip them with the capacity to navigate and manage challenging situations (Ferrero et al., 2020; Smith, 2021). Vasconcelos (2021) and Campbell-Reed et al. (2020) report that the previous experiences of older workers in other industries help them consolidate best practices in each industry. Older workers merge experiences and lessons from the different challenges in their working careers and subsequently develop crystallised wisdom (Hall, 2021; Kaltenberg et al., 2021). This is also known as ‘practical wisdom’, which is crucial for the workforce (Hirschi & Pang, 2020).

Industry Expert 3 contributed that older workers’ experiences and competencies are valuable and cannot be learned or adapted from textbooks. It is this implicit knowledge that gives older workers their wisdom and vision. Industry Expert 4, given his experience working with low-wage older workers, presented them as having intangible knowledge of the industry. He describes them as mentors who ‘*can guide the younger generation*’ and ‘*accelerate their learning process*’. Moreover, older workers can share their vision based on their experiences. This serves as a beacon to guide the younger generation and inspires them towards success. Studies in Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Canada report older workers being deployed as mentors in apprenticeship and entrepreneurial programs (Berger, 2021; Santini et al., 2020). In Australia and Germany, however, they are engaged to perform consultancy roles for the organisations within the industry they have worked in for many years (Luke & Neault, 2020; Wilckens et al., 2020). The recommendation for establishing more humanistic ideals in the workplace for older workers threatened by technology can be countered by engaging them as mentors and consultants (Lefkowitz, 2019; Micheel, 2021).

The complexities that motivate older workers to experience sustained employment and improve their employability is a stern challenge (Alcover & Topa, 2018). Older workers can

be dynamic, envision the positives and anticipate challenges that are likely to occur in their organisations and industries. Given their vast experience, older workers are accomplished, equipped with various competencies and have in-depth organisational and industrial knowledge. If afforded the opportunities to use their competencies, older workers flourish and remain as valuable assets to the workforce.

6.3.2.3 Meaning

The older workers in this study showed they were flourishing when they were engaged in meaningful work and found fulfilment in being gainfully employed. Meaning here refers to finding a purpose, fulfilment and satisfaction in the job that is done (Rothausen & Henderson, 2018). Many older workers in Singapore seek to stay active and be meaningfully engaged through work (Billet, 2011; MOM Singapore, 2019; Thang et al., 2019). Older workers seek meaningful engagement in their professions for both sustainability at work and their wellbeing. In this section, three categories underlying meaning are discussed: meaning due to career ambition, meaning in job role and responsibilities, and meaning due to alignment of values.

Meaning due to career ambitions

Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing promotes sustainability in the professional lives of workers (Mercado, 2018). One factor is finding meaning and understanding the value in one's work. In this study, older workers with firm career ambitions were observed finding meaning in their work. They were steadfast in their job roles and found meaning in their work due to their ambitions. For example, Older Worker 4 explained how he dreamed of providing for his family by conducting training. He shared that his wife found the profession financially unstable, but he convinced her it was viable due to his love for the job and eventually earned enough to support the family. Older Worker 4 found meaning in his job role and believed in his dream. A worker finding meaning in their job is indicative of their wellbeing. However, they are also more likely to succeed in their chosen profession (Weziak-

Bialowolska et al., 2020) and enjoy job stability, as they see the value in their work (Kooij et al., 2020a).

Two studies (Bertolino et al., 2011; Parker & Andrei, 2020) affirm that older workers with proactive personalities tend to be more motivated and are oriented by their professional goals. Older Workers 1 and 9 described how their career ambitions helped them find meaning in their respective professions. Older Worker 1 explained that he felt energised even when working extra hours and found meaning in his role as a service crew member in a fast-food restaurant, compared to his previous job where he was always looking to leave. Similarly, Older Worker 9, an animal and nature lover, found her calling as an animal trainer and observed an improvement in her overall wellbeing, having realised her ambition of working with animals. Older Worker 13 reflected that after some soul searching upon retiring from the stressful global banking industry, he wanted to find work that aligned with his ambition of helping and motivating others. He found meaning and flourished in his calling as an addiction therapist and wrote two books on addiction. Bilbija and Rendall (2021) and Elmes (2021) note significant improvements in workers' wellbeing when they found meaning in what they do for a living, which subsequently positively impacted their organisations. Moreover, workers who flourish contribute towards a more positive and inclusive workplace environment (Cardiff et al., 2020).

Meaning due to job roles and responsibilities

Besides finding meaning due to their ambitions, there are other instances when older workers found meaning in their job roles and responsibilities. Three of them commented that their roles at work are their own reward, and the salary was not their primary motivation. Older Worker 6 explained that money alone would not be the sole source of happiness. If older workers enjoy their work and find meaning, they would remain committed to their jobs and the organisations they work for, which benefits both. Heyes and Tomlinson (2021) and Kooij et al. (2020b) similarly report that salary is not a suitable predictor of performance

success at work; rather, finding meaning in the job role is a useful indicator that the worker will likely perform well and become an asset to the organisation. Older Worker 20 added that older workers offer stability to the organisation if they find meaning in their work, as they would value their role and not job-hop.

Older Worker 12 found meaning in her role as a national historian conducting World War II tours in Singapore. She explained that her sense of patriotism and love of history allows her to perform well at work and keeps her going despite being 80 years old. In this instance, the awareness and application of character strengths at work have consistently been associated with desirable feelings, attitudes and functioning (Strecker et al., 2020). Older Worker 12's ability to find meaning in her job role has facilitated her longevity and performance in this position despite her advanced age. Finding meaning in the job role has been shown to facilitate the flourishing of older workers, which in turn promotes employment sustainability and success (Luke & Neault, 2020).

Meaning due to alignment of values

In addition to finding meaning in their jobs, analysis of the data in this study indicated that older workers flourish at work when their personal values align with their organisation's values. During Focus Group Session 4, Adult Educator 5 highlighted how older workers always sought to add value to their organisations. The alignment of the organisation's values with the older workers' helps them find meaning in their work, which creates value. All participants at the session agreed with this observation. Three studies highlight the impact of finding meaning in work by aligning one's values with those of the organisation (Luke & Neault, 2020; Raab, 2020; Scales & Lepore, 2020), helping them flourish at work (Kooij et al., 2020b). This was observed in Older Worker 20, who described how she enjoys her job and finds meaning in the values associated with the job and organisation where salary alone is not her main concern. A coherent alignment of values between the older workers and the organisations they work for is indicative of their wellbeing (Chalofsky & Cavallero, 2019).

Older Workers 3 and 5 found meaning in their job roles in helping people and did not consider the salary to be the main driver for work. First, Older Worker 5 embodied how finding meaning in his job helping stroke patients in a nursing home allows him to flourish and find fulfilment, even though the job did not come with a lucrative salary. Second, Older Worker 3 found meaning in her job as a national tourist guide and enjoyed preparing for her tours, as she considers it an honour to represent Singapore. Her values align with that of Singapore's tourism board. Consequently, she was never concerned about the amount of hard work and time she invested without expecting better compensation and flourishes in her profession. Similarly, Older Worker 10, a water-conservationist, explained that he found his job meaningful as he shared similar values with the government on water as a precious resource for Singapore and actively works towards educating different segments of the population on the importance of water. He embraced the opportunities afforded to him and flourished in his role.

Older Workers 1 and 13 compared their levels of flourishing between their current job and previous jobs. Older Worker 1 described his current job as fulfilling. He found meaning in assisting customers and even enjoyed working extra hours, which contributed to his flourishing at work. He shared that he volunteered as a member of the worker's union to help other workers and found meaning in doing so. Older Worker 15 recounted finding meaning in providing the best service for the customers at the restaurant, as he enjoys interacting with customers as a service ambassador at the fast-food chain and always looked forward to going to work. These workers exhibit alignment between their personal values and their organisation's values. Older Worker 19 lamented the lack of support and shared experience of a challenging period while working towards becoming the captain of a container ship. He explained that this experience shaped his values, and now he aims to mentor younger cadets on their training journey and help them achieve their dream of captaining the ship.

Different motivations make it challenging to fully incorporate the complexities that motivate older workers to experience sustained employment and improve their employability (Alcover & Topa, 2018). However, in this study, older workers who found meaning in their jobs due to their professional ambitions, the meaning in their job roles, or alignment of personal and professional values were more likely to flourish and stay committed to their organisations.

6.3.2.4 Engagement

Engagement in this study refers to a deep interest and passion in acquiring knowledge and learning new skills (Ensour et al., 2020; Guillory, 2020). Several older workers in this study showed a deep interest and passion in acquiring knowledge and learning new skills. Their dynamic approach towards remaining relevant in the workforce has helped them flourish in their job roles. Engagement is certainly critical for the wellbeing of an aging workforce (Toth et al., 2021). Continuous engagement with learning and upskilling have enhanced older workers' competencies and their flourishing. This section discusses the different ways older workers engage with learning and has been organised into three categories: engagement due to job requirements, engagement due to personal growth, and engagement due to changing economic demands.

Engagement due to job requirements

Although it is often compulsory for older workers to attend training as work requirements, the older workers in this study were happy to be engaged in learning. For example, Older Worker 3 highlighted that when she attended training to facilitate tours conducted at the National Gallery of Singapore, she felt '*honoured and welcomed the opportunity to learn*', even though she was already very experienced. In addition, she explained that although they were given a stipend to attend the training, she was willing to attend training and develop her skillset without any expectation of compensation. Older Worker 13 explained how he embarked on a learning journey to qualify as an addiction

therapist, which he described as continuous growth. Older Worker 6 spoke of being passionate about sales and always looking to acquire new skills to improve. Being engaged in learning reveals a positive state of wellbeing (Bartels & Jackson, 2021) and suggests these workers want to remain relevant and valuable to the workforce.

Older Worker 12 shared that he adopts a dynamic attitude when it comes to learning. He explains that due to his job requirements as a pilot, it is critical to continuously improve by *'reflecting and learning from his mistakes'*. Older Worker 18 recounted that when she started out, she *'learnt while on-the-job by seeking out her senior colleagues and asking for their help'*. She reflected that she could perform well by *'taking down notes on the correct procedures she has to perform'* to ensure she learned how to do her work effectively. Imran et al. (2020) examine the impact of organisational support on employees' engagement, finding that employees who are engaged in their job roles are likely to flourish and thrive at work. These examples show the positive attitude of Older Workers 12 and 18 towards learning and how keeping themselves engaged allows them to flourish at work.

Engagement due to changing industry trends and economic demands

Given its lack of natural resources and small geographical size, Singapore must establish a 21st-century knowledge-based economy to contend with changing dynamics in the global arena to give it an advantage in rapidly changing global economies (Osborne & Borkowska, 2017). Older workers are also engaged in learning due to the rapidly changing economic demands. Industry Expert 7 described older workers as being *'bridges of knowledge who are able to traverse between the knowledge they have and the knowledge they need to learn to cope with changing industry trends'*. She explains that the capacity to do this allows them to adapt to changing trends as they can *'anticipate the future and marry the past with this anticipated future'*. An awareness of the changing trends in the industry and economy helps a worker anticipate challenges or seize opportunities in the employment market (Do et al., 2020). Having this awareness is also indicative of flourishing in older workers.

Adult Educators 4 and 10 consider older workers capable and driven. They are continuously engaged in learning new skills and are always aware of changes in industry trends and economic demands. Employer 3 describes the older workers as never getting tired of learning and always engaged in looking for something to help them perform better. Older Workers 13 and 19 both asserted that found *'engaging in learning is good for health'* and Older Worker 19 added that he has no problems learning from younger or junior workers as he believes all learning is useful in the future. Older Worker 13 also shared that he found *'learning important in his role as an addiction therapist as it helps him to keep up to date with the latest trends that will impact his research work'*. Similarly, Older Worker 2 highlighted that being engaged in learning is crucial and *'having this mindset will help us survive in a competitive workforce'*. It is evident that strong engagement with learning improves the employment wellbeing of the older worker.

Engagement due to personal growth and passion

Another form of engagement towards learning observed in this study relates to personal growth and passion. For example, Older Worker 13, despite *'facing many challenges in pursuing his aim of becoming an addiction therapist, persisted and engaged with acquiring new skills'*. This passion for learning can be credited as one key reason for his success. Although it was very challenging to achieve accreditation in a completely new industry upon retirement, Older Worker 3 kept on learning and explained that he *'thoroughly enjoyed the process'*. He added that even when *'he was in the finance industry, his continuous engagement with knowledge allowed him to flourish and led him to eventually achieving his ambition'*. Crucially, continuous engagement with learning creates value in the older workers and indicates that these workers will thrive given their attitude towards continuous growth (Mehta, 2020). Adult Educator 5 confirmed that she observes this positive attitude in older workers and enthusiasm for learning, particularly in their questioning and collaboration with

peers. In learning, a dynamic attitude is very helpful in consolidating and benefiting from learning (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2020; Kanfer et al., 2020).

Industry Expert 7 highlighted that her desire to learn and acquire new skills such as digital literacy reflects older workers' attitudes and mindset. As an organisational consultant, she explains that this capacity for lifelong learning in older workers helps them bridge the past and the future. This develops their knowledge and allows them to identify potential transformations in the industry. Both Adult Educator 2 and Employer 3 described the older workers as independent and passionate learners. They observed that age is not a barrier for older workers who are willing to take charge of their learning and are aware of their learning needs. Employer 3 added, '*they are there not for the money but merely the learning experience*'. Learning is about having a forward-looking mindset to keep on learning and progressing, which makes these older workers dynamic and future-focused. As Bakker and van Woerkom (2018) confirm, dynamic workers are very likely to flourish and enjoy success in their professions.

Older workers in this study are also dynamic when it comes to learning. Adult Educator 10 described them as willing and passionate learners. Older Worker 2 demonstrated her enthusiasm towards learning when she reasoned that she would '*go all out*' to learn, while Older Worker 9 explained how she continues to reinforce her learning even when she is not at work. Similarly, Older Worker 13 reflected this dynamism by describing how he acquired counselling skills through research. A survey in Libya reported that at least 80% of managers had a positive attitude towards having older workers because they are experienced, less prone to errors and have a positive learning ability (Salah & Habtoor, 2020).

Older Worker 19 displayed his dynamic attitude and approach to learning; for him, there will always be something new to learn and all knowledge '*can be useful one day*'. Older Worker 12 explained his engagement with learning by reflecting on his mistakes and knowledge gaps. He then sought to learn ways to fill this gap and manage challenges at work.

Older Workers 11 and 20 both demonstrated a willingness to learn and passion for acquiring skills outside of work for leisure. Older Worker 11 explained that as a historian, she feels engaged by sharing the knowledge she has learned and doing this makes her *'feel alive and well ... it's my passion to learn and share with others.'* Passion is a significant factor in the personal growth of older workers that positively influences their career progression (Hagel et al., 2017; Posey, 2021).

The dynamism of older workers in this study is evident in their positive engagement with learning and willingness to acquire new skills. The older workers are very willing learners and enjoy gathering new skills, not simply for economic or professional gain. Therefore, an important factor in older workers' flourishing is their deep-rooted desire to keep acquiring new skills and engage with learning in their respective job roles. Besides their enjoyment of learning, another attribute in the flourishing of older workers is their ability to develop positive relationships.

6.3.2.5 Positive relationships

Positive relationships refer to the good relations and connections people develop with others around them; some signs of having developed a positive relationship include respect and trust (Albers & Salomons, 2021). Developing positive relationships with colleagues and peers in the workforce helps older workers flourish in their respective job roles. This section discusses two forms of positive relationships older workers developed in their respective jobs: positive relationships for workplace needs, and positive relationships for organisational and professional needs.

Positive relationships for workplace needs

The S-BIT theory of work applied in this study suggests that workers who experience positive emotional states and experiences with access to opportunities for professional growth and actualisation in their professional lives are likely to achieve positive work engagement and enjoy a holistic state of wellbeing (Allan et al., 2019b). Older workers who demonstrate

the ability to develop positive relationships flourish in their professions and display a positive state of wellbeing. Adult Educator 9 and Older Worker 20 explained that in the security industry, for example, building positive relationships is crucial to ensure security arrangements are carried out properly. Older Worker 20 shared that having conversations and building relationships is an essential aspect of the security industry, and these relationships make the work easier. Older Worker 3 added that she performed well as a national tour guide by building positive relationships with her attachés during a global summit. She explained that due to these positive relationships, she received more job offers as she flourished in her role as a guide.

Older Workers 6 and 15, however, both enjoy building relationships with people, which is vital in the retail, food and beverage industry. They felt energised by their interactions with customers and developed positive professional relationships. As a result, they performed well at work and experienced positive mental health. Besides being beneficial for performance, developing positive relationships helps older workers with their mental health. Studies confirm that developing positive social or professional relationships can enable a positive mental state of health (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2021; Harb et al., 2019; Waters, Cameron et al., 2021; Wissing et al., 2021).

Older Worker 10 revealed that developing positive relationships in his role as a military officer helped create a bond with the men and establish a coherent dynamic allowing them to work well together as a unit. Zacher et al. (2018) argue that older workers flourish in roles that involve working together in teams with others and collaborating effectively. Similarly, Older Worker 17 thought empathy and building positive relationships with the junior nurses she mentors helps establish a positive working environment for the team and allows everyone, including herself, to flourish. Having positive relationships can build positive team dynamics and facilitate the mentoring process for younger workers.

Besides helping older workers flourish at work, building positive relationships help them cope with crises at work and creates new employment opportunities. For example, Older Worker 18 showed empathy to the flying crew and built a positive relationship with them. During crises or in instances of urgency, the crew would always help her out. Older Worker 13 revealed that building good relationships with her peers helped create opportunities and facilitated entry into new industries. Steed et al. (2021) observe that positive relationships at work are significant in creating professional opportunities and opening up entry into new sectors for business (Sarta et al., 2021).

Positive relationships for organisational and professional learning needs

Another factor to account for the flourishing of older workers is the positive relationships they develop to serve organisational and professional learning needs. Older Worker 14 explained that the relationships developed when working in teams at work was beneficial because he benefited from the diversity in the team and learned valuable software skills from the younger members. Older Workers 11 and 12 echoed similar sentiments. Older Worker 11 acquired useful knowledge as a historian from members of her fraternity, and their passion for history helped them come together and develop strong bonds. Similarly, Older Worker 12's team rallied around one another to help overcome challenges during a rigorous learning journey to obtain a flying licence as cadets. Adult Educator 9 revealed that older workers who attended training due to industry requirements are '*close knitted*' and happy to support one another. He added that relationships are essential in establishing support networks and positive relationships among various stakeholders. Positive relationships within a team improve team dynamics and allow members to flourish and perform well (Geue, 2018; van Woerkom et al., 2020).

Adult Educator 5 observed that older workers established positive camaraderie during training sessions, which facilitated the learning process. Positive relationships allow them to share best practices and create employment opportunities. A positive learning environment

can develop lasting relationships between the learners and yield many benefits for the learners in the future (Li et al., 2020; Ogunyemi et al., 2020).

Positive relationships at work benefit older workers, allowing them to flourish and enjoy good mental health. Being socially connected allows older workers to stay current and improves their wellbeing (Li et al., 2020).

The next section discusses the construct of grit—the other half of the dynamic-grit mindset. It argues older workers' flourishing can be attributed to them embodying the dynamic-grit mindset. The five factors forming the concept of grit in this study are discipline, commitment, perseverance, passion and vision (see Figure 6.2), which enable the older workers in this study to navigate Singapore's competitive economy and surmount the challenges inherent in a competitive and constantly changing workforce.

The important role of work and mental health in older workers was highlighted in the literature review (see Section 2.5). Having good mental health has a reciprocal effect in ensuring that older workers enjoy positive wellbeing due to sustained employment in competitive economies (Bjelajac et al., 2019; Cresswell-Smith, et al., 2022; Križaj et al., 2019). The dynamic-grit mindset plays a vital role in the mental health of older workers who experienced sustained employment. The discussion surrounding the dynamic-grit mindset in this chapter has shown that older workers valuable assets and can help address the labour deficit in Singapore's workforce.

6.3.3 Problem-solving and emotional intelligence

The data analysed in this chapter has shown that the five factors from Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing and the concept of grit are critical to the flourishing of the older workers in Singapore. However, older workers' flourishing is facilitated by problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence. The next two sections demonstrate how problem-solving and emotional intelligence enable the flourishing of older workers in Singapore.

6.3.3.1 Problem-solving

Problem-solving in this study refers to the process of analysing challenges (Sinha & Kapur, 2021) and seeking solutions to difficult or complex issues in relation to work (Hanschke et al., 2021). Problem-solving has been organised into two categories: problem-solving and competency, and problem-solving and resilience. Problem-solving is considered an essential skill in the global workplace (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020), and its effectiveness is more pronounced than ever as many organisations struggle to survive in the wake of the pandemic (Khachan & Cappelletti, 2021; Reeves & Levin, 2021).

Problem-solving and competency

Due to vast experience and competencies developed over many years of work, older workers have become effective problem-solvers. Older Worker 19 shared that older workers can look at *'a challenge from a different perspective'* and *'the problem-solving skills come with maturity'*. Employer 1 thought that older workers have *'a lot of operational experience'* and *'can provide practical solutions as they have seen the best practices in the industry'*. The experience of an older worker is multifaceted (Froidevaux et al., 2020) and cannot be entirely replicated in training (Visser et al., 2020). The work experiences of older workers can be considered a form of crystallised wisdom and a cumulative effort of many years of working experience and navigating organisational challenges (Nusbaum & Schneider, 2020; Wei & Wang, 2020).

Older workers have the knowledge and wisdom to mentor younger workers on problem-solving skills. Problem-solving is a skill that cannot be fully taught in training institutions but is best learned through real-world work experience (Azam, 2020). Adult Educator 7 explained that problem-solving involves practical knowledge that older workers have, and this can serve *'as a guide'* for organisations and younger workers. Industry Expert 3 added that *'problem-solving is a key aspect of work'* that younger workers must learn from their older counterparts, as these workers have effective problem-solving skills already put

into practice over many years. Employer 1 summarised this skill as *'a marriage of both theory and practice'* and *'actual practitioner knowledge'*, which is vital to solve organisational challenges and steer the organisation ahead in uncertain times (Middleton, 2020). As such, problem-solving is a competency that makes older workers intangible, valuable assets to the workforce.

Problem-solving and resilience

Resilience is a key factor that accounts for the flourishing and effective problem-solving skills of older workers. Older Worker 1 highlighted that older workers have the life skills and ability to turn things around, even during challenging times when such skills cannot be encapsulated in training courses or found in younger workers new to the workforce. Industry Expert 1 added that in the global working environments, there are *'many unknowns and uncertainties'*, and *'it is impossible to train or prepare for every single possible challenge'*. Given the uncertainty in the global business environment (Al-Thaqeb et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2020), the resilience and experience older workers have to turn things around provides stability to the organisation. Older Worker 19 added that there are a lot of challenges and pressure in global organisations; older workers are not overwhelmed by these challenges as they have *'different tricks to solve problems'* and *'the resilience to continue functioning'* to see through the challenges.

Older Worker 5 explained that older workers *'have the ability to think on the spot'* and because of their *'resilience and knowledge are unfazed in a VUCA [volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity] environment of the global economy'*. Older Worker 17 reflected that training junior nurses in a hospital environment is challenging in the wake of the pandemic and it is important *'to be able to problem-solve effectively'*, which helps them remain resilient knowing that they are able to mitigate and manage challenges during uncertain times. The correlation between problem-solving and resilience is evident in older workers who have the required repertoire of problem-solving skills, enabling their resilience

during challenges, crises and uncertain times (Prayag et al., 2020). Problem-solving skills and resilience are necessary for organisations (Johnson & McLean, 2021), a combination that can determine survival or extinction in a volatile global economy (Hynes et al., 2020; Liang & Cao, 2021).

6.3.3.2 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the other determinant found to facilitate the flourishing of older workers. Emotional intelligence is a term fashioned by Peter Salavoy and John Mayer in their 1990 article ‘Emotional Intelligence’ in the *Journal of Imagination, Cognition and Personality* (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Dan Goleman (1998) expanded Salavoy and Mayer’s ideals by defining emotional intelligence as a person’s ability to be aware of their own feelings and those of others, motivate ourselves, and manage emotions effectively to deal with different situations. Mayer et al. (2003) characterise emotional intelligence as a set of four related abilities: perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions. Emotional intelligence is a well-known construct, originally referring to E. L. Thorndike’s term, as the ability to understand and manage people and act wisely in social relationships (Petrides, 2010). However, emotional intelligence in this study refers to the ability to comprehend, apply and manage emotions in positive ways to communicate effectively, empathise with others, overcome challenges, resolve conflicts and relieve stress at work (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2020; Cui, 2021). Emotional intelligence is discussed in managing challenges and building positive relationships.

Emotional intelligence and managing challenges

The older workers in this study have a high degree of emotional intelligence and use this to their advantage in workplaces. Older Workers 6, 11 and 15 shared how emotional intelligence is a key factor that allows them to effectively manage challenges in their work. Older Worker 11 considers emotional intelligence important for her to manage demanding tourists, while Older Worker 15 uses it as an employment mediator: ‘*one of the most crucial*

skills to have in mediation is emotional intelligence'. Industry Expert 4, a CEO in the cleaning industry, witnessed that older workers *'can easily deescalate a tense situation or conflict'* very quickly using their emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is an important skill in particular industries. For example, Adult Educator 9 expressed that when it comes to handling conversations and difficult people in the security industry, communication strategies and knowing how to *'size people up'* and *'handle demanding and sensitive situations'* is vital. Older Worker 17 added that in a healthcare environment, particularly during the pandemic, situations with patients and families can get *'heated up'*, which demands that *'staff demonstrate good emotional intelligence'* to handle such situations. Kooij (2020b) asserts that older workers are capable of self-regulation, which helps them handle difficult situations well, and being able to regulate themselves helps sustain their psychological wellbeing (Dirican & Erdil, 2020; Jimenez, 2020).

Emotional intelligence and building positive relationships

Besides being important to handle demanding situations, emotional intelligence is required to build positive relationships and open up employment opportunities. Industry Expert 3 and Adult Educator 7 highlighted their abilities to communicate intelligently and soft skills—a skill lacking in the workforce—to *'identify disconnects'* and *'build relationships within the industry'*. Being able to do this helps develop positive relationships, which are crucial in many industries. Adult Educator 7 added that having positive relationships is something older workers value, as it provides them *'with a sense of assurance and security with their peers'* at work. This sense of assurance allows them to have confidence in their strengths and use this positively to flourish (Lucey & van Nieuwerburgh, 2021) in their respective job roles. Older Worker 6 similarly revealed that older workers are often seen *'collaborating and working together'* and use their *'emotional intelligence well to help out one another during difficult periods like the pandemic'*. Positive relationships were

highlighted in Section 5.4.2.5 as one of the factors indicative of the wellbeing of the older workers. Developing positive relationships enables older workers to flourish (Parker & Andrei, 2020) and benefits both the older workers and their organisations in the longer term.

Emotional intelligence in developing relationships helps older workers have confidence in their work, which in turn improves their mental health. For example, Older Worker 18 shared that '*emotional intelligence is key*' to her role as a flight administrator as it '*helps her develop good relationships*' with the pilots. Doing this, she explains, '*helps ensure the wellbeing of pilots*' and subsequently ensures international safety and legal aviation requirements are fulfilled. Employer 1 highlighted that the older workers in his team are '*excellent at developing positive relationships with customers*'. He added that their communication and connection was most helpful in building relationships with customers. This clearly has a mutually beneficial effect for both the organisations and the older workers. Having positive relationships at work has been shown to improve an organisation's overall wellbeing and enhance its workers' positive mental health (der Kinderen et al., 2020; Salas-Vallina et al., 2021).

Adult Educator 7 noted that '*many organisations now lacked the emotional intelligence inherent in the older workers*'. This can be deleterious as emotional intelligence is a core skill required in organisations to navigate a *VUCA* global environment (Hurley et al., 2020). Due to their vast experience in different organisations, meeting different people and handling various work situations, older workers in this study have developed excellent emotional intelligence skills. By using emotional intelligence effectively, older workers flourish, perform well in their jobs, and experience positive mental health and overall wellbeing (Karimi et al., 2021; Riyanto et al., 2022). This section has discussed problem-solving and emphasised its use alongside resilience and technical competencies. Similarly, this skill has facilitated the flourishing of the older workers and worked well with two factors from Huppert and So's (2011) theory of flourishing. To conclude, both problem-solving and

emotional intelligence are determinants with a significant influence that enables the flourishing of older workers and is indicative of their positive wellbeing.

6.4 Work Culture and Management

The Singapore government is described by media analysts, scholars and international activists as being driven by economic pragmatism and strict authoritarianism (Cheang & Choy, 2021). These values are generally manifested in the work culture in Singapore (Woo, 2018). The local work culture largely centres on discipline, punctuality, productivity and ROI (Deyo, 2019; Chew, 2017). As discussed in Section 1.2, Singapore's strong and steady performance in economic growth and development has been driven by the government's relentless strategic drive into globally relevant industries and sectors. However, older workers are often sidelined when it comes to employment in key industries (Mackenzie & Marks, 2019). Older workers are usually seen as liabilities in Singapore's workforce (Chay & Kim, 2021; Mehta, 2020). Many organisations perceive them as a significant disadvantage, negatively impacting their productivity and ROI (Wang & Fang, 2020; Hashiguchi et al., 2020). However, as the discussion on older workers' character strengths in Section 2.9 suggests, the appropriate application of these strengths in the workplace can help advance productivity, increase engagement and improve morale (Baer, 2015; Macfarlane, 2019). The importance of having a supportive workplace context (Cooperrider, 2017) that enables older workers to utilise their strengths to flourish is discussed here. Establishing positive workplace environments are also advantageous to the organisations, creating shared benefits that support the wellbeing of both the older worker and their organisations. The discussion will follow key areas into two categories: positive work culture and management support.

6.4.1 Positive work culture

Workplace culture refers to shared values, belief systems, attitudes, the way of working and the assumptions that workers in a workplace share and adhere to (Cardiff et al.,

2020). A positive workplace culture improves teamwork, raises morale, increases productivity and efficiency, and enhances workforce retention (Clack, 2021; Rajoo, 2020). A positive work culture can be significant in persuading an applicant to work for an organisation (Grant & McGhee, 2021; Imran et al., 2020). Further, having such a work culture can help an organisation achieve its core objectives (Ali & Anwar, 2021; Bantha & Nayak, 2020). However, besides being a persuasive factor that promotes organisational effectiveness, a positive work culture can facilitate the flourishing of workers in that particular organisation. Industry Expert 6 shared his thoughts on the type of workplace culture that would enable the flourishing of older workers. He explained that *'a family-like atmosphere is beneficial'* and older workers would appreciate a *'nurturing environment and supportive workplace'* and *'place wellbeing at the heart of how success is measured'*. The fact that older workers prefer working in teams was also highlighted by Adult Educator 9. Industry Expert 7 added that *'the older workers should be leading the way'*, and they need to be given the space to *'create and lead as they have a wealth of experience'*. He added that flourishing is not about the *'dollars and cents only'* but about the systems and structures that *'must be empowered'* to *'create meaning for older workers'* and *'unleash their potential by giving them the opportunity to create value'*.

As highlighted in the S-BIT theory of work in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.2.2.2), positive individual characteristics are important in the work context and influence positive work outcomes. High levels of wellbeing are found in workplaces with inclusive and supportive organisational policies (Anderson, 2018; Owens et al., 2019). Employer 3 added that it is essential to have a work culture that *'allows older workers to share success stories'*, not only to motivate but also to introduce *'best practices from other organisations and industries as they have the experience'*. Studies (Kim & Plester, 2021; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021; Yang et al., 2021) on organisational culture report that having family-like work cultures promotes wellbeing and enhances the staff's work performance (Imran et al., 2020). Further,

working in groups assists the different work teams to achieve their targets and improve the overall dynamics of the teams to attain organisational goals (Sabuhari et al., 2020).

Conversely, a negative work culture can smother organisational ambitions, hamper organisational dynamics and disorientate the workers (D'Cruz, 2021). Employer 3 highlighted the consequence of what she believes to be a '*negative work culture*' in Singapore where '*there is a glass ceiling and no open-door policy*' with the management, creating a very negative work culture. Employer 1 added that '*hiring is a long and expensive process*' and it would not be practical to keep hiring new staff if recruitment was conducted poorly. He suggested establishing '*a buddy system*' and engaging older workers by setting up '*a work culture department*' to sustain a positive work culture and healthy work environment. When considering recruitment, Employer 2 also shared how he utilises a matrix system to ensure the hiring process in his organisation is streamlined. This allows his organisation to hire the right older workers who are likely to flourish.

In addition to the hiring system, another effective aspect of workplace culture is workplace strategies that engender a positive culture while simultaneously improving the quality of work (Butler, 2020). Industry Expert 2 revealed that the '*workplace culture is fundamental to every organisation and hiring must be done well*'. He felt that older workers should be '*treated as assets or not mere digits*' to observe their true value. Research studies on work culture (Tamunomiebi & Mezeh, 2021; Tiwari & Jha, 2021; Van Der Wal et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020) assert that workplaces with negative cultures suffer from a high turnover of staff and poor organisational performance. Industry Expert 1 suggested introducing '*corporate volunteerism*' as a form of corporate social responsibility. He revealed that during volunteering, the older workers '*would not have pressure*' when volunteering and adopt '*a culture of sharing*'. He added that they would '*take back the learning during volunteering back to the workplace*', and terms this as the '*MERE-exposure effect*' or '*unconscious learning*' (Cutting, 2020; Mrkva & Van Boven, 2020). The *MERE* exposure

effect—also known as the familiarity principle—describes people’s tendency to develop preferences for things simply because of familiarity and constant exposure (O’Brien, 2021). Industry Expert 1 suggests the ‘*positive mindset*’ gained from helping others will be taken back to the workplace, thus transforming the workplace culture. As such, involvement in corporate volunteerism improves workers’ wellbeing (Ahmed et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2020) and introduces a positive workplace culture (Farooq et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020).

A positive work culture can go a long way in improving the wellbeing of older workers. This is best expressed by Older Worker 10, who shared that ‘*work was like home for her*’ where everyone was family. They ‘*persevered as a family and went through challenges together*’. Even the management would be ‘*working together with the workers as a team*’ and treated everyone well. Such a work culture enables the organisation to achieve its goals (Clack, 2021) while its workers flourish.

6.4.2 Management support

One crucial characteristic of positive leadership is demonstrating virtuous behaviour (Waters, Algeo et al., 2021). This is because when employees feel valued, recognised and cared for—positive effects of leadership virtuousness—they can develop behavioural repertoires and use these to build up their performances (Hendriks et al., 2020; Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2017; Nagarajan et al., 2019). One significant factor enabling the flourishing of older workers is a supportive and virtuous management style. This refers to a form of management that promotes the development and sustenance of a positive work culture. A positive work culture has multiple benefits, including facilitating the flourishing of older workers. For example, Older Worker 1 explained how ‘*a positive working environment made them feel like family*’. He elaborated that compared to his previous jobs, the ‘*management was supportive*’, which led to positive wellbeing for the workers.

Supportive management is another significant factor responsible for the flourishing of older workers (Cole & Hollis-Sawyer, 2021). The current study identified six ways support from the management assisted older workers' flourishing: constructive feedback, trust, flexibility, appreciation, job rotation and upskilling, and support and feeling valued.

6.4.2.1 Constructive feedback

Industry Expert 1 highlighted the importance of providing feedback appropriately to *'build a resilient mindset'*. He explained that *'feedback given to older workers has to be constructive without dismissing their wisdom and work experience'*. It must be *'an instrument to motivate and support the older workers, not mark them down'*. Older Worker 20 confirmed that management are the *'cornerstones of the organisation'* and when they give appropriate feedback, older workers like herself can benefit, improve and be *'entrusted with more responsibilities'*.

6.4.2.2 Trust

Older Worker 3 revealed feeling encouraged to perform even better when the *'management entrusted her with responsibilities'*. Trusting older workers may work in management's favour. Older Worker 3 shared that she felt empowered by the trust given by her employer. She explained that *'the management would always call upon the seniors to handle the major projects'*. She felt this trust was *'empowering and it was a form of intrinsic motivation'* for the older workers. In addition to trust, older workers also thrive when given opportunities. Older Worker 18 shared that she flourished and stayed with the same organisation throughout her entire career *'because of the trust showed and opportunities given by the management'*.

6.4.2.3 Flexibility

A supportive management also exercises flexibility in managing older workers. Employer 1 explained that *'older workers sometimes have to be home early to take care of their spouses who are unwell or attend to household responsibilities and as such require*

flexible hours and shifts'. The *'management has to be flexible and support the needs of these workers to get the best out of them'*. This flexibility shown by the management encourages older workers to perform better and promotes employment sustainability, as the older workers value the flexibility provided.

6.4.2.4 Appreciation

Employer 2 demonstrated genuine appreciation for his workers when he attended to an act of honesty by one of his workers personally. He turned up at the older worker's workplace and awarded him a *'certificate of appreciation personally'* even though he was the CEO of that organisation. His organisation's mantra was *'the 3 "Rs" system'*. It *'represents the need to respect the team, recognise the good work done and reward fairly for all in the team'*. He highlighted that these principles were foundational to ensuring his workers have the platform to flourish.

6.4.2.5 Job rotation and upskilling

Employer 2 revealed that his organisation encourages job rotation and upskilling to enhance productivity and improve the capabilities of the staff as a whole. He hopes this will *'keep the older workers motivated and improve employment sustainability'*. Li and Lin (2020) suggest that management's trust in their subordinates evokes employee self-management and self-motivation and displays organisational trust and empowerment to employees. Empowering older workers has a significant positive influence on their environment in a work context (Black, 2020; Ruiz-Palomo et al., 2020).

6.4.2.6 Support and feeling valued

Older Worker 14 similarly revealed how *'he flourished when his manager supported and ensured that he was supported and valued as a member of the team'*. Support from management and valuing older workers was an enabling factor for their flourishing. Industry Expert 4 added that during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was important to show *'support for the older workers'* and *'remove discrimination'*. He explains the need for *'adjustment from all*

stakeholders’ to *‘create an environment conducive’* for older workers to thrive. One suggestion was *‘using appreciative inquiry’*. Industry Expert 7 similarly suggested that *‘appreciative inquiry could be employed to engage older workers and explore the kind of culture they want to persevere; to create an appreciative work culture for older workers’*. Differentiated and flexible thinking and actions among the management were crucial during COVID-19, given the multitude of uncertainties workplaces face and the frequent adaptations they need to make (Obrenovic et al., 2020; Venuleo et al., 2020). The management in any organisation plays a crucial role in the wellbeing of older workers (Cole & Hollis-Sawyer, 2021). Management exercising flexibility, showing trust, and providing support, opportunities and empowerment advances flourishing for older workers and their organisations.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the significant role of the dynamic-grit mindset in the working lives of older workers. The discussion presented 1) challenges and consequences that stem from ageism in Singapore’s workforce, 2) older workers’ dynamic-grit mindset and how this positions them as assets to their organisations and Singapore’s workforce, and 3) work contexts and management styles that contribute to conducive work environments for older workers, enabling them to flourish and utilise their strengths to the organisation’s benefit.

Ageism has affected older workers, limiting employment opportunities and diminishing their value to Singapore’s workforce. However, the discussion in this chapter demonstrated how the dynamic-grit mindset of older workers facilitated their success beyond the systemic inequities caused by ageist attitudes. The next chapter provides a conclusion to the study. It then reviews its strengths, significance and limitations and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

To conclude the study, this chapter reviews its response to the research questions, highlights its main findings, identifies its significance, strengths and contributions, and considers its limitations and recommendations for future research. As outlined in the introductory chapter, this is the first study to use Cooperrider and Srivastava's (1987) appreciative inquiry methodology as a research methodology to examine the challenges brought by ageism in Singapore's workforce. Thus, it has the potential to act as a transformative instrument to change ageist perceptions of older workers and argues that they remain relevant to Singapore's workforce. The findings highlight the precarious situation of older workers to inform policymakers in Singapore's government that older workers are assets to the workforce and can contribute to the wellbeing of the nation in their advanced years.

Chapter 1 introduced the problem of the demands in sustaining Singapore's economy and its challenges in the employment landscape in the context of its increasingly aging population. It explained that the focus on economic and employability policies when studying older workers had shifted attention away from older workers onto materialistic, political and labour concerns of the state (Böttcher et al., 2018). This led to the precarious position of older workers who find it challenging to be employed or remain employed in Singapore.

Chapter 2 presented a scoping review of the literature related to older workers, employment policies, ageism, character strengths, mental health and wellbeing. It defined terms including 'older worker' and examined the employment policies affecting these workers' employability. It discussed the role of work on the mental health of older workers and highlighted that ageism is prevalent in many organisations. An examination of the motivations and character strengths of the older workers revealed an intricate relationship

between character strengths and wellbeing, highlighting the significance of being in employment on the mental health of older workers.

The theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 outlined three theories: critical gerontology, Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing, and Owen et al.'s (2019) S-BIT theory of work. This theoretical framework is significant because it allows analysis of the challenges older workers face through concepts in critical gerontology. However, this focus was also shifted to identify appreciative factors of the older workers that enhance their wellbeing by analysing the data through Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing. This identified the enabling factors that facilitate older workers' flourishing and optimal functioning using Owen et al.'s (2019) S-BIT theory of work. The three theories are significant in understanding and explaining the correlations between character strengths, work performances, organisational behaviour and wellbeing of the older workers. This approach enables policymakers, the government and organisations to develop strategies and implement initiatives to facilitate the optimal functioning and wellbeing of these workers for positive outcomes.

Chapter 4 described Cooperrider and Srivastava's (1987) appreciative inquiry method as the methodological approach for this research study. The first two phases of appreciative inquiry were employed to initiate a positive transformation of older workers in Singapore. Forty semi-structured interviews were conducted during the Discovery phase and 10 focus group sessions were organised for the Dream phase. The data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2014) six-step thematic analysis, and the main findings were presented in Chapter 5. The data presented in this chapter established a case for the precarious situation of older workers caused by ageism prevalent in Singapore's workforce. The older workers were a foundational part of Singapore's labour force since the post-independence days, forming the cornerstones of the manufacturing, finance and transportation sectors. However, they are now increasingly relegated to secondary employment markets, including in sunset industries such

as the security and cleaning industries (Charles & Wen, 2021; Tan et al., 2020). The discussion of the findings in Chapter 6 established that the emphasis on economic and employability policies in Singapore has shifted the attention from fully understanding the plight of the older workers. Consequently, the deficit in Singapore's workforce has been exacerbated by failing to see how older workers are indeed assets who can help address the labour concerns of the state. Chapter 7 concludes with the significance of the study, followed by the recommendations and limitations.

7.2 Summary of the Research

This research aimed to challenge prevailing attitudes towards older workers by identifying appreciative factors of older workers as perceived by key stakeholders, including employers and industry experts in Singapore's employment sector. The findings demonstrated that older workers are assets to Singapore's workforce. The findings from this study are expected to inform policymakers, shape training initiatives and create an awareness of older workers as assets to the Singapore's workforce. The research questions for this study were:

- 1) What are the appreciative factors and enabling influences behind these factors for older workers in employment in Singapore?
- 2) How would these appreciative factors inform employment and training policies?

The objectives for this study were to:

- evaluate the appreciative factors in the working lives of 30 older workers from four different ethnic groups (i.e., Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others) in Singapore
- analyse the perspectives of 10 adult educators and 10 employers or industry experts on the appreciative factors of older workers in Singapore
- critique government policies on older workers in the last five years (2017–2021)
- synthesise the appreciative dialogues of older workers, adult educators, employers and industry experts and collectively envision a desired future for older workers in Singapore.

The dynamic-grit mindset in Singapore's aged labour force was impacted by systemic inequities in a workforce driven by economic practicality and global forces. These inequities

hamper employment opportunities for older workers and reduce the likelihood of them continuing to contribute to Singapore's workforce. Ageism can be a damaging factor for older workers and creates barriers to continue contributing to the workforce and using their strengths. Using the Discovery and Dream phases of Cooperrider and Srivastava (1987)'s appreciative inquiry methodology, an evaluation of the appreciative factors of older workers revealed how their dynamic-grit mindset facilitated successful careers and enhanced their employability in a competitive workforce.

This study extended Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing, arguing that it is inadequate for explaining the flourishing of older workers in Singapore. The study findings demonstrated that grit is a core component of flourishing in addition to five of the factors found by Huppert and So (2011) (i.e., resilience, meaning, engagement, competence and positive relationships). Two other determinants—problem-solving and emotional intelligence—were found to be significant skills in enabling the dynamic-grit mindset of older workers. All of these components are encapsulated within the dynamic-grit mindset (see Figure 6.1). Duckworth et al.'s (2007) concept of grit has also been extended by the findings in this study. The grit displayed by older workers through the dynamic-grit mindset comprises five different components. In addition to passion and perseverance, as theorised by Duckworth et al. (2007), the current study found that discipline, commitment and vision were also components of grit. Thus, components forming the concept of grit observed in the older workers are 1) discipline, 2) commitment, 3) perseverance, 4) passion and 5) vision (see Figure 6.2).

The dynamic-grit mindset of older workers in Singapore is a significant step in countering ageism and transforming the negative societal perceptions of older workers. The data showed how the concept of the dynamic-grit mindset is key to describing older workers as assets to Singapore's workforce. It explains how having this mindset can help older workers navigate demanding work cultures and flourish in a global workforce still reeling and

suffering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment policies in Singapore, including initiatives by the Singapore government to reskill older workers and assist them with career coaching (Mehta, 2020; Strack et al., 2021), have not been completely effective in addressing the challenges older workers face (see Section 6.2.3). This study found that positive work cultures and supportive management are critical to enabling and enhancing the appreciative factors of older workers.

7.3 Significance of Research Study

The findings of this research study are significant because it is the first study that utilises the appreciative inquiry methodology to look at the precarious lives of older workers.

Other points of significance are:

- 1) This is the first study to evaluate the appreciative factors of older workers and determine that they can be assets to the workforce.
- 2) It is also the first study in Singapore to use appreciative inquiry to understand the strengths of older workers and employ these as a transformative tool to counter ageism to transform negative societal attitudes towards older workers.
- 3) It is the first study to analyse the precarious lives of older workers through a critical gerontology lens. In addition, it looks at the concept of flourishing and the S-BIT theory of work to understand the factors concerning older workers and their wellbeing.
- 4) This study extends Huppert and So's (2011) concept of flourishing. Five factors from the concept of flourishing were observed in older workers in this study: resilience, meaning, engagement, competence and positive relationships. Two other determinants—problem-solving and emotional intelligence—were found to be significant factors. All of these components are encapsulated within the dynamic-grit mindset.
- 5) This study advances Duckworth's concept of grit. The study found that grit in older workers consisted of five different components, whereas Duckworth et al.'s (2007) well-known concept of grit was originally primarily comprised of passion and perseverance.
- 6) Besides extending both theories, this study shows how the dynamic-grit mindset is relevant and necessary for positive mental health and wellbeing. Here, wellbeing refers to the optimal functioning of older workers at work. It is crucial not only for a country with an increasingly aging population, but also for the overall wellbeing of a workforce and economy severely impacted by the pandemic.
- 7) This study is one of the first in Singapore to highlight the systemic inequities within the workforce due to ageism and how this hampers employment opportunities for

older workers and diminishes opportunities for them to contribute to Singapore's workforce.

- 8) This study explained how the dynamic-grit mindset accounts for the success and longevity of older workers in Singapore's workforce and highlights their role in the wellbeing of their organisations.
- 9) This study also highlighted the enabling factors of a positive work culture and supportive management, which allows older workers to utilise their dynamic-grit mindset, making them assets to their organisations.
- 10) This study also involves key stakeholders within Singapore's workforce and describes the holistic transformation needed to address ageist attitudes and inequities in the workforce and recognise older workers as assets to create affordances for them to contribute to the Singaporean economy.
- 11) The appreciative methodology used for this study could be adapted to help Singapore's workforce by including older workers as part of the workforce and encouraging a culture of flourishing in the workforce.
- 12) In times of austerity, with many economies still grappling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, having the dynamic-grit mindset is relevant and practical, not only for the older workers but the entire population of Singapore.
- 13) The dynamic-grit mindset is also relevant to other members of the population, such as younger workers and students in higher education institutions who will form part of Singapore's future workforce, as it will enable their flourishing in their respective contexts.
- 14) The dynamic-grit mindset is an important, relevant contribution to the field of positive psychology and one that will provide an impetus for the global workforce, as it can become an enabling factor for societies to move forward in overcoming the impacts brought about by the pandemic.

7.4 Recommendations

Although the findings of this study are comprehensive and significant to the workforce and organisations in Singapore, the concept of flourishing is very much under-researched in Singapore (Chan, 2018; Jian & Lam, 2021). It would be important to extend the findings of this research study and also establish future research in wellbeing in different contexts, such as in higher education, healthcare and crisis management. The following recommendations may be considered:

- 1) This study could be extended to a wider population of older workers in industries not covered in this study, such as the manufacturing, finance and transportation industries.

- 2) The dynamic-grit mindset is a construct that could be represented using a checklist or a scale in a quantitative survey. This survey could be carried out on other segments of the workforce to analyse if this mindset is prevalent throughout the workforce.
- 3) This study could also be further developed through an extensive study on the work cultures prevalent in Singapore, analysing the effectiveness of these cultures in enabling workers' strengths.
- 4) Although extensive interviews were conducted with older workers from several core industries, this study could be applied in other industries that employ older workers.
- 5) The findings of this study could also be used to operationalise the dynamic-grit mindset by creating a toolkit for students studying in national schools and education institutions in Singapore.
- 6) The dynamic-grit mindset can also be developed into a wellbeing initiative to help affected workers manage the impacts of the global pandemic through workshops and training initiatives.
- 7) The functionality of the dynamic-grit mindset could be further explored to evaluate if its application is suitable for measuring the productivity and effectiveness of organisations.

7.5 Limitations

Despite the strengths of this study and the potential of the dynamic-grit mindset, there are some limitations:

- 1) The sample size is non-random, as convenience sampling was used and limited only to older workers above 50 years old.
- 2) The context of the study is limited to Singapore. Given Singapore's unique economic system, the findings may not be applicable to other economies with a substantial population of older workers.
- 3) It was possible to only involve older workers and other stakeholders from some of the core industries in Singapore, such as tourism, social work and security industries, where there is a higher prevalence of older workers.
- 4) Given that wellbeing is a dynamic construct involving many factors, it has not been possible to cover all the aspects of wellbeing that contribute to thriving organisations in Singapore.
- 5) It has not been possible to examine all of Singapore's workforce development policies and evaluate their impacts on the wellbeing of the older workers and meeting the needs of Singapore's workforce.

7.6 Concluding Remarks

This research study is significant because it investigated how older workers experience systemic inequities in human resources policies, government policies, workplace contexts and society due to ageist perceptions in Singapore. Older workers find themselves increasingly isolated and are perceived as liabilities by human resources departments, organisations and society (Francioli & North, 2021). This is a concern for Singapore, which has a rapidly aging population (Sakamoto, 2019), a low birth rate (Anand et al., 2020) and an economy challenged by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hwee, 2020). As such, Singapore needs to galvanise the efforts of its most valuable resource, its workforce, to ensure it continues to thrive and remain at the forefront of the world's economy. To this end, the strategic development and deployment of its human capital is its main asset (Bennett, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the appreciative factors of the older workers to first, identify them as assets to Singapore's workforce, and second, evaluate the enabling factors to encourage their flourishing as part of Singapore's strategic development of its workforce to address the challenges it faces. The findings from this study will help establish older workers as assets, address the deficit in Singapore's workforce and very likely reduce the dependency on foreign labour.

Using the Discovery and Dream phases of an appreciative inquiry methodology, the findings revealed that the dynamic-grit mindset in older workers enabled them to mitigate challenges in Singapore's workforce brought about by ageism. The dynamic-grit mindset is unique to the older workers in Singapore in this study. This distinction lies in the different components that make up the dynamic-grit mindset. Also, how the combination of factors in grit—Huppert and So's (2011) five factors of flourishing together with problem-solving skills and emotional intelligence—form a unique construct that enabled the flourishing of older workers in this study. Further, the data analysis also revealed that a positive work culture and supportive management are vital to support the flourishing of the older workers. The

dynamic-grit mindset of the older workers in Singapore is a significant step in countering ageism and transforming the negative societal perceptions of older workers. Having such a mindset can help older workers navigate demanding work cultures in tumultuous times and flourish in sustained and gainful employment

Older workers in Singapore's workforce are currently seen as liabilities and often struggle to gain employment or are not accorded with the same opportunities as their younger counterparts regarding promotions and continued employment. Highlighting the dynamic-grit mindset of the older workers in Singapore is a significant step in countering ageism and transforming the negative societal perceptions of older workers. Such a mindset can assist older workers to navigate demanding work cultures in very tumultuous times and flourish in sustained and gainful employment. Having this mindset enables older workers to remain resilient against the inequities they face in the workforce. Their dynamism in terms of their competencies, problem-solving skills and finding meaning in the work they do, and continuously being engaged with the demands of the economy, facilitates their longevity and ensures their success in the workforce. In addition, the positive relationships and connections they develop and their emotional intelligence enable them to succeed at work.

A positive work culture and supportive management are enabling factors for older workers to flourish. With the dynamic-grit mindset, older workers function optimally and thrive in their workplaces. First, in a positive work culture, older workers gain a sense of security (Barnes & Weller, 2020; Wang & Fang, 2020), finding they thrive in a family-like organisational culture where everyone works as a team, not competitors (Rasool et al., 2021). Older workers flourish when the management shows confidence in their abilities and empowers them with the appropriate resources to do well in their respective job roles. With these conditions, the application of the dynamic-grit mindset of older workers is fully optimised and allows older workers to flourish and function at their best. Being afforded this support determines the positive wellbeing of older workers and their organisations.

The concept of the dynamic-grit mindset used in this study can serve as an exploratory tool for future scholars to investigate how it can counter different forms of discrimination in workplaces besides ageism. Ayalon et al. (2020) and Losada-Balter et al. (2020) assert that older workers above the age of 50 are more likely to be affected by the pandemic than younger workers, as they are labelled as vulnerable and at-risk due to the impacts of COVID-19. However, emerging studies on the effects of COVID-19 indicate that older workers respond more positively to measures taken to cushion the impacts (Ceccato et al., 2021; Kooij et al., 2020b; Nair et al., 2021). The functionality and benefits of having the dynamic-grit mindset can be evaluated further in older workers working in industries such as healthcare, aviation and finance that have experienced a challenging period impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the dynamic-grit mindset can be applied to provide illuminating insights to facilitate reforms of employment policies, workplace practices and training initiatives in Singapore.

Studies have also shown that older adults are able to adapt to the aging process quite easily and age successfully at work (LaBarge & Pyle, 2020; Taneva & Yankov, 2020; Verhage et al., 2021). However, it is important to support them through this process by developing workplace initiatives and employment policies shaped by the findings of this study. It would be prudent and practical to apply the findings of this study and complete the appreciative inquiry cycle by following up on the last two phases of appreciative inquiry: Design and Destiny. The findings of this study can be communicated to policymakers, human resource practitioners, recruiters, trainers and the Singaporean society at large about what is at stake, older workers' true capabilities, and what might be improved in Singapore's employment and wellbeing landscape. Cooperrider and Fry (2020) affirm the importance of recognising that the best in human systems can flourish in times of disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Completing the appreciative inquiry cycle would complement ongoing

efforts to improve wellbeing policies and programs for healthier lives and better mental health of workers in Singapore (Churchill et al., 2021; Cresswell-Smith, et al., 2022; Utanes, 2020).

Finally, the findings from this study 1) has identified older workers as assets to Singapore, 2) will inform policymakers on developing policies to improve the employability of older workers, 3) suggest that older workers address the deficit in Singapore's workforce, 4) better understand and encourage the flourishing of the older workers, 5) will create an inclusive and a dynamic workforce to address Singapore's economic needs, and 6) will develop and establish wellbeing initiatives for older workers in Singapore's workforce to enhance the longevity of their employment.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table A1

Demographics of Older Workers

Older Worker	Age	Gender	Profession	Industry
#1	63	Male	Server Crew	Food and Beverage
#2	65	Female	Corporate Trainer	Training
#3	65	Female	National Tour Guide	Tourism
#4	62	Male	Corporate Trainer	Training
#5	60	Male	Counsellor / Social Worker	Social Work
#6	68	Female	Sales Consultant	Retail
#7	67	Male	Tour Guide / Theatre Performer	Tourism
#8	62	Female	National Tour Guide	Tourism
#9	52	Female	Conservationist and Facilitator	Public Education
#10	70	Male	Conservationist and Facilitator	Public Education
#11	80	Female	Tour Guide/Historian	Public Education
#12	57	Male	Airline Pilot	Aviation
#13	65	Male	Addiction Therapist/ Counsellor	Social Work
#14	67	Male	Employment Mediator	Manpower
#15	65	Male	Service Ambassador	Food and Beverage
#16	55	Male	Security Officer / Administrator	Security
#17	54	Female	Lecturer/Course Director	Healthcare
#18	52	Female	Airline Rostering Supervisor	Aviation
#19	57	Male	Maritime Shipping Auditor	Maritime
#20	57	Female	Security Officer	Security

Table A2*Demographics of Adult Educators*

Adult Educator	Age	Gender	Profession	Training Sector
#1	57	Female	Adult Educator	Employability Skills and Digital Literacy
#2	39	Female	Adult Educator	Employability Skills and Digital Literacy
#3	56	Male	Adult Educator	Employability Skills and Neurolinguistic Programming
#4	56	Male	Adult Educator	Oil and Gas Workplace Safety and Health
#5	51	Male	Adult Educator	Employability Skills and Digital Literacy
#6	67	Male	Adult Educator	Soft Skills and Financial Literacy
#7	58	Male	Adult Educator	Facilitator Certification Program
#8	54	Female	Adult Educator	Employability Skills and Problem-Solving
#9	69	Male	Adult Educator	Security and Enforcement
#10	53	Female	Adult Educator	Employability Skills and Career Coaching

Table A3*Demographics of Employers*

Employers	Age	Gender	Profession	Industry
#1	46	Male	Hotel Restaurant Manager	Hospitality
#2	49	Male	CEO, Facilities Management Organisation	Cleaning and Facilities Management
#3	52	Female	CEO, Consultancy and Management	Service Consultancy

Table A4*Demographics of Industry Experts*

Industry Expert	Age	Gender	Profession	Industry
#1	54	Male	Social Psychologist and Counsellor	Social Work/Psychology
#2	40	Male	Health and Aging Thought Leader	Healthcare/Social Work
#3	63	Male	Career and Employability Coach	Training and Employability
#4	55	Male	Member of Parliament and Director for Low Wage Workers Union	Manpower and Labour Ministry
#5	48	Male	Social Worker (Family Service Centre)	Social Work/Career Counselling
#6	47	Male	CEO and Instructional Designer	E-Learning Solutionist & Consultant
#7	35	Female	Organisational and Management Change Consultant	Organisational Psychology and Change Management

Appendix B

Ethics Approval: Approval H-

2020-005 Ethics

Our reference 34148

08 January 2020

Professor Faye McCallum
School of Education



RESEARCH SERVICES
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ETHICS, COMPLIANCE AND
INTEGRITY
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CRICOS Provider Number 00123M

Dear Professor McCallum

ETHICS APPROVAL No: H-2020-005

PROJECT TITLE: Journeys of strength: an appreciative study of older workers in Singapore

The ethics application for the above project has been reviewed by the Low-Risk Human Research Ethics Review Group (Faculty of Arts and Faculty of the Professions) and is deemed to meet the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018)* involving no more than low risk for research participants.

You are authorised to commence your research on: 08/01/2020

The ethics expiry date for this project is: 31/01/2023

NAMED INVESTIGATORS:

Chief Investigator: Professor Faye McCallum

Student - Postgraduate

Doctorate by Research (Ph.D.): Mr Mohamed Fadhil Bin Mohamed Ismail

Associate Investigator: Associate Professor Mathew White

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL: Thank you for your responses dated 01.01.2020 and 08.01.2020 to the matters raised.

The revised application provided 08.01.2020 has been approved.

Ethics approval is granted for three years and is subject to satisfactory annual reporting. The form titled AnnualReport on Project Status is to be used when reporting annual progress and project completion and can be downloaded at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/research-services/oreci/human/reporting/>. Prior to expiry, ethics approval may be extended for a further period.

Participants in the study are to be given a copy of the information sheet and the signed consent form to retain. It is also a condition of approval that you immediately report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval including:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants,
- previously unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project,
- proposed changes to the protocol or project investigators; and
- the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Anna Olijnyk

Convenor

Associate Professor John Tibby

Convenor

The University of Adelaide

Appendix C

Ethics Approval: Amendment Approval

Our reference
34148

21 May 2020

Professor Faye
McCallum
School of
Education

Dear Professor McCallum

ETHICS APPROVAL No: H-2020-005

PROJECT TITLE: Journeys of strength: an appreciative study of older workers in Singapore

Thank you for the amended ethics application provided on the 28th of April 2020 requesting an amendment to add additional interview question related to COVID-19. The amendment has been approved.

The ethics amendment for the above project has been reviewed by the Low Risk Human Research Ethics Review Group (Faculty of Arts and Faculty of the Professions) and is deemed to meet the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018)* involving no more than low risk for research participants.

You are authorised to commence your research on: 08/01/2020

The ethics expiry date for this project is: 31/01/2023

NAMED INVESTIGATORS:

Chief Investigator: Professor Faye McCallum



RESEARCH SERVICES
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS,
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CRICOS Provider Number 00123M

Student - Postgraduate Doctorate by Research (Ph.D.): Mr Mohamed Fadhil Bin Mohamed Ismail

Associate Investigator: Associate Professor Mathew White

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL: Thank you for your responses dated 01.01.2020 and 08.01.2020 to the matters raised. The revised application provided 08.01.2020 has been approved.

Ethics approval is granted for three years and is subject to satisfactory annual reporting. The form titled Annual Report on Project Status is to be used when reporting annual progress and project completion and can be downloaded at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/research-services/oreci/human/reporting/>. Prior to expiry, ethics approval may be extended for a further period.

Participants in the study are to be given a copy of the information sheet and the signed consent form to retain. It is also a condition of approval that you immediately report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval including:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants,
- previously unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project,
- proposed changes to the protocol or project investigators; and
- the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Anna Olijnyk
Convenor

Dr Jungho Suh
Convenor

The University of Adelaide

Appendix D

Participant Information Sheet

Attachment A – Email Invitation

RECRUITMENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore

With one of the highest life expectancies, Singapore's workforce is inevitably getting older. This research study seeks to discover new findings about older workers by examining their strengths and taking into consideration perspectives of industry experts, employers and adult educators in Singapore through interviews and focus group discussions.

Each participant will attend one face to face interview and one focus group session. Each interview session will take for about 60 minutes while the focus group session is expected to take up to 3 hours. The interview will be conducted at a convenient time at the Institute for Adult Learning Singapore and will be audio recorded and transcribed. The participant may, at their discretion, share documents or other material in relation to their career successes and achievements.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any stage or choose not to answer any questions. Participants will not face any negative consequence from such withdrawal or refusal. In addition, no findings which could identify any individual participant will be published, and the privacy of all participants will be protected at all stages of the research project.

If you are interested in knowing more about the research or in participating, please send an email to mohamedfadhil.binmohamedismail@adelaide.edu.au. I will be glad to provide you with more information about this research project.

Kind regards,

Mohamed Fadhil

Attachment B – Participant Information Sheet (Older Workers)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore.

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: H-2020-005

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Faye McCallum, Associate Professor Mathew White.

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Mohamed Fadhil STUDENT'S DEGREE: Ph.D. in Education

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

This research study seeks to discover new findings about older workers by examining their strengths and taking into consideration perspectives of industry experts, employers and adult educators in Singapore through narrative interviews and focus group discussions. The main aim of this research study is to challenge prevailing narrowed attitudes towards older workers and contribute to transforming how older workers are perceived and envision a more inspiring and positive future for older workers by informing future training initiatives and policy formulation.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Mohamed Fadhil bin Mohamed Ismail. This research will form the basis for the degree of Ph.D. in Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Adelaide, Australia under the supervision of Professor Faye McCallum and Associate Professor Mathew White

Why am I being invited to participate?

You are being invited as you belong to one of these groups of participants below.

- Older workers who are in active employment either full-time or on contractual terms.
- Older workers who fulfil the first criteria and are 50 years of age and above.
- Adult educators who are involved in training older workers for more than 10 years.
- Industry experts who have been involved in Singapore's employment sector for more than 10 years.
- Employers who are actively involved in the recruitment and re-employment of older workers.

What am I being invited to do?

You are being invited to participate in a face-to-face interview and one focus group discussion session. The interviews would be an individual face to face session while the focus group sessions would involve other participants including industry experts, employers and adult educators as well. These interview sessions would primarily discuss the strengths of older workers in Singapore, their contributions and achievements as well as an understanding of the reasons for their sustained employment in their respective industries.

All the sessions will only be audio recorded. The interviews would be conducted at the interview rooms at the Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore. No follow up interview is necessary but should the need arise, the primary researcher shall seek clarity from the participant through an email or a phone call.

How much time will my involvement in the project take?

The face to face interview is expected to take only up to an hour while the focus group session is expected to last for about 3 hours. The primary researcher may also seek clarification over the phone through a short chat if necessary. Besides this, there are no other foreseeable commitment required from the participant.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

While there is a slight inconvenience and time required to attend the interview and focus group session, we believe there are no known risks associated with this research study. To minimise

risks, proper protocols are followed such as gaining ethics approval before any interviews/surveys or collecting documentation. Sharing of information and participation is subject to participant consent who have the right to withdraw at any time within the duration of the study up to 7 days upon the completion of the focus group session.

Risks for participating in the study are mitigated by ensuring that the time and location for interview will be at the Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore, away from the place of employment of the participant. The time for interview could be during weekend, after hours or during their non-instructional teaching time or spare time during their work.

What are the potential benefits of the research project?

The possible benefits of participating in the research are as follows:

- 1) Provide an opportunity for participants to share and reflect on their peak experiences in employment and training.
- 2) Gives older workers the opportunity to clarify their role in Singapore's workforce.
- 3) Clarify the perceptions of stakeholders on older workers.
- 4) Open up opportunities for further research into potential roles older workers can assume to address the deficit in Singapore's workforce.
- 5) Transform stakeholders' perspectives of older workers.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time during the course of the study till up to 7 days after the completion of the focus group without incurring any risks or consequences.

What will happen to my information?

Confidentiality and privacy: The interview and focus group data will be stored in the University of Adelaide's online secured storage box for at least 5 years and accessible only to Mohamed Fadhil Bin Mohamed Ismail, Professor Faye McCallum and Associate Professor Mathew White. In addition, all participants will be de-identified and given a pseudonym. The data analysed will only use these pseudonyms as a form of identification. The identity of the participants will be treated in the strictest confidentiality during data collection and codes will be used to protect their

anonymity. All identifying content in the data will be removed or changed (where applicable) to protect anonymity as well.

While all efforts will be made to remove any information that might identify the participant, as the sample size is small, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, the utmost care will be taken to ensure that no personally identifying details are revealed.

Storage: The interview and focus group data collected will be stored in the University of Adelaide's online secured storage box for at least 5 years and accessible only to MohamedFadhil Bin Mohamed Ismail, Professor Faye McCallum and Associate Professor Mathew White. The hard copies in a locked office.

Publishing: The outcomes of the project will be made available in the form of a Ph.D. thesis. In addition, the researcher plans to draft a journal article from the project as well as a conference paper. The researcher will also deliver a conference presentation based on the paper and thesis submission. The data acquired from this project may also be used in future research projects that are either:

- (i) an extension of, or closely related to the original research project; or
- (ii) in the same general area of research by the same researchers.

Your information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet and it will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except as required by law.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

For questions and to seek clarification about the project, the primary researcher can be contacted via email or phone at:

Mohamed Fadhil bin Mohamed Ismail

Email: mohamedfadhil.binmohamedismail@adelaide.edu.au

Phone : +65-90298092 / +61 8 8313 0694

Professor Faye McCallum

Email: faye.mccallum@adelaide.edu.au

Phone: +61 8 8313 0694

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (H-2020-005). This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat at:

Phone: +61 8 8313 6028

Email: hrec@adelaide.edu.au

Post: Level 4, Rundle Mall Plaza, 50 Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE SA 5000

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated.

You will be informed of the outcome upon the completion of the investigation.

For research conducted in Singapore, if you wish to speak with an independent person if are experiencing emotional distress and need counselling support, please contact the Seniors Helpline Singapore at: Phone: 1800-555 5555 or email: counselling@sagecc.org.sg

If I want to participate, what do I do?

Please read through the information sheet and consent form carefully and arranged for an interview appointment with the primary researcher via email or phone and bring along the signed consent forms when attending the face-to-face interview. Please feel free to contact the research team via email/phone, at any time if you have any questions or to raise your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Faye McCallum,
Associate Professor Mathew White,
Mohamed Fadhil bin Mohamed Ismail.**

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

CONSENT FORM

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore
Ethics Approval Number:	H-2020-005

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.

Yes No

3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.

4. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.

- One Interview (One Hour)
- One Focus Group Session (3 Hours)

Yes No

5. I agree to be:
Audio recorded

Yes No

6. I understand that as my participation is not anonymous, I can withdraw any time from the start of the research up to 7 days after the completion of the focus group session without any negative consequence.

Yes No

7. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published in journal article, thesis and conference paper and presentation.
8. I have been informed that in the published materials I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
9. I hereby provide 'extended' consent for the use of my data or tissue in future research projects that are:
 - Research undertaken by these same researcher(s)
 - an extension of, or closely related to, the original project:

in the same general area of research Yes No
10. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.
11. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____
 Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research to _____
(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____
 Date: _____

Appendix E

Interview Protocol and Guide

Interview Guide - For Older Workers

Introduction

Hi [name of participant], How are you today? [Wait for reply].

I am Fadhil, the primary researcher for this research project [Self-introduction]. Thank you for your willing participation. Your participation is truly appreciated as it serves to strengthen our understanding of older workers, their employability and training.

This research project is entitled ‘An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore’. It aims to evaluate the appreciative factors in the working lives of 30 older workers in Singapore, as well as analyse the perspectives of adult educators and employers or industry experts to collectively envision a desired future for older workers in Singapore.

We plan to conduct at least 50 interviews and one focus group session over the entire project. Any reference to your interview would appear in a publication to be written in 2 years’ time and would be labelled with a code, for example, Worker 7. Any specific name of a person, an institution, a place or a course would be made generic or given a pseudonym.

I shall be recording this interview using an audio recorder as it will allow me to concentrate on what you are sharing. However, if you are not comfortable, please let me know and I will take notes instead. Lastly, please feel free to let me know if you would like me to stop the recording at any time during the interview or if you feel uncomfortable with the questions asked.

[FLIP TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS]

Interview Guide - For Older WorkersIntroductory Questions

To start off the interview:

1. Please share your age (group) and racial group if you are comfortable?
2. Please also share with us your qualifications (both academic and vocational competencies)?
3. To start off, describe your career history.
4. What are the job roles you have assumed in your career?
5. What are the training and upgrading opportunities afforded (given) to you during your career?
6. When you feel engaged in your work or your life, describe what is happening?

Phase 1: Discovery

1. What do you love most about your job? What first drew you to this job and what has most encouraged you to stay?
2. What do you consider some of the most significant trends, events, and developments shaping the future of your industry and your profession specifically?
3. Please describe some of your most significant contributions and achievements in your career. Describe the emotions you experienced when making these contributions?
4. As an employee, there are inevitably successes and frustrations. What stands out for you as high points in your career?
 - Please describe what happened and who was involved. What other factors facilitated this success?
 - What difference were you able to make to the organisation and the people around you?
 - Which of your strengths and talents were called upon?
 - What contributed most to the success of the efforts?
 - What did you learn from these positive experiences?
5. What are the possibilities for your future if you reflect upon what you have just shared (in question 4)?
6. How has the COVID-19 situation affected your employment?
7. What steps have you taken to mitigate or overcome the effects of the COVID-19 situation such as the lockdown measures?
8. What strengths of yours were most evident and useful during this period?

Interview Guide - For Employers

Introduction

Hi [name of participant], How are you today? [Wait for reply].

I am Fadhil, the primary researcher for this research project [Self-introduction]. Thank you for your willing participation. Your participation is truly appreciated as it serves to strengthen our understanding of older workers, their employability and training.

This research project is entitled ‘An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore’. It aims to evaluate the appreciative factors in the working lives of 30 older workers in Singapore, as well as analyse the perspectives of adult educators and employers or industry experts to collectively envision a desired future for older workers in Singapore.

We plan to conduct at least 50 interviews and one focus group session over the entire project. Any reference to your interview would appear in a publication to be written in 2 years’ time and would be labelled with a code, for example, Employer 5. Any specific name of a person, an institution, a place or a course would be made generic or given a pseudonym.

I shall be recording this interview using an audio recorder as it will allow me to concentrate on what you are sharing. However, if you are not comfortable, please let me know and I will take notes instead. Lastly, please feel free to let me know if you would like me to stop the recording at any time during the interview or if you feel uncomfortable with the questions asked.

[FLIP TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS]

Interview Guide - For Employers

Introductory Questions

To start off the interview:

1. Please share your age and racial group if you are comfortable in doing so?
2. What is the industry your organisation is in and its core purpose (if you are willing to disclose)?
 - Do share with us a brief history of your organisation?
 - What was it like when you first started?
 - How has the industry your organisation is in changed over the last few decades?
 - How do you feel about the job at that time?
3. What are the job roles older workers assume (take up) in your organisation?
4. What are the training and upgrading opportunities afforded (given) to them in your organisation?
5. What do you consider some of the most significant trends, events, and developments shaping the future of the employment sector and your industry specifically in Singapore?

Phase 1: Discovery

1. What do you admire most about older workers? Describe their strengths.
2. Describe the most significant contributions of older workers to this industry and your organisation? What are the factors that facilitated these contributions?
 - Please elaborate on what happened and who was involved. What other factors facilitated this success?
 - What difference were they able to make to the organisation and the people around them?
 - Which of their strengths and talents were called upon?
 - What contributed most to the success of the efforts?
3. Please share your opinions about the possibilities for the future of older workers if you reflect upon what you have just shared earlier (in question 2)?
4. How has the COVID-19 situation affected the employment of older workers?
5. What steps have you taken to mitigate or overcome the effects of the COVID-19 situation such as the lockdown measures for your workers?
6. What strengths of the older workers were most evident and useful during this period?

Interview Guide - For Industry Experts

Introduction

Hi [name of participant], How are you today? [Wait for reply].

I am Fadhil, the primary researcher for this research project [Self-introduction]. Thank you for your willing participation. Your participation is truly appreciated as it serves to strengthen our understanding of older workers, their employability and training.

This research project is entitled ‘An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore’. It aims to evaluate the appreciative factors in the working lives of 30 older workers in Singapore, as well as analyse the perspectives of adult educators and employers or industry experts to collectively envision a desired future for older workers in Singapore.

We plan to conduct at least 50 interviews and one focus group session over the entire project. Any reference to your interview would appear in a publication to be written in 2 years’ time and would be labelled with a code, for example, Industry Expert 3. Any specific name of a person, an institution, a place or a course would be made generic or given a pseudonym.

I shall be recording this interview using an audio recorder as it will allow me to concentrate on what you are sharing. However, if you are not comfortable, please let me know and I will take notes instead. Lastly, please feel free to let me know if you would like me to stop the recording at any time during the interview or if you feel uncomfortable with the questions asked.

[FLIP TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS]

Interview Guide - For Industry Experts

Introductory Questions

To start off the interview:

1. Please share your age and racial group if you are comfortable in doing so?
2. Please describe your job role and responsibilities (if you are willing to disclose)?
 - Please share with us a brief history of your Singapore's employment landscape in the past decade?
 - What was it like when you first started?
 - How long have you been in this industry?
 - How has employment changed over the last few decades?
 - How do you feel about these changes and their effects on workers?
3. What are the job roles do you observed being given to the older workers in Singapore currently? Why is this the case?
4. What about the training and upgrading opportunities afforded (given) to them? What is the desired outcome of these training opportunities?

Phase 1: Discovery

1. What do you admire most about older workers? Describe their strengths.
2. What do you consider some of the most significant trends, events, and developments shaping the future of the employment sector and your industry specifically in Singapore?
3. Describe the most significant contributions of older workers to Singapore's workforce?
 - Please elaborate on what happened and who was involved. What other factors facilitated this success?
 - What difference were they able to make to the organization and the people around them?
 - Which of their strengths and talents were called upon?
 - What contributed most to the success of the efforts?
4. What are the possibilities for the future of older workers if you reflect upon what you have just shared (in question 3)?
5. How has the COVID-19 situation affected the employment for older workers?
6. What steps have the government taken to mitigate or overcome the effects of the COVID-19 situation such as the lockdown measures on these workers?
7. What strengths of older workers were most evident and useful during this period?

Interview Guide - For Adult Educators

Introduction

Hi [name of participant], How are you today? [Wait for reply].

I am Fadhil, the primary researcher for this research project [Self-introduction]. Thank you for your willing participation. Your participation is truly appreciated as it serves to strengthen our understanding of older workers, their employability and training.

This research project is entitled ‘An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore’. It aims to evaluate the appreciative factors in the working lives of 30 older workers in Singapore, as well as analyse the perspectives of adult educators and employers or industry experts to collectively envision a desired future for older workers in Singapore.

We plan to conduct at least 50 interviews and one focus group session over the entire project. Any reference to your interview would appear in a publication to be written in 2 years’ time and would be labelled with a code, for example, Adult Educator 3. Any specific name of a person, an institution, a place or a course would be made generic or given a pseudonym.

I shall be recording this interview using an audio recorder as it will allow me to concentrate on what you are sharing. However, if you are not comfortable, please let me know and I will take notes instead. Lastly, please feel free to let me know if you would like me to stop the recording at any time during the interview or if you feel uncomfortable with the questions asked.

[FLIP TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS]

Interview Guide - For Adult Educators

Introductory Questions

To start off the interview:

1. Please share your age and racial group if you are comfortable in doing so?
2. Please share your job role and responsibilities (if you are willing to disclose)?
3. What kind of training do you conduct for older workers?
4. How long have you been in this industry?
 - Do share with us a brief history of your Singapore's training landscape in the past decade?
 - What was it like when you first started?
 - How has training changed over the last few years?
 - How do you feel about these changes and their effects on older workers?
5. What are the training and upgrading opportunities afforded (given) to them?
6. How do you such opportunities shape the professions and future of older workers?

Phase 1: Discovery

1. What do you admire most about older workers in Singapore? Describe their strengths.
2. What do you consider some of the most significant trends, events, and developments shaping the future of employment and the economy in Singapore?
3. What do you consider the most significant contributions of older workers to Singapore? Describe the factors that facilitated these contributions?
 - Please describe what happened and who was involved. What policies and government initiatives facilitated this success?
 - What difference did it make to the economy and employment sector?
 - Which of their strengths and talents were most relevant when these policies were enacted?
4. What are the possibilities for the future of older workers if you reflect upon what you have just shared (in question 3)?
5. How has the COVID-19 situation affected the employment and training of older workers?
6. What steps have you taken to mitigate or overcome the effects of the COVID-19 situation such as the lockdown measures when training older workers?
7. What strengths of the older workers were most evident and useful during this period?

Focus Group Guide - For All Participants

Introduction

Hi [name of participant], How are you today? [Wait for reply].

Thank you for your willing participation in our focus group discussion. Your participation is truly appreciated as it serves to strengthen our understanding of older workers, their employability and training.

This research project is entitled 'An Appreciative Study of Older Workers in Singapore'. It aims to evaluate the appreciative factors in the working lives of 30 older workers in Singapore, as well as analyse the perspectives of adult educators and employers or industry experts to collectively envision a desired future for older workers in Singapore.

We have conducted interviews involving all of you here. Any reference to your interview would appear in a publication to be written in 2 years' time and would be labelled with a code, for example, Employer 3 or Worker 7. Any specific name of a person, an institution, a place or a course would be made generic or given a pseudonym.

I shall be recording this focus group session using an audio recorder only as it will allow me to concentrate on what you are sharing. However, if you are not comfortable, please let me know and I will only take notes instead. Lastly, please feel free to let me know if you would like me to stop the recording at any time during the interview or if you feel uncomfortable with the questions asked.

[FLIP TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS]

Focus Group Discussion Guide:

Phase 2: Dream

Imagine a time in the future when people see older workers in Singapore as assets and a fundamental part of our workforce. These workers would also be considered globally as an exceptional example of a thriving, progressive community where they are engaged as leaders and owners of Singapore's economic and employment future.

Introductory Discussion

Describe your thoughts about strengths of older workers you have observed and some notable contributions you have seen from them in your career.

Part 1- Presentation including an illustration

- i) In this exciting future, how are older workers engaged in Singapore's employment sector? What roles do they play and what industries would they be involved in?
- ii) How would they be described? What is sustaining their dedication in the workforce?
- iii) What kinds of systems and structures are most encouraging for older workers to remain in Singapore's workforce?
- iv) If you could create a stimulating and rewarding work environment for older workers, how would such an environment be like?

Part 2 - Discussion after the first set of presentations

- i) What are the three best themes you have observed on dream enactments? Why are they the best themes?
- ii) What elements – processes, systems, governance, policymaking, training initiatives, family support, and relationships- offer the best opportunities for change?
- iii) If you could do more of what you have all described more consistently, what could be possible in the future for older workers?
- iv) How could you move from where older workers are right now to where they would like to be?
- v) If there was once action you could take as a start to move these workers towards their desired future, where would you start?

Part 3

Based on your discussion, create an opportunity map (mind map) for the desired future for older workers taking into consideration their desired job roles, work environments, professional and training opportunities as well as societal perceptions of older workers.