

# Our Guest Editors

## Talk about the aging workforce



MARCIE PITT-CATSOUPHES

What some might call a perfect storm is now brewing as baby boomers approach traditional retirement age just in time to intersect with the “new economy,” a decreasing supply of younger workers, and major shifts in private pension and public income-maintenance systems. To provide a look at the state of the aging workforce and the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, the *Generations* editorial board invited two guest editors who have been paying serious attention—Marcie Pitt-Catsouphe, codirector of the Boston College Center on Aging and Work/Workplace Flexibility, and Robert B. Hudson, professor and chair of social welfare policy at Boston University School of Social Work.

The well-being of families and workers is at the heart of Marcie Pitt-Catsouphe’s research and teaching. She holds a Ph.D. in sociology and social work and is associate professor at Boston College Graduate School of Social Work. She is known for her thoughtful teaching and rigorous scholarship related to older adults, social planning, and work and family issues. “I’ve seen how critical work environments are for quality of life of adults,” she says, “and also for those connected to them.”

Pitt-Catsouphe is also a Research Fellow of the Work and Family Roundtable and the former director of the Center for Work and Family and the Sloan Work and Family Research Network, where she initiated a pilot project to provide research-based information about work and families to state legislators. She is the author of numerous publications in the field, including research reports, books, and journal articles. She recently testified before the Senate Special Com-

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mittee on Aging, where she said that the aging of the workforce “may well be one of the most compelling social issues of our time.”

Now, as codirector of the Center on Aging and Work/Workplace Flexibility, she is a principal investigator of the National Study of Business Strategy and Workforce Development and of the Study of Aging and Work in Industry Sectors. In related efforts, she is studying the workplace culture and the adoption of innovative employee policies and programs by small, medium, and large organizations. “The center is unusual because we are doing research that will apply in the workplace,” she says. “Our second purpose is providing high-quality information to those who are making organizational change.

“An aging society has altered our expectations about work and retirement, and individuals and organizations must change their assumptions. For a number of reasons, it’s clear that people will remain in the workforce longer. Most employers have seen all the press about the aging population and are aware of the aging of the workforce and their customer base. But with regard to their own employees, they have only just begun asking if they should be paying attention. Now is the time for employers to develop innovative responses to older workers’ needs and to make sure that they are prepared to engage older workers’ talents.

“In our research on workplace flexibility, older workers are very articulate in expressing their preferences—especially for real choices, control over their work situation, and opportunity. These conversations offer a platform to how we in the multigenerational workforce can all work differently.”

Robert Hudson is also known for application of research and theory to practice. He holds a Ph.D. in political science and during his distinguished career has become one of the most prominent scholars and analysts of the major trends in social policy—and their effects on real people.

Hudson’s ability to relate policy concerns to a broad range of audiences is evidenced in his frequent speaking engagements before professional and lay audiences and his prolific writing. His most recent book is *The New Politics of Old Age Policy* (Johns Hopkins University Press), and he is editor-in-chief of the periodical *Public Policy and Aging Report*. He is a winner of the prestigious Donald P. Kent Award and the Arthur S. Flemming Award for achievement and leadership in the field.

Hudson’s interest in the aging workforce is founded in his studies of cross-national aging policy and welfare state development. “From having been well-accepted cornerstones of the modern welfare state, older people today are widely viewed as excessive cost centers for that institution and as being able to play more productive economic roles than has traditionally been the case,” he says. “Extending work lives among the old is part of a wider cross-national trend associated with ‘active labor market policy,’ curtailing old-age and pension benefits in lieu of new work opportunities and obligations.”

As a visiting professor at the University of Melbourne, he says, he was struck by the huge shift in attitudes toward extended work lives in both Australia and the U.S.



ROBERT B. HUDSON

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“After trying for a half century to get older people out of the workforce, and making sure they had enough money to retire, the attitude now is that they should stay longer,” he says. “During the past fifty years, the U.S. took on great responsibilities with Social Security and Medicare. Now the Social Security umbrella is not going to expand; there are changes in the benefit formula, extended retirement age. In addition, private pensions are not what they once were. The basic message is that people will have to do more on their own.

“And of course, there can be many motivations for working longer and for encouraging older workers to remain engaged and employers to retain and hire them. We see efforts to develop flexibility in the workplace and arrangements that will benefit both the employer and the worker.

“A lot of people say they want to work longer. Many people will need to work, but what if they can’t? A number of class, race/ethnicity, and gender issues are in play. The situation indeed brings challenges and opportunities. This issue of *Generations* is a reality check.” ❧

—Mary Johnson