

The talent pool of mid-career and older professionals holds an untapped wealth of knowledge for state and private rail companies worldwide. Many professionals have become specialists in their field, but most of them consider that their expertise is not utilised or well understood by their employers. Careers at this level can either stagnate or accelerate, depending on how individuals perceive the opportunities provided to them by companies. In 2015, a study of 351 experienced rail professionals from 30 countries, in the mid-term of their career or between 40 and 50 years of age, confirmed that career fulfilment factors, especially in relation to the opportunity to use specialist knowledge and personal creativity, are important engagement factors. For companies, retaining high-level professional skills, knowledge and expertise is crucial as the rail industry innovates to increase productivity in a competitive market.

This paper explores the organisational strategies required to capitalise on existing expertise while allowing individuals to fulfil their personal aspirations and professional knowledge. The paper considers four areas that contribute to engagement including: leadership, people management, knowledge management and creativity management.

The issues being addressed:

Strategies that companies can pursue to increase engagement of rail industry mid-career professionals through a framework of leadership, people management, knowledge management and creativity management.

Keeping mid-career professionals engaged by utilising individual knowledge and expertise in organisational innovation.

The objectives or proposed outcomes:

A large number of mid-career professionals feel their expertise and talents are overlooked in organisations and hence become disengaged from giving their best efforts to their organisation. The paper discusses strategies that should be included in a tool kit to assist managers and HR staff to be able to make the most of experienced professionals' talents.

These findings are insightful for companies in managing their mid-career workforces effectively to fulfil the potential of all rail employees.

Lessons learnt

- The talent pool at mid-career holds an untapped wealth of knowledge
- Different organisational approaches are needed to effectively manage the aspirations of different generational groups in rail
- Utilise the potential of all rail employees to contribute innovative organisations, not a 'one size fits all' approach
- Items to include in a tool kit to manage mid-career professionals' aspirations