



Allowing people experiencing menopause to thrive in the workplace

Executive summary

- Menopause remains a taboo subject, unsuitable for polite conversation in Western societies.
- The UK is, however, leading the conversation on menopause in the workplace with political debates, media coverage and policy innovations within institutions such as [menopause manifestos](#).
- These initiatives seek to transcend the taboos to improve well-being during menopause and to counteract the [14% of women ready to leave their jobs due to menopause-related reasons](#).
- The menopause policies and workplace conversations have, however, adopted an almost exclusively medicalised discourse- it is reduced to causes and biological processes. Thus, looking at the lived experience of menopause as being a period of fragility in which deteriorating symptoms and suffering are commonplace.
- The assumption that employees leave their jobs due to menopause's debilitating symptoms and limitations fails to account for the effect of employees leaving their jobs to pursue a more fulfilling life as a consequence of the lived experience of menopause that goes beyond the medical view. For instance, some women consider this transition towards a new phase of life as a period when they have more wisdom and maturity, feel freer and more productive and can find their workplace inadequate or limiting.
- In addition to the challenges that the menopause presents, women are otherwise traditionally less privileged in the workplace. For instance, they remain in low-paid jobs in comparison to men, the gender pay gap

persists, and they are also [most susceptible to suffering from pension poverty](#).

The Zest that we describe in our study is inspired by Margaret Mead's 1950 quote:

“The most powerful force in the world is a menopause woman with zest”

This illustrates the lived experience of menopause involving a combination of daring and the desire to finally invest in projects that, for various reasons, including social pressure and gender stereotypes, had to be postponed earlier in life.

Policy recommendations

1. Raise awareness through responsible, positive and supportive messaging.
2. Workplace policies should include career and social support, not just medical answers.
3. Create workplace guidance on how women at this stage in life can be not only protected but also supported in their careers.
4. Champion more inclusive and creative work environments for all through the creation of supportive communities.

Policy recommendations explained

Raising menopause awareness is vital but the debate must also counter negative perceptions. Organisations adopting hyper-awareness—and exclusive use—of medicalised discourses may also inadvertently stigmatise women by promoting women's image as frail and whose decline is earlier than men's. This penalises not only women going through menopause but also younger cohorts of women who advance their careers in anticipation of what seems to be only an adverse destiny. Instead, awareness agendas should publicly promote the positive

and energising aspects of menopause while privately offering all levels of support when needed.

Menopause policies should not be limited to the availability of medical support, medical leave or medicines. Employers should understand how women's career trajectories intersect with a desire to overcome accumulated disadvantages in the workplace due to, for instance, gender discrimination, parenting and caring responsibilities or mothering expectations in the form of pressures associated with being motherly and maternal (even in the absence of children).

Women at this stage in life should be supported with restorative and clear opportunities to be able to be in positions of power where they can transform their capacities and ambitions into action to the benefit of the institution but also to support other women as role models and allies.

Support companies to utilise the '[dialectic of zest' tool](#) to re-design work practices and challenge stereotypical views on gender. Menopause Cafes, for instance, should not be only spaces of conviviality and protection but also spaces for innovation and change. Policies should support institutions in designing practices that enable mid-life women to thrive and contribute their talents to transform organisations, boosting their inclusivity and creativity.

About the research

Our work continues an emergent conversation on the positive and energising aspects of menopause in the workplace. We propose a social interpretation of menopause that challenges a pervasive perspective of medical decline; our work introduces the "dialectic of zest," as inspired by the writings of Margaret Mead, to help institutions and governments understand that the lived experience of menopause also involves a desire for liberation from gendered social expectations and a new beginning in women's life, "a second spring". This daring and willingness in menopausal women offers an interesting opportunity to learn and transform within organisations aiming at fairer representations of women's talent and work contributions.

By problematising women's experiences going through this transition in the workplace, we reveal how well-intentioned awareness campaigns can lead to further stigmatisation. We thus encourage organisations to not only favour an approach of "education for all" but also help extend perceptions beyond medicalised perspectives to include a less partial view of the experience of menopause that also involves the daring and desire to create change and meaning.

In our work, we show how adopting a more holistic analytical lens, including other ways of seeing and acting regarding menopause in the workplace. In particular, we propose integrating the subject within a more significant gender equality policy and women's career advancement programmes, this can contribute to protecting not only women's health but also women's talents effectively, giving women the support they require through their ups and downs.

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Read the [full study](#).

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