

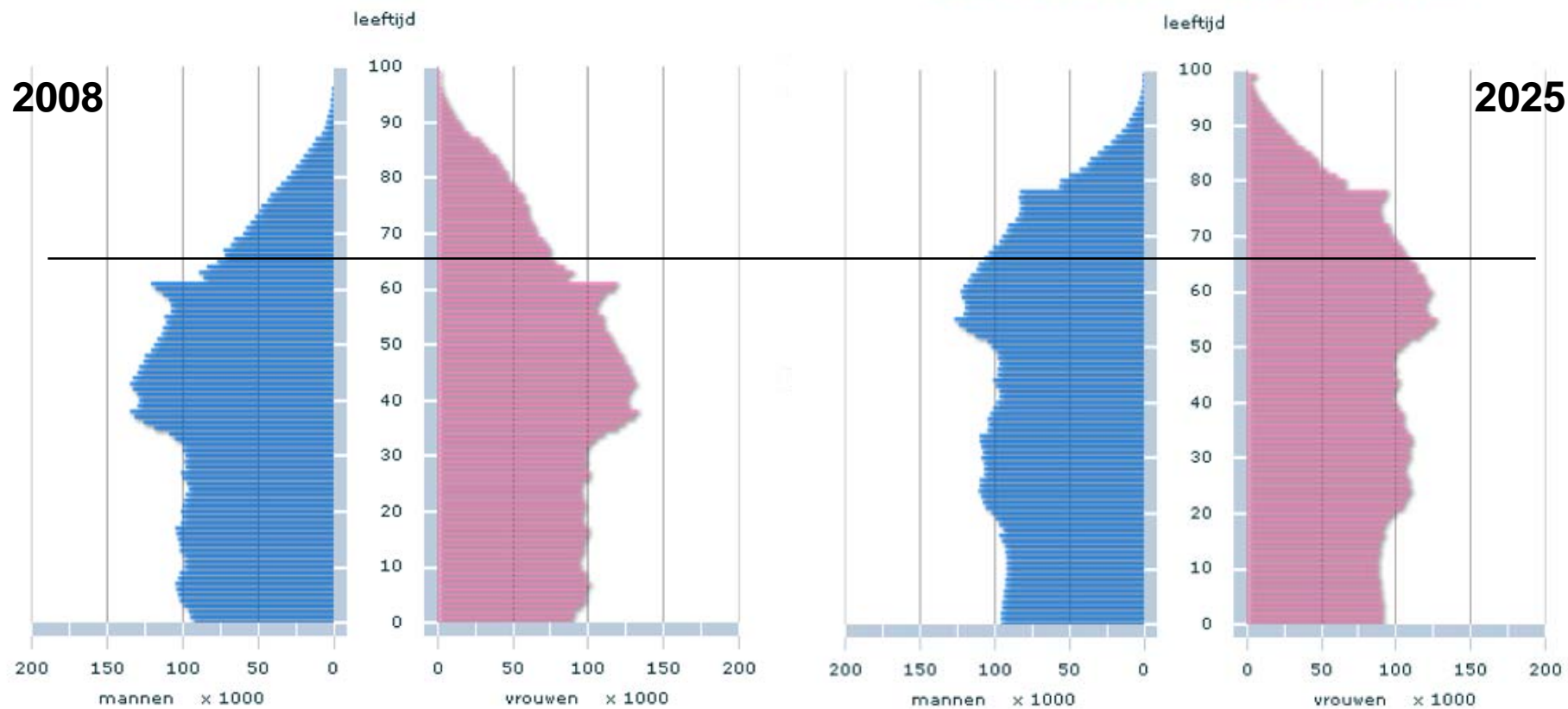


Knowledge and the ageing employee

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Demography

Age distribution The Netherlands, 2008-2025



Source: CBS

Temporary consequences

- Ageing refers to two demographic trends:
 1. Structural: people live longer
 2. Temporary: increase of number of older people as a result of past fluctuations in the fertility rates

- The main threats come from the temporary demographic trend:
 1. Brain drain: large scale retirements of the baby boomers
 2. Talent gap: shortage of younger workers that follow the large scale retirements (demographic cliff)

- These trends are reflected in the working population (15-65) and threaten the organization's ability to make knowledge productive

Assumptions about older workers' contribution to knowledge productivity

- In our culture *ageing* often equals *worsening*
 - The image of older workers is based on anecdotal evidence of individual cases
 - The image of older workers is based on many prejudices, myths:
 - Decreasing willingness to change, less motivated, increasing absenteeism (sick leave), decreasing productivity, uncreative, slower with technology, less interested, unwilling to learn, unwilling to take risk, etc.
- More and more evidence shows that these assumptions are false, however they serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy
- Consequence of these false assumptions is that organizations lose interest in (the potential of) older workers

The risks of ageing from a KM/IC perspective

- Combining the temporary consequences of ageing and the false assumptions about older employees results in two main risks:
 1. Underutilization of older employees
 - false assumptions deprives the organization of an important source of value creation
 2. Loss of knowledge
 - retirement wave and decline in supply of labour threatens the organization's ability to make knowledge productive

Conclusion: research agenda

- The looming brain drain and talent gap endangers the organization's ability to be knowledge productive
- Current developments might contribute to a structural better understanding and usage of the potential of older employees
- In order to deal with ageing from a KM/IC perspective, we should be able to answer the following questions
 1. What are the specific competences of the older knowledge workers?
 2. How can we retain knowledge from older workers?
 3. How can we stimulate inter-generational learning?

Summary

- “People in their late 50s, 60s and 70s have now become the largest under-utilized pool of human resources in the economy”
(Business Week)