



MANAGING MIXED-AGE TEAMS

A FIELD GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

A multigenerational staff has the skills and savvy
to help your company be more successful.



AARP
Work Reimagined

FIVE

GENERATIONS IN THE WORKFORCE

1925 1945 1965 1980 1997 Today



Traditionalists



Boomers



Gen X



Millennials



Gen Z



AND THE
TREND ISN'T
LIKELY TO
CHANGE
ANYTIME
SOON

By 2034
adults 65⁺
will outnumber
children
under 18*

1/2 of all
children
born in
—  —
after 2007
will live to
be 104†

*[census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/cb18-41-population-projections.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/cb18-41-population-projections.html)

†www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_White_Paper_We_Will_Live_to_100.pdf?mod=article_inline

WHY INVEST IN AN AGE-DIVERSE WORKFORCE?

YOU GET A LOT [MORE](#)

MORE PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity in both younger and older workers is higher than in companies without mixed-aged teams.

MORE RETENTION

In age-inclusive organizations, turnover goes down for younger and older workers.

MORE PERFORMANCE

Mixed-aged teams outperform similar-aged teams in creative tasks and decision-making.

MORE SHARING

Older workers tend to share their knowledge with younger workers, helping their colleagues develop and better engage.

Learn even more at aarp.org/more

TEN PRINCIPLES

TO HELP YOU BUILD AND
MANAGE AGE-DIVERSE TEAMS

1



Concentrate on the value each team member creates rather than on their title or seniority. Whether through public recognition or private development conversations, focus on the value each team member contributes and how that value stems from their unique skill set rather than seniority.

2



Emphasize experience (and its relevance to the team's work) regardless of age. The unique experiences of early-, mid-, and late-career workers each have a role to play in creating products, designing solutions, and solving problems. Adopting this mindset will enable you to recognize all team members without falling prey to age-based stereotypes.



3

Scrap the stereotypes and stay alert for unconscious bias. Observe each team member individually—don't assume, for example, that younger workers are fast or older workers are tech illiterate. Encourage team members to call out instances where they feel they (or others) are being limited by stereotypical thinking.



Promote training opportunities. Encourage everyone on the team regardless of age to take advantage of all offered training and upskilling benefits provided by the organization, including tuition reimbursement, interim assignments and job shadowing.

5

Accommodate differences in communication styles—some team members prefer text and chat to email, others prefer phone or in-person. Check in periodically on how communication is received, particularly with regard to word choice and punctuation. Some generational differences do exist, which can unintentionally result in offense or misunderstanding.



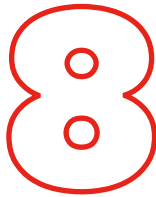
Adopt an expansive view of age that moves beyond a person's chronological age and takes life stage into account—some Boomers are going back to school, many Gen X have young children, roughly a quarter of family caregivers are Millennials. Major life events are a stronger indicator of employee needs and affinities than age.



7



When possible, deliberately pair older and younger workers together on tasks or projects. Research shows that mixed-age teams are more productive and perform better on complex and creative tasks than teams without a spread of ages.



Approach development conversations in a positive light and from a growth mindset. "Everyone can learn. How can we leverage you? What do you need?" Avoid inadvertently dismissing older workers with traditional approaches to development that associate growth with youth. And provide support for workers who might feel daunted by the prospect of developing new skills.



Think creatively about compensation and other incentive structures to reconfigure how “career success” is defined. While moving “up the ladder” is one way to incentivize employees, placing a premium on knowledge and experience—perhaps through a “master” or “emeritus” status—is another way to value workers who continue to contribute at a high level.

10

Be deliberate about knowledge transfer—while it often happens organically, it's wise to encourage it, as well as to devise a system for capturing what is being transmitted. Explore how knowledge transfer can double as training opportunities for younger and older workers alike. And make sure to foster an atmosphere of psychological safety to alleviate tension between generations that may include fears of being pushed out on one end or denied opportunity on the other.



Sign the AARP Employer Pledge to demonstrate how your company values workers of all ages, and actively works to level the playing field for those over the age of 50.

aarp.org/employerpledge

Questions? Contact us at
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