Welcome

If you're reading this, you're curious about how your organization can be one where all employees can thrive in their work teams without encountering age or generational biases.

The issue has never been more pressing. In a recent AARP study,[1] 83% of employers said that creating a more multigenerational workforce would drive their success and growth. They believe that their organizations need to do more to maximize the full potential of an age-diverse workforce. In fact, these executives highlighted *age* as a top area of diversity management that requires the most improvement.

This creates major opportunities for employers, who now consider it a key business strategy to address the needs and unleash the synergies of a workforce that can span as many as five generations. Given the conventional wisdom that employees leave managers and not organizations, a valuable tactic is to provide managers with training on how to successfully lead a mixed-age team.

You're holding a powerful toolkit that you can use to leverage your manager training initiatives (onboarding, new-manager training, and ongoing supervisor training) to build the careers of your employees across all ages and career phases. You don't have to be the CEO or head of HR to use this toolkit. You can use it as a supervisor of a team; a supervisor of other managers; a senior leader; or someone in the HR, DE&I, CSR or L&D teams. The tools here can be used by organizations of all sizes, from 5 employees to over 25,000. They can be adapted for organizations with all types of employees, and across all industries.

You can use this toolkit to:

1. Win buy-in from key influencers in your organization to engage managers around age inclusion.

2. Start a new initiative to train managers to lead mixed-age teams.

3. Build elements into your existing manager development practices to address leading a mixed-age team.

The kit has everything you need to design and build your initiative — from the data you need to garner support and win resources to the tactical training exercises you can use. As you use this kit, share your successes by emailing us at employerpledge@aarp.org.

We are grateful to Workable Concept for their partnership in creating this toolkit for you.

Warm regards,

Heather Tinsley-Fix
Senior Advisor, Employer Engagement

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[1]"According to the AARP Global Employer Survey 2020, 83% of employers state that it would be very or at least somewhat valuable to their organisation's success and growth to create a more multigenerational workforce. Executives in large global companies recognize that their organization would need to undertake more efforts to maximise the full potential that an age-diverse workforce offers, listing age, besides disability, as the area of diversity management that requires most improvement (Forbes Insights, 2011[33])."

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Introduction

Mixed-Age Teams: A Value-Creation Strategy Hiding in Plain Sight.

Today's "multigenerational workforce brings together a greater mix of workers at all ages than in the past, when workplaces typically consisted of larger numbers of younger workers and relatively few older workers."[2]

These multigenerational workplaces "include people with a diverse range of perspectives depending on their life stage and their different experiences. Some (but not all) of these may be linked to age."[3] In fact, "despite the widespread belief that each generation has a distinctive and fixed set of needs and motivations concerning work, there is much more evidence that workers of all ages broadly value the same things."[4] Regardless of the age or generation of the worker, their career phase and life stage often present consistent needs and challenges for employers to address.

Where age and generation do matter in the workplace is in the age bias that plays out across employees of all ages, but especially those toward the start or end of their careers. How managers acknowledge and address age bias can lead to either a fully engaged and productive team or one that leaves considerable value untapped. At scale, individual managers' approaches to age diversity within their own teams quickly become strategic issues for the organization.

On the other side, "employers who can successfully combine the talents and diverse outlooks of their employees — whatever their age — generally find that their workforce is enriched and more productive as a result," according to the OECD.[5] "Reaping these benefits will require putting in place tailored support at all ages and strengthening collaboration between generations."[6]

The team unit is a natural environment in which to provide this tailored support and strengthened collaboration. Most employers already do so by training managers to develop inclusive practices around gender, race, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. Wise employers will prepare their managers to do the same around age inclusion.

Quick Terminology Note:

Throughout the toolkit, we refer to "age-inclusive workplaces," "multigenerational workplaces" and "intergenerational workplaces." These terms are used interchangeably by the experts we cite here. They all refer to creating a workplace where employees at all phases of their careers feel a sense of inclusion and belonging. These terms acknowledge that although the needs of employees are not tied only to their age or generation, age bias does exist and needs to be navigated throughout their careers.

[2] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81
[3] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81
[4] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81
[5] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81
[6] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81 p.55

Why Is the Manager Role Key to Creating an Age-Inclusive Workforce?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr, president and CEO of the Society of Human Resources Professionals, has noted that "there is no relationship in the workplace more powerful than the one between people managers and employees… As working Americans challenge organizations to manage and lead differently, those that don't will find themselves left behind."[7]

One key area where employees want their organizations "to" manage and lead differently" is around age. Ideally, all people managers are trained and motivated to create an experience where employees do not encounter age bias and where they know they will have support if they do experience it.

Let's consider four reasons why the manager role is critical when creating an age-inclusive workplace:

1. Managers have an outsize effect on employee engagement — both positive and negative.

2. Employees are highly reluctant to talk to their managers about age-bias concerns.

3. Managers can make or break an organization's DE&I goals by supporting or ignoring them within their own team practices and culture.

4. Managers are the key drivers of employee attrition — and retention.

Managers have an outsize effect on employee engagement — both positive and negative.

Almost any employee will tell you that their experience of their workplace — and their level of engagement — is most heavily determined by their manager's actions and inactions. In fact, research by Gallup found that managers account for 70%[8] of the variance in employee engagement. So how might this play out on mixed-aged teams?

We work in a world where, research shows, many employees see or experience age bias; however, few report it. If the employees are not going to report it to their manager, the onus is on the employee's manager to notice and interrupt age bias both in their own team and in the broader organizational teams with whom their direct reports work.

Managers can increase employee engagement and cultivate a sense of belonging by building mixed-age teams where all members can observe how the skills, experiences and views of colleagues across the age spectrum create value. Alternately, managers can choose not to do so. Employees are paying attention — and both managerial action and inaction affect their level of engagement.

Employees are highly reluctant to talk to their managers about age-bias concerns.
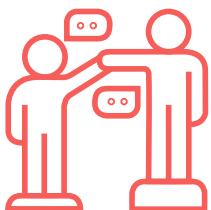
Of course, managers cannot easily address employee issues about which they have little awareness. In terms of the risks of age bias and the value of mixed-age teams, most managers are in the dark. Consider how managers could make themselves more approachable if they paused to think about the implications of these basic statistics:

[7]https://www.shrm.org/about-shrm/press-room/press-releases/pages/survey-84-percent-of-us-workers-blame-bad-managers-for-creating-unnecessary-stress-.aspx
[8]https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/182792/managers-account-variance-employee-engagement.aspx

- Only 3% of workers age 45+ have ever made an official complaint about age discrimination. This, even though 15% of workers age 45+ have heard negative remarks related to their older age from a colleague or supervisor, 16% cited not getting hired for a job they applied for because of their age, and 12% cited being passed up for a promotion or another chance to get ahead.[9]

- Younger workers are often more aware of bias in general and are potentially more inclined to notice age bias, but they may underreport because they are aware that federal age discrimination law does not protect employees under age 40 and may be unaware that some state age-discrimination laws protect workers regardless of age.

- Employees underreport age bias because they fear retaliation in the form of reduced roles or uncharacteristically low performance reviews that result in termination.[10] Their concern is reasonable. In fact, about half of full-time workers between the ages of 50 and 54 will lose their jobs involuntarily.[11]

Managers can make or break an organization's DE&I goals by supporting or ignoring them within their own team practices and culture.

Multigenerational issues intersect with all DE&I focus populations, creating unique challenges and opportunities for each one. Managers will help their organizations achieve their DE&I goals and run more productive, successful teams if they lead with an active awareness that:

- "Ageism hits women earlier and harder."[12]

- Men of all ages are navigating changing gender norms in the workplace and no longer have predictable "ages" or time requirements for involvement in parenting, caregiving and shared family duties.

- The LGBTQ workforce is being reshaped by younger workers who are more diverse and stronger allies, including around age-related bias.

- Black employees overall are more likely to have seen or experienced age discrimination.

- Hispanic/Latino workers age 40+ are most likely to have seen or experienced workplace age discrimination.

For more data and details on the intersectional nature of multigenerational workplaces, see pages 17–23 of the Intergenerational ERG Toolkit at www.aarp.org/intergenERG.

Managers are the key drivers of employee attrition — and retention.

Conventional wisdom (and perhaps personal experience) tells us that employees leave managers, not organizations. The research starkly supports this. Consider how issues of age bias or a lack of actively age-inclusive managerial behaviors might be reflected in this data:

[9] https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/economics/info-2018/multicultural-work-jobs.html
[10] https://www.fisherphillips.com/news-insights/age-is-more-than-a-number-trends-in-workforce-composition-ageism-and-efforts-to-address-the-elephant-in-the-room.html
[11] https://www.urban.org/research/publication/how-secure-employment-older-ages
[12] https://www.catalyst.org/research/gendered-ageism-trend-brief/

- "1 in 2[13] employees have left their job to get away from their manager at some point in their career." In fact, 82%[14] of employees surveyed for a recent report said they "would consider quitting their job because of a bad manager."

- Employees are open to manager support right up to the point when they leave. According to Gallup Research, "52%[15] of exiting employees say that their manager or organization could have done something to prevent them from leaving their job. But only about a third[16] of former employees said they had a conversation with their manager about leaving before they quit."

- Gallup has also found that "it's disengaged workers who are at the highest risk of leaving. It takes more than a 20%[17] pay raise to lure most employees away from a manager who engages them, and next to nothing to poach most disengaged workers. High-quality managers who inspire and support their teams are an effective moat of protection for retaining their most talented workers."

What does an organizational leader do when they realize that those in managerial positions can drive — or drag down — employee engagement, organizational productivity, the ability to achieve DE&I goals, and employee retention?

They look for ways to set up the people in that role for success.

How Can I Use This Manager's Toolkit for Leading Mixed-Age Teams?

The previous pages described the critical role managers can play in building highly engaged mixed-age teams that drive both productivity and cultural goals. The pressures and expectations are high, as are the costs of managers who are not actively age inclusive.

Meanwhile, almost any manager will tell you that they feel they are in the "buffer zone" — tasked with making the organization's productivity goals, culture, DE&I goals, benefits and policies real for the individuals who report to them. They often do this without full clarity, support, training and coaching from their own organizations. Often, they personally pay the price when their team is underresourced due to the resulting employee attrition.

The past few years have been especially hard on managers, as they have had to navigate an unprecedented scope and pace of change simultaneously in their organizations, their own teams, the world and their own lives. It's no surprise that in November 2021, 35% of managers reported they were burned out "very often or always."[18]

[13] https://www.gallup.com/workplace/215384/gallup-manager-team-leader-development.aspx
[14] https://www.valuepenguin.com/news/majority-workers-would-leave-job-becuase-of-manager
[15] https://www.gallup.com/workplace/357104/ways-managers-stop-employee-turnover.aspx
[16] https://www.gallup.com/workplace/357104/ways-managers-stop-employee-turnover.aspx
[17] https://www.gallup.com/workplace/358346/gallup-workplace-insights-learned-2021.aspx
[18] https://www.gallup.com/workplace/357404/manager-burnout-getting-worse.aspx

In this context, organizations that aim to create an age-inclusive workforce need to support their managers. They need to provide managers with training to help them develop the skills to lead mixed-age teams.

This toolkit offers practical, actionable ideas to help you do it. You can use it:

- **As a manager yourself** to invest in developing the skills that will help both you and your team perform and thrive. You don't need any specific support from your organization to use it as a personal development tool.

- **With your managers** to send three messages: 1) Their success is related to learning to lead a mixed-age team, 2) the organization will help them develop the skills to do so, and 3) the organization will recognize their success managing mixed-age teams as they build their career.

- **With your teams who provide support to managers** — HR, DE&I, L&D, CSR — on how to lead effectively. Experiencing a handful of the training exercises in their own teams can equip them to integrate the trainings on managing mixed-age teams into their daily work, supporting healthy teams across the organization.

- **With senior leaders** to raise their awareness of how mixed-age teams drive value creation and inclusion goals — and to build buy-in and momentum for investing in ongoing efforts to provide managers with training to lead mixed-age teams.

Section I: How Do Mixed-Age Teams Drive Organizational Performance?

Mixed-age teams drive organizational success by strengthening the core elements of the team unit, namely: productivity and performance, inclusion and belonging, and recruiting and retention.

Unit I: Productivity and Performance

Since productivity is a core driver of organizational growth, profitability and competitive advantage, it is critical to consider how mixed-age teams increase employee performance and productivity:

- Both younger and older workers are more productive when they work in companies that have mixed-age teams compared to companies without mixed-age teams.[19] [20] In fact, workers under age 35 are the least productive, but experience productivity gains when they work with older workers. Workers over age 50 have similar productivity levels as those age 35–49 and are more productive when there are more younger workers among their colleagues.[21]

- On an age-diverse team, as in teams that are diverse in other aspects, people bring different skills, experiences and views to bear on the work at hand, and thus produce stronger end results.[22] "Diverse teams have far more pathways to execute on an idea, which enables them to iterate on them faster and more cost-effectively… They can also navigate the enterprise on a tight budget and tap into networks they may not have otherwise explored on their own. This type of expansive, serendipitous collaboration is what drives fast action."[23]

[19]AARP, The Business Case for Workers 50+, 2015.
[20]https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81 p.54
[21]https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81 p65
[22]https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0927537112001236
[23]https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/why-diverse-and-inclusive-teams-are-the-new-engines-of-innovation

- When the task "entails dealing with strategic and complex decision-making with vaguely defined problems in a dynamic setting…increased age diversity can lead to enhanced group discussions, better analysis and superior problem-solving."[24]

- Older workers, who have the highest levels of employee engagement of any age group,[25] tend to share their knowledge with younger workers, helping their colleagues develop and better engage.[26] In fact, "simply by increasing the share of older workers by 10%, companies can generate a one-off gain worth slightly more than a year of growth."[27] "This increase in productivity leads to a range of secondary benefits, including improved profitability, more competitive product pricing, better employer branding, and the opportunity to raise market share, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)."[28]

Unit II: Inclusion and Belonging

To realize the full benefits of diversity for the organization's culture and bottom line, inclusion and belonging must be strong within each team unit. Consider how mixed-age teams can increase employees' overall sense of inclusion and belonging:

- Employees (and potential employees) of all ages expect their workplace to be fully inclusive. Unlike some aspects of diversity, age affects every employee personally. Mixed-age teams are key to cultivating a sense of inclusion and belonging, especially for early- and late-career employees.

- A team that goes beyond age diversity to achieve age inclusion will benefit from the areas that "research shows are enhanced by inclusion (and worsened by exclusion). These include intelligent thought and reasoning, self-improvement, prosocial behavior, self-regulation, a sense of purpose, and well-being. Each of these represents real financial gains or losses for teams and organizations."[29]

Unit III: Recruiting and Retention

The value of anything that can increase success in recruiting and retention is perhaps most keenly felt by the manager — who needs to carve time out from their "core job" to recruit, hire and train new team members and to provide coverage during transitions that result from attrition. Similarly, the manager is also the most direct beneficiary of the benefits that accrue from higher retention of team members and their knowledge and experience. These points underscore how mixed-age teams benefit recruiting and retention:

- In age-inclusive organizations, turnover goes down for both younger and older workers.[30] In fact, "simply by increasing the share of workers aged 50+ by 10%, companies can enjoy 4% lower turnover."[31]

[24] https://ideas.repec.org/p/iso/educat/0093.html or http://repec.business.uzh.ch/RePEc/iso/leadinghouse/0093_lhwpaper.pdf
[25] https://vervoe.com/age-diversity/
[26] AARP, The Business Case for Workers 50+, 2015.
[27] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/15f92878-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/15f92878-en
[28] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/15f92878-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/15f92878-en
[29] https://trainingindustry.com/articles/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/beyond-diversity-the-science-of-inclusion-and-belonging/
[30] AARP, The Business Case for Workers 50+, 2015.
[31] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81 p54

- According to the EEOC, "workers aged 50 and older have the highest levels of engagement in the workplace," and engaged workers tend to stay longer with an organization. As a result of reassessing how to manage age diversity in the workplace, organizations benefit from lower recruiting costs as well as the retention of institutional knowledge."[32]

- As managers seek to recruit the most productive team possible, highlighting that they value age inclusion will enhance their recruiting success. Nearly 70%[33] of job seekers say a diverse workforce is important when considering job offers, and age diversity within a team is especially likely to affect the career decisions of both younger and older recruits.

Unit IV: Action Tools

Self-assess my organization's age-inclusion landscape
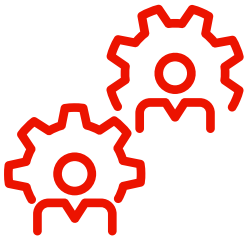
Managers don't work in a vacuum. They work in the context of their overall organization's human resource policies, work structures, financial incentives, performance metrics and organizational culture. Use this tool to consider the context for your initiative to train managers to lead mixed-age teams.

6 Ways to Include Age in Your Diversity and Inclusion Work[34]

Read the framing article 6 Ways to Include Age in Your Diversity and Inclusion Work and then complete the self-assessment checklist to see your organization's current areas of strength and opportunity.

[32] https://vervoe.com/age-diversity/
[33] https://www.lucasgroup.com/your-career-intel/value-diversity-inclusion-workspace/
[34] https://aarp.connectedcommunity.org/age-inclusive-workforce/include-age-in-diversity--inclusion/article-how-to-include-age-in-diversity--inclusion

Gut check on my personal context

In every organization, there will be pockets of more support and less support for age inclusion. As a manager yourself, consider your personal experience and power to advocate for age-inclusive management practices in your own team and organization.

Take a moment to read this short article, and reflect on whether any of the stories in it sound familiar to you: I Was a Manager in an Ageist Workplace.[35]

- In your own workplace, who is a supporter of your efforts to adopt and encourage others to adopt more age-inclusive managerial practices? Who is likely to agree in principle, but not in action?

- Are there areas where you can move toward more age-inclusive practices yourself and in your own team without generating personal career risk?

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[35] https://euthinktank.com/managing-yourself/i-was-a-manager-in-an-ageist-workplace/ also at https://hbr.org/2022/03/i-was-a-manager-in-an-ageist-workplace?ab=seriesnav-bigidea

Section II: How Can I Influence Leaders to Invest in Training Managers to Lead Mixed-Age Teams?

Unit I: Make Your Case with Data and Stories

When you are presenting or leading discussions, use key data to make your case to 1) raise awareness of the issue of age bias and the overall value of mixed-age teams, and 2) invest in training managers to lead mixed-age teams. Here are a few tips to help you shape your messaging:

Create a shared starting point for everyone

Your audience may include people who are already active advocates for age-inclusive work practices — and others who are new to the idea that age inclusion is a strategic imperative. Create a shared starting point for everyone by framing a few key data points that are compelling to all.

For example:

We all know that "numerous studies have shown the benefits of a diverse, equitable workplace for business performance, innovation, customer loyalty and employee trust. Diverse teams better represent the customers they serve, make decisions with fewer blind spots, and bring more varied and innovative thinking to problem-solving."[36] [37] But many of us haven't given much thought to age as an element of a diverse team.

In fact, age inclusion is good for business. In 2018, American industries forfeited a boost of over 4% to GDP because of age discrimination in the workforce.[38] How much of that was in our own organization? What could happen if our organization had 4% higher net income every year?

Here's how a multigenerational workforce can create financial value for us as an employer:

- Higher productivity per employee

- Greater diversity of ideas, knowledge and skill sets

- More resilience

- Stronger pipeline of talent

- Improved workforce continuity, stability and retention of intellectual capital.[39]

Creating an age-inclusive organization now will yield increasing value over time. Increased longevity and declining birth rates indicate that the five-generation workforce is here to stay. Indeed, the percentage of workers age 55+ has doubled in the past 25 years,[40] and they now account for 25% of the workforce.[41] Investing in age-inclusive practices now will provide both short-term and longer-term benefits for us.

Select your follow-up data with your audience in mind
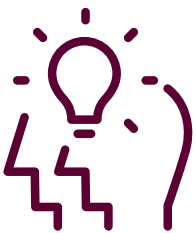
Choose a focused set of data that speaks to your specific audience — their roles, their motivations and how they will react to what you are specifically requesting. Provide enough data to build credibility, but not enough to overwhelm or provide fodder for naysayers.

For example, here's how you might use the data introduced in Section I:

- **Productivity and performance** are key motivators for many C-suite, finance team and P&L owners across the organization. When talking with these team members about investing in efforts to train managers to successfully lead mixed-age teams, this type of data is especially convincing.

- **Inclusion and belonging** are key motivators for many C-suite, senior leaders, HR, DE&I and ERG leaders across the organization. When talking with these team members about investing in efforts to train managers to successfully lead mixed-age teams, this type of data is especially convincing.

36 https://hbr.org/2021/05/to-make-real-progress-on-di-move-past-vanity-metrics?registration=success and https://euthinktank.com/managing-yourself/i-was-a-manager-in-an-ageist-workplace/
37 https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-and-where-diversity-drives-financial-performance
38 https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/econ/2020/impact-of-age-discrimination.doi.10.26419-2Fint.00042.003.pdf
39 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81 p.41
40 https://builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/ageism-in-the-workplace
41 https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/22/success/ageism-women-work/index.html

- **Recruiting and retention** are key motivators for all managers across the organization, in addition to HR and senior leaders. When talking with these team members about investing in efforts to train managers to successfully lead mixed-age teams, this type of data is especially convincing.

Great sources of data include this guide and the additional research listed in the Resources section at the end of this toolkit.

Anticipate and prepare to overcome obstacles in the conversation

Before you begin your conversation, you'll likely be able to guess who in the conversation are already advocates or sceptics. Think ahead to their questions or concerns and be prepared to offer your thoughts. Try to listen carefully to their questions or concerns without becoming defensive, so you can determine what type of information will be valuable to share in your post-meeting follow-up.

For example:

Question: "If No One Is Complaining About This, Why Do I Need to Take Action?"

This is a fair and common question among leaders who are already stretched. In your response, you can share some of these ideas:

- Even if people are not reporting age bias, our employees of all ages are concerned. While it may not be surprising that 35% of workers aged 50–64 have experienced age discrimination, nearly 20% of workers 15–34 and 35–49 also report that they have experienced age-based bias in their workplace.[42] Some research suggests that younger employees are more affected by attitudinal ageism (assumptions, stereotypes, language choices used to describe them), while older employees are more likely to encounter punitive actions based on age discrimination (e.g., targeted for layoffs).[43]

- The fact that many of these employees are legally protected from age discrimination means it's even more critical that we take action to cultivate age-inclusive teams and managers. There is both strategic and financial value to being proactive instead of reactive around age inclusion and age discrimination. Proactive includes both creating an age-inclusive workplace *and* ensuring that employees who are experiencing age discrimination give us a chance to address it. This is why manager training is key. Research shows that people are more likely to report age discrimination if they have been educated about it: 65% of survey respondents with training reported age discrimination when witnessed versus 49% of overall respondents.[44]

Question: "I See the Issue, but Is Manager Training Really Part of the Solution?"

Once people agree on the problem, they are likely to diverge in their opinions about which solution(s) are best. In your response, you can share some of these ideas:

- 1 in 4 workers age 45 and over have been signaled out negatively for their age by their own managers or supervisors. On the other side, young employees may also feel left out of leadership roles or opportunities because of their age.[45] Given that so many of these age-bias-based decisions are made by managers, and that

[42]https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81 p. 88
[43]https://www.theguardian.com/money/2012/jan/16/young-older-people-age-discrimination-work
[44]https://www.seniorliving.org/research/age-discrimination-statistics-facts/
[45]https://hbr.org/2021/07/do-your-dei-efforts-consider-age-class-and-lived-experience

so few people are comfortable raising concerns to their manager about age bias, it's incumbent on us as senior leaders to train managers to develop the skills to successfully lead mixed-age teams.

- Manager training is an investment that both managers and their direct reports value and see as a signal that we care about their career development. According to the Society of Human Resource Management, "50%[46] of American workers believe it would help them improve their own work performance if their direct supervisor's people management skills were improved." Given that "84%[47] of U.S. workers say poorly trained managers create a lot of unnecessary work and stress," manager training is an opportunity to create value broadly across the organization and see a high return on our investment.

Question: "I'm On Board, But I Don't Think I Can Get Approval or Resources for This."

Even when individuals are personally supportive of an idea, they worry about whether they can convince their own bosses to approve and provide resources for it.

It's always easier to convince an executive to approve a tactic that addresses a need they already see. Remember that most executives already believe that their organization needs to better address age diversity. You don't need to convince them. Instead, position your proposal for manager training as a practice that will help them address that need. In your response, you can share some of these ideas:

- Research shows that global executives acknowledge that age is a valuable dimension of diversity that their organizations are not addressing sufficiently. They "would implement [these] practices if tools and support were available:

  - 68%: purposefully designed mixed-age teams

  - 70%: unbiased recruitment

  - 74%: training and lifelong learning opportunities."[48]

- Managers — and critically, the training the organization provides to them — are essential to all three of these areas. We can likely secure buy-in from executives by framing our manager training initiative as a tactic to support them.

Use stories to trigger empathy and leverage aspirational goals

Many leaders, particularly those who drive resource allocation decisions, first need to be convinced with their heads — so provide the data that will move them quickly to awareness and alignment on how your proposal will create value. However, once the analytic boxes have been checked, they move to action led by their hearts.

If you can, find some stories that create a human face to the proposal you're bringing. Is it a manager who can talk about their challenges learning to manage a mixed-age team? An employee who can speak to their experience with a manager who was/not skilled at leading a mixed-age team? An industry competitor the C-suite always strives to match or beat who is already ahead of your organization in their efforts to create an age-inclusive organization?

[46] www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/toxic-workplace-culture-report.aspx
[47] https://www.shrm.org/about-shrm/press-room/press-releases/pages/survey-84-percent-of-us-workers-blame-bad-managers-for-creating-unnecessary-stress-.aspx
[48] https://www.aarpinternational.org/initiatives/future-of-work/living-learning-and-earning-longer

Try to speak to both the heads and the hearts of the leaders you are trying to move to act. Pull some heartstrings, prompt empathy and even push on the competitive spirit when it helps!

Unit II: Action Tools
Start the conversation in your own organization

Now you're prepared to lead a discussion about the strategic value of age-inclusive organizations, and ready to explore starting an initiative to train managers on leading mixed-age teams. The first step can feel the hardest — asking for the first meeting to talk about it.

To make it easy, here's a draft email template you can edit and use to reach out to your HR lead, division head or another senior leader in a position to greenlight a new-manager training initiative.

Dear [HR leader or senior leader],

I'm reaching out because I'd like to schedule time to share an idea that could help our organization's teams be more productive and inclusive. I just read that 83% of executives believe that creating a more multigenerational workforce would drive their success and growth,[49] yet there is a dearth of action. Most said they would invest in professional development practices to advance age inclusion if they had the tools to do so.

I may have just found a tool that can help us take action. The *Manager's Toolkit to Leading Mixed-Age Teams* is a new resource from AARP's employer engagement team. It has data we can use to frame discussions, and practical training resources we can use to take our first steps.

Can we find a time in the next two weeks to talk about creating an initiative to provide training that will prepare managers to successfully lead their mixed-age teams? I think both the managers themselves and their direct reports would welcome tools that can help their teams be more productive, inclusive and enjoy higher retention.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

[Your Name]

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[49]"According to the AARP Global Employer Survey 2020, 83% of employers state that it would be very or at least somewhat valuable to their organization's success and growth to create a more multigenerational workforce. Executives in large global companies recognize that their organization would need to undertake more efforts to maximize the full potential that an age-diverse workforce offers, listing age, besides disability, as the area of diversity management that requires most improvement. (Forbes Insights, 2011[33])"

Section III: How Can I Design an Initiative to Train Managers to Lead Mixed-Age Teams?

Unit I: Best Practices to Design a Manager Training Initiative

Your efforts will be most successful if you use best practices for designing your manager training. Consider these suggestions:

- **Be explicit to managers that your organization's values call them to lead with empathy.** "Leading from a place of service and understanding has been proven to reduce turnover and create better working relationships. Managers forget that it is OK for them to be human [and might need you to remind them that it will make them a more effective team leader]."[50]

- **Lead with a "compelling story** that relates to the need for leadership"[51] from managers with mixed-age teams before introducing specific tools or concepts. Make them feel the "why" before you ask them to learn "how."

- **Teach concepts that are "simple but profound…**ideas that are easy to learn, retain and apply, but which have a big impact are more likely to show results."[52]

- **Connect your training material to your managers' existing strengths** and passions; then show them how those strengths and skills can transfer to leading mixed-age teams.[53]

- **Integrate training on leading mixed-age teams into the ways of learning that managers value most highly:** external coaching if you offer it, developmental assignments, assessments to diagnose leadership strengths, and formal in-person training.[54]

Unit II: Best Practices for a Strong Launch

Once you have rallied your organization's support and resources, it's key to have a strong launch that builds momentum, raises awareness of the strategic value of building a more age-inclusive workplace, and provides clear and measurable successes that you can use to convince leaders to continually invest in and expand the effort. Consider these best practices for a strong launch:

[50]https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2021/11/05/10-best-ways-to-make-new-manager-training-more-effective/?sh=1a7e3ecb2931
[51]https://blog.grovo.com/5-best-practices-great-management-training/
[52]https://blog.grovo.com/5-best-practices-great-management-training/
[53]https://blog.grovo.com/5-best-practices-great-management-training/
[54]https://media.ddiworld.com/research/GLF2021-final.pdf

- **Start with a pilot effort** — either via a dedicated training session or by adding content about leading mixed-age teams into an existing manager training program. Starting small gives you plenty of room to ask for and integrate feedback from participants, to iron out operational issues, and to gather success stories that will help you win additional resources and support from key influencers.

- **Ask for feedback and use it to iterate your approach** before you expand your training reach. Ask the participants, their own managers and their own direct reports to get a sense of how valuable the training was, and most critically if the managers participating have been able to use it in leading their teams.

- **Give a microphone to the early participants who will be strong advocates.** They can influence other leaders to bring the training to the managers on their own teams and assure their peers that their time will be well spent. Highlight them in your organization's internal communications channels. If an internal roadshow is part of your launch plan, include these early adopters.

- **Follow up with the managers who participated in the training roughly a month later** to see what additional support they need. Sometimes it's as simple as gathering the same group for an open discussion and Q&A about how they have been using their training and heightened awareness of age-related team dynamics.

Unit III: Action Tools

Your organization likely already has many different opportunities to train managers. Use this simple cheat sheet to identify the most promising options for creating a pilot effort on leading mixed-age teams. It can help you identify the people you'll want to talk with in your initial outreach.

Type of manager training effort	Does your organization have this?	How likely is the leader of this training effort to be open to a new idea?
Onboarding training for people in manager roles	Y N	
New manager training for people who have been promoted to their first managerial role	Y N	
Regularly scheduled training for all managers	Y N	
Opt-in trainings available to managers	Y N	
Team off-sites where managers from a specific department can gather for a breakout session		
ERG-based professional development programs that reach managers	Y N	
Trainings offered by the DE&I team that can address age inclusion as a DE&I goal	Y N	
Other		

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Section IV: What Training Exercises Can We Use?

To jump-start your effort to train managers to lead mixed-age teams, here are a full set of training exercises.

Each one asks the manager to actively use a tool to self-assess and engage with a specific best practice for managing a mixed-age team. These are bite-sized activities that can be completed in about 15–30 minutes. Thus, you can either combine them into a half-day training or integrate individual exercises into your existing manager training offerings and/or team meetings.

Ideally, a manager will progress through the full set in the order presented, but they are designed to also function as a menu if needed. Each exercise can be done by an individual manager, in a group training session for managers, and/or in most cases they can be adapted by a manager to do with their full team of direct reports.

The activities include:

Activity 1: Mindset Shift: From Age-Based Assumptions Toward a Career-Phase and Life-Phase Orientation

Activity 2: Are We Set Up to Succeed as a Mixed-Age Team?

Activity 3: How Can I Recruit a Mixed-Age Team?

Activity 4: How Can I Embed Age-Inclusive Practices into My Work?

Activity 5: How Can I Talk About Age Inclusion with My Team?

Activity 6: How Can I Manage Up and Down Across Age Differences?

Activity 7: How Can I Alleviate Tensions Between Team Members of Different Ages?

Activity 8: How Can My Team Build Age Inclusion into Our Customer Experience or Product?

Activity 9: Sign the AARP Employer Pledge

Activity 1: Mindset Shift: From Age-Based Assumptions Toward a Career-Phase and Life-Phase Orientation

The first step for anyone who wants to lead a thriving mixed-age team is to proactively shift from making age-based assumptions toward an orientation instead centered on career phase and life stage. Managers can see huge dividends from small efforts to be aware of limiting age-based assumptions and to pay attention to the needs of employees based on their current life phase and career stage.

Step 1: Recognize examples of age-related assumptions on your team.

"The assumptions we make about generational groups (including our own) can hold us back from understanding teammates' true selves as well as the skills, information, and connections they have to offer. Noticing that we're making these assumptions is the first step to combating them."[55]

For one day, really watch for how age-based assumptions show up in your team's daily experiences — and in your own managerial decisions. "This might mean noticing that a team leader dismissed a young employee's request for more responsibility as 'entitled' behavior or that you left senior employees out of your meeting on innovation."[56]

Pay special attention to examples of unconscious bias. If you have to choose someone to cover for you in a leadership team meeting, do you assume the oldest member of your team will have more gravitas and influence among senior leaders? If you have to assign a social media project, do you take a mental shortcut to assume a younger team member will enjoy — and excel at — that assignment?

Step 2: Shift from age and generational assumptions toward a career-phase and life-stage orientation.

Our multigenerational workplaces "include people with a diverse range of perspectives depending on their life stage and their different experiences. Some (but not all) of these may be linked to age."[57] In fact, "despite the widespread belief that each generation has a distinctive and fixed set of needs and motivations concerning work, there is much more evidence that workers of all ages broadly value the same things."[58] Regardless of the age or generation of the worker, their career phase and life stage often present consistent needs and challenges for employers to address.

- **Create a simple sketch of how your own life stages have overlapped with key career phases.** Design it however you like, but if you get stuck, just scan the lists below for ideas.

  - Career phases might include: first job, first managerial role, years in a heavy travel role, years of a high intensity schedule working for a key promotion, years in a role where you are not pursuing the next promotion, an unexpected career opportunity that causes you to make a major move, years where you are oriented toward retirement, and retirement.

  - Life phases might include: single without care responsibilities, single with care responsibilities, partnered with care responsibilities, partnered without care responsibilities, high personal health, navigating personal health issue, phase prioritizing career over life outside work, phase prioritizing life outside work over career… anything!

[55] https://hbr.org/2022/03/harnessing-the-power-of-age-diversity?ab=seriesnav-bigidea
[56] https://hbr.org/2022/03/harnessing-the-power-of-age-diversity?ab=seriesnav-bigidea
[57] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81
[58] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/59752153-en.pdf?expires=1636142224&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=590E9514C66F2CFBA873D4D5FD3CAD81

- **Now, create a simple sketch of how life stages overlap with key career phases for the colleague you know best:**

If you did so for each person in your organization, it would become immediately obvious that every employee's journey is unique. Some people work straight through and do not navigate parenting, caregiving, personal health crises, or intensive out-of-work interests that keep them from focusing 100% on work. But that's not very many people. One might become a parent during his first job out of college, while another might become a father for the first time in the middle of his career. One might plan to retire at age 40, while another assumes he'll work until age 70. One might enjoy great health for decades, while another has to take a year out of the workforce to recover from a health issue or injury.

When we stop to think about it, we know that age-based assumptions don't tell us anything about what an employee needs to achieve their personal career goals and to thrive both in and outside of the workplace.

- **Now jot down a list of what kind of managerial support and/or organizational support an employee might need if they were in these specific career stage or life stage:**

Career-stage samples

Type of manager training effort	Does your organization have this?	How likely is the leader of this training effort to be open to a new idea?
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.

Life-stage samples

Making choices independently without responsibilities to a partner, child or family member.	A year where the employee navigates caring for an ill family member who passes away, and grieves their loss.	Navigating divorce and adjusting to post-divorce lifestyle, budget and new reality of retirement timeline.
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.

This simple exercise illustrates that managers can often predict what an employee needs based on their career phase and their life stage. Assuming they can make accurate predictions based on an employee's age, though, will always miss the mark.

Activity 2: Are We Set Up to Succeed as a Mixed-Age Team?

The strongest determinant of an employee's experience of the workplace is the most basic organizational unit — their team. Thus, it is critical to ensure that at the team level, the employee experiences an age-inclusive dynamic. Research has identified these "pre-conditions for the effectiveness of mixed-age teams:

- High task complexity

- Low salience and high appreciation of age diversity

- A positive team climate

- Low age discrimination

- Ergonomic design of workplaces

- The use of age differentiated leadership"[59]

If you are a manager, take a moment to do a quick check-in to see if you are already laying the groundwork for successfully leading a mixed-age team. Which of these already exist in your own team?
Which are areas where improvement is needed?

Precondition for an effective mixed-age team	Does this describe your team?		
My team regularly collaborates (either within or outside the team) on complex tasks without highly intense time pressure.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
My team's dynamics do not position age at the center of how we see each other or our work, or in how we frame disagreements in our team.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
My team's norms and behaviors promote a high appreciation of age diversity.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
My team has an overall positive climate within our group's working relationships and collaboration style.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
My team actively works to recognize and reduce age bias in our workplace.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
My team improves ergonomic design in our workplaces, especially for work that is physical in nature.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
My leadership of the team and interactions with each team member consider each individual's unique life and professional experience.	Often	Sometimes	Rarely

1. Looking at your answers, which area could you focus on to increase the likelihood that your mixed-age team will be as productive and successful as possible? _____

2. Who/what resources in your organization could help you make improvements in this area for your team? _____

3. What is a specific step you can take in the next two weeks to improve this area? _____

[59] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22317517/ and https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272021711_What_makes_age_diverse_teams_effective_Results_from_a_six-year_research_program

Activity 3: How Can I Recruit a Mixed-Age Team?

The first step in leading a successful mixed-age team is to recruit and hire team members effectively.

Unbiased recruiting practices are used by only 6% of employers,[60] so it will often fall to you as a manager to ensure your own hiring practices are free of age bias. Assumptions by hiring managers about age, salary expectations, skills and qualifications can result in biased job postings that, at best, discourage older job seekers, and, at worst, fall afoul of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.[61]

Find a copy of a recent job posting on your team — or pull up a currently posted job opening on your team. Print it or open it online in a format where you can write comments on it. By the end of this activity, you'll have a new version that will be more likely to attract the best candidate of any age, and a more age-inclusive plan to source and hire candidates.

1. **Review the language of the job posting for coded language that comes across as ageist.**

   • Have you replaced age-biased terms with more neutral language? AARP's guide Say This, Not That, can help:

SAY THIS	NOT THIS
Entry level (even better, include salary range)	Recent college grad
List specific skills and required proficiency level	Digital native
List specific skills and required proficiency level	Tech savvy
Agile, creative thinker	Fresh
Adaptable	Young
Education level	Graduation year
List company values, benefits, DE&I policies	Cultural fit
Productive	Go-getter
Highly engaged	High energy
At least X years of experience	No more than X years of experience

   • Have you removed requests for date of birth and graduation from the application process?

   • Have you removed requests for past salary history, which may contribute to a bias against experienced workers and gender-pay inequality? Instead, post salary ranges for all job postings.

[60]https://vervoe.com/age-diversity/#:~:text=Advancing%20age%20diversity%20in%20the%20workplace%20is%20no,supportive%20of%20everyone.%20Create%20an%20age-inclusive%20hiring%20process
[61]https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/work/employers/2020/09/apwj-39195-wj-remove-bias-v3.pdf

- Have you removed opportunities for candidates to submit a photograph with their application?

- Can you be more explicit when an attribute is a true requirement (e.g., a technical certification) or simply a recommendation (e.g., at least three years' experience in a specific area)? Older and younger candidates are more likely to drop out of applying if they do not have every item you list as a requirement.

- If you want to keep going, there are many online products that will scan a job description and highlight language for many types of bias, including age. Many offer a free trial that can provide a great learning experience.

2. **Consider the opportunities to promote from within your own team**

- Review the requirements of the newly edited job description with each of your current team members in mind. Consider whether each person on your team who has most of the qualification requirements would be better positioned to achieve their career goals if they had this role.

- Is there someone for whom a lateral move could be extremely valuable for their long-term career goals?

- Is there a high performer who could succeed in a skip-level promotion since that team member is already fully oriented to the team's work and dynamics?

- Is there someone who wants to shift from a more senior role to a lower-pressure and/or part-time role due to career- or life-phase considerations? Or someone who would like a phased retirement opportunity?

3. **Review the context for your job opening on the organization's general job listings website**

- Make sure age is included in the standard company EOC statements that appear on every job description. Does the language explicitly state that candidates of all ages are encouraged to apply?

- Are age-inclusive images included in the recruiting materials and website?

- Does the organization's recruiting information highlight company policies, benefits and career development practices that are compelling to candidates across the age spectrum?

- Does the content send signals of what a "cultural fit" will be with the organization? For example, does it highlight foosball tables and happy hours but not mention volunteer days and remote or hybrid work opportunities?

4. **Choose external platforms to post the opening where you can specifically reach those with the skills and experience you seek, and where you are likely to find candidates at both ends of the age spectrum.**

- Have you posted on sites targeted by industry or profession?

- Have you posted with organizations that specialize in return-to-work or on-ramping for workers who have taken time out for other life-phase-related responsibilities?

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- When recruiting in university settings, do you use both on-campus recruiting and alumni recruiting opportunities?

5. **Review your interview practices**

- Double-check who is invited to interview for the role. Does your group of interviewees include candidates in a wide range of ages? Are you unconsciously weeding out candidates who you think are "too young" to be up for the role's responsibilities? Or weeding out candidates who are older than you (or the hiring manager) since you're nervous about managing someone who is older than you? Do you have a set of questions prepared that have been screened to ensure they do not reflect age bias or a bias toward seniority?

- Can you edit the interview questions to refocus on the specific skills, perspectives and experiences each candidate could bring to the role?

- Who is conducting the interviews? Will candidates meet team members who show the age diversity of the hiring team and/or the broader organization?

6. **Make it more likely your chosen candidate will accept your offer.**

- In your offer, did you proactively include all information about company policies and benefits that are important at all life phases and career phases? Flexible work and remote work arrangements, family and caregiving leave, caregiving-related benefits, and student loan benefits can meaningfully signal to candidates who are both younger and older that yours is an age-inclusive team.

- Have you provided the candidate with contact information for other team members, if appropriate, so the candidate can reach out directly to ask questions around inclusion, work-life integration and career development of their potential teammates?

- Have you provided candidates with a contact list for the leaders of the Employee Resource Groups/Affinity Groups so they can reach out directly to connect with others who may have similar experiences in your organization?

If you've taken all six steps, you now have a more age-inclusive recruiting and hiring practice to put in place for your next hire. Congratulations!

Note: This activity is well suited to be repurposed for a manager to do with their full team using a neutral sample job description (e.g., pulled from the company's open job listings but on a different team).

Activity 4: How Can I Embed Age-Inclusive Practices into My Work?

The crux of your role as a manager is to bring together the efforts of your direct reports toward shared goals. When you can embed age-inclusive management practices in your daily work together, the benefits of mixed-aged teams that you learned about earlier in this toolkit will come to bear in your own team. Your employees will be more engaged, innovative and productive and more likely to stay on your team.

In this activity, focus on these four best practices for managing mixed-age teams:

1. **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. And provide support for workers who might feel intimidated by the prospect of developing new skills.

2. **Concentrate on the unique mix of skills and experience each team member brings** to the table rather than on title or seniority. Whether through public recognition or private conversation, focus on the value each team member contributes and how that value stems from their unique skill set rather than from how senior they are. This is particularly important when managers are younger than some of their team members.

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

4. **Approach development conversations from a growth mindset and in a positive light.** How can we leverage you? What do you need? Avoid inadvertently dismissing older workers with traditional approaches to development that associate growth with youth."[62]

Now, sketch out a plan for how to use proven best practices in a specific current project on your team.

1. What is a project that all or most of your direct reports are working on together? _____
   _____

2. In each column header, write the initials of a single team member. Add columns if needed.

3. In each box of the table, jot a note about one action you can take to personalize your management of that team member using the age-inclusive best practice. Your comment doesn't need to be long, but it does need to spark your memory about your intended action in managing this team member on this specific project.

4. For each team member, circle the one idea that you think will have the most benefit for that individual in the context of this specific project. Then put a date in the box for when you'll take this action.

[62]https://www.aarp.org/work/employers/age-diversity-inclusion-guide/#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20ensuring%20your%20people%20managers%20have,be%20younger%20than%20some%20of%20their%20direct%20reports.

5. For each team member, put a star by the one idea that you think might be most challenging to do with this team member. Give extra thought to how you can make this action successful.

Managerial practice	Team member	Team member	Team member
Promote training opportunities			
Concentrate on the unique mix of skills and experience of the individual			
Accommodate differences in communication styles			
Approach development conversations from a growth mindset and in a positive light			

Activity 5: How Can I Talk About Age Inclusion with My Team?

While there are specific skills you as a manager need to develop and use to lead a successful mixed-age team, obviously all team members need to develop their own age-inclusive work practices and mindsets.

Here are a few ideas for how you can start the conversation — and keep it going — on your own team.

You can personally lead each of these activities with your team, or you can use these as opportunities for team members to step up and lead these activities during a team meeting.

1. **As a team, take the online *Age Inclusion in the Workplace* virtual course from AARP.**
   https://www.aarp.org/disrupt-aging/age-inclusion/in-the-workplace/

   Ask team members to complete the training before a chosen team meeting. Add an agenda item to discuss key takeaways and any ideas team members would like to use in either your team or your team's work with the broader organization.

2. **Use a strengths-assessment tool to give your team a new framework to see one another's skills and experiences** — and think practically about the value of having a team where together you represent a wide range of strengths. Each individual will have a better understanding of how they can best work, and how their profile can best collaborate with other profiles held by teammates.

   While these tools are not specific to age or generation at all, they can be used by team members to update age-based assumptions they make about one another. Instead, they will move to strengths-based knowledge about each colleague.

   Your organization may already have access to these tools, or you can use single-use codes to access them:

   - VIA Character Strengths

   - Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI)

   - CliftonStrengths

3. **In a teamwork session, take a few minutes for everyone to read the short article** *10 Principles for Managing Mixed-Age Teams*.

   Take a quick poll (use Post-it notes, a Google form or your usual chat or poll tool) to guide discussion. Ask each person:

   a. Which one of the 10 principles do you think our ORGANIZATION does really well?

   b. Which one of the 10 principles to you think our TEAM does really well?

Discuss the results and talk about why the answers are different at the organizational and team levels. Encourage people to use specific examples from their own experiences, which will make the point that these principles support team members of all ages.

Next, ask each person:

c.   Which one of the 10 principles do you think our ORGANIZATION needs to focus on improving?

d.   Which one of the 10 principles to you think our TEAM needs to focus on improving?

Discuss the results and talk about why the answers are different at the organizational and team levels. Encourage people to share specific ideas for improvement rather than dwelling on examples that show the need for improvement.

End with the group choosing one principle that the team wants to focus on in the coming week, and a roundtable of an action each team member can take to explore it.

4.   **If appropriate, share the short article** *Is That Conflict with Your Colleague Really About Age Difference?* and have follow-up conversations in your 1:1 meetings with each team member to hear their thoughts and observations.

Activity 6: How Can I Manage Up and Down Across Age Differences?

Your success depends on your ability to manage both "up" and "down" in your organization's hierarchy. In either case, you are likely to be managing — or be managed by — someone with whom you have a significant age difference. Paying attention to how to do this well is an underappreciated, but very important, contributor to your overall career success.

1. **Think of two people who can make or break your personal success in your current managerial role in the next 12 months, and with whom you have a significant age difference.**

   a. Who is one who reports to you? If you have a direct report who is older than you are, consider choosing this person for this exercise. Many managers find these are direct reports whom they unconsciously perceive as a threat, and so reflecting on this relationship can be especially valuable.

   b. Who is one who is senior to you? This can be either your manager or another senior leader who influences how your work is perceived. If someone in these roles is significantly younger than you, consider choosing this person for this exercise. Many managers find these are the people whom they unconsciously perceive as a threat, and so reflecting on this relationship can be especially valuable.

2. **With each person in mind, think about how you can ensure each best practice is used in these relationships. Then fill in each box** with a question or idea that might help you manage those two relationships more effectively.

Harvard Business Review's Best Practices for _Managing People from 5 Generations_	Person who reports to me	Person more senior than I am
1. **"Don't dwell on differences"** that are based on generalizations and generation-based assumptions. Get to know each person individually. **Talk Tip:** When one team member expresses an interest in something, build on it by noting it as an interest they share with another team member.		
2. **Build collaborative relationships.** With direct reports who are older than you "the mindset is to make that person your partner and involve them in everything you do. You're still the boss and the one making the decisions, but you should hear them out." When managing younger workers, "they are used to discussion and engagement because that's what they had in the college environment. Help your employees make the transition from school to the workplace by encouraging debate. You don't necessarily need to take their advice, but be aware that this is where they're coming from." **Talk Tip:** Ask, "How would you approach this issue?" rather than "What should we do?" to signal that you are soliciting input but will still make the decision.		

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Harvard Business Review's Best Practices for *Managing People from 5 Generations*	Person who reports to me	Person more senior than I am
3. **Study your employees.** Ask them about their "preferred communication style and planned professional paths." Recognize that career paths are no longer linear, so you may have team members who are feeling ambitious in a career phase when you assume they are winding down, or someone who wants to hold at their current career spot while they take on responsibilities outside of work for a phase. **Talk Tip:** In a 1:1 meeting, ask each person to reflect on how you/your team can help them thrive at work and in their life this week, this quarter and this year.		
4. **Establish a culture of coaching across ages in your team.** "Mixed-age work teams are…a way to promote cross-generational mentoring. Studies show that colleagues learn more from each other than they do from formal training, which is why it is so important to establish a culture of coaching across age groups. In mixed-age teams, mentoring relationships develop more naturally." **Talk Tip:** Ask each team member to self-identify two to three topics where they are happy to be a "sounding board" for other team members. These can be in areas where they are especially passionate, curious or knowledgeable.		
5. **Consider life paths and career paths.** "Don't assume you already know how to motivate employees who are older or younger — ask them what they want out of their professional lives," and then actively listen to their answers. Be open to how that fits with what they want from their lives outside work without making assumptions about what age, gender or career phase means for their professional ambition. **Talk Tip:** Without asking specifically about life events and personal topics, ask each person to share something that they really look forward to this year professionally, and ask how you can support them to achieve it. Another option is to both read this article on career portfolio vs. career ladders and ask what resonates with them personally in how they think about their career path.		

Activity 7: How Can I Alleviate Tensions Between Team Members of Different Ages?

In any high-performing team, and certainly in teams that fully leverage their diversity to create value for the organization, psychological safety is key. Cultivating a sense of psychological safety is one of the most important parts of supervising a team. Without it, the team will always perform below its potential and have higher attrition and lower employee engagement.

Forbes explains this well in [How To Encourage Inclusivity On Your Team](https://www.forbes.com):

> "Without psychological safety, people won't risk being themselves at work. They may show up to meetings, but they'll sit quietly, feeling they aren't truly welcome or wanted. They'll be afraid to actively contribute or share opinions that differ from the majority. Julie Nugent, now a senior vice president at Catalyst and chair of the Catalyst Award Evaluation committee, sums it up well: 'Do people feel safe at work? Do they feel like they can bring their whole selves to work? Do people feel like they can contribute without being penalized? When you think about inclusion, those are what make employees either feel included or not.'[63]

> "'Before your employees can trust you, you must demonstrate your trust in them. Treat them like adults capable of managing their time, not like suspect adolescents. Invite all team members to share their opinions. Own up to your errors, and encourage others to do the same, making it clear that mistakes are inevitable and human. Embracing vulnerability will make your employees feel psychologically safe.'"[64]

This is especially crucial when leading a mixed-age team. Fostering an atmosphere of psychological safety can alleviate tension between generations that may include fears of being pushed out on one end or denied opportunity on the other. In a world where employees of all ages are personally concerned about age bias, yet don't talk about it with their manager, a manager's effort to increase psychological safety can have a major effect on the team's morale, engagement and productivity.

Let's get started:

1. **First, map your personal experience of psychological safety at work.**

   - Jot a list of moments at work when you felt you could share a risky or unpopular idea: _____ and _____ and _____

   - Jot a list of moments at work where you felt comfortable sharing something that made you feel vulnerable: _____ and _____ and _____

     These are moments where you likely experienced psychological safety.

     On the other hand…

   - Jot a list of moments at work where you tried to become "invisible" or avoid sharing your full thoughts with someone: _____ and _____ and _____

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[63] https://www.forbes.com/sites/serenitygibbons/2019/08/27/how-to-encourage-inclusivity-on-your-team/?sh=4ddc49335a38
[64] https://www.forbes.com/sites/serenitygibbons/2019/08/27/how-to-encourage-inclusivity-on-your-team/?sh=4ddc49335a38

- Jot a list of moments at work when you were criticized, ignored, experienced a micro-aggression or your idea was dismissed in a way that didn't feel respectful: _____ and _____ and _____.

    These are moments when you were trying to work in a context without psychological safety. It's likely that you were not able to contribute fully to the work at hand because it didn't feel like your contributions and perspectives were valued.

2. **Now, spend the rest of today actively looking for signals of psychological safety in the meetings, conversations and correspondence that you participate in and witness in your own team.** At the end of today, reserve five minutes to jot here what you noticed:

    a. An example of a 1:1 **in-person interaction** where it seemed both people felt psychologically safe: _____. How I could tell: _____ _____

    b. An example of a 1:1 **in-person interaction** where I'm NOT sure if one or both of them felt psychologically safe: _____. How I could tell: _____ _____

    c. An example of an **in-person interaction in a meeting** where it seemed everyone felt psychologically safe: _____. How I could tell: _____ _____

    d. An example of an **in-person interaction in a meeting** where I'm NOT sure everyone felt psychologically safe: _____. How I could tell: _____ _____

    e. An example of a **decision I saw made today** where it seemed everyone was willing to share their input and perspectives freely, debate and feel valued regardless of the decision outcome: _____ _____. How I could tell: _____ _____

    f. An example of a **decision I saw made today** where it was clear that NOT everyone was willing to share their input and perspectives freely, debate and feel valued regardless of the decision outcome: _____ _____ How I could tell: _____

    g. Did you see or experience any moments where there was potential tension between team members of different ages that was left unresolved? _____ If so, how might this have played out differently if those team member(s) felt more psychologically safe with one another or on the team? _____

3. Finally, choose one of the situations where you noticed a lack of psychological safety (from b, d, or f above.) Could you have helped by using any of these conversational "shifts"?

a. **Post-meeting individual follow-up:** "There were a few moments in that meeting where it looked like you had an idea or a different view, and I'd love to hear what it was." Then, after the individual shares it, you might ask, "Next time, is there anything I could do in that situation to make it easier for you to share your ideas with the whole group?"

b. **In a meeting where decisions are being made without buy-in or input from everyone:** "I hear that some people feel strongly that we should do (x). Let's pressure-test it to see if that holds. For the next few minutes, I just want to hear us brainstorm things that are cons/risks with this decision."

c. **Remember that if you see any team member showing age bias to a colleague**, you cannot ignore it. You need to pull them aside afterward and succinctly explain, "I noticed that when you spoke to/about (name), you made a comment that [paraphrase what they said]. Regardless of your intent, which may have been humor or just casual, it's important that you realize that it was disrespectful of our other colleagues. Can we talk about how you can shift your behavior/language/assumptions in the future?" You should also approach the person they spoke to/about, with a similar acknowledgment that you saw the age bias happening and have taken steps to encourage their colleague to rethink their approach. Ask them how they are feeling, and what if anything they'd like you to do. Many managers will also then jot a note about the exchanges so they can refer back if needed (e.g., if the colleague showing age bias does not change their behavior).

Activity 8: How Can My Team Build Age Inclusion into Our Customer Experience or Product?

By now, your team likely sees that you are managing with a more age-inclusive approach. Now, show them that you consider age inclusion as a driver of real financial value for your organization's products and services, and an area ripe with the potential for innovation.

Host a brainstorming session to look at a key product or service that your team provides — through the lens of age inclusion. It could be for either an internal or an external customer. The point is to engage your team to approach their daily work with a heightened awareness of how age-inclusion considerations can create value for all. For example, does your organization offer a consumer service? If so, how might you innovate to improve that service to better meet the needs of parents who are also family caregivers? Does your organization create a physical product? If so, how could you understand how people of different ages actually use that product, and identify opportunities for innovation?

If your organization has an Employee Resource Group(s) focused on mixed generations, early-career and/or later-career employees, your team can invite those ERG members to provide real-time feedback on the marketing and product efforts that your team leads. Their input can shape your team's customer-facing decisions and increase your team's success.

AARP's *Longevity Economy Report* has data to help you to highlight the size and dynamics of the 50+ consumer market, which is not only sizable, but also generally underserved in most product and customer experience design: https://www.aarp.org/longevityeconomy.

Activity 9: Sign the AARP Employer Pledge

If the managers in your organization have done any of the activities in this toolkit, you are already showing your commitment to building an age-inclusive workforce. Congratulations!

You're invited to sign the AARP Employer Pledge. Doing so publicly affirms your commitment to building an age-inclusive workforce. It will also ensure you receive additional tools and ideas on how to do so.

AARP Employer Pledge

"We believe in equal opportunity for all workers, regardless of age, and that 50+ workers should have a level playing field in their ability to compete for and obtain jobs. Recognizing the value of experienced workers, we pledge to recruit across diverse age groups and to consider all applicants on an equal basis as we hire for positions within our organization."

Employers who sign the Pledge agree that they:

- Believe in equal opportunity for all workers

- Recognize the value of experienced workers

- Recruit across diverse age groups and consider all applicants on an equal basis, regardless of age

- Believe that 50+ workers should have a level playing field in their ability to compete and obtain jobs

Who's eligible for the Employer Pledge Program?

- No age discrimination lawsuits within the past five years

- A live website with contact information

- An active point of contact

Resources

AARP

Find all of AARP's resources for employers to create age-inclusive workplaces here:
https://www.aarp.org/employers

Speakers for your events. If you would like AARP to present on topics related to age diversity and inclusion, take advantage of our free tools and resources, or discuss strategies in which you as the employer or Human Resource professional can promote age inclusion across your organization; email employerpledge@aarp.org to request a speaker.

Pledge. 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. https://www.aarp.org/forms/employer-pledge-form/

Research resources. AARP Research uncovers compelling insights on the 50+ population through groundbreaking research. We inform thought leaders internally and externally with strategic insights about the needs, market conditions and trends impacting the 50+ to fulfill AARP's mission of providing Real Possibilities for Americans 50+. Visit https://www.aarp.org/research/ to learn more.

> *"As people live, learn and earn longer, AARP is committed to working with businesses to help them reap the benefits of a multigenerational workforce where people can continue to work for as long as they need or want to."*
> — AARP CEO Jo Ann Jenkins.[65]

Workable Concept

Workable Concept works with employers to create family-friendly workplaces, with employees to create strategies that let them thrive at work and home, and with business and social sector leaders to create the products that make it all possible. Resources that can be leveraged for manager training events, panels and activities are at www.workableconcept.com.

Other Organizations

What Works Program from the University of Massachusetts Amherst Center for Employment Equity
https://www.umass.edu/employmentequity/what-works

OECD and AARP Report Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer
https://www.oecd.org/publications/promoting-an-age-inclusive-workforce-59752153-en.htm
offers strategies businesses can use to ensure that all employees are getting the opportunity to fully contribute and grow. The same project developed the Growing with Age digital learning platform for employers
https://www.aarpinternational.org/growingwithage?CMP=RDRCT-PRI-WORKJOBS-120420.

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[65]https://www.aarp.org/work/employers/info-2020/growing-with-age.html

Acknowledgments

[Pull from ERG Toolkit. Format to fit one page, not two. 1/2-page versions of AARP, Workable Concept organizational content and contacts]

Notes