# The Prism of Age in the Workplace
## EXPANDING YOUR DEFINITION OF AGE CAN HELP FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

When considering the age-diversity of your organization's workforce, the chronological age of your employees often comes to mind first. However, a person's subjective age — how they see themselves — consists of a lot more, such as life stage, career stage, generation, and so on. Building age into diversity and inclusion efforts requires a more complex understanding of age as seen through multiple lenses.

| LENSES | AS A COMPONENT OF INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTIVE AGE | ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER FOR WORKFORCE AGE DIVERSITY |
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| **Chronological age:** Number of years lived since birth | Chronological age is decreasingly important in determining workplace outcomes, owing to variation in other aspects of age (physical-cognitive, life events, etc.). | Chronological age distributions can be useful for planning, because greater proportions of workers tend to retire at specific ages (e.g., 65). However, as the number of workers who plan to work longer increases, this approach will likely diminish in importance. |
| **Physical-cognitive age:** Physiological changes that affect the ability to work | Different aspects of physical-cognitive age can be dispersed across the age spectrum, particularly within the context of wider disability accommodation. | While workers develop strategies to deal with physical-cognitive changes, a diverse multigenerational workforce may require ergonomic changes as well. |
| **Career stage:** A person's stage in the context of their career or line of work | While career development theory suggests that early-career, mid-career, and late-career workers have different needs and preferences, workers today are more likely to re-career in middle and later life, turning this paradigm on its head. | Workers may no longer be interested in moving through career stages in a lockstep manner, requiring a nimble approach to training, development, and advancement programs in multigenerational contexts. |
| **Generational age:** Birth cohort, including the worldviews and values attributable to macro-level factors, such as economic circumstances and historical events | Cohorts currently in the workforce are Generation Z (2000–), millennials/Generation Y (1981–1999), Generation X (1965–1980), baby boomers (1946–1964), and traditionalists/silent generation (1900–1945). | Perceived diversity in generational values, such as the use of technology versus face-to-face meetings, can be a potential source of conflict in the workforce; dispelling generational stereotypes and myths will help mitigate potential conflict. |
| **Life-events age:** Age relative to transitional events, such as getting married, having children, and retiring | Life-events age does not necessarily correspond to other aspects of age. For instance, a "middle-aged" worker who adopts a child might feel "younger" than her chronological age would suggest. | Like normative age, life-events age relates more to people's unique path in life. Recognizing that life events do not follow a neat, chronological trajectory will help you adopt work-life policies that benefit everyone. |