

Multigenerational / Intergenerational Workforce

Age diversity presents challenges relating to understanding difference because every generation thinks differently, is interested in different issues, and motivated by different things, but it can be easy to forget this in the workplace. This factsheet explains the broad age bands within workforces, the suggested motivations and working styles of different generations, and the implications of our multigenerational / intergenerational workforce for managers, leaders, and colleagues.

What is a multigenerational / intergenerational workforce?

A multigenerational workforce is a workplace comprised of people from several generations. With the scrapping of the default retirement age in 2011 and the investment in the apprenticeship levy in 2017, this has meant workforces are more likely than ever to be multigenerational / intergenerational: made up of five generations working together.

The average lifespan has been increasing, so more individuals are choosing to work past the typical retirement age. Furthermore, in the UK, there is no legal retirement age, and employers can no longer force their employees to retire at a particular age. This change came about in April 2011 when the 'Default Retirement Age' law was scrapped, following a campaign by [Age UK](#). Now, it is up to the individual when they decide to stop working.

Understanding different generations

For the first time in modern history, it is now common for organisations to have staff working side by side who represent four to five generations. These groups are defined as:

- Silent Generation / Traditionalists: born between 1928-1945
- Baby Boomers: born between 1946-1964
- Generation X: born between 1965-1989
- Generation Y / Millennials: born between 1981-1996
- Generation Z: born between 1997-2012

It is important to remember that everyone is different! Nevertheless, some studies have shown some possible attributes individuals from each generation may have:

Silent Generation / Traditionalists

Want opinions and ideas to be valued and to be rewarded for loyalty and experience. With a communication preference for face to face, traditionalists like clarity about roles and responsibilities and authority for decision making. Jobs are for life approach.

Baby Boomers

Want to be rewarded for long hours, and to have authority to make decisions. Valuing social responsibility and personal development opportunities, baby boomers like face to face or phone and email communications. Careers are defined by employers.

Generation X

Places highest priority on work-life balance. They like flat organisations and matrixed responsibilities and challenging work. Loyal to people/profession not organisations. Gen X prefer text or email communications and like portfolio careers.

Generation Y / Millennials

Freedom and flexibility are key drivers. The value empowerment to get things done, challenging work, teamwork, and fun. Work and life are blurred. Communicate online and via mobile devices. Gen Y often aspire to start their own business.

Generation Z

Value remote work options, flexibility, continual feedback, and rapid career progression. Results driven, Gen Z are able to easily consume and digest large amounts of information. Prefer to communicate with images and video calls rather than text, and multitask across multiple screens. Like to change job frequently and interested in starting their own business.

The presence of multiple generations in a workforce expands the pool of available talent. Yet, many employers have still yet to take advantage of this.

Benefits of a multigenerational workforce

Simply put, a multigenerational workforce adds value to the organisation. Younger employees can be more accustomed to rapidly developing technology, whilst mature staff could bring more experience and help guide decision-making. An effective collaborative workforce brings overall increased productivity and innovation.

Below is a list of benefits of a multigenerational workforce:

- Skill diversity – Every generation brings a different set of skills to the table, and they will often be able to complement each other across all aspects of an organisation.
- Open-mindedness – if all staff are more or less from the same generation, it is easy for them to think that everyone approaches work and sees the world the same way they do. There is more likely to be a similar way of thinking. From an organisation perspective, this narrows business growth. Having a diverse workforce in terms of age and other protected characteristics, opens people's minds. Employees will have various perspectives on every subject and idea that arise. As a result, the organisation will appeal to a much broader demographic.
- Creating mutual mentors – With a more diverse team, there are more ways for staff to learn from each other. This could create mutually beneficial mentoring opportunities. The recent trend of reverse mentoring allows for more mutual learning across generations.
- Custom onboarding processes – Age diversity within a workforce means consideration must be given to providing staff with a custom onboarding process that suits their area of comfort while also allowing scope for development. For example, while a baby boomer may join your team with a wealth of expertise, they may not be as familiar with Zoom. On the

other hand, many young Gen Z professionals may be very familiar with remote working tools and software, but have less experience within the organisation's sector.

Age Discrimination

Features of the protected characteristic of age under the UK Equality Act 2010 include:

- Protection against unfair treatment because of someone's actual age, or the age they are thought to be, or the age of someone they are associated with
- Protection against harassment because of age, and different treatment because of age (only being allowed in very limited circumstances)

Top tips for creating an inclusive multigenerational workforce

- **Study the demographics** – make use of data and analytics to understand how the workforce is split, and identify trends to implement age inclusive initiatives
- **Look beyond the stereotypes** – move beyond the labels and get to know each person individually. Mixed aged teams bring a wealth of opportunity to any employer. Fresh thinking coupled with experience can produce highly effective teams
- **Look beyond the generalisations** – research on different generations is very broad and general; just because an individual falls into a particular generation, does not necessarily mean they think/feel that way about their work, career, and the workplace
- **Ask about working preferences** – discuss flexible working, hybrid working, communication style, reasonable adjustments etc. this can be done using the [inclusion passport](#)
- **Encourage awareness of difference** – the generational differences do not mean that generations are incompatible. Encourage awareness of difference and collaborative working. Everyone can benefit from new ideas coupled with experience and wisdom
- **Create a reciprocal mentoring program** - younger employees could teach older employees how to use social media to drive business results, and older generations can provide mentoring regarding interpersonal skills, practical skills and/or communication
- **Adapt approaches** – this could be to all elements of the employee life-cycle
- **Be flexible** – while different generations may have different needs, individuals also have different needs based on personal and external factors
- **Do not segregate the generations** – consider ways in which the different generations can collaborate, support, and enhance learning for all employees
- **Learn more about age discrimination** – you can find our more about ageism [here](#).

Resources:

<https://www.process.st/what-is-cancel-culture/>

<https://www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk/blog/ageism-at-work-what-employers-need-to-know/>

<https://www.hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/51-of-older-workers-say-they-need-to-be-valued-more-to-stay/148076>

<https://www.aarpinternational.org/File%20Library/Future%20of%20Work/2020-Global-Insights-Multigenerational-Workforce-Infographic.doi.10.26419-2Fres.00399.002.pdf>

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/retirement/retirement-age>

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1806122/age-friendly-employer>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonwingard/2018/08/08/reverse-mentoring-3-proven-outcomes-driving-change/?sh=76b9d6638b51>

<https://www.aihr.com/blog/multigenerational-workforce/>

<https://hbr.org/2021/08/how-to-manage-a-multi-generational-team>