



The New Age of Working

Getting the
Most from Your
Multigenerational
Workforce



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Five Generations Now in the Workplace.....	4
Demographic Shifts and the Future Workforce	6
Benefits of the Multigenerational Workforce	7
Challenges Facing Generationally Diverse Teams.....	9
Strategies to Increase Collaboration and Leverage Diversity.....	11
Conclusion	14



Introduction

Different generations have always worked side-by-side, with grandparents, parents, and children striving together on farms, restaurants, and small businesses. The multigenerational workplace isn't new, and unfortunately neither is the friction between older and younger people. Many people would say the “[generation gap](#)” is as wide today as when *Look* magazine editor John Poppy coined the term in 1967.

While common, these age-related biases interfere with productivity, employee engagement, and long-term sustainable success. In the modern workplace, employees from four – or even five – generations might work together. And, due to demographic changes and continued demand for talented workers, multigenerational teams will only become more prevalent in the next five to 10 years.

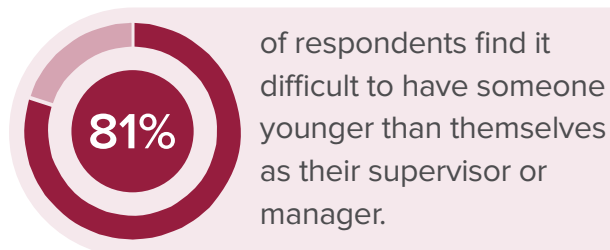
The challenge for inclusive leaders is clear:

To attract and retain the most talented workers, companies must take advantage of the unique assets of every individual and create a welcoming workplace where everyone can thrive, no matter their age.

Forward-thinking organizations will leverage the knowledge and experience of older workers and the energy and agility of younger workers to create innovative, high-performing teams. This guide will provide actionable advice to promote understanding and dispel problematic assumptions based on age, in order to foster a culture of inclusion and belonging.



Surveys conducted by [Deloitte](#) and [LiveCareer](#) found that



The Five Generations Now in the Workplace



A broad overview of the historical events and cultural trends that have influenced the various generations can be valuable. These contexts can guide strategies to recruit and retain talented workers, and shed light on varying expectations and preferences. However, it is important to remember that each person is unique; be wary of generalizations that stereotype individuals based on their age.

Traditionalists or the Silent Generation

Traditionalists, usually defined as those born from 1928 to 1945, made up 2% of the U.S. workforce in 2022. Many served their countries during World War II and the Korean War, and the managerial style of this generation tends to follow a top-down approach to getting things done. Most traditionalists have retired from the workforce, yet those who remain are valuable sources of institutional knowledge.

Baby Boomers

Baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, made up 18.6% of the workforce in 2022. Boomers witnessed the Cold War, the Vietnam War, Watergate, the moon landing, and the Civil Rights Movement. This optimistic generation grew up in a prosperous post-war economy, and many were the first in their families to attend college. Boomers entered the workforce when a top-down managerial approach was the norm, but many younger boomers have embraced a more collaborative leadership style.

Generation X

In 2022, Gen X made up 34.8% of the U.S. workforce. This generation, born between 1965 and 1980, witnessed great technological developments including personal computers, mobile phones, and video games. Gen X grew up in a more turbulent economy, living through the end of the Cold War, the AIDS epidemic, and the loss of U.S. manufacturing jobs. Because Gen Xers grew up with more freedom and independence than previous generations, they tend to have a strong entrepreneurial spirit and value work-life balance.

Millennials

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, made up the largest share of workers in 2022 at 38.6%. This generation has lived through the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Columbine and Sandy Hook school shootings, the Iraq/Afghanistan war, the election of Barack Obama, and the rise of social media. Millennials tend to prefer a cross-functional way of working and respond well to feedback and recognition. Members of this generation are often technologically adept, curious, and ambitious — motivated by meaning and quality of life. In general, millennials want to learn and collaborate with inspirational managers.

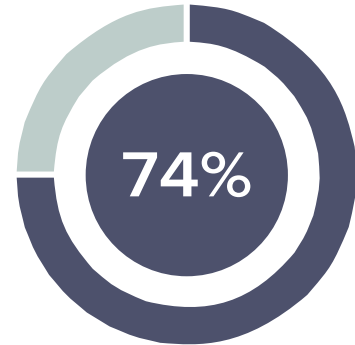
Generation Z

Gen Z, those born between 1997 and the early 2000s, are the most diverse group in our country's history, and in 2022 made up 6.1% of the workforce. Gen Z has faced the COVID-19 pandemic, pervasive social media, climate change, and school gun violence. This is a generation of advocates; they aren't afraid to speak up for themselves or others, challenge the status quo, or reimagine processes and systems. These tech-savvy workers are used to the online environment and flexible schedules, and want those benefits in the workplace. Gen Z workers recognize the importance of [mental health](#) and quality of life, and they are willing to leave a job if the company's culture doesn't align with their values.



Demographic Shifts and the Future Workforce

Over the next decade, **retiring boomers will make way for millennials and Gen Zers, who together are expected to make up the majority (74%) of the U.S. workforce by 2030.** However, the sheer size of the boomer generation means many older Americans will continue working into their 70s or beyond. Demographic futurist Bradley Schurman projects that in the same timeframe, the 75-plus workforce will be twice what it is today.



We're entering into a new period for humankind where our societies are getting quite old. We're having a lot fewer babies than ever before. Also, due to scientific innovation, social innovation, clean water, and access to food, we have an incredibly high survival rate now through childhood. Many of us live into adulthood more than ever before, and this is allowing us to live much longer lives.

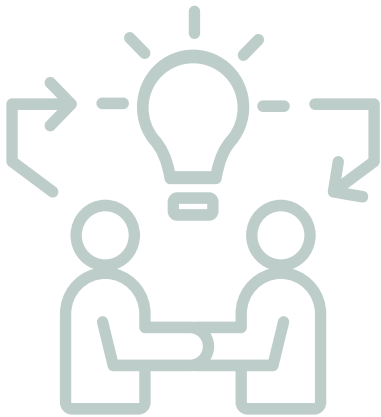
— **Bradley Schurman**, Author of *The Super Age: Decoding our Demographic Destiny*

At the same time, Gen Z will influence changes in the workplace. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are critically important to this diverse generation, and companies that don't align their mission with DEI values will find it difficult to attract and retain young workers.

According to a Deloitte study, the notion of career success is also evolving, as younger generations see a good salary as less important than personal growth and values alignment. "If given the choice of accepting a better-paying but boring job versus work that was more interesting but didn't pay as well, Gen Z was fairly evenly split over the choice," the report states. This attitude contrasts with the inclinations of older workers, who generally value the stability and status that comes with a bigger paycheck.

Benefits of the Multigenerational Workforce

The dual influences of experienced older workers and socially conscious younger workers can benefit companies that anticipate and prepare for these cultural shifts. Forward-thinking organizations can reap the benefits of a multigenerational workforce by prioritizing robust training and leadership programs and integrating diverse perspectives in their decision-making.



Knowledge-sharing and mentoring

Intentional and [structured mentoring programs](#) enable business leaders to promote the cross-generational transfer of knowledge and skills. Mentoring helps people get better at their jobs, improves employee morale, and boosts workplace retention. Younger staff want the coaching that older colleagues can provide, while mentoring helps senior workers gain insights into new technology or market trends. Relationships grow and workplace collaboration increases because of mentoring.

At Kimberly-Clark, a multinational consumer products organization based in Irving, Texas, senior leadership instituted a reverse-mentoring program in which millennials were teamed with older executives to help them understand what would best engage younger employees. Experienced nursing staff at WakeMed Health & Hospitals in Raleigh, North Carolina, meet regularly with newer nurses to focus on professional development.



Because I'm older, a lot of times the younger nurses will look up to me. They look to me for guidance and comfort and 'Am I doing this right?' They just want that reassurance, so as an older nurse now, I'm able to provide that to them.

— **Carrie Fraser**, a registered nurse at WakeMed,
who has been a mentor for 15 years

Embracing a multigenerational workforce helps organizations build a strong talent pipeline by investing in young professionals. Ensuring that leaders identify and train their successors improves organizational continuity. By sharing their wealth of business expertise with millennials and Gen Z, traditionalists and boomers can pass on institutional knowledge and ensure that the company thrives even after they retire.



Diverse teams

Just like any other dimension of diversity, having a multigenerational workforce enhances problem-solving and increases productivity. Diverse skill sets bring diverse perspectives, which in turn generate stronger results specifically because they create a guardrail against uninformed or ill-informed decision-making. Strong cross-functional teams improve and accelerate the decision-making process while reducing risk.

[Paul Rector](#), Vice President & General Manager - Global Accounts at Lenovo, participated in a company-sponsored [reverse mentoring program](#) to help him understand and better collaborate with his younger colleagues. The experience helped him become a more insightful leader, and it also helped him serve his customers.



I have a lot of customers who are younger than I am. [Reverse mentoring has] also helped me understand more about where my customers are coming from, and how I can talk more in their language, and show them more about how I think and see the world too.

— **Paul Rector**, Vice President & General Manager
- Global Accounts, Lenovo

Having a multigenerational workforce improves profits and the bottom line. When a company's staff reflects its target market, it is better able to anticipate and respond to their needs; therefore, a multigenerational workforce can better appeal to a larger target market. [Millennials spend \\$200 billion per year](#), the most spending power of any generation yet. However, [baby boomers control 70% of discretionary spending power](#), highlighting the need for multiple perspectives.

Challenges Facing Generationally Diverse Teams

Despite the advantages of multigenerational workforces, interpersonal conflict can arise around attitudes about work, communication, ageism, and unconscious bias. It is up to leaders and individual champions of inclusion to confront the underlying source of friction and address any biases.



Attitudes about work

Depending on their early career experiences—which often correlate with age—people might have different approaches or philosophies about work. The 2022 uproar about “[quiet quitting](#)” highlighted two distinct attitudes toward being asked to work extra hours or perform duties outside one’s job description. At the time, younger workers expressed their frustration with their managers on social media, while many older people viewed the posts as complaining or promoting laziness.

The public clash reflected different job expectations and the assumptions people made about each other. A person working 40 hours a week – and no more – might be resented by others working longer hours. That’s one reason why workplace norms – like those about work hours – should be explicitly explained and documented. It’s also crucial for leaders to discover each person’s expectations through honest conversations, especially when managing a multigenerational team.



Employees can still have a good sense of belonging within an organization and still want to finish their work and go home at the time that their day is supposed to end.

— **Sarah Morgan**, CEO at BuzzARooney and
Director of Equity & Inclusion at Humareso, a human
resources consulting firm





Communication

For any successful cross-generational relationship to thrive, it's important to establish early on how each person prefers to communicate. Younger people might be more comfortable texting or using direct messaging platforms like Slack, while older workers might prefer talking over the phone or connecting via email. If the organization has a common platform for communication, all employees should be expected to use it.

Communication guidelines are especially crucial when it comes to giving and receiving feedback. As part of the onboarding procedure, managers should ask a few basic questions: How do you like to receive feedback? How do you give feedback? Nonverbal communication, especially during difficult conversations, is also important. How is the other person sitting or behaving? It's better to ask outright how the other person is feeling and work through any negative emotions, rather than let bad feelings fester.



Unconscious bias and ageism

Generational bias can come in the form of ageism, in which people discriminate against others based specifically on their age; or it can come in the form of affinity bias, where people tend to prefer people who are similar to them. This could mean age itself but also life stage, work experience, hobbies, and other characteristics that are influenced by age.

Watch out for exclusionary behavior such as not including an older person in a brainstorming session or only giving a younger person menial tasks. Remarks about a person's age or appearance are rarely appropriate, and comments like, "You look too young to be a [insert profession]" or "You look so good for your age" are common microaggressions. Even innocent-seeming remarks like "You make me feel so old" or "You're the same age as my child (my parent)" can create distance or erect barriers between people.

Remind employees what ageism looks like so all employees can be aware of it and know what options are available, should it occur. Your organization should have zero tolerance for all forms of discrimination.

Strategies to Increase Collaboration and Leverage Diversity

To better compete in the ever-changing marketplace and attract the most talented employees, companies must be intentional about creating workplaces that foster a collaborative culture. Organizations can use physical practices and technological tools to nurture teamwork among employees at different levels in the company and from different generations. Examples include: shared flexible workspaces instead of assigned cubicles, virtual meetings using Zoom or Microsoft Teams, and communication platforms such as Slack or Google Meet.



Communicate the company's mission and values.

Organization leaders should speak often about the mission and values of the company; they should be transparent and authentic. Go over the mission during onboarding, and emphasize how your company is promoting a culture of inclusion and belonging. The message should be about the bottom-line business opportunities as well as the social and community advantages. Aligning each employee's day-to-day work with the overall company mission demonstrates that every person is valued for their contributions. Workers are more engaged when they know that they have a crucial role to play in the organization's success.

Intentionally recruit diverse teams.

Your ability to recruit top talent is based on everything from your job description to your interview process. You must ensure that all communications are free from exclusive language and resume review doesn't put undue weight on things such as graduation year or software proficiency, unless it's a required skill. You also want to make sure all individuals who are interacting with prospective employees have undergone [unconscious bias training](#).

Establish mutual mentorship programs.

Encouraging mentoring, through formal mentorship programs, can decrease turnover, foster inclusion, and promote work engagement. Program leaders can match experienced professionals with less seasoned individuals. Experience, not age, should guide who is matched with whom. In fact, this is a best practice for any organization-sponsored mentorship program, as it capitalizes on participants' diverse expertise.

Even if there isn't a formal mentorship program at the organization, individuals can establish informal, mutually beneficial relationships by connecting with colleagues who they would like to get to know and learn from.

Regardless of the framework, mentors and mentees should outline their respective roles and responsibilities, as well as the goals that each participant hopes to achieve from the relationship. Make time for regular check-ins and respectful exchanges of perspectives and experiences.

Build a culture of learning and collaboration.

Organizations should also consider job shadowing, cross-training, employee-led training, and lunch-and-learns. These practices and events demonstrate that growth and knowledge-building are important to the company, and that all employees have something unique to contribute. More formal professional development and on-the-job training should use a variety of teaching methods to suit different learning styles. Some prefer to learn by doing, [others by reading how-tos, and still others by watching videos.](#)

Evaluate employee benefits and policies to ensure equity and inclusion.

Make sure that all employees benefit equally from the organization's policies and procedures. Don't assume that everyone needs the same things or assume what employees need based on their age. For instance, working parents, staff with hidden illnesses, and those caring for older relatives might prefer flexible or hybrid working arrangements. Older individuals, people with disabilities, and those of child-bearing years might need more comprehensive health insurance options. Second-career workers and younger staff would both benefit from scholarships for continuing education.

When considering generational diversity, it's important to note that often a person's stage of life has more to do with their priorities and their interests, rather than their generation. As with any dimension of diversity, the only way to provide the employee with what they need is to ask them. A new parent in their 20s has many of the same needs as a new parent in their 40s. A first-time manager in their 30s wants the same leadership training as a first-time manager in their 50s.

Make belonging a priority.

Intergenerational employee resource groups (ERGs) increase employee engagement, foster feelings of belonging, promote professional development, and encourage the cross-generational transfer of knowledge. Many ERGs have mentoring or professional development as part of their mission, and they are good places to find potential mentors or connect with people who share an identity or experience.

For leaders, maintaining connections through weekly one-on-ones and tracking employee engagement are critical, whether employees are remote, hybrid, or in-person. Regular company-sponsored social events, such as meet-and-greets and team-building activities, should also be planned to appeal to members of all age groups and physical abilities. This helps multiple generations in the workplace mingle on a more personal level and establish camaraderie.

For example, a trivia game competition would be more inclusive than a company softball game or outing at a ropes course. You might also consider a team-building day spent volunteering at a local charity, where there are a variety of tasks to accomplish.

There are also a few actions individuals can take to help disrupt bias and create a more inclusive workplace. Primarily, these involve being an active ally: interrupting microaggressions, calling people in, and seeking diverse perspectives when in a meeting or brainstorm session. It boils down to being mindful of and making the most of generational diversity. It means being intentional about seeking alternate perspectives and new experiences.



Conclusion

Generational diversity brings clear benefits to any organization able to harness its power. Building intergenerational teams is good for the bottom line, resulting in a stronger talent pipeline, workforce continuity, and the retention of institutional knowledge. However, [age discrimination](#) and microaggressions toward employees young and old remain common. Inclusive leaders and culture-centric organizations have an opportunity to create positive change by disrupting bias and ensuring that every individual feels a sense of belonging.

Understanding the different influences and attitudes of each generation can result in valuable insights, however generalizations only provide broad context. It's important for inclusive leaders to get to know their team members and discover what each person needs to do their best work.

Regardless of their role, employees can cultivate strong interpersonal relationships in order to promote understanding and achieve better collaboration throughout the organization.

High-performing, multigenerational teams thrive in workplaces where every individual is respected and everyone can contribute their best work – no matter their age. The research aligns with the notion that a positive work environment benefits all employees. As consultant Molly Delaney writes for [Korn Ferry](#), “in terms of what really drives employee engagement and job satisfaction, we’re not seeing a great deal of difference across generational groups. All of the groups are driven by well-run, well-managed organizations that demonstrate care and concern for their employees.”



Future business success relies on the ability to recruit and retain the most talented individuals, no matter their age. In fact, demographic trends suggest that many organizations will soon have members of four or five different generations in their workforce. Our experts can give you the tools to bridge the generational divide and create an inclusive environment where all workers feel a sense of belonging. [Learn more about our generational diversity workshop.](#)

About The Diversity Movement

The Diversity Movement (TDM), a Workplace Options company, helps organizations drive growth through culture-led initiatives that lead to enhanced well-being, belonging, and trust. By helping leaders and their teams be more productive, collaborative, and innovative, TDM enables organizations to deepen employee engagement and deliver scalable business impact. Our integrated approach empowers leaders to create inclusive culture through the application of data-informed insight, award-winning content, technology, and DEI expertise. The result? Your organization benefits from better business outcomes delivered by high-performing, resilient teams. Learn more at thediversitymovement.com.