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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Labour markets across developed economies have changed substantially in recent decades. In





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The results of this survey reveal that British business leaders recognise the workforce is becoming more diverse from an age perspective, with more than seven in ten employers (73%) reporting there are more generations in work today than in the past. Furthermore, three in five leaders (61%) agree that there are significant differences in work culture preferences among employees from different generations. In this context, a number of studies argue it is important to understand the shared events that take place within each generation's late formative years, and are most likely to contribute to any shared generational identities that emerge in the workplace.

- Baby Boomers (born 1946-1963) have often lived through considerable economic growth and technological progress. Members of this generation have or nearly have reached retirement age.
- Gen X (born 1964-1980) have experienced financial strains and the decline of traditional industries but are currently experienced employees and are more likely to hold senior positions.
- Millennials (born 1981-1996) have grown up around mobile phones and computers, are considered the most-educated generation but their early careers have been influenced by impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis which has restricted their income.
- Generation Z (born 1997-2012) are digital natives, but their studies and early careers have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

However, there is nevertheless an increasing consensus that generational differences in the workplace can be overstated, and the focus should instead be on the common threads that unite different generations and the benefits that each bring.

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In our survey, seven in ten senior business leaders in Britain agreed that their organisation benefits



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1. INTRODUCTION

The first quarter of the 21st century has seen major shifts in how, where, and when work is done, as well as who is in the workforce. One of these shifts is the emergence of multigenerational workplaces that include four generations in the workplace for the first time in history.³ This shift is primarily due to people living and working for longer, with Bain & Company finding that workers aged 55 and over will exceed 25% of the G7 workforce by 2031, 10 percentage points higher than in 2011.

Technological advancements have also revolutionised the nature of work, enabling greater flexibility in how and where we work. The roll out of remote and hybrid working during the Covid-19 pandemic sparked a major step change in working practices for some workers and we are now experiencing an even more significant transformation with the emergence of AI technologies.

These technologies are being taken up by a workforce that has a greater presence of women, broader representation of different ethnic minority groups,⁶ more disabled people,⁷ and higher numbers of people who are working into their late 60s and 70s than ever before. In the US, two in five workers (41%) expect to work beyond the age of 65 – yet 30 years ago it was just 12%.

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While the majority of these shifts in the labour market have been studied in detail, engagement with the fact that there are four generations in the workplace for the first time in history is often reduced to caricatures based on emotive and divisive traits associated with younger and older workers.

Considered academic^{10,11,12} and public policy studies⁸ are all too often reduced to media coverage that uses attention-grabbing headlines branding generations with terms such as 'lazy' or 'old fashioned' – for example 'Not all employers are tolerating Gen Z's laid-back language' or 'Gen X has had to learn or die: Mid-career workers are facing ageism in the job market'.

These narratives fail to engage with the reality of what more multigenerational workplaces mean in practice, emphasising supposed dividing lines between generations, and often overlooking the many positive opportunities that come with having multiple generations at work.

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Multigenerational workplaces are here to stay – and they bring a raft of opportunities and challenges for employers. The presence of different generations in the workforce can enable knowledge sharing and skills transfer, and each age cohort can contribute unique ideas to the organisation, leading to a more dynamic and creative workplace⁵

In this context, understanding how employers can navigate the multigenerational workplace and create inclusive policies that promote healthy workplaces and positive cultures is vital. This means uniting different generations whilst respecting differences – a challenge that requires a considered understanding of the following key questions:

- 1.







3. WHAT MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKPLACES MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS

The previous section of this briefing provided a note of caution when it comes to interpreting the existing evidence regarding the impact of generational differences in the workplace. However, there remains a significant need to better understand the ways in which demographic change is playing out across the workforce, and how employers themselves are responding.

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A survey of over 1,000 senior business leaders in Great Britain found that over half (51%) had more than one generation in their organisation. More than seven in ten senior business leaders (73%) said that their organisation recognises that there are more generations in work today than in the past. Senior business leaders from large organisations (more than 250 employees) were more likely than those from small to medium sized businesses

to have more than one generation in their organisation. More than seven in ten senior business leaders (73%) said that their organisation recognises that there are more generations in work today than in the past. Senior business leaders from large organisations (more than 250 employees) were more likely than those from small to medium sized businesses to have more than one generation in their organisation. More than seven in ten senior business leaders (73%) said that their organisation recognises that there are more generations in work today than in the past. Senior business leaders from large organisations (more than 250 employees) were more likely than those from small to medium sized businesses to have more than one generation in their organisation.



On average a quarter of senior business leaders (24%) said they had Baby Boomers working in their organisation. Sectors in which it was more common for organisations to employ workers aged 60 and over were education (33%), professional and scientific (29%) and finance and insurance (29%). The sectors in which it was less common were retail (22%), health (21%), business administration and support services (19%) and information and communication (15%).

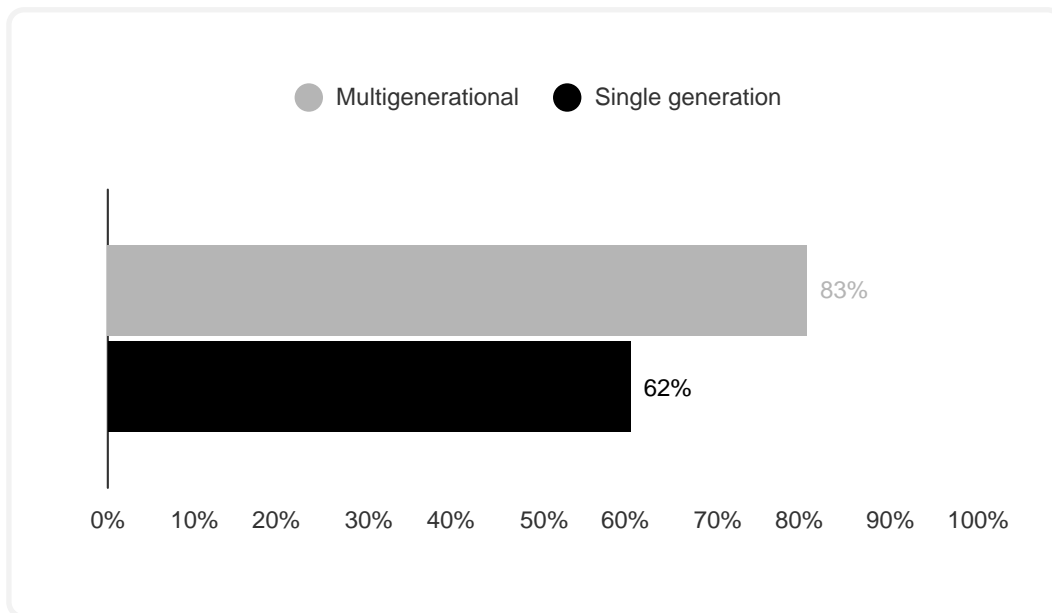


Research by the SHRM Foundation in the United States has found that investing in multigenerational workforces can lead to improved employee performance and team productivity, increased knowledge sharing, and improved overall company performance⁴². The OECD have found that age diversity can also reduce the risk of disruption to organisational resilience. For instance, having workers of similar ages raises the risk that a significant part of the workforce stop working simultaneously due to common life events – like the birth of a child or other health issues or risks.

However, a study conducted by the LSE Inclusion Initiative and Protiviti found that employees with large age gaps from their managers often report lower productivity⁴¹. The study found that those with a manager more than 12 years their senior are nearly 1.5 times more likely to report lower productivity. However, the same study also reported that employees were more likely to have higher productivity if their organisation implements intergenerationally inclusive work practices – nearly nine in ten employees reported high productivity levels in firms with intergenerationally-inclusive work practices, compared to around six in ten employees from firms without these practices.⁴³

Our research reveals that seven in ten senior business leaders (70%) agree that their organisation benefits from the diverse perspectives brought by a multigenerational workforce. Senior business leaders from organisations with multigenerational workforces were much more likely to state their organisation benefits from the diverse perspectives brought by a multigenerational workforce than single generation employers (83% vs 62%).

Figure 1: Senior business leaders agree that their organisation benefits from a multigenerational workforce



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across 10 countries

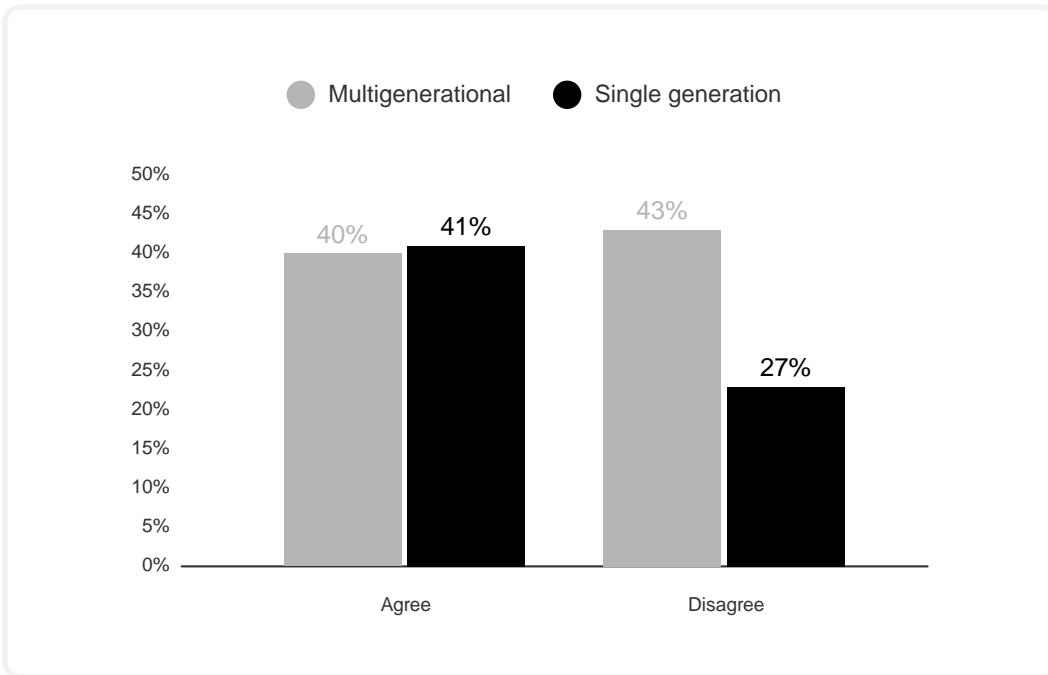


Over a third of business leaders (39%) reported that having a multigenerational workforce leads to difficulties in communication and collaboration.

While many organisations see the value of a multigenerational workforce, over a third of business leaders (39%) reported that having a multigenerational workforce leads to difficulties in communication and collaboration.

Senior business leaders from organisations with a multigenerational workforce are more likely to disagree with the statement that it leads to such difficulties. Four in ten leaders (43%) with a multigenerational workforce disagreed with this statement, compared to 27% of respondents from organisations with only one generation in their workforce.

Figure 1: Senior business leaders' views on communication and collaboration difficulties in multigenerational workplaces.

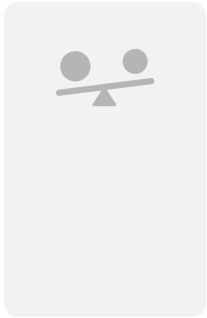


Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across 15 European countries.

Three in five leaders (61%) agree that there are significant differences in work culture preferences among employees from different generations. This rate increases to 68% of respondents from a multigenerational workplace. In addition to this, business leaders from large organisations (more than 250 employees) were more likely than those from SMEs (less than 250 employees) to agree that there are significant differences in work culture preferences among employees from different generations (79% vs 62%). Employers highlighted that the greatest difference between generations is their work-life balance expectations, with two in five senior business leaders (44%) sharing this opinion. In contrast, only 5% of senior leaders think that there are no differences between generations.



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Menopause in the workplace

All women, and some trans and non-binary people, will transition through menopause at some point in their lives. With almost four million women aged 45 to 55 employed in the UK, there are few workplaces where menopause is not being anticipated or directly experienced by members of its workforce.⁴⁴

Most individuals will experience a range of physical and/or psychological symptoms as a result of menopause,⁴⁵ which can be directly impacted by a person's workplace environment. However with proper support from employers, employees can manage their symptoms effectively to continue successfully at work.

In the last five years there has been increasing awareness about the need to build menopause-friendly workplaces.⁴⁷ Yet only a quarter of organisations (24%) have a standalone policy for menopause transition in place.⁴⁸ When developing a policy or guidance document on menopause in the workplace, employers can include:

- **Statement of principles** – including how the organisation and its senior managers are supporting employees and why it is an important workplace issue for everyone.
- **Policy objectives** – including the actions that the organisation will take to implement the policy and the key outcomes it wants to see.
- **Education and awareness** – to promote a basic understanding among all employees about what menopause is and how it can impact health.
- **Key responsibilities** – setting out which employee groups have responsibility for implementing specific aspects of the policy, including senior managers, line managers, HR, employees, and occupational health.
- **Activities and initiatives to be implemented under the policy** – such as stress risk assessments and line manager training.

However, having a standalone menopause policy will have limited impact if there is not attention given to fostering an open and supportive culture. Employers can create an inclusive workplace and draw more effectively on an older workforce through:⁵⁰

- **Raising awareness of menopause as a workplace issue** through internal campaigns, information sharing, and seminars.
- **Employee support** – including running internal surveys to gather insight and establishing support networks such as menopause ambassadors, champions, and employee groups.
- **Training for line managers** – including training on supporting those experiencing menopausal symptoms and how to have difficult or sensitive conversations.
- **Menopause guidance and workplace adjustments** – including changes to job design and work environment.
- **Updating their absence policy** – including menopause as a reason for sickness absence.



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Almost half of senior business leaders (49%) think that flexibility in work hours and location, and support for work-life balance and boundaries, are important factors in creating a positive work culture for a multigenerational workforce. When asked about their organisation's practices and policies, 44% of business leaders from a large organisation and 32% of those from a SME offered training for remote and hybrid working.

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ALEXA HIGHFIELD, PARTNER, PWC

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Socialising at work has evolved significantly over the past few decades, influenced by technology, the post-pandemic world of work, and shifting attitudes in relation to factors such as work life balance and



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In today's multigenerational workplace, and with hybrid working models becoming the norm for many, new expectations for inclusive and positive work cultures are emerging, and there is an increased focus on creating environments that prioritise employee health and wellbeing. This can include a need for virtual celebrations when teams are spread out remotely, or an emphasis on socialising within work hours to ensure that those with long commutes or caring responsibilities outside of work hours do not miss out.

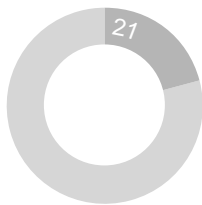
There is a growing imperative for employers to foster cultures where all employees feel included, irrespective of age, interests, or working pattern. Whilst "after work drinks" have long been a staple of socialising and workplace culture, in recent years there has been a shift in attitudes towards the appropriateness of centring workplace social activities outside of working hours or around the consumption of alcohol.¹



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Almost half of senior business leaders (45%) think that clear communication and transparency from leadership is an important factor in creating a positive work culture for a multigenerational workforce. However, just over a fifth of business leaders (21%) have line management training in place specifically for multigenerational workplaces, and only 26% of senior business leaders think that resources to help managers create inclusive work environments are an important factor in creating a positive work culture for a multigenerational workforce. As organisations develop more diverse teams drawn from multiple generations, this is likely to become a more acute need.

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Line management training for multigenerational workplaces



5. CONCLUSIONS

To thrive in an ever-changing labour market, it is vital that employers recognise that multigenerational workplaces are here to stay and that greater generational diversity in the workforce presents new opportunities as well as challenges. Having multiple generations in the workplace can bring different perspectives, innovation, and opportunities for knowledge sharing and mentorship. By fostering an environment that embraces diversity, organisations can benefit from the strengths of a multigenerational workforce.

The academic literature relating to the impact of multigenerational workforces suggests we should be cautious in overstating the differences between what different generations are ultimately looking for from work. In reality, there are a range of core features of work, ranging from clear communication and transparency to being able to access flexibility that all colleagues value and benefit from, irrespective of their age.

Nevertheless, there is a need for employers to engage more proactively to ensure they are maximising the opportunities of inclusive multigenerational workplaces. To support them in doing so, this briefing sets out a series of key principles for employers to use when designing and developing workplace policies in the future.

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1) Agree proactive and long-term workforce planning to support line managers and workers

Proactive and long-term workforce planning is essential to support line managers and workers effectively. Line managers, who often rise to their positions without formal training, require comprehensive support to ensure they are equipped to lead an increasingly multigenerational workforce.

To enable this long-term planning, employers should consider implementing training programmes to develop managerial skills. Such programmes can enable managers to recognise the importance of soft skills such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. These skills are increasingly vital as workplace dynamics shift and become more diverse, demanding more nuanced management approaches.

Additional resources

- Read articles on the Harvard Business Review about managing a multi-generational teams such as this one on [Best Practices for Engaging a Multigenerational Workforce](#).
- Chartered Management Institute (CMI) has [tools for management and leadership qualifications](#).

2) Implement age-inclusive policies

Employers should review their employment practices and procedures beginning at the recruitment stage and make sure that they do not deter different age groups from applying to jobs or staying in work. Employers should actively work to root out any elements of age bias in their hiring process.

Beyond this focus on recruitment, a wider approach to age-inclusive policies will involve supporting employees with ill-health. Effective management of ill-health and retention policies is vital to maintaining a productive multigenerational workforce. Additionally, job design should be re-evaluated to accommodate the physical and cognitive capabilities of workers at different life stages, ensuring that all employees can perform their roles effectively and safely. By embracing these age-inclusive strategies, employers can harness the diverse skills and experiences of a multigenerational workforce, leading to greater innovation and productivity.

Additional resources

- Organisations working with different age worker groups, such as [Youth Futures Foundation](#) and the [Centre for Ageing Better](#) provide great tools for inclusive recruitment. There would be equivalent of these organisations in other countries for reference.

3) Develop lifelong learning opportunities for all employees to support their career growth

The increasing trend of longer working lives presents more opportunities for employees to acquire new skills, yet research shows that those who need training the most are often the least likely to receive it.⁵⁶ The urgent need for digital skills became particularly evident after the pandemic, which highlighted the necessity for adaptability and agility in the workforce. To develop lifelong learning opportunities, organisations could:

- **Foster a culture of lifelong learning and upskilling:** To address this, employers must cultivate a culture of lifelong learning and upskilling, ensuring that all staff have access to ongoing development opportunities. To foster such a culture, employers should promote on-the-job learning opportunities and consider implementing mentorship schemes for different age groups.
- **Set a clear performance goals for career progression:** This can help employees see the path to their growth within the organisation. Additionally, training line managers to recognise and support the importance of continuous improvement is crucial. By prioritising lifelong learning, organisations can not only enhance their workforce's skillset but also improve employee satisfaction and retention.

Additional resources

- Business in the Community (BITC) have resources for [developing lifelong learning and essential skills](#) You can also find out more about their [Employment and Skills Leadership Team](#).
- Find out more about the Lifelong Loan Entitlement and read Phoenix Group's [Never Too Late To Learn report](#).



Flexible working arrangements can take various forms, from flexible hours to job-sharing. To embrace flexible working arrangements, employers need clear guidelines that specify the rules for accessing these arrangements and how they will be managed. When done correctly, flexible working arrangements can



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