

Collaborative Advantage:

# Leveraging the Power of Cross-Generational Teams

A Joint Perspective from the St. Gallen Symposium  
and Boston Consulting Group



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# Imprint

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# Table of Contents



Introduction	4
Why Age Diversity Can Create Tremendous Organisational Value	5
Tools for Leveraging the Power of Cross-generational Teams	8
Conclusion	17
About the Authors & Acknowledgements	18
References	19

# Introduction

In light of the demographic transformation of many industrialised and emerging economies, today's workforce is the most age-diverse ever. In today's multigenerational workforce, at least four generations work side by side, confronting organisations in the public and private sector with unique challenges and opportunities. Proactive efforts to build and sustain effective cross-generational teams can help unlock the unique benefits of this age-diverse workforce, which include more holistic decision-making, greater creativity and higher employee satisfaction, and, ultimately, increased productivity and organisational performance. As the share of the OECD's population aged 50 and over is expected to rise from 37% in 2020 to 45% in 2050, designing an inclusive work environment for all generations will be key to creating a human-centred future of work and sustaining economic progress.

However, we seem to know little about how to embrace and leverage the power of age diversity in an organisation. While key components of the diversity agenda such as race, gender and sexual orientation have moved front and centre

in organisational change efforts, the key role of age diversity is often overlooked. Indeed, we see a marked gap between aspirations and actual practice: In a recent survey, 83% of employers agreed that a multigenerational workforce is key to growth and success, but less than 10% currently have programmes and policies in place that support a multigenerational workforce.

Age diversity calls for targeted approaches, keeping in mind specific needs and aspirations of each generation. Building on a review of a growing research field, this white paper outlines the key challenges and promising measures of a multigenerational workforce. To enable organisational leaders, we build on interviews with front runners and academic experts to shine a light on emerging tools and instruments that are key to combining the talents and unique outlook of all generations and unlock the power of cross-generational teams. In particular, we offer actionable recommendations for ways to listen to and learn from the next generation, leverage experienced talent and create a cross-generational community within the organisation.

# Age and Generational Diversity Will Shape the Workforce of the Future

**Today's workforce is the most age-diverse ever.** It is now common for organisations to have employees working side by side representing four generations<sup>1</sup> – and it is likely that in most organisations almost any team is made up of members of multiple generations.

“The multigenerational workforce [...] includes people with a diverse range of perspectives depending on their life stage and their different experiences of education, work, technology, family life, health, coping with setbacks and making important decisions. Some (but not all) of these may be linked to age.”

OECD REPORT ON AN  
AGE-INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE 2020

Gen Zers are the first digital natives; they grew up with the Internet, smartphones and social media. More experienced employees, such as baby boomers and Gen Xers, bring decades of know-how to their team. Researchers have identified specific attitudes and values more typical for one rather than the other generation. But it is equally important to acknowledge that commonalities usually outweigh such differences and all generations share a common sense of fairness, a longing for respect, and aspirations to accomplish a purpose in work.<sup>2</sup>

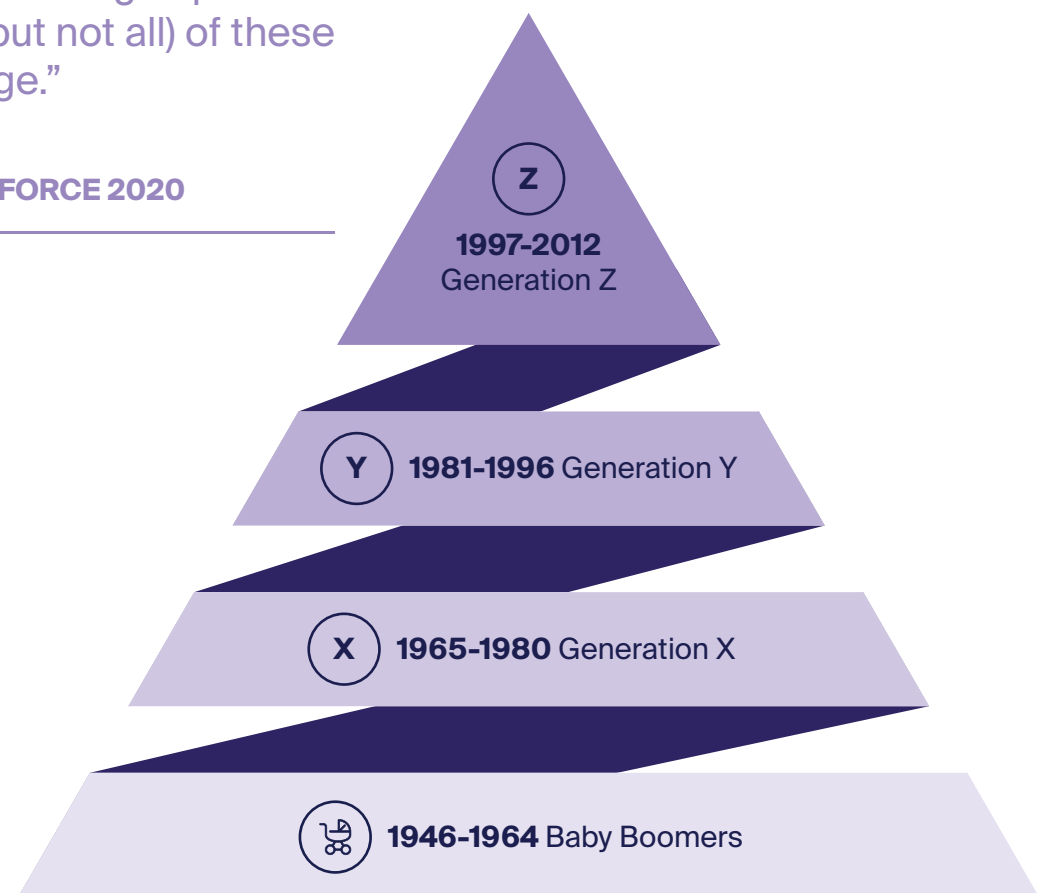


Exhibit 1: Four generations in today's age-diverse workforce



# Age Diversity Can Create Tremendous Value – That Remains to Be Leveraged by Organisations

A review of this growing field of research reveals **three main pathways** through which a conscious effort at cross-generational teaming and collaboration benefits organisations and their workforce.

First, diversity of generational experience, skills and views **improves the quality of decisions made**. People with different backgrounds and tenure approach a problem in different ways and collaboratively craft more holistic solutions.<sup>3</sup> A senior employee with decades of experience might be in an excellent position to share insights about industry, management and negotiation. Conversely, a Gen Z new hire might be the best person to show colleagues how to get the most out of social media or collaboration tools.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, tapping into the knowledge of various generations can help companies to concurrently innovate their value propositions to consumers and societal stakeholders at large. On the leadership level, data reveals a clear and positive correlation between the number of younger directors on the board and one-year total shareholder return.<sup>5</sup> Overall, an increase in age heterogeneity in companies is associated with an increase in workforce productivity and greater innovation.<sup>6</sup>

Second, strong interaction and exchange between generations ensures that companies **preserve and harness their institutional knowledge and know-how**. This process greatly reduces the risk of expertise not being passed on to the next generation, being lost as older generations retire. Older generations need opportunities and the infrastructure to share what they have acquired over their careers. This includes both hard technical knowledge as well as soft skills like client relationship management or negotiation techniques. It's important to effectively leverage that expertise and allow for

time to create knowledge cascades through which learners can selectively draw on relevant information and experience on demand. This helps them internalise important know-how and preserve it in the organisation for future generations.<sup>7</sup>

Third, an age-diverse work environment that empowers those of all generations is a key building block of an inclusive **and engaging work environment**. Having one's voice heard, and specific needs and aspirations accounted for, strengthens the commitment and loyalty of all employees to the organisation. If companies exclude next-generation voices, it can lead to disengagement and disillusionment with senior leadership among members of Gen Y and Z, which might lead to them leaving the company. For older employees, age-related issues pose their own set of challenges, as they are twice as likely to experience age-related discrimination than younger workers.<sup>8</sup> To address and prevent this, age-inclusive HR hiring practices are key and have been shown to have a positive effect on firm performance and employees' collective turnover intentions.<sup>9</sup>

“The Covid-19 pandemic has made it clear that the challenges we face cannot be solved through the traditional, hierarchical way of doing business, but that organisations need to combine the wisdom, knowledge and experience of older generations with the social-mindedness, creativity and tech savviness of younger ones.”

**RACHELE FOCARDI, FOUNDER, XYZ@WORK  
AND AUTHOR OF “REFRAMING GENERATIONAL  
STEREOTYPES”**

While cross-generational teams can unlock very positive dynamics for companies, they are often neglected by company leaders and upper management. The leadership level of companies – similar to political offices – is heavily skewed towards the older generations. The average age of board members and executives is even increasing steadily, whereas members of younger generations are missing and highly underrepresented at the senior level.<sup>10</sup> On the flip side though, companies prefer to employ younger talent which is leading to a neglected talent pool among the older workforce. Next to the negative implications on the quality of decisions made and, ultimately, company performance, firms end up leaving out a key stakeholder as they embark on their transition to a more sustainable business model and net-zero emissions.

Even more worrying, the OECD has identified ageism as the most common form of workplace discrimination.<sup>11</sup> A 2021 global survey of employees found that, for more than half of employees, conflicts stemming from a lack of understanding between generations are frequent – 58% of Gen Z and 45% of Baby Boomers felt this way.<sup>12</sup> This underpins the fact that the potential of an age-diverse workforce is often not leveraged, and, as a result, more challenging aspects of a multigenerational workforce tend to come to the fore.

What becomes apparent is a **marked gap between aspiration and organisational reality**: In a recent global survey of employers, 83% said they considered it very or at least somewhat valuable to an organisation's success and growth to shape a more multigenerational workforce. Even though many companies acknowledge its relevance, less than 10% of employers currently have programmes and policies in place that support a multigenerational workforce.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, while 93% of professionals across generations say generational diversity should be a key aspect of their employer's diversity & inclusion agenda, only 22% of HR professionals say their organisation is strongly committed to it.<sup>14</sup> To enable organisational leaders to close this gap, we will shine a light on emerging tools and instruments that are key to combining the talents and unique outlook of all generations and unlock the power of cross-generational teams.

# Tools for Leveraging the Power of Cross-generational Teams

Successfully crafting cross-generational teaming requires an active steering of intra-company dynamics to overcome barriers and biases which might arise from generational divides. It requires senior leadership to actively be involved in highlighting the importance of a collaborative atmosphere across generations and continuous efforts to keep it alive. As we have had the opportunity to learn from companies at the forefront of embracing and driving cross-

generational collaboration, we see three important pillars for successful multigenerational teams: In order to promote cross-generational exchange – especially from the younger to the older and often more senior generation – two tools have proven to be very effective in recent years. Both reverse mentoring programmes and shadow boards give a firm's younger generation a voice and the older generation a structured way to listen and learn from them.

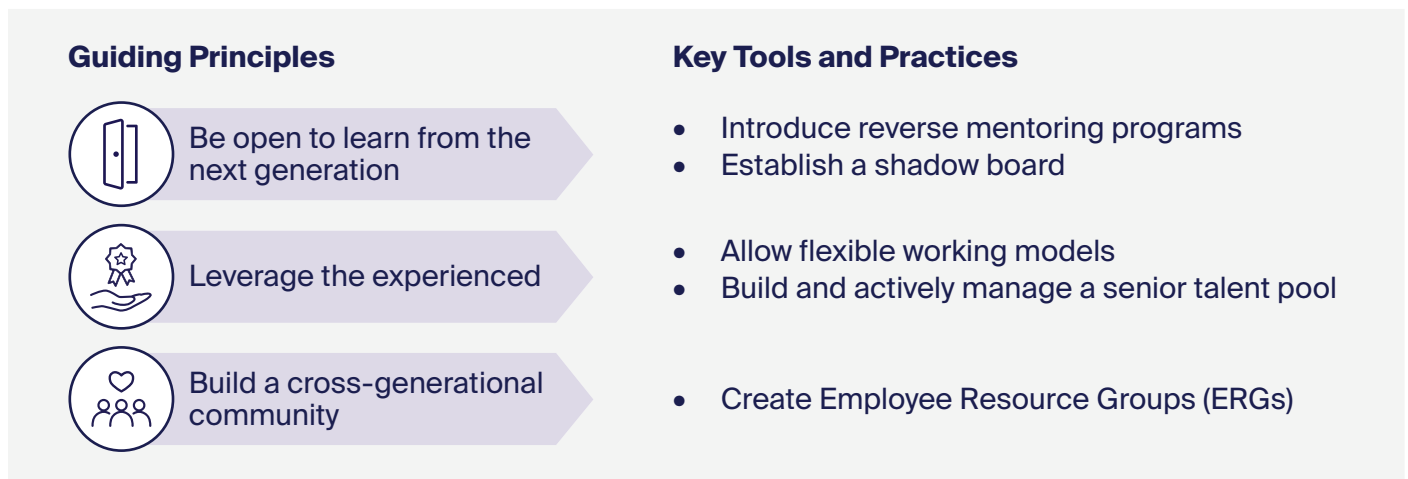


Exhibit 2: Guiding principles and key tools for leveraging a multigenerational workforce

## 1. BE OPEN TO LEARNING FROM THE NEXT GENERATION

**Reverse mentoring programmes** turn traditional mentoring relationships upside down. By matching senior employees – often from the executive management level – and junior talent, they facilitate cross-generational mentoring to improve knowledge transfer, from the younger to the older generation and provide reflections to executives.<sup>15</sup> A reverse mentoring programme can be the driver for culture change, promote diversity, strengthen awareness for emerging strategic issues, and increase knowledge of

specific topics (like about technology or digital skills) while also increasing engagement and retention among younger workers.

Reverse mentoring programmes pair a more junior mentor with a more experienced mentee. The mentee and mentor are usually free to choose the frequency and intensity of exchange and the topics of focus, with some general guidance from the broader organisation.





## EXAMPLE: INTRODUCING REVERSE MENTORING IN THE FINANCIAL INDUSTRY

A leading global bank started to experiment with reverse mentorship early on in its organisational transformation. It was meant as a catalyst for “interhuman connections”. Driven by the ambition to enable senior executives to learn from the next generations as well as to help younger talent to develop important leadership capabilities, the reverse mentorship relationships were initially set up as six-month projects. The initial members were selected from the bank’s top leadership and from high-calibre next-generation leaders arising from the bank’s talent management.

At the beginning of the project, the mentor and mentee teams were guided on the expected steps to take but were able to chart their own course. They were advised to define clear, upfront agreements for how to they want to run the mentorship: frequency of meetings, type of meetings, issues to cover and alignment of the roles of each participant. Throughout the project, the mentors were put in the driver’s seat to engage with the senior mentee prior to their exchanges to be able to prepare for the meetings. In addition, the bank established frequent meetings for the mentors to share lessons learned and to establish best practices, which enabled the mentors to build the required capabilities the bank was looking for. In addition, the bank also frequently checked in to learn whether the mentorship is helpful for the mentee as well. By doing so, the bank was able to continuously fine-tune the programme where possible.

After this initial, closer steering of the mentor-mentee relationship, the exchange between mentor and mentee became natural and continued to run independently beyond the intended six-month period. So, additional teams were set up to continue this successful journey. Today, reverse mentoring has expanded across the organisation, and younger colleagues can apply for it themselves (besides being asked to join), enabling the bank to identify additional talent which might have been overlooked with traditional talent management approaches. The reverse mentoring programme has therefore emerged to become an open platform for input into the organisation’s leadership and an integral part of the bank’s management style.

“Reverse mentoring expanded the capabilities of senior leadership. It motivated junior talents to step up and take a role in drafting the organisation of the future. Reflection and honest feedback brings a lot to the entire organisation.”

**MARIJKE BRUNKLAUS, SENIOR ADVISOR,  
BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP**

As reverse mentoring turns around the usual senior-to-junior relationship, adapting to the reversed relationship can be challenging. Senior employees might be used to leading conversations and guiding younger colleagues, potentially making it harder to exhibit the openness and introspection required to learn. In addition, younger colleagues might find it challenging to share their perspectives openly or may lack techniques to be effective mentors.

There are several key steps for organisations to set reverse mentoring programmes up for a successful start. First, both mentors and mentees need to have aligned expectations of the objectives of the reverse mentoring and on the roles of the mentor and mentee. Summarising these in a mentorship charter can help to provide a clear framework and to drive the right mindset. Second, both mentor and mentee need to free up sufficient time to build a good rapport. If both engage only loosely and spend very little time on the mentorship, that could be a sign that either might not value the exchange, and it may be advisable to terminate the mentorship. Thirdly, as junior mentors might be inexperienced in a mentorship role, bringing the mentors together to exchange on learnings and best practices is helpful for establishing the required techniques for effective mentoring. Finally, a mentor-mentee relationship can only be successful if both want to learn from each other and put in the effort. Experienced HR experts will need to kick off the relationship, but the mentor and mentee need to keep it alive. They need to chart their own course, set their own priorities and define their interaction model. In addition, frequent check-ins and surveys are invaluable to evaluating the success of reverse mentoring for the company and to continuously enhance the programme where required.

**“When this programme is not championed by the top, the mentees see this as ‘another one of these programmes we have to partake in’. If the executive mentee cancels at least two meetings with their mentors, then the relationship erodes.”**

**JENNIFER JORDAN, PROFESSOR OF LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR, IMD**

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**Shadow boards** allow junior voices to be heard at the top, tackling the problem of sometimes disengaged younger workers and thereby enabling a strong response to changing market conditions, especially by gaining insights into the mind of the younger generations. Shadow boards are an increasingly popular tool among companies that gather a team of young and motivated individuals to act as sparring partners for the company’s executive committee and its board for a certain period.<sup>16</sup> Varieties of shadow boards have been employed by companies such as Accor, Gucci, GroupM India, Beazley Group, and even several small to medium-sized businesses, with considerable impact.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas reverse mentoring initiatives mostly focus on the personal, individual level, shadow boards have a more strategic purpose: They help leadership teams to become aware of emerging trends and next-generation perspectives, and they can inform strategic reinvention and change management. “It helps the organisation to develop humility at the top and the leadership team to realise that they don’t know everything and that there are different kinds of valuable and relevant knowledge in their organisation”, IMD Professor Jennifer Jordan explains. In the example of Italian fashion brand Gucci, its “shadow comex” work helped the company to adopt a digital-first approach and more than double sales in recent

years, particularly among young consumers.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, shadow boards can be an excellent tool to identify the next generation of leaders, often better than traditional high-potential talent programmes.

## **EXAMPLE: ESTABLISHING A PLATFORM FOR FUTURE LEADERS AND A SPARRING PARTNER FOR SENIOR EXECUTIVES THROUGH INTERBRAND'S HORIZON BOARD**

One of the companies that has been most successful in implementing a shadow board is Interbrand. As the brand consulting firm launched its Horizon Board – bringing together six women and four men in seven cities across three continents – in early 2020 in the wake of Covid-19-related lockdowns, the board met virtually, from the outset of their tenure. Inspired by other shadow boards, including Gucci, where a shadow board played a key role in business model transformation, Interbrand's Horizon Board was to serve a dual function. In an advisory capacity, the board served as a next-generation sparring partner for the firm's executive leadership team and delivered a candid strategic SWOT analysis across areas such as work, people and growth. As an owner and implementer of concrete projects, the board led the development of Interbrand's purpose and ambition, as well as forming an ethics committee, playing an integral role in the company's ethical framework.

Initiatives proposed by the Horizon Board were championed by individual leadership-team members, as part of a two-way mentoring programme, and the CEO met with board members on a monthly basis. Horizon Board members dedicated about four hours per week throughout their 18-months term, and – next to the

specific projects they delivered – the immense growth in their leadership and strategic skills were a key outcome of the programme, resulting in all members being promoted through their tenure. Key challenges for Interbrand included working across different time zones, mobilising through the difficult economic environment during the pandemic, and ways to balance and target the members' resources to selected, key initiatives. These challenges were more than met by the Board members, who rapidly emerged as a model for effective collaboration.

The programme was considered a success both by Horizon Board members and the firm's senior leadership, and the board's new cohort has now begun to define its priorities and projects for the programme's second iteration.

**“Next generation boards are a vital and valuable platform, playing a key role in their contribution to the business, and as a programme for future leadership. The Horizon Board has already established itself as a leading and influential light across Interbrand's global network.”**

**REBECCA ROBINS, GLOBAL CHIEF LEARNING AND CULTURE OFFICER, INTERBRAND**

Some other key challenges of shadow boards include making sure the cadence and rigor of attendance from the senior executives meets expectations. It is also important to set a clear goal of what the shadow board's impact should be and what their decision-making power is. Another challenge is finding the tools and resources to make the proposed initiatives happen, so the shadow board actually has a tangible impact and doesn't just become an empty shell.

**“The greatest measure of success was to see the changes that happened within the organisation. We have shaped the purpose, ambition and mindset of our organisation and the leadership team through this platform.”**

**MARGHERITA CORTESI, STRATEGY CONSULTANT AND MEMBER OF THE FIRST HORIZON BOARD, INTERBRAND**

Such challenges can be addressed by looking beyond the obvious high-potential group when recruiting candidates, having the CEO actively sponsor the programme to ensure commitments, and to keep evaluating and iterating the programme as it evolves.

## 2. LEVERAGE THE EXPERIENCED

People are living and working longer than ever before. Contrary to the largely negative ways they are often understood – in terms of a “demographic shock” – such developments also offer great potential. The OECD estimates that building multigenerational workforces and giving

older employees greater opportunities to work could raise GDP per capita by 19% over the next three decades. Older workers can boost firm productivity not only through their own experience and know-how but also by enhancing team performance via age and skill complementarities between younger and older workers.<sup>19</sup>

Organisations' success increasingly depends on fully mobilising the potential contribution of older as well as younger people in the workforce. And older workers stand ready to contribute: 57% of employees globally envision working beyond retirement but less than a third feel they have options to do so in a suitable manner.<sup>20</sup> It's therefore time for a paradigm shift in how organisations engage their more experienced talent.

While many employees are eager to continue working beyond the typical retirement age, they want to do so in a more flexible way to also enjoy the benefits of the additional free time or to reduce stress levels. **Enabling flexible working models** is, therefore, critical to allowing the workforce to fulfil their needs while still leveraging important capabilities for the company. Part-time work, phased retirement or the voluntary step back from leadership to expert positions to allow more junior talent to take responsibility (“rainbow careers”) are some of a variety of options to meet the aspirations and specific needs of senior employees. However, flexible work programmes are still often not proactively offered or leveraged to a company's advantage. Too often, they are seen as driving unnecessary complexities.

Enabling flexible working models not only starts prior to retirement but should be available throughout the career path. They need the support of leadership and need to overcome negative biases by making participation an advantage. In addition, they require increased flexibility of HR-related processes and contracts.



## EXAMPLE: KEEPING SENIOR EMPLOYEES ENGAGED IN THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY

A leading insurance company currently introduces phased retirements and flexible working models for older employees. As the risk of retirement eligibility is quite high in the organisation, the firm wants to avoid losing all that talent.

Luckily, many want to work longer, especially in part-time and flexible roles. Enabled by this opportunity, the insurer brought back retired employees on an hourly basis. Employees have a strong interest in preserving and developing the capabilities of the organisation, not least to leave a positive legacy behind.

Temporary contracts can help to engage these highly experienced workers. Additionally, understanding employees' needs and perspec-

tives on retirement early on is important to create a tailored transition and extension plan. Creating this career journey helps to avoid a knowledge cliff and to benefit from the deep knowledge experienced employees bring to a company. Such appreciation for these senior experts' knowledge, paired with the flexibility of working on a project basis, has been very well received by retirees and greatly benefits all parties involved.

The biggest challenge are the outdated retirement and pension plans. These are very fixed in nature and need to allow for more personalization going forward, reflecting society's need for more flexibility.

To assist workers re-entering the workforce after retirement, an emerging model to implement cross-generational knowledge transfer is to create senior talent pools. **Senior talent pools** allow organisations to retain crucial skills and knowledge within their reach, oftentimes on a flexible project basis.

“We are now seeing a stage of life that simply didn't exist some decades ago: Lives are certainly not over at the age of 65, but rather a new period begins. The aspiration to continue contributing knowledge and skills, while also continuously learning, is huge on the part of many retirees.”

**ALEXIS WEIL, FOUNDER OF SENIORS@WORK**

Large corporates such as Daimler, Bosch and thyssenkrupp have successfully set up their own senior talent pools, offering their services to units within their groups as well as to outside clients, while Swiss start-up seniors@work offers a digital platform to match senior talents with organisations looking to close specific skills gaps. For start-ups especially that often mainly attract more junior talent, engaging experienced retirees on a project basis often adds unique benefits in terms of complementary skills and experience.





## EXAMPLE: FACILITATING CROSS-GENERATIONAL COLLABORATION AT THYSSENKRUPP SENIOR EXPERTS

Thyssenkrupp Senior Experts closely works with the group's HR departments to identify and engage senior employees willing to contribute their skills and knowledge after their retirement. Their senior experts bring unique professional and specialist expertise as well as leadership experience and join specific thyssenkrupp projects as well as external organisations, on average for six months on a part- or full-time basis. Next to very specific specialist skills, such as those of project engineers, employers value senior talents for their experience and soft skills in particular. In situations that may seem overwhelmingly complex and challenging for junior team members, senior experts stand ready to contribute their rich experience, serenity and social intelligence. As career progression is not their priority, they're also valued for their honesty and trustworthiness.

Participants of such programmes have reported benefits such as feeling challenged and having different outlets for intellectual stimulation

during retirement, being connected to the younger generations, and engaging in the future transformation of society. Oftentimes, senior experts become mentors of junior team members and form relationships that last beyond their project assignments – underlining the key value all generations assign to cross-generational relationships and collaboration.

**“In my experience, mindset is key. As a senior employee, you have to remain open for feedback to continuously learn, and to take a step back, particularly if you used to work in a senior management position prior to retirement.”**

**PETER DOLLHAUSEN, CEO, THYSSENKRUPP SENIOR EXPERTS**

To set up a pool of senior talents, it's important to continuously screen an organisation for retiring talents that are willing to work after retirement and to inform the organisation about post-retirement opportunities. To reap the full potential of senior talent pools, and in light of the pace of change in an increasingly digital world, managers of pools should also empower senior talent to continue learning, develop new, particularly digital skills, and stay on top of industry development. Retirees have to be open to developing their digital skills

to be able to participate in these programmes. Lastly, it's important to stress that senior talents are not there to replace junior talent but to flexibly complement teams where very specific skills and experience cannot be found otherwise.



### 3. BUILD A CROSS-GENERATIONAL COMMUNITY

In light of an increasingly multigenerational workforce, it's key to encourage an age-diverse culture where all workers feel comfortable, respected and appreciated regardless of age. Ageism is the most common form of workplace discrimination, and studies show for the US economy that age discrimination against those aged 50 plus cost the US economy \$850 billion in 2018 alone.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the above-mentioned tools, it is thus important to also institute cultural change, that embraces cross-generational exchange, understanding and trust within organisations. Such cultural change is best promoted through a combination of leadership role modelling and commitment from the top down, as well as the orchestration and facilitation of bottom-up communities for cross-generational respect and dialogue.

An important building block to institutionalise and enable such bottom-up communities are **intergenerational Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)**. ERGs can be focused on different themes, including gender equality, organisational change, and the future of work. So, ERGs are a flexible tool that can be used to foster cross-generational dialogue and inclusion where data may indicate a need for greater engagement or where employees by themselves aim to put the issue on the agenda. Intergenerational ERGs bring together employees of different seniorities and departments to, first of all, engage in regular conversations on the significance of generational values, differences, and commonalities. Such exchange is key to create mutual awareness: "The key driver of generational tensions within organisations is a lack of mutual awareness. Team members from different generations often know almost nothing about each other and where they're coming from. This leads to a confirmation bias of respective stereotypes," Rachele Focardi, Founder of XYZ@Work, explains.

Next to creating mutual understanding, more specific projects can then emerge from these conversations, such as initiatives to include age diversity in a company's diversity and inclusion strategy, introduce targeted learning opportunities (like reverse mentoring as described above), and to create a better, more age-inclusive workplace. In this way, ERGs are a more informal model, often a very first step for a company embarking on its journey towards greater generational inclusion. The discussions held within the groups can develop into more formal and focused initiatives.



## EXAMPLE: PROMOTING AN AGE-DIVERSE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AT BARILLA

One of the early adopters of intergenerational ERGs is the Italian pasta maker Barilla. Barilla is a fourth-generation family-owned business, and the intergenerational nature of its rich history are core to the company's values and culture. Barilla employs ERGs as a flexible way to tackle issues that are particularly pertinent at its Parma headquarters or one of its many countries offices around the world. To work on generational issues as part of its diversity and inclusion agenda is something the markets can, but do not have to, work on. At its headquarters, where more than 1,500 employees are located and baby boomers and Gen X make up the majority of the organisation, its intergenerational ERG grew from an informal network of Gen Z and Y new joiners. The group soon realised the need to engage with senior employees, and “build a bridge among generations”, as Francesco Fabbro, one of the initiators of the intergenerational ERG explains.

Sponsored by a member of the senior leadership team, the cross-generational ERG called Y.O.U.N.G. (Young Original Unique Network Generations) was founded, engaging members from all generations across the company's headquarters. Since 2017, the ERG has launched several initiatives that aim to foster dialogue

and mutual understanding where generational values and aspirations diverge. Key projects include surveys and interviews to gather more age-specific data on employee well-being, cross-generational workshops, and an annual Generation Day featuring talks and panels. For the company's HR and D&I executives, the ERG is the go-to point for any matters related to age diversity. Where annual employee surveys indicate generational divides, the ERG explores ways to overcome them. For Barilla, the ERG continues to act as a starting point for initiatives across the company, such as a mutual, generational mentoring programme offered to interested employees across generations, departments and roles.

**“When you have inclusive workplaces, you minimise groupthink and understand your consumers better. You also identify things you shouldn't do and create a greater visibility of risks.”**

**TALITA ERICKSON, CHIEF D&I OFFICER, BARILLA**

Barilla's findings and those of other successful ERGs highlight that establishing intergenerational employee resource groups is a gradual process and that building a community is not a one-time task but a continuous journey. Elements have to be piloted and will potentially fail, while others will prove to be successful and will be continued. ERGs can serve as an effective bottom-up force for cultural change, but they benefit from sponsorship of a senior manager to enhance the visibility and impact across the organisation. To ensure the commitment and motivation of its members, organisations should

make the extra effort of ERG members count in their performance evaluation, for instance, by introducing an “organisational goal” next to business goals in performance agreements and evaluations. Once engaged in an ERG, many employees report the growth in personal and leadership skills and the ability to build and nourish something meaningful as key benefits of ERG membership. That makes ERGs a promising tool for organisations wanting to jump-start the conversation on cross-generational issues. With the right support from senior management, key and sustainable initiatives can flow from there.

# Conclusion

In light of an increasingly age-diverse and multigenerational workforce, organisations' success increasingly depends on fully mobilising the potential contribution of older as well as younger people in the workforce. Initiatives like reverse mentoring programmes, shadow boards, senior talent pools or intergenerational employee resource groups can aid in taking more holistic and forward-looking decisions, retaining and sharing organisational knowledge and memory, and create a more inclusive and engaging work environment. Through these pathways, facilitating cross-generational collaboration in a proactive manner can enhance overall organisational productivity and performance and position an organisation as an attractive employer and brand for all generations.

Setting these initiatives up for success can be a challenge. However, three pivotal principles can help you embark on your journey of engaging a multigenerational workforce:

- Combine top-leadership engagement and ownership with bottom-up engagement to drive change towards an age-diverse and inclusive organisational culture.
- Start small and learn fast to continuously enhance and expand initiatives for better and more inclusive cross-generational collaboration.
- Create excitement for the opportunities that cross-generational teams can bring for the company.

Cross-generational collaboration can unlock tremendous value for companies and their younger and more experienced employees – provided that employers overcome the current gap between aspiration and organisational practice and move the issue up on their agenda.

Finally, cross-generational diversity does not thrive in isolation, but needs to be embedded in an inclusive environment that embraces diverse perspectives, experiences and priorities. It is this diverse environment that shapes daily experiences among colleagues and their motivation for an organisation<sup>22</sup>. Diversity in general and cross-generational diversity in particular are the prerequisites to unlock the power of cross-generational collaboration.

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