

WORKING TOGETHER: MAXIMISING THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

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ABOUT THE WORK FOUNDATION

The Work Foundation is a think tank focused on improving working lives across the UK through applied research and new ideas. For over a century, we have worked to break down the barriers individuals and communities face in accessing good work.

We believe everyone should have access to secure, rewarding, and high-quality work. By engaging directly with workers, employers, policymakers, and leading academics, we deliver rigorous applied research to tackle structural inequalities in the labour market and improve working lives across the UK. We are part of Lancaster University's Management School, and work with a range of partners and organisations across our research programmes.

THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR RESPONSIBLE DRINKING

The International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to reducing harmful drinking and promoting understanding of responsible drinking. IARD is supported by the leading global beer, wine, and spirits producers, who have come together for a common purpose: to be part of the solution in combating harmful drinking. To advance this shared mission, IARD works and partners with public sector, civil society, and private stakeholders.

IARD actively supports the WHO and UN SDG goals to reduce harmful use of alcohol. With four generations coexisting in the workforce, IARD is encouraging workplaces to consider the development of alcohol in the workplace policies that promote inclusion and informed choice whether employees choose to drink or not. This has additional resonance for the tens of thousands of businesses which may be working with alcohol beverages as part of their work. IARD has developed resources to support senior leaders to put these policies in place and resources for line managers, available at www.iard.org/actions.

CITATION

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METHODOLOGY

The study is based on an international literature review, a Survey of 1,167 senior business leaders across Great Britain, and a roundtable attended by relevant national and international stakeholders. The fieldwork for the survey took place online between 29 April and 6 May 2024, and the roundtable took place online on 9 May 2024.

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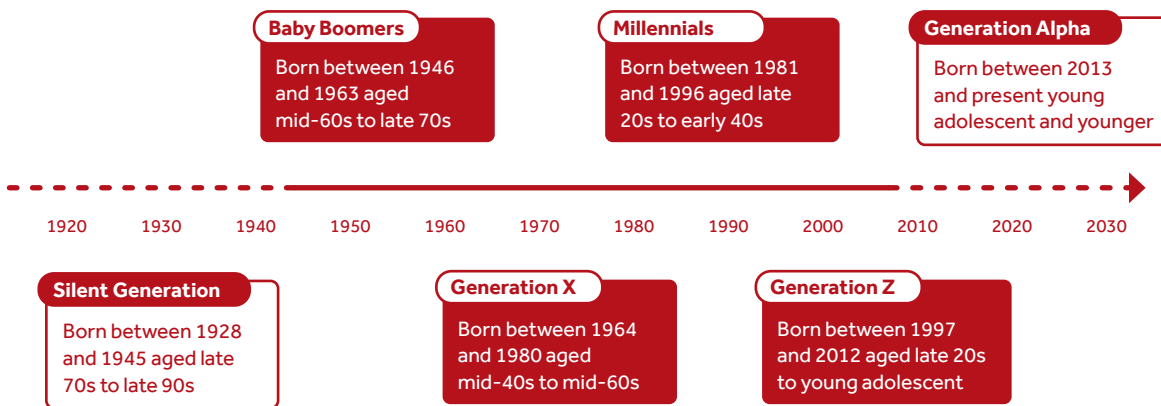
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Labour markets across developed economies have changed substantially in recent decades. In particular, workforces have become significantly more diverse. There are now more women, people from ethnic minorities, and disabled people in work in developed economies than ever before. New technologies and shifts in societal expectations have allowed more jobs to become more flexible and adaptable to workers’ needs. Whilst structural inequalities in the labour market persist, demographic changes are shaping the range of people we work with.

In addition, governments and employers across the world face a series of complex and interrelated challenges as populations age and working lives extend. In G7 countries, workers aged 55 and over will exceed 25% of the workforce by 2031 – and countries including France, the UK, and Japan have all raised their retirement age in response.

As a result of these shifts, for the first time in history there are now four generations in the workplace, with workers born in the 1950s and 1960s now working alongside people born in the 2000s and this provides new opportunities for employers and workers. While other labour market changes have been studied in-depth, multigenerational workforces have received limited examination bar media coverage that has often focussed on the potential negatives.

Figure 1: A timeline of the emergence of the four generations



Source: Work Foundation using Parry and Battista (2019) definitions of the four generations.

Over the last five years – through the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis – there has been a change in how employers approach their responsibility to their employees and the introduction of workplace policies to support them. Given multigenerational workplaces are here to stay, there is now a pressing question as to how employers harness the opportunities that they offer and support managers to provide responsible leadership.

In partnership with the International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD), this Work Foundation briefing aims to understand generational differences in work attitudes and building strong work cultures by going beyond the stereotypes and headlines to provide insight and guidance for managers and senior leaders. It does so by analysing existing international literature, findings from a roundtable with global stakeholders, and a Surveyation survey looking at the experiences of senior business leaders across Great Britain in May 2024.

While generational differences exist, they can be overstated and often bring significant benefits

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 identifies 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.

There is a 'say-do gap' on how British employers support managers to create inclusive workplaces that support diversity

In our survey, seven in ten senior business leaders in Britain agreed that their organisation benefits from the diverse perspectives brought by a multigenerational workforce, but evidence suggests doing so requires proactive action on behalf of employers.

A study conducted by the LSE Inclusion Initiative and Protiviti found that employees with a manager more than 12 years their senior are nearly 1.5 times more likely to report lower productivity.¹ However, the study also found that nearly nine in ten employees reported high productivity levels in firms where the employer had introduced intergenerationally-inclusive work practices, compared to around six in ten employees in firms without these practices.²

With these findings in mind, it's concerning that our survey suggests there remain significant gaps in terms of age inclusive policies within British organisations. For instance, close to one third of senior business leaders (31%) agree an emphasis on inclusivity and diversity initiatives is important in creating a positive work culture for a multigenerational workforce, but only 18% of leaders include age in their EDI policies, only 16% have a menopause support policy, and only 13% have age champion schemes.

Similarly, almost half of leaders (49%) agree flexibility in work hours and location is important in creating a positive work culture, but only 32% of SMEs (less than 250 employees) offer training for remote and hybrid working (compared to 44% of large organisations). Just under half of leaders (45%) agree clear communication and transparency from leadership is important, but only 21% have line management training specifically designed to support managers to lead in multigenerational workplaces in place.

And the same appears to hold true when it comes to bringing colleagues from across organisations together socially. Socialising at work has evolved significantly over the past few decades, and each generation brings its own preferences and expectations to the workplace, which can shape how they participate in social activities. When asked about policies around socialising at work, 34% of leaders agree opportunities for socialising in person are important, but 81% of employers do not have guidance on inclusive social events and just 21% have a workplace alcohol policy on responsible consumption in place.

How should employers respond to an increasingly multigenerational world of work?

The rise in multigenerational workplaces will inevitably place new demands on employers – particularly when it comes to proactively implementing policies to meet the needs of different generations throughout their working lives and to foster a more inclusive workplace culture more widely. Those employers who do so will be better placed to recruit and retain staff and develop more productive, happy and healthy workforces.

To achieve an inclusive workplace that promotes better health and wellbeing and increased productivity, we recommend employers are guided by the following principles:

1. Develop proactive and long-term policy planning to support line managers and workers
2. Implement age-inclusive policies to unlock the benefits a multigenerational workforce
3. Develop lifelong learning opportunities for all staff to support their career growth
4. Embrace flexible working arrangements
5. Develop policies and procedures that promote inclusion, diversity, and choice

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 2011.⁴

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,⁵ a 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.⁸ In the US, two in five workers (41%) expect to work beyond the age of 65 – yet 30 years ago it was just 12%.⁹

A need to go beyond lazy generational stereotypes

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 studies¹³ 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'¹⁴ 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.

How to harness the opportunities of inclusive and productive multigenerational workplaces

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 workplace.¹⁵

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. Are there significant dividing lines between generations in work?
2. What do employers in Great Britain perceive as the challenges and opportunities associated this?
3. How can employers create inclusive cultures at work and productive multigenerational workplaces?

To try to answer these questions, this briefing reviews how generational differences can emerge and the implications they provide, analyses contemporary employer views on the challenges and opportunities of managing multigenerational workforces, and sets out a series of recommendations for employers and managers to help them create more inclusive and productive multigenerational workplaces in the future.

2. EXPLORING GENERATIONAL DIVIDES IN WORK: DIFFERENCES IN WORKING LIVES AND CULTURES

Generational differences at work have received extensive international media attention over recent years.^{16,17,18} Many debates have centred on the challenges and constraints of having multiple generations in the workplace, highlighting the potential risks and conflicts that can arise from such diversity.

Academics and commentators have raised the potential that the specific socio-economic contexts of each generation shape how they each respond to broader trends within employment and their relationship with work. The most explored points around generational differences at work include job satisfaction, autonomy, and status. For instance, a study based on data gathered for over 30 years in the United States found that successive generations put more value on job compensation, job security and conditions, and job autonomy than older generations, whereas status was less important for them.¹⁹

Dencker et al. argue that generational identities emerge in the workplace based on the shared events that take place within each generation's late formative years.²⁰ Additionally, research has suggested that organisational commitment such as loyalty to one's employer tends to decrease over each successive generation.²¹

The prospect of differing generational perspectives on work has led to concern among some business' leaders. An international study from 2011 found that almost one quarter of company executives surveyed rated 'intergenerational cohesion' as the most significant risk their company faced, and many more rated it as one of the top three risks.²²

Figure 2: Dividing lines or common threads? The socio-economic contexts of each generation

Baby Boomers (1946-1963)

Born in the years following World War Two, some scholars have called this generation the luckiest in history, benefiting from considerable economic growth, technological progress, and an expansion of the welfare state.²³ However, the 1960s Baby Boomers entered the labour market between the late 1970s and early 1980s, which were periods of severe economic recession. Baby Boomers have lived and worked longer than many generations before them but are increasingly reaching retirement age.

Generation X (1964-1980)

Gen X experienced the financial strains of 1980s and early 1990s, and policies of privatisation and the decline of traditional industries.²⁴ Due to their time spent in the labour market and experience built up within the workplace, they are more likely to hold managerial or senior positions at work today.

Millennials (1981-1996)

Millennials are the first generation to grow up using mobile phones and social media.²⁵ They are considered the most-educated generation with around 40% of people in their late 20s and 30s having graduated from university in the UK.²⁶ However, many millennials experienced the impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis earlier on in their careers, which had a long-lasting impact on their wages.²⁷ They are also impacted heavily by the housing crisis and have lower home-ownership rates.²⁸

Generation Z (1997-2012)

One of the significant characteristics of Gen Z is their status as digital natives – they do not remember the time before smartphones.²⁹ Most Gen Z entered the workforce during the Covid-19 pandemic and at the height of a cost-of-living crisis. Gen Z individuals who were at school at the time of the pandemic had their education heavily interrupted, and now in the labour market, they are also experiencing stagnating wages, high levels of job insecurity, and challenges with housing market. Around 50% of all 23-year-olds are still living with their parents in the UK.³⁰

While there are still a small number of people from the Silent Generation (those born in 1928-1945) working, nearly all members of this generation are not in the workforce and are not included as an 'active' generation in this research. Generation Alpha is the youngest generation and were born after 2013. The oldest of this generation is expected to enter the labour market in four years' time.

Are generational divides at work overstated?

Despite some limited academic studies, evidence regarding substantive generational differences in the workforce remain inconclusive and inconsistent – and there is an increasing consensus that generational differences in the workplace are often overstated, and the focus should instead be on the common threads that unite different generations.^{31,32}

For instance, a paper reviewing existing studies found that meaningful differences between generations are unlikely to apply to work-related variables and where differences do exist the likelihood is they are attributable to factors other than generational membership.³³

The World Values Survey (WVS) – an international research programme established in 1981 – found that of 24 countries, workers in the UK are least likely to say work is important in their life and should come first where countries like Italy, France and the United States rank higher than the UK.³⁴ The importance of work has declined among Baby Boomers as they have started to leave the labour market, while younger generations are much more likely to view work as a key part of their life. Instead of considering this as a generational difference, the study attributes this difference to the time spent in the labour market, rather than an intrinsic value for each generation.

“Generational differences can be overstated if you focus on the issue of poor working conditions and their impact on health and wellbeing as these are absolutely the same for everyone in the workforce. Whether you are young or old, high work intensity, long working hours, low autonomy, and adverse social behaviour are going to have an impact on your physical and mental health.”

BARBARA GERSTENBERGER, HEAD OF WORKING LIFE UNIT, EUROFOUND

The risks of placing too much emphasis on generational divides

The nature of the academic literature relating to generational differences suggests we should be careful in overstating their importance. There are also practical risks of placing too great an emphasis on how different generations engage with work, which can hinder employers from achieving an inclusive environment that works for employees of all generations.

A study by Working Families found that 'employees threatened by age-based stereotypes concerning work performance are less able to commit to their current job'.³⁵ Instead, the focus should be on overcoming discrimination at work. According to research by the Centre for Ageing Better, one in three people experience age prejudice or age discrimination, and more than a third of 50–69-year-olds (36%) feel at a disadvantage applying for jobs due to their age.³⁶

The desire for increasing flexibility is another key commonality that can bring generations together. Most young people aged 16-24 (92%) and just under three quarters of over-50s (72%) in the UK want flexible work to achieve a better work-life balance.³⁷ Equally factors like clear communication and transparency are universally valued across generations in the workplace.

Taken together, these reflections raise further questions regarding how employers themselves perceive the challenges and opportunities associated with increasingly multigenerational workforces and the choices they are already making when responding to this demographic shift.

3. WHAT MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKPLACES MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS

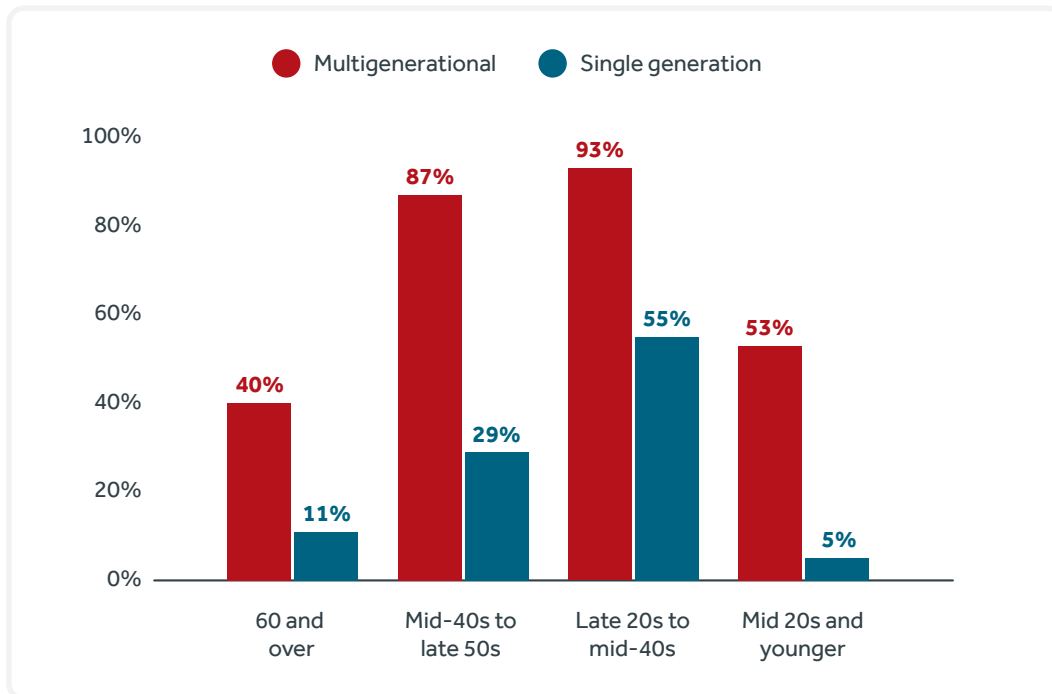
The previous section of this briefing provided a note of caution when it comes to interpreting the existing evidence regarding the impact of generational differences in the workplace. However, there remains a significant need to better understand the ways in which demographic change is playing out across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

Exploring the composition of multigenerational workplaces across Great Britain

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 (SMEs) (less than 250 employees) to say that their organisation recognises there are more generations in work today (81% vs 76%).ⁱ

Millennials (those aged in their late 20s to mid-40s) are the most dominant generation in both multigenerational workplaces (93%) and in single generation workplaces (55%) according to our respondents. Baby Boomers (those aged 60 and over) are the least likely generation to be represented in a multigenerational workplace (40%). Organisations with multigenerational workforces are more likely to have employees aged between late 20s to late 50s than they are to have the youngest or oldest employees in the workforce.

Figure 3: The proportion of the different age groups that make up the workforce, as indicated by survey responses from senior business leaders across Great Britain



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

i. It is important to note that the findings of this research show the perceptions of senior business leaders and may not represent the national workforce trends.

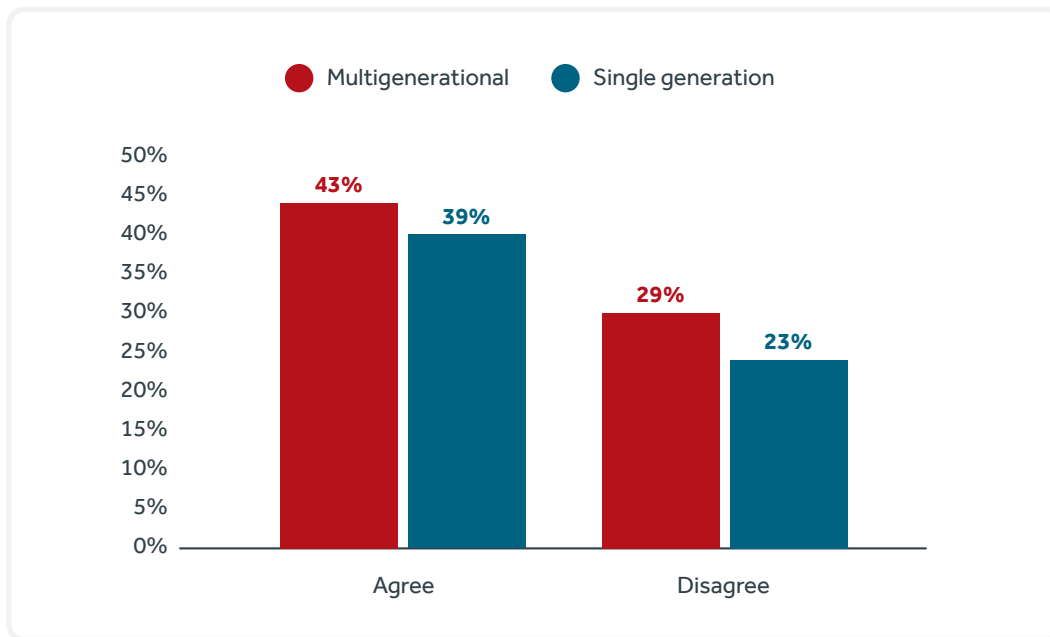
On average a quarter of senior business leaders (24%) said they had Baby Boomers working in their organisation. Sectors in which it was more common for organisations to employ workers aged 60 and over were education (33%), professional and scientific (29%) and finance and insurance (29%). The sectors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

Baby Boomers are more likely to be in workplaces that do not offer remote working than younger generations

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a major shift towards increasing flexibility at work, especially with regards to where work is done. As of June 2024, 14% of working adults in Great Britain were working exclusively from home and 26% were working remotely in a hybrid way.³⁸

Employers who require their workforce to work onsite only were also more likely to employ people aged 60 and over. Three in ten employers (29%), who do not offer remote or hybrid options, employ people aged 60 and over, compared with 23% of employers who do offer remote and hybrid options. By contrast, only 17% of employers who employ people aged 20 and younger, or “Gen Z”, require their workforce to always be onsite. This suggests that workplaces with younger generations of workers present are more likely to offer remote and hybrid working.

Figure 4: The percentage of employers that agree or not that their organisation has found that the shift to remote and hybrid work has been difficult in multigenerational workplaces



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

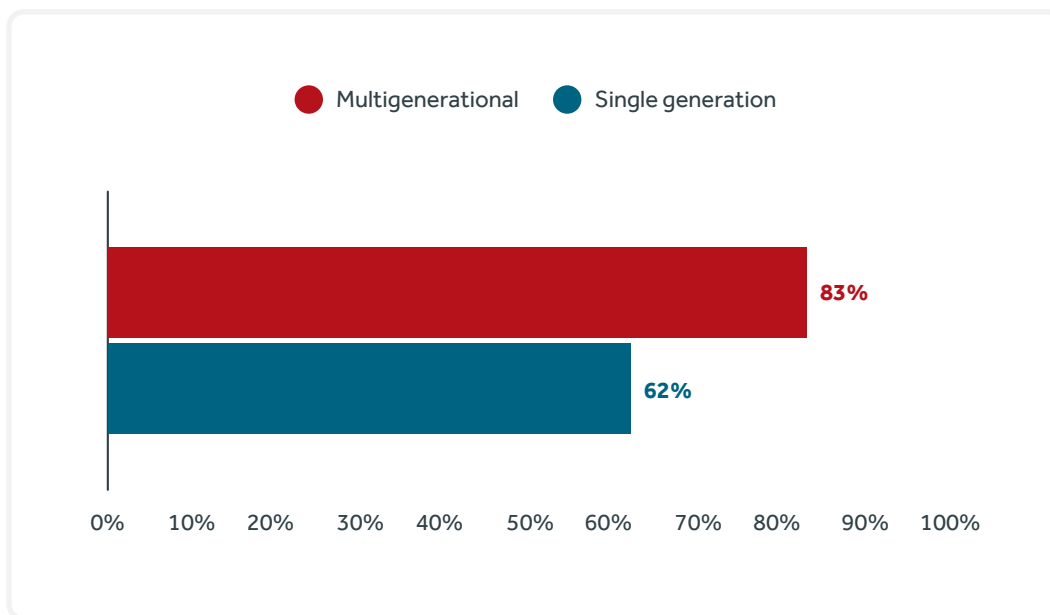
Employers recognise the benefits of a multigenerational workforce

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 performance.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

However, a study conducted by the LSE Inclusion Initiative and Protiviti found that employees with large age gaps from their managers often report lower productivity.⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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 5: The percentage of senior business leaders that agree that their organisation benefits from the diverse perspectives brought by a multigenerational workforce



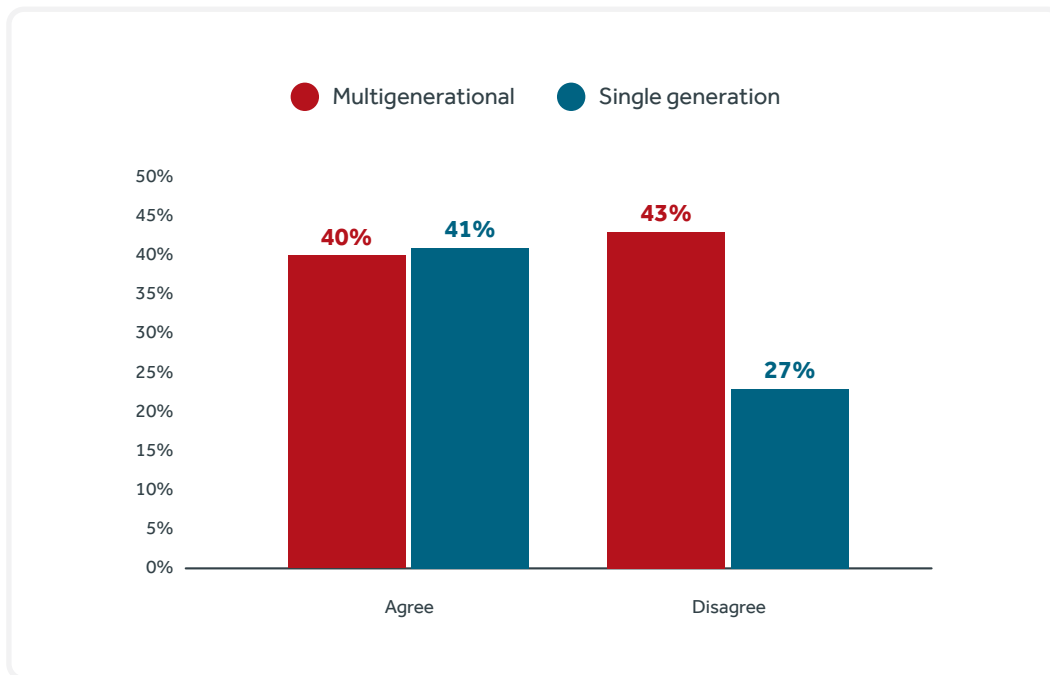
Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

Multigenerational workplaces can create challenges

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 6: The percentage of employers that agree or not that having a multigenerational workforce leads to difficulties in communication and collaboration



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

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.

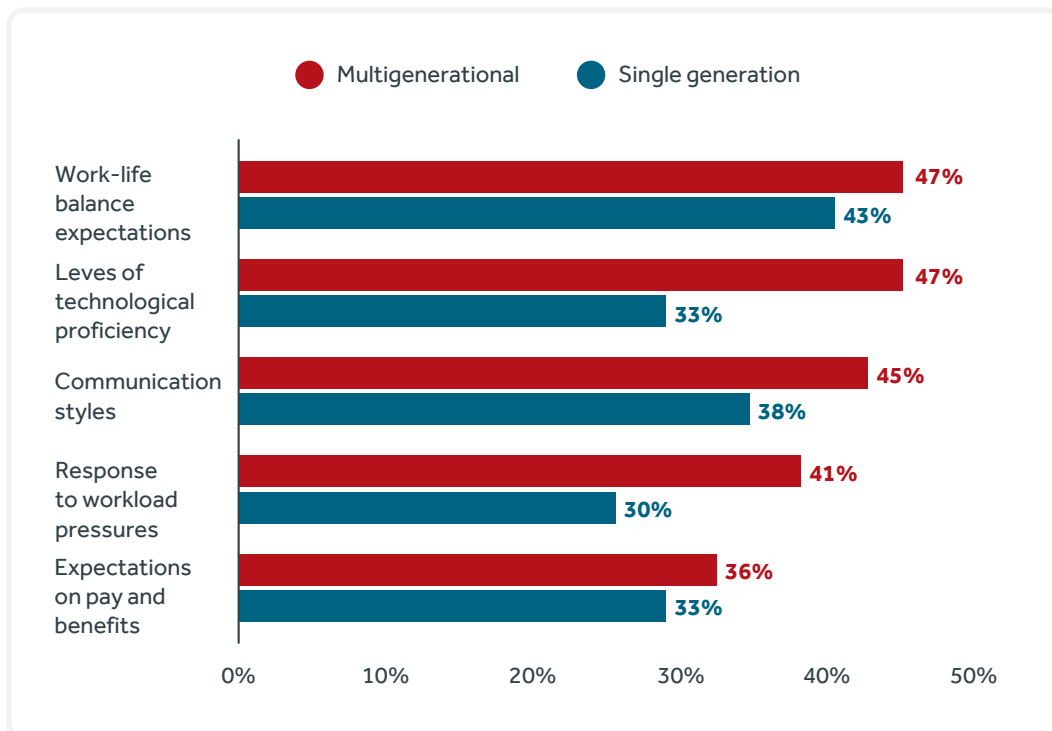
Figure 7: The top five differences between generations in their approach to work culture according to all employers surveyed



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

The top five chosen options were followed by attitudes towards remote and hybrid working (30%), attitudes towards career progression (30%), and preferences for leadership and management styles (26%). Employer views on generational differences in work approaches largely align with popular culture.

Figure 8: The top five differences between generations in their approach to work culture according to employers of multigenerational workforces vs those with a single generation



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

Organisations with more than one generation were more likely to report differences between generations at the workplace. Nearly half of respondents (47%) said work-life balance is a difference, followed by 45% stating communication styles, 40% levels of technology proficiency, 34% response to workload pressures and 34% on expectations on pay and benefits.

4. NAVIGATING THE MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE: TOWARDS PROACTIVE INCLUSION

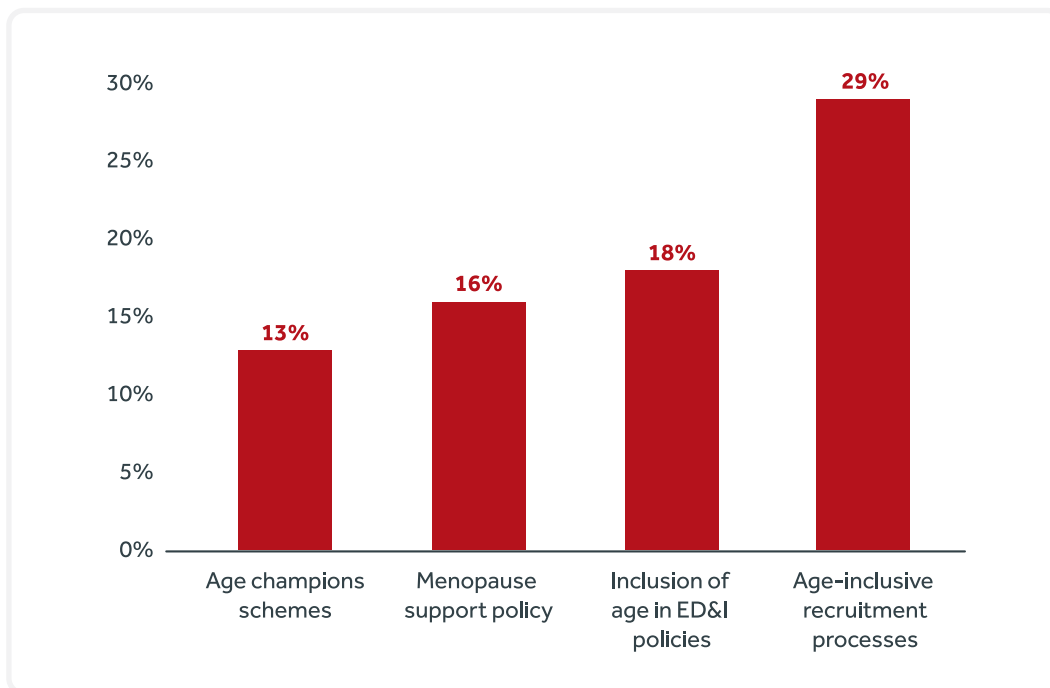
Looking ahead it is clear that the multigenerational nature of the UK workforce – and in many similar developed economies – will continue to grow, with a new generation expected to enter work at the end of this decade. There is an increasing need, therefore, for employers to take a proactive approach when responding to the challenges and opportunities these shifts will create, and in particular to the policies that can help cultivate a workplace culture capable of supporting colleagues from across generations to lead productive, happy and healthy working lives.

Ensuring the workforce remains productive, happy and healthy will require an increased focus on age inclusive policies, flexibility at work, the different ways colleagues brought together in a social context, and renewed investment in supporting managers to lead effectively in a more complex organisational environment.

There is a say-do-gap in terms of age inclusive policies in the workplace

Over two thirds of respondents (67%) state that their organisation actively addresses generational stereotypes and biases in their workplace to create a more inclusive environment. However, only a third of senior business leaders (31%) agree that an emphasis on inclusivity and diversity initiatives is important in creating a positive work culture for a multigenerational workforce. Even less employers put in policies to support age inclusion in the workplace with only 18% of senior business leaders including age in their EDI policies, 16% have a menopause support policy, and 13% have age champion schemes.

Figure 9: The percentage of employers who have age inclusion policies and practices



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

Policy in focus: 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.⁴⁶ 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:⁴⁹

- **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.
- **Definitions and symptoms** – 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.

Having flexibility policies is recognised as an important factor in creating a positive work culture

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.

“Organisations have a way to go in terms of reimagining how they operate and organise themselves to really make the best use of multigenerational workforces. Organisations should think about how they operate in an ecosystem in order to really make the best of the differences in society and how people want to work.”

ALEXA HIGHFIELD, PARTNER, PWC

Socialising at work can contribute to a positive and inclusive work culture

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 the consumption of alcohol. A third of employers (34%) stated that opportunities for socialising in person are important, and yet only four in five (81%) employers do not have guidance on inclusive social events. However, when considering organisation size, large organisations (31%) are much more likely to have this type of guidance than SMEs (17%).

Critically, over a quarter of business leaders (28%) think that social events that accommodate employees who choose not to drink alcohol are important to create a positive work culture for a multigenerational workforce, but just 21% have a workplace alcohol policy on responsible consumption.

Figure 10: The percentage of employers who have social and cultural policies and practices



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

Policy in focus: Inclusive socialising at work

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.⁵¹

Our research found that more than two thirds of employers (69%) recognise that work social activities should ensure responsible alcohol consumption and options for non-alcoholic beverages, but that four in five (79%) report that their organisations do not however have policies on responsible alcohol consumption in place.

Organisational approaches should aim to create inclusive and healthy workplace cultures through wider policy and guidance, such as through:^{52,53}

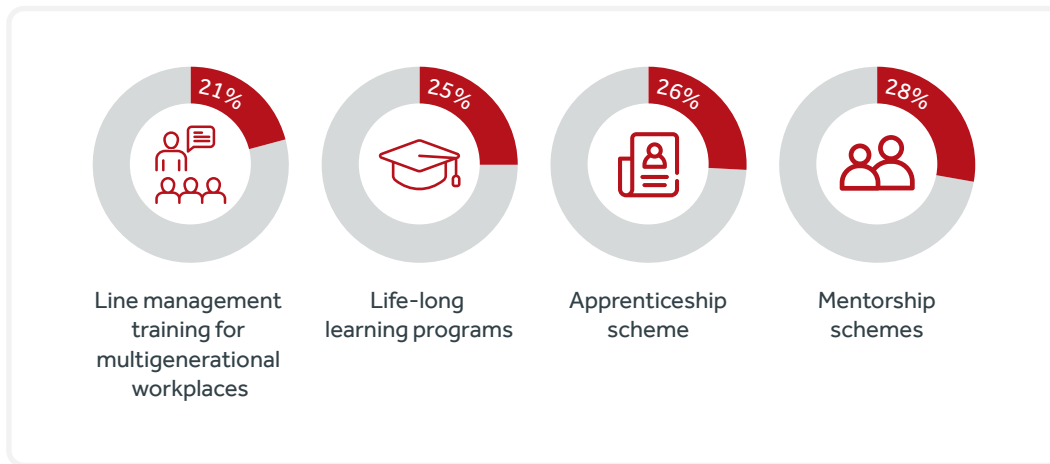
- **Event labelling** – change the description of events away from "drinks" to "socialising", "networking", or "gathering" instead.
- **Alternative drinks** – provide non-alcoholic drinks alongside alcoholic drinks. Our research found that 28% of business leaders think that social events that accommodate employees who choose not to drink alcohol is an important factor in creating a positive work culture for a multigenerational workforce.
- **Alternative events and event timings** – run activities that do not centre on alcohol, and host morning, lunch, or afternoon gatherings to include those with caring responsibilities and/or disabilities who may struggle to attend evening events.
- **Dietary requirements** – ask about preferences for non-alcoholic drink as part of requests for dietary requirements.
- **Training** – run training for everyone on the issues associated with health risks and communicate the organisation's message.

In addition to having policies in place, in order to facilitate inclusive socialising and choice in the workplace, employers can foster cultures that allow this by focusing on behaviour change (such as confronting non-inclusive behaviours and role modelling a tone from the top), encouraging a "speak up" culture, and establishing support groups and networks to allow employee voice to shape decisions.

Clear communication and transparency from leadership is key

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.

Figure 11: The percentage of employers who have learning and development practices



Source: Work Foundation analysis of nationally representative survey of senior business leaders across Great Britain, unweighted total: 1,167.

Managers can play a key role in translating senior management’s goals into practice

According to research from the London School of Economics, the most important aspect in enabling a flourishing multigenerational workplace is the role of the line manager – particularly in bridging the gap between policy creation and implementation.^{54,55} Yet, research by the Chartered Management Institute showed that 82% of employees who enter manager positions have not had any formal management and leadership training. Good managers understand the core behaviours that support workers’ health, wellbeing, and engagement, regardless of their age but need formal training. Otherwise many managers are left ill-equipped to handle the challenges of their role, support colleagues, and work towards the strategic goals of their organisation.

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.

Principles for creating inclusive multigenerational workplaces

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](#).

4) Embrace flexible working arrangements

Flexible working 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 foster a trust-based culture and improve employees' job satisfaction. Organisations should also put measures in place to monitor and evaluate the implementation of flexible working and identify areas for improvement in the short to medium term.

Additional resources

- Read about [2024 Working Families Best Practice Award winners](#) on Working Families website.
- Explore Timewise's resources on [making flexible working work for everyone](#).

5) Develop policies and procedures around employee health and wellbeing

In today's hybrid and diverse workplace, it is crucial for employers to create inclusive and responsible environments. To achieve this, employers could:

- **Offer guidance for inclusive work cultures, including social events:** For example, employers need to develop clear guidelines and procedures to ensure workplace social events are inclusive for all employees. This includes considering various cultural, religious, and personal preferences to make everyone feel welcome and included in the social events. A part of this guidance can be an alcohol policy.
- **Provide training to line managers on how to use guidance and protocols to ensure successful and inclusive work cultures:** Training line managers is key to fostering an inclusive work environment and employee wellbeing, recognising in-person socialising as being vital in supporting a positive work culture for a multigenerational workforce.

Additional resources

- Visit IARD's website to explore their [resources for senior leaders to develop workplace alcohol policies](#) and interactive tools for line managers.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a literature review, a Surveyation survey of 1,167 senior business leaders across Great Britain, and a roundtable attended by relevant national and international stakeholders. The fieldwork for the survey took place online between 29 April and 6 May 2024, and the roundtable took place online on 9 May 2024.

Roundtable attendees

- Dan Ellis, ACAS
- Andy Wiggans, Benenden Health
- Courtney Kealy, CBS (Chair)
- Tracy Riddell, Centre for Ageing Better
- Ben Willmott, CIPD
- Carmen Millé, Educational and Community Response Center
- Barbara Gerstenberger, Eurofound
- Teresa de la Garza Martinez, FEMSA Proximity Division (OXXO)
- Leana Olivier, Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FAAR)
- Julian Braithwaite, International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD)
- Sangheon Lee, International Labour Organisation
- Thomas Thurnell-Read, Loughborough University
- Florence Jaguga, Moi Teaching & Referral Hospital
- Alexa Highfield, PwC
- Ben Harrison, Work Foundation at Lancaster University.

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