

Benefits and Considerations of an Intergenerational Workforce



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The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the presenter and do not necessarily represent the views of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

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The older generation thought nothing of getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning — and the younger generation doesn't think so much of it either.

Author unknown, c.1944



Overview

- Aging Demographics & Outcomes
- NCPAW and Productive Aging
- Different generations on the Job
- Best practices
- Q&A

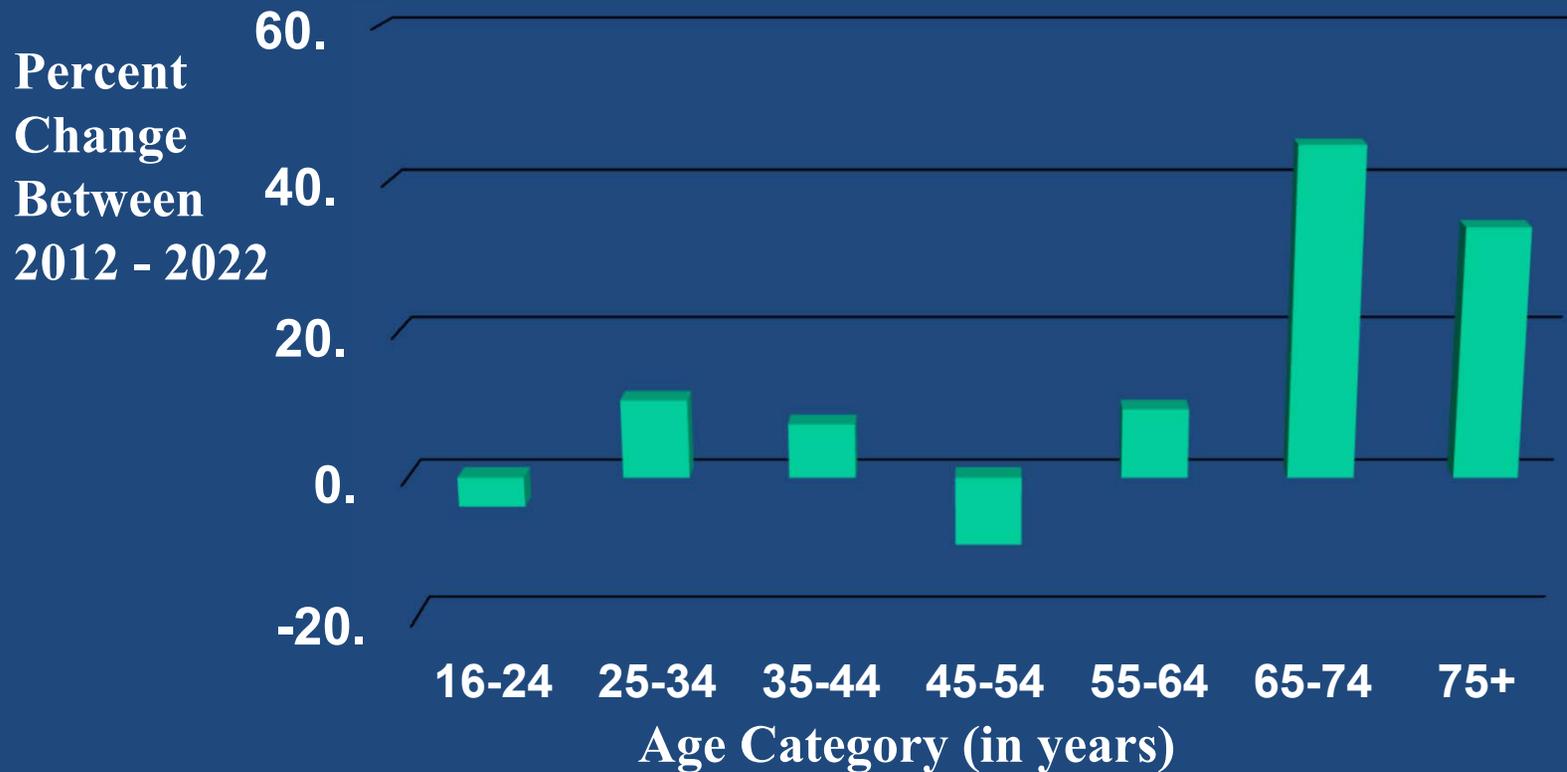


At What Age Do You Become an Older Worker?

- Age Discrimination in Employment Act (U.S.): 40+ years
- European perspective: 45+ years
- AARP: 50+ years
- U.S. Census: 55+ years
- Depends on the industry, individual worker, etc.

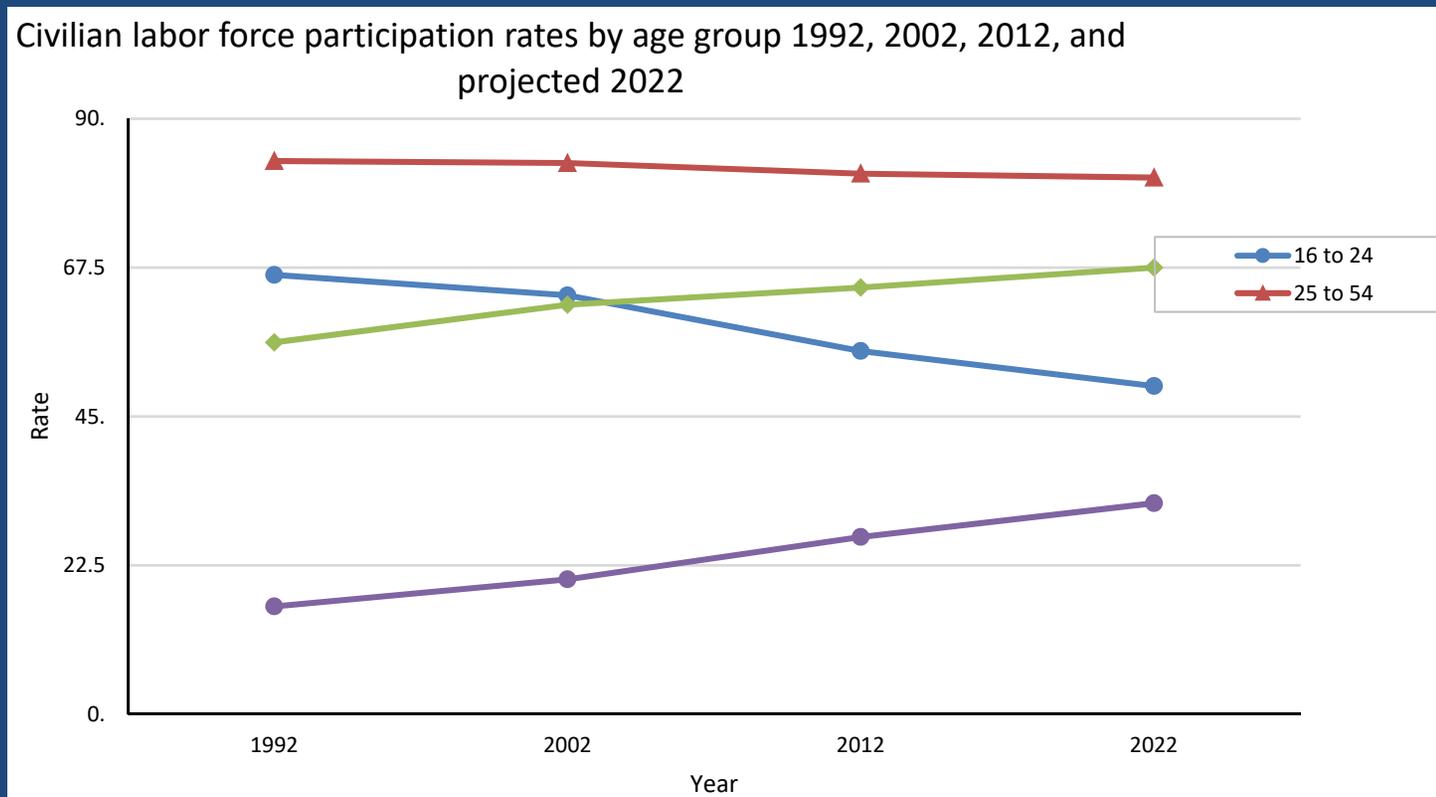


Projected Change in U.S. Civilian Workforce Between 2012 and 2022 by Age Group¹



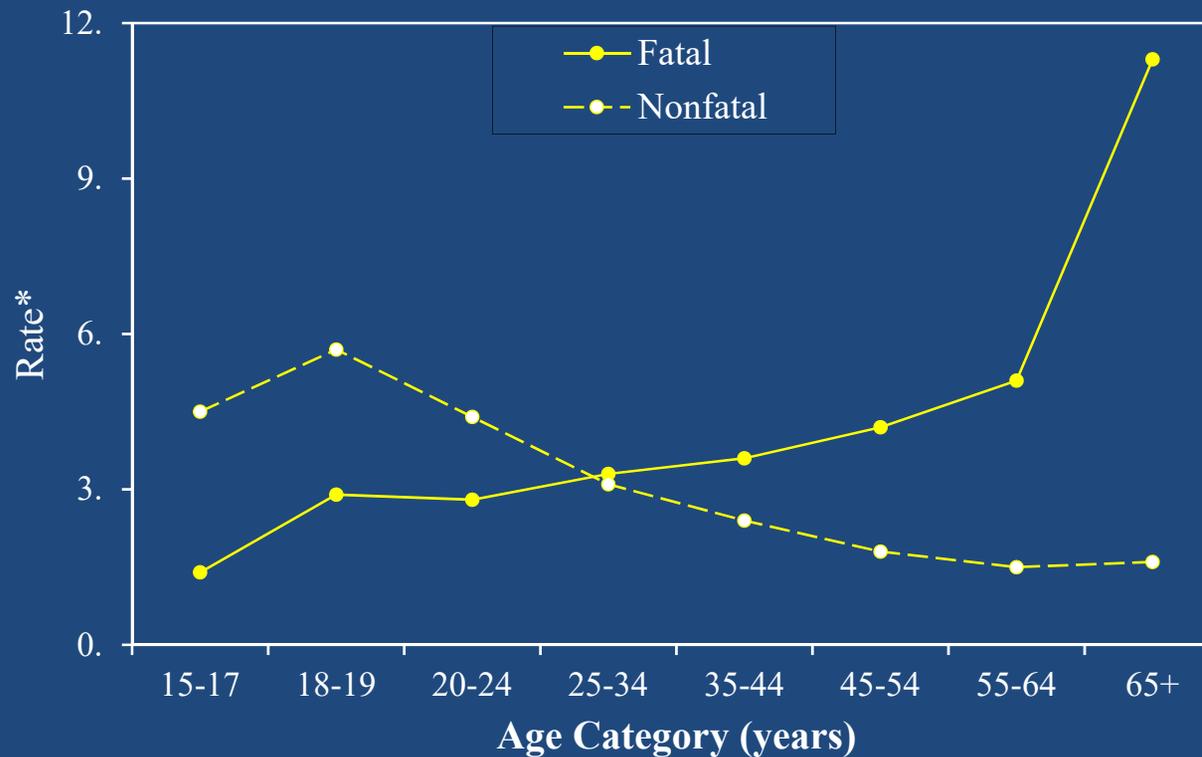
¹Toossi, M. (December, 2013). Labor force projections to 2022. *Monthly Labor Review*, pp. 1-28.

U.S. Civilian labor force participation rates by age group 1992, 2002, 2012, and projected 2022¹



¹U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Rate of Fatal and Nonfatal Occupational Injuries/Illnesses as a Function of Age¹



* Fatal injuries: rate per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers; Nonfatal injuries: rate per 1,000 full-time equivalent workers.

¹ National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEIS-Work), United States, 2004; and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, United States, 2005.

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Aging As Decline & Loss



- Most types of biological functioning decline.
- Risk of disability and chronic health conditions increases.
- Risk of severe and fatal injuries increases.
- Recovery following a health problem can be more challenging.
- **Caveat:** Enormous individual differences; decline/loss might not necessarily affect work.

Aging As Development & Growth

- Crystallized intelligence tends to increase.
- Emotional health tends to be stable across the working life and may actually improve.
- Motivation and job satisfaction may gradually shift and improve.
- Older workers tend to be more risk-averse
- ***Caveat:*** Amount of growth may depend on your environment.



National Center for Productive Aging and Work (NCPAW)



- Develop NIOSH-wide research goals on the aging workforce
- Build and expand upon collaborations with outside partners
- Expand knowledge on interventions and best practices
- Develop a broad range of useful products and resources on the aging workforce

Productive Aging

Productive aging is an approach that emphasizes the positive aspects of growing older and how individuals can make important contributions to their own lives, their communities and organizations, and society as a whole.

--Robert N. Butler



(minimize losses, maximize growth)

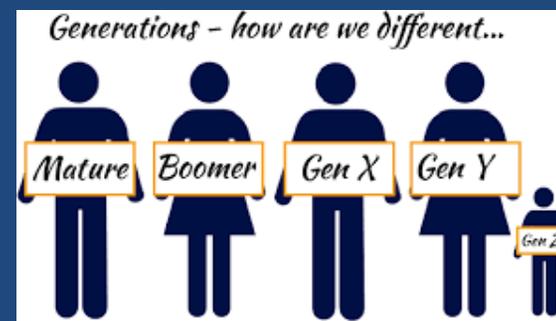
Four Attributes of Productive Aging Applied to Work



- Life span perspective.
- Comprehensive and integrated approach to occupational safety and health
- Emphasis on outcomes that recognize the priorities of both workers and employers
- Supportive work culture for multigenerational issues

Supportive work culture for multigenerational issues

- By 2020, up to five generations working side-by-side
 - WW II, 1925-1945
 - Baby Boomers, 1946-1964
 - Generation X, 1965-1980
 - Millennials, 1981-2001
 - Gen Z
- Increased interpersonal exchanges across age groups
- The need for generational intelligence



Different Generations on the Job

- More helpful to think of life stage or *lifespan*¹.
- Intergenerational conflicts exist, but they often stem from errors in attribution and perception rather than valid differences.
- However, even the perception of “generational differences” can be cause for concern²



- ¹ Giancola F [2006]. The generation gap: More myth than reality. *Human Resource Planning* 29(4): 32
- ² Rudolph CW, Zacher Z. [2015]. Considering generations from a lifespan developmental perspective. *Work Aging Retire* 3(2): 113-129. doi: 10.1093/worker/waw019

Different Generations on the Job

- Attitudes toward work¹
 - Decline in work ethic among younger workers debatable
 - Older generation: work = attaining organizational goals.²
 - Younger workers: work = achieving individual goals²
- Attitudes toward supervision
 - Older workers: authority and rules, freedom from supervision³
 - Younger workers: no micromanagement, clear instruction, strong leadership²
 - Younger workers require regular feedback; older workers might be insulted by it.⁴

• ¹ Smola & Sutton (2002). ² Singh (2013) ³ Joyner T [2000]. ⁴ Jurkiewicz CE, Brown RG [1998].



Different Generations on the Job

- Attitudes toward safety
 - Older workers more likely to read warnings, but no evidence of difference in adherence¹
 - Older workers show more positive attitudes toward safety^{2,3}
- Employee engagement⁴
 - Similar motivators across the lifespan
 - Management interest in worker well-being, skill improvement, organizational reputation



• ¹ Hancock HE et al. [2001]. ²Siu et al. [2003]. ³Yin W et al. [2017]. ⁴Towers Perrin [2006].

Different Generations on the Job

- Injuries and exposures
 - Younger workers experience more non-fatal injuries¹
 - Older workers have decreased risk, but experience high rates of serious and fatal injuries.²
- Training styles and needs³
 - Younger: Hard and soft skills on the job
 - Older: Soft skill on the job . . Hard skills through instruction

• ¹ Topf MD [2000]. General next? *Occupational Hazards* 62: 49-50. ²National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine [2004].

³ Deal JJ [2007].



Implications of Age Diversity in the Workplace

- Increase in older workers means increase in younger managers supervising older workers
- Conflict → Workplace stress → Other outcomes¹
- Still much to learn about the impact of intergenerational conflict on occupational safety, health, and well-being
 - Manufacturing
 - Construction



- ¹ Santos, Cox [2000]. Workplace adjustment and intergenerational differences between matures, boomers, and Xers. *Nursing Economics* 18:1, 7-13.

Recommendations

- Identify the generational groups.¹
- Encourage knowledge transfer.²
- Respond to diverse training needs.²
 - Younger: Hard and soft skills on the job
 - Older: Soft skill on the job . . . Hard skills through instruction



- ¹Biggs S, Lowenstein A [2011]. *Generational intelligence: A critical approach to age relations*. London and New York: Routledge.
- ²SPReW [2008]. Generational approach to the social patterns of relation to work. Retrieved from <http://www.ftu-namur.org/sprew/>

Recommendations



- Understand different priorities.¹
 - Young workers: autonomy
 - Mid-career workers: flexible working
 - Older workers: avoid physically demanding jobs, more flexibility
- Manage age similarity preference (ASP).²
 - When workers prefer to interact and work with people their own age
 - ASP can increase uncertainty, perceived challenges, and subsequently, stress

- ¹SPReW [2008]. Generational approach to the social patterns of relation to work. Retrieved from <http://www.ftu-namur.org/sprew/>
- ²Standifer et al. [2013]. How age similarity preference, uncertainty, and workplace challenges affect conflict. *Human Relations* 66:22, 1597.

Where to start?

- Conduct a needs assessment. Where are the most pressing needs?
- Set a goal.¹
 - What could be added or changed to make this a better workplace?
 - Who should we involve?
 - What obstacles might there be? How do we address each obstacle?
 - What specific steps do we take to make it happen?
- Identify a plan/intervention (e.g., goal matrix)
- Carry it out and assess the results.



¹NIOSH [2016]. Fundamentals of total worker health approaches: essential elements for advancing worker safety, health, and well-being. By Lee MP, Hudson H, Richards R, Chang CC, Chosewood LC, Schill AL, on behalf of the NIOSH Office for Total Worker Health. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2017-112.

Strategies to Enhance Productive Aging: Considerations

- Choose goals that are
 - Large enough to make an impact, but
 - Manageable enough to be accomplished.
- Needs go far beyond an educational curriculum
- May be difficult to get organizations to commit to a systematic approach
- Classroom model has limited reach.



Acknowledgements

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- Email NCPAW: ncpaw@cdc.gov
- Web: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/productiveaging/>



Discussion and Questions



Additional Resources

- NCPAW home page
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/productiveaging/>
- Office of Total Worker Health®
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/twh/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/twh/fundamentals.html>
- Designing the Age Friendly Workplace
 - <https://agefriendlyworkplace.squarespace.com/>
- Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) Work Ability Index
 - <http://partner.ttl.fi/en/health/wai/pages/default.aspx>
- EU-OSHA Healthy Workplaces for All Ages E-guide
 - <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/e-guide-all-ages>

