



THE MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

Age and the U.S. Worker Experience



SETTING THE STAGE

For the first time, five generations are working together, side-by-side in the American workforce.

These workers have significantly different values, experiences, expectations, and needs.

To successfully foster a workplace culture where workers of all ages feel respected and valued, it's essential that organizations understand the complexities of the multi-generational U.S. workforce, as well their particular workforce.

Understanding and respecting multi-generational needs isn't just a matter of inclusion.

It's a business imperative—

96%

of American workers say it's important to them to work for an organization that values workers of all ages

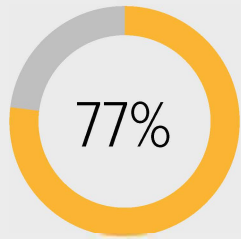
Workers of all ages want to be valued, respected, and treated fairly. And yet...

Recent spotlights on high-profile age-related lawsuits and personal anecdotes would suggest that older workers, in particular, may be facing **age discrimination** and may be **feeling overlooked and undervalued** in the workplace.

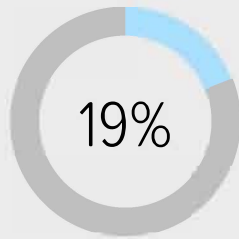
WHO'S LEGALLY AN 'OLDER' WORKER?

Typically, a discussion of age in the workplace focuses on older workers as a legally protected class. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) protects workers 40 years of age and up from employment-based age discrimination, but do workers know who's protected?

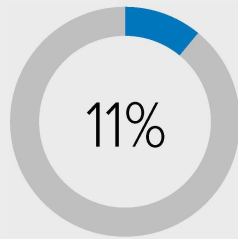
Percentage of employees who can correctly identify the age at which U.S. workers become protected under ADEA



HR Professionals



C-Suite Executives



People Managers

While most of HR knew that ADEA protections begin at age 40, the vast majority of Executives and Managers had no idea, even within five years of either direction— a huge liability risk for organizations.

Knowing ADEA protections matters

Those in leadership positions across organizations, from front-line managers up through the C-Suite, are making important workplace decisions that involve age but **aren't informed about the ADEA** or other employment laws.

Without knowledge and training, these employees may be engaging in discriminatory behaviors that have legal implications for their businesses.

Any discussion of age-related treatment in a five-generation workforce needs to explore the experiences of **every part of that workforce.**

Workers across the age spectrum deserve a workplace culture that empowers them, **whether they're a member of a legally protected class or not.**





DEFINING AGE DISCRIMINATION VS AGEISM

There are lots of terms related to age in the workplace, and this discussion requires some definitions.

Age Discrimination involves treating an applicant or employee less favorably because of their age. Age discrimination can generally **only be applied to those covered by ADEA** protections (workers 40+).

Ageism is a term describing stereotyping, prejudice or unequal treatment on the basis of age. **Ageism can occur to workers of any age, but is not illegal** unless the worker in question is of a protected class.

We use the term **ageism** throughout this presentation to better encompass this broader perspective and to better capture the experiences of the multi-generational workforce.

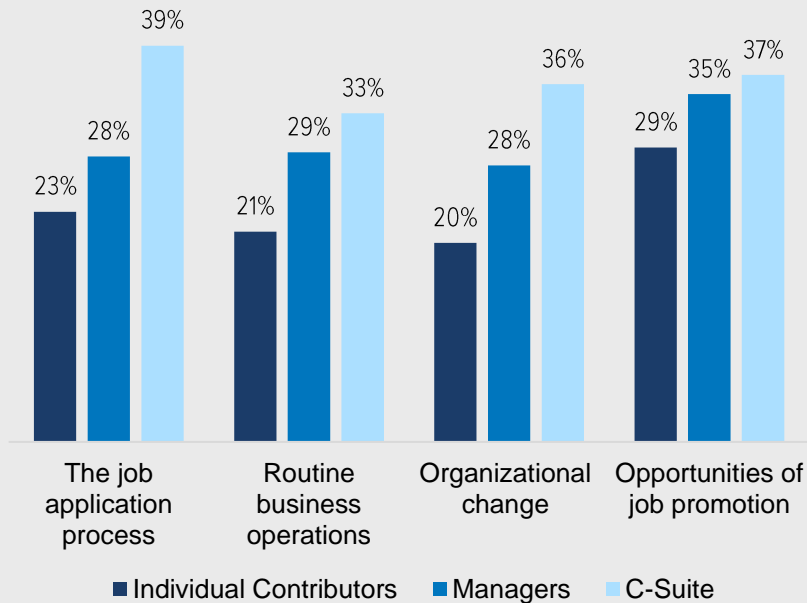
A photograph of several business professionals sitting on a modern, metallic bench. They are dressed in professional attire, including suits and blouses. The image is framed with a white border and has a torn-paper effect at the edges. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

1.

EXPERIENCING AGEISM

Who experiences ageist treatment in the workplace?

Have you ever felt treated unfairly in the workplace due to your age during...



Between one-fifth and one-third of all American workers report feeling treated unfairly in the workplace due to age.

*Workers in more senior positions are the **most likely** to report unfair treatment.*

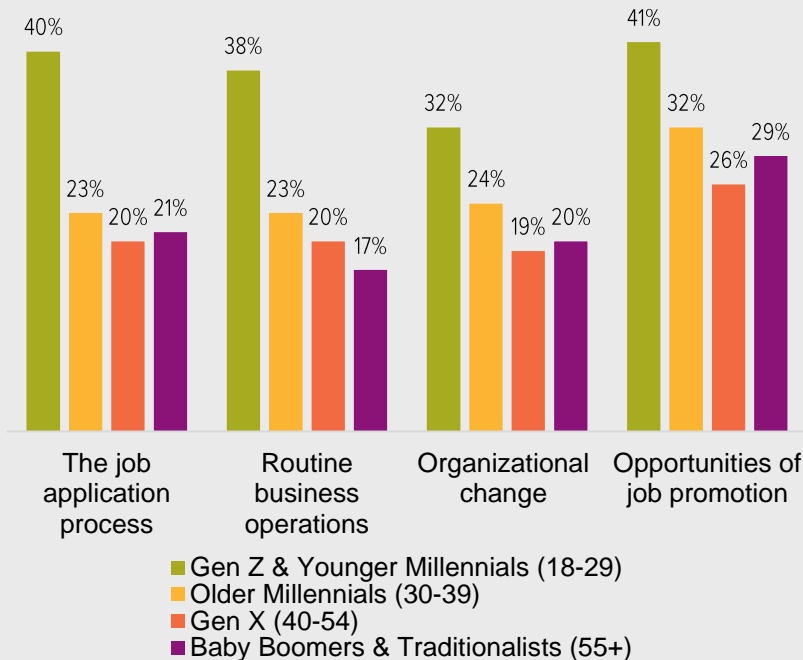


2.

GENERATIONAL IMPACTS

American workers of different generations report very different experiences with age-related unfair treatment.

Have you ever felt treated unfairly in the workplace due to your age during...



*Workers below 30—Gen Z and Younger Millennials— report experiencing unfair treatment due to age about **twice as often** as any other age group.*

All workers over 39 report unfair treatment due to age at similar rates, but different times.



HOW UNFAIR TREATMENT DUE TO AGE IMPACTS WORKERS

Impacts of unfair treatment due to age are highly variable, with workers reporting a broad array of outcomes.

Gen Z and Younger Millennials

say that this treatment primarily impacts them socially, with 29% reporting that they are **taken less seriously at work.**

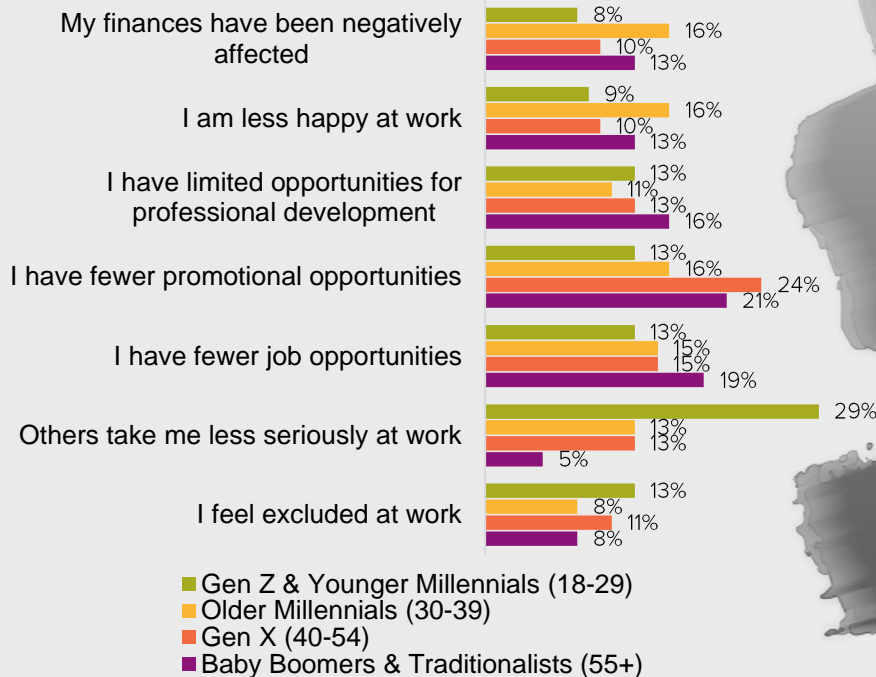
Older Millennials

report impacts on their **finances**, their **happiness at work**, and their **opportunities** for jobs and promotions.

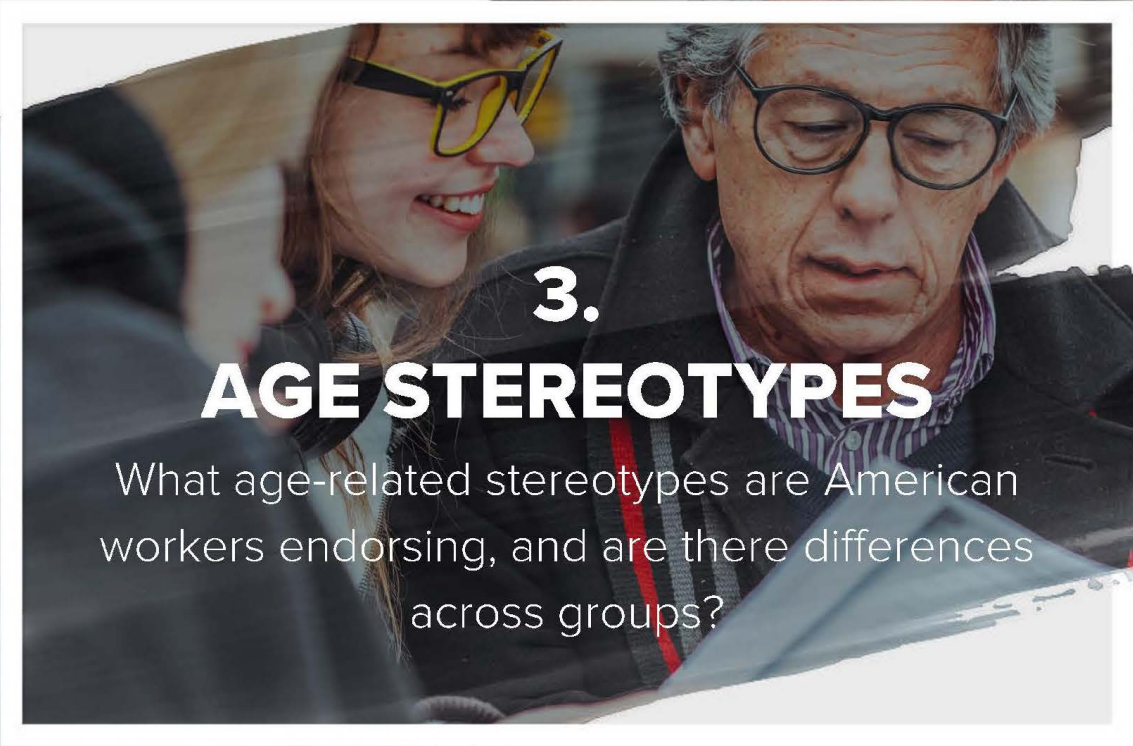
Gen X, Boomers, and Traditionalists

report having **fewer** job, promotional, and professional development **opportunities available** to them.

In what way do you think this treatment has most impacted you personally?*



There's no one way that age-related unfair treatment affects workers. Differing social impacts, opportunity impacts, and financial impacts may indicate fundamentally differing perspectives on the nature of work across age groups.



3.

AGE STEREOTYPES

What age-related stereotypes are American workers endorsing, and are there differences across groups?



**STEREOTYPES
MOST
ENDORSED BY
AMERICAN
WORKERS**

1. Younger workers are inexperienced 70%

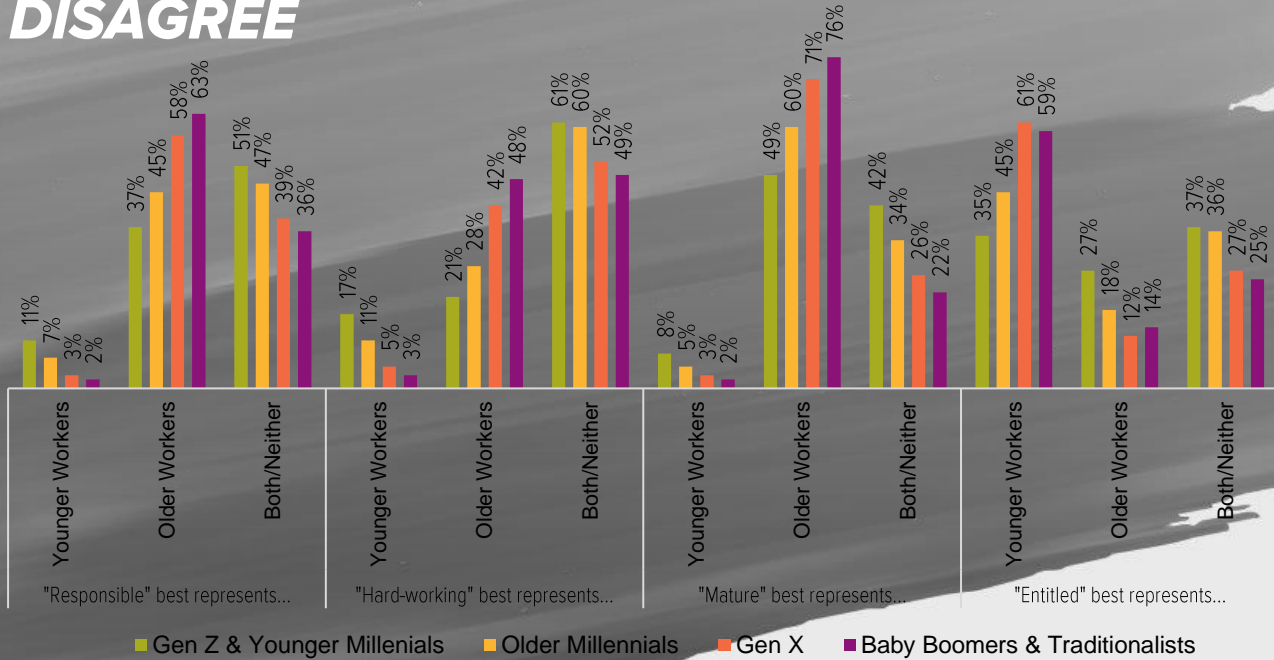
2. Older workers aren't competent with new technology 68%

3. Older workers are resistant to change 64%

4. Older workers are mature 64%

5. Younger workers aren't loyal to organizations 58%

STEREOTYPES ON WHICH THE GENERATIONS DISAGREE





**WHO
ENDORSES
WHAT?**

GENERATIONS

When it comes to positive stereotypes like responsibility, maturity, and work ethic:

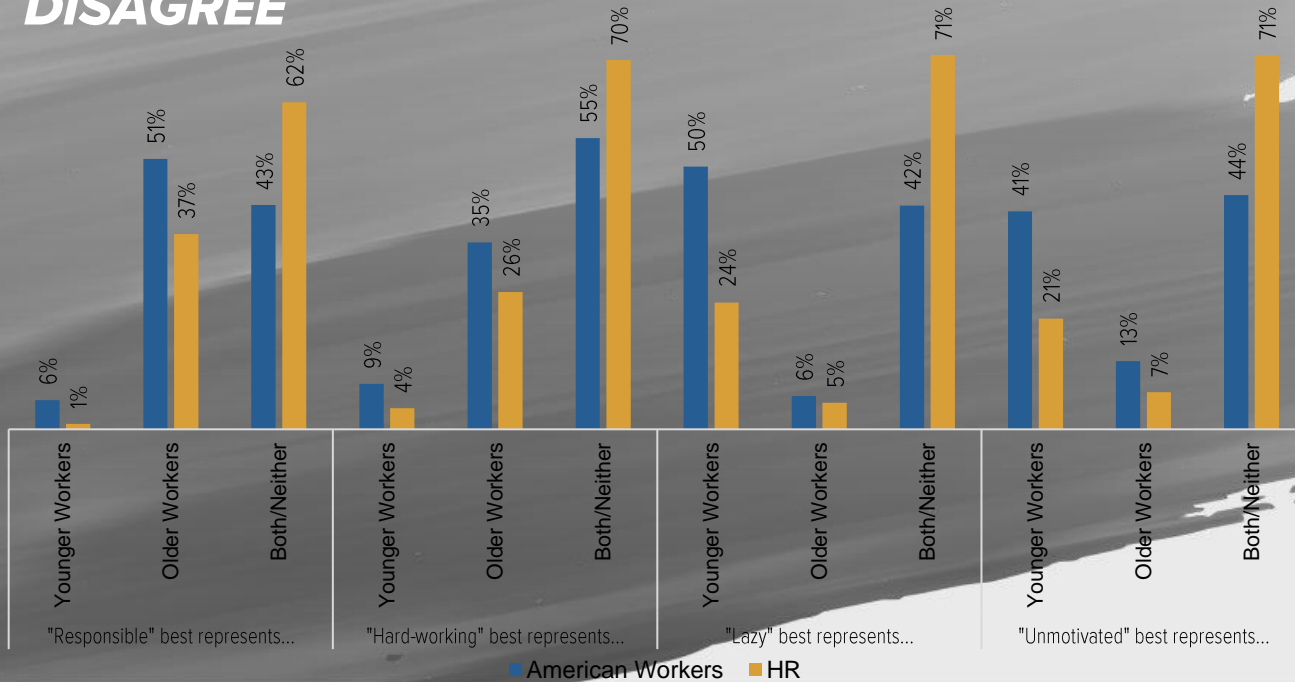
Gen X, Boomers, and Traditionalists were somewhat more likely to endorse these stereotypes about **older workers**.

Gen Z and Millennials were more likely to say positive stereotypes describe **both groups equally**.

For negative stereotypes like entitlement, laziness, and lack of responsibility:

Gen X, Boomers, and Traditionalists were somewhat more likely to endorse these stereotypes about **younger workers**.

STEREOTYPES ON WHICH HR & AMERICAN WORKERS DISAGREE





**WHO
ENDORSES
WHAT?**

**WORKERS VS
HR**

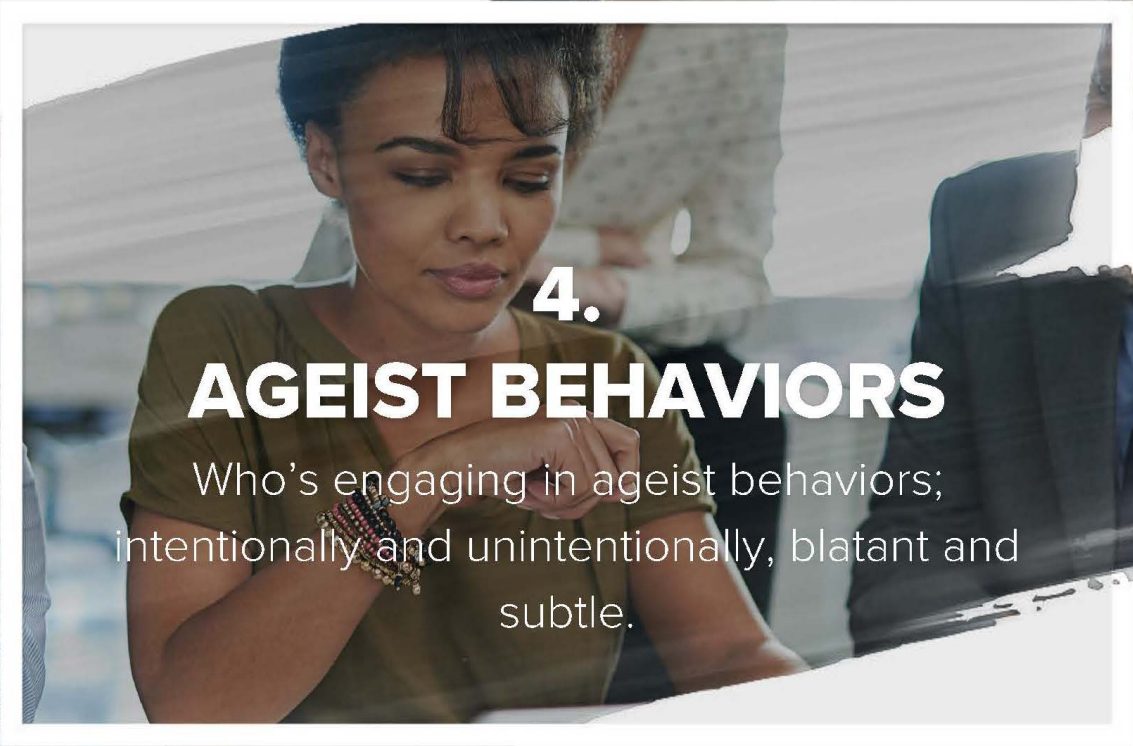
When it comes to stereotypes like responsibility, work ethic, laziness, and lack of motivation:

American workers were somewhat more likely to endorse them as describing a particular age group.

HR was more likely to say that these descriptions represent both older and younger workers equally.

However, for certain negative stereotypes, HR and American workers were in agreement:

American workers and HR were about equally likely to say that lack of competence with technology and resistance to change describe older workers and that entitlement and disloyalty to organizations describe younger workers.

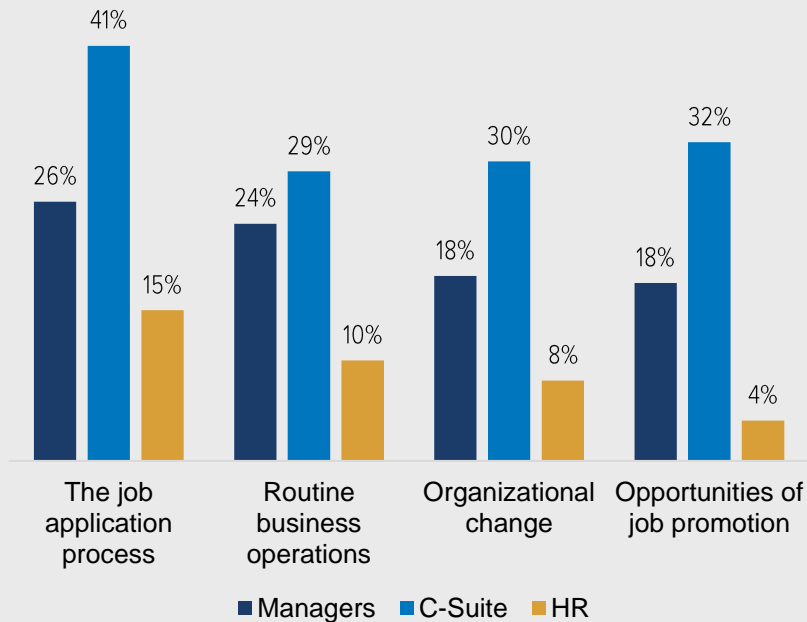


4.

AGEIST BEHAVIORS

Who's engaging in ageist behaviors;
intentionally and unintentionally, blatant and
subtle.

Has an applicant's or employee's age ever played a role in a decision you've made during...



Forty percent of C-Suite executives report using age as a factor in their decision making during hiring.

Across the board, managers and executives are far more likely to say they've made decisions based, at least in part, on age.

People managers and executives need more and better training on the impact of ageism in the workplace.

And their decisions aren't the only thing they need to be trained on:

19%

of HR professionals think hiring managers at their organizations are screening out certain workers on the basis of age when writing job descriptions.



DO PEOPLE MAKE AGEIST DECISIONS?

To gauge whether **American workers and HR** are engaging in **ageist behavior** we conducted an experiment where respondents were presented with hypothetical work scenarios and asked to make a series of choices between two equally qualified employees (e.g., “who would you hire?”).

Weaved into these employees’ descriptions about their experiences, skills, and abilities were their ages, **one older and one younger**.

These scenarios were designed to mirror real-world **hiring, routine operations, job promotion, and organizational change** decisions that managers and HR professionals are responsible for.

The findings of this experiment were telling...

We found that both **American workers and HR endorse age-related stereotypes**, and they are also using these stereotypes to make work-related decisions.

Respondents **didn't show overall age preferences**, but the reasons respondents provided for their choices were **frequently tied to strongly endorsed age stereotypes**.

Relying on age stereotypes during...





THE TAKEAWAY

There can be a lot of ambiguity during workplace decision making. Regardless of one's role, it can be easy to default to using age stereotypes when we're asked to make choices using limited information.

Organizations must ensure that decision-makers at *all levels* are trained to seek out and use only job-related information when making important workplace decisions.

Employees should also be trained to recognize the age-related assumptions they may be making about others in the workplace.



5. **THE BUSINESS CASE**

Why organizations need to take action on preventing ageism and work better with the multi-generational workforce.



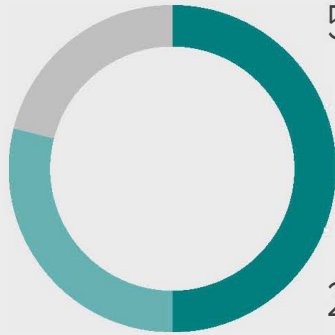
Workers' age-related experiences and perceptions, whether real or imagined, help shape workplace culture.

To successfully foster a workplace culture where workers of all ages feel respected and valued, organizations must strive to build more age-inclusive workplaces, to challenge age stereotypes, and to educate employees on the value that workers of all ages can bring to the table.

THE STATE OF TRAINING ON AGE-RELATED TOPICS AT WORK

38% of organizations do not have any formal D&I training at all

OF THOSE THAT DO HAVE D&I TRAINING

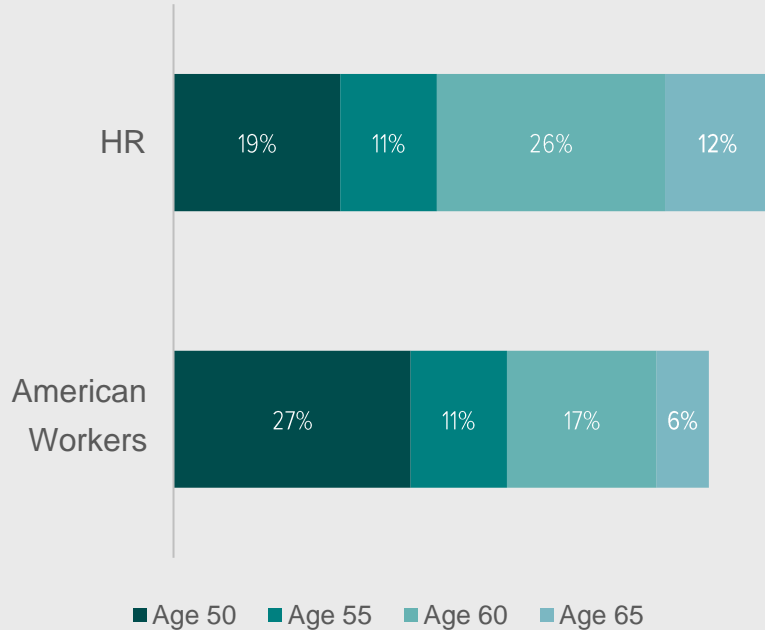


50% said their organization's training includes information about age

29% said their training explicitly does not



WHO DO WORKERS *THINK* COUNT AS 'OLDER'?



When asked at what age they considered someone an 'older worker', a majority of all respondents say somewhere between 50 and 65.

HR professionals were most likely to delay considering someone an older worker.

It's important to be aware of this discrepancy when designing training programs that address age in the workplace.

A large, stylized green brushstroke graphic that sweeps across the left side of the page. It is composed of multiple overlapping strokes of varying shades of green, from light to dark, creating a sense of movement and energy. A white rectangular frame is superimposed on the left side of this graphic, containing the word 'METHODOLOGY' in white, bold, uppercase letters.

METHODOLOGY

The survey of individual contributors, managers, and C-Suite executives was fielded September 26 – October 18, 2019 by NORC at the University of Chicago for the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Online interviews were conducted with 1,058 individual contributors, 1,062 managers, and 208 C-suite executives.

Of the 2,328 total interviews conducted, 1,044 respondents were surveyed using the AmeriSpeak Panel®, NORC at the University of Chicago’s nationally representative, probability-based panel, and 1,284 respondents were surveyed using a non-probability online panel. Data were weighted to reflect the population of U.S. working adults. The margin of error is approximately ± 3.07 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

The survey of HR professionals was fielded October 2 – October 31, 2019 by SHRM. In total, 1,104 HR professionals participated in the survey. Respondents represented organizations of various sizes in a wide variety of industries across the United States. Data were weighted to benchmarks that reflect the U.S. population of HR professionals.



APPENDIX

ADEA KNOWLEDGE QUESTION BREAKDOWN

According to the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), at what age do U.S. job applicants and employees become protected from employment-based age discrimination?

