Facilitating knowledge transfer between generations

Funded by

World Business Council for Sustainable Development

OECD

Please cite this content as: OECD (2024), “Facilitating knowledge transfer between generations”, OECD, Paris.

Acknowledgments : This document was prepared by Simona Otrisalova from the Employability Division of the Directorate for Employment Labour and Social Affairs. It benefitted from the helpful comments of Mark Pearson, ELS Deputy Director and Shruti Singh, Senior Economist and statistical help by Dana Blumin.

Design and editorial support: Monica Meza-Essid.

This work has been funded by: the Equity Action Platform of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), building on the work of Business for Inclusive Growth (B4IG) which was integrated into WBCSD early 2024

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Introduction

The firm-specific knowledge and expertise accumulated over years of service represent invaluable assets for business. However, companies are increasingly facing the risk of losing talent as two key trends unfold. First, due to ageing populations and the approaching retirement of the demographically strong baby boomer generation, many long-tenured employees will leave the labour market, taking with them decades of experience. Second, with rapidly evolving labour markets, workers are more frequently changing jobs. For instance, overall job tenure declined by 8% (or around nine months) between 2012 and 2019, with more than half of workers aged 55-59 having left their positions within the next five years (OECD, 2023[1]).

Embracing greater age diversity and fostering effective collaboration between generations can be effective ways in supporting a dynamic working environment, high employee engagement and productivity, ultimately leading to higher retention of both older and younger workers (OECD, 2020[2]).

To fully leverage the advantages of a multigenerational workforce, employers need to break down prevailing age-related misconceptions and understand their workforce's needs and preferences. Recent evidence indicates that there are more similarities in work attitudes and aspirations across workers of all ages. For instance, the scope of work, recognition, impact, and work relationships are job dimensions that both older and younger workers declare as valued aspects of work (OECD and Generation, 2023[3]).

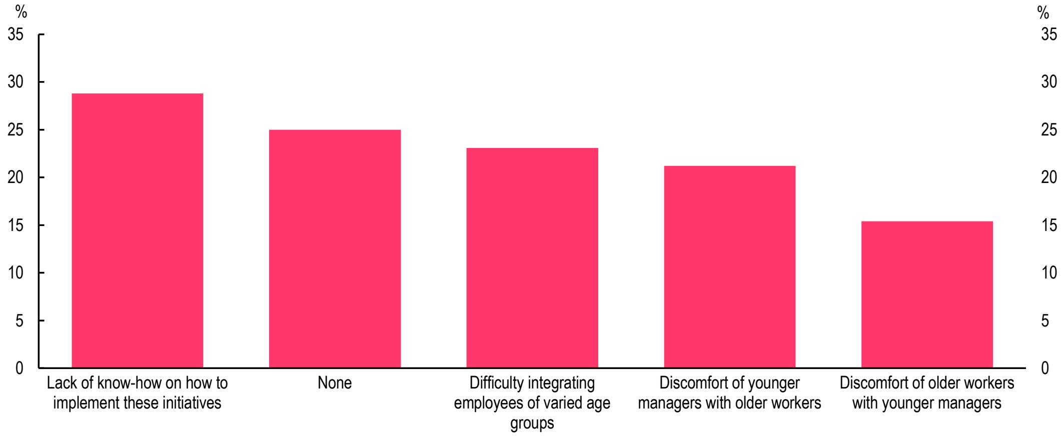
In this context, facilitating effective knowledge transfer between generations emerges as a strategic imperative, crucial not only for transmitting work-related knowledge but also for shaping attitudes (Pfrombeck, Burmeister and Grote, 2024[4]). Intergenerational knowledge transfer ensures continuity, resilience, and competitiveness in the face of evolving workforce dynamics (Burmeister and Deller, 2016[5]). This is particularly important for SMEs, which often grapple with labour shortages and limited resources for training and development.

The 2024 OECD/B4IG/WBCSD Multigenerational Workforce Survey revealed that only a few employers have fully developed policies to encourage knowledge transfers, as they encounter several barriers when implementing these initiatives. One significant challenge is the age gap between managers and their subordinates, with younger managers often feeling uncomfortable managing older workers, and vice versa. Notably, the lack of know-how on how to implement these initiatives emerged as the most commonly cited barrier, with over 28% of surveyed companies acknowledging it (**Figure 1**).

This brochure aims to bridge this gap by identifying the most effective tools for facilitating knowledge transfer across generations and overcoming age-related misperceptions, while also outlining the practical steps organisations should consider when implementing them. The brochure features several insights from companies, as well as two comprehensive case studies included in the appendix.

Figure 1. Employers lack information on how to implement knowledge transfers

Share of respondents identifying specific barriers that their company faces in implementing knowledge transfer initiatives.



Note: The OECD, in collaboration with B4IG/WBCSD and Business at OECD (BIAC), conducted a survey to explore multigenerational employer practices on knowledge transfer. The online anonymous survey, ran from November 15, 2023, to February 2, 2024, and targeted HR or line managers. The survey question, "In your opinion, what are the barriers your company faces in implementing knowledge transfer initiatives?" was answered by 52 self-selected companies (OECD, 2024[1]).
Source: 2024 OECD/B4IG/WBCSD Multigenerational workforce survey

Intergenerational knowledge transfer

What is it about?

Intergenerational knowledge transfer refers to a process by which individuals of varying age groups share and acquire valuable skills, information, experience, and ideas within a business setting (Wang and Noe, 2010[6]; Harvey, 2012[7]). This transfer can occur formally, through structured instruction procedures, training, and workshops, or informally, when information is exchanged often on the job, through verbal instructions, observation, or presentations.

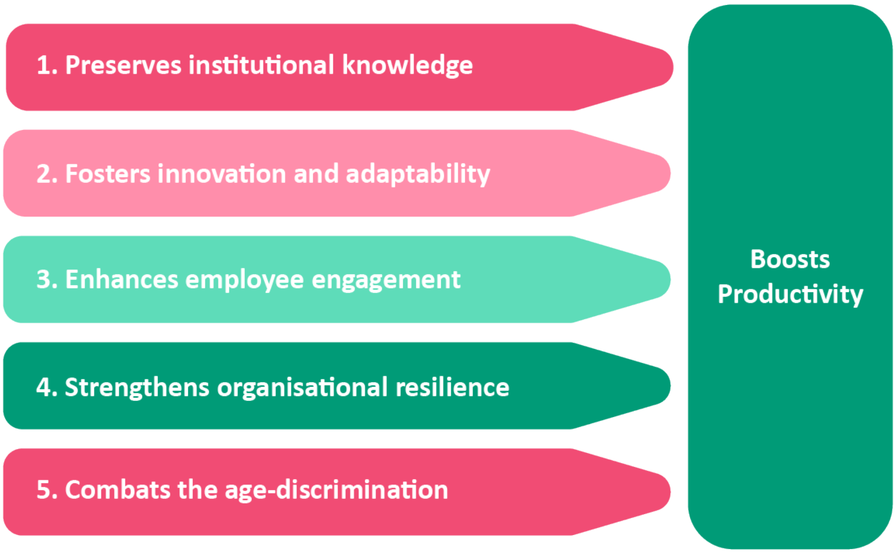
Similar to an iceberg, knowledge can be divided into explicit and tacit components (Dalkir, 2013[8]; Bolisani and Bratianu, 2018[9]). Explicit knowledge, comparable to the visible tip of the iceberg, consists of information that can be readily codified into tangible forms such as documents, recordings, images, or formal procedures (Calo, 2008[9]). On the contrary, tacit knowledge resides within the minds of experienced employees and the organisation's collective memory. While explicit knowledge is easily transferable without loss of meaning (Turner and Makhija, 2006[10]), articulating and sharing tacit knowledge proves to be more challenging. Nonetheless, this type of knowledge is crucial for firm-specific institutional know-how, providing a competitive edge, and should be integrated into knowledge transfer mechanisms (Harries, 2012[11]; Sprinkle and Urick, 2018[12]).

An effective intergenerational knowledge transfer boosts productivity…

Learning from long-tenured team members allows new or inexperienced employees to gain valuable insights into the organisation's culture, values, and goals, and quickly learning about company policies, procedures, and best practices. This can be particularly important during the onboarding of new employees and when implementing new technologies (Jeske and Olson, 2022[16]). Conversely, younger workers can share fresh perspectives and up-to-date skills with their older counterparts, creating a dynamic learning environment. Also, by sharing experience, individuals can build upon their successes and avoid the mistakes of others, leading to better decision-making.

By encouraging exchanges and dialogues between generations, organisations can challenge stereotypes associated with age and foster a culture of continuous learning, resulting in a more skilled workforce and greater innovation (Schmidt and Muehlfeld, 2017[17]).

Infographic 1: Intergenerational knowledge transfer brings numerous benefits:



…and increases resilience of the company

Intergenerational knowledge transfer ensures that critical knowledge is effectively passed on and retained within the diverse workforce of an organisation or team (Burmeister and Deller, 2016[5]). Crucial for succession planning, it facilitates a smooth transition of leadership and responsibilities to younger employees during times of change, such as when an experienced employee retires or leaves the organisation.

Finally, knowledge transfer between generations fosters greater job satisfaction, loyalty and retention among both younger and older workers (Burmeister, Wang and Hirschi, 2020[18]; Henry, Zacher and Desmette, 2015[19]; Marvell and Cox, 2017[20]). Studies indicate that while younger workers value receiving knowledge from their coworkers, more experienced workers often find fulfilment in passing on their know-how and expertise to others.

Main type of programmes that facilitate knowledge transfer between generations

This section presents various initiatives that employers can implement to connect employees of different generations in the workplace and facilitate knowledge flows among them. Evidence shows that establishing one-to-one relationships between workers of varying levels of seniority and age is particularly effective for transferring implicit knowledge. At the same time, a more systemic and structured approach is preferred for transmitting explicit and coded knowledge, such as through documentation and knowledge management systems (Rupčić, 2018[15]). Within-firm mobility is also a key component of enhancing intergenerational knowledge transfer (OECD, 2024[21]).

1. Coaching and mentoring ensure effective knowledge transfer from older to younger workers

Learning relationships through coaching and mentoring mobilise older experienced workers to share skills, knowledge, and expertise with their younger 'protégés' through developmental conversations, experience sharing, and role modelling. Although both concepts are often used interchangeably, mentoring refers to a more informal relationship concerned with the long-term career development of the individual, while coaching is more formally centred on specific skills and job performance that address organisational needs (Passmore, 2006[22]).

At the organisational level, intergenerational mentoring and coaching programmes have been found to enhance productivity, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and retention of both younger and older workers (Hussain Shah, Bin Othman and Bin Mansor, 2016[23]; Ghosh and Reio, 2013[24]). Additionally, they serve as a supportive mechanism for other training programmes (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016[25]; Hagen and Gavrilova Aguilar, 2012[26]; Burmeister, Wang and Hirschi, 2020[18]).

From the employees' perspective, a 2018 AARP survey on *Mentorship and the Value of a Multigenerational Workforce* revealed that 83% of respondents who have had or have been mentors considered the experience extremely or very important to their career (Anderson, 2019[14]). While developing job-related skills and expertise are among the top benefits of mentorship, most mentees also value the advice and connections a mentor can provide. Concurrently, senior mentors may experience higher visibility across the organisation, as well as gratification and recognition from the mentoring relationship (Kennett and Lomas, 2015[32]; Eby et al., 2006[31]). This is indeed well documented in the coaching scheme targeted at workers aged 45 and above that BNL BNP Paribas, an international banking player, developed in Italy (Box 1).

Intergenerational mentoring and coaching programmes have proven to be a cost-effective strategy, particularly beneficial for businesses navigating competitive environments (OECD, 2020[2]). Employers widely acknowledge these initiatives as highly effective for transferring knowledge between generations (Figure 2). As a result, coaching and mentoring programmes have become cornerstone tools in talent management practices.

Box 1. Insights from BNL BNP Paribas

Objective: BNL BNP Paribas offers senior experts the opportunity to share their knowledge through a coaching scheme, facilitating the transfer of accumulated skills and know-how to their colleagues, especially the younger ones.

Main elements: In 2022, BNL BNP Paribas launched an internal cross-generational coaching programme across its offices in Italy. This initiative helped to create a Learning Expert Community, an internal talent network, while also recognising the contributions of senior experts within the company.

This new learning model at BNP Paribas includes the Train-the-Trainer programme (TTT), which started with a pilot involving 17 employees aged 45 and above, all recognised as field experts with specific skills and validated experience by their managers. To prepare them for their roles, they received training in lesson organisation, class management, and participant engagement, including exercises on effective voice use, creating teaching tools, sharing community goals, and technical setup. The teaching experience culminates in a 3-hour webinar where the expert is prominently featured, and their teaching experience is validated by the company, fostering a community of Learning Experts.

Outcome: As a result, the trained senior experts have been able to share their knowledge in group seminars of varying sizes, ranging from 15 to 80 participants, delivering over 180 hours of courses since 2022. Initially targeting younger newcomers, these sessions have also attracted a broad spectrum of older employees seeking IT skill updates or new learning opportunities. As the initiative scaled up, the Expert Learning Community expanded itself up to 69 members.

This internal cross-generational coaching programme has proven to be a cost-effective way to disseminate knowledge and foster a new culture that values the talent of older workers, thereby enhancing overall engagement and increasing their visibility across the company. A surprising outcome has been the interest of younger employees in becoming part of the Learning Expert Community, sharing their digital skills with older colleagues.

"Intergenerational mentoring and coaching programmes have proven to be a cost-effective strategy particularly beneficial for businesses navigating competitive environments", **OECD 2020**

Figure 2: Initiatives perceived as most effective for intergenerational knowledge transfers

Share of respondents identifying a specific initiative among the top three most effective in intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Note: The question "According to you, what are the top three most effective initiatives and formats for multigenerational knowledge transfer?" was answered by 52 respondents among the members of B4IG/WBCSD and BIAC
Source: 2024 OECD/B4IG/WBCSD Multigenerational workforce survey

Mentoring programmes can be tailored to fit different needs but should align with both individual and organisational goals (Blackman, Moscardo and Gray, 2016[25]). At Nestlé, for example, mentoring initiatives began organically as employees sought advice from more experienced colleagues. Acknowledging their success, these initiatives were spotlighted and expanded to benefit all employees in the company's respective territories (Box 2).

2. Reverse mentoring keeps experienced workers engaged and new colleagues committed

Reverse mentoring inverts the traditional mentoring model by acknowledging the expertise of younger employees and allowing them to lead the relationship, sharing their expertise and fresh perspectives with older mentees. The knowledge transfer primarily occurs through regular, structured meetings, which encourage senior employees to stay updated and adapt to the evolving business landscape.

While reverse mentoring is commonly used to impart technological skills to senior employees in most organisations (Chaudhuri and Ghosh, 2012[28]), its potential extends beyond this.

It serves as a conduit for transferring new ways of working, diverse perspectives and work-life balance strategies. It can also help to dismantle social isolation among mature workers and challenge age-related stereotypes (Breck, Dennis and Leedahl, 2018[29]; Flinchbaugh, Valenzuela and Li, 2018[30]). For younger workers, such relationships offer access to information, professional respect, personal fulfilment, and leadership development, ultimately reducing turnover rates (Harvey et al., 2009[31])

Box 2. Insights on mentoring initiatives from Nestlé

Objective: Nestlé aims to leverage the knowledge of their experienced employees through various mentoring and reverse mentoring initiatives.

Main elements: Nestlé implements diverse mentoring programmes tailored to specific market demands of its workforce, such as:

- In China, Nestlé operates a reverse mentoring programme, centred around 6 key topics since 2023: i) strategies to attract and retain younger generations, ii) digital marketing techniques appealing to younger demographics, iii) exploring AI in business operations, iv) youth expectations on feedback, v) becoming a Key Opinion Leader (KOL) with over 10,000 followers, and vi) enhancing customer centricity.
- In Pakistan, Nestlé conducts a structured cross-generational mentoring programme featuring an initial internal communication launch, a comprehensive 2-hour orientation session covering programme guidelines and expectations, four follow-up meetings of 1.5 hour, an informal lunch midway at the midpoint, a dinner, and a closing ceremony with subsequent internal communications.
- In the UK and Ireland, a mentoring programme focusing on parenting was developed following the challenges faced by a female HR employee balancing work and motherhood. To address the high attrition rates among employees returning from parental leave, this initiative has been expanded and is now integrated into personal development learning. It now allows more experienced parents to mentor new parents on managing parental leave and the transition back to work.

Outcome: These initiatives effectively facilitate communication between generations, fostering mutual understanding of each generation's strengths and differences, ultimately cultivating a positive and productive work environment. They have also contributed to improved retention rates, as employees feel more supported, recognised, and guided by the company. Key success factors among these initiatives have proven to include ensuring appropriate mentor-mentee matches, addressing mentee concerns through clear expectations, and securing strong commitment from all participants throughout the programme.

Due to the diverse experiences and backgrounds of individuals involved, ensuring proper pair selection is key to establishing confidentiality and encouraging participants to step outside their comfort zones, openly sharing their feelings, thoughts, and new perspectives. To maximise the potential of the intergenerational knowledge transfer, both mentors and protégés should understand the mutual benefits of their relationship, fostering a reciprocal connection rather than a hierarchical one (Ghosh and Reio, 2013[24]). This approach has been adopted at SAP, a multinational software company, which launched a cross-generational programme. Here, mentors and mentees take turns to ensure a both-way transfer of knowledge (Box 3). Although there are many similarities with traditional mentoring, reverse mentoring puts more emphasis on certain factors contributing to a successful relationship between mentor and mentee (Marcinkus Murphy, 2012[32]; Pfrombeck, Burmeister and Grote, 2024[4]; Singh, Thomas and Numbudiri, 2021[33]).

Box 3. Case study on cross-generational mentoring programme in SAP

Objective: The SAP cross-generational mentoring programme aims to effectively integrate young newcomers into the company and enhance cooperation and mutual understanding between different generations of workers.

Main elements: The SAP cross-generational mentoring programme goes beyond traditional mentorship by facilitating mutual learning and growth between colleagues of different generations. Using a digital platform for efficient pairing based on individual preferences, the programme encourages a two-way exchange where younger and older employees share their experiences, skills, and knowledge.

Outcome: Qualitative feedback indicates the programme's success in reducing age-related biases and improving communication across generational divides at SAP. The programme helped senior managers to understand and adapt their communication styles to better engage younger employees, thereby enhancing integration and productivity within multigenerational teams. Employees of different generations have gained valuable career insights and guidance, fostering a culture of mutual respect and continuous learning.

More information can be found in Appendix.

For instance, given its deviation from traditional approaches, obtaining support from top management and line managers is essential. Also, openness to learn is especially important since mentees have higher status and power in the hierarchy of the organisation and must relinquish some control and demonstrate a willingness to learn from younger mentors. Finally, while reverse mentoring isn't intended as a catalyst for the career advancement of mentors, there should be a focus on developing their leadership skills.

3. Intergenerational job shadowing promotes on-the-job transfer of knowledge

Intergenerational job shadowing has proven to be another cost-efficient method for transferring skills and knowledge across generations. This practice requires junior employees to closely observe and learn from their more experienced colleagues as they carry out their daily tasks (Martin, Kolomitro and Lam, 2014[34]).

Beyond teaching relevant skills, this method is particularly effective for the transfer of tacit knowledge by revealing workflows, problem-solving techniques, decision-making processes, and interpersonal dynamics. Additionally, job shadowing encourages interactions with professionals across different departments and levels of seniority, helping to build networks throughout the organisation. This can lead to valuable insights into the company's culture, bridging generational gaps, and fostering a more inclusive and collaborative workplace.

From a strategic perspective, job shadowing is essential for succession planning. It ensures smooth transitions when senior employees leave, by preparing their successors with the necessary knowledge and skills to maintain continuity of expertise within the organisation. It also allows employers to identify and prepare high-potential individuals for important roles, ensuring timely knowledge transfer.

While typically aimed at younger, less experienced employees, who often have higher expectations for career mobility, older and more experienced individuals also seek to gain from new and challenging opportunities (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010[35]).

The effectiveness of job shadowing programmes largely depends on the willingness of senior employees to provide guidance and detailed insights, and on the engagement of the observers, who must be proactive in asking relevant questions. To maximise the benefits of job shadowing, it is crucial to include real-time feedback and performance evaluations from both the participants and their mentors, identifying areas for improvement (Jaworski et al., 2018[36]; Azizi, Zolfaghari and Liang, 2010[37]).

4. Intergenerational team pairing fosters knowledge sharing between generations

Organisations can boost intergenerational knowledge transfer among their employees by intentionally forming age-diverse teams. Multigenerational teams perform better thanks to the spillover effect of more experienced to less experienced employees and the complementarity between the different attitudes and skills of employees of different ages (OECD, 2020[2]). Generational differences are often observed in attitudes toward work, organisational commitment, leadership, and communication styles (Parry and Urwin, 2011[52]), (Benson and Brown, 2011[53]), (Becker, Richards and Stollings, 2022[51]). If effectively leveraged, these differences can lead to positive outcomes, such as improved collaboration, innovation, and productivity. Each generation has something to offer: younger workers are most valued for their tech savviness and energy (Anderson, 2019[14]), while experienced workers have developed soft skills and a deeper insight regarding business relations and leverage points (Rupčić, 2018[15]).

Moreover, research indicates that intergenerational contact can alleviate negative age bias, bolster positive attitudes between different age groups, and ultimately improve retention rates of both, younger and older workers (Li et al., 2021[13]; Henry, Zacher and Desmette, 2015[19]; Iweins et al., 2013[38]; OECD, 2020[2]). These benefits of integrating younger employees with senior ones is exemplified by ManpowerGroup in Poland, where young employees are invited to join the senior leadership team (Box 4).

However, managing multigenerational teams bring some challenges too. Managers play an important role in ensuring effective intergenerational cooperation, particularly in mitigating potential conflicts that may arise due to age disparities between employees and supervisors, or insufficient integration of age-diverse team members (OECD, 2020[2]).

Overcoming these barriers involves team-building activities focused on fostering interpersonal relationships, facilitating social interactions, and building trust within teams (Wu, Hsu and Yeh, 2007[39]; Shuffler, DiazGranados and Salas, 2011[40]). Providing managers with relevant training can assist them in navigating age-related dynamics and fostering a culture of information sharing among different generations (Veingerl Čič and Šarotar Žižek, 2017[41]; Goh, 2002[42])

Box 4. Case study on intergenerational team pairing in ManpowerGroup

Objective: ManpowerGroup recognised a lack of representation of younger generations in decision-making and strategy formulation teams, whose work impacts both younger and older employees. This initiative aims to enrich board perspectives with insights from younger viewpoints.

Main elements: In Poland, selected young employees are invited to participate in regular senior leadership meetings, where they represent younger generations. Over a period of one to two years, participants share their perspectives, needs, and beliefs, openly discussing their perceptions on various topics, such as communication styles, ESG, benefits and other policies appealing to younger generations.

Outcome: This intergenerational programme has yielded positive initial feedback from both older and younger employees. Senior leaders have gained valuable insights into younger generations while younger employees have developed a deeper understanding of business accountability and decision-making processes. The programme helped to foster innovative policies that cater to both age groups. Future evaluations will measure the impact of these decisions on engagement and job satisfaction among younger employees in the company.

More information can be found in Appendix.

5. Digital documentation allows to capture and archive key knowledge across time and space

With the advent of ICT and networked computing systems, the process of capturing, storing, and disseminating knowledge has become more accessible and cost-effective than ever before. Digital documentation is especially promising for the transfer of explicit knowledge (Farooq, 2018[43]), enabling wider dissemination to current and future employees through corporate intranets or knowledge portals.

Digital documentation plays a pivotal role in capturing and describing an organisation's processes, thereby providing clear guidelines on its current policies, procedures, and protocols. Preserving key expertise from both current and former employees allows an organisation to create a comprehensive knowledge repository over time (Dalkir, 2013[8]). It serves as an efficient knowledge transfer tool between generations due to several key attributes. These are:

- **Accessibility**: Digital documentation ensures convenient access to information anytime, anywhere, and by anyone within the organisation.
- **Searchability:** Digital platforms offer efficient search functionalities, enabling employees of varying experience levels to swiftly locate relevant information.
- **Adaptability:** Incorporating diverse formats such as text documents, videos, audio recordings, and interactive multimedia presentations, digital documentation caters to the diverse learning preferences of different generations.
- **Collaboration**: Features such as commenting and editing facilitate collaborative knowledge creation and sharing among employees of different ages.

The user-friendliness of digital documentation is crucial for facilitating efficient knowledge transfer. It should include data and information that are easily digestible, essential for decision making, and vital for daily work (Stoddart, 2001[44]). Best practices involve standardising formats and templates to ensure consistency and clarity. Additionally, providing adequate training and support to employees in using dedicated platforms is essential for promoting widespread adoption and proficiency (Ellison, Gibbs and Weber, 2015[45]; Li and Herd, 2017[46]; Goh, 2002[42]).

6. Communities of practice boost knowledge transfer beyond traditional organisational boundaries

Communities of practice refer to groups of people who gather (either physically or virtually) to make use of shared knowledge, in order to enhance learning, explore new ways of working, and create a shared value for the group (Dalkir, 2013[8]). They cut across traditional organisational boundaries, including people who do not share the same job function, but overlap in a particular area of interest, as demonstrated by the example of Schneider Electric China (Box 5).

This increasingly recognised collective learning practice tends to make information flows relevant, featuring a shared repertoire of cases, techniques, tools, stories, concepts, and perspectives (Wenger, Trayner and Laat, 2011[47]).

Facilitated by social media platforms, blogs and discussion forums, communities of practice are increasingly held online. This enhances knowledge sharing especially in situations where opportunities to interact on a face-to-face basis are constrained by geography, cost and time differences (McLoughlin et al., 2018[48]). Moreover, online spaces allow experienced individuals to share their knowledge over a longer period of time, ensuring a smooth transfer between generations.

Box 5. Insights from Schneider Electric China: Communities at work

Objective: Schneider Electric China aims to create a networking mechanism for both employees retiring in 5-10 years (referred to as "senior talent") and their managers. Via this, members can proactively make continuous knowledge sharing and provide one another with emotional support that helps senior talents better cope with work and life challenges, transfer internal expertise, and plan for their unique professional futures.

Main elements: In 2023, Schneider Electric China established the Galaxy Club as part of their senior talent development programme "Galaxy Project". This community with both digital and face to face events is open to all employees, regardless of age or role, who are interested in sharing experience and insights on topics relevant to senior talents (50+ years). Key topics for 2024 include: Sharing successful practices and key concerns: Disseminating best practices related to business pivots and associated challenges, including for instance discussions on how to manage anxiety.

Career development knowledge and skills: Enhancing the career trajectories of senior talents through skill and development and knowledge sharing.

Information sharing: Highlighting internal and external opportunities to keep senior employees informed and engaged.

Outcome: The Galaxy Club provides a dedicated space for senior talent and their managers to engage in discussions on career development. By involving employees from diverse backgrounds, the programme fosters an inclusive environment that values intergenerational collaboration. For example, it has developed roadmaps for both senior talent and their line managers, outlining specific actions to achieve mutually beneficial growth.

How to implement an efficient intergenerational knowledge transfer within companies?

Developing a structured intergenerational knowledge transfer plan is crucial for any organisation aiming to facilitate an effective flow of information and competences among employees of different age groups (FasterCapital, 2024[49]; Goh, 2002[42]; Schmidt and Muehlfeld, 2017[17]; Dalkir, 2013[8]). A comprehensive knowledge transfer plan typically outlines a roadmap with key steps and strategies, including details such as the knowledge to be transferred, the transfer method, the transfer team, the timeline, and the budget. Best practices suggest that such a plan should encompass four key steps:

Step 1: Identify critical knowledge and key players in intergenerational knowledge transfer

The first step in creating an effective intergenerational knowledge transfer plan involves conducting a comprehensive knowledge mapping and gap analysis. This can be accomplished by analysing job roles, tasks, and responsibilities to determine the critical knowledge that employees require to perform their jobs.

Simultaneously, it is essential to identify the target audience in the knowledge transfer - both the individuals or teams possessing the expertise to share (knowledge sharers) and those requiring this knowledge (knowledge recipients). The knowledge transfer team, responsible for transferring the knowledge from the source to the recipient, can consist of subject matter experts, trainers, mentors, coaches, and other senior employees.

Step 2: Capture, store and share the knowledge

After identifying and prioritising the relevant knowledge and audience, the company can determine the most effective methods for knowledge transfer. Each method comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages, and the optimal choice will depend on factors such as the nature of the knowledge, the number of employees involved, and the organisation's budget. However, a common practice is to formally store at least some explicit information in the form of documents, to establish a knowledge base accessible to all employees at all times.

Step 3: Create a supportive environment for knowledge sharing

The proposed plan should also anticipate and mitigate potential challenges and barriers when it comes to intergenerational knowledge transfer. Evidence suggests that management and administrative support fostering a strong cooperative and collaborative culture is especially important for knowledge sharing between individuals of different generations (Mueller, 2014[50]). Additionally, a robust culture of continuous learning, along with explicitly allocated time for it, is essential to engage older workers effectively.

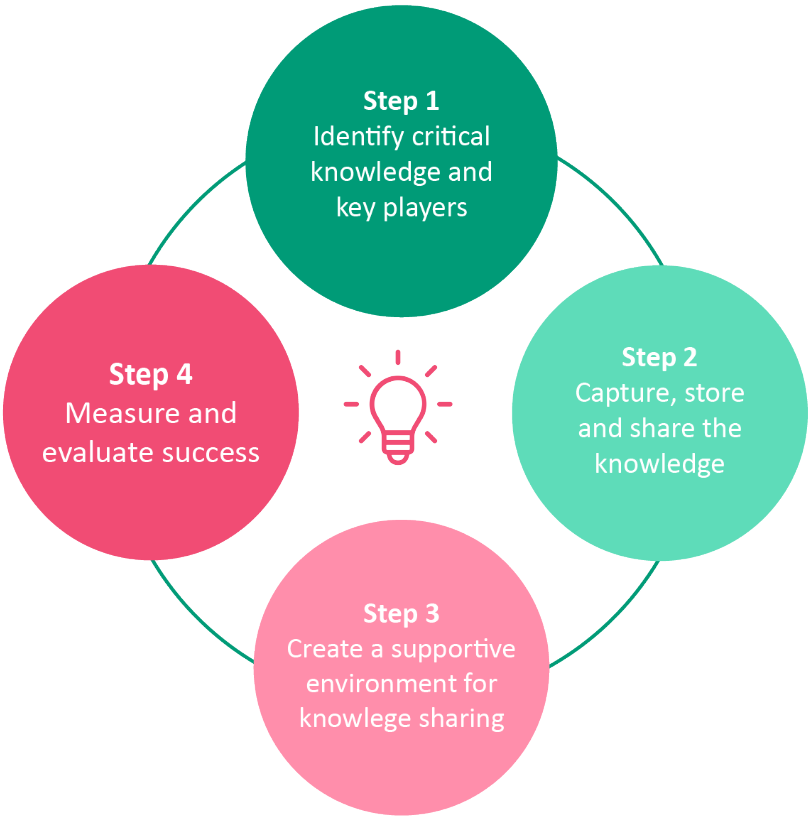
Another element of this step is developing appropriate infrastructure that aligns with the organisation's cultural and technological enablers.

Breaking down hierarchies and fostering horizontal communication flows might enhance both intergenerational knowledge sharing and seeking. Implementing effective reward systems can also motivate experienced employees to share their know-how with younger colleagues rather than engage in competitive behaviour.

Step 4: Measure and evaluate success

Once the intergenerational knowledge transfer process concludes, it is important to assess its effectiveness. Performance metrics, like employee productivity, employee retention, job satisfaction and customer satisfaction are commonly used to gauge the impact of intergenerational knowledge transfer initiatives. Additionally, gathering feedback from older and younger employees helps to identify areas for improvement, enabling refinement for future implementation.

Infographic 2 – Knowledge transfer plan



Concluding remarks

By embracing intergenerational collaboration and fostering knowledge transfer, organisations can tap into the potential of a multigenerational workforce, future-proof themselves, and thrive in an ever-evolving labour market. As highlighted throughout this brochure, employers can facilitate the seamless intergenerational transfer of both explicit and tacit knowledge by implementing robust programmes that bring different generations together, facilitate dialogue between them, and document the accumulated expertise of older workers. This not only ensures business continuity, productivity, and resilience but also fosters a culture of continuous learning and innovation. Effective knowledge transfer between generations is thus a strategic imperative for organisations to navigate the challenges posed by ageing workforce dynamics.

Appendix A: Case study: SAP

The content of this appendix was provided by the company.

Overview

SAP, a multinational software company, launched a reciprocal cross-generational programme in 2017, which pairs two individuals from various backgrounds across the company to exchange specific skills, aspirations, and preferences. This reciprocal approach has helped to reduce misunderstandings between different generations by encouraging open conversations and has led to a more inclusive organisational culture.

Purpose of the SAP’s cross generational mentoring programme

This initiative was born out of a need to integrate newcomers into the company and improve cooperation and mutual understanding between older and younger workers. SAP realised that while having five generations effectively working together boosts innovation and leads to better outcomes, managers may find it challenging to ensure smooth collaboration between workers of different generations. To address workplace misunderstandings, two awareness sessions with focus group discussions around different perceptions and ways of working among generations were conducted. This improved collaboration between age-diverse team members and the initiative evolved into a two-way cross-generational mentoring programme, which aims to bring different generations closer.

Participants in the SAP's cross generational mentoring programme

The programme became a global tool available to all employees across all territories, ensuring a diverse range of mentors and mentees. The programme is promoted through a monthly diversity and inclusion newsletter and employees can include participation in the programme as a personal development goal in their learning objectives. Around 50 pairs are formed during each cohort, which occurs once or twice a year, depending on demand. While the pairing of participants was done manually in the initial years, the 2023 cohort was matched using the SAP mentoring digital tool. This tool can incorporate diverse features such as selecting mentors based on gender, culture, age, experience, and business units.

Description of the SAP’s cross generational mentoring programme

Pairing of the mentors with the mentees

SAP ensures efficient matching of mentors with mentees. While the responsible team manually paired participants in the first cohort, SAP now uses a digital tool to automatically match interested employees based on parameters such as background, personality, and desired exchange topics (e.g., soft skills, technical skills, career guidance, specific experiences). This information is collected during the programme sign-up, where mentors and mentees describe their background, personality, aspirations, expectations from the programme, and preferences. Mentees and mentors can have more than one mentoring relationship if they want to explore more perspectives.

Support during the programme

After pairing interested individuals, SAP explains the programme in detail and delivers a group workshop on "Breaking Generational Myths." The cross-generational mentoring core team also provides participants with best practices and guidance on how to effectively play the roles of mentor and mentee. They provide tools and information about the purpose of the programme, possible discussion topics, the importance of building trust, and the need for efficient follow-up, open communication, and two-way feedback.

The managing team also organises an initial ice-breaking session, where paired individuals meet and define their expectations and what they want to learn from each other (e.g., one individual wants to learn more about technology, while the other is interested in tacit organisational knowledge). Regular meetings (every 3-4 weeks) of the paired individuals are encouraged in dedicated work zones, in more informal settings, or online, during regular working hours for around 1.5 hours over a 6 to 9 month period. The company organises a mid-term checkpoint, where HR ensures that the relationship is progressing well. After approximately 6 months, a final concluding event takes place for all individuals who participated in the mentoring experience. This graduation ceremony for the cohort serves to compare the various mentoring relationships, highlight commonalities and differences, and recognise the added value of the programme. The core team also collects feedback to monitor the programme's effectiveness and identify possible improvements or required modifications for future cohorts.

Project impact and outcomes

Collected qualitative feedback revealed that the programme has been highly effective in eliminating age-related biases. Despite SAP being a technology-driven company where senior employees are well-versed in digital trends, there existed a generational gap in work styles and communication. Senior managers sometimes faced difficulties managing newcomers who are fresh graduates. Additionally, some senior managers received poor scores from new hires but very good scores from experienced team members—highlighting that the issue was not managing talent but different perception and preferred ways of working and communicating. The cross-generational mentoring programme can help bridge this gap as older employees learned to communicate more effectively with younger generations, adapting their language and understanding different work preferences (e.g., adjusted meeting hours). This improved the integration of young newcomers into the company, enhanced perceived productivity, and reduced frictions and misunderstandings within multigenerational teams. The programme also enabled employees from different generations to gain valuable career insights and guidance from their more experienced counterparts, fostering a culture of mutual respect and continuous learning.

Key learning

Two concepts have been crucial for the programme's success. First, the idea that everyone is both a mentor and a mentee is embedded in the programme, allowing both individuals to take turns and effectively learn from each other. Second, whoever is in the role of the mentee is encouraged to ask the question "Why?" whenever they receive guidance or opinions from their mentors. This helps understand the rationale behind the advice, question it, and exchange perspectives during deeper conversations.

Further information

Unlock The Power of Cross-Generational Inclusion

Appendix B: Case study: ManpowerGroup

The content of this appendix was provided by the company.

Overview

ManpowerGroup, a global leader in innovative workforce solutions, has established a shadow board in Poland. This initiative invites young employees to participate in meetings and other activities with the senior leadership team of the country, fostering a two-way exchange of perspectives to bridge intergenerational divides.

Purpose of the ManpowerGroup's programme

ManpowerGroup conducted workshops on challenges associated with different generations working together, particularly focusing on preferences regarding leadership and communication within the organisation. These workshops revealed leadership in Poland that despite Gen Z constituting approximately one-third of the local workforce, their perspectives were underrepresented in executive decisions affecting company workforce and policies. To better inform senior management about the aspirations and needs of younger workers, a shadow board programme was established. This initiative aims to enrich senior leadership's decision-making and translate company strategy into day-to-day reality, ensuring it encompasses the perspectives of both younger and older employees.

Participants in the ManpowerGroup's programme

Participants in ManpowerGroup's programme were informed about the opportunity and its purpose through various channels, including emails, town hall meetings, and newsletters, ensuring a wide reach to potential candidates. Out of approximately 130 younger workers in Poland, about 30 expressed interest, and 7 were selected to join the so-called Junior Leadership Team in 2024.

The selection process carefully considered the backgrounds of the younger workers to ensure diversity across divisions, geographic locations, viewpoints, and personal traits, aiming to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives within the younger generation.

Description of the ManpowerGroup's programme

The programme was launched in January 2024, with selected junior colleagues intended to participate in the shadow board for a two-year cadence. Following this period, younger employees will rotate to ensure a continuous influx of fresh perspectives.

The intergenerational board convenes regular operational meetings every 4 to 6 weeks, conducted online or face-to-face, with additional informal online interactions between meetings as needed. During the sessions, younger employees actively engage with senior leaders, sharing their perspectives and questioning the rationale behind formulated policies and ideas. They are treated as business partners, empowered to challenge senior leadership decisions to foster open communication.

Project impact and outcomes

While it is too soon for a formal quantitative impact evaluation, the qualitative feedback collected regularly after each session has been very positive. The meetings are described as inclusive, characterised by openness and a supportive environment, benefiting both generations:

- Senior leaders gain valuable insights into the younger generation's mindset, learning about different styles of social media messaging and overall communication. They also receive fresh ideas for the ESG initiatives and learn how to offer appealing benefits and career prospects to younger employees, ultimately boosting retention rates and job satisfaction among this demographic group.
- Younger employees gain exposure to high-level business perspectives. They learn about accountability and responsibility for handling confidential internal information and witness how financial and organisational decisions are made.

Overall, the multigenerational aspect of the team has proven valuable in bridging generational differences, leading to more innovative and adaptive policies that satisfy both younger and older workers.

A more formal evaluation is planned after the programme's conclusion. The impact of the programme will be measured by assessing the engagement and job satisfaction indicators of younger workers collected during the annual internal employee survey, directly assessing the impact of the new knowledge on the younger segment of the workforce.

This initiative was developed locally by ManpowerGroup in Poland but has the potential to be scaled up in the coming years and embedded in the global framework of the company.

Key learning

First, while the primary goal is to foster dialogue between generations on various topics, it is crucial not only to prepare younger employees to openly discuss different perspectives but also to train older workers to be receptive and integrate these perspectives into the strategy, even if they diverge from longstanding beliefs.

Second, maintaining regular contact with younger participants has been a great enabler of the initiative. Instead of waiting six months for formal feedback via a survey, more frequent, shorter check-ins have proven effective in promptly addressing development needs and facilitating rapid adjustments between meetings.

Further information

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