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Barriers and Enablers to the Multigenerational Workforce

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Globally, lifespans are longer today than at any other time in history. This fact changes the demographic spread of populations and increases the proportion of people over 65 years old. In Australia life

expected to live to 74.4 years, compared with 81.3 years in 2019-21. Over this same period women's life expectancy has increased by 5.1 years from 80.3 years to 85.4 years[1]. The 2023 Intergenerational Report reveals that the population is ageing due to projected low fertility rates and rising life

whereby those aged 15-64 will fall by 3.5% to 61.2% and the population over 65 years will rise by 6.1% to 23.4%[2].

The demographic shift towards an increasing older population and extended lives has led to an increase in workforce participation by older people from 6.1% in 2001 to 15% in 2021[3]. This has a number of implications for the workplace, including:

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Universally, across all interviews and discussions, the majority of participants stated that they would
not want to retire at all and would want to remain active and engaged in the workforce. They would prefer a transition to retirement
where they would work a reduced number of days, or would leave a corporate environment to consult,
have their own business or work in a completely different industry.

Irrespective of age, participants stated that they loved work because of the personal connection/

Time and again participants mentioned the importance of active, vocal, demonstrable leadership for change to occur and age diversity to be more prevalent in the workforce.

hours and remote working are all considered critical to accommodate the diversity of needs and preferences across the lifespan and generations.

There was broad agreement and recognition that the experience of older employees was valuable. Working with an older person had a positive impact on a younger person's attitude towards recruiting older people and their you can't see it, you can't be it'.

Support for older and younger workers is critical for age diversity success. Suggestions ranged from mentorship programs, technology skills training, and training on leadership and communication for managers.

age' from 15-64 years old to 15-75 years old; support for skills training/re-training; and the need for people. Overwhelmingly, it is essential for leadership to step forward and be vocal on the importance for action. This is followed closely by proactive and immediate changes to HR policies and practices

Teams and organisations have historically comprised people of different ages. However, lifespans today lead to an increase in the number of older people either seeking to remain or re-enter the workforce. [illegible] [7,8]. An effect of this is the potential for employees in their 20s, 30s or 40s to be working with or managing people in their 60s or 70s. In Australia, the median age of the labour force is between 33yo in the Northern Territory to 42yo in Tasmania[9] compared to the median age of Australia's population between 15-79 of 43 years. The [illegible] [10]. Yet the qualifying age for a pension is 67 years.

Workplaces of the future will have more age diversity by necessity, whether that be due to labour shortages, or the reality of needing to fund a longer life. Organisations must adapt. When employees of a [illegible] However, making assumptions about or creating a team or workforce based on generational or age-based ties is limiting[11]. This changed dynamic and increased age diversity raises the potential for non-traditional team structures including younger managers supervising much older team members. Additionally, there [illegible] working with someone in their 60s or 70s who is not their manager. Therefore, it is increasingly essential for HR practitioners, managers and senior executives to have insights on the barriers, enablers and interventions possible to support the non-traditional   structure. For the purpose of this research, support for multigenerational teams is considered to be   . This is made evident through the HR policies and practices that support HR diversity and the actions of the Board and senior leadership.

Ageism, the prejudice towards someone based on their age, is largely directed towards older people. [illegible]

An ageing workforce and its implications are an international concern[35]. Those organisations that are ██████████████████████████
retention[36]. However, research shows how pervasive age stereotypes and stereotype threat contribute to barriers for older workers' engagement in paid work[37,38].

This study seeks to contribute to existing knowledge on workforce age diversity by exploring ageism, age-based stereotypes, and employee attitudes and beliefs on the inclusion of older workers for multigenerational teams.

This project aims to explore the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that prevent or enable organisations to foster more cooperative multigenerational teams.

This study sought to gain insights to the following questions:

What are the age-based perceptions of older/younger people in the workforce?

What are the barriers to age diversity and building multigenerational teams?

What perceived interventions or initiatives would enable multigenerational teams to be created and supported?
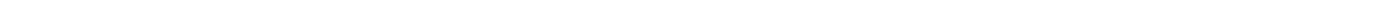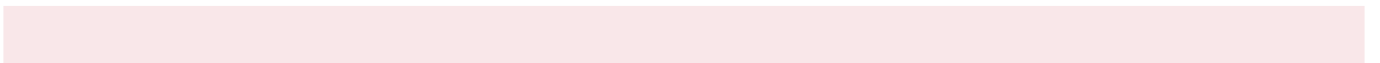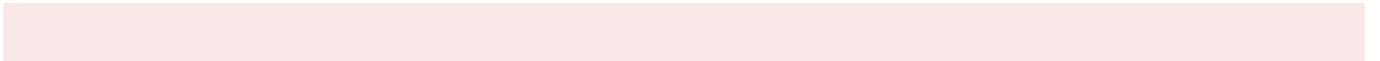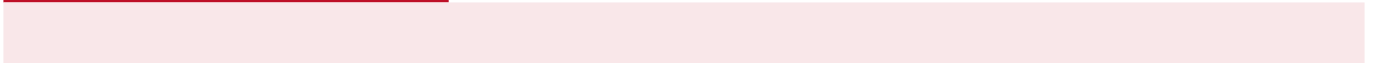
Online discussions were conducted and recorded using Zoom. In-person interviews or focus groups were recorded using an external recording device. A notetaker was present for all conversations. Software was used to automatically transcribe the interviews and group discussions. Transcriptions were reviewed by the facilitator and notetaker by listening to the recordings to ensure accuracy as language and context were considered critical for analysis. This eliminated issues associated with accents or colloquialisms that may not be correctly transcribed through an automated process. During focus 斶犙 犙犙犙犙犙犙犙

their name to ensure that comments could be correctly attributed to each person. This assisted with transcription review and eliminated any potential for comments to be assigned to either the wrong participant or the facilitator.

The computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program NVivo 12 was used to aid data analysis. Initial nodes were determined based on the objectives of the research - identifying enablers and barriers to multigenerational teams - together with concepts and variables based on literature (e.g. implicit ageism; stereotypes; perceptions) and recurring themes or ideas that emerged from the data (eg. recruitment policies and practices; shared work ethic; supportive leadership).

In addition to the core project objectives, the qualitative nature of the study provided the researchers with an opportunity to have a broad ranging conversation about work. This included conversations about when participants thought they'd stop working and what they enjoyed about work. The feedback 犙犙犙犙犙犙犙犙犙犙犙犙犙犙犙

(how they describe themselves) and perceptions of either older/younger workers. Next, a summary of the factors that were considered to contribute to good or bad team experiences are provided. These insights provide context for the subsequent results on the enablers and barriers for multigenerational teams to be supported.

I would hope to retire by thirty. Earlier the better. But realistically probably around 60, 65.

When would I stop working? I'd say 45. Yeah. Quit working at 45.

"

Probably 70 I reckon, just in terms of super and savings and might even have to keep going on. I have no idea. But it's not going to be 65 I know that for sure.

"

I have all these grand plans of retirement, but I can't imagine not working.

So I don't have a day or age or maybe there'll be a bit of a break. Maybe we'll do part time, maybe I'll go back to full time and I'll go work for a startup one time.

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I like working because I like interacting with people. I like the challenge. And then when you do something and accomplish something, I like that feeling.

"

How we perceive ourselves and others affects how we relate to others. Social categorisation encapsulates these individual and relational perceptions. Perceptions we use to understand, predict and assess the behaviour of others[40]. The social categories we use are informed by factors including our experience, cultural background, social norms and life stage. Similarly, our attitudes towards others and ourselves are

of categorisation that groups people based on their year of birth. They generalise that group's attitudes and behaviour based on the cultural, social and world context and affairs during a particular period. This natural tendency to evaluate and categorise people and the associated use of generational labels

beyond perceived differences.

Underpinning explicit or implicit ageism and age-based stereotypes are perceptions - both how we perceive ourselves and how we perceive others. During focus groups participants were asked to note

worker, depending on which age group they were in (i.e. 25-44 or 45+ year olds). Analysis of this exercise revealed a number of overlapping attributes across all age groups as shown in Table 2.

Approachable	Approachable
Collaborative	Collaborative, team player, inclusive
Curious	Curious, inquisitive
Enthusiastic	Enthusiastic
Driven	

The extent to which self perceptions of 45+ year olds aligned with 25-44 year olds perceptions of older people revealed the following intersection of characteristics:

- approachable/sounding board/easy to talk to
- chatty/story-tellers
- experienced/wise/knowledgeable
- yﬁ᷈ᵱ
- respectful
- thoughtful/measured
- mature/old
- social/outgoing/friendly

In terms of 25-44 year old self-perceptions and the description of younger workers by those 45+, the characteristics that aligned were:

- curious
- enthusiastic/eager to learn
- driven/determined
- impatient
- energetic
- fun/humour
- introverted/quiet
- thoughtful
- fashionable
- knowledge/has some answers/new ideas
- open-minded

There were also numerous differences between how younger people perceived themselves and how people 45+ described younger workers and vice versa. Table 3 provides a summary of those variances.

Accountable	9 to 5	Bright	Big picture
Challenging	Balanced	% N C T K , G T	Calm
Direct	% Q P , F G P V	Customer-led (VOC)	Can be narrow-minded
Easy going	Creative	Fair	Care too much about themselves
Humble	Entitled	Inclusive	% Q P , F G P V
Non-competitive	Fresh point of view	Innovative	Connection to the past/ stories
Resilient	Intimidated	Mediator	Cynical
Caring	Passionate	Passionate	Dislike technology
Commercial	Patient	Analytical	Honest
Empathetic	Always ready to provide input	Committed	Measured
Reliable		Engaging	Not meticulous
Respect time	Apprehensive	Financially focused on results	Not to be underestimated
Supportive	Doesn't want to do the hard yards	Happy to admit when wrong	Old-school
	Fire and forget	Kind	Patient
	Helpful	Empathic	Quirky
	Needs a surprising amount of hand holding	Team player	Relaxed
	1 X G T E Q P , F G P V	Thorough	Resilient
	Quick		Sounding board for anything
	Rigid		Supportive
	Savvy		Tech non-savvy
	Short sighted		Trustworthy
	Smart/tech savvy		A bit slow but it's endearing
	Unreasonable		Carefree
	Wants to climb the career ladder without the process of spending time in the relevant roles to get there		Conservative
			Driven
			High level not technical
			Less socially active
			Serious more than funResp9m [(7 T

work enables employees greater choice to accommodate varying generational needs and preferences. /X̃Ã/ǎW̃ÃĂẄĄŸ⊦

work was evident throughout the study with participants of all ages.

Not enough corporate roles for part-time there. If you think about [it] most corporate jobs [are] full-time and I would say somebody who's 60 might not necessarily want to be working full-time. They might want to work part-time because their priorities are slightly different.

So, I was going to say, being open to job sharing, permanent part-time arrangements, things like that, the sorts of things that an organisation needs to do to foster an environment where it's more able to employ older people.

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The value of older employees' experience was a consistent theme. Similarly, the experience of working with an older person was shown to have a positive impact on attitudes towards recruiting older people and their inclusion in multigenerational teams as different age-groups are able to learn from each other.

But that said, like, now after these meetings, it's like, yeah, you would hire them [older people], but you also still have these sort of preconceived notions about how they're going to perform. So yeah, it's just … an education thing I guess.

You'll be able to leverage their experience … they've come through it all. Have done business cycles up, down, whatever. #PF HQT OG KVoF DG HTQO VJG ,TUV VKOG where you just leverage them, their experience, their knowledge.

" I think they'd bring into that team more than work. They'd bring in a whole… set of life experience, which can be a huge D G P G , V V Q C P [V G C O IQKPI VJTQWIJ UQOGVJKPI "

So, I think maybe people are reluctant to hire that old person because they don't know what it's like already to be working in that sort of dynamic maybe. I'm learning Excel from someone who is, like, could be my grandma …. Seriously, … it's been really I T G C V D G K P I C D N G V Q Y Q T M Y K V J V J C V U Q T V Q H R G T U Q P e + H + Y G T G C O C P C I G an older person because I have experience working with them, and it's not all bad.

Establishing mentorship programs, buddying up younger workers, technology skills training for older workers, and training on leadership and communication for managers can bridge generational gaps and boost overall competence.

[I heard about a company] in Sydney … they take those experienced people and who are maybe a little bit far behind [with] the technology. They do a course to upskill them and re-feed back to the company.

There's a two-way street of learning that can occur very effectively between younger members and older members.

" I think mentoring is a good example. A good example of learning through someone else is the best way you learn one thing if you can kind of make that happen. "

Maybe like a buddy program. It's like the interns. The interns and the externs. We get a young person and an old person. They're paired together. So you teach them IT and they can teach you how they stay calm.

I think leadership programs where you … link team effectiveness and team success to a mix of skill sets. … The whole concept V J C V U K V U W P F G T F K X G T U K V [K U [Q W T G ƒ G E V V J G E Q O O W P K V [V J C V [Q W Y Q T M K P

Cautionary comments were made about introducing training or programs such as mentoring that are solely focused on age.

No [doesn't agree with mentoring]. Because you then call it out as being something different. And then I think you would kind of exacerbate the problems because then you feel like you're enforcing something unusual to happen. I think it <004Am0470205 mb

Participants in the mixed age discussion group were presented with the main ideas for organisations

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e NKMG C HGCT YQWNF DG + IGV OCFG TGFWPFCPV KP VJG PGZV ,XG [GCTU +oO C

… age gets blamed for things that you probably wouldn't blame on age if they weren't that old. You'd just say it was something else. I think age becomes the kind of scapegoat excuse for people when it's not necessary. For example say a 30 year old manager forgot to update something on their rosters and you were like oh that's just, you know, they probably had too much on their mind or they were … out too much this week. The 60-year-old if they were in the same position we'd be saying, I wonder if they're getting on?

Concern was expressed about

The other side where you just don't have the shared experiences. You don't have the common jokes, you know … You don't have that [with] the person who's 40 years older than you. So, you can't really connect to that level or have the banter that you would with people your own age.

into a team:

"
… the much younger people they generally are more, as I say, easy going and can have more fun. Right. And I think that is a positive thing because it will make the team a bit happier than all of us sitting there grumpy in our own ways.
"

There was some awareness that
, and occasionally a positive experience was shared.

Just like the knowledge that they can bring. So for example, I work with someone who is much, much, much older than me and she'll tell me like, you know, the history of what they used to do with super and how they used to process certain things. And it will just solidify my understanding for what we currently do right now, because I understand how things sort of changed over time. And I'm like, you can't just Google that. Like someone needs to tell me.

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younger manager. There was general consensus amongst participants that the manager would need a

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but also the older team members' perception of their management capability.

But yeah, it doesn't worry me in the slightest [if they're younger], as long as they know what they're doing, because I

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knowledgeable enough and had a wide enough lens to do that job.

I think that that can be a bit of a worry about managing somebody older than you. Literally, because you're sitting there thinking, oh, this person's got so much more experience than me. That … can be a level of respect built into age, which you have to get past as a boss because … you can't just give someone respect purely because of their age.

Yeah. Look, I think if … it's a leader then they'd probably have been promoted on … the merit of their capabilities or potential. So I like to think that there's an understanding and awareness of, … the dynamics with … having to motivate and lead someone who's a decade, two or three … older than themselves. There might be a little bit of initial anxiety or pressure. You know, how am I going to handle this with someone who is old enough to be my dad or mom or whatever?

This study was concerned with gaining insights on the barriers and enablers for older and younger
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Key to this comprehension was the need to acquire knowledge on age-based perceptions and reasons
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the similarities and differences between age-groups to identify the potential tensions or frictions for
multigenerational teams in the workplace. As organisations are composed of single or multiple teams,
participants were also invited to share their experience of ingredients they considered contributed
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of concerns were raised about a person's health as they enter their 50s and 60s. Assumptions were also made about the capability of older people, the type of work that may suit them, technological capabilities, their ability to be innovative and that older people may be less driven. Another worry raised was the ability for older people to socialise and integrate with a younger team. Would it work?

and preferences for interacting with fellow workers were also raised particularly in digital or online communication. Organisational culture was found to have an impact on attitudes towards older people

a reason for behaviour or simple errors that would be overlooked or explained in another way if the person was younger. These insights expose the degree of ageism and age-based stereotypes that

Comments about the recruitment policies and practices of an organisation as an inhibitor to more age diversity recurred frequently throughout conversations with both Senior Executives and in focus groups. This was referenced in the context of the organisation itself as well as the practices of external recruitment companies. There was consensus that external recruiters were ageist which is why older people are not included in the pool of applicants for review and potential interview.

Multigenerational teams and greater inclusiveness of older people inherently leads to less familiar hierarchical structures whereby younger managers will have responsibility for leading a team that

experience of a younger manager, the perception of a manager's skill by an older team member, and the willingness of an older team member to listen to a younger manager. This highlights the need for management training and support and should be overlaid with the factors deemed to contribute to a

workers and the ongoing reports of age discrimination and ageism. Changing culture and normalising multigenerational workplaces will take time, but is achievable with the right frameworks and continued communications with an emphasis on reframing what ageing, longevity and work can and will look like in the future.

that enable people of all ages to work according to their life stage and other responsibilities, including caring for children, elderly parents, unwell partners or voluntary activities.

Introduce interventions that support greater age diversity and effective multigenerational teams. Measure the impact and publicly report on the outcomes.

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and misrepresents the disparity between the median age of people employed and the median age of
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15-75. Ideally, reporting of the revised working age would be adopted by governments and reported in Labour Force Statistics and publications such as the Intergenerational Report.

As older people may want/need to continue working, providing employment pathways through affordable skills training is critical. This may be to either update technology skills and/or scaffold knowledge and build capability to support career transitions to work
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nurses or care workers transitioning out of the class room or health sector. The provision of subsidised
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Vocal and demonstrable leadership on the recruitment and retention of older people is critical for greater inclusion and increased HR diversity. Regular reporting of HR policies and practices and their impact in senior executive or board meetings and annual reports would visibly and publicly reveal the positive effect of age diversity.

effective integration of older people into teams. This includes:

Introduce interventions that increase awareness of ageist assumptions and stereotypes.

A requirement that external recruitment companies provide a minimum of two suitable candidates above a certain age, for all roles (e.g. 50 or 55).

The recruitment process and emails were approved by the UNSW Ethics Committee.

The research team worked with the HR departments at Dymocks and Challenger for participant recruitment. Employees were invited to participate in the focus groups on three occasions. The HR team were provided with the recruitment email and email reminders. Two reminders were sent before being considered lost to follow up. Each reminder included instructions for participants to withdraw their consent to participate in future rounds of interviews or focus groups or from further contact.

Employees who wanted to participate were asked to send an email expressing interest to the research team. Interested employees were then sent an email with a letter providing details of the focus group or interview and a link to the Participant Information Statement in Qualtrics.

The discussion guide themes were developed based on work from Beaton et. al. (2008)[32], Birkinshaw, Hamel, and Haslem (2019)[45], Fasbender & Gerpott (2022)[46], Kunze, Boehm, and Bruch (2013)[47], North and Fiske (2015)[11], Posthuma and Campion (2009)[48], Turner, Oakes, et. al. (1994)[29]. The same discussion guide was used for all conversations to ensure consistency and support analysis, with the exception of the mixed-age focus group. The senior executive and age-based focus group guide was developed based on commonsense (eg. Share one thing you love about work; At what age do you think you'll stop working?; What support or training would you want if you were in a scenario of either reporting to someone younger or having someone older reporting to you?) and concepts from literature including social capital, social bonding and perceptions (eg. What's important to you when working with others?; 7ï2þjavŤ AľŴ¢the
mind?; You have a much older person in your team (say 60s, 70s, 80s) and you're their manager. What do you think that would be like?).

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comments from the previous four age-based focus group conversations. Initially, participants were asked

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