

THREE THINGS EMPLOYERS
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT:
**INTERGENERATIONAL
RELATIONS**

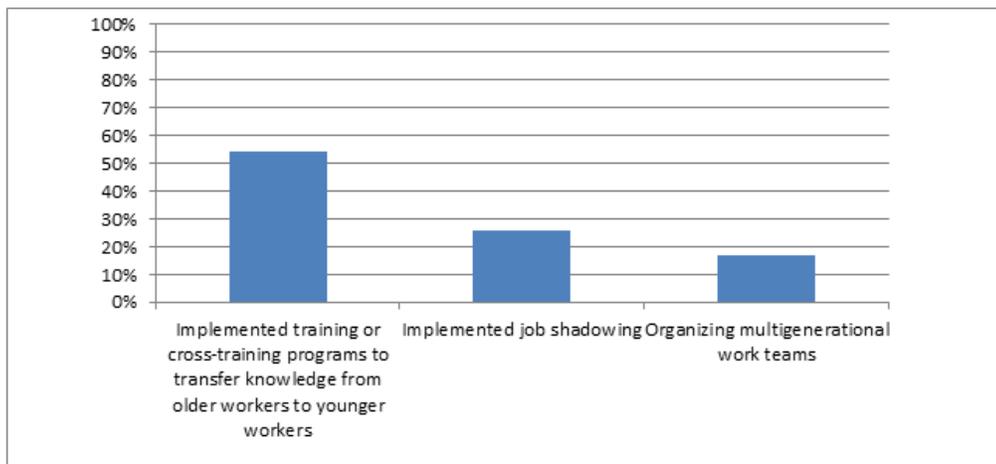
Although some employers are concerned about the potential for generational conflict in the workplace, evidence suggests that these fears are overestimated. Employers can readily support positive intergenerational relations in the workplace using a range of policies and practices. Many of these policies and practices overlap with other areas, such as training and development.

1. WHY SHOULD EMPLOYERS CARE ABOUT INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS?

Short answer: Positive intergenerational relations create a win-win situation for training and development, knowledge transfer, and leadership development.

In focusing only on the role programs for positive intergenerational relations play in reducing conflict, employers often underestimate the extent to which these initiatives can support other organizational priorities, such as training and leadership development. Figure 1 shows several programs that serve multiple functions, including building intergenerational relations. For instance, cross-training and job shadowing both help to train younger workers and build one-on-one relationships between workers of different generations.

Figure 1. Percentage of employers who have implemented selected strategies to manage potential skill gaps as the workforce ages



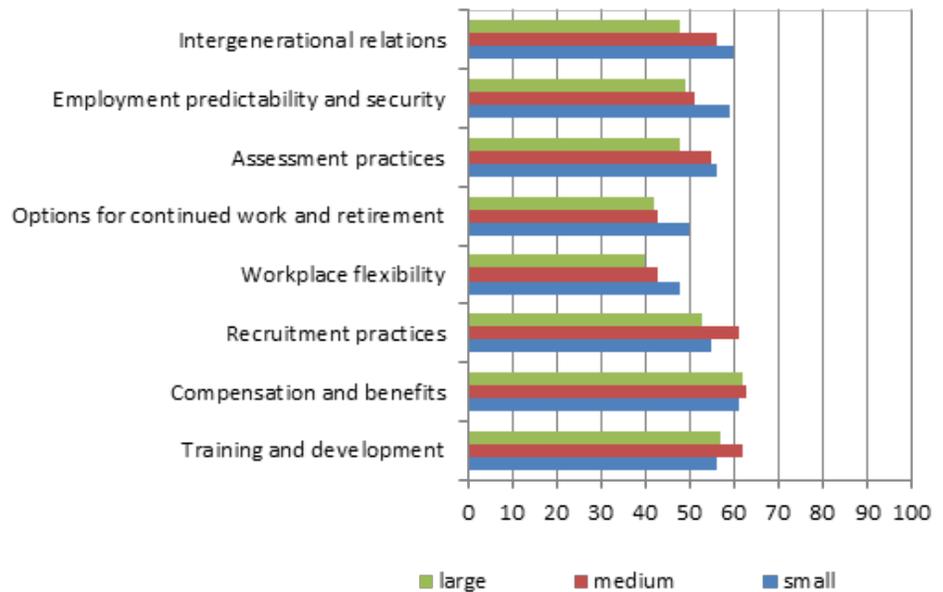
Source: SHRM. (2015). The aging workforce-basic and applied skills. Washington DC: Society for Human Resource Management.

2. IS TOP LEADERSHIP AT SMALL ORGANIZATIONS LESS COMMITTED TO INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS THAN TOP LEADERSHIP AT LARGE ORGANIZATIONS?

Short answer: No, top leadership at small organizations may actually be more committed to intergenerational relations in general.

At small organizations, top leadership often wears more than one hat. It is not uncommon for the owner of a small company to be the chief executive, accountant, and human resource manager all at once. Perhaps because they interact with all of their employees on a regular basis, they have a particularly strong commitment to fostering positive intergenerational relations. In fact, as shown in Figure 2, small companies in the 2015 Talent Management Study have an edge in top leadership commitment to intergenerational relations, compared both to top leadership in large companies and to their own commitment to some other areas, such as training and development.

Figure 2. Top leadership commitment scores from the 2015 Talent Management Study, by organizational size



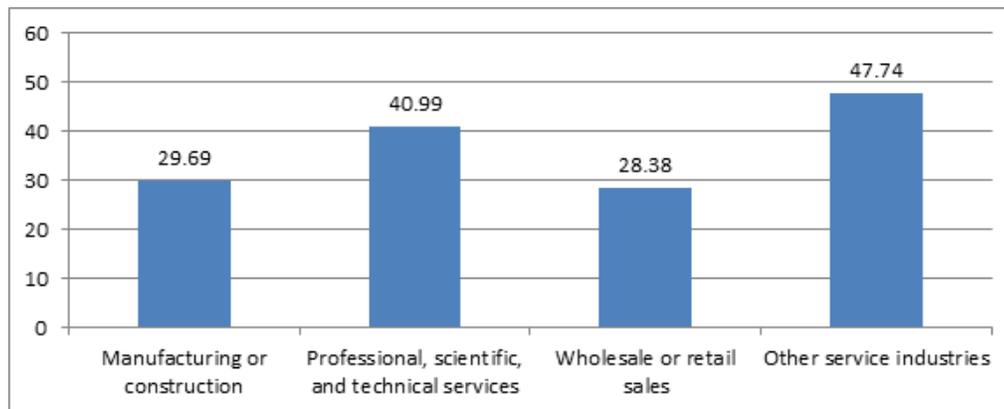
Source: 2015 Talent Management Study (N=343)

3. WHAT IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES TO FOSTERING POSITIVE INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS?

Short answer: Manager training. Ensuring that managers know how to manage workers of all ages, life stages, and career stages can help head off trouble before it starts.

Supervisors often have a huge amount of influence over the quality of intergenerational relations within their work groups, but are not always given the necessary motivation and training to make the most of their mixed-age teams. Only a minority of organizations provide training to help supervisors better manage the multigenerational workforce, and these training programs are more common in some industries (e.g., professional, scientific, and technical services) than in others (e.g., manufacturing and construction). This represents an area of potential weakness for many organizations.

Figure 3. Percentage of organizations that offer supervisor training for managing a multigenerational workforce



Source: 2014 Talent Management Study (N=343)

If a dedicated training program for managing the multigenerational workforce is unrealistic for your organization at this time, consider embedding this information into other training activities. For instance:

1. In work-family training efforts, emphasize to supervisors that life stage (e.g., patterns of family responsibilities) is different from chronological age. For instance, some supervisors think of “work-family” as an issue for younger workers, and may not fully understand that workers of all ages need supports to balance work and family. This will only become a bigger issue due to the rise in working caregivers over the next few decades.
2. When launching intergenerational training programs, such as mentoring and reverse mentoring, ensure that supervisors know that the goal of such programs is not only to transfer skills and competencies but also to increase rapport between workers of different generations.

Want to find out where you stand on intergenerational relations relative to similar employers? Visit our Workforce Benchmarking Tool. Developed in collaboration with AARP (www.aarp.org/employerbenchmarking), the tool rates your workforce practices in intergenerational relations and 7 other areas against the national average and provides practical next steps via a customized report.

ABOUT THE CENTER ON AGING & WORK

Established in 2005, the Center on Aging & Work at Boston College promotes quality of employment as an imperative for the 21st century multi-generational workforce. We integrate evidence from research with insights from workplace experiences to inform innovative organizational decision-making. Collaborating with business leaders and scholars in a multi-disciplinary dialogue, the center develops the next generation of knowledge and talent management. Since our founding, we have conducted more than 20 studies in collaboration with employers, including the Age & Generations, Talent Management, and Generations of Talent studies.

For more information about the Center, please visit:

<http://www.bc.edu/agingandwork>

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APPENDIX. Types of intergenerational relations programs

Type of intergenerational relations programs

Coaching and mentoring

Training and development programs that rely on employees training each other

Supervisor training programs

Benefits related to dependent care and other family issues

Some examples of intergenerational relations programs

- Coaching
- Mentoring
- Networking
- Cross-training among workers of different career stages or ages, to improve employees' proficiency in tasks outside their current work roles

- Supervisor training for managing diversity
- Supervisor training for managing a multi-generational work team
- Supervisor training for responding to work-family needs of employees
- Supervisor training for providing career advice to employees at different stages of their careers
- Supervisor training for workforce planning