

A GATE to Understanding “Older” Workers: Generation, Age, Tenure, Experience



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**National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine
Committee on Understanding the Aging Workforce and
Employment at Older Ages**

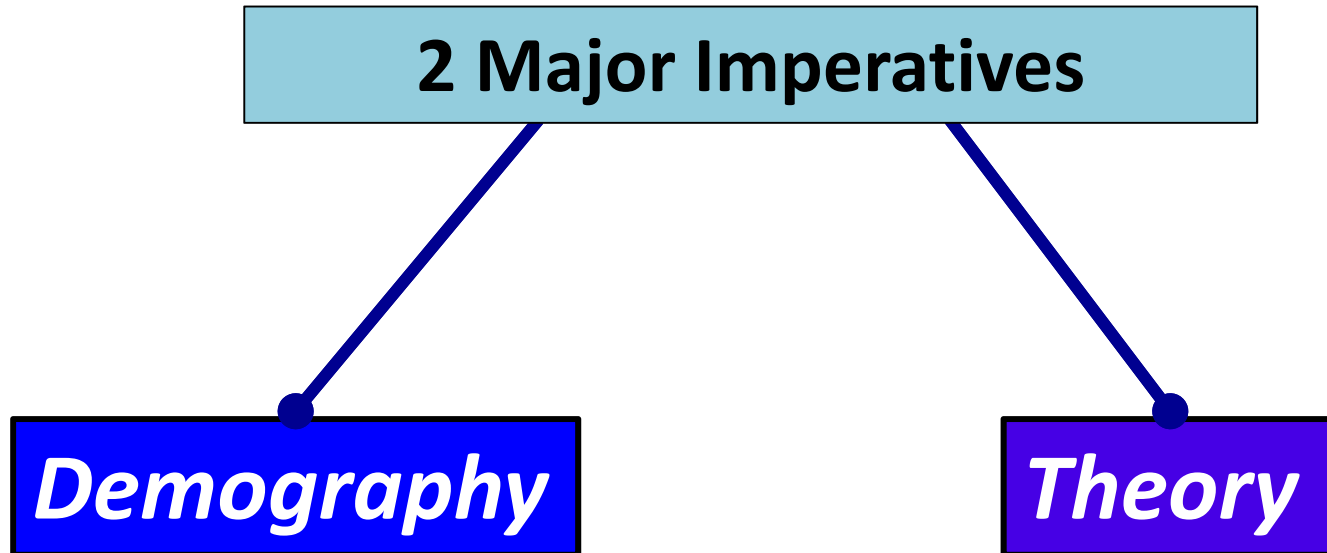
June 2020

Roadmap: Issues & Solutions

1. **Demographic/Theoretical Imperatives:** Historically older and age-diverse workforce, but lack of adequate scholarly precision;
2. **Inconsistent Findings:** Older workers are simultaneously valued and devalued; age diversity does not consistently yield productive outcomes;
3. **Solutions to these Issues:** A GATE approach clarifies between “older” worker and “age” diversity subtypes, toward stronger predictions.



Motivating the Issues



Demography

“Demography is destiny.”

-Auguste Comte, Sociologist

“Get ready for the *silver tsunami*.”

-*Washington Times*

Growth in Population Age 65 & Over

Percentage of U.S. Population Over 65

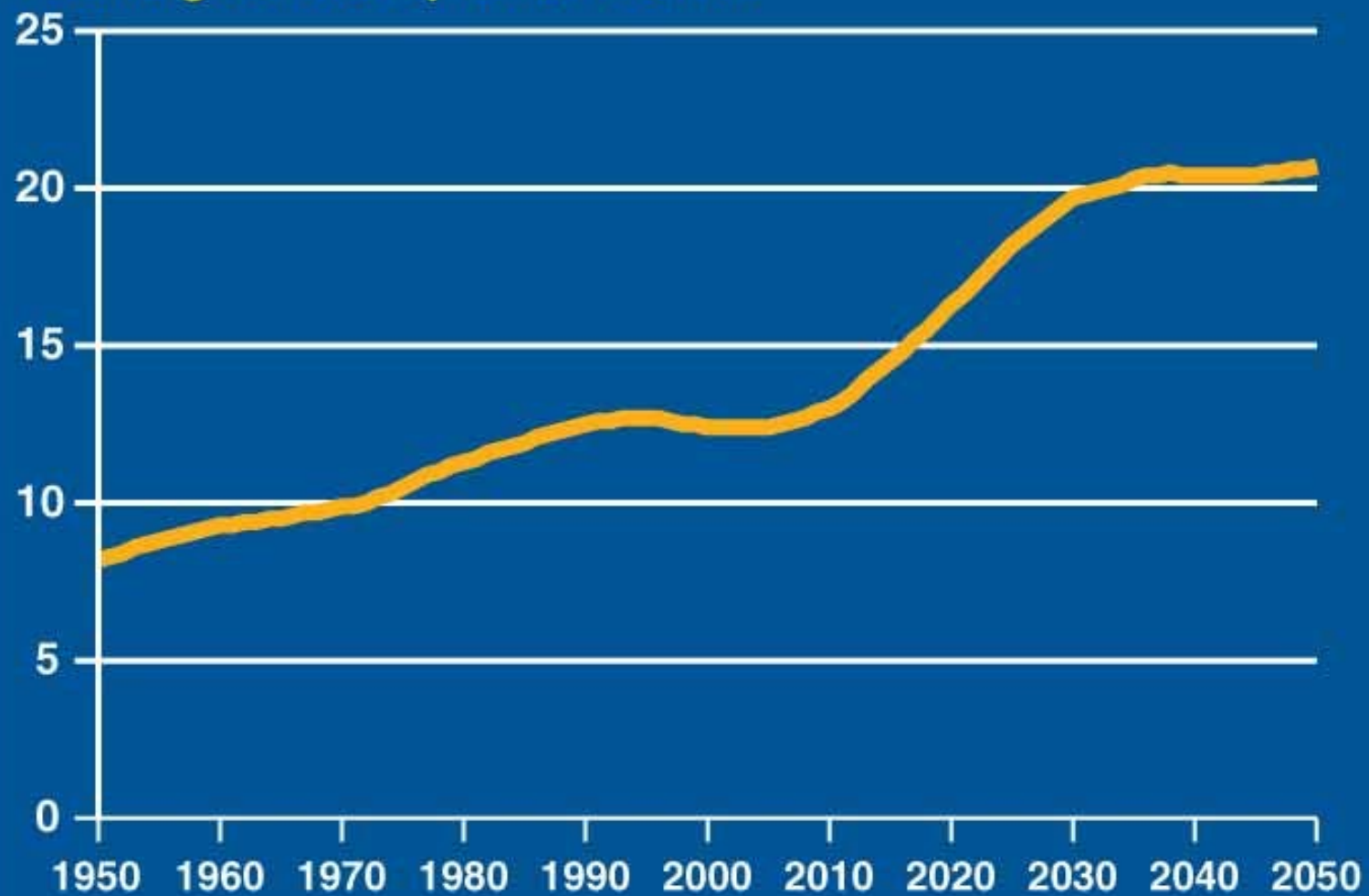
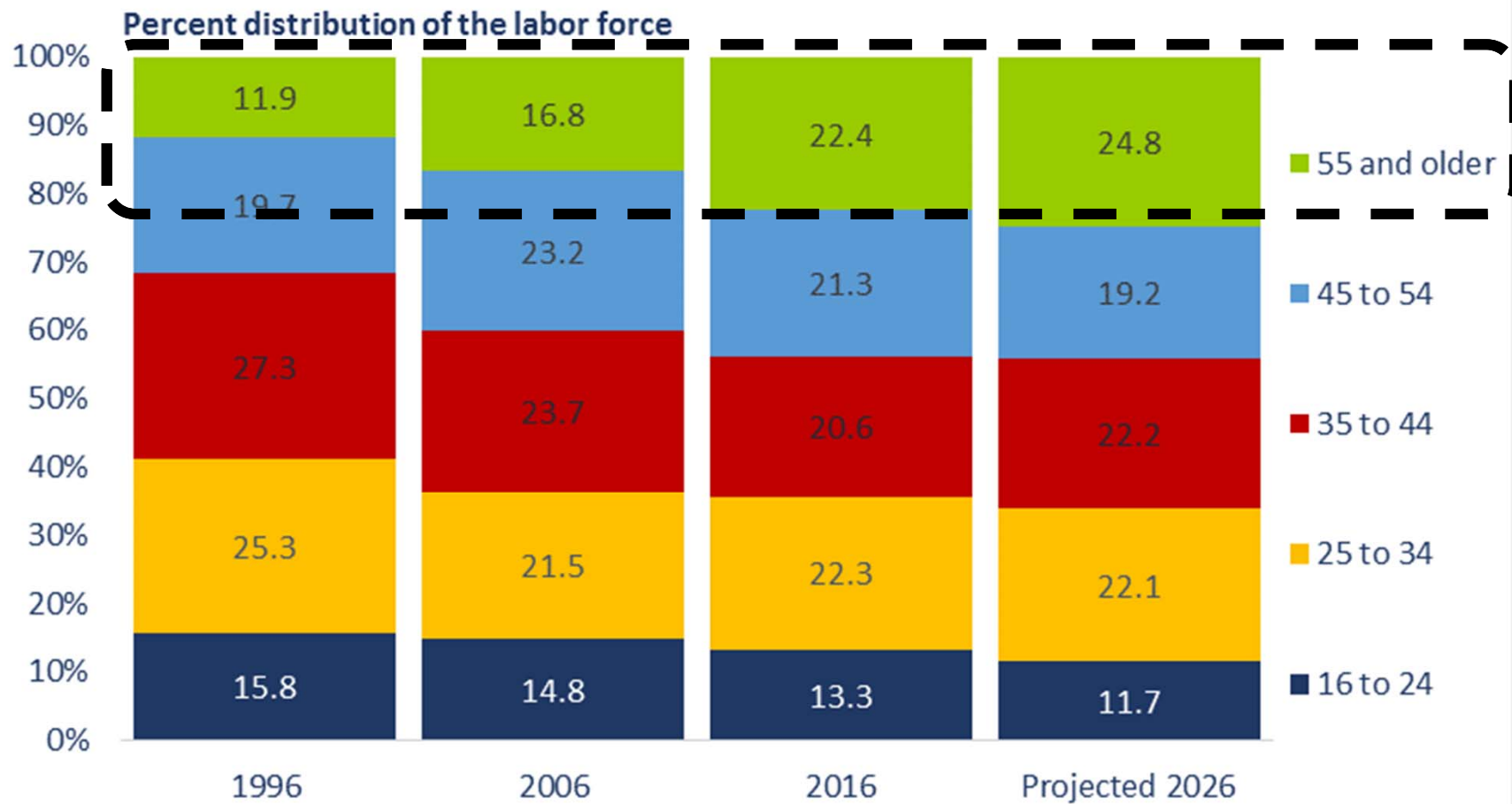


Chart 2. Labor Force Share, by Age Group, 1996, 2006, 2016, and Projected 2026

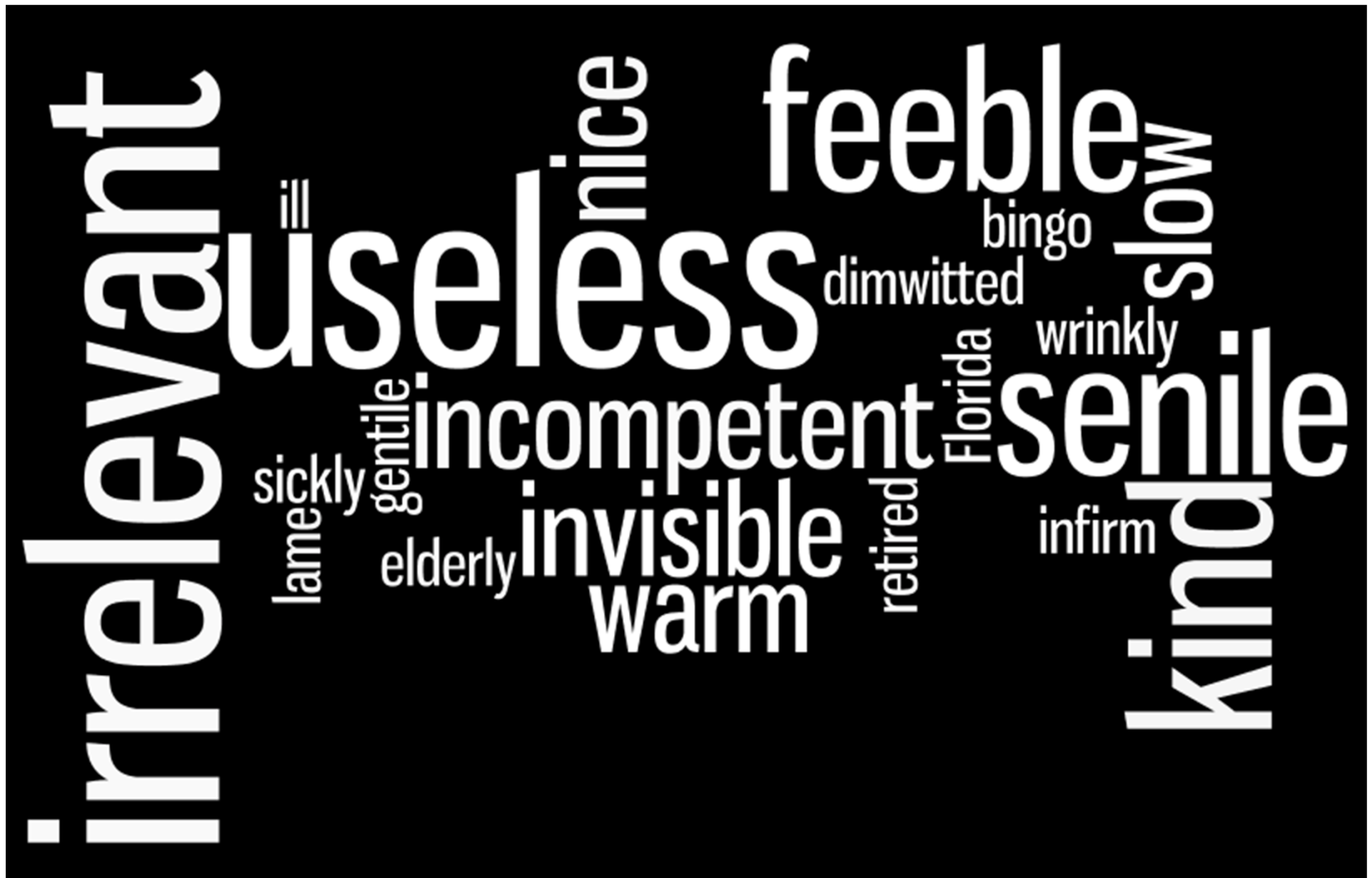


What is an “older” worker, anyway?

What is “age” diversity, anyway?

What can we currently predict from these 2 elements?

“Older People” Descriptive Stereotypes





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Scholarly Inconsistencies: Predictors

Older Workers

Chronological age ranges:

- 37 (Riach & Rich, 2010) to 70 (Neumark, Burn, & Button, 2015)
- No numerical age attached (e.g. Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2011) (Greenberg et al., 2004)

Age Diversity

Different metrics:

- Organization/group standard deviation of worker age (Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas, 2011)
- SD of age divided by mean age (Timmerman, 2000)
- Teachman's index of age group distribution (0 = fully uniform to 1 = perfectly even distribution; Schippers et al., 2003)

Scholarly Inconsistencies: Outcomes

Age does not predict job performance (Ng & Feldman, 2008)...

...Managers (Seemingly) Love Senior Employees...

Perceptions of Positive Workforce Characteristics by Career Stages
% respondent organizations stating "very true"

	Early-Career	Mid-Career	Late-Career
Our employees are loyal to the company.	22.4%	37.7%	53.8%
Our employees have a strong work ethic.	24.4%	39.4%	51.9%
Our employees are reliable.	23.5 %	46.1%	51.3%
Our employees have low turnover rates.	19.0%	33.6%	50.3%
Our employees have high levels of skills relative to what is needed for their jobs.	21.0%	38.4%	46.7%
Our employees have established networks of professional colleagues.	16.5%	29.4%	46.3%
Our employees have established networks of clients.	15.8%	29.6%	44.4%
Our employees are productive.	28.5%	42.1%	38.5%
Our employees want to lead and supervise others.	20.4%	33.2%	36.0%
Our employees take initiative.	30.7%	34.5%	32.1%
Our employees are creative.	35.4%	34.0%	29.1%

...yet Older Workers Face Consistent Barriers

Pitt-Catsoupes et al., 2007

Multi-Level Barriers to Utilizing Older Workers

3 Tiers

HIRING

ON THE JOB

FIRING

Audit Studies

- Older (compared to younger) job applicants 40% less likely to receive entry-level interviews



Lahey, 2008

Experimental Studies

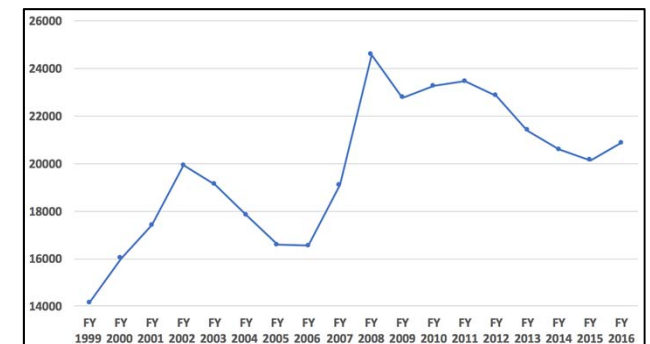
- Older workers denied training resources (compared to equally qualified/tenured younger ones)



North & Fiske, 2016

EEOC Data

- 47 percent rise in age discrimination charges 1999-2017



EEOC, 2017

Sources of Older Worker Barriers

Societal and Employer Attitudes

Older age stereotypes:

- Mortality reminder (Greenberg et al., 2004)
- Nice but incompetent (Fiske et al., 2002)
- Useless burden (Nelson, 2005)
- Societally invisible (Thompson, 2007)

Older employee beliefs:

- Too costly (Burtless, 2013)
- Receive less than half of training as younger workers (Dychtwald & Morrison, 2004)

Coded Language

Job descriptions:

- **“Fit in with a young team”** (McGoldrick & Arrowsmith, 1993)
- **“New” or “recent”** college graduates (Kopytoff, 2014)
- **“New blood”** (Cardinali & Gordon, 2002)
- **“Willingness to learn;” “high ambition”** (Kulik, 2014)

On the job:

- **“Over-qualified”** or poor **“cultural fit”** (McGann et al., 2016)

Older Worker Self-Handicapping

“Stereotype threat”:

- **“Memory task”** undermines performance...
- ...**“reading comprehension”** or **“impression formation”** enhances performance (Chasteen et al., 2005; Kang & Chasteen, 2009)

Subjective Age:

- Feeling subjectively “young” is adaptive, feeling “old” is maladaptive (Hess et al., 2004)

Age Diversity Challenges

Diversity: Good and Bad...

- **“Double-edged sword”**
(Milliken & Martins, 1996; Williams & O’Reilly, 1996)
 - Enhances creativity and innovation (Milliken & Martins, 1996)
 - Reduces social cohesion; increases relationship conflict and turnover (Carter & Phillips, 2017; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998)

...Except for Age Diversity

- Age diversity fosters predominantly **neutral** or **negative** outcomes (Boehm & Kunze, 2015)
 - Relationship Conflict (+)
 - Turnover (+)
 - Innovation (o/-)
 - Performance (o/-)
 - Perceptions of discrimination (+)
- No consistent recipe for productive age diversity (but see Burmeister et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020):
 - Knowledge transfer: older workers want to pass along knowledge, younger workers want to receive it

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Older Workers are Different...



Older Workers are Different...



Older Workers are Different...

Generation:
member of
certain birth
cohort

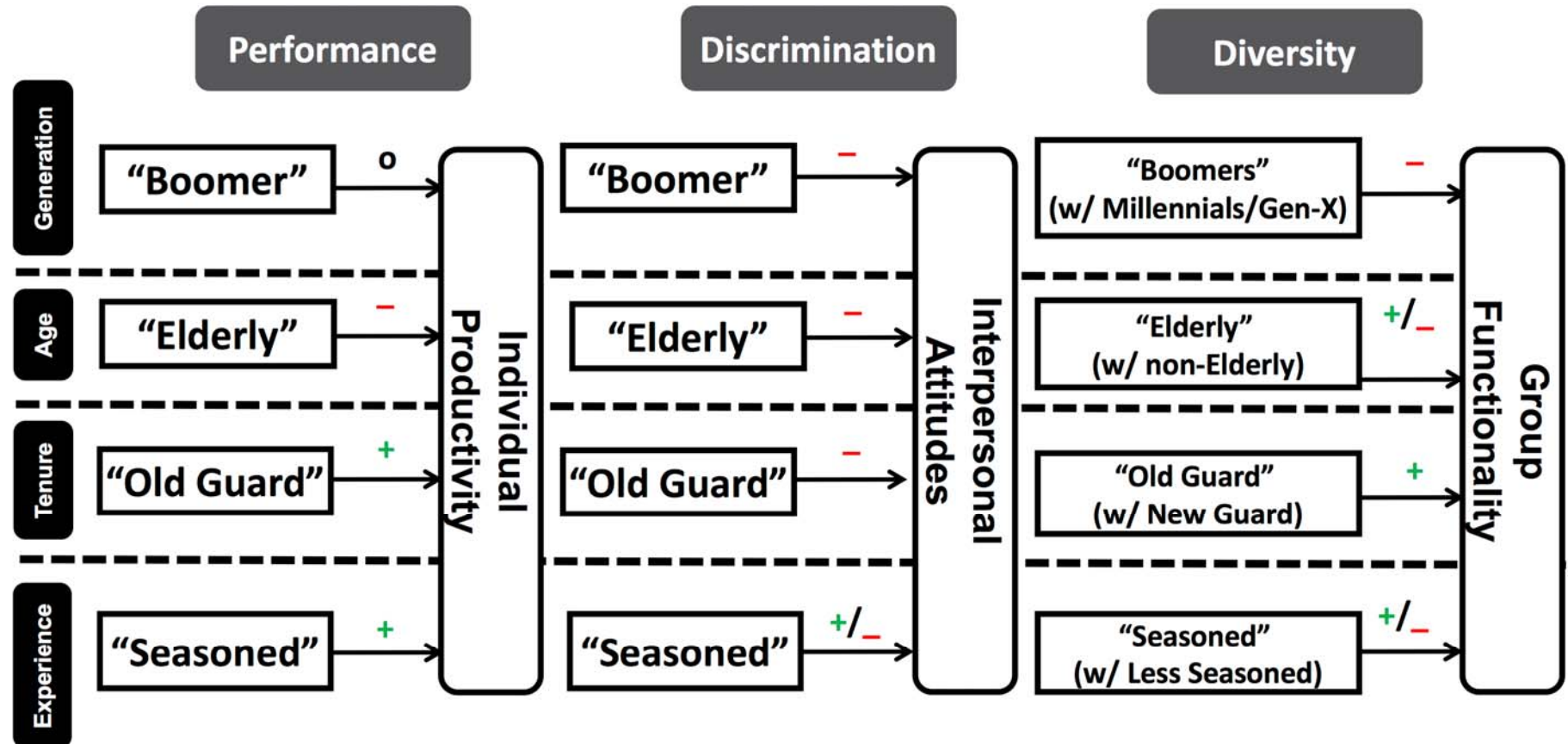
Age:
occupies a
particular life
stage

Tenure:
member of
certain work
cohort

Experience:
unique skill
set developed
via life/work
events



A GATE Approach to “Older” Workers



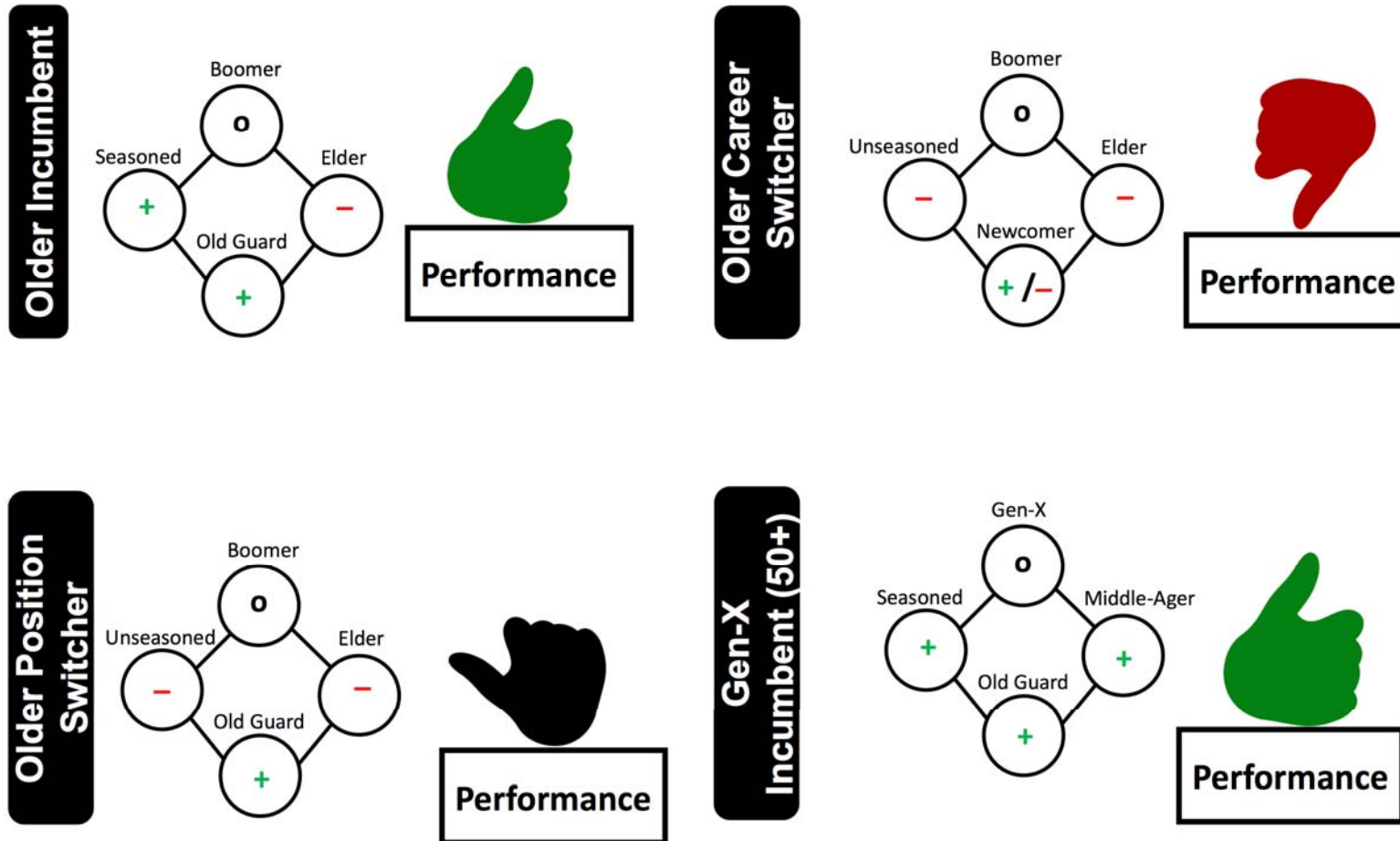
Using GATE to Predict Performance

Sample Pathway toward Testing Older Worker Performance as a Function of Different GATE Predictors

	Employee A	Employee B	Employee C	Employee D	Employee E
Generation	Boomer	Gen-X	Boomer	Boomer	Boomer
Age	67	45	53	67	65
Tenure	High (20+)	High (20+)	High (20+)	Low (< 1)	High (20+)
Experience	High (20+)	High (20+)	High (20+)	High (20+)	Low (< 2)
Key difference from Candidate A	N/A	Generation/ Age	Age (Lifestage)	Tenure	Experience

Which GATE elements are most predictive of individual performance?

Using GATE to Predict Performance



Which GATE “compounds” are the most effective performers?

Using GATE to Predict Discrimination

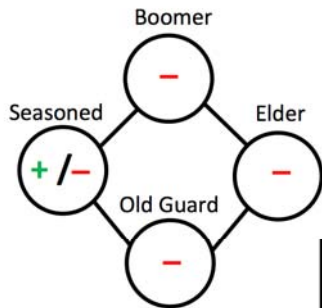
Sample Pathway toward Testing Older Worker Discrimination in Hiring as a Function of Different GATE Predictors

	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Candidate D
Generation	Boomer	Gen-X	Boomer	Boomer
Age	67	45	52	65
Tenure	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Experience	31 (High)	26 (High)	30 (High)	0 (Low)
Key difference from Candidate A	N/A	Generation & Age	Age (Lifestage)	Experience

Which GATE elements are most predictive of individual discrimination?

Using GATE to Predict Discrimination

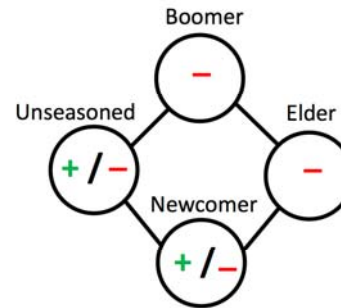
Older Incumbent



**Interpersonal
Attitudes**



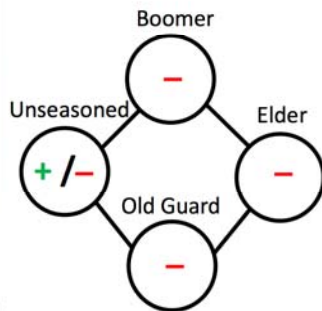
**Older Career
Switcher**



**Interpersonal
Attitudes**



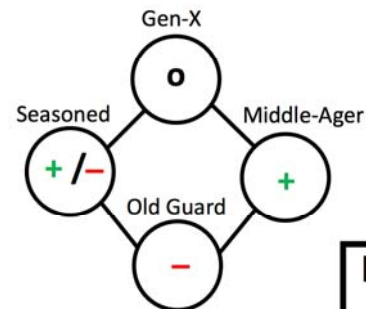
**Older Position
Switcher**



**Interpersonal
Attitudes**



**Gen-X
Incumbent (50+)**



**Interpersonal
Attitudes**



Which GATE “compounds” are the most at risk for discrimination?

Using GATE Alignment to Predict Diversity Faultlines

Pathways toward Testing Age Diversity Faultlines as a Function of Integrated GATE Predictors

Group Number	GATE Category	Member A	Member B	Member C	Member D	Diversity	Faultline Strength
1	Generation	Boomer	Boomer	Boomer	Boomer	none	none
	Age	67	67	62	64		
	Tenure	25	23	20	24		
	Experience	high	high	high	high		
2	Generation	Silent	Boomer	Gen-X	Millennial	Maximum	Very weak (1 aligned category; 4 subgroups)
	Age	78	64	46	25		
	Tenure	50	35	20	2		
	Experience	56	40	24	2		
3	Generation	Boomer	Boomer	Gen-X	Millennial	Moderate	Weak (2 aligned categories; 2 subgroups)
	Age	64	65	45	25		
	Tenure	2	20	20	2		
	Experience	20	2	20	2		
4	Generation	Boomer	Boomer	Millennial	Millennial	Low	Very strong (4 aligned categories; 2 subgroups)
	Age	67	64	26	24		
	Tenure	32	30	3	2		
	Experience	32	30	3	3		
5	Generation	Boomer	Millennial	Boomer	Millennial	Moderate	Strong (3 aligned categories; 2 subgroups)
	Age	62	34	64	33		
	Tenure	14	2	2	14		
	Experience	30	2	30	2		

Summary and Recommendations

Strengths of a GATE Approach

- Identify **which GATE elements** most strongly predict key outcomes:
 - To what extent is “ageism” driven by G/A/T/E?
 - To what extent is functional age diversity driven by G/A/T/E subgroup alignments?
- Identify **different compounds** of older workers
 - “Older Incumbent” vs. “Older Career Switcher” vs. “Older Position Switcher” vs. “Gen-X Incumbent,” etc.



Summary and Recommendations

Age *Multidimensionality*

- To what extent does ageism derive from GATE-ism?
- What kind of GATE diversity fosters productive “age” diversity?
- Other factors that make not all chronologically aged workers the same (e.g. health, family obligations)

Age *Malleability*

- Subjective Age
 - “how old one feels” (e.g. Nagy et al., 2019)
 - Also likely affected by different GATE dimensions (North & Shakeri, 2019)

Age *Context*

- Industry (Usova & North, ongoing)
- Culture (North & Fiske, 2015)
- Gender (Martin, North, & Phillips, 2019)
- Young-targeted ageism (Francioli & North, under review)



PEOPLE ARE LIVING & WORKING LONGER THAN EVER.
TRADITIONAL RETIREMENT IS INCREASINGLY OBSOLETE.
GENERATIONS ARE BUMPING INTO ONE ANOTHER AT RECORD RATES.

OUR RESEARCH UNCOVERS HOW BUSINESSES, POLICY, AND SOCIETY
SHOULD BEST ADAPT TO THESE FAR-REACHING TRENDS.



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Thanks!

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