

MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKPLACES RESEARCH: FINAL REPORT

**Centre for Work, Organisation & Wellbeing,
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Executive Summary

Rising life expectancies, decreased fertility rates, increased retirement age, and increased costs of living has meant Australia's workforce is highly diverse in age. By 2060, 23% of the Australian population will be aged over 65 years, which is likely to require higher participation rates in the workforce of older workers. This increases pressure for employers to address generational differences in their employee attraction, retention, turnover and engagement strategies. This report assesses the characteristics of successful age diverse workplaces, and the policies and practices these employers utilise to support their high-performing employees of all ages. This report supports the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) to develop appropriate training resources to support the capacity of Australian employers to create successful age-diverse workplaces.

Researchers from the Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing (WOW) at Griffith University were contracted by the former DESE, now DEWR, to: assess the relevant published scientific literature regarding multi-generational workplaces; identify Australian current best practices for multi-generational workplaces; interview Australian employers and employees to capture their experiences working within and managing successful multi-generational workplaces; and collate feedback from key stakeholders to validate the project's recommendations. Specifically, this research process sought to advance knowledge and to generate recommendations for Australian employers regarding:

1. The characteristics of a high-performing multi-generational workplace,
2. The policies and practices employers of high-performing multi-generational workplaces have implemented to create this environment, and
3. The initiatives or solutions that will be successful in Australian multi-generational workplaces.

This project identified five key recommendations for action to promote high-performing multi-generational workplaces in Australia:

1. **Provide Age Diversity and Inclusion Training.** Implement training to encourage understanding and appreciation of generational differences, minimise stereotypes and prevent discrimination.

- 2. Use Inclusive Communication Methods.** Use multiple communication methods to ensure all generations are reached effectively. This could mean using a combination of emails, face-to-face, social media, and team collaboration tools.
- 3. Embrace Multi-Generational Mentoring Opportunities.** Implement programs where younger and older employees can readily learn from each other. Older employees have a wealth of experience and wisdom to share, while younger workers have fresh perspectives and more up to date technical and digital skills.
- 4. Invest in Continuous Learning and Development.** Encourage continuous learning and development, mindful of different generational needs. This can include training opportunities that leverages the strengths of each generation, digital literacy programs for older workers, and leadership training for the younger employees.
- 5. Implement Flexible Working Arrangements.** Allow flexible working hours or remote working to help accommodate the different lifestyles and family needs of various generations. Flexibility can also extend to flexibility of work locations, shifts, leadership opportunities and training opportunities, and can apply to all staff.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Report Scope

This report describes research undertaken to assess the factors and best practices that promote Australian high-performing, age diverse workplaces. Three components of research were conducted:

- (i) a review of the academic research literature (i.e., peer reviewed research),
- (ii) a review of the industry literature or 'grey' literature (i.e., unpublished reports and documentation by organisations/departments, accreditation bodies, etc.), and
- (iii) findings from interviews with employees and employers from medium and large organisations.

In this report, a multi-generational workforce is viewed as consisting of employees from numerous different generations, with potentially a gap of five decades between the oldest and youngest employees. More specifically, the intention of this report is to provide a useful, evidence-based, and consolidated resource for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) regarding the enablers and barriers to multi-generational workforces within Australia, a snapshot of current industry standards and best practices, and a set of strategic actions for Australian workplaces.

Given the different preferences and perspectives of each generation, creating a workplace culture that empowers all employees is potentially challenging. But it generally provides clear benefits for employees and organisations if this diversity in thinking and behaving is successfully harnessed (Campbell et al., 2017). This report addresses these issues and aims to provide an evidence base for employers to better support their multi-generational workplaces.

This report is structured as follows. First, the background information is presented to set the context for this project. Second, the methodology employed for the literature reviews, organisational review, interviews, and Delphi technique is described. Third, the findings from the reviews and data collection is presented. The results section and the final recommendations are based on addressing these six research questions identified by the Department:

1. *What do high-performing multi-generational workplaces look like and are there such workplaces in Australia? Who are the best practice employers in Australia?*

2. *What do best practice employers do to support these types of workplaces?*
3. *Are there generational differences in Australian workplaces that may be presenting employers with challenges?*
4. *Despite differences, are there similarities across generations?*
5. *If generational differences exist that present challenges, how can we address them to reduce impacts on Australian workplaces?*
6. *What are some existing initiatives or solutions that are successful and could be promoted in Australia?*

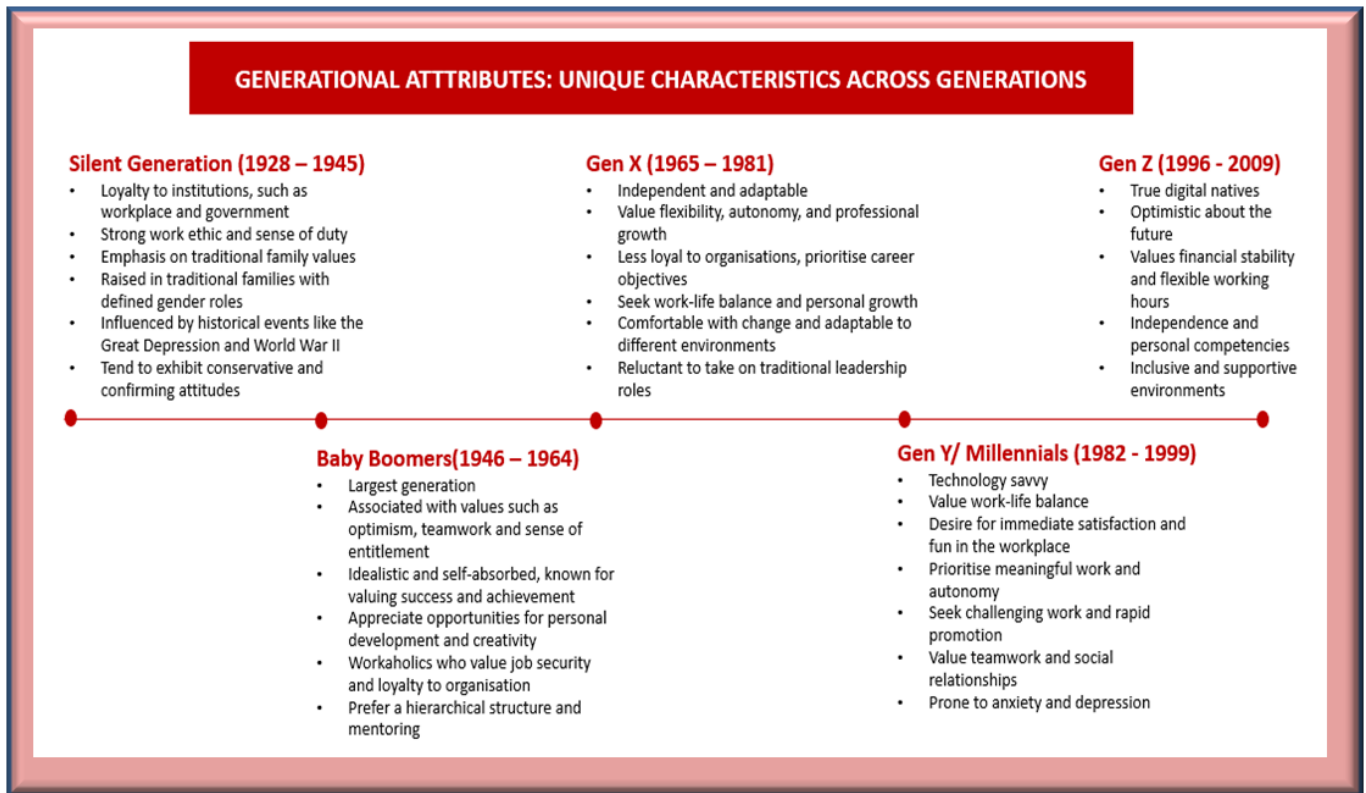
The research findings are structured around answering each of these six research questions. However, note that the overlap between several of these research questions and the need to ensure participants' confidentiality, ensured that some responses to these questions were modified by the researchers.

1.2 Definitions of the Generational Cohorts

Generations are defined as groups of individuals who are similar in age and share common historical and social events, which influence their attitudes, values, and personality characteristics (Mannheim, 1952). For this project, the definitions of each generation are tied to a significant social, economic, and political event (Benson, 2018), highlighting the impact of historical events and cultural phenomena during key developmental stages that form collective memories, which in turn impact individuals' attitudes, values, and personality characteristics (Caspi et al., 2005; Costanza et al., 2012). One caveat is that these generational cohorts are defined by *Western* ideas that might not apply to employees from other cultural backgrounds. This is because there is limited research on generation differences in non-western cultures and how this translates to workplace practices.

This report examines the characteristics and preferences of five generations in the workplace: the **Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z** illustrated in Figure 1. These definitions reflect the common typology of generations suggested by Strauss and Howe (1991), "*as a special cohort-group whose length approximately matches that of a basic phase of life, or about 22 years*" (p. 34).

Figure 1. Generational attributes: Unique characteristics across generations



Recent Australian employment statistics released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) and summarised in Table 1, demonstrate the wide age diversity of workers currently employed within Australia.

Table 1. Current Employment Statistics, Australia

Ages (years):	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Number Employed	1,949,700	2,989,400	2,915,400	2,636,100	1,976,200	611,300
Employment ratio	64%	76.90%	82.60%	81.30%	66%	13.90%
Unemployment	10%	4.30%	3.20%	3.30%	3.30%	2%

The 65+ years worker category includes all Silent Generation and early Baby Boomers (those born in 1958 or earlier). The 55-64 years category includes all remaining Baby Boomers and early Generation Xers (those born in 1965-1968). Representing the two highest employment ratios, the 45-55 years category is comprised entirely of Generation X employees, while the 35-

44 years category comprises mostly Generation Y employees. The 25-34 years category also comprises Generation Y's born later (1990-1998), while the 15-24 years category comprises mostly all Generation Z workers, plus some early Generation Y workers (born in 1999).

1.3 Silent Generation

The *Silent Generation*, also known as Matures or the Traditionalists, were born between 1928 and 1945. While relatively few individuals from this generation are employed, they still comprised 7.5% of the Australian workforce in 2021 (Statista, 2023). These workers were raised during the Great Depression and World War II, which significantly influenced their values and beliefs. As shown in Figure 1, the Silent Generation is known for their loyalty to their families, communities, and institutions (Hansen 2012). They have a strong belief in institutions such as the government, religion, and education, and value authority and order, typically leading them to follow rules and regulations (Sweet & Swayze, 2017). The Silent Generation employee is likely to have a strong sense of duty to their employer, demonstrate a high work ethic, and commitment to their jobs and careers. Research also shows they prefer to conform to established norms and traditions rather than challenge them (Beutell & Wittig-Berman 2008).

1.4 Baby Boomers

The *Baby Boomer Generation* were born between 1946-1964 and were shaped by the civil rights and women's movements and the Vietnam War (Benson et al., 2018). Generally, Baby Boomers are results-driven, highly competitive, and value hard work. They tend to be planners and consider the long-term implications of their decisions. While they may be less confident with newer technology, they do value productivity and tend to use technology for that purpose (Sox et al., 2017). Baby Boomers place a high value on work and are often loyal to their organisations, seeking job security and stability. They grew up in a time of post-World War II prosperity, which instilled in them a sense of optimism and entitlement (Park & Gursay, 2012). However, some Baby Boomers are criticised for being self-absorbed and focused on their own success and achievements. They appreciate opportunities for personal development and creativity, often seeking extrinsic rewards like career progression (Lub et al., 2012). Baby Boomers also tend to prefer a hierarchical structure and value mentoring relationships (Eyoum et al., 2020). They are often willing to take on leadership roles and are well-represented among senior decision-makers.

1.5 Generation X

Generation X (born 1965-1981) has several key characteristics that distinguish them from previous and subsequent generations. They grew up during times of economic and social instability, including the AIDS epidemic, economic uncertainty, and the fall of the Soviet Union (Glazer et al., 2019). These experiences have resulted in a potentially cynical and untrusting attitude towards organisations (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008). However, they are known for valuing independence, autonomy, and personal growth, and prefer managers and leaders who allow them to work independently.

Gen Xers prioritise work-life balance, seeking a balance between work and leisure time, and tend to value flexible work arrangements (Mahmoud et al., 2020). Gen Xers can be highly entrepreneurial, comfortable with change, and seek out challenging and interesting jobs. However, due to their experiences with economic instability and societal change, they tend to be less loyal to employers than previous generations and can be action-oriented, focusing on achieving their career objectives more than loyalty (Benson & Brown, 2011). While Gen Xers value emotional security and often seek out positive work relationships and growth opportunities, they can also be reluctant to take on formal leadership roles in organisations. Overall, Generation X is a self-reliant, independent, and adaptable generation shaped by the rise of single-parent and blended families, working mothers, and dual-career couples.

1.6 Generation Y

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, were born between 1982 and 1999 and grew up witnessing the collapse of iconic companies due to unethical leadership (e.g., Enron; Christopher Skase). They are often described as tech-savvy and confident in their abilities. Growing up during the rise of the internet and globalisation, they are more likely to expect instant gratification through technology (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019). Work-life balance is a high priority for Millennials, and they prioritise leisure time more than previous generations. They also have high expectations for rapid promotions, pay raises, and instant feedback, and they are driven by altruistic work values that prioritise meaningful work (Park & Gursoy, 2012). As a diverse generation with varying values, Millennials question authority and value collaboration. They desire immediate satisfaction and a fun work environment, and they are comfortable with workplaces that provide transparency, guidance, and feedback (Glazer et al.,

2019). They are digital natives who prioritise autonomy and meaningful work (Gursoy, 2008). Millennials seek challenging work, rapid promotion, and a balance between work and personal life. They are comfortable with diverse groups and enjoy working in teams with a common goal. Millennials place less emphasis on leadership compared to Generation Xers and Baby Boomers, although this likely stems from their less frequent interactions with executive-level leaders, as a result of their lower positions within organisational hierarchies (Pasko et al., 2021). Millennials are optimistic, goal-driven, and seek immediate feedback, stability, and high job satisfaction (Chen & Choi, 2008). Millennials value teamwork and social relationships in the workplace, but may be more prone to anxiety and depression and less satisfied with communication at work (Smaliukiene & Bekesiene, 2020). Overall, Millennials are a tech-savvy and diverse generation with high expectations for meaningful work, rapid advancement, and a healthy work-life balance.

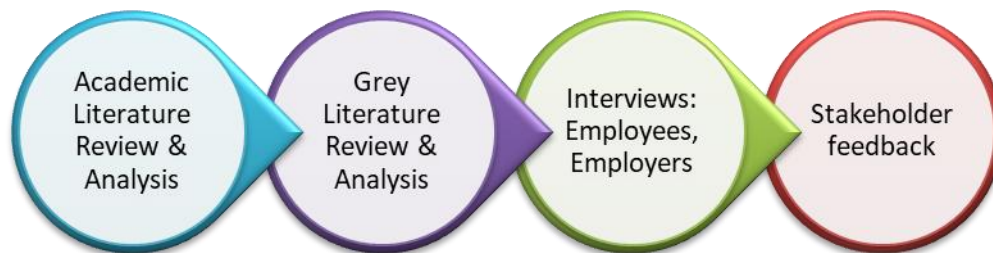
1.7 Generation Z

As shown in Figure 1, *Generation Z*, born between 1996 and 2009, are considered true digital natives, with a constant connection to their smartphones and high proficiency in using technology (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019). Note that the year used to indicate the beginning of Generation Z (and the end of Generation Y) does vary within the literature, ranging from 1996 to 1999. Gen Z are optimistic about the future and believe in their ability to make a positive impact. They value financial stability and flexible working hours to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Additionally, Generation Z prioritises environmental concerns, and values independence to develop and showcase their personal competencies. They seek inclusive and supportive work environments and embrace new digital tools and platforms. Smaliukiene and Bekesiene (2020) highlighted that social relationships are the most important component of wellbeing at work for Gen Z.

2.0 Methodology

This section describes the research methodology that was undertaken by this project. To reiterate, this research process sought to advance knowledge and to generate recommendations for Australian employers regarding: the characteristics of a high-performing multi-generational workplace; the policies and practices employers of high-performing multi-generational workplaces have implemented to create this environment, which could be promoted to other employers; and the initiatives or solutions that will be successful in Australian multi-generational workplaces. To improve our understanding in this regard, a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative methods was adopted, and this is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Research Methodology



We conducted and combined assessments of qualitative elements i.e., interviews conducted with employers and employees from Australian medium and large organisations (across multiple industries), application of the Delphi technique, and thematic analysis of the literature, with a quantitative analysis (i.e., data obtained via a systematic literature review), to answer the key research questions and produce recommendations. More specifically, four data collection methods were employed:

1. A systematic review was undertaken of the published empirical academic literature. This involved summarising and mapping existing evidence, models, and research options to address the research questions and assess the relevance of different models for the Australian context.

2. A second systematic analysis was undertaken of the 'grey' literature (e.g., organisational reports, white papers) to identify the characteristics of high-performing multi-generational workplaces and the policies and practices implemented by these employers.
3. A total of 56 interviews were conducted with 11 employers and 45 employees of medium (over 20 employees) and large employers (over 200 employees) across multiple industries within Australia. For confidentiality reasons the specific organisations we interviewed are not individually identified in this report.
4. Finally, a Delphi technique was employed to gather feedback from key stakeholders, namely experts, government department and agencies, and industry peak bodies to validate the project's findings and recommendations.

2.1 Academic literature review

The academic literature search methodology was informed by a validated systematic review process (Pickering & Byrne, 2014) and is summarised in Figure 3. The literature for this systematic review was sourced using scientific and academic research databases, including ProQuest, Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCOhost. To capture a wide range of scholarly literature (i.e., peer reviewed academic journal articles, book chapters, reports, and unpublished dissertations) a list of keywords was compiled to identify the best workplace practices in this context. These search terms and inclusion criteria are detailed in Appendix A.

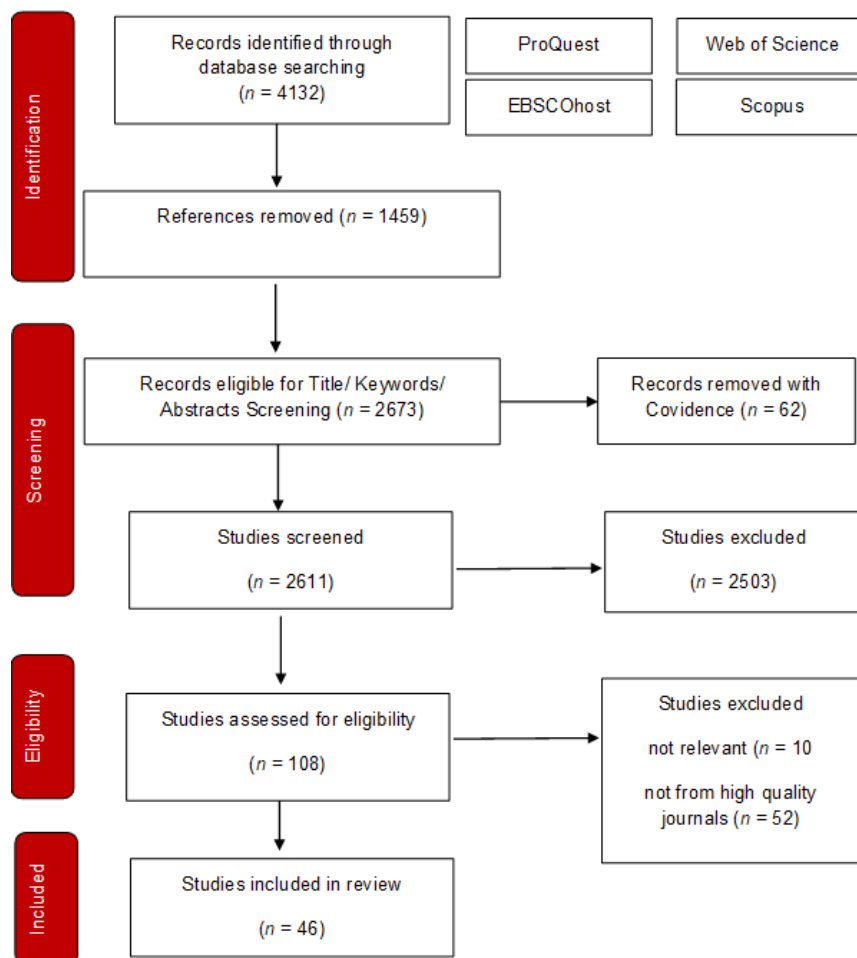
To generate the most relevant and recent evidence, the literature search included local and international literature published in English in the last 15 years (2008 to end of 2022). In addition, the publication must have compared two or more generations, be based on a non-student population, and be from an OECD country to ensure it is applicable to the Australian context. To ensure the quality of the publications, only tier A and A* journals from the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal List were included in the final review. This journal list ranks academic journals based on their quality, impact, and prestige, with tier A*, followed by A, being the highest-quality and most prestigious journals. By using these inclusion criteria, this systematic literature review aimed to ensure that only relevant, high-quality publications were selected, and that the review was systematic, transparent, and reproducible.

The screening process for identifying the eligible articles was processed using COVIDENCE software. Figure 3 shows a total of 4,132 articles were initially identified, and this was reduced

to 2,673 after duplicates were removed. These articles underwent title and abstract screening, which identified a further 62 duplicate publications to be deleted. Of the 2,611 articles eligible for the screening process, a total of 2,503 articles were excluded due to either describing irrelevant topics (studies that did not address the research questions or provide relevant information) and/or did not meet the rigorous standards of scholarly research in terms of study design and research methods. Of the 108 articles that were assessed for full eligibility, a total of 62 articles were excluded after full-text screening as they did not meet the review criteria and were poor quality. Finally, a total of 46 high quality relevant articles met all the eligibility criteria for synthesis. Figure 3 illustrates the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement.

Figure 3. PRISMA Flowchart

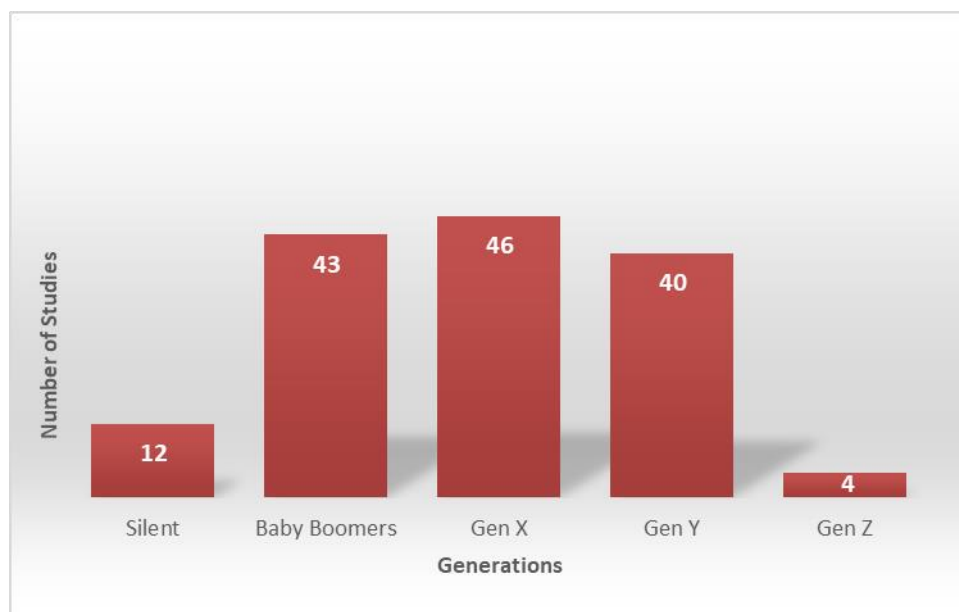
Systematic Literature Search



For calibration and refinement, two authors independently reviewed the full text of all articles with a strong level of inter-rater agreement ($kappa = 0.82$). Given the high level of agreement, only 12 articles underwent a consensus process with a third author.

Of the 46 unique articles retrieved for full-text screening, the demographic analysis identified these articles described five generations in the workforce, aligning with our multi-generational framework presented in Figure 1; namely Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. Figure 4 illustrates all of the articles studied Gen X workers ($n = 46$), followed by Baby Boomers ($n = 43$), and the least studied was Gen Z ($n = 4$), which is to be expected (Tulgan, 2016).

Figure 4. Generational Breakdown of the Studies

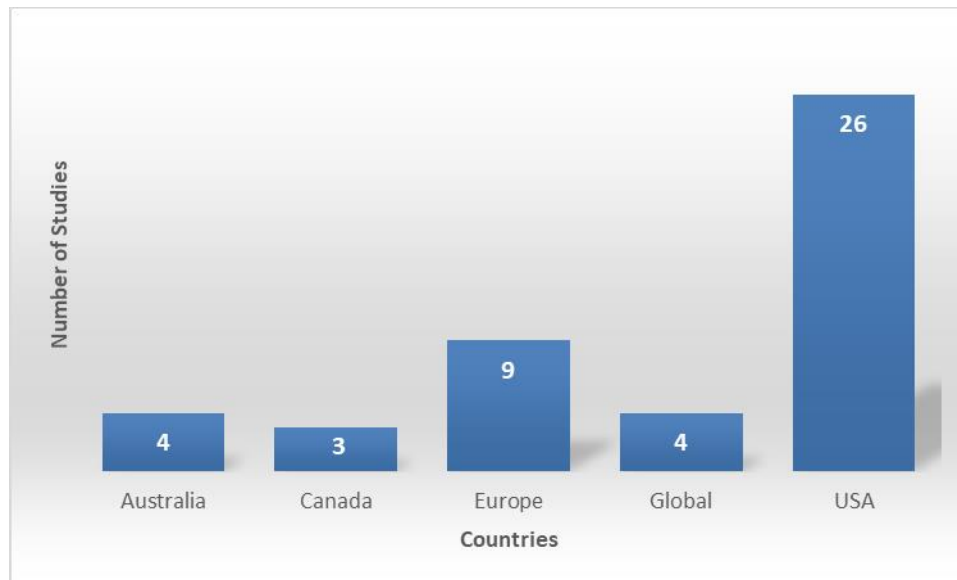


In terms of location, the majority of the studies ($n = 26$) were conducted within the United States, with only four studies conducted within Australia. The remainder of studies were conducted within Europe, Canada, or as global/international studies (Figure 5). This indicates a Western cultural viewpoint is highly dominant in the multi-generational workforce research (Jones et al. 2018).

In terms of research methods, only one longitudinal study was identified (Wakim, 2014). This is a major research limitation highlighted in this topic area. The majority of the studies ($n = 34$)

were based on self-report survey measures. Only a small number of studies used either focus groups ($n = 5$) or interviews ($n = 6$) to collect data and analyse generational differences.

Figure 5. Geographical Breakdown of Studies



2.2 Grey literature review

A similar systematic review process as above was adopted for the 'grey literature review'. The process involved a systematic identification, evaluation, and synthesis of grey literature, which consisted of materials not formally published through traditional academic or commercial channels, such as organisational reports, working papers, and policy documents.

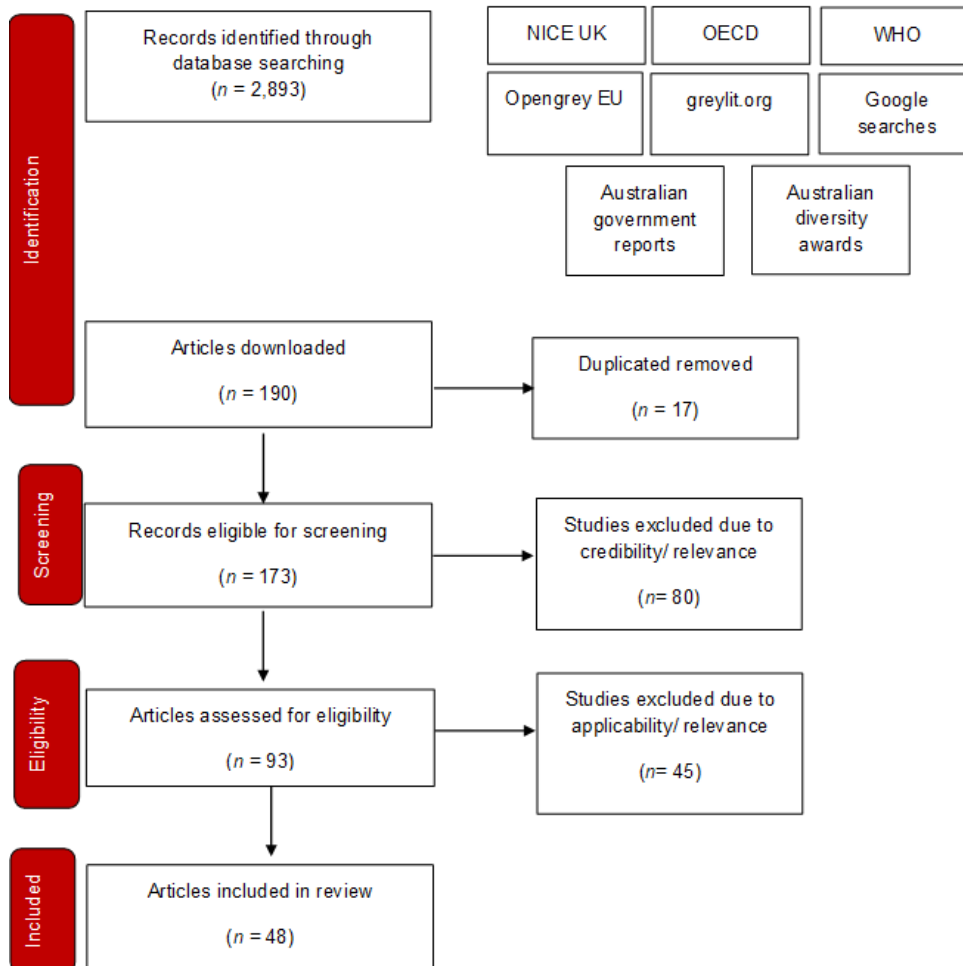
To source these references, searches were conducted of Australian government websites, institutional repositories, and the sites for professional associations and organisations, non-governmental organisations, and think tanks. Research databases were also searched, such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), World Health Organisation (WHO), System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe (<http://www.opengrey.eu>), and New York Academy of Medicine: The Grey Literature Report (<http://www.greylit.org>). Table 2 summarises the results of the grey literature search and it can be seen that a total of 2,893 documents were initially identified.

Table 2. Grey Literature Search Results

Site	Results
International repositories	
The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE UK)	7
OECD	157
WHO	255
Opengrey EU	0 (limited scope)
greylit.org	0 (only focused on health data)
<i>Total</i>	<i>419</i>
Australian diversity awards	
AHRI	42
Urban Development Institute	1
Australian Resources Energy	27
<i>Total</i>	<i>70</i>
Australian governmental reports	
Australian Government	878
Google searches	
Broad search	767
Consulting companies	383
Case studies	191
Australian diversity awards	185
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,526</i>
Grand Total	2,893

Figure 6 summarises the grey literature process. From the 2,893 documents initially identified, a total of 190 relevant documents remained after reviewing and deletion of inappropriate documents. After removing 17 duplicates, a three-step process was implemented to verify the credibility and relevance of the documents. First, documents were removed that were not addressing best practice or comparing different generations or were older than ten years (2011 and older), or were overly focused on ageism rather than generations, or were not focused on the workforce. Second, when extracting information, a further 45 documents were deleted as they lacked applicability and relevance to the topic. A final total of 48 relevant documents met all the eligibility criteria for synthesis.

Figure 6. Grey Literature Process Review



2.3 Qualitative Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with both employers and employees working in Australian multi-generational organisations, to understand their perspectives of multi-generational policies, procedures, and work experiences. Employers and managers from organisations across Australia were invited to participate, representing both medium (over 20 employees) and large organisations (over 200 employees), from multiple industry sectors (retail, aged care, childcare, consulting, rail, psychology, disability, cleaning, landscaping, insurance, and aerospace). The interviews were semi-structured, with key questions informed by both the literature review and the six research questions for this project. These are summarised in Appendix B.

A total of 56 interviews were conducted (11 employers and 45 employees) with questions focussing on employee recruitment, attraction and retention strategies, generational expectations, employer-based initiatives supporting a multi-generational workforce, and challenges associated with working in an age-diverse organisation. Table 3 presents a description of the interviewees. It can be observed there was a relatively even spread of interviewees from the Baby Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y (millennial), and Gen Z cohorts.

Table 3. Generations of Interviewees

Type of interview	Generation	Number
Employer	All 5 generations	11
Employee	Silent Generation	1
	Baby Boomer	12
	Generation X	11
	Millennials / Generation Y	10
	Generation Z	11
Total		56

The aim of the interviews was to extend the literature reviews and gain current perceptions from both Australian employees and employers of their *lived experiences* of working in and managing multi-generational workplaces. The rich data produced by these interviews offers valuable insights regarding current practices and first-hand insights of age diverse workplaces. It also identifies multi-generational challenges and enablers not captured by the systematic literature search. Interview responses were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify and report the key codes and themes within the data.

2.4 Delphi Study

A Delphi technique was employed to gather feedback from key stakeholders, namely experts, government department and agencies, and industry peak bodies, to validate the project's findings and recommendations. The Delphi technique identifies a consensus assessment across subject experts. It allows for reflection among participants, who can reconsider their view based on the anonymous views of others (Barrett & Heale, 2020). After the data analysis from the systematic reviews and interviews were completed, key findings and recommendations

were sent to a sample of subject experts, to the Department and to all the interviewees. All participants were invited to provide their feedback. However, only a small response ($n = 2$) was received, despite multiple follow-ups and reminders. Thus, while offering valuable information, confidence in the generalisability of the data produced by the Delphi process is low.

3.0 Findings

This section presents the results of the findings of the two systematic literature reviews, interviews with employers and employees, and the Delphi study. For ease of readability, this section is structured in terms of each of the six research questions.

3.1 What do high-performing multi-generational workplaces look like and are there such workplaces in Australia?

The data analysis of the two (international) systematic literature reviews identified 14 key strategies, policies, practices, and traits common to high-performing multi-generational workplaces. These 14 strategies are illustrated in Figure 7 and summarised in Table 4.

Figure 7. Key characteristics of positive and productive multi-generational workplaces



Table 4. Key characteristics of positive and productive multi-generational workplaces

Characteristics of positive and productive multi-generational workplaces	
1. Value co-creation	A high-performing workplace prioritises value co-creation processes involving employees. Participation in these processes produces higher wellbeing and job satisfaction across all generations. Examples: encouraging employees to share their insights and ideas, fostering collaboration across departments and teams, and creating a culture that values innovation and continuous improvement.
2. Focused on job satisfaction	Job satisfaction should be a prominent criterion for career success evaluation, and is a focus of high-performing multi-generational workplaces. Across all generations, employees who are satisfied with their work and feel valued are more likely to be high performers.
3. Work-life balance (WLB)	High-performing workplaces strive to support all employees across all generations in achieving their preferences for work-life balance and to prioritise their wellbeing. Research demonstrates that younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) in particular are demanding more work-life balance (WLB) strategies to improve their work motivation and quality of life. WLB is commonly achieved by offering childcare, flexible hours, and alternative employment options.
4. Employee wellbeing	High-performing workplaces prioritise employee wellbeing by fulfilling their self-determined needs. This includes providing employees across all generations with the specific resources, support, and autonomy they need to feel empowered and engaged in their work, and strategies to promote their mental health.
5. Supportive management	High-performing workplaces have managers who are "people persons" and offer regular support, praise, and gratitude. These managers are team players who value participation and respect their employees across all generations.
6. Career development opportunities	High-performing workplaces provide employees across all generations with opportunities for career mobility and development which helps them feel valued and increases job satisfaction. These development opportunities provide opportunities for learning and development and begin early in employee careers, to encourage younger employees to remain with the organisation. Examples: formal training programs, mentorship, and coaching, on-the-job learning and other development opportunities. By investing in employee development, employers can help employees to build new skills and stay engaged and motivated.
7. Leadership training	To develop effective managers, high-performing workplaces implement systems for identifying potential managers early, and provide training that covers generational awareness, positive reinforcement, time management, customer service, and conflict resolution. Emphasis is on developing leaders while considering the preferences of each generation, to define priority attributes for success.

Characteristics of positive and productive multi-generational workplaces	
8. Tailored HR practices	HR practices are tailored to different career stages and generations to better suit employees' diverse needs and expectations. Examples: different approaches to job content, career development, rewards, and social/cultural obligations.
9. Generation-specific approaches	Recognition that each generational cohort has unique characteristics assists in producing high-performing workplaces. Example: younger generations are more likely to use technology to communicate and collaborate, while older generations may value face-to-face interactions and a more traditional hierarchical structure.
10. Technology balance	Barriers for all generations include differing perceptions of work effectiveness, such as views by older generations of younger generations being overly preoccupied with technology. A high-performing workplace is aware of these differences and ensures that technology is used in a balanced way to enhance, rather than detract from, employee engagement, job performance and satisfaction.
11. Communication & collaboration	To involve employees effectively, a high-performing workplace fosters a culture of collaboration and communication. This involves creating channels for employee feedback, encouraging cross-functional teams, and providing opportunities for professional development and growth. Effective communication is vital for a positive and productive multi-generational workplace. Different generations typically have different communication styles and preferences. Clear and open communication builds trust, fosters collaborations, and avoid misunderstandings.
12. Mentorship	By implementing formal mentorship programs, organisations reduce workplace conflicts by matching older and younger employees. Thus, younger workers find role models and receive their training, and older workers utilise their life experiences in the mentoring process.
13. Safety focus	High-performing multi-generational workplaces have an effective safety culture which includes all employees. Employers monitor workplace compensation claims and celebrate progress while making safety everyone's responsibility.
14. Age diversity awareness	Developing intergenerational training and mentoring programs and including emotional intelligence training will help improve relationships between older and younger generations. Different generations generally do have different work values and expectations. Understanding these differences can improve job satisfaction, service delivery efficiency, and reduce employee turnover.

As well as the 14 key characteristics listed in Table 4 above, which were largely derived from the international literature, two additional characteristics were identified from the interviews as being highly relevant to Australian workplaces. These two characteristics, shown in Figure 8, are described below and are illustrated by pertinent quotes from the interviewees.

Figure 8. Characteristics of positive and productive multi-generational workplaces highly pertinent to Australian workplaces



3.1.1 Inclusive learning cultures celebrate differences and embrace mistakes.

Fostering a high-performing and inclusive work culture requires acknowledging and leveraging the strengths of each generation, whilst promoting understanding and collaboration amongst them (Bentley University Center for Women and Business, 2017). It is important to focus on the similarities between generations and recognise that they all basically value meaningful work. Meaningful work is achieved by ensuring that employees understand the company's strategic goals and how their roles contribute to organisational success, tapping into their common intrinsic motivation. This research noted how allowing employees to fail and learn from their experiences in a supportive environment was reported as key to being inclusive and focusing a learning culture. For example, one employer reported:

“So if somebody attempts something and they don't get the outcome, they can expect myself or Jill (pseudonym) or any of our managers to ask 3 questions: ‘What was your intent? What happened? And what have you learned?’ There's no putative response. It's just: ‘OK, great. Go away and execute better next time’. But if you make the same mistake twice, that's a whole other conversation.” (Technology employer).

Embracing an inclusive culture in each team was also noted as important to employers achieving success:

“We need to use a team-based approach where we actually, team by team, work with the team and unravel what is causing obstacles in terms of performing and you know, unlock that potential within the team.” (Consulting employer).

Similarly, employees commented that being able to learn from their mistakes was a key theme related to their workforce performance and retention. This was particularly important for Generation Z employees who were still learning their roles. For example,

“It’s like you go do something but if you need me, I’m here while you go do it. But also go and make your mistake and then come back to me with your learnings. But your mistake isn’t going to be like an issue” (Gen Z, female employee 1).

For older employees, having an opportunity to mentor was a key retention strategy:

“Because I have that life experience and if I’m on the floor, I can then help to make suggestions as to how to deal with this right now. I think I couldn’t have done it when I was 30, I wouldn’t have been drawn to it at all. But at my stage in life, you’ve got some life experience to pull on” (Gen X employee, female).

Thus, transferring knowledge, and learning from others in a risk-free environment, was central to best practice retention strategies. These findings mirror the reports in the international literature, which recommends that creating an effective multi-generational workplace is based on respect, inclusion, and collaboration among all employees (LinkedIn, 2020). This is important because all generations contribute uniquely to an organisation and this should be encouraged (Bentley University Center for Women and Business, 2017; Poepzel, 2021). This finding was also highlighted in our interviews where several employees stated that being involved in an inclusive team contributed to their satisfaction at work as they could learn from another generation. For example:

“You’ve always got something to bring to the table. They can always teach me something I might not know” (Generation X employee, male).

“I mean, with Jane (pseudonym), who was our marketing person, who just left, you know, we had really good debates about should we be on TikTok ... we’re still very traditional LinkedIn... Jane was always good at sort of raising things that you know (my employer) and I hadn’t really thought about it because it’s just not our ..world” (Generation X employee, female).

This was also echoed by employers who reported that:

“The life experience and digital experience from the younger ones can marry up for maximum productivity and performance outcomes” (Employer, consulting).

High-performing multi-generational organisations create new, innovative strategies to embrace age friendliness profiles across their workforces. This has resulted in many companies revising their policies to accommodate a multi-generational workforce, with 89% of talent professionals believing in its contribution to a company's success (LinkedIn, 2020). Additionally, organisations including for example, Pfizer, CVS Health, and Hewlett Packard Enterprises, have implemented multi-generational initiatives, such as internships and ‘*returnships*’ to tap into the skills of older employees (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2013). Other examples include attracting ‘*grey nomads*’ into work by offering them *travelling team positions* where employees travelling around Australia can request shifts at any local branch of their organisation via a Facebook page. This initiative assists in retaining workers and attracting employees across the country:

“A travelling team member is where a team member might have got to the point where they want to take 12 months off and rather than lose their job with (the organisation), resign, and then come back, instead if they're a permanent team member, all they have to do is change to casual, then they can basically work in any store around Australia.”
(Employer, national retail organisation).

Embracing new employment opportunities for older workers was also central for inclusivity:

“I think we need to think differently and sometimes how we view [them as] not just, you know, sitting there waiting for retirement, they've got skills and experience and energy to bring” (Employer, Consulting industry).

Creating an inclusive workplace requires avoiding age-based stereotypes and recognising the strengths and unique characteristics of each generation (AHRC, 2021; Bentley University Center for Women and Business, 2017; Nicholson, 2021). This was also a strong theme in our interviews with employers, who stated that:

“We don't label or stereotype people because of the generations, but what we've got to do is realise people have different perceptions of the world based on where they're at”
(Rail organisation employer).

Addressing the complexities of a multi-generational workforce and combating stereotypes requires more than verbal explanations; high-quality training is essential for supporting

employees in embracing diversity (Nicholson, 2021). This training should focus on soft skills, such as collaborative work, managing information overload, and adaptive responses to changes, which can help leaders better support their teams in achieving work-life balance, enhancing productivity, and fostering a positive organisational culture (Queensland Government Department of Education, 2020). One such initiative is organisations who have *Generational Diversity Communities of Inclusion* and release departmental traineeship guidelines to promote inclusiveness and understanding among employees (Queensland Government Department of Education, 2020). To ensure the effectiveness of training for a multi-generational workforce, organisations must personalise the learning experience by considering each individual's cognitive style, current knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as identifying gaps in these areas (Learning Guild, 2014).

Consequently, good multi-generational employers were seen to offer training to identify and embrace inclusivity at work. This training included: unconscious bias training, age friendliness training, and leadership insight training opportunities. In addition, these opportunities were found to be open to all employees, and our interviews revealed that the best performing multi-generational employers provided leadership opportunities to all employees, including part-time and casual weekend staff that could 'opt in' for leadership shifts depending on their life circumstances. This included employers constantly challenging their own thoughts/views:

"So you've got to make sure that what you're doing is attractive to the people that you want to attract as well. And often you know as we get into leadership roles, we tend to be a bit set in our ways, or we tend to be at the older end." (Employer, consulting firm).

"We run what we call leadership insights: What was that about? Who am I? What am I? Unconscious biases and what and how do I? What drives me?" (Transport company employer)

In summary, building inclusive cultures includes provision of support, resources and openness within the team, which are core components of successful multi-generational employers.

3.1.2 Embracing different communication styles

The second key characteristic pertinent to Australian workplaces focused on different communication styles between the generations of workers. It was clear that organisations without strategies to address multi-generational challenges and generation-specific needs, risk

missing valuable opportunities and facing a competitive disadvantage primarily due to inter-personal conflict between (inter-generational) employees (Rifkin, 2016). In addition, effective communication was identified as essential for managers to improve employee engagement and increase morale, regardless of an employee's age or stage of life (Vitality, 2018). To do so, best practice employers consider the preferences of different generations when implementing management styles. Additionally, rotating employees across departments can broaden organisational understanding, while educating management on generational differences can foster acceptance, respect, and productivity among cohorts (Pili et al., 2018). Clear communication was crucial to bridging generational gaps and preventing misunderstandings (LinkedIn, 2020; Rifkin, 2026).

Leaders can address generational differences through solution-oriented conversations, tailoring their communication strategies and selecting appropriate channels to cater to different employee preferences (Employee Benefits, 2016). Advancements in technology have opened new opportunities for collaboration, and organisations can consider employee needs and wants when implementing tools and techniques (Nazim et al., 2019). To effectively manage the technological environment, user-friendly technology is essential, and effective organisations seek employee input before implementing new systems (Nazim et al., 2019). By fostering understanding and inclusivity, generational differences can become sources of energy, creativity, and innovation (AHRC, 2021; LinkedIn, 2020).

Internationally, the reviews conducted by this research identified that embracing a culture of collaboration and communication is key to success (Becker et al., 2020). This includes offering a range of communication channels to team members. This was also reflected by a project leader who we interviewed as an employee representative at this organisation:

“It’s been pretty typical that the people of a different generation will pick up information in different forums. Younger employees have got apps on their phone and they’re not afraid of having things or breaking them. All of a sudden, they just apply for leave on their phone in the same way Facebook gets updated and you just look at it and go, oh yeah... So from that perspective, there’ve been some challenges with some different groups not picking up. Another example is if we were sending out emails or logging onto our workplace, those from an older generations weren’t doing it, so they were not across the communication.... We tried lots of different things – we had little videos, we had things

put up on the notice board, we had change champions out in the store , so we had to just sort of address it in lots of different ways...to accommodate all the different groups as much as we could.” (Generation X employee).

Across all organisations, both younger and older employees reported the importance of embracing different communication methods with team members. For example:

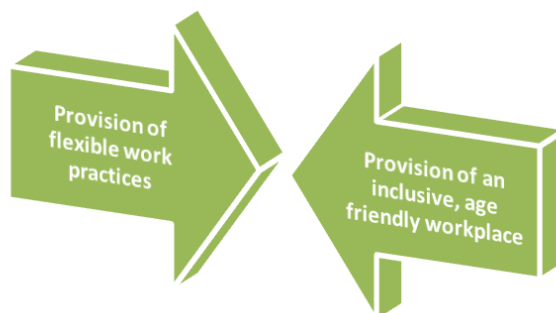
“Having an open culture of communication and just like a friendly office culture and workplace culture more generally, so whatever differences are present in life, experience, age or whatever... It’s a lot easier to connect and communicate and share information among those lines” (Gen Z, female employee).

In summary, the interviews illustrated the importance of providing feedback and support and communication across multiple platforms; thereby recognising the multiple methods by which multi-generational employees can both speak and be heard.

3.2 What do best practice employers do to support these types of workplaces?

Australian best practice employers are taking proactive steps to support multi-generational workplaces. Multiple programs and policies are implemented that promote diversity, equity and inclusion, and provide equal opportunities for employees of all generations. These include promoting work-life balance, and offering career development opportunities tailored to different generations. These employers invest in training and development programs that address generational differences, foster inter-generational collaboration, and encourage knowledge transfer. In addition, the interviews revealed that best practice employers invest in two key practices: flexible work practices and maintaining an age friendly reputation (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Practices of Australian employers to support multi-generational workplaces



3.2.1 Provision of Flexible Work Practices

The analysis of the interview data indicated that across all the generations of workers, the importance of having flexible working arrangements was the strongest theme, in terms of attracting and retaining staff both from an employer's and an employee's perspectives. Over 60% of employees sought flexibility and autonomy for different reasons. For example, younger generations may seek flexibility for childcare or education reasons, while older generations sought flexibility for health or lifestyle reasons. While this was reported to be more of a retention factor than an attraction factor, there was an acknowledgement that flexibility is critical to the future of work across all the generations. For example:

"I personally value flexibility a lot...my personal preference would be two days a week now at home, and three days a week at work" (Baby Boomer, male employee).

"We have a lot of people who are carers for their parents and then we have parents in the mix as well. So flexibility seems to work" (Generation X, female employee).

Increased autonomy was also reported as a crucial factor of flexible work practices, beyond location and hours. What was interesting however, was that while the majority of the older workforce (Gen X, Baby Boomers and Silent Generation employees) considered flexibility primarily in the form of working from home vs the office (80%), almost all (over 90%) of the younger staff members preferred to work *in* their office spaces, although they appreciated the option for flexibility:

"There's definitely the resources for hybrid work so there's no issue, but I do enjoy going into the office to experience the organisation" (Generation Z, female employee).

"You have the option of staying home..hybrid.. I just don't like it.. I like people around me and I feel like going to a physical space. It's much more productive for me" (Generation Z, female employee).

But flexibility to some employees meant more than just the ability to work-from-home. For some employees this also meant flexibility in hours and opportunities provided at different stages in their career:. For example:

"I have always worked part-time and I'd consider full-time for the right role, but that hasn't happened in my career" (Baby Boomer, male employee).

For others, it referred to the autonomy provided through flexible arrangements:

“I really enjoy being able to work independently for a lot of the time but then also have...the ability to reach out for support” (Generation Z, female employee).

For employers, catering for flexible workplace practices extended to initiatives mentioned previously such as the travelling staff member where:

“So long as they arrange it and call ahead, they let the stores know that they are going to be in Darwin in October if there's any shifts there, can they do it?” (Employer).

Moreover, being flexible and inclusive around leadership opportunities was highlighted as an effective innovation at one organisation to retain part-time workers, particularly older ones.

“There was a duty coordinator role we put in place which meant you could be a coordinator part-time. So that if you were already a coordinator and you had to step back for your kids or whatever it was, you could do it part-time and still have that sort of CV and that responsibility that doesn't discriminate.” (Baby Boomer, male employee).

Thus, flexibility at work continues to be an important topic to address. However, while each generation appreciates the capacity for hybrid workforces and flexibility, what this flexibility actually meant to each generation did vary, and thus is a component for employers to be cognisant of.

3.2.2 Provision of an inclusive, age friendly workplace

This study found that all generations naturally had stereotypical views of each other, and that embracing diverse views on new ways of working from all generations is critical to the success of high-performing workplaces. Across both the employers and employees interviewed, it was apparent they all appreciated the benefits of working in age-diverse work teams, understanding that everyone brings a distinct perspective and level of knowledge based on their experiences. As a result, all generations had positive things to say about other generations. For example:

“Young people constantly astound me at how well they can do everything successfully. I can't believe how much time they can devote to working, studying, taking their partners out and being respectful with them, playing sports and fitting it all in.” (Baby Boomer, male employee).

“You've always got something to bring to the table. They can always teach me something in that I may not know” (Gen X, male employee).

3.3 Are there generational differences in Australian workplaces that may be presenting employers with challenges?

This project identified three main areas of generational differences that can present challenges in our workplaces, namely: *recruitment pathways*, *career management*, and *technology and communication* (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Workplace generational differences



While there was an appreciation across the generations of what an age diverse workforce can provide, it is important to note that Australian employers and employees also identify generational differences that can sometimes result in challenges. For example, some employees admitted they perceived it can be difficult at times:

“I think trying to generate work with Gen Z and borderline Alphas and Gen X with the kids...it’s challenging... our values are different and I think our expectations within work are different....because of how we live our lives.” (Gen X female employee).

3.3.1 Differences in Pathways to Recruitment

The external reputation of the organisation as an age friendly workplace was found to be an attractor for older generations. For some older workers (Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation), the age inclusive reputation of the workplace proceeded the attractiveness and intention to apply. One older worker reflected that because it was a retail organisation:

“You had a bit of an idea about the sort of place that (the organisation) was before you applied there” (Baby Boomer, male employee).

Similarly, another employee commented that there was a “*real level of respect for the old salty worker*” (Baby Boomer, male), which impacted his intention to apply. Gen X workers were also attracted to the employer based on their knowledge of the company. For example:

“I have a lot of respect for the owners...and...the way they treat their people” (Gen X, male employee).

“My wife has a disability. I saw how it was with some companies... as an income-making machine... And I wanted to work with a company that ...treat them with respect they all deserve” (Gen X, male employee).

In contrast, most of the younger workers did not reflect on the importance of external reputation in this study and instead relied on their networks to secure their roles. For example:

“I actually knew the girl that was leaving this position, so I applied pretty much through her” (Gen Y, female employee).

Thus, this study highlighted the differences in employee attraction requirements for future vacancies.

3.3.2 Career Management

When discussing their careers, Baby Boomer workers primarily identified transitions to retirement and flexible work practices, whereas Generation Z employees were more naturally focused on experiences to build their careers. For example,

“At my stage, I’d be transitioning to retirement rather than looking for the next step-up. When the time is right, I’d like to go part-time. I’d like to stay within (my organisation) but go part-time and sort of gradually phase out.” (Baby Boomer, male employee).

Other older workers acknowledged it is harder to work than it used to be:

“I find that I’m slowing down a lot. I’m tired after a day’s work of four or five hours, but I think that’s all part of being an older person” (Baby Boomer, male employee).

For Generation X employees, the transition to retirement is on their mind but further in the distance, and instead, consideration of alternative models of work remains the focus:

“I think I’d like to see us flip to a retainer model where once you’re ready to retire you work as a contractor and you come in and you do the things you want to do on the

projects that you want to do and we engage in a different way” (Generation X, female employee).

Generation Y and Z employees are actively seeking career opportunities. For example:

“That’s why I’m taking the Melbourne job, to open the doorway for the next role.”
(Generation Y, male employee).

“I’ve given myself 12 months. I’m not ready to leave the company so it’s more about what comes up in their kind of team”. (Generation Z, female employee).

3.3.3 Technology and Communication

The interviews also revealed that the role of technology in communication varies across the generations with different communication preferences, and can be challenging for both employers and employees (although 3.1.2 noted if these differences are embraced they can lead to better outcomes). For example:

“People who are calling in sick are sending a message on ‘workplace’ (online application) instead of instead of ringing up and there’s different ways that they connect. They think it’s OK because they send text messages to their friends you know, whatever TikTok is and all that sort of stuff. They get into a trend and they use those trends and that’s how they work. And I think we got to move with that ...with the you know, progress with the times and people who are connecting. We are a face-to-face business with customers. We have to learn the art of connecting with people and getting that relationship with our team members. We have to live. They’re not always going to be able to work with their own cohort. They’ll have to be able to work with different people and learn from each other.” (Employer, Retail Organisation).

“We hear a lot about you know, young people they only text, whereas obviously older people may prefer more face-to-face, or telephone. So you find that that sort of occurs in the workplace ... they’ve all got their phones with them. I have mine with me, but I might ... I might make 10 phone calls... I very rarely text, yeah, and the kids seem to do that.”
(Baby Boomer, male, employer).

3.4 Despite differences, were there similarities across generations?

This project identified three key areas of similarities for the workers of multiple generations, namely: *flexible work arrangements*, *meaningful work*, and *career opportunities* (Figure 11). These three factors are positive work characteristics provided by best practice employers, and each is supported by considerable evidence in the literature for their positive impact in attraction and retaining workers of all ages.

Figure 11. Workplace generational similarities



3.4.1 Flexible work practices

The desire for flexible work practices were similar across generations in this study as was previously discussed. This included a recognition of the importance that flexibility of working arrangements was the strongest theme both from an employer and employee perspective, with over 60% of employees interviewed seeking flexibility and autonomy for different reasons, as was described in section 3.2. This need for flexibility across generations was captured by one employee, who also acted as a manager:

“People may want flexibility for very different reasons at the beginning or at the end of their careers or even sometimes in between” (Baby Boomer, Female).

This sentiment was also reflected by the employers who acknowledged that flexible work arrangements could be implemented in jobs where employees are required on site to perform their roles. For example, one employer from a manufacturing industry reported that:

“Our workplace is not a very flexible organization as they need to fix engines in workshops. That means they need to be present in the workshop Monday to Friday. So what we've done is we've restructured our standard working hours to accommodate for a

9 day fortnight every year and in Adelaide, for a reduced Friday working hours. So although we don't have flexibility where I can say you can work from home, we have structured our working powers so that it accommodates a little bit of work-life balance, and work out you know, flexibility for them to be able to do some private stuff, you know support their kids at school, or watch a sporting event, or whatever” (Employer, Female).

3.4.2 Provision of Meaningful and Interesting Work

Our study has revealed that the pursuit of work-life balance and the longing for personal growth and challenging opportunities are priority job characteristics across all generations. The literature reviews revealed that across the generations, employees seek work that is both meaningful and fulfilling. Moreover, individuals from all age groups sought satisfaction and a sense of purpose in their work life, valuing the achievement of a balance between their work and personal lives, albeit with differing priorities and approaches. This was also evident in our interviews where one staff member reflected that they were contemplating their next steps after mastering their role:

“It's been 10 years. I'm sort of thinking everything's almost too easy, you know. Well, say there's still challenges that have come up. You know, I could sort of do a lot of what I do with my arms tied behind my back. So .. I'm sort of wondering what's next” (Generation X, female)

This sentiment was also reflected by a team leader who acknowledged that while some of their team members are onto their next career due to injuries they must consider, there was still a need to provide meaningful work:

“The other risk we have is there is a lot of non-work related injuries, particularly if this is their second or third career perhaps like a plumber or concreter.. and they get hired in their 40s, 50s or 60s they will come with some pre-existing injuries. So it's about not discriminating against them for that but what is actually reasonable and can we give someone meaningful work” (Team leader).

3.4.3 Career Opportunities

The systematic literature review revealed that career growth and development were also important to workers across all generations, as they actively sought out opportunities to enhance their skills and progress in their professional journeys. Recognition and appreciation

for their contributions played a vital role in motivating individuals from different generations. However, while all employees wanted career opportunities, and to be motivated - this was experienced differently by each generation. This sentiment was also shared by a manager who reported:

“As a leader within the organisation, I'll find that the biggest challenge is the ‘what's in it for me?’ I understand that motivation, but it's not what drives me, for I'm more driven by ‘what can I do for others’ or ‘what does it mean to others’ or ‘what's the outcome to the (end user)?’ For example, for me, it doesn't matter what I need to do. It's just if whatever I do, it needs to have that outcome. Whereas I find sometimes what I find challenging is that these people don't perceive it like that. People are very much well, ‘what do I get out of this?’ (Team leader, healthcare).

“What the 62-year-old in my team wants is very different than what the 20- or 30-year old's want. They want a career.. they want to make a mark and they want something to challenge and move on. What the 62-year-old wants is to be respected and be useful.”
(Team leader, retail).

Thus, acknowledging the common goal of motivating and respecting each employees' contributions is core to a healthy multi-generational workplace.

3.5 If generational differences exist, how can we address them to reduce impacts on Australian workplaces?

3.5.1 Provision of Age inclusive policies

While most employers stated they did not actively recruit for a particular age group or generation, some larger employers did have arrangements with secondary and tertiary institutions to build their recruitment pipeline. No organisation interviewed had a targeted strategy for employing more experienced or older employees. Instead, they reflected that strategies that work reflect respect and acknowledgement for the different career stages of individuals. For example, one employee reported:

“There is no pressure that you're on the fast track or not. I've talked to quite a few people who've been in the business for a while who you know, maybe started off full-time on a track, then they had to take a step back, work part-time when they had caring roles but then you can get back on that track as well” (Generation X, female employee).

For all employees, the perception of equality was highly important:

“They value (your opinion) the same, no matter what your experience is.” (Generation Z).

In order to foster an age-diverse culture, the grey literature review also revealed that it is particularly important to promote cultural change through leadership role modelling, top-down commitment, and bottom-up communities for cross-generational respect and dialogue (National Health Service, 2019; Queensland Government Department of Education, 2020).

3.6 What are some existing initiatives or solutions that are successful and could be promoted in Australia?

As was noted above, few organisations reported any formal initiatives targeted at specific generations of their workers. Instead, their programs were inclusive of all employees. For example, the travelling retailer positions were opened to all staff, although it was acknowledged that these positions were generally filled by ‘Grey Nomads’. Similarly, leadership programs for both part-time and full-time staff, allowed for career growth regardless of job type. Listening to employees was also promoted by many organisations where a ‘leadership huddle’ was implemented to share any concerns/comments or new processes daily, with each leader to then distribute these items to their broader teams. One employer in disability support revealed that this strategy was useful for her as a leader to touch base with employees to check in, regardless of age. For example,

“Every day we have a huddle and I try to go to those 10 minute huddles ..and then they’ll talk about what we’re noticing... So if I (or) any of my leadership team hear something in that huddle of note we’ll share that... So that one of us will go OK and pick up the phone to say look, we know that you had a particularly tough shift last night.. I’m just calling to see how you’re going” (Female, employer).

Of the two organisations that did report specific programs targeted to different generations, these programs included a transition to retirement seminar series, which is a common proactive offering by employers. For example,

“As part of our wellbeing program for an example in January, we did financial wellbeing ...we invited our key superannuation fund to give a talk on preparing yourself for

retirement. So that was obviously more attended by people from different, you know, older generations” (employer, female)

Programs also included the ability for employees to use accrued leave entitlements to reduce their working hours while taking home the same salary, and a future leader program for younger workers. Both programs were effective and appreciated by the workforce interviewed. Another organisation was beginning to implement training sessions for their future leaders’ program on inclusive leadership to tackle unconscious bias. Specifically,

“Our future leaders’ program will have an inclusive leadership training session as well. We’re including in those a section on generational leadership and how to be able to identify how do they learn, how to you know, how to best connect with it. And it also includes the nuances between younger leaders and older workers, older leaders and younger workers and workers and workers” (Retail employer, male).

According to the literature reviews, many organisations in Australia are challenged with attracting and retaining quality employees as the Baby Boomer generation retires, necessitating the development of new standards of human resource management (generation-specific management). To effectively connect with a multi-generational workforce, organisations can adopt flexible workplace policies, implement inclusive leadership approaches to bridge generational gaps, and recognise the distinct values and personality traits among different generations. This entails acknowledging the values inherent to each generation, such as celebrating achievements, cultivating a lively and enjoyable work environment, fostering teamwork, and encouraging community engagement. By adapting leadership styles and work approaches to accommodate generational preferences, organisations are found to enhance team interactions, decision-making processes, and overall work efficacy. For instance, older generations, including Generation X and Baby Boomers, may favour assuming leadership roles and prioritising organisational values, while younger generations such as Generation Y and Z may place value on status, work-life balance, variety, and recognition of achievements.

Furthermore, mentorship programs, recognition and rewards, tailored management strategies, and customization of performance appraisal processes can address conflicts and meet the unique needs of different generations. Additionally, organisations should promote intergenerational learning and knowledge transfer to foster employee alignment.

By implementing these strategies, organisations can best create supportive work environments, enhance employee engagement, and foster loyalty across their generations of workers. Customization of these strategies based on the specific needs, industry, culture, and demographics will maximize the effectiveness of these approaches in addressing generational differences and promoting a harmonious and productive work environment.

4.0 Conclusions and Key Recommendations

This research assessed the practices reported by both international and domestic organisations to effectively work with employees of different generations. Some of these best practices are fairly common-sensical, such as ensuring clear communications and providing equitable work benefits to all workers, regardless of their generation. Other practices were more nuanced and illustrate that a recognition of the different styles of working and different needs and approaches to work, exhibited by employees of different generations, is indeed valuable for employers, and importantly, is directly related with attraction and retention of all high-performing workers. We summarise this research by highlighting five key recommendations for high-performing workplaces to consider when employing workers across generations (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Recommendations for high-performing workplaces to consider when employing workers across generations



- 1. Age diversity and inclusion training.** It is clear that significant differences do exist for workers across different generations, most noticeably in their communication preferences and technology use. The implementation of training acknowledging these employee differences is especially important for managers to undertake. This training will encourage a

greater understanding and appreciation of workers' generational differences, minimise stereotypes, and assist in preventing discrimination. Numerous 'off-the-shelf' organisational generational programs do exist. Thus, Australian organisations who don't already implement this type of training are strongly recommended to do so.

- 2. Multiple communication methods.** This research identified the different preferences of communication methods utilised by workers of different generations. It is apparent that successful workplaces are aware of this and employ a variety of communication methods to engage with their workers. Thus, the same message is required to be shared via multiple communication methods, to ensure all workers are promptly notified. This typically means using a combination of emails, face-to-face, social media, and digital team collaboration tools to communicate a message. Importantly, flexibility in this approach is also necessary, to ensure that new social platforms and innovative communication channels can be readily and promptly adopted by organisations.
- 3. Multi-generational mentoring and teams.** The research identified that the occurrence of organisational opportunities and formal programs which engage both younger and older employees to learn from each other, are invaluable. Such programs recognise the value of all generations, for example that older employees commonly have useful experience and wisdom to share, while younger workers commonly contribute a fresh perspective and innovative technical skills. Programs and discussions which encourage an understanding of these inter-generational differences, especially via informed discussions, are recommended.
- 4. Continuous learning and development.** It is clear that high-performing workplaces offer continuous learning and development for all workers, regardless of age. Thus, training opportunities such as digital literacy programs, use of social media, leadership training, retirement planning, and people management can be stereotyped to appeal to distinct generational cohorts, but the **equitable offering** to all workers is highly advantageous. Such offerings encourage a 'generational mix' and facilitate an improved understanding of any generational-specific difficulties or sensitivities across all workers.
- 5. Flexible working arrangements.** Both the reviewed literature cited in this report, and our own contributions to the broader work-life balance literature, note the value of offering flexible working arrangements (FWAs) to workers across all generations. Specific key life experiences involving family caring demands for example, are applicable across multiple generations (e.g., caring for new children, teenage children, elderly parents and relatives).

Plus, other life demands including studying, sporting, travelling, and religious demands are also common causes of requests for FWAs by workers of different ages. The evidence is clear that organisations which support these FWAs requests, both attract and retain workers across all generations. Importantly, FWAs include work hours (changes between full-time and part-time work patterns) and also flexibility of work locations, shifts, leadership opportunities and training opportunities.

Whilst workplaces have commonly employed workers across all different generations, recent advances in digital technology, social media, and communication channels, have highlighted some generational differences between current employees. Adapting our workplaces to better recognise and understand these generational differences is a crucial factor in organisational success. We also recognise that adaptability of our workplaces is likely to increase in the future, as further changes to working patterns occur at both ends of the generational range.

5.0 References

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6.0 Appendices

Appendix A: Academic literature review search terms and inclusion criteria

Search terms included (multigeneratio* OR "generational" OR "generation z" OR "generation x" OR "generation y" OR ("baby boomer" OR "baby boomers") OR "silent generation" OR "veteran generation" OR "traditional generation" OR "sandwiched generation") AND (workplace OR employ* OR organi* OR workforce OR manager OR "team member") AND ("workplace expectation*" OR "workplace attitude*" "work life balance" OR "work performance" OR respect OR value OR retention OR "job satisfaction" OR turnover) .

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Employer Interview Protocol

Themes	Question examples
Introduction/ rapport building	Can you please tell me a little about your role?
Multi-generational understanding	What does the term multi-generational workplace mean to you?
Organisational context	What aspects of your employment offer do you think attracts staff to work at <insert employer name>?
Recruitment and Selection	How does <insert organisation here> seek to recruit across all ages?
Relevance of knowledge and skills	How does <insert employer name> leverage the experience of their employees?
Multi-generational work teams	What initiatives do <insert employer name> have in place to support a multi-generational workplace?
Challenges in operating a M-G workplace	You describe <Insert employer name> as a multi-generational workplace. What challenges if any do you face as a result of employing people across generations?
Generational specific support	Does <insert employer name> offer any specific support/ initiatives for employees that belong to different generations?
Best practice suggestions	Are there any strategies that you have come across/ heard about that would better support a multi-generational workplace?

Employee Interview Protocol

Themes	Question examples
Introduction/ rapport building	Can you please tell me a little about your role?
Organisational context	What is the best part of working with this organisation? Why do you think that is?
Relevance of knowledge and skills	Talk about your strengths and experience and how they are utilised within the workplace (how utilised in your role).
Multi-generational work teams	Can you please describe who you usually interact with at the workplace during your workday?
Work demands	We talked about the best part of working in your role / organisation. What might be challenging aspects?
Work-life balance	How would you rate your work-life-balance?
Career development & professional identity	If you needed support, how would you go about that?
Career construction in multi-generational workplaces	Considering what we talked about and your experiences so far, where do you see yourself in your career?
Overall satisfaction	Considering everything we have talked about, how happy (satisfied) are you in your current workplace?