

# Psychological Scientists Address the Challenges of an Aging Workforce

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Older adults are a growing proportion of the American workforce in unprecedented numbers. For the first time since 1948, American employees over age 65 outnumber teenage workers, according to a report from AARP. Yet, older workers are still beset by discriminatory hiring and negative stereotypes about their capabilities and competence.

Last week, psychological scientists from the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) hosted a congressional briefing in the Senate demonstrating how evidence-based strategies can help organizations and policymakers successfully manage the emerging challenges of the world's aging workforce.

APS Fellow Ruth Kanfer of the Georgia Institute of Technology, Lisa Finkelstein of Northern Illinois University, and Mo Wang of the University of Florida spoke on current research demonstrating how science-based strategies can help establish practices that keep older workers engaged and active on the job.

A 2014 meta-study from Songqi Liu, Jason Huang, and Mo Wang found that job search training programs may be a particularly potent way to combat unemployment in older workers. After reviewing results from 9,575 job seekers engaged in different 47 job search training intervention programs, the researchers found that older workers hugely benefited from these programs compared to other age groups.

Research has shown that as we age some skills may decline, while others actually peak. Aside from having more experience on the job, older workers also often have better interpersonal skills and more interest in taking on mentoring roles than younger workers.

Unlike their younger peers, older workers not only have the necessary knowledge to share with others on the job, but an increased motivation to do so. Both organizations and individuals can benefit from tapping into older people's motivation to mentor.

A study from psychological scientists Stephan Boehm, Florian Kunze and Heike Bruch of University of St. Gallen found that age diversity in the workplace can even benefit an organization's bottom line.

Over 14,000 employees from 93 German companies participated in a survey measuring perceptions of a company's age-inclusiveness and age diversity (e.g. age-neutral recruiting policies, equal access to training for all age groups, and age-neutral career and promotion systems). Companies that were rated as more age-inclusive and diverse also enjoyed stronger financial performance, return on assets, and employee productivity.

By employing strategies based on science, policymakers and organizations have the best chance of successfully meeting the economic, cultural, and technical needs of the aging workforce.

## References

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