

# Preventing ageism

“The rise of HRW is tightly linked to the use of digital technologies. Unfortunately, significant stereotypes relate to age and the use of these technologies. If these stereotypes are not considered and mitigated, in addition to essentialising employees, they might divide the work teams and create inequalities.



## What is ageism?

« Old people can't use a computer. », « Ask the trainee to create the PowerPoint, young people know how it works! » Who has never heard this type of phrase at work?

According to the World Health Organization « **Ageism refers to the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination towards others or oneself based on age.** » It is generally understood as the experience of old people (or people perceived as old), but it also pertains to young people.

There are a lot of stereotypes about age and work: young people would be less skilled and lazy when older employees would be strict and unable to adapt to new forms of work...

We also tend to categorise generations (millennials, boomers, gen Z...) by assign them specific traits, interests, and skills, hence contributing to **essentialising them and reducing them to stereotyped representations.**

# Ageism in remote and hybrid work (HRW)



The rise of HRW is tightly linked to the use of digital technologies. Unfortunately, **significant stereotypes relate to age and the use of these technologies:**

- We tend to assume that young people are comfortable with technology, computers, and software used for work
- On the contrary, we expect older employees to encounter difficulties and to be less skilled when it comes to these issues

**If these stereotypes are not considered and mitigated, in addition to essentialising employees, they might divide the work teams and create inequalities.**

For example:

- Young employees **will not be trained** to use digital work tools during their onboarding as they are assumed to already have mastered them
- They will be **given specific tasks** without any certainty that they have the proper skills to complete them: create a PowerPoint presentation, revise and edit a document, update the website...
- Conversely, older employees will be assumed not to be skilled in the use of the same tools, which may lead to **tasks or projects not being assigned to them**, or **bypassing their application** for a fully remote position
- They may be perceived as **out of touch with their time** without this being justified or true, and be excluded from the work collective
- Regardless of their age, employees who struggle with new technology **may not feel comfortable sharing their difficulties** and try to overcompensate, leading to stress and fatigue

# Preventing ageism in HRW

- ✓ When recruiting, avoid biased phrasing such as “We are looking for a dynamic person, comfortable with new technology.”
- ✓ Set a **shared foundation** regarding the digital tools every employee should master
- ✓ Regularly assess employees’ mastery of digital tools **and offer training session to bring them up to standard regardless of age**
- ✓ **Include familiarising oneself with digital tools in the new employees’ onboarding programme**
- ✓ **Encourage sharing knowledge and skills** with mentoring and reverse mentoring programmes
- ✓ **Normalise asking for help**
- ✓ **Provide tutorials on how to use digital working tools.** For example, how to edit a text in Word, how to create a PowerPoint presentation, how to use Teams or Slack features effectively...
- ✓ **Mitigate stereotypes linked to age and generations**, especially for managers and recruiting teams
- ✓ **Analyse HR data** to detect inequalities related to age in recruitment, career development and training plans
- ✓ **Involve employees of all ages** when elaborating working methods and choosing working tools



## References

- World Health Organization, Ageing: ageism - <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism>