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ACCORD: A Framework for Managing Intergenerational Differences at Work

From stereotypes to mutual understanding, inclusion and performance

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Abstract

This article presents ACCORD, a framework for managing age-related and intergenerational tensions at work, grounded in psychological contract theory and organizational justice theory. ACCORD comprises six sequenced actions: testing assumptions, agreeing communication norms, encouraging contribution and voice, providing opportunities to grow, making reciprocal expectations explicit, and reviewing data. Four cross-cutting principles underpin them: dignity, fairness, inclusion and mutual accountability. The article distinguishes age from generation, tenure and authority; specifies the responsibilities of employers, managers and employees; and offers two practical tools, a diagnostic and an expectations exchange, together with organizational indicators.

Keywords: *age diversity; Generation Z; intergenerational relations; organizational justice; psychological contract*

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Introduction

Managers sometimes mistake disagreement for disrespect and initiative for indiscipline. Employees, meanwhile, may mistake legitimate supervision for resistance to change. When the two people involved are of different ages, both sides readily reach for the same explanation: the generation gap.

That explanation is usually too convenient. A younger professional may want rapid feedback, autonomy and room to try new technologies; an experienced manager may prize operational discipline, established procedures and accountability. The disagreement may have less to do with generational identity than with experience, position, communication habits or perceptions of fairness. A meta-analysis found that generational differences in work attitudes are small and inconsistent (Costanza et al., 2012), and a consensus report of the U.S. National Academies concluded that generational categories are not a sound basis for workforce management, because research rarely separates generational effects from those of age and historical period (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2020).

Getting the diagnosis wrong is costly. Gallup estimates that replacing an employee costs roughly one-half to two times their annual salary, a figure that varies by role and circumstance, and reports that 52% of voluntary leavers believed their manager or organization could have prevented their departure (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). Development is a frequent gap: in Deloitte's 2025 survey, about half of Gen Z respondents said they wanted their managers to teach and mentor them, but only 36% said this was happening (Deloitte, 2025).

Age, seniority and authority are not the same. This article distinguishes four things that are often conflated: *age* (how old someone is), *generation* (the birth cohort they belong to), *seniority or tenure* (how long they have been in the organization or occupation), and *authority* (their formal power over others). A 35-year-old supervisor may manage a 55-year-old employee; a younger manager may have more technical expertise than an older subordinate; two employees of the same age may have very different experience. Many differences attributed to generation are better explained by career stage, tenure or position (NASEM, 2020; Rudolph & Zacher, 2017). ACCORD therefore addresses the relationship between

employees, their managers and their employers, whatever their ages, while remaining alert to age-related assumptions.

ACCORD is a framework for managing age-related and intergenerational tensions at work, without assuming that every disagreement between people of different ages is generational. Its six connected actions help managers recognize differences without stereotyping, promote inclusion without compromising performance, and clarify what each party can reasonably expect of the other. It is designed for line managers, HR professionals and organizational leaders, and for students analysing cases of intergenerational conflict, early-career retention and leadership.

1. Conceptual Foundations

Two ideas underpin ACCORD: the psychological contract and organizational justice. **Psychological contract theory explains what the parties believe they owe one another. Organizational justice theory explains how they judge the fairness of decisions, treatment and processes. ACCORD translates both into managerial action.** Research on stereotyping, voice, mentoring and retention informs the individual actions.

1.1 Psychological contract theory

Psychological contract theory concerns individuals' beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between themselves and their employer (Rousseau, 1989, 1995). Beyond the formal contract of employment, employees develop expectations about fair treatment, development, recognition, flexibility and opportunities to contribute. Employers and managers, in turn, expect competence, commitment, reliable performance, professional conduct and respect for legitimate procedures. Underlying the contract is the norm of reciprocity described in social exchange theory: working relationships last when contributions on each side are returned over time (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner, 1960).

When either party believes the other has failed to meet its obligations, the consequences are significant. A meta-analysis found that perceived psychological contract breach is associated with lower trust, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and performance, and with higher intentions to leave (Zhao et al., 2007). Breach is most likely when expectations are implicit, inconsistent or formed on different assumptions. A younger employee who expects rapid advancement may be disappointed by a conventional promotion structure; a supervisor who expects independent judgement *within* established procedures may interpret unauthorized experimentation as irresponsibility (Rousseau, 1995).

1.2 Organizational justice theory

Organizational justice theory explains how people judge fairness. Colquitt (2001) distinguished four dimensions: distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of decision processes), interpersonal justice (respectful treatment) and informational justice (adequate and truthful explanations). Meta-analytic evidence shows that each dimension predicts outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, trust and performance (Colquitt et al., 2001). The distinctions matter in relationships across age and seniority: employees may accept an unfavourable decision when they understand the reasons, have been heard and believe the process was fair, while even an attractive pay package can be undermined by disrespect, exclusion or arbitrary treatment.

1.3 The central proposition

Combining these two theories, ACCORD advances the following proposition:

> *Managers can address workplace differences more effectively by testing assumptions, establishing clear communication and decision practices, encouraging contribution and reciprocal learning, clarifying mutual obligations, and evaluating outcomes within a context of dignity, fairness and inclusion.*

Appendix A maps each action to these two theories and to the research that supports it.

1.4 Context: national culture and beyond

Relationships across age and seniority are shaped by context as well as by individuals. Syed and Özbilgin's (2009) relational framework shows that diversity practices operate at three interacting levels: the macro

(national culture, institutions and law), the meso (organizational systems and culture) and the micro (individual identities and relationships). ACCORD asks managers to consider each action at all three levels.

National culture shapes how age and seniority are read at work. Where power distance is high, deference to seniority is widely expected, and employees who hold such values are less likely to speak up to their managers (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009). Behaviour that one setting treats as healthy challenge may be read in another as disrespect, and silence that one manager takes as agreement may signal deference or caution. Culture is nonetheless a weak guide to any individual. A meta-analysis of 558 studies using Hofstede's framework found that, averaged across four cultural value dimensions, approximately 80% of the variation lay *within* countries rather than between them; even for power distance only about 21% of the variation was between countries (Taras et al., 2016). Assumed cultural traits can also mislead. A meta-analysis of attitudes toward older adults found them more negative in Eastern than in Western societies, contrary to the common belief that Eastern cultures revere their elders, and identified rapid population ageing as a predictor of negative attitudes (North & Fiske, 2015).

Generational labels travel poorly. Popular categories such as Baby Boomers and Generation Z largely reflect Western, and particularly American, historical experience, yet the events that shape a birth cohort differ from one country to another, and reviews of the evidence note that generational research has given little attention to national context (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Demography differs too. Some countries have ageing and shrinking workforces, while others, including many in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, have young and growing populations (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2024). The age profile of a workplace, and therefore who manages whom, varies accordingly.

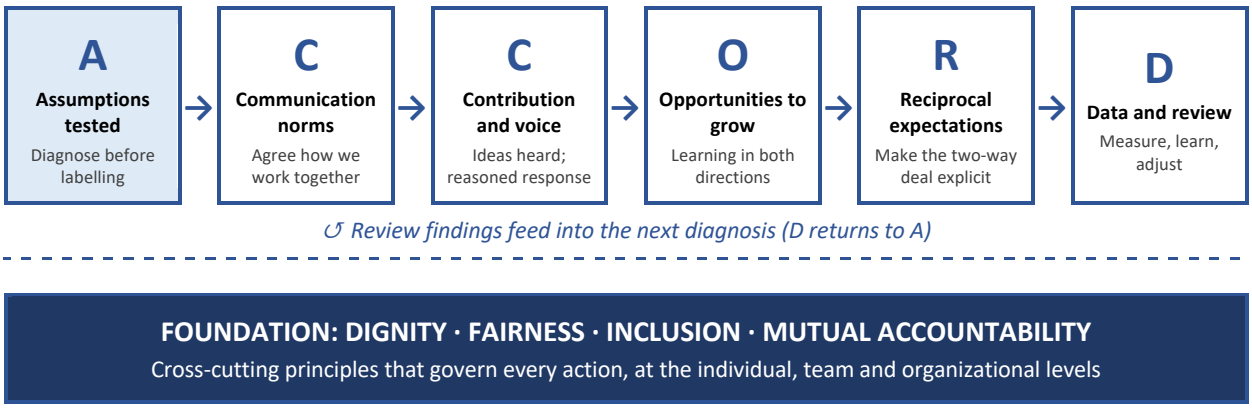
Institutions add a further layer. Legal protection against age discrimination and the policies that govern work at different ages vary considerably between countries (WHO, 2021), and occupational norms vary within them: a manufacturing plant, a hospital and a software start-up in the same city may treat seniority very differently. Managers should therefore distinguish national culture from organizational hierarchy, occupational norms, regional and educational background, and individual religious practice, and should avoid replacing generational stereotypes with national ones.

2. The ACCORD Framework

Figure 1 presents ACCORD as six actions that spell the framework's name in the order a manager would use them. The starting point is diagnosis, because an inaccurate reading of the problem leads to the wrong intervention. Review comes last because evidence may show that the original diagnosis or the agreed arrangements need to change, which sends the manager back to the first action. The band beneath the actions holds four principles that apply at every step: dignity, fairness, inclusion and mutual accountability.

Figure 1

The ACCORD Framework



Note. Read from left to right, starting with "Assumptions tested". Managers may return to an earlier action at any point; the sequence is a guide for practice.

3. The Six Actions

A. Assumptions Tested: Diagnose Before Labelling

"Gen Z employees dislike authority." "Older managers resist technology." Statements like these feel like explanations, but they usually end the inquiry just when it should begin. A younger employee challenging a procedure may have spotted a genuine inefficiency; an experienced manager rejecting a proposal may be weighing safety, cost or compliance rather than opposing innovation. The first ACCORD action is therefore to test assumptions about age, generation or seniority before acting on them.

Such assumptions are widespread. The World Health Organization estimates that one in two people worldwide hold moderately or highly ageist attitudes, and notes that ageism affects younger as well as older people (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). At work, common stereotypes about older workers, such as lower performance or resistance to change, receive little empirical support yet still influence decisions (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Merely expecting to be stereotyped by another age group can make people interact less openly (Finkelstein et al., 2015).

Separating behaviour from judgements about the person also matters for feedback. A meta-analysis of feedback interventions found that feedback improves performance on average, but over one-third of interventions reduced performance, particularly when feedback directed attention to the self rather than the task (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

What managers should do. Ask what the employee actually did, what circumstances may explain it, and whether the same standard would be applied to someone of a different age or tenure in a comparable role. Separate performance problems from personality judgements, and cite specific examples of behaviour.

What employers should do. Include age within diversity, equity and inclusion strategy, and review recruitment language, appraisal, promotion and access to training for age-related bias. Training should build skills in recognizing assumptions and applying consistent standards; lectures on supposed generational traits achieve little. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that diversity training is more likely to produce meaningful and sustained outcomes when it includes skills development, is reinforced over time, and forms part of broader organizational initiatives (Bezrukova et al., 2016). A study of 708 U.S. private-sector establishments found that structures assigning responsibility for diversity were more effective than training alone (Kalev et al., 2006).

> ***Workplace example:*** *A supervisor describes a new recruit as impatient because she requests frequent feedback. Instead of treating this as a generational trait, the supervisor checks whether she understands performance expectations and whether the existing feedback process is adequate.*

C. Communication Norms: Establish Respectful Working Relationships

Two people can share the same goal and still misread each other daily. One employee may prefer brief digital messages; another expects formal emails or face-to-face discussion. Informality that one person regards as openness may be read by another as disrespect, and silence in meetings may reflect deference, uncertainty or fear of criticism as easily as lack of interest. No style is inherently superior, but workplace communication must be clear, professional and suited to the task.

The quality of the manager–employee relationship has measurable consequences. Leader–member exchange theory holds that managers develop relationships of differing quality with each member of their team (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), and a meta-analysis of leader–member exchange research found that higher-quality relationships are associated with better performance, satisfaction and commitment, and with lower turnover intentions (Dulebohn et al., 2012). For newcomers, role clarity and social acceptance are among the strongest predictors of successful adjustment (Bauer et al., 2007), which is why explicit norms matter most early in a working relationship.

In practice, this means settling the basics early: which channel to use for what, expected response times, forms of address, how meetings run, how often feedback is given and how problems are escalated. Managers should be explicit about which decisions need formal approval and which can be handled informally, and they should ask for feedback on their own communication. Dignity at work is non-negotiable in both directions: disagreement must never involve humiliation, ridicule or personal attack.

Employers set the boundaries within which these conversations take place. That means enforceable policies on respectful behaviour, bullying, harassment and grievances; supervisor training in

constructive feedback and conflict resolution; accommodation of religious and cultural practice without pressure in either direction; and safe, credible channels for raising concerns.

Consider a newly hired engineer and her production manager. In their first week they agree that urgent production issues call for a phone call, routine updates can go by message, and any proposal affecting safety or operating procedures must be documented and approved before it is implemented. The conversation takes ten minutes and settles questions that would otherwise surface months later as complaints about attitude.

C. Contribution and Voice: Encourage Ideas Without Abandoning Accountability

An employee who is ignored often stops speaking up, or starts acting without permission. Both are costly. In hierarchical organizations, junior employees may hesitate to question established practice, while those encouraged to innovate may misunderstand the limits of their authority. Managers need employees who speak up, but they also need decisions to be made through proper channels.

Employees engage in learning and speaking up when they believe interpersonal risk-taking will not lead to embarrassment or punishment (Edmondson, 1999). A meta-analysis confirmed that psychological safety is associated with voice, learning behaviour and task performance (Frazier et al., 2017). Leaders' openness is a key signal: employees speak up more when they perceive their managers as open to input (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2014).

The workable approach is to separate the right to propose from the right to decide. Managers should invite ideas from employees at every career stage, listen before judging, explain their decisions and recognize useful contributions. They should also specify **decision rights**: what employees may change on their own, what requires consultation, and what requires formal authorization.

Employers can support this with a clear route from idea to pilot, including small budgets and defined approval steps, with cross-age project teams and improvement workshops, and with assurance that speaking up carries no career penalty. Inclusion does not require accepting every suggestion. It requires fair consideration and a reasoned response, which is the essence of procedural and informational justice (Colquitt, 2001).

Suppose a junior employee proposes a digital monitoring system. The manager asks for a short business case, works through the operational risks with him and authorizes a limited pilot with agreed performance measures. The employee gets a fair hearing, and the plant keeps control of its processes.

O. Opportunities to Grow: Promote Development and Reciprocal Learning

In many workplaces, formal mentoring assumes that knowledge flows from senior to junior employees. ACCORD asks managers to make it flow both ways. Development matters at every career stage, although immediate needs differ. Early-career employees may need technical guidance, organizational knowledge, feedback and exposure to decision-making; experienced employees may benefit from new digital skills and fresh perspectives.

Mentoring is associated with better career outcomes such as promotion, compensation and satisfaction, although effects depend on relationship quality and programme design (Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2008). Reverse mentoring, in which a junior employee mentors a senior colleague, can build learning and relationships in both directions (Murphy, 2012). Contact between groups also matters: across 515 studies, intergroup contact was associated with reduced prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and interventions that bring generations together reduce ageist attitudes toward older adults (Burnes et al., 2019; WHO, 2021). Most of this evidence comes from outside the workplace and concerns attitudes toward older people, so organizations should track whether their own programmes improve relationships in both directions (Action D).

For managers, this starts with regular conversations about development goals and skill gaps, followed by coaching and stretch assignments. Development also includes helping people see how their work matters to the organization and to the people it serves: across 259 studies, motivational job characteristics, among them task significance, explained about a third of the variance in job satisfaction (Humphrey et al., 2007). Pairing less-experienced employees with colleagues who hold relevant expertise is the obvious step; recognizing what newer employees can teach is the one most often missed. Employers provide the structures: formal and reverse mentoring, job rotations and cross-age learning teams, matched to development needs, together with transparent access to development and promotion criteria linked to performance.

For example, an experienced production manager might mentor a newly appointed engineer in safety, supplier relationships and operational judgement, while the engineer helps the manager evaluate digital dashboards and new production technologies. Each sets explicit learning objectives at the start and reports progress against them at review.

R. Reciprocal Expectations: Make the Two-Way Deal Explicit

Much workplace resentment begins with an expectation nobody said out loud. A productive working relationship depends on obligations that run in both directions (Rousseau, 1995). Conflict arises when one party emphasizes its own expectations while overlooking the other's, or when expectations are never stated. Each side then keeps a mental list of the other's failures ("he ignores procedures" against "he ignores my ideas") without ever having said what it expects. Because perceived breach damages trust, commitment and retention (Zhao et al., 2007), making expectations explicit is one of the most practical steps a manager can take. Research on realistic job previews points the same way: realistic information at entry lowers inflated expectations and is associated with modestly higher retention (Premack & Wanous, 1985).

Table 1 lists expectations that commonly surface. They are framed by role, not by age: they apply whether the manager is older or younger than the employee. Judgements about how much autonomy to grant should depend on demonstrated competence, risk and performance, not on age.

Table 1

Reciprocal Expectations Between Employees and Managers or Employers

Employees may reasonably expect from managers and employers	Managers and employers may reasonably expect from employees
Fair compensation and transparent decisions	Reliable performance and professional commitment
Constructive feedback and development	Willingness to learn and respond to feedback
Opportunities to contribute ideas	Evidence-based proposals and respect for decision procedures
Reasonable flexibility and work–life balance	Accountability for agreed work arrangements
Dignity, respect and inclusion	Respectful conduct toward colleagues
Consistency between organizational values and practices	Responsible conduct consistent with organizational policies

Requests for individual arrangements, such as flexible hours or remote work, are a common test of reciprocity. Such "i-deals" can benefit both employee and employer, but co-workers may react negatively unless the arrangements are seen as fair and legitimate (Rousseau et al., 2006). In a randomized trial with 1,612 employees of a Chinese technology company, working from home two days a week reduced quit rates by one-third without affecting performance or promotion over two years (Bloom et al., 2024). The staff were mainly graduates in desk-based roles, so the result makes a case for piloting flexibility; it does not predict outcomes in operational jobs. At the other extreme, meta-analytic evidence suggests that very high levels of remote work can weaken relationships with co-workers (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), which is why agreed availability and review dates matter. Workload belongs in the same conversation. The World Health Organization's guidelines on mental health at work identify heavy workloads among the main risks and recommend training managers to prevent stressful working conditions and to respond to employees in distress (WHO, 2022).

What managers should do. Use the expectations exchange (Section 4.2) to discuss performance targets, decision authority, development, working arrangements and professional conduct. Assess requests for flexibility or additional reward against organizational constraints, consistency and contribution, and explain the reasons for decisions.

What employers should do. Maintain transparent and equitable pay policies with regular market benchmarking, credible performance management, fair promotion procedures and clearly communicated flexibility arrangements, so that the deal does not depend on one manager's discretion.

Reciprocity should not be confused with a transactional bargain in which every benefit must produce an immediate return. Dignity, legal entitlements and fair treatment are obligations in their own right. Nor

is responsibility equal: managers and employers hold more formal power and therefore carry particular obligations.

> ***Workplace example:*** *An employee requests greater flexibility to work remotely. The manager considers operational requirements and agrees a three-month trial with clear availability expectations, performance indicators and a review date. In return, the employee commits to responsiveness during agreed hours and to flagging problems early.*

D. Data and Review: Measure Progress and Adjust Practices

What is not measured tends to be explained by anecdote, and anecdote is where generational stereotypes thrive. Organizations may introduce training, mentoring or flexible work without checking whether these improve employee experience or organizational outcomes. Yet the conversations that prevent avoidable departures are often missing: in Gallup's research, 51% of employees who left voluntarily said that in the three months before they left, no manager had spoken with them about their job satisfaction or future (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). A meta-analysis of turnover research identifies job attitudes and the quality of relationships with leaders among the consistent predictors of voluntary departure (Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Evidence also links age-inclusive practice to organizational results: firms with age-inclusive HR practices report a more positive age-diversity climate, which in turn is associated with better firm performance and lower turnover intentions (Boehm et al., 2014). Because managers strongly shape team engagement (Gallup, 2025), and global engagement fell to 20% in 2025 (Gallup, 2026), monitoring how employees experience their managers is particularly important.

Within a team, the manager reviews agreed objectives, feedback, performance and unresolved concerns, and holds **stay interviews**, asking "What keeps you here? What might make you leave?", before problems turn into resignations. Review also closes the loop: was the original diagnosis accurate, and did the intervention address the underlying problem?

Across the organization, employers can monitor engagement, voluntary turnover, promotion, participation in development and grievances, broken down by age band *and* by tenure and grade where lawful and appropriate, so that age effects are not confused with seniority effects (Appendix B). Exit interviews conducted through HR, with reasons coded against the six ACCORD actions, and confidential feedback add the context that numbers lack. Small differences should not be over-interpreted, not every difference reflects discrimination, and demographic data must be handled responsibly.

Suppose HR launches a mentoring programme and, a year later, finds high participation alongside continuing reports from early-career employees that they have few chances to contribute. The evidence points to managerial practice under Contribution and voice, and more mentoring will not fix it.

4. Putting ACCORD into Practice

ACCORD can be used in onboarding, performance discussions, team meetings, conflict resolution and organizational reviews. It is most useful when a disagreement is being explained as a clash between generations. Two tools translate it into action: the ACCORD diagnostic and the expectations exchange.

4.1 The ACCORD diagnostic

The diagnostic is a structured conversation guide. It assesses the relationship or the system, never the person. The manager and the employee can each answer the questions separately and then compare their views. Where a direct conversation is inappropriate, for example because of a power imbalance or unresolved conflict, HR can administer the diagnostic confidentially and share only aggregated themes. In case analysis, students answer each question from each protagonist's perspective and cite evidence from the case.

Table 2

The ACCORD Diagnostic

Action	Diagnostic question	Evidence and views of each party	Agreed action, owner and review date
Assumptions tested	Are we judging behaviour, or making assumptions about age, generation or seniority?		
Communication norms	Are expectations about communication, conduct and decision authority clear and agreed?		
Contribution and voice	Can people propose ideas and raise concerns safely, and do they receive a reasoned response?		
Opportunities to grow	Is there equitable access to feedback, mentoring, learning and career progression?		
Reciprocal expectations	Do both parties know what they expect of each other, and is each meeting its obligations?		
Data and review	Do we know whether our actions are improving relationships and outcomes?		

Rather than applying numerical cut-offs, prioritize the actions where there is (a) clear evidence of a problem, (b) material disagreement between the parties about what is happening, or (c) significant organizational risk, such as safety, legal exposure or the likely loss of valued employees. Disagreement between the parties is itself informative and may reveal unspoken expectations, differing interpretations or competing interests.

4.2 The expectations exchange

The expectations exchange turns psychological contract theory into a 15–20 minute conversation. It can be used at onboarding, after a promotion or change of manager, when a flexibility request is made, or whenever a disagreement is attributed to "the generation gap". Each party first answers the questions privately, then they compare answers and agree commitments.

Table 3

The Expectations Exchange: Four Questions

Question	Purpose	Suggested time
1. What do I expect from you?	Makes implicit expectations explicit	5 minutes (written individually)
2. What can you reasonably expect from me?	Clarifies one's own obligations and builds reciprocity	Completed with question 1
3. Where do our expectations differ?	Locates likely sources of perceived breach before they cause conflict	5–10 minutes (discussion)
4. What specific commitments will we make, and when will we review them?	Converts discussion into accountable, time-bound commitments	5 minutes (agree and record)

Commitments should be specific ("weekly 15-minute check-in on Mondays" rather than "more feedback"), recorded briefly, and reviewed on an agreed date, typically after three to six months or when circumstances change. Where one party holds more power, the manager should speak second on question 1 so as not to anchor the discussion.

Safeguard. Speaking second does not remove a power imbalance. Where there is a significant power imbalance, unresolved conflict, or concern about retaliation, the discussion may be facilitated by HR or another neutral person. Employees should not be expected to negotiate statutory rights or basic

standards of dignity and fair treatment; these are obligations, not bargaining items. Complaints about harassment, discrimination or misconduct belong in formal procedures, not in an expectations exchange.

4.3 From diagnosis to action

1. **Describe the problem in behavioural terms**: what happened, when, and with what effect.
2. **Work through the diagnostic** (Table 2), separately and then together.
3. **Prioritize** one or two actions using the criteria in Section 4.1.
4. **Agree specific actions**, an owner for each, and a review date, recorded in the final column of Table 2.
5. **Review** on the agreed date, using the indicators in Appendix B where relevant, and return to the first action if the original diagnosis proves wrong.

5. Responsibilities of Managers, Employees and Employers

ACCORD assumes that productive working relationships require contributions from all three parties (Table 4). This reflects the reciprocal logic of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995) while recognizing that obligations are not symmetrical.

Table 4

Responsibilities Under ACCORD

Party	Core responsibilities
Managers	Set clear expectations; listen; treat employees with dignity; give feedback; apply standards consistently; balance individual preferences against operational requirements
Employees	Perform competently; communicate professionally; respect legitimate procedures; raise concerns constructively; remain open to learning from colleagues with different experience
Employers	Provide fair HR policies, accessible grievance procedures, development opportunities, appropriate pay and recognition, and mechanisms for addressing discrimination and misconduct

Employers and managers hold greater formal authority and therefore carry particular obligations to ensure fairness, dignity and lawful treatment. Employee accountability must not be used to excuse discriminatory practices or unreasonable working conditions. Nor should inclusion be read as an absence of standards: a respectful workplace can maintain demanding performance expectations, enforce safety procedures and address misconduct while giving employees the opportunity to explain their actions and improve.

6. Contribution and Further Development

6.1 The contribution of ACCORD

ACCORD provides a structured way to address workplace tensions that are often attributed to generational differences, an explanation that recent reviews of the evidence find weak (NASEM, 2020; Rudolph et al., 2021). It begins by examining the actual source of a disagreement, then connects communication, employee voice, development and reciprocal expectations to decisions that managers and employers can take. Its final action, data and review, ensures that those decisions are revisited in the light of experience and evidence.

ACCORD brings these practices together by focusing on what happens between managers and employees. It treats age, generation, experience and authority as different things, holds both parties to their responsibilities, and recognizes that the relationship is shaped by organizational policy as well as individual behaviour. The diagnostic and the expectations exchange make it usable in management development, organizational practice and teaching.

Existing models, including the Include, Individualize and Integrate (3i) approach to age-inclusive organizational practice (Parker & Andrei, 2020; Andrei & Parker, 2022) and the framework proposed by Ropes and Ypsilanti (2016), address intergenerational relations at the organizational level. ACCORD

complements this work by focusing on how managers and employees understand their obligations to each other, handle their differences and assess the results of their decisions.

6.2 Further development and application

ACCORD also opens up opportunities for empirical research. Field studies could examine how its diagnostic and expectations exchange influence managerial relationships, employee voice and retention over time. Comparative studies across industries and national contexts, including high power-distance settings of the kind described in Section 1.4, would help establish where the framework works best and how it can be adapted.

In application, ACCORD operates within employment law, collective agreements and formal procedures for harassment and discrimination; serious misconduct belongs in those procedures. It also works best when conversation is combined with evidence. Diagnostic discussions capture how each party sees the relationship, and the indicators in Appendix B show whether those views are borne out across the organization.

Conclusion

Managers do not need to memorize the supposed traits of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials or Generation Z. Those labels oversimplify behaviour and invite stereotypes (NASEM, 2020). What managers need is a disciplined way of working: test assumptions, agree how to communicate and decide, open voice, build growth in both directions, make mutual expectations explicit, and review the evidence. The same discipline applies to tensions rooted in professional background, tenure or position.

Effective intergenerational management does not ask one generation to accommodate another. It builds working relationships in which differences are understood, dignity is protected, contributions are valued, and both sides keep their side of the bargain.

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Appendix A: Theoretical Foundations and Supporting Evidence

Table A1 maps each ACCORD action to the two principal theories set out in Section 1 and to the main research that supports it.

Table A1

Principal Theories and Supporting Evidence for Each ACCORD Action

ACCORD action	Link to the principal theories	Supporting evidence
Assumptions tested	Procedural and interpersonal justice: decisions free of bias and stereotyping	Age stereotypes (Posthuma & Campion, 2009); meta-stereotypes (Finkelstein et al., 2015); lifespan perspective (Rudolph & Zacher, 2017); diversity training and accountability (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Kalev et al., 2006); combined anti-ageism strategies of policy, education and intergenerational contact (Burnes et al., 2019; WHO, 2021)
Communication norms	Interpersonal and informational justice; clarity about obligations	Leader–member exchange (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995); newcomer adjustment (Bauer et al., 2007)
Contribution and voice	Procedural justice: a fair hearing and reasoned response	Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Frazier et al., 2017); employee voice (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2014)
Opportunities to grow	Employer obligations for development in the psychological contract	Mentoring (Allen et al., 2004; Eby et al., 2008); reverse mentoring (Murphy, 2012); intergroup and intergenerational contact (Burnes et al., 2019; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)
Reciprocal expectations	The psychological contract itself; distributive justice	Contract breach (Zhao et al., 2007); idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau et al., 2006); flexible work (Bloom et al., 2024)
Data and review	Accountability for fair outcomes over time	Diversity accountability structures (Kalev et al., 2006); age-diversity climate (Boehm et al., 2014); turnover antecedents (Rubenstein et al., 2018)

Appendix B: Organizational Indicators for Data and Review

Table B1 lists indicators employers can use to review progress. Benchmarks should come from internal trends over time, relevant external comparisons (for example, sector salary surveys or engagement norms) and the organization's particular circumstances. Where results are compared across age bands, they should also be compared across tenure and grade, so that age effects are not confused with seniority effects. Report data only in groups large enough to protect anonymity and in line with data-protection law.

Table B1

Indicators for Monitoring ACCORD

Action	Indicator	Definition	How to interpret
A, C	Age-inclusion climate	Average score on a short set of survey items on fair treatment regardless of age (see Boehm et al., 2014)	Compare across age, tenure and grade groups and over time
C	Manager relationship quality	Share of employees agreeing "I have a trusting relationship with my manager"	Track by team and over time; investigate teams that diverge from the organizational trend
C	Ideas submitted	Number of improvement ideas submitted, by submitter's career stage	Falling volumes may signal reduced confidence in being heard
C	Ideas receiving a reasoned response	Ideas that received a documented decision with reasons ÷ ideas submitted	The key fairness indicator: ACCORD promises a fair hearing, not automatic approval
C	Ideas approved for pilot	Ideas approved for a pilot ÷ ideas submitted	Interpret with care: low rates may reflect idea quality, budgets or safety requirements, not only managerial dismissal
O	Mentoring participation and quality	Percentage of employees participating in relevant mentoring or reciprocal learning arrangements, reported by career stage, together with participant feedback and progress against agreed development objectives	Check that experienced as well as early-career employees take part, and that participation translates into development
O	Early-tenure mentoring coverage (supplementary)	Employees in their first three years with an active mentor ÷ all employees in their first three years	Useful for onboarding, but not a substitute for the indicator above
O	Time to first promotion	Median months from joining to first promotion	Compare cohorts over time and against stated promotion criteria
R	Pay-to-market ratio	Employee pay ÷ market median for the same role and grade, from a reputable salary survey	Review trends, especially for high performers and in periods of high inflation
D	Early-tenure voluntary attrition	Of employees hired in a defined period (e.g., a calendar year), the percentage who leave voluntarily within 24 months of their own start date. Report each cohort only after all its members have completed 24 months or left.	Compare successive hiring cohorts; analyse by role, grade and age band
D	Regretted attrition	High performers who leave voluntarily in a year ÷ average number of high performers in that year	Investigate any sustained increase, using exit-interview data
D	Stay and exit interview coverage	Exit interviews held ÷ voluntary leavers; stay interviews held ÷ target employees	Low coverage limits what the organization can learn; code reasons against the six actions