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Research Article

Gender and Age as Determinants of Innovative Work Behaviour Among Public Non-Formal Education Employees in Southwestern Nigeria

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study explored gender and age as determinants of Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) among public non-formal education employees in southwestern Nigeria. The study employed the explanatory sequential mixed-method design and purposive sampling procedure was used to enumerate 208 non-formal education employees of the officer cadres and above from five states in Southwestern Nigeria. The instruments used were IWB Questionnaire and the interview guide, respectively. The quantitative data were analysed with the aid of simple statistics, t-test, and Analysis of Variance while the qualitative data were content-analysed. The findings indicated that the public non-formal education employees exhibited high degree of opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea promotion, idea realisation and idea sustainability, respectively. The results indicated that there were significant differences in innovative work behaviour on the basis of age. This was in favour of those public non-formal education employees from thirty years of age and above compared with their counterparts who were below such age. Lastly, the result revealed that the public non-formal education employees innovative work behaviour did not differ on the basis of the employee's gender. This means that there was no significant difference between male and female non-formal education employees' ability to embrace innovative work behaviour in the course of monitoring, evaluating and implementing the Agency's literacy-oriented programmes. The study's findings have implications for promoting innovation and sustainability in non-formal education settings through competency development among employees. The findings further imply that non-formal education programs should prioritise innovation development strategies, particularly for younger employees. The finding implies that innovative work behaviour initiatives in non-formal education settings can be designed without gender bias by focusing on universal strategies that benefit all employees.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy skills occupy a great position towards personal development and nation's survival and progress. As possession of these skills would enhance citizens to understand written instructions, manage finances, perform civic duties among others. It makes citizen to not only promote openness to change but also stimulate creativity. This establishes that the literacy skills could go a long way to equip individuals within the society the prerequisite knowledge to blend with societal needs of the 21st century in particular and overall economic growth in general. However, the peculiarity of some potential individuals who for one reason or the other missed the literacy skills due to their inability to attend and enrol into formal educational programmes resulted into the official establishment of non-formal education programmes (Kester *et al.*, 2021).

In Nigeria, the principal mandate of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) and State Agencies for Mass Education/ State Agencies for Adult and Non-Formal Education (SAME/ AANFE) as publicly owned non-formal education bodies are to raise literacy levels among children, adults and youths who are not enrolled in formal school settings, with a particular target on women, nomads, and other vulnerable members of the society (Wami, 2022). At the federal stage, the NMEC is saddled with the responsibilities of setting literacy-oriented national policies and provides support to its sisters' organisations at the state levels, particularly SAME/AANFE. At the state levels, the SAME/ AANFE are in a position to implement these programmes, adapt literacy-oriented policies and mobilise resources to meet local needs and content, respectively.

In spite the establishment of NMEC and SAME at both federal and state levels, the non-literacy rate in the developing countries including Nigeria is on the high side. Globally, an estimated of 773 million youths and adults are still struggling with basic literacy, and 580 million of them are domiciled in E-9 countries (UNESCO, 2021). For example, 49.6%, 33.9%, 27.2%, and 19.5% of elementary school graduates in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Uganda, and Nigeria could read, write and perform basic arithmetic, leaving more than half of them non-literate (Van-Fleet, 2012). Aside from this, Aderinoye and Ladan (2021) acknowledged that the non-literate rate in Nigeria is on the high side to the level that one-third of children in Nigeria are not enrolled in either formal or non-formal educational settings, and even one in every three or four adults is non-literate.

However, it seems that for the employees of the State Agencies for Mass Education/ State Agencies for Adult and Non-Formal Education to attract the potential learners to enrol and achieve the literacy mandate, there is need to embrace innovative work behaviour in the course of monitoring, evaluating and implementing agencies' literacy programmes.

Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) refers to the employees' ability to explore opportunities, generate ideas from the explored opportunities, recognise the existence of such ideas, and implement ideas as well as sustain such ideas with a view to achieving organisation's goals and mandate (Lambriex-Schmitz, *et al.*, 2020). DaCosta and Loureiro (2019) concluded that all the novel ideas that usually emanate within the workplace is always a product of employees' IWB.

In this context, the IWB has five cyclical phases. Opportunity exploration gives room for examination of the efficacy of the prevailing working arrangement for improvement. Idea generation exists when innovative ideas are created to replace the existing ones. Idea promotion exists when a newly created idea is introduced and embraced at the workplace. Idea realisation takes place when operational solutions or insight for future analogous scenarios are provided. Lastly, idea sustainability exists when a newly created idea is promoted among employees.

However, observation indicated that most employees of the SAME lack potential to explore, generate, promote, realise and sustain literacy ideas within the agencies and beyond. For instance, majority of these employees do focus on traditional means of monitoring, evaluating and implementing routine literacy tasks. These employees seem to have lacked the ability to leverage digital tools to literacy instruction, attract literacy needy individuals to literacy centers, partner with non-governmental bodies for resources, collaborate to share novel literacy ideas among colleagues, and provide mobile literacy programmes outside the literacy centers among others. Literature indicated that employees' IWB could be strengthened or marred by employees' gender and age. SAME employees are expected to be without exception.

Think-innovation-think-male philosophy sees IWB as a masculine task (Luksyte, *et al.*, 2018; Bekele & Singh, 2022). This philosophy buttresses that males could embrace IWB and produce higher output than their female counterparts at the workplace. In another development, Bekele and Singh (2022) found that male employees exhibit higher levels of innovative work behaviour than female employees, and that these differences are statistically significant. Leong and Rasli (2014) and Dan *et al.* (2023) found that workers' innovative work behaviour was not influenced by gender.

Aslan and Kask (2018) noted that as an employee advances in age in the workplace, there is a tendency for the decline in his/her ability to embrace IWB. This showcases that the older employees may become more resistant to change, have physical and cognitive declines, and face age-related stereotypes which may in turn limit their creativity level and engagement ability, respectively. Ng and Feldman (2013) found that older workers engage in fewer innovation-related activities compared to their younger colleagues.

Previous studies on poor performance of SAME employees have focused largely on Personalized System of Instruction Kester and Okemakinde (2008), compensation, resource provision, allocation and utilisation (Oyelami & Alokun 2019; Jonathan, 2020; Kester & Owojuyigbe, 2021; Akinyooye & Osainika, 2022), available programmes, instructors, accessibility, clientele distribution, and facilities (Soyele & Egunyomi, 2020), insufficient classrooms, reading facilities, educational resources, and power supply (Joseph, *et al.*, 2014), the roles of the psychological, societal and economic factors on adult learners' decision to enrol and persist in the non-formal educational system (Aransi, 2019), influence of training opportunities (Ojo & Omoregie, 2018), with little or no attention paid to the extent to which gender and age determine SAME employees' IWB in Southwestern, Nigeria. Hence, the gap filled by this study.



1.1. Objectives of the study

The study's general objective was to examine demographic factors (gender, age, job tenure and educational qualifications) as determinants of Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) among employees of State Agencies for Mass Education (SAME) in Southwestern Nigeria, while specific objectives are to;

- i. investigate the extent to which SAME employees exhibit the elements consisted of opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea promotion, idea realisation, and idea sustainability and aggregate IWB;
- ii. explore how SAME employees' IWB differ on the basis of gender in southwestern, Nigeria; and
- iii. investigate the extent to which SAME employees' IWB

differ on the basis age in southwestern, Nigeria.

1.2. Research questions

The study was guided by the following questions.

- i. To what extent do SAME employees exhibit the elements consisted of opportunity exploration, idea generation, idea promotion, idea realisation, and idea sustainability and aggregate IWB?
- ii. How do SAME employees' IWB differ on the basis of gender in southwestern, Nigeria?
- iii. To what extent do SAME employees' IWB differ on the basis age in southwestern, Nigeria?

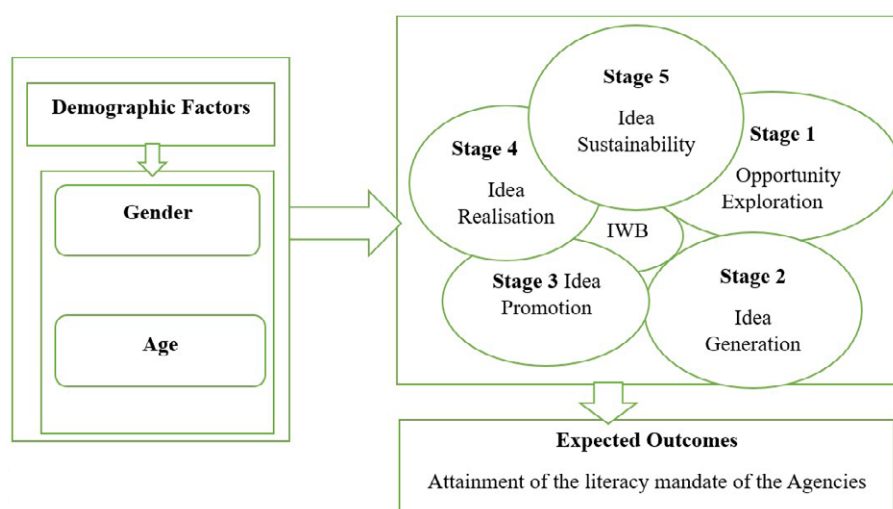


Figure 1. Study's conceptual framework

Source: Researchers' Initiative (2025)

Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework of the study. This framework shows the interplay among gender, age, and employees innovative work behaviour. The framework indicates that IWB in this study is cyclical in nature with five unique phases. However, there is need to note that not all employees could begin from exploring opportunities at the workplace. This means that the principles of division of labour and specialisation can be applied to allocate employees into any of the stages of innovative work behaviour at the workplace.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Demographic Factors and IWB of Employees

Bekele and Singh (2022) examined how workers' creative behaviour was affected by differences in demographic traits. The finding indicated that male workers have considerably higher levels of IWB compared to their female counterparts in the institutions. Second, according to educational background, the results showed that employees with more education demonstrate more innovative work practices. Last but not least, research indicates that people with greater experience have more innovative work practices.

This study corroborates the conclusions of Leong and Rasli (2014), which indicated no correlation between employees' innovative work habits and their educational attainment or sex. The findings of this research contradict those of Ng and

Feldman (2013), who found that older workers participate in fewer innovation-related activities compared to younger ones. Sari and Adi (2021) reported no significant difference in educational level and employees' IWB during the global pandemic.

Rauvola *et al.* (2020) concluded that workers of varying ages bring distinct work values to the workplace. Older workers typically base their work on their prior experiences. These senior workers' capacity for creative work will be limited as they become older since they will be less able to adjust to changes at work. Younger employees, on the other hand, seem more driven to engage in innovative behaviour since they value learning new things and are open to trying out different working methods.

Ng and Feldman (2013) believed that older workers—who often were in the middle or later phases of their careers—had a greater familiarity with the company's operations than younger workers. As they grew older, they were probably more knowledgeable and mature, which enabled them to take on creative endeavours and helped them approach difficulties from other perspectives. Yunus *et al.* (2014) discovered little disparity in the IWBs of male and female workers. Nonetheless, Bekele and Singh (2022) discovered that the levels of Innovative Work Behaviour shown by male and female workers differed statistically considerably.



Employees also have sexed expectations, which affect how individuals see themselves and behave at work (Dan *et al.*, 2023). Stereotypically, a female is thought to be more cooperative and compassionate, whereas a male is thought to be autonomous, determined, daring, and dedicated to the work. In light of this, individuals of either sex may encounter various obstacles and expectations that are a reflection of how their views on IWB have influenced them.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

The study employed explanatory sequential mixed-method design. This design encourages interweaving qualitative and quantitative data in such a way that research issues are meaningfully explained. The complementarity of the explanatory sequential mixed-method design allowed the researchers to first obtain the data via questionnaire and later explored the existing theme to design the qualitative section. This design was considered appropriate for this study, because it allowed collection of quantitative data from the public non-formal education employees and qualitative data from the heads of the non-formal education agency under investigation, respectively.

3.2. Population, sample and sampling technique

The two hundred and thirty-five (235) permanent employees of the public non-formal education agency specifically the State Agencies for Mass Education in the five southwestern states, Nigeria formed the target population. Two hundred and eight (208) SAME employees of the officer cadres and above (Level 8 and above) from five out of six southwestern states were purposively enumerated. These categories of the public non-formal education employees were purposively sampled due to the fact that they occupy key position in the monitoring, evaluation and implementation of the organisational exercises. Five heads of the public non-formal education Agencies were purposively sampled and engaged in Key Informant Interview (KII). They are in position to attest to whether the innovative work behaviour of the public non-formal education employees differ based on age and gender or not.

3.3. Instrument, validity and reliability

The instrument used has two sections. First section contained demographic characteristics of the respondents ranging from gender, age, educational qualification to job tenure. The second section was an adapted versions of the Innovative Work Behaviour Questionnaire (IWBQ) construct developed by Lambriex-Schmitz *et al.* (2020). This instrument had forty-four items used among academic and non-academic employees working in Vocational Education in Netherlands. Therefore, twenty-five out of forty-four items considered relevant were fine-tuned and used.

The instrument was subjected face and content validity. The reliability of the instruments was established by administering it to twenty-five (25) SAME employees from Lagos State. The study used the Cronbach alpha reliability approach which produced 0.863 and indicated that the instrument has a substantial degree of internal consistency.

3.4. Method of data analyses

The study used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software for data analysis. The research question number one was answered using descriptive statistical tools (Mean and Standard Deviation), while inferential statistical tools (t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to answer research question number two, respectively.

3.5. Ethical approval and considerations

The University of Ibadan Social Sciences Ethics Committee gave its approval with the assigned number UI/SSHREC/2023/0144. However, the ethical principles observed while on field comprised informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results based on research questions

Research question 1: To what extent do SAME employees exhibit the components of IWB (opportunity discovery, idea creation, idea promotion, idea realisation, and idea sustainability) and aggregate IWB in Southwestern Nigeria?

Table 1. Components and aggregate IWB as demonstrated by SAME employees in southwestern nigeria.

Descriptive Statistics	Mean (\bar{x})	St. Deviation	Interpretation/ Decision
Opportunity Exploration	3.12	0.81	High Extent
Idea Generation	3.27	0.79	High Extent
Idea Promotion	3.30	0.87	High Extent
Idea Realisation	3.37	0.74	High Extent
Idea Sustainability	3.22	0.79	High Extent
IWB	3.25	0.64	High Extent

4.2. Interpretation and discussion

Table 1 indicated that the employees of SAME maintained high opportunity exploration ($\bar{x}=3.12$; St. Dv. = 0.81), idea generation ($\bar{x}=3.27$; St. Dv. = 0.79), idea promotion ($\bar{x}=3.30$; St. Dv. = 0.87), idea realization ($\bar{x}=3.37$; St. Dv. = 0.74), idea sustainability ($\bar{x}=3.22$; St. Dv. = 0.79), and aggregate IWB ($\bar{x}=3.25$; St. Dv. = 0.64) against the threshold of 2.50.

The responses from the interviewed participants corroborated high degree of the exhibition of IWB among employees of the State Agencies for Mass Education as thus:

The permanent employees are currently in charge of running the literacy programs and supervising the literacy centers because the contracts of the part-time instructors have not been renewed yet (KII/OYO/DIRECTOR/MALE/2023).

Under my leadership, the agency has implemented innovative initiatives, including providing free materials like queen primers, writing materials, and reading resources to adult learners and instructors. This aims to reduce the financial burden on current students and attract new ones, increasing access to literacy programs and promoting a more inclusive learning environment (KII/EKITI/EXECUTIVE SECRETARY/



FEMALE/2023).

My officers have demonstrated exceptional innovation and resourcefulness, as evidenced by their successful facilitation of the first junior school certificate examination, BECE, for adult learners in the state in 2023, and they continue to effectively harness resources and explore opportunities to achieve the agency's literacy goals and mandate (KII/OGUN/DIRECTOR/FEMALE/2023).

My employees are proactive, keeping themselves informed about agency activities, exchanging ideas with facilitators, and suggesting innovative ideas to attract resources from stakeholders (KII/ONDO/DIRECTOR/MALE/2023).

This is to infer that the employees under investigation occasionally keep themselves informed about new concepts, get updated on developments from sister agencies, question traditional working methods, discuss potential changes, and exchange thoughts on recent developments with ad hoc literacy instructors to a high extent.

The employees frequently engage in idea generation activities, such as discussing personal ideas for improvement, suggesting new ideas, exchanging ideas on concrete changes, and expressing personal opinions on underlying problems facing literacy programmes with literacy instructors and co-employees to a high extent.

The SAME employees maintained a high level of idea promotion, frequently suggesting new ideas to authorized persons, promoting new ideas among colleagues and literacy instructors, and getting instructors acquainted with new methods, while discharging their literacy responsibilities to a high extent.

The SAME employees frequently supported the idea realisation component of the IWB to a high extent, by actively supporting literacy instructors in implementing developed ideas, testing solutions to emerging problems, monitoring progress, designing operational strategies, and keeping instructors informed about the progress of realising literacy ideas.

The SAME employees demonstrated a high level of commitment to the idea sustainability component of the IWB, by consistently gathering results of implemented ideas, comparing them to the Agency's goals, organizing training programs for literacy instructors, discussing broader applications with colleagues, and working with the Agency's quality assurance system to support and enhance the implementation of new ideas at literacy centers to a high extent.

This finding is consistent with previous studies, such as those by Erwat *et al.* (2012). Abdul Rahman *et al.* (2022), Oyewole *et al.* (2020), Alotaibi *et al.* (2022), and Singh *et al.* (2022), which reported high levels of innovative work behaviour among employees in various sectors, including the public sector in Malaysia, the Nigerian banking industry, Saudi Arabian hospitals, and the Indian IT industry, respectively. This suggests that the trend of innovative work behaviour could cut cross different professions and industries. This finding contradicts the reports of Babayemi *et al.* (2009); Akinyooye and Adesokan (2021), Murphy *et al.* (2022) and Soputan and Tinneke (2022), which suggested that employees in traditional firms tend to exhibit lower levels of Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB).

Research question 2: How do SAME employees' IWB differ on the basis of gender in Southwestern Nigeria?

Table 2. The difference in SAME employees' IWB on the basis of gender

IWB			
Equal variances assumed		Equal variances not assumed	
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	3.975	
	Sig.	.058	
t-test for Equality of Means	t	-.305	-.291
	df	199	125.124
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.760	.772
	Mean Difference	-.720	-.720
	Std. Error Difference	2.357	2.475
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	-5.367	-5.617
	Upper	3.928	4.178

4.3. Interpretation and discussion

Table 2 revealed no statistically significant difference in the extent to which SAME employees embrace IWB on the basis of gender ($t_{199} = 0.305$; $0.760 > 0.05$). This is because the sig. value of 0.760 was greater than the probability value of .05. This suggested that both male and female employees exhibit similar levels of commitment to IWB to the literacy-oriented activities of the Agencies. Dan *et al.* (2023) claimed that there are no significant differences in the female and

male employees' ability to embrace IWB. This showcased that females' employees are more cooperative and compassionate, while their males' counterparts are autonomous, determined, daring, and dedicated to the work.

In contrary to the outcomes of this study, Bekele and Singh (2022) found that male workers have considerably higher levels of creative work behaviour compared to their female counterparts in the institutions. Yunus *et al.* (2014) and Chukwudeh and Ojo (2018) found that there are insignificant



differences between female and male employees and their innovative work behaviour. Bekele and Singh (2022) and Okoro and Ojo (2018) found that male employees exhibit higher levels of innovative work behaviour than female employees, and that these differences are statistically significant.

In her claim, an informant corroborated this finding by submitting that:

Regardless of gender, the agency's hiring process for Adult and Mass Literacy Officers (AMLOS) and other staff members is always determined by merit. During the recruitment process, the terms and conditions apply to both male and female

candidates equally. As a result, the monitoring, assessment, and execution of literacy-focused tasks are activities that both men and women can participate in (KII/EKITI/EXECUTIVE SECRETARY/FEMALE/2023).

Similarly, another informant reiterated that:

Because the agency under my leadership operates on the principle that "what a man can do, a woman can too," it does not give any preference to any one gender over another when assigning officers (KII/OYO/DIRECTOR/MALE/2023).

Research question 3: To what extent do SAME employees' IWB differ on the basis of age in Southwestern Nigeria?

Table 3. Difference in SAME employees' IWB on the basis of age.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	7638.711	3	2546.237	11.625	0.000*
Between Groups	43147.508	197	219.023		
Total	50786.219	200			

Table 4. Results of post hoc comparisons dunnett t3 on age

IWB	Mean	Difference (I-J)	S. E	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Age						
19-29 Yrs.	30-39 Yrs.	18.965*	4.667	0.000	8.43	29.50
	40-49 Yrs.	25.680*	4.539	0.000	15.43	35.93
	50 Yrs. & Above	19.740*	4.969	0.000	8.52	30.96

4.4. Interpretation and discussion

Table 3 indicated statistically significant difference in SAME employees' IWB on the basis of age. This is because ($F(3, 197) = 11.625$; ($p 0.000 < 0.05$), which is less than the p-value of 0.05. This, according to post-hoc results in the Table 4 was in favour of SAME employees who were from 30 years and above of age compared with their counterparts below such an age.

This suggested that as SAME employees age, their motivation and engagement in their work at the Agency would increase, potentially due to factors such as increased job clarity or a stronger sense of purpose. Ng and Feldman (2013), and Ojo and Chukwudeh (2016) corroborated this finding by claiming that older employees usually have a greater familiarity with the company's operations than did younger workers. As they grew older, they were probably more knowledgeable and mature, which enabled them to take on creative endeavours and help them approach difficulties from other perspectives.

An informant disagreed with this empirical finding, as she reiterated that:

The employees' ability to embrace IWB was not limited by demographic feature especially age, though experience and wisdom can come with age, but younger employees are always open to new ideas and experimentation compared with their old counterparts (KII/EKITI/EXECUTIVE SECRETARY/FEMALE/2023).

An informant supported the result of this finding by saying that:

In my agency, older employees are so innovative and always transfer and share the knowledge and expertise with younger colleagues. This is to ensure that innovative ideas and solutions are not lost when they retire or leave the agency. The agency encourages and supports older workers to contribute to IWB rather than assuming they are less capable or less interested in innovation (KII/OSUN/DEPUTY DIRECTOR/MALE/2023).

A female informant also corroborated that:

Employee's cognitive abilities like problem-solving and decision-making usually peak at mid-age. This makes them to contribute to the agency's activities via IWB. As they have an accumulated experience and expertise that make them to have deeper understanding of the organisation and enable them to identify opportunities for innovation (KII/ONDO/DIRECTOR/MALE/2023).

5. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that SAME employees have the potential to explore, generate, realise, promote and sustain literacy-oriented ideas to a high extent, respectively. The demonstration of this behaviour did not significantly differ on the basis of gender, but did on the basis of age.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on this, the following recommendations are raised for concerned stakeholders.



i. Government or non-governmental bodies should establish innovation incubators or labs, provide dedicated resources and support for SAME employees to develop and test new ideas. They should create a synergy that would promote partnership with sister agencies in other states or country in order to assist the employees to stay abreast of trends and best practices and to leverage collective knowledge and expertise.

ii. The finding that IWB did not differ on the basis of gender of employees presents an opportunity to foster a gender-inclusive culture that encourages innovation and creativity among all employees by policy makers. To leverage this finding, policy makers should prioritise gender-neutral strategies that promote IWB. This includes providing equal access to resources, training, and development opportunities that enhance innovative skills, such as creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

iii. Policy makers should tailor the approach to innovation and creativity to meet the unique needs and strengths of different age groups. For younger employees (19-29 years), programmes should focus on providing opportunities for autonomy, feedback, and opportunities for growth and development. For middle-aged employees (30-49 years), programmes should focus on providing opportunities for mentorship, coaching, and leadership development. For older employees (50+ years), programmes should focus on providing opportunities for knowledge sharing, wisdom development, and legacy building.

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