

A GATE TO UNDERSTANDING “OLDER” WORKERS: GENERATION, AGE, TENURE, EXPERIENCE

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The aging workforce is a widely acknowledged, major organizational phenomenon. Nevertheless, its present level of scholarship is both narrow in focus and inconclusive in implications for key organizational domains: namely, individual-level performance (why does evidence suggest no effect of worker age on overall performance?), interpersonal-level discrimination (why do older workers face heightened discrimination if their performance is generally valued?), and group-level diversity (why has research failed to identify consistent age diversity benefits?). The present review argues that answering these questions necessitates expanding the older worker space by incorporating research approaches of other, well-established literature studies—each of which offer equally valid ways of understanding (older) worker age, but do not typically cast themselves as covering age *per se*. Although these other literatures—comprising Generation, Age, Tenure, and Experience (GATE)—potentially foster a more sophisticated conception of older workers than present approaches typically offer, these literatures have remained largely separate, resulting in their own level of inconclusive and sometimes contradictory predictions for an aging workforce. To address each of these issues going forward, researchers must integrate GATE elements in all older worker investigations. A GATE approach avoids overreliance on chronological age as a predictor, more accurately represents the inherent complexity of age as a status category, and potentially offers more definitive conclusions than present approaches do. Such is timely, and crucial, for a topic that is somehow both ubiquitous in the workforce and yet not well understood by mainstream organizational scholarship.

After a considerable stint on the sidelines of organizational behavior (OB), the topic of the rapidly aging workforce is beginning to earn some scholarly playing time. Older worker focus now spans edited volumes (Hedge & Borman, 2012), special journal issues (Fraccaroli & Truxillo, 2011), and annual review articles (Truxillo, Cadiz, & Hammer, 2015). Taken together, these calls for increased scholar and practitioner attention might suggest the completion of a foundational opening act for this nascent scholarly domain.

Nevertheless, Act 2 could use greater conceptual clarity. For instance, age-based definitions remain surprisingly unclear in this literature; as per researchers, an “older” worker chronologically ranges

anywhere from 37 (Riach & Rich, 2010) to 70 (Neumark, Burn, & Button, 2015). Other such investigations leave the matter even more ambiguous, using the qualitative term “older workers,” with no numerical age attached (Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2001). This literature also generally does not distinguish between different shades of older workers, such as how perceptions might differ toward the 62-year-old, 30-year-tenured employee, versus the 62-year-old employee hired last year—not to mention the extent to which the effectiveness of an age-diverse workgroup might depend on tenure differences versus life-stage differences. Thus, if Act 1 successfully has encouraged greater attention on the topic of older workers, then with hope, a successful Act 2 might urge greater nuance in its study.

The present literature faces not only a lack of clarity in predictors, but also in terms of understanding outcomes. For instance, performance generally does not decline with age (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Ng & Feldman, 2008; Posthuma & Campion, 2007), and managers are aware of older workers’ unique value (Pitt-Catsouphes, Smyer, Matz-Costa, & Kane, 2007). Nevertheless, age discrimination charges have risen

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over the past two decades (North & Fiske, 2015a), and nearly two-thirds of older workers feel discriminated against because of their age (Moss, 2016). By the same token, broad acknowledgment of the pragmatic need to accommodate an aging workforce has yet to translate into a precise knowledge base of how to best accomplish this (North & Hershfield, 2014). In a similar vein, although the study of age diversity has grown alongside aging workforce scholarship, the roadmap for harnessing productive age diversity remains unclear (Boehm & Kunze, 2015)—much less what represents a threshold of “age diversity” in the first place, given disparities in how researchers operationalize it (Klabuhn & Thommes, 2017). In sum, “accommodating older workers” sounds nice in theory, but in both scholarship and practice, the topic remains niche; what constitutes “older” remains surprisingly vague; and in key domains of OB, it is still unclear what worker age reliably predicts—if anything at all.

Toward clarifying these outstanding issues, injecting comprehensive nuance into the older worker space, and clarifying relevant predictors and outcomes, this review integrates diverse bodies of older worker–relevant literature, suggesting a more comprehensive framework for future research on these topics. I divide this review into three parts. Part 1 outlines the state of the aging workforce literature, describing how existing perspectives, although helpful, rely too heavily on numerical age as the defining older worker metric. This leaves unresolved major questions surrounding the integration of older workers in key domains of individual performance, interpersonal discrimination, and group-level diversity. In the hopes of identifying key older worker predictors that go beyond mere chronology, Part 2 posits four other, disparate bodies of extant literature that belong in the older worker space, but which historically have been considered separate—Generation, Age, Tenure, and Experience (GATE). Here I argue that each literature figures integrally into the equation for understanding what we mean by “older” workers; however, considering these (GATE) predictors as separate from one another—as has been the case with these segregated literatures—fosters its own set of contradictory messages vis-à-vis older worker outcomes in performance, discrimination, and diversity. To resolve the inconsistencies outlined in Parts 1 and 2, Part 3 suggests paths forward, urging researchers to adopt integrative GATE approaches that simultaneously account for these multiple age-related dimensions, rather than relying on a single numerical

indicator of age. I conclude by highlighting how adopting a holistic GATE view of an aging workforce dovetails with broader, ongoing OB scholarly imperatives: striving for construct clarity, incorporating context, and tackling grand managerial challenges.

PART 1: THE AGING WORKFORCE LITERATURE, AS CURRENTLY CONSTRUCTED

Although existing work has proven useful in various ways, I outline three overarching issues: (1) The literature is currently too *niche* to fully capture the issue’s importance and scope, and to motivate organizational scholars to contribute; (2) its reliance on chronological age as a construct has resulted in overemphasis of an *ambiguous predictor*; and (3) its chronological age focus has resulted in *unclear outcomes* to understand what an aging workforce truly signifies for the field of management.

A Scholarly Paradox: Universal Acknowledgment yet Niche Attention

Virtually all organizational scholars agree on the importance of understanding a rapidly aging workforce. A widely cited 2014 *Academy of Management Journal* editorial characterizes the worldwide issue as “at a critical turning point,” stating that “it is time for us to unpack the proxies [of age] and explore what it really means to have an older workforce” (Kulik, Ryan, Harper, & George, 2014: 934). A recent *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology* piece echoes this call: “As a field we need to accept the challenge of identifying what employers and societies can do to help deal with this growing issue [of the aging workforce]—and move beyond age as a statistical control variable” (Truxillo et al., 2015: 374). Nevertheless, in spite of its acknowledgment as a “grand challenge” facing management worldwide, the aging workforce continues to be vastly understudied compared with other topics such as sustainability and climate change (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016; Howard-Grenville, Buckle, Hoskins, & George, 2014).

It is not so much that no one studies the topic, but rather that the organizational literature that focuses explicitly on “older” or “mature” workers remains comparatively niche. This sparsely populated intellectual space focuses primarily on human resource considerations for an aging workforce, or else dynamics of the often overlooked domain of age diversity. These subliterate studies often make the

argument that accommodating the aging workforce is necessary because of demographic (i.e., workforce aging) forces—and argue that far too little research attention elucidates up-to-date considerations, such as the extent to which employer attitudes potentially influence age discriminatory practices (Loretto & White, 2006).

These points are generally well taken, but to date have not inspired many managerial scholars to fill the void. To illustrate, in line with a literature search robustness check employed by Cronin, Weingart, and Todorova (2011), I searched for key words pertaining to the aging workforce, in arguably the six highest impact scholarly management journals (*Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, and *Organization Science*). I searched within each journals' two most recent full years of publication (2017–2018) for article key words or titles containing “age discrimination,” “age diversity,” “aging,” “aging workforce,” “elderly,” “older,” or “older workers.” This search yielded a total of *three* total results (Gielnik, Zacher, & Wang, 2018; Kooij, van Woerkom, Wilkenloh, Dorenbosch, & Denissen, 2017; Saluja, Adaval, & Wyer, 2017). (Similarly, the key word “retirement” garners four total hits over this 2-year period; Bilgili, Campbell, O'Leary-Kelly, Ellstrand, & Johnson, 2018; Kim, Shin, Heath, Zhang, & Higgins, 2017; Wang & Luo, 2018; Wang & Wanberg, 2017.) Moreover, in the two Academy of Management Annual Meetings over this span, keyword searches for “aging workforce” produce six total results, whereas eight hits emerge for “older workers” (Academy of Management, 2017, 2018). Although scarcity of research attention *per se* is not evidence of a problem, when combined with the near-universal acknowledgment of the issue's importance, this scant level of research attention is puzzling, at the very least.

Even when garnering attention, aging workforce scholarship tends to be limited to two organizational subfields: human resources and diversity. But here, too, the focus is generally limited. In HR circles, the aging workforce topic still lacks a concrete base of knowledge of best practices (Paullin, 2014). Meanwhile, although diversity as an organizational topic is certainly prominent in its own right, age diversity research pales in comparison with that of race and gender (Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2011). This is illustrated by a comparative lack of diversity initiatives emphasizing age relative to other forms (Roundtree, 2011).

An Overemphasis on (Ambiguous) Chronological Age as a Predictor

Aside from a general lack of scholarly attention, aging workforce scholarship also lacks precision in its construct clarity. In their conceptualizing of “older,” both the aging workforce and age diversity subliteratures tend to rely on chronological age as their key barometer. The former typically focuses on a prevailing numerical cutoff to define what constitutes an older worker (e.g., over 50; Loretto & White, 2006); meanwhile, the latter emphasizes a distribution of chronological age, based on the standard deviation, or related such variance metric, of a group's age (Klabuhn & Thommes, 2017). Emphasizing a single numerical definition of “older” presents concerns both methodological and theoretical, even if it does reflect chronology-based rationales to study the aging workforce in the first place (e.g., rapid rises of 55+ workers; Tossi, 2012).

Methodological inconsistencies. What constitutes older age in the workplace is highly malleable and differs widely between researchers (James, McKechnie, & Swanberg, 2011). For instance, experimental and field studies on hiring biases or other treatment disparities based on age quantify “older” as ranging from 37–47 (versus 21–27 for a younger comparison group; Riach & Rich, 2010), to 50–62 (versus 35–45 comprising young; Lahey, 2008), to 64 (versus 24 and 44; North & Fiske, 2016), and 62–70 (versus 28–32; Neumark et al., 2015). From the standpoint of traditional retirement regulations, one might argue that a worker must be in his/her sixties to be considered “older” (Pitt-Catsouphe & Smyer, 2006), but as per other research, the average response to “how old is old” in the workplace converges at age 45 (Gahan, Harbridge, Healy, & Williams, 2016). Meanwhile, in the United States, 40 is the threshold for protection under the 1967 Age Discrimination in Employment Act (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2017).

Theoretical ambiguities. One-size-fits-all numerical brackets also ignore contextual factors (Thomas, Hardy, Cletcher, & Ainsworth, 2014). For instance, what represents “older” comprises factors that include health (within the individual), surrounding age demography (within organizations), and sector type (within industries; North & Fiske, 2015a; Thomas et al., 2014). Thus, from this standpoint, too, it remains unclear precisely whom, theoretically speaking, the proverbial “aging workforce” encompasses (Claes & Heymans, 2008). Perhaps for this reason, some investigations leave the matter altogether ambiguous,

using the qualitative term “older workers,” with no numerical age attached, to ascertain age perceptions (e.g., Chiu et al., 2001). However, this approach similarly renders unclear how researchers should operationalize the aging workforce.

Unclear (and Contradictory) Outcomes from Chronological Age Alone

Likely as a result of this ambiguity in chronological age-based predictors, numerous unanswered questions exist in predicting organizational outcomes, comprising three key domains: individual-level performance, interpersonal-level discrimination, and group-level diversity.

Individual performance. Scholars on the aging workforce often ask: “What does workforce aging mean for workplace productivity?” Or, relatedly: “How do older workers perform, relative to other age groups?” Nonetheless, these questions continue to be unsettled. Large-scale studies show a non-significant relationship between chronological age and most domains of core work performance (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Ng & Feldman, 2008; Posthuma & Campion, 2007), and inconsistent effects on innovativeness (Ng & Feldman, 2013a, 2013b). Other research finds that under certain conditions, performance actually increases with age (e.g., in sales; Liden, Stillwell, & Ferris, 1996), whereas this relationship is negative under other circumstances (e.g., among European professionals; Zacher, Heusner, Schmitz, Zwierzanska, & Frese, 2010). These findings, combined with opaqueness concerning what is “old” in the workplace, suggest that purely chronological age approaches to predicting performance are too imprecise.

A critic might suggest that focusing on particular performance domains might yield more definitive results, but here, too, findings are largely inconclusive. A recent meta-analysis on the relationship between chronological age and various domains of job performance (Ng & Feldman, 2008) finds that, within different domains, age predicts performance in divergent directions: positively predicting organizational citizenship behaviors and safety performance; negatively predicting absenteeism, tardiness, training program performance, and workplace aggression; and generally null effects on core task performance and creativity—not to mention an overall curvilinear effect on “counterproductive” work behaviors. Ultimately, strong conclusions are elusive for why chronological age predicts individual performance in these divergent ways.

Interpersonal discrimination. A second key domain on which the older worker literature focuses is age-based discrimination. Here, too, conflicting findings emerge: Older workers are generally valued, and yet face increased levels of discrimination in the labor market and on the job. Unpacking this disconnect is urgent, as the workforce ages and record-high numbers of older workers seek employment (Van Dam, 2018).

On the one hand, managerial and organizational surveys yield generally positive views of older workers because of their enhanced experience, technical knowledge, conscientiousness, customer rapport, and emotional stability (Brooke & Taylor, 2005; North & Hershfield, 2014; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2007). In fact, companies that accommodate older workers seek to capitalize explicitly on the value of these qualities (Greenhouse, 2014; North, 2014). Other investigations find older workers’ job performance to be considered equal to that of younger workers—with both groups equally likely to receive job-related awards and promotions (Cleveland & Landy, 1983).

On the other hand, despite these agreed-upon benefits, people reliably deny opportunities to older workers, at all levels of the employment process—hiring, on the job, and firing (North & Fiske, 2015a). At the hiring level, experimental studies show a strong reluctance to hire older workers compared with other age groups; a strong preference for youth results in younger job applicants (as compared with equally qualified older ones) receiving positive responses over 25 percent more often (Bendick, Jackson, & Romer, 1997). A large-scale audit study (Lahey, 2008), in which the researcher mailed resumes matched on all dimensions except for age to nearly 4000 jobs, finds an age discrepancy even more pronounced among female applicants (40 percent)—a pattern replicated via an even larger field experiment comprising 40,000 job applications (Neumark et al., 2015). On the job, such studies show a reluctance to invest training resources in equally qualified but differentially aged workers (North & Fiske, 2016). Meanwhile, at the firing level, a 47 percent rise in age discrimination charges between 1999 and 2017 indicates that older employees feel increasingly discriminated against (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2017). Given that the workplace is older than ever, understanding the discrepancy between older worker hiring reluctance and on-the-job, valued performance is timely. Nevertheless, the aging workforce literature

as currently constructed does not offer the level of nuance necessary to explain or reconcile these contradictions.

Group-level diversity: Does age diversity help or hurt? and when? Meanwhile, similarly contradictory or unresolved patterns emerge when examining the outcomes of age diversity (Boehm & Kunze, 2015). A meta-analysis of published studies finds an overall null relationship between age diversity and reported group performance (e.g., Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2011). Indeed, individual studies present evidence for age diversity predicting both positive outcomes (Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas, 2011; Li, Chu, Lam, & Liao, 2011) and negative ones (Ali, Ng, & Kulik, 2014; Timmerman, 2000; West, Patterson, Dawson, & Nickell, 1999). This same overall null pattern emerges in age diversity analyses on specific organizational domains; in innovation and conflict, most studies likewise find a null relationship between age diversity and productivity (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2002; Kearney & Gebert, 2009; Wiersema & Bantel, 1992).

Perhaps more disconcertingly, a greater amount of present evidence suggests that age diversity predicts perceptions of organizational age discrimination; that is, because of the age-based subgrouping that tends to form with the presence of different age groups, an unintended side consequence is the heightened belief that the organization fosters an age discriminatory climate (Kunze et al., 2011; Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2013). Perhaps relatedly, age diversity strongly predicts organizational turnover (Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin, & Peyronnin, 1991; Wiersema & Bird, 1993), although at least one study argues for the opposite pattern (Centre for European Economic Research [ZEW], 2013). Nevertheless, these results encompass a few studies only; the relationship between age diversity—itsself a nascent research area—and key workplace outcomes remains largely unresolved (Backes-Gellner & Veen, 2013).

One explanation for this lack of conclusiveness is that, like other diversity types, age diversity is a “double-edged sword,” heightening potential for both creativity and conflict (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). However, another likely explanation, comparable with the aforementioned, inter-study inconsistencies in older worker definitions, has been variance in approaches to quantifying age diversity (Klabuhn & Thommes, 2017). Researcher metrics of age diversity have

included (a) the organization’s or group’s standard deviation of worker age *per se* (Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas, 2011), (b) a calculated coefficient of variation (i.e., standard deviation of age divided by mean age; Timmerman, 2000), or (c) a category-based Teachman’s index, measuring the evenness of age group distribution on a 0 (fully uniform) to 1 score (perfectly even distribution; Schippers, Den Hartog, Koopman, & Wienk, 2003). Variation between these metrics inherently risks disparate conclusions.

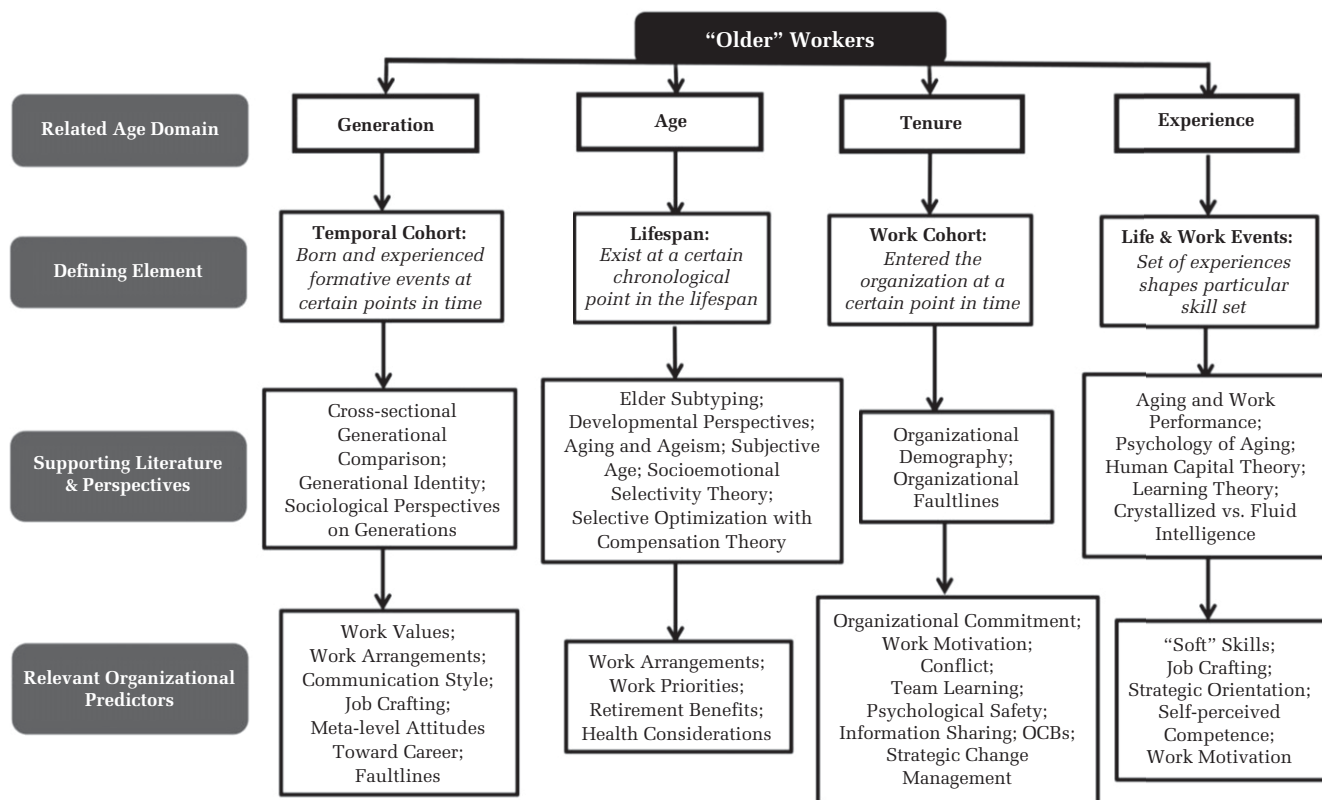
Complicating the matter is the thorny theoretical issue of quantifying “perfect” age diversity in the first place (an issue plaguing the organizational study of “perfect diversity” of any type; Bell et al., 2011). A recent perspective argues for three distinct such perspectives: (1) separation, in which perfect diversity entails a perfect split between different group members; (2) variety, in which perfect diversity is a uniform distribution of members across possible categories; or (3) disparity, in which perfect diversity comprises a positively skewed distribution, with one member at the highest endpoint and others at the lowest (Harrison & Klein, 2007). From this standpoint, age diversity researchers using standard deviation methods might be envisioning disparity, whereas those using Teachman’s index are in reality measuring variety. Much like the aforementioned statistical disparity in quantifying age diversity, this disparity in theoretically conceptualizing age diversity also risks inconclusive predictions for the increasingly age-diverse workplace.

PART 2: INCORPORATING OTHER AGE-BASED PREDICTORS: GENERATION, AGE, TENURE, EXPERIENCE (GATE)

Toward more comprehensively understanding an aging workforce—and clarifying performance, discrimination, and diversity outcomes—I propose that researchers consider intertwined elements underlying (older) worker age: (1) (earlier) birth-cohort–based *generation*, (2) (later) life-stage–based *age*, (3) (earlier) work-cohort–based *tenure*, and (4) (greater) life-and-work-event–based *experience* (GATE; Figure 1).

Such a perspective offers at least two key advantages over prevailing approaches. First, GATE goes beyond a single numerical age value, offering more nuanced predictors that potentially address the literature’s inconclusiveness. Second, GATE elements, by and large, already comprise their

FIGURE 1
Typology toward the Multidimensionality of “Older” Workers



own, well-established literatures; although not typically incorporated within the older worker domain *per se*, they forge equally legitimate and critical considerations for comprehending older workers. Thus, GATE represents the first comprehensive framework of what age signifies within key mainstream OB domains. This sweeping reintegration expands the older worker space away from niche status.

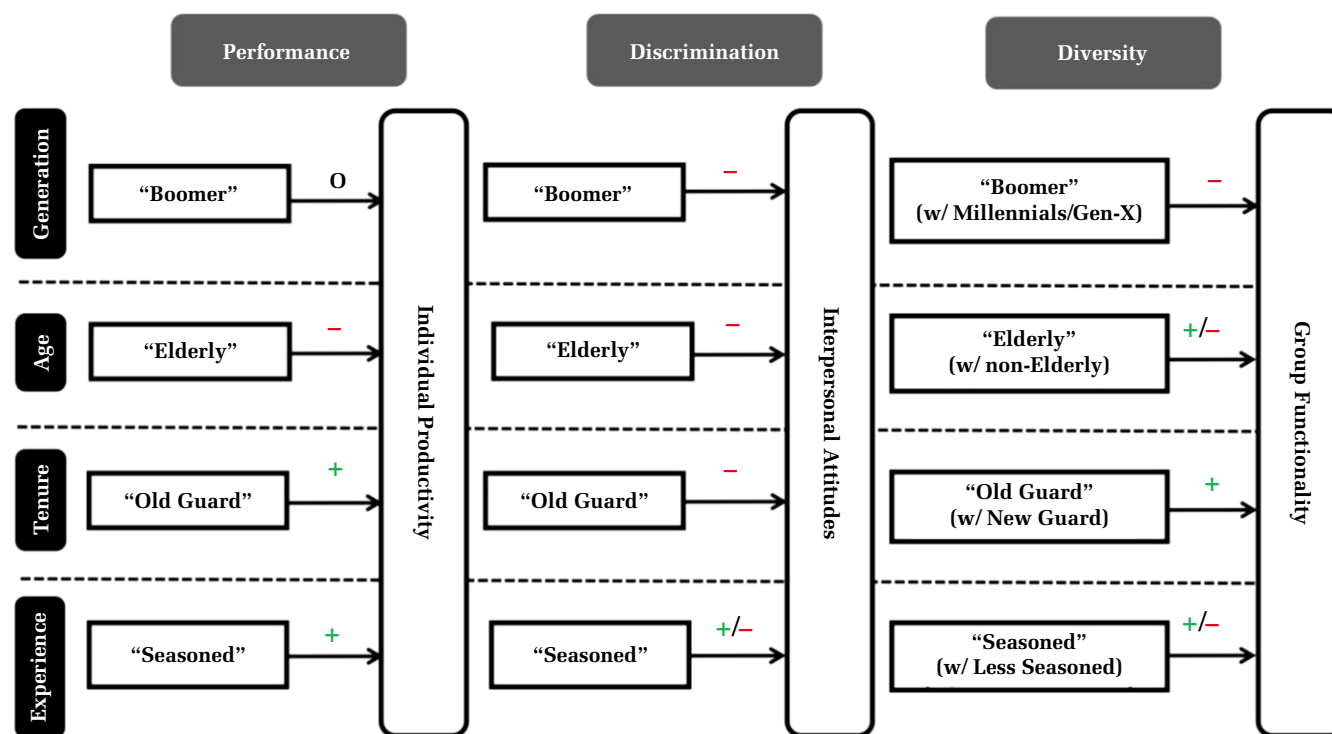
Nevertheless, as this section also uncovers, the focus on GATE dimensions as segregated from one another yields its own set of contradictory (and sometimes incomplete) predictions (e.g., “Boomers” might face greater levels of discrimination than “experienced” workers; see Figure 2). By elucidating how chronological age comprises multiple, intertwined elements whose predictions sometimes oppose one another, GATE also helps explain why a reliance on chronological age alone has been, to an extent, fruitless. As a result, Part 3 will outline integrative research approaches to reconciling these contradictions, in order to move the literature forward.

Generation: Older Workers as Boomers

The main thesis of generational approaches is that the older worker belongs to a certain birth cohort, came of age at a certain point in time, and experienced certain formative experiences. Generations are a powerful age-based category that many popular outlets popularize, but scholars generally disagree over what generational categories reliably predict (Rudolph & Zacher, 2017a, 2017b). Even though evidence is indeed mixed that generations differ consistently in their attitudes (Rudolph & Zacher, 2017a), the lay belief that such differences exist is too strong to ignore. Thus, the present state of these findings suggests that generational perceptions are necessary to understanding an aging workforce—just perhaps not in the manner that scholars often assume (that differences exist) but rather in enduring perceptions of these differences.

How generational approaches inform organizational scholarship. The idea of generations has intrigued scholars since at least the early 20th century, with sociological perspectives arguing for

FIGURE 2
Older Worker Outcomes, Sometimes Contradictory, as a Function of individual GATE Predictors, as per These (Largely Segregated) Literatures



the “distinct consciousness” shared by cohorts over time (Joshi, Dencker, & Franz, 2011; Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Martocchio, 2010; Mannheim, 1928/1952). Comprising its own, scholarly subdomain, generational perspectives in OB tend to emphasize proverbial categories, such as comparing Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) to other generational brackets (e.g., Gen-X and Millennials) on key workplace variables (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Reinforcing this approach are narratives in the popular press (e.g., how to “manage Baby Boomers” and “keep different generations happy” in the workplace; James, 2017; Pochepan, 2018).

Nevertheless, a growing debate questions the legitimacy of proverbial generational groupings. On the one hand, calls for greater research attention on organizational generations (Joshi et al., 2011) point to the record-high number (five) of proverbial generational groups coexisting in modern workplaces (i.e., Silents, Boomers, Gen-Xers, Millennials, and Gen-Z; Twenge, 2010). This line of thinking has spurred researchers to recommend disparate leadership styles for leading different generations—citing evidence that, for instance, today’s younger employees, compared with previous generations at

the same age, hold different views of effective leadership (Anderson, Baur, Griffith, & Buckley, 2017). By the same token, a growing body of work explores the divergent work styles and psychological motivations between different generational members. For instance, Boomers are more affiliation-motivated, whereas Millennials are more individualistic (Twenge, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge, Carter, & Campbell, 2017).

Nevertheless, other scholars argue that proverbial generational groupings are essentially mythical (Rudolph & Zacher, 2017a, 2017b). This counterargument comprises numerous critiques: (1) Random sampling from a given generational bracket likely results in a consistent mean average age, but widely disparate age *distributions* between samples—rendering any findings likely due to either chance or idiosyncratic “data cutting” decisions (Rudolph, 2015); (2) cross-sectional perspectives fail to disentangle age (e.g., a worker is 40 years old), period (e.g., the study is conducted in the year 2018), and cohort (e.g., that the worker was born in 1978, with experiences spanning from that point through 2018; Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Rudolph, Rauvola, &

Zacher, 2017); (3) both qualitative and quantitative reviews offer scant empirical evidence that generational distinctions consistently influence work outcomes (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012; Costanza, Darrow, Yost, & Severt, 2017); (4) in predicting work attitudes, motivations, and behaviors, stronger evidence argues in favor of life-stage-related changes or other contextual influences over generational identity-related explanations (Rudolph & Zacher, 2017b). For these reasons, critics have likened generational distinctions to astrology, suggesting that generations are an appealing yet glorified source of confirmation bias (i.e., overfitting certain behaviors as evidence of categorical difference) and ultimately not rooted in strong empirical evidence (Rauvola, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2018). Instead, such critics advocate for abandoning proverbial generational approaches—perhaps defining cohorts based on a sole, objective birth year to account for both interindividual cohort effects and intraindividual period changes over time (Rudolph et al., 2017; Rudolph & Zacher, 2017a, 2017b).

How generational approaches fundamentally underlie older worker understanding. Regardless, as even the harshest critics of proverbial generational categories acknowledge, people strongly believe in brackets and identities, to an extent more forceful than these brackets might predict actual differences (Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012). For instance, people reliably stereotype Boomers as competitive, set-in-their-ways workaholics, relative to other generations (Bourne, 2015; Dimitriou & Blum, 2015). Thus, there is reason to believe that people's self-identities foster some degree of generational fault lines—that is, perceptions of category-based difference, fostering subgroup divisions, which potentially undermine group productivity (e.g., inhibiting team learning and collaboration; Lau & Murnighan, 1998). As per the diversity and fault-line literatures, birth-cohort generational fissures might cause such friction if people subscribe to their existence (Lawrence & Zyphur, 2011), as evidence suggests many typically do.

Moreover, being born at a certain point in time does mean sharing formative experiences. Evidence from other fields, particularly sociology, indicates that interactions and worldviews draw heavily from one's place in time (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014). Therefore, even if OB has yet to conclusively ascertain the influence of proverbial generational brackets on work outcomes, a shared “generational consensus” still might exist within the minds of differentially aged workers. Therefore, the perception of

generational divisions is likely sufficient to foster workplace divisions.

Moreover, in spite of doubts concerning the predictiveness of proverbial generations, some evidence exists that Boomers (the most well-known present older worker generational bracket) differ from other generations in key work-related constructs, although with evidence weaker in certain domains than others. For instance, nonsignificant or inconsistent generational differences emerge vis-à-vis overall altruism, job satisfaction, desire for job stability, personal work ethic endorsement, and how career success is evaluated (Dries, Pepermans, & De Kerpel, 2008; Kowske, Rasch, & Wiley, 2010; Twenge, 2010; Zabel, Biermeier-Hanson, Baltes, Early, & Shepard, 2017). However, significant distinctions between Boomers and younger generations do materialize across a variety of work attitudes. For example, Boomers differ from other generations in their (extrinsically versus intrinsically motivated) work values, (greater) perceived work ethic, (diplomatic versus direct) communication styles, (less) narcissism, and (greater) focus on a job as a career rather than a stepping stone (Gordon & Steele, 2005; Hernaus & Pološki Vokic, 2014; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Twenge, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008).

Older worker outcome findings from generational approaches. Generational brackets predict at least some differences in work outcomes across performance, discrimination, and diversity domains. Nevertheless, given the relative sparseness of generations as a research topic, controversy over whether generational brackets are meaningful, and the limitations of cross-sectional approaches, these findings on their own are largely inconclusive (see Figure 2).

Individual performance: Little present evidence for major generational differences (see Figure 2).

Given considerable attention on generational differences in work attitudes, values, and preferences, it is perhaps surprising that relatively few studies examine such differences in actual work performance. Nonetheless, for all of the focus on generational differences, managers rarely, if ever, rate their Boomer employees any lower or higher than Gen-X or Millennial workers (Rauvola et al., 2018). It remains unclear when disparate generational identities yield differential performance ratings from others.

However, when focusing on the impact of generational self-identifies on *self-perceived* performance, stronger conclusions do emerge. One key finding posits that a generational identity might be

more adaptive than a chronological age-based one. Studies show that priming older adults' generational identity boosts self-perceived performance, whereas emphasizing chronological age inhibits it (Weiss & Lang, 2012). Moreover, compared with younger generations, maximizing Boomers' performance derives less from money, fame, and image (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012) and more by perceived relationship fit with coworkers (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). Thus, maximizing older worker performance might necessitate "generational job-crafting" that dovetails with unique motivators of Boomers, relative to other generational brackets (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Interpersonal discrimination: Evidence that perceiving older workers as "Boomers" fosters primarily negative attitudes from others (see Figure 2).

On the other hand, the research base on interpersonal attitudes is clearer: People tend to perceive a "Boomer" in a manner that is more vilified than valued—and importantly, with a different connotation than the term "older worker." A recent study shows that people discriminate more against a job applicant cast as a "Baby Boomer" than the one who is an "older worker"—more likely to fire the former, and to hire and defend the latter (Cox, Young, Guardia, & Bohmann, 2018). Similarly, "older workers" are perceived as dependable and committed, whereas "Boomers" are stereotyped as primarily achievement-oriented, competitive, valuing monetary (over intrinsic) rewards, and entitled to indulgent gifts (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Perry, Hanvongse, & Casoinic, 2013; Posthuma & Campoin, 2009). This apparent preference for older workers over Boomers might stem from policy influences: age, after all, is a protected category under discrimination laws—which might dissuade study participants from actively expressing negative age-based attitudes—whereas generation does not offer this same buffer (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). Whatever the reason, disentangling generational versus age-based identity shows that the Boomer label generates particularly negative interpersonal reactions.

At a broad level, too, Boomers face higher levels of reported discrimination than any other older age cohort in history; record-high levels of reported (older) age discrimination exist, as noted (a 47 percent rise in individual age discrimination charges has emerged since 1999; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2017). The Boomer generation also faces mounting blame for overreliance on Social Security and Medicare (Howe & Strauss,

2007) and general economic downturn (Longman, 2005). Thus, in contrast to the potential individual benefit of generational (versus age) identity within the older worker, there is an apparently commensurate interpersonal cost.

Group-based diversity: Evidence that grouping older workers as "Boomers" coexisting with other generational categories predicts primarily negative diversity outcomes (see Figure 2).

As outlined earlier, although strong empirical justification for proverbial generational groupings is mixed, challenges arise nonetheless from the fact that organizational members believe so strongly in their existence. For example, a recent survey finds that 51 percent of Millennials believe that "Boomers" are to blame for having made things worse for the Millennial generation (Brandon, 2018). Moreover, even if generational differences in work priorities are minimal in reality, a perception of competing priorities nonetheless fosters tension, pitting Boomers' work-over-family prioritization against younger generations' work-life balance preference (Lester et al., 2012). Given that group-based fissures are enhanced when group boundaries are seen as fixed rather than permeable (Lalonde & Silverman, 1994), emphasizing generational categories risks activating fault lines between younger and older cohorts. Indeed, 60 percent of organizations report intergenerational conflict (Murphy, 2007). In sum, generational distinctions seem to divide age groups more than unite them.

Age: Older Workers as *Elders*

Going beyond mere chronological age also entails acknowledging that older workers by nature exist at a different, later point in the lifespan than younger workers. Older workers' place in the lifespan fundamentally shapes their relationship with work, in which meaning and balance are emphasized over other concerns.

How life-stage approaches inform organizational scholarship. The concept of life-stage differences might seem basic, but mainstream OB emphasis on life-stage effects *per se* is surprisingly scant. Where present, such focus tends to emphasize non-senior populations (e.g., the "motherhood penalty" afflicting middle-aged women, or the "teddy bear effect" showing benefits among youthful-looking African American CEOs; Correll, Bernard, & Paik, 2007; Livingston & Pearce, 2009).

How life-stage approaches fundamentally underlie older worker understanding. Generally speaking, older workers' later-life-stage status shapes

a prioritization of meaning and balance over all else in their work lives. As per Selective Optimization with Compensation Theory (SOCT; Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Freund & Baltes, 1998), as people over time lose certain qualities and gain others, their goals and outcomes change. Later-life workers use optimization strategies to maximize the time available to them, and use compensation strategies to offset any declines in functioning (Baltes & Dickson, 2001). In a related vein, older workers prioritize skill variety (which allows them to use the variety of skills they have accumulated, facilitating optimal performance), whereas younger workers prioritize task variety (which facilitates developing new skills and learning; Zaniboni, Truxillo, & Fraccaroli, 2013). The process of compensation, optimization, and selection does not affect all older adults equally—a process known as the plasticity of aging (Mühlig-Versen, Bowen, & Staudinger, 2012). Nevertheless, older workers' later life stage indubitably shapes their work motivations toward broader, legacy concerns over day-to-day anxieties (Zacher, Rosing, Henning, & Frese, 2011).

The managerial subdomains of work meaning and organizational commitment offer supportive findings of this pattern. As per the socioemotional selectivity theory (SST; Carstensen, 2006), perception of limited future time (beyond chronological age *per se*) shapes older adults' prioritizing emotional meaning in their work life (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Similarly, because later-life-stage workers tend to have fewer demands on their time, they uniquely strive for greater work–life balance (Ng & Feldman, 2012). Given the impact of life stage on work motivations, it is perhaps unsurprising that a classic meta-analysis finds age—a proxy for life stage—to trump organizational tenure in predicting certain forms of organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Life-stage distinctions shape perceptions from others, as well. A key difference exists between the “young–old” (roughly 55–75) from the less active “old–old” in priorities and abilities (Neugarten, 1974; North & Fiske, 2013a). For instance, the young–old are frequently still working, so they face greater expectations to retire, step aside, and make way for younger generations (i.e., active *succession* prescriptions); by contrast, the old–old's later life stage more frequently endures the expectation to minimize shared societal resource use (i.e., passive *consumption* prescriptions; North & Fiske, 2013a, 2013b). Thus, an aging workforce necessitates acknowledging that “older” workers actually comprise

traditional older age and large portions of middle age.

Older worker outcome findings from life-stage approaches. In spite of older workers' adaptive later-life-stage processes, research findings show that emphasizing life stages tends to inhibit their opportunities (see Figure 2).

Individual performance: Evidence that a self-focus on later-life-stage “elderly” negatively predicts performance (see Figure 2).

The downside of acknowledging the later-life status is apparent via work on subjective age—the age at which older adults perceive themselves, irrespective of their actual chronological age (Rubin & Bernsten, 2006), and which predicts, above and beyond chronological age, older workers' work attitudes and their targeted organizations (Rioux & Mokunkolo, 2013). Here, older adults are often motivated to disidentify as “old” (Montepare & Lachman, 1989), and older workers who feel subjectively younger perform better, suggesting that simply feeling “old” hinders performance more than actually being numerically older does (Kornadt, Hess, Voss, & Rothermund, 2016). By the same token, negative self-perceptions toward aging diminish older workers' health outcomes, work performance, and motivation to continue working, whereas positive views of later life stages enhance these components (Gaillard & Desmette, 2010; Hess & Hinson, 2006; Levy & Leifheit-Limson, 2009; Levy, Zonderman, Slade, & Ferrucci, 2009). Thus, emphasizing older workers' later life stage serves to inhibit their performance, whereas it is adaptive to self-identify as young(er).

Interpersonal discrimination: Evidence that perceiving older workers as elders fosters primarily negative attitudes from others (see Figure 2).

Age discrimination theories often link interpersonal devaluation of older individuals with later life–associated phenomena. One perspective attributes such discrimination to health concerns or contagion, in which older and infirm are disfavored (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994). Indeed, feeling vulnerable to infectious diseases intensifies ageism (Duncan & Schaller, 2009), as does perceiving older adults as mortality reminders (Martens, Greenberg, Schimel, & Landau, 2004).

In a similar vein, discrimination in hiring older workers develops from perceptions of later-life inhibitions (Bjelland, Bruyere, Von Schrader, Houtenville, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Webber, 2010), or else concerns over health-related costs (Neumark et al., 2015). A climate of negative attitudes toward

older workers dissuades them from an opportunity-seeking promotion orientation (Bowen & Staudinger, 2013). This inhibits their performance by reducing their tendency to pursue potentially work-life-extending endeavors, such as trainings (Zacher et al., 2010).

Group-based diversity: Evidence that grouping “elders” with “non-elders” produces mixed group-based diversity outcomes (see Figure 2).

At first glance, a life-stage approach promises uniting workplace age groups. Broadly, age is the only universal social category, comprising life stages that every person eventually joins, provided sufficient lifespan (North & Fiske, 2012). Building on this, an encouraging set of findings show that priming long-term legacy concerns makes later-life-stage groups more receptive to the needs of younger-life-stage groups (Wade-Benzoni & Tost, 2009). Likewise, reminding younger adults that they will one day become old makes them more receptive to later-life-stage concerns (e.g., retirement savings; Hershfield et al., 2011). Thus, capitalizing on the inherent universality of age might serve as an effective way of uniting age groups, highlighting their shared trajectory.

However, despite this encouraging angle, evidence linking age's inherent fluidity with consistently positive workplace outcomes is scant. On the one hand, chronological age diversity among top management teams (TMTs) predicts market success (Kilduff, Angelmar, & Mehra, 2000). On the other hand, a study on 93 top management bank holding teams finds chronological age dissimilarity (unlike tenure dissimilarity) to be a significant predictor of turnover (Jackson et al., 1991). Thus, the jury is out on whether life-stage diversity produces the positive workplace outcomes that it promises.

Tenure: Older Workers as the Old Guard

A third manner of extending past chronological age perspectives is acknowledging the highly intertwined component of organizational tenure, or the length of time spent with an organization (Staw, 1980). Characterizing older workers as the “old guard” acknowledges that they entered the organization at a certain point in time, and have operated within the organization for a certain period of time. However, not all older workers can be considered equivalent based on similar chronological age: although age and tenure are highly correlated, members of disparate generational brackets might be equally tenured, and likewise, workers of the same age might have entered the organization at different points.

How tenure approaches inform organizational scholarship. Organizational tenure is a key predictor in many respects, often outpacing chronological age in predicting employee behaviors. Formative organizational fault line perspectives argue that clear fissures emerge around “years of shared experience,” shaped primarily by tenure (Lawrence & Zyphur, 2011). Similarly, classic organizational demography work illustrates how organizational culture derives largely from tenure (Carroll & Harrison, 1998). Although highly correlated with chronological age, organizational tenure reflects time spent with the organization only.

From this standpoint *per se*, strong fault lines do form. For instance, a 63-year-old employee likely feels more comfortable communicating with a 48-year-old coworker who simultaneously entered and rose up through the organizational ranks, than she does with a 61-year-old employee hired last year (Lawrence & Zyphur, 2011). Thus, as with generation and life stage, a chronological age focus alone fails to capture this nuance.

How tenure approaches fundamentally underlie older worker understanding. Scholars have disentangled the effect of organizational tenure from that of other demographic characteristics, including chronological age, in at least two key first-order predictors of work performance. First, organizational tenure (more than chronological age) predicts organizational commitment among older workers, whereas the reverse is true for younger workers (Cohen, 1993). A more nuanced perspective finds that tenure predicts continuance commitment—that is, the desire to stay with an organization because of understanding the costs of leaving—whereas chronological age predicts affective (general desire to remain) and normative (obligation to remain) forms of commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1993). Moreover, a meta-analysis finds organizational tenure—controlling for chronological age—to be the key moderator variable in the organizational commitment–performance relationship (Wright & Bonett, 2002). Thus, disentangling tenure from age is necessary in any “older” worker investigation.

Albeit less commonly, scholars also have isolated tenure's impact on work motivation, another key predictor of performance. A study on male, blue-collar workers finds organizational tenure to positively predict intrinsic work motivation (Cook & Wall, 1980). On the white-collar side, a different study finds the same pattern among Norwegian bank employees (Kuvaas, 2006). Yet another study posits a curvilinear relationship between tenure and motivation (Wagner, Ferris, Fandt, & Wayne, 1987).

Although a general lack of studies obscures the tenure–motivation link *per se* (Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, & Dijkers, 2008), the relationship between tenure and key second-order (i.e., performance) outcomes is perhaps clearer (see next sub-section).

Research highlighting “older” worker abilities often cite skills that actually develop with tenure—for instance, valuing older workers as a unique organizational memory storehouse and supplying tacit knowledge, relationships, and organization-specific experiences (Dunham & Burt, 2011; Harvey, 2012; Lahaie, 2005). By the same token, organization-specific boons frequently ascribed to “mature” workers, such as being higher in organizational citizenship behaviors and organizational commitment (Paullin, 2014), also derive most primarily from tenure (Wright & Bonett, 2002).

Older worker outcome findings from tenure approaches. Research offers encouraging support for the general value of tenure.

Individual performance: Evidence that a self-focus as the “old guard” positively predicts performance, particularly among TMTs (see Figure 2).

Multiple large-scale studies show that organizational tenure positively predicts performance. An analysis comprising 32,000 entry-level employees finds an overall tenure–performance correlation of 0.18 (Hunter & Hunter, 1984). A subsequent meta-analysis, comprising a sample of over 16,000 (operationalizing organizational tenure as “experience in your present position”) finds this relationship to be even stronger, at a level of 0.32 (McDaniel, Schmidt, & Hunter, 1988). A more recent meta-analysis of 350 empirical studies (cumulative sample of 249,841) finds that a worker’s organizational tenure predicts both positive and negative performance outcomes (organizational citizenship behaviors, core task performance, and aggressive behaviors and non-sickness absence), even when controlling for chronological age (Ng & Feldman, 2010). However, even this analysis finds a significantly positive relationship between tenure and performance, overall. Although a more recent study argues for a curvilinear relationship between tenure and performance (Uppal, 2017), a greater amount of existing evidence supports an overall positive relationship, even if the relationship may be more complex than this.

Tenure’s beneficial effects on performance are perhaps even clearer among top management. A key analysis (Bergh, 2001) tested two competing hypotheses concerning organizational tenure: (1) the upper echelons perspective, which posits that executives with shorter tenure, free of organizational memory

constraints, will be more adaptable than their longer tenure counterparts; versus (2) the resource-based view, which posits that executives with longer tenure are more successful at acquisition outcomes because of their enhanced organization-relevant knowledge. This analysis, comprising 104 acquisitions over a 5-year period, found far more evidence for the latter prediction—that is, executives with longer tenure tend to perform better in this domain, thereby supporting the resource-based view on tenure. Buttressing this result is the finding that leader organizational tenure in the financial services industry predicts employee productivity (Steffens, Shemla, Wegge, & Diestel, 2014). Thus, when examining the impact of tenure on performance, hierarchical level is an important consideration for the aging workforce space’s development.

Interpersonal discrimination: Evidence that perceiving older workers as the “old guard” fosters primarily negative attitudes from others (see Figure 2).

At the level of interpersonal *discrimination*, tenure-based fault lines are surprisingly strong. In fact, many have argued that interpersonal workplace relationships stemming from tenure similarity are stronger than those deriving from any other social category, including gender, ethnicity, and chronological age (e.g., Lawrence & Zyphur, 2011; McCain, O’Reilly, & Pfeffer, 1983; Pfeffer, 1983, 1985). Because of this, organizational tenure fault lines heighten the risk of interpersonal exclusion (Lawrence & Zyphur, 2011), turnover (McCain et al., 1983), and undermine certain types of information sharing between differentially tenured workers (Gilson, Lim, Luciano, & Choi, 2013). Tenure dissimilarity also predicts emotional conflict—in contrast to age diversity, which reduces such conflict (Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999)—and a lack of interpersonal communication frequency (Zenger & Lawrence, 1989). Thus, at the interpersonal level, divergence in organizational tenure appears to foster discrimination and might underlie a good portion of what scholars often label “ageism” targeting older workers.

Group-based diversity: Evidence that grouping “the organizational old guard” with “the newcomers” and other less-tenured groups predicts primarily positive diversity outcomes, particularly among TMTs (see Figure 2).

Nevertheless, silver linings emerge at the group diversity level. In certain domains, such as medical clinics, tenure diversity enhances overall cognitive diversity, which facilitates strategic change at the organizational level (Van de Ven, Rogers, Bechara, & Sun, 2008). By the same token, an analysis of 250

leaders and 1,753 employees finds a positive relationship between team organizational tenure diversity and productivity—above and beyond the benefits of individual employee tenure *per se* (Steffens et al., 2014).

Still, these positive signs are qualified by key moderator considerations. For instance, tenure diversity effects appear stronger in certain industries than in others (e.g., oil more so than food; Murray, 1989). Researchers hypothesize this is due to industry-specific differences in top-level management's role in shaping strategy (Milliken & Martins, 1996). Moreover, the impact of tenure diversity might depend on the focal productivity domain. For example, in innovation, the relationship between tenure diversity and productivity appears to be curvilinear (Chi, Huang, & Lin, 2009). Similarly, organizational tenure diversity in product development indirectly predicts productivity (via facilitating the group's ability to share goals and prioritize), but also negatively predicts meeting deadlines and staying within budget (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992).

As with individual performance, the hierarchical level emerges as an important moderator of tenure diversity effects. Indeed, the TMT tenure diversity, more so than at other levels, is more strongly linked with organizational outcomes (Murray, 1989). The TMT diversity may be more symbolic than cognitive—that is, doing more to generate buy-in from diverse intraorganizational groups than to facilitate cognitive dexterity *per se* (Milliken & Martins, 1996). Nevertheless, studies often uncover a positive relationship between productivity and group-based tenure diversity at the upper levels. An analysis of 42 U. K. manufacturing companies found that the TMT tenure diversity positively predicts productivity (in contrast to age diversity, which negatively predicts it; West et al., 1999). Taken together, such tenure diversity findings offer promising paths for harnessing what scholars often overcharacterize as mere “age diversity” (Carroll & Harrison, 1998; Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003).

Experience: Older Workers as Seasoned Employees

Although organizational scholars often equate organizational tenure with overall work experience, the two are conceptually different (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998). Whereas tenure is more of an internal socialization process—an accumulation of knowing values and expected behaviors within a given organization—experience derives from knowledge

gleaned from action, practice, and perception of tasks and duties over time (Sturman, 2003). Another way of disentangling experience from tenure is that the former is inherently quantitative, and based primarily on time—the number of years on the job or in the organization, or else the frequency of completing a given task—whereas the latter incorporates key qualitative components, such as task challenge, complexity, and opportunities for career advancement over time (Quiñones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998). As with organizational tenure, although work experience is heavily intertwined with chronological age, it represents its own, standalone construct, comprising the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired over time, rather than the amount of time *per se* (Lance, Hedge, & Alley, 1989; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998).

How experience approaches inform organizational scholarship. The human capital theory explains experience boons: workers invest experience in themselves to enhance their abilities (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2000; Sturman, 2003). Similarly, learning theory posits that abilities increase as one accumulates and uses experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). From a psychology-of-aging standpoint, the accumulation of experiences augments one's crystallized intelligence (factual knowledge and pattern recognition), which compensates for steady declines across the lifespan in fluid intelligence (ability to learn new skills quickly; North & Fiske, 2012; Salthouse, 2012).

Given various experienced-based benefits, scholars have proposed models delineating the experience accumulation process over time. One influential paradigm posits a full-crossed 3-dimensional model, comprising three levels (organization, job, and task) crossed with three measurement modes (amount, type, and time; Quiñones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995). Building on this, a later model characterizes experience as the interaction of qualitative and quantitative components that interact over time, shaping primary outcomes of work motivation, knowledge, and work attitudes, and secondary outcomes of performance and career development (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998).

How experience approaches fundamentally underlie older worker understanding. Advocates for older workers often tout an experience-honed skill set. Indeed, strong evidence indicates that work experience is the main predictor of workers' self-perceived competence and motivation to learn on the job, fostering both tacit “know-how” and social competence (social interaction and communication; Paloniemi, 2006). Moreover, managerial perceptions, worker self-reports, and empirical studies all

link experience with a unique set of “soft skills,” such as enhanced agreeableness, calmness, conscientiousness, wisdom, and stress management (Carstensen & Mikels, 2005; Grossmann, Na, Varnum, Park, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2010; Loehlin & Martin, 2001; North & Hershfield, 2014; Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2007). Driving self-perceived work efficacy is task experience *per se*, above and beyond general experience (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

Older worker outcome findings from experience approaches. Studies conceptualizing older workers in terms of their heightened experience have uncovered promising evidence for the value of an aging workforce.

Individual performance: Evidence that focusing on older workers' experience positively predicts individual performance (see Figure 2).

A classic analysis comprising over 24,000 U.S. employees finds that experience is an overall stronger (positive) predictor of work performance than is chronological age (Avolio, Waldman, & McDaniel, 1990). Likewise, a meta-analysis of 93,103 individual data points disentangles experience, tenure, and chronological age, finding that experience is the strongest of the three predictors in positively predicting performance (Sturman, 2003). Some evidence suggests that experience predicts performance at a steeper rate earlier on, plateauing in the later career stage, albeit still in a positive direction (Avolio et al. 1990; Jacobs, Hofmann, & Kriska, 1990; McDaniel et al., 1998). Regardless, consensus beliefs posit an overall positive relationship between being “seasoned” and performing well on the job, even if the pure linearity of this relationship is unclear.

More nuanced investigations unpack specific experience components in predicting performance. For instance, experience can be general, measured as a number of total work years, or it can be subdivided into different levels (task experience, versus job experience, versus organizational experience) or different measurement units (amount, time, or type). From this standpoint, task experience emerges as an even stronger predictor of performance (with a correlation of 0.43) than the overall job experience (which presents an overall correlation of 0.27; Quiñones et al., 1995). This general pattern holds up in the specific cases of U.S. Air Force jet repair mechanics (Lance et al. 1989), experimental studies employing a group decision-making task (Littlepage, Robison, & Reddington, 1997), and local community adults of all ages undergoing a computer learning task (Czaja & Sharit, 1998). In all cases, task experience appears to outpace overall experience (and, for

that matter, chronological age) in positively predicting performance.

Like organizational tenure, work (and specifically task) experience also predicts TMT performance. Among executives, controlling for other age-related characteristics, accumulated work experience predicts aptitude in strategic thinking competency—the ability to spot and seize market opportunities and carry out a vision to realize organizational and stakeholder value thereof (Dragoni, Oh, Vankatwyk, & Tesluk, 2011). From a task experience standpoint, hiring executives with specific company acquisition experiences benefits organizational performance with respect to future acquisitions (McDonald, Westphal, & Graebner, 2008).

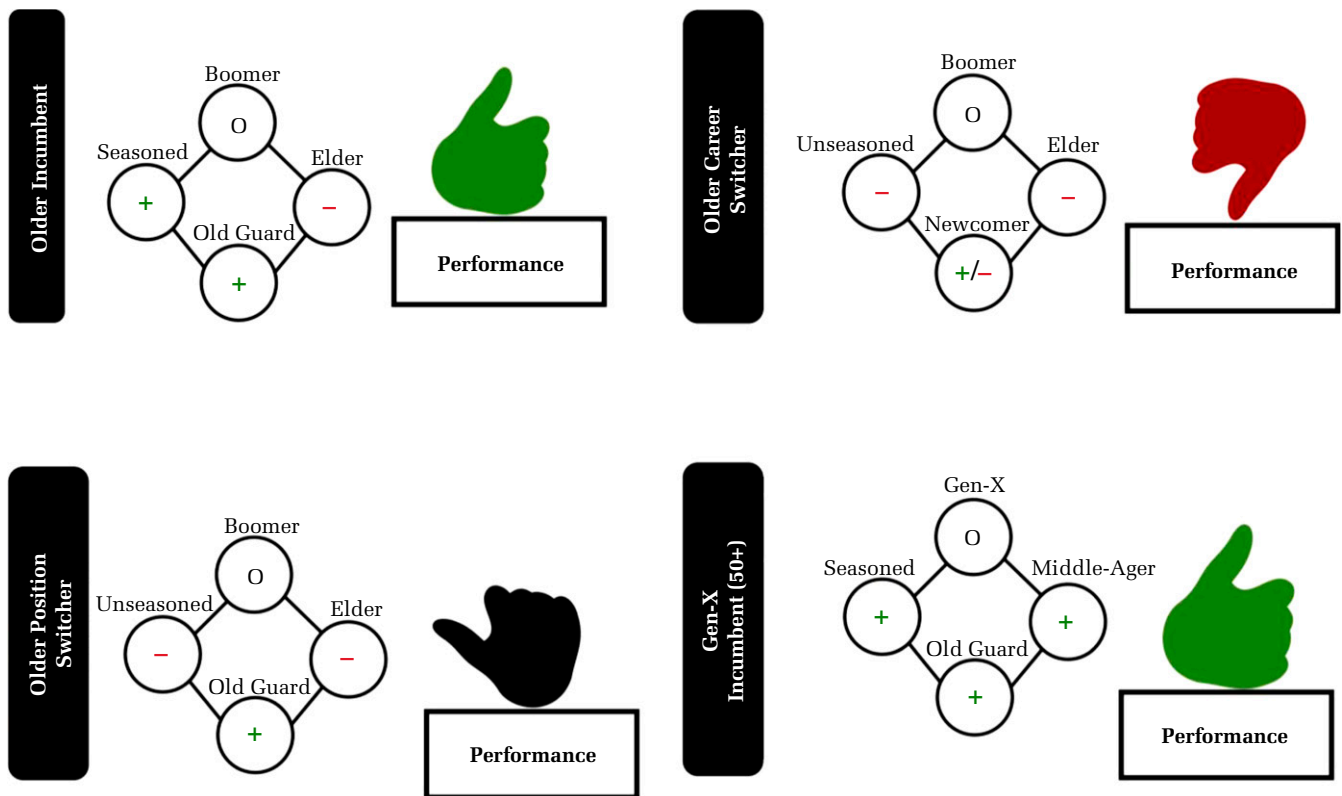
Interpersonal discrimination: Evidence that perceiving older workers as “seasoned” predicts mixed interpersonal attitudes from others (see Figure 2).

However, with respect to *discrimination*, experience appears to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, respect for seniority is an organizational norm that pervades countries around the world (Dedoussis, 2004; Fischer, 2008). On the other hand, studies show that, in the minds of employers, experience connotes perceptions of excess cost (Porcellato, Carmichael, Hulme, Ingham, & Prashar, 2010) or inability to train (Brooke & Taylor, 2005). This calls into question whether experienced applicants should omit their experience in any job recruitment materials (Sullivan, 2000). Nevertheless, older worker advocates specifically point to experience and accumulated knowledge as the key benefit for organizations looking to stay competitive in the long term (Paullin, 2014), and managers echo this perception (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2007).

Group-based diversity: Evidence that grouping seasoned workers with less seasoned workers produces mixed diversity outcomes (see Figure 2).

Group-level *diversity* in experience is similarly double-edged. A major benefit of what researchers label “age diversity” actually encompasses heterogeneity in experience—group-level differences in know-how and cultural norms, passed down from more experienced to less experienced organizational cohorts (Backes-Gellner & Veen, 2013). Such diversity can enhance strategic orientation ambidexterity (Heavey & Simsek, 2017), and developing efficient skill specialization that enhances group performance (Bunderson, 2003). On the other hand, value differences emerging from experience-level disparities foster communication breakdowns, conflict, and turnover (Backes-Gellner & Veen, 2013; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989).

FIGURE 3
Predicted Net Performance Outcomes, as a Function of Integrated GATE Compound Profile Examples



Note. A net negative performance prediction for the Older Career Switcher does not mean that older workers are incapable of successfully switching careers. This paper argues merely that, as per a GATE analysis, the Older Career Switcher faces more performance hurdles than facilitators. Certainly, there are exceptions to every rule. Moreover, if given the opportunity, these older workers eventually earn experience and tenure in their new position, which predicts elevated performance over time.

PART 3: FROM AGE CONFOUNDS TO GATE COMPOUNDS

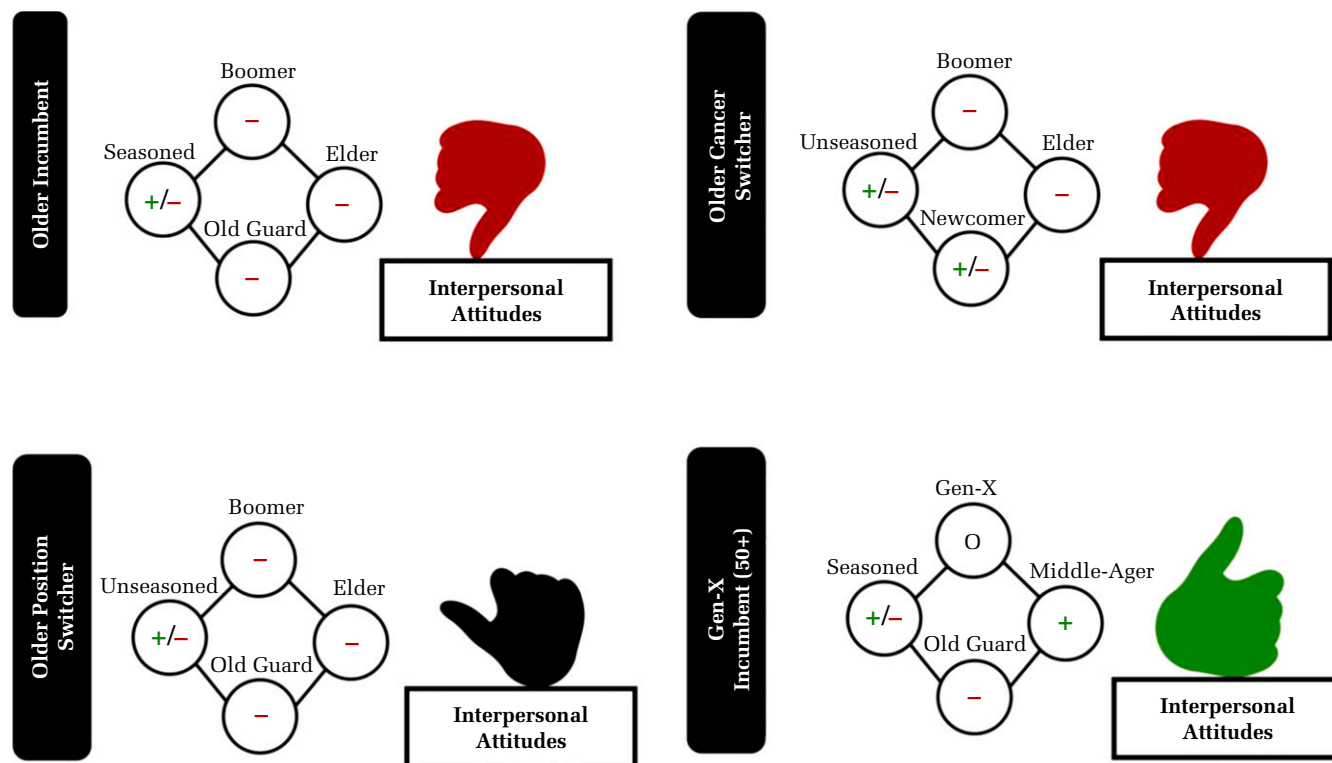
Part 1 has argued that chronological approaches to older workers are ineffectual. Part 2 has argued that identifying GATE dimensions is necessary for disentangling intertwined age components, but that these segregated literatures present their own set of contradictions between one another. Part 3 now argues for the importance of integrating GATE components to remedy both issues.

The first advantage of an integrative GATE approach is yielding more informative, “GATE compounds” in studying older workers, relying not on age *per se*, but on the sum of age-connoted parts. Consider four different, example GATE composites (see Figures 3 and 4): (a) the older incumbent—that is, a Boomer in his/her sixties (elder life stage), who has worked for the same company for decades (long tenure), in generally the same skill-based role (high

experience); (b) the older position switcher—that is, a Boomer in his/her sixties, long-tenured, but who has recently transitioned into a brand-new role requiring different skills (thus forfeiting considerable experience); (c) the older career switcher—that is, a Boomer who is transitioning to a new role in a new company or industry (thereby forfeiting the tenure and experience often ascribed to “older” workers); and (d) the Gen-X incumbent—a senior (50+) worker, long-tenured, but not yet old enough to face some of the life-stage hurdles often afflicting older workers. Although these four GATE profiles do not exhaust all possible combinations, already inter-composite differences are apparent: Much like in chemistry, compound wholes differ based on the distinct combinations of their component parts.²

² I would like to acknowledge Matthew Cronin for providing the chemistry analogy to illustrate a key advantage of an integrative GATE compound perspective.

FIGURE 4
Predicted Net Discrimination Outcomes, as a Function of Integrated GATE Compound Profile Examples



Note. Similar to the point made in Figure 3, Figure 4 does not indicate that Older Incumbents and Older Career Switchers are universally derided. This paper argues merely that, as per a GATE analysis, they are more at risk for discrimination than are other GATE composites.

Unpacking these fine-grained distinctions is where future research on the aging workforce must head to solve noted challenges in this intellectual space. A GATE compound approach acknowledges multiple “meanings of age” in the workplace, as others have argued (albeit in relatively specific contexts, such as motivation and communication; Kooij et al., 2008; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989), but extends beyond, conceptualizing how these different elements operate simultaneously and jointly, forming differential profiles of older workers. A compound-based approach dovetails also with recent emphasis on intersectionality, or the intersection of multiple (usually subordinate) social categories (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Much in the same manner that a “black woman” and “older woman” are not perceived tantamount to “black” + “woman” and “older women,” respectively (in both cases, the compound eludes prejudice associated with each categorical component; Martin, North, & Phillips, 2019; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), a GATE profile approach illustrates how multiple, intersecting elements of age

shape the challenges and opportunities of different older worker composites.

As noted, existing research on older workers often conflates GATE factors with one another. Thus, a second key contribution of an integrative GATE perspective is potentially disentangling the relative impact of different GATE elements from one another. In the same manner that researchers have recently advocated for greater theoretical nuance in understanding gender effects (which some argue reflect power dynamics primarily; Lammers & Stoker, 2019; Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015) or race factors (which some argue are influenced heavily by social class underpinnings; e.g., Lareau, 2002), the same pivotal moment now exists to characterize age effects as GATE effects. In a similar fashion, a GATE approach emphasizes broadly how chronological age maps onto other, overlooked factors; research approaches can disentangle these intertwined components to determine which aspects are most predictive of older worker outcomes.

Opening the GATE to Unpacking Individual Performance

Adopting GATE compounds to predict performance. The four example GATE composites cited in the prior section illustrate the utility of a GATE profile approach in enhancing performance predictions (see Figure 3). Although generational affiliation does not consistently predict performance (see Part 2), significant inter-compound performance difference predictions emerge via the other three GATE components.

On average, the older incumbent is likely to perform well: whatever older-life-stage performance hurdles might exist (e.g., subjective oldness, as noted in Part 2) are outweighed by documented performance boons that come with tenure and experience (also discussed in Part 2). By contrast, the older career switcher, who is low on tenure—and, given the career switch, lower on skill-related experience—is likely to face more difficulty, at least early on; nevertheless, a newcomer's lack of initial ability is often offset, at least partially, by increased willingness to learn (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997).

Meanwhile, the older position switcher's case is less clear: On the one hand, older-life-stage hurdles combined with a lack of direct, relevant experience negatively predict performance; on the other hand, switching positions within the same company maintains old guard status, which tends to correlate positively with performance. Thus, performance depends on the skill transferability from the old position to the new one, or else how quickly those new skills can be accumulated. Finally, the case of the Gen-X incumbent indicates a smoother path, having accumulated many of the experience- and tenure-based benefits associated with older workers, whereas a middle-aged life stage avoids many noted later-life performance pitfalls that older workers sometimes face.

Disentangling relative impact of GATE components on performance. A second advantage to an integrative GATE approach is disentangling the

relative impact of generation, age, tenure, and experience on performance. Imagine that a manager seeks to appoint a project leader. The choices include a 67-year-old Boomer who has worked with the organization for more than 20 years, a 45-year-old Gen-Xer who has also worked at the company for more than 20 years, a 53-year-old Boomer who has worked with the organization for more than 20 years, a 67-year-old Boomer who has considerable industry experience with a *different* company, but who has joined the present organization only this past year, and a 65-year-old Boomer who has been with the organization for more than 20 years, but who has recently switched to a different department, necessitating new, late-career skill set development. Among these candidates, which is the best choice?

Although this is the type of question many organizational scholars enjoy pursuing, from an age standpoint, it is one that the existing literature would have trouble answering. In line with the present article's thesis, relative to candidate A, candidate B differs most significantly on generational cohort and life stage; candidate C differs primarily on life stage only; candidate D differs on tenure; and candidate E differs primarily on task-related experience (see Table 1). When juxtaposed with one another, as these candidates are, a complex age story arises—one for which the present state of the literature would have difficulty making strong performance predictions.

This puzzle epitomizes the need for researchers to continually strive to operationalize and quantify the relative impact of each GATE element in predicting individual performance. For instance, a candidate's birth year could ascertain generational cohort (per recommendations from Rudolph & Zacher, 2017a, 2017b), number of "cultural timetable" life span achievements could serve as a proxy for life stage (e.g., number of children; Elder, 1977; Hawkins & Belsky, 1989), years with current organization would quantify organizational tenure (Staw, 1980), and number of years with task-related endeavors operationalizes experience (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

TABLE 1
Sample Pathway toward Comparing Older Worker Performance as a Function of Different GATE Predictors

	Employee A	Employee B	Employee C	Employee D	Employee E
Generation	Boomer	Gen-X	Boomer	Boomer	Boomer
Age	67	45	53	67	65
Tenure	High (20+)	High (20+)	High (20+)	Low (< 1)	High (20+)
Experience	High (20+)	High (20+)	High (20+)	High (20+)	Low (< 2)
Key difference from Candidate A	N/A	Generation/Age	Age (Lifestage)	Tenure	Experience

By coding and quantifying these multidimensional predictors of the older worker, and accounting for the variance in performance due to each, the equation for predicting performance in the aforementioned scenario becomes clearer than existing approaches offer. A continual such focus will also help resolve apparent inconsistencies in performance predictions between GATE elements, as outlined (see Figure 2).

Interpersonal Discrimination: From Ageism to GATE-ism

Comparing GATE compounds to predict different levels of discrimination. A GATE compound approach elucidates why age discrimination afflicts certain older workers more than others (see Figure 4). As per Part 2's literature review, the older incumbent faces discrimination based on generational membership (e.g., "Boomers" are stereotyped as mercenary and competitive), life stage (where "elders" are stereotyped as costly and slow), and tenure status (where a strong fault line exists between the "old guard" and other cohorts)—and, to a lesser extent, experience (which garners the mixed perception of respect but costliness). The older position switcher likely faces similar discrimination hurdles, as a Boomer, elder, and old guard member. Nevertheless, a position switch might connote an eagerness to learn, contradicting negative perceptions of seasoned employees as difficult to train (Gioaba & Krings, 2017).

The older career switcher also potentially escapes the stuck-in-their-ways perceptions sometimes ascribed to older workers (Canduela, Dutton, Johnson, Lindsay, McQuaid, & Raeside, 2012). Although, as noted, their Boomer and elder status risks negative attitudes from others, an attempt to switch careers and jobs fosters the newcomer signal of willingness to learn and take risks (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997). Of all, least at risk for discrimination is the Gen-X incumbent. No scholarly evidence exists that people reliably discriminate against Gen-X members *per se*, and although being a member of the "old guard" risks fault lines with other cohorts, the value of experience (mixed), combined with an overt advantage as a middle-ager (people of all ages endorse middle-aged high-status; Garstka, Hummert, & Branscombe, 2005; Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004), suggests that such workers avoid the (later) life-stage-based prejudice often leveled at older workers.

Disentangling relative impact of GATE components on discrimination. In spite of a recent spike in age discrimination research (North & Fiske, 2012),

such studies are surprisingly unresolved about which factors underlie workplace age perceptions. In general, prevailing theories on age discrimination center on characteristics associated with later life, such as mortality salience, illness, and senility (Burnstein et al., 1994; Martens et al., 2004; North & Fiske, 2012), but these perspectives are not as relevant to older workers, who are usually in relatively good health (North & Fiske, 2013a).

In a similar vein, audit studies elucidating age discrimination in the labor market often try to isolate chronological age as the deciding factor in shaping job opportunities. Although these studies are undoubtedly foundational, even their authors acknowledge the inherent challenges of controlling for inherently intertwined age factors, particularly experience. Efforts to account for these confounds have resulted in a diversity of solutions: For example, some such approaches match younger and older applicants on all possible factors except for experience, which inherently goes with age (Riach & Rich, 2006). Other approaches try to "control for" the experience confound by intentionally granting the older applicant greater general experience in a different industry (Bendick, Brown, & Wall, 1999); others grant younger and older applicants similar work experience, ascribing the latter's employment absence to child-rearing (Bendick et al., 1997), or else truncate the resume's work history altogether by limiting it to a recent 10-year range (Lahey, 2008). Nevertheless, each of these approaches presents its own set of confounds—either presenting older workers as uncharacteristically inexperienced, or else failing to isolate age from experience (or some other intertwined element) as the deciding factor (Neumark et al., 2015).

Given these challenges, and as per the present article's focus, I argue that future audit studies should focus less on isolating age *per se*, and more on isolating which age-related components (i.e., GATE) most strongly drive labor market discrimination. For instance, researchers might compare the job market success of (a) a 67-year-old Boomer with 31 years of industry experience, (b) a 45-year-old Gen-Xer with 26 years of industry experience, (c) a 52-year-old Boomer with 30 years of industry experience, and (d) a 65-year-old Boomer who has a great deal of general work experience, but is seeking a second career, and, thus, has little industry-relevant experience (see Table 2).

As with the potential performance study proposed in the prior section (Table 1), each job candidate systematically differs from the other in a key component: Relative to candidate A, candidate B differs in his/her generation and life stage; candidate C

TABLE 2
Sample Pathway toward Comparing Older Worker Discrimination in Hiring as a Function of Different GATE Predictors

	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Candidate D
Generation	Boomer	Gen-X	Boomer	Boomer
Age	67	45	52	65
Tenure	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Experience	31 (High)	26 (High)	30 (High)	0 (Low)
Key difference from Candidate A	N/A	Generation & Age	Age (Lifestage)	Experience

differs primarily in his/her life stage only; and candidate D differs primarily in the level of experience. In order for the aging workforce literature to move forward, comparing potential outcome disparities in this manner is imperative.

Harnessing Group-based GATE Diversity

Adopting a GATE fault line approach to diversity. As Part 2 reviewed, age diversity's benefits remain elusive, and in many cases, greater age diversity results in reinforcing difficult-to-overcome, age-based fault lines (Boehm & Kunze, 2015). As per the core argument of this paper, approaches to "age" diversity should really ascertain "GATE diversity"—acknowledging that what scholars have often characterized as age fault lines really derive from up to four different category divisions.

To this end, research approaches should adopt a GATE-based fault line perspective, based on how strongly different GATE categories align (adapted from Lau & Murnighan, 1998), see Table 3.³ For instance, Group 1, which comprises four members of comparable generations, life stages, tenure levels, and experience, comprises no diversity—and as such, virtually no potential for GATE fault lines. Likewise, Group 2 also presents very weak fault line strength, but for a different reason: maximum GATE diversity, with group members each comprising four different generations, life stages, and tenure and experience levels. As such, due to the fact that there is no GATE-based alignment, strong subgroups are unlikely to form.

By contrast, groups with more moderate levels of diversity tend to present the strongest potential for subgroup formation (see Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Group 4 reflects very strong potential for fault lines because of strong subgroup alignment fostering two

highly distinct groups, each sharing within-group similarities across all four GATE dimensions: (1) 60-something-year-old Boomers with high experience and high tenure both via the same organization versus (2) 20-something Millennials with comparatively low tenure and low experience. Likewise, Group 5's moderate diversity represents strong potential for subgrouping, with three aligned GATE categories comprising two groups: 60-something Boomers with high experience juxtaposed with 30-something Millennials with low experience. However, in this case, tenure does not align quite as well as it does in Group 4, and thus, Group 5's fault line potential is slightly lower. Finally, Group 3 lies somewhere in the middle: although comparably moderate to Group 5 in its amount of diversity, the potential for sub-grouping lies primarily in comprising two Boomers in their mid-60s, but because they differ in terms of experience and tenure, their subgroup alignment is unlikely to be as strong as in Group 5 (see Table 3).

Disentangling relative impact of GATE fault lines on diversity. Resembling strengths of a GATE approach within performance and discrimination, a GATE diversity approach also presents the benefit of disentangling which individual GATE elements foster the strongest fault lines. To this end, researchers going forward can gauge the extent to which subgroup formation in a given workplace forms from (a) proverbial generational groupings (Boomers versus Gen-Xers versus Millennials; Twenge, 2010), (b) life-stage effects (e.g., having children versus not having children; Hawkins & Belsky, 1989), (c) tenure divisions (which some argue trump most other category divisions; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989), and (d) experience differences (in line with the argument for older workers' benefits; Paullin, 2014).

In other words, to truly unite "age" groups, scholars must seek to understand which aspects of age form the strongest subgroup divisions—not just that GATE alignment forms subgroups *per se*. As per the literature reviewed in Part 2, generational fault lines appear to be among the strongest

³ Per this article's focus, here I explore faultline category alignment of GATE. However, I acknowledge that the presence of various other social categories (e.g., gender, race, and organizational role) renders the fault line picture even more complex.

TABLE 3
Pathways toward Testing Age Diversity Faultlines as a Function of Integrated GATE Predictors

Group No.	GATE Category	Member A	Member B	Member C	Member D	Diversity	Faultline Strength
1	Generation	Boomer	Boomer	Boomer	Boomer	none	none
	Age	67	67	62	64		
	Tenure	25	23	20	24		
	Experience	high	high	high	high		
2	Generation	Silent	Boomer	Gen-X	Millennial	Maximum	Very weak (1 aligned category; 4 subgroups)
	Age	78	64	46	25		
	Tenure	50	35	20	2		
	Experience	56	40	24	2		
3	Generation	Boomer	Boomer	Gen-X	Millennial	Moderate	Weak (2 aligned categories; 2 subgroups)
	Age	64	65	45	25		
	Tenure	2	20	20	2		
	Experience	20	2	20	2		
4	Generation	Boomer	Boomer	Millennial	Millennial	Low	Very strong (4 aligned categories; 2 subgroups)
	Age	67	64	26	24		
	Tenure	32	30	3	2		
	Experience	32	30	3	3		
5	Generation	Boomer	Millennial	Boomer	Millennial	Moderate	Strong (3 aligned categories; 2 subgroups)
	Age	62	34	64	33		
	Tenure	14	2	2	14		
	Experience	30	2	30	2		

Diversity levels and fault line strength both derive from prior work (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Diversity is based on the total number of attributes in which at least two members are different, how those attributes might be organized into similar categories, and the variance of each attribute. Fault line strength derives from the number of GATE categories that align and the possible ways to form subgroups on the basis of these attributes.

of the four GATE dimensions, doing more to divide age cohorts than unite them, and inhibiting performance. However, on the flip side, emphasizing tenure diversity appears to smooth over these divisions and positively predict performance. Meanwhile, life stage and experience diversity are mixed. Nevertheless, testing these different drivers of diversity fault lines simultaneously, rather than in isolation—perhaps by priming certain types of GATE diversity over others and then exploring group productivity—is how this literature should move forward.

CONCLUSION: BROAD ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR CONTRIBUTIONS OF SHIFTING FROM AGE TO GATE

A GATE focus dovetails with timely scholarly imperatives: (1) emphasizing construct clarity; (2) understanding context; and (3) tackling grand challenges. In its contributions to each of these domains, GATE underscores the timely nature of the aging workforce as a high-priority scholarly topic.

Enhancing the Construct Clarity of Workplace Age

OB scholars generally care deeply about *construct clarity*—that is, spelling out conceptual arguments with precision in definitions, boundary conditions, and semantic relationships to other related constructs, as well as overall coherence and logical consistency (Suddaby, 2010). Pragmatically, a lack of construct clarity generally results in a swift manuscript rejection; theoretically speaking, too, a general cry for increased construct precision has permeated OB for decades (Bacharach, 1989).

A GATE perspective situates age within each of these imperatives. First, GATE increases definitional precision within the older worker space, elucidating what exactly “older” means in the workplace context. Second, by emphasizing how chronological age alone cannot make strong predictions, GATE elucidates what numerical age cannot predict (boundary conditions). Third, a GATE integration of previously disconnected bodies of age-related literature inherently forges necessary semantic connections between related

constructs. Finally, by illustrating the inherent coherence (yet distinctiveness) between generation, life stage, tenure, and experience, a GATE perspective also enhances logical consistency in how researchers think about age going forward.

In sum, an emphasis on age as GATE serves as a roadmap for how scholars can be conceptually clearer in their approaches to an aging workforce, helping the literature overcome inconsistencies in predicting performance, discrimination, and diversity. Treating age as GATE reinforces the idea that not all chronological ages are created equal, thereby acknowledging vast (and often overlooked) variance within older age, in which interpersonal diversity actually peaks across a variety of domains (e.g., cognitive functioning, future orientation, and personality characteristics; Bal, Jansen, Van Der Velde, de Lange, & Rousseau, 2010; Mühlhig-Versen et al., 2012; Nelson & Dannefer, 1992).

Acknowledging the Context Dependence of Age

Another major OB call has comprised greater emphasis on *context*, defined as surrounding factors in the environment external to the individual, usually occurring at a different level of analysis (Johns, 2006). Context incorporates all distal factors that influence individuals within the workplace, including relational demography, situational opportunities and constraints, and temporal components (i.e., time itself; Mowday & Sutton, 1993). Recent scholarly work has underscored the importance of context in significantly altering individual differences in entrepreneurial success (Navis & Ozbek, 2016), workplace well-being (De Rond & Lok, 2016), and leadership emergence (Wellman, 2017), to name only a few domains. The workforce aging issue is similarly multilevel, robust, and context-dependent, ranging from individual-level considerations to global economic concerns (Bloom, Canning, & Fink, 2010; North & Fiske, 2015b).

By inherently discouraging a one-size-fits-all, chronological indicator of age, GATE provides an inherently context-dependent framework for understanding (older) worker age. For instance, in a U.K. professional soccer, the average career span is eight years, and the average retirement age is 35 (PFA, 2018); thus, within this circumstance, GATE can shift to match a truncated work-life span. That is, rather than focusing on “Boomers” or “Millennials,” this context features generational cohorts that are likely based on which year players entered the

league; rather than focusing on traditional life-stage differences based on the entire human life span, this context likely fosters divisions based on life-stage events that occur between ages 18 and 40 (e.g., marital status and number of children); given high rates of organizational turnover in this industry, tenure differences in this industry might be based on whether a player has played for one team or multiple teams over the course of his/her career; finally, experience differences emerge between those players who survive past the 8-year average threshold versus those who have not yet done so.

By contrast, GATE distinctions would differ in other contexts, such as white-collar, specialized skill-based professions typically with an older and longer tenured workforce (e.g., tax preparation, agricultural management, and real estate sales; Wilson, 2017). Broadly speaking, the difficulty in studying age is that it is a dynamic status category, rendering its study resistant to one-size-fits-all (i.e., chronological) approaches. However, GATE provides a framework, sensitive to contextual factors, that helps make sense of how “age”-based workplace differences emerge.

Addressing the Grand Challenge of the Aging Workforce

Finally, OB scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of tackling *grand challenges*—that is, major issues affecting managerial practices worldwide (George et al., 2016). Such challenges include bridging the science–practice gap, reducing climate change, combatting gender inequality, and making sense of a digital workforce (Banks, Pollack, Bochantin, Kirkman, Whelpley, & O’Boyle, 2016; Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016; Howard-Grenville et al., 2014; Joshi, Neely, Emrich, Griffiths, & George, 2015). Naturally, most pertinent to the present article is the grand challenge of an aging workforce, which, as currently constructed, scholars characterize as one of the strongest harbingers of economic downturn (Bloom et al., 2010)—and yet, as noted, severely lacking in scholarly attention (Kulik et al., 2014).

As the workforce continues to age at record rates (North & Fiske, 2015a), focal management issues should gravitate toward how to best accommodate and theoretically understand older workers (Truxillo et al., 2015). A GATE perspective not only forges pathways toward addressing this grand challenge, but its direct applicability to unpacking performance, discrimination, and diversity shows how the aging workforce applies to virtually all

organizational levels and domains. To my knowledge, the present article is the first that comprehensively links aging workforce concerns with major OB topics. By emphasizing how the topic of workforce aging is timely and relevant for nearly any established research domain, and by providing a roadmap for enhanced theoretical precision, the present review drives the subject matter into the scholarly mainstream once and for all.

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