



Factors that may promote and hinder successful cooperation between younger managers and older subordinates

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AIM OF THE STUDY

To increase our understanding and knowledge of the significance of age in working life and the relations between younger managers and older subordinates as seen from the perspectives of both sides.



RESEARCH QUESTION

What factors may promote and hinder successful cooperation between younger managers and older subordinates?



INTERVIEWEES

23 younger managers

- aged 22–34
- with experience of managing subordinates who were at least 20 years older

19 older workers

- with experience of being managed by a manager who was at least 20 years younger



- Mutual respect and trust
- Management styles
- Communication
- Participation
- Learning
- Cooperation



I lose confidence in a person who pretends to have more experience or knowledge than he has. It is so easily revealed.

(Female subordinate in the private sector, aged 59)



To listen to older people, well, that is easy to say. Of course, I want to listen to older people but it is about really absorbing what they say. It sounds very nice to take into account all viewpoints but sometimes it is easy to run your own race anyhow.

(Male manager in a private company, aged 33.)



That you are older and have a lot of experience does not mean that you know everything and even when you know you sometimes have to have indulgence towards the other younger person. You don't have to say all you know all the time.

(Female subordinate in the public sector, aged 56)



Sometimes I just know that the outcome of a decision is going to be bad but I feel I cannot say it. I am afraid to tell them and I say to myself, OK then, they will draw a blank and there is nothing I can do about it.

(Female subordinate in a private company, aged 62)



It has taken me many years to learn and then I have a younger manager who has not gone through all this. I try to tell her that from my experience I know a better way to do this. But the manager doesn't want to do what I suggest. So I have to implement my idea in such a way that she believes it to be her idea.

(Female subordinate in a private company, aged 61)



It is very much about not trying to be an expert over the experts because you cannot be that. Instead you have to compromise and find solutions together.

(Male manager in the public sector, aged 34)

As a leader I work very much by participation. We work together. We are very much focused on the goals and what is expected from each of us, and then I try to create a space for each of them to grow.

(Female manager in a private company, aged 33)



You watch yourself a lot more as a manager when you have older subordinates. You think about what you are doing a lot more. You learn from them and it can be very rewarding because managing is difficult.

(Female manager in the public sector, aged 25)

You can use the competence of the older people, and that is enormously good for me as a younger manager if I invite them to share their knowledge with me.

(Female manager in the public sector, aged 33)



Older people don't rush away and they may have a slowing-down effect on younger people and managers. Their questioning may be of help because if I cannot answer I have to think the matter over and consider whether it is correct or not. They think about things that younger managers don't think of. Younger managers don't have all that experience.

(Male manager in a private company, aged 34)



CONCLUSION

Older people can be very comfortable working as subordinates of younger managers and they can all work very well together if there is mutual respect and trust, if they listen to each other and take advantage of each other's competencies.