

Guidelines for Your 55+ Policy



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Colophon

This is a research-based guide for developing your 55+ policy.

It is founded on the research project 'Senior Practices' from the University of Copenhagen. The guide is aimed at managers and HR departments looking for inspiration to shape their 55+ policy. Along with this guide, the tool '55+ Conversations' is included, which you and your employees can use to facilitate discussions. Research shows that these conversations contribute to better and longer working lives.

Additionally, you can find videos and podcasts related to the material at 55plus.ku.dk.

The guide and the accompanying tools can be used freely and may be included in consultancy services and the like. However, the materials must be freely available and therefore must not be sold on its own.

Why Create a 55+ Policy?



Introduction

In an ageing society, successful workplaces foster long careers, enabling 55+ employees to stay and contribute their competencies. Our skills develop throughout life, and with age and experience, we improve at communication, viewing situations from multiple perspectives, thinking systematically, providing professional care, making sound decisions and maintaining emotional control. Teams that include senior employees often thrive and perform better. Therefore, it makes sense to support long working lives.

A good 55+ policy isn't about maximising hours or prolonging employment for its own sake. Instead, it's about effectively utilising their skills for the benefit of both parties.



We use the term 55+ policy instead of senior policy because the latter often focuses too heavily on phased retirement.

A good 55+ policy encompasses both retirement planning and creating opportunities for long working lives and continued competency development.

The naming of the policy should reflect your workplace's unique approach and priorities.



Identify Needs and Increase Attractiveness

If you, as managers and employers, want to retain your 55+ employees longer, it's crucial to understand their needs and how your workplace can meet them.

The purpose of this guide is to help your organisation design a 55+ policy that ensures your workplace remains attractive – even beyond traditional retirement age.



When Should We Act?

For most, age 55 is far from retirement. A 55-year-old employee today often has many years left in the workforce. However, people start reflecting on the final stages of their careers at different times. It is therefore important to start early. Many employees begin to reconsider their career paths and retirement transitions in their late 50s. You want to engage in dialogue with employees while they are in this process and before they have finalised their plans. Once a plan is set, it can be difficult to change.



Since 55+ employees are very different, the timing of when they feel the need for a 55+ conversation or when the 55+ policy becomes relevant to them can also differ significantly. Research indicates that employees at companies with a 55+ policy and structured conversations tend to retire later.



When Should We Act? - continued

We have named the tool 55+ Conversations and the accompanying policy 55+ Policy because this timing works well for many organisations. However, for other companies and employees, offering a 55+ conversation at this stage might feel too early. If you believe that offering the conversation when employees turn 55 is premature, you can choose alternative approaches. For example, you could set the timing to seven years before the average retirement age within your organisation or ten years before the state pension age. However, it is crucial to determine an age at which the conversation is offered to all employees.

It is also essential to emphasise that this is only an offer. Be clear that the conversation aims to create a positive and attractive work environment for 55+ employees, encouraging them to remain a part of your organisation for as long as possible. If an employee still feels that the timing is not right, ask when they believe it would be the appropriate time.



Research Insights

Diversity is important in terms of age. Studies show that workplaces and teams with diverse age profiles both thrive and perform better. Furthermore, losing employees is costly. Many skills are lost with them, workflows are disrupted and new staff must be recruited and trained. It has been estimated that replacing an employee costs between one-third and double their annual salary. Additionally, there is the impact on the company's reputation when employees seek other opportunities or rush into retirement.

For the employee themselves, it also makes sense to think in terms of long careers. Research on quality of life indicates that individuals aged 65–75 are the most satisfied, and those who continue working are the happiest in that age group. Many seniors find that they actually enjoy their work as their careers approach their end. But they also realise that something needs to change if they are to remain in the workforce. This could include adapted working hours, new tasks, different roles, the use of new tools or something else entirely.

How to Create a 55+ Policy



It is important that you discuss what is important to you. What works well for one workplace may not necessarily work well for another, and there are significant differences between employee groups and collective agreements. However, there are several general points you should consider. Below, we have elaborated on nine key points.



When going through these nine points, you should consider what would fit your organisation and how. It is also important to remember that this can be a challenging process. For some employees, it may not feel comfortable to be singled out as a specific group due to their age. It is important to emphasise that many of the things you might offer to employees over 55 could also be offered to other employees. And it is crucial to make it clear that reaching the age of 55 should not be a taboo subject. Talk about it, and talk about age, but in a respectful manner.



Once you have gone through the points and decide on a 55+ policy, you should include it in your employee handbook in the same way you handle GDPR and sustainability. When developing an ESG policy and reporting on your ESG, it is natural to include your 55+ policy as part of the 'S' in ESG.

Once you have created your policy, it should be implemented. Moving from thought to action can be challenging. Therefore, consider whether you need external help to implement it.



Needs Clarification: The Needs of 55+ Employees

A good 55+ policy requires an open dialogue about the needs and desires of 55+ employees. Start by holding a meeting with all 55+ employees where you discuss what they want. Before the meeting, offer the opportunity to submit anonymous requests, as this can be a sensitive topic for some.

Prior to the meeting, you can share the videos and podcasts that come with this material.



Offer Clarification: The Workplace's Flexibility

We often speak with managers who want to retain their 55+ employees but are unsure what is actually feasible in the workplace. Many 55+ employees also hesitate to express their needs because they aren't sure what options are available to them.

Discuss with the rest of the management team and HR what frameworks you will create after consulting with the 55+ employees. Is it permissible to reduce working hours beyond what is stated in the collective agreement? Should you offer additional vacation weeks? What about salary and pension contributions? Can someone still attend courses when they are 64? Ask 55+ employees what arrangements might be relevant to them and then consider what your workplace can offer the group. This might also include employing retired staff as temporary workers or creating clear opportunities to return after retirement. In some cases, a 55+ policy can also serve to create more flexible working conditions for members of all age groups. It may also be a good idea to ensure that union representatives are aware and updated on the topic.



Dialogue: Use the Tools for a Separate Conversation or as Part of the Annual Review (MUS)

The accompanying tool, '55+ Conversations', provides guidance on how you, as an employer, can initiate and conduct these conversations. The tool is structured around five themes that the manager and employee can choose from if covering all the themes feels too extensive for the conversation. The 55+ conversations can be part of the annual review (MUS) or a separate meeting.

Be sure to provide employees with the tools they need to prepare. The tool includes preparation materials and guidance for the conversation. If, as a manager, you find it difficult to have the conversation, for example, because you feel uncomfortable discussing age, talk to your management colleagues or network about it. Use it as an opportunity to develop as a manager.

Additionally, many 55+ employees need to discuss senior work life with each other and external parties. Consider whether you can support this by facilitating peer groups or inviting external facilitators.



Download Competencies

In addition to promoting longer working lives, a good dialogue also allows you to plan how the competencies of 55+ employees will be transferred to other staff before they retire. Be sure to ask about their knowledge of the workplace and its history, which is often valuable moving forward.



Create Meaning: Competence Development and Involvement

Many 55+ employees experience an increasing number of changes that they cannot see the purpose of. If you want to promote long working lives, you should involve employees in understanding the reasons behind these changes. Otherwise, many will choose to retire as soon as they can. The experience of frequent changes may also be linked to mandatory competence development. Many 55+ employees still want the opportunity for further competence development, but they want to discuss what would make sense for both the workplace and the employee.

A good 55+ policy should, therefore, also include measures that involve employees in decision-making processes and promote discussions about personal and professional development.



The Social Aspect: Support Communities

Social communities are important in the workplace, including for 55+ employees. Social networks and relationships at work are a significant reason why employees continue in the same job and even choose to work beyond retirement age.

Talk about the social communities at the workplace and find out how 55+ employees are faring socially at work. Consider what initiatives you can offer to improve the communities at the workplace, including for those 55+.



Recognition: Promote 55+ Employees

It is important that employees feel valued in the workplace. Many 55+ employees become more self-directed throughout their careers. By the time they reach their 50s, it may be rare for them to interact with management or be praised for their efforts.

However, recognition is also important later in life, and some 55+ employees consider retirement because they are unsure if managers and colleagues think it is time for them to step down. It may be a good idea to pre-empt this creeping doubt through recognition.



Alternative Engagement Options Before Retirement

Some 55+ employees may need to scale back or have a more flexible arrangement before retirement, during which they can pass on their skills to others. Today's work life doesn't have to be either/or.

Often, you can have 55+ employees available in other ways than through a traditional full-time or part-time role, and in cases where it benefits both the employee and the workplace, such arrangements can continue for many years. Even for employees who prefer a looser connection, a good process is important, and for the workplace, it's crucial to create a dialogue and process that ensures their knowledge doesn't disappear with them.



Counter Ageism: Remember Inclusion

We often hear about age discrimination when 55+ employees struggle to find new jobs. However, age discrimination is also an issue in many workplaces. Some 55+ employees experience being left out of conversations at the lunch table, encountering derogatory language about 55+ workers or seeing younger employees being prioritised for promotions and training opportunities.

Have an open conversation about whether 55+ employees experience this in your workplace, and create a code of conduct on how you will foster an inclusive workplace for all. Most managers and colleagues are not aware that they may be unintentionally excluding 55+ employees.

