AGE DOES NOT DEFINE US

The Intergenerational Design Principles — A research report from The Age of No Retirement
REDEFINE OUR FUTURE

The labels of age and generations that we have used for so many years as a way to help define ourselves and understand who we are, have become increasingly irrelevant. In fact, we would go further and say that these age labels are also in danger of holding businesses back and detrimentally impacting on the structural fabric of our society. It has happened right under our noses, but we have now woken up to the fact that there is a more age-neutral world out there.

The negative narrative of Age is still very powerful. It is deeply ingrained in all our subconsciousness, and perpetuated by the media. The story that we hear, day in, day out, is of the looming ‘demographic crisis’ which will place a huge burden on our society as the population of older people gets even bigger. This narrative is loud and strong. While we acknowledge that there are indeed challenges ahead, there are also huge opportunities. The fact that we are living an extra 10 years on average of healthy living in the middle of our lives, is a more real and optimistic narrative.

Ageism is rooted in our society. It is fueled by the seemingly arbitrary segmentation of the population along generational or age-related lines. Society is changing. In fact it has changed. The linear life path – study work, marry, have kids, retire, die – is over. College students can be 20, 30 or 60 years of age. First time parents can be 20, 30 or 60 too. Moving into a new house can be a milestone for a new family, an older mid-life divorcee, an expanding multigenerational family, or older empty-nesters who are downsizing. Grandparents can be 45 or 85. In this new world people object to being treated like a nameless, faceless unit of a demographic herd.

Yet the outdated segmentation by age is still used all the time by businesses, the media, government, indeed by all of us. Just think about the last time you bought a birthday card with a derogatory message about getting older. The real question that needs to be asked is this, ‘Is age segmentation still relevant?’

Do we really become the same as everyone else up to 100+ once we turn 50? Other labels are equally discriminatory and naive — pensioner, retirees, 65+, 70+, elderly, boomer. The same can be said of labels for people who are younger – millennial, gen X, gen Y. All place irrelevant and inappropriate descriptors on people. How meaningful and useful are these terms? Or are they merely a misguided convenience for marketers, journalists, service designers and many others?

We believe inclusive innovation must be based around everyone, young and old alike, and on what we have in common across all ages. Talking about erroneous stereotypical differences creates and perpetuates an unnecessary divide. By embracing the radical concept of ‘age-less’ thinking we can embrace the unlimited opportunities that exist – for intergenerational employment models, new age-inclusive products and services and new ways of connecting and communicating across all ages.

This report is a summary of what we found when we asked, “Let’s stop talking about what divides us, and ask instead what unites us? What happens when we stop talking about Us vs. Them, of older vs. younger, and explore what we have in common?”

But we did not simply stop at identifying commonality, we wanted to know what we need to do next? How can we make real change? A key part of our research was to test our core belief that designing for all ages was the way forward – for businesses, for brands, for public services, for government, for our communities. And in the summary you can see the power and potential of our pioneering 10 Principles of Intergenerational Design.
HOW WE CONDUCTED OUR RESEARCH

Working in partnership with the incredible research teams at Flamingo and Tapestry we spent 6 months on a groundbreaking piece of research.

We surveyed 2000 people online, ranging from 18 to 99 years of age, to explore the general attitudes to ‘Age’ in British society. We wanted to see whether an intergenerational approach to the design of products and services could be a powerful business driver as well as a catalyst for socioeconomic change on a global scale.

The findings of this research shatter many of the age- and generation-related stereotypes that are deeply embedded in British culture, and indeed in the cultures of many countries around the world.

This report is a summary of our findings from this comprehensive and ambitious study. Over the weeks and months ahead you will find videos and more information from our Intergenerational Research Unit on our website www.theageofnoretirement.org/research
01 Age cannot define me

We have all become far too accustomed to being segmented, grouped and labelled according to our age. The slicing and dicing of our society goes on, creating deep divides and pitching generations against each other. Segmentation by age has become an established, and even convenient, part of our everyday life – from advertising campaigns, to product and service design, to the rationing of health and social care services, to name just a few.

But, how valid is this approach? Are people of different ages or generations really so different from one another? Are their needs, desires, values and motivators really so distinct so as to warrant completely different approaches in service design and delivery?

The answer is a resounding NO.
One of the reasons that age does not define us is that most of us feel somewhat different to many others in our age bracket. That’s just as true whether you’re 20 or 80.

Question asked:
I do not feel I am always like everyone else in my age group.

How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?

If age doesn’t give you much help in determining what someone is like, what does? People would like to meet people of different ages to find out.

Question asked:
I like to mix with people of a different age or generation.

How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?
Even though we were fairly confident that consumers of all ages would agree that segmentation on the basis of age was a particularly poor and irrelevant notion, we did expect to see a little more difference when exploring attitudes towards information technology. It is clear that is an easy and lazy stereotype to see the youngest amongst us as techno wizards, whilst older people are still struggling to program the video recorder. You will see from the research that it is much harder to separate age groups on the basis of technology than you might expect.
89% of young people and 84% of the oldest rely on the internet. However both feel equally overwhelmed by new technology.

8/10 people – young and old – want life to slow down.

The internet is part of my life – I’d miss it terribly if it wasn’t there.

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<th>Age Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>89%</td>
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<td>65+</td>
<td>84%</td>
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I feel overwhelmed with the constant flow of new technologies.

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<td>18-24</td>
<td>60%</td>
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Life is too fast these days, everything should slow down.

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<td>18-24</td>
<td>77%</td>
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The internet and associated technologies have changed how we organise our own lives and communicate to one another. Once the internet becomes part of our lives, it is almost impossible to imagine life without it – no matter what our age.

It is easy (and somewhat lazy) to characterise the young as always on the go and continually ‘connected’ to the digital world and the older as less tech-focused. However, we found that the experience of both older and younger people are remarkably similar. All generations rely on the internet, despite seeming to be increasingly overwhelmed by the possibilities, connectivity and speed that it offers. Hand-in-hand with this, we found that both older and younger people want life to ‘slow-down’.
MORE THAN 77% OF PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TRY TO LIVE HEALTHILY.

I try to live a healthy lifestyle.

18-24 77%  65+ 82%

86% OF OLDER PEOPLE AND 89% OF YOUNGER PEOPLE WANT PRODUCTS THAT WORK WELL AND LOOK THE PART.

I want products that both work well and look good.

18-24 89%  65+ 86%

BOTH OLDER AND YOUNGER PEOPLE EQUALLY USE ONLINE SHOPPING.

When shopping I use online search a lot.

18-24 84%  65+ 79%
Another topic on which the generations agree is the desire to keep active for as long as possible and continue to learn new skills.

People in their middle years who are seeing their parents age and perhaps slow down a little, are frequently motivated to stay active for as long as they possibly can. And their own children, in turn, are embracing healthy living even earlier as they prepare themselves for a hundred-year life. With each passing generation, therefore, we can expect to see the differences in activity and attitude get smaller and smaller.

As well as keeping active, most of us want to continue to learn new skills well into our sixth decade.

This is one of the areas where there is more of a difference by age, as the desire to learn new skills is higher amongst the youngest in the survey. The youngest are also most likely to struggle for the time to learn and do all that they want to do, which is perhaps where their older peers can step in. They perhaps have more time, they have the skills and — as we’ve already seen — everyone likes to mix with people of different generations. Intergeneration working groups in companies, and skill-sharing schemes in the wider world, would seem the logical conclusion.
85% of people of all ages want to keep active for as long as possible.

Every generation wants to be more active throughout life than the one that precedes it. Meeting and facilitating this demand from successive generations is a challenge for both government and commerce.

Time is a barrier, however, particularly amongst the young. Skill sharing with older people and and intergenerational working groups could spread knowledge and deal with the time constraints of some.

8/10 want to learn new things. Only 85% have the time to do the things that matter to them the most.

Question asked:
I will try and live my later years more actively than my parents did.

How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?

Question asked:
I am eager to learn new things. I just don’t have time to do the things that matter to me

How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?
So far we have looked at the growing body of evidence that the generations are increasingly similar, that they think in similar ways about a range of topics, and they would like to be talked to in a similar way.

Despite all of this, it is clear that ageism pervades society. It is a well-accepted fact that businesses, the media and brands stereotype people by age, and our survey findings provide clear evidence that this is still the case. Ageism, or prejudice on the basis of age, is experienced by 80% of those aged 24, rising to 90% of those aged 70. Brands and media aside, it is also strongly felt that society is ageist, while politicians and that politicians do not give equal weight to every generation’s concerns. This is something which may weigh more heavily on younger generations, with those aged under 34 more likely to feel excluded or think that their issues are ignored by those in power.

What we may be seeing is a world where brands place too much weight on younger people, and politicians perhaps do not give them enough consideration. Ageism is not something only experienced by older people.
76% of people felt politicians do not care about people of my age or background. 6 in 10 people questioned felt undervalued by society because of their age.

Politicians don’t care enough about people of my age or background.

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<td>79%</td>
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Society doesn’t value me enough because of my age.

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<td>69%</td>
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<tr>
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The perception that politicians do not care about people of their age or background is held commonly across generations — and is particularly strongly felt amongst the under 35s. This is matched by a high percentage of people who felt that society does not value them because of their age. This is strong across all ages at an average of 58% — but is most striking in the age 18-24 age bracket.

Both of these statistics demonstrate there is a conscious correlation across generations that their age, not only how they are viewed, but also how they are valued by society. Therefore, age-neutrality is important for both ends of the age spectrum.
We might view the younger generations as being confident and competitive, but they are more likely than others to lack the confidence to make big decisions.

Question asked:
I don’t feel confident in making big decisions.

How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?

The younger generations are also most likely to lack confidence at work, suggesting they would benefit from older mentors and cross-generational teams.

Question asked:
I wish I were more confident at work.

How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?
The case for an age-neutral world appears to be indisputable. A world that addresses the commonality of values, ambitions and circumstances, regardless of age. It is something that people are increasingly demanding and it is only going to become of greater consequence as the nation’s demographics continue to shift.

It is also important to note that it is not something which will benefit just older people. Many of us have become used to a experience, with many of the devices and tools we use, and the simpler the solution, and more delightful it is to use, the greater will be its demand across all ages. It is also important to note that effort is both physical and mental — that being clear and easily understood is just as important as requiring the right amount of physical effort.

The brands that get this right — and many are doing this well, incorporating many of the age-neutral design principles we have identified (see section 6) — are those that are seen as the most modern, trusted and empathetic. This is not just a nice-to-have, it is something that needs to be top-of-mind with every CEO, something which will directly impact a business’s bottom line.
88% said that brands should focus on needs and interests rather than age.

Question asked:
Brands shouldn’t think about age – needs and interests are more relevant.

How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?

We’ve already seen that consumers want to be talked to as people with real interests and knowledge, not just as framed through the increasingly stereotype of an age bracket. This speaks to a population that is increasingly aware of the pervasive power of age-centred thinking in decision making, but critical of its effectiveness when representing them as individuals.
THE YOUNG AND MIDDLE-AGED ARE DRIVING DEMAND FOR A FRICTIONLESS EXPERIENCE.

Whilst the older population may well need more ‘frictionless’ experiences – it is the young and middle-aged who are leading the charge for products/services that are accessible, usable, intuitive, natural, delightful.

REGULARLY FEEL ANXIOUS WHEN DOING EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES AND HAVE TROUBLE MEMORISING NEWLY ACQUIRED INFORMATION...

REGULARLY FIND IT HARD TO READ SOMETHING SMALL AND STRUGGLE TO HEAR CONVERSATIONS IN LOUD PLACES.

HAVE TROUBLE WITH HEAVY OR FIDDLY OBJECTS. MOST DESIRE FRICTIONLESS EXPERIENCES...
9/10

THINK BUSINESSES AND BRANDS NEED TO ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES.

Question asked:
Companies need to work with governments to ensure equal access for all ages.
How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?

It’s important to note that this is seen as something to be tackled from both the political and the commercial sphere – it’s something everyone should be thinking about.
83%

WANT AGE-NEUTRAL AND INCLUSIVE BRANDS THAT ARE THE MOST MODERN AND RELEVANT.

Question asked:
Age-neutral, inclusive brands are the most up-to-date and modern.

How much do you agree / disagree with this statement?
The case for the creation of an age-neutral world has been made. So how do we go about achieving it? What we need is a blueprint for intergenerational design, a template that can be used by marketers, brand managers, product and service designers, researchers, communicators, leaders, politicians and service providers – to help them engage meaningfully with their target audiences according to common values and needs, regardless of age.

In collaboration with eminent designers and leaders from across all sectors – from consumer and branding experts to design leaders and innovators, and, of course, citizens, consumers, older and younger – we have co-developed the 10 Principles of Intergenerational Design (IDP).

What is so striking about these principles is how universal they are. Each one of the 10 is seen as important by more than 90% of our research respondents, indicating clearly that they speak to real issues and concerns of people in their everyday lives. These issues range from the physical to the psychological and from the functional to the aesthetic. To be truly age-neutral is to make products that appeal to the widest group of people possible, to make them simple, delightful and rewarding to use.

Creating an age-neutral intergenerational world is a big ask, but it is the right ask. To do anything otherwise, according to our research sample of 2000 people, would be an enormous mistake. And, because there is such a strong correlation between delivering against these principles and trust in a brand, the real motivator for intergenerational change will be the financial benefits available to every organisation that embraces it, regardless of which sector they are operating in or whether they are for – or non-profit.
INTergenerational Design Principles

From the insights generated from this survey and through a wider process of research and development workshops, we have developed the 10 Intergenerational Design Principles (IDP*).

These principles are in beta stage and are now being tested in a range of real-world/live contexts. We welcome all input, feedback and support in the development of these principles into the future.

IDP (Intergenerational Design Principles) have been developed and researched since 2015 by The Age of No Retirement, in partnership with Flamingo Consultancy, Tapestry Research and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design (Royal College of Art).

The Benefits of These Principles...

IDP* yields products, services, experiences which are usable by, and useful and satisfactory to the widest age range possible.

IDP provides a valuable and actionable platform for sustainable innovation and growth.

IDP is in everyone’s interest.

IDP reflects today and tomorrow’s changing reality.

IDP improves brand equity and sales.
THE 10 PRINCIPLES OF INTERGENERATIONAL DESIGN...

SAFE AND SECURE
Having your rights of safety, privacy, information security looked after, being respectful of personal rights and not discriminating.

CLEAR AND INTUITIVE
Being easy to understand, or easy to work out how to use.

TIME-EFFICIENT
Optimising your use of time, not being too slow nor too fast.

DELIGHTFUL
Finding things to be pleasing, beautiful or enjoyable.

ACCESSIBLE
Being easy to find, reach or use either online or off; being accessible as and when required without being intrusive.

HUMAN CONNECTION
Helping you feel connected to other people, or having two-way conversation.

FLEXIBILITY
Being given choice, being easy to adapt and not punishing errors too harshly.

RIGHT EFFORT
Needing the right level of physical effort, mental effort or is easy on the senses – sight/sound/touch, etc.

EMPOWERING
Feeling that things contribute to self and social worth, or that they promote your development and autonomy.

SUSTAINABLE
Things being sustainable, either in terms of environmental or economic development, durability, social unity or inclusivity.
When testing the 10 Intergenerational Design Principles – we found that overwhelmingly people felt that they are important and that products/services should respond to them wherever possible in the future. However, only 16% of people felt that currently these design principles are being adhered to by brands. The key principles of ‘safe and secure’, ‘intuitive’, ‘time-efficient’, ‘delightful’ and ‘accessible’ were seen as the most important principles that would have a positive impact on everyday life.

These results demonstrate that the principles (even in their beta form) are not only connecting with people – they are also raising public awareness / consciousness around the limitations and frustrations that exist around the current design of products and services that we encounter every day.
TO CONCLUDE

AGE DOES NOT DEFINE US.
THERE IS SO MUCH MORE THAT UNITES GENERATIONS THAN WE ALL REALISE...

This report contains just a few of the top-level highlights. There is so much more analysis and interpretations to be conducted on the data – particularly on the 28 business sectors that were performance-rated against the 10 IDPs by the 2000 survey participants. But the main conclusion is clear: People of all ages are more alike than different.

That values, needs and desires are unrelated to age. From the research we can infer that, most significantly, organisations are spending too much time and money on activities that fundamentally limit their market scope and reach. This is a staggering discovery, and one that could and should change the way every organisation – government, public sector, charities, foundations, as well as private sector – thinks about what they do, why they do it, and who they do it for.

That is not to say that segmentation is wrong. It’s just saying that segmentation and stereotyping by age is wrong. Segmentation by need, value, desire, affordability can be useful. Just not by age. There are incidences and prevalences that might increase or decrease over the life course, but they too are not age-specific.

Surely it must follows then, that all organisations should be adopting an all-age, intergenerational approach in their brand strategies, communications, service delivery, value propositions – to engage, delight and benefit as many people as possible.

• IDP* yields products, services, experiences which are usable by, useful and satisfactory to the widest age range possible.
• IDP provides a valuable and actionable platform for sustainable innovation and growth:
  • IDP is in everyone’s interest.
  • IDP reflects today and tomorrow’s changing reality.
  • IDP improves brand equity and sales.
• IDP has been developed and researched since 2015 by The Age of No Retirement, a social innovation enterprise, in partnership with Flamingo Consultancy, Tapestry Research and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design RCA.
Many thanks to all of the participants and stakeholders involved in this research. A special thank you to our research partners at Flamingo, Tapestry and The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design (RCA).

If you are interested in seeing the full report or are interested in exploring how our research and our Intergenerational Research Unit can benefit your organisation or business then please get in touch – we would love to work with you.

This is just a beginning and we will be continuing to develop, test, prototype these principles. Make sure you regularly visit our website to see the latest research and impact stories on how powerful our Intergenerational Design Principles are in their application.

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If you would like to learn more about this research and about The Age of No Retirement please visit:

www.ageofnoretirement.org @agenoretirement

The Age of No Retirement

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THE HELEN HAMLYN CENTRE FOR DESIGN