



Why Age Discrimination Matters at Sofidel

The issue

Age discrimination is becoming an increasingly important workplace issue in the UK, presenting serious legal, operational and reputational risks for Sofidel UK. Research by People Management found that the number of age discrimination-related claims increased by 600% compared to the previous year, with average awards exceeding £100,000 (Clemo, 2025). Ageism remains endemic in the UK society and the Equality Act 2010 provides strong legal protections against unfair treatment based on age across the employment lifecycle (CIPD, 2025a).

National context

The House of Commons inquiry into the rights of older people found strong evidence that reveals age-related disadvantages across the UK, highlighting gaps in equality protections (Parliament, House of Commons, 2025).

Impact on younger workers

Age discrimination is not limited to older workers but also includes unfair treatment of the younger generation at work. UK Youth (2024) found that 93% of young people experience some form of negative treatment based on their age.

“93% of young people experience negative age-based treatment.”

Why this matters at Sofidel

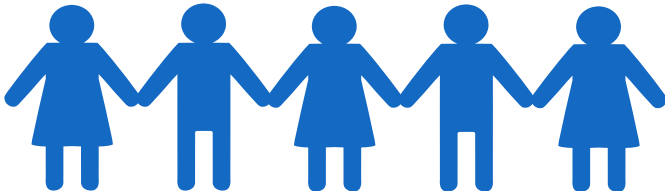
At Sofidel, assumptions about physical ability, experience, maturity or adaptability could be inadvertently influencing organisational decisions related to recruitment, training, promotions, flexible working requests and performance management decisions. Managers at Sofidel play an important part in building an inclusive and diverse organisational culture where decisions are made on merit rather than stereotypes or assumptions relating to age.



CIPD (2025b) highlights that effective line management is positively associated with employee wellbeing, better performance and lower turnover. In contrast, poor management is associated with negative health outcomes and increased conflict. Failure to address ageism in the workplace can lead to negative impacts on wellbeing and engagement, increased workplace disputes and a lack of resolution costing an estimated £28.5 billion annually (ACAS, 2021). This also heightens the risk of Employment Tribunal claims under the (Equality Act 2010).

Creating a Psychologically Safe Workplace

Edmondson’s (1999) idea of **psychological safety** highlights that if employees are able to contribute and be effective, it means that they feel respected, supported and can speak up without fear.



Understanding Age Discrimination at Sofidel

The Equality Act (2010) protects employees and workers from discrimination on the basis of age. This includes employees at all ages, from recruitment to training, promotion, performance management and dismissal. Managers should be aware that age discrimination can affect younger and older workers and may happen intentionally or unintentionally (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020).



Types of Age Discrimination

Direct Discrimination

EHRC (2020) explains that direct age discrimination is when an employee is treated less favourably due to age.

Examples at Sofidel might include:

- Age related assumptions that older employees are about to retire and therefore are not given opportunities for training.
- Younger employees being automatically excluded from certain responsibilities or promotions due to assumptions about age.
- Age related expressions for example 'too old' or 'too young'.

Indirect Discrimination

EHRC (2020) explains this happens when a workplace practice, policy or requirement places a disadvantage on a group of employees of a particular age.

Examples:

- Expecting older workers to work excessive hours.
- Using length of service as the only factor in deciding who to promote.
- Introducing new technology without ensuring that all employees, including older workers, receive appropriate support and training.

Managers should ensure that any workplace decision or practice is objectively justified and applied fairly to all ages (EHRC, 2020).

Harassment

Harassment is any unwanted behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of an individual or creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment may amount to bullying and may take the form of comments, jokes or stereotypes related to age.

Examples:

- Mocking an older worker for being “slow on the line”, “holding up production” or struggling with new digital systems during machine change overs.
- Jokes about retirement “don’t worry you’ll be gone soon anyway” or “We shouldn’t waste training on you at your age.”
- Dismissing menopause symptoms in hot production areas or mocking older workers for needing more frequent breaks.



Managers need to recognise that what some may see as banter can still create a disrespectful workplace culture. Schein (2010) highlights how everyday behaviours and comments can reflect deeper assumptions. Allowing age-related jokes or stereotypes to go unchallenged reinforces a culture where certain age groups feel undervalued or excluded.

Victimisation

Victimisation is where an employee is treated unfairly for raising concerns or supporting someone with an age discrimination issue (Equality Act 2010). Managers must ensure that employees feel able to raise their concerns without fear of being retaliated against or excluded.

Example:

- An older worker complains about ageist jokes on a production line and becomes uncomfortable when afterwards they start being excluded from team discussions, receive less favourable shifts or miss out on overtime opportunities.



**Working Together
for an Age-Inclusive
Workplace**

Can age based decisions ever be justified?

Age discrimination is different from other protected characteristics because it is possible to treat people differently on the grounds of their age without breaching the law if the difference in treatment can be objectively justified. This means that the employer must prove that the treatment is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim (Equality Act 2010).

Examples:

- Modifying manual handling tasks through alternative shift patterns or lifting arrangements for older workers, with decisions supported by input from occupational health (Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974).
- Restrictions might be placed on young workers aged 16-17 from operating high-risk machinery in line with (The Working Time Regulations 1998) and (Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974).

Managers should ensure that they make **evidence-based** decisions and that these are necessary and proportionate. They must avoid making assumptions or relaying on stereotypes associated with age (EHRC, 2020).

What should managers at Sofidel do?

The role of managers in preventing age discrimination and fostering an inclusive working environment is important as it contributes to shaping workplace culture through everyday management behaviours, decisions and the way they communicate and respond to concerns. Managers should take prompt action when issues arise, as addressing conflict early can prevent them from escalating and reduce the likelihood of formal complaints or Employment Tribunal Claims (ACAS, 2021).

CIPD (2025b) highlights a strong link between effective line management, employee wellbeing and positive workplace relationships. Factors that contribute to this include fair decision making, open communication and consistent management practices which can lead to better performance, reduced conflict and a more inclusive culture across all age groups.

Managers should:

✓ Challenge age-related stereotype and inappropriate behaviour

Address comments or behaviours related to age, regardless of how informal or light-hearted they may seem. They should be vigilant when observing team dynamics, shift interactions or line-side conversations, recognising how these specific exchanges can reinforce age-based stereotypes. Addressing inappropriate behaviour early promotes a more respectful and inclusive culture.



Use objective and evidence-based decision-making

All operational decisions such as assigning tasks or duties, operating equipment or approving shift changes must be based on ability, performance and operational need. Managers must be sure these operational decisions are transparent and documented if necessary. Managers must also ensure that these decisions remain free from assumptions based on age.



Ensure equal access to training and development

All employees should have equal access to training and development opportunities, including fair access to new equipment, digital systems, safety processes and progression pathways. Managers should regularly review rosters to ensure opportunities are not unintentionally limited by assumptions about experience, adaptability or career stage.



Manage performance issues fairly and consistently

Performance issues or conduct concerns should be addressed promptly with clear evidence and consistent standards. Managers should avoid letting assumptions about age influence how issues are interpreted and addressed, ensuring that expectations and support are handled equally for the full team.

✓ Encourage open communication and employee voice

Promote open communication and allow employees to voice concerns about workload, shift patterns, training needs and teamwork without fear of negative repercussions. This can be achieved by encouraging regular check-ins, creating opportunities for feedback during handovers or team briefs and responding constructively to concerns raised.

✓ Lead by example

Managers influence workplace culture through their daily actions. Demonstrating inclusive leadership through respectful communication, consistent application of rules and regulations and modelling fairness in task and opportunity allocation can help build trust and support positive working relations across age groups.

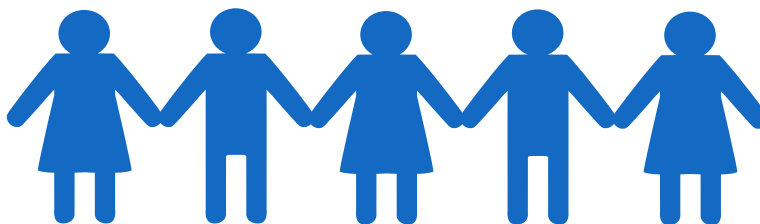


These approaches align with UK employment law and recognise best practice guidance to prevent age discrimination and promote diversity and inclusion (Equality Act 2010; CIPD, 2025a; ACAS, 2025a).

For further support or guidance, please contact the HR team.

Creating an Age-Inclusive Culture at Sofidel

Creating an age-inclusive culture goes beyond legal requirements, driving operational performance and workplace culture. By ensuring employees of all ages are respected and valued, enabling them to contribute effectively. This will foster better retention, engagement and knowledge sharing across teams (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023). Sofidel's Code of Ethics and broader people policies are grounded in principles like dignity, equality, inclusion and respect in workplace relationships. The company aims to provide a prejudice free working environment, ensuring opportunities are given fairly to people at all stages of their working life (Sofidel Group, 2025).



Managers are accountable for challenging inappropriate behaviour ensuring fair and consistent decision-making and promoting inclusion across different age groups. Effective management involves creating a culture of psychological safety where employees feel empowered to contribute and be heard without fear (Edmondson, 1999).

Promoting respectful communication, inclusive leadership, early intervention on concerns and fostering a positive and productive workplace culture are needed for Sofidel to minimize legal and risk exposure while maximising employee wellbeing and creating an inclusive environment for all ages.

Inclusive Leadership Starts with You

The most effective managers at Sofidel:



Question assumptions



Treat everyone with fairness



Make space for every voice



Role-model respect



Build opportunities for all ages

**Do your actions
reflect the culture
you want to
create?**