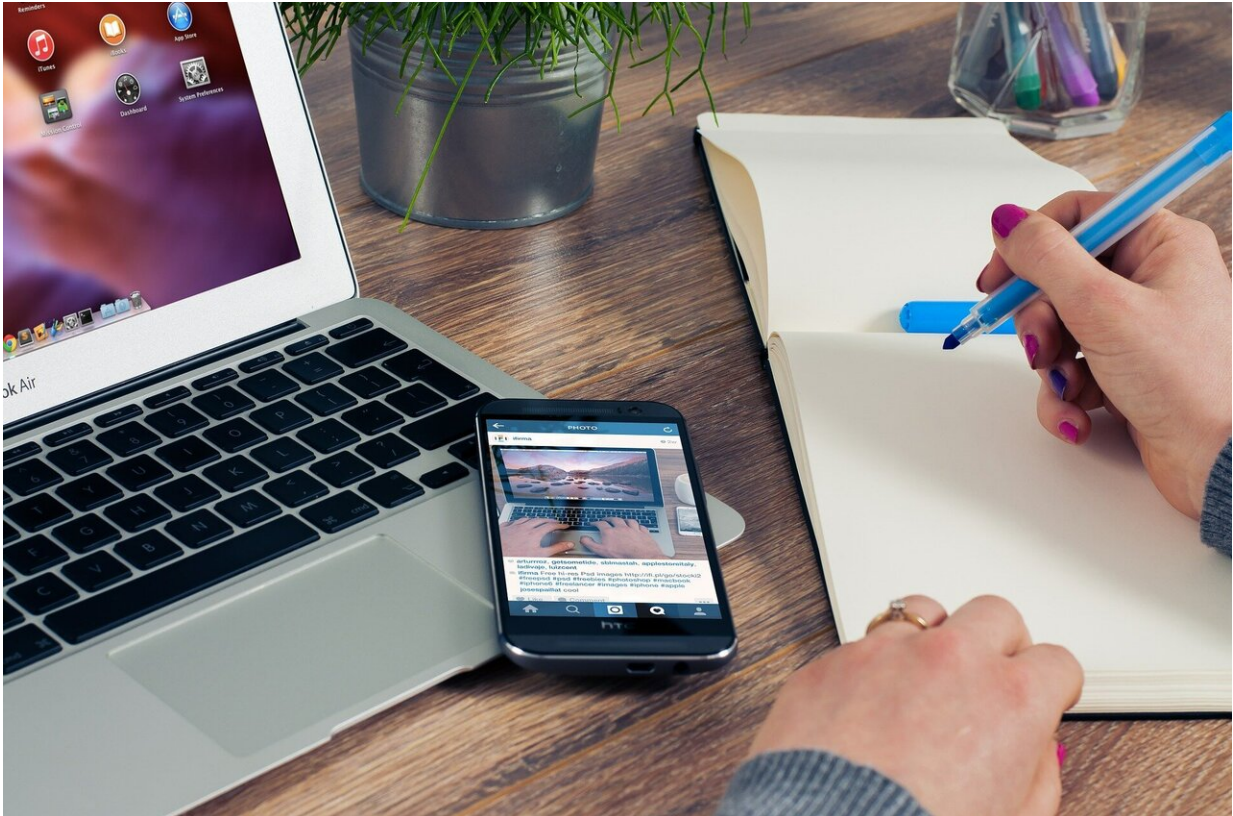


# When older people feel excluded at work

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Employees over 50 can feel excluded and demotivated in the workplace for various reasons. They feel particularly excluded when they believe that their cognitive abilities decrease with age, as psychologists from the University of Basel report in the journal *Work, Aging, and Retirement*.

Older people are generally happier and have better [social relationships](#) than [younger people](#)—and yet, negative stereotypes about older people are widespread, for example, they are often seen as forgetful and less competent than younger people. The researchers now show that older workers who have internalized such negative age stereotypes feel belonging less to their company and their colleagues. As a consequence, they are less motivated to seek social contacts in the workplace. This, in turn, can have [negative consequences](#) for their integration and can cause them to leave the work process, for example through early retirement.

## **Is performance also declining?**

Older employees over 50 are not only often confronted with [negative stereotypes](#) about [cognitive decline](#), they can also internalize them; for example, by agreeing with the idea that intellectual performance declines with age and that they themselves are affected by this decline. Previous research has shown that the internalization of negative age stereotypes can have an impact on performance-related variables.

But internalized negative age stereotypes also affect the emotions and motivation of [older workers](#). Older workers might feel insecure about their belongingness in the workplace. This was shown in four online experiments and in an overall analysis with a total of 1306 employees between 50 and 76 years of age and from various professions. The more the persons internalized negative age stereotypes, the less they were motivated to establish social contacts with their colleagues and the more they socially withdrew. Investigations of the causality of these relationships, however, did not yield any clear results.

## **Fewer age stereotypes**

"Fewer negative age stereotypes would not only enable more older

employees to maintain fulfilling social contacts in the workplace," comments project leader Prof. Dr. Jana Nikitin the studies. The professional potential of older employees could also be better capitalized: "This could, in turn, contribute to solution of economic and social challenges in connection with the latest demographic developments."

**More information:** Georg Rahn et al, Feeling Out of Place: Internalized Age Stereotypes Are Associated With Older Employees' Sense of Belonging and Social Motivation, *Work, Aging and Retirement* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/workar/waaa005](https://doi.org/10.1093/workar/waaa005)

Provided by University of Basel

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