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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

New Perspectives on Diversity and Inclusion Research in Organizations

Linking Age-Diversity Practices and Company Ratings Over Time: Evidence From Employer Reviews and a Longitudinal Experiment

Claudia C. Kitz[1] | Kyriaki Fousiani[1] | Susanne Scheibe[1] | Raphael Eppler-Hattab[2]

[1]Department of Organizational Psychology, University of Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands | [2]The Center for Research and Study of Aging, Faculty of Social Welfare and Health Sciences, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

Correspondence: Claudia C. Kitz (c.c.kitz@rug.nl)

Received: 28 September 2024 | **Revised:** 7 August 2025 | **Accepted:** 9 August 2025

Keywords: aging workforce | company ratings | fading effect | perceived organizational support | social exchange theory

ABSTRACT

As global populations age, organizations face increasing pressure to support an age-diverse workforce. Although age-diversity practices have been shown to yield individual benefits, their temporal impact on broader evaluations of the organization such as employees' company ratings remains underexplored. This study investigates how employee perceptions of age-diversity practices positively influence company ratings and whether these effects diminish over time as such practices become the "new norm." Drawing on social exchange and adaptation-level theories, we conducted two studies. In Study 1, we analyzed 1245 employer reviews from 30 companies over 14 years, applying natural language processing and multilevel modeling. In Study 2, we experimentally replicated and extended the findings of Study 1 by manipulating age-diversity practices and capturing within-person changes in perceptions of organizational support and company ratings over time. Results indicate that while age-diversity practices enhance company ratings, these effects fade as employees adapt, and thus, practices elicit weaker reciprocal responses from employees. Theoretically, our findings underscore the importance of considering the time-related effects of diversity practices, highlighting the time-sensitive nature of employee reciprocity. Methodologically, we propose a novel multilevel framework, integrating publicly available qualitative and experimental data to assess the temporal impact of organizational adaptation to demographic shifts.

Diversity and inclusion have become central tenets of modern organizational strategy. Organizations adopt diversity initiatives to promote equity, innovation, and performance by fostering inclusive representation across demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity, and disability (Roberson 2018). Among the various dimensions of workforce diversity, age diversity (i.e., having employees from a wide range of age groups in the organizational workforce) has gained particular attention because of its profound implications for workforce dynamics and organizational effectiveness. Indeed, the growing diversity of the workforce in terms of age is among the most pressing organizational concerns (Kunze et al. 2021; Li et al. 2021). As populations age worldwide (World Health Organization [WHO] 2022), organizations face pressure to foster inclusive environments that support employees across all working life stages (Burke et al. 2014; United Nations 2023; Voelpel and Streb 2009; WHO 2015). For organizations, responding to the needs of an age-diverse workforce in general and older employees in particular (i.e., employees aged 50+)[1] is essential not only to maintain a healthy workforce (Kossek et al. 2019) but also to sustain competitive advantage

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by preserving organizational knowledge, fostering intergenerational collaboration, and catering to age-diverse customers (e.g., Bloom and Canning 2012; Parker and Andrei 2020).

A robust body of research has examined individual-level outcomes of diversity practices broadly (e.g., inclusion, performance, commitment, or well-being; Dawson et al. 2024; Randel 2025; Scheuer et al. 2025) and age-diversity practices more specifically (e.g., employee motivation, work ability, and job satisfaction; Pak et al. 2019; Piszczek and Pimputkar 2020; Truxillo et al. 2015). As organizations increasingly adopt diversity strategies to support an age-diverse workforce, it becomes essential to understand how these initiatives shape broader evaluations of the organization (e.g., Kanitz et al. 2024). Despite the centrality of employees as proximal stakeholders (Recendes et al. 2024), their evaluations of such initiatives have received comparatively less emphasis in the literature (for exceptions, see Mawdsley et al. 2022; Richard 2000). Employees do not merely experience diversity initiatives; they actively interpret them, forming evaluative judgments based on perceived authenticity and credibility that serve as powerful signals shaping how the organization is viewed. Public employer review platforms provide a unique, underutilized window into these employee perceptions. These reviews not only reflect perceptions of workplace culture, values, and support systems (Höllig et al. 2024) but also serve as expressions of reciprocity, wherein employees reward perceived organizational support (POS) with positive company ratings or voice dissatisfaction through negative company ratings. Despite their relevance, the role of perceived diversity practices, particularly age-diversity practices, remains insufficiently understood in shaping such evaluations, especially when viewed through the lens of social exchange theory (SET, Blau 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). Without attending to these perceptions, research risks overlooking how diversity practices influence broader organizational evaluations.

Beyond the limited evidence on how diversity practices translate into company ratings, the time-related effects of diversity efforts also remain underexplored, particularly regarding whether employees reciprocate the perceived support for older workers over time or if this reciprocity fades as such practices become the "new normal." Specifically, it is yet unclear whether organizations consistently receive favorable ratings from employees in response to age-diversity practices, or whether this association diminishes over time as employees perceptually adapt to such initiatives. Drawing upon adaptation-level theory (Helson 1948) and intertwining it with SET (Blau 1964), we argue that the reciprocity between employees and organizations in the context of age-diversity practices will fade over time. Employees may respond to organizational efforts with positive company evaluations (Settoon et al. 1996), viewing diversity practices as discretionary investments that reflect an organization's commitment to its employees' well-being. However, as employees adapt to such age-diversity practices, their positive effect may diminish. This adaptation may weaken employees' inclination to reciprocate, as the cues that signal support or investment become less salient over time. Such changes in employees' perceptions have important implications not only for employer ratings but also for broader judgments regarding an organization's commitment to its workforce. However, research has yet to examine how perceptions of diversity practices evolve over time, leaving both theoretical and practical implications underexplored. Without a nuanced understanding of these time-related effects, organizations risk overestimating the longer-term benefits of age-diversity initiatives, potentially overlooking opportunities to sustain their effectiveness and ensure continued positive employee outcomes.

To examine the time-related effects of diversity perceptions, we conducted two studies. In Study 1, we combined web-scraping of employer reviews and sentiment analysis with multilevel modeling (e.g., Hickman et al. 2020; Landers et al. 2016). Using 1245 employer reviews from 30 companies across the German, Austrian, and Swiss stock markets collected between 2011 and 2024, we analyzed how perceptions of age-diversity practices shape company ratings over time. By integrating large-scale, real-world sentiment data with SET, we provide new insights into how employees perceive, acknowledge, and reciprocate organizational age-diversity practices and demonstrate that the positive relationship fades over time periods because of adaptation to these practices. In Study 2, we sought to experimentally replicate these findings by manipulating age-diversity practices and measuring company ratings across a series of sequential scenarios of "monthly HR newsletters" ($N_{within} = 2700$, $N_{between} = 300$). Furthermore, in this study, we measured employee–POS, which we considered as an underlying mechanism explaining the hypothesized relationship.

This paper makes several key contributions. First, by integrating aging workforce research with the broader literature on organizational support and SET, we offer a general framework for understanding how employees perceive diversity practices. This is why we highlight how perceptions of an organization's age-diversity practices can foster reciprocal employee attitudes and behaviors toward the organization. Second, by adopting a temporal lens grounded in adaptation-level theory, we demonstrate that the perceived effectiveness of age-diversity practices may diminish over time—a fading effect that underscores the need for organizations to continuously monitor and renew their diversity efforts to sustain their impact. Third, we present a novel, cost-effective method for transforming employer reviews about diversity practices into quantitative data for multilevel analysis, addressing calls for innovative use of naturally occurring data (Guzzo et al. 2015; Tonidandel et al. 2018). The convergence between review-based patterns and experimental findings supports the validity of this approach and offers a scalable tool for studying age-diversity practices in real-world contexts.

1 | Theoretical Background

1.1 | The Organizational Need and Benefit of Supporting an Aging Workforce

As demographic shifts reshape the composition of the global workforce, age-responsive organizational practices have become increasingly critical for sustaining employee well-being and organizational performance. Indeed, organizations have upscaled their efforts to implement targeted diversity practices to support the unique needs of older employees (e.g., Moen et al. 2017; Turek et al. 2020; Wilckens et al. 2021). These age-diversity practices address challenges that become more salient

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with age—including health-related concerns, technological adaptation, and retirement planning—that often fall outside the scope of broader organizational support systems (e.g., Scheibe and Kooij 2024; Truxillo et al. 2015). Although aligned with general diversity and support practices in their aim to enhance employee well-being and organizational outcomes (Allen et al. 2003; Boehm et al. 2014; Eisenberger et al. 2020; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002), age-diversity practices are distinct in their emphasis on sustaining older employees' engagement, productivity, and capacity to contribute over time (Boehm et al. 2021; Kooij et al. 2009, 2014). With labor market age dynamics continuing to evolve, there is a growing imperative for organizations to implement practices that maintain, optimize, and extend the careers and working lives of (older) employees (Boehm et al. 2021; Fasbender and Gerpott 2021; Sinclair et al. 2024).

We suggest that age-diversity practices serve as strategic precursors for POS, capturing employees' beliefs that their contributions are valued and their well-being is prioritized (e.g., Eppler-Hattab et al. 2020a). Parker and Andrei's (2020) framework of organizational meta-strategies to support older employees—comprising Inclusion, Individualization, and Integration—provides a useful approach for classifying age-diversity practices, particularly in how such strategies may influence employees' POS (Chong et al. 2025). Specifically, *Inclusion* practices involve actively recruiting and engaging older employees in organizational activities, thereby fostering perceptions of belonging and a supportive, positive work environment (Holvino et al. 2004; Shore et al. 2018). *Individualization* practices tailor work experiences to the unique needs of older employees, such as personalized development plans and job redesign (Bal and Boehm 2019; Grant and Parker 2009), which may shape employees' sense of being supported. Finally, *Integration* practices focus on incorporating older employees into teams and processes through knowledge-sharing and mentoring programs, potentially enhancing collaboration and positive intergenerational learning experiences (Gerpott et al. 2017; Harvey 2012). By embedding these meta-strategies into organizational age-diversity practices, organizations can strengthen employees' perceptions of POS. Moreover, by fostering a sense of security and well-being, age-diversity practices can enhance job satisfaction, increase organizational commitment, and reduce turnover (e.g., Van Dam et al. 2017; Zhou et al. 2024). Ultimately, these strategies may not only enhance the well-being of older employees but may also contribute to the overall success and effectiveness of the organization.

1.2 | Employer Review Platforms as Public Channels of Employee Perceptions

A key organizational outcome shaped by employee perceptions of age-diversity practices and POS is how employees, as proximal stakeholders (Recendes et al. 2024), rate their organization, particularly on public platforms. Employer reviews are voluntarily and anonymously created by employees and shared on a third-party platform, informing the public about their employer's working conditions (e.g., Kollitz et al. 2022). Online reviews are increasingly influential for organizations, with over 93% of individuals in the United States relying on them for decision-making (Krey et al. 2024), making these platforms critical in shaping public perceptions of organizations (e.g., Carpentier and Van Hoye 2021). The reviews employees provide on these platforms represent a numerical rating of an organization, usually accompanied by diverse text-based responses and explanations about different aspects of the working conditions and experiences (e.g., Krey et al. 2024). Given that employer reviews are shaped by employees' perceptions of the organization and their working conditions, the extent to which employees view diversity practices as supportive and beneficial to their well-being influences their evaluations. When these practices are perceived positively, employees are more likely to provide positive ratings. Conversely, if such practices are seen as insufficient or lacking, employees may provide negative ratings. Thus, online employer ratings serve as a meaningful indicator of how well organizations are meeting employee expectations.

Although positive employer reviews on rating platforms have become an important source for organizations to display their performance, benefits, working conditions, or attractiveness (e.g., Card et al. 2012; Evertz et al. 2021; Höllig et al. 2024; Palese et al. 2021), negative reviews can harm an organization's reputation by reducing its overall attractiveness to multiple stakeholders (Kollitz et al. 2022). Therefore, employer reviews are a critical outcome for organizations, as they directly impact their ability to retain and attract talent.

We propose that when employees, as proximal stakeholders, perceive their organizations as actively supporting older workers through targeted age-diversity practices, they evaluate the organization positively due to higher perceptions of organizational support, resulting in higher overall company ratings. This proposition is grounded in SET (Blau 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005), which suggests that in the context of diversity practices, employees perceive increased organizational support and reciprocate this with positive attitudes and behaviors (Eisenberger et al. 1997, 2001). Specifically, when employees perceive their organization as committed to supporting an aging workforce through age-diversity practices, they are more likely to feel valued and supported, resulting in more favorable evaluations. This happens because age-diversity practices can signal an organization's commitment to the well-being of its workforce. Conversely, if such practices are seen as insufficient or lacking, employees may provide negative ratings. Thus, online employer ratings serve as a meaningful indicator of employee perceptions about how well organizations are meeting their expectations. By considering employees' perceptions of their organization's age-diversity practices on the one hand, and their subsequent interpretations of organizational support (i.e., POS) on the other hand, SET provides a useful framework for understanding how diversity practices translate into company ratings. Perceptions about an organization's age-diversity practices shape employees' POS, reinforcing a perceived obligation to respond with positive contributions to the organization (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002)—in our case, company ratings.

Prior research has demonstrated that employees reciprocate organizational efforts toward diversity by providing (positive or negative) company ratings on public platforms. For instance, Wang et al. (2023) demonstrated that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements can substantially improve company ratings, highlighting the critical role of employee

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evaluations in shaping organizational reputation and success. Similarly, research in other areas, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), has demonstrated the importance of employer ratings as indicators of employee-perceived organizational practices with the aim of informing a public audience (e.g., Diez-Cañamero et al. 2020; Chatterji and Toffel 2010). That is, organizations have been shown to convey their CSR through signaling their efforts, which are evaluated by customers and employees, leading to increased employee satisfaction and organizational attractiveness (e.g., Wisse et al. 2018; Zhang et al. 2020).

Yet, the way employees as proximal stakeholders perceive organizational age-diversity practices, in particular, remains underexplored. Although Parker and Andrei's (2020) framework proposes strategies for organizations to support and integrate older employees (see also Chong et al. 2025), these strategies have yet to be examined through the lens of SET, particularly in terms of how employee perceptions about age-diversity practices influence employees' reported company ratings on public employer review platforms. Therefore, building on SET (Blau 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005), we argue that age-diversity practices may shape employees' perceptions of the organization's support and care (e.g., see Casper and Harris 2008), which translates into higher POS and consequently enhanced company ratings. Collectively, these arguments lead to

Hypothesis 1. *Employees' more positive perception of their organization's age-diversity practices will be associated with a higher company rating.*

Hypothesis 2. *POS will mediate the positive relationship between employees' perception of their organization's age-diversity practices and their company rating.*

1.3 | The Fading Effect of Age-Diversity Practices

Although organizational scholars have long examined the benefits of diversity practices, less attention has been paid to their time-related effects—that is, the extent to which organizational practices continue to yield positive outcomes over time. Recently, scholars have begun to shift attention toward the temporal implications of positive organizational interventions, reflecting a growing recognition that their impact may not remain static over time (e.g., Bezrukova et al. 2016; Burnett and Aguinis 2024; Leslie 2019; Ward et al. 2022). We argue that as organizations support longer working lives (e.g., Oude Mulders and Henkens 2019), employees' perceptions of diversity practices might gradually change to a "new normal" due to such adaptation. According to adaptation-level theory (see Helson 1948; Parducci and Helson 1965 or Bowling et al. 2005), individuals evaluate current experiences against prior ones, which form a baseline of comparison. Over time, as current experiences are incorporated into employees' cognitive baseline, their perceived significance fades, rendering previously impactful stimuli increasingly routine and less psychologically salient. As Bowling et al. (2000, 1046) note, "exposure to earlier stimuli serves as a frame of reference by which later stimuli are judged. These earlier stimuli are mathematically combined to form one's unique adaptation level." Indeed, adaptation-level theory has proven useful in capturing how employee perceptions evolve over time. For example, research has applied this framework to theorize and investigate changes in perceptions of well-being (Diener et al. 2006), organizational justice (Robbins et al. 2012), and workplace stressors (Fu et al. 2021), as well as to explore the diminishing relationship between perceptions of job satisfaction and organizational commitment over time (Xu et al. 2023).

Applied to organizational diversity practices, the above suggests that employees may interpret them as meaningful indicators of discretionary support. Within the POS and SET frameworks (Blau 1964), perceived support can foster organizational commitment and a sense of reciprocal obligation (e.g., Eisenberger et al. 2001). However, as employees adapt individually or collectively to age-diversity practices, the practices' potential to sustain employee reciprocity toward the organization fades. Thus, even when organizations implement new or updated age-diversity practices, employees assess them according to their new adaptation level. This shift can weaken the exchange balance central to SET, lowering POS and, consequently, reciprocal behaviors. In essence, although the structural presence of diversity policies may remain, the normative baseline of comparison employees use to interpret such practices may have changed, reducing their capacity to drive positive organizational outcomes.

Building on this, we argue that as perceptions of age-diversity practices are compared with a changing adaptation level, POS and, in turn, the reciprocal exchange dynamic are weakened. When employees no longer view these practices as exceeding their adaptation level, their sense of organizational support fades, reducing their motivation to reciprocate with positive attitudes or behaviors. This "fading effect" causes the positive impact of perceived age-diversity practices on outcomes like company ratings to weaken over time—not because the practices change, but because employees' adaptation level shifts. Based on this, we state

Hypothesis 3. *Time interacts with perceptions of organizational age-diversity practices in predicting company ratings, such that the relationship between perceived age-diversity practices and company ratings becomes weaker over time.*

Hypothesis 4. *Time interacts with perceptions of organizational age-diversity practices in predicting company ratings via POS, such that the indirect effect becomes weaker over time.*

2 | Overview of Studies

To test our hypotheses, we conducted two studies. Study 1 analyzes employer reviews from 30 companies in the DACH[2] region using sentiment analysis and multilevel modeling to assess how employee perceptions of their organizations' age-diversity practices relate to company ratings over time periods (i.e., Hypotheses 1 and 3). Although this study captures patterns using real-world data, its reliance on between-person data limits assessment of within-person change. Instead of individual change, the focus is on group-level shifts—how employees

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within an organization *collectively* adjust the weight they assign to perceptions of age-diversity practices when rating their company. Study 2 replicates and extends Study 1 using a longitudinal experimental design across nine time points, allowing for *within-person* analysis of how age-diversity practices influence company ratings through POS, thereby testing Hypotheses 2 and 4. Specifically, we manipulated age-diversity practices through monthly HR newsletter scenarios from a fictitious company. The experimental scenarios were based on Parker and Andrei's (2020) Include, Individualize, and Integrate metastrategies and aligned with Chong et al.'s (2025) operationalization. Control scenarios focused on neutral operational and administrative topics without reference to diversity practices.

3 | Study 1

3.1 | Design and Procedure

We web-scraped reviews written by employees on an employer rating platform in the German-speaking DACH region in February 2024.[3] The reviews on the platform[4] were publicly posted by employees between 2011 and 2024 to inform a broad audience and provide job seekers with realistic insights into their employers. We selected this platform because it captures employee evaluations across various work-related aspects, and the aging workforce in particular. Employees provide an overall numerical rating alongside a personalized slogan and rate specific predefined subdomains of their work experience using a five-star system (indicating increasing quality) and text-based feedback. These subdomains guide reflections on different employment aspects, offering a structured yet comprehensive way to share relevant experiences. The areas of evaluation include both general aspects (e.g., "What I find good about my employer") and more specific categories such as "work atmosphere," "image," "work-life balance," "working conditions," "career/development," "salary and benefits," "leadership behavior," "team cohesion," "communication," and "interesting work tasks." Uniquely, this platform includes a subdomain focused on perceptions of age-diversity practices, setting it apart from other employer review sites. Employees can choose how many subdomains to rate, allowing for a flexible and multifaceted reflection of their work experience.

The platform employs a rigorous, multistep content verification process to ensure data quality. Upon submission, users provide a confidential, valid email and must follow community guidelines. Reviews undergo automated screening for violations (e.g., profanity and personal data), technical issues (e.g., duplicates), and suspicious activity. Those passing are published immediately; flagged reviews receive manual evaluation by a moderation team assessing content and metadata. If concerns arise, users are contacted for clarification or proof of employment. Resubmitted reviews undergo a second manual check before approval. This thorough process ensures the credibility and authenticity of the data analyzed.

To assess the relationships of interest broadly, we scraped the reviews of the 10[5] highest-ranked companies on the German, Austrian, and Swiss stock markets of November 2023, respectively, using the software ParseHub (ParseHub 2024). For each of the 30 companies, we extracted all individual reviews provided, filtered by the presence of text in our independent variable perceptions of the organization's age-diversity practices. From these cases, we extracted all data containing the overall quantitative rating of the company (i.e., our dependent variable), the date of each review (i.e., our moderator), and the text responses[6] to the prompts of the subdomain on the perceived age-diversity practices (i.e., our independent variable). Further, we aimed to verify the robustness of our model by accounting for aspects that previous literature found to be important contributors to age-supportive workplaces and included the text responses on the subdomains of "leadership behavior," "work atmosphere," and "team cohesion" as control variables (see Section 3.3 for more details).

We thus transformed text-based responses regarding perceptions of how older employees are treated and relevant control variables into quantitative scores by integrating sentiment analysis (Silge and Robinson 2016) with multilevel modeling (Klein and Kozlowski 2000). Sentiment analysis evaluates each word by comparing it to a predefined dictionary, where each word matching the dictionary is assigned a positive or negative valence score. Each text response (i.e., employee feedback in a subdomain) is then assigned a total valence score by summing the sentiment scores of all matching words.

All reviews were written in German. To convert these qualitative reviews into quantitative scores, we applied the SentiWS dictionary (Remus et al. 2010), a validated sentiment lexicon for German text. This dictionary includes around 16 000 positive and 18 000 negative words, including nouns and adjectives, each assigned a valence score (e.g., "gut" [good] = +0.37; "beklagen" [complain] = −0.50). For each text response in the four relevant subdomains—age-diversity practices, leadership behavior, work atmosphere, and team cohesion—we calculated a valence sum score, yielding four independent sentiment variables used in subsequent quantitative analyses.

To increase the robustness of our sentiment analysis, we applied two key data processing steps. First, we excluded the word "old" and its variants (e.g., "older" and "elder") from the sentiment dictionary, as they carry a slightly negative valence (−0.005) that could bias analyses related to age-diversity perceptions. Second, we filtered out reviews containing negations (e.g., "not optimistic"), since the sentiment dictionary does not account for negation and would inaccurately assign a positive score. As a result, we excluded reviews with negations from the analysis, leading to missing data for those cases. Specifically, out of 4048 reviews, we excluded 951 for age-diversity perceptions, 1079 for leadership behavior, 556 for team cohesion, and 732 for work atmosphere, so as to minimize the use of misleading data.

In combination with the quantitative company rating per review and the date on which each review was posted, we then use the sentiment scores for the multilevel modeling.

3.2 | Sample

Our sample comprised 4048 reviews across 30 companies: 2808 from Germany, 766 from Austria, and 402 from Switzerland. Reviews ranged from 2011 to January 2024 (see the online

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TABLE 1 | Descriptive statistics and correlations of Study 1.

Variable	*n*	*M*	SD	ICC(1)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Time[a]	4042	2.75	0.86	—	—	0.02	0.01	0.04*	−0.00	−0.06**	0.01
2. Company rating	4039	3.52	1.15	0.10	0.02	—	0.25**	0.37**	0.45**	0.28**	0.01
3. Perceptions of age-diversity practices	2826	0.09	0.37	0.00	0.01	0.26**	—	0.14**	0.17**	0.08**	−0.00
4. Leadership behavior	2749	0.11	0.51	0.01	0.04*	0.39**	0.13**	—	0.19**	0.17**	0.00
5. Work atmosphere	2790	0.19	0.55	0.03	0.01	0.48**	0.18**	0.22**	—	0.20**	0.00
6. Team cohesion	2506	0.28	0.42	0.03	−0.06**	0.30**	0.08**	0.18**	0.24**	—	−0.00
7. Avg. annual revenue (Mio)	4048	81 238.22	67 804.44	0.00	0.01	0.01	−0.00	−0.02	0.00	0.01	—

Note: Number of observations with values for each variable = 1276. Number of companies = 30. Values below the diagonal are for the full dataset (within + between company data), meaning the conventional zero-order correlations; the data above the diagonal are the correlations among the means for each company (estimates of the between-company correlations that are used for estimating the group mean centered estimates used for hypothesis testing).
Abbreviations: ICC = intraclass correlation, or ICC(1), as the model-estimated proportion of between-company variation to total variation. *M* and SD are used to represent the regular mean and standard deviation, respectively.
[a]Coded in 4-year intervals with 1 = 2011–2014, 2 = 2015–2018, 3 = 2019–2022, and 4 = 2023–2024.
*Indicates $p < 0.05$.
**Indicates $p < 0.01$.

Appenddix A for company-level details). Companies varied widely in size, with average annual revenues ranging from 579 million USD to 260 144 million ($M = 81\,238.22$ million), reflecting diverse levels of firm performance.

Because of the nature of platform data and our analytical procedures, missing values occurred for several reasons, including absent company ratings, missing review dates, or lack of text in specific subdomains. Sentiment analysis also contributed to missingness, as the SentiWS dictionary (Remus et al. 2010) only recognizes formal German words, excluding emojis, colloquialisms, and nonmatching terms. Rather than imputing missing values with full information maximum likelihood procedures (which may include instances where respondents did not have anything to say about the topic), we opted for listwise deletion. This approach yielded a final analytic sample of 1163 complete cases across 30 companies. Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1.

3.3 | Measures

3.3.1 | Company Rating

When providing a review, every employee provided an overall numerical rating of the company on a scale from 1 (*poor company*) to 5 (*best possible company*). We web-scraped this numerical rating for each review, on which we later performed the sentiment analysis. The average company rating was 3.52 (SD = 1.15), indicating a relatively balanced distribution of positive and negative assessments. This reduces concerns about extreme cases or platform-related bias in the dataset.

3.3.2 | Perceptions of Organizational Age-Diversity Practices

Scores derived from the SentiWS dictionary captured perceptions of organizational age-diversity practices. Outliers beyond ±3 standard deviations (±1.14) were winsorized (Tukey 1962). Scores ranged from −1.20 to 1.12, with values near zero indicating neutral sentiment, negative scores indicating negative sentiment, and positive scores indicating positive sentiment. Examples of positive reviews include "Fair treatment of older colleagues is a given" (0.38) and "The full range from career starters to near-retirees is represented" (0.22). Negative examples are "Hardly any colleagues over 45" (−0.17) and "Middle-aged and older colleagues are often pushed into underqualified roles" (−0.50).

3.3.3 | Time

We used the review posting date as our moderator "time," categorizing it into 4-year intervals: 2011–2014 (420 reviews), 2015–2018 (881 reviews), 2019–2022 (2048 reviews), and 2023–2024 (693 reviews).[7] To adjust for varying group sizes, we applied interval-based weights in our analyses. Robustness checks using alternative intervals (2-, 3-, and 5-year) confirmed that findings were not driven by the chosen time classification (see online Appendix D).

3.3.4 | Covariates

Using the SentiWS dictionary, we included reviews of interpersonal and organizational aspects in our model, which prior literature suggests play an important role in inferring the reports

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about age-diversity practices and may, therefore, impact our outcome variable, company rating. First, since leadership is crucial for addressing the needs of an aging workforce (e.g., Truxillo et al. 2015; Wegge et al. 2012), we included text-based reviews on perceived "leadership behavior." Valence scores for this variable ranged from −1.58 to 1.55. Second, using the same approach, we included text-based reviews on perceived "work atmosphere," given its importance in organizational performance and treatment of older employees (e.g., Boehm et al. 2014; Kunze et al. 2011). Valence scores ranged from −1.67 to 1.69. Further, we controlled for text-based reviews of perceived "team cohesion," scored from −1.26 to 1.31, as faultlines research (e.g., Kunze and Bruch 2010; Thatcher and Patel 2012) and demographic similarity studies (e.g., Riordan and Shore 1997) suggest that relational demographics can affect organizational performance. For all covariates, values exceeding ±3 standard deviations from the mean were replaced with the value of ±3 standard deviations (Tukey 1962).

Lastly, we included companies' average annual revenue (2011–2024) as a covariate to account for differences in financial capacity that may influence their ability to implement age-diversity practices and affect employee perceptions. Revenue figures, obtained from public sources, ranged widely from 579 million USD to 260.14 billion ($M = 81.24$ billion, SD = 67.80 billion), suggesting a diverse dataset that includes both smaller firms and large corporations with substantial earnings.

3.4 | Analytical Approach

Given that the data were nested within companies, we examined whether part of the variance in our outcome variable of company rating may be attributable to this higher-order structure. We deemed the ICC score of 0.10 in combination with our group sample size to sufficiently reflect the between-group variability of our data (e.g., Bliese 1998).

We used a multilevel linear mixed-effects model to examine how perceptions of age-diversity practices relate to company ratings over time. First, time was treated as an ordinal variable (coded 1, 2, 3, and 4) to assess overall relationships. In follow-up analyses, time was treated as the categorical factor time period with rotated reference groups to identify specific time-point contrasts and their effects on company ratings. We also tested interactions between perceptions of age-diversity practices and time. All models included fixed effects for leadership behavior, work atmosphere, and team cohesion, along with their interactions with time periods. To reduce group-level bias, all continuous predictors were group-mean-centered by company (e.g., González-Romá and Hernández 2017). To account for organizational variability, we included random slopes for perceptions of age-diversity practices at the company level. We also weighted the time variable using the inverse of group sizes (i.e., number of reviews per time interval) to prevent overrepresentation and ensure unbiased estimates (e.g., Hahs-Vaughn 2005). We used R version 4.2.2 (R Core Team 2022) and the lme4 package (Bates et al. 2015) to run a multilevel linear mixed-effects model while using restricted maximum likelihood (REML) estimation. For visualizing our interaction, we used the packages sjPlot (Lüdecke 2023), RColorBrewer (Neuwirth 2022), and ggplot2 (Wickham 2016).

3.5 | Results

Our model testing for how perceptions of the organizational age-diversity practices predict company ratings while controlling for perceptions of leadership behavior, team cohesion, and work atmosphere[8] explained considerable variance with a marginal R^2 of 0.66 and a conditional R^2 of 0.99 (see Table 2).

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the results indicated a significant positive relationship of perceptions of age-diversity practices on company ratings ($b = 0.83$, SE = 0.17, $t = 4.77$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that employees who perceive their organization as supporting older employees more positively tend to provide higher overall ratings of the organization. The main effect of time period was not significant ($b = -0.01$, SE = 0.02, $t = -0.45$, $p = 0.651$), indicating that time period alone was not related to company ratings. However, the interaction between the perception of age-diversity practices and time period was significant ($b = -0.19$, SE = 0.06, $t = -3.12$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 3 and showing that the positive relationship of the perception of organizational age-diversity practices on company ratings decreased over time periods (see also Figure 1). Among the control variables, time period and its interaction with leadership behavior ($b = -0.19$, SE = 0.05, $t = -2.43$, $p = 0.015$) and work atmosphere ($b = 0.11$, SE = 0.04, $t = 2.65$, $p = 0.008$) were also significant negative and positive predictors of the company rating, respectively. However, the interaction between team cohesion and time period did not predict the outcome ($b = 0.08$, SE = 0.06, $t = 1.41$, $p = 0.158$).

In follow-up analyses, we contrasted all relationships based on the different time intervals, represented by four dummy variables, that is, 2011–2014, 2015–2018, 2019–2022, and 2023–2024. In sum, the results support the fading effect, showing a significant decrease in company rating when comparing 2011–2014 to 2023–2024 ($b = -0.63$, SE = 0.19, $t = -3.27$, $p = 0.001$) and indicating strong trends for the comparisons of 2015–2018 to 2023–2024 ($b = -0.38$, SE = 0.20, $t = -1.95$, $p = 0.051$) and 2019–2022 to 2023–2024 ($b = -0.35$, SE = 0.19, $t = -1.87$, $p = 0.062$). The detailed overview is presented in the online Appendix B.

3.5.1 | Robustness Checks

To assess the robustness of our findings, we conducted three supplementary analyses (see Appendices C and D for a detailed explanation). First, we tested for potential nonlinear relationships by estimating quadratic and cubic effects of perceived age-diversity practices and their interactions with time. Model comparisons using chi-square difference tests revealed no improvement in model fit beyond the linear specification, supporting the appropriateness of our linear modeling approach. Second, we re-estimated our models excluding all control variables to examine the unadjusted relationships. The main relationship between perceived age-diversity practices and company ratings remained significant, whereas the

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TABLE 2 | Multilevel moderation for company rating in Study 1.

	Estimate	Std. estimates	SE	df	*t*	*p*	
(Intercept)	3.46	−0.08	0.13	32.96	26.57	<0.001	***
Perceptions of age-diversity practices	0.83	0.11	0.17	93.74	4.77	<0.001	***
Time[a]	−0.01	−0.02	0.02	1170.00	−0.45	0.651	
Leadership behavior	0.66	0.29	0.05	1245.00	12.72	<0.001	***
Work atmosphere	0.65	0.32	0.05	1249.00	13.76	<0.001	***
Team cohesion	0.46	0.16	0.06	1240.00	7.18	<0.001	***
Avg. annual revenue (Mio)	0.00	0.07	0.00	12.43	0.86	0.408	
Perceptions of age-diversity practices × Time	−0.19	−0.07	0.06	389.80	−3.12	<0.001	**
Leadership behavior × Time	−0.12	−0.06	0.05	1249.00	−2.43	0.015	*
Work atmosphere × Time	0.11	0.06	0.04	1249.00	2.65	0.008	**
Team cohesion × Time	0.08	0.03	0.06	1247.00	1.41	0.158	

Note: $N = 1276$. Linear mixed model with random intercepts and random slopes for the variable perceptions of age-diversity practices. Grouping variable = company. Group mean-centered values for the variables perceptions of age-diversity practices, leadership behavior, work atmosphere, and team cohesion were used.
Abbreviations: SE = standard error. Std. estimates = standardized estimates to infer about the relative importance of the predictors.
[a]Coded in 4-year intervals with 1 = 2011–2014, 2 = 2015–2018, 3 = 2019–2022, and 4 = 2023–2024. In the analysis, the dataset was grouped by the time variable, and the number of observations was counted for each time interval. The inverse of the group size was then computed as a weight for each observation, allowing for weighting based on group size to address potential group-level variation. Marginal $R^2 = 0.66$, conditional $R^2 = 0.99$.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

interaction with time was no longer statistically significant. This suggests that while the positive association between perceived age-diversity practices and company ratings is robust, the fading over time intervals only emerges when controlling for core aspects of the work environment, namely leadership behavior, team cohesion, and work atmosphere. These variables likely account for contextual influences that would otherwise obscure the temporal dynamics of our focal effect, underscoring the importance of including theoretically relevant controls. Third, we conducted sensitivity analyses using alternative time frames (two-, three-, and five-year intervals) to ensure our findings were not dependent on the specific time window chosen. Across all models, the pattern of results remained consistent. Taken together, these additional analyses support the robustness and temporal generalizability of our core findings.

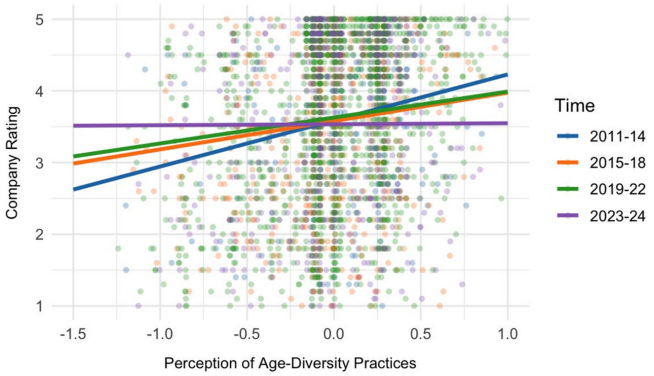


FIGURE 1 | Interaction effect of perceptions of age-diversity practices and time period on company rating in Study 1. *Note:* Means and standard deviation plotted for the interaction effect. Model based on the random intercept and random slopes for the dependent variable perceptions of age-diversity practices and including controls.

3.6 | Study 1 Discussion

Study 1 offers initial field evidence that employees' perceptions of age-diversity practices influence public company ratings and that this relationship fades over time periods. However, the anonymity of reviews, vital for privacy, restricted access to detailed demographic and contextual data, limiting our ability to analyze differences between individuals. As a result, we cannot assess whether reviewer age moderated these effects or whether fading occurs *within* individuals over time. To address these open issues, we conducted a longitudinal experiment manipulating the presence of different age-diversity practices over time. This design allows for an investigation of within-person change while providing greater control over the organizational signals employees interpret. We focused on POS as a mediator and company ratings as the outcome, testing Hypotheses 2 and 4.

4 | Study 2

4.1 | Participants

The experiment was conducted via Prolific with employed UK-based participants whose primary language was English and who spent at least 75% of their work time using a computer to ensure the experiment was realistic to them. To ensure an age-diverse sample, we stratified recruitment into three age groups:

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21–35, 36–50, and 51–65 years. The study took an average of 17.40 min to complete (SD = 10.72), with no duration differences across conditions. Participants received compensation in line with the UK minimum hourly wage (£6.27).

We recruited 300 participants in total (154 for the experimental and 146 for the control condition, randomly assigned) to compare between- and within-person effects across the nine measurement time points sufficiently. There were no dropouts, and in case of missing values, we used FIML estimations. Participants were, on average, 42.10 years old (SD = 11.39; range from 21 to 65 years) and 54% female and had an average professional working experience of 13.68 years (SD = 10.02).

4.2 | Design and Procedure

We conducted a preregistered,[9] longitudinal experimental study (i.e., scenario experiment), manipulating the presence versus absence of organizational age-diversity practices across nine time points. Participants received a series of nine scenario-based newsletter emails, each purportedly sent 1 month apart by the fictional HR department of the consulting firm StratEdge. These newsletters provided monthly updates about their respective organizational practices. In the experimental condition, newsletters provided insights on age-diversity practices in line with Parker and Andrei's (2020) three I's classification. Next to the manipulation of age-diversity practices in the newsletters, routine operational and administrative updates on, for example, the office setup or schedule were also presented to ensure realism. In contrast, the nine newsletters in the control condition did not mention age-diversity practices but only general organizational updates (i.e., unrelated to age-diversity practices).

Upon providing their consent, participants reported demographic and occupational information and their current level of fatigue (on the five-item Visual Analog Scale for Fatigue, VAS-F; Lee et al. 1991). Participants were then randomly assigned to either the experimental or control condition, in which they were presented with nine newsletters. After every newsletter email (i.e., our manipulation), participants were asked to rate their POS and their company for the respective month. After the nine scenarios, employees again filled out the fatigue scale. There was no increase in fatigue, but in contrast, participants were significantly less fatigued at the end of our survey ($M = 2.81$, SD = 2.38) compared with the start ($M = 2.59$, SD = 2.37; $t[2699] = 11.638$, $p < 0.001$).

To ensure that participants read the email newsletters, we instructed them to read each newsletter carefully, had the button to proceed to the next page only appear after 10 s, included three attention check items across the vignettes, and informed participants that they would be asked to recall as much as possible on the content of the vignettes at the end of the survey. Seven participants failed each of the three attention check items (all in the control condition), whereas three participants per condition also took longer than three standard deviations to complete the whole survey. Four participants (i.e., two per condition) did not pass the recall exercise, stating that they did not remember anything or placing "NA" in the textbox. Excluding these cases did not affect the direction or significance of the findings; thus, results are reported for the full sample, including these participants.

4.3 | Manipulations

The newsletters appeared randomly to rule out carry-over effects. Additionally, each newsletter in the experimental condition was matched in length and sentence structure with the corresponding newsletter in the control condition to maintain consistency across conditions (see also Aguinis and Bradley 2014; Atzmüller and Steiner 2010). Importantly, half of the content of the newsletters in the experimental condition focused on age-diversity strategies, whereas the other half contained neutral content, identical to that in the control condition. This design ensured that participants would not easily detect the manipulations. All scenarios were developed using example cues from Parker and Andrei's (2020) framework. ChatGPT (OpenAI 2025) was subsequently used to refine the language, enhance structure, and ensure consistency in length and wording across experimental conditions, while maintaining alignment with the theoretical parameters.

4.3.1 | Experimental Condition

We manipulated organizational age-diversity practices based on Parker and Andrei's (2020) classification and in line with the operationalization by Chong et al. (2025). Specifically, three newsletters per strategy described initiatives such as anti-discrimination efforts and age-inclusive recruitment (Include), tailored support like flexible work and return-to-work programs (Individualize), and intergenerational collaboration through mentoring and knowledge-sharing (Integrate). An example newsletter (i.e., Individualize) is presented in Figure 2.

4.3.2 | Control Condition

Participants received neutral company updates on administrative topics (e.g., office efficiency and internal processes) with no references to age diversity, serving as a baseline. The complete list of scenarios can be found in the online Appendix E.

4.3.3 | Manipulation Check

To ensure that the manipulation worked, we conducted a manipulation check at the end of the survey in which participants rated the company's level of investment in older employees on a scale from 0 (worst possible rating) to 10 (best possible rating). The exact item was "Considering all newsletters, to what extent do the HR practices at StratEdge support older employees?" The manipulation was successful, with participants in the experimental condition providing significantly higher responses ($M = 8.60$, SD = 1.38) compared with participants in the control condition ($M = 4.95$, SD = 2.17), $F(1, 2689) = 2721.40$, $p < 0.001$.

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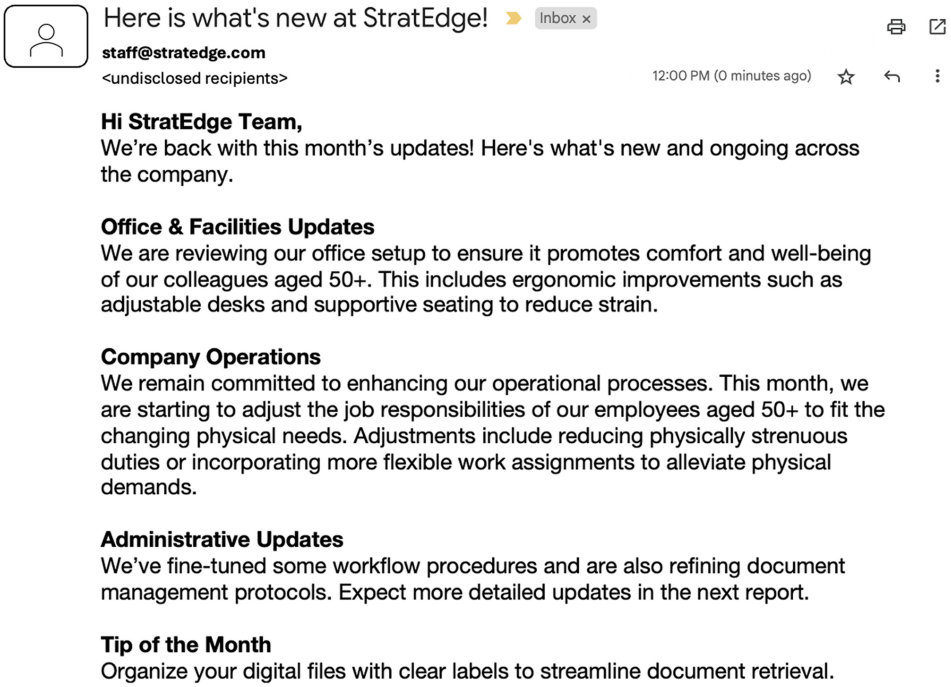


FIGURE 2 | Sample newsletter for the experimental condition (i.e., individualize) in Study 2.

4.4 | Measures

4.4.1 | POS

We used a shortened, slightly adapted three-item version of Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) 9-item scale, administered after each newsletter. Participants rated statements such as "StratEdge really cares about my well-being," "StratEdge is willing to help me perform my job," and the reverse-coded "StratEdge shows very little concern for me" on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated greater POS. Reliability across the nine time points was high (range from $\omega = 0.84$ to $\omega = 0.90$).

4.4.2 | Company Rating

Company rating was measured using a single-item question: "Overall, my rating of StratEdge for this month is ..." Participants rated the company on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 represented the worst possible rating, and 10 represented the best possible rating.

4.4.3 | Covariates

We controlled for participants' age by measuring it as a continuous variable (in years).[10]

4.5 | Analysis Procedure

We estimated two models. First, to assess Hypothesis 2, we used a 2-1-1 multilevel mediation model in MPlus 8.0 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2015) where at Level 2 (i.e., between), condition predicted POS (a path) and on Level 1 (i.e., within), we estimated a random slope for the relationship between POS → Company rating (b path), while we also accounted for covariances among all variables. Second, to test Hypothesis 4, we estimated a multilevel moderated mediation model following Preacher et al.'s (2010) recommendation, which has the benefit that all relationships can be estimated within one model. On Level 1 (i.e., within), Time predicted POS, which in turn predicted company rating. We estimated random slopes for the relationships between Time → POS (a path), POS → Company Rating (b path), and Time → Company rating (c' path). At Level 2 (i.e., between), condition moderated the effect (i.e., random slope) of Time on POS, while we also accounted for covariances among all variables and age as a control variable on Level 2. In both models, we grand-mean-centered all predictor variables and used the robust maximum likelihood estimator (MLR).

4.6 | Results

The descriptive statistics of all focal variables and their intercorrelations are presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 4, the results support Hypothesis 2, indicating that POS mediated the relationship between organizational age-diversity practices and company ratings. Specifically, the indirect effect was positive and significant ($\gamma = 0.79$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.57, 1.00]), suggesting that age-diversity practices enhanced POS and, in turn, company ratings.

Regarding the moderated mediation model testing the hypothesized fading effect (Hypothesis 4), we examined whether

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TABLE 3 | Descriptive statistics and correlations of Study 2.

Variable	*M*	SD	ICC(1)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	42.10	11.39	0.47	—	−0.01	−0.62**	0.01	−0.00	0.03	0.02
4. Condition[a]	0.51	0.50	—	0.01	0.00	0.04*	—	0.00	0.29**	0.27**
5. Time	5.00	2.58	—	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	—	0.00	0.04*
6. POS	4.78	1.35	0.74	0.03	−0.04	0.10***	0.29***	0.03	—	0.83**
7. Company Rating	6.46	1.97	0.73	0.02	−0.05**	0.09***	0.27***	0.04*	0.83***	—

Note: $N_{between} = 300$, $N_{within} = 2700$. *M* and SD are used to represent the regular mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values below the diagonal are for the full dataset (within + between company data), meaning the conventional zero-order correlations; the data above the diagonal are the correlations among the means for each company (estimates of the between-person correlations that are used for estimating the mean-centered estimates used for hypothesis testing).
Abbreviations: ICC = intraclass correlation, or ICC(1), as the model-estimated proportion of between-company variation to total variation. POS = perceived organizational support.
[a]Control and experimental condition.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

TABLE 4 | Multilevel 2-1-1 mediation results Study 2.

Effect	Est.	SE	Est./SE	*p*	
Within					
POS → Company rating (*b* path)	0.99	0.03	30.93	< 0.001	***
Between					
Condition → POS (*a* path)	0.79	0.13	6.12	< 0.001	***
Condition → Company rating (*c′* path)	0.29	0.10	2.80	0.005	**
Indirect effect	0.79	0.13	6.03	< 0.001	***

Note: Analysis based on MPlus multilevel mediation approach. $N_{within} = 2700$, $N_{between} = 300$. Control variables were excluded as the model would not be admissible if included.
Abbreviation: POS = perceived organizational support.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

the indirect effect of time on company ratings via POS would be negative in the experimental condition but not in the control condition. We found a significant Time × Condition interaction effect on POS, indicating that the time effect on POS differed between conditions ($\gamma = -0.03$, $p = 0.013$, 95% CI = [−0.05, −0.01]). Follow-up analyses tested the conditional indirect effects for each condition. Although the conditional indirect effects did not meet conventional thresholds for statistical significance, they revealed trend-level patterns consistent with our theoretical expectations: In the experimental condition, the time-related effect was negative (indirect effect$_{experimental} = -0.012$, $p = 0.083$), whereas the control condition exhibited a positive time-related effect (indirect effect$_{control} = 0.013$, $p = 0.061$).

Together, these results provide partial support for Hypothesis 4—showcasing the relevance of time in the relationship between age-supportive practices and POS, although the conditional indirect effects failed to reach statistical significance. Beyond these focal relationships, we again found a significant main effect of the condition on POS, such that participants in the age-diversity practices condition reported higher POS compared with those in the control condition ($\gamma = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.47, 0.56]). See Table 5 for the detailed results and Figure 3 for the moderation effect.

4.6.1 | Robustness Check

To test the robustness of our findings, we examined whether participant age moderated the effect of experimental condition on POS by including a Condition × Age interaction term. This interaction was not statistically significant, indicating that the focal relationships did not vary by age. These results suggest the primary findings hold across the sample's age range. Detailed results are provided in the online Appendix F.

4.7 | Study 2 Discussion

Study 2 sought to provide further evidence within an experimental framework and extend Study 1 by formally testing the mediating role of POS (Hypothesis 2) and moderated mediation mechanisms (Hypothesis 4). The results provided robust support for Hypothesis 2: Participants exposed to age-diversity practices rated the company higher, with this effect mediated

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TABLE 5 | Multilevel moderated mediation results Study 2.

Effect	Est.	SE	Est./SE	*p*	
Within					
Time → POS (*a* path)	0.01	0.01	1.89	0.059	
POS → Company rating (*b* path)	0.89	0.04	23.72	< 0.001	***
Time → Company rating (*c′* path)	0.03	0.01	5.75	< 0.001	***
Between					
Condition → POS	0.51	0.03	17.79	< 0.001	***
Time × Condition → POS	−0.03	0.01	−2.50	0.013	*
Control variable (means)					
Age	42.10	0.66	64.01	< 0.001	***
Conditional indirect effects					
Indirect control	0.01	0.01	1.88	0.061	
Indirect experimental	−0.01	0.01	−1.74	0.083	

Note: Analysis based on MPlus multilevel moderated mediation approach. $N_{within} = 2700$, $N_{between} = 300$.
Abbreviation: POS = perceived organizational support.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

by POS. This underscores that age-diversity practices signal organizational commitment, enhancing perceptions of support for older employees and improving public company ratings. Importantly, partially supporting Hypothesis 4, the interaction between perceived age-diversity practices and time significantly predicted a decline in POS. The indirect effect on company ratings via POS also weakened over time, though only at the trend level. This suggests that although age-diversity practices initially boost perceived support and company evaluations, their positive impact on POS fades with repeated exposure. Since the moderated mediation effect was not statistically significant, further research is needed to robustly test this fading mechanism and identify the conditions under which it occurs.

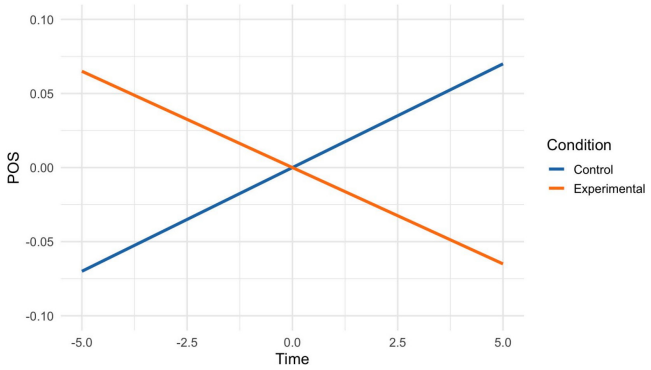


FIGURE 3 | Simple slopes for time on POS by condition in Study 2. *Note:* POS = perceived organizational support. Control = control condition not including diversity practices. Experimental = experimental condition including age-diversity practices (i.e., include, individualize, and integrate).

5 | General Discussion

Across two studies, we investigated how employee perceptions of their organization's age-diversity practices influence company ratings. Building on SET (Blau 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005) and adaptation-level theory (Helson 1948), we hypothesized that although employee perceptions of age-diversity practices will lead to better employer ratings, these positive perceptions will fade over time as practices become part of the new adaptation level of employees and thus provoke less reciprocal behavior. Both of our studies' results supported Hypothesis 1: Employees' perceptions of organizational age-diversity practices positively influenced company ratings. Study 1, based on a large-scale analysis of public employer reviews, showed that perceived organizational age-diversity practices predicted company ratings even after accounting for well-established predictors such as perceived leadership, work atmosphere, and team cohesion. In addition, the results of Study 1 also provided evidence for the fading effect postulated in Hypothesis 3, showing that although employee perceptions of age-diversity practices positively predicted company ratings, the positive relationships with company ratings diminish over time periods (i.e., from 2011 to 2024).

Study 2 demonstrated that the effect of perceived age-diversity practices on company ratings was mediated by POS, thus supporting Hypothesis 2. Our results also provided evidence for a fading effect of age-diversity practices on POS over time. Although the conditional indirect effect of time on company ratings via POS for the experimental condition did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, and thus, Hypothesis 4 was only partially supported, the direction and magnitude of the negative estimate suggest a potential downward indirect trend, warranting further investigation in future research. Notably, we also observed a

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significant direct effect of age-diversity practices on company ratings, suggesting that beyond POS, different processes may underlie this relationship. Overall, the results underscore the complex relationship in which efforts to support the aging workforce may not always translate into sustained improvements in company ratings.

Notably, Study 1 revealed significant interactions between time period and both leadership behavior and work atmosphere. Consistent with the fading effect, leadership behavior's influence on company ratings declined over time periods. However, the work atmosphere showed an opposite, positive interaction, challenging our expectations. This may be because work atmosphere reflects a more affective, ambient, and collectively reinforced perception of organizational climate, less prone to rapid adaptation than discrete cues like leadership behavior or age-diversity practices. This finding urges caution in broadly applying the fading effect and underscores the need to differentiate which organizational signals fade, persist, or strengthen over time—insights critical for managing and sustaining positive employee perceptions.

5.1 | Theoretical Implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions. First, we show that employee perceptions of organizations' age-diversity practices uniquely predict employee ratings of their companies. Our findings are therefore in line with SET and the literature stating that the age-friendliness of an organization, that is, the extent to which organizations maintain age-related organizational values, policies, and climates that support older employees, is an important precursor to how organizations are perceived by their employees (e.g., Boehm et al. 2021; Eppler-Hattab et al. 2020b, 2024). Importantly, Study 1 demonstrates that the hypothesized relationship persists even after accounting for well-established predictors of organizational outcomes, such as leadership behavior, team cohesion, and work atmosphere. This highlights the unique contribution of perceived age-diversity practices to how employees, as proximal stakeholders, evaluate their organizations. At the same time, we acknowledge that future research using field data should continue to account for other salient work-related variables, as perceptions of age-diversity practices are likely formed in conjunction with broader workplace experiences rather than in isolation.

Second, we integrate POS and employee reciprocity (Blau 1964; Eisenberger et al. 2020) with aging workforce research (e.g., Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel 2009; Eppler-Hattab et al. 2020a) to explain both the positive and fading effects on company perceptions. Our findings indicate that organizational age-diversity efforts, particularly through initiatives that encompass inclusion, individualization, and integration (Chong et al. 2025; Parker and Andrei 2020), foster positive employee perceptions of organizational support, which in turn contribute to higher organizational ratings. Importantly, our results also provide evidence for a direct effect (i.e., c' path) of age-supportive practices on company ratings, suggesting that an exclusive explanation via POS may be too limited. One possible theoretical explanation is that age-supportive practices have immediate signaling value (e.g., Connelly et al. 2011, 2024), conveying symbolic cues about organizational values and priorities. These broader evaluative signals may influence employee perceptions independently of social exchange processes. At the same time, our findings highlight an important temporal effect: although the impact of age-diversity practices is positive, the effects diminish over time as employees adapt their baseline of comparison. As a result, initiatives become less effective in fostering reciprocal employee behaviors toward the organization. In line with adaptation-level theory (Helson 1948; Xu et al. 2023), this fading effect underscores the importance of not only implementing diversity practices but also monitoring how they are perceived over the long term (e.g., Connelly et al. 2011).

Third, our research offers a novel multilevel approach to evaluating the organizational implications—both benefits and potential drawbacks—of supporting an aging workforce. By combining web-scraping with natural language processing, we were able to extract and analyze rich, large-scale qualitative data reflecting naturally occurring discourse within and about organizations. To strengthen the validity of these findings, we conducted a longitudinal experiment, which allowed us to replicate and extend the initial results in a controlled setting. This methodological triangulation enhances confidence in the observed effects and underscores the value of combining organizational-level data with experimental methods (Turner et al. 2017) to better understand diversity practices.

5.2 | Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that implementing diversity initiatives tailored to the needs of an aging workforce can enhance organizational performance by improving employer ratings on third-party public platforms, increasing visibility, and refining organizational processes, which in turn can lead to better business outcomes (see also Pahos et al. 2024). However, organizations must remain mindful of the time-related nature of employee perceptions of diversity initiatives, as employee perceptions adapt. Sustaining effective initiatives thus requires ongoing effort to align with shifting employee perceptions. To maintain the positive impact of their signaled support toward older employees and continue benefiting from age-diversity adaptations, organizations must engage in continuous maintenance and communication of these practices while evaluating and updating their policies (see also Eppler-Hattab et al. 2020a, 2024). Regularly reviewing and adjusting their policies in response to feedback from employees will help maintain their effectiveness and demonstrate an authentic, sustained, and novel commitment to age diversity. Our approach in Study 1 of analyzing employer reviews could offer such a practical tool, as it showcases organizations a cost-effective means to continuously assess and refine their age-specific policies and practices in response to evolving employee perceptions, thereby facilitating the development of tailored strategies to support an aging workforce.

Importantly, our studies were conducted in countries within Europe characterized by comparatively strong institutional support for aging workers, including comprehensive retirement and social security systems to sustain older employees' labor force participation (e.g., offering phased retirement

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options, incentivizing ongoing training; Eurofound 2025; OECD 2023). These structural supports likely mitigate some of the workplace challenges associated with aging. Thus, our findings likely represent a conservative estimate of the phenomena. In countries with comparably less social welfare provisions or less developed retirement systems (see Biggs 2019 or Zauzmer Weil 2024 for global comparisons), the same dynamics may manifest more strongly. Accordingly, our findings may be even more pronounced in contexts where older workers face greater structural vulnerabilities, emphasizing their cross-national relevance.

5.3 | Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

This study offers several key strengths both empirically and theoretically. First, by integrating aging workforce research with organizational support and adaptation-level theories, we combined a large-scale field analysis (Study 1) with a controlled experiment (Study 2), enhancing ecological and internal validity. Second, Study 1 used over 4000 natural-occurring employer reviews from the DACH region, providing unique insights into employees' public evaluations outside formal surveys. Third, sentiment analysis and multilevel modeling captured the content and structure of perceptions. Study 2 complemented and extended these insights through a longitudinal experiment, allowing us to examine POS, examine time-related patterns in a controlled setting, and demonstrate the convergence of findings across methods.

However, our studies are not without limitations. Study 1 lacked data on the age of reviewers, and although Study 2 found no age moderation of the fading effect, future research should further explore age-related differences in evaluations on employer review platforms. This is especially important for understanding the long-term impact of diversity practices, as efforts supporting one group may unintentionally marginalize others (Burnett and Aguinis 2024). Additionally, since Study 1 highlighted the roles of leadership behavior and work atmosphere, factors not controlled for in Study 2, future work should investigate how these contextual variables jointly influence within-person fading effects.

Another limitation of Study 1 is the inability to determine when age-diversity initiatives were introduced, how they evolved, or how employee perceptions shifted over time. This limits our assessment to outcomes tied to repeated or sustained exposure, rather than the immediate or delayed effects of initial implementation. Although the European context, with strong government support for age-inclusive policies, may reduce variability in rollout timing, it also restricts generalizability. Future research should examine the initial introduction of age-diversity initiatives and how timing shapes employees' reference points for comparison. For instance, intervention-based designs could help shed light on whether initial exposures accelerate or delay the fading effects over time.

Study 2 employed Parker and Andrei's (2020) three "I's" framework to capture employee responses to age-diversity practices, yet important questions remain about their long-term effects. As Devine and Ash (2022) highlight, sustained initiatives may influence employee perceptions and organizational dynamics over extended periods. Although our experiment reveals the immediate psychological impact of perceived support, it is limited by the short timeframe—participants evaluated practices within minutes, unlike the gradual implementation seen in real-world contexts. Although detecting a fading effect so quickly underscores the temporal fragility of perceived support, it also calls for research on how these perceptions develop over weeks or years. Future studies should replicate this work in organizational field settings, using longitudinal designs to capture the full trajectory from policy introduction to employee response, thereby assessing the durability of perceived support and its effects on engagement and commitment.

Lastly, future research should replicate Study 2 with additional control variables. As highlighted in Study 1, perceptions of age-diversity practices do not develop in isolation but are shaped by broader organizational factors. Exploring how these elements influence responses to age-diversity efforts is key to deepening our understanding of support for older employees.

6 | Conclusion

This study extends our understanding of age-diversity practices in organizations by demonstrating that initiatives aimed at supporting the aging workforce are significant predictors of organizational evaluations over and above other workplace characteristics, such as leadership behavior, work atmosphere, and team cohesion, evaluated by the organization's most proximal stakeholders—their employees. These findings highlight the strategic value of age-diversity practices in shaping employees' positive views of their employer. However, the study also reveals that the positive effects of such initiatives may fade over time as employee adaptation levels evolve. This fading effect highlights a critical challenge for organizations: Maintaining the effectiveness of diversity initiatives requires continuous adaptation to the changing perceptions of the workforce. Our results suggest that organizations must be attentive to employees' evolving adaptation levels regarding age-diversity practices. By doing so, organizations can sustain the perceived value of these initiatives, ensuring they continue to positively influence employee evaluations and the associated benefits for the organization as a whole.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to Selina Langner and Nika Peklar for their valuable assistance during the data processing and coding. This publication is based upon work from COST Action CA22120, LeverAge, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Endnotes

[1] What constitutes an "older employee" is of current debate in the literature as this varies across countries and cultures. However, a common approach in the literature defines older employees as those aged 50 and above (McCarthy et al. 2014), which is the definition we adopt in this paper.

[2] Germany, Austria, Switzerland.

[3] The study was reviewed and approved by the ethics board of the University of Groningen.

[4] To comply with our study's ethics approval, we do not disclose the name of the employer rating platform, nor do we publicly share the data. If readers are interested in the data, they may contact the first author.

[5] We chose to focus on 10 companies per country due to the time-intensive nature of the web-scraping process, particularly the subsequent preparation and structuring of the dataset. Given that the subdomains and text reviews can appear in random order within each review—depending on how many subdomains an employee chooses to evaluate—the most challenging and time-consuming aspect of data collection was organizing this information into a structured format. As a result, we limited the number of reviews and companies included in our dataset to ensure the process remained manageable and the data could be effectively analyzed.

[6] We did not extract the comic-style star ratings for the respective subdomains because they were embedded as images, which the web-scraping software could not process as numerical data.

[7] The naturally occurring, field-based data from employer reviews were posted at irregular intervals, resulting in variation in review frequency across months and years—especially in the platform's early stages before gaining widespread use. Treating time as a continuous variable risked uneven data density and hence biased conclusions. Grouping reviews into broader time intervals ensured sufficient sample sizes for robust estimation. Alternative interval specifications and robustness checks are detailed in the online Appendix D.

[8] We estimated random effects for perceptions of age-diversity practices since these perceptions may vary across companies. We included the control variables as fixed effects only since modeling these as random effects, too, resulted in an inadmissible model. Further, we included the interaction terms between all control variables and the moderator when assessing our model (see Yzerbyt et al. 2004).

[9] 10.17605/OSF.IO/82GX4

[10] Note that none of the reported effects change when excluding the control variable from our analysis.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Table A1:** Sample Sizes per Company in Study 1. **Table B1:** Time Period Contrasts in Study 1 Using Company Rating as the Criterion. **Table C1:** Results of Study 1 Excluding the Control Variables. **Table D1:** Results of Analyses Using 2-Year Time Intervals in Study 1. **Table D2:** Results of Analyses Using 3-Year Time Intervals in Study 1. **Table D3:** Results of Analyses Using 5-Year Time Intervals in Study 1. APPENDIX E: Overview of Scenarios in the Experimental and Control Conditions. **Table F1:** Multilevel Moderated Mediation Excluding Age as Control Variable in Study 2. **Table F2:** Multilevel Moderated Mediation with Age as Second Moderator in Study 2[a].

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