

Knowledge Transfer Between Younger and Older Employees: A Temporal Social Comparison Model

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge transfer between younger and older employees can help to prevent organizational knowledge loss and contribute to business success. However, despite its potential benefits, knowledge transfer does not occur automatically. To better understand the challenges associated with age-diverse knowledge transfer, we develop a conceptual model outlining 10 propositions. Specifically, we adopt a temporal social comparison perspective suggesting that employees compare their current and future status (i.e., the prestige, respect, and esteem provided by others). Expected future status differences are meaningful among age-diverse employees because older employees may have a higher current status than their younger colleagues, whereas younger employees may gain a higher status in the future. In our conceptual model, we propose 2 opposing pathways through which temporal social comparison impacts knowledge transfer, namely age-specific motives (i.e., generativity and development striving) and discrete emotions (i.e., fear of losing status and fear of losing face). In addition, we introduce individual and organizational boundary conditions that can modify the downstream consequences of temporal social comparison on knowledge transfer between younger and older employees.

Knowledge and its transfer between employees—defined as the flow of useful information, skills, and expertise from a source to a recipient (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002)—is crucial for the competitiveness of contemporary organizations (e.g., Jiang & Chen, 2018; Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006). Against the backdrop of global population aging, scholars have become particularly interested in knowledge transfer between younger and older employees (Dietz, Burmeister, & Fasbender, *In press*). Age-diverse employees who share and receive knowledge with and from each other can help to prevent organizational knowledge loss (Harvey, 2012) and contribute to business success (Ropes, 2013). Regardless of its potential organizational benefits, however, knowledge transfer between younger and older employees does not occur automatically (Ellwart, Bündgens, & Rack, 2013). From the diversity (e.g., Roberson, 2019) and mentoring literature (e.g., Marcinkus Murphy, 2012), we know that tensions in terms of values, behavior, and identity may occur due to age and/or generational differences, which can hinder successful knowledge transfer between younger and older employees (Schmidt & Muehlfeld, 2017; see also Urlick et al., 2017).

Scholars have begun to explore the specific antecedents of knowledge transfer among age-diverse employees with a particular emphasis on social categorization processes (Burmeister & Deller, 2016). Social categorization processes entail that people classify themselves and

others into different groups based on certain features, for example age (Zacher et al., 2019). As such, Ellwart and colleagues (2013) found that objective age diversity at the organizational level and perceived age diversity at the individual level decreased knowledge transfer in organizations, presumably because social categorization processes between younger and older employees undermine in-depth discussions of knowledge (i.e., information elaboration). Relatedly, research has shown that experiencing age discrimination—a salient social categorization experience that can create identity threats—can hamper older employees' knowledge sharing efforts with younger colleagues (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2021).

Despite the evidence concerning the importance of social categorization processes in predicting knowledge transfer between age-diverse employees, scholars have paid little attention to social comparison between younger and older employees and its role in the knowledge transfer process. This is surprising given that social comparison is inherently linked to social categorization (Lambert & Bell, 2013; Richter, Scully, & West, 2005). Comparing oneself to others is a fundamental aspect of human behavior and serves as an adaptive mechanism by which to evaluate potential competitors and construe one's own identity (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995). Social comparison involves comparing

not only one's own and another's current status (i.e., the prestige, respect, and esteem provided by others; Bendersky & Pai, 2018) but also expected future status differences (i.e., *temporal social comparison*; Festinger, 1954; Reh, Tröster, & Van Quaquebeke, 2018). It should be noted that future status differences may be particularly meaningful in age-diverse dyads because older employees often have a longer work history and possess a higher current status than their younger counterparts (T. W. H. Ng & Feldman, 2009). In contrast, younger employees may have more "potential" to climb the career ladder and are likely to gain higher status in the future. However, while the social comparison literature has evolved as a rich research stream exploring various motivational and emotional reactions to social comparison processes at work and beyond (Gerber, Wheeler, & Suls, 2018), it remains unconnected to the age and knowledge transfer literature. We thus draw on the social comparison literature to contribute a new perspective to the scholarly conversation on age and knowledge transfer.

Specifically, we explicate how temporal social comparison links to knowledge transfer between younger and older employees through age-specific motives and discrete emotions. In terms of motives, we build on previous research (Inceoglu, Segers, & Bartram, 2012; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Kooij & Van De Voorde, 2011) that has revealed differences in younger and older employees' work motivation (i.e., *generativity* and *development striving*) to explain knowledge transfer between younger and older employees. In terms of emotions, we consider age-specific discrete emotions and differentiate between *fear of losing status* and *fear of losing face* (cf. Fang, 2017; Kunzmann, Kappes, & Wrosch, 2014), two emotions that provide differentiated information about how employees deal with age-specific opportunities and constraints resulting from social comparison with their younger or older counterparts. Taken together, we propose that while older employees may be naturally motivated to share skills and pass on knowledge to the next generation (Kooij & Van De Voorde, 2011), they may also fear losing status when sharing their knowledge with younger colleagues (Joshi et al., 2010). In contrast, younger employees may be naturally motivated to develop and learn through knowledge transfer (Kooij & Van De Voorde, 2011) but may simultaneously experience fear of losing face (i.e., feeling dishonored or less respected; Fang, 2017) when sharing knowledge with their older colleagues.

Furthermore, we shed light on the individual and organizational boundary conditions that follow from the nomological net of social comparison theory (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Festinger, 1954) and knowledge transfer (e.g., Burmeister, Fasbender, et al., 2018; Pinjani & Palvia, 2013). First, we shed light on the individual context by explaining how *perceived similarity* (i.e., the believed commonalities with another person; Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008) changes the relevance and perspective of temporal social comparison for both younger and older employees. Second, we incorporate the relevance of the organizational context by specifying how age-inclusive human resources (HR) practices (i.e., bundles of HR practices aiming at ensuring equal opportunities for employees of all age groups with regard to recruiting, training and development, promotion, and managerial support; Boehm, Kunze, & Bruch, 2014) could buffer the detrimental consequences of temporal social comparison on the age-specific motives and emotions involved in knowledge transfer between younger and older employees.

The proposed conceptual model contributes to the literature on age and knowledge transfer in three ways. First, by introducing temporal social comparison as an antecedent of knowledge transfer between younger and older employees, we contribute to the literature on knowledge transfer in age-diverse settings, in particular to research that has focused on social categorization processes (Burmeister, van der Heijden, et al., 2018; Ellwart et al., 2013; Fasbender & Gerpott, 2021). Second, we differentiate age-specific motives and fears to link employees' temporal social comparison to knowledge transfer, thereby connecting the literatures on *age-specific* motives and emotions at work (e.g., Inceoglu et al., 2012; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Kooij et al., 2011; Kunzmann et al., 2014) to research on *generic* motives and emotions in knowledge transfer (e.g., Fang, 2017; Gagné et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019). Third, by specifying perceived similarity and age-inclusive HR practices as moderators that can change the effects of temporal social comparison in differing ways for younger and older employees, we not only help to clarify the boundaries of generalizability (Bacharach, 1989) but also contribute a more fine-grained understanding of the role of age in organizations (Lawrence, 1988; North, 2019; Truxillo, Cadiz, & Hammer, 2015). Finally, our work also offers promising avenues for practitioners who want to effectively manage knowledge transfer between younger and older employees.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER BETWEEN YOUNGER AND OLDER EMPLOYEES

Knowledge transfer describes the flow of knowledge between individuals. We focus here on knowledge transfer as a dyadic process that requires two employees to share and receive knowledge from each other (Reinholt, Pedersen, & Foss, 2011; Szulanski, 1996). It is important to clarify the role of age in this dyadic knowledge transfer process. The influential work by Kooij and colleagues (2008) differentiates five meanings of age (i.e., chronological age, organizational age, functional age, psychosocial age, and life span age; functional age refers to changing cognitive and physical abilities; psychological age captures the normative side of aging, including self and social perceptions; life span age refers to one's life stage or family status; these three conceptualizations have been considered research on the motivation to work but are less relevant in the knowledge transfer context). For the knowledge transfer context, chronological and organizational age are of particular relevance. Chronological age captures the number indicated in one's passport (i.e., the amount of time that has passed from one's date of birth to the given date). Researchers have acknowledged that the specification of chronological age differences between younger and older employees (e.g., 10 or 15 years) as an indicator for age diversity is arbitrary, but it allows for the empirical investigation of age-diverse knowledge transfer (e.g., Burmeister, Gerpott, et al., 2020; Burmeister, Wang, & Hirschi, 2020; Fasbender, Gerpott, & Unger, 2021). The implicit assumption in studying chronological age in the context of knowledge transfer is that the older employees become, the more knowledge and skills they should have been able to acquire. Organizational age, which captures employees' career stages, organizational tenure, acquired skills, and social perception by others, is, however, more comprehensive. In other words, organizational age is about employees' seniority and accumulated expertise, as well as their acquired status. From this perspective, older as compared to younger employees are in more advanced stages

of their careers, hold longer organizational tenure, have acquired more skills, and tend to occupy higher social positions. While chronological age is interrelated to organizational age (Kooij et al., 2008; North, 2019), we rely here on organizational age because it offers a more comprehensive perspective that is useful for developing theory on knowledge transfer between age-diverse employees.

With regard to knowledge transfer between younger and older employees, scholars have debated whether it is a unidirectional or bidirectional process (Burmeister & Deller, 2016). The unidirectional perspective assumes that knowledge flows from the older knowledge sender to the younger knowledge receiver (i.e., the source–recipient model). In contrast, the bidirectional perspective suggests that knowledge flows in two directions, such that older and younger employees are both knowledge senders and knowledge receivers (i.e., the mutual exchange model). The source–recipient model is underpinned by the notion that older employees typically have more work experience and therefore possess more knowledge that they can share with their younger counterparts (Voelpel, Sauer, & Biemann, 2012). Scholars have also found that organizational age norms exist that put older employees in the role of the knowledge sender and younger employees in that of the knowledge receiver (Burmeister, Fasbender, et al., 2018). However, others have argued that both older and younger employees possess unique knowledge and have therefore highlighted the importance of the mutual exchange of knowledge (Harvey, 2012; Tempest, 2003). For example, younger employees may contribute by sharing their up-to-date scientific or technical insights, whereas older employees can contribute by sharing their insights on how to incorporate these ideas into company-specific circumstances, for example, by knowing the right political players (Gerpott, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Voelpel, 2017). In line with this notion, we conceptualize knowledge transfer between younger and older employees as a bidirectional process wherein both older and younger employees engage in knowledge sharing and knowledge receiving behaviors.

TEMPORAL SOCIAL COMPARISON

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) states that people compare themselves to others to conduct accurate self-evaluations. Social comparisons occur rather automatically (Greenberg, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2007), which entails that employees engage in social comparisons fairly spontaneously and that doing so requires relatively little effort (Gilbert et al., 1995). In other words, when employees are confronted with social information, they tend to compare themselves to the individuals involved (Wood, 1996). The only requirement for a social comparison is a criterion or comparison dimension, which “can be anything on which the comparer can notice similarity and difference” (Gerber et al., 2018, p. 177). In organizations, people often compare their *status*—defined as the prestige, respect, and esteem one holds in the eyes of others—to understand their relative standing to others (Greenberg et al., 2007).

Recently, scholars have introduced a *temporal* perspective to the social comparison literature in which people compare their *future* status with that of others (Reh et al., 2018). This temporal perspective (i.e., comparing one’s future self with those of others) goes back to the concept of status momentum. Status momentum refers to the assumption that people’s evaluations of others are based not only on individual attributes but also trajectories (Markman & Guenther, 2007; Pettit et al.,

2013). Pettit and colleagues (2013) argue that people have internalized the physical principle of momentum, which states that objects in motion do not stop until they meet a resisting force. This entails that in the evaluation of others, people believe that these others continue their trajectory (Figure 1). In other words, employees’ evaluative judgments of, for example, their colleagues’ future status are guided by the colleagues’ current development and career trajectory. Research has shown that employees compare their past development with that of their colleagues and utilize these temporal trajectories to form assumptions about their potential future status (Lam et al., 2011; Reh et al., 2018). In the following, we explain how this emerging stream of literature has promising implications for understanding knowledge transfer between younger and older employees.

TEMPORAL SOCIAL COMPARISONS IN AGE-DIVERSE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Based on the organizational age perspective (Kooij et al., 2008), we rely on an initial status difference as an underlying assumption in our conceptual model. This decision is grounded in the observation that older employees often hold a higher current status in their organization based on their organizational tenure, acquired skills, and past work experience (T. W. H. Ng & Feldman, 2009; Tempest, 2003; Voelpel et al., 2012). This current status difference, however, may change in the future because younger employees tend to strive for higher status in the future when developing their careers (Kooij & Van De Voorde, 2011). Taking employees’ trajectories and their potential future status into account is particularly relevant when considering knowledge transfer in an increasingly age-diverse workforce.

Traditionally, older employees were expected to pass their status to the next generation as they moved closer to retirement (Lawrence, 1987; Lawrence & Tolbert, 2007). The rigid view of employees’ career development in which older employees were typically seen as on the descending branch has only changed fairly recently (Fasbender et al., 2019; M. Wang & Wanberg, 2017). Today, older employees do not necessarily withdraw from the workplace when they retire but may instead plan to continue working (Fisher, Chaffee, & Sonnega, 2016; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019; Wöhrmann, Fasbender, & Deller, 2017). Temporal social comparison may therefore become increasingly relevant for an age-diverse workforce. Older colleagues are no longer expected to make way for younger employees’ development and could

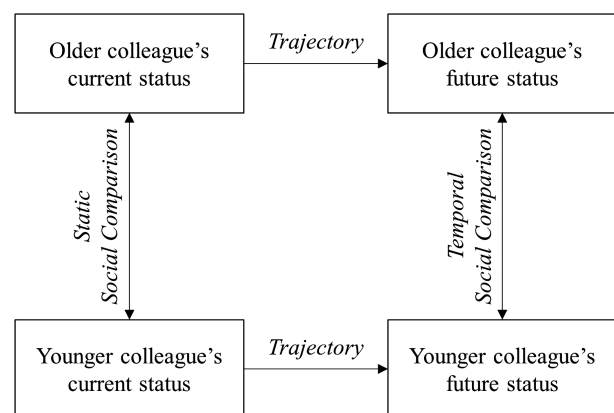


Figure 1. Static versus temporal social comparison.

thus be perceived as posing a risk to younger employees' expected and desired future status (Handley & den Outer, 2020). Similarly, older employees may recognize that younger colleagues who are currently "harmless" may climb the career ladder and thus become competitors for status in the future when both younger and older employees alike seek higher-level positions.

From employees' perspectives, the recent career trajectories of their (younger or older) counterparts could thus inform the outcomes of their social comparison at work. Specifically, engaging in social comparisons and recognizing that one is worse off than one's (younger or older) counterpart (= unfavorable social comparison) can inhibit knowledge transfer (Joshi et al., 2010). We argue that the inhibiting effect on knowledge transfer occurs because an unfavorable social comparison outcome changes age-specific motives (i.e., generativity and development striving) and emotions (i.e., fear of losing status and fear of losing face). These motives and emotions in turn shape younger and older employees' knowledge sharing and receiving behavior with their colleagues, respectively. Figure 2 illustrates the proposed mechanisms. We explain these mechanisms in detail in the following sections.

Temporal Social Comparison and Age-Specific Motives

In the aging literature, scholars typically differentiate between two age-specific motives related to knowledge transfer: generativity striving and development striving (Kooij & Van De Voorde, 2011). Generativity striving is defined as the concern to guide the next

generation (Erikson, 1964; see also Doerwald et al., 2021). Typically, employees who strive for generativity seek job characteristics, tasks, and situations that enable them to mentor, teach, train, or share expertise and skills with younger generations (H. Henry, Zacher, & Desmette, 2015). Development striving is defined as the need to learn and develop (Kooij & Van De Voorde, 2011). Employees who strive for development typically seek job characteristics, tasks, and situations that offer the possibility of achievement and mastery, including challenging work. Although the two motives may exist in employees of both age groups, there is considerable evidence that older employees experience more generativity striving, whereas younger employees experience more development striving (Kooij & Van De Voorde, 2011). In line with previous research, we thus focus on generativity striving for older employees and development striving for younger employees when focusing on the downstream consequences of social comparison for age-diverse knowledge transfer.

For older employees, we theorize that social comparison can reduce generativity striving. Temporal social comparison leads older employees to foresee that their younger counterparts will "overtake" them in the future because their younger colleagues' status is on the rise and will at some point be higher than their own status (Joshi et al., 2010). This in turn makes older employees' attempts to guide the next generation superfluous because younger employees no longer depend on their older colleagues' efforts in terms of sharing expertise and skills for them to move on (Maurer, 2001; Murillo, 2011). In other words, older employees may lose

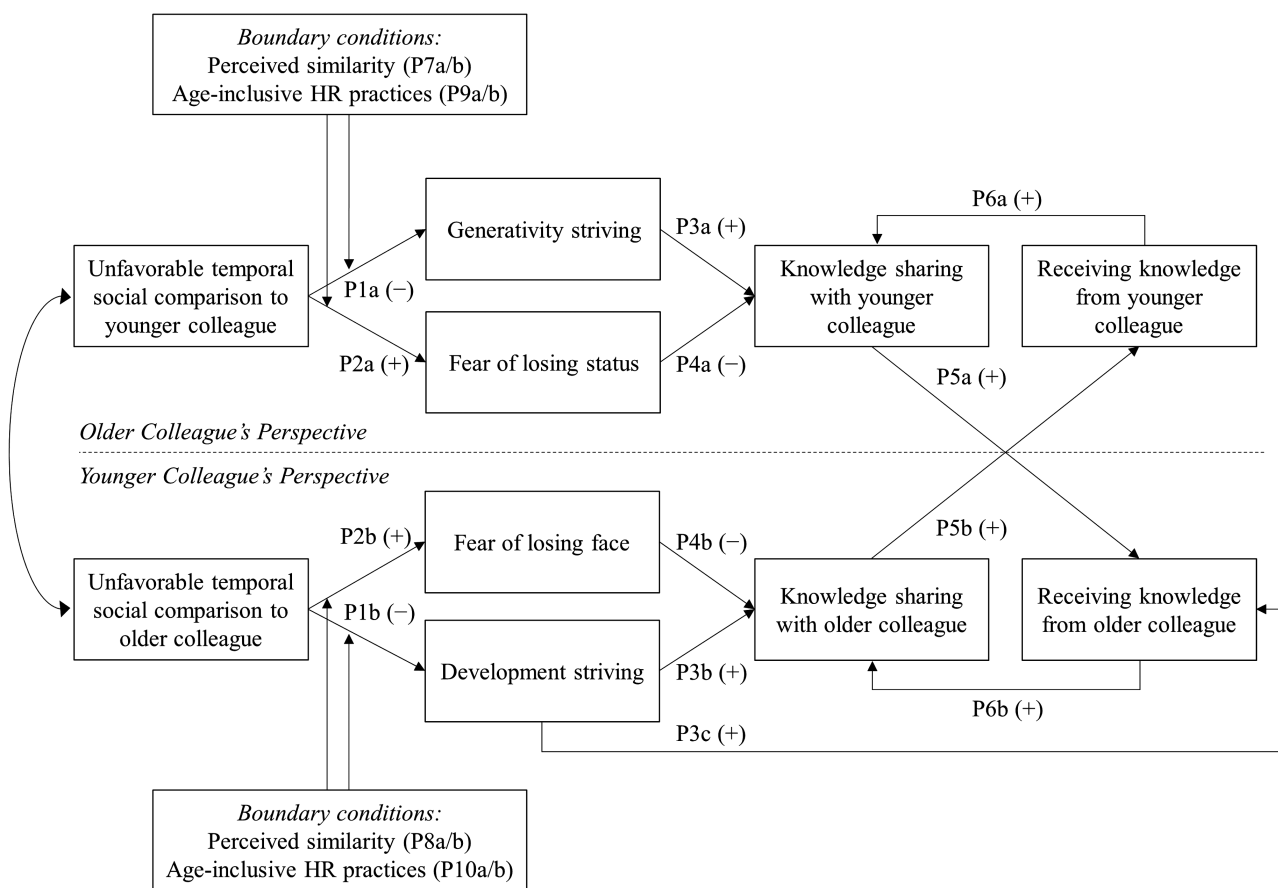


Figure 2. Age-diverse knowledge transfer from a temporal social comparison perspective.

confidence in the value of their own knowledge for others (Fasbender & Gerpott, 2021), which will likely reduce their generativity striving.

Proposition 1a: An older employee's unfavorable temporal social comparison to a younger colleague reduces generativity striving.

For younger employees, we theorize that social comparison can hamper development striving. Specifically, temporal social comparison leads younger employees to realize that their older counterparts enjoy higher status and will continue to be so in the future because their older colleagues' status will (still) be higher than their own status (E. S. W. Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). This demotivates younger employees to learn and develop, as they may feel that, regardless of what they do, they will not be able to "catch up" with their older employees (Kim et al., 2012). In other words, younger employees are likely to perceive the continued difference in status as an insuperable barrier, which reduces their development striving.

Proposition 1b: A younger employee's unfavorable temporal social comparison to an older colleague reduces development striving.

Temporal Social Comparison and Age-Specific Fears

Social comparison in organizations can elicit emotional reactions because potential status differences can either boost or threaten one's self-image (Greenberg et al., 2007). In that regard, a well-established finding is the so-called contrast effect (i.e., putting oneself in contrast to another person). The contrast effect states that favorable social comparison leads to positive affect, while unfavorable social comparison leads to negative affect (Gerber et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2007). This is because favorable social comparison (i.e., perceptions of having a higher status than the other person) prompts a positive self-image, whereas unfavorable social comparison (i.e., perceptions of having a lower status than the other person) threatens one's self-image. While the tendency to react with a contrasting emotional reaction constitutes an interesting insight, it neglects a more fine-grained understanding of the emotional reactions that link social comparison to knowledge transfer between younger and older employees.

A more fine-grained perspective from which to study emotional reactions following social comparison can be drawn from the literature on the motivational differentiation of discrete emotions. Discrete emotions vary in their motivational intensity, which implies that they also vary in their potential to initiate action (Harmon-Jones, Gable, & Price, 2013; Lerner & Keltner, 2000). A discrete emotion with high (vs. low) motivational intensity (and thus potential to elicit action) is fear (Harmon-Jones et al., 2013). Fear constitutes a basic emotion and is described in Homer's *Iliad*, one of the earliest records of humankind: "A man who stumbles upon a viper will jump aside: as trembling takes his knees, pallor his cheeks; he backs and backs away..." (Izard, 2009, p. 8), showing its high potential to elicit action. More precisely, fear can be defined as an unpleasant feeling of threat and potential harm that initiates protective action (Hebb, 1946).

In the knowledge management literature, fear has been established as a powerful emotion that commonly accompanies knowledge transfer processes and interferes with employees' knowledge sharing

and receiving (Empson, 2001; Fang, 2017; Renzl, 2008). Hence, we focus on fear to link social comparison to knowledge transfer between younger and older employees. Based on the literature on age-specific discrete emotions (Kunzmann et al., 2014; Kunzmann & Wrosch, 2018), we differentiate between fear of losing status, which is particularly relevant for older employees, and fear of losing face, which is particularly pertinent for younger employees.

For older employees, we theorize that social comparison can trigger fear of losing status. Fear of losing status refers to the concern that one's status—that is, the influence one has over others through respect and admiration (Hasty & Maner, 2020)—is at risk. An unfavorable temporal social comparison leads older employees to realize that their status is threatened because they expect that their younger colleagues' status will become higher than their own status in the future (Joshi et al., 2010). Paradoxically, the higher the status that people achieve, the higher their fear of losing it (Renshon, 2015), possibly because "losses loom larger than gains" (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, p. 279). In addition, this finding reflects the prevalent notion that "status is difficult to achieve and even more difficult to keep all one's life" (Busquet, 2011, p. 71). Employees who perceive that they may lose status in the future (which can be reflected in objective indicators of success) may be concerned that "they have reached a ceiling to upward mobility including promotions, high-impact assignments, and leadership roles" (Neeley, 2013, p. 478). Therefore, we propose that older employees fear losing status when experiencing an unfavorable temporal social comparison.

Proposition 2a: An older employee's unfavorable temporal social comparison to a younger colleague triggers fear of losing status.

For younger employees, we theorize that social comparison may trigger fear of losing face. Fear of losing face is linked to the Chinese Confucian culture concept of "face," which is regarded as the "the most delicate standard by which Chinese social intercourse is regulated" (Lin, 1935, p. 200 in Zhang, Cao, & Grigoriou, 2011). Fear of losing face, however, has been argued to be a universal phenomenon that is also present in other cultures (Zhang et al., 2011). Simply put, fear of losing face reflects people's concerns of being evaluated unfavorably by others and feeling ashamed (Leary, 1983). An unfavorable temporal social comparison leads younger employees to understand that their older counterparts are and will still be ahead of them now and in the future because their older colleagues' status will (continue to) be higher than their own (E. S. W. Ng et al., 2010). This realization likely leads younger employees to be insecure about themselves, as they (a) are generally more subject to feelings of ignominy following an unfavorable event than older employees (J. D. Henry et al., 2018; Orth, Robins, & Soto, 2010) and (b) reason that they are not fulfilling organizational expectations of climbing the "career ladder" fast enough (Lawrence & Tolbert, 2007). Therefore, younger employees are concerned about being evaluated unfavorably by others. In contrast, older employees have a proven "track record" of earning respect over time (called *mianzi* in Chinese culture; Mascolo, Fischer, & Li, 2003), which accounts for their current higher status and protects them against feelings of losing face (Bergner & Holmes, 2000). People with a higher status

tend to have a largely positive self-concept, which protects them from fearful reactions even when confronted with disconfirming evidence (Bergner & Holmes, 2000).

Proposition 2b: A younger employee's unfavorable temporal social comparison to an older colleague triggers fear of losing face.

Age-Specific Motives, Knowledge Sharing, and Knowledge Receiving

In this section, we focus on how age-specific motives shape age-diverse knowledge transfer. For older employees, we propose that generativity striving leads to knowledge sharing with younger colleagues because sharing knowledge with younger colleagues allows older employees to fulfill their needs to guide and shape the next generation through, for example, passing on their skills and experience (Doerwald et al., 2021). Therefore, knowledge sharing can be seen as a motive-based expressive behavior that is consistent with generativity striving (cf. Stets & Burke, 2003). Supporting this theoretical assumption, evidence indicates that older employees are motivated to choose work that allows them to support future generations (Fasbender et al., 2016; Stamov-Roßnagel & Biemann, 2012).

Proposition 3a: An older employee's generativity striving enhances knowledge sharing with a younger colleague.

For younger employees, we propose that development striving facilitates knowledge sharing and receiving with older colleagues. First, sharing knowledge with more experienced colleagues constitutes a new task that challenges younger employees and therefore allows them to fulfill the achievement and mastery needs associated with development striving (Kooij et al., 2011). In line with this notion, previous research has revealed that positive attitudes toward development lead people to participate in development activities (Maurer, Weiss, & Barbeite, 2003). Furthermore, younger employees feel proud and valued when they can share knowledge with their older counterparts (Gerpott et al., 2017).

Proposition 3b: A younger employee's development striving enhances knowledge sharing with an older colleague.

Second, we propose that younger employees' development striving facilitates knowledge receiving from older colleagues because knowledge from older employees can help younger employees learn (Fasbender et al., 2021). Supporting this notion, initial research has shown that receiving knowledge from their older counterparts satisfies younger employees' competence needs (Burmeister, Wang, et al., 2020).

Proposition 3c: A younger employee's development striving enhances knowledge receiving from an older colleague.

Age-Specific Fears and Knowledge Sharing

In this section, we explain the inhibiting effects of age-specific fears on knowledge sharing. For older employees, we propose that fear of losing status inhibits knowledge sharing with younger colleagues

because knowledge is a manifestation of status and associated with personal value derived from holding that knowledge (Fang, 2017; Hsu & Chang, 2014; Renzl, 2008). When older employees fear losing status to younger colleagues, they are less likely to share knowledge with them and may instead withhold relevant knowledge (Joshi et al., 2010). Prior literature in the field of information systems has acknowledged an inhibiting effect of fear on knowledge sharing (Hsu & Chang, 2014; Junni, 2011; Renzl, 2008). For example, Fang (2017) found that self-referenced fear (i.e., fear with focus on negative consequences for the self) is negatively related to knowledge sharing in the context of mobile social networking applications (i.e., online context), thus providing initial support for our theorizing.

Proposition 4a: An older employee's fear of losing status inhibits knowledge sharing with a younger colleague.

For younger employees, we theorize that fear of losing face reduces knowledge sharing with older colleagues. Fear of losing face can, for example, be triggered when one shares a failure, an unfavorable experience, or knowledge that others regard as useless (Fang, 2017). For younger employees, this is particularly likely to occur in interactions with older colleagues because older employees tend to be perceived as wiser and more experienced (Tempest, 2003). Younger employees are thus often unsure whether their knowledge could help their older colleagues. Sharing knowledge puts younger employees in a vulnerable position where their knowledge may be criticized by their (older) colleagues (Anthony, 2018; Fang, 2017). Younger employees, who are more likely to experience fear of losing face, thus attempt to avoid situations in which they may be evaluated unfavorably, which entails they encounter fewer knowledge sharing situations with their older colleagues. From the literature on intergenerational learning and reverse mentoring, we know that problems can arise when younger employees consider sharing knowledge with their older colleagues. For example, an in-depth qualitative study by Gerpott and colleagues (2017) reported that some younger employees were afraid that older employees would act as "smart alecks," which discouraged them from sharing their knowledge with older colleagues. These initial findings support the proposed assumption that younger employees' fear of losing face weakens knowledge sharing with older colleagues.

Proposition 4b: A younger employee's fear of losing face inhibits knowledge sharing with an older colleague.

Knowledge Sharing and Knowledge Receiving: Not Always Two Sides of the Same Coin

In this section, we explain how knowledge sharing and knowledge receiving are related to each other. Based on the knowledge transfer and learning literature (Reinholt et al., 2011; Szulanski, 1996), we first propose that an employee's knowledge sharing is a necessary precondition for another employee's knowledge receiving (i.e., a crossover effect). In other words, knowledge sharing must precede knowledge receiving to achieve successful knowledge transfer between younger and older employees (Fasbender et al., 2021). Disentangling knowledge sharing and receiving is relevant, as doing so opens up the possibility that one employee shares knowledge but

the other one does not receive it. Research on collective knowledge transfer differentiates a sequence of phases such as initiation, implementation, ramp up, and integration (Grand et al., 2016; Hansen, Mors, & Lovas, 2005; Szulanski, 1996). Transferring this concept to dyadic knowledge transfer processes entails that knowledge exchange can get “stuck” at different points. For example, the potential knowledge receiver may not recognize that the other person is sharing valuable knowledge (i.e., an attention problem), may not understand the sender’s knowledge (i.e., an encoding problem), or may simply regard the shared knowledge as irrelevant to the task at hand (i.e., a reception problem). After all, it is not self-evident that an individual in a status-differentiated dyad would accept the knowledge offered by their partner (Thomas-Hunt, Ogden, & Neale, 2003). Our model (Figure 1) therefore reflects that an older employee’s knowledge sharing with a younger colleague is a necessary (but not sufficient) precondition for the younger colleague to receive knowledge. Vice versa, a younger employee’s knowledge sharing with an older is a prerequisite for the older colleague’s knowledge receiving but is not a given. Stated formally, we propose the following crossover effects:

Proposition 5a: An older employee’s knowledge sharing with a younger colleague enables the younger colleague’s knowledge receiving.

Proposition 5b: A younger employee’s knowledge sharing with an older colleague enables the older colleague’s knowledge receiving.

We further suggest that there is a reciprocal relation between older and younger employees’ knowledge sharing and receiving, indicating the existence of a quid pro quo mechanism. Drawing on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and economic game theory, where the so-called tit-for-tat strategy is a frequently exhibited behavior in the repeated prisoner’s dilemma (Dal Bó & Fréchette, 2019), we argue that knowledge transfer between younger and older employees is a reciprocal process involving a positive and a negative feedback loop. A positive feedback loop indicates that when one employee receives a considerable amount of valuable knowledge from a colleague, the receiving employee is willing to reciprocate knowledge such that they will likely share knowledge in return (Jinyang, 2015; Kang, Lee, & Kim, 2017). In contrast, a negative feedback loop means that when one employee receives only small bits of knowledge from a colleague, the receiving employee feels less obligated to reciprocate knowledge sharing (Abualqumboz et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2020). In line with our argument, the knowledge withholding literature (Cerme et al., 2014) has emphasized the importance of such reciprocal interpersonal dynamics.

Proposition 6a: An older employee’s knowledge receiving from a younger colleague increases their knowledge sharing with the younger colleague.

Proposition 6b: A younger employee’s knowledge receiving from an older colleague increases their knowledge sharing with the older colleague.

Combining our arguments, we theorize that older and younger employees’ social comparison is linked to their knowledge transfer behavior in two ways, namely an actor-driven and a partner-driven process. First, we argue that temporal social comparison is linked to knowledge sharing through employees’ age-specific motives (i.e., generativity striving and development striving) as well as through age-specific fears (i.e., fear of losing status and fear of losing face), which in turn increases knowledge receiving for the colleague (i.e., a crossover effect). Therefore, temporal social comparison can be seen as an actor-driven process (cf. Twum-Darko & Harker, 2017) that links employees’ inner psychological states to other-directed behavior (i.e., knowledge sharing, which is eventually received by others).

In addition, we argue that temporal social comparison is also linked to knowledge sharing through the psychological processes unleashed in a colleague (rather than in oneself). This is because we assume a reciprocal mechanism between knowledge sharing and knowledge receiving and crossover effects between older and younger employee dyads. Specifically, older employees’ knowledge sharing also depends on their knowledge receiving from younger employees (i.e., a reciprocity mechanism), which in turn is determined by younger colleagues’ knowledge sharing (i.e., crossover effect). To illustrate, recall that younger colleagues’ knowledge sharing is influenced by their temporal social comparison (through development striving and fear of losing face). Accordingly, older employees’ knowledge sharing is influenced not only by the outcomes of their own temporal social comparison but also by those of their younger colleagues (i.e., a partner-driven process). Similarly, younger employees’ knowledge sharing is likely also influenced by whether they have received knowledge from older employees (i.e., reciprocity mechanism), which is in turn determined by older colleagues’ knowledge sharing (i.e., crossover effect). Recall that older colleagues’ knowledge sharing is influenced by their temporal social comparison (through generativity striving and fear of losing status). Therefore, younger employees’ knowledge sharing is influenced not only by their own temporal social comparison but also by that of their older colleagues. In summary, temporal social comparison is also a partner-driven process that links colleagues’ inner psychological states to other-directed behavior, which is then received and reciprocated by the other.

BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

To specify the “when” of our model—that is, the boundaries of generalizability—we focus here on theoretically related boundary conditions that follow from the nomological nets of social comparison theory (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Festinger, 1954) and knowledge transfer (e.g., Burmeister, Fasbender, et al., 2018; Pinjani & Palvia, 2013). First, we acknowledge the individual context by specifying how perceived similarity changes the relevance and perspective of temporal social comparison for both younger and older employees. Second, we account for the organizational context by pointing to age-inclusive HR practices that can moderate how strongly temporal social comparison shapes the age-specific motives and emotions involved in knowledge transfer between younger and older employees.

Individual Context: Perceived Similarity

Perceived similarity refers to the extent to which one person believes that they share similarities with another person (Montoya et al., 2008).

Diversity scholars typically differentiate between similarities related to surface- and deep-level features (Roberson, 2019). Whereas age, gender, and ethnicity represent exemplary surface-level features because they are potentially visible to others, deep-level features may include values, beliefs, personality traits, or educational backgrounds, which are more difficult to observe at first sight (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Despite differences in their ages, older and younger employees can still perceive themselves as similar because they may share other common features, such as the same gender and ethnicity, as well as similar values, beliefs, and personality characteristics (Hernandez et al., 2017; Illies & Reiter-Palmon, 2018; Neuwirth & Wahl, 2017). We argue that in a temporal social comparison context, perceived similarity has different implications for older and younger employees.

For older employees, we theorize that perceived similarity inverts the relation between social comparison and generativity striving. When an older employee perceives strong similarity to the younger counterpart with whom they compare, the older employee will likely be proud that a younger colleague who is similar to themselves will eventually step into their shoes—even against the backdrop that this may mean that the younger colleague will overtake them in the future (Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1977; Lentz & Allen, 2009). With increasing levels of perceived similarity, older employees may claim the identities, resources, and perspectives of younger colleagues as their own (Eby & Robertson, 2020; Wright, Aron, & Tropp, 2002). This entails that if older employees can contribute to the success of younger employees by passing on knowledge, the older employees will be able to enhance themselves beyond their declines in other areas—an opportunity that should strongly speak to their generativity striving (Heckhausen & Krueger, 1993). Consequently, older employees will be more motivated to share whatever expertise and skills they have acquired to ensure that their “doppelgänger” will be successful. When older employees perceive lower similarity to their younger counterparts, an unfavorable temporal social comparison should, however, strengthen the negative relations with generativity striving. In other words, older employees will be more discouraged from passing on their skills and expertise to individuals with whom they have little in common and who might then overtake them due to receiving the shared knowledge (Owen & Solomon, 2006). Taken these observations together, we propose the following:

Proposition 7a: An older employee’s perceived similarity to the younger colleague with whom they compare themselves moderates the relation between an unfavorable temporal social comparison and generativity striving such that the negative relation turns positive when perceived similarity is higher (vs. lower).

Relatedly, we theorize that for older employees, perceived similarity to younger colleagues with whom they compare themselves buffers the relation between social comparison and fear of losing status. When an older employee recognizes that they will lose status relative to their perceived similar younger colleague in the future, they can still associate the successes of their younger counterpart with their own. This is because the older employee identifies the younger colleague “as representative of his or her past” (Ragins, 1997, p. 494; see also Eby

& Robertson, 2020; Wright et al., 2002). An older employee’s future self-image is thus less threatened when a younger colleague is expected to gain a higher status (Dalton et al., 1977; Lentz & Allen, 2009). Accordingly, older employees’ concern with regard to losing status in the future should be reduced.

To illustrate, imagine a professor is working with a talented assistant professor who reminds them of themselves at the beginning of their academic career: They may share similar values, the same educational background, and comparable expressions of personality traits. The assistant professor is highly successful, has already won several awards and turns out to publish high-quality research. The professor may feel that the assistant professor is progressing much more rapidly than they did at the same age and that it will only be a matter of time until the assistant professor reaches a higher status than the professor. Nevertheless, because the professor perceives themselves as being similar to their younger colleague, they may still willingly pass on their knowledge and benefit by basking in the glow of their younger colleague’s success.

However, when an older employee compares themselves with a younger colleague with whom they have little in common (i.e., lower levels of perceived similarity), they are unlikely to view the successes of their younger colleague as their own (Owen & Solomon, 2006). This explains why the older employee’s fear of losing status should be more pronounced when noting in an unfavorable temporal social comparison that their dissimilar younger colleague may overtake them in the future. Taken these observations together, we propose that older employees are comparatively less afraid of losing status after identifying a future status threat in a temporal social comparison when they perceive higher (vs. lower) similarity to their younger colleagues.

Proposition 7b: An older employee’s perceived similarity to a younger colleague moderates the relation between an unfavorable temporal social comparison and fear of losing status such that the positive relation will be weaker when perceived similarity is higher (vs. lower).

In contrast to older employees who may be reminded of their past selves when a similar, albeit younger, colleague overtakes them, the relevant perspective for younger employees is a glimpse into their future selves when comparing themselves with older colleagues who share relevant attributes (Humberd & Rouse, 2016; Ragins, 1997). Accordingly, an unfavorable social comparison paints a rather demotivating picture of the future and—under the condition of higher (vs. lower) levels of perceived similarity—poses the risk of discouraging younger employees (Heckhausen & Krueger, 1993). We thus theorize that for younger employees, perceived similarity strengthens the negative relation between social comparison and development striving. When a younger employee recognizes that they may not be able to achieve the status of their perceived similar older colleague in the future, they may experience a sense of discouragement that inhibits learning and development (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Mitchell, Eby, & Ragins, 2015; Quinn et al., 2021). To illustrate, imagine that a young assistant professor notices that they are rather similar (e.g., in terms of values, educational background, or personality) to an older colleague who holds

a full professor position. The assistant professor also recognizes in a critical self-reflection that their own abilities (e.g., in terms of publication output) or external requirements (e.g., raised bars for promotion) render it likely that they will never achieve the same status as their older counterpart in the future. Due to their perceived similarity, this entails that the assistant professor has to devalue their own self-image. As such, the unfavorable outcome of a social comparison contributes to the younger employee's conclusion that little can be done to change their status in the future and thus someday reach the older counterpart's successes.

If the social comparison is unfavorable but the older colleague is very dissimilar, this effect should be less pronounced, as the younger employee may not relate the outcome of the social comparison to their own potential development trajectory. Past research has demonstrated that perceived similarity versus dissimilarity predicts how relevant people regard social comparison to another person, and scholars have thus argued that comparing oneself to dissimilar others leads to ambiguous information and is therefore less relevant overall (Gastorf & Suls, 1978; Miller, 1982). Social comparison to a dissimilar older colleague should therefore be less relevant to a younger employee's development striving. To return to the previous example, the young assistant professor can simply tell themselves that their own path will differ from that of their older colleague and continue to develop in their own direction. Stated formally, we propose the following:

Proposition 8a: A younger employee's perceived similarity to an older colleague moderates the relation between an unfavorable temporal social comparison and development striving such that the negative relation will be stronger when perceived similarity is higher (vs. lower).

Relatedly, we theorize that for younger employees, perceived similarity to an older colleague with whom they compare themselves enhances the relation between social comparison and fear of losing face. When the older colleague is perceived as similar and the younger employee feels they cannot reach equivalent status in the future, the younger employee may put their counterpart on a "mental pedestal" and idealize the older colleague. Being awestruck by a higher status colleague as a result of an unfavorable social comparison can thus make it less likely that an employee will speak up and share their own knowledge (Menges et al., 2015). In contrast, if the older colleague is perceived as dissimilar and the younger employee recognizes that they can never attain equivalent status, they may care less about how the dissimilar older colleague judges them (Gastorf & Suls, 1978; Miller, 1982; Quinn et al., 2021). In line with this notion, evidence indicates that the opinions of similar others are more important in terms of influencing behavior than those of dissimilar others (Hysenbelli, Rubaltelli, & Rumiati, 2013). To summarize, we propose the following:

Proposition 8b: A younger employee's perceived similarity to an older colleague moderates the relation between an unfavorable temporal social comparison and fear of losing face such that the positive relation will be stronger when perceived similarity is higher (vs. lower).

Organizational Context: Age-Inclusive HR Practices

Age-inclusive HR practices are bundles of HR practices aimed at providing equal opportunities for employees of all age groups with regard to recruiting, training and development, promotion, and managerial support (Boehm et al., 2014). The definition of age-inclusive HR practices implies that an organization does not simply introduce a few age-oriented HR practices at random but instead has a coherent approach to designing HR practices in an age-inclusive way throughout the employee life cycle (Boehm & Dwertmann, 2015). Introducing such bundles of HR practices is assumed to be highly effective, as they create comprehensive systems "that are internally consistent and reinforcing to achieve some overarching results" (Lepak et al., 2006, p. 221; see also Boehm & Dwertmann, 2015). From previous research, we know that age-inclusive HR practices can lead to an age-inclusive climate characterized by low competition for resources between different age groups (Boehm et al., 2014; Burmeister, van der Heijden, et al., 2018; Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2011, 2013; Rudolph & Zacher, 2020). While perceived competition adds fuel to the fire (Reh et al., 2018), age-inclusive HR practices should reduce the detrimental consequences of temporal social comparison due to the competition-reducing effects of such practices.

For older employees, we propose that age-inclusive HR practices serve as a protecting factor against the detrimental consequences of unfavorable social comparisons on such employees' generativity striving. When age-inclusive HR practices are higher (vs. lower), older employees are more likely to put their generativity striving motive into practice (Kooij et al., 2011), as the age-inclusive HR practices ensure equal access to resources and career opportunities for older employees (Kunze et al., 2013) regardless of whether younger employees may potentially overtake them in the future. Therefore, we expect that the negative effect of unfavorable temporal social comparison on older employees' generativity striving should be buffered at higher (vs. lower) levels of age-inclusive HR practices.

Proposition 9a: Age-inclusive HR practices moderate the relation between an older colleague's unfavorable temporal social comparison and generativity striving such that the negative relation will be weaker when age-inclusive HR practices are higher (vs. lower).

Relatedly, at higher levels of age-inclusive HR practices, older employees' fear of losing status is reduced as a consequence of social comparison. Having access to equal opportunities with regard to training and development, promotion, and managerial support assures older employees that their status is not at risk, even if they note that their younger colleagues are doing better compared to themselves. This is because age-inclusive HR practices signal to employees "that their organization makes serious efforts to support diversity" (Kunze et al., 2013, p. 435; see also Kooij et al., 2010). Through a sensemaking process, employees interpret such signals as indicating that their contribution at work is not only appreciated but also uncontested by other (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Ferris et al., 1998). In contrast, when age-inclusive HR practices are lower, older employees may worry about their future position in the organization, and therefore their fear of losing status due to unfavorable social comparison should be enhanced.

Proposition 9b: Age-inclusive HR practices moderate the relation between an older colleague's unfavorable temporal social comparison and fear of losing status such that the positive relation will be weaker when age-inclusive HR practices are higher (vs. lower).

For younger employees, we theorize that age-inclusive HR practices invert the relation between social comparison and development striving. That is, if age-inclusive HR practices are higher, younger employees feel more motivated to develop themselves (Kooij et al., 2010, 2011). From previous research, we know that development striving can foster self-improvement, as employees are more intrinsically motivated to seek self-improvement information (Janssen & Prins, 2007), take initiative in terms of personal growth (Matsuo, 2019), engage in meta-cognitive strategies (Ford et al., 1998) and emotion regulation (L. Wang & Yan, 2018), and are more likely to seek knowledge from their older colleagues (Fasbender et al., 2021). Therefore, despite realizing that they may not reach their older colleagues' status, younger employees may strive to improve their own skills and abilities at work irrespective of the levels and progress of their older colleagues because they still feel that development opportunities exist in their respective organizations. In contrast, when age-inclusive HR practices are lower, younger employees may feel they have few opportunities to enhance their position in the organization, regardless of whether they develop themselves or not, because privileges in the organization are coupled to age rather than to equal opportunities. Moreover, lower levels of age-inclusive HR practices signal to younger employees that promotions and other organizational support mechanisms are a "zero-sum game" in that when one age group gains in terms of resources or status, another age group is expected to lose (North & Fiske, 2015). Lower levels of age-inclusive HR practices would therefore discourage younger employees' development striving even further. Taken together, we propose the following:

Proposition 10a: Age-inclusive HR practices moderate the relation between a younger employee's unfavorable temporal social comparison and development striving such that the negative relation turns positive when age-inclusive HR practices are higher (vs. lower).

Furthermore, we theorize that age-inclusive HR practices buffer the detrimental effect of temporal social comparison on younger employees' fear of losing face. Age-inclusive HR practices ensure that younger employees have as much access to training and development, promotion, and managerial support as their older colleagues (Boehm et al., 2014). Therefore, age-inclusive HR practices can reduce tensions and competition for resources between different age groups (Kunze et al., 2011, 2013) and in turn reduce the salience of temporal social comparison between employees (Reh et al., 2018). Accordingly, higher (vs. lower) levels of age-inclusive HR practices should buffer younger employees' personal insecurities stemming from unfavorable social comparison with their older colleagues.

Proposition 10b: Age-inclusive HR practices moderate the relation between a younger employee's unfavorable temporal social comparison and fear of losing face such that the positive relation will be weaker when age-inclusive HR practices are higher (vs. lower).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Testing the Proposed Relationships of Our Model

The most striking direction for future research would be to creatively think about how to develop suitable research designs to test our model. In Table 1, we provide an overview of suitable research designs and methodological considerations related to the propositions of our conceptual model.

To establish internal validity, scholars could utilize laboratory experiments to test the front part of our model or vignette studies to manipulate the boundary conditions. One challenge that deserves scholarly attention in this context is ensuring that "the stakes are high," meaning that participants actually experience age-specific motives and emotions in a laboratory or hypothetical setting as compared to a real organizational setting (for some inspiration, see Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Pronin, Olivola, & Kennedy, 2008).

In the next step, scholars may then want to establish external validity by conducting field research to investigate the proposed relations "in the wild". Depending on the access of the research team, several study designs could be suitable. If possible, empirical studies would benefit from relying on a dyadic study design that involves younger and older colleagues who regularly work together and have opportunities to exchange knowledge. Such a design allows to collect the perspectives of both sides and to use analytical approaches that account for the interdependence between colleagues (i.e., actor-partner-interdependence model, cf. Burmeister, Wang et al., 2020; Fasbender et al., 2021). Alternatively, scholars could also use time-lagged or cross-lagged individual survey designs to test the entire moderated mediation chain on a between-person level from each age group's perspective. Considering that knowledge sharing and receiving have been shown to vary on a daily level (Burmeister et al., 2021), an experience sampling approach constitutes another suitable approach to test the entire model from a within-person changes perspective. In contrast, if scholars are more interested in a higher-level perspective, they may want to consider collecting individual data in multiple organizations to test the cross-over effects of age-inclusive HR practices on the proposed relations in our model. Relatedly, intervention designs are also imaginable that either investigate what happens to the proposed relationships when organizations introduce age-inclusive HR practices or that try to reduce the occurrence of unfavorable social comparisons.

Specifying Interactive Effects of Current and Future Social Comparisons

In addition to testing the proposed relationships, we also see several avenues to extend our model. In terms of temporal considerations, our theorizing revolves around the thus far overlooked *future* social comparison perspective as an antecedent of knowledge transfer between younger and older employees. In that regard, we consider

Table 1. Guiding Future Research: Suitable Study Designs to Test the Proposed Relationships

Goal	Suggested Research Designs	Propositions
Establish internal validity	<p><i>Lab experiments</i> to test the central assumption that temporal social comparison triggers age-specific motives and fears</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, by using a 2×2 between-subject design manipulating both social comparison (low vs. high) and age of the social comparison partner (young vs. old) Social comparison could be manipulated by giving participants a bogus performance feedback on a verbal ability test (e.g., solving anagrams) relative to their matching partner (Reh et al., 2018) The age of the social comparison partner could be manipulated by using two confederates, namely one young and one old confederate; the comparability of the two confederates (e.g., in terms of perceived status, trustworthiness, likability, and physical attractiveness; Burmeister et al., 2018) could be ensured through a pilot study 	P1a/b, P2a/b,
	<p><i>Experimental vignette methodology</i> to establish whether contextual factors augment or extenuate the effects of temporal social comparison on age-specific motives and fears</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, by using a 2×2 mixed-factorial design with social comparison (low vs. high) as the between-subject factor, and age-inclusive HR practices in a hypothetical company (low vs. high) as the within-subject factor Important to ensure that “the stakes are high,” meaning that participants actually experience age-specific motives and fears in a hypothetical setting as compared to a real organizational setting (for some inspiration, see Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Pronin et al., 2008) 	P7a/b, P8a/b, P9a/b, and P10a/b
Establish external validity	<p><i>Dyadic survey designs</i> to investigate the proposed relations in the field</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross-sectional or if possible, time-lagged design: Test the predictive effects of age-specific motives and fears on knowledge sharing/receiving (use actor-partner-interdependence model, cf. Burmeister et al., 2020, Fasbender et al., 2021) Cross-lagged sampling: Determine the causal priority between knowledge sharing and knowledge receiving between interaction partners 	P3a/b/c, P4a/b
	<p><i>Individual survey designs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time-lagged or if possible, cross-lagged design: Test the entire moderated mediation chain on a between-person level from each age group’s perspective Experience sampling: Consider within-person variance of study variables, in particular knowledge sharing and receiving from each age group’s perspective (cf. Burmeister et al., 2021) 	All propositions
	<p><i>Multi-organizational survey design:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmarking: Test the cross-over effects of organizational boundary conditions on employees’ temporal social comparison experiences linked to knowledge sharing and receiving in a multilevel design with employees being nested in a larger organizational context (cf. Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2021) 	P9a/b and P10a/b
	<p><i>Intervention studies</i> in the field (cf. Truxillo et al., 2015):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, an intervention intended to reduce competition at work (e.g., adapt internal communication guidelines, abolish forced ranking systems and instead offer noncompetitive reward and promotion indicators that guarantee remuneration to everyone who satisfies the objectively defined criteria) to test whether this diminishes younger and older employees’ experiences of unfavorable social comparison in their daily working life and its consequences Alternatively, testing whether introducing age-inclusive HR practices in an organization can mitigate the negative effects of unfavorable temporal social comparison on age-specific motives and fears. 	All propositions

the (predominant) situation that younger employees’ *current* status is lower than that of older employees. However, there may also be situations in which a younger employee has a higher current status than an older employee, for example, because a younger employee

entering a team is hired on a high-potential track and an older employee also joining the team is working in a low-status administrative position. Moreover, considering the demographic developments of the workforce, companies are shifting from a tenure-based toward a

performance-based approach to promotions, which entails that situations in which younger employees have higher current and future statuses may occur more often. In that regard, initial evidence (Lam et al., 2011) indicates that current and future status differences may jointly shape behavior toward the interaction partner such that a young high-potential individual may particularly suffer in terms of not receiving knowledge when an older employee feels that they cannot match the performance of the younger colleague either now (i.e., current social comparison) or in the future (i.e., future social comparison). Scholars may thus consider further studying the interplay of current and future social comparisons between younger and older employees.

Considering the Role of Task Interdependence

Dyadic interactions at work are characterized by varying degrees of task interdependence, meaning that dyadic interaction partners “depend on each other for expertise, information, and resources to complete a task” (Pinjani & Palvia, 2013, p.146; see also Gerpott et al., 2018). In other words, at lower levels of task interdependence, each interaction partner can work on their own tasks and the outcome (e.g., performance, quality) simply depends on their own behavior. In contrast, at higher levels of task interdependence, the dyadic interaction partner needs to coordinate their actions when working on tasks because the best outcome can only be achieved if they coordinate their actions. Previous research has found that task interdependence is positively related to knowledge sharing in diverse global virtual teams and that task interdependence can moderate the relation between deep-level diversity features and knowledge sharing (Pinjani & Palvia, 2013). These results reveal that task interdependence can be an important dyadic context factor for age-diverse knowledge transfer. Even though temporal social comparison may affect the age-specific motives and emotions of younger and older employees, the degree of their task interdependence could serve as a factor that mitigates the subsequent effects on knowledge sharing and receiving behavior. We thus recommend that future research acknowledges the dyadic context, in particular, task interdependence, when studying our model, as task interdependence may change the way in which temporal social comparison affects knowledge transfer between older and younger employees.

Seeing the Other Side of the Coin: Social Comparison as Other-Oriented Phenomenon

While useful in connecting the research on social comparison with the literatures on age and knowledge transfer, our approach to social comparison from a self-interest perspective may be too narrow and pessimistic to reflect reality (Frey & Meier, 2004). It is very likely that social comparison is not only about employees’ self-centered, relative standing in organizations (Greenberg et al., 2007) but instead also has positive aspects. In this regard, one may imagine social comparison as an other-oriented phenomenon that sparks cooperative behavior. For example, if an employee compares themselves to a colleague in terms of prosocial acts such as providing emotional and instrumental support or showing citizenship behavior, then this could motivate the former to also engage in more cooperation in the workplace. Scholars have discussed this side of the coin under the umbrella of normative social comparisons, thereby showing that social comparisons (e.g., being informed about others’ contributions) can lead to higher cooperation and charitable giving in nonwork contexts (Croson & Shang, 2008; Frey & Meier, 2004). To expand our focus on self-oriented social

comparison, we encourage future researchers to investigate social comparison as an other-oriented phenomenon in the workplace.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

A final contribution of our model is that it could help to derive practical implications through which organizations can impact age-diverse knowledge transfer. As a caveat, these recommendations are closely linked to the empirical confirmation of the proposed relationships and, as such, inextricably linked to the future research recommendations. To begin, organizations may be well advised to reduce the relevance of social comparisons driven by self-interest. Given that social comparisons largely happen automatically in the workplace (Greenberg et al., 2007), it may be difficult to eliminate their occurrence. However, organizations could focus on making social comparison less relevant by introducing interventions intended to reduce competition at work. For example, organizations could adapt their internal communication guidelines (e.g., intranet, company newsletter) such that the official communication emphasizes that employees from different age groups are not in competition for resources.

Second, our model could also sensitize practitioners to the idea that knowledge sharing is not equal to knowledge receiving. While knowledge sharing constitutes a necessary precondition, it may not be sufficient for effective knowledge transfer, which entails that organizations should aim at fostering both activities (i.e., knowledge sharing and receiving) among younger and older employees (Fasbender et al., 2021). In terms of knowledge sharing, HR departments or managers are advised to clearly communicate that the organizational value of sharing knowledge is greater than the individual costs (Gerpott et al., 2019; Razmerita, Kirchner, & Nielsen, 2016). In terms of knowledge receiving, the goal should be to habituate employees to engage in this behavior as part of their daily work routine (Razmerita et al., 2016). Organizations can also foster knowledge receiving by sending age-diverse employees to one-day training programs intended to raise awareness of each other’s knowledge (Burmeister, Gerpott, et al., 2020).

Lastly, another implication of our model could be that organizations invest in age-inclusive HR practices to prevent the potentially detrimental effects of temporal social comparison on knowledge transfer between younger and older employees. Research has established that introducing age-inclusive HR policies signals to employees that their respective organizations make serious efforts to establish a fair climate for everyone, thus reducing intergenerational competitiveness and improving the quality of interactions between age-diverse employees (Kunze et al., 2013). Accordingly, HR practitioners may want to regularly review recruitment, promotion, career development, and training practices to ensure that they are equally offered to and used by employees from all age groups (Boehm et al., 2014).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To conclude, as two mega-trends—the knowledge economy and demographic changes—are jointly shaping organizational life, we believe it is crucial to bring these perspectives together and facilitate knowledge transfer between younger and older employees as a central competitive advantage. It is our hope that the outlined model, which utilizes a temporal social comparison perspective, will contribute to the discussion of this topic by encouraging a broader reflection in scholarly

work and among practitioners regarding factors that can help or hinder knowledge sharing and receiving in an intergenerational workforce.

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