

Chapter 14

Managing Age Diversity at the Workplace: Global Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Workplace diversity has been one of the most critical issues over the past few years. It is a difficult subject for managers to tackle in the space of work. Organizations are facing an inherent age gap among their employees, which raises new issues for professionals. With the rapid changes and developments in technology, the elderly employees are generally perceived as those “missing agility and repelling new technology.” There are other grounds on which the age of employees has been discussed as a determinant of varying levels of behavioral and work-related outcomes. It is essential for businesses to figure out the means to manage and balance the age diversity at the workplace. However, the biggest obstacles that professionals may face when trying to implement this include modifications in areas such as job characteristics, working time, and management styles. This study discusses the global perspectives on age diversity at the workplace and provides actionable recommendations for organizations to develop an inclusive environment for higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

“Age is not how old you are, but how old you feel” (Marquez & Tornaritis, 2007). Age composition is seen as a dynamic factor across all the developing and developed economies (Nagarajan, Wada, Fang, & Sixsmith, 2019). Older workers above 55 years of age have grown from 13% in 2000 to 24% in 2019 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). These dynamic changes in the aging population and the multi-generational co-existence in the workplace have resulted increases emphasis on workplace age diversity (Wegge & Meyer, 2020). Past studies have highlighted various positive employee and organizational outcomes of age diversity in the workplace (Boehm & Kunze, 2015).

Age brings in many changes such as physical changes, affective changes, cognitive changes, personality level changes, and motivation levels. Physical changes are related to sensory, muscular, etc., (reduced strength and reduced hearing ability are some examples). Cognitive changes are related to mind and intelligence (reduction in processing speed, selection attention etc.). Affective changes are related to emotional regulation and generation (positive nexus between age and well-being, ability to deal with stressful events). Personality level changes can be attributed to the big five personality traits, such as an increase in agreeableness and a reduction in neuroticism. Lastly, changes in motivation levels are pertinent to intrinsic, extrinsic, and growth motives. It is observed that there is a positive relationship between age and intrinsic motives and a negative relationship between age and extrinsic motives, age, and growth motives.

Many studies reported that older workers are targeted on age-based stereotypes, and with ageist attitudes, the quality of intergroup communication, knowledge sharing practices, worker engagement, and intentions to remain with the organization may tend to get negatively affected Srividya and Base (2022). On the contrary, the trend to motivate older workers to continue to work beyond the normal retirement age (NRA) is on the rise. In order to get the maximum benefit, employers should understand the unique knowledge, attitudes, motivations, and experiences of older employees and then select the vital employees for rehiring. Once the choice is made, the compensation, workplace norms, and career progression opportunities may be decided (Orlaith et al., 2022). Research on NRA is currently at its nascency, and future research studies could focus on various themes related to it.

BACKGROUND

Age is defined as a multi-dimensional process that captures the changes in functioning over time (Schalk et al., 2010). Different ages are described in the literature, such as subjective age, functional age, and chronological age (Sterns & Miklos, 1995). Functional age is defined as the actual number of years that an individual lived (Schalk et al., 2010). An individual’s chronological age is an indicator of health, motivation, life stage, and generational status, which deals with the indirect effects of age and future time perspective. The Demands-resources model implies that age in the workplace may favor the younger workforce for the likelihood of remaining in the same job until retirement.

Subjective age is defined as the experience of being of a certain age, which may be greater than, less than, or equal to the chronological age (Barak & Stern, 1986). Out of all these three states, an individual’s feeling of being younger than chronological age results in better productivity and vitality (Kotter-Grühn, & Jaconelli, 2013), and subjective age is generally used as a measure to understand employee behavior in the workplace. Past studies have focused more on chronological age and less on personal age, espe-

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