8. Managing Ageism at Workplace

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Abstract:

Increasing youth centric societies have given birth to various problems one of which is ageism. Discrimination among the people of different age group has a great impact on the working environment if found among employees. During the research it is found that ageism effects the effectiveness and overall productivity of the work.

Therefore, understanding the various reasons behind ageism is essential for addressing and reducing its impact at the workplace and it would be beneficial to the organisational policies to focus on reducing ageism. An employee centric work culture does not support ageism hence considered as prominent sign of unhealthy and uncultured organisation. Though it is a concern but often not taken seriously. Organizations should take the initiative to reduce the effect of ageism at workplace. Here in this chapter an attempt was made to focus the root causes, effects and possible solutions to reduce the effect of ageism at workplace

Keywords:

Discrimination, age group, ageism, workplace

8.1 Introduction:

8.1.1 Ageism:

The term ageism was first used by gerontologist Robert N. Butler to describe discrimination against older adults.

Butler RN, Butler RO. *The Longevity Prescription*. Avery.

Today ageism can be considered as discrimination among people based on the age factor falling under group of children, teenager, adult or senior citizen. It usually has negative impact on human being.

It involves underestimating the capability of human being considering them too old or small to perform a particular task. Ageism leads to unfair treatment given to people in personal or professional life resulting in stressful experience and demotivating to them.

This act against human rights may have serious consequences on people's mental as well as physical health. Excluding people from the group or the institution, mere negligence, forceful retirement, unavailability of learning opportunities and difficulty in finding employment in old age are some common signs of ageism.

8.1.2 Ageism at Workplace:

From the business perspective people become incapable as the age older as compare to younger generation.

Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) claims that employers commonly discriminate against older workers. Although ageism can be experienced by both the younger and older employees but always highly effecting over 45 years of age. Probably the reason for the same is inaccurate stereotype about older employees which negatively impacts the working environment. Ageism can impact hiring practices, job security, opportunities for advancement, and overall workplace culture. Addressing this issue is crucial for fostering a diverse, inclusive, and equitable work environment.

8.2 Objectives:

1. To understand the concept of ageism and its impact on workplace.
2. To know the cons of non-employee centric approach of organisations.
3. To analyse the root causes and impact of ageism.
4. To suggest possible solutions to be implemented in an organisation to reduce control the ageism.

8.3 Importance of the Study:

1. This research article will help to understand the negative impact of the ageism on employees and the effect on overall productivity.
2. This research article focuses on causes of ageism and helps to understand the controllable measures that an organisation can initiate.
3. This article contributes to the improvement in organisation's culture and environment by avoiding setbacks of employees.

8.4 Limitations of the Study:

1. Data used the research is completely secondary in nature.
2. Ageism is not the only problem that employee faces at the workplace by resolving which productivity can be improved absolutely.
3. Any of the practical example or problem of ageism at workplace was not observed through data collection.

8.5 Research Methodology:

The research methodology for this Book Chapter involves a descriptive research design to analyses existing secondary data.

Relevant secondary data is collected from various online and offline sources such as websites, research papers, reference books etc.

8.6 Discussion:

Causes of Ageism at Workplace:

Ageism in the workplace, like other forms of discrimination, can be driven by a variety of factors.

Understanding these underlying reasons is crucial for addressing and mitigating age-related biases. Here are some key reasons behind ageism:

- **Stereotypes and Misconceptions:**

Stereotypes about age often rooted in outdated beliefs. For instance, older workers might be seen as less adaptable or less tech-savvy, while younger workers might be perceived as lacking experience or stability. These misconceptions are not necessarily based on actual abilities but rather on generalized assumptions about age groups. Media influence can be one of the prominent reasons for the same. Media portrayals can perpetuate stereotypes about age. For example, older adults are often depicted as less active or less competent in modern contexts, which can reinforce negative perceptions.

- **Economic and Organizational Pressures:**

Commonly organisational philosophy considers older workers as more expensive due to higher salaries, increasing healthcare costs, or anticipated retirement benefits. This can lead to preferences for younger, less costly employees. In industries with constant upgradation, there might be a belief that younger employees are better equipped to handle new technologies, which can unfairly disadvantage older workers who may need additional training.

- **Cultural and Social Norms:**

Often workplaces are in search of innovation hence associating youth with energy, creativity, and potential. This cultural bias can marginalize older workers who may be seen as less dynamic or less innovative. Social considerations about age and productivity can influence workplace culture as well. For instance, there may be an unwritten expectation that older workers should be close to retirement, which can affect their perceived value and opportunities.

- **Personal Bias and Unconscious Prejudices:**

Managers and decision-makers may have unconscious biases about age that influence their decisions regarding hiring, promotions, and team dynamics. These biases can lead to discriminatory practices, even if the individuals involved do not consciously endorse ageism.

People often prefer working with individuals who are similar to themselves. If a workplace predominantly consists of younger employees, there may be a natural inclination towards younger individuals for new opportunities.

- **Generational stress:**

Distinct generations may have varying work styles, values, and communication preferences. Misconception or conflicts arising from these differences can sometimes manifest as age-related bias or discrimination. Older workers may be resistant to change, particularly in active fields. This perception can lead to biases against them, despite evidence that many older employees are adaptable and willing to learn.

- **Lawful and Institutional Factors:**

In some regions, age discrimination laws may not be strongly enforced, leading to a lack of accountability for discriminatory practices. This can create an environment where ageism is more likely to occur. Organizations may lack comprehensive policies or training programs to address ageism, leading to unintentional discrimination and a lack of awareness about the impact of age-related biases.

- **Economic Uncertainty:**

During economic downturns or periods of uncertainty, older workers may be more vulnerable to layoffs and job loss due to biases that prioritize younger workers or cost-cutting measures. In times of economic strain, organizations may prioritize employees who are perceived to offer the most immediate value, which can disadvantage older workers who may be seen as less aligned with current business needs.

Impact of ageism at workplace:

Ageism in the workplace can have far-reaching and detrimental effects on both individuals and organizations. These effects span various dimensions, from personal well-being to organizational efficiency. Here's a detailed look at the impacts of ageism:

- **Effects on Individuals:**

Ageism can lead to feelings of exclusion, devaluation, and frustration among affected employees. Employees who experience ageism may face barriers to career advancement. Older workers might be denied promotions or challenging assignments, while younger workers might struggle with perceptions of inexperience, limiting their career growth. Being subjected to ageist attitudes and practices can erode an individual's self-confidence and self-worth.

This is especially true for those who are frequently passed over for opportunities due to their age. Ageism can contribute to higher levels of stress and anxiety, particularly in the face of job insecurity or discriminatory practices. This can have adverse effects on both mental and physical health. Employees who feel that their age is a barrier to inclusion may experience social isolation and alienation in the workplace, leading to a decreased sense of belonging and engagement. Persistent ageism can lead to older employees choosing early retirement or being forced out of their jobs, either voluntarily or involuntarily, which can impact their financial stability and retirement plans.

- **Effects on Organizations:**

Ageism can limit the diversity of perspectives within a team or organization. A lack of diverse age groups can result in less creative problem-solving and innovation, as different age groups bring unique experiences and viewpoints. Organizations that practice ageism may lose experienced and skilled employees who could contribute significantly to the organization's success. This can lead to a loss of institutional knowledge and expertise. Discriminatory practices can contribute to higher employee turnover rates, as affected employees may seek more inclusive environments. This can lead to increased recruitment and training costs for the organization. Organizations known for ageist practices may suffer reputational damage, making it harder to attract top talent across all age groups. Negative perceptions about a company's culture can also affect customer and client relationships. Engaging in age discrimination can expose organizations to legal risks and financial penalties. Lawsuits or complaints related to age discrimination can lead to costly legal battles and potential fines.

Employees who perceive or experience ageism may be less engaged and motivated. This can affect overall productivity, teamwork, and morale, leading to decreased organizational performance. Ageism contributes to an inequitable work environment where employees are not treated based on their skills and contributions but rather on their age. This undermines fairness and can foster resentment and discord among staff.

- **Effects on Team work:**

Ageism can exacerbate conflicts between different age groups within a team. Misunderstandings and biases can lead to tensions and reduced cooperation between older and younger employees.

A lack of appreciation for the strengths of various age groups can hinder effective team collaboration. Age-based biases can prevent teams from fully leveraging the diverse skills and experiences of their members. When ageist attitudes prevail, the opportunity for valuable mentoring relationships between experienced and less experienced employees may be lost. This can hinder knowledge transfer and professional development.

- **Long-Term Implications:**

Individuals who face ageism may struggle with long-term career impacts, including reduced earning potential and fewer opportunities for career advancement in future roles. Widespread ageism can have broader economic implications, including reduced productivity and increased unemployment rates among certain age groups, which can impact the economy at large. Persistent ageism can contribute to intergenerational inequity, where certain age groups are disproportionately favoured or disadvantaged, affecting social cohesion and equality.

How to Prevent ageism at workplace:

Preventing ageism in the workplace involves a multifaceted approach that includes policy development, training, and fostering an inclusive culture. Here's a comprehensive guide on how to effectively prevent and address ageism:

- **Develop Inclusive Policies and Practices:**

Create and enforce clear anti-ageism policies that prohibit discrimination based on age in hiring, promotions, job assignments, and layoffs. Ensure that these policies are communicated to all employees and integrated into organizational practices. Implement practices that promote equal opportunity for employees of all ages. This includes fair and transparent processes for recruitment, performance evaluations, and career development. Ensure that job descriptions focus on the skills and qualifications required rather than age-related assumptions. Avoid language that might imply a preference for a particular age group.

- **Provide Training and Awareness Programs:**

Offer training programs to help employees recognize and address unconscious biases, including age-related prejudices. Training should focus on the benefits of a diverse workforce and the importance of fair treatment. Train managers and leaders to recognize and challenge ageism.

Equip them with strategies to support and value employees of all ages and to promote an inclusive work environment. Make diversity and inclusion a continuous part of professional development. Regularly update training materials and sessions to address emerging issues and reinforce commitment to an inclusive workplace.

- **Foster an Inclusive Culture:**

Encourage a diverse workforce by actively recruiting and retaining employees of various ages. Highlight the value of different perspectives and experiences in contributing to organizational success. Facilitate opportunities for employees of different ages to work together. Initiatives such as cross-generational teams, mentoring programs, and knowledge-sharing sessions can help bridge gaps and build mutual respect. Recognize and celebrate the contributions of employees across all age groups. Public acknowledgment of achievements can reinforce the value of diversity and counteract age-related biases.

- **Implement Fair Performance Management:**

Use objective, performance-based criteria for evaluations, promotions, and salary increases. Ensure that decisions are based on merit and achievements rather than age. Provide regular and constructive feedback to employees of all ages. This helps ensure that all employees have the opportunity to improve and grow within the organization. Offer equal access to training, professional development, and advancement opportunities for employees of all ages. This helps ensure that everyone has a fair chance to advance their careers.

- **Create a Supportive Work Environment:**

Ensure that employee benefits, such as healthcare, retirement plans, and work-life balance options, are designed to support employees of all ages. Address any disparities that may disadvantage certain age groups. Provide flexible work options, such as remote work or adjusted hours, to accommodate different needs. Flexibility can help address various life stages and personal circumstances. Establish support networks, such as employee resource groups or mentoring programs, that cater to the needs of employees at different life stages. These networks can provide guidance, support, and a sense of community.

- **Address Complaints and Monitor Progress:**

Create clear and confidential channels for employees to report instances of ageism. Ensure that reports are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. Conduct regular audits and surveys to assess the workplace environment and identify potential issues related to ageism. Use this data to make informed decisions and improve practices. Implement mechanisms for employees to provide feedback on diversity and inclusion initiatives. Use this feedback to make necessary adjustments and demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement.

- **Lead by Example:**

Ensure that top management and leadership are visibly committed to preventing ageism. Their support and actions set the tone for the rest of the organization. Encourage leaders and employees to model inclusive behavior and challenge ageist attitudes. Promote a culture of respect, where all employees are valued for their skills and contributions. Share success

stories of employees from various age groups to highlight their contributions and break down stereotypes. This can help shift perceptions and reinforce the value of diversity.

Benefits of hiring old people:

Hiring older employees can bring a range of valuable benefits to an organization. While younger employees also offer significant advantages, older workers bring unique strengths and experiences that can greatly contribute to a diverse and effective workforce. Here are some key benefits of hiring older employees over younger ones:

- **Vast Experience:**

Older employees often have years of industry-specific experience with their extensive experience, older workers may have developed strong problem-solving skills and the ability to navigate challenges that come from a deep understanding of their field.

- **Strong Work Ethic:**

Older employees often have a proven track record of reliability and dedication. They may demonstrate a strong commitment to their work, punctuality, and a high level of responsibility.

Years in the workforce can cultivate a high degree of professionalism, including strong communication skills, effective teamwork, and a solid understanding of workplace etiquette.

- **Leadership and Mentoring Abilities:**

Many older employees have held leadership or managerial roles in the past and can bring valuable skills in leading teams, managing projects, and driving organizational goals.

Older employees can serve as mentors to younger staff, providing guidance, sharing knowledge, and helping to develop the next generation of leaders. Their experience can be instrumental in professional development.

- **Stability and Loyalty:**

Older employees may be seeking long-term stability and are often less likely to switch job compared to younger employees, leading to lower turnover rates and continuity within the team. They may exhibit greater loyalty to the organization and be more committed to its success, given their desire for a stable and supportive work environment.

- **Strong Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking:**

The accumulated knowledge and experience of older employees can provide valuable insights and innovative solutions to complex problems, drawing from a broader range of past experiences. Their experience can help in risk assessment and management, helping to anticipate potential issues and avoid common problems.

- **Effective Interpersonal Skills:**

Older workers often bring higher emotional intelligence, which can contribute to better interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, and a more harmonious work environment. They may have established extensive professional networks over the years, which can be beneficial for business development, partnerships, and client relations.

- **Adaptability and Learning Agility:**

Contrary to common stereotypes, many older workers are highly adaptable and capable of learning new technologies and methods, often driven by a desire to remain current and relevant. Older employees may show a strong commitment to continuous learning and personal development, often additional training or certifications to stay updated in their field.

- **Positive Impact on Workplace Culture:** Older employees can serve as role models for younger staff, demonstrating professionalism, work ethic, and a positive attitude toward career development and growth. Their presence adds to the diversity of the workforce, enriching the workplace culture with a variety of experiences, viewpoints, and approaches.

- **Customer and Client Relations:**

Older employees may excel in building and maintaining relationships with clients, particularly those who value the depth of experience and reliability they bring to client interactions. They can offer insights into the needs and preferences of a broader range of clients, including those from different generations, enhancing customer service and satisfaction.

8.7 Conclusion:

Understanding the various reasons behind ageism is essential for addressing and reducing its impact in the workplace. By recognizing the stereotypes, economic factors, cultural norms, and personal biases that contribute to age-related discrimination, organizations can implement strategies to promote fairness and inclusivity. The effects of ageism in the workplace are multifaceted and can have significant implications for individuals, organizations, and broader society. Hiring older employees offers numerous benefits that can enhance organizational effectiveness, stability, and culture. Their extensive experience, strong work ethic, leadership abilities, and unique perspectives can contribute significantly to a well-rounded and successful team. By recognizing and valuing these strengths, organizations can build a more diverse and resilient workforce that leverages the strengths of employees across all age groups.

8.8 References:

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