

1.2 Ageism

Step 1. Think

Time: 45 min

Individual exercise

Summary

Ageism is, in short, the prejudices and stereotypes associated with age in our workplaces and in society at large. Ageism is everywhere and leads to serious negative consequences for individuals. For example, as a younger person not being listened to during meetings or not getting that management promotion, or as an older person being rejected in recruitment processes or subjected to generalizations such as being resistant to change or technically incompetent - regardless of what you actually are or what you can do.

For us as a workplace, ageism risks preventing us from achieving our goal of attracting and retaining the best possible talent. In addition, research shows that teams with employees representing a range of ages are more productive and that employees tend to stay longer in companies with a range of ages compared to workplaces where many people are in the same age range. For society as a whole, ageism is extremely costly as it reduces mobility in the labor market, leads to lock-in and reduces the ability of industries or businesses to manage the supply of skills in the short and long term. This exercise puts ageism on the agenda and creates reflection and discussion on what we need to do in our workplace to become more inclusive in relation to age.

What to do:

- Appoint a facilitator. The moderator is responsible for reading the exercise in advance and leading discussions during the exercise.
- The facilitator reminds the participants of the conversation guidelines.
- The exercise consists of two parts. The parts can be carried out on the same occasion or split between two meetings. However, it is important that part 1 is done before part 2.
- In part 1 of the exercise, you read the text "Ageism - the most accepted discrimination of our time?", watch clips 1 and 2 and then engage in a conversation based on the discussion questions.
- In part 2, you first read the text "Recruitment without discrimination". Then watch clip 3 but pause the clip after 3 minutes to discuss the questions. Finish by watching the last part of the clip.
- Take note of the tips for becoming less ageist.

Conversation guidelines

- Assume that "everyone" is in the room ("those of us who...").
- Remember that we have different prior knowledge and experience of the themes raised, so show respect.
- Think freely and interpret each other kindly.

Exercise

PART 1

Ageism - the most accepted discrimination of our time?

"It is not the passage of time or aging that makes it difficult to get older. It is ageism."

This quote from author Ashton Applewhite highlights where the responsibility for age prejudice and age discrimination should lie. She makes the comparison that it is not having a vagina that makes it difficult to be a woman without sexism or having a boyfriend that makes it difficult to be a gay man without homophobia.

Ageism cuts both ways in that both younger and older people are affected. It is a special "-ism" in that, in practice, if we act or think ageist, we are prejudiced against ourselves, either our future selves or our past selves. In the context of discrimination against the elderly, it is easy to justify why the issue should be highly relevant and important for everyone because no one is getting younger - right?

In society, we can see how much importance is generally attached to age by, for example, how role models who do unusual things for their age are portrayed, such as the opinion leader Greta Thunberg or the now deceased 100-year-old blogger Dagny Karlsson. Or how in news contexts it is always considered relevant to indicate the age of those involved, such as victims of crime, perpetrators or lottery winners, because through prejudice and stereotypes we then think we know more about those people than we did before. Or why do you think this is done?

A Linnaeus University research study published in 2017 examined age discrimination in Swedish workplaces. The authors of the report sent more than 6,000 fictitious job applications to employers who advertised positions in industries such as administration, restaurants, cleaning, retail, corporate sales and transportation. The employers' responses were then measured. The survey clearly showed that

middle-aged and older jobseekers are being screened out. The chance of being contacted by an employer decreases sharply from the age of 40, and then continues to decrease with the age of the applicant. Closer to retirement age, the chance of being contacted is very low, almost non-existent. The probability of being contacted falls by about five percentage points for every ten years of ageing. Women are more affected than men, so there is a kind of double effect when age and gender are examined together.

Clip 1 This is What Being 'Old' Looks Like in Hollywood -

<https://youtu.be/xz6Sk3KjQbY?si=XXcivJD6w7HqtHEd>

Clip 2 People Over 40 Denied Free Samples in Social Experiment -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0MPuWg3pzs>

Discussion questions

- What do the film clips and text make you think about?
- Have you noticed ageism in society? In your workplace?
- In which situations do you think ageism usually occurs? Against younger people? Against older people?
- How do you think ageism can be counteracted?
- What do you think are the benefits of mixed-age working groups?

PART 2

Recruiting without discrimination

According to TNG, there are three main factors that make employers reluctant to select employees who are over 40 years old:

- Ability to learn new things
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Drive and initiative.

At the same time, several studies show that there is no link between getting older and ceasing to be innovative, flexible or no longer delivering as expected in the workplace. Our abilities change over time. While there is evidence that fluid intelligence - the ability to absorb new information quickly - declines as we get older, another type of intelligence called crystallized intelligence is strengthened. This

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means that previous experiences and learned behaviors such as seeing patterns and connections improve as we get older. In short, we reach the same goal but in different ways.

In recruitment processes, salary can be a factor that leads recruiters to reject older applicants. However, instead of assuming that older people will have too high a salary demand, as in all recruitment processes, there should be a dialog about salary with the applicant in question. Should it ultimately be the case that it is not possible to match the salary demands of an older applicant (and others), there should be openness towards the applicant to build trust and create transparency. It may be that an applicant is open to reducing their claim because the workplace, or other circumstances, are favorable.

Another common excuse is that older applicants are 'overqualified'. Debater and PR consultant John Mellkvist works in many ways to reduce ageism. He has said: "Would you ever disqualify your child's school teacher on the grounds of being 'overqualified'? Would you do it if it was your parent's doctor?". And it's worth thinking about when it comes to new hires - what's the difference?

Clip 3 Age discrimination in recruitment, The job interview -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_2TsJOqe8I

NOTE! The clip is a free version of a paid clip, so there is text above the image. If you want to buy the clip to show it without the text, please contact www.skillboosters.com.

Discussion questions

- What happens in the clip?
- What prejudices and situations of vulnerability can you identify?
- What would Sarah and her colleague have done differently?
- Do you recognize the situation?
- Are there points you can take back to your workplace?

Three tips for becoming less ageist

1. "Think the other way around". That is, if you see or listen to a person who is "young" according to your definition, you can imagine that they are "older" and vice versa. Would the person's changing age somehow change the way you read the situation, think about the person or how you would evaluate what is being said? And

if so, why? Sometimes there are legitimate reasons to think differently based on age, but usually not.

2. Surround yourself with people of all ages and try to find role models and inspiration from people of ages other than your own.

3. stop equating age with experience. Experience means nothing without putting it in context. A person who has been in the workforce for five years may have zero experience with social media, while someone who has just started their first job may have been managing large social media accounts for years on a voluntary basis or their own.

Sources

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