

Analysis of media story on age discrimination in the workplace



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Access a media story that presents a topical workplace problem (this could be related to any number of issues we have address in this paper, including: performance, engagement, personality, motivation, leadership, diversity, stress, bullying). The story could be found in the print media or featured in any on-line media. You need to include a copy of the story or a link to the item in your reflection.

Topic: Age discrimination on workers who are 40 years of age or older –
<https://bigthink.com/politics-current-affairs/ibm-ageism?rebelltitem=1#rebelltitem1>

1. Introduction

This paper was about International Business Machines (IBM) – the once-dominant technology companies in the world. Over the past few years, the company had been sued of firing up to 100, 000 older employees to attract millennial workers. Former Vice President of Human Resources – Alan Wild – reported that IBM had “laid off 50, 000 to 100, 000 employees ages 40 and over in just the last several years”, in order to enhance revenues and keep pace with the latest trend in cloud computing and mobile tech. The company had been replacing older United State and Canada employees from their jobs with fresher, less experienced, lower-paid employees and sending many of them overseas. For this reason, several handfuls of lawsuits have named the company for their ageist practices/discrimination against older workers, including a class-action case in Manhattan and individual civil suits filed in California, Pennsylvania and Texas in 2018 (Johnson, 2019).

<https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-media-story-on-age-discrimination-in-the-workplace/>

The case study of IBM company in the news represents a popular workplace problem of managing age discrimination on workers who are 40 years of age or older. The purpose of this paper is approaching the topic of age discrimination in workplace concept. It is divided into three parts to analyze with the case above. Firstly, the paper defines the term of age diversity and discrimination based on the theoretical background of organizational behaviors. Secondly, it points out the issues, the reasons as well as the challenges of managing age diversity and discrimination in organization. Finally, it suggests solutions on how to achieve age diversity and limit age discrimination in organizations.

2. Main body

1. Introduction about Age discrimination

Age discrimination in the workplace is a major concern in today's business although the topic is not new. According to Australian Human Rights Commission, age discrimination or also commonly known as ageism involves when an individual is treated unfairly than another person in a same situation, because of their physical age (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012). There are several ways to classify ageism. Regarding to physical ages, we have negative behaviors or practices against old people, people in their middle years, teenagers and children.

- 🌐 Young age discrimination (16–24 years).
- 🌐 Middle age discrimination (25–49 years).
- 🌐 Older age discrimination (50–State pension age – SPA)

 Senior age discrimination (over SPA).

(Sargeant, 2011)

2. Age discrimination in workplace concept (the issues and the reasons)

In workplace concept, age discrimination means implementing practices and policies that may be a disadvantage of older employees by setting limited arbitrary age for hiring, rewards, working conditions, and discharge through he or she is potential for job performance (AARP, 2006). It can be manifested in many different forms such as making biased decisions, receiving negative feedbacks, or experiencing unfair behaviors in hiring process, performance evaluation and promotion, lacking of training opportunities as well as forcing retirement at fixed age (Zacher & Steinvik, 2015). There are four popular types of ageism in workplace (Equality and Human Right Commission, 2019).

1. The first type where ageism manifests in those behaviors related to the employee's employment status regarding in the hiring process, the compensation and benefit (for example: the employee is paid less than others because of their age, or overlooked for promotion), training and development opportunities and dismissed decisions of employers. (Stypińska & Nikander, 2018). According to ProPublica – a nonprofit investigative news outlet – in IBM, older employees were fired and laid off or boosted resignation even when they had been rated with high performance by the company during the performance appraisal, and young employees with lower-paid were hired and trained to replace these positions. IBM did not provide any information or data about why an employee was cut or who else was departing when the lawyers and

federal agency requested. Also, the company encouraged targeted layoff older employees to apply for other positions or transferred the permanent contract into term contract with the same works but lower pay and fewer benefits (Propublica, 2018).

2. The second type could be defined as indirect discrimination where an employer age equally practices but there is some criterion is disadvantage to people of a certain age or age group (for example: fixed number of years of working experience in job advertisements). Though IBM stated that the company makes its employment decisions based on skills not age, older workers were kicked out of IBM, as company built “ trendy” and “ cool” image like Google and Amazon.
3. The third type is harassment – as unwanted practices or behavior that violating a person’s dignity; humiliating or offensive environment for the person (for example: ageist jokes, disrespectful treatment by employers, colleagues or clients) (Stypinska & Turek, 2017). In the document issued in 2006 by the IBM Business Consulting Services, IBM described their older workers as “ gray hairs” and “ old heads” while stated that younger workers are “ generally much more innovative and receptive to technology than baby boomers.” (IBM Business Consulting Services, 2006).
4. The last one is victimization – it is happened someone is bullied when he or she supports or complains of ageism. A former senior executive at IBM said that she had warned her managers about the happenings of age discrimination in the companies and she had been fired in 2017 because of this.

Whereas there are proportion of younger people also experiences of age discrimination in workplace (Abrams & Houston, 2006; Snape & Redman, 2003), elderly people are often perceived as a burden, and persons in need of care. Based on the view of older workers who themselves define ageism in workplace as “ not being allowed to do something you are capable of or willing to do just because of your chronological age” (Carmichael, Hulme, Porcellato, Ingham, & Prashar, 2011). Age discrimination among older worker is very difficult to eliminate among all the discriminations that the EEOC investigated because of employers’ negative stereotypes and attitudes toward them. For example, most employers believe older workers are poorer physical demands for work, less flexible, less creative, less productivity, less adaptable in technological development, and less trainable than are younger workers (Perry & Parlamis, 2006). Most of employers believed older workers lack of computer skills and appropriate qualifications, and difficulty adapting to varying work settings (Barnes, 2009).

3. Recommendations/solutions for age discrimination in workplace

Although have laws and legislation to protect persons age 40 and over and prevent discrimination by age in the labor market, the problem of ageism persists in the modern workplace. To fight for age equality in organization, Human Resources department plays a crucial role, which is responsible for maintaining employee relations and managing age discrimination in an organization. The first step to preventing age discrimination in workplace is to foster the culture of diversity and inclusion. Human Resources team should develop a consistent and reasonable policies or employee handbooks that can reflect the organization’s culture for eliminating age discrimination.

The organization have to ensure the board management team as well as all managers/supervisors are familiar with the company's policy as well as commit to it. Moreover, because ageism relates to negative assumptions and stereotypes about age towards older adults (Palmore, Branch, & Harris, 2005), apart from policies, employers should design and organize workforce training sessions as a part of introduction process educate employees about age diversity. It could be included unconscious discrimination through wording, elimination of stereotypes and prejudice among older workers, and the benefits of age diversity (UNECE, 2019).

On the other hand, we could not deny the role off the governments in promulgating legislative frameworks to eliminate age discrimination and imposing heavily fine those organizations violated (UNECE, 2019). There are many countries still have mandatory retirement ages in their policies, and it is one of the reasons causing age discrimination in workplace. Physical age is not a reliable factor to assess an employee's productivity or employability. To enhance age diversity and protect worker ages 40 and over, the OECD has suggested that countries should gradually eliminate the retirement age regulations in laws and policies (OECD, 2018).

3. Conclusion

IBM has faced with many lawsuits and criticism recently because the problem related to age discrimination among older employee. The company failed to understand the benefits as well as the importance of mixed-age workplace. Many researchers emphasized that age diversity can improve organizational productivity and foster innovation when groups are come into

complex discussions because of the different knowledge, perspectives and experiences (Pitt-Catsouphes, Mirvis, & Berzin, 2013; Trawinski, 2015). When an organization values age differences among employees, they could feel comfortable to express their full abilities and make creative outcomes (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2013). The main key to sustain successful workplace is utilize the best qualities of each worker and create a diverse environment to enhance skill, knowledge and experience of the teams.

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