



Age Diversity - The Future of the Workplace

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Age diversity is the future of workplace

Talent shortage, aging demographic will drive trend



From SeasonedPros.ca Insights Lab

When we think of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, we most often think of bias around gender, culture and race. What we don't often hear about is the bias of age.

It is a phenomenon that stalks workers over the age of 50, and in sectors like IT, over the age of 40. It is said to be one of the most tolerated forms of discrimination.

Assumptions fuelling agism

There is a cultural assumption that older workers are slower, less tech-savvy and unable to learn new skills. Youth is often glorified in popular culture and many businesses have

replaced older workers with young ones in the belief they will save money

It is of course illegal to discriminate against job candidates based on age, but it is difficult to prove that a candidate was not chosen because of their age. It is also expensive, legally speaking.

In some cases, the bias of employers is unconscious. Other times the bias is overt. Employers who want young workers will code job descriptions with language like “entry position,” “fresh,” “digital natives” that have “no more experience than X number of years.”

Employers are not allowed to ask a candidate’s age, but job platforms contain [algorithms capable of screening candidates](#) based on data like the year they graduated from high school or university. In other words, they are screening based on age.

Workplace skills go beyond digital

There is no question that young workers bring value to an organization with their digital skills and fresh perspectives, however technical skills become obsolete with the rapid advance of technology.

When leaders sacrifice experienced workers for a youth-based workforce, they lose institutional knowledge and other skills that are becoming increasingly important.

Soft skills are emerging as a new focus for organizations that are now swamped by data. As technology and AI replace certain routine tasks and furnish businesses with yet more data, leaders need to know what to do with all of this information.

They are discovering that they need talent with human skills like the ability to listen, communicate with empathy, work in teams and make strategic decisions based on data and instincts. These are not capabilities that are learned in university programs that focus on tech. They don't come from AI; they come from experience.

This is how age diversity benefits an organization in the data era. Human skills of instinct and experience cannot be replaced by youth or tech.

The Thomas Edison case for diversity

Diversity theory builds its case on the fact that more minds create better product and process innovations. The presence of different perspectives and experiences in a team challenges assumptions and promotes innovation.

Age diversity introduces the notion of “cognitive diversity.” Contrary to the lonely genius working in isolation, most great technological advances came about from collaborations of teams building group insights on the knowledge that came before.

This model of collaborative innovation was deployed by Thomas Edison in the invention of technologies such as the phonograph, the incandescent light bulb and motion picture cameras.

He understood that technological innovation had to be guided

by instinct as well as book knowledge. Edison also knew that he needed team members who understood the people who would use his innovations.

This is a key insight for companies who are selling products and services to target demographics. Talent that matches the demographic characteristics of clients and customers have insights into their priorities and thought processes and how they like to be addressed and communicate with. This enhances sales opportunities.

Companies that involve leaders and workers across the age spectrum will benefit from the knowledge and insights into their markets. Age diversity not only promotes productive workplaces, it is also a key to growth.

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