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Jenkins, Andrew Kevin

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Original Citation

Jenkins, Andrew Kevin (2008) Work matters for "older" hotel employees in the UK and Ireland: perceptions of workplace equality. In: International Labour Process Conference 2008, 18th - 20th March 2008, University College Dublin, Ireland. (Unpublished)

This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/5893/

Work matters for "older" hotel employees in the UK and Ireland: *perceptions of workplace equality*

Andrew Kevin Jenkins
Senior Lecturer in Hospitality Management
Department of Logistics and Hospitality Management
School of Applied Sciences
The University of Huddersfield
Queensagte
Huddersfield HD1 3DH
a.k.jenkins@hud.ac.uk

FULL PAPER

The UK and Irish populations are ageing and projections suggest a considerable growth in the number of older people in both of these countries over the next 25 years. Population ageing will invariably affect hotel workplaces which have traditionally relied on younger workers. A focus on older workers' accounts of employment in contemporary hotel workplaces is important as little is known about the attitudes, experiences and aspirations of older workers. In order to address this gap in knowledge, twenty three interviews with older employees aged fifty and above were conducted, eleven in the ROI and twelve in the UK. Findings from the interviews revealed that all older workers felt they were treated the same in terms of access to training in the workplace. Nevertheless, many older workers who were interviewed mentioned a lack of Information Technology skills as a barrier to promotion and this may represent a challenge to the future prospects of older workers. There was evidence to suggest that certain jobs, especially housekeeping, were age-typed as typically belonging to "younger workers" and departmental job segmentation was evident in that certain departments were composed of jobs deemed to be more suitable for a person of a certain age.

Introduction

Despite the burgeoning literature on the employment of older workers (Loretto, Vickerstaff and White, 2006), little is known about the attitudes, experiences and aspirations of older workers themselves (Donovan and Street, 2000; Loretto and White, 2006b; Loretto, Vickerstaff and White, 2006) or those older workers currently in employment (Loretto and White, 2006c). The issue of equality in the hotel workplace for older workers has never been investigated in-depth, only as part of a wider study (e.g. Chiu, Chan, Snape and Redman, 2001; Loretto and White, 2006a) or limited to an exploratory survey (e.g. Magd, 2003). Thus, older workers have been largely sidelined by studies on equality in the hotel workplace and have been treated as objects rather than subjects who are able to speak for themselves (Blaikie, 1999). It is the intention of this article to redress this imbalance by focusing on the views of older workers in order to give voice to those who are, perhaps, the most affected by workplace inequality.

This paper will discuss the issue of equality in the hotel workplace with a focus on "older" employees. For the purposes of this article, an "older" worker is defined as an employee aged 50 and above. However, it should be noted that meanings of age and old age are socially and culturally constructed (Wilson, 2000) and it is difficult to establish the moment at which a person becomes old. This is because old age is an imprecise term (Minois, 1989). An individual may not realise he or she has become old as old age is sometimes more apparent to other people than to the individual concerned (de Beauvoir, 1996).

In undertaking research on older workers, a decision has to be made in terms of who to include. This usually corresponds to chronological age. Much research on ageism and equality in employment uses the age-band of fifty and above to define an older worker (e.g, McKay and Middleton, 1998; The Cabinet Office, 2000; Loretto, Vickerstaff and White, 2005; Whiting, 2005). After commencing with a discussion of research on older hotel workers and the rationale

for the study, this article will discuss theories of workplace equality, the changing demographic structure of the UK labour market and its impact on the hotel industry and findings from interviews with older hotel workers in the UK and Republic of Ireland. The paper will conclude by relating the findings of interviews with older hotel employees to theories on workplace equality.

Theories of workplace equality.

Equality is a difficult word to define as its meaning is ambiguous and it is used to mean different and sometimes contradictory things (Levin et al, 1992). The Oxford Dictionary of English (2005) defines equality as "the state of being equal, especially in status, rights or opportunities". In determining equality and inequality, a moral judgement has to be made about whether social difference is better or worse (Vincent, 1995). According to Barnard, Deakin and Kilpatrick (2002) there are two types of equality: formal equality and substantive equality. Formal equality refers to a liberal conception of equality, which is reflected in the principle of direct discrimination (Barnard, Deakin and Kilpatrick, 2002). Substantive equality relates to equality of results (where apparently consistent treatment results in inequality and is reflected in the principle of indirect discrimination), equality of "fairness" (the full participation of groups in the workplace) and equality opportunity (equal starting points) (Barnard, Deakin and Kilpatrick, 2002).

The notion of equality and inequality is strongly related to political orientation. A central belief of capitalism is the transformation of humans into a workforce which is a factor of production and an instrument of capital (Braverman, 1974). This would invariably result in some people being treated more favourably than others and lead to social inequalities (Blaikie, 1999). Indeed, Phillipson (1982) claims that capitalism is incompatible with attempts to meet the needs of older people. Furthermore, inequality against older people reflects the fundamental weaknesses of

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social welfare and social policy in a capitalist economy (Phillipson, 1982). However, Levin et al (1992) claim that, in relation to capitalism, the free-market is a great leveller of prejudice and has, over the years, tended to eliminate discrimination because of the monetary costs involved in pursuing discriminatory practices.

The concept of equality in employment is a constantly evolving concept and is influenced by a multiplicity of factors. According to Tomei (2003), three models of equality can be recognised: the procedural or individual justice model, the group justice model and equality as diversity. The procedural or individual justice model seeks to reduce discrimination by eliminating personal characteristics which are not relevant to the job (Tomei, 2003). As a result of criticisms of this model, the broader concept of substantive equality was developed, resulting in the equality as social justice model and the equality as diversity model (Tomei, 2003). The equality as social justice model includes the group justice model, which is concerned with the results of selection, recruitment and dismissal and affirmative action, which gives preferential treatment to disadvantaged groups (Tomei, 2003). The equality as diversity model recognises individuality and acknowledges the existence and equal value of individual's different identities (Tomei, 2003). This approach has been popularised by the term: "Diversity Management" or "Managing Diversity".

The phenomenon of diversity has attracted considerable interest and attention in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century (Konrad, Prasad and Pringle, 2006). Over the last forty years there has been a shift from an equal opportunities perspective to one based on managing diversity (Lucas, 2004; Noon and Ogbonna, 2001). Managing diversity has become particularly prevalent in the USA but it is unclear to what extent it has taken hold in organisations and businesses elsewhere (Harris, Brewster and Sparrow, 2004). According to Liff (1996), debates about diversity in the USA have centred on ethnicity whereas in the UK the primary focus has

been on gender. The increased focus on managing diversity has taken place largely as a result of changing demographic factors, particularly the ageing of the population in the United States of America and Europe, legal protection, changes in employment, including increased globalisation, and the growth of the service sector (Hays-Thomas, 2004).

Managing diversity has become a management buzzword (Newell, 1995) although numerous versions of it exist and the meaning of the term is contested, both in the UK and the USA (Liff, 1999). Indeed, according to Groschl and Doherty (1999, p.263), "neither theorist nor practitioners in the Diversity Management area have a common view on the precise objectives and characteristics of Diversity Management". Kaler (2001) believes that there is major difficulty in defining diversity as it has been packaged and repackaged for potential buyers and lacks any definitive formulation. Similarly, Maxwell, McDougall, Blair and Masson (2003) report on the plethora of definitions concerning diversity management and Thompson and McHugh (2002) comment on the limited nature of theory and practice. However, as the managing diversity approach is still in its infancy, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is theoretically underdeveloped (Thompson, 2006).

Equality, or inequality, is related to the concept of justice which is socially constructed and is based on past decisions of fairness (Colquitt et al, 2001). Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith and Huo (1997) discuss four eras of social justice research: relative deprivation, distributive justice, procedural justice and retributive justice. Relative deprivation concerns satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding the allocation of goods and services but theories of relative deprivation do not help explain people's knowledge of whether something is deserved or that a person's judgement of justice will affect feelings and actions (Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith and Huo, 1997). Distributive justice relates to decisions where "outcomes are consistent with implicit norms for allocation, such as equity or equality" (Colquitt, 2001, p.386). Young (1990) is critical of the

distributive paradigm, stating that it tends to ignore the institutional context which largely determines material provision and tends to misrepresent the logic associated with distribution as applied to nonmaterial goods and services. Procedural justice can be explained according to two models; the instrumental model, which focuses on the economic incentives to promote fairness and the relational or group value model which focuses on the economic benefits of being a member of a particular group (Cropanzano and Greenberg, 2001). Retributive justice concerns how people react to social rules being broken and how the person should be punished by an individual or group, the type of punishment which should be implemented and the severity of the punishment (Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith and Huo, 1997)

Research on organizational justice is complex, due to the lack of a unifying theory or established research paradigm (Cropanzano and Greenberg, 2001). Moreover, as the effects of distributive justice on employees in the workplace are affected by procedural justice, there is much overlap between these two concepts (De Cremer, 2005). Montada (1998) discusses the concept of a "justice motive" based on justice principles which seek to rectify perceived injustices. Justice, according to Montada (1998), is about choosing from different principles of justice. Thus, in relation to salaries, older workers may wish to apply the seniority concept whereas younger workers may plead for equity based on like work (Montada, 1998).

In discussing the types of equality initiatives, Kirton and Greene (2000, p.102) have developed the following framework: (Table 1)

Table 1 Types of equality initiatives

Approach	Principle	Strategy	Method	Type of equality
Liberal	Fair equal opportunity	Level playing field	Policy statement, equality proof, recruitment and selection procedures	Equality of opportunity
	Positive action	Assistance to disadvantaged social groups	Monitoring, pre-entry training, in-service training, special courses, evaluate EO within management	Equality of opportunity
	Strong positive action	Give positive preference to certain groups	Family friendly policies, improve access for disabled, make harassment a disciplinary offence	Moving towards equality of outcome
Radical	Positive discrimination	Proportional equal representation	Preferential selection, quotas	Equality of outcome
Managing diversity	Maximise individual potential	Use diversity to add value	Vision statement, organization audit, business-related objectives, communication and accountability, change culture	Equality means profit aligned with organizational objectives

The above framework is a development of Jewson and Mason's (1986, p. 312) "elements of equal opportunities policies" which differentiates between liberal and radical approaches. According to Jewson and Mason (1986, p. 312), the liberal approach to equal opportunities is characterised by fair procedures, bureaucratisation of decision making, Positive Action and the perception is that justice is seen to be done. The radical approach is characterised by fair distribution of rewards, politicisation of decision making, Positive Discrimination and the perception is consciousness-raising (Jewson and Mason, 1986, p. 312). The liberal approach is based on the philosophy of sameness where the focus is on the individual and individual merit (Kirton and Greene, 2000). The free market is central to the liberal approach where efforts are made to remove distortions in the operation of the free market (Kirton and Greene, 2000). The liberal approach is associated with the practice of Positive Action which concerns efforts to "remove obstacles to the free operation of the labour market" (Jewson and Mason, 1986, p. 322). In the UK, the Equal Pay Act

(1970), Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and Race Relations Act (1976) are all manifestations of the liberal approach to equality (Kirton and Greene, 2000).

The changing demographic structure of the UK labour market and its impact on the hotel industry

The European Union's population is ageing. This is a result of falling rates of fertility, increased life expectancy, effects of the "baby-boom" and migration movements (Commission of the European Communities, 2002). In all OECD countries the proportion of elderly people in the population is forecasted to increase dramatically (Spiezia, 2002). In terms of the fertility rate in the EU, figures have fallen for all countries (Eurostat, 2005). The declining fertility rate is the result of a complex interplay of factors, including higher rates of female participation in the labour market, women having children later in life, more women in higher education, increased costs of child rearing, higher divorce rates and an increase in the number of childless women (Hollywood, Brown, Danson and McQuaid, 2003).

It is projected that, of all regions of the world, Europe will be the most affected by population ageing with the number of people in the 50-64 age group increasing by 26% in the period 1995-2015 (Taylor, 2001, p.1). In the UK, figures for 2003 show that the population aged 50-64 was 16.9% in 2000; for Ireland the figure was 14.3% (Eurostat 2005). In the UK, the median age of the population is forecasted to increase from 38.6 years in 2004 to 42.9 years by 2031, reaching approximately 45 years by 2060 (Shaw, 2006).

There are 19.8 million people aged 50 and over in the UK (www.statistics.gov.uk). This represents a 24% increase since 1961 and the number is projected to increase by a further 37% by 2031 when the UK will possess almost 27 million people aged 50 and over (www.statistics.gov.uk). As the baby-boom generation of the Mid 1960s age, the working age

population of the UK will become older. By 2020, there will be 0.9 million (4%) fewer working people aged below 40 than aged above 40 in the UK (Shaw, 2006). In the UK, people aged between 50 and the State Pension Age (SPA) account for just under 22% of the working population (Age Positive, 2002). People aged 50 and above are more likely to be economically inactive (Trade Union Congress, 2006). There are 2,486,00 economically inactive women and men aged between 50 and the SPA in the UK and a further 221,000 are unemployed (Trade Union Congress, 2006).

As is the case with most OECD countries, employment of people aged 50 and over in the UK has declined sharply since the 1970s although in the period 1998 to 2002, the number of people aged 50 and over in employment in the UK increased by 650,000 (Disney and Hawkes, 2003). Furthermore, in the period 1997-2004, the employment rate for people in the UK aged 50 and above but below the SPA increased from 64.7% to 70.0% (Kersley et al, 2006). In particular, the decline in economic activity rates of men aged 50 and older in OECD countries over the last thirty years has been remarkable (Duncan, 2003) with participation rates for older males falling on average between 29% and 30% in OECD countries in the period 1970-1990 (Desmond, 2000, p. 241). At the end of 2002, about seven million people aged 50 and over were in employment in the UK; of these 56% were male (Disney and Hawkes, 2003).

Employment rates for older people vary greatly between different parts of the UK with activity rates being considerably lower in Scotland, Wales and Northern England than Southern England (Brown and Danson, 2003). Amongst older people, the unemployment rate is twice as high in Scotland compared to England (Hollywood, Brown, Danson and McQuaid, 2003). In addition, it is likely that severe inequalities exist amongst older people in the UK with respect to employment opportunities with professional and managerial workers being able to work part-time into their 70s whilst "manual workers with grotty jobs and few skills often lack the opportunity, or desire,

to work past their 50s" (The Guardian, 02/12/03). Demand for workers aged 50 and above is likely to be influenced by their substitutability, comparability and cost compared with other workers (Hotopp, 2005).

An ageing population affects the labour market in two ways: it reduces labour supply, thereby influencing the unemployment rate, and increases dependency levels, resulting in higher taxation and a reduction in employment (Spiezia, 2002). Population ageing is likely to be the most important of all demographic changes for the foreseeable future (Hollywood, Brown, Danson and McQuaid, 2003) and will have major implications for everyone in society (Harper, 2000). Moreover, population ageing may result in labour shortages and reduce economic growth (OECD, 2004). Concern about population ageing has lead to a preoccupation with debate about a "demographic time bomb" where declining birth rates, increased longevity and an ageing population pose a threat to economic prosperity. However, in his book "The Imaginary Time Bomb", Mullan (2002) argues that such a threat does not exist. Rather, it represents a warning against the dangers of playing on individual uncertainties and fears and of naturalising social problems.

According to the OECD (2006), population, productivity and participation (known as the three Ps), are key to address population ageing. The main negative impact of an ageing population on GDP per capita growth relates to the decline in the size of the prime-working population (those aged 20-64) and an increase in the size of the older and younger age groups (OECD, 2006). In relation to productivity, a decline in the prime-working population can be offset by a permanent increase in the labour productivity of all workers (OECD, 2006). Increased labour participation rates of older workers would have the effect of reducing economic dependency ratios, increasing public finances and potentially enhancing economic growth (OECD, 2006).

The Hospitality Industry in general, and more specifically hotels and restaurants, employ a predominantly young workforce. This is confirmed by the results of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) which found that, in all workplaces surveyed, 32% of workplaces had 25% or more of their workforce aged 50 and above. This compared to only 13% of workplaces in the Hotel and Restaurants industry (Kersley et al, 2006). Moreover, older employees, defined as those aged 50 and above, were absent from 14% of all workplaces compared to 40% of workplaces in the Hotels and Restaurants industry (Kersley et al, 2006). At the other end of the age spectrum, results from WERS 2004 revealed that 47% of workplaces in the Hotels and Restaurants Industry employed 25% or more employees aged 16 to 21 compared to 15% for all workplaces (Kersley et al, 2006). Furthermore, younger employees, defined as those aged 16 to 21, were absent from 37% of all workplaces compared to 16% of workplaces in the Hotels and Restaurants industry (Kersley et al, 2006). Much of the industry is style obsessed, particularly designer bars, boutique hotels and celebrity-chef restaurants. The industry seems to be particularly ageist and "The image of beautiful young things dressed in Armani dominates the industry. Employers seem determined to discriminate when it comes to age" (Clark, 2000, p.24).

Findings from interviews with older hotel workers in the UK and Republic of Ireland
In order to ascertain older employees' views on equality in the workplace, twenty three interviews were conducted with older workers in ten hotel workplaces within a hotel chain, eleven in the ROI and twelve in the UK. This hotel chain was purposefully selected as it was deemed to be "typical" of hotel chains in the UK and ROI and the researcher had corporate-level contacts which made access easier. The specific type of semi-structured interview used was the semi-structured life world interview, the purpose of which is to "obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, p.5-6). The hotels where interviews took place were purposefully selected to reflect the geographical coverage of hotels in both countries and, furthermore, represent the hotel

group's major brands. Therefore, in relation to the ROI, hotels were chosen in Dublin (3), Cork and Limerick. In relation to the UK, hotels were chosen in Glasgow, Newcastle, Birmingham, Bristol and London. Hotel properties were selected using a purposive sampling method involving the researcher building up a sample to satisfy specific project needs (Robson, 2002). Although appropriate for qualitative research and the use of the interview method, in common with all non-probability sampling, this sampling technique is not appropriate when generalising from a sample to a population (Robson, 2002). In the case of hotels in the UK and ROI, interviews took place in the summer of 2005.

Respondents were asked "How old do you have to be in order to be an "older" worker?" Some employees gave a chronological age. This ranged from the mid-40s to the 80s. Other employees provided a more philosophical answer with Karen stating that "The day I can't get up from bed and work is the day that I'm old" and Margaret concluding that an older worker was someone who actually felt they were slowing down. The older workers who were interviewed commented on their positive working relationships with younger workers with mutual respect being important in fostering good relations.

Older hotel workers were asked about the skills which they had as an older person which a younger person wouldn't have and, conversely, skills which a younger person would have which they, as an older person, wouldn't have. Older employees believed themselves to be better at dealing with customers/looking after customers, have better judgement, be better able to evaluate the consequences of actions, have more (life) experience, have greater insight into the job, have greater commitment to the job, have good communication skills, be more mature, proactive, patient, diligent and diplomatic. Older employees believed younger employees to have better computer skills, be better qualified/educated and to be more confident, enthusiastic, modern in outlook, energetic, flexible and up to date with regulations.

Employees were asked the type of jobs in the hotel which would be particularly suitable for older employees and, conversely, jobs which would not be suitable. Most employees considered most jobs to be suitable. However, housekeeping was mentioned by nine older workers (six in Ireland and three in the UK) as being not suitable for older employees as work in this area was considered physically demanding.

Older employees were aware of the age structure of employees in their property and the fact that most employees were under 30 years of age. Some employees also commented on the age structure of a particular department which was considered, perhaps, unusual in being staffed by a greater number of older or younger workers. Opinions were divided on whether older workers thought the hotel's management preferred young recruits. An Irish employee, Bob, stated that younger managers were more likely to choose younger staff whilst Janet thought management didn't have a deliberate age group in mind but were mindful of the cost.

Older workers were asked what training they had received in the hotel. Almost all of the employees were interested in being trained and had undertaken training in different areas. Examples included: Information Technology, Customer Care, Health and Safety, Manual Handling, First Aid and Food Hygiene. Older employees seemed enthusiastic about training, with Mike stating: "I want to do training. I never refuse any opportunities." This was in stark contrast to Tim who said that "They knew when I came here that I had no ambition to be trained. It's not a productive investment for the hotel. I'm not building a career". All employees answered "yes" to the question: "Do you feel that all age groups are treated the same in terms of access to training in this organisation?" In relation to this question, Helen added "Age doesn't come into it. They (the management) encourage people. Everyone gets trained whatever level they are at".

When asked if age was a barrier to promotion, Mike stated that, as a laundry supervisor, he had applied for promotion but didn't get it because he would be difficult to replace. Janet had applied for an office manager's job but her computer skills were not good enough although "age was not important in the decision to promote". Liz hadn't applied for promotion because "I raised a girl on my own". Peter stated that "I'm 60 next birthday and I'm not interested in promotion". Sue also stated that she wasn't interested in promotion. Bob had applied for promotion "A couple of years ago. It was ages before the Personnel and Training manager got round to having interviews. I asked a few times when the interviews were going to be. She asked me if I'm sure I would be up to it, that the job may be a bit strenuous. Though she didn't mention age, I do know that all supervisors here are around 30ish. I think they prefer them that age". Tim, who, prior to joining the hotel, occupied a senior position in a Finance company, stated: "I'm not interested in promotion. From my background I could manage this property". Nick hadn't gone for promotion because "I can't write or spell. When I left school I couldn't write my name". Kath hadn't thought about promotion and was happy doing what she was doing. For Ann, few promotional possibilities existed in the hotel but "the hotel was five minutes from my home. I didn't want to move. It's great to walk to work". Another reason for not considering promotion possibilities was the worker's desire not to have any extra responsibilities. This was the case as far as Karen was concerned.

Respondents were asked whether they ever felt discriminated against in an interview or selection process because of their age. Some thought not. For example, Mike said: "I've genuinely never felt any discrimination because of my age". Kath commented that "when I went for the interview here, I had no problem getting the job". However, some respondents thought discrimination had taken place. For example, Janet commented that "When I was coming for this job I was 40 at the time. It influenced a number of potential employers. One actually said that they wanted somebody younger". Tim also thought he had been discriminated against in an interview or selection process

because of his age: "Yes. At times I could intimidate the interviewer because of my experience".

According to John, it was difficult to state whether he had been discriminated against in an interview or selection process because of his age because he never got to the stage of having an interview.

Conclusion: theories on workplace equality applied to older worker employment in hotels

The variety of responses given to the question "How old do you have to be in order to be an "older" worker?" reinforces the suggestion that age and older age are relative concepts and the age at which a person becomes "old" will differ according to a range of factors such as health, income, gender, social class and education. Thus, defining an older worker in chronological terms is problematic and research on older workers which uses chronological age as a condition of respondent selection may result in the inclusion of workers who may not define themselves as "older" workers and the exclusion of those who might. Therefore, in researching older worker employment, it may be advantageous to select workers based on whether they consider themselves as older workers, an approach advocated by Riach (2007) as, for some people, a clear boundary into old age does not exist (Wilson, 2000).

Some employees commented on the age structure of a particular department which was considered, perhaps, unusual in being staffed by a greater number of older or younger workers. It seems that departmental job segmentation is ageist in that certain departments will be composed of jobs deemed, by management, to be more suitable for a person of a given age. Therefore, segmented internal labour markets (Collinson, Knights and Collinson, 1990) operate which disadvantage, or sometimes benefit, older workers.

Housekeeping was mentioned by nine older workers as being not suitable for older employees as work in this area was considered physically demanding. It may be the case that the job itself

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could be redesigned so that it is within the physical capacity of the older worker (Doering, Rhodes and Schuster, 1983) but there was little evidence to suggest that housekeeping jobs had been redesigned in any of the properties where interviews with older workers took place. Or it may be the case that housekeeping jobs are age-typed as typically belonging to younger staff (Perry and Finkelstein, 1999). According to Hollinshead, Nicholls and Tailby (2003), structural discrimination results in certain groups being excluded due to certain practices. Thus, in this instance, the practice of choosing employees for housekeeping jobs, with a greater emphasis on physical ability, may represent a form of structural discrimination.

Some older workers did not consider ageism to be a problem with one Irish worker, Janet, stating that "I can only speak from personal experience but I have never felt discriminated because of my age. It's not an issue". Janet also pointed out that "Maybe age discrimination does go on but I've never come across it". This would correspond to Donovan and Street's (2000, p. 28) contention that "People may be victims of a variety of forms of age discrimination without being aware of it". Similarly, it may well be the case that an older worker may feel that he or she has been discriminated against because of their age when this was not the case (Donovan and Street, 2000). Other older workers were aware that it existed with a male UK-based worker, John, claiming that "The whole industry is ageist". An Irish worker, Ann, considered the General Manager's attitude important with respect to the employment and treatment of older people in the hotel.

The majority of older workers who were interviewed were interested in being trained and had undertaken a range of training and development courses in such areas as health and safety, customer care and information technology. All employees interviewed in HotelCo properties in the UK and Ireland answered "yes" to the question: "Do you feel that all age groups are treated the same in terms of access to training in this organisation?" This contradicts the findings of Brooke and Taylor's (2005) research of organisations in the UK and Australia which

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demonstrated that older workers were excluded from training opportunities, especially in relation to new technology. As far as training is concerned, it is vital that all workers have the same access to such training as older workers tend to have fewer qualifications than younger workers (OECD, 2006b). Otherwise, older workers will be placed at a disadvantage in the workplace. However, it may be the case that the organisation is using training to serve a social function, helping workers form friendships thus distracting them from the alienating work which they perform (Grugulis, 2006).

Some older employees were not interested in promotion for a variety of reasons. These included caring responsibilities at home, not wanting the extra responsibility, a lack of Information Technology skills and not being interested in promotion. Therefore, a range of reasons explain the possible lack of interest in being promoted and it is also possible that older workers limit their own horizons (Newton, 2006) or internalise negative prejudice and discriminate against themselves (Loretto and White, 2006a). The lack of Information Technology skills, in particular, which was mentioned by many older employees in HotelCo, may represent a challenge to the future prospects of older workers as today's society is characterised by technological change with less respect for tradition (Seabrook, 2003).

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