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**Age discrimination in hotel workplaces:
H.R.M. practices and their effects on the employment of "older"
workers.**

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There is evidence to suggest that more people suffer from age discrimination than any other form of discrimination. This is a problem for the individuals concerned, businesses and the economy. Despite major growth of literature on age discrimination in employment in recent years, there remains a dearth of research into age discrimination in hotel workplaces. The aim of this article is to assess the role of Human Resource practices in perpetuating age discrimination in such workplaces. The study is empirical and focuses on the views of ten Human Resource managers of hotels in the UK and Ireland. This study uncovered little evidence to suggest that older workers are experiencing direct discrimination. However, evidence of indirect discrimination included the widespread use of internet recruitment, a focus on local colleges when recruiting, a focus on work flexibility, a desire to recruit Eastern European workers and few special initiatives to attract older employees.

Age discrimination in hotel workplaces: H.R.M. practices and their effects on the employment of “older” workers.

Introduction

Discrimination based on age is not a new phenomenon. People have experienced discrimination because of their age for hundreds of years. In some societies the “old” were venerated but, in general, they were treated with hostility (Minois, 1989). This hostility continues to the present day and negative views of older people represent a challenge to the fair and equitable treatment of older people in society, employment and other spheres of life.

It seems that, compared to younger adults, older workers are disadvantaged in the labour force and this is due to stereotypical views about older employees (Harris, 1990). A report on ageism in Britain by Age Concern England, based on interviews with 1843 people throughout the UK, revealed that more people had suffered from age discrimination than any other form of discrimination (Age Concern England, 2005). The UK government believes ageism and age discrimination to be a problem, stating that it is “bad for the individual, bad for business and bad for the economy” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005, p. 19) whilst Folger and Cropanzano (1998) believe any form of injustice to be detrimental to organisations and employees. Furthermore, an OECD (2004) report into ageing and employment policies in the UK identified age discrimination as a widely perceived problem.

Although the UK did not introduce a law to address age discrimination in employment (and vocational training) until October 2006 (IRS, 2006), other countries have long since pursued a legislative approach to confront age discrimination. For example, the U.S.A. introduced the Age Discrimination in Employment Act in 1967 (Harris, 1990) whilst, at the state level, Colorado passed a law in 1903 which covered age discrimination of people aged 18-60 (Adams, 2003). In Europe, Spain appears to have the most developed provisions for protecting older workers’ rights (McDonald and Potton, 1997). In the Republic of Ireland (ROI), age was introduced as a ground of discrimination in the workplace in the Employment Equality Act, 1998, and the Equal Status Act, 2000 and revised in the Equal Status Act, 2004 (The Equality Authority, 2005). It should be remembered, however, that because legislation exists to combat age discrimination in employment, it does not necessarily mean that age discrimination is eliminated.

Much age discrimination in the workplace is subtle (Cooper and Torrington, 1981) and appears to be deeply embedded in the policies, practices and cultures of many organisations (Hollywood, Brown, Danson and McQuaid, 2003). Therefore, legislation alone cannot be expected to fundamentally change peoples’ perceptions of older workers but can act as a catalyst to foster change.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this article is to assess the role of Human Resource practices in perpetuating age discrimination in hotel workplaces. This aim is supported by four objectives, namely

1. To define an “older” worker, ageism and age discrimination
2. To establish the link between ageism and discrimination
3. To ascertain the effects of Human Resource management practices in hotel workplaces on the employment of “older” workers
4. To suggest ways in which hotel workplaces can minimize age discrimination against “older” employees in relation to recruitment, selection, training, development, equal opportunities and managing diversity

Background and rationale

In relation to this paper, an “older” worker is defined as a person aged fifty or above. The rationale for choosing chronological age for research on age discrimination in employment is that it is an objective, knowable measure of age. Furthermore, much research on ageism in employment uses the age-band of fifty and above to define an older worker. For example, McKay and Middleton’s (1998) report on the Characteristics of Older Workers for the Department for Education and Employment suggests that the age of 50 is a suitable point at which to refer to workers as “older”. Furthermore, the Cabinet Office’s (2000) report “Winning the Generation Game” focused on people aged between 50 and state pensionable age and Loretto, Vickerstaff and White’s (2005) report on “Older workers and options for flexible work” for the Equal Opportunities Commission defined an older worker or older person as being aged 50 and above. In addition, the OECD’s series of reviews on ageing and employment policies in OECD countries, defined older workers as all workers aged 50 and above whilst acknowledging that “the age of 50 is not meant to be a watershed in and of itself in terms of defining who is old and who is not” (OECD, 2004, p.3).

Butler and Lewis (1973, p.127) developed one of the earliest definitions of ageism, stating that it represents “the prejudices and stereotypes that are applied to older people sheerly on the basis of their age”. Ageism is a form of oppression which arises from a social construction of old age (Biggs, 1993). Furthermore, ageism, as is the case with racism and sexism, pigeonholes people and does not represent their unique ways of living (Butler and Lewis, 1973). Ageism limits an older person’s life chances due to restrictions being placed on them as a result of stereotypical assumptions about their role and abilities (Thompson, 2003) and legitimizes the use of chronological age as a marker to deny older people opportunities and resources (Bytheway, 1995)

Ageism is a set of beliefs and attitudes which portrays older people in a negative, stereotypical manner, reinforcing the fear of ageing (Hughes, 1995). It combines with globalization to stigmatize older people as bigoted, rigid and backward-looking (Glover, 2001). Bytheway (1995) believes ageism to be pernicious, leading to discrimination based on chronological age. Although the focus of much British government intervention regarding age discrimination has been on the over fifty age group, age discrimination can affect people of all ages and now affects individuals in their thirties and forties (Wersley, 1996). Ageism sets older people apart as being different in a generalised and oversimplified way and is a set of social relations which is used to discriminate against older people (Minichiello, Browne and Kendig, 2000).

A model which helps explain the link between ageism and discrimination is given in Figure 1. From this model it is evident that ageism and discrimination are complex phenomena which are affected by a range of environmental factors and result in stereotyped views of older people. At the policy level, supranational institutions, such as the European Union, can initiate policy to address age discrimination, as well as national governments. Professional industry-bodies, such as the British Hospitality Association, can also play a role in shaping policy, as can the firm or organisation itself. Personal values may be shaped by a range of factors including gender, class, educational background and religion, as will the experiences of

older people, although these may be positive or neutral, a fact that is not represented formally in Figure 1.

Figure 1 .

The relationship between ageism and discrimination

| | | | | | |
|---|-----------|----------|------------|-----------|--|
| Economic | Political | Cultural | Historical | Social | |
| Structure | Values | Heritage | Legacy | Attitudes | |
| The Social Construction of Ageing | | | | | |
| Ageing results in negative images, stereotypes and messages | | | | | |

(Adapted from Hughes, 1995, p.43)

Within an organisation, discrimination can take one of three forms: individual discrimination, structural discrimination or organisational discrimination (Hollinshead, Nicholls and Tailby, 2003). Individual discrimination concerns prejudice demonstrated by one individual against another; structural discrimination results in certain groups being excluded due to certain practices (e.g. requirements for promotion) and organisational discrimination reflects commonly-held beliefs about the suitability of certain groups for certain jobs (Hollinshead, Nicholls and Tailby, 2003). Discrimination can be direct or indirect (Tomei, 2003). Direct discrimination takes place where an employee is treated less favourably on the grounds of age, gender, race et cetera than an employee of a different age, gender, race et cetera (Daniels, 2004). Indirect discrimination takes place when an employer applies an unjustifiable criterion to different groups (for example, based on age, gender and race) which adversely affects one group, resulting in a person from the disadvantaged group being unable to comply with the criterion (Daniels, 2004).

Sex discrimination, race discrimination and disability discrimination have been widely discussed in literature on equality. However, age discrimination is “a neglected social phenomenon” (Bytheway, 1995, p.1) and there is “little information about age discrimination in employment” (IPM, 1993, p.24). Although much has changed since the IPM’s (1993) report on Age and Employment, with major growth of research in the UK on older workers (Loretto, Vickerstaff and White, 2006), there is a lack of information and awareness in organisations about older workers and the problem of age discrimination. Thus a survey by Martin and Gardiner (2007) into awareness of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 by British hospitality industry managers prior to the introduction of the new legislation, revealed a lack of preparedness for the new age discrimination legislation. Despite this lack of awareness, in recent years organisations have started to recognise the need to address age discrimination (Thompson, 2003), as a result of demographic changes, a tight labour market and impending legislation. The introduction of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 in the UK mean that British businesses will need to reflect on how they treat older workers as, in today’s highly competitive environment, there is increasing pressure for companies to behave in a responsible manner (Back, 2006).

Despite the acknowledgement, by government and academics, of the existence of age discrimination in employment (for example, The Carnegie Inquiry into the Third Age, 1993; CIPD, 2001; DTI, 2003; Age

Concern, 2005; Taylor and Walker, 1998; Snape and Redman, 2003), compared to other forms of discrimination, relatively little research has been undertaken (Age Concern, 2005). Indeed, “Discrimination by age remains the most pervasive and perhaps the least recognised and acknowledged of prejudices in our modern society” (The Edge, 2005, p.26). According to Riach (2007, p. 1702), “despite the development of policy to encourage equal practice towards “older workers”, there is still a lack of sophisticated understanding about the multifaceted ways in which ageism may be experienced or enacted within an organizational context”. In order to truly understand ageism in an organizational context, it is necessary to ascertain the views of older workers themselves as “relatively little is known about the attitudes and expectations of those in the spotlight: older workers themselves” (Loretto, Vickerstaff and White, 2006, p. 480). This article does not seek to ascertain older worker views on workplace equality but these have been discussed in Jenkins’ (2008) paper “Work matters for “older” hotel employees in the UK and Ireland: *perceptions of workplace equality*”

The problem of age discrimination in employment in the hotel industry has never been investigated in-depth, only as part of a wider study (e.g. Chiu, Chan, Snape and Redman, 2001; Loretto and White, 2006) or limited to an exploratory survey (e.g. Magd, 2003). This study focuses on the views of Human Resource managers as they, “play an important role as guardians of equal opportunities” (Hoque and Noon, 2004, p.497). Moreover, Human Resource managers have an important stake in how employees perceive the fairness of outcomes in the workplace (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998). This paper attempts to uncover the effects of Human Resource Management policies and practices on the recruitment, selection, training and development of older workers. Indeed, this is an approach recommended by Taylor (2001) in his report to the European Commission entitled “Analysis of ways to improve employment opportunities for older workers”.

Review of previous research

In an examination of management attitudes and perceptions towards older employees in hospitality management, Magd (2003, p.395) concludes that “Many hospitality organisations have realised the value that older workers bring to their organisations and have begun aggressively recruiting them”. However, only catering-industry examples (such as Pizza Hut) are given. Magd’s (2003) research focused on small and medium hospitality firms in Scotland and employed a postal questionnaire. This could be considered a methodological weakness since much age-discrimination is subtle and would not be identified using such a method. Moreover, only 25 questionnaires were returned and, as the questionnaire was completed by the owner or managing director of the firm, it is likely that the results present a biased view of older workers in the hospitality industry. The research is useful, however, in that it identified the perceived benefits and disadvantages of employing older workers.

Clark’s (2000, p.24) short article in the *Caterer and Hotelkeeper* called “Old gold” outlines major demographic trends affecting the UK and discusses the attitude of hospitality employers who “seem determined to discriminate when it comes to age”. According to Clark (2000, p.24), “the image of beautiful young things dressed in Armani dominates the industry” and “Hospitality is undoubtedly ageist”. However, this article merely discusses some of the issues in a condensed format with little empirical evidence.

One of the few articles written about “Managing Diversity in hotels” concerned Groschl and Doherty’s (1999) study of Diversity Management practices in hotels in San Francisco. This article presented the findings of primary research using interviews and questionnaires conducted in six hotels. The main finding was that most of the hotels implemented a “reactive diversification strategy” (i.e. a strategy which does not expressly value the diversity of the workforce). Groschl and Doherty’s article raises a number of interesting issues but its application to the British hotel industry is questionable, notwithstanding the limitations of surveying only six hotels. The article does not directly discuss ageism or age discrimination in the workplace.

HRM, age and employment is the theme of Lyon, Hallier and Glover's (1998) article entitled "Divestment or investment? The contradictions of HRM in relation to older employees". The authors consider HRM's role in perpetuating age discrimination because HRM theory "...can be seen to amplify older workers' problems by reinforcing ageism in management thinking through the provision of a commercially appropriate rationale which embellishes existing stereotypes and doubts about the commitment of older workers" (Lyon, Hallier and Glover, 1998, p.57). According to Lyon and Glover (1998), HRM provides a business-orientated explanation of the problems inherent in employing older workers, calling into doubt the commitment of older people and valorising youth. Furthermore, there is nothing intrinsic about HRM which makes it a positive force in challenging oppression and discrimination, although it may offer increased opportunities for encouraging equality (Thompson, 2003). It should be remembered, however, that ageist attitudes towards older workers existed long before the emergence of HRM as a management phenomenon (Lyon, Hallier and Glover, 1998).

In undertaking research into age discrimination in employment, Jenkins (2007, p. 12) recommends not relying exclusively on quantitative data but utilizing more qualitative methods, such as interviews, because "as much age discrimination is subtle and indirect, qualitative research methods are necessary to uncover underlying attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes and employment practices". Furthermore, Jenkins (2007) states that age discrimination cannot be measured in a purely positivistic manner. As research on perceptions of age discrimination in employment needs to expose underlying causal mechanisms, the use of statistical methods and techniques will not uncover such mechanisms (Johnson, 2003). Therefore, the method employed in this study is qualitative, namely semi-structured interviews.

Methodology

Interviews were held with ten Human Resource Managers, five in the ROI and five in the UK. On average, interviews lasted approximately an hour with Human Resource managers. All Human Resource managers worked for the same international hotel chain, the name of which, because of sensitivity issues, cannot be revealed. The hotel chain in question was, however, at the time the interviews took place, one of the largest hotel chains in the UK and ROI. This hotel chain was purposively selected as it was deemed to be "typical" and the author had corporate-level contacts which made access for research more straightforward.

It should be noted that interviewing is extremely complex, requiring highly-developed social skills (Oppenheim, 1992). The interview is a conversation between the interviewer, who asks prepared questions, and the interviewee or respondent who answers these questions (Frey and Mertens Oishi, 1995). The interview is one of the main methods of qualitative research and is a very good method for investigating a person's beliefs, perceptions and views of reality (Punch, 2005). According to Burman (2005, p.50-52), there are four main reasons for conducting interviews: to explore complex issues; to elicit subjective meanings; to increase the reflexivity of the research and to establish power relationships. All four reasons are valid for research into age discrimination in employment.

In developing a structure to the interview process, Kvale's (1996, p.88) seven stages of an interview investigation was used. This consisted of the following stages: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting. Furthermore, different types of interview questions were used, namely introducing questions, follow-up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, direct questions, indirect questions and interpreting questions (Kvale, 1996, p.133-135). In terms of the interview strategy, flexibility is required in responding to the interviewee's interpretation of the social world (May, 2002). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were undertaken. The semi-structured interview is "composed of parts which are structured while other parts are relatively unstructured" (Aldridge and Levine, 2001, p.6).

The hotels were purposefully selected to reflect the geographical coverage of properties in both countries and, furthermore, represent the major brands. Therefore, hotels were chosen in Dublin (3), Cork, Limerick,

Glasgow, Newcastle, Birmingham, Bristol and London. Interviews took place in the summer of 2005. Hotels 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).

Careful consideration was given to the method of transcribing as this “involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules” (Kvale, 1996, p.165). Furthermore, an application of Kolb’s 1985 Learning Cycle, as given in Maylor and Blackmon, 2005, was used to analyse the qualitative data (i.e. interviews). This consisted of four steps: checking the data, re-familiarising the data by spending time considering the issues raised and reordering or summarising the data, extracting key concepts from the data and checking for the re-occurrence of concepts and the emergence of patterns and fit with the data (Maylor and Blackmon, 2005, p.348).

Findings

A total of ten Human Resource managers were interviewed, five in the ROI and five in the UK. All Human Resource managers were female and all were white. None of the managers was aged 50 or above. All managers were able-bodied and worked full-time. In reporting the findings of interviews with Human Resource managers, each manager will be given a fictitious first name. However, all other information pertaining to the Human Resource manager is correct.

Louise, Debbie, Angie, Emily, Mary, Paula, Rita and Sally stated that the company website was used to recruit employees. Word-of-mouth was also a favoured method and was mentioned by Louise, Debbie, Mary, Paula, Rita and Judy. Sally commented that her hotel had an “Introduce a friend” programme. The methods used to recruit personnel depended on the position and the practice of managers receiving speculative CVs was commonplace. Emily also used radio advertising and, due to the difficulty of recruiting chefs, targeted catering colleges in the city. This was also the case in another Irish city where Mary would recruit from the college close to the hotel. According to Mary, recruitment of students would take place throughout the year, with peaks taking place in September, when many student casual staff would be hired, and April, when many student casual staff would leave to concentrate their efforts on examinations. Jobcentres were mentioned as a source of recruitment by Debbie, Trish, Paula and Judy.

According to the Human Resource managers, training needs were identified and some training done by the hotel and some, such as food safety, by headquarters or an external organisation. In general, the nature of training depended on the department in which the employee worked. None of the properties had age-awareness training or anything similar. Judy commented that “No, we don’t know whether there’s a need for it” and Angie stated that “No, we did have disability training and age could be part of that”. Similarly, Mary’s property did not have age-awareness training because “To be honest the reason I probably haven’t done it is because I’d be afraid you could be seen to be discriminating against them or the one thing is that a lot of people, I know mostly women, don’t like to be highlighting their age. So some people might not actually be comfortable with highlighting the over 50s.”

All of the properties had an equal opportunities policy, which was directed by headquarters and implemented in the property. Debbie, Rita and Judy thought the equal opportunities policy was effective but Emily commented that, “I don’t know if it is effective. It is clear”. Angie stated that the equal opportunities policy was decided by headquarters and enforced by her but effectiveness could be compromised as “It’s not necessarily the policy but the people”, meaning that line managers had to implement the policy and this was not always done effectively. Paula was also critically reflective, stating that “in certain circumstances we are not an equal opportunities employer. For General Managers, for

example, we always appoint internally”.

Little attempt was made to actively manage employee diversity in the properties with Louise stating that “It’s not an issue”. Debbie considered that employee diversity at her property “happens on its own”, Judy thought her workforce was mixed but “managing diversity is not something that I consciously think of”. Emily was aware that the CVs she received were from young people although she also stated, “We do have 3 people over 50 but they are off sick and are not likely to come back”. When asked how she had tried to manage employee diversity in her property, Trish stated “that’s a hard question to answer. Age-wise not really. All our jobs are open to everyone. It depends on the individual”

When asked about the age-balance of employees in their properties, Louise and Paula reported a spread of ages. However, Debbie and Rita stated that the majority of their employees were between 20 and 25 and Debbie added that “it tends to be (so young) because of the shifts”. Angie alluded to the fact that the age-balance depended on the department and level with most managers in their 20s, the bar and restaurant staff were very young and housekeeping and front office were more “mixed”. Trish also mentioned differences according to department in her hotel, stating that “We have lots of youngsters as casuals and in Food and Beverage”. At Sally’s hotel the full-time staff tended to be older than the part-time staff. At Emily’s property there was nobody aged 50 or above and “The average age of employees is 20-24. The oldest is 43”.

Managers’ perceptions of the local labour market seemed skewed towards younger people with Louise saying that “The labour market is full of younger people. There are a lot of students looking for part-time work” and Angie commenting that “the city has lots of universities”. Emily was a little more reflective: “People of a certain age group would want a job in a hotel. Perhaps it has something to do with our recruitment methods”. As far as Mary was concerned, the labour market was very young but people with more experience would have higher salary expectations. Referring to her city in the UK, Trish declared that “most people looking for jobs are students looking for part time work. It’s rare that somebody older applies for a job. The restaurant staff are very young. Probably people over 50 would be looking for full-time jobs. It’s rare to see someone over 30 apply for a Food and Beverage job”. Differences between how younger and older people applied for jobs was evident in Sally’s hotel where younger people would apply via the internet and older people would hand-in their CV at reception. Sally further commented that “there are a lot of mature people in the labour market but I don’t see many of them applying for jobs here”.

Human Resource managers were asked about a range of government initiatives in terms of equality in the workplace. These were different according to whether the property was located in the ROI or the UK. Approximately one month before the interviews took place, the “Say No to Ageism Week” (May 16th to May 22nd 2005) was held in the ROI. Only one of the managers, Emily, had heard of the initiative and had displayed a poster on ageism in the workplace. No follow-up training was held. Similarly, in relation to the properties in the ROI, little awareness existed of the Employment Equality Acts of 1998 and 2004 and initiatives to promote equality of opportunity for older people under the Equal Status Act of 2000 and 2004. The same applied to awareness concerning the contents of the report “Towards Age Friendly Provision of Goods and Services”, another Irish EO initiative.

Human Resource managers in the UK were asked a number of questions about government or government-sponsored equality initiatives. None of the managers were aware of the information available from the Third Age Employment Network. However, all managers were aware of the government’s legal initiatives to outlaw age discrimination in the workplace but only one manager, Paula, had any firm idea of what this might entail: “Yes. It comes into effect next year (2006). It will impact on more things than people realise. As far as the following initiatives in the UK were concerned, the managers knew very little or nothing

about them: The Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment; Age Positive's Practical Guide for Business (Age Diversity at Work) and the DTI's report entitled "Towards Equality and Diversity: Report on Responses on Age". The New Deal 50+ programme was known but wasn't considered a fruitful initiative to recruit older workers with Debbie stating that "we've never taken anyone on", Angie responding that "we haven't been contacted by them" and Trish commenting that "we haven't appointed anyone from the Jobcentre in 2 years, although we interview a lot of people (from there)".

Conclusions and recommendations

This section will be structured according to the Human Resource Management three-part cycle: attracting an effective workforce (focusing on recruitment and selection), developing an effective workforce (focusing on training and development) and maintaining an effective workforce (focusing on equality and diversity) (Baum, 2006; Nickson, 2007).

With regards to recruitment, interviews with Human Resource managers revealed a number of policies and practices which may, potentially, be discriminatory towards older workers. Firstly, the company website proved to be a popular method used in the recruitment for all positions in the UK and Ireland. This may place older people at a disadvantage as internet access, computer ownership and computer skills tend to be lower amongst older people. Secondly, both in the UK and Ireland, Human Resource managers stated that colleges were an important source of recruitment for their properties, particularly in relation to the recruitment of casual staff. Again this may disadvantage older applicants as an overwhelming majority of students at colleges and universities in Ireland and the UK are under the age of twenty-one. For example, in the UK, almost 80% of students beginning full-time first degree study are aged 18-20 (Weko, 2004). Of full-time enrolments to Irish higher education institutions in 2004-2005, of the 80,639 enrolled, 6,420 (8%) were aged 30 and over (The Higher Education Authority (of Ireland), 2005). Furthermore, the use of word-of-mouth recruitment could, potentially, disadvantage older people as existing hospitality workers, who tend to be under twenty five, may inform friends of vacancies in the property.

With regards to selection, as experience was considered essential by some managers, this may place older workers at an advantage. Appearance was considered crucial and candidates were assessed on appearance during the interview. The objectivity of assessing appearance is disputable and this may allow the manager to exercise bias, appointing a person on "aesthetic" grounds in order to produce a particular style of service (Warhurst, Nickson, Witz and Cullen, 2000). This may disadvantage older applicants. The importance of good social skills may indirectly benefit older workers as Human Resource managers, in the UK and Ireland, commented that older people had good/better social skills.

As far as training and development was concerned, in general, the nature of training depended on the department in which the employee worked. None of the hotels had age-awareness training or anything similar. The lack of focus on age-awareness may be the result of a lack of awareness about the issue, the sensitivity of the subject or fear of being discriminatory. As far as promotion was concerned, all positions were advertised internally and externally although Human Resource managers stated a strong preference for internal candidates, particularly the properties in Ireland. This would certainly disadvantage external candidates, whatever their age.

All of the properties had an equal opportunities policy which was developed by headquarters and implemented in the hotel. Human Resource managers considered the policy effective but Emily, a manager of an Irish property, stated: "I don't know if it is effective. It is clear". A UK-based manager, Angie, claimed that "it's not necessarily the policy (that's at fault) but the people". This reiterates the importance of the line manager's role and responsibility in ensuring an equal opportunities policy is implemented as line managers are taking-on greater responsibility for recruitment, selection, induction and

training (Cornelius, 1999).

Little attempt was made to actively manage employee diversity in the properties with Louise stating that “It’s not an issue” and Debbie considering that employee diversity at her property “happens on its own”. This corresponds to Loretto and White’s (2006) finding from research into employers’ attitudes, practices and policies towards older workers in Scotland, that “The age-mix within the organisations seemed to be the result more of chance than deliberate policy” (Loretto and White, 2006, p. 327)

It was evident from interviews with Human Resource managers in the UK and Ireland that Eastern European workers were considered desirable hotel employees with one British manager claiming that almost all housekeeping staff were from Eastern Europe. As more Eastern European workers seek employment in the hospitality industry, both in the UK and Ireland, the age diversity of the workforce may change, resulting in a younger workforce. However, a UK manager, Trish, stated that the age balance had not changed over the last three years because “When one person leaves the person that comes is the same age”. This, in itself, suggests that discriminatory practices may exist with the manager matching a job to a person of a certain age, confirming Hollinshead, Nicholls and Tailby (2003) contention that organisations have commonly-held beliefs about the suitability of certain groups for certain jobs.

Human Resource managers in the UK and Ireland were asked about a range of government initiatives in terms of equality in the workplace. Only one of the Human Resource managers in Ireland, Emily, had heard of the “Say No To Ageism Week” and had displayed a poster on ageism in the workplace. No follow-up training was held. Little awareness existed of the Employment Equality Acts and initiatives to promote equality of opportunity for older people under the Equal Status Act. The same applied to awareness concerning the contents of the report “Towards Age Friendly Provision of Goods and Services”.

In the UK, none of the UK Human Resource managers was aware of the information available from the Third Age Employment Network. All five managers were aware of the government’s legal initiatives to outlaw age discrimination in the workplace. As far as the following initiatives were concerned, the Human Resource managers knew very little or nothing about the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment; Age Positive’s Practical Guide for Business (Age Diversity at Work) and the DTI’s report entitled “Towards Equality and Diversity: Report on Responses on Age”. Human Resource managers did know of the existence of The New Deal 50+ programme but it wasn’t considered a good method to recruit older workers.

There are a number of potential explanations for Personnel and Managers’ poor knowledge of age discrimination initiatives. Firstly, it may be the case that the initiatives are not sufficiently publicised by the authority with the responsibility for the particular initiative, for example the Department for Work and Pensions concerning the New Deal 50+ Programme in the UK or the Equality Authority’s “Say No To Ageism Week” in the ROI. Secondly, it may be the case that Human Resource managers do not feel ageism and age discrimination in the workplace is an issue which is sufficiently important to merit further exploration. Thirdly, it may be the case that Human Resource managers were not getting sufficient support from headquarters about equality initiatives regarding older workers and were left to their own devices to find out about such initiatives. Finally, Human Resource managers may have been so preoccupied with other diversity initiatives that they overlooked age equality and diversity. Indeed, some Human Resource managers were of the opinion that age diversity just happened and did not need to be managed.

This study uncovered little evidence to suggest that older workers are experiencing direct discrimination. Evidence of indirect discrimination against older employees included the widespread use of internet recruitment, a focus on local colleges when recruiting, a focus on work flexibility in some

properties, a desire to recruit Eastern European workers and few special initiatives to attract older employees into the workforce. Moreover, the lack of recognition regarding the importance of age by some managers in equality issues may serve as a barrier to the employment and advancement of older worker equality.

In order to reduce age discrimination in hotel workplaces, managers should:

1. Ensure age-neutrality in recruitment and selection
2. Develop and implement a recruitment strategy which uses a broad range of methods
3. Develop and implement special initiatives to attract older workers into the workforce
4. Collect and make use of statistics on the age of employees in the workforce and the age of applicants who were short-listed, rejected or appointed
5. Offer age-awareness training to all employees and managers
6. Train line managers on equality issues and how they should interpret and implement the workplaces' equal opportunities and/or managing diversity policy
7. Offer specific Information Technology training for older workers
8. Develop and implement a promotions policy which is age-neutral and encourage older workers to apply for promotion
9. Offer a greater range of flexible work patterns to all workers and offer greater flexibility in terms of retirement
10. Ensure age-neutrality where redundancies is concerned
11. Include a specific mention of age in the organization's equal opportunities or managing diversity policy
12. Establish and support an age-diversity workgroup to advise on age-related matters
13. Develop and implement policy and practice on developing an age-diverse workforce
14. Ensure that all managers are aware of age-discrimination legislation and other major initiatives to address age discrimination in the workplace and that these are translated into improved policy and practice
15. Measure the effects of the organization's equal opportunities and/or managing diversity policies

Employment conditions and opportunities for older workers have undoubtedly improved over the last twenty years. However, there is still much to achieve, especially in the hospitality industry which is particularly ageist (Clark, 2000). Many businesses have realised the benefits of employing older workers. It is time that hospitality businesses followed suit.

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Personal
Values

Experiences of older people

Policy
Government Level

Local Authority Level

Agency Level

Low expectations

Negative self-image

Professional Encounters

Personal Encounters

Mediated by class, race, gender