

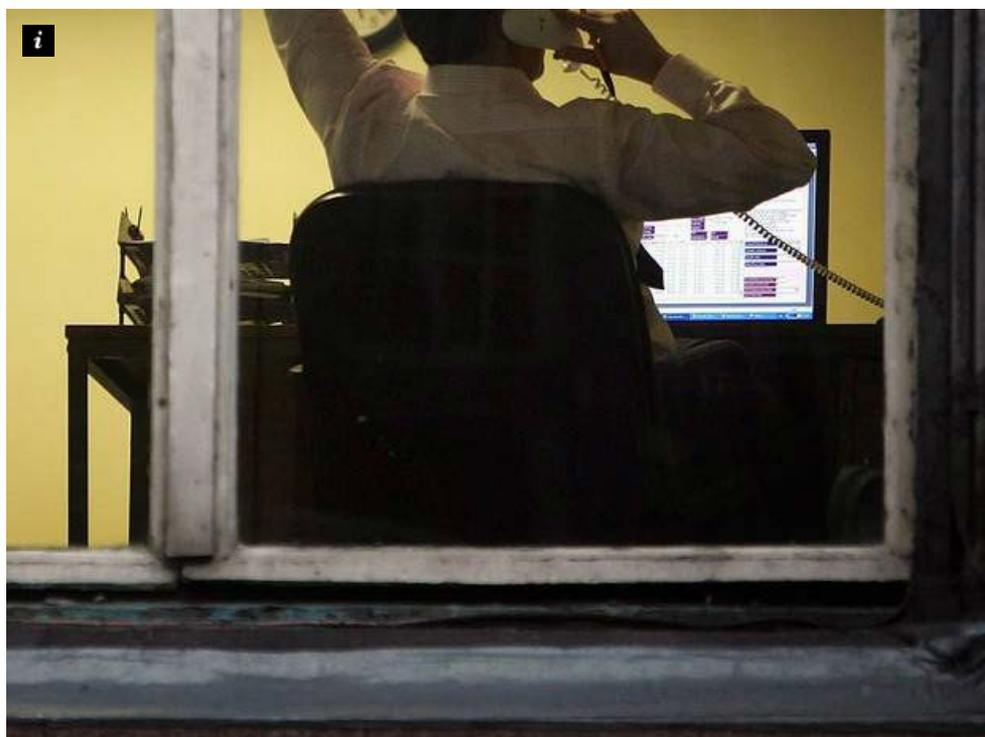


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## Ageism at work: older workers are being unfairly overlooked



**MATT GINGELL**

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According to a report by the Institute of Leadership and Management, 61 per cent of managers say that their over fifties workers have low (20 per cent) or very low (41 per cent) potential to progress.

This is despite the over fifties scoring higher than younger workers for occupation specific knowledge and skills (85 per cent) and understanding of customers (78 per cent).

ILM has found that employers are often wrongly assuming that the over fifties lack the desire and interest to progress into more senior leadership roles.

From the survey of more than 1,400 UK managers, managers themselves rated team members aged fifty one plus far lower than younger age groups for their keenness to learn, develop and progress.

They only scored them at 46 per cent for these attributes, compared to 67 per cent for generation X (born 1965-1979) and 79 per cent for their younger millennial colleagues (born 1980- 1997).

The over fifties, however, rated their own keenness to develop at 94 per cent, higher than the millennial age group that were surveyed, who trailed in last place with 87 per cent.

Kate Cooper, Head of Research ILM, states "We are seeing signs of organisational ageism, where highly skilled and talented staff members have less opportunity to progress as they get older. It seems this culture is so embedded that many workers over 50 are accepting they have limited opportunities in their current organisations."

"Old" stereotyping seems to be at play. If older workers have the necessary skills and experience and are as keen, if not keener, than their younger colleagues to learn and develop, wrong assumptions are clearly being made. Age discrimination can come in all sorts of guises. What's the law?

It is unlawful for an employer to discriminate directly by treating a job applicant or employee less favourably because of age without objective justification. This would preclude an employer from passing an employee by for promotion on a belief that because of their age they were not keen to step into a new role.

Supposing an employer wrongly believed that a 60-year-old employee was not interested in a senior management role? And supposing the employer's conduct was influenced by a stereotyped view that the person was too old to want to change their job?

This is likely to amount to less favourable treatment because of age; and it would be very difficult for an employer to be able to justify the way the person had been treated.

It is also unlawful for an employer to discriminate by applying a provision, criterion or practice that disadvantages job applicants or employees of a particular age group without objective justification.

An example of this type of discrimination could be, for example, having an advert stating that the job would suit someone in the first three years of their career. Someone in an older age group would be more likely to have more than three years' experience, and would be disadvantaged.

This is what's called indirect discrimination. Harassment, related to age, and victimisation are prohibited too.

Since 2011 employers have been prevented from being able to force employees to retire when they reach the age of 65. A retirement dismissal will amount to direct discrimination unless it can be objectively justified. It is now much more difficult for employers to retire their staff – and the number of over sixty-fives choosing to stay in work has risen to more than 1 million.

Government figures show that an estimated 13.5 million jobs will be created over the next 10 years but only 7 million young people will enter the labour force. A management skills' gap is therefore looming.

Employers would be foolish to disregard the talent of older workers.

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