

The research on the Mechanisms of Age Discrimination and Job Remodeling on Job Performance

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Abstract: The current aging of society is serious and the labor pyramid is shifting toward middle and old age. While the proportion of older employees in society is increasing, some companies and employees hold a greater bias against older employees, and older employees feel a sense of unfairness, deprivation and loss. In this paper, a questionnaire based on Petrou et al.'s scale was adapted and a model with job reshaping as a mediating variable was developed to investigate the association between age bias and performance earned by older employees. It was found that higher levels of age discrimination reduce job performance by decreasing employees' job reshaping, and this finding held true after a series of robustness studies. The moderating and influencing effects of older employees on work engagement are present, and their effective cognitive and psychological moderating mechanisms can be exerted through job reshaping. The results of this study can provide valuable management suggestions for HR managers and companies to improve older employees' work engagement.

1. Introduction

Since the 21st century, the population aged 60 and above in China has gradually grown over 260 million, and the degree of aging has further deepened. Coupled with the continuous development of China's economy, society's demand for high-quality labor is also increasing, and labor shortages are frequent. What older employees bring is not only the knowledge and skills of the company, but more importantly their responsible spirit, which is an important part of building corporate genes. However, for older employees of a company, they are at the end of their career journey, when career mobility and motivation are low and engagement levels are low. Under this internal emotional pressure, they are also faced with external realities. Influenced by society's perceptions and general knowledge, younger employees have age stereotypes about older employees. Social support is an important resource that affects the psychology of older employees, and with increasing age stereotypes, older employees will be less engaged in their work and thus in the company and society as a whole.

Work reinvention, however, can lead to changes in this phenomenon, and Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) introduced the concept of job reinvention, which can take three different forms: task, relationship, and cognitive reinvention. By redefining job roles and making each position more equitable, job reshaping can reduce age discrimination from the outside in for corporate workers, especially older employees.

2. Current State of Research

Schloegel (2018) identified and differentiated age stereotypes in ASD, and they found that age discrimination at work can have many negative consequences for organizations (e.g., decreased company performance, employee turnover), teams (e.g., inter-team conflict), and individuals (e.g., selection discrimination, poor health) if age-biased behaviors are not controlled for. In contrast, Avery (2007) [1], using a sample of 901 employees in the UK, showed that recognition of older colleagues had a significant positive impact, and those who expressed greater satisfaction with their colleagues also tended to report higher levels of engagement. Thus, bias towards older employees not only affects

the engagement of older employees, but also has a significant impact on the engagement of younger employees, and it is important for companies to correct this bias in order to motivate them to go further.

Based on socioemotional selectivity and self-categorization theory, a model was developed and tested on how Henry's (2015) interaction between employee age and opportunities for creativity and development predicts age bias and turnover intentions through the quality of intergenerational contact in the workplace. Williams (2016) proposed the Inside-Out-Out-Out (IO-OI) model, a developmental work well-being of a dual-process positive systems science approach. Most current research aims to understand the content and process of age-based stereotypes, the accuracy of stereotypes, the outcomes of age bias, and the conditions under which stereotypes are most likely to lead to discrimination; few studies have focused on the attenuating effects of job reshaping on age bias.

This paper directly investigates age bias and older employees' earned performance, providing a new perspective for older employees-related research, and enriches the research related to the concept of job reshaping by using job reshaping as a mediating variable.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, the concept of older employees is defined as the age group of the workforce in companies that are 45 years old or older. A questionnaire was used to conduct the survey, and for the distribution of questionnaires to older employees over 45 years old, a questionnaire adapted from Charlis and Tougas was used. Based on the existing mature scale, an online self-administered questionnaire collection method was used, and 877 valid questionnaires were distributed and collected, on the basis of which comprehensive statistical analysis was conducted.

Based on the valid questionnaires, this paper used job reshaping as a mediating variable and established the following model based on the bias towards older employees and their obtained performance the Figure 1.

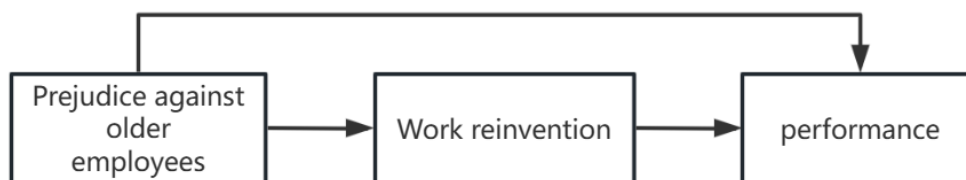


Figure 1: Process flow chart

3.1 Age Discrimination and Job Performance

Age discrimination refers to negative value judgments or unreasonable treatment by others based on being younger or older in age. In this paper, we study the effect of age discrimination on older employees in the workplace, and thus age discrimination in this paper refers specifically to negative evaluations or unreasonable treatment received by being older in age. "Ageism" reflects the process of discrimination based on stereotypes of a person's age (Inder and Bryson, 2007) [2]. Older employees lose motivation after experiencing age discrimination, which in turn affects their ability to excel at work and set goals for future career development, and reduces helping and innovative behaviors toward the organization (Cheung and Wu, 2012; Ng and Feldman, 2010) [3].

Han Wing et al. (2007) divided job performance into four significantly separated structures: task performance, relationship performance, learning performance, and innovation performance [4]. Among them, task performance refers to the results or behaviors of employees who contribute to organizational goals through technical cores in accordance with the tasks and responsibilities specified in the job description; relational performance refers to behaviors and processes that indirectly contribute to organizational goals through support for the social, organizational, and psychological context in which the job is performed; innovation performance is the behavioral process that indicates that employees continuously shift the focus of knowledge (innovation) in order to gain their own competitive advantage and maintain their core competitiveness and obtain

continuous growth momentum in the process of continuous knowledge sharing and transfer.

In summary, this study concludes that, on the one hand, age discrimination will affect older employees' interest and commitment to their own work, and under the threat of age discrimination, they may treat new technologies with a closed and complaining attitude, and fail to make full use of new technologies to improve their work efficiency, thus leading to unrealized performance breakthroughs. On the other hand, age discrimination will affect the relationship between older employees and other colleagues, especially with younger employees, and affect the work cooperation between them, thus affecting labor efficiency and work performance. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study.

3.2 Age Discrimination and Job Reinvention

Job reinvention refers to individuals' initiatives to change tasks, relationships, and perceptions of their jobs to better match their needs and goals (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Tims, Bakker, and Derks, 2012). The proactive behavior of job reinvention requires employees to continuously adapt to the challenges and constraints of the job (Berg, Wrzesniewski, and Dutton, 2010) in order to enable them to adapt to and participate in the rapidly changing work environment and ultimately help them solve the problems they face (Grant and Parker, 2009) [5].

In contrast, Nair and Vohra (2010) found in their study that discriminatory unfair treatment caused job alienation in more than 20% of the survey respondents. Age discrimination against employees approaching retirement can lead to job withdrawal behavior (Hu, L.H., 2016). Both job alienation and job withdrawal behaviors have a negative impact on the proactive behavior of job reinvention. Job detachment causes older employees to shift their focus from their own work to other matters outside of work, and the resulting inability to cope with challenges and difficulties at work will in turn lead to job withdrawal behavior, which will lead to flight or even fear of work, and prevent them from internalizing the vision of job reinvention and externalizing it into practical action. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

3.3 The Mediating Role of Job Reinvention

There are differences between older employees' reinvention and younger employees' job reinvention (Kooij, 2015), and older employees' job reinvention is divided into three basic types: adaptive reinvention, developmental reinvention, and applied reinvention (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Kanfer, 2004) [6]. Adaptive reshaping is a type of reshaping in which older adults decline, such as seeking counseling and assistance, finding alternative ways to achieve goals, etc.; developmental reshaping is a type of reshaping aimed at learning new skills or growing (Robson et al., 2006; Baltes & Baltes, 1990), such as attending workshops to improve knowledge and skills, etc.; applied reshaping focuses on existing types of reinvention, such as tasks of interest that focus on optimizing existing knowledge and skills. From both definitions it is easy to see that there is a correspondence between the three main types of job reshaping and the four main structures of job performance, adaptive reshaping corresponds to relational performance, developmental reshaping corresponds to learning performance and innovation performance, and applied reshaping corresponds to task performance. When a certain type of job reshaping is actively generated, its corresponding job performance is correspondingly increased, and job reshaping positively affects job performance. Age threat can negatively affect or threaten individuals to some extent. In summary, this study concludes that age discrimination by others against older employees at work will prevent them from spontaneously engaging in job reinvention, thus showing negative work attitudes and lower work engagement, and hindering job performance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study.

4. Analysis of Questionnaire Results

4.1 Questionnaire Collection

This questionnaire was conducted in January 2023, and the questionnaires were distributed

electronically online and manually offline. A total of 581 questionnaires were distributed, 581 were collected, and 581 valid questionnaires were qualified.

4.2 Basic information

Among the 581 respondents, 379 were male, accounting for 66.23% of the respondents, and 202 were female, accounting for 34.77% of the respondents. In terms of age, we set open intervals, and in general, our research subjects are mainly older male employees aged 45-50, which is in line with the actual research subjects. In terms of education, 80.55% of the respondents have high school or less or specialist degrees, and in terms of occupational level, 80.9% are general employees and grassroots managers, while middle managers and top managers account for about 19.1%.

We also conducted research on the work status and work unit status of older employees. The questionnaire data showed that more than 80% of the personnel had an annual income of \$50,000-\$120,000 after tax. In terms of the enterprises where they work, the vast majority are state-owned enterprises, state-controlled enterprises and private enterprises, and a small number of Sino-foreign joint ventures. In the work time of this unit, most of the older employees work in this unit between 11-30 years, accounting for 62.48%.

4.3 Empirical analysis of mediating factors

The variables and their definition are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of main variables

Variable	Variable symbol	Variable definition
Age Discrimination	Ageism	The older employees' own perceived attitude of denial towards themselves because of others, mean value of question 9
Job Reinvention	Job crafting	Employees' job identity obtained from their own job restructuring, mean value of questions 10 to 12 of the questionnaire
Job Performance	Job performance	Employee job identification from own job restructuring, average of questions 10 to 12 in the questionnaire

The mean values of each question under age discrimination, job reshaping, and job performance dimensions were calculated separately, and the path regression model was constructed in Mplus 8.3 with the mean value of age discrimination as the independent variable, the mean value of job reshaping as the mediating variable, and the mean value of job performance as the dependent variable. Figure 2 shows the diagram of the mediating model, and Table 2 demonstrates the coefficients and standard deviations of each path. From the results, it can be seen that age discrimination significantly and negatively predicts job reshaping and job performance, and when age discrimination is higher, both job reshaping ($\beta = 0.237, p < 0.001$) and job performance ($\beta = -0.755, p < 0.001$) are significantly lower. Meanwhile, job reshaping significantly and positively predicted job performance, and when job reshaping was higher, job performance was significantly higher ($\beta = 0.237, p < 0.001$). The results of the mediation effect analysis using Bootstrap iterations 2000 times showed that job reshaping played a significant mediating role between age discrimination and job performance with a mediation effect value of -0.212, i.e., a higher degree of age discrimination reduces job performance by decreasing employees' job reshaping.

Table 2: Path coefficient results

Path	B	SE	β
Age Discrimination → Job Reinvention	-0.611	0.014	0.893***
Age Discrimination → Job Performance	-0.741	0.028	-0.755***
Job Reinvention → Job Performance	0.340	0.042	0.237***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

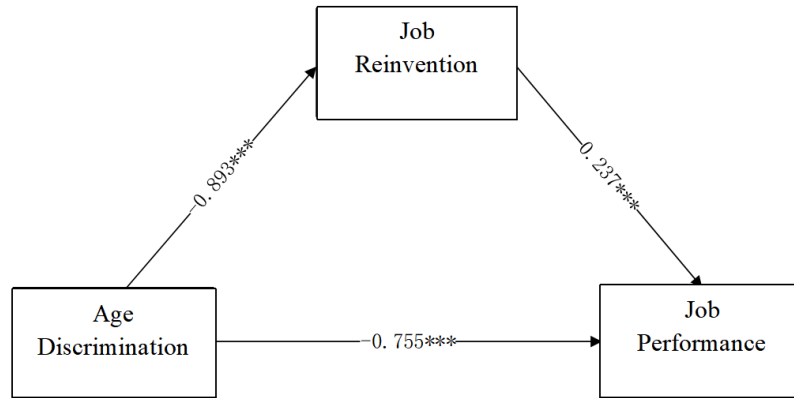


Figure 2: Intermediary model

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we used the above mediation model to study the mediating effect of job reshaping of older employees on the effect of age discrimination on job performance, and verified through data analysis that job reshaping plays a significant mediating role between age discrimination and job performance, and obtained the following suggestions after comparative analysis: Pay attention to the inner demands of older employees and rectify the working atmosphere in the company, pay attention to the working environment of elderly employees, minimize the impact on job remodeling, attach importance to the construction of the mentor system, and fully establish a communication bridge between elderly employees and young employees to avoid conflicts.

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