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**The Influence of Employee
Age and Sex on
Employee Evaluations**

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The Influence of Employee Age and Sex
on Employee Evaluations in the Workplace

by

Gerald P. Gormley

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee
of Lehigh University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
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in

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ABSTRACT

This study tested the hypothesis that an older hypothetical employee would be evaluated in a less positive way than a younger hypothetical employee. The study also examined whether the hypothetical employee's sex would influence the evaluation and whether age and sex would interact with one another to influence the evaluation. Additionally, the age and sex of the evaluators were examined to determine what effect these variables had on the evaluations. One hundred and six raters (47 female, 59 male) between the ages of 26 and 74, with work experience of from three to forty-two years, completed an in-basket exercise containing one of two employment - related evaluations in which a positive or negative choice of action was required. These evaluations concerned the promotion or training of a hypothetical employee, whose age and sex was randomly distributed among the evaluators so that approximately one quarter received each of the following variable pairings: young male; young female; old male; old female. Results indicated a significant negative age stereotype effect for the promotion judgment in which case the young employee received significantly more positive evaluations than did the old employee. A similar, but not significant,

negative age stereotype trend was also observed in the training judgment. No significant main effects were found for sex of employee, sex of evaluator, or age of evaluator. Although the evidence supported the hypothesis that age bias affects significant decisions relating to employment, additional questions regarding the impact of other personality attributes (positive and negative) and situational circumstances upon the perceptions of the elderly are raised. Workplace and societal responses to address the ageism issue are outlined.

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INTRODUCTION

As an increasing number of United States corporations seek to streamline their workforces in the face of intense global competition, the legal and ethical issues relating to voluntary versus coercive retirement, fast-track career management, and employee development training will become increasingly important. The dilemma that subsequently arises is the reconciliation of the needs of the individual worker and those of the employer organization: are they mutually exclusive? An increasingly important factor in this equation is the aging of the U.S. population and, specifically, its workforce. This study will examine one major element of aging in the workplace: the impact of employee age on the evaluation of employee performance.

Legal Ramifications

The problem of age perception in the workplace is reflected in the distribution of age related litigations filed at the federal court level under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) during 1987 (Bureau of National Affairs, 1988):

84% filed by white males

68% dealt with an employee's dismissal or
involuntary retirement

59% were filed by managerial or professional employees

54% were filed by employees who were between the ages of 50 and 59

A majority of these cases originated in right-to-work states and the typical litigant, who would not otherwise be able to seek redress as a member of a protected class, sought an age-based federal lawsuit as the only recourse in their search for an equitable solution. This litigious trend and the enormous costs associated with it, both of which have accelerated at an increasing rate of up to 20% per year over the past five years (Bureau of National Affairs, 1988), will undoubtedly continue unless a common ground of understanding is reached by the parties involved. Finding a solution to this question of age in its relation to the job marketplace becomes even more critical when consideration is given to the "baby boom" generation, which is maturing and rapidly reaching protection under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.

Aging and Work

Work has always been a key element in the development of identity and worth, and is second only to gender in providing a consistent and well defined sense of identity (Sarasan, 1977). However, the role of work during the

last 100 years in the United States has changed dramatically. So, too, has the role of the older worker changed, as society in the United States has grown from agricultural to industrial. As an individual aged in the agrarian environment, a reduced capacity for physical work was replaced with a respect and sense of worth accorded to the family matriarch or patriarch. As workers moved from a rural society into the urban workforce the ability to successfully substitute wisdom for physical capabilities diminished. The intervention of two world wars absorbed most young male workers and lengthened the active working life contribution of older workers into the late 1940's. In the 1950's and 1960's, however, American industry began to realize that room was needed for the younger workers who were now in the workforce, and the concept of early retirement was introduced and sold as the idyllic time that older workers had "earned". Since that time, industry has used the "Madison Avenue" style approach to entice older workers to again make room, this time for the employees of the "baby boom" generation who are now growing to be mature members of the workforce. It will be in the opening decades of the twenty-first century (2000 - 2025) that the real crisis will arise, when the baby boomers reach that point when they will face the dilemma of old age in American private industry.

Defining "Old Age" in the Workplace

What is old age in the workplace? United States federal legislation provides clear chronological guidelines as to who is considered old and who is not. The ADEA has mandated that age discrimination protection be provided to all U. S. citizens who have reached the age of 40. Further federal legislative fiat including the Social Security Act (1935), the Civil Services Retirement Act (1920, 1929), and the Railroad Retirement Act (1934) have, through their administrative guidelines and benefit formulas, encouraged employees to cease work at the age of 65 or earlier. These federal programs usurped individual autonomy with the assumption that older people had to be provided for (not worked with) and were unable to actively engage in the decision making process with regard to their continuing participation in the labor force. While federal law currently prohibits mandatory retirement in most occupations (except those occupations such as airline pilots for which bona fide occupational qualifications exist), these past practices have encouraged employer organizations to rely on chronological life stage, to the exclusion of individual abilities, in determining who should - and who should not - have the opportunity for work, identity, and economic fulfillment in the workforce. Even a statistical analysis of the wisdom of

chronological workplace obsolescence no longer will support existing practices of retirement based on age alone. Consider that the decision to adopt the age of 65 as the Social Security retirement benchmark was made at a time when life expectancy was 59.9 years for males and 63.9 for females (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1960) If a similar logic were applied today retirement guidelines would be between the ages of 78 and 80 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). Sound logic notwithstanding, there is ample evidence that real life experience supports the supposition that in addition to being able to work, retired workers are ready and willing to work as well. In exploring the work options for older American workers, Gray and Morse (1980) found that two of every five retirees that they surveyed returned to work for pay after retirement either for economic, social, or psychological reasons. Sheppard (1976) reported even more persuasive evidence that retired workers seek reentry into the active workforce. He found that 55 percent of blue-collar and 76 percent of white-collar workers that he interviewed would return to work if they could find a position, regardless of their income level during retirement. It is indeed unfortunate that against this backdrop of skilled and eager people poised to reenter the workforce, we have federally mandated restrictions associated with retirement

income, most of which require the individual to return a large percentage of their additional earnings in the form of taxes and other reimbursements to the federal government.

Clearly, one should question whether or not, and under what conditions, there is sufficient justification for the use of age as a criterion for determining job placement, training, ability, and retention within an organization.

The critical need to assess the validity of institutionalizing the theoretical links between chronological thresholds and perceived productivity potential was highlighted by Mowsesian (1986, p. 102). "To be retired from one's productive role in society is to become a member of an ambiguous and heterogeneous social group which has few identity points other than chronological age, little shape or form which is valued by the larger society, and a relatively minor place in the social structure." The irony of this observation can be fully appreciated when one considers that a U. S. Department of Labor report indicated that only 14 percent of industrial jobs require substantial physical strength (Anderson, 1978) A clear assumption can be made here that in the remaining 86 percent of the industrial positions higher intellectual and cognitive skills are more

essential to the job than physical ability. Since there is little evidence that intellectual ability is negatively correlated with age, it becomes all too apparent that a valuable resource is being relegated to the frustration of the workplace sidelines.

Age Perceptions in the Workplace

Even though frequently prohibited by law, there is considerable evidence that age is indeed an influential factor in the workplace. Rosen and Jerdee (1976) investigated the influence of age stereotypes on managerial decisions and found that negative job-related characteristics are attributed to older workers. Assumptions about the physical, cognitive, and emotional characteristics of older employees influenced a series of administrative actions that were clearly damaging to the well being and career progress of older workers. These age related prejudices included assumptions about a decline in the mental and physical capacities of older workers as well as their resistance to change and ability to improve upon job related skills. This chronologically biased viewpoint ultimately resulted in an administrative predilection to terminate older employees rather than to invest in training, counseling, or other remedial assistance.

Before reaching the conclusion that chronological aging inevitably results in a negative stereotype, consideration must be given to evidence that perceptions are interactive, and age alone is but one factor contributing to the expectations one may have of a particular individual. Research conducted by Stier and Kline (1980) with university students provided evidence that perceptions of the elderly are situationally determined and multidimensional in character. Concluding that views of the elderly can not be conveyed appropriately by a single, univalent attitude, the authors recommended a perception based upon a component character analysis that would allow for a multiplicity of situational factors. Recommendation was made for future research based on such factors as the attitude dimension assessed, the situational factors regarding the target person, sex of the rater, sex of the target person, and the rater's knowledge about and level of contact with the elderly.

Research by Braithwaite (1986) also focused on the possibility that perceptions of the elderly are based upon interactive components. Specifically, he suggests that old age stereotyping is evident only when the individual exhibits socially unattractive behavior. Braithwaite's results indicated that disabled elderly adults are judged

more harshly than able elderly adults, but no more so than their younger counterparts, leading to the conclusion that disability was a more critical cue than was age.

Nonetheless, respondents viewed age as a more relevant piece of information in judging the old than the young.

Furthermore, expectations about the abilities of the elderly were lower and more negative than those of younger adults.

Green's research (1981) summarizes the consistent perceptions of the aged that have emerged from a wide variety of studies, and notes that the elderly are viewed as conservative, set in their ways, weak, passive, of low energy level, and personally unacceptable. While acknowledging these findings, however, she points out methodological and conceptual problems with most survey instruments and reasons that participant responses may be influenced by a number of variables that interact with age. Lawrence (1974) provided earlier indication of this interactive effect in working with subjects who viewed pictures of individuals that varied in sex, age, and style of dress. The rank order of cues influencing the judgments of the respondents were dress, facial expression, age, body build, and stance. Additionally, age was found to be used in conjunction with other cues more often than in single associations, while other cues

tended to be used most frequently in single associations. Together, these findings strongly indicate that age works in concert with a variety of other cues, a finding that prompted Green to call for additional research to help clarify how characteristics other than age affect reactions to older individuals.

The extent to which age alone influences perceptions of the elderly was also examined by Locke-Connor and Walsh (1980). Participants in their study were asked to evaluate a young or old candidate based upon the results of a job interview, and were randomly assigned to the variable conditions of candidate age, sex, competence, and interview outcome. Results of the study indicated that the outcome of the job interview significantly affected judgments relative to the candidate's competence. Both age and sex, however, showed no significant effect in the candidate's assessment. An important fact pointed out by the authors was that information about a presumably expert assessment has great impact upon a subsequent reaction by another individual. The authors presented an interesting outlook as a result of this finding, and reasoned that it is only in more ambiguous situations (with no expert assessment provided) that age and sex stereotypes have the greatest influence. Therefore, in real life decision making situations where no pre-decision input can be

provided, it appears that both age and sex can still be reliably counted on to influence individual perceptions. This is supported by data from Locke-Connor and Walsh which suggests that the failure of older candidates to be hired was more expected than the failure of younger candidates.

Further evidence of the negative effects of age stereotyping in an interview context was provided in research conducted by Avolio and Barrett (1987). While they concluded that, given the same qualifications, young interviewees were rated more favorably than old interviewees, the results indicated that the evaluations of the old were not significantly different than the evaluations of targets whose age was not specified. This finding questions whether, when comparing young and old, we are discriminating positively in favor of the young or negatively to the detriment of the old. The answer to this may be the former, and insight into this is provided in the 1988 research conducted by Ryan and Heaven, who conclude that situations requiring competence are viewed as less typical and less important for the old. It would indeed be unfortunate if some forms of stereotypic age discrimination may be passive, with the young adults receiving favor because of a lack of attention and low competency expectations for the older adults.

It is apparent that under some conditions age, whether or not in conjunction with other factors, does indeed impact upon perceptions and decisions made about the elderly. Noting this, Kogan (1979) points out that the study of old age stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs is impeded by conceptual and methodological problems. There is reason to believe, according to Kogan (p. 11), that "investigators in the present domain are unaware of the degree to which their empirical outcomes reflect the specific methods employed rather than the construct under study". Essentially, Kogan is concerned with what he feels is an unclear distinction between attitudes and beliefs about the elderly. In addition to this, he points out that most research has failed to establish an attitude - behavior link regarding perceptions of elderly people, a situation that prevents researchers from drawing conclusions regarding behavior from attitudinal judgments about older people. He suggests that attitude scales force the subject to overgeneralize in an attempt to respond to old people as a class without regard for individual differences within that class. According to Kogan, the resulting stereotyping from attitude scales is not a distortion in reasoning, but rather part of the normal human categorization process. Citing studies by Kogan and Shelton (1960) and Griffitt, Nelson, and

Littlepage (1972), Kogan suggested that subject responses to a stimulus person provided more information relative to behavioral intention and age stereotypes than did responses elicited by generalized scales. In both these studies age had less impact on the impressions formed than did the occupation of the stimulus person or the level of similarity of beliefs. Thus, unable to account for the many findings of age stereotyping found in gerontological literature, Kogan (p. 26) attempts to provide an explanation in terms of research design: "If you want to be sure of obtaining age stereotypes from your subjects, make sure that you use a within - Ss design." He explains that this is because the comparative judgments between young and old stimulus persons push age to the forefront as a salient characteristic. A demand character is subsequently generated which allows the subject to make the comparative judgments called for by the experiment. Kogan's (p. 27) reasoning appears sound until he dismisses the problem of forced demand characteristics by claiming that "there are few occasions in the real world...where we are called upon to make comparative judgments between a younger and an older person." This statement shows little sensitivity to the real world employment context, wherein young and old compete daily for a limited number of jobs, promotions, and training opportunities.

The Current Study

The focus of this study was on the existence of age stereotyping in a work environment and whether age and sex could be expected to have an impact upon decisions relating to an individual's employment. Based on prior research (Rosen and Jerdee, 1976, Locke-Connor and Walsh, 1980, Green, 1981, Braithwaite, 1986, Mowesian, 1986), the specific hypothesis was that older employees would be viewed in a less positive way than younger employees. The current study provided a more stringent test of this hypothesis than prior research in three important respects. First, unlike the pool of undergraduate college students used as subjects in many research studies, the subjects (evaluators) in the current study were individuals with work histories that provided them with substantial real life experience that was well suited to the judgments they were required to make. Second, the shortcomings of the within - subjects design highlighted by Kogan (1979) were avoided by using a between - subjects design. Third, the age factor was effectively masked by embedding the judgment material in a realistic, business context.

A second goal of this study was to determine if the sex of an employee impacts on evaluations or interacts with age to impact evaluations. This employee sex

variable and its potential influence was discussed by Kimmel (1988), who concluded that chronological age appeared to be the most dominant factor influencing prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices, and that females were especially vulnerable to age - related discriminatory practices.

The study also tested to see if the employee evaluations are impacted by the sex or age of the evaluator. There is evidence that females are more inclined than males to view the elderly in a positive way. As early as adolescence, females participating in attitudinal research have responded more positively to old persons and have rated old people as more acceptable than did their male counterparts (Couper, Sheehan, and Thomas, 1991). A similar finding was earlier observed by Davis (1988) who noted that, compared with males, females viewed the elderly as more mentally and physically attractive. There is also research evidence that the age of the evaluator may influence the evaluations. This age effect was specifically addressed by Jackson and Sullivan (1988), whose age stereotyping research indicated that the evaluations of old respondents on an age stereotype measure were more favorable than those of young respondents.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 59 men and 47 women between the ages of 26 and 74, all of whom had work experience in a manufacturing environment in the Middle Atlantic or New England states. They were identified and recruited for this study because of their professional and personal contacts with the experimenter. Bachelor level degrees were held by 77.4%, while 17.9% held an advanced degree. Actual work experience varied from three to 42 years. Of the total number, 19.8% were not currently employed in an industrial occupation at the time of this study. One hundred twenty-two subjects were originally identified as potential participants based upon their industrial work experience. Ten of these were eliminated because of incomplete responses. Six did not respond to the request to participate in the study. None of the subjects received payment for their participation.

Materials and Procedure

The subjects were told that they were selected to participate in the study because their industrial work experience would provide them with the requisite frame of reference to evaluate the "In Basket Exercise" material (see Appendix) that was presented. It was explained that

the "In Basket" format was chosen because it is a credible and familiar evaluative and skills assessment tool that simulates certain workplace conditions. They were told that this exercise was designed to approximate a realistic workplace demand for decision making, delegation, and judgment skills and that their responses would be used in refining the "In Basket" methodology used in a future employee assessment project.

Each subject was given an individual package that contained instructions plus ten pages of material. They were advised that the exercise would take approximately thirty minutes to complete. Each was asked to work alone and to select a block of time free of interruptions in order to maximize their concentration on the entire task rather than on any single portion of it.

Subjects began by reviewing the instructions, which indicated that they were to assume the role of a newly appointed district sales manager who was attending to issues left unfinished by the recently resigned predecessor. The scenario takes place on a Saturday immediately preceding a three week overseas business trip, thus creating the need for the subject to make immediate decisions without the benefit of consultation. Each situation involved making business decisions about personnel or products of the firm and all required that

action be taken without delay. Subjects were asked to indicate their decisions and action items directly on the worksheets.

Each subject read one description of a training or promotion judgment which called for the participant to make an evaluation regarding the training or promotion of a hypothetical subordinate employee in the organization. The age and sex variables for this employee were evenly distributed (+/- 1) among the total group of evaluators. In the training judgment, which described the performance problems of a hypothetical customer service employee, the employee was named either Thomas or Theresa Marks to convey gender information and was described as either 29 or 61 years old. All other information provided was identical. Subjects read the description of the situation and were asked to make a evaluation whether to train the employee to improve performance or to terminate the employee and find a suitable replacement. In the promotion judgment, which described a promotional opportunity for an innovative and creative individual, the employee was named either Paula or Paul Murphy to convey gender information and was described as either 29 or 59 years old. As in the training judgment, all other information provided to the evaluator was identical. Subjects read the description of the required judgment and were asked to

choose either to promote the known employee or to hire a new employee with the requisite skills from outside the company. Training or promotion evaluations on the employee were randomly imbedded into the other "in basket" materials to mask the actual emphasis of the study on the effects of age and sex of employee on evaluator perception.

Design

This study utilized the following design: 2 (age of employee) x 2 (sex of employee) x 2 (age of evaluator) x 2 (sex of evaluator). Table 1 presents this design with the cells numbered from 1 to 16. These cell designations will be used in the description of the analysis in the next section. The threshold for the young / old evaluator designation was 50 years of age.

Table 1. Diagram of the 2 (Age of Employee) x 2 (Sex of Employee) x 2 (Age of Evaluator) x 2 (Sex of Evaluator) Design With Cells Numbered From 1 to 16

		<u>Employee</u>			
		Male		Female	
		Young	Old	Young	Old
<u>Evaluator</u>					
Female	Old	cell 1	cell 2	cell 3	cell 4
	Young	cell 5	cell 6	cell 7	cell 8
Male	Old	cell 9	cell 10	cell 11	cell 12
	Young	cell 13	cell 14	cell 15	cell 16

RESULTS

The choices for each judgment (promotion, $n = 52$ and training, $n = 54$) were categorized as either positive (promote / train response) or negative (hire another / terminate response). Tables 2 and 3 show the number of positive responses and total number of evaluators for each cell diagramed in Table 1.

Because of the small cell populations the interactions of all variables in the full $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ design could not be reliably analyzed. To allow for an analysis using larger cell populations and to look at the possible pairwise interactions among the four variables, the data were summed over all different pairs of variables to reflect the six possible pairwise combinations of these four variables. For example, consider the interaction between employee age and evaluator age. Data for promotion of a young employee as evaluated by a young evaluator came from summing over cells 5, 7, 13, and 15 (see Tables 1 and 2). The total for these four cells is 13 positive promotion judgments out of a total of 15 evaluators, or a proportion of $13/15 = .87$ as seen in Table 4. Table 4 and Table 5 show the proportion of evaluators that selected the positive choice for each of the six combinations of variables.

Because no apparent two way interactions among any of the variables were evident, the data were collapsed to one - way tables (see Tables 6 and 7), and chi square tests were performed for all main effects for both the promotion and training judgments. For example, the .80 (20/25) proportion of positive promotion responses for the young employee comes from summing over all eight odd numbered cells, while the .33 (9/27) proportion of positive promotion responses for the old employee comes from summing over all eight even numbered cells.

Summaries of the chi square test results for all main effects are shown in Table 6 and Table 7. These results indicate a significant effect for the age of employee variable in the promotion judgment ($X=11.62$, $p<.001$), and evidence of a similar but not significant ($X=3.2$, $p<.1$) trend for this variable in the training judgment.

No other main effects were significant in either the promotion or training judgment.

Table 2. Number of Positive Promotion Responses (Total Number of Responses per Cell)

<u>Evaluator</u>		<u>Employee</u>			
		Male		Female	
		Young	Old	Young	Old
Female					
	Old	2 (2)	1 (2)	2 (2)	2 (3)
	Young	3 (3)	1 (3)	3 (4)	1 (3)
Male					
	Old	2 (3)	1 (4)	1 (3)	1 (4)
	Young	4 (4)	1 (4)	3 (4)	1 (4)

Table 3. Number of Positive Training Responses (Total Number of Responses per Cell)

		<u>Employee</u>			
		Male		Female	
		Young	Old	Young	Old
26	<u>Evaluator</u>				
	Female				
	Old	2 (2)	1 (2)	1 (2)	1 (3)
	Young	4 (4)	4 (4)	4 (4)	2 (4)
	Male				
	Old	2 (3)	1 (3)	2 (3)	2 (3)
Young	4 (5)	3 (4)	3 (4)	2 (4)	

Table 4. Proportion of Evaluators That Selected the Promotion Option (Total Number of Evaluators) for Each Pairwise Interaction

	Employee Age		Employee Sex		Evaluator Sex	
	Young	Old	Male	Female	Male	Female
Evaluator Age						
Young	.87 (15)	.29 (14)	.64 (14)	.53 (15)	.56 (16)	.62 (13)
Old	.70 (10)	.39 (13)	.55 (11)	.50 (12)	.36 (14)	.78 (9)
Evaluator Sex						
Male	.72 (14)	.25 (16)	.53 (15)	.40 (15)	-	-
Female	.91 (11)	.46 (11)	.70 (10)	.67 (12)	-	-
Employee Sex						
Male	.92 (12)	.31 (13)	-	-	-	-
Female	.69 (13)	.36 (14)	-	-	-	-

Table 5. Proportion of Evaluators That Selected the Training Option (Total Number of Evaluators) for Each Pairwise Interaction

	Employee Age		Employee Sex		Evaluator Sex	
	Young	Old	Male	Female	Male	Female
Evaluator Age						
Young	.88 (17)	.69 (16)	.88 (17)	.69 (16)	.71 (17)	.88 (16)
Old	.70 (10)	.46 (11)	.60 (10)	.55 (11)	.58 (12)	.56 (9)
Evaluator Sex						
Male	.73 (15)	.57 (14)	.67 (15)	.64 (14)	-	-
Female	.92 (12)	.62 (13)	.92 (12)	.62 (13)	-	-
Employee Sex						
Male	.86 (14)	.69 (13)	-	-	-	-
Female	.77 (13)	.50 (14)	-	-	-	-

Table 6. Proportion of Evaluators That Selected the Positive Option for Each Judgment (Total Number of Evaluators) and Chi Square Value for Each Main Effect

Judgement	Age of Employee			Sex of Employee		
	Young	Old	X ²	Male	Female	X ²
Promotion	.80 (25)	.33 (27)	11.62*	.60 (25)	.52 (27)	.38
Training	.81 (27)	.59 (27)	3.2	.78 (27)	.63 (27)	1.42

a. The degrees of freedom for each chi square test of independence was 1.

* p<.001

Table 7. Proportion of Evaluators That Selected the Positive Option for Each Judgment (Total Number of Evaluators) and Chi Square Value for Each Main Effect

Judgement	Age of Evaluator			Sex of Evaluator		
	Young	Old	χ^2	Male	Female	χ^2
Promotion	.59 (29)	.52 (23)	.2	.47 (30)	.68 (22)	2.33
Training	.79 (33)	.57 (21)	2.93	.66 (29)	.76 (25)	.7

a. The degrees of freedom for each chi square test of independence was 1.

DISCUSSION

The study's major hypothesis that older employees would be evaluated in a less positive way than younger employees was partially supported. While the employee age main effect was clearly significant in the promotion judgment, it was not significant in the training judgment, though the difference again favored young over old. Before conclusions can be reached regarding the influence of employee age on employment related judgments, a number of issues that have potential impact on the interpretation of the data and the conclusions that are drawn must be evaluated.

First, why was age of employee a significant factor in the promotion judgment but not in the training judgment? There is an ample body of research that suggests that the presence of individual, specific information relative to a target person results in less stereotypic reactions on the part of the rater. In an analysis of attitudes relating to younger and older adults, Kite and Johnson (1988) showed that when additional information was supplied about the target persons, evaluations of the elderly were more positive

than when the target person was a "generic" older individual. This data supports earlier research by Weinberger and Milham (1975), who compared attitudes toward generalized and personalized young and old people. They found that when only general information was provided attitudes were more negative toward the old person than attitudes toward the young person. However, when personalized information was provided about both target persons the attitudes toward the old became more positive than the attitudes toward the young targets. This suggestion that specific and detailed target descriptions, or lack thereof, can influence responses to target persons may account for the negative and stereotypic responses to the old employees in the promotion judgment, where very little specific, personalized information about the employee is provided. Interestingly, in the training judgment, the additional information that is supplied about the behavior and performance of the young and old employees is negative. It may be that personality attributes of any type (slow, lack of drive, cranky, etc.) remove the generic mask from the old person and evoke sympathy or a linkage with old people who are admired (grandparents, etc.) and who have similar personality characteristics.

In addition, the different consequences of the two judgments may account for the absence of a significant age of employee effect in the training judgment. The promotion judgment offered choices, essentially, of promote or not promote; no further consequences are defined for the employee. The training judgment offered choices with much more clearly defined end results: train the employee or terminate the employee. With such an onerous result possible, and with such a disparity in the choices available, the evaluators may have been less inclined to choose the negative response that threatened the employee with the termination of employment.

The sex of employee variable appears to have had little effect on the evaluations in both judgments, although it was noted in general that male employees received more positive responses than did the female employees. The overall less favorable evaluations for the female employees may be the result of stereotyping beliefs that the female workers are "second incomes" and therefore less deserving of promotion and less impacted by job loss.

Sex of evaluator was not significant in this study, although a similar trend was noted in both judgments for female evaluators to make positive evaluations more frequently than their male counterparts. This trend is consistent with the findings noted earlier (Davis, 1988;

Couper, Sheehan, and Thomas, 1991). Nor was there a significant main effect for the age of evaluator variable although it was observed that old evaluators were more likely to choose the negative option for the training judgment. This is opposite to the findings of Jackson and Sullivan (1988). In the current study it may be that differences in the number of positive evaluations are due to the evaluators' level and history of business experience rather than age per se.

Overall, the results from the analysis of the four main effects in this study raise a number of questions which are relevant for those who are interested in the interpersonal dynamics that are present and influential in the workplace. Because of its demonstrated significance in the promotion judgment, the employee age variable may be of special interest. And while the other main effects were not found to be significant in this study, the trends and observations noted earlier should provide encouragement for future research. Particular care should be taken to develop methodologies that mask the variable under study, use a between - subjects design, and use participants with experience that is relevant for the required evaluation.

Clearly, there is substantial evidence that the age of an employee does impact upon his or her treatment while

at work. If the level of performance and the amount of information available about an individual affect important decisions relative to the treatment of older workers, then there is an immediate and definitive way in which the employer organization can and should respond. Number one among the available responses is training to raise this issue to a higher level of awareness among all employees. For this to be successful one must ascribe to the belief that people in general, and those in the workplace specifically, do not purposely wish to discriminate because of an individual's age. If organizational leaders embrace this belief then positive, organized training responses to educate and correct misconceptions may help. However, the most effective method to reduce the presence of ageism and its prejudicial effects requires going beyond the workplace and out to the societal setting. The opportunity for people to learn and understand lifespan development and an increased emphasis and appreciation for the value of intergenerational relationships are ultimately the way to reduce age to simply one of the multiplicity of factors that describe, without limiting or defining, the individual character.

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APPENDIX

Research Materials

The promotion and training judgments represent the first eight pages of the following "in basket" material. Each subject received one of these evaluation sheets, which was randomly imbedded into the remaining material.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

October 27, 1989

TO: Mike Darnell, District Manager
FROM: C. O'Neill, Manager, Human Resources

C. O'Neill

Please note the following personnel summary. This employee is in your area of responsibility and we need your decision on this. After review, indicate your choice of action and return to me.

SUMMARY:

Paul Murphy is a 59 year old employee with six years of service with the company. He has worked in the manufacturing/assembly facility within your region and has been considered a solid "good" performer.

A supervisor's position has become available in the new "cell" manufacturing area, a position that requires a high degree of innovation and creativity in supervising the work force. Fresh solutions to challenging new problems will be encountered daily by the new supervisor. Paul's a high school graduate and has one year of technical school training. This educational level is approximately equal to other supervisory personnel.

CHOICES OF ACTION:

We need your decision on this immediately, since we must fill this position during the week of November 6th. Indicate (circle) your recommendation and return to me:

- a) Promote Paul, based upon his past work record
- b) Hire a supervisor from outside the company who has worked with a similar product in an established "cell" manufacturing environment.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

October 27, 1989

TO: Mike Darnell, District Manager

FROM: C. O'Neill, Manager, Human Resources

C. O'Neill

Please note the following personnel summary. This employee is in your area of responsibility and we need your decision on this. After review, indicate your choice of action and return to me.

SUMMARY:

Paul Murphy is a 29 year old employee with six years of service with the company. He has worked in the manufacturing/assembly facility within your region and has been considered a solid "good" performer.

A supervisor's position has become available in the new "cell" manufacturing area, a position that requires a high degree of innovation and creativity in supervising the work force. Fresh solutions to challenging new problems will be encountered daily by the new supervisor. Paul's a high school graduate and has one year of technical school training. This educational level is approximately equal to other supervisory personnel.

CHOICES OF ACTION:

We need your decision on this immediately, since we must fill this position during the week of November 6th. Indicate (circle) your recommendation and return to me:

- a) Promote Paul, based upon his past work record
- b) Hire a supervisor from outside the company who has worked with a similar product in an established "cell" manufacturing environment.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

October 27, 1989

TO: Mike Darnell, District Manager
FROM: C. O'Neill, Manager, Human Resources

C. O'Neill

Please note the following personnel summary. This employee is in your area of responsibility and we need your decision on this. After review, indicate your choice of action and return to me.

SUMMARY:

Paula Murphy is a 59 year old employee with six years of service with the company. She has worked in the manufacturing/assembly facility within your region and has been considered a solid "good" performer.

A supervisor's position has become available in the new "cell" manufacturing area, a position that requires a high degree of innovation and creativity in supervising the work force. Fresh solutions to challenging new problems will be encountered daily by the new supervisor. Paula's a high school graduate and has one year of technical school training. This educational level is approximately equal to other supervisory personnel.

CHOICES OF ACTION:

We need your decision on this immediately, since we must fill this position during the week of November 6th. Indicate (circle) your recommendation and return to me:

- a) Promote Paula, based upon her past work record
- b) Hire a supervisor from outside the company who has worked with a similar product in an established "cell" manufacturing environment.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

October 27, 1989

TO: Mike Darnell, District Manager

FROM: C. O'Neill, Manager, Human Resources

C. O'Neill

Please note the following personnel summary. This employee is in your area of responsibility and we need your decision on this. After review, indicate your choice of action and return to me.

SUMMARY:

Paula Murphy is a 29 year old employee with six years of service with the company. She has worked in the manufacturing/assembly facility within your region and has been considered a solid "good" performer.

A supervisor's position has become available in the new "cell" manufacturing area, a position that requires a high degree of innovation and creativity in supervising the work force. Fresh solutions to challenging new problems will be encountered daily by the new supervisor. Paula's a high school graduate and has one year of technical school training. This educational level is approximately equal to other supervisory personnel.

CHOICES OF ACTION:

We need your decision on this immediately, since we must fill this position during the week of November 6th. Indicate (circle) your recommendation and return to me:

- a) Promote Paula, based upon her past work record
- b) Hire a supervisor from outside the company who has worked with a similar product in an established "cell" manufacturing environment.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

October 27, 1989

TO: Mike Darnell, District Manager

FROM: C. O'Neill, Manager, Human Resources

C. O'Neill

Please note the following personnel summary. This employee is in your area of responsibility and we need your decision on this. After review, indicate your choice of action and return to me.

SUMMARY:

Thomas Marks is 61 years old and has been an employee with the company for four years. He is a customer service representative in the sales department and is responsible for handling customer phone calls dealing with product complaints and resolving them personally (within company guidelines) or referring the complaint to a higher company authority.

For the past six months, Thomas' performance has declined.irate customers who were mishandled by Tom have been forced to lodge their complaints with his supervisor or, on two occasions, with the company president. The problem is that Tom is slow and unresponsive, and gets far behind in his follow-up to customers. He lacks drive and tact, and on occasion has snapped at customers on the phone.

CHOICES OF ACTION:

Because of the heavy workload the department faces, we must make an immediate decision as to how Thomas should be handled. Indicate (circle) your recommendation and return to me.

a) talk with Thomas about the problem and provide immediate remedial training to improve performance.

b) terminate Thomas and find a fully qualified replacement who is tactful, yet aggressive, and who can keep up with the heavy department workload.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

October 27, 1989

TO: Mike Darnell, District Manager
FROM: C. O'Neill, Manager, Human Resources

C. O'Neill

Please note the following personnel summary. This employee is in your area of responsibility and we need your decision on this. After review, indicate your choice of action and return to me.

SUMMARY:

Thomas Marks is 29 years old and has been an employee with the company for four years. He is a customer service representative in the sales department and is responsible for handling customer phone calls dealing with product complaints and resolving them personally (within company guidelines) or referring the complaint to a higher company authority.

For the past six months, Thomas' performance has declined.irate customers who were mishandled by Tom have been forced to lodge their complaints with his supervisor or, on two occasions, with the company president. The problem is that Tom is slow and unresponsive, and gets far behind in his follow-up to customers. He lacks drive and tact, and on occasion has snapped at customers on the phone.

CHOICES OF ACTION:

Because of the heavy workload the department faces, we must make an immediate decision as to how Thomas should be handled. Indicate (circle) your recommendation and return to me.

a) talk with Thomas about the problem and provide immediate remedial training to improve performance.

b) terminate Thomas and find a fully qualified replacement who is tactful, yet aggressive, and who can keep up with the heavy department workload.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

October 27, 1989

TO: Mike Darnell, District Manager
FROM: C. O'Neill, Manager, Human Resources

C. O'Neill

Please note the following personnel summary. This employee is in your area of responsibility and we need your decision on this. After review, indicate your choice of action and return to me.

SUMMARY:

Theresa Marks is 61 years old and has been an employee with the company for four years. She is a customer service representative in the sales department and is responsible for handling customer phone calls dealing with product complaints and resolving them personally (within company guidelines) or referring the complaint to a higher company authority.

For the past six months, Theresa's performance has declined.irate customers who were mishandled by Theresa have been forced to lodge their complaints with her supervisor or, on two occasions, with the company president. The problem is that Theresa is slow and unresponsive, and gets far behind in her follow-up to customers. She lacks drive and tact, and on occasion has snapped at customers on the phone.

CHOICES OF ACTION:

Because of the heavy workload the department faces, we must make an immediate decision as to how Theresa should be handled. Indicate (circle) your recommendation and return to me.

a) talk with Theresa about the problem and provide immediate remedial training to improve performance.

b) terminate Theresa and find a fully qualified replacement who is tactful, yet aggressive, and who can keep up with the heavy department workload.

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMO

October 27, 1989

TO: Mike Darnell, District Manager
FROM: C. O'Neill, Manager, Human Resources

C. O'Neill

Please note the following personnel summary. This employee is in your area of responsibility and we need your decision on this. After review, indicate your choice of action and return to me.

SUMMARY:

Theresa Marks is 29 years old and has been an employee with the company for four years. She is a customer service representative in the sales department and is responsible for handling customer phone calls dealing with product complaints and resolving them personally (within company guidelines) or referring the complaint to a higher company authority.

For the past six months, Theresa's performance has declined.irate customers who were mishandled by Theresa have been forced to lodge their complaints with her supervisor or, on two occasions, with the company president. The problem is that Theresa is slow and unresponsive, and gets far behind in her follow-up to customers. She lacks drive and tact, and on occasion has snapped at customers on the phone.

CHOICES OF ACTION:

Because of the heavy workload the department faces, we must make an immediate decision as to how Theresa should be handled. Indicate (circle) your recommendation and return to me.

a) talk with Theresa about the problem and provide immediate remedial training to improve performance.

b) terminate Theresa and find a fully qualified replacement who is tactful, yet aggressive, and who can keep up with the heavy department workload.

You are Les Morgan, the newly appointed District Sales Manager of Continental Construction Accessories (CCA), manufacturers of electrical and building components for use in the residential and commercial building industry. One week ago your predecessor, Mike Darnell, resigned from CCA after a series of disagreements with Arthur Gill, the company president, and Charles Nickels, General Manager.

You know that Mike Darnell left some unfinished work behind and you've come in on Saturday, November 4, to clear up your desk. The attached items require your immediate attention and you must take action today since you will begin a three week overseas business trip on Monday, November 6.

Review the attached material and note your decisions and instructions directly on each memo. Your secretary will pick up the material on Monday and see that your instructions are carried out in your absence.

STAYBUILT CONSTRUCTION CO

8291 CINDERBLOCK BOULEVARD
AMYVILLE, OHIO

October 12, 1989

Mike Darnell
Central District Sales Manager
CONTINENTAL CONSTRUCTION ACCESSORIES
101 Sweeney Road
Centerville, OH

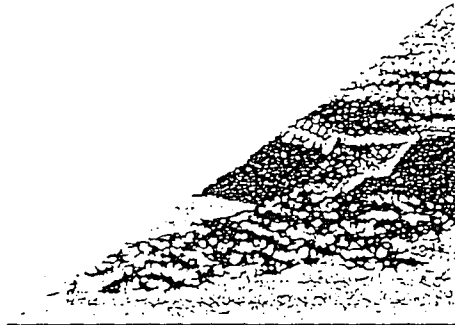
Dear Mr. Darnell:

We have worked closely with you for almost 20 years. We have never in this time had a reason to complain about your products. However, in the past two months we have noticed that the paneling we have been buying from you has a tendency to warp under extreme heat conditions. We are convinced that this warping is an indication of the low, flame-retarding characteristics of this product. As you know, the flame-retardant qualities of paneling is an area of utmost concern for us and all builders. Unless we hear from you immediately concerning this matter, we intend to bring this up to the State Consumer Protection Agency and the State Building Products Commission. I look forward to hearing from you.

A. Johns

Arnold Johns

1-



... Dam (color) will be made 180 ft. higher, ... and 6 mi. of earthen embankments added.

covers any in-

panies, along with a
of Brazilian and Vene-
uers, submitted only target
or "nonresponsive" bids—when
opened the bids in Caracas
before Christmas. The power
known officially as Electrifica-
roni, got only one firm bid for
me from a mainly European
headed by the Italian
regilo. If this group got
absorb cost overruns.
week Edelca officials
to study the nonres-
They have reason
bid ran to \$1.64
responsive bid
ison-Knudsen
n lower. The
from ven-
i Guy F.
ea. If
bid,
get
a

GAS STATION FIRE

Mercury Volunteer Fire Department was called out at 10:00 p.m. last night to quench a one-alarm blaze at Milby's Gas Station on Lockwood Street. The cause of the fire was a short circuit in one of the electrical fixtures. Damage was estimated at \$3,000 to this 6-month old structure.

Construction will be complicated. New concrete needed to thicken the present dam must be cooled so it will not shrink away from the old concrete, according to specifications prepared by Edelca's designer, Harza Engineering Co. in Chicago. The dam's spillway must be raised in a tricky series of increments so that there is always room for possibility to pass. Battalions of earthen have to be shipped in a tent of a small million ...

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The temptation
are afoot to head it
tative Charles A. V
Senator William Prox
planning early legislati
anteed loans under mc
pline. But those efforts
future and face hard sit
time, federal agencies h
started to stampede throu
guarantees loophole in the re
of the 1974 Budget Act.

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the volume of guaran
almost double to \$10
who are worrie
ation of f
the

*Make -
This station
was built with own
ML221 lighting and
St...*



Continental Construction Accessories

101 Sweeney Road

Centerville, Ohio

Ms Donna McQuade
Sales Representative
CCA
197 Ace Boulevard
Blairsville, Ohio

MEMO...

from the desk of

Gas. Nickels

DATE: October 18, 1989

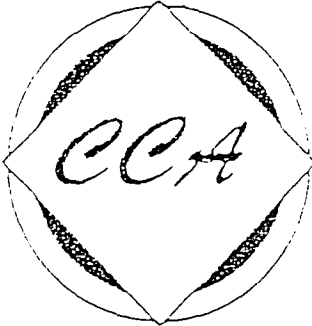
TO: Mike Darnell

Mike:

We have been asked to break in a new sales hire. Her name is Susan Aiken. She has just graduated from the University of North Carolina and comes to us with great recommendations. I expect you to make sure that Susan gets basic experience in demonstrating both the electrical and the woodworking products. She will be with us for six months. We expect her to arrive on November 6 at your office, so be prepared to assign her to a salesperson immediately.

CN

Charles Nickels



MEMO

October 16, 1989

TO: Donna McQuade

FROM: Mike Darnell

Donna:

We recently discussed your moonlighting at that department store. This has got to stop. I am forwarding the attached memo for your information.

Mike Darnell



L.M.,

I thought you would want to see this before it is sent out.

The envelope is attached; just drop it in the mail.

Joan

CONTINENTAL CONSTRUCTION ACCESSORIES

TIPS FROM THE TOP

October 12, 1989

TO: All Regional and District Sales Personnel

I am proud of the way you folks in the field have gotten together in a team effort to play the CCA game!

In any professional team it is essential that all the players devote themselves exclusively to the game. The first-rate ball carrier does not also compete as a swimmer, and I do not think that the first-rate sales representative can, or will, attempt to do anything but sell. The pros have no time for part-time athletes and CCA cannot have time for part-time field representatives. It is up to you coaches, the regional and district managers, to select the pros for us and to put the amateurs on waivers.

Remember, to keep the ball moving, we need a professional offense.



A. W. Gill

*Mike,
this means no
part-time jobs. Tell
your people. CAH*

10/26/89

Memorandum

TO: District Sales Manager
FROM: Lou Heppenstall

Les:

I understand that the Citizens Action Committee for Sound Building Practices plans to use our French Provincial wall board as an example of unsafe building materials in a public demonstration on the 8th of November in downtown Bedrock. These radicals plan to set fire to a panel as an illustration of the danger of modern building supplies. They've even invited the press! I hate to see such good products as ours used in this fashion. I don't know what I'm going to do, but I intend to stop this somehow.

Lou

MEMO...

from the desk of

Gas. Nickels

DATE: November 2, 1989

TO: Charles Nickels

Les:

The Personnel Department needs your input on the attached. Mike dragged his feet on this--let's resolve it now!

It's your choice. Let Personnel know ASAP.

CH

Charles Nickels

VITA

Gerald P. Gormley

Mr. Gormley was born in Norwalk, Connecticut on November 29, 1948. Parents are Edward P. Gormley (deceased) and Anita B. Gormley. After receiving a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Connecticut in 1971, Mr. Gormley served for two years active duty as an officer in the U.S. Army. Since 1973, he has worked in private industry with the Ingersoll Rand Company and, currently, as Vice President of Human Resources with Textron Lycoming Corporation in Stratford, Connecticut. His areas of professional experience are labor negotiations, employee relations, and organizational development. He has been actively involved in changing organization culture, and has designed and directed successful manpower planning and assessment methodologies in a number of corporate settings. In addition to membership in several professional associations, he actively consults on human resource issues in the private, not-for-profit, and academic sectors. Mr. Gormley resides in Easton, Connecticut with his wife Christine and their four children.

END

OF

TITLE