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Talent and Age:

How Do Human Resource Manager Meanings of Talent Influence Their Perceptions of Older Workers?

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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Signed………

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On a personal note, this research was inspired by two older gentleman who over the years I've come to deeply admire and respect. Both demonstrate the powerful social and economic benefit the older worker represents. Humble men who built successful businesses, they continue to be in demand well past conventional retirement age by their many clients. Bob Critchley in the business world and David Bentley in the legal field demonstrate why communities need to positively re-imagine the ageing process and celebrate the wisdom of the elder.

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I wish to end with a note of dedication to my late Mum, Pat Hessell. In my pre-teen years Mum predicted I was going to write something of substance. Whilst Mum clearly hoped it might have been a Man Booker prize winner, nonetheless I know she would be thrilled I have been able to realise my 'itch' to contribute to the world of knowledge. Thanks, Mum, for planting the seed.

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHRI	Australian Institute of Human Resources
ASHRR	Australian Senior Human Resources Roundtable
COTA	Council of the Aged
DA	Discourse analysis
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
ILT	Institutional logics theory
PM	Personnel Management
P-O Fit	Person-Organisation fit
SHRM	Strategic Human Resource Management
SIT	Social identity theory
TA	Thematic analysis
TM	Talent management

Abstract

The business world has long held the view that talent, particularly over the shorter term, is vital to maximising organisation performance. Over the past 30 years large companies have positively embraced talent management initiatives as a critical contributor to business performance although empirical evidence supporting this claim is debatable. Corporate talent management initiatives have also failed to significantly improve workplace diversity. HR managers believe talent to be a scarce resource whilst struggling to define what it means. Whether the proliferation in corporate talent programmes might be associated with a negative Australian business view of the older worker is worthy of exploration.

Little research exists analysing how HR managers understand talent within their personal work environments and the organisation factors that may influence their talent understanding. There also exists very little talent, diversity or older worker literature examining older worker value within the context of organisation talent meanings. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how HR managers, within their work environments, understand talent and how this influences their perceptions of the older worker.

Population ageing is recognised as a mega-trend of this century with major anticipated social and economic ramifications. The Australian Federal Government, in recognising this trend, finds itself with a major policy problem within the workplace, trying to reverse previous practice of encouraging older workers to leave the labour market for the benefit of the younger worker. The Australian Government is now focused on encouraging older workers to continue working.

However, despite the changing older worker value political rhetoric, within the Australian workplace, older workers have a negative image with evidence of workplace discrimination and barriers in hiring decisions. Simplistic negative older worker stereotype frameworks have largely been adopted to explain a business reluctance to increase the mix of older workers within the workforce. Such an approach ignores the possibility of broader institutional factors influencing perceptions of the older worker. The adoption of talent management programmes within large Australian based corporations represents a case in point.

Eighteen senior HR executives working in large organisations operating within Australia were interviewed for this thesis as part of a grounded theory research approach. The industries involved spanned financial services, technology, medical services, manufacturing and distribution, tertiary education and professional services. A triangulation method was adopted for the study. This consisted of the afore-mentioned semi-structured interviews and an examination of the annual company reports of the HR interviewee organisations plus a review of trade journals focused on talent and diversity management. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

The thesis finds that institutional factors play a more significant role in HR manager talent meaning than previous studies realise. The major finding is that HR managers' perceptions of talent reflect a particular institutional logic perspective. This finding is presented as having negative implications for older worker employability. A model is developed to explain how HR managers understand talent as they do and its negative consequences for the older worker. The thesis highlights ageism may be more institutionalised than is currently understood.