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WORKPLACE AGEISM IN TURKEY:  
AN URBAN LEGEND OR REALITY? – A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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– A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

**TÜRK İŞ YAŞANTISINDA YAŞ AYRIMCILIĞI: ŞEHİR EFSANESİ Mİ  
YOKSA GERÇEK Mİ? – KALİTATİF BİR ÇALIŞMA**

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- 1) iş yaşantısında yaş ayrımcılığı
- 2) yaşa bağlı ayrımcılık
- 3) İK uygulamaları
- 4) lider desteği
- 5) alternatif kariyer patikaları

**Anahtar Kelimeler (İngilizce)**

- 1) ageism in worklife
- 2) age-based discrimination
- 3) HRM implications
- 4) leader support
- 5) alternative career paths

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to understand whether organisations in Turkey have an ageist and discriminative attitude towards their older employees. The study examined the existence of ageism and age-based discrimination with the help of three groups of participants: Firstly, the employees who are over 45 that do not hold managerial positions; secondly the human resources managers, and lastly the function managers, all to be in the same organisations. The frequencies, recurrences and attributions of expressions are examined to understand the general attitudes towards a particular age group. The primary concern of the study is to understand whether there is a perceived potential in older employees to be valued as important assets to serve to the future of organisations, and the ways chosen to reveal this potential for higher work performance. Developmental activities of organisations and the intention of older employees to participate those activities are also examined. The mediating role of Human Resources Management (HRM) implementations and leadership support are also among the key findings of this study. And finally, alternative career paths to be designed for older employees were investigated from different point of views of the participants. Due to limited research available, this study is expected to contribute to the social sciences literature based on ageism in work life in Turkey.

Keywords: ageing, ageism in work life, age-based discrimination, older employees, HRM implications, leadership support, alternative career paths.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma ile, Türkiye’deki iş yerlerinde belirli bir yaşın üzerinde olan çalışanlara yönelik yaş ayrımcılığı yapıp yapılmadığı ve bu ayrımcılık neticesinde işe alımdan başlayarak tüm kariyer hareketlerinde belirli bir yaşın üzerindeki çalışanlardan vazgeçme potansiyeli olup olmadığının anlaşılması amaçlanmıştır. Yaş ayrımcılığının varlığı çalışmaya katılan üç ayrı çalışan profiline odaklanılarak tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır: 45 yaş üzeri yönetici olmayan çalışanlar, insan kaynakları yöneticileri ve çeşitli fonksiyonların yöneticileri. İfadelerin frekansları ve yoğunluğu analiz edilerek belirli bir yaşın üzerinde olan çalışanlara yönelik eğilimler, önyargılar, algılar ve tutumlar araştırılmıştır. Yapılan çalışmanın en temel odak alanı, belirli bir yaşın üzerinde olan çalışanların, örgütlerin geleceği düşünüldüğünde, değerli birer kaynak olarak görülüp görülmediğini anlamak ve ilgili potansiyeli açığa çıkarmak için ne tür yollar benimsediklerini anlamaya yöneliktir. Bu bağlamda, belirli bir yaşın üzerindeki çalışanların gelişim faaliyetlerine katılmada sergiledikleri gönüllülük düzeyi de araştırmanın önemli konuları arasındadır. Bunun yanı sıra, insan kaynakları uygulamaları ve lider desteğinin aracı değişkenlik rolü de çalışmanın bulguları arasında yer almaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında son olarak, farklı katılımcı profillerinin gözünden, belirli bir yaşın üzerindeki kişiler için hazırlanabilecek alternatif kariyer patikaları da tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Türkiye’de işyerinde yaş ayrımcılığı konusunda yapılan çalışmaların oldukça kısıtlı olmasından dolayı, bu çalışmanın sosyal bilimler literatürüne katkı sağlayabileceği öngörülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yaşlanma, iş yaşantısında yaş ayrımcılığı, yaşa bağlı ayrımcılık, İK uygulamaları, lider desteği, alternatif kariyer patikaları.

## INTRODUCTION

This study addresses an unnamed phenomenon rising in Turkish Organisations, Ageism. Since, the age composition was young until recently, ageism has not been considered as a remarkable subject to studies. Data derived from a report of Euromonitor International (2013) reveals that the median age of the population in Turkey is expected to reach to 36,5 by 2030. And the ageing of the population is an ongoing process where the birth rates drop, and life expectancy of increase. This means that, the workforce is also in an ageing process in Turkish work-life.

The term Ageism was firstly introduced by Robert Neil Butler in 1968 and it has been defined as a type of discrimination based on age. A similar but more recent definition was made by World Health Organisation (WHO) in the Global Report of Ageism explaining that “ageism has several interrelated aspects: (...) stereotypes (thoughts), prejudice (feelings) and discrimination (actions or behaviour)” (2021). Thoughts and feelings of people lead to discriminative behaviours both in social life and in work life. Major stereotypes towards older adults are “illness, impotency, ugliness, mental decline, mental illness, uselessness, isolation, poverty, and depression” (Palmore, 1999). These stereotypes consequently lead to an elimination process of older people from several settings.

Since the ageing workforce is growing rapidly, it is important to understand if an ageist attitude towards older employees grow in Turkey, too. Even though it has not been a popular subject of interest in Turkey so far, daily practices Turkish work-life verify that ageism could be an unrevealed or unnamed problem in organizations. Starting from the hiring process, older employees seem to be eliminated from organizations gradually. According to The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) statistics, employees over 35 comprise more than 50% of the labour force in Turkey, and unemployment rates for employees over 35 is increasing (2022).

**Table 1-1. Unemployment Rates in Turkey, 2011-2020**

	<b>15-24</b>		<b>25-34</b>		<b>35-44</b>		<b>45-54</b>		<b>55-59</b>		<b>60-64</b>	
	<b>2011</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Females</b>	20,7	29,9	13,6	17,3	8,4	11,6	5,1	8,6	2,2	4,5	1	2,4
<b>Males</b>	17,1	22,5	9,3	14	6,9	9,4	7,5	9,9	7,3	9	4	7,3

Source: OECD (2022), Labour Force Statistics, Turkey.

Where organisations tend not to hire older employees (Ogutogullari & Kilic, 2016), the increase in the unemployment rate of older employees seem to be an irreversible threat. It is observable that the main tendency is to hire young generations and invest on them whereas the older employees seem not to be worth investing on.

Consequently, organisations seem to be missing the opportunity to benefit from their older employees for a longer period. As a result, older employees presumably find themselves eliminated from work-life and their experience, mastery, and organisation knowledge seem to be lost. This is considered to be an important risk for the organisations in the medium and long term because, Turkey has the potential to come across with the risk of a decrease in the active workforce and the experienced white-collar employees, even their ages are older, might become much more important assets for the organizations.

Besides, even the retirement age in Turkey has increased to ages 60-64, older employees seem to have a risk of being eliminated from work-life earlier than their retirement age. OECD (2022) also reveals that employment of employees between 50-54 is 48,5% in Turkey, whereas in OECD countries it is 78,8%. Naturally, older employees themselves also suffer from unemployment and protecting an ideal life standard.

And finally, ageism is also a threat for the governments where the health and pension systems face sustainability problems in the whole world. The ageing of the

population is considered as a threat on economic growth (Bloom et al., 2003; as cited in Usta&Murat, 2017), social security systems' sustainability, the population of the workforce and therefore to the tax systems (Bouman, et al., 2015). That is, while older adults' population increase proportionally and at the same time they are retired or unemployed, it means that the tax income of governments will be in a decrease; and parallel with that, the burden on the pension and health systems will increase.

In this qualitative study, the main objective is to investigate if ageism has become an issue to be solved for the good of employees, organisations and for the government of Turkey. Secondly, the aim is to understand solutions or alternative paths to extend older employees' employment. Older employees' skill set plays an important role to satisfy work needs, therefore willingness for development, and the leadership support are also considered as variables that have an impact on this context.

The empirical studies on ageism are limited in Turkey. Studies are mainly based the health industry and students. More importantly, ageism in Turkish work life is a subject studied less than ageism as a general concept. With this study, a contribution to social sciences literature in Turkey is expected in terms of workplace ageism.

# **1 BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

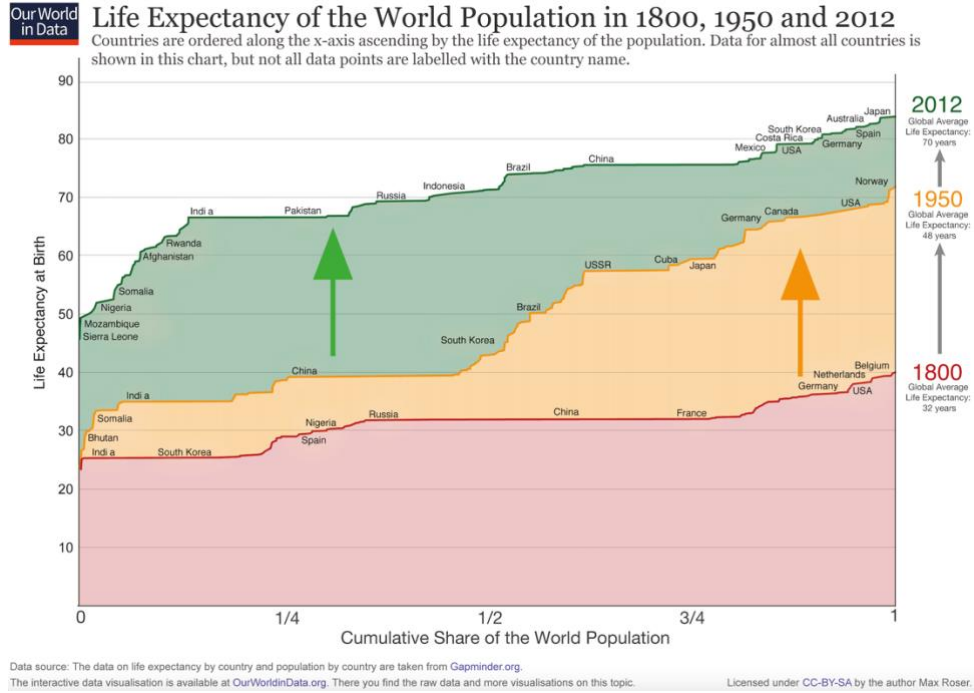
## **1.1 AGEING AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION OF POPULATIONS**

Thanks to scientific and technological improvements, people live longer, and the number of people at old age increase in the whole wide world. By the increasing accessibility to consumed resources and developments in science, especially in medical care, ageing of the population becomes a more remarkable success story day by day, and lifespan of humanity keeps increasing strikingly as time goes by.

A quick review of history would be helpful to specify this fact. A report, derived from studies of the American history professor James C. Riley (2005) was published by the United Nations (UN) Population Division in 2019. The report reveals that, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the average life expectancy in the whole world had only been predicted to be 32 years. It was not common to live longer than 40 years. Just in 150 years, in 1950, it has become 42 years in half of the world by the help of improvements in health and medicine (UN, 2019). Additionally, by the end of World War II, a new chapter in the whole world has begun, and societies had the chance to settle down and start to improve their lives in every aspect under the light of industrialism. Of course, this fact also had an impact on getting improved decade by decade. Meanwhile, countries who did not have the opportunity to benefit from medical improvements did not have a sprint in their life expectancy and remained short-lived for a long time compared to the improved countries.

And finally in 2012, the global average life expectancy increased to 70 years (Figure 1.1), where all the people of all the countries had the chance to access to the improved solutions in medicine, and the gap between the two subgroups closed to a large extent (UN, 2019).

**Figure 1-1. Life Expectancy of the World Population in 1800, 1950, 2012**

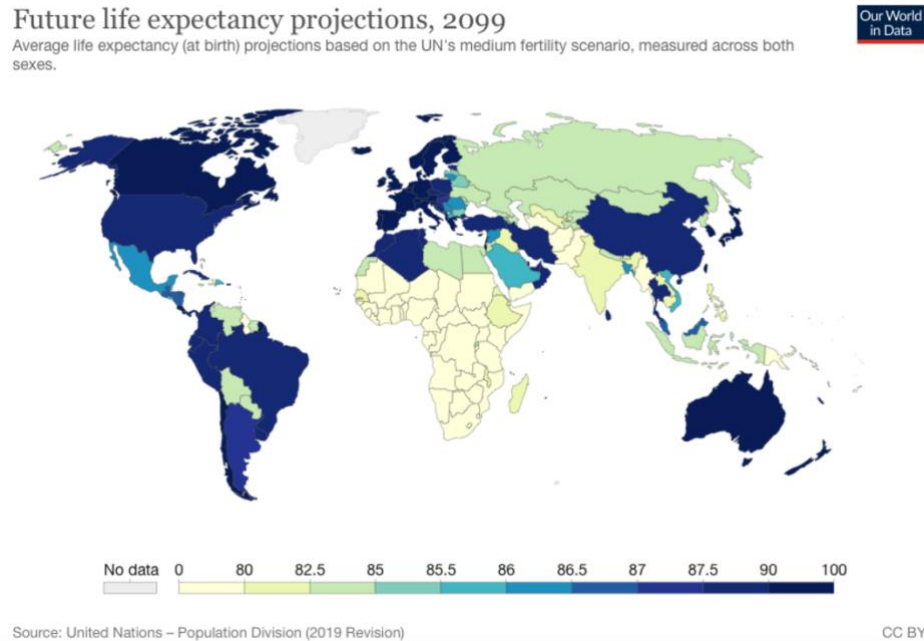


Source: United Nations, Population Division (2019).

The UN Population Division (2019) also estimates the average life expectancy to be over 80 in the whole world except from Guyana, most of Africa, Yemen, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, and Papua New Guinea (Figure 1.2). Even in those countries who seem to have disadvantages to live up to their 80s are predicted to have a lifespan of 70 and over. This also means that, all the people of the whole world will have the chance to life twice as more comparing to the beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In short, the increasing opportunities to live a longer and healthier life makes it possible to discover the unknown limits of a human being, and who knows where we are going.

**Figure 1-2. Future Life Expectancy Projections, 2099**



Source: United Nations, Population Division, 2019

Consequently, it has become a known fact that the population of elders keeps growing. Besides, the 7<sup>th</sup> World Population Ageing Report of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of WHO states that, in every country in the world, the size and proportion of older people in the population increase accordingly. As regards to the statistics, the number of people over 65 is expected to increase to approximately 1,5 billion from 700 million by 2050. Moreover, a person who turns 65 years old could expect to live an additional 17 years in 2015-2020 (2019). This makes the potential life expectancy to become 82 in 30 years as mentioned before.

It would also be helpful to consider the age standards that have been revised in 2015 by WHO to understand the concept better. Adults from 25 to 44 are considered as “young” in the new world order. “Middle-age” is defined as 44-60; “elderly age” is 60-75; “senile age” is 75-90; and “long-livers” are 90 and older (WHO, 2015). So,



while mentioning the increase of the older population, the groups of “elderly age”, “senile age” and “long-livers” are comprised.

On the other side, birth rates keep descending, depending on several social and economic factors such as the changing social status of women, increasing level of education, increasing age of marriage, use of several birth-control methods, etc. According to OECD Fertility Rates Statistics (1970-2020) there is no single country on the earth that the fertility rates did not descend consistently in the past decades. As regards to many studies, the reason for that is “postponed family formation and child-bearing, and a decrease in desired family sizes” (OECD, 2020). In short, the lifespan of people extends whereas the birth rates drop down.

The extension of human lifespan and the reduction of birth rates lead to a shift in the age distribution of the population. The proportion of older people in populations grows whereas the proportion of younger people descends gradually. In the same report, another striking data is that the older people outnumbered the population of children under 5; and by 2050, they are expected to outnumber the population of adolescents and youth who are in the age group of 15-24, too (UN, 2019).

This transformation in the population age distribution is named as a “Demographic Transition” and the term was first coined by the American demographer and the first director of United Nations Population Division Frank W. Notestein in 1945. Another demographer John R. Weeks defines it as a process in which a country moves from high birth and high death rates to low birth and low death rates, and “this is actually a whole set of transitions relating to changes in health and mortality, fertility, migration, age structure, urbanization, and family and household structure” (2011). And consequently, that makes the median age of a population older than it was before.

The change in the age composition of the population is said to bring several challenging consequences. For instance, the sustainability of pension systems of countries is being threatened because of the increasing number of retired employees. Assumably, due to the increasing number of older adults, the health systems also are

being challenged. In a way, retired employees who no longer contribute to the economic production and the tax incomes of countries turn out to be a burden for the governments (Bouman et al., 2015). If the economic systems of governments are not expected to be capable of carrying the increasing number of retired employees, an extended work life is critical for both the older employees themselves and for the economic systems they are related to.

From the employer point of view, the age composition of the workforce also changes because of the increasing number of older employees (Picchio, 2015), and this might lead to a blockage for desired younger employees if older employees hold on in organizations for longer periods. Holding on in the organizations also mean that the employers' employment costs become higher, and unfortunately this does not seem to be a favourable option for the employer. Studies reveal that small enterprises with a hundred or less employees, and also large enterprises with a thousand and more employees were not very fond of employing older employees because of their costs (Munnell, et al., 2006).

Besides, it is also widely acknowledged that people in old age seem not to be so attractive in social groups where, ageism continues to be a worldwide phenomenon (McConatha, Schnell, Volkvein, Riley & Leach, 2003; Mc.Conatha et al., 2013). Both in social life and in work life, age related stereotypes and prejudices lead to ageism according to research. But it would be beneficial to mention that old age in social life and in work life may differ in terms of numbers. Research on ageing or ageism mostly focus on the age 60 and over. But in work-life, ageist attitudes have an impact on adults who are still in their middle-ages. That is why we need to understand the concept of "work life expectancy" together with the concept "ageism" for a better understanding of what old age is in work life and what ageism account for the ones who are considered as old.

## 1.2 AGEISM AND WORK LIFE

Ageism is a term first coined by Robert Neil Butler in 1968, and it is defined as a “systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against individuals or groups based on their age”. So, both the thoughts and the behaviours toward older people are subject to ageism. Stereotyping shapes the thoughts, feelings or attitudes and has the potential to lead discriminative behaviours. As Erdman Palmore also indicates, “ageism is similar to racism and sexism” (2001). Palmore in his book “Ageism – Negative and Positive”, also calls ageism as “the 3<sup>rd</sup> great “ism” after racism and sexism” in the USA (1999). It is a type of discrimination that has been growing since the 1970s. It stands both for a prejudice and a discriminative behaviour against the older age group. Palmore also calls it as “negative ageism”, and states that “positive ageism” is also a type of ageism. Positive ageism is kind of a positive discrimination not against, but for older people. The literature focusing on ageism is mainly concerned with “negative ageism” and the scope of this study is also focusing on negative ageism.

But how can a success story of living longer in a healthier way end up leading a type of discrimination? Why would older people be subject to a type of discrimination?

The evolutionary theories starting from Charles Darwin, indicate that physical and cognitive skills decline with age (Catell, 1971; Horn, 1978; Horn & Catell, 1967; as cited in Ljubuncic & Reznik, 2009). As Darwin states, all the living creatures are subject to natural selection, and ageing brings the end of life closer and closer each day, and for that reason, ageing means being ineffective in nature. The evolutionary theorists, starting from August Weissmann (1891) to contemporary researchers bring various explanations to this fact; the fact that physical and cognitive skills deteriorate by age.

The deterioration of cognitive skills has become a consistent finding of research and it is distinguished between two types of ability: fluid and crystallized. The fluid intelligence has an impact on agility, problem solving, abstract thinking,

spatial ability, and short-term memory. It starts declining in young adulthood and continues to decline in to the 60s. Crystallized skills are verbal ability, semantic thinking, and general meaning that take reference from the long-term memory. These abilities are more stable until 70s (Cattell,1963; as cited in Ljubuncic & Reznik, 2009). Changing from person to person, the deterioration of cognitive skills starts to become visible especially in old ages.

Although most of the people are not even aware of the evolutionary theories about ageing, or about the declining process of cognition, older adults are often perceived and stereotyped as inflexible, frail, incompetent, out of touch, and slow (Posthuma & Champion, 2009) in practical life, too. 9 major negative stereotypes toward older adults are defined as illness, impotency, ugliness, mental decline, mental illness, uselessness, isolation, poverty, and depression (Palmore, 1999). Consequently, it comes as no surprise that older employees become eligible to stereotyping in their workplace (Manzi, et al., 2018), too. Ageing is a process each and every human being would face in standard conditions, in fact this kind of a discrimination is all-embracing.

To understand what ageism is, it would also be necessary to consider it as a stereotype threat in work life. Stereotype threat is the concern that others are evaluating a targeted individual through the lens of negative group-based stereotypes (Steele, 1997). This is also what Palmore has named as “negative ageism”. Older employees are often considered as less productive (McGregor & Grey, 2002; Shah & Kleiner, 2005; Smith, 2001; Taylor & Walker, 1994), and comparing to younger employees they are perceived as less trainable and promotable (Arrowsmith & McGoldrick, 1996; Finkelstein, burke, & Raju, 1995; Steinhauser, 1998). Stereotype threat is a phenomenon that also has a negative effect on individual performance, attitudes, motivations, and well-being (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Manzi et al., 2018). In other words, independent from their real skills and potential, older employees may suffer from these negative attitudes. As one of the topics of stereotype threat, ageism leads organizations not to recognize the value, the skills, and the potential of their older employees.

It is also possible to see the consequences of ageism in the hiring processes of organizations. Findings show that older employees receive fewer opportunities for employment interviews (Finkelstein et al., 1995; McCullin & Masrshall, 2001; Salthouse & Maurer, 1996; M. Wilson & Kan, 2006). In most of the job postings an expected experience range is being mentioned, and that leads to the elimination of the older candidates. If one is beyond the age range criteria, it becomes impossible to be a candidate, too. Even though discriminative job postings are prohibited by legislation in many countries, it is still possible to see job postings including age specifications (UNECE, 2019;).

Distinguishing and managing the risks of stereotype threat, and especially ageism, is highly important because most of the industrial economies need older employees to remain in the workforce longer both to reduce the strain on the retirement systems and to carry on making financial contributions (Walker, 2007). “Population ageing is often depicted as a challenge to economic progress and to the sustainability of public budgets” (Rafeh&Ferre, 2021). That is, older employees that are eliminated from work life cannot contribute to the tax system of countries anymore, and also become a burden for pension and health systems.

Being at “old age” in general social life and in work life have different meanings. Accordingly, work life expectancy is another dimension to be considered in the context. The Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) published an estimation stating the possible age range to remain in work life, that is 16 to 75 in 1982, then in 1986 revised the age range to 14-75 (Department of Labor, 1982; Department of Labor, 1986; as cited in Schieren, 1993). A more recent and remarkable statistics was published by Euromonitor in 2020. Expected duration of active working life in 34 European Union countries (including the candidate countries like Turkey) is indicated as 35,7 years in the report. The longest expected work life duration was reported in Sweden, which is 42 years. The beginning of work life is considered as the age 15. That means, the expected work life duration is between ages 15-51. Even in Sweden, the oldest age to participate work life is reported as 57 (Eurostat, 2020). This recent

study, comparing to the statistics of BLS, stands out to address the older employees' unemployment risk clearly. Where 50s are considered as middle-ages rather than old ages according to WHO, it can be seen that employment of the older adults (actually middle ages) is an issue to focus on. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act in the US finds age 40 eligible for coverage, whereas age 62 is the average retirement age again in the US. And from a psychological point of view old age is considered age 45, an age where most of the population must use corrective lenses for near-vision acuity (Charness & Czaja, 2006). So, there is no specific consensus on the cut-off where old age starts in work life. Related to most of the studies, focusing on the age 40 and over would be significant.

In most of the OECD countries, increasing the participation of older employees to work-life (45-64 years) is taken as primary strategy to cope with demographic challenges, and the retirement of skilled workers (Meyers, 2016; UNECE, 2019). It is possible to say that all the countries that are in a demographic transition stage, sooner or later will have to be considering ageism as an issue and will have to study on precautions and encouragements that would support older employees to extend their work lives to a longer period. Even if the existing regulations on late retirement in many countries make it possible to extend work life to the mid 60s, it seems as if the elimination of employees from work life gradually increase starting from the middle-ages.

### **1.2.1 Ageism and Work Life in Turkey**

The decrease in birth and death rates is to become a subject with growing interest in Turkey like all the developing countries in the world. A research report which is rolled out by Euromonitor International reveals that Turkey's population would be in a rapid ageing process in between 2012-2030, and the median age in 2030 is expected to reach to 36,5 from 29,7 (2013). In other words, it is possible to consider Turkey as a country which is in a demographic transition process, too. The population

is ageing, the demographic composition is in a change, and parallel with that there is an increase in the number of older employees. According to Euromonitor's report, the working age population in Turkey (15-64 years) will grow by 21.7% from 50.5 million people in 2012 to 61.5 million people in 2030 (2013). Accordingly, the population of older employees is also expected to increase.

As a country that is struggling from industrialization and modernization, ageing has not received significant attention in Turkey, because until recently, Turkey had a young population (McConatha et al., 2004). As Imamoglu & Imamoglu (1992) also suggest, old age has not been considered as a primary research subject in Turkey. A limited number of studies focused on ageing and ageism, in terms of being in a demographic transition period, and there are studies mainly sampling the health industry or students in Turkey. On the other hand, the ageing workforce, and the potential risk of discrimination they might face, in other words "ageism in work life", has not been an important concern so far. Turkey is a country that will come across with the risk of a decrease in the active workforce and the experienced white-collar employees, apart from their ages, will become a much more important asset for the organizations. Besides, even the retirement age in Turkey has increased to ages 60-64 starting from 1999, older employees seem to have a risk of being eliminated from work-life earlier than their retirement age.

Daily practices in the work life in Turkey verify that ageism could be an unrevealed or unnamed problem in organizations. Starting from the recruitment process, older employees seem to be eliminated from organizations gradually. TurkStat reports reveal that 57% of the workforce and 40% of the unemployed population is at age 35 and more (2018). A report by OECD (2022) reveals recent statistics, that is unemployment rate of women over 35 increased to 43,8% and unemployment of men over 35 increased to 61,3% by the end of 2020.

According to these statistics, unemployment rates increase rapidly for the population who is at the age 50 and more. Since there are less job postings specifying

age criteria today, it needs to be explained why so many middle-aged people are unemployed.

Research on ageism in Turkey, is based mainly on population and employment statistics, and there is a need to understand if old age is the main cause to be eliminated from work life. On a country where the hot topic is the unemployment of young generations, unemployment of the older adults is still not a focus area. After all, it is a known fact that employers prioritize young candidates for hiring and older employees for rescission (Arıcı, 2005; Yuksel, 2007; Uyanik; 2021; as cited in Ogotogullari & Kilic, 2016).

### **1.3 RECRUITMENT AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS**

Each employee has a role, and a related mission with this role in an organization. This role is expected to be explained in each job description. As long as the assignments, tasks, duties, and expectations are fulfilled, an employee keeps accomplishing his/her mission that is driven from the job description of his/her position. Business results related to the mission exhibits the level of performance, and if the performance of an employee is evaluated as high, it means that there is nothing to complain about for the organization.

The essential meaning of the term performance is “the act of doing a job, an activity, etc.” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Campbell (1999) defined performance as behaviour relevant to the attainment of an organization’s verifiable goals (Torlak et al., 2018). Naturally in all organizations, gaining satisfactory or high performance from each employee leads to achievements, success, and growth. That is why, performance is a key indicator to evaluate employees. And organisations use a range of systems to evaluate, manage, reward, and direct job performance of their employees (Murphy, 2018). Driven from those performance evaluations, decisions about salary, training programs, and even employee terminations are taken (Murphy et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018). These performance evaluations cover both the business results and the



behaviours that indicate the skills of the employees (Armstrong, 2006; as cited in Torlak et al., 2018). So, it would be reasonable to think that, regardless of their ages, employees must be evaluated according to their performance and skill set.

Performance is the main indicator and has a priority of course, but the skills that identify the capacity or the potential of the employee also gives an idea to organizations if it is worth to invest on their employees. The skill set of employees often is defined as competencies and stands for the potential of each employee. A competency is defined as an ability or skill (Merriam-Webster, 2021) to fulfil a specific job description. So, both the level of performance and the level of competencies explain the value of an employee for the organization.

At first glance, performance management systems seem to secure employees as subjects to objective evaluations, however performance management systems have been criticised for being inefficient tools starting from the last decade (Murphy, 2020). Even if most of the organizations use performance management systems, there is little evidence that the performance management systems and policies have an outstanding impact on performance outcomes, and provide fair evaluations (Murphy, 2018).

For instance, even a performance management system must be clear in the rating criteria and must be based on the job descriptions (Hedge et al., 2006), the raters being negatively biased toward old age, reflect age stereotypes in their evaluations (Sterns & Miklos, 1995; as cited in Perry et al., 1996). Even though the basic characteristics of a performance appraisal system for older employees have no difference from that of young employees, the system partially is based on subjective rating criteria (Hedge et al., 2006). And this leads to a subjective and/or ageist attitude toward older employees. For instance, older employees are known to be forced to retire for being no longer competent (Palmore, 1999). The evaluation of “being competent” is mainly susceptible and considered to be based on subjective ratings.

It is possible to see the same approach in recruitment processes, too. Older applicants seem to have less hiring opportunities. The findings of a study conducted in the UK by Drydakis et al. (2017) revealed that the chance for being accepted for a job

interview was three times less than younger applicants. Specifically for the white-collar positions, older applicants were 42,7% less likely to be accepted for interviews. Another study which is conducted by Perry, et al. (1996) reveals that, if the raters are biased against older age, the more discrimination of older candidates appear.

These findings state clearly that an older applicant is eliminated from a hiring opportunity regardless of his/her skills or experience. Old age becomes a hidden criterion of the biased evaluator. Prejudices and stereotypes against older applicants make it difficult for them to participate back in work life, and most probably because of that reason, unemployment of older adults become an enormous problem.

### **1.3.1 Recruitment and Performance Appraisals in Turkey**

Performance management systems are widely used tools to evaluate employees especially in corporate companies of Turkey. It is possible to observe the large effort put to performance management systems and to the improvement of such systems. Besides, the companies that did not complete their institutionalization process, do not use performance management systems, yet. There are approximately 3,5 million companies that are classified as small and medium businesses by TurkStat. That is the 99% of the whole business life in Turkey. And it is reported that 95% of these companies are still family businesses, have less than 250 employees, and in most of them family members are directly in the execution of the business instead of being on the business. Most of these companies still do not employ executive level professionals. These companies comprise 73% of the total of employment in Turkey and the average lifespan of these companies is 34 years (TurkStat, 2020).

The short life of most of these family companies, and the small size of them makes an advanced human resources approach problematic in general. Human Resources functions still work mainly as Personnel Management functions, even their names have become Human Resources Management. Moreover, Human Resources Management as a profession emerged by the beginnings of 1990s in Turkey (Eroglu,

2016), and it still can be considered as a profession under development. The transformation and modernization of the HRM world in Turkey has begun by the entrance of international consultancy firms to Turkish market in the 1990s. In the same period, modern HRM implementations and techniques stepped in, and the real modernization in HR functions spread rapidly especially in large corporations by 2000s (Ercek, 2004).

Depending on general observations, even performance management systems are the most common HR implementations, it is still possible to say that there are many companies that do not have a performance management system, even they are in the Top 500 Industrial Enterprises List (Istanbul Chamber of Industry, 2020). Even worse, there may even not be a specific human resources department in companies with small size (Ozcelik and Aydinli, 2006).

In the same context, the recruitment processes of organizations are also a problematic, and it is not clear if recruitment processes are based on targeted competencies in most of Turkish companies. Competency based hiring is still not being practiced widely, which means the employee selection process depends more on a subjective approach. In one of the recent research projects, it is stated that “hiring is conducted unfairly” both in Turkey and Iran (Torlak et al., 2018). Again, in large companies, recruitment policies are mainly specified and written (Ozcelik & Aydinli, 2006), but in small and medium businesses which comprise 99% of Turkish business world, it would be hard to say the same thing.

In the context of ageism, there is no empirical study on how older employees' performance is evaluated and measured, and there are no findings about the recruitment process of older employees. But it is possible to observe that job postings in known internet sites like [www.kariyer.net](http://www.kariyer.net), [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) mention various criteria about years of experience which risks older employees to be ideal candidates for many organizations. A study conducted by Man (2020) reveals that, from among fifteen hundred job postings of ISKUR, an average of 20% still specify age limitations for applications.

## **1.4 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

Together with all these, it is also important to review what organizations do with their people to increase and perpetuate high performance. Of course, HRM implementations do not only consist of recruiting, and measuring performance. For the sake of ideal business results, training and developing people is also an important mission of HR departments. “Given the continual influx of technology in most workplaces and the subsequent change in work demands, training is an issue of critical importance to everyone. In order to keep pace with changes in jobs and jobs demands, employees need to consistently learn new skills and new ways of doing things” (Charness & Czaja, 2006).

Especially in large companies where strategic human resources management takes place, training and development activities are expected to be everlasting. Strategic HRM is about to form a strong link between business strategies and HRM actions (Schuler & Jackson, 1987; Grundy, 1998; Ferris et al., 1999; Gratton et al. 1999; Sheppeck & Militello, 2000; Huang, 2001; as cited in Ozcelik & Aydinli, 2006). By this link, HRM aligns all its actions to make it possible for all the people in an organization to execute strategies of the main business. So, an advanced HRM approach naturally increases the focus to grow people and their competencies for better business results. As it is mentioned before, an advanced HR approach such as strategic HRM is mostly available in large businesses. Even so, when it comes to training and developing people, there are many findings that state ageist attitudes exist in many companies.

### **1.4.1 Ageist Attitudes towards Older Employees’ Trainability**

When it comes to training and developing older employees, various age stereotypes related to older employees have considerable influence on the actions taken. Even the older employees are expected to participate developmental activities,

the expectation of them to develop or grow seem to be suspicious. It would be helpful to recall stereotypes toward old age to analyse the level of ageist attitudes in organizations.

#### **1.4.1.1 Stereotype-I: Older Employees are not Worth Training**

One of the most remarkable stereotypes related to older employees is that “they are not worth training” (Hedge et al., 2006). As Lazazzara et al. argue, “a vicious circle is established whereby companies do not want to invest in training for older workers and at the same time older workers are discriminated against on the labour market because they are untrained” (2013). One of the reasons for such a stereotype is that older employees are believed not to be willing to learn new skills because of having a limited time left in work life, and consequently they do not have challenging goals about the rest of their career (Nelson, 2016; Novelli, 2020). As long as they deny developmental opportunities (Farr, Tesluk, & Klein, 1998), their skills and competencies rust away and they turn to be unqualified employees for the job, and the perception about them becomes “a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Hedge et al., 2006). Assumptions about work life expectancy, and the policies of an organization may easily lead to such a stereotype. Organizations that mainly focus on payoffs and profits think that if an older employee is trained to gain new skills, it would take a long time to benefit from it, and an employee of old age is not expected to remain in the organization for a long time (Ilisanu & Andrei, 2018). Even an older employee is associated with retirement, studies reveal that older employees are more loyal to their organizations and are more stable in what they expect from work life, and so, they would not quit their jobs as it is assumed (Posthuma & Campion, 2009).

According to Lazazzara et al.’s study, the aspects that have impact on the willingness of older employees for participating the developmental activities are, the characteristics of older employees themselves, economic reasons (which is described as finding it to be too expensive to invest on older employees), psychological aspects

(such as ageism) and older employees' self-confidence because of the supervisor approach. On the other hand, training preferences which are adopted to generational differences and needs is also a factor to be considered as impacting the willingness of older employees to participate in training programs (Urlick, 2016). Findings of Urick shed a light to several training techniques (technology based, formal instructor-led trainings, on-the-job trainings, and mentorship) and the impact of these techniques on the younger and older employees (2016).

#### **1.4.1.2 Stereotype-II: Older Employees are in Mental Decline**

Another age-related stereotype is that mental abilities are in a decline starting from the middle-ages (Palmore,1999); that means, it is difficult for older employees to learn new things. Studies related to cognitive abilities reveal that, “cognitive impairment (memory loss, disorientation, or confusion) is an inevitable part of the ageing process” (Palmore, 1998). So, this fact makes it suspicious to gain new skills for older employees. The increasing level of technology usage and unstoppable developments in business life makes self-improvement compulsory to get up to date. Older employees have the ability to learn new skills, but with a slower pace as their age increases. Dipboye et al. (2005) state that there is no evidence to support the idea that older employees lose their abilities to meet job-related goals, and this claim is also supported by IQ test scores. Conrad et al. (2008) also note that “older employees can learn how to use new technology as well as the youngsters”. So, the main issue seems not to be a cognitive decline but the learning process and methods.

#### **1.4.1.3 Stereotype-III: Older Employees are Inflexible and Slow**

Another stereotype related with old age is the perception that older employees are not flexible enough when facing a change. Research of Posthuma & Campion (2009) as well as Nelson (2016) reveal that older employees are mostly perceived

inflexible, and resistant to organizational changes, and are more insistent on what they already know, in other words their comfort zone. A psychological aspect explains this tendency: “as we grow old, our anxieties and fears about the unexpected future increase considerably” (Johns, 1973; as cited in Ilisanu & Andrei, 2018). Even so, it is underlined that these anxieties are not big incidents in work-life and older employees have the capacity to adjust to all the changes in their workplace. Unfortunately, their clumsiness in such improvements fuel this stereotype. Their loyalty and ongoing performance give a clue about their adaptation abilities, but still, they are considered to be inflexible and unadaptable.

#### **1.4.1.4 Stereotype-IV: Older Employees have Weaker Work Performance**

The prejudice of older employees’ lower performance derives mainly from three of the common stereotypes; being inflexible, being frail (health, illness), and being useless. As a reminder, the fact about being inflexible was explained as, older employees are not against change, but they may need a little more time in adapting themselves to new situations.

On the other hand, especially for the older adults that are over 65, illness, weakness, fatigue, and clumsiness (and accidents related to clumsiness) are widespread prejudices (Tuckman & Lorge, 1958; as cited in Palmore, 1999). “They can easily be distracted by health issues” (Craft et al., 1979; Prendha & Stahl, 2001; Ng. & Feldman, 2012; as cited in Ilisanu & Andrei, 2018), and this is believed to lead lower performance. Indeed, the fact about being ill or frail is right the opposite.

Older adults, especially over 65 may be twice as likely to have chronic illnesses as compared to younger adults, but when it comes to acute illnesses, accidents and injury, the comparison is more favourable (National Center for Health Statistics, 1995, as cited in Palmore, 1999). Because older adults take better care of themselves, they are more careful about taking risks, making accidents, and being injured.

Furthermore, the stereotype about being useless is fuelled by the other stereotypes that is explained before: mental decline and illness. A survey conducted by the Center of Retirement Research at Boston College on 400 private-sector employers shows that employees that are 55 and over are more productive than the young employees and they have distinctively better knowledge on procedures, and they are more successful in interacting with customers (Munnell et al., 2006). In fact, most of the research show no performance differences between older employees and young employees (Waldman&Avolio, 1986; McEvoy&Cascio, 1989; Salthouse&Maurer, 1996; Ng&Feldman, 2008; as cited in Malinen&Johnston, 2013).

Considering the growing literature on ageism, it would not be wrong to say that older employees are not favoured assets to invest on in work-life. Even they are not discriminated from training and development opportunities directly, it is possible to say that organizations are not pinning hope on their older employees while still investing on them.

#### **1.4.2 Training and Development Activities in Turkey**

Training and Development is one of the main activities of HR departments in Turkish companies. As mentioned before, small and medium businesses still do not have a sophisticated HRM structure and including large businesses HRM is widely considered as a second-grade function (Mellahi et al., 2013). But it still is possible to observe that many HR departments are divided into two sub-units even formally or in practice: “Training and Development”; and “Recruitment and Selection”. As the important components of a developing economy, organizations tend more to invest on their human capital to gain better business results and, by this way, to survive and grow against competition (Ozcelik & Aydinli, 2006).

In an ideal setting, training decisions are expected to derive from performance appraisals (Scott-Lennon, 1995; as cited in Mellahi et al., 2013). But in Turkey,



performance appraisals are far from being objective, there is no scientific validity of measures and raters are untrained (Aycan, 2001).

Another challenge for HR departments is the evaluation of training effectiveness. Measuring the return on investment is a challenging issue when it comes to soft skills development. In a country where strategic HRM practices are still not widely spread, justifying the investment made on people becomes a greater challenge; and where the investment for trainings cannot be justified, the more the budgets for trainings lay on the line (Murphy, 2018).

Furthermore, the lack of strategic HRM also may lead to inefficient use of training budgets. Unjustified training strategies with business demands, ineffective training and trainer selection, ineffective content and design of training programs may lead to such inefficiencies. To increase the training quality and efficiency, HR functions need to be positioned in strategic levels, be a part of strategic decisions, and their performance needs to be evaluated regularly. Findings on HRM in Turkey reveal that HR functions are not even subject to performance appraisals in most of the local organizations (Mellahi et al., 2018).

Due to the limited number of research on ageism in Turkey and Turkish work-life, it is not possible to refer to any scientific data related to stereotypical or ageist attitudes towards older employees' trainability. When putting all these aspects together, not only for older employees but for all the employees of Turkish organizations, training and development practices seems to be in a need of improvement. It is hard to assume that older employees get advanced performance appraisals and effective trainings in accordance with the performance appraisals.

## **1.5 THE IMPACT OF LEADER SUPPORT ON OLDER EMPLOYEES**

The superiors of employees also have an impact on the development process of each employee in several terms.

First, managers are responsible of doing effective performance appraisals and give regular feedback to their subordinates for improvement. As the raters of performance appraisals, managers are being criticised for not being trained enough to do objective and fruitful performance appraisals. The feedback frequency as well as the feedback quality of leaders are also considered suspicious according to HRM studies (Aycan, 2001; Ozcelik & Aydinli, 2006). Also, because of having a collective culture, confrontation and objective criticism becomes an issue, and individual assessments become also suspicious as development tools (Cetin, et al., 2016).

As a widely studied subject, leadership quality is identified as having a mediating role in the willingness of employees to develop themselves, and to participate in developmental activities. Van Vianen et al. (2011), argue, “The relationship between age and training and development willingness was also moderated by supervisor beliefs about the learning avoidance orientation of older workers”. That is, the leader support leads to the willingness of older employees to participate learning and developmental activities.

Also, the motivation and performance of employees have direct links to leadership quality. Consequently, same rules apply for older employees, too. Studies indicate that leadership quality has a great influence on the older employees’ self-perception, and it has an important role to overcome the disadvantages of a potential ageist attitude against older employees.

## **1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES**

Ageism has become a widely spread phenomena that has started to be spoken up in the last decades especially in western cultures. Along with being in the pinnacle of demographic transition, older adults seem to be under ageist threats both in social life and in work life in the US and European countries.

Fortunately, anti-ageist precautions and encouragements of governments and/or related institutions started to improve the conditions of older adults in joining

work life and statistics show that in some countries, participation of older employees into work-life is in improvement.

Many UNECE (The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) countries have regulations to avoid discrimination against age groups. And remarkable examples would shed a light to positive implementations.

“Vacancies for All Ages” (limitations to employers to be more age inclusive and to avoid age discriminative vacancy notes) in Netherlands, “Age-friendly workplace” (tools for knowledge transfer from older to younger, to position older employees as the mentors and coaches of young employees) in the Republic of Moldova, “Active Together 45+” (a teamwork to develop and prepare 120 socially excluded older adults for work life. 40 of them succeeded) in Poland, “The Sixty-plus Centre” (an employment-assistance centre for 60+ adults that gives trainings for new technology adaptation) in Israel are fruitful actions in avoiding discrimination against older adults (UNECE, 2019).

The most notable age-based stereotypes towards older employees in work life that we have focused on are, “being not worth training”, “being in mental decline”, “being inflexible and slow” and “having weaker work performance”. On the other hand, studies revealed that older employees are generally trainable and are beneficial for the workplace in many aspects. If an older employee is not discriminated in any sense, and if there is enough managerial support, this might have a reformative and positive impact on the older employee’s drive for self-development and high performance. If there are ageist attitudes, the older employee can feel demotivated in a way to hold on in work life and loses motivation for self-development and high performance. In other words, if older employees feel they are given up, they likely also give up. So, it is important to realize the required circumstances to avoid the self-fulfilling prophecy of older employees’ “uselessness” in work life.

When it comes to Turkey, there is no scientific data that is revealing or clarifying the presence or absence of ageism in work-life. On the other side, data shows

that Turkey is also in a demographic transition period, and the number of older employees increase in work life.

Depending on general observations, well-educated young talents seem to be more attractive for employment, comparing to older and experienced employees. So, the first objective of this study is to understand if there is ageism in Turkish work life or not. Ageism in Turkish work life is not a spoken-up issue, yet. That is why, to understand the level of awareness and tendencies about ageism is also an important issue.

If there is ageism, or in other words discriminative behaviours against older employees, understanding the causes and dynamics of such attitudes is the second objective.

If older employees are being eliminated from work life because of explicit and/or implicit ageist attitudes, it is important to contribute to the related literature about what is suggested to avoid ageism and to benefit from older employees for a longer period as the third objective of this study.

To sum up, in this study we are looking for the answers to the following questions: (1) Are older employees considered as having low potential and are perceived less beneficial for organisations in Turkey? (2) What is the attitude of HR Managers and Functional Leaders/Managers towards the older employees when it comes to investing on them? (3) What are the perceptions and self-beliefs of older employees about themselves on being useful assets for their organizations? (4) Does a supportive leadership approach have a positive and reformative impact on the self-beliefs and self-perceptions of older employees? (5) Does a supportive HR approach have a positive and reformative impact on the self-beliefs and self-perceptions of older employees?

This study is expected to investigate if workplace ageism is also a widely spread phenomenon, what the level of ageism is, and the what the dynamics of ageist attitudes are in Turkish work life. The study focuses on three different point of views

in terms of understanding attitudes: the HR managers, the function managers (other than HR), and the, so called, older employees.

The study is designed as a qualitative study to understand the feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants from their own point of views. The opportunity to examine individual experiences and perceptions is expected to lead to a deeper understanding of what really happens in a world where ageism is never an issue spoken up explicitly.

Via phenomenological approach, the similar and/or opposing patterns in experiences, feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants will be analysed, and the overall data will be interpreted in terms of ageism.

## **2 METHODS**

### **2.1 INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

Jonathan A. Smith and Mike Osborn identify the aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as “to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (2007). In such an analysis the focus is on understanding how an object is perceived rather than producing an objective statement of the object (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The “object” to be interpreted in this study is the so called “older employee”. And the main purpose is to analyse how this “object” is perceived from different perspectives: the object itself and the others who are directly related to it.

Ageism is a concept derived from prejudices and biases. So, the personal point of views belonging to the participants are expected to lead us to a deeper understanding of what is happening. A deeper understanding, if there is a perceived ageism in work life; if so, to reveal the level and the dynamics of this artifact. That is why, a qualitative approach is favoured to reach the expected point of arrival, which is beyond a “yes or no answer”.

### **2.2 SAMPLING DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS**

Since this study is based on ageism, the sampling design needed to be based upon older employees. So, it was necessary to focus on a specific group of participants to understand their perception about older employees. There was a need to narrow down the criteria and do non-probability sampling to achieve meaningful data for this study. And for this reason, purposive sampling method was chosen.

Three main group of participants were determined as the sample of this study. (1) the older employees, (2) the HR managers, and (3) the function managers. By interviewing three different group of participants, it was aimed to understand different

perspectives of different respondents. Firstly, it would be necessary to explain the criteria identified for the group of participants.

### **2.2.1 Older Employees**

Considering the work life expectancy statistics and the findings indicating the cut off age for being considered as old in workplaces, employees that are 40 and over are said to be confronting ageism gradually. Also in Turkey, in all the HR actions starting from the recruitment process to the termination process, age 40 seems to be the cut-off point to be considered as old (Baybora, 2007; Altan et al., 2003; Arici, 2005; as cited in Ogotogulları & Kilic, 2016). As the age increases, the intensity of ageist attitudes also increases. That is why, the participants as older employees were targeted as employees who are over 45.

Findings also indicate that employees who are in managerial positions do not confront ageist attitudes or discrimination as much as the employees working as specialists. This is thought to be because of the positional power and authority which justifies being at an older age. Thus, the potential participants that hold managerial positions were eliminated from being in the group of older employees in this study.

Consequently, the two main criteria to be in the group of older employees was to be determined as being 45 and over, and with the job title specialist.

### **2.2.2 HR Managers**

The second group consisted of HR Managers of the same companies of the older employees' group. HR Managers hold the responsibility to make HR strategies to contribute to the business results by building effective HR policies. HR managers are also expected to be the policy and decision makers starting from the recruitment processes of employees. They are responsible of effective performance appraisal

systems, training, and development activities as the main authority in organizations as well.

In sum, all the HRM implementations have direct impact on older employees. No other criteria such as age, gender, etc. were specified in determining this group of participants.

### **2.2.3 Function Managers**

As the third group, function managers from various departments were chosen as important figures, since all their actions have quite big impact on employees, in this case on older employees. Any function manager is expected to contribute to all the activities starting from the recruitment process to the displacement process.

Most importantly, their mediating role on the drive of older employees' participation in developmental activities for better business results is a strong finding of related research (Van Vianen et al., 2011). Older employees perform their daily jobs in close relation with their superiors and for this reason managers of any function have the role of shaping an employee's work experience. Again, no other criteria such as age, gender, etc. were specified in determining this group of participants.

The researcher as a corporate performance consultant had the advantage of having a wide professional network which was helpful to reach to the targeted participants. The participants were chosen from the researcher's professional network, via purposive sampling approach. At the end, the participants of this study were chosen from four organizations which operate in various industries to assure the diversification of the data to be collected. In each organization, one employee, one HR manager and one function manager were generated as the participants of this research and the total number of participants came up as twelve.

In the pre-study stage of this thesis, targeted number of participants was fifteen, but thought-provokingly, it was not easy to reach older employees with the criteria defined for this study in almost ten or more organisations. The average age of



employees holding specialists' positions were mainly younger than 40 in the other potential organisations.

Twelve participants from four organisations were generated for this study within the frame of identified sampling criteria (Table 2.1).

**Table 2-1. Demographics of the Participants**

#	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Job Title	Industry
1	E1	45	Female	Sales Specialist	B2B Car Rental
2	E2	49	Female	Sales Specialist	Services
3	E3	53	Male	Business Dev. Specialist	Automotive
4	E4	46	Male	Sales Specialist	Iron-Steel
5	HRM1	48	Female	HR Director	B2B Car Rental
6	HRM2	46	Female	HR Director	Services
7	HRM3	55	Male	CHRO	Iron-Steel
8	HRM4	46	Male	HR Manager	Automotive
9	FM1	44	Male	Sales Director	B2B Car Rental
10	FM2	44	Male	Sales Director	Services
11	FM3	40	Male	Sales Director	Automotive
12	FM4	35	Male	Supply Chain Director	Iron-Steel

The pseudonyms used for each participant consist of the beginning letter of the participants group and a number. Older employees were abbreviated as “E”, functions managers were abbreviated as “FM”, and human resources managers were abbreviated as “HRM”.

The ages of “older employees’ group” were between 45 and 53. This, made it a highly valuable group of participants in terms of understanding the attitudes. The “group of HR managers” were at ages between 46 and 55; and the “group of function managers” were between 35 and 44.

Even though gender was not a criterion, the older employee group consisted of equal numbers of genders, two female and two male participants. HR managers also consisted of two female and two male participants. For the function managers, the group completely consisted of male participants.

Three of the older employees' job titles were coincidentally sales specialists, and one of them was a business development specialist. One of the HR managers hold the highest title as a chief human resources officer and a member of the executive board. Two of the HR managers were directors, and member of the executive board, and one HR manager was the HR manager of a small group of HR specialists. Three of the function managers were sales directors, and member of the executive board, and one of them was a supply chain director who also was a member of the executive board. All the participants in HR and function manager group except for one, were of high value in terms of being the member of the executive board and being among the decision makers in their organisations.

The participants' organizations were from various industries, namely, B2B Car Rental, Services, Automotive, and Iron-steel. The B2B Car Rental and the Iron-steel organizations were of local companies of Turkey, where the services and the automotive organizations were multinational organisations. By this variation, the opportunity to examine the impact of being in different organizational cultures was also assured.

The participants will be mentioned with pseudonyms throughout the thesis in terms of academic ethics.

### **2.3 INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted individually with each of the participants. Since the main objective is to understand attitudes from different point of views, a semi-structured interview approach was necessary depending on the specific issues the participant inclined to raise in a meaningful context. The structural

side of the interview questions represented the context and the “semi” quality served to the freedom of expression of the participants.

The interview questions were built by the researcher with aligned questions for each of the participants’ group. And therefore, three sets of interview questions investigating the attitudes towards older employees were prepared. The minor differences among the questions were due the different dynamics of the participant groups (Appendix-A1, B1 and C1).

The question set of the older employees’ group consisted of 21 open-ended questions (Appendix. C1); the HR managers’ question set consisted of 22 open-ended questions (Appendix. A1), and the function managers’ question set consisted of 23 open-ended questions (Appendix. B1).

The sub-groups of the questions were, “demographic information”, “organisation’s age composition”, “perceived performance and perceived potential of older employees”, “willingness of older employees to participate developmental activities”, “leadership support towards older employees”, and “career planning of older employees”.

The questions investigating demography only consisted of the age and occupation of the participants. The questions about organization’s age composition investigated the general age composition, the hiring policies, and the number of older employees that do not hold managerial positions. These questions were expected to give a brief knowledge about the general culture of the organization in terms of ageism.

The third sub-group consisted of questions about how the older employees were perceived in terms of business results and in terms of their potential addressing the future of the organization; also, their perceived strengths and weaknesses, and finally the attitude of younger employees towards older employees.

Willingness of older employees to participate developmental activities was investigated in the next sub-group, since the ageism studies revealed that older employees are less willing to participate training and development activities.

The sub-group of questions about leader support aimed to investigate the superior support about participating in training programs, willingness, and drive for self-development.

The final sub-group of questions investigated the present career plans and alternative scenarios for different career plans for older employees.

In none of the questions, the concept of ageism and age-based discrimination are mentioned explicitly. Utmost importance was given to that all the questions were open-ended and bias-free to understand the potential implicit attitudes.

All the questionnaires were ended with the question “Is there anything you would like to add, or you think that is not covered?” to understand which feelings and thoughts the interview provoked in the participants’ mind.

## **2.4 PROCEDURES**

The pre-study procedures were planned to be applied as follows: (a) Five older employees, five HR managers, five function managers were detected from the researcher’s personal network at a desk-research from among 32 organizations. Also, an extra list of participants was prepared as back-up in case of potential obstacles. (b) As the second step, HR managers were called personally by the researcher to explain the scope of the study and to take a pre-approval to reach other contacts in their organisation. (c) After the pre-approval of HR managers, the potential participants that were determined before were called personally by the researcher to give necessary information about the study and for their verbal approval to participate the study. (d) To all the participants approved to participate, a consent form that was approved by the ethics committee was planned to be shared during the meetings for a formal approval.

Contrary to expectations, the number of the participants increased from five to four of each targeted group. There were difficulties to find older employees fitting to the criteria determined by the researcher.

The interviews were planned as face-to-face meetings that would take one hour and fifteen minutes. But unfortunately, by the precautions related to Covid-19 pandemic, all the face-to-face meetings were cancelled. And interviewing via digital platforms, namely Teams, has been planned with the participants as an alternative solution.

A verbal approval containing academic ethics and privacy was taken from each of the participants while all the interviews were recorded via Teams application by the consent of the participants.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach was used to analyse the data collected from participants. MAXQDA was used as the analysis tool.

## **2.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative research “may be regarded as involving the collection and analysis of non-numerical data through a psychological lens in order to provide rich descriptions and possible explanations of people’s meaning-making - how they make sense of the world and how they experience particular events” (Storey, 2007). That is why it has become an approach that was mainly built up by the social scientists in time. There are five approaches to do qualitative analysis, which are, Phenomenological Analysis, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive Inquiry (Wertz et al., 2011).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as the analysis method. The main purpose of IPA is to understand how participants perceive an object or concept and to explore the meanings of these perceptions. In this study, older employees were chosen as the “object”, and the perceptions of themselves, the HR managers and function managers were analysed through the lens of IPA. The perceptions of these groups were expected to give a deeper understanding of the presence of ageism and age-based discrimination that is implicit and/or explicit in their organisations.

The data collected from twelve participants via one-to-one Teams meetings were transcribed to texts from media and were analysed by using MAXQDA 2022. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, therefore the data transcribed is also in Turkish. All the analysis process was made in Turkish and translated into English by the researcher.

To define the data, three main codes and sixteen sub-codes per the main codes were created. The sub-codes of the main codes were defined similar for all the group of participants which were “the older employee”, “HR manager” and “function manager”.

Group of participants were identified as the main codes because the objective of the study was to understand how the older employees were perceived from three different point of views which were critical for the purpose of the study. The sub-codes were based on the interview questions and were defined similar for each group to detect the similarities, differences and contradictions mentioned by the participants. What an older employee is for the self, for the HR manager and for the function manager was investigated by a 270 degrees evaluation approach.

All the codes and sub-codes were defined prior to analysis to avoid a focus shift. Even so, it was checked continuously if there has been a need to add codes or sub-codes during the data analysis process. No additional codes or sub-codes were added to the code system in the end.

The analysis was made as a 270 degrees evaluation to catch and pinpoint the major issues related to the concept, ageism and/or age-related discrimination. By the help of this coding structure, the self-perceptions of the older employees were compared to the other participants’ perceptions during the analysis.

In the data analysis process not only the verbal expressions but also the indirect expressions were analysed while taking utmost care of not being reflective.

**Table 2-2. Codes and Sub-codes**

<b>CODES</b>	<b>SUB-CODES (For each Code)</b>
45+ Employee	Age
HR Manager	Position
Function Manager	Hiring Criteria of the Organization Perception of 45+ Employees in terms of Performance Perception of 45+ Employees in terms of Potential Younger Peers' Attitude Managers' Attitude Perceived Attitude of 45+ Employees toward Development Tools Perceived Attitude towards Work-life Positive Perceptions of the Age Group (45+) Negative Perceptions of the Age Group (45+) Impact of Managers' Attitude Career Planning Actions of Managers for 45+ Employees Career Planning Actions of HR Managers for 45+ Employees Alternative Positions Proposed for 45+ Employees

## **2.6 POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER**

Qualitative studies also distinguish from quantitative studies in terms of the researcher's role of being a component of the research. While the participants make sense of an object, the researcher tries to make sense of the participants' perceptions (Smith and Osborn, 2007). The researchers' knowledge about the related concept and their reflexivity in interpreting the findings have utmost importance in evaluating the quality of the study (Berger, 2013).

I, as the researcher of this study, am occupied as a corporate performance consultant, giving service to private sector companies mainly in their

institutionalization processes for seven years. I also take part as a senior trainer and facilitator in needs of skills development related to institutionalization processes of these companies. Beforehand, I was occupied as a corporate sales manager in telecom industry with an experience of sixteen years in professional life. In the twelve years of this experience, I held various managerial positions, and had the chance to work with large teams, and experience leadership as a job. Both as a professional and a consultant I have been observing older employees for more than twenty years. Moreover, I have been working with them both in my professional life, and my present situation.

In a country that experiences an economic tribulation, unemployment of older adults become a more visible complication day after day. Even if not articulated clearly, ageism seems to be a subtle issue in work-life. As my knowledge about ageism increased, the number of my questions about this concept have also increased. I find it important to understand the concept of ageism in the cultural context of Turkey from the perspective of older employees, organisations and other parties related to them.

Therefore, with this qualitative study, my aim is to use my consultancy experience as a researcher (e.g., interviewing for needs analysis and diagnosis, analysing qualitative data for consultancy reports), and contribute to the literature of work-place ageism in Turkey.



### **3 RESULTS**

Ageism is defined as a type of discrimination directed to an age group, and the term is mainly being used towards older age. While becoming a rising phenomenon in social life, work-life also gets a striking share. A large number of research revealed ageist attitudes and discrimination against older employees in the U.S., and in European countries. The dynamics of workplace ageism are also widely explained throughout these studies. The ageist attitude takes its roots from negative stereotypes, and the discriminative behaviour takes its roots from the ageist attitude (WHO, 2021).

In this study, the concept of workplace ageism was investigated in similar terms. The stereotypes, attitudes and finally the behaviours were investigated with a similar logic in several work environments of Turkey.

#### **3.1 STEREOTYPES FOR OLDER EMPLOYEES**

First, it would be beneficial to briefly remember what old age means in Turkish culture. Opposing to the individualistic cultures of the U.S. and European countries, old age has a distinctive meaning in Turkey as a country that is defined as having a collectivistic culture. In collectivistic cultures, old age represents life experience and wisdom. There is generally a respect towards older adults both in social life and work-life. Studies conducted in Turkey reveal that “older adults still hold considerable prestige and are valued and respected” (Aykan & Wolf, 2000; Bacanali et al., 1994, as cited in McConatha et al., 2010). It is a widely spread behaviour to respect, follow the advice of older adults in Turkey. Considering the cultural context, examining the positive stereotypes is also important.

In this study, positive stereotypes were considered for two reasons. One is to understand if Turkish cultural motives influence stereotypes in work life, and secondly, to understand if older employees are considered as beneficial assets for the

organizations. The positive stereotypes were analysed through the lenses of three different participant groups, that are, Function Managers, HR Managers and Older Employees (in terms of their self-perception). The most salient positive stereotypes that were mentioned at least two times by each of the participants were interpreted as seen in Table 3.1.

**Table 3-1. Positive Stereotypes for Older Employees**

<b>Function Managers</b>	<b>Hr Managers</b>	<b>45+ Employees</b>
Experienced	Experienced	Experienced
Challenger	Challenger	Challenger
Communicator	Communicator	Communicator
Responsible	Responsible	Competent
Calm	Calm	Effective
Natural elder sister/brother	Natural elder sister/brother	Advisor
Expert	Expert	Energetic
Teaching	Teaching	Fast
Loyal	Loyal	Patient
Trustworthy	Trustworthy	Result oriented
Easy going	Supportive	
People oriented	Collaborative	
Exertive	Mature	
Hard working	Organized	
Willing and able	Resilient	

While defining the stereotypes, similar expressions and meanings were consolidated, and all the terms in the table above consist of interpretations of the researcher together with the participants' direct expressions.

All the participants expressed three positive stereotypes in common. The older employees were identified as “experienced”, “challenger” and “communicator”. Both the older employees’ self-image and the other participants’ perceptions and experiences were in the same direction.

For the other positive stereotypes, the function managers and the HR managers had mostly a common perception where the older employees attributed some other qualities for the age-group they were in. Seven other common positive stereotypes from the perspective of the function managers and HR managers were identified, namely, “being responsible”, “calm”, “natural elder sister/brother”, “expert”, “teaching”, “loyal”, and “trustworthy”.

In sum, older employees were stereotyped as “loyal, calm, experienced, expert and challenger employees that communicate well and teach their experiences to other people such as if they their elder sister/brothers in the organisations”. Considering the collective culture in Turkey, these qualities make sense with the general image of older employees in social life, too.

On the other hand, older employees attributed some other qualities to their own age group, namely, “being competent”, “effective”, “advisor”, “energetic”, “fast”, “patient” and “result oriented”.

The positive stereotypes “advisor” and “patient” can be considered as similar concepts with “teaching” and “calm”, but the other stereotypes, “being competent, effective, energetic, fast and result oriented” are highly opposed by the other participants while expressing the negative qualities of older employees.

Here, we see the first distinction between what older employees’ self-image is, and what others think or feel about them. Older employees find themselves and their own age group energetic, fast, competent, and high performer. And these qualities are exactly opposing the negative stereotypes towards older employees that are revealed in many studies.

In general terms, this might represent a lack of self-awareness in a certain level. As mentioned before, employees have difficulties in having regular and qualified

feedback from their supervisors, and this may lead to a lack of self-awareness. The cultural basis of this situation is that, in collectivistic cultures, confrontation becomes mainly an issue, and this leads to avoid feedback sessions mostly.

### 3.2 STEREOTYPES AGAINST OLDER EMPLOYEES

Throughout the interviews with the function managers and HR managers, the dominant negative stereotypes were expressed directly or indirectly. Most of the negative stereotypes were in contradiction with the positive stereotypes that were also mentioned by themselves. This contradiction was taken seriously throughout this study in explaining the presence of ageist attitudes in Turkish work life. Even older employees themselves could not escape from the reality of other participant groups while identifying the negative qualities of their own age-group.

**Table 3-2. Negative Stereotypes against Older Employees**

<b>Function Managers</b>	<b>Hr Managers</b>	<b>45+ Employees</b>
Low in self-awareness	Low in self-awareness	Candid
Incompetent	Incompetent	Traditional
Technologically illiterate	Technologically illiterate	Prudent
Unprogressive	Unprogressive	Prejudiced
Doer	Doer	
Effortless	Effortless	
Indifferent	Indifferent	
Abdicator	Abdicator	
Conservative	Conservative	
Inadaptive	Out of date	
Untrainable	Underdeveloped	
Slow	Underperformer	
Prejudiced		

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Inflexible	
Indecisive	Voiceless
Anxious	Frail
Daunted	Conformist

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The two important findings here were that (a) older employees also shared a common point of view with the other participant groups in some respects. Both the older employees and the other participants shared the same view of older employees' being traditional and prejudiced. (b) The function managers and HR managers expressed the negative qualities they have attributed to older employees which were to a large extent opposing the positive stereotypes they have expressed.

The common stereotypes of older employees with the other participants gives us a strong clue about the self-perceptions of older employees. A salient narrative of an older employee was as follows:

“Actually... I also feel motivated or flexible towards changes, but I feel like... I want to distil the decisions that are taken... I think on it, it takes a little while. Others bulldoze into everything. I want to think a little more on pros and cons. Or do I speculate on decisions, and be prejudiced against them, I don't know... My ideas come like this in times like this.” (Participant E4)

Here, we firstly see the “I and others” concept. The older employee categorizes himself as a distinctive component of the team. In a way, the older employee defines himself as minority. Secondly, a so called Freudian slipper takes place while the participant defines himself as “motivated and flexible towards changes”. Even there were no implications on being motivated or flexible, the participant found it necessary to put down “his being like others” in terms of motivation and flexibility. Here again,

the implicit message could be articulated as “they see me different from others, but I am not”.

On the other hand, the open expression on being prejudiced and indecisiveness corresponds to two of the stereotypes belonging to a function manager who works in another organization. E4, in a way is entrapped between his own way of doing things and most probably what is expected from him in work life.

The second salient finding about negative stereotypes was the contradictions of function managers and HR managers in stating the positive and negative qualities of the older employees. On one hand older employees were positively stereotyped as challenger, hard- working, willing and able, expert, collaborator, mature, responsible, and exertive, on the other hand they were negatively stereotyped as conformist, daunted, inadapive, underperformer, indifferent, and incompetent. These two sets of qualities seem not to complete each other. In some of the narratives, the contradictions were expressed openly:

“They are experienced but it has negative effects. They keep saying ‘we did this before and it did not work. We also did this when we were young, it is useless.’ They are experienced but this experience demotivates and sucks the energy of others.” (HRM3)

“They are easy going. They prefer accommodating instead of leading. Instead of trying new things... They pull us back I think” (HRM2).

“They are extremely loyal. You know employees who are 40-45 nowadays were like this when they were employees: ‘I will work somewhere somehow, and I will work in the same place until retirement’. That is why they are usually loyal to the place they work” (FM4).

In all these narratives, it is possible to sense the way positive stereotypes were mentioned. While positive stereotypes were annotated, negative stereotypes were narrated with longer sentences, more in detail, as if trying to persuade the researcher to what they were emphasising.

According to the interpretations of these narratives, it is obvious that negative stereotypes of older employees were present in the selected four organizations. It would be beneficial to keep in mind that two of these companies were of large multinationals, and it is possible to argue the presence of ageist attitudes despite the presence of advanced HRM implications.

A combination of positive and negative stereotypes can be interpreted in a high level as, older employees are valuable for their experience, loyalty, and willingness. But on the other hand, they are perceived as underperformers and inflexible.

### **3.3 RECRUITMENT AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS**

#### **3.3.1 Recruitment Process**

The ageist attitudes that derive from stereotypes and prejudices were planned to be traced in several aspects. Recruitment policies are one of the indicators that could explain ageist attitudes and even discriminative behaviours. Therefore, one of the questions of the interviews was,

“Is there any age criterion in the recruitment processes of your organisation?” (Appendix-A, Question.7)

All the answers were clearly “no!”. But, with annotations...

“We don’t explicitly mention the age range, but we put experience as a criterion, for example 5 years of experience... In a sense neither too

young, nor too old. We narrow the age range down a little bit. Even if we don't mention it, we actually consider age..." (FM2).

"For someone around 45, it is not that easy to start a new job, to learn the company's reflexes, culture, and habits... to be adapted to a new system... Actually, it is not that easy for those ages" (FM1)

"We don't have an age criterion, but functional managers also expect us to find younger employees. They think, older ones can't work in the field, they wouldn't gallop..." (HRM1)

Prejudices and/or stereotypes on the difficulty in adaptation and being frail (not being able to gallop) are expressed explicitly. Consequently, ageist attitudes which drive discriminative behaviours in the recruitment processes were detected clearly in this section. None of the organizations that were subject to this study had explicit age criteria according to their recruitment policies, but the implementations in practical life were far from being non-discriminatory.

In addition, one of the reasons for that was also mentioned to be the insufficient rewards and benefits designed for the specialist roles. It is presumed in advance that an experienced candidate would not prefer to work with entry-level rewards and benefits. A narration clearly opposing to this assumption was made by one the employees:

"I believe there are many unemployed women who have strong CVs, who are experienced, well-educated, and still have the potential to be beneficial. But they cannot return to work life" (E2).

"I am very well educated. I had an impressive career. But when they saw my CV, my age, and the long period I was away from work life, I



think they were eliminating me from the process. I was not even invited to interviews, and after a while I started losing my faith in myself, I lost the hope of going back to work life” (E2).

E2 was a well-educated, and qualified woman at the age 48. She had to quit working vis majors, and after a while, started looking for a new job. It took years for her to return to work life and she owes to the CEO of the company she works for. Because the CEO was in her private network and gave her a chance (!) to work in her current organisation. What if the CEO was not in her private network?

What if E2 did not have the chance (!) to start over?

These findings are also corresponded with unemployment statistics of TurkStat that flag the unemployment rate of older employees. In a country where the total unemployment volume is incredibly high, the high unemployment rate of older employees calls attention to our issue, ageism.

### **3.3.2 Performance Appraisals and the Impact of Leader Support on Older Employees**

HRM studies in Turkey reveal that advanced HRM implementations mainly were practiced in multinational organisations, mostly because of the direct link to a centralized HR approach of the headquarters of these companies. But to increase the efficiency, the implementations are being adapted to local settings (Mellahi et al., 2013).

Two of the organizations that the participants of this study were employed are multinational companies, and the other participants are from local but large companies that are in the top 500 large-companies list of the Chamber of Industry. It is possible to consider all the participants of this study being in a comparatively advanced setting in terms of HR implementations. All the participants work in companies that have

written HR policies, a performance appraisal system and a training and development department.

In terms of performance appraisals, it is highly important to rate all the employees with an objective, fair, and competence-based system. And related to the performance appraisals, preparing the development plans and training programs for employees is the basis of developing the people of organisations. Also, the managers, as the raters of these systems, play an important role in the efficiency of performance appraisal systems.

This study focused mainly on the role of the managers for having direct impact on an employee's performance. Managers' attitudes and level of support were asked to the older employee participants group as below:

“How do you find your manager's support in general terms?”  
(Appendix-C, Question.15).

Examples from the answers were as follows:

“He acts warm to me... He didn't act as he did to others, he is more friendly to me.” (E1)

“I don't feel like we have a superior-subordinate relationship. I can ask him easily when I don't understand something. I say, ‘I can't make head or tail of it, let's riddle me that...’. In other words, I don't act as if I understand everything. And, he never says ‘Are you an idiot? How come you don't understand it!’. Or when I give him feedback, he says ‘Thank you, I've never thought of it before’. That is, I can communicate with him easily.” (E2)

“I was expecting to become a manager... Then, he was employed as my manager. The way he treats me, the way he supports me... Whatever my title is, I feel that I’m a part of the team and we run for the same goals. It (this support) was actually important for me.” (E4)

In these expressions “being treated differently from others” and “being treated as a friend or peer” theme is salient. Treating an older employee different from others or in a more friendly way gives us a clue about positive discrimination for older employees. At first sight, this finding is both positive and surprising. Along with the negative stereotypes they have, managers could have been expected to behave in an abuseful way.

That is why, there was a need to understand the reasons for such positive behaviours deeply. Narratives of functional managers and HR managers shed a light to this contradiction:

“While answering your question, I realized that I positively discriminate older employees... To be frank, I behave more tolerant considering their capacities. I try to make them complete the match (referring to sports games).” (FM2)

“While giving feedback, they are treated with respect because of their age. Managers are usually younger than them. Being a bit more polite is necessary... Also, you think like that ‘you don’t have any expectations anymore, Let’s get down to business, and do your responsibilities properly. We are filling in time here. Let our smooth relationship go on.’ Instead of developing them doing the business with no hassle becomes more important. Neither the company promises anything or there will be a progress in their career. The attitude is like ‘do your job, it’s ok for us, when you want to quit, we can talk’” (FM3)

“After a certain age, it becomes harder for them to accept feedback. The manager assumes they would not change. They would not accept, they would not change, and to avoid any conflict they might be skipping giving feedback.” (HRM1)

In the narratives of function managers HR managers, it was clearly traced that older employees were considered as “having low capacity”, “having difficulties in accepting feedback”. Moreover, they “tolerate” older employees instead of developing or leading them. It is obvious that function managers tolerate the older employees while they are trying to fill their time for retirement. The hopelessness devoted to older employees can also be seen in the expressions. Nobody expects more from them. Nobody challenges them. The relationship in terms of leader support merely seems like staying out of trouble and plugging along.

It is possible to argue that, if there is an older employee in the team, the managers tolerate them somehow, but when it comes to make a choice of working with them, they prefer younger employees. The managers that participated in this study seem not to be excluding older employees or do nothing to eliminate them from the organisation, but they are not satisfied by working with them for several reasons.

### **3.4 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

Training and development activities are among the most important activities of an HRM function, because training and development activities are expected to have an impact on better business results. It is also one of the most important activities of the organisations in Turkey, too. Organizations in Turkey, “focused on upskilling the workforce and have invested significantly in training and development in recent years” (Mellahi et al., 2013).

From the perspective of the literature on ageism, older employees' trainability has become a research subject in terms of various concerns. One is the deterioration of cognition with age, and another one is the stereotypical approach that find older employees untrainable and inadapative to new situations.

### **3.4.1 Ageist Attitudes toward Older Employees' Trainability**

This study has focused on training and development activities that the older employees were involved and their reactions to these developmental activities. Studies on cognition oppose to the concept that older employees are untrainable. The deterioration process of cognition in time stays valid but many studies revealed that older adults can learn new skills (Blieszner et al., 1981; Palmore, 1999; Charness&Czaja, 2006; Hedge et al., 2006; Strebler, 2009; Van Vianen, 2011; Lazazzara et al., 2013; Picchio, 2015; Urick, 2016; Meyers, 2017; Rahman, et al., 2021).

Among the stereotypes of this study, it is also possible to see negative stereotypes pointing out this concept. That are identified as, "unprogressive", "untrainable", "incompetent", "technologically illiterate" and "underdeveloped".

If we recall the widely spread negative stereotypes towards older employees, we can also see the linkage between the participants' reaction to interview questions and what the literature has suggested.

#### **3.4.1.1 Stereotype-I: Older Employees are not Worth Training**

There are no explicit implications about older employees' being not worth training. The narrations of the participants were more of older employees' being in the need of development. Also, it is widely known that older employees generally are not being eliminated from training and development programs in Turkey. Luckily,

whatever the stereotypes are, they are mostly given equal opportunities for self-development.

One of the reasons for that might be the content of the interview questions. No questions were asked, and no implications were made directly or indirectly about “older employees’ being not worth training”.

But still, it would be beneficial to bear in mind that, participants in such self-report studies would not like to express all their thoughts and feelings explicitly, and this might be a subject for future studies on the same concept. Malinen and Johnston (2013) in their study argue the fact of implicit measures, and they argue, “in the current climate of political correctness, it is often perceived to be unacceptable to reveal opinions that go against the universal norms of equity”.

If we recall the narrations mentioning that there were no further expectations from older employees, the investments that are made on them can be considered time consuming from the perspective of function managers.

#### **3.4.1.2 Stereotype-II: Older Employees are in Mental Decline**

The stereotype on older employees’ mental decline, even if not stated directly, was mentioned in various sections of the interviews.

“When a new product launches, they try to learn it. Maybe other account managers spend only half an hour to understand what it is, but older employees spend five more hours to learn the same thing. At the end, of course they learn.” (FM2)

“Understanding, perceiving and adaptation is extremely difficult for them.” (FM2)

“What you try to teach, you teach at level-1. Then, a moment comes, and you see that they cannot react accordingly. Because the capacity is limited. And this causes gaps in the organization.” (FM2)

Especially FM2, a sales director from a multinational company explicitly stated that older employees have limited capacity, and their learning process is not like the other employees. The reason for this might be either the openness of the participant, or the different point of view that he has comparing to the other participants. Still, it is possible to say that other participants also made implications directed to the skills and capacities of older employees.

#### **3.4.1.3 Stereotype-III: Older Employees are Inflexible and Slow**

Widely spread stereotypes on inflexibility and low speed were expressed in most of the interviews. Salient narrations are as follows:

“When we ask them to take a new responsibility, it startles them. They worry if they could adapt to the new responsibility.” (FM3)

“Developing and changing their behaviours... changing them is extremely difficult.” (HRM2)

“They inhibit themselves in adapting to new situations.” (HRM4)

Inflexibility was found to be the main theme here. In many points, it was possible to find implications about this issue. If we recall the negative stereotypes mentioned in this study, being “conformist”, “conservative” and “out of date” also symbolize this concept.

Even the older employees themselves identified their age-group slower in adaptation. Where the older employees define this situation as an analysing process, the other participants defined it as being inflexible and, in a way sticking into their comfort zone. Older employees define it as being cautious because of their experiences, but others define it as being anxious and resistant to change.

The factors that have impact on speed and adaptation would be useful to be considered to understand this issue better. In this study, this dimension was not examined.

#### **3.4.1.4 Stereotype-IV: Older employees have Weaker Performance**

One of the questions of the interviews was “how do you find older employees’ performance in general?”.

The answers mainly consisted of the meanings “not bad” or “mediocre” where older employees perceived themselves as “high performers”. Not only in this study, but in many studies on workplace ageism older employees are not considered as high performers. They are mostly defined as incompetent and underperformer as previously mentioned. And again, it would be beneficial to question the self-awareness of older employees, and the factors that would increase their self-awareness about the perception they create.

Salient expressions of function managers and HR managers about the performance of older employees were as follows:

“Maybe it is a cliché, but they are unproductive, blunt... They cannot add value to what they do. If they don’t become a manager sometime, they become unproductive employees.” (HRM3)

“They are like servicemen. They only do their job.” (HRM4)



“After a certain age they cannot work with high tempo.” (FM3)

“They are mediocre. They just do their job.” (FM2)

Older employees seem to be there as long as they do their jobs. The question is, what is expected from them? What is the future-plan for them? Most of the function managers and HRM managers underlined that they do their job, whatever is given to them. But, as a known fact, work-life is in a constant change, and the future is always demanding.

It is also necessary to understand how older employees react to training and development activities. This was asked both to older employees themselves and the other participant groups. One and each of the participants agreed on that the older employees are highly willing to participate trainings and developmental activities. Older employees themselves expressed that they see training programs as an opportunity for self-development. But still, they are selective in the training style they believe that works the most for them.

Therefore, in this study, it is possible to see that older employees are willing to participate training and development programs, opposing to the studies that revealed the opposite.

Preferred training tools were also asked to all the participants and one theme became salient: Face to face in-class training programs or coaching/mentoring were seen ideal both by the older employees and the other participant groups.

Older employees attributed this to their choice of being in “real relationships”, “face-to-face and open to communication opportunities”. So, digital learning tools were mostly rejected. In digital learning settings, they do not feel the real communication and they do not find any opportunity to express themselves as they have mentioned. This addresses both a positive and a negative stereotype: “being communicators” and “being technologically illiterate”.

“Maybe I am old headed. I prefer being face-to-face instead of digital platforms. Trainings with a real touch, real feeling, in the same atmosphere is something I like more. I don’t claim they are better training programs, I’m used to it, maybe that is the reason...” (E2)

“You can reach many people at the same time in digital training programs, but I like it better when it’s face-to-face... It touches you, it’s more effective... I didn’t have an experience of coaching or mentoring but when I get feedback, I like it. When someone cares for you, it feels good.” (E4)

Consequently, face-to-face learning tools seem to be appealing more to the older employees. The reason for that is mentioned as “having an opportunity to communicate in a better way”. Studies also reveal that older employees feel “much more comfortable with on-the job training and mentorship” (Urick, 2016).

Another theme also became prominent that the older employees expressed their feelings about being cared and being in real relationships. At this point, the level of leader support becomes more valuable. Having feedback from the manager, of course in a constructive way, fuels the feeling of being cared. And as a positive finding of this study, older employees mainly expressed their satisfaction about their managers.

### **3.5 CAREER PLANNING OF OLDER EMPLOYEES**

Since, the older employees were still performing in their organizations, it was necessary to understand what kind of a future was being planned for them. The participants’ approach to career planning was related with what they were expecting from them.

“They are hard to develop, it is difficult to change them... They are detached from technology... Do we expect anything from them about the future? No.” (FM3)

“I observe that some of them are in an idle mode. They are waiting for being retired... It is because there is no future for them in this organisation.” (FM1)

When it comes to planning a future for the older employees, the function managers and HR managers mainly expressed that none of the parties had future expectations. But when it comes to what older employees expressed about their future, the expectations became distinctive from the other participants:

“In fact, I don’t have a hope for future... Years have passed, and I have never demanded anything from anybody. I have never said ‘let’s plan a future for me’.” (E1)

“I don’t think they have a future plan for me. If I were ten years younger, they would have. But now I am 49. If they invest on me and take the return of their investment... I think they would prefer someone younger than me to invest on” (E2)

“I should have been a manager so far. For several reasons they did not promote me. I think that’s a loss for them.” (E3)

“I am not satisfied with my career, yet. I think there is still a way to go. This makes me feel like... This makes me feel disappointed.” (E4)

It was obvious that all the older employees had hopes and expectations about their career, and now they feel as if they came to a dead end. “Hopelessness” and “disappointment” are the main themes when it comes to older employees’ present state of feelings.

One of the major problems here is that, when talking about a career path, all the participants focus on being a “manager”. This derives from a deficiency in the available career paths in the organizations in Turkey. Having a career or better rewards and benefits depend only to be promoted to leadership positions. That is why, all the participants considered the position of older employees in a way at a dead end.

### **3.5.1 Alternative Career Paths for Older Employees**

The older employees subject to this study are considered incompetent to be promoted to leadership positions, but on the other hand their expertise was mainly regarded. That is why, considerably an important question was raised to the participants to understand what alternative career opportunities for the older employees could be.

The participants were asked to be creative and think free from the present circumstances. The ideas of the participants excluding the older employees, can be seen in the table below with their frequencies.

**Table 3-3. Alternative Positions for Older Employees**

<b>Alternative Positions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Internal Mentor	4
Internal Trainer	3
Internal Counsel	2
Part-time Consultant	1
Customer Experience Specialist	1
Task Management Jobs	1

Customer Relations Specialist	1
Call Centre Agent	1
Process Leader	1
Project Leader	1

Not only for the existing older employees, but for all the employees these positions were mentioned as alternative career paths to leadership positions. Additionally, any type of rotation was also considered to be an alternative career opportunity to benefit from the older employees for longer periods.

Older employees themselves also answered the same question. The ideal options were defined as, “recruitment officer”, “orientation specialist”, “internal mentorship”, and any type of rotation within the organization.

Additionally, while answering this question, the older employees’ facial expressions have changed, and it is observed that their moods have turned to be as if they were in “a hopeful dream”. Opposing to what the function managers and HR managers mentioned, older employees positioned themselves as “employees ready for the future”. Maybe, if there would have been “hope”, there would have been different plans, too.

Studies examining the qualities of experienced older employees reveal that there are alternative career paths to benefit from older adults’ experience and expertise. UN (2021) mentions that inclusive policies of governments and institutions have fruitful results in member countries. For instance, AARP Experience Corps a non-profit, hires older adults as tutors to improve reading skills of children. Senior Corps is another organisation hiring hundreds of thousands of Americans 55 and over as mentors and tutors of children and young teens. (Halvorsen&Emerman, 2013). Age Friendly Workplace initiative that took place in the Republic of Moldova also is a remarkable example for benefiting from older employees’ experiences by training them as mentors for younger generations (UNECE, 2019).

Especially in advanced organisations, internal mentorship drives the attention of HR managers gradually. Findings in this study attract the attentions to the concept of internal mentorship, too. Moreover, intergenerational learning has started to become a valuable topic for the organisations because of having employees from various generations at the same time. So, not only the older employees may be positioned to give mentorship to the younger, but also the younger employees can be positioned as the mentors of older employees. This interaction between the older and younger generations would serve to increase the overall performance of the organisations.

### **3.6 ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

It would also be beneficial to sum up the findings as answers to the research questions of this study.

#### **3.6.1 Are Older Employees Considered as Having Low Potential, and Perceived as Less Beneficial for Organisations?**

The common positive stereotypes of all the participants of this study are defined as, older employees are experienced, they are challengers/fighters, and they are good in communicating. But when it comes to the negative stereotypes, older employees were defined as being conformists, underperformers, incompetent and indifferent. They were also defined as traditional and prejudiced against new situations.

According to this study, these negative stereotypes lead to the elimination of older candidates from job interviews. And for the present older employees, the potential was described as limited. Older employees were only doing their job and could not bring anything new to what has been done.

Consequently, there have been no future plans for the older employees other than “completing the game” in their current position.

These findings give a broad idea of that older employees are being considered as employees with low potential, and their benefit to their organisations is not more than accomplishing their routine responsibilities. The investments that are being made to them seems nothing more than a matter of form. While older employees try to perform their jobs, their superiors handle them with tolerance (!), and let it go as long as the jobs are done.

### **3.6.2 What is the Attitude of HR Managers and Function Managers towards the Older Employees When It Comes to Investing on Them?**

As a positive finding, none of the older employees were positioned as employees that were not worth investing on. There were no explicit expressions mentioning this. But on the other hand, there were explicit expressions about the absence of further expectations from the older employees.

Working with the older employees were being handled almost as a social responsibility to carry them to their recruitment phase as long as they accomplish their jobs. Both the function managers and HR managers defined the way they manage older employees as tolerating them, which really implies their dissatisfaction about working with the older employees.

### **3.6.3 What are the Perceptions and Self-beliefs of Older Employees about Themselves on Being Useful Assets for Their Organisations?**

Opposing the literature on workplace ageism, the HR Managers and Function Managers that participated in this study, the Older Employees perceived themselves as effective, competent, energetic, and fast. Since they defined themselves as competent, they also implied that they have potential for further positions, too. For being not promoted until today, it is observed that they have the tendency to blame others.

The dominant feelings were observed to be disappointment and hopelessness for both their present situation and for the future. Consequently, they turned out to be employees that have no further expectations from their organizations, similar to their organizations having no further expectations for them.

#### **3.6.4 Does a Supportive Leadership Approach have a Positive and Reformative Impact on the Self-beliefs and Self-perceptions of Older Employees?**

In this study, the older employees expressed their positive perceptions towards their managers. Mostly, they were satisfied with the behaviours of their superiors. The support they see from their managers can be considered as a representation of their presence in their organisations. One mentioned the positive feeling of being a part of a team through his manager, the other mentioned the positive discrimination of the manager that shows itself by a friendly and warm approach, and another stated the freedom of expressing herself to her manager.

In terms of the behaviours of the superiors, all the older employees were observed as pleased. But on the other hand, we already know that the Function managers are in an effort to manage the situation with low hassle. They avoid conflicts and unpleasant communication with their older employees. They tolerate their older employees instead of trying to develop them.

Eventually, it is obvious that there is need to examine the two sides of the same coin. And as a thought-provoking finding, the perceptions of the older employees about their managers do not seem to be explaining the real thoughts and feelings of their managers.



### **3.6.5 Does a Supportive HR Approach have a Positive and Reformative Impact on the Self-beliefs and Self-perceptions of the Older Employees?**

The last research question was about the HR approach and its impact on the older employees. Perceptions about HR functions were not questioned directly during the interviews. But, from a researcher point of view, it is possible to interpret the HR approach.

In this study, we see that there was no old age specified implementations or actions. While having a dialogue on training programs and effective training tools, it clearly can be seen that the HR managers had appropriate comments in line with the older employees' expectations. For instance, coaching and mentoring were mentioned to be effective training or development tools for the older employees, but on the other side we see that the older employees that have participated in this study had no experience on being coached in their organisations.

The general attitude of the HR departments was no different from that of the function managers. The HR managers also expressed their thoughts about the low expectations they have of the older employees.

Moreover, it was observed that the HR managers were not fully aware of ageism as a concept, and never had thought on it as an issue. It was possible to understand this by the end of each interview. At the closure of each interview, all the HR managers mentioned their awareness about what the situation is about the older employees, and they felt responsible for creating alternative career paths in the future.

## **4 DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 WORK-PLACE AGEISM IN TURKEY IS NOT AN URBAN LEGEND**

In this study, the stereotypes, the attitudes, and the behaviours toward older employees in Turkey were examined with a qualitative approach. Since, the studies were limited in number, there were no studies specifically investigating work-place ageism in Turkey. This study reveals that, stereotypes to or against older employees were in correspondence with the findings of previous research worldwide. Even though Turkey is defined as collectivistic country, the widely known “respect to the elderly” concept becomes faded in work-life. Older employees were mostly perceived as similar to individualistic cultures. This may be a result of the ongoing convergence of Turkish work-life to a more universal approach.

Then, it is time to study on what precautions may be taken in order to extend the work life of older employees. As mentioned before, in a country that is in a demographic transition, the organizations are in need of qualified employees, and unemployment of the older adults become a complication for both the older employees and for the government, ageism has the potential to become a problematic for all the parties.

#### **4.1.1 We are hiring! But not hiring...**

Ageism towards older employees becomes evident in recruitment processes. That is to say, explicitly discriminative behaviours emerge for the older adults, and this keeps increasing the unemployment of older employees, day by day. According to Eurostat statistics, the employment rate for the age range 55-64 is only 31% in Turkey. Since there are no regulations and laws focusing on older employee employment that encourage companies to recruit older employees, companies tend not to hire older

employees. Along with laws and regulations, there is also a need for an institutional approach by the Government such as tax deductions, and other incentives to encourage employers to recruit older employees. As a country that is defined as a candidate of being a European Union member, Turkey needs to add ageism to her agenda and actively take her seat in the UN initiatives.

#### **4.1.2 If not discriminated, where are they?**

It is necessary to recall that, even in the preparation process of this study, it was difficult to reach older employees in organisations with the defined criteria, that is, being older than 45 and holding a position as a specialist. Also, during the interviews, the number of older employees that were white-collar specialists were asked to the participants, and proportionally a very few numbers were mentioned. All the organizations subject to this study, had 500 employees and more, and the numbers of older employees with these specifications were not more than 10 in any of these organisations.

Even if none of the participants openly expressed a will to discriminate older employees from their organizations, findings of this study confirmed the limitations in the recruitment processes, and also in the retirement decisions. The tendency of forcing older employees to retirement has not been covered in this study, and it would be beneficial to examine the dynamics of retirement decisions for future studies.

Also, there is another aspect to consider while studying work-life ageism in Turkey. As an observation, it is possible to say that most of the Turkish companies, especially middle and small businesses that are almost the 99% of the work-life in Turkey, do not have a long history and do not have firm databases to improve their know-how. Each time an older employee leaves an organisation, a deep know-how also moves away with her/him. Where most of the organizations are not institutionalized, it would be useful to consider the side effects of losing older employees with this perspective, too.

### **4.1.3 There are Ways to Work with Older Employees**

Older employees have expectations about their future in the organisations they belong to. But there are important blockages to be solved.

First, this study reveals that older employees are willing to participate training and development activities which is an advantage to fight with ageism. In this case, improving the quality of the investments to be made on older employees must be reviewed meticulously. Previous studies argue that training and development programs with age specific preferences would work better to have effective results (Charness et al., 2006; Picchio, 2015). Working remotely and digitalization of work (including training and development programs) seems inevitable, but if age specific preferences would be considered while planning development programs, the return on investment would be more visible, and this would lead to further developmental activities supported by the employers.

Secondly, a need for enriched career options seems to be essential. Keeping in mind the fact that older employees' expertise can be beneficial in different type of jobs, not only hierarchical promotions but linear promotions also seem to be indispensable. Forming new jobs and titles and improving the rewards and benefits attached to those positions can be considered. By this way, not only older employee work-life would expand, also the organizations would find better ways to benefit more from their older employees.

Thirdly, the governmental institutions embrace anti-discriminative legislation, but there is still no specific mention on discrimination based on age. The laws and regulations seem to be in need to be improved in terms of avoiding and auditing ageism and age-based discrimination. This would both secure the rights of older employees who are potentially being forced to retire from work life in earlier ages, where they can still be beneficial and also for the government for a sustainable pension and health system. Even though the ageing of the population is being considered as a challenge to various systems in countries, research show that the countries giving opportunities

to older employees have the chance to raise GDP per capita by as much as 19% for the coming decades (UN, 2021). UN also remarks that “preliminary findings of a joint initiative of AARP (American Association of Retired Persons), OECD and the World Economic Forum to identify and share multigenerational and inclusive workforces are more resilient and better positioned to be more successful in a competitive environment” (2021).

Ageism is a problematic for the economic systems of governments. Ageism is a problematic for the older employees of today. And tomorrow will be a problematic for the young generations of today. As the population of the workforce will decrease gradually, it seems to be a problematic for the organisations, too. And there will be no time like the present to act.

## **4.2 LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

Some limitations must be considered in this study covering the sampling and the methodology. Although the findings strongly address the existing literature on workplace ageism, the size and the quality of the sample seem to be improvable. Also, the methodology can be enriched for future studies to gain advanced data that would lead to make deeper and extensive analysis.

Regarding the sample of the study, a diversity is determined which has the potential to risk the quality of the data collected. Three different groups of participants consisted of older employees, HR managers and function managers. The participants were all reached following the desk research of the researcher from her own business network. The HR managers and functions managers were directly closer contacts of the researcher. That means, trust between these participants and the researcher was built previously which led to open communication during the interviews and avoided the risk of political correctness. The data quality in this sense is considered to be at high level. On the other hand, three of the older employees were first time contacts for the researcher. Although the data collected from them are of high value, the risk of

cautious expressions might not have been avoided completely. For future studies, it would be beneficial to reach participants at a similar level in terms of building trust.

When it comes to the methodology of the study it is possible to state that this study gives satisfying answers to all the research questions. But it is possible to enrich the data addressing workplace ageism with a more sophisticated methodology. With a study with a mixed methodology and a larger sample size, it would be possible to reveal employment rates of older employees in various industries and find out if there are industry specific dynamics.

Also, it would be beneficial to investigate the consequences of generational changes in organizations and understand if workplace ageism has direct negative impacts on business results.

Another approach to contribute to the literature of workplace ageism can be considered as a longitudinal study investigating the methods to benefit from older employees more, and to find out the best alternative career paths for employees that are about to work in their organizations for longer periods. Alternative career paths were only questioned briefly in this study. The focus to the extension of the work life of employees can be improved in future studies.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A1**

#### **Interview Questions Used in the Study**

##### **HR Managers**

##### **English Version**

#### **Demographics**

1. What is your name and surname?
2. What is your age?
3. Which position do you hold in your organization?
4. Are you responsible of HR processes such as hiring, employee engagement, training, and development of employees in this organization?

#### **Organizational**

5. What is the average age in your organization?
6. What is the age distribution in your organization?
7. Do you have any criteria about age in your hiring process? Please explain.
8. How many employees do you have over 45 and at the same time that do not hold leadership positions (non-managers)?

#### **Perception and Evaluation**

9. How do you evaluate your employees who are non-managers over 45 in terms of their performance?
10. How do you evaluate your employees who are non-managers over 45 in terms of their potential?
11. How do you evaluate your employees who are non-managers over 45 in terms of their willingness to developmental activities?
12. What are your positive observations about these employees in terms of business results?

13. What are your negative observations about these employees in terms of business results?
14. How would you evaluate the general behaviours and attitudes of other employees towards these employees?

### **Willingness to Developmental Activities and Developmental Support**

15. How would you evaluate your non-manager employees over 45 in terms of their willingness to participate in developmental activities?
16. How would you evaluate your non-manager employees over 45 in terms of their reaction to various developmental tools? (Such as in-class trainings, digital learning tools, webinars, seminars, reading appointments, workshops, coaching, mentoring)
17. Which developmental tools would you prefer to use if you would prepare a development plan for your non-manager employees over 45? Please explain.

### **Leader Support**

18. How would you evaluate the leader support to your non-manager employees over 45?
19. Do you think that leadership support has an impact on the willingness of these employees to participate in developmental activities? Please explain.
20. How would you evaluate the carrier plan that is prepared by the leaders of these employees?

### **Career Plan**

21. In your point of view, on which aspects does one need to focus in their career plan? / What kind of a future must be prepared for them in the organization?
22. When there is an available managerial position in your organization do you consider your non-manager employees over 45 as strong candidates?
23. In what kind of alternative positions do you think these employees must be benefited from?
24. Is there anything you would like to add?

**Appendix A2**  
**Mülakat Soruları**  
**İK Müdürleri**  
**Türkçe Versiyonu**

**Demografi**

1. Adınız, soyadınız?
2. Kaç yaşındasınız?
3. Hangi pozisyonda çalışıyorsunuz?
4. Görev ve sorumluluklarınız arasında işe alım, çalışanların memnuniyet ve bağlılığı, çalışanların gelişimi gibi konular var mı?

**Organizasyon**

5. Şirketinizdeki yaş ortalaması nedir?
6. Mevcut çalışanlarınızın yaş dağılımı nedir?
7. İşe alım esnasında yaş ile ilgili bir kriteriniz var mı? Açıklar mısınız?
8. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan kaç çalışmanız var?

**Algı ve Değerlendirmeler**

9. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızı “performans” açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
10. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızı “sahip oldukları potansiyel” açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
11. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızı “gelişime açıklık” açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
12. Bu yaş grubunda “iş çıktılarına etki” açısından en “olumlu” gözlemlerinizi nedir?
13. Bu yaş gurubunda “iş çıktılarına etki” açısından en “olumsuz” gözlemlerinizi nedir?

14. Şirket içinde, bu yaş grubuna yönelik diğer çalışanların davranışlarını nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

### **Gelişime Açıklık ve Geliştirme Desteği**

15. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızı “gelişim faaliyetlerine katılım ve gelişim gösterme” açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

16. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızın “çeşitli eğitim-gelişim araçlarına” ne şekilde reaksiyon verdiğini gözlemliyorsunuz? (Sınıf içi eğitim, online webinar ve seminerler, okuma ödevleri, atölye çalışmaları, koçluk, mentörlük vb.)

17. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızı geliştirmeye yönelik bir gelişim programı hazırlayacak olsanız ne tür araçları kullanmaya öncelik verirsiniz? Açıklar mısınız?

### **Yönetici Desteği**

18. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızın “bağlı oldukları yöneticinin desteğini almak” açısından ne durumda olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?

19. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızın kendilerini geliştirme isteği üzerinde yöneticilerinin bir etkisi olduğuna inanıyor musunuz? Açıklar mısınız?

20. 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınız için yöneticileri tarafından hazırlanan kariyer planlarını nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?

### **Kariyer Planı**

21. Size göre, bu çalışanların kariyer planlarında nelere odaklanılmalı? / Onlara nasıl bir gelecek hazırlamak için destek verilmeli?

22. Şirket içinde herhangi bir yöneticilik pozisyonu açıldığında 45 yaş üstü ve yönetici olmayan çalışanlarınızı bu pozisyonlar için aday olarak görüyor musunuz?

23. Sizce bu çalışanlarınızı ne tür pozisyonlarda değerlendirilmeli?

24. Ekleme istediğiniz herhangi bir konu var mı?



**Appendix B1**  
**Interview Questions Used in the Study**  
**Function Managers**  
**English Version**

**Demographics**

1. What is your name and surname?
2. What is your age?
3. Which position do you hold in your organization?
4. Do you actively participate in HR processes such as hiring, employee engagement, training, and development of employees in this organization?

**Organizational**

5. What is the average age in your team?
6. What is the age distribution in your team?
7. Do you have any criteria about age in your hiring process? Please explain.
8. How many non-manager team-members over 45 do you have in your team?

**Perception and Evaluation**

9. How do you evaluate your employees who are non-managers over 45 in terms of their performance?
10. How do you evaluate your employees who are non-managers over 45 in terms of their potential?
11. How do you evaluate your employees who are non-managers over 45 in terms of their willingness to developmental activities?
12. What are your positive observations about these employees in terms of business results?
13. What are your negative observations about these employees in terms of business results?

14. How would you evaluate the general behaviours and attitudes of other employees towards these employees?

**Willingness to Developmental Activities and Developmental Support**

15. How would you evaluate your non-manager employees over 45 in terms of their willingness to participate in developmental activities?
16. How would you evaluate your non-manager employees over 45 in terms of their reaction to various developmental tools? (Such as in-class trainings, digital learning tools, webinars, seminars, reading appointments, workshops, coaching, mentoring)

**Leader Support**

17. How would you evaluate your support to your non-manager team-members over 45?
18. Do you think that your support has an impact on the willingness of these employees to participate in developmental activities? Please explain.
19. How would you evaluate the carrier plan you prepared for these employees?

**Career Plan**

20. In your point of view, on which aspects do you need to focus on their career plan? / What kind of a future must be prepared for them in the organization?
21. When there is an available managerial position in your organization do you consider your non-manager team-members over 45 as strong candidates?
22. In what kind of alternative positions do you think these employees must be benefited from?
23. Is there anything you would like to add?

**Appendix B2**  
**Mülakat Soruları**  
**Fonksiyon Müdürleri**  
**Türkçe Versiyonu**

**Demografi**

1. Adınız, soyadınız?
2. Kaç yaşındasınız?
3. Hangi pozisyonda çalışıyorsunuz?
4. Görev ve sorumluluklarınız arasında işe alım, çalışanların memnuniyet ve bağlılığı, çalışanların gelişimi gibi konular var mı?

**Organizasyon**

5. Takımınızdaki yaş ortalaması nedir?
6. Takımınızdaki yaş dağılımı nedir?
7. İşe alım süreçlerinizde yaşla ilgili bir kriteriniz var mı? Lütfen açıklayın.
8. Takımınızda yönetici olmayan 45 yaş üstü kaç kişi var?

**Algı ve Değerlendirmeler**

9. Yönetici olmayan 45 yaş üstü çalışanlarınızı performansları açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
10. Yönetici olmayan 45 yaş üstü çalışanlarınızı potansiyelleri açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
11. Yönetici olmayan 45 yaş üstü çalışanlarınızı gelişim faaliyetlerine gönüllülükleri açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
12. İş sonuçları açısından bu çalışanlarınızda gözlemlediğiniz olumlu yönler nedir?
13. İş sonuçları açısından bu çalışanlarınızda gözlemlediğiniz olumsuz yönler nedir?

14. Bu çalışanlarınıza diğer çalışanlarınızın tutum ve davranışlarını nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

### **Gelişime Açıklık ve Geliştirme Desteği**

15. Yönetici olmayan 45 yaş üstü çalışanlarınızın gelişim faaliyetlerine gönüllü katılımları açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

16. Yönetici olmayan 45 yaş üstü çalışanlarınızı çeşitli eğitim-gelişim araçlarına ne şekilde reaksiyon verdiğini gözlemliyorsunuz? (Sınıf içi eğitimler, dijital öğrenme araçları, webinarlar, seminerler, okuma ödevleri, atölye çalışmaları, koçluk, mentörlük, vb.)

### **Yönetici Desteği**

17. Bu çalışanlarınıza verdiğiniz desteği nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

18. Bu çalışanlarınıza verdiğiniz desteğin eğitim-gelişim faaliyetlerine karşı gönüllülükleri üzerinde bir etkisi olduğuna inanıyor musunuz? Lütfen açıklayın.

19. Bu çalışanlarınız için hazırladığınız kariyer planlarını nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

### **Kariyer Planı**

20. Size göre, bu çalışanlarınızın kariyer planlamalarında nelere odaklanmanız gerekiyor? / Onlara kurumunuzda nasıl bir gelecek hazırlanması gerekiyor?

21. Kurumunuzda uygun bir yöneticilik pozisyonu olduğunda, bu çalışanlarınızı güçlü birer yönetici adayı olarak görüyor musunuz?

22. Bu çalışanlarınızdan alternatif olarak ne tür pozisyonlarda daha çok verim alınabileceğini düşünüyorsunuz?

23. Eklemek istediğiniz bir şey var mı?

**Appendix C1**  
**Interview Questions Used in the Study**  
**Employees over 45**

**Demographics**

1. What is your name and surname?
2. What is your age?
3. Which position do you hold in your organization?

**Organizational**

4. What is the average age in your team?
5. What is the age distribution in your team?
6. Are there any criteria about age in your organization's hiring process? Please explain.
7. How many non-manager team-members over 45 are there in your team?

**Perception and Evaluation**

8. How do you evaluate your performance?
9. How do you evaluate your potential?
10. How do you evaluate your willingness to participate developmental activities?
11. How would you evaluate your performance comparing to younger employees?
12. How would you evaluate your potential comparing to younger employees?
13. How would you evaluate the general behaviours and attitudes of other employees towards you?

**Willingness to Developmental Activities and Developmental Support**

14. How would you evaluate yourself in terms of your reaction to various developmental tools? (Such as in-class trainings, digital learning tools, webinars, seminars, reading appointments, workshops, coaching, mentoring). Please explain.

**Leader Support**

15. How would you evaluate your leader's support towards you?
16. Do you think that your leader's support has an impact on the willingness of your participation in developmental activities? Please explain.
17. How would you evaluate the carrier plan that is prepared by your leader for you?

**Career Plan**

18. What kind of a future must be prepared for you in this organization?
19. When there is an available managerial position in your organization are you considered to be a strong candidate?
20. In what kind of alternative positions do you think you must be benefited from?
21. Is there anything you would like to add?

**Appendix C2**  
**Mülakat Soruları**  
**45 yaş üstü Çalışanlar**

**Demografi**

1. Adınız, soyadınız?
2. Kaç yaşındasınız?
3. Hangi pozisyonda çalışıyorsunuz?

**Organizasyon**

4. Bulduğunuz takımın yaş ortalaması nedir?
5. Bulduğunuz takımın yaş dağılımı nedir?
6. Kurumunuzun işe alım kriterleri arasında yaşla ilgili bir kriter var mı? lütfen açıklayın.
7. Bulduğunuz takımda yönetici olmayan 45 yaş üstü çalışan sayısı nedir?

**Algı ve Değerlendirmeler**

8. Kendi performansınızı nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?
9. Kendi potansiyelinizi nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?
10. Gelişim faaliyetlerine katılım konusundaki gönüllülük derecenizi nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? Lütfen açıklayın.
11. Daha genç yaştaki çalışanlara kıyasla kendi performansınızı nasıl buluyorsunuz?
12. Daha genç yaştaki çalışanlara kıyasla kendi potansiyelinizi nasıl buluyorsunuz?
13. Diğer çalışanların size olan davranışlarını nasıl tanımlarsınız?

**Gelişime Açıklık ve Geliştirme Desteği**

14. Çeşitli eğitim-gelişim araçlarına karşı düşünce ve reaksiyonunuzu nasıl değerlendirirsiniz? (Sınıf içi eğitimler, dijital öğrenme araçları, webinarlar,

seminerler, okuma ödevleri, atölye çalışmaları, koçluk, mentörlük, vb.) Lütfen açıklayınız.

### **Yönetici Desteği**

15. Bağlı olduğunuz yöneticinin size verdiği desteği nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
16. Bağlı olduğunuz yöneticinin size verdiği desteğin, eğitim-gelişim faaliyetlerine olan gönüllülüğünü üzerinde bir etkisi olduğuna inanıyor musunuz? Lütfen açıklayınız.
17. Yöneticinizle birlikte hazırladığınız veya yöneticinizin sizin için hazırladığı kariyer planını nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

### **Kariyer Planı**

18. Kurumunuzda size nasıl bir gelecek hazırlanması gerektiğini düşünüyorsunuz?
19. Kurumunuzda uygun yöneticilik pozisyonları boşaldığında güçlü adaylardan biri olarak değerlendirildiğinizi düşünüyor musunuz?
20. Alternatif olarak ne tür pozisyonlarda sizin deneyimlerinizden daha iyi faydalanılabileceğini düşünüyorsunuz?
21. Eklemek istediğiniz bir şey var mı?



## **ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL**

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.