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STABILITY OF THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SURVEY: FINDINGS FOR MATURE AGED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE HEALTHCARE ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract

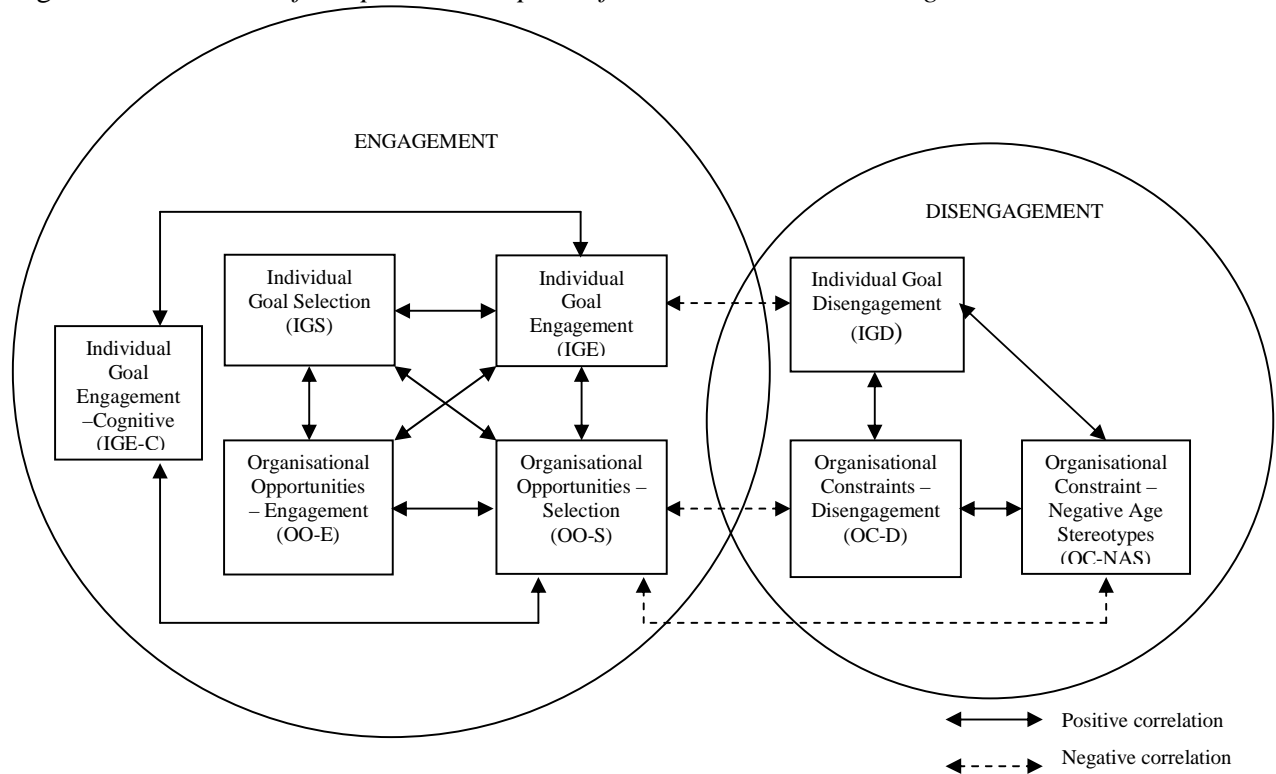
This article investigates work related learning and development amongst mature aged workers from a lifespan developmental psychology perspective. The current study follows on from research regarding the construction and revision of the Learning and Development Survey (LDS; Tones & Pillay, 2008). Designed to measure adaptive development for work related learning, the revised LDS (R-LDS) encompasses goal selection, engagement and disengagement from individual and organisational perspectives. Previous survey findings from a mixed age sample of local government workers suggest that mature aged workers aged over 45 years are less likely to report engagement in learning and development goals than younger workers, which is partly due to insufficient opportunities at work. In the current paper, exploratory factor analysis was used to investigate responses to the R-LDS amongst two groups of mature aged workers from a local government (LG) and private healthcare (PH) organisation to determine the stability of the R-LDS. Organisational constraints to development accounted for almost a quarter of the variance in R-LDS scores for both samples, while remaining factors emerged in different orders for each data set. Organisational opportunities for development explained about 17% of the variance in R-LDS scores in the LG sample, while the individual goal disengagement factor contributed a comparable proportion of variance to R-LDS scores for the PH sample. Findings from the current study indicate that opportunities for learning and development at work may be age structured and biased towards younger workers. Implications for professional practice are discussed and focus on improving the engagement of mature aged workers.

Research Question

An emerging field of research has investigated the application of lifespan development psychology to mature age workforce issues (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Robson, Hansson, Abalos & Booth, 2006), although few studies investigate work related learning and development (Robson & Hansson, 2007). Tones and colleagues (Tones, 2009; Tones & Pillay, 2008) developed the model of adaptive development for work related learning from an integration of lifespan development psychology models (see Boerner & Jopp, 2007; Tones & Pillay, 2008). Major processes in adaptive development include the selection of goals (selection), pursuit of goals (engagement), and adaptation to developmental losses (disengagement). The model was tested and refined via the Learning and Development Survey (LDS), which was designed to measure these three processes from the perspective of the individual respondents, as well as their perspective of opportunities and constraints for learning and development in the workplace. A pilot study was conducted which involved the survey of 113 local government (LG) workers aged 18-65 and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Eight factors encompassing 38 items emerged from the EFA, which are shown in Figure 1 (Tones, 2009). In order of total variance explained in LDS scores these factors were Organisational Opportunities – Selection (OO-S),

Individual Goal Engagement (IGE), Organisational Constraints – Disengagement (OC-D), Individual Goal Selection (IGS), Organisational Opportunities – Engagement (OO-E), Individual Goal Engagement – Cognitive (IGE-C), Individual Goal Disengagement (IGD), and Organisational Constraints – Negative Age Stereotypes (OC-NAS).

Figure 1. *The Model of Adaptive Development for Work Related Learning*



The aim of the current study was to evaluate the 38 item revised LDS (R-LDS) on two samples of mature aged workers, defined as aged 45 to 64 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2004). It was expected that the responses of mature aged workers would differ from the findings in Tones and Pillay’s (2008) pilot study in two ways. First, OC-D and OC-NAS were expected account for a greater proportion of variance in R-LDS scores compared to OO-S and OO-E as the literature indicates that organisational and social barriers to learning and development are evident for mature aged workers, whereas younger workers are likely to receive more encouragement to learn and develop in organisational and social settings (Nagele, & Walker, 2006). Second, IGD was anticipated to contribute a greater proportion of variance in R-LDS scores than IGS, IGE and IGE-C due the organisational constraints associated with learning and development in mature aged workers compared to younger workers.

Methodology

The participants were 119 mature aged workers from a LG (57) and private hospital (PH; 62) organisation. The LG sample consisted of a mix of males and females from managerial, professional and lower level occupations. By contrast, the PH respondents were mostly females from managerial or professional roles. The R-LDS was distributed via the internet for the LG, and print for the PH.

Data analysis involved exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using the maximum likelihood function on SPSS. Items were retained if they exhibited a loading of +/- 0.4 or greater, and did not share cross loadings of +/- 0.3. Internal consistency analysis was conducted to omit redundant items.

Results

An oblique rotation provided the most meaningful solution in each EFA. Retained items are shown in Table 1. The R-LDS was reduced to seven factors and 24 items for the LG data set, and six factors and 18 items for the PH data set.

Table 1
Retained Indicators of the R-LDS: LG and PH Data Sets

Indicator	LG	PH
Organisational Constraints – Disengagement (OC-D)		
OGD1 In my workplace, older workers are encouraged to retire.	.984	1.068
OGD2 Older workers are not offered training and development in my workplace.	.743	.886
OGD3 In my workplace, knowledge of the latest technologies is valued over direct industry experience.	.763	-
OGD5 In my workplace, younger workers are considered to be more competent than older workers.	.867	.832
OGD7 In my workplace, I have been given fewer learning and development opportunities as I get older.	.733	.759
OGD9 In my workplace, younger workers are considered to be more successful in learning and development activities than older workers.	-	.832
OGD11 In my workplace, older workers are thought to be unwilling to learn.	.581	-
Organisational Opportunities – Selection (OO-S)		
OGS1 My workplace provides job opportunities that are appropriate for me.	.857	-
OGS3 My workplace provides learning and development opportunities that meet my needs	.851	-
OGS7 My workplace helps me to decide which skills to improve.	.740	.401
OGS10 In my workplace, learning and development activities are designed to develop a range of skills.	.625	.836
OGS12 My workplace is willing to change learning and development activities to suit my needs.	.756	-
OGE13 In my workplace, I can get help when my job becomes difficult.	.494	-
OGE14 In my workplace, I have the opportunity to participate in training.	.558	.523
Organisational Opportunities – Engagement (OO-E)		
OGE2 In my job, I have to make difficult decisions.	1.001	.881
OGE3 In my job, I have to make quick decisions.	.813	.692
Individual Goal Selection (IGS)		
IGS1 It is important for me to teach work skills to younger workers.	.698	-
IGS2 It is important for me to influence the future of my workplace.	.492	-
Individual Goal Engagement - Behavioural/ Selection; Loc. Gov't (IGE-B); Priv. Hosp. (IGSE-B)		
IGS3 It is the right time for me to improve my work skills.	-	.407
IGE1 I am willing to work hard at developing new work skills.	.722	.549
IGE2 I try to obtain challenging jobs in order to develop my skills.	-	.737
IGE3 If training and development opportunities are available within my workplace, I will participate in them.	.398	-
IGE5 I design better ways of doing my job when it becomes challenging.	.739	-
Individual Goal Engagement – Cognitive (IGE-C)		
IGE13 I have the ability to achieve my learning and development goals.	.513	.608
IGE15 I stay focused on my learning and development goals.	1.067	-
IGE16 When I have set a learning and development goal for myself, I am confident that I will achieve it.	-	1.054
Individual Goal Disengagement (IGD)		
IGD2 Learning and development goals are not important to me.	-.542	-.593
IGD4 When my learning and development goals do not work, it's because I am unlucky.	-	-.796
IGD6 I do not need to participate in learning and development because I am competent in my job.	-.979	-.725

Table 2 contains the total variances explained (TVE), eigenvalues and Cronbach's alphas (α) for each factor solution. Organisational constraints – disengagement (OC-D) explained almost a quarter of the variance in R-LDS scores in each sample. Organisational factors explained a dominant proportion of variance in the LG solution. The opposite was observed in the PH data set as individual factors influenced variance in R-LDS scores to a greater extent than organisational factors.

Table 2

Eigenvalues, Total Variances Explained and Cronbach's alphas, LG and PH Factor Solutions

Factor	LG			PH		
	Eigenvalue	TVE	α	Eigenvalue	TVE	α
Organisational Constraints – Disengagement	8.784	23.115	.904	8.622	23.303	.929
Organisational-Opportunities - Selection	6.662	17.532	.899	2.133	5.765	.724
Organisational Opportunities - Engagement	2.548	6.706	.835	1.613	4.360	.700
Individual Goal Selection	2.349	6.181	.737	-	-	-
Individual Goal Engagement – Behavioural (Selection)	1.934	5.090	.794	2.785	7.526	.839
Individual Goal Engagement- Cognitive	1.696	4.462	.718	1.969	5.322	.813
Individual Goal Disengagement	1.315	3.460	.718	6.751	18.247	.789

Table 3 shows the inter-correlations between factors for both data sets. Common to both solutions are the strong negative correlation between OC-D and OO-S, and the positive correlations between OO-S and both IGE-B/ IGSE and IGE-C, IGE-B/ IGSE and IGE-C and OO-E. The main difference between the two solutions was the pattern of correlations between IGD and other factors. For the LG data set, IGD was negatively correlated with IGS, IGE-B and IGE-C, which suggested that mature aged workers who were disengaged from learning and development goals failed to engage with learning and development at work. By contrast, for the PH data set, IGD was positively correlated with OC-D and negatively correlated with OO-S, which indicated that mature aged workers may disengage from learning and development goals in response to a lack of opportunity for learning and development at work.

Table 3

Factor Intercorrelations: LG and PH Data Set

	OC-D	OO-S	OO-E	IGS	IGE-B/ IGSE	IGE-C	IGD
OC-D	1.000	-.340**	-.100	Factor not identified in PH data set.	-.053	-.059	.251**
OO-S	-.512**	1.000	.187	Factor not identified in PH data set.	.274**	.195*	-.189*
OO-E	.012	.065	1.000	Factor not identified in PH data set.	.333**	.166	-.218*
IGS	.027	.152	.274**	1.000	Factor not identified in PH data set.		
IGE-B/ IGSE	.011	.217*	.199*	.496**	1.000	.464**	-.448**
IGE-C	.175*	.182*	.206*	.388**	.499**	1.000	-.369**
IGD	-.048	.018	-.095	-.253**	-.268**	-.384**	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: Lower (unshaded) diagonal – LG data set; Upper (shaded) diagonal – PH data set

Discussion and Conclusion

Outcomes of the EFA analyses indicated a reduction in the number of factors and quantity of items in each factor for both data sets compared to the findings of the pilot study, which was conducted on a mixed age sample (Pillay & Tones, 2008). Hypotheses concerning the

prominence of disengagement factors were partially supported. The OC-D factor accounted for the greatest proportion of variance in both data sets, ahead of OO-S and OO-E. However, IGD was observed to explain more variance than individual selection and engagement factors for the PH model only, while this hypothesis was refuted in the LG solution.

The factors structures of the R-LDS differed for the LG and PH mature aged data sets, in that organisational opportunity factors were more salient in the former structure, while IGD was more salient in the latter. Although the original study was conducted within the LG which may have introduced some bias to retained items, differences in occupational status between the two mature aged data sets used in the current study may account for the disparate findings.

Private hospital employees may have been less sensitive to opportunities in the workplace than LG employees due to their professional or managerial status, as their high occupation level may have left limited scope for further career progression within the organisation. This is supported by correlations between IGD and OC-D and OO-S for the PH data set.

By contrast, mature aged LG employees tended to hold lower level jobs, so there may have been greater scope for career progression and learning and development opportunities within the organisation. There was also a positive correlation between IGE-C and OC-D for the LG data set, which implies that mature aged workers draw on internal motivational resources for learning and development in the context of organisational constraints. However, the strong negative correlation between IGD and IGS, IGE-B and IGE-C for the LG data set suggested that mature aged workers were either willing to engage with opportunities for learning and development at work, or disengaged from learning and development altogether. Furthermore, IGD was not correlated with OC-D, so disengagement was unrelated to constraints for learning and development at work.

Findings of the current study indicate that age related constraints to learning and development are salient to mature aged workers even in high level occupations. The patterns of individual factors in relation to organisational factors indicate diversity within mature aged worker populations and possibly organisational cultures with respect to learning. Improvement of learning and development opportunities for mature aged workers and encouragement of engagement in such opportunities is imperative, as has been suggested in the prior literature (eg. Nagele & Walker, 2006). However, learning and developmental opportunities will be required to be tailored to both individual and organisational needs and capabilities.

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