



# City Research Online

## City, University of London Institutional Repository

---

**Citation:** Forth, J. ORCID: 0000-0001-7963-2817 and Metcalf, H. (2014). Young People's Experiences in the Workplace (12/14). London, UK: ACAS.

This is the published version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

---

**Permanent repository link:** <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/20890/>

**Link to published version:** 12/14

**Copyright and reuse:** City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

---

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

[publications@city.ac.uk](mailto:publications@city.ac.uk)

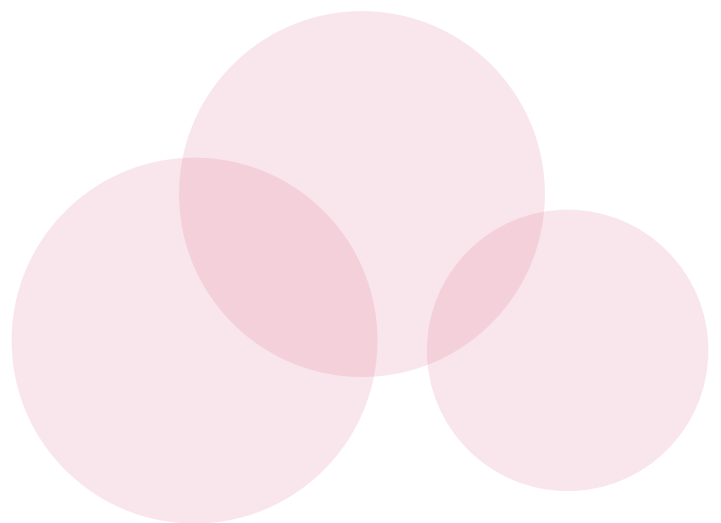
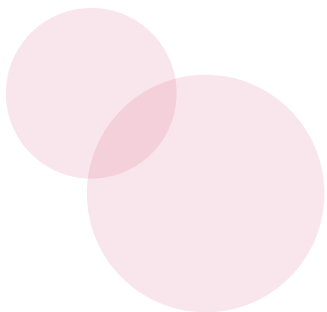
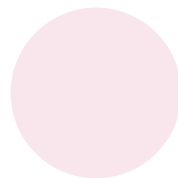
---

# Research Paper



Young people's experiences in the workplace

Ref: 12/14



2014

John Forth and Hilary Metcalf

(The National Institute of Economic and Social Research)

For any further information on this study, or other aspects of the Acas Research and Evaluation programme, please telephone 020 7210 3673 or email [research@acas.org.uk](mailto:research@acas.org.uk)

Acas research publications can be found at [www.acas.org.uk/researchpapers](http://www.acas.org.uk/researchpapers)

ISBN 978-1-908370-54 9

# **Young people's experiences in the workplace**

**John Forth and Hilary Metcalf  
NIESR**

Report to Acas

November 2014

## **DISCLAIMER**

The views in this report are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of Acas.

## **FOREWORD**

Acas has undertaken a number of studies reporting on workplace experiences of young workers – their use of Acas services, how they handle problems and access information at work, what they perceive as the challenges of starting employment, and the types of management support that employers can usefully provide to those who are new to the world of work. With the CIPD and Unionlearn, we have also recently published guidance for employers on managing young workers:

(<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/h/5/Managing-future-talent.pdf>).

Our interest in this area straddles a number of agendas, including ensuring that Acas services are directly relevant to the needs of young workers, as well as contributing to the wider debate around youth transitions to employment. This new report adds further to our body of knowledge, providing new quantitative evidence on both work orientations and the factors that contribute to workplace commitment for younger workers.

Acas is grateful to John Forth and Hilary Metcalf at NIESR for their work on this project.

Gill Dix  
Head of Strategy  
Acas  
November 2014

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	4
LIST OF FIGURES.....	5
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	6
ABBREVIATIONS.....	7
REPORTING CONVENTIONS.....	7
SUMMARY.....	8
1. INTRODUCTION.....	11
2. YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORK ORIENTATIONS.....	13
2.1. Background.....	13
2.2. Our approach.....	13
2.3. Data and methods.....	13
2.4. Results.....	15
2.5. Summary and conclusions.....	24
3. COMMITMENT IN THE WORKPLACE.....	25
3.1. Background.....	25
3.2. Our approach.....	25
3.3. Data and methods.....	26
3.4. Results.....	31
4. VOICE AT WORK.....	36
4.1. Background.....	36
4.2. Our approach.....	36
4.3. Data and methods.....	37
4.4. Results.....	42
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	49
6. APPENDIX TABLES.....	51

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Sample sizes for the analysis of work orientations .....	14
Table 2.2 Young people's work orientations, 2012.....	16
Table 2.3 Work orientations by age, 2012.....	17
Table 2.4 Ranking of work orientations by age, 2012.....	18
Table 2.5 Number of work orientation factors rated highly by age, 2012 .....	19
Table 2.6 Job preferences of young people, 1992-2012 .....	20
Table 2.7 Number of work orientation factors rated highly by young people, 1992-2012 .....	21
Table 2.8 Number of work orientation factors rated highly, all ages, 1992-2012 .....	21
Table 2.9 Work orientation for the cohort aged 20-29 in 1992 .....	22
Table 3.1: Comparison of questions in Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) and WERS 2011 .....	28
Table 3.2: Indicators of HR practice taken from WERS 2011 .....	30
Table 3.3: Differences in commitment by age group (regression analysis) .....	31
Table 3.4: The associations between HR practices and commitment by age group (regression analysis) .....	33
Table 4.1: Indicators of voice arrangements taken from WERS 2011 .....	41
Table 4.2: Differences in involvement rating by age group (regression analysis) ....	43
Table 4.3: Differences in satisfaction with involvement by age group (regression analysis) .....	44
Table 4.4: The associations between voice arrangements and ratings of involvement by age group (regression analysis) .....	46
Table 4.5: The associations between voice arrangements and satisfaction with involvement by age group (regression analysis) .....	47
Table 6.1 Work orientation by age, percentages, 2012 .....	51
Table 6.2 Ranking of job preferences of young people, 1992-2012 .....	52
Table 6.3: Prevalence of voice arrangements among employees, by age, 2011 .....	53

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Work orientation questions in the SES .....	14
Figure 3.1: Organisational commitment and engagement questions in WERS 2011 ..	27
Figure 4.1: Employee involvement questions in WERS 2011 .....	38



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We gratefully acknowledge the advice and support received from David Taylor and Gill Dix, who managed the research project within Acas.

We acknowledge the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Acas, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, the ESRC and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research as the sponsors of the Workplace Employment Relations Study, the National Centre for Social Research as the data collectors and the UK Data Archive as the distributors of the data.

We acknowledge the Economic and Social Research Council and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills as the sponsors of the Skills and Employment Survey, GfK NOP as the data collectors, and the UK Data Archive as the distributors of the data. We are particularly grateful to Alan Felstead, Duncan Gallie and Francis Green - the principal investigators on the survey - for advice on the data.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
HR	Human Resource
MQ	Management Questionnaire (WERS)
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares
SEQ	Survey of Employees Questionnaire (WERS)
SES	Skills and Employment Survey
WERS	Workplace Employment Relations Study

## **REPORTING CONVENTIONS**

Tables presenting the results of statistical tests use asterisks to indicate levels of statistical significance. A key is provided under each table.

The presentation of the statistical results focuses only on the main findings of interest. However detailed tables of coefficients for all of the statistical models are available from the authors on request.

## SUMMARY

### Introduction

Much of the research and policy-focused debate around young people's experience of the labour market focuses on the transition from education to employment, or on transitions between employment and unemployment. Rather less attention has been given to the extent to which the needs and expectations of young workers are understood by employers - that is, to how they are managed and to young people's experience of the workplace.

We use nationally representative survey data to address three questions:

- *What do young people look for in a job?* For example, how important are good pay or job security, relative to flexible working hours or a friendly working environment?
- *Which aspects of the working environment are most effective in engendering organisational commitment and engagement among young people?* For instance, is it high pay, good training provision, effective communication, or is it other things?
- *Which arrangements for employee voice give young people a sense of influence or involvement at work?* Is employee representation more or less effective than direct communication, for example.

A key theme throughout the analysis is the extent to which the attitudes and experiences of young people (i.e. those aged under 30) are unique to that age group, or are similar to the experiences of workers in older age groups (i.e. those aged 30-39 and 40-59 years).

### Young people's work orientations

We used data from the 2006 and 2012 Skills and Employment Surveys (SES), and from their predecessor, the 1992 Employment in Britain Survey, to examine the importance that employees placed on 15 different aspects of work, including: extrinsic factors, such as pay or job security; intrinsic factors, such as enjoyable work tasks; social factors, such as friendly colleagues; and factors relating to job demands and flexibility.

Young people's work orientations stress intrinsic, extrinsic and social factors, with job security and work they like doing being most prominent. There is less stress on job demands and flexibility. However, these orientations are not wholly stable over time: there appears to have been an increase in the importance of many factors, an increase which is greater than for other age groups, so that young people appear to have become relatively more demanding across a wider range of factors over time. The data suggest that young people's work orientations may also be affected cyclically, with the stress on job security declining and the stress on work interest and pay increasing in boom periods. However, there remains a strong degree of consistency in young people's work orientations over this period, in that the order of ranking of elements has remained fairly unchanged.

Compared with employees in other age groups, young people in 2012 appear to regard more work orientation factors as important. This is due mainly to a greater emphasis on extrinsic factors by young people than other age groups. Differences in intrinsic and social factors are fewer and, whilst young people place less importance on choice of working hours, the latter may be due to fewer young people having family responsibilities. Overall, the differences by age should not be overstated and there is a similarity in ranking of work orientation factors across different age groups.

We found some evidence of the differences in ratings of factors between age groups at any one time being partially a cohort effect, rather than solely an age effect. In particular, it appeared as though extrinsic orientations (with the exceptions of training and promotion) held at a young age might persist as a person ages. Age differences in extrinsic orientations therefore seemingly reflected differences between generations (i.e. when people were born) rather than their age per se. However, our evidence on this issue is drawn from a single cohort and it would be necessary to explore this further to draw more robust conclusions.

### **Organisational commitment**

We used data from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) to compare levels of organisational commitment between younger, middle-aged and older workers. We found that *the levels* were very similar across the three groups, and that those small differences that did exist between the age groups could be explained by factors other than age. In other words, we found that young workers are no more and no less committed in their jobs than middle-aged or older workers, once we account for other differences in their characteristics and circumstances.

Regression analysis identified a *number of factors that were associated with higher levels* of commitment among young workers. Many of these were factors that have been suggested in the wider research literature as being potentially important in raising commitment and engagement within the workplace. However most of the factors that proved important among young employees in WERS were also found to be important for workers in other age groups. The one exception was the delegation of decision-making autonomy to work teams, which was uniquely associated with commitment among young people. Two other factors – the extent to which managers encourage skill development and the provision of pension contributions – were also found to have a greater association with levels of commitment among young people than among employees in the next age group (those aged 30-39 years).

While we cannot conclude that these relationships are necessarily causal, as our data is cross-sectional in nature, the WERS results do support theoretical propositions that employers can implement HR practices which raise levels of commitment and engagement among young workers. They also suggest that many of these practices are also the kinds of practices that can raise commitment more generally across the workforce.

## **Employee involvement and voice at work**

Finally, we used the data from WERS 2011 to examine employees' ratings of the extent to which they were involved in workplace decision-making – and to examine their levels of satisfaction with this level of involvement.

We found that ratings of involvement are higher among younger workers. However this wholly reflects other differences in personal, job and workplace characteristics across the age groups: once such other factors are taken into account, young people's ratings are similar to those of middle-aged workers and *lower* than those of older workers. Turning to employees' degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in decision making at their workplace, we found that the differences between age groups are very small and can be explained by other factors. Any lower ratings of involvement among younger people do not therefore lead to lower levels of satisfaction among younger workers.

Attempts to identify a set of voice arrangements that were associated with higher ratings of involvement among young workers did yield some statistically significant associations, but they did not combine to provide a coherent picture of the types of voice arrangement that raise young workers' ratings of involvement with workplace decision-making (or their satisfaction with the same). One reason for this could be the relative paucity of employee-level voice measures in WERS.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Much of the research and policy-focused debate around young people's experience of the labour market focuses on the transition from education to employment, or on transitions between employment and unemployment. The focus of such debates is typically on the skills and employability of young people – that is, the qualities that they bring to the job. Rather less attention has been given to the extent to which the needs and expectations of young workers are understood by employers - that is, to how they are managed and to young people's experience of the workplace.

In the mid-2000s, Demos argued that there was a growing disconnect between young people and the organisations that employed them, with traditional organisational structures and frameworks providing inadequate means of engaging young people in the workplace (Miller and Skidmore, 2004; Gillinson and O'Leary, 2006). In 2010, the REC's Youth Employment Taskforce also stated that "employers must be prepared to adapt to changing priorities and attitudes to work. Young job-seekers are looking for different things from their work – variety, flexibility, a sense of purpose and the opportunity to take on new challenges" – and there are "real benefits for employers who are prepared to innovate and 'tap into' different skills and mind sets." (REC, 2010: 4).

The majority of the existing evidence on how young people experience work, and what motivates and engages them, is qualitative and relatively small in scale however.<sup>1</sup> A review of existing literature, published by Acas in 2012, found a relative paucity of research that investigated either: (a) young adults' perceptions and thoughts about the journey into work; or (b) how young people in their first jobs experience working life (Oxenbridge and Evesson, 2012: 4). The authors noted that there was a particular gap in the literature relating to young people's expectations and experiences in Britain since the onset of recession in 2008.

Nevertheless, the conclusions of that review – supported by more recent qualitative research among young people and employers (e.g. Culliney and Broughton, 2013; CIPD, Acas and Unionlearn, 2014) – are that a number of aspects of the working environment appear to be particularly important in shaping young people's experience of work. These include:

- Targeted induction processes – to ensure that the young person has a clear understanding of their role and of the organisation's policies, procedures and culture
- Supervisory support and mentoring – to ensure that the young person has clear lines of authority, and receives ongoing guidance and support for their longer-term development
- Clear channels of communication – so that issues can be identified, discussed and resolved quickly, and so that young people feel included and that they have a voice within the organisation
- Performance appraisal – to provide clear feedback on the young person's performance and to identify developmental needs and opportunities.

---

<sup>1</sup> The aforementioned study by Demos (Gillinson and O'Leary, 2006) is one notable exception, involving a survey of 539 graduates.

Whilst the existing evidence is instructive, there remains a concern that it is largely based on small-scale studies which may be unrepresentative of the wider picture. There is currently little up-to-date and nationally representative quantitative evidence on the attitudes and experiences of young workers; the aim of this report is to provide such evidence. We do this by analysing nationally representative survey data to address three questions:

- *What do young people look for in a job?* For example, how important are good pay or job security, relative to flexible working hours or a friendly working environment?
- *Which aspects of the working environment are most effective in engendering engagement and commitment among young people?* For instance, is it high pay, good training provision, effective communication, or is it other things?
- *Which arrangements for employee voice give young people a sense of influence or involvement at work?* Is employee representation more or less effective than direct communication, for example.

The survey data that we use to address the first of these questions come from the 2006 and 2012 Skills and Employment Surveys (SES), and from their predecessor, the 1992 Employment in Britain Survey.<sup>2</sup> The data that we use to address the second and third questions come from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS). A key theme throughout the analysis is the extent to which the attitudes and experiences of young people (i.e. those aged under 30) are unique to that age group, or are similar to the experiences of workers in older age groups (i.e. those aged 30-39 and 40-59 years).

Our analysis and results are presented in the remainder of the report. Chapter 2 examines young people's work orientations. Chapter 3 investigates the factors that raise levels of commitment and engagement among young people, and Chapter 4 seeks to identify the arrangements that enable young workers to feel more involved in decision-making at their workplace.

---

<sup>2</sup> We refer to these three surveys as the Skills and Employment Surveys in the remainder of the report.

## **2. YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORK ORIENTATIONS**

### **2.1. Background**

As discussed in the introduction, there is little quantitative evidence on what young people see as desirable in work, nor, consequently, the extent to which young people's orientations differ from that of other age groups. Quantitative research on work orientations has tended not to disaggregate by age, instead focusing on the orientations of the average worker and whether these have been changing over time (Gallie *et al.*, 2012). This work showed that workers value both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of work (particularly having work one likes doing, being able to use one's abilities and initiative, good pay, job security, training provision, friendly people and good relations with supervisors). It also showed that the importance of intrinsic factors grew over the period 1992-2006. In this section, we provide information on how orientations differ by age and we update the picture to 2012.

### **2.2. Our approach**

We use data from a set of nationally-representative employee surveys, conducted in 1992, 2006 and 2012, to address the following questions:

- Which elements of a job do young people rate as being most important?
- Do their orientations differ from that of employees in other age groups?
- Have young people's orientations been changing over time?
- To what extent are differences related to age or cohort?

We follow Gallie *et al.*, (2012) who examined 15 aspects of employees' work orientations between 1992 and 2006 for the workforce in aggregate.<sup>3</sup> We add more recently available data, for 2012, and disaggregate employees into three age groups (20-29, 30-39, 40-59). We describe the importance of each work orientation factor among young people (those aged 20-29), and compare this with its importance to other age groups and also discuss any changes over time. Following Gallie *et al.*, (2012), we also control for a number of personal characteristics besides age, so as to reduce the possibility that any age-related differences that we observe are simply the product of other factors (such as differences in qualification levels across age groups).

### **2.3. Data and methods**

#### **2.3.1. Data**

Our data comes from the Skills and Employment Surveys Series Dataset (SES) (Felstead *et al.*, 2014), a nationally representative dataset which combines common elements of six surveys of employees conducted between 1986 and 2012. Appropriately weighted, it provides nationally representative data for employees in Britain. Our analysis uses three of the surveys, 1992, 2006 and 2012.

---

<sup>3</sup> Owing to changes made to the sample weights when constructing the publicly-available, combined SES dataset that we use in this analysis, our estimates differ slightly from those published by Gallie *et al.* from the original survey datasets.



### 2.3.2. Classifying employees by age

The SES survey series includes employees aged 20-59 (or 64 for SES 2012). We apply a consistent definition across the three surveys that we use in our analysis by excluding those aged 60-64 from SES 2012, and categorise employees into three distinct age groups: 20-29, 30-39 and 40-59. The sample sizes are given in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Sample sizes for the analysis of work orientations**

age	1992	2006	2012	Total
20-29	945	681	389 <sup>4</sup>	2015
30-39	1064	1189	537	2790
40-59	1412	2108	1240	4760
<b>Total</b>	<b>3421</b>	<b>3978</b>	<b>2166</b>	<b>9565</b>

Source: Skills and Employment Survey

### 2.3.3. Measures of work orientation

The work orientation measures from the SES are set out in Figure 2.1. Each item is rated on a four-point scale from 'Essential' to 'Not very important'.

**Figure 2.1: Work orientation questions in the SES**

SHOW CARD E2 I am going to read out a list of some of the things people may look for in a job and I would like you to tell me how important you feel each is for you, choosing your answer from the card: (ROTATE LIST)  Good promotion prospects Good pay Good relations with your supervisor or manager A secure job A job where you can use your initiative Work you like doing Convenient hours of work Choice in your hours of work The opportunity to use your abilities Good fringe benefits An easy work load Good training provision Good physical working conditions A lot of variety in the type of work Friendly people to work with  1. Essential 2. Very important 3. Fairly important 4. Not very important NOT ON SHOW CARD 5. <i>Don't know</i> 6. <i>Refused</i>
--

<sup>4</sup> The smaller sample size of 20-29 year olds in 2012 is due to the total sample size of the SES being almost halved between 2006 and 2012.

Following Gallie *et al.* (2012), we group these 15 factors into four sub-groups: intrinsic; extrinsic; social; and job demands and flexibility.<sup>5</sup> The allocation of items to these four groups is shown in the tables in this chapter.

#### **2.3.4. Methods**

Cross-tabular analysis is used to describe the importance of each factor by age and year, focusing firstly on the percentage of employees who rated the item 'Essential' and then on the percentage who rated it either 'Essential' or 'Very important'. We test the statistical significance of any raw differences between age groups and over time, and repeat the process after controlling for differences in the proportion of employees in each group that are male/female, the proportion with different educational qualifications and the proportion with children aged under 5. The statistical analysis is conducted using the method of ordinary least squares.

### **2.4. Results**

#### **2.4.1. Young people's orientations in 2012**

In 2012, young peoples' ratings of the range of factors examined in the SES showed preferences for intrinsic, extrinsic and social factors at work, but less concern with factors related to job demands and flexibility (see Table 2.2).

Job security was the factor most often seen as essential by young people (with 52 per cent rating it 'essential'), closely followed by work they liked doing (46 per cent) (Table 2.2). Many other factors were seen as essential by around one third of young people, ranging across intrinsic factors (being able to use their abilities, being able to use initiative), extrinsic factors (physical working conditions, good pay, training provision) and social factors (friendly people and relations with supervisors). Perhaps surprisingly, promotion prospects were seen as essential by only 24 per cent of young people, whilst variety was essential to only 20 per cent. Factors related to job demands and flexibility (convenient working hours, choice in work hours and an easy work load) did not rate highly.

---

<sup>5</sup> The last of these renames Gallies' "work-life balance" group although the choice of items is unchanged.

**Table 2.2 Young people's work orientations, 2012**

	Factor rated 'Essential'		Factor rated 'Essential' or 'Very important'	
	Percentage	Ranking	Percentage	Ranking
<b>Intrinsic</b>				
Work you like doing	46	2	87	2
Use of abilities	37	4	86	3 (joint)
Can use initiative	32	7 (joint)	82	7
Variety	20	12	64	11
<b>Extrinsic</b>				
A secure job	52	1	95	1
Physical working conditions	33	6	84	5
Good pay	32	7 (joint)	81	8
Training provision	29	9	78	9
Promotion prospects	24	10	74	10
Good fringe benefits	13	14	42	13
<b>Job demands and flexibility</b>				
Convenient work hours	23	11	61	12
Choice in work hours	15	13	36	14
An easy work load	8	15	23	15
<b>Social</b>				
Friendly people	39	3	86	3 (joint)
Relations with supervisors	35	5	83	6

Source: Skills and Employment Survey 2012

In considering young people's work orientations and preferences, it is useful to consider factors considered 'very important' by them even if not 'essential'. Combining factors rated very important and essential shows a similar pattern of preferences to those considered essential – certainly the ranking of the items is not greatly altered (see Table 2.2). However, under this broader definition (essential or very important), we also find that a much larger number of the 15 factors are identified by young people as preferences they may look for in a job.

The importance of job security to young people stands out, with 95 per cent of young people considering it at least very important. The importance of intrinsic, extrinsic and social factors to young people was also brought out more strongly under the broader definition, with many factors seen as very important or essential by at least four out of five young people (i.e. work they like doing, being able to use their abilities, being able to use initiative, physical working conditions, good pay, friendly people and relations with supervisors). The importance of training provision and promotion prospects is also more evident here, with these items being at least very important to around three-quarters of young people. Variety, whilst essential to only one fifth of young people was at least very important to nearly two thirds. Factors associated with job demands and flexibility (as well as good fringe benefits) continued to be important to fewer young people. However, convenient working hours was at least very important to three out of five young people.

### 2.4.2. Differences by age group in 2012

The work orientations of young people in 2012 differed in some respects from those of older employees (Table 2.3). Differences that were statistically significant were mainly confined to extrinsic factors, and tended to indicate factors that were seen as more important by young people than by those aged both 30-39 and 40-59. This held whether one only considers factors rated as 'essential' or also includes those rated as 'very important'. Thus, for example, whilst 52 per cent of young people saw job security as essential, only 39 per cent of those aged 30-39 and 38 per cent of those aged 40-59 saw it as essential. The exceptions to this amongst extrinsic factors were good fringe benefits, which were viewed similarly by all age groups, and pay, which was viewed similarly by those aged 20-29 and those aged 30-39.

**Table 2.3 Work orientations by age, 2012**

	Cell percentages					
	Factor rated 'Essential'			Factor rated 'Essential' or 'Very important'		
	20-29	30-39	40-59	20-29	30-39	40-59
<b>Intrinsic</b>						
Work you like doing	46	42	40*	87	88	90
Use of abilities	37	35	32	86	86	84
Can use initiative	32	27	26	82	82	82
Variety	20	21	19	64	65	66
<b>Extrinsic</b>						
A secure job	52	39**	38**	95	89**	84**
Physical working conditions	33	20**	20**	84	76**	72**
Good pay	32	26	25**	81	78	67**
Training provision	29	20**	19**	78	68**	64**
Promotion prospects	24	16**	10**	74	60**	41**
Good fringe benefits	13	10	9	42	41	36*
<b>Job demands and flexibility</b>						
Convenient work hours	23	22	20	61	65	65
Choice in work hours	15	12	13	36	48**	47**
An easy work load	8	3*	6	23	21	21
<b>Social</b>						
Friendly people	39	31**	29**	86	82*	82**
Relations with supervisors	35	30	29	83	84	85

Source: Skills and Employment Survey 2012

Asterisks indicate significant difference from the 20-29 age group: \* p<0.10; \*\* p<0.05

The one non-extrinsic factor of greater importance to young people than to both middle-aged and older workers was working with friendly people. However, whilst the percentage of young people rating this essential was much greater than in other age groups, the size of the difference between age groups was fairly small for those rating it at least very important.

There was only one factor rated of importance less often by young people than by other age groups: choice of working hours (at least very important to 48 per cent of 30-39 year olds and 47 per cent of 40-59 year olds, compared with 36 per cent of 20-29 year olds). One may suspect that this is, in part, a compositional affect, with a lower percentage of young people having family responsibilities; however this and other differences between the age groups remained substantially the same after having adjusted for differences in the composition of the samples in terms of qualifications, gender and the presence of a dependent child aged under five (see Appendix Table 6.1).

Despite the differences by age in the percentages rating certain items as 'essential' or 'very important', there was substantial similarity in the *ranking* of factors across age groups, with job security, work you like doing and use of abilities ranking highly for each age group and choice of working hours, an easy work load and good fringe benefits typically being seen as relatively unimportant (Table 2.4). Comparing across age groups, the ranking of specific items differed by more than two places for only four factors (physical working conditions, promotion prospects, convenient working hours and relations with supervisors).

**Table 2.4 Ranking of work orientations by age, 2012**

	Ranking based on cell percentages					
	Factor rated 'Essential'			Factor rated 'Essential' or 'Very important'		
	20-29	30-39	40-59	20-29	30-39	40-59
<b>Intrinsic</b>						
Work you like doing	2	1	1	2	2	1
Use of abilities	4	3	3	3 (joint)	3	3
Can use initiative	7 (joint)	6	6	7	5	6
Variety	12	9	10	11	10	9
<b>Extrinsic</b>						
A secure job	1	2	2	1	1	3
Physical working conditions	6	10	8	5	8	7
Good pay	7 (joint)	7	7	8	7	8
Training provision	9	10	10	9	9	11
Promotion prospects	10	12	13	10	12	13
Good fringe benefits	14	14	14	13	14	14
<b>Job demands and flexibility</b>						
Convenient work hours	11	8	8	12	10	10
Choice in work hours	13	13	12	14	13	12
An easy work load	15	15	15	15	15	15
<b>Social</b>						
Friendly people	3	4	4	3 (joint)	5	5
Relations with supervisors	5	5	4	6	4	2

Source: Skills and Employment Survey 2012

This commonality of ranking positions across age groups, when contrasted with the differences in the actual ratings of certain items, serves to indicate that young people tended to rate *more* factors as essential than did other age groups in 2012: on average, employees in the 20-29 age group rated 4.4 of the 15 items as essential, compared with 3.5 and 3.4 for those aged 30-39 and 40-59, respectively (Table 2.5). Young people also rated more factors essential or very important (an average of 10.6 factors, compared with 9.9 among older workers). This could suggest that younger employees are less able to discriminate as to which items are most important to them; however, young people did not rate everything more highly and some items were rated as relatively unimportant. Indeed the range between the highest and lowest rated items was larger among young than old. It therefore appears as though younger people did have a broader range of preferences in respect of work than older age groups in 2012, as the initial comparison of their responses suggested.

**Table 2.5 Number of work orientation factors rated highly by age, 2012**

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Average (mean) number of factors rated:</b>	
	<b>Essential</b>	<b>Essential or Very important</b>
<b>20-29</b>	4.4	10.6
<b>30-39</b>	3.5**	10.3
<b>40-59</b>	3.4**	9.9**

Source: Skills and Employment Survey 2012

Asterisks indicate significant difference from the 20-29 age group: \* p<0.10; \*\* p<0.05

### ***2.4.3. Differences for young people over time***

From a policy perspective, the degree of consistency in work orientations over time is important: if preferences are found to have changed over time, preferences in 2012 may not be a useful indicator of preferences in the future, although the direction of change may be a useful guide to how preferences may alter.

A comparison with the work orientations reported in SES 1992 shows that young people's job preferences have changed over the past 20 years. Between 1992 and 2012, the percentage of young people rating a factor as essential rose significantly for two-thirds of the factors, and the percentage rating a factor at least very important rose significantly for four-fifths of the factors (Table 2.6). Indeed, training provision and '(job) variety' were the only factors which had not grown significantly in importance in either the 'essential' rating or the combined 'essential' and 'very important' ratings.

With two exceptions, these changes remain after standardising for changes in composition in the sample in terms of gender, whether there is a dependent child under the age of five and qualifications. These exceptions were the rise in the importance of use of abilities (rated as essential) and being able to use one's initiative (rated as either essential or very important). It seems likely that the raw change in the percentages of young people rating these two factors as important is due to the rise in the qualification level of young people over the period, such that the groups of young people observed in 1992 and 2012 are more similar in their ratings of these items once differences in their educational attainments have been controlled for. However, as stated above, the remaining eleven factors, i.e. around two-thirds of young people's job preferences, had grown in importance over this period, even when such changes in the samples are taken into account.

**Table 2.6 Job preferences of young people, 1992-2012**

	Cell percentages					
	Factor rated 'Essential'			Factor rated 'Essential' or 'Very important'		
	1992	2006	2012	1992	2006	2012
<b>Intrinsic</b>						
Work you like doing	35**	53*	46	84	91*	87
Use of abilities	29**	37	37	79**	87	86
Can use initiative	25**	31	32	77**	87	82
Variety	18	24	20	61	69	64
<b>Extrinsic</b>						
A secure job	41**	45*	52	85**	85**	95
Physical working conditions	29	27	33	71**	78**	84
Good pay	27	41**	32	72**	84	81
Training provision	33	24	29	77	75	78
Promotion prospects	17**	28	24	57**	70	74
Good fringe benefits	7**	11	13	29**	45	42
<b>Job demands and flexibility</b>						
Convenient work hours	11**	18*	23	37**	62	61
Choice in work hours	6**	9**	15	24**	39	36
An easy work load	3**	6	8	11**	21	23
<b>Social</b>						
Friendly people	25**	38	39	76**	88	86
Relations with supervisors	28	33	35	76**	88*	83

Source: Skills and Employment Survey

Asterisks show whether percentage is significantly different from 2012: \*  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$

It is possible that the increase in importance of many specific factors for young people may have been due to a greater *general* propensity to categorise factors as important in 2012. Certainly, the average number of factors rated essential by young people increased from 3.4 to 4.4 between 1992 and 2012 and, for those rated essential or very important, rose from 9.2 to 10.6 (Table 2.7). Moreover, the rise in the number of factors rated highly occurred for all age groups (Table 2.8), suggesting that expectations from employment rose for all employees. However, the patterns seen in Table 2.6 do not appear to be wholly explained by any such generalised changes. First, the increase for young people was greater than for other age groups; and second, among young people, some factors increased significantly whilst others did not. This suggests that some specific factors did in fact become more important for young people over this period (Table 6.2 in the Appendix shows how the rankings change over time).

**Table 2.7 Number of work orientation factors rated highly by young people, 1992-2012**

	Average (mean) number of factors rated:	
	Essential	Essential or Very important
<b>1992</b>	3.4**	9.2**
<b>2006</b>	4.2	10.7
<b>2012</b>	4.4	10.6

Source: Skills and Employment Survey

Asterisks indicate significant difference from 2012: \* p<0.10; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 2.8 Number of work orientation factors rated highly, all ages, 1992-2012**

Year	Average (mean) number of factors rated:					
	Essential			Essential or Very important		
	20-29	30-39	40-59	20-29	30-39	40-59
1992	3.4	3.1	2.9	9.2	9.0	9.1
2012	4.4	3.5*	3.4*	10.6	10.3	9.9**

Source: Skills and Employment Survey

Asterisks indicates that the increase from 1992-2012 was significantly different from the increase among 20-29 year olds over the same period: \* p<0.10; \*\* p<0.05

One implication of these results is that the job preferences of young people in the age band 20-29 may not be wholly stable over time. However, there was a *broad* consistency in the relative importance of different factors for this age band between 1992 and 2012.

Comparison of changes between 1992 and 2006 and between 2006 and 2012 suggests a cyclical element affecting work orientation. Whether one looks at the factors rated as 'essential' or at those rated as 'essential' or 'very important', one finds that, over the latter, shorter, period, fewer factors changed in importance and the growth in the importance of most factors between 1992 and 2012, as discussed above, had largely occurred by 2006 (see Table 2.6). However, the importance to young people of work they like doing grew between 1992 and 2006 but fell between 2006 and by 2012. The same occurred for pay. At the same time, the growth in the importance of job security largely occurred after 2006. Together these suggest a cyclical element may have influenced job orientation, with more emphasis on the work people like doing and demand for higher pay, but less interest in job security, in periods of greater economic prosperity. It would be useful to explore the presence of a cyclical influence further, using evidence across other time periods and other age groups.

A second issue affecting these changes may be a 'cohort effect' (an effect whereby the period in which you grew up and have lived causes you to develop different orientations than someone born in a different period). To explore this, we compared work orientations for those aged 20-29 in 1992 with those aged 40-49 in 2012 (Table 2.9). (Note this is a sub-group of the older age group used above.) These age-year groupings represent the same cohort, i.e. those who were 20-29 in 1992 would have been 40-49 in 2012 (although the two survey samples do not necessarily comprise the same individuals).



**Table 2.9 Work orientation for the cohort aged 20-29 in 1992**

	Cell percentage			
	Factor rated 'Essential'		Factor rated 'Essential' or 'Very important'	
	Aged 20-29 in 1992	Aged 40-49 in 2012	Aged 20-29 in 1992	Aged 40-49 in 2012
<b>Intrinsic</b>				
Work you like doing	35	43**	84	90**
Use of abilities	29	35	79	87**
Can use initiative	25	29	77	83**
Variety	18	19	61	69**
<b>Extrinsic</b>				
A secure job	41	42	85	85
Physical working conditions	29	25	71	72
Good pay	27	25	72	69
Training provision	33	22**	77	68**
Promotion prospects	17	12**	57	46**
Good fringe benefits	7	9	29	37**
<b>Job demands and flexibility</b>				
Convenient work hours	11	24**	37	65**
Choice in work hours	6	14**	24	49**
An easy work load	3	6**	11	20**
<b>Social</b>				
Friendly people	25	30	76	82*
Relations with supervisors	28	33	76	86**

Source: Skills and Employment Survey 1992

Asterisks show whether percentage is significantly different between 20-29 year olds in 1992 and 40-49 year olds in 2012: \*  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$

In terms of factors rated as essential, the comparison between 20-29 year olds in 1992 and 40-49 year olds in 2012 shows a difference in orientation for job demands and flexibility factors, but little difference for intrinsic, extrinsic or social factors. Comparison with the differences by age in 2012 (Table 2.3) suggests that the differences in ratings of factors by age groups over time are subject to a variety of influences, with some tending to persist from a young age, others differing according to age, and others changing or remaining similar over time for all ages:

- For intrinsic factors (other than 'work you like doing') there is a lack of difference in preferences between 20-29 year olds in 1992 and 40-49 year olds in 2012 (Table 2.9) and there is also a lack of difference by age in 2012 (Table 2.3). This suggests that orientation towards most intrinsic factors has been stable over this period and differs little by age. The same applies to the importance of relations with supervisors.

- For extrinsic factors (other than promotion and training) and preference for friendly people, the lack of difference in orientation between 20-29 year olds in 1992 and 40-49 year olds in 2012 (Table 2.9) contrasts with the difference by age in 2012 for these factors (excluding good fringe benefits) (Table 2.3). This suggests that orientations towards these factors held at a young age persist as a person ages, but that societal factors create different orientations for new cohorts.
- For promotion and training the reduction in the importance between 20-29 year olds in 1992 and 40-49 year olds in 2012 (Table 2.9), combined with a difference by age in 2012 (Table 2.3) suggests an age-related influence on these orientations, an influence which would be expected.
- Job demands and flexibility factors are more important for 40-49 year olds in 2012 than 20-29 year olds in 1992 (Table 2.9). However, there is little difference by age in job demands and flexibility orientations in 2012 (Table 2.3). This suggests there has been an overall societal change in these orientations. The pattern is similar for 'work you like doing'.

When we add in factors which have been rated as very important, the pattern for extrinsic factors and for job demands and flexibility is similar to that for factors rated essential. However, for intrinsic and social factors, the pattern differed for 'essential or very important' compared with essential alone: each of these factors was more important to 40-49 year olds in 2012 than 20-29 year olds in 1992 (Table 2.9). Given the lack of differences in orientation by age in 2012 for intrinsic factors (Table 2.3), this suggests a societal change towards these factors over this period and this has affected this cohort. However, the societal change has not been great enough to influence what people see as essential (as described above).

The above analysis of the interplay of cohort and age should be seen as identifying possible links rather than a robust identification of these. Further analysis would be required to establish these links more definitively, but this was outside the scope of this study. It would be useful to explore the cohort effect further to check whether this pattern is found across different cohorts and to better identify the type of factors which are more subject to change or continuity (and, in particular, whether the different pattern for extrinsic and other factors holds). Nevertheless, the analysis highlights that – whilst at any given time the job orientations of young people may differ from that of older people – orientations may not be innately more important to one age group than another, but some orientations may be malleable to societal influences and policy changes. In the case of job demands and flexibility orientations, for example, it is certainly possible that the policy emphasis on encouraging family friendly policies and practices over recent decades may have resulted in the attitudinal changes noted above.

## **2.5. Summary and conclusions**

Young people's work orientations stress intrinsic, extrinsic and social factors, with job security and work they like doing being most prominent. There is less stress on job demands and flexibility. However, these orientations are not wholly stable over time: there appears to have been an increase in the importance of many factors, an increase which is greater than for other age groups, so that young people appear to have become relatively more demanding across a wider range of factors over time. The data suggest that young people's work orientations may also be affected cyclically, with the stress on job security declining and the stress on work interest and pay increasing in boom periods. However, there remains a strong degree of consistency in young people's work orientations over this period, in that the order of ranking of elements has remained fairly unchanged.

Compared with employees in other age groups, young people in 2012 appear to regard more work orientation factors as important. This is due mainly to a greater emphasis on extrinsic factors by young people than other age groups. Differences in intrinsic and social factors are fewer and, whilst young people place less importance on choice of working hours, the latter may be due to fewer young people having family responsibilities. Overall, the differences by age should not be overstated and there is a similarity in ranking of work orientation factors across different age groups.

We found some evidence of the differences in ratings of factors between age groups at any one time being partially a cohort effect rather than solely an age effect. In particular, it appeared as though extrinsic orientations (with the exceptions of training and promotion) held at a young age might persist as a person ages and so age differences in extrinsic orientations reflected differences between generations (i.e. when people were born) rather than their age per se. The importance of training and promotion, not unexpectedly, did appear to decline with age. Job demands and flexibility and social factors appear more subject to change over working life, irrespective of age. It is possible that social developments (e.g. the emphasis on family-friendly working) have been influential in driving changes in the latter types of factors across all age bands. However, our evidence on cohort, social and age effects is drawn from a single cohort and it would be necessary to explore this further to draw more robust conclusions.

### **3. COMMITMENT IN THE WORKPLACE**

#### **3.1. Background**

The discussion in the previous chapter suggested that younger workers differ somewhat from older workers in terms of things that they look to obtain from a job. This would suggest that employers may need to tailor their approach so that they effectively motivate and engage younger workers, since the types of HR practice which raise levels of commitment among younger workers may be different to those which raise commitment among older workers.

This chapter investigates levels of organisational commitment among younger and older workers, and seeks to identify those HR practices which are associated with higher levels of commitment among younger employees. Our investigation is framed within the existing academic literature on organisational commitment and its determinants.

Organisational commitment is typically viewed as having three components (Meyer and Allen, 2007). The first and second are 'normative commitment' (under which the employee commits to the organisation because of feelings of obligation) and 'continuance commitment' (whereby the employee commits because of the losses they will incur through leaving the organisation). The third aspect is 'affective commitment', which concerns the employee's emotional attachment to the organisation. In conceptual terms, this third aspect of affective commitment has some overlap with the concept of 'engagement', which has recently been the focus of much attention from policy makers (e.g. see MacLeod and Clarke, 2009).<sup>6</sup>

The human resource management (HRM) literature sees organisational commitment (particularly affective commitment) as a key asset for any firm (e.g. Walton, 1985). Employees with higher levels of commitment are more likely to expend discretionary effort in pursuit of organisational goals, to seek to acquire firm-specific skills and to share private knowledge about ways in which production processes or service delivery can be improved. Each of these 'outcomes' has the potential to raise levels of productivity within the firm. Committed and engaged employees are also more likely to stay with the firm, thus allowing the firm to recoup a return from any investments in training and saving turnover costs.

#### **3.2. Our approach**

We use data from a nationally-representative, linked employer-employee survey, carried out in Britain in 2011/12, in order to investigate two questions:

- Do younger workers demonstrate higher or lower levels of organisational commitment than older workers?
- Which types of HR practice are associated with higher levels of commitment among younger workers, and are these the same as (or different to) the types of HR practice that are associated with higher commitment among older workers?

---

<sup>6</sup> Engagement can be defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, *dedication* and absorption" (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008: 209) [emphasis added].

In relation to the first question, previous research (e.g. Bryson and White, 2008) indicates that age is not the only factor which influences levels of commitment among employees. We therefore control for differences in other personal characteristics (such as an employees' level of educational attainment), differences in the types of jobs that younger and older workers do, and differences in the types of workplace in which they are located.

In respect of the second question, we focus on those HR practices that feature prominently in the existing literature on commitment. The HRM literature (e.g. Pfeffer, 1998) identifies a number of practices as being important in raising levels of commitment within the workplace, namely: selective hiring; job security and internal labour markets; training and development; information and voice; team-working; high pay contingent on performance; and harmonised terms and conditions.<sup>7</sup> Organisational psychology, on the other hand, has tended to focus on the importance of 'perceived organisational support' (POS), i.e. the extent to which the employee feels supported and well-treated by the organisation (e.g. Rhoades et al, 2001). Some of the practices common in the HRM literature can also be expected to raise levels of POS (training provision is one example). However the POS perspective suggests that other practices or management activities beyond the typical HRM list may be influential in raising commitment; these might include the provision of flexible working practices (or an understanding approach towards work-life conflicts), and high levels of behavioural integrity on the part of managers (e.g. dealing with employees honestly, consistently and fairly).

### **3.3. Data and methods**

#### **3.3.1. Data**

Our data come from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study (Department for Business Innovation and Skills *et al.*, 2014). Appropriately weighted, it is a nationally representative survey of workplaces in Britain with 5 or more employees, covering all sectors of the economy except agriculture and mining (see van Wanrooy et al., 2013, for a discussion). The analysis presented here exploits two elements of the survey. The first is the management interview, conducted face-to-face with the most senior workplace manager responsible for employee relations. Interviews were conducted in 2,680 workplaces between March 2011 and June 2012 with a response rate of 46 per cent. The second element is the survey of employees, distributed in workplaces where a management interview was obtained. Twelve-page self-completion questionnaires were distributed to a simple random sample of 25 employees (or all employees in workplaces with 5-24 employees) in the 2,170 workplaces (81 per cent) where management permitted it. Of the 40,513 questionnaires distributed, 21,981 usable ones (54 per cent) were returned.<sup>8</sup> Weights are provided with the survey data to correct for the sample design and any observable non-response biases.

---

<sup>7</sup> Individual studies use variations on these themes, but the list provided identifies the principal headings that appear in most research studies (see Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008, for a discussion).

<sup>8</sup> An additional 3,858 questionnaires were distributed at 247 workplaces where there were no employee questionnaires returned. We assume that these questionnaires were never distributed by the employer (van Wanrooy et al., 2013: 210) so they are not included in the figures in the text.

The WERS questionnaires are available for inspection on-line at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/workplace-employment-relations-study-wers>

### 3.3.2. Classifying employees by age

The Survey of Employees Questionnaire (SEQ) asked employees to categorise themselves into one of nine age groups, with the lowest age range being 16-17 years and the highest being 65 and above.<sup>9</sup> We omit employees aged 60 and above (the top two categories) and then collapse the remaining seven categories into three groups: 16-29 years; 30-39 years and 40-59 years. These contain 4,001 employees, 4,611 employees and 11,499 employees respectively. The age ranges used in the second and third of these groups accord with those used in the analysis of the SES (see Chapter 2). The first group includes younger employees than the SES analysis (which, by necessity, only includes employees aged 20 and above); however, employees aged 20-29 comprise the majority (90 per cent) of all employees in our 16-29 age group in WERS after applying population weights.

### 3.3.3. Developing a measure of organisational commitment

Elsewhere in the SEQ, employees are asked a variety of questions about their personal characteristics, their job and their employment situation. Some questions concern their attitudes to their job and employer, with one set seeking to identify their levels of organisational commitment and engagement (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Organisational commitment and engagement questions in WERS 2011**

**C1** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about working here?

*Tick one box in each row*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Using my own initiative I carry out tasks that are not required as part of my job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I share many of the values of my organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel loyal to my organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am proud to tell people who I work for	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The first question in this set was a new question in WERS 2011 that had not appeared in earlier surveys in the series, and was intended to capture an employee's engagement with their job by providing an indicator of the extent to which they voluntarily undertake work beyond their job description. This indicator contains the essence of the positive, work-focused and dedicated approach that is

<sup>9</sup> The full set of categories are: 16-17; 18-19; 20-21; 22-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60-64; 65 and over.

embodied within the definition of engagement set out in Section 3.1 above, although it has the obvious weakness of comprising a single item.

The second, third and fourth questions in the set have appeared in the WERS SEQ since 1998 and have been used as an indicator of affective commitment by a number of previous researchers (e.g. White and Bryson, 2008; Green, 2008). Together with the engagement item, they map across reasonably well to four of the six items used by Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) in their influential study of organisational commitment and work organisation in the US and Japan (see Table 3.1).

When we code the answers given to these four questions in WERS 2011 to a numeric scale ranging from 0 to 4 (where 0="Strongly disagree" and 4="Strongly agree"), we find that the four measures are each positively correlated with one another.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in principal components analysis, one single factor formed from all four measures provides a better overall fit to the data than multiple factors formed from separate groupings of one, two or three of the measures. Together, these results suggest that the four measures capture different aspects of the same underlying construct. With this in mind, we develop a single additive index of organisational commitment and engagement by summing all four measures; this yields a single index ranging from 0 to 16. The index has a mean value of 11.3, a standard deviation of 2.8 and a Cronbach alpha of 0.78.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 3.1: Comparison of questions in Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) and WERS 2011**

<b>Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990)</b>	<b>WERS 2011</b>
My values and the values of this company are quite similar	I share many of the values of my organisation
I feel very little loyalty to this organisation	I feel loyal to my organisation
I am proud to work for this company	I am proud to tell people who I work for
I am willing to work harder than I have to in order to help this company succeed	Using my own initiative I carry out tasks that are not required as part of my job
I would take any job in order to continue working for this company	
I would turn down another job for more pay in order to stay with this company	

Note: Adapted from White and Bryson (2008: Table 1).

<sup>10</sup> The pairwise correlations ranging from 0.22 (items one and four) to 0.75 (items three and four).

<sup>11</sup> An index comprised solely of the second, third and fourth items in Figure 3.1 – those measures of organisational commitment that have traditionally appeared in WERS - has a Cronbach alpha of 0.85.

### **3.3.4. Measures of HR practice**

Our measures of HR practices are taken variously from the employee and management questionnaires in WERS. We utilise indicators that appear in the SEQ, where possible, as these allow for the possibility that employees within the same workplace may be treated differently by managers or have differential exposure to certain practices. However, the SEQ does not offer exhaustive coverage of the practices discussed in Section 3.2 above and so, in cases where there is no suitable indicator at the level of the individual employee, workplace-level indicators from the management questionnaire (MQ) are also used in addition. The indicators that are used are listed in Table 3.2 on page 30.

### **3.3.5. Methods**

The statistical analysis is carried out using ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions in order to identify the independent associations between employee age and organisational commitment (and between specific HR practices and organisational commitment) after controlling for other differences in characteristics between employees. The analysis has two strands.

In the first strand of the analysis, we pool the three age groups discussed earlier and conduct regression analyses to determine whether levels of organisational commitment are higher or lower among younger workers than among older workers. We include controls for employee characteristics (gender, ethnicity, disability, married/partner, dependent children, caring responsibilities, academic & vocational qualifications), job characteristics (hours, occupation, supervisory responsibilities and tenure) and workplace characteristics (employment size, industry, region, single/multi-site and public/private sector). We also include controls for HR practices as listed in Table 3.2.

As we are concerned that employees' workplaces may have other unobserved traits which affect levels of commitment among the workforce, we also conduct analyses that replace all workplace characteristics and HR practices with a dummy variable which identifies the workplace to which each employee belongs. This allows us to remove any workplace-level influence on employees' levels of commitment that is common to all employees at a work site (the workplace 'fixed effect'), thus potentially giving us a cleaner view of the importance of other influences, albeit that we are unable within this 'fixed effects' framework to identify the impact of those practices observed only at workplace level in the MQ.

In the second strand of the analysis, we conduct regression analyses of each age group separately, with the focus switching to the coefficients on the indicators of HR practice in each of the three regressions. We first consider which areas of HR practice are associated with higher levels of commitment among younger people. We then compare the coefficients on the HR indicators between the three age groups, using Chow tests to ascertain whether the 'effects' (the coefficients) differ to a statistically significant extent between the age groups.<sup>12</sup> We run regressions with our full set of controls, including testing the sensitivity of our results to the inclusion of workplace fixed effects.

---

<sup>12</sup> The Chow test is a statistical test of whether the coefficients in two linear regressions on different samples can be considered equal to one another (Chow, 1960).



**Table 3.2: Indicators of HR practice taken from WERS 2011**

Practice	Indicator (question number: description)	
	Survey of Employees Questionnaire	Management Questionnaire
Selective hiring	X	CATESTW: any attitude test in recruitment CPTTESTW: any performance test CFILLVAC: preference for internal candidates
Job security & internal labour markets	A2: type of contract A5: job feels secure	CINDUCT: any induction program BAWARD: Investors in People accreditation FSOCINX: performance appraisals for non-managerial staff
Training and development	B3: days of training in past year B4: mismatch between skills and job demands C2E: whether managers encourage skill development	ERECOG: any recognised unions
Information and voice	B6: perceptions of level of information provision B7: perceptions of consultation D1: whether a union member D4: whether a union present at workplace	
Team-working	X	CTEAMHOA: team-working where team members are mutually dependent CTEAMHOC: team-working where team members decide how work will be done
High pay contingent on performance / pension contributions	E11: Gross pay (banded) E12: Whether any performance-related pay or pension contributions	
Harmonisation	X	X
Perceived organisational support	B1: Availability of flexible working practices C2D: whether managers are understanding about work-life conflicts C2A, C2C, C2C, C2F: whether managers are reliable honest, sincere and fair C3: quality of relations between managers and employees at the workplace	
Autonomy	A7: influence over how the job is carried out	

Note: X = no indicator available.

With each element of the analysis, however, one must bear in mind that the data are cross-sectional in nature and that HR practices are not randomly assigned among employees. Consequently it is not possible to make robust causal inferences (i.e. if we observe a positive association between an HR practice and employees' levels of commitment, we cannot say with certainty that the presence of the HR practice has had a direct causal impact on levels of commitment among the employees in question; we can only say that an independent positive association remains after controlling for other possible influences). In many cases, it is at least possible that the direction of causality may run in both directions (autonomy is a good example – see Green, 1998). Any causal language is therefore used for stylistic purposes only.

### 3.4. Results

#### 3.4.1. Do levels of commitment vary by age?

When we examine the values on our commitment index across each of the three age groups, we find that levels of commitment are very similar across the three groups. The mean value of 11.11 among those employees aged 16-29 is only marginally below the mean of 11.25 for employees aged 30-39 and the mean of 11.30 for employees aged 40-59.

These differences of +0.14 and +0.29 respectively alter slightly to +0.17 and +0.24 when we run regression analyses that omit any employees with missing values on any of our independent variables.<sup>13</sup> Column 1 of Table 3.3 shows that these differences are statistically significant at the five per cent level. In other words, when we simply compare mean levels of commitment across age groups, younger workers report slightly lower levels of commitment than middle-aged and older workers, but the differences are very small (less than 10 per cent of a standard deviation).

**Table 3.3: Differences in commitment by age group (regression analysis)**

Employee's age	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Ref. 16-29 years</i>					
30-39 years	0.168*	0.001	0.036	0.019	0.029
40-59 years	0.240**	0.206*	0.186**	0.144*	0.075
<i>R-squared</i>	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.021</i>	<i>0.407</i>	<i>0.417</i>	<i>0.527</i>
<i>Observations</i>	<i>15,344</i>	<i>15,344</i>	<i>15,344</i>	<i>15,344</i>	<i>15,344</i>

Source: WERS 2011

Notes: 1 is the raw difference; 2 has controls for personal characteristics; 3 has controls for personal and job characteristics; 4 has controls for personal, job and workplace characteristics and HR practices; 5 has controls for personal and job characteristics plus workplace fixed effects.

Asterisks indicate that the coefficient is statistically significant from zero: \* p<0.10; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01.

<sup>13</sup> The alternative to omitting cases with missing values would be to assign such values to new category on the variable in question; however, with a large number of independent variables this is complex.

Moreover, the difference between young workers and middle-aged workers disappears as soon as we begin to control for differences in the characteristics of employees in these two age groups. Column 2 of the table indicates that the mere addition of controls for other personal characteristics is sufficient to eliminate the difference between the group of workers aged 16-29 and the group aged 30-39. Young workers therefore report slightly lower levels of commitment than those workers aged 30-39, but only because of differences in other personal characteristics between the two groups, and not because of their age *per se*.

Older workers aged 40-59 show persistently higher levels of commitment in Columns 1-4, even after the addition of controls for personal, job and workplace characteristics and HR practices. However the inclusion of workplace fixed effects in Column 5 reduces this difference substantially such that the coefficient is no longer statistically significant from zero at the 10 per cent level. This indicates that the higher levels of commitment reported by older workers arise because older workers are disproportionately located in 'high-commitment' establishments where levels of commitment are relatively high for all workers, irrespective of their age. In short, young workers are no more and no less committed in their jobs than middle-aged or older workers, once we account for other differences in their characteristics and circumstances.

#### ***3.4.2. Which HR practices are associated with higher levels of commitment?***

When we run separate analyses for each of the three age groups and turn our attention to the potential role of HR practices in raising levels of commitment, we find a number of areas of HR practice that are associated with higher levels of commitment among younger workers. Some of these appear to play a more important role in influencing commitment among younger workers than they do among middle-aged and/or older workers; other areas of HR practice are associated with higher levels of commitment in each of the three age groups alike.

The results of our regression analyses are summarised in Table 3.4. The first column identifies those HR practices that were significantly associated with commitment in a pooled model containing employees from all three age groups used in the analysis. This provides a benchmark for the analysis and shows that many of the factors highlighted in the literature were found, when measured using the proxies listed in Table 3.2, to be positively associated with levels of commitment reported by employees in WERS. The next three columns show the equivalent results from models run on each age group in turn. A comparison of the symbols presented in these three columns indicates that some practices (e.g. information and voice) are positively associated with commitment in all three age groups, whereas others (e.g. team-working) appear to be influential for some age groups and not others. A more formal test of whether the model coefficients differ significantly between the 16-29 and 30-39 age groups is provided in the final column of Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4: The associations between HR practices and commitment by age group (regression analysis)**

Practice	All employees	Age group (years)			16-29 v
		16-29	30-39	40-59	30-39
Selective hiring					
Job security & internal labour market	+	+	ns	+	ns
Training and development	+	+	ns	+	*
Information and voice	+	+	+	+	ns
Team-working	ns	+	ns	ns	*
High pay contingent on performance / pension contributions	ns	ns	ns	ns	*
Harmonisation					
Perceived organisational support:					
Trust	+	+	+	+	ns
Understanding about work-life conflicts	+	ns	+	+	ns
Autonomy	+	+	+	+	ns

Source: WERS 2011

+ (-) Factor is positive (negative) and statistically significant from zero at the 10 per cent level or higher in a regression model containing employees within the age range indicated by the column heading and the full set of control variables discussed in the text.

ns Coefficient is not statistically significant from zero.

\* The coefficient in the model for 16-29 year olds is larger and statistically significant from the coefficient in the model for 30-39 year olds.

It will be apparent from the earlier discussion (and Table 3.2) that we have often used multiple indicators for each particular area of HR practice. This level of complexity is not shown in Table 3.4, which instead indicates whether *any* of the chosen indicators under a particular HR practice heading were significantly associated with levels of commitment within each age group. However, the specific indicators that proved influential were as follows:

- Job security: whether the employee perceived their job to be secure at the workplace (rather than indicators of contract type or preferences for internal recruitment)
- Training and development: how well the employee perceived that managers at their workplace encourage skill development (rather than indicators of the number of days of training received by the employee, the presence of an induction process, the use of performance appraisals, or Investors in People accreditation)
- Information and voice: employees' perceptions of how effectively managers at the workplace consult with employees (rather than indicators of how good

- managers are at keeping employees informed, or indicators of union membership)<sup>14</sup>
- Team-working: whether team members decide how work is to be done (rather than whether they are mutually dependent on each other to carry out their work tasks)
  - Pay: an indicator that the employee received pension contributions from their employer<sup>15</sup>
  - Perceived organisational support: whether the employee perceived managers at the workplace to be reliable honest, sincere and fair, and whether the employee perceived that managers understood about employees having to meet responsibilities outside of work (rather than indicators of the climate of employment relations at the workplace or the availability of flexible working practices)<sup>16</sup>.

### **3.4.3. Summary**

When we compare levels of organisational commitment between younger, middle-aged and older workers, we find that the levels are very similar across the three groups. The small differences that are apparent are found to be statistically significant. However, the difference between young workers and middle-aged workers disappears as soon as we begin to control for the personal characteristics of employees in these two age groups; and the differences between younger workers and older workers are found to arise because older workers are disproportionately located in 'high-commitment' establishments where levels of commitment are relatively high for all workers, irrespective of their age. In short, we find that young workers are no more and no less committed or engaged in their jobs than middle-aged or older workers, once we account for other differences in their characteristics and circumstances.

The regression analysis identified a number of factors that were associated with higher levels of commitment among young workers. Many of these were factors that have been suggested in the wider research literature as being potentially important in raising commitment within the workplace. However most of the factors that proved important among young employees in WERS were also found to be important for workers in other age groups. The one exception was the delegation of decision-making autonomy to work teams, which was uniquely associated with commitment among young people. Two other factors – the extent to which managers encourage skill development and the provision of pension contributions – were also found to have a greater 'influence' on levels of commitment among young people than among employees in the next age group (those aged 30-39 years).

---

<sup>14</sup> Although information provision by managers was positively associated with commitment among older workers, and in the pooled model.

<sup>15</sup> Pension contributions had a weakly (but non-significant) positive coefficient in the model for young workers, and a weakly (but non-significant) negative coefficient in the model for middle-aged workers; the difference between these two 'effects' was statistically significant from zero, as indicated in Column 4 of Table 3.4.

<sup>16</sup> The climate of employment relations was, however, positively associated with commitment among older workers and in the pooled model.

We cannot conclude that these relationships are necessarily causal, as our data is cross-sectional in nature and we are not able to apply any quasi-experimental methods that would robustly demonstrate causality. Indeed, we are aware that other studies have demonstrated that, in the case of autonomy at least, the relationship works in both directions.<sup>17</sup> However our results suggest two things: first, that the WERS data support theoretical propositions that employers can implement HR practices which raise levels of commitment among young workers; and second, that while there are some differences in the importance of particular HR practices between age groups, most of the practices that are influential amongst young workers are also the kinds of practices that can raise commitment more generally across the workforce.

---

<sup>17</sup> Green (2008) showed that employers gave greater levels of autonomy to employees with higher levels of organisational commitment.

## **4. VOICE AT WORK**

### **4.1. Background**

The availability of effective 'voice' at work is one of the factors that is said to be key in engaging people in the workplace (see, for example, MacLeod and Clarke, 2009). The MacLeod report argued that this applies in particular to engaging young people at work: "the evidence is that many people, particularly younger employees, want more out of work than simply a wage packet at the end of the week" ... "They want choice – and voice." (*ibid.* 29). Indeed, employee perceptions of effective consultation was found in Chapter 3 above to be one of the factors associated with higher levels of organisational commitment among young people in our analysis of WERS (as it was also for middle-aged and older workers).

A challenge remains, however, to identify the most effective means of providing 'voice' to younger workers in the workplace. Union membership has been relatively low among young workers for many years (Bryson and Forth, 2010). Although unions argue this is largely because of the concentration of young people in non-union workplaces, rather than a lack of interest in union representation, there seems no prospect of any notable increase in the level of union membership or representation among young workers in the near future. Non-union representation is also relatively uncommon in UK workplaces (Van Wanrooy et al, 2013). And so attention has increasingly turned to methods of direct communication between employers and employees (e.g. workforce meetings, team briefings, employee surveys), which have become more prevalent over time (Brown et al, 2009). Most recently, some focus has been placed on the opportunities provided by social media (e.g. Smith and Harwood, 2011), although questions have been raised as to how influential such channels might be in practice (see Acas, 2012). Yet surprisingly, there has been relatively little quantitative analysis of the extent to which the availability of different voice mechanisms is associated with ratings of involvement on the part of employees.

One important question, however, is whether employees necessarily want more involvement. This is not always the case, with some employees being content to have relatively little influence over many workplace decisions. It is then instructive to look not only at employees' ratings of the level of involvement that they have in decision-making at their workplace, but also at the levels of satisfaction with the same.

### **4.2. Our approach**

As in Chapter 3, we use data from WERS to investigate three questions:

- Do younger workers report higher or lower levels of involvement in workplace decision making than older workers?
- Are younger workers more or less satisfied with their level of involvement in workplace decision making than older workers?

- Which types of 'voice' arrangement are associated with higher ratings of involvement (and involvement satisfaction) among younger workers, and are these the same as (or different to) the types of arrangements that are associated with higher ratings of involvement (and involvement satisfaction) among older workers?

In respect of voice arrangements, we focus on arrangements for collective representation, distinguishing between union and non-union forms. We also focus on various arrangements for direct consultation between employers and their employees, including the presence of face-to-face meetings and the use of written arrangements such as employee surveys.

Otherwise the approach taken in this chapter is very similar to that taken in Chapter 3. In particular, age is unlikely to be the only factor which influences ratings of involvement among employees, and so we control for differences in other personal characteristics (such as an employees' level of educational attainment). We also control for differences in the types of jobs that younger and older workers do, and differences in the types of workplace in which they are located.

### **4.3. Data and methods**

#### ***4.3.1. Data and classifications***

The reader is referred to Section 3.3 (beginning on page 26) for a description of the WERS data and a discussion of how we classify employees into age groups for the purposes of our analysis. Suffice it to say here that we categorise employees into the same three age groups that are used in Chapter 3, namely: 16-29 year olds; 30-39 year olds; and 40-59 year olds.

#### ***4.3.2. Measures of employee involvement***

In the WERS SEQ, employees are asked three sets of questions which directly address the issue of involvement in workplace decisions. The first (question B6 in Figure 4.1 below) asks how good managers are at providing information to employees about workplace changes; the second (question B7) asks how good managers are at consulting employees and allowing their views to influence workplace decision making; the third (question B8) asks about the employee's degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in workplace decisions. We utilise the second and third of these three questions (B7 and B8), discarding the first (B6) because of its focus only on downward communication.



Figure 4.1: Employee involvement questions in WERS 2011

**B6** In general, how good would you say managers at this workplace are at keeping employees informed about the following? *Tick one box in each row*

	Very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Changes to the way the organisation is being run	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in staffing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in the way you do your job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial matters, including budgets or profits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**B7** Overall, how good would you say managers at this workplace are at... *Tick one box in each row*

	Very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Seeking the views of employees or employee representatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responding to suggestions from employees or employee representatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allowing employees or employee representatives to influence final decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**B8** Overall, how satisfied are you with the amount of involvement you have in decision-making at this workplace? *Tick one box only*

Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When we code the answers to B7 on a numeric scale ranging from 0 to 4 (where 0="Very poor" and 4="Very good"), we find that the three measures are each positively correlated with one another.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in a principal components analysis, the three items load together in a single factor, suggesting that they capture different aspects of the same underlying construct. We therefore develop a single additive index of involvement by summing all three measures; this yields a single index ranging from 0 to 12. The index has a mean value of 6.38, a standard deviation of 3.17 and a Cronbach alpha of 0.93.

<sup>18</sup> The pairwise correlations are 0.83 for items one and two, 0.78 for items one and three and 0.84 for items two and three.

When we code the answers to B8 on a numeric scale ranging from 0 to 4 (where 0="Strongly disagree" and 4="Strongly agree"). This scale has a mean value of 2.22 and a standard deviation of 0.99.

#### **4.3.3. Measures of voice arrangements**

The employee questionnaire in WERS provides no measures of the availability of voice arrangements for individual employees, over and above an indicator of union membership and presence which identifies whether the employee is a union member and whether they are working in an establishment in which a union is present. Our measures of voice arrangements are therefore taken almost entirely from the management questionnaire. The indicators that are used are listed in Table 4.1 on page 41.

#### **4.3.4. Methods**

The statistical analysis is carried out using ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions in order to identify: (a) the independent associations between employee age and our measures of involvement and involvement satisfaction; and (b) the independent associations between our measures of voice arrangements and these measures of involvement and involvement satisfaction. As in Chapter 3, the analysis has two strands.

In the first strand of the analysis (Section 4.4.1), we pool the three age groups discussed earlier and conduct regression analyses to determine whether ratings of involvement (or involvement satisfaction) are higher or lower among younger workers than among older workers. As in Chapter 3, we include controls for employee characteristics (gender, ethnicity, disability, married/partner, dependent children, caring responsibilities, academic & vocational qualifications), job characteristics (hours, occupation, supervisory responsibilities and tenure) and workplace characteristics (employment size, industry, region, single/multi-site and public/private sector). Alongside the set of workplace characteristics, we also include controls for HR practices as listed in Table 3.2, and for the voice arrangements listed in Table 4.1.<sup>19</sup> Finally we also conduct analyses that replace all workplace characteristics, HR practices and voice arrangements with a dummy variable which identifies the workplace to which each employee belongs. As in Chapter 3, this fixed-effects approach allows us to remove any workplace-level influence on employees' ratings of involvement that is common to all employees at a work site, thus potentially giving us a cleaner view of the importance of age in shaping the views of employees *within a given workplace*.

In the second strand of the analysis (Section 4.4.2), we conduct regression analyses of each age group separately, with the focus switching to the coefficients on the indicators of voice arrangement in each of the three regressions. In these analyses, our aim is to identify those voice arrangements that are associated with ratings of involvement (or involvement satisfaction) in each age group. We first consider which types of voice arrangement are associated with higher levels of commitment and

---

<sup>19</sup> The prevalence of these voice arrangements among employees in each of the three age groups is presented for information in Appendix Table 6.3.

engagement among younger people. We then compare the coefficients on the voice arrangements between the three age groups, using Chow tests to ascertain whether the 'effects' (the coefficients) differ to a statistically significant extent between the age groups. In a departure from the approach taken in Chapter 3, however, we are unable to incorporate workplace fixed effects into the regression analyses in this second strand of the analysis, because most of our voice indicators are measured at workplace (rather than employee) level and so there is no variance on these measures between employees in the same workplace.

**Table 4.1: Indicators of voice arrangements taken from WERS 2011**

Practice	Indicator (question number: description)	
	Survey of Employees Questionnaire	Management Questionnaire
<b>Representative voice:</b>		
Union membership	D1: Whether employee is a union member	
Union presence at the workplace	D4: Whether there is a union at the workplace	ERECOG: whether any recognised union
Availability of union representative	X	ESTEWARD, EOTHUREP: whether any unions have lay representatives at the workplace
Availability of non-union representative	X	EOTHREP: whether any non-union representatives at the workplace
Presence of joint consultative committee	X	DJOINT: whether any joint consultative committee at the workplace
<b>Direct voice:</b>		
Any all-workforce meetings with 25%+ time for dialogue	X	DMEET, DMTWOWAY: whether managers hold all-workforce meetings with 25%+ time for dialogue
Any team briefings with 25%+ time for dialogue	X	DBRIEF, DBTWOWAY: whether team leaders or line managers hold team briefings with 25%+ time for dialogue
Any problem-solving groups	X	DCIRCLES: whether there are any problem-solving groups at the workplace
Any employee survey	X	DSURVEY: whether a survey of employees has been conducted in the last two years
Any suggestion scheme	X	DSUGGEST: whether there is a suggestion scheme at the workplace
Any use of email for consulting employees	X	DCONSULT: whether managers use email for consulting employees
<b>Employers' stated preference:</b>		
Whether managers prefer direct consultation to consultation with unions	X	APHRAS07: extent to which managers agree (or disagree) that they prefer to consult directly with employees

Note: X = no indicator available

As in Chapter 3, one must bear in mind that the data are cross-sectional in nature and that voice arrangements are not randomly assigned to employees. Consequently it is not possible to make robust causal inferences (i.e. if we observe a positive association between a voice arrangement and employees' ratings of involvement, we cannot say with certainty that the presence of this type of voice arrangement has had a direct causal impact on the extent to which employees feel involved in workplace decision making; we can only say that an independent positive association remains after controlling for other possible influences).

#### **4.4. Results**

##### ***4.4.1. Do ratings of employee involvement vary by age?***

When we examine the values on our involvement index for each of the three age groups, we find that ratings of involvement are higher among younger workers. The simple mean value of the involvement index among employees aged 16-29 is 6.96, compared with mean values of 6.56 among employees aged 30-39 and 6.44 among employees aged 40-59. These differences of -0.40 and -0.52 respectively reduce to -0.32 and -0.44 when we omit any employees with missing values on any of our independent variables (Column 1 of Table 4.2), but these are still moderately sized differences (amounting to at least one third of a standard deviation) and both are statistically significant at the five per cent level.

Once we begin to control for differences between the three age groups in the characteristics of employees, however, the coefficients reduce in size, such that young people's ratings are not significantly different from those of middle-aged workers, and are *lower* than those of older workers. Specifically, after the addition of our full set of employee, job and workplace controls (Column 4 of Table 4.2) the differences between young workers and middle-aged and older workers become statistically non-significant. After the addition of workplace fixed effects (Column 5 of Table 4.2), levels of involvement among younger workers are in fact lower than those among older workers (those aged 40-59) and the difference is large enough to be statistically significant. This indicates that the higher levels of involvement reported by younger workers arise because they are disproportionately located in establishments where ratings of involvement are relatively high for all workers, irrespective of their age. Once we account for these and other differences in the characteristics and circumstances of workers of different ages, young people give similar ratings to those aged 30-39 and lower ratings than those aged 40-59.

**Table 4.2: Differences in involvement rating by age group (regression analysis)**

<b>Employee's age</b>	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>(5)</b>
<i>Ref. 20-29 years</i>					
30-39 years	-0.322**	-0.087	-0.215*	0.022	0.138
40-59 years	-0.437***	0.012	-0.126	0.147	0.244***
<i>R-squared</i>	<i>0.003</i>	<i>0.050</i>	<i>0.058</i>	<i>0.486</i>	<i>0.586</i>
<i>Observations</i>	<i>14,613</i>	<i>14,613</i>	<i>14,613</i>	<i>14,613</i>	<i>14,613</i>

Source: WERS 2011

Notes: 1 is the raw difference; 2 has controls for personal characteristics; 3 has controls for personal and job characteristics; 4 has controls for personal, job and workplace characteristics, plus HR practices and voice arrangements; 5 has controls for personal and job characteristics plus workplace fixed effects.

Asterisks indicate that the coefficient is statistically significant from zero: \*  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Turning to employees' degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in decision making at their workplace, we find that the differences between age groups are actually very small. The simple mean value of the satisfaction indicator among employees aged 16-29 is 2.30, compared with mean values of 2.27 among employees aged 30-39 and 2.26 among employees aged 40-59. These differences of -0.03 and -0.04 respectively reduce to -0.02 and -0.03 when we omit any employees with missing values on any of our independent variables (Column 1 of Table 4.3) and neither is statistically significant from zero. Equally, once we control for differences between the three age groups in the characteristics and circumstances of employees, the coefficients remain non-significant (with the sole exception of the coefficient for older workers in the model controlling for personal characteristics – yet this coefficient returns to non-significance once job characteristics are added). Any lower ratings of involvement among younger people do not therefore lead to lower levels of satisfaction with involvement among younger workers.

**Table 4.3: Differences in satisfaction with involvement by age group (regression analysis)**

<b>Employee's age</b>	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>(5)</b>
<i>Ref. 20-29 years</i>					
30-39 years	-0.019	0.032	-0.009	-0.029	-0.015
40-59 years	-0.034	0.082**	0.054	0.007	0.007
<i>R-squared</i>	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.045</i>	<i>0.059</i>	<i>0.442</i>	<i>0.526</i>
<i>Observations</i>	<i>15,880</i>	<i>15,880</i>	<i>15,880</i>	<i>15,880</i>	<i>15,880</i>

Source: WERS 2011

Notes: 1 is the raw difference; 2 has controls for personal characteristics; 3 has controls for personal and job characteristics; 4 has controls for personal, job and workplace characteristics, plus HR practices and voice arrangements; 5 has controls for personal and job characteristics plus workplace fixed effects.

Asterisks indicate that the coefficient is statistically significant from zero: \* p<0.10; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01.

#### **4.4.2. Which voice arrangements are associated with higher ratings of involvement?**

When we run separate analyses for each of the three age groups and turn our attention to the potential role of different voice arrangements in raising ratings of involvement (and the degree of satisfaction with the level of involvement), we find a less coherent picture than was apparent in respect of organisational commitment in Chapter 3.

When looking at our models of ratings of involvement in which all three age groups are pooled together (Column 1 of Table 4.4), we find employees who are union members give higher ratings than employees in non-unionised workplaces, as do non-members who work in workplaces where unions are known to be present. However in the separate models for each age group, neither of these 'effects' is statistically significant among young workers. We find a similar pattern for workers in establishments where managers profess a preference for direct consultation: here the association is only statistically significant in the model for workers aged 30-39.

Only two voice arrangements are found to be significantly associated with ratings of involvement among young workers: first, the presence of all-workforce meetings (irrespective of whether 25 per cent of the time is given over to dialogue); and second, the use of employee surveys. While the positive association of employee surveys with ratings of involvement is unique among younger workers, all-workforce meetings are also statistically significant in the model for workers aged 30-39 years, suggesting that these are more generally effective in raising ratings of involvement (and not uniquely or more substantially so among younger workers).

When looking at our models of satisfaction with involvement (Table 4.5), fewer practices have significant positive associations with levels of satisfaction and those that do are not typically the practices that were significant for ratings of involvement.

The only practices to prove positive and statistically significant in the pooled model were the indicator of the presence of a joint consultative committee at the workplace, and the indicator of all-workforce meetings with less than 25 per cent of the time given to employee dialogue. There seems no ready explanation as to why all-workforce meetings with limited time for dialogue should raise levels of satisfaction when meetings with more time for dialogue do not. Nor is there a ready explanation as to why a joint consultative committee should do so when no other forms of representative voice show a positive association. The negative association with the presence of problem-solving groups in the model for young workers also has no straightforward explanation.

Consequently, whilst the analysis of voice arrangements did yield some statistically significant associations, these do not combine to provide a coherent picture of the types of voice arrangement that either raise or lower ratings of employee involvement with workplace decision-making (or levels of employees' satisfaction with the same). One reason could be the relative paucity of employee-level voice measures in WERS, with the workplace-level measures forming imperfect proxies for the availability of voice to individual employees.



**Table 4.4: The associations between voice arrangements and ratings of involvement by age group (regression analysis)**

Voice arrangement	All employees	Age group (years)			20-29 v 30-39
		20-29	30-39	40-59	
<b>Employee level indicators:</b>					
Union member	+		+	+	
Non-member in unionised workplace	+		+		
Non-union workplace	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	
DK if union at workplace	+		+	+	
<b>Workplace level indicators:</b>					
Recognised trade union					
On-site union rep					
On-site non-union rep					
Joint consultative committee					
<i>Managers prefer direct consultation:</i>					
Agree	+		+		
Neither agree/disagree	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	
Disagree					
<i>Whole workforce meetings:</i>					
Yes with 25%+ for dialogue	+	+	+		
Yes with <25% for dialogue	+	+	+		
No	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	
<i>Team briefing groups:</i>					
Yes with 25%+ for dialogue					
Yes with <25% for dialogue			+		
No	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	
<i>Other forms of direct consultation:</i>					
Problem-solving groups			+		*
Employee survey		+			
Suggestion scheme					
Email for consultation		-	-		

Source: WERS 2011

Ref. Reference category.

+ (-) Factor is positive (negative) and statistically significant from zero at the 10 per cent level or higher in a regression model containing employees within the age range indicated by the column heading and the full set of control variables discussed in the text.

ns Coefficient is not statistically significant from zero.

\* The coefficient in the model for 20-29 year olds is larger and statistically significant from the coefficient in the model for 30-39 year olds.

**Table 4.5: The associations between voice arrangements and satisfaction with involvement by age group (regression analysis)**

Voice arrangement	All employees	Age group (years)			20-29 v 30-39
		20-29	30-39	40-59	
<b>Employee level indicators:</b>					
Union member			+	-	*
Non-member in unionised workplace					
Non-union workplace	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	
DK if union at workplace					*
<b>Workplace level indicators:</b>					
Recognised trade union			-		
On-site union rep					
On-site non-union rep					
Joint consultative committee	+	+		+	
<i>Managers prefer direct consultation:</i>					
Agree					
Neither agree/disagree	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	
Disagree				-	
<i>Whole workforce meetings:</i>					
Yes with 25%+ for dialogue			+		
Yes with <25% for dialogue	+		+		
No	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	
<i>Team briefing groups:</i>					
Yes with 25%+ for dialogue			-		
Yes with <25% for dialogue			-		
No	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	
<i>Other forms of direct consultation:</i>					
Problem-solving groups		-	+		*
Employee survey				-	
Suggestion scheme					
Email for consultation			-		

Source: WERS 2011

Ref. Reference category.

+ (-) Factor is positive (negative) and statistically significant from zero at the 10 per cent level or higher in a regression model containing employees within the age range indicated by the column heading and the full set of control variables discussed in the text.

ns Coefficient is not statistically significant from zero.

\* The coefficient in the model for 20-29 year olds is larger and statistically significant from the coefficient in the model for 30-39 year olds.

#### **4.4.3. Summary**

When we examine the values on our involvement index for each of the three age groups, we find that ratings of involvement are highest among younger workers. However young people's ratings are similar to those of middle-aged workers and *lower* than those of older workers (by around one quarter of a standard deviation) once other factors are taken into account. Turning to employees' degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in decision making at their workplace, we find that the differences between age groups are very small and can be explained by other factors. Any lower ratings of involvement among younger people do not therefore lead to lower levels of satisfaction among younger workers.

Attempts to identify a set of voice arrangements that were associated with higher ratings of involvement among young workers did yield some statistically significant associations, but they did not combine to provide a coherent picture of the types of voice arrangement that raise young workers' ratings of involvement with workplace decision-making (or their satisfaction with the same). One reason could be the relative paucity of employee-level voice measures in WERS.

## 5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acas (2012) "Employee voice is benefitting from the changing nature of communication in the workplace", *Acas Workplace Snippets*, October.
- Bakker A and Demerouti E (2008) "Towards a model of work engagement", *Career Development International*, 13: 209-223.
- Brown W et al (2009) *The Evolution of the Modern Workplace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bryson A and Forth J (2010) "Trade union membership and influence 1999-2009", NIESR Discussion Paper No. 362.
- Bryson A and White M (2008) "Organisational commitment: do workplace practices matter?", CEP Discussion Paper No 881, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.
- Chow, G (1960) "Tests of Equality Between Sets of Coefficients in Two Linear Regressions", *Econometrica*, 28, 3: 591-605.
- CIPD, Acas and Unionlearn (2014) *Managing Future Talent: A Guide for Employers*, London: CIPD.
- Culliney M and Broughton A (2013) *Young People's Views and Experiences on Entering the Workplace*, Acas Research Paper 09/13, London: Acas.
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and National Institute of Economic and Social Research (2014) *Workplace Employee Relations Survey, 2011* [computer file]. 4th Edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], April 2014. SN: 7226, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7226-4>
- Felstead, A. et al. , *Skills and Employment Surveys Series Dataset, 1986, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2006 and 2012* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], March 2014. SN: 7467 , <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7467-1>
- Gallie D, Felstead A and Green F (2012) 'Job preferences and the intrinsic quality of work: the changing attitudes of British employees 1992-2006' *Work Employment and Society* 26: 806.
- Green F (2008) "Leeway for the loyal: a model of employee discretion", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 46, 1: 1-32.
- MacLeod D and Clarke N (2009) *Engaging for Success: Enhancing Performance Through Employee Engagement*, London: Department for Business Innovation and Skills.

- Marchington M and Wilkinson A (2008) "High commitment HRM and performance", Chapter 3 in *Human Resource Management at Work: People Management and Development*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, London: CIPD.
- Meyer J and Allen N (2007) "A three-component conceptualization of organisational commitment: Some methodological considerations", *Human Resource Management Review*, 1: 61-98.
- Miller P and Skidmore P (2004) *Disorganisation: Why Future Organisations Must 'Loosen Up'*, London: Demos.
- Gillinson S and O'Leary D (2006) *Working Progress: How to Reconnect Young People and Organisations*, London: Demos.
- Lincoln J and Kalleberg A (1990) *Culture, Control and Commitment. A Study of Work Organisation and Work Attitudes in the United States and Japan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxenbridge S and Evesson J (2012) *Young People Entering Work: A Review of the Research*, Acas Research Paper 18/12, London: Acas.
- Pfeffer J (1998) *The Human Equation*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- REC (2010) *Avoiding a lost generation - Preparing young people for work now and in the future: Recommendations of the REC UK Youth Employment Taskforce*. London: Recruitment and Employment Confederation.
- Rhoades L, Eisenberger R and Armeli S (2001) "Affective Commitment to the Organisation: the Contribution of Perceived Organisational Support", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86: 825-836.
- Smith and Harwood (2011) van Wanrooy, B., Bewley, H., Bryson, A., Forth, J., Freeth, S., Stokes, L. and Wood, S. (2013) *Employment Relations in the Shadow of Recession: Findings from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Walton R (1985) "From control to commitment in the workplace", *Harvard Business Review*, 85, 2: 77-84.

6. APPENDIX TABLES

Table 6.1 Work orientation by age, percentages, 2012

	Factor rated 'Essential'					Factor rated 'Essential' or 'Very important'				
	Percentage and significance without controls			Significance with controls		Percentage and significance without controls			Significance with controls	
	20-29	30-39	40-59	30-39	40-59	20-29	30-39	40-59	30-39	40-59
<b>Intrinsic</b>										
Use of abilities	37	35	32				86	84		
Can use initiative	32	27	26			86	82	82		
Variety	20	21	19			82	65	66		
Work you like doing	46	42	40*			64	88	90		
<b>Extrinsic</b>						87				
Good pay	32	26	25**	*			78	67**		
Promotion prospects	24	16**	10**	**	**	81	60**	41**	**	**
A secure job	52	39**	38**	**	**	74	89**	84**	*	**
Good fringe benefits	13	10	9			95	41	36*		
Training provision	29	20**	19**	**	**	42	68**	64**	**	**
Physical working conditions	33	20**	20**	**	**	78	76**	72**	*	**
<b>Work-life balance</b>						84				
Choice in work hours	15	12	13	*			48**	47**	**	**
Convenient work hours	23	22	20			36	65	65		
An easy work load	8	3*	6	*		61	21	21		
<b>Social</b>						23				
Friendly people	39	31**	29**				82*	82**		
Relations with supervisors	35	30	29			86	84	85		

Source: Skills and Employment Survey 2012

Asterisks show whether percentage is significantly different from the 20-29 age group: \* p<0.10; \*\* p<0.05

Controls: sex, highest qualification, having a child aged under five years of age

\*\*

**Table 6.2 Ranking of job preferences of young people, 1992-2012**

	Factor rated 'Essential'			Factor rated 'Essential' or 'Very important'		
	1992	2006	2012	1992	2006	2012
<b>Intrinsic</b>						
Work you like doing	2**	1	2	2	1	2
Use of abilities	4** (joint)	5	4	3**	4 (joint)	3 (joint)
Can use initiative	8** (joint)	7	7 (joint)	4**	4 (joint)	7
Variety	10	10 (joint)	12	10	11	11
<b>Extrinsic</b>						
A secure job	1**	2	1	1**	6**	1
Physical working conditions	4 (joint)	9	6	9**	8**	5
Good pay	7	3	7 (joint)	8**	7	8
Training provision	3	10 (joint)	9	4 (joint)	9	9
Promotion prospects	11**	8**	10	11**	10	10
Good fringe benefits	13**	13	14	13**	13	13
<b>Job demands and flexibility</b>						
Choice in work hours	14**	14**	13	14**	14	12
Convenient work hours	12**	12	11	12**	12	14
An easy work load	15**	15	15	15**	15	15
<b>Social</b>						
Friendly people	8** (joint)	4	3	6** (joint)	2 (joint)	3 (joint)
Relations with supervisors	6	6	5	6** (joint)	2 (joint)	6

Source: Skills and Employment Survey

Asterisks show whether percentage which underlies the ranking is significantly different from 2012: \* p<0.10; \*\* p<0.05

**Table 6.3: Prevalence of voice arrangements among employees, by age, 2011**

	Age group			Comparisons across age groups	
	16-29	30-39	40-59	16-29 vs 30-39	16-29 vs 40-59
<b>A. Percentage of employees with specified characteristic:</b>					
Union member	11	18	29	*	*
Non-member in unionised workplace	15	20	19	*	*
Works in non-union workplace	22	29	29	*	*
Doesn't know if union at workplace	52	32	23	*	*
<b>B. Percentage of employees in workplaces with specified characteristic:</b>					
Recognised trade unions	35	46	58	*	*
On-site union rep	27	37	47	*	*
On-site non-union rep	18	18	19		
Joint consultative committee	35	41	45	*	*
<i>Managers prefer direct consultation:</i>					
Agree	74	66	60	*	*
Neither agree/disagree	13	15	16		*
Disagree	13	20	24	*	*
<i>Whole workforce meetings:</i>					
Yes with 25%+ for dialogue	35	36	36		
Yes with <25% for dialogue	52	49	45		*
No	13	15	19		*
<i>Team briefing groups:</i>					
Yes with 25%+ for dialogue	47	50	50		
Yes with <25% for dialogue	39	42	38		
No	14	8	12	*	
<i>Other forms of direct consultation:</i>					
Problem-solving groups	28	34	36	*	*
Employee survey	59	65	68	*	*
Suggestion scheme	40	41	43		
Email for consultation	64	76	69	*	*

Source: WERS 2011

Estimates in Panel A are weighted responses from the Survey of Employees. Estimates in Panel B are employment-weighted responses from the Survey of Managers.

Asterisk indicates that the difference between the age groups is statistically significant from zero at the 10 per cent level.





