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Recruiting Older Workers: Realities and Needs of the Future Workforce

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Recruiting Older Workers: Realities and Needs of the Future Workforce

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Abstract

This chapter examines literature pertaining to the recruitment of older workers. It begins by addressing the question of relevance and why older worker recruitment matters. It then examines what is known about older workers, including their attitudes, motivations, and behaviors. Next the chapter addresses what employers are looking for in older workers and, more specifically, discusses the continuum of employers' practices from those that aggressively try to attract and retain older workers and apply a conservation model of older worker management to those that apply a depreciation model and focus primarily on retrenchment and downsizing older employees. Finally, it addresses how employers can recruit older workers through changes in organizational policies and practices.

Key Words: aging workforce, bridge employment, human resources strategy, retirement, older worker attraction, older worker behaviors, older worker benefits, older worker costs, older worker motivation, older worker recruitment

This chapter addresses issues surrounding the recruitment of a segment of society that has become increasingly important to the labor market: older workers who are approaching retirement or are already retired but available to work. Because older workers often have not explicitly been studied in the recruiting literature, we take a broad view on the issue of older worker recruitment by discussing four main questions that provide a framework for understanding. We begin by discussing "why should we care" about the recruitment of older workers. Second, we address "who are they?" by describing research relating age to job performance, work-related attitudes, willingness, and motivation to work. Third, we describe "what employers want (or not)" regarding older workers. Finally, we address "how do we attract them?" by examining factors an organization interested in recruiting older workers might consider to be more successful at attracting older workers.

Older Worker Recruitment: Why Should We Care?

One of the most important trends affecting virtually every developed nation in the world is the aging workforce (Kinsela & He, 2009). Workforce aging is driven by increased longevity and historical changes in birthrates. Changes in birthrates affect both ends of the age structure. On one end are a growing number of older people. In the United States, we are witnessing the progressive aging of the nearly 80 million adults who were born between 1946 and 1964, commonly referred to as "baby boomers" (Alley & Crimmins, 2007). Currently most of these baby boomers range from 47 to 65 years old. In terms of the workforce, the aging of baby boomers is largely responsible for the increasing number of workers older than the age of 55. The number of people older than the age of 55 is projected to increase by 43 percent before the end of the decade. At that point, they will account for

one out of every four workers in the United States (Toosi, 2009). As they continue to age, the number of people older than the age of 65 (historically, an age by which most people have already retired) also will increase substantially. By 2030, the full cohort of baby boomers will have reached age 65. To frame this shift another way, in 2011, 10,000 baby boomers began turning 65 years old every day, and they will continue to do so at that rate every day for the next 20 years (Astrue, 2007). During those 20 years, the number of people older than the age of 65 will increase by some 80 percent. In the United States, the number of people older than the age of 65 will go from one out of every eight to one out of every five (Administration on Aging, 2011).

At the other end of the age spectrum the comparatively low birthrates in years following the baby boom years—the so-called “baby bust”—contributes to the aging workforce, as there are fewer younger workers relative to older workers. Indeed, for the first time on record, younger workers age 16 to 19, who will be entering their prime work years, are outnumbered by the number of workers older than the age of 65, who will be leaving the workforce (Silberman, 2010). The aging of the workforce is by no means unique to the United States. Similar demographic trends are well underway across Canada, Europe, Australia, China and other parts of Asia (Henkens & Van Dalen, 2003; Kinsella & He, 2009; Kuebler, Mertens, Russell, & Tevis, 2009; OECD, 2006).

These trends toward an increasingly older workforce are well established and well known. They have been developing (and are being written about in both the popular press and academic literature) for years. A large retirement age workforce raises a number of social and economic issues for society in general as well as for employers and individuals.

Societal Issues

The potential for large-scale workforce exits owing to retirement brings a wide variety of concerns for society in general. Chief among these concerns is how society can afford to support the income and healthcare needs of an older population. In the United States and elsewhere, governments are struggling with the solvency of old age income insurance programs that were designed around taxes on current workers to provide benefits for retirees. These types of systems work well when a small number of retirees are being supported by a large number of workers. Each worker needs to contribute only a small amount of his or her

earnings to support a retiree, and excess contributions can be held in trust. This ratio of beneficiaries to workers, referred to as the old age dependency ratio, obviously is influenced by the age structure. In 1950, there were 14 people older than the age of 65 for every 100 workers. By 2006, that number had increased to 20 people older than 65 for every 100 workers, and by 2030, it is projected to increase to 35 people older 65 for every 100 workers (Shrestha, 2006). This ratio of workers to retirees will not sustain the old age social security system at current benefit and tax levels, and those funds that were held in trust will be exhausted by about 2036 (Social Security Administration, 2011).

Like funding for old age income insurance programs, governments also are struggling to fund the healthcare needs of older people. In the United States, much of the healthcare-related costs are paid through employer-subsidized health insurance programs provided to employees. When workers turn 65 and retire, a large share of healthcare spending shifts to Medicare, which is funded through a combination of payroll taxes, premiums, and general tax revenues. Total spending on Medicare in 2010 accounted for 15 percent of the total federal budget, approximately 3.6 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) (Davis, 2010). In the coming years, both the number of new enrollees (people turning 65) and the cost of each new enrollee (due to the increasing cost of healthcare) will increase. By 2035, the share of GDP consumed by Medicare is projected to nearly double to 6 percent of GDP (Congressional Budget Office, 2011).

Although policymakers offer and debate solutions, the level of spending on retirement income and healthcare programs likely will place a continuing burden on the economy that simply is not sustainable if older workers stop working. Rather, from a societal standpoint, it makes sense to find ways to encourage older workers to work longer than they currently are or expect to be. This means finding ways to make work attractive to older workers.

Employer Issues

The aging workforce also raises concerns for employers (Burke & Ng, 2006; Cappelli, 2008; Rau & Adams, 2012), and several recent surveys confirm this. For example, 40 percent of employers reported that they expect the aging workforce will have a negative or very negative impact on their business within the next 3 years (Pitt-Catsouphes, Sweet, Lynch, & Whalley, 2009). In a survey about trends affecting the workforce, the Society for Human

Resources Management (2011) found that “large numbers of Baby Boomers (1945–1964) leaving the workforce at around the same time” was among the top 10 concerns expressed by human resource managers (SHRM, 2011, p. 4). For employers who still offer defined benefit pension plans (31 percent of private sector employers; BLS, 2009a) and retiree health coverage (23 percent of private employers; BLS, 2009b), one concern focused on managing the financial liabilities of these benefits. Other concerns were more general, and included the impact of an aging workforce on (1) talent acquisition and (2) knowledge retention.

Whether the rapidly aging workforce will lead to widespread worker shortages is debatable. The answer will depend on factors such as immigration patterns, the ability to substitute labor with technology, and importantly, workforce participation of older workers. Certainly, however, there will be increased competition for workers, and this is likely to be particularly acute in several specific areas because some of the fastest growing industries also have a disproportionate number of older workers. Growth industries such as aerospace, energy, advanced manufacturing, and technology, where there is strong demand for employees who are highly trained and highly skilled, have a preponderance of workers older than the age of 50 that could leave the workforce (Department of Labor, 2008). Healthcare is already experiencing a shortage of nurses. Beyond the technical skills needed in these areas, there is likely to be sharp competition for experienced managerial talent. The competition for all types of talent is global. Developed and developing countries, also experiencing an aging population, compete for the same sets of skills. Clearly, as the economies of developed and developing countries continue to grow, more employers will be chasing fewer skilled workers. Recruiting and hiring older workers who otherwise would retire may help alleviate these pressures to acquire a talented workforce.

Just as it is important to acquire talent, it also is important to retain it. This is particularly true when the types of skills needed are developed over a long period of time and are more firm-specific. Older workers often have years of experience managing people and processes. They have learned how the systems within their organization work and have developed relationships with customers, suppliers, and other professional contacts. Clearly, large-scale workforce exits by older workers will be difficult to manage, and attracting experienced workers or

retaining older workers will be key to retaining accumulated knowledge.

Individual Issues

Of course, individuals, both young and old, have good reason to be concerned about an aging population and workforce. Younger workers face the prospect of increased taxes to help pay for income and healthcare needs of the elderly. In addition, they are concerned about caring for their aging relatives and preparing for their own aging. They see the financial strain on Social Security and Medicare, and legitimately wonder if those protections will be in place when they are old. They also witness how older workers are treated by society and employers and develop expectations about how they will be treated with age. Older workers are most immediately affected by changes in public policy and employment practices. They face a series of related decisions about how they will afford to leave the workforce through retirement, where they will live, and how they will spend their retirement and with whom (Adams & Rau, 2011). Often these must be planned in advance and occur under uncertain individual, economic, and social conditions.

Many older workers express deep concerns about being able to afford retirement without continuing to work. Surveys conducted by the Employee Benefits Research Institute (EBRI) have shown a steady decline in the number of older workers who are confident that they will be able to afford retirement (EBRI, 2011). In 2011, this retirement confidence measure hit an all-time low, with 27 percent of those surveyed indicating that they were “not at all” confident about being able to afford retirement (EBRI, 2011). These concerns are well founded. Social Security, employer-provided pensions, and personal savings (the traditional “three-legged stool” of retirement funding sources) all seem to be in doubt. The solvency of social security systems in the United States and elsewhere is in question (*The Economist*, 2011). Employer pensions have changed over the last several decades from defined benefit programs to defined contribution programs (e.g., 401k plan). This change has shifted the funding of retirement (via employee contributions) and the risk associated with the investment of those funds more squarely on the individual. Other changes to employee benefit programs, such as matching levels for retirement savings programs and subsidized retiree health plans being reduced or eliminated, also impact older workers’ ability to afford retirement. Most research suggests that older workers have not

saved enough to retire comfortably. Indeed, using data from the Survey of Consumer Finances, it has been estimated that only 53 percent of the households polled had a retirement savings account and that the median value of those accounts was a mere \$45,000 (Purcell, 2009b). Obviously, one way to mitigate these financial concerns is for older workers to continue in some form of paid employment.

Closely related to older workers' concerns about funding retirement are those regarding opportunities to continue working. Although many older workers express a desire to continue working, for an increasing number, that possibility can appear rather bleak. Corporate downsizing, layoffs, and terminations lead to unemployment of workers of all ages. However, older workers have a considerably harder time finding a new job and becoming reemployed. In 2010, those older than the age of 55 were unemployed an average of 35.5 weeks, and those in the 16- to 24-year-old age bracket were unemployed an average of 23 weeks. Nearly half (49 percent) of those older than the age of 55 were unemployed for 27 weeks or longer (Sok, 2010). Those who do become reemployed suffer long-term earnings losses (Couch, Jolly, & Placzek, 2009). Those who do not become reemployed often give up and change their status from unemployed to retired.

Rethinking Retirement

At the root of all of these concerns is whether older workers will continue to work or exit the workforce. For most of the last half of the 20th century, older workers left the workforce through retirement, which was seen as a relatively short period coming later in life, when one stopped working and instead pursued leisure. Further, there was a trend toward increasingly younger retirement ages. This type of non-working retirement is simply not sustainable, or as McManus, Anderberg, and Lazarus (2007) described it, "an unaffordable luxury" (p. 484). Fortunately, the nature of retirement has been changing, and the classic description is no longer accurate for many people (Beehr & Adams, 2003; Shultz & Wang, 2011; Wang & Shultz, 2010). Given that the average lifespan is now 77 years, someone retiring at 65 can expect to spend 12 years in retirement (National Center for Health Statistics, 2006). Many older people continue to work or have alternating periods of work and non-work. This post-retirement work often is referred to as bridge employment (Shultz, 2003). The trend toward younger retirement ages also is no longer accurate. The decline in the median

age at retirement began to level off during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and now has begun to increase (Friedberg, 2007). As a result, some now are conceptualizing "retirement" as a later-life career period, as opposed to an end of a person's working life (Wang, Adams, Beehr, & Shultz, 2009; Wang, Olson, & Shultz, 2013).

Older Workers: Who Are They?

Given the concerns about an aging workforce and considering this "new" definition of retirement, it has been argued that organizations should take a more active and strategic approach to recruiting and managing older workers (Rau & Adams, 2012). To develop effective recruiting systems, it is important to know how age, as a characteristic of those in the talent pool, is related to work outcomes. In this section, we examine the relationships among age, job performance, work-related attitudes, willingness to work, and motivation.

Age, Job Performance, and Attitudes

There are many perceptions and misperceptions regarding older workers. As noted earlier, not all of these are negative, but many are. Some of the most common misperceptions are that age is related to lower job performance and other important work-related behaviors and attitudes. These often stem from the now outdated "deficit model of aging" implicit in our assumptions about changes in people's abilities as they grow older (Kossen & Pedersen, 2008). This model supposes that aging is accompanied by declining mental and physical abilities that ultimately lead to poor functioning across life domains (e.g., poor performance at work). Of course, this model ignores the emergence of new abilities that come with aging (e.g., increased emotional maturity) and that people are highly adaptable to their environments. An alternative to the deficit model is the "successful aging" approach (Freund & Baltes, 2007), which posits that people are able to adapt to declining abilities in ways that allow them to maintain functioning. For example, older workers leverage their accumulated work experiences to maintain performance on routine tasks and deploy that experience to more novel tasks.

These two approaches to understanding aging suggest very different relationships between age and performance. The deficit model suggests a strong negative relationship, and the successful aging model suggests no relationship, or even a positive relationship, between aging and work behavior. The relationship between age and job performance has been

empirically studied for years. Several meta-analyses summarizing these studies have appeared periodically in the literature (e.g., McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Waldman & Avolio, 1986). In a recent one, Ng and Feldman (2008) examined the relationship between age and 10 different dimensions of job performance and found that age was unrelated to measures of core task performance (objective measures as well as supervisor, self, and peer ratings). Age was, however, positively related to organizational citizenship behavior and safety behaviors. In addition, age was negatively related to tardiness, objective measures of absenteeism, counterproductive behaviors, on-the-job substance abuse, and workplace aggression. In a separate meta-analysis, Ng and Feldman (2009) found that age was negatively related to voluntary turnover. To summarize, the best evidence to date that has been gleaned from multiple studies indicates that older workers perform their core job tasks as well as younger workers, and beyond that, engage in more organizationally desirable behaviors and fewer organizationally undesirable behaviors at work. This would seem to make them ideal candidates for organizations seeking to fill open positions.

Despite this evidence, some still may have concerns about older workers' abilities to perform in today's new workplace that requires interpersonal interactions with co-workers and customers and other potentially stressful working conditions. Here again, the empirical evidence should help allay these concerns. The pattern of results for organizational citizenship behavior and aggression found by Ng and Feldman (2008) suggests that older workers are helpful and avoid trying to harm others. Gellert and Kuipers (2008) found teams with higher average ages had higher performance than teams with younger average ages. They also found no relationship between age diversity in team and team performance. In interacting with customers, some evidence suggests that older workers experience more positive affect and engage in more functional emotional labor strategies than younger workers (Dahling & Perez, 2010). Therefore, they may be readily able to provide customer service and manage the negative effects of interacting with angry or discourteous customers. Also, there is little evidence to suggest that the stressful nature of work would be any more problematic for older workers than for younger workers. One meta-analysis found that age was largely unrelated to the experience of either stressors (negative working conditions such as role ambiguity) or strains (negative consequences of stressors such as anxiety; Adams & Burns, 2008).

In another meta-analysis, Shirom, Gilboa, Fried, and Cooper (2008) found that age moderated the relationship between stressors and job performance. That is to say, the negative relationship between stressors and job performance was less negative for older workers than for younger workers. Based on this collection of findings, it would seem older workers are well suited to the types of team-related job demands in the workplace today.

Many studies have examined work-related attitudes of employees. Again, researchers have used meta-analysis to review and quantitatively summarize these studies (e.g., Bal, De Lange, Jansen, & Van Der Velde, 2008; Cohen, 1993). One of the most comprehensive of these meta-analyses was conducted by Ng and Feldman (2010) and used some 800 studies to examine the relationship between age and 35 different work-related attitudes. The study included variables linked to job-based attitudes (e.g., facets of job satisfaction, involvement, and motivation), people-based attitudes (e.g., social support, conflict, fairness, and leadership perceptions), and organization-based attitudes (e.g., commitment, trust, and loyalty). In general, they found that older workers had more favorable attitudes on 27 of the 35 attitudes. Age had no relationship to seven of the remaining eight attitudes (these focused on fairness perceptions, social support, and job security) and an unfavorable relationship with only one, where age was found to have a substantial negative correlation with satisfaction with promotions. In addition to this wide range of employee attitudes, researchers also have begun to examine the relationship between age and employee engagement. Using a large sample of employees ($N = 183,454$) from a variety of organizations, Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa (2008) found workers in the older than 55 age group reported higher levels of engagement than younger groups of workers. Similar results were found using a sample of workers in a retail sales organization (James, McKechnie, & Swanberg, 2011) and cross-national samples (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). Generally then, older workers tend to display positive work-related attitudes and levels of engagement.

Willingness and Motivation

In addition to being able to perform at work and maintain positive work-related attitudes, older workers appear to be willing and motivated to work. In surveys done several years ago, 32 percent of baby boomers indicated that they wanted to continue working full-time, and 55 percent

indicated that they wanted to continue working part-time (Administration on Aging, 2001; Roper Starch Worldwide, 1999). So far, these older workers appear to be holding true to their word. Older workers are working longer (Purcell, 2009a). Those who retire from their primary jobs often continue working (Giandrea, Cahill, & Quinn, 2009). Using data from the Health and Retirement Study, Maestas (2010) found that nearly 50 percent of retirees either engaged in partial retirement or later returned to work (unretired). She also found that 82 percent of those who returned to work had planned to do so. Looking ahead, one recent survey found that 75 percent of workers older than the age of 50 indicated that they expect to continue to work during their retirement years (Brown, Aumann, Pitt-Catsouphes, Galinsky, & Bond, 2010). Thus, older "retirement age" workers could become a valuable source of talent for organizations seeking to fill vacant positions.

Although it is helpful to know that older workers are willing and able to work, from a recruitment standpoint, it is important to know older workers' reasons or "motivation" to work. Motivation determines choices about what to do, how much effort to expend doing it, and how long (Campbell & Pritchard, 1976). Having an understanding of older workers' motivation to work can help organizations tailor their recruitment activities if necessary.

Work motivation is one of the most widely researched topics in the area of HR/OB (for reviews, see Donovan, 2002; Diefendorff & Chandler, 2011; Kanfer, 1990). Building on earlier motivation theories, several models of motivation that explicitly recognize age recently have begun to appear in the literature. Like the deficit model of aging described earlier in relation to job performance, models linking age to work motivation propose that age-related changes in cognitive abilities, physical abilities, personality, preferences, and so forth affect the motivation of workers as they age, as opposed to age being an explanatory variable itself (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, & Dikkers, 2008; Warr, 2001). Unlike the deficit model of aging, not all of these models predict a uniform decrease in motivation with increasing age. For instance, Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) recognized patterns of loss, growth, reorganization, and exchange in these individual differences across the life span, and suggest these impact motivational processes. Along these same lines, Stamov-Roßnagel and Hertel (2010) suggested that older workers may experience gains, losses, or no change in motivation,

depending on the specific tasks performed on the job. Mor-Barak (1995) built on Alderfer's (1969) Existence, Relatedness and Growth Needs theory by suggesting that older workers develop "generativity needs," which she described as the need to teach, share, and otherwise pass on knowledge and skills to younger generations. From a practical perspective, the various theories of motivation suggest that it may be more informative to examine age-related differences in motives, both content and process factors that determine motivation at work, than levels of motivation.

Researchers have begun to examine the motives of older workers empirically using concepts based on these various theories of motivation (e.g., Kooij, de Lang, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dikkers, 2011; Loi & Shultz, 2007; Nakai, Chang, Snell, & Fluckinger, 2011; Warr, 2008). In a recent meta-analysis of these studies Kooij et al. (2011) examined the relationship between age and 12 work-related motives. They found that age had a positive relationship with intrinsic motives such as accomplishment/achievement, helping others, skill use and autonomy, as well as job security. Age was negatively related to motives surrounding development, advancement, compensation, and benefits. Recognizing older workers are not a homogeneous group, several studies have examined differences in work motives among subgroups of older workers seeking employment. Loi and Shultz (2007) examined 10 work-related motives and found that they were differentially important to various subgroups of older workers. For instance, financial motives were more important to younger older workers (age 40–54) than other subgroups, whereas scheduling (e.g., full-time vs. part-time) was most important to displaced workers (age 55–61) and least important to older retirees (age 70+). In a similar study, Nakai et al. (2011) examined nine work-related motives and found that they helped distinguish among subgroups of older job seekers. These findings suggest that motives of older workers may differ from those of younger workers and across subgroups of older workers.

Several broad conclusions can be drawn from this literature addressing the relationship among age, job performance, attitudes, and willingness and motivation to work. First, older workers have many characteristics that would seem to make them ideal recruits for many organizations. They tend to perform well on the job, have positive attitudes, and are engaged. The implication for recruitment is that older workers are a viable talent pool from which

to draw employees. Second, although there are some differences in terms of *motives* for work, there seems to be little evidence for older workers having lower levels of *motivation*. The implication for recruitment is that organizations wishing to attract and retain older workers need to ensure there is some correspondence between the types of inducements the organization provides and the types of working-related motives that older workers express. From a strategic HRM perspective, an organization that is able to accomplish this, and in such a way that it differentiates itself from other organizations, can gain a competitive advantage through the recruitment of older workers.

This literature does have several limitations. One is that much of the research on the relationship between age and job performance has been conducted using the current workforce. Because of this, “older” old workers, such as those who have just begun working longer or in bridge jobs, are underrepresented. There is little reason to believe that performance, attitudes, and willingness or motivation to work drop off or change precipitously at the slightly older age range. However, there is a hazard from generalizing the results of the prior research that has included only small numbers of older old workers. More research directly examining the job performance of those who are working in retirement is needed.

An Older Workforce: What Do Employers Want (or Not)?

To this point, we have discussed why recruiting older workers makes sense from societal, organizational, and individual perspectives. We have argued that the literature supports the notion that older workers have much to contribute to the workplace as their motivation and performance levels remain high, or perhaps even increase, with age. In this section, we discuss how these notions fit with employers’ wants and needs.

The literature on older worker employment and recruitment shows two vastly different realities when it comes to employer practices aimed at recruitment and retention of an aging workforce. Some organizations follow a conservation model (Yeatts, Folts, & Knapp, 2000) and have made older worker recruitment and retention a priority. The conservation model is closely aligned with the “successful aging” approach (Freund & Baltes, 2007) and views older workers as valued assets of the organization, whose contributions and health should be maintained. CVS, for example, doubled the number

of workers older than age 55 from 1992 to 2002 through focused HR policies designed to attract and retain older workers (Mullich, 2003). However, the number of employers taking a proactive approach to older worker recruitment is decidedly small. A 2003 SHRM study of 428 HR professionals found only 28 percent were making any changes in recruiting, retention, and management in direct response to the aging workforce (Collision, 2003).

By far most employers have been disinterested in the attraction and retention of older workers. A study conducted by Manpower, Inc., using data from more than 28,000 employers spanning 25 countries and territories concluded that few respondents indicated their organizations were implementing strategies specifically aimed at older worker recruitment (14 percent) and retention (21 percent: Manpower Group, 2011). Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo (2010) drew a similar conclusion based on survey responses from Canadians older than age 50. They asked respondents to evaluate the extent to which their organizations were engaging in practices that were responsive to older worker needs and wants within each of seven categories of HR practices. Using a scale of 1 to 5, respondents indicated that their organizations, in general, had very few HR practices aimed at older worker attraction and retention, with compensation and retirement practices such as phased retirement being the least common. However, none of the other HR areas—training, job design, performance evaluation, recognition practices, and flexible work arrangements—were rated above 3.0. Indeed, numerous researchers concluded that most employers are not taking steps that would motivate older workers to remain in the workforce (e.g., Baltes & Young, 2007; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Parkinson, 2002; Rappaport, Bancroft, & Okum, 2003; Thorpe, 2008). The SHRM 2003 study showed 59 percent of the responding HR managers indicated that they do not do anything to actively recruit older workers, and 65 percent of HR professionals indicated they do not have specific practices aimed at retaining older workers (Collision, 2003). Loretto and White (2006) reported that very few of the employers in their study were even aware of the demographic trends pushing age to the forefront of HRM.

However, a mere disinterest in older worker recruitment and retention, though problematic, is not as concerning as the increased prevalence of employers actively designing HR policies that *discourage* older worker employment. These employers could be described as following a strategy consistent

with a “depreciation” model (Hall & Mirvis, 1994; Lyon, Hallier, & Gover, 1998; Parkinson, 2002; Patrickson, 1998; Rodriguez & Zavodny, 2003; Taylor, 2002). The depreciation model is aligned closely with the “deficit model of aging” (Kossen & Pedersen, 2008) and views workers’ value to an organization as diminishing with age and increasing in expense, resulting in a net cost that exceeds the benefits of employing older workers. A prevalence of depreciation model thinking surely has resulted in poor planning and lack of preparedness for the issues employers will face in managing an aging workforce, but it also has encouraged the use of downsizing and early retirement programs, sometimes with little regard to their resulting impact on organizational effectiveness. With the deterioration of both formal and informal job security contracts, older workers themselves are in the crossfire, as employers, often erroneously, perceive there is more to be gained by downsizing older workers than there is to retaining them (Bass, 2000; Sicker, 2002; Rubin, 1996).

Downsizing and early retirement incentives often disproportionately affect older workers, (Gardner; 1995; Quadagno, MacPherson, Keene, & Parham, 2001). Clark and d’Ambrosio (2005) noted, for example, that many universities and colleges pursue retirement benefits policies, phased retirement, and early retirement to encourage older workers to retire rather than implement policies that are likely to have direct improvements in productivity and skills of those older workers who remain employed. Further, research has shown that older workers have more difficulty finding high-quality jobs (e.g., Farber, 1993; Koeber & Wright, 2001; Lippmann, 2008; Smith & Rubin, 1997) and may suffer greater salary losses (Koeber & Wright, 2001; Ong & Mar, 1992;). Without a guarantee of job security, the fact that older workers typically are more expensive (higher salaried) than younger workers and may lack certain required or desired skills, combined with societal norms and practices that facilitate older workers’ exit from the workforce (e.g., Social Security) and subject them to age-related stereotypes (Baird, 2006; Boerlijst, Munnichs, & van der Heijden, 1998) makes them more vulnerable to job loss.

Why Recruiting/Retaining Older Workers Is a Priority for Some

Although the challenge of maintaining staffing with an aging and retiring workforce often is cited as the main reason employers recruit older workers,

there are several reasons for pursuing an intentional strategy of older worker recruitment and retention. Each of these motivating factors warrants closer examination.

Older workers have desirable attributes. Given the research summarized earlier, it is not surprising that some employers simply recognize that older workers have certain desirable attributes that can be of benefit to them in meeting their organizational mission. A 2003 SHRM study looking at employer recruitment practices found that 72 percent of the 427 human resource managers responding to the survey identified each of the following as key advantages of hiring older workers: willingness to work nontraditional schedules, ability to serve as mentors, and invaluable experience. Other advantages cited included a strong work ethic (69 percent), reliability (68 percent), added diversity of thought (61 percent), loyalty (58 percent), take work more seriously (58 percent), have established networks (51 percent), higher retention rates (44 percent), and more knowledge and skills (30 percent; Collision, 2003). In their qualitative study of 40 managers from a variety of industries and company sizes, Loretto and White (2006) found that participants generally felt that older workers had more life experience, job-related expertise, knowledge, and contacts; were more committed to their work and more motivated; and had better interpersonal skills than younger workers and that they were, therefore, attractive as employees. In a benchmark study, Pitt-Catsouphes, Kane, Smyer, and Shen (2006) found that “early adapters” believed that late-career employees tended to take more initiative; were loyal and reliable; had established networks of professional colleagues; and had high skill levels, a strong work ethic, and low turnover rates. Other research supports the conclusion that some employers simply believe older workers have attractive attributes such as reliability and loyalty (McGregor, 2001; Taylor & Walker, 1994). These beliefs have been linked to positive perceptions of “fit” between older workers and jobs requiring greater levels of maturity, stability, and loyalty (Oswick & Rosenthal, 2001).

Experienced or impending labor shortage. As mentioned earlier, whether or there is an impending broad-scale labor shortage still is being debated. Looking at BLS projected labor force levels and comparing these to projected employment counts has led some to argue there will be a severe shortage. However, simply comparing supply and demand figures is not an accurate analysis of labor surplus

or shortage, for the simple fact that some people hold multiple jobs and the data are collected in very different ways, which makes straight comparisons problematic (Horrigan, 2004). Nonetheless, some employers are experiencing or anticipating significant worker shortages, and this is a primary impetus for pursuing older workers.

Competition in labor markets is reflected in a recent survey of employers conducted by the Manpower Group across 39 countries. That survey found that slightly more than one-third of employers reported having difficulty filling jobs because of a lack of talent. In the United States, one-half of employers reported having difficulty filling jobs (Manpower Group, 2011). A 2002 SHRM study asking 445 HR professionals their opinion about the impact of the aging population on their workplace found that 37 percent believe it would have a great or very great impact on their workplace in the next five years (Collision, 2002). By 2011, human resource professionals identified competition for jobs, markets, and talent as one of their top 10 concerns (SHRM, 2011).

Based on age and employment data from the BLS, Horrigan (2004) identified several occupations that are more likely to experience labor shortages. Included were bus drivers, loan counselors, social workers, aircraft pilots, transportation managers, market and survey researchers, special education teachers, human resource specialists, network systems analysts, and sales engineers. In each of these occupational categories, at least 20 percent of employees were 55 and older, and the projected net employment increase was greater than the national average. In some cases, labor shortage pressures already have required employers in certain industries, or for certain occupations, to be creative and aggressive in retaining and recruiting older workers (e.g., Davidson & Wang, 2011; Harris, 2011; Sargen, Hooker, & Cooper, 2011; Vise, 2011).

Knowledge gap/transfer. When older workers retire, they take considerable organizational knowledge with them (DeLong, 2004). This sometimes is called "brain drain." Although the brain drain that might accompany a few workforce exits here and there probably can be managed through good knowledge transfer practices, mass exits such as might result from early retirement incentives or downsizing present significant problems for organizations. For example, Mullich (2003) noted that some experts have partially attributed the FBI's failure to accurately synthesize data related to terrorist activities prior to 9-11 to the FBI's mandatory

retirement age of 57, which resulted in the loss of experienced, knowledgeable analysts.

More than two-thirds of employers report concerns regarding the loss of organizational-specific knowledge and experience that older workers have accumulated (MetLife, 2009). Thus, many employers may need to manage a knowledge gap that results from a labor shortage, an unanticipated wave of retirements, or an education/skills gap in the labor force. According to a 2003 SHRM survey, 18 percent of HR respondents indicated that their organizations were working to capture institutional memory/organizational knowledge of their aging workforce. One tool at their disposal is to hire experienced, skilled older workers who can help to fill in the knowledge gaps left by exiting older workers (Collision, 2003).

Managing needs of the current workforce.

Many employers who pursue a strategy of recruitment and retention aimed at older workers do so in direct response to the changing needs of their own workforce and an organizational commitment to valuing diversity. These changing needs (e.g., elder care benefits, flexible work arrangements, financial planning services, health care benefits, ergonomic adjustments) force employers to think more about policies that will retain their existing workers. Faced with the reality of an aging workforce and impending retirements, these organizations find they also need to give more thought to how they can best manage the transition to retirement for their employees. The Office of Personnel Management, for example, estimated that in 2012, 45 percent of its full-time, permanent workforce would be of retirement eligibility age (OPM, 2008). Consequently, the Office of Management and Budget has issued a bulletin requiring each federal agency to conduct a workforce planning exercise examining its demographics, projecting future skill needs, and summarizing strategies for maintaining the quality of its workforce (OMB, 2001).

A national survey by researchers at The Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility at Boston College found that 75 percent of employers had done at least some analysis of their workforce demographics in anticipation of the effects of retirement (Pitt-Catsouphes, Smyer, Matz-Costa, & Kane, 2007). The 2003 SHRM survey showed that 23 percent of respondents indicated their organizations are beginning to examine their policies, and 7 percent had proposed specific changes or already had a plan in place to manage the retirement of a large percentage of workers age 55 and

older. A benchmark study of “early adaptors” to changing age demographics, also conducted by The Center on Aging & Work, found that organizations that tend to adopt older-worker friendly policies to meet the needs of their aging workforce tend to have a culture that values learning at all career stages and emphasizes multigenerational respect (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006).

Why Recruiting Older Workers Is Not a Priority for Others

The stated reasons that employers give for policies that have a disproportionate negative effect on older workers are primarily economic: increasing pension costs, higher salaries, and the need to downsize mean employers have been offering early retirement packages in an effort to induce retirement and reduce the number of older workers in their workplaces (e.g., Clark & d’Ambrosio, 2005). However, unstated reasons also are relevant: negative attitudes, stereotyping, and discrimination. We address each of these next.

Older workers have negative attributes. The 2003 SHRM study of HR managers found that 52 percent believed their organizations were at least a little hesitant to hire older workers, and 62 percent believed hiring managers were at least a little hesitant to hire older workers (Collision, 2003). When asked about disadvantages of older workers, respondent HR managers indicated that they don’t keep up with technology (53 percent), are less flexible (28 percent), don’t have the same drive (14 percent), require more training (14 percent), stifle creativity (14 percent), and take time for eldercare (12 percent). Results from the benchmark study conducted by the Center on Work & Aging are consistent with these findings (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006). Respondents indicated that late career employees were burned out (44 percent), reluctant to try new technologies (38 percent), want to take a lot of time from work to deal with family (24 percent), are difficult to train (18 percent), and are reluctant to travel (12 percent).

Loretto and White (2006) found that older workers, although more flexible in work hours in some ways than younger workers, generally were perceived by managers in their study to be less willing to work in the evenings. Managers in their sample also believed that job performance deteriorated after age 50, especially in jobs involving manual labor. When employers were required to make accommodations for older workers, it appeared that these changes were not done willingly. Employers

in their study tended to worry about absences and general health of older workers and the influence of these factors on productivity.

Other studies draw similar conclusions regarding the perceptions of older workers as inflexible, resistant to training, and resistant to change (Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2001; Redman & Snape, 2002). Not surprisingly, the perception of negative attributes appears to influence employer perceptions regarding “fit” between older workers and particular types of jobs (Oswick & Rosenthal, 2001) as well as the cost–benefit assessment associated with certain types of human capital investment such as training (Kodz, Kersley, & Bates, 1999; Warr, 1994).

Older workers are more expensive. The perception that older workers cost more to employ than younger workers has been cited frequently as a reason for the disproportionate downsizing and reluctance to hire older workers. Indeed, 36 percent of HR managers responding to the 2003 SHRM/NOW survey indicated that they believe older workers caused expenses to rise (Collision, 2003). Perceived higher costs typically arise from many sources. Pension and healthcare costs are leading concerns. Pitt-Catsouphes et al. (2006) reported that 64 percent of the organizations in their benchmark study indicated that healthcare costs by age had been estimated, and that these costs were highest among late-career employees. Clark and d’Ambrosio (2005) pointed to the higher costs of employing older faculty and providing health and pension benefits to retirees as problems facing many institutions of higher education. AARP (2005) reported employees aged 50 to 65 have higher healthcare costs than those aged 30 to 40, with healthcare spending increasing at age 40. They estimated that medical claims paid by employers for employees age 50 to 64 cost approximately 1.4 to 2.2 times as much as those for workers age 30 to 40. Base salary accounted for the largest difference in labor costs by age.

In addition to healthcare and salary costs, employers have concerns about increased workers compensation costs due to longer-lasting and recurrent workplace injuries associated with aging (Hays, 2009). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 2007 indicated that the number of days away from work due to nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses increased with age. The median number of days off work for all injured or ill workers was 7 but increased to 12 for those age 55 to 64, and to 16 for those 65 and older (BLS, 2008). Gillian (2007), reporting on a 2005 study by the Workers’

Compensation Research Institute, concluded that older workers take longer to heal, and therefore are away from their jobs for a longer period than younger workers. In addition, older workers were less likely to return to the workplace. Allen, Woock, Barrington, and Bunn (2008) found some evidence that excessive overtime (employees working 60 or more hours per week) created more problems for older hourly employees than younger employees (however, no effect was found for salaried workers). Moderate overtime did not have a significant negative effect on older workers.

It is important to note that whether older workers are actually more expensive than younger workers is highly debatable. Most research does not directly factor in lower turnover rates, higher skill levels, and other positive attributes of older workers; after these are considered, cost differences may be negligible. This was the conclusion of the AARP (2005) study finding that the differential ranged from close to zero to 3 percent for many industries.

Societal and organizational norms and incentive structures. Several researchers have argued that the negative individual and organizational attitudes regarding older workers that pervade our culture, and consequently the workforce, create powerful devaluing messages about older workers (Armstrong-Stassen & Cattaneo, 2010; Barth et al., 1993; Eastman, 1993; Loretto & White, 2006). In some cases, the push to overcome ageism is part of a national agenda, for example, Great Britain's "Agepositive" campaign that attempts to improve employer awareness of the positive attributes of older workers and sensitize them to appropriate age-related policies and practices (Loretto & White, 2006).

Societal norms and practices create incentives that facilitate older workers' exit from the workforce. For example, societal norms in the United States that tie healthcare insurance to employment (as opposed to a national healthcare system) may make older workers less attractive. Indeed, Scott, Berger, and Garen (1995) examined data from the Employee Benefits Supplement of the Current Population Survey and found that the probability of a worker age 55 to 64 being hired was significantly lower in firms with healthcare plans, and that this effect increased with the cost of the healthcare plan (i.e., more costly plans resulted in lower employment rates for older workers). Although this same study did not find a difference in hiring patterns of companies offering defined benefits versus defined contribution plans, one would expect

defined benefit plans to decrease the likelihood of older worker hires, as backloading compensation increases the incentive to hire younger workers and defined benefit plans typically allow earlier retirement (and greater retirement income security). Social Security and other financial programs (e.g., Medicare) also may have a dampening effect on older worker employment because employers may feel less obligation to hire older workers or assume they have less need to work.

Similarly, the strong societal norms currently associated with downsizing have a dampening effect on older worker employment. Research also has found that after downsizing has occurred, employer interest in policies and practices aimed at older workers also declines (Barth, McNaught, & Rizzi, 1993; Boerlijst, Munnichs, & van der Heijden, 1998; Rix, 1996). Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo (2010) concluded that downsizing decreased the likelihood that organizations would have HR practices targeted at meeting the needs of older workers and created a less supportive culture for older workers. They argued that downsizing policies that encourage early retirement and/or specifically target older workers send a message that the organization "views its older workers as disposable and does not value them" (p. 346). Barth et al. (1993) referred to older workers as "the scapegoats of corporate cost containment" (p. 176). Thus these policies create a downward spiral of older worker employment, in effect resetting organizational, individual, and societal values and norms regarding older workers.

Finally, we note that at the time the Social Security Act (1935) was passed, life expectancy was 61.7 years and benefits were to begin at age 65. Contrast that with the present time, when the average life expectancy is greater than 77 years, but the average age at retirement is 62 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2006). Clearly, societal expectations and norms for retirement have changed over the past 75 years, with individuals' expectations of retirement age decreasing. Parkinson (2002) argued that early retirement practices used to implement workforce reductions are more common than those that attempt to retain older worker talent. It is not too surprising, then, that a perpetuating cycle of older worker underemployment develops as both workers and employers begin to expect that early retirements are the norm.

Discrimination. Finally, the failure to recruit and retain older workers stems, in part, from intentional and unintentional discriminatory practices of employers (Neumark, 2009). We have noted that

there are some positive perceptions of older workers (e.g., reliable, strong work ethic). Yet, there also are some very negative perceptions of older workers. For example, they are seen as being less productive and unable to keep up with technology (James, Swanberg, & McKechnie, 2007; Van Dalen, Henkens, & Schippers, 2010). These stereotypes and biases persist even in the face of contradictory research (e.g., Chiu et al., 2001; Finkelstein & Burke, 1998). For example, several studies indicated that age and performance are largely unrelated (e.g., Forteza & Prieto, 1994; McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Rhodes, 1983; Waldman & Avolio, 1986), that older workers tend to perform as well as younger workers after the skills are learned, and that they also have lower absenteeism, turnover, and fewer incidents of accidents and/or injury (e.g., Barth, McNaught, & Rizzi, 1996; Charness, 1995).

Even where negative age-related stereotypes have basis in fact, their broad application leads to bias and discrimination because individual differences are not considered (Finkelstein & Farrell, 2007). Statistics from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) show 23,264 claims under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) were received in 2010, up markedly from 15,785 in 1997. The number of settlements increased from 642 in 1997 to 2,250 in 2010 (EEOC, 2011). Minda (1997) argued, for example, that organizations have skirted age and pension discrimination laws through downsizing or reductions-in-force (RIF) that disproportionately affect older workers. Minda coined the term “opportunistic downsizing” and argued that such practices should be considered discriminatory because they exploit the vulnerable position of a late-career employee who cannot easily leave the relationship because of factors such as job-specific training, which is not transferable to other potential employers, employment and pension benefits linked to seniority, and familial and community ties.

It is difficult to prove irrefutably that there is widespread age discrimination against older workers. However, the weight of the research evidence from field studies (Karpinska, Henkens, & Schippers, 2011), survey research using self-reports (Gee, Pavalko, & Long, 2007), and an analysis of trends in equal employment opportunity enforcement actions (see Neumark, 2009; Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011) all suggest that age discrimination in employment practices is a real issue for many older workers. Loretto and White (2006) also found that older workers, even where managers believed

they were valued employees, typically were not the preference when hiring, and that such hiring often happened either because the employer had no choice or only where jobs were aligned with positive age stereotypes (e.g., part-time, lower level positions). They argued that older workers are victims of both ageism (the application of negative stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs) and actual behaviors designed to exclude or disadvantage individuals on the basis of their age. Their study concluded that the causal relationship between these two is complicated, but both are important to creating barriers to older worker employment.

Older Workers: How Do We Attract Them?

Recognizing that many employers do not proactively recruit older workers, we now address how those that do can be successful in attracting an older applicant pool (and retaining the one they have or anticipate.) The challenge for any employer interested in recruiting older workers to either stay or come back into the workforce is to manage their workforce strategically in such a way as to (1) create an internal organizational culture that can overcome the devaluing messages that most individuals become accustomed to receiving by developing policies and practices that appeal to older workers and best utilize their talents; (2) find qualified older workers; and (3) minimize any costs uniquely associated with an older workforce (e.g., longer injury recovery times). Before we examine these three points more closely, it is helpful to understand which organizations are most likely to be interested in older worker recruitment.

Characteristics of Organizations Targeting Older Workers

Previously, we noted several reasons that organizations might be interested in adopting recruitment practices targeted at older workers. Although each organization’s situation is unique, there appear to be common characteristics associated with older worker recruitment. For example, smaller organizations have been found to be more likely to hire older workers and develop policies that are “older-worker friendly” (e.g., Andrews, 1992; Hu, 2003; Loretto & White, 2006; McVittie, McKinlay, & Widdicombe, 2003). This may be a function of necessity or the ease with which smaller companies can make accommodations for older workers. There is also evidence that employers in rural areas are more likely to employ older workers, perhaps because of older populations

located in those regions (Hayward, Hardy, & Liu, 1994). In a sample comparing working retirees and those still employed in their career jobs, however, Armstrong-Stassen (2008) did not find any differences in the organizations by industry, size, or location. Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo (2010) found a significant relationship between age composition and employer retirement practices. Organizations with an older workforce were more likely to offer retirement options that included phased retirement and rehiring retirees.

Recalling the benchmark study conducted by the Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2006) also may shed some light on relevant organizational characteristics. The 136 organizations included in the study were asked to participate because they were identified as “early adaptors” (i.e., those that had already put older worker-friendly policies and practices in place) or with plans to make the aging workforce a priority. Although not a random sample, the organizations spanned a variety of industries, but healthcare/social assistance, professional/scientific/technical services, and manufacturing organizations were most prevalent. Of these organizations, 61 percent were multinational, most were for-profit, and the number of employees ranged from 456 to 148,000. Most had been established for at least 11 years and reported positive financial performance. The report noted that 64 percent had positive overall growth in the size of their workforce over the past year while 46 percent experienced some downsizing. These organizations tended to employ predominately full-time employees (72 percent or more), and had somewhat higher levels of diversity in their workforce (on average, 47 percent female, 26 percent minority, and 37 percent older than age 40). Although clearly not definitive, together these results suggest the profile of older worker-friendly organizations as falling into one of two camps: smaller, rural organizations and larger, multinational and diverse organizations where skilled labor shortages might be expected (e.g., healthcare, scientific services).

Although these employers are ahead of the curve, we can anticipate that in the coming years, many more organizations will need to think more strategically about how to manage an aging workforce and applicant pool. As older workers and retirees are likely to be attracted to organizations that are perceived to be more open to employing older workers, we now explore the ways proactive organizations have been targeting older workers in recruitment practices.

Strategic HR Management and the Older Worker

Rau and Adams (2012) explored the relationship between organizational strategy and HR management decisions regarding retirement and argued that different strategies suggest different attitudes and practices in managing an older workforce. Some organizations, for example, might be focused on cost containment and use downsizing to shed higher costs of older worker salaries. Others may be concerned with customer service and continuity and focus on retaining older talent. Regardless, Rau and Adams (2012) argued that an organization's approach to managing an older workforce requires a holistic approach to creating a workplace that meets the needs of older workers. Recruitment cannot be viewed in isolation from other HR practices and policies because it is these very policies that create either a positive culture that attracts older workers or an uninviting one that deters them.

Creating an internal organizational culture that values older workers. For those organizations interested in attracting older workers, creating a supportive internal organizational culture is essential. Not only do these cultures perform better in attracting older workers, but it appears that workers who perceive that they were not treated fairly or respected by members of their work group, or felt that their contribution had not been valued by their organization prior to retirement are significantly more likely to stay out of the workforce (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008). This suggests that bad policies have a reverberating negative effect on older workers' desire to come back into the workforce (with the same or a different employer) after retirement.

Many researchers have suggested that HR practices matter when it comes to attracting and retaining older workers (see, e.g., AARP, 2002; Agarwal, 1998; Casey, Metcalf, & Lakey, 1993; Eastman, 1993; Farr & Ringseis, 2002; Goldberg, 2005; Hedge, Borman, & Lammlein, 2006; Jamrog, 2004; McEvoy & Blahna, 2001; Morton, Foster, & Sedlar, 2005; Patrickson, 1998, 2003; Peterson & Spiker, 2005; Rappaport et al., 2003; Walker & Taylor, 1998). A positive culture for older workers generally is created with mutually supportive practices that cover all functional areas of HR. These practices signal a culture where older workers are valued and nurtured (Feldman, 1994). After reviewing the research on HR practices and an aging workforce, Armstrong-Stassen (2008) concluded that there were seven key HR strategies to consider: flexible work arrangements.

training and development opportunities, job design with the older worker in mind, recognition and respect for older workers, sound performance management systems, compensation practices that reward older worker contributions, and multiple options for pre-retirement and post-retirement work (e.g., phased retirement). Armstrong-Stassen (2008) found significant differences in the importance of these seven categories of HR practices to individuals currently in post-retirement jobs and the extent to which their organizations actually were implementing those practices. Employers performed worse in offering age-friendly compensation options and pre- and post-retirement options.

When comparing three categories of individuals (currently retired, working in post-retirement, and working in career job), Armstrong-Stassen (2008) found significant differences in the decision to remain in, or return to, the workplace across seven categories of HR practices. For example, flexible work arrangements (days/hours worked, reduced workweek) were significantly more important to those in their post-retirement jobs than to those in their career jobs. On the other hand, compensation (e.g., improving the pension plan) was significantly more important to those still in their career jobs than to those in post-retirement employment. Those in retirement rated HR practices in the following order of importance to their decision to return to the workforce: recognition and respect for older workers ($\bar{x} = 3.63$), performance evaluation ($\bar{x} = 3.57$), age-specific job design ($\bar{x} = 3.18$), compensation ($\bar{x} = 3.07$), flexible working options ($\bar{x} = 3.02$), training and development aimed at older workers ($\bar{x} = 2.87$), pre/post-retirement options such as phased-in retirement, trial retirement, and retirement with callback arrangements ($\bar{x} = 2.58$). The employers of those in post-retirement positions also were more likely to offer flexible work arrangements, training and development targeting older workers, job design options, recognition and respect for older workers, older worker compensation options, and pre-post retirement options than organizations of career respondents (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008).

The benchmark study of the Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility found the majority of early adaptors and aged-friendly organizations in their sample offered employee assistance programs (93 percent), elder care information services (87 percent), family issues seminars (80 percent), life insurance (73 percent), paid sick days (67 percent), retirement planning seminars (67 percent), short-term disability insurance (60 percent), and

long-term care insurance (53 percent). A majority (80 percent) offered some of these benefits to their retirees, and about half allowed employees to access some of these benefits in caring for their grandchildren. Flexible work arrangements were offered by many of these organizations: control over breaks (59 percent), flexible work hours (53 percent), and caregiving leave (35 percent). In addition, a smaller proportion of these organizations offered numerous other benefits attractive to older workers in particular: transfer to reduced responsibility jobs (25 percent), sabbaticals or work career breaks (24 percent), telecommuting options (18 percent), job sharing (18 percent), working part year (12 percent), and phased retirement (12 percent). (Collision, 2003) found that only 10 percent of HR respondents indicated that their organizations were offering phased/gradual retirement.) Loretto and White (2006) found that several organizations in their study attempted to accommodate older workers with lighter schedules and support during illness.

We note two caveats to the conclusion that HR matters when it comes to recruiting older workers. First, there is little research directly examining the impact of particular policies and practices on older worker attraction. Rau and Adams (2005) looked at the effect of three policies on applicant attraction to bridge employment (scheduling flexibility, an EEO statement targeted at age discrimination, and opportunities to transfer knowledge). They found that only scheduling flexibility and a targeted EEO statement had a positive main effect on applicant attraction, but that all three policies together had an added positive influence. This may provide limited support for the notion that HR policies build upon each other to create an age-friendly culture.

Second, policies at the organizational level may not be reflected in practices at the unit level. Loretto and White (2006) concluded that an official policy had an effect on layoff and retirement, but manager attitudes had more effect on recruitment, performance management, and employee development. The literature on flexible work arrangements also finds organizational policies do not necessarily signal practice, because for a variety of reasons, individual managers may be resistant to implementing the organization's formal stated policy finding.

Finding qualified older workers. To be effective in recruitment, it is not enough simply to offer various age-friendly practices. Employers who are looking specifically to increase the pool of older worker applicants also must engage in targeted recruitment. They also have to be communicated

in a manner that signals to retirees that the organization values their contributions (Rau & Adams, 2005), and via appropriate channels. Organizations have a number of options for targeting retirees who may be active or passive job seekers (Rau & Adams, 2005) including: (1) direct mail, (2) newspapers/Internet, (3) posters in places retirees frequent, (4) radio, (5) employment agencies, (6) open houses/informational seminars, and (7) networking and referrals. Unfortunately, there is little research examining employer recruitment practices or sources and their success at generating a qualified older applicant pool.

The 2003 SHRM study looking at employer recruitment practices found that only 41 percent of HR managers reported they have targeted recruitment plans directed at older workers. Among those that do target older workers, 30 percent rely on employee referrals, 19 percent rely on networking, 9 percent rely on employment agencies, 8 percent rely on temporary staffing companies, 7 percent rely on Internet recruitment, and only 2 percent participate in older worker job fairs (Collision, 2003). These same HR managers reported flexible schedules (24 percent), continuous training (17 percent), and reduction in work hours (17 percent) as means by which they attempt to retain their older workers. Only 5 percent actually ask older workers what they want (Collision, 2003). Beyond this, we know little about how employers can target older workers more effectively in their recruitment practices.

Minimizing costs uniquely associated with an older workforce. Unfortunately, employer practice would suggest that the main focus of cost minimization to manage an older workforce is to downsize. Little attention is given to other cost minimization efforts that could manage expenses of an existing older workforce. The primary tools for downsizing are early retirement incentives and phased retirement programs.

As noted previously, there has been a trend toward early retirement in the United States. In part, this is due to active planning by employers to downsize their workforce by offering generous early retirement programs. These plans typically determine both eligibility and payouts as a function of employee age and years of service. Wang and Schultz (2010) described the decision to retire early as a function of both organizational and individual characteristics, and both are relevant to an employee's particular choice. In looking at university faculty, Kim and Feldman (1998) found that faculty

members who were in poorer health, had lower salaries, and who planned to work after retirement were more likely to retire early when the option was offered to them. Workers with higher workloads and stress levels were more likely to accept early retirement offers (e.g., Elovainio et al., 2005; Lin & Hsieh, 2001; Szubert & Sobala, 2005).

To encourage retirements, many universities have implemented phased retirement (Clark & d'Ambrosio, 2005). These programs are designed to allow employees to decrease work activity slowly over time, rather than through a one-time event going from full-time work to no work. Generally, phased retirement plans allow employees to reduce their work hours but maintain some compensation and benefits. The prevalence of phased retirement programs in the United States is fairly low. A Watson Wyatt study (Wyatt, 1999) showed that educational institutions were more likely than other types of organizations to offer phased retirement programs, and Conley (2007) found that about one third of the educational institutions surveyed offered phased-retirement plans. These differences are expected to decline over time, and a recent study suggests that these plans have been effective in increasing retirements (Allen, 2005).

Beyond downsizing methods, little attention is given to the cost minimization efforts that could be directed at an existing older workforce. This is unfortunate because there are significant downsides to seeking cost savings through downsizing and early retirement: "brain drain," low morale, and decreased organizational loyalty. In fact, there are many other things employers can do to address costs associated with older workers. Bridge employment, though not strictly a cost containment strategy, has the advantage of allowing organizations to hire experienced employees for less cost. Bridge employment generally refers to workers re-entering the workforce following a retirement period or giving up one's career job for a job of lesser responsibility and, often, time. Bridge employment helps to create greater continuity in jobs and can reduce training and "startup" costs often associated with new hires. In addition, bridge employees can often serve as mentors (Feldman & Seongsu, 2000), reducing training costs for other employees. Cahill, Giandra, and Quinn (2006) found that about 60 percent of American workers opted for bridge employment before completely leaving the labor force. Bridge employees tended to strongly agree that they enjoyed going to work, and this positive attitude can lower costs associated with absenteeism,

tardiness, and poor performance due to apathy or poor attitude.

AARP (2005) suggests health care cost containment is critical to address when managing an older workforce. As employees age, they tend to use more medical services, and their covered dependents also are more likely to use medical services (AARP, 2005). Employers can take several steps to mitigate these costs, including changes to copays, deductibles, and out-of-pocket expenses, but, more importantly, with greater attention on employee wellness programs and health education, along with greater education on medical care consumerism (i.e., teaching employees how to be smart consumers of medical services) (AARP, 2005).

Another way employers have been attempting to cut the cost of older workers is to address the cost of pension benefits, which make up another major component of an employer's cost of older workers. Many employers have addressed these costs by shifting away from defined benefit plans that guarantee a specified amount of retirement income toward defined contribution plans. Defined contribution plans shift the risk of investment to individual employees and reduce an employer's exposure to financial loss. Data from the Federal Reserve Board's (n.d.) Survey of Consumer Finances for 1985 through 2007 show the number of families with defined benefit plans has declined by 50 percent since 1989. The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (2009) reported the number of defined benefit plans it insures declined from 114,396 in 1985 to 29,400 in 2006. On the other hand, defined benefit plans encourage longevity and this can mitigate some of their cost. Some companies are offering hybrid plans that share features of both defined benefit and defined contribution plans. According to AARP (2005), the cost of defined benefit plans is determined in large part by the service levels and ages of the plan participants.

One problem that employers must be cognizant of is the tendency to focus only on the costs of employing older workers and to ignore the costs associated with replacing them. New, younger employees typically have higher turnover rates than older workers, and turnover can be costly to organizations, particularly when jobs require specialized skills, education, and experience. In addition, new employees have startup costs associated with learning the job, the organization, the customer, and the industry. Another group of overlooked costs includes the costs of transacting a turnover (e.g., conducting exit interviews, processing paperwork,

phasing or winding down an employee's productivity, transferring knowledge and work to others.) AARP (2005) concluded that, after accounting for all these costs, the cost of employing workers older than age 50 was not significantly higher than the cost of employing younger workers, even without taking proactive steps to mitigate the costs we have outlined here.

Designing an organizational strategy for managing an older workforce clearly involves creative thinking and knowledge of existing literature addressing both the needs of older workers and the human resource practices well suited to addressing recruitment, performance management, work assignment and placement, cost containment, and other needs of the employer. Effective older worker recruitment can be achieved only when the various components of the HR architecture work together to create an environment where older workers are valued, deployed, and managed in the most effective ways possible.

Future Research

To manage the demands that a large contingent of unemployed, financially unprepared, older citizens will put on the economy, we argue that it makes sense to find ways to make work attractive to older workers. By doing so, we can encourage them to maintain a productive and fulfilling work life well past the current age of retirement. We know that recruitment of older workers is much like recruitment of any other targeted group in that the perception of organizational fit drives older worker applications. Beyond that somewhat obvious observation, however, lies a host of unanswered questions that can inform theory and policy pertaining to older workers. Perhaps most salient to employers looking to attract older workers is the need to develop a more complete understanding of the policies and practices that create a supportive, desirable work environment for the older worker. We know, for example, that scheduling flexibility and targeted EEO statements increase older worker attraction (Rau & Adams, 2005). Additional research on organizational policies and practices that attract older workers would be useful. For example, older workers may desire different types of training and development opportunities, accommodations in work design, different compensation practices, or different hierarchical structures than younger workers. Such research could help us to understand what policies and practices work and also address their economic practicality.

A second line of research could address the profile of organizations that are successful in attracting and managing an older workforce. It would be helpful to know whether there are certain characteristics of the organization, the work, the industry, or the business environment that make some organizations more amenable and/or accommodating to an older workforce than others. For example, just as managerial attitudes are important for implementing workplace flexibility practices (Loretto & White, 2006), they may be of critical importance to implementing older-worker friendly policies.

Third, as noted earlier, the literature examining the relationship between age and performance has some limitations. This research could be extended by looking at “older old workers” such as those engaging in bridge employment or those who have returned to work following a period of retirement.

Finally, we noted that there is a correlation between the conservation/deficit psychology pertaining to perceptions of older workers and the conservation/depreciation models of managing older workers. The applicability of these constructs to older worker recruitment practices and outcomes warrants further investigation. One might speculate, for example, that the recruitment practices of an organization that views older workers from a deficit perspective would vary substantively from those applying a conservation psychology. They are likely to advertise differently, use different recruitment sources, use different networking tools, use different recruiters or encourage different types of communication with recruiters, and have fewer accommodations for the application process. Understanding how different psychological approaches affect recruitment practice will be helpful to advancing our knowledge in this area.

Because of the dearth of research in the area of older worker recruitment, there is potential for research using a variety of methodological approaches. Certainly, given the nature of this research, longitudinal studies are of critical importance to understanding how applicant attitudes, preferences, and choices change as we age. In addition, longitudinal studies examining changes in employer practices as their workforce ages would be illuminating. However, policy capturing, field research, experimental designs, and qualitative case studies are also needed. Policy capturing and experimental studies have been commonly used in the recruitment literature to ascertain applicant preferences and isolating the effects of various policy features. Field research would be effective in

understanding employer current and best practices as well as older workers’ recruitment experiences. Finally, qualitative studies would be very beneficial to understanding applicants’ and employers’ attitudes, values, and decision-making processes.

In conducting this research, we need to be cognizant of considerable differences in the experiences of older workers and design studies that can examine the full range of experiences among them. Studies that capture variance in health, age, and other demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race, work events (e.g., those currently retired and moving back into work, those close to retiring, those who do not plan to ever retire) will require careful attention to sampling. As countries and cultures have different attitudes and beliefs regarding aging, cross-cultural studies would be desirable. In addition, economic conditions and other external factors can have significant effects on both employer practices and applicant preferences. Advances in our understanding of these effects will require breadth in sampling and comprehensive reporting of external study conditions at the time of data collection.

Conclusion

The reality facing most employers of the future is that an increasing percentage of their workforce and their available applicant pool will be older workers. It is important for them to understand that in recruiting older workers they will not simply be competing with other employers, but they also will be competing with the non-working retirement alternative. This review of theoretical and empirical work related to the recruitment of older workers points out that the obstacles to creating and maintaining a thriving older workforce are not insurmountable. As the research addressing “what do older workers want?” makes clear, older workers want many of the same things that younger workers want: respect and recognition, flexible work hours, health benefits, fair compensation and performance management, a chance for meaningful work, and opportunities for professional and personal development. This suggests that employers who are already well on their way to strategic HR practices merely need to tweak their policies and communications to address the unique needs of an older workforce. Perhaps the more challenging concern for these employers will be combating continued strong societal messages regarding negative stereotypes of older workers and replacing them with an internal message that older workers are valued partners in organizational success.

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