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THE AGING WORKFORCE:

PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER ENDING

DIRK BUYENS

Dirk.Buyens@vlerick.be

HANS VAN DIJK

Hans.Vandijk@vlerick.be

THOMAS DEWILDE

Thomas.Dewilde@vlerick.be

ANNICK VLAMINCKX

ANS DE VOS

Ans.Devos@vlerick.be

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DIRK BUYENS

Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School

HANS VAN DIJK

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THOMAS DEWILDE

Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School

ANNICK VLAMINCKX

ANS DE VOS

Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School

Contact:

Hans van Dijk

Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School

Tel: +32 16 24 88 26

Fax: +32 16 24 88 00

Email: Hans.Vandijk@vlerick.be

ABSTRACT

Purpose - The purpose of this study is twofold. The first is to relate the negative image of older workers to stereotype threat and propose that effective retention management should start with the replacement of this negative image. The second is to assess the needs, perceptions and preferences of older workers regarding their career-ending.

Design/methodology/approach - 266 employer questionnaires and 1290 older worker questionnaires identified the employers' perceptions of older workers and the career-ending needs and preferences of older workers.

Findings - The results provide indirect support for the hypothesis that the negative image of older workers forms a self-fulfilling prophecy due to mechanisms of stereotype threat. Furthermore, the results indicate that job involvement plays a crucial role in the preference to retire or keep on working.

Research limitations/implications – Stereotype threat promises to be of significant relevance for the career-ending measures of older workers. However, the empirical design of the study limits the possibility to draw direct inferences about the effects of stereotype threat on older workers.

Practical implications - Measures and policies aimed at prolonging the participation of older workers at the labor market should be tailored to the specific needs, perceptions and preferences of older workers.

Originality/value – The concept of stereotype threat has never been connected with popular perceptions of older workers. Further, the assessment of the needs, perceptions and preferences related to the career-ending of older workers has never been done in European studies.

Keywords - Retention management, Stereotype threat, Older workers.

INTRODUCTION

The retirement of the baby boomers is the pre-eminent HR issue of the coming decade (Young, 2006). Around the world, governments, institutions and organizations are jointly engaged in developing strategies to cope with the aging workforce. Because such a mass exodus of employees is unprecedented in management history, the impact is assessed on all different organizational and societal levels (OECD, 2004). Based on future expectations several measures were made at the European Summit in Lisbon in March 2000 that are supposed to help Europe to manage the aging workforce. Raising the total participation of the joint workforce to 70% in 2010 was one of the most important norms. During a subsequent summit in Stockholm this was further specified in a participation of 50% of older employees within the range of 55-64 years old by 2010 (Jouhette and Romans, 2006).

With a percentage of 64,3%, the participation of the Flemish working population at the labor market is currently above the European average of 63,3%. However, for the age between 55 and 64 years this percentage in 2004 was only 29,5%, which is the lowest average of the whole European Union (Nonneman, 2007). Most other European countries have not yet reached this norm of 50%, though, so for the whole European Union it constitutes a tremendous challenge. In order to find out whether this objective is reachable at all and - if so - how it can be reached, it should be assessed first why so many people exit from the labor market before the official retirement age of 65. If, for example, this is the result of physical or mental health problems, then it is rather improbable that this objective will be reached at all. Imposing a participation norm of 50% on older employees would then be unwise - to say the least, for forcing burnt-out people to keep on working will only result in more socio-economical problems on the long term. Furthermore, in case especially health problems prevent people from working until they are 65, other policies are needed to keep them working than when it results from, for example, a loss of motivation to keep on working (Thompson and McHugh, 2002).

Measures and policies aimed at prolonging the participation of older employees at the labor market should therefore be tailored to the specific needs, perceptions and preferences of older employees. To our knowledge, this has not yet been done in European studies. In this paper we address the needs, perceptions and preferences of older workers in Flanders. Older workers are defined as workers who are 40 years old or older. Super and Hall (1978) have identified this as the turning point for many in their careers. Whereas some still have many ambitions and evolutions in their career, others reach their summit at this point. The age of 40

therefore seems to be the minimum age at which people start losing their career-aspirations and possibilities and, hence, need to think about their career-ending.

Why the participation level of older employees needs to be increased

The most important reason to make the participation level rise is ensuring the sustainability of the social security system (Ulrich and Brott, 2005). This system is organized in such a way that the workforce bears the retirement and healthcare expenses of the elderly. Although this system in most European countries currently is in balance, five independent developments are putting it at risk (Duval, 2003; Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

First, the improvements in hygiene, food, health care and science are leading to a rapid increase of life-expectancy which, in turn, leads to an increase in expenses for both pension and medical healthcare (Mayhew, 2003). Second, the average age at which employers enter the labor market has increased due to longer periods of study (Tucker, 2007). As a consequence, the number of productive years at the labor market is decreasing, which leads to less compensation for the social security system expenses. Third, the average age at which participants leave the labor market is currently decreasing (Duval, 2003), which contributes to the decrease of the number of productive years. Fourth, with a mean of 1,58 in 1997 Europe is currently having the lowest fertility rate in history (Adsera, 2004). This means that relatively fewer people will enter the labor market in the future, leading to less compensation for the expenses of the elderly. Finally, the fifth reason why the social security system in European countries is in danger of being misbalanced is the approaching mass retirement of the baby boomers (Duval, 2003).

When all these factors are added up it reveals a doom-scenario in which the discontinuation of the social security system seems unavoidable. In Belgium, for example, the increase in expenses for pensions and healthcare between 2005 and 2030 due to these demographical changes has been estimated to constitute an amount equal to 3,8% of the BNP (Studiecommissie voor de Vergrijzing, 2006).

In this estimation other, related problems are not even included. One of these problems is that the interaction between the second, third, fourth and fifth factor will lead to an enormous tension on the labor market. Up till today the efflux of older workers has always been countered by an influx of new entrants (graduated students, women, immigrants etc.), but the factors mentioned above indicate that this will not be possible anymore in the near future. At the same time the reduction of productive years entails that careers become more

intense. During these years one needs to work very hard and effectively. This will easily lead to a stressed and tensioned welfare state (Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

In order to create effective measures that provide adequate answers, further insight into these issues is needed. The first, second, and fifth factor that put the social security system at risk are givens, though, so they cannot be counterbalanced. Regarding the mass retirement of the current generation of older workers, delaying the retirement might be a necessary but insufficient solution. Policies aimed at postponing the retirement age should be aimed at the following generations also. Recently, the European Union and some individual European countries have started actions aimed at raising the birth rate (RAND, 2005), but even if those measures will be successful, its results will not start to bear fruit before at least twenty years have passed. As a consequence, the main objective for the next twenty years is raising the participation level of the workforce. The current demographical statistics indicate that especially among the older workforce there are possibilities to make this happen.

A closer look at the low participation rate among the older workforce

In many European countries, several years ago early retirement arrangements were created that were supposed to solve the problems with youth-unemployment (in Belgium the “bridge-pension” was introduced for this purpose). It was expected that the early retirement of older employees would provide room on the labor market for young entrants. However, present-day it is clear that both groups are incommensurable due to the lack of experience of the entrants (VBO, 2003). Hence, there is no such direct relationship between early retirement and increased entry of new participants at the labor market, nor is it likely to ever exist. Instead, nowadays this arrangement presents a problem for the future, as it obviously did stimulate older workers to retire earlier (Bratberg et al., 2004). It increases the financial situation of the older employee which, together with mental and physical healthcare issues, is related to a decrease in intended age of retirement (Farr and Ringseis, 2002). Quinn and Burkhauser (1994) found that, besides these two factors, attitudes toward work and spare time, social networks, social circumstances and future expectancies also affect the age of retirement. A moderating factor is the type of job, for some jobs are more demanding than others.

Time of retirement does not always depend on the employee, though, for there is actual proof that an early retirement is often not the voluntary choice of an employee (Gough, 2003). A predominant reason for this is that older employees are regularly undervalued

(Duval, 2003). Not only does popular and professional literature portray older workers as unhealthy, senile, and as resisting change or education, also the performance and productivity is often questioned: they are supposed to be less productive, have more health problems, and a lower physical capacity. Moreover, they are supposed to be inflexible and unwilling to follow an education (Taylor and Walker, 1998). The only positive counter-remarks that are made are that they are reliable, experienced and efficient (Nelson, 2002; Thornton, 2002; Abrams *et al.*, 2006). As a consequence of this negative image, older employees are frequently the main victims of discharge measures due to, for example, downsizing or restructuring.

Research has offered a more balanced picture, though (Duval, 2003; Rupp *et al.*, 2006). It is true that the physical capacity of older employees is decreasing, but social and mental skills, such as feelings of responsibility, leadership, conscientiousness and creativity are increasing (Meganck *et al.*, 2004; Taylor and Walker, 1994). However, other reasons for employers to choose a younger worker are the higher salary of older workers and the expected return on investment. Older employees are in general more expensive than their younger equivalents, and because of their age it is expected that older employees will stay shorter with the organization (Shea, 1991).

In summary, the low participation rate among the older workforce has different causes. Existing institutional policies regarding retirement and salary, employee characteristics and preferences, the type of work, employee attitudes and popular perceptions are all mutually interacting and enhancing factors. Insight in the exact workings of these latter factors is needed before existing institutional policies can be modified and new, more effective institutional policies can be implemented. Therefore this study focuses on older workers' career-ending needs and preferences, and on employers' perceptions of the older worker.

Employers' attitudes and popular perceptions: stereotype threat as the cause of a vicious circle

An interesting fact that can be deduced from the factors mentioned above is that there is a clear incongruence between the images of the older employee as offered by popular and professional literature and as offered by empirical research. In the media and within organizations older workers are perceived as much less skilled than scientific studies prove them to be.

This popular image entails the risk that it leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The best way to explain this is by using a related, but less well-known social-psychological concept

called *stereotype threat*. This refers to “the fear of confirming others’ negative stereotypes about one’s group what makes it more difficult for people to perform up to their potential” (Kenrick *et al.*, 2002; p.383). The major contributing factor to this effect is whether or not the negative stereotypes are salient (Haslam, 2004). Given the earlier mentioned popular and professional image of older workers, the stereotype of older workers as deteriorating is currently omnipresent and, hence, nearly unavoidable.

Another effect of stereotype threat, besides the decrease in performance of the victims of negative stereotypes, is that it may lead them to de-identify with those places where society expects them to fail (Kenrick *et al.*, 2002). For older workers this creates an advantage on the short run, as it helps them to maintain positive feelings about themselves in the face of negative stereotypes. On the long run, however, the distancing of older employees from their workplace will lead to, among others, less involvement, less interest, and less enthusiasm. All of this leads to a decrease in motivation, which is another contributor to a decrease in performance among old workers (Haslam, 2004; Van Knippenberg, 2000). Meanwhile, it enhances the stereotypes and actually creates a negative spiral. The loss of motivation and performance will enhance the perception of the weakening older worker, causing employers and other employees to regard them as – among others - moody, inactive, and as resisting change or education (Roberson and Kulik, 2007). Hence, the stereotype will result in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This might even be enhanced by what has been described by dispositional inference theory as “the tendency to interpret ambiguous events and behaviors in ways that support our expectations” (Kenrick *et al.* 2002; p.79). This means that if we already expect older workers to perform less well than their younger colleagues, it is more likely that we attribute underperformance to the characteristics of the older worker than that we tend to do that for younger workers. Indeed, Rupp *et al.* (2006) found that performance errors of older workers more often lead to severe recommendations, while performance errors of their younger counterparts more often lead to recommendations to remedy the performance problems.

As a consequence, we hypothesize that older workers are perceived by employers as performing less well than older workers themselves do, even if the job does not require physical labor. Due to the vicious circle as presented above older workers will think that their performance level is decreasing too, but to a lesser extent. Furthermore we hypothesize that older workers are less motivated to work than they used to be. An important implication of this is that measures aimed at making them work longer should first of all focus on enhancing motivation. Imposing measures upon them while disregarding the motivational impact will

likely only worsen the work motivation of older workers. In effect, this would enhance the stereotype and strengthen the effect of the stereotype threat.

We therefore need first of all insights into what would motivate older workers to keep on working. What is the way they perceive their role and situation? What are their needs that must be met, and what are their preferences for their career-ending? These are the questions that were addressed in the study.

METHOD

Sample and data collection

Separate web-based questionnaires were available for HR-managers (representing the perspective of the employers) and employees of organizations in Flanders for a period of seven weeks on a website. Through a media-campaign potential respondents were called to participate. Despite the disadvantage of web-based questionnaires that it can only be filled out by people who use a computer and who visit the site of the large media organization where it was published, we chose for this option due to reasons of efficiency. This way it was possible to reach a representative pool of respondents within a short period of time.

In total 321 HR-managers and 2479 employees filled out the questionnaire. After the removal of questionnaires with missing or unusable values a total number of 266 employer questionnaires and 1290 employee questionnaires remained; this means a utility percentage on the side of the employer of 83% and on the side of the employee of 52%.

Measures

The questions posed in the questionnaire focused on the perceptions of both the employer and the employee and on the needs and preferences of the employee. The questionnaire for the employer started with questions about demographical statistics of the organization (sector, size, ratio blue-collar workers), followed by several 5-point Likert scale items assessing their perception of retirement problems within their organization, existing end-of-career measures and facilitations within their organization, and perceptions about the evolution of their older workers.

The questionnaire for the older workers started with demographical questions as well (age, gender, hierarchical level, level of education, marital status, and type of contract). This was followed by a question in which the respondents had to distribute 100 points among four

broad life-areas (work, family, free time, engagement, Super & Sverko, 1995). Job involvement was assessed using four items (Lawer and Hall, 1970; Morrow, 1983) and had a reliability coefficient of .79 (Cronbach's alpha). Stress and work pressure, physical load, health and future aspirations were assessed by using the scale of Elchardus and Cohen (2003). Stress and work pressure had a reliability coefficient of .77, but the reliability coefficients of the scales for health and for physical load were unsatisfactory. Health was still taken into the analysis by using the item 'in my work I am hindered by my health condition'. The reliabilities, measured by Cronbach's alpha, of the four aspiration-items were .73 for free time, .69 for self-actualization, .74 for career-related aspirations, and .61 for material aspirations. Finally, most items in the questionnaire assessed the perceptions of the older workers by a 5-point Likert scale.

Analysis

For the statistical analysis of both questionnaires we used the statistical software program SPSS. Frequencies and correlations were used to compute the basic needs, perceptions and preferences, whereas linear regression and factor analysis were used for more in-depth analyses.

RESULTS

During the analysis we controlled for outcomes on the demographical variables that were not representative of the population. We found that both at the employers' side as on the employees' side the physical labor section was relatively underrepresented. Whereas only 28,8% of the employers belonged to the blue-collar section (71,2% white collar), among the employees this percentage was only 9,8% (90,8% white-collar). This means that especially on the older workers' side the results mainly reflect the scores from the white-collar population.

We controlled for remarkable correlations between demographical variables and other measures, but in general none were found. Only the ones that showed significant correlations we will present here.

Results from the employers' side

First, we asked the HR-managers what end-of-career options they offer their older workers. Table 1 shows that on average no specific end-of-career measures for

older workers exist within Flemish organizations.

Insert Table 1 about here

In those cases where such measures do exist, in general they are more targeted at individual older workers than that they are organization-wide measures. As a consequence, it is more likely that they resulted from occasional end-of-career management problems and are not implemented based on expected problems in the future.

Insert Table 2 about here

With regard to the questions that examined the employers' perceptions of the evolution of older workers, Table 2 shows that on nearly all scales the employers perceive a slight decline in employee performance. Although this confirms the popular view of older workers, it is not as dramatic as sometimes is suggested. Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that the employers do acknowledge that the knowledge and expertise of the older workers have increased. It also shows that no extreme ratings were used for any of the items. As a consequence, it is fair to conclude that the employers' overall perception of the performance of the older worker is that it is slightly deteriorating.

Results from the side of the older workers

Four life-areas. First we assessed the relative importance that older workers ascribe to their work as compared to three other important life-areas, in which we controlled for age-related differences. As depicted in Table 3, the results show that there are no significant age-related differences, neither in preferred nor in actual time distribution across the four life-areas.

Insert Table 3 about here

There are large differences between preferred and actual time distributions, though. Clearly, employees prefer spending much less time at work and more at their families and free time than they actually do.

Insert Table 4 about here

We also controlled for hierarchical level, the results of which are shown in Table 4. Whereas the relative importance of work increases with the hierarchical level, the relative importance of family decreases. This suggests that identification with the job is more predominant among high-level workers than among low-level workers.

Job involvement. Age, hierarchical level and level of education showed a significant positive relation (Pearson's r) with job involvement of .10, .21 and .20, respectively. This positive relation strengthens the impression that employees working at higher levels in the organization identify themselves more with their work.

Preferred retirement age. For each hierarchical level we examined the preferred retirement age. Whereas for blue-collar workers the average age was 57,9 years, for white-collar workers this varied between 59,2 (clerks) and 61,3 years (board members). Through a multivariate regression analysis we used the preferred retirement age as the dependent variable. As independent variables demographical factors (*model 1*) and needs and preferences (*model 2*) were used. As the results show, both models are significant.

Insert Table 5 about here

However, the preferences and needs of the older employees (*model 2*) explain nearly 2,5 times better the preferred retirement age than the demographical factors. Of these latter factors, especially gender and level of education appeared to be significantly related to preferred retirement age. Women prefer to retire earlier than men, and a higher level of education is related to an increase in preferred retirement age. Of the preferences and needs factors, positively related with preferred retirement age are job involvement, mean organizational retirement age, and career aspirations. Negatively related with preferred retirement age are mortgage payment, stress, desire for free time, and desire for self-actualization.

Career-ending systems. Both older workers' preferences and expected opportunities for using specific career ending systems were assessed, of which the results are shown in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 about here

These results indicate that the older employee has a positive attitude towards the different systems that enable them to retire early. The right to work after the age of 65 is also regarded as positive. However, nearly 90% of the respondents conceive a duty to work after the age of 65 as negative. Hence, the opportunity to keep on working after passing the official retirement is good, but not the obligation. Interestingly, despite this positive attitude towards these end-of-career facilitating systems, most respondents do not expect to use them.

End-of-career preferences and possibilities. In Table 1 we showed what specific end-of-career measures exist in organizations. The same items were used to assess what measures are appealing to older workers, and which would motivate them to work longer.

Insert Table 7 about here

The results of Table 7 show that most of these measures are appealing to older employees. Measures that have more negative responses are related to a change in career, thereby showing that the older workers like their jobs. Especially the measures aimed at developing older workers and at providing older workers with more free time receive a very positive attitude. However, none of these measures encourage older workers to work longer. Only the measures that decrease the number of working days and working hours are regarded as possible incentives for retention. Interestingly, over one-third of the respondents indicate that extra training is also a likely stimulant for postponing retirement.

Preferred future career. If older employees keep on working, it is important to assess more concretely what their preferred working situation would be.

Insert Table 8 about here

Table 8 shows the career preferences of the older workers. Based on a factor analysis these items can be categorized into three factors that together explain 43% of the variance. The first group of items indicates the preference for career diminishment. Interestingly, only the option of working less or working part-time is a preferred option for some. Cutting down on responsibilities or work load is not preferred among older workers. The second group of

items measures career-expanding preferences. The results indicate that the aspirations of the older workers are not really related to leadership or management oriented functions, but that they wish to enhance their expertise and that they want to use it to coach and train younger colleagues. The third group of items measures career-preservation preferences. 65% of the older workers indicate that they wish to maintain their current position, thereby showing that the older workers in general feel comfortable in their jobs.

Antecedents of preferred future career. We used these three factors as dependent variables in a multivariate regression analysis to create a model that integrates the previous findings. As independent variables the same demographical factors (*model 1*) and needs and preferences (*model 2*) as in Table 5 were used.

Insert Table 9 about here

Table 9 shows that especially the preferences and the needs of older workers are related to their preferred future career. Of the demographical items only hierarchical level showed a strong positive correlation with career expanding preferences. Persons with a low hierarchical level prefer to diminish the role of work in their life. Of the items assessing the needs and preferences of older workers, job involvement, material aspirations and career aspirations are positively related to career expanding preferences, while stress and health are negatively related to career expanding preferences.

These results point out that the older workers who wish to diminish the role of work in their lives are people who are not very involved in their jobs, who are under much stress and pressure, and whose health is not optimal. Furthermore these persons desire to spend more time with family and friends and to develop themselves, and they do not have many material aspirations. We see this type of workers especially among the lower organizational hierarchies.

Regarding the older workers who prefer to preserve their career, not many significant relations are found. They seem content with what they have and wish to preserve it, as is reflected by the strongly negative relation with career aspirations.

The older workers who wish to expand their careers are especially men who work fulltime on a high level. They are highly involved, have low psychological pressure, and still have many aspirations.

Older employees' perceptions of their own evolution. In Table 2 the employers' perceptions of older workers' evolutions are depicted. We asked the same questions to the older employees about their own evolution to check for dissimilarities and to test the hypotheses about the effects of stereotype threat.

Insert Table 10 about here

Table 10 shows that older workers are a lot more extreme in their perceptions of themselves than the employers were. However, on average the older workers have the impression that their performance and capabilities have neither decreased nor increased, thereby showing a more positive perception of themselves than the employers did.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

While there is global awareness about the future problems resulting from the mass-retirement of the baby-boom generation, little is known about what would motivate them to keep on working (Young, 2006). This is surprising as both national and international political debates are being held about what measures are needed to manage these problems effectively (Duval, 2003), and one of the key measures focuses on retention (Loretto and White, 2006). In our theoretical framework we suggest that imposing such measures is likely to yield opposing effects to what is intended, a hypothesis that was confirmed by our results. While, for example, the right to remain working after the age of 65 years is regarded as positive, the duty to remain working after the age of 65 years receives a very negative response.

Instead, retention management measures should fit the specific needs and preferences of the older worker. The outcomes of this study show that this can best be reached by improving the job involvement of older workers. Higher levels of job involvement showed to be related to preferences for career preservation or career expansion, while lower levels of job involvement are related to career-diminishment preferences. Furthermore, the results provide indirect support for the hypothesis that stereotype-threat mechanisms play a role in the performance of older workers. The extremely diverse perceptions of older workers about changes in the level of their own performance suggest that older workers have become rather insecure about their own capabilities. Although our research design limits our capability to draw direct conclusions out of this finding, it does provide support for the hypothesis that ageist stereotypes have negatively affected the older worker. In their experimental study,

Abrams *et al.* (2006) have found a causal relation between cognitive underperformance of older people due to salient ageist stereotypes. Hence, this part of our study adds to a cumulating pile of evidence that mindsets about the abilities of older workers need to be changed in order for an effective extension of stay of older workers at the labor market. (Nelson, 2002; Taylor and Watson, 1998). The results of this study provide many insights in what other retention measures would be effective and would be welcomed by the older workers themselves.

Retention management

Our finding that the organizations in our study have hardly started with implementing retention measures and policies actually constitutes a reason for optimism. Although from a pro-active management point of view they should have already started, this provides the opportunity to avoid imposing measures that do not suit the older workers. Instead, the organizations can start to develop retention management policies that take the needs and preferences of older workers regarding their career-ending into consideration and that are aimed at improving their job involvement.

Improving job involvement. Numerous variables can be named that are related to the level of job involvement (Haslam, 2004). Because of this, organizations can implement equally numerous interventions that can all potentially enhance the job involvement of older workers. Our findings suggest that the effectiveness of such interventions in general depends on several individual characteristics of the older worker, such as hierarchical level, gender, stress and work load, health, sigh for time, and on their aspirations. However, before such retention management measures can work, first of all people's perception of older workers needs to be changed (Duval, 2003; Taylor and Walker, 1998). As long as the stereotype of older workers being less useful than their younger counterparts exists, the stereotype threat will remain effective, as will all of its consequences (Rupp *et al.*, 2006). Not only the employer, but also the older workers and the other employees must change their mindsets and start acknowledging that older workers can still be very valuable to an organization. Indeed, Abrams *et al.* (2006) found that stereotype threat can be diminished by creating more understanding, but more research on this topic is definitely needed.

Tailored end-of-career management. Our regression analysis showed that both the preferred future career and the desired age of retirement vary between workers, and that these variations are intimately related to the preferences and the needs of older workers. Given that

the preferences and needs of older workers vary for each person as well, it would be wise for organizations to offer a wide range of end-of-career possibilities. That way, organizations can select together with older workers the type of career ending that satisfies the needs and preferences of both parties.

Extra training. Another result that is important with regard to retention management is the finding that nearly all older workers showed interest in extra training. Although most of the employers indicated that they offer extra training to older workers, in their extensive study Hedge *et al.* (2005) found that older workers in most organizations have less access to extra training than younger workers. That this can lead easily to the emergence of performance differences is illustrated well by using computer-training as an example. The introduction of the computer into the workplace has put many older workers who were not raised with a computer at a disadvantage. Not being used to working with a computer or to using it at home, it poses a big challenge for them in jobs that require a lot of computer work to keep up with the pace of younger workers who have grown up with computers (Gist *et al.*, 1988). Organizations should therefore provide more opportunities for older workers to follow extra training, and perhaps even create trainings that are specifically targeted at the older workers. Future research could focus on what types of training would especially be effective for older workers.

The older worker. Of the individual employee sufficient levels of maturity has to be expected. One cannot maintain the attitude that one wants to work less without compensating. The results of this study indicated that older workers are becoming aware of this fact. It is therefore likely that retention management can be effective. *Can*, for it is of utmost importance that it is not imposed. Instead, the needs and preferences of older workers should be considered in the development of any retention management plan.

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TABLE 1:**Organization-specific measures**

Which of the following alternatives do you offer your older workers?	To nobody	To hardly anybody	To some	To nearly everyone	To everyone
<i>Stop working in shifts</i>	50,8	18,1	17,5	4,5	9,0
<i>Stop working extra hours</i>	57,1	13,1	13,1	4,7	12,0
<i>Taking additional holidays</i>	49,0	8,9	8,9	9,4	23,8
<i>Having less severe responsibilities</i>	47,3	22,9	24,9	1,5	3,5
<i>Having more severe responsibilities</i>	37,1	14,4	42,1	3,0	3,5
<i>Having more flexible working hours</i>	30,2	15,1	26,3	8,3	20,0
<i>Working less hours a week</i>	30,3	11,4	35,8	9,0	13,4
<i>Being released from certain tasks</i>	43,8	24,1	29,6	1,5	2,0
<i>Following extra training</i>	12,3	5,9	34,0	19,7	28,1
<i>Following career-management sessions</i>	59,8	15,6	14,6	2,0	8,0
<i>Going on bridge-pension</i>	29,4	11,3	20,1	15,2	24,0
<i>Being able to take up full-time time credit</i>	24,1	11,8	28,6	12,3	23,2
<i>Receiving a bonus for working longer</i>	81,7	4,0	5,9	1,0	7,4
<i>Improvement of the working conditions</i>	31,4	8,8	24,5	9,3	26,0
<i>Transfer within the organization</i>	24,7	18,0	44,3	4,1	8,8
<i>Transfer to another organization</i>	60,6	17,7	18,2	0,5	3,0
<i>Ergonomical adjustments</i>	17,0	13,0	40,0	10,0	20,0

Note. Results are displayed in percentages of corresponding answers.

TABLE 2:**Evaluation of physical and mental decline**

How do you evaluate the evolution of your older employees on the following matters.	Strongly declined	Declined	Remained the same	Increased	Strongly increased
<i>Their working pace</i>	2,3	56,3	37,7	3,3	0,5
<i>Their performing ability, the amount of work they can handle</i>	1,9	48,3	46,0	3,8	0,0
<i>Their ability to focus</i>	1,4	31,9	64,3	2,3	0,0
<i>Their health condition in general</i>	0,9	44,8	53,8	0,5	0,0
<i>Their knowledge and expertise</i>	0,5	5,1	37,7	51,6	5,1
<i>The number of absent days due to being ill</i>	0,9	9,8	65,9	22,4	0,9
<i>Their ambitions to achieve something at work</i>	8,4	45,8	42,5	3,3	0,0
<i>Their working motivation and drive to work</i>	3,3	29,8	58,6	7,0	1,4

Note. Results are displayed in percentages of corresponding answers.

TABLE 3:**Preferred and actual time distribution among four large life-areas (categorized by age)**

	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	> 60
Work	33,89 (50,66)	35,61 (51,32)	34,61 (51,14)	38,80 (54,74)	42,5 (49,37)
Family	37,60 (28,21)	35,89 (28,69)	35,86 (27,44)	33,41 (25,05)	28,47 (25,97)
Spare time	21,58 (15,86)	20,24 (13,57)	21,43 (15,25)	19,48 (14,00)	20,34 (17,63)
Engagement	6,9 (5,26)	8,26 (6,44)	8,09 (6,23)	8,29 (6,37)	8,68 (7,03)

Note. Scores indicate the average number of points that respondents distributed from a total of 100 points to the preferred (without brackets) and the actual time consumption (between brackets) of each of four life-areas.

TABLE 4:

Preferred and actual time distribution among four large life-areas (categorized by hierarchical level)

	Blue collar	White collar	Middle-management	Board
Work	27,74 (43,70)	34,39 (51,59)	39,62 (56,11)	43,27 (59,68)
Family	41,21 (30,19)	35,55 (27,48)	34,42 (25,22)	32,17 (22,85)
Spare time	21,84 (18,06)	22,28 (15,22)	18,78 (13,85)	16,98 (12,39)
Engagement	9,22 (8,10)	7,77 (5,72)	7,19 (4,82)	7,59 (5,29)

Note. Scores indicate the average number of points that respondents distributed from a total of 100 points to the preferred (without brackets) and the actual time consumption (between brackets) of each of four life-areas.

TABLE 5:

Determinants of retirement

Dependent: <i>Preferred retirement age in years</i>	(β)	(β)	R ²
Model 1			0.11
Gender	.182**	.150**	
Fin. Dependent children	-.078*	-.071*	
Care-needing parents	-.039	-.026	
Hierarchical level	.135**	.053	
Education level	.179**	.109**	
Work system	.047	.055	
Model 2			0.35
Mortgage payment		-.085*	
Job involvement		.258**	
Stress and work load		-.222**	
Health		-.023	
Mean organizational retirement age		.227**	
Mean retirement age of friends		.053	
Sigh for time		-.101**	
Sigh for self-development		-.113**	
Material aspirations		.052	
Career aspirations		.113**	

*p < .05

**p < .01

TABLE 6:**Attitudes towards end-of-career systems, and expected probability to use them**

What do you think about the currently existing end-of-career systems, and to what extent do you think you will use them?	Very positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very negative
Half-time bridge pension	16,7 (4,6)	37,4 (8,2)	27,7 (19,3)	11,5 (34,8)	6,6 (32,4)
Time credit when passing the age of 50 years	29,4 (11,9)	42,8 (10,1)	19,2 (21,6)	6,0 (30,4)	2,5 (25,2)
Bridge pension or an equivalent system	22,1 (10,3)	33,3 (12,8)	23,6 (20,3)	12,4 (28,3)	6,4 (27,3)
Pension at the age of 65 years	7,6 (16,8)	18,4 (18,5)	25,4 (21,7)	26,0 (26,5)	20,8 (15,4)
The right to remain working after the age of 65 years	16,3 (2,9)	42,1 (18,5)	22,7 (21,7)	10,2 (26,5)	7,1 (15,4)
The duty to remain working after the age of 65 years	0,3	1,3	6,9	27,7	62,9

Note. Results of attitudes towards end-of-career systems (without brackets) and the expected probability to use them (between brackets) are displayed in percentages of corresponding answers.

TABLE 7:

Expected use and effectiveness of organization-specific retention measures

Would you use any of the following initiatives if your employer would offer them, and would they stimulate you to work longer?	Not at all	Probably not	Maybe	Probably	Very probably	Dimension
<i>Stop working in shifts</i>	9,4 (37,2)	10,3 (23,9)	17,2 (15,6)	28,8 (11,3)	34,2 (12,0)	1
<i>Stop working extra hours</i>	8,7 (30,7)	16,4 (28,3)	19,6 (16,4)	25,0 (15,4)	30,3 (9,2)	1
<i>Taking additional holidays</i>	2,7 (18,1)	6,3 (16,2)	11,5 (20,6)	32,7 (28,3)	46,8 (16,9)	1
<i>Having less severe responsibilities</i>	15,5 (29,3)	29,0 (31,4)	28,0 (22,0)	17,5 (13,4)	10,0 (3,9)	1
<i>Having more severe responsibilities</i>	17,3 (37,2)	27,5 (30,7)	29,2 (19,4)	19,9 (9,3)	6,2 (3,4)	2
<i>Having more flexible working hours</i>	6,4 (19,5)	8,1 (17,7)	21,2 (23,4)	28,9 (23,1)	35,4 (16,3)	1
<i>Working less hours a week</i>	6,4 (14,2)	14,1 (16,2)	19,7 (24,9)	30,8 (28,2)	29,0 (16,4)	1
<i>Being released from certain tasks</i>	11,9 (22,6)	20,0 (21,5)	28,1 (27,0)	23,3 (21,1)	16,7 (7,9)	1
<i>Following extra training</i>	4,3 (22,4)	6,1 (22,3)	18,0 (22,2)	32,6 (18,9)	39,0 (14,3)	2
<i>Following career-management sessions</i>	11,8 (29,7)	21,4 (26,2)	27,9 (23,6)	25,6 (15,0)	13,3 (5,5)	2
<i>Going on bridge-pension</i>	13,9	16,4	19,1	22,8	27,9	3
<i>Being able to take up full-time timecredit</i>	16,5	23,7	25,5	18,1	16,2	3
<i>Receiving a bonus for working longer</i>	18,0 (23,9)	21,8 (22,4)	23,9 (22,5)	17,6 (16,7)	18,7 (14,6)	4
<i>Improvement of the working conditions</i>	3,7 (21,8)	10,5 (20,2)	23,7 (24,6)	32,5 (21,5)	29,7 (12,0)	1
<i>Transfer within the organization</i>	20,8 (36,1)	24,0 (26,8)	33,6 (27,8)	4,9 (7,5)	6,7 (1,8)	2
<i>Transfer to another organization</i>	33,0 (44,3)	27,6 (29,1)	26,5 (20,9)	8,8 (4,7)	4,1 (1,1)	2
<i>Ergonomical adjustments</i>	9,5 (30,3)	14,6 (22,8)	29,9 (27,2)	27,1 (11,5)	18,9 (8,2)	1

Note. Results of expected use of organization-specific retention measures (without brackets) and the expected effectiveness of those measures (between brackets) are displayed in percentages of corresponding answers.

TABLE 8:**Career preferences**

What expectancies do you have regarding your future work situation?	Not at all	Probably not	Maybe	Probably	Very probably	Dimension
<i>I want to maintain my function, tasks and responsibilities</i>	5,5	9,9	19,6	46,7	18,4	3
<i>I want to maintain my function, but have less physical workload</i>	41,8	29,1	14,9	10,8	3,4	1
<i>I want to maintain my function, but have less responsibilities</i>	43,6	35,6	12,5	7,4	0,9	1
<i>I want to maintain my function, but have more leadership-tasks</i>	21,5	29,1	24,6	19,6	5,3	2
<i>I want to work less or part-time</i>	23,7	19,7	20,2	22,4	14,1	1
<i>I want to work in a new function</i>	45,8	23,3	20,6	7,1	3,3	3
<i>I want to gradually reduce my current responsibilities</i>	41,4	30,6	14,1	10,5	3,4	1
<i>I want to coach/train younger workers</i>	6,3	6,4	25,9	38,5	22,8	2
<i>I want to remain/become an expert in my area of profession</i>	4,7	9,0	17,2	37,1	32,1	2
<i>I want to have a more general/management function</i>	33,8	24,9	22,6	13,6	5,0	2

Note. Results are displayed in percentages of corresponding answers.

TABLE 9:

Antecedents of expanding, decreasing or maintaining the current career

	Decreasing		Expanding		Maintaining	
Model 1	(R²: .06)		(R²: .15)		(R²: .01)	
Hierarchical level	-.187**	-.112**	.167**	.117**	-.026	-.034
Gender	.028	.044	.149**	.156**	-.008	-.001
Education level	-.066	-.017	.103**	.041	-.091*	-.064*
Work system	.099*	.063	-.184**	-.119**	-.003	-.028
Model 2	(R²: .31)		(R²: .35)		(R²: .44)	
Job involvement		-.107**		.215**		.121**
Stress and work load		.301**		-.104**		-.015
Health		.273**		-.085**		-.075*
Sigh for time		.109**		.049		-.035
Sigh for self-development		.130**		.002		-.051
Material aspirations		-.074*		.218**		.015
Career aspirations		-.052		.274**		-.632**

* p < .05** p < .01

TABLE 10:**Sense of physical and mental declination**

In what way have the following matters evolved for you in the past five years?	Strongly declined	Declined	Remained the same	Increased	Strongly increased
<i>My working pace</i>	20,3	19,0	21,8	19,7	19,2
<i>My performing ability, the amount of work they can handle</i>	18,9	21,1	21,1	21,2	17,7
<i>My ability to focus</i>	20,5	19,5	20,4	18,2	21,4
<i>My health condition in general</i>	19,1	19,7	22,9	19,7	18,5
<i>My knowledge and expertise</i>	20,2	19,6	19,4	19,9	21,0
<i>The number of absent days due to being ill</i>	17,1	19,5	21,0	20,4	21,4
<i>My ambitions to achieve something at work</i>	20,0	22,5	21,2	18,1	18,2
<i>My working motivation and drive to work</i>	19,2	21,4	21,0	20,4	18,0

Note. Results are displayed in percentages of corresponding answers.