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Thriving at 55+: Supporting Late Career Employees in Satisfying and Productive Work

(Participant report)

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Introduction

Population ageing is taking place in almost all areas of the world with Japan, Germany and Italy being the most ageing countries. Being a result of two simultaneous developments - the steady increase of life expectancy across Europe and falling fertility rates, demographic ageing is expected to become entrenched in many countries during the next half of the century with the number of people aged 60 years or over increasing more than twice and exceeding the number of children by 2050. Thus, the ageing population becomes a key challenge for society and an important social and economic responsibility. Furthermore, the ageing of the population has led and will lead to significant changes in the workforce, particularly demonstrated by the rise of employment rates amongst older workers (usually workers aged 55 years and over).

As the need to keep older workers in the workforce has been referred to as an “emergency”, various prevention measures ranging from changes in the legislation and social security systems to the introduction of tailored life-long learning programmes and flexible work models have been undertaken recently. As result, across Europe there has been a considerable increase of the employment rates of older workers (aged 55-64) over the last ten years from 38% to 47%. There is a wealth of examples about how employers can benefit from hiring and retaining older employees at work. Reforms in the pension and legislation systems have been made, and actions in terms of the development of age neutral recruitment and retention measures have been undertaken. Most arguments are around potential financial and social benefits as results of utilising older workers’ experience and transferring their skills to younger employees within organisations.

However, the task of retaining older workers in the workforce is a reflection of individual needs as well as societal ones. Research on older workers’ motives to stay at work demonstrates that beyond financial needs people see their inclusion in the labour market as an important aspect of their personal identity and their social life. Older workers’ successful involvement with the labour market could be related to their own overall well-being, which is reflected in the concept of ‘successful ageing’ taking into account age-related changes in work-related abilities and motives. Also, it is not just a question of keeping older workers in work: ***how can one also make the most of their contribution?***

The “Thriving at 55+” project addresses the question of how older workers experience their ageing in the workplace and focuses particularly on the features of work and work environment that both older workers and their employers consider important for older workers’ well-being and performance. It investigates in-depth the personal and organisational strategies that are most effective in helping older workers to not just maintain, but also improve their well-being and performance at work and, therefore, ensure better and longer working lives.

Issues that need to be addressed further

“...we do a better job of managing industrial scrap than we do of managing the careers of older workers. At least companies recognise the value to be derived from industrial scrap.”
(Greller and Stroh, 2004)

Stereotypes and discrimination of older workers

Age discrimination has been found to be the most widely experienced form of discrimination across Europe and although it may be experienced by workers at all ages, older workers seem to be those who take it most seriously. Stereotyping can have both positive and negative consequences. Examples of positive stereotypes of older workers are ‘increased levels of loyalty’, ‘reliability’ and ‘job commitment’. Sometimes, as a result of some positive images about older workers, they can be favoured in their access to certain types of work. Generally, it appears that older workers are most often negatively stereotyped. Recent research indicates that the six of the most common and damaging stereotypes about older workers are that older employees (compared to younger workers) are ‘less motivated’, ‘less willing to engage in training and career development programs’, ‘more resistant to change’, ‘not as trusting’, ‘more likely to experience health problems that affect their work’, and ‘more vulnerable to work–family conflicts’.

Negative age stereotypes may have negative effects on older workers’ self-esteem, job performance and well-being. It has consistently been found that negative stereotypes significantly affect employers’ attitudes towards training, promotion and

retention of older workers and willingness to work with older workers. This, in turn, may lead to older workers’ withdrawal from the labour market. Many times the effects of age discrimination are hidden and masked by situations such as forced retirement or redundancy. There is good evidence that nearly all negative stereotypes about older workers are unjustified. For instance, it has been revealed that older (compared with younger) workers provide longer and more reliable service to their employers, are not less adaptable, have fewer accidents compared to younger workers, often possess complex intellectual capacity, have good customer and interpersonal skills, have good learning capacity and motivation to learn.

The type and prevalence of age discrimination can vary across types of employers, industries, jobs, countries and be expressed through certain Human Resource Management strategies and practices (e.g. reduced recruitment and/or reduced training and learning opportunities for older workers). For instance, it is highly likely that older workers with specialist skills in skill shortage areas will be more valued by employers while this tendency does not apply to sectors with lower skills base and no shortage of applicants. Age stereotypes about older workers seem to be particularly strong in certain industries, such as finance, retail, insurance, technology, information

services. A specific example is the ICT sector, where discrimination against older workers is particularly rampant even in the context of high skills gaps and shortages.

There is growing international awareness of the value of older workers which has contributed to changes in employers' attitudes toward older workers and reduction of the numbers of age-discrimination events. However, recent studies indicate that employers are still not responsive enough to changing these attitudes. For instance, a survey amongst older employees from organisations across in the UK has found that only 14% of managers consider their organisation well prepared to cope with the issues caused by the ageing workforce. About 40% of older workers still considered themselves as being discriminated against because of their age (CIPD & CMI, 2010).

Age-related changes and work-related outcomes

It has been well documented that people change physically and psychologically with age. Some of these changes are demonstrated through people's behaviours at work. Most importantly, we have to acknowledge that there are big individual differences and, for example, some of these age-related changes may be more obvious for some individuals and negligible for others.

Older workers are likely to be less fit than younger workers and, therefore, they may experience more difficulties than their younger colleagues when performing physically demanding jobs. However, research has demonstrated that the degree of physical change is not just related to age, but is highly dependent on many other factors

such as individual's heredity, life styles, physical activity, and the environment. Thus, not everybody is likely to experience age-related disadvantages in their work.

There could be also declines in some cognitive functions, mostly associated with fluid intelligence (e.g. working memory and information processing) at later age. However, such age effects were found not to be great on average and can be further reduced within a supportive environment (i.e. when adjusting time, new enabling technologies, etc.). Furthermore, the levels of cognitive decline among older individuals may vary significantly. For instance, some older individuals show very little change in competence or performance until very old age. In addition, declining fluid intelligence abilities are usually compensated by increased crystalized intelligence (e.g. knowledge and experience). Thus, using their accumulated knowledge and experience, older workers may perform better than younger workers in their jobs.

Similarly to physical and cognitive (fluid intelligence) changes, people may experience some personality changes when they grow older. For instance, studies demonstrate that older workers are less extraverted and open to change than younger workers, but at the same time - more self-controlled, tolerant, modest and conscious. Yet again, these changes are very individual and do not apply to everyone.

Of particular research interest are the age-related changes in worker's motivation. It has been consistently demonstrated that, despite of some believes, work motivation does not decline with age. However, workers' priorities tend to change over time and with age. For instance, older (compared with

younger) workers may tend to attribute more importance to some social aspects of work (such as supporting younger workers and transferring their experience) as well as to feeling valued and involved than to career development options and striving for achievement.

Some individual outcomes such as work performance and occupational well-being have also been discussed with regard to later age. Well-being can be interpreted in terms of various concepts amongst which workers' mental and physical health and work satisfaction. Older age is usually associated with higher (physical) health risks and some jobs and workplaces are more hazardous than others for workers' health. Yet again, individual health depends on many other factors, such as for example individual's biology and life styles. Regarding job satisfaction, it has been reported that older workers are likely to express higher job satisfaction (compared with younger colleagues) and to attribute a significant importance to their job content and relations with colleagues.

Overall, there is no consistent evidence about age-related changes in work performance. Researchers suggest that there is no age-related decline in job performance, apart from when the work demands high levels of physical stamina and effort. The declines of performance are more likely due so skill obsolesce or exhaustion than to age. In addition, it is well documented that workers' well-being and performance are related. Therefore, keeping older workers healthier and happier at work can enhance their performance.

Supporting older workers in organisations

At job level, various characteristics are expected to have effects on individuals' work behaviours. Therefore, it is important to identify those jobs in which older age is either a benefit or a limitation and to employ practices to support older workers' adaptability. For instance, some job characteristics, such as higher autonomy, higher task significance, higher skill variety and specialization, greater opportunities for providing social support to colleagues, are particularly associated with higher job satisfaction and performance for older workers. Other job characteristics (e.g. job complexity and information processing) may have rather negative than positive effect on older workers' job satisfaction and performance. In addition, relationship between age and job characteristics may be influenced by a variety of factors, such as individual differences and contextual (e.g. organisational) factors. Therefore, the positive effects of the appropriate job design can be facilitated at both individual and organisational levels.

Older workers in organisations can support themselves through some *personal (individual) strategies*. Contemporary theory is likely to view ageing as a process of growth rather than decline. This view is reflected in the concept of 'successful ageing', which suggests that individuals can experience good health and vitality over the life-span, but not only at young age. There are *personal approaches* to successful ageing. One particular path is minimising the impact of the negative age-related changes (e.g. decline in some fluid intelligence aspects) and maximising the effects of the positive ones

(e.g. crystallised intelligence). This is best demonstrated through the theory of Selection, Optimization and Compensation (SOC). The SOC model suggests that individuals can successfully adapt to age-related changes and changes in the workplace through using three types of personal strategies: *selection* (e.g. reducing individual's range of activities selecting the most important tasks), *optimization* (e.g. improving one's skills through training and development) and *compensation* (e.g. demonstrating one's strengths in front of others). There is good evidence that the use of SOC strategies can enhance worker's performance and well-being and becomes particularly important with age.

Older workers can also be supported by their employers (*organisations*). As organisations play a significant role in shaping one's skills, knowledge, motivation, and social relationships, they are an important social context for individuals. Thus, the quality of the employee-organisation relationship (EOR) and Human Resource Management (HRM) may have critical impact on older workers' well-being and performance. In simple words, EOR theory presumes that employees are likely to reciprocate their input in the organisation based on their perception of the extent to which their organisation values them. If employees are satisfied with what the organisation provides, they will be more willing to reciprocate with their contributions to the organisation. Therefore, it can be expected that older workers who feel more valued and supported by their organisations, will be more dedicated to their organisations.

Strategic Human Resource Management (HMR) is an important tool for organisations

to provide support to their workers. In particular, older workers are likely to prefer organisations which demonstrate their consideration of older workers through their HRM practices. Fighting negative stereotypes and discrimination against older workers has become increasingly important for many organisations and is well reflected in their HRM strategies. In the last few decades there has been a significant shift in the employers' attitudes and strategies towards older workers from targeting them when labour reductions were required towards supporting the idea of positive ageing and more particularly, the utilization and retention of older workers. Practical indicator of employers' interest and attempts to introduce specific age- management practices is the occurrence of terms, such as 'age-diverse management', 'pro-age management', 'age-sensitive management', 'age-positive', 'age conscious HR policy', etc. The employment of 'age-friendly' HRM strategies most of the times is encouraged by changes in the national policies and legislations.

The extent of implementation and the forms of 'age-friendly' HRM strategies vary significantly across countries, industrial sectors and organisations. Most examples of successful age-management are derived from the Western countries. Some HRM practices associated with older workers may include reduced working hours, flexible working options, adjusting job roles, refresher training, and extra annual leave and may aim to help older workers maintain their job performance at an acceptable level. Other HRM practices, encouraging older workers to undertake new projects, tasks, and job roles, learn new skills, and mentor/coach others on the job, may have rather a

developmental than maintenance effect on older workers and, thus increase their work performance and satisfaction. Furthermore, successful HRM practices may encourage some older workers to remain in the workforce longer and even return to work past retirement.

Thriving or Surviving in late career

Thriving are individuals who feel both vitality and learning, which in turn allow them to develop themselves. Thriving workers are not just surviving (i.e. being able to handle job demands through creating a relatively safe environment), but feeling enthusiastic, acquiring new knowledge and skills and experiencing growth. It was found that thriving workers, compared to non-thriving ones, overall perform better, are more creative, have better relationships with their co-workers, feel more satisfied with their job and committed to their organisation, and are healthier.

From a career development perspective workers aged 55 years and older are often considered as late career workers. Classical theory and practice view late career as a 'closure' of one's working life, rather than strive for development. Nowadays this view is about to change. Many older workers still seek continuing personal growth and development. However, this might be different kind of growth, compared with younger workers. Unlikely many younger workers who may prefer promotion, older workers may rather strive at refining their skills, developing relationships, exercising autonomy and control, contributing to the collective good by (for example) transferring their experience to their younger colleagues. This suggests that older workers can also

experience thriving, though may be in a slightly different way than younger workers.

Methodology

There is no consensus in the literature about who is the late career or 'older worker'. Recently more researchers choose to define older workers as those who are at least 55 years old, partly because this is currently the fastest growing segment of the workforce. This definition is also based on a common social perception. For instance, a study report by CIPD and CMI (2010) demonstrates that when asked to suggest an age of an 'older employee', people in the United Kingdom on average referred to men at the age of 56 and over women aged 55 years and over. Therefore, we defined the main target group of our project as 'employees aged 55 years and over'.

Our purpose was to investigate how people age in the workplace and, more specifically, what personal and organisational strategies are most effective in helping older workers to not just survive, but also thrive at work. The research objectives were met through three studies that were implemented simultaneously in two countries (the United Kingdom and Bulgaria) and two industrial sectors (health and information and communication technologies). In study 1 we analysed qualitative data from 47 semi-structured interviews (10 with Human Resource managers and with 37 older workers from 10 employment organisations in both countries and both sectors). Study 3 incorporated multiple sources of data (both

qualitative and quantitative) for eight case studies with successful late career workers. Study 2 was quantitative, based on an on-line survey evaluation with the participation of over 1000 older workers in 10 large organisations (some of which have already participated in study 1, and some new) in both countries and sectors. A total of 698 survey responses were analysed for the purposes of this report. Most of the data (83%) came from the UK. About half (50,3%) of the participants in the total sample were from the health sector and half were from the ICT sector. The numbers of female (50,4%) and male participants were also almost equal. The mean age of the whole group was 58 years. About 46% of all participants had been in the same jobs for over 10 years and about 83% had been working for the same organisation for more than 10 years.

Findings

First, we investigated how employees see themselves and are seen by their employers, how workers perceive and manage age-related changes in their work attitudes, approaches and preferences in their late careers. Figure 1 presents the main themes that emerged from our interviews with late career employees about their perceptions of ageing in the workplace. Below is a summary of the most important outcomes.

The far-reaching effects of knowledge and experience

All late career employees reported perceptions of age-related increases in *accumulated knowledge and experience*. These, in turn, were associated with a number of benefits. Far from being a compensation

for declining fluid intelligence, knowledge and experience were seen as facilitators of higher level cognitive functioning, stability, good people and team skills, ability to influence. Furthermore, all these benefits were seen as significant contributors to superior work performance by older workers.

However, despite these perceived virtues of older workers, another important sub-theme that emerged from the interview data analysis is a lack of employer recognition of what older workers can offer. This was most evident in perceptions of whether the employing organisation would be willing to hire older workers, but was also reflected in a perceived lack of recognition and respect by the employing organisation. Most statements came from health workers in both countries.

Becoming less dynamic?

Negative perceptions of older workers about themselves tend to revolve around deficits of and *openness to change*. There is considerable overlap between these perceptions and the common stereotypes about older workers, and this overlap is more evident than for the positive perceptions. At the same time, the number of reported negative categories and their prevalence in the interview transcripts is considerably smaller than the positive categories. In addition, we observed slightly different patterns in the conceptualizations of the older workers across sectors and countries. Overall, the Bulgarian health workers (compared with the UK workers and the Bulgarian ICT workers) were more likely to report negative perceptions about older workers in general. One contributory factor for these outcomes could be the lack of strong

HRM function and formal equality and diversity policies in the studied Bulgarian health organisations (as reported by the study participants).

Perceptions of older workers as *lacking creativity, proactivity and a desire for learning* (compared with younger workers) were attributed to older workers' changing motives with age/career stage, and/or ability to learn, especially regarding IT skills. Some older workers shared that they needed more frequent training (compared with younger workers) in order to be able to keep up with on-going changes in job content and work environment. Yet in contrast, most interviewees perceived themselves as continuously learning (formally or informally) and did not report any significant difficulties in doing so. Only a few interviewees from both sectors and countries mentioned declining *physical* and *cognitive capacity*, and most of them thought that even if such declines do occur, they are insignificant and do not have an impact on their job performance. There were also a number of references from both countries and sectors to the maintenance of physical and mental fitness. However, importantly, these were usually in the context of worries about what might happen in the future rather than what was happening now.

Thriving and Surviving

Whilst for most of our interviewees a priority in late career was to continue developing themselves, for some it was more important to preserve or maintain their mental and physical resources: 'there are always small new things to learn. However, there is nothing that can enrich my perspective or knowledge' (ICT, Bulgaria, female); 'My

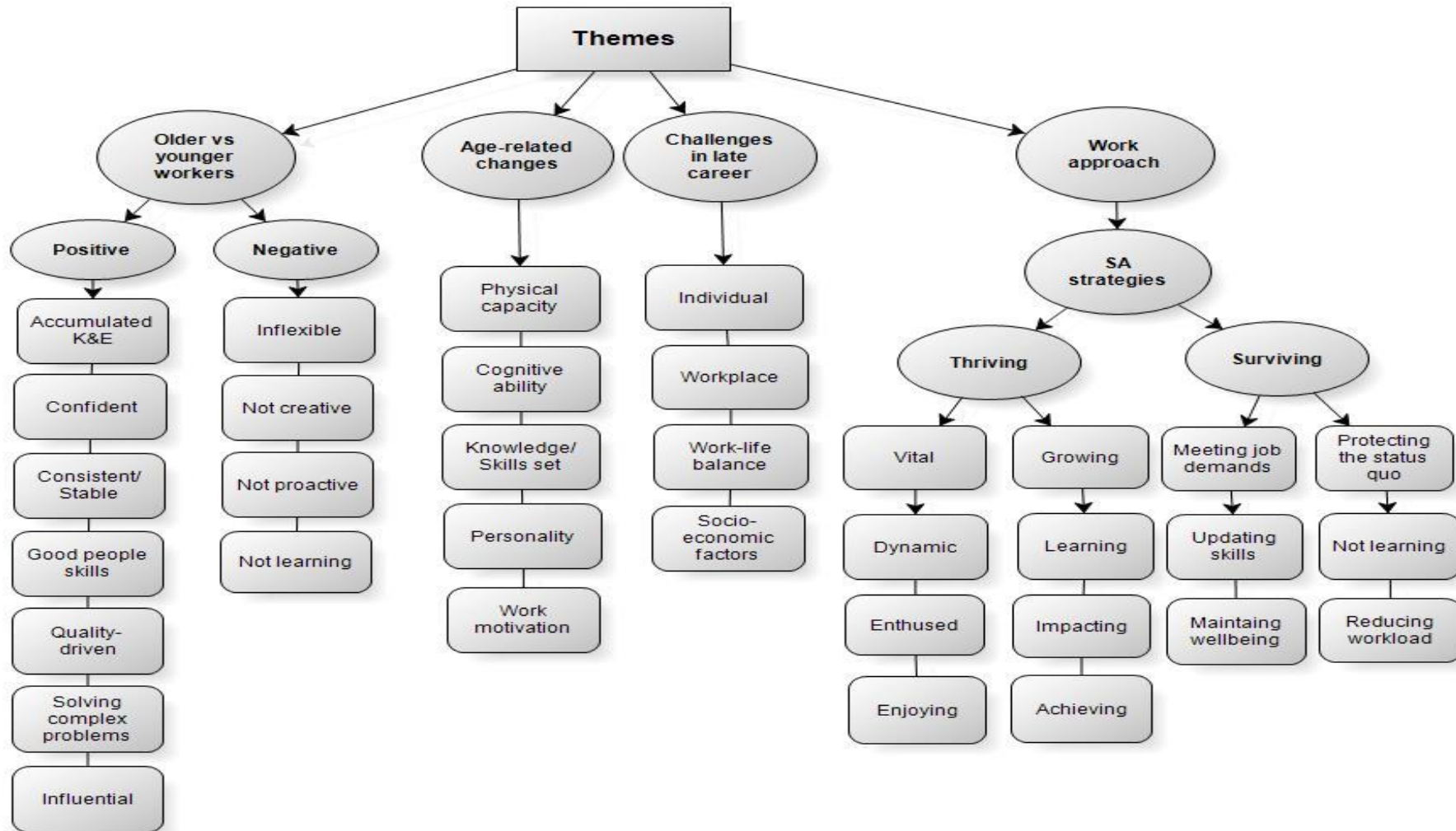
idea is not so much about career development, but maintaining the status quo' (ICT, Bulgaria, male). We construe this as *surviving* (as opposed to thriving) in the workplace as the individuals' tendency to preserve their mental and physical resources by limiting their work activities and perspectives in order to cope with work conditions that are perceived as highly demanding.

Further, we discern two sub-categories of surviving: *meeting job demands* and *preserving the status quo*. Meeting job demands is associated with updating job skills and using strategies to ensure that one remains an adequate performer. Preserving the status quo is shown by a lack of desire to learn/update skills and to avoid involvement in workplace changes and initiatives. Experiences of surviving in the workplace were reported by workers who also reported overwhelming job demands, perceptions of not enough organisational support, and sometimes negative perceptions of older workers.

Social roles at work

Almost all workers from both countries and sectors expressed social motives, demonstrated by their willingness to transfer knowledge within the organisation and contribute to the organisational and societal good. Nearly all participants reported that they had undertaken formal or informal mentor roles helping younger workers to learn on their jobs and/or transferred knowledge to colleagues through succession planning initiatives. Workers also shared that they often volunteered for these roles and appreciated being in them because they felt useful, involved, respected and recognised in

Figure 1. Late career employees' conceptualisations of ageing in the workplace



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Behavioural strategies at work

Consistent with existing literature, our interview data demonstrated that many older workers begin using successful ageing (SOC) strategies that help them to secure good performance and derive more pleasure from their work. Generally, these strategies were seen by our interviewees as new approaches aimed at the optimal utilization of their work capacity particularly in late career. However,

rather than a deliberate attempt to compensate for declining energy and cognitive capacities, the use of SOC strategies seemed to be seen as an outcome of years of learning about how to make the best of oneself at work. Again, this demonstrates another knock-on effect of the knowledge and experience possessed by older workers. The majority of references to SOC strategies came from ICT workers from both countries. However, the reports of the Bulgarian workers revealed mostly the use of selection strategies, while the UK workers were more likely to report also the use of optimization and compensation strategies. In addition, the interviewees who reported using successful ageing strategies also reported high levels of autonomy and control over their jobs. This observation supports previous findings that the effective use of SOC strategies can be enabled through increasing workers' job autonomy and control.

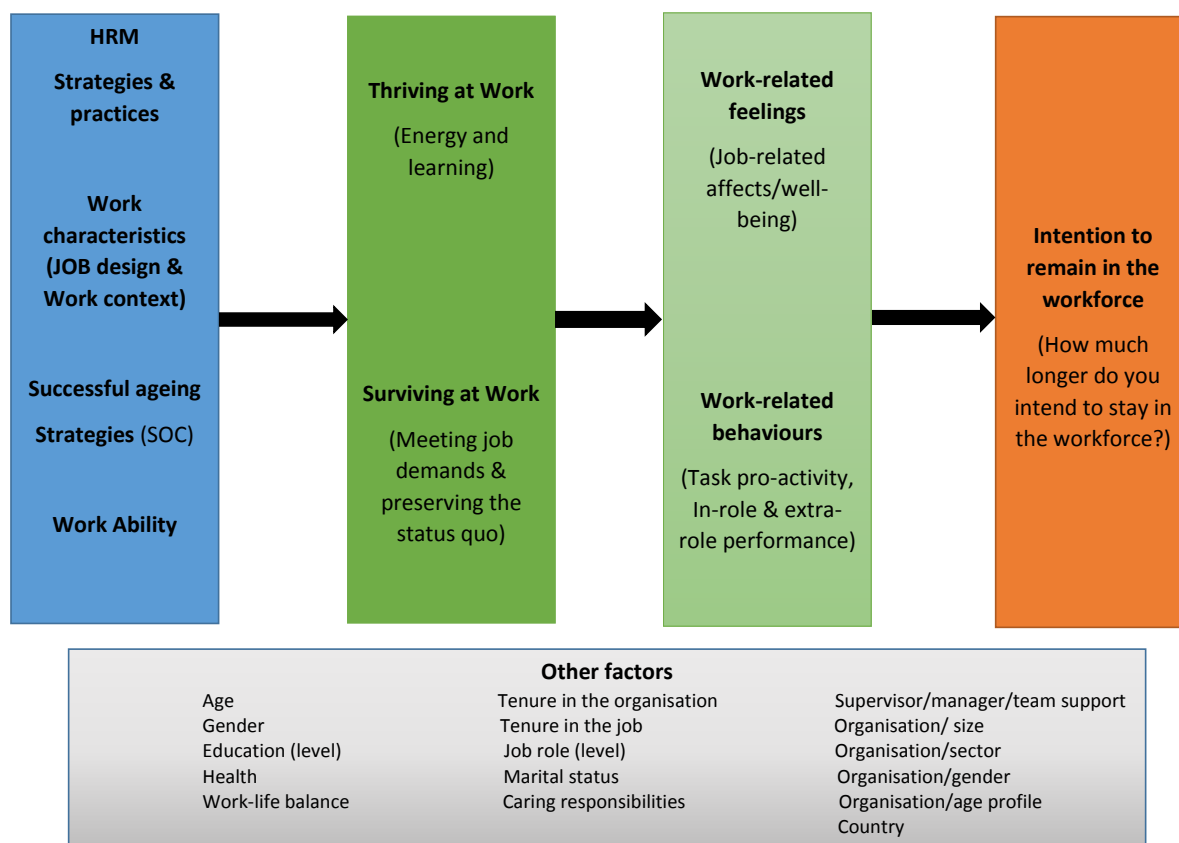
Second, based partly on the interview data and mostly on the data obtained through the on-line survey, we explored workers' perception of the availability of organisational and personal strategies for managing late careers as well as the associations between these strategies, work characteristics and the employees' experiences of thriving and surviving in the workplace. In addition, we looked for relationships between thriving, surviving and work-related well-being and performance. The conceptual framework of this investigation is presented on Figure 2. More detailed information is presented in the Appendix to the report.

Organisational and personal strategies for managing late careers

Regarding organisational management strategies, our findings revealed that the availability of diversity-related policies and their implementation varied significantly across organisations. Even when available such policies and practices were not always clearly communicated with employees. They tended to focus on disability and gender more than age. Although such policies and formal practices were not available in some organisations, both HR managers and employees were likely to consider their organisations' cultures as 'friendly' to older employees. Most late career workers and HR managers were likely to think that, irrespective of diversity policies, older applicants' chances of being recruited are high only in areas of skills shortages and/or on temporary contracts. Most organisations did not see a need to introduce HR practices for late career workers (apart from retirement-related services).

All organisations were likely to offer flexible working options to all of their employees mostly in the forms of reduced hours, flexible schedules (and shift work), working from home, and job sharing. Although these flexible working arrangements were likely to result from formal organisational practices, more often they were due to ad-hoc arrangements with line managers. Most interviewed employees thought that they could benefit from flexible working at some point, especially if they remain in the workforce past retirement age. Furthermore, job design practices were more often informal than formal and not specifically focused on late career workers. Overall, both older workers and HR managers thought that

Figure 2. Relationships between work characteristics, organisational strategies, individual behavioural strategies and work-related outcomes



older workers should be given some control over/adjust their jobs.

Most organisations were likely to provide various forms and levels of training and equal access to training for all of their employees. Most employees (with the exception of Bulgarian health workers) thought that the range and quality of training opportunities offered by their organisations had improved in the last few years. However, there were no T&D opportunities designed particularly for late career employees. In addition, organisations tended not to monitor the uptake of training and development opportunities by older workers (apart from

mandatory training). Indeed, many of the interviewed employees were likely to see most training offered by organisations as more suitable for early to mid-career workers, compared with late career workers. Also, only a few organisations provided training on age-management and it is often in the context of broader equality and diversity training programmes.

Retirement-related practices in most UK organisations tended to offer extended services including retirement advice and retirement planning workshops, while the Bulgarian organisations were more likely to provide services limited to advice on

retirement documents. Phased retirement was promoted in some (UK) organisations, but was not a common practice. All organisations had abolished compulsory retirement age. However, employees in some of the study organisations still felt vulnerable to regular “redundancy rounds.” Redeployment of retired people was more likely to be applied at larger scale by health organisations. Retirees in the ICT sector were likely to be redeployed on consultancy or temporary contracts.

The survey data further revealed that making adjustments to job design was perceived as the least available group of practices by late career employees. It seems that these workers saw their employment organisations as doing only a limited amount to adjust jobs to the needs and skills of older workers. The HR practices in the areas of recognition and respect and fair performance evaluation were also reported as not seen to be very available for older workers. This finding suggests that such practices are either not available as much as others for (late career) employees, or they are present in the organisations, but not communicated clearly with the workers. This assumption is partly supported by our findings about work characteristics that present a somehow more optimistic picture. Overall, core work characteristics such as task variety (i.e. having tasks with various aspects) and information processing (i.e. having to deal with larger amounts and complex information) seemed to be more recognisable for the study participants, compared with the mentioned above HR practices.

In terms of personal management strategies, many participants reported the use of *selection*, *optimization* and *compensation*

strategies, and the optimization approach was the most used one among the three. In contrast, selection strategies were used least. This may be because some jobs do not permit the selection of tasks or autonomy of the job holder.

Antecedents and outcomes of Thriving and Surviving in organisations

Overall, most participants in our study were likely to report higher levels of thriving than surviving. These older workers therefore felt that they were thriving, although sometimes thriving was related rather to learning than to experiences of vitality and energy. Surviving in the sense of just meeting job demands (MJD) was not especially high as about 40% of the participants tended not to be sure or to disagree with the statement ‘the demands my job makes of me are manageable’. The second dimension of Surviving (preserving the status quo – PSQ) was presented statistically in almost the same way as the first one. This indicates some tendency to adopt a ‘siege mentality’, but overall this is not a dominant way of being for most participants.

Three job characteristics seemed to be significant predictors of the experiences of Thriving and Surviving in late career. First, job autonomy (i.e. the degree to which the job-holder can make autonomous decisions about his/her work) was positively associated with Thriving and with the more positive aspect of Surviving MJD. Second, social support (given by employees, not so much received) was also positively associated with Thriving and Surviving MJD. Third, physical work demands were consistently negatively related to Thriving and Surviving MJD and positively associated with the more negative dimension of Surviving – protecting the status quo (PSQ).

Other important job characteristics that may predict Thriving and Surviving in organisations were skill variety (i.e. the need use a variety of skills for one's job) and information processing. Skill variety was positively associated (though not as strongly as we expected) with Thriving and negatively related to Surviving PSQ, while information processing demands did tend to be negatively associated with Thriving (particularly in the sense of vitality) and Surviving MJD, but also positively related to Surviving PSQ. This could mean, for instance, that increased intellectual job demands (e.g. having to deal with a large amount and complex information or complex new information) may reduce the positive (e.g. Thriving) and increase the negative (e.g. Surviving PSQ) experiences in late career. This suggestion was further supported by the analysis of employees' work ability (i.e. the balance between job demands and job resources), revealing that higher levels of work ability (i.e. good match between job demands and job resources) were critical for Thriving and the more positive aspect of Surviving (meeting job demands).

Some HRM strategies and practices may also have an impact on older workers' experiences of Thriving and Surviving. Training and development was found to be the strongest positive predictor of Thriving, followed by Fair performance evaluation and Recognition and respect. This means that employees who have access to desirable training and development opportunities, feel recognised, respected and fairly evaluated by their organisations, would be more likely to experience Thriving at work. The same three strategies were also predictors, although somehow weaker, for Surviving MJD. Interestingly, Surviving PSQ was negatively

predicted by Recognition and respect and positively predicted by Compensation HRM strategies. This suggests that employees who do not feel valued by their organisations, but still receive some desirable compensations (e.g. anticipated pension) would be more likely (compared to people with different experiences) to feel that they are merely surviving at work.

Regarding the individual behavioural strategies, optimisation was a positive predictor for Thriving and Surviving MJD, as well as a negative factor for Surviving PSQ. This suggests that positive feelings can be encouraged by providing late career workers with opportunities to optimize their skills (e.g. to emphasise their strengths and/or further develop their skills through formal or informal training, etc.), while at the same time such opportunities may help to reduce the negative feelings of Surviving. Furthermore, Surviving PSQ appeared to be predicted positively by the selection strategy on its own. This may mean, for example, that the reduction to one's range of work activities to the bare minimum in combination with other factors (e.g. bad health) may further fuel negative feelings of surviving.

In terms of work outcomes that are related to Thriving and Surviving, we found that both Thriving and Surviving MJD were strong positive predictors for employees' well-being (i.e. positive feelings at work), while Surviving PSQ predicted well-being in a negative way. This means that employees who experience Thriving and the more positive aspect of Surviving (meeting job demands) would be more likely to demonstrate, for instance, higher job satisfaction. Contrary, workers who

experience the negative aspect of Surviving (protecting the status quo) would tend to experience high levels of job-related stress and low levels of positive feelings, such as job satisfaction.

Moreover, Thriving at work, but neither of the two Surviving dimensions, appeared to be a predictor of high job performance. We measured three types of job performance. First, task proactivity that is demonstrated by the individual's initiative to take action and make a change with regard to his/her work tasks. Second, in-role performance that presumes a stronger emphasis on the individual performance associated with the specific task characteristics. Third, extra-role performance that refers to the employee's wider performance-related behaviours and is also associated with organisational citizenship. In our study only Thriving appeared to predict all three aspects of work performance in a positive way. This suggests that late career employees' performance can be optimised by increasing experiences of Thriving in the workplace. However, as long as Surviving (both MJD and PSQ) does not seem to high predict performance, organisations and individuals should learn to recognise and prevent surviving behaviours.

Finally, we found some differences across countries and sectors. Overall, the UK respondents tended to report experiences of Thriving slightly more than their Bulgarian counterparts, while the Bulgarian (compared with the UK) participants on average demonstrated significantly higher Surviving experiences. Furthermore, the late career employees from the UK (vs those from Bulgaria) reported higher self-rated task proactivity and in-role performance, while the Bulgarian reported higher self-rated extra-role performance, slightly higher general use of SOC strategies (with a prevailing use of the selection strategy), and slightly higher availability of HRM strategies. The only (statistically) significant differences at a sector level were in the area of the HRM practices, which overall were perceived as more available by the employees from the health (compared with ICT) sector. We did not find any significant differences in terms of employees' well-being across countries and sectors.

Conclusions and recommendations

Organisations should design workplaces that encourage late career workers' thriving vs surviving.

- Results from this study confirm previous findings from psychological research that there are some age-related changes in individual capacity, values and approaches that shape older workers' expectations towards the types of work environment and organisational support they want.
- Contrary to some common stereotypes, these expectations are not just towards maintaining one's status at work, but also refer to development aspirations.
- Workers with access to HRM practices they value, are likely to think that there is no need for organisations to follow age-diverse management approaches. In contrast, older workers with limited access to 'desired' HRM practices in organisations are likely to consider the implementation of age-diverse management approaches (with particular sensitivity to older workers) as important.
- There is a need for improved dialogue between organisations and their older workers. This is particularly obvious through the areas of mismatch in HRMs' and employees' perceptions about the need and availability of good HRM practices.
- Most HR managers and older employees believe that managing an ageing workforce is an increasingly important issue, but only a few organisations provide training on age-management and it is often in the context of broader E&D training programmes.
- Employees in their late career can experience higher levels of thriving at work and these experiences may have a positive impact on individuals' work well-being and performance. Alternatively, some workers may have less positive, even negative experiences, associated with feelings of surviving. Although surviving sometimes can also be positively related to well-being, it does not contribute to high work performance. Moreover, some surviving experiences seem to have negative effects on both well-being and performance at work.
- Therefore, organisations can support late career employees in terms of their well-being and performance by using practices to reduce negative surviving experiences and increase positive experiences of thriving. This can be achieved by the introduction of particular HRM practices, as well as by allowing and encouraging employees to use successful ageing behavioural strategies and craft their jobs.

Key recommendations for line managers:

- ✓ Remember that most negative age-stereotypes are not justified
- ✓ Provide access to meaningful and interesting tasks that include more variety and opportunities
- ✓ Allow and encourage late career employees to have a real ‘say’ in the design of their jobs and in setting their performance standards
- ✓ Allow moderate to relatively high levels of job autonomy when appropriate
- ✓ Be ready to suggest and provide flexible work arrangements when appropriate
- ✓ Promote health awareness and available health benefits packages
- ✓ Ensure regular direct (e.g. face-to-face) contact and clear communication
- ✓ Provide constructive feedback on a regular basis
- ✓ Facilitate opportunities for team work and relations with other people in the organisation
- ✓ Encourage and support knowledge-transfer activities by, for instance, formal and informal mentoring roles, training, etc.
- ✓ Monitor training opportunities and uptake for late career employees on a regular basis
- ✓ Ensure equal access to appropriate as well as desirable training and development opportunities for late career workers
- ✓ Overall, encourage the development (e.g. through training) and use of successful ageing behavioural strategies

APPENDIX

Table 1. List of Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies and practices

HRM strategies	HRM practices
Flexible work options	1.Flexible work schedules 2.Reduced workweek 3.Job sharing 4.Unpaid (additional) leave 5.Working from home
Training and development	6.Training to update current job skills 7.Training to learn new skills 8.Training of managers in effective utilisation of mature employees
Job design	9.Challenging and meaningful tasks or assignments 10.Reduced workload pressures and job demands 11.New roles for mature employees
Recognition and respect	12.Recognition of experience, knowledge, skills and expertise 13.Recognition of the significant role mature employees can play 14.Ensuring that mature employees are treated with respect
Feedback and performance evaluation	15.Useful feedback from supervisor/manager 16.Fair performance appraisal system/ approach
Compensation	17. Financial incentives to remain in the workforce instead of retiring 18. Good pension plan
Pre- and post- retirement options	19.Phased-in retirement 20.Opportunities to work past retirement

Table 2. List of main concepts and definitions

Concept	Definition
Work characteristics	Job autonomy The degree to which the job permits making and pursuing one’s own decisions at work.
	Task variety The degree to which the job demands a wide range of tasks.

	Information processing	The degree to which the job requires dealing with large amount and complex information.
	Social support	The degree to which the job provides opportunities for social interactions and helping others in the organisation.
	Physical demands	The degree to which the job presumes physical effort.
Work performance	Task proactivity	The extent of self-directed action necessary to adapt to/cause changes (at work).
	In-role performance	Core-task employee's behaviours (i.e. behaviours directly prescribed/required by one's job).
	Extra-role performance	Employee's behaviours, which are not part of his/her formal job requirements, but help to achieve positive organisational outcomes.
Affective well-being at work	Positive affect	Positive feelings at work, associated with enthusiasm and/or comfort.
	Negative affect	Negative feelings at work, associated with anxiety/stress and even possibly depression.
SOC strategies at work	Elective selection	Restricting one's range of work tasks to a smaller number of important domains by weighting/prioritising the available alternatives.
	Loss-based selection	Restricting the range of work tasks by selecting particular tasks/aspects as a consequence of restricted opportunities and loss of function (e.g. lack of resources/skills).
	Optimization	Increasing one's development reserves and maximizing one's capabilities.
	Compensation	Using pragmatic strategies or external aids in order to compensate/replace unavailable resources (e.g. lost capabilities, etc.).
Thriving at work		A psychological experience of both vitality and learning/development at the same time.
Surviving at work	Meeting job demands	Updating job skills and using strategies to ensure that one remains an adequate performer.
	Protecting the status quo	Demonstrated lack of desire to learn/update skills and to avoid involvement in workplace changes and initiatives.

Figure 3. HRM strategies per organisation

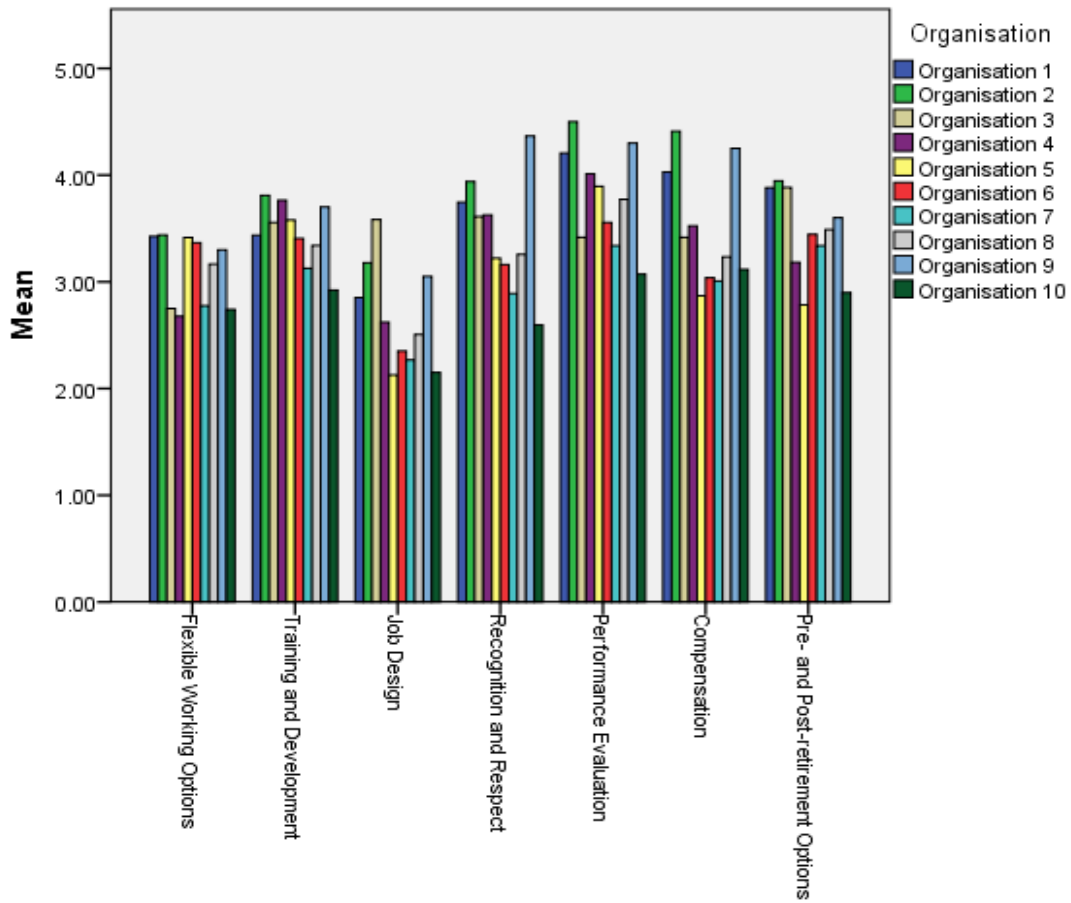


Figure 4. Work characteristics per sector

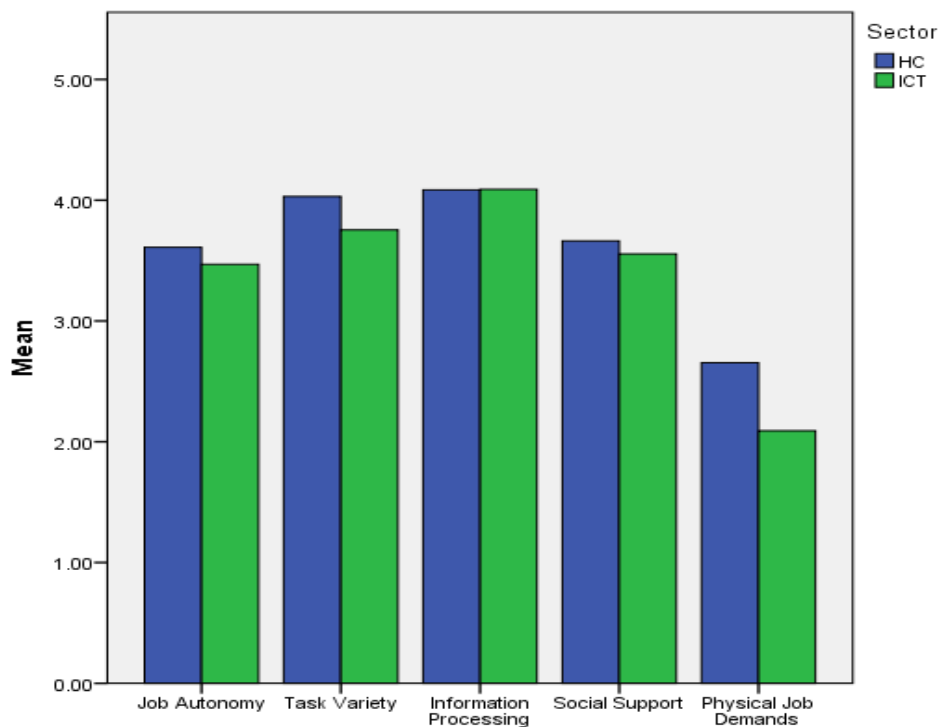


Figure 5. Work characteristics per organisation

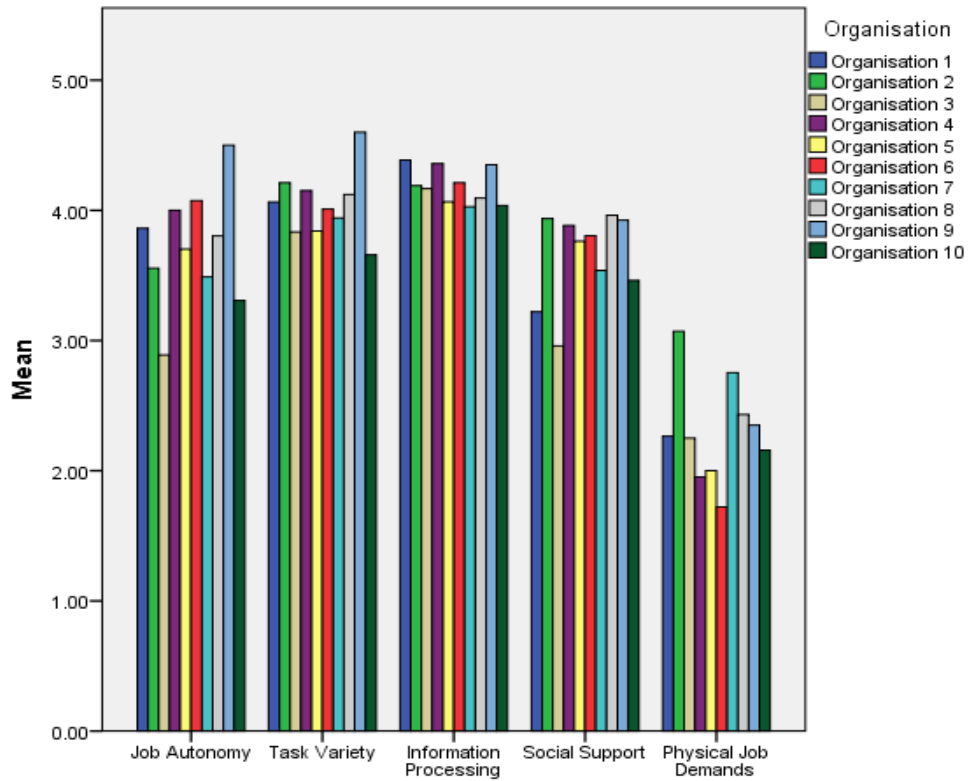


Figure 6. Performance indicators per organisation

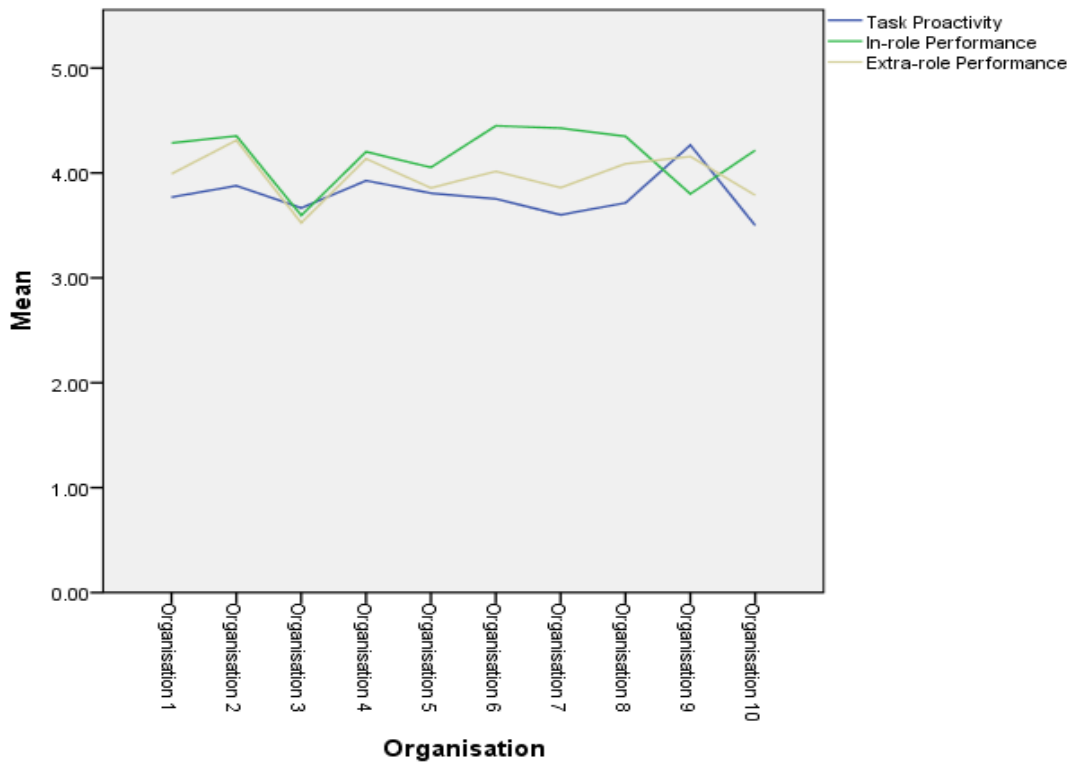


Figure 7. Performance indicators per organisation

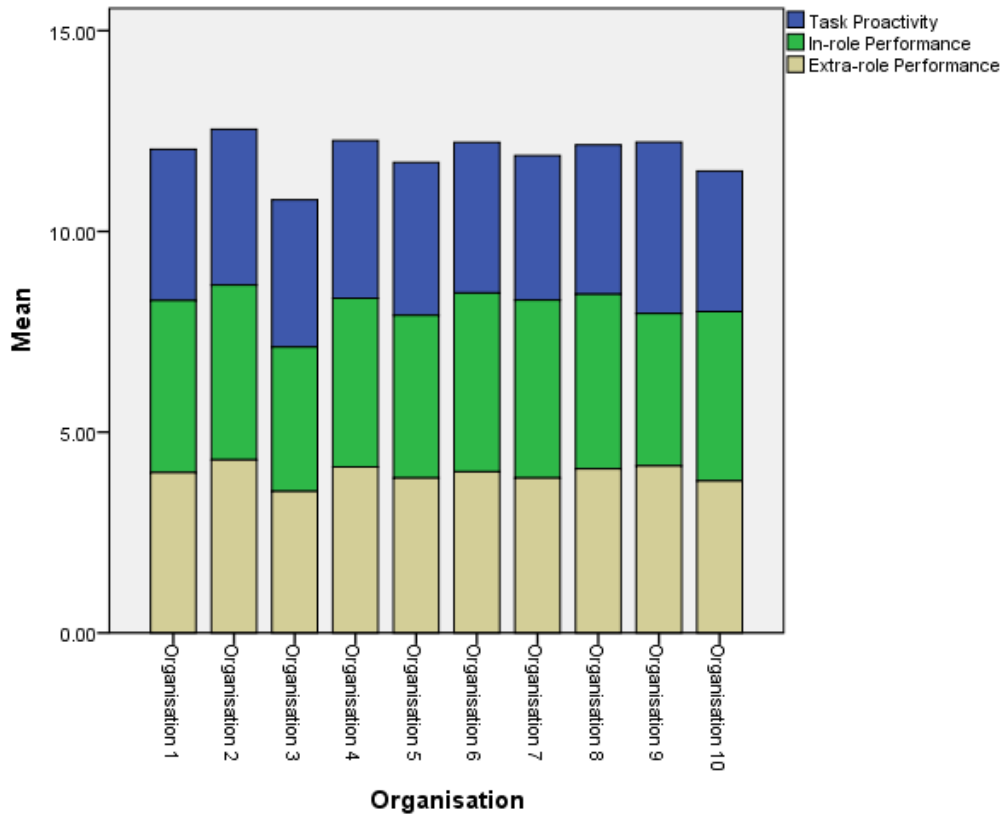


Figure 8. Positive and negative affect (well-being) per organisation

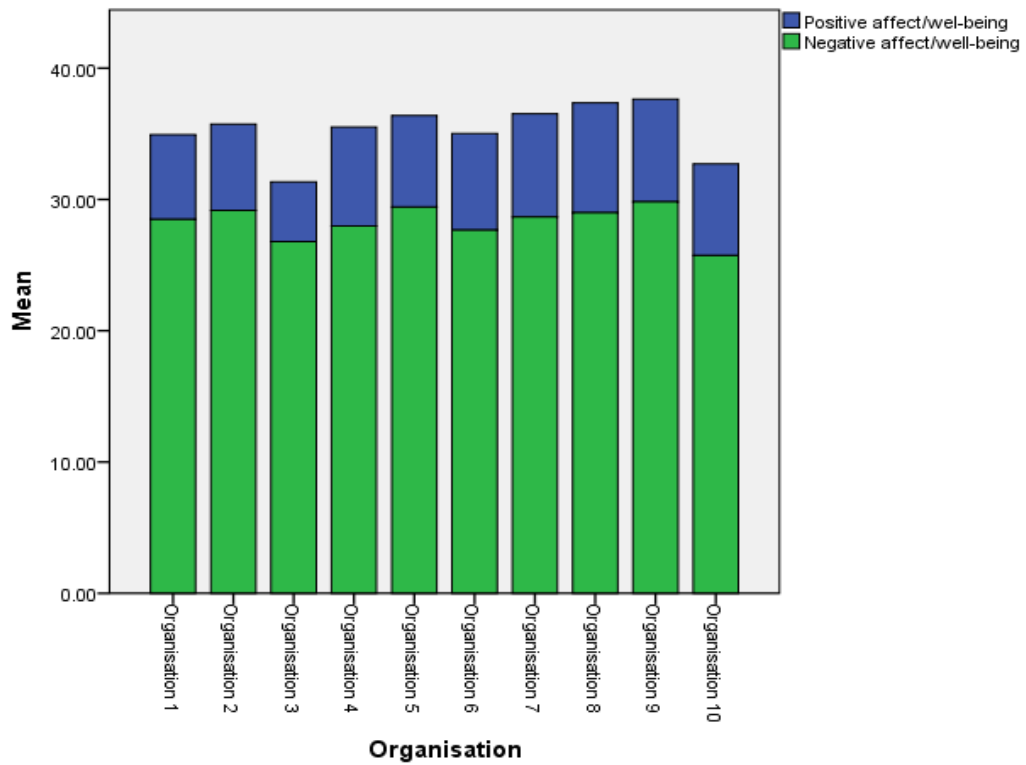


Figure 9. Use of selection, optimization and compensation strategies per organisation

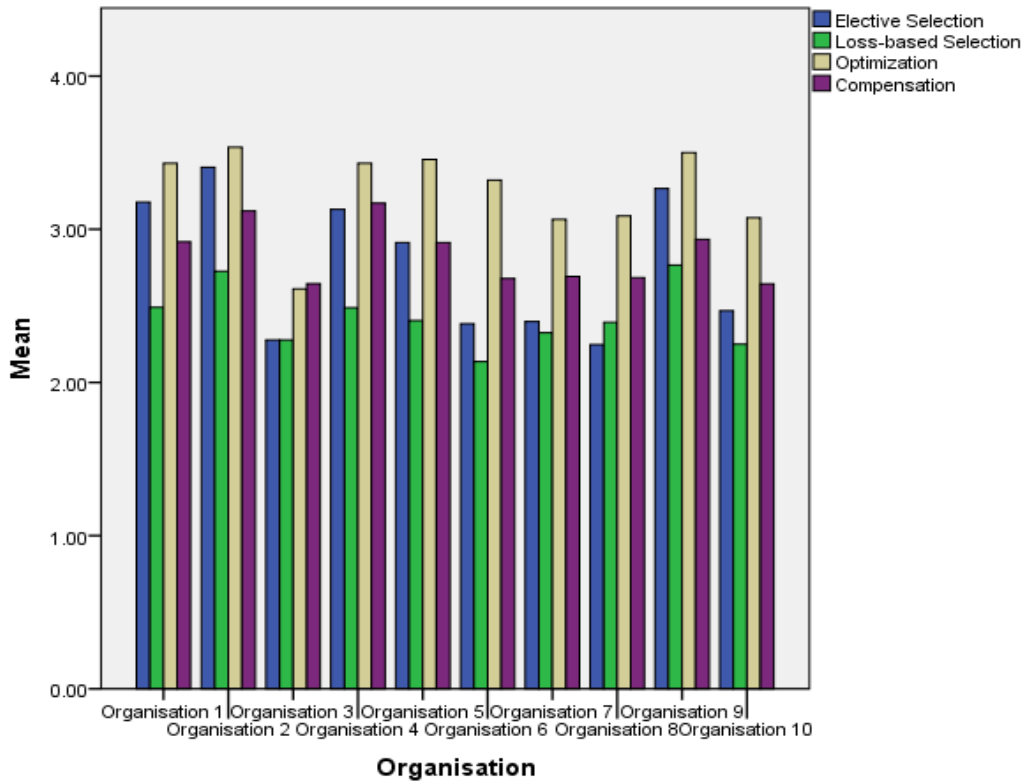


Figure 10. Thriving and surviving at work per organisation

