Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this dissertation was to investigate how older workers can be kept active and engaged in the workforce and motivated to continue working beyond retirement age. Retirement theories were examined to discern which factors are important in understanding retirement behavior and to identify knowledge gaps. Lifespan development theories (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999; Carstensen & Lang, 1996) were investigated to understand the process of aging; particularly the biological, psychological and socio-relational changes that take place as a result of it (De Lange, Taris, Jansen, Smulder, Houtman, & Kompier, 2006). Subsequently, retirement theories and lifespan development theories were used as lenses to investigate how human resource management (Guest, 1987; Paauwe, 2009; Wright & McMahan, 1992) could contribute to employees' motivation to continue working.

The studies in this thesis give answers to various unresolved issues. Specifically, the studies revolve around the following key issues as discussed in Chapter 1:

1. How do HR inducements contribute to employees' motivation to continue working;
2. What is the role of the organizational climate in employees' motivation to continue working;
3. How do employees want to work after retirement (Work after retirement Profiles).

This chapter summarizes the main findings regarding these key issues. Second, the main contributions of this thesis are discussed. Third, the practical implications of the findings are discussed, together with the limitations, and finishes with suggestions for future research and the prime conclusion.

Summary of Main Findings

Key issue 1: HR inducements contributing to the motivation to continue working.

The first key issue concerned the role of human resource management practices in relation to the motivation to continue working among older workers. Existing research on retirement demonstrated that a variety of factors influence employees' retirement decisions. These can be categorized as: individual; job; organizational; family; and, socio-economic factors (Wang & Shultz, 2010). However, despite their relevance, organizations have only limited control over them, particularly personal and family factors. Organizational and job-related factors could be influenced by HR practices. The first key issue investigated was the factors that organizations do have control and influence over and where HR systems could be developed to increase employee motivation to continue working beyond retirement age.

The HRM literature argues that HR practices are key communicators between the organization and its employees and affect organizational outcomes (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). Development-oriented HR practices, in particular, can contribute to older workers’ motivation and their ability to stay active in the workforce (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008). Development HR practices can enable employees to continue working by increasing their employability and motivate them to continue working by establishing a good relationship with its employees (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008; Van der Heijden, de Lange, Demerouti, & Van der Heijde, 2009).

In Chapter 2 the availability and use of HR practices were investigated in four healthcare organizations participating in the Sustainable Employment in the Health Sector project. The
results demonstrated that, although employees’ perception of availability of all HR practices was high, the actual use of these practices was low. For example, for the practice *Exemption from irregular hours or overtime*, the perception of availability was 51.8%, while the use was 7.2% in one of the organizations. This suggested that the practices did fulfill their signaling function, but not necessarily their practical function, as employees refrained from using these practices.

Chapter 3 focuses on how development-related HR practices contribute to the motivation to continue working and the mechanisms through which these practices relate to the motivation to continue working. In line with HRM theorists, I have argued that HR practices shape how employees perceive the collective psychological climate in the organization and their individual psychological contract with the organization (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). This perception of the psychological climate and psychological contract are then related to how employees evaluate their organization. This is indicated by, for instance, their commitment to the organization and engagement in their work. These attitudes are related ultimately to employee behavior and, thus, also the motivation to continue working (Ajzen, 1991).

The described model (see page 61) is tested in Chapter 3 in two samples of employees working for two healthcare organizations. The results demonstrated that, in both samples, perceived development HR practices are positively related to employees’ perception of a psychological development climate and the fulfillment of the psychological contract. The results also show that, in both samples, psychological development climate and psychological contract fulfillment are related to higher organizational commitment and work engagement. Finally, organizational commitment was related positively to the motivation to continue working in one sample, while this relationship was not significant in the other sample. Work engagement was related to the intention to continue working in both samples.

Since age was such an important factor in the study, additional analyses were conducted to see whether age affected any of the relationships in the model. The results of the first sample demonstrated that the relationship between development HR practices and psychological development climate was stronger for older workers. In the second sample, the path between psychological contract fulfillment and organizational commitment was stronger for younger workers than for older workers. Thus, for younger employees (between 40 and 50 years old), the fulfillment of the psychological contract is a stronger predictor of organizational commitment than it is for employees who are 50 years and older.

The results of Chapter 3 shed particular light on how development HR practices are related to the motivation to continue working through mediation of organizational climate and work attitudes. The results demonstrate that the perception of the availability of (development) HR practices fulfill the signaling function by creating an organizational climate that encourages older workers to continue working and fulfilling the psychological contract. This subsequently induces positive attitudes related to the organization and work which then, ultimately, is related to a higher motivation to continue working. Hence, the study showed how HRM practices relate to motivation to continue working. Development HRM is important for workers, regardless of their age, and relates to higher motivation to continue working through creating an organizational climate in which people become engaged and committed. These positive work attitudes are imperative for employees in considering whether to continue working.
previous research has shown that work attitudes predict motivation to continue working (Wang & Shultz, 2010).

The results of Chapters 2 and 3 have demonstrated that work engagement is a consistent and important predictor of the motivation to continue working.

Chapter 4 investigates how work engagement can be generated through work characteristics, and how age plays a role in this relationship. The job characteristics model argues that core job characteristics increase work engagement (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Kahn, 1990). The job characteristics included in Chapter 4 were: workload; autonomy; development opportunities; and, feedback. Specifically, the relationship between work engagement and workload was investigated for older and younger workers, as were the effects of autonomy, development opportunities and feedback on this relationship.

First, the study demonstrated that the relationship between workload and work engagement is curvilinear, and shaped as an inverted U. Workload can be perceived as a work demand that is challenging because employees expect to meet the demands by investing efforts and to be rewarded for that (Vroom, 1964). As such, this has a positive effect on work engagement. However, when workload becomes too high and exceeds the capability of the individual to successfully cope with it, the effect becomes negative (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998; Karasek, 1979). This has a negative effect on work engagement. In summary, workload is related positively to work engagement, but when workload becomes too high, work engagement decreases.

Second, the results showed that the relationship between work engagement and workload was different for older and younger workers. Lifespan theorists suggest that individuals develop mechanisms to cope with the (physical and cognitive) losses they encounter as a result of aging (Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980). Consequently, older workers, in general, have more resilience and experience (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004) which enables them to cope better with demanding situations. Hence, age buffers the effect of workload on work engagement such that older workers are less prone to negative effects of workload.

Finally, the results showed that job resources (i.e. development opportunities, autonomy and feedback) increase work engagement, and that the resources development opportunities and autonomy buffer the relationship between workload and work engagement among younger workers. Specifically, when age is high, the buffering effect of resources on the relationship between work engagement and workload is weaker than when age is low. The latter can be explained by the notion that older workers buffer the negative effect of workload through their individual coping mechanisms, while younger workers are more dependent on externally provided job resources (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995).

The finding that feedback did not affect the buffering effect that age has on the relationship between work engagement and workload can be explained in two ways: First, there are other forces that affect the effectiveness of feedback, namely, the type of feedback, the way it has been given and situational factors (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). The context of high workload may decrease the effectiveness of feedback as when employees are already busy feedback may become unwelcoming, undermining their ability to cope with workload at the moment. Second, feedback differs from autonomy and development opportunities in that the improvement in
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performance comes from an external force. Contrastingly, in the case of autonomy and development opportunities, people themselves initiate improvement in performance.

The results of Chapter 4 demonstrate that HR inducements (job resources) increased work engagement and provided employees support while performing their job tasks. Second, the result suggests that there are age-related differences in how HR inducements are perceived. This suggests that some HR inducements may be more effective for younger workers than for older workers, and vice-versa. Further, some HR inducements may even be counter-effective for older workers. These could include development-related HR practices that require cognitive abilities, which decrease with aging. Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) explained two types of developments in the adult intellect; individuals are confronted with losses regarding fluid intellectual abilities (working memory, abstract reasoning, attention and processing of novel information), while encountering gains with crystallized intellectual abilities (educational knowledge and experience). When development HR practices are offered in the form of a training that requires fluid intelligence, it is conceivable that older workers have a hard time successfully completing their training and it may even cause stress.

Two important implications stem from this key issue. First, the studies show the importance of development-oriented HR inducements in motivating older workers to continue working. Earlier studies have demonstrated that development leads to employability and that this is important for them to keep performing well at their jobs (Van der Heijden, Schalk & Veldhoven, 2008) or through an organizational development climate employees feel that the organization is committed to them and want to reciprocate this commitment by demonstrating commitment towards the organization and, ultimately, having a higher intention to remain (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008). In this dissertation, a more integrative view is taken by including actual development practices as a source of development climate and employability. Second, the effect of HR inducements on psychological states, but most probably also on employee behavior, may play out differently for older and younger workers. When HR inducements, such as job characteristics that form resources in performing at the job are offered to employees, age-related differences may affect their effectiveness.

Key issue 2: Organizational climate and the motivation to continue working. This key issue is related to the former one. The relationship between HR practices and employee behavior, we noted, was not a direct one. HR practices have a signaling function. For example, practices signal to employees what is expected from them and the subsequent interpretation of those practices by the employees form an organizational climate (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). As such, when organizations want to encourage prolonged employment, this should be supported by the organizational climate and shaped by the organization’s HR practices. In Chapter 3, I researched and demonstrated the key role of organizational development climate in the relationship between development HR practices and the motivation to continue working. The study demonstrated that the perceived availability of development HR practices create an psychological development climate which leads subsequently to positive work-related attitudes and which, ultimately, is related positively to the motivation to continue working.

In Chapter 5 I investigated how individuals want to work after retirement and four work after retirement profiles were discerned that represent different preferences regarding post
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retirement employment. This study demonstrated that the different work after retirement profiles were related to organizational climate. The relationship between organizational climate and work profiles is discussed in more detail as part of key issue 3.

The implication that stems from this key issue is that organizational climate is an important predictor of the motivation to continue working and also of the preferences regarding the work profile of the after retirement employment. Prior research had demonstrated already that a development climate is a predictor of the intention to remain in an organization (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008). However, my findings take this further by demonstrating that organizational climate can predict how employees want to continue working after retirement.

Key issue 3: Work after Retirement Profiles (WARPs). In Chapters 2 and 5 the question of how older employees want to work after retirement was investigated. Existing studies on continued work participation of older workers often have focused on how to motivate older workers to continue working (e.g. Armstrong-Stassen, 2008). Recent studies have investigated how older workers want to participate in employment after retirement (so called bridge employment). However, the variations in the types of work participations were defined ex ante and, generally, limited in scope. In these studies work participation after retirement, or bridge employment, is categorized based either on the field of participation (i.e. career bridge employment versus non-career bridge employment) (e.g. Davis, 2003; Gobeski & Beehr, 2009) or on the organizational domain (i.e. same organization or different organization) (Zhan, Wang & Yao, 2013). My work takes a more detailed approach to discerning types of work participation after retirement. After retirement work profiles were expanded with regard to important domains, such as the content, frequency and distribution of the work. Considering the upcoming labor shortages (Eurofound, 2011) it is important to research which type of work profiles would motivate employees to take on bridge employment. Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 investigated how older employees want to work after retirement. Chapter 5 takes this a step further and discerns four work after retirement profiles and investigates which individual and work-related factors are related to employees’ specific work profile preferences.

The literature on contingent work arrangement and part-time work allowed a taxonomy with six dimensions of work to be designed. These dimensions included: frequency; distribution; format; duration; work-context; and, job-description. Within each dimension different options were defined. For example, the options of frequency were: unchanged amount of hours; decreased amount of hours; more hours; or, total withdrawal (see Table 5.1 on page 114). For each option employees were asked to what extent they would want to work in that manner after retirement. So, the work after retirement profiles (WARPs) were constructed via an exploratory factor analysis which demonstrated that four work profiles could be distinguished. The first work profile is that in which employees want to work less in their retirement (WARP less). The second one is a work profile in which employees do not want to change their work existing work profile (WARP unchanged). The third is a work profile in which employees want to modify the content of their work (WARP content modification). The final work profile is directed at context modification (WARP context modification).
How the preference for each work profile would be related to individual and work related factors was investigated also. The results demonstrated that age, education, hours worked per week, future time perspective, organizational climate and psychological contract fulfillment each were unique predictors of the preferences to work in according to a specific work profile. The results showed that employees with a higher level of education and employees, who perceive the organizational climate as accommodating towards older workers, prefer to work according to the WARP less. Development climate and psychological contract fulfillment were related positively to WARP unchanged. Thus, when employees perceived that the organization supports and encourages them to develop themselves; employees did not want to change their retirement work profile. Similarly, when employees felt like the organization meets their promises, they did not want to change their retirement work profile. Further, WARP content change was related negatively to chronological age and related positively to future time perspective and accommodative climate. This means that that older employees did not want to change their job tasks in their after retirement jobs and the more employees perceived that they have a long future ahead, the more they wanted to change their job description.

Further, when employees perceived a climate in which the organization encourages them to work less and to do less demanding jobs, employees wanted to change their job description. Finally, WARP context modification was related positively to education level and accommodative climate and related negatively to psychological contract fulfillment. Also, employees with a higher level of education were more likely to want to change their job description in retirement. The need for older workers to change their job description is in line with recent work on job crafting and aging. This argues that job crafting (i.e. self-initiated work-related changes so that work demands meet personal abilities and needs) is important for successful aging because motives and abilities change with age, and job mobility is low among older workers (Kooij, Tims, & Kanfer, 2014). In addition, employees who perceived the organizational climate as encouraging them to work less and do less demanding tasks also wanted to change their job context. Contrastingly, employees who felt that the organization had met its promises wanted to remain working in the same organization.

An important implication is that, when investigating work participation at older age, work profiles are very relevant to consider. Similar to any other life stage, work participation at older age can take on various forms. When these various forms of preferred work profiles are considered and “continuing working” is not just regarded as doing the same thing for an additional time, it is likely to increase the motivation to continue working. Therefore, communicating the various possibilities to continue working to older employees can be a very important tool for organizations to provide employees with more control over their careers, as well as a realistic outlook on the last stage of their careers. Moreover, when older employees are aware of the possibilities to craft the later stages of their careers, this may increase their motivation to continue working.

6.2 Theoretical implications and Contributions related to the key issues

This dissertation began with the question: how employees could be motivated to continue working, and particularly how organizations could influence this? Any organizations’ main tools to manage employees are their HR practices. As suggested by the signaling theory
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(Ostroff & Bowen, 2000), an important function of HR practices is that it signals to employees what the organization expects from them. Thus, an organization’s HR practices are vital in encouraging older workers to continue working. The key issues of this thesis in this respect were:

1. How can development HR practices contribute to the motivation to continue working?
2. What is the role of the organizational climate in motivating employees to continue working; and,
3. How do older employees want to continue working?

The section below gives an overview of the theoretical contributions related to these key issues.

Contribution 1: The impact of development HR practices on the motivation to continue working

The first contribution of this dissertation is that it investigates the role of development HR practices in the context of encouraging older workers to continue working. Earlier studies have demonstrated that development is an important predictor of employment at older age (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008). However, there are no studies that investigate the particular role of development HR practices. Development HR practices are especially important in increasing older employees motivation to continue working, since employees who use development HR practices continuously develop themselves and, by so doing, acquire relevant skills and remain employable (Van der Heijden, Schalk, & van Veldhoven, 2008). Furthermore, offering development-related HR practices, their availability signals to employees that the organization considers them worthy to invest in (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). In exchange employees want to return the commitment that organization is showing them by displaying commitment towards the organization and/or work.

The role of development HR practices was investigated in three ways: first, the use and availability of HR practices was researched. The results demonstrated that, while usage of HR practices was low, the perception of the availability was high. Second, the effect of the perception of availability of development HR practices on the motivation to continue working was investigated. The results demonstrated that the mere availability of development HR practices could contribute to employees’ motivation to continue working by creating a psychological development climate for older workers and fulfilling their psychological contract. This increases work engagement and organizational commitment and, consequently, the motivation to continue working. The perception of the availability of HR practices was related to a psychological development climate and the fulfillment of the psychological contract. This is related to organizational commitment and work engagement of which work engagement is consistently related to the motivation to continue working. While the perception of availability was an important predictor of engagement and the motivation to continue working, when actual usage is low, development HR practices do not contribute to the performance of employees. In so doing, development HR practices do not actually increase employability when they potentially could.

In the third approach of investigating the effect of development HR practices, I demonstrated that the weekly availability of development opportunities affected weekly work engagement in the context of high workload. Specifically, weekly development opportunities increased work engagement, and buffered the negative effects of high workload. Hence, the
perception of the availability of development HR practices (climate) increased work engagement on an organizational level, while actual weekly development opportunities increased work engagement on a personal level. Also, engaged workers are more willing to continue working (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). This underscores the fact that development was important for employees, and especially for older employees who were often offered limited development opportunities (Maurer & Rafuse, 2001).

This dissertation has demonstrated that the availability of development HR practices creates a climate that encourages employee development. This is related to the motivation to continue working through work engagement. Development HR practices in the form of weekly development opportunities increase work engagement by helping to deal with high levels of workload. Hence, development HR inducements are both effective psychologically, by creating a climate and positive work related attitudes, as well as practically, when they are provided at the job.

**Contribution 2: The impact of work engagement on the motivation to continue working**

The second contribution of this dissertation is related to the role of work engagement in motivating older workers to continue working. Existing studies have demonstrated that individuals’ evaluation of their relationship with work and organization (e.g. organizational commitment, job satisfaction) is an important predictor of its retirement behavior (i.e. early retirement, bridge employment) (Gobeski & Beehr, 2009; Wang & Shultz, 2010). However, in this context, work engagement is a concept that has received little attention. As a concept, work engagement refers to a state of personal investment in the work role such that the person is willing to allocate personal resources to perform well at work and has an emotional connection with work (Kahn, 1990). According to Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2009) engaged workers feel enthusiastic about their work, they have high levels of energy and are often deeply involved in their jobs. Thus, conceptually, work engagement is a more active psychological state compared with organizational commitment or job satisfaction, which are more passive responses to how employees perceive their jobs and their organizations.

For engaged workers, work is a source of energy instead of something that absorbs energy out of a person. Moreover, as suggested by the work role attachment theory (Carter & Cook, 1995), leaving the work role would cause stress for the engaged worker instead of relief. The findings in this dissertation confirm that work engagement is crucial in prolonged work participation. Specifically, my results demonstrate that work engagement is a consistent predictor of the motivation to continue working and, therefore, should be included in studies about retirement behavior. Since motivation is inherently an intrinsic concept, work engagement would be the most relevant type of work related attitude to study it, especially when it comes to studies about the motivation to continued employment.

**Contribution 3: Determinants of work engagement**

Related to the second contribution, the third contribution involves further investigation of how work engagement can be generated on an individual, job characteristic level and how this differs for younger and older workers. This dissertation has investigated what the conditions were for work engagement in the context of high workload and how this differed for older and
younger workers. In addition to the development opportunities discussed above, job autonomy and feedback were included as core job characteristics that would increase engagement (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

Existing studies have often assumed that the relationship between workload and work engagement is linear (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005). Based on the job stress literature (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992) and the person organization fit literature, I demonstrated that this relationship is curvilinear. Lifespan theories of development demonstrated that older workers develop resources to cope with workload and, therefore, are better in coping with high workload and are affected less by fluctuating workload, compared with their younger counterparts. This dissertation demonstrated also that the buffering effect of job resources, as suggested by the job demands and resources literature (i.e. autonomy and development opportunities), differs for older and younger workers. The results demonstrate that, while job resources increase work engagement for both young and old, for younger workers they are stronger buffers in the relationship between work engagement and workload. This dissertation contributes by demonstrating that there are age-related differences in how workload effects work engagement and in how job resources buffer the relationship between work engagement and workload. Moreover, these differences are likely to be related to how age-related changes affect how older employees operate at work. Age-related differences should be taken into consideration in the context of an aging work force when we want to keep older workers active and engaged in the workforce and we need a better understanding of which job characteristics are effective in doing so.

Contribution 4: Work after retirement profiles.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to retirement literature by examining how employees want to work after retirement. Existing studies have often investigated factors predicting early retirement or postponing retirement. However, little research has been done on how individuals want to continue working considering different possibilities regarding the work dimensions, frequency, distribution, formant, duration content and context of work. Chapter 5 investigated employees’ preferences regarding these work dimensions. Based on these preferences, four work profiles were created: the first work profile is one in which employees want to work less in their retirement (WARP less). The second work profile is when employees do not want to change their work existing work profile (WARP unchanged). The third work profile is where employees want to modify the content of their work (WARP content modification). The final work profile is directed at context modification (WARP context modification). Subsequently, the relationship between these work profiles and organizational climate and the psychological contract was investigated. The work after retirement profiles were related to the following organizational factors: WARP less was related to organizational accommodative climate; WARP content change was also related to accommodative climate; WARP context change was related to accommodative climate and negatively related to psychological contract fulfillment and WARP unchanged was related positively to organizational development climate and psychological contract fulfillment. The findings demonstrated that organizational climate is important not only in increasing employees’ motivation to continue working after retirement age, but also in shaping their after retirement work profiles.
6.3 Limitations and related suggestions for future research

As with every study, this research has limitations is discussed at the end of each chapter. The section below addresses the overarching limitations that run through the dissertation.

The first limitation is related to the most important variable in this research: the motivation to continue working. While motivations and intentions are important predictors of actual behavior, they do not necessarily translate to actual behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Thus, even though employees may be motivated to continue working, this does not necessarily have to result in actual working beyond retirement. Hence, it is important to investigate, not only whether people can be motivated to continue working, but also the extent to which they actually work beyond their retirement age. Notwithstanding, motivation is important, because when motivation to continue working is absent, it is very unlikely that people will continue working, and, thus, motivation is a necessary requirement for employees actually to continue working (Bal, de Jong, Jansen & Bakker, 2012).

The second and a related limitation is that a large part of the data for this research was cross-sectional. Considering the nature of the research that stems from the research question of how organizations can motivate employees to continue working, a longitudinal design would be more desirable. The actual effect of the organizational inducements could be tested if there were at least two times of measurement. As it takes time for the availability of HR practices to show their effects on employee attitudes and behavior, a longitudinal design would be desirable. Further, by conducting a longitudinal study with multiple measurements, it would also be possible to measure actual behavior. Therefore, a suggestion for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal research to test:

1) What the effect of HR inducements are over time;
2) To investigate actual retirement behavior, in addition to motivation;
3) To investigate actual work after retirement profiles;
4) To investigate what the effect is of providing different work profiles on retirement vs. Continue working.

It is conceivable that providing different options will increase employees’ motivation to continue working.

The third limitation relates to the samples of the studies. Since the dissertation was part of a larger project regarding sustainable employment in the health sector, all studies were conducted in the health sector, and mostly in the eldercare sector. Consequently, some sector specific characteristics are reflected in the samples. Specifically, most respondents were female, and had on average intermediate vocational training as their highest completed education. Yet, in practice, a sample with these characteristics is very interesting to study since women on average retire earlier than men (Eurostat, 2007) and lower educated individuals are likely to retire earlier since education is associated with skills and ability to perform at work (Von Bonsdorff, Shultz, Leskinen & Tansky, 2009). Furthermore, the healthcare sector in particular is struggling with shortages of skilled employees (Eurofound, 2011). However, for future research it is important to investigate other sectors with other demographics. Thus, more men and a more even distribution in education level in order to confirm the generic usefulness of the findings.
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A final limitation is related to the data collection method used in the studies. All data were collected through surveys and were self-reported. While some variables contained personal feelings and motivations, for other variables, such as availability HR practices or job resources, it would have been useful to have multiple sources to prevent common method bias. Nonetheless, statistical techniques were used to test for common method bias. The results suggested that there was no evidence of common method bias. Yet, future research should address this limitation and apply a multi-source approach in collecting data.

6.4 Future Research Agenda

6.4.1 Age sensitive HR inducements

A central finding in this dissertation is related to the importance of individual differences in how HR inducements are interpreted. It was shown that there are individual age-related differences in how core work characteristics or job resources affected employee wellbeing. In a broad sense this suggests that more research should be done on individual differences in the effect of core work characteristics or job resources on employee wellbeing. Hitherto, there has been hardly any research that differentiates on the basis of individual differences. If we are to contribute to the aging literature, it is important to investigate what types of work characteristics are valuable for older workers to perform their daily tasks.

6.4.2 Work after retirement profiles

One of the central themes of this dissertation was how employees want to continue working after retirement. This dissertation suggested different work after retirement profiles for older workers. The idea of work profiles is new and requires more research. In this dissertation work profiles were studied among mostly female workers working in the health sector with vocational training as their average highest completed education. Future research could investigate more the idea of work after retirement profiles in different sectors and with a dataset with a more evenly distributed gender and education distribution. The notion of different possibilities regarding the work profiles may increase the motivation to continue working as well. It is conceivable that when different profiles are offered, employees find that they could fit their work better with other activities. Future research could develop also the idea of work profiles in general by investigating how preferences regarding work profiles shift during life span.

6.5 Practical Implications

The main theme of this thesis (continuing working) is, apart from being an important matter from an academic perspective, also imperative from a societal and practical perspective for organizations that are increasingly dealing with an aging workforce. This thesis has demonstrated that organizations can encourage older workers to continue working through HR inducements. Valuable practical implications can be derived from these findings.

The findings demonstrate that to encourage older workers to continue working is an objective that should be integrated in the organization’s HR strategy. I do not advocate specific age-related policies, but advocate rather that policies and practices should be viewed as applicable at all ages; yet possibly to differ in content or execution, as appropriate.
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The findings demonstrated that providing development-related HR inducements contributed to the motivation to continue working. Both the availability of development-related HR practices, as well as having development opportunities at work, increased older workers’ work engagement and, ultimately, their motivation to continue working. The availability of development HR practices signals to workers that they are valuable and are worth investing in. Development opportunities at work increased work engagement by helping to accomplish job tasks. This can be regarded as an important job resource. Since older employees encounter losses in cognitive and physical functioning (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004) it is important that their skills are continuously updated so they are better able to successfully perform their job tasks. Therefore, employee development, especially for older employees, should be an important part of organizations’ HR strategy. The availability of practices should be clearly communicated and the actual usage should be promoted so organizations continuously invest in development throughout employees’ working lives to keep their employees employable, active and engaged in the workforce.

The possibilities for development can be communicated through various means. An important tool is the annual performance evaluation between the employee and the manager. Managers should ask structurally what employees’ development needs are to fulfill their ambitions. They should also evaluate the fit between their individual competences and the competences required for the job. Effective participation in learning and development activities should be encouraged for employees, regardless of their age. The specific content and implementation of these activities may vary for older and younger workers. Considering age-related losses and gains, learning and development activities for older workers should be primarily focused on strengthening their best qualities. Moreover, there is an important task for managers related to this; they are the closest to and have the best insights of the employees and the work. To deploy managers effectively to fulfill this task may require time allocation and possibly also training.

Another important finding in this dissertation is that work engagement is an important concept when it comes to the motivation to continue working. Work engagement is important because for engaged workers, work is an important part of life, such that they have a positive emotional bond with work and to leave the workforce would result in distress (Carter & Cook 1995; Atchley, 1989). Therefore, organizations should carefully nurture work engagement at all ages. The findings demonstrated that organizations can do this through development HR practices that create an organizational development climate and by providing job resources that support employees to successfully accomplish their job tasks.

Research in the field of job stress, the job characteristics model and the job-demands and resources model argue that job characteristics are predictors of employee wellbeing; e.g. too many demands may cause burnout and stress and core characteristics, or job resources will lead to engagement. The study on the relationship between workload and work engagement demonstrated that there are age-related differences in the effects of job characteristics on employee wellbeing. Therefore, nurturing work engagement needs customization, and interventions on task level should be considered.

With regard to the latter, the third practical implication is related to the finding that older employees have different work-related preferences and needs. An important finding was that job
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characteristics have a different effect on older and younger workers’ wellbeing. In addition, the findings demonstrated that employees want to change their work profiles in retirement. Hence, an important implication is that there is a need for age sensitive HR management. To keep employees effectively active and engaged in the workforce organizations should develop a HR management structure that is responsive to individual differences and, specifically, age-related needs and abilities. It is important to evaluate what the organizational needs are. There should be a clear problem definition and accordingly goals should be defined. The goal could be retaining older workers but, in a larger context, could be decreasing absenteeism among older workers or increasing work engagement – depending on the problem definition. When the problems and goals are identified, HR practices should be implemented accordingly.

We have investigated how older workers want to continue working and identified different work after retirement profiles. I demonstrated that employees have different preferences with regard to their work after retirement profiles. Second, organizational factors (i.e. organizational climate and the psychological contract) impact the preference for a specific work after retirement profile. Hence, organizations can use work profiles as tools to offer different options in post-retirement employment. Since organizations can influence employees’ preferences for certain work profiles through organizational climate and psychological contract, they can actively encourage employees to select a profile according to the organizations’ wishes. By monitoring employees’ preferences regarding their work after retirement profiles, organizations can anticipate to changes in their workforce composition. A possible way to do this is via the annual performance evaluation talk when managers should openly discuss work profile possibilities. Since employee’s preferences regarding the work profile may change at different life stages, work profiles should be discussed all ages. For instance, starting a family may include specific preferences, as does reaching older age.

6.6 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to research how older employees can be motivated to continue working after retirement age. It has shown that organizations’ HR inducements play an important role in this respect. Development HR practices contribute to older employees’ motivation to continue working through organizational climate that affects employee attitudes and, ultimately, the motivation to continue working. However, due to age-related individual differences, the effects of HR inducements are heterogeneous. Thus, it is important to take these differences into account when deploying HR systems to induce a positive organizational climate, a positive evaluation of the psychological contract and positive work attitudes. Individual differences also emerge in preferences regarding older workers’ after retirement work profiles. These individual preferences regarding older retirement work profiles are associated also with organizational factors that can be influenced by HR inducements.
6.5 References


Chapter 6 Discussion


