



Age management: theory and practice

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Ageing workforce & the role of employers

- The European population (EU28) is projected to grow from 507.2 million in 2013 to 522.8 million in 2060 (EC 2017).
- The percentage of seniors (65 years or older) is forecasted to grow by 10%, while the working age population is expected to drop by 9.4% over the same period (EC 2017).
- Given this scenario, the active participation of older people in the labour market is key to guaranteeing the sustainability of our social security systems and the competitiveness of our economies.
- The relevance of the active and positive role of employers in promoting older workers' employment and employability (Burke, Cooper, & Field, 2013), as well as in preventing age discrimination at work, has been broadly recognised (Hedge, 2009; Taylor, 2008a).

Ageing workforce & the role of employers

- Scholars have shown that age management is not considered a strategic priority by European employers (Naegele & Walker, 2011; Walker, 2005).
- Most of them address age management only when they have to face issues of competitiveness, related for instance to problems of labour shortage or surplus (Midtsundstad, 2011).
- Their engagement towards creating inclusive workplaces for workers of every age is affected by their attitudes towards the older workers (Loretto & White, 2006; Taylor & Walker, 1998): negative stereotypes about older workers influence employment-related decisions (Taylor, 2001) and conduct to age-based discriminatory practices within organisations (Hedge, Borman, & Lammlein, 2006).

Older workers

- There is not a unique definition of older worker. The concept varies across contexts and cultures → e.g. in the US age-related anti-discrimination laws refer to older people as people aged over 40.
- Moreover, people are progressively ageing more slowly and this change modifies norms and cultures around ageing.
- What is broadly accepted is that there are some age-related changes that might affect the work sphere.

Older workers: individual changes



- **Physical changes:** decline in physiological and physical abilities
- **Cognitive changes:** negative relation between age and fluid intelligence (processing speed, working memory, selective attention) (Craik & Salthouse 2008); positive relation between age and crystallized intelligence (knowledge, skills and wisdom) (Truxillo et al. 2015)
- **Changes in personality:** age-related attitudinal and behavioral changes in the workplace (Ng & Feldman 2013, Truxillo et al. 2012)
- **Affective changes:** less negative appraisal of stressful events and positive relation between age and affective wellbeing (Truxillo et al. 2015)
- **Motivation:** positive relation between age and accomplishment, connection with others and autonomy (intrinsic motives) and between age and the social motive of helping people or contributing to society; negative relation between age and compensation, benefits and promotion (extrinsic motives) and between age and growth motives such as achievement and mastery (Truxillo et al. 2015)

Older workers: the social context of ageing

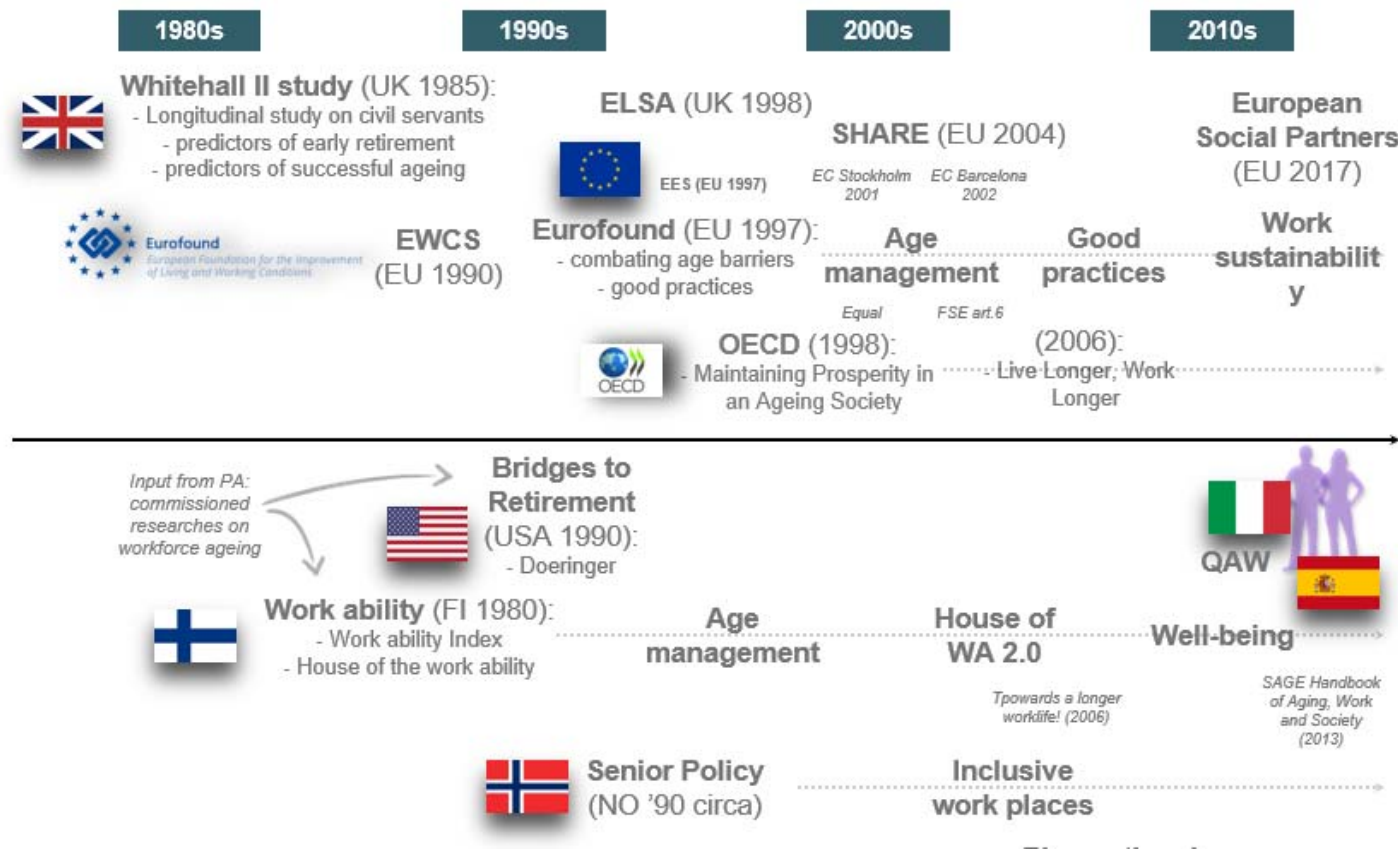


- **Age stereotyping:** older people are considered less flexible, less technically competent, less competitive (Finkelstein & Burke 1998)
- **Age discrimination:** in most companies, discriminatory practices against older workers are still diffused (Billett, Dymock, Johnson, & Martin, 2011; Krings, Sczesny, & Kluge, 2011) (especially recruitment and training)
- **Age climate:** increased age diversity related to an increase in the age discrimination climate, which in turn negatively affects organizational-level performance and commitment (Kunze et al. 2011); inclusive HR practices led to a more positive age climate, which in turn is related to better company performance (Böhm et al. 2014).
- **Age-related leadership:** negative effects of leader-follower age differences might be improved by helping older leaders increase their generativity; improving followers' negative perceptions of older people may improve the leader-member relationship (Truxillo et al. 2015)

Age management: definition and paradigms

Age management is defined as those measures that combat age barriers and/or promote age diversity. These measures may entail specific initiatives aimed at particular dimensions of age management; they may also include more general employment or human resources policies that help to create an environment in which individual employees are able to achieve their potential without being disadvantaged by their age (Walker 1999).

Age management: definition and paradigms



Potential interventions

PRE:

- **Recruiting:** age-neutral job advertisement, focus on experience in job interviews, no negative stereotypes, recruitment instruments targeting older employees, re-recruitment

DURING:

- **Work redesign:** increased autonomy (Hertel et al. 2013), skills variety (Zaniboni et al. 2013), decreased task variety (Zaniboni et al. 2014)
- **Increasing positive relationships between age-diverse groups:** mentoring, reverse mentoring, mixed work groups (Truxillo et al. 2015)
- **Development practices:** facilitating training for older workers
- **Work-life balance supportive practices:** flexible work arrangements, part-time/reduced time, distance work, eldercare support (Truxillo et al. 2015)

Potential interventions

- **Supporting workers safety and health:** safety climate (supervisors practices, communications and behaviours) affects safety outcomes. Interventions that support people of specific age through specific supervisors' behaviours. / Positive relationship between age and health: older workers support the safety of younger workers (Ng & Feldman 2008)
- **Ergonomic interventions:** increase worksite illumination, control for glare, use larger fonts, and reduce background noise (Charness et al. 2007), reduction of lifting and carrying tasks (Sharit & Czaja 2012), limit non-standard shifts that cause sleep disturbance. For sedentary works: seating designs that provide lumbar support, a backrest, armrests, adjustable seat height, cushioned surfaces, and sufficient leg space (Sharit & Czaja 2012), moving/adjustable desks (Truxxillo et al. 2015)

POST:

- **Transition to retirement:** different forms of gradual transition (partial, phased, trial with call-back arrangements) + preparatory measures

Two examples

- High performance: how Porsche is future-proofing its ageing workforce: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EFeqJzacE0>
- BMW's Aging Assembly Line Runs Like New: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b2aLleeC4A>

Discussion and conclusions

- **Only the older workers?** A positive age diversity climate, which supports people across the life span, benefits all workers (Böhm et al. 2014) + Today's younger workers are tomorrow's older workers, and thus interventions to support people throughout their work life span are key
- **Integrated interventions:** the larger social context in which people live can critically affect their health and ability to work (see Loepcke et al. 2013) thus they need to be taken into account in planning age management interventions
- **Age management as a methodology:** it's the process to be used to attain a correct understanding of the issues and implications raised by the workforce ageing process (Marcaletti 2019)

Thank you for your attention!
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