

# **Research that Matters to Employers: Overcoming Constraints to Later Life Work**

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**Featuring: Sloan Research Network on Aging & Work**

**Jacquelyn Boone James, PhD**

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## **Panel I: Organizational and Government Response to Changes in the Context of Work**

### **Employers and Older Workers: Changing Attitudes in a Changing Economy**

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Ageism in the workplace has long been an issue for older workers. This presentation draws upon data from qualitative studies funded by the Ohio Department of Aging and the Institute of Education Sciences. The studies include interviews with employers (n=5) who hire older workers and with community college and workforce development professionals (n= 42) who partner with employers to meet their employment needs. Interviews explored areas such as attributes of older workers that employers find attractive, skill deficiencies common in older workers, willingness of employers to provide training to older workers, and attitudes toward hiring older workers.

With unemployment rates at a multi-year low, employers are actively seeking workers of all ages and are generally willing to provide training to new employees, regardless of age. Employers value the work ethic of older workers, appreciate low rates of absenteeism, and welcome older workers serving as mentors to younger workers. Recent skill upgrading is valued as an indication of the potential employees' ability and willingness to learn. Conversely, older workers may lack current technology skills and have unrealistic salary expectations. Specific examples will be provided concerning the attributes of older workers employers find most valuable and suggestions for how older workers can make themselves more marketable to potential employers.

Gaining a better understanding of issues faced by older workers seeking new employment or hoping to improve their current work situation is important to practitioners and policy makers seeking to improve opportunities for older workers, and therefore of interest to the Network.

## **Indexing Organizational Practices for Later Life Work**

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Later life work heavily depends on organizational attitudes and practices regarding older employees. While more interest has recently been given to the antecedents of successful employment in later life, organizations still lack possibilities to assess their individual areas for improvement, to benchmark results against industry or regional peers, and to derive impactful strategies to retain older employees' performance, health, and motivation. We hence propose an interdisciplinary index for organizational practices (Wöhrmann, Deller, & Pundt, 2018), which has qualitatively been developed based on German and U.S. data and is planned to be validated quantitatively by end of 2018. This presentation focuses on the operationalization of the index, discusses differences between Germany and the U.S., and provides preliminary findings from the cross-organizational validation study in Germany. The index consists of nine dimensions, namely organizational culture, leadership style, and seven more specific dimensions, including work design, health management, and transition to retirement.

## **The Labor Market Challenges Facing Older Unemployed Workers**

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Delaying retirement is often viewed as the surest route to financial security in old age, but this strategy depends on whether older adults can find jobs. Past research has documented that older unemployed workers experience much longer unemployment spells than their younger counterparts. The employment challenges facing older displaced workers may reflect the challenges facing the broader population of older adults struggling to find jobs. However, relatively little is known about how job prospects vary among older unemployed workers. This study uses data from the 2004 and 2008 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation to examine the likelihood of becoming laid off, the length of unemployment spells experienced by older laid-off workers, and the characteristics of new jobs for laid-off workers who become reemployed. The analysis compares outcomes by such factors as gender, education, race and ethnicity, and characteristics of the former job (including occupation, industry, and salaries). The results indicate that older people of color and older people with limited education face special challenges becoming reemployed.

## **Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places? A Cross-Country Examination of Efforts to Stimulate Employer Demand for Older Workers**

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This project has taken an international look at (1) policies in the public and private-sector that might be contributing to rising employment rates in industrialized nations, specifically those of the European Union, Japan, and Australia and (2) how developments compare and contrast to those in the United States. The undertaking has involved what is essentially a literature review of published articles by academics and policy analysts, conference presentations, and the so-called “grey literature,” along with contacting experts in the field for input. Particular attention has been paid to promoting employer demand for older workers, which is a topic not easily studied and one that has not featured prominently in research in the United States. More than any country, Japan has implemented policies and programs to get employers to retain older workers, even if it is not with much enthusiasm. MOPACT—Mobilizing the Potential of Active Aging in Europe—has attempted to identify efforts to stimulate employer demand for older workers in 13 countries. The findings are not especially illuminating; many efforts are designed to enhance worker skills and abilities, something that employers require of all their workers. This presentation will highlight key findings of this research as they pertain to employer demand, hypothesize about further research needs, and speculate on whether policy can have a substantive impact on employer demand. Workshop participants will leave with a better understanding of the importance of employer demand in increasing labor force participation rates and what public policies might do to promote it.

## **Perception versus Reality: Employers’ Knowledge about the Aging Workforce**

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### **Discussant: Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, PhD**

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## **Panel II: Barriers and Facilitators to Work in Later Life**

### **Job Adverts: Exploring the First Point of Discrimination**

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Drawing on social role theory, age stereotypes and research on hiring biases, this talk explores ageism as a barrier to extending working life from two perspectives, the perspective of the employer and the job applicant. We report 3 studies ( $n = 93$ ;  $n = 160$ ,  $n = 264$ ) showing how job adverts can be framed to target younger vs older job applicants, and demonstrate age-fit, i.e. how older vs younger job applicants can be matched to older vs younger job adverts. We then explore how the adverts influence evaluations of the organization but also how appealing the job positions are. Evidence suggests that older but not younger prospective job applicants find age-matched job adverts more appealing. These findings are discussed in relation to on-going work to explore the role of age-fit in the employment context.

### **Future Time Perspective and Work Motivation in Later Life**

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A growing body of research findings indicate the importance of an individual's future time perspective (FTP) on work motivation and behavior in later adulthood. This presentation reviews recent evidence linking age, FTP and work-related outcomes, results of a recent meta-analysis investigating age-FTP relations, and implications of findings for developing interventions that promote adaptive motivational orientations in later work life.

### **Challenges to Implementing Flexible Work Policies**

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Study after study has identified flexible work schedules as a job characteristic that is strongly associated with working longer. Fewer studies, however, have surveyed organizations themselves to understand their challenges in addressing the needs of the aging workforce. The National Study of Business Strategy and Workforce Development, a large-scale survey of firms, identified work places that were likely to be early adopters of workplace policies aimed at retaining older workers. Even in this select sample, a surprisingly high percentage of firms were not actually implementing workplace flexibility (Pitt-Catsouphes, Smyer, Matz-Costa, & Kane, 2007). They gathered information on the firms' perceptions of barriers to flexibility initiatives. The most prevalent concerns were the reactions of customers and clients, concerns about treating all employees equally, difficulties with supervising, co-worker resentment, and abuse of policies. Less research has focused on identifying *strategies* for overcoming those barriers. This presentation presents the results of an interview protocol administered to 14 line managers in a social science research institute at a major public university. In this semi-structured interview, questions focused on the experiences of providing flexible work experiences for workers over age 50, especially the extent to which there were concerns about abuse of the policy, difficulties with supervising employees working in a flexible manner, loss of productivity, treating all employees equally, co-worker resentment, and it being too time-consuming for line managers. The result is a rich source of qualitative data on the challenges of implementing flexible work policies, especially focused on older workers.

## **Post-Recession Retirement: A Typology of Post-Retirement Workers**

*Dawn C. Carr, Miles Taylor, Christina Matz-Costa, and Ernest Gonzales*

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The recession occurring between 2007 and 2009 was the largest economic downturn in the US since the Great Depression. Although there has been a growing trend of engagement in post-retirement work, for older Americans leaving full-time work during the recession, post-retirement work has become more common. This paper uses 2008-2014 Health and Retirement Study data to identify typologies of retirement for those leaving full-time work (using a Latent Class Analysis approach) and describes the characteristics of individuals who move through these retirement pathways. Five typologies were identified: part-time back to full-time, shift to part-time, shift to partial retirement, phased retirement, and full retirement. Less than half of older workers who

left full-time work in 2008 fully retired and remained retired through 2014. The implications of these different pathways and the potential relevance of these findings for organizations and in relation to potential policies will be discussed.

**Discussant: Phil Taylor, PhD**

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**Keynote Address: Reaping the Benefits of an Aging Work Force**

*Kerry Hannon*

Kerry Hannon is a nationally recognized expert and strategist on career transitions, personal finance and retirement. She is a frequent TV and radio commentator and is a sought-after keynote speaker at conferences across the country. She has appeared as a career and financial expert on The Dr. Phil Show ABC, CBS, CNBC, NBC Nightly News, NPR, and PBS. Kerry focuses on empowering yourself to do more with your career and personal finances – now and for the future. Kerry is currently a columnist and regular contributor to *The New York Times*. She is AARP's Work and Jobs Expert and Great Jobs columnist. She is a contributing editor and Second Verse columnist at *Forbes*, and the PBS NextAvenue.org expert and columnist on personal finance and careers.

Kerry is the award-winning author of a dozen books, including *Money Confidence: Really Smart Financial Moves for Newly Single Women* and the national bestseller *Great Jobs for Everyone 50+: Finding Work That Keeps You Happy and Healthy . . . And Pays the Bills*.

**Panel III: Proposed Pilot Projects for Overcoming the Constraints of Later Life Work—the “Fish Bowl”**

**Presenter 1: Increasing the Retirement Age – The Employers' Perspectives**

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The increased life expectancy and the gradual rise in pensionable age caused an increase in the labor force participation of older workers, prolonging working life in Israel as well as in other OECD countries. While much attention has been paid to the needs of older workers, little is known about the employers' perspective. Thus, the current study will examine the impact of extended working lives and post retirement work from the employers' perspectives.

Mixed methods will be used. First, semi-structured interviews will be performed with experts to characterize the dimensions of influence involved in work at older ages on organizations. Based on the interviews a questionnaire will be designed and distributed to approximately 300 employers to examine their perception about employing older workers and to quantify the impact of various dimensions. It will also allow us to estimate the expected costs involved in the adjustment of employers to the aging workforce.

Similar projects that will take place in Germany and the Netherlands will allow international comparison among the three countries. This project will contribute and expand the knowledge about the effects, consequences and expected costs of increasing the retirement age and working at older ages from the employers' perspective.

## **Presenter 2: Self-Employment in Later Life: Documenting How Workplace Characteristics Predict Job Tenure, Earnings, and Health**

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Nearly half of American workers aged 55 and older have saved nothing for retirement, foreshadowing a financially-insecure future. Concurrently, self-employment has been heralded as a way to shore up one's finances in later life. In fact, more than 20% of Americans aged 50 and older report that they work for themselves, yet previous research reveals that the self-employed, on average, earn less than those in wage-and-salary employment, with this finding remaining true in later life. My preliminary analysis using the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) of older Americans, for example, reveals that the self-employed, on average, earn less than half that of wage-and-salary workers.

Researchers and policymakers have focused on the impact that longer working lives can have on promoting retirement security, but scholarship on the relationship between the self-employment experience and well-being is lagging. Using the secondary, longitudinal, and nationally-representative HRS that surveys more than 20,000 Americans over 50 every two years, I aim to ask the following question: What workplace characteristics, such as stress, physical demands, and working alone, are associated with higher earnings, job tenure, and health? Additional variables of interest include sociodemographic factors and measures of human, social, and financial capital.

Aligning with the mission of the Sloan Research Network to promote quality and choice of work in later life, this proposal will result in at least one empirical paper. Further, it advances our knowledge on a prominent, yet under studied, form of work in later life, providing context to discussions on facilitating longer working lives.

### **Presenter 3: The Aging Blue-Collar Worker: Exploring Issues in Crafting a Meaningful Later Life**

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Today's health and demographic trends have given rise to concepts such as "encore work," particularly in more socioeconomically advantaged groups. These ideas may not be accessible to or resonate with all older adults and may, in fact, serve to restrict opportunities for and choices about meaningful engagement and personal growth. For example, aging blue-collar workers, some of whom are no longer capable of doing their physically taxing jobs but not financially secure enough to retire altogether, often struggle to transition into new, less strenuous roles where their hard skills are still valuable. Cultural factors may play a key role in retirement planning processes and outcomes as well. We propose a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) study focused on aging blue-collar workers in which we explore the unique challenges at the intersection of aging and social/productive engagement, with a focus on what employers might do to better support these workers.

### **Presenter 4: Modifiable Job Characteristics and Transition to Retirement by Health**

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Work environments influence how long and in what capacity older workers stay engaged in paid work. Previous research has shown that certain job characteristics are particularly important to retaining older workers relative to younger adults. What is less well understood is how various characteristics differentially affect older adults who face health problems. The current project will examine modifiable work environment factors and how they influence transitions out of full-time work in later life. Drawing on longitudinal data from the HRS, we will use Latent Class Analysis to identify qualitatively important profiles of modifiable work



environment factors that co-occur and are most important for retaining older workers, and explore how these factors differ for those with different health statuses. We will discuss the relevance of these findings for work environments, and discuss potential changes in work environments that might facilitate higher retention of older workers in the work force.

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