

Introduction

This paper lays the groundwork for a research program on the topic of how intergenerational learning can contribute to the effectiveness of organizations by capitalizing on the capacities of the ageing worker.

According to innumerable studies published by policy research centers in the EU and other developed countries, the pool of available workers is diminishing at an alarming rate due to retirement and an ageing population (Bartels, 2010; Commission, 2009; Stam, 2009). Although there is quite some work on the problem of an ageing population, reports in scientific journals and practitioner, or grey, literature fail to present much empirical work on the specific topic of how organizations can capitalize on the knowledge and innovative capacities of an older worker (INNO-Grips, 2008). Mostly one finds reports and studies that further define the problem and speculate about future consequences. This latter aspect is especially evident in the grey literature.

From both scientific and practitioner literature three main themes can be defined. The first theme explores the question: “How can organizations reduce levels of stress in order to keep older workers from retiring (early)?” (Barnes-Farrall, 2006; Bartels, 2010; Ilmarinen, 2001; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2007; van der Heijden, 2001) The second theme is about developing organizational structures that conduce improved productivity of older employees (Jones & Hayden, 2009; Sprenger, 2007). The literature in this stream seems to come equally from scientific sources and the grey literature and considers relationships between the work organization and the older worker.

The third theme is what I call the “intergenerational learning stream”. This is the least developed of the three themes and comes from a mixture of scientific and grey literature spanning different disciplines such as management science and human resource development. There is also some work in the field of educational science on intergenerational learning, but this is not typically in organizational contexts, but rather social situations like extended families or in communities of practice, where a trade is learned in a social collaborative situation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For us, this theme will be expanded upon and will focus especially on relationships between older

workers and their younger colleagues, specifically trying to gain understanding how these relationships can influence organizational development through innovation, learning, and critical organizational knowledge retention, all within an organizational setting.

The following model serves to illustrate our interests in the relationships between older and younger employees in organizational settings.

*Relationships between older and younger employees
in an organizational context*

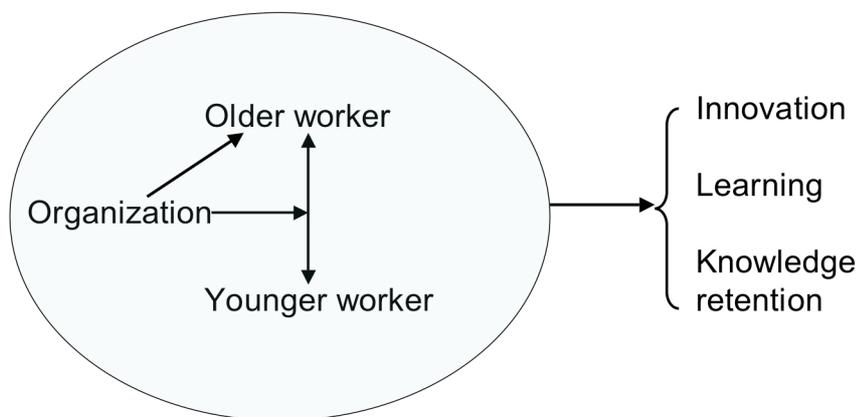


Figure 1. Conceptual research model

Research Questions (preliminary)

In order to guide the research I have developed several working research questions. These are preliminary and subject to revision, but they do give a good idea of where we want to go with the research. The main research question is as follows:

“What measures, in regards to an ageing workforce, can management take in order to increase organizational effectiveness?”

The answer to this question will be a series of policy recommendations that can be used for designing organizational development trajectories in knowledge-intensive, service-based organizations.

The following sub-questions, which come directly from the model shown in *Figure 1*, have been formulated to help further guide the research in its exploratory phase.

The first sub-question looks at the relationship between the older employee and the work organization:

1. *What organizational characteristics influence the learning, innovation and critical knowledge retention of the older worker?*

The next sub-question deals with the relationship between older and younger workers and how these might result in organizational development:

2. *What processes occur in the relationship between older and younger workers that have an affect on learning, innovation and critical knowledge retention?*

The third question considers the role of organizational context on the relationships between older and younger workers:

3. *How do organizational contexts affect the relationships between older and younger workers that contribute to learning, innovation and knowledge retention?*

In order to answer these three sub-questions, questions, we will use a combination of desk research and interviews. The sampling will be based on effective and less effective organizations.

Once the exploratory part of the research is done, we move on to the experimental aspect. The purpose of this part of the research is to design and test interventions based on the policy recommendations developed in the exploratory part of the research.

Sources

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