

Entry on "Age"
Wiley Encyclopedia of Management, Volume 6 International Management, Volume 3
Barbara S. Lawrence and Najung Kim
Published 2014

Final Draft May 13, 2012

Abundant research shows that age plays many roles at work, for workers and for working. One theoretical feature distinguishing these studies is the mechanism by which age influences work (Lawrence, 1996). Some scholars assume that age effects are relatively fixed. Work-related consequences for a given age are independent of how age is perceived. Other scholars assume that age effects emerge through social interaction. Work outcomes depend on individuals' perceptions and the meanings age acquires through social construction.

By far the majority of age studies assume age effects are fixed. Much recent research examines the aging work force, an extant phenomenon in many countries. The greyer the workforce becomes, the harder it is for societies to maintain support for their aging populations and the harder it is for younger generations to carry the economic and social burdens that result (Banks, 2006). These changing age distributions have forced organizations to readjust pension systems, reexamine pay systems and provide additional succession planning (Cahill, Giandrea, & Quinn, 2006).

Additional research in this category examines how age indexes workers' emotional, physical and cognitive changes. Life stage models define expected developmental sequences anchored to specific ages (Levinson, 1978) and life span perspective explains how individuals handle these developmental gains and losses (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999). Work-role stressors and work-family conflict differ across age groups (Matthews, Bulger, & Barnes-Farrell, 2010) and older workers' attitudes and values influence work motivation (Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dijkers, 2011) and intentions to continue working (Shacklock & Brunetto, 2011).

The second group of studies assumes that age effects emerge through social interaction. Common negative age stereotypes are activated when older workers do not fit the perceived correct (younger) age for a job (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Increasing organizational age diversity is related to increasing negative age climate (Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2011). The impact of team age diversity on performance varies with factors such as task interdependence (Timmerman, 2000) and age salience (Wegge et al., 2012). When task interdependence is high, age diversity becomes a liability. This association is mitigated when teams value the contributions of members' different ages.

Scholars believe age-related perceptions exist in all social systems (Eisenstadt, 1956, p. 21). In cross-country comparisons, scholars find that perceived age profiles for adolescence, adults and the old are similar (Chan et al., 2012). However, the meaning of specific ages and thus their effects may differ. Koreans experience higher anxiety than Americans about the negative effects of becoming old (Yun & Lachman, 2006) and Moroccans evidence more

positive stereotypes than the French towards the old (Macia et al., 2009).

Scholars' studies of age norms and work also fall in this group. When age norms support entrepreneurship for older workers, their intentions to engage in new businesses increase, to some extent independent of positive self-perceptions and social support from family and friends (Kautonen, Tornikoski, & Kibler, 2011). People develop widely shared notions about the ages when others become concerned about career advancement and developing new skills. Interestingly, they don't seem to apply the norms to themselves. They do not express the concerns they expect for others of their age (Greller, 2000).

Although it seems likely that work-related age effects result from the interdependence between direct and emergent mechanisms, there is almost no work that examines both (Lawrence, 1996). Given that age distributions are impractical to manage at organizational and national levels, this interdependence seems an important next step.

- Baltes, P. B., Staudinger, U. M., & Lindenberger, U. 1999. Lifespan psychology: Theory and application to intellectual functioning. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50: 471-507.
- Banks, J. 2006. Economic capabilities, choices and outcomes at older ages. *Fiscal Studies*, 27(3): 281-311.
- Cahill, K. E., Giandrea, M. D., & Quinn, J. F. 2006. Retirement patterns from career employment. *Gerontologist*, 46(4): 514-523.
- Chan, W. 2012. Stereotypes of age differences in personality traits: Universal and accurate? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103(6): 1050-1066.
- Eisenstadt, S.N. 1956. *From Generation To Generation: Age Groups And Social Structure*. London: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Greller, M. M. 2000. Age norms and career motivation. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 50(3): 215-226.
- Kautonen, T., Tornikoski, E. T., & Kibler, E. 2011. Entrepreneurial intentions in the third age: The impact of perceived age norms. *Small Business Economics*, 37(2): 219-234.
- Kooij, D. T. A. M., De Lange, A. H., Jansen, P. G. W. J., Kanfer, R., & Dikkers, J. S. E. 2011. Age and work-related motives: Results of a meta-analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32(2): 197-225.
- Kunze, F., Boehm, S. A., & Bruch, H. 2011. Age diversity, age discrimination climate and performance consequences – A cross organizational study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32(3): 264-290.
- Lawrence, B. S. 1996. Interest and indifference: The role of age in the organizational sciences. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 14: 1-59.
- Levinson, D. J., with Darrow, C. N., Klein, E. B., Levinson, M. H., & McKee, B. 1978. *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Macia, E., Lahman, A., Baali, A., Goetsch, G., & Chapuis-Lucciani, N. 2009. Perception of age stereotypes and self-perception of aging: A comparison of French and Moroccan populations. *Journal of Cross Cultural Gerontology*, 24: 391-410.

- Matthews, R. A., Bulger, C. A., & Barnes-Farrell, J. L. 2010. Work social supports, role stressors and work-family conflict: The moderating effect of age. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 76(1): 78-90.
- Posthuma, R. A., & Campion, M. A. 2009. Age stereotypes in the workplace: Common stereotypes, moderators, and future research directions. *Journal of Management*, 35(1): 158-188.
- Shacklock, K., & Brunetto, Y. 2011. A model of older workers' intentions to continue working. *Personnel Review*, 40(2): 252-274.
- Timmerman, T. A. 2000. Racial diversity, age diversity, interdependence and team performance. *Small Group Research*, 13(5): 592-606.
- Wegge, J., Jungmann, F., Liebermann, S., Shemla, M., Ries, B. C., Diestel, S., & Schmidt, K.-H. 2012. What makes age diverse teams effective? Results from a six-year research program. *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation*, 41(1): 5145-5151.
- Yun, R. J., & Lachman, M. E. 2006. Perceptions of aging in two cultures: Korean and American views on old age. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 21(1-2): 55-70.