



**INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIOLOGI
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Retaining the Aging Workforce

Studies of the interplay between individual and organizational
capability in the context of prolonged working lives

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Abstract

Amidst the realities of workforce aging and policies to prolong the working life across Europe, policymakers and researchers have emphasized the employer's role in providing suitable working conditions for older workers under the human resource term "age management." Although the definition of age management refers to all age groups, previous research has primarily used the concept in the context of older workers' employment participation. The age-management imperative stresses employers' active role in adapting work to older workers' abilities and preferences by developing, modifying, sustaining, and providing flexible work arrangements to strengthen these workers' capabilities and encourage them to remain in work longer. However, previous research has repeatedly shown that employers often take a passive or reactive approach to implementing measures to retain older employees. Also, knowledge of effective workplace interventions to promote older workers' employability, work ability, and health is sparse. Against this background, this thesis seeks insights into enabling and hindering conditions at the individual and organizational levels using the capability concept as a theoretical approach. Capability refers to individuals' and organizations' ability to convert existing resources and perform actions to realize selected goals, such as continuing to work or retaining older workers. This thesis intends to answer the following questions: What personal and work-related factors promote or hinder older workers' ability and willingness to continue working? What barriers and opportunities influence public welfare organizations' capability to retain older workers? How do individuals' capabilities interact with organizational capabilities in the context of prolonging the working life? The empirical studies of this thesis are based on three data sources: (a) a population-based representative panel and registered data covering 55–64-year-olds (from Panel Survey of Aging and the Elderly, PSAE), (b) a cross-sectional study of employees aged 55 years or older in the city of Gothenburg (Hearts–Lexliv study), and (c) an interview study with 19 line managers and their HR partners in the healthcare sector (ArbetsKraftsprojektet). The first article compared personal and work-related determinants of retirement preferences and subsequent behavior. Findings indicated that people tended to retire later than initially preferred. Personal health, work ability, physical work exposure, and job satisfaction were important determinants of preferences and actual retirement behavior. The second article explored the role of work accommodations among older workers with poor health measured in terms of disease, illness, and sickness. Poor health conditions in combination with few opportunities to accommodate work increased the risks of early retirement. However, these associations were not equally consistent with illness. The third article examined the impact of negotiated individualized work arrangements, so-called idiosyncratic deals, on retirement preferences. It found negotiated individualized work arrangements matching employees' competence, experience, and growth opportunities to be important for public-sector employees' retirement preferences. The fourth article examined organizational barriers to retaining older workers in Swedish public-welfare organizations. The findings suggested that public welfare employers' ability to retain older workers is hindered by line managers' high workload, inflexible HR strategies, and the absence of elaborated age-management strategies and coordination within the organization. Empirical data also indicate that preferences for earlier retirement and earlier actual behavior are more frequent among females and among individuals in lower socioeconomic positions with lower education. This thesis demonstrates that older workers' preconditions for prolonging the working life are largely shaped by the interaction between personal factors, such as health, perceived work ability, and physical and psychosocial working conditions, and organizations' capability to adapt and provide flexible solutions concerning, for example, negotiated individualized work arrangements or accommodations. The model presented in this thesis provides guidance in identifying vulnerable groups and conditions in the labor market.

Key words: Retirement, retirement preferences, active aging, working conditions, idiosyncratic deals, age management, senior policies, age-conscious leadership, healthcare, public welfare organizations, job design, capability, human resources management, sustainable working life, job quality, idiosyncratic deals

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