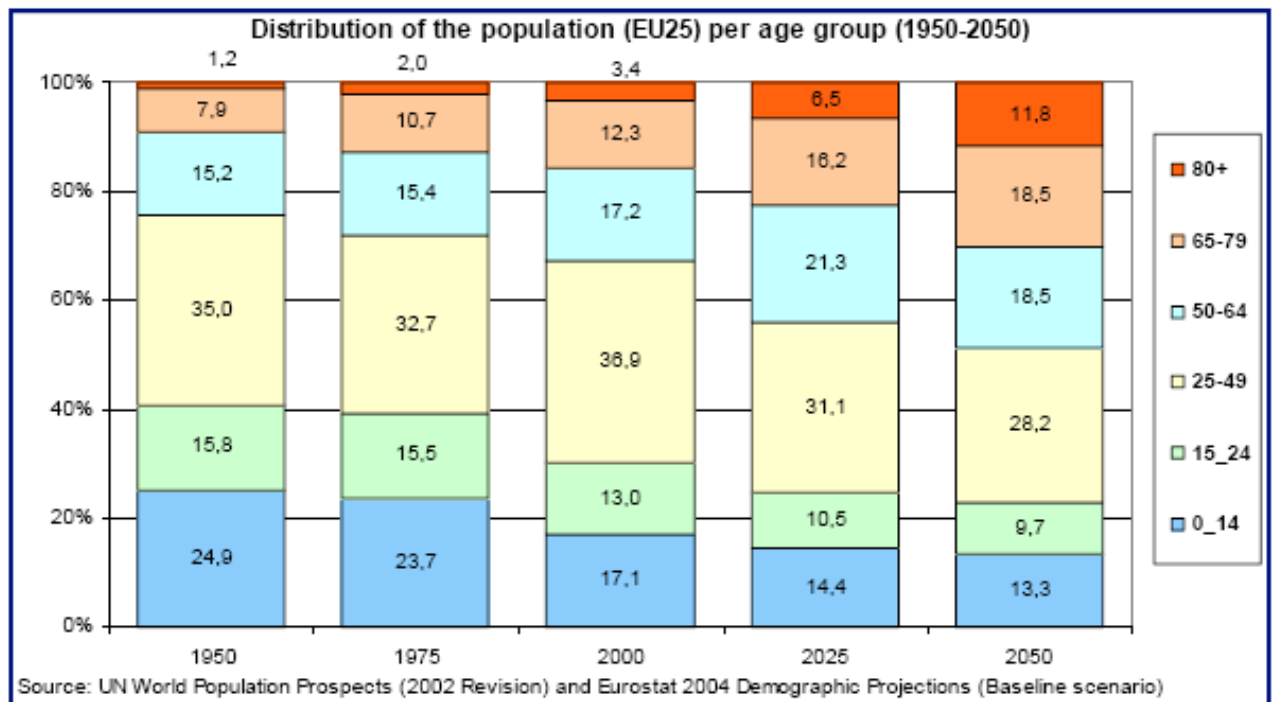


Short Report on the EAWOP Small Group Meeting on Aging and Work, Tilburg, 17-19 January 2007.

Background of the theme of the small group meeting

In Europe, the age distribution of the population is expected to change in the next decades. The prognoses included in Figure 1 show that it is expected that the number of elderly people will increase, especially in the older age groups. The percentage of younger people is expected to decrease. These developments have implications for the work situation, and the age composition of the workforce.

Figure 1: Projection of the demographic development in Europe until 2050 (from: Commission of the European Communities, 2005).



At the European Union level, the Commission of the European Communities has formulated several policy questions on how to cope with these demographic changes in work. Policy questions are, for example (Commission of the European Communities, 2005):

- How can the organisation of work be modernised, to take into account the specific needs of each age group?
- How can we enable older people to work more?
- How can work organisation best be adapted to a new distribution between the generations, with fewer young people and more older workers?

Work and Organizational Psychology can contribute to the knowledge needed to solve these policy questions. Indeed, in several European Countries, the topic of aging and work is already receiving considerable attention in research by European Work and Organizational Psychologists. In addition, professional Work and Organizational Psychologists are increasingly involved in counselling individuals and organizations on age-related problems in the work situation. Trying to prevent

problems of older employees by implementing long-term organizational strategies that take the development of employees over time with age into account is an activity in which work and organizational psychologists can play an important role.

The small group meeting

The aim of the small group meeting was to bring together the knowledge and expertise of European researchers to exchange research results and discuss future directions for research. Aging and work is an important and relevant theme on which much work still needs to be done.

The small group meeting was organized by René Schalk and Marc van Veldhoven of the departments of Organisation Studies and Human Resource Studies of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Tilburg University in the Netherlands. The meeting was sponsored by EAWOP, WAOP and Tilburg University.

During the three days of the conference 28 participants, active researchers with a background in work and organizational psychology with expertise on aging and work from Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland presented and discussed their research.

The meeting was structured to have ample room for discussion about each paper presentation. In addition, each of the four themes of the small group meeting was discussed in depth.

The four themes were:

- The relationship between age and productivity/employability;
- Age and health;
- The transition from work to (early) retirement;
- HRM for older employees in organizations.

The results of the meeting

The meeting was productive, interesting, and had a very cooperative atmosphere. The participants were motivated, enthusiastic and participated in lively discussions even during lunch, dinner, and until late in the evening. An example of the involvement of the participants in the in the meeting was that the impact of the fierce storm that challenged the Netherlands on the second day of the meeting venue was only really noticed when the presentations and discussions were over and participants left the building. The storm took down trees and caused quite some damage and even deaths in the immediate environment of the meeting venue.

The following papers were presented at the meeting. The papers and presentations can be accessed on the Internet through the following link:

<http://www.tilburguniversity.nl/faculties/fsw/departments/HRS/SGM/papers/>

Theme: Performance and employability

- *Zacher* (Germany)
Relationships between age and different forms of job performance:
Implications for Human Resource Management
- *Gellert & Kuipers* (Netherlands)
The effects of age on team processes and team performance
- *Van der Schoot, Van der Heijden, Scholarios, Bozionelos & The Indicator Study Group* (Netherlands)
Employability management needs analysis within the ICT sector in Europe

- *Roßnagel & Hertel* (Germany)
HRM and age-related changes of work motivation: Matching motives, values, and interests with job characteristics
- *Van Veldhoven & Dorenbosch* (Netherlands)
Age and proactivity

Theme: Health and well being

- *De Lange, Taris, Jansen, Smulders, Houtman & Kompier* (Netherlands)
Age as factor in the relation between work and mental health: Results of the longitudinal TAS survey
- *Van den Broeck, Notelaers & De Witte* (Belgium)
Work characteristics and work related well-being of older workers: A job demands resources model perspective
- *De Jonge* (Netherlands)
Job strain, effort-reward imbalance and employee health: Are older workers worse off?
- *Bal, De Lange, Jansen & Van der Velde* (Netherlands)
A meta-analysis of aging, tenure, the psychological contract, and work-related outcomes

Theme: Retirement

- *Crego, Alcover & Martínez* (Spain)
Older workers' reasons for leaving the labour market and psychosocial outcomes of early retirement: Main findings of a research program carried out in Spain
- *Potocnik, Tordera & Peiró* (Spain)
Early retirement: A psychosocial perspective of the work-role exit process
- *Zappalà, Depolo, Fraccaroli, Guglielmi & Sarchielli* (Italy)
Postponing job retirement? Psychosocial influences on the planning of work career exit
- *Desmette & Gaillard* (Belgium)
When the worker becomes an "older worker": Analysing the career ending in the light of social identity theory
- *Hansez & Bertrand* (Belgium)
Measuring leaving factors and job intention to quit in Belgium: A company-level approach in an age comparison perspective
- *Kooij, Jansen, De Lange & Dijkers* (Netherlands)
Age-related factors in the motivation to work: What we know and where we need to go

Theme: (HR) Policy

- *Kraus* (Switzerland)
The establishment of "elder employees" as a new target group for education
- *Iller* (Germany)
Attitudes to ageing-appropriate personnel policy of personnel managers
- *Linkola* (Finland)
Goals of lifelong rewarding: Changing the psychological contract of early exit - The Finnish experience

- *Claes & Heymans* (Belgium)
HR professionals' views on work motivation and retention of older workers: A focus group study
- *Schalk* (Netherlands)
The influence of HRM on age-related changes in employability, commitment, and health

The results of the meeting are summarized in a joint “position paper” that includes recommendations for further research and implications for policy.

Furthermore, the results of several studies presented will be published in scientific journals. A special issue of the journal *Career Development International* will include research presented at the small group meeting.

The small group meeting brought an outstanding group of European Work and Organizational psychologists together who are active in the field of research on work and aging. We hope that the meeting will foster future cooperation between these scientists and stimulate further (joint) research in this important area.

The “executive summary” summarizes the main results of the small group meeting.

Executive summary

Main results and conclusions from the small group meeting on aging and work, Tilburg 17-19 January 2007.

The results and conclusions are divided into three parts. The first part, lessons learned, summarizes main learning points that came up in the papers presented and the discussions during the small group meeting. This is a summary of what the work and organizational psychologists who were present at the meeting see as an important knowledge base and starting point for practical measures. The second part, a research agenda, summarizes important areas for future research in the field of aging and work. The third part highlights practical questions and implications for policy measures that need to be addressed in the future.

Lessons learned

1. It is important to take a life-span perspective. Persons have a past and a future. This implies, for example, an emphasis on lifelong learning and development.
2. It is important to take into account the changing context of growing individualisation and the declining meaning of institutions in our society.
3. It is important to not see aging as a negative development. The focus should not be on diminishing capacities (cognitive as well as physical). The lower maximum capacities with age are becoming less and less important because of automation (physical work) and computerization (cognitive work, especially memory and computation-related tasks). It is more important to take into account how motives, personal preferences, and attitudes change and further develop over time, and how these changes impact on work.
4. It is important to take into account intergenerational issues and differences. For example, 'senior power' is often suggested as a positive situation, whereas in some organizations the power of older employees is seen as problematic by younger employees. When people get older, they might have developed more deeply rooted habits.
5. It is important to communicate to companies that the demographic change is there and that they have to take this into account in their personnel policies. The advantages of older employees should be promoted.
6. Increasing attention is needed for the potential of older workers. There is a need for more provision of training to older employees that matches their needs.
7. There is a need for a more idiosyncratic approach: a greater focus on individual differences, not on the stereotypical views about different age groups.
8. Personnel policies should be aligned to differentiated age-related needs. For example, respect, dignity, and recognition should be maintained in situations when employees receive lower wages because of a demotion.
9. More flexibility is needed from employers. For example by facilitating opportunities for age-related part-time work.

Research Agenda

1. We need better research, which implies:
 - a. A change in focus from process models/descriptive analyses (what, when, whom) to explanatory models (why).
 - b. The problem of selection effects that is overarching in many studies should be tackled. This could be done by making more and better use of existing data.
 - c. More interdisciplinary research is needed, building a specific methodology for (psychological) research on aging and work
2. We need better conceptualisations of the age construct. It is still a question how the category of older workers can be construed. What is old? One single definition of age is not possible. Being old, feeling old, acting old are separate concepts. The meaning of age can also change: for example, being 57 years of age implied a couple of years ago "it is time to go". Now it means that a person "still has many years to go". There is much diversity: individual age is not necessarily related to the age characteristics of groups.
3. The different transitions in life (for example retirement) are often not viewed from a life span perspective. What do these transitions mean in the flow of events and how do experiences with previous transitions have an effect at later age?
4. There is a low employment rate among the elderly workforce. What do the other older people do? What are the consequences of long term unemployment? What are the factors that make it difficult to (re)enter paid employment?
5. Take prospects for the future into account (is what we study now, relevant for the workforce of 2020? (temporary changes in work force composition).

Implications for policy and practical questions

1. In most of studies only limited differences are found between age groups in terms of health, initiative, et cetera. This is in sharp contrast with age discrimination/stereotyping that is abundant in practice. An active promotion of an "no difference until proven wrong" attitude might need to be stimulated (give older employees the benefit of the doubt) in the wider public.
2. Ownership of the age-problem issue by politicians, scientists and unions only has to be abandoned. Employers, managers, and HR-professionals also "own" the problem.
3. Take a life-span perspective. Design HR instruments that take the lifespan perspective of employees into account.
4. Accept the diversity in the group of older employees.
5. Actively involve multiple stakeholders in the age issue.
6. How to address companies (employers or potential employers)?
7. How to make companies more willing to employ older employees?
8. How to convince companies of the potential of older employees?
9. What kinds of effects does HRM have (moderator, primary effect). How do practices work out over time?
10. Which specific instruments can be developed (for example with respect to training)?