

What should we actually DO for older workers? Identifying the research gaps in organizational practice and interventions

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Overview

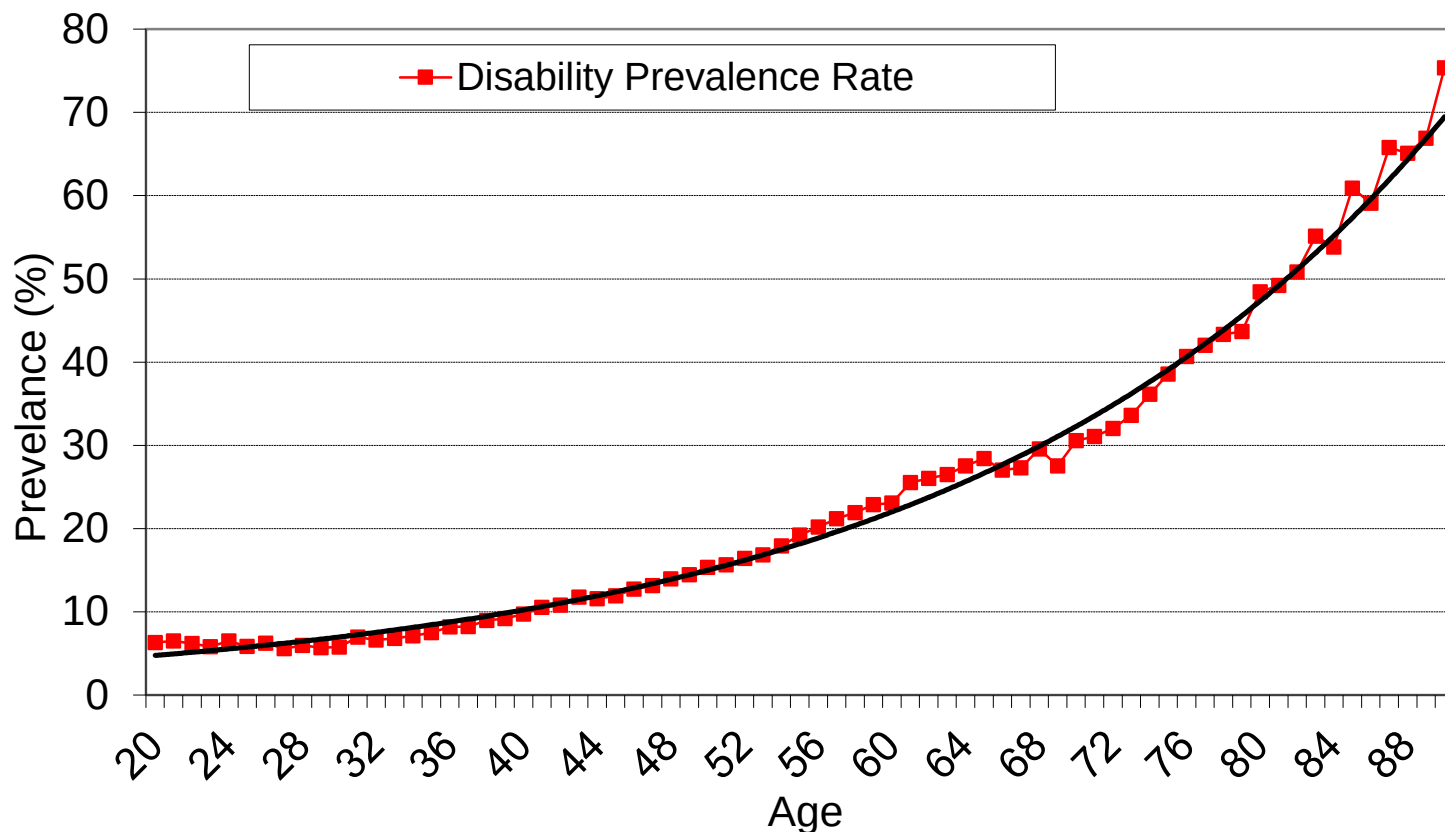
- Why are interventions to improve health, safety, wellbeing for older workers important?
- Describe the gaps in the psychosocial research on age-related interventions.
- What psychology can offer in terms of theory and empirical research.
- Some possible next steps in workplace age-related interventions.

Why is this important?

- People living longer and need to work longer to sustain retirement systems (Vaupel, 2010).
- Workers must stay healthy and happy to continue working – and we have this responsibility.
- A large number of people are working longer not because they want to but because they have to (AARP report, 2013).

Age, Physical Health, & Disabilities

Figure 1. Growth in Disability Prevalence by Age



Source: NIDRR Demographics and Statistics RRTC at Cornell University's Employment and Disability Institute, calculations from 2003 ACS PUMS file performed by Robert Weathers, 2005.

Why is this important? (cont'd)

- Employers and societies need to maintain the health of their older populations for reasons of healthcare.
- Successful societies must maintain well-being for their populations (Costanza et al., 2014, *Nature*).

Why is this important? (cont'd)

- But empirical work on interventions to support health and well-being of older workers is scant, especially for people working beyond “traditional” retirement age.
- Opportunity to make psychology even more relevant to workers, organizations, and society.

What does this mean?

- Test workplace practices and interventions to support people working into and beyond standard retirement ages.
- Use psychological theories and mechanisms that explain the health and well-being outcomes of older workers specifically and
- Go beyond research on older workers' perceptions of their work environment.
- Work with other disciplines, e.g., medicine, economics.

The nature of the gap

The nature of the gap

1. HR functions and the aging workforce. (Truxillo, Cadiz, & Rineer, in press; *Oxford Research Reviews*).

- Research is on older workers' *perceptions* of HR practices (e.g., Hertel et al., 2013; Truxillo et al., 2012).
- Perceptions of HR practices and actual HR practices can be quite different (Liao et al., 2009)
- What people believe they need and what they *actually* need can be quite different (e.g., Training literature; Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Orvis et al. 2009).

The Nature of the Gap

2. “Total Worker Health”™ in the US.

- Goal of TWH™ is to examine integrated interventions (psychosocial, health promotion, etc.) to advance worker health, safety, security.
- Major goal of NIOSH.
- Older workers are a stated issue, but little specific intervention focus on them thus far, especially psychosocial interventions.

The Nature of the Gap

3. Review of the total worker health (TWH™) literature (Anger et al., under revision.)

- Identified 17 published TWH™ articles.
- Little specific focus on older workers or identified age differences.

The Nature of the Gap

4. Older workers can be a vulnerable population.
- Older workers have fewer but more severe accidents (Ng and Feldman 2013).
 - Don't have many sick absences, but have more health problems (Ng and Feldman 2013).
 - People may be working even when they have serious health problems.
 - Example: Health intervention project (NIOSH) of construction workers: Many signs of poor health.

(Hammer, Truxillo, & Bodner)



The Nature of the Gap

5. Review of the research on older worker interventions

(Truxillo, Cadiz, & Hammer, in process, *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*.)

- Psychology now has a lot of good theory about workplace aging.
- Strong empirical research on older workers' perceptions of their environment and important outcomes.
- *Almost nothing* focused on evaluating employer interventions or HR policies related to age.

We need specific advice for employer “best practices”.

What is the literature saying about
workplace age interventions?

What is the literature saying?

“Very few OH interventions have addressed the health and workability of older workers and there is considerable scope for developing OH provision, which accounts for the needs of the older workforce” (McDermott et al., 2010, *Occupational Medicine*).

“...there is little clarity in practice about what it [active aging] means for individuals and society beyond a crude economic reduction in terms of working longer” (Walker & Maltby, 2012, *International Journal of Social Welfare*).

What is the literature saying?

“The priority can no longer be more studies on risk groups and risk factors: rather, researchers in OHP should address the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions.” (Nielsen, Taris, & Cox, 2010, *Work and Stress*).

“...there are still a large number of research gaps [regarding interventions] including the lack of longitudinal research ... and stress and anxiety in older workers.” (Crawford et al., 2010, *Occupational Medicine*).

Aging Workforce Interventions

A very small example of what's out there in the literature (there isn't much.)

Hughes et al. (2011) *American J. of Public Health*

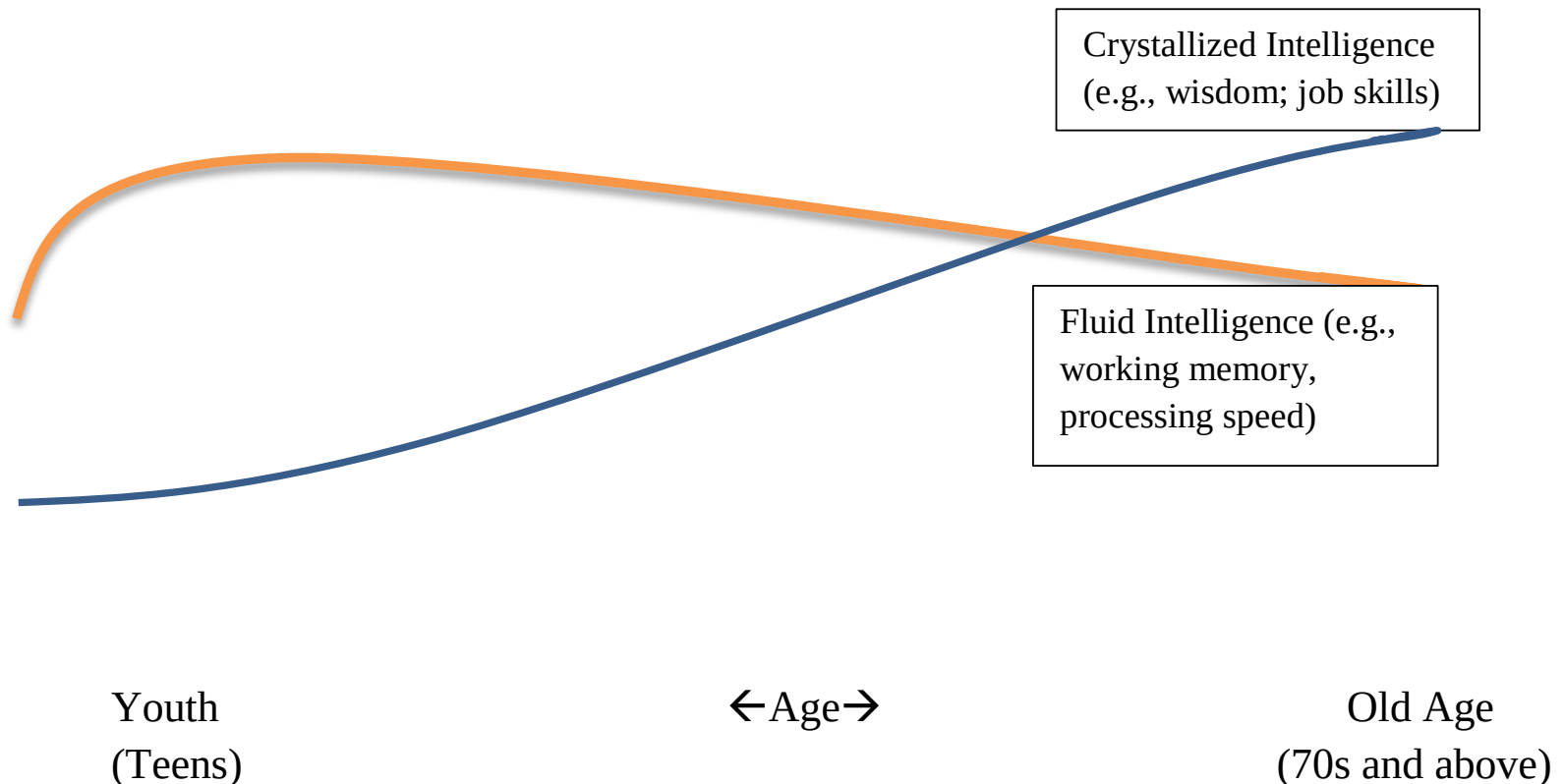
- RCT with 427 US hospital staff over 40 years old
- Baseline, 6 months, 12 months (fruit and veg. consumption, weight, exercise, stress)
- 3 conditions
 - *Web-based risk assessment with personal coaching.
 - Web based risk assessment with training modules.
 - Control group: Printed materials.
- Conclusion: Great design & measures. No psychological theory.
 - For example, Carstensen et al., 2006 on initiation of change in older persons.

Strijk et al. (2013) *Scandinavian J. of Work and Env. Health*

- RCT with 730 Dutch hospital staff over 45 years old
- Baseline, 6 months, 12 months (vitality, work engagement, productivity, sick leave)
- 2 conditions
 - Weekly yoga, workout, aerobic exercise, lifestyle coaching for goal setting, feedback, and problem solving strategies.
 - Control – none of the above.
- Results: No intervention effects except for people who actually complied with the yoga and workout.
- Conclusion: Great design & measures.
 - No theory regarding behavior.
 - No consideration of the social context.

Psychology's Strength as a Field with Regard to Age: Strong Theory and Empirical Findings about Aging

Chronological Age: Cognitive Changes



Age and Personality

(Roberts et al., 2006;

Soto & John, 2012; Soto et al., 2011)

- Increases in:
 - Conscientiousness
 - Self-Discipline
 - Agreeableness
- Decreases in:
 - Neuroticism
- Improved emotional problem-solving
(Blanchard-Fields and colleagues)

Lifespan Development Theories

- Selection, Optimization, and Compensation Theory (SOC) (Baltes & Baltes, 1991)
 - *Select*: What goals/outcomes to pursue
 - *Optimize* efforts and resources
 - *Compensate* to offset age-related declines

Example: Older worker selects to focus on job tasks that capitalize their increased crystallized intelligence and compensate for changes in abilities.



Lifespan Development Theories (continued)

- Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST) (Carstensen, 1999)
 - Time remaining
 - Younger workers: Knowledge acquisition goals
 - Older workers: Emotion-related goals

Example: Younger worker chooses to increase core job-related skills; older worker selects to focus on the interpersonal aspects of work (e.g., OCBs)

- Support (e.g., Hertel & colleagues, 2013; Kooij et al., 2010; Zacher & Frese, 2011; Zaniboni, Truxillo, & Fraccaroli, in press)

Age and Motivation

- Kanfer & Ackerman (2004) Model
 - Changes in motivation as people gain and lose abilities, skills, and knowledge
 - Generativity motives in middle age
- Increased intrinsic motives, decreased extrinsic motives (Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dijkers, 2011)
- Generational differences? Baby boomers/intrinsic values; millennials/extrinsic (e.g., Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010)

Age Stereotyping and Related Issues

- How older and younger people are viewed by others.
Negative stereotypes of older workers may be changing. (Bal et al., 2011; Finkelstein et al., 1995; Posthuma & Campion, 2010)
- Subjective aging:
How they view themselves
- Meta-stereotyping: How they think others see them
(Finkelstein & colleagues)
- Age climate (e.g., Kunze, Boehm, and Bruch, 2011, Boehm et al., 2014)



Age and Work Attitudes and Performance

- Age is associated with improvements in nearly all job attitudes (Ng & Feldman, 2010).
- Very few changes in performance; a slight improvement in OCBs and safety performance (Ng & Feldman, 2008).
- Most negative stereotypes of workers are not true, except decreased interest in training (Ng & Feldman, 2012).

Other useful theoretical approaches and mechanisms for interventions

- Leadership and age: LMX (e.g., Hannes Zacher & colleagues)
- Job design & age (e.g., Truxillo, Cadiz, Rineer, Zaniboni, & Fraccaroli, 2012).
- Work-life balance (e.g., Hammer & colleagues)
- JD-R model (e.g., Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Age losses as demands; job characteristics/environment as a resource.

SWOT Analysis for Psychology and Age Interventions

Strengths, Weaknesses,
Opportunities, and Threats

SWOT Analysis for Age Interventions in Using Psychological Theory

Strengths:

- Strong theories of work, and strong theories of older workers (e.g., SOC, SST).
- Strong basis of empirical research.
- Excellence in methodology, measurement, experimental design.

SWOT Analysis for Age Interventions and Psychology

Weaknesses:

- Most work is focused on perceptions, not objective measures of the work environment (e.g., job design literature).
- We tend to collect data showing relations among perceptions and attitudes rather than objective workplace characteristics and hard health outcomes.

SWOT Analysis for Age Interventions in Work Psychology

Opportunities:

- Work with non-psychologists, e.g., physicians, occupational health specialists, human factors, safety experts.
- Greater focus on interventions from journals and funding agencies.
- Greater focus on older workers in journals and funding agencies.

SWOT Analysis for Age Interventions in Work Psychology

Opportunities:

- A focus on “scalable” interventions that can be easily disseminated. Examples:
 - Interventions for mobile devices, etc.
 - “Wise” interventions: Precise, easily implemented theory-based interventions that affect psychological processes (Walton, 2014; *Current Directions in Psychological Science*).

SWOT Analysis for Age Interventions in Work Psychology

Threats:

- Difficulty getting access to organizations for this type of research.
- Many of our best social science interventions are not easily scalable.

Suggestions Moving Forward

- Interdisciplinary research:
 - We need each other.
- Consider within-person analyses to examine intervention effects over time.
- Think “research to practice”.

Suggestions Moving Forward

- Re-think technology to support older workers.
- Look to what we already know in creating interventions (e.g., Iweins et al., 2013 and “intergenerational contact”)
- Focus on the mediating and explanatory mechanisms.
 - We need to know *how* and *why* interventions worked (Nielsen et al., 2010).

Suggestions Moving Forward

- Manage, measure, and describe contextual factors, e.g., supervisor support, participant “readiness”, communication with participants.
- To support dissemination of results:
 - Carefully describe intervention procedures.
 - Develop robust fidelity tools.
- Let’s not forget younger workers.

Conclusions

- There's a gap in terms of interventions for older workers.
- We can fill the gap: We have the theory, empirical research, and skills.
- We must work with other disciplines – just do it.
- A big opportunity for work psychology
 - Relevance to society
 - Relevance to the quality of life for older workers
 - Visibility of our own profession

A quick announcement...

New Journal on Age Research

- *Work, Aging and Retirement* (Oxford)
- Editor: Mo Wang, National Science Foundation
- Associate editors:
 - Kene Henkens, University of Amsterdam
 - Junqi Shi, Peking University
 - Donald Truxillo, Portland State University
- Submission portal just opened March 17:
<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/workar>

Thank you!

Questions?