

Keeping older workers committed and employed by means of in/formal HRD initiatives

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Relevance of the study

- ▶ Importance of flexible, competent workforce
- ▶ Population ageing - impact on labour market
- ▶ Importance of retaining older employees
- ▶ Organizational commitment plays important role
- ▶ HRD-practices may increase commitment

HRD and Commitment

▶ HRD

- Generally defined as set of formal practices
- Shift from formalized to more informal learning

▶ Commitment

- Characterizes employee's relationship with an organization
- Includes three facets: affective, continuous and normative commitment
- All three: negatively related with intention to leave

▶ Mixed support for positive relationship between HRD and commitment (depends on in/formal level of HRD)

Formality level of HRD

- ▶ Various categories of learning and development
- ▶ Lack of agreement about in- / non- / formal HRD
- ▶ Four aspects of in/formal attributes (Colley et al., 2003)
 - location/setting – process – purposes – content
- ▶ Continuum of formal / informal learning aspects
- ▶ HRD initiatives are in/formal to a more or lesser degree
 - High level of formality - averagely formal HRD intervention
 - Low level of formality - averagely informal HRD intervention

Older workers

- ▶ HRD investments focus on younger employees
- ▶ Less support and encouragement for older workers to engage in learning and development
- ▶ Negative stereotyping – more employability problems
- ▶ Empirical evidence on older workers:
 - More (normative and continuous) organizational commitment
 - More informal learning preferences of older workers

Hypotheses

- ▶ **H1:** HRD intervention's level of formality negatively correlates with employee's organizational commitment
 - The higher the formality level the lower the organizational commitment

- ▶ **H2:** This negative correlation is stronger for older workers than for their younger colleagues

Research design

5-point scale

1 = informal / 5 = formal

Aspects:

(Based on Colley et al., 2003)

Process
Location/setting
Purposes
Content

**Level of formality
of learning activities**

Seven activities

(Based on Wognum & Bartlett, 2002)

External training course
Training-on-the-job
Mentor or coach
New task, job, or project
Feedback from supervisor or colleague
Self-study / reading professional literature
Networking / Contact with externals

Age

Three groups

< 35 years
35-55 years
>55 years

H2: +

H1: -

Organizational commitment

Three components

Affective commitment
Continuous commitment
Normative commitment
(De Gilder et al., 1997)

Method

- ▶ Selecting all 165 employees of a medium sized company
- ▶ Data gathering by paper (60) and online (105) questionnaire
- ▶ Data analysis
 - Descriptive analysis
 - Cronbach's alpha
 - Correlation / bivariate correlation analysis
 - Hierarchical regression analysis

Results: response and respondents

▶ Response

- Overall: 48% (n=79)
 - Written questionnaires (17%)
 - Online questionnaires (66%)

▶ Respondents

- Mean age: 43.8 years
- 4 female, 75 male
- 87% has a permanent contract
- 95% works more than 30 hours a week
- Over 50% is employed in this organization for more than 5 years

Results: HRD activities

Learning event	%	Mean level of formality (1 = informal, 5 = formal)
External training course	55	3.68
Training-on-the-job	27	3.10
Mentor or coach	8	2.66
New task, job, or project	37	1.78
Feedback supervisor/colleague	52	1.95
Self-education/professional literature	55	1.99
Networking/contacting externals	35	1.67

- ▶ Attended number of learning activities: $M = 2.68$
- ▶ Overall level of formality: $M = 2.43$ ($SD = .64$)

Results: HRD activities and age

Learning event	% < 35 years	% 35-55 years	% > 55 years
External training course	76.2	41.7	54.5
Training-on-the-job	52.4*	16.7	18.2
Mentor or coach	23.8*	2.8	4.5
New task, job, or project	47.6	38.9	22.7
Feedback supervisor/colleague	71.4	47.2	40.9
Self-education/professional literature	61.9	52.8	50.0
Networking/contact with externals	33.3	38.9	31.8
<i>Mean amount of learning activities</i>	<i>3.67*</i>	<i>2.39</i>	<i>2.23</i>

- ▶ The amount of learning activities decreases when age gets higher!
- ▶ The three most popular learning activities are similar for all groups.

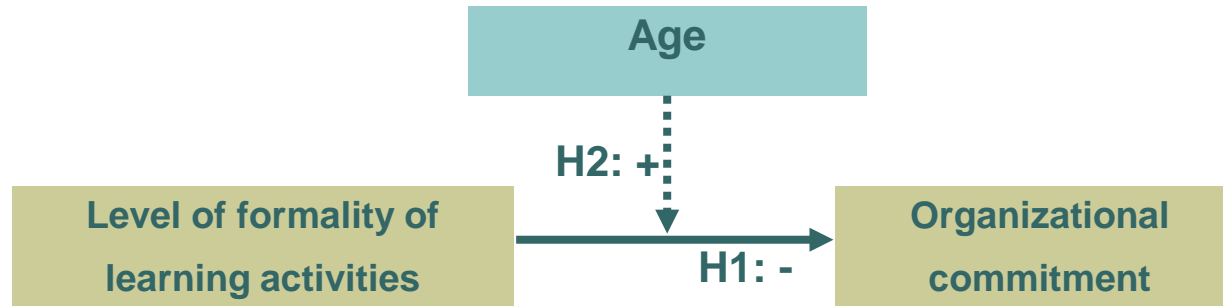
Results: commitment

Component	Mean level of commitment (1 = low, 5 = high)
Affective commitment	3.57*
Continuous commitment	2.69*
Normative commitment	3.01
<i>Total commitment</i>	<i>3.09</i>

- ▶ Significant difference between age groups for continuous commitment

	< 35 years	35-55 years	> 55 years
Continuance commitment	2.12*	2.88	2.93

Results: hypotheses



- ▶ Hypothesis 1: no support was found
- ▶ The study indicates a positive relationship between the level of formality of learning activities and organizational commitment.
- ▶ Hypothesis 2: no support was found
- ▶ Age does moderate the positive relationship between formality of the learning activity 'New task, function of project' and continuance commitment.

Conclusions

- ▶ Interesting results were found although no support for hypotheses
- ▶ Medium sized company indeed tends to favour informal learning
- ▶ Longer tenure and higher age goes with decrease in different types of learning and development
- ▶ Learning events 'feedback', 'mentor or coach', 'training-on-the-job' in particular decrease as the period of employment increases
- ▶ Older workers are more organizational committed, which specifically holds for continuous commitment
- ▶ Workers who formally learn through a new task, job, or project become more continuous committed, which even more holds for employees aged above 55
- ▶ Results add new insights to the public debate in which 'older workers' knowledge development has often been narrowed to formal training courses

Further research

Further research should include:

- ▶ SMEs and larger companies from varying sectors of industry
- ▶ Personal and situational characteristics enhancing older workers' development and commitment, such as conscientiousness, development potential, self-efficacy, prior education, and function level
- ▶ Various types of organizational support enhancing older workers' development and commitment, such as support from co-workers and supervisors, availability of development and learning resources and policies
- ▶ The newly developed formality scale and its components
- ▶ Employees' relative age next to employee's chronological age