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A conceptual cross-disciplinary model of organizational practices for older workers: multilevel antecedents and outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Due to population aging and its implications for organizations and societies, organizational practices for older workers (OPOWs) play a relevant role in multiple research disciplines. So far, most reviews on this topic operationalize organizational practices as antecedents of older workers' outcomes. We extend this perspective by illustrating multilevel antecedents and outcomes of OPOWs. In doing so, we demonstrate how these organizational practices directly and indirectly affect older workers, organizations, and society and how, in turn, older workers, organizations and society impact OPOWs. Drawing on a literature review, we discuss key theories and present current empirical findings from multiple research disciplines to propose an integrated cross-disciplinary model with the potential to guide future research and practice.

KEYWORDS

Cross-disciplinary; human resource management; multilevel model; older workers; organizational practices

Introduction

Workforces are aging in most developed countries (Zacher et al., 2018), affecting older workers (micro level), organizations (meso level) and societies (macro level) alike. While there are severe consequences of aging workforces, such as labor force shortages or higher costs for pension programs, prolonged working lives could counter such challenges (Morrow-Howell et al., 2018; Staudinger et al., 2016). Consequently, scientists and practitioners have become increasingly interested in promoting later-life work.

Prior research has shown that organizational practices, such as human resource (HR) practices, are related to older workers' ability, motivation

and opportunity to continue working later in life (e.g. Pak et al., 2019). This effect on the individual level could also interact with the consequences of aging workforces on organizational and societal levels. Likewise, factors on all three levels could potentially act as antecedents of organizational practices for older workers (OPOWs; Boehm et al., 2021). Due to the increasing relevance of the topic, the research field has been rapidly evolving. Several prior frameworks have applied a multilevel perspective to classify antecedents and outcomes of individual-level variables such as retirement timing (e.g. Fisher et al., 2016). Additionally, we are aware of two other recent publications in which the authors developed a multilevel framework that focuses on OPOWs. Henkens (2022) focused on the role of organizational practices for older workers' health and performance while also considering societal-level antecedents. Boehm et al. (2021) broadly identify multilevel antecedents and outcomes of age-related HR practices. Both publications highlight the necessity to take a closer look at the antecedents and outcomes of OPOWs. We want to expand these findings by focusing on the underlying mechanisms behind the multilevel antecedents and outcomes. The pathways through which organizational practices affect and are affected by older workers, organizations, and societies are not always apparent. A cross-disciplinary review of the theoretical approaches related to research on OPOWs is needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of these multilevel pathways, particularly those that have not been covered in empirical research yet, and lay the foundation for future theoretical and empirical advancements.

Thus, we aim to develop a cross-disciplinary conceptual model of OPOWs and their multilayered antecedents and outcomes. We take a closer look at two complementary pathways: First, we outline how OPOWs affect older workers, organizations and societies (Figure 1). Second, we demonstrate how societies, organizations and older workers influence the availability of OPOWs (Figure 2). Based on a literature review, we identify, summarize, and integrate theoretical approaches from multiple research disciplines and underline the findings with current empirical developments, thereby creating a holistic overview of the research landscape. By providing a framework and highlighting yet under researched areas, we aim to support researchers in developing new research questions and identifying fitting theoretical approaches for more multilevel, cross-disciplinary research on OPOWs and aging workforces.

Procedure

As a first step, we identified different research fields relevant to research on OPOWs and aging workforces to set the scope for our review. Disciplines were chosen based on the authors' knowledge and a review

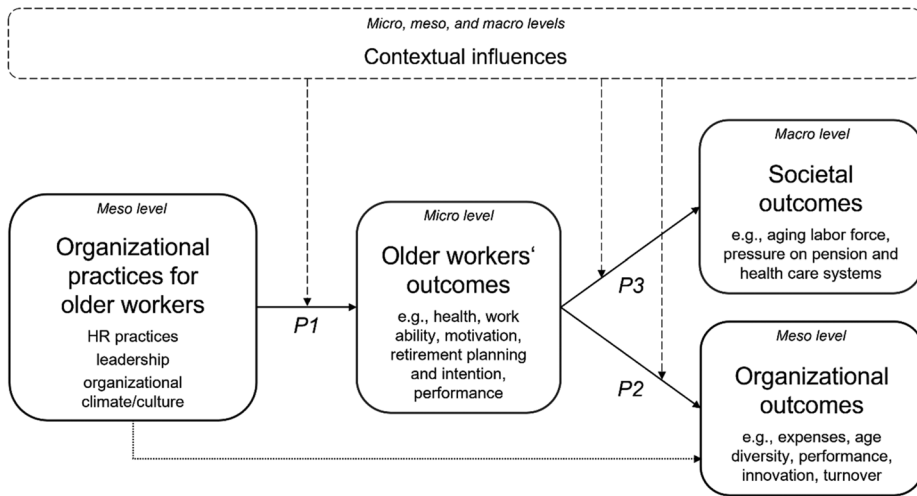


Figure 1. Organizational practices for older workers and their outcomes on micro, meso and macro levels. Note. P = proposition.

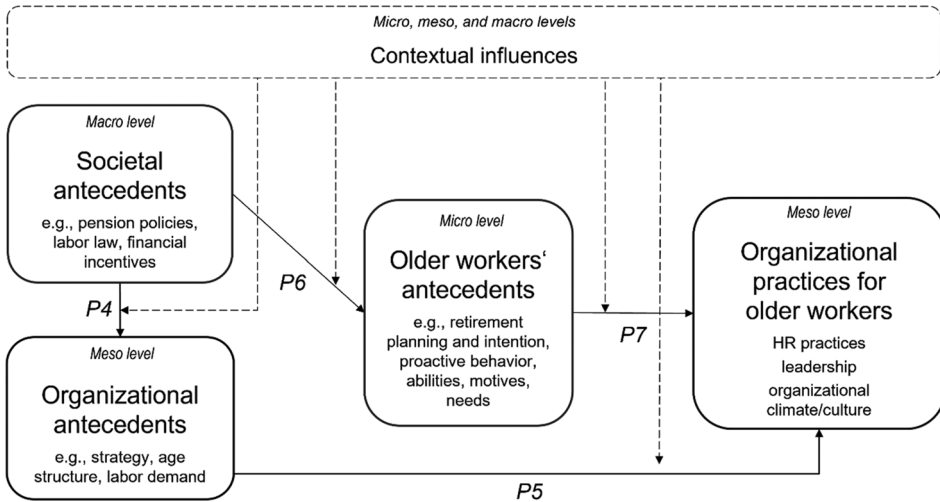


Figure 2. Organizational practices for older workers and their antecedents on micro, meso and macro levels. Note. P = proposition.

of the literature already on hand, including several cross-disciplinary publications (e.g. Beehr & Bennett, 2015). The resulting disciplines were gerontology, psychology, organizational psychology, management, economics, political science, and sociology.

Research has shown that experts can help identify literature not identified with database searches alone (Papaioannou et al., 2010). Thus, as a second step, we conducted eleven expert interviews with scientists to understand better the discipline-specific approaches to research on work and aging and receive recommendations for the literature search (e.g. database choice). Furthermore, they served as subject matter experts

who provided us directly with relevant theories (see [Appendix A](#) for a detailed description of the expert interviews).

In a third step, we conducted a multi-channel literature search. First, we searched the multidisciplinary database *Web of Science*. Next, we conducted a journal search (Daniels, 2019) with twelve key journals repeatedly named in the expert interviews representing the research disciplines. Furthermore, we manually scanned the publication lists of more than 50 authors mentioned in our expert interviews, including the interviewed experts. Lastly, we screened specific publications mentioned by the experts (see [Appendix A](#) for a detailed description of the literature search procedure). The literature search was carried out in May 2022.

Due to the expected multitude of publications, we set several inclusion and exclusion criteria. We only searched for literature published since the year 2000. Publications were included when they targeted older workers and focused on at least one relationship between our model's main elements (i.e. OPOWs, older workers, organizations, and society). Since the literature review's primary purpose is to identify relevant theories and the overview of empirical research serves as supporting evidence for these theoretical approaches, we included theoretical work, reviews, and meta-analyses published as papers, book chapters, and books written in English language. We excluded other grey literature, non-published manuscripts, and primary empirical studies whose focus was not to develop a new theoretical or conceptual model. We further excluded publications that focused on illnesses, disabilities, generations, self-employment, unemployment, a specific subgroup of older workers (e.g. older migrants), or the evaluation of a particular country's governmental policies. [Figure 3](#) shows the complete selection process. In two cases, additional publications were identified through reference lists of included publications. Ultimately, we identified 219 publications that meet our inclusion criteria (see [Appendix B](#) for a complete list).

We use a narrative synthesis to detect and categorize theoretical approaches mentioned in the literature. An overview of the findings is displayed in [Table 1](#). The approaches are summarized and integrated based on the relationships they cover. Drawing on these findings, we develop the propositions for our conceptual model to incorporate all relevant relationships covered in research on the antecedents and outcomes of OPOWs to date. We further use these findings to detect research gaps regarding additional hypothesized propositions. We also apply a narrative synthesis to the empirical findings. If we could not identify any meta-analyses or reviews for a theoretically proposed relationship, we conducted a manual search for primary empirical studies to assess whether the relationship had been analyzed empirically. If that is the case, we report the primary empirical studies.

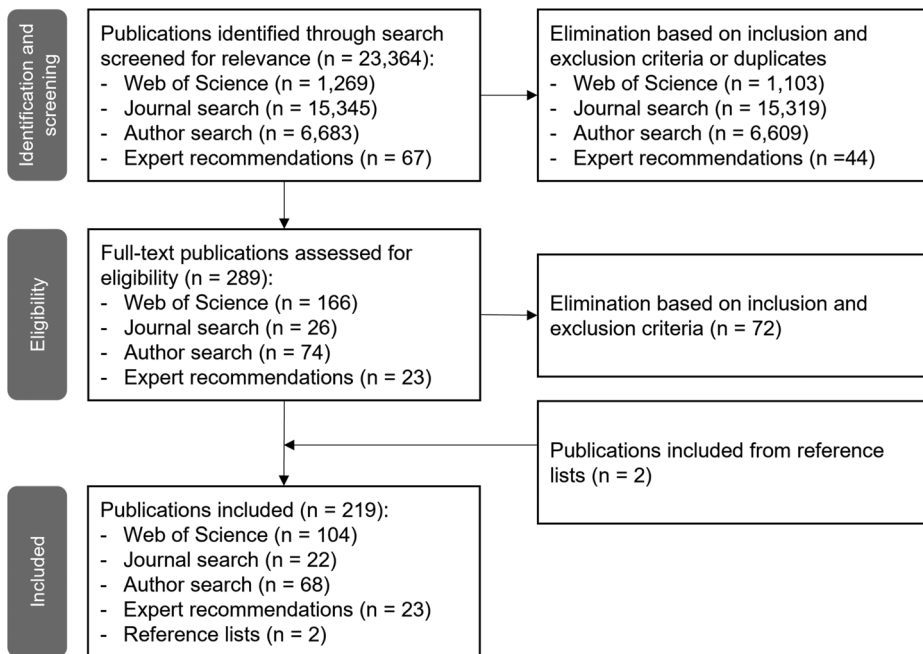


Figure 3. Flow diagram of the literature selection procedure.

Conceptualization of organizational practices for older workers

Boehm and Dwertmann (2015) and Wilckens et al. (2021) broadly categorize OPOWs into bundles of HR practices, leadership styles, and organizational climate/culture. We follow this broad categorization for our conceptual model and further acknowledge that there are different types of OPOWs within these bundles. In line with Boehm et al. (2021), these OPOWs can be either age-neutral or age-related. Age-neutral OPOWs are ‘designed and implemented without referring to age’ (Boehm et al., 2021, p. 260). On the contrary, age-related OPOWs could either be age-specific (i.e. practices designed for the needs of older workers), age-inclusive (i.e. practices equally designed for the needs of workers of all ages) or referring to age diversity (i.e. practices designed to foster good intergenerational collaboration). In addition to these three OPOWs bundles, variables like job demands, job resources, and factors related to age stereotypes and discrimination are commonly covered in research on work and aging (e.g. Carlstedt et al., 2018; Chen & Gardiner, 2019). For our model, we do not explicitly categorize these work-related variables as separate practices since they are inevitably related to OPOWs, for instance, through flexible working arrangements, supervisor support, or age diversity climate (Pak et al., 2019).

Table 1. Overview of theoretical approaches used in the reviewed literature.

Proposition	Relevant theories (in alphabetical order)
<i>P1: Organizational Practices for Older Workers Affect Older Workers' Outcomes</i>	
HR management theories	Ability, motivation and opportunity framework (Kooij & van de Voorde, 2015), job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), job-demands control model (Karasek, 1979), job-demands resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001), leader-member exchange, organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), person-environment fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1989), signaling theory (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and work design model (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006)
Life-course and lifespan theories	Action regulation across the lifespan (Zacher et al., 2016), assimilative and accommodative coping (Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990), life course perspective (Elder, 1994), lifespan theory of control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995), motivational theory of lifespan development (Heckhausen et al., 2010), socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999), and SOC theory (Baltes et al., 1999)
Motivational theories	Career self-management model (Lent & Brown, 2013), expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), self-regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998), social cognitive career theory (Lent & Brown, 2013), and theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991)
Role theories	Continuity theory (Atchley, 1999), image theory (Beach & Mitchell, 1987), and role theory (Ashforth, 2001)
Social theories	Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and stereotype embodiment theory (Levy, 2009)
Vocational theories	Boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), career stage model (Super, 1953), and protean careers (Hall, 1986)
Rational-economic theories	Prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) and rational choice theory (Hatcher, 2003)
<i>P2: Older Workers Affect Organizational Outcomes</i>	
	Human capital theory, information/decision-making perspective (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007), intergroup contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), life-course and lifespan theories (see P1), self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), social capital theory, and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)
<i>P3: Older Workers Affect Societal Outcomes</i>	
	Active aging (Walker, 2002), activity theory, disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961), and labor demands and labor supply models
<i>P4: Societal Factors are Antecedents of Organizational Factors</i>	
	Convergence theory, institutional theory, opposing forces hypothesis (Henkens, 2022), and situational strength hypothesis (Cooper & Withey, 2009)
<i>P5: Organizational Factors are Antecedents of Organizational Practices for Older Workers</i>	
	Strategic management approaches (e.g., Kadefors et al., 2020; Lössbroek et al., 2019; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013)
<i>P6: Societal Factors are Antecedents of Older Workers' Attitudes, Behavior, Well-Being and Health</i>	
	Active aging (Walker, 2002), agency vs. structure, lifespan theories (see P1), law-related theories (e.g. Doron, 2009), rational choice theory (Hatcher, 2003), social normative theories (Feldman & Beehr, 2011), and transitional labor market theory (Schmid, 2002)
<i>P7: Older Workers' Attitudes, Behavior, Well-Being, and Health are Antecedents of Organizational Practices for Older Workers</i>	
	Job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and lifespan theories (see P1)

Organizational practices for older workers and outcomes on micro, meso, and macro levels

In the following section, we present our literature review results regarding the outcomes of OPOWs structured along our model displayed in

Figure 1. Based on the identified theoretical approaches, we propose that OPOWs directly affect older workers' outcomes (Proposition 1), which in turn directly affect organizational outcomes (Proposition 2) and societal outcomes (Proposition 3). Accordingly, we assume that OPOWs indirectly affect organizational outcomes and societal outcomes through their direct effect on older workers' outcomes. Our model further acknowledges that contextual factors could moderate the proposed relationships. These influences could stem from the individual (e.g. demographic characteristics), organizational (e.g. organizational characteristics), or societal (e.g. national context) levels. Moreover, OPOWs and their outcomes could act as moderators on higher- or lower-level relationships. We first summarize relevant theories supporting each proposed relationship. Then we underline these theoretical approaches with a short overview of current empirical research findings. Lastly, we point out possible moderating effects. Due to the high number of publications included in our review, we will only provide representative citations following the example of Wang and Shultz (2010).

Organizational practices for older workers and older workers' outcomes

Theoretical approaches

There is an immense diversity of theoretical approaches that propose and explain the effect of OPOWs on older workers. Although some theories have been used more often than others, research has not been dominated by one theoretical approach since each approach has its value. We aim to provide an overview, highlighting the most commonly used perspectives. An overview of the individual theories identified in the review is provided in Table 1.

The first theoretical perspective stems from the management and organizational psychology literature. *HR management theories* focus on the direct impact of OPOWs. Here, traditional work design theories like the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) argue that different types of job and work design characteristics (e.g. job demands and resources) affect older workers' outcomes, for example through the mediating effect of psychological states like perceived meaningfulness of work (for an overview, see Cadiz et al., 2019). Person-environment fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) goes one step further and emphasizes the need for a fit between the characteristics of older workers (e.g. abilities, needs, and values) and the work environment (i.e. job, team, supervisor, and organization characteristics) to foster older workers' health, motivation, performance, and withdrawal intention. Due to changing work environments and individuals, the level of fit can shift over time (Feldman & Beehr, 2011). OPOWs can be utilized to stabilize, restore, or improve the fit by changing the work environment

or individual characteristics (de Lange et al., 2015). Another set of HR management theories focuses on exchanges between organizations and older workers (e.g. social exchange theory; Blau, 1964). According to these approaches, OPOWs operate as sources of support and an expression of appreciation, which older workers will reciprocate through positive work attitudes and behaviors (de Lange et al., 2015).

The second theoretical perspective encompasses some of the most commonly used theoretical approaches to work and aging: *life course and lifespan theories*. The life course perspective (Elder, 1994) argues for the role of agency but also highlights that an individual's historical, social, and structural context affects life events and role transitions within life course trajectories (Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). Considering that the work sphere constitutes an integral part of this context (Fisher et al., 2016), OPOWs could be used to positively influence the experience of the work sphere and, thus, shape retirement decisions. Contrary to this perspective, lifespan theories view human development as a continuous process (Rudolph, 2016). They explain how individuals actively influence and are influenced by their environment and how they pursue and adjust their goals with changing circumstances. While the life course perspective emerged from sociology and has mainly been applied to retirement transitions, the lifespan approach is rooted in psychology (Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021) and has been applied to various research topics in the area of work and aging. The lifespan theory of control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995) and the subsequently developed motivational theory of lifespan development (Heckhausen et al., 2010), for example, argue that older workers use primary control strategies by taking action to change their environment according to their needs (e.g. using technical aids to complete a task). If these strategies do not work, they apply secondary control strategies as a substitute where older workers make changes within themselves (e.g. making goal adjustments) to adjust to the environment and regain primary control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995; Kooij & Kanfer, 2019). Since the use of primary control strategies declines in older age (Rudolph, 2016), older workers are forced to make internal self-regulatory changes. OPOWs could facilitate this process (e.g. by fostering selection, optimization, and compensation [SOC] strategies; Taneva & Arnold, 2018). In general, age-related changes in abilities, motives and needs predicted by lifespan theories have implications for older workers' attitudes towards and need for OPOWs. This can explain why some OPOWs are more relevant for older workers' outcomes than other OPOWs (de Lange et al., 2015). For example, maintenance practices like regular medical check-ups might gain relevance for older workers by helping them to maintain their levels of functioning despite potential changes and challenges in health (Pak et al., 2019).

Age-neutral *motivational theories* not stemming from the HR literature have also been applied to the relationship between OPOWs and older workers, particularly regarding retirement decisions. Most of these theories share that outcome expectations influence older workers' motivation, intentions, and behavior. For instance, the self-regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998) has similarities to lifespan theories since it tries to explain individual behavior targeted toward goal attainment under internal and external changes using promotion and prevention orientations. This theory suggests that low availability of OPOWs could lead to earlier retirement for older workers with a prevention focus since they try to avoid negative work environments (Feldman & Beehr, 2011). Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) focuses on psychological needs. According to this theory, older workers have higher motivation and well-being when organizations implement OPOWs that correspond to older workers' needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence.

Role theory (Ashforth, 2001) and image theory (Beach & Mitchell, 1987) focus on social roles and self-perceptions to explain retirement decisions. Individuals decide to retire if retirement better fits their role and self-image than continued work (Wang & Wanberg, 2017). While such *role theories* have primarily been used to study retirement adjustment, they could also be applied to research on OPOWs. Older workers might prefer to continue working in later life if their current attitudes and goals fit better with their work role than their non-work role (Fisher et al., 2016). Considering the person-environment fit theory, OPOWs could play a crucial part in this assessment by improving the fit with the work role.

A large stream of research on *social theories* aims to explain the emergence and impact of social work-related factors like ageism on older workers' outcomes. One common definition distinguishes ageism into prejudices (affective component), age discrimination (behavioral component), and age stereotyping (cognitive component; Stypińska & Nikander, 2018). According to theories like social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), individuals tend to categorize themselves and others into in- and out-groups based on observable traits such as age. They tend to favor in-group members and discriminate against out-group members (Parker & Andrei, 2020). Consequently, ageism at work could result from younger workers feeling negative toward the older workers' out-group (de Paula Couto & Rothermund, 2019). In line with stereotype embodiment theory (Levy, 2009), older workers might internalize negative age stereotypes leading to undesirable work outcomes. This implies that age-inclusive and age-diversity OPOWs, which help foster intergenerational collaboration (Boehm & Kunze, 2015), could decrease the potential for age discrimination and its negative consequences for older workers.

Research on the relationship between OPOWs and older workers' outcomes has also applied *vocational theories*. We present two competing theoretical approaches here (for a comprehensive overview, see Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). The traditional career stage model (Super, 1953) divides one's career into different stages that emerge successively throughout life. According to this, older workers enter the decline stage at age 65, where transitions from work to retirement occur (Wang & Wanberg, 2017). This perspective has been replaced by newer vocational theories like the protean career model (Hall, 1986) that emphasize flexible career progressions and opportunities for prolonged working lives through the workers' active role in shaping their careers (Wang & Wanberg, 2017). These theories suggest that OPOWs providing autonomy, resources, and flexibility become increasingly important with age (Hall, 1986).

Finally, *rational-economic theories* highlight the economic perspective on retirement-decision making. In its simplest form, these theories propose that older workers evaluate their financial resources and compare them to those needed in retirement – independent of other social or psychological considerations. They would decide to retire if they accumulated enough wealth (Feldman & Beehr, 2011). In line with this, OPOWs that open up opportunities to earn and save money in later life can affect retirement decision-making, particularly among older workers that feel like they have not gathered enough financial resources for retirement (Feldman & Beehr, 2011).

Overall, research has built a deep theoretical foundation to explain the effect of OPOWs on older workers' outcomes through various mechanisms. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 1: Organizational Practices for Older Workers Affect Older Workers' Outcomes

Empirical findings

Although there have been calls for more empirical research regarding the relationship between OPOWs and older workers' outcomes (e.g. de Lange et al., 2015), recent reviews demonstrate that – analogously to the theoretical research – empirical research on this topic has advanced quite far. We present empirical findings along the three OPOWs bundles defined above (i.e. HR practices, leadership, and organizational climate/culture).

HR practices. Within this bundle of OPOWs, there are diverse individual domains of HR practices spanning the entire employee life cycle (for an overview, see Boehm et al., 2021). Empirical research on the effect of these HR practices on older workers' outcomes has grown tremendously within the last decade, although the degree of advancement differs for the individual

domains. While many studies have covered research on work design, occupational health and training and development practices for older workers, comparably less research has covered practices related to the transition to retirement and flexible employment options in later life.

In general, existing research has shown that in line with the theoretical approaches presented, the effect of HR practices on older workers' outcomes is not uniform. Instead, the effect's strength and sign depend on the type of HR practice and outcome studied. A recent systematic review (Pak et al., 2019) of 110 empirical studies examined the impact of HR practices on older workers' work ability, employability, and motivation to continue working. The authors found that development practices (e.g. training) positively affected employability and the motivation to continue working. Although both maintenance (e.g. ergonomic workplaces) and accommodative (e.g. phased retirement) practices positively impacted work ability, there was no relationship between utilization practices (e.g. task enrichment) and the outcomes of interest (Pak et al., 2019). Additionally, some recent research indicates that the use of maintenance practices might also be related to adverse employee outcomes since older employees with lower resources are more likely to utilize them (Pak et al., 2021). Pak et al. (2019) further found that while job resources positively impacted the outcomes, high physical job demands negatively affected the work ability and motivation to continue working. Still, even this extensive review does not allow conclusions regarding the relative impact of each HR practice since the included studies only covered some of the practices, and there were too few studies including maintenance, accommodative and utilization practices in general (Pak et al., 2019). Thus, currently, we cannot make statements regarding which HR practice is most influential for older workers' outcomes.

Research has shown, however, that in line with lifespan theories the relevance of different domains of HR practices can vary with age. While the impact of development and utilization practices on workers' attitudes is relatively stable across the lifespan, the relevance of maintenance practices seems to increase with age. Accommodative practices also seem to gain relevance for specific subgroups of older workers (de Lange et al., 2015). The finding that development practices are positively related to older workers' motivation to continue working in later life somewhat challenges earlier expectations made based on socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999) that suggest that these practices would be more relevant for younger workers and their career-related motives. One explanation could be that, in line with signaling theory (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000), older workers value the signals sent by the organization by providing them with training and development opportunities (Boehm et al., 2021).

Leadership. Reviews show that a substantial amount of empirical research has considered the role of leadership for older workers' outcomes. In particular, supportive and appreciative leadership styles have shown to be beneficial (e.g. Chen & Gardiner, 2019; van den Berg et al., 2010). Respectful leadership is also positively related to older workers' desired retirement age (Wöhrmann et al., 2017). Still, empirical research that compares different leadership styles and their role for older workers, in particular, is scattered (Boehm & Dwertmann, 2015).

Organizational climate/culture. Empirical research on organizational climates and cultures targeted toward older workers has only begun to emerge within the last decade. Kunze and Toader (2019) reviewed seven studies investigating age-related organizational climates, such as age diversity climate or climate for successful aging. They showed that these climates positively impact older workers' affective commitment, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and motivation to continue working. While research on age-related organizational climates and cultures is still at an early stage, research on related factors like age stereotypes and age discrimination has been conducted quite thoroughly in the past. Meta-analytic results show that both negative and positive age stereotypes are prevalent (Bal et al., 2011). However, most of these stereotypes have proven invalid (Ng & Feldman, 2012). Empirical research indicates that – as suggested by social theories – age stereotyping and age discrimination are negatively related to older workers' work engagement, well-being, health, development, and performance and positively related to their turnover and retirement intentions (de Paula Couto & Rothermund, 2019; Weber et al., 2019).

Summary

Our review identified diverse theoretical approaches that propose an effect of OPOWs on older workers' outcomes. Interestingly, almost all research disciplines are involved in this research. The review also identified diverse empirical work on the relationship between OPOWs and older workers' outcomes, although areas for advancement within the bundles still exist (e.g. HR practices regarding continued employment options or age-related organizational climate/culture). However, many of the studies examine the relationship using cross-sectional research designs. Even in the area of health management, where intervention studies are quite common, meta-analytic results show that the number of intervention studies focusing on older workers is relatively low (Oakman et al., 2018). Thus, although theoretical research proposes causal relationships, there is still a need to empirically test these propositions using research designs that permit causal conclusions. Another aspect worth mentioning is the lack of research considering all three OPOWs bundles simultaneously. While

some reviews incorporate all bundles (e.g. Boehm & Dwertmann, 2015; Edge et al., 2017), meta-analyses or single empirical studies that consider aspects of HR practices, leadership, and organizational climate/culture in relation to older workers' outcomes are sparse. Such future studies are essential to compare the relative impact of the different OPOWs and draw implications for practice.

Older workers and organizational outcomes

Theoretical approaches

As demonstrated, life course and lifespan theories can be applied to explain changes in workers' abilities, motives, and individual work outcomes in later life. Logically driven, it could be argued that changes in individual work outcomes should manifest in organizational-level outcomes through their accumulated impact. For example, if a large number of older workers in an organization could improve their task performance, the collective performance should be beneficial for organizational performance outcomes. However, the effect might not be that straightforward. Interaction processes on the micro level and contextual factors could complicate it (Kozlowski et al., 2013). More in-depth theoretical explanations for the emergence and mechanism of this specific cross-level effect though are sparse in the literature.

Instead, much of the theoretical work focuses on organizational implications of age diversity, a direct consequence of an increasing share of older workers within the workforce. Among the most common approaches are the information/decision-making perspective and the self-categorization perspective, which propose positive and negative consequences of age diversity for organizational outcomes, respectively. The information/decision-making perspective (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007) proposes that age-diverse work teams benefit from the members' various resources (e.g. know-how, skills, and perspectives). The different views and opinions force age-diverse teams to review task-relevant information thoroughly to reach a consensus. In line with this thinking, age-diverse workforces are supposed to foster human and social capital since they have a wider variety of knowledge and skills and form more varied social connections (Li et al., 2021).

On the contrary, according to social theories, age diversity can facilitate in-group bias (Brewer, 1979). The similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), for example, proposes that individuals prefer to interact with others who are similar to them (e.g. in age) since these interactions are more likely to affirm one's attitudes and behaviors (Parker & Andrei, 2020). This can lead to an increase in trust, communication, and cooperation among in-group members (i.e. younger and middle-aged workers;

Boehm & Kunze, 2015), while the discrimination against and exclusion of older workers is increasing, thereby harming team performance (Parker & Andrei, 2020).

All three theoretical perspectives presented here suggest that older workers and age diversity play a role for organizational outcomes, albeit in positive and negative ways. Hence we posit:

Proposition 2: Older Workers Affect Organizational Outcomes

Together with our first proposition that OPOWs affect older workers, this implies that OPOWs indirectly affect organizational outcomes through older workers. Individual outcomes that are positively or negatively affected by OPOWs can collectively reflect upon organizational outcomes. Moreover, OPOWs directed towards creating an age-inclusive work environment might prevent the potential negative implications of age diversity in organizations.

Empirical findings

Empirical research provides some evidence to confirm the theoretical proposition that older workers are inevitably interrelated with organizational-level outcomes. First, from an economic point of view, depending on the organization's age structure, challenges for corporate staffing might arise when many older workers decide to retire and successors have not been found, resulting in a loss of valuable knowledge. Moreover, employing many older workers can impact labor costs *via* higher salaries or healthcare costs for senior workers (Fisher et al., 2016).

Second, as proposed by theory, older workers' accumulated individual work outcomes could impact organizational-level outcomes. In their meta-analytic work, Ng and Feldman (2008, 2010) found workers' age to be unrelated to core task performance, creativity, and performance in training programs. Age was, however, positively related to job satisfaction, intrinsic work motivation, job involvement, organizational commitment, loyalty, and organizational citizenship behavior. Moreover, age was negatively related to role conflict, role overload, counterproductive work behavior, workplace aggression, and absenteeism. These individual outcomes are relevant for organizational functioning, effectiveness, and productivity (Ng & Feldman, 2008, 2010), although empirical research on the specific cross-level mechanism – similar to the theoretical research – is sparse.

Third, a direct consequence of aging workforces and prolonged working lives is a shift in the age structure leading to older and more age-diverse workforces (Hertel & Zacher, 2018). Research on the relationship between work teams' age diversity and team outcomes is inconsistent. A recent meta-analysis of 74 quantitative studies demonstrates that age diversity

in teams is only related to employee turnover (Schneid et al., 2016). Contrary to prior studies (e.g. Gellert & Kuipers, 2008), the authors found no relationship between age diversity and teams' performance, innovation, or satisfaction. Similarly, a literature review conducted by Boehm and Kunze (2015) shows inconsistent results for the relationship between age diversity and organizational-level outcomes. However, there was a slight tendency for negative relationships between employee age and organizational performance and innovation. One reason for the inconsistent findings on team and organizational outcomes could be that increasing knowledge and skills can compensate for potential age-related declines in physical and cognitive abilities (Bowen et al., 2011).

Summary

Overall, theoretical and empirical perspectives highlight a direct effect of older workers and age diversity on organizational outcomes. However, more empirical research on organizational-level outcomes is needed to understand the inconsistent findings. Research suggests that integrating the theoretical perspectives might be the key to this since stereotyping and intergroup bias might prevent positive outcomes from being released (Boehm & Kunze, 2015). Consequently, depending on the selected outcome and contextual influences, aging workforces and age diversity might have a positive, negative or no impact on the outcome (Schneid et al., 2016).

Older workers and societal outcomes

Theoretical approaches

This section presents research on the relationship between older workers and societal outcomes. Although the impact of aging workforces on societies has been studied empirically in the past, theoretical approaches that cover this relationship are sparse among our identified literature. A significant part of the research is carried out from an economist's perspective using labor demands and labor supply models (Oude Mulders & Wadensjö, 2015).

One string of theories describes the retirement transition and its implications for society. Activity theory argues that older individuals will age successfully when they can maintain their activity levels in old age. This would lead to high health, life satisfaction, and social engagement (e.g. through continued employment; Walker, 2002; Zacher et al., 2018). On the contrary, disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961) argues that older individuals will inevitably retire and withdraw from participating in society. While activity theory has been criticized for putting too much pressure on the individual and having a too idealistic view of aging, disengagement theory has been criticized for being

too negative (Walker, 2002). Moreover, both approaches tend to neglect the context in which older individuals are situated. One approach that is supposed to provide a more realistic view regards the concept of 'active ageing' (Walker, 2002). Underlying this concept is the presumption that aging workforces impact societies in several ways. They put increasing pressure on pension and healthcare systems and drive the need for continuous education and the prevention of exclusion in old age. According to 'active ageing', the ongoing active participation of older individuals in the labor market can counteract the challenges rising from aging populations (Walker, 2002).

Even though theoretical perspectives on the role of older workers for societal outcomes are limited, the economic perspective and the concept of 'active ageing' provide a basis for suggesting a direct effect of older workers on pension and healthcare systems, governmental financial planning, and labor market stability (Nagarajan & Sixsmith, 2023). Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 3: Older Workers Affect Societal Outcomes

Overall, similar to the findings for organizational outcomes, these results suggest that OPOWs can indirectly affect societal outcomes through their impact on older workers, for example by promoting prolonged working lives or fostering older workers' health.

Empirical findings

Empirical research regarding the impact of aging workforces on societies has mainly been conducted in the field of economics and relies heavily on quantitative analyses of population data (Oude Mulders & Wadensjö, 2015). This research demonstrates that many countries face the reduction and aging of the working population, which has been shown to put increasing pressure on pension and healthcare systems due to higher expenditures (Morrow-Howell et al., 2018). Prolonged working lives have been promoted as one possible solution. If older workers choose to stay employed even though they could retire, they counteract labor force shortage and continue contributing to social security systems. As a result, pressure on post-retirement income support programs could decrease (Morrow-Howell et al., 2018). Moreover, healthcare costs could decrease since working can retain and enhance older workers' health (cf. Staudinger et al., 2016).

Summary

Existing theoretical research proposes and empirical research confirms that older workers impact societal outcomes. However, this research is predominated by an economic, mathematical approach and stays rather silent on other potential underlying mechanisms. One reason could be

that this topic has received comparably less attention and is often used as an introductory theme in other research fields. Nevertheless, continued analyses of population data are necessary to monitor the aging working population's impact on the labor market and social systems. Moreover, further consideration of moderating variables could facilitate the understanding of cross-national differences.

Contextual influences on the relationship between organizational practices for older workers and their multilevel outcomes

Although they are not the focus of our model, we still want to acknowledge that a large variety of factors could moderate all three propositions concerning the multilevel outcomes of OPOWs. For example, regarding the effect of OPOWs on older workers (Proposition 1), SOC strategies (Baltes et al., 1999) could moderate the relationship. The use of SOC strategies could buffer potential negative or strengthen potential positive effects of job demands and job resources (Moghimi et al., 2017). Additionally, motives, knowledge and abilities, gender and personality, socioeconomic status, or family-related factors could be individual-level moderators (de Lange et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Wang & Shultz, 2010). Likewise, specific OPOWs might be more beneficial for some occupations but less beneficial for others (e.g. occupations with high job demands; Fisher et al., 2016). Macro-level policies to support caregivers could play a role from an economist's perspective (Morrow-Howell et al., 2018). Regarding the effect of older workers on organizational outcomes (Proposition 2), OPOWs themselves might prevent the emergence of an age discrimination climate (e.g. OPOWs that aim to foster intergenerational collaboration), thereby preventing potential adverse effects of age diversity on organizational outcomes (e.g. Kunze et al., 2013). Other moderating variables like demographic characteristics might also play a role (e.g. country of origin; Boehm & Kunze, 2015). The effect of older workers on societal outcomes (Proposition 3) can also be moderated by various influencing factors, such as the economic sector or the overall national economic situation (Bélanger et al., 2016; Cooke, 2006).

Organizational practices for older workers and antecedents on micro, meso, and macro levels

In this section, we present our literature review results concerning the antecedents of OPOWs structured along our model displayed in [Figure 2](#). Based on the review, we propose that societal factors directly affect organizational factors (Proposition 4), which in turn directly affect the availability of OPOWs (Proposition 5). We further propose that societal

factors affect older workers' outcomes, such as their attitudes, behavior, well-being, and health (Proposition 6), which serve as another direct antecedent of OPOWs (Proposition 7). Hence, in addition to organizational factors and older workers' attitudes, behavior, well-being, and health as direct antecedents, we assume that societal factors can be considered indirect antecedents of OPOWs. Similar to the model of outcomes in [Figure 1](#), we propose possible moderating effects through micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors.

Societal factors and organizational factors

Theoretical approaches

Among the reviewed literature, one theory that proposes a direct effect of societal factors on organizational factors is institutional theory. This theory proposes that national institutions regulate organizational practices, for example through legislation and policies. Thus, organizations within the same institutional environment tend to follow the path set by national institutions and implement the same organizational practices (Boehm et al., 2013), for example using age-neutral recruiting practices in accordance with anti-age discrimination policies. According to the situational strength hypothesis (Cooper & Withey, 2009), organizations' flexibility and individuality regarding the implementation of OPOWs is especially limited in strong situations where governments predefine many policies and regulations regarding the employment and retirement of older workers (Henkens, 2022). This theoretical approach can also explain the emergence of cross-country differences regarding the availability of OPOWs. However, this so-called path dependency has been criticized for ignoring the independent role of organizations. Employers may choose to proactively initiate programs not determined by legislation. In line with this thinking, the opposing forces hypothesis postulates that governmental policies may lose their strength if the organization firmly believes in its own strategies and actions (Henkens, 2022).

While we acknowledge organizations as independent actors, there are still theoretical approaches that suggest that societal factors can affect employers' decisions and actions, albeit not as sole predictors. Consequently, we propose:

Proposition 4: Societal Factors are Antecedents of Organizational Factors

Empirical findings

Several areas of governmental legislation and policies have been proposed to influence employers' decisions and actions regarding OPOWs. First, changes in pension policies might affect OPOWs for the retirement

transition through their impact on workforce planning. Mandatory retirement ages, for example, can be used as a rationale to terminate or not renew older workers' employment contracts (Rönmar et al., 2017). Second, anti-age discrimination policies or labor laws have implications for organizations and OPOWs. One example is the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) in the USA, which illegalizes age discrimination against people aged 40 or older (Staudinger et al., 2016). Finally, policymakers can provide financial incentives to motivate employers to hire and retain older workers, such as lower tax costs or financial bonuses for hiring older workers (Staudinger et al., 2016). Although these relationships have been frequently proposed, little empirical research exists to confirm these assumptions (Henkens et al., 2018). A U.S. study found that the organizational strategy to comply with legislation and policies was positively related to OPOWs (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013), thereby showing support for the theoretical proposition that societal factors can function as antecedents. Another study revealed that according to employers, governmental incentives to combine work and retirement (e.g. through partial retirement) are the most effective policies. Wage subsidies for older workers are deemed less effective but still more effective than anti-age discrimination laws and media campaigns against age stereotypes. The study further revealed that – in line with the independent role of employers – the number of employers actually abiding by these governmental policies by implementing OPOWs was relatively small (Conen et al., 2012).

Summary

In sum, empirical research provides preliminary evidence that, in line with theoretical considerations, legislation and policies can act as antecedents of employers' willingness to implement OPOWs. However, the relationship seems to depend on the policy type, and many policies' effectiveness is still unknown. More empirical research that applies a theoretical approach could help understand the relationship, thereby advancing research and implications for practice. Nevertheless, employers' behaviors regarding OPOWs are not solely based on reactions to societal antecedents. As the next section will show, employers' decisions are influenced by the assessment of a large variety of factors.

Organizational factors and organizational practices for older workers

Theoretical approaches

Identified theoretical approaches that aim to explain employers' decision-making regarding OPOWs are shaped by a strategic

management approach. In its simplest form, the decision to hire and retain older workers, and subsequently implement OPOWs to achieve this goal, has been described as weighing demands (e.g. labor demands) and resources (e.g. financial resources; Henkens & van Dalen, 2013; Kadefors et al., 2020). Lössbroek et al. (2019) take on a more differentiated approach and propose that considerations of profitability, principles, and pressure regulate employers' decisions to hire and retain older workers. Accordingly, the prevalence of OPOWs would be higher when replacements for older workers are hard to find (profitability), age norms promote age diversity (principles), and demands from governmental regulations and societal expectations exist (pressure). Similarly, Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) propose that three factors are relevant: the business case, benchmarking, and compliance. A business case emerges if older workers' continued employment is profitable to organizations due to better organizational outcomes. From a benchmarking perspective, OPOWs are implemented to compete with other organizations. Finally, compliance considerations imply that organizations implement OPOWs to comply with institutional laws and policies.

Overall, we identified several theoretical approaches that suggest that organizational strategies, preferences, and considerations can affect the decisions and actions regarding OPOWs. Hence, we posit that:

Proposition 5: Organizational Factors are Antecedents of Organizational Practices for Older Workers

Together with Proposition 4, this implies that societal factors operate as indirect antecedents of OPOWs *via* their effect on organizational antecedents. Anti-age discrimination policies, for example, can play a role in employers' decision-making processes, potentially leading to a higher priority of specific OPOWs and a higher likelihood of implementation.

Empirical findings

Lössbroek et al. (2019) empirically tested their model regarding the influence of profitability, principles, and pressure. They found that profitability considerations regarding the feasibility of OPOWs, the benefits of older workers for the organization, and labor substitutability can impact the prevalence of OPOWs. In line with this, recruitment problems due to the reduction of the labor force, training requirements, and a high share of older workers within the workforce can foster the need for action and put OPOWs on the agenda (Fisher et al., 2016; van Dalen et al., 2015). On the contrary, employing older workers might increase labor costs due to higher healthcare costs and seniority wages (Lazear,

1979). Lössbroek et al. (2019) further found that age norms influence managerial principles and decisions. Prior studies have also shown that managers' age norms and age stereotypes can be barriers to implementing OPOWs (cf. Dordoni & Argentero, 2015). Finally, external pressures, especially through trade unions, are also relevant (Lössbroek et al., 2019). Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) also empirically confirmed their model of organizations' decision-making, demonstrating that all three factors (i.e. business case, benchmarking, and compliance) are relevant.

Summary

Theoretical approaches and preliminary empirical evidence support the role of organizational factors as antecedents of OPOWs. This research suggests that it is crucial to create a business case for the need to hire and retain older workers to increase the prevalence of OPOWs. Still, more research is needed to better understand the relative impact of each factor (e.g. business case, compliance, age norms, pressure, and bench-marking) in employers' decision-making.

Societal factors and older workers' attitudes, behavior, well-being, and health

Theoretical approaches

Theoretical research suggests that governmental legislation and policies might also directly influence older workers' outcomes, such as their attitudes, behavior, well-being, or health. Compared to the reverse relationship (Proposition 3), this research string has received more attention in the literature.

Underlying the theoretical approaches is the debate between agency and structure. While the structure approach states that external social structures enable or constrain older workers' retirement decisions, agency proposes that older workers make that decision independently. Changes in pension and social policies would impact the social structure (Damman & Henkens, 2017). This could either constrain their agency (e.g. early retirement policies) or give them more freedom (e.g. policies for more flexibility in later life work). Lifespan theories also highlight this interplay between older workers' agency and their environment. Based on this perspective, the theories identified highlight opportunities for governments and societies to shape the structure or support the agency of older workers.

Based on the concept of 'active ageing', governments can respond to aging workforces by promoting older workers to actively participate in society (Walker, 2002). According to this, opportunities for lifelong learning, gradual retirement, and anti-age discrimination legislation

should be implemented. Transitional labor market theory highlights the need to abolish early retirement schemes, promote the work ability and employability of older workers, externalize caregiving responsibilities, and offer flexible pension entitlements to foster later life work (Hartlapp & Schmid, 2008). Considering rational choice theory, financial benefits from working in later life offered by the government can also impact retirement decisions (Feldman & Beehr, 2011). According to social normative theories, older workers also factor in social norms regarding the appropriate retirement timing held by their social environment when making retirement decisions (Feldman & Beehr, 2011).

Based on the agency and structure debate as well as the individual theories suggesting different areas in which governments and societies can affect older workers, we propose that:

Proposition 6: Societal Factors are Antecedents of Older Workers' Attitudes, Behavior, Well-Being, and Health

Empirical findings

The review of the empirical research indicates that there are three main areas in which societies and governments can promote prolonged working lives. First, changes to retirement and pension policies have proven to affect retirement decisions. Two recent systematic reviews show that an increase in the mandatory retirement age, financial penalties for claiming pension benefits before reaching the mandatory retirement age, and delayed retirement incentives can increase older workers' labor force participation (Boissonneault et al., 2020; Pilipiec et al., 2021). The abolishment of early retirement schemes, actuarial neutrality of pension systems, and more flexibility in the gradual retirement transition are other essential policies to promote prolonged working lives (Focarelli & Zanghieri, 2005). Second, policies regarding older individuals' training have been suggested to promote older workers' employability, although empirical evidence of the effectiveness of such policies is inconsistent (Staudinger et al., 2016). Third, anti-age discrimination laws and policies like the ADEA that affect employers' decision to hire and retain older workers impact older workers' opportunities to continue working in later life.

Summary

In sum, theoretical and empirical research provides valid evidence for the role of societal factors as antecedents of older workers' attitudes, behavior, well-being and health. Despite identifying several theoretical approaches to explain this macro-micro level relationship, the review also reveals that research on this topic often operates from a rather atheoretical perspective, focusing on a few specific policies, such as

mandatory retirement ages. Only a few reviews systematically compare the effect of different types of policies (e.g. Boissonneault et al., 2020). Similar to research on OPOWs as predictors of older workers' outcomes, empirical research on societal predictors seems fragmentary, leaving room for future research.

Older workers' attitudes, behavior, well-being, and health and organizational practices for older workers

Theoretical approaches

Researchers have started to consider that older workers might have an active role in shaping their work environment and consequently OPOWs. In this regard, job crafting describes workers' proactive behavior to change the work task or environment to enhance the person-job fit (Kooij et al., 2015). In line with the categorization of HR practices used by Pak et al. (2019), this behavior can be accommodative (e.g. decreasing job demands), developmental (e.g. challenging work tasks), or utilizing (e.g. making use of acquired skills through new tasks; Kooij et al., 2015). Beyond job crafting, lifespan theories can also explain older workers' proactive behavior to change the work environment to align it with their needs. Furthermore, older workers' changing abilities, motives, and needs inevitably play a role in organizations' decisions to implement certain OPOWs and dismiss others (Chen & Gardiner, 2019; Zhan & Wang, 2015). Thus, older workers can, actively and passively, shape the OPOWs available. Consequently, we posit:

Proposition 7: Older Workers' Attitudes, Behavior, Well-Being, and Health are Antecedents of Organizational Practices for Older Workers

Together with Proposition 6, this implies that societal factors can be considered indirect antecedents of OPOWs through their effect on older workers. Pension policies in particular affect older workers' decisions to stay or leave the workforce, thereby influencing to what extent older workers shape OPOWs.

Empirical findings

Research proposes several proactive behaviors that could potentially impact OPOWs, such as acquiring new knowledge, participating in health promotion activities, or looking for challenging new tasks (for an overview, see Kooij, 2015). However, little empirical research has analyzed which of these behaviors older workers engage in and how they influence OPOWs. One more recent study by Kooij et al. (2017) demonstrated that older workers engage in proactive behaviors aiming to adapt the work task to fit their strengths.

Summary

While the concept of proactive work behavior aimed at changing work characteristics has been studied for many years, the specific application to the context of older workers has only recently been made. Thus, more empirical research is needed that analyses the antecedents and outcomes of proactive behaviors, such as job crafting, for older workers.

Contextual influences on the relationship between organizational practices for older workers and their multilevel antecedents

Research has proposed several potential moderators for the relationships described above. Regarding the impact of societal factors on organizational factors (Proposition 4), the national economic context, employers' associations, NGOs, or supranational organizations might act as moderators (Muller-Camen et al., 2011). The national economic context might also moderate the effect of societal factors on older workers (Proposition 6; Szinovacz et al., 2014). Besides the economic context, the cultural context has also been proposed to be relevant (Marcus et al., 2020). Regarding the impact of organizational factors on the availability of OPOWs (Proposition 5), technological advancements might facilitate flexible work arrangements (Meurs et al., 2008). Furthermore, industry and job type might also play a role. The nursing occupation, for instance, is significantly affected by workforce aging, which increases the need for OPOWs (Keller & Burns, 2010). Finally, future research should also consider possible moderating variables for the role of older workers' proactive behavior for OPOWs (Proposition 7). Kooij et al. (2015), for example, note that the type of occupation might influence job crafting behaviors.

Discussion

Future research directions

This review reveals that theoretical and empirical research on the outcomes and antecedents of OPOWs has advanced to various degrees, thereby leaving room for future research. We highlight the most promising future research directions in [Table 2](#).

While research on the effects of single OPOWs on older workers' outcomes provides a basis for practical recommendations, future studies should follow Pak et al. (2019) and compare the effectiveness of different OPOWs (e.g. work design interventions, transformational leadership, age diversity climate). Theoretical explanations for the relevance of each type of OPOW are available. However, research that studies the relative impact would enable well-founded managerial decisions regarding the development

Table 2. Overview of future research directions.

Topic	Example research questions
Examining the relative impact of OPOWs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What OPOWs are most effective in fostering older workers' ability, motivation, and opportunity to continue working? What is the relative impact of each OPOW?
Assessment of OPOWs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there differences in the assessment of OPOWs made by (older) workers, general managers, and HR managers? • How do these differences emerge? • What are the implications for individual- and organizational-level outcomes?
OPOWs and organizational outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who should rate OPOWs in individual- and organizational-level research? • When do positive and negative outcomes of age diversity emerge on the organizational level? What are moderators and mediators of the relationship? • What are the mechanisms through which individual work outcomes emerge cross-level on organizational outcomes? • What positive and negative outcomes of OPOWs for the remainder of the workforce might exist on the organizational level?
Employers' decisions to implement OPOWs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do employers react to macro-, meso-, and micro-level antecedents? What are moderators and mediators within the decision-making process?
Cross-national research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do cross-national differences in legislation and policies regarding older workers emerge?
Multilevel, cross-disciplinary research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the relative impact of each level of antecedent in employers' decisions to implement OPOWs? • What are potential interactions between OPOWs, governmental policies, and individual characteristics for older workers' decision to continue working in later life? • Are there OPOWs and governmental policies that work best for specific subgroups of older workers?

and implementation of OPOWs. Future studies could also examine possible differences in the assessment of OPOWs made by older workers, general management, and HR management and their implications for individual- and organizational-level outcomes. For this purpose, the theoretical concept of intended, actual, and perceived HR practices developed by Nishii et al. (2018) could be integrated into the existing research.

Furthermore, we need a deeper understanding of the influence of aging workforces on organizational-level outcomes. Based on the information/decision-making perspective and social theories, researchers can explain the emergence of positive and negative implications of growing age diversity for organizational outcomes. However, it is still unclear under which conditions positive or negative effects arise. Moreover, the mechanism behind the cross-level effect of individual work outcomes on organizational outcomes is still underexplored. Strengthening the business case for the employment of older workers and the usefulness of OPOWs could foster positive attitudes towards older workers and the implementation of OPOWs (Kadefors et al., 2020). Therefore, future research should integrate both theoretical approaches and include contextual moderating or mediating variables (e.g. organizational age structure or OPOWs) to examine when positive outcomes occur (Boehm &

Kunze, 2015). In line with this, we identified some research that suggests a potential effect of OPOWs on organizational-level outcomes that is not mediated through the effect on older workers. Practices explicitly implemented for older workers could potentially positively and negatively affect younger and middle-aged workers (Kadefors et al., 2020). Based on social theories (e.g. social identity theory and self-categorization theory), the use of age-specific OPOWs could be perceived as a preferential treatment of older workers, which might generate negative feelings towards older workers, thereby fostering ageism (de Paula Couto & Rothermund, 2019). On the contrary, age-neutral OPOWs benefit workers of all ages. However, comparatively little theoretical and empirical research has covered this topic. Thus, future research should shed further light on the potential adverse implications of OPOWs for the remainder of the workforce (see dotted arrow in Figure 1).

Since organizations are in charge of one main driver of prolonged working lives – OPOWs – it is necessary to understand which factors drive or hinder the implementation. However, our review of the antecedents of OPOWs reveals that theoretical and empirical research on employers' motivation to implement OPOWs is somewhat scattered. We need to understand better how organizations weigh and prioritize the factors in their decision-making and what factors might explain differences in organizations' reactions (e.g. organizational culture; Henkens et al., 2018). An integration of institutional theory and strategic management theories might serve as a foundation for future research that can also help to understand possible cross-national differences.

Regarding macro-level antecedents, many cross-national comparison studies have shown that legislation and policies towards older workers vary across countries. More research is needed that helps understand the emergence of these differences. Some research has hinted, for example, that culture and the national economic situation might play a role (Marcus et al., 2020). Such cross-national research could facilitate the comparison of the effectiveness of different national policies and legislations and give further insights regarding the generalizability of empirical findings (Oude Mulders & Wadensjö, 2015).

A general implication for future research drawn from our review is the need for more multilevel, cross-disciplinary research. While research on the individual paths has advanced to various degrees, only a few studies adopted a research design that spanned over micro, meso, and macro levels simultaneously. However, as we demonstrate, they are all interrelated. As such, more cross-level research could help to integrate findings from multiple research fields and foster the understanding of antecedents and outcomes of OPOWs (Cadiz et al., 2019; Muller-Camen et al., 2011). To achieve this, scholars need to start thinking and researching outside their

own disciplines, for example by establishing multidisciplinary research teams. Since each research field has its value for studying work and aging (e.g. economics focuses on the cost and benefits aspect, sociology focuses on social structures, and psychology focuses on individual differences), such research endeavors have great potential.

Future studies on the antecedents of OPOWs should include variables regarding organizational characteristics and strategies (e.g. compliance considerations), governmental policies (e.g. financial incentives), and older workers' proactive behavior (e.g. job crafting) to compare their relevance for employers' motivation to implement OPOWs. Future research on predictors of individual retirement decisions should also take into account meso- and macro-level influences such as OPOWs and retirement policies (Hofäcker & Naumann, 2015). One possible theoretical approach could be to apply a behavioral economics perspective (Camerer & Malmendier, 2007). So far, this theoretical perspective has sparsely been applied to the context of aging workforces (Coile, 2015), although it combines assumptions from psychology and economy and might, therefore, serve as a basis for cross-disciplinary research. Another option could be integrating lifespan theories and the concepts of agency and structure. This could enable predictions regarding each level's relative impact, thereby facilitating more purposeful research and practice.

Prior research has shown that older workers should not be treated as a homogeneous group since large differences exist (e.g. Edge et al., 2017). Hence, studies examining the usefulness of OPOWs and governmental policies should consider these differences to develop more differentiated approaches. For instance, in the case of gender differences, an integration of lifespan theories or the concepts of agency and structure with theories regarding gendered life courses (e.g. theory of cumulative advantage/disadvantage; Dannefer, 2003) could be beneficial to develop a differentiated model.

Implications for practitioners

Prolonged working lives will become increasingly relevant for organizations and governments to counter the challenges raised by aging workforces. Our review highlights the importance of older individuals' willingness to continue working in later life for organizations to stay competitive and productive. OPOWs are essential to enhance older workers' health, performance, and intention to continue working. Based on theoretical considerations, it is advisable to follow a lifespan perspective to develop and select OPOWs (Hertel et al., 2013). Since there are many connections between the meso and macro levels, employers should also actively seek cooperation with governmental institutions,

NGOs, and labor unions to exchange experiences and develop new programs (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2020).

Policymakers need to acknowledge their crucial role in retirement decision-making. Pension and healthcare systems, anti-age discrimination policies, and societal age norms have shown to be related to the prevalence of OPOWs and retirement decisions. Consequently, policymakers might need to make necessary changes to legislation and policies to promote OPOWs and later life work. This includes policies that encourage organizations to hire and retain older workers, which could be achieved by disseminating knowledge regarding the implementation and effectiveness of OPOWs. Moreover, governmental anti-age discrimination initiatives could raise awareness for ageism and influence employers' attitudes (Morrow-Howell et al., 2018). Additionally, governmental policies could be aimed at older workers (e.g. a legal basis for gradual retirement transitions or vocational training). Such policies should also consider individual life trajectories and contextual factors like the family environment. Financial support for caregivers, for example, might lighten the stress on older working caregivers (Morrow-Howell et al., 2018).

Limitations

Despite the strengths of our review, including the cross-disciplinary nature, the focus on the theoretically proposed pathways of OPOWs and their multilevel antecedents and outcomes, as well as the broad literature search procedure, we want to address some limitations. The purpose of this review was to provide an overview of theoretical approaches to research on aging workforces underlined with current empirical research developments placing a particular focus on OPOWs to develop a cross-disciplinary model to guide future research. Although we included references to multilevel contextual variables to account for additional influencing factors, those factors were not focused on. However, we acknowledge that contextual variables play an important role, particularly in older workers' later life work. Especially the domestic environment (e.g. family and gender roles) is a critical interface for retirement decisions (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013).

Moreover, our model does not necessarily constitute an exhaustive representation of every discipline involved in research on work and aging. It could be that the involvement of further research disciplines (e.g. occupational health) would have yielded additional perspectives for our review. The literature search strategy itself might have also limited our findings. Since we broadly reviewed literature from multiple disciplines and had to limit the scope of our review, we can only present the surface of some areas of research here (e.g. research on ageism) and

cannot get into detail regarding specific explanations for the proposed relationships. While meta-analyses and reviews provide a good overview of empirical research, there are likely single empirical studies not covered by this search that could add to the results or highlight divergent findings. Additionally, the retrievability and credibility of books and book chapters might be lower compared to peer-reviewed articles. However, we obtained the publication lists from publicly available sources and only included authors that are established scientists in the field of work and aging. Including these publications aided in avoiding publication bias and extending the range of theories mentioned in the peer-reviewed articles (Adams et al., 2017), thereby offering added value to our review. Finally, our model does not aim to be static. Research on work and aging is progressing rapidly, and new future developments might extend the theoretical and empirical findings presented here.

Conclusion

Based on a broad literature review, we developed a cross-disciplinary model of research on OPOWs and their antecedents and outcomes on micro, meso, and macro levels. Providing an overview of theoretical approaches and current empirical developments, we highlight the interrelations and multilevel pathways. With the conceptual model and the outline of future research directions, we hope to foster multilevel, cross-disciplinary research on organizational practices for older workers and later life work.

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Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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Appendix A: Procedure details

Expert interviews

We contacted nineteen scientists to ask for their participation in an expert interview. The experts all have a research focus on older workers and aging workforces and were chosen based on their knowledge of and impact on one of the respective disciplines (e.g. through publications or research projects). In sum, we interviewed eleven scientists. Out of these, two experts each come from the research fields of gerontology, psychology, management and business science, and sociology. Three other experts belong to the research fields of organizational science, economics, and political science, respectively.

The sessions were held as semi-structured interviews. In the first part of the interviews, the experts were asked to name relevant theories in their research discipline regarding the relationship between OPOW, older workers, organizations, and society. In the second part of the interviews, we asked for recommendations regarding the choice of the database for our literature search, journals and authors relevant to research on work and aging in the respective research discipline, as well as specific publications.

Literature search

We selected the database *Web of Science* since it was most often mentioned by our experts. The timespan we used to include literature was also selected based on recommendations we received through the expert interviews. Many experts suggested this timeframe because there was substantial growth in publications, political activities, and established research centers focused on aging and work after the beginning of the 21st century.

Regarding the literature search in the *Web of Science*, we searched the title, abstract, and keywords of articles using one group of search words for the focus on aging (e.g. ‘ag\$ing’ and ‘life-span’), one for the focus on work (e.g. ‘work*’ and ‘job*’), and one for the focus on theories and models (e.g. ‘review*’ and ‘conceptual*’). We further added one group of search words to exclude specific topic areas (e.g. ‘clinical*’ and ‘dement*’), selected English as the language, set the time span to the years 2000 to

May 2022, and excluded non-relevant *Web of Science* categories (e.g. ‘biophysics’ and ‘nutrition dietetics’). A complete overview of the search strategy is provided in [Table A1](#). Two of the authors independently screened the titles and abstracts of the search

Table A1. Search strategy for Web of Science.

TI = (((‘ag\$ing’ OR ‘older worker*’ OR ‘older employee*’ OR ‘life-span’ OR ‘life-course’) AND (review OR meta-analys?s OR conceptual*) AND (work* OR job* OR occupation* OR employ* OR profession* OR retire*)) NOT (clinical* OR dement* OR caregiv* OR medic* OR alcohol* OR residential* OR biology OR cell* OR therap* OR disease* OR diagno* OR animal* OR youth* OR hormon* OR obesity OR metabol* OR diabetes OR vehicle* OR neuro* OR sex* OR divorce* OR brain OR immigrant* OR memory OR parenthood OR electric* OR hearing* OR school*))

OR TS = (((‘ag\$ing’ OR ‘older worker*’ OR ‘older employee*’ OR ‘life-span’ OR ‘life-course’) AND (review OR meta-analys?s OR conceptual*) AND (work* OR job* OR occupation* OR employ* OR profession* OR retire*)) NOT (clinical* OR dement* OR caregiv* OR medic* OR alcohol* OR residential* OR biology OR cell* OR therap* OR disease* OR diagno* OR animal* OR youth* OR hormon* OR obesity OR metabol* OR diabetes OR vehicle* OR neuro* OR sex* OR divorce* OR brain OR immigrant* OR memory OR parenthood OR electric* OR hearing* OR school*))

OR AB = (((‘ag\$ing’ OR ‘older worker*’ OR ‘older employee*’ OR ‘life-span’ OR ‘life-course’) AND (review OR meta-analys?s OR conceptual*) AND (work* OR job* OR occupation* OR employ* OR profession* OR retire*)) NOT (clinical* OR dement* OR caregiv* OR medic* OR alcohol* OR residential* OR biology OR cell* OR therap* OR disease* OR diagno* OR animal* OR youth* OR hormon* OR obesity OR metabol* OR diabetes OR vehicle* OR neuro* OR sex* OR divorce* OR brain OR immigrant* OR memory OR parenthood OR electric* OR hearing* OR school*))

AND LANGUAGE: (English)

AND DOCUMENT TYPES: (Article OR Book OR Book Chapter OR Early Access OR Editorial Material OR Review)

Indexes = SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, ESCI

Timespan = 2000–2022

Refined by: [excluding] WEB OF SCIENCE CATEGORIES: (ENERGY FUELS OR RADIOLOGY NUCLEAR MEDICINE MEDICAL IMAGING OR UROLOGY NEPHROLOGY OR NEUROSCIENCES OR WATER RESOURCES OR CHEMISTRY APPLIED OR OBSTETRICS GYNECOLOGY OR ENGINEERING ENVIRONMENTAL OR MATERIALS SCIENCE MULTIDISCIPLINARY OR CRIMINOLOGY PENOLOGY OR PHYSICS CONDENSED MATTER OR CELL BIOLOGY OR GENETICS HEREDITY OR ENGINEERING MECHANICAL OR SURGERY OR DERMATOLOGY OR NANOSCIENCE NANOTECHNOLOGY OR BIOCHEMISTRY MOLECULAR BIOLOGY OR ORTHOPEDICS OR ENGINEERING MULTIDISCIPLINARY OR NUTRITION DIETETICS OR CONSTRUCTION BUILDING TECHNOLOGY OR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES OR ENDOCRINOLOGY METABOLISM OR EDUCATION EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH OR PSYCHIATRY OR METALLURGY METALLURGICAL ENGINEERING OR PHYSICS SYSTEMS OR INSTRUMENTS INSTRUMENTATION OR SPORT SCIENCES OR DENTISTRY ORAL SURGERY MEDICINE OR GEOGRAPHY OR NUCLEAR SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY OR MECHANICS OR FOOD SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY OR PERIPHERAL VASCULAR DISEASE OR CHEMISTRY ANALYTICAL OR REHABILITATION OR GREEN SUSTAINABLE SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY OR BIOLOGY OR AUDIOLOGY SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY OR OPHTHALMOLOGY OR COMPUTER SCIENCE INFORMATION SYSTEMS OR PLANT SCIENCES OR FISHERIES OR ENGINEERING CIVIL OR BIOTECHNOLOGY APPLIED MICROBIOLOGY OR ENGINEERING ELECTRICAL ELECTRONIC OR ENGINEERING CHEMICAL OR PEDIATRICS OR ELECTROCHEMISTRY OR ENGINEERING INDUSTRIAL OR PHARMACOLOGY PHARMACY OR ONCOLOGY OR GEOSCIENCES MULTIDISCIPLINARY OR OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGY OR CHEMISTRY PHYSICAL OR REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY OR PHYSICS APPLIED OR INFORMATION SCIENCE LIBRARY SCIENCE OR MATERIALS SCIENCE CHARACTERIZATION TESTING OR PATHOLOGY OR FORESTRY OR INFECTIOUS DISEASES OR COMPUTER SCIENCE SOFTWARE ENGINEERING OR RESPIRATORY SYSTEM OR COMPUTER SCIENCE THEORY METHODS OR ANATOMY MORPHOLOGY OR EMERGENCY MEDICINE OR ANESTHESIOLOGY OR MATHEMATICS INTERDISCIPLINARY APPLICATIONS OR COMPUTER SCIENCE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OR DEVELOPMENTAL BIOLOGY OR COMPUTER SCIENCE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPLICATIONS OR EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY OR INTEGRATIVE COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE OR HOSPITALITY LEISURE SPORT TOURISM OR LANGUAGE LINGUISTICS OR REGIONAL URBAN PLANNING OR MARINE FRESHWATER BIOLOGY OR URBAN STUDIES OR MATERIALS SCIENCE BIOMATERIALS OR COMPUTER SCIENCE CYBERNETICS OR MICROBIOLOGY OR MEDICAL INFORMATICS OR PARASITOLOGY OR METEOROLOGY ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCES OR SOIL SCIENCE OR SPECTROSCOPY OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE OR VETERINARY SCIENCES OR ASTRONOMY ASTROPHYSICS OR CHEMISTRY INORGANIC NUCLEAR OR MATERIALS SCIENCE CERAMICS OR ETHNIC STUDIES OR RHEUMATOLOGY OR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OR AGRICULTURE DAIRY ANIMAL SCIENCE OR ARCHAEOLOGY OR AGRONOMY OR ART OR CHEMISTRY MEDICINAL OR AUTOMATION CONTROL SYSTEMS OR ENGINEERING AEROSPACE OR CHEMISTRY ORGANIC OR GASTROENTEROLOGY HEPATOLOGY OR LINGUISTICS OR EDUCATION SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINES OR ANTHROPOLOGY OR EDUCATION SPECIAL OR ENGINEERING BIOMEDICAL OR ENTOMOLOGY OR ENGINEERING MANUFACTURING OR ZOOLOGY OR MATERIALS SCIENCE COMPOSITES OR GEOCHEMISTRY GEOPHYSICS OR MATERIALS SCIENCE PAPER WOOD OR MUSIC)

results to identify relevant publications. We then reviewed the full manuscripts of the pre-selected publications according to our inclusion and exclusion criteria to make a final selection.

Regarding the additional literature search, among the journals that the experts most often named were *Academy of Management Journal*, *Ageing and Society*, *The Gerontologist*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journals of Gerontology: Series A*, *Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Psychology and Ageing*, *Work, Aging and Retirement* and *Work, Employment and Society*. We further added the *Journal of Human Resources* and the *Journal of Labor Economics* to represent the economics research field. The first author manually screened the titles and abstracts of the published articles for all journals except *The Gerontologist* and *Journals of Gerontology*. Due to the vast number of articles, we added a search string using the terms ‘work*’, ‘job*’, ‘occupation*’, ‘employ*’, ‘profession*’, and ‘retire*’ to reduce the search results. A list of the authors whose publication lists were screened manually by the first author can be obtained upon request.

Appendix B: Reference list of reviewed literature

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