

THE DEPLOYMENT OF ENRICHED CAPACITIES: THE RIGHTS OF OLDER WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

The basic assumption in this article is that growing older does not mean only, or even necessarily, a decline in one's labour capacities. Some capacities increase over the years, although this development is clearly not the same for each and every individual. The older workers' "enriched" capabilities are determined by certain aspects of job design. Older employees find, however, that their ability to learn and grow is hardly respected or addressed by their employer. Through action research in collaboration with a team of older female care workers with low educational levels, a new learning process was launched in a health care institution. The programme was designed in line with the team's own needs and experience. Thus, the initiative and learning demand lay with the participants. Their experiences and interests were key to the learning programme, which consisted of experimental and collective learning with the opportunity of self-direction. With the development of their capacities in the job and their improved performance, a change arose both in the employment relationship (the delegation of power and a more coaching oriented management style) and in the work content (the possibility of organising and cooperating in order to solve problems together). Due to new cutbacks and quality requirements in the standardisation of care processes, however, most of the changes have since disappeared.

INTRODUCTION

The potential labour force is ageing. Not only have measures been taken against early retirement in the Netherlands, but the pension age has also been raised to 67. Unfortunately, employers are not doing much about ageing workers. In general, it is business as usual, which means that most employers focus only on young workers, who cost less (Henkens & Schippers, 2008) and provide flexibility. Managerial language and concepts such as mobility and freedom of movement work only for workers with a specific mindset and for young workers. This rather disadvantages older workers (Roper, Ganesh, & Inkson, 2010). Older workers find that their capacities are hardly respected, used, or addressed in their company. Most of the literature notes the negative stereotyping of older workers (Posthuma & Campion, 2009) and the exclusion of such workers. In this article, and in contrast to what occurs within organisations, we want to discuss the concept of inclusion, in terms of the way in which individuals and the organisation interact and the norms and values of individuals in relation to organisational procedures, practices, and policies (Mor Barak, 2000). In their description of inclusion, Shore et al. (2011) underline belongingness and uniqueness as aspects of inclusion, and they discuss the way organisations value them. In his dissertation, Zinsmeister (2012) studied the employment of the real capacities of older workers (Ilmarinen, 2006; Roberts, 2006; Zinsmeister, Meerman, & van Hoof, 2009) throughout the labour process and looked for possibilities in the organisational context to use the capacities of older workers. In his study, he underscored the work content and, emphatically, also the employment relationship (Kluytmans & Ott, 1999; van Ruyseveldt, Huiskamp, & van Hoof, 1995) as areas to focus on in finding a way to do justice to the insights and experiences of older workers in the contemporary world of work. In this article, we aim to understand the organisational aspects that contribute to the inclusion of older workers.

We formulated the following question:

Which characteristics of work and employment relations encourage and initiate the deployment and inclusion of (the labour capacity of) older workers when we consider their real capacities?

The point of departure for this study is the assumed existence of an interaction between employment relationship, work content, and labour capacities, which takes shape within an organisation's external context, for example, in relation to the labour market, or due to governmental policy. The degree to which the "enriched" capacities of older workers can be addressed and developed is context bound and depends on the work content and the design of the employment relationship (Gould et al., 2008; Ilmarinen, 2006, Sennett, 2008). This interaction is graphically displayed in Figure 1.

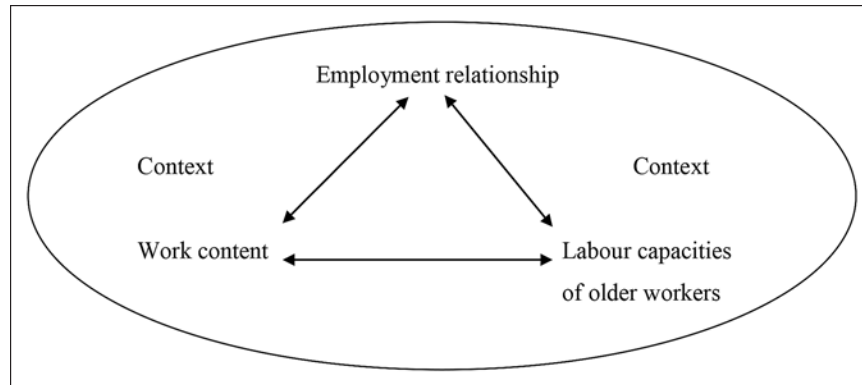


Figure 1. Labour capacities of older workers in a labour organisation.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

In the available literature, most research projects focus on the notion of deficiency (Loretto, Vickerstaff, & White, 2007; Taylor, 2008) as leading to a policy to dismiss older workers. In face of the general attitudes to these workers, it is not fair to ask them to strive for activation and self-responsibility. Our goal, in these circumstances, is to look for older workers' enriched capacities and the development of their crystallised intelligence (Baltes, 1997; Nunes & Kramer, 2009) as well as the deficiencies they experience as a result of a long working life. (Crystallised intelligence comprises the skills and knowledge acquired through education and acculturation. Applying old knowledge to solve a new problem depends on crystallised intelligence.) This development is clearly not the same for each and every individual. It is determined by certain aspects of the job design (physical and mental demands), the work process, and the employment relationship, as well as by factors outside the direct work context such as policy with regard to older workers and the course of a (working) life (Gould et al., 2008; Janssens & Steyaert, 2003; Pruijt, 1997; Sennett, 2008). It also depends on special events such as periods of unemployment or migration. If workers have enough opportunities to develop their capacities in the work process, this will have positive consequences for their work motivation, qualifications, and productivity. The benefit to be gained from older workers is in their *enriched* capability to deal with complexity. Due to their ample experience and practice, older people are able to respond to unexpected situations. They have learnt from their own experiences and can, therefore, take the initiative to deal with new situations and create new sets of circumstances that are meaningful to them. Their experience is reflected in abilities such as astuteness, consideration, reasoning, understanding of the whole, verbal understanding, attribution of meaning to life, taking responsibility for their

work, loyalty to their employer, accumulated experience, and motivation to learn (Ilmarinen, 2006).

Characteristics of Work

In the work situation, justice is not always done to these qualities of older workers (Powell, 2010). Neither are they adequately supported. There is often a shortage of challenging work that would allow older workers to utilise their enriched capabilities. The limited amount of challenging work must be divided up. Older workers are often excluded from challenging work because their enriched capacities are not recognised due to existing stereotype images. And furthermore, older workers are not able to develop these capacities to their full potential due to lack of opportunity. Older workers are often stigmatised as “worn out” and as costly assets to the company; investment in their labour capabilities, it is thought, would be a waste of money. This opens the door to early retirement (Loretto et al., 2007; Naegele & Walker, 2006; McCann & Giles, 2003; Taylor, 2008).

Employment Relations

The employment relationship is situated within an environment and forms a dynamic whole of explicit and implicit rules, codes of conduct, and obligations between the employer and worker(s) in which the dimensions of exchange, authority, and cooperation can be distinguished (van Ruysseveldt et al., 1995). These dimensions are at odds with one another (Kluytmans & Ott, 1999). In the exchange dimension, the worker puts time, qualifications, and performance capacity at the employer’s disposal in exchange not only for a reward but also for opportunities to develop and build a career. Negotiations about this exchange may disrupt the industrial peace. That is why, in the Netherlands, the negotiations about (mainly) wages and secondary labour conditions often take place outside the work organisation—in industry-specific collective labour agreement meetings. In these meetings, the negotiations about personal development and career opportunities are undifferentiated—they are not tailored to the different groups of workers or individuals in the organisation. The implementation of these generalised rules in the labour organisation, and especially their application in individual cases, rarely passes off smoothly and often arouses distrust.

Typical of the authority dimension of the employment relationship is that the workers, being on the payroll, are subordinate to the employer. A key component of this dimension is the hierarchy that is reflected in the direction and control of the workers’ conduct. In major organisations, the human resource management (HRM) tools are essential in putting this direction into practice (Legge, 1995). The literature on HRM highlights the individual involvement of workers and their performance which in fact has led to the exact opposite: more steering and authority (Legge, 1995). Involvement and dedication are par excellence the qualities that Dutch employers attribute to their older workers (van Dalen, Henkens, & Schippers,

2009, 2010). The involvement of workers may change the authority relationship. Direction given on the basis of the involvement of the workers does not mean that distrust will disappear, but rather that the collective distrust in the employment relationship will shift toward an individually based distrust between the manager and the individual worker (Nagelkerke & de Nijs, 2007).

Cooperation is needed to achieve production; it is in essence the foundation of the employment relationship. The distrust found in the exchange and authority dimensions is not conducive to cooperation. A sustainable employment relationship requires a basis of trust between the workers and their employer (de Lange, 2004). Such a relationship is aimed at the worker's long-term availability and optimum input. It is on the basis of functional trust in the expertise of (older) workers that the employer allows room for tailor-made duties, and it is on the basis of that expertise that the workers supply insights, experience, and knowledge according to each situation and, therefore, with different outcomes. Thus, the emphasis in the employment relationship shifts toward the cooperative dimension. The exercise of authority may severely hamper that cooperation and foster distrust. If, however, in the design of the employment relationship the use of available HR tools is aimed at personal development instead of control, individual distrust does not necessarily have to stand in the way of cooperation.

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS AND OLDER WORKERS

Deployment of the labour capacities of older workers requires the employment relationship to be designed in such a way that the older workers (in the cooperative dimension of the employment relationship) have the opportunity to further develop their experience-based expertise and their enriched capabilities. Following Thompson (1967), we refer to intensive technology, which is expedient wherever the work is characterised by complex interactions (with people or things). Connecting situations, objectives, and means (technology) requires intensive interventions that can be realised on the basis of acquired expertise. It is especially the older workers who possess the ability to respond to (unpredictable) situations. This approach is completely opposite to the organisation of work on the basis of "machine reasoning," in which duties are designed and standardised top-down according to the production process (e.g., by protocols, formats, guidelines)—and every employer has to adapt to this standardisation. It should be noted that standardisation often includes work processes, input and output, that should not be standardised (Pruijt, 1997). Based on negotiations, the employment relationship continually deteriorates, becoming simply a financial transaction. Cooperation is overlooked.

The workers who possess the capabilities to respond to complex interactions with a subject are preeminently older workers. It is from their experiences that they see the possibilities of intervention in practice, whenever strictly managed performance fails. This expertise comes to the fore in all the improvisations that are

needed on a daily basis in a health care facility in interactions with patients suffering from dementia.

A sustainable employment relationship with reliable workers requires managers to change from stern direction to handing over responsibilities and authority to the staff. Sustainable management is the art of trust and letting go (de Lange, 2004), allowing the use of the real capabilities of older workers. A sustainable employment relationship, therefore, implies an enhancement of the cooperative dimension and less reliance on the hierarchically based, authoritative dimension as the core of the employment relationship between the employer and older workers.

Work Content

The work content concerns the nature and level of the duties; it is the way in which the work is organised, including the use of the technical tools that are available to do the job. The work content in our model refers to the quality of the work. We refer to a “good” performance if the person concerned is able to apply her/his personal knowledge and skills and can personally develop, and the work does not make the person ill; or, as Karasek and Theorell (1990) put it, if there is an optimal combination of job demands and social support.

Poor work content, for instance, includes physically very demanding work that, over the course of an individual’s career, leads to greater physical deterioration than may be expected on the basis of calendar age. Routine work does not lead to workers’ personal development; nor does it encourage the grasping of opportunities for this. Development is only possible if the jobs involved are complex and involve varied duties, in which case we refer to the work content as “rich.” An important prerequisite is that the content of the work should offer everyone the opportunity to “carry responsibility, gain autonomy, determine the methods and operation, and (help) make essential decisions on how the duties are carried out” (Mok, 1990: 125). This can be achieved at the individual level through increasing or broadening the tasks involved, but also at the collective level through the use of semi-autonomous teams.

The way in which the work is performed depends on the possibilities that exist to organise and cooperate in order to solve problems together. If the worker’s capacity to organise is structurally present, we can refer to a meaningful interaction in the employment relationship. The possibilities for organising are, moreover, often a prerequisite for the worker’s bond with the work and the organisation. When workers grow older, their organisational capacities and the ability to direct themselves increase (Ilmarinen, 2006). The possibilities for organising and carrying out complex duties are, therefore, necessary in order for older workers to make full use of their labour capacities and thus give meaning to both the cooperative and the authoritative dimensions of the employment relationship.

METHODS

In order to answer our main question, we carried out a survey and a case study. We used the survey to select organisations with an inclusion policy for older workers. The outcomes showed that a mere 5% of the organisations in the Amsterdam region support such a policy (Zinsmeister, 2012). We selected a case in health care because of the large number of older workers in the sector and because of a special request for help made by a specific institution.

We embarked on our project about employability, autonomy, and development with workers. In collaboration with a team of care workers, supervisors, and trainers of low and middle education levels, we investigated enriched capacities and changes in employment relations and work organisation. We used a learning programme geared to older workers as an intervention designed to provide them with more freedom and autonomy in their work situations. In order to gain insight into the effects of our intervention, we used in-depth interviews, observation, and focus groups. To gain some understanding of the context, we used policy papers that focused on the organisation of care.

We introduced action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990) in our project as a way of collecting data about the images and real perceptions of older workers. By using this method, we activated (images of) older workers, and through our research we tried to change the work conditions of older workers.

RESULTS

In the action research in the health care institution, the theoretical concepts were made more concrete for a specific group of older female workers with low- and middle-level education.

It was the workers' team with the highest mean age that participated in the study. Their average age was over 52 years. Almost 25% of the group were over 60, and more than 75% were over 50. A 22-year-old considerably lowered the average age. The group consisted of 20 women with a fixed work contract and with widely differing ethnic backgrounds. Their educational level was that of secondary vocational education, with one exception. Almost half of the team members had had an employment contract for more than 12 years with their present company, and the others had worked for less than 10 years for this company and had very mobile work experience.

The basic care that the team provided for the residents suffering from dementia was good, but strongly based on standardised and routine tasks. There was rarely any horizontal or vertical collaboration, due to the extensive protocols that lead to standardised practices. These are developed at the national level. As a consequence, the care workers had hardly any room to organise anything for themselves. The older workers' own insights and experiences could hardly be utilised in this work situation. According to all those involved, the team was hardly open to

new developments. Organisational changes in the institution went hand in hand with learning programmes—often intended to enrich and broaden the staff members' tasks—but the older workers learned little or nothing. The learning programmes were characterised as consisting of obligatory, formal, whole-class sessions in which theoretical knowledge was taught by an expert. For years, the team had been strictly hierarchically managed. Due to the extent of collective agreement in the care industry, the exchange relationship plays a marginal role in institutions; all the labour conditions are settled at the industry level outside the institution. Team members experienced the organisation of work as from above, as hierarchical and authoritarian. They had to obey orders instead of acceding to the demands of the clients.

After mutual introductions and exploratory interviews, the researcher decided—in consultation with the managers and the head of the HRM department—to create a new learning programme, specifically for older workers. The trainers (all females) and the researcher (male) developed this programme on the basis of the principles of experiential learning (Freire, 1970) in combination with work-based learning (Onstenk & Blokhuis, 2007). The trainers were responsible for carrying out the programme.

The team determined the subject of learning themselves, according to their needs. They wanted to improve their occupational therapy support and learn together. Supporting patients with dementia in their daily occupations demands a selection of different activities that suit each client's condition. In this programme, the initiative and learning demand lay with the participants. Their experiences and interests were key. Throughout the programme, the trainers asked the participants to identify which experiences were relevant and the trainers asked them “to critically reflect on these while also focusing on the meaning they attribute to these experiences.” All this took place during four meetings, but the team members also exchanged experiences in other settings. The participants put into practice a great deal of what was discussed, thereby incorporating the diversity within the team. “We want to do it by ourselves in our own way.”

All four meetings had the same structure: they began with a discussion of the participants' experiences in their activities (which took place in between the meetings) and reflection on these experiences. Next, the subject of the meeting was settled (for instance, discussion of available activities and how to deal with them, and exchange of practical examples). The meetings were concluded with an evaluation and an assignment, which involved experimenting with the relevant subject: “Try some activities and report back at the next meeting.” These practice-oriented assignments fed back into the team members' practical experiences and were designed to help to get a long-term learning process going.

The learning programme was aimed at starting off a process of collective learning, in which the participants would be challenged to make more explicit the knowledge that was relevant but still only implicit to them, and to use their real capabilities. Abstract knowledge transfer on the basis of theory was averted. By

constantly reflecting on their practical experiences, they limited the risk of experience concentration. (This means, generally, with increasing age there will be a considerable increase in experience quantity; generally, with increasing age there will be decreasing experience diversity. Experiencing a fairly limited variety of experiences quickly results in a certain expertise and routine allowing for the realisation of high labour efficiency within a small tasking package (Thijssen, 1992; Thijssen & Rocco, 2010)) Through self-direction, the team lifted their experiences to a higher level and learned from them. They thus achieved the opportunity to put into practice their enriched capabilities, such as their astuteness, consideration, reasoning, understanding of the whole, verbal understanding, attribution of meaning to life, taking responsibility for their work, loyalty to their employer, accumulated experience, and motivation to learn. The new learning programme was appreciated: “Talking about it makes you more aware”; “It makes you feel good about your work, and you get more pleasure out of it”; “We learn especially from all the personal input, since the input of others gives you a new perspective”; “This way of training makes you feel far more relaxed, so that you learn more easily”; “It leads to you doing more together.” All the participants were activated and they experienced the way of learning as enjoyable.

Conditions under Which the Labour Capacities of Older Workers Can Be Included

For most of the team members, the intervention set off a learning process that led to the development of “enriched” labour capacities, as is presumed in the theory. This group of older workers indeed entered a learning process that had an effect on their daily practice. The learning process was also a group process. This was also recognised by the team members: “The learning has had a good start,” meaning “that you can learn a lot from one another. Once you get used to it, initially under supervision, this learning from each other may also take place in a staff meeting or patient information exchange or something like that.” In some cases, the learning process did not start off, which seems to relate to experience concentration and a low insecurity tolerance (Thijssen, 1992). After all, the workers were not used to being allowed to experiment for themselves or having their experiences regarded as valuable. “Nothing is predetermined,” a worker noticed. Granting autonomy in the workplace is a condition for the deployment of experiences. For most of the participants, however, the learning process had positive consequences for their work motivation and performance. There was now room to organise the work as they saw fit, “because the boss is finally not determining how we should perform our duties,” and they were using their freedom to act. The employer had not prescribed anything, which allowed for spontaneity on the workfloor (“This also indirectly shows an appreciation for the way the team deals with the work”). Where the work content was concerned, the team members gained more opportunities to carry out their duties as they saw fit, which led to a broadening of their tasks

(by improving and integrating their occupational therapy support) and enrichment of them (more room to organise). A number of team members indicated that they had learnt that not all activities can be planned. "You simply have to use the possibilities that emerge." As regards the employment relationship, it was noticeable that the managers kept more distance, that authority was being delegated, and that the cooperative dimension became more prominent. Coordination or cooperation with colleagues was important in this: participants worked on "how to involve [their] colleagues" or "appeal for their help." This points toward a broader interpretation of their work than before.

The development of the capacities of older workers who were "set in their ways" in this health care case started off through a learning programme that was based on the principles of self-direction, experiential learning, and collective informal learning in the participants' own workplace. Programmes that are consistently designed according to these principles can contribute to the development of the labour capacities of older workers. Such programmes move the workers from being inactive and immobile workers to being active workers in the organisation. This requires trainers, as an organisational practice, to take on a different role: they should behave less as experts and more as process supervisors. In the programme described above, they "knitted it all together" and asked questions about what they heard, so that the group provided even more information. Many team members felt that this had set them thinking about their work. "Nothing was predetermined"; everything came from the group itself, so that the learning sank in properly.

Through relying on workers' existing expertise, as well as daring to give them more autonomy, the intervention was successful. This development was made possible by a new direct manager, who was informed of the learning programme and supported the process. She was primarily focused on the cooperative dimension of the employment relationship. She actually tried to put sustainable management into practice, to initiate a shift from strict control to handing over responsibilities and authority to the workers. The shift within the employment relationship from the authoritative to the cooperative dimension in this case proved to be an important condition for the development of the labour capacities of older workers. "the team is finally being treated as a group of adult women."

Functional trust in the labour capacities of older workers allows for an adaptation of the organisation of work in the direction of intensive technology, whereby workers can contribute insights, experiences, and knowledge from their expertise. "When you get older, you get a better perspective of the content of this work and what you want with it." This adaptation of the organisation of the work process is also an important condition for the better utilisation of the labour capacities of older workers. The design of HR tools aimed at development rather than control, as seen in the learning programme, and the support of managers who delegate responsibilities and authority enhance this development.

Self-direction offers a team the opportunity to come back into the labour process and utilise its members' capacities to carry out more complex tasks inducing more

the co-operative and authoritative dimensions of the employment relationship. The development of older workers is set in motion when this process is designed from the bottom up.

This study indicates that women with a long record of service in the institution concerned can increase their employability. Long-term relations form the basis for older workers to develop and deploy their enriched capacities. Designing the contractual relationship around the exchange dimension is, therefore, also a factor that improves the inclusion of the labour capacities of older workers. Willingness to build a long-term employment relationship creates mutual trust and mutual responsibility.

The main conclusion, therefore, is that where older workers with lower education levels are concerned, it is possible to get a developmental process going and a system of “good practices” can emerge with the inclusion of older workers. Learning programmes such as the one designed for this study may be a great help.

This case, however, also showed rather dramatically that success is not solely dependent on the creation of specific conditions in the organisation itself, but also on developments in the environment of the organisation. Organisations do not operate in a vacuum. Due to new cutbacks and quality requirements in the shape of the standardisation of care processes by the government and health insurers, the possibilities for a richer work package have become very limited. The worker is “forced” to emphasise the power relationship, otherwise the continuity of the organisation will come under even more pressure. New funding arrangements have set off a process of rationalisation, which boils down to doing more with fewer members of staff. As a result, the team has begun to complain. Its members cannot provide proper care, the atmosphere is affected, they become irritable, and more “quarrels between the members of the team” occur. “A night shift on your own is possible, but you are exhausted by the end of it and you have no time for the residents.” For the time being, the external developments seem to have had a negative impact on the dissemination of good practices—at any rate in this sector.

In order to minimise such a negative impact, both managers at the sector level and the national government should increase their awareness of stereotypical views of older workers and of such workers’ potential labour capacities. Since the actions of management and government determine the organisation of work in many institutions where the policy is designed, they should use their awareness to create conditions that improve the inclusion and employability of older workers.

ANSWER TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Which characteristics of work and employment relations encourage and initiate the deployment and inclusion of (the labour capacity of) older workers when we consider their real capacities?

The point of departure for this study was that (1) crystallised intelligence increases with age, and that (2) this increase is the foundation for the “enrichment” of older workers’ labour capacities, while recognising that (3) this development does not take place automatically but rather depends on the characteristics of the work content of the positions they hold or have held, as well as on the specific design of the employment relationship. The prerequisite in all this is that (4) they are given the chance to develop.

Although we cannot generalise from this study, especially since the health care institution in which we conducted our research itself requested its participation, our action research in the health care institution shows that the capacities of older workers, under certain conditions, are present and can be tapped. A group of older workers of lower educational levels did indeed perform better in their work after an intervention based on their capacities, resulting in a better use of the autonomy and organisational possibilities that they were granted. They used their capabilities, and psychologically they returned to fuller participation in the organisations they work for.

The employability, inclusion, and deployment of the labour capacities of older workers can be made possible by the following:

1. their ability to carry out complex tasks;
2. their freedom to choose the way they organise and perform their work;
3. direction that is based on trust in their expertise;
4. cooperation in teams with the possibility of greater autonomy and a change in relations with the authorities;
5. the possibility of learning, supported by learning programmes that fit the needs of older workers and are designed on the basis of self-steering in teams. The health care case in our study is a clear illustration of this.

In order to be able to use these possibilities, the following conditions need to be present:

1. a type of organisation of the work process that is based on a central role for expertise, and coordination based on an intensive technological interpretation of the process;
2. an employment relationship in which emphasis is placed on cooperation and on sustainable management, which corresponds with this emphasis;
3. a business policy in which older workers are not viewed as a category, but in which their individual capacities and the development of these capacities are the point of departure.

In light of the foregoing, we discern three principles that are essential for the deployment of the labour capacities of older workers:

1. intensive technology (Thompson, 1967), to direct the organisation of the work process;

2. sustainable leadership, in which cooperation between the supervisor and the workplace is paramount, short term contracts are diminished and management is based on knowledge of actual practice;
3. an acknowledgement of the diversity among workers and acceptance that this diversity can lead to ambiguity and paradoxes within the organisation—with HRM acting to limit control effects of HR tools.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This action research project shows that the women involved, with long records of service, know what they are doing. Due to a lack of “room,” this knowledge could not be applied before the learning programme was introduced. The organisation of the work did not allow the women to use their own knowledge and skills optimally. The main conclusion of the action research is that this can be changed, even for less well educated older workers. Learning programmes, such as the one developed in this study, can render great service in starting off a development process and making workers aware of their true capacities and deployment. This, however—as we have seen—directly touches upon the key characteristics of the employment relationship and the work content. It is, clearly, the *mutual exchange* between the changes in labour capacity as a result of educational measures and the changes in the employment relationship and work content that determine the success of the older workers’ deployment.

Long-term relations form the basis for older workers to develop and deploy their enriched capacities. Not only cooperation but also a contractual relationship (exchange dimension) focused on the long term improve the deployment of their labour capacities. A willingness to build a long-term employment relationship creates mutual trust and mutual responsibility.

Our research, however, also showed that mutual responsibility does not apply only in terms of creating specific conditions within the organisation itself; developments around the organisation must also be reviewed with regard to their consequences for workers and especially for the inclusion of older workers. It is management’s responsibility to assess developments in respect of the organisation of work and the room for experience on the work floor. Organisations do not operate in a vacuum. They are obliged to evaluate legislation and government cutbacks in the light of the care that must be provided (in the case of health care institutions) and the workers who are responsible for providing it. Our research reveals that if management does not assess this properly, cooperation suffers. It has also taught us that a learning programme should be permanently available to support older workers. Both employers and older workers are easily taken in by the negative stereotypes associated with older people. Working toward an inclusive organisation is not easy. It requires courage.

In this study, we have concentrated on the specific qualities of older workers in a health care institution and have not tried to extrapolate from them to job

requirements in other work situations. We therefore recommend that more research be undertaken from this perspective. Too often, older workers are undervalued or sidelined because their contribution or potential contribution to organisations is not appreciated. Where young people are still willing and able to conform to “hard” job requirements, employers ignore the “soft” enriched qualities attributed to older workers (van Dalen et al., 2009). The right to offer their real capacities and to be able to reveal the consequences for the institution has to be accepted if older workers are obliged to stay longer in the workplace due to measures taken against early retirement and to the raising of the pension age. Van Dalen et al. (2009) argue for more investment in older workers to ensure that they are just as attractive to employers as young workers, for example, through fiscal measures. We, on the other hand, make a plea for the transformation of organisations to connect with the qualities of older workers. It is precisely the obstacles posed by employers’ stereotyped views of older workers, together with short-term thinking, that must be broken down. This will require a fundamental change in employer thinking and action.

Our study shows that the meaningful deployment and inclusion of the labour capacities of older workers are possible. In order to bring this to fruition, however, result-oriented actions are needed in the organisational policy, work content, and employment relationship. Management boards of institutions must follow their own course to achieve this. This process will not run smoothly. Legislation imposed by the government and by specific industries, combined with short-term reasoning and a focus on costs, will create obstacles. These will put pressure on “the logic of the sustainable employment relationship”. The boards need to fight hard in the struggle against the ruling mainstream of general developments in the labour market, in employment relations, and in organisational systems. Their main focus should be on the continuity of their organisations. They should also focus on the quality of products or services delivered in the long term instead of on profit (or cost reduction) in the short term, based on quality requirements in the shape (of the standardisation) of countable processes. If society is sincere in the recognition of the need to increase older people’s labour participation, then it must provide these people with meaningful, challenging work. If this is done, then the deployment of older workers will be unbounded.

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