

Research Article

European Top Managers' Age-Related Workplace Norms and Their Organizations' Recruitment and Retention Practices Regarding Older Workers

Jaap Oude Mulders, MSc,^{*} ^{1,2} Kène Henkens, PhD, ^{1,3,4} and Joop Schippers, PhD²

¹Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI-KNAW), The Hague, The Netherlands. ²Utrecht University School of Economics, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. ³Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. ⁴University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen, The Netherlands.

*Address correspondence to Jaap Oude Mulders, MSc, Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI-KNAW), PO Box 11650, 2502 AR, The Hague, The Netherlands. E-mail: oudemulders@nidi.nl

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Abstract

Purpose: Top managers guide organizational strategy and practices, but their role in the employment of older workers is understudied. We study the effects that age-related workplace norms of top managers have on organizations' recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers. We investigate two types of age-related workplace norms, namely age equality norms (whether younger and older workers should be treated equally) and retirement age norms (when older workers are expected to retire) while controlling for organizational and national contexts.

Data and methods: Data collected among top managers of 1,088 organizations from six European countries were used for the study. Logistic regression models were run to estimate the effects of age-related workplace norms on four different organizational outcomes: (a) recruiting older workers, (b) encouraging working until normal retirement age, (c) encouraging working beyond normal retirement age, and (d) rehiring retired former employees.

Results: Age-related workplace norms of top managers affect their organizations' practices, but in different ways. Age equality norms positively affect practices *before* the boundary of normal retirement age (Outcomes a and b), whereas retirement age norms positively affect practices *after* the boundary of normal retirement age (Outcomes c and d).

Implications: Changing age-related workplace norms of important actors in organizations may be conducive to better employment opportunities and a higher level of employment participation of older workers. However, care should be taken to target the right types of norms, since targeting different norms may yield different outcomes.

Keywords: Bridge employment, Labor market, Retirement, Work after retirement

Under pressure of population aging and its adverse effects on the economy, governments of Western countries have tried to increase the labor force participation of older workers. After many years of labor market and retirement reforms, employment participation among older workers is rising and retirement ages are gradually increasing. In addition to the lower prevalence of early retirement and thus increasing employment participation of older workers

before the “normal retirement age” of 65, the prevalence of employment *after* normal retirement age has also increased (Cahill, Giandrea, & Quinn, 2015; Pleau & Shauman, 2012; in this study, we refer to the normal retirement age of 65, since this was the age at which public pension started in many countries and at which age full retirement was usually possible. In addition, in the European countries studied here, at the time of the survey, 65 was the most common

age of mandatory retirement). This increase is visible in countries where mandatory retirement is generally unlawful, such as the United States and United Kingdom, but also in countries where mandatory retirement at the normal retirement age is commonly built into collective bargaining agreements, such as in many continental European countries.

From an economic perspective, these changes are mainly supply-side driven: As a result of population aging, closed-off pathways into early retirement, decreased retirement benefits, and changing retirement preferences, there are more older workers in the labor market who seek employment until and beyond normal retirement age (Dingemans, Henkens, & Van Solinge, 2015; European Commission, 2015). On the demand side, most organizations are reluctant to recruit or retain older workers on a large scale. All else equal, younger workers are usually preferred over older workers, for example, in advancement, selection, and overall evaluation (Bal, Reiss, Rudolph, & Baltes, 2011), and age is negatively related to reemployment success, especially after the age of 50 (Wanberg, Kanfer, Hamann, & Zhang, 2015).

A key finding is that organizations appear to deal with retention and recruitment issues regarding older workers in a nonsystematic or case-by-case way (Hutchens & Grace-Martin, 2006; Oude Mulders, Henkens, and Schippers, 2015; Vickerstaff, 2006): In general, there are no or limited policies regarding recruitment and retention of older workers, and decisions about the (prolonged) employment of older workers appear to be made on other grounds. However, it is largely unclear how such organizational decisions can be explained. To help answer such questions, we study the role of top managers more closely. It is well established that organizational outcomes may depend crucially on the values and dispositions of powerful actors within the organization (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), especially concerning factors such as setting and guiding organizational strategy and exploring new directions (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2008). Although it has been suggested that top managers shape frameworks for hiring and decision making for lower level managers (Finkelstein et al., 2008), it is unclear what role top managers may play in shaping opportunities for the employment of older workers, especially concerning relatively uncommon modes of employment, such as working beyond normal retirement age that fall outside the institutionalized norm of normal retirement age.

In the current study, we investigate how top managers' *age-related workplace norms* affect practices regarding recruitment and retention of older workers up to and beyond normal retirement age. We conceptualize age-related workplace norms as top managers' individual beliefs about age-related issues in the workplace that may be influenced by factors such as the organizational and societal context, institutional factors, and stereotypical thinking (Lawrence, 1996; Settersten & Hagestad, 1996).

Age-related workplace norms have been shown to influence employment decisions regarding older workers in various settings (e.g., Karpinska, Henkens, & Schippers, 2013a, 2013b; Lindner, Graser, & Nosek, 2014), but norms of top managers have not been studied before. Workplace norms that are considered here are the norms regarding equal treatment of younger and older workers on the labor market (age equality norms) and norms about the appropriate timing of retirement for older workers (retirement age norms).

This study contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, this study is unique in its focus on how top managers affect their organizations' practices with regard to recruitment and retention of older workers. Although line managers and human resources (HR) managers have received some attention in the literature (e.g., Kooij, Jansen, Dijkers, & De Lange, 2014; Oude Mulders, Van Dalen, Henkens, & Schippers, 2014) and have some autonomy to influence organizational practices, the power to determine organizations' practices more broadly ultimately lies with top management (Finkelstein et al., 2008). Top managers not only have the autonomy to decide how to act with regard to recruitment and retention of older workers but also influence the decision making of others and are responsible if the practices do not work out in the desired way. This sets them aside from lower level managers or HR employees whose degree of autonomy and responsibility is considerably lower.

Second, we consider four different recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers: (a) recruitment of older workers from outside the organization before normal retirement age, (b) encouraging retention of older workers until and (c) beyond normal retirement age, and (d) rehiring former employees who retired. This way, we recognize that different factors may affect organizations' practices regarding older workers *before* and *after* the boundary of normal retirement age, which can be seen as an institutionally created and publicly accepted norm of when people should retire. Also, we recognize that different factors may influence behavior toward older workers within or outside of the organization. Because actual retention of workers until and beyond normal retirement age is contingent upon those employees accepting to work longer, the retention measures should be understood as the organization creating a supportive climate for working until or beyond normal retirement age.

Third, we utilize unique data that combines personal information of top managers, such as their age-related workplace norms, with information on their organizations' backgrounds and HR policies. We study a sample of 1,088 top managers from six European countries with different institutional contexts. This provides a broad empirical base for studying the impact of top managers' age-related workplace norms on organizational practices regarding recruitment and retention of older workers and allows us to assess

the importance of top managers' age-related workplace norms relative to other organizational and societal factors.

Theoretical Background

Age-Related Workplace Norms

Norms are a central concept in sociological explanations of demographic transitions such as leaving the parental home, family formation, and childbearing (Liefbroer & Billari, 2010). Although less commonly studied, behavior regarding workplace transitions such as promotions and retirement may also be influenced by norms (Radl, 2012; Settersten & Hagestad, 1996). Age-related workplace norms may be especially important for issues such as prolonged employment of older workers and their timing of retirement, considering decades of shaping expectations and behavior of people through institutionalization of retirement and public policies (Kohli, 2007; Radl, 2012). For example, the age of 65 is considered the normal retirement age in most of the developed world, which is at the same time a result from and supported by public policies such as state pension ages of 65 in many countries (Hofäcker, 2015).

Norms are statements or views that have an "ought" character (Liefbroer & Billari, 2010). In other words, they describe how things should or should not be or what people should or should not do. Norms influence behavior either through the threat of punishment or through the internalization of norms (Liefbroer & Billari, 2010; Radl, 2012). Norms are social in nature, but each individual has his/her own conception of a norm. That is, individuals have ideas about how things should or should not be, or when things should happen in a person's life, and aggregated over groups of individuals this becomes a social norm (Radl, 2012; Settersten & Hagestad, 1996).

Here, we argue that top managers' age-related workplace norms are likely to affect organizations' practices regarding recruitment and retention of older workers, directly through top managers' decisions or indirectly through lower level managers' decisions. When top managers are themselves involved in recruitment and selection of new employees and retention decisions of existing employees, their age-related workplace norms will directly influence their decisions. If top managers are not concerned with recruitment and retention decisions themselves, their age-related workplace norms may "trickle down" through the organization and thereby influence the decisions of lower level managers. Here, we specifically consider two types of age-related workplace norms: age equality norms and retirement age norms.

Age Equality Norms

Age equality in the workforce refers to the equal treatment of (adult) people of all ages in the workforce, opposing differential treatment that is solely based on people's age. Although age equality is an ideal that is supported by many governments through anti-age discrimination

legislation (Leeson, 2006), age discrimination due to ageist preconceptions is still quite pervasive in the labor market (Roscigno, Mong, Byron, & Tester, 2007), meaning people either explicitly or implicitly do not fully subscribe to age equality (Malinen & Johnston, 2013). People may differ in the extent to which they find age equality in the workforce desirable, based on, for example, personal experiences with workers from different age-groups and certain characteristics they ascribe to workers of different ages. Here, we argue that such age equality norms may influence organizational practices. We define age equality norms as the support for the equal treatment of younger and older workers on the labor market.

When it comes to age equality norms of top managers of organizations, some contributing factors can be identified. First, Van Dalen and Henkens (2005) showed that support for age equality has increased over time but also that it is heavily influenced by national economic conditions. In particular, the support for age equality was high in good economic times but tended to decrease substantially under bad economic conditions, when older workers were seen as "expenses that can be cut" (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2005, p. 708). Second, the organizational context in which managers operate may influence their age equality norms. For example, the type of work within an organization may be perceived to be especially suitable for younger or older workers, or managers may favor certain groups based on the existing level of age diversity within their organization. Third, managers may hold stereotypical views of workers from different age-groups that may inspire their views about age equality. Stereotypical views of older workers are common and may include negative stereotypes, such as lower productivity, resistance to change, and a lower willingness to learn, or positive stereotypes, such as a higher reliability, dependability, and organizational commitment (Bal et al., 2011).

We expect that top managers' age equality norms are related to their organizations' recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers. Organizations where top managers support equal treatment of older and younger workers will be more likely to have practices aimed at the recruitment and retention of older workers, whereas organizations where top managers favor younger workers over older workers will be less likely to have practices aimed at the recruitment and retention of older workers (Hypothesis 1).

Retirement Age Norms

A special type of norms, age norms are expectations about the age (range) at which specific transitions should be made (Lawrence, 1996; Settersten & Hagestad, 1996). The most relevant norms that may influence organizations' ways of dealing with the recruitment and retention of older workers are retirement age norms or the expectations about when older workers should retire from work (Van Solinge & Henkens, 2007). Like any age norm, retirement age

norms may specify one age at which one expects older workers to retire or may be a range with lower and upper age limits for the retirement transition (Liefbroer & Billari, 2010).

Radl (2012) reported on the average retirement age norms in 14 European countries. Retirement age norms for men were relatively close to and, in some countries, higher than the public pension age of 65. For women, the retirement age norms were much lower and nowhere exceeded the age of 65. Over time, retirement age norms appear to be rising. Many developed countries, especially in Europe, used to have a strong “early exit culture” in which it was common and completely accepted to retire well before the public pension age, and it was even expected of older workers to retire early to open up jobs for younger workers (Hofäcker & Unt, 2013; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2005). With the abolishment of early retirement opportunities and the closing off of “alternative pathways” into early retirement, people’s expectations about when older workers should retire seem to have risen. For example, Karpinska, Henkens, and Schippers (2013b) report an average upper retirement age norm of 64.5 years among a sample of Dutch middle managers in 2010, and Oude Mulders, Van Dalen, Henkens, and Schippers (2014) report an average upper retirement age norm of 65.7 years among a similar sample in 2013.

Retirement age norms of top managers are a reflection of their own experiences and personal values about the appropriateness of when to make the retirement transition and of the observed attitudes and behavior in their social network (Radl, 2012; Settersten & Hagestad, 1996). Top managers will be more likely to explicitly open up recruitment and retention opportunities for older workers when they normatively expect older workers to work up to higher ages. In addition, expectations about late retirement may influence lower level managers to recruit and retain older workers. Conversely, top managers who have lower retirement age norms see older workers as unfit to work until higher ages, and thus normatively expect them to retire earlier, and will therefore be less likely to explicitly focus their recruitment and retention efforts on older workers. To sum up, organizations where top managers hold higher retirement age norms are more likely to have practices aimed at the recruitment and retention of older workers than organizations where top managers hold lower retirement age norms (Hypothesis 2).

Organizational and National Context

Top managers are expected to be very important in influencing their organizations’ recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers, but the organizational and national contexts they operate in may also affect practices. Here, we control for a number of different factors at the organizational level and the country the organization is located in.

Age-Based HR Policies

HR policies that are specifically concerned with managing the needs and desires of older workers can be used by organizations to manage older workers in a way that is congruent with the organization’s business strategy (Rau & Adams, 2012) and to signal the value that they attach to their mature workforce (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008a). Although general HR policies may also achieve these goals, the application of HR policies that are explicitly aimed at older workers shows that an organization acknowledges that older workers may differ from other employees in their needs and desires and that such age-based HR policies may help to create a better working relationship (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008b). Although top managers may be able to influence the application of age-based HR policies to some extent, we assume here they are formed in a dynamic process that is subject to external and internal factors. Here, we control for four policies that may be closely related to the employment of older workers: training plans, early retirement opportunities, accommodation measures, and demotion (cf. Oude Mulders et al., 2015; Van Dalen, Henkens, & Wang, 2015).

Structural Factors

Further, we include a number of structural factors at the organizational level that may be related to organizations’ recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers as control variables. Specifically, we include the sector or industry of operation; the size of the organization; the workforce composition in terms of the percentage of older workers within the organization; and the labor market position of the organization, or more specifically, whether the organization has difficulties finding qualified personnel.

Finally, we control for the country the organization is located in. There are large differences in institutional contexts, welfare regimes, and organizational cultures within Europe that may affect organizations’ way of dealing with older workers (Conen, Henkens, & Schippers, 2012). Recruitment and retention practices of organizations may also differ per country based on the demographic composition of the workforces and economic conditions in the country. Although we expect country differences in the recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers, it goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the underlying processes (for a discussion on national differences in Europe see, e.g., Hofäcker & Unt, 2013).

Methods

Data

The data were collected among employers in Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden between February and November 2009. In each country, a sample was drawn among organizations with 10 or more employees. The sample was stratified according to size and sector. Organizations from all sectors, except

the agricultural industry, were sampled. The surveys were identical but translated to each country's main language. The interview technique that was used in each country depended on what was perceived to be the best mode to address respondents in each particular country. The different methods were computer-assisted Web interviewing (Denmark), paper-and-pencil interviewing (Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden), and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (Italy and Poland). Total response rates were 11% (Germany), 17% (Italy), 23% (the Netherlands), 23% (Poland), 28% (Denmark), and 53% (Sweden), for a total number of 4,910 responses. These response rates are in line with other large-scale employer surveys in organizational research (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). The surveys were completed by different types of organizational actors. For the current study, only surveys that were completed by the top manager (director, owner, or CEO) were selected ($N = 1,365$). This was not related to organizational size or sector but was related to country. Surveys were completed by the top manager more frequently in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands (36–43%) than in Italy, Poland, and Sweden (10–18%). Managers who did not complete questions on their organizations' recruitment and retention practices, their age-based HR policies, or their retirement age norms ($n = 277$) were removed from the sample. Item nonresponse for the other variables in the current study was low (<1.5%) and random, which explains the minor differences between sample sizes for the different dependent variables. The remaining sample consists of 1,088 observations. Because the dependent variables are dichotomous, we analyzed them with separate logistic regression models.

Measures

The wording of the variables used in this study is presented in Table 1. The top managers' age equality norms were computed as the average of three questions that were answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.66$). The wording of these questions, the answer distribution, and descriptives are presented in Table 2. The scores on the age equality norm scale run from 0 to 4, with low scores indicating a preference for younger workers and high scores indicating support for age equality. The question on top managers' retirement age norms was formulated in the same way as in the third wave of the European Social Survey (Radl, 2012). Organizational size is included in the analyses as the natural logarithm of the size reported by managers to aid interpretation and avoid problems with extreme outliers.

Results

Table 1 provides descriptive information on the variables used in the current study. With 26% of top managers indicating their organization encourages employees to keep working until normal retirement age, this is the most

common practice related to employment of older workers. Seventeen percent of managers indicate their organization focuses their recruitment specifically on older workers, whereas 13% of manager indicate their organization encourages employees to work beyond normal retirement age or rehires retired former employees. Practices that focus on employment of older workers beyond normal retirement age are thus much less prevalent than practices that deal with older workers before the boundary of normal retirement age. This appears to be related to the mean top managers' retirement age norm of 67.21. Although this is above the age of 65 that most countries have as normal retirement age, closer inspection of the distribution of this variable shows that 65 is the modal value and about 45% of respondents answered 65 or lower. Table 2 provides information about the composition of the age equality norms of managers. The average value of 2.28 indicates moderate support for age equality, but the distribution of scores suggests considerable variation in the support for age equality among top managers.

Table 3 provides results of the logistic regression analyses for the different forms of retention and recruitment of older workers. Overall, we see that top managers' norms with respect to age equality and retirement ages affect organizations' retention and recruitment practices regarding older workers, but in different ways. Model I shows that top managers' age equality norms affect their organizations' likelihood of recruiting older workers, so that when managers support age equality, organizations are more likely to recruit older workers. In addition, Model II shows that when managers support age equality, organizations are more likely to encourage their older workers to work until normal retirement age. There is no significant effect of top managers' age equality norms on their organizations' likelihood of encouraging working beyond normal retirement age (Model III) or rehiring retired former employees (Model IV). The effects of top managers' age equality norms are illustrated in Figure 1, which shows predicted values of organizations' likelihood of recruiting older workers and encouraging working until normal retirement age against age equality norms of top managers. The lines show that organizations where top managers support age equality are far more likely to recruit older workers or encourage working until normal retirement age than organizations where top managers favor younger workers. Hypothesis 1 is thus partly supported.

With regard to the retirement age norms of top managers, Model III shows that when top managers have higher retirement age norms, their organizations are more likely to encourage employees to work beyond retirement age. Likewise, Model IV shows that higher retirement age norms of top managers are related to higher likelihoods of organizations rehiring retired former employees. Top managers' retirement age norms do not affect the recruitment of older workers before normal retirement age (Model I) or encouraging working until normal retirement age (Model II).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Wording of the Study's Variables

	<i>N</i>	Mean or %	<i>SD</i>	Wording	
Dependent variables					
Recruitment of older workers	1,085	0.17	0.38	“Which of these recruitment or retention policies are used in your organization?” (0 = <i>no</i> ; 1 = <i>yes</i>)	
Retention until normal retirement age	1,079	0.26	0.45		
Retention beyond normal retirement age	1,080	0.13	0.34		
Rehiring retired former employees	1,084	0.13	0.33		
Independent variables					
Top managers’ characteristics					
Age equality norm	1,076	2.28	0.78	Scale constructed of three variables (see Table 2)	
Retirement age norm	1,088	67.29	5.17	“At what age do you consider a person too old to work in your organization for 20 hr a week or more?”	
Age	1,087	49.93	8.69	“Which of these policies are applied in your organization?”	
Female	1,087	0.20	0.40		
Age-based human resource policies					
Training plans for older workers	1,083	0.17	0.38		
Early retirement opportunities	1,084	0.25	0.43	“In which sector does your organization operate?” 18 answering categories recoded to three main sectors.	
Accommodation measures for older workers	1,086	0.25	0.43		
Demotion	1,084	0.07	0.26		
Organizational characteristics					
Sector	1,078			“How many employees are currently employed by your organization?”	
Public		31.91%			
Industry and construction		34.88%			
Services and trade		33.21%			
Organizational size	1,077	679.13	15,246.53	“What percentage of your workforce consists of older workers?”	
Organizational size (logarithm)	1,077	3.95	1.44		
Percentage older workers (aged 50+)	1,073	23.82	16.60		
Recent recruitment problems	1,082			“Has your organization recently faced difficulties finding employees?”	
No		47.87%			
For some positions		42.79%			
For many positions		9.33%			
Country	1,088				
Denmark		22.33%			
Germany		16.64%			
Italy		6.62%			
Poland		13.69%			
Sweden		6.80%			
The Netherlands		33.92%			

The effects of top managers' retirement age norms are illustrated in Figure 2, which shows predicted values of organizations' likelihood of encouraging that their older workers work beyond normal retirement age and of rehiring retired former employees against the retirement age norms of top managers. The lines show that organizations where top managers hold high retirement age norms are much more likely to encourage working beyond normal retirement age or rehire retired former employees than organizations where top managers hold low retirement age norms. Hypothesis 2 is thus also partly supported.

Further, the effects of age-based HR policies on recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers are

generally positive. Training policies, accommodation policies, and demotion for older workers are all associated with higher likelihoods of recruiting and retaining older workers (weakest effects for rehiring former employees). Offering early retirement opportunities does not affect recruitment or retention practices.

With regard to the structural factors, there are a few notable effects. Larger organizations are more likely to focus their attention on older workers before the boundary of normal retirement age, but not after, whereas organizations with relatively more older workers are more likely to focus on employment after the boundary of normal retirement age, but not before. Further, we find that retention of

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Age Equality Norm Scale

	Strongly agree (0)	Agree (1)	Neutral (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly disagree (4)	Mean	SD
One is better off investing in young employees than in older employees	5.81%	27.74%	22.76%	38.89%	4.79%	2.09	1.04
Older workers should step aside to give younger workers more career opportunities	3.32%	16.90%	16.90%	49.95%	12.93%	2.52	1.02
Younger workers should be preferred to stay over older workers in case of organizational downsizing	2.31%	24.63%	28.24%	38.33%	6.48%	2.22	0.97
Age equality norm						2.28	0.78

Note: $N = 1,076$. Scale runs from 0 to 4; low scores indicate a preference for younger workers; high scores indicate support for age equality.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Models for the Different Forms of Retention and Recruitment of Older Workers, Coefficients, and Standard Errors

		Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
		Recruit older workers		Encourage employees to work until retirement age		Encourage employees to work beyond retirement age		Rehire retired former employees	
		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept		-4.98***	1.34	-3.89**	1.16	-8.33***	1.46	-9.56***	1.50
Top managers' characteristics									
Age equality norm		0.30*	0.13	0.29**	0.11	0.12	0.14	0.18	0.14
Retirement age norm		0.00	0.02	-0.01	0.02	0.06**	0.02	0.05*	0.02
Age		0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.03*	0.01
Female		0.21	0.24	0.05	0.20	-0.21	0.28	0.00	0.27
Age-based human resource policies									
Training plans for older workers		0.55*	0.22	0.59**	0.20	0.84**	0.25	0.31	0.25
Early retirement opportunities		-0.01	0.23	-0.39	0.21	0.00	0.26	0.47	0.25
Accommodation measures for older workers		0.55*	0.22	0.60**	0.19	1.15***	0.23	0.81**	0.25
Demotion		0.61*	0.30	0.97**	0.30	0.68*	0.33	0.13	0.37
Structural factors									
Sector (ref. = Public)	Industry	0.09	0.23	0.07	0.20	0.55*	0.27	0.47	0.27
	Services and trade	0.12	0.24	0.14	0.20	0.66*	0.28	0.53	0.28
Size (log)		0.22**	0.06	0.15*	0.06	-0.01	0.08	0.05	0.08
Percentage older workers		0.01	0.01	0.01*	0.00	0.02*	0.01	0.02**	0.01
Recent recruitment problems (ref. = no)	Some positions	0.40*	0.20	0.50**	0.16	0.43*	0.22	0.23	0.22
	Many positions	0.72*	0.31	-0.01	0.30	-0.05	0.42	0.60	0.37
Country (ref. = the Netherlands)	Denmark	0.59*	0.28	0.81***	0.23	1.08**	0.31	0.68	0.35
	Germany	1.39***	0.28	0.63*	0.26	0.88*	0.37	1.65***	0.35
	Italy	-0.17	0.64	0.12	0.43	1.13*	0.53	0.19	0.78
	Poland	0.70*	0.33	1.97***	0.27	1.71***	0.36	2.53***	0.35
	Sweden	0.31	0.50	0.43	0.37	0.64	0.52	0.38	0.60
<i>N</i>		1,022		1,017		1,017		1,021	
Log likelihood		-402.72		-521.85		-335.45		-324.01	
$\chi^2(19)$		130.37***		179.42***		125.54***		134.38***	
McFadden's R^2		0.1393		0.1467		0.1576		0.1718	

Note: * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

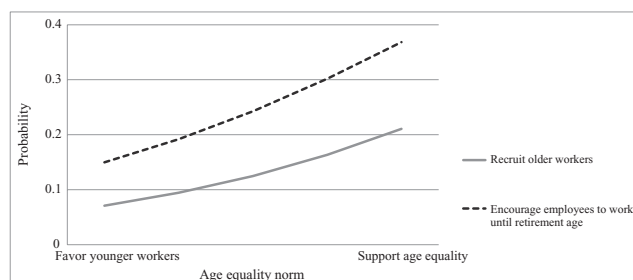


Figure 1. Illustration of the effects of top managers' age equality norm on organizations' recruitment and retention of older workers before normal retirement age. Predicted values calculated with all other variables at their mean value.

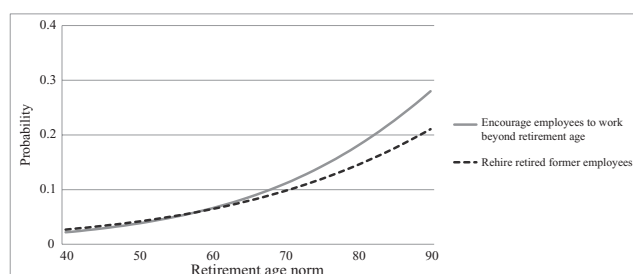


Figure 2. Illustration of the effects of top managers' retirement age norm on organizations' recruitment and retention of older workers beyond normal retirement age. Predicted values calculated with all other variables at their mean value.

employees up to and beyond retirement age is more likely in organizations with limited recruitment problems but unexpectedly not in organizations with extensive recruitment problems. Finally, there are clear differences between organizations from the different countries in this study. Organizations from Denmark, Poland, and Germany are overall much more likely to retain or recruit older workers than organizations from the Netherlands, Italy, and Sweden.

We assessed the robustness of these findings with additional analyses that included interaction effects, in particular to check whether the effects of top managers' age-related workplace norms on their organizations' practices differed per country, due to different sample sizes and the rather strong effects of country dummies. The results showed one notable effect: The positive effect of age equality norms on recruiting older workers before retirement (Model I) is offset by a significant negative interaction effect in Germany, but not in the other countries. In other words, when top managers support age equality, their organizations are more likely to recruit older workers before retirement, but not in Germany. In all other models, the substantive results do not change, indicating the robustness of the results.

Discussion

In the current study, we studied how top managers' age-related workplace norms affect organizations' recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers. A key strength of this study is its consideration of multiple ways

of recruiting and retaining older workers, and the focus on top managers and the way their norms shape organizational practices.

We found support for our hypotheses that age-related workplace norms of top managers affect organizations' recruitment and retention practices. However, age equality norms and retirement age norms affect different kinds of practices: Top managers' age equality norms only affect organizations' practices *before* the boundary of normal retirement age, whereas retirement age norms influence organizations' practices *after* the boundary of normal retirement age. In other words, top managers' norms regarding age equality affect whether their organization recruits older workers (before retirement age) and encourage employees to work until normal retirement age, while their norms about the retirement timing of older workers affect whether their organization retains workers beyond normal retirement age or recruits retirees. It is interesting that age equality norms do not affect practices *after* normal retirement age, and retirement age norms do not affect practices *before* normal retirement age. This suggests that employment of older workers before and after normal retirement age are seen as distinct modes of employment. Apparently, support for age equality only applies to workers within the range of "normal working age" that is usually defined from age 20 to 65. Employment of older workers after normal retirement age may be seen as something extraordinary and therefore not be affected by age equality norms.

The findings corroborate the general theoretical notion that norms are an important driver of behavior in the work domain (Settersten & Hagestad, 1996). It furthermore shows the importance of top managers in directing organizations' practices and thereby the importance of leadership in the emergence and effects of norms (e.g., Ostrom, 2000). Next to directing line managers' selection behavior regarding older job applicants (Karpinska et al., 2013a; Oude Mulders et al., 2014), age-related workplace norms also influence organizations' practices on a higher level. This may imply that age-related workplace norms of top managers trickle down through the organization, affecting other people's norms in the process, thereby affecting organizations' behavior. Top managers' retirement age norms were found to be especially important in creating opportunities that are outside the institutionally created and publicly accepted norm of normal retirement age. Especially in Europe, where mandatory retirement at normal retirement age is prevalent and employment beyond normal retirement age is relatively uncommon, top managers' dispositions toward older workers may be crucial in creating employment opportunities beyond the societally institutionalized norm of normal retirement age. Such norm-breaking opportunities may only be possible when top managers are supportive of later retirement ages.

The effects of age-related workplace norms were found on top of the established effects of age-based HR policies,

where organizations with HR policies specifically designed for older workers are also more active employers of older workers (e.g., Armstrong-Stassen, 2008a; Oude Mulders et al., 2015). Although not tested in the current study because of cross-sectional data limitations, this appears to be the result of a cyclical and continuous process, in which HR policies to manage older workers are implemented out of practical or strategic concerns (Rau & Adams, 2012), after which more older workers are attracted to the organization (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008b) which leads to more older workers in the organization and more active HR policies to deal with them (Van Dalen et al., 2015). This mechanism may be a fruitful endeavor of future research.

This study has some limitations that deserve attention. First, as mentioned above, the data are cross-sectional which restricted our ability to test causal effects. Next to age-based HR policies being the result of continuous processes, age-related workplace norms may also change as a result of organizational practices, demographic developments, and institutional changes at the macro level. One crucial question regarding age-related workplace norms is how stable they are over time and how they will develop in aging societies. Future studies could collect longitudinal data on workplace norms, organizations' age-based HR policies and employment practices regarding older workers to study the causal relationships.

Second, the dependent variables in this study offer limited information, in the sense that they inform us whether older workers are a specific target in recruitment or retention, but not what the *prevalence* of recruiting or retaining older workers is. Also, the dependent variables regarding encouraging retention of employees did not specify how exactly employees were encouraged to work longer and how many employees did prolong their careers. It cannot be ruled out that some organizations may have indicated to focus their recruitment and retention practices on older workers but in reality end up recruiting or retaining few older workers, for example, because they could not find qualified older workers or because other more attractive workers were eventually hired or retained. This limitation may be addressed by future studies by computing, for example, the percentage of older workers among newly hired employees as the dependent variable, by looking at retention rates of older workers around normal retirement age or by developing more detailed measures of how employers encourage longer working lives.

Third, the measures for age-related workplace norms were rather crude and could be improved in future studies. Age equality norms in the workplace, in particular, may be broader than conceptualized here. Future studies could improve this measure by including a broader array of items relating to age equality in the workplace, such as questions regarding the suitability of workers of different ages for certain positions and norms about promoting workers of different ages. Also, future studies should develop a

measure that includes the possibility to indicate a preference for older workers. With regard to the retirement age norm, future studies could refine this measure by asking, for example, for norms about minimum and maximum ages at which employees should retire.

In conclusion, this study makes a novel contribution to the literature by specifically considering the important role that top managers play in guiding their organization and setting frameworks for employment decisions in the rest of the organization by studying the effects of their age-related workplace norms on organizations' recruitment and retention practices regarding older workers. The results show the importance of differentiating between employment *before* and *after* the boundary of normal retirement age, since different types of norms affect these practices. Changing age-related workplace norms may be conducive to better employment opportunities and a higher level of employment participation of older workers, but care should be taken to target the right types of norms, since targeting different norms may yield different outcomes. Awareness campaigns could create more awareness about age discrimination, age equality, and qualities of older workers. In particular, more attention to culturally expected retirement timing and age equality is warranted, since age-related workplace norms are more directly related to employment behavior by organizations and managers than stereotypes of older workers (Karpinska et al., 2013a). Especially when it comes to stimulating employment outside the societal norm of normal retirement age, policy makers should try to change top managers' norms about career duration and retirement timing.

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