1. Age and generational diversity in careers

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Until recently, academic research on age and careers had been slow to progress and had remained underdeveloped compared to the large body of literature on gender and careers. However, in the past few years there has been a vast increase in the number of studies of focusing on careers across the life-span and in age differences in preferences towards career outcomes (e.g., Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013; Feldman, 1994). One explanation behind this explosion of popularity lies in the demographic change which is occurring across the world.

Demographic change due to increasing life expectancy and falling birth rates means that the population in most countries is ageing (Kulik et al., 2014). This presents challenges in relation to social security and welfare policies such as pensions and healthcare (Bloom et al., 2010) and potentially leads to skills shortages in the labour market. These challenges have meant that scholars and practitioners alike have recognized the importance of encouraging individuals in the later stages of their lives and careers to remain in the workforce. Consequently, over the past 20 years we have seen governments such as that in the UK legislate against age discrimination and remove the default retirement age in order to encourage the extension of working lives. Alongside legislative initiatives, organizations and professional bodies have sought to motivate and retain older workers, while at the same time competing effectively for the smaller number of younger workers available in the labour market. These initiatives have led to increasing age diversity in the workplace as careers get longer. As part of this, attention in the careers arena has turned to understanding the impact of age on careers, in order to enable employers to support their employees in all age groups in developing a meaningful and rewarding career across the life-span (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013).

This chapter draws upon existing research in order to examine the current state of knowledge in relation to age and careers. In doing this, it both examines the process of the career and how this might develop across the life course, but also investigates the impact of age on individuals' conceptualizations of career success and on individual preferences for career outcomes. The chapter seeks to synthesize what is a

somewhat disparate literature in order to identify the practical implications of what is already known about age and careers, and to suggest areas for future research.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO EXAMINING AGE DIVERSITY

One of the reasons behind the disparity in the evidence on age and careers is the fact that scholars have used a variety of different lenses when examining age-related influences. Therefore, when examining the impact of age on careers, it is important to recognize the different ways in which age can be conceptualized in relation to its impact on careers. There are three commonly used perspectives in examining the impact of age (Unite et al., 2012). First, a focus on age or maturation effects reflects the fact that people's needs in relation to their careers change as they get older, due to physiological and psychological changes that are experienced as people age. These changing needs are reflected in different preferences for career outcomes (Sterns and Miklos, 1996; Sturges, 1999). Second, a focus on career stage recognizes that people have different needs and experiences as they reach different stages in their broader lives, such as getting married and having children (Levinson, 1978; Super, 1957). Finally, a generational effect emphasizes the idea that different age cohorts of individuals will have different shared values and preferences based on their different experiences growing up (Mannheim, 1952). A generation has been defined as 'an identifiable group that shares birth years, location and significant life events at critical development stages' (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). In the Western world at least, most research has focused on four generations: Veterans (born 1925–42), Baby Boomers (born 1943–60), Generation X (born 1961–81) and Millennials or Generation Y (born after 1982) (Strauss and Howe, 1991; Twenge, 2010).

This chapter draws on these three approaches to conceptualizing age in order to examine the influence of age on careers. While the conceptual distinction between these three approaches is reasonably clear, distinguishing between them empirically can be more problematic. In fact, most studies have examined age differences using cross-sectional studies, without consideration for whether these age differences are actually due to life-span, life stage or generational effects. Unfortunately cross-sectional research is insufficient to separate out these effects (Parry and Urwin, 2011; Rhodes, 1983). In order to reliably establish whether age differences are due to life-span or generational effects, for instance,

longitudinal research is needed to follow preferences over time and identify whether these remain stable (thus indicating a generational effect), or change as people get older (indicating a maturation or life-span effect). In order to examine life-stage effects accurately a more detailed consideration of personal circumstances such as marriage and having children is needed. Therefore, while reporting on research that has used these three approaches, it is important to realize that often the conclusions that are drawn in relation to whether these are life-span, life-stage or generational effects need to be interpreted with some caution.

While focusing on these three approaches in this chapter, it is also important to recognize that the conceptualization of age is not limited to these three perspectives. Increasingly, in conceptual work around age, scholars have moved away from the use of simple chronological age due to the realization that this might not reflect the complexity of age effects in the workplace, and might actually be only a proxy for a variety of age-related variables (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). As well as using generational age, scholars have begun to discuss more specific conceptualizations of age such as: functional age (a person's competence in performing certain tasks in comparison with their peers), social age (based on the views held by society regarding what individuals of particular age groups should do and how they should behave), subjective age (the age that an individual feels), organizational age (organizational tenure) and biological age (mental and physical functioning) (Cleveland and Hanscom, 2017; Kooij et al., 2008). To date, very little empirical research has been undertaken in relation to conceptualizations outside of life-span, life-stage and generational approaches, thus for simplicity this chapter focuses on these three approaches.

CAREERS ACROSS THE LIFE-SPAN

In contrast to the more recent neglect of age in the literature on careers, age was central to the early models of career progression, which focused on career stages. For example, Super's (1957) career stage model proposed four different psychological stages of career progression: exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement. While age was cited as a secondary consideration to an individual's perceptions and personal circumstances, the fact that these stages were initially seen as occurring in a linear fashion over an individual's career meant that age was a secondary and, some maintain, an unintended determinant (London and Greller, 1991). Super's model was later expanded to reflect more dynamic life-cycles in an individual's career and to add the notion of

recycling where an individual could return to an earlier stage (Hall, 1976), thus making the link between age and career stage less direct.

Levinson's (1978) life-span model proposed four sequential age-related life stages: childhood, and early, middle and late adulthood. The model was founded on the notion of a consistent structure of lockstep progression relating to shared age- and experience-related norms. As such it was criticized for its rigidity, lack of flexibility in relation to age and, significantly, the extent to which it too, like Super's model, failed to reflect the reality of women's working lives (Arnold, 1997; Powell and Mainiero, 1992). The original focus of this theory was on early to mid-career; Levinson later proposed additional stages for those over 50, but these were never fully developed (Arnold, 1997).

Recent career theories have moved away from the notion of a linear pattern of careers, suggesting that the nature and experiences of today's career entrants differ significantly from previous generations (Ng et al., 2017). As long-term employment within a single organization is no longer the norm, scholars have reconceptualized the nature of careers as 'boundaryless' and 'protean'. 'Protean' careers refer to the tendency for modern careers to be self-directed and for individuals to manage their own careers rather than relying on organizational career management (Hall, 1996). The idea of a boundaryless career reflects the fact that individuals are increasingly mobile across both physical and psychological boundaries (Arthur, 1994; Mirvis and Hall, 1996). More recent developments have included the 'kaleidoscope' career in which people adapt their career patterns in order to promote authenticity, balance, and to fit work and personal life together (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). It can be seen that in these theories of career the link between age and career development has been removed. Indeed, the link between age and careers within the contemporary careers context has seldom been researched, with age more commonly used as a control variable in careers research.

However, the existence of an ageing workforce, and increasing numbers of people staying in work for longer, has led to a growing interest in the careers of older (defined here as over 50 years of age) workers in particular. Early career stage theories painted a relatively simple picture of a slowing of career progression in later life, followed by complete retirement, such as that in Super (1957) and Savickas's (2002) disengagement stage. In these theories, this final career stage represents a decline in a person's interest and energy for their career (Savickas, 2002; Super, 1957) and is followed by the complete cessation of work. Indeed, there is substantial evidence that career progression usually slows down, or plateaus, as people get older (Armstrong-Stassen and Schlosser, 2008; Ference, 1977). Careers can plateau in two ways: first, organizationally,

in that people fail to be promoted despite the fact that they might have the capability to perform at a higher level, due to a lack of organizational opportunities or management belief that they are capable of performing at a higher level; second, personally plateaued individuals are seen as not wanting further progression or as lacking the skills to progress (Appelbaum and Finestone, 1994). In addition, Allen et al. (1999) introduced the idea of job content plateauing, when there is no further development within one's job which therefore stops being personally challenging. Although plateauing can occur at any stage in an individual's career it is more likely to occur for older individuals (Armstrong-Stassen and Schlosser, 2008). The evidence shows that the likelihood of people making a career change declines with age. For instance, 85 per cent of economically active people in their twenties report a transition of some kind, but the proportion doing so falls progressively to about 40 per cent in their fifties (McNair et al., 2003).

Despite the evidence that careers in older workers tend to plateau, more recent work has recognized that the career paths that older workers follow as they reach normal retirement age are more varied and complex than originally envisaged, with some individuals slowly phasing out of work into full retirement, while others start new careers at this point of their lives (Feldman, 1994). Scholars have recognized that career paths in people aged over 50 years old are driven by multiple factors such as personal motivations and contextual characteristics, rather than by age per se, and that the idea of a 'cliff edge' retirement is outdated (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013). For example, research has emphasized the importance of organizational structures and policies (Greller and Stroh, 1995), human resource management practices, particularly training and development (Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel, 2009; Sterns and Miklos, 1996), career counselling (Canaff, 1997) and perceived organizational support (Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel, 2009), as well as personal factors such as financial status, health issues and work attachment (Hansson et al., 1997), in driving retirement decisions.

In my own qualitative research with Dianne Bown Wilson (originally published as Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013), we presented a detailed analysis of the different patterns and perceptions of current and future career progression in older managers. Drivers for career progression in this group were varied and included the positive factors of enjoyment, interest, challenge, contribution, recognition and self-realization; and the negative drivers of avoiding stagnation, reducing stress and retaining what had already been achieved. We found some evidence of extrinsic drivers being replaced by intrinsic elements over time, in line with past research (e.g., Kooij et al., 2008; Sturges, 1999), and also that broad

career satisfaction was a key driver of decisions about whether to retire or to carry on in the same or a new career. Career progression was also influenced by personal experiences such as health problems and bereavement, their situation in relation to family and a partner, quality of life, tiredness or stress, stability and security, lifestyle and interests, financial situation, and workplace influences such as structure, organizational culture, working conditions and relationships with co-workers.

Rather than displaying similar patterns of experiences and aspirations in relation to their careers, individuals' career plans were varied and could be divided into four types. First, some wanted to stick with their current role in their current organization until they decided to retire and leave work entirely. Rather than being negatively plateaued, managers stated that they were happy with this situation and had no desire for advancement at this stage in their careers. Second, some wanted to switch to a different career at this point in their lives, either by responding to opportunities or by retiring and drawing their pension and then starting again in a new career. In this case, many saw the receipt of their pension as providing the financial security they needed to be able to follow the career that they intrinsically desired. Third, some were planning to slow down by reducing either their hours or their responsibilities in the run up to retirement. These individuals wanted to stay in the same role and continue to use their existing skills, but with fewer responsibilities. Fourth, some older workers planned to continue to strive for further career advancement via increased status or responsibilities. This was either in their current organization or involved a move to a new organization in order to achieve this.

In sum, this research demonstrates clearly the variety of career paths that individuals might take in the later stages of their careers and also the varied personal and contextual factors that might drive or influence their choices. It should be noted though that this study was based on managers only, a group who are likely to be financially secure and have significant agency in determining their career choices. It is likely that people in lower roles are more likely to be driven by financial considerations and might have less freedom to make the career changes that they might desire. However, this does support previous work developing typologies of older workers in relation to their decisions about retirement (Flynn, 2010). In practice, the variety of potential career paths in relation to older workers and retirement has been recognized and accommodated in the form of phased retirement plans and bridge employment initiatives where an individual is provided with a particular role, often at a lower level of responsibility, in the run up to full retirement (Alcover, 2017).

AGE DIFFERENCES IN CAREER PREFERENCES

This chapter now moves on to look at the impact that age has on individuals' conceptualizations of career success and preferences for career outcomes. As the literature on this topic is generally divided into that which takes a life-span approach and that which takes a generational approach, these two literatures are examined separately in the first instance

Differences Across the Life-Span

It has long been recognized that individual preferences in relation to career outcomes, and personal conceptualizations of career success, change as people get older. For example, several authors have noted that extrinsic and material components of career success such as pay and hierarchical promotion seem to decline in importance as people get older, while intrinsic and more subjective elements of careers such as autonomy and job satisfaction become more important (e.g., De Lange et al., 2010; Kallenberg and Losocco, 1983; Kooij et al., 2008; O'Connor and Wolfe, 1987; Sturges, 1999). Similarly, Loretto et al. (2005) also noted that motivators such as pay, promotions and status were important for younger workers but not for older individuals. Authors have suggested that the shift in the meaning of work and careers in later life is not the same for both men and women (Sturges, 1999). For example, Berquist et al. (1993) suggested that men become increasingly dissatisfied over the age of 50 as their informal leadership and influence at work begins to decline; whereas women, who have progressed more slowly at earlier stages of their careers, might actually experience increasing influence and therefore increased career satisfaction at this age. In addition, women at age 50 have been suggested to have higher commitment to their work compared to men, who are often still motivated by financial reasons (Patrickson and Hartmann, 1996). However, it should be noted that other studies have failed to find any age differences in perceptions of career success in different age groups, concluding that education, gender and job type are stronger predictors of attitudes than age (Pillay et al., 2006).

Changes in preferences for career outcomes as people age have often been explained using resource-based theories such as socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen and Lockenhoff, 2004) and selection optimization with compensation theory (Freund and Baltes, 1998), which essentially argue that people move through life evaluating their personal resources, and then change their focus at work to emphasize those aspects which best match resources that they perceive to be available.

Alternatively, it might be suggested that preferences change as individuals move through different career stages. For example, the need for financial rewards is reduced once an individual is finally secure and their children have reached adulthood.

Generational Differences

More recent literature has taken a generational approach to examining age differences in relation to careers. One area that has attracted some interest is the question of whether the younger generations undertake their careers in a more boundaryless and mobile fashion than older generations, therefore undergoing numerous changes of organization and occupation. For example, Lyons et al. (2015) examined this possibility of a shift in career patterns and found evidence of increased job and organizational mobility, with Millennials having almost twice as many job and organizational moves per year as members of Generation X, three times as many as Baby Boomers, and four and a half times as many moves as Veterans. Their results also showed that Generation X made twice as many moves as Baby Boomers, and two and a half times the number of moves as Veterans, showing that there was a trend in increasing mobility across generations. Similarly, Dries et al. (2008) examined whether beliefs about careers differed in Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials, and found that the incidence of 'bounded' careers (those within only one or two organizations) decreased with each generation and were replaced by 'staying' careers (in which people change employers regularly, but long for security and stability and believe they will be able to stay with their current employer) and 'homeless' careers (similar to 'staying', but people do not believe that they can stay with their current employer). However, these results do show that younger generations retain a preference for job security similar to that of older generations, even if this is not practically possible.

There is a variety of other empirical work that looks at differences in various aspects of careers across generational groups. For example, Millennials in particular have been suggested to have higher expectations of having a career which allows them work–life balance (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; Smola and Sutton, 2002) and social connections at work (Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; Wong et al., 2008), compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers. Specifically, longitudinal work by Twenge et al. (2010) showed that younger generations had a higher preference for leisure time and generally lower work centrality. In relation to the Kaleidoscope career model, Sullivan et al. (2009) noted that, when

compared to Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y had a higher drive for both work–life balance and authenticity in their careers.

Hansen and Leuty (2012) found that Veterans valued prestige and autonomy more than Baby Boomers and Generation X, whereas younger workers placed more emphasis than the older generations on extrinsic values such as working conditions, security and compensation, and social values. It should be noted here that these findings are similar to those in studies taking a life-span approach to careers, in that younger workers seem to focus more on extrinsic career outcomes than older workers. As this research was cross-sectional it is impossible to truly disentangle whether this difference is due to ageing (life-span) or generational effects. However, other research has supported an increase in a preference for extrinsic forms of career success over time (Krahn and Galambos, 2014; Twenge et al., 2010). In addition, this younger generation has particularly high expectations of career advancement (Ng et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2008) and training and development (Louglin and Barling, 2001; Sturges et al., 2002).

Integrating Life-Span and Generational Approaches

Most research on career experiences and preferences uses either a generational or age (maturation) perspective to compare age cohorts, with few scholars attempting to integrate the two approaches. One rare exception to this is the work of Ng et al. (2017), who have examined experiences during the establishment career stage (Super, 1957). This research showed that the nature of the challenges experienced in this early career stage differed between Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials. Baby Boomers experienced more traditional linear careers, characterized by a relatively easy transition into work followed by upward progression; while Generation X had more difficulty in establishing their careers; and the level of mobility needed to develop a successful career increased across Generation X and Millennials. This is interesting as it highlights the need to combine both life-span (age) and generational approaches in examining career preferences and experiences in different age groups.

Research by Unite et al. (2012) attempted to examine different explanations (that is, generational versus age and life stage) for age differences in preferences for career success outcomes. They qualitatively compared individual conceptualizations of career success in more than 100 older (post-50 years of age) and younger (under 30 years of age) workers in 11 countries. They did not adopt a single perspective on age differences but instead drew on life-span, life-stage and generational

perspectives in explaining the results. The research demonstrated broadly more similarity than differences across age groups. When asked to explain what career success meant to them, both older and younger respondents most commonly cited aspects related to achievement, satisfaction and characteristics of the job or task. In line with previous work (Loretto et al., 2005; Sturges, 1999), achievement did seem to be slightly more important to the younger group compared to older workers: satisfaction and job or task characteristics were important across both age groups. Despite the lack of age differences overall, differences between age groups were found at a country level. In particular, in the United States of America (USA), job performance, recognition and job or task characteristics were most important to the older group; whereas achievement, satisfaction, learning and development, and making a difference were more important to the younger group. While the results here need to be interpreted with some caution due to the cross-sectional nature of the research, these characteristics do seem to be in line with the characteristics stereotypically ascribed to Baby Boomers (our older group) and Millennials (our younger group). In China, however, the older group conceptualized career success as achievement, material output, job security and performing one's role; whereas the younger group emphasized achievement, job or task characteristics, satisfaction and the social working environment. These characteristics can be ascribed to the specific context in China and the changes in this context over the past 30 years. This research therefore demonstrates the importance of context in driving differences between age groups, and as such might be in line with a generational approach, in that career preferences have been shaped by individuals' very different experiences while growing up. This is very much an initial exploratory attempt at investigating age differences in this way, and considerable research is still needed to pull apart age, generational and life-stage effects on careers.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has provided a relatively brief overview of the current state of knowledge in relation to age and careers. Both a life-span and generational approach to the influence of age on careers was adopted, and consideration was also given to the impact of life stage on career preferences. What is clear from this analysis is that the literature on age and careers is somewhat immature and fragmented due to the multitude of perspectives taken. Consequently, it is difficult to obtain a detailed understanding of how age affects careers.

Traditional career theory mapped the development of a career as a linear process, implicitly related to age. However, contemporary theories have moved away from this linear approach, instead emphasizing the importance of personal and contextual factors in driving career experiences. Indeed, we have seen an increase in the complexity and variety of careers, particularly as people reach normal retirement age. The idea of a linear career in which an individual is working one day and then retired the next is no longer appropriate for most people; the introduction of phased retirement plans and bridge employment has further added to the options that people can consider when reaching this stage of their lives. The complexity of how people make decisions about careers as they move through their lives is still not fully understood, and therefore needs considerably more research.

It is clear that different age groups have different conceptualizations of career success and therefore different preferences for career outcomes. Less clear, however, are the reasons behind these differences. For example, research has shown that younger workers place more emphasis on extrinsic career success such as pay and hierarchical status. This has been explained in the literature in relation to both generational differences and changes as an individual ages, but a definitive understanding of what drives age differences in career preferences has not been achieved. This demonstrates a real need to bring together the different approaches to understanding age differences in order to identify the mechanisms that lead to changes in conceptualizations of career success across age groups. It is only by identifying how and why age affects careers that employers can take steps to address these differences and support their employees more effectively in developing their careers.

Practical work in the area of age and careers has mirrored the disparity in the academic literature. For example, the need to retain older workers for longer has given rise to a variety of practical advice on how to extend working life. This body of literature has emphasized aspects such as flexible work arrangements, retraining and enhanced benefits for older workers (Duxbury and Halinski, 2014; Hermansen and Midtsundstad, 2015; Picchio and Van Ours, 2013; Stone and Tetrick, 2013).

The advice from generational research has focused primarily on how to satisfy the different generations, in particular the younger generation, in relation to career outcomes and thus motivate and retain them in the workforce. There is a vast amount of advice available from professional bodies and consultancies about how to manage the Millennial generation. This is worrying, as the vast majority of this work relies on cross-sectional studies that cannot truly separate generational affects from other age-related outcomes. Research is much needed to reliably identify any

changes in career preferences of younger groups based upon generational effects, so that the advice provided is evidence-based rather than anecdote-based.

It is obvious from the above discussion that a more integrated approach to examining the influence of age on careers is needed. There is a need not only to examine different approaches to explaining age effects, but also to disentangle age effects from the impacts of other personal and contextual factors. The ageing of the workforce and increasing age diversity in the workplace mean that it is increasingly important that this research be undertaken in order to develop a more mature and reliable evidence base on which to develop human resource management and career management practices.

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