

When and Why Do Employers (Re)Hire Employees Beyond Normal Retirement Age?

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ABSTRACT

Older workers are increasingly being encouraged to work beyond normal retirement age (NRA). Given that employers generally control opportunities for employees to work beyond NRA, better understanding their motivations, attitudes, and experiences in (re)hiring employees to work beyond NRA is vital. To date, however, research investigating employment beyond NRA has primarily focused on the perspective and experiences of employees. In this study, we analyzed data from a 2017 survey of 1,214 Dutch employers to examine whether workplace social norms, employers' concerns related to workforce aging, and structural organizational characteristics were related to whether or not they employed working retirees. We found that workplace norms about working beyond NRA, concerns about career opportunities for younger workers, and structural characteristics such as organizational size, sector, and proportion of female and older workers in the organization were significantly associated with whether or not organizations employed workers beyond NRA. In the second, exploratory, phase of our analysis, we investigated attitudes and approaches toward workers beyond NRA among those who had previously employed such workers. Most employers agree that they mainly (re)hire workers with unique knowledge or experience to work beyond NRA and that employees usually take the initiative in prolonging employment. Employers' opinions on whether employees working beyond NRA should accept a pay cut or block the progress of other employees are more mixed. Insights gained from the current research can help guide future research and policy to support longer working lives, from both employee and employer perspectives, even beyond normal retirement age.

KEYWORDS: older workers, labor market, retirement, employment, organizations

Declining fertility and mortality rates have led to significant changes in the age profiles of western societies and, consequently, their labor markets (Crimmins & Zhang, 2019). To keep social security systems sustainable and tackle potential labor shortages resulting from these demographic changes, workers across developed nations are increasingly being encouraged to extend their working lives by foregoing early retirement, retiring later, and potentially continuing to work after the statutory or normal retirement age (NRA; Barnes et al., 2009), which is defined as the age at which people become (fully) eligible for pension benefits.

Emerging evidence shows that employees are gradually adjusting to the prospect of longer working lives, with increasing labor force participation rates among older workers and increases in preferred retirement ages across European countries in recent years (Hess, 2017). In addition to increasing intentions to work longer, the number of workers continuing in employment after NRA has also seen significant increases in recent years (Pleau & Shauman, 2013). This rise in

employment after NRA has been linked to a number of individual and societal level factors (Beehr & Bennett, 2015). Social norms regarding retirement (Dingemans et al., 2017), as well as an individual's health (Kerr & Armstrong-Stassen, 2011), education (Wang et al., 2008), and financial status (Kim & DeVaney, 2005) play a key role in determining whether people work after retirement. However, although our understanding of the antecedents and the impact of working beyond NRA from the employee's perspective have grown, comparatively little is known about the considerations, attitudes, and motives of employers regarding the employment of older workers beyond NRA.

Employment beyond NRA is conceptually close to the notion of bridge employment, which can be broadly defined as paid employment after retirement (Beehr & Bennett, 2015). However, because 'retirement' itself can be an ambiguous concept (Beehr & Bowling, 2013), bridge employment is mostly associated with employee-focused research, and the legal context—and therefore the motives—for employers to (re)hire retirees can vary between types of retirees

(e.g., before and after NRA), our study will focus exclusively on employers (re)hiring older workers beyond NRA.

Improved understanding of employers' perceptions and experiences of (re)hiring employees after NRA is crucial, as employers ultimately control the opportunities that employees get for working beyond NRA (Vickerstaff, 2006), aside from workers moving into self-employment (van Solinge, 2014). Although some retirees may wish to work longer, their ability to remain in, or return to, the workforce is largely dependent on the decisions of employers to hire or retain them. Previous research has shown that although employers may recognize advantages to employing older workers, such as loyalty and experience, their ratings of older workers' employability and productivity are commonly more negative than that of younger workers, resulting in disproportionately scarce employment opportunities for older workers (Heywood et al., 2010). Although the decision to (re) hire an older worker after NRA may appear conceptually similar to the decision to hire or retain an older worker before retirement age, there may be important distinctions between these groups of employees and the subsequent hiring decisions (e.g., the legal context, expected contract duration). To date however, employers' decision making related to employees beyond NRA remains largely unexplored.

Therefore, in this study, we examine the experience of Dutch employers in facilitating the hiring, or continued employment, of workers beyond NRA. More specifically, first, we investigate which organizations do and do not employ workers beyond NRA, and whether that behavior is related to factors commonly shown to relate to employers' behavior with regard to older workers. In particular, we consider the relationship between social norms regarding working at older ages within the organization and concerns that employers have regarding workforce aging, and whether or not they employed workers beyond NRA, while controlling for a range of structural organizational characteristics.

Second, focusing exclusively on those employers who have previously engaged with workers beyond NRA, we conduct exploratory analysis investigating the nature of employers' attitudes and approach toward employing working retirees. Specifically, we consider four aspects of the employment relationship with employees beyond NRA: whether employers expect older workers that want to work beyond NRA to (1) initiate the new employment relationship themselves; (2) possess unique skills or experience; (3) agree to a lower salary; and (4) block the career progress of younger workers. In addition to presenting descriptive statistics about these aspects of employers' attitudes and approach towards employment after NRA, we also study the associations between the predictor variables from the first phase of the analysis and these employer attitudes. We do so in an attempt to discover which factors may be relevant for employers' attitudes, which can then guide future research on these largely unexplored topics.

The current study contributes to the literature in two main ways. First, we further elucidate factors that may encourage or discourage employers from hiring or retaining workers beyond retirement age. Although previous research has investigated employers' hiring decisions in relation to retirees, these works have used a much narrower set of predictors (Karpinska et al., 2011) and have predominantly focused on early retirees as opposed to those who work beyond NRA (Oude Mulders et al., 2015). Second, we explore the attitudes and approach employers use when (re)hiring employees after NRA. This employers'

perspective is largely missing from the literature but is imperative for a better understanding of labor market dynamics after NRA.

INTERNATIONAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT OF EMPLOYMENT BEYOND NRA

NRAs can differ between countries and can—within countries—be different for men and women and for people of different birth cohorts (OECD, 2019). Countries may also differ in the legal context regarding (employment beyond) NRAs, especially regarding employment protection legislation and mandatory retirement. Many countries have mandatory retirement regulations, which allow employers to dismiss workers upon reaching NRA (OECD, 2017; Wood et al., 2010). In these countries, working beyond NRA is entirely contingent on the willingness of employers to negotiate, or renegotiate, employee contracts. On the other hand, countries that have outlawed mandatory retirement also have much less stringent employment protection legislation, so that employment after NRA is still largely contingent on employers' willingness to continue an employment relationship (Hyde & Dingemans, 2017). Even though most countries have explicit antiage discrimination legislation, mandatory retirement regulations are commonly exempted, and because age discrimination against people working beyond NRA is difficult to prove, the effectiveness of such legislation is often limited (OECD, 2019).

Cohort-specific NRAs have been in effect in The Netherlands—where this study is situated—since 2012, when the government decided to gradually raise NRA from 65. Currently (2020–2021), NRA is set at 66 years and 4 months and will reach 67 years by 2024. After that, NRA will increase by 8 months for every 1-year increase in life expectancy at age 65 (OECD, 2019). Mandatory retirement is only allowed at NRA, and is practically always enforced, because employment protection legislation is strong and antiage discrimination legislation prevents dismissal due to age at any other time. A law that specifically regulates employment after NRA was introduced in 2016, not only ensuring minimum wage and protecting against unfair treatment, but also lowering employment protection for this specific group (Oude Mulders, 2019).

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

There is a dearth of literature examining the hiring or retention of workers beyond NRA. Although some quasiexperimental studies have looked at how individual characteristics of retirees relate to individual managers' decisions whether or not to (re)hire workers beyond NRA (Oude Mulders et al., 2014), it is unclear how organizational factors and characteristics are related to the actual decision of employers to engage in an employment relation with workers beyond NRA. Here, we distinguish three groups of factors that may be related to this behavior: age-related social norms regarding working at older ages, employers' concerns regarding longer working lives, and structural characteristics of organizations.

Social norms

An important factor in employers' seemingly low willingness to employ retirees may be the social norms surrounding aging in the sphere of work and retirement. Norms refer to the rules and social attitudes governing what is or is not acceptable behavior within a particular social setting (Boudon, 2003). The concept of age-related norms,

first outlined in the literature by Neugarten et al. (1965), has gained increasing research attention, with the existence of age-related norms for retirement now widely accepted in the literature (Kohli, 2007; Radl, 2012).

An employer's internalized retirement age norm shows the age at which employers generally think employees should retire from the workforce. This may derive from mandated NRA, but also from employers' personal beliefs, the beliefs and behaviors of their peers, or individual experiences with older employees within their organization (Settersten & Hägestad, 1996). Although this conceptualization of internalized retirement age norms is concerned with when employees in general should retire, employers may differ in the extent to which they apply such a norm to individual cases. Although some employers may not condone anybody working beyond what they have internalized as the retirement age norm, others may be willing to let individual cases deviate from the general social norm (Oude Mulders et al., 2017). Previous studies have linked higher internalized retirement age norms to increased willingness to employ (early) retirees (Karpinska et al., 2013; Oude Mulders et al., 2014), and also to organizations' increased support for longer working lives (Oude Mulders et al., 2017). Therefore, we hypothesize that employers that hold a higher internalized retirement age norm will be more likely to employ older workers beyond NRA than those with lower internalized retirement age norms (hypothesis 1).

In addition to internalized retirement age norms of employers themselves, we also consider their perception of the social norms regarding working at older ages among the employees in their organization. Even though not all employees may hold similar norms, and employers may not subscribe to the social norms of their employees themselves, it is likely the employer's perception of social norms among their employees that affects employers' behavior, because employers may fear a backlash of negative responses and decreased commitment from their staff when they transgress an accepted organizational social norm.

Previous literature has identified that hiring an employee from outside the organization is viewed differently to the continued employment of a worker beyond NRA. For example, employers recognize the firm-specific knowledge and expertise held by older employees. However, these advantages are only seen through continued employment rather than the hiring of older workers (Heywood et al., 2010). The general and job-specific training required by new employees, may result in younger workers—with their longer projected tenure—being viewed as more cost effective and therefore more attractive to hiring managers (Adler & Hilber, 2009). We hypothesize that employers who perceive the social norm within their organization as more welcoming to the rehiring of former employees (hypothesis 2a) or the hiring of external retirees (hypothesis 2b) are more likely to have experience employing workers beyond NRA.

Employer concerns

Beyond social norms regarding work at later ages, employers' concerns regarding the effects and practicalities of workforce aging may also inhibit their openness to employees working past NRA. Negative perceptions surrounding the skills and abilities of older workers are pervasive in society and affect the employability of older workers in the eyes of employers and hiring managers (Van Dalen et al., 2010). The

extension of working life beyond NRA could be seen as breaching the 'implicit contract' (Lazear, 1990) between employees and employers, and may trigger these preexisting concerns employers hold about the capabilities of older workers (Oude Mulders & Henkens, 2019). The current work examines four main categories of employer concerns related to workforce aging and longer working lives: Concerns about the mental fitness of older workers; concerns about the physical fitness of older workers; concerns about the limited employability of older workers with health problems; and concerns about career opportunities for younger workers.

Evidence of employer concerns regarding reduced physical and mental capabilities of older workers is widespread in the literature (Harris et al., 2018). Together, these capacities are often viewed as underpinning an employee's work ability, that is, the ability, or perceived ability, of an individual to meet the requirements of their job (Cadiz et al., 2019; Ilmarinen, 2009). Although the adoption of certain workplace strategies and policies to accommodate older workers can increase work ability (Oakman et al., 2018) and ensure that they perform as effectively as their younger colleagues, these measures require employers who are willing and motivated to implement them. Recent evidence shows that employer concerns about the mental and physical capacity of older workers to withstand the demands of working life significantly are related to employers' behavior in facilitating longer working lives (Oude Mulders & Henkens, 2019). Because it is likely that employers expect the mental and physical fitness of older workers to decline further after NRA, we hypothesize that these concerns will also be related to their decision to (re)hire workers beyond NRA; with those expressing greater concern about the physical (hypothesis 3a) and mental capabilities (hypothesis 3b) of older workers expected to be less likely to employ them beyond NRA.

The impact of concerns regarding the physical capabilities of older workers on hiring decisions may be compounded by concerns regarding the limited employability of workers with health conditions. The likelihood of experiencing health conditions increases with age, with health problems shown to be the most significant cause of declining employment rates among older workers (Barnes et al., 2009). Although chronic health conditions have traditionally been linked to earlier exit from the labor force, more stringent regulations regarding disability insurance in recent years have resulted in individuals with chronic health conditions remaining in the workforce for longer (Staubli, 2011). Given the reduced work ability and lower productivity associated with chronic health problems, adequately providing for the increasing number of older workers remaining in the labor force poses a significant challenge for employers (Vanajan et al., 2019). Therefore, employers' concerns about the limited employability of workers with health problems may play a role in their hiring decisions regarding working after NRA. We hypothesize that employers who express greater concern about the limited employability of workers with health conditions will be less likely to have experience employing workers beyond NRA (hypothesis 3c).

Concerns regarding reduced career opportunities for younger employees due to workforce aging and the prolonged employment of older workers may also be related to employers' hiring decisions. Rooted in the lump of labor fallacy—the notion that workers are in competition for a finite number of employment opportunities—many fear that increased participation of older workers in the labor force

negatively impacts career prospects of younger workers (Munnell & Wu, 2013). Employers who believe that by employing workers beyond NRA they are limiting career opportunities for other workers may therefore be less inclined to do so. Despite a lack of evidence that more people working beyond NRA limits younger workers' opportunities, these concerns are pervasive, and may therefore affect (re)hiring of older workers beyond NRA (Kalwij et al., 2010). On this basis, we hypothesize that employers reporting greater concern about the career opportunities for younger employees will be less likely to have experience employing workers beyond NRA (hypothesis 3d).

Structural factors

In investigating the relationships between social norms and employer concerns about workforce aging on the one hand, and employment of employees beyond NRA on the other hand, it is important to control for structural characteristics of the organization itself. Factors such as the size of an organization are related to the implementation of age-based HR policies (Oude Mulders & Henkens, 2019), which in turn may affect the opportunity structure to employ retirees. Additionally, evidence suggests that the pervasiveness of age-related stereotypes, both positive and negative, can vary significantly based on an organization's size, and the sector in which they operate (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Furthermore, the makeup of the existing workforce may also relate to the availability of employment opportunities for retirees within a firm. Organizations are more likely to employ retirees in more flexible roles (Taylor & Walker, 1998). Therefore, a large organization, or an organization with a large existing flexible workforce, may provide greater flexibility in incorporating retirees into the workforce. Similarly, the existing levels of employment of older workers, and the presence and severity of recruitment problems within an organization may indicate the supply of, and demand for, working retirees in an organization, respectively.

Employers' approach to employing workers beyond NRA

In the second exploratory phase of our analysis, we investigate the nature of employers' attitudes and approach toward employing working retirees among those who have employed workers beyond NRA. Specifically, we study whether employers think older workers working beyond NRA initiate the new employment relationship themselves, possess unique skills or experience, should agree to a lower salary, and whether they block the career progress of younger workers. This phase is explorative because although limited evidence suggests that these factors may play a role in employers' considerations to employ workers beyond NRA, these motives and approaches of employers have not been subject of thorough investigation. For example, Conen et al. (2012) found that only 13% of employers would ask workers to work beyond NRA, even when faced with staff shortages. Quasiexperimental evidence suggests employers use unique knowledge or experience and the willingness of retirees to accept a pay cut as selection criteria (Oude Mulders et al., 2014), but evidence from actual organizations is missing. Lastly, people extending their working lives and working beyond NRAs blocking career progress of younger workers is a common concern in public discourse and may affect employers' willingness to employ retirees (Munnell & Wu, 2013).

METHODS

Data

The current data set consists of employers' responses to a survey about aging workforces and longer working lives, conducted between December 2016 and March 2017 in the Netherlands. A sample of 6,000 organizations from all sectors (except agriculture) was invited to participate. Only organizations with 10 or more employees were included; micro-organizations (with less than 10 employees) were excluded, given their relatively informal HR policies and ad hoc approach to aging (Cardon & Stevens, 2004).

To ensure an adequate number of responses from a variety of organizations, the sample was stratified across size and sector, with large organizations and those in the public sector oversampled, whereas small organizations and those in the service industry were undersampled. As such, the sample is not fully representative for the population of Dutch organizations, but size and sector are controlled for in the analysis. Each organization received a letter inviting them to participate, along with a hard copy of the questionnaire. Organizations could complete the survey in two ways: By completing and returning the hardcopy questionnaire, or by following a unique code contained in the invitation letter to complete the survey online. While the questionnaire was addressed to the director or CEO, the letter specified that other employees with in-depth knowledge of the organizations' practices were eligible to complete the questionnaire. A further two reminders were sent, the first comprising only a reminder letter containing their unique online code, and the second also containing a new hardcopy questionnaire. This resulted in a total of 1,358 participating organizations. The response rate of 23% matches response rates found in similar large-scale organizational surveys conducted both nationally (Conen et al., 2012) and internationally (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Because item nonresponse was relatively low (between 0.5% and 4.7%), single stochastic regression imputation was used to correct for missing data in most of the predictor variables. However, to ensure that imputed figures remained within a logical range, predictive mean matching ($K = 10$; Rubin, 2004) was used to impute missing data for the variables measuring the proportion of female employees, the proportion of flexible contract workers, and the proportion of employees aged 50+ working in an organization, whereas truncated regression imputation was used for the variable internalized retirement age norms.

To ensure that we only analyze data from respondents that have experience and are (partly) responsible for personnel decisions in their organizations, we considered their positions in the organization. The respondents of the survey were owners/directors/CEOs (46.03%), general or departmental managers (6.62%), HR managers (24.74%), HR employees (12.30%), and other types of employees (10.31%). The group of other employees ($n = 140$) were removed before analysis because we could not verify if they were involved in making personnel decisions. Robustness checks showed our results were not substantively related to respondents' positions (see note on Table 4).

Two cases were removed as they failed to respond to the question regarding their experience with employees working beyond retirement. A further 2 cases were excluded for responding to questions regarding their organization's experiences in employing working retirees despite previously indicating their organization had no such experience. This left a final total of 1,214 observations for analysis.

Measures

Outcome variables

In the first phase of the analysis, we examine employers' previous engagement with working retirees, which was assessed via responses to the questionnaire item "Does your organization have experience with employees who continue to work after normal retirement age?" Participants' responses (either yes or no) then formed the outcome variable for the initial phase of our analysis.

The second phase of our analysis focused on the opinions and experiences of those who had previous experience with working retirees. Participants were asked to rate on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) to what extent they agreed with the following statements: (1) "Working beyond retirement in our organization normally happens at the initiative of the employee"; (2) "Working retirees in our organization have unique knowledge and/or experience"; (3) "If people in our organization work beyond retirement age, this holds back career progress of others"; and (4) "If people in our organization work beyond retirement age, they must accept a lower wage."

Predictor variables

To assess individual respondents' internalized retirement age norms, participants were asked to list at which age they found employees "generally too old to be working more than twenty hours per week" (Radl, 2012). This item was measured this way—investigating attitudes toward older employees working more than 20 hr per week rather than explicitly asking about views on when individuals should retire—because the meaning and interpretation of "retire(ment)" can be ambiguous and lead to confusion (Beehr & Bowling, 2013). Responses were truncated between 50 and 90 to reduce the impact of a small number of outliers (but did not alter the substantive results). To assess workplace social norms about retirement, employers were asked to rate on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very negatively) to 5 (very positively), how they thought workers in their organization would judge (1) rehiring an employee to work beyond NRA and (2) hiring an external retiree to work beyond NRA.

Additionally, we measured employers' concerns regarding prolonged employment of older workers. To assess this, employers were asked the following question: "People need to keep working much longer than before. In that context, to what extent do you, as an employer, worry about...?" (1) the physical capabilities of older workers; (2) mental capabilities of older workers; (3) limited employability of workers with health problems; and (4) reduced career opportunities for younger workers. Employers were asked to respond on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely).

Finally, various structural characteristics of the organizations, such as their size and sector, were included in the analysis as controls. The size of the organization, based on the number of employees, was divided into 3 categories based on Eurostat's Structural Business Statistics classification: small (10–49 employees), medium (50–249 employees), and large (>250 employees). Respondents' sector of operation was assessed with Eurostat's NACE Rev. 2 classification system, then reduced to three broad categories: industry, services and trade, and public sector. Employers were also asked to list the percentage of female employees, workers over the age of 50, and workers on a flexible (nonstandard) employment contract in their organizations.

For ease of interpretation, these percentages were divided by 100, so that they could be read as proportions (i.e., ranging between 0 and 1). Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate whether or not the organization was experiencing recruitment problems ("no," "sometimes," or "often").

Analyses

The first phase of our analysis will investigate the factors associated with whether or not employers have previously employed workers beyond NRA. To this end, we conduct a logistic regression to estimate the associations of our predictor variables (social norms and employer concerns) and control variables (structural organizational characteristics) with the outcome variable, employer engagement with retirees.

In the second phase of the analysis, we will conduct four separate ordered logistic regression analyses. These exploratory analyses examine the relationship between the predictor variables and various measures of employers' attitudes and impressions about their experience with working retirees. The outcome variables in the analyses will be whether employers (1) agree that working beyond NRA happens at the initiative of employees; (2) view workers beyond NRA as having unique skills and/or experience; (3) believe workers beyond NRA should accept a lower salary; and (4) believe workers beyond NRA limit career opportunities for younger employees. Ordered logistic regression is most suitable for these analyses, given the ordinal nature of the Likert-type response variables (Harrell, 2015).

RESULTS

Table 1 outlines the descriptive statistics for the variables studied here. The majority of organizations, 54.04% ($N = 656$), had previously employed workers after NRA, with 45.96% ($N = 558$) having never previously employed a worker beyond NRA in their organization. Table 2 shows the correlation coefficients between the variables included in further analyses.

Employers (re)hiring retirees

The results of the logistic regression model predicting experience of employing workers after NRA are presented in Table 3. Although no significant relationship to employers' internalized retirement age norm was found (hypothesis 1 not supported), their perceptions of workplace norms about the acceptability of rehiring a former employee or hiring an external retiree to work beyond NRA are related to their behavior, supporting hypotheses 2a and 2b. Organizations with more accepting workplace norms regarding the hiring of outside retirees, and the continued employment of former regular employees beyond NRA, were significantly more likely to have previous experience with workers beyond NRA. It is worth noting that the positive association of workplace norms regarding continued employment of former regular employees is much larger than that of hiring outside retirees. This presumably reflects the fact that rehiring former employees after mandatory retirement is the most common form of employment after NRA in the Netherlands.

With regard to employer concerns about workforce aging, only concerns about how longer working lives may block the career progress of younger workers were associated with organizations' (re) hiring workers beyond NRA, supporting hypothesis 3d, but not hypotheses 3a–3c. Organizations in which employers reported greater

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for variables included in the analysis.

Variable	N	Mean or %	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Outcome variables					
Experience with employees after NRA					
Yes	656	54.04%		0	1
No	558	45.96%		0	1
Working retirees taking initiative for work after NRA	646	3.73	0.89	1	5
Working retirees have unique knowledge and/or experience	649	3.71	0.80	1	5
Working retirees must accept a lower wage	644	2.81	0.98	1	5
Working retirees hold back career progress of others	648	2.85	1.04	1	5
Predictor variables					
Internalized retirement age norm	1,214	67.21	4.08	50	90
Workplace norm: rehiring former employee	1,214	3.25	1.03	1	5
Workplace norm: hiring external retiree	1,214	2.60	1.04	1	5
Concerns about older workers' physical capabilities	1,214	3.25	1.14	1	5
Concerns about older workers' mental capabilities	1,214	3.10	0.96	1	5
Concerns about limited employability of workers with health problems	1,214	3.45	1.05	1	5
Concerns about younger workers' career opportunities	1,214	2.71	0.93	1	5
Size					
Small (10–49 employees)	395	32.54%		0	1
Medium (50–249 employees)	470	38.71%		0	1
Large (>250 employees)	349	28.75%		0	1
Sector					
Industry	419	34.51%		0	1
Services and trade	349	28.75%		0	1
Public	446	36.74%		0	1
Proportion of female employees	1,214	0.42	0.31	0	1
Proportion of employees aged 50+	1,214	0.32	0.18	0	1
Proportion of flexible contract workers	1,214	0.14	0.16	0	1
Recruitment problems					
No	421	34.68%		0	1
Sometimes	419	34.51%		0	1
Often	374	30.81%		0	1

Note. NRA = normal retirement age.

concern for the opportunities for younger workers were significantly less likely to have previously employed workers beyond NRA.

A number of structural characteristics of the organization were found to be significantly related to employers' experience with employing workers beyond NRA. A greater proportion of older workers within an organization were associated with an increased likelihood of having previously employed workers after normal retirement. Contrastingly, organizations with a higher proportion of female employees were less likely to have previously employed workers beyond NRA. The size of the organization was also an important predictor, with medium and large organizations more likely than smaller firms to have previously employed workers beyond NRA. Last, a significant relation between the sector in which an organization operates and engagement with retirees was found, with employers in the public sector more likely to have previously employed workers beyond NRA than employers in the industry or services and trade sectors.

Characteristics of the employment relationship

The distribution of responses to each of the four outcome variables in the second phase of the analysis is outlined in [Figure 1](#).

Initiating employment

The results showed that a majority of employers (70%) agreed that employment of workers beyond NRA is mainly at the initiative of the employee. Eleven percent of employers disagreed, and 19% neither agreed nor disagreed that employment beyond NRA was primarily at the behest of employees. Results of an ordered logistic regression analysis (Model I in [Table 4](#)) showed that only employer concerns regarding prolonged employment of older workers were associated with whether they found employees mainly responsible to take the initiative for working beyond NRA. Employers who reported greater concern with older worker's physical capabilities were more likely to agree that employment happens at the initiative of employees. In contrast, those who were more concerned about older worker's mental capabilities were less likely to agree that employment of retirees happens at the initiative of employees.

Unique skills and experiences

Overall, the majority of employers who had previously employed workers beyond NRA (67%) agreed that workers over NRA in their organization had unique experience or skills, with 7% of participants

Table 2. Correlation matrix of all outcome, predictor, and control variables included in the analyses.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1. Experience with employees after NRA	—																		
2. Working retirees taking initiative for work after NRA	n/a	—																	
3. Working retirees have unique knowledge and/or experience	n/a	-0.00	—																
4. Working retirees must accept a lower wage	n/a	-0.07	-0.10*	—															
5. Working retirees hold back career progress of others	n/a	.04	-0.18***	.17***	—														
6. Internalized retirement age norm	.05	-0.00	.10*	-0.03	-0.09*	—													
7. Workplace norm: rehiring former employee	.26***	.03	.13***	-0.10*	-0.26***	.22***	—												
8. Workplace norm: hiring external retiree	.18***	-0.01	.16***	-0.08*	-0.30***	.15***	.42***	—											
9. Concern about older workers' physical capabilities	.02	.11**	-0.09*	.05	.08*	-0.32***	-0.18***	-0.15***	—										
10. Concern about older workers' mental capabilities	.04	-0.07	-0.12**	-0.01	.17***	-0.30***	-0.12***	-0.14***	.48***	—									
11. Concern about limited employability of workers with health problems	.04	.07	-0.11**	.06	.09*	-0.24***	-0.12***	-0.12***	.61***	.42***	—								
12. Concern about younger workers' career opportunities	-0.08**	-0.01	.00	-0.01	.16***	-0.10*	-0.14***	-0.12***	.17***	.23***	.29***	—							
13. Size	.27***	-0.02	-0.09*	-0.07	.08*	-0.10*	-0.02	.02	.16***	.17***	.15***	.09***	—						
14. Sector	.03	.00	-0.01	-0.06	.04	.10*	.03	.01	-0.27***	.02	-0.13***	.08**	.13***	—					
15. Proportion of female employees	-0.07*	.02	-0.08*	-0.06	.08*	.05	.00	.02	-0.19***	.04	-0.08**	.06*	.11***	.70***	—				
16. Proportion of employees aged 50+	.11***	-0.08*	.06	-0.06	.06	-0.07*	-0.05	-0.10***	.10***	.10***	.14***	.10***	.15***	.02	-0.01	—			
17. Proportion of flexible contract workers	.02	.04	-0.09*	.00	-0.03	-0.02	.01	.09**	.05	-0.04	.04	-0.01	.08**	.05	.09**	-0.09**	—		
18. Recruitment problems (ref. = no)	.09**	.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.07	-0.08*	.01	.05	.16***	.15***	.17***	.10***	.16***	-0.02	-0.05	-0.05	-0.03	—	

Note: n/a = not applicable; NRA = normal retirement age. No correlations were computed between outcome variables in phase 1 and phase 2 of the analysis as all participants in the second phase of the analysis had responded yes to the binary categorical outcome variable from phase 1.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 3. Logistic regression predicting experience with employment of workers beyond normal retirement age.

Variable	OR	SE	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
Social norms					
Internalized retirement age norm	1.02	0.02	.341	0.98	1.05
Workplace norm: rehiring former employee	1.66	0.12	.000***	1.44	1.92
Workplace norm: hiring external retiree	1.23	0.09	.003**	1.07	1.41
Employer concerns					
Concerns about older workers' physical capabilities	0.99	0.08	.906	0.85	1.15
Concerns about older workers' mental capabilities	1.10	0.09	.240	0.94	1.29
Concern about limited employability of workers with health problems	1.09	0.09	.314	0.92	1.27
Concerns about younger workers' career opportunities	0.80	0.06	.002**	0.69	0.92
Structural factors					
Size (ref. = small [10–49 employees])					
Medium (50–249 employees)	2.01	0.31	.000***	1.48	2.72
Large (>250 employees)	4.88	0.89	.000***	3.42	6.97
Sector (ref. = industry)					
Services and trade	1.24	0.22	.233	0.87	1.75
Public	1.83	0.42	.008**	1.17	2.85
Proportion of female employees	0.27	0.08	.000***	0.15	0.49
Proportion of employees aged 50+	3.08	1.18	.003**	1.46	6.51
Proportion of flexible contract workers	1.14	0.47	.745	0.51	2.56
Recruitment problems (ref. = no)					
Sometimes	1.31	0.20	.081	0.97	1.76
Often	1.24	0.20	.200	0.89	1.71

Note. CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio. *N* = 1,214.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

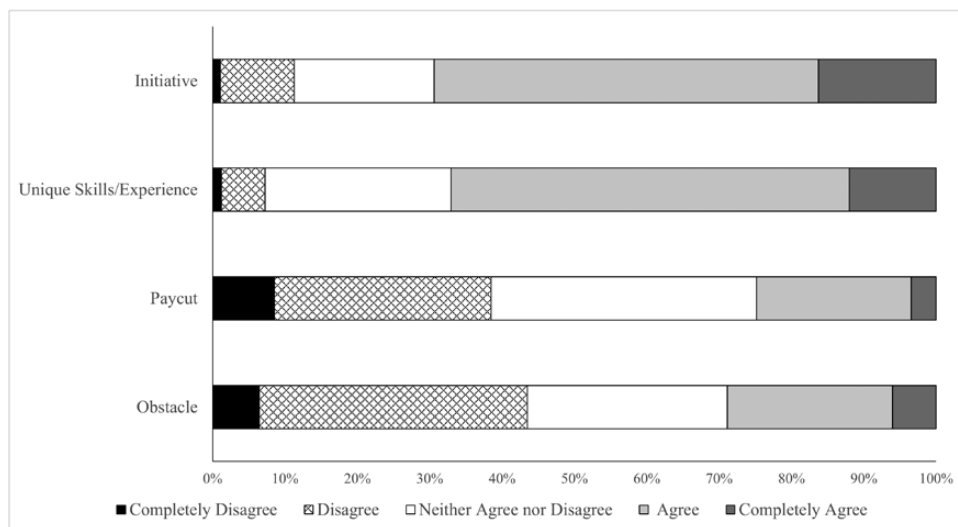


Figure 1. Employers' attitudes toward various important aspects of employing workers beyond normal retirement age in their organization.

disagreeing, and the remainder (26%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement. Model II in Table 4 outlines the results of the ordered logistic regression predicting whether or not employers viewed workers hired beyond NRA as possessing unique skills or experience. More positive workplace norms regarding hiring employees from outside the organization were linked to greater levels of thinking that older workers have unique skills or experience. No significant associations were found for employer concerns. In larger organizations, and

organizations with a higher proportion of female employees and flexible contract workers, employers were less likely to agree that workers beyond NRA have unique skills/experience.

Pay cut

Thirty-eight percent of the employers who have previously (re)hired workers beyond NRA disagreed that those workers should take a pay cut, compared with 25% who agreed and 37% who neither agreed nor

Table 4. Ordered logistic regression analyses for the outcome variables (initiative, unique skills/experience, pay cut, blocking progress) characterizing the employment relationship.

Variable	Model I: initiative			Model II: unique skills/experience			Model III: pay cut			Model IV: blocking progress		
	Coef.	SE	<i>p</i>	Coef.	SE	<i>p</i>	Coef.	SE	<i>p</i>	Coef.	SE	<i>p</i>
Social norms												
Internalized retirement age norm	-0.01	0.02	0.68	0.01	0.02	0.602	-0.01	0.02	0.628	0.01	0.02	0.591
Workplace norm: rehiring former employee	0.1	0.09	0.293	0.18	0.1	0.068	-0.14	0.09	0.134	-0.34	0.1	.001**
Workplace norm: hiring external retiree	-0.08	0.08	0.312	0.23	0.1	.016*	-0.06	0.09	0.521	-0.44	0.09	.000***
Employer concerns												
Concern about older workers' physical capabilities	0.31	0.08	.000***	0.03	0.09	0.735	0.05	0.09	0.613	-0.05	0.09	0.59
Concern about older workers' mental capabilities	-0.34	0.1	.001**	-0.18	0.1	0.081	-0.09	0.1	0.371	0.25	0.1	.011**
Concern about limited employability of workers with health problems	0.12	0.1	0.217	-0.15	0.1	0.148	0.09	0.1	0.368	-0.00	0.1	0.966
Concern about younger workers' career opportunities	-0.05	0.09	0.566	0.08	0.1	0.425	-0.02	0.09	0.798	0.25	0.09	.006*
Structural factors												
Size (ref. = small [10–49 employees])												
Medium (50–249 employees)	-0.10	0.21	0.638	-0.47	0.21	.025*	-0.33	0.2	0.098	0.15	0.19	0.444
Large (>250 employees)	-0.13	0.23	0.568	-0.43	0.21	.039*	-0.34	0.21	0.103	0.19	0.2	0.354
Sector (ref. = industry)												
Services and trade	0.15	0.21	0.48	0.21	0.21	0.297	-0.16	0.21	0.433	-0.05	0.19	0.781
Public	0.25	0.28	0.383	0.36	0.27	0.176	-0.03	0.27	0.925	-0.31	0.25	0.214
Proportion of female employees	0.38	0.4	0.345	-0.84	0.39	.032*	-0.27	0.41	0.505	0.73 ^a	0.37	.045*
Proportion of employees aged 50+	-1.06	0.57	0.064	0.91	0.5	0.068	-0.84 ^a	0.49	0.089	0.07	0.48	0.886
Proportion of flexible contract workers	0	0.53	0.995	-1.08	0.48	.026*	0.11	0.46	0.82	-0.23	0.51	0.647
Recruitment problems (ref. = no)												
Sometimes	0.13	0.19	0.499	0.03	0.2	0.878	-0.13	0.19	0.477	-0.32	0.19	0.083
Often	0.13	0.21	0.547	-0.11	0.21	0.583	-0.19	0.2	0.337	-0.46	0.19	.016*
Cut 1 ^b	-4.82	1.54		-3.68	1.63		-4.43	1.6		-3.34	1.52	
Cut 2 ^b	-2.34	1.47		-1.82	1.57		-2.51	1.59		-0.73	1.5	
Cut 3 ^b	-1.05	1.46		0.09	1.57		-0.90	1.58		0.59	1.5	
Cut 4 ^b	1.5	1.46		2.95	1.59		1.37	1.61		2.6	1.5	
Pseudo-R ²	0.0199			0.0348			0.011			0.0604		

Note.

^aDifference in statistical significance in sensitivity analysis in which departmental managers were excluded (full results available on request).

^bCut refers to the estimated cutpoint on the latent variable used to differentiate adjacent levels of the outcome variable when values of the predictor variables are evaluated at zero.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

disagreed. Model III in Table 4 shows the results of the ordered logistic regression analysis investigating employer attitudes toward the pay rate of employees working beyond NRA. No significant associations were found. Thus, although some employers believed that working retirees should accept a lower salary, this opinion was not overly associated with social norms, employers' concerns, or structural organizational characteristics.

Blocking progress of younger workers

Overall, employers were more likely to disagree (43%) that workers beyond NRA limited the progress of younger workers, than to agree (29%), or remain neutral (28%). The final ordered logistic regression

conducted as part of our analysis investigated the predictors of whether employers view employees who work after retirement age as blocking the career progress of others. The results (Model IV in Table 4) show that more accepting workplace norms regarding both the hiring of new, and the continued employment of existing workers beyond NRA, as well as frequently experiencing recruitment problems were associated with employers disagreeing that older workers block opportunities for other employees. In contrast, employers are more likely to feel that working past NRA does impede other workers when they are concerned about older workers' mental capabilities, when they are concerned about younger workers' growth opportunities, and when they have a greater proportion of female employees.

DISCUSSION

The first goal of our study was to identify the organizational factors that are related to the employment of workers beyond NRA. We distinguished three relevant categories of organizational determinants: social norms, employer concerns about workforce aging, and structural organizational factors. Overall, the results show that just over half (54%) of the organizations had previously employed workers beyond NRA. In relation to social norms, we found that organizations with more accepting workplace norms regarding hiring new workers and rehiring existing workers beyond normal retirement were significantly more likely to have previously employed workers beyond NRA. The rather strong association between employers' perceptions of workplace norms suggests that employers consider how their behavior will be judged and perceived by their staff, and let that assessment guide their own behavior. Especially employers' assessment of how their staff would respond to them rehiring a retired former employee, rather than an external retired applicant, were associated with their behavior. This is probably a reflection of how many people that work beyond NRA do so for the same organization as before (Beehr & Bennett, 2015).

However, in contrast to both our own hypothesis and previously reported findings (Karpinska et al., 2013), we found that employers' individual internalized retirement age norms (i.e., the age at which they thought employees generally should retire) were not related to hiring decisions beyond NRA. This finding suggests that employers do not always apply general norms regarding working at older ages when making these decisions, but rather consider workplace norms and focusing on the qualities of the individual employee that wants to continue working.

In addition to social norms, our study also examined the association between employer concerns about workforce aging in general on engagement with workers beyond NRA. Our results showed that when employers expressed concerns for limited career opportunities for younger employees, their organizations were less likely to have previously hired workers beyond NRA. Other typical concerns related to longer working lives, such as about the mental and physical capacities of older workers, were not related to (re)hiring retirees to work beyond NRA. This finding runs contrary to our initial hypotheses and is at odds with previously reported results (Oude Mulders & Henkens, 2019). One explanation for this may be that, as with internalized retirement age norms, employers may make more individualized decisions regarding the employment of retirees (Parker & Andrei, 2020). Thus, although employers may have general concerns regarding the physical and mental capabilities of older workers, and the employability of workers with health concerns, these broad concerns will not necessarily apply to every older employee and every hiring decision involving workers beyond NRA.

Additionally, we included structural organizational characteristics as controls in our model investigating the (re)hiring workers beyond NRA. Our results showed that several of these structural characteristics were significantly related to (re)hiring workers beyond NRA; with organizations more likely to have employed workers beyond NRA if they had larger number of employees, operate in the public sector, and have a higher proportion of older workers. However, the effects of various workplace social norms and employer concerns were evident even with such structural organizational characteristics taken into account.

The second goal of the current research was to explore the approaches used when employers do facilitate work after NRA and investigate employers' attitudes toward working retirees in their organization. Using the same predictor variables as the first phase of our analysis, we examined their relationship to employers' ratings of whether employees took the initiative for working beyond NRA, whether or not working retirees in their organization have unique skills and experience, whether workers beyond NRA should take a pay cut, and whether workers beyond NRA blocked the career progress of others.

Our results show that for the vast majority of employers (70%) employment of working retirees in their organization is predominantly at the initiative of the employee. Thus, even when employers are supportive of longer working lives, they are rarely proactive in the recruitment and retention of employees beyond NRA. From a policy perspective, this implies that much more engagement from the demand side is required in order for longer working lives to be a viable answer to impending labor market shortages.

The reasons behind the apparent reluctance of employers to be proactive are not immediately apparent from our study. Our results found that greater concerns about older workers' physical capabilities were associated with agreement that working beyond NRA happened at the initiative of the employee, with the opposite pattern observed in relation to concern regarding workers' mental capabilities. Although we cannot verify the underlying mechanism, these associations may be best understood in terms of the work conducted within an organization. Employers more concerned about deteriorating physical capabilities of their employees may have a more physical labor process. This may require a greater focus on recruiting younger workers to maximize future productive potential, while leaving the initiative to retirees if they want to continue working beyond NRA. Employers more concerned about deteriorating mental capabilities of older employees, on the other hand, may have a more mentally taxing labor process, with their general recruitment process more focused on hiring an age-diverse group of employees, and thus also more likely to initiate employment beyond NRA for employees that are considered employable and potentially interested. However, more research is required to substantiate these relations.

We further found that the majority of respondents (67%) viewed workers employed in their organization beyond NRA as having unique skills or experiences, with this view associated with more accepting workplace norms about rehiring older workers. Although this could be viewed as painting a positive picture of employers' impressions of working retirees, it may also imply that employers view employing outside workers beyond NRA as an exception to the rule—choosing only to hire exceptional external candidates that have reached or exceeded retirement age. The lack of statistical significance in relation to perceived workplace norms for existing employees further indicates that existing employees and external candidates may be viewed differently upon reaching NRA. The finding that compared with smaller organizations, medium and large organizations were less likely to view workers beyond NRA as having unique skills or experience may be reflective of more standardized HR practices or larger organizations, in which older workers do not have to be exceptional to retain or acquire a position (Cardon & Stevens, 2004; Moen et al., 2017).

In terms of remuneration, only 25% of employers believed that workers beyond NRA should receive a lower wage. Although this is at odds with previous research highlighting the importance of downward

wage flexibility in willingness to employ workers beyond NRA (Oude Mulders et al., 2014), it may also reflect the idea that real-life decisions about employment terms may be made on an individualized basis. Indeed, given our findings that workers offered positions beyond NRA are usually viewed as having unique skills and/or experience, employers may be more inclined to pay full wages to retain such highly valued workers. This possible individualized approach to employment terms may go some way to explaining why no significant associations were found between our predictor variables and ratings of whether or not working retirees should accept a pay cut.

Finally, we found that overall, employers have a relatively positive view of workers beyond NRA, with only 29% believing their employment limits the opportunities for others. Somewhat unsurprisingly, we found that those who were more concerned with the career opportunities for younger workers were more likely to agree that working beyond NRA limited opportunities for younger workers. In contrast, organizations with more accepting perceived workplace norms about (re)hiring older workers were less likely to view working retirees as an impediment to others. This, together with the results from the main analysis (Table 3), suggests that employers in their practices and attitudes towards employment beyond NRA are strongly driven by whether their employees would tolerate such employment arrangements. Organizations facing recruitment problems were also less likely to agree that working retirees were blocking career paths for younger workers, showing that next to organizational culture, practical concerns are also relevant for employers. The positive association between concerns about mental capabilities of older workers and agreeing that working retirees block career progress of younger workers may, again, be related to the type of work, with organizations with a more mentally straining labor process being more concerned about retirees blocking career paths of younger workers in general, but this mechanism deserves further study.

Implications

Taken together, our results may have important implications for policy and practice. Our results have demonstrated the importance of workplace social norms, employer concerns about workforce aging, and structural characteristics of the organization, for both the initial decision as to whether or not workers are (re)hired beyond NRA, and the nature and conditions of their employment when they are employed. Given the importance of perceived workplace social norms for employers' decisions, policy makers may try to improve opportunities for older workers by combating ageist stereotypes and employment practices in campaigns. Banning mandatory retirement could also be considered, as this would create opportunities to continue working beyond NRA for more older workers (Dingemans et al., 2016). However, such a change would have to be integrated in a much broader set of policy changes, including decreases to employment protection legislation and seniority-based wages, to successfully increase access to the labor market after NRA (Oude Mulders, 2019). For employers, the results of our study highlight that more accepting workplace social norms are conducive to employment of workers beyond NRA. Employers may try to create more accepting social norms in the workplace by creating a flexible, inclusive, and age-diverse working environment for people of all ages and emphasizing the value of older employees in a general sense (Eversole et al., 2012). Senior managers propagating the

importance of age-diversity and employability over the life course may play a guiding role for the rest of the organization in this regard (Moens et al., 2017; Oude Mulders et al., 2017). For older workers that want to continue working beyond NRA, the results show that most employers will not take the initiative, so they should be vocal about their own desires regarding continued employment. Having unique skills or experience increases their employability beyond NRA significantly, but accepting a pay cut may not be necessary.

Limitations

Although our study provides important insights into employers' views on longer working lives, there are a number of limitations that must be taken into account. First, our study examined only the behavior and attitudes of employers in the Netherlands. Although the mechanisms between the studied variables are presumably similar in other countries, particularities of the Dutch context are likely. Second, the survey used for data collection required employers to give general responses regarding the employment of workers beyond NRA in their organization. Given that within these broad responses respondents could not differentiate between different types of employees (e.g., high skilled vs. low skilled, hiring external retirees vs. rehiring former employees), their opinions regarding working retirees and the working practices they reported may not apply equally to all employees. Third, our study relies heavily on single-item measures, which may raise doubts about the reliability and validity of these measures. Despite growing evidence from a variety of disciplines indicating sufficient validity and reliability using single-item measures (e.g., Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; McKenzie & Marks, 1999), and the fact that some of our measures have been used in previous research; validated, multi-item measures would have been preferable given the complexity of some of the concepts measured. Finally, with the current cross-sectional data, we could not analyze causal relationships between the concepts studied here. Simultaneity or reverse causality could be possible, and longitudinal data are needed to better understand in which order social norms and concerns influence outcomes such as employment of retirees beyond NRA. Especially for social norms, it seems likely that some simultaneity may occur, as social norms both shape and reflect reality (Etzioni, 2000). However, given the relative infrequency with which the employment of retirees beyond NRA occurs, we consider reverse causality unlikely.

FUTURE RESEARCH

A number of additional avenues for future research have emerged from our study. First, there is a need for research explicitly investigating the employment conditions of those working beyond NRA. Although our study has given provisional insight into potential links between employers' attitudes and working conditions for retirees, additional research is required to better understand the impact of employers' views of employment beyond NRA on actual work practices. Second, research into employers' perspectives on longer working lives across other cultures and contexts is advised. This would serve not only to address the paucity of research in this area, but also to investigate the generalizability of our results. In addition, given the over-reliance on single-item measures in our work, we strongly encourage any such additional research to employ validated, multi-item measures of some of our key predictor variables to ensure the validity and reliability of

insights gained from the current work. Third, our results highlight the potential importance of perceived workplace norms and certain concerns on employers' decision making and approach toward hiring workers beyond NRA. Additional research into what underlies and sustains these norms and concerns could therefore lead to the development of successful interventions to promote longer working lives and increased opportunities for employment beyond NRA. Finally, longitudinal data are required to gain more nuanced understanding of employers' perspectives and experiences regarding facilitating work beyond NRA. This longitudinal approach is also necessary to establish causality and determine the causes and consequences of employers' attitudes and decision making relating to (re)hiring retirees.

To conclude, the current study makes a novel contribution to the literature by examining the factors that, from an employer's perspective, encourage or hinder the employment of workers beyond NRA. Furthermore, our study examines the factors that are related to employers' opinions of workers they have employed beyond retirement age, as well as the nature of the employment conditions offered to working retirees. Our work highlights the importance of several factors, particularly the role of workplace social norms, in making employers more amenable to (re)hiring workers after NRA.

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