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Author(s): Aaltio, Iiris; Salminen, Hanna Maria; Koponen, Sirpa

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Ageing employees and human resource management – Evidence of gender-sensitivity?

[Author 1 Name] Iiris Aaltio
[Author 1 Affiliation] School of Business and Economics, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

[Author 2 Name] Hanna Salminen
[Author 2 Affiliation] University of Tampere, Finland

[Author 3 Name] Sirpa Koponen
[Author 3 Affiliation] School of Business and Economics, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Corresponding author: [Name] Iiris Aaltio
[Corresponding Author's Email] iiris.aaltio@jyu.fi

Purpose: This study identifies different research strands concerning studies related to human resource management (HRM) and ageing employees. More specifically, we analyse how age and gender are understood and conceptualised in these studies.

Design/methodology/approach: An integrative literature review concerning ageing employees and HRM with special reference to gender is the approach taken in this paper.

Findings: Recent studies relating to HRM and ageing employees were categorised and analysed. We conclude that there is a need for a more holistic understanding of the concept of age in studies related to ageing employees and HRM. We also argue that the intersection of age and gender is under-researched in the field of HRM.

Practical implications: Based on literature review we outlined directions for how gender-neutral age management studies may be extended. A pluralist understanding of age and gender would help to understand the different needs and expectations that ageing employees may have in terms of HR practices and policies. Institutional practices and legislation can promote equality, but organizational contexts, both internal and external, should be scanned in order to recognize possible ageist or age-blind practices. Ageing women in particular have the burden of being recognized in terms of chronological stereotyped changes that might damage their work and career.

Originality/value: Research on ageing employees and HRM with special reference to gender is limited and therefore an integrative literature review is needed.

Keywords: age, ageing employee, gender, Human Resource Management

Paper type: Conceptual paper

Introduction

Ageing has become a necessary focus of interest in today's society. The workforce in Europe is ageing as a result of the baby-boom generation born in the 1940s combined with the current low birth rate. The ageing population has a great impact on social insurance and pension systems, which are challenged within the existing models of social support (Bengston and Lowenstein, 2003; see Ilmarinen, 2006). It has been claimed, for example, that ageing population will lead to lower proportions of workforce in industrialized nations, which threatens productivity as well as the ability to support an ageing population (Krug 2002; see Powell and Cook, 2009). Therefore, the need for the workforce to continue working into later life has been stressed in recent years. For example, several steps have been taken in order to close the early exit routes and raise the employment levels of ageing employees in many European countries. (Henkens *et al.*, 2008; Walker, 2005). However, at the same time ageing employees are still frequently found to be as the main victims of downsizing or restructuring (Buyens *et al.*, 2009).

Even though recent research has shown that the assumption of a general decline in skills and abilities with increasing age is simplistic and incorrect (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004), employers' behaviour towards ageing employees can be based on stereotypical assumptions concerning ageing employees' work ability, abilities and job performance, which may influence HR practices and policies in organizations (Brough *et al.*, 2011). This can be partly due to the fact that views on ageing are rooted in the memory of societies and are presented as cultural stereotypes (Aaltio, 2008). In Western societies, ageing is often seen in the context of decline and deterioration, while Asian cultures usually value ageing more positively (Leung, 2000). However, there is also evidence that women are more inclined to social devaluation in ageing compared to men, because a woman's value is more grounded in her appearance and reproductive prospects (Powell and Hendricks, 2009).

In recent years, HRM scholars have become interested in ageing employees (Guest 2011). However, studies relating to human resource management (HRM) and ageing employees vary greatly according to their perspective and frame of reference. Therefore, there is a need for an integrative literature view. The aim of this paper is to analyse recent studies related to ageing employees and human resource management. The research questions are following:
- What strands of research can be found concerning HRM and ageing employees, and how do they differ from each other?
- How have age and gender been understood and conceptualised in HRM-related and ageing employees' studies?

We aimed to answer the research questions by carrying out an integrative literature review. In other words, we searched for peer-reviewed journal articles concerning ageing and human resource management in order to synthesize them together with selected reports related to management of ageing employees. The selected reports have been taken into analysis, because they represent an example of central studies related to this topic.

Ageing and gender in the field of HRM

Usually, age is understood in terms of chronological age, referring to one's calendar age. However, the concept of age is multidimensional. For example, Sterns and Doverspike (1989) have given the often-cited five-fold distinction of age: in addition to chronological age there is functional age, psychosocial age, organizational age and lifespan age. Functional, physical or biological age relates to changes in health, fitness, functioning and appearance. Psychosocial age is related to the self and the social perception of age: subjective age defines how old a person feels, with which age cohort he or she identifies, and how old he or she desires to be, whereas the social perception of age focuses, for example, on the age at which society perceives an individual to be older, the definitions and stereotypes of older employees and the implications for HR decisions of labelling an employee as older. (Kooij *et al*., 2008; Uotinen, 2005; Laslett, 1989; Doering *et al*., 1983.) Organizational age refers to seniority and organizational tenure, but it can also refer to career stage, skill obsolescence and age norms within the organization (Kooij *et al*., 2008). The lifespan concept can best be measured by an individual's life stage or family status (Kooij *et al*., 2008; Sterns and Doverspike, 1989; Sterns and Miklos, 1995). Relational age, on the other hand, describes how an individual's age compares with the actual or perceived age distribution within the organization, work team, or supervisor–subordinate dyad (Armstrong-Stassen and Lee, 2009). The age-based conceptualizations are interrelated (Kooij *et al*., 2008), and the meanings that are related them are socially and culturally constructed (Uotinen, 2005). An alternative method of measuring age is work ability (Tepas and Barnes-Farrell, 2002), emphasizing the point that the ability to work should not only be seen in terms of changes in a person's functioning, but rather a process of human resources (physical, mental and social capacities, health, education and competence, values, attitudes, and motivation) in relation to work demands, the work environment and management (Ilmarinen, 2006).

In general, age can be seen as a social organizing principle, which defines individual employees as well as work groups. In addition, different age groups, both ageing and younger, gain identities and power in relation to another age groups. Age relations also intersect with other power-based relations, such as gender (Calasanti and Slevin, 2006). It is claimed that the constructions of ageing are fundamentally gendered (Ainsworth, 2002), and as gender refers to a cultured knowledge that differentiates women and men (Aaltio and Mills, 2002), images concerning the aged woman and the aged man differ (Featherstone and Wernick, 1995). Gender stereotypes represent socially shared beliefs about the attributes of men and women that influence our perceptions of individual men and women (Cleveland *et al*., 2000). Feminine and masculine genders consist of values and ideals that are rooted in culture (Aaltio and Mills, 2002). For example, characteristics such as goal-orientation and strength in decision-making are typically related to men, whereas nurture and relationship orientation are often ascribed to women (Wood, 2008; Cleveland *et al*., 2000).

Feminist scholars have also shown that gender is a structure of social inequality. In the HRM literature, gender stereotyping has mostly concerned the obstacles women face in management careers (Wood, 2008), while most of the feminist studies relating to the

work context have concentrated on the experiences of younger women and gendered relations, neglecting the workplace experiences of ageing women (McMullin and Berger, 2006). Ainsworth (2002) has argued that the neglect of gender in the research on ageing employees illustrates a frequent cultural characteristic of older women: their invisibility, which can be considered as a form of cultural non-recognition, where one age-group is "*rendered invisible at the moment it is marked out and stereotyped*" (Young, 1990, 123, see Ainsworth, 2002). Therefore, we believe that there is a need to study how gender has been taken into account in the studies concerning ageing employees and HRM.

Due to the ageing workforce, management of ageing employees has gained greater attention among HRM scholars (Guest, 2011). However, studies related to ageing employees and HRM vary greatly (Salminen, 2012). This can be partly due to the fact that HRM itself is a vague and elusive concept (Price, 2007). Firstly, HRM can be described as a body of management activities, such as recruitment, selection, learning and development, reward, communication, teamwork and performance management (Beardwell and Claydon, 2010). Secondly, HRM refers to a particular approach to carrying out those activities (Torrington *et al*., 2011).

Beardwell and Claydon (2010) have stated that, in its broadest sense, HRM can be used to refer any approach to managing employees. However, a broad distinction can be made between 'hard' HRM and 'soft' HRM. The former approach emphasizes the need to manage employees in ways that will obtain added value from them and thus achieve competitive advantage. The latter stresses the need to gain employees' commitment through involvement, communication and trust. (Armstrong, 2003; Legge, 2005.) More recent debates on HRM have introduced terms such as 'high-commitment' and 'high-involvement practices' which are related to 'soft HRM', whereas 'strategic HRM' has replaced 'hard HRM'. (Beardwell and Claydon, 2010.) A distinction can be also made according to the debate about the universalist versus contingency HRM approach (Guest, 2011). The former emphasizes so-called best practices, which can be applied from one organization to another, whereas the latter stresses a strategic fit with the external environment. In addition to strategic fit, it is also important to notice that the HRM system does not take place in a vacuum. In Europe, for example, the legislative framework makes sure that a minimum set of HR practices are used in most organizations (Guest, 2011).

In recent years, the focus in HRM research has shifted from organization level analysis to employee level, and the importance of understanding how employees interpret and experience HR practices applied in the organization has been stressed (Guest, 2011). For example, Nishii *et al*. (2008) have stated that it is not only the presence of HR practices that is important, rather than employees' perceptions about organization's intentions behind HR practices. Guest (2011) has argued that an under-theorised topic in HRM research concerns the assumptions about the motives and commitment of the workforce referring the possible changing needs and preferences that older employees may have compared to younger ones.

Legge (2005) has distinguished four different HRM models according to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) well-known classification of perspectives within organizational studies. Each of these models represents different worldviews, assumptions, research methods and implications (Bishop, 2011). The normative strand of HRM studies is related to the functionalist paradigm presented by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and it describes what HRM 'should be'. The descriptive-functional approach focuses on what HRM 'is', reflecting a greater pluralism in the understanding of employment relations. The descriptive-behavioural approach focuses on what HR professionals actually do within the organization, while the critical-evaluative approach pays attention to HRM in relation to asymmetries of power between organizations and individual employees. (Bishop, 2011.)

In this study, we analyse the selected studies according to the level of these studies (societal/organizational/individual) as well as the scope of HRM (single activity vs. multiple activities). In addition, we use the four models of HRM presented by Legge (2005) as our lenses when we analyse recent HRM studies related to ageing employees in order to map different strands of research and to demonstrate how they differ from each other. We acknowledge that the concept of age is multidimensional and gendered. Therefore, our aim is to identify how age and gender are understood and conceptualised in studies relating to HRM and ageing employees.

Methodology

Integrative literature reviews are usually conducted in order to address either mature or new topics (Torraco, 2005). This study falls on the latter category. Due to the fact that the topic concerning ageing employees in the field of HRM is relatively new, and it has not yet undergone a comprehensive literature review, our aim is to map the territory. Many of the studies related to ageing employees and HRM have been empirically driven; therefore, we believe that there is a need for an integrative literature review, which organizes the present research.

The integrative literature review was conducted through a search of the Emerald and EBSCHOhost Academic Source Premier computerized databases for the period from January 2005 to December 2012. Multiple research strategies were used. Because the terms "ag(e)ing", "older" and "mature" are often used synonymously, we used them all as keywords in our search strategy. We started the search on Emerald using following *keywords*: "Ageing"/"aging"/"older"/"mature" AND "gender" AND "HRM"/"human resource management"/"personnel"/"work". This gave us only one result, which was excluded, because it was not a peer-reviewed article. After that we used the following keywords: "Ageing"/"aging"/"older"/"mature" AND "gender" AND *in all fields*: "HRM"/"human resource management"/"personnel"/"work". We also used following research strategy: keywords: "Ageing"/"aging"/"older"/"mature" AND "HRM/human resource management/personnel/work" AND *in all fields*: "gender". These search strategies gave us totally 13 articles of which 7 were selected for future analysis.

We searched from Ebscohost Academic Source Premier for full-text, scholarly reviewed journal articles published in English between January 2005 and December 2012. First, we

used *Subject Terms*: "Ageing"/"aging"/"older"/"mature" AND "gender" AND "HRM"/"human resource management"/"personnel"/"work". After that we used following search: *Subject Terms*: "Ageing"/"aging"/"older"/"mature" AND "HRM"/"human resource management"/"personnel"/"work" AND *in TX all text*: "gender". Finally, we used following search: *Subject Terms*: "Ageing"/"aging"/"older"/"mature" AND "gender" AND *in TX all text*: "HRM"/"human resource management", "personnel". These search strategies gave us 11 articles total, of which we selected 2 articles for future analysis.

There was some research strategy overlap in both databases, so that the same articles appeared many times. We only included those articles, which focused solely on ageing employees and human resource management. In addition, articles which were general reviews or view-points were excluded, because we were interested in peer-reviewed articles (empirical, theoretical or conceptual). In addition, a few central publications related to our research topic (Ilmarinen, 2006; Walker, 2005; Naegele and Walker, 2006; Metcalf and Meadows, 2010) were included in order to provide additional information and to deepen our analysis. These selected articles and publications served as our data. We acknowledge that some relevant, for example, feminist studies has been left out, but we believe that our search presents a comprehensive overview of the current research concerning ageing employees and HRM. Table 1 provides information on the analysed studies including author, subject of the study, strand of research, focus of HRM, level of analysis, definition of age and gender.

Analysing studies relating to ageing employees and HRM

We first organized articles into four broad research strands: age management, retention, ageism and gender-sensitive studies. However, we acknowledge that this categorization is overlapping. After that we analysed the level of these studies and the scope of HRM. Finally, we evaluate how these strands of research fit to the Legge's (2005) HRM models. Based on our literature review, it can be argued that the term "ag(e)ing", "older" or "mature" employee was used synonymously in the analysed studies. However, the threshold of the ageing differed from the age of 40 (Buyens *et al*., 2009) to age of 50 (Armstrong-Stassen and Templer 2005; Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010; Winkelmann-Gleed, 2012). For example, Ilmarinen (2006) has defined ageing employees as 45 and over, and justified it by the fact that this is the period when major changes occur in work ability and that this "early" definition of ageing employees provides better possibilities for implementing actions to raise low participation rates among ageing employees and prevent early retirement. In the analyzed studies, age was understood dominantly as a chronological age. Studies which recognized the gender aspect were in minority. However, there were studies which treated gender as a background variable (Buyens *et al*., 2009).

Age management studies

Age management relies heavily on work ability studies, which explore changes in the health, functional capacity, work ability, work environment and stress of employees over

45 years of age as a result of ageing (Ilmarinen, 2006). However, there is no consensus about the definition concerning age management. Ilmarinen (2006) has presented a definition which emphasizes occupational health and work objectives: "*Age management requires taking the employee's age and age-related factors into account in daily work management, work planning and work organization, thus everyone – regardless of age – can achieve personal and organizational targets healthily and safely*". This definition can be considered "gender neutral" because it makes no distinction between female or male employees. In addition, age management is seen as a way to improve the employability of both ageing men and women while at the same time helping organizations to adjust to the inevitable ageing of the workforce, in order to enhance competitiveness and productivity (Naegele and Walker, 2006; Walker, 2005).

In the analysed age management studies, the underlying theoretical understanding of HRM has not discussed in detail. Most of the analysed age management studies (Ilmarinen 2006; Walker 2005; Naegele and Walker, 2006) focused on broad range of age management practices. For example, Walker (2005) has stated that age management can be related to different practices by which employees are managed within organisations, "*with an explicit focus on ageing*", but it may also refer to management of workforce ageing by public policy incentives. At the organizational level, (1) job recruitment and exit, (2) training, development and promotion, (3) flexible working practices, (4) ergonomics/job design and (5) changing attitudes to ageing workers within organizational training, development and promotion have been defined as key dimensions of age management (Casey *et al*., 1993; see Walker 2005). Naegele and Walker (2006) have extended this list with health protection and promotion and workplace design, redeployment, and the transition to retirement. However, Armstrong-Stassen and Templer (2005) in their study focused only on training practices. They found that only a minority of Canadian organizations was highly devoted to adjusting training methods according the needs of older employees and that only few attempts to provide age-awareness training to supervisors of ageing employees were made. There was a significant gap between what HR professionals viewed as important for the retention of older employees and the extent to what the organizations were actually doing. (Armstrong-Stassen and Templer, 2005.)

According to this perspective, age-aware practices may be specific initiatives aimed at particular dimensions of age management, but they may also include more general HR practices and policies that enable to create an environment in which each employee can achieve his or her potential without being disadvantaged by age (Naegele and Walker, 2006). For example, in the UK, a system of annualized hours has been found to be helpful to ageing employees with caring responsibilities, but it is not intended only as an age-specific HR strategy (Walker, 2005).

Retention studies

The recent trend in HRM studies which has stressed the notion that employees may interpret HR practices provided by the organization differently (Guest, 2011) can be also seen in the studies related to ageing employees and HRM. Some of the studies have asked

ageing employees about the HR practices provided by the organization (Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010), while others have examined the impact of age-aware HRM policies and practices on the motivation of older workers to remain in employment (Kooij *et al*., 2008). In this line of studies age is understood as chronological age. However, Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo's (2010) study showed that employees who reported that their organization as having mostly older employees reported that their organizations were more likely to provide retirement options or rehiring retirees than those employees who described their organization as having primarily younger employees (Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010). Based on the notion that the different conceptualizations of age have distinct effects on work-related attitudes, Kooij et al. (2008) conducted a literature review concerning age-related factors that influence the work motivation of older employees. Kooij et al. (2008) were interested about how chronological, functional, psychosocial, organizational and life span age affect ageing employees' motivation to continue to work. They concluded in their study, that age-related factors such as deteriorating health and career plateaus should be addressed by HRM. For example, ergonomic adjustments and continuous career development are examples of HR practices that could motivate ageing employees to continue working. (Kooij et al., 2008.)

However, in these studies gender had been treated merely as a demographic variable. In other words, gender has been understood as sex and attention has not been paid to the fact that women may have different needs and preferences compared with ageing male employees, which is either ignored or discussed only to a limited extent. For example, Winkelmann-Glied (2012) concentrated on the topic of "managing" the transition from full-time work into full-time retirement arguing that retention is related to career management, training and development as well as flexible, staged retirement, in which the HR function of the organization often struggles to cope. Winkelmann-Glied (2012) stressed that individual employees are trying to combine and balance a range of responsibilities and interests, both in work as well as in terms of family. It was found that limited individual choice over the extending working careers was mediated by social support. Especially the relationship with and treatment experienced from supervisors was seen as being crucial when employees aimed to negotiate labour market participation or exit (Winkelmann-Glied 2012).

August (2011) in her study, argues that the way in which employees exit the workforce and enter retirement may be even less predictable for women employees than for men. In other words, women and men employees' career paths vary greatly due to the differing educational and organizational opportunities, but also family roles and obligations, as well as ideas on what constitutes a successful career (Mavin, 2001, see August, 2011). Her study demonstrated that, even though women employees have traditionally faced the stereotype that their adaptation to retirement is easier than men's, women may have many fears and concerns about potential losses.

Studies related to ageism

Some of the analysed studies focused on the influences that shaped age-related HR practices and policies in organizations. In the EU, the Employment Framework Directive,

passed in 2000, illegalize discrimination, for example, on the grounds of age, religion or belief, disability and sexual orientation, in access to employment, training and guidance, and the membership of organizations (Walker, 2005). In their study, Parry and Tyson (2009) used neo-institutional theory to examine organizational responses to the UK's age discrimination at work legislation. They adopted an organizational level perspective and conducted a longitudinal survey of HR managers and four case studies within different UK organizations. They found that organizational complexity, sector differences, the different stakeholders and interest groups affected the time taken for implementation of the new laws, and the extent to which a "compliance" or a business driven "utilitarian", or a moral justification approach was adopted (Parry and Tyson, 2009). In their study age was not explicitly defined, but it was discussed in the context of legislative changes. Metcalf and Meadows (2010) have also found that age (including time to retirement), length of service and other age-related factors (expected length of service, disability and health and sickness and absence records) affected HR policies and practices in organizations.

Selection, performance appraisal, training decisions and career planning are examples of HR practices where age discrimination may influence HR decisions (Stern and Miklos 1995, see Parry and Tyson, 2009). However, in practice, evidence towards age discrimination is hard to detect, because it is often hidden and indirect (Walker, 2005). The study of Byens et al. (2009) found indirect support for the statement that a negative image of older employees forms a self-fulfilling prophecy influencing the performance of older employees. Even though earlier studies have demonstrated that women of all ages are more likely to experience ageist attitudes concerning their appearance or sexuality than men (Duncan and Loretto, 2004; McMullin and Berger, 2006), the recent studies representing the 'ageism strand' have ignored the gender aspect. This gives support for the notion there is a need to more thoroughly study the relationship between ageism and gender.

Gender-sensitive studies

In this review, we found two gender-sensitive studies. Firstly, Irni (2009) demonstrated in her study that the resistance of older women employees to unsatisfactory practices was interpreted as part of women's bodily ageing. She studied older women and men (56–64 years old) in various positions in ten large Finnish organizations of different sectors, and analysed the irritations felt by older women as part of the wider gendering practices of the organizations. In the study, older male employees also felt irritated at work, for example by issues such as a large workload, time pressures or unjust practices, but they were not seen as becoming difficult or cranky as they grew older. She concluded that the resistance of older women towards unsatisfying practices was explained in organizations in terms of individual gendering characteristics associated with ageing and even by women's midlife biology (Irni, 2009).

On the other hand, Emslie and Hunt (2009) found in their study concerning the work-life balance of middle-age female and male employees that the female employees identified problems with the juggling of their paid work with other responsibilities such as adult

children and ageing parents. Men, on the other hand, identified their work–life balance as being problematic in the past, when children were young. The researchers concluded that the difficulties of work–life balance lasted longer and were more complex for women than for men (Emslie and Hunt, 2009).

Even if a few, these studies show that taken gender as a perspective, sensitive perceptions can be made concerning how age and gender are related. Also they demonstrate the women's special needs in the problems of aging and HRM.

Conclusions

Theoretical implications

The lack of theoretical review concerning ageing employees and HRM, especially from a gender perspective, provided the point of departure for this paper. We identified four strands of studies related to ageing employees and HRM: age management, retention, ageism and gender-sensitive. The focus of HRM varied in the analyzed studies from one HR practice, for example training (Armstrong-Stassen and Templer, 2005) to multiple HR practices (Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010; Walker 2005). At the broadest sense, the influences of an ageing workforce were analyzed at the societal, organizational and individual level (Ilmarinen 2006; Walker 2005; Walker & Naegel 2006). In the organizational level analysis, the focus was, for example, on organizations' legal and institutional influences on age-related HR practices (Parry and Tyson, 2009). By contrast, the individual level analysis focused more on ageing employees' job-related attitudes, like organizational commitment (Winkelmann-Gleed, 2012) as well as work-motivation (Kooij et al., 2008) which may influence how HR practices are interpreted. There were also studies which adopted both an organizational and individual level perspective (Buyens et al., 2009). Our literature review showed that the most dominant way to understand and conceptualize age was chronological, and the interrelatedness of ageing and gender was neglected in most of the studies. In most of the studies, the concept of gender was ignored or used primarily as background variable.

In our literature review, we also analysed studies relating to HRM and ageing employees by using Legge's (1995) categorisation. In age management studies, the common theme was that employees *should* be managed in a more age-sensitive manner. Therefore, these studies can be considered as representing the normative HRM model, which is related to the functionalist paradigm presented by Burrell and Morgan (1979). These studies shared a unitary frame of reference; they did not focused on stakeholder interests or contextual factors. In these studies, age was conceptualized mostly as a chronological or functional age, and the changes related to ageing had mostly been understood in the context of work ability, which emphasizes the balance between individual resources and job demands. However, possible gender differences in terms of needs and preferences had not usually taken into account these studies resulting in a 'gender neutrality' and 'gender blindness'. However, Armstrong-Stassen and Temper's (2005) study showed that there was a significant difference between what is considered important for the retention of older employees in organizations and what is actually done to retain older employees. For

example, financial expenses and the lack of strategic significance were important reasons for organizations not to engage in older employee-friendly training practices (Armstrong-Stassen and Templer, 2005). This echoes the discussion concerning the rhetoric and reality of HRM in general (Legge 1995).

Studies which had focused on the question of retention or early exit of ageing employees adopted an individual level of analysis. These studies concentrated on identifying how ageing employees interpret HR practices provided by their organization (Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010). The main idea in this strand of studies is that the heterogeneity among employees, based on age and/or gender, may result in different attitudes towards HR practices which can influence their intention to stay in or leave the organization. This stream of studies can be categorised under the 'descriptive-functional' HRM model presented by Legge (2005), which stresses, for example, that employees and employers may not necessarily agree or pursue the same goals or means of achievement (Legge, 2005). In this line of studies, there was only one study which recognized the multidimensional nature of age (Kooij et al. 2008). Gender-issues appeared indirectly in terms of family-responsibilities faced by older employees (Winkelmann-Gleed 2012).

In normative age management studies, HR practices are often presented as implementing good age management procedures, and the contextual factors are not analysed in detail. However, it has been found, for example in the UK, that public sector organizations are more likely to introduce HR policies aiming to extend the working life of older employees (Parry and Tyson, 2009). In studies relating to ageism and ageist practices in HRM, age is seen as an important structural basis of inequality. In addition, age is usually understood as chronological as well as psychosocial, referring to stereotypes and social attitudes related to older employees. However, in this stream of study, limited attention has been paid to the issue of how intersections between age and gender relations influence inequality in organizations. This line of studies more often adopted employer level perspectives and analysed, for example, how HR professionals assessed the management of ageing employees in the organizations. Therefore, this strand can be seen to be linked to the under 'descriptive-behavioral' model of HRM, which focus on, for example, what HR professionals actually do in the organizations (Legge 2005). However, it should be noted that the categorization made in this study was elusive. For example, some of the studies categorized under the 'descriptive-behavioural' model could be also categorised under 'descriptive-functional' model, because they share some common characteristics.

It seems, based on our review, that the intersection of age and gender is under-researched especially in normative age management studies. Studies which were categorised as gender-sensitive (Irni 2009; Emslie and Hunt, 2009) had some common characteristics with the critical-evaluative HRM model presented by Legge (2005) and it is related to the radical humanist paradigm, which highlights that different actors have to be aware of patterns of dominance in order to change (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Collis and Hussey, 2009). For example, the study of Irni (2009) demonstrated that ageing women employees can be perceived within the framework of stereotypes produced in the workplace, rather than based on specific changes in performance or skills.

Based on our theoretical review, we argue that there is much to be gained from the feminist research tradition being incorporated into studies relating to HRM and ageing. For example, there is a need to study in more depth how age is socially constructed in the context of HRM; in particular, more research is needed to analyse how age is 'executed' through interactions with others in the organizational context. This is especially important where ageing women employees are concerned, as they have the historical burden of being recognized on the basis of other terms than their work career. As presented earlier, it would be important to overreach from organization level analysis to employee level, and to explore how employees interpret and experience HR practices applied in the organization (Guest, 2011). If there is more research based on actual experiences of gendered aging individuals, it is possible to evaluate HR practices' possible age-gender blindness.

Practical implications

Based on our theoretical review, we would like to highlight a number of issues. Firstly, gender blind or stereotypical understanding of age and gender not only influences co-workers' and managers' perceptions of ageing employees, but also influences the older employees' work behaviour and decisions to continue working. In normative age management literature, age management is presented as collection of 'best' HR practices which aim to maintain and increase older employees' work ability as well as helping organizations to reach their goals. However, Kooij et al. (2008) stated that many organizations use calendar age to define older employees in their HR policies, which may have a negative effect on the motivation of the older employees. Therefore, there is much to be gained if age is seen as a multidimensional and gendered concept and the different needs and preferences based on age and gender are more fully recognized. For example, the notion that older employees may have different retirement-related desires (August 2011) should be recognized by the closest supervisor and flexible retirement options should be discussed in development discussions.

There is also a need to understand the contextual factors behind HRM, like downsizing, age structure or location (Armstrong-Stassen and Cattaneo, 2010), which influence HR practices and policies made in organizations. In addition, there are different 'drivers' (for example legislation, societal pressures) behind age management practices (Parry and Tyson, 2009), and therefore tailored solutions concerning age-friendly HR practices are needed. There is evidence that public organizations have been more proactive in taking steps to retain ageing employees (Parry and Tyson, 2009). According to with this, public organizations can function as role models for private organizations, and because they represent fields where women often form the majority of the workforce (e.g. health care), this benefits ageing women employees in particular. The worth of age-friendly HRM policies and practices cannot always be measured in detail, and therefore social responsibility as well as sustainable HRM policies and practices are needed both in private and public organizations.

In addition to external factors, age and gender stereotypes are embedded in organizational cultures and have practical consequences for HRM practices and policies made in organizations. In order to nourish the age diversity in an organization, current HRM policies and practices should be analysed in order to recognize possible ageist or age-blind practices rooted in the organization. This also means that the gendering structures and processes produced in organizations are exposed. In addition, there is evidence that managers may hold stereotypical views towards ageing employees (Ilmarinen, 2006) which may hinder the change in an organization's cultural values. It seems that the rhetoric of the importance of age-friendly HR practices and policies may differ greatly from the actual HR practices used in the organization (Armstrong-Stassen and Templer, 2005, Riach, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to shift from randomly used 'age-friendly' HR practices and policies to more integrated and strategically relevant HR practices in order to create workplaces in which each employee feels valued and ageing is not faced stereotypically (Winkelmann-Gleed, 2012).

Finally, feminist studies have shown that both women and men can suffer from standardized and stereotyped images of gender, and therefore a critical approach is needed in order to bring about a fair system based on individual life choices, as well as supporting flexible HRM policies in organizations. In other words, historical factors must be faced and constantly negotiated by women and men as they construct their identities as organizational members. Compared with women, men often face the need to be active in working life, but do not face the kinds of shifts in personal image experienced by women. The importance of a man's public role makes his life and self-esteem more dependent on factors emerging from his working life compared with that of a woman. At the same time, women have the burden not to be recognized as career orientated and especially older age might encourage this stereotype. In addition, HR managers and supervisors can endorse both women's and men's needs for later career construction and recognize their individual aims.

Limitations and future directions

The different concepts (for example ageing/mature/older) used in different HRM studies made it difficult to gather all the relevant studies for this literature review. Therefore, we acknowledge that a more thorough literature review, covering more databases, more keywords and a longer period of time, is needed in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the topic. However, this study made an effort by identifying different approaches, how ageing employees are studied in the field of HRM.

One future direction would be to concentrate to one specific approach and analyze how this line of HRM studies has evolved over the years. In addition, the interrelatedness of age and gender is still largely absent from the HRM literature and more empirical research is needed in this field. Therefore, we argue that there is a need to broaden studies related to ageing employees and HRM into different directions. Firstly, there is a need to understand the concepts of age and gender more broadly and also acknowledge the interrelatedness of these two concepts. The reality of HRM has been criticized in terms of promoting equal opportunities, because discrimination in the workplace for example on

grounds of age and sex, still exists regardless of the legislation (Kamenou and Fearfull, 2006). Therefore, more critically oriented HRM studies is need in order to detect the possible ageist and gendering HR practices rooted in organisations. In addition, both employee and organizational level analysis should be applied when studying the management of ageing employees. For example, as Legge (2005) has argued: *"the importance of HRM lies not in the objective reality of its normative models and their implementation, but in the phenomenological reality of its rhetoric"*. Critical feminist studies could provide new insights into this field and question basic assumptions and beliefs concerning women and men in the organization. In the future, in order to extend theoretical but also practical discussions of ageing and gender in the context of HRM, it is necessary to focus on individual level that also takes into account gendered differences. We also argue that by engaging more qualitative research into HRM, for example constructivist or mixed methods approach, could provide deeper understanding of the topic relating to management of ageing employees. Finally, there is also a need to compare and analyse both the concepts of age management and diversity management simultaneously.

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