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# Perceived High Involvement Work Practices and Retirement Intentions

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## Abstract

Sustainable human resource management (HRM) stresses the importance of maintaining and developing organizations' human capital for social, ecological and financial reasons. In the context of aging workforce, the social aspect of sustainable HRM relates to the discussion of retaining older employees and preventing their early exit from work life. This study builds on sustainable HRM literature and examines the antecedents of working until official retirement age and continuing working beyond retirement age with special reference to perceived high involvement work practices (HIWPs). The study population consisted of older (more than 50 years) nursing professionals who work at a Finnish university hospital. The quantitative survey data were collected in spring 2016 as a part of the Work Careers of Older Workers Continued Work Participation and Bridge Employment Research project (JATKIS), conducted at the Gerontology Research Center, University of Jyväskylä. The results indicated that good work ability, older age and HIWPs perceived as good were positively related to older nursing professionals' intention to continue working until retirement age and beyond. A better financial situation was in turn negatively associated with the intention to continue working until retirement and after retirement.

**Key Words:** human resource management, high involvement work practices, older employees, retirement, work ability

## Introduction

Changing demographics are thought to influence the supply of potential workers and cause labor shortages (Hennekam & Herrbach, 2015, 2013). Several countries, including Finland, are already struggling to find healthcare professionals (OECD, 2015). The lack of professionals forces organizations to take a more sustainable perspective on their human capital and confront issues related to an aging workforce (Ehnert & Harry, 2012). Retaining and developing human capital (in other words, managing current employees with a long-term focus) is a central aspect of sustainable human resource management (HRM). Sustainability is also closely related to the discussion of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 2015), and sustainable HRM has roots in the human relations movement and the Harvard approach to HRM (Ehnert & Harry, 2012).

Sustainable HRM stresses that long-term HRM practices are beneficial not only for organizations' own employees but also for their families and other external parties and society (Ehnert et al., 2015; Barrera-Martínez et al., 2017). Accordingly, organizations' decisions concerning workload, work hours, job design and layoffs are likely to affect employees' health and well-being (Pfeffer, 2010, p. 40). However, the social aspect has received far less attention compared to environmental issues in studies related to sustainable HRM (Pfeffer, 2010). For example, retention of older employees has rarely been studied in the context of sustainable HRM. Our aim is to contribute to filling that gap. The contribution of this paper is two-fold. First, this paper contributes to the sustainable HRM discussion by concentrating on the significance of high involvement work practices (HIWPs) in older employees' intention to retire which has been a neglected area in the field of sustainable HRM. In other

words, we focus on sustainable HRM at the individual level. Second, we examine older nursing professionals' intention to continue working until retirement age and after retiring. Thus, we follow several recent studies (Shacklock & Brunetto, 2011; van Solinge & Henkens, 2014) that investigated factors promoting older employees working until retirement and do not focus on the antecedents of early intention to retire, which has been the primary focus in retirement studies.

In this study, we rely on chronological age and define employees older than 50 years as "older employees" in line with previous retirement studies (Armstrong-Stassen & Cattaneo, 2010; Herrbach et al., 2009; Hennekam, 2015). We focus on individuals' intention to retire which can be depicted as one part of the retirement process followed by the actual decision to retire and the final act of retirement (Topa & Alcover, 2015). Furthermore, there is evidence that employees' intention to retire indicates their actual retirement decision (Beehr, 1986; Adams & Beehr, 1998). We focus on perceived HRM practices, because recent HRM literature has highlighted the importance of studying how employees perceive HRM practices, and not only focusing on the presence of those practices (Mendelson et al., 2011). For instance, Ang et al. (2013, p. 3092) pointed out there is a need to understand how HRM practices are related to job withdrawal intention at the individual level. Our research questions is as follows: How are individual-level perceptions of HIWPs related to intention to continue working until retirement age and beyond?

## Theoretical framework

Sustainable human resource management Sustainability as a concept is closely related to the discussion of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Theoretical and practical interest in sustainability started to emerge during the 1990s along with the popularity of the "triple bottom line" (Carroll, 2015, p. 92). In contrast to strategic HRM (SHRM), which has dominated during the last few decades, sustainable HRM acknowledges the role of HRM practices for social and eco-

logical outcomes along with financial outcomes. Furthermore, the diverse interests of different stakeholders are highlighted in the sustainable HRM literature (Kramar, 2014; Ehnert et al., 2015). In other words, employees are seen as a valuable asset for organizations, not as a disposable resource (Ehnert et al., 2015; Barrena-Martínez et al., 2017). Ehnert and Harry (2012, p. 225) argued that sustainable HRM research is still in the pioneering phase, and the definitions of sustainable HRM take different forms. For example, Zaugg et al. (2001, p. II) saw sustainable HRM as “the long term socially and economically efficient recruitment, development, retainment and disemployment of employees” (see Ehnert & Harry, 2012, p. 226).

Sustainable HRM is discussed and studied at different levels. At the societal level, sustainable HRM relates to the discussion of corporate sustainability and social responsibility, and the focus has mainly been on ecological sustainability. At the individual and organizational level, attention is directed toward internal HRM processes and issues related to employees' health and work ability, for example (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Ehnert & Harry, 2012). The macro-level perspective and environmental issues have predominated in the field of sustainable HRM, whereas social issues and the micro-level perspective have received less attention (Pfeffer, 2010; Morgeson et al., 2013; Mak et al., 2014). Although retention of employees is a central aspect of sustainable HRM (Zaugg et al., 2011), the issue of retaining older employees and postponing retirement seems to have been neglected in studies related to sustainable HRM.

### High Involvement Work Practices (HIWPs)

In this study, we took a micro-level perspective on sustainable HRM and examined the significance of HIWPs on older nursing professionals' intention to continue working until retirement age and after retiring. Sustainable HRM practices which meet employees' expectations are expected to have a positive influence on employees' commitment and motivation (Barrena-Martínez et al., 2017, p. 4). There is no universal operationalization for socially sustainable HRM practices (De Lange et al., 2015), but several studies have contrasted the practices with HIWPs (Kramar, 2014; Gollan, 2005). HIWPs, also called high-performance work systems (HPWSs) or high commitment management, are seen as a long-term investment, not only a short-term cost (Kramar, 2014; Mariappanadar & Kramar, 2014; Mendelson et al., 2011). Harmon et al. (2013, p. 393) provided the following definition: “a holistic work design that includes interrelated core features such as involvement, empowerment, development, trust, openness, teamwork, and performance-based rewards.” This list of HR practices is not exhaustive, but the idea of HIWPs is that when HRM practices, such as selective hiring, extensive training, participation in decision making and information sharing, fit together, they reinforce each other (Kramar, 2014, p. 1073). Together, these HRM practices will have a positive impact on employees' abilities, motivation and opportunities to perform well (von Bonsdorff et al., 2016, p. 2).

HIWPs may reinforce the mutual-investment relationship between an organization and its employees (Kehoe & Wright, 2013, p. 169), and HIWPs highlight the importance of trust and empowerment (Harmon et al. 2003, p. 394). There is extensive evidence that HIWPs are positively related to employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors (Kehoe & Wright, 2013), as well as to organizational outcomes (Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Zhang & Morris, 2014; Mendelson et al., 2011). For example, Harmon et al. (2013) showed that HIWPs are

positively related to employees' job satisfaction and negatively to patient service costs in U.S. Veterans Health Administration centers providing evidence that HIWPs can contribute to individual and organizational outcomes (Harmon et al., 2013, p. 393). There is also some evidence that HIWPs have stronger influence on employees' attitudes and behaviors compared to organizational performance due to the greater distance between HRM practices and organizational outcomes (Zhang & Morris, 2014, p. 82). Only a few recent critical studies contested the argument that HIWPs benefit employees and the organization simultaneously (Mariappanadar & Kramar, 2014).

When it comes to retaining older employees, the connection between HIWPs and older employees' intention to continue working until retirement age and beyond has not been fully explored. Authors have argued that HIWPs can safeguard individuals from the negative effects of aging, such as skill deterioration and decreasing work ability (von Bonsdorff et al., 2016). For example, providing older employees with adequate opportunities for training and development can be expected to have a positive impact on their ability to continue working until the official retirement age and even beyond (Armstrong-Stassen & Stassen, 2013). Especially in the healthcare field, continuous learning requirements together with the psychically and mentally demanding working environment are likely to influence nursing professionals' intention to retire.

In addition to HRM practices, a number of individual factors can influence older employees' intention to retire. For example, poor physical or mental health (Topa & Alcover, 2015, p. 388) and poor work ability (Alavinia et al., 2009), as well as skill obsolescence (Kooij et al., 2008), may compromise employees' ability to continue working until retirement age and beyond. In contrast, a poor financial situation forces older employees to continue to work. For example, Blakeley and Ribeiro (2008) showed that older female employees who have a spouse and a secure financial situation are more likely to retire early than unmarried older female employees with an insecure financial situation. Templer et al. (2010) defined three broad categories of individual factors which can contribute to employees' intention to continue working until retirement age and beyond: financial necessity, work fulfillment and generativity. Financial necessity concerns financial constraints that force older employees to continue working (Templer et al., 2010, p. 480-81). For example, there is evidence that in many European Union (EU) countries women are at a higher risk of experiencing poverty in old age, compared to men, due the women's inadequate pensions (Foster & Walker, 2013, p. 3). Work fulfillment is associated with positive feelings toward working. Generativity concerns older employees' willingness to share their knowledge and expertise with younger employees, for example (Templer et al., 2010, p. 480-81). Because HIWPs are used to empower employees, enhance their skills and competences and foster their knowledge sharing, it can be postulated that HIWPs are likely to have a positive influence on older employees' feelings of work fulfillment and generativity, which, in turn, can promote the intention to continue working until retirement age and beyond.

## Method

### Data collection

This study is part of the Work Career of Older Workers Continued Participation and Bridge Employment Research project (JATKIS) conducted at the Gerontology Research Center (GEREC) at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. The data were collected by postal survey at a Finnish university hospi-



<b>Gender, % (n)</b>	
Women	90 (353)
Men	10 (39)
<b>Age, mean <math>\pm</math> SD</b>	57.0 $\pm$ 3.7
<b>Education, % (n)</b>	
College level or lower	78 (305)
Bachelor's degree or higher	22 (84)
<b>Years of employment <math>\pm</math> SD</b>	34.2 $\pm$ 6.0
<b>Years in the current employer organization <math>\pm</math> SD</b>	22.0 $\pm$ 11.5
<b>Years in the current position <math>\pm</math> SD</b>	18.0 $\pm$ 12.1
<b>Form of employment, % (n)</b>	
Permanent (full- or part-time)	93 (364)
Temporary (full- or part-time)	7 (27)
<b>Work time, % (n)</b>	
Regular day or night work	50 (195)
Shift work	50 (194)
<b>Works overtime, % (n)</b>	
Not at all	18 (68)
Randomly	67 (258)
Regularly	16 (62)
<b>Pay €/month, mean <math>\pm</math> SD</b>	2843.8 $\pm$ 1215.4
<b>Marital status, % (n)</b>	
Married or in a non-marital relationship	72 (280)
Single (including divorced and widowed)	28 (109)

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

tal in the spring 2016. The questionnaire was targeted at older (older than 50 years) nursing professionals working at the hospital. The study population consisted of 962 nursing professionals of whom 396 returned the questionnaire (a response rate of 41%). The Ethical Committee of University of Jyväskylä approved the study. All participants were provided information concerning the purpose of the study, data collection methods, protection of anonymity, voluntary nature of participation, maintenance of confidentiality and privacy in publications. Informed consent was assumed when participants returned questionnaires.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are provided in Table 1. Most of the respondents were female (90%). The mean age was 57 (SD = 3.7). The majority of the respondents had college-level education (78%). The respondents had long work experience at their current employer organization (Mean = 22.0, SD = 11.5) and in their current position (Mean = 18.0, SD = 12.1). Most of the nursing professionals had a permanent job (93%). Half of the respondents had a regular day job. Only 16% of the respondents reported that they regularly worked overtime. The average monthly salary was around €2800. The majority of the respondents (72%) were married or in a non-marital relationship.

### Measures

The questionnaire covered areas related to well-being at work, work ability, health, resilience, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, HRM practices, organizational justice, job control, managerial and co-worker support and different intentions to retire.

In this study, we used two retirement scales. The intention to continue working until retirement age scale was formulated

from two items: "I want to continue working in my job until retirement age" and "My health allows me to work until retirement age" (Salminen et al., 2016). The Cronbach alpha value for the sum variable was 0.738. More than 60% of the respondents agreed totally or somewhat with these two statements (Table 2, p. 32).

The intention to continue working during retirement scale included six Likert-scale items (Table 2). A sample item is: "I would like to work while retired." The Cronbach alpha value for the sum variable was 0.738. Twenty-two percent of the respondents indicated they would work while retired. Sixty-four percent of the respondents agreed that their skills and 43% that their work ability allowed them to work after retiring. Only 16% of the nursing professionals perceived working after retiring as a financial necessity, and 17% perceived it as a good solution for them. Approximately one quarter (28%) of the respondents agreed that their organization allows them to continue working after retiring.

HIWPs were measured by using 10 items from Harmon et al.'s (2003) scale. The wording of several items slightly differed from the original scale. The items covered areas such as information sharing, performance-based rewards, teamwork, empowerment and trust between a supervisor and employees. The scale ranged from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much). The Cronbach alpha value for this sum variable was 0.875. The mean values and standard deviations (SDs) of the HIWPs scale items are provided in Table 3 (p. 32). In general, the mean values for the HIWPs scale items were moderate. Items related to rewarding (Mean = 1.89), knowing how one's own work contributes to the whole organization (2.92) and getting one's own opinions and views heard by the organization (Mean = 3.09) received the lowest mean values.

Work ability was studied by asking respondents to estimate their work ability compared to their lifetime best. The question was based on the Work Ability Index (WAI), and it has been shown to be a reliable measure of individuals' work ability (Tuomi et al., 2002).

Several background variables were asked on the questionnaire. In this study, we used chronological age, marital status and wealth (financial security) as individual factors when investigating antecedents of intention to retire. Previous studies have demonstrated that a number of individual factors, such as age, gender, marital-status, health and financial situation, can influence individuals' intention to retire (Beehr & Bennett, 2015; Wang & Shi, 2014; Davies & Cartwright, 2011).

### Data analyses

Correlation (Pearson) and hierarchical regression analyses (stepwise) were used to analyze the data (SPSS 21.0). Correlation analysis was used to analyze the bivariate correlations between the studied variables. Linear regression analyses (the stepwise method) were used to examine the antecedents of intention to retire.

### Findings

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations (Pearson) are shown in Table 4 (p. 33). The mean value for intention to continue working until retirement age was higher than for the intention to work during retirement. The mean value for HIWPs was moderate. Age correlated positively with intention to continue working until retirement age and intention to work during retirement. Work ability and HIWPs also had a positive correlation with the retirement sum variables. The

Retirement scales	Agrees totally or somewhat (%)
<b>Intention to continue working until retirement age scale</b>	
1. I want to continue working in my job until retirement age	64
2. My health allows me to continue working until retirement age	62
<b>Intention to continue working during retirement scale</b>	
1. I would like to work while retired	22
2. I have the skills required to continue working after retiring	64
3. My work ability allows me to work after retiring	43
4. It would be a financial necessity for me to continue working after retiring	16
5. My organization allows me to continue working after retiring	28
6. I find working after retiring is a good solution for me	17

Table 2. Retirement scales items

HIWPs scale	Mean	SD
In your workplace, to what extent:		
1. Everyone can really improve one's skills.	3.67	0.79
2. Employees are aware of issues affecting the job.	3.59	0.80
3. Everyone feels personal empowerment and ownership of the work process.	3.67	0.78
4. Team spirit and co-operation exist.	3.63	0.94
5. There is trust between employees and the supervisor.	3.50	1.02
6. People are encouraged to make things in new and better ways.	3.48	0.97
7. Employees can work as productively as they can.	3.72	0.86
8. Employees are rewarded for high-quality products and services.	1.89	0.96
9. Employees know how their work contributes to the company's goals.	2.92	0.95
10. Sufficient effort is made to get employees' opinions and views.	3.09	0.99

Table 3. HIWPs scale items

strongest positive correlation was found between the retirement sum variables.

Linear regression analyses with the stepwise method were applied in order to explore the antecedents of intention to continue working until retirement age and intention to work during retirement. The individual-level variables (age, marital status, work ability and wealth) were entered in the first block. The categorical variables (marital status and wealth) were transformed into dummy variables. Perceived HIWPs were entered in the second block. In Table 5 (p. 33), standardized beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ), the proportion of the variance explained ( $R^2$ ) and adjusted  $R^2$  are presented.

The results show that good work ability and older age were positively related to nursing professionals' intention continue working until retirement age and during retirement. A good financial situation (wealth) was negatively associated with those intentions. Similarly, being married decreased older nursing professionals' intention to continue working after retiring. HIWPs perceived as good slightly increased nursing professionals' intention to continue working until retirement age and beyond. The first regression model explained 29% of the variance, and the second regression model explained only 16%.

## Conclusions

In the context of an aging workforce, policies and practices regarding "active aging" in working life can be seen to support healthier and "fuller" lives of older individuals and thus benefit the well-being of individuals, communities and societies (Foster & Walker, 2013). Currently, there is growing academic and practical interest in CSR-HRM (Voetglin & Greenwood,

2016), as well as in sustainable HRM which highlight the importance of economic, ecological and social sustainability (Mak et al., 2014). Socially sustainable HRM practices focus on maintaining and developing employees' skills and competencies, fostering information sharing and enhancing empowerment. These practices are seen to have positive individual-level outcomes which will eventually turn into organization-level outcomes. (e.g., Kramar, 2014.) Already, considerable research evidence shows that HIWPs are positively related to employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors, as well as organizational performance (see for example Zhang & Morris, 2014). However, the retention of older employees has received little attention in the discussions of sustainable HRM, although it aims to promote individuals' sustainable working careers (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). In this study, we took a micro-level perspective and examined how older nursing professionals' perceptions of HIWPs were related to their intention to continue working until retirement age and after retiring.

The results of this study showed that there was a positive link between perceived HIWPs and intention to continue working until retirement age and after retiring. This link provides evidence for the direct association between perceived HIWPs and employees' job withdrawal intention (see, for example, Ang et al., 2013, p. 3109). However, these relationships were modest. This study also showed that work ability was closely related to older nursing professionals' late intention to retire. In line with previous studies (Alavinia et al., 2009), good work ability was positively related intention to continue working until retirement age and beyond. Older age was also positively associated with intention to continue working until retirement age and after retiring. Similarly, older age was positively associated

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Age	57.0	3.7							
2 Marital status	2.5	1.0	.100*						
3 Wealth	1.6	0.8	.102*	-.140**	.421**				
4 Work ability	7.8	1.6	-.030	-.091	.176**	.100*			
5 Intention to continue working until retirement age (sum variable)	3.8	1.1	.173**	.047	.021	-.036	.481**		
6 Intention to work during retirement (sum variable)	2.7	0.9	.123*	.064	-.068	-.140**	.292**	.448**	
7 HIWPs (sum variable)	3.3	0.6	.111*	-.028	.135**	.154**	.169**	.199**	.114*

Note: p<0.05\*, p<0.01\*\*

Table 4. Characteristics of the study variables (Means, standard deviations and Cronbach Alpha values) and Pearson correlations

Variables	Intention to continue working until retirement age (Standardized beta coefficient)	Intention to work during retirement (Standardized beta coefficient)
Age (years)	.174***	.116*
Marital status (dummy)	n.s.	-.122*
Wealth (dummy)	-.131**	-.206***
Work ability	.470***	.297***
Perceived HIWPs	.137**	.099*
N	373	368
R <sup>2</sup>	.287*	.160**
adj. R <sup>2</sup>	.280*	.148**
F-test	37.112***	13.746
df	4	5
Standard error of estimate	.921	.784
Durbin-Watson	1.982	2.165

p<0.05\*, p<0.01\*\*, p<0.001\*\*\*

Table 5. Hierarchical regressions (Stepwise) of different intentions to retire

with late intention to retire among British financial sector employees in Davies and Cartwright's (2011) study, but health and financial factors had an insignificant effect on late intention to retire in that study. These differences could be due to the differences in the nature of work, as well as sectoral differences. The work of nursing professionals is often physically and mentally demanding, and therefore, work ability has a significant role in late intention to retire.

Today, careers are becoming longer and more unpredictable than before, which requires sustainable HRM practices in order to support employees during their careers (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). Due to the increasing retirement age and the expected labor shortage in different fields, it is important to understand how to support older employees' intention to continue working until official retirement age and even beyond. The present study showed that older nursing professionals' positive perceptions of HIWPs and good work ability were positively linked to their intention to continue working until retirement age and even beyond. Based on these results, we argue that intention to work until retirement age and beyond could be seen as an outcome of sustainable HRM practices. For example, Barrera-Martínez et al. (2017, p. 29) argued that retention of employees is a central element in developing socially sustainable HRM, although it has rarely been included in CSR standards.

Several previous studies have identified HRM practices or

age management as important for retaining older employees in general (Naegele & Walker, 2006; Ilmarinen, 2006) as well as older nursing professionals in particular (Armstrong-Stassen et al., 2015; Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2010). However, these studies have rarely used the sustainable HRM or social responsibility perspective as a theoretical framework (De Lange et al., 2015). Therefore, there is a need to integrate studies related to the retention of older employees and sustainable HRM. Furthermore, due to the fragmented nature of the current sustainable HRM research, there is need for integration and coherence (Mak et al., 2014).

Future studies should also examine micro-level processes (Morgeson et al., 2013) more thoroughly, such as the causal chain between sustainable HRM and intention to retire. However, in order to confirm a causal chain, longitudinal data are needed. In this study, we focused on perceived HIWPs as a whole, but in the future, different bundles of HRM practices should be studied in more detail (e.g., Mendelson et al., 2011; Bal et al., 2013; Kooij et al., 2014). Furthermore, recent HRM studies stressed that older employees vary in terms of needs and preferences (Kooij et al., 2014; Bal et al., 2013), and therefore, more research is needed to investigate the importance of individualized HRM practices. In the present study, the respondents were mainly registered nurses. The significance of sustainable HRM practices for retaining employees, for exam-

ple, is based on occupational and job-related differences (see for example Ang et al., 2013), as well cultural differences (Mak et al., 2014). Finally, the data were gathered from a single source, which restrains the generalizability of the results and increases the risk of mono-method bias. Collecting data from different sources and levels in an organization would provide an oppor-

tunity to investigate the links between sustainable HRM and individual- and organizational-level outcomes.

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