

Organisational Measures and Strategies for a Healthy and Sustainable Extended Working Life and Employability

Kerstin Nilsson (✉ kerstin.nilsson@med.lu.se)

Research article

Keywords: age, work environment, swAge, demography, retirement, employment, employability, management, organisation, HR

Posted Date: August 4th, 2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-50103/v1>

License: © ⓘ This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

[Read Full License](#)

Abstract

Background: Due to the global demographic change, a larger amount of people will need to work until an older age, and organisations and enterprises need to make measures in order to facilitate an extended working life. The aim of this study was to investigate and find out organisational measures and suggestions to promote and make improvements for a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages in an extended working life.

Methods: The data of the text analysis in this qualitative study was collected through focus group interviews and individual interviews including 133 participants: employees 55- 72 years (87), first line managers (33), trade union representatives (6), HR-professionals (7).

Results: This study has identified various suggestions for measures and actions that would increase the employees' ability to cope in working life until an older age. The measures have been sorted into different themes: to promote a good physical and mental work environment; to promote personal financial and social security; to promote social inclusion and social support in the work situation; and to promote creativity and intrinsic work motivation, i.e. based on the spheres of determination in the theoretical swAge-model.

Conclusions: Based on the study results a tool for dialogue and discussion on employee work situation and career development has been developed, and attached to the article. Regular conversations, communication and close dialogue are needed and are a prerequisite for good working conditions and a sustainable working environment, as well as to be able to manage employees and develop the organisation further. The identified measures need to be taken care of regularly throughout employees' entire working life, in order to enable a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages.

Introduction

The working population is ageing in many countries. A larger number of people need to keep working in order to maintain the welfare system in a sustainable economic manner [1]. The challenge is how to enable and incentivise people to remain in working life until an older age [2]. It is of great importance to discuss and explore organisational measures with the intent of enabling people to participate in working life for longer, since several countries and societies plan to postpone the retirement age. Therefore, the demographic shift and its' challenges and opportunities are of special interest for societies, and require the implementation of policies and measures to help people stay healthy and active until an older age. However, the attitudes towards the extension of working life seem to differ at different levels in the societies. Earlier studies and a theoretical model on sustainable working life for all ages (the swAge-model) state the following nine determinant areas that influence whether people can and want to work and be part of the labor force until an older age, and to promote a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages [3-6] (Nilsson, 2003; Nilsson, 2005; Nilsson et al 2011; Nilsson, 2013; Nilsson, 2016a; Nilsson 2020): 1) Diagnoses and self-rated health; 2) Physical work environment; 3) Mental work environment; 4)

Working hours, work pace and time for recuperation; 5) Personal finances; 6) Personal social environment; 7) Work social environment; 8) Work task satisfaction and the possibility of meaningful activities; 9) Knowledge, skills and access to skills development. However, the organisations and enterprises need to perform and implement sustainable measures and strategies in order to make an extended working life possible for a larger number of individuals [3-10]. Due to what we know and could find by reviewing literature on the subject, there is a limited number of earlier studies and knowledge on: how organisations and enterprises can and wish to perform measures and strategies for a healthy and sustainable extended working life.

The aim of this study was to investigate and find out organisational measures and suggestions to make improvements for a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages in an extended working life.

Methods

The research design was decided to be qualitative, in order to provide an in-depth investigation of the organisational measures and strategies that can promote a healthy and sustainable working life until an older age. The research question is one of complexity and involves different contexts in the organisations and enterprises. Therefore, in order to examine the research questions in a better way, the data was decided to be collected through interviews.

Study population:

To maximise the number of participants according to heterogeneity, the recruitment sites included individuals of different sex, different positions and professions, from work domains in both female and male- dominated workplaces and both from the public as well as the private sector. The total study population consisted of 133 participants, including: first line managers, elderly employees (55-72 years of age) in both blue- and white-collar professions, trade union workers, and human resource personnel (Table 1). The elderly employee occupations were nurse, nurse assistant, physician, social worker, medical secretary, carpenter, construction worker, concrete worker, engineer, technician, mechanic, installer, electrician, salesperson and farmer.

Table 1. Distribution of the study population.

Participant group	Number of participants			Number of focus group interviews within the group	Number of individual interviews within the group
	Total	Women	Men		
Employees 55- 72 years	87	42	45	14	22
First line managers	33	15	18	8	
Trade union employees (two of whom were also safety delegates)	6	2	4	3	
Human resource personnel	7	3	4	3	
Total	133	62	71	28	22

The participants were recruited in different ways. 105 of the informants were recruited through a snowball selection at organisations and enterprises. The human resource managers at the organisations and enterprises were informed through phone by the researcher and questioned whether the organisation or enterprise was interested in participating in the study. The human resource manager in turn directed the question of participation to the management in the organisation and for volunteers at different levels in the organisation who were interested in participating in the study. However, the sample of informants was voluntarily collected after the researchers invited their workplace to participate in the study and the organisation and the enterprise had accepted. A letter with information about the study was distributed through the contacts at the organisations and enterprises. The contact person informed people with the desired profile of participation and further handed the information letter on. The presumptive participants then gave their consent to participate or rejected participation. Additionally, 61 participants from an earlier work environment study conducted within the research group, were contacted by mail and received written information about the study with an invitation to participate in the study and to be the subject of an interview. 22 individuals responded and received further information on the study and the participation by phone and were asked to participate. Of those all accepted and gave consent to participate in the interview and in the study. The participants from the trade unions were invited in another way. The researcher e-mailed written information about the study directly to the trade union with an announcement and invitation for interested participants to volunteer and participate in the study. The contact person informed people and handed the information letter on further. The sample of presumptive participants was voluntarily collected and subsequently gave their consent to participate in the interview and in the study.

Data collection:

The majority of the data was collected through focus group interviews including in total 111 informants. Focus groups are suitable for obtaining knowledge about perceptions and beliefs regarding a specific topic [11,12]. The purpose of a focus group interview is to stimulate and start a dialogue between the

participants to an open discussion within the scope of the study topics [13]. The focus group sessions included 2-7 participants from the same organisation or enterprise. The focus groups consisted of individuals in the separate positions of: first line managers and human resource personnel; elderly employees (55-72 years of age); trade union workers (Table 1). Two of the trade union workers (one man working at a construction enterprise and one woman working at a health care organisation) were also safety representatives, with the opportunity to stop work immediately if any risk or safety issues occurs in the workplace. The interviews were carried out in neutral and calm surroundings at the respective workplaces. Each interview session had a duration of 1½ - 2½ hours and all of the discussions were audio recorded and transcribed, though with the identity of the interviewees hidden. However, due to time schedule issues and logistic problems, the interviews with 22 of the informants were individual interviews. Individual interviews are intended to provide a deeper understanding and knowledge about the individuals' own subjective experience and perspective of their situation [13]. The individual interviews took place in the informants own homes, more specifically at the dinner table in their kitchens. Each interview session took 1½-2 hours and all of the discussions were audio recorded and transcribed, but the identity of the interviewees was concealed.

Analysis:

All the interviews were analysed together through text analysis method, more specifically deductive content analysis, in order to crystallize the relevant parts of the collected data. Deductive content analysis is a suitable choice when an existing theory involves the application of conceptual categories in the analysis of a new context [14]. Deduction can be said to constitute a conclusion from the general to the individual. The deductive content analysis increases the deductive approach by using theories and knowledge from previous research to refine, and possibly extend, a theoretical framework [15]. Additionally, in the content analysis any text that does not fit in the existing theory or the predefined categories gives new codes and is analysed to verify any new category. Thereby content analysis also has an inductive approach.

The analysis in this study was performed in several steps. The analysis started by constructing a formative categorization matrix with four pre-set categories based on theories and the determinant spheres in the swAge- model [3-5]. In the next step of the analysis, all the interviews were read together as one text to make sense of the whole. In order not to miss anything of importance this was done two times. In the third step of the analysis, specific interesting parts were marked in the text and colour coded. In the fourth step of the analysis, those colour coded text parts were put together and given codes. The codes were then grouped and categorized according to their meanings, similarities and differences and linked to the predetermined categorizations in different themes and sub-themes showing the reappeared basic ideas typical of the participants' descriptions. The presentation of the findings in the following result section of this paper is based on the four predetermined themes based on the determinant spheres of the theoretical swAge-model.

Results

The result of measures and strategies to highlight in the organisational work, in order to make improvements for a sustainable extended working life for all ages, are presented in the following themes: Measures for the work environments health effects; Measures for personal financial security; Measures for social support and inclusion; Measures for execution of work tasks.

Measures for the work environments health effects

Measures to consider the effect of biological ageing related to employee's health and risk assessments in the systematic work environment management

The interviewees in all of the varying occupations participating in this study stated that areas of importance, that decreases the possibility of an extended working life, were physical and mental health problems. The interviewees describe that a high level of physical and mental demands for a duration of years in a problematic work environment usually leads to physical health problems, especially in the last year of the employment. One HR-personnel stated: *"I think that you can perceive a big difference after the age of 60. You lose very much then. Mostly physically. That you cannot be bothered, you are tired. It is hard to work in health care."* A trade union representative from the construction industry describes the health problems associated with increasing age: *"There are many employees who can take two painkillers, both at lunch and breakfast. However, most people go into the bathroom and take them, since most people do not want to show it. I dare not even speculate how large the use of painkillers is. It can range from 50% to 10%. If I must be honest it is very extensive."* Many interviewees stated the importance of an action plan for organisational measures in order to examine work environmental risks, take actions and follow up on the measures and actions. A manager stated: *"We need to work with accident prevention all the time, such as to always wear protective goggles, gloves, and the like. Such things have of course been an improvement to minor accidents today. But then the second thing, the long process where you work every day in a physically demanding occupation and eventually you will become physically worn out in old age. We have not really come up with how to solve this."* However, there are actually systems on how to continuously manage these work environmental problems in the day to day work. One manager stated: *"If it makes a real impact to work with systematic work environment management then it is possible that more people can continue to work until an older age, I'd say."* To systematically work towards that the physical and mental work environment becomes healthier and more sustainable for all ages was stated as important by the interviewees.

An organisational culture that promotes the use of ergonomic aids:

Many of the elderly employees in physically demanding work environments described it as problematic to keep working due to the physical work environment. The organisational culture regarding the use of ergonomically correct positions, aids and equipment was described to be changed in the direction to get a better physical work health. One manager stated: *"Younger ones just go for it. They hear well, see well and feel good. But when they are around 60 they have tinnitus for not using hearing protections when they were younger. Back pain all the time because when you were 25 you could lift 60 kg, no problem. The back creaked a bit, but it went well. Then it is too late."* One trade union worker said: *"We have this macho*

culture: Just go for it!! I have been using the machine every day, year in and year out for ten years and it went well. I cannot feel my arms today, but it does not matter, just go for it. Then the younger guys think: If the elderly employees work like that, I should not be weaker. Then they learn the wrong way and the problem continues." A manager in health care stated that it was obvious to arrange for ergonomic aids in order to protect and enable the patient, but sometimes the employees were not as good at protecting themselves and would take their own safety and health for granted. One manager stated: *"It is important to inform more regularly about accessibility and protection equipment. That it is included as a requirement. We often focus on the patient, when the patient needs an aid we help them so that they understand how to use it. But it is also about our own working environment and health."* The interviewees stated that it was important to instill a positive attitude in order to provide a good and safe work environment in the entire organisation. Furthermore, that not only the managers, HR-personnel and trade union representatives have to be aware of this, the employees also need to be educated and take responsibility regarding their own safety and enjoy a good work environment.

Rotation, variation and change of duties to reduce physical and mental demands

Rotation between different work tasks was stated by the interviewees as a measure to reduce health problems from demanding work tasks and situations at work. One elderly employee said: *"I am in favour of rotation between different tasks, and I talk from my own experience. You lay slabs and lift the stone, every day, twice a year. You might lift 7-8 tons a day with your body. It takes a devilish toll on the body, this monotony. Instead, it is better to rotate a little and switch tasks within the work team. It's about planning, to ensure that the conditions to be able to rotate exist."* One manager said: *"You need to modify the task. When you come up to 60 years, you can't roof a house, you can't make roof trusses. Then there are other tasks. One must plan and structure the workplace. -Can we put him in charge of small tasks, or shall we let him handle the logistics?"* To rotate could on the other hand increase fear, insecurity and the experience of more stress, if the elderly employee was not used to rotate work tasks but only worked with the same tasks and in the same place. One manager described: *"When I started to work here I introduced the need to rotate on all workstations. Then there were older employees who had difficulty opening the computer at the new table, even though it was exactly the same kind of computer that also looked exactly the same. It was not possible to understand how to do it when they left the table where they had stood for 20 years. Some could not even enter their user name. However, after a while it was no problem".* To rotate work tasks in the work place was also described as both a problem and a solution to reduce problems in the mental work environment. It could in some aspects be perceived as stressful to move from a familiar work spot and work tasks to an unknown area, but on the other hand it could be a solution and a possibility to reduce stress and increase the understanding of the total organisation and towards each other's work tasks. An elderly employee stated: *"It would have been good to start from the beginning and to really get around. Many of the staff have to move. They have been in one place for 30-40 years. They do not know what it looks like at their neighbouring colleague basically. It is very good to walk around and see what others have it like to appreciate their own, and maybe come back again."* In other words, a

regular rotation between different work tasks seems to be a good measure in order to promote a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages.

Effort, information and participation to reduce work stress

The interviewees described a problematic work situation as when there was a great demand on them to execute their work tasks, even though there were a lot of factors they could not control in their work situation, affecting their possibility to execute their work tasks. Additionally, there were a lot of organisational development going on that the employees did not understand or see any possible objective or benefits of based on their own position within the organisation. A trade union representative said: *"There are so many reorganisations and we face a lot of new systems. Our members become much stressed if they do not understand why there must be a change or because of the novelty of it. You become frightened and tired of all the new systems /.../ it could be new and changed monitoring systems, payroll systems, personnel systems, financial systems, planning systems. We need to receive information and be included in what and why these systems are needed. If they are needed."* The interviewees described that better information and participation within organisational development and changes in work tasks could increase their understanding of what was going on within the organisation. Therefore, they suggest more accurately targeted information and participation within organisational development and work task changes as important measures that could balance the sense of reward and decrease work stress. The elderly employees also described how they as employees want to experience a sense of reward for the effort they put in their work tasks, for example words and actions of appreciation from their managers and organisations, despite work tasks not being satisfactory fulfilled due to circumstances out of the employees' control.

Reduce violence and threats in the work situation and brief each other

There are times in the work situation circumstances that can include threats and violence. An elderly employee in a health care organisation described: *"There are some patients who are confused and demented and who can become violent and fight. There are also patients with frontal lobe dementia who become completely personality-changed and pull staff down in bed and try to make sexual encounters. They can't help it, but it is our work environment and it is stressful to face this every day and having to defend ourselves."* The situations that include violence and threats need to be decreased if a larger number of elderly employees, as well as employees of any age, should have a possibility to keep working. An important measure described by the informants was to have the possibility of briefing each other and talk about possible, perceived and experienced situations and issues in the work situation that include threats and violence. The possibility of talking about these situations in group and with a supervisor was described as a much needed measure in order to reduce stress and anxiety regarding new situations including threats and violence and on how to handle them.

Work Schedule

Measures regarding the working hours appeared to be important in order to make working life more sustainable for all ages. An HR-professional said: *"Many elderly employees like to reduce the number of work hours, have shorter work shifts and more flexible working hours to cope and have time to recover."* Flexibility in the work schedule was stated as important for elderly employees' revitalisation and to be able to work until an older age. A manager defined it: *"The possibility of having a little bit more flexible working hours is one of the most important factors for the possibility to keep working in an extended working life, as I perceive it."* Though, many stated that flexibility in working hours was impossible in organisation since it would cause problems in the production line. However, others stated that this was not true, because it could be done with better planning and organisation of the work tasks. An HR-professional said: *"Many elderly people prefer to work fewer hours because they are unable to cope. I think younger people would rather work a very long shift and then have time off for two days in the middle of the week. When you are older, you have changed that view and gained the insight to work more often but shorter work shifts to cope. We especially saw this in the workplaces where there was an opportunity to influence working hours and schedule. There you could see that younger people worked much longer work shifts but more rarely. Older people worked more often, though had shorter work shifts, preferably five-hour work shifts".* A trade union worker in a construction enterprise stated that many elderly employees no longer had the strength needed to work full time and said: *"Those who have come up to 60 years and have physical problems could work part-time, and go down to, say, 75%. If the elderly employee had reduced their working hours, though worked from 9 to 14 it would not affect the work team and production negatively at all /.../ In more project-oriented workplaces for example, the staff could work for 3 months and then have time off for three months".* However, the trade union worker also mentioned that if elderly employees decreased their working hours their pension could be negatively affected, and therefore many elderly employees do not consider reduced working hours as a possible choice to have a more sustainable working life. Another important measure described by some interviewees associated to this was to adapt the work content to the scope of working hours, so that those who work part-time were not expected to perform full-time work in a less amount of hours.

Work pace

The elderly employees were described to be just as exposed to the demanding mental work environmental problems as the younger ones, i.e. sometimes they experience an insufficient influence of own decisions and control on their work situation, and some run the risk of being subjected to threats and violence. However, it seems to be especially stressful for the ageing employees with high expectations on their productivity from enterprise/organisation, managers and co-workers when they, due to their biological ageing and health problems, cannot be as productive in some work tasks anymore. A trade union worker described this: *"There are difficulties in the work team when elder employees are worn out and cannot perform as good as the other ones. Not to be performing fully anymore and risk dragging down the contracted work in the work team is stressful for the older employees".* The work pace was mentioned when it comes to make measures for elderly employees. One manager stated: *"I feel that those who are 50, 55+, they cannot work in the same work pace of those who are 25-30 anymore."* Additionally, many of the elderly employees stated that they experienced that work was more stressful

these days and that they could not work in such a stressful work pace any more. Instead they wanted to work with a fewer number of different work tasks, to have the possibility of focusing and performing fewer work tasks more properly. Too many work tasks increase the work pace because it also takes time to switch between different work tasks. An elderly employee in elderly care said: *"There are so many work tasks around that does not have to do with care work at all, and that is stressful. We must document a lot, write a lot and keep contact with relatives. They pull at you from all directions. We must bake, we must get food ready, we must organize activities to the accommodation, and we must pack up diapers. We have to do so many different things, the patients have to wait. The patients complain about that, and then you get yelled at by the manager for not having time to do the care work."* The interviewees stated the importance of good quality in the work tasks executed, and not to focus as much on quantity. The interviewees described that a measure to achieve this was to have fewer tasks and work in a more comfortable work pace with the possibility to consider and be creative.

Importance of self-care for a sound (occupational) health

The interviewees stated that healthy ageing is about taking care of themselves and their own health. Some interviewees talked about the fact that individual employees have a responsibility of taking care of and managing their own health, but that the surrounding attitude, for example in the workplace, contributed to whether they could and whether they took this responsibility. A manager said: *"There must be a genuine interest in taking care of oneself, because it is not just about exercising, it is also about eating right and sleeping properly and all those other things that affect how we feel in everyday life"*. An elderly employee said: *"To get exercise, eat, sleep, and all that influences how we feel in our daily lives is also a part of the working environment"*. Some interviewees talk about the significance of physical exercise, but also about the importance of a healthy diet. The interviewees also stated that people had better eating habits before, when it was possible to get lunch coupons from the enterprise or organisation to exchange for lunch. These days this counts as an income benefit in Sweden and results in increased taxes for the employees, therefore no enterprise or organisation has this system anymore. However, there was a greater worry about the younger generations' possibility of having a sound health. The managers and elderly employees pointed out that the younger employees were more into eating fast food instead of maintaining a healthy diet. A manager said: *"We have many people who have a coca cola and a chocolate bun for breakfast. I think it would be a good measure to treat the staff to a good breakfast when they come here, so they have the energy to work."* The manager stated that the young employees of today will be elderly employees one day, and that if they do not change their diet, they will have great health problems when they get older. The interviewees discussed that physical activity was very important to care for the bodily functions to keep mentally and physically healthy. An occupational health care professional said: *"Fitness in some way is essential for everyone to maintain a sound physical and mental health regardless of desk work or physically demanding work. Exercise either at work or sponsored by work. Exercise at work could be mandatory, not only for police officers and firefighters as it contributes to higher productivity and less sick absence among employees"*. A manager said: *"I don't think there's a chance that you will be able to work until a higher age unless you take care of yourself and your body. It can well be stated that a lot of our employees have physically demanding jobs in health*

care, but who also miscalculate their body if you look at how they maintain their physical exercise and their diet. It's not good. We do what we can there. We provide information, offer lunch and occupational health care and tell about the importance of physical exercise, mental recuperation and a well-balanced diet. That you should exercise even if you have a physically demanding occupation". Some interviewees discussed whether measures to develop an organisational culture that promotes self-care and a healthy lifestyle could be a step on the way to a more healthy and sustainable working life, or if it was to violate employee integrity and risk of shaming people.

Physical activity, 'maintenance of functions', to keep and increase mentally and physically good health

Physical activity was stated as an important measure to keep and increase a physically and mentally sound health. Making it possible and in addition compulsory to exercise at work and as a part of the work schedule, was a measure supposed to support a more sustainable working life until an older age. An HR-professional stated: *"I come from the police department and also work quite a lot with firefighters. In those occupations physical exercise and maintenance of their body during working hours is mandatory, to score their tests and keep up good physics in order to do a good job. But it's almost more tiring and demanding to work in health care. Health care professionals need to exercise as much as employees in the police department or fire brigade. It should be equivalent when you save people's lives. I think that all physically demanding service occupations need to get exercise at work, as part of the working hours. It should be a requirement, because it's a safety and work environment issue."* An elderly employee said: *"I think it would be good if they would put fitness exercise in the work schedule. I think many do not want to go away when they get home. They live far from the city where they work. But if they had one hour a week in their working hours I think, if you put it in, many would feel a lot better because of it, it is actually perceivable. We see it on our elderly patients' exercise and raising of their arms every now and then. Just doing that a couple of times a week makes them feel better. Why can't the staff do that, without having to do it in their own leisure time? We get older, as does our shoulders and arms, our body shrink down, it's really important to exercise. I think most would agree if it was in the working schedule. Don't you too? Now that us co-workers exercise for a few hours, and gently move our arms and shoulders, nothing unusual really, so many have felt good because of it."*

Another elderly employee described that physical activity was not only important for the body but also for the mind. She said: *"You become more alert if you exercise at all, because I know some girls who have started and never done any before, and they say that they are very energetic: -I can do more than I did before! And I actually think that you do."* Physical activity and exercise was highlighted by the interviewees as an important measure to promote a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages.

Occupational health services support to prevent work environmental problems and increase good occupational health.

The interviewees stated the need of measures to make working life healthier for all ages and to make working life more sustainable. Some managers and HR-professionals emphasized the need to put the employees' wellbeing in their systematic work environmental management in order to handle an extended working life. Someone said: *"When we do our safety rounds and look over tools, activities, etc. we can also look over the employees' physical and mental possibilities to work"*. However, the HR-professionals and managers further stated the need of professional help on how to decide on and implement the measures. An HR-professional said: *"I think we need to take more action when I see the injuries that employees have today. This will be intensified if we do not begin to make measures in the working environment and work situation now. That must be reasonable in some way, if we expect that elderly employees will perform and deliver until an older age in the same way. Perhaps measures for physiotherapeutic rehabilitation. It is not only the somatic part. It is so easy to decide on and take physical action. But it can also be mental. It should not be forgotten. This second part is more difficult to work with. We have occupational health services that we can turn to for help with it, but maybe we also should have something in the administration that we can turn to."* As the HR-professional describes the manager has a lot of tasks and responsibilities, and they cannot be experts on everything. Therefore, they need to include other professions and experts to take care of some of the measures in order to make the work situation healthy and sustainable for employees belonging to different age groups.

Summary:

The participating interviewees stated that an awareness of employees ageing in their systematic work environment control management and strategy in the daily work at the organisation or enterprise was an important strategy for a sustainable working to an older age, i.e. an awareness of ageing in the: investigation of working conditions; in the assessing of risks; in the development of an action plan, when taking action; as well as an awareness of ageing in the follow up of the results. Other measures to promote a good and healthy work environment that supports health and wellbeing, and are of importance for a sustainable working life until an older age were: an organisational culture that promotes the use of ergonomic aids and tools; rotation and change of work tasks to reduce physical wear; physical activity to maintain bodily functions and keep mentally and physically fit; the importance of a healthy diet for sound (occupational) health; and occupational health care support to promote health and prevent physical and mental injury, illness and stress.

Measures for personal financial security

Salary and financial benefits

One reason to why people work is to receive salary, in order to finance their life. When we asked the elderly employees about their reasons to keep working in an extended working life some stated: *"For me it's a financial issue. I am not hypocritical about that"*. A trade union representative said: *"When you work you have reasonably good finances. But on the other hand you have less leisure time to do activities than*

someone in retirement. As a pensioner you will have to live with less money, but much more time to do what you want. It's a balance. When can I leave (for retirement)?" The changes in salary and financial benefits are measures that can work both as a carrot and stick for a longer working life.

Measures in the organisations and enterprises work environment to promote continuous employability

In order to be employable, certain things are needed. Therefore, some interviewees distinguish the need of measures to promote continuous employability, so that elderly employees can provide themselves through continuing to work until a higher age. A basic necessity is that the employee's health is sufficient to work, to be able to participate in working life and to receive a salary. A manager stated: *"Elderly people who are worn out and have a sore neck and shoulders, they get a medical certificate that they cannot lift more than 10 kg. But then we say to that person that we do not have any tasks for them. Because we have not any work tasks where you do not have to lift at least 10 kg. So then there is no possibility of re-employment after their injury and sick absence"*. The interviewees stated that work environment security in order to reduce risks of occupational diseases, injury, sick absence and disability pension were important for the individual employee's employability and the employees' personal finances. A manager said: *"20 years ago, people were unable to work until retirement age in this profession. Because back then you did not have the tools and you did not have the working environment of today. But even today, some are worn out but have to suck it up and work because they have no choice. Otherwise they will have too low pensions and have financial problems"*. Some interviewees stated that the organisations and enterprises were responsible for the working environment. That when the organisation or enterprise chooses not to provide safety aids or tools or does not provide enough people for an activity, they should consider the long term cost of this, since it can cause sickness absence and disability benefits in the long run. A trade union representative said: *"In large workplaces, it is easier to provide more people and protection equipment than in a place where we are two employees, because the price is so bad, we have not considered the cost of that. So, in those workplaces you have to work harder than one would have thought. We also have some smaller workplaces in facility work where we do not have access to the work protection equipment one would need at all times. It is often like that. What to say of the rules of preparation, it is usually included in larger projects, you need this and that, and then it is part of the offer and price, etc. That is where the safety representative should object."* The interviewees regarded work environment safety representatives at the workplaces and their mandate to stop work if there are any health risks present as an important measure in order to reduce risks in the workplace that could affect the employees' health, continuous employability and thereby employee salary and personal finances. Some interviewees, mostly managers actually, highlighted the importance of safety protection, and how injury and sick absence otherwise could cause economic stress for the organisation or enterprise.

Measures to change the organisational culture, to promote and increase responsibility and employees' use of safety equipment and assistive technology in the workplace

The organizational culture influences how one perceives one's work, tasks, as well as the use of aids, tools etc. Therefore, the organisational culture should promote a responsible and sustainable working life,

to prevent employees being worn out physically or mentally. It is also important for the staff that the management show appreciation for their efforts. A trade union representative stated the importance to make measures in order to change the organisational culture: *"We have this macho culture; just go for it! I have used that machine every day for years and years, ten years and it went well. However, I have numbness in my arms today, though that does not matter, just go for it! Now I generalize a little. When the young guys learn, the frail Bengtsson can do it, he is able to, and so am I! Then, for example, we have a young guy today, he is not yet 30 years of age, who must have cortisone pumped into his arms. Not yet 30 years old! It is too weird that it should be like that /.../ they are 30 - 35 years old and are starting to have physical problems with knees, back and legs already, and they may not have worked for more than 15 years. After all, it's scary that many of the younger ones can't handle it."* Many interviewees working in physically demanding workplaces expressed the need to change the organisational culture, to use the aids and tools that were available to avoid being exhausted and unable to work, and subsequently risk financial consequences due to lack of employability. An elderly employee who expressed problems with the organisational culture said: *"Younger people go on just like anyone else. You hear well, look good and feel good. But around 60 you get tinnitus for not using hearing protection, so it is, sore back because when you were 25 you lifted 60 kilos no problem, it creaked a little, but it went well. That's what it is like. Then it's too late."* Opportunities to maintain employability until an older age and to counteract "macho attitudes" were described as conscious efforts aimed at creating a more favourable organisational culture. The role of the organisational culture in employability at an older age was expressed, above all, by managers in the heavy construction industry. A manager stated: *"There's a huge focus on working environment, actually. /.../ It was stated by the executive group management that it is not about money, it is about well-being at the employees construction site."* A manager stated that acute injuries were reduced with protection equipment, but that becoming physically worn out seems more difficult to combat using physical means: *"Now we have introduced to always use protection goggles, gloves and the like. Such things have been an improvement to minor accidents today of course. But then in the long run, when you work in a physically demanding profession, you will get worn out eventually"*. Rotation between different work tasks was one measure stated of the informants to in some part reduce health problem in a working environment with heavy physical demands.

Measures to promote and increase employability through continuous competence development

In order to execute work tasks and activities the employees need appropriate knowledge and competence on how to do this. Many of the interviewees stated the need of continuous knowledge and competence development in order for the employees to stay employable. However, some managers, and also some elderly employees, stated that some of the elderly employees do not want to continue developing their knowledge and learn new things anymore. Although almost every organisation and enterprise develop due to the ongoing change in the world and societal circumstances. If an employee does not have the right competence and knowhow in order to their work tasks, they are not employable. A manager stated: *"When there is change in the organisation, which of course it happens for a bit every now and then, if the employee's competence does not fit the new tasks, they should be placed somewhere else. Then we try to get these employees other tasks and locations. We also need to look at what they bring in competence."*

Sometimes an elderly employee no longer has the right skills and training. They are not as employable anymore". Other interviewees stated that with a broad competence and/or special competence it was easier for the employee to change work tasks, workplace or occupation if health problems stressed them to do so. The participating interviewees stated that it was of great importance to take measures to promote a continuous improvement of competence, personal development and learning of new skills in order to maintain employees' continuous employability, and in the long and the short of it personal financial security through the possibility to obtain salary from work.

Summary:

The interviewees stated that measures to promote personal financial security for elderly employees were important to secure their continuous employability. Therefore, measures for work environmental security, risk assessment and reduction of work injuries are needed in the intention of reducing risks of health problems, so that employees can manage an entire working life and not be worn out prematurely and subsequently forced out of working life with less financial benefits through long-term sick leave, disability pension, unemployment or premature retirement. Furthermore, continuous competence development is key, so that elderly employees do not risk being laid off due to lack of fitting tasks because their competence is obsolete or they lack the skills needed and therefore cannot be relocated with continued employability and provide for themselves by participating in working life. Some interviewees also stated the need of a reasonable and sufficient salary development regardless of age.

Measures to promote social support and inclusion

Measures to promote a balance between working life and leisure time

Employees have a personal life outside their work. The interviewees describe a need for measures in the work situation that utilize individual needs, participation and activities with family, leisure time and hobbies. Many of the elderly employees stated that they were much more tired these days. This fatigue affected their leisure time, because they had to prioritize rest and recuperation when they did not work. An elderly employee said: *"In the evening when I came home, I did not have the energy to start doing fun things /.../ I have way too little recuperation. I got a telling-off from my brother last summer; he said that I never call and never come to visit. I replied that I do not have the energy. After work I go home, cook, eat, sit on the couch and then I go to bed. /... / Over the years, I feel that the balance has got worse and worse /.../ We have a little cabin in Falkenberg where we would like to spend some time... But we can't, because I don't have time... I don't have time to do anything at home."* Being too exhausted to take part in leisure activities and exercise could cause feelings of embarrassment. An older employee said: *"It is like you said previously, I am so tired. I am almost ashamed sometimes that I don't have the energy to do anything else than work and sit in front of the TV. It is like that unless I am off for the whole weekend or something. I don't really do anything during the weeks other than work. It almost feels a little bit embarrassing"*. Many of the interviewed elderly employees stated the need of measures to promote elderly employees' work

schedules and working hours that, other than work, addresses the need of the individual's participation in a personal social environment, leisure activities, family, hobbies and relaxation. Otherwise, many state that they would prefer to leave working life due to the lack of content in life besides work, and to have a better possibility of living a full life.

Measures to promote social inclusion in a team

The sense of community in the workplace was described as important in order to create a sustainable extended working life. Difficulties arose if the elderly employee sensed feeling like an outsider in their former work team, then they would not want to extend their working lives. A trade union worker said: *"There are no guidelines in the enterprise generally saying that when a skilled employee, coming up to 63, 64 years of age, then it should be done like this. They leave it to the team to redistribute responsibilities. There will be an outcry: We should not have him in our work team, because he is worn out! He cannot perform to the piece work! Actually, the piece work is an issue for elderly employees"*. All the interviewees stated the importance of the work social environment and measures to promote inclusion of every individual in a reliable team. To be a part of a social group was stated as important to increase the willingness to keep working in an extended working life. An HR-professional stated: *"Those who appreciate the social life in their work situation and who have a large social network at work tend to work for quite some time."* An elderly employee said: *"I get on well at this job and it feels good. I meet many nice colleagues and managers who appreciate the effort, so there is no hard consideration to keep working."*

Another elderly employee said: *"One thing that makes you want to come here and work is that you have a lot of friends and acquaintances. People you meet every day, talk and hang out with."* An organisational culture with sustainable values allows customization of the work situation. The sense of participating in something larger than oneself and working with colleagues were stated as important factors to keep working in an extended working life.

Measures to increase the elderly employees' status in an occupation and a work team

The interviewees describe that it is key to feel that work tasks and activities are perceived as important and needed for the productivity and the organisation. Having appropriate resources and equipment to execute the work tasks was seen as important in order to experience appreciation from the organisation and the manager. Some productions and professional groups included in the study had received new work uniforms and were offered training days, which assisted to signal the status and value of the employees to the organisation. An elderly employee describes: *"It was Anna (a manager) who introduced it. She cared a lot about raising the status of their careers. So they got uniforms that say 'Cleaning Department' on them, and they all got training. A whole week of training. It cost a lot of money, but I think it made them feel more appreciated."* However, the participants describe that male dominated occupations and work tasks have a higher status within the organisation and were more appreciated than female dominated occupations. A participant stated: *"Men have higher status in organisations. All who needed got work uniforms that were payed for by the organisation, and they do not have to take them*

home and wash themselves. They have full time work, and also have a higher salary for the same work tasks". Some participants describe that this difference in status was part of the fact that a larger number of women left working life earlier than men. They stated it as an important measure to promote and increase the status of female dominated occupations and work tasks in order to increase their willingness to stay working in an extended working life.

Social support to promote and increase the elderly employees' self-esteem in the organisation

Social support was described as a measure to increase the older employees' willingness to stay in working life for some more years. One manager describes that many elderly employees had to change their own self-image by themselves too, and said: *"It is often the general idea in society that individuals are not interested in the labour market when they are over 55. This is in many people's heads. If you do not believe in yourself then it will be tough".* Another manager said: *"I have employees who basically have the same chronological age, but where one has decided to work until 67 and the other to work until 65. I think many start to dip down when they begin to see the end of working life in any way. Then, it is a lot about motivation, and I discovered that it determines quite a lot and that's pretty much about it. Attitude and motivation affect a lot."* Some interviewees stated that because of old age, health problems or personality, some employees do not want to be in the front line. They want to take it easy, have enough time to recover and do a good job in their own pace. Therefore, a measure to keep a larger number of elderly employees within the organisation until an older age was to make it possible to have different positions based on the elderly employee's own needs. However, the importance of this is the ability to know that they are good enough and to feel included in the social participation despite not being able to keep up with a high work pace. A manager describes that they have made agreements within the work team to make it possible for everyone to get best, or at least good enough, fitted tasks: *"There was an agreement and this elderly nurse has since then expressed that she feels very calmed by it. She does a satisfactory job, but she does not need to do this to be in the front line. ... She avoided the stress, she has expressed that; now I know what I should do, I will do what I must. For it is not fair that one should leave a long working life with a sense of failure; I'm not good enough. Then it is better to have taken that into consideration."* Measures to promote and increase the employee's self-esteem in the organisation, in spite of the employee being the most productive worker or not, was described to be important in order to keep working in an extended working life.

Measures to promote and increase the attitude of employees as a productivity investment

The interviewees stated that it was an important measure to feel included in a social group and to be seen as a unique individual in order to make work life more sustainable until an older age.

All the respondents stated the importance of different age groups at the workplace because it takes time to build experience from life. One of the trade union workers said: *"It takes such a long time to build up experience that some older key people are worth gold to the organisation"*. Elderly employees were described as a resource with valuable assets for organisations and companies. Measures to take care of and promote the elderly employees' experience-based knowledge were needed both for the acknowledgement of the elderly employees and for the prosperity of the organisation. Some managers described that they include elderly employees in development meetings for the business and new projects even though the employees were elderly and did not have much time left before retirement. A manager stated: *"It is very valuable to have an elderly employee in the production and in the work team, they know what to do and been through most problems so they keep calm in the most difficult and problematic situations."* Having mixed age groups strengthens regrowth and creativity when experience and knowledge meet and can be exchanged. To highlight and promote the elderly employees' value to the work team and the production was described as an important measure in the quest of creating a healthy and sustainable extended working life. Some of the respondents also described how customers and patients who themselves were elderly preferred to turn to elderly employees with their requests. This is probably because they experienced it being easier to meet in a common reference framework and historic familiarity with someone in the same age group and that facilitates the communication.

Measures and actions to decrease negative attitudes and (age) discrimination

Managers, HR, trade union representatives and elderly employees stated that it was important not to generalise, not to hold stereotypes that all elderly employees are the same and take actions and measures in order to eliminate negative attitudes toward ageing, victimization and age discrimination because of effects on work ability related to biological and cognitive ageing. The attitude towards elderly employees held by managers, co-workers and organisations influence the elderly employee's experience of motivation to work. However, in the analysis it was possible to determine some negative attitudes towards elderly employees in the work organisation. A manager stated: *"To put it bluntly: it is a fact that you want to invest in the younger employees, they've got many years left. Now we have laws and regulations that govern us and control us to not make any difference because of age"*. Another manager describes that elderly employees' productivity was not as high as the younger employees': *"I may, as supervisor, not expect the same productivity of a 65 year old employee that I can of a 30 year old. But is it okay that older employees are not as effective? Is it okay if they cannot do the same things? That they cannot produce at the same level? Can we justify that we expect different things at different ages from our employees? For it is like that in reality"*. Some elderly employees indicated that they felt age discriminated against, and that it was important to change that. One elderly employee said: *"I heard at some point that when you as an elderly employee continue and work for longer, you do not make place for younger generations. I do not know how to understand this because it is not really true. It is not a matter of a generational switch. It is about competence. You should see us more as individual employees with different competences, instead of a certain age"*. The participants stated that it was important to eliminate negative age related attitudes and to acknowledge individuals instead of generalizing about

individual employees based on their chronological age and on stereotypically negative attributed characteristics of the social age group elderly employee, i.e. to age discriminate.

Summary:

The interviewees stated that measures to promote social inclusion, participation, coherence and social support in the work situation by considering whether all employees were included in the work social environment and in the work team are of great importance. They also stated the importance of measures to decrease negative attitudes and (age) discrimination, and to increase social support and the elderly employees' self-esteem in the organisation. As well as to appreciate the elderly employees' mentoring, (working) life experience and calming effect on the work team as an important productivity investment. Additionally, employees have a personal life outside work and elderly employees, due to their biological ageing, need more time for recuperation, the work schedules need to pay attention to individual needs for social participation outside work and activities with family, leisure time and hobbies.

Measures for execution of work tasks

Measures to increase motivation and work satisfaction

At work people must perform work tasks and activities in order to receive their salary. Many interviewees describe that their work tasks and the content of their work activities were very important to them. Especially elderly employees with work tasks and activities involving problem solving, where they could utilize their abilities and skills in a way that they could not do outside of work, stated that they did not want to retire from working and that it was of great importance for them to stay in working life. However, other elderly employees stated that their work tasks and activities lacked meaning to them and were a reason for them to leave working life. One elderly employee stated the need of measures in working life in order to make the work interesting, motivating, meaningful and stimulating, the employee put it like this: *"If you go to the same place and do the same thing for 40 years, then it is not as fun. We get new challenges when we get into new projects, with new people, and in making sure that it works"*. To sometimes declare and highlight the employees' work roles, tasks and activities in the bigger picture of the surrounding work place, to the production and in society, was described as a measure that would increase the experience of the tasks and work activities as motivating, meaningful and appreciated within the organisation, enterprise and society. Measures to promote the experience of work tasks as interesting, meaningful and stimulating, or the experience of activities together with co-workers as stimulating and meaningful, were described as important in order to stay in working life and to keep working until an older age. The feeling of importance when performing work tasks was described as meaningful and stimulating by one elderly employee above 65 of age, who stated: "I still feel curious, I am not fed up by what I am doing at work, but find stimulation in it all the time." Another elderly employee said: "I would not have kept working if I had not been stimulated. It applies to conditions and everything". Many informants stated that the experience of importance in work tasks constituted a preference to keep working in an extended working life.

The rotation and change of work tasks in order to increase motivation and work satisfaction

Some interviewees described the rotation between different work tasks to be a measure that motivate and stimulate employees to keep working an extended working life. One manager stated: *"I think we need to have rotation. It should be mandatory to work in different places and to move around at work. Between different tasks, within their own workplace or in another department. Because I have seen when we have forced people to move around, at first it is only disastrous for this person. They believe that working life is over. Six months later, when you ask them, they say it's quite amazing, really good: "I have had to learn again, I have seen new things and met new people" they say. I have never heard anyone say that it was a disaster when it's been a while. In the beginning of the change many are paralyzed by fear, but then after a while it is only positive"*. One elderly employee described how she got a new job after a reorganisation, including rotation between work tasks within the work team, she stated: *"I love the contacts, the meetings you have with new people, it doesn't matter if they are older or younger. There are always new meetings, new challenges; how do I solve this? And then the well-being of the team. A bunch that always stand up for each other, you have problems and crises within the team that you always have, so you can sit down, nurses and manager and everything, so it is a great concept and great manager, it helps a lot. The manager, she trusts the work team. It is a security for us"*. However, some of the interviewees describe that in order to make rotation possible the employees had to have the skills needed for every work tasks. One manager said: *"Rotation is important. But the skills issue is very important at that. It's about people who think that it might be good to go on and widen their views and their areas of expertise, otherwise it will not work. To participate in knowledge development, or to read up on their skills by themselves"*. This manager also described how it was his issue to motivate the employees to develop. Individual development and broader knowhow from the rotation of work tasks was also described as an important measure to the employee's employability and possibility to keep working in a changing work organisation and working life. However, the interviewees also describe that all employees could not rotate and do every work task in the workplace due to physical or mental functional variation.

Measures to highlight the employees' abilities

Some of the informants described that in work and at the work place, the individual employee sometimes becomes anonymous and assumes the role of an employee to perform the assigned tasks and activities at work. The individual's unique abilities run the risk of becoming invisible and of not coming to fruition. To experience oneself as a replaceable cog in the organisation's machinery was described as having a draining effect on the motivation. The meaning of their own individual efforts was experienced as non-existent by the employee. Some of the elderly interviewees who had left working life in an early age, i.e. before 64 years of age, stated that they had experienced work as a barrier to do more meaningful and satisfying things with their life and that they would have gladly stopped working even earlier if their personal finances had allowed it. One interviewee who felt that he did not receive any appreciation at work stated: *"I was quite skilled at finding problems in the energy system and solving these problems so that the organisation could save a lot of money. But, they never thanked me for that. I sold myself cheap at that job and never got any credit for my commitment."* Another elderly interviewee said: *"New*

managers, who were economists and did not know anything about the work tasks and how to do things, changed the organisation. You and your work team couldn't decide on how to execute the work tasks anymore and there was much more stress." One interviewee made this statement: *"I put so much into that work but nobody cared and no-one appreciated me anymore. My manager frankly did not give a damn. It was no fun anymore /.../ if someone cares and appreciates what you do, you want to do it even better, but if no-one cares you stop caring too."* This type of experience caused frustration and made work feel dull and uninteresting. Therefore, many of the informants stated the importance of paying attention to the employees' individual skills and specialities and to highlight them as unique individuals, important to the functionality and productivity of the organisation or enterprise. Some managers described that they had made their employees responsible of different areas and tasks in order to increase the motivation and the employees' experience of being needed and required by the organisation. Some managers also described that they had noticed some employees' leisure interests and utilized those skills in new work tasks for the employee in the work place, which had been a success for both the enterprise and to the employees' motivation to work.

Measures to promote competence development in order to enable continued employability

To execute their work tasks the employee need to have the appropriate knowledge, competence and skills. Some of the interviewees stated that competence development needs to be continuous and never stop in the intention to meet the changes in work, tasks, as well as to meet changes in the world and technology development. An HR professional stated: *"As long as you work you need to have the right skills to do the job. That is pretty simple. The day you stop training is, well, on the day you go home"*. That the staff has the appropriate knowledge and abilities lies not least in the interests of the enterprise and the organisation. It is costly to lose competence and need to recruit new employees. A manager said: *"Retaining and developing staff is important for the work and business. It is true that hiring a new mechanic, it costs about a million before they are up and running and fully productive. And if you let go of a mechanic who worked here, you must start all over again. We continuously train a huge amount here in the workplace as well. And we did not have to dismiss anyone for that reason"*. It was described as an important measure both to the employees and to the organisation that employees are enabled to continue their employability.

Competence development regardless of age

Cognitive ageing effect individuals' reactions, memory and ability to store knowledge, which was described by some of the interviewees. A manager said: *"Elderly may need more time to learn new things that are not in line with their previous knowledge. But I have not worked with someone who had to leave his post because he could not handle the new technology. But it's just giving them different durations of time"*. Unfortunately, there were managers who indicated that they did not really see the benefit of training and developing the competence of elderly employees who would leave working life soon. A manager said: *"To be completely honest, it is the younger employees that we want to invest in. The elderly are already on their way out of here"*. But there were also managers who, on the contrary, saw it as more

important to invest new knowledge and competence development in the elderly employees because they already had extensive knowledge, therefore they could add more value to the business directly. *"I can see it almost in the way that in younger employees you have to invest a lot of money. You must educate. You must make sure they go on. But then when people are over 50, then you can harvest. Then you get the return! You don't have to keep them going. They know their stuff! They are self-sufficient! They take their own development initiatives to the extent needed! You get a lot of stuff. It's harvest time!"* Many of the informants stated that an important measure in order to enable employees to continue working until an older age was that they continued to develop their competence and skills until the day they ended their working life.

Organisational culture that acknowledges and utilizes (elderly) employees' experience and knowledge

On the basis of having lived a long life, a person accumulates a lot of both positive and negative experiences and generic skills that can be added together with book learning from formal education. The use of this experience-based knowledge was highlighted by several different interviewees. The interviewees described that measures to enable the elderly employee's experience-based knowledge to be utilized in the work tasks were both valuable for the elderly employee, being able to use and get access to this experience-based knowledge, which also contributed to their experience of feeling valuable, and that this experiential knowledge was a valuable asset for organisations and enterprises. An elderly employee said: *"It is important to utilize skills. Leave us the freedom to do our job based on our expertise. So that we can help and support if you need to discuss something, and at the same time that there is a possibility for us to have support if we need support at work"*. Measures to transfer and exchange knowledge and competence between the generations were identified as a significant investment to both new employees, the elderly employees and to the work organisation. A manager said: *"It is important to have the opportunity of utilizing the elderly's competence and commitment. They may practice some sort of mentoring and transfer their knowledge to different teams"*. Furthermore, elderly employees who possessed special skills were more interesting for the employer to retain and they gladly met these employees' demands for adaptation of work tasks, just to be able to keep these employees until a higher age. A trade union representative said: *"It takes a long time to build experience, so some people with what they have gone through are worth gold to the organisation./.../ I think it makes you a little bit special to the enterprise and you have better opportunity in negotiations. Maybe that you can work three days a week, then we make this deal. Then these people (elderly employees) feel a little bit like, a little proud, you see"*. Measures to promote and increase an organisational culture where the employees' knowledge, no matter if it is experience-based knowledge or knowledge from education, is utilized and considered important to the organisation, seem to motivate and stimulate elderly employees to keep working until a higher age according to several of the interviewees.

Summary:

Measures to promote knowledge, competence development, creativity and intrinsic motivation in the performance of work tasks were described by the interviewees as an important strategy to enable

employees of participating in a sustainable working life until an older age. Furthermore, that the organisational culture lets older employees have the possibility of developing skills and be included in the development and new projects in the workplace regardless of age. Rotation of work tasks could be a way to learn new skills and abilities to keep employees employable in the organisation, but also in the case of reorganisations and change of the production. Rotation of tasks, e.g. changing occupation and activities within the organisation and switching work tasks was also suggested to make change of duties, to reduce monotony in tasks, and to increase motivation and job satisfaction. To utilize the elderly employees' experience-based knowledge by asking them to mentor new employees is a way of exchanging knowledge between generations and was described as a measure to increase the motivation and meaningfulness at work, but also to increase the employees' employability and total knowhow within the organisation.

Discussion

The conducted interview study has presented several organisational measures and suggestions to make improvements and to promote a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages in an extended working life. The results collected from the interview data were organised into four main themes based on the four areas of determination in the theoretical swAge-model, with a number of extracted sub-themes of organisational measures and suggestions for a healthy and sustainable extended working life. The four main themes were: Measures for health effects associated with working environment; Measures for personal financial security; Measures for social inclusion and social support in the work situation; Measures for creativity and intrinsic work motivation. These themes are also closely related to the research stating what people consider in the decision whether to keep working for some years or to retire, i.e. the consideration of: i) their own health in relation to the work situation and work environment versus retirement; ii) their personal financial situation in employment versus retirement; iii) the opportunities of social inclusion in working life situations versus retirement; iv) and the opportunities of meaningful and self-crediting activities in working life versus retirement [3,4,9].

Measures for health effects associated with working environment

Systematic work environment management is a part of the EU regulations (89/39/EEG) and is compulsory in all of the participating countries in the EU. Employers, according to this, must systematically examine the workplace on a regular basis to eliminate risks in the work environment and to prevent employees from suffering ill health and injuries caused by work. According to a recent study, a proper systematic work environment management in the workplace is statistically significant and associated with employees being able work until an older age [16]. Many interviewees in this study stated that an awareness of employee ageing was needed in their systematic work environment control scheme, because the risks differ in different age groups. The biological ageing, as well as a higher risk of developing chronic diseases that comes with an older age also increase the risks in the work environment, additionally, elderly employees in general have declining hearing, sight, reaction ability and speed, which increase the risks of injury in this age group [3,4,17,18,19]. The interviewees in this study

stated that, to reduce the risk of developing health problems because of the working environment, the organisational culture needs to promote the use of ergonomic aids; rotation and change of work tasks to reduce tear and strain; regular physical activity to maintain bodily functions and to stay mentally and physically healthy; the importance of diet for (occupational) health. Additionally, they suggest a better use of the occupational health care to support and promote health and to prevent physical and mental injury, illness and stress. However, a recent study in Sweden stated that the occupational health care accessible through the workplace nowadays is not statistically significant and associated with whether the employees are able to work until 65 years of age or beyond, but that there was a potential to change this, if the occupational health care start to focus on the age perspective in the workplaces [16]. In a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages awareness of this is important, as well as to implement measures to promote the work environments' health effects.

Measures for personal financial security

It is much better for employee's wellbeing if they work because they want to, and not because they cannot afford to leave the workplace [20]. In this study many interviewees stated that employees who were injured or had a disease and were not fully productive, also had problems with their employability if they could not execute their work tasks any more, if they could not be moved to another part of the organisation and enterprise or if they could not be re-employed within a reorganisation. Additionally, the interviewees stated that employees were not as employable if their skills and knowledge were dated or they did not keep up with the technology developments or did not have the latest knowledge, resulting in not being able to execute their duties and tasks as expected or to be relocated within their organisation. Earlier studies also state the need for employees to stay employable in the objective of being able to participate in an extended working life and provide for themselves [21,22]. Likewise, earlier studies state the necessity for organisations and enterprises to implement actions and measures in order to help the employees stay employable on the basis of ethics and humanity, and because risk prevention and competence development for the employees means less expenses for the organisation compared to recruitment and new hires [21,23]. In a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages it is important with awareness and measures to promote personal financial security.

Measures to promote social inclusion, participation, coherence and social support in the work situation

Many interviewees stated the importance of measures to promote social inclusion and social support in the work situation by considering whether all employees were included in the work social environment and in the work team. Additionally, earlier research states the importance of social inclusion, participation, coherence and social support in the work situation [9,24,25]. An important part in this area is the leadership. The manager needs to know that the employee needs to acknowledge his/her unique personal situation based on his/her: health, physical and mental working environment, need of recuperation, personal social/family situation, need of skills and knowledge in relation to his/her work tasks, etc. Different employees need different social support and level of participation in the work situation. But no one needs, experience wellbeing or are able to produce on their best level if they feel

excluded or discriminated against based on their age or other factors. Several interviewees describe the importance of actions and measures to decrease negative attitudes and (age) discrimination, and to promote and increase social support and elderly employees' self-esteem in the organisation. Many manager interviewees participating in this study describe that the older employees who were also mentors had a calming effect on the work team, which was an important productivity investment. Furthermore, earlier studies state the elderly employee's experience and calming effect as important [24,26]. However, in order to increase the willingness to participate in an extended working life the elderly employees also need to know they are valued, feel appreciated and have the possibility of participating and being included in a social context in the organisation. In a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages it is important to be aware of and take actions and measures to promote social inclusion, participation, coherence and social support in the work situation.

Measures to promote knowledge, development, creativity and intrinsic motivation in the performance of work tasks

According to many of the interviewees, motivation and skills were important in order to stay at work and in employment until an older age. Earlier studies also states the importance of skills, knowledge development, stimulation, meaningfulness and motivation in the work tasks for the employee's willingness to work [27,28]. Additionally, earlier research states that the employee's skills and knowledge was especially important in order to keep up their employability [21,22, 29]. However, the organisational culture have to give elderly employees the possibility of developing skills and to be included in the development and in new projects at the workplace, regardless of age, and to fuel the employees possibility of keeping up to date on their knowledge and experience of stimulation in work tasks. Measures and activities as such as rotation of work tasks, e.g. changing occupation and activities within the organisation and switching work tasks, could be a way to reduce monotony in work tasks, to learn new skills and work tasks and to increase motivation and job satisfaction to keep employees in the organisation or within reorganisations and change of the production. Some interviewees suggested, and some had also tried, to utilize the elderly employees' knowledge of experience through the possibility of being a mentor to new employees, by having responsibility for work areas, and by participating in activities such as discussions groups to exchange knowledge between generations of employees and increase the work teams' common knowledge. In a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages it is important to be aware of and take measures to promote knowledge, development, creativity and the employees' experience of intrinsic motivation in the performance of work tasks.

Limitations

A limitation of interview studies might be the established context, since researchers could approach the data with bias. Additionally, there might be a risk that in direct content analysis the findings are more supportive rather than non-supportive of the predefined categories. However, in this present study, the predefined categories from the theoretical swAge-model were not used to guide data collection or probe questions during the interviews. The predefined categories were only applied during the analytical

process. In terms of trustworthiness, the quality of a content analysis depends on the availability of extensive and appropriate data. These findings represent different work domains, different occupational groups and professions, from different hierarchical position within the organisations. Though, findings from qualitative studies could not be stated to be transferable to all other cultural contexts. However, regarding the transferability of the findings, it could be said that the themes are relevant to many others in similar workplaces. The findings were also related to earlier studies about elderly employees' problems and possibilities regarding whether they can and want to participate in an extended working life, and thereby add to the accumulation of results regarding elderly employees' possibility of working in an extended working life [30].

Implications

The implications of the findings in this study, based on the interviewees' own words, are that there are many possible measures to implement, which needs to be improved in the organisations and enterprises to make circumstances in working life more healthy and sustainable for employees of all ages. One management tool to investigate what measures the individual employees primarily need to stay employable is through recurring individual career development discussions with employees. The manager and employee can systematically use a matrix together at the development discussion, where the needs are mapped and to be followed up at the subsequent development discussion (see appendix 1). The suggestions for organisational measures based on the findings in this study are:

- Measures to promote a sound physical and mental work environment for employees by considering to:

- Establish an organisational culture that promotes the use of technical and ergonomic aids.
- Establish reduced work stress, balanced workload, duties and responsibilities.
- Establish increased effort/reward balance.
- Establish safety activities to reduce violence and threats in the work situation.
- Establish rotation, variation and change of duties and work tasks to reduce physical demand, static work load and tear. As well as to reduce mental demands, stress, vulnerability and threatening situations.
- Establish work schedules that allows sufficient recovery through breaks during work and time for recuperation between work shifts.
- Establish work pace in a reasonable rate so the employee can cope physically and mentally, if there are shifts with a higher work pace these should be complemented by shifts with a slower work pace.
- Establish physical activity for maintenance of the body, and to keep and increase a mentally and a physically good health.
- Establish the importance of a healthy diet for a good (occupational) health.
- Establish access to occupational health services and support to prevent work environmental problems and increase good occupational health.

- Measures to promote personal financial and social security by considering to:

- Establish salary and financial benefits responding to a reasonable personal financial security and sufficient wellbeing.
- Establish work environmental security management and risk assessment to reduce the risk of health problems causing decreased employability and to reduce the risk of less financial benefits by sick leave, disability pension and unemployment.
- Establish measures for competence development and continued employability in order to make elderly employees able to provide for themselves by working until an older age.

- Measures to promote social inclusion and social support in the work situation by considering to:

- Establish situational- and age adapted leadership with focus on the basis of employee's needs are adapted for the best possible support of the work and development.
- Establish activities for social inclusion in the work team and to build a community and sense of security to increase the attraction of extended employment.
- Establish risk assessment and activities to reduce negative attitudes, victimization, scapegoat mentality and (age) discrimination in the workplace.
- Establish social support to increase the elderly employees' self-esteem, sense of acknowledgement, sense of security and inclusion in the organisation.
- Establish access to a balanced level of information regarding ongoing activities and changes in the organisation.
- Establish participation in decisions that effect the own work tasks and work situation.
- Establish activities in order to pay attention to individual employees as an important productivity investment, e.g. mentoring and calming effect on the group as well as entrepreneurship and ideas.
- Establish working schedules (with a balance between shorter and longer work shifts and time for recuperation between work shifts) that takes into consideration and utilizes the employee's individual needs, participation and activities with family, leisure time and hobbies.

- Measures to promote creativity and intrinsic work motivation by considering to:

- Establish activities to increase motivation, stimulation and meaningfulness in work task.
- Establish possibility for professional development, to new knowledge and competence development regardless of the employees' age and position in the organisation.
- Establish an organisational culture that enables employee's opportunities and skills (outside work as well) to be part of or to be involved in problem solving, organisational development and new projects.
- Establish an organisational culture that takes into consideration and appreciates (elderly) employees' experience and knowledge as a production asset.

- Establish activities and an organisational culture that states the need of the employee's continuous development of knowledge and skills to keep up their ongoing employability.
- Establish possibilities for the employees to take care of and manage larger or smaller work areas with the intention of stimulating, pay significance to and instill motivation in the work tasks as well as increase the individual's employability.
- Establish possibilities of rotation and change of duties and work tasks to reduce boredom and increase motivation and job satisfaction. For example by the organisation persuaded to switch tasks and change activities.

Conclusion

The demographic changes in society put a strain on organisations and enterprises. The need of extending working life, and the simultaneous higher average age among employees, increase the need of measures to perform a healthy and sustainable working life for all ages. In order for working life to become sustainable for all ages, communication is needed. Regular conversations and close dialogue are a prerequisite for good working conditions and working environment, as well as to be able to manage employees and develop the organisation further. The measures should not only be taken for the elderly employees because all employees, hopefully, will be an elderly employee some day and their health and skills need to be taken care of throughout their entire working life. Working life is complex and therefore all nine different determination areas of need to be considered in order for employees to be able and want to work in an extended working life. This study has identified various proposals for measures and actions that would increase the employees' ability to cope with working until an older age. The measures have been sorted into different themes, which are based on the spheres of determination in the theoretical swAge-model [3-5]. The implication is that these proposed measures, that have been developed based on analysis of the interview and findings in this study, will be useful for organisations and enterprises to consider and will be tested further through new research projects.

Abbreviations

swAge: sustainable working life for all ages; HR: Human resource professionals

Declarations

Acknowledgements

The author wants to thank Eva Bengtsson, Carita Håkansson, Pia Hovbrandt and Katja Hörnstedt for their participation and help with the data collection.

Author's contributions

The author has completed the analysis, authored the paper and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

This study was funded by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte) and AFA insurance. We declare that the financiers were not involved or had any role in the design of the study, the data collection, the analysis, the interpretation of data or in the writing of this paper. Open access funding was provided by Lund University.

Availability of data and materials

The data used in this study is managed by the author. To access this data please contact the author.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The interviews and study were approved by Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr. 2013:722), and was conducted according to the principles expressed in the Declaration of Helsinki. All the participants received written information of the study before their decision to participate, and a written informed consent form was obtained in the beginning of the focus group interview. The data was analysed anonymously.

Consent for publication

Not Applicable.

Competing interests

The author declare that she has no competing interests.

References

- [1] World Economic Forum. Global Agenda Council on Ageing; 2016.
<https://www.weforum.org/communities/global-agenda-council-on-ageing/>
- [2] OECD. Pensions at a Glance 2017: OECD and G20 Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing; 2018.
https://doi.org/10.1787/pension_glance-2017-en.
- [3] Nilsson K. A sustainable working life for all ages – The swAge-model. Applied Ergonomics: 2020; JERG_103082. doi: 10.1016/j.apergo.2020.103082
- [4] Nilsson K. Conceptualization of ageing in relation to factors of importance for extending working life – a review. Scand. J. Publ. Health. 2016;44, 490–505.
- [5] Nilsson K. To Work or Not to Work in an Extended Working Life? Factors in Working and Retirement Decision, Lund: Lund University; 2013, p.1-119.

- [6] Nilsson K. Rignell-Hydbom A. Rylander L. Factors influencing the decision to extend working life or to retire. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health*. 2011;37(6):473–480.
- [7] Nilsson K. Vem kan och vill arbeta till 65 år eller längre? En studie av anställda inom hälso- och sjukvården. [Who can and want to work until 65 years or beyond? A study with employed in health and medical care]. *Arbete och hälsa*. 2005;14. (in Swedish).
- [8] Nilsson K. Förlängt Arbetsliv – En Litteraturstudie Av Faktorer Med Betydelse För Förlängt Arbetsliv Som Alternativ till Tidig Pensionsavgång. [Extended Working Life – A Literature Review on Factors Important to an Extended Working Life as an Alternative to Early Retirement]. Malmö: Swedish National Institute of Working life; 2003. (in Swedish).
- [9] Nilsson K. Why work beyond 65? Discourse on the decision to continue working or retire early. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*. 2012; 2(3):7–28.
- [10] Ilmarinen J. Toward a longer working life: Aging and quality of working life in the European Union. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of Occupational Health; 2006.
- [11] Krueger R. Casey M. Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2009.
- [12] Then K.L. Rankin J.A. Ali E. Focus group research: What is it and how can it be used? *Canadian Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing*. 2014;24(1),16–22.
- [13] Kvale S. Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun. [The qualitative research interview]. Lund: Studentlitteratur; 2001. (in Swedish)
- [14] Hsieh H-F. Shannon S.E. Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*. 2005;15(9), 1277–1288.
- [15] Assarroudi A. Heshmati Nabavi F. Armat M.R. Ebadi A. Vaismoradi M. Directed qualitative content analysis: The description and elaboration of its underpinning methods and data analysis process. *Journal of Research in Nursing*. 2018;23(1), 42–55. doi:10.1177/1744987117741667
- [16] Nilsson K. When is work a cause of early retirement and are there any effective organisational measures to combat this? A population-based study of perceived work environment and work-related disorders among employees in Sweden. *BMC Public Health*. 2020;20(1):716. doi: 10.1186/s12889-020-08865-5
- [17] Ahola K. Sirén I. Kivimäki M. Ripatti S. Aromaa A. Lönnqvist J. Work-Related Exhaustion and Telomere Length: A Population-Based Study. *PLoS One*. 2012; 7 (7), Article e40186. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0040186

- [18] von Bonsdorff ME. Kokko K, Seitsamo J. von Bonsdorff MB. Nygård C-H. Ilmarinen J. Rantanen T. Work strain in midlife and 28-year work ability trajectories. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*. 2011;6:455-463. doi:org/10.5271/sjweh.3177.
- [19] Fridriksson JF. Tómasson K. Midtsundstad T. Sivesind Mehlum I. Hilsen AI. Nilsson K. Albin M. Poulsen OM. Working Environment and work retention. Copenhagen: Nordiska ministerrådet TemaNord. 2017;559:1-121.
- [20] Wang M. Shultz KS. Employee Retirement: A Review and Recommendations for Future Investigation. *Journal of Management*. 2010;36(1):172-206. doi:101177/0149206309347957.
- [21] Gratton L. Scott A. The Corporate Implications of Longer Lives. MIT Sloan Management Review, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Massachusetts: Spring; 2017 <http://mitsmr.com/2mFYyU9>
- [22] Lent R.W. Lopez A.M. Lopez F.G. Sheu H.B. Social cognitive theory and the prediction of interests and choice goals in the computing disciplines. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. 2008;73(1):52-62.
- [23] Dengler P. Lifelong Employability Thriving in an Ageing Society. Zürich: Springer Gabler, 2018
- [24] Nilsson K. Managers' attitudes to their older employees - a cross-sectional study. *Work: J. Prevent. Assess. Rehabil*. 2018;59 (1):49–58.
- [25] Mykletun R. Furunes T. The ageing workforce management programme in Vattenfall AB nordic, Sweden. In: Ennals, R., Salomon, R.H. (Eds.), *Older Workers in a Sustainable Society*. Labor, Education & Society. Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag; 2011. p. 93–106.
- [26] Nilsson K. Active and healthy ageing at work. - a qualitative study with employees 55-63 years and their managers. *Active and healthy ageing at work. – a qualitative study with employees 55-63 years and their managers*. *Open J. Soc. Sci*. 2017;5, 13–29.
- [27] Hovbrandt C. Håkansson C. Karlsson G. Albin M. Nilsson K. Prerequisites and driving forces behind an extended working life among older workers. *Scand. J. Occup. Ther*. 2017; 28: 1–13. doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2017.1409800.
- [28] Nilsson E. Nilsson K. The transfer of knowledge between younger and older employees in the health and medical care: an intervention study. *Open J. Soc. Sci*. 2017;5:71–96.
- [29] Salthouse T. Aging and measures of processing speed. *Biological Psychology*. 2000;54: 35-54.
- [30] Willig C *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: McGraw-Hill Education; 2013.

Figures

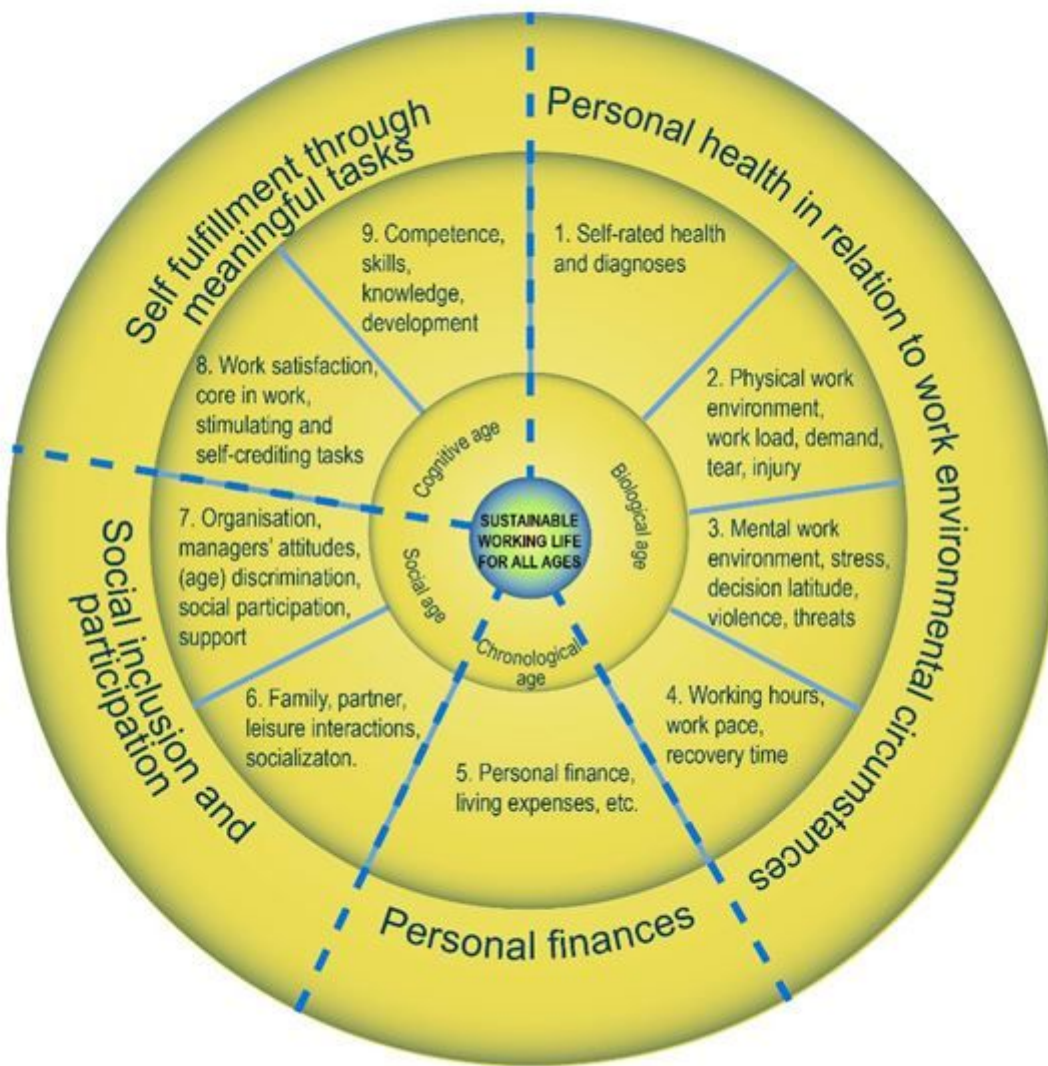


Figure 1

The micro level of the swAgeTM-model – Sustainable working life for all ages (Nilsson K., 2020).

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [Appendix1.doc](#)