



→ RESEARCH AT CRANFIELD SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

WWW.KNOWLEDGEINTOACTION.CO.UK

Cranfield
UNIVERSITY
School of Management

Career progression in older managers: motivational and gender differences

Dr Dianne Bown-Wilson

Visiting Fellow

Cranfield School of Management

dianne.bown-wilson@cranfield.ac.uk dianne@inmyprime.co.uk

- Rising average age of employees and increasing proportion who are older & want/need to work longer.
- Changing career contexts and structures: from traditional linear pathways to boundaryless, protean and kaleidoscope career models.
- Workforce composition (increasing numbers of female managers).
- Removal of mandatory retirement - employers having to control a potentially open-ended situation.
- Working life: older individuals themselves need new sources of information and support to enable them to deal with the changing career landscape (Gibson, 2004).

- Older age is not an attribute that is either present or not:
“Ageing is an individual and multi-dimensional process ... relatively little research has addressed how workers will perceive themselves, or be perceived by others as old”
- Sterns and Miklos, 1995
- Age is context- and job-dependent – can vary by role, age relative to colleagues, organizational norms.
- “Older workers” - a generic term that affords limited insight into differing needs and requirements relating to job type, career path, gender, etc.

- “Career” numerous definitions - may focus on content, mobility, perspective, etc.
- “Career progression” is not clearly defined as a construct.
- Career progression may mean incremental personal development or career success.

“Career progression: a gradual movement or development towards a destination or a more advanced state” - OED

Recent studies (e.g. Armstrong-Stassen and Schlosser, 2008) reveal that there are still large numbers of older individuals in the workplace for whom objective career progress (e.g. promotion) has ceased, even though with self-directed careers in boundaryless situations one would no longer expect to find this situation.

“Increasingly, individuals are driven more by their own desires than by organizational career management practices.

Thus while organizational leaders are struggling to identify positive strategies and practices to tackle the changing work environment and workforce... individuals are ... taking more responsibility for their own career development and employability.” (Sullivan & Baruch 2009:1543).

Career motivation (London 1983), differs from work motivation in including a wide variety of career-related behaviours associated with an individual's personality, needs and interests. The underlying constructs relate to:

- ***career identity*** – the extent to which people define themselves by their work and how central their work identity is to who they feel they are,
- ***career insight*** - how realistic people are about themselves and their careers and how accurately they relate these perceptions to career goals; and
- ***career resilience*** – the extent to which people resist career barriers, obstacles or disruptions to their work.

Existing research into motivation for career progression:

- Based on assumptions that older individuals are motivated by the same factors as earlier in their career.
- Unable to account for *subjective* career progression and psychological mobility in older individuals.
- Lacking detail about how older *managers* evaluate and take responsibility for their own career.
- Unable to identify/explain gender-related differences.

Little is known about:

- the influence of the proactive or reactive nature of employment context or active or passive stance of older employees themselves.
- the interaction of drivers such as career success, job satisfaction, & personal development on individual motivation.
- changes in older individuals e.g. values.
- links between age and drivers of career motivation - the specific factors that represent “progress” in the subjective view of older workers themselves.

What are the motivational drivers for career progression in managers aged over 50?

- *How are these motivational factors perceived as different from earlier in the career?*
- *Do the motivational drivers of female managers aged over 50 differ from those of male managers aged over 50?*

- Two large UK financial services organizations
- 27 male + 13 female managers
- Age range 50 – 63
- Semi-structured interviews incorporating timelines
- Average interview time: 1hr 8mins
- Template / NVivo analysis

What are the motivational drivers for career progression in managers aged over 50?

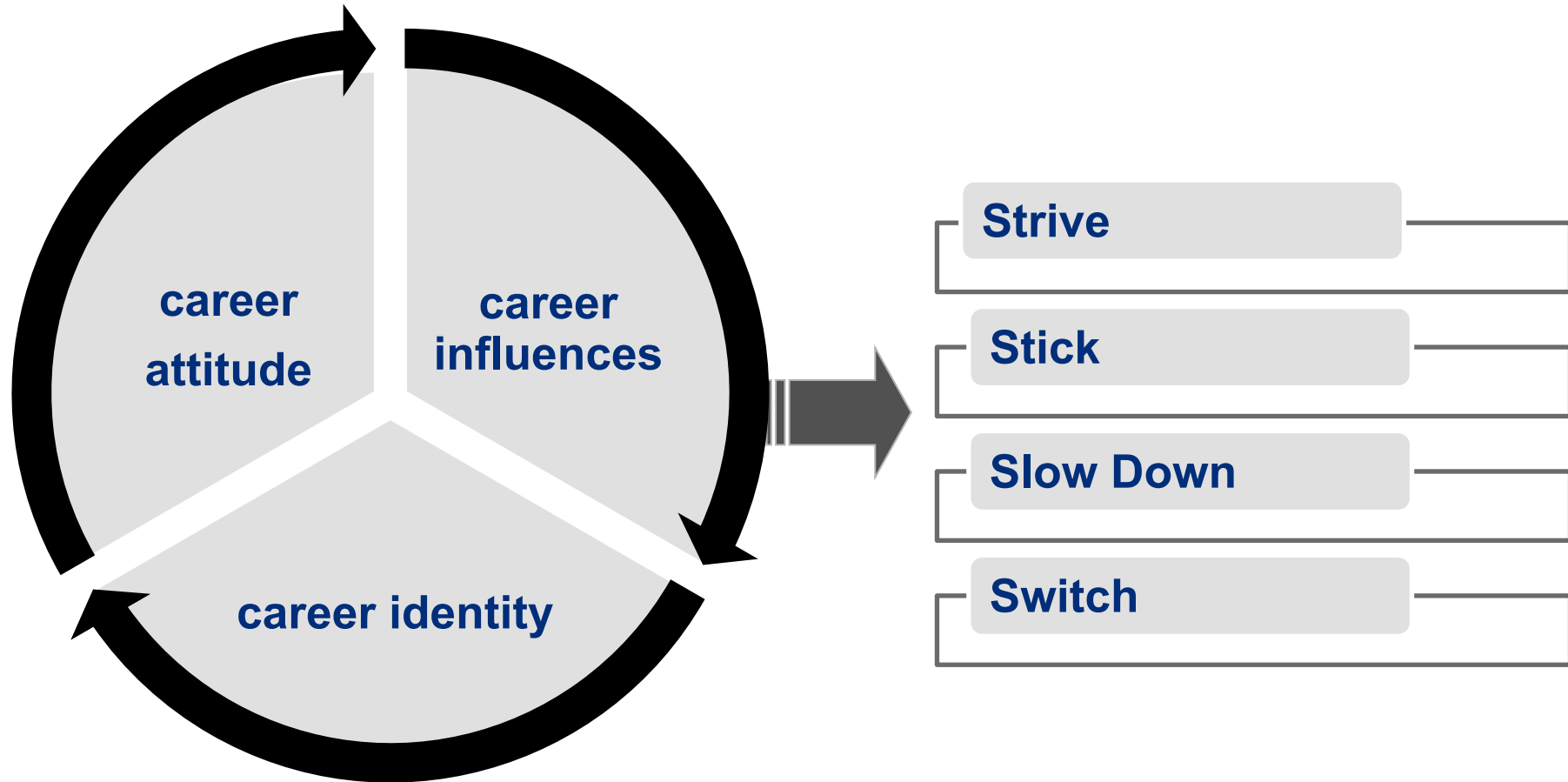
- **Identity:** extent to which the individual is defined by their work.
- **Drivers: positive** - enjoyment, interest, contribution, status, autonomy; **negative** – avoiding stagnation, reducing stress.
- **Influences: personal** - family, health, finances, quality of life; **organizational** - organizational change, relationships.
- **Attitudes:** satisfied/optimistic – disappointed/resentful

“I’m actually quite happy and comfortable with what I’m doing and don’t want to change. So, for example if they [the company] decide to geographically relocate, I won’t. That’s the sort of pressure that would prompt me to make a change.” (Keith, age 55)

- motivational drivers: job satisfaction, challenge, and retaining what had been already achieved; influences: family and geographical location - together representing a wish for stability.
- The desire for stability doesn’t drive the career, it merely acts as a counterbalance in respect of plans and decisions (drivers) relating to potential career events.

- **Organizational** factors: – continuing advancement, maintaining the status quo, lateral movement, flexible working, status.
- **Personal** factors - following interests or developing new skills, retaining power and autonomy, using knowledge and experience, continuing to learn and develop, retaining enthusiasm and commitment.
- Overall, individual conceptions of the meaning of “career” and “career progression” were based on past and current career experiences, plus views and aspirations regarding future work.
- Future orientations: **strive , stick, switch, or slow down**

Drivers of career progression



- **STICK:** those who want neither more nor less than their current role in their current organization.
- In general this does not represent a negative position. The majority of managers indicated that they were happy to be in this situation and had made the choice themselves not to seek further advancement.

“I want to be left alone to get on with it, do my job, and go home at the end of the day... What’s going to happen next? The answer is, ‘Nothing really!’ but now that’s an okay answer.” (Trevor, age 55)

- **SWITCH:** A drive to change to a different career or a different type of work.
- Some of the younger managers saw this as a move they might make prior to retirement (i.e. prior to taking their pension); however the majority saw it as something they aspired to once they had taken their pension and retired from their current career path.

“I haven’t yet firmed up what I’m going to do. Whatever I do after I retire from here, whatever field it’s in, I would consider a continuation of my career... I’d want to do it full-time; I don’t do things by halves.” (Julia, age 50)

- **SLOW DOWN:** those who wanted to have less commitment to their job either through working reduced hours or by finding a way of reducing the responsibilities/ pressures their current role entailed. For many this needed to be considered alongside pension and other financial implications.
- Many saw their working life post-retirement (i.e. post taking a pension) as reflecting this option.

“I like coming to work generally...and I think I’d be a bit dull if I stayed at home the whole time. But it would be great to be here less, maybe three days; that would give me a chance to do more of the things I want.” (Gail, age 50)

- **STRIVE:** The most traditional career orientation in that it represents a drive for further objective career advancement as marked by increased status and responsibilities and further pay increases.
- This advancement was seen by some as taking place within their current organization; others conceded that they may have to go elsewhere to realise their ambitions.

“There are at least two more slots above mine and I expect to get them. It’ll take time, but if it doesn’t happen, I’ll be making it happen somewhere else.” (Neville, age 56)

How are motivational factors perceived as different from earlier in the career?

- **Objective:** change from financial accumulation, and supporting a home and family to maintenance of lifestyle and financial security.
- **Subjective:** change from establishing a career / building a reputation to retaining status and maintaining /extending influence.
- **Financial remuneration:** now an influencing factor rather than a driver, although strong desire to hold on to what has already been achieved.

Do the motivational drivers of female managers aged over 50 differ from those of male managers aged over 50?

In general, no. But two significant differences:

1. motivation for career progression in older female managers is heavily influenced by factors relating to family needs.
2. the majority of female managers wanted to slow down and/or to renew their career through switching to a different occupation.

To knowledge:

- Career progression in older managers is motivated by individually complex drivers and relates to past, current and future career decisions.
- Subjective factors become more significant but are no less important than objective drivers had been earlier in the career.
- Gender-related differences relate to future aspirations.

To practice:

- “Older workers” are not a single group – role, gender, and career progression orientation may lead to differing needs/aspirations.
- Retirement does not necessarily mean the end of the career.

1. Treat older workers as individuals - devise a range of policies to meet their different needs and aspirations.
2. Recognise that changes take place – positive and negative – as individuals age.
3. Start the “retirement” planning process much earlier.
4. Provide optional career coaching or counselling for older workers.
5. Include older workers in talent management reviews.

6. Provide training and development opportunities.
7. Establish flexible working and flexible retirement policies.
8. Promote role models to guide older workers' career aspirations.
9. Encourage intergenerational working and mentoring schemes.
10. Establish a business case for employing and retaining older workers.

“There is little evidence ... that employers are cognizant of the need to develop different policies for different groups of older employees... it is essential for employers to get away from thinking of older employees as an homogeneous group”

(Patrickson & Ranzijn, 2006:734)