Keeping older workers committed and employed by means of in/formal HRD initiatives

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Relevance of the study

- Importance of flexible, competent workforce
- Population ageing - impact on labour market
- Importance of retaining older employees
- Organizational commitment plays important role
- HRD-practices may increase commitment
HRD and Commitment

HRD
- Generally defined as set of formal practices
- Shift from formalized to more informal learning

Commitment
- Characterizes employee’s relationship with an organization
- Includes three facets: affective, continuous and normative commitment
- All three: negatively related with intention to leave

Mixed support for positive relationship between HRD and commitment (depends on in/formal level of HRD)
Formality level of HRD

- Various categories of learning and development
- Lack of agreement about in- / non- / formal HRD
- Four aspects of in/formal attributes (Colley et al., 2003)
  - location/setting – process – purposes – content
- Continuum of formal / informal learning aspects
- HRD initiatives are in/formal to a more or lesser degree
  - High level of formality - averagely formal HRD intervention
  - Low level of formality - averagely informal HRD intervention
Older workers

- HRD investments focus on younger employees
- Less support and encouragement for older workers to engage in learning and development
- Negative stereotyping – more employability problems
- Empirical evidence on older workers:
  - More (normative and continuous) organizational commitment
  - More informal learning preferences of older workers
Hypotheses

- **H1**: HRD intervention’s level of formality negatively correlates with employee’s organizational commitment
  - The higher the formality level the lower the organizational commitment

- **H2**: This negative correlation is stronger for older workers than for their younger colleagues
Research design

Level of formality of learning activities

Aspects:
(Based on Colley et al., 2003)
Process
Location/setting
Purposes
Content

Seven activities
(Based on Wognum & Bartlett, 2002)
External training course
Training-on-the-job
Mentor or coach
New task, job, or project
Feedback from supervisor or colleague
Self-study / reading professional literature
Networking / Contact with externals

Organizational commitment
Three components
Affective commitment
Continuous commitment
Normative commitment
(De Gilder et al., 1997)

Age

H1: -

H2: +

Three groups
< 35 years
35-55 years
> 55 years

5-point scale
1 = informal / 5 = formal

Aspects:
(Based on Colley et al., 2003)
Process
Location/setting
Purposes
Content
Method

- Selecting all 165 employees of a medium sized company
- Data gathering by paper (60) and online (105) questionnaire
- Data analysis
  - Descriptive analysis
  - Cronbach’s alpha
  - Correlation / bivariate correlation analysis
  - Hierarchical regression analysis
Results: response and respondents

Response
- Overall: 48% (n=79)
  - Written questionnaires (17%)
  - Online questionnaires (66%)

Respondents
- Mean age: 43.8 years
- 4 female, 75 male
- 87% has a permanent contract
- 95% works more than 30 hours a week
- Over 50% is employed in this organization for more than 5 years
## Results: HRD activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning event</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean level of formality (1 = informal, 5 = formal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External training course</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training-on-the-job</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor or coach</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New task, job, or project</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback supervisor/colleague</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-education/professional literature</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking/contacting externals</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Attended number of learning activities: M = 2.68
- Overall level of formality: M = 2.43 (SD = .64)
Results: HRD activities and age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning event</th>
<th>&lt; 35 years</th>
<th>35-55 years</th>
<th>&gt; 55 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External training course</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training-on-the-job</td>
<td>52.4*</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor or coach</td>
<td>23.8*</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New task, job, or project</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback supervisor/colleague</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-education/professional literature</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking/contact with externals</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean amount of learning activities</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.67</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>2.39</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The amount of learning activities decreases when age gets higher!
- The three most popular learning activities are similar for all groups.
### Results: commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Mean level of commitment (1 = low, 5 = high)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>3.57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous commitment</td>
<td>2.69*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative commitment</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Significant difference between age groups for continuous commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>&lt; 35 years</th>
<th>35-55 years</th>
<th>&gt; 55 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuance commitment</td>
<td>2.12*</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1: no support was found
- The study indicates a positive relationship between the level of formality of learning activities and organizational commitment.

- Hypothesis 2: no support was found
- Age does moderate the positive relationship between formality of the learning activity ‘New task, function of project’ and continuance commitment.
Conclusions

- Interesting results were found although no support for hypotheses
- Medium sized company indeed tends to favour informal learning
- Longer tenure and higher age goes with decrease in different types of learning and development
- Learning events ‘feedback’, ‘mentor or coach’, ‘training-on-the-job’ in particular decrease as the period of employment increases
- Older workers are more organizational committed, which specifically holds for continuous commitment
- Workers who formally learn through a new task, job, or project become more continuous committed, which even more holds for employees aged above 55
- Results add new insights to the public debate in which ‘older workers’ knowledge development has often been narrowed to formal training courses
Further research

Further research should include:

- SMEs and larger companies from varying sectors of industry
- Personal and situational characteristics enhancing older workers’ development and commitment, such as conscientiousness, development potential, self-efficacy, prior education, and function level
- Various types of organizational support enhancing older workers’ development and commitment, such as support from co-workers and supervisors, availability of development and learning resources and policies
- The newly developed formality scale and its components
- Employees’ relative age next to employee’s chronological age