Abstract:

The workforce in most industrialized countries is aging and growing more age-diverse, and 21st Century employers will be challenged to keep workers satisfied, engaged, and productive across the lifespan. However, little psychological research has examined the interplay between worker age and job design. To address these issues, I present a model based in lifespan development theories which describes how age may moderate employees’ reactions to job characteristics. I also enumerate the factors associated with chronological age – physical, cognitive, and motivational – which could affect how workers react to elements of their jobs. Using the Work Design Questionnaire framework (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), I illustrate how older and younger workers may react differently to the same job characteristics. I describe some preliminary empirical studies supporting the model and note possible boundary conditions, moderators, and mediating mechanisms. I conclude with a discussion of the opportunities for work psychology and suggestions to guide future research to address the aging workforce.