

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF OLDER WORKERS AND THE PROCESSES OF MAINTAINING, EXTENDING AND LEAVING EMPLOYMENT

Carlos-María Alcover¹, Gabriela Topa² and Juan José Fernández¹

¹Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. ²Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

This paper has three objectives: firstly, we offer a synthesis of the recent results regarding the psychosocial and organizational factors involved in early retirement processes, especially in the case of early retirement in Spain. Secondly, we provide an analysis of the need to redefine retirement in the Spanish context, specifically by implementing "bridge employment" modalities. And lastly, we identify future lines of research and we indicate the practical implications for workers, organizations and societies as a whole.

Key words: Older workers, Early retirement, Bridge employment, Full retirement, Occupational health.

Este artículo tiene tres objetivos: en primer lugar, ofrecer una síntesis de los resultados de los estudios recientes sobre los factores psicosociales y organizacionales implicados en los procesos de retiro laboral temprano, especialmente en el caso de la prejubilación en España. En segundo lugar, presentar un análisis sobre la necesidad de redefinición del retiro en el contexto español, en concreto a partir de la implementación de modalidades de "empleo puente". Y en tercer lugar, identificar las principales líneas de investigación futura y señalar las implicaciones prácticas para los trabajadores, las organizaciones y las sociedades en su conjunto.

Palabras clave: Trabajadores mayores, Retiro temprano, Empleo puente, Jubilación, Salud ocupacional.

Maintaining workers over 50 years of age in the workforce has suffered significant changes in relatively few years. After two decades characterized by the early exit from work activity, current policies are aimed at prolonging working life in flexible forms of employment, which can be either as an employee, self-employed or mixed, either full or part time, permanent or temporary (Alcover, Topa, Parry, Fraccaroli & Depolo, 2014a). Thus, the management of older workers has changed from "pro-retirement" approaches to "pro-working" policies (Wang & Shultz, 2010).

Early retirement has characterized the Spanish labor market for the past two decades. Even in the absence of a legal framework to regulate it, many organizations have used it to reduce their workforce to cope with mergers and restructurings motivated by automation or outsourcing work processes to other countries. Consequently, a large number of workers after the age of 50 have left their work, voluntarily or involuntarily, before the age of early or mandatory retirement (Alcover, Crego, Guglielmi, & Chiesa, 2012). Organizational pressures to dispense with older workers, together with incentives for early retirement and a generous public pension system have caused an excess of early retirement in Spain and countries of the Mediterranean and Central Europe (Angelini, Brugiviani & Weber, 2009).

The strong incentives for the unemployed to retire early are another important aspect. Recent data indicate that unemployed people over 55 years show high rates of retirement at 61. The advantage obtained by receiving unemployment benefit at this age subsidizes the withdrawal from the labor market, and partly explains the low rate of re-entry in these workers, who tend to exhaust their unemployment benefit entitlements before reaching the age of early retirement (García-Pérez, Jiménez-Martín & Sánchez-Martín, 2010).

Furthermore, these practices have not taken into account the effects of progressive and accelerated aging of the population. If current demographic trends hold, the outlook for Spain shows two fundamental characteristics: a progressive decrease in inhabitants over the coming decades, which would mean that in 2052 the population would be 41.5 million, 10.2% less than at present, and there would be a marked tendency to aging, with a reversal in the age groups and a growing disparity between the numbers of people that are older and younger than 40 years of age. Specifically, the over 64 age group would be more than double the current figure, and it would make up 37% of the total population. By contrast, the Spanish population would fall by 9.9 million in the age group of 16 to 64 year olds (a decrease of 32%) and by nearly 2 million in the population group of 0-15 year olds (a decrease of 26%) (INE, Spanish National Institute of Statistics, 2012).

The potential dependency ratio, i.e., the number of people aged 15 to 64 for every person aged 65 or over, would rise from 24 dependents per 100 workers in 2005 (Muszynska &

Correspondence: Carlos-María Alcover. Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. Paseo de los Artilleros, s/n. 28032 Madrid. España.
E-mail: carlosmaria.alcover@urjc.es

Rau, 2012), to a rate of 58% in 2020, and it would exceed 76% in 2050, the highest in the world, slightly above Japan and Italy (Harper, 2010). The INE (2012) even considers the possibility of reaching a rate of 99% around that year, which would mean that for every person of working age there would be another that would not be in the age to do so.

The trends towards an increasingly aging population require a reformulation of the balance between time spent working and time of retirement (Engelhardt, 2012), with the objective of maintaining the pension and welfare programs for the elderly (Borsch-Supan, Brugiavini & Croda, 2009). This requires a reformulation of policies and practices, as well as new research on the relationships between age and work and career management in older workers (Peiró, Tordera & Potocnic, 2013).

Recent data indicate that early retirement rates in developed countries have been halted and even reversed (Kantarci & van Soest, 2008; Peiró et al, 2013), and the tendency to work longer can be seen even in countries where early retirement was a common pattern before (Schalk & van Veldhoven et al., 2010). Studies show that increasing numbers of older workers are in employment, or are planning to work part-time or temporarily (Giandrea, Cahill & Quinn, 2009). Older workers continue to work mainly due to the intrinsic interests-characteristics of the work, the satisfaction it provides and the motivation of achievement, as well as for social reasons and financial security (Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, Kanfer & Dikkers, 2011). The results of our studies (Topa, Moriano, Depolo, Alcover & Morales, 2009; Topa, Moriano, Depolo, Alcover & Moreno, 2001) show that retirement planning is related to the acceptance of "bridge employment" and subjective perception of income, and both are positively related to good adjustment to retirement. In short, these trends lead to a redefinition of the traditional concepts of career and retirement, and require organizations to redefine their strategies for managing older people.

This article has the following objectives: 1) to provide a synthesis of the results on the psychosocial and organizational factors involved in early retirement, especially in the case of early retirement in Spain; 2) to present our analysis of the need to redefine retirement in the Spanish context, specifically from the implementation of modalities of "bridge jobs". And 3) to identify the main lines of future research, pointing out the practical implications for workers, organizations and societies as a whole.

EARLY RETIREMENT

Early retirement is the permanent cessation of work activity before the minimum age for early or mandatory retirement. Not being a recognized legal concept, pre-retirement situations can be very varied. Usually, the company compensates workers proportionally while they receive unemployment benefits (these

two items together accounting for between 70 and 100% of all remuneration received) until reaching retirement age, early or mandatory (Crego & Alcover, 2004). While the absence of regulation makes it difficult to know precisely the number of workers affected in Spain and their economic situation, estimates indicate that the figure has increased from 166,500 in 2006 to 213,800 in 2009 and 260,000 in 2010 (Jiménez-Martín, 2012). According to other sources (Toledo Pact, 2012), in the period from 2005 to 2011 between 50% and 60% of workers who retired were under the age of 65, and 10% of them were 61 years old or younger. These data show that since the start of the crisis or recession (2008-2009) the Spanish labor market has experienced a significant increase in job opportunities based on this figure. This contrasts with the reverse trend noted by the OECD (2010); in industrialized countries during the same period there has been continued growth of older employed workers, which is a change from what happened in previous recessions (Peiró et al, 2013). In Spain, however, the recession continues to expel older workers from the labor force.

Early retirement involves a wide range of heterogeneous situations that give rise to a wide range of experiences and consequences for individuals (Alcover & Crego, 2008; Schalk, van Veldhoven et al, 2010). One of the main features of early retirement in Spain has been the perception on the part of workers that their retirement was involuntary (Jociles & Franzé, 2008). According to Dorn and Sousa-Poza (2007), "voluntary" and "involuntary" are inherently subjective concepts, and it is important to assess how the people involved experience them. The data showed that 32.5% of people that took early retirement in Spain perceived it as involuntary, compared to 8.8% in Denmark, 9.4% in the U.S. or 12.2% in Canada. Furthermore, Spain had a ratio of 0.328 early retirees per worker in the age group of 45-69 years, the third highest after Slovenia (0.344) and Hungary (0.342), in contrast to 0.062 in Norway, 0.080 in the U.S. and 0.081 in France.

The results of our studies on Spanish early retirees demonstrate that perceived involuntariness, measured by pressure from the employer perceived as the reason for the retirement, was the *push factor* with the greatest weight, in contrast to reasons of *pursuing personal interests, reasons of health or stress* (Alcover et al, 2012; Alcover & Crego, 2005; Fernández, Alcover & Crego, 2010, 2013; Fernandez, Crego & Alcover, 2011). These pressures are often masked in corporate restructuring processes (Van Solinge & Henkens, 2007) and in policies of explicit or implicit persecution of workers (schedule changes, reallocation of tasks, role overload, etc.) which create adverse working conditions and aversive experiences that force involuntary acceptance of an early retirement plan (Crego & Alcover, 2004; Crego, Alcover & Martínez-Iñigo, 2008). These data are consistent with those obtained by Potocnic, Tordera

and Peiró (2009, 2010), who found that organizational pressures along with group norms regarding retirement were the most significant factors that motivated the workers to accept early retirement.

As for the consequences of involuntariness, those who perceive a lack of control in the decision to retire expressed less satisfaction and poorer adjustment in retirement (Fernández, Alcover & Crego, 2013), especially when they show high levels of commitment, centrality of work, professional maturity and predicted career development (Alcover & Crego, 2005), and they also had poorer levels of mental health (Negrini, Panari, Simbula & Alcover, 2013). Also Potocnic, Tordera and Peiró (2013) suggest that involuntariness is associated with dissatisfaction with retirement, but it can be either constructive, i.e. when the retiree actively looks for ways to control the situation, or fixed, in which case the person affected does nothing to change the situation.

In another study, Potocnic, Tordera and Peiró (2008) found that the involuntariness was associated with lower levels of psychological well-being and satisfaction with retirement in women than in men, indicating a gender-associated component that must be considered in evaluating the consequences of these processes. However, other data (Fernández, Crego & Alcover, 2008) showed no significant difference in satisfaction with retirement for men and women, and even pointed out that women are more active in retirement and demonstrate greater freedom to control their sources of enjoyment. Previous research indicates this inconsistency in results (Griffin, Loh & Hesketh, 2012), so it seems that gender interacts with other variables to build complex patterns in experiences of adjustment and satisfaction with retirement.

On the other hand, Cerezo and Topa (2008), using a sample of pre-retired senior executives, found that the lack of a perception of control was associated with poorer adjustment to retirement; this perception is significant in workers accustomed to exercising control over their activities (Barnes-Farrell, 2003), and is also noted in the results of a study by Perera, Martínez and Monreal-Bosch (2013) with a sample of physicians from the National Health System.

GRADUAL RETIREMENT AND EXTENSION OF WORKING LIFE

In the last two decades the conceptualization of work and retirement as opposite states has become obsolete in most developed countries (Cahill, Giandrea & Quinn, 2013). The tendency to work longer with alternative forms of employment involves the replacement of the concept of *trajectory* with that of *transition* to define the work-life cycle of individuals (Elder & Johnson, 2003). There is consensus in considering retirement not as a single event but as a process that develops over a variable period of years (Shultz & Wang, 2011; Szinovacz, 2003), with various combinations of employment possible prior to exiting the

workforce (Pleau & Shauman, 2013). Retirement has a longitudinal development through which older workers gradually decrease their psychological attachment to their work activity until reaching full retirement (Wang, 2013; Wang, Henkens & van Solinge, 2011). The modalities of gradual retirement are becoming more frequent (Cahill, Giandrea & Quinn, 2013), and adopt forms such as “progressive retirement” and “partial retirement”, “bridge employment” or “reincorporation” after temporarily leaving work activity.

In general, “bridge employment” refers to forms of employment that follow a career or full-time job and precede complete labor-force withdrawal or retirement from work (Cahill et al, 2013; Feldman & Kim, 2001; Shultz, 2003). Thus, the types of “bridge employment” may be regarded as forms of retirement to prolong working life, while the term “full retirement” is reserved to refer to absolute retirement from the workforce (Gobeski & Beehr, 2009). The transitions that are typical of “bridge employment” occur both within the same occupation and in different occupations, and may be paid employment (part-time, full time or temporary) or self-employment or freelance work (Beehr & Bennett, 2007; Wang, Penn, Bertone & Stefanova, 2014).

As for the factors that predict acceptance of a bridge job, these include perceived good health, an age of around 57-62 years, greater seniority in the organization, a high level of commitment and work satisfaction, a perception of high competence and high career-related skills, high entrepreneurial orientation, having a partner who also works and children or dependent family members, having the need to maintain a level of income beyond retirement age or to guarantee the necessary contributions to ensure eligibility for subsequent pension systems, lack of compensation and benefits or pension plans, and the desire to reduce the levels of stress and work overload of a full-time job (Alcover, Topa, Parry, Fraccaroli & Depolo, 2014b).

The use of forms of “bridge employment” in countries around the world has shown benefits for individuals and organizations. These include improvements in the psychosocial quality of life and life satisfaction during the pre- and post-retirement periods; an increase in well-being and occupational health due to reducing the stress and overload generated by a full-time job; a reduction of serious diseases and functional limitations and an improvement in mental health; an increase in satisfaction and adjustment to retirement; greater autonomy and financial security in the post-retirement period; a decrease in the experiences of age discrimination in older workers, as beneficial agreements are established between them and the organizations regarding flexibility of the employment relationship; and promoting flexible employment arrangements that allow organizations to retain—and even attract—skilled and experienced workers once they have reached the age of

retirement (Alcover et al., 2014b). Finally, the qualitative data show that older workers who continue working beyond retirement age usually have good motivation, high competence and are generally productive (Kantarci & van Soest, 2008).

In the Spanish labor context the debate on the extension of working life is very recent. The effects of the aging population on the maintenance of the pension system have led in recent years to the implementation of legislative measures to encourage the retention of older workers, the extension of working life and even re-entry to the labor market after retirement. While the term “bridge employment” is not commonly used, Spanish legislation allows two types that can be considered to be similar: *partial retirement* and *flexible retirement* (Alcover & Topa, 2014).

The opinions on the extension of working life in Spain vary significantly between workers and firms. Recent data indicate that it is considered *very beneficial* by 36% of companies, *beneficial* by 50%, and only 9% consider it to be *detrimental*, with 5% being *indifferent*. However, most older workers, whose continuity interests companies, are highly skilled (92%), while those with middle and lower levels of qualifications are estimated at only 4% each (Doménech & García, 2012). These data are consistent with those from SHARE, showing that participation in the labor force of workers aged between 60 and 70 years in Europe focuses on people with higher socioeconomic status, both men and women (Komp, van Tilburg & van Groenou, 2010). In Spain, the proportion of people between these ages who are in paid employment is 18% in men and 8% in women.

However, the workers’ opinion is not as favorable. A recent study (Pérez-Díaz & Rodríguez, 2008) notes that, in 1996, 71% of Spaniards were opposed to an increase in the mandatory retirement age, although this opposition had decreased to 55% in 2008. Only 25% of active workers over 50 would consider retiring over the age of 64. Most wanted to retire at the age of 60 and the reluctance to prolong their working life was very strong. Their preferences are also revealed when they point out that increasing the retirement age is the least desired option for addressing the impact of demographic aging on the pension system (Muñoz de Bustillo, 2007).

In the absence of empirical studies analyzing “bridge employment” in Spain, we used the Spain subsample of the SHARE study (Topa, Moriano, Depolo & Morales, 2009; Topa et al, 2014). The correlational analysis of the sociodemographic indicators shows that among those involved in forms of “bridge employment”, economic well-being, valued in terms of higher pension income has a positive relationship with good physical health, and a negative relationship with deterioration in mental health. A positive relationship was also observed between physical health and time served in the organization. As regards the psychosocial variables, the existence of family responsibilities maintains positive correlations, although

moderate, with life satisfaction and job satisfaction. And as for the quality of bridge employment, considered in terms of the benefits perceived by the worker, it is positively related to time served in the organization and physical health, and negatively related to depression.

The results of studies in Ibero-American countries report similar trends. For example, in Brazil the decision to accept forms of “bridge jobs” is based on the possibility of achieving a greater time flexibility and job control thanks to the autonomy and the centrality given to work (Franca, Menezes, Bendassolli & Macedo 2013; Menezes & Franca, 2012). When this is not possible and retirement is accepted, there may be informal work arrangements that fulfill similar functions to those of “bridge employment” (Cintra, Ribeiro & Andrade, 2010). Other studies (Zanelli, 2012) point to the need for organizations and Brazilian society to face up to the challenges of retirement and of extending working life to cope with the aging population and its effects on health and well-being in older people and the sustainability of pension systems.

CONCLUSIONS

The progressive aging of the Spanish population, the delay in the full integration of young people into the labor market and the reversal of the migratory balance suggest that the dependency ratio will double over the next decade. To maintain the current pension system, it is necessary to make changes to the labor law, as well as adopting measures to reduce the high rate of youth unemployment. In 2013 the Spanish Government amended the mandatory retirement age, which will be progressively increased to 67. These measures cause negative reactions in many of the workers, since the general perception of retirement as early as possible is firmly entrenched. However, as already noted by the collectives of self-employed workers, it seems crucial to accept the extension of working life in order not to suffer a drastic decline in purchasing power upon retirement (Alcover & Topa, 2014).

In our view, the extension of the mandatory retirement age is not the only measure to take, and it may not even be the most effective, since not all work and professional activities can be prolonged to the same extent, which will have different negative effects on workers. Consequently, the direction that the political and social actors should take is that designed to articulate flexible modalities of prolonging working life, voluntary and negotiated between companies and workers, such as practices of “bridge employment”.

These modalities have increased the U.S., Canada, UK, countries of northern Europe, Australia and Japan. By contrast, in Spain and central and southern Europe and in Latin America, these experiences are relatively few, and bridge employment is far from being the norm in the processes of leaving the labour force (Borsch-Supan, Brugiavini, Jürges, Mackenbach, Siegrist



& Weber, 2005; Topa et al., 2009, 2014). In addition to the expectations of workers to plan and make decisions about whether or not to continue working, the existence of institutional, structural or legal limitations or restrictions in each country can have a significant inhibitory effect on bridge employment experiences (Raymo, Warren, Sweeney, Hauser & Ho, 2010), with the potential loss of benefits for workers, organizations and societies as a whole.

We believe that the implementation of these modalities could be very beneficial in Spain to achieve various objectives (Alcover & Topa, 2014):

- 1) To ensure continued labor market participation for workers who wish voluntarily to prolong their working lives, either for personal or for financial reasons while they remain capable of working effectively at the required levels.
- 2) To improve health and general wellbeing through continued working, and to attain other desirable psychosocial outcomes like the preservation of the individual's social identity and networks, job and life satisfaction, and facilitation of the transition to full retirement.
- 3) To help organizations retain skilled, experienced employees with high levels of intellectual and social capital, thereby stemming the knowledge drain caused by the mass outflow of older workers from Spanish firms in the last two decades.
- 4) To bolster policies and practices designed to support active ageing and foster a positive image of old people, and to reduce or prevent stereotyping and prejudice associated with old age, and combat increasing age discrimination in the workplace.
- 5) To secure the viability of current pension and social welfare systems, protecting the model of generational solidarity characteristic of Spanish society in recent decades and helping to maintain the autonomy and dignity of a long-lived population.

In short, the implementation of "bridge employment" modalities, together with the already initiated reform of the pension system, would have objectives of reducing early retirement and contributing to extending working life by increasing the mandatory retirement age and eliminating age limits for those who voluntarily wish to continue working. However, these measures should be complemented by an increase in programs of "life-long learning" as well as a greater extension of subsequent training plans. These policies should target specific groups, such as older unemployed workers and groups with lower levels of qualifications (Engelhardt, 2012), considering that organizations prefer to retain the most qualified group (Doménech & García, 2012) and that older people with lower socioeconomic status have fewer possibilities of performing paid work (Komp et al., 2010).

An additional consideration should be to facilitate the real advancement of age of entry of young people into the labor

market (Muñoz de Bustillo, 2007), promoting occupational training and short cycle university courses.

Moreover, "bridge employment" would be linked with the guidelines of the European Union on workplace health in an aging society, articulated in a strategic reorientation that would combine integration and preventive action plans (Morschhauser & Söcher, 2006). Integration seeks to preserve the employment of older workers, while preventive approaches also aim to ensure maintenance of health and employability throughout working life. All of this would also help to facilitate the participation in organizations, associations and institutions, of people after retirement, and to enhance the human capital development of the new profiles of retirees (Lizaso, Sánchez de Miguel & Reizábal, 2008).

Finally, "bridge employment" has the advantage of maintaining the continuity of patterns and lifestyles (i.e., the balance between work activities and family and leisure activities), preventing the rupture and sudden changes in activity typical of traditional retirement and promoting positive psychological outcomes related to personal and social identity, perceptions of personal accomplishment, role performance, entrepreneurial behavior, etc. (Wang & Shultz, 2010). All this coincides with a growing trend in organizations to consider strategies of "bridge employment" as an important part of human resource management policy designed specifically for workers over the age of 50 (Rau & Adams, 2004). In this regard, future research will be of great importance in facilitating organizations to develop more effective strategies and recruitment practices aimed at attracting retirees to positions of "bridge jobs" through flexible and contingent agreements with benefits for both parties, and for societies as a whole.

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