



# OPENING THE DOOR TO WORKING PAST RETIREMENT

A qualitative study of the drivers of an extended working life and the connection to HRM strategies and practices

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Examiner:	Bertil Rolandsson
Report no:	xx (not to be filled in by the student/students)

## Abstract

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**Purpose:** The purpose of the present thesis is to understand how different aspects, work and non-work related, drive engineers decision to either retire or extend working life. By identifying the drivers of an extended working life the aim is to understand how HR strategies and practices can be developed and designed to enable and facilitate an extended working life.

**Theory:** The present thesis uses two analytical frameworks. First, the concepts push, pull, jump, stay and stuck were used to understand how different aspects affect the respondents intention to remain in work or to retire (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz, Morton, & Weckerle, 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003). Second, work by Büsch, Dittrich, and Lieberum (2012) identifying four different dimensions of influencing factors; personal, family-related, work and organisational-related or socio-economic factors is used to understand which dimension the aspects identified belong to and how they influence the engineers' retirement decisions.

**Method:** A qualitative case study was adopted using semi-structured interviews. Nine engineers and one representative from the case company's HR department was interviewed. The engineers were interviewed regarding their retirement decision and the HR representative was interviewed regarding individual and organisational conditions for an extended working life.

**Result:** The study identified both drivers to a continued working life as well as drivers influencing the engineers' to retire. Besides the identified drivers three main findings were found contributing to the broader knowledge of retirement as a decision making process. (1) Work and organisational-related factors stand for the majority of stay factors. (2) Unfulfilled stay factors become push factors. (3) Family-related aspects always pull the individual out of labour. The study's results together with the analytical framework further aided the development and identification of five HR practices aimed at retaining older workers within the case company.

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# Table of Content

Introduction .....	1
Objectives and Research Questions .....	2
Disposition .....	3
Background .....	3
Conditions for an Extended Working Life in Sweden .....	3
The Swedish Pension System and Postponing Retirement .....	4
Securing the Welfare System Through Increased Labour Participation .....	5
Previous Research .....	6
A Strategic Human Resource Management Perspective to the Aging Workforce.....	6
Forecasting & Workforce Planning.....	7
Knowledge Transfer .....	8
Retention Strategies.....	8
Developing Retention Strategies .....	10
Why Organisations Haven't Engaged in Employing Older Workers .....	12
The Retirement Decision and Influencing Factors.....	13
Analytical Framework.....	15
Push, Pull, Jump, Stay & Stuck.....	15
Four Dimensions of Influencing Factors.....	16
Methodology .....	17
Research Setting .....	17
Research Design.....	17
Participant Selection.....	18
Data Collection.....	19
Data Analysis .....	20
Limitations .....	21
Ethical Considerations.....	22
Empirical Findings .....	23
Human Resources and the Retention of Older Workers .....	24
Working Past Retirement at the Case Company, HR Processes and Strategies .....	24
Reasons for Prolonging Working Life .....	27
Meaning, Personal Development and the Ability to Contribute .....	27
Social Context & Colleagues .....	28

Recognition .....	28
Flexibility .....	29
Loyalty .....	29
Reasons for Leaving Working Life .....	30
Physical and Psychosocial Work Environment.....	30
Organisational Change .....	31
The Dream of Retirement & Making the Most of the Last Years in Life .....	31
Aspects Outside Work Taken Into Account.....	32
Health .....	32
Family & Friends .....	33
Personal Economy.....	33
Pension System .....	34
Analysis .....	34
Analysing the Results From a Push, Pull, Jump, Stay and Stuck Perspective .....	35
Reasons for Prolonging Working Life .....	35
Reasons for Leaving Working Life .....	36
Aspects Outside Work Taken into Account.....	37
Analysing the Results Using the Four Dimensions of Influencing Factors .....	38
Discussion .....	40
Conclusion.....	46
Contribution to Existing Research and to the Field of HR.....	48
Suggestions for Further Research.....	48
References .....	50

## Introduction

The Swedish government recently agreed to extend the legislated retirement age in a stepwise process between the years 2020-2026, today's lower retirement age 61 will be raised to 64 while the upper retirement age is raised from 67 to 69 (Regeringen, 2017). Longer life expectancy, healthier aging, later establishment on the labour market, increasing dependency ratios and the need for a sustainable well-fare state financing are some factors that have built up the political agreement and discussion of extending working life and raising the retirement age (Arbetsmarknadsutskottet, 2014; SOU2012:28). Sweden's aging population together with a tradition of early retirement has laid ground for a socioeconomic problem where a rapidly decreasing group of people, working citizens, provide for an increasing number of non-working citizens. According to Andersen, Määttä, and Valkonen (2014) adjusting the retirement age might be enough to financially stabilize the pension system. It will however be insufficient to encourage individuals to extend working life, establishing longevity and securing the sustainability of the welfare system (ibid.).

The aging workforce not only causes socioeconomic problems but also increasing organisational concerns where a shortage and lack of competence increases as older workers retire from working life while there aren't enough younger talents to fill their place. Despite the importance of this issue on a societal level and the potential damage it may cause on an organisational level a report presented by Manpower (2007) indicates that many Swedish organisations lack strategies for both recruiting and retaining older employees'. To prevent the potential negative effects the aging workforce will have on organisations and on society strategies need to be found to encourage individuals to prolong working life (Greller, 2012).

In order to develop adequate strategies encouraging an extended working life knowledge regarding the drivers of an extended working life is needed. The aim of the present thesis is therefore to investigate what factors drive engineers' to either extend working life or to retire. So that adequate human resources (HR) strategies encouraging and extended working life can be designed. The thesis is a qualitative case study focusing on engineers within a municipally owned organisation. Engineers are of interest to study partly because predictions show that there will be a shortage of engineers (Universitetskanslersämbetet, 2015) but also because they due to the character of their work are physically able to prolong working life but also financially secure enough to retire. According to a study by De Vos and Meganck (2008) retention

strategies are only effective if they are consistent with employees needs and values. By springing from individuals' perceptions, the author hopes to ensure that the suggested HR strategies bring value to the case company and contribute to the retention of older workers.

Previous research has primarily focused on the aspects that drive individuals to retire early while a limited but growing field of research has studied aspects driving employees' to extend working life (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Although previous research has studied HR strategies and practices aimed at retaining older workers, little is known about how to develop adequate HR practices aimed at retaining older workers (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Kooij, Jansen, Dijkers, & De Lange, 2010). This lack of knowledge further demonstrates a gap between scientific knowledge and practice. Building on the drivers of a continued working life the present thesis contributes to the lack of knowledge on how to develop HR practices aimed at retaining older workers. Moreover, the thesis contributes to previous research and to practitioners within the field of HR management with increased knowledge concerning employees' retirement decision and the drivers of an extended working life.

## **Objectives and Research Questions**

The purpose of the present thesis is to understand how different aspects, work and non-work related, drive engineers decision to either retire or extend working life. By identifying the drivers of an extended working life the aim is to understand how HR strategies and practices can be designed and developed to enable and facilitate an extended working life. Doing so the thesis further aims to bridge the existing gap between academic research and practice.

To realize the studies purpose interviews will be held with both engineers and a representative from the case company's HR department. The following three research questions lay as foundation for the study:

- *What work and non-work related factors drive engineers' to either extend working life or to retire?*
- *How does the HR department at the case company strategically work to enable an extended working life and reduce the negative effects the aging workforce may have on the organisation?*
- *Based on the identified drivers of an extended working life how can HR facilitate opportunities for an extended working life?*

## **Disposition**

The present thesis is distributed in the chapters introduction, objectives & research questions, background, previous research, analytical framework, methodology, empirical findings, analysis, discussion and conclusion. The chapters introduction, objectives & research questions and background problematizes the thesis's topic and describes its background and purpose. The initial chapters are followed by previous research which concerns previous research addressing strategies for retaining and managing older workers, potential motives for extending working life as well as additional research relevant to the thesis thereby providing a holistic picture of the thesis's topic from an academic perspective. Thereafter, the chosen analytical framework is described which is the concepts and perspectives used to analyse and interpret the gathered data to acquire a deeper understanding of the issue. Perhaps facilitating the development of new knowledge. Following the analytical framework, the methodology used to investigate the research problem is described through the thesis's research design, its context, a description of the collaborating organisation, participant selection as well as a description of the collection and analysis of data. The findings are presented in the section empirical findings, the findings are then discussed and analysed using the chosen analytical framework in an attempt to answer the thesis's research questions and understand the results in relation to the previous chapters background and previous research. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the thesis's main findings, its contribution to existing research as well as suggestions for further research.

## **Background**

This chapter provides the reader with some background to the issue at glance. A brief description of the conditions of an extended working life in Sweden is presented as well as a description of Sweden's current pension system from a prolonged working life perspective. The chapter is concluded with a section regarding the potential consequences of an aging workforce and proposed solutions to the deficit in the welfare system.

### **Conditions for an Extended Working Life in Sweden**

Two report's, one from the Swedish governments official investigations (SOU2012:28) and another from the Swedish labour committee (Arbetsmarknadsutskottet, 2014) examining personal, organisational as well as societal conditions for prolonging working life in Sweden, find that individual conditions for prolonging working life are good. People are generally



healthier and have better cognitive abilities at the point of traditional retirement than some years ago, even though individual variations exist of course. This is confirmed in a report from the OECD (2003), where numbers show that the percentage of people between the ages 45-64 reporting good health has steadily increased since the 1980's. Despite this positive development the initial age when individuals retire gets lower and lower and employees spend less years of their lives in labour (Bengtsson & Nilsson, 2004). According to the two reports negative attitudes and discrimination toward older employees are two of the factors preventing older employees from prolonging working life (Arbetsmarknadsutskottet, 2014; SOU2012:28).

### **The Swedish Pension System and Postponing Retirement**

The year 1999 Sweden implemented a new pension system replacing the previous ATP-system which was a defined-benefit pay-as-you-go system where pension benefits were determined by a percentage of the 15 most favourable years of a person's working life (Kruse, 2010). In the older system thirty years of contribution was enough to receive full pension and each missing year up to thirty reduced a person's pension by 1/30<sup>th</sup>. Benefits in the new pension system, however, are based on employees' income their whole working life, the new system thereby provides individuals incentive to prolong working life further increasing his or her pension benefit (ibid.). The aim with the new system was to establish a better connection between a person's contribution and benefits (Kruse, 2010). The new pension system has received international attention because of its financial and political stability (Kruse & Ståhlberg, 2015). Nonetheless, it has also been criticised for its low pensions, its sensitivity to changes in the stock market and its fairness toward disadvantaged groups in society (Kruse, 2010). Pay-as-you-go systems, systems where today's workers' contributions pay benefits for today's pensioners are vulnerable to changes in demographics like the one in Sweden. Were an aging population means that the number of workers decrease while the number on pensioners increase (ibid.). In order to face this issue Kruse (2010) means that either the pension benefits need to be lowered or the contributions increased, or perhaps both.

Today's pension system has its origin in a time when individuals started working as teenagers and were fortunate to reach a pensionable age (Baruch, Sayce, & Gregoriou, 2014). The reality is that individuals enter the labour market much later with more education than was previously required, individuals live until their 80's and are both qualified and capable of continuing to work in their 60's and 70's (ibid.).

## Securing the Welfare System Through Increased Labour Participation

A combination of issues has led to the agreement of raising the retirement age; longer life expectancy, later establishment on the labour market, lower fertility rates and an ageing population (Arbetsmarknadsutskottet, 2014). These factors all contribute to an increased dependency-ratio and put strain on the well-fare state financing. According to a report published by the Swedish governments official investigations (SOU2009:93) there are three reasonable solutions to the deficit in the well-fare state financing; (1) through raising taxes, (2) through reducing public service standards and lowering social compensations levels, or by (3) increasing the amount of worked hours within the economy. The first alternative seems least likely since Sweden currently has one of the world’s highest income taxes. Raising income taxes further might risk the loss of economic- and human capital to countries with lower level taxes (Hansson, 2010). The second alternative is a possible but unfavourable alternative on a societal, organisational and individual level. Therefore, the third alternative seems like the preeminent alternative and could be achieved in several ways. Through enabling opportunities for young people to enter the labour market earlier by lowering entry requirements. Through increasing the number of hours worked for those who already have a job by transitioning part-time jobs to full-time. Through creating opportunities for people whom are unemployed or on both long- and short term sick leave to begin or return to work. Also through extending working life by making it easier for older employees to keep on working (SOU2009:93).

Compared to other countries Sweden already has a relatively high average retirement age, *Table 1* illustrates the percent of citizens between different ages in labour.

	Ages 55-59	Ages 60-64	Ages 65-69
Sweden	83,2	67,7	22,0
OECD Average	69,6	46,3	20,9

*Table 1.* Employment rate in percent between different ages. (OECD, 2017)

Sweden is well over the OECD average and has a high employment rate both between the ages 55-59 and 60-64, between the ages 65-69 however the employment rate drops and is just above the OECD average. The radical drop of employment rate can be explained by a number of reasons; a norm of retirement at the age of 65, lack of financial benefits and incentives for

working past the age of 65. Regardless, the drop indicates an opportunity where effort can be made to increase the employment rate among workers between the ages 65-69, further contributing to an increase in the amount of hours worked within the economy.

## **Previous Research**

In this chapter, the main contributions to the topics strategic human resource management connected to an aging workforce are presented, together with research regarding individuals retirement decision and the drivers of an extended working life. The search for relevant literature was performed in the databases JSTOR, ScienceDirect, SAGE, OECD iLibrary, PsycINFO and Google Scholar to name a few using the keywords ‘retirement’, ‘older workers/employees’, ‘aging workforce’, ‘extending/prolonging working life’, ‘retention’, ‘HR’ and ‘strategic human resource management’, both on their own and combined in different constellations.

Research regarding retirement is interdisciplinary and has been studied by researchers within social work, economics, organisational sciences, psychology and sociology amongst others (Shultz & Wang, 2011). Retirement as such is a rather new phenomenon, the first pension system was established in Germany year 1889 and it was first round the year 2000 the topic gained considerable interest amongst researchers. As a result, the majority of the existing knowledge regarding psychological aspects concerning retirement has been uncovered the last 2-3 decades (ibid.).

Equivalent to the OECD’s (2006) definition of an older worker, older workers will be defined as workers 50 years or older as this indicates the beginning of declines in participation rates.

### **A Strategic Human Resource Management Perspective to the Aging Workforce**

Even though research dating back to the 1980’s (such as Johnston and Packer (1987)) have advised of the human resource implications that the aging workforce entails organisations have demonstrated limited response to the challenge (Greller, 2012). Managing the impact of the demographic changes will require that human resource managers take on a strategic approach to the aging workforce. By perceiving older workers as a resource of strategic interest organisations proactively can plan their business, foresee and respond to its potential downfalls

(Greller, 2012). Adopting a strategic approach to the aging workforce may mean that negative effects of retirement, being the loss of critical competence or shortage of competence, are reduced and the positive effects realized contributing to the overall business aims (Rau & Adams, 2012). A study by Henkens, Van Solinge, and Cozijnsen (2009) found that managers attitudes toward retirement have effect on employees retirement decisions. If asked to remain within the organisation by their manager one third of the studies respondents expressed that they would have remained within the organisation, while little or no recognition seemed to influence the respondents to retire earlier (ibid.). This goes to show that HR managers and employers play a key role in determining the opportunities to continue working past retirement through their actions and attitudes to a prolonged working life.

Previous literature highlights four central processes essential to take a strategic grip of the issues related to an aging workforce; forecasting, workforce planning, knowledge transfer and retention strategies. The following three sections will describe each of the them and their strategic importance.

### **Forecasting & Workforce Planning**

Both knowledge management and talent management literature have addressed the concerns related to an aging workforce and how to best sustain both knowledge and talent within organisations (Calo, 2008). What they have in common is their strategic approach to the problem were forecasting, conducting knowledge and talent inventories as well as workforce planning are central practices. These practices are intended to map labour supply and demand to prevent and minimise the risks of talent shortage and loss of competence that the aging workforce may entail (Arnold, 2005; Calo, 2008). These predictive processes also allows organisations to take long-term steps to address anticipated shortfalls or excesses (Rau & Adams, 2012). On the other hand, employee turnover is an inevitable part of organisational life, in some cases turnover may be planned and controlled for while other cases not. Still much of previous research shows that organisations have a good chance of planning, predicting and to some extent controlling employee turnover (Calo, 2008). By predicting the potential effects that the aging workforce will have on the own organisation, measures can be taken and actions can be made to anticipate and prevent potential negative effects.

## **Knowledge Transfer**

The aging workforce also puts demands on HR departments to find strategies to transfer knowledge within organisations. Even though the younger generations entering today's labour force are more technically skilled than previous generations it will take time for them to achieve the capabilities that the exiting generations holds (Baird & Griffin, 2012). These capabilities being job-specific knowledge, contacts and experience that enable them to make appropriate and well-balanced decisions and be high performing in their role (ibid.). Transferring knowledge within the organisation should therefore be one of HR's main priorities as employee talent and intellectual capital have become means to a competitive advantage (Calo, 2008; DeLong, 2004). Passing on and transferring knowledge is therefore important to leverage knowledge within the organisation sustaining the organisations competitive advantage. Knowledge transfer does not occur spontaneously nor naturally, finding ways to transfer knowledge on an organisational level is therefore a vital part of knowledge management (ibid.). Studies show that organisational culture may determine whether knowledge is transferred or not (Calo, 2008; Ling-hsing & Tung-Ching, 2015). A company's organisational culture may either reward and encourage knowledge transfer or unintentionally discourage knowledge transfer (ibid.). Mentoring, shadowing, simulation, paired work or guided experience are just some examples of practical ways to transfer knowledge (Weber, 2013). Which of them is appropriate depends from case to case and what type of knowledge is to be transferred, tacit- or explicit knowledge (ibid.).

## **Retention Strategies**

Retaining older workers within the organisation is perhaps the most important process to prevent the negative effects of the aging workforce. Also to sustain vital knowledge within the organisation while simultaneously increasing the number of hours worked within the economy. Researchers have over time identified several retention practices including; work environment, managerial and social support, feedback, career development, financial incentives, opportunities for development, flexible work, performance appraisal, training and work-life balance (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Cappelli, 2000; De Vos & Meganck, 2008; Horwitz, Heng, & Quazi, 2003; Ramlall, 2004).

A comprehensive study by Armstrong-Stassen (2008) identified 28 HR practices reflecting 7 human resource strategies specifically aimed at retaining mature employees (see Appendix,

*Table 2*); flexible work options, job design, training for mature employees, training for managers of mature employees, performance evaluation, compensation as well as recognition and respect. Deriving from their list of 28 HR practices, Armstrong-Stassen (2008) further studied to what extent different organisations were engaging in the different practices. They also studied which of the seven strategies were most important in influencing older workers intention to remain in working life. Their findings showed that recognition and respect was the most important factor affecting individual's intention to stay in the work while training and development was rated as the least important strategy. Surprisingly, they also found that the reasons why HR departments weren't engaging in HR practices aimed toward older employees was because they thought that there wasn't any interest in or demand for such processes among their employees. While the employees reported that they thought that the reason why HR departments weren't engaging in such processes was that it wasn't a priority to the organisation. Armstrong-Stassen's findings demonstrates the importance of making the retention of older workers a pronounced and outspoken priority to the organisation. With the issues related to the aging workforce knocking on organisations doors retention strategies should stem from a conscious organisational business strategy.

Despite the substantial knowledge of what practices encourage retention there seems to be a misconception between HR and older workers which practices are effective in retaining older workers. A study by De Vos and Meganck (2008) compared HR managers and employee's perception of what HR strategies and practices were most important for retention management. The HR managers reported that training, career perspective, financial rewards, performance management and communication were the most important retention strategies. While the employees on the other hand reported that career development opportunities, social atmosphere, job content, financial rewards and work-life balance were most important for the employees intention to remain within the organisation (ibid.). This emphasizes the importance of mapping which retention strategies are most effective in retaining older workers in order to align HR practitioners and employees' perceptions. Furthermore, research shows that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the retention of older workers (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). Occupations vary as do individuals different needs and values of what factors would motivate them to extend working life. Knowing these factors organisations and HR professionals can create strategies that address the drivers of a continued working life.

Research by Maestas (2010) indicates that a majority of employees plan to continue working in some form even after they retired from their career job or career employer. Both bridge employment (working for pay after retirement) and partial retirement (reduced work commitment working for a new employer) are becoming more common (Beehr & Bennett, 2015). This signifies that individuals are willing and capable of continuing to work and that employers challenge does not lie in persuading individuals to continue working, but to continue working for them.

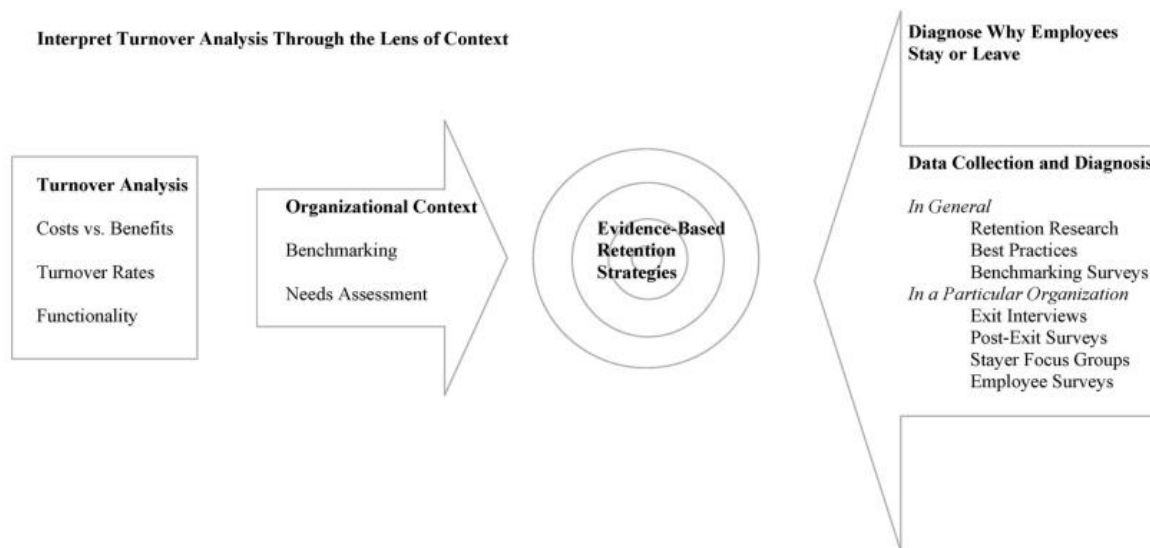
Retaining older workers and specifically those who carry ‘key competence’ may make some employees more valuable and important to retain than others (Beal, 2016). A study by Flynn (2010) found supporting evidence that organisations are positive to retaining employees past the traditional retirement age but remained discretion over who was offered the opportunity to continue working past retirement. Their study also found that organisations found the retention of employees with company-specific knowledge more cost effective than replacement (ibid.).

There is a strong link between recruitment and retention strategies and the global economy. A weak global economy causes employers to hire a limited number of people, causing an oversupply of human resources (Herman, 2005). During such circumstances organisations can be selective in their hiring decisions as employees are dependent on attaining any job at all and therefore cope with circumstances regarding compensation, working conditions and job design they otherwise might haven’t. A strong global economy on the other hand causes an abundance of jobs where employers compete for the same human resources. Employees can then be selective when choosing job depending on, for instance, what compensation and benefits the organisation offers. During a weak global economy retention strategies are therefore less essential to organisations than they are during a strong global economy where other organisations may be after the same human resources (ibid.). Being in the midst of a strong global economy this is important to have in mind as it puts additional strain on organisations to compete for human resources.

## **Developing Retention Strategies**

As demonstrated previous research has addressed strategic HR management and its relation to an aging workforce. However, not many researchers have looked at how to develop HR practices aimed at retaining older workers. On a broader level an article written by Allen et al.

(2010) proposes a model used to develop strategic evidence-based retention management strategies (see *Figure 1*). The article addresses retention management on a general level but is perfectly applicable to the retention of older workers. The authors argue that to maximize the return on investment it is pivotal to understand the nature of turnover in the given context (*ibid.*).



*Figure 1.* A model of how to develop strategic evidence-based retention management strategies. (Allen, Bryant & Vardaman, 2010, p.58)

The *first* step to developing evidence-based retention strategies is to conduct a turnover analysis, assessing turnover rates, turnover costs, and the functionality of which employees are exiting the organisation (Allen et al., 2010). Functionality refers to the assessment of who is leaving the organisation, not all turnover is bad why turnover may be assessed as either functional or dysfunctional. The *second* step involves considering the organisational context of which the turnover is occurring. Benchmarking and needs assessment are approaches for assessing turnover in relation to both internal and external circumstances. Comparing turnover rates to competitors is considered external benchmarking while internal benchmarking considers turnover rates within the organisation over time. Needs assessment is the assessment of labour supply and demand. External needs assessment considers labour market conditions that affect the supply and demand for human capital. While internal needs assessment considers the future strategic and organisational direction and how it affects the supply and demand of labour. The *third* step involves collecting data in order to diagnose why employees stay within or leave the organisation. Data can be collected in general by reviewing retention research, examining best practice drawn from the experience of other organisations or from



benchmarking surveys. Identifying the drivers of turnover on a more specific level in a particular context or of a subpopulation is often desirable and can be collected using exit interviews, post-exit surveys, focus groups or employee surveys among other ways (ibid.). The model generated by Allen et al. (2010) can be used to understand and assess the need for retention strategies and also to develop appropriate retention strategies. The model further strengthens that the thesis's objectives of identifying the drivers to stay within or to retire from the organisation is an adequate way and part of developing retention strategies.

### **Why Organisations Haven't Engaged in Employing Older Workers**

Several studies show positive advantages both for organisations and employees extending working life and the retirement age. The organisation retains valuable knowledge and experience within the organisation, reducing risks of labour shortage (SOU 2012:28), while employees' attain greater quality of life, better health and cognitive abilities (Humphrey, Costigan, Pickering, Stratford, & Barnes, 2003; Insler, 2014). Despite these positive effects, older workers are often subject to ageism, which is prejudice views of older workers resulting in employment discrimination (Nelson, 2004). Typical negative stereotypical views and attributions of ageing and older workers are reduced productivity, less motivation, resistance to change and decreased flexibility (Fridriksson et al., 2017). These stereotypes may act as self-fulfilling prophecies where older workers are offered less training which eventually make them less productive. Although individuals health and physical ability deteriorates with age, factors such as strategic thinking, sharp-wittedness, considerateness, wisdom, ability to deliberate, ability to rationalise, holistic perception and language skills improve with age (Ilmarinen, 2012). Research also indicates that individuals cooperation skills, tacit knowledge, professional competence, structural awareness of the organisational functions and professional network improves with age. Furthermore, research shows that older workers are loyal towards their employer, record less absenteeism and are highly committed and engaged in their work (ibid.).

Early retirement has extensively been used as a soft way of reducing headcount to meet budget constraints (Vickerstaff, Cox, & Keen, 2003). Economic fluctuations and recessions have therefore historically had negative effect on older employees' opportunities to stay in labour and even more to extend working life. Early retirement schemes therefore contribute to making age discrimination socially acceptable (ibid.). A regular claim made is that older employees need to retire to make room for younger employees. Results of a study by Gruber, Milligan,

and Wise (2009) found no support for the notion that if older employees stayed longer in the workforce, job opportunities for younger employees would decline. Evidence from their study contrary suggests that increased employment rate amongst older employees is associated with an increase in youth employment and reduced youth unemployment (ibid.).

Voices have been raised saying that the retirement age should be eliminated completely because it signals a benchmark when employees should leave the labour market and reinforces the norm and belief that old people are unwanted on the labour market (Baruch et al., 2014).

## **The Retirement Decision and Influencing Factors**

Previous research has largely focused on factors affecting individual's decision to retire and less on factors affecting individual's decision to continue working. Literature regarding employees motives for prolonging working life is therefore scarce but has gained increasing attention the last decades as a shift in cultural expectations of taking early retirement to continuing to work has taken place (Ekerdt, 2010). There has also been a shift in government policies from having a pro-retirement perspective to a pro-work perspective instead (Shultz & Wang, 2011).

Some of the factors affecting individuals retirement decisions identified by previous literature are; gender, education, ethnicity, work-ability, health, personal economy, marital status, caregiving responsibilities, flexibility, work-life balance, job design, autonomy, development opportunities, organisational commitment, job embeddedness, work environment, social and managerial support, organisational attitudes, recognition, the economy, the pension system and -benefits (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2017; Davies & Cartwright, 2011; Dingemans, Henkens, & Solinge, 2016; Honig, 1996; Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, & Dijkers, 2008; Nilsson, 2013; Pienta & Hayward, 2002; Sewdas et al., 2017; Thieme, Brusch, & Büsch, 2015)(For a review of the literature on the antecedents to retirement see Wang and Shi (2014)). These aspects and perhaps other aspects are weighed against each other to form a person's retirement decision. Much of previous research has studied retirement as a decision-making process (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Shultz & Wang, 2011) and some researchers even mean that the decision-making process is not highly rational nor entirely conscious (Paullin & Whetzel, 2012).

The majority of literature studying different aspects influencing a person's retirement decision takes a quantitative approach, thereby studying the effect of single or multiple variables on individuals retirement age. A recent quantitative study by Anxo, Ericson, Herbert, and Rönmar (2017) examined what the authors call *leavers* motives for retiring from working life as well as *stayers* motives for remaining in working life. Leavers were individuals who had retired from working life while stayers were individuals who remained in working life. Their results showed that *leavers* focal reason for retiring was because they had 'many other meaningful and interesting things to do'. They also found that health, economy and working conditions such as stress were important reasons for leaving working life. The reasons why *stayers* remained in working life was because they felt a strong involvement with their work and because their job was stimulating and enriching. A majority of their respondents also expressed that they stayed because they couldn't see themselves in retirement and that 'positive experience of others continuing to work' influenced their decision to stay. Financial reasons were also expressed as a reason to stay (ibid.). A combined qualitative and quantitative study by Nilsson (2013) similarly found that when individuals determine whether to retire or to keep on working they considered their ability to balance work and life with respect to health and ageing, the economic benefits, opportunities for social inclusion as well as the opportunities for engaging in meaningful activities. If best fulfilled at work or in leisure determined whether the person continued to work or chose to retire (ibid.). Both studies illustrate how individuals retirement decisions are complex and seem to be affected by aspects both within and outside work.

Lord (2002) conducted a study similar to this one, where engineers motives for prolonging working life was studied using Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and Herzberg's two-factor theory. Lord found that Maslow's third and fourth level needs, the feeling of belonging and appreciation were most important for engineers' motivation to extend working life. His study also suggests that investments in what Herzberg calls motivators, in his two-factor theory of motivators and hygienes, positively affects job attitudes and are longer lasting than investments in hygiene factors such as salary. However, evidence shows that motivational factors have proven harder to implement (ibid.). The present thesis being a qualitative study may perhaps contribute to Lord's study by attaining a deeper understanding of engineers' motives to extend working life. When examining the drivers to an extended working life it is important to recognize that some factors are beyond the control of the employer such as the global economy and critical events in the employees personal life (Allen et al., 2010).

## Analytical Framework

The present thesis will use two analytical frameworks. First, the concepts of push, pull (Shultz et al., 1998) and jump (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990) will be used to understand factors affecting individuals decision to retire. While the extended concepts stay and stuck (Sartland & Øverbye, 2003) will be used to understand factors affecting individuals decision to remain in working life.

Second, the push, pull, jump, stay and stuck framework will be complemented with work by Büsch et al. (2012) identifying four different dimensions of influencing factors in a person's retirement decision. Whether being personal, family-related, work and organisational-related or socio-economic factors (ibid.).

### Push, Pull, Jump, Stay & Stuck

Shultz et al. (1998) were the first to use the concepts of push and pull to understand older workers' decision to retire. Previously the concepts of push and pull have been used in several fields of research to explain aspects, both positive and negative, influencing individuals' decision making. The most known example is in migration research where the concept of push is used to explain negative aspects pushing a person to migrate to a new area because of for e.g. natural disasters or high crime-rate in the current area. Pull factors on the other hand are factors positively affecting a person to migrate to a new area because of for e.g. higher wage-levels or relatives and loved ones living in the new area (ibid.).

In the retirement literature *push factors* have been used to understand aspects pushing individuals into retirement, typically negative, such as ill health, imbalance between work demands and individual resources, lack of competence or pressure from management/co-workers to retire (Fridriksson et al., 2017; Shultz et al., 1998) inducing older workers to retire. *Pull factors* have been recognized as positive external aspects pulling an employee out of the labour market. Examples of pull factors could be socioeconomic pension structures offering economic incentives to retire or collective norms and values of early retirement influencing an individual to retire (ibid.). The concept of *jump* was later added to the push and pull literature by Featherstone and Hepworth (1990) to explain internal aspects causing an individual to retire such as pursuing an alternative career, the desire to travel around the world or as simple as the desire to spend more time with friends and family.

The concepts push, pull and jump all explain aspects affecting individuals decision to retire disregarding the different aspects affecting an individual to remain in work. Snartland and Øverbye (2003) therefore suggested that the concepts stay and stuck are to be added to the push, pull and jump literature. The *stay* concept refers to aspects positively affecting individual's intentions to remain in work, examples of such aspects may be good working conditions, good work environment, that one's work is perceived as stimulating, developing and meaningful as well as a good relationship to managers and co-workers. *Stuck* aspects on the other hand are negative mechanisms forcing an individual to remain in work even though they would rather have retired, examples of stuck aspects could be that an individual can't afford to retire for financial reasons or the fear of social isolation if one were to leave work (ibid.).

The concepts push, pull, jump, stay and stuck are not mutually exclusive, a person's decision to retire may have several different explanations and the same event, such as an early retirement offer from ones employer may be rated as either a push or pull factor by different individuals (Fridriksson et al., 2017; Shultz et al., 1998).

## **Four Dimensions of Influencing Factors**

Research regarding the drivers of an extended working life has yet to be clearly delineated, Büsch et al. (2012) differentiated between four groups of influencing factors;

- Personal factors
- Family-related factors
- Work and organisational-related factors
- Socio-economic factors

The different determinants for retiring or continuing to work found in previous research can all be categorised into one of these four groups. *Personal factors* identified by previous literature is for example gender, education, ethnicity, work-ability and health. *Family-related factors* studied by the literature is for example marital status and caregiving responsibilities. *Work and organisational factors* influencing older workers to extend working life identified by previous research is; flexibility, work-life balance, job design, autonomy, development opportunities, organisational commitment, job embeddedness, work environment, social and managerial support, organisational attitudes, recognition and compensation to name a few. While *Socio-economic factors* studied by previous literature are for example the economy, the pension system and -benefits.

The analytical framework will assist the researcher in attaining a deeper understanding of the empirical material adequately answering the thesis's research questions. The concepts of push, pull, jump, stay and stuck were chosen because they demonstrate the interplay of factors affecting a person's retirement decision. While the dimensions identified by Büsch, Dittrich, and Lieberum was chosen because they comprehensively account for the interaction of factors on micro-, meso- and macro-level. By adopting these two analytical frameworks the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents' retirement decision, factors weighed in and how HR strategically can organise their work to support an extended working life for their employees.

## **Methodology**

This chapter presents the method for collecting and analysing the empirical data. First the research setting and case company is presented. Thereafter the chosen research design and a description of the field work is described. From there the chapter turns to a description of the participant selection and data collection process. A detailed description of how the data was analysed is thereafter described in the section data analysis. The chapter is concluded by a description of potential limitations with the chosen research method.

### **Research Setting**

The present thesis was written in collaboration with a municipally owned company based in Western Sweden. Writing the thesis together with an organisation in comparison to interviewing engineers from several different organisations created added value in the sense that the organisations HR processes and strategies could be understood in relation to their employees retirement decisions and their willingness to retire early versus late.

### **Research Design**

In an effort to examine and answer the thesis's research questions a qualitative approach was adopted using semi-structured interviews; interviews where an interview guide is used as foundation for the interview assisting the interviewer and interviewee to stick to the research area without precluding the emergence of related topics and discussions (Bryman, 1988). A qualitative approach is efficient when the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of individuals' motivation, attitudes, behaviour, perceptions, views and feelings (Hakim, 2000).

Therefore, a qualitative approach was most suitable in answering the research questions which regards individuals' motivations, perceptions and views in relation to retirement.

The thesis's research questions allows for divergent results based on the studies setting, with this in mind a case study was conducted to create focus and minimise impact of differentiating factors such as type of business or demographic setting to affect the results. Case studies typically provide deep understanding of the issue at glance and requires the researcher to set boundaries around the case, specifically defining the unit of analysis. Therefore, the boundaries for the present thesis were carefully set to include one case company employing several individuals within the same profession, namely engineers. Engineers as professionals was chosen for several reasons, first because predictions show that there will be an increased demand for engineers since a vast proportion of engineers are approaching retirement and universities are unable to graduate engineers in a sufficient pace, see Appendix *Figure 2* (Universitetskanslersämbetet, 2015). Correspondingly, statistics show that there will be a shortage of 51 000 engineers the year 2030 (SCB, 2013). Finding strategies to retain older engineers within the organisation is therefore one way of tackling this challenge. Second, because engineers typically have the physical ability to extend working life as their work typically hasn't been physically demanding. Third, because they due to their occupation generally are financially secure meaning that they don't need to continue working past retirement for financial reasons. It is therefore specifically interesting to understand how individuals that are physically capable to work but financially secure enough to retire can be encouraged to work past the traditional retirement age.

## **Participant Selection**

Some thirty organizations employing mainly engineers in the immediate and neighbouring area were contacted describing the thesis's objectives and research questions, asking if they would be interested in being subject of such a study. Three organisations showed their interest in the thesis and wanted to meet to discuss a potential collaboration further. A meeting was scheduled with an HR-strategist from the first organisation to come back with shown interest. After an initial meeting with the first company a collaboration was met and the other organisations interested were declined. The initial meeting signalled the starting point of the fieldwork and the HR-strategist further on acted as gate keeper for further contact with the engineers and human resources department within the company.

An age range between the years 45-55 was set in collaboration with the case company to target engineers that have a few years left to retirement, meaning that they might have started to consider their retirement plans but not yet made any definite decisions. This deliberate choice was made so that the engineers still have an open mind-set in terms of what they take into consideration in their retirement decision and what might affect their choice. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, selecting participants relevant to the research questions and design (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The HR-strategist contacted engineers within the organisation in the chosen age-range asking if they would be interested in being interviewed on the subject. The contact information to those who accepted was then sent to the researcher so that an interview could be scheduled. All in all, 9 engineers were interviewed from different business areas within the organisation. The engineers had different engineering roles within the organisation, some in managerial positions. The respondents mean age was 51,6 ranging from 46 to 54 years and the mean tenure was 16,5 ranging from 3 to 29 years, 6 of the respondents were female and 3 male. To ensure the anonymity of the engineers no further information regarding the respondents age, sex or work role will be given.

In addition to the interviews with the engineers, an interview was held with an HR-strategist from the human resources department to understand the company's current HR processes and strategies for retaining older engineers within the organisation.

## **Data Collection**

The data collection was performed in May and April 2018, where 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. Two interview guides were constructed one for the engineers and one for HR based on the studies purpose, research questions and with the analytical framework and previous research in mind. Pilot interviews were first held with one engineer and one HR practitioner to test the relevance and vigour of the interview questions. Face-to-face interviews were then scheduled and conducted at the respondent's respective workplaces. The interviews varied from 30 to 60 minutes and were recorded to facilitate the analysis of the interviews. The interviews were held in Swedish since both the researcher and the respondents mother tongue is Swedish, the interview guides and the interview quotes have therefore been translated from Swedish to English retrospectively.



The emphasis of the interview questions with the engineers lied in understanding when the respondents intended to retire, if they had begun to plan for their retirement, what aspects they might take into account in their retirement decision both work related but also aspects outside work. Besides this the interviewees were asked to elaborate on current retirement patterns within the organisation, attitudes toward older workers, organisational possibilities to prolong working life as well as potential improvements in the organisations management of older workers. The societal concern of an aging workforce was also discussed as well as the respondent's thoughts on an increased retirement age and the impact of the digitalization on retirement. The focus of the interview questions with the HR department on the other hand lied in understanding how the organisation strategically work to attract and retain older engineers. If and how they enable a prolonged working life, whether they strategically plan for an aging workforce and what effects the aging workforce might have on their line of business. The HR representative, just like the engineers, was asked to elaborate on current retirement patterns within the organisation, attitudes toward older workers, organisational possibilities to prolong working life as well as the representative's thoughts on an increased retirement age and the impact of the digitalization on retirement.

## **Data Analysis**

To facilitate the analysis process the data needed to be transcribed, the interviews were therefore transcribed continuously during the data collection process and after the completion of each interview. The interviews were transcribed in a so called *unfocused* manner which means that the interviews were transcribed word by word from beginning to end providing a general overview of the entire data set (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Unfocused transcriptions provide a detailed picture of what was said and its intended meaning but does not regard contextual or interactional features such as intonations of voices, nuances in speech or non-verbal speech such as gestures. When transcribing the author creates a representation of the collected data, depending on punctuation and colloquialism the meaning of the data can be interpreted in different ways. The author therefore carefully needs to transcribe the data in a manner that illustrates what was meant by what was said avoiding misrepresentation. Some degree of alteration is therefore to be expected during the transcription process to create an accurate picture of what the respondent meant (*ibid.*). The interviews were therefore first transcribed word by word and thereafter gone over while listening to the recorded interview to check that

the transcription was correctly transcribed representing accurately what the respondent said, and meant by what was said.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis which is a method of analysis used to sort the collected data into themes according to commonalities, relationships and differences (Gibson & Brown, 2009). The analysis process begun by coding, identifying different themes within the data set (For a full overview of the identified codes, themes and categories see Appendix *Figure 3.*). The process of coding is a cyclical process meaning that the researcher goes over the transcripts several times, the transcripts were therefore read and re-read several times. This is part of the analytical process as new themes may evolve during the process, meaning that previously excluded text may become relevant as new codes evolve (Gibson & Brown, 2009). After all of the transcriptions had been coded the codes were collected in a new document divided by respondent. This document facilitated the analysis and aided the researcher in seeing commonalities, relationships and differences in the data concluding in three different categories covering most of the codes; reasons for staying, reasons for retiring and aspects taken into account. The codes that did not fit into these three categories were disregarded since they weren't relevant to the research questions nor purpose.

## **Limitations**

When assessing the trustworthiness and potential limitations of a study, *reliability* and *validity* are concepts commonly used. *Reliability* refers to the trustworthiness of the research findings if an exact replica of the research design were to be performed in another time or by another researcher (Kvale, 2007; Leung, 2015). It can be argued that the reliability of the current study is weak since the specific boundaries set due to the characteristics of being a case study means that the results may look different if replicated under different circumstances. The purpose of a case study is to generate in-depth knowledge of the single example being studied potentially aiding the understanding of the broader phenomena. It can therefore be argued that a case study is a beneficial research method despite its limitations with regards to reliability.

*Validity* refers to whether the research design measures what it aims to measure or put differently the correctness of the tools, processes and data used as measurements (Kvale, 2007; Leung, 2015). Are the research questions valid for the anticipated outcome, is the chosen research design and methodology appropriate for answering the research questions, is the

sampling and data analysis appropriate and are the results and conclusions valid for the sample and context (Leung, 2015). When assessing the validity of the current study there are a few limitations one needs to take note of that may have affected the results. The participant selection method used was purposive sampling, targeting individuals suitable to the research requirements. The selection process was due to reasons of integrity performed by the contact person at the case companies HR department and it is therefore difficult for the researcher to know whether the selection of participants may have been biased in any way. Due to the character of the present research it is although unlikely that it may have affected the results. Transcribing and analysing the results of the interviews should be as objective as a process it can be, where the researcher continuously checks, questions and theoretically interprets the findings objectively (Kvale, 2007). Being a subjective being however it is hard to know whether the researchers personal views, perceptions or other may have affected the results. A limitation of the study may also have been that the interviews and transcriptions all were performed in Swedish and then translated to English. Which may mean that some things might have been lost in translation. On the other hand, since both the researcher and the respondents mother tongue is Swedish performing the interviews in English might have meant that some of the results were lost if either the researcher or the respondents answers were limited by their language skills. Furthermore, the limited number of interviews may have been a limitation, a few more interviews would have been desirable to achieve a more reliable result. The age range of the respondents may also have been a limitation. Since the respondents have approximately 10-20 years left until retirement it is difficult to tell whether their expectations of retirement and what may drive their decision to extend working life or to retire in fact is realistic.

## **Ethical Considerations**

When performing any type of research there are four main ethical aspects that need to be accounted for; *informed consent*, *confidentiality*, *avoiding harm* as well as *integrity and professionalism* (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Kvale, 2007). *Informed consent* entails informing the respondents of the overall purpose of the study, the research design, the respondents right to withdraw and the respondents voluntary participation and consent (Kvale, 2007). Prior to the interviews the respondents' were e-mailed an information letter about the studies overall purpose, research questions, research design as well as information regarding their right to withdraw at any point in time. The respondents were further provided with the researchers contact information if they had any further questions regarding the research method or the

research itself. The respondents were also given the chance to ask questions during the interview regarding the design of the research and the research process.

*Confidentiality* means that information regarding the respondents identities and information that could reveal their identify will not be reported (Kvale, 2007). The respondent were promised anonymity why only general information regarding the respondents' sex, age and work role have been reported. As researcher I argue that in this case more detailed information is uncalled-for for the interpretation of the results. During the research process the respondents personal data have been handled with utmost discretion and by the researcher alone.

When performing an interview study possible *harm* to the respondents need to be weighed against the potential benefits of participating in the study (Kvale, 2007). For the current study the anticipated chances of suffering any harm by participating in the study are assessed to be very small. The potential benefits of the study being increased knowledge regarding engineers retirement decision and an extended working life is also regarded to outweigh the small chances of harm of participating in the study.

The fourth account *integrity and professionalism* refers to the researcher as a person and his or her ability to critically and morally asses the research findings in relation to scientific knowledge (Kvale, 2007). When performing interviews the researcher is the main instrument and key to obtaining new knowledge why his or her trustworthiness and moral standards reflect the quality of the results. Professionalism includes the researchers ability to objectively asses the results in an unbiased manner and free from external influence on the results from for e.g. research funder or interviewee (ibid.). This is something that the researcher continuously has had in mind when performing the present study.

## **Empirical Findings**

In this section, the empirical findings are presented according to the categories and themes that were identified during the course of data analysis, the results are presented using quotes from the interviews. To provide setting the chapter begins by presenting the findings from the interview with HR regarding the case company's current processes and strategies in relation to older workers and the retention of them. The first section is followed by three sections encompassing the results from the interviews with the engineers. The three sections are divided

in reasons for prolonging working life, reasons for leaving working life and aspects outside work taken into account.

For reasons of confidentiality the engineers have randomly been given a number from 1-9, preceded by the letter E for engineer. Quotes from the interview with the HR respondent is labelled HR, simply because only one interview was held with a representative from the companies HR department.

## **Human Resources and the Retention of Older Workers**

In this section the results from the interview with HR is presented. The section begins with a description of the findings regarding the case company's perspective of an extended working life, the opportunities to extend working life within the case company and how they work to retain older workers within the organisation. The section is concluded by a section regarding knowledge management within the case company.

### **Working Past Retirement at the Case Company, HR Processes and Strategies**

That working past retirement within the case company is perceived as something positive was expressed both by the HR representative and the engineers. The HR representative explained that they work hard to achieve a sustainable working life for their employees with a good work-life balance to enable an extended working life for those who want. The HR respondent explains that their employees aren't supposed to quit because they are tired or torn by the organisation but because they have made a good effort and it is time for them to take the next step in life. Creating a good work environment, both physically and psychosocially, is one way the organisation works to achieve a sustainable working life. Some of the examples given were through the promotion of good health, providing preventive health care benefits, providing company health care services, having a bicycle benefit, by performing risk analysis's, co-operating with the trade union, by building a good and safe working culture, by providing their own gym and by working with the physical work environment through providing adequate working spaces and aids.

The normal retirement age within the case company according to the HR representative is approximately 65, the last few years however they have seen a shift towards a trend where more and more of their employees want and choose to work past the traditional retirement age coming

from a trend where several of their employees retired much earlier than the traditional retirement age:

”...we’ve seen the last few years that we have a number of employees that have chosen to work longer than 67, I’ve also seen a tendency that many work until 67.” HR

When the case company’s employees become 67 their permanent contracts are ended and the employees who continue working past the age of 67 continue as consultants. Both the HR representative and the engineers explain that remaining within the organisation past 67 isn’t certain, it is dependent on the organisations need for the individuals experience and knowledge.

According to the HR representative the organisation has gone from having processes and strategies that support early retirement to processes that enable opportunities of a continued working life instead. Previously they had a program called ‘80 90 100’ which was an opportunity which employees between the ages 60-65 could apply for and it meant that they worked 80%, were paid 90% and received 100% pension benefits. The benefit was removed however since the organisation felt that it didn’t align with the societal concern of an extended working life. They aim to create opportunities for individuals to continue working and not the other way around. The HR respondent however stresses that they extensively work with flexibility through individual and personalized solutions adapted to their employees’ personal conditions and needs for flexibility.

When asked how the organisation manages older employees the HR respondent explains that they don’t necessarily do anything different for people in different ages, they depart from the individual and his or her personal needs depending on situation. When asked if they work to recruit and retain older workers within the organisation the HR respondent says that they don’t exclude anyone. They have had examples within the organisation where they have employed persons who were 60 plus where it’s been valuable to the organisation to attain the competence and experience that those persons have had. When discussing leadership in relation to age management the HR respondent says:

”[...] it’s a lot about the managers ability to be situational in their leadership and their ability to adapt their management based on the different kinds of individuals they have in their team and age can be one reason for thinking a little differently.” HR

The HR representative expressed that they notice that several of their employees that only have a few years left until retirement start to consider whether to remain in or leave the organisation in times of organisational change. However, the HR representative also says that it depends on the individual, some employees see organisational change as something challenging and an opportunity to stay to assist in the process.

When the organisations employees leave the organisation for retirement it means that a considerable amount of tacit knowledge and experience is leaving the organisation. According to both the HR representative and the engineers the organisation does not have a standardized way of working when it comes to knowledge transfer. It's up to the managers and their employees to make a plan for that process if there's a need for knowledge to be transferred. The HR representative expressed that they usually say that for positions with heavy competence overlapping half a year is reasonable, depending on the circumstances it might however be difficult to realize which stresses the importance that managers and their employees have a close dialog regarding the employees plans for retirement. The question of retirement is brought up in the individual's performance appraisal. The HR representative expressed that their employees usually take responsibility for raising the question with their manager if they intend to retire so that they can plan for a good transition both for the organisation and the employee.

When asked how the organisation deals with workforce planning with older workers and retirement in mind, the HR representative explained that it's something that primarily is done when the organisation has their business and operational planning. This is where they ask themselves where their business is headed and if they have the right competencies and skills within the organisation to realize their goals. They regularly perform staffing analysis's as well, where they look at what type of competence is leaving the organisation, if it is to be replaced with the same or new competence or perhaps if the position shouldn't be replaced at all. The HR representative also explains that the case company does not have a mentorship programme as such but that if they see an opportunity within the organisation where a younger or less senior employee can be mentored by an older employee they usually try to join those individuals. As the HR respondent says however, it is dependent on if the mentor wants to and is willing to mentor a colleague.

## **Reasons for Prolonging Working Life**

In this section the findings regarding what would motivate engineers to prolong working life are presented. The central reasons the respondents expressed for prolonging working life distributed in the titles below was the feeling of meaning acquired when working, opportunities for personal development, the individual's ability to contribute, the social context and one's colleagues, being recognized, opportunities for flexibility and loyalty.

### **Meaning, Personal Development and the Ability to Contribute**

The most emergent and emphasized topics were those concerning the meaning of work, possibilities for personal development and the individual's ability to contribute. All nine engineers touched upon the topic irrespective of if their intentions were to continue working past retirement or not. For the respondents to continue working past the normative retirement age, work needed to have a greater meaning than just going to work and getting paid:

“As long as I think, as long as my environment thinks I can contribute with something, I think it's great fun to keep on working. I think it's fun what I'm doing. If the case is that that place slowly disappears, the role might not be needed or something else then I would consider doing something completely different. But as long as I can contribute [...] then I can consider staying a long time and in that case the retirement age doesn't really matter.” E4

Besides the feeling of meaning, having fun at work, having a good relationship to one's colleagues as well as learning and developing were expressed central aspects likely to influence the respondents decision to stay. The content of one's work was also expressed as an important factor affecting the respondent's decision to continue to work or not. One of the respondents expressed that (s)he wouldn't stay to update an excel-sheet, a task that anyone else just as well could do. Several of the respondents also mentioned that the autonomy to control and decide over one's work was also considered an important factor:

“...that I have goal setting, that I have a task on a slightly longer term with a responsibility and authority, and that I can take on the task with a high degree of self-control. That I'm not locked to one workplace, like the assembly line or cashier at ICA. I mean it's more to have a degree of freedom within the scope of my task to plan and execute my work in order to deliver and do what I am supposed to do.” E1

The above mentioned aspects seemed to have central influence on whether the respondents will choose to prolong working life or not.



## **Social Context & Colleagues**

The respondents mentioned that the social context which work entails is something that could influence their decision to stay. They also spoke about the importance of having a good relationship to one's colleagues and how that could influence the individual to stay longer. On the other hand, one of the respondents expressed that retirement could mean a form of social isolation if one's social context is lost completely:

"I can imagine that if you are in the situation that you don't have anything. You might not be living with someone, you don't have a hobby, maybe no children or poor contact with your children. Going from a socially rich life or what one should say, where you meet people on a daily basis and have that exchange to go home and be completely alone. That alone can make one chose to stay even if the employer gives signals that one is not desired." E2

The above citation demonstrates that the social context can have both positive and negative impact on individuals intention to stay. One of the respondents spoke about the social context in terms of humans being a social being. At work one spends the days with other people you personally haven't chosen, some you establish a good relationship to while others you might not quite get along with. This forces you to adapt and develop because you need to keep up a certain level and that is something the respondent would miss if (s)he chose to retire.

## **Recognition**

Several of the respondents also expressed that their retirement decision would be affected of whether they felt that they were needed and wanted by their employer or not. If they were recognised for their work and needed within the organisation it could influence the individual to stay:

"And then it may be that if you plan to go home and you have an employer who begs on their knees for you to stay for a year or so for some reason, of course that affects or may affect depending on what conditions oneself has. So, the employer has a big role to play in if you are wanted or unwanted, if you stay or not." E2

Like the citation above illustrates the respondents also expressed that not being recognised could influence them to retire earlier instead.

## **Flexibility**

All of the respondents mentioned that flexibility in one way or another could affect their ability to remain in labour. Being able to phase out of working life through flexible working hours or a flexibility to work from home could allow the individual to work longer in life:

“If you can find ways to step down, then I think more people could be available to work longer in life, evening out both one’s pension and economy and it wouldn’t mean working all or nothing.” E5

Like E5 expresses retirement often means that one goes from working 100% to 0% overnight, being able to ease out of working life through different kinds of flexibility while simultaneously improving one’s financial situation is something several of the respondents found attractive and beneficial. On the question if there is anything the organisation could offer to make the decision to prolong working life more attractive E4 says:

“Yes, I think so. There is a lot to do there. More flexible employment conditions, more flexible opportunity to, [case company] previously had a system called 80, 90, 100 where you could work less percent but continued to build on your pension. Such things I think are valuable.” E4

The above citations demonstrates that increased flexibility means that the respondents may be willing to extend working life but that the respondents perceives that more can be done by the organisation in terms of flexibility.

## **Loyalty**

Another reason for staying and prolonging working life that was brought up was the feeling of loyalty, to make a good exit both from an individual and organisational perspective:

“You always have a feeling of loyalty, if you're working on something where you're an important part you have loyalty to want to finish it so you don’t put someone else in trouble.” E6

Making a good exit and to minimise negative impact on the organisation was brought up by several of the respondents. Two of the respondents also felt that making a dignified exit should be everyone’s right having worked a whole life. This findings further demonstrates the dedication several of the respondents expressed to the organisation.

## Reasons for Leaving Working Life

When discussing reasons for prolonging working life it was natural to discuss factors influencing the individual to leave working life as well. The aspect most of the respondents mentioned was their work environment, both the physical work environment but foremost the psychosocial work environment. Other factors mentioned for leaving was organisational change, to fulfil a dream or just to live life and make the most of the last years in life.

## Physical and Psychosocial Work Environment

One of the purposes for choosing engineers as subject group for the present thesis was because engineers typically don't have a physically demanding job meaning they are likely to have the physical ability to prolong working life but as E9 puts it:

“The stress, the exhaustion that so many suffer from where we as industry might have fewer than other, but it is still growing and growing all the time. So what you said about engineers having physically done well, I feel like, like now it's more about the psychological aspect.” E9

Negative psychosocial aspects such as stress is a growing issue for many different occupational groups including engineers which becomes apparent when almost all of the respondent raise the issue:

“Because it is stressful, pressured, always a lack of time, always lack of resources, always a bad conscience and the question is how long you can cope working that way.[...] It's not like a good working environment can make you stay but a bad working environment can make you go.” E2

Psychosocial work environment aspects, especially stress and high workload, were expressed as something that is likely to affect the respondents' retirement decision and their ability to prolong working life or not. Some respondents acknowledge that it's already an issue while others express that their work environment is satisfactory today but that it could change and that it would affect their retirement decision. E5 expresses that the psychosocial work environment has turned into a societal problem with increasing sick leave and points out that it's a question that organisations need to handle in order to be successful and competitive.

“I wish that there was, there is a lot of talk about sustainability these days, social sustainability has come up as one of those, a bit like the environment was in the nineties, a bit like you don't really understand what it is. I think it will be, given all the long-term sick leaves in society, I think it will be a factor

[...] that companies that want to succeed in the same way, today you can't ignore environmental issues." E5

From the citations it is evident that the respondents' consider the physical and psychosocial work environment an important building block in enabling a prolonged working life.

### **Organisational Change**

Two of the respondents meant that if an organisational change would occur while their approaching retirement it would probably hurry up the process and their exit from the organisation:

"If there would be an organisational change, [...], well yes, of course that would hurry up the process and you'd start to count down the days." E1

One of the respondents mentioned that (s)he would probably feel like a plug in the system if an organisational change would come up and that it may influence the respondent to retire rather than prolong working life. Organisational change was also mentioned by the HR representative as a time when they generally experience more turnover.

### **The Dream of Retirement & Making the Most of the Last Years in Life**

Another topic that came up in several of the interviews was the dream of retiring to fulfil a dream while one's health is still intact:

"A colleague of mine has an idea that when we become pensioners we're going to get a seasonal job. We're going to go down to the alps and work for a few hours every day or a few hours a week at a restaurant or hotel. Where we're going to do the dishes and make some beds and then go skiing the rest of the time." E1

"It would be an idea that if I'm really healthy and alert that I would like to do a round-the-world trip that I've never done. While I have the strength, can and want to." E8

Dreams like the one's mentioned in the above citations are natural to have, the respondents were however uncertain of how realistic these dreams were in reality. Several of the respondents also talked about making the most of the last years in life, to have some fun, feel good and live life less structured. One of the respondents said that postponing retirement to long might mean that the individual never gets the chance to do the fun things (s)he would want to while in

pension which is why (s)he wouldn't want to postpone retirement too long either. The results indicate that the respondents' view retirement as a new era in life where the individual has time to put more focus on his or her personal life. Possibly allowing the individual to be somewhat more selfish than labour- and perhaps family life has allowed him or her to be.

## **Aspects Outside Work Taken Into Account**

When deciding to remain in working life or to retire there are a number of things outside work the respondents took into account. The main aspects mentioned were; health, economy, family, friends and the design of the pension system.

### **Health**

The respondents expressed that health was one of the most important factors affecting their ability to prolong working life:

“Yes, but I think again that it's health that matters the most [...] of course it will matter if I have, have, have to but again it's not enough if you have to for financial reasons if you don't have the health.” E9

Like E9 says, in order to stay within the organisation regardless of reason one needs to be healthy, without a good health it matters less if you stay because you want to or because you have to for financial reasons. As several of the respondents expressed it, if their health is intact they would like to continue to be active in different parts of life, work being one of those parts:

“But if you are healthy, which people often are well up in the ages, it's not a factor, it's more a hygiene factor for me. If I'm healthy then it's other things that affect, if you're not, then that basic prerequisite is gone and you might need to consider taking an early retirement.” E6

On the other hand, two of the engineers as well as the HR representative mentioned that working longer in life there is a greater risk of becoming ill in dementia or Alzheimer's for example without being aware of it oneself. The respondents acknowledged the consequences and damage it could have both to their work and perhaps for the organisation if that were the case. They also expressed that it's a sensitive topic because it might be hard to prove and talk to the person who is ill but doesn't comprehend it. The respondents meant that while having people work longer in life you still need to be aware that age takes its toll and that health deteriorates with age.

## **Family & Friends**

Naturally the respondents' expressed that their family and friends had an impact on the their retirement decision. Primarily the respondents' mentioned that their partners would influence their decision and particularly their partners retirement age. One respondent expressed that (s)he wouldn't mind spending a few years at home alone while another respondent said:

“...but otherwise if (s)he (partner) continues in his/her wheel tracks, I'll keep going in mine because it's not like I'm unhappy at work or am physically worn out and I like having some structure in the day. I wouldn't want to sleep until late in the morning, I think it's pretty okay to get up in the morning and do stuff.” E1

The respondents expressed that their family, especially their parents, children and perhaps grandchildren would influence their decision, if they are needed more by them than by their employer. One of the respondents mentioned that his or her friends might also influence the decision:

”It might be that you have good friends who have retired [...] and you start hearing that their playing tennis or they go on trips or do something else. Then you start to think, why should I sit here, they're having much more fun. This (points at phone) keeps ringing with nice pictures. Then maybe I'll start wondering what I'm doing here.” E3

One of the respondents also mentioned health in relation to family, that (s)he felt that helping his or her family out while (s)he still has his or her health could influence the individuals retirement decision.

## **Personal Economy**

When discussing what factors affect the engineer's retirement decision the respondents expressed that their economy and financial situation was something that would affect when and at what age they would or could retire.

“[...] the income decreases a little, it does, so that's something you would need to look closer at, what it would mean. It might be that you move to something smaller and size your costume cost wise.” E3

Most respondents hadn't taken a closer look yet at what their financial situation looked like if they were to retire but they all said that it's something they'd need to take into account.

Depending on their financial situation they might either be able to retire earlier or need to consider working longer for financial reasons:

“The money partly, if it wouldn’t be that much money then I might be prepared to endure a few more years to get a better life as pensioner but otherwise it’s more if I feel like it.” E8

One of the respondents mentioned that if extending working life a year or two longer didn’t have that much impact on his or her pension benefit or economy as pensioner then (s)he probably wouldn’t continue working past retirement. Although the respondents’ acknowledged that their personal economy likely will affect their decision, the economic aspect alone probably wouldn’t influence their decision to stay.

### **Pension System**

The pension system and its design was also mentioned by several of the respondents as a factor that would affect the respondents’ retirement decision:

“I don’t know what the system will say. I belong to a generation where all of this has changed quite much, we came from a system where you started your working life and will leave with a completely different system. I might have, if I retire at age 70 I might have 17 years left of life, that’s quite a long time. What the system looks like then is just speculations today.” E4

The pension system has changed considerably during the respondents working lives and will probably continue to change considering the demographic changes and the sustainability issues the current system faces. The respondents express that they are uncertain of how the pension system will affect their decision but that it is probably something that they will need to take into account.

### **Analysis**

In this chapter the empirical findings are analysed in two stages using the analytical framework and previous research. The first stage begins by analysing the results using the push, pull, jump, stay and stuck framework (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003). This part of the chapter follows the same structure as the results chapter, distributed by the titles; reasons for prolonging working life, reasons for leaving working life and aspects outside work taken into account. The chapter continues to the second stage where

the second framework is added to the analysis, the four dimensions of influencing factors, further developing the understanding of the results.

### **Analysing the Results From a Push, Pull, Jump, Stay and Stuck Perspective**

To recollect, *push* factors are negative factors pushing an individual into retirement, *pull* factors are positive external aspects pulling an employee out of work, *jump* factors are internal aspects influencing an individual to retire or to choose another occupation (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998). *Stay* factors are positive aspects influencing an individual to remain in work while *stuck* factors are negative aspects forcing the individual to remain in work rather than retiring (Snartland & Øverbye, 2003).

### **Reasons for Prolonging Working Life**

Factors mentioned that were important to the respondents for continuing to work past the traditional retirement age were; the feeling of meaning acquired when working, opportunities for personal development, the individual's ability to contribute, the content of one's work, autonomy to decide over one's work, opportunities for flexibility, having fun at work, the social context work entails, good colleagues, recognition and loyalty. The reasons for remaining in labour identified are consistent with findings in previous research. Nilsson (2013) demonstrated that social inclusion and engaging in meaningful activities are important aspects of individuals retirement decisions which the identified factors meaning, the social context and relationship to colleagues reinforces. The identified aspects ability to contribute, recognition and loyalty further conform with Lord (2002) findings that Maslow's third and fourth level needs, the feeling of belonging and appreciation are important for engineers' decision to remain in labour. De Vos and Meganck (2008) further found that employees' perceived career development opportunities, social atmosphere, job content, financial rewards and work-life balance to be the most important retention strategies. Several of the identified reasons for prolonging working life are consistent with the strategies identified by De Vos and Meganck.

From a push, pull, jump, stay and stuck perspective (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003) the identified factors are all regarded as stay factors, positive aspects influencing the respondents to stay (Shultz et al., 1998), if fulfilled. If unfulfilled however, the respondents contrary regarded them as push factors influencing the individual to exit working life (ibid.). One of the examples given was the ability to contribute,



if the respondent felt that (s)he could contribute with something by remaining in work (s)he would do so, if that wasn't the case (s)he would consider retiring instead.

The results show that the respondents expressed that the social context working life entails could influence the respondents to stay for different reasons, either because one enjoys his or her colleagues or because of the fear of the social isolation leaving working life could mean. The social context can therefore positively be regarded as a stay factor but also negatively regarded as a stuck factor. Loyalty in this case means that the individual stays even though he or she has a choice to leave, arguing that loyalty in this case is applicable as a stay factor.

It is clear from the analysis above that analysing the results of the motives for prolonging working life using the concepts of push, pull, jump, stay and stuck (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003) it is not as simple as saying that the motives to stay are always stay factors. Depending on circumstances the different factors influence individuals decision in different ways.

### **Reasons for Leaving Working Life**

Factors mentioned influencing the respondents to retire from work rather than continuing to work past the traditional retirement age were; a negative physical and psychosocial work environment, organisational change as well as retiring to fulfil a dream, pursue a new career or simply to make the most of the last years in life. The identified aspects influencing individual's to retire are just as the reasons to stay consistent with findings in previous research (Wang & Shi, 2014). Anxo et al. (2017) found that leavers left their organisation because they had 'many other meaningful and interesting things to do'. The identified aspects retiring to fulfil a dream, pursue a new career or to make the most of the last years in life reinforces this notion. Anxo et al. (2017) further found that working conditions such as stress influence individuals to retire, a finding that the identified aspect a negative physical and psychosocial work environment strongly supports.

From a push, pull, jump, stay and stuck perspective (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003) the physical and psychosocial work environment, if bad, is likely to influence the respondents retirement decision negatively pushing the individual out of working life. On the other hand, unlike the stay factors above the respondents express that a good work environment wouldn't influence the respondents to stay.

Organisational change and the negative aspects that come with organisational change was expressed as something that might influence some of the respondents to retire rather than continuing to work under unstable conditions. Organisational change thereby being a push factor.

Retiring to fulfil a dream, to do something different for example pursuing a new career, to travel round the world or simply to make the most of the last years in life can be regarded as both a pull and jump factor which are factors positively influencing individuals to retire.

### **Aspects Outside Work Taken into Account**

Factors outside work influencing the respondents retirement decision mentioned were; health, family and friends, personal economy and the pension system. The identified aspects continue to confirm findings in previous research. The identified aspects health and personal economy reinforces Nilsson (2013) who found that economic benefits and health strongly influence whether individuals chose to retire or continue in labour. Anxo et al. (2017) similarly indicated that health and economy are important reasons for leaving working life.

Health was one of those aspects that all of the respondents raised, if the ability to work is lost due to health issues it matters less if one is willing to work past retirement or not. Health, if bad, can therefore be regarded as a push factor from a push, pull, jump, stay and stuck perspective (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003). Similar to the work environment however good health isn't regarded a stay factor but a prerequisite for individuals ability to continue to work.

The respondents expressed that spending more time with friends and family or taking care of parents or grandchildren would positively affect the respondents to retire, pulling them out of labour. The respondents also mentioned that their partners retirement plans would influence their retirement decision, if their partner retired they would likely retire as well.

It is evident from the empirical findings that the respondents personal economy will affect their retirement decision to some extent. The individuals personal economy is the only identified factor that may affect the individuals in all five different directions, push, pull, jump, stay or stuck. An insufficient economic compensation can push the individual out of labour. A good economic compensation on the other hand can influence the individual to stay, further

improving the individuals personal economy. A bad personal economy can force the individual to continue working thereby being stuck while a good personal economy on the other hand can pull the individual out of labour or enable him or her to jump.

The pension system and its design was also one of the aspects that the respondents took into account. The design of today's system provides incentive to remain in labour and disadvantages to employees who retire earlier than the traditional retirement age. From a push, pull, jump, stay and stuck perspective stuck (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003) the pension system as such doesn't push the individual out of labour, pull the individual out of labour nor influence the individual to jump. It can however either influence or force the individual to remain in work, thereby being stay and stuck factors.

To conclude, Analysing the different aspects influencing the individuals retirement decision using the concepts of push, pull, jump, stay and stuck (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003) clarifies how different aspects affect individuals retirement decision. The knowledge gained from the analysis may further aid the understanding of what strategies are effective to retain older workers within the case company.

### **Analysing the Results Using the Four Dimensions of Influencing Factors**

Adding the second framework and dividing the aspects into either of the four dimensions of influencing factors (Büsch et al., 2012) further aids the understanding of the respondents retirement decision. To illustrate, a compilation of the two analytical frameworks together with the empirical results have been summarized in Table 3 below. Table 3 creates a good picture of what dimension the different factors identified in the interviews belong to and how the different dimensions affect individuals retirement decision from a push, pull, jump, stay and stuck perspective (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003).

*Personal factors* identified by the results were; health, fear of social isolation and personal economy. *Family-related factors* identified were: spending time with family and friends, caregiving responsibilities and partners retirement decision. *Work and organisational-related factors* identified were: the physical and psychosocial work-environment, organisational change, the ability to contribute, the feeling of meaning, personal development, recognition,

work content, flexibility, autonomy, colleagues, financial compensation and loyalty. *Socio-economic factors* identified was; the pension system.

	<b>Negative aspects</b>	<b>Positive aspects</b>
<b>Early Retirement</b>	<b>Push</b>	<b>Pull/jump</b>
	<b>Work and organisational-related factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Physical and psychosocial work environment</li> <li>- Organisational change</li> <li>- Not able to contribute</li> <li>- Not meaningful</li> <li>- No recognition</li> <li>- Unstimulating work tasks</li> <li>- No personal development</li> <li>- Weak relationship to colleagues</li> <li>- Financial reasons, unsatisfactory compensation</li> </ul> <b>Personal factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ill health</li> </ul>	<b>Personal factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make the most of the last years in life</li> <li>- Feeling of freedom</li> <li>- Rich personal/social life</li> <li>- Good personal economy</li> </ul> <b>Family-related factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spending time with family and friends</li> <li>- Caregiving responsibilities</li> <li>- Partner is retiring/retired</li> </ul>
<b>Late Retirement</b>	<b>Stuck</b>	<b>Stay</b>
	<b>Personal factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fear of social isolation</li> <li>- Bad personal economy</li> </ul> <b>Socio-economic factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The pension system</li> </ul>	<b>Work and organisational-related factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to contribute</li> <li>- Fun work tasks</li> <li>- Learning and developing</li> <li>- Strong relationship to colleagues</li> <li>- Social context</li> <li>- Work content</li> <li>- Feeling of meaning</li> <li>- Autonomy</li> <li>- Recognition, wanted and needed</li> <li>- Flexibility</li> <li>- Loyalty to the organisation</li> <li>- Financial reasons, improved personal economy</li> </ul> <b>Socio-economic factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The pension system</li> </ul>

*Table 3.* A compilation of the empirical results using the analytical framework.

Departing from the four dimensions of influencing factors (Büsch et al., 2012) when interpreting the findings in Table 3 there are a few things that stand out. (a) Work and

organisational factors constitute the majority of the factors in the push and stay squares. Demonstrating that the employer has great influence on individuals' retirement decision just as Allen et al. (2010) argue in their article. (b) The pension system only influences the respondents decision to stay which goes to show that the retirement system does what it is designed to do, provides incentive for a prolonged working life (Kruse, 2010). (c) Family related factors are only represented in the pull/jump square indicating that family related aspects generally influences the individual to exit labour life.

Table 3 further illustrates the complexity of individuals retirement decisions. It is evident that analysing the results using the chosen analytical framework, provided a better understanding of the decision making process surrounding retirement and how different aspects may drive individuals decision in different directions.

## Discussion

In this chapter the research questions are discussed and answered in light of the chapters background, previous research, empirical findings and analysis.

- *What work and non-work related factors drive engineers' to either extend working life or to retire?*

The stay square in Table 3 outlines the work and organisational-related factors that the engineers reported would influence their decision to remain in labour. They were; the ability to contribute, fun work tasks, opportunities for personal development, good colleagues, being part of a social context, feeling of meaning acquired when working, autonomy to decide over one's work, recognition, flexibility, compensation and loyalty. The factors influencing engineers to remain in work are similar to the factors identified by previous literature important for individuals decision to remain in labour independent of profession (Anxo et al., 2017; Lord, 2002; Nilsson, 2013). This suggests that engineers are not much different than other occupations when it comes to the drivers of a continued working life. Table 3 furthermore illustrates how it out of the four dimensions of influencing factors primarily is work and organisational factors that affect the individual to stay. This finding is significant as it indicates that the employer has decisive impact on whether their employees continue working past retirement or not just as Allen et al. (2010); Henkens et al. (2009) argue. It also indicates that

there are several aspects that the employer has direct effect on that may or may not influence an extended working life.

The Push square in Table 3 outlines the work and organisational-related factors influencing the respondents to retire. They were; the physical and psychosocial work environment, organisational change, unsatisfactory compensation, inability to contribute, no feeling of meaning, no personal development, no recognition, unstimulating work tasks and a weak relationship to one's colleagues. The aspects identified influencing the respondents to retire also correspond with aspects identified by previous literature (Anxo et al., 2017; Nilsson, 2013). By examining the results using the concepts of push, pull, jump, stay and stuck it becomes apparent that failing to satisfy certain stay factors may influence individuals to retire instead. This stresses the importance of working with these aspects and keeping them within the stay square of Table 3. It is equally important however to work with all of the push factors as work environment and health for example were expressed as prerequisites of a prolonged working life. Organisational change will probably be inevitable however as it is part of the organisations development and life. The awareness of its effect on turnover, and specifically on older workers makes it possible however to address the employees going through change.

Aspects outside work influencing the engineers retirement decision can be found in all four of the squares in Table 3, push, pull/jump, stay and stuck. Focusing on the aspects influencing the respondent to retire early, these were ill health, family-related aspects such as spending time with family and friends, caregiving responsibilities, retiring/retired partner and personal factors such as a good personal economy or the feeling of freedom, making the most of the last years in life or a rich personal/social life. Health is a crucial aspect of a person's ability to remain in work irrespective of age, since health declines with age there is a real possibility that ill health may hinder a prolonged working life which is in line with findings in previous research (Anxo et al., 2017; Lord, 2002; Nilsson, 2013). Of the results to determine family-related factors, whether meaning caregiving responsibilities, spending time with friends and family or a retired/retiring partner, always seem to pull the respondents out of labour. Even if previous research has acknowledged that family related aspects typically influence individuals to retire from work this finding is significant. To the best of my knowledge, no previous research has acknowledged the importance of designing practices to prevent this aspect from influencing individuals to retire from labour. Practices that establish work-life balance permitting an extended working life.

Turning to the aspects outside work influencing the respondents to remain in labour these were the pension system, fear of social isolation and a bad personal economy. The pension system may either encourage the individual to stay or force the individual to stay depending on the individual's financial situation. The fear of social isolation or a bad personal economy may also force the individual to stay but for the wrong reasons. These are important to have in mind, identify and support as being forced to stay isn't positive either for the individual or the organisation. Even though the above mentioned aspects are outside work there is still several things organisations can do to influence these aspects. The one may not need to exclude the other, it may be possible to find flexible solutions to satisfy both the individual's personal needs while remaining in labour. By for example promoting good health or offering flexibility so that the individual may attend to family and caregiving needs or other personal interests.

On a broader level, three findings concerning the decision making process deriving from the above analysis and discussion are specifically noteworthy:

- Work and organisational-related factors stand for the majority of stay factors
- Unfulfilled stay factors become push factors
- Family-related aspects always pull the individual out of labour

The first bulletin demonstrates that the employer, in contrast to what one might think, has great impact on aspects influencing employees to remain in labour. Indicating that investments in HR practices aimed at retaining older workers are likely to have good effect. The second bulletin shows that ignoring or failing to work with the aspects that influence individuals to stay may automatically influence older workers to retire. Demonstrating the importance of continuously working with retention management as a preventive measure. The third and final bulletin demonstrates the importance of taking employees' private life into account when discussing the individual's opportunities of an extended working life. Although previous research has acknowledged that family related aspects typically influences individuals' decision to retire there's a general perception in society that work and personal life are to be kept apart. These three findings contribute to broader knowledge of retirement as decision making process and aid the understanding of how employers influence their employees' retirement decision. Also how employees' retirement decision is influenced by his or her personal life. Aspects that may be kept in mind when designing retention strategies to facilitate an extended working life.

- *How does the HR department at the case company strategically work to enable a prolonged working life and reduce the negative effects the aging workforce may have on the organisation?*

Previous research pointed out four organisational practices that are central to reduce the negative effects the aging workforce may have; forecasting, workforce planning, knowledge transfer and retention (Arnold, 2005; Baird & Griffin, 2012; Greller, 2012; Rau & Adams, 2012). The empirical findings showed that the case company engages in both forecasting, workforce planning, knowledge transfer and retention with an aging workforce in mind. The larger focus of the present thesis however lied in understanding engineers retirement decision, why only one interview was held with HR regarding their current strategies and processes. For that reason it is difficult to tell to what extent the case company engages in the strategies aimed at reducing the negative effects of an aging workforce. A greater understanding of the organisations overall strategies would have been beneficial, the results do however provide a good indication of the case company's current strategies and practices.

The empirical results further showed that the case company have a positive view and attitude to working past retirement and take several measures to create a sustainable working life enabling their employees to work longer in life. Regarding the retention of older workers the case company derives from the individual and organisational circumstances from case to case. Is there a desire from the individual to continue working past the traditional retirement age? If so under what circumstances, labour and personal related? Is there a need for the individuals skills and competence within the organisation and if so can organisational arrangements be made to accommodate the individual's needs? As previous research has shown employers attitudes and actions to a prolonged working life determine the opportunities of a continued working life (Henkens et al., 2009). The case company's positive attitude toward working longer in life may be one of the explanations to the shifting trend toward retiring later the case company sees among their employees. Anxo et al. (2017) also noted that positive experiences of others continuing to work influenced the respondents of their study to do the same. Both the HR representative and the engineers gave examples of employees within the organisation that have continued working within the organisation past the traditional retirement age of 65 but also past the upper retirement age 67. These examples may therefore also positively influence other employees within the organisation to do the same.



As visible the overall conditions for an extended working life within the case company are good. One thing that stuck out from the empirical findings however was that the HR respondent stated that they ‘don’t necessarily do anything different for people in different ages’. But when their employees’ turn 67 their permanent contracts are ended and if they chose to continue working for the case company they continue as consultants. This may be interpreted as employees’ older than 67 aren’t employed on the same terms as employees’ in other ages and may be seen as a barrier to an extended working life. At this point it is uncertain why the case company has chosen to work this way, it may have its explanation in legal or practical issues. This is something that case company might need to consider changing to show that the case company is a company that encourages an extended working life.

Further the HR representative expressed that ‘remaining within the organisation past 67 isn’t certain, it is dependent on the organisations need for the individuals experience and knowledge’. This is in line with the findings of both Beal (2016); Flynn (2010) indicating that retaining employee’s carrying key competence may make some employee’s more important to retain than others. Allen et al. (2010) further argues that the development of strategic evidence-based retention management should be preceded by an organisational needs assessment. This reinforces that the case company’s retention management is appropriately performed from a scientific perspective.

- *Based on the engineers’ motives for extending working life how can HR facilitate opportunities for an extended working life?*

The empirical results show that the case company by many means already is a good example of an organisation that promotes a prolonged working life, perceiving older workers as a resource of strategic interest. The findings of the present study and the answers to what may drive engineers retirement decision to either retire or prolong working life proved consistent with the drivers identified by previous research (Anxo et al., 2017; De Vos & Meganck, 2008; Lord, 2002; Nilsson, 2013; Wang & Shi, 2014). Moreover, the interviews with the engineers’ and the answer to research question one provides direction as to which HR practices in fact may promote a prolonged working life for engineers’ within the case company. Addressing both the work and non-work related aspects influencing the respondents to either remain in or retire from work there are five main HR practices that may prevent these aspects from having negative effect on the respondents retirement decision. These five practices being; job design,

recognition and respect, flexible work/work-life balance, work environment and compensation and benefits. The practices and the influencing aspects that they address are listed in Table 4 below.

<b>HR practice</b>	<b>Influencing Aspects</b>
<b>Job Design</b>	Feeling of meaning Ability to contribute Attractive work tasks Personal & professional development Autonomy Workload
<b>Recognition and Respect</b>	Wanted and needed
<b>Flexible Work/Work-life balance</b>	Make the most of the last years in life Feeling of freedom Rich personal/social life Spending time with family and friends Caregiving responsibilities Partner is retiring/retired
<b>Work Environment</b>	Health, Work Ability High workload Stress
<b>Compensation &amp; Benefits</b>	Improved benefits Financial compensation Incentives for a prolonged working life

*Table 4.* Suggested HR practices facilitating an extended working life.

Interpreting table 4, to facilitate a prolonged working life it will be important for the case company to establish an adequate *job design* with challenging and meaningful assignments, possibilities for personal and professional development and the ability to determine and decide over one's workload. *Recognising* older employees as an asset to the organisation as well as recognising their individual significance to the organisation will also be important to retain older workers. The results moreover show that *flexibility* will be important for the retention of older workers enabling a prolonged working life while simultaneously maintaining *work-life balance* as commitment in one's private life may increase. Continuously working to improve the *work environment* for older workers will also be important for their ability to continue

working longer in life. The results indicate that the principal issue the case company needs to work with, with regards to the work environment is stress and high workload. *Compensation and benefits* also have effect on the respondents retirement decision. The benefits perhaps more so, benefits meaning for example more vacation and other benefits providing incentive for a prolonged working life. The findings show that compensation matters for the respondents retirement decision but that compensation alone isn't enough for the individual to extend working life which conforms with previous research.

The practices identified in table 4 are similar to the HR strategies and practices in table 2 (See Appendix), identified by Armstrong-Stassen (2008). The only practice suggested in table 4 that Armstrong-Stassen does not identify is the work environment. The respondents of the present thesis however emphasizes that the work environment is and will be essential to the respondents ability to extend working life. The results show that the work environment alone will not influence the respondents to continue in labour, it can however influence the respondent to retire if unsatisfactory.

Knowing which HR practices are central to promote a longer working life it still is important to recognise that the feeling of meaning for example may infer different things to different individual's. Departing from each person individually like the case company does will be key to ensuring that the practices fulfil their purpose of retaining older employees. Managers will therefore have a key role in realizing the HR practices. Despite knowing what strategies and practices are important to an extended working life it therefore boils down to managements and managers ability to put the aging workforce on the strategic agenda. Creating a setting where there's an awareness that older workers are an asset to the organisation and that they are both willing and capable of continuing to work if given the right circumstances to do so (Calo, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

The thesis's introduction, background and previous research implies that the door to working past retirement is closed and perhaps beginning to become ajar. To tackle the implications of an aging workforce the door to extending working life needs to be opened. But how is the door opened and how can HR strategies and practices be constructed to facilitate an extended working life? This is where the thesis took root.

The study's findings and the identification of push, pull, jump, stay and stuck factors (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1990; Shultz et al., 1998; Snartland & Øverbye, 2003) proved consistent with previous research regarding what factors influence employees' to extend working life and what factors influences them to retire. Somewhat simplified, the ability to contribute, meaningful work, autonomy, personal development, social context, recognition and flexibility influenced engineers' to prolong working life. Not being able to contribute, no feeling of meaning, no personal development, a weak relationship to co-workers, no flexibility, no recognition, ill health, family and friends, a bad physical and psychosocial work environment, reorganisation and to pursue a dream or to make the most of the last years in life where aspects that influenced engineers' to retire. The empirical findings together with the analytical framework further permitted the identification of *five* HR practices (job design, recognition and respect, flexible work/work-life balance, work environment and compensation and benefits) central to the promotion of an extended working life for the case company. Besides the identification of HR practices the analytical framework led to *three* significant findings important to understand the decision making process surrounding retirement and how organisational practices impact the retirement decision of their employees. (1) Work and organisational-related factors stand for the majority of stay factors. (2) Unfulfilled stay factors become push factors. (3) Family-related aspects always pull the individual out of labour. Hence, the findings of the present thesis brought insights as to what might drive engineers' retirement decision and departing from the drivers, how appropriate HR strategies can be developed to retain older workers. The results from the present study further showed that the door to retirement is in the case company's case wide open for those employees whose competence is needed and who's willing to prolong working life. Even if the present thesis provides suggestions for further development, the case company can already be seen as a good example of a company that retains older workers and much can be learned from their way of working.

Furthermore, the analytical framework applied proved to be appropriate to both understanding employees' decision making, but also to identify and develop HR practices designed to retain older workers. Bridging the existing gap between scientific knowledge and practice while simultaneously demonstrating the validity of the chosen framework. The analytical framework may together with Allen et al.'s (2010) model of development of strategic evidence-based retention strategies (Figure 1.) further advantageously be used as a tool for developing appropriate retention strategies both on an individual- and organisational level. Therefore I am confident that the knowledge gained from the present thesis may aid other organisations in

opening the door to an extended working life as well. Further improving the societal and organisational outlooks of this socioeconomic problem.

## **Contribution to Existing Research and to the Field of HR**

The present thesis contributes to previous research with increased knowledge regarding the decision making process surrounding retirement and how different aspects drive individuals' decision to either prolong working life or to retire. Further, the thesis contributes to the lack of knowledge regarding the retention of older workers and what employment practices may encourage older workers to postpone retirement. The thesis also contributes to the lack of knowledge on how to develop HR practices aimed at retaining older workers and offers a tool and way of working to develop appropriate retention strategies.

The thesis contributes to practitioners' within the field of HRM with insights as to what drives individuals retirement decisions. Moreover, how organisational strategies and practices can be designed and developed to prevent the negative effects the aging workforce may have on organisations. The thesis further emphasises the importance of taking a strategic grip on the challenges related to an aging workforce.

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

The present thesis studied what drives engineers' decision to prolong working life or to retire and found that engineers' value the same or similar aspects as individuals of other occupations. It would be interesting if further research looked deeper into this finding by performing a comparative study with several occupational groups to see if the notion found in this study holds true.

The present thesis regarded white collar workers and the drivers of an extended working life. A search of the literature shows that limited research has studied blue collar workers intention to remain in labour past the traditional retirement age. It would therefore be interesting if further research studied what drives blue collar workers to extend working life, and if, and if so how, it compares to white collar workers.

The present thesis concluded in five HR practices appropriate to for the retention of older workers. It would be very interesting if further research used the analytical framework, just as the present thesis does, as a tool for developing retention strategies in several other organisations. To furthermore test the tool through longitudinal studies to see if the identified retention strategies in fact facilitate an extended working life.

Although HR departments are the catalysts of practices aimed for retaining older workers, managers play a vital role in implementing and employing these practices. For this reason further research should study managers role in facilitating opportunities of an extended working life.

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## Appendix

Figure 2. Estimated need for engineers (yellow line) and number of engineers graduating up to the schoolyear 2034/35 (blue bars). (Universitetskanslersämbetet, 2015, p. 42)

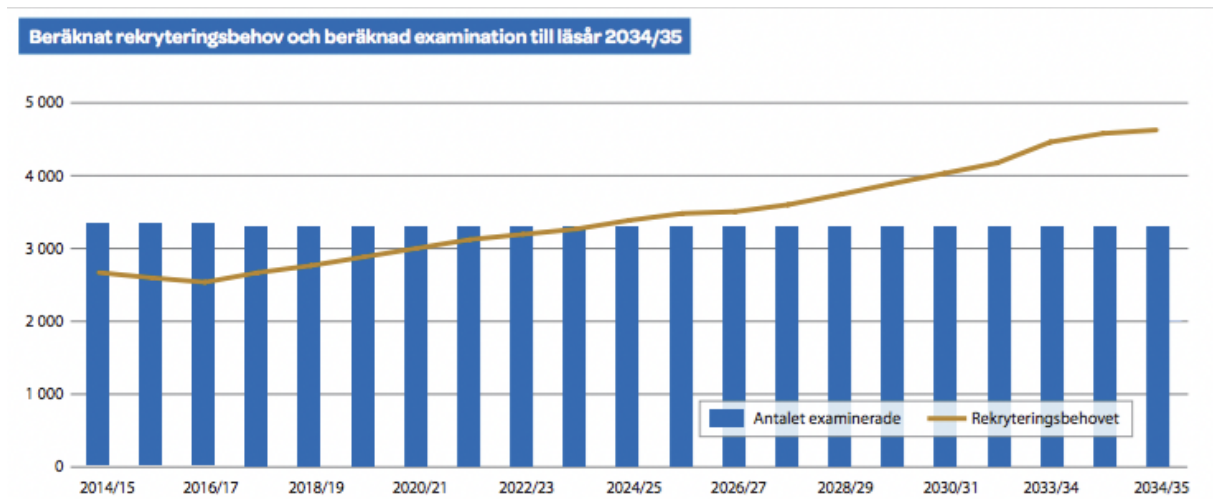


Figure 3. Coding Tree. Themes, codes and categories stemming from the data set.

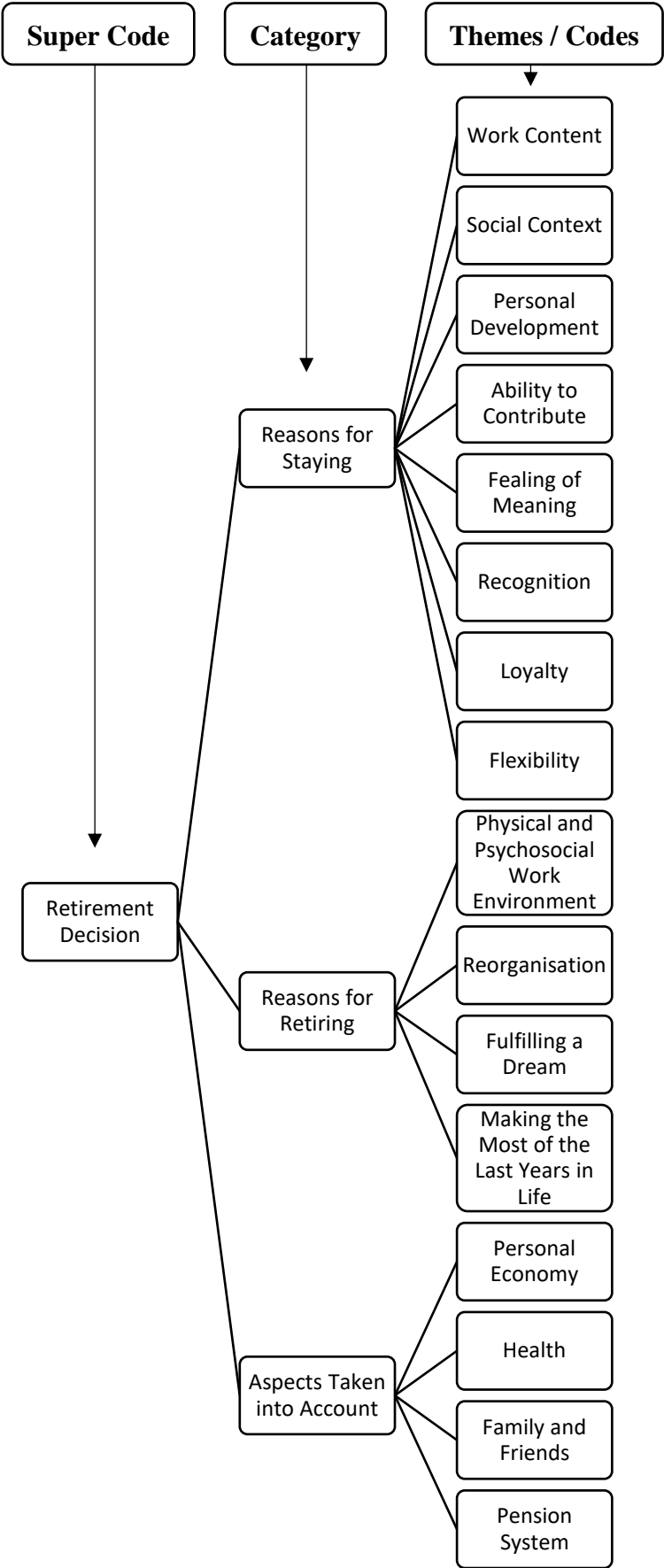


Table 2. The seven most important HR practices for mature workers and their respective practices. (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008, p. 338)

<p><b>Flexible Work Options</b>          Providing flexible work schedules (days/hours worked)          Providing a reduced work week (part-time)          Offering job sharing (two people sharing a full-time position)          Offering unpaid leave (education, elder or parental care)          Providing Options to work from home</p>
<p><b>Job Design</b>          Providing challenging and meaningful assignments          Creating new roles for mature employees          Redesigning jobs to be more appealing to mature employees          Ensuring mature employees have input in determining their workload          Providing opportunities to transfer to a less stressful/strenuous job</p>
<p><b>Mature Employee Training</b>          Targeting mature employees for training to update their job skills          Targeting mature employees for training to acquire new skills          Providing access to new technology that will assist mature employees in performing their job          Providing the same opportunities as younger employees to be promoted or transferred</p>
<p><b>Manager Training</b>          Providing age awareness training programs for managers (how to manage mature employees and how to avoid bias in appraising the performance of these employees)          Educating managers about effective ways to utilize mature employees</p>
<p><b>Performance Evaluation</b>          Ensuring mature employees have input in setting performance standards          Conducting fair performance appraisals (free from age bias)          Providing mature employees with useful feedback about their job performance          Providing feedback to mature employees in a supportive manner</p>
<p><b>Compensation</b>          Offering incentives for continued employment          Increasing financial compensation          Improving benefits by providing more vacation time and additional time off</p>
<p><b>Recognition and Respect</b>          Recognizing the accomplishments of mature employees          Recognizing the experience, knowledge, skill and expertise of mature employees          Recognizing the role that mature employees can play (e.g. serving as mentors)          Ensuring that mature employees are treated with respect by others in the organization          Showing appreciation for a job well done</p>