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Profiles of mature job seekers: Connecting needs and desires to work characteristics

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Summary The number of mature job seekers actively pursuing employment is increasing, and it is critical to recognize the variety of needs and desires they want from employment. We hypothesized that mature job seekers would be grouped into meaningful clusters based on their desires for work and that these groups would differ regarding the work features they were looking for in a new job. Using survey data from a sample of 173 mature job seekers over age forty, we identified three clusters: Those who work primarily for monetary and family reasons (which we labeled *satisficers*), those who seek personal satisfaction and learning opportunities from employment (*free agents*), and those who seek employment for a broad variety of reasons (*maximizers*). These three groups differed in their preferences for work schedule, availability of benefits, and developmental opportunities. We conclude by discussing potential individual-level interventions and organizational recruitment and staffing strategies for different groups of mature job seekers. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

Shifting population demographics and changing career trajectories are causing organizations to re-evaluate how they define the place of older workers in the workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, of approximately 140 million employees in the US, six million are above the age of 65. Roughly 77 million are above the age of 40 and are therefore defined as older workers by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), and the proportion of mature workers is projected to grow (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). AARP (2008) found that 70 percent of people aged 45–75 indicated that they are planning to work in their retirement years. The population of mature workers is increasing, and these workers are planning to work longer than in the past. Due to economic hardship, layoffs/restructuring, or work/family conflict, finding an acceptable job can be challenging for mature workers.

When mature job seekers hit the job market, they may be motivated by a number of non-salary factors (Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007). Policymakers and HR professionals are challenged to

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maximize staffing decisions involving mature job seekers. Research investigating the motivations of mature job seekers can provide insight into the reasons that they are pursuing work, as well as how these differences translate into preferred work arrangements. Designing successful strategies for supporting mature job seekers in the job search process requires a clear understanding of what they need and want from their work environment.

A successful job search requires a match between the needs and desires of job seekers and the organizational or job characteristics offered. The present study extends the literature on mature job seekers in two substantial ways. First, we specifically focus on the different patterns of work-related desires and needs among mature job seekers. Mature workers are often classified as a single group with a uniform pattern of needs (i.e., Rau & Adams, 2005). However, this may be too coarse a grouping, as Noonan (2005) states ''there is no 'typical older worker''' (p. 237). Previous studies have demonstrated that subgroups of mature job seekers, in terms of age range and availability of social security benefits, vary in characteristics such as work motivation (AARP, 1993; Loi & Shultz, 2007). To further explore this variability among mature job seekers, we considered reasons why they would seek employment. Second, we focus on specific job characteristics that are most preferred by the subgroups of mature workers based on their different patterns of needs and desires. This linkage between what mature workers *want* from their jobs and what the job actually *offers* can inform recruitment strategies, training needs assessments, and career counseling programs that are specifically aimed at mature workers.

Our investigation includes job seekers aged 40 and above. These individuals qualify for protection under the ADEA. In addition, as Ng and Feldman (2008) have pointed out, age 40 also marks the midpoint of the active workforce. Because the age of 40 is also typically referred to as the beginning of middle age, we struggle to refer to our sample as ''older'' and instead have adopted the term ''mature.'' We see this as more inclusive and a label that is *not* synonymous with chronological age (as there is wide variability in those aged 40 vs. 60, for example). The mature worker term is also consistent with language used by our field partner in this study.

Challenges specific to mature job seekers

A key issue is that mature job seekers may have different experiences in recruitment, selection, and training processes, emphasizing the need for research specific to this population (Beatty & Visser, 2005; Eberts & Hobbie, 2008; Hedge, Borman, & Lammlein, 2005: Rothwell, Sterns, Spokus, & Reaser, 2008; Shultz & Adams, 2007). Particularly relevant is research and theory investigating how mature job seekers navigate the search process and achieve successful re-employment. We discuss four issues related to the job search that merit special attention for mature job seekers: Age and job performance, age bias, effects of unemployment, and age differences in the job search process.

Age and job performance

The stereotypical belief that mature workers are less productive than younger workers has not been supported by empirical research, which indicates that age and performance are not related (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989) or even *positively* related (Waldman & Avolio, 1986). This discrepancy between perception and reality is somewhat explained by the finding that the age/job performance relationship is mediated by factors such as individual skills and organizational design (Salthouse & Maurer, 1996). A meta-analysis by Ng and Feldman (2008) indicated that mature workers engaged in more citizenship behavior and safety behavior and less counterproductive work behavior than their younger counterparts. Thus, for most operationalizations of job performance, the common perception of lower performance for mature workers is not supported.

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Age bias in the workplace

Age bias is a continuing conflict for mature workers and their employers and is most frequently seen in differential training opportunities, pay structures, and layoffs (Finkelstein & Farrell, 2007; Hedge et al., 2005). The number of ADEA cases has been increasing over the last five years due to reductions-in-force and the increasing number of workers reaching retirement age (Zink & Gutman, 2005). In an employment interview context, older applicants received lower overall ratings than did younger applicants even though their qualifications for the position were equivalent (Avolio & Barrett, 1987). Age stereotypes have resulted in age discrimination for simulated selection decisions (Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995) as well as actual decisions by employers (Lahey, 2008). Given these results, age stereotypes may disadvantage mature job seekers who may be competing with younger counterparts for employment.

Effects of unemployment

Research clearly shows that unemployment negatively impacts well-being. In a meta-analysis, McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, and Kinicki (2005) found that unemployed individuals are less satisfied with their lives, have poorer mental health, and report lower physical health than those who are employed. Warr (1987) suggests that such effects are due to critical life elements (i.e., interpersonal relationships and financial security) being absent or reduced, which then affects mental health variables.

The interplay of age and unemployment on key outcomes is complex. Although the unemployment rate for the age 45+ group is lower relative to younger age groups, long-term unemployment (26 weeks or longer) is more frequent for those above age 45 (Emsellem & Semidey, 2008; Jorstad, Mak, & Cohen, 2008), and mature discouraged job seekers experience more financial difficulty, social isolation, and depression (Rife & First, 1989). Thus, financial, interpersonal, and mental health outcomes may be better for mature *workers* but worse for mature *job seekers*.

Age and the job search process

Research indicates that age is negatively related to a number of job search outcomes. A meta-analysis by Kanfer, Wanberg, and Kantrowitz (2001) indicated that age is negatively related to job search intensity ($\rho = -0.06$) and likelihood of becoming employed ($\rho = -0.07$), indicating that mature job seekers engage in fewer job search activities and are slightly less likely to find a job. Similarly, Wanberg, Watt, and Rumsey (1996), found that job search intensity is positively related to re-employment for younger job seekers, but negatively related to re-employment for people over age forty. Mature job seekers report several barriers to the job search process such as age, being overqualified, and finding fewer jobs that match their experience (Allan, 1990). Adams and Rau (2004) studied retirees seeking a bridge job and found that those who were younger, perceived fewer job search constraints, and had access to social support were more likely to engage in job seeking. More research specific to mature job seekers is needed given differential relationships between age groups and various job search experiences.

Why older adults work

Although of central importance, money is not the only reason individuals want to work (Morse & Weiss, 1955). Work may provide a wide range of beneficial features, and Warr (1987) argued that lack of these features (i.e., financial security, interpersonal relationships, valued social roles) due to job loss might be debilitating. The effects of work features on individuals may vary as each person differs in the priorities they assign to these features.

Psychological processes underlying aging, cohort effects, changes in the nature of work, and the surrounding social context all shape patterns of needs and desires for work (Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes,

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2007), consistent with the life-span development perspective (Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Normative age-graded factors (age-related physical and cognitive changes), normative history-graded factors (experiences and events shared by age cohort), and non-normative factors (experiences unique to individuals) characterize a person's unique developmental pattern (Baltes et al., 1980; Sterns & Huyck, 2001).

The dynamic conceptualization of work life is especially important when understanding needs and desires of middle-aged and older adults (Sterns & Subich, 2002). Midlife is characterized as a ''re-negotiation'' period because individuals tend to experience role changes in both work and family contexts, often causing them to re-evaluate their life priorities (Sterns & Huyck, 2001). Kalleberg and Loscocco (1983) found that younger workers tend to emphasize financial and intrinsic reasons to work when compared to older cohorts. Conversely, working to achieve other life goals becomes more important for older workers.

Mor-Barak (1995) defined four categories of meaning of work applicable for older job seekers (social contact, personal, financial, and generativity) and linked them to job search outcomes. These factors also contribute to bridge employment satisfaction, attitude toward retirement, and occupational self-efficacy (Dendinger, Adams, & Jacobson, 2005). Those who raised generative reasons for working were more satisfied with their bridge jobs and kept positive attitudes toward retirement. Similarly, people who emphasized social reasons for work (i.e., interacting with others) had more negative attitudes toward retirement. Taken together, these findings support the notion that a variety of financial as well as non-financial reasons will influence the job search process for mature job seekers.

Dimensions of mature job seekers' desire for work

Based on the review above, we identified nine domains (detailed below) of motivations for mature job seekers to pursue employment. Because this line of research is still developing, this taxonomy was intended as a starting point in investigating the variability of mature job seeker motivations, as well as a basis for item writing in the current study.

Security

Although many mature workers view non-financial desires as important, financial need is the strongest motivator to work (AARP, 2008). Health benefits also are important, and many employers do not offer post-retirement healthcare coverage, which can be a strong motivator for older workers to remain working until they are eligible for Medicare or Medicaid (Gustman & Steinmeier, 1994; Hursh, Lui, & Pransky, 2006). The general shift from defined benefit pension plans to defined contribution plans has provided a strong incentive to remain in the workforce longer (Toosi, 2007).

Family

Family circumstances influence older adults' desire to work in various ways. People may want to spend more time with family, as individuals experience changes in family roles in midlife (Sterns & Huyck, 2001). Parenting duties may decline, but many workers may acquire a new caregiving role for elderly parents or grandchildren (Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007). Some may view family obligations as an incentive to continue working, while others may choose to work less or withdraw from the workforce.

Personal

Individuals vary in how they want to use their time. Individuals must balance their post-career work and leisure preferences, and finding work can improve overall time management (Kim & Feldman, 2000). Using time in a meaningful manner and simply occupying time are reasons why some older adults seek

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bridge employment (Ulrich & Brott, 2005). Some older adults are uncertain about the free time that retirement can provide, and they continue working because work keeps them busy (Noonan, 2005).

Work
Staying connected with one's career is another reason why mature job seekers pursue work (Ulrich & Brott, 2005). Individuals vary regarding the extent to which they identify with their profession. Thus, work can be an important part of who they are and provide a great deal of satisfaction. In predicting retirement age, those who are more committed to their career are more likely to postpone their retirement (Adams, 1999).

Learning
Work provides people with an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills as well as to retain existing skill sets. This could range from formal training and developmental activities provided by organizations to more informal day-to-day usage of work skills and knowledge. Contrary to aging stereotypes, many older adults express a strong desire for continuous learning and development (Brown, 2003).

Generativity
Generativity is a commitment to make contributions to society that will outlive the individual through teaching, mentoring, and leaving tangible products (McAdams, 2001). Based on Erikson's developmental theory, Mor-Barak (1995) found that older adults often are motivated by generative reasons to work, including desires to seek opportunities to share their experiences, values, and knowledge with younger generations. Increasing numbers of middle-age and older adults are seeking a job that gives them an opportunity to use their experiences and skills to help others (Metlife Foundation & Civic Venture, 2008).

Esteem
This category points to basic psychological desires to be recognized and respected. Previous studies have reported that older adults work to maintain self-esteem, self-efficacy, a sense of pride, and personal satisfaction with life (Dendinger et al., 2005; Mor-Barak, 1995). As family and social relationships change, mature job seekers may place increasing emphasis on their work in maintaining esteem.

Interpersonal
Work provides an opportunity for individuals to build non-family relationships, and such social networks are often invaluable (Hulin, 2002). The social network can serve as a source of information as well as a support system that protects mature adults from aversive events and situations (Vinokur & Caplan, 1987).

Health
Many older adults engage in work or other activities in order to stay physically and mentally active (Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007). In addition, health concerns influence mature worker choices for the type and amount of work (Noonan, 2005).

Clusters of mature job seekers

Given the large potential variability in the desire or motivation for work, we believe that it is important to be able to classify mature job seekers into meaningful subgroups or clusters. Thus, instead of the

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factor analytic perspective, which uncovers how items or sets of items interrelate, one of our main goals is to use patterns of responding on the desire for work dimensions to group mature job seekers into subgroups. If a meaningful set of clusters is determined, key differences between the clusters can be analyzed, supporting our belief that coarse categorizations of job seekers (i.e., ''older job seekers'') can mask differences between groups.

Such an investigation with mature workers does have precedent. Brown (2003), through cluster analysis, identified three subgroups among 1500 working older adults: *Balancers*, *earners*, and *work enthusiasts*. The sample included pre-retirees who were planning to work into retirement and retirees who were employed. Balancers indicated a wide array of needs and desires for their retirement work. These individuals wanted a job that would keep them both physically and mentally active, would be fun and not too stressful, and would make them feel useful and appreciated. In contrast to the balancers, earners were almost exclusively interested in working because they needed the money to support themselves and their families. Work enthusiasts were primarily motivated by an interest in the work itself and career advancement.

In the current study, we are interested in identifying groups among mature job seekers based on their desires and needs toward work using a similar method as Brown (2003). A key difference between the two studies is the sample. Brown's study included securely employed participants, whereas the current study targets active job seekers who are either unemployed or expecting layoffs or job loss in the near future. Active job seekers are likely to differ from securely employed individuals in terms of financial security and motivation to work. Considering the similarities, and differences, between our sample and Brown's, we compare our mature job seeker clusters to Brown's results.

Research question 1: Are there meaningful subgroups (clusters) among mature job seekers based on their desires, or motivation, for work?

Work characteristics sought by mature job seekers

Once meaningful clusters of mature workers are identified, it is useful to determine what kind of work characteristics and/or job features the subgroups are looking for. Understanding the types of work characteristics that different subgroups are pursuing may be useful to organizations in order to maximize workforce productivity and diversity. This allows organizations to tailor certain jobs and recruiting material to targeted subgroups. Recommendations from the literature include making targeted recruiting efforts, offering developmental opportunities (i.e., through on-site and job-related training, opportunity to mentor, etc.), and enhancing flexibility at work (including phased retirement options, flexible time, and various caregiving benefits, etc.).

Utilizing tailored recruiting strategies

Effective staffing strategies can start from tailored recruiting strategies. Doverspike, Taylor, Shultz, and McKay (2000) suggested three areas to consider when recruiting the baby boomer generation: The advertising process, the interview, and follow-up process, as well as the actual nature of the work. Advertising should take older workers' interests into account in terms of the content, placement, and modality. Organizations also can communicate through a friendly environment for mature job seekers during the interview and follow-up process (Doverspike et al., 2000).

Creating opportunities for development and knowledge transfer

Keeping knowledge and skills up-to-date is critical for mature workers to continue working. Some organizations have created on-call talent pools in which retirees can transfer their knowledge to the younger generation. For example, YourEncore, initially founded by Proctor & Gamble and Eli Lilly,

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helps skilled retirees return to work. It serves as a placement agency by matching retired scientists and engineers with various short-term projects posted by companies (AARP, 2008). By doing so, experienced retirees have opportunities to apply their expertise to projects that they choose to participate in.

Offering flexible work arrangements

Reaser, Spokus, Sterns, and Rothwell (2006) found that some employers offer flex-time work schedules and optional benefits to retain or hire older workers. Mature job seekers may need positions that allow them to limit their work hours, typically referred to as a phased-down retirement process. Flexible or reduced work hours are important factors in attracting mature job seekers who are concerned about work/life balance (Rau & Adams, 2005). For example, Baptist Health South Florida offers paid time-off hours, which can be either accumulated or received as salary, allowing for personal management of work/life balance (Morton, Foster, & Sedlar, 2005).

Based on the above work characteristics, we propose that different subgroups, based on varied motivations for pursuing work, will be attracted to different organizational features.

Research question 2: Do subgroups of mature job seekers, identified based on their desires for work, show different patterns in their preferences for work characteristics?

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited at a job fair targeting job seekers age 40+ in a large midwestern metropolitan area (Fall, 2007). The job fair was hosted by a non-profit organization that provides various services to older adults in the community. Their services range from a senior employment services program to a retiree volunteer program. This organization biannually hosts a job fair. Job seekers learned about the job fair through various media (i.e., newspaper, radio, TV, organization's website), flyers distributed at various community locations, other employment programs offered, and word-of-mouth.

Approximately 1350 job seekers and 45 employers attended the job fair. The employers provided job opportunities in areas such as clerical, customer service, accounting, food services, sales, healthcare services, and engineering ranging from entry-level to management. Employers represented various industries such as healthcare, telecommunications, transportation, insurance, education, and hospitality. Some employers attended with a specific interest in hiring mature job seekers whereas others participated to find job candidates in general.

The job seekers received a paper-and-pencil survey when they visited a survey booth staffed by the researchers. The survey consisted of focal questions for this study as well as feedback for the job fair. After providing informed consent, participants filled out the survey either on-site or returned the survey via mail. It took approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. Upon completion, participants were thanked and given an envelope opener or keychain inscribed with the field partner's contact information as a small gift. A total of 182 job seekers completed the survey, and most were completed on-site (about 10 percent chose to mail their survey). A total of nine cases were removed in the analysis for a variety of reasons: Five respondents did not complete any of the desire items, three respondents were below age 40, and one individual showed a careless responding pattern, resulting in a final sample size of 173. The mean age of sample was 57.3 (a range of 41 to 76). Among the final sample, about 40 percent was male. The

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majority of the participants were white; 77 percent White, 17 percent Black, 1.2 percent Asian/Pacific islander, less than 1 percent for Hispanic or Native American categories, 1.7 percent other ethnic background. Participants also varied in educational attainment; 7 percent some high school education, 31 percent high school or equivalent, 23 percent some college education, 13 percent associate degree, 11 percent bachelor's degree, 4 percent some graduate-level education, and 10 percent graduate degree. Approximately 47 percent of participants were married. This sample is similar to Brown (2003) in average age, but had a wider age range. Furthermore, in the Brown study, respondents were working retirees and pre-retirees who were asked about their plans to work into retirement. By contrast, our sample includes people above age 40 who are currently searching for a job for a variety of reasons. Although we did not directly measure whether the respondents were currently employed, information collected by the sponsor from the same job fair in the following year indicated that approximately half of the job fair attendants were actively employed when they attended the job fair.

Measures

Mature job seekers' desires

Twenty-four items representing mature job seeker desires were used. Four of the items were based on the Meaning of Work Scale (Mor-Barak, 1995) and six items were adopted from a 10-item questionnaire asking reasons for working into retirement used by Brown (2003). The rest of the items were written specifically for this study to represent other desires suggested by qualitative studies (i.e., Ulrich & Brott, 2005) and our literature review. Items used in previous studies were content analyzed to determine if they represented one of the nine domains we identified as important from the literature (security, family, personal, work, learning, generativity, esteem, interpersonal, and health). Some new items were written in order to make sure that each of these domains was appropriately measured, resulting in a 24-item measure. The items were reviewed by five researchers and modified accordingly.

Participants were asked to indicate how important each item was with regard to their work on a 5-point scale (1 = not important, 5 = very important). Although the items were selected to cover the nine domains detailed earlier, single items, rather than a domain composite score, were used for several reasons. First, items within a domain measured relatively unique content and therefore were not intended to reflect a latent construct. For instance, although it is likely that many people will want both financial security and health benefits from their employment, these are separate aspects of the security domain. Second, since we were approaching the mature job seekers and asking them to complete the survey while they were attending the job fair, it was critical that the needs and desires measure be as short as possible.

External variables

Preferred work characteristics: Fifteen work characteristics were included in this study based on existing surveys (i.e., AARP, 2008). The items covered work schedules (part-time, full-time, flexible hours), team orientation, challenging tasks, short-term or long-term job commitment, on-the-job training, benefits (health, financial, caregiving), educational assistance, paid time-off, recruitment and other programs targeting mature workers, and workplace diversity. Participants were asked to evaluate the criticality of each work characteristic with respect to their future employment, using a 5-point Likert scale for response (1 = doesn't matter, 5 = must have).

Preference in relation to previous job: Participants were asked to indicate if their preferred industry, job type, and work schedule was identical to their previous job. Participants provided a check mark if they were specifically looking for the same industry, job type, or schedule from the previous job.

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Demographic information: Age, gender, ethnic background, education level, and marital status were included. Although more than two categories were included in a survey for ethnic background, education, and marital status, these variables were dichotomized in order to show profiles of each cluster in a clear manner. Ethnic background was coded into white or non-white. Education was classified into a bachelor's degree or higher versus no bachelor's degree. Marital status was coded as married or non-married.

Data analyses

The proportion of missing values among desire items was relatively small (1.1 percent) and was scattered throughout the survey and across respondents, and we designated the data as missing at random (MAR; Schafer & Graham, 2002). We then adjusted the correlation matrix of variables with the expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm and conducted a multiple imputation procedure with NORM (Schafer, 1999). This process resulted in a single dataset with missing data replaced (Schafer & Graham, 2002; Sinharay, Stern, & Russell, 2001).

We performed a two-stage cluster analysis with 24 desire items using Ward's method in the first step in order to identify the number of clusters and K-means analysis for final cluster membership (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984; Ward, 1963). Since the cluster analysis procedure does not use a significance test to determine the optimal solution, it is important to examine cluster differences on external variables in order to have confidence that the clusters represent meaningful, empirically derived subgroups of people (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). One-way ANOVAs were performed for age and the 15 preferred work characteristics. When the omnibus test was significant, a Scheffé test was conducted as a post-hoc test, which provides more conservative results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Chi-square tests were conducted for industry, job type, and schedule preference in relation to previous jobs as well as other demographic variables (gender, ethnic background, education, and marital status).

Results

Cluster analysis

The hierarchical cluster analysis suggested a three-cluster solution. A large jump in the fusion coefficients occurred when three clusters were merged into two. Thus, we conducted K-means cluster analysis and specified that individuals be assigned to one of three clusters. Table 1 presents means of the desires for each cluster. Across all clusters, financial security was an important reason for work as was staying healthy and mentally active. However, the clusters differed with regard to how other desires were emphasized relative to financial security.

The individuals in Cluster 1 (26.6 percent of total sample) put more priority on financial security, as it was rated as more important than the other desires. They were also seeking employment to obtain health benefits and to stay healthy. Another notable pattern of this group was higher scores on family-related variables compared with other desires. They considered family responsibilities and satisfaction with family as important reasons to work. For individuals classified into Cluster 1, generative desires and personal use of time did not seem to be a priority. This group was seeking employment primarily to earn income and take care of their family, and fulfilling other life goals through their employment seemed to be less important. Cluster 2 was the smallest of the clusters (16.8 percent of total sample). This group is characterized by low family-related desires and a focus on individual-level goals. Feeling satisfied by their work, learning new skills, and staying healthy were raised as important reasons by individuals in Cluster 2.

Cluster 3 was the largest in size (56.6 percent of total sample), and individuals in this cluster gave high scores across all the desires. Unlike the other groups, there is no one desire that stands out from the

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Table 1. Cluster means on the 24 desire items used to form the clusters

		Cluster 1 Satisficer	Cluster 2 Free agent	Cluster 3 Maximizer
	n	46	29	98
Security	Financial security	4.50	4.31	4.87
	Health benefits	4.24	3.24	4.68
Family	Family obligation	4.20	1.59	4.60
	Family time	4.15	3.59	4.79
	Family satisfaction	4.20	4.14	4.90
Personal	Own time	3.78	3.79	4.50
	Dream	3.54	3.28	4.43
	Daily structure	3.52	3.72	4.59
	Use of time	3.57	4.52	4.83
Work	Career connection	3.59	4.34	4.85
	Work satisfaction	4.22	4.62	4.89
Learning	Skill maintenance	3.80	4.45	4.87
	New learning	4.11	4.62	4.82
Generativity	Social participation	3.50	3.83	4.54
	Contribution to society	3.74	4.00	4.65
	Passing knowledge	3.65	4.03	4.82
Intrinsic	Status and respect	3.74	4.38	4.86
	Self-esteem	3.93	4.38	4.97
	Satisfaction with life	4.17	4.59	4.94
Interpersonal	Social network	3.83	4.45	4.79
Health	Reduction in work demands	4.02	4.41	4.83
	Subjective health	4.28	4.62	4.93
	Mentally active	4.24	4.62	4.94
	Physically active	3.89	4.14	4.49

others to characterize this group. Although financial aspects remained important, this group also indicated that desires related to family, personal time use, career, learning, generativity, self-esteem, social life, and health needs were all expected as well.

Based on the observed characteristics, we labeled Cluster 1 as *satisficers*, Cluster 2 as *free agents*, and Cluster 3 as *maximizers*. The terms ''maximizing'' and ''satisficing'' come from research involving decision-making strategies (Simon, 1955). This distinction between maximizers and satisficers has been applied to the job search context previously (Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006). Some people search for the best solution by exploring all possible choices (maximizers), while others settle for a solution that is good enough (satisficers). In the current study, individuals in Cluster 1 were looking for a job largely for financial reasons and were willing to negotiate on the other aspects that their employment may provide them. In contrast, individuals in Cluster 3 were searching for a job that satisfies their wide spectrum of desires and did not seem to prioritize their job expectations. Cluster 2 was labeled as free agents because these individuals had fewer external factors forcing them to find a job (i.e., family obligation) and could pursue an employment opportunity to fulfill their individual desires.

Cluster differences with external variables

One-way ANOVAs and Chi-square tests were performed on the demographic variables and preferences regarding work characteristics to further explain distinguishing features between clusters (see Table 2).

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Table 2. Analysis of external variables for three clusters

	Cluster 1 Satisficer	Cluster 2 Free agent	Cluster 3 Maximizer	F or χ^2
Demographic variables				
Mean age (range)	55.23(41–71) $_{a}$	59.68(48–76) $_{b}$	57.54(42–76) $_{a\ b}$	3.19*
Gender (% male)	60.5	22.2	36.8	11.37**
Ethnicity (% white)	84.4	89.3	72.2	5.13
Education (% four-year degree)	34.8	27.6	20.6	3.36
Marital status (% married)	57.8	28.6	49.0	5.99
Preferred organizational/job characteristics				
Part-time	2.72 $_{a}$	3.83 $_{b}$	2.83 $_{a}$	5.46**
Full-time	3.21 $_{a\ b}$	2.96 $_{a}$	3.85 $_{b}$	5.06**
Flexible hours	3.05	2.96	3.33	1.08
Team orientation	3.18	3.07	3.58	2.27
Challenging tasks	3.36	3.39	3.66	1.11
Short-term job commitment	2.50	2.64	2.63	1.48
Long-term job commitment	3.47	3.19	3.81	2.47
On-the-job training	3.62 $_{a\ b}$	3.29 $_{a}$	4.00 $_{b}$	4.37*
Health benefits	3.54 $_{a\ b}$	2.71 $_{a}$	3.77 $_{b}$	5.17**
Financial benefits	3.40 $_{a\ b}$	2.64 $_{a}$	3.77 $_{b}$	6.80***
Caregiving benefits	1.93 $_{b}$	1.15 $_{a}$	2.33 $_{b}$	9.08***
Educational assistance	2.56	2.19	2.90	3.04
Paid time-off	2.98 $_{a}$	2.79 $_{a}$	3.81 $_{b}$	9.29***
Programs for older workers	3.21 $_{a\ b}$	2.74 $_{a}$	3.67 $_{b}$	5.61**
Workplace diversity	3.20 $_{a\ b}$	2.50 $_{a}$	3.38 $_{b}$	4.31*
Preference in relation to previous job				
Same industry (%)	46.5	54.2	65.2	4.36
Same job type (%)	50.0	76.0	64.1	4.83
Same work schedule (%)	51.2	53.8	71.9	6.43*

Note: Higher score on each organizational/job characteristic indicates that participants considered it as must-have attribute. One-way ANOVAs were conducted for continuous variables. For individual rows, means with different subscripts differ significantly with Scheffé test. χ^2 analyses were performed for categorical variables.
$^{*}p < 0.05$. $^{**}p < 0.01$. $^{***}p < 0.002$ (Bonferroni correction).

The purpose of these comparisons was to determine if the clusters showed meaningful differences on variables that were external to the cluster analysis. Significance tests which meet the Bonferroni correction ($p < 0.002$) are also presented in Table 2.

Demographic variables

One-way ANOVAs indicated that the groups differ in age ($F_{(2,\ 164)} = 3.19$, $p < 0.05$). Post-hoc tests showed that free agents ($M = 59.7$) are significantly older than satisficers ($M = 55.2$). The results of χ^2 tests showed group differences in gender composition ($\chi^2 = 11.4$, $p < 0.01$). Satisficers had the higher percentage of males (60.5 percent) whereas maximizers (63 percent) and free agents (78 percent) had more women.

Work characteristics

The one-way ANOVA results showed group differences in nine out of 15 preferred work characteristics. Satisficers, free agents, and maximizers varied in their preference for part-time work ($F_{(2,\ 148)} = 5.46$, $p < 0.01$), full-time work ($F_{(2,\ 149)} = 5.06$, $p < 0.01$), on-the-job training

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($F_{(2,\ 163)} = 4.37$, $p < 0.05$), availability of health benefits ($F_{(2,\ 159)} = 5.17$, $p < 0.01$), financial benefits ($F_{(2,\ 160)} = 6.80$, $p < 0.01$), caregiving benefits ($F_{(2,\ 154)} = 9.08$, $p < 0.001$), paid time-off ($F_{(2,\ 155)} = 9.29$, $p < 0.001$), employment programs targeting older workers ($F_{(2,\ 156)} = 5.61$, $p < 0.01$), and workplace diversity ($F_{(2,\ 163)} = 4.31$, $p < 0.05$). *Post-hoc* tests were conducted to reveal specific group differences. In terms of work schedule, free agents showed stronger preference for part-time jobs and maximizers preferred full-time. Group differences between maximizers and free agents were significant for on-the-job training, benefits (health, financial, caregiving), paid time-off, employment programs for mature workers, and diversity at work. Compared to free agents, maximizers considered the availability of these programs or characteristics as critical. Satisficers were between free agents and maximizers, and their preferences were not significantly different from either group regarding most of these characteristics.

Preference for similar or different jobs

The groups differed in their interest to pursue a work schedule that was different from their previous job ($\chi^2 = 6.43$, $p < 0.05$). Maximizers had a higher percentage of individuals who were looking for the same work schedule as their previous jobs (71.9 percent), compared to satisficers (51.2 percent) and free agents (53.8 percent). Although it was not statistically significant, interesting group differences were observed in preference for the same job type. Seventy-six percent of free agents and 64 percent of maximizers responded that they would like to obtain the same type of job as they held in past jobs. In contrast, roughly half of the satisficers indicated a preference for same job types.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first goal was to extend previous work on the heterogeneity of the desires and motivations of mature job seekers (i.e., Brown, 2003; Loi & Shultz, 2007), who often face a different set of circumstances than those who are continuously employed in steady jobs. This objective was tested empirically with a sample of mature job seekers at a job fair, and cluster analysis indicated that three meaningful clusters of mature job seekers could be identified based on desires for work. The second goal of the study was to analyze differences between these clusters in the work characteristics they were seeking. Although financial security was emphasized as a priority across all three subgroups, the clusters did differ regarding preferred work features, including work schedule, availability of benefits, and targeted opportunities/programs for mature employees. Taken together, these findings offer useful categorizations of mature job seekers that move beyond viewing them largely in terms of chronological age and employment history. Key defining features of the subgroups regarding demographic composition and work characteristics sought are discussed below.

Subgroup profiles of mature job seekers

Satisficers

The primary goal of satisficers in pursuing work was to earn money. This subgroup was younger compared with other groups and contained proportionately more males and married individuals. As such, family care was an important consideration for pursuing work. They also tend to be open to a

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change in industry, job, or schedule from their previous jobs. It is most important for satisficers to find a job to earn money, leading them to be open to a broader range of options.

Free agents

In contrast to satisficers, this subgroup tended to be more comprised of females and unmarried individuals, and free agents tended to have fewer financial and family care obligations. Thus, work may be optional for them as opposed to a necessity, and part-time employment was viewed as particularly attractive. As such, free agents emphasize intrinsic aspects of work such as satisfaction and learning. Although financial security and salary did motivate this subgroup, free agents also emphasized opportunities to learn new things and the importance of being happy with their work and life. Of note, this was the smallest group in the overall sample, and free agents were older on average than members of the other clusters. Although we cannot infer directly from our data, this pattern may reflect individuals who are social security recipients and/or in solid financial situations.

Maximizers

Over half of the sample was in this subgroup, and these individuals had a wide range of desires for work and strong preferences for full-time employment, training opportunities, access to benefits, paid-time off, recruitment specifically targeting mature workers, and workplace diversity. Demographically, this group included a larger proportion of females and individuals with less education. This cluster was also comprised of a larger percentage of non-white individuals than the other subgroups. Maximizers fit a general profile of job seekers who are pursuing work for a variety of reasons and are looking for a number of organizational and job characteristics. As discussed below, this group may present a considerable challenge for policymakers and organizations alike, because maximizers' job search may not be targeted.

The three clusters of mature job seekers have similarities and differences with the groups of mature workers identified by Brown (2003). As with Brown, we identified three clusters with different patterns of work needs and desires adding further support that older workers are heterogeneous. In particular, Brown's ''earners'' had a similar pattern of work desires and demographic characteristics as our ''satisficers.'' In both studies, financial security was paramount for these individuals. By contrast, Brown's ''balancers'' and our ''maximizers'' indicated that both money and enjoyment were important for their employment. In the context of a job search, these individuals have an expectation of an ''ideal'' job as they appear unwilling to actually ''balance'' their needs and desires. Finally, Brown's ''work enthusiasts'' and our ''free agents'' have similarities on the surface: It is a smaller group that emphasizes working for enjoyment and staying active. However, in the Brown study, these individuals did not need to work for monetary reasons and were largely highly educated, professional men. In our study, money is important for this group who were predominantly women seeking a part time job.

Strengths, limitations and future research

The current study explored a useful grouping scheme based on mature job seekers' desires. This is a valuable approach to explore heterogeneity within this group that moves beyond age-graded categorizations. Although age may be a proxy for a general career path (i.e., entrance to the workforce, retirement), chronological age alone does not identify an individual's unique career pattern (Schaie, 1990; Sterns & Subich, 2002). Considering subgroups of mature job seekers based on their desires and motivations for work offers an understanding of the personal, familial, and career factors that are more proximal to job search behavior and outcomes than age categorizations. This study investigates in an exploratory fashion one of many potential meaningful groupings of mature job seeker characteristics.

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Although this study represents an important linkage between motivations for work and preferred work characteristics with mature job seekers, this investigation is not without limitations. Conducting the investigation with a sample of job seekers at a job fair presented a number of challenges. Participation was voluntary, and a larger sample size would have been preferred, although we attempted to address this potential limitation by conducting a multiple imputation procedure in order to keep all of the cases. In addition, the job fair sample obtained may not be entirely representative of mature job seekers in general, as discouraged and/or passive job seekers, those pursuing volunteer work, and job seekers who look for employment in other forms are likely underrepresented in this sample.

A number of measurement issues may limit the interpretation of results. Future research will want to include a number of additional variables to put the results presented here in perspective. For example, income is one of the most important considerations of mature individuals in the workplace (AARP, 2008), and future research should include more descriptive measures of income status. Similarly, the status of individual and/or household social security benefits would also aid in controlling for the financial need for mature job seekers to pursue work (AARP, 1993; Loi & Shultz, 2007). In addition, variables such as employment status (employed vs. unemployed), primary work history (i.e., blue collar, white collar), and length and intensity of the job search could also prove informative for investigations of mature job seekers.

It is also important to note some potential limitations of the procedure and analysis. Cluster analysis was appropriate for our goal of investigating subgroups of mature job seekers. However, results of cluster analysis can be somewhat sample specific. The number and characteristics of clusters may vary with different job markets in terms of region and age groups. Therefore, replication is of particular importance when generalizing from the current results (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984).

In addition, as the goal of cluster analysis is to look at groupings of individuals as opposed to groupings of items, the traditional psychometric considerations of factor structure and internal consistency of the 24 desire items was of lesser importance. Our goal was to be inclusive with regard to desires/motivations for seeking with the belief that there were no latent underlying constructs represented by the items. Future research is encouraged to investigate potential dimensions of desires for work that would lend themselves to a composite structure. Regarding the desire items, it should also be noted that an individual's desires for work in general may differ from how he/she would emphasize needs and desires during a job search.

The above limitations call for at least three related areas for future research. First, replication is essential, potentially with larger samples across different geographic areas, to increase generalizability of the clusters identified in this study. In addition, comparison of the current results of mature job seekers with younger cohorts will deepen our understanding of a wide variety of individuals in job searching. Assuming the clusters are replicated, it would be informative to investigate whether cluster membership is related to various job-search outcomes (i.e., job-seeking behaviors, job-search success, satisfaction with employment options, job satisfaction, etc.). Such research would necessarily involve a longitudinal investigation, but it could prove extremely valuable, particularly in addressing the concerns generated by the current study (i.e., whether the expectations of maximizers ultimately prove unrealistic given national and regional job markets).

Individual and organizational implications

Each subgroup is likely to experience different challenges in obtaining a job that matches their motivation for working. Satisficers will benefit from application of research investigating the predictors of job search success, as they are looking for steady employment and may often be facing severe financial burdens. Training effective job search skills that utilize many sources (i.e., newspaper,

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networking, internet) will be particularly beneficial for this subgroup. As this group is most likely be under pressure to find a job, preparing them for potential challenges (Vinokur & Caplan, 1987; Vuori, Price, Mutanen, & Malmberg-Heimonen, 2005) and assuring social support for these job seekers (Mallinckrodt & Fretz, 1988) will be a key for these individuals to keep searching and become successfully re-employed.

Conversely, free agents are searching for employment that complements their quality of life, work/life balance, and learning goals. As such, free agents are less likely to require direct intervention, but could benefit from access to alternative employment job sites and job boards. Maximizers may represent the greatest difficulty in supporting their job search due to their desire to have work meet so many varied needs. One way to prepare maximizers for job searching may be modifying their expectations. These individuals may benefit from career counseling by prioritizing career goals with individual and family needs so they can conduct a more efficient job search.

Different subgroups also pose challenges and potential solutions for organizations. Creating and advertising selected work features may attract different subgroups of mature job seekers. For example, recruitment and other organizational staffing practices targeting mature workers are more likely to attract maximizers than free agents. Satisficers who primarily seek financial security for fulfilling family responsibility may not be concerned with benefits regarding training, development, or workplace diversity. To attract this group, organizations may emphasize availability of full-time jobs as well as health and financial benefit plans that enable them to support their family. Conversely, free agents are those who are more interested in individual goal achievement. Employers can attract them by offering part-time options including flex-time and assigning tasks that would provide developmental opportunities. Lastly, maximizers are less clear in what they want in organizational/job features, as they are likely to demand many benefits in a given job. Employers may have to negotiate with maximizers by having them choose from alternative compensation packages (i.e., cafeteria-style benefits plans).

Conclusion

Mature workers, aged 40 and above, represent a large portion of today's workforce. The current study extended the previous understanding of mature workers by further providing evidence of heterogeneity among mature job seekers. The three groups identified in this study differ in what they wanted from work and what they sought in a specific job. ''Mature job seekers'' refers to a wide range of individuals, and considering them as a single group may limit the policies and practices which could be developed to meet their various patterns of needs and desires. The group differences should impact how researchers, practitioners, and policymakers conceptualize mature job seekers and create resources that support them.

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