

INSIGHTS INTO TIME & PLACE MANAGEMENT

*Does the influence of Time & Place
Management (TPM) policies on work
engagement vary by physical health status?*

Based on an analysis by Cort W. Rudolph, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at Saint
Louis University and Boris Baltes, Ph.D., Professor at Wayne State University

ABOUT THE STUDY

Health and Aging at the Workplace

Health is a critical issue for the aging workforce, in part because age is correlated with the onset and worsening of some health conditions. Workers in poor health often retire earlier than they had planned. Workers with health conditions who do remain in the labor force may become less engaged in their jobs due to the strain associated with health limitations.

It is important to identify options that enable older adults and those with health conditions to remain productively engaged in their work. Cort W. Rudolph (Assistant Professor of Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Saint Louis University) and Boris Baltes (Professor of Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Wayne State University) used data from the Age & Generations Study and asked the following question:

Can TPM policies help older workers in poor health maintain their levels of work engagement?

Anticipating that TPM policies could be especially helpful to workers who are in poor health, the authors examined the impact of TPM policies on work engagement (level of vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work) and explore whether that impact might be different depending on employees' age and health status.

Putting Age and Health in the Context of Resources and Demands

To meet the demands of everyday life, workers use a wide variety of resources, including mental resources such as a positive outlook, physical resources such as health, and environmental resources such as the assistance of a spouse.

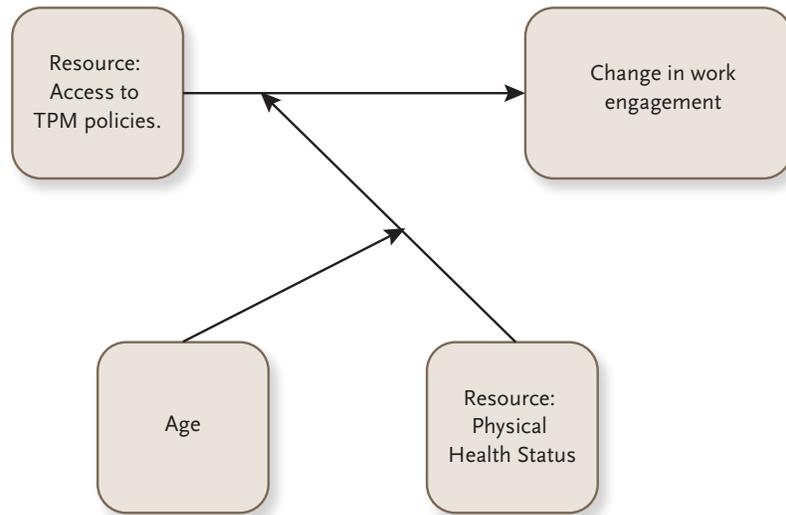
Poor health can lessen the resources to which people have access and can reduce their ability to effectively meet job and life demands. When demands outweigh resources, a person's work engagement might decrease because all available resources are consumed in an effort to meet the demands placed upon them. When demands are in balance or lower than resources, a person's work engagement might increase because they have the time or energy to go above and beyond the minimum requirements at work. In the absence of some resources (such as physical health status) other resources might become more important (such as access to TPM policies) to maintaining or increasing work engagement.

Rudolph and Baltes argue that age is an important part of the relationship between health and work engagement. As people age, they begin to focus on behaviors that improve their performance in certain areas, spending less time on unfavorable behaviors. Declines in health make these behavioral changes necessary, but it takes time for people to identify and develop the strategies that work for them— leading to higher levels of such behavior among older adults in poor health than younger adults in poor health. For example, an older worker with declining night vision might opt to take advantage of telecommuting policies or flexible work schedules to avoid driving at night. This relationship is shown in Figure 1.

Time & Place Management (TPM) policies "give employees greater options and control over where, when, how, and how much work gets done."

The authors expected that the relationship between access to TPM policies and engagement being strongest for those older individuals with low physical health. Workers in poorer health would need access to TPM policies more as a resource. Workers who were older would have more experience and time to develop strategies that work for them.

Figure 1. The moderating roles of age and physical health status



Source: Rudolph & Baltes, under review.

The authors defined age in three different ways: chronological age, objective organizational age, and subjective organizational age (see Box 1).

Key Insights

1. **Older workers have higher work engagement than younger workers**, regardless of how age is defined. In addition, the change in work engagement over time is more positive for older workers. This suggests a widening gap between the engagement of younger workers and older workers.
2. While they do not decrease work engagement for any combination of age and health status, **TPM policies have the most strongly positive effects for younger workers in good health and older workers in poor health**. That is, they benefit older workers in poor health as much as they affect younger workers in good health, when age is defined as organizational age (tenure or career stage) rather than chronological age.

The Bottom Line

The positive effect of access to TPM policies on work engagement is strongest for two groups: younger workers in good health and older workers in poor health.

Box 1: What Is Age?

Most people today think of age — the length of time a person has existed — as the number of years since a person was born. However, from a workplace perspective, other definitions of age can be just as important.

- **Objective chronological age is the number of years a person has been alive.**

This is the way most people think of age, yet it may be becoming less important than it was in the past. For much of the 20th century, people entered and left school, married and had children, and got their first jobs and retired at relatively similar chronological ages. Today, the age ranges that are considered “normal” for those important life transitions are widening.

- **Organizational age refers to the number of years that a person has been employed at their organization.**

Job tenure, the number of years people have been with their organization, may be of greater consequence to many organizational outcomes than chronological age is. For instance, worker job satisfaction may increase if their identification with the organization increases over their tenure.

- **Subjective organizational age is the stage in their career that people consider themselves.**

This study looked at whether they would consider themselves early-, mid-, or late-career. Career stage differs from job tenure, since workers may change employers without changing careers, or change careers without changing employers.

ABOUT THE SLOAN CENTER ON AGING & WORK

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Since our founding, we have conducted more than 20 studies in collaboration with employers: for example, studies on “Age & Generations,” “Talent Management,” and “Generations of Talent.” Studies under way are “Assessing the Impact of Time and Place Management” and “Engaged as We Age.”

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Summarized by:

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