

Abstract

There is extensive research on workplace conflict and its consequences, but there is a lack of research on how this affects the work ability of senior employees. The purpose of the thesis was to explore the relationship between senior employees' conflict experiences in the workplace and their work ability until age of retirement across different occupational fields. Quantitative analysis was performed using data retrieved from Statistics Norway's Living Conditions Survey on Work Environment from 2019 (n=11 212) using SPSS. Two statistical methods were used: Chi-square test and logistic binary regression. The study shows that most senior employees in the sample report never having experienced conflicts with supervisors, colleagues, or customers. However, there was a statistically significant relationship between work ability and conflict with supervisors. These findings suggest that the conflict measures used in the study may not fully capture all aspects of conflict experienced by senior employees at work. Exploring the effects of workplace conflict on work ability, adds value to theoretical psychological frameworks, but future research could delve deeper into specific types of conflicts or explore other factors that may impact work ability among this demographic, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Keywords: Work ability, workplace conflict, senior employees, social identity theory, work environment, survey

Sammendrag

Det eksisterer omfattende forskning på arbeidskonflikt og dets konsekvenser, men det mangler forskning på hvordan dette påvirker senioransattes arbeidsevne. Formålet med denne hovedoppgaven var å undersøke forholdet mellom senioransattes konfliktopplevelser på arbeidsplassen og deres arbeidsevne frem til pensjonsalder på tvers av ulike fagfelt. Kvantitativ analyse ble utført med bruk av data fra SSBs Levekårsundersøkelse om arbeidsmiljø fra 2019 (n=11 212) med bruk av SPSS. To statistiske metoder ble anvendt: Kvikvadrattest og logistisk binær regresjon. Studien viser at de fleste senioransatte i utvalget rapporterer aldri å ha opplevd konflikter med ledere, kollegaer, eller kunder. Det er imidlertid en statistisk signifikant sammenheng mellom arbeidsevne og konflikt med overordnede. Disse funnene indikerer at studien kanskje ikke fanger opp alle aspekter ved konflikt som kan oppleves av senioransatte på arbeidsplassen. Å utforske konsekvensene av arbeidskonflikt på arbeidsevne, bidrar til psykologiske teoretiske rammeverk, og fremtidig forskning bør utforske ulike typer konflikter eller andre faktorer som kan påvirke arbeidsevne til senioransatte, og dermed gi en mer omfattende forståelse av dynamikken som spiller inn.

Stikkord: Arbeidsevne, arbeidsplasskonflikt, senioransatte, sosial identitetsteori, arbeidsmiljø, undersøkelse

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Preface

The content of this thesis represents a substantial investment from the author in terms of time, effort, research, and writing. This thesis is dedicated to the author's parents who, through continuous emotional, financial, and academic support has contributed to the completion of both the studies and the thesis of the author. Their outstanding support has been both a guidance and help through these years at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

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The data has been collected by Statistics Norway in the Living Conditions Survey on Work Environment carried out in 2019. The thesis statement has been developed by the author herself and supervisor Emmanuel Aboagye with his extensive knowledge within the field of organizational psychology, as well as with help and guidance from external supervisor, Trond Løkling, with outstanding competence within conflict management.

Introduction

The world's population is ageing rapidly (Mitchell & Walker, 2020). In 2020, more people were over 60 than under 5, and by 2050, 22% of the population will be over 60. This is an increase from 12% in 2015 (WHO, 2023). The growing number of older people has significant implications for all aspects and sectors of society, including the labour market. The increasingly older generation is due to both decline in fertility and birth rates, and increased life expectancy, which calls for governmental and societal interventions (Insler, 2014, p. 195). For many countries, the situation with an ageing workforce, will not be manageable. By 2047, in OECD countries, there will only be 2 workers per pensioner (OECD, 2011, p. 40). To maintain the balance between the working and the non-working population, an action of great significance is to extend the working careers and lives of employees, and to stagnate the trend of retiring early (Wozniak et al., 2022, p. 509-510).

According to the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO, 2023) every fifth employee in Norway is above the age of 55. In the years to come the share of this workforce will experience a rapid growth, while the workforce below the age of 40 will decrease. Also, the number of people above the age of 70 or older is expected to double from today's number within the year of 2060. Today 1 of 8 are above the age of 70, but within 2060 every fifth person will be over the age of 70 (Gleditsch, 2020). In 2100 more than 25% of the Norwegian population will be 70 years old or older. This leads to a population consisting of a majority of seniors and a minority of youngsters (Tømmerås & Thomas, 2022, p. 4). Fewer people engaging in the workforce leads to a higher number of pensioners and fewer active workers. This increases public expenses and can cause economic challenges for societies (Lee & Mason, 2017).

Consequently, a political debate about increasing the retirement age to receive retirement benefits has occurred. In Norway, the Norwegian Parliament has agreed upon a retirement agreement, the so-called pension settlement (Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2023). The contents of this settlement include increasing the age limits for retirement, involving a gradual increase in the age limit in the pension systems. An important objective of the retirement agreement from the Norwegian Parliament is stimulating longer working careers. Increased age of retirement will, according to the Norwegian Parliament, cause more employees to work longer, which could, in turn, increase the average retirement pension and hence making the retirement system more socially sustainable (Meld. St. 6 (2023-2024), p. 8-9). Increasing the minimum age to receive retirement benefits, has been pointed

out as a tool to incentivize senior employees to retire later, which could alter the upcoming economical and societal challenges regarding the elder boom (Insler, 2014, p. 195).

Senior employees bring valuable experience and skills to the workplace, contributing significantly to organizational success. Their extensive knowledge base and expertise can enhance decision-making processes, mentor young colleagues, and provide continuity in operations (Kaur & Verma, 2011, p. 116). However, despite these benefits, seniors may encounter challenges that affect their work ability until retirement. Workplace conflicts, for instance, can pose significant hurdles, and may increase the likelihood of diverse deleterious effects, such as workplace aggression and violence (Barling et al., 2009, p. 679), as well as costly employee outcomes including turnover (Frone, 2000, p. 252-253), burnout (Fujiwara et al., 2003, p. 317), depression and withdrawal (Inoue & Kawakami, 2010). These conflicts, whether with supervisors, colleagues, or customers, can create a negative work environment, impacting seniors' overall well-being and their ability to continue working effectively until retirement. Thus, while senior employees offer immense value to organizations (Perrin, 2016, p. 247), it is essential to address and mitigate the challenges they may face, particularly concerning workplace conflicts, to ensure their continued engagement and success in the workforce. Also, from a psychological perspective, the question regarding the positive and negative effects of employment is relevant for every individual in societies as it is part of the question regarding how to spend their limited time and what one should expect from and strive for in the workforce. This question has, however, received limited theoretical and empirical research attention (Paul et al., 2023, p. 1-2).

The dysfunctional effect of conflict affects both the performance of the individual and the organization. Resolving the demands and antecedents that leads to conflict, enables time being spent more efficiently on productivity in the organization (Kasi & Sarma, 2013, p. 732). Also, employees, in a situation of conflict, could choose to promote their self-worth or personal gains to achieve motivation and self-direction considered necessary to achieve their desires goals, which could occur at the expense of their co-workers or the organization (Williams & McCombs, 2022, p. 810-811). In addition, prolonged conflict could cause psychological and physical distress among employees which could further reduce their work ability. Lastly, conflict can cause morale problems in the workforce, loss of productivity, and work sabotage (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014, p. 129). Among other psychological responses the following consequences has been listed: Inattentiveness, lack of interest in work, job dissatisfaction, work-related anxiety, nervousness, irritation, and frustration (W. T. Wang et

al., 2019, p. 1041; Deng et al., 2022, p. 216). Also, Behavioural responses include smoking, alcoholism, aggression towards other employees or employers, work sabotage, reduced communication, and resistance against attempts of influence. Physiological responses have also been identified, including headaches, coronary issues, and hypertension – to mention a few (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014, p. 127-128). These factors can affect work ability (Tuomi et al., 1991, p. 132).

Extensive research on retirement, conflict and work ability has been carried out over the decades (Tuomi et al., 1991; Costa & Sartori, 2007; Bochatay et al., 2019; Garrouste & Perdrix, 2022). However, there is a gap regarding age specific research. Several studies regarding conflict in the workplace and work ability do not focus specifically on senior employees. There is a need for research dedicated to understanding how experienced conflicts in the workplace affects senior employees' work ability, considering specifically their unique challenges, needs and situations in the workforce, separating them from the younger workers. Some studies have been performed within specific sectors rather than across different occupational fields (Bochatay et al., 2019). Accounting for cultural and contextual differences is also of great significance to explore the experience of conflict within different sectors, and how this could affect senior employees' work ability (Hennessy & West, 1999). Also, studies seek to explore the impacts of retirement, but there seem to be a lack of focus on the causes of retirement other than health (Garrouste & Perdrix, 2022). Further, there seems to be extensive research carried out within specific occupational fields, but a lack of research on work ability and conflict for the entire working population. The relationship between age and decreased work ability within the field of health care, specifically nursing, is well established, but there seems to be a lack of age specific research within work ability and conflict across different occupational fields (Camerino et al., 2006, p. 551).

This thesis aims to examine senior employees' conflict experiences with supervisors, colleagues, and customers, and how this relates to their work ability until the age of retirement. Customers are persons including customers, clients, students, or others that are not employed at the same workplace, but that the individual employee may be in contact with (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 80). The thesis' contribution lies in addressing gaps in research on retirement, conflict, and work ability, specifically for senior employees. By exploring how workplace conflicts affect the work ability of senior employees until retirement, it also considers their unique needs and situations compared to younger workers. By examining overlooked contextual factors and comparing experiences across sectors, this research aims to

provide a comprehensive understanding of how conflicts affect work ability in various occupational fields.

The thesis will first introduce often used concepts and a definition of these to ensure a common understanding of the concepts employed. It will then explain the psychological and economic implications of work for seniors, before if it will introduce work ability and experienced conflict within the framework of social identity theory. The thesis will then introduce the research method applied to explore the question of interests in the study. This will be followed by an introduction of the sample as well as a presentation of the results of the analysis performed, and a discussion of these. Finally, a conclusion will be presented.

Concepts and hypothesis development

The elder boom and senior employees

The elder boom is a phenomenon that is present worldwide. It can broadly be defined as a change in the composition of the population where the share of elders in the population increases, where the share of youngsters and younger adults decreases. Several reasons for this phenomenon have been identified, but this population shift is mainly due to fluctuations in birth numbers, immigration and emigration, and increased life expectancy, resulting in fewer active workers per pensioner (Farstad, 2020).

From 2019 to 2050, the world's population aged 65 years or older is expected to increase from 9% to 16%. This has important consequences for society, including loss of competent workforce as the number of younger employees entering the workforce is lower than the proportion of senior employees retiring and exiting the workforce. Also, a higher number of people retiring leads to an increase of people relying on pensions and social allowances. This could pose a threat to the fiscal and financial sustainability of societies and pension programmes. To mend these potential and upcoming issues, countries should create and adopt policies to facilitate how to handle these challenges (Mazumdar et al., 2022, p. 1563-1564). One factor mentioned as important for mending this, is having more active workers per pensioner. As there are a lower number of younger workers entering the workforce than the number of workers retiring and exiting the workforce, a potential intervention is keeping senior employees in the workforce longer (Dychtwald et al., 2006, p. 12).

Defining senior employees

Defining senior employees is not a straightforward process. There is a lack of established consensus on defining senior employees as there are doubts regarding who can be categorized as seniors. A commonly used age definition of senior employees enfold people within the age bracket of 55-64 years old (Dychtwald et al., 2006, p. 39-40; Kosowski, 2018, p. 38). Therefore, this thesis, when talking about senior employees, will include employees aged 55 years and older.

Characteristics of senior employees

To understand the characteristics of senior employees, it is essential to consider their experience and expertise, work ethic and commitment, as well as challenges faced by senior employees in terms of age discrimination and technological adaptability. Senior employees contribute greatly to organizations and businesses. They possess a wealth of experience from years of training, employment, and courses. They also contribute to avoiding mistakes being done in the workplace (REF). Retaining senior employees is a smart business move as they help companies save money and contribute with great experience and knowledge (Perrin, 2016, p. 246). Senior employees also demonstrate strong work ethic and commitment, which is beneficial for organizational success (Barrick et al., 2015, p. 114).

Senior employees differ from the younger employees. Studies have reported that older workers have a higher probability of having more loyalty to their employer and organization than younger employees (Singh & Gupta, 2014, p. 1198). Also, with increased age, seniors experience physical changes within muscular, cardiovascular, and respiratory function. In addition to a growing risk of disease and death, there is a decrease of physical and mental capacity. These changes are neither linear or consistent, and older age is characterized by great diversity. Ageing is also associated with transitional changes, such as retirement, relocation of housing, and changes of social contexts, such as loss of friends, partners, and family (WHO, 2023). Retiring leads to sudden changes in daily life due to shift in schedules, leisure time, income, and social status. Many retirees also experience a decrease in income due to pensions generally being lower than income pre-retirement, which could lead to constraints in budgets (Garrouste & Perdrix, 2022, p. 843-844). An increase of healthcare costs could further impact the economic situation of retirees. Many senior employees retiring earlier than the retirement age mention declining health as one of the main reasons for doing so. These different factors differentiate senior employees from younger employees as they have more factors to consider when planning their future in both the workforce and as a retiree (Garrouste & Perdrix, 2022, p. 845; Galama et al., 2013, p. 883).

Senior employees also face challenges in the workforce, especially related to ageism. Ageism is discrimination against a group due to their chronological age and might include prejudicial attitudes, negative stereotypical beliefs, and discriminatory practices (Cortijo et al., 2018, p. 202). Compared to their younger colleagues, they are often considered less productive and flexible, resistant to change, hard to train, and more costly (Meulenaere et al., 2020, p. 872). Senior employees also face challenges regarding technological adaptability. Studies have illustrated that senior employees lack skills in using and adapting to new technology (Kosowski, 2018, p. 45-46). Despite these challenges, senior employees see themselves as equally competent as their younger colleagues (Kosowski, 2018, p. 45). Companies have also been identified to consider senior employees less attractive to hire than younger workers, due to the younger workers lower social security contributions and their familiarity with new technology (Castellini et al., 2023, p. 52).

Managing senior employees

To effectively manage senior employees, it is crucial to consider strategies to promote inclusivity and diversity, implementing training and development programmes, and addressing age-related issues in the workplace. Flexibility in terms of flexible hours, opportunity to work remote, part-time-work, and short- or long-term leaves has been identified to be important to prolong working life of senior employees (Camerino et al., 2006, p. 7).

Also, training and development options have been identified as important to promote self-confidence, value, and self-perceptions of one's contributions in the workplace. Providing training and skills development is of great significance to meet the rapid changes occurring in organizations due to the growing demands for innovation and globalization of the labour market, as well as competition from other actors (Castellini et al., 2023, p. 52). In organizations there is a need for continuous learning and training of senior employees to train skills related to technology. To successfully keep senior employees in the workforce, it is a necessity that organizations improve the technical skills of their workforce, enabling opportunities to both continue learning and updating knowledge and skills throughout the working lives of their employees (Kosowski, 2018, p. 42-46).

The participation of senior employees in the workforce is expected to positively contribute to the economy and development of societies, especially in terms of a shrinking workforce with fewer active workers per pensioner (Tømmerås & Thomas, 2022, p. 4; Farstad, 2020). As the older population grows, the burden on shrinking working population increases in terms of the social and economic support provided by an active workforce. This

affects the welfare of societies (Nagarajan & Sixsmith, 2021, p. 42). How organizations can retain senior employees will be elaborated in the practical implications-part of the thesis.

Workplace conflict

The potential for conflict is present in every organizational life that creates order and coordination of efforts, individuals, and system. Conflict can be defined as processes or situations where one party asserts that its interests are being opposed with those by another party (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2009, p. 4). Conflict can be viewed both as a negative situation which should be avoided, and as a situation which necessitates management and opportunities for growth and development (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014, p. 118-119).

Conflict at work can take many forms. A comprehensive definition of workplace conflict can therefore be challenging, but a common understanding of the phenomenon is a process occurring when an individual or a group perceive differences and oppositions between themselves and another individual or group of individuals. These differences can occur in terms of beliefs, interests, practices, resources, or values that are of significance (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008, p. 4). Thus, conflict types can be functional, situational, and interactive. Functional conflict views conflict as serving a social function, the situational approach views conflict as expressed only under certain situations, and the interactive conflict-view seeks to understand how conflict occurs, and what methods and mechanisms are employed to express it (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014, p. 120). This definition differentiates between so-called latent and manifested conflict. The former includes perceived conflict and refers to conflicts occurring within the states of individuals or groups. The latter, on the contrary, involves constructive negotiations and even violence, and therefore refers to dynamics between both persons and groups (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008, p. 4).

Several different sources for the occurrence of conflict in organizations and workplaces has been identified. De Dreu & Gelfand (2008) identified three sources of workplace conflict. Amongst these were scarce resources and conflicts of interest, which occur when individuals in the workplace possess different motives for resources, and the presence of social dilemmas and team games. These can be defined as resource conflicts. The need for a positive social identity were also identified as a possible source of conflict, which could create value and relational conflicts. These were specifically related to self-esteem, ego-threat, and value-related conflicts affecting the individual's, or the group's self-esteem, social identity, and ego. The final identified source of conflict was cross cultural variations in the sources of conflicts. This includes cognitive consistency, social validation, and sociocognitive

conflicts which could occur due to cross-cultural variation within the workplace and between employees, supervisors, and customers participating in the workplace of question (De Dreu et al., 2008, p. 8-21). Additionally, there exists many different types of conflict. Amongst these are conflicts within role, relationship, process, status, goal, identity, and social, to mention a few (Su & Rungruang, 2023, p. 372).

Work ability

Work ability is the self-reported capabilities of workers to perform the work they are hired or assigned to do (Kim et al., 2022, p. 168). It regulates professional activities by stating what activities and competences are expected and/or required to perform different kinds of work, and what can be expected of employees performing the job. It also creates reasonable work requirements, which, in turn, could lead to the reduction of work-related illnesses and injuries. The concept can therefore be defined as the formal education or training and expectations to what is required to perform a certain job, as well as the employee's ability to perform a job in terms of their physical and psychological health (Tengland, 2010, p. 275 + 283).

Work ability is a dynamic process. It changes throughout life and is said to be the interaction between individual resources, working conditions, and the surrounding society. Individual resources include education, health, and motivation, and working conditions include environment and human relations (Costa & Sartori, 2007, p. 1916). Work ability is therefore the balance between individual resources and characteristics of the employee, and the demands of the job. The major determinant of work ability involves physical and mental health, social relationship skills, educational level, and enhancement of competences, such as attitudes, motivation, values, the working environment, and leadership. When these determinants and conditions, are satisfied, the resulting effects include employability, productivity, heightened quality of work, productive ageing, quality of life, and well-being (Chisagiu, L., 2015, p. 52 + 60).

Healthy and productive ageing cannot be conceived without maintaining or developing work ability. This has been identified as perhaps the most important outcome when investing in the senior workforce (Chisagiu, 2015, p. 59-60). The senior workforce possesses characteristics and traits that differ from the younger workforce; they are in different situations and phases of their lives which affects their work ability in a different manner than the younger workforce (WHO, 2023). Research has illustrated that the senior workforce's decrease in work ability and incentives to retire or withdraw from the labour market, are due

to factors as ageing itself as well as the effects this has on physical and mental capacities, unsatisfactory working conditions, and poor management in organizations. More specifically, a lack of recognition from supervisors and conflicts with them, conflicts with co-workers, and dealing with angry customers, clients, or patients, has been identified to affect work ability negatively (Varianou-Mikellidou, 2020, p. 1 + 5). This has led to the suggestion that improving the working environment in terms of reducing conflict could positively affect work ability among senior employees. Factors identified as positively affecting work ability are the feeling of safety at work, reduced job stress, job satisfaction, sense of autonomy and control (Wozniak et al., 2022, p. 519-520).

Psychological and Economic implications of work for seniors

There are opportunities and challenges both psychological and economic concerning seniors in the workforce (Kaur & Verma, 2011, p. 116; C. Wang et al., 2014).

Psychological

As senior employees approach the retirement age, they enter a different phase of their lives as they are both in the final stages of their role as an employee, they are in a transitioning phase in becoming a retiree instead of an employee with subsequent changes in their daily living, and they possess different values, goals, and contents of daily living than at the beginning of their careers (Mitchell & Walker, 2020).

The consequences of an aging population have received increased attention from researchers, policy makers, and the public. This is due to both the economic implications of an ageing population, which will be discussed later in the thesis, but also due to the contribution work and work ability has on psychological and psychosocial wellbeing (Nordenmark & Stattin, 2009). Considering social identity theory, having a positive social identity associated with one's place of work, can lead to favourable psychological consequences, such as an overall self-perception of worth inducing a positive construal of one's world. Social identity theory states that the more positive an individual's social identity is, the more access the individual has to self-affirmational resources, which could enable the individual to cope with experiences and thoughts threatening the individual's identity. A positive social identity with one's place of work could therefore serve a protective role, and lead to favourable psychological consequences and increased overall wellbeing (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014, p. 206).

Employment has been identified to have several benefits for psychological wellbeing. Amongst these are time structure, social contact, status, appreciation, goal-achievement, and activity. The loss of time structure might lead to negative emotions and a decline in mental health, according to Paul and colleagues (2023). Social contact is also beneficial for good mental health providing the individual with a collective purpose and the experience of being useful. Employment can also lead to status, causing feelings of being valued. Appreciation has also been identified to be of significance to the experience of the self, which could have a positive impact on mental health. Also, being active within employment leads to goal setting, and achieving these goals is beneficial for good mental health. A satiation of these above-mentioned needs is considered necessary to maintain psychological wellbeing, and a deprivation of these might lead to psychological suffering (Paul et al., 2023, p. 2). If these needs are not met at the workplace, for instance in the presence of conflict, could this lead to psychological distress and therefore create intentions to quit or retire prematurely?

Experienced conflict with supervisors, colleagues, or customers etc., could lead to employees experiencing discomfort, stress, and dissatisfaction. This could cause a deprivation of the above-mentioned benefits of employment, leading to experiences of loss of contact with one's work environment, not feeling useful and hence reducing the feeling of meaningfulness and being valued and appreciated by the workplace. This could reduce perceived work ability among senior employees as experienced conflict in the workplace can increase feelings of stress, anxiety, and discomfort. In other words, conflict can lead to the deprivation of psychological and social needs typically fulfilled by work (Paul et al., 2023, p. 2). This could influence senior employees' perceived work ability negatively, in terms of them viewing their work ability as lower during experienced conflict in the workplace than they would have perceived their work ability in the absence of conflict.

Economic

Senior employees represent a large proportion of the global workforce. They enrich the workforce with valued and qualified skills and updates certificates, they possess mature judgements, long tenure, and a rich and useful combination of skills. These qualities are difficult to replace, and even though younger workers have higher educations, they do not possess the experiences, skills and judgments gained through years of active participation in the workforce that senior employees have. This combination of education, experience, knowledge, and commitment to performing high-quality work are invaluable (Kaur & Verma, 2011). In addition to its being difficult to replace or compensate for this knowledge and

experience, society is facing a future with too few young workers. The generation after the elder boom is much smaller, indicating that companies cannot rely upon a younger workforce compensating and replacing the skills gap and lack of employees (Dychtwald et al., 2006, p. 12). Discovering what influences senior employees' work ability until or beyond retirement, is of great economic value on both an individual, organizational, and societal level (Lee & Mason, 2017).

Many organizations and businesses have expressed worries about their futures as well as the qualifications of their employees. In a recent survey performed by NHO (2023), 4 out of 10 companies had employees with intentions to retire in 2024. One third of these businesses expressed concerns regarding loss of competence that was hard to replace (NHO, 2023). The increasing number of seniors in the population, with intentions to retire in the foreseeable future, indicates that valuable skills and competence could evaporate when seniors retire (Kreisman, 2002, p. 7). Increased labour force participation has been identified as a necessity to cope with the need for competence in the workforce. Discovering factors affecting employees' desire to work until the age of retirement or beyond, is of great value to both preserve already existing competence in the labour market as well as facing the economic challenges following an ageing workforce (NHO, 2023).

Literature review on the relationship between experiencing workplace conflict and work ability

Extensive literature exists on the relationship between experiencing workplace conflict, work ability, and retirement. A study conducted by Bochatay and colleagues (2019) found that conflicts led professionals to lose confidence in their skills as well as the development of negative perceptions of the out-group involved in conflict and questioning their membership of the in-group (Bochatay et al., 2019, p. 804). This study is, however, not age-specific and does not consider the whole workforce in terms of age, not only senior employees. Conflict can impact senior employees' intentions to stay or retire illustrating the importance of exploring how conflict affects them (Camerino et al., 2006, p. 7). The study by Bochatay and colleagues (2019) is also conducted within a specific sector: Health care. The perception of conflict might be different within different organizational and work contexts, and to understand the entire scope of conflict and its effects, it is important to conduct studies across different occupational fields.

Garrouste & Perdrix (2022) explores retirement as antecedents of various health outcomes. This is a study showing that later retirement does not have any impact on neither mortality or pathology, and that retirement leads to an increase in self-reported health, a decrease in consumption of healthcare, and a cognitive decline. They highlight that the studies conducted on how earlier retirement impacts senior employees, are scarce (Garrouste & Perdrix, 2022, p. 841 + 860). However, these studies are not age-specific either, leaving them difficult to be applicable for seniors' work ability and their experience of conflict. Also, the study conducted by Garrouste & Perdrix (2022) explores only the impact of retirement. It does not control for the causes of retirement, such as conflict.

A previous study conducted by Wolfe (1985) suggested that the health of seniors improved largely due to retiring earlier. This was identified as being due to taking greater advantage of the potential benefits of retiring by starting it earlier. The study also suggested that it is difficult convincing employees to delay their retirement as they are seeking to exploit their retirement effectively and gain as many benefits as possible, which are done by starting it earlier, not later (Wolfe, 1985, p. 1266). However, this study is several decades old and is likely to be outdated. This illustrates the need for research on retirement and how it is affected by work ability and conflict, and how work can be beneficial for mental health and overall well-being within the upcoming societal changes with an ageing population (Paul et al., 2023, p. 2; WHO, 2023).

Research has also been carried out on ageing and work ability. Costa and Sartori (2007) discovered a general decrease in work ability over the years but highlights the fact that mental involvement and autonomy contributes to a constant and high work ability over the years. The results indicated a decrease in work ability over the years, but also emphasizes the fact that working conditions and personal health, causes changes in work ability (Costa & Sartori, 2007, p. 1914 + 1925). This study, however, does not include research on conflict and how it affects work ability, nor does it solely focus on senior employees. It is also an old study, which could indicate that the results are outdated.

Studies have tried to understand and identify occupational factors affecting work ability, how a combination of these affect work ability, and how these factors influence physical and mental work ability. Results indicated that high levels of work stressors, physical demand, physical work environment, and work schedules affected work ability most. They categorized different factors of work, and amongst these was work organization including management, role conflict, lack of freedom, and uninspiring work. Role conflict was

identified to impair mental work ability the most and seemed to be more important among healthy ageing workers than high muscular demand, poor work environment, and lack of freedom. This led to the conclusion that role conflicts were one of the most dominant stressors to impair mental work ability, and it was advised that this should be accounted for when designing jobs for senior employees (Tuomi et al., 1991, p. 128-134). However, the only conflict they investigated was role conflict, and the study did not include conflicts with supervisors, colleagues, or customers, which could be of relevance to gain a greater understanding of the dynamics and effects of conflicts in the workplace.

Kreisman (2002) identified that what most influences an employee's intention to stay, leave or retire, is the role of the manager. Even if employees are well paid, receive recognition for their work performance, and can learn, develop, and grow both personally and organizationally within the workplace, they will leave the organization if they do not like their supervisor. The study also discovered that issues with the supervisor, is the primary reason for loss of talent in organizations (Kreisman, 2002, p. 11).

Research carried out among a Norwegian sample by Sterud and Hanvold (2021) identified a 13.4% prevalence of conflict with supervisors and colleagues in the workplaces of the respondents (p. 328) causing the prevalence of mental distress amongst of 6.6% of the sample (p. 325). Also, adverse social behaviours were more prevalent among women and younger workers (Sterud & Hanvold, 2021). However, this study was not carried out solely on senior workers. Another study conducted in Italy discovered that older workers, defined as employees within the age of 40-55 years old, reported more conflicts at work than their younger workers. Also, private companies within Industry and Commerce sectors exhibited more expulsion tendencies compared to public sectors. Within public sectors conflict might manifest it more in a more subtle manner than in the former. The study also specified that within School and Health sectors, with a clear hierarchy, could also lead to conflicts. Also sectors of Industry, Commerce, and Service could give rise to conflict due to companies within this sector were small and less unionized. Also, the study identified that women experience more conflicts than men (Castellini et al., 2023, p. 52-53).

Hypotheses

H1a: Ability to work until retirement is associated with conflict with supervisors among seniors.

H1b: Ability to work until retirement is associated with conflict with colleagues among seniors.

H1c: Ability to work until retirement is associated with conflict with customers etc. among seniors.

H2a: $\beta_1 \neq 0$ (conflict with supervisors has an effect on work ability).

H2b: $\beta_2 \neq 0$ (conflict with colleagues has an effect on work ability).

H2c: $\beta_3 \neq 0$ (conflict with clients has an effect on work ability).

Theoretical framework of social identity theory

Several theories are relevant for examining workplace conflict and work ability among senior employees. However, the theory that will be employed to facilitate the analysis of the relationship between conflict and senior employees' intentions to quit or stay in their jobs, is Social Identity Theory (SIT). At the core of this theory lies the definition of social identity as the part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his knowledge of membership in or belonging to certain social groups together with the value or emotional significance attached to this group membership (Hogg, 2016, p. 6; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 129). SIT consists of a fundamental psychological part, describing the underlying cognitive processes of the definition of social identity as well as the assumption that people strive for a positive social identity, and a social-structural part, describing how people cope with a negative social identity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 130).

Group memberships defines our identity as they tell us who we are and who we are not. They can also determine and affect our feelings, as well as the thoughts and feelings that arises when thinking about the groups we belong to, which contribute to forming our social identity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 129). We, as individuals, categorize ourselves as belonging to in-groups, bringing together individuals with common features, and these in-groups distinguish us from individuals belonging to the out-groups. We view our in-groups more favourably than the out-groups (Bochatay et al., 2019, p. 800).

Social identity theory consists of three processes: Social categorization, social comparison, and social identity. Social categorization involves dividing the social world into groups and hence identifying the in-groups, the groups you are a part of, and the out-groups, which are the groups you are not a part of. This self-categorization elicits social comparison with the out-groups, and when successfully differentiating the in-group in a positive manner from the out-groups, this will contribute to a positive social identity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 131-132). Conflict is a social or relational phenomena, where groups can be both the leader group, colleagues, or customers. When senior employees do not identify with any of

these groups at work a relational tension could form, which could increase a potential for conflict to arise which in turn leads to stay- or leave-decisions among this demographic group.

The social structural part of SIT addresses the issue on how people respond to a negative social identity. The theory lists three courses of action to choose from when this occurs: Individual mobility, collective action, or social creativity. When an individual experiences a negative social identity, the individual can choose between individual mobility, involving the individual to seek entrance to a higher status group, collective action which involves the group working for an improvement of status, or social creativity involving changing the comparison group (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 133).

In the context of workplace and conflict, the individual mobility-aspect of social identity theory enables the individual experiencing conflict to seek out another workplace or retire and, hence, changing their in-group. The in-group changes from being in the workplace, to being a retiree. Collective action could involve contacting union representatives or taking other courses of action that could reduce the conflict level in the workplace, or being socially creative by changing how they think about the situation, for instance “*at least I don't work at that other job*”. However, SIT specifies the factors determining which strategy is likely to be used. For individual mobility to even be possible, the group must be permeable, which is the case for a place of work. This is, however, not the case for groups such as gender and ethnicity. If the group is not permeable, individual mobility is not possible. Therefore, stability and legitimacy of the status differences plays an important role in the choice between the two other strategies: Collective action or social creativity. The probability of choosing collective action increases when status differences are illegitimate and unstable. However, if, for instance, low status is legitimate and stable, the probability of choosing social creativity is more likely. In other words, threat(s) towards social identity is important in determining if an individual flees from the group, or fights the status quo (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 133).

How can experienced conflict in the workplace among senior employees be explained within the framework of social identity theory? As mentioned, social identity theory states that individuals identify with their in-groups. In terms of a workplace, individuals will identify with the people participating in it, including supervisors and employees. When experiencing conflicts with their supervisors, senior employees may experience a reduction in or diminishing of their positive social identity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 136). This could further lead to a strained relationship with their ingroup, including experiencing doubts regarding their professional skills, disillusion, and questioning their career path.

Experiencing conflicts may therefore cause a diminished sense of belonging or support within the workplace, which could negatively affect senior employees' work ability (Zahid & Nauman, 2024, p. 248).

Also, as the theory states, individuals could choose between different strategies to mend with these issues. One of these strategies are individual mobility; senior employees in the workforce could choose to change their place of work, but if the opportunity for retirement is present, they could also choose to leave the workforce and retire (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 133). These matters will be further elaborated in the discussion-part of the thesis.

Materials and methods

This is a cross-sectional study which performed quantitative analysis using data retrieved from Statistics Norway's Living Conditions Survey on Work Environment from 2019. This survey aims to discover different working environment conditions among employees in Norway, including topics such as connection to the workplace, physical, chemical, and ergonomic working environment, psychosocial working environment, occupational health problems and absence due to sickness, and requirements and opportunities for development at work. The survey has previously been carried out 7 times since 1989. To enable comparisons of the data with previous participating cohorts, the questions are largely identically worded and asked in the same manner as in previous cohorts. In this way, development over time can be studied (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 7).

Sample

In 2006 a random nation-wide sample consisting of 18 999 people was drawn for the survey amongst people in the age group of 18-66 years old. These were drawn from BeReg, which is the central demography database of Statistics Norway, and is updated monthly with information from the Norwegian Tax Directorate's central population register. The reason for this age cut-off was mainly to cover the population amongst employed workers, which created the foundation for the surveys conducted in both 2009 and 2013. In 2016 a rotation of the sample occurred by replacing one third of the sample with people that have not previously been contacted. In 2019, which holds the database for this thesis, an additional one third was replaced, and an equal number was rotated into the sample (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 8).

The sample size in the data from the Living Conditions Survey on Work Environment from 2019 consisted originally of 19 810 people within the ages of 18 to 66 years old. Due to

non-responses and resignations, the net sample was 11 212 participants. 15,7% of these were people in the age group of 17-24 years old, 38,6% was 25-44 years old, and 46,7% of these were in the age group of 45-67 years old (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 7-9).

In this panel survey, Statistics Norway wished to maintain the cross-sectional characteristics of the sample, to ensure that it was representative for the population the survey was intended to cover. The sample that was drawn in 2006 were drawn as separate cross-sectional nationwide sample that was collectively representative for the population in the relevant age group. In 2016 a rotation of the sample found place by replacing 1/3 of the sample with participants that had not been contacted earlier. In 2019 another third of the sample was rotated and replaced with the same amount. To continue the separate cross-sectional characteristics, the sub-committees in 2009, 2013, 2016 and 2019, of those who were retained, were supplemented with 17-, 18- and 19-year-olds and immigrants (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 8).

Procedure

The survey was conducted from the 19th of August 2019 to the 29th of March 2020 through personal interviewing conducted via phone, and by using computers. The number of questions the interviewees received depended on whether they were employed, not employed, or self-employed with or without permanent employment. The time of the interviews were on average 26 minutes. For employed interviewees the interviews lasted for an average of 33 minutes, while non-employed interviewees lasted for three minutes. In advance of the survey, information was sent out via e-mail to the respondents, with the purpose of informing the respondents about the survey scheme, theme and privacy before the interviews were conducted. If the respondents had not read the information before the conduction of the interviews, they were referred to the content of the e-mail before the interview started, to ensure informed consent. To increase the response rate, reminders were sent out via both e-mail and SMS amongst people they had not successfully gotten in contact with. Also, respondents that first declined participating, were followed-up via e-mail and SMS (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 10).

Regarding response rates through the years, it has overall been negative, but with an upturn from 2016 to 2019. In 2006, Statistics Norway successfully interviewed 67% of the sample, in 2009 61%, in 2013 and 2016 53%, and in 2019 57%. The negative trend could mainly be because the share of people whom they had not successfully contacted has

increased over the years. From 2016 to 2019, the share of non-contact people has remained stable (Dalen & Bye, p. 10).

Quality of the data

In the selection of the sample, sampling biases can occur, where randomness can lead to the distribution of certain characteristics in the sample not being identical to the distribution in the population (sample variance). This bias is due to fluctuations in the sampling process, and it is to be expected that the individuals selected in each population group do not systematically differ from those not selected. Nevertheless, if certain groups are underrepresented in the gross sample, they will weigh too little to affect the overall result. This means that the data collected after conducting the survey, does not represent a cross-section of the population that Statistics Norway want to say something about. Such sampling bias is controlled for in the sampling process to minimize these types of errors (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 13).

However, biases can occur due to dropouts. The dropouts are people who, for various reasons, Statistics Norway were unable to interview. The gross sample was all the individuals attempted to be interviewed, while the net sample was the people that they were able to interview. Non-response bias could mean that the net sample may not necessarily be fully representative of the Norwegian population represented by the gross sample. The differences between the gross and the net sample is largest amongst people with different educational backgrounds. Individuals with primary school as highest educational level, constitutes 2,5% less of the net than the gross sample. Individuals with higher education are overrepresented with just above 4%. There are also some differences between the age groups; individuals within the age of 25-44 years old are underrepresented with 3,4% in the net sample, whilst individuals within the ages of 45-67 years old, are overrepresented with almost 3%. There are small differences in willingness to respond regarding gender and regions. The differences between the gross and net sample are not critical for the representativeness of the survey, but Statistics Norway created a weighting to correct some of the biases between the samples to ensure that individuals with underrepresented characteristics count more, while individuals with overrepresented characteristics are counting less. This weight variable is named “fvekt” in the data file (Dalen & Bye, p. 13-15), which was applied before conducting the analysis.

The thesis focused on the data of senior employees defined as age of 55+ years old, consisting of 2696 respondents (Dalen & Bye, 2020). The reason for this age restriction

follows the age definition of senior employees as previously stated in the thesis (Kosowski, 2018, p. 38).

Measurements

The data from the Living Conditions Survey includes several variables, but the thesis will outline the data regarding work ability and experienced conflict in workplaces.

Work ability

Work ability was measured with two items, i.e., *Eldre2a = do you think you will be able or healthy enough to work until age of retirement*, *Eldre2b = until what age do you think you will be able to or healthy enough to work until*. Eldre2a was only asked to respondents aged 50-66 years old, and has the values YES/NO. If the respondents answered “no” to Eldre2a, Eldre2b was asked which is a continuous variable. The Eldre2a-variable has values labelled 1=yes, 2=no, 8=I don't know, and 9=wish not to answer.

Conflict at work

Conflict at work was measured with three items i.e., *Sp51c = conflict with supervisors*, *Sp51d = conflict with colleagues*, and *Sp51e = conflict with customers etc*. Sp51c, d and e are labelled “do you often, sometimes, rarely, or never experience uncomfortable conflicts with supervisors/colleagues/customers, clients, students or others that are not employed in your workplace?”. This was a categorical conflict variable with four levels ranging from 1-4 where 1=often, 2=sometimes, 3=rarely, and 4=never (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 88).

Statistical analysis

To test the hypotheses, the data analysis programme SPSS was used to employ two different statistics and measures: Chi-square test and logistic binary regression. The chi-square tests were used to investigate the association between two categorical variables: Work ability and Type of conflict. A chi-square test was performed for each combination of Work ability and Type of conflict (“with supervisors”, “with colleagues”, and “with customers etc.”). For each chi-square test the chi-square statistics (χ^2), degrees of freedom (df), and p-value (p) were reported.

Logistic binary regression was applied to investigate the relationship between work ability, which was the dependent variable, and predictor variables such as conflict with supervisors (Sp51c), colleagues (Sp51d), and customers etc. (Sp51e). Model 2 was controlled for gender. Logistic regression coefficients (B), p-values (p), and odds ratio (Exp(B)) were reported for each predictor variable in each model.

Results

Table 1 describes the study sample. The entire sample consists of 11 212 participants with 5377 (48%) females and 5835 (52%) males. The sample of respondents aged older than 55 years old and over consists of 2969 individuals, with slightly less females (48%) than males (52%). The mean age of respondents was 42 years old for the entire sample. Among respondents aged 55 and above (55+), the mean age was 60 years. The largest occupational fields include General subjects (26%), followed by the Scientific, craft and technical fields (23%), and Health-, social-, and physical educations (17%). This distribution of the senior employee sample was consistent with the general sample.

Table 1: Description of study sample (N = 11 212)

Variable	Description	Frequencies and %	55+
Age	<i>Age</i>	42 (14)	60 (4)
Gender	<i>Female</i>	5377 (48%)	1303 (48%)
	<i>Male</i>	5835 (52%)	1393 (52%)
Occupational field	<i>General subjects</i>	3189 (30%)	685 (26%)
	<i>Humanistic and aesthetic subjects</i>	533 (5%)	117 (4%)
	<i>Teaching and educational science</i>	745 (7%)	202 (8%)
	<i>Social studies and legal subjects</i>	537 (5%)	69 (3%)
	<i>Economic and administrative subjects</i>	1275 (12%)	361 (14%)
	<i>Scientific, craft and technical subjects</i>	2385 (22%)	620 (23%)
	<i>Health-, social- and physical educations</i>	1560 (15%)	444 (17%)
	<i>Primary industry</i>	168 (2%)	55 (2%)
	<i>Communication, safety, and other service-related subjects</i>	390 (4%)	104 (4%)
Sp51c	<i>Uncomfortable conflicts with supervisors</i>	7997 (71%) Often =86 (1%) <i>Men = 44 (1%)</i> <i>Women = 42 (1%)</i> Sometimes =579 (7%) <i>Men = 293 (4%)</i> <i>Women = 286 (4%)</i> Rarely =2771 (35%) <i>Men = 1518 (19%)</i> <i>Women = 1253 (16%)</i> Never =4561 (57%) <i>Men = 2344 (29%)</i> <i>Women = 2217 (28%)</i>	1680 (62%) Often =21 (1%) <i>Men = 7 (0%)</i> <i>Women = 14 (1%)</i> Sometimes =143 (9%) <i>Men = 73 (4%)</i> <i>Women = 70 (4%)</i> Rarely =636 (38%) <i>Men = 361 (22%)</i> <i>Women = 275 (16%)</i> Never =880 (54%) <i>Men = 449 (27%)</i> <i>Women = 431 (26%)</i>
Sp51d	<i>Uncomfortable conflicts with colleagues</i>	8016 (72%) Often =42 (1%) <i>Men = 17 (0%)</i>	1687 (62%) Often =5 (0%) <i>Men = 1 (0%)</i>

		<i>Women = 25 (0%)</i> Sometimes=574 (7%) <i>Men = 281 (4%)</i> <i>Women = 293 (4%)</i> Rarely=2977 (37%) <i>Men = 1614 (20%)</i> <i>Women = 1363 (17%)</i> Never=4423 (55%) <i>Men = 2298 (29%)</i> <i>Women = 2125 (27%)</i>	<i>Women = 4 (0%)</i> Sometimes=123 (7%) <i>Men = 68 (4%)</i> <i>Women = 55 (3%)</i> Rarely=696 (41%) <i>Men = 394 (23%)</i> <i>Women = 302 (18%)</i> Never=863 (51%) <i>Men = 429 (25%)</i> <i>Women = 434 (26%)</i>
Sp51d	<i>Uncomfortable conflicts with customers, client, students etc.</i>	8024 (72%) Often=238 (3%) <i>Men = 116 (1%)</i> <i>Women = 122 (2%)</i> Sometimes=1336 (17%) <i>Men = 621 (8%)</i> <i>Women = 715 (9%)</i> Rarely=3036 (39%) <i>Men = 1589 (20%)</i> <i>Women = 1447 (18%)</i> Never=3414 (43%) <i>Men = 1887 (24%)</i> <i>Women = 1527 (19%)</i>	1691 (63%) Often=22 (1%) <i>Men = 10 (1%)</i> <i>Women = 12 (1%)</i> Sometimes=245 (15%) <i>Men = 128 (8%)</i> <i>Women = 117 (7%)</i> Rarely=680 (40%) <i>Men = 358 (21%)</i> <i>Women = 322 (19%)</i> Never=744 (44%) <i>Men = 399 (24%)</i> <i>Women = 345 (20%)</i>
Eldre2a	<i>Work ability – do you think you will be able to or be healthy enough to work until the age of retirement?</i>	Yes=2298 (86%) No=380 (14%)	Yes=1437 (84%) No=268 (16%)
Eldre2b n = 364 n = 258 (55+)	<i>Until what age do you think you will be able to or healthy enough to work until?</i>	63 (2.4)	63 (2)

Sp51c measures conflict and is labelled “do you often, sometimes, rarely or never experience uncomfortable conflicts with supervisors in the workplace?”. Sp51d measures conflict with colleagues and is labelled “do you often, sometimes, rarely or never experience uncomfortable conflicts with colleagues in the workplace?” and Sp51e is labelled “do you often, sometimes, rarely or never experience conflicts with customers, clients, students or others that are not employed in your workplace?” (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 80).

Eldre2a measures workability and is labelled “Some work until the age of retirement, and some quit earlier than retirement. Do you think you will be able to or be healthy enough to work until the age of retirement?”. Eldre2b is labelled “Until what age do you think you will be able to or healthy enough to work until? Do not consider the retirement age if you think or know that you can work longer than this age” (Dalen & Bye, 2020, p. 88).

Table 1 above also shows the proportion of respondents experiencing uncomfortable conflicts with supervisors, colleagues, and customers etc. The first frequencies and

percentages listed in the columns are the amount of the sample responding to the question. The table shows that 8% of the whole sample and 10% the 55+ sample report to have experienced uncomfortable conflicts with supervisors often or sometimes. 8% of the whole sample and 7% of the 55+ sample report to have experienced conflicts with colleagues often or sometimes, and for often or sometimes experiencing uncomfortable conflicts with customers etc., 20% of the whole sample report to have experienced this, while this number is 16% for the 55+ sample. The distribution of experienced conflict for both the samples are relatively similar. Both samples report higher levels of conflict with customers than with supervisors or colleagues, but 4% more of whole sample report to have experienced conflict with customers etc. than the 55+ sample.

The Eldre2a-variable, the variable measuring work ability, consists of 2678 participants, and the 55+ sample consists of 1705. The Eldre2a-variable has values labelled 1=yes, 2=no, 8=I don't know, and 9=wish not to answer. Most people report believing to be able to or healthy enough to work until the age of retirement. Only the sample within 50-66 years old was asked this question, and among them 2298 (86%) responded "yes", and 380 (14%) responded "no". Among individuals aged 55+ years old, 1437 (84%) responded "yes", and 268 (16%) answered "no" to Eldre2a which is a relatively similar response distribution between the two samples. Regarding the Eldre2b-variable, the number of participants in the whole sample is n=364, but for the sample of participants aged 55 years old and older, the number is n=258. Within this variable the mean age is 63 for both samples, meaning that 63 is the age most people think they will be able or healthy enough to work until.

In the appendix there are tables showing crosstabs of occupational field, work ability and the three different levels of conflict both for the entire sample (Appendix 1) and for the sample of 55 + (Appendix 2). Both appendixes illustrate the relationship between the variable occupational field, labelled "fagfelt" from LKU, work ability (the ability or being healthy enough to work until age of retirement) labelled "Eldre2a), and the three conflict variables (Sp51c, Sp51d, Sp51e). Appendix 1 shows that most respondents across different occupational fields report to never experience conflict with neither supervisors, colleagues, nor with customers etc. Also, the number of respondents responding "yes" to work ability is higher than respondents answering "no" across different occupational fields, which is the same trend for both the entire sample and for the 55+ sample. Although there are some variations of responses across the different occupational fields, the overall trend is that most respondents answer "Never" to have experienced conflicts on their workplace.

When viewing the relationship between occupational field and work ability, there are some variations in responses to work ability among the different occupational fields for individuals aged 55+. Specifically Economic and administrative subjects, Scientific, craft and technical subjects, and Health, social, and physical educations show relatively higher percentages of respondents reporting they will be able to work until the age of retirement. Within fields like Social studies and legal subjects, and Primary industry, however, there are a higher proportion of respondents expressing doubts about their work ability until the age of retirement. Specifically occupational fields associated with administrative roles or technical expertise, seem to have stronger beliefs about their work ability. On the other hand, occupational fields requiring physical labour or those who might have higher stress levels, such as Social studies and legal subjects or Primary Industry, exhibit more uncertainty about their work ability until retirement.

When viewing the relationship between experienced conflict with supervisors and occupational field, there seem to be some variations. Most respondents within Primary industry reported to rarely or never experience conflict with supervisors. Other fields, such as General subjects and Scientific, craft and technical subjects, show more variation with mixed responses to experiencing conflicts often, sometimes, rarely, or never. This suggests that there is a relationship between occupational field and experience of conflict among individuals aged 55 years or older.

Table 1 also illustrates the distribution of experienced conflict among gender. 8% of both men and women report to experience conflicts with supervisors often or sometimes. This is similar to the findings for the category of 55+ where 5% of women and 4% of men report to experience conflicts often or sometimes with supervisors. The reports of never experiencing conflict with supervisors are also quite similar between the genders. Regarding uncomfortable conflicts with colleagues neither gender for both samples report to experience this often. 4% of men and women in the whole sample report to sometimes experience conflicts with colleagues, while in the 55+ sample 4% of men and 3% of women experience this sometimes. 55% of the whole sample report to never experience conflicts with colleagues while this number is 51% for the 55+ sample. Regarding conflicts with customers the majority of both the whole sample (43%) and the 55+ sample (44%) report to never experience this. 20% of the whole sample report to often or sometimes experience this, including 11% of women and 9% of men. For the 55+ sample 8% of women experience this often or sometimes, while this number is 9% for men.

Table 2 illustrates the relationship between work ability (Eldre2a) with three different types of conflicts: With supervisors, with colleagues, and with customers etc. within the sample consisting of respondents aged 55+. Most of the sample report to never have experienced conflict with either supervisors, colleagues, or customers etc.

Table 2. Chi-square test of relationship between work ability and types of conflict.

WORK ABILITY	TYPE OF CONFLICT				CHI-SQUARE TESTS		
	With supervisors				x ²	df	p
	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>			
Yes	13 1%	106 8%	513 38%	729 53%	9.047	3	.029
No	6 2%	31 12%	101 38%	125 48%			
	With colleagues				x ²	df	p
	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>			
	Yes	4 0%	94 7%	547 40%	721 53%	5.886	3
No	1 0%	24 9%	121 46%	119 45%			
	With costumers etc.				x ²	df	p
	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>			
	Yes	17 1%	195 14%	553 41%	605 44%	0.308	3
No	4 2%	40 15%	104 39%	117 44%			

By performing the chi-square test, the results show a significant relationship between work ability and conflict with supervisors ($x^2 = 9.05$; $df=3$; $p=.029$). There is, however, no statistical significance between work ability and conflicts with colleagues ($x^2 = 5.89$; $df=3$; $p=.117$), or conflicts with customers ($x^2 = 0.31$; $df=3$; $p=.958$).

Logistic regression analysis on the effect of conflict types on seniors' work ability

Table 3 shows a logistic regression analysis with work ability as the binary dependent variable (outcome-variable). The

independent variable is three different types of conflict: With supervisors, with colleagues, and with customers etc. Model 1 is a regression analysis of work ability with the three different conflict levels separately, whilst Model 2 controls for gender

Table 3. Results of binary logistic regression analysis

Variables	Model 1			Model 2: Controlled for gender		
	B	p	Exp(B)	B	p	Exp(B)
<i>Sp51c – Conflict with supervisors</i>	-0.536	.008	.585	-.521	.010	.594
<i>Sp51d – Conflict with colleagues</i>	-.298	.204	.742	-.301	.201	.740
<i>Sp51e – Conflict with customers etc.</i>	-.084	.643	.920	-0.83	.649	.921

Model 1: The coefficient (B) for work ability and experienced conflicts with supervisors, is -0.526 with a p-value of 0.008. Exp(B) is 0.585. These results suggests that for each unit increase in conflict with supervisors, the odds of perceived work ability until the age of retirement decreases by approximately 41.5%. These results indicate that experienced conflict with supervisors negatively affects perceived work ability among senior employees, indicating that work ability reduces when conflict with supervisors is high. The p-value of 0.008 suggests that this effect is statistically significant.

The coefficient (B) for work ability and experienced conflicts with colleagues is -0.298 with a p-value of 0.204. The Exp(B) is 0.742, suggesting that experienced conflict with colleagues decreases perceived work ability until age of retirement by approximately 25.8%. However, the p-value of 0.204 indicates that this effect is not statistically significant.

For work ability and experienced conflict with customers etc., the coefficient is -0.84 with a p-value of 0.643. The Exp(B) is 0.920. This suggests that perceived work ability decreases by 8% when experiencing conflicts with customers etc. Nevertheless, the p-value is 0.643 which indicates that this effect is not statistically significant.

Model 2: This model controls the findings in Model 1 with gender. In the results listed above, the coefficients, Exp(B) and p-value remain relatively similar to Model 1. Overall, these results indicate that gender does not substantially change the relationship between the three different levels of conflict and work ability, indicating that even when controlled for gender, conflicts with supervisors still affects perceived work ability.

Discussion and conclusions

Extensive research on workplace conflict and its consequences lacks in exploring how it affects senior employees' workability. The thesis studied the association between senior employees' conflict experiences and their ability to work until retirement age. The findings suggest that the frequency of conflicts with supervisors has a statistically significant impact on the perceived work ability of senior employees until retirement. However, the relationship

between conflict with colleagues and customers etc. was not statistically significant. The former is in line with previously conducted studies (Kreisman, 2002, p. 11).

Descriptive statistics

The dataset includes individuals aged 18-66 years old, with an age limitation of 55+ year olds. The mean age of the 55+ sample is 60. These individuals are distributed across various sectors with most employees within the fields of General subjects, Scientific, craft, and technical subjects, and Health, social and physical educations. Regarding experiencing uncomfortable conflicts, most of the sample reported to never experience this, but the prevalence of experiencing conflicts was highest with customers, clients, students, etc. (16%). This study has solely focused on senior employees aged 55+ years and has therefore not focused on comparing the experience of conflict among this age bracket compared to their younger employees. This will be further discussed in the section of the thesis discussing limitations of the study. However, previous conducted studies discovered that adverse social behaviours, such as workplace conflict, was more prevalent among younger workers (Sterud & Hanvold, 2021, p. 330). The results from this study suggest that there are small differences in the experience of conflict among the whole sample and for the 55+ sample. The whole sample report slightly higher levels of conflict experiences compared to the 55+ sample. Among the 55+ sample there is a 10% prevalence of experienced conflict with supervisors, as shown in table 1. This seems to be lower than the estimate of 13.4% in the Norwegian population (Sterud & Hanvold, 2021, p. 328 + 330).

Occupational field and work conflict

The study examined variations in perceived work conflicts across different occupational fields, finding that certain fields such as Humanistic and aesthetic subjects, Teaching and educational sciences, Social studies and legal subjects, Primary industry, and Health, social and physical educations reported higher levels of conflict with supervisors, colleagues, and customers. Conversely, fields like General subjects, Economic and administrative subjects, and Scientific, craft and technical subjects, and Communication, safety and other service subjects reported lowest levels of conflict. Interestingly, while some fields displayed consistently high or low levels of conflict across all three categories, others showed disparities, suggesting that conflict prevalence can vary within and between occupational fields. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing the diverse nature of workplace conflicts and implementing targeted interventions to address them effectively across different organizational contexts.

Occupational field and work ability

Another interesting finding of the study delves into the impact of various occupational fields on senior employees' perceptions of their work ability until retirement age. Appendix 1 displays the distribution of beliefs regarding work ability across different fields, highlighting variations in perceptions. For instance, while most senior employees in General subjects express confidence in their ability to work until retirement, the proportion is lower in Health, social and physical educations. Teaching and educational science fields show comparatively higher work ability perceptions, whereas Scientific, craft, and technical subjects indicate lower levels. These findings might suggest the influence of job stability, satisfaction, physical demands, and conflict on individuals' perceptions of work ability within different occupational contexts (Varianou-Mikellidou et al., 2020, p. 3).

Gender, conflict at work and work ability

The study explores gender dynamics in conflict experiences and workability among individuals aged 55 and older. While the sample exhibits a slightly higher representation of males, there are minimal gender differences in reported conflicts with supervisors, colleagues, and customers. Both men and women generally report similar frequencies of conflict experienced across various levels. Although slight variations exist, such as men reporting slightly lower conflict frequencies with customers, these differences are not substantial. Contrary to previous research indicating gender-related challenges in the workplace, this study finds no significant gender differences in conflict experiences among senior employees. These findings challenge previous assumptions and suggest a more balanced perception of workplace conflicts across genders among older employees (Sterud & Hanvold, 2021, p. 328 + 330; Castellini et al., 2023, p. 52-53).

Conflict with supervisors reduces work ability among senior employees

The result from the study suggests that conflict with supervisors affects workability negatively. This relationship is statistically significant and proposes that heightened conflict with supervisors reduces the work ability of senior employees. This also suggests that reduced conflict increases work ability (Wozniak et al., 2022, p. 519-520). This finding remains largely consistent even after controlling for gender. The hierarchical differences between an employee and a supervisor might contribute to this effect, as conflicts with supervisors can evoke negative emotions, such as anger, fear, frustration, and distrust, causing psychological distress which could potentially reduce work ability (C. Yang et al., 2021, p. 551; H. Wang et al., 2021, p. 3). There are power imbalances between employees and supervisors (Agnihotri et al., 2023), and supervisors hold a higher authority within the organizational hierarchy

compared to other employees (Kovič & McMahon, 2023, p. 403). Conflict with a supervisor may also create thoughts and concern regarding how to handle the conflict, which could further exacerbate the psychological distress due to the conflict and further affect work ability negatively (Bochatay et al., 2019, p. 803-804). Experienced conflict with supervisors may therefore hold a heavier burden and impact work ability more significantly than conflict with colleagues and customers. Senior employees might also hold feelings of stress and uncertainty causing them to feel vulnerable when conflict arises with their supervisors, who have authority over their jobs, tasks, and performance evaluations (Mitchell & Walker, 2020). Supervisors have the power to influence the workplace culture in terms of inclusion and social groups. This illustrates both a potential for conflict to arise, and the significance of a supervisor in the workplace (Pettinger, 2005, p. 48).

In most workplaces and organizations, supervisors are also the one's providing feedback, guidance, and career advancement opportunities for the staff. They allocate resources and provide rewards (Anglin et al., 2022, p. 1474). Experiencing conflict with supervisors might therefore cause employees to experience doubts regarding their interpersonal resources and job security in terms of career advancement opportunities as well as reduced job satisfaction (Elfering et al., 2017, p. 25-26; H. Wang et al., 2021, p. 8). This role of the supervisors further contributes to the significant impact conflict may have on work ability. Experienced conflict with colleagues or customers, on the other hand, might have less direct implications for the employee's work life in terms of job stability and advancement, which reduces the impact these types of conflict may have on their work ability (Elfering et al., 2017, p. 27).

Social identity theory offers meaningful insights into this matter. The thoughts and feelings that arise from memberships of in-groups, contribute to forming our social identity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 129). Experiencing conflict with supervisors can disrupt the social identity of senior employees derived from their in-group straining the relationship between the employee and the in-group, causing a negative social identity. When experiencing conflicts within the organization, this could disrupt a sense of belonging and positive identification with the workplace. Supervisors are authority figures in the workplace with great salience and value, and when conflict is experienced with them, this could cause the employee to feel alienated or excluded from the workforce, experiencing lack of appreciation, and doubting their skills, leading to a disruption of the sense of unity and identification with the in-group (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 136; Bochatay et al., 2019, p. 802-804). This

could reduce work ability and increase intentions to retire early due to the desire to escape feelings of stress and anxiety associated with the workplace, as well as wanting to avoid further conflict, even though they might originally believe themselves to be able to work until retirement (Kuriakose et al., 2019, p. 693-694).

When experiencing conflicts with supervisors, the supervisor can become a part of the out-group rather than a member of the in-group due to weakened shared identity and a disruption of common goals (Elfering et al., 2017, p. 25-26). Studies have illustrated that conflict can cause employees to develop negative perceptions of the out-group involved in conflict, and this could further increase the level of conflict (Bochatay et al., 2019, p. 804). Social identity theory also states that we tend to favour our in-group. Therefore, in the organizational context when comparing in-groups with out-groups, employees favour their place of work, ensuring that it is positively distinctive and clearly different and more positively evaluated than the out-group. This in-group favouritism is dependent on subjective belief structures about their in-group compared with the out-group. When experiencing conflict with supervisors, and, in an attempt, to retain a positive social identity with their workplace, senior employees might categorize their supervisor(s) as part of the out-group, which could maintain the positive social identity with the in-group, reducing the psychological consequences of the experienced conflict (Hogg, 2016, p. 7).

When experiencing conflict with a supervisor, this might cause the employee to choose between different courses of action. Social identity theory has identified three different strategies for how to handle the experience of a negative social identity. When a senior employee experiences conflicts with their supervisor, they can choose between individual mobility and seeking entrance to another status group, collective action which involves working for a status improvement of their group, or social creativity. The findings suggest that conflict is a threat towards social identity, which could force the employee to choose individual mobility and fleeing from their in-group, which is the workforce, and choosing to pursue another place of work or retiring, resulting in reduced work ability (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 133).

Perceived conflict with supervisors in the workplace can profoundly impact the work ability of senior employees. Experience of conflict can undermine physical and mental health of senior employees, resulting in decreased job performance, disengagement from the workplace and withdrawal, reduced job satisfaction, which could further lead to intentions to retire early (Wayne et al., 2017, p. 878-879). Addressing and resolving workplace conflict is

essential to maintain a positive and healthy work environment promoting the well-being and productivity of senior employees.

The findings of the research highlight the nuanced relationship between work ability and experienced conflicts within the workplace hierarchy. It suggests that the impact of conflicts with supervisors is heightened concerning the perceived work ability of senior employees, suggesting that conflict with supervisors corresponds to reduced work ability. The consistency and statistical significance of this finding, does not, however, imply that conflicts with colleagues and customers may not influence perceived work ability to some extent. The results illustrate a decline in work ability in the presence of conflict, indicating that there is a need for further exploration into the specific mechanisms underlying these dynamics.

Conflict with colleagues and customers, and work ability

Although there were nonsignificant findings, it seems that when senior employees experience conflicts with colleagues, which constitutes a majority of the workforce, this could disrupt belongingness to the in-group, causing senior employees to, perhaps, seek out individual mobility and retiring. Experienced conflict can also reduce a sense of belonging to the organization. Sense of belonging and identification with the in-group have, by social identity theory, been identified to create loyalty and commitment to both the organization and its common goals. Employees categorize themselves as part of the organization and they commit to the organization emotionally (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 135). In the presence of conflict, this loyalty and commitment may be eroded causing the belonging and identification to the organization to be reduced. Research has shown that employees' identity with their work group more strongly than the organization, and when belonging and identification is reduced due to the experience of conflict with colleagues, this could also gradually lead to a negative social identity and reducing the sense of belonging to the in-group (Hennessy & West, 1999, p. 361). When experiencing conflicts with supervisors, they can become a part of the out-group. However, when experiencing conflicts with colleagues, which constitutes a majority of the workforce, this could disrupt the belongingness to the in-group causing senior employees to, perhaps, seek out individual mobility and retiring (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 133).

Conflict with customers has also been shown to negatively impact the well-being of employees within workplaces. It can erode the protective functions of interpersonal support in the workplace, negatively influencing the well-being of employees. Conflict with customers has also been shown to increase risk of burnout (Klingbyl & Chung-Yan, 2022, p. 151 +

159). Conflicts with customers can lead to several negative feelings, including emotional exhaustion. This could negatively impact work ability itself, but it could also negatively impact the employee's interactions with customers, potentially influencing the quality of the customer satisfaction (Zhao et al., 2014, p. 423-424). If the customer satisfaction is reduced, this could worsen the conflict, causing the employee to experience further negative emotions to their workplace, which could possibly reduce their work ability (W. T. Wang et al., 2019, p. 1041; Deng et al., 2022, p. 216)

Conflict also affects psychological well-being. In the presence of conflict, individuals may feel anxious, depressed, and reduced motivation and energy to perform their jobs. When experiencing conflict with colleagues, senior employees might also feel reduced social support and not having someone to share their thoughts and feelings with. The feelings of lack of competence and skills, due to the presence of conflict, can also affect psychological well-being, which could result in reduced work ability (Bochatay et al., 2019, p. 802-804.). Also, these negative effects on psychological well-being can lead to decreased job performance, due to reduced concentration and motivation. When there is an on-going conflict present, this can make it hard to focus on performing one's tasks in the workplace, which could possibly lead to errors and decreased productivity, which negatively affects work ability (C. Yang et al., 2021, p. 551; H. Wang et al., 2021, p. 3).

However, the relationship between experienced conflict with colleagues and customers and work ability is not statistically significant. This does not mean that conflict with colleagues is not present or that it does not impact the work ability of senior employees, but rather that this effect is not as pivotal as conflict with supervisors.

Gender differentiations

While there are variations in reported conflicts between men and women, the general pattern indicates that conflicts are no different in the prevalence across genders. This implies that uncomfortable conflicts with supervisors, colleagues, and customers occur in various work settings regardless of gender. However, prior research has shown that workplace conflict is more common among women compared to men, and that such conflicts are gender-related (Sterud & Hanvold, 2021, p. 328-331). In an earlier study on conflict, workplace conflict was categorized with other negative social behaviours, such as sexual harassment, bullying, threats, acts of violence, and workplace conflicts (Sterud & Hanvold, 2021, p. 328). In another study by Castellini and colleagues (2023), there were no gender disparities in conflict reports by managers. However, some women reported higher instances of sexual harassment.

It remains uncertain whether sexual harassment falls under the conflict variables of the dataset. This study also revealed that women face more conflicts than men in terms of personal attacks (Castellini et al., 2023, p. 43).

Occupational fields differentiation

Most senior employees are positive that they will be able or healthy enough to work until the age of retirement. On the other hand, there seems to be a trend across the data set that occupational fields associated with administrative roles or technical expertise, seem to have stronger beliefs about their work ability. This is contrary to the age discrimination and doubts regarding senior employees' technical skills as mentioned previously in the thesis (Kosowski, 2019, p. 45-46; Castellini et al., 2023, p. 52). On the other hand, occupation fields requiring physical labour, such as Primary industry, or fields associated with higher stress levels, such as Social studies and legal subjects, exhibit more uncertainty about their work ability until retirement. This might be because of both the natural physical changes that come with older age (Galama et al., 2013, p. 883). This might also be due to factors such as not having any supervisors for those employed within Primary industry, such as agriculture and farming, as other occupational fields. The level of conflict might be lower with fewer people in the workplace (Tømmerås & Thomas, 2022, p. 4). This is in line with previously conducted research that found that managers within fields such as Industry, Commerce and Service sectors reported higher levels of conflict and adversities than general workers (Castellini et al., 20203, p. 43).

The study conducted by Stenrud and Hanvold (2021) also showed differences between occupational fields. Adverse social behaviours, such as sexual harassment, bullying, threats, and workplace conflicts, were more prevalent among legislators, senior officials, and managers, as well as service-, shop- and market sales-workers. In addition to these occupational groups, the study also included technicians, clerks, and associate professionals (Stenrud & Hanvold, 2021, p. 328). Considering the occupational fields from LKU, the occupational group of legislators, senior officials, and managers can be included in the "Economic and administrative subjects", and service-, shop- and market sales-workers can be included in the "Communication, safety, and other service subjects". The findings from Stenrud and Hanvold (2021) are not in line with the results from this thesis; the occupational field of Communication, safety, and other service subjects did not differ substantially from other occupational fields in terms of experience of conflict or work ability. Also, senior employees within economic and administrative subjects reported some of the lowest levels of

experienced conflict in the workplace. They also reported great beliefs regarding their workability. However, the LKU collected participants from more occupational fields than the study by Stenrud and Hanvold (2021). It is therefore possible that the distribution or results of experienced conflict would have been different if more occupational fields were included in the study by Stenrud and Hanvold (2021).

The reason for the different distribution of experience of conflict and work ability across different occupation fields, might therefore be connected to the organizational culture of the different occupational fields. However, the study does not control for these and other variables such as size of workforce, or number of employees, when examining the relationship between conflict and work ability. When discussing these findings, it is therefore important to account for different variables as well. It is important to note that different fields, sectors, and organizations may differ from each other regarding culture, hierarchy, structure, union representatives, the relationship between colleagues, degree of contact and communication. The organizational culture and norms surrounding conflict resolution can influence the impact conflicts has on work ability. An organizational culture that prioritizes open and honest communication and clear, precise conflict resolution strategies, may effectively mend with, and reduce the negative impact of conflict on work ability (Longe., 2015, p. 85).

There are few studies connecting characteristics and demands of an organization with the work ability of their employees. However, studies have connected work ability with the type of job performed within the organization. Difficult working conditions in terms of, for instance, long working hours and shifts, were shown to negatively affect work ability. Also, physically demanding jobs including lifting, moving, or holding loads impacted work ability negatively. Regarding organizational factors, such as lack of recognition from managers, dealing with angry clients or patients, age discrimination and conflict also had a negative impact on work ability (Varianou-Mikellidou et al., 2020, p. 2 + 5). This is consistent with the findings from this study showing which occupational fields report lower or higher work ability across different fields.

How can social identity theory explain these differences observed? As previously mentioned, social identity theory posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from the in-groups they belong to, such as their work groups or department (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 129). We connect great value and emotional significance to our in-groups which motivates us to seek positive distinctiveness for those groups (Ho &

Yeung, 2021, p. 104). Social identity theory offers insights into how experienced conflict within different occupational fields can manifest itself. The social identity of a work group creates a professional identity which includes the values, beliefs, and goals of the organization and the employees in it. In the presence and experience of conflict within the workplace, individuals can experience a disruption between their professional identity connected to the in-group, the workplace, and the demands of their role (N. Yang & Zhang, 2023, p. 464).

Theoretical contributions/implications

As the results show negative coefficients across all models presented, it implies that when conflict increases, work ability is reduced.

However, it seems that in connection with theory, employees may identify more strongly with their colleagues and their supervisors than their customers, as they are a part of their in-group, and customers are a part of the out-group. Conflict experienced with and within the in-group may have a more pronounced impact on their work ability compared to experienced conflict with customers (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 132). Senior employees, who have likely spent a considerable amount of time in the organization, may strongly identify with their role and the organization itself. Consequently, conflicts with supervisors can threaten their sense of belonging and identity within the workplace. From a social identity perspective, conflicts with supervisors may disrupt the perceived alignment between the senior employees' personal identity and their organizational identity. This incongruence can create psychological tension and diminish their motivation to remain productive and committed to their work. Ultimately, the negative impact of conflicts with supervisors on work ability among senior employees underscores the importance of fostering positive interpersonal relationships, effective communication channels, and supportive leadership within organizations (Foy et al., 2019, p. 1020.).

The findings suggest that conflict is a threat towards social identity, forcing the employee to choose between individual mobility and fleeing from their in-group (the workforce), or fighting the status quo in terms of collective action or social creativity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 133). The development of a positive social identity within the workplace, the in-group, creates a sense of belonging and could foster social safety. However, this could also reduce cooperation between groups in the workplace and could potentially increase intergroup conflict (Kerins et al., 2022, p. 342). These are important matters to consider when further exploring the impact of conflict on work ability and its significance to theoretical models.

Practical contributions/implications

Workplace conflict has many costs and consequences (Kosowski, 2018, p. 38). For the workplace, unresolved conflict can generate financial and human costs in terms of frustration, low morale among the workforce, tension, problems with communication, and low trust. This could further lead to bad quality of the decision making in the workforce, time wastage, lowered job motivation, absenteeism, and loss of skilled employees (Riaz & Junaid, 2010, p. 605). This could lead to the argument that organizations and their supervisors should develop effective conflict management strategies or lose parts of their workforce. If conflicts are not managed or efficiently solved, workforce members will be lost, which leads to both financial costs and loss of skilled workforce and competence for society in general.

The study shows that most senior employees in the sample report never having experienced conflicts with supervisors, colleagues, or customers. These findings lay the groundwork for the development of interventions and practices aimed at supporting senior employees. By understanding the prevalence of conflict avoidance or resolution among this demographic, organizations can tailor interventions to improve workplace conditions and enhance the well-being of senior employees. Employing theories from social psychology, such as social identity theory, could potentially enable different occupational fields to explore and appreciate the causes of conflict on workplaces and hence shape the way we conceptualize ourselves and others (Kerins et al., 2022, p. 342).

The probability of senior employees choosing to stay in or leave the workforce, is highly dependent on their motivational and organizational support. In terms of how organizations can retain their senior employees, several factors have been identified. Amongst these are work environment, including flexible work arrangements and age-friendly work environment. Training and development programmes have also been identified as important (Nagarajan & Sixsmith, 2021, p. 48-49). Addressing age discrimination in the workforce is also of great importance to retain senior employees in the workforce. Therefore, creating a positive work environment is also important. Acknowledging that ageism might be present in the organization is a first step in doing so which can grow organizations' understanding of both ageism and how to increase well-being of senior employees (Cortijo et al., 2019, p. 207). Implementing strategies and policies to cope with conflict in the workplaces and creating a positive work environment also contributes to retaining senior employees by reducing workplace stress, and increasing productivity, performance, and well-being of senior employees (Foy et al., 2019, p. 1020).

Workplace conflict increases stress, illness, reduced job satisfaction, and absenteeism amongst employees. Organizational interventions identified to reduce conflict and increase well-being among employees are flexible working hours, access to support services, cultural support for employees, and social support (Foy et al., 2019, p. 1022-1023). Creating a work environment facilitating positive interactions between colleagues can strengthen the organizational identification of employees and is important in creating a positive work environment and retaining senior employees (Ho & Yeung, 2021, p. 119). This highlights the importance of creating interventions to increase cooperation within organizations and prevent conflict escalation to retain senior workers.

Future research

When discussing these findings, it is important to note that age differs from one individual to the other. Even though two individuals may share the same age, or birth year, there may be differences between them in terms of their functions physically or mentally (Kaur & Verma, 2011). There is no such thing as the typical older person; an 80-year-old might have the same mental and physical capacities as a 30-year-old, and the other way around; some seniors may experience significant declines of their capacities at a much younger age than others. This diversity in age arises from the physical and social environments people surround themselves in, and the relationships we have within and with our environments is affected by our personal characteristics, such as our family, gender, ethnicity, the people we surround us with, and the activities and work we perform (WHO, 2023). In other words, there are differences between chronological age and functional age, and how age is perceived and unfolded varies between individuals. Adaptions in aging may also help researchers understand the prospects of staying or leaving the organization. This idea of adaption among senior employees can be further investigated.

Effective recognition and reward systems has also been identified as important to retain senior employees in the workforce. This includes designing and implementing strategies to reward the employees of an organization with the purpose of attracting, motivating, and retaining employees. This has been shown to affect employees' turnover intentions and performance (De Gieter & Hofmans, 2015, p. 201). Also, reward and recognition are an organization's way of appreciating their employees, which can boost their motivation for performance and retaining in the organization (Tirta & Enrika, 2020, p. 90). This would be of great interest for future research to discover how organizations can retain senior employees.

Senior employees face limited job opportunities compared to younger colleagues, making it challenging to find new employment. Quitting and searching for a new job is more complex for seniors due to age, health concerns, and the looming prospect of retirement. The question arises: Will dissatisfaction and discomfort at work push them towards retirement instead of seeking new opportunities? Will they opt to retire rather than continue in the workforce? While conflicts with colleagues and customers may not weigh heavily on senior employees, clashes with supervisors could significantly impact their decision to stay or leave. The influence of conflicts with colleagues or customers is not as decisive for senior employees. These are nuanced aspects of ageing and work where further research might be needed.

Limitations

Some limitations of the present study should be mentioned. First, the study is conducted using data retrieved from Statistics Norway's Living Condition Survey (2019) with a cut-off at 55+ years old to investigate the experience of conflicts among the employees defined as seniors. The problem with only having one age group, is that it eliminates the opportunity to compare senior employees' experience of conflicts and work ability with other age groups' conflict experiences and work ability. However, having two groups, for instance one group labelled "senior employees" and another group labelled "young employees", could potentially blur out the cut off-group as the "others"-group would be much larger since it would include all other ages than the 55+-group. In a more practical sense, this would mean that people that are soon-to-be seniors, for instance 50+, would also be defined as "younger employees" and hence blur out the defined cut-off.

Another limitation of this study is the analysis performed. When analysing the data, for instance in table 2, crosstabs were used for categorical variables. A possible better suited statistics method would have been the Fisher Exact Test due to the "less than five"-demand stated in the Crosstabs-section in SPSS. Also, the sample size of respondents is relatively small, especially in some of the categories of conflict, particularly the "often"-response to the experience of conflict and "no"-response to perceived work ability. This could potentially limit the statistical power of the analysis making it less generalizable to the whole population.

Also, to understand the multi-dimensional costs and consequences of workplace conflict, future studies should use richer and more mixed methods to fully understand the phenomena. These methods could be in-depth interviews, case studies, and focus groups, and

longitudinal study designs. This could contribute to creating a holistic picture of workplace conflict (Riaz & Junaid, 2010, p. 607).

The data quality from Statistics Norway's Living Conditions Survey (LKU) could also serve as a possible limitation of the study. LKU used a cross-sectional design, which could limit the ability to establish causal relationships between the different variables conducted. Using a longitudinal design could provide stronger evidence by measuring response changes of the different variables over time (Dalen & Bye, 2020). Also, The Sp51-variables did not include specifications regarding type of conflict, for instance verbal, physical or psychological (Su & Rungruang, 2023, p. 372). Were the conflicts reported subjectively experienced or were there an objective conflict involving only the employee and a supervisor, were there a conflict between two or more individuals, or the whole workforce, and the supervisors? What did the conflict involve and how was it managed? And what were the results of the different conflicts experienced? Exploring the contents and the consequences of conflict would be of great significance to understand the greater scope of the conflicts reported, especially what types of conflict were reported. Also, exploring how these conflicts relate to different organizational phenomenon and what impact they had on the individual experiencing the conflicts, is of great value to understand the effects of conflict, both on a psychological and organizational level (Riaz & Junaid, 2010, p. 600).

This study has been conducted among a Norwegian population. This could impact the generalizability of the study as different cultural and societal context could influence the consequences, impact, and experience of the phenomenon. However, conflict research has been carried out in different continents and countries, showing quite similar results leading up to the conclusion that conflict has negative impacts on both the organization and the employees working in the organization (Riaz & Junaid, 2010)

Finally, poor management or leadership has been identified as one of the main reasons for why employees leave organizations (Kreisman, 2002, p. 12). However, this has not been controlled for in this thesis, which is a limitation with the study, but an implication for future research. Controlling for other variables that investigates organizational context and culture may also be of relevance to understand the greater scope of workplace and conflict dynamics as well as how everything is intertwined in the organizational culture, affecting both individuals, the workforce, and the organization (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019, p. 126).

Conclusion

This study shows that conflict with supervisors have a detrimental effect on the work ability of senior employees. These findings can contribute to the groundwork for developing interventions and practices to support senior employees and tackle conflict issues in their work environment to extend their ability to work until retirement age. By understanding the prevalence of conflict avoidance or resolution among this demographic, organizations can tailor interventions to improve workplace conditions and enhance the well-being of senior employees.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Occupational field, work ability, and experienced conflict for the whole sample.

Occupational field	Work ability until the age of retirement	Experienced conflict with supervisors (Sp51c)					2 Experienced conflict with colleagues (Sp51d)					3 Experienced conflict with customers (Sp51e)				
		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
General subjects	Yes	5 (1.2%)	28 (6.9%)	124 (30.7%)	247 (61.1%)		1 (0.2%)	22 (5.5%)	138 (34.2%)	242 (60.0%)		7 (1.7%)	47 (11.6%)	152 (37.5%)	199 (49.1%)	
	No	4 (5.0%)	6 (7.5%)	33 (41.3%)	37 (46.3%)		1 (1.3%)	7 (8.8%)	36 (45.0%)	36 (45.0%)		1 (1.3%)	10 (12.5%)	27 (33.8%)	42 (52.5%)	
Humanistic and aesthetic subjects	Yes	1 (1.0%)	12 (11.4%)	38 (36.2%)	54 (51.4%)		2 (1.9%)	9 (8.4%)	39 (36.4%)	57 (53.3%)		1 (0.9%)	14 (13.2%)	45 (42.5%)	46 (43.4%)	
	No	0 (0.0%)	4 (26.7%)	7 (46.7%)	4 (26.7%)		0 (0.0%)	2 (13.3%)	9 (60.0%)	4 (26.7%)		0 (0.0%)	1 (6.7%)	8 (53.3%)	6 (40.0%)	
Teaching and educational science	Yes	1 (0.6%)	19 (12.1%)	57 (36.3%)	80 (51.0%)			13 (8.3%)	68 (43.3%)	76 (48.4%)		5 (3.2%)	31 (19.6%)	81 (51.3%)	41 (25.9%)	
	No	1 (2.0%)	4 (8.2%)	24 (49.0%)	20 (40.8%)			4 (8.0%)	28 (56.0%)	18 (36.0%)		3 (6.0%)	15 (30.0%)	17 (34.0%)	15 (30.0%)	
Social studies and legal subjects	Yes	0 (0.0%)	5 (5.9%)	37 (43.5%)	43 (50.6%)		1 (1.2%)	10 (11.6%)	33 (38.4%)	42 (48.8%)			16 (18.6%)	31 (36.0%)	39 (45.3%)	
	No	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	3 (25.0%)	6 (50.0%)		0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (33.3%)	8 (66.7%)			4 (33.3%)	5 (41.7%)	3 (25.0%)	
	Yes	1 (0.3%)	22 (6.2%)	138 (38.9%)	194 (54.6%)		1 (0.3%)	23 (6.4%)	147 (41.2%)	186 (52.1%)		1 (0.3%)	43 (12.1%)	140 (39.3%)	172 (48.3%)	

	No	1	5	15	21	2	3	19	19	0	6	13	25
		(2.4%)	(11.9%)	(35.7%)	(50.0%)	(4.7%)	(7.0%)	(44.2%)	(44.2%)	(0.0%)	(13.6%)	(29.5%)	(56.8%)
<i>Economic and administrative subjects</i>	Yes	6	38	231	301		39	238	299	4	61	228	288
<i>Scientific, craft and technical subjects</i>	No	1	13	43	31		9	46	33	1	13	36	39
		(1.1%)	(14.8%)	(48.9%)	(35.2%)		(10.2%)	(52.3%)	(37.5%)	(1.1%)	(14.6%)	(40.4%)	(43.8%)
<i>Health, social and physical educations</i>	Yes	7	35	139	182	1	29	158	178	11	72	162	121
		(1.9%)	(9.6%)	(38.3%)	(50.1%)	(0.3%)	(7.9%)	(43.2%)	(48.6%)	(3.0%)	(19.7%)	(44.3%)	(33.1%)
	No	1	6	23	31	0	6	31	24	0	15	30	16
		(1.6%)	(9.8%)	(37.7%)	(50.8%)	(0.0%)	(9.8%)	(50.8%)	(39.3%)	(0.0%)	(24.6%)	(49.2%)	(26.2%)
<i>Primary industry</i>	Yes		4	9	13		4	9	13		3	11	12
			(15.4%)	(34.6%)	(50.0%)		(15.4%)	(34.6%)	(50.0%)		(11.5%)	(42.3%)	(46.2%)
	No		1	3	5		0	4	5		1	5	2
			(11.1%)	(33.3%)	(55.6%)		(0.0%)	(44.4%)	(55.6%)		(12.5%)	(62.5%)	(25.0%)
<i>Communication, safety, and other service subjects</i>	Yes		6	31	46	1	6	34	43	1	14	29	39
			7.2%	37.3%	55.4%	(1.2%)	(7.1%)	(40.5%)	(51.2%)	(1.2%)	(16.9%)	(34.9%)	(47.0%)
	No		1	3	4	1	0	4	3	1	2	2	3
			12.5%	37.5%	50.0%	(12.5%)	(0.0%)	(50.0%)	(37.5%)	(12.5%)	(25.0%)	(25.0%)	(37.5%)

Appendix 2:

Occupational field, work ability, and experienced conflict for the sample of 55+.

Occupational field	Work ability until the age of retirement	Experienced conflict with supervisors (Sp51c)					2 Experienced conflict with colleagues (Sp51d)					3 Experienced conflict with customers (Sp51e)				
		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
General subjects	Yes	3 (1.0%)	17 (5.9%)	90 (31.5%)	176 (61.5%)		1 (0.3%)	13 (4.5%)	95 (33.2%)	177 (61.9%)		3 (1.0%)	31 (10.8%)	109 (38.0%)	144 (50.2%)	
	No	3 (5.4%)	2 (3.6%)	22 (39.3%)	29 (51.8%)		1 (1.8%)	5 (8.9%)	21 (18.1%)	29 (51.8%)		1 (1.8%)	5 (13.9%)	18 (32.1%)	32 (57.1%)	
Humanistic and aesthetic subjects	Yes		5 (8.6%)	22 (37.9%)	31 (53.4%)		1 (1.7%)	7 (11.7%)	21 (35.0%)	31 (51.7%)		7 (11.9%)	26 (44.1%)	26 (44.1%)		
	No		3 (27.3%)	6 (54.5%)	2 (18.2%)		0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)	6 (54.5%)	3 (27.3%)		0 (0.0%)	6 (54.5%)	5 (45.5%)		
Teaching and educational science	Yes	1 (1.1%)	12 (12.8%)	35 (37.2%)	46 (48.9%)			6 (6.4%)	45 (47.9%)	43 (45.7%)		2 (2.1%)	23 (24.2%)	45 (47.4%)	25 (26.3%)	
	No	1 (2.7%)	3 (8.1%)	18 (48.6%)	15 (40.5%)			4 (10.5%)	21 (55.3%)	13 (34.2%)		3 (7.9%)	9 (23.7%)	14 (36.8%)	12 (31.6%)	
Social studies and legal subjects	Yes	0 (0.0%)	4 (9.3%)	20 (46.5%)	19 (44.2%)		1 (2.3%)	8 (18.2%)	16 (36.4%)	19 (43.2%)			10 (22.7%)	15 (34.1%)	19 (43.2%)	
	No	1 (10.0%)	2 (20.0%)	1 (10.0%)	6 (60.0%)		0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (20.0%)	8 (80.0%)			4 (40.0%)	4 (40.0%)	2 (20.0%)	
Economic and administrative subjects	Yes	1 (0.5%)	13 (6.5%)	80 (40.2%)	105 (52.8%)		1 (0.5%)	11 (5.5%)	88 (44.0%)	100 (50.0%)		1 (0.5%)	20 (10.1%)	84 (42.2%)	94 (47.2%)	
	No	0 (0.0%)	5 (15.2%)	9 (27.3%)	19 (57.6%)		0 (0.0%)	3 (9.1%)	15 (45.5%)	15 (45.5%)		0 (0.0%)	5 (14.7%)	10 (29.4%)	19 (55.9%)	
Yes		3	23	152	189			22	151	193		3	40	148	179	

<i>Scientific, craft and technical subjects</i>	No		(0.8%)	(6.3%)	(41.4%)	(51.5%)		(6.0%)	(41.3%)	(52.7%)	0.8%	10.8%	40.0%	48.4%
			0	11	28	22		7	30	25		5	26	31
		(0.0%)	(18.0%)	(45.9%)	(36.1%)		(11.3%)	(48.4%)	(40.3%)		0.0%	8.1%	41.9%	50.0%
<i>Health, social and physical educations</i>	Yes		5	23	86	121		20	106	111	7	52	101	77
			(2.1%)	(9.8%)	(36.6%)	(51.5%)	(8.4%)	(44.7%)	(46.8%)	3.0%	21.9%	24.4%	42.6%	32.5%
	No		1	3	14	23		3	20	18	0	10	20	11
		(2.4%)	(7.3%)	(34.1%)	(56.1%)		(7.3%)	(48.8%)	(43.9%)	0.0%	24.4%	48.8%	26.8%	
<i>Primary industry</i>	Yes			3	7	10		2	8	10		2	9	9
				(15.0%)	(35.0%)	(50.0%)	(10.0%)	(40.0%)	(50.0%)		10.0%	45.0%	45.0%	45.0%
	No			1	1	4		0	2	4		0	4	1
			(16.7%)	(16.7%)	(66.7%)		(0.0%)	(33.3%)	(66.7%)		0.0%	80.0%	20.0%	
<i>Communication, safety, and other service subjects</i>	Yes			5	17	23		4	16	25	1	9	12	23
				(11.1%)	(37.8%)	(51.5%)	(8.9%)	(35.6%)	(55.6%)	2.2%	20.0%	26.7%	51.1%	
	No			0	2	3		0	3	2	0	1	2	2
			(0.0%)	(40.0%)	(60.0%)		(0.0%)	(60.0%)	(40.0%)		0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%