Chapter 22
Resilience in the Workplace: Job Conditions that Buffer Negative Attitudes Toward Older Workers

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In the United States and abroad, older people are vulnerable to negative perceptions and stereotyping, and in some instances outright discrimination (Hedge et al. 2006). These vulnerabilities are especially problematic today due to the increasing demands for employment opportunities among older workers. Are there protective factors that render older workers resilient to these vulnerabilities? Are there things that employers of older workers can do to buffer these vulnerabilities?

Forty years of research documents the negative stereotypes about the capabilities of older workers (Hedge et al. 2006). Most of these stereotypes have been challenged, even refuted, by the bulk of empirical research (see, e.g., McEvoy and Cascio 1989; Ng and Feldman 2008), yet they remain. Recent research reveals their intransigence, especially among younger co-workers (James et al. 2007). It may be the case that negative attitudes and misperceptions about the capabilities of older workers accumulate over time and lead to a slow erosion of older employees' well-being, in a way that may be similar to the way "microaggressions," as described by Sue et al. (2007b), erode the self-esteem of racial minorities. Seldom, however, are these forms of adversity examined for their effects on older workers themselves. In addition, there has been limited attention focused on protective factors that might minimize the typical negative outcomes of negative attitudes toward older workers.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the impact of negative attitudes toward older individuals in today's workplace and explore factors mitigating against them. We propose that there are both internal and external factors that contribute to individuals' sensitivity to the stress associated with negative attitudes. Drawing from conceptions of diversity among other underrepresented groups (Mor Barak 2005), we will explore the extent to which experiences on the job are protective factors against the harmful effects of negative attitudes. In the context of work, job conditions such as supervisor support and work team inclusion may serve as external protective factors, while employees' dispositions or sources of psychological hardiness, such as one's core sense of self, may act as internal protective factors against the harmful effects of daily microaggressions expressed as negative attitudes

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toward late-career workers. We also examine the extent to which job conditions and core sense of self modify the relationships between positive attitudes and the two outcome variables, mental health and employee engagement.

Age: The Twenty-First Century Workforce Diversity Challenge

In recent decades, the U.S. workforce has become progressively more diverse in terms of age. During the 1950s, the 65 and older workforce was relatively small in comparison to other age groups (Toossi 2002). Recent pressure to continue work into later life, however, has meant that today's older workers represent a substantial portion of the U.S. workforce, a trend that is expected to continue in the coming decades. There are now increasing numbers of workplaces where individuals who range widely in age work side by side (Toossi 2006). In fact, in 2007, 14.8% of the labor force was between ages 16 and 24, 68.4% was between ages 25 and 54, and 16.8% were ages 55 or older (Toossi 2006). It is said that "age is the new diversity" (Capowski 1994).

In the current swirl of economic turmoil, dramatic investment/pension losses, and doubts about the sustainability of social security in the United States, many workers who thought they were nearing retirement age are being forced to rethink their plans, which will further increase this trend of extended labor force participation among older adults. The *Boston Globe* recently published a story bemoaning the lack of jobs available to younger workers due to current older workers' reluctance to retire (Gavin 2009, February 28). The point was to bring out the old saw that older workers should make room for younger workers who need to get started on their careers. The story is but one example of the kind of age and generation polemics that have been circulating in the popular press and that have been perpetuated by some organizational consultants, suggesting that people of such wide age ranges and career stages have trouble working together (Lancaster and Stillman 2005). While this literature includes negative (and some positive) stereotypes of both older and younger workers, older workers are a special case due to the fact that, as the *Globe* story indicates, they are expected to vacate their positions.

Negative Stereotypes of Older Workers

One of the more persistent and hard to dispel notions about older workers is that they are hard to train (i.e., slow to learn) or disinterested in learning. In addition, they are often thought to be less productive, less physically able, less ambitious, and less adaptable compared to younger workers (Hassell and Perrewe 1995; Ng and Feldman 2008; Rosen and Jerdee 1976). In a recent study, 44% of the employers surveyed felt that their late-career workers are reluctant to try new technologies, 38% felt their late-career workers are burnt out, and 28% felt they are reluctant to travel (Pitt-Catsouphes et al. 2007). These negative stereotypes associated with older workers may be one form of ageism in the workforce (McCann and Giles 2002). Indeed, age discrimination claims have been on the rise for some time, with a recent spike (approximately a 30%

increase over last year, from 2007 to 2008) that has made news in the *Washington Post* (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2010; Vogel 2009).

Studies have shown that ageism is experienced by many older workers. In a recent AARP survey, 60% of respondents between ages 45 and 74 reported that they believe that age discrimination is present in the workplace, and of those, 45% think it is very common (Groeneman 2008). In that same study, 13% of respondents between ages 45 and 74 felt that they were treated worse by their employer in comparison to other workers as a result of their age (Groeneman 2008). Whether or not discrimination is involved, negative attitudes in the workplace constitute a serious problem for older workers. They are "detrimental to both individual and organizational productivity, and although legislation can mandate particular organizational policies, it cannot dictate attitudes or behaviors" (Hedge et al. 2006, 46).

How Do Negative Attitudes Affect Older Workers?

Sue, et al. (2007a) have described a phenomenon whereby racial minorities experience "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group…" (p.72), referred to as "microaggressions." These slights and insults are often experienced as challenges to the self esteem and/or well-being of their targets. Microaggressions are often out of the awareness of the perpetrator and sometimes take the form of "subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, and tones" (Sue, et al. 2007b, p. 273).

We assert that microaggressions are not limited to insults having to do with race; insults having to do with age also have pernicious effects. Any type of slight, from an inappropriate tease ("old man," "gramps") to an outright slur ("greedy geezer," "old bag") is an instance of negative attitudes and assumptions that are degrading to older people. In our view, when these incidents happen repeatedly, day after day, they may be considered age-related microaggressions. As such, they are likely to have a negative impact on the well-being and the work-related outcomes of older workers. It is interesting to note that James et al. (2008) found that perceptions of unfairness toward older workers predicted lower well-being and employee engagement for all but the youngest workers (under age 30). Thus, negative attitudes and perceptions affect the organizational climate whether one is a member of the targeted group or not.

As was previously mentioned, there are many negative and mostly erroneous attitudes about the capabilities of older workers. In fact, prejudice about age is the most socially acceptable prejudice there is in America (Hedge et al. 2006). Older people themselves, who have internalized the negative attitudes so prevalent in our society, are just as likely to hold such attitudes as are younger people (Levy and Banaji 2002). Older workers constitute a very heterogeneous group; however, and older workers respond in different ways to the challenges associated with negative attitudes that may be present at their places of work. To the extent that there may be protective factors that foster resilience in older workers against the damaging

effects of such negative attitudes, it would be beneficial to both employers as well as to employees to discover them.

Resilience and the Workplace

Throughout the life course, individuals are faced with many hardships that range from single traumatic events to pervasive adversity over many years. Some individuals are able to thrive despite such experiences, while others seem to falter. We are learning that it is not simply luck that puts people in one category or the other. Those who seem to effectively cope in stressful situations, or who do not manifest the negative outcomes typical of those who have similar experiences, are said to be resilient. Resilience has been defined in many different ways by different people. Summarizing broadly, the definitions primarily conceptualize resilience either as an outcome of some event/situation or as a process leading to an outcome (Kaplan 1999).

Definitions in which resilience is viewed as an outcome focus on the idea that resilience occurs as an unusual response to a stressor. For example, resilience was defined by Masten (1989) as "the positive side of adaptation after extenuating circumstances" [as cited in Ryff et al. (1998, 70)]. In this sense, a person is thought to be resilient when showing a positive outcome despite a significant adversity which has typically resulted in a negative outcome.

In contrast, definitions of resilience as a cause or influence focus on the idea that individuals may possess certain personal characteristics that protect them from negative outcomes typical of others. One of these characteristics is "hardiness." Psychological hardiness is a quality of an individual defined as having high "commitment (belief in the importance and value of oneself and one's experiences or activities), control (the belief that life events and experiences are predictable and consequences of one's actions), and challenge (the belief that change is normal and represents a positive rather than threatening circumstance)" (Kaplan 1999, 20–21). It is thought that hardy individuals may be better able to withstand significant stressors in their environments due to their atypical cognitive and behavioral responses to events (Crowley et al. 2003). In addition, research has shown a link between other instantiations of psychological hardiness such as high self-efficacy, high self-esteem, and internal locus of control, with positive outcomes despite significant risk factors (Cappella and Weinstein 2001; Kaplan 1999; Kumpfer 1999; Wanberg and Banas 2000). According to this conceptualization, resilience is similar to a stable personality trait.

The study of resilience has traditionally focused on people who are either (a) growing up under adverse conditions, such as poverty, extreme violence, parental mental illness, or tragic life events (Luthar et al. 2000) or (b) coming to terms with extremely traumatic events, life-threatening situations such as rape or some other form of sexual abuse (Bonanno 2004; James et al. 1997; Liem et al. 1997). More pertinent to the research presented here, some studies have examined resilience in the face of the indignities of aging. Staudinger et al. (1999), for example, found that

certain aspects of personality and emotional response sets are related to satisfaction with aging, which they conceptualized as resilience. In addition, Ryff et al. (1998) suggested that psychological resources such as positive self-perceptions and social comparisons are protective factors for psychological well-being among older adults. In recent years, the study of resilience has been broadened to include everyday stressors.

Martin and Marsh (2008) proposed a new construct, "buoyancy," to describe everyday resilience which is defined as "an individual's capacity to successfully overcome setbacks and challenges that are typical of the ordinary course of everyday life" (p. 169). From this perspective, individuals may show resilience to chronic stress in their everyday environments, or as mentioned above, older workers may be resilient in the face of perceived negative assumptions and stereotypes held about them by their younger coworkers.

Regardless of the definition, the study of resilience involves the recognition of risk factors and the search for protective factors. Risk factors heighten the chances of negative outcomes and may be internal or external (Keyes 2004). Protective factors work to buffer against the negative effects of the risk factors and like risk factors, they may also be internal or external (Kaplan 1999). Simply put, protective factors serve to increase the likelihood of a person's resilience in the face of risk factors. For example, a risk factor for many children is growing up in an impoverished environment, but a protective factor in that situation may be strong social support from parents and peers. If a child in such an environment shows positive developmental outcomes, the child may be thought of as resilient and the protective factor of social support the buffer. Similarly, work overload is a risk factor for lower job satisfaction, but supervisor support may be a protective factor against the negative effects of work overload.

Facilitators of Resilience in the Workplace

There are both internal and external factors that can contribute to individuals' sensitivity to and hardiness in response to the stresses associated with negative attitudes. While employees' dispositions or sources of psychological hardiness (such as one's core sense of self) may act as internal protective factors against the harmful effects of daily microaggressions expressed as negative attitudes toward late-career workers, job conditions such as supervisor support and work team inclusion may serve as external protective factors.

Numerous studies have found that high levels of social support help buffer against the negative outcomes seen with many risk factors (Bonanno et al. 2007; McCalister et al. 2006; Wilks and Croom 2008). Accordingly, social support at work may serve as a protective factor for older workers against the negative attitudes that they are exposed to in many places of work. Supervisor support is defined as "the degree to which employees form impressions that their superiors care about their well-being, value their contributions, and are

generally supportive" (Dawley et al. 2008, 238). It is thought to affect work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Ng and Sorensen 2008). It is possible that a highly supportive supervisor relationship could serve as a buffer for the deleterious effects of negative attitudes toward older workers.

The extent to which one is made to feel that he or she is a crucial part of the work team may also buffer negative attitudes that could be present at the workplace. Often referred to as "inclusion," it refers to "the degree to which individuals feel part of critical organizational processes such as access to information and resources, involvement in work groups, and the ability to influence the decision making process" (Mor Barak and Cherin 1998, 48). Work team inclusion has a substantial impact on employees' experiences and has been linked to many work-related outcomes, as well as outcomes of well-being (Mor Barak et al. 1998). High levels of work team inclusion may foster feelings of being part of a supportive work environment which may in turn protect older workers from the negative attitudes of others.

Age & Generations Study

To explore outcomes associated with negative attitudes toward late-career workers we used data from the larger *Age & Generations Study* (Pitt-Catsouphes et al. 2009). The *Age & Generations Study* gathered information about employee well-being in today's multigenerational workforce. Employees completed a survey between November 2007 and March 2008, asking a series of questions about the following topics: employees' perceptions of their work, organization/department as a whole, work group, supervisor/team leader, work style, and outlook on life. In total, 2,210 employees from 12 departments in nine organizations participated in this study. The data were weighted so that each organization was equally represented in the sample.

For the purposes of this investigation, our sample focused on older workers. Older workers are often defined based on chronological age (Greller and Simpson 1999; Riach 2007), but the term "older worker" has been applied to a large range of ages from 40 to over 75 (Hedge et al. 2006; Kooij et al. 2008). Acknowledging the large range of ages that has been used to describe older workers (Kooij et al. 2008; Pitt-Catsouphes and Smyer 2007), we adopted a definition congruent with American Discrimination in Employment Act which protects anyone 40 and over from age discrimination. Consequently, our sample of older workers includes workers aged 40 or older.

The participating organizations in the *Age & Generations Study* are affiliated with a range of industry sectors: two of the organizations are in the educational services industry; two are in health care and social assistance; one is in retail trade; two are in finance and insurance; one is in professional, scientific, and technical

Table 22.1 Characteristics of the sample

	Employees aged 40 years or older
Approximate number of participants	1,000
Percentage of women	65.7
Percentage of men	34.3
Percentage of full-time employees	87.8
Percentage of part-time employees	12.2
Percentage of hourly employees	44.8
Percentage of salaried employees	55.2
Median wage for hourly employees	$29/h
Median salary for salaried employees	$84,244.54/year
Average age of employees	51 years
Percentage age 40–49	43.1
Percentage age 50–59	42.8
Percentage age 60–65	10.1
Percentage age 65 or older	4.0
Percentage with supervisory responsibilities	49.0
Percentage reporting that they have an additional job with a second employer	7.7
Percentage of temporary employees	4.8
Percentage of consultants	2.4
Percentage reporting that they were "working in retirement," i.e., they had officially retired from a previous job	5.7

services; and one is in the pharmaceutical industry. Five of the participating organizations have a worksite located outside of the United States and four do not. All of the organizations in our sample were considered large businesses, each having over 1,000 employees: four of the organizations had between 1,000 and 10,000 employees; four had between 10,000 and 50,000 employees; and one had over 50,000 employees. While four of the participating organizations were for-profit, five were nonprofit.

Table 22.1 summarizes some of the employee characteristics in the sample for employees aged 40 or older.

Attitudes at Work

As part of the *Age & Generations Study*, employees were asked about their perceptions of workers at different career stages. In this study, we used measures of attitudes toward late-career workers as a proxy for attitudes toward older workers. Respondents were asked how true it was that late-career workers (1) are productive; (2) take initiative; (3) add creativity to projects; (4) have high levels of skills

Table 22.2 Means and standard deviations for the attitudes toward late-career team members ($N = 910$)

In general, how true do you think the following statements are for the members of your team who are late career?

	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Late-career employees are productive	3.18	0.69	1–4
Late-career employees take initiative	2.88	0.82	1–4
Late-career employees add creativity to projects	2.76	0.79	1–4
Late-career employees have high levels of skills compared to what is needed for their jobs	3.00	0.77	1–4
Late-career employees are often our best employees	2.92	0.75	1–4

compared to what is needed for their jobs; and (5) are often our best employees (see Table 22.2). A composite score was then created by taking the mean of these five items. Lower scores indicate less positive attitudes toward late-career team members and higher scores indicate more positive attitudes. These results suggest that workers aged 40 or older are more positive about older workers (in general) being productive and having high levels of skills compared to their assessment of older workers having what is needed for their jobs. By contrast, workers 40 and older were less positive about their ability to add creativity to projects. When the responses to the individual items regarding attitudes toward late-career team members were aggregated, we found that the attitudes are significantly less positive among workers under age 40 ($M = 2.81$, SD = 0.58) than among those age 40 or older ($M = 2.95$, SD = 0.56), $t(1{,}745) = 5.01$, $p = 0.001$.

Relationships Between Negative Attitudes and Important Outcomes: Mental Health and Engagement

Building on previous work suggesting that negative attitudes are very stressful for those experiencing them (Sue et al. 2008), we examined the extent to which attitudes toward late-career team members predict outcomes of well-being for employees aged 40 or older. To measure personal and organizational outcomes, we used a measure of mental health (personal well-being) and employee engagement (active involvement with and commitment to the organization). Mental health was measured using the eight-item SF-8 (Ware et al. 2001). Sample items include, “During the past 4 weeks, how much have you been bothered by emotional problems (such as feeling anxious, depressed, or irritable)?” and “During the past 4 weeks, how much energy did you have?” Employee engagement was measured using a nine-item adapted version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli and

Table 22.3 Standardized regression estimates of measures of well-being on attitudes toward late-career workers (*N* = 737)

	Mental health	Employee engagement
Predictor	B	B
Gender[a]	0.105**	0.108**
Marital status[b]	0.012	–0.021
Parental status[c]	–0.028	–0.118**
Ethnicity[d]	–0.083*	–0.111**
Education[e]	0.039	–0.007
Income	0.074*	0.089*
Age	0.199***	0.171***
Attitudes toward late-career team members	0.136***	0.265***
R^2	0.077***	0.124***

Note: Gender, marital status, parental status, ethnicity, education, income, and age are controls

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

[a]Reference = female

Reference = married or cohabitating

[c]Reference = has no children

[d]Reference = white

[e]Reference = bachelors degree or higher

Bakker 2004). Sample items include "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" and "I am immersed in my work."[1]

As can be seen in Table 22.3,[2] after controlling for key demographic characteristics and dependent care responsibilities, an increase in positive attitudes toward late-career team members is associated with an increase in well-being and employee engagement. Of course, the reverse is also true; negative attitudes toward late-career team members are associated with lower well-being and lower employee engagement. These findings suggest that negative attitudes toward late-career team members can contribute to the erosion of older workers' well-being and depress their employee engagement scores in a way similar to the way the microaggressions erode the self-esteem and well-being of racial minorities. As such, they are a significant risk factor for poor mental health outcomes among older workers.

[1]According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is the "harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). Generally, engaged employees are those who have a "sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of their job" (Schaufeli et al. 2002, 73; see also Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa 2009). Angle and Perry (1983) suggest that this type of "harnessing" of the self is a function of the way that employees have been treated by the organization.

[2]It is interesting to note that this finding is consistent for workers under the age of 40. For these workers, negative attitudes towards late-career team members are also related to lower levels of mental health and employee engagement.

Protective Factors

Having found that attitudes toward late-career team members are related to well-being and employee engagement, we wanted to explore the extent to which some older workers are more susceptible to the stress associated with them than other older workers, as Kang and Chasteen (2009) have suggested. Using a model of resilience proposed by Luthar (1991) as a framework, who examined personal attributes that moderated the relationship between the risk factors of life stress and low socioeconomic status and the outcomes of social competence, we assessed what factors moderate the relationship between the risk factor (negative attitudes) and the outcomes (mental health and employee engagement). Specifically, we looked at the extent to which certain job conditions and the personal disposition of core self-evaluations (CSE) moderate the relationship between negative attitudes toward late-career team members and mental health and employee engagement for workers aged 40 or older. We used the measures listed in Table 22.3 and examined the moderating effects of potential internal (CSE as dispositional "hardiness") and external protective factors (supervisor support and work team inclusion as job conditions) on the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and the well-being outcomes.

Supervisor support was measured using an eight-item adapted scale (Bond et al. 2002; Greenhaus et al. 1990; Mor Barak and Cherin 1998). Sample items include "My team leader/supervisor gives me helpful feedback about my performance" and "My team leader/supervisor cares about whether or not I achieve my career goals." Inclusion was measured using a ten-item adapted scale (Bond et al. 2002; Mor Barak and Cherin 1998). Sample items include "I have a say in the way my work group performs its tasks" and "I am able to influence decisions that affect my work group." The CSE is a higher order construct comprised of neuroticism (reverse scored), locus of control, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. It was measured using the 12-item CSE Scale (Judge et al. 2003). Sample items include "When I try, I generally succeed" and "I determine what will happen in my life."

Protective Factors for Older Workers

As can be seen in Table 22.4,[3] direct effects were found between CSE (but not supervisor support or team inclusion) and mental health. Supervisor support, team inclusion, and CSE also contributed to the explanation of the variation in the measure of employee engagement.

[3]When looking at workers under the age of 40, CSE does not significantly moderate the relationship between attitudes towards late-career team members and mental health. In addition, for workers under the age of 40, supervisor support, work team inclusion, and CSE all do not significantly moderate the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and employee engagement. This suggests that these moderators may be unique to older workers.

Table 22.4 Standardized regression estimates of measures of well-being on attitudes toward late-career workers and supervisor support, inclusion, and CSE (*N* = 737)

	Mental health	Employee engagement
Predictor	B	B
Gender[a]	0.029	0.074*
Marital status[b]	–0.018	–0.052
Parental status[c]	0.034	–0.073*
Ethnicity[d]	–0.065*	–0.086**
Education[e]	–0.008	–0.050
Income	0.030	0.023
Age	0.138***	0.142***
Attitudes toward late-career team members	0.016	0.122***
Supervisor support	0.061	0.119**
Attitudes by supervisor support	0.022	0.098*
Inclusion	–0.048	0.121**
Attitudes by inclusion	–0.016	–0.151***
CSE	0.559***	0.380***
Attitudes by CSE	–0.071*	–0.106***
R^2	0.360***	0.358***

Note: Gender, marital status, parental status, ethnicity, education, income, and age are controls
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001
[a]Reference = female
[b]Reference = married or cohabitating
[c]Reference = has no children
[d]Reference = white
[e]Reference = bachelors degree or higher

Core self-evaluations moderated the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and mental health for older workers. Supervisor support, work team inclusion, and CSE all moderated the relationships between attitudes toward late-career team members and employee engagement among older workers. The significant interactions between attitudes and CSE in predicting mental health, and the interactions between attitudes and CSE, supervisor support, and inclusion in predicting employee engagement suggest that CSE, supervisor support, and inclusion serve as protective factors against attitudes toward late-career team members (cf. Luthar 1991).

To further examine the moderating effects of supervisor support, work team inclusion, and CSE as either protective or vulnerability processes, we plotted the relationships between the significant moderators and attitudes toward late-career team members for mental health and employee engagement for older workers (see Figs. 22.1–22.4). If the outcomes of mental health and employee engagement are high when the moderators are at higher levels despite high levels of negative attitudes toward late-career team members, then the moderators are protective factors in our conception of resilience; however, if the reverse is true and the outcomes of

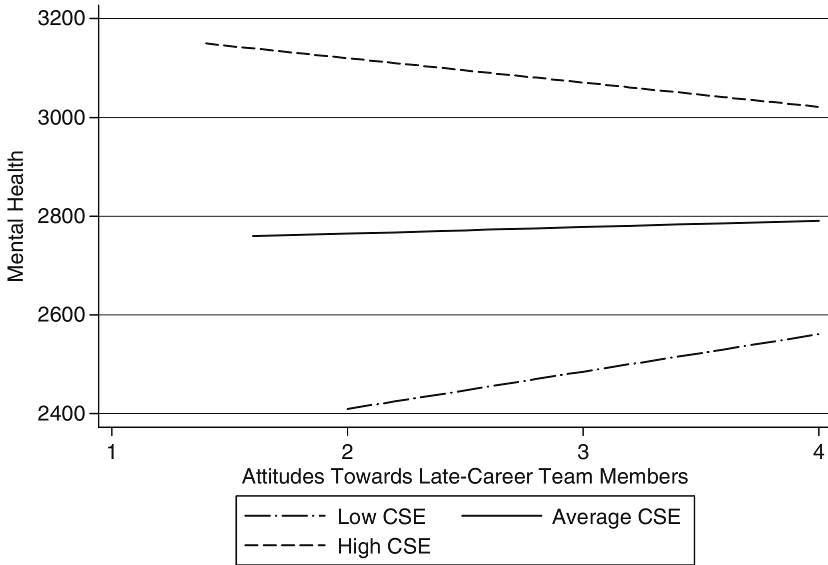

Fig. 22.1 Moderating effect of core self-evaluations (CSE) on the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and mental health

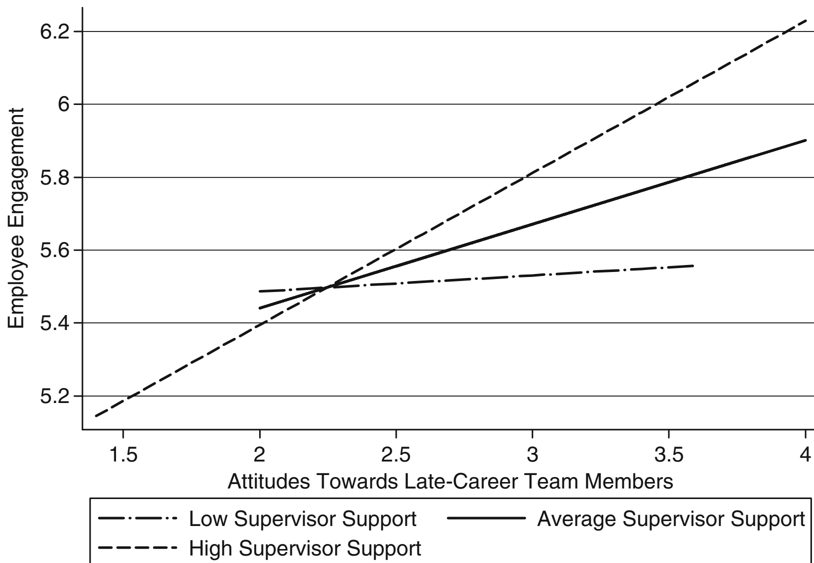

Fig. 22.2 Moderating effect of supervisor support on the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and employee engagement

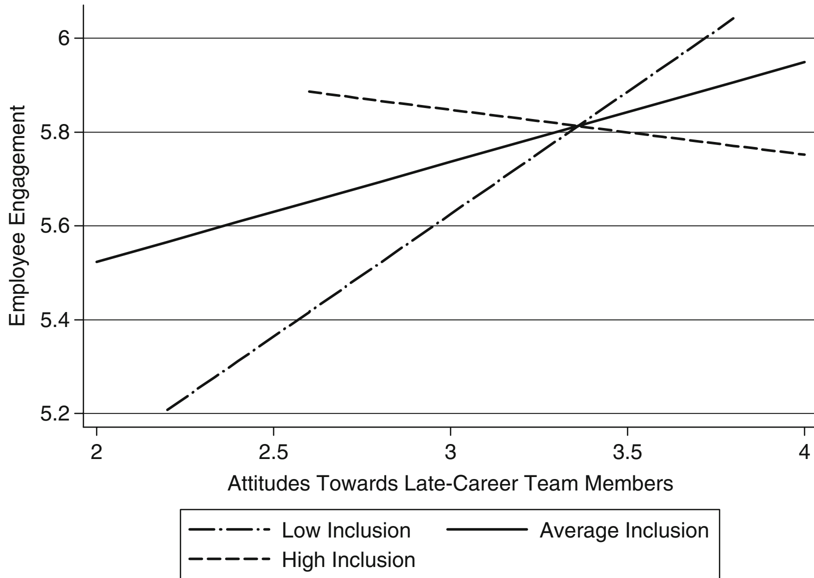

Fig. 22.3 Moderating effect of work team inclusion on the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and employee engagement

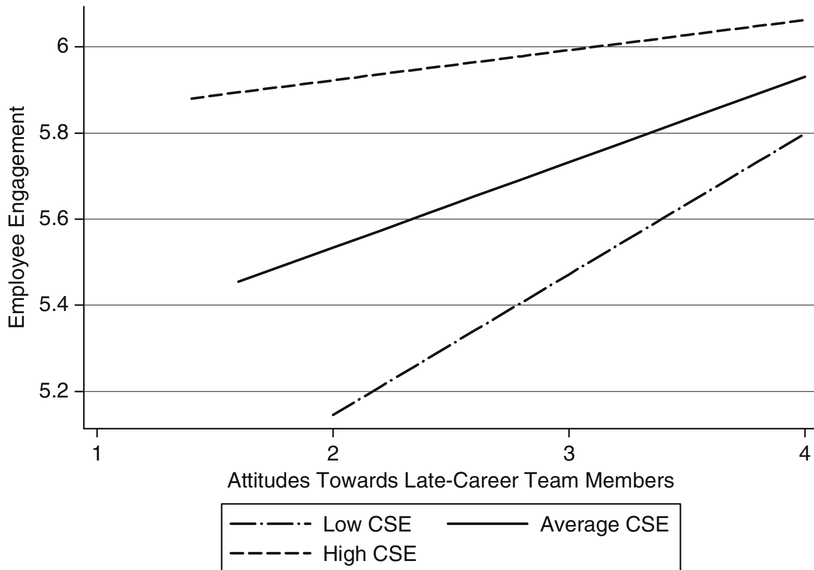

Fig. 22.4 Moderating effect of CSE on the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and employee engagement

mental health and engagement are lower, then the moderators are considered to be vulnerability factors. Thus, when protective factors against negative attitudes toward late-career team members are present, a person is thought to be resilient.

As can be seen in Fig. 22.1, when the risk factor of negative attitudes toward late-career team members is present, workers with low CSE have lower mental health than workers with average or high CSE. As attitudes toward late-career team members become more positive and are no longer a risk factor, the effect of the attitudes on mental health decreases. This suggests that CSE serve as a protective factor against the effects of the negative attitudes on mental health in a way that is similar to the way that "hardiness" has functioned in previous studies (Crowley et al. 2003; Kaplan 1999).

As can be seen in Fig. 22.2, contrary to our expectations, employee engagement was not higher for workers with high supervisor support when the risk factor of negative attitudes toward late-career team members was present. This suggests that supervisor support is not a protective factor against negative attitudes. However, as the attitudes toward late-career team members become more positive, employee engagement is greater for workers with high supervisor support than for those with average or low supervisor support.

Another important potential external protective factor is work team inclusion. As can be seen in Fig. 22.3, when attitudes toward late-career workers are very negative and the risk factor is present, workers with high levels of work team inclusion have higher employee engagement than workers with average or low work team inclusion. However, as attitudes become more positive and they are no longer a risk factor, the effect of work team inclusion on levels of engagement diminishes. This finding suggests that work team inclusion is a protective factor against the effects of negative attitudes on work-related well-being.

The moderating effect of CSE on the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and employee engagement is similar to the effect for mental health. As can be seen in Fig. 22.4, when attitudes toward late-career team members are the most negative, workers with high CSE have the greatest employee engagement compared to workers with average or low CSE, but CSE have little effect on employee engagement when attitudes are more positive and are no longer a risk factor. This suggests that CSE or hardiness is a protective factor against the effects of the negative attitudes on employee engagement.

Conclusions

While resilience remains a complex and multifaceted variable, our findings show that it is a useful construct for understanding the on-the-job experiences of today's older workers. It would be easy (but a mistake) to assume from preliminary analyses that job conditions have little to do with mental health in the workplace. Indeed, our findings suggest that job conditions have no direct effect on the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and mental health. When conceptualizing

vulnerabilities among older workers or late-career team members such as negative attitudes, and examining the data for buffers against these vulnerabilities, our focus shifts not only from direct, negative effects but also to a more positive frame. Instead of what's wrong in the workplace, it is helpful to expand on what is working well.

Findings indicate that there are both internal and external buffers against the age-related microaggressions older workers are subjected to. Specifically, high CSE served as a significant protective factor against the risk factor of negative attitudes on both mental health and employee engagement. Work team inclusion was an important moderator of the relationship between attitudes toward late-career team members and employee engagement but not mental health. These findings suggest that CSE and work team inclusion are particularly important for older workers' employee engagement when attitudes toward late-career team members are negative. In addition, having more positive attitudes toward late-career team members in general is related to greater employee engagement and mental health in older workers regardless of job conditions and personal dispositions.

Contrary to our expectations, the job condition operationalized as supervisor support was not a protective factor. Even so, the significant interaction between attitudes toward late-career team members and supervisor support revealed that for more positive attitudes, employee engagement is greater for workers with high levels of supervisor support when compared to workers with average or low supervisor support. Although not necessarily a protective factor, supervisor support is an important factor in the life of older workers, especially when the organizational climate is favorable toward late-career workers.

As we conclude this chapter, we must grapple with an important question: why should employers care about protecting older workers from daily slights and degradations? First, as employers come to see the value of older workers for their good work ethic, their ease with customers, and their reliability (James et al. 2008; Munnell et al. 2006; Pitt-Catsouphes et al. 2007), they also want them to be happy and satisfied; there is concern with their well-being. Second, as employers work with intergenerational teams and struggle with a reeling economy, employers want to know what will engage these employees and ensure their commitment to the organization. Workers who are "engaged," for example, tend to be less stressed and more satisfied with their lives; they also tend to use less health care, take fewer sick days, be more productive, and stay longer with their organizations than their less engaged counterparts (Gallup Organization 2003, 2006). Given the relationship we have found between protective factors against negative attitudes and engagement, it would seem to be in employers enlightened self-interest to take an interest enhancing the resilience of their older workers.

Employers can take a number of steps to promote the development of work environments that protect older workers against the microaggressions associated with ageism. As a first line of defense, employers should gather information (either formally or informally) to assess the extent to which (and in what types of situations) employees perceive ageism at the workplace. Following this type of culture audit, employers can take steps, such as supervisor training and team building experiences that promote supervisor support and a climate of inclusion.

Some employers might also find that job redesign (i.e., adjusting some aspects of jobs so that they better fit with the needs and preferences of older workers) is an effective approach as one study found that job redesign that results in skill variety, increased task significance and autonomy can enhance resilience (Badran and Kafafy 2008).

Decades of research suggest that negative stereotypes against older workers are entrenched and it may take time to replace assumptions about the limitations of older workers with new perspectives about the assets that older workers can bring to the workplace. In the mean time, it is the responsibility of employers to create work environments that help foster resilience that can help older workers maintain their engagement in and enjoyment of meaningful jobs.

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