

Promoting Knowledge Transfer in the Mature Workforce: The Effects of Perceived Age Discrimination and Task Significance

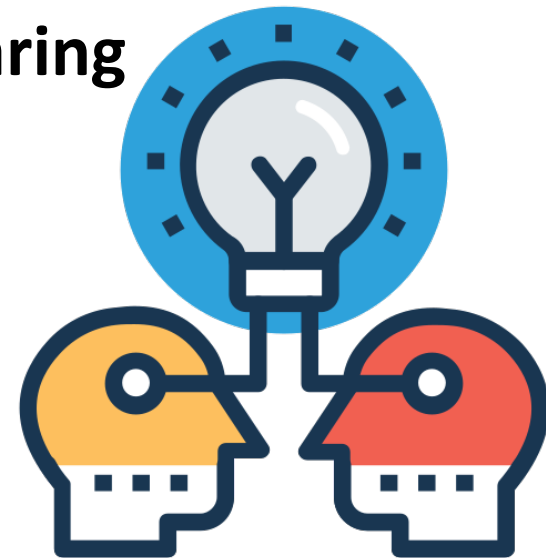
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2nd CEPAR International Conference
4 July 2023

Knowledge Transfer

- Knowledge management and transfer is a key to organisational survival and success.
- Knowledge transfer between older and younger employees is a key competitive advantage in the increasing age-diverse workforce.
- Knowledge sharing of older employees: knowledge sender
- Knowledge seeking of older employees: knowledge receiver
- **RQ: What factors affect older employees' knowledge sharing and knowledge seeking and what are the mechanisms?**



Knowledge sharing and seeking

- **Knowledge sharing** involves distributing knowledge to others, increasing the pool of collective knowledge and increasing the resources available to colleagues to solve organizational problems.
- **Knowledge seeking** constitutes a learning-oriented behaviour and requires an individual to search for information from colleagues to enable knowledge and skill development.
- Both are **other-oriented** behaviours and are thus shaped by the **social environment**.



Age discrimination as an antecedent

- Perceived age discrimination refers to the experience of being treated differently due to one's age.
- Social categorization theory (Hogg, 2000)
 - In-groups vs. out-groups
 - Age is often used as a cue for group formation
 - Group formation affects interactions. Individuals tend to view ingroup members more positively.
- Age discrimination has been associated with a range of negative outcomes, including withdrawal from work, work engagement, poor health, and job satisfaction (Rothermund et al., 2021).
- **RQ1: How and why perceived age discrimination affects older employees' knowledge sharing and knowledge seeking?**



Feelings of inclusion as a mechanism

- Diversity research: shifting from problem focus to inclusion focus, creating work environments where diverse individuals feel included.
- Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991): tensions between human needs for validation and similarity to others and need for uniqueness and individuation.
- Uniqueness and belongingness work together to create feelings of inclusion (Shore et al., 2011).
 - Belongingness: people choose social identities with particular groups and seek acceptance into those groups.
 - Uniqueness: people define themselves in terms of category memberships that distinguish themselves from others.



Age discrimination and feelings of inclusion

- Age discrimination and belongingness
 - Age discriminatory actions communicate to older workers that they are not part of the accepted in group, which diminishes their sense of belongingness.
- Age discrimination and uniqueness
 - Age discriminatory actions communicate to older workers that they are not valued in the organisation, which diminishes their sense of uniqueness.
- H1: Age discrimination is negatively related to feelings of belongingness (H1a) and feelings of uniqueness (H1b).



Belongingness and knowledge sharing/seeking

- Belongingness and knowledge sharing
 - High belongingness: trust, social connection, norms of reciprocity, and shared communication, which are important antecedents of pro-social behaviours (Shore et al., 2011).
 - Belongingness will facilitate knowledge sharing.
- Belongingness and knowledge seeking
 - The loyalty, cooperation, and trustworthiness among group members function to enhance the security of individual members.
 - Belongingness will facilitate knowledge seeking.
- H2: Feelings of belongingness is positively related to older employees' knowledge sharing (H2a) and knowledge seeking (H2b).

Uniqueness and knowledge sharing/seeking

- Uniqueness and knowledge sharing
 - Uniqueness as a form of human capital. E.g., an older employee may have knowledge of the company and its industry that is potentially valuable to the group.
 - People who put higher value on their uniqueness are more likely to publicly display those unique elements (Imhoff & Erb, 2008).
- Uniqueness and knowledge seeking
 - Knowledge seeking is other-oriented behaviour and is affected more by the climate and interpersonal relationships such as trust and closeness.
 - Uniqueness is not related to knowledge seeking.
- H3: Feelings of uniqueness is positively related to knowledge sharing.

The mitigating role of task significance

- **RQ2: What factors can mitigate the negative effect of age discrimination?**
- Task significance: the extent to which one's work has a potential impact on the work or lives of others (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).
- Effect of task significance on age discrimination and belongingness
 - A sense of purpose and meaning that comes with high task significance may facilitate recategorization by providing a shared identity as members of a team or organization that is known to have a positive impact on the work or lives of others.
- H4a: Task significance will mitigate the age discrimination on belongingness.

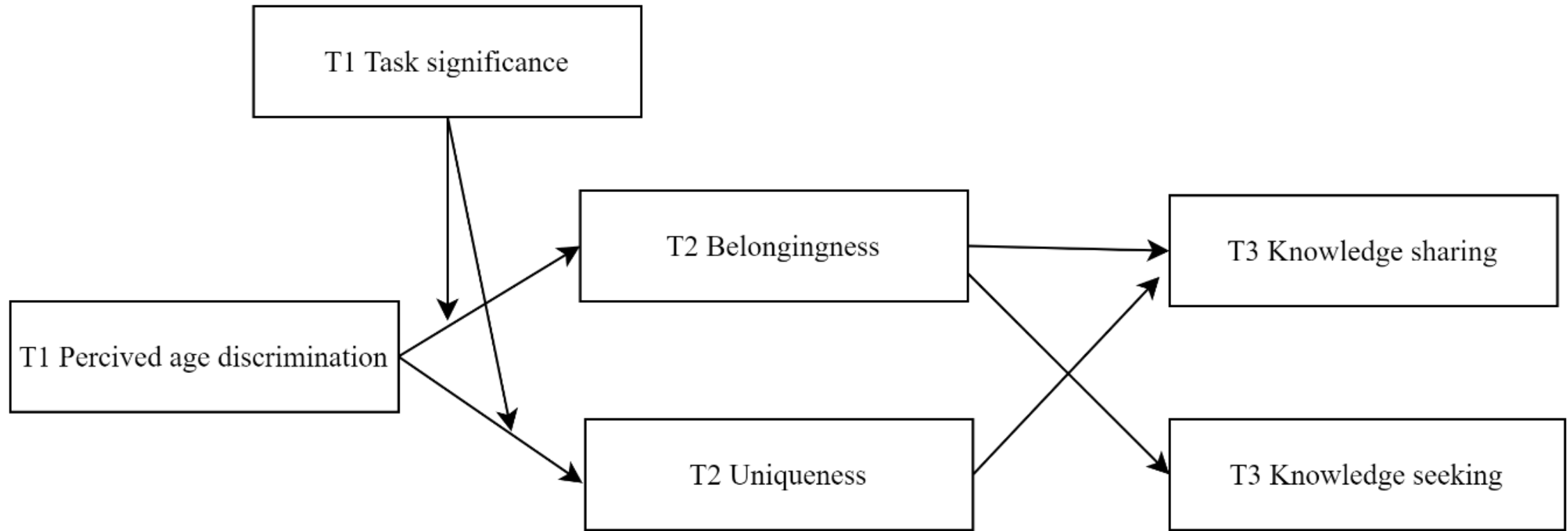


The mitigating role of task significance

- Effect of task significance on age discrimination and uniqueness
 - According to the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1991), when people get older, their focus in life shifts from future-oriented information focused goals to present-oriented emotional related goals.
 - Jobs that offer high task significance would allow older workers to express themselves in a way that aligns with their unique needs, especially when the environment does not support and value the expression of their uniqueness.
- H4b: Task significance will mitigate the negative effect of perceived age discrimination on uniqueness.



Research model



Methods

Participants and procedure

- Three-wave data with six-month interval were collected via an online panel service provider in Australia. Wave 1: May 2020, Wave 2: November 2020, Wave 3: May 2021.
- 296 participants were included in the analysis who completed all three surveys and remained with the same employer over data collection period.
- 53% are females, age ranged between 45 and 77, with an average age 57.10 (SD=7.50), average tenure is 13.57 years (SD=10.68).

Measures

- Perceived age discrimination (James et al., 1994), T1.
- Belongingness (Chung et al., 2020), T2.
- Uniqueness (Chung et al., 2020), T2.
- Knowledge sharing (Winkelmann et al., 2009), T3.
- Knowledge seeking (Winkelmann et al., 2009), T3.
- Task significance (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), T1.
- Control variables: Age, education level, working from home (T3).
- Measures rating ranges from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”.

Results

Table 1: The Mediation Model

	T2 Belongingness		T2 Uniqueness		T3 Knowledge sharing		T3 Knowledge seeking	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control variables								
T1 Age					-.004	.005	-.02**	.01
T1 Education					.01	.02	-.01	.03
T3 Working from home					-.02	.04	.11*	.06
Predictors								
T1 Age discrimination	-.22***	0.05	-.19***	0.05				
T2 Belongingness					.25***	0.06	.35***	0.07
T2 Uniqueness					.15*	0.06	.03	0.08

Table 2: Indirect Effects

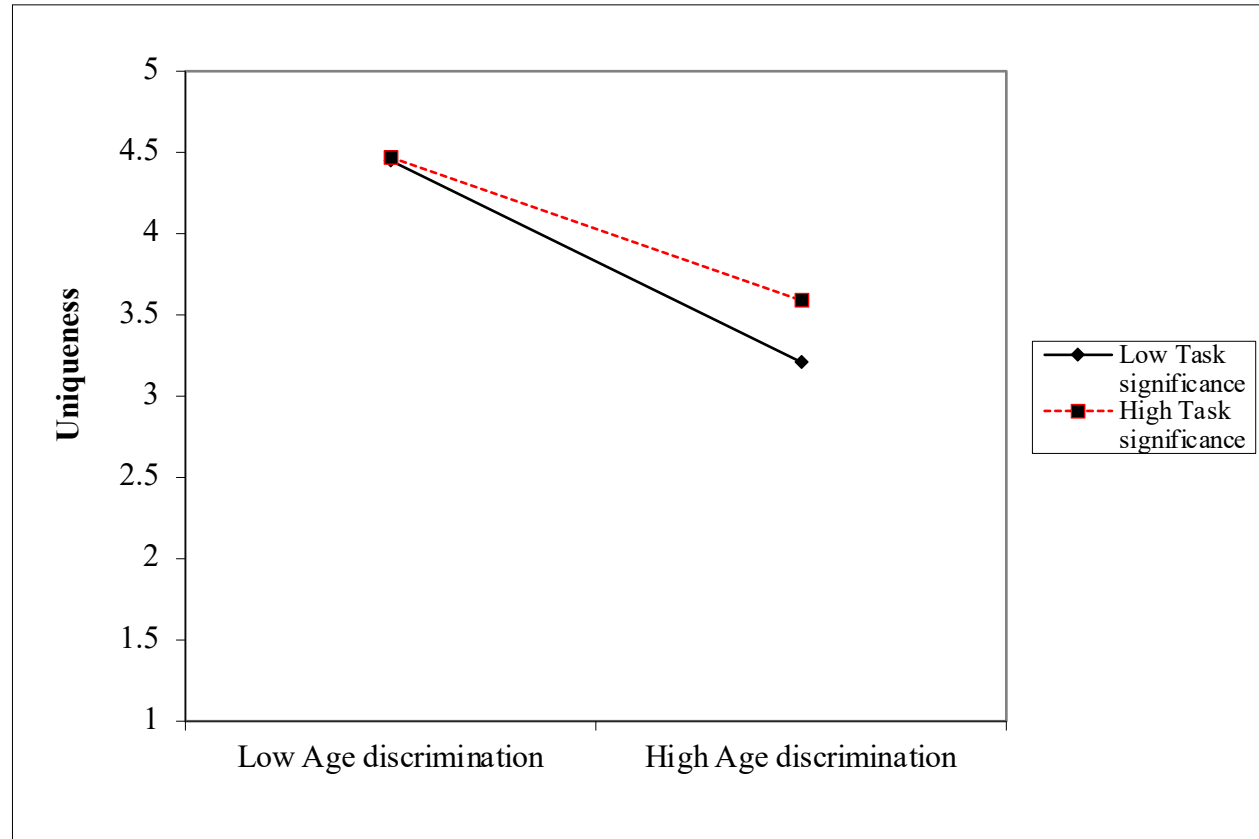
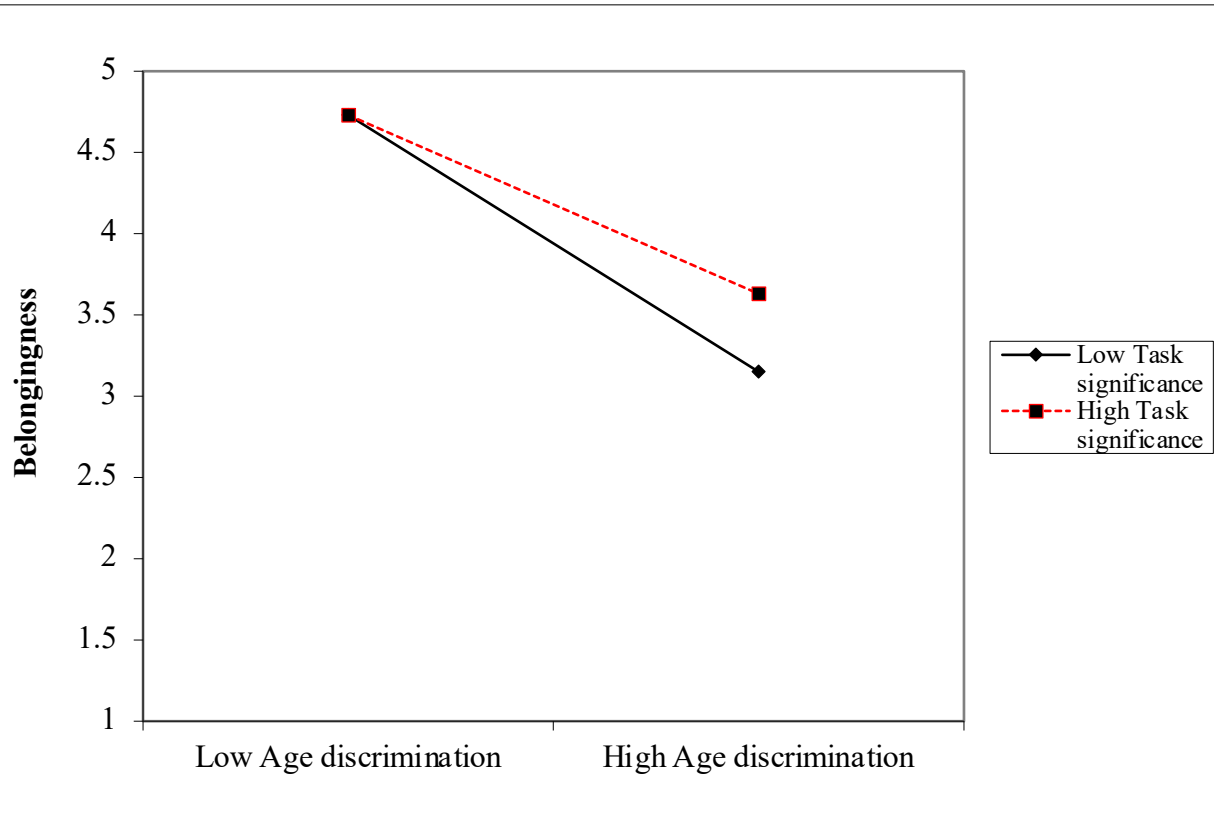
Indirect effect	B	SE	95% CI
Age discrimination-belongingness-knowledge sharing	-.05	.02	[-.10, -.02]
Age discrimination-uniqueness-knowledge sharing	-.03	.02	[-.06, -.001]
Age discrimination-belongingness-knowledge seeking	-.08	.03	[-.15, -.02]
Age discrimination-uniqueness-knowledge seeking	-.01	.02	[-.05, .03]

Results

Table 3: The Moderated Mediation Model

	T2 Belongingness		T2 Uniqueness		T3 Knowledge sharing		T3 Knowledge seeking	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Control variables								
T1 Age					-.004	.005	-.02**	.01
T1 Education					.01	.02	-.01	.03
T3 Working from home					-.02	.04	.11*	.06
Predictors								
T1 Age discrimination	-.67***	.16	-.53***	.17				
T1 Task significance	.12	.10	.10	.11				
T1 Age discrimination × T1 Task significance	.12**	.04	.09*	.04				
T2 Belongingness					.25***	0.06	.35***	0.07
T2 Uniqueness					.15*	0.06	.03	0.08

The mitigating effect of task significance



Discussion

- Contributions

- We recognise that knowledge sharing and knowledge seeking are distinct behaviours and both of them are beneficial to both mature workers and organizations.
- We identify the distinct role of belongingness and uniqueness in influencing older employees' knowledge sharing and knowledge seeking.
- We connect work design and ageing literature by revealing that the identity processes of belonging/uniqueness are not only activated by interpersonal/relational processes but also by the intrinsic nature of the work.

- Limitations

- Cannot draw causal conclusion.
- Self-rating knowledge sharing/seeking.
- Did not specify the target of knowledge sharing/seeking.

**Thanks for your
attention!**

Measure items

- Perceived age discrimination (James et al., 1994), T1.
 - I have sometimes been unfairly treated at work because of my age
 - At work I feel socially isolated because of my age
 - I have fewer training opportunities at work because of my age
 - I have fewer opportunities for promotion because of my age
- Belongingness (Chung et al., 2020), T2.
 - I am treated as a valued member of my work group
 - I belong in my work group
 - I am connected to my work group
- Uniqueness (Chung et al., 2020), T2.
 - While I work, I am comfortable expressing opinions that diverge from my group
 - I can share a perspective on work issues that is different from my group members
 - When my group's perspective becomes too narrow, I am able to bring up a new point of view

Measure items

- Knowledge sharing (Winkelmann et al., 2009), T3.
 - My colleagues ask me to support their efforts in gaining work experience
 - I communicated effectively with my coworkers
 - I provide help to coworkers when asked or when needed
- Knowledge seeking (Winkelmann et al., 2009), T3.
 - My colleagues show me special procedures so that I can learn them
 - My colleagues support my efforts to gain work experience
 - I learn a lot by asking colleagues for their knowledge
- Task significance (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006), T1.
 - The results of my work are likely to significantly affect the lives of other people
 - The job itself is very significant

Descriptive Results

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. T1 Age discrimination	2.21	1.04	.90								
2. T1 Task significance	3.79	0.95	-.11	.81							
3. T2 Belongingness	4.08	0.86	-.29***	.46***	.93						
4. T2 Uniqueness	3.91	0.82	-.27***	.38***	.68***	.89					
5. T3 Knowledge sharing	3.98	0.69	-.08	.30***	.44***	.40***	.78				
6. T3 Knowledge seeking	3.31	0.84	-.13*	.24***	.34***	.26***	.53***	.85			
7. T1 Age	57.07	7.53	.06	.09	.16**	.11	.03	-.12*	–		
8. T1 Education	3.93	1.71	.07	.14*	-.03	.04	.01	.01	-.11	–	
9. T3 Working from home	1.69	0.87	.01	-.07	-.07	.04	-.04	.08	.04	.28***	–