Chapter 4

Neuroscientific Approaches for Maintaining, Balancing, and Developing Mature Workers

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ABSTRACT

As the aging population is rapidly increasing worldwide, keeping older workers to address the skilled labor shortage has been an important economic issue. This study pursues the current status of the older workforce in the U.S., identifies organizational support systems for mature workers, and proposes neuroscientific approaches and methods to maintain and develop effective mature workers through an integrative review of recent research findings in neuroscience and brain-based learning and development.

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INTRODUCTION

The aging population is rapidly increasing worldwide due to governmental and societal support systems and initiatives to promote healthier living conditions for older adults (Hoorens et al., 2011; Wheaton & Crimmins, 2012). Life expectancy for older adults will continue to increase annually (Coile & College, 2018). By 2060, the U.S. population over 65 years old is expected to be almost 24 percent of the demographic mix (Administration for Community Living, 2018). This aging trend implies that mature workers will seek to prolong the years they work before retirement (Lim, Smith, & Kim, 2016) and thus transform the structure and characteristics of the workforce in many developed countries.

At the organizational level, keeping older workers in the workplace to address the skilled labor shortage has been an important economic issue (Alcover & Topa, 2018). Typically, older workers are committed to their companies (Tay & Diener, 2011) and have a sense of belonging. Through prolonged employment, they can meet their economic needs (Sudharsanan & Bloom, 2018). Although retaining older workers in the workplace is beneficial, organizations have struggled to retain their mature workers motivated and engaged (Lim et al., 2016).

From a neuroscientific perspective, many of the traditional approaches to maintain and develop mature workers are inappropriate for organizational productivity and competitiveness (Martindale, 2014). To address the development needs of older workers, many well-known U.S. companies have sought to apply brain-based learning and performance strategies to maximize the effectiveness of human resources and organizational development initiatives and activities. The number of new scientific findings about how the brain functions to maximize employee performance has exploded each year (Jenson, 2008). To saliently maintain, balance, and develop mature workers who are competent to meet the business needs to meet global competition, a top priority for organizations has been to strategically adopt and utilize neuroscientific findings to pursue human resource and organizational effectiveness (Lim, Chai, Park, & Doo, 2019).

Thus, the purpose of this study is to (a) describe the current status of the older workforce in the U.S., (b) identify organizational support systems for mature workers, and (c) propose neuroscientific approaches and methods to maintain and develop effective mature workers by reviewing recent research findings in neuroscience and brain-based learning and development. The research questions guiding this study are as follows: 1) What support systems are available for mature workers? 2) What has neuroscientific research revealed about the mature workforce in terms of learning and development? and 3) How can organizations develop mature workers by adopting brain-based approaches?
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