

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO WORK  
MOTIVATION OF OLDER WORKERS IN  
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES ROLES IN  
IRELAND

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The study explores work motivation of older professional services workers in Ireland. Specifically, it examines individuals who are termed, “older workers”, defined as 50+, and investigates what motivates them.

**Context:** Changing demographics that include an increased aged population is impacting work places, with employees prolonging their working years. People are expected to live longer and greater emphasis will be put on both working and saved earnings for retirement. Individuals and organisations need to understand motivations for this cohort and plan and develop practices accordingly.

**Literature:** The existing literature provides a range of views on older workers, regarding their motivation and potential contribution. Consistent is the agreement that this cohort require consideration within the labour market to maximise engagement and productivity, with work motivation being a key factor.

**Methodology:** An inductive qualitative approach is used. Semi structured interviews were carried out, with a sample of 8 participants from professional service roles in Ireland. Thematic Analysis was then used to analyse the data.

**Findings:** The key findings that emerged from the research are of a highly motivated group, interested in continued development and challenges, and seeking opportunities to contribute in their chosen professions. Significant is the ongoing extrinsic motivation for financial security, which including the comments from the participants, the researcher suggests is an impact from the recent recession.

**Originality:** Whilst there has been research on motivations for older workers, the majority pertains to other geographic regions other than Ireland. The literature indicates that the national context is a factor and, therefore, an understanding of work motivation for older workers, from an Irish context, is of interest and value.

## DECLARATION

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Diversity management necessitates ensuring that individuals maximise their potential and contribution to an organisation, which, in turn, supports inclusive company cultures (IBEC, 2003). Society, with an ageing population, requires that organisations give attention to an increasingly age diverse workforce. The CIPD (2014) comments, however, that few organisations are undertaking significant activities to attract, motivate, and retain workers of different ages and unlock the benefits and skills they bring. Changing demographics of developed countries, with reduced birth rates and an increased aged population, has affected workplaces, with employees prolonging their working years and the official retirement age increasing to reduce the pension burden on the state (Farndale, Biron, Briscoe and Raghuram, 2015). Traditional concepts such as retirement are being replaced with concepts of lifelong working, including a variety of roles during adulthood. It is anticipated that older workers may exceed the number of new entrants into the workplace over the coming decades (Stein, Rocco and Goldenetz, 2000).

Globally, it is projected that populations of individuals over 60 years of age will have increased from 11% to 22% by 2050, since 2000. Approximately, 34% of Europe's population will be over 60 years of age by 2050 (WHO, 2016). Projections are that people will live longer and hence greater emphasis will be put on both working and saved earnings for retirement. A US study showed that trends have been changing, with older workers increasingly being interested to remain working and maintain productiveness, rather than retire (National Institute on Aging, 2007).

In an Irish context, the labour force anticipates growth. By 2026, increased participation in the workforce, combined with changing demographics, will mean that those in categories aged 50 and over will increase from 23.4 percent to 30.3 per cent of the labour force. The older population (i.e. those aged 65 and over) is projected to increase threefold by 2046 (Central Statistics Office, 2013), with those over 50 and 65 making up a larger section of the labour force and the retirement age increasing to 68.

In relation to work and ageing, a number of commentators have expressed that age impacts motivation (Kooij, de Lange, Jansen and Dijkers, 2008; Lyons and Kuron, 2014). Stamov-Rossnagel & Hertel (2010, p. 896) define work motivation as a “set of energetic forces that determine work related behaviours”. This includes work motivation factors that are both intrinsic and extrinsic (Hennekam, 2016). If organisations are required to understand how to maintain the productivity and performance of older workers (Goštautaitė and Bučiūnienė, 2015), it will be critical to understand the work motivation of employees (Drabe, Hauff and Richter, 2015).

The impact of age and the related needs, values and goals for older workers is understood to be significantly influenced by a national context (Drabe, et al., 2015). This study seeks to understand the work motivation of older professional services workers in Ireland. Specifically, it will explore individuals who are termed, “older workers”, defined as 50+, seeking to investigate what motivates them. It is intended to use an inductive, qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews are to be undertaken with workers over 50+ years who are currently working in professional services roles.

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding into the work motivation of older workers. This knowledge may support both organisations and individuals in the planning and development of the desired requirements for older workers in the latter stages of their working lives. This is intended to be of interest to both individuals and organisations. There is an ongoing demand for talent in the workforce, with talent meaning individuals that are capable for the needs and development of their roles, to contribute to and benefit the organisation. Organisations need to include older workers in the workforce talent pool, aiming to understand their expectations and ambitions, creating and enhancing practices and policies that retain them in the workforce and in their organisation (Patrickson and Ranzjin, 2006).

Whilst studies have been conducted that focus on motivation for older workers, there is less information relating to an Irish context. The researcher understands this as a gap and through this exploratory study intends to provide understanding in this area, looking specifically at those in Professional Service roles in Ireland.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, will provide a literature review on work motivation for older workers. The Research Methodology employed will be described in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 will also include the research question and research objectives of this dissertation. The Findings of the research will be presented in Chapter 4, with Chapter 5 discussing the relationship of the findings to the existing literature. Chapter 5 will also respond to the research question, with details on how each of the research objectives relate to the findings of this research. Chapter 6 will then outline the researcher's conclusions and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter will review literature as relates to work motivation for older workers.

#### **2.1 Work motivation**

Stamov-Rossnagel & Hertel (2010, p. 896) define work motivation as a “set of energetic forces that determine work related behaviours”. Motivation affects, not only how an individual may increase skills and abilities, but how they may use them. It can influence three aspects of action: direction (choice), intensity (effort), and duration (persistence) (Locke and Latham, 2004).

Initial research on motivation focused on how the individual could be “motivated” to apply their effort and abilities for the benefit of the employer, whilst seeking to understand, on an individual level, its relation to their own respect and independence. It is accepted that it can be complex and very specific to an individual; however, seeking to gain an understanding would support better decisions for both individual and organisation (Handy, 1993). As studies evolved, there is insight given to older workers providing a contribution in the workplace, however, fundamental to this is knowledge of individual preferences and differences (Sterns and Miklos, 1995).

As individuals progress within their working careers, the desire to reach one’s potential and to be recognised for that may increase in value. At the highest level of reaching one’s potential, it may be considered as self-actualisation. Self-actualisation is understood as the manifestation of an individual's full potential and the satisfaction of the attainment of this (Ivtzan, Gardner, Bernard, Sekhon, and Hart, 2013). In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is the highest level of motivation (Maslow, 1943).

To date, there has been comparatively less studies in relation to ongoing motivation and progression for the older worker, about which information could be insightful for organisations and individuals (Bown-Wilson and Parry, 2013). Given the growing cohort of older workers, this knowledge is important for understanding what motivates older workers as they continue through their working lives.

## **2.2 Older workers**

Within some of the research on ageing, chronological age, as an indicator of work performance, has been deemed as not dependable, adding that performance may indeed improve with age, given the anticipated accumulation of knowledge and experience (Warr, 1994). The term “older workers”, for those aged 50 and above, has commonly been used in studies relating to workforce participation (Kooij, et al., 2008) and older workers have been defined as 50 years or over from an employer’s point of view, also (Sargeant, 2001). For the purposes of this study, 50+ years will also be used for “older workers”.

With the predicted lengthening of working years, employers are required to seek ways to engage and motivate older workers. This is for both having an engaged employee and a productive employee. Likewise, it is key to ensure that older workers are not exiting the workplace early, with the resultant intellectual capital, knowledge, and experience being lost (Patrickson and Ranzjin, 2006). It should be noted that there can be multiple factors that will impact on an older worker’s options to stay and adapt within their workplace (Yeatts, Folts and Knapp, 2000).

Organisations are encouraged to embrace diversity, in this case, age diversity, and with it encourage innovation and creativity, allowing the potential of a source of competitive advantage (Bassett-Jones, 2005). It is worth noting that, in studies undertaken, the relationship between age and motivation may be delivering skewed results, as samples of older workers taken are those participating in the workforce and, therefore, will not include those who exited the work force, whether through reduced motivation or being unable to keep up with the demands of working (Hertel, van der Heijden, de Lange and Deller, 2013).

The motivation and development of an age diverse workforce will be of concern for business leaders and government policy makers; older workers leaving organisations creates skill shortages (SHRM Research, 2014). The attributes of each generation should be reviewed by organisations, in this case, older workers. This is with a view to developing strategies and programmes that motivate older workers to remain in the workforce and, in doing so, potentially enabling organisations to gain a competitive advantage (Bell and Narz, 2007).

### **2.3 Professional services in Ireland**

The researcher has chosen to undertake the exploratory study on work motivation of older workers in Professional Services sectors in Ireland. There has been significant growth in this sector in past decades and it continues to grow. In the UK, the UK Professional Services sector is significant to the success of the UK economy, given that it contributes 15% of UK GDP, provides 14% of all employment, and delivers 14% of exports (pwc, 2016). Professional services include a range of different occupations, such as architects, lawyers, accountants, and roles that often require professional licenses to operate and which provide support to businesses of all sizes and in all sectors. The specialist advice, along with the services given by the professional services sector, stimulates, improves, and supports productivity and growth across the economy. Motivation of this cohort of individuals is, therefore, of interest, specifically with tighter labour markets, that of older workers.

In a specific study, by Lord and Farrington (2006), completed on knowledge workers (which would correspond within the Professional Services category also), organisations were recommended that the attraction, retention and motivation of productive older workers was key, if they as organisations were to meet the needs of the current and future business environment. Leading theorists in human behaviour contend that both retention and productivity is a function of how motivated the individual is (Lord and Farrington, 2006). In a tight labour market, the management of a diverse age workforce is equally important so that organisations are both perceived and are attractive to potential workforces (Rabl and Triana, 2014). Where workers have remained in the workforce, it can be noted that the largest cohort of these, at 30%, have been in professional or managerial roles (National Institute on Aging, 2007). The expectation is that this may be similar in Ireland and impact professional services.

The decision to base this study on Irish workers is that, while studies have indicated that there may be varied factors for job satisfaction in relation to motivation for older employees, these differences are more noticeable in some countries than others (Drabe, et al., 2015). Therefore, it is of interest to explore motivation of older professional services workers within an Irish context. Professional Services employees

are typically educated to degree level and beyond. All would be involved in ongoing professional development and training within their chosen sector.

## **2.4 Motivation**

Firstly, the researcher will present some of the key theories on motivation, followed by exploring some of the existing knowledge of motivation for older workers. It is intended in the course of the execution of the research to ascertain what motivational factors are relevant for professional services workers in Ireland.

### ***2.4.1 Motivation theories***

Motivation can be described as the set of forces that invigorate, guide, and maintain behaviour (Hitt, Black and Porter, 2014). Motivation theories can be categorised into two types: content theories and process theories (Hitt, et al., 2014) . For relevance to this study, the researcher will focus on content theories.

Amongst the traditional theories of motivation include Herzberg's two factor theory which focuses on, 1) motivators: these are internal to the role such as the work itself, achievement, recognition and advancement, or 2) hygiene factors: which are external to the job such as salary, job security and benefits. The levels to which motivators and hygiene factors are fulfilled will determine the satisfaction and motivation of individuals (Herzberg, 1968). Motivation is also increased where individuals are involved in the goal-setting process and, likewise, receive feedback on their performance. Hackman and Oldham's theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) focus on five core job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, which create the conditions and activate three psychological states: experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility, and knowledge of results. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is based on the premise that an individual is motivated to meet their most basic needs first; physiological needs, such as water, food, and then security needs, before moving to the next level to satisfy higher order needs, such as social and esteem needs. Maslow focuses on internal factors, while Herzberg's two factor theory focuses on external factors

Two types of motivations are considered – intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation exists when individuals feel that their work is important, provides autonomy, and gives opportunity to advance and develop abilities. Hackman and Oldham's model

identified the characteristics that bring about intrinsic motivation. This is consistent with Dan Pink's (2009) elements for true motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

Organisations need to motivate and engage staff to maximise an individual's potential and contribution, not just looking at costs, but also that which maintains their motivation and well-being – the latter being not just an ethical consideration, but also to ensure the return on investment; committing to employees delivering to the longer-term also (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2008). Organisations are recommended to practice leadership styles that recognise the variety of work characteristics between generations, encouraging those of older workers so that positive employee motivation is nurtured and ultimately contributes to enhanced productivity (Hui-Chun and Miller, 2006).

#### ***2.4.2 Factors for motivation of older workers***

Older workers may have varying motivations compared to their younger peers (Lyons and Kuron, 2014) which require alternate approaches by their organisations to meet their needs (Kulik, Ryan, Harper and George, 2014). The direction of motivation, such as values and needs, for the older worker, to continue to work, is likely to change with age (Kooij, et al., 2008). Older workers in recent studies present themselves in a developmental phase rather than in a decline phase (Taneva, Arnold and Nicolson, 2016). This is represented in their view that their experience and knowledge which is age-related allows them to have a strategic view, with developed modes of critical thinking (Taneva, et al., 2016)

Studies have indicated that older workers are more motivated by relationships with colleagues, with their role and security, income and advancement being of less importance (Drabe, et al., 2015). Older workers can be particularly impacted and are motivated to work because of the opportunity for social contact, providing for a wide range of needs and goals to be fulfilled (Carstensen, 1995). Older workers value autonomy of their work and organisation and respond positively to encouragement of the development of relationships with colleagues; this, in turn, may motivate good working behaviours which is valuable for the organisation (Goštautaitė and Bučiūnienė, 2015). The socio-emotional selectivity theory asserts that as individuals age, there is a move towards emotional satisfaction to re-enforce or sustain ones identity. For older workers, this would see them prioritising established social contact

and a sense of belonging (Carstensen, 1995). In the workplace and supporting further social contact, it is suggested that mentoring can be of benefit to the older worker, being a motivational factor for them. This is also beneficial for the organisation, as it enables the transfer of knowledge and skills, and corporate memory is retained (Calo, Patterson and Decker, 2014).

It is important to have an insight into the importance of compensation for the ageing worker, as it may impact their decisions on remaining in the workforce, which for employers with a focus on retention, is important (Stynen Forrier and Sels, 2014). In a study undertaken with a group of engineers, aged 55 to 70, in 2002, 59% responded that they were financially independent enough to allow them to cease employment at that time (Lord, 2002).

To support retention and ongoing productivity in the workplace, flexibility is recognised as being a key motivating factor for older workers (Capowski, 1994). Workers over 50 tend to have more flexible work arrangements. Some of them are self-employed also, and, in addition, may be in a position to take reduced working hours (National Institute on Aging, 2007).

As relates to abilities, as older workers become aware of potentially reduced abilities in some areas, this has been seen to reduce their motivation, which, in turn, impacts their performance (Kanfer and Ackermann, 2004). Consideration has been offered for continued training and development where required to mitigate. Capowski (1994) noted that the ability to learn, not only can continue well into one's 70s, but that the continual attention to learning and development also supports older workers in their ability to feel active and energetic in their roles.

Motivating factors, such the enjoyment of work, an opportunity to develop and reach one's potential and social contact and belonging, are also contributing factors for older workers to continue to participate in the workforce (Kooij, et al., 2008). Studies have proposed that there is a negative relationship between growth-related motives and age and a positive relationship between personal needs and job characteristics (Hertel, et al., 2013). Where there are concerns of self-esteem for older workers, this may be mitigated as a result of the educational and professional position an individual may have (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2007).

Claes and Heyman (cited in Wang, Olson and Schultz, 2013), using HR focus group, identify three sources to enhance work motivation: 1) older workers attached importance to have contact with superiors and having opportunity to take on responsibilities and were more motivated when these conditions were met, 2) older workers were more motivated when given clear and challenging timelines, and 3) older workers were more motivated when they had the opportunity to mentor others, sharing knowledge and receiving recognition for same. It is also noted that the key is to understand if the organisation is interested in retaining all older workers equally.

## **2.5 Changes in work motivation for older workers**

It is of interest to the researcher to examine if factors for work motivation have changed across the career trajectory of the older worker. There are suggestions of changes in work motivation throughout an individual's career (Kanfer & Ackermann, 2004).

Work motivation may change from younger to older workers, with older workers placing more emphasis on intrinsic factors, such as social elements like mentoring and sharing of knowledge and or the sense of belonging or feeling recognised for their contribution, which supports self-esteem (Taneva, et al., 2016). In contrast, they may be less motivated by factors (extrinsic) such as their advancement or progression in the role or efforts for greater achievement (Kanfer & Ackermann, 2004).

Kanfer and Ackerman (2004), in their study, experienced that, as workers age, extrinsic motivators such as compensation reduced in interest. This was consistent with the more recent study by Calo (2014) that revealed that self-rated extrinsic motivators such as compensation and recognition decreased with age, whereas intrinsic motivators such as enjoying work and being challenged did not change with increased age (Calo, et al., 2014).

Reiss and Haverkamp (2005) in their work proposed that individuals older than 36 lean towards the higher motives of Maslow's hierarchy; evidence of self-actualisation was demonstrated to a greater extent. Whilst some literature finds that the motivator of challenge may decrease with age (Kanfer & Ackermann, 2004), other studies present a positive view, that the interest in stimulating and challenging work prevails as workers age (Calo, et al., 2014). A sense of achievement and accomplishment was

identified as a key motivator in studies as age increased (Lord, 2002), however, not all are in agreement with this and, in some cases, believe that the motivation to achieve diminishes with age (Kooij, et al., 2008).

It was observed that motivating conditions are required throughout working lives, especially if understood that competencies are reduced or lacking (Hertel, et al., 2013). Declining ability may be compensated by older workers experience and knowledge of how best to manage their tasks in the workplace (Kanfer & Ackermann, 2004). As workers age, they tend to use skills and techniques learned, such as being efficient with time and their knowledgeable experience to compensate on areas that may be reduced, such as stamina or energy (Ng & Law, 2014). Training and development has been viewed as a strategy to mitigate the retention of older workers, yet motivations for participation in training is low and has declined with age (Meyers, Billett and Kelly, 2010). Overall, it is suggested that older workers are motivated by different factors, rather than having a diminished work motivation (Calo, et al., 2014).

The researcher will seek to explore if older workers in professional services in Ireland express that there have been changes in their work motivation.

## **2.6 Considerations of demotivating factors for older workers**

Stereotypes abound and the key is to get to know each person on an individual level, understanding the characteristics and providing insight on effective ways to motivate (Knight, 2014). Stereotyping of older workers include negative views such as lacking flexibility, absenteeism, not engaging with new technology or adaptable to change. Interestingly, research has shown that absenteeism is lower for older workers, and their commitment to the organisation is high (Lord and Farrington, 2006).

Negative attitudes may exist as relates to older workers and their interest in continued professional development. If older workers are seen as less open to new experiences and learning, it may affect whether they are chosen for training and development opportunities (Truxillo, McCune, Bertolino and Fraccaroli, 2012). Older worker's ability to grasp new concepts and their motivation and interest in work has been questioned (Calo, et al., 2014). These assumptions, whilst recognising that ageing may also include a period of decline, especially as relates to mental and cerebral function,

have been found, through research, to be misinformed and overly simplistic (Kanfer & Ackermann, 2004).

However, on the positive side, again from a stereotypical stance, positive views include older workers' experience, their perceived good judgement, and their strong work ethic. Age stereotypes may sometimes be to the advantage of the older worker (Truxillo, et al., 2012). Indicators are that older workers may have a greater commitment, with decreased numbers of voluntary absences than their younger colleagues (Warr, 1994).

Calo (2014) is of the view that societal stereotypes of older workers, whether true or not, influence organisations behaviours; for example, in hiring or promotion, withstanding that many of these stereotypes are unsubstantiated. The organisations that will be successful are those that see all workers as people, with diverse plans and ambitions, and who seek to support them in a context that is beneficial to both the individual and the organisation (Turner and Williams, 2005). Perceptions of older workers may also affect decisions regarding hiring of older workers (Truxillo, et al., 2012)

From a motivational perspective for older workers, it is important to ensure that age related stereotypes don't become a self-fulfilling prophecy, with older workers taking prompts and signals from others on how they are expected to work (Hertel, et al., 2013).

Evidence shows that older workers do invest in their careers in spite of demotivating factors or barriers (Greller, 2006), with barriers being organisational such as age discrimination, policies and practices or personal such as health, family commitments, or inexperience. The 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace is challenged with the conflict of needing to respond to demographic shifts in employment while still dealing with stereotypes and biases toward older workers (Stein, et al, , 2000), and their related impacts to motivation.

## **2.7 Organisational practices to support work motivation amongst older workers.**

Organisations need to understand how to sustain performances of older workers, a factor being motivation. Despite figures showing the increased trend of older workers

participation, organisations rarely implement special programmes to encourage or motivate them (Goštautaitė and Bučiūnienė, 2015). Organisations, seeking to sustain workforce participation of older workers, will need to ensure that their practices meet the needs of older workers so as to maximise the full potential of an ageing workforce (Kooij, et al., 2008).

Some HR Practices such as reduced or flexible working hours, additional training, or adjusted roles help support older workers in sustaining performance. Other practices such as the taking on of new projects or the mentoring of other staff provide a developmental aspect for the older worker and increased work motivation and satisfaction (Taneva, et al., 2016). Government policy and regulatory changes are also impacting the ageing workforce, with retirement ages and eligibility for state pension increasing; this is a contributing factor to an increase in participation rates of older workers (Ng & Law, 2014).

As older workers roles may develop in the organisation, it is suggested that they may play a role as mentors (Capowski, 1994). It is suggested that mentoring can be of benefit, not just to the older worker, but for the organisation, as it enables the transfer of knowledge and skills and corporate memory is retained (Calo, et al., 2014). Older workers have institutional knowledge about the organisation, which can be shared with younger or newer members of the organisation. Formal or informal programs can be used to make this successfully happen that would benefit all generations and the organisations (Ng & Law, 2014). This mentoring, given that there would be cross-generational activity, may also reduce stereotyping (Calo, et al., 2014)

Flexible working arrangements have been indicated as a motivating factor for older employees to remain in the workforce (Bell and Narz, 2007). In addition to flexibility being a motivating factor, it may enable individuals to prolong their working years. It is suggested that business strategies used to support other cohorts such as working mothers could be developed and adapted for older workers (Calo, et al., 2014). Policies that allow for flexible schedules and alternate work arrangements may be appropriate to accommodate the ageing workforce (National Institute on Aging, 2007). Organisations may consider reducing the working hours for the high performing older worker. Likewise, organisations could look at options for the older worker, such as adapting aspects of the working environment, changing the tasks required, and or

indeed reskilling, with a final option being a move towards retirement (Patrickson and Ranzjin, 2006).

Work practices from recruitment through to performance management will be affected by organisational and management attitudes to older workers (Calo, et al., 2014). It is understood from studies that investing in factors that are understood to motivate older worker will have a greater positive influence on productivity and aids the retention of staff (Lord, 2002). The implementation of known motivators will require management support and may also require a shift in organisational culture (Lord, 2002). To support an interest in continued learning and development for older workers, it has been suggested that managers and organisations should encourage older workers in roles and tasks that provide a sense of accomplishment and achievement that motivates them (Kooij, et al., 2008). Training and education of managers on best practice for managing an age diverse workforce may, in itself, be an important factor for employee motivation, ensuring that, not only skills are available, but also the motivation to participate in shared goals (Boehm, Kunze and Bruch, 2014). Therefore, organisations would benefit from increased understanding regarding age-related differences so as to adapt their HRM strategies and leadership styles in an effective and sustainable way (Hertel, et al., 2013).

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Consideration needs to be given to older workers, their motivations to remain in the workforce and how their collective experience can be best channelled to benefit both organisations and the wider community (Hedge, Borman and Lammlein, 2006). It is suggested that organisations need to respond to the demands of a workforce that is ageing, specifically to how it relates to workplace practices and policies (Calo, et al., 2014)

The motivation of older workers to remain within the workforce is required, not just by organisations, but by the economy and society, being aware that that the exit of older workers will cause considerable pressure on the social security systems of industrialised countries (Greller, 2006). Organisations need understanding that chronological or perceived ages can be deceptive and may not be consistent with reality, preventing a clear assessment of individual aspects, work ability, and motivation (Hertel, et al., 2013).

Managers need to be supported in their familiarity and awareness to the needs and challenges of their ageing colleagues and this awareness is deemed as important as any organisational practices that could be implemented (Sterns & Miklos, 1995). This can be viewed as an opportunity to embrace increased diversity and through potential required changes bring with it an inclusivity, flexibility and work-life balance that changes the shape of what the working world is today (Kulik, et al., 2014)

Exploration on the motivations of older workers and what they value as they progress in their working lives will be insightful to support future work practices. Recognising that employees may work into and beyond the historically traditional retirement age of 65 years will need to be examined, with supportive working arrangements created for the life needs of an ageing workforce (Stein, et al., 2000), all balanced with the economics of organisational and societal requirements.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The researcher is undertaking an exploratory study into work motivation of older workers in professional services roles in Ireland. In this chapter, the methodology selected will be justified, providing rationale for the research approach employed. The sample used will be described. The research techniques and procedures utilised to collect and analyse the data will then be detailed. Ethical considerations will be advised, along with any limitations.

#### **3.2 Research Question**

An exploratory study into work motivation of older workers in professional services roles in Ireland.

##### ***3.2.1 Objectives***

1. To gain an understanding of what motivates older workers (i.e. 50+ years) in professional services roles in Ireland.
2. To examine if factors underpinning motivation have changed across the career trajectory and why.
3. Are there demotivating factors (barriers/bias/stereotype) that impact motivation for older workers?
4. To examine what organisational practices could be put in place to increase motivation levels among the older workforce.

As the study is exploratory in nature, the researcher expects the themes and results to be emergent. . The study aims to achieve a greater understanding of what motivates older workers in present day work environments, specifically, in this case, the Professional Services sector in Ireland. As labour forces continue to tighten in a global and national context, it is critical to understand both how to motivate and encourage older workers, to both be retained in the work force and be satisfied and productive. Also, as careers are not linear, it may be the case that older workers join an

organisation from age of 50+, so it is important that prospective employers know how to motivate them as they continue to progress in their careers.

### **3.3 Research philosophy**

The research philosophy that is used can be indicative of how the researcher views the world (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). The “onion metaphor”, as described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), likens the process of peeling away layers of factors so as to reach the most appropriate strategy for the research.

#### **3.3.1 Ontology**

The researcher agrees, as suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), that a research question has the possibility to be answered from more than one philosophical position. Ontology, being concerned with the nature of reality (Quinlan, 2011), holds that it may be viewed from an objectivist or subjectivist position. As the study being undertaken is that of an exploratory nature, and relates to individual’s experiences and motivation in the workplace, the individual’s views and experiences are of interest to the researcher and may be considered to be more subjectivist in nature. The subjectivist view accepts that individuals will all have differing interpretations on situations based on how they, as individuals, view the world (Saunders, et al., 2012).

#### **3.3.2 Epistemology**

According to Goldman (1968, p.1), epistemology is “interested in the knowing mind”. Epistemology concerns what knowledge is comprised in a field of study and how that knowledge is created (Quinlan, 2011).

A research paradigm is a philosophical framework that shows how research should be undertaken (Collis & Hussey, 2009). The philosophical framework used to guide the research will be interpretivism. The researcher believes that interpretivism, which focuses on exploring the complexity of social phenomena rather than the measuring of it, as in the case of positivism (Collis and Hussey, 2009), aligns best and is the preference for research, given the researcher’s interest in the study of work motivation and older workers. It will be sought to understand perspectives that are rich in meaning . An alternative that has been considered is that of positivism. Positivism, originating in the natural sciences, engages research that uses a deductive process to understand

social phenomena, with an emphasis on quantifiable data gathered that predispose statistical analysis (Saunders, et al., 2012). The researcher is choosing to research from the viewpoint that reality is subjective and dependent on how we each view the world. The emphasis in the researcher's study is understanding the world from the point of view of the participant.

As the researcher will be seeking to understand data from the participant's perspective, it is understood that a phenomenological approach is being taken, as the researcher is interested in the experience of those who are living the experience (Quinlan, 2011), in this case, older workers in professional services roles.

Understanding that research may be designed to either test or develop a theory will determine whether the research approach is deductive or inductive – deductive seeking to test and inductive seeking to develop. The researcher is interested in gathering data and exploring a phenomenon, building on theory, which is consistent with an inductive approach (Saunders, et al., 2012). The researcher plans to undertake research of work motivation and older workers so that a view can be formed and that themes may emerge. The researcher's development of the view through the progress of the research is understood as inductive reasoning (Horn, 2009).

The exploratory study will generate knowledge about multiple experiences of people who are over 50 and working in professional services. Within the epistemological position of interpretivism and this type of study, no reality or views of a participant is considered more valid than another.

### **3.4 Methodological Choice**

Data can be collected by quantitative or qualitative research and methods. Quantitative research collects mainly numerical data and opinions, with a reliance on deductive reasoning, reporting findings in terms of one relationship to another (Horn, 2009). Qualitative research assumes that the area of research is "rich" and that the situation on which it is based, requires exploration to reveal an understanding of the issue or process (Horn, 2009), and Bryman and Bell (2015).

Whilst a number of studies on "older workers" have used a quantitative approach (Boehm, Kunze and Bruch, 2014 and Lord and Farrington 2006), other relevant

research (Meyers, et al., 2010; Bown-Wilson & Parry, 2013; Taneva, et al., 2016) use a qualitative methodology.

For this exploratory study, the researcher intends to use qualitative methods. The researcher is interested in the flexibility that the qualitative methodology choice allows. In addition, the researcher is interested in the quality of the theoretical implications that qualitative research makes (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The researcher has also taken into consideration practical implications regarding access to participants (Bryman and Bell, 2015). There is some argument against qualitative methods in that the interpretation and data collection may be open to bias and error from the researcher. In addition that the results may not be used across a larger population is deemed as a basic flaw in the use (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). However, whilst quantitative methodologies may be of preferred interest when knowledge of large population samples is required, qualitative methodologies have risen in use, where greater and deeper understanding is desired (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Qualitative methods are when seeking to gather rich and insightful data from the exploration of complex matters (Bowling, 2009).

### **3.5 Research timeline**

The interviews commenced from the 15 June 2016 and were all completed by 5 July 2016. The interview transcription was completed by 10 July 2016.

### **3.6 Sample and participant profiles**

The criteria for the population sample is that all individuals must be 50+ years of age and work in professional services roles. Purposeful sampling has been employed, where the researcher targeted individuals who were known to meet the selection criteria (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008). The participants ranged in age from 50 to 70 years of age, with the median age being 57. The sample population was made up of individuals from Legal, Finance, Architectural, and HR professional roles. Participants are working in a range of industry sectors and are both employed and self-employed. Of the eight participants, five are male and three are female. Eight interviews were conducted. The participants were known by the researcher, either personally, as previous work colleagues, or current work colleagues. All participants invited to participate, agreed.

Research participants were introduced to the concept of the research being undertaken initially by conversation or email, in which the research being undertaken was outlined and a request of their consideration to participate solicited. Each participant received a copy of the consent form, prior to the interview taking place. The consent form included a high level summary of what would be covered in the interview, stating the aim of the research. The consent form also explained how the procedure involved the recording of information, how confidentiality was protected, and how participation was voluntary.

Professional services include a range of different occupations, such as architects, lawyers, accountants, and roles that often require professional licenses to operate and which provide support to businesses of all sizes and in all sectors.

**Table 1 – Participant profiles**

Participant	Age	Professional Services role
Participant 1	59	HR Professional
Participant 2	50	Architect
Participant 3	70	Engineer
Participant 4	59	Lawyer
Participant 5	59	Lawyer
Participant 6	55	Accountant
Participant 7	55	HR Professional
Participant 8	50	HR Professional

### **3.7 Research Instrument**

‘A conversation with purpose’ is the description regularly applied to qualitative research interviews (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Interviews are commonly used as a method in qualitative studies and the results incline towards rich accounts of the views of the participants or emergent categories of behaviour driven by theory (Horn, 2009). An alternate to this such as a questionnaire, or survey (if quantitative method was being used) was considered for their potential convenience to the participant, the consistency of questions and the opportunity to use for larger groups of people. Surveys were used in research on older workers by Lord & Farrington (2006); (see also Calo, et al., 2014; Hennekam, 2016).

The researcher has decided to use semi-structured interviews, as they enable a balance between the key issues and topics to be covered and latitude for the participant to respond in a way that seems appropriate for them (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Fisher, 2010). The approach is consistent with previous literature, where the viewpoints of older workers were solicited. Semi structured qualitative interviews were used in studies by Bown-Wilson & Parry (2013) and Taneva, et al. (2016).

The researcher has also chosen interviews as the instrument, as it is understood as being a suitable method because of the identified requirement of the study to achieve insights into personal motivations and interests (Meyers, et al., 2010). Interviews can provide rich data and, therefore, can be a good foundation from which to analyse data. Interviews were semi- structured and exploratory in nature. In the semi-structured interviews undertaken, the researcher's experience was that these type of interviews offered flexibility to probe and ask further questions.

The researcher, in preparation for the interviews, has sought to gain a strong knowledge of the existing literature related to the study and sub-objectives, as this supports the researcher to move with the flow in the conversation (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). An interview schedule was created and was important so as to allow specific themes to be covered so as to address the objectives of the dissertation. Skills for successful interviewing include the ability to develop rapport and that of active listening. Interviewers should not show reaction to answers, however, face-to-face interviews do allow reactions based on non-verbal response and body language. The researcher, based on her experience and in her relationships with the participants, sought to employ the above practice.

### **3.8 Procedure**

#### ***3.8.1 Pilot interview***

A pilot interview using the interview schedule was carried out. This was to ensure that questions were easily understood and that they led to open conversation. The pilot interview also made sure that the questions were not offensive, in line with ethical considerations. The pilot interview was also held to establish that the practicalities of time required and collection and storage of data was consistent with objectives required. The interview schedule was reduced after the pilot interview. There was one

pilot interview conducted and the participant is known to the researcher, as a work colleague.

### ***3.8.2 Preparation pre interviews***

The location of the interview was agreed with each participant and interviews were held at either the researcher's offices or a location of choice for participant. Two participants requested that the interviews be held at their private homes post work hours and one participant requested that the interview take place at his work office prior to his work commencing.

At the start of each interview, the researcher provided ground rules for the interview, recapping on the information in the consent form, including the ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality, providing an approximation of how long the interview would take. All participants signed the consent form on the day of their interview. The researcher also advised that the interview was less so a dialogue and that the research was interested in their views and experiences of the items discussed. The participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers.

There were eight interviews in total, with an average duration of 49 minutes. The interview time ranging from a minimum of 30 minutes to a maximum of 61 minutes. Interviews were recorded for accuracy using a Dictaphone application on the researcher's mobile phone. The interviews were transcribed into a word document for analysis.

Following the completion of each interview, they were then saved to a secure location for later transcription. The interviews were deleted from the mobile phone of the researcher. The recording of the interview allowed the interviewer to focus on the interview, engaging fully in listening and avoiding any distraction that might occur with note taking. As they were recorded, this function was also used at the analysis stage.

### ***3.8.3 Interview schedule***

The interview questions were carefully constructed to reflect the aims of study. An interview schedule was created and was important so as to allow specific themes to be covered so as to address the objectives of the dissertation. This was grounded in the

relevant related literature as relates to older workers and workplace motivation. Whilst an interview schedule was created, the questions were modified slightly within each interview to reflect the answers that had been given by the participant. An example of this would be following on from the open question of “What currently motivates you in your work” in the course of the following questions, participant 1 was asked by the researcher “*Could you talk to me a little bit further about what is it that you enjoy that’s motivating for you?*”. Participant 2 was asked, “*What type of work do you enjoy?*” This would be typical of semi-structured interviews and encourages more relevant data being proffered (Horn, 2009).

The opening statement was reflective of the consent form and basis for the exploratory study. There was also a variety of open or prompt questions to solicit further information on key points raised, so the participant could expand or elaborate on specific points made.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

The researcher decided on Thematic Analysis to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data analysis approaches employed within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis were considered but decided against based on what the researcher understood as the time demand required for what described as a ‘complex process’ (Smith, et al., 2009, p.80). Thematic Analysis is considered as providing a flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which the researcher deemed would be best suited to her exploratory study requirements. Thematic analysis is deemed as a useful approach to analyse responses of a particular group of respondents to identify primary themes (Green & Thorogood, 2009).

All interviews had been recorded and transcribed. The recordings allowed the researcher to repeatedly listen to the interviews. The researcher made handwritten notes on initial ideas from the outset, taking note if there were similarities amongst the texts. The researcher followed a process of in-depth review of the first interview and transcript, noting elements of interest as related to the research objectives and developing potential themes. The researcher was also open if other areas of interest arose that were not direct linked to the research question. The researcher continued

this process through all of the transcripts. The researcher was 'active' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in her identification of themes.

The researcher supported her analysis of the data by organising the data clearly and used an excel spreadsheet to support this and so could easily revert back to review specifics of themes. The researcher noted all the codes for each participant and sought to bring each of the codes into related categories. These were then analysed and organised into themes. The researcher's analysis of the data was consistent with the process described by Braun & Clarke (2006).

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

All invited to participate in the study were advised that participation was voluntary, anonymity would be maintained, and that all information was held as confidential. Participants signed a consent form to acknowledge and record their understanding of this.

The researcher notes the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015. The legislation states that individuals may not receive less favourable treatment than another person based on nine grounds. Age is noted as one of these grounds. The researcher ensured that participants were aware that the term 'older' worker was grounded in the literature and was based on chronological age. If prompted by the participant's comments, the researcher reassured participants that age was not being described as negative but rather a collective categorisation. In addition they were invited as participants because of their working roles in Professional Services.

The researcher sought to create an environment where the participants felt safe to speak about issues personal to them and relevant to the exploratory study. The researcher sought to maintain an appropriate balance between the researcher's interest in pursuing knowledge and the ethical respect for the integrity of the participant (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This was achieved through the efforts completed in creating and piloting the interview schedule, soliciting feedback, and adapting schedule and style if required.

It is important to mitigate any risk that may be associated by the nature of qualitative research. This may be resultant from the researcher being unsystematic regarding what is significant or important and if the relationship of the researcher with the participants

creates a bias (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Developing good trust and rapport is also important so as not to bias the information shared by the participant (Sekaran, 2003). The researcher acknowledges these ethical issues. The researcher whilst conscious of the rapport created as the participants was known to her, was also aware that participants may not have been comfortable speaking on some personal issues for the same reason i.e. that they were known to her.

All information was electronically recorded and participants agreed to this. Whilst all participants agreed to the recording, one individual did comment on the confidentiality of the information. The researcher reassured the participant on the methods taken for confidentiality.

The secure storage of the data collected was an ethical consideration (Quinlan, et al., 2015). Information was saved on both a mobile phone device and securely transferred to a laptop for later transcription and analysis. Both mobile phone device and laptop are password protected and transcripts could not be accessed. Data on the mobile phone device was deleted once it had been securely saved to laptop.

### **3.11 Limitations**

The participants involved came from a range of areas within professional services industries. Whilst the researcher was seeking to recognise emerging themes and those consistent with the current literature, the researcher acknowledges that a view of a single industry or based on gender alone may have brought different results. The researcher accepts this and her primary interest in this particular study was the individual views of workplace motivation and older workers and not with the emphasis either on industry or gender.

There is a split of 5 to 3 between men and women participating. This may affect the data gathered, although it may also recognise that there are less older (50+) female workers in active employment.

Whilst the participants come from both the personal and professional network of the researcher, the researcher is conscious that some participants may feel less in a position to disclose certain information. This was mitigated by the assurance of confidentiality and the continued trust and rapport between that of participant and researcher. Also, the fact that these people were known to the researcher allowed them

to be candid in their answers, sharing views with an implicit understanding that the researcher was known to them and the environment they worked in.

The participants were known to the researcher and it is understood that this can be open to bias beyond the researcher's constraints, with the participants being in the sample only because of the ease of access to them. This is counter-argued in that whilst access to participants may have been with ease, these samples met a purposeful sample selection criteria (Saunders, 2012). In this case, the researcher's criteria for selection was individuals of 50+ years of age who were working in Professional services roles; this selection criteria was met and of relevance to meet the research aims.

The researcher chose a mono-method approach using semi-structured interviews. It may have been considered to carry out a survey to reach a wider audience. The researcher did consider, but in this instance, time limitations would have presented an issue in potentially accessing a meaningful sized group.

Finally, the researcher carried out rigorous analysis of the data. It is, however, the researcher's own interpretation of the data and, therefore, will be limited by that interpretation.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

I will now look at the findings from the research undertaken. This dissertation sought to explore the work motivation of older workers. The sample population was made up of participants aged 50-70 years old, who are working in professional services roles in Ireland. Semi structured interviews were undertaken with 8 participants. As outlined in chapter 3, thematic analysis was used to understand and establish themes.

**Table 2 – Findings: Categories and Themes**

Categories	Categories	Themes
Ability	Lack of tolerance	
Autonomy	Legacy	Economic Reality
Belonging	Management of time	
Benefits of age	Money	Consolidation of Experience/ Self-Actualisation
Bias	No social contact	
Change in motivation	Pass the torch	Self-Worth / Self-Esteem
Consolidation	Recognition	
Continued learning	Reflective	Legacy / “Passing the Torch
Contribution	Self-actualisation	
De-motivation	Self- esteem	Belonging / Social Contact
Drive for progression	Self-worth	
Economic reality	Social contact	Flexibility /Work-Life Balance
Enjoys work	Speed	
Expert	Status	Continued Learning / Ability
Economic reality	Stereotyping	
Finance/ security	Survival	Professional Services & Age
Gives back	Technology	
Grey-haired wisdom	Work-life balance	
Growth		

## 4.2. Thematic Analysis

### 4.2.1 Theme 1: Economic reality

Money being a motivator to work for older workers was mentioned by all but one of the participants. Whilst individuals' circumstances will differ, there are still "*overarching economic reasons for working*" (participant 5), for this cohort of people. Family responsibilities and commitments were cited and that "*earning a wage is a very, very powerful and positive motivation*" (participant 1), to support the family. Similarly, participant 3 noted that the "*motivation to work was to earn money to rear a family and to pay the bills effectively*" and participant 8 strongly added the "*motivation for working is to sustain my family*" and overall "*survival*".

Not all older workers were at a stage of financial independence that they had prior expectations for. In the case of participant 1, due to choices he had made earlier in his career, he sought for the stability and confidence of money and a "*degree of surety which I don't have and that's motivating*". The reality was that he now needed money "*to pay off the mortgage*", with a perceived limited timeframe to do it, due to age, and a requiring consequence of needing to continue to work.

The recession also played into the current requirements and work motivation for older workers. Participant 4 remarked that "*the last ten years have had a horrific impact on people my age*" and from a working perspective it's a "*needs must*". The issues of falling pensions and devalued investments played heavily, being a "*huge issue for people of my age in terms of where they're going to go in years to come.... and so a motivation why people (older workers) need to continue to work*"(participant 4). Participant 3 commented that a number of friends were working because, post-recession, their "*pension might be belly-up*" and that "*the motivation there is purely to build up a fund*". "*The recent recession has brought many of them back*", commented participant 8.

The retention of the older workforce and their work motivation is also linked with their personal finance needs, with pension and retirement care being a key factor for their motivation to return where applicable.

Insight on salaries and compensation was mixed, with participant 2 being disappointed that his chosen area of professional services is "*poorly paid as a profession ... in*

*comparison to other professions of a similar standing and complexity*”, contrasting with participant 7, who felt that the financial reward has always been “*appropriately compensated*”. Whilst finances are a motivating factor, depending on what level of financial stability the individual enjoyed, work motivation was also to allow money earned as an “*opportunity to give your-self a treat*” (participant 3), supplementing income from savings and pension.

Overall, the necessity and requirement of working for monetary return still plays heavily in the motivations of the older workers sampled. Contributing factors such as a recession in the recent years of employment has impacted them and these older workers may still be working to mitigate this impact.

Participants acknowledged that there is a commercial reality for the retention of any one in the workforce, whether young or old. Regardless of motivation, need, and desire to work, it would come down to a commercial decision and potentially a business case if they were to work or continue to work. Therefore, whilst participant 8 was of the opinion that there is an economic reality of what organisations need and can afford, with organisations potentially saying, “*we can get more out of this person (younger) and pay them less*”, participant 3 voiced the concern that from his experience there was potential commercial “*shortcomings*” in such decisions.

#### ***4.2.2 Theme 2: Consolidation of experience and self-actualisation***

Whilst money is and remains a factor for many, participant 4 commented that, as you got older, the requirement or desire to work “*might be less driven by the monetary aspect of it*”. A number of participants spoke about their desire to use all the skills and experience that they had accumulated throughout their working years and how they found that consolidated use of skills to be a work motivator. Participant 1 said “*my ability and my experience of the solutions I have to offer them*” and the opportunity to use brings “*a lot of validation*” which he had stated as a key work motivator.

Participants found it a motivating factor for work when they had the opportunity to consolidate their years of experience, recognising their personal and work career growth and self-actualisation. Participant 2 described it as “*very motivational ... to be gainfully employed in what I am skilled and trained to do*” from the course of his career. Participant 5 spoke to a recent example of her work and how she “*was able to*

*bring my years of experience and wisdom*". She was motivated by that opportunity to bring together the skills that were acquired over the years, reflecting on the example given saying *"that was a good day... it's what I do well"*. Participant 7 was motivated in her current role, where she could bring her *"years of knowledge, experience and positive contribution to a workforce"*.

In contrast, where a consolidation of skills was not fulfilled, participants found it demotivating. Participant 8 expressed a frustration at not being able to work at her potential and *"would like to be able to bring the benefit of my experience at a higher level"*. Similarly, participant 6 voiced dissatisfaction regarding the use of his collective skills feeling that he was not *"using them to the greatest advantage"* and his desire and motivation to do so *"I want to use all the tools in my tool box and that's probably what's most frustrating is that I am not using all the tools"*.

In the path of consolidation and self-actualisation, participants expressed an awareness of their own growth and an overall drive for progression that continues to exist. Participant 2, who amongst motivating factors said that he works *"because I enjoy it"*, sought to drive further and set up his own business. He was conscious that he would survive or fail on this basis of own skills, namely, his consolidated years of experience. He described this as a *"hugely motivational influence"*. Participant 3 in his earlier career *"missed out on an opportunity to do technical stuff"* and so at the age of 70 is very motivated to take on a new opportunity to fulfil desire for his personal professional growth.

#### **4.2.3 Theme 3: Self-worth and self-esteem**

Participants expressed the importance of self-worth and self-esteem at work and that this was a factor of motivation for them. Participant 1 stated that *"self-worth and validation are very important to me"*, continuing with *"I find self-worth in work"* and self-worth being what he actively seeks. Participant 3 appreciated the recognition from others of his skills *"the self-esteem... somebody would ask you to do a job...gives one an uplift that you feel you have something to give"*.

The recognition of one's ability was important and to do a good job at it was important. Participant 4 acknowledged that *"what motivates me now is to do work correctly"*. Participant 1 liked to *"be recognised for what I'm doing well"*, however, with the

caveat, *“if you get pushed back and dropped, then that doesn’t fulfil the motivation to work”*.

Self-worth and work motivation was tied to the quality of the work that participants experienced or had opportunity to experience. Participant 2 spoke regarding the importance of the calibre of work as related to motivation and self-worth and that *“drudge, drudge kind of work is not going to do anything for your motivation”*. Good quality work completed would *“stand as a testimony”* of his achieved ability and self-worth. In contrast, where an individual perceived their work or service was not being used, it challenged their self-worth with a consideration of whether they were still a good fit for their current organisation. Participant 7 referred to this in *“being an integral part of the business is key”* for her and that if she in her role was becoming periphery to the business that it would have *“a big influence .... in terms of questioning my role within an organisation”*. Whilst self-worth may come from the individual, the organisation can impact this and adversely impact the work motivation of the individual.

#### ***4.2.4 Theme 4: Legacy and "passing the torch"***

A number of participants described how it was important for them to give back and contribute and as such leave a legacy. This giving back what they felt they had learnt, the *“passing on of knowledge”* (participant 5), was described as a motivator by many of the participants. Participant 6 found that that other employees *“copying your route”* and seeing them *“using that methodology or thought process”* was a motivator. For participant 6, it supports self-worth as a *“booster of confidence”* and contributed to the legacy of the employee *“that your message is appreciated and adopted out there”*. On a broader perspective, the opportunity to contribute was an innate quality to the participant. Participant 5 spoke that she was *“brought up with a work ethic, giving something back”* and that she was motivated by her *“contribution to society”* through her efforts in the workplace. The concept of the legacy was supported by participant 1 in his view that his accumulated work experiences were of value now, which he can *“hopefully can pass them on”* and in doing so *“help people to realise themselves (their potential)”*.

A means to sharing this legacy was suggested in the area of mentoring. Participant 3 had experienced mentoring younger colleagues and had *“got a lot of satisfaction”*

from it. From a business and commercial perspective, participant 1 was of the opinion that *“letting older managers go without them giving some of their wisdom to younger people formally is an awful waste of talent”*. Mentoring would be a vehicle to achieve this. In leadership roles, and if mentoring is not formalised, the opportunity for a work legacy and to give something back could also be fulfilled by *“coaching and developing teams”* as per participant 6.

Of course, while participants recognised that that it is time to *“pass the torch as the younger generation coming up”* (participant 8), recipients needed to be open to this knowledge sharing from their older peers. This may require organisational support to be effective.

Finally, the interest in sharing a legacy was not limited to just the idea of sharing it proactively to others in the organisation. Along with the interest of keeping a legacy and the importance of that for older workers, there was a consciousness and interest of that legacy being maintained and upheld as good and positive. This referred to ensuring that, while you were working, your standard and contribution would be maintained at a high standard. Participant 3 commented on his decision, along with some of his colleagues, regarding an appropriate time for retirement. They actively decided that they didn't *“want to go on the extra mile and screw up on something”* which could then *“be your legacy and more often than not the good stuff is forgotten”*. In this case, recognition and self-awareness of ability and capacity is key and may be a requirement that you even consider to move to some other role where you *“feel you still contribute”*.

#### ***4.2.5 Theme 5: Belonging and social contact***

The motivator of belonging and social contact was mentioned by all participants, namely, in their requirement of this being fulfilled by their ongoing engagement in a workplace.

Participant 3 cited as a motivation to work as being social and the *“interaction with people”* and through working and *“getting out of the house”* that it enabled or encouraged him to keep his *“interest in the outside world”*. Participant 2 supported the benefits of belonging and being part of a team or group in his work. It allowed him

to attend to work that was of greater interest, motivating for him and was *"only achievable because of the staff cohort"* to use and facilitate.

Participant 1 enjoyed the social contact, however, being self-employed and working as a consultant experienced an *"emptiness"*, with not having that ongoing belonging that may exist when working *"in a structured organisation environment"*. This experience of a lack of connectivity and continuity was *"demotivating"* for participant 1, and he is often left feeling *"bereft ... powerless"* and even likening it to *"bereavement"*. Consultancy may be considered a route for many older workers outside an organisation; however, it does not come without its challenges i.e. not having continuity and a sense of belonging as described above.

For participant 6, *"the social engagement is key"* as a motivational factor, commenting that while he could do his work from home that he *"wouldn't dream of it"* as he would miss the social interaction. The sense of belonging and social contact brought additional benefits, with participant 5 citing the diversity of ages and gender and this being a motivating factor for her workplace as a place that was stimulating and interesting to be part of, with *"diversity ... being so enriching in the workplace"*, age diversity being a factor of that.

The concept of the workplace delivering social contact still played a large factor. The workplace providing a place *"to keep involved with people"*, as per participant 6, versus a stereotyped perception of others or potential self that he may end up being *"with the grumpy guys out in the golf club complaining about the quality of the sandwich ... I think there's more to life than that"*. With the workplace facilitating your motivating factor to be *"involved with what you like ... doing work that you enjoy"* (participant 4).

Whilst previously stated that money is a motivator for work, participant 8 stated that it was and is the *"professional, personal relationships... that motivates more than money"*. In contrast to the other participants, participant 8 does not need the work environment for social engagement and sense of belonging to be fulfilled. *"It's not for the social aspect that I come to work ... I did that in my twenties ... but that's not the case any longer"*.

The concept of ongoing belonging was also challenged in that it was acknowledged that at some stage the sense of belonging may not be there. It may not be an indefinite

continuum and that it may shift to whereby you *“feel you don’t belong there anymore”*, as commented by participant 5. The cause of this shift may be different factors, with examples given that your *“value system”* is no longer aligned or that the sense of belonging and richness of social contact is impacted by other peers leaving the workplace.

#### ***4.2.6 Theme 6: Flexibility and work-life balance***

The availability of flexibility as a work motivator was raised by a number of the participants. Different reasons for interest in flexibility was cited from needing it from a work-life-balance perspective, or as a reality for workers who may have had the cognitive ability to continue, but who were struggling from a physical energy perspective, and others who mentioned that after their years of contribution that they felt the desire not to work all the time. They felt in many ways that, after their years of service and or tenure i.e. *“earned your stripes”* (participant 5), that they could have an opportunity for a return on their investment in the organisation or contribution to society.

Participant 8 stated currently that the *“flexibility”* that her role allowed was key motivator in her current role. It allowed her to achieve a *“work-life balance, fulfilling responsibilities at home as well as have a career”*. Participant 3, who worked a part-time role, experienced *“more enjoyment out of the work”* on a part-time basis now in quite a task driven role versus when he was working full-time. Participant 3 commented that having the flexibility of a part-time role *“would motivate me to continue”* however recognised that from a *“business commerce point of view that ... not much room for a part-time role ... or half job”* and so may not always be a feasible option for an employer.

Participant 8 was of the opinion that *“ten hour days is just not sustainable and people generally have other interests ... perhaps family ... aging parents ... not that their career is over, but perhaps they are onto the next phase ... so they’re on a winding down phase ... so with that perhaps more flexibility, shorter hours, more flexible work”*, and that it may be in all interests to identify areas or roles where they can *“give back to the business”*.

Participant 7, in recent years, has sought to bring *“more balance in terms of work and family life”*, also recognising the importance of it specifically as it related to priorities of family. So whilst technology has allowed a *“work life balance”*, as per participant 6, so that he does not need to travel as much, participant 2 noted, with increased technology, you could be *“100% turned on the whole time”* and that it was important to be careful about managing that to maintain a balance.

Touching on people’s ability to carry out their roles, it was commented by participant 8 that *“People have worked thirty years, they’ve worked hard and they built their careers ... physically they can’t continue at the same pace, it’s just not possible to sustain that”*, so flexibility is seen as a way to retain the individual in the workforce without placing the same physical demands on them. Physical in this case was understood as the demands of standard work hours and not that it was physical work.

It was, however, shared that it was important that there would be a certain commitment from the employer in the flexibility i.e. that days or hours were established *“less spasmodic”* (participant 3) and agreed as this was important from a sense of order.

#### ***4.2.7 Theme 7: Continued learning and ability***

The openness and requirement for continued learning amongst older workers was prevalent with all participants. Professional services roles would typically have an established continuous professional development requirement or associated body which individuals of a particular profession would be affiliated to. Therefore, in many ways all would have an obligation for continued learning. Having said that, most expressed a sincere interest in continued learning and education. Participant 1 was resolute in not wanting to *“lose the education that I had and have”*, adding that there is *“no point bringing yourself up to a level of education ... or expertise and letting it go”*. In addition, it was noted that it was important to *“need to stay current”*, participant 6 and *“abreast of best practice”*, participant 7, with participant 2 confirming, *“you are in a constant learning mode”*.

It was recognised by some of the participants that their capacity to learn at speed may have reduced and that was suggested that this needed to be taken into account for learning and development. Participant 1 echoed this in sharing that individual's

*“capacity to understand new and complex ideas gets slower ... it doesn't mean it goes away ... it just gets slower”.*

Technology and the rate and change and pace that it brought featured in many of the participants' comments. Participant 2 recognised that *“technological advances are ever present”* and this was an area in his role that he needed to keep abreast of. Participant 4 found that the speed of technological advances had brought were challenging and how it appeared to demand an *“instant reaction”*. In response to the instant demands that technology has brought, participant 1 commented that workers are *“not introduced to new ways of working and new things in a good way”*, essentially being *“told to implement and only given half a day”*, which neither lent to good learning nor was motivational in return. The suggestion was that older workers needed freedom and access to engage in further education regarding changing work practices. Whilst participants did not shy away from learning new IT and technology related practices, *“the more of it that I learn, the more I like it”* as commented by participant 5. Participant 5 also sensed a perception that it may be thought that she would not have the interest, ability or capacity to learn, commenting her perceived thoughts from others about her that *“she is going to get lazy or she is finding these new systems difficult”*.

Continued learning is a requirement for all, and older workers are no different – they all felt that they needed to be on top of current best practices for their disciplines. Whilst noted that continued learning and *“the feeding of the brain is very motivational”*, by participant 5, overall, it is driven by the need for all workers to adapt to changing environments and continued learning is a requirement of this. By not adapting with the environment, *“you become extinct ... you're useless ... we are all commodities in the workplace”*. This was contrasted by participant 6, who had a desire to learn, but found it was not being fulfilled by his current workplace. He expressed disappointment in that, while he felt he was perceived as the experienced older worker and as the *“tried and trusted lieutenant”* that he was not getting the opportunity to challenge himself and was *“not learning anything new”* which was de-motivating for him.

Whilst continued learning as both an interest and a requirement for all older workers prevailed, all were conscious of what their ability and capacity was for both continued

learning and the execution of work. Participant 1 commented, *“sometimes it takes a while to bring it all back”*, although the ability is there when the work is needed to be done. Participant 2 confirmed that, for him, the *“abilities to absorb complexities of new technology is definitely decreased from what it was twenty years ago”*, acknowledging that the *“flexibility of my brain ... is not as strong”*. Some of the participants noted that, while they may not have the same energy levels as in previous years, they use learned techniques from their experience to be more aware and efficient with their time to maintain expected workplace efficiency. Participant 6 shared that he might need to *“re-read things a couple of time to get the gist”* and was *“extra careful”* but that he did not believe that his ability had diminished.

#### **4.2.8 Theme 8: Professional services and age**

The relationship of professional services and age was mentioned by a number of the participants and, overall, that being of older years was perceived as a positive factor. Participant 1 supported this with saying *“if you are talking about the sort of industry I’m in (HR Consultancy)...the fact I have grey hair is actually a benefit”*. Participant 2, likewise, remarked that *“from an inter-professional point of view you probably get taken more seriously the older you are”*

The group sampled were from 50-70 years of age, with the average age being 57, and the high majority expressed their sense of not *“feeling old”*. They did recognise that, for their professional services, often, a deference may be given to them, based on their experience, which typically matured and improved, with participant 2 stating that you *“gain a body of knowledge that tends to push you into the role of expert”*. Participant 3 reflected on this, describing an example of a work meeting, where all other attendees were, on average, 10 years younger and he *“felt there was a certain deference”* to him. Participant 1 concurred with this, saying that *“as you get older, they come at you as wiser and that’s validating”*, with participant 6 also supporting this, stating that *“people have a respect for age”* with often a general positive attitude that *“well you’re older so you must know”*. However, this was not supported by all participants, with participant 5 commenting, *“it’s not just because you are older that you know more”*. Participant 1 had experienced a case of inverted bias with a former colleague of equal age, whereby his experience was that an equal aged peer was *“more critical of their aged colleagues than younger people”*.

Whilst participants were aware of their age, they were consistent in their attitude that young or old that all should be treated equally “*once you have the energy and you’re doing the task you are given*” (participant 3). They did express, however, that the perception of them may be different. This was expressed in their sense that others might consider that they were not capable for the job required, considering that as an older worker they might present a liability. Participant 4 thought that the perception may exist that “*he might forget to do things ... he’s not fast, he’s not reading the stuff*”. Another participant was of the view that given his demonstrated commitment to the organisation that he may be “*taken for granted*” (participant 6).

The concept of a demonstrated bias or stereotyping of older workers was shared, with mixed views. Participant 2 expressed “*older workers are their own worst enemies*”, elaborating that they (older workers), may adopt an attitude of non-progression and a reluctance to learn. This was supported by participant 1, who had the opinion that, for some individuals, “*they’ve reached mid-fifties and say ‘why do I need to improve?’*”. Participant 1 did contrast this, however, and, from his experience, felt that there were individuals who “*don’t see age as a block, they see age as a convenience to do other things*”.

There were also concerns if opportunities to both work and progress would diminish as you got older. This would be as a result of organisations favouring new entrants to the workplace who may be younger and, as per participant 6, “*business dynamic tends to look at the bright new star*”. There was a sense expressed, that, as an older worker, he (participant 6), had not only plateaued, but was also a commodity. There was a sense among one participant (5), that as an older worker she was being “*slightly tolerated*” and that there was little or no acknowledgement for all the years of service given nor that a certain value was brought by an older worker.

If there was a stereotype that older workers were not interested in learning, this was strongly refuted, with many expressing interest and need for continued learning, albeit recognising that they may need some understanding that on the technology side that additional support might be required.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the key findings from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to uncover these findings. The findings were presented under themes outlined in Table 2. The next chapter will discuss these findings along with the related literature. This researcher will also respond to the research questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This chapter will link the findings presented in Chapter 4 to the Literature Review in Chapter 2 and offer what the findings raise, when considered with previous research. The researcher will also look at the relationship of this consideration to the research objectives, outlined earlier in this dissertation.

#### 5.1 Discussion of Themes

##### 5.1.1 *Economic reality*

Financial security is recognised as a work motivator by leading theorists Maslow (Maslow, 1943) and Herzberg (Herzberg, 1968). In the consideration of older workers and their increasing numbers in the workforce, the importance of compensation and the economic reality to older workers should be understood to support motivation, retention and productivity (Stynen , et al., 2014) . The economic reality and financial requirements is expressed by the majority of participants as being a primary motivator to work. Participants commented on the motivation for working - “*to sustain a family*”, to “*pay the mortgage*” and for “*survival*” (participants 2, 1, 8, respectively). This is in contrast to the findings of a study group of professional services employees (engineers), by Lord (2002) and contrary to the work of Kanfer and Ackerman (2004), Drabe (2015) and in a study undertaken by Calo (2014), who maintained that that extrinsic motivators such as finance would reduce as individuals aged.

The researcher suggests the following explanation for this contradiction. The recent recession from 2007 onwards has impacted the participants of this study. Participants 3 and 4 both commented on the experience of their peers and the impact of the recession, with requirements to work to “*build up a fund*”, with pensions maybe being “*belly-up*” and the motivation for return of the older worker being for financial needs and economic reality. Ng and Law (2014) support this explanation in their advising that many older workers delayed retirement due to the recession. This is in addition to governmental policy extending the retirement age, both increasing participation rates of older workers, but also placing a requirement for older workers to stay in the

workforce, as the state pension will not be available until later years (Ng & Law, 2014).

From a future perspective, the ongoing geopolitical context is recognised by the researcher. The research took place from June to early July 2016. The most significant occurrence during that time was the EU Referendum for British citizens to determine if they would remain in the European Union. One participant had commented on “Brexit”, as it was commonly referred to, expressing awareness and concern of the impact of geo-political factors and the impact they may have on the Irish economy, society, industry and on his profession. This is mentioned in the context of the challenges it may bring in the future and impact to motivation as an older worker.

### ***5.1.2 Consolidation of experience and self-actualisation***

In Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), self-actualisation is considered the highest level of motivation, with self-actualisation being understood as an individual reaching full potential and their satisfaction of this achievement (Ivtzan, et al., 2013). Reiss and Havercamp (2005) argue that, as individuals increase in age, the desire for self-actualisation increases. This is also consistent with the work of Kanfer and Ackermann (2004) and Lord (2002), who maintained that a sense of achievement and growth was a key work motivator that increased with age. This supports the prevalence of the theme of self-actualisation in the researcher’s findings. The participants all expressed their desire to fulfil their potential and seek ongoing growth. Maslow (Maslow, 1943) defines self-actualisation for man as “*the tendency for him to be actualised in what he is potentially*” (p.382). Participants spoke about the desire to use all their skills and given their years of experience in their chosen professions, considered in some cases that they had reached a level of expertise (Participant 1, Participant 6), or given the accumulated and consolidated body of knowledge learned that they had moved into the “*role of expert*” (Participant 4).

Whilst Kooji (2008) argued that motivation to achieve may diminish with age, they acknowledge that the opportunity to reach one’s potential was a motivating factor for older workers to remain in the workforce. This opportunity, when not available, could be demotivating as was supported by the researcher’s findings. Participant 6 and 8 expressed dissatisfaction and frustration where their years of experience were not

being used or maximised. All participants expressed this desire of consolidation of their years' accumulated experiences.

This drive for progression as expressed by participants (2, 3) with increased task and role significance as job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) reveals intrinsic motivation for their work. This is consistent with the study of Hertel (2013) and is supported also by the recent studies undertaken by Taneva et al. (2016). The study by Taneva evidenced older workers exhibiting a development phase with increased age rather than their motivation and work efforts decreasing. The researcher's findings are consistent with Taneva's work also in the participants' view of their "*experience*", "*wisdom*", which is age-related, allowing them (the participants), to have progressed to a high level of thinking ability and problem-solving.

### ***5.1.3 Self-worth and self-esteem***

The theme of self-worth and self-esteem was prevalent amongst the participants of the study. This is supported in recent literature by Taneva (2016) who asserted that older workers placed emphasis on intrinsic factors such as feeling recognised for their contribution to work, which supports their self-worth. Participant 3 appreciated the recognition from others for his skills "*the self-esteem...gives one an uplift*". Herzberg (1968) includes recognition as a motivating factor for job satisfaction. Self-esteem is on the second highest level of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), and as per participant 7, factors such as "*being an integral part of the business*" if positively recognised, would support that individuals' self-esteem as relates to the workplace.

The opportunity for a high "*calibre of work*" and challenging work as a work motivator and supporting self-esteem was expressed by participant 2. This is contradicted in the case of older workers, by Kanfer and Ackermann (2004), who maintained that the motivator of challenge may decrease with age. More recent studies such as that by Calo (2014) present a positive view that the interest in stimulating and challenging work prevails as workers age. This study was undertaken with educated professionals and may be seen with parallels to the participants of this study.

The researcher suggests that the sample of older workers used for this study, in this case all educated professionals, may be a factor in all actively expressing self-esteem as important. The participants, being in a position through their roles and education

to mitigate it if self-esteem was lacking versus the paradox discussed in the study by Ainsworth & Hardy (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2007).

#### **5.1.4 Legacy and “passing the torch”**

The concept of leaving a legacy, contribution to the organisation and as such “*passing the torch*” was presented strongly by all participants as important and motivational for them. This parallels with the study by Claes and Heyman (cited in Wang, Olson and Schultz, 2013), whereby older workers had increased motivation when they were in position to share knowledge and be recognised for this.

The participants were cognisant of the knowledge they had of their profession or organisation and actively spoke to the “*passing of knowledge*” (participant 5) and the “*passing of the torch*” (participant 8), meaning to younger generations or new entrants to the organisation. This echoes the views of Ny and Law (2014), Calo (2014) and Patrickson and Ranzjin (2006) recognising that older workers have both corporate memory and knowledge that could be beneficial to share, being motivational for the older worker to impart, and of value for the organisation to retain.

Kooji (2008) proposed that mentoring, whether formalised or informal, could fulfil the desire for intrinsic motivation that workers desire to achieve. The experience of mentoring was expressed as a source of “*satisfaction*” for participant 3. This positive experience of mentoring was repeated by other participants, including also the opportunity to provide a “*contribution to society*” (participant 5). From a commercial and societal perspective, there are benefits to be had. As an addition to the concept of legacy, participants commented on leaving a good legacy, which the researcher had not seen within the literature review.

#### **5.1.5 Belonging and social contact**

Maslow (1948) offers belonging and social needs as motivators, and this theme was expressed by the majority of participants as being a factor for their enjoyment and motivation for work. Participants enjoyed the “*interaction with people*” (participant 3), and being “*involved*” (participant 4 and 6), with participant 6 advising that, whilst he could work from home, he “*wouldn't dream of it*”. This is consistent with the work of Kooji (2008), who maintains that social contact and belonging can also be factors as to why older workers both participate and remain in the workforce.

When social contact or belonging is not experienced or is limited for older workers, it can have a negative or demotivating effect for an individual to the detriment of one's identity, as per Carstensen (1995), and this was eluded to by participant 1 in his description of "*emptiness*" and feeling "*bereft ... powerless*" when the opportunity for ongoing belonging or connectivity was not forthcoming. The literature also points to the positive response that good working relationships may have for both motivation of the individual and the good working behaviours that this may support (Goštautaitė and Bučiūnienė, 2015). This is contradicted somewhat by participant 5, who whilst recognising the value of relationships, does not view it as an area that motivates her and "*didn't mention that as something that motivates ... because obviously it doesn't*".

#### **5.1.6 Flexibility and work-life balance**

The opportunity for flexibility in the workplace was mentioned by a number of participants (3, 5, 6, and 8) as being a motivator to continue to work and contribute in the workplace. Capowski (1994) acknowledged this as being, not only a motivating factor, but also that it supported productivity and retention. Participants cited reasons from needing it for work-life balance (participants 5 and 8) or from a recognition that their physical energy may have diminished (participant 3). Participant 5 was also of the opinion that it could be offered from the organisation given that one had "*earned your stripes*" in commitment and contribution in the course of their tenure.

The variety of reasons can be considered within the work of Calo (2014) who acknowledges that flexibility is a required consideration for organisations, not just to accommodate the needs of the older worker, but where it is of business interest to retain individuals with this corporate memory and ability who have a variance of working needs compared to the standard hours model. Participant 8 indeed suggested that organisations may be led by the "*needs must*" of the upcoming generations and "*changing societal*" factors such as women having children later, intimating that this was, not just an issue to accommodate for older workers, but the changing societal groups. This opinion resonates with a proposal from Calo (2014) that business strategies and work arrangements supporting flexibility for other groups such as working mothers could be developed or adapted for older workers.

### ***5.1.7 Continued learning and ability***

The researcher's findings present a resounding attention from older workers of an ongoing desire and need to learn. This is in contrast to the stereotype that Calo (2014) shares that older workers will not be interested in their continued development. As relates to ability, some of the participants recognised that they may be slower grasping new concepts, particularly when it is technology related. To counteract this, some mentioned that they use techniques from their experience such as their learned efficiency of time and that their overall ability delivered and that experienced by their employer remains strong. This supports the view of Kanfer and Ackermann (2004), that to over simplify the abilities of older workers can be misleading. Capowski (1994), in an earlier study, argues that the ability and capacity to learn continues in ones 70's and the activity of continued learning assists older workers in feeling capable in their roles.

Participants were consistent in their interest to continue to learn and whilst ability with certain areas, for example, technology for participant 2, may be reduced, the individual, not only sought ways of how to overcome these, but the solution also benefited the organisation to make it *"a lot easier for us to work together as a team"*. This is in contrast to the view of Kanfer and Ackermann (2004), who stated that motivation lessened when older workers became aware of diminished abilities.

It is suggested by Kooji (2008) that managers and organisations should encourage challenging work for older workers, as this, in turn, drives the motivation of continued learning and development for older workers. This may well be the case, however, it is very evident from the participants of this study that they are already highly self-motivated in their interest, not only to maintain their learning and education, but to continue to add to this. As noted by participant 5, *"the feeding of the brain is very motivational"*, but by not adapting to the changing society *"you become extinct"* and continual learning was a requirement in this.

### ***5.1.8 Professional services and age***

This study has been undertaken in an Irish context and, as recognised by Drabe (2015), the impact of age for older workers, as relates to work motivation, can be influenced significantly by the national context. In this study, the researcher would suggest that

the nature of employment of the sample, i.e. that all in professional services, has an impact.

A number of the participants, whilst not having a sense of *“feeling old”*, recognised that there was a certain deference experienced by them given their age. This reflects the work of Truxillo (2012) that age stereotypes can sometimes be advantageous for the older worker. Given the nature of their professions, where the roles matured with experience, participants had words such as *“wiser”* and *“expert”* being used in relation to them. Participants were consistent in their attitude that regardless of whether young or old *“once you have the energy and that you’re doing the task”* (participant 3) you should be treated equally.

Stereotypes do exist and Knight (2014) suggested that understanding older workers on an individual level provided understanding on how to motivate. The experience of stereotyping and its influencing behaviour was consistent with the researcher’s findings in the case of participant 1, who experienced stereotyping at the interview or hiring stage. *“I’ve gone into interviews where people have stopped and said ‘oh’,”* with the implication that on seeing him (and their perceived age of him) that there is a shift in perception of the individual (in this case, participant 1) and in his experience, it had impacted the interview process. This is consistent with views expressed by Calo (2014). Whilst organisations do have a role to play, older workers should ensure that they live as per the view expressed by participant 1 that they *“don’t see age as a block, they see age as a convenience to do other things”*. This is supported by the work of Hertel (2013), encouraging that older workers take their own lead in how they act and the strong contribution that they make and continue to make in the workplace.

## **5.2 Relationship of findings to the research objectives**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of work motivation of older workers in professional services roles in Ireland. The key themes that emerged from the research are presented in Table 2. In addition to what the researcher has included earlier in the discussion, the researcher would like to summarise the key findings that were dominant, specifically those related to the research objectives.

There were 4 research objectives.

1. To gain an understanding of what motivates older workers (i.e. 50+ years) in professional services roles in Ireland.
2. To examine if factors underpinning motivation have changed across the career trajectory and why.
3. Are there demotivating factors (barriers/bias/stereotype) that impact motivation for older workers?
4. To examine what organisational practices could be put in place to increase motivation levels among the older workforce.

This will now be discussed in relation to the findings of this dissertation:

**To gain an understanding of what motivates older workers (i.e. 50+ years) in professional services roles in Ireland.**

Economic Reality was dominant for participants. Whilst Drabe (2015) and Calo (2014) would maintain that extrinsic motivators such as salary, job security would decrease with age, this is not the current experience of the participants. Elements of economic reality such as Maslow (1943) “*safety and security*” and “*working conditions and pay*”, a hygiene factor for Herzberg (1968) feature strongly in the participants motivations to work. The researcher links this to the recent recession and the impact that this would have had on participants.

The participants interviewed demonstrated a consistent motivation in realising their potential (self-actualisation) and how this could be achieved in the work environment. This was consistent with the work of Reiss and Havercamp (2005), Kanfer and Ackermann (2004), and Lord (2002), whose studies spoke of the desire of self-actualisation as individuals age, and Kooji’s (2008) acknowledgement that this was a motivating factor to remain in the workplace.

Participants expressed being recognised for their efforts and the sense of self-worth that they would receive or enjoy in their role as also a key motivator for work, consistent with Taneva (2016) and Calo (2014), but contradicted somewhat by Kanfer and Ackerman (2004). Both self-actualisation and self-worth are considered as work-motivators by theorist Herzberg (1968) and they are at the higher levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs (1948).

Participants presented a strong desire and were motivated to make a contribution to what the researcher termed as “*Legacy*” and in doing so “*pass the torch*” to either younger generation or new workers to their environment. This was consistent with the views of Ny and Law (2014), Calo (2014), and Patrickson and Ranzjin (2006). Continued learning was also a key factor raised by all participants and whilst acknowledging that their ability may be somewhat reduced for speed of learning, they were consistent in their views of their ongoing ability to be able to learn; echoing the view of Capowski (1994). In line with ability, some participants included the opportunity for flexibility of work arrangements to be a motivating factor.

Relationships are considered a hygiene factor by Herzberg (1968) and the concept of belonging and social needs in the middle of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943). The participants, overall, were motivated to work by the opportunity for social contact and belonging and, likewise, were demotivated when this was lacking (Carstensen, 1995; Kooij, et al., 2008; Goštautaitė & Bučiūnienė, 2015).

**To examine if factors underpinning motivation have changed across the career trajectory and why.**

There are suggestions of changes in work motivation throughout an individual’s career (Kanfer & Ackermann, 2004), typically extrinsic factors such as compensation decreasing in importance. The researcher has written of the “*economic reality*” that participants related, with the requirement for individuals to work for financial reasons. They did, however, in some cases, share that this requirement had lessened over time, albeit it still is important for other reasons at this time. Participant 3, as the oldest participant, shared “*my motivation to work was to earn money to rear a family and to pay the bills effectively*”, however, “*it wouldn’t be the motivation now obviously, I have a freedom of choice*”. Intrinsic motivators such as enjoying work and being challenged did not change with increased age (Calo, et al., 2014). Individuals focused on progression, such as Participant 2, who set up business independently, “*setting up my own, there was a huge motivational influence and influence on continuing to maintain some foothold in the profession.*” As workers age, they tend to use skills and techniques learned, such as being efficient with time (Ng & Law, 2014) , this was supported by Participant 2, saying that his ability and motivation had not changed. He had “*become a lot more efficient*” and tended to “*to just get more dedicated to the*

*task in hand. So less messing around*". Participant 5 and 8 proposed that their work motivation had not changed at all. Overall, it is suggested that older workers are motivated by different factors, rather than having a diminished work motivation (Calo, et al., 2014). This is reflected in the feedback from Participant 7; *"think the things that would have motivated me in previous roles over the years are still the things that motivate me now ... different challenges and the different... environments that you would find yourself working in and that will at times ... dictate what are the motivating factors, where the priorities are depending on you know"*.

Overall, participants' intrinsic motivation did not appear to change. The motivations as to why they worked may have evolved with their lives, such as rearing a family, and buying a house. Consistent amongst this sample of professional services workers was their drive for progression, the opportunity for self-worth, and self-actualisation.

#### **Are there demotivating factors (barriers/bias/stereotype) that impact motivation for older workers?**

In spite of any perceived barriers, older workers do invest in their careers (Greller, 2006). Barriers may be organisational or personal. The participants of this study were self-motivated, with a drive for progression. Participant 8 expressed how she was *"intrinsically motivated"* and actively sought a career change. Calo (2014), Truxillo et al (2012) comments that societal stereotypes may influence organisations for hiring or promotion. The experience of stereotyping and its influencing behaviour was consistent with the researcher's findings in the case of participant 1, who experienced stereotyping at interview or hiring stage; *"I've gone into interviews where people have stopped and said 'oh,'"* with the implication that on seeing him (and their perceived age of him) that there is a shift in perception of the individual (in this case participant 1), which, in his experience, has impacted the interview process.

While older workers may also want to progress in their careers, where negative attitudes exist that display doubts in older workers in interest in continued learning, it may affect decisions on those chosen for development opportunities (Truxillo, et al., 2012). This has been the experience of participant 6, who explained *"I am ten or eleven years on, I'm still not a VP, yet I'm actually coaching VPs ... if I'm recognised as being at that level of leadership, why wasn't my career allowed progress like that as well and is there an age thing?"*

Knight (2014) suggests that understanding characteristics of individuals will support effective ways to motivate. Organisations need to respond to demographic changes and manage actively issues culturally, if bias arises, as this will impact motivation (Stein, et al., 2000). As participant 3 suggests, it needs to be “*part of the culture*” and “*filter its way down the line to other workers in the company*”.

Age stereotypes may sometimes be to the advantage of the older worker (Truxillo, et al., 2012) and a number of the participants spoke to the “*deference*” they experienced as a result of their age. From a stereotypical position and not a barrier for older workers are the positive views that exist regarding the accumulated experience of older workers, their strong work ethic, and their perceived good judgement.

**To examine what organisational practices could be put in place to increase motivation levels among the older workforce.**

From an organisational perspective, studies have recognised that significant financial investment may not be necessary to deliver on motivational factors for older workers as much can be delivered by management engagement, training, and company culture. Withstanding this, it has been suggested by Lord (2002) that the execution of motivational factors is difficult to achieve (Lord, 2002). In contrast, many participants in this exploratory study describe their own driven self-motivation, such as “*enjoying work*” (participants 1, 2, 7,) and commented to being “*intrinsically motivated*” (participant 8). This may suggest that, for this cohort of people from professional services environments, that while management support and company culture is always important, it may not have the same significance for workers who have a high degree of self-motivation.

Participant 5 spoke to both the enjoyment and stimulation of working with a variety of ages in the workplace and found this experience of diversity “*enriching in a workplace*”. Kulik (2014) supported this opportunity for diversity, claiming that it would bring an inclusivity, flexibility, and work-life balance to evolve today’s working world as we know it (Kulik, et al., 2014). However, participant 4 was more reticent of this change happening: “*The only way that diversity and our age in the workplace will apply is when people see a level of contribution coming from those, which they can’t get from other people*”.

Participants 1 (“*doesn’t think enough is done in mentoring ... it’s validating*”), and participant 3 (“*as a mentor I got a lot of satisfaction out of working with these guys*”) promoted the opportunity for mentoring, which is agreed with by Taneva 2016, who notes that mentoring provides a developmental aspect for the older worker and a greater work motivation and satisfaction (Taneva, et al., 2016).

The cultural change that is required, as noted by participant 3, to educate managers on an age diverse workforce, ensures that, not only skills are available, but that the motivation for all levels to participate in shared goals are there too (Boehm, Kunze and Bruch, 2014).

Flexible working arrangements were indicated as a motivating factor (Bell and Narz, 2007 and Calo, et al., 2014) for older employees to remain in the workforce and this was included by participants 5 and 8 as both a desire for work arrangements and suggestion for prolonging working years as it enabled a work life balance.

Participants were keen to progress on a level playing field with their co-workers. Therefore, whilst suggestions are included, such as formal mentoring programmes, flexible work arrangements, potentially some support on technology, it should be done with equality. Participant 2 commented “*There should be no special treatment*” for older workers. From a business perspective, this was related the findings of the study of Goštautaitė and Bučiūnienė, (2015) that, despite figures showing the increased trend of older workers participation, organisations rarely implement special programmes to encourage or motivate participation. It will come down to a commercial decision and a ‘needs must’, meaning that any changes taking place will be based on business requirements rather than individual or societal interests.

### **5.3 Limitations and implications for future research**

This qualitative study included a broad age range of “older workers”. The sample used was from 50-70 years old, with the average age of 57. This span of twenty years the researcher suggests would impact upon the findings. The research sample is limited by the experiences of those that participated. Withstanding that the findings were rich in their giving, future research may consider the use of a survey in addition to the qualitative interviews.

Alternate variables such as cognitive age could be considered regarding the sample used to understand work motivation for older workers. The study focused on older workers by chronological age only. The researcher focused on older workers only. It may be interesting to compare findings with that of younger workers to understand general motivations as related to the research objectives. This was not within the scope available for the researcher, however, it could be considered for future research.

The study focused on individuals from professional services roles only. It may be of interest for future research to study and compare with older workers of other industries and sectors. Other alternatives could be to concentrate on one area of professional services.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Conclusions**

This dissertation was an exploratory study into work motivation of older workers in professional service roles in Ireland. The participants of the research provided rich and interesting data, the themes of which were summarised in chapter 4 as findings. In the discussion chapter, chapter 5, the researcher linked the findings both to the literature and the research questions and objectives. Here, in this chapter, the researcher will summarise the findings of the dissertation overall, and offer recommendations.

The participants interviewed demonstrated a consistent motivation in realising their potential (self-actualisation). Self-worth was valued by all, as was the importance of recognition for their efforts and contributions in their individual roles. Participants also expressed interest in contributing back into the organisation and to their colleagues. This could be in the form of mentoring and not only enabled the transfer of knowledge but from the participants perspective supported an interest in leaving a 'legacy' and 'passing the torch' to the next generation. Whilst not all required the workplace for a sense of belonging and social contact, the desire for productive and professional relationships was significant and they commented on as being of value. Individuals were open to ongoing challenges and sought actively to be both involved and contributing in their roles. Whilst the range of the participants was from 50-70 years old, the ongoing drive for progression, albeit potentially at varying rates, was consistent. The drive for progression was supported by their interest for continued learning and development. Some participants did acknowledge a diminishing in their speed of learning but they all were consistent in their ongoing ability to learn. At the outset, the majority of participants acknowledged that finance and money was a primary motivator and that the economic reality of the recent years of recession had impacted them in their professional services roles. In the professional services roles, increasing age was of positive interest in that it was recognised that by nature of their roles and professions that the years of experience was an element that lent to a certain 'deference', in terms of experience.

Key findings that emerged from the research is of a highly motivated group, consistent with the finding of Taneva (2016), whereby older workers continue in a development phase with increased age. The participants were interested in continued development and challenge and seeking opportunities to contribute in their chosen professions. Significant is the ongoing extrinsic motivation for financial security, which is contrary to Kanfer and Ackerman (2004), Drabe (2015), and in a study undertaken by Calo (2014) whereby extrinsic motivation for financial security would decrease with age. In addition to the comments from the participants, the researcher suggests this is an impact from the recent recession. The findings provide insight to participants who seek to deliver in their own roles and contribute into the organisation. The individuals are both interested to leave a legacy and pass their knowledge onto others. These professional service workers still seek personal growth and fulfilment in their work endeavours and are disappointed if there are barriers to achieving this. Professional service workers typically are educated and their interest in continued professional learning and development is consistent. These professional service workers are of a generation where technology has changed fundamentally their working environments and most spoke to varying degrees of the impact of this. They did not, however, shy away from these changes, rather, they were open in their abilities and were keen to both find and offer solutions as to how they could equally advance alongside this changing landscape. Flexibility and work-life balance was raised as a means for some to continue in the workplace however most were committed to working in full-time roles. Most expressed that their work motivation had not changed in the course of their career.

Amongst the sample, there was a dearth regarding demotivating factors. The dominant focus was of intrinsic motivators such as self-actualisation and self-esteem being fulfilled. Two areas, however, that could be considered included that of continued development and any bias or stereotype that may exist around this, as this may affect development opportunities, as per Truxillo (2012), of bias or stereotype. This could be mitigated with organisation actions that will be outlined in the recommendations.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

The researcher found the study stimulating and encouraging, through the drive and energy of the participants. Very generally, for future research, the researcher

recommends undertaking interviews for rich and insightful information. As a recommendation, this may be prefaced by a general broader survey to get a cross section of view from wider range and potentially different sectors. It may be of interest also to consider gender impact. The results may influence potential organisational practices undertaken.

As noted in the limitations section in chapter 5, alternate samples could be considered for future research so as to inform organisational practice. Suggestions include choosing a particular professional service type, industry or indeed variable that determines older workers such as cognitive age versus chronological age.

Older workers have presented that they are driven by challenging tasks and roles. This is consistent with their interest in self-actualisation and continued growth. Organisations should consider the assignment of such tasks or projects where relevant to incumbent workers. This is driven by having the right people applied to a project and not age related. The suggestion is that organisations should be aware that the older working cohort, in this case, professional services workers, have indicated a clear interest in challenging tasks.

The researcher presents, below, suggested programmes that could be undertaken by an organisation. These recommendations are informed by the findings from the research. A critical success factor for the effectiveness of these programmes will be management support and organisational cultural awareness.

Suggested programmes for consideration:

1. Mentoring programme
2. Flexible work programme
3. Continued development programme
  - Technology related

### ***6.2.1 Implementation and costs estimate***

Mentoring programme:

- The mentoring programme can be established internally. The suggestion is that the programme is managed by a business unit manager and/or can also include the involvement of human resources for facilitating. It is encouraged that all ages are involved in the mentor programme. This can

also support the reduction of stereotyping. Content and scope for this programme can be determined by business need.

- Regarding the Costs = Cost per hour of mentor + cost per hour of mentee. The cost per hour can be calculated either by their salary or their charge out rate as an example.
- Effectiveness of the mentor programme can be reviewed on a quarterly basis.
- Measurements could include review of key performance indicators of the both mentor and mentee.

#### Flexible work programme:

- Organisations may consider a flexible work programme. It is suggested to review some of the current models that may exist as relates to other flexible programmes in place. These for example may be those in place for working parents.
- Costs = the hours not worked, may be deducted as unpaid leave. This means that there is not a direct cost to the organisation for time off taken. There needs however to be consideration of the potential ‘opportunity lost’ of the individual not working i.e. lost earnings for the organisation. This, however, has to be weighed up with the potential productivity increases that the offering of flexible work may provide.
- The flexible work programme should be reviewed on a quarterly basis. Implementation timelines will be subject to business being able to function under new work arrangements.

#### Continued development programme

- Continued development programme may come under a potential Learning & Development organisation or as part of the Human Resource function. The content of the programme would need to be scoped out according to the needs of the business and individuals involved.
- If the skillset was in the organisation, a training needs analysis could be undertaken including a career development path. This would not be age specific. As noted in the findings, older workers do acknowledge that they

may have difficulties with new technology, so a technology component could be included.

- Implementation timelines will be subject to business needs. The programme should be reviewed on a quarterly basis at the out-set.
- Costs = costs will be subject to requirements and based on a return on investment for the organisation.
- It could be considered that other members of the organisation mentor older workers in technology and older workers, in turn, mentor members who have less acumen than the older worker. This would be considered as a barter system of continued development and mentoring.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **PERSONAL LEARNING STATEMENT**

The researcher found the experience of the dissertation a rich educational journey. The researcher enjoyed the choosing of a topic that was of interest and believed important. The opportunity to explore it in depth within the literature was enjoyable. The researcher particularly enjoyed the involvement required to fulfil the research element, specifically the preparation and undertaking of the interviews. The researcher found the experience stimulating and it was a privilege to engage and listen to the insights from the individuals who participated. The researcher realised that she may have had some unconscious bias regarding older workers and their ability and motivations. This came to light in the interview stage through listening to their honest insights and responses as relates to their experiences and motivation. The researcher found it encouraging and somewhat inspirational of the energy and drive that this collective group expressed. It has impacted positively the researcher's view of older workers in the work force and their related motivations.

The skills required to undertake the process of the dissertation were varied and quite a challenge. I believe and trust that the skills will support me in future endeavours.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: Consent Form

### **An exploratory study into work motivation of older workers in professional services roles in Ireland.**

Researcher: Ms Crona McLoughlin ([crona.mcloughlin1@student.ncirl.ie](mailto:crona.mcloughlin1@student.ncirl.ie))

Research Supervisor: Dr Joanna McHugh ([Joanna.McHugh@ncirl.ie](mailto:Joanna.McHugh@ncirl.ie))

The aim of this research is to explore the motivation of older workers\* who are working in professional services roles. (\* The literature comments that older workers from a chronological perspective are deemed “older” at the age of 50 years and above.) The researcher seeks to understand if older workers motivations have changed from earlier in their career to now. The researcher seeks to explore if there are barriers to motivation for older workers and ultimately if we can devise ways to tackle these barriers and improve motivation.

If you agree to participate in this research, you will complete a one-to-one interview with the researcher. This interview will be recorded and transcribed for analytic purposes. Your data will be kept confidential, stored securely for a period of 5 years, and destroyed afterwards. Your identity and other personal information will not be revealed, published, or used in other studies. Small segments of data may be used in future academic presentations with only your prior expressed consent to the specific data being used. You have the right to withdraw your data from the study at any point until the analysis has been completed and the thesis and/or publication has been submitted. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

I have understood the information provided and have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study. I have received satisfactory answers to my questions. I understand that my interview will be audiotaped. I consent to participate in the study.

Participant signature

Date

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Researcher signature

Date

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## **APPENDIX 2: Interview Questions / Schedule**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS / INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

#### **“An exploratory study into work motivation of older workers\* in professional services roles in Ireland”**

*\* The literature comments that older workers from a chronological perspective are deemed “older” at the age of 50 years and above ...*

**To gain an understanding of what motivates older workers (i.e. 50+ years) in professional services roles in Ireland.**

1. Could you describe to me what currently motivates you in your work?
2. Do you think there are specific motivational factors for you at this stage in your careers (If so, what..?)
  - a. What type of work do you enjoy?
  - b. What type of work do you not like or enjoy less?
3. Why do you work? ....What are your main reasons for working?
  - a. Can you describe factors that contribute to your feeling of satisfaction as relates to your motivation in the workplace?
  - b. Can you describe the factors that contribute to your feeling of dissatisfaction as relates to your motivation in the workplace?
4. What factors are important for you to continue to work
  - a. Are there any other factors that are important for your motivation to continue to work?

**To examine if factors underpinning motivation have changed across the career trajectory and why.**

1. Has your motivation at work changed over the years ...? And how?
  - a. Has your interest/ability in tasks or parts of the role changed rather than the entire role?
2. How if at all have you changed the way you do your job as you have progressed in your career?
  - a. Have you adopted a different approach to your work since turning 50...?
  - b. What type of work are you more motivated to do
  - c. What type of work are you less motivated to do

**Are there demotivating factors (barriers/bias/stereotype) that impact motivation for older workers?**

1. What is your view of older workers as relates to their motivation
2. Do you view yourself as an older worker?
  - a. Do you think you are viewed as an older worker? ..and if so how..?
3. Have you experienced any change in how you are treated in the workplace (as an older worker)? Can you describe...
  - a. Are comparisons of you to older workers important or of relevance to you?
  - b. Are comparisons of you to younger workers important or of relevance to you?
4. What effects/ impacts you as an older worker in the workplace? Opportunities, challenges...

**To examine what organisational practices could be put in place to increase motivation levels among the older workforce.**

1. How do you think your organisation/s could benefit from engaging the older working cohort?
2. Do you think work practices are required to change (for older workers)?
  - a. Have work practices for older workers changed?
  - b. Does your current organisation make any accommodation for older workers ...how?
3. How do you think the future workplace could look like (for you) as you continue to work that would be motivational for you?
4. What workplace initiatives could be undertaken..?
  - a. What role could senior management play...?

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Student number: x14100304

School: Business

Course: Human Resource Management

Degree to be awarded: Master of Arts

Title of Thesis:

“An exploratory study into work motivation of older workers in professional services roles in Ireland.”

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