Abstract: Dissertation - Age-differentiated leadership and recovery-promoting work design
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The ongoing shift in demographics, marked by declining birth and mortality rates and a shrinking qualified workforce, necessitates that organizations promote health, motivation, organizational commitment, and workability to maintain (older) employees (Chand & Tung, 2014; He et al., 2016; Hertel & Zacher, 2018; Ilmarinen & Tempel, 2002; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Population Division, 2022). Thus, the probability of age-diverse teams and the share of older employees in organizations rises (Hertel & Zacher, 2018; Wegge & Schmidt, 2015). While this development can favor employee performance and health (Hertel & Zacher, 2018), managing an age-diverse workforce poses severe challenges for organizations, including suitable ergonomic and personnel measures (Beier, 2015; Deller et al., 2008; Hertel & Zacher, 2018). However, age-diverse teams can negatively impact health and performance if appropriate techniques are not implemented (Joshi & Roh, 2009; van Dijk et al., 2012), such as age-differentiated leadership (Jungmann & Wegge, 2023; J. Wegge et al., 2012). Moreover, the Job-Demand Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker et al., 2023) describes how demands and resources can affect exhaustion and work motivation. Supervisors may influence these demands and resources on several pathways, such as designing work, performing as a buffer for demands, and acting as a resource for employees, promoting job crafting, and hindering self-undermining (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). In addition, recovery as a self-regulation technique poses another critical factor in the JD-R model (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Dolce et al., 2020).

This dissertation aims to contribute a scientific-based and empirical-examined training approach to improve supervisors’ general and age-differentiated leadership behavior as well as the recovery (behavior) of employees and supervisors in various field settings. Furthermore, it adds to training research regarding different contents, target groups, and methods. Studies 1 and 2 had the goal of promoting age-differentiated leadership and positive age-diversity mindsets. However, the age-differentiated training programs used in these studies varied in terms of the target group (large-scale vs. small-scale, one organization vs. various organizations), methods used (web-based vs. face-to-face, trainer vs. no trainer), and length of the training (one-and-a-half vs. two-and-a-half-days vs. required amount to complete the training within 42 weeks).

Study 1 was aimed at training supervisors of small- and medium-sized enterprises. The study consisted of Study 1A, which was a one-and-a-half-day face-to-face training (Supervisor sample: N = 74 (warm-up), N = 68 (one-day-training) and N = 47 (booster), subordinates: N = 366 (pre-measurement), N = 115 (post-measurement), N = 55 (matching pre-post measurements), and
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Study 1B, which was a self-guided web-based training (supervisors: N = 44 (matching pre-post measurement), subordinates: N = 57 (matching pre-post measurements). Based on the beneficial results of Study 1B that displayed, for an example, self-reported increase in subjective knowledge of the training topics, age-differentiated leadership, and age-diversity appreciation, the web-based training was developed. The web-based training also indicated a self-reported increase in subjective knowledge, age-differentiated leadership and age-diversity appreciation. Furthermore, assessments of employees of the trained supervisors showed beneficial tendencies. Based on the supervisor’s assessment, several team interaction processes (e.g., team reflexivity) significantly increased, including innovation and team reflection. Thus, findings supported enhanced performance through age-differentiated leadership. Unfortunately, the results were not replicated on the employee or the team level. Nevertheless, non-significant increases in overall age-differentiated leadership and goal-setting were also detected at these levels of analysis. Regarding health, employees also showed non-significant beneficial tendencies. The comparison between the web-based and the face-to-face training yielded no significant differences. However, the web-based version displayed a stronger non-significant increase regarding the measured outcomes (e.g., age-differentiated leadership, age-diversity appreciation).

Study 2 conveyed age-differentiated leadership and a positive age-diversity mindset within a two-and-a-half-day training program in a large-scale car manufacturing company. The longitudinal study involved 123 supervisors, and over 800 employees in 90 teams at each of the three measurement times (t1: 989, t2: 838, t3: 937). It also looked into the correlation between age-differentiated leadership and break behavior, recovery experiences, and absenteeism. Results indicated a significant self-reported and externally assessed (individual employee level) increase in age-differentiated leadership in the training group compared to the waiting-control group. Effects for age-diversity appreciation and team interaction processes (team identification, conflicts) were not significant. Nevertheless, the training group displayed a more beneficial development. The latter beneficial effects were only detected for innovation on the individual employee level. The study also confirmed the association between age-differentiated leadership with break behavior, recovery after breaks, and recovery behavior. It also supported the expected negative association between age-differentiated leadership and absenteeism.

Study 3 investigated a new web-based training for improving break behavior at work and recovery behavior after work in the care sector (N = 17 (pre-post comparison), N = 9 pre- follow-up comparison) over three times of measurement. The training content was derived from a
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literature review, interviews with care experts, and workshops with care professionals. Supervisors and employees were investigated as one group. Recovery behavior, including recovery planning and behavior, significantly increased. Similarly, a significant improvement in overall recovery experience was detected. In addition, training had a significant positive effect (decrease) on the need for recovery and burnout.

Training is a promising approach to improving age-differentiated leadership and recovery in organizations and, consequently, health and performance. In addition, the dissertation extended findings of age-differentiated leadership towards additional sectors (e.g., car manufacturing), perspectives (individual, team, and supervisor) SMEs, and associations with recovery and absenteeism. It also showed that training could deliver age-differentiated leadership and recovery. Furthermore, the dissertation fulfilled Bell et al. ‘s (2017) request for further comparison between web-based and face-to-face training programs, while also incorporating the web-based attendance (adherence perspective). With respect to the JD-R model underlying the tested hypotheses in the three studies it can be concluded that both age-differentiated leadership and recovery can be integrated into this framework. Moreover, an association between these two added components was confirmed. Future research should investigate this interaction in more detail. In addition, training is an approach to improving these components.