

# Best Agers in Denmark

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*A Danish case study on retention of older employees in the municipality  
Frederica Kommune pertaining to the EU project Best Agers*

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## **Introduction and background**

This paper will focus on the thoughts of employers and employees in the public sector about early retirement. Concretely, the paper seeks to give an account of the employees' possibilities and expectations about either leaving or remaining on the labour market after the age of 60-62 years.

To this end, data was collected from a single municipality; thus the investigation should be considered as a single-case study.

More generally, the paper represents the Danish contribution to the combined investigation in the EU project 'Best Agers' (see [www.best-agers-project.eu](http://www.best-agers-project.eu)). The project has 19 partners who represent different sectors in Germany, Poland, Sweden and the Baltic countries. Each of the partners seeks to develop environments of innovation across generations, where people in their best age, defined as 55+, cooperate with other age groups, for example about business concepts and better competences. The aim is to generate new ideas and share expertise.

As co-organizers of this paper, Frederica Kommune and UC Lillebælt have thus set out to investigate employers and employees attitudes toward retaining employees longer than the normal retirement age of 60-62 years from the labour market.

### *EU project*

The overall aim of the EU project is to retain on the labour market employees who have the option to retire with a pension or similar within a number of years. These people are defined here as so called Best Agers. The motivation for the project is the challenge from the cross-pressure on the labour market; that is increasingly fewer young people and more old people. All of the participating countries in the project face this challenge. Thus, the project seeks to investigate this challenge and create a window of opportunity for a larger political attention:

*"It is a central goal of the project to identify instruments with which the partner cities and regions can influence the labour market participation of Best Agers, e.g. by improving the image of Best Agers as skilled professionals and encouraging businesses to provide incentives for employees not to go into early retirement." (www.best-agers-project.eu)*

In that regard, UC Lillebælt had early on an intention to adapt the Danish part of the project to an empirical investigation of a delimited area of employment. Hence, they choose to conduct a case study in a municipality where the same line of thought as in the EU project already was in focus. Furthermore, UC Lillebælt hopes to work towards developing tools that can contribute to maintaining the older employees on the labour market.

### *Fredericia Kommune as case*

The municipality Fredericia was chosen because of the initiatives that have been started in the municipality within a range of areas which concerns older citizens.

In the innovation project called 'Frederica shapes the future' from 2010, seven so called radical innovation ideas was introduced. One of the ideas was a project about 'As far as possible in life' (Fredericia Kommune, 2010). In that project, a vision about *"a municipality with active, resourceful elders, who through prevention, rehabilitation, technology and social networks is as far as possible in life"* (Fredericia Kommune, 2009).

The aim with project 'As far as possible in life' is *"to develop compensating and caring help to a rehabilitating and preventive effort with a focus on strengthening elderly citizens in mastering their own life"* (Fredericia Kommune, 2009). The purpose is to develop the eldercare provided by the municipally following principles such as: from compensation to rehabilitation; from care to prevention and from late to early effort. Thus, the idea is to create better opportunities for having self-helped elderly citizens; both physical and mental and who form parts of sound, social networks. In addition, the idea is that the elderly can maintain a calm and meaningful life (Fredericia Kommune, 2010).

Following this, the purpose with the investigation about Best Agers in Denmark was both to examine attitudes amongst Fredericia Kommunes employees and employers, and to gather knowledge that Fredericia Kommune will be able to use in its strategy to maintain employees, Best Agers, as long as possible on the labour market. As point of departure, the eldercare in the municipality was used. This point of reference is in line with that taken by some of the other participants (Pinneberg/Kiel) in the EU project. In the quantitative collection of data, other areas have been involved, namely the technical area and the administration in the municipality. The results from the paper is, as mentioned, also part of the transnational investigation, Best Agers, of employees and employers attitudes towards prolonging older peoples work life (Projektbeskrivelse, 2010).

### *Theory and design*

It was considered that a quantitative (e-surveys) and qualitative (interviews) approach would usefully supplement each other in order to examine older employees' conditions and attitudes towards retirement from the labour market. Both employees' and employers' attitudes are part of this approach. The empirical data are interpreted and put into perspective according to the concepts of 'emploability' and 'social capital'.

The different stages of the investigation were as follows:

1. As preparation to the present case study, a literature review was conducted regarding the conditions for older people on the labour market, particularly conditions on the Danish labour market (Navrbjerg, 2007; Friss et al., 2008). However, EU related literature have also been in focus (Walker, 2002). For more information, see the reference list in the back of this paper.

2. Electronic surveys to, respectively, a sample of 279 employees of the age of 55 years and above, and a sample of 54 employers within the eldercare, the technical sector and the administration in the municipality.<sup>1</sup>
3. Semi-structured interviews with eight Best Ager employees within the eldercare chosen from different institutions in Fredericia Kommune.
4. Focus group interviews with employers from different departments in Fredericia Kommune.
5. Analysis and interpretation according to theory about employability and social capital.
6. Points to pay attention to deduced from the analysis.

### *Theoretical approach in the analysis*

The theories about social capital and employability have been used in the interpretation of the empirical material, since both theories offer useful explanations of and insights about personal and work related considerations behind early or late retirement. In addition, they illuminate how networks and relations can help retain older people's connection to the labour market. Thus, the first theory focus on the relationship between personal aspects and the work based, while the second theory centres on the relationship between the social and the workplace as an organisation. Both of these aspects are central in order to illuminate and interpret employees' and employers' attitudes and experience with retaining older people on the labour market.

The theory on **employability** (Kadefors, 2010) can be defined as *the individual ability, opportunity and incentive for seeking employment. Employability which is the ability to work has mainly been used in connection with the individual capacity to maintain or obtain employment.* Some of the central factors in this ability are initiative, flexibility and availability. However, other more situational factors should also be mentioned. It could for example be experience; optimizing of abilities; opportunities that present each self in a work related context; optimal use of one's competences and one's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Kadefors lists some barriers that seniors, which he defines as 50+, could meet during the work life.<sup>2</sup> Some of the factors are:

- Health (physical, coordination, cognition)
- Competence (for example IT)
- Rules and regulations
- Attitudes (from employees as well as employers)

Furthermore, there exists a dividing line between on the one hand classical employability as the individual work related ability, and on the other hand the situational employability where one can affect the social and workplace related factors that make up the work. Several studies have

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<sup>1</sup> The quantitative part was conducted in corporation with Mikkel Munk Quist Andersen (student at Department of Political Science, Aarhus University), who among other things carried out the data processing in SPSS.

<sup>2</sup> This is from the "Life Competence 50+" study conducted by Kadefors in EU.

revealed that variation in work ability is greater within the different age groups compared to the variation between these groups.

In sum, the argument in connection with the Best Ager project is that while physical and mental changes in one's work ability do happen as one gets older, one could still maintain employability and ability to retain productivity far longer than one might expect (Kadefors, 2010: 6).

The concept of **social capital** can be defined as "... *the characteristic which puts the members of the organisation in place to jointly solve their core tasks*" (Olesen et al., 2008: 44). The members must be able to work together based on a high level of trust and fairness. This means, that the individual employee shows team spirit by doing more than the employee is paid to do; that is, one gives and delivers without having an intention of getting something else in return. Social capital is at its core about social relations, such as cooperation, trust and fairness. The proper, mentally work environment could in a social capital perspective be seen as an approach to work which imputes meaningfulness, recognition, respect, support, predictability, information and a clear division of responsibilities (Olesen et al., 2008: 7). Firms with a high degree of social capital are considered as development oriented, while firms with a low degree of social capital are burdened by stress. The particular about social capital is that it is nested in the relations; not in the individual. By this, social capital becomes a resource in the form of a network that is built around a group, where each of the individuals has mutual responsibilities. Thus, network, trust and norms are concepts that constitute the concept of social capital (Olesen et al., 2008: 8).

Summing up, in the Best Ager project social capital can be seen in the attitudes one has towards what work means for the employee. Relations with colleagues as a reason for continuing on the labour market although having an old age will thus take part as one of the perspectives by which the results of this paper are interpreted.

### *The focus of the investigation*

Having introduced the perspectives about work ability, that is employability, and social capital, the main questions addressed in this paper are:

- Which factors and attitudes affect whether Best Ager employees are retained in their employment in Fredericia Kommune?
- Which considerations on maintaining Best Ager on the labour market exist amongst the employers?

Theoretically, the questions are analysed with respect to the theories of employability and social capital. The last mentioned perspective will have its focus on retaining and developing the social environment. Methodically, the paper utilizes data from surveys administered to employees and employers, personal interviews with eight employees and a focus group conducted with middle level employers.

## Results

This section first brings together the results from the survey and focus group conducted with the employers. It will then go on to present the results from the survey and interviews with the employees. The most important tables and figures which form the background for this section can be found in the appendix.

### *Employers and Best agers*

#### *Survey part*

The population consisted of 54 employers<sup>3</sup> of whom 33 did complete the electronic survey which was sent to them. Thus, the response rate was 61 per cent which is satisfying according to usual conventions for survey design.

The majority of the employers (57.6 per cent) indicated that the employees leave the labour market when they are between 60 and 62 years. Almost one-third (27 per cent) said that they do not know when the employees in their department leaves the labour market.

The employers were asked about whether the fact that there are becoming fewer young and more old people demographically have had an effect on a range of different areas of leadership. Equally, they were asked whether they believe it will have an effect on the same areas from now on. For more details, see figure 1 in the appendix.

In response to the question about how it has been until now, only one area, namely 'the age structure of the department', had a majority of employers (6.2 per cent<sup>4</sup>) who said it has have a high or very high degree of importance. Contrary, there are a majority on all of the other areas who said that it has have a low or very low degree of significance.

Regarding the question how they believe it will turn out from now on, a majority was found on all areas who said it will have a high or very high degree of importance. Concretely, the areas were:

- The age structure of the department (majority on 43.4 per cent)
- Planning regarding the employees (majority on 40.5 per cent)
- Work hour arrangement (majority on 31.1 per cent)
- Strategic planning and models (majority on 31.1 per cent)
- Organization of the work and preparation (majority on 28.2 per cent)
- Ergonomic conditions and age-specific arrangement of work (majority on 25.0 per cent)

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<sup>3</sup> The survey was sent to employers within the areas of eldercare, technique and administration.

<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 is presented in so called percent differences which show the majority in the answers. For each of the areas, a difference in percentages was calculated between the proportion who said *very high* or *high* minus the proportion who said *very low* or *low*. Thus, if there are equally many positive and negative answers, then the value is 0. The way of representing emphasises marked fluctuation in the answers.

- Inferior competences and lack of specialized labour (majority on 16.2 per cent)
- Training and education of employees (majority on 15.6 per cent)

The employers mentioned that the primary reasons for early withdrawal amongst the employees are related to the health and family. In addition, for women spare time activities do also play a role.

To-third of the employers said that their workplace offers opportunities for flex time for the old employees. One-third does not.

Furthermore, 70 per cent of the workplaces offer health improving initiatives. About 50 per cent offer special, ergonomic adaptation of the workplace. On the other hand, only few of the workplaces offer mentor initiatives (18 per cent) and teamwork across age groups (15 per cent). For more information, see table 1 in the appendix.

Regarding the opportunity to affect the working hours and job tasks, and the use of economic incentives, the employers see these as crucial onwards in order to motivate older employees to prolong their carrier. Contrary to this, they do not believe that the opportunity to become a mentor or for enhance the qualifications and carrier development will be especially important in the future. For more information, see table 2 in the appendix.

### *Focus group part*

In the focus group interview<sup>5</sup> held with the employers it was apparent how the leaders see the older employees in their organisation. To keep seniors on the labour market is not about age; contrary it is about the values and the culture in which the leaders see the employees.

In response to what the employers believe effects how long employees remain on the labour market, the leaders mentioned that the work should have quality and be exciting. In addition, more visible things such as wage, fewer working hours and the physical burden of the job were mentioned. The employers have learned that the skilled employees have high quality demands well above average. They talked about a bar which is high but which is constantly challenged if the quality of work is lowered such that the work only encompasses “must do” assignments.

By this way, the skilled, elderly employees’ personal identity is linked to the job tasks and hereby the values the leaders stresses as very important. This is values such as freedom under responsibility and working together as a team because one really wants that.

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<sup>5</sup> The focus group interview was conducted with two employers. One was a leader from the eldercare; the other was a leader from technical department.

The employers emphasises value based leadership. This type of leadership is challenged if the older employees need perks such as care days owing only to their age. The employers would rather give extra praise when a certain milestone or target which everyone has contributed to is reached. Thus, keeping people in work is not about age, but instead about the values that make the workplace an interesting place to be. Therefore, the employers are not particularly concerned about discussing senior related aspects when they have staff development interviews with their employees: *"I believe it is artificial to conduct a senior interview"* as one of the leaders said.

The style of appreciating the employees happens for the employers though visibility and attention. Again, it is not about age, but instead it is about appreciating quality. This praise should of course be in line with the values one cherishes; no matter if it is in the eldercare or if it is in the contact with citizens regarding technical questions. Consequently, it is not common for the employers to think especially about age related aspects. Rather, the focus is on the quality related aspects of the work that is taking place. However, it is important for all employees to be seen. It is not about age, but about something more general, as one of the employers expressed: *"That one makes clear that you have been seen and heard"*.

In response to the question about which barriers there could be prohibiting staying longer on the labour market, the employers said that physical conditions (offices and meeting rooms), narrow area of expertise and time schedules (time at day, working in weekends) could be a problem. In addition, physical disability down could be a further problem. However, the employers did also mention that these problems could be remedied though more flexible and differentiated working hours and conditions, and offers on heal related initiatives at the workplace, for instance massage or aid to the eldercare.

When one of the employers was told to describe a typical Best Ager, she made a typological division between on the one hand the solid, reliable workers who carry out their tasks with high quality. This is experience worker which everyone is comfortable with. Then, on the other hand, there is the project manager. This type of worker is know in the entire organisation and is capable of getting ting done. These two profiles are seldom observed in pure form. The employers referred to that Best Agers expresses themselves in the social capital of the organisation as someone who enhances the culture that one wishes to promote.

Consequently, social capital becomes an interpretation<sup>6</sup> of the employers' attitudes towards how employees can influence the relations in the organisation. Some of the statements from the employers in this connection were as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> See also the section 'Combined analysis'.

*“When the employees do the expected, respects agreements and contribute to the culture and the social, then I believe it is fine that they keep on working. Often, I do not know how old they are, I must admit”.*

*“If it is an employee that is good for the group and house, then I will go far to keep her (no matter the age)”.*

*“Actually, I have some of mine, which in the teams they are placed in, comes to me unsolicited to mention that we should make sure he stays (said about a 67 year old person)”.*

*“Regarding the employees I have which have just recently reached 60 years, I experience that they delivers and adds value to the house”.*

Thus, social capital is linked with both the way the employers understand the values, and with the way they perceive how older employees cooperate about the tasks they ought to carry out.

### *Employees and Best Aged*

#### *Survey part*

##### *Description of the sample*

The population consisted of 279 employees of whom 176 did complete the electronic survey which was sent to them. Thus, the response rate was 63 per cent which is satisfying according to usual conventions for survey design.

The characteristics of the respondents are as follows: firstly, about 11 percent of the respondents are males and 89 percent are females all at the age of 55 years and above. Secondly, 76 per cent of the responses are from the eldercare while the technical area and the administration, respectively, make up 7 and 17 per cent of the sample. Thirdly, 85 per cent are married or live as partners. Fourthly, 25 per cent have as their highest education a primary education, 25 per cent have a professional education and just under half of the respondents have a short or medium long further education. Finally, about half of the respondents work fulltime while the other half work part-time and a few have a flex job of some kind.

In response to the question about how much the employees wish to work, 35 per cent said they would like to work fulltime and 65 per cent said they would like to work part-time.

### *Expectations to age of retirement*

Firstly, about one-third said they do not know when the colleagues usually leave the labour market, while 60 per cent believes the retirement age is between 60 and 62 years. Only a small number of the respondents think it is after the 62 years.

Secondly, just about half of the employees expect realistically to withdraw from the labour market no later than at 62 years. Only 13 per cent expects to wait until the official retirement age and 29 per cent have not yet made a decision.

Finally, the survey showed that men and employees in the areas of the technique and administration expect to retire at a later age compared to women and employees in the eldercare.

### *Which factors affect the employees' decision to leave the labour market before the age of 65?*

Firstly, the most important factor according to the employees regarding early retirement is a heavy workload. Factors such as working overtime, economic and family related conditions do not have a large effect. In addition, in relation to the factors about policies and rules, and arrangement of work time, it was not possible to find any statistical significant results. For more information, see table 3 in the appendix.

Secondly, regarding incentives to remain longer at the labour market, the following ones stroke out as the most important: less strain from work (38 per cent), more flexible working hours (21 per cent), lower working hours without compensation (23 per cent) and improved physical and mental working environment (28 per cent). For more information, see table 4 in the appendix. In addition, no statistical significantly differences were found between sexes or between groups of education regarding the importance of the difference incentives.

Finally, a statistical significantly difference regarding a heavy workload was found between the eldercare and the combined group of technique and administration since more respondents within the latter group emphasized this factor.

Below is a summary of the answers to the open-ended question in the survey. These commentaries supplement the closed questions in the survey, and give an impression of some of the reasons for early retirement, which as mentioned is before the age of 65.

### *Satisfaction*

Some of the employees mentioned that they do not believe that changes are needed since they like their job, and wish to remain on the labour market given the health allows it.

### *Lack of personnel and too demanding residents*

There have been cut-backs in spending and consequently downsizing in personnel. This implies, that the remaining personnel have to work extra hard. In addition, around holidays and periods of sickness, the workload gets extra demanding. The use of substitutes have been cut down some places and the employees mentioned that it is extra burden full to work with non-regular substitutes.

Consequently, many of the employees indicated that there is not enough time to take properly care of the residents, especially the more demanding residents. Some even mentioned that some of the residents lately have become more demanding and out of balance mentally.

### *Too much documentation and bureaucracy*

A theme which repeated itself amongst the commentaries was that demands, control, registration and administration take up too much of time in the eldercare, which leads to less time to direct contact with the citizens. It was commentaries as: *"It will soon become impossible to carry out a decent and humane job because of rules and documentation"*, *"The more or less meaningless documentation"*, and *"There simply is no such thing as common sense"*.

### *Fast development*

Many of the employees mentioned the fast development in the municipality which leads to some having a hard time keeping up with the changes. This leads to stress and a feeling of inadequacy. In that regard, aspects such as organisational changes and increased IT demands were mentioned. Some did also mention that it is important to recognize that learning simply takes longer time when one is older.

### *Barriers in connection with the work time*

One factor which many did mention was the need to have the weekend off so that one can be with one's family. As the situation is right now, one works every second weekend, which some see as a factor that leads to early retirement. In addition, the opportunity for more flexibility and influence on the work time was mentioned. Besides, in two cases the possibility for flexible, early retirement was mentioned, so that one may work fewer hours and receive early retirement pay for that part of time that has been removed.

### *Interview part*

Interviews were conducted with eight employees whereof five were SOSU assistants and three were nurses. The ages of the interviewees are between 55 and 63 years. These employees have selected by their superiors as special best agers. Within few years they have the possibility to end their work life but they wish to continue and they are very resourceful. What is their motivation to keep on working?

Most of the interviewees are married and have children and grandchildren. The interviewees described themselves as positive, happy and trustful beings although two of the interviewees have health related problems.

First of all, what motivates the employees and what are their feelings toward the work? As a whole, the employees are happy to go to work and most of them find it exciting. It is about making a difference and having a challenging job. A lot of the employees emphasized the joy of doing something good for the elder residents and that eldercare is motivating. The tasks are very varied which enhances the motivation to go to work. Most of the employees mentioned the social part of the work as very important. As one of them said: *"I love to remain in my work"*. Others mentioned that the job is independent and that it praises the value of freedom. Even though the personal, economic situation is important, it is not a factor which at first motivates the employees: *"We talk more about the residents than about money"* as one of the employees expressed it.

#### *Appreciation and thrust*

When the employees are told they are doing a good job or praises and helps each other, they feel like they are appreciated at their job. *"It is wonderful when a colleague mentions that I was very good at what I did"* as one of the employees said. Especially the employers are emphasized as being good at praising others work and at creating thrust. At the same time, the focus of the leaders on the individual employees is important for thrust and appreciation. Thus, a clear trend in the interviews is that the employers are good at building thrust and giving praise. Visibility and a positive way of acting towards both the individual employees and the group of employees are important for the employees, when they discussed leadership in the interviews. Furthermore, it is important for the employees that they encounter freedom and support when the different groups are planning their workday. By this way, the support from the employers is a factor which is appreciated by the employees.

#### *Workload*

Lack of personnel and too many non-regular substitutes give rise to pressure amongst many of the employees. If one do not wish to lower the standards, then the pressure is even harder. In that connection, working at weekends was mentioned as being too tough. It could be an idea to make the workload independent of the individual employee: *"Too survive in this system, I have chosen to say to myself that I have decided how it is meant to be. I have to work with those rules and norms that exist"*. The employees did also mention cut-downs as a reason for a bigger workload: *"The pressure has got bigger. Three years ago there were two employees per department. Now is it three to two departments. We have to work faster."* In that regard, the employees wish to receive help from more voluntaries. However, it is also a question about proper planning regarding the executing part of the machinery if one wishes to solve the problem. One of the employees did also mention that the pressure is lower if one has greater experience. At the same time, however, it can be hard not having the time to hold hands with a residents should they need it.

### *Physical and mental working environment*

When it comes to the physical working environment, the employees stressed that working at weekends is tough. At the same time, they pointed at lack of personnel, for instance due to sickness, creates a mental strain. In addition, if an employee feels left out without having any influence or without capacity to respects agreements, it can be tough mentally. As mentioned before, it is vital that the employers do what they can to create a decent working environment and a good spirit as some of the employees expressed it. Cut-backs, saving and reorganisations are also reasons for anxiety. In that regard, it is important with openness and information. *“We do use humour a lot in our work. That is what we have to do.”* as one of the employees answered as a reply to a bad, psychological working environment.

Furthermore, one of the employees mentioned that unforeseen events can be some of the hardest. In addition, even though work has been set in motion to obtain aid for the workers in the eldercare, for instance a lift to a ceiling, the work in the eldercare can be tough from time to time, as many of the employees did mention. On the other hand, they do find the physical arrangement as decent. The older employees mentioned that one can use experience to compensate for the hard, physical work. Showing consideration and thinking about ones working positions is seen as something that can counter the hard work. Finally, some did mention the existence of good safety representatives one can contact.

### *Development of competences*

There exist quite a lot of in-service training courses of which the older employees take part in. Amongst these are courses about conflict management, speaking, mentoring, dementia, sign language, rehabilitation and techniques of properly moving citizens around. No matter the age, there is a keen interest in taking part in these courses: *“Even though we are quite old girls, it is still lovely to obtain in-service training”*.

### *When do I retire and what shall be done if I should wish to continue working?*

Amongst the older employees who were interviewed, there is only one who wishes to retire at the age of 60 due to a bad knee, and two at the age of 62. The other part of the interviewed employees are still very open regarding when they wish to retire and one will first retire at the age of 65. Thus, overall there is a keen interest in continuing working as long as possible given the body allows it, as expressed by the employees.

The health was mentioned as one of the most important reasons for determining whether one wishes to continue working. In addition, a more flexible working hour was mentioned whereby it would be possible to work fewer hours or work at a time more convenient for the individual, for instance having fewer shifts in the weekend. At the same time it was emphasized that the employees do not want to lower their quality standards. They do not want to compromise on this

regarding due to their age. For some it is a matter of having less responsibility if they should wish to continue working. In connection with the abovementioned, the openness and flexibility from the employers are also stressed as important.

#### *Senior interviews and ideas to maintain Best Aged at the labour market*

It is not common to conduct senior interviews and discuss when one wish to retire at the workplaces involved in this case study. Only in very specific instances or if the individual employee wish to discuss it, have it been conducted. Additionally, one of the employees had at an earlier workplace written an article about bringing the subject of retirement on to the table sooner than it happens now.

When the employees were asked to brainstorm about ideas about how to keep the Best Aged on the labour market, aspects such as fewer working hours and more use of substitutes were mentioned. One of the employees said one could take contact to those who have retired in order to inquire whether they wish to work as substitutes. Other mentioned one could contact young, volunteers or students. Again, working at weekends was emphasized as being a burden. Some mentioned a flexible retirement arrangement as a possibility. However, quite a lot do not know this arrangement. The idea is to use some of one's retirement pay to keep part of one's job. One mentioned that the planning aspect of the work could be improved such that the work is organised more flexible. Furthermore, offers on health related programs such as massage were mentioned as something that could have a relieving effect on the physical problems. Summing up, the new ideas could potentially relieve the employees in their work whereby they can concentrate on their core task: servicing the residents.

Finally, the employees said they would miss the residents, colleagues and the work when they retire.

## Combined analysis

In the following section, the results from the surveys, interviews and focus groups will be combined into an overall analysis, where the theories of employability and social capital will be applied.

First of all, the results of the case study indicated that most of the employees and employers believe the retirement age will be between 60 and 62 years. Amongst the employers, 57 per cent said they believe most of the employees will leave the labour market between 60 and 62 years while 27 per cent do not know when it will happen. At the same time, the survey and interviews with the employees found that *a quite a bit of the employees wish to remain longer at the labour market* if certain conditions were present. Amongst these are a more flexible arrangement of the working hour regarding day, night and weekend shifts; economic incentives and a smaller workload.

Furthermore, there seems to be a tendency amongst the employers that they have not thought that much about the demographic development. However, *there are many of them who in the future will have their focus on it*. At the same time, the employers recognized that lack of personnel from now on will have a great impact on a range of different aspects of management. Interestingly, the employers did not see qualifications of competences and carrier development as important in the future in contrast to the employees who did mention those aspects during the interviews.

Regarding how to maintain the employees on the labour market, it seems that the employers do not count age as important. Instead it is all about *strengthening the values and the culture* contained in the place of work. Thus, value based leadership was emphasized in the focus group interview as more important *than taking the employees' age into consideration*. In this regard, the employers have learned that the older employees contribute with above-average quality. They talked about that 'the bar' is set high, but also that the bar is constantly challenged with regard to the mutual standards through which the quality risks getting lowered, since these standards implies only giving room to 'must do' tasks. Related to the apparent disparage of age, the employers found it inconsistent if they were to praise and give benefits to one particular group only because of the birth certificate of the group. By this way, and in line with emphasizing value based leadership, some employers thus believe senior interviews are less important. Consequently, *social capital* is both connected with how the employers understand the values and with the way through which they look at the older employees' cooperation around the tasks that need to be carried out.

Within the concept of social capital, one often makes a contrast between three types of social capital. Firstly, there is a narrow type called *bonding*, where building of trust and cooperation take place within the social network in focus. Secondly, there is a variant where the focus lays on the *bridging* that occurs between people in different social networks. Those relations are created across different networks, for instance through those contacts employees can have to other institutions by means of cooperation and in-service training. Finally, social capital can consist of those contacts the employees happen to have, and those contacts the employers have through powerful networks, for instance contacts to decision-making committees and so on in municipality, region or state contexts. These kinds of networks are called *linking* networks, and are characterized by the type of form that connect people across zones of influence, as for example the political and economic sphere in a society (Hegedahl & Rosenmeier, 2007).

By way of the above, when the employers emphasize values and norms as more important than both the development of each individual employee and allotting benefits due to age, it could be seen as a certain way of thinking that enhances social capital. In the theory about social capital, it is the relations and creation of networks that increases organisations combined performance. This happens both through the bonding and bridging types of social capital. This interpretation is strengthened by the interviews with the employees, which showed that it is the social relations one has to the colleagues that matters.

As one of the employers said in the focus group interview: *"If it is an employee that is good for the group and house, then I will go far to keep her"*.

Another employer stressed as well in the focus group interview: *"Actually, I have some of mine, which in the teams they are placed in, comes to me unsolicited to mention that we should make sure he stays (said about a 67 year old person)"*.

Moreover, the employer participants in the focus group interview mentioned with great emphasis Best Ager employees with their demands and norms as leading to great quality in their work. This has significance in relation to each of the employees, but also for the impact it can have on the remaining staff as well as residents and citizens. Therefore, it is not obvious whether the employers' aim is social capital, which is about relations and creation of network, or development of Best Ager employability, which concerns each of the employees' working ability and mental, physical and health related wellbeing (Kadefors, 2010).

In addition, most of the Best Ager employees indicated that they are content with their job. They feel they are making a difference. At the same time, they place a *great weight on quality*. By way of their expertise, it has influence on the way by which they establish contacts; not only to colleagues but also to the residents or citizens.

When the employers are told to mention what prevents employees from staying on the labour market, they pointed at economic aspects, psychological wearing down and work at weekends.

As for the employees in the survey and interviews, family related aspects seem important to take into consideration when considering whether to leave the labour market or not. However, the most important reason according to the survey is the *workload*. With respect to this, the employees referred to the work as being very intensive. If one compares this with the high quality norms which the Best Ager according to this case study possess, cf. “setting the bar higher”, it implies that the employees in a very significant degree are exposed to a mental pressure. Besides, given that there are becoming fewer and fewer to service each of the citizens and that there is not enough time to sufficient contact with the citizen or resident, these are apparent explanations on why each of the employees are hard-pressed.

One other particular aspect is a wish to work less in the weekends compared to the currently situation where such work takes place every other weekend. In addition, there is a wish to have more influence on the arrangement of the working hours. One employee suggested that one creates a stable team of substitutes in the weekends; a solution also found other places. Thus, there seems to be a strong need to oblige the employees wishes if they are to remain longer at the labour market.

There is also reason for concern with regard to the *public way of managing* which through the latest decades have placed great emphasis on documentation, control and detailed regulations in the area of eldercare. This is because the employees look at this development as “meaningless” and as an indication of a “lack of common sense”. Consequently, each of the employees has to work much faster which leads to a bigger workload. However, at the same time there is marked understanding for and delight towards the employers, since many of the employees praises them. The point is that a competent management often can relieve the large workload.

Finally, when the employees were asked to bring economically, viable ideas to the table regarding maintaining Best Ager at the labour market, quite a lot mentioned that one could make more flexible arrangements, where the working hours could be adjusting to needs of the individual. Moreover, around one-fifth of the respondents in the survey were willingly to *work less without receiving economic compensation*. Only a few mentioned *the flexible retirement age*; an arrangement apparently only a few employees and employer know the existence of. With regard to that, the employers said that the many rules and opportunities are confusing to keep track off. Instead they referred to the trade unions regarding this.

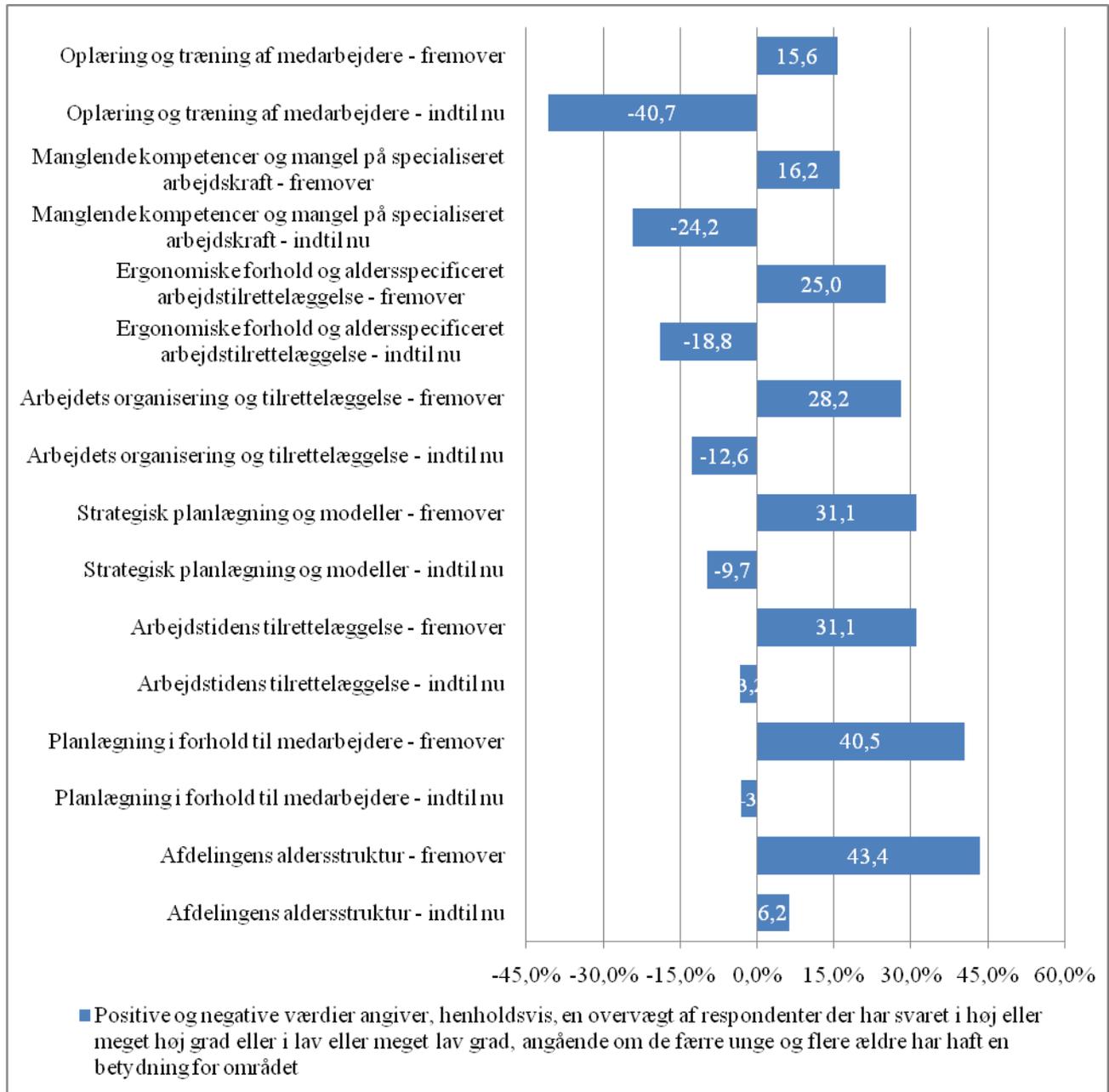
## **Points to pay attention to regarding Best Aged**

On the basis of the present investigation, the following points to pay attention to could be noticed in the continued work with personnel policies:

1. More attention on the strain of work.
2. More attention on strategic leadership in connection with the changes in the demographics. In other words, more focus on retaining additional older people compared to earlier.
3. The employers have limited attention on age related conditions.
4. More of the employees wish to work at part time.
5. Limit documentation and registration (cf. a project about no-control zones in Aarhus Kommune; see [www.kontrollfri.dk](http://www.kontrollfri.dk)).
6. Arrange for relief of work at weekends.
7. Lack of knowledge about flexible early retirement.
8. One-fifth of the employees in the investigation wish to work fewer hours without compensation.
9. The relationship between the importance of one's close relations to colleagues and opportunities to develop this network to the entire organisation. This could be in the form of value based leadership (freedom and responsibility given to groups and teams).
10. Opportunity to speak with former employees which have left the labour market.

## Appendix

**Figure 1: Comparison between the importance for the department of fewer young people and additional old people on a range of different areas. Percent index of differences. 2010.**



Source: Employer survey 2010, web-survey. N=33.

Notes: For each of the areas, a difference in percentages was calculated between the proportion who said *very high* or *high* minus the proportion who said *very low* or *low*. Thus, if there are equally many positive and negative answers, then the value is 0. The way of representing emphasises marked fluctuation in the answers. The different areas are written in Danish. However, the results of the figure are explained in English on pp. 7-8.

**Table 1: Which activities or job functions does your workplace offer such that it can take advantage of its older employees? Row percent. 2010.**

Activities and job functions	Offer	Do not offer	Total	
	%	%	n	%
Mentor arrangements	18,2	81,8	33	100
Developments of competences	33,3	66,7	33	100
Health related activities	69,7	30,3	33	100
Carrier development	15,2	84,8	33	100
Teamwork across different age groups	12,1	87,9	33	100
Special, ergonomic arrangement of workplace	51,5	48,5	33	100

Source: Employer survey 2010, web-survey. N=33.

**Table 2: How important will these activities and incentives become in order to motivate older employees to stay longer at the labour market? Row percent. 2010.**

Activities and incentives	In a very high degree	In a high degree	Neither in a high nor low degree	In a low degree	In a very low degree	Total	
	%	%	%	%	%	n	%
Opportunity to affect the working hours	27,6	55,2	17,2	0,0	0,0	29	100
Opportunity to influence the job tasks	16,1	67,7	6,5	9,7	0,0	31	100
Opportunity to become a mentor	4,2	8,3	45,8	29,2	12,5	24	100
Opportunity for development of competences and carrier	0,0	18,5	40,7	25,9	14,8	27	100
Focus on a improved working environment	13,8	55,2	20,7	10,3	0,0	29	100
Focus on an ergonomic correct working place	20,7	44,8	17,2	17,2	0,0	29	100
Offers on health and fitness programs	21,4	35,7	25,0	7,1	10,7	28	100
The use of economic incentives	13,8	62,1	24,1	0,0	0,0	29	100

Source: Employer survey 2010, web-survey. N=33.

Notes: Respondents who answered "don't know" are excluded.

**Table 3: Experiences factors amongst employees regarding whether employees in their department leaves before the age of 65. Row percent. 2010.**

Experienced factors	Yes	No	Total	
	%	%	n	%
Policies and rules	58,5	41,5	94	100
Too much working overtime*	21,8	78,2	119	100
Too large workload*	84,1	15,9	138	100
Economic conditions*	34,5	65,5	87	100
Working hours barriers	47,1	52,9	102	100
Family related barriers*	37,6	62,4	85	100

Source: Employee survey 2010, web-survey. N=176.

Notes: Respondents who have answered "don't know" are excluded.

\*= statistical significantly more than 0 per cent (at the 5 percent alpha level or below) have answered "yes".

**Table 4: Wishes for improvements regarding what could make employees stay longer on the labour market. Row percent. 2010.**

Wishes for improvements	Chosen	Not chosen	Total	
	%	%	n	%
Less strain from work*	38,1	61,9	176	100
More flexible workings hours*	21,0	79,0	176	100
Making better use of own competences*	13,1	86,9	176	100
Lower workings hours without compensation*	22,7	77,3	176	100
Improved working environment (physical and mental)*	28,4	71,6	176	100
Development of competences (courses and in-service training)*	15,9	84,1	176	100
Other*	31,3	68,7	176	100

Source: Employee survey 2010, web-survey. N=176.

Notes: It is not possible to differentiate between the category "not chosen" and no answers.

\*= statistical significant difference between the proportion of "chosen" and "not chosen" (at the 5 percent alpha level or below).

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