Factors Affecting Workplace Accommodations Among Older Workers

1. Program description

The U.S. workforce is becoming grey. The ratio of workers age 55 or older among the whole working population will be one to four by the year of 2030 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Furthermore, the percentage of the U.S. workforce between the age of 55~64 is growing faster than any other age groups (Strack, Baier, Fahlander, 2008).

The chance of acquiring functional limitations increases dramatically with age. According to the National Organization on Disability (2001), individuals of 55-64 have a 21.9% chance of developing a disability, and 42% reported functional limitations (NOD, 2005). For example, older age is associated with a higher prevalence of sensory or cognitive impairments (Caban, Lee, Gomez-Marín, Lam, & Zheng, 2005; Salthouse, 2010).

If these individuals with self-reported activity limitations remain in the workforce, a remarkably high proportion of older workers will likely experience impairments of sufficient severity to qualify them to seek protection under Title I of the ADA, including employment discrimination and workplace accommodations.

Workplace accommodation is defined as any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that allows a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in all aspects of employment equal to those of employees without disabilities (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2011).

Workplace accommodations play important roles in assisting people with disabilities to their career opportunities, such as job retention (Ellison, Russinova, MacDonald-Wilson, & Lyass, 2003; McNulty, 2007), enhanced job performance (Rumrill, Roessler, Battersby-Longden, & Schuyler, 1998), and extended job tenure (Chirikos, 2000). These accommodations help level the playing field, and allow people with disabilities to be more competitive for employment and advancement opportunities (Baldridge & Veiga, 2001).

Despite the positive impacts of requesting and using workplace accommodations for work retention and career development, the rates of requesting and utilizing workplace accommodation were low (Allaire, Wei, & LaValley, 2003; Davison, O’Leary, Schlosberg, & Bing, 2009; McMullin & Shuey, 2006). For example, older workers with various impairments were less likely to use assistive technology in the workplace (Williams, Sabata & Zoina, 2006). In addition, McMullin & Shuey (2006) found older workers who attributed their functional employment needs to aging rather than disability were less likely to request or receive an accommodation. Furthermore, workplace accommodation was the second highest type of allegations filed to EEOC among this age group, and a higher rise of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) charges over time by this age group compared with other age groups (Bruyere & Young, 2012).

With the trend of greying workforce, sustaining productive employment and enhancing job satisfaction among this group is beneficial to the employee, families, businesses, and society. Businesses have identified the benefits of retaining older workers, including stability, experience, higher morale and lower turnover than other age cohorts (Ritter, 2012). Maintaining productive employment past age 55 is also associated
with improved overall health, and maintenance of social and community networks and participation (Christ et al., 2007; Vallamil et al., 2006). Finally, optimizing opportunities for these older workers to maintain workplace productivity reduces the likelihood of their seeking long-term disability benefits (Loy, n.d.).

Despite the phenomenal expansion in the ranks of older workers in the workforce, and the overall benefits of maintaining older workers productive, little research has been focused on their workplace needs and factors associated with requesting accommodations though many studies have examined other age groups.

**Study Goals**

The proposed study aims to gain understandings of the employment-related needs of older workers, factors of impact the requesting and using of workplace accommodation, and examine strategies designed to sustain workplace productivity and job satisfaction. This study will based upon the research models used for other age groups while considering the unique aspects of older workers.

I am interested in exploring factors that may contribute to decisions for requesting reasonable accommodations, which in turn, may impact job retention and career development for older workers. In this study, I am focusing on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and acceptance of disability on decisions for requesting RAs among older workers who are 55 years of age or older.

**Literature Review**

According to Lent, Brown & Hackett’s (1994; 2000) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), an individual’s self-efficacy (beliefs about one’s ability to successfully perform particular behaviors or course of action) and outcome expectations (beliefs about the consequences of given actions) affect job performance and work-related behaviors, including requesting and utilizing RAs. Despite the significant impact of self-efficacy and outcome expectations on job performance and career development for persons with disabilities (Fabian, 2000), few empirical studies have examined relationships between levels of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and decisions to request RAs, except Hutton (2006), Baldridge (2001), and Baldridge and Veiga (2006).

Though these studies shed some light on factors associated with requesting accommodations in the workplace, they have their limitations: First, no study has specifically examined factors affecting requesting and using workplace accommodations targeting older workers. Second, acceptance of disability, a critical variable impacting individuals’ perceptions of their functional limitations thus influencing their decisions to request accommodation (McMullian & Shuey, 2006), has not been explored in previous studies. Third, no study comprehensively examined the likelihood of requesting RAs through the SCCT model. While Hutton (2006) focused on self-efficacy, Baldridge (2001) concentrated on outcome expectations. According to Bandura (1982), outcome expectancies and self-efficacy expectancies should be differentiated from each other: an individual may believe that he/she possesses the ability to perform the necessary activities but may have serious doubts about the anticipated outcomes. Consequently, his/her behavior will not change in the expected direction. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is needed to examine the impact of both self-efficacy and outcome expectations in relation to RA requests. Fourth, instruments used in previous research either lacked solid psychometric properties (Hutton, 2006) or focused on certain specific domains while neglecting general self-efficacy/outcome expectation domains (Baldridge, 2001;
Researchers highlighted the importance of both domain-specific self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Hackett & Watkin, 1995) and general self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Smarr et al., 1997). Use of a variety of self-efficacy/outcome expectation measures designed to assess different aspects of career self-efficacy/outcome expectations may provide a more complete picture of work self-efficacy/outcome expectations.

Therefore, this study will examine the impact of acceptance of disability, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations on decisions for requesting accommodations among older workers. This may help to test the application of the SCCT model and examine the mediating impact of acceptance of disabilities on accommodation requests among older workers.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the impact of acceptance of disabilities, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations on decisions for requesting RAs for older workers who have workplace accommodations needs, controlling for individual personal characteristics (i.e. level of disabilities, knowledge on the Americans with Disabilities Act, and level of disability acceptance, etc.)?

2. Does SCCT predict the outcome of requesting accommodations for older workers who have workplace accommodation needs?

**Methods**

I will use an online survey to recruit participants for this study. Potential participants will be recruited from national consumer organizations and large rehabilitation agencies across the country, such as the National Empowerment Center, and the National Mental Health Consumer Self-Help Clearinghouse, and the National Council on Disability. All participants should be 55 years of age or older and need accommodations in the workplace. Approximately 200 participants will be recruited for this study. I estimate the sample size based upon the following considerations: strong relationships among the theoretical constructs (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and job performance/job related behaviors) in previous empirical research (Lent, et al, 2005; Lent, Lopez, Lopez, & Sheu, 2008); solid instruments with sound psychometric properties (as described below); and the ratio of survey items to sample size (Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003).

Instruments used in this study include:

**Outcome expectations:** Three RA domain-specific outcome expectation scales and one general scale will be used. The three RA domain-specific scales include: Anticipated employer compliance for RA (Florey, 1998); anticipated image cost (Anderson & Williams, 1996), and perceived help-seeking appropriateness (Florey, 1998). Baldridge (2001) used these scales, which demonstrated sound psychometric properties (Cronbach Alpha coefficients: .97, .91, and .98 respectively). The general work outcome expectation scale was developed by Ciompi, Dauwalder and Ague (1979). Hoffman, Kupper, & Kunz (2000) used the scale in their investigation and found the scale had sound psychometric properties.

**Self-efficacy:** One RA domain-specific self-efficacy scale and one general self-efficacy scale will be used. The RA domain specific scale was developed by Roessler and Rumrill (1993). The scale has been used in studies for individuals with multiple sclerosis (Cronbach Alpha coefficient=.93; Roessler & Rumrill, 1994) and individuals with visual
impairments (Cronbach Alpha coefficient=.86; Rumrill, 1999). The general work self-efficacy scale was established by Waghorn, Chant, and King (2005). This scale covers four domains: vocational service access and career planning, job acquisition, work-related social skills, and general work skills. It demonstrated sound psychometric properties: Cronbach Alpha coefficient=.96, and good construct and concurrent validities.

Acceptance of disability: Considering the significance of disability identity on job behaviors and retention (Saeki, 2000), an abbreviated form the Acceptance of Disability Scale (Roessler, 1991) will be used. Linkowski (1971) developed the scale’s full form to test the relationships between personal adjustment and rehabilitation outcomes. The scale demonstrated a high degree of internal consistency of .93. In addition, the instrument also showed a high level of construct validity and concurrent validities (Linkowski, 1987).

Moderating measures: I will use the Americans with Disabilities Act knowledge scale developed by Hutton (2006). In addition, I will collect the demographic information, diagnosis, and information about the RA requests.

Outcome measures: Participants will be asked about whether they requested RAs, whether they received RAs, their level of satisfaction with RAs, and utility of RA on job retention.

To answer the first research question, I will use logistic regression to examine the impact of acceptance of disability, self-efficacy and outcome expectations on participants’ decisions for requesting accommodations controlling for ADA knowledge, and diagnosis. To answer the second research question, I will use Structural Equation Modeling to investigate the model application of the SCCT to request workplace accommodations.

Timetable
The timeline for the current proposed study is shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Estimated Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB approval/approval of using scales</td>
<td>By Feb. 30th, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript writing</td>
<td>Jul. 1st, 2013 to Aug. 31st, 2013</td>
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2. Demonstration of New Research Program


My dissertation examined the impacts of self-efficacy and outcome expectations on requesting accommodations mainly among younger adults with disabilities. The proposed study extends my previous research by studying the impacts of acceptance of disability, self-efficacy, and outcome expectation targeting older workers who have workplace accommodation needs.

b. Date of terminal degrees and FSU state date: PhD (2011). FSU state date: July 2012

c. Previous experience: University of Maine Farmington, Assistant professor (8/11-5/12)
3. **Long-Term Research Goals**
   My long-term research goals are to create empirically and practically sound interventions that enhance older workers’ job performance and job satisfactions by encouraging older workers utilizing workplace accommodations and supports. This proposed study together with my previous research (Dong, MacDonald-Wilson, & Fabian, 2010; MacDonald-Wilson, Fabian, & Dong, 2008) focused on identify factors related to request and provision of accommodations. The findings will help to guide and design interventions facilitating acceptance of disability, self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which in turn, will enhance job productivity and performance for older workers and individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

4. **Mentoring Plan**
   Dr. Deborah Ebener, Associate Professor, FSU College of Education has agreed to serve as my primary professional and research mentor for this project. Dr. Ebener shares my interests in examining disability issues and has an expertise in this field. Dr. Ebener and I will hold regular meetings to review my progress on this project, discuss my ongoing research activities, and evaluate and refine my long-term research and funding application goals.

5. **Budget Form (See Attached)**

6. **Progress Statement**
   Before the grant period, I will fully review the literature review, obtain the IRB approval, and gain consents to use the scales in this study. I plan to collect the data during the summer 2013 and complete data analysis by the end of the grant period. In fall 2013, conference proposals and manuscripts will be prepared and submitted, and external grants will be applied.

7. **Professional Obligations the PI has for the Award Period**
   I will have no other professional obligations during the award period.

8. **Statement of Permission**
   I, Shengli Dong, grant FSU permission to use this proposal as an example of an awarded format in the event if is funded.

9. **Human Subject Review**
   IRB application is on-going.

10. **References (See Appendix)**