

# Managing Seniority in Academia: Three Perspectives

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## Abstract

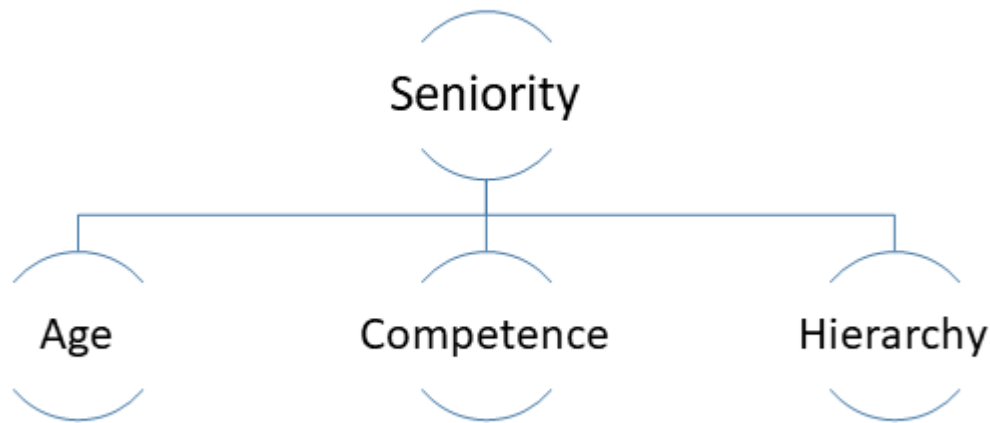
Managing seniority is a rising but still an understudied theme in universities' Human Resource Management (HRM). In many European universities, the academic staff is ageing. In this chapter, we discuss the nature of seniority and consider it from three different perspectives that are interrelated in academic careers: the age, level of competence and hierarchy. At the individual level, these dimensions are overlapped in concrete and thus they are challenging to define and examine. All three dimensions are significant with respect to organizational HRM in universities, and they are connected with many ways to the traditions and practices of the academic work and careers in academia in general.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Human Resource Management, seniority, academic profession, academic careers.

## INTRODUCTION

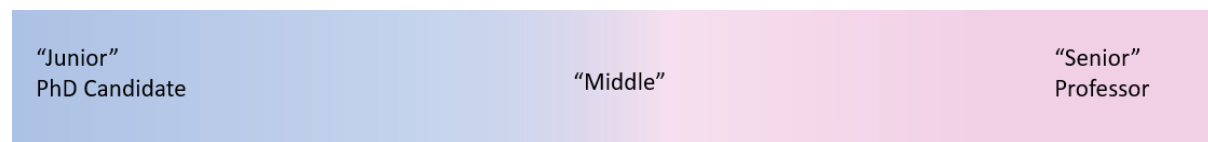
Seniority has multiple meanings in relation to academic careers. Our aim is to shed light on different dimensions of seniority and provide conceptual tools for discussing seniority. In this chapter, we approach seniority from three interrelated perspectives associated to three 'demographic variables' or "background variables" measuring different dimensions of seniority, namely: age, qualifications and organizational position. These are often taken for granted, and consequently, not discussed or defined. We will conceptualize seniority from three Human Resource Management (HRM) perspectives: age, level of competence and hierarchy (Figure 1). The 'demographic variables' are strongly correlated at the population level, however, they are not different measures for the same phenomena. At the individual level, one can find multiple combinations of these variables. In this article we do not present empirical figures or estimates on seniority, but we rather discuss the nature of seniority in academia as well as its importance for the management of the academic workforce.

**Figure 1** *Three HRM Perspectives of Seniority: Age, Level of Competence and Hierarchy*



When we speak of seniority in terms of *age* (years), a junior is someone who is younger or represents a different generation. When we refer to seniority as a level of *competence*, a junior is someone who has fewer merits and qualifications and likely less knowledge than the senior. When we refer to seniority in terms of *position*, a junior is someone below the senior in the organizational hierarchy. We can also approach these dimensions from a more conceptual perspective. The first definition refers to discussions of chronological age. The second refers to capabilities and competences and the third to a formal organizational hierarchy. Since these definitions of seniority are often highly correlated, they are sometimes mixed. Between seniority and juniority there is a grey zone of mid careers. For instance, while ‘pure PhD candidate’ is globally junior and ‘full professor’ is globally senior, the mid-career positions are difficult to compare and analyse without recognizing the dichotomy first and trying to locate ‘mid positions’ on the continuum. In this article we use the word ‘seniority’ to describe the top end of the continuum. Consequently, we do not problematize the continuum as such.

**Figure 2** *Dichotomy and Continuum of Seniority*

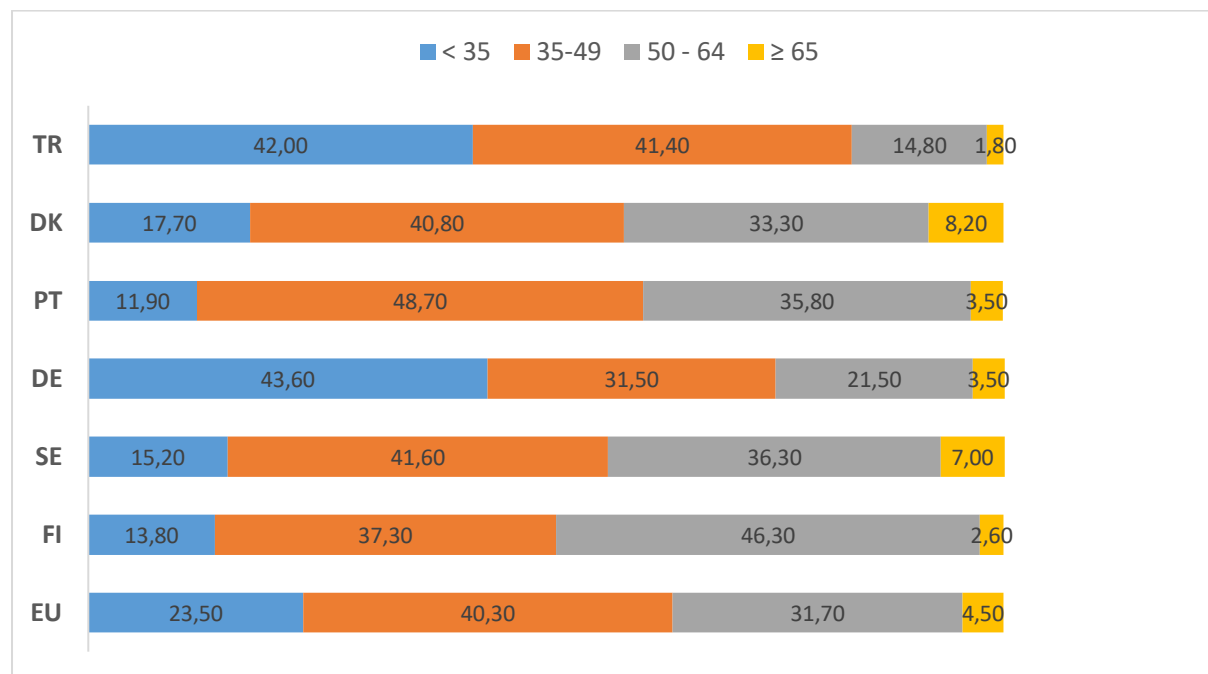


## CHRONOLOGICAL AGE

The number of ageing employees is increasing in sectors and industries worldwide and affecting organizational management practices (Mahon & Millar, 2014). In the field of higher education, the number of older academics is higher than ever before (Cahill et al., 2019). In

European universities, academic staff is ageing; an increasing share of academics are over 50 years of age in many countries. However, there are substantial differences between European countries. In Finland, among a few other countries, over 40% of academics belong to this age group, whereas, for example, in Germany and Turkey, the share of young academics forms a substantial proportion of all academics (see Figure 3; European Commission, 2017).

**Figure 3** *Academic Staff by Age Groups in the EU, Finland (FI), Sweden (SE), Germany (DE), Portugal (PT), Denmark (DK) and Turkey (TR)*



Source: European Commission 2017.

There are only a few studies that have approached the impact of ageing in academia (Kaskie, 2017; Kaskie et al., 2017). One positive result is the retention of prestigious senior scholars, whereas the negative effects that may sometimes occur include budgetary challenges due to the salary structure of the ageing faculty and limited job opportunities for junior scholars (Kaskie et al., 2017). Despite these changes, few studies have examined the management of ageing academics (Kaskie, 2017) or generational differences in higher education (Santiago et al., 2015). Academics are universities' most important assets (Enders, 2000), so these institutions must understand the effects of these demographic changes and modify their HRM practices and career policies to engage professors to continue working into retirement and to manage variations in career and retirement plans and practices (Larkin & Neuman, 2013; Meyer & Evans, 2005).

It is said that the work and career of an academic differ from those of other professions. First, there is no clear work-life boundary. The transition of mindset from work to leisure can be difficult to achieve, and work is constantly in an academic's thoughts. Second, academic careers are seen as limitless, timeless and, in many ways, 'boundaryless'; they do not operate on a hierarchical or typical organizational basis and are not bound by employment status (Davies & Jenkins, 2013.) Third, retiring from academia is not as predictable or well-defined as in many other professions, and many academics continue their careers beyond retirement

(Baldwin et al., 2018). Consequently, the gap in the research on ‘age-aware management’ in universities needs to be addressed. To further explore this topic, we will briefly introduce the concepts typically used in the management of seniors in large organizations. Then we will briefly discuss retirement in academia, followed by a look at academia from a generational perspective.

In management studies of senior employees, the terms ‘senior’, ‘ageing’, ‘older’ and ‘mature’ have been used interchangeably (Aaltio et al., 2014) and the threshold for defining an older employee has varied greatly (McCarthy et al., 2014). Considering older employees as a homogenous group and relying on chronological age have received criticism (Thomas et al., 2014). Thus, a broader understanding of ageing, such as one that includes the social, psychological, and physical dimensions, as well as the interlinkage between ageing and gender, is needed (Thomas et al., 2014; Aaltio et al., 2014). In academia, the use of the term ‘senior’ in this meaning of physical age and use of the concept of seniority in higher education literature to understand ageing is an atypical approach to seniority.

In the field of management studies, the concept of age management has been used to refer to management practices aiming to promote age-friendly workplaces to increase age awareness and pay attention to age-related strengths and challenges among employees (Ilmarinen, 2006; Wallin, 2014; Walker, 2005). Similarly, attention has been paid to age-related differences in work motivation among employees (Kooij et al., 2011) and different ‘age-aware’ (McCarthy et al., 2014, p. 389), ‘age-conscious’ (Principi et al., 2015, p. 811) and ‘age-inclusive’ HR practices (Hertel & Zacher, 2016, p. 397) have been explored. Furthermore, it has been argued that ageing employees may prefer different kinds of HR practices to younger employees, due to differences in lifespan goals and future time horizons (e.g., Kooij et al., 2011). In addition to individual motivation and work environment, the research on ageing employees relates to changes in individuals’ physical, social, and psychological changes due to ageing. While individuals’ physical resources are likely to decline during ageing, the same is not true of their social and psychological resources, which may even strengthen (Ilmarinen, 2006).

In the literature, the term ‘workability’ has been used to describe the interaction and measure the balance between work demands and individual resources. Thus, active management practices are needed to safeguard and strengthen individuals’ workability over the course of individual careers (Ilmarinen, 2019.) For example, flexible HRM practices can enable older employees to compensate and find suitable ways to carry on with their work despite the losses that result, for example, from physical changes (Bal & De Lange, 2015). Few age-aware HRM studies have also paid attention to gender aspects in the discussion of ageing employees (Aaltio et al., 2014; Salminen et al., 2018). For example, older male and female employees may have differing experiences in terms of encountering ageist organizational practices as well as caring responsibilities (such as ageing parents or grandchildren) during the late career phase (Aaltio et al., 2014).

In the literature, several age-aware HRM practices have been identified (e.g., Principi et al., 2015; Aaltio et al., 2014). These include training and development opportunities, career counselling, mentoring and flexible work arrangements (Wallin, 2014). However, recent studies have shown that there are sectoral differences in terms of how proactively and holistically employers apply these activities (Wallin, 2014). For example, Kaskie (2017) showed that only a few universities in the United States have made modifications, such as

providing retirement counselling or health and wellness programmes to manage their ageing academic workforce. There is also some evidence that large organizations are more likely to apply age management practices than small or medium-sized ones (Principi et al., 2015).

One important aspect of managing ageing is retirement. Retirement practices vary from country to country and from profession to profession. In some countries, there is no mandatory or legally binding retirement age and professors can prolong their careers as long as they wish and are capable of doing so (Baruch, 2013). Regardless of whether they have a mandatory retirement age, universities are trying to be as flexible as possible when modifying different career paths or retirement models.

One higher education-specific age-related HR practice is the use of the position and/or status of emeritus professor. While emeritus status is relatively common nowadays, it can still only be given to a restricted group of people, usually senior professors who have retired (Thody, 2011). The status differs between institutions and countries; emeritus status can be viewed as an honorary title for a retired professor, rewarding them for a long or meaningful academic career in a particular institution, or it can be seen as a transition to a new career stage after formal retirement, or both together. The discussion on emeritus or post-tenure positions has a different flavour in a context in which there is neither an official retirement age nor a well-functioning work pension system for academics (as in Latvia) (Arnhold et al., 2018; Chapter 19 in this book) than it does in countries (like Finland) in which emeritus professor is a title for a professor who has retired, but still performs academic activities and continues to cooperate with the university on some level (Finnish Union of University Professors, 2020) while enjoying their pension.

The status of emeritus professor allows professors to continue their work and career beyond retirement (Baruch, 2013). Emeritus professors can continue doing research, teaching and guiding students and junior colleagues, but they usually have fewer responsibilities and may have part-time working hours (Baldwin & Zeig, 2012). The emeritus status can be seen as a form of bridge employment, which Feldman (1994) described as a model of self-, part-time, or short-term employment after the completion of permanent employment and prior to permanent retirement with the same or a completely different employer, industry and/or field (Kim & Feldman, 2000). This arrangement allows academic workers to hold onto their status in academia (Tarkar et al., 2017), making it a practical way for universities to manage their retirement models and career paths, as well as to hold onto the knowledge and skills of older professors.

Due to pension system changes, the late career stage of older generations is becoming longer and more diverse (Kojola & Moen, 2016; Cahill et al., 2019). Consequently, so-called ‘bridge-employment’, which refers to working after retirement, is becoming more common (Kojola & Moen, 2016). For example, Cahill et al.’s (2019) systematic literature review showed that continuing work beyond official retirement is common among academics. It is a way for older academics to retain their identity and maintain the preferred aspects of their role. Thus, academics seem to prefer a gradual transition from work to retirement (Cahill et al., 2019).

Although a late career stage can mean fulfilment and continuing growth, older employees may also encounter a career plateau or ageism (Hennekam, 2015; Thomas et al., 2014). For example, the term ‘grey ceiling’ has been used to describe a career plateau due to older age (Thomas et

al., 2014, p. 1573). Career capital is one factor that influences career success during the late career stage (Tempest & Coupland, 2017; Hennekam, 2015).

Along with studies on age-aware management and retirement practices, there has been a growing interest in generational differences and generational dynamics in organizational contexts (Joshi et al., 2011). This is most notable in practically oriented management studies and consultancy literature (Thomas et al., 2014). As a concept, a generation refers to a cohort of people who were born during a specific period and have experienced similar sociocultural events (Mannheim, 1952; Joshi et al., 2011; Pyöriä et al., 2017). The same events influence people of different generations differently because they experience them at different stages in their lives and careers (Järvensivu, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014).

Although studies have used different boundaries to define generations, four generations that are relevant for the contemporary working life have been identified in the international literature: 1) Baby boomers (1946–1964), 2) Generation X (1965–1976), 3) Generation Y (1977–1997) and 4) Generation Z (1998–) (Tapscott, 2009, p. 16; Järvensivu, 2014, p. 35). However, these categorizations are not applicable in all countries. The younger generations, who have entered working life under conditions of increased uncertainty and a new career landscape, are argued to be less loyal and committed to their employers and place more value on freedom and work-family balance than the older generations (Järvensivu, 2014; Lyons et al., 2015).

For example, Generation Y has been described as highly educated, technology-savvy and demanding of flexible work arrangements (Järvensivu, 2014; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015). Career mobility is also more common among younger generations than older ones (Lyons et al., 2015). High job mobility drives organizations to find new ways to attract and retain talent (Lyons et al., 2015); however, organizations also rely on the experience and expertise of older employees and must find ways to retain their senior workforce (Mahon & Millar, 2014; Salminen, 2019). Generational differences are also evident and important in academia, but studies on generational differences are rare and are often combined with comparisons of attitudinal and motivational differences of academics at different levels of the organizational hierarchy.

## **COMPETENCE**

Seniority management can also be approached from a career advancement perspective. Therefore, this section examines seniority in terms of the level of professional competence. Career capital refers to an individual's experiences, competences, and emotional intelligence. Senior employees with high career capital are characterized by having high qualifications, (tacit) knowledge and skill levels, along with strong networks and intrinsic motivation (Nonaka 1994; Tempest & Coupland, 2017). The strategic management of academics and their careers has been stressed in higher education in order to maintain and develop universities' human capital in the context of changing labour markets (Baruch, 2013).

Workflow management can be based on the standardization of products (outputs), processes (quality standards, procedures) or competences (Mintzberg, 1993). Since university work is complex (Musselin, 2007), managing outputs, outcomes and throughputs is often challenging; thus, managing competence is emphasized in universities. Staff are typically managed in terms

of seniority as a reflection of their qualifications and level of competence. This is not often done explicitly or even consciously. Assessments are an essential part of academic work that are seldom framed as management; rather, management is often considered as something external to the process and is often referred to as ‘managerialism’, ‘politics’, or ‘bureaucracy’.

Furthermore, peer reviewing academic work is a central and traditional part of the inner quality control of academic outputs by the academic profession. In academic work and careers, academic performance is conducted in the organizational frameworks of universities and career development takes place in the career structures offered by the organization (Musselin, 2013a; Musselin, 2013b; Siekkinen et al., 2016). Therefore, the assessment of academic competence is done primarily by the discipline and with disciplinary traditions and criteria, however they are verified, and career promotions are conducted by the organization.

A great deal of energy is spent assessing the quality and competence of the academic workforce through recruitment and promotion processes. Most career frameworks are built to manage and steer employees to the desired competence building. Assessment frameworks are an essential part of university management systems. This type of seniority management is commonly done through assessment, evaluation, and ranking. In academia, seniority management in relation to competence is often done in three realms: teaching, research, and service, also known as public engagement and academic citizenship. In addition to these three missions of universities, in some disciplines (such as medicine or engineering), competence related to one’s occupational field is relevant for the management of academic competence.

Universities have introduced different kinds of indicators and quantitative targets to monitor and steer the work of academics (Kallio et al., 2015). Various research and teaching evaluation practices can be found in many European universities (Moraru et al., 2015). A fair evaluation requires good indicators. However, quantitative indicators are poorly suited to the evaluation of academic work since the outputs of complex academic work are difficult to measure (Musselin, 2007). As a consequence, countable elements such as publications are eventually produced and measured (Kallio et al., 2015; Kallio et al., 2017). In addition, there are significant differences between the outputs of different disciplines and how they can be measured. For example, the societal impact of hard sciences is easier to verify, while implications in the social sciences and humanities can occur over a long period and a direct societal impact is often impossible to confirm (Muhonen et al., 2018).

Teaching assessments follow two principles. First, teaching-related outputs can be assessed as an estimate of teaching competence. For instance, the experiences or number of supervised PhDs can be checked as a proxy for expertise in PhD education. Second, the assessment can be based on competences. However, these are usually indirect measurements, such as a certificate of pedagogical training or student feedback. In addition, the assessment can be based on the observations of peers or pedagogical experts (Casey et al., 1997). An outcome-based assessment can be biased because tasks such as PhD supervision can be directly linked to the organizational hierarchy. Therefore, they may measure the position rather than the expertise.

Compared to teaching, research assessment data are often easier to collect. However, it is not easy to judge how well different indicators describe the quality or even quantity of the work done (Musselin, 2007). In research, it is especially difficult to make cross-disciplinary comparisons of seniority as competence. It is typically assessed through one of the following methods: the quantity of research outcomes as a proxy of quality, the quality of research

outcomes or the prestige of the publication forums. Quantity is often measured by different publication categories. Quality is typically assessed through peer review or bibliometric indicators, for example, the h-index, while prestige is assessed through the national rankings of publication forums and bibliometric indicators of journals, for example, the impact factor (Smith et al., 2013). In addition, the research can be assessed indirectly by assessing the quantity and prestige of research funding.

There is a growing interest in measuring seniority in the administrative or service functions of academic work, and terms such as ‘publicness’, ‘community engagement’, ‘outreach’ and ‘academic citizenship’ have been used to describe tasks that do not fall under research or teaching. According to many career frameworks and international practices, seniority can also be demonstrated through tutoring, assessment activities, positions of trust, public communications, expert tasks, and popularized publications (Macfarlane, 2007).

Assessments of individual competence in different tasks are often systematically managed through career and promotion frameworks. These frameworks can be attached to the hierarchy or can function independently based on the academic qualifications. In some countries, the job vacancy (public position) and the competence of post holders are detached; however, in other countries they are tightly attached, and the post can be altered when the qualifications increase. There are two typical ways of managing seniority, as competence, in academia: the vacancy-based system and the promotion-based system.

In a vacancy-based system, a post has a certain (minimum) requirement for professional competences. A person is selected for the post for either a fixed or an undefined time. Regardless of increasing competence and merit, the position remains, as well as the title of the position holder. Meanwhile, increased competence can be rewarded, such as with a performance-based salary system. In this system, academics can be promoted regardless of their entry position. When competence increases, the title changes and the person moves upward in the hierarchy. It is also possible that only the title changes and the hierarchy remains the same, that is, an academically senior person, such as a professor, can be hierarchically in a line organization lower than a junior person, such as an associate professor. A third option is a variation of the first two: so-called tenure track positions. These positions are conditional positions in which one can be promoted if competence has increased within an agreed-upon time (see Arnhold et al, Chapter 19 in this volume).

Meritocracy has a Janus face. It can be considered as a fair and equal system of hierarchy, as the etymology of the word ‘merit’ suggests that ‘one gets that which one deserves’ and, if the system works, ‘everyone has an equal chance to advance and obtain rewards based on their individual merits and efforts, regardless of their gender, race, class, or other non-merit factors’ (Castilla & Benard, 2010, p. 544). Meritocracy and the excellence related to it (which is ideologically linked to managerialism), are both deeply rooted in universities and reflect the values of academic life (Deem, 2009). The idea of meritocracy has long dominated the discussion on equality in universities (Deem, 2007); however, currently it is being more critically considered.

Meritocracy can also be approached from a sociological perspective as a system of normalisation and exclusive hierarchy that does not consider individual characteristics and environmental factors. Recently, numerous critical studies have been conducted on meritocracy in academia, particularly from a gender perspective (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014; Nielsen, 2016a,



2016b). As Deem (2009, p. 22) states: ‘perhaps in time, this will lead to some reflections on whether excellence and meritocracy are still appropriate for the 21st century university, which is located in an increasingly diverse and differentiated global setting’. Now, we will turn the discussion to seniority as hierarchy.

## **HIERARCHY**

Academia is a social system with various roles, positions, and inner hierarchical structures. As addressed by Clark (1983), academic activities are structured by the organizations – universities – as well as by the different disciplines. The roles and positions of academics have their own hierarchies in each social sphere. In other words, academics have a certain role and a position in the university where they work and in the discipline to which they belong. Uppermost in the academic hierarchy is the professor, who has prestige in both spheres. The link between academic seniority and organizational seniority is probably the most central variable in academic HRM. In some situations, the organizational position of the individual and the disciplinary position are not synchronized, which can create tensions in the work of the individual academic. For example, a manager who has gained the manager position without being a senior academic can end up in this kind of conflicted situation.

While the international trends of managerialism and new public management have changed the institutional frameworks of universities, they have also made many professors into not only senior academics, but also managers, and have provided more power to university middle management (Carvalho & Santiago, 2010). As Evetts (2011) argued, many professionals have been recreated as managers, so that organizations can manage their – often highly critical – professionals more efficiently (see also Birnbaum, 2004; Deem, 2004). Meanwhile there has been a development towards the professionalisation of managerial positions (Pekkola et al., 2020) that has meant that not all middle managers, such as deans and heads of departments, are senior academics but are rather junior and gained their qualifications from other sectors. The seniority in organizational hierarchy does not equal seniority in academic competence and thus creates a different layer or perspective to the management of the academic workforce and careers.

University decision-making structures have changed in other respects as well. Traditionally, universities included several collegial bodies, often a senate or similar, where decisions were collectively made by academics. Collegiality, in which a small elite group of academics hold the hierarchy (Clark, 2001), has had several meanings in higher education systems throughout history. This has been challenged by centralized, hierarchical and managerialist decision-making structures (Deem, 2004). The power has shifted from collegial practices, in which the decisions are made by departments or groups of senior individuals, to corporate practices, in which the power lies in the institutional practices or in the hands of the senior management team (McNay, 1995; Neave & Rhoades, 1987; Pekkola et al., 2018). This shift from the collegial model based on the chair system, through the departmental model towards the managerial model, has detached the disciplinary and organizational seniority. The importance of external funding has also changed the landscape of seniority. There are multiple approaches to the positions of ‘principal investigator’ and ‘project manager’ and the use of resources and managerial power related to them are managed in new ways in academia. The projects are not self-evidently managed by the senior academics (full professors and chair) but often by the principal investigators, who may be in their mid or early career. However, the prestige of the

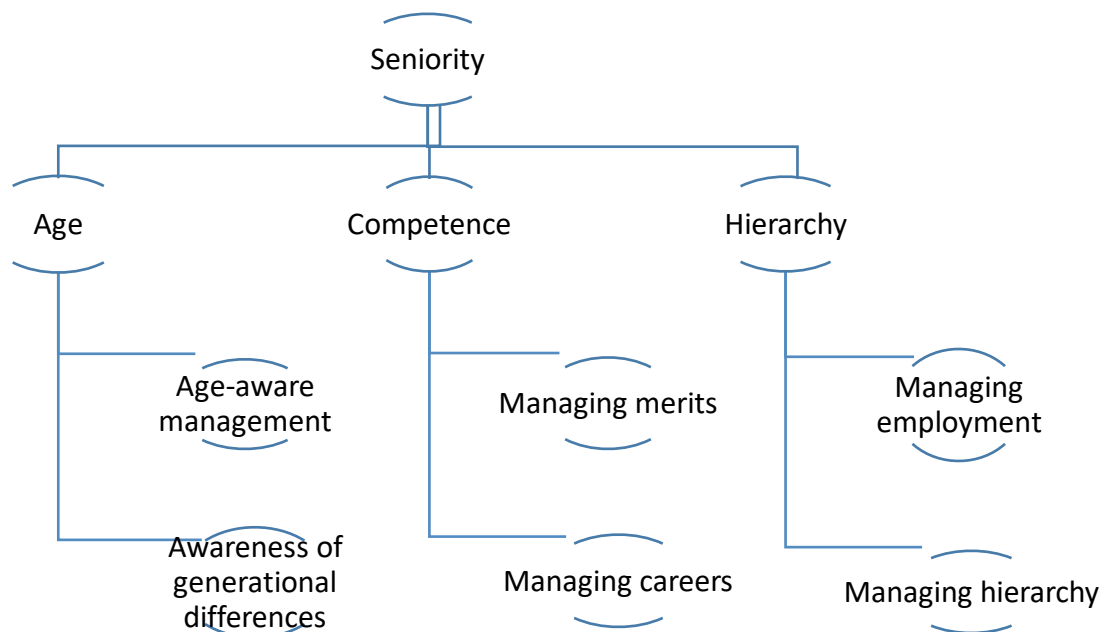
(full) professor position has remained. The academic professional group is closed to outsiders and guarded by gatekeepers. Even though university activities are increasingly monitored by administrative managers, these professional gatekeepers have significant power in the university recruitment processes (Vellamo et al., 2021).

One additional dimension related to organizational hierarchy in academia is the clear distinction between permanent and fixed term faculty members. A core group of academics (often senior in age, competence, and hierarchy) hold permanent posts, as well as managerial and supervisory roles, which gives them significant power over junior academics with unstable prospects. They are also entitled to participate in organizational decision making and subjected to the HR-policies related to rewarding, wellbeing etc., since they are part of the permanent faculty. Commonly, the positions of academics on insecure contracts will stabilize if they remain in academia (Kwiek & Antonowicz, 2013).

## MANAGING SENIORITY IN ACADEMIA

In this article, we have taken a management perspective and looked at seniority, a subject rarely studied in the higher education context, and focused our discussion on age, competence, and hierarchy. In Figure 4, we summarize our discussion by depicting these three different aspects, which include concrete organizational HRM practices related to age-aware management, awareness of generational differences, managing merits, managing careers, managing employment, and managing the hierarchy in universities.

**Figure 4** *Three Aspects of HRM Connected to Seniority in Academia*



These three conceptual aspects of age, competence and hierarchy, and their practical organizational applications, comprise a good overview on management related to seniority in the organizational context of universities. However, the theoretical basis, as well as the concrete applications related to these concepts, still need further clarification and development.

Age-aware management and awareness of generational differences have become more important for HRM due to demographic changes, which have led to a growing interest in the management of senior employees. The large number of older employees and extended career phases, due to retirement reforms, have forced organizations to rely on and find new ways to manage their senior workforce (Salminen, 2019). The basic idea behind age sensitive HRM and age management is acknowledging that employees may have different age-related needs and preferences (Aaltio et al., 2014). Employee differences can also be the result of generational differences. For example, loyalty towards an organization and pursuit of work-family balance are argued to be espoused by different generations (Järvensivu, 2014; Lyons et al., 2015). However, it is often difficult to pinpoint which employee differences are due to age, generation, or period (external influences) (Joshi et al., 2011). Furthermore, intersectionality should be acknowledged more as other categories, such as gender and education, influence the late career stage of senior employees (Thomas et al., 2014). For example, family responsibilities of women may postpone their career development compared to that of men.

Due to their cumulative work experience, social networks, and tacit knowledge, combined with the low physical demands of the work, senior academics are more likely to possess a high level of career capital (e.g., Nonaka, 1994; Tempest & Coupland, 2017) than individuals in many other occupations. Furthermore, the invigorating nature of academic work and the ability to influence one's work during the late career stage (e.g., Cahill et al., 2019) are likely to motivate senior academics to continue working until their retirement age and beyond. Thus, universities should be more active in their HRM policies and practices regarding retirement.

Managing the competence of individuals in a meritocratic organization such as a university remains a central aspect for HRM. Academic traditions related to academic work and academic careers are strong and sometimes not in line with the organizational HRM policies and practices, which can create tensions between them. Academic success as well as career progression are based on the successful peer-evaluation of academic performance. These academic outputs are being assessed in the disciplinary contexts, but the organization is still offering the frameworks in which the individual is performing the work and proceeding in their career (Musselin, 2013a; Musselin, 2013b; Siekkinen, Pekkola, & Kivistö, 2016). Furthermore, in the promotions and recruitments of universities, these different aspects of disciplinary and organizational power are being exploited (Vellamo et al., 2021).

With regard to diversity, strictly standardized career structures and narrow criteria for academic performance create a one-size-fits-all culture in a university. There, equality is defined only through meritocracy, and excellence through New Public Management (NPM)-ideologically driven ideas on efficiency and outputs which can be quantified, which does not take into account the diversified academic workforce (Siekkinen, Pekkola, & Carvalho, 2019; Deem, 2007; 2009), or disciplinary differences (Muhonen et al., 2018).

With respect to managing employment and managing hierarchy, universities are in transition. The old chair system and collegial idea of dean as *primus inter pares* has been questioned. As a global tendency related to NPM, the autonomy of higher education institutions has been

strengthened in many countries. This has created more pressures for accountability, performance and, consequently, professional management. In many cases, the hierarchy in an organization is no longer linked directly to the chair system and assessment of academic qualification but to new types of hybrid positions that have emerged (Pekkola et al., 2020).

## **CONSEQUENCES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMICS**

What seniority means, and how different aspects of it should be taken into account in the context of universities, are broad issues that have been briefly considered in this article. Each of the aspects that have been provided in our article – age, competence, and hierarchy – are significant with respect to organizational HRM in universities and they are connected in several ways to traditions and practices of academic work and careers in academia in general. In many ways, organizational HRM responds to these.

Age has multiple meanings in academia. Management questions related to age can be concrete, like in Latvia (see Arnhold et al., in Chapter 19 in this volume), where the entire career system is impacted by the lack of a retirement age and clear exit points from careers. In some other countries, age is discussed mostly in relation to the discussion of emeritus contracts and affiliations. In some others, age is discussed in relation to early career positions, as academic age (time after defence of one's doctoral dissertation). This tends to be assimilated with physiological age, especially in cases in which the potential of the individual is evaluated simultaneously with academic age. Increasingly, also in universities, lifespan-related differences are discussed, especially in the context of gender and international mobility, as well as work-life balance. There are also generational differences that should be taken into account when planning and managing academic work and recruitment. Age is a relevant factor for age sensitive HRM practices in all workplaces. However, the topic of age is only seldom discussed as part of HRM practices in higher education.

Seniority as a level of academic competence and qualification is also essential to the management of academic staff (see Geschwind et al., in Chapter 29 in this volume). In the management of academic competence, the career structures and criteria on promotions are central. Academic work is autonomous, the teaching happens in classrooms led by the teacher, and the research is based on academic self-determination. Thus, the management of careers, qualifications and competences is one of the few legitimate ways of managing and steering academic work and performance. The management of seniority as competence connects the organizational HRM functions to the wider disciplinary and scientific communities. In addition, it provides an avenue to integrating professional competence and expertise as well as the societal service function to be part of the management of academic staff and their work. Management and accreditation of competences is also an important part of the motivational system in academia, in which the possibilities of monetary reward are often limited.

Managing hierarchy and line organization is often, but not always, correlated with the management of competences. A managerial position may be a 'necessary evil' related to a position granted based on competences and qualifications (e.g. full professors post includes a responsibility to lead a research group or a study programme), or it can be a competence related to the qualification needed for a professorship (e.g. demonstrated leadership skills as a requirement to be promoted). In many European systems, management positions diverge from competence-based seniority. Heads of departments and units may be post-doctoral fellows and

increasingly deans are professional managers. This has a dual impact on the management of academic staff. Firstly, there is a need to take into account the management tasks in the assessment of seniority as competence to make management duties more attractive, since management positions are not always considered as career advancement in academia. Secondly, there is a tendency towards the establishment of a separate career track for managers.

In many cases, universities' responses to many HRM related issues, which will be emphasized in the future, have so far been rather careless. Seniority, especially age-aware management, has been an underestimated issue in universities.

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