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## Identifying Pre-Retirees for Bridge Employment: Factors That Influence Post-Retirement Employment Decisions

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<b>Editor's Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Identifying Pre-Retirees for Bridge Employment: Factors That Influence Post- Retirement Employment Decisions</b> <i>Sharon Kendrick &amp; Melody D. Wollan</i>	<b>3</b>
<b>From Micro to Meso: Overuse of Strengths - A Framework for Assessing and Improving Organizational Effectiveness</b> <i>Mary K. Foster</i>	<b>18</b>
<b>The Shifting Paradigm of Baby Boomer Retirement Planning</b> <i>David M. Savino</i>	<b>30</b>
<b>The Influence of Situational and Transformational Leadership on Successful Crisis Management</b> <i>Kenneth M. Baylor</i>	<b>36</b>
<b>Guanxi and Ethical Decision Making</b> <i>Russ Urness &amp; Perry Hahn</i>	<b>48</b>
<b>Instructional Technology in Business Education: An Examination of Online Learning Styles</b> <i>Robert M. Ballenger &amp; Dennis M. Garvis</i>	<b>60</b>
<b>Guidelines for Contributors</b>	<b>78</b>

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## **Identifying Pre-Retirees for Bridge Employment: Factors That Influence Post-Retirement Employment Decisions**

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*Abstract: In a field study of 387 pre-retirees, four factors are demonstrated to be important as tools to aid Human Resource Managers and managers in predicting and influencing employees to consider participation in bridge employment: education levels of pre-retirees, training opportunities offered, role support from others (of particular importance supervisors and coworkers), and work family balance issues. Additionally, our findings draw attention to the importance of employment status (part-time versus full-time) and the number of years to retirement in predicting pre-retirees' intentions to work in bridge employment.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

For the first time in history, four generations are impacting the workforce (Poindexter 2008). In the middle of this employment activity, baby boomers are breaking from the full-time workforce to engage in either second careers or part-time employment ventures that could encompass the next ten to fifteen years with the year 2026 seeing a rapid increase in the employable group of people aged 65 and older (Poindexter 2008; Wilson and Palha 2007). At least 80 percent of baby boomers will consider working past the traditional retirement age in the form of part-time work (Smyer and Pitt-Catsoupes 2007). Some workers will be forced to delay retirements, while others who are engaged in career jobs may find that they have the option to retire gradually on their own terms.

Fully half of pre-retirees in their 50s are interested in second careers where shortages currently exist and where shortages are projected into the future, to include areas such as education, healthcare, government work, and human services (Freedman 2007). Individuals falling into this category are focusing in on early retirement and are proactively pursuing full-fledged second careers with the intention of focusing on work that matters most to them and to the larger society (Freedman 2007). In this scenario, "bridge employment" (Feldman 1994; Feldman and Kim 2000) serves as a buffer job for a pre-retiree who is transitioning from a career job and describes the jobs people take after leaving full-time employment and before engaging in full-time retirement. Participation in bridge jobs from these pre-retirees is common among high-wage pre-retirees who accept bridge employment for quality-of-life reasons (Cahill, Giandrea, and Quinn 2006).

For many pre-retirees contemplating bridge employment (Feldman 1994), the traditional meaning of retirement (from an economic and age-related standpoint) is being reinvented as people age and consider heightened dilemmas such as training, education, social support, and work/family conflicts as influential factors on participation in bridge employment. As this trend becomes a reality, new employment deals will need to be struck between employers and bridge employees as innovative ways to continue productivity by filling the skill gap (Smyer and Pitt-Catsoupes 2007). In this sense, providing bridge jobs for older Americans enables not only the company to thrive by retaining knowledgeable and experienced workers, but also gives the retiree a chance to stay active, experience a different line of work, be productive, earn income, and remain socially engaged (Cahill et al., 2006). Areas such as job-sharing, flex schedules, and use of retirees as contract workers will allow employers and pre-retirees to creatively plan ahead for changes on the employment horizon (Alford, Farnen, and Schachet 2004). In doing so, the firm gains a better understanding of how and why older workers choose to leave the labor force, and how

best to guide the desire of many pre-retirees to continue working beyond traditional retirement ages (Cahill et al. 2006).

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

While an obvious and realistic perspective on motivations to work include the necessity of earning a wage to support living standards (mortgage, utilities, food), with the pre-retiree population, economic need is not a consistent predictor (Dychtwald, Erickson, and Morison 2004; Herzog, House, and Morgan 1991; Schulte 2008; Weston 2008). Certainly there are retirees that return to the workforce because they are motivated by a hierarchy of needs such as Maslow's (1943) physiological and safety needs. However, theory such as Maslow's (1943) social, esteem, and self-actualization needs and Herzberg's (with colleagues Mausner and Snyderman 1959) motivators as well as anecdotal evidence also predict that there are other motives for continuing to work after completing a career and not entering immediately into full-time retirement. The challenge for managers is to effectively direct pre-retiree activities and essentially "socialize" pre-retirees for bridge employment similar to preparing new employees to develop early stages of their career (Louis 1980; Super 1980). In doing so, we suggest four categories of factors that appear to be related to the likelihood to participate in bridge employment.

### Education

Older workers and pre-retirees continue to rely on skills and experiences that have served them well in their careers when they consider bridge jobs (Ulrich and Brott 2005). Higher levels of education in pre-retirees produce in-demand skills for employers seeking to fill openings. In some examples, the job actually comes to the pre-retiree versus having to seek out employment opportunities. Conversely, lack of education during career life can produce absence of job options when approaching retirement. After working in one field, pre-retirees considering bridge employment found that even though they had acquired transferable skills, they lacked the confidence to continue education and acquire new skills in order to find a niche in the changing career environment (Ulrich and Brott 2005).

For those lacking tenure or education and who find themselves at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale, bridge jobs provide some financial security; albeit an unfortunate and undesirable finale to pre-retirees who might have hoped for a more stable retirement scenario (Cahill et al. 2006). Women, for example, were shown to benefit from postsecondary education in a study conducted by Zhan and Pandey (2002) in which retirement choices were either expanded or limited, as influenced by advanced educational opportunities. Pre-retirees with advanced education were afforded more selective employment choices (following retirement) when compared to the working poor (women) whose job experiences were seen as adequate and less costly alternatives to education. In the latter instance, the working poor (pre-retirees) were forced to search for quick employment even after receiving vocational training to further their knowledge and/or job skills when attempting to secure employment into their retirement years (Zhan and Pandey 2002).

Disengagement theory (Atchley 1975, 1976) suggests that employees with more education will have a broader skill set to continue to use in post-retirement employment. As a pre-retiree begins to make a conscious decision to remove him/herself from the workforce, highly prioritized work-related involvement begins to take a back seat to more self-focused involvement. In addition to having more time to allocate to personal pursuits, education opens the door to more selective use of free time associated with life after retirement (Atchley 1975). Blue collar/laborers have less education on average when it comes to post-employment choices and because they do more manual labor, they are not as likely to be able to use their skill set in retirement, compared to those that do more office/cognitive work. The resulting stress and strain in losing this 'safety net' (the only job they know how to do in the form of manual labor) may lead to feelings of despair and disengagement, predominately more so among blue-collar workers versus non-blue collar retirees. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase with advancing levels of education.

## **Training Opportunities**

Training continues to remain a priority to some pre-retirees. The very thought of becoming disengaged with the workforce and losing ground to technology is enough to keep some workers engaged into what once would have been considered the golden years of leisure. As the current financial crisis continues to multiply, the ability to remain involved with the workforce beyond the traditional retirement age remains a vital issue of concern with pre-retirees. Accessing updated training is vital to survival and staying up-to-date on trends allows aging workers to continue work involvement into the future; a necessary component in attempting to better balance financial upheavals (Greene 2008).

Providing training opportunities for workers has a strong relationship to participating in bridge employment. Many organizations can better help pre-retirees prepare for a retirement or bridge employment decision by providing basic training sessions to engage the aging worker throughout his/her career (Bradford 1979). Such training serves to create awareness by seeking to improve or upgrade employees' productivity through self-awareness, acceptance of emotional reactions, ways to cope with stress and change, life-planning issues, and interest tracking. Other programs address defining goals for remaining years of employment and acknowledging personal interests through engaging both pre-retiree and spouse or significant other in discussion sessions that entail matters such as actual retirement expectations, to include working after retirement (Bradford 1979).

Assisting in the transfer of knowledge from experienced to less experienced workers can engage pre-retirees in formal mentoring programs that pair new employees with seasoned workers (Giroux 2008). A bold move such as formal/informal mentoring programs helps to nurture and build confidence, and works to create a rewarding experience that benefits both pre-retiree and mentee (Giroux 2008). Employers who can tap into existing knowledge potential can potentially see a boosting of knowledge-sharing with colleagues and eventual reception of the pre-retiree to learning from others.

Pre-retirees who felt good about themselves and who viewed themselves as competent workers whose jobs have enabled them to continue learning, were found to be adaptable to new experiences and skill-building sessions (Ulrich and Brott 2005). Older workers desiring to remain connected to the workforce following retirement welcome the chance to use skills and experience and maintain social connections (Smyer and Pitt-Catsouphes 2007). Being able to tap into previous knowledge and abilities prompt pre-retirees to stay with current employers; for examples, key indicators of success in recruiting and retaining older workers included the inclusion of job autonomy, learning opportunities made available, decision-making involvement with managers, and inherent variability that comes with age.

On the other end of the spectrum, many pre-retirees had a challenging time moving into bridge jobs after retirement if job titles did not match long-term career titles or if occupations were defined too narrowly. In this instance, many did not fully investigate a job opportunity because they lacked the appropriate technology skills or questioned their ability to learn new skills (Ulrich and Brott 2005). The thought of taking pre-employment tests were viewed as unpleasant by some of these pre-retirees, while others picked up on subtle age discrimination when younger workers questioned their capabilities, or failed to hire or promote older workers. Consequently, rather than deal with developing new career strategies to cope with these changes, Ulrich and Brott (2005) found many pre-retirees selected retirement over remaining engaged in part-time or bridge employment. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree has more training and development opportunities.

## Role Support

Support for a pre-retiree's personal and professional development was found to be associated with the degree to which a professional network was maintained (Greller and Richtermeyer 2006). Also relevant to a pre-retiree's decision to remain involved with the workforce was personal career insight as enhanced by coworker and managerial support. The qualitative social support from coworkers received in these instances was stable, and increased the satisfaction felt by older workers who opted to remain engaged in the workforce in a full-time status following a pending retirement decision. In this scenario, pre-retirees who opted to continue working did so with the perception that support from coworkers did not decline over time (Bosse et al. 1993). This is important in that social support is important in maintaining a way of extending the working life of a pre-retiree by preserving contacts and networks necessary for career longevity (Greller and Richtermeyer 2006). In these examples, role support from others seems to have had the biggest influence (even beyond economic dependency) on whether or not employees plan to participate in bridge employment. Those who select to participate in work after retirement receive social support and seem to have good working relationships with coworkers and supervisors (i.e., social information processing model) and thus are more willing to stay in the employment relationship.

On the other hand, some pre-retirees who are contemplating continued employment may not always have the support of supervisors in the workplace; this is deemed particularly important as supervisors tend to be the ones who define and influence the performance appraisal system (Henkens 1999). In this scenario, external conditions such as lack of coworker and supervisor support and lack of control in the job as experienced by pre-retirees inflict influence in the decision to participate in a bridge job (Van Solinge and Henkens 2007). External conditions can also influence pre-retirement decisions such as a strong tendency of companies to prune the workforce by offering early retirement programs as a more socially acceptable way to sidestep large-scale layoffs (Van Solinge and Henkens 2007). As such, older workers sometimes find themselves funneled into jobs that have become redundant due to technological advances or victims of job redundancy or organizational restructuring and the loss of status resulting from impending retirement can have adverse effects on pre-retirees who anticipate an intense loss of relations with coworkers (Bacharach et al. 2007). This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree's perception of role support by others increases.

## Work Family Balance

With retirement lasting twenty years or longer for a pre-retiree, human resource managers are now faced with finding ways to engage the older worker for longer periods of time (Dorfman 2002). This includes not only preparing pre-retirees for continued engagement in work, but also being able to provide redefined counseling to aid pre-retirees in understanding non-economic issues (primarily family and spousal focused) that accompany prolonged employment decisions. Internal conditions such as home life and pressing family responsibilities (caregiving) and lack of spousal support play a role in influencing a pre-retiree's receptiveness to retirement and continued work involvement (Van Solinge and Henkens 2007).

Retirement decisions by married couples are often linked to a spouse's decision of when to retire (Smyer and Pitt-Catsouphes 2007). The issue of work family balance is indeed important, and those that report a balance are more likely to participate in bridge employment (Henkens 1999). In a study conducted by Henkens (1999), the extent to which partners influence each other in regards to early retirement and caregiving responsibilities established that early retirement was, to a certain extent, a household decision. Henkens (1999) found that partner or spousal support impacted the retirement decision-making process, and that partners gauged the effect of early retirement if they themselves were supportive of harmonious activities regarding home and work life in general. They were, therefore, more

inclined to support a pre-retirement decision if they expected fewer disruptions to marital life (i.e. division of housework, shared activities, and maintaining of social relations). Overall, a pre-retiree (whether male or female) who mutually supported a spouse's decision to remain engaged in the workforce (whether phased or partial) viewed work as a meaningful and productive investment of time and energy. (It is also important to note that men in the study scored lower than women on retirement adjustment if a spouse remained employed and adapted less easily to a spouse's absence from the home.)

As retirement decisions are pondered by pre-retirees, productivity in the workforce is often an issue with what one's personal life holds in retirement. Although the labor force in general is projected to increase with older worker involvement, a major burden facing pre-retirees as they approach retirement will be the challenge of whether or not to engage in bridge employment despite negative setbacks such as caregiving network issues or lack of support from others in their community (Lima et al. 2008). Geographical relocations, family life concerns such as caring for aging parents, adult children returning home, becoming 'parents again' to grandchildren, and health concerns (of the pre-retiree and spouse) will make it increasingly difficult for pre-retirees to combine these caregiving responsibilities with the decision of whether or not to continue labor force participation (Lima et al. 2008). Learning to set reasonable goals and boundaries for family members who are engaged both in the workforce and in caregiving is a meaningful and productive investment of time and energy (Dorfman 2002). As such, these non-economic influential factors provide 'pushes and pulls' in the decision of labor force involvement as coupled with sensitive issues such as care-giving responsibilities and personal obligation felt to family, and have the potential to negatively influence the ability to continue working after retirement. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree perceives greater control over work and responsibility to family conflicts.

## METHODS

### Overview

#### Sample

Data was collected from 387 pre-retirees who anticipated retiring within ten years or less and were employed on a full-time (n=277) or part-time (n=110) basis. Average tenure at current employer for both groups was 4.95 years. The short tenure expressed by survey participants could be contributed to the transient nature of the population surveyed, and to the fact that participants were eligible to complete the survey if they anticipated retiring within ten years or less. Sixteen job categories were represented and the percentages of respondents in them were as follows: computer and related 20.2% (full-time 24.5%, part-time 9.1%), management or supervisory 16.5% (FT 16.2%, PT 17.3%), education or training 14.2% (FT 13.0%, PT 17.3%), healthcare practitioners and technical 9.3% (FT 9.4%, PT 9.1%), food preparation or serving related and building and ground cleaning/maintenance each in identical proportions at 7.8% (FT 6.9%, PT 10.0%), transportation or material moving 5.2% (FT 5.8%, PT 3.6%) with the following categories representing less than 5% of the total sample and less than 5% of either FT or PT workers: architecture or engineering (4.4%), production (3.9%), legal (2.6%), arts, design, entertainment, media (2.1%), financial services (1.6%), sales (1.6%), community or social services (1.6%), office, administrative or clerical support (0.8%), and construction, installation, or repair (0.8%).

There were larger numbers of women (59.7%) that participated in the study than men; of full-timers, 57.8% were women, but a larger percentage (64.5%) of part-time respondents were women. Age ranged from 41 to 74 years, with an average of 54.07. Full-time respondents were slightly younger and encompassed the entire range, with an average age of 53.51. Part-time respondents ranged from ages 44

to 65, with an average of 55.48. Most respondents were married at 67% (17% divorced, 9% never married). Education level varied: 18.6% received their high school diploma or GED, 26.9% had community college/AA degrees, 26.6% had 4-year university/college degrees, and 25.8% had masters or doctoral degrees.

### **Procedures**

A member of the research team presented the opportunity to participate in the study to members of a county-based Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) at one of their monthly meetings. This county has a population of approximately 300,000 residents, situated within an urban community in the southeastern United States. Participation by each company and respondent was voluntary. The research team was provided with a list of employee names from each company, and 1,100 names were selected at random from those lists. In total, 24 companies were utilized for data collection, representing a broad cross-section of industries and job categories. Respondents were provided (in an email or memo by their HR manager or research team member, or by personal visit by a member of the research team with a presentation at a staff meeting, depending on the company's preference) with a web-link that was maintained by the research team with an invitation to participate and an opportunity for a small nominal gift by drawing of participants. A pencil and paper option was also offered. The overall response rate was 35.2%.

### **Dependent Variable**

#### ***Intentions to participate in bridge employment (IPBE)***

The dependent variable, intentions to participate in bridge employment, was measured with a scale composed of twenty-items, as provided in Appendix 1 (all but five items are reverse coded). These items were derived from a number of existing scales (Atchley 1975, 1976; Bailey and Hansson 1995; Davis 2003; Feldman and Kim 2000a; Gee and Baillie 1999; Gray and Morse 1980) related to career and job change, and intentions of future behavior (specifically of leaving a job and modified to reflect entering a bridge employment position). Agreement with each item was indicated using a seven-point Likert scale from "1 = strongly agree" to "7 = strongly disagree". This scale had an acceptable Cronbach alpha reliability of .866 (.811 for full-time, .892 for part-time respondents).

Two pilot studies were conducted in the development of this scale. The first contained a sixteen item measure and was sent to 39 individuals ages 39-70. Analysis of the results and comments from the respondents indicated a concern between "part-time" and "full-time" intentions, and thus, this categorization was collected as an independent item and wording was adjusted on affected questions. Another concern of wording was with the construct and use of the term "identity" which was determined to be misinterpretable to the audience, and questions referring to identity were rephrased. Ultimately, it was determined that there were two different types of questions for bridge employment; those that addressed categorization (of part-time vs. full-time, current employer or different employer, current industry or different industry, volunteer or for money) and those that addressed behavior, motives, and the broader likelihood to participate in future employment after retirement from a "career job". The first group was a sub-scale of nine-items that were determined by the research team (eventually, one item was dropped from this scale). The second group of twelve questions received a second pilot study, in which 89 members of a local AARP chapter ranging in age from 50-67 and within two to five years of retirement were provided with the IPBE scale (50 responded, for a 56% response rate). Two questions related to identity again received revision prior to the full-study data collection. In the full-study data collection, categorical analysis of interactions (resulting in 6 categories of no bridge employment, part-time preferred, long-term preferred, long term and part-time, not sure, or not long-term and not sure part-time) between IPBE, part-time (vs. full-time) and long-term (vs. short-term bridge employment) indicated that 62.2% of the sample had some intention to work after retirement with the majority of these (38.1%)



preferring part-time bridge employment of a short-term nature, 24.6% had no intentions to participate in work after retirement, and 13.2% were uncertain about their plans.

## **Independent and Control Variables**

### ***Education***

Education level was measured with two items: “what is your highest level of education completed?”, and “have you received or attended any updated training, technical, or skill building seminar(s)?” Respondents could check one of eight categories as representing the highest level they had completed: grade school (grade 6) coded 1, junior high (grade 8) coded 2, high school or GED (3), AA/Community College (4), 4-year University/College (5), Masters Degree (6), Doctoral Degree (7), Other/specify (8). If they had received additional training, an additional 0.5 was added to their education level score.

### ***Training opportunities***

Training opportunities were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and not at all to 7 = strongly agree or a very large extent) adapted from Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997). These items covered both formal and informal developmental experiences that the respondent may be encountering related to training (Fields 2002) such as “provides me with challenging assignments”, “projects to develop and strengthen new skills”, and “managers made a substantial investment in you recently by providing formal training and development opportunities”.

### ***Role support from others***

Role support was measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = don't have such a person to 5 = very much) adapted from Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau (1980). This measure assessed work-based and social support an employee perceives that is available from their supervisor, coworkers, and spouse and/or family and friends. According to Lim (1996), this is one of the most widely used social support scales for a work context. Items were analyzed as a 12-item scale that is a composite of all social support (alpha of .918), and broken into three sub-scales to reflect source of role support for more in-depth analysis: supervisor (alpha of .951), coworkers (.939) and family/spouse (.941), and ranked such that family and spouse was the biggest source of role support (mean of 4.09), coworkers next (mean of 3.26) and supervisors last (mean of 3.17), a consistent pattern in both full-time and part-time respondents.

### ***Work family balance***

Work family balance was measured using a 14-item, five point Likert scale (1 = very little, 5 = very much) adapted from Thomas and Ganster (1995). This scale measures an employee's perception of control over demands and aspects of work and family responsibilities and allows for a reflection of multiple social roles (Fields 2002). It was adapted to reflect “senior” issues from the extant literature such as spousal interdependence, marriage, supporter dilemmas, and caring for an aging parent or other dependent relative. Reliability measures indicated an alpha of .844, and the scale had a mean score of 3.14, with no significant difference between full-time and part-time respondents.

### ***Control variables***

We controlled for several variables in our analyses. First, we controlled for years to retirement. Respondents were asked with an open-ended question “How many years until you retire from your current employer? The average time to retirement was 5.12 years for the overall sample, though full-time employees had much longer to retirement (6.43 years to retirement) compared to part-time employees at 1.85 years. Participating in bridge employment is becoming more common among younger retirees (62

years and younger) who are approaching retirement and who leave full-time career jobs are more likely than older workers (aged 62 and older) to participate in bridge jobs of a part-time status (Cahill et al. 2006). Out of this younger group, women are more likely than men their same age to accept a part-time bridge job. Not surprisingly, individuals under the age of 65 who are approaching retirement from a career job are more likely to engage in part-time bridge employment if company-related healthcare lacks portability, which holds true for both men and women (Cahill et al. 2006).

We also controlled for a number of demographic variables, including gender, age, tenure in the organization, and economic dependency. These have been demonstrated in previous research as factors associated with the acceptance of bridge employment (Adams and Rau 2004; Davis 2003; Doeringer 1990; Shultz 2001; Smyer and Pitt-Catsouphes 2007; Ulrich and Brott 2005; Weckerle and Shultz 1999). Gender was measured with the question “What is your gender?” (male was coded 1 and female, 2). Age was measured with an open-ended question “What is your age?” Tenure was measured with “How long you were employed or are currently employed at your ‘career job’?” with eight categories ranging from under 3 years (coded 1) to 30 years or longer (coded 8).

Economic dependency is an additive index based on four factors, following the approach that Brett, Clon, and Slocum (1995) suggested. In an effort to expand on economic dependency, a 4-item measure of number of dependents, marital status, amount the respondent’s income contributed to household income, and the perceived ease of being able to find a similar paying/benefits job was used and added together to get an economic dependency score to help control for issues of social mobility (Wollan 2002). These four factors are: to what extent does your income support your household (0-100%, then categorized such that 0-25% = 1, 26-50% = 2, 51-75% = 3, 76-100% = 4), number of dependents your household supports, how likely you could find a job with another employer that is similar to your current job (0-25% = 1, 26-75% = 0, 76-100% = -1), and do you receive benefits at your current job (coded yes = 1, no=0)? A range from 0 (little economic dependency on job) to 10 (high economic dependency on job) was realized, with 82.2% of respondents falling in the range of 2 to 6 (7.2% on 0 or 1, 10.6% on 7 to 10) and little differences in the dispersion between part-time and full-time respondents. Economic dependency has been shown in past research to be related to gender and income support, such that men showed greater economic dependency on their employment to provide for others (Wollan 2002). As the workforce continues to age, so does the need for an individual approaching retirement to have increased savings and an awareness of necessary financial planning (Alford, Farnen, and Schachet 2004; Schulte 2008; Weston 2008). Participation in bridge jobs by both men and women transitioning from full-time careers was common among low-wage individuals out of financial necessity; however, men approaching retirement from a full-time job were less likely than women to accept a bridge job if early retirement financial incentives were offered by the pre-retiree’s company (Cahill et al. 2006).

## RESULTS

The correlation matrix and descriptive statistics of our variables are presented in Table 1. To test all of the hypotheses, we performed hierarchical regression analyses. Table 2 presents these results. In the first step, control variables were entered. Control variables were employment status (full-time/part-time), years to retirement, gender, age, tenure with organization, economic dependency, and marital status. In the second step, the factor under consideration was added to the equation. As predicted, all hypotheses were supported. Hypothesis 1 predicted that intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase with advancing levels of education. Education significantly predicted intentions to participate in bridge employment ( $\beta = .209$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 13.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .220$ ). Thus, as predicted, education explained unique variance in the intentions to participate in bridge employment beyond that which was accounted for by the control variables.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase with more training and development opportunities. Training and development opportunities significantly predicted

intentions to participate in bridge employment ( $\beta = .228$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 14.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .230$ ). Thus, as predicted, training and development opportunities explained unique variance in the intentions to participate in bridge employment beyond that which was accounted for by the control variables.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree perceives that they are receiving role support from others. Role support from others significantly predicted intentions to participate in bridge employment ( $\beta = .217$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 13.08$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .217$ ). Thus, as predicted, role support explained unique variance in the intentions to participate in bridge employment beyond that which was accounted for by the control variables. In addition, further analysis of the source of the role support was explored given the nature of the role support scale. Of the three sources of role support tested, role support from coworkers had the greatest impact ( $\beta = .235$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 13.59$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .223$ ) followed by role support from supervisor ( $\beta = .168$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 12.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .204$ ). Interestingly, role support from family was not-significant ( $\beta = .076$ ,  $p = .126$ ).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that intentions to participate in bridge employment will increase when a pre-retiree perceives greater control over work and responsibility to family conflicts. Role support from others significantly predicted intentions to participate in bridge employment ( $\beta = .176$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $F_{8,378} = 12.80$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .213$ ). Thus, as predicted, role support explained unique variance in the intentions to participate in bridge employment beyond that which was accounted for by the control variables.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, we explored the extent to which four factors influenced the intentions of pre-retirees to consider work after retirement (i.e., bridge employment). Even with numerous other explanatory variables controlled, more education, more opportunities for training and development, role support (specifically from supervisors and coworkers), and a reduction in work-family conflict were significant predictors of an individual's intentions to engage in bridge employment after retirement. These findings provide support for identifying and targeting human resource efforts of employing and retaining a trained post-retirement workforce for part-time or project management types of work.

The contribution of this work lies in its interdisciplinary nature and adding to the base of knowledge of managing an aging workforce in the human resource and management literature (Feldman 1994; Han and Moen 1999; Holland and Gottfredson 1992; Ruhm 1989). The study demonstrates the need for career transition support in later career stages (Super 1980), particularly from employers seeking a flexible workforce with flexible work arrangements. Our findings demonstrated consistency with previous studies that have examined non-economic reasons as to why older workers participate in bridge employment, such as fulfillment of personal goals (Atchley 1975, 1976), intensity of commitment to work (Meyer, Allen, and Smith 1993; Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant 2001), and social belongingness and contribution (Binstock 1998; Davis 2003).

The strength of the importance of work-family conflict for this population is also interesting. Traditionally, much of the work-family conflict literature has focused on childcare and dual career issues of spouses. While we anticipated that work-family conflict would be present for this population, our mean result of 3.14 (on a 5 point Likert scale where 5 indicates more control and a 1 indicates very little control) indicates that there remains less control of work-family balance activities than might be assumed by those preparing for retirement. In our sample, 33.1% of respondents indicated that they felt they had control over work-family conflicts (scoring 3.50 – 5.00), 22.7% reported little control (scoring 1.00 - 2.50) and the balance scoring the neutral mid-point. Anecdotally, pre-retirees have indicated to us that issues like changing expectations of housework of the now retiring spouse, conflicts over how to spend time and retirement funds, and generational management of aging parents and grown children resurface in providing fertile

TABLE 1  
CORRELATION MATRIX OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTER-SCALE RELIABILITIES [N=387]

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
1	Intentions to Participate in Bridge Employment	4.28 (0.96)	[.866]												
2	Education	4.98 (1.32)	.244**	[n/a]											
3	Training Opportunities	4.40 (1.40)	.296**	.229**	[.810]										
4	Role Support from Others	3.51 (0.93)	.378**	.220**	.428**	[.918]									
5	Role Support Supervisor	3.17 (1.29)	.331**	.187**	.435**	.872**	[.951]								
6	Role Support Coworkers	3.26 (1.17)	.384**	.259**	.390**	.873**	.769**	[.939]							
7	Role Support Spouse/Family	4.09 (1.07)	.159**	.061	.158**	.584**	.210**	.238**	[.941]						
8	Work Family Balance	3.14 (0.82)	.180**	.097	.285**	.174**	.143**	.160**	.103*	[.844]					
9	Part/FullTime	0.72 (0.45)	.382**	.224**	.192**	.435**	.438**	.428**	.130*	.057					
10	Yrs to Retire	5.12 (4.18)	.310**	.040	.202**	.405**	.435**	.414**	.072	.495**					
11	Gender	1.60 (.49)	.054	-.020	-.080	.054	-.008	.033	.113*	-.062	-.051				
12	Age	54.07 (5.87)	-.115**	.177*	-.145**	-.130*	-.170**	-.144**	.024	-.152**	-.448**	-.083			
13	Tenure	4.95 (2.07)	-.060	.263**	.103*	-.006	-.016	.036	-.036	.000	-.216**	-.098*	.374**		
14	Economic Dependency	3.97 (1.89)	.104*	-.086	.113*	.165**	.071	.120*	.212**	.098	.066	-.129*	-.070	.018	

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

Note: Race was collected as a control variable, but was omitted from this correlation matrix when it was not significantly correlated with any of the non-control variables of interest listed above. Marital Status was collected as a control variable and included in further analysis because of its relationship to Role Support (.129\*) and with Role Support Family (.240\*\*).

**TABLE 2**  
**RESULTS OF HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS EXAMINING INTENTIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN BRIDGE EMPLOYMENT ON**  
**FOUR FACTORS<sup>3</sup>**

Variable	Step 2: Independent Effect				
	Control	H1	H2	H3	H4
Control					
Employment Status (FT/PT)	.298**				
Years to Retirement	.175**				
Gender	.089				
Age	.025				
Tenure	-.025				
Economic Dependency	.061				
Marital Status	.069				
Independent Effect					
H1: Education		.209**			
H2: Training Opportunities			.228**		
H3: Role Support (overall)				.217**	
a) Role Support (supervisor)					.168**
b) Role Support (coworkers)					.235**
c) Role Support (family)					.076
H4: Work Family Balance					.176**
R <sup>2</sup>	.183	.220	.230	.217	.213
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.168	.204	.213	.200	.197
Change in R <sup>2</sup>		.037	.047	.034	.030
F	12.11**	13.33**	14.09**	13.08**	10.93**
Df	7,379	8,378	8,378	8,378	8,378

<sup>a</sup> Entries are betas.

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

ground for work family conflict. Thus, we suggest that future researchers continue to consider the pre-retiree's work family conflict in models, and that those who study work family conflict investigate career transition conflict, and that of an aging workforce.

Another interesting finding of this study relates to the nature of bridge employment and the importance of the pre-retiree's employment status (part-time versus full-time). We controlled for employment status in our models and testing of the four main factors hypothesized, but the results of the overall model warrant consideration as well. The regression model indicated an  $R^2$  value of .146 ( $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .298$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for employment status and  $R^2$  value of .019 ( $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .175$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for years to retirement (compared to  $R^2$  values ranging from .021 to .047 and  $\beta$  from .168 to .228 for hypothesized independent variables). One-way Anova analysis comparing the part-timer's intentions to full-timer's intentions to participate in bridge employment indicated a significant difference between these two groups ( $F_{1,385} = 65.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Our results indicate that part-time employment prior to retirement generally yielded fewer intentions to continue work in retirement. On the other hand, many of the full-time employed pre-retirees seemed willing to step into part-time employment after retiring from their career jobs. Thus, it appears that part-time employment is truly seen as a "bridge" between full-time and non-working status. The results suggest that in terms of years to retirement, the further an employee is from retirement, the more likely they are to have intentions to work after retirement, but have diminishing expectations and intentions to work after retirement as that decision looms closer. We suggest that this may be related to diminishing health standards as one ages, and the diminishing uncertainty about the costs of retirement and funds available (the economic dependency argument). In other words, an employee six to eight years from retirement may be concerned that their retirement funds will not be adequate and will necessitate some form of bridge employment, but nearer to retirement, it is not unusual for retirement counselors to meet with pre-retirees and provide them with the specifics of their expected income. Additionally, given disengagement theories, a respondent is likely to see themselves as part of a workgroup until they move closer to retirement, when coworkers and supervisors might start tapering off interactions and work assignments in anticipation of the pre-retiree's future absence. At that point closer to retirement, respondents are already disengaging and have less intentions to continue the employment relationship, while focusing on non-work activities in the future.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the major implications for future research is the significance of the part-time versus full-time pre-retiree status in assessing future intentions to participate in bridge employment. More than just a control variable, we assert that this variable warrants further analysis and consideration as a moderating variable. Additionally, the importance of years to retirement draws attention to the need for researchers to consider this framing window when considering respondents and inclusion of their data, as accuracy of the predictions of intentions to participate in bridge employment appear to be different depending on the length time from actual retirement.

The findings also suggest that more attention is warranted on the source of role support and the actual impacts that coworkers and supervisors have when influencing employees. One can infer from this sample that while there is work-family balance concern, one statement being made is that "my family just doesn't understand my work-life" and provides much less of a supporting environment for working activities than comes from other sources. Are there ways to integrate family members more effectively to provide support for the working employee? Does it matter if family members are supportive or not?

## LIMITATIONS

Limitations in this study should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the design of the study was cross-sectional, and not longitudinal. Measuring intentions (of any nature) is an interesting

measure of a point in time, but as research in other areas such as turnover intentions has demonstrated, where intentions to quit accounts for less than 15% of turnover variance (Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000; Hom and Griffeth 1995), intentions are not the same as behavior. Further, the timing and limiting the sample to those closer to retirement should yield more accurate predictions of behavior, consistent with the timing of behavioral-intention theories (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980).

We were also cautious but unable to reduce the common method bias. All responses were from a self-reported survey. Finally, given the relatively low predictions of our four factors studied, taken in combination with the two significant control variables (employment status and years to retirement), there are most certainly additional variables that can be considered as having explanatory power in predicting intentions to participate in bridge employment.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study continues to build the base of knowledge in management literature on the phenomenon of “bridge employment” begun in earnest with Feldman’s (1994) work, and tied to numerous career models (i.e., Super 1980). While much has been done in the area of pre-employment and early employment socialization of newcomer employees, we suggest and demonstrate here that there is a career transition and socialization process, via role support, education, training and development, and work family balance issues, that arise again as employees near retirement and consider phasing out of career jobs and into part-time or project-based bridge retirement.

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## APPENDIX INTENTIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN BRIDGE EMPLOYMENT SCALE

<b>1 – Strongly agree</b>	<b>2 – Agree quite a lot</b>	<b>3 – Agree just a little</b>	<b>4 – I'm not sure</b>	<b>5 – Disagree just a little</b>	<b>6 – Disagree quite a lot</b>	<b>7 – Strongly disagree</b>
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**Using the scale above to answer the following questions, please choose the answer that fits you best:**

1. After I retire from my “career job”, I would like to work in long-term employment.
2. After I retire from my “career job”, I would like to work in part-time employment.
3. I do not want to work in any form of employment after I retire from my “career” job. \*
4. If I were to work after retirement, I am likely to work in the same/similar industry.
5. After I retire from my “career” job, I am likely to work for my current employer.
6. After I retire from my “career” job, I am likely to work for a former employer.
7. After I retire from my “career” job, I am likely to work for another employer.
8. If I were to work after retirement, I am likely to work for money.
9. If I were to work after retirement, I am likely to do volunteer work.

### **When I think about working after retirement:**

10. I expect that I will have to seek some form of paid employment once I retire.
11. I intend to continue working in some capacity after I have retired from this job.
12. I plan to be fully retired and not engaged in work for wages or salary once I retire.\*
13. I fear that my past experiences would not be valued when I think about working again after retirement.  
\*
14. When I think about going back to work after I retire, I dread having to start a new career from the bottom. \*
15. The thought of having to compete with a younger generation would keep me from working after retirement. \*
16. I would like to continue working after I retire because I enjoy the chance to contribute productively to society.
17. I plan to keep working after retirement because I enjoy having contact with people.
18. The thought of being able to use my current knowledge, skills, and abilities in another job gives me reason to continue working after retirement.
19. I see myself continuing to work after retirement because I anticipate losing a part of who I am once I retire from my current career/job.
20. When I think about continuing to work after retirement and describing myself to someone I don't know, I can see myself talking primarily about my work.

\* All item responses except items 5, 12, 13, 14, 15 are reverse-coded.