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**Images of older workers**

*Content, causes, and consequences*

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## Chapter 2

# Framing workforce aging by organizations and the news media

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## Abstract

**Despite that workforce aging is recognized as a key social and economic concern of developed countries, previous research has largely neglected the role of organizational and news media in the debate about this topic. Relying on a content analysis of five Dutch newspapers and the organizational media of 50 Dutch organizations ( $N = 1328$ ), this study traces variation in frames of older workers' employability. Results reveal that organizations in their organizational media attempt to avoid associations with problems related to older workers and highlight the solutions they offer, while news media are relatively more inclined to problematize the issue and victimize older workers. This study elucidates our understanding of how organizational and news media communicatively deal with older workers' employability, and how key actors drive frame-formation processes in both domains.**

## 2.1 Introduction

Stimulating the employability of older workers is considered one of today's and tomorrow's biggest challenges of most developed countries. The urgency of the topic contributed to several European governments introducing new policy measures, such as the postponement of the retirement age and abandoning possibilities for early labor-market exits (Piekkola, 2008). Given the profound impact of these changes on labor relations, policy reforms proved highly controversial and regularly stirred heated public debates (Grünell and Houtman, 2011). Especially in the aftermath of the economic crisis, rising unemployment rates among older workers put spotlights on the issue and placed organizations' attempts to handle the issue of an aging workforce under scrutiny (Kraan and Wevers, 2012).

Contrasting interpretations of older workers' employability might delay or hamper the achievement of agreement between diverse key governmental and organizational actors, which is necessary to successfully implement and execute policy measures (Grünell, 2009). Although destructive or one-sided media representations of problems and solutions related to an aging workforce therefore constitute a significant

barrier in the employability debate (Van Selm and Van der Heijden, 2014), previous studies have largely neglected the communication environment in which these interpretations are shaped and expressed (Anderson, 2015). If problems related to older workers' employability are trivialized in a media context, this may have negative consequences for the extent to which key organizational actors regard the issue as urgent and accordingly take appropriate action (Campbell, 2007; Taylor and Walker, 1998). The objective of this study is, therefore, to investigate how organizational and news media frame the issue of older workers' employability and how diverse actors bring different representations to the forefront.

Theoretically, this study takes a two-step approach to study how organizational and news media frame older workers' employability. In a first explorative step, we apply the well-established framing concept (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007) to the scarcely researched interplay of frame-formation processes in organizational and news media (e.g., Greenwood and Jenkins, 2013; Schultz et al., 2012). Second, to account for variation in how the issue of older workers' employability is framed, we trace the influence of differences between organizational and news media and source characteristics. We base our analyses on a content analysis of newspaper coverage and organizational media (annual reports and employee magazines) of Dutch organizations, in the timespan 2006 – 2013.

With this research, we offer at least three contributions to the literature. To begin, this study is first to provide a comprehensive insight into organizational and news representations of older workers. Second, moving beyond merely descriptive analyses, we aim to unravel the circumstances that are most likely to trigger problematic or one-sided representations. Here, we build on evidence from the framing literature about factors that account for frame variation (Scheufele, 1999) and acknowledge both micro- and macro influences on organizational and news (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) coverage. Finally, this study contributes to the understanding of the causes of frame variation in an organizational and news environment. The few extant studies that compare organizational and news frames mainly look at the evolvement and understanding of organizational crises (Schultz et al., 2012). The here-studied case is unique in that we track over time frame construc-

tion of an issue that is not pertinent to a specific organization, but will eventually impact the entire labor market and society.

## 2.2 Frames of Older Workers' Employability

To investigate how organizational and news media communicate about older workers' employability, framing theory offers a valid starting point. Framing theory has been applied to a wide variety of social phenomena (Bryant and Miron, 2004), amongst which issue-dynamics in the organizational and societal realm (e.g., Greenwood and Jenkins, 2013). A classical definition of the framing concept is offered by (Entman, 1993, p. 52), who refers to

“[selecting] some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”

With this, framing helps to understand how salient issues render their subjective meaning from interpretative and signifying representations.

Here, the conceptualization of diagnosis and prognosis as ‘core’ frames coined by Snow and Benford (1988) is noteworthy. Diagnostic frames allow for the identification of problem definitions and beg the question who experiences the consequences of the problem (i.e. the victim or problem holder). Prognostic frames involve the formulation of a solution to the problem and the ascription of responsible actors to carry out the solution. Taken together, this framework covers the central elements of Entman's classical definition, and proved to be a useful tool in analyzing frame variation across diverse contexts, ranging from social policy (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007), organizational communication (Schultz and Raupp, 2010), media representations of social groups (Snow et al., 2007) and parliament – media interactions (Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007).

In the context of this study, we focus on variation in problem and solution definitions of the employability issue of older workers across

organizational and news media, and across different sources. Specifically, we trace variation in the following three dependent variables. First, we are interested in the *comparison of general problem and solution articulations*. Second, as a central element of diagnostic framing, we look at who is seen as the problem holder. With older workers as our main focus of study, we trace the relative victimization of this group. Third, as a central element of prognostic framing, we look at the attribution of accountability for solutions to deal with an aging workforce. The attribution of accountability concerns the responsibility or answerability of actors for solving employability issues of older workers. Based on the knowledge that frames of attribution are especially salient in an organizational context (Hallahan, 1999), we focus our attention on the attribution of accountability to organizational actors.

In the following, we firstly sketch how general differences in organizational and news media logics may affect variation in these three frame clusters. Secondly, on a lower level of analysis, we discuss the influence of sources in organizational and news media on our dependent variables.

### **2.3 Organizational and News Media Frames of Older Workers' Employability**

Organizational and news logics might explain to what extent and how older workers are portrayed. To start, the construction of frames in organizational media is likely to result from attempts to design a favorable organizational image (e.g., Bortree et al., 2013; Hallahan, 1999; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2013). Organizations aim to build trust and comply with the demands of divergent actors, resulting in ritualized justifications in organizational outlets and in the institutionalization of corporate social responsibility departments and managers (Schultz and Wehmeier, 2010). This resonates in the types of frames organizations select when communicating about socially responsible or irresponsible behaviors. Organizational attempts to avoid negative associations with problems related to workforce aging is understandable, since age-intolerant policies and perceived age-discrimination climates not only pose risks for the organizational reputation, but are also shown to negatively influence overall company performance (Kunze et al., 2011).

Organizations may, in their organizational media, strategically attribute accountability for older workers' employability to other actors than themselves, such as politicians or individual older workers. After all, the acknowledgment of responsibility to address workforce aging implies that organizations commit themselves to some form of contribution to the issue. On the other hand, the rewards for communicating about the efforts individual organizations undertake to address workforce aging for the organizational reputation are considerable. By claiming accountability, organizations can convince both internal and external stakeholders of their corporate social responsibility. Good employer practices and the maintenance of a diverse workforce may not only improve access to new markets and legitimize an employer's reputation (Shore et al., 2009), but is also associated with improved financial performance (Bebbington et al., 2008). Indeed, the manner in which organizations communicate about sustainability issues has been shown to affect their marketplace success (Bansal and Clelland, 2004). These social and economic benefits illustrate why organizations in their communication tend to focus on their social and sustainable behaviors, hence engage in the framing of responsibility (Hallahan, 1999).

Based on these findings, we anticipate that organizations will disassociate themselves from perceived problems and withhold from victimizing older workers, in that way avoiding negative organizational associations that might cause reputational harm. Conversely, it can be anticipated that organizations try to improve the organization's reputation by stressing the opportunities the individual corporation offers and by focusing on accountability efforts.

These logics governing organizational media content are at odds with the journalistic news-production process. Contrary to the stakeholder approach of corporate communication, one of the traditional cornerstones of print mass media is to serve a broad audience (Deuze, 2005). News media form a less restricted communication environment, by offering a platform to multiple sources, actors, perspectives, and arguments related to organizational and societal issues (Cozma, 2015; Tiffen et al., 2013).

Nonetheless, the manner in which journalists frame social issues also follows certain logics. With financial motives growing stronger in media organizations, it becomes increasingly important that news

“sells” (Witschge and Nygren, 2009). In order to attract public attention, journalists focus on personification and dramatization of news events (e.g., Eilders, 2006; Strömbäck, 2008). Previous research has shown that when describing social issues, news media place a stronger emphasis on diagnosis compared to prognosis (Snow et al., 2007). Especially in comparison to organizational communication, news media are inclined to focus more on causes and consequences of problems (Schultz et al., 2012). In line with this, and based on the knowledge that negative events are particularly newsworthy (Galtung and Ruge, 1965), it can be anticipated that news media compared to organizational media more strongly victimize older workers and hold organizations responsible for the problems that this part of the workforce is facing on the labor market. We hypothesize:

- H1 Compared to news media coverage, organizational media coverage contains more prognostic framing, while news media coverage compared to organizational media coverage will contain more diagnostic framing.
- H2 Organizational media will victimize older workers to a lesser extent compared to news media.
- H3 Compared to news media, organizational media are more prone to attribute accountability to organizations, while news media compared to organizational media will attribute accountability to other actors (such as political actors, individual workers, and labor unions).

## 2.4 Influence of Source Characteristics on Frames of Older Workers

Next, on a lower level of analysis, this study traces the influence of sources in organizational and news media on variation in our dependent variables. We expect that differences in source characteristics amplify or attenuate the reliance on certain frames and that the propensities for selecting those sources differ in an organizational and media context. Framing processes are set in motion by interactions between



reporters and sources (Entman, 1991). Within media arenas, diverse actors compete for the promotion of their own agenda's and frames (Sheafer and Gabay, 2009), driven by the insight that favorable coverage is a prerequisite for public and policy influence (Baum and Potter, 2008). This frame competition is also likely to play a role in the debate about older workers' employability, where highly conflicting interests and perspectives are at stake (Grünell, 2009). The success of strategic attempts to create and influence frames applied by journalists compared to organizational professionals is likely to vary across contexts, given the above-outlined tension between news values and strategic organizational motives.

To deepen our insight into these processes, in this study we use a typology of source characteristics. First, because we aim to model the difference in problem and solution definitions, we look at the extent to which various sources cited in the content (e.g., governmental, societal and organizational actors) problematize the issue and the extent that organizational and news media offer a stage to these sources. Second, we differentiate between quoted and unquoted sources. Quoted sources embody specific and identifiable actors, cited in organizational and news media. Unquoted sources are less identifiable in nature. Analyzing these differences allows us to map the extent that (news) organizations hold responsibility for statements, or whether this can be ascribed to cited persons in organizational and news content. With regard to variation in framing elements, we take an explorative approach, since the limited amount of empirical research on this issue restrains us to formulate expectations. The following research question is formulated:

RQ1 How do diagnostic framing, victimization and the attribution of accountability vary across source characteristics (i.e., quoted vs. unquoted, problematization)?

In addition to the influence of source characteristics, we are interested in the question how two key actors in the employability debate promote divergent frames: Employers and older workers. First, employers hold a key position in the debate, since the acceptance and incorporation of policy measures are to a large extent dependent upon their willingness to do so (Vickerstaff et al., 2003). Employers have

been shown to hold stereotypical beliefs about older workers, with negative consequences for several organizational outcomes (e.g. Gordon and Arvey, 2002). Dutch employers are generally reluctant to invest in training and retention of older workers, but instead traditionally take measures to accommodate the workload of older workers, like reducing working hours and adopting early exit measures (Van Selm and Van der Heijden, 2013). Driven by governmental and societal pressures to adopt policies to stimulate sustainable employability and the retention of older workers, it is more likely that employers openly endorse and maintain responsible and sustainable age-policies, even though actual practices may be different (Loretto and White, 2006). Employers' perspectives on older workers' employability and the extension of working lives appear inherently opposed to the perspective of older workers themselves (Conen, 2013, p. 77). First, feelings of inequality due to age discrimination in the recruitment process and within the workplace are likely to play a significant role among older workers (Porcellato et al., 2010). Additionally, older workers might express concerns about policy reforms and the extension of their working lives, given that (older) workers fear that they will not be able to meet the physical and productivity demands when forced to prolong their working lives (Conen, 2013, p. 73). Based on these findings it can be anticipated that older workers are likely to express concerns regarding their present and future employability and emphasize their victimized position. Contrary, we expect that strategic organizational attempts to frame the issue in terms of solutions and claim accountability will be mirrored by employers' statements. Hence, we expect the following:

- H4 When cited in organizational and news media, older workers are more likely to address older workers' employability (a) in terms of diagnostic framing and (b) highlight the victimized position of older workers. On the contrary, employers' statements are more likely to (c) emphasize the accountability efforts the organization undertakes.

## 2.5 Method

### 2.5.1 Data

To test our hypotheses, a quantitative content analysis was carried out on eight years of organizational media and newspaper coverage (2006 – 2013). For the sample of news articles, we selected the five subscription-based newspapers in the Netherlands with the highest circulation rates (Algemeen Dagblad, De Telegraaf, de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Trouw) (Bakker and Scholten, 2009). These newspapers reach a large proportion of Dutch inhabitants and include outlets with both a popular and qualitative focus. News articles were selected from *LexisNexis* with the use of an extensive search string, encompassing references to older workers and/or aging within organizations and/or lifelong employability ( $N = 894$ ).

The set of analyzed organizational media were derived from 50 large-scale Dutch organizations. With the aim to give a comprehensive perspective on organizational communication about the issue at stake, we included both employee magazines and annual reports in our sample<sup>1</sup>. Following the reasoning that the employability issue of older workers is particularly salient and challenging for organizations where human capital is a major asset, we included organizations on the basis of their number of workers. More specifically, organizations that belonged to the top 100 of largest employers in the period 2011 – 2013 (Dekker, 2011,1) were requested to share their communication material. A number of 40 organizations were willing to participate. This number is supplemented with 10 large-scale organizations that employed at least 850 workers, selected through snowball sampling. Our final sample represents organizational outlets from diverse organizations in both the public ( $n = 26$ ) and private ( $n = 24$ ) sector<sup>2</sup>. From these organizations,

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<sup>1</sup>Our measure of organizational media consists of both annual reports and employee magazines. Employee disclosures in annual reports serve to maintain legitimacy in society (Kent and Zunker, 2013). Employee magazines contribute to the creation of organizational culture, and translate and validate managerial power to workers (Heller, 2009). In that way, employee magazines are an important vehicle for advertising managerial beliefs about aging workers and employability to individual workers (Kuokkanen et al., 2010)

<sup>2</sup>The data came from organizations in the following sectors of industry: Industry ( $n = 4$ ); Energy Supply ( $n = 2$ ); Construction Industry ( $n = 1$ ); Trade ( $n = 2$ ); Transport

we obtained all published annual reports ( $n = 400$ ). Our sample of employee magazines ( $n > 2000$ ) is as inclusive as possible, given the fact that not all organizations continuously published employee magazines in the complete research period. In a second step, both annual reports and employee magazines were searched with the identical search string used to select the newspaper articles. Only annual reports and employee magazine articles that deal specifically with older workers, aging within organizations and/or lifelong employability were used in our analyses. This resulted in a sample of 151 annual reports and 283 employee magazine articles. Together, annual reports and employee magazines constitute our measure of organizational media ( $N = 434$ ).

### 2.5.2 Coding Procedure and Reliability

The material was coded in two steps. In a first, inductive step, we developed our measurement instrument on the basis of a qualitative pre-study of organizational and news media ( $n \approx 200$ ). Following previous research (Vliegthart and Boomgaarden, 2007) we analyzed organizational and media content with a set of sensitizing questions (Snow and Benford, 1988), in order to identify the frame categories. Specifically, a set of 200 randomly selected organizational and news media items addressing older workers' employability were extensively and repeatedly analyzed. To identify the diagnostic frame categories, the following sensitizing questions were used: What is seen as the problem? What/ who causes the problem? What are causes and consequences? To identify the prognostic frame categories, we asked: *What should be done to solve the issue? How should the problem be resolved? Who is taking responsibility to solve the issue?* We analyzed the content in repetitive cycles until all central problems and solutions present in organizational and news content were mapped and we encountered no new issue-relevant frames.

In a second deductive phase, the identified frame categories were quantitatively coded. Distinct newspaper articles, annual reports, and employee magazine articles constituted the coding units, which were

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and storage ( $n = 4$ ); Information and communication ( $n = 2$ ); Financial services ( $n = 9$ ); Public administration and public services ( $n = 17$ ); Education ( $n = 2$ ); Health and welfare ( $n = 6$ ); other services ( $n = 1$ ).

all independently coded by 4 human coders. Coders received an extensive training and executed series of pre-tests resulting in iterative refinements of the category descriptions until an acceptable level of consensus on all the categories was ensured. Final reliability is established on a reliability sample of 74 randomly selected items. For all variables, coders reached at least 93% agreement. Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for intercoder reliability for all variables was above .61 (see Appendix). This level of reliability is comparable to previous content analytic studies that executed content analysis on complex content categories with multiple coders (Coe et al., 2014; Pedersen, 2014).

For the presentation of our results, we clustered the frame categories in six major diagnostic and prognostic frames that cover dominant problems and solutions that prevail within organizational and media debates in the Netherlands in the period of research.

### 2.5.3 Dependent variables

*Diagnostic (vs. prognostic) framing.* A diagnostic or prognostic framing element was considered to be present in a given coding unit when the character of problems related to older workers was addressed in accordance with the predefined problem or solution categories. Multiple frames could be coded per coding unit ( $\alpha = .61 - .79$ , see Appendix). For analysis, we rely on the percentage difference between diagnostic and prognostic frames<sup>3</sup>.

*Victimization of older workers.* Coders indicated the actor subjected to the consequences of the problem for every diagnostic frame, i.e., the victim of the perceived problem ( $\alpha = .60$ ). For analysis, we recoded this variable into the percentage of the relative victimization of older workers versus victimization of all other actors.

*Organizational accountability.* For every prognostic framing element, coders indicated the attribution of accountability, which deals with the question who is taking responsibility by offering opportunities to solve problems related to older workers' employability ( $\alpha = .65$ ). For analysis, we look at the difference between ascriptions of accountability to organizational actors versus other actors.

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<sup>3</sup>The following formula is used: diagnostic framing =  $(d / (d + p)) * 100$ . ( $D$  = diagnostic framing elements,  $P$  = prognostic framing elements).

### 2.5.4 Independent variables

*Quoted (vs unquoted) sources.* For each framing element, a source was coded. Frames can be reported as unquoted observations or comments from journalists or communication officers, but also as quotes from specific groups of actors, such as employers, workers, political and societal actors and actors from labor unions and recruitment agencies ( $\alpha = .68$ ).

*Problematizing.* To indicate whether sources take a problematized stance, we calculated the tendency of sources to overstate problems relative to their use of solution statements. The degree of problematization of sources was calculated by subtracting the number of prognostic statements from the number of diagnostic statements divided by all framing statements, with the value 0 meaning a perfect balance, and values above 1 referring to the degree that problems are overstated.

*Older workers.* A dummy variable was created differentiating between older workers as sources and all other sources ( $\alpha = .68$ ). *Employers.* A dummy variable was created differentiating between employers and executives as sources and all other sources ( $\alpha = .68$ ). For an overview of the descriptive statistics of frames and sources, please consult Table 2.1. *Organizational (vs news) media.* A dummy variable was created distinguishing between organizational media and news media.

*Control variables.*

*Time trend.* Time trend is measured in months, varying from the first month of the research period (1) to the last (96). *Unemployment.* Unemployment refers to the quarterly percentage of the Dutch workforce in the age category 45 – 65 without a job<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.5.5 Analysis

In order to address our hypotheses and research question, we structured our dataset into multiple layers. First, on the lowest level, we consider framing statements, which vary across source characteristics. Second, on the level of time, we take into account variation across months. On this level, we control for time factors and the influence of changing unemployment rates in the research period. Last, on the level of the

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<sup>4</sup>Derived from Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS]).

Table 2.1: Descriptive statistics of frames and sources in news media, annual reports, and employee magazines

|  | News<br>Media | Annual<br>Reports | Employee<br>Magazines | Total    |
|--|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------|
|  | <i>N</i>      | <i>N</i>          | <i>N</i>              | <i>N</i> |
| Diagnostic frames                                | 1035          | 44                | 145                   | 1224     |
| Prognostic frames                                | 1038          | 535               | 411                   | 1984     |
| Victimization of older<br>employees              | 624           | 6                 | 52                    | 682      |
| Victimization of other<br>actors                 | 411           | 38                | 93                    | 542      |
| Accountability<br>attributed to<br>organizations | 248           | 462               | 248                   | 958      |
| Accountability<br>attributed to other<br>actors  | 790           | 73                | 163                   | 1026     |
| Quoted sources                                   | 1246          | 44                | 373                   | 1663     |
| Unquoted sources                                 | 827           | 535               | 183                   | 1545     |
| Older workers<br>as sources                      | 81            | 0                 | 71                    | 152      |
| Employers as sources                             | 153           | 39                | 148                   | 340      |

*Note.* Absolute frequencies are reported.

(news) organizations in our sample, variation can be located within the type of content. We aggregated our data according to these levels<sup>3</sup>. Herewith, the analyses remain precise, while missing values that appeared on a weekly level were avoided (see for a similar approach: e.g., Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007). Given the hierarchical dependency of the data, it is likely that observations within groups are more similar, making multilevel modeling the obvious choice for data analysis (Hox, 2005). Moreover, a multilevel design allows us to test cross-level interactions between source characteristics and types of content. Our basic observations (i.e. sources and framing elements) are hierarchically nested within different (news) organizations and various time periods. However, months and organizations do not have a clear hierarchical structure. Each time period may appear in all organizations,

while different organizations are also coded within one time period. Therefore, we must apply a cross-classified multilevel design for linear regression. Maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) was used.

## 2.6 Results

### 2.6.1 Descriptive results

In the following, the results of our analyses attempting to explain framing of older workers' employability will be discussed. First, however, we look at the attention for the topic in organizational and news media in relation to unemployment rates and describe the absolute prominence of frames. As is shown in Figure 2.1, organizational attention follows the trend of news media till the year 2010. Afterwards unemployment rates among older workers increased. Concurrently with this trend, news media reported more on the topic in absolute terms, while attention in organizational media declined. Unemployment did not correlate significantly with attention for the topic in news media ( $r = .10, p = .815$ ). Conversely, the negative correlation between organizational media attention for the topic and unemployment rates is significant on the .10 level ( $r = -.67, p = .07$ )<sup>5</sup>.

We now turn to the absolute prominence of frames in organizational and news media. For the presentation of the results, we clustered the diagnostic framing elements into five categories (see Table 2.1). We start with a description of the identified diagnostic frame clusters.

1. *Privileging older workers*: Advanced systems of social security and progressive wage payment systems stand in the way of a more dynamic labor market. 2. *Abolishment of protection*: Lowering the level of employment protection and the outward shift of the retirement age is perceived problematic. 3. *Ageism and stereotypes*: Age-based stereotypes thwart the labor opportunities of older workers. 4. *Failure of inclusion*: Older workers are economically and socially disadvantaged compared to younger generations, both in their attempts to seek employment, as with regard to promotion chances and access to education within organizations. On the work floor, the inclusion of older workers

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<sup>5</sup>The correlations are based on aggregated data on the yearly level, given that annual reports are published only ones a year.



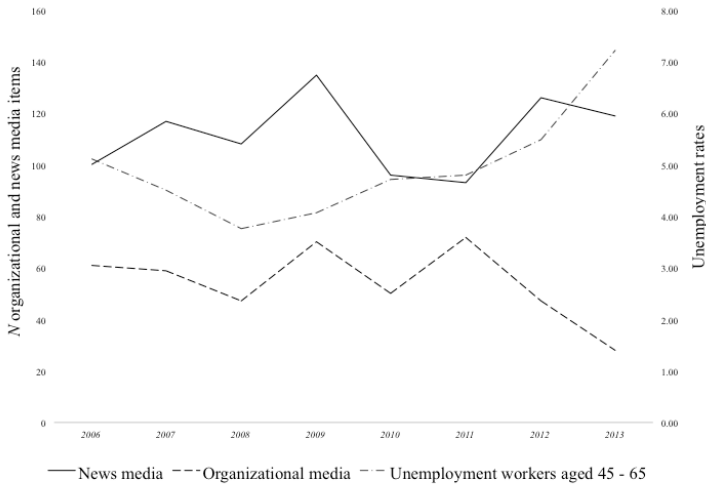


Figure 2.1: Attention for older workers' employability in organizational and news media and unemployment rates among workers aged 45 – 65

is hindered by conflicts with younger generations. *5. Loss of knowledge and employment value:* This frame problematizes the aging workforce for organizations and society, e.g. by emphasizing the consequences of knowledge depreciation. Problems are attributed to the diminished value of older workers for organizations, such as reduced levels of physical resilience and productivity. Immobility on the labor market causes stagnation of personal development and deteriorates employability.

As displayed in Table 2.2, the prominence of these diagnostic frames differs in absolute terms across organizational and news media. In 34.2% of the total share of diagnostic framing elements, news media emphasize the failure of inclusion. Contrary, and as could be expected, organizational media are more inclined to highlight the consequences of loss of knowledge and employment value (32.8%). Equally interesting is the finding that organizations only occasionally frame privileging older workers (7.4%) and abolishment of protective measures (4.2%) as a problem, while the prominence of these frames is considerably higher

in news media (resp. 17.5% and 14.2%).

Also prognostic framing elements are clustered into five major categories: 1. *Abolishment of privileged rights*: This frame focuses on solutions on the societal/legislative level, in particularly the necessity of breaking down rules that protect the labor position of incumbent older workers. Conventional protective measures and progressive wage payment structures should be broken down as a means of tackling employment barriers on the side of employers. 2. *Preserving accommodative measures*: The principle that older workers receive benefits based on their tenure and are accommodated in their workload is framed in prognostic terms. In order to cope with future labor market demands, early retirement pathways and attracting young workers are suggested as sound solutions. 3. *Combatting age stereotypes and stimulating age diversity*: Negative images and stereotypes about older workers should be addressed in order to better their chances on the labor market. Organizations should foster an age-diverse work climate. 4. *Fostering inclusion and retention*: This frame relates to the desirability of increasing the number of older workers that are working in organizations. Older workers should gain and maintain employment, in order to preserve their value for society and organizations. The postponement of the retirement age is encouraged, and programs that facilitate older workers in finding new employment are perceived desirable. Retaining older workers for organizations is deemed necessary to prevent knowledge depreciation. 5. *Improving working conditions, employability, and mobility*: In order to meet the demands of present and future labor markets it is argued to be necessary to invest in the employability potential and the life-long learning principle. Preparing and preserving a workplace with a safe and healthy working system and education opportunities for staff members of all age cohorts is perceived necessary to cope with the demands of an aging workforce.

Again, we find considerable variation in the use of prognostic frames across organizational and news content. In 32.2% of the total share of prognostic framing elements, news media emphasize the need of labor market inclusion. Not surprisingly, organizational media mainly stress the importance of improving working conditions, employability, and mobility (70.7%). Notice that the abolishment of privileged rights is rarely framed as a solution in organizational media (3.8%), while this

Table 2.2: Diagnostic and prognostic framing by type of content

|   | News media |       | Organizational media |       | Total    |       |
|---|------------|-------|----------------------|-------|----------|-------|
|   | <i>N</i>   | %     | <i>N</i>             | %     | <i>N</i> | %     |
| <b>Diagnostic framing</b>                             |            |       |                      |       |          |       |
| Privileging older workers                             | 181        | 17.49 | 14                   | 7.41  | 195      | 15.93 |
| Abolishment of protection                             | 147        | 14.20 | 8                    | 4.23  | 155      | 12.66 |
| Ageism and stereotypes                                | 94         | 9.08  | 9                    | 4.76  | 103      | 8.42  |
| Failure of inclusion                                  | 354        | 34.20 | 34                   | 17.99 | 388      | 31.70 |
| Loss of knowledge and employment value                | 259        | 25.02 | 124                  | 32.81 | 383      | 31.29 |
| <b>Prognostic framing</b>                             |            |       |                      |       |          |       |
| Abolishment of privileged rights                      | 279        | 26.88 | 36                   | 3.81  | 315      | 15.88 |
| Preserving accommodative measures                     | 125        | 12.04 | 87                   | 9.20  | 212      | 10.69 |
| Combatting age stereotypes, stimulating age-diversity | 57         | 5.49  | 66                   | 6.98  | 123      | 6.20  |
| Fostering inclusion and retention                     | 334        | 32.18 | 88                   | 9.30  | 422      | 21.27 |
| Improving working conditions and employability        | 243        | 23.41 | 669                  | 70.72 | 912      | 45.97 |
| Total diagnostic framing                              | 1035       | 49.93 | 189                  | 16.65 | 1224     | 38.15 |
| Total prognostic framing                              | 1038       | 50.07 | 946                  | 83.35 | 1984     | 61.85 |
| Total diagnostic and prognostic framing               | 2073       | 100   | 1135                 | 100   | 3208     | 100   |

frame is relatively prominent in news media (26.9%).

### 2.6.2 Explanatory results

This brings us to the results attempting to explain frame variation. Table 2.3 summarizes variation in diagnostic framing, victimization and

the attribution of accountability. We controlled for time and the level of unemployment among workers aged 45 – 65. Time significantly affects variation in the victimization of older workers. For each month that passed in our research period, the victimization of older workers increased with .15 percent. Apart from this effect, our controls do not significantly influence our outcome variables. The intra-class coefficients on the level of (news) organizations range between .14 and .35, indicating that for all reported models a considerable portion of the variance can be explained on the third level. Remarkably, the level of time accounts for only a limited amount of variation, with intra-class correlations ranging between .02 and .04 – indicating high consistency over time.

We now address our hypotheses assessing the influence of organizational and news media on frame variation (H1 – H3). First, we expected that organizations would be less inclined compared to news media to hold diagnostic frames (H1). Model 1 (Table 2.3) displays the factors accounting for variation in the degree of diagnostic framing. Here, we find that organizational media hold 16.7% less diagnostic frames compared to news media, keeping all other factors constant. Hence, we may accept H1. Second, we expected that organizational media would be less prone to victimize older workers compared to news media (H2). Model 2 explains variation in the degree that older workers are victimized. As expected, organizations tend to avert attention from the victimized position of older workers by focusing attention on other actors. Precisely, organizational media are 28.6% less likely to victimize older workers compared to organizational media, offering support for H2. Third, we predicted that within organizational media, the accountability efforts of organizations are stressed, while news media attribute this accountability to other actors, such as politics or individual workers (H3). Here, we consult Model 3, which presents factors accounting for the attribution of organizational accountability. Again, our hypotheses regarding the main effect of the type of media can be unambiguously confirmed. Controlling for other factors, there is a 54.1% higher chance to find the attribution of accountability in organizational media compared to news media.

We now address our research question assessing the influence of source characteristics (RQ1). We answer this question by discussing

Model 1 - 3 (Table 2.3) in order of appearance. In Model 1 (diagnostic framing), we find logically a significant main effect of the extent that sources problematize on overall diagnostic framing. To model the contingency of the extent that (news) organizations in our sample report sources that problematize the issue of older workers' employability, we allowed a random slope of this source characteristic on the (news) organization level. The significant variance of the slope points to considerable between group variation, meaning that the (news) organizations in our sample indeed differ in their tendency to report sources that problematize the issue. Subsequently, we added a cross-level interaction term between problematization and organizational (vs. news) media to the fixed part of the model. This coefficient is significant, indicating that organizational media tend to report less problematized sources compared to news media, resulting in less overall diagnostic framing.

We now look at Model 2 (victimization of older workers). Here we find that quoted sources appear to be important advocates of the victimization perspective in organizational communication. Specifically, quoted sources compared to unquoted sources are 9.7% more likely to victimize older workers, keeping all other factors constant.

Last, with regard to the attribution of organizational accountability (Model 3), analyses yielded a significant interaction between quoted sources and organizational (vs news) media. This indicates that quoted sources in organizational media are 22.1% less likely to attribute accountability to organizational actors compared to unquoted sources, over and above effects in news media. This means that attribution of accountability of organizations is mainly stressed in organizational media in unquoted parts. This finding indicates that quoted sources within organizational communication tend to attribute responsibility to other actors, and therefore might not perfectly align with the dominant organizational vision.

This brings us to our hypothesis assessing the influences of employers' and older workers' statements on frame variation (H4abc). First, we expected that older workers would rely on diagnostic framing (H4a). However, Model 1 displays no main effect of older workers' statements on diagnostic framing. We do find an interaction effect between organizational media and older workers' statements, indicating that older

Table 2.3: Multilevel models explaining frame variation of older workers' employability

|                                | Model 1            |               | Model 2                       |               | Model 3                       |               |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
|                                | Diagnostic framing |               | Victimization older employees |               | Attribution of accountability |               |
|                                | <i>B</i>           | ( <i>SE</i> ) | <i>B</i>                      | ( <i>SE</i> ) | <i>B</i>                      | ( <i>SE</i> ) |
| <b>Fixed part</b>              |                    |               |                               |               |                               |               |
| Older employees                | -2.49              | (3.78)        | 21.92                         | (8.27)**      | -12.27                        | (7.35)        |
| Employers                      | -4.54              | (2.27)*       | -17.65                        | (5.74)**      | 25.55                         | (4.04)***     |
| Quoted sources                 | -2.16              | (1.85)        | 9.73                          | (3.90)*       | -3.23                         | (3.37)        |
| Problematization               | 18.61              | (2.31)***     | 1.31                          | (1.11)        | 0.02                          | (0.94)        |
| Organizational (vs news) media | -16.68             | (3.63)***     | -28.61                        | (8.20)***     | 54.10                         | (9.78)***     |
| Unemployment                   | -0.52              | (0.91)        | -1.15                         | (2.05)        | -0.56                         | (1.58)        |
| Time trend                     | 0.03               | (0.04)        | 0.15                          | (0.08)*       | 0.03                          | (0.06)        |
| Older employees X org. media   | 13.19              | (6.12)*       | 18.33                         | (13.75)       | -12.07                        | (11.58)       |
| Problematization X org. media  | -6.65              | (2.59)*       | 1.17                          | (1.95)        | -1.65                         | (1.54)        |
| Quoted sources X org. media    | 0.82               | (3.21)        | -3.57                         | (8.90)        | -22.10                        | (5.49)***     |
| Constant                       | 42.08              | (2.29)***     | 50.62                         | (5.47)***     | 23.37                         | (8.27)**      |
| <b>Random part</b>             |                    |               |                               |               |                               |               |
| $\sigma_m$                     | 3.88               | (1.98)*       | 9.95                          | (3.22)*       | 17.52                         | (2.65)*       |
| $\sigma_t$                     | 3.12               | (1.14)*       | 13.28                         | (3.55)*       | 4.51                          | (2.56)        |
| $\sigma_p$                     | 5.04               | (0.88)*       |                               |               |                               |               |
| Intraclass correlation level 3 |                    |               |                               |               |                               |               |
|                                | 0.14               |               | 0.18                          |               | 0.35                          |               |
| Intraclass correlation level 2 |                    |               |                               |               |                               |               |
|                                | 0.04               |               | 0.04                          |               | 0.02                          |               |
| Log likelihood                 |                    |               |                               |               |                               |               |
| Null Model                     | -6172.84           |               | -3647.87                      |               | -4671.25                      |               |
| Log likelihood                 |                    |               |                               |               |                               |               |
| Full Model                     | -5593.71           |               | -3612.91                      |               | -4619.21                      |               |
| <i>N</i> level 3               | 45                 |               | 34                            |               | 45                            |               |
| <i>N</i> level 2               | 674                |               | 425                           |               | 610                           |               |
| <i>N</i> level 1               | 1221               |               | 701                           |               | 921                           |               |

Note. Unstandardized coefficients (*B*) are reported from cross-classified multi-level models using MLE estimation; Standard errors between brackets; Problematization, time trend and unemployment are centered at their grand means;  $\sigma_m$ ; variation on the level of the type of (news) organizations;  $\sigma_t$ ; variation on the level of time;  $\sigma_p$ ; random slope 'problematization' across (news) organizational types; org.refers to organizational. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

workers' statements exert a stronger influence on the share of diagnostic framing elements within organizational compared to news media. Thus, we can only partly confirm H4a. Second, we expected that older workers would be likely to stress the victimized position of older workers in their statements (H4b). In Model 2 we find strong support for this hypothesis. Compared to other sources, older workers are 21.9% more likely to emphasize victimization. Contrary, compared to other sources, employers are 17.7% less likely to victimize older workers instead of other actors. Last, we anticipated that employers would emphasize the accountability efforts of organizations when cited (H4c). This indeed appeared to be the case. When employers are cited, this increases the likelihood that organizational accountability is emphasized with 25.6% (Model 3).

## 2.7 Discussion

This study sets out to investigate how organizational and news media frame older workers' employability and trace the factors that account for variation in these representations. Results tell us that relative to news media, organizational media tend to focus on solutions offered by the organization to address issues related to workforce aging and avoid associations with problems regarding older workers' employability.

The finding that organizations in their organizational media are inclined to disassociate themselves from problems in the employability debate was anticipated, and firstly surfaced in the amount of attention paid to the topic. In absolute terms, organizational media attention for the issue diminished in the research period, while unemployment problems of older workers became more pressing and attention in the news media for the issue increased. Arguably, the economic crisis changed the experienced urgency of older workers' employability for organizations, instigating them to devote fewer resources to all kinds of programs dealing with employability (see Conen et al., 2011). Conversely, higher levels of unemployment signaled the importance of older workers' employability for journalists, making it a more salient and urgent topic that requires journalistic responsiveness.

Second, also our frame analysis of organizational communication outlets indicated that organizations disassociate themselves from prob-

lems in the employability debate. Within a news environment, the employability issue is relatively more often framed in diagnostic terms, and the emphasis is placed on older workers' victimized position. Contrary, organizations focus in their organizational media on the responsible efforts they undertake to address workforce-aging issues. This indicates that Dutch organizations take the employability issue of older workers seriously. Organizations in our sample undertook efforts to claim accountability for maintaining and fostering older workers' employability, which corresponds with the finding that in absolute terms, Dutch employers have adopted a relatively large amount of measures to deal with an aging workforce (Van Dalen et al., 2009).

Our descriptive results show that on several domains, organizational and news frames are highly opposed. First, while the existence of widespread ageism on the Dutch labor market (Andriessen et al., 2014) is emphasized as a key labor market concern within news coverage, organizations generally do not communicate about this problem, nor are suitable solutions discussed. Second, the most dominant prognostic frame found in our organizational sample – Improving working conditions, employability and mobility – represent much needed responsible policy measures, but do not correspond with the pattern of solutions suggested in the news arena, such as the abolishment of employment protection measures.

In addition, our results show that source characteristics significantly affected frame-formation processes on organizational and news media agendas. This study shows that the relative success of frame-building efforts of sources differs in organizational and news media contexts. To be precise, we found that journalists were more inclined to select certain sources that problematize the issue, which affected the overall diagnostic nature of frames used. The reliance on these types of sources is likely to result from journalistic efforts to make the issue attractive for a larger audience (Nisbet et al., 2003). Furthermore, we found that quoted sources in organizational media did not align with the organizational logic, which was clearly staged by the organization in unquoted parts of the text. The emphasis in organizational media on the opportunities the individual organization offers with regard to the employability of older workers is therefore mainly stressed by the organization but to a lesser extent supported by quoted individual (older) work-



ers. This indicates that we might have caught organizations in their dilemma to be transparent and offer a stage to diverse internal and external stakeholders, while simultaneously manage their strategic aims (Christensen, 2002).

Last, the pattern of disassociation with problems related to older workers' employability as found in organizational media was mirrored by employers' statements in organizational and news coverage. Employers de-emphasized problems and refrained from victimizing older workers, but instead frequently highlighted the accountability efforts of individual organizations. In contrast to this, older workers highlighted their victimized position and withhold from ascribing accountability to organizations. Older workers themselves appeared to be important advocates of diagnostic frames in organizational media, signifying that they express an alternative perspective on the issue in an organizational context.

These differences in frames in both domains may cue older workers with conflicting perspectives on how to improve their labor-market situation. The emphasis in news media on problems prevailing on the labor market, opposed to the solution-oriented perspective in organizations, could prompt older workers to stay in place, fearing unemployment if they seek out employment with an alternative employer. Contrary, unemployed older workers may experience feelings of injustice when hiring practices do not line up with claimed responsible organizational behaviors. These contrasting perspectives therefore potentially contribute to the experienced mismatch between views of employers and older workers, which is claimed to hamper older workers' employability success (Patrickson and Ranzijn, 2000).

There are a number of shortcomings to this study. First, we studied organizational media of 50 organizations, which is not large enough for a representative picture of all organizational media. Second, the sample of organizational material was drawn from information that organizations voluntarily shared, making the sample prone to self-selection bias. Third, it should be acknowledged that organizational and news media serve different goals, which in part may explain the variation we found in diagnostic and prognostic frames. Indeed, the finding that organizational and news media differ in the extent that they problematize social issues, ties in with previous research (Bortree et al., 2013; Schultz et al.,

2012). We encourage future research to investigate how the issue is framed in media types that serve similar goals, such as financial and popular news.

This study adds to the framing literature in several ways. Theoretically, our findings contribute to insights into the dynamic and divergent manner with which organizational and news media respond to one of today's most pressing social and economic issue. By explicitly comparing organizational and news frames, we follow in the footsteps of the few studies that try to understand logics guiding discourses in these distinct - but highly interrelated - domains (Greenwood and Jenkins, 2013). Merely due to our comparative approach, we were able to shed light on prevailing gaps in the manner that organizational and news media resonate and reinforce beliefs about older workers' employability. Practically, our results stress the need for organizations to acknowledge and respond to concerns about workforce aging prevalent in the broader news media environment in which they operate. Since the success of employability measures is dependent upon negotiated agreements between societal actors, employers and workers (see Euwals et al., 2009), a more coherent perspective on challenges and suitable solutions in organizational and public domains constitute a crucial step towards fostering older workers' employability.

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## 2.9 Appendix

Table 2.4: Intercoder reliability per variable

|  | Krippendorff's<br>alpha | Average pairwise<br>percent agreement |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Diagnostic frames</i>                                 |                         |                                       |
| Privileging older workers                                | 0.68                    | 95.61%                                |
| Abolishment of protection                                | 0.61                    | 96.62%                                |
| Ageism and stereotypes                                   | 0.61                    | 93.24%                                |
| Failure of inclusion                                     | 0.76                    | 96.54%                                |
| Loss of knowledge and employment value                   | 0.65                    | 96.29%                                |
| <i>Prognostic frames</i>                                 |                         |                                       |
| Abolishment of privileged rights                         | 0.70                    | 96.10%                                |
| Preserving accommodative measures                        | 0.61                    | 95.80%                                |
| Combatting age-stereotypes, stimulating age-diversity    | 0.73                    | 96.51%                                |
| Fostering inclusion and retention                        | 0.65                    | 97.29%                                |
| Improving working conditions, employability and mobility | 0.74                    | 95.10%                                |
| Sources  | 0.68                    | 95.40%                                |
| Victimization older employees                            | 0.60                    | 95.65%                                |
| Organizational accountability                            | 0.65                    | 95.03%                                |