

Comparative Analyses of Diversities at Work: Insights from a Life Course Perspective

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Stream Outline

Throughout the social, cultural, and historical transformations of recent decades, individual lives have become more fluid, challenging what has previously been considered as the standard life course trajectory. The classical tripartite structure of the life course – differentiating between a preparatory phase of education – a long phase of continuous employment – and an institutionalized post-employment phase in retirement is increasingly coming apart (Marshall and Mueller 2002).

These changes are particularly reflected in transformations in work life: women and men come in and out of work at different times, age boundaries of employment become blurred and transitions and turning points in people's lives take on new meanings. Even work itself has changed in nature, as secure continuous employment is increasingly being replaced by atypical, non-permanent work and individual employment careers have become less predictable. At the same time, these transformations have led to increasing ambiguities between the development of employment careers and relevant transitions in private lives. As lives unfold over time, an individual's multiple life course trajectories (e.g. employment, family, care, and education trajectories) can and do occur in tandem at any given point in time and place.

Individual decisions under these changed societal conditions are characterized by the dialectic relationship between persistent social influences and situational restrictions, on the one hand, and the increasing importance of human agency and individual choice, on the other hand.

This increased complexity poses a new set of challenges in the workplace, as sustainable and effective HRM policies will need to consider these changes in the life course trajectories of their employees, and to design measures that are in line with individual demands and expectations. A life course perspective is therefore important for understanding, diverse employment trajectories, the significance of different transitions and turning points in people's lives across time, and more broadly the dynamic nature of diversity.

This stream explores the increasingly complex and intertwined diversities at work from a life course perspective. It invites papers that examine a number of possible interrelated themes addressing life course issues, including (but not restricted to):

- Transitions in and out of work (e.g. diverse forms of parenthood, care, education, illness, disability, retirement and redundancy)
- The challenges and experiences of a multi-generational workforce
- Impact of government and organizational policies to support life course transitions (e.g. flexi-security)
- Time, biographies, and identities across the life course
- Life course and human capital (e.g. highly skilled workers; vulnerable workers)
- Gender, leadership and diversity management across the life course

Questions addressed could include, for example

- How can the life course best be conceptualised within research and debates on diversity at work?
- How do the challenges to diversity, equality and inclusion change as workers move through the life course?
- How do diverse groups experience life course transitions and turning points?
- What are workplace assumptions about diversity and the life course?

- Can leadership be flexible enough to support life course transitions and take account of biographies in the making?

In order to systematically compare the effects of variations in nation-specific contexts on both individual life course trajectories as well as the demands for effective HRM policies, we especially welcome comparative analyses that contrast most recent developments in different modern societies.

Keywords

Life course, biographies, transitions, social change, generation

References

Marshall, VW and Mueller, MM. (2002). *Rethinking social policy for an aging workforce and society: Insights from the Life Course Perspective*. Discussion Paper No. W/18, Canadian Policy Research Networks.