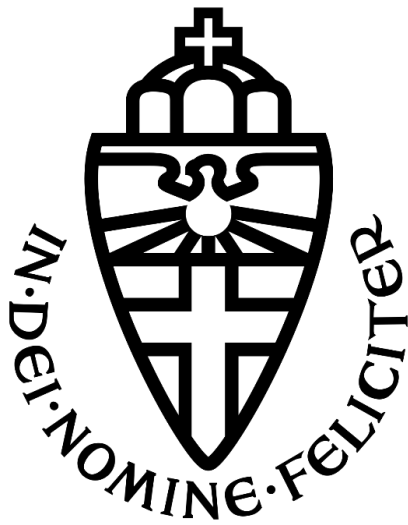


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**Bridging Retirement – An Analysis on the Dynamic Process of Bridge
Employment and its Impact on Retirees’ Identities**



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1. Introduction

In times of globally changing demographics organizations have to face an increasingly ageing or ‘graying’ workforce that is approaching the retiring age (Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Veth et al., 2017). According to Veth et al. (2017), in “European countries, the proportion of workers aged 55–64 year[s] old has increased from 36.9% in 2000 to 46.3% in 2010, with an average annual growth rate of 2.3%” (p.2778). This enormous annual growth of older workers, who are entering the stage of retirement can be explained, among others, by aid of lower birth rates, longer life expectancies and an extended “age of final labour market withdrawal” (Taylor & Earl, 2015, p. 252). Furthermore, due to an increasing number of older workers who are simultaneously approaching the retirement age, the average of years that are spent in retirement increases as well (Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Price, 2000). This led to the point that recently managerial literature shed light on the social phenomena of retirement and how this phase is individually adjusted, shaped and experienced by retirees. One adjustment to the process of retirement might be to take on bridge employment, which is increasingly done by retirees (Wang & Shultz, 2009; Zhan et al., 2009). As research suggests, almost half of the retirees “choose to engage in some form of bridge employment” (Zhan et al., 2009, p. 374) instead of full retirement. Nonetheless, recent literature fails to capture the dynamic process that lies behind the phenomenon of bridge employment (Wang & Shultz, 2009). Moreover, engaging in bridge employment involves various different experiences and narratives of retirees whose identities might be influenced by this process as well. In general, the process of bridge employment is widely under-researched and it is not known how the dynamic and individual process of bridge employment might influence the identity of retirees.

Retirement has long been oversimplified as “an abrupt transition from work to non-work” (Byles et al., 2013, p. 25) and retiring is often traditionally translated into a “withdrawal from productive work” (Byles et al., 2013, p. 25). This outdated understanding often declares retirement as being solely about non-work (e.g. Silver, 2018) and it does not take into account trends of individualization of the retirement process itself, as for instance taking on a “bridge job”. The latter is often simply demarcated as some kind of work after retirement that is paid (Wang & Shultz, 2009). Bridge employment however can be understood as a transitional process of “employment that takes place after a person's retirement from a full-time position but before the person's permanent withdrawal from the workforce” (Kim & Feldman, 2000, p. 1195). Although the phenomena of bridge employment occurred already some time ago, it is regarded as a relatively new academic research field which has gained prominence over the last

few years in managerial, psychological and gerontological literature (e.g. Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Kim & Feldman, 2000).

Contemporary scientific literature predominantly focuses on clarifying quantitative predictors, antecedents and drivers of retirees to take on bridge employment (e.g. Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Kim & Feldman, 2000; Wang & Shultz, 2009; Zhan et al., 2009). These predictors have been categorized based on micro-level personal factors, meso-level work-related or organizational factors and macro-level or societal influencing factors (Wang & Shultz, 2009). Various studies share the common denominator that first of all, a good health status, but also financial pressure were two of the most important drivers behind the choice of taking on a bridge job (Zhan et al., 2009). Other drivers, e.g. education, gender, family, work stress and work attitudes, also affect the decisions of taking on a bridge job (Beehr & Bennett, 2014). When solely focusing on the quantifiable predictors of bridge employment, the latter is often treated as a static and neutral “informed decision-making process” (Wang & Shultz as cited in Beehr & Bennett, 2014, p. 116) of retirees. This neglects the individual and dynamic narratives and contextual embeddedness of retirees in particular historical-, socio- and economic national contexts. As often criticized by scholars, bridge employment “could also be a ‘bumpy’ process” (Wang & Shultz, 2009, p. 194), leading to retirees different experiences, perceptions and shapes of bridge employment.

Consequently, when engaging in bridge employment, the identity of retirees might be influenced in various ways. According to MacKenzie and Marks (2018), the general relevance of an occupation to individuals’ identities can be seen by aid of “a strong emotional attachment to work” (p.41). However, if the ‘core identity’ of retirees is “inseparable from their work, stopping or altering this commitment to work through retirement can be difficult” (Silver, 2018, p. 9). Beehr and Bennett (2014) furthermore argue, a retiree might have a preference for either the new bridge employee’s identity or the identity that has been developed grounded on their former career occupation. Thus, the transition from working full-time to retirement can also be regarded as a particular ‘role exit’ according to Ashforth (2000), which is paired with insecurities. These are generated by leaving a job or occupation that is helping retirees to “define who they are for themselves as well as for other[s]” (Beehr & Bennett, 2014, p. 121). This understanding of a pre-defined identity built for oneself and others indicates that identity must be understood as being co-constructed (Ybema et al., 2009). Furthermore, this co-constructed identity is a rather dynamic interplay that passes through a “wide variety of inter-textual identification processes to develop an ongoing sense of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in

interaction with their social environments” (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 305). When the social environments change through the process of retiring or bridge employment, the existing co-constructed concept of retirees’ identity might change accordingly.

Nevertheless, contemporary literature does not investigate bridge employment as a dynamic process as well as the various ways in which bridge employment impacts the identity of retirees. Hence, further investigation on the actual process behind bridge employment in its full complexity is needed as well as the influence on the retiree’s identities. This led to the following research question: *How does bridge employment as a dynamic process influence the identity of retirees?* By answering this research question this study scientifically contributes to closing the literature gap by studying bridge employment as a dynamic process that influences and is influenced by individuals. This was done by applying the theoretical lens of a rite de passage through which the transitional process of bridge employment was analyzed. Further contextual, personal and societal factors that might influence retiree’s identity have been identified. In this way, this study theoretically adds upon contemporary bridge employment related studies by viewing bridge employment as a dynamic process through the lens of a rite de passage, which contributes to a more diversified picture of bridge employment within literature as well as a deeper understanding of the dynamic identity of retirees. Moreover, it is relevant to gain knowledge on this process since it will enrich the current quantifiable insights by aid of more dynamic and contextualized data.

This study furthermore aims to provide more practical insights into the complex process of bridge employment. Organizations will be more likely to hire older workers, as a general lack of skilled workers will be more prominent in the upcoming years due to an ageing workforce (Mazumdar et al., 2018). Getting more insights in the ways bridge employment influences retirees, organizations might improve their recruitment strategies in a supportive manner as well as facilitate retirees with bridge jobs that facilitate a smoother transition from work into a new stage of career or into retirement.

In order to do so, a qualitative research method approach was applied to gather valuable data in the context of the German workforce by aid of 10 semi-structured interviews with retirees or bridge employees (these two terms are hereafter used interchangeably throughout the study). In this research an inductive approach was applied and a rather interpretivist epistemological perspective was followed, which allowed for an exploratory research question (Myers, 2013).

After this chapter has briefly introduced the overarching research topic and research goals, the most important theories used throughout this research are further elaborated on in the following chapter. Chapter three then presents a description of the methodology employed during this research. Following, the results of the analyses will be presented and further discussed in chapter five. Finally, this study will provide managerial implications and will conclude by a personal reflection in chapter six.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides an overview of the most critical theories that are prevailing in contemporary literature and form the backbone to this research. The following section starts with the process of retirement and its static nature in contemporary literature and is followed by discussing the concept of identity of retirees. Finally, the concept of bridge employment will be elaborated on and zoomed into through the theoretical lens of a rite de passage.

2.1 The Context of Bridge Employment: Retirement

This study aims to understand retirement in a more dynamic manner by considering the ways in which it is constantly re-defined or shaped by retirees, for example by taking on bridge employment after officially being retired. Before taking on bridge employment, retirees usually enter the stage of being ‘officially retired’ which is thus part of the dynamic process of bridge employment. According to Byles et al. (2013), contemporary retirement literature offers striking shortcomings since it picks up an outdated and homogenous assumption of traditional retirement while not considering the individual experiences and the ways in which retirees attach meaning to the processes underlying retirement. In the upcoming sections of this literature review, firstly, a political and historical development of retirement is provided. Secondly, large shortcomings of contemporary literature regarding the process of retirement are presented. Lastly, discourses of age that underlie the process of retirement are further elaborated.

2.1.1. Development of the Understanding of Retirement

The term of retirement can be traced back to the sixteenth century, in which it has been understood as the “retreat of armies” (Silver, 2018, p. 4). In the following, retirement has often been associated with, among others, “withdrawing, fleeing from engagement, and receding from companionship in a desire to detach” (Silver, 2018, p. 4). Later on, this association was picked up in the disengagement theory, which proposes that with growing age a “mutual

withdrawal between older people and society” (Silver, 2018, p. 5) comes along. Thus, being retired and receiving a pension was often simplistically translated into the withdrawal or detachment from society. However, the social and economic context in which older workers retire changed drastically during the course of the last few decades (e.g. Hofäcker & Naumann, 2015). For example, along with developing retirement reforms, the official retirement age has been raised from 65 to 67 years, carried into effect in 2021 (Veth et al., 2018). These political and socio-demographic changes indicate that retirement is always embedded in a certain context and undergoes periods of multi-level changes in a frequent manner.

Early attempts of outlining retirement-related literature already indicated that the process of retirement cannot simply be understood as a single ‘event’ but rather as a process “from career employment to a bridge job or jobs and eventually to permanent withdrawal from the labor force” (Cahill et al., 2013, p. 385). Moreover, recent studies fairly criticize the static character of the outdated definition of retirement and try to engage with the process that lies behind the social phenomenon of retirement (e.g. Barnes & Parry, 2004; Wang & Shultz, 2009).

2.1.2. Retirement as an Individualized Adjustment Process

Retirement has also often been recognized as a rational decision-making process and a “motivated choice behavior” (Wang & Shultz, 2009, p. 174). Retiring is thus on equal terms with the choice of withdrawing from work as well as the choice of reducing “psychological commitment to work” (Wang & Shultz, 2009, p. 174). This positivistic assumption of retirement as an informed decision-making process offers striking limitations. Firstly, not all decisions that are taken around retirement are voluntarily made by retirees, who, secondly, are not always informed about all possible consequences of their decisions (Wang & Shultz, 2009). As a critique against that rational and static understanding of retirement, Cahill et al. (2013) emphasize the existence of diverse forms of retirement, e.g. gradual retirement. This is defined as “both partial retirement (a change in employer and usually a reduction in hours)” (p.386) and phased retirement, which refers to a reduction of working hours with one employer. Even though Cahill et al. (2013) acknowledge the different shallow forms retirement can take on and that the meaning of retirement might differ among individuals, they still define retirement as withdrawal from the workforce. This perspective on retirement has been criticized various times for its neutrality while neglecting the intra-categorical differences, e.g. age and gender, among the group of retirees which might contribute to the ways in which retirees shape their own process of retirement (Price, 2000; Taylor & Earl, 2015; Wang & Shultz, 2009).

This study adopts the definition of retirement as being an individualized adjustment process which is embedded in a certain societal context that is additionally influenced or surrounded by many prevailing discourses, as for instance the discourses surrounding age and ageism. The adjustment process perspective on retirement has been demarcated by Wang and Shultz (2009). Within this perspective, retirement is perceived as a “process through which retirees get used to the changed aspects of life in the transition from work to retirement and achieve psychological comfort with their retirement life” (Wang & Shultz, 2009, p. 177). This processual perspective acknowledges retirement as some form of ‘transition’ into a new phase of life or work, however, contemporary literature regarding this perspective mostly focuses on quantifiable predictors that might foreshadow decisions to take on new career development stages (Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Mazumdar et al., 2018; Wang & Shultz, 2009).

Applying this perspective, the process of bridge employment can be understood as being an adjustment to or an individual shaping of retirement. In this line, adjusting to retirement by taking on a bridge job can also be perceived as a stage in career development following Wang and Shultz’s (2009) line of reasoning. Moreover, retirement is not seen as an abrupt career exit but rather as a continued stage in which workers have control over their own careers and shape them according to their own norms, values and goals (Wang & Shultz, 2009).

2.1.3 Age as a Social Construct

Taylor and Earl (2015) add upon the criticism that retirement is a non-neutral process, instead, it is a socially constructed phenomenon that relies on the construction of older workers and age(ing), which forms another shortcoming of contemporary literature. More precisely, when stressing that “ageing has no existence independent of social interaction and power relationships in society” (p.252) Taylor and Earl (2015) take on a critical perspective in understanding retirement and point to the underlying discourses of age(ing) which are socially constructed. Generally, discourses can be defined as manifestations of prevailing power structures underlying particular practices that become meaningful in certain contexts through the discourses themselves (see Thomas et al., 2014).

When understanding age as a discourse, it can be said that age functions as a “master signifier to establish ways of thinking, being and doing, establishing what we can see as reality and truth, and both creating and constraining meanings related to age” (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 1570). Thomas et al. (2014) elaborate on this perspective by defining age as a “culturally and politically resonant discourse” (p.1570) nourishing materialistic as well as discursive societal

practices. Besides, Ainsworth and Hardy (2008) stress that an ageing discourse can be understood as a culturally shaped narrative that puts age or ageing on equal terms with decline. One might say that the perception of age as decline underlines the traditional assumption of retirement as being about detachment from society and non-work.

Particularly, critical gerontology is challenging the fixed assumption of age and ageism studies, whilst recognizing age as a “complex and pervasive discourse” (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 1570) that generates certain ways of thinking and shapes the meanings that are commonly attached to age. However, looking at recent age-related studies, it becomes clear that discourses around ageing also change over time. A few years ago, when early retirement has been promoted by organizations, a prevailing age-related discourse revolved around ‘successfully ageing’ which recently changed to a ‘resisting the decline’ age-discourse in which older workers are motivated to work longer and stay productive during retirement (Thomas et al., 2014). This productivity might be safeguarded, for example, through taking on bridge employment. There are also age-related discourses that affect younger women in multiple ways, however, addressing these discourses would exceed the scope of this research (see Kelan, 2014). Even though many scholars acknowledge that age cannot be viewed in isolation, but must rather be seen “as an embodied identity” (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 1570), very few organizational studies focus on the discourse of age that accompanies the process of retirement (e.g. Thomas et al., 2014). Based on this perception, one can say that age and its societal perception might also affect the ways in which retirees perceive their own (former organizational) identities. Moreover, the discourses around the social construction of age were used in this study to understand how the dynamic identities of retirees were not solely impacted, but also how the dynamic identities were constructed as a response to the socio-normative context in which retirees live in.

2.2 Retirees’ Identity as a Dynamic Concept

As already mentioned, this study perceives identity not as a fixed and homogenous entity, but rather as a dynamic concept surrounded by underlying power structures or discourses. The next sections will first, define identity as a dynamic concept and secondly, clarify the connection between identity and work and why identity becomes salient in the process of retirement.

2.2.2 Definition of Dynamic Identity

Within diversity literature, various stances regarding the understanding of identity prevail (e.g. Alvesson et al., 2008; Zanoni et al., 2009). However, this study takes on an emancipatory,

critical view on underlying power relations that affect identity construction and personal agency to actively shape an individual's identity (Alvesson et al., 2008). By taking on this critical approach, the identity of retirees is treated in this study as a dynamic and fluid concept due to the assumed presence of multiple co-existing, shifting and competing identities (see Alvesson et al., 2008; Bauman & Haugaard, 2008). More precisely, the formation of individual identity is seen as a process that is constantly under construction and that any "appearance of stability in any given 'identity' is, at best, a transient accomplishment" (Ybema et al., 2009, p. 301). This fluid and dynamic character of identity helps to understand the ways in which retirees might shape and construct their identity and it is later on picked up within section 2.3.3.

2.2.1 Interplay between Identity, Work and Retirement

This study is based upon the assumption that retirees' identities are not solely dynamically constructed, but also highly related to work and therefore also to changes that affect working routines in any way. For example, MacKenzie and Marks (2018) stressed the high degree of relevance an occupation has for older workers and that their identity can be seen by means of a "strong emotional attachment to work" (p.41). However, when older workers officially retire, and "assume greater or lesser degrees of detachment from the work they have performed for much of their lives, they engage with a series of adjustments in their routines, relationships and expectations" (Beehr & Bennett, 2014, p. 213). Thus, one might conclude that they are entering a liminal, transitional phase in which former roles and relatively stable identities come under increased scrutiny and pressure, and are likely to undergo substantial change in response to new constellations of resources, such as time, money, personal space, health status, social networks and personal relationships (Barnes & Parry, 2004). However, the new stage or role as a retiree is not only homogeneously treated in literature, but has also often been described as "roleless" (Price, 2000, p. 84).

This central notion was picked up in role theory, which was firstly introduced by Parsons in 1942 and revisited by many relevant other contributors (Price, 2000; Wang & Shultz, 2009; Zhan et al., 2009). This theory is often used as a basic framework to explain retirees' behavior during retirement. Role theory suggests that the entrance into retirement simultaneously means entering a 'roleless' state or experiencing a loss of status due to the missing "defined characteristics associated with this role" (Price, 2000, p. 84). Furthermore, the rather blurry definition of a retiree and strong association with decline, withdrawal, "old age and the potentially limited productive activity of seniors" (Price, 2000, p. 84) might cause confusion and disarray with regard to retiree's own identity as well as self-esteem.

The continuity theory, which was firstly introduced by Atchley, adds upon the role theory perspective by taking on the fundamental assumption that being absent from work or disrupting the working routine is stressful in a psychological manner, as individuals perceive or experience this stage of “rolelessness” (Kim & Feldman, 2000, p. 1195). This ‘roleless’ phase is appealing to individuals that have a rather high identification with their former career or job. Furthermore, these individuals are more “likely to seek continuity theory through some form of work involvement” (Kim & Feldman, 2000, p. 1195) after retirement, as for instance through engaging in bridge employment. By doing so, a structure is upheld due to the new activities retirees choose to engage with, as Zhan et al. (2009) formulate it: “engaging in career bridge employment can be viewed as a strategy to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures to avoid the experience of stressful disruption” (p.385).

Thus, the identity of retirees might be re-defined during bridge employment. For instance, bridge employees “may like the bridge employee identity more or less than his or her identity that had been based on the career job” (Mazumdar et al., 2018, p. 120). Contrarily, as Mazumdar et al. (2018) claim, bridge workers may also identify themselves rather as retirees than as bridge employees if the bridge job somehow ‘disagrees’ with their former built identity. In times of discontinuity, such as retiring from a career job, former roles can be exited and new roles, e.g. bridge employment, might be entered. In the meantime, the former role, as for example the occupational role related to a former career job, a retiree strongly identified him or herself with is in transition (Ashforth, 2000). Moreover, these role transitions also generate switches in self-conceptions (Ashforth, 2000). Discontinuities can also be seen as identity threats leading individuals to craft or safeguard their unique identities (Brown & Coupland, 2015).

To sum up, identity and work are highly interrelated. Therefore, short and long-term outcomes of the dynamic and transitional process of bridge employment and changings in their work structure or routines might influence the retiree's identity and need further investigation.

2.3 Bridge Employment as a Dynamic Process

This section will firstly provide an overview of prevailing definitions of bridge employment. In the following, a more detailed definition of bridge employment will be given and a description of several aspects and factors anteceding the process of bridge employment will be further discussed. Lastly, bridge employment will be viewed through the lens of a rite de passage that shows the transitional character of the process underlying bridge employment.

2.3.1 Changing Definitions of Bridge Employment

The concept of bridge employment appeared in early studies in the late 1960s as some sort of “extension of, or departure from, general retirement research as researchers were beginning to notice that the concept of ‘traditional retirement’ was fading” (Beehr & Bennett, 2014, p. 116). In the meantime, older workers or retirees increasingly poured into alternative career paths after retirement in terms of bridge jobs (Beehr & Bennett, 2014). As briefly indicated before, the definitions of bridge employment that are present in contemporary literature take on a rather universal and one-dimensional character. Bridge employment is commonly defined as paid work after retirement (Wang & Shultz, 2009) or as a process of transition “from a full-time position but before the person’s permanent withdrawal from the workforce” (Kim & Feldman, 2000, p. 1195). From an organizational studies point of view, the process of bridge employment in this literature field is often undifferentiated understood in terms of an ‘employment option’ which might help to circumvent labor shortages caused by societal developments as the actual retiring generation of baby boomers (Wang & Shultz, 2009). These definitions are rather static, since no nuancing is made regarding the type of work retirees take on after they are officially retired and individual adjustments to the process of bridge employment are not considered.

In contrast to early studies on bridge employment, numerous current studies underline the various characteristics of bridge employment. For example, bridge employment is basically categorized by aid of three prevailing types: firstly, “career bridge employment (i.e., individuals accept bridge employment in the same industry/field as their career jobs)” (Wang & Shultz, 2009, p. 192), secondly, full retirement and thirdly a bridge employment in a different field. Besides, bridge employment can either be paid or unpaid (Wang & Shultz, 2009) and take on a flexible work arrangement, in which bridge employees have either a non-temporary, sometimes ongoing, contractual work arrangement or “a sporadic (i.e. temporary) work arrangement with either the pre-retirement organization or another organization” (Mazumdar et al., 2018, p. 1346). These different factors and forms of bridge employment particularly served scholars to develop a quantifiable framework of all possible antecedents, processual stages and outcomes of bridge employment.

2.3.2 Antecedents of Bridge Employment

Beehr and Bennett (2014) as well as Wang and Shultz (2009) created a threefold categorization of factors that affect retiree’s decisions to engage in bridge employment: firstly, individual or micro-level factors, e.g. retiree’s health, secondly, meso-level, job or organizational factors,

e.g. compensational practices and lastly macro-level, societal factors, e.g. economic developments or policies.

The most frequently discussed individual or micro-level factors are age, wealth, health, education and gender of retirees (e.g. Kim & Feldman, 2000; Zhan et al., 2009). Regarding the influencing factor age, there is a correlation between retirees being less willing to engage in bridge employment and growing age, due to increasingly more diseases that they might suffer (Beehr & Bennett, 2014). Therefore, large age-related intra-group differences might prevail among the group of retirees. Secondly, retirees that have greater personal wealth are more likely to take on voluntary bridge jobs, whereas retirees with less personal wealth are more restricted in their decision to engage in a paid bridge job (Beehr & Bennett, 2014). Lastly, the relationship between the personal factor health and bridge employment is two-directional. First of all, the better the status of retiree's health, the more likely they are taking on a bridge job (Beehr & Bennett, 2014). Secondly, having a bridge job does positively affect retiree's health, since they "reported fewer major diseases and fewer functional limitations" (Zhan et al., 2009, p. 383). Regarding education, it can be said that the level of the highest obtained academic degree is significantly and positively related to retiree's decisions whether to take on a postretirement job or not (Hofäcker & Naumann, 2015). Additionally, gender potentially impacts the process of retirement and bridge employment. One can say that "Women are more likely to have discontinuous work histories" (Beehr & Bennett, 2014, p. 117) which is caused by different factors such as varying family responsibilities, bearing children, lower-status and low-pay occupations, marital or family arrangements. These factors may cause disrupted working careers (e.g. working part-time) which in turn may affect their available resources and opportunities to continue their former career after being retired (Price, 2000). This in turn might affect the type of bridge employment female retirees take on.

As scholars emphasize, research on binary categorical antecedent factors, as presented above, does not take into account personal experiences of retirees, intra-group differences and intersections of the different social categories that are used in quantitative research (Price, 2000).

The meso-level factors as well as job or organizational factors of work stress and work attitudes, such as job satisfaction, have gained attention in contemporary bridge employment research. Regarding work stress, it is known that negative experiences in retirees' former careers "will serve as a deterrent from accepting a bridge job" (Beehr & Bennett, 2014, p. 118)

in the same organization or career field. They might even opt for a bridge job within a different field of work or not at all (Beehr & Bennett, 2014).

Basically, literature regarding societal or macro-level factors, such as demographic developments, that influence bridge employment is scarce as Beehr and Bennett (2014) describe it, and thus, need further elaboration. Besides, not only macro-level factors, but the combination of multi-level factors lead to very own and unique expectations and experiences of bridge employees, since they “have passed through important life transition periods and decision-making phases through leaving work and retiring and re-enter workforce” (Mazumdar et al., 2018, p. 1347). Nevertheless, these complex interrelated combinations of multi-level factors, unique experiences and expectations are widely under-researched in contemporary literature (Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Mazumdar et al., 2018).

2.3.3 Bridge Employment through the Lens of a Rite de Passage

In order to better grasp the transitional process of bridge employment this study adopts the lens of a rite de passage. The latter has been characterized as a ritual that accompanies “every change of place, state, social position and age” (Van Gennep as cited in Maruna, 2011, p. 8). Furthermore, every life contains transitional phases from both groups to groups as well as from particular social situations to one another (Van Gennep, 2019). Maruna (2011) picks up the three phases, initially defined by Arnold Van Gennep, every Rite de passage follows: “separation from everyday reality, a period of liminality, then reintegration as a new person” (p.8). Firstly, the separation phase has been characterized by Turner (1998) through a “symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions” (p.5). The second phase is characterized by a state of liminality in which the ‘passenger’ is affected by a certain ambiguity since this stage has only very few or no traits from the stages before and after the liminal state (Turner, 1998). The last stage shows a completed transition into the new ‘role’ or stage of life (Turner, 1998). Nevertheless, these clearly defined stages have been criticized for their static character, as these stages might be interwoven and thus cannot always be clearly delimited.

Turner (1998) furthermore states that rites de passage indicate the transitions between socially constructed states or stages, which he defines as a rather stable condition including “social constancies as legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree” (p. 4). This view underlines the assumption that bridge employment may function as a rite de passage supporting the transition between a former or career job based profession or built identity of

retirees into a newly defined role paired with changes of retirees' dynamic identity. Within the stage of liminality, labelled as 'betwixt-and-between period' by Turner (1998) a certain degree of solidarity between the 'passengers' is prevalent, as all passengers are entering some kind of 'roleless' stage. Moreover, these rituals are characterized by "a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership" (Collins as cited in Maruna, 2011, p. 7).

By applying this lens, it becomes clear that bridge employment must be understood in terms of a rite de passage that accompanies retirees in their process of retiring. Maruna (2011) moreover picks up the idea that: "Rites of passage become the 'events that we remember, that give meaning to our personal biographies' (...), hence shaping our self-narratives and personal identities" (Collins as cited in Maruna, 2011, p. 9). This statement links the rite de passage, in this case, the process of bridge employment, to the dynamic identities of retirees and how these are shaped and re-defined accordingly. Therefore, when undergoing such a rite de passage, the dynamic identities of retirees become salient since their surrounding social environments including social constancies change as well.

To sum up, this research views bridge employment through the lens of a rite de passage as a dynamic and transitional process, which can be seen as adjustment to the retirement process and is formed and created by retirees as a form of continued career stage, that it is part of a broader societal and normative context.

3. Methodology

In the following chapter a transparent description is given to justify the most important research methods that have been used throughout this study. More precisely, the underlying philosophical assumptions to this research, the research design, and various steps within the data collection process, data analysis and research-related ethics will be presented.

3.1 Philosophical Assumptions

Myers (2013) proposes that every research has an underlying philosophical assumption, which in turn forms the baseline of the chosen research methods as well as data collection technique and data source. Furthermore, in order to assess the "validity and scope of the knowledge" (Myers, 2013, p. 56) that has been obtained by aid of this study, the philosophical and epistemological stance of this research are described.

This research adopted an inductive approach paired with a rather interpretivist epistemological perspective, which allowed the research question to be of exploratory nature (Myers, 2013). Since this study's exploratory research question aimed to discover various (novel) ways in which the process of bridge employment influences retirees' identity, it was therefore aligned with the underlying philosophical assumption. Within an interpretivist epistemological approach it is assumed that reality, in this case of retirees, can only be assessed by investigating the underlying "social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments" (Myers, 2013, p. 59). This paper focused on the individual sense-making and meaning giving of the retirees and bridge employees, most of all, strived to understand the social phenomena of bridge employment and its influences on retirees' identity from an emic point of view.

3.2 Research Methods and Design

Overall, a research method can be understood as a certain strategy of scrutinizing a specific research topic (Myers, 2013). Regarding its design, this research used qualitative research methods, which enabled the researcher to understand and "study social and cultural phenomena" (Myers, 2013, p. 24). Since this study aimed to analyze the social phenomenon of the dynamic process of bridge employment, it was important to understand retirees' "motivations and actions, and the broader context within which they work and live" (Myers, 2013, p. 24). Furthermore, qualitative research methods are applicable when studying events, motivations or actions that may underlie processes, as Langley (1999) describes it: "Process research is concerned with understanding how things evolve over time and why they evolve in this way" (p.692). In order to identify the process of bridge employment qualitative research methods were used to detect various "events, activities, and choices ordered over time" (Langley, 1999, p. 692) which also formed parts of the constructed realities of retirees.

In addition, qualitative research methods are beneficial when the research subject, in this case, retirees and their dynamic identities are going to be studied in-depth and when the research topic is relatively new and not much has been published on this particular topic yet (Myers, 2013). Considering the very unique narratives of retirees and their life paths "gives prominence to human agency and imagination; hence it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity" (Riessman as cited in Myers, 2013, p. 269). In this line, qualitative research fits with an exploratory research approach this study took on by exploring the different ways how

the process of bridge employment influenced retirees' identity and thus also their socially constructed realities.

3.2.1 Data Collection Technique: Semi-Structured Interviews

First and foremost, within the overarching qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection method to obtain evident data that answered the research question. In the following abstract, the choice for this method is further elaborated.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Solely the research method of semi-structured interviewing was chosen due to several reasons. First of all, according to grounded theorists, it is less important to immerse oneself "in the setting or to become part of the group under study in order to understand the meaning and significance" (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 411). In this case, to understand the meaning retirees or bridge employees attach to bridge employment. One huge advantage of this approach was that the researcher diminished the risk of losing a rather objective view on the social phenomenon or, and moreover, influencing this research's participants through the researcher's omnipresence in the field (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Secondly, since bridge employees' identity is a highly subjective matter, it can only be understood through their lenses which required a method that offered the possibility to intensively concentrate on the respondents. Thirdly, as the research question might touch upon a sensitive issue, namely the effects of bridge employment on their unique identities, it was important to provide the respondent enough room and possibilities to build up a trusted relationship with the researcher. Besides, the interviews were recorded in order to fully focus on the respondent and listening back to parts of the interviews to subsequently verbally transcribe them (Gobo, 2008).

Even though a semi-structured interview does not require a strict adherence to the pre-selected structure, various important topics have been chosen beforehand and an interview guide was established. This will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraph. The interview guide contained all relevant topics, and the different time and process-related questions that were posed (see Appendix 2). During the interviews, mostly open questions were asked as they enabled "respondents to relate their stories and establish each actor's main concerns, thereby providing a direction for subsequent interviews" (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 414). More precisely, probing open questions offered enhanced possibilities to get a deeper understanding of retiree's subjective view on bridge employment and the consequences this

process bears for them. Furthermore, reactions on open questions gave the researcher a hint about what core themes the respondent preferred to talk about. A semi-structured interview method also bears the advantage of obtaining “both retrospective and real-time accounts by those people experiencing the phenomenon of theoretical interest” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 19). Particularly in this case this aspect was important as this study aimed to investigate effects on retiree’s identity which could only be identified when gaining a full picture of the whole pre-, during-, and after-retirement process including the phase of bridge employment.

Most of the interviews were conducted digitally, thus via telephone or video-conferencing, forced by the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic. This generated the advantage of not limiting the amount of respondents that during the pandemic otherwise could not have been reached due to the risk of infection. Besides, telephone interviews generally produce a larger inter-categorical diversity of the respondents (Lo Iacono et al., 2016).

Interview Guide

The interview guide consisted of five fundamental topics: 1) General and demographic-related introductory questions; 2) Working life before official retirement; 3) The initial process of retirement and the process of adopting a bridge employment; 4) The process of bridge employment; (Optional 5) The process after bridge employment. All of these rather time-related and retrospective topics were addressed during the interviews and not necessarily in a chronological manner depending on the course of the interview. A more detailed view on the interview-guide and the topic list can be found attached (Appendix 1 & 2).

Since the interviews partly addressed retrospective experiences of retirees, corresponding retrospective questions had been asked that served to capture the time periods shortly before retirement, during and after official retirement as well as bridge employment. Symon and Cassell (2012) discuss the usage of retrospective research versus real-time one and claim that these different types “may ideally complement each other” (p.149). Thus, by using retrospective questions various experiences of retirees that find their derivation in the past provided the researcher with a broader understanding “of chains of cause” (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 149).

3.2.2 Sampling of Respondents

In this study, retirees and bridge employees were sampled in Germany. Within the German context, retirement is a rather controversial topic (Cassel & Thomas, 2016; Hofäcker & Naumann, 2015). Since 2007, the official pensionable age of 67 years has been declared by the German Federal Government (Cassel & Thomas, 2016). Exceptions to that pensionable age are made when older workers become sick or unable to perform their work tasks beforehand. Generally, the individual number of pensions are regulated by the German retirement system, which means that in order to receive a pension, individuals need to pay monthly contributions to the pension insurance (OECD, 2006). However, it is important to notice that “(...) individual pension entitlements are based exclusively on the salary points acquired, and these are defined as the proportion of the [contributory] income of the insured person to the average income of all insured persons in the respective period” (Breyer, 2013, p. 117). This furthermore means that the actual amount of contribution is of less importance, which is in line with the German social security system (Breyer, 2013).

For this study, solely retirees that obtained a German pension or took on a bridge employment within Germany were considered meeting this study's requirements. These respondents were selected based on snowball sampling. Worth to mention is that the respondents needed to meet two main criteria. First and foremost, being officially retired from their main career job or a former job they had. Secondly, they took on some kind of bridge employment (paid, voluntarily, full-time, part-time etc.).

Snowball Sampling

Gobo (2008) defined snowball sampling as a sampling technique that “involves the picking of individuals only, who display the necessary attributes, and then, through their recommendations, finding other individuals with the same characteristics” (p.104). In this case, only retirees that had officially been retired were approached and interviewed. Despite a relatively large number of retirees who engaged in some kind of bridge employment, it was more likely that bridge employees knew other bridge employees, maybe even through various active networks. Thus, this sampling approach enabled the researcher to broaden the sample size of possible respondents who had the required attributes.

The first respondents have been approached by asking retirees from the researcher's private network. This started with retirees that were known through the direct neighborhood as

well as grandparents or familiar retirees of friends and family. The first interviewees have been recruited via telephone and through a first phone conversation between the researcher and the respondent to introduce the research topic to the retirees. After these retirees agreed to an interview, they were asked for further possible respondents within their own network. The final sample consisted of 7 male and 3 female respondents. They all worked in some kind of a bridge employment, all in different sectors, and spent between several months and 19 years in official retirement. Age-wise the sample ranged from around 58 years to 79 years and thus offered a huge intra-categorical bandwidth regarding age. A more detailed overview of the 10 different respondents can be found under Appendix 4.

3.2.3 Data Analysis Approach

The relevant results and theory underlying this research solely evolved through the iterative interplay between analysis and data collection (Symon & Cassell, 2012).

The semi-structured interviews were analyzed by means of the Gioia methodology, thus, the data analysis approach is in line with the inductive method of this study. This approach was particularly helpful to inductively develop new topics and concepts and simultaneously meeting rigor criteria (Gioia et al., 2012). The semi-structured interviews were first of all inductively analyzed by aid of open codes, then aggregated into first order concepts and second order themes. Then dimensions were created out of those themes (Gioia et al., 2012). The following section will dive deeper into this approach.

The initial stage of first order concepts consisted of informant codes and terms or even categories that were gathered by the researcher without trying to “distill categories” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 20). This initial stage can be compared to the open coding phase, which moreover assisted to “reflect and explain the events that occurred through the participants’ own eyes” (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 413) and to consequently label these events. This first stage provided the researcher with first directional ideas of the study before focusing on selective terms and categories, in other words, it was an orientation stage. Within this phase 1036 open codes were developed by aid of the software tool Atlas.ti to avoid missing any underlying important topics.

First order concepts are preceded by a second order analysis (Gioia et al., 2012). The aim of this second phase was to more selectively focus on patterns that emerged by “seeking similarities and differences among the many categories” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 20). This in turn

reduced the amount of open terms and served the researcher to identify 56 higher order codes, called networks in Atlas.ti or core variables that build a larger category or concept (Symon & Cassell, 2012). By deriving first general concepts, this phase was placed within a rather theoretical realm in which the researcher focused on the question if these concepts were appropriate to further describe and explicate the social phenomenon of bridge employment (Gioia et al., 2012). However, the focus of the researcher was specifically on “nascent concepts that don’t seem to have adequate theoretical referents in the existing literature” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 20) to eventually contribute to already existing theory by developing data-driven theories.

After the second stage, theoretical coding was applied to “distill the emergent 2nd-order themes even further into 2nd-order ‘aggregate dimensions’ ” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 20). These aggregate dimensions have a higher theoretical level and formed the final stage in the analysis process, conceptualized how the second order terms codes relate to each other and helped to link these conceptual relationships to theory (Gioia et al., 2012). Since this research adopts the rite de passage as an analytical lens, dimensions have been based on this framework.

Finally, codes were visualized by aid of the data structure that has been explained beforehand. Thus, a Gioia method template was developed that provides a good overview of the different conceptual levels of the first order terms, second order concepts and aggregated dimensions (see Appendix 3).

3.3 Research Quality Criteria

Credibility & Rigor

While striving for a high degree of research credibility the researcher aimed at integrating and fitting the respondent’s “constructed realities (...) and the reconstructions attributed to them” (Guba & Lincoln as cited in Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 206). Credibility and rigor could be achieved, among others, by being aware of the researcher’s own subjectivity over the course of the research (Symon & Cassell, 2012). In this line, initial understandings as well as constructions of the retirees and the researcher were recorded, to check whether these have been defied or contested based on this research’s participants unique constructions (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 206).

Transferability

This study aimed not solely to identify locally and contextually valid arguments and concepts regarding the influences of retirement or bridge employment on retiree's identity, but furthermore purposed to extract "transferable concepts and principles" (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 24) that allows to reach a broader audience. Gioia et al. (2012) argue that "Many concepts and processes are similar, even structurally equivalent (...), across domains" (p.24). Moreover, it can be stated that emerging concepts in this specific case might exemplify principles "that can be taught as a transferable generality- namely, 'principles that are portable' from one setting to another" (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 24).

Dependability

This criterion is better known under the positivistic label of reliability. In order to demonstrate the dependability of this study appropriately, all changings or adjustments that were made during the study were recorded "and made available for evaluation" (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 207) for the reader or respondent as well.

3.4 Research Ethics

Besides following the quality research criteria mentioned beforehand, this inquiry followed the guiding American Psychologists Association's principles of research ethics (American Psychological Association, 2017). As the qualitative research methods applied in this research awaited intensive semi-structured interviews, in which the respondents shared vulnerable, personal and unique experiences with the researcher, a transparent and trustful treatment of participants and their information had to be safeguarded. Birch and Miller (2012) underline the power of the researcher when participants reveal very sensitive data to the researcher "in a relationship of closeness and trust" (p.2). Nevertheless, receiving this data "can provide access to the rich, deep data that the qualitative researcher seeks" (Birch & Miller, 2012, p. 94).

To ensure a trustful treatment and an informed consent for all participants, the reformulated golden rule: "Treat others as you yourself want to be treated and provide benefit to the organization and individuals involved in your work" (Maylor and Blackmon as cited in Myers, 2013, p. 72), was adhered to in all times. In this line, all respondents were informed and taught upfront about the research content and goal as well as the methodological framework. Furthermore, every respondent was guaranteed the possibility to stop his or her participation at

any point of time if desired, paired with a deletion of all recorded and obtained data until then. Furthermore, the results of this study were sent via email towards the participants, including his or her personal transcript to avoid any pitfalls or revealing information the participants did not feel comfortable in sharing. Besides, confidentiality and participant's anonymity have been safeguarded in not revealing the names of the participants. Instead they are referred to as Respondent 1-10. Moreover, no confidential content of the interviews was shared with a third party. A deeper elaboration on the role of the researcher throughout the study will be done in the last chapter (see paragraph 6.2).

To maintain a high degree of transparency of the research goals, a template of the Gioia coding analysis method is provided as well as an interview guide and a topic list (see Appendices 1-3). The results aim at explaining and supporting any statement that was made as grounded in the data received from this research's semi-structured interviews.

4. Results

This chapter presents the results of the analysis following the presented data analysis approach. The results are reflected in a condensed manner based on the analytical framework of the three phases that constitute a rite de passage: 1) The separation of everyday reality; 2) A period of liminality and 3) A reintegration phase. This structure has been chosen to provide the reader a better overview of the given results. Nevertheless, through the analysis it became clear that these phases do neither mean the same for every respondent nor does every bridge employment chronologically pass through all of these phases strictly (see Chapter 5).

4.1 Separation from Everyday Reality and its Impact on Retiree's Identity

This part of the results will demonstrate the ways in which the dynamic process of bridge employment impacts the identity of retirees in the first phase of a rite de passage, the separation from retirees' everyday reality, which is paired with various events that support this departure. This section starts by outlining three identification patterns retirees identified with before they officially retired: 1.) Identification with their former organization; 2.) Identification with occupation, profession, handcraft and 3.) Identification as a family breadwinner (see paragraph 4.1.1). Afterwards, three events that were part of retiree's realities are linked to the separation phase and further elaborated on (see paragraph 4.1.2).

4.1.1 Retiree's identity in the Separation Phase of a Rite de Passage

Identification with former Organization

As these results will show, every respondent had his or her very unique and own story about life and working life, however, it became clear that many retirees strongly identified with their former organization, which can be illustrated based on various aspects. First of all, the expression of belonging. One of the respondents who was a department manager had a very strong identification with the department he led for more than 30 years. For instance, he found his own motto to express his belonging towards his department: *"Once claims department, always claims department"*. He stated further that he *"could not imagine changing departments"* (Respondent 5). Additionally, a strong sense of belonging could also be recognized by the incident that various respondents found it hard to retire earlier. Respondent 7 said *"I cannot just quit, I cannot do it emotionally, I am so married to this club here, every drop of blood in my veins is red like this company [color of the organization] - so it wasn't possible"*. Consequently, he agreed with the HR department of his former organization to sign an annulment contract instead. Another aspect that mirrored a high identification with retirees' former organizations was a high devotedness for the company, including working longer hours and working during the weekend (e.g. Respondent 5).

Secondly, the recognition retirees received from their former organization also reinforced a strong identification with the organization. The perceived recognition differed in meaning for the respondents: Respondent 1 stressed the monetary reward she received for good work, while Respondent 7 rather underlined that holding a certain leading position or a particular job title was a form of recognition for him. He furthermore stressed that a job title was not only important to him but *"even to the outside world - especially to business partners you have in the business world"*.

Similarly the length of employment with a company strengthened the high identification with retirees' pre-retirement company as a third aspect. For example, a few retirees explained that back when they started their apprenticeship, sometimes even within the company in which they later retired, a long period of employment within the same company would mean *"prestige"* (Respondent 5).

A fourth aspect clearly underlined the strong identification with a former organization, namely the comparison of a familiar corporate environment, including employees, colleagues

and executives to the symbol of 'family'. For instance, after giving up his football career, Respondent 7 thought of spending more time with his family, but in fact he spent more time in the company. During the interview he often used football terms in order to express his strong identification with the company, e.g. *"I am so married to this club"* whereas club refers to the insurance company he worked for over 40 years. Another example forms Respondent 2, he had no children himself, but called the post department he managed for several years his *"baby"*. Additionally, Respondent 3 concluded that for her *"work is also a kind of family"*.

Identification with Occupation, Profession, Handcraft

Based on the analysis it can be said that some retirees rather identified with their own productivity, profession or handcraft and felt not as committed as other retirees to their former organization. Sentences as *"I always got something to do"*, *"I cannot stand still"* and *"I need to do something productive"* came back on a regular basis (e.g. Respondent 1). This identification has been sensed in different aspects, as for example the huge readiness to change the company over the course of retirees' careers. Respondents 2, 1 and 9 changed their profession various times due to changes within their interests or due to companies that went bankrupt in the beginning of their career. In this line, Respondent 1 said that *"every time I felt bored or I did not feel good, I changed my job"*. It becomes clear that the willingness to frequently change the employer during retirees' active working careers is related to a lower identification with a certain company. This in turn strengthened an identification pattern of being 'the productive retiree' by focusing rather on their own skills independent from the company they worked for. Consequently, this also impacted the identity of retirees, since these respondents rather identified themselves with their own productivity, profession or skills.

The aspect of receiving recognition has also been important for the respondents that identified rather with their own productivity. However, the recognition they wished to receive or received was earned for their work. For some it has been the recognition in a monetary form for work, as Respondent 8 states *"I always had a higher wage than the others, through diligence and work and overtime and never said no"*. This way he distinguished himself from the rest of the employees that worked for his former company, too. Also Respondent 1 distinguished herself from her colleagues, as she explained that she always saw herself as no *"team player"* and rather identified with her own productivity which was one of the reasons why she already started to work as a freelancer next to her main job years before her official retirement. Moreover, Respondent 8 who worked as an electric welder said: *"Yes, I was able to use what I had learned from my former job again and the company benefited from it"*. He clearly and

proudly demonstrated that the company was benefitting from him and his working skills and not the other way around.

Identification as (Family) Breadwinner

By some retirees the answer to the question “what did your job mean to you?”- was primarily “income” and that they needed to provide financially for the family long before they retired. Even though this was mentioned by various retirees, all of them found themselves in a different situation back then. For example, Respondent 7 mentioned that for him the job was not simply “*striving for higher things*”, but he further said: “*I wanted to earn good money, I wanted to have a secure job, I wanted to feed my family*”. Furthermore, he mentioned an arrangement with his wife upon the ‘classical’ breadwinner model when he started to work around the 70s, meaning for him that he was the main earner and his wife worked part-time. Also Respondent 8 stated that his job meant “*first of all income for my family*”. Other retirees mentioned that even though they always loved to work, the financial part was also necessary, as for instance for Respondent 4 who worked full-time to provide for her three children after getting divorced from her husband in around the 1960s-1970s. Besides, this role of providing financially for the family also generated pressure for retirees. For instance, as Respondent 10 reflected a feeling of being overloaded and being “*under pressure, that you also have to hold out, for financial reasons, because of the pension*”. Furthermore, he was partly the lone earner in his family since his wife was raising three children at around the late 90s. Most remarkable is that the ‘male-breadwinner model’ or different ‘breadwinner models’ formed prevailing societal norms around the 1950s and evolved until the late 20th century (Pfau-Effinger, 2004) and thus were surrounding and impacting retirees’ decisions and identities back then. This in turn highlights the high importance of the socio-normative context that may affect retirees’ identity before and after retirement. Underlining this view, Komp-Leukkunen (2019) furthermore points to various ways in which breadwinner-models may affect the actual transition of older workers into retirement.

Summing up, worth the mention is that these different categories must not be understood in a mutually exclusive manner, some retirees identified with their former organization and with their own productivity. In order to exemplify why these different stances of retirees’ identity have been derived from the interviews and how these are affected by bridge employment in the phase of separation from everyday reality, the following section frames the different functions of bridge employment as well as important events before retirement.

4.1.2 Events that mark the Separation of Everyday Life

The following section presents three main events that contributed to the separation of retirees' everyday reality: 1.) farewell to the previous organization, 2.) work pressure, 3.) starting or planning bridge employment before retirement. These events will be further explained and will be linked to the previous mentioned identification patterns of retirees.

Farewell to the Previous Organization

In order to identify influences on retirees' identity proceeding from bridge employment one needs to better understand retirees' life paths before retirement. Asking retirees about the period before retiring, it became clear that aspects as the last working day, the choice of the successor and a farewell celebration all belong to the comprehensive point of farewell to their former organization and form important events that support retirees' separation from everyday life.

The first aspect, a farewell celebration with colleagues, employees or their family was mentioned by many respondents as a very joyful and important event (see Respondent 2). However, due to the fact that a few respondents retired during the current pandemic, their farewell celebration was restricted to a very small number of allowed employees or colleagues that were able to meet together in a huge room to celebrate in strict compliance with Covid-19 measures. In some cases the celebration took place at home, as Respondent 6 elucidates “*Then we celebrated at home, so in that sense it was a celebration organized by my wife or my family, including my son with his partner and my daughter. That was simply a great transition into retirement*”. Three department managers that have been interviewed worked within the same organization, all of them reflected that their farewell celebration was simply “*impersonal*” and that they wished for a more “*stepwise farewell*” (see Respondent 5, 6, 7). Besides the restricting character Covid-19 had on this event, many respondents could not celebrate a farewell from their former organization due to a physical illness they suffered back then and described their exit or farewell as “*it just phased out*” (e.g. Respondent 10).

Often this farewell celebration took place on the last working day of the retirees, which was experienced differently by almost every respondent. Most remarkably is that for those who could not physically attend their last working day it was perceived as a “*relief*” (Respondent 4). Besides, these respondents also had a higher fluctuation of organizations they worked for during their working career than retirees that worked around 30 years for the same company. Other retirees, mostly those who very strongly identified themselves with their former

organization, experienced their last working day before retirement as very emotional or intensive and some even as frustration (e.g. Respondent 5). For example, Respondent 7 mentioned that he was crying on his last day since he recognized that *“it will never be the same again”*. This indicates that goodbye events were tremendously important to retirees, but also meant a clear cut and separation from their everyday routine.

Work pressure

As another separating aspect respondents mentioned that their working conditions were changing and becoming more stressful. For example, Respondent 1 described her perception of the last years within her former company as being trapped within a hamster wheel. She furthermore said: *“So you try to get everything done, but somehow it has never been possible to really get everything done, because the pressure was simply too high. So that wasn't realistic the last few years”*. The retired department managers also mentioned that within the last years they had the feeling to be increasingly controlled as they now needed to write down every decision they would make within their department (Respondent 5). This promoted a feeling of being controlled and led to the case that retirees primarily detached themselves from their former working life. Besides, the Covid-19 pandemic generated an increasing amount of work pressure in different sectors as for instance insurances, which caused a higher performance pressure. Consequently, a department manager mentioned that he was scared to go from working *“150% or 200% to 0%”* and could not really prepare his retirement mentally (Respondent 7).

The choice of the successor revealed itself as a very sensitive aspect when retiring for some respondents. Respondent 7 was not satisfied with the choice of his successor. Respondent 7 even thought about withdrawing his request to retire earlier. He very severely stated *“I was so dissatisfied I would have almost jumped off, then would have called the pension office and said it doesn't work out, I have to keep working because my succession has become a real disaster”*. Talking about leaving their former workplace behind was perceived as very difficult for retirees that were dissatisfied with their successor. In contrast to the ones that perceived their successor as competent. Most remarkably is that respondents, who picked their successor themselves could more easily ‘let go’ off their former organization, as Respondent 6 mentioned, he was lucky to pick his own successor and described the successor as *“Desired candidate”*. He further said *“I was still able to do this in time. As a result, I think we've managed a sensible transition. Of course that also makes me a bit more satisfied”*. Thus, the choice of a successor

that was not meeting the retirees' expectations often led to a feeling of 'unfinished work' or of 'not leaving their work behind properly' for retirees, which hindered the separation from their everyday life significantly and accepting the new stage of retirement. Moreover, they felt responsible for the situation 'they left behind' due to a strong identification with their former organization or department they managed that was even intensified through this undesired farewell situation.

This change and break in their usual everyday working routine was in many cases some kind of preparation for bridge employment. More precisely, as Respondent 3 stated *"I did not want to go with these changes"* after feeling that her environment was changing. Consequently, this initiated the planning of bridge employment because these events brought retirement and the new life phase into reality. A changing working environment caused in many cases the disruptive distancing from their former organization. It wasn't the same organization for them anymore and that made it easier to transition into a new life phase (see Respondent 3). Thus bridge employment could also be seen as some kind of exit from their former everyday routine and as gateway for a whole new experience they might encounter in the future.

Starting or Planning Bridge Employment before Retirement

Another factor that caused a separation from everyday reality was the acceptance or the planning of a bridge employment. Within this section the dynamics of the bridge employment process becomes clear, since the aspect of early planning or starting a bridge job meant for some retirees rather a separation from their former daily routines, while for other retirees it meant already a start of the liminal and second phase of a rite de passage. Nevertheless, most of the retirees experienced this event as some kind of separation from their everyday reality, which is why it was addressed in this phase.

Retirees that specifically identified themselves with their own productivity often accepted bridge employments, which had no thematic relation to their main job, long before they retired. As for example Respondent 1, who started to give felt-making courses long before retiring and was selling her products at markets. After she retired from her company she made herself self-employed and registered her own small business as a freelancer to continue with felt-courses (see Respondent 1). Besides, the electric welder provided Winter-road maintenance on freelancer basis long before he retired and later on even worked as a priest (Respondent 8). After retirement he continued with his bridge employment(s) and provided the Winter-road maintenance to his old company. Asking him how he felt after being retired he responded *"I*

knew I would still keep my Bridge Employments” (Respondent 8). However, he also stated *“and I have to say, I would miss something if I didn't do all the bridge employments”* (Respondent 8). Even though the electric welder strongly identified with his own productivity, he also enjoyed providing his services again for his former company. Taking on a bridge employment before retiring supported retirees’ identification with being productive next to their job. Thus bridge employment as a way to separate from everyday life supported retirees to mentally create a different daily routine, a different working environment. Therefore, they broadened their self-perception of identity and transitioning into retirement was perceived easier, since their former bridge jobs did not fall apart.

Retirees that strongly identified with their former organization often took on bridge employment that was within their main job industry and stopped the bridge job when they officially retired, which was even stronger separating them from their former daily routines. Particularly the heads of departments from the insurance company had a voluntary bridge employment next to their main careers, two of them worked within the ‘Association of insurers’ (Respondent 5, 7). Within this activity the respondents could make use of their main job and the expertise on that subject of matter. However, after retirement they also stopped to work for this organization since they had the feeling to no longer be *“up to date”* (Respondent 7) within their subject area. Moreover, Respondent 7 rather wanted to socially engage, to do something for refugees and Respondent 5 wanted to drive the ‘Civic Bus’ within his village, thus he already procured the certificate to drive the Civic Bus before retiring to directly start with his bridge employment afterwards. Other retirees have been restricted to take on bridge employment due to a current physical illness (see Respondent 4, 9, 10). Restricted working activities that in some cases forced the respondent to retire earlier had a tremendous effect on their identity, most remarkably is that these respondents had a very strong wish to work after they officially retired.

To start or to plan a bridge employment before retiring did not only supported retirees from everyday life separation, it also brought financial safety along, since it was a way to still pay into the state pension fund in case of missing pay-in years for receiving the official state fund (Respondent 1). In this phase, planning or taking on a bridge employment led to a faster separation of everyday life for retirees, but also functioned fundamentally to a broadened work identity and formed an easier transition into the state of being retired.

4.2 Phase of Liminality and its Impact on Retiree's Identity

The second phase of a rite de passage forms the period of liminality, which has been defined by Turner (1998) as a stage paired with a feeling of ambiguity and a break with traits that are present within the separation and reintegration phase. This stage is also accompanied by the dynamic process of bridge employment. For some retirees this phase already began when they started bridge employment before retiring. As indicated before, for others this phase became very real after they officially retired from their main job. In the following sub-sections firstly, the identification pattern of being a free and self-determinant retiree is presented, continued by showing how differently the liminal phase has been experienced by retirees. Lastly, the characteristics of a liminal phase, solidarity and group membership, are presented.

Free & self-determinant

Within the first phase a strong identification pattern of being productive has been found out. This identification with being productive and with retirees' own handcraft was also present within the liminal phase and retirees identified themselves often as being free and self-determinant. As Respondent 1 explained *"I always have to have something to do. Because that's also where I get my confirmation for myself. I can't do nothing. I also know that as long as I am physically and mentally able to do it, I will continue to do it. So I'm not going to retire now and say 'so I'm just going on vacation' and do nothing anymore. I can't do that, I wasn't born for that"*. She reflected that after being retired she felt a huge relief as she could finally structure her days as she wanted to. Nevertheless, worth mentioning is that Respondent 1 was already working in bridge employment and this helped her to maintain her self-identification with her own productivity after being retired.

Many respondents felt more flexible after being retired through the missing working pressure and were shaping their everyday life by only doing what they liked to do (see Respondent 2). Respondent 2 described his newly gained flexible status as *"you no longer have the pressure you used to have. Whether you had pressure now or not. That means today you can enjoy your free time as you would like to, you are no longer dependent on the employer"*. Even though Respondent 2 strongly identified with his former organization, the certitude that he already knew he would work again for his company through a bridge employment impacted his self-identification. More precisely, after being retired, he increasingly identified himself with his own productivity. This shows the dynamic character of retirees' identities situated in the changing context within the dynamic process of bridge employment.

Thus, bridge employment is supporting retirees' identity in being a free and self-determinant person as they can flexibly choose a bridge employment that suits their lifestyle. As for example respondent 1 who is working as a freelancer next to her cleaning job, or retiree 8 who is self-employed and provides winter services to his former company next to his job as a priest after retirement. Remarkably is that many retirees did not share this feeling during their active working life and felt rather inflexible (e.g. Respondent 10). However, this strong identification of being a free and self-determinant retiree and choosing a bridge job accordingly could also be interpreted as some kind of coping strategy of retirees with the new and disruptive stage of retirement. Furthermore, this newly gained flexibility and identification pattern shows the dynamic construction of retirees' identities within a new and liminal stage of life.

Entering a "roleless" state?

Every respondent has been asked about their feelings shortly before and after they retired. As a result, a broad spectrum of diverse answers were given. Mainly three dominant categories of answers are going to be discussed in this section. Firstly, retirees that did not perceive the phase after retirement as being roleless. Secondly, retirees who perceived entering this stage as very difficult and felt less worthy, which was also related to physical illness, and thirdly, retirees who had a delayed realization of retirement.

Firstly, especially retirees who already planned or took on bridge employment long before they retired, experienced the start of the liminal phase earlier. Consequently, this feeling of entering a roleless state was mostly not present after retirement. On the contrary, they rather perceived the phase after being retired as 'consistent'. More precisely, a few retirees reflected that they would simply feel *"the same"* as compared to their former career (Respondent 8). Respondent 8 delineated his perception during bridge employment as *"I feel the same, so the daily routine I can now vary, I can now control, I couldn't before"*. In this line, bridge employment also helped retirees to uphold parts of former structures and routines.

Secondly, for some of the retirees there was a very strong feeling of being useless or the presence of black hole after they retired (e.g. Respondent 4, 9). Respondent 4, the former sales assistant, replied that she felt terrible in the beginning of her retirement. She formulated it as follows: *"Suddenly I was, or I had the feeling to be worthless"*. She also mentioned that her children were back then all living on their own and that she had nothing left to do. Besides, during her working life she identified herself as being the family breadwinner and caring for her three children. Transitioning into a new life phase affected her identity in a way that she did

not really know who she was, since her context and the roles or meanings that were attached to it changed as well. This was also the starting point for her to plan a bridge employment (Respondent 4). Thus in that very special case, bridge employment functioned as an exit out of this 'roleless' state and as a coping strategy with this new and disruptive liminal phase that was paired with a changing working context.

Retirees that suffered from an illness were not only restricted in working activities but also in safeguarding former social contacts. Respondent 9, who had to sell his own company due to lung cancer and was forced through his illness to retire earlier and is now receiving governmental disability pension, stated that this period was very dark for him. He recognized that *"there is nothing left, there is just a big black hole. That is the problem"* (Respondent 9). Thus, the perspective of not being able to work again after giving up his company had a tremendous effect on his well-being and self-perception. Besides the detrimental loss of working activities, also the contact to a social network is diminishing, which was shared by retirees that experienced their physical illnesses similarly (see Respondent 10). To sum up, this section clearly shows how the loss of work and the loss of meaning attached to retirees' work impacted their identity. The breakaway of daily routines and structures which formed retirees' contexts before retirement displayed the retirees in drawing *"on their work activities to construct identities they regard as important, valued and meaningful"* (Brown & Coupland, 2015, p. 1315). More precisely, working routines and the context of work are directly related to the dynamic construction of retirees' identities, which might result in a re-configuration of identity and meaning making when contextual structures are contested or changing.

The third interesting aspect formed the delayed realization of being retired. More precisely, many retirees stated that they realized only after a few weeks of retirement that they were retired and not on vacation, as Respondent 7 stated: *"In the beginning it felt like being on vacation, but at some point this phase is over"*. Also Respondent 5 talked about the new *"rhythm"* of his everyday life within retirement that he still does not have after months of being officially retired. However, he also mentioned that Covid-19 was hindering so many activities he was planning to do during this time and that this made it more complicated establishing a new routine. Another retiree described his realization point as some kind of turnaround and decisive point to apply for a bridge employment after being officially retired. He said: *"(...) during the vacation when I retired, I realized that I wasn't finished yet, that it couldn't be it, and as I saw all my things of my study standing around here and I already had a grandchild, but that this alone couldn't be a perspective for me"* (Respondent 10). To recap, a strong feeling of

being not useful anymore and a delayed realization of the retirees' actual state led to the feeling of being roleless or an unfinished feeling and this was very often the starting point for retirees to search for an alternative, a bridge employment.

Many retirees, who realized retirement delayed, answered that they used the time shortly after being retired to tidy up or clean their homes. Most remarkable is that retirees who strongly identified themselves with their former company, felt a stronger need to find a new order at home, which can be illustrated by the statement *"My office was always tidied up and clean but here at home I gathered so many rubbish over the years (...). I threw it all away"* (Respondent 7). Cleaning the house symbolizes some kind of a new beginning they felt within retirement and also a reconfiguration of their identity. Interestingly, another respondent compared retirement to her maternity leave during her active working life. She explained it as follows: *"And then when you leave[retire], I mean I had that before when I went on maternity leave, I remembered that when I left, I thought, you've had that before"* (Respondent 3). The case that she compared leaving work for bearing a child and becoming a mother to her retirement clearly shows the impact retirement had on her. Giving birth to a child also forms a very substantial new phase in life and this eventually symbolizes even a new role that she might take over during retirement.

Solidarity

A few respondents retired earlier, since organizations were re-structuring and thus many workplaces were outsourced and not needed anymore. In these cases the respondents often received an annulment contract signed by both the retiree and the organization and afterwards received an organizational rent. In two cases this occurred to the whole department within one company which meant that many working colleagues stopped working at the same time. Respondent 3 described this process as follows: *"We all went along. And all the ones we liked, they left and I'd say 2/3 or 2/4 were still there and 2/4 left. It was like 'going together' (laughs). That wasn't so bad. I think when you really go all alone, that's worse in terms of the feeling"*. For her the feeling to retire at the same time as her colleagues and solidary experiencing this phase together made it easier for her to embrace the new life phase. This common transition into a new phase of life and leaving the old company behind was mentioned by numerous respondents. Shared solidarity with former colleagues formed an important aspect for retirees since it diminished the feeling of 'going alone' as they could share their feelings and eventually fears of retiring with each other and felt understood since their colleagues were experiencing

the same back then. Besides, the contact and exchange with retiring colleagues did sometimes prevail after official retirement and thus meant some kind of safety net or belonging for retirees in a very disruptive and liminal life phase.

Solidarity did not only prevail among retiring working colleagues. It has also been signaled from employees that wished the retiring department manager goodbye. *“They (employees) said ‘we wish you all the best, enjoy your retirement, you deserved it now, take your time, you have been there for everyone and now take something for yourself’– and that is how I see it now”* (Respondent 7, department manager). This shared solidarity from his former employees legitimated his own self-perception of deserving to be in retirement and also enjoying the time for himself.

Group Membership & Belonging

Next to solidarity, also the characteristic of group membership was present for many retirees within the liminal phase. For many respondents the maintenance of the former social working network had a high importance. For instance, Respondent 1 and 3 received a retiree pass that allowed them to eat breakfast or dinner at the canteen of their former company. Respondent 3 mentioned that shortly after she retired she was meeting her retiring colleagues a few times in her old company to have breakfast together. Furthermore, they could meet at their former office corner. Nevertheless, she stated that the frequency of meetings and contact to her former colleagues is shrinking, partly due to Covid-19 since the company’s canteen is closed, but also due to the course of the time which is according to her *“a pity”* (Respondent 3).

Contrarily, other retirees, who took on bridge employment directly after being retired, used bridge employment as an opportunity to uphold their former social network. For instance, shortly before retirement, Respondent 2 accepted an offer from a different company that would now provide services for the company he worked for over 30 years. For him bridge employment was a possibility to keep a function within the post department he managed before. He works about five times a month and after he works or even on other free days he visits his former colleagues. He stressed *“(…) Retired life suits me well, I still have my social contacts”* (Respondent 2). Besides, Respondent 7 mentioned that shortly after he retired, one of his former executives who retired a few years before, was sending him a text message saying *“welcome to the club”*. Thus, one huge aspect of why retirement was perceived positively was the maintenance of a social network. In this case, bridge employment operated as a means to uphold

an identification with a former company through maintaining the previous social network and therefore provided an easier transition into retirement.

In summary, bridge employment can influence the identity of retirees in this phase as a maintenance to hold up parts of their former working identity that preserves the feeling of ‘nothing has changed’ and maintaining a social network through working for the same company. This pattern shows a dynamic strategy of retirees to cope with this liminal phase when the context of work is changing. However, it can additionally take over the function as some kind of perceived exit out of a ‘roleless’ state.

4.3 Reintegration as a New Person and its Impact on Retiree’s Identity

The last part of this results chapter aims to illustrate the different ways in which retirees are accompanied by bridge employment in their transition of reintegrating as a ‘new person’. Since the term ‘new person’ is part of the original definition of the reintegration phase of a rite de passage, it is used within this phase. However, it is rather broadly understood in this study and demonstrates a few aspects of a renewed identity of retirees. In the following, the emergence of the retirees’ identification with their bridge employment is presented as well as the strong wish to re-define retirement. Lastly, the period after bridge employment ends is shown.

Identification with Bridge Employment

For many retirees the identification with their bridge employment evolved throughout the process. As many retirees already took on their bridge job long before they retired, new identification patterns were initiated earlier for some retirees than for others. Besides, since many retirees just recently started to engage in a bridge job, the meaning they attach to bridge employment might vary from the meaning other retirees attach to it. This section firstly presents retirees that took on a bridge employment in a different career field and thus extended their familiar working environment and secondly shows retirees that remained working within the same career field as their pre-retirement work.

Firstly, many retirees used bridge employment as a chance to get to know a different industry, to take on jobs with lesser responsibility and most of all with less work pressure (e.g. Respondent 1, 3, 7). For example, Respondent 3 explained that she always wanted to work in the organic store and that she finally applied for it after being retired. Nevertheless, after working a few years within the food industry she decided to take on an accounting bridge job

within a shipping company and thus returned to her former profession in a different company. Besides she stated that she now really liked her job (see Respondent 3). Another example is given by Respondent 7, who used various football terms to express his strong identification with his former insurance organization and his own department, by stating that he decided to take on this Civic Bus initiative as bridge employment because it was a good possibility for him to *“stay always at ball height, you also help the old people spontaneously”* (Respondent 7). Hence he spoke in very familiar football terms about his bridge job in a totally different industry, which shows that he also identified with his new bridge employment and attached meaning to it in similar ways as he did with his former company.

Secondly, various retirees chose a bridge job that was either related to their company they worked for, to their profession they fulfilled or to the same career field they worked in. For instance, Respondent 2, who not only strongly identified with his former company, but also showed a strong identification with his current bridge job by stating: *“Only as I said, I love my job, of course, because for that I'm a full professional, which means you can kick me out of bed in the morning and I'm there immediately”*. Furthermore, Respondent 10 who strongly identified with his profession and own productivity and who worked as a teacher before retirement in a particular field returned according to him through his bridge job to his “origin” (Respondent 10). The meaning his new bridge employment had for him becomes clear by his statement: *“I found the time there very valuable because I got a lot back from all sides. Especially from the students. In this respect, I am glad to have done something useful”*. Another example provides Respondent 4, who started her career life as a religion teacher, however, continued her working career as a shoe sales assistant in which she later also retired. After retirement, she took on a voluntary bridge job in giving memory training for seniors in her local community. When asking her what kind of person she was at her bridge job, she answered: *“Yes let's say, so in memory training I was actually perceived as a teacher. We were all on a first-name basis and we were all very nice to each other, but I was the one who had the say (laughs)”*. These examples show the various ways in which retirees identify with their bridge jobs and how bridge employment functioned as a means to create meaning in a new stage of life in the form of new working activities, which supported a dynamic construction of retirees' identities even within a familiar career field.

'Unretirement'

Retirement or - since the interviews were held in the German context - 'Ruhestand' translates into inactivity and many respondents did not identify with that. One respondent said that Ruhestand was actually not an adequate term for his new life phase (see Respondent 6) and another respondent just simply invented a reversed term "*Unruhestand*" which could be translated into "*unretirement*" (Respondent 8). Respondent 2 reflected "*Yes well retirement actually means nothing other than when you are out of active working life. So that means you no longer have the pressure you used to have*". Moreover, also Respondent 6 always thought about "*a different term than retirement*". In summary, there was a strong need for almost all of the retirees to re-define retirement, which shows that retirees were actively constructing a new picture of retirement with which they could identify. Moreover, this redefinition supported the reintegration of retirees as a new person within this new stage of life.

After Bridge Employment ends

To recap, bridge employment can function or accompany retirees into their new phase of life or into their 'unretirement'. Moreover, this accompanying function of bridge employment does not immediately stop when a bridge job ends. Worth mentioning is that bridge employment really helped respondents to become familiar with their new life phase: as some retirees initially felt 'useless' or had 'unfinished work' left, their perception and feeling in retirement during and after their bridge employment changed significantly. For example, respondent 10 described his situation before taking on a bridge employment and after being officially retired as 'unfinished work' he furthermore claimed "*I wasn't done yet*" with his work. Now after his bridge employment contract ended, he had the feeling that he could have finished his work. He furthermore said "*When I see it here (materials of his former work), I can give it all away now, all the material to my daughter. And this is now completed for me*" (Respondent 10). This example demonstrates bridge employment as a means to close perceived unfinished work and to accompany the retiree into a new phase without work.

Another respondent whose volunteer activity, memory training for seniors within the church, was restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic and is currently placed on hold, shared similar experiences. First of all, asking her about the time around her official retirement, which is about 20 years ago, she indicated that she felt terrible, useless and without any worth (Respondent 4). Taking on her bridge employment was a way for her to 'fill' retirement and to give her new life stage a new meaning as she explained it: "*Yes let's put it this way, after getting*

used to being retired and filling it out, very meaningfully, I have to say it's excellent" (Respondent 4). However, now that this activity is placed on hold and one cannot foresee whether it will be re-activated or not, it seemed as if Respondent 4 could accept this situation differently now. She explained *"Yes, so I must say, now everything goes much quieter, and even in that I actually see that as very nice. My calendar is now always empty or almost always empty but as I said, thank God I have these 3 children who visit me again and again and take time and then we chat or drink a cup of tea"*. Besides, she also keeps contact with the participants of her memory training and fills her days now with going out for a walk and cooking healthy (Respondent 4).

Most remarkable is that physical illness, which forced retirees to stop their bridge employment, often had a large effect on how retirement was perceived. For instance Respondent 9, who talked about his personal meaning he attached to bridge employment after being retired: *"I had tried to get this feeling back, I was on the best way, only then the body had put a spoke in my wheel. And then the hole is right back there and even a bit bigger"*. This means that bridge employment was seen as a way to gain back his old feeling or fulfillment he felt through his own company. It was a way to maintain his old working identity or to establish a new working identity in a changing working context, nevertheless, after his illness was returning stronger, he had a strong feeling of emptiness.

5. Discussion

This research intended to reveal how the dynamic process of bridge employment influences retirees' identity viewed through the lens of a rite de passage. The following section will furthermore discuss the presented results against the backdrop of the theoretical framework. Because of the qualitative inductive analysis of this study, new data and relevant findings were generated and these will be elucidated accordingly in order to answer the research question: *'How does bridge employment as a dynamic process influence the identity of retirees?'*. This chapter is divided into three sections that encompass the three theoretical main contributions of this study. First of all, the usability of the analytical lens of a rite de passage to explore the dynamic process of bridge employment is deliberated. Secondly, the functionalities of the dynamic process of bridge employment are deliberated. The third section discusses the dynamic identities of retirees in relation to bridge employment.

5.1 A Rite de Passage as Analytical Lens to Explore Bridge Employment

Within this study the analytical lens of a rite de passage, a ritual that accompanies transitions from one life stage or fixed point of life to another (Van Gennep, 2019), was used to explore the dynamic process of bridge employment and the effects this had on retirees' identities. In the following, the application of this lens is further discussed.

The first phase of a rite de passage, the separation from everyday life, has been defined by Turner (1998) as behavior, performance or action that is separating, in this case, retirees from "an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions" (p.5). Even though this phase has been experienced very differently by all of the retirees, the results show that some events were captured that contributed to a faster separation of retiree's everyday realities: farewell events, the choice of successor and work pressure affected the ways in which the separation from retirees' everyday routines took place. In addition, negative experiences caused a more difficult separation for retirees. However, these events often functioned as an initial starting point of thinking about, planning or taking on a bridge employment for retirees. Moreover, already the planning of bridge employment reinforced the separation from everyday life and clearly marked a break within retirees' routines.

Even though these events all promoted the separation from retiree's daily structures and routines, they also need to be understood in the particular context in which retirees experienced them. Moreover, as the results show, this phase and these events were experienced at different points in time and at different stages during retirees' lives.

According to Turner (1998), people who are affected by the second, liminal phase experience a certain vagueness and especially ambiguity, since this phase solely provides a small number of perceived stable traits that are present within the first and last phase as well. Comparing this phase to Turner's statement it is revealing that the perceived feeling was often not reflected as ambiguous by retirees, either retirees enjoyed the new stage of life or they suffered from this stage change as the given results showed. Nevertheless, bridge employment accompanied many retirees in establishing new identification patterns of being a 'free and self-determinant retiree' as a coping strategy to face this new and disruptive stage of life as shown by the results. Besides, it was revealing that the dynamic process of bridge employment could not clearly be delimited into one liminal phase that was equally perceived by all the respondents. Changing working conditions, identification patterns of retirees and the role of context shaped the experiences of retirees within and of this phase.

The last phase foresees a complete transition or a full reintegration as a new person within the new stage of life (Turner, 1998). In this phase, the transitional character of the process of bridge employment was highlighted since it accompanied retirees into a new stage of life. Since this study perceived the identity of retirees as dynamic and co-constructed, a snapshot presented within the results of altered identification patterns need to be always situated in a certain context in which the retirees experienced these changes or the development of their dynamic identity. Nevertheless, as presented within the results, many retirees developed new identification patterns within this phase and it was demonstrated how underlying discourses had been challenged, which finally led to partially renewed identification patterns or re-constructed identities of retirees. Also in this phase, the dynamic character of bridge employment became salient, since this construction of retirees' dynamic identities did not simply stop when a bridge job came to an end.

All in all, the framework of a rite de passage shed light on various transitional and accompanying functionalities of bridge employment, in different phases of retirees' lives, which will also be addressed in the next paragraph. Nonetheless, using the rite de passage as an analytical framework, with three pre-defined phases did not support a detailed reflection of the dynamic process that lies behind bridge employment, since this process cannot clearly be categorized into three phases, as indicated within the results. Furthermore, the analytical framework did not comprehensively capture the dynamic construction of retirees' identities. Besides, every retiree experienced retirement and bridge employment differently, meaning that firstly not all retirees went through all phases of a rite de passage when taking on bridge employment and secondly the process of bridge employment has been perceived in a different way by every retiree.

5.2 The Dynamic Process of Bridge Employment and its Functionalities

To recap, bridge employment was understood throughout this study as a dynamic process that is accompanying retirees in their transition from working into retirement and in changes of assumed fixed states as for example, age, profession, position, social prestige etc. (Turner, 1998; Van Gennep, 2019). The results showed that bridge employment is not solely a dynamic process, but also took on various functionalities, which clearly underlines the difficulties in finding an adequate definition of this dynamic social phenomenon.

Needless to say is that retirees diversely shaped and filled the separation phase which in turn had a varied effect on their identities. For example, some retirees who rather identified

with their own profession and productivity started a bridge employment long before retirement and continued with it after being retired. In this line, bridge employment was used as a means to build upon or broaden job related working routines during an active working career and thus crafted new daily reliabilities and new structures that reinforced an identification pattern of 'being productive'. Furthermore, as the results showed, planning or taking on bridge employment before retiring aided retirees to transition more easily and provided some kind of stability or certain safety net when entering the disruptive stage of retirement.

As the results section demonstrated, bridge employment took on various functions within the liminal phase and consequently impacted the identity of retirees. For instance, many retirees experienced this phase as difficult. Furthermore, based on the results it can be stated that some retirees had a strong feeling of being not useful after retiring and a delayed realization of retirement strengthened the feeling of rolelessness or that this 'couldn't be it'. This feeling was often the starting point for retirees to search for an alternative. In this line, bridge employment functioned as some kind of exit and a gateway out of this 'rolelessness'.

As described within the theory chapter of this study, the liminal phase is paired with a feeling of group membership and solidarity (Turner, 1998). These two aspects were also reflected within the results of this study. When entering retirement, many retirees felt shared solidarity with their former colleagues, which resulted in an increased feeling of belonging in this liminal stage of life. Besides the shared solidarity, the results also underlined the strong importance of group membership for retirees. Group membership and the maintenance of a former social network has often been achieved by taking on a bridge employment in the same career field or company. Therefore, bridge employment supported retirees in their transition as a means of holding up former networks and thus also former identification categories. This finding is in accordance with Zhan et al. (2009) who point to bridge employment's functionality of perseverance and maintenance of present or current structures to circumvent stress proceeding from disruption when entering retirement. This perseverance was primarily experienced by retirees that directly started their bridge employment after being retired or beforehand and continued with it throughout retirement.

The results of the last phase showed the varied status of retirees and the diverse functionalities and meanings of bridge employment. The first functionality referred to the point that bridge employment was supporting retirees who identified themselves with their own productivity, profession and occupation to reinforce this perception by flexibly choosing a

bridge job that was fitting their new routines. A second functionality, based on the results, forms the ‘gateway function’, which means that retirees used bridge employment as a means to broaden their former social network, get to know a different industry and thus the opportunity to reconfigure their identity within an unfamiliar environment. Moreover, arguing in the line of Mazumdar et al. (2018) bridge jobs can provide retirees the possibility of entering a new career stage and also have a similar meaning for retirees as their career job beforehand. The third functionality refers to the strong wish of redefining retirement by aid of taking on a bridge employment and thus also re-configuring one’s identity. More precisely, as the results show, bridge employment generated an opportunity for retirees to return to a state of activity and thus either reinforce their former identity or build up new identification patterns.

Moreover, this phase presented the impact of bridge employment on the identity of retirees after their bridge job ended, which clearly supports the statement of the varied functionalities. The perceptions of retirees, who initially perceived themselves being in a roleless state after retiring, changed after their bridge jobs ended. An easier acceptance was possible and the acceptance of a daily routine without work. **This supports the picture of bridge employment as an accompanying process that simplified the transition of retirees into their new stage of life.**

5.3 Dynamic Identity of Retirees

This study understood identity based on a critical view and aimed to take underlying power structures, discourses and relations that impact retirees into account (see Alvesson et al., 2008). As the results show, the identities of retirees are not solely diverse and unique, but are also highly related to work. This view is confirmed by Brown and Coupland (2015) who stress that work and working activities are highly important when it comes to identity construction which is furthermore regarded “as important, valued and meaningful” (p.1315). This relation between work and identity must not by any means be perceived as static, since perceived identities are often “threatened, may be ambiguous or contested, and are frequently fragile and insecure” (Brown & Coupland, 2015, p. 1315). This is often the case when working activities change as for example through retirement or taking on a bridge employment and provokes a re-configuration or construction of retirees’ identification patterns, which will be demonstrated in the following.

Based on the results, three prevailing identification patterns have been demonstrated, which are neither mutually exclusive nor the only intersections impacting retirees. Firstly,

retirees strongly identified themselves with their former working company, which was supported by the results of aspects such as the length of employment, devotedness to the company, working long hours and the symbolization of the company as family. This company built a perceived fixed stage in retirees' lives and of their identity which went under scrutiny when entering retirement. Secondly, retirees identified themselves with their own profession, productivity and occupation, whereas thirdly, many retirees primarily identified as the family breadwinner and focused on financial aspects of their career. These identification patterns were highly influenced by the context in which retirees not only lived, but grew up, as has been presented by the societal normative origin of the breadwinner model that was a strong identification pattern of retirees.

As Price (2000) criticized, retirees as well as retirement has been homogeneously treated within literature. This critique also refers to role theory, which outlines retirement as a 'roleless state' paired with a perceived loss of position, role, status, profession (Price, 2000). Based on the results, this roleless state was specifically related to the liminal phase of a rite de passage. Furthermore, every retiree filled retirement differently and attached a different meaning to this period of life. The results showed that most retirees could not identify as an 'inactive' retiree and thus tried to cope with this state differently. This caused a strong wish of redefining retirement and even a re-configuration of their unique identities. Bridge employment was most of all seen as a very flexible way to redefine and restructure retirement. The agency that retirees felt in gaining back power to restructure their everyday routines led to a reinforced identity as the 'productive and active' retiree. Nevertheless, it must also be added that the perception of being 'roleless' was not perceived by everyone, which was partly due to the circumstance that bridge employment formed a constant in life of retirees that supported a transition between life stages

Grounding this finding within the continuity theory (see Kim & Feldman, 2000) it becomes clear that bridge employment can function as providing a continuity for retirees to uphold the former work identity, as has been described in the section before. Nevertheless, for those who searched for a bridge employment in a different career field or took on a bridge job after spending months in retirement, solely the outlook to be able to work again often already reduced stress. On the contrary retirees that were unable to work ever again due to physical illness. The results furthermore show that retiring was not always stressful for retirees, many enjoyed the self-determinant character of it and used bridge employment as a means to refill and actively shape this period differently than their working life before. In this line, solely using

the continuity theory and role theory to explain retiree's behavior within the new stage of life does not reflect the flexible, transitional and multi-level process that retirees experience.

Even though this study did not primarily focus on underlying discourses that surround retirees, it became revealing that discourses around inactivity during retirement were challenged by all of the retirees. The latter had a strong wish to redefine retirement either by aid of bridge employment or by identifying themselves as free, productive and self-determinant. This strong wish to re-define retirement became salient within the phase of reintegration and thus formed a part in reconfiguring retirees' identity. The discourses around staying productive have already been entitled by Thomas et al. (2014) as 'resisting the decline' age-discourses which evolved over time within organizations to keep older workers motivated to work. The 'resisting the decline' discourse can also be related to the finding that retirees experienced their loss of work or changing working activities in retirement as a feeling of being useless. Labelling this discourse solely as 'resisting the decline' does not reflect the unique and complex career paths and the developed identification with their own productivity long before official retirement. Furthermore, productivity was primarily safeguarded or re-gained through taking on bridge employment, which formed a large part of retirees' identities. Nevertheless, the strong presence of discourses around productivity illustrates the hidden power of underlying prevailing societal discourses and thus the high importance of the socio-normative context, which in turn impacted retirees' identities.

To recap, this study contributes to a richer picture and more diversified understanding of bridge employment by viewing this social phenomenon as a dynamic process with different functionalities that become salient in a certain socio-normative context in which retirees are situated in. This is also impacting the dynamic identities of retirees in various different ways.

6. Final Remarks

This chapter covers the concluding remarks of this research. It is subdivided into four parts. It starts with this research's limitations, continued with a personal reflection of the researcher and suggestions for further research approaches that would be necessary to deepen this rather new academic field of bridge employment and retirees' identity and it ends with concrete and practical recommendations for organizations.

6.1 Limitations

Regarding the limitations, it is noteworthy that the methodological design of this research was established before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, this had an impact on this research in various ways. First of all, the sample size for the interviews was initially set at 15. However, since the sample group referred to retirees, who ranged age wise between 58 and 80 and this age group was perceived 'at risk', ten interviews could be conducted. Consequently, it was even harder to reach out to retirees during this time. This in turn affected not only the acquisition of respondents which was done by aid of snowball sampling solely via telephone, but also the generated results since less data and less variation was present through a smaller sample. Besides, friends and family of the retirees were also affected by Covid-19 which is why only a few of the respondents could recommend further possible respondents that would be able to participate in an interview during the pandemic. Moreover, snowball sampling often brings along the disadvantage that most of the respondents share the same social network and also most of the time the same educational degree and sometimes even the same background with regard to interests, job history or the like. An increased sample and thus increased variety of the respondents could have generated more categories within the analysis of the data and would have affected the results positively.

Furthermore, having a sample group that is especially affected financially, mentally and most important socially by this pandemic, left not only its traits on retirees, but also caused impersonal meetings with the researcher. Consequently, it was less possible to build up a relationship beforehand and throughout the interview. Having respondents from an own personal network had the advantage that respondents were more willing to participate, however, it also had beard difficulties while interviewing. For instance, when interviewing a familiar person, the researcher had to be free from his own developed bias and needed to ask obvious questions that he might already know the answer to. Besides, also taboo questions were harder to pose, as the kind of personal relationship with the respondent played a role.

6.2 Personal Reflection

Symon and Cassell (2012) stress that "every research or study pose[s] serious questions of 'identity' and 'self' for the researcher" (p.57). Thus, this personal reflection aims at identifying certain intersecting factors which played a role during the research process and moreover influenced the researcher's own identity.

First of all, throughout this research, the researcher was 25 years old, she furthermore found herself in the last phase of her study and had few working experiences. These aspects became important when she spoke to older people or retirees. Firstly, age differences between the researcher and the retirees created a perceived distance, which was difficult to overcome during the telephone interview. Moreover, reflecting the study design, which needed to be re-designed due to Covid-19, the researcher was restricted in interviewing personally at sight. This had the clear downside of not seeing the other person upfront and resulted in a perceived higher pressure to build up a trusted relationship in a very short time for the researcher and to overcome this perceived distance.

Another aspect formed the lack of working experiences and a lack of felt commitment towards a company that was perceived by the researcher herself, which made it in the beginning hard to understand the impact work can have on one's identity. During the interviews, the researcher noticed that the retirees often referred to their generation, as one that worked more independently and one that worked in a less standardized manner, and that especially the younger generations would change this now. This left its traits on the researcher, since she felt somehow guilty for being part of a more volatile, digital and more standardized working generation. This feeling led her to reveal her opinion during interviews and to some extent defending herself by stating 'yes, it is different now' and that this 'standardization is now a new working trend'. After conducting every single interview, the researcher thought about the power of exposing too much of her own point of view and thus also co-constructed or manipulated the direction of the interview to some extent. Nevertheless, this phenomena is not rare among qualitative researchers as Essers (2009) underlined in her personal reflection: "As the sphere was generally quite informal and the women sometimes also wanted to know my opinions, the interviews might better be typified as conversations than conventional 'question-answer interviews'" (p. 166). Thus, viewing the interviews rather as co-constructed conversations, helped the researcher to let go her nervousness about revealing too much own opinion on different work-related topics.

Generally speaking, the researcher's own identity became under scrutiny throughout the study. For example, listening to the huge importance work had for retirees and how they perceived themselves, the researcher questioned her anticipated career path as being adequate for her to fill a large part of her life. More precisely, as two of the female interviewees were working part-time when bearing and raising children, the researcher firstly became very aware of the fact that she might undergo similar working changings. She suddenly found herself

confused between her anticipated planned career-focused working life and the experiences that were shared by female retirees who followed different career paths. Overall, the researcher gained a lot more self-confidence throughout the study and the interviews and enjoyed conducting the interviews with retirees that shared very different and intimate life experiences.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

The research design was conceptualized before Covid-19 broke out and brought Germany into a nation-wide lockdown. Consequently, this had large influences on the ways in which bridge jobs were executed, some were even paused and other opportunities for bridge employment completely broke away. Nevertheless, this pandemic pathed the way for many new and interesting further research topics around bridge employment and how retirees were affected during that particular period.

First of all, as Beehr and Bennett (2014) indicated, findings around macro-level factors that could antecede or surround bridge employment are scarce and have not yet been qualitatively researched. Thus, focusing on possible macro-level factors has a large potential to contribute to a fuller picture of antecedents of bridge employment, but also to a broader understanding of retirees' identity in a qualitative way.

Secondly, since this study primarily focused on work identity, further research should aim to detect more intersecting factors that might be influencing retirees' identities. For example, the role of family and family-related attitudes or marital experiences, which are solely addressed by quantitative studies, need further investigation, as many retirees stressed the huge importance of their familiar background, e.g. their marriage, during their working careers, but also in the transition into retirement. Furthermore, since the sample only contained three female retirees, who shared different experiences and discontinuities during their working careers, e.g. working part-time after a child birth, than male retirees, more intersectional research is needed on the influencing factor of gender. Thus, in order to better understand the multi-faceted character of the identity of retirees further inductive research on these intersections is needed to also better illuminate the effects of bridge employment on identity.

Lastly, this research only partly addressed various discourses that surround retirees and their dynamic construction of identity in relation to socio-normative contexts. Throughout this study a few indications have been identified that could guide further research topics on discourses that surround retirees. For instance, the oldest Respondent of this study perceived herself as

very young and compared herself to Respondents within her memory training senior group that were younger than her, but needed more training. Thus, it seems as if discourses around the perception of age does also have a huge importance within the dynamic process of bridge employment and need further elaboration.

6.4 Recommendations & Implications

The findings of this study firstly, support organizations in order to base practices that surround retiring employees of the particular company and secondly, can be used to receive a better understanding of the dynamic process of bridge employment. Overall, this research recommends the following practices to facilitate the successful transition into retirement, however, those need to be tailored to the organization itself.

Firstly, interpreting the results, it became clear that a stepwise transition from their former career job into retirement or a reduced working load might prepare retirees better for their next stage of life rather than an abrupt transition. Thus, this study recommends organizations to establish practices or programs that facilitates a stepwise retirement, e.g. in terms of working reduced hours, or taking on a bridge employment already next to their last year of work before retiring.

Secondly, in most companies there are clearly designed onboarding practices. However, off-boarding practices are often considered as less important even though goodbye practices for retirees and a positive farewell from working companies could result in a positive resume about the organization and can lead to more retirees that are still willing to work for the company or are actively promoting the company for the rest of their lives. Therefore, this study recommends all organizations to put focus on and design off-boarding practices with regard to providing dignified farewells.

Thirdly, various respondents mentioned that they valued the possibility of being able to visit their former company including their old colleagues. Some of them even received a retiree badge and were thus allowed to eat breakfast, lunch or dinner within their former company. This led to many meetings with former colleagues and thus simplified the maintenance of an alumni network. This in turn supported an easier transition into retirement. The practice of creating an alumni network for retirees of the same company could provide the possibility to share experiences, feelings and fears with each other and thus establish more solidarity and a feeling of belonging for older workers.

All in all, organizations need to prioritize measures for older employees more in the future to not only enable them to retire well, but also to sustainably design and create more space for potential secondary activities, such as bridge jobs, for older employees.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Topic list

1.) General and demographic-related introductory questions	a. A general introduction of the researcher, the project and the interviewee, including demographics.
2.) Working life before official retirement	a. Questions around their official retirement & their former career (job). Questions around former profession and actual work tasks.
3.) The initial process of retirement and the process of adopting a bridge employment	a. Period after being officially retired: retirees' experiences in that period, how did they feel? What were crucial changes? Any adoptions in activities around family or friends etc.? b. Reasons why and (when) interviewee entered a new stage of bridge employment. Questions around the experience of bridge employment: for example: new colleagues, tasks, frequency and kind of bridge employment.
4.) The process of bridge employment	a. Questions around the form, tasks, factual and demographic information around bridge jobs of retirees. b. Questions on the underlying feelings
Optional: 5.) Process after bridge employment	a. Questions regarding the experiences after bridge employment? b. Daily activities, tasks, feelings and personal experiences.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

2.1 Introduction into topic: Introducing topic of research, & study background: Radboud University, Master's thesis & research purposes: Hello my name is Nicola, 25 years old and I am currently a Masters student at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Currently I am writing my thesis about the very enriching topic of retirement and how this phase, which can take on different forms in our lives, is actively shaped by all of us. It is important to look behind this often stigmatized phase of

live to understand work transitions maybe even better or to understand various organizational but also political measures to path this way for everyone.

- Why interviewee was chosen: This is also the reason why I have the pleasure to talk to you today.
- Expressing thankfulness towards interviewee for participating, especially in these times (Covid-19 pandemic 2020).

To ensure a smooth start of the interview, several aspects will be mentioned:

- There are no wrong answers, I am interested in all kind of answers.
- Obtained data will be treated anonymously.

After introducing the topic, I ask the interviewee for permission to record the interview just for simplification of analysing it later on, if yes I continue, if no I have to tell them that I will be making notes during the interview. (Making sure that recording is not intimidating for the employee with sentences as: To record the interview would help me a lot afterwards, in case I forget something, just to recap. All data is safe and not shared with another party.)

➔ Start recording.

2.2) Topics & Open questions: All of these questions will be placed according to the course of the interview and must not be asked in a chronological order. Moreover, many follow-up questions will be asked to ensure the provisions of enriching examples that might illustrate the experiences and feelings of the retirees in a lighter way.

2.2.1) General and demographic-related introductory questions: A general introduction of the researcher, the project and the interviewee, including demographics.

- After I have introduced myself, could you please introduce yourself?
- Important back- up questions:
- How old are you?
- Where do you live?
- Could you tell me more about your family? (Where do they basically live, do you have children, grandchildren, a wife or husband?)

2.2.2) Working life before official retirement: Questions around their official retirement & their former career (job). Questions around former profession and actual work tasks.

- Before officially being retired, what was the last job you were occupied in? And before that?
- What kind of job was that? What were your daily tasks?
- How did you feel at work? How did you feel when you came home back then?

- What did the job meant to you?
- How long were you occupied at the same organization or at your main job you referred to?
- How did your daily routine looked like before retiring?

➔ Period leading towards retirement (while still working)

- While still working how did you think about your upcoming retirement?
- Looking forward to it? Dreading retirement?
- Back then did you have any plans with regard to retirement?
- If yes, how did these plans look like?
- Did you have any plans back then how to continue working? If yes, how or could you give an example?

2.2.3) The initial process of retirement and the process of adopting a bridge employment: Period after being officially retired: Retirees experiences in that period, how did they feel? What were crucial changes? Any adoptions in activities around family or friends etc.?

- How did you experience the day you retired? What did you do in the following weeks, which activities etc.?
- When did you officially retire or when did you stop working?
- What do you think or feel about retirement? What does it mean to you?
- What were, according to you, the main reason(s) you retired?
- How does your daily routine look like now?
- How did you feel after official retirement? How would you describe yourself within the process of retirement?

➔ Reasons why and (when) interviewee entered new stage of bridge employment. Questions around the experience of bridge employment: for example: new colleagues, tasks, frequency and kind of bridge employment.

- When did you start working in your bridge job?
- How did you develop the idea to take on a bridge employment?

2.2.4) The process of bridge employment: Questions around the form, tasks, factual and demographic information around bridge job of retirees.

- What kind of bridge employment are you doing? Could you tell me more about your task?

- *Back-up: What kind of bridge job are you employing?*
 - *How many hours do you work?*
 - *Where is the bridge job?*
 - *Is the bridge job unpaid or paid (sensitive question, might be reformulated)? Are you getting any kind of rewards for your bridge job? And if yes, what are these?*
- How did your daily routine change?
- What kind of person are you at work? How would your colleagues describe you?
- Why did you take on this bridge employment?
- ➔ Questions on the underlying feelings:
 - How do you feel when you think about your bridge employment? *Back-up: How would you describe the person you are when you are at work?*
 - Are you thinking about your bridge job when going home?

2.2.5) Process after bridge employment = Just in case the retiree stopped with the bridge employment

- ➔ Questions regarding the experiences after bridge employment?
 - When did you stop with your bridge employment?
 - What are the main reasons why you stopped with your bridge job?
- ➔ Daily activities, tasks, feelings and personal experiences.
 - How would you describe a typical day in your life now?

Appendix 3: Gioia Method – Coding Template

Figure 1.1 Integration of Atlas ti. Network groups into a Gioia Coding Method template

1st Order Concepts	2nd Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions 1.0	Aggregate Dimensions 2.0
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Farewell Celebration- Last working day- Goodbye Present- Legitimation of retirement through colleagues and employees	Farewell to the company before retirement	Phase of Separation from everyday reality	Bridge Employment as a Rite de Passage
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Changes in length of service- Changes in work routine before retirement- Choice of successor v.p.- Work pressure (calm down after working day)	Changing working environment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Backgrounds to retire- „I know I still would keep my BE“	Starting/Planning BE before retirement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Restricted working activities- Illness limits social contacts	Illness /ill health		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Company offered coverage	Financial planning of retirement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Joint (transition to) retirement- Legitimization of retirement by work colleagues /MA	Solidarity		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Company environment equated with family	Symbols of group membership		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close relationship with work colleagues /MA - Length of service - Preservation of old social network - Company influenced life - Work as a means of coping with grief 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling of uselessness & emptiness after retirement - Delayed Realization of the new phase of life after retirement 	Entering "roleless" state		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Renovation/ cleaning up after retirement - <> Foreign-dominated everyday life 	"Selbstgestaltung" of everyday work / life	Reintegration as a new person	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diminished contact with former work colleagues 	Working in Bridge Employment		
	Leisure activities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retirement perceived as positive - Future plans for retirement 	Re-definition of retirement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification with former department - "I am married to this club" - High level of commitment to the company - Willingness to work overtime - Recognition of the company - Leading position (job title) - Different positions within the same organization 	Identification with former organisation	Retirees' self-perceived (work) identity before retirement	Retiree's Identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High importance of one's own labor/productivity - Recognition at work - Rather works alone - Felt needed 	Identification with occupation, profession, handicraft		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "My job meant first of all income for my family" - Family next to job - Familiar support during career 	Identification as (family) breadwinner		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I felt so little useful" - "I felt I had no longer any worth" - Self-satisfaction now in focus - Balanced person after retirement - "I only did what I wanted to do" 	Self-perception after retirement	Retirees' self-perceived (work) identity after retirement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent self-perception - Socially engaged, altruistic - Felt needed and valuable - More freedom and self-determination through BE 	Identification with Bridge Employment	Retiree's self-perceived identity during BE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chance to develop further - Complete unfinished work - Give back to others - Financial security - Back to the source - Change of industry - Joy - Gaining recognition 	Meaning BE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emptiness due to disability - Everyday life calmer - "Retired is a pretty good thing"- enjoying retirement now - "then I was out too" 	Self-perception after BE	Retiree's self-perceived (work) identity after BE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "We did the senior dance outdoors". 	Corona influence on extracurricular activities	Covid-19 Influence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Everything has fallen away" - Citizen bus now to take patients to immunization clinics - Digital work exhausted 	Corona influence on secondary employment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impersonal farewell - High work pressure/ pressure on earnings - Company in recession 	Corona Influence on transition to retirement		

Appendix 4: Overview of Respondents/ Sample

Respondent	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Former Career Job	Years of Retirement	Bridge job
1	61	Female	German	Financial Analyst	8	Freelancer & Cleaning services mini job
2	65	Male	German	Head of Post Department at IT-company	2	Mini Job at former Post Department of IT company
3	58	Female	German	Office Management Assistant at IT-company	8	Mini Job at Haulage firm (doing accountancy & office management)
4	79	Female	German	Shoe saleswoman	19	Teacher of memory training at church (voluntarily)
5	64	Male	German	Head of adjustment of damages department in insurance company (department manager)	<1	Working voluntarily as 'Grüner Herr' (helping sick people in the hospital)
6	65	Male	German	Area Manager (department manager) Transport law in insurance company	<1	Working voluntarily for a refugee relief (helping refugees in visits to authorities)
7	64	Male	German	Department manager in insurance company	<1	Driving for the 'Civic Bus' initiative (voluntarily)
8	64	Male	German	Electric Welder	2	Freelancer in providing winter road maintenance services & pastor
9	61	Male	German	Automotive Mechanic (Owner of own vehicle repair shop)	4	Mini Job as Automotive mechanic
10	69	Male	German	Special pedagogue/ Special education teacher	4	Special education teacher with focus on handicrafts in school