ENGLISH SUMMARY

Chapter 1. The core question of this dissertation is why older (promising) technicians opt for voluntary early retirement. Not a lot has been done, both in policy as well as scientific research, to have employees answer the question themselves - employees of whom you would have never expected that they especially would cease activities early. The government, moreover, opposes leaving a paid job prematurely, by, among others, laws and regulations, abolition of pre-pension advantages - hoping that it will make employees extend their working life. The government seems to be successful with their policy of discouragement; there is a clear increase in the number of people extending their working life. However, on reflection, this is mostly due to increasing labour participation amongst older women and lower numbers of rejections and early retirements. By contrast, there are clear indications that employees are less inclined to extend their working life. Recent research shows that - even though more than half of the employees aged 60 years and over expect to stop working at the age of 65.7 - they would have stopped at the age of 63.4 if they had a say in it: three years earlier than the state pension age (Henkens et al., 2016). There are also indications that promising older employees, who are healthy, love to work, and are employable, stop working prematurely. Approximately two million German pensioners in the ages 55-64 (approximately half of all pensioners) say they are in good health but have nevertheless stopped working. It is not clear why they have stopped working prematurely. In our country, as recent research shows, a cohort of older employees within the government and within the education system leading promising and versatile working lives, voluntarily ‘dropout’ early as well (Corvers et al., 2015). This research shows that the pension group is actually more satisfied with their jobs and feels involved with the organization of the education system and shows more interest in politics and community than the employees who keep working. Right now there is growing attention for employees in more heavy and arduous professions such as the technical sector. They often have a primary and secondary education. How do matters stand with the promising older employees in this sector? Do they also voluntarily stop working early and why?

The core question of this study is: Why do older technicians with a primary and secondary education (who assess themselves as healthy, love to work and are in demand) opt for voluntarily early retirement? The following subsidiary questions resulted from this core question: (1) What is the nature and content of employees’
views on the freedom of choice in the current and planned collective institutional facilities for the passage of paid work towards pension?, (2) What motives do older technicians have for voluntary early cessation of activities?, and (3) Which social-cultural, personal, social context and time factors affect their choice?

Chapter 2. This chapter contains almost the entire previously published Breij & Van Oosterhout (2016) publication. This own research has been recorded in the dissertation as a preliminary study. The title of this publication is “Retirement. Employees’ views on their freedom of choice when leaving paid jobs. And what employers and professors think about that.” The research made use of individual in-depth interviews with ten employees and five employers, and seven professors with subject-matter expertise, including SER Crown appointed members. Employers and professors are interviewed to be able to better assess the employee’s context. It seems that the deliberation and decision process that is triggered by those retirement conditions is different for different employees and generates different outcomes. The explanation for this is that this process also depends on other factors that do not belong to the collective institutional retirement conditions, such as working conditions, family life and personal financial possibilities (such as personal assets). The interviewed employees indicated they always deliberated the collective institutional retirement conditions in conjunction with these other conditions, the employers see their employees doing this, and appreciate this, but keep a distance just to keep it business-like.

Chapter 3. The literature research and the theoretical framework will be addressed in this chapter. The preliminary study provided the angle for the literature choice and the development of an own theoretical frame. This frame consisted of four theses with supporting suppositions, which provided suppositions with regard to the dynamics within the (possible) decision process for voluntary early cessation of activities. In the literature choice, but also in determining the theoretical frame, the starting points were mostly theories and notions which indicate immaterial factors as predominant/dominant for the final decision. This meant opting for the supposition that the influence of the collective-institutional and financial factors, however crucially-determining these are thought to be, is outweighed by psychological factors. The biggest inspiration for this study, and thus also for the theoretical frame, relied on Carstensen et al. (1999) life-span theory of motivation. Essentially, the theory indicates that the feeling of the elapsing of years, and in particular the feeling to be
running out of time, gives people a growing motivation to make something of their lives. It is assumed then, that the preference for early retirement is persistent and the result of diverging personal deliberations, in which time emerges as the most significant deliberation (Carstensen et al., 1999: 165): “As people move through life they become increasingly aware that time is in some sense “running out.”... It becomes increasingly important to make the “right” choice, not to waste time on gradually diminishing future payoffs. Increasingly, emotionally meaningful goals are pursued.” Seven years later Carstensen (2006) published the article The Influence of a Sense of Time on Human Development in which after further empirical research once again the meaning of personal time awareness in relation to chosen own developments and future is confirmed.

It plays a dominant role in the decision on how to proceed. As such, it is, supposedly, a better predictor than chronological age. The theory of the five mechanisms that stimulate voluntary early retirement (Bal et al., 2012; Kanfer et al., 2012; Reeuwijk et al., 2013; Wang & Shultz, 2010) also inspired: the changed views on time; the changed social cultural value of work; the experienced health and vitality; the experience of the end of the career and the experience of a lack of support from the employer. The developed theoretical frame that acted as input but also as a touchstone for the field research started after that consisted of four theses each with supporting suppositions. Based on this theoretical frame four suppositions have been formulated in the shape of verifiable theses:

Thesis 1: When older employees start viewing their lives outside of paid work as more important, it increases the possibility for voluntary early cessation of activities as opposed to retirement at state-pension benefit age. Thesis 2: When older employees have a clear feeling for time awareness, it increases the possibility for voluntary early cessation of activities as opposed to retirement at state-pension benefit age (Note: Time awareness is defined as the realization that all is temporary and that you can either choose to let time go by passively or to consciously utilize it). Thesis 3: When older employees worry less about their financial future, it will increase their motivation for voluntary early cessation of activities as opposed to cessation at state-pension benefit age. Thesis 4: Older employees who love work and their professions, are dedicated to the company, believe they are employable and healthy, will stop working for money sooner when they get less valuation for it in their own working environment or when they find the work less enjoyable.
Chapter 4. The central objective of this chapter is the research method. Initially there was qualitative research followed by quantitative research. The qualitative research consisted of three group interviews and five individual interviews. Almost all respondents had stopped working early when they were around 62 years old and worked in a technical profession. They have used the possibility of ‘vroegpensioen’ (early retirement) offered by the Pensioenfonds Metaal and Elektro (PME) and the Pensioenfonds Metaal and Techniek (PMT). The selection of these respondents was preceded by a written questionnaire (open questions) among 109 respondents. After that, quantitative research (structured and open questions) took place using a questionnaire pre-tested on a specially assembled TNS NIPO panel using digital questioning. The quantitative research focused on persons from 55 to 69 years old who had been working or still worked in a technical profession. The fieldwork for the questionnaire started on 12 July 2016, concluded on 21 July 2016 and was monitored daily. After the first 50 observations had come in, a first set of charts was made to execute a final check on the functioning of the questionnaire. To achieve sufficient response, a reminder was sent out after the first fieldwork week. In the end, 615 panel members have reacted to the invitation for participation to the research (68% response). Within this group, 288 persons were currently working and 286 had stopped working. Of those, 218 (76%) and 230 (80%) persons respectively have/had a technical profession which falls within the scope of the recorded definition in the questionnaire. These persons, 488 in total, have filled out the complete questionnaire. It took an average of 14 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. 84% of the group of non-workers (who stopped working) turned out to consist of 194 people who prematurely stopped working, of which 48% voluntary and 52% non-voluntary.

In the qualitative research the choice was made to first understand the thoughts and feelings of the older technicians in order to uncover what comes into play in the selfargumentation in their decision to prematurely stop working. The qualitative research bears the characteristics of the Grounded Theory (NVivo-method). The quantitative research was deemed necessary after that to find out, fed by the qualitative research, if the outcomes from the qualitative study can also be found among larger groups of older technicians. It was also possible to get a clear view on the factors that play a part in the choice of (voluntary) early cessation of activities by this group compared with older technicians in this age group (55-69) that are still working, and the older technicians which have prematurely stopped working on a non-voluntary basis. Together these studies provided the possibility to map the motives and backgrounds of the choice for voluntary early cessation of activities.
They complemented each other, also connected to a joint reflection on the same theoretical frame.

Chapter 5. In this chapter, the qualitative research results are presented and brought in confrontation with the theoretical frame (and supporting suppositions). This resulted in the following, among other things. Working conditions are particularly decisive for (give the essential push to) early cessation of activities. The respondents express this in the announcement “enough is enough”, clearly an umbrella term with a hidden world and goes together with the feeling of having worked for the longest of times, something that was also used as an argument. Dissatisfaction with working conditions comes in many shapes but the most important ones were alienation/detachment by losing the feeling of commitment, caused by re-organizations, new owners, new management and performance standards and loss of a feeling of respect. With deep appreciation for the own profession and own ability, and own employability. Rising stress, physical/psychological problems still manageable at work. Fear of losing one’s own health causes leaving on time, also because of the feeling of mortality. The partner has a big influence on the decision. Immaterial factors take the upper hand over material factors. These last factors are important for the decision, but early cessation of activities is considered to be so important that people settle for the money/capital that they are content with. Less money is what people have to reckon with in terms of freedom. At the time one chooses. The control is taken into one’s own hand – on grounds of a fickle government, but also for reasons of self-protection (staying healthy, stress).

Chapter 6. The quantitative research among 448 older technicians (55-69) is at the core of this chapter. Many older technicians and older technicians with a secondary education become aware that “enough is enough” and that they have been working for the longest time especially in a 5-year period prior to the actual premature retirement. It is time for “other things”. Initially, the motives for early cessation of activities seem to be so-called push-factors. The situations in and around the working situation become less agreeable. Broadly expressed working conditions which, for a variety of possible reasons, give rise to more negative thoughts about extending their working life. A first conclusion is that intangible motives for voluntary early retirees play an important role in their early retirement, and more often than tangible motives. Two reasons that emerge most clearly are that they conclude they have worked long enough and that they need more time for other things. A financial contribution from
the employer has been important. Under this financial arrangement is then usually a termination scheme planned with the employer. A second conclusion concerns the factors that influence the choice made to retire voluntarily. Only age (a socio-demographic feature), experienced health and the value assigned to free time over money (personal factors), are influential. Voluntarily early retirees stop working later than involuntary early retirees, often feel very healthy and find free time more important than money, compared with the involuntary retirees. The other examined factors are not influential, such as the level of education, work-related factors (industry, size of company, position on the labor market, attitude towards work and such), financial factors (pension situation), other personal factors (optimistic/pessimistic) and time factors (life expectancy).

A third conclusion concerns the older technicians who are still working but expect to take early retirement in the future. With these respondents, many more factors influence their expectations to likely or certainly leave early. These are: age, education level (social demographic characteristics), age at first job, importance of work in the past five years, demand for the type of work in the current job market, difficulty in finding another job, love for the work (work-related factors), experienced health, an optimistic or pessimistic attitude of life and the value given to free time over money (personal factors).

Chapter 7. The Final Considerations can be found here. The most important conclusions are as follows.
First, older technicians have little confidence in the government when it comes to the institutional moment (determined by law and regulation, such as the AOW benefit) and the amount of pension benefits. They will take matters into their own hands, to provide greater security for themselves by making use of the available opportunities so that they can leave when and under the financial conditions they wish for themselves. The willingness to take early retirement with lower benefits, if one has adequate funds according to their own judgement -is a part of that. Intangible motives appear to be more important than tangible motives when taking voluntary early retirement. Secondly, older technicians have the feeling in the transition to voluntary early retirement that they still have more or less good health, even though they may experience some physical and psychological problems. Their health would be threatened by continuing to work. They fear that they will not be able to enjoy life after stopping work due to health issues. The awareness urges this employee to work for so long, and that “it has been enough”. Thirdly, when deciding whether
or not to take early retirement in the future, an important consideration for the technicians who are still working is, if there is a negative assessment of current working conditions. One feels less at home. The valuation for work is hardly diminished and not at all for one's profession. The attitude of the employer contributes to the early retirement. Employers generally show distance to the older employee as it comes time to transition to retirement. They find this to be the responsibility of the employee himself.

It is recommended that the government can keep matters more in its own hand by offering reliable certainty regarding its pension policy. People want to count on a trustworthy government. What the government does is strongly facilitate early cessation of activities, where early cessation of activities is precisely the unintended consequence. It is also recommended to conduct more research into the specific target group of voluntary prematurely retired older employees with a technical profession. This data is not sufficiently available. More energy needs to be put into preventative company healthcare. There is a reason that healthy older technicians fear the loss of their health if they work longer. They see colleagues that have lost their health. From the world of business health care, there is a strong concern about the health of workers in heavy and arduous occupations. The focus here is mainly on improving working conditions, also a hot item among the older technicians themselves. Finally: All companies are advised to, if they want to keep these older technicians, to examine, for each individual employee, where possible tensions lie between love for the work and the actual working conditions. The working conditions cannot be simply ticked off from a list, however convenient it may be, but can be discovered in a personal and open conversation in which the employee's “to matter” feeling is crucial.