An Integrative Psychological Perspective on (Successful) Ageing at Work

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Introduction

One of the most important societal trends affecting our workplace and workforce in the following decade concerns the combination of a smaller number of younger workers relative to their older counterparts, and the current 'early exit' culture in Europe. Because of the staff shortages and possible knowledge loss (e.g., Calo 2008; Joe et al. 2013) that may accompany these demographic changes, there is a strong financial reason to retain and sustain ageing employees at work (Kooij et al. 2014; Truxillo and Fraccaroli 2013). In order to respond to today's labour market needs, many governments have chosen to increase the official retirement age to 66 or even higher. In the Netherlands, for example, retirement age will be gradually raised to 66 years in 2019 and to 67 years in 2023. Other European Union countries have similar plans to steadily raise their retirement ages to 67 years in 2023 (France), 2027 (Spain), or 2031 (Germany). In the UK and Ireland, the retirement...
age will increase to 68 in 2028 (Ireland) and in 2046 (the UK). However, the reality of older workers' current employment does not yet match these political ambitions. According to figures collected by the European Union Labour Force in the European Union Labour Force Survey (Eurostat 2014), the ELT-28 (i.e., average of the 28 European Union countries) employment rate for persons aged 55–64 was 64.1 per cent in 2013. However, when looking more closely at the country level or when differentiating between age categories, the active labor participation of older European employees does not appear to be as high. The EU's employment rate of older workers—calculated by dividing the number of persons in employment and aged 55–64 by the total population of the same age group—was 49.5 per cent in 2013 (OECD 2014), whereas the OECD average was 54.9 per cent in the same year. In the USA and Korea, for example, employment rates of workers of 55–64 years old were, respectively, 60.9 per cent and 64.3 per cent in 2013.

Therefore, one of the most demanding challenges for managers, and Human Resource Management (HRM) in particular, is to find effective strategies or policies that will stimulate or enable ageing workers to remain employable (i.e., engaged, healthy, and productive; see Van der Klink et al. 2011) members of the workforce (e.g., Kooij et al. 2014; De Lange et al. 2015). Unfortunately, of all the employees aged 55–64 years in 21 European countries, only 8.2 per cent participated in job-related training during the last month in 2012 (OECD 2012). For 34 OECD countries, this percentage was 9.4. These outcomes conclude that, in general, older workers' employability is at stake, and that it is urgent to address this issue, both from a scientific as well as from a practical perspective. From a scientific vantage point, recent studies hint at the importance of specific bundles of HR practices in enhancing older workers' employability (e.g., Kooij et al. 2014), while the need for development does not appear to be the same for higher-versus lower-educated workers (e.g., Gründemann et al. 2014; Warr 2008). From a more practical standpoint, ageing and de-juvenization of workforces across the globe form an urgent reason to keep older workers employable throughout their careers. We argue that both employers' as well as employees' objectives should be carefully aligned in order to protect workers' employability across the lifespan. Concretely, a lifespan-aware and diversity-friendly HRM perspective (De Lange et al. 2015) that is characterized by specific, diversified HR activities in different career and life stages is necessary in order for people to grow old successfully and to sustain a Person-Environment (PE) fit at work (Baltes and Baltes 1990). PE fit refers to the degree to which an individual's characteristics correspond with those of his/her work environment (Kristof 1996). As we will describe in the next two paragraphs, older workers are confronted with functional changes, which call for congruent adaptations in their (interaction with their) work environment. The mechanisms underlying these associations are described in more detail in the paragraph on psychological theories on (successful) ageing at work. As workers have moved from an expectation of life-time employment towards a focus on the need to protect their employability (career potential) (Forrier and Sels 2003; Fugate et al. 2004; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden 2006; Van der Heijden et al. 2009), there is an urgent scholarly need to better understand what elements add to sustainable careers for all workers (De Vos and Van der Heijden 2015). Building upon the earlier work on the changing nature of careers (e.g., Arthur et al. 1999), Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015) differentiate between four elements in the definition of careers—namely, the elements of time, social space, agency, and meaning.

As regards time, over the past decades, there have been substantial changes in this element of time. The combination of longer careers with less predictable, and in many cases, shorter-term career sequences calls for reconsidering the traditional notion of a career.

The disappearance of careers with a predictable length and order or sequences, which was more deterministic for individuals, has made room for more options and opportunities to shape one's career over time (Van der Heijden and De Vos 2015: 3). As regards social space, the amount of choices individuals have to make across life spheres has expanded, yet at the same time, we perceive an ever-increasing amount of unpredictability of career outcomes and a decrease in job security (Lee et al. 2011). That is to say, employees may perceive more career opportunities, however, in many cases at the risk of their career sustainability (Van der Heijden and De Vos 2015: 3). Agency, being the third element, requires the development of a set of career competencies (knowing how, knowing why, knowing whom; Arthur et al. 1995). At the same time, however, individuals are not as rational in their career decisions as an overly large emphasis on individual agency might suggest (De Vos 2013), and individual agency does not imply that other actors in the career field (organizations, institutions) no longer have any responsibility in terms of managing careers (De Vos and Gielen 2014a, b). Finally, as regards the meaning of a career, Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015) have argued that it is much more idiosyncratic than it used to be. In combination with the other three elements, in an increasingly unpredictable and complex world of work, individuals are viewed as the primary factor responsible for their own career and career success, in line with their subjective values. Obviously, underlying this new view on career success is that employability has become a core

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1 Unweighted averages for 21 European OECD countries.
2 Unweighted averages for 34 OECD countries.
element and a critical vehicle for attaining whatever type of subjective success criterion individuals might strive for (Van der Heijden and De Vos 2015: 4). This is the reason why we will not only present conceptualizations of, and studies on, (successful) ageing in general and at the workplace, we will also focus on the more individual-centred concept of active ageing.

In this chapter, we will therefore: (1) conceptualize successful ageing, active ageing, and ageing at work; (2) discuss psychological theories that can explain differences in age-related functioning across time; and (3) present HR policies and practices that can facilitate sustainable careers across the lifespan. We will start with conceptualizing (successful) ageing at work.

Conceptualizing Successful Ageing and Active Ageing at Work

Rowe and Kahn (1997: 433) have defined successful ageing as 'low disease, high functional capacity and active engagement with life'. These authors stated that physical activity (known as an important aspect of good mental and physical health) contributes to at least one aspect of this triad: functional capacity. Although it has been a very influential paradigm in gerontology research (e.g., Cosco et al. 2013; Jeske et al. 2010; Zacher 2015a), this definition reflects a rather passive, deterministic (cause-and-effect), and outcome-oriented approach to ageing that is not completely in line with the multidimensional construct of ageing conceptualized above. If we follow Rowe and Kahn's conceptualization, only those older individuals who are not ill or disabled and who are active can be deemed 'successful'. According to their view, only a small proportion of older adults would be ageing successfully when set against these criteria. In a review of successful cognitive and emotional ageing studies by Jeske et al. (2010), the median percentage of people meeting these (objective or functional) criteria for successful ageing was 35 per cent, which was similar to that seen in the MacArthur Network on Successful Ageing (Berkman et al. 1993). Moreover, individuals with low physical health can still remain engaged at a higher age (e.g., Weir et al. 2010). These findings strengthen the characterization of successful ageing as a complex construct encompassing not only objective or functional criteria but also more subjective, psychosocial components. More specifically, both dimensions (i.e., objective and subjective) can coexist independently from each other within one ageing individual. To give a concrete example, Rudolph, De Lange, and Van der Heijden (2015), in their scholarly work on the adjustment processes in bridge employment, differentiate between objective (production/performance data, active work participation, and participation in bridgework itself) and subjective (performance ratings, work engagement, work ability, and continuity intentions) indices of sustained work performance, and moreover, incorporate subjective success criteria as well (i.e., psychological success, well-being, life satisfaction, and perceived success).

In addition, nowadays, ageing individuals are increasingly perceived as (pro)actively responding to real-life challenges instead of passively reacting to stimuli. Although there is by no means one universally agreed definition of successful ageing, the existing definitions are all multidimensional in nature (e.g., physical, cognitive, emotional, and social functioning). A distinction can be made, however, between objective (i.e., emphasizing functional or physical capacities, such as lack of disease and disability, such as Rowe and Kahn (1997) proposed) and subjective (i.e., representing psychosocial processes such as attainment or maintenance of personal goals, positive attitudes towards the self, and social embedding) definitions of successful ageing (Jeske et al. 2010). With this multidimensional approach to successful ageing in mind, a paradigm shift from a traditional positivist-functionalist perspective to a social-constitutive perspective is needed (see Dannefer and Daub 2009).

The criteria for successful ageing that have been found in previous studies can be grouped into five categories (e.g., Bowling 2007 for a review): (1) biomedical or 'health'; (2) broader biomedical functioning or health and social engagement; (3) social functioning; (4) psychological resources; and (5) lay indicators. The biomedical criterion has been measured in previous research by the following indicators: having diagnosed, chronic medical conditions (i.e., actual number reported), ability to perform activities of daily living, and psychiatric morbidity measured using the General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12; Goldberg and Williams 1988). The broader biomedical criterion has been operationalized with a comprised summation of the first criterion plus the number of different social activities one has engaged in during the past month, as an index of social engagement. Social functioning has been measured by a comprised summation of the number of different social activities one engaged in during the past month, the frequency of one's social contacts, and the number of supporters. Psychological resources have been operationalized by self-efficacy, best optimism score, plus GHQ-12 items on sense of purpose (i.e., playing useful part, coping, and self-esteem). Finally, lay indicators that have been used in previous ageing research are, for example, gross annual income and perceived social capital.

If these five categories of factors form its main criteria, a formula for successful ageing has been proposed by Morgan (2006), who states that research evidence provides support for what has been called the 'use it or lose it' hypothesis. This hypothesis stresses that—in order to successfully age—one should stay active in multiple domains. More specifically, the following factors have
been associated with a reduced likelihood of intellectual decline; high levels of educational attainment, high occupational mental workload, linguistic skills, and regular intellectual stimulation (Morgan 2006: 82). However, since the previous paragraph has shown that successful ageing definitions focus on either objective (functional-physical) or subjective (psychosocial) success criteria, one could argue that there are two different types of outcomes that ask for two different approaches or recipes. Bowling and Iliffe (2011) examined whether baseline biological, psychological, and social approaches to successful ageing predicted future Quality of Life. They found that only the psychological approach to successful ageing independently predicted Quality of Life. Therefore, successful ageing is not just about maintaining one’s physical health but also about maximizing one’s psychological resources (e.g., self-efficacy and resilience) in order to improve or maintain one’s Quality of Life. As the authors state: ‘Increasing use of preventive care, better medical management of morbidity, and changing lifestyles in older people may have beneficial effects on health and longevity, but may not improve their Quality of Life. Adding years to life and life to years may require two different and different approaches, one physical and the other psychological’ (Bowling and Iliffe 2011: 1).

Because of the increasing research attention for subjective (next to more objective) indicators or criteria of successful ageing—possibly resulting from the emergence of positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Donaldson et al. 2011)—research interests now regularly focus on qualitative research methods and lay perspectives as well. Cosco et al. (2013) have recently performed a review and meta-ethnography on lay perspectives of successful ageing. They concluded that successful ageing is a complex construct pertaining to more than just physical health. Furthermore, psychosocial factors were the most frequently mentioned components of successful ageing in the qualitative studies of lay perspectives included in their review. One qualitative study in which 22 community-dwelling adults with a mean age of 80 years were interviewed (Reichstadt et al. 2010) reported two primary themes related to successful ageing: self-acceptance/self-contentment (e.g., realistic self-appraisal, a review of one’s life, and focusing on the present) and engagement with life/self-growth (e.g., novel pursuits, giving to others, social interactions, and positive attitude). Concretely, striking a balance between these two constructs was critical and interventions that help individuals with this balancing act were perceived as relevant by the participants. More specifically, interventions that extend or maintain one’s support systems and those pertaining to personally tailored information that may facilitate informed decisions and enhance one’s coping strategies were deemed important.

This concept of striking a balance or being an active agent in responding to life challenges resonates with the concept of active ageing, also referred to as ‘positive ageing’ or ‘ageing well’, and is in line with the previously explained dimension of agency in the conceptualization of sustainable careers by Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015). This concept has been described as maximizing one’s own psychological resources (e.g., self-efficacy, resilience, humor etc.) or ‘keeping active’. In their study, Stenner, McFarquhar, and Bowling (2011) have performed a thematic decomposition of 42 transcribed interviews with British people aged 72 years and over. They found that active ageing is understood in relation to physical, cognitive, psychological, and social factors, but that these factors coexist in complex combinations. The notion of activity was expressed as keeping active or as avoiding becoming passive. In other words, agentic capacity or being able to respond to challenges is of vital importance in the ageing process, since ageing is indefinitely associated with loss of resources and functional capacity. As Stenner et al. (2011) stated: “The implication is that, regardless of chronological age, experiences of increasing passivity/diminishing activity may be associated with losing one’s vitality and hence feeling ‘old’. This process might be likened to a downward swerve in agentic capacities to affect and be affected by other people, circumstances and things” (p. 475). Losing social support, for example, can be the start of a downwards swerve towards passively ‘giving up’, which may lead to a further loss of resources (e.g., losing additional parts of one’s support network).

After this conceptualization of ‘successful ageing’, we will now focus upon ‘successful ageing at work’, followed by an outline of psychological theories that explain differences in age-related functioning over time. Ageing at work can best be portrayed as a multidimensional process reflecting changes in biological, psychological, and social functioning over time (De Lange et al. 2006; Kooij et al. 2008). In defining older workers, Sterns and Doverspike (1989) proposed five different approaches composed of chronological, functional, psychosocial, organizational, and lifespan development. They described these approaches as follows: (1) chronological age refers to one’s calendar age; (2) functional- or performance-based age is based on a worker’s performance, and recognizes that there is a great variation in individual abilities and functioning through different ages. As chronological age increases, individuals go through various biological and psychological changes reflected in individuals’ health, psychical ability, cognitive abilities, and performance; (3) psychosocial or subjective age is based on the self and the social perception of age. Subjective age (or self-perception) refers to how old an individual feels, looks, and acts, with which age cohort the individual identifies, and how old the person desires to be (Kalter et al. 2002).
applied to an individual with respect to an occupation, company, or society (e.g., stereotypes of older workers); (4) organizational age refers to the ageing of individuals in jobs and organizations, which is more commonly discussed in the literature on seniority and job or organizational tenure; and (5) the lifespan concept of age relates to behavioral changes at any point in the life cycle. Lifespan age can, for example, be measured by life stage or family status.

Subsequently, De Lange et al. (2006) translated these operationalizations into one overall figure highlighting relations between general ageing at work, underlying age operationalizations and more specific age-related factors (see Fig. 4.1). Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, and Dikkers (2008) conducted a review of 24 empirical and nine conceptual studies on the distinguished age operationalizations (using different age measures) in relation to work motivation, and found that most of these age-related factors can have a negative impact on the motivation of older people to continue to work. From a practical or professional vantage point, these age-related factors (e.g., declining health) should, therefore, be addressed by HR policies and practices such as ergonomic adjustments which could facilitate older workers (their motivation) to continue to work. And although this review indicates that various age-related factors are important in understanding older workers' motivation to continue to work, the authors recognize that the processes underlying the association of these age-related factors with the motivation to continue to work are still largely uncharted territory.

In an attempt to summarize the aforementioned conceptualizations and operationalizations of successful ageing (at work), Table 4.1 comprises several measures or indicators which tap into the concepts of successful, active, and work-related ageing.

Table 4.1 Possible indicators of successful, active, and work-related ageing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ageing sub-concept</th>
<th>Possible indicators</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful ageing</td>
<td>Quality of Life, biomedical or functional health measures (e.g., diagnosed medical conditions, and parts of the General Health Questionnaire-12), social functioning (e.g., the number and frequency of one's social contacts), psychological resources (e.g., self-efficacy and best optimism), and lay indicators (e.g., gross annual income and perceived social capital)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active ageing</td>
<td>Physical and mental reserves, self-efficacy, resilience, and agentic capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-related ageing</td>
<td>Job tenure, occupational time perspective, and skill obsolescence (e.g., Rudolph et al. 2015)</td>
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In sum, although these conceptualizations are crucial for getting a grasp on what the constructs of successful ageing, active ageing, and work-related ageing mean, they do not provide unequivocal insights in the causal nature of the aforementioned relations and possible theoretical explanations for the relations found in previous studies (e.g., Kooij et al. 2008). In the following sections, we will, therefore, address in more detail relevant lifespan developmental psychological theories that can further explain relations between successful ageing and sustainable careers.

**Psychological Theories on (Successful) Ageing at Work**

During the last decades, lifespan theories have moved away from unilateral perceptions of age towards more complex and dynamic conceptualizations of the ageing process. The lifespan theory of Selection Optimization and Compensation (SOC) (Baltes et al. 1999) and Socio-emotional Selectivity Theory (SST) (Carstensen 1995, 2006), for example, explain how goals change over the lifespan. SOC theory (Baltes et al. 1999; Kooij et al. 2014) states that people maximize the gains and minimize the losses they experience over time by using different strategies. To maximize gains, people select desirable outcomes or goals (i.e., elective selection) and optimize their resources to reach these desirable outcomes. To minimize losses, people select fewer goals in response to those actual or impending losses and compensate for these losses by investing their remaining resources in counteracting these losses. By employing these strategies, individuals strive to achieve three different lifespan goals: growth (i.e., reaching higher levels of functioning), maintenance
(i.e., maintaining current levels of functioning or returning to previous levels of functioning), and regulation of loss (i.e., functioning adequately at lower levels).

SOC theory further proposes that the allocation of resources aimed at growth will decrease with age, whereas the allocation of resources used for maintenance and regulation of loss will increase with age (Baltes et al. 1999). In a study by Freund (2006), regulatory focus was found to shift from emphasizing promotion in young adulthood to focusing on maintenance and prevention in later adulthood. In a similar vein, the Socio-emotional Selectivity Theory (SST; Carstensen 1995, 2006) proposes that age-related changes in the perception of time result in changes in social goals or motives, thereby shifting the motive for social interaction from gaining resources (i.e., instrumental) towards receiving affective rewards (i.e., emotional) and strengthening one’s identity. Whereas instrumental goals involve knowledge acquisition, autonomy, social acceptance, and status attainment, emotionally meaningful goals involve generativity, emotional intimacy, and feelings of social embeddedness (Lang and Carstensen 2002; Kooli et al. 2014).

The Lifespan Theory of Control (Heckhausen et al. 2010) builds upon these two theories by addressing how individuals actively choose goals in accordance with the principles of developmental optimization. It proposes greater reliance on secondary control strategies with ageing to keep striving for the maximization of primary control: that reflects one’s ability to influence important outcomes in one’s environment. Secondary control strategies, which address internal motivational processes in order to minimize losses in levels of primary control, are needed when the original goal has become unattainable. They can also help to minimize further losses and maintain current levels of functioning, or expand primary control. An individual could, for example, as his/her functional capacities decrease with age change his/her preferences from extrinsically rewarding (e.g., striving for a job promotion) to intrinsically rewarding job features (e.g., accumulating one’s expertise; Kanfer and Ackerman 2004).

Two additional psychological theories that bring the ageing process to the work context are environment-fit theory and Job crafting. As mentioned above, Person-Environment (PE) fit (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005; Lawton and Nahemow 1973) is frequently described as the compatibility between a person and his or her surrounding environment which occurs when their characteristics match. Nested with PE fit are the sub-concepts of Person-Job (PJ) fit, Person-Group (PG) fit, Person-Organization (PO) fit, and Person-Supervisor (PS) fit (e.g., Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Since—as described earlier—functional capacity declines with age, which has implications for one’s (mis)match with the work environment, PE theory (including these four sub-types) is a relevant perspective when considering ageing in the workplace. Job crafting is a more specific construct, which is defined as ‘the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work’ (Wrzesniewski and Doruton 2001: 179). Usually, these changes are made in order to make one’s job more meaningful, engaging, and satisfying (e.g., Demerouti 2014).

In sum, conceptualizations of successful ageing have moved from unidimensional, functional-objective and passive characteristics to multidimensional, psychosocial-subjective, and dynamic features. Furthermore, lifespan theories assume that as individuals age, they will increasingly focus on intrinsic, maintenance-related and socio-emotional goals and will reduce their attempts to strive for extrinsic, growth-related or instrumental goals by using selection, optimization, and compensation tactics and—in general—relying more on secondary as opposed to primary control strategies. In the work context, a lack of fit between an individual and his/her work environment may lead to job-crafting efforts, which are associated with SOC strategies.

When all the psychological theories and perspectives discussed above are related to the contemporary notion of sustainable careers, one could claim that there is room for compensatory strategies while successfully ageing at work. In line with SOC theory (Baltes et al. 1999) and the Lifespan Theory of Control (Heckhausen et al. 2010), accumulated knowledge and experience can continue to make strong and supportive contributions to our intellectual performance throughout life, even when faced with a decrease in physical or cognitive capacities. By ‘active ageing at work’, individuals can maximize or relocate their personal resources or those of their environment in order to compensate for (actual or anticipated) losses. In this manner, their PE fit will be maintained or increased.

Therefore—and in line with recent psychological health models such as the Job Demands-Resources Theory (Bakker and Demerouti 2007)—we first propose a more general dual-process theory of successful ageing, wherein one route relates physical activity to functional capacity or physical health and a second path is composed of active ageing in association to engagement or Quality of Life (see Fig. 4.2). Sustained physical activity will lead to increased levels of functional capacity (i.e., the objective, physical-functional route). In addition, ageing individuals who keep active in spite of (or in response to) the challenges that life throws at them will be more engaged, and are expected to have higher Quality of Life, than those with more passive behaviour (i.e., the subjective, psychosocial route). Both types of relationships are expected to be moderated by personal resources (e.g., resilience and self-efficacy) and...
Contextual resources (e.g., family support, supervisor support, and HR policies). In cases where an older individual has high self-efficacy, for example, he or she will probably feel more confident in responding adequately to critical life events, and will thereby feel more engaged or vital. Naturally, the (socio-political, organizational and personal) context or situation of the ageing individual will impact these associations as well.

Similarly, Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015) stress the importance of social space, being one of the four dimensions of sustainable careers’ research and practice, and argue that as a career refers to the movement of a person through social space as well, careers cannot be studied without considering the context with which they are inherently connected. In particular, if an individual lives in a country with extensive governmental policies that facilitate older people, for example, his/her possibilities for active ageing and compensatory strategies will be higher compared to those residing in countries with fewer old-age policies. The impact of the broader context in which the ageing individual finds himself or herself (see also Zacher 2015b) is exemplified by cross-cultural studies of successful ageing (e.g., Tan et al. 2010; Ranzijn 2010).

Fig. 4.3 A model of adjustment to bridge employment (Note: Dashed line indicates a conditional (i.e., moderated) effect)

In a similar vein, Rudolph, De Lange, and Van der Heijden (2015) in their work on the psychological adjustment process for bridge employees crafted a work-related model that considers the influence of both contextual resources (HR practices, social support, leadership, social climate for ageing) and demands (socio-economic demands, work factors, normative/social pressures, work-home balance), and intrapersonal resources (e.g., developmental, self-regulatory, and other resources; see Fig. 4.3). They conceptualized that intrapersonal resources are the primary antecedents of adjustment to bridge employment, and argued, in line with Heckhausen's concept of primary and secondary control strategies (e.g., Heckhausen et al. 2010; Heckhausen and Schulz 1995) and demands-resources perspectives (e.g., Bakker and Demerouti 2007), that the degree of fit between contextual factors and demands has a conditional influence on the relationship between intrapersonal resources and adjustment. More specifically, under conditions of positive fit, individuals are less likely to rely on intrapersonal resources in order to adjust to bridge employment. However, in case of a lack of fit between contextual factors and demands, intrapersonal resources are more likely to drive adjustment processes (see Rudolph et al. 2015, for more detailed information).

HR Policies Facilitating Successful Ageing in the Workplace

In line with the assumptions of the SOC model (Baltes et al. 1999), Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) argued that losses in old age will result in motivational interventions aimed at slowing performance decline, causing older
workers’ goal focus to shift from promotion to prevention. As a result, growth motives are likely to decrease with age, whereas motives for maintenance and security are likely to increase as workers age. This is supported by Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, and Dikkers (2011) who found that security motives increase with age (among certain subgroups) and that growth motives decrease with age.

This may affect the effectiveness of HR policies aimed at facilitating older workers’ motivation to (continue to) work. As Kooij and colleagues have proposed (2013) and found (2014) in their mixed-methods study, HR practices for ageing workers can be categorized in four central bundles: (1) development HR practices, which are practices that help individual workers to reach higher levels of functioning (e.g., training); (2) maintenance HR practices, which help individual workers to maintain their current levels of functioning in the face of new challenges (e.g., flexible work schedules); (3) utilization HR practices, which are practices that help individual workers to return to previous levels of functioning after a loss by removing job demands that have become unachievable for an employee from the job and replacing them with other demands that utilize already existing, but not yet necessarily applied, individual resources (e.g., lateral job movement); and (4) accommodative HR practices, which organize adequate functioning at lower levels when maintenance or recovery is no longer possible (e.g., less physically demanding posts).

More recent empirical evidence supporting these bundles or categorizations of HR practices has been found by Veth et al. (2015).

Since lifespan theories and studies demonstrate a shift in goal focus with age, Kooij et al. (2014) expect that development HR practices become less important, and that maintenance, utilization, and accommodative HR practices become more important for older workers in general. As Townsend (2007) has suggested, however, certain (social) policies may foster the sense of ‘being old’ that is associated with the previously mentioned ‘downward swerve’ in agentic capacities. This could refer to the accommodative practices proposed by Kooij et al. (2014).

On another note—as the conceptualization of work and retirement continues to evolve—the Protean Career emphasizes the role of self-management in a shifting work environment (Hall 1976, 2004). This encompasses greater responsibility to the individual for learning and mastering skills, as well as adapting to the changing work environment (Hall and Mirvis 1995). A protean career is initiated and sustained by the employee rather than the employer. Individuals are thereby able to shape their own careers. New management constructs such as job crafting (Wreznowski and Dutton 2001) or ‘I-deals’ (i.e., idiosyncratic deals or tailor-made agreements that may facilitate sustainability at work; Rousseau 2005) are concrete exemplifications of this development. Career self-management and career lifelong education become critical tools for the protean concept that seem ideally suited to the current world of work and can be an asset to individuals and to organizations. For the individual, career self-management affords the flexibility to develop a career path that best fits with individual needs, whether they be financial, family-related, or related to individual development and stage of life. A self-determined approach can lead to personal satisfaction and better person-job fit.

As the workforce ages, workers will be forced to accept protean careers and reject the traditional views of security in employment. Sterns and Subich (2002) highlight the importance of mobility in career development, suggesting that individuals who self-manage their careers may be more proactive in searching for opportunities outside the company. For the individual, a few positive effects that come along with self-managing a career may be composed of more flexible job opportunities, the option to leave a company at will, and the ability to foster and present a person’s specific talents (Hall and Mirvis 1995). Obviously, with self-management, individuals are enabled to enhance the meaning of their career (being the fourth dimension in the research on sustainable careers; Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015)), in terms of the value of specific career outcomes, as well detailed by Arthur et al. (1999) when describing the evolution of careers from ‘means of earning to means of learning’ (Van der Heijden and De Vos 2015: 1).

An Integrative Perspective

De Lange et al. (2015) have recently presented a review on relations between HRM and sustainability across the lifespan and argued that an integrative perspective is needed to fully address the impact of (successful) ageing at work (see Fig. 4.4), and that may trigger further scholarly work in the career field. The authors argued that both employers’ as well as employees’ work-related objectives concerning current and future work should be fine-tuned in order to enable sustainable careers. In order to do so, they proposed a lifespan aware and diversity-friendly HRM perspective to diagnose what employees need, in terms of specific HR practices, across career and life stages. Given the increasing diversity of the labour market, in the lifespan trajectories of workers as well as in the (changing) content of their work, De Lange et al. (2015) stressed that HRM departments and research should critically examine worker inclusiveness and invest in prevention, curation as well as ampliation types of HR practices to protect the sustainability of careers of all categories of workers.
Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter has attempted to give an overview of: (1) the concepts of (successful) ageing, active ageing, and ageing at work, (2) psychological theories that can explain differences in age-related functioning across time, and (3) HR policies and practices that may facilitate sustainable careers across the lifespan. Successful ageing can be perceived as a multidimensional concept by nature, including both objective (e.g., emphasizing functional or physical capacities, such as lack of disease and disability) and subjective (e.g., representing psychosocial processes such as attainment or maintenance of personal goals, positive attitudes towards the self, and social embedding) elements or indicators.

Active ageing refers to maximizing one’s own psychological resources (e.g., self-efficacy and agency) or keeping active. Finally, we described that ageing itself is also a multidimensional concept that cannot be solely operationalized by calendar age; rather, it encompasses all changes in biological, psychosocial, organizational, and societal functioning.

Most psychological theories or theoretical mechanisms with regard to the ageing worker are based on the concept of (increasing one’s) balance or fit. Balance between self-acceptance and growth (e.g., active ageing), and the (mis)fit of changing functional capacities or resources (e.g., biological losses) are observed as one gets older with one’s contextual demands (e.g., work pressure, flexible workplaces) and resources (e.g., HR practices, social support, and supportive leadership). A theoretical framework integrating these psychological perspectives on ageing individuals in a work environment is given in Fig. 4.4, and may be used as a general research agenda for studying the degree to which ageing workers fit their work contexts.

From a theoretical standpoint—as the changes with regard to time, social space, agency, and meaning (see De Vos and Van der Heijden 2015) have important implications for careers, the practice of career management, and the field of career studies—the perspective of ‘sustainability’ ought to be added to contemporary scholarly research on careers. Adding a sustainability perspective to empirical work on careers would provide a more nuanced picture of how actors within different contexts (e.g., in one’s working organization, one’s broader life sphere, and in the broader societal context) interact with one another, have their impact on careers, and can affect the sustainability of careers over time (see Van der Heijden and De Vos 2015).

More practically, we would like to point to the dual responsibility of: (1) older workers themselves in being an active agent investing in increasing their employability and thereby reducing the risk of their knowledge and skills becoming obsolete (e.g., by investing in their ongoing development and by
engaging in job crafting), and (2) employers, HR professionals, and direct supervisors in actively supporting their ageing workers in these efforts to stay or become more employable (e.g., by offering accommodative, maintenance, utilization, and development HR practices).

In sum, although older workers (and younger workers alike) are important actors in adapting themselves to a rapidly changing work environment, all parties involved in their work context should try to facilitate them in this ongoing attempt by offering congruent (bundles of) HR practices, ensuring supportive leadership, and possibilities for job (re)design. This is a dynamic process involving many stakeholders that may lead to PE misfit and subsequent adaptation efforts (see Zachar 2015b). In case the contextual and personal factors mentioned above are aligned, however, optimal levels of PE fit may be achieved, which may eventually lead to successful, highly employable ageing workers who are engaged, healthy, and productive.

References


