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Older Workers' Self-Management and Sustainable Employability at Work:

Lessons Learned from Science and Practice

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Abstract

This chapter presents an overview of relevant theory and empirical research on self-management skills and capabilities of older (unemployed and employed) workers, and distinguishes possible intervention methods (based on insights of science as well as practical experience) to prolong working lives of older workers. Moreover, we present an integrative perspective that pays attention to multiple factors in the workplace (i.e., self-management, psycho-social work, human resource management, leadership) to understand the dynamics between self-management of older workers in relation to person-environment fit and sustainable employability at work.

Case report: Nurse Angela Baker

Angela Baker (50 years old) has been active as a nurse for more than twenty-five years in elder care, a profession she had wanted to practice since childhood. Caring for others (her mother, grandmother, the neighbors) gave her life a sense of meaning. After her college education in nursing, she was lucky to get started right away within an elderly care institution. She enjoyed working there until she was twenty-five. By obtaining new training certificates in specialized elderly care, other types of jobs also came within reach. She saw more complex forms of care as a new challenge (self-development). In her opinion, the past twenty-five years have really flown by. She was happy to work as part of an enthusiastic team. Recently, however, she has started to experience pressure from increased administrative duties, absence of sick colleagues, and merger with another institution (reorganization). Angela wonders (self-reflection) how she can better manage the caregiving tasks at work, increased administrative pressure, and caregiving at home where she provides informal care for her mother of 88 years. Angela says: "A period of leave or sabbatical would enable me to care for my sick mother, but I don't want to abandon my team at work. The department, with an increasing number of patients, is already so busy and colleagues are regularly sick." Her supervisor recently indicated in a development interview that given her private situation, Angela may take a short period of care leave (an available HR practice), but there is unfortunately not much room for adjusting schedules, given the dropout of colleagues. Angela and her supervisor make a plan together and discuss it with the team. Angela feels somewhat relieved. The proposed leave period and the support and confidence of her supervisor and team provide her with a feeling of being valued at work, but she fears that the leave will not be sufficient for the long-term care she needs to provide for her mother. Practically speaking, there are few options for adjustments or job crafting after return from her leave.

Introduction

The global labor force participation rate¹ shows that the number of older workers has increased significantly during the past decade and many countries face a so-called graying workforce with relatively more older than younger workers.ⁱ For example, 2020 statistics from OECD countries (figure 1) show that 82.6 percent of adults aged 55-plus were working in Iceland in 2019 compared to 69.7 percent in the Netherlands, 63.8 percent in the United States of America, and 33.7 percent in Turkey. As a result, employers face a challenge: how to enhance a sustainable working life for older workers like Angela Baker in the case report?ⁱⁱ It is not surprising that the concept of successful aging at work has become a popular research topic, attracting theoretical as well as conceptual research attention.

For example, Kooijⁱⁱⁱ conceptualizes successful aging at work from a sustainability perspective, and argues that a continuous *person–job fit* between the changing person and changing work is required for employees to be able to maintain their health, motivation, and work ability, and thus age successfully at work. On the other hand, Zacher and colleagues^{iv} point to a more process-based definition focusing on elements of self-management and adaptation of aging workers across time. More specifically, they argue that personal resources, active regulation of behavior and optimal investment of resources,^v maintenance of the (perceived) capacity to influence the environment, and focusing on positive events and experiences^{vi} enable individuals to age successfully across the lifespan. Finally, according to De Lange and Kooij,^{vii} successful aging at work can be defined as the pro-active maintenance or adaptive recovery (after loss) to high(er) levels of (subjective) health, vitality, work capacity, employability and motivation to continue working, and at the same time creating or

¹ The labor force participation rate is based on the sum of all workers who are employed or actively seeking employment divided by the total noninstitutionalized, civilian working-age population.
<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/participationrate.asp>

maintaining a fit with the work environment. In other words, successful aging at work is the self-management process of workers necessary to become and remain employable during the life course, indicating that employees are able to pro-actively recover and improve over time through self-management skills and actions, and with support or interventions from the work environment.

This chapter discusses the importance of pro-active self-management of aging workers at work and possible intervention methods (based on insights of science as well as practical experience). We take an integrative perspective including information from the psycho-social job design literature (self-management literature), but will also highlight relevant insights from human resource management and leadership studies on how leaders can play an important role in sustaining employees' self-management and employability.

Figure 1. OECD. Employment rates for workforce aged 55-64 years

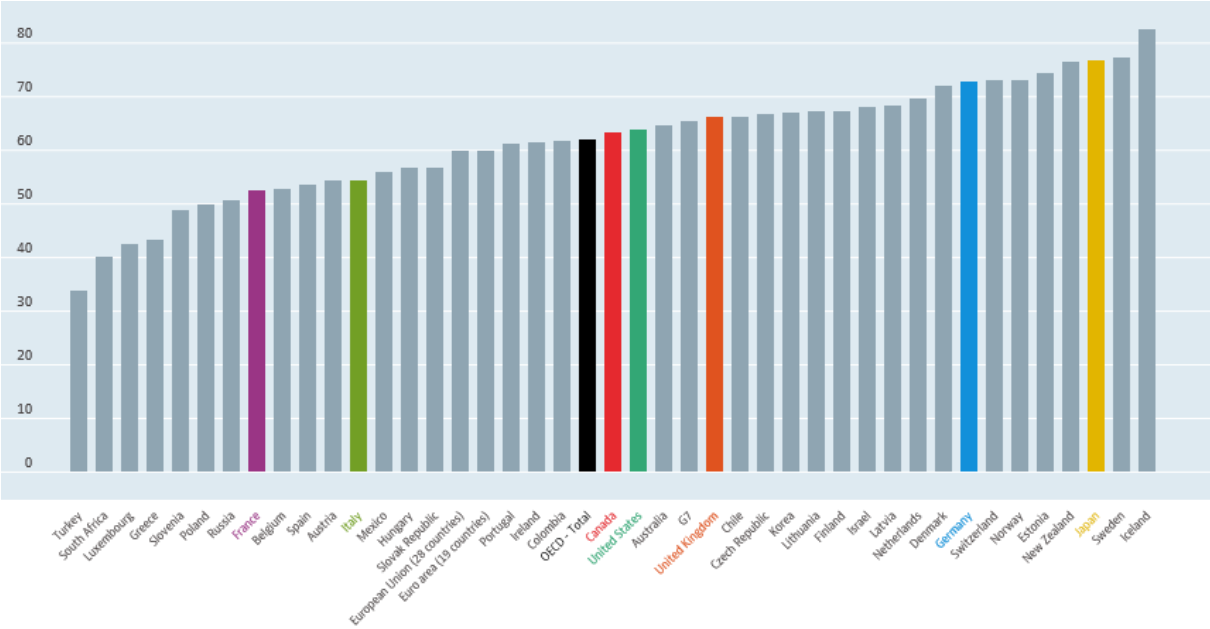


Figure 1: OECD. Employment rates for workforce aged 55-64 years

Self-management and sustainable employability: an integrative perspective

Sustainable employability has often been measured as work ability,^{viii} vitality,^{ix} and employability.^x As these capacities relate to human strengths, health, and motivation in organizations, they are considered crucial for employees to remain and perform at work.^{xi} While work ability represents the health component of sustainable work ability, vitality represents the motivational component, demonstrated by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, and the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persist even in the face of difficulties.^{xii} Employability refers to individuals' ability to adequately fulfill work in current and future jobs, inside and outside the current organization.^{xiii} Although the opportunity to retain or find work might also depend on labor market characteristics, it is generally noted that individuals' characteristics, such as self-management at work, abilities, skills, and knowledge, contribute to employability and labor market participation. Organizations and managers can facilitate and support self-management of aging workers by providing the right conditions and by implementing interventions that, for example, actively focus on improving the self-management skills and capacities of older employees. In the next section, we will address definitions of self-management at work, and subsequently highlight the different ways self-management can be improved within the workplace.

Self-management at work

There are many different definitions of self-management. Some definitions emphasize psychological topics such as: self-awareness, self-image, self-analysis, self-control, attention and choice processes^{xiv} while other definitions place more emphasis on behavioral areas that people can or cannot control, such as health behavior, learning and development.^{xv} For example, Lorig and Holman^{xvi} showed that people can distinguish the following self-management tasks: select new goals or challenges and formulate relevant actions to reach those goals (e.g., "I want to live a healthier life or I will acquire new skills to start a new

profession"); make decisions (e.g., "I am going to go to fitness after work"); maintain and apply resources (e.g., "I know which physical, mental, cognitive and social resources I can use on and off the job"); enter into and maintain interpersonal relationships (e.g., I will develop a relevant professional network through LinkedIn); and follow up and sustain actions over time.

Self-management at work therefore involves a complex psychological process that has interfaces with concepts such as "self-determination"^{xvii} and "self-efficacy" (personal effectiveness^{xviii}). Self-determination is the extent to which an individual feels that he or she can initiate and regulate actions at work to maintain a fit with the work environment (in terms of required knowledge, skills, motivation and physical and mental well-being). "Self-efficacy" (or self-effectiveness) is the individual's confidence that he or she can (continue to) perform certain tasks at work. Self-management (also known as "human agency"^{xix}) of workers implies that workers know themselves well, can manage themselves, can (learn to) change or adapt themselves within and outside the work context to be able to stay connected to the work environment. As a result, self-management has cognitive, affective and behavioral elements.^{xx} Based on the aforementioned line of reasoning De Lange^{xxi} developed the following psychological multi-dimensional definition of self-management at work. (See also figure 2.)

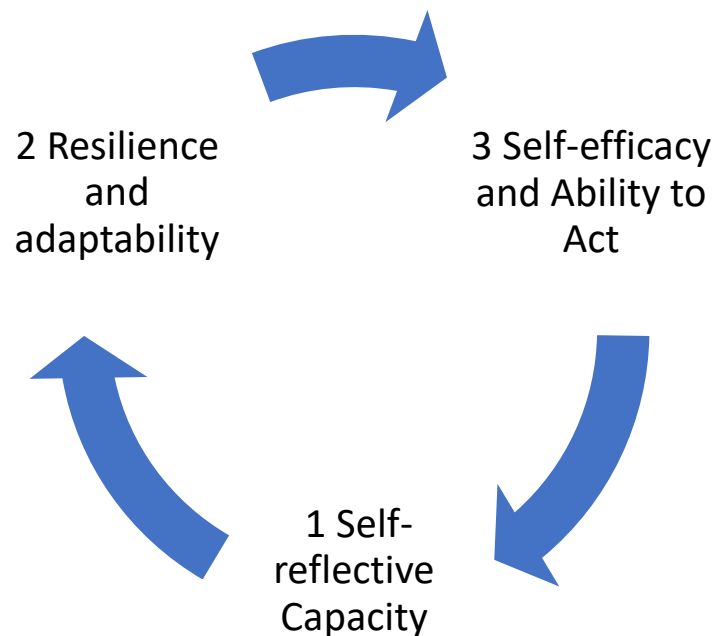
Self-management at work is the extent to which a worker:

- **has self-reflective capacity:** This means that a worker is cognitively self-aware, knows what he or she wants and can do to develop a meaningful self-image at work over time (has self-insights, has a clear self-concept), can make an analysis of available goals, self-regulatory strategies, rewards and can develop an action plan to achieve and maintain a desired (future) goal or self-image at work. Subsequently, the worker can monitor and evaluate progress in personal development and the alignment or fit with the work environment over time (can achieve self-monitoring and self-evaluation).

• **knows resilience and adaptive capacity.** This means that a worker can adapt his or her own cognitions or ideas, emotions and behavior in a changing context, has the capacity to change or adapt, and is capable of self-development and self-improvement across time.^{xxii}

• **is self-effective and able to act.** The worker can effectively convert goals into concrete follow-up steps, behavior or actions, and therefore can successfully implement action plan(s). As a result, a worker is able to apply self-management when he or she makes optimal use of the demands and resources that the work and home environment have to offer. The worker takes the initiative to adapt or develop behavior to fit personal capabilities and level of resilience in a dynamic work context.^{xxiii xxiv}

Figure 2: Self-management at work: a psychological multi-dimensional concept with cognitive, affective and behavioral elements¹⁸



A multi-factorial life course-based psychological perspective on self-management at work

Relatively few theories are available in work and organizational psychology that focus on the relationship between self-management and successful aging at work across time. Moreover, little research has focused on a positive approach or on empowerment of aging workers (e.g., seeing older workers as potential talent) to sustain or improve their level of employability at work. Strong points in the aging process at work have received little attention. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, clinical psychologist Martin Seligman, together with an important network of psychologists (including Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi^{xxv}) introduced the term *positive psychology*. More attention was paid in this theoretical tradition to the importance of positive emotions, meaning-making processes, positive thoughts and intrapersonal as well as interpersonal resources for self-management at work, aimed at progress, growth and development of human behavior in organizations.

Based on positive psychological theory, De Lange's multi-factorial model of successful aging at work^{xxvi} (see figure 3) postulates that sustainable employability of workers over time is a result of the (changing) dynamics between the contextual workload and individual self-management capacity across the life course.^{xxvii} Every profession and every practical context has its own unique proximal and distal demands as well as possible proximal and distal resources. "Proximal" means factors that are close to or can be perceived and experienced directly by the worker. "Distal" means factors further away from the worker, but still affecting worker outcomes. In the case report of Angela Baker presented previously, the contextual demand at work is, for example, the reported administrative workload, but Angela also reports support from her supervisor in looking at her double-duty caregiving tasks and being able to take additional leave (job resource, human resource practice). The level of experienced contextual workload can, in this respect, be explained by the combination of the

contextual proximal and distal demands and the proximal and distal resources in relation to the self-management skills and strategies of a worker. If the contextual workload meets the self-management capacity of a worker, he or she will experience a fit with the work environment.^{xxviii xxix}

A person-environment fit and a fulfilled psychological contract are important positive predictors for sustainable employability during the life course.^{xxx} It is important that the motivation, knowledge and skills of the employee match the work context in the sense of the requirements set by the job, also labeled as a demand-abilities fit. Secondly, the attitude and motivation of the employee (such as self-determination and sense of purpose) must match the work context in the sense of the provided job challenges and resources and, for example, task significance that the work generates. In the latter case we speak of a needs-supply fit. The needs of the worker and the supply from the work match.

Figure 3, the multi-factorial model, builds upon earlier models like the job-demands-resources model^{xxxxi} but expands it by distinguishing self-management skills and strategies of aging workers in and outside of the work environment, and including the influence of lifespan changes as possible moderators.

Shanan and Macmillan give the following definition of life course: "(...) the age-graded sequence of roles, opportunities, constraints, and events that shape the biography from birth to death."^{xxxii} Positive and negative life course events over time influence the way in which individuals develop. By ordering and summarizing events in stories and our thoughts, we give them a positive or negative meaning. Azevedo, Martins and Maia stated: "Human beings are time-binding, storytelling creators, whose lives themselves are situated in time, as time-binding narratives—past, present, future."^{xxxiii} *Life events* can refer to important moments in life, such as a birth, obtaining a diploma, a marriage. They can also refer to periods or conditions—such as a period as a spouse, or after a divorce—versus experiences

and perceptions of (missed) opportunities and events during the life course: "I would like to have children"; "I want to enjoy my children more"; "I want a loving partner." Life course perceptions are therefore not only about development over time, but can also be about the (desired) interaction with others and the environment during the life course.^{xxxiv}

Life events are based on periods and the subjective meaning given to it, positive or negative. In our case, Angela Baker experienced the reported double-duty caregiving tasks as more taxing across time, in combination with the increased proximal workload in the healthcare institution. Research by Pak and colleagues^{xxxv} shows that life course events are very diverse in terms of type of event and impact and they influence perceived sustainable employability at work. In addition, negative assessment of a life event can go hand in hand with reduced employability, for example through reduced personal resources for self-management. It is therefore important to pay attention to the self-reflection processes and emotional meaning-making processes of life-events and how these processes affect reported self-efficacy at work, and reported person-work fit.

The unique changes that workers experience during the life course can progress gradually, but can also be experienced abruptly. Normative life course changes apply to many employees, such as the menopause for women and the decrease in physical reserves among employees after the age of 50. Non-normative influences occur more by chance, such as winning the lottery or having an accident.^{xxxvi} In this context, researchers also refer to meaningful life events or transitions, such as birth or marriage, the death of a loved one, the start and end of a career or the start of caregiving roles. Life shocks are life-course changes or transitions that occur unexpectedly and have a high impact or are emotionally demanding such as the death of a child.^{xxxvii} Life-events that are evaluated as negative or shocking will have larger depleting effects on the self-management skills and strategies of workers.

Ward-Griffin and colleagues show that female nurses with more intensive forms of dual care (care at work and informal care at home) reported negative effects in their employability levels, such as reduced chances of promotion, an increased risk of overloading, and a reduced work capacity over time.^{xxxviii} In their study, three different types of informal care conditions and the nurses' experienced burden or load were distinguished through self-reflection and group sessions. Namely the nurses could distinguish: "making it work," "working to manage," and "living on the edge" caregiving situations. In the "making it work" condition, caregivers were able to manage the caregiving load themselves by asking others for help. As a result, nurses with informal care duties experienced minimal so-called double-duty caregiving at work and home. Nurses who were "working to manage" experienced caregiving tasks as more taxing, resulting in work-life imbalance and more work problems. The most burdensome double-duty-caregiving condition was the "living on the edge." Their double caregiving situation had become too burdensome (too many expectations in work and private life both internally and externally and little to no support) and they experienced reduced mental and physical well-being and feared to drop out soon. In the next section, we will address possible work-related interventions to improve self-management at work of aging adults.

Figure 3. Multi-factorial model

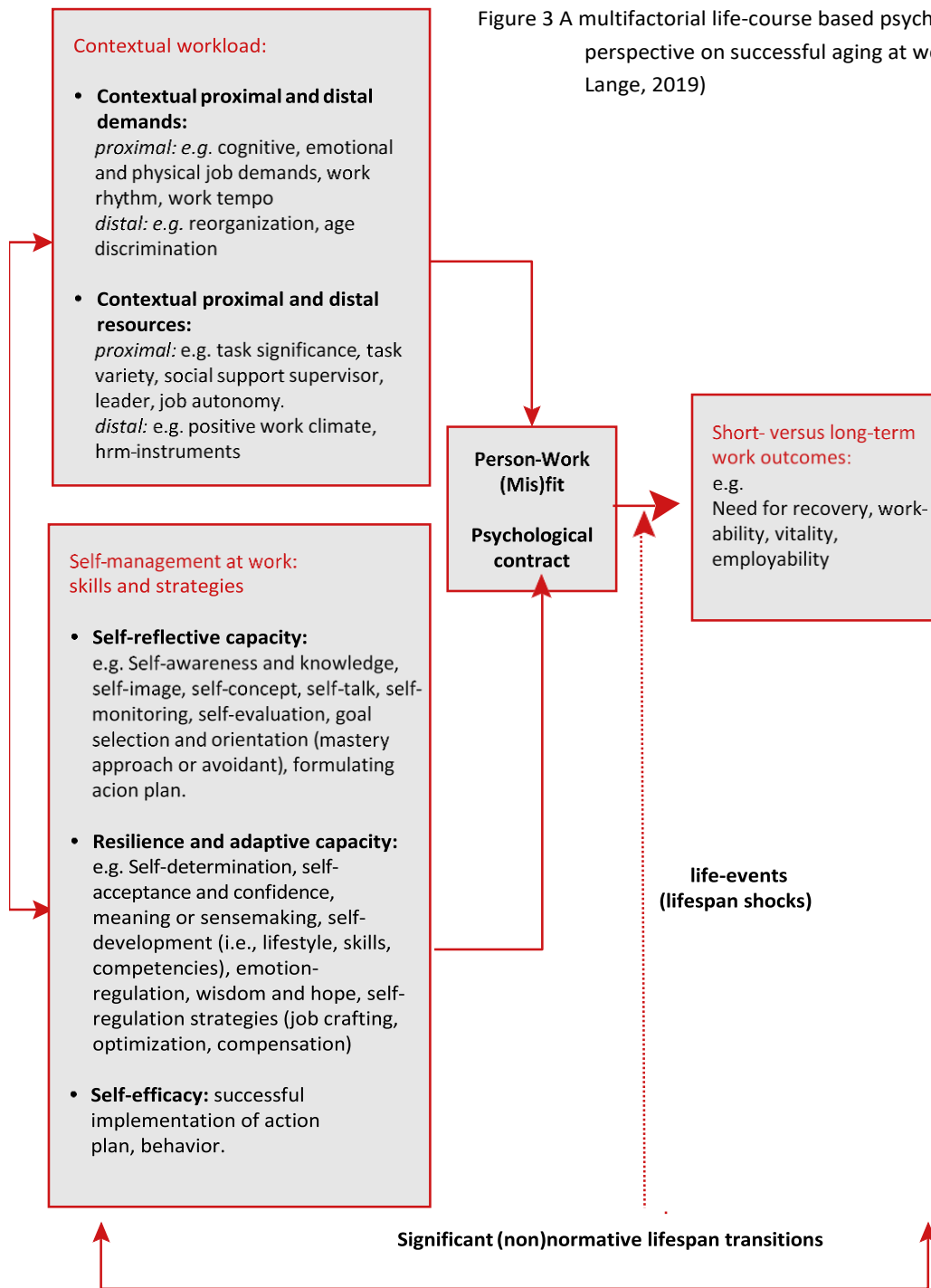


Figure 3 A multifactorial life-course based psychological perspective on successful aging at work (based on De Lange, 2019)

Nb. The dotted line refers to possible moderating effects of life-span events.

Work-related interventions to improve the self-management of aging workers.

In this section we will discuss evidence-based interventions to strengthen the self-management of workers in relation to sustainable employability.^{xxxix} (See figure 3.) Three interventions that create or implement are:

1. Healthy work design that meets and fosters the self-management capacity of aging workers;
2. The use of human resource management practices to build self-management capacity of aging workers; and
3. The influence of leadership behavior at work in empowering aging workers.

Design of healthy work and job crafting. Healthy work design is characterized by a balance between contextual job demands and job resources. Working for a prolonged time in a situation with an imbalance (too high task demands combined with insufficient resources, such as autonomy and social support) leads to the development of mental and physical complaints and increased risk of reduced employability over time. Self-management and sustainable employability is therefore a topic that needs to be interpreted within a certain context. For example, the work context of nurse Angela Baker (described in the case study) can be characterized by a relatively high workload and reduced job resource options (due to colleagues dropping out, reorganizations, and a high administrative workload). The design of active and healthy jobs in which task requirements are balanced with resources is therefore of great importance to enable self-management and maintaining a fit with the work environment.

Job crafting: Job crafting as a technique can be used to sustain employability and create a better fit with the work environment. Job crafting refers to ways in which workers utilize opportunities to adapt to or change their work environment to develop an improved fit with their self-management capacity.^{xi xli} Self-regulatory actions can include: a worker

adjusting his or her own cognitive view or beliefs of the work tasks, focusing on the positive elements of the work (*cognitive crafting*); actively changing the task or selecting other tasks (*task crafting*); and creating meaningful social interactions at work and seeking to work only with a nice supervisor (*relational crafting*). According to the 'selection, optimization and compensation (SOC) model' of Baltes et al.: sustainable employability is possible through the use of the right self-management strategy: *selection* (focusing on specific work tasks), *optimization* (making ergonomic adjustments to the work setting) or *compensation* (taking more time for a cognitive task). To be able to age successfully, older people will show more compensatory behavior or look for other possibilities by, for example, finding tasks that are physically less intensive or by creating recovery options. In this way they retain their sense of control and positive self-image.^{xlii}

Similarly, the motivational theory of lifespan development^{xliii} shows that individuals strive to exercise continuous control over their environment during their life cycle to make it more in line with their own wishes, personal projects or life goals, the so-called *primary control capacity*. In contrast, *secondary control* processes focus more in crafting the self to bring oneself or one's self-management skills more in line with environmental demands. The two processes together are proposed to optimize an individual's sense of control and human agency. Primary control strategies aimed at compensation are, for example, external aids, such as help from others or technical aids that workers can use at work. Secondary control strategies focus on adjusting their dedication or energy in a work task. Individuals increase their dedication to reach a work goal, for example, by imagining how happy they will be when the goal is achieved and by repeating that they can achieve the goal. Secondary control strategies aimed at compensation with regard to the preferred life or work-related goals can include workers accepting and mentally detaching from unattainable goals and protecting themselves by comparing themselves with others who are worse off.

Kooij and colleagues^{xliv} tested the effect of a job-crafting intervention and found that participation in a job-crafting workshop was effective in relation to "strength-based crafting or strengthening self-management skills," aligning the work with their own self-management strengths and talents. The intervention was aimed at adjusting the job to personal strengths and interests and older workers who participated and crafted the job towards their strengths revealed positive results for demands-abilities and needs-supplies fit. Unexpectedly, participating in the job crafting intervention did not influence job crafting towards interests.

Human Resource Management.

A growing body of research pays attention to the role of HR practices in sustaining older adults at work.^{xlv} For example, Kooij and colleagues^{xlvi} formulated four bundles of HR practices—*developmental*, *maintenance*, *utilization*, and *accommodative* practices—based on the aforementioned selection, optimization and compensation model (See table 2.) The SOC model suggests that employees allocate their resources in line with four major life goals, namely growth, maintenance, recovery, and the regulation of loss. If HR practices are bundled according to these employee life goals, research has shown that employees will use HR practices that fit their goals and see these practices as one coherent set. First, developmental practices aim to aid workers in improving their performance (e.g., training and promotion). These practices are mainly related to advancement and satisfy the need for growth and development. As such they are important job resources, which can help employees generate additional personal self-management related skills. For example, De Lange and colleagues^{xlvii} showed that employees gained job resources like autonomy after receiving a promotion. As developmental practices are classified as job resources and can help workers generate additional personal self-management based skills, we argue that they will be beneficial for successful aging at work. In line with this expectation, the review of Pak et al.^{xlviii} revealed

significant relations between developmental practices and work outcomes like employability and work motivation.

Second, HR maintenance practices help workers to sustain their performance in spite of (age-related) loss of resources (e.g., declines in physical capabilities). These practices are mainly focused on security and protection of personal resources (e.g., health). Examples of maintenance practices are health checks and performance appraisals. Maintenance practices can help individuals increase their job and personal resources. For example, ergonomic adjustments made to the workplace can reduce the number of work-related physical disorders. Moreover, the review of Pak et al.^{xlix} showed that maintenance practices (especially health promotion) were significantly positively associated with work ability.

Third, utilization practices tap the experience, knowledge, and competencies of older workers (e.g., mentoring roles and participation in decision-making) thus optimising their personal resources. These practices can be used to assist workers in regaining performance after having experienced a drop in performance. They usually make use of lateral development in which job demands that do not fit the coping resources of the employee are replaced by other demands that fit better with the existing personal resources of the individual. For example, through mentoring, an older worker is better able to use such resources as knowledge and skills of the company and the profession. Nonetheless, the current evidence on association between utilization practices and work outcomes like work ability, employability and motivation to work is still inconclusive and deserves more research attention to draw stronger conclusions.

Fourth, accommodative practices (e.g., demotions and exemption from overtime) are used when an employee can no longer regain previous levels of performance and needs to be assisted in functioning at a lower level. This type of practice helps to regulate the loss of employee resources. To illustrate, a worker who had a burnout can be offered a demotion to a

less challenging position, thereby reducing strain and allowing the employee to continue working until retirement age. Earlier research has found that accommodative practices like workplace rehabilitation, reducing the number of working hours, and getting exemptions from evening and night work were found to have a positive effect on work ability.

An overview of all HR practices that are included in the different bundles can be found in Table 2^{1 li iii}.

Table 2. *Overview of HR practices supporting older worker self-management*

Accommodative practices	Utilization practices	Maintenance practices	Developmental practices
Long career break	Participation	Flexible benefits	Career planning
Early retirement	Task enrichment	Performance Pay	Promotion
Reduction of tasks and/or responsibilities	(knowledge transfer)	Compressed workweek	
Additional leave	(Partial) change in tasks or responsibilities	Ergonomic adjustments to the workplace	Continuous training or instruction on the job
Demotion		Adjustments to work tasks due to illness	
Retirement			
Exemption from working overtime/night shifts			
Reduced workload			

When Van der Mark-Reeuwijk et al.^{liii} reviewed evidence-based interventions to prolong working lives of older workers, they found seven interventions that are relevant: 1) career development workshops, 2) health promotion at work, such as yoga, fitness, availability of free fruit, 3) preventive consultation with a company doctor, 4) online health risk assessment, 5) mental coaching by phone, 6) regular exercise, and 7) tai chi. In general, these interventions seem to have small, positive effects. For example, studies showed significant positive changes: a reduction in the need for recovery, improved work capacity, reduced absenteeism and drop-outs from work. In addition, job resources such as autonomy, social support, feedback and leadership, but also HRM-practices such as health promotion and stimulating career counseling, have strong positive effects in predicting indicators of sustainable employability (measured as work ability, employability, and motivation to continue working).

The design of a healthy working environment and HR interventions are therefore important tools that employers can use to enhance the self-management of workers during the life course. Another powerful factor in sustaining self-management and sustainable employability is leadership and behavior towards aging workers.

Leadership: health-promoting leadership as important factor

Leadership can influence person-environment fit of subordinates (see figure 3). While there are many definitions of leadership, most see leadership as a process whereby a leader through intentional influence guides, structures, facilitates activities and relationships within a group or an organization, i.e., motivating and inspiring his or her employees to work for a common goal.^{liv} Although the terms leadership and management are sometimes used interchangeably,

leadership refers to “one to one” (dyadic leadership) or “one to many” (leadership).

Management, on the other hand, concerns the organization of work, i.e., planning and controlling work activities, focusing on administration and task achievement. When it comes to categorizing leadership styles or approaches, some researchers use the label ‘leadership’, and others use ‘management’.

Leadership theories are dynamic and new theories have been developed over time,^{lv} without rejecting former theories. If so, how do different approaches to leadership interact? The contingency theory suggests that leadership is situational, and that there is no single right way to lead because it depends on the situation of the followers (i.e., their self-management skills), the person-work fit (i.e., work ability, vitality and employability), and the dyadic relationship between leader and follower. This means that a style effective in one situation may not be effective in a different situation.

Because leadership is relational, the dyadic relationship between a manager and his or her subordinates is central to developing sustainable employability. For instance, research on dyadic relationships based on leader-member-exchange theory (LMX) suggests that leaders unaware of the on-going development of dyadic relationships will automatically form strong relationships with a small number of employees (in-group) and weaker relationships with the remaining group of followers (out-group). The assumption is that in-group members are highly committed and more likely to get interesting work tasks, get invited into networks, etc., and the leader uses internal attribution to explain success of the project (due to the knowledgeable employee) or failure (due to external circumstances). In contrast, out-group members are expected to do what is in their work contract and the leader will most likely use external attribution to explain failure of the project (due to the employee’s incompetence) or success (due to external circumstances).

Dyadic leadership theory^{lvi} suggest that the dyad relationship between leaders and their members, rated from the employee perspective, may influence workers' well-being. Furunes et al. found that followers with a weak relationship to their closest supervisor were more prone to be stressed, experience bullying and age discrimination, as well as negative affectivity. Older workers may be particularly vulnerable. Few studies have investigated whether particular approaches to leadership may be more fruitful in terms of sustaining older workers' employability.

Research suggests that some leadership styles may be better suited to addressing and adapting to workers' diverse expectations and needs. *Transformational* leaders are found to highly prioritize their relationship with their followers, and show individualized consideration in order to meet followers' needs for empowerment, personal growth, self-efficacy and achievement.^{lvii} Transformational leadership correlates positively with both individual and organizational outcomes. A meta-review^{lviii} suggests that transformational leadership can predict many positive and negative aspects of employee well-being; nonetheless, evidence is blurred. When it comes to employee health, Nielsen and Daniels^{lix} suggest that there may also be negative effects of transformational leadership. Because transformational leaders have high expectations, employees may perform beyond own capacities, which may have long-term negative health consequences (longer sick leave). Due to these limitations of the transformational leadership approach, researchers have looked into new approaches to leadership, which both directly and indirectly focus on employees' physical and mental health.

A systematic review suggests that health-promoting leadership adds value to transformational leadership.^{lx} Health-promoting leadership is defined as the process of creating a culture for health-promoting workplaces and values that inspire and motivate

employees to participate in such a development.^{lxi} Health-promoting leadership is not only considered to be a promising path to sustaining employee health, but also building organizational capacity and resilience^{lxii}, i.e., a holistic workplace strategy. The health-promoting leader actively engages in promoting employees' health, takes responsibility for action, maintains open communication, and accommodates employees' participation in change processes.

A recent study by Furunes et al.^{lxiii} of health-promoting leadership in a nursing context suggests certain characterizing qualities, including autonomy, role clarity and the relevant level of job demands, the possibility of participating in decision making, getting support from colleagues, and developing one's skills and competence. A health-promoting leader in the health context is described as being attentive, taking action, and communicating openly. Nurses expect their leaders to care about and invest in their professional development. This study contributed to the health-promoting leadership literature by showing that nurses expect their leaders to foster meaningfulness in their daily work. Meaningfulness is found to be of particular importance for health professionals in coping with high quantitative and emotional demands^{lxiv} and may buffer burnout or other negative employee outcomes.

Moreover, Furunes and colleagues^{lxv} suggest that health-promoting leadership concerns both core leadership tasks and core leadership behavior. Core leadership tasks are short-term (demanding immediate action), medium-term, and long-term tasks. Short-term tasks include giving feedback to employees and handling sick leave. Medium term activities include building an organizational culture for health promotion, through building trust, care and health awareness. Long-term activities are the leadership tasks related to encouraging employees' sense of coherence. Sense of coherence refers to the degree that employees feel that their work (situation) is meaningful, manageable, and whether they understand the whole.

Health-promoting leader behaviour includes being attentive, authentic, curious and courageous.

How then does health-promoting leadership contribute to sustaining older workers' employability? Drawing on another study of nurses^{lxvi}, we learn that meaningfulness is one of the main motivations to continue working. Meaningfulness is related to making a difference for patients and their families, and the nurse-patient relationship is considered the most meaningful. Nursing is a profession where many leave the profession early, hence older, experienced nurses are likely to be resilient and have developed coping mechanisms that make stressful situations manageable and comprehensible. This may be partly due to the individual's self-management strategies, but could also be facilitated by the leader or closest supervisor through health-promoting leader behavior and/or human resource management activities. Nurses mention that self-efficacy and reliance on one's own judgment increase with work experience, thus making them more prone to staying on the job. One dilemma addressed was the increase in job demands, compromising quality of care. For example, extreme time pressure might make it impossible for the nurses to fulfill work tasks to the professional standard they aspired to, thus compromising their ethical standards. Leaders need to understand that nurses' motivation to continue working is based on making a difference for patients (meaningfulness or self-determination), mastering the job (self-efficacy), and mentoring younger colleagues (generativity motives).

Insights from Practice: self-management challenges of unemployed older workers

We will end this chapter with reflections of director Anne-Marije Buckens based on her practical work in 50 Company, an agency that specializes in re-skilling and re-training 50plus workers who want to change careers or are unemployed and searching for new work (see case report 2).

Case report 2 Unemployed Peter finds a new job—the outcome of un-tagging, talent scouting and self-management in practice

One day Peter (55 years) came to 50 Company for help. Peter had worked as a pathologist but could no longer perform his work due to arthrosis in his hands. His profession was so specific that he had no idea what other professions he could practice. We helped Peter un-tag and stripped him of all labels that fit the pathologist-anatomist profession.

Peter talked about what his position entailed and what tasks his work mainly consisted of. Contrary to what we assumed at first, Peter's job consisted mainly of communication. Peter said that he is good at bringing complicated news in an emotional context to patients' relatives. Peter proudly told about the moments he looks back with satisfaction, and where he made a difference with his communication skills.

An important part of Peter's new talent profile was "communicating in difficult situations."

We examined professions where this element was essential. Peter found a new job as a counselor for victim assistance. He does what he has been good at for years, communicating in difficult situations. He did not have to re-train and can use the competencies that he has had for years.

Figure 4: Top 10 Twenty-first century skills

Top 10 Twenty-first century skills

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management

5. Coordinating with others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment and decision making
8. Service orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive flexibility

Source: Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum 2016

Retaining or getting a new job as a 50plus worker: insights from practice

In the dynamic labor market, mainly through robotization and technological innovation, re-skilling, training and lifelong education in twenty-first century skills have become crucial to remain employable and attractive for employers (see figure 4). However, a large group of older adults has received insufficient training and is unable to meet the requested competence profile of employers searching for new applicants. Moreover, just like Peter, older workers are unaccustomed to taking self-reflection time to determine their ideal self-concept at work or reflecting upon and evaluating the strengths, talents and weaknesses in their work functioning.

From un-tagging to talent scouting, talent development across the life course

During educational and vocational training and working life, aging workers receive numerous tags (e.g. good in maths or language). These tags largely determine the choices workers make in their careers, but often do not capture all possible talents or self-management strengths of older workers. To create more sustainable careers across the life course, science as well as practice show that we need to un-tag workers and invest more time in self-reflection, talent-

scouting, and development, thus expanding self-management skills and capabilities across the life course.

Checklist for finding a new job as an older worker

In summary, the practical case studies as well as relevant empirical research reveal that the following self-management skills and capabilities are important to take into account if an older worker is to remain employable across time: self-reflective capacity, resilience and adaptability, as well as self-efficacy at work. We will end with a checklist older workers can use to reflect upon their self-management and employability at work:

1. *Self-reflective capacity*: Take enough time to reflect on your possible future work-self and possible strengths, talents or weaknesses in relation to your work functioning. Do you have enough resilience to change your career view, to job craft and create a new career path or to take up new training? Do you have enough self-efficacy or do you need coaching to successfully implement formulated action plan(s)? Map your knowledge, skills, personality traits, motives, ambition and added value to an organization according to the principle of un-tagging and talent-scouting and talent-development (see case report 2).
2. *Resilience and adaptability*: Determine which future-proof professions and functions match your profile, talents and self-management skills and capabilities, and take up new training. Do not fear change.
3. Being 50plus means that you have a lot of life experience and possible wisdom. Your patience, trust, attitude and life wisdom are very attractive for an employer.
4. Write a labor market pitch in which you explain to the new employer what added value you can offer to the organization.
5. Determine which network contacts can help you acquire your new job and, via LinkedIn, get in touch with those people.

6. *Self-efficacy*: Work on your personal branding based on positive storytelling via the internet. Build a personal brand by posting business, professional and work-related expressions in the form of blogs, vlogs, interviews and opinion pieces.
7. Don't be fooled that after the age of 50 you are no longer attractive to employers. You are as attractive or unattractive, young or old, as you present yourself. Make sure you have a good story and let it count. Make sure you develop a positive self-concept, self-talk, learn to reflect positively about yourself.
8. Don't be too modest in your presentation. State what you are good at, what your passion and ambition is.
9. When finding an appropriate job, be able to further craft the job (in terms of relations with supervisors and colleagues, tasks, possible human resource management practices) so it fits your own self-management talents or strengths.

Notes:

ⁱ OECD. "Employment Rate by Age Group (Indicator)." *doi: 10.1787/084f32c* (Accessed on 23 February 2020).

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