Work Across the Lifespan

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Lifespan Perspectives on Successful Aging at Work

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The concept of \textit{successful aging} was initially proposed in the gerontological literature in the 1960s (e.g., Atchley, 1971; Cumming & Henry, 1961; Havighurst, 1961; Neugarten, 1972). However, it wasn’t until Rowe and Kahn (1987) published their paper on the MacArthur Model of successful aging in \textit{Science} that the focus shifted from defining successful aging as an absence of disease and decline to asserting the importance of health and growth as the basis for aging successfully (Pruncho & Carr, 2017). The original MacArthur Model has three primary components: low risk of disease and disease-related disability; maintenance of strong mental and physical function; and continued engagement with life, including both paid and unpaid (volunteer) productive activities. However, successful aging in the original MacArthur Model has been criticized for focusing primarily at the individual level of personal agency (e.g., the need to engage in health promoting behaviors), while ignoring macro-level influences on successful aging which are often out of the control of the individual, such as societal norms and policies related to gender, race, and socioeconomic status differences (c.f., Katz & Calasanti, 2015).

More recently, Rowe and Kahn (2015) discussed an extension of the original McArthur Model of successful aging, labeling it “Successful Aging 2.0: Conceptual expansions for the 21st century”. The interdisciplinary MacArthur Research Network on an Aging Society came together in 2007 to identify both the problems and potentialities of societal aging. The network identified four key criteria related to successful aging at the societal level: productivity and engagement; cohesion among generations; balancing the
risks and benefits of an aging society; as well as resilience to stress, and sustainabil-
ity of functioning over time. Thus, to the extent that society can create a context in which all four of these criteria can be optimized, the individual’s ability to age successfully will be enhanced.

In that vein, Rowe and Kahn (2015) discussed three main goals for scholars and policy makers who wish to optimize the context for successful aging at both the societal and individual levels. First, core societal institutions including schools, colleges, workplaces, hospitals, and families need to be reengineered to serve an increasingly age diverse society better. Second, there is the need to adopt a life course perspective to redistribute life’s major activities (e.g., education, work, retirement, childrearing, leisure) across the lifespan better to match the 21st century reality of an aging society. And, third, Rowe and Kahn discuss the need to focus on human capital and the productivity gains that are created by the “longevity dividend” provided by extended lifespans.

One will notice immediately that all three of the goals touch upon the areas of work and employment. The first goal of reengineering societal institutions, for example, prominently emphasizes the significant role of workplaces and successful aging. Meanwhile, the second goal of redistributing major life activities includes realizing that learning does not end after one completes high school or college, but rather continuous learning will need to occur throughout our lifetimes. This need directly impacts our job opportunities and ultimately how our careers unfold in the 21st century. The third goal of focusing on human capital speaks directly to longer work lives, whether individuals continue in their careers or engage in bridge employment or volunteer work as they transition from their career pursuits toward retirement (Wang, Adams, Beehr, & Shultz, 2009). However, before we explore successful aging at work more in depth, we will first discuss lifespan perspectives on successful aging more broadly.

LIFESPAN PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESSFUL AGING

While Successful Aging 2.0 takes a broad, macro approach to studying successful aging (i.e., a societal level view), it is not technically a lifespan perspectives on successful aging. The lifespan perspective, as the name implies, examines the entire life course from childhood to old age. However, as Zacher and Rudolph (2017) recently noted, in practice most empirical research using the lifespan approach focuses on older adults (e.g., age 60 years and older) who are often already outside the workplace. Below we briefly discuss two, broad-based lifespan perspectives that have been applied to, and are particularly relevant to our understanding of successful aging at work. See Zacher and Rudolph (2017), as well as other related chapters in this volume, for a full discussion of other relevant lifespan theories.
Baltes and Baltes (1990); Baltes (1997) selection, optimization, and compensation model is a meta-theoretical perspectives on development across the lifespan that focuses primarily on older individuals (age 60 years and older) and approaches used to maintain basic functions of daily activities. In the model, selection refers to the process individuals use to bring focus and prioritize goals as they age. Whereas, optimization is about maximizing the resources individuals currently possess (e.g., focusing more on crystalized versus fluid intelligence as we age), while compensation is about bringing in additional resources (e.g., using hearing aids to compensate for age-related degradation in auditory capacity). While the model was initially applied to gerontological issues of advanced aging, in the past few decades it has also been applied to a multitude of organizational topics.

For example, in a recent summary of the research applying the selection, optimization, and compensation framework to organizational issues, Moghimi, Zacher, Scheibe, and Von Yperen (2017) found that implementation of the three strategies positively influences a variety of organizational outcomes, including job satisfaction, employee engagement, and job performance. Thus, the model clearly has had a significant influence on how organizational scientists have examined successful aging at work.

Another prominent theory of successful aging is the motivational theory of lifespan development (Heckhausen, 2006). The theory proposes two control mechanisms that can be used to promote successful aging. The first, primary control mechanism involves attempts to control or influence one’s environment. For example, seeking a new job that has more supportive leaders and coworkers would be a form of primary control whereby individuals take the initiative to change their environment to foster successful aging. The secondary control mechanism involves attempts to adapt to one’s existing environment rather than control or influence it directly. For example, if an individual seeks social support from family or coworkers as an adaptive mechanism to an unsupportive work environment, then the individual is not working to control the environment, but rather adapting to it via relying on secondary control mechanisms. In many instances, it is not possible for the individual directly to influence or control the environment itself, and so, as a result, secondary, adaptive mechanisms are a logical way to facilitate successful aging. As the example above suggests, the motivational theory of lifespan development, like the selection, optimization, and compensation model, has direct applications to successful aging at work as well.

While lifespan theories of successful aging have been popular and well-studied in the gerontological literature, they are not without their critics. Most notably, lifespan theories often fail to integrate context into their explanations of developmental change. Said another way, lifespan theories tend to focus on the processes of intraindividual development (i.e., ontogenesis), while often neglecting extraindividual influences of context on development (i.e., sociogenesis). As a result, person-by-context interactions are typically
not examined (Zacher & Rudolph, 2017). Therefore, below we briefly discuss three perspectives on successful aging at work that take a broader systems-based, multiactor (e.g., employees, organizations, families, governments) perspective, thus accounting for broader contextual factors.

SUCCESSFUL AGING AT WORK

As noted earlier, all three goals listed by Rowe and Kahn (2015) (i.e., reengineering core societal institutions, adopting a life course perspective, and focusing on human capital) speak conspicuously to the workplace. While theorizing on successful aging in gerontology has traditionally focused on individuals in the 60-years-old and older age range, focusing on successful aging at work requires that we focus on a somewhat younger cohort, often in the 40 to 60-year-old age range or what gerontologists often refer to as midlife. Although with labor force participation continuing to climb at older ages (Toossi, 2013), an upper age limit closer to 70 or older is becoming more appropriate when studying successful aging at work.

Some two decades ago, Abraham and Hansson (1995), as well as Hansson, DeKoekkoek, Neece, and Patterson (1997), helped to bring the concept of successful aging at work into the mainstream. In the former study, Abraham and Hansson surveyed 224 working adults ranging in age from 40 to 69 and examined their use of selection, optimization, and compensation strategies to maintain their levels of job performance despite age related declines. Their results “suggest that the SOC model of successful aging may be useful in explaining how older workers can maintain important job competencies. Correlational evidence also suggests, however, that characteristics of the job, workplace, and individuals may mediate the initiation and effectiveness of SOC behaviors” (p. 94). Thus, the Abraham and Hansson study served two formative purposes. First, it was one of the first studies to apply the broadly defined selection, optimization, and compensation model of successful aging specifically to the workplace. Second, the authors took a systems-based, multiactor perspective regarding successful aging at work, thus setting the stage for future researchers to integrate contextual factors, such as the workplace policies toward older workers, when studying successful aging at work.

Meanwhile, in a review paper two years later, Hansson et al. (1997) provided an examination and integration of the successful aging-at-work literature. While the timeframe of the review was somewhat limited (i.e., 1992–6), it was the first comprehensive review of the literature on successful aging specifically in the work context. In addition, while successful aging in the workplace was only one of seven related areas reviewed (e.g., retirement, careers, older worker health, age discrimination), it also served as an overarching theme or organizing framework for the review. Thus, successful
aging at work became the meta-theoretical framework for reviewing a wide variety of work-related issues particularly important for older workers (e.g., age discrimination).

In later empirical studies, Robson, Hansson, Abalos, and Booth (2006) examined “criteria older workers use to evaluate their success in aging in the workplace” (p. 156). Based on a survey of over 200 older workers, Robson et al. identified five distinct self-reported criteria for successful aging at work. These criteria included: (1) adaptability and health, (2) positive relationships, (3) occupational growth, (4) personal security, and (5) continued focus and achievement of personal goals. Each of the five dimensions was positively correlated to workers’ self-perceptions of successful aging (i.e., ratings of how well they had aged compared to their same-aged peers), with adaptability and health having the strongest relationship and personal security having the weakest relationship with workers’ self-perceptions of successful aging at work.

In a follow-up article, Robson and Hansson (2007) focused on behavioral strategies (i.e., proactive behaviors) in which older workers engaged to age successfully at work. In a two-part study of over 250 workers, Robson and Hansson identified seven dimensions of behavioral strategies related to successful aging at work via factor analyses: (1) relationship development, (2) ensuring security, (3) continuous learning, (4) stress relief, (5) skill extension, (6) career management, and (7) conscientiousness. All seven of these behavioral strategies were positively correlated with workers’ self-perceptions of successful aging at work identified in their 2006 study. In addition, the worker’s age moderated the relationships between the behavioral strategies of relationship development and skill extension with perceived success, where the strategies were less strongly related to perceived success among older compared to younger workers.

More recently, Zacher (2015a,b) provided a working definition, and a theoretical framework, for investigating successful aging at work. Zacher and his colleagues (e.g., Zacher, 2015a,b; Zacher & Rudolph, 2017) have recently provided comprehensive reviews of the successful aging-at-work literature. For example, Zacher (2015a) offers one of the first explicit, clear, and concrete definitions of successful aging at work. Namely,

Successful aging at work involves a comparison of employees’ intraindividual age-related trajectories of a work outcome over time and across working lifespan with other employees’ age-related trajectories of the same outcome. Employees whose trajectories deviate positively from the average trajectory are aging successfully at work (p. 9).

Zacher then goes on to outline four key themes of successful aging at work. First, he examines the criteria associated with successful aging at work. That is, both the objective and subjective work outcomes that are
valued by both employees and organizations. Next, he tackles the need to focus on explanatory mechanism behind successful aging at work, such as investigating age as a potential moderator. He then moves on to discuss the potential constraining and facilitating factors that help to explain differences in successful aging outcomes across different ages. Finally, he emphasizes the need to look at temporal patterns that can be operationalized by examining intraindividual age-related changes in criteria over time and across the lifespan.

In laying out these four key themes, Zacher (2015a) provides one of the first comprehensive theoretical frameworks for fully investigating and understanding successful aging at work. He then provides a series of figures that would allow researchers to compare their findings to see if, in fact, their results support his definition of successful aging at work. In addition, Zacher summarizes his theoretical framework of successful aging at work in a figure that has employee age as the key antecedent, a variety of personal (e.g., knowledge, skills) and contextual (e.g., work characteristics) moderators and mediators, and a variety of work outcomes (e.g., work motivation, job performance, turnover, and occupational health and wellbeing) (see Zacher, 2015a, Fig. 2, p. 11).

Kooij (2015a,b) also recently outlined her own theoretical perspectives on successful aging at work. The focus of her theoretical model was on employees’ proactive behaviors, the maintenance of the fit between employees and their jobs, and sustainable management of personal resources (i.e., work ability). As a result, in Kooij’s model of successful aging at work, employees need to play a proactive role in maintaining their physical and mental health, work motivation, and work ability in order to sustain performance in their present and future work lives. That is, they need to engage in both proactive person-job fit and proactive career behaviors to maintain person-job fit. In addition, Kooij argues that the effect of a continuous person-job fit on the maintenance of health, motivation, and work ability is mediated by employees’ effective management of their personal resources. Thus, just as with the selection, optimization, and compensation model discussed earlier, engaging in maintenance behaviors may require a tradeoff between depletion of resources by engaging in such proactive behaviors and the gains obtained in person-job and career fit by engaging in those same behaviors.

In the remainder of our chapter, we will use Kooij’s (2015a,b) model as our meta-theoretical framework that emphasizes the employee’s active role in promoting successful aging at work (see also, Zacher & Kooij, 2017). Engaging in proactive behaviors, in Kooij’s model, leads to maintaining person—job fit throughout the life course, which, in turn, leads to key successful aging at work outcomes such as maintaining one’s health, motivation, and work ability. Therefore, we next incorporate several prominent theories that speak directly to engaging in proactive work behaviors that promote successful aging at work.
PROACTIVE BEHAVIORS: ACTIVELY SHAPING WORK AND RELATIONSHIPS

Adapting and responding to changes and opportunities positively contributes to successful development over the course of one’s lifespan. Active adaptation to both internal and external changes is essential for successful adaptation. Changes can be imposed externally (i.e., through market and consumer shifts that impact products, services, and jobs), but also emerge naturally as part of experiences as we age (i.e., graduations, marriages, children, aging parents). The decisions and choices that individuals make in response to the changes they face impact the outcomes they experience both personally and professionally. Proactive behaviors focused on approaches that optimize performance and eliminating and/or reducing obstacles that interfere with progress toward desired outcomes impacts successful aging at work.

Over the life course, individuals who make choices to use their strengths at work and prioritize tasks to invest time working on tasks they find most interesting and engaging tend to optimize their performance overall (Cleveland, Fisher, & Walters, 2017). To respond effectively to changes, tasks that are unattainable or unrealistic considering available resources or the prevailing political environment in the organization (i.e., understanding what can be done within the culture of the organization) need to be abandoned. Kooji (2015a) provides a comprehensive review of the proactive behaviors in which individuals can engage to facilitate successful aging at work, including seeking additional training and mentoring, as well as goal setting and emotion regulation. In addition, the lifespan development literature supports the contention that as individuals age, they take an active role in responding to and shaping the environment in ways that optimize the outcomes they value given the resources that are available to them (Rudolph, 2016).

In addition, the literature focused on person-environment fit and proactive behavior in organizational psychology delineates a wide range of behaviors that are related to successful aging at work. Job crafting serves as a linchpin integrating the proactive approach individuals use to optimize the fit between the strengths they possess and the targeted results desired by the organization to optimize person—environment fit (Kira, Van Eijnatten, & Balkin, 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Personal strengths are unique combinations of characteristics and behaviors that impact how individuals approach work to optimize relationships and performance (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011). Strengths are not static, however. Over time, individuals proactively create opportunities to use their strengths at work and expand their knowledge and skills that contribute to the development of their strengths (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Lang & Carstensen, 2002; Wang, Olson, & Shultz, 2013). The job demands-resources model of job crafting delineated by Tims and Bakker (2010) increased the research and focus on...
the importance of job crafting as a process that optimizes individual well-being and performance.

**OPTIMIZING PERSON–JOB FIT: CRAFTING TO STRENGTHS**

Strategies to optimize person-job fit have been found to predict performance, engagement, and satisfaction at work (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). The concept and practices related to job crafting have been utilized to optimize person-job fit since the late 1980s. Considering the continuous internal and external changes that impact organizations today, job crafting offers a more adaptive and timely response to rapidly changing conditions than the traditional process used by organizations to redesign jobs.

Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski (2013) asserted that individual’s strengths, motives, and interests serve as a unique lens through which to develop strategies to adapt job tasks and processes to improve job performance. Job crafting can take multiple forms and thus contributes to successful aging at work through the actions individuals take to create and sustain a clear and evolving definition of their work, as well as who they are in relationship to their work. In addition, job crafting is an active process through which individuals take the initiative to sustain meaning and engagement in their work. This process impacts individual motivation, engagement, and well-being through fostering the development of strengths and skills that increase person-job fit. More specifically, job crafting specifically focuses on changing the perceived characteristics of the job that differentiates it from other proactive work behaviors, such as taking personal initiative (Demerouti & Bakker, 2014).

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) identified three primary dimensions of job crafting behaviors: task, cognitive, and relational. With task crafting, individuals focus on changing the boundaries of their work and the approaches they use to complete tasks. This form of crafting allows individuals to adapt to changes in performance requirements in response to outside pressures (i.e., to increase performance related to new competitors in the market, implementation of technology that changes the approaches and processes used to complete tasks) and also develop new ways to improve task performance and increase efficiency by applying knowledge and experience in new ways. Changes associated with task crafting benefit the organization and team by increasing performance and efficiency related to achieving key goals set by the organization. Task crafting also benefits individuals by maintaining interesting and challenging work that provides opportunities for continuous learning and developing new approaches to complete tasks.

Cognitive crafting is the process of reframing how one views one’s role. Individuals may reframe the tasks they need to complete by focusing on the overall purpose of their work and view their work as an integrated whole.
For example, teachers may focus on the purpose of facilitating the development of students to expand their critical thinking skills in ways that allow them to more successfully navigate the plethora of information that bombards them daily rather than focusing on the (sometimes excruciating) details associated with writing lesson plans, grading assignments, and managing disruptive classroom behaviors. As a result, cognitive crafting changes the boundaries of how individuals see their jobs (e.g., I am influencing students’ lives by fostering and nurturing the development of their critical thinking and leadership skills).

**Relational crafting** emphasizes the importance of who individuals work with as they complete tasks. Individuals seek out others whom they prefer to work with as they complete tasks and assignments. This includes individuals with whom they enjoy working who may: (1) possess complementary skills that assist them in completing work in a high-quality manner, (2) provide unique perspectives to help them develop creative approaches and innovations, as well as (3) fulfill social needs through working with and developing collaborative relationships and meaningful attachments at work (Rath, 2007).

In a recent field study, Kooij, van Woerkom, Wilkenloh, Dorenbosch, and Denissen (2017) implemented an intervention to identify the impact of crafting jobs focused specifically on crafting tasks to utilize individuals’ strengths and interests. Results from their intervention demonstrated that job crafting initiated by the individuals who were specifically linked to their strengths positively impacted older worker performance and effectiveness, but did not impact the performance of younger workers. This is an important contribution to our understanding the impact of job crafting on successful aging at work. Specifically, as employees age, they develop more self-confidence, self-awareness, and dominance at work, which positively contributes to their ability to craft their roles at work and align their actions with their strengths in ways that optimizes performance (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Therefore, one important factor in aging successfully at work is related to self-awareness and building an environment that facilitates the ability to use ones’ strengths in meaningful ways.

In an effort to synthesize the literature on job crafting, Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne, and Zacher (2017) recently completed a meta-analysis of the research conducted to date on job crafting related to proactive behaviors that facilitate and optimize person–job fit. They used the four dimensions of job crafting proposed by Tims, Bakker, and Derks (2012). The dimensions were: (1) seeking out increasingly more challenging work and volunteering to work outside one’s current role; (2) reducing and eliminating job tasks that negatively impact physical, cognitive, or emotional well-being through minimizing work/life imbalances and excessive workload; (3) expanding autonomy and task variety to facilitate structural resources that positively impact motivation; and (4) expanding social resources that increase support from colleagues and seeking out feedback and advice from others at work. Results
showed that overall job crafting, as a composite of all four dimensions defined in Tims et al, was related to agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness to experience (Big Five dimensions), proactive personality, and general self-efficacy.

**MOTIVATIONAL MAINTENANCE AND SUCCESSFUL AGING: INTRINSIC GOALS**

The motivational maintenance perspective asserts that motivation remains stable over the life course. This stability is fueled by interests and strengths that are actively nurtured by the choices and decisions made by individuals to engage in work that they find motivating (Krapp, 2005). Motivational maintenance over the life course is supported by research in the adult continuing education literature (Gegenfurtner & Vauras, 2012), as well as research on workplace curiosity and aging (Reio & Callahan, 2004; Reio & Choi, 2006; Reio & Wiswell, 2000). In an organizational context, curiosity is defined as a state of emotional arousal that motivates information seeking and exploratory actions that reduce uncertainty while also facilitating learning. Motivation that is fueled by curiosity becomes self-sustaining over the course of one’s working life as new situations and challenges emerge. As a result, motivation is sustained as new problems and opportunities arise, which in turn require individuals to develop new approaches and learn new skills to optimize performance.

Motives and values are influenced and refined through experiences across the life course, including important experiences at work (Rudolph, Baltes, & Zabel, 2013). Work values can also be influenced by developments occurring within one’s occupation or overall cultural trends. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, the ability to afford to retire early was seen as an important outcome that, when achieved, contributed to individuals’ ability to freely pursue leisure and personal interests outside of paid work roles. However, the trend more recently has been toward working longer (Toossi, 2013) not only to address economic needs for individuals, but also to meet important intrinsic needs related to need for achievement (i.e., continued learning and development within one’s area of expertise) and need for affiliation (i.e., social needs and the importance of friends at work). This more recent cultural trend to continue in work roles past traditional retirement age to meet one’s intrinsic needs is supported by the theory of motivational maintenance across the life course (Gegenfurtner & Vauras, 2012; Krapp, 2005).

Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, and Kikkers (2011) meta-analysis found a positive relationship between aging and the importance of intrinsic need satisfaction at work over the life course. Specifically, as workers age, they expressed a higher need for intrinsic motive satisfaction related to feelings of accomplishment, use of skills, autonomy, and enjoyment of work. Results showed that as workers age, they placed less emphasis on extrinsic need
satisfaction related to financial compensation and prestige (Kooji et al., 2011). The results of this meta-analysis found that as one ages, the motive to engage in continuous learning (i.e., growth need) declined. This was interpreted as supporting the selection, optimization, and compensation model that asserts that as individuals age they compensate for losses, related to cognitive declines that make it more challenging to learn new information and develop new skills, by reducing the amount of time they invest in formal training activities at work.

An alternative interpretation is that as one ages, individuals have a broader network of people to whom they can turn for information and training via informal interactions, as well as their ability to engage in autonomous learning (i.e., web searches and self-initiated tutorials) (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). As a result, successful aging at work may indeed be impacted by one’s ability to maintain and expand learning through drawing on resources that have been nurtured over the course of one’s career and integrate those people and resources as situations warrant (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995).

MEASURES OF CAREER SUCCESS: THE IMPORTANCE OF MEANINGFUL WORK ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

A comprehensive definition of career success needs to include both subjective (e.g., meaningful work linked to purpose and autonomy) and objective (e.g., economic, promotion, prestige) measures (Olson & Shultz, 2013). Decades of research (Baltes, Rudolph, & Bal, 2012; MOWIRT, 1987) indicates that across occupations, age, and cultures, up to 95% of individuals indicated that they would continue working even if they did not have to do so for economic reasons. Individuals measure the success of each career step quantitatively (e.g., promotions, salary increases) and qualitatively (e.g., perceived autonomy, learning and growth, feelings of making a contribution).

However, the relative importance of financial and nonfinancial outcomes received for investing time and energy at work changes over the course of one’s career. For example, Loi and Shultz (2007) found that the emphasis on pay and benefits is highest at midlife due to costs related to children, aging parents, college costs, and mortgage, and that once those obligations are met, the importance of financial measures of success decline as one ages. Thus, successful aging at work is linked to both objective and subjective outcomes achieved over the life course. This is important since needs and aspirations change as individuals go through different life stages (e.g., graduation from college, marriage/committed relationships, birth of children, aging parents).

Finding meaning in one’s work roles is essential throughout the life course (Fairlie, 2010; Zacher, 2015a). For example, Fairlie (2013) found that engagement in meaningful work impacted feelings of success at work across all individuals in the workforce, regardless of their age. Rather than focus on spurious claims that younger workers are in search of meaning at work
Salzberg, 2012) or only as individuals age, meaningful work has a greater impact on sustained motivation than extrinsic rewards (Carstensen, 1995, 2006), the focus of organizational leaders can be on reinforcing the meaningfulness of work employees are engaged in at all ages and career stages. Dimensions of meaning gained through work are related to important outcomes that individuals seek over their life course (Kotter-Gruhn, Wiest, Zurek, & Scheibe, 2009), what makes people happy (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001), and are linked to higher levels of well-being (Keyes, 2007; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

While there are individual differences in how meaningful work is defined, common attributes include: work provides the opportunity to reach one’s full potential; contributes to one’s ability to leave a legacy, fulfill one’s life purpose; is congruent with one’s values and goals; fulfills the need for personal accomplishment; and facilitates fully one’s ability to actualize their potential (Baumeister, 1991; Emmons, 1999; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) offered an integrative model that delineates four major pathways to finding meaningful work. This model provides a synthesis of agency (i.e., the drive to assert, expand, master, and create through one’s individual actions) and communion (i.e., the drive to develop meaningful connections, attachments, and relationships with others). The four pathways to meaningful work delineated by Rosso et al include: (1) Individuation whereby meaning is created through actions that distinguish individuals as competent, valuable, and worthy; (2) Contribution creates meaning through taking action to make a significant impact by being of service to something or someone beyond oneself; (3) Connection reflects meaningfulness through engaging in actions that create alignment between individual “current” versus “ideal” self; and (4) Unification reflects meaningfulness through creating harmony among individuals and principles that they value. In summary, the definition of what is meaningful may evolve as one’s career unfolds and new levels of mastery are achieved through one’s work (Olson & Shultz, 2013). Thus, successful aging at work is related to the experience of meaning at work that contributes to feelings of success and accomplishment as one’s career unfolds (Fairlie, 2013).

CAREER SELF-MANAGEMENT

Career changes and transitions occur across the lifespan that also impacts successful aging at work (Yoo & Lee, 2017). Managing these changes and transitions is an essential aspect of career self-management and thus an integral part of successful aging at work. Changes in careers can be precipitated by both macro- and micro-level conditions and opportunities. At the macro level, economic changes and the patterns of population aging impact career options and alternatives. The economic downturns in 2000 and 2008 in the
United States, for example, significantly impacted the need for workers to stay in the work force longer to recover the financial and pension losses that were caused by both economic downturns.

In addition, organizations have also changed their shape and flattened their structures in efforts to streamline and maintain competitiveness in the global markets. These changes have led to more turbulent and less predictable career options (Liu, Englart-Carlson, & Minichiello, 2012), which, in turn, impacts the need for individuals to assume full responsibility for forging career paths that are customized to their needs, abilities, and personal circumstances (Jung & Takeuchi, 2017). What has traditionally been the purview of organizations to provide career paths and continuous development of individuals to meet the needs for organizational growth and market expansion has been replaced with the emphasis on processes that are owned and managed by individuals (Shultz & Olson, 2013; Yoo & Lee, 2017).

This macro evolution occurs based on the deep understanding that I have to manage my own career. This includes taking specific steps to identify work that meets one’s needs and is congruent with one’s values (DeVos & Seegers, 2013). Ongoing environmental scanning for opportunities and networking opportunities to identify and create options for the near and long-term future impact one’s ability to successfully age at work (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). In the current organizational context, workers are clearly aware of the importance of continuous adaptation to new circumstances that parallel developmental milestones that occur over the life course (Kahana, Kelley-Moore, & Kahana, 2012). As individuals age, they have more understanding of their options and greater self-awareness about which strategies and tactics best help them respond to time pressure, interpersonal stress, changes at work, and other work-related factors (Parker & Collins, 2010; Schwartz, 2007; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001).

**BROADER TRENDS AND WORK ABILITY**

Organizations continue to change to adapt to their environments. As such, to remain successful, individuals need to adapt to age successfully at work (Shultz & Olson, 2013). For example, organizational structures (i.e., hierarchy toward matrix, organic organizational designs) and cultures (i.e., corporate headquarters dominated by the country of origin versus globalization; multicultural workers) can change significantly over the course of one’s career. As a result, proactive planning and agile responses are essential for successful aging at work (McGonagle, Fisher, Barnes-Farrell, & Grosh, 2015). What was not imaginable 30 years ago is the reality today; defined benefits for retirement are virtually nonexistent for most jobs, with the shift to defined contributions and independent planning for one’s nonwork/retirement years being the norm (Hardy & Reyes, 2016). Older workers’ experience and background can assist them in understanding the evolution of this
complexity. It is clear that there is a need now to replace age-graded life course with an age-integrated life course (Hardy & Reyes, 2016; Shultz & Olson, 2013). While removing the age-graded expectations and boundaries can cause chaos and difficulty in the short run, in the long run this will lead to increased successful aging at work (De Vos & Seegers, 2013; King, 2004).

In addition, broader contextual factors, such as organizational climate, can impact successful aging at work. In fact, Zacher and Yang (2016) recently introduced the concept of organizational climate for successful aging and found that it was a moderator of the relationship between employees’ age and their focus on opportunities. In turn, a focus on opportunities was related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation to continue working after official retirement age. Thus, organizational climate for successful aging serves as an important contextual resource for older workers hoping to age successfully at work.

The concept of work ability (Ilmarinen, 2009a; Kumashiro, 2009) addresses successful aging at work to the extent that it focuses on how older workers maintain their employability as they age. Ilmarinen (2009b) notes that work ability is basically “a balance between a person’s resources and work demands” (p. 61). At the most basic level, or foundation, is a worker’s functional capacity (e.g., physical and mental health). At the next level are competencies (e.g., up-to-date knowledge, skills, and abilities). The third level consists of value (e.g., attitudes and motivations). Accordingly, positive attitudes toward work and appropriate motivation to continue working are needed to remain employable as one ages. These levels of work ability are placed in the context with the work itself, including the environment, work demands, as well the attitudes and behaviors of organizational leaders. In addition, societal norms and expectations, as well as the personal resources of the worker (e.g., wealth, social support networks) also set the context for the various factors that are likely to increase one’s work ability.

Thus, to the extent that older workers can combine the earlier levels to create high levels of work ability within the context of the work itself and the work environment, the worker is likely to create a scenario that is more likely to lead to successful aging at work. As a result, the concept of work ability provides yet another avenue to look at successful aging at work, which puts a heavy emphasis on personal agency of maintaining competencies and motivations, while also taking into account the broader context within which this transpires.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

We began this chapter by reviewing the literature on successful aging from a gerontological perspective in order to provide a historical context. We next
moved to examining successful aging at work, specifically within the lens of lifespan development. While the formal research and theorizing on successful aging at work specifically is relatively new, it is beginning to grow exponentially. More importantly, clear and concrete definitions and models of successful aging at work have recently emerged (Kooij, 2015a; Zacher, 2015a). We then used Kooij’s (2015a) model of successful aging at work as our meta-theoretical framework for exploring various theories and models of proactive behaviors (e.g., work ability, job crafting, motivational maintenance) which directly inform modern conceptions of successful aging at work.

Several directions for future research come in to focus as we ponder how best to proceed in investigating the construct of successful aging at work. First, it is clear when taking a lifespan perspective that a systems-based, multiactor perspective (i.e., employees, organizations, family and other social support networks, governments) is needed to fully understand not only how successful aging at work should be pursued, but also why some strategies will be more effective than others (Kooij, 2015a; Thomas, Hardy, Cutcher, & Ainsworth, 2014). While the primary focus should be on the employees’ individual agency and proactivity behaviors they must pursue to achieve successful aging at work (i.e., taking an ontogenetic perspective with regard to intraindividual differences in aging), it is clear that the employee’s actions take place in a broader organizational and societal context (i.e., taking a sociogenetic perspective). Zacher and Kooij (2017) provide a wide-ranging model of normative age-related changes in person characteristics and how those in turn impact how various proactive behaviors should be prioritized across the work lifespan. In addition, they provide a dozen different research propositions with regard to aging and proactivity at work that will help to guide future research.

Second, while numerous proactive behaviors have been noted here and in the literature reviewed, what are the potential synergies among the various strategies (Kooij, 2015a)? That is, might some proactive behaviors go together better and more efficiently than others in promoting successful aging at work? In addition, how may these combinations change as the ontogenetic process plays out over time for individual workers? Future research on successful aging at work needs to explore these possibilities across workers and various proactive behaviors.

Third, there is a clear need in future research to explore both subject and objective successful aging at work. With the nature of work and the workplace rapidly changing and evolving in the 21st century (Shultz & Olson, 2013), how individual workers subjectively define what successful aging at work means to them will also be rapidly evolving. Robson et al. (2006) provided an excellent empirical start for exploring various aspects of subjective aging at work, however additional work is needed to confirm and expand their seminal work in this area.
REFERENCES


