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Chapter 20

Lifespan Perspectives on Work Motivation

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Work has long been recognized as an integral feature of human life. For most people, identities and aspirations related to employment begin early in life and are continuously shaped by community, family, schooling, health, job opportunities, and economic realities. In early adulthood, people typically focus on learning new competencies, choosing an occupation, and managing the school-to-work transition. During midlife, goals and concerns often shift to improving the work experience, career development, and managing periods of unemployment. With improved health in later adulthood and the uncertain economic conditions that persist in many developed countries, more people are living and working longer (Bal, Kooij, & Rousseau, 2015). As a result, organizations have experienced a steady increase in age-diversity (Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2011), generating new challenges for human resource and general managers with respect to developing practices that motivate employees of all ages (De Lange, Kooij, & Van der Heijden, 2015; Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, & Dijkers, 2013).

In accordance with the changing employment landscape, organizational psychology researchers have focused substantial attention toward identifying the key factors that promote work motivation among older workers (e.g., Kanfer, Beier, & Ackerman, 2013). Many studies have examined worker motivation as it relates to the retirement decision process (see Wang, 2014). Other studies have examined the impact of human resource practices on attitudes and intentions to remain in the organization (e.g., Armstrong-Stassen & Urseel, 2009). Although these studies provide important evidence for the determinants of employment continuity and longevity among older individuals, such studies do not typically directly examine the motivational mechanisms and processes that govern observed effects.

Although fewer in number, several studies have examined how organizational and socio-relational factors affect the motives and motivational processes that underlie work motivation and later retirement from the work force (e.g., De Lange, Van Yperen, Van der Heijden, & Bal, 2010; Kooij, Bal, & Kanfer, 2014; Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dikkers, 2011). For example, findings by Kooij, Jansen, Dikkers, and de Lange (2014) show a relationship between decreasing future time perspective and promotion focus and age-related shifts in growth motives and motivation to continue working. Other studies have examined the psychological pathways through which supervisors and front-line managers motivate older workers (Bal, De Jong, Jansen, & Bakker, 2012; Knies, Leisink, & Thijssen, 2015). To date, however, relatively few studies have examined how and why motivational variables, such as self-efficacy and goal setting, might change with age (e.g., Kanfer, Frese, & Johnson, 2017; Latham & Pinder, 2005; Steel & König, 2006).

In this chapter, we take a lifespan perspectives on work motivation to provide an integrative conceptual overview for understanding how and why work motivation changes with age. Specifically, we integrate lifespan perspectives with theories of motivation rooted in the organizational psychology literature. Combining these literatures allows us to focus on work motivation in later adulthood and to coordinate relevant age-related factors, such as abilities and personality characteristics (which change over the working lifespan) with relevant determinants of work motivation, such as self-efficacy and self-regulatory processes.

The objectives of this chapter are twofold. First, we selectively review theory and research on work motivation to highlight major motivational building blocks and the processes that may be affected by adult development. Since these factors might also be relevant in other life domains, such as family, health, and leisure, and to successful aging in general, they are potentially relevant for models on lifespan development (e.g., Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010). In a related vein, we discuss how changes in personal characteristics associated with aging may constrain the utility of applying work motivation approaches that emphasize learning rate or extrinsic rewards. Second, by integrating motivation and lifespan perspectives we hope to illuminate better how adult development, the context in which work is performed, and work experiences affect job attitudes and work behaviors across the lifespan. Research on aging at work can build on these insights to examine organizational strategies and individual behaviors beneficial to improving health, performance, and wellbeing of older employees and to extending working lives (Truxillo, Cadiz, Rineer, Zaniboni, & Fraccaroli, 2012).

Our chapter is organized into four sections. In the first section, we call attention to foundational work motivation theories and findings. In the second section, we review evidence on age-related changes across the lifespan

and discuss important lifespan theories. In the third section, we discuss and review evidence on how age-related changes may impact key determinants of motivational processes and work outcomes. In the fourth and final section, we briefly review evidence on the impact of organizational and human resource strategies directed toward enhancing motivation among older workers, identify gaps in our current knowledge about how to develop and sustain work motivation among older workers, and propose an agenda for future research directions.

WORK MOTIVATION

Modern theories of work motivation describe why people act and the factors that influence the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of work activities (Kanfer et al., 2017). For most of the last half of the 20th century, work motivation theories have been closely aligned with a performance-centric perspective that focuses almost exclusively on motivation as a proximal determinant of worker performance. During the past few decades, however, changes in the nature of work and advances in motivational theorizing have broadened this focus to include a person-centric perspective that emphasizes the multilevel motivational dynamics that unfold over time and influence the individual's construal and construction of his/her work role and action. The person-centric perspective, with its emphasis on reciprocal determinism (of affect, behavior, and cognition; Bandura, 1977) affords increased possibilities for fruitful integration with approaches that emphasize shifts in work motivation over the lifespan.

Numerous theories of work motivation have been proposed (see Kanfer & Chen, 2016; Kanfer et al., 2017). For present purposes, these theories can be usefully organized into three distinct-but-related groups based on their primary focus: (1) theories that emphasize the motive or reasons for action (motive-based theories), (2) approaches that highlight the contextual constraints and affordances associated with one's work role, and (3) integrative process formulations that focus on the mechanisms through which person-context transactions affect worker goals (goal choice) and the self-regulatory processes by which workers seek to accomplish those goals (goal pursuit).

Motives. Motives are the reasons for action. Aroused and salient motives energize and direct behavior through their effects on motivational processes (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). The most-well known motive theories pertain to the universal, higher-order motives that drive volitional human choice and action: the desire for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory posits a range of motivational states based upon the extent to which work goals are construed as personally meaningful and allow for the exercise of autonomy and competence in execution. According to self-determination theory, higher levels of motivation occur when work goals are perceived to be self-determined and when behavior

regulation is internal. In contrast, motivation is lowest when work goals are construed as externally imposed and their accomplishment is regulated or controlled by external forces or other people. For example, older workers with higher levels of job experience may construe extrinsically imposed rules as controlling. Self-determination theory highlights the beneficial consequences of work goals that permit a sense of control and achievement through their effects on self-related variables, such as sense of agency and self-efficacy.

Other motive-based approaches focus on the role of motives related to social identity, relatedness, and belonging in work motivation. Although there has been relatively little research directly studying the effects of these social motives on specific motivational variables, it is likely that such motives play an important role in both goal choice and goal pursuit. For example, satisfaction of relatedness motives may be reduced when habitual work routines and customs are dissimilar to those of younger coworkers. Work motivation may also be diminished when older workers perceive that supervisors or coworkers hold negative age-stereotypes (Maurer, Barbeite, Weiss, & Lippstreu, 2008; Posthuma & Campion, 2009).

Another line of motivation research has focused on how motives affect motivation through their impact on the motivational orientation that an individual adopts with respect to his/her work goals. Theories by Dweck (1986) and Higgins (1997), for example, propose that work goals may be construed from either an approach perspective or an avoidance/conservation perspective. The adoption of an approach, promotion-focused, or learning orientation toward goal accomplishment is generally associated with higher levels of motivation, learning, and performance. In contrast, the adoption of an avoidance, prevention-focused, or performance-proven orientation has been frequently shown to have detrimental effects on motivation and its outcomes (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). All other things equal, workers with more salient motives for learning and accomplishment are more likely to employ a promotion-focused motivational orientation that supports high levels of effort and persistence.

Context. The work ecology has long been considered an important determinant of work motivation. Arguably, the most well-known theory in this area is Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics theory. According to this theory, specific job characteristics, such as skill variety, task identity, and autonomy, influence work motivation through their effects on three critical psychological states: meaningfulness of work, responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of results. Findings using this model are concordant with theories of self-determination in showing that task meaningfulness mediates the effects of job characteristics on work motivation (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). More recent approaches, however, have recognized the incompleteness of job characteristics theory and have focused on

the socio-relational features of work as they impact work motivation and performance (e.g., [Grant & Parker, 2009](#)).

Process. Work motivation theories that emphasize motives and context point to the importance of cognitive-affective states that signal satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and belongingness motives. However these formulations do not well describe the key mechanisms and processes by which these states influence goal choice and goal pursuit. Over the past half century, a number of integrative process-oriented theories have emerged. Expectancy-value theories (e.g., [Vroom, 1964](#)), popular through the late 20th century, are used to predict goal choice and motivational force. Although evidence for the rational tenets of these theories is mixed, there is strong support for the role of major elements of the model. According to expectancy-value theories, motivation is a function of both the worker's expectation of task success and the attractiveness of perceived intrinsic and/or extrinsic outcomes associated with success. From a lifespan perspective, expectancy-value models suggest that motivation should vary as a function of age-related changes in perceived competencies and desired outcomes.

During the late 20th century, work motivation researchers shifted their attention toward investigating the variables and processes through which goals are translated into action. Locke's goal-setting theory ([Locke & Latham, 1990](#); [Locke, 1968](#)), Bandura's social-cognitive theory ([Bandura, 1977, 1986](#)), and action regulation theory ([Frese & Zapf, 1994](#); [Frese, Rank, & Zacher, 2017](#)) explicate the cognitive and self-regulatory processes underlying goal choice and goal pursuit. In these formulations, worker motivation emerges over time as a function of the individual's self-efficacy and the effectiveness of self-regulatory processes that sustain task attention and effort despite obstacles and frustrations. When goal success is perceived to be low or uncertain, higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with higher levels of motivation and performance. However, when goal success is perceived to be high, self-efficacy may be unrelated or negatively related to motivation and performance ([Vancouver, Thompson, & Williams, 2001](#)). From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that self-efficacy is most important for motivating performance to accomplish challenging work goals, but plays a weaker role in motivation among workers performing routine tasks.

Theory and research from the person–job fit perspective has also yielded a number of important findings on how resources available to the individual affect indices of motivational depletion, such as burnout, exhaustion, and stress. One prominent model in this domain is the job demands-resources theory by Bakker and his colleagues ([Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001](#)). Studies using the job demands-resources theory typically define job demands as the “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job” that incur psychological costs, and job resources as the same aspects of the job that help achieve work goals and act to reduce job

demands and costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274). Examples of job resources include autonomy, social support, performance feedback, and opportunities for professional development. Examples of personal resources, which may function similar to job resources, include optimism and self-efficacy. Studies investigating the job demands-resources theory show a significant role of job and personal resources for sustaining work motivation, particularly when job demands are high. High levels of job resources have also been shown to mitigate the effect of high job demands on negative work attitudes and burnout.

Summary. The past few decades have witnessed a striking convergence in work motivation theorizing. Although formulations continue to differ in their emphasis on the processes by which different variables affect motivation and performance, there is broad agreement across motive, context, and process perspectives for two key determinants of an employee's sustained allocation of resources or motivation at work: (1) an individual's goals, (2) an individual's self-efficacy for being able to accomplish the desired goal.

Nonetheless, issues often arise when attempting to apply these theories to the prediction of worker motivation. Most work motivation theories are isolationist in nature; that is, these approaches best predict an individual's behavior with respect to a single goal, such as meeting a project deadline, irrespective of other work demands. In the modern workplace, workers must often choose how to allocate their resources (including attention and effort) across multiple work (and nonwork) goals that have different deadlines and demands, such as completing a report, preparing a presentation, or attending a child's performance at school. Recent theorizing by Steel and König (2006) and others (Fishbach & Finkelstein, 2012) suggest that individuals toggle the allocation of personal resources across tasks based on principles of goal discounting (delaying effort allocation to distal goals) and perceptions of goal progress. Although research in this area is relatively recent, findings to date suggest that individuals tend to allocate personal resources to different goals based on a combination of goal progress and perceived value of goal attainment. In addition, although work motivation theories have focused extensive attention on the effects of select self-related variables (e.g., self-efficacy), research has yet fully to integrate the role of broader self-construals, such as social identity (Van Knippenberg, 2000), work-related self (Knez, 2016), and possible future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), for understanding goal choice, goal pursuit, and work behaviors.

The application of work motivation findings to older workers highlights two additional gaps in current motivation theorizing. First, most motivational theories represent age-related differences in worker motives ahistorically, rather than as a consequence of developmental age-related changes in biology, cognitive abilities, motives, and the broader context in which work is experienced. Human resource management practices that emphasize incentives and work practices aligned to the satisfaction and provision of job

resources optimal for younger workers can disadvantage older workers and may suggest that older workers are less motivated than younger workers (for example in terms of motivation for new skill learning). However, a recent meta-analysis by [Ng and Feldman \(2008\)](#) demonstrated that core task performance is not negatively related to age, thus providing little evidence for a universal age-related decline in work motivation.

A second gap in work motivation theories with respect to older workers pertains to the emphasis on intensity rather than direction of action. A growing number of individuals are choosing to work longer and/or return to work following retirement, and there is substantial interest among public policy makers on how best to encourage employable retirees to remain and/or return to the workforce ([Truxillo et al., 2012](#)). As [Kanfer et al. \(2013\)](#) propose, most theories on work motivation—aimed at prime age employees—have focused on intensity of motivation at work, rather than motivation to work or motivation to retire. [Kanfer et al. \(2013\)](#) suggest that the determinants of motivation *to* work and to retire differ from that of motivation *at* work. Recent findings by [Ebener \(2017\)](#) provide support for this notion. Her findings suggest that motivation to work and to retire may be more powerfully determined by nonwork and self-related variables than motivation at work.

To fill these gaps and provide a more complete picture of work motivation across the lifespan, we must consider how person and job characteristics and resources change as a function of intra-individual and occupational/career changes. In the next section, we review age-related differences in person and job resources in their historical context according to lifespan psychology theories.

LIFESPAN PERSPECTIVES ON AGE-RELATED CHANGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WORK MOTIVATION

Building on models of adult development, we next focus on age-related changes that impact motivational processes and work outcomes across the lifespan. Lifespan models highlight “constancy and change in behavior throughout the life course” ([Baltes, 1987](#), p. 611), focusing on general principles of development as well as differences and similarities between individuals and intraindividual modifiability ([Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980](#)). An important assumption of this literature is that the aging process is characterized by a number of age-related changes across the lifespan that impact motivation. [Sterns and Doverspike \(1989\)](#), see also [Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, & Dijkers, \(2008\)](#), captured these age-related changes in four conceptualizations of aging at work that matter, in addition to chronological or calendar age.

Their first conceptualization is functional age, which is a performance-based definition of age, referring to cognitive and physical abilities. [Kanfer and Ackerman \(2004\)](#) and [Ng and Feldman \(2013\)](#) identified age-related losses, gains, and exchanges in these abilities. *Losses* occur in physical

abilities (e.g., muscle strength) and fluid cognitive abilities (e.g., working memory, speed of information processing; [Maertens, Putter, Chen, Diehl, & Huang, 2012](#); [Salthouse, 2012](#)). *Gains* occur in crystallized cognitive abilities (e.g., general knowledge), experience, and socioemotional abilities (e.g., emotion regulation; Grossmann et al., 2010; [Kanfer et al., 2013](#); [Lucas & Donnellan, 2011](#); [Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006](#); see also Chapters 2, 3, and 6 of this volume). Finally, *exchanges* occur in personality traits (i.e., conscientiousness, emotional stability, and social dominance increase and extraversion and openness to experience decrease with age).

The second conceptualization is psychosocial age, including social and self-perceptions of age. Social perceptions of age include stereotypical beliefs about older workers and age norms. For example, older workers are still often stereotyped as less flexible and less productive than younger workers ([Van Dalen, Henkens, & Schippers, 2010](#)). Self-perceptions of age refer to subjective age and future time perspective. Older workers are more likely to feel old and to perceive limited time left at work and in life than younger workers (e.g., [Zacher & Frese, 2009](#)). The third conceptualization pertains to organizational age, reflected in measures such as the worker's job and organization tenure and career stage. Older workers usually have long job and organization tenure, and hence more job-relevant expertise and routinization. In addition, older workers are more often in a maintenance career stage, characterized by a concern for maintaining their self-concept, as well as concerns for maintaining interest in the job and seeking greater opportunity for involvement. The fourth conceptualization of age is lifespan age, which refers to normative changes associated with life stage (e.g., [Schaie & Willis, 2000](#)), as well to nonnormative changes that occur over time.

Lifespan theories of development. Conceptualizations of aging at work capture the numerous changes that are part of the aging process and undoubtedly affect work motivation. To help us understand how these age-related changes affect work motivation, we turn to the lifespan literature and discuss three highly influential lifespan development models. The most well-known theory of lifespan development is the [Baltes and Baltes \(1990\)](#) selection, optimization, and compensation model (see also Chapter 4 of this volume). A basic tenet of this model is that goal focus changes with age. Since losses tend to outnumber gains in older age, aging individuals face depleting resources, such as time and energy. As a result, they think more carefully about the lifespan goals to which they will allocate their resources and adjust their allocation of resources accordingly. In particular, as people age, they allocate fewer resources toward reaching higher levels of functioning (i.e., growth), and more resources toward maintenance, recovery, and regulation of loss ([Baltes, Lindenberger, & Standing, 1999](#)). The selection, optimization, and compensation model also proposes that people engage in three types of behavior to deal with depleting resources. The first strategy involves selecting and prioritizing goals, based on either personal preferences

(elective selection) or based on the unavailability of goal-relevant resources (loss-based selection). The second strategy entails optimizing goal-relevant means or resources, for example, by investing more effort or through training. The third strategy involves compensating for losses in goal-relevant means or resources by using alternative means or resources, such as tools or help from coworkers.

A second important lifespan theory is socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1995; see also Chapter 6 of this volume). This theory proposes that the perception of remaining time (i.e., future time perspective) leads to a shift in the prioritization of socioemotional goals. Young people, who typically perceive time in their future to be open-ended and full of opportunities, prioritize instrumental goals to maximize future outcomes, such as goals related to acquiring knowledge and information (e.g., through training or establishing large social networks). In contrast, older adults are more likely to perceive time in their future to be limited with few remaining possibilities, and will thus prioritize goals that maximize affective outcomes in the present, such as goals related to experiencing positive emotional states and meaningfulness. Building on socioemotional selectivity theory, Charles (2010) introduced the strength and vulnerability integration model, which explains how emotion regulation processes change with age and future time perspective. Emotion regulation involves controlling the type, extent, and timing of experienced emotions, which have been found to improve with age (Charles & Luong, 2013). On one hand, these age-related improvements are assumed to be caused by a shortened perception of remaining time, which leads to an increased motivational focus on positive emotional experiences and a tendency to avoid negative experiences. On the other hand, accumulated self-knowledge and experience should also increase the effectiveness of emotion regulation strategies among older adults (Charles, 2010).

The third influential lifespan theory is Heckhausen et al.'s (2010) motivational theory of lifespan development, which is based on Heckhausen and Schulz' lifespan theory of control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995; Schulz & Heckhausen, 1996; also see Chapter 5 of this volume). The motivational theory of lifespan development posits that people continuously strive to exercise personal agency (primary control capacity). To maintain high levels of primary control, they use two types of strategies. First, they use primary control strategies to shape their environment consistent with their needs. When primary control strategies are not possible, individuals are proposed to use secondary control strategies that involve changing goals to fit environmental demands (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). Since aging individuals face depleting resources, goals can become more difficult and costly to attain. As a result, older individuals can be expected increasingly to use secondary control strategies, such as goal adjustment, which allows them to disengage from a goal that no longer is attainable and to re-engage with a new or adjusted goal that is still attainable. As Heckhausen, Shane, and Kanfer

(2017) illustrate, the motivational theory of lifespan development can be fruitfully used to identify different motivational challenges related to career development and progress across the working lifespan.

TOWARD A UNIFIED UNDERSTANDING OF WORK MOTIVATION IN LATER ADULTHOOD

Building on the conceptualizations of aging at work and lifespan models discussed in the previous section, we propose that determinants and processes of work motivation change across the lifespan. More specifically, the two key determinants of an employee's sustained allocation of resources or motivation at work, that is, an individual's goals and an individual's self-efficacy, are likely to change with age. With respect to an *individual's goals*, lifespan psychology theories and findings have argued and found that goals shift with age in two ways. First, goals shift away from growth and toward maintenance and regulation of loss as explained by both the selection, optimization, and compensation model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) and socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1995). Indeed, research on how work motivation changes with age (e.g., Kooij et al., 2011; Rhodes, 1983) has found that work motives pertaining to a development goal focus (e.g., learning new things, promotion) decrease with age, and that security work motives (e.g., job security) related to maintenance and regulation of loss increase with age. Similarly, De Lange et al. (2010) found that a significantly higher number of older workers endorsed dominant mastery avoidance goals relative to younger workers, and Kooij et al. (2014) found that promotion focus decrease with age. Second, consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1995) and the motivational theory of lifespan development (Heckhausen et al., 2010) theories, as workers age their goals can be expected to shift away from more long-term extrinsic objectives and toward more short-term intrinsically-oriented goals. In support of this proposition in a work context, Kooij et al. (2011) found that intrinsic work motives pertaining to accomplishing worthwhile tasks, utilizing skills, and helping others increase with age and that extrinsic work motives related to compensation and promotion decrease with age.

Shifting goals are likely to result from age-related factors and not from age in itself. Kooij et al. (2013) found, for example, that the shift from growth toward security motives largely resulted from age-related changes in subjective health and future time perspective, and Kooij et al. (2014) found that the age-related decrease in promotion focus was due to a shortening future-time perspective. The shifts in goal focus in turn influence work-related action and behavior (Kanfer et al., 2017; Zacher, Hacker, & Frese, 2016). For example, older workers might spend more time helping out younger coworkers than allocating time to performance of boring, routinized tasks. In addition, shifts in goal focus or work motives are likely to predict

motivation to work or to retire, since many organizations emphasize incentives and work practices aligned to the work motives of younger employees.

Lifespan psychological theories do not generally focus on how aging influences *self-efficacy* related to work. However, age-related factors have been proposed to influence self-efficacy, particularly in detrimental ways (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, & Dikkers, 2008). For example, losses in physical abilities and fluid intelligence are likely to influence work self-efficacy negatively (Fisher, Chaffee, Tetrick, Davalos, & Potter, 2017). Similarly, psychosocial age is likely to influence work self-efficacy negatively; when employees perceive themselves as old or perceive they have limited time left in their work or life, they will feel less able to attain their goals (Kooij et al., 2008). In a similar line of reasoning, Maurer (2001) argued that self-efficacy for career-relevant learning and skill development decreases with age. Maurer (2001) identified a number of processes through which self-efficacy for learning and development decreases with age. These processes largely relate to the different conceptualizations of aging at work highlighted above. First, older workers might have fewer opportunities for development due to age stereotypes that affect managerial decision-making regarding access to training (i.e., related to psychosocial age; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976). Second, older workers might perceive that certain key abilities required for learning decline somewhat with age (Salthouse, 2012) and that physiological variables such as anxiety, arousal, or health that affect self-efficacy diminish (i.e., related to functional age). Third, older workers may experience fewer work role transitions and are less likely to get promoted or to get assigned to a change in job content which would offer developmental opportunities (i.e., organization age). Similarly, older workers might receive less support and encouragement for development because they are relatively old compared to supervisors and coworkers and their social network decays over the years (Schabracq, 1994; i.e., organization age). Such processes can be expected to diminish self-efficacy and reduce motivation to adopt and pursue demanding work goals. It is important to note, however, that aging also involves positive age-related changes (e.g., in conscientiousness or social dominance) that might positively influence self-efficacy. This is supported by the literature on personality development (e.g., Specht, Bleidorn, & Denissen et al., 2014). This literature proposes that individuals mature with age (i.e., the “maturity principle”), with most individuals becoming more dominant, responsible, self-confident, conscientious, and self-controlling over the lifespan (Roberts et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, research on how and why self-efficacy changes with age in a work context is largely lacking. Fletcher, Hansson, and Bailey (1992) developed the occupational self-efficacy index, which assesses middle-aged and older workers’ beliefs in their continued ability to learn, adapt, and be productive in a changing workplace. They found no differences in occupational self-efficacy between middle-aged and older workers. This finding

might result from the two contradicting processes highlighted above; decreasing physical and cognitive abilities and stereotypes about older workers lead to age-related decreases in self-efficacy, but the maturity principle leads to age-related increases in self-efficacy. Similarly, from a resource perspective, changes in self-efficacy may also occur as a function of job demands. Jobs that involve task variety and demand regular skill development might serve to buffer age-related changes in self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy in turn is not only important for older workers' motivation at work, but also for their motivation to work. Since organizations emphasize incentives and practices that are beneficial for younger workers, older workers need to rely on themselves to adjust their work practices and conditions to their own motives and abilities. In this line of reasoning, [Kooij, van Woerkom, Wilkenloh, Dorenbosch, and Denissen \(2017\)](#) have argued for the benefits of job crafting, or self-initiated changes that employees make to their jobs to foster person-job fit. [Kooij et al. \(2017\)](#) found that aging workers benefit more from a job crafting intervention, increasing their job crafting behaviors and thus their perceived fit with the job. Similarly, [Bal et al. \(2012\)](#) found that idiosyncratic deals (i.e., the idiosyncratic deals made between employees and their organization) increase motivation to continue working.

Besides influencing the two key determinants of work motivation, aging, and related processes delineated in lifespan psychology, theories appear to play a role when applying work motivation theories to more complex work contexts. First, lifespan theories provide insights on *goal discounting* and *goal progress* in dealing with multiple work (and nonwork) goals. For example, the motivational theory of lifespan development proposes that engaging in secondary control strategies, such as devaluing unattainable goals or enhancing the value of conflicting goals, is important for self-regulation. These strategies will help in dealing with and prioritizing multiple goals and can be expected to be used more often by older workers. In addition, theories on future time perspective (an important age-related factor) emphasize the importance of goal discounting. [Steel and König \(2006\)](#) denote this "sensitivity to delay" and demonstrate how discounting influences the utility of different goals. Accordingly, we expect that goal discounting is also likely to change with age. For example, [Green, Fry, and Myerson \(1994\)](#), [Green, Myerson, Lichtman, Rosen, and Fry \(1996\)](#), and [Green, Myerson, and Ostaszewski \(1999\)](#) examined the role of age in temporal discounting and found that the rate at which individuals discounted the value of delayed rewards decreased with age. These findings indicate a developmental trend toward decreased impulsivity and increased ability to delay gratification. However, as individuals age, their (occupational) future time perspective is likely to decrease ([Lang & Carstensen, 2002](#); [Zacher & Frese, 2009](#)). Thus, as retirement approaches and perceived remaining time gets shorter, older workers are likely to be more sensitive to delay and to allocate fewer

resources to long-term work goals (Steel & König, 2006). Instead, we expect that older workers might allocate more resources to nonwork roles (e.g., volunteering) in order to prepare for retirement.

Lifespan theories and research findings on personality development also provide insights on the role of broader self-construals, such as identity, in goal choice and pursuit. This literature proposes that one's self-concept and identity become clearer with age (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). As individuals age, they proactively select or create trait-related experiences that deepen, refine, elaborate, and stabilize their (professional) identity (e.g., Roberts & Caspi, 2003). Hence, as individuals age, they can be expected to develop stronger and clearer (professional) identities. This increased insight in the self allows older workers to adjust their work practices and work conditions accordingly, which is likely to influence their work motivation.

In sum, aging at work involves several age-related changes that, in turn, influence both motivation at work and motivation to work, particularly through their effects on goal setting and self-efficacy. This has important practical implications, but additional research is still needed to disentangle the different age-related processes that play a role.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Our review of the work motivation literature suggests substantial progress in terms of understanding how lifespan factors may affect an individual's motivation at work and to continue working. Findings to date emphasize the importance of adopting a person-centered perspective for understanding motivation related to work and for developing interventions and management practices to promote job performance and work engagement. Theorizing by (Baltes & Baltes, 1990), Heckhausen et al. (2010), and (Carstensen, 1995) highlight changes in motivated-behavior and decision-making related to work driven by fundamental human motives for sustaining a sense of personal agency and positive self-concept in light of age-related shifts in competencies and externalities. These theories point to the importance of choosing work contexts and developing action strategies that support a sense of self-efficacy and satisfaction of broad self-related accomplishment, relational, and generative motives rather than instrumental motives. Empirical findings provide support for these notions with respect to the positive effects of organizational practices that support these motives through greater support for training (Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009), job crafting (Kooij et al., 2017), work flexibility (Bal & De Lange, 2015; Rau & Adams, 2005), and mentoring (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2011).

Beyond considering how aging influences work motivation, our integration of lifespan and motivation perspectives offers new directions for research on lifespan development. We identified two key motivational

mechanisms for work motivation: (1) an individual's goals, and (2) an individual's self-efficacy for being able to accomplish the desired goals. Although theories of lifespan development accord goals a central role in aging, less attention is paid to understanding the role of self-efficacy. For example, the motivational theory of lifespan development proposes that older individuals will use secondary control strategies, because their primary control capacities decrease in older age. Self-efficacy is likely to play a role here and might influence primary control capacity. Finally, our integrated perspective contributes to the organizational psychology literature on work motivation by demonstrating that key determinants of work motivation change with age and associated processes such as losses in health and changes in time perspective. In particular, the change in future time perspective has been largely neglected in the literature on work motivation and incorporating (perceived) time is likely to improve predictions of work motivation theories.

Our integrated perspective also highlights a number of abiding questions. As shown in [Table 20.1](#), relatively little is known about the motivational dynamics that underlie the decision to continue working in later life. Further research in this area is likely to be particularly important for public policymakers concerned with predicting how different factors, such as occupation, work history, and life events, may influence the decision to continue to participate in work activities beyond the normative retirement period. In addition, we know little about the effects of selection, optimization, and

TABLE 20.1 Examples of Promising Future Research Directions in Lifespan Approaches to Work Motivation

Research Recommendations

1. *Motivation at work and motivation to retire.* How does the experience of motivation at work contribute to the retirement decision-making process? How does selection, optimization, and compensation strategy choice influence workplace withdrawal? How does subjective age influence motivational processes at work?
2. *Self-efficacy.* How do age-related changes in future time perspective affect work self-efficacy? How does work self-efficacy affect choice of motivational strategy for work accomplishment? What effects do different features of the work role (e.g., autonomy, task significance) have on work self-efficacy?
3. *Goal pursuit.* Are there differences in self-regulatory efficiency associated with the use of primary vs secondary motivational strategies to accomplish work goals? How does future time perspective influence motivational orientation toward work goals and persistence during goal pursuit?
4. *Work identity and relatedness motive satisfaction.* How does work interdependence, team composition, team cohesion, and leadership practices affect older worker relatedness motive satisfaction, work self-efficacy, and motivational strategies used to accomplish work-related goals?
5. *Goal discounting.* What is the relationship between age-related changes in emotion regulation and goal discounting?

compensation strategy choice or job crafting behaviors that prevent workplace withdrawal and positively influence retirement decision making. Finally, we know little about the underlying mechanisms that influence motivation at work and motivation to work of older adults. For example, there is little empirical evidence on whether and how self-efficacy changes with age and on age-related processes that cause these potential age-related changes in self-efficacy.

Two additional research gaps pertain to the current work context in which employees need to allocate their resources among several work and nonwork roles. Future research in this area might usefully build on lifespan theorizing that emphasizes the role of perceived time in motivation. For example, the motivational theory of lifespan development proposes that a developmental deadline will influence the behavioral strategies that individuals use to reach their goals. Likewise, [Steel and König \(2006\)](#) propose that sensitivity to delay will influence the goals to which individuals allocate their resources. In addition, future research on work motivation should focus more on the role of work identity, because this is likely to influence goal pursuit.

In summary, our coordination of lifespan and motivation theories suggests several important new directions for research to better understand how and why work motivation may change across the lifespan. Our analysis suggests that age-related changes in work motivation are not uniformly or inevitably negative. Rather, we propose that changes in work motivation reflect how older workers adapt to the twin dynamics of adult development and job demands in order to sustain pursuit of enduring motives related to control, competence, and relatedness. Organizational interventions and practices that support these individuals in accomplishing such goals in the work context are needed to realize fully the promise of longer working lives and successful aging at work.

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