

Pathways to successful aging in organizations

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Lifespan literature views the process of successful aging as a person's on-going successful adaptation to age-related changes, as well as to environmental demands and opportunities. Criteria for successful aging at work can be maintenance of a level of functioning, but also growth in the context of a variety of individual and environmental factors (Kooij, 2015; Zacher, 2015). In this paper, we propose and test a new conceptual model of successful aging at work. It encompasses the joint effects of organizational and person variables on various components of job performance through perceived work well-being, captured by employees' psychological experiences of thriving and surviving at work.

Spreitzer and colleagues define thriving at work as "...the joint sense of vitality and learning, which communicates a sense of progress or forward movement in one's self-development" (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538). Experiences of thriving at work can be driven by organizational factors, such as access to performance feedback, and opportunities for meaningful work (Spreitzer et al., 2012; Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009). Further, thriving at work has been found to be positively related to outcomes such as high job and career role performance, positive work-related behaviors, work-related and overall well-being (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Porath et al., 2012). Despite not being conceptualized from a lifespan perspective originally, the construct thriving at work fits well within the Socio-emotional Selectivity (Carstensen, 1992) and Selection, Optimization and Compensation (SOC) (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) models and can be viewed as closely associated with successful aging at work, as defined by Zacher (2015).

Surviving at work is an emerging concept that contrasts with thriving at work. It has been defined as the individual's tendency to preserve their mental and physical resources by limiting their work activities and perspectives to cope with work conditions that are perceived as highly demanding (Taneva et al., 2016). It is suggested that surviving at work will be negatively associated with work well-being and job performance. Thus, this construct fits within Zacher's (2015) description of unsuccessful aging at work.

A systematic review and meta-analysis by Moghimi, et al. (2017) reveals that the use of each of the individual SOC strategies as well as the whole set of SOC strategies is positively related to age, overall job performance, job autonomy, satisfaction, and engagement. The use of SOC strategies can be facilitated through certain organizational practices (e.g. Müller et al., 2012; Rudolph, 2016). Furthermore, the availability and uptake of certain human resource practices has been found to be positively related to a number of individual work outcomes, including work well-being, job performance and intention to extend working lives (e.g., Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Kooij et al., 2014). Some of these practices can have differential effects in late career. For example, Kooij and colleagues (2013) reported that the association between development HR practices and well-being weakened with age (but strengthened for performance), whilst the opposite was true for maintenance HR practices.

We propose two groups of research hypotheses: A) five predictions of relationships between organizational practices, personal strategies, thriving and surviving at work and B) five hypotheses about the mediating roles of use of SOC strategies, thriving and surviving at work on the relationships of organizational practices with three components of self-reported job performance (task proactivity, in-role and extra-role performance). Figure 1 below presents all research hypotheses.

Method, Results and Conclusions

Between October 2014 and May 2015, 853 employees from four large UK organizations (two from the healthcare and two from the ICT sectors) completed an on-line survey. Nearly 2/3rds of the responses (563) came from the ICT sector. The mean age for the entire sample was 57.85 (SD = 2.85). About 76% of health employees were female, and 78% of ICT employees were male.

Data were analyzed with MPlus, Version 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2011). Preliminary analyses demonstrated acceptable model fits for each of the 10 study measures (see Figure 1) and the overall 10-factor model (RMSEA = .046, 90% CI [.043, .048], CFI = .927, TLI = .917, χ^2 (651) = 1800.881, SRMR = .059). Further tests revealed lack of significant common method variance, and thus no evidence of common method bias.

The hypothesized model was estimated using a maximum likelihood (ML) algorithm and 1,000 bootstrapped samples to accurately estimate indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Analysis confirmed a significant effect of industrial sector but not organizational tenure on job performance. All predictions from group A (see 1-5 on Figure 1) were fully or partially supported. For instance, availability of HR practices was positively related to the use of SOC strategies ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$); optimization SOC strategies (but not selection and compensation) were positively related to thriving ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) and negatively associated with surviving at work ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .01$).

Moreover, all anticipated indirect effects from group B (see 6-10 on Figure 1) were fully or partly confirmed. For instance, thriving at work mediated the relationship between available HR practices and task proactivity ($\beta = .12$, SE = .02, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.07, .165], in-role performance ($\beta = .146$, SE = .02, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.102, .183]) and extra-role performance ($\beta = .097$, SE = .02, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.045, .149]).

Hence, we conclude that pathways to successful aging at work can be mapped by tracing the effects of both organizational and person factors on job performance through employees' experiences of thriving and surviving. These findings inform both employees and HR professionals on how to manage effectively the process of successful aging at work.

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Figure 1: Conceptual model

