Chapter 23

Lifespan Perspectives on Emotion, Stress, and Conflict Management

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In the decades to come, there will be dramatic demographic change in most industrialized countries, with life expectancy and the average age of the population increasing. At the same time, the percentage of younger employees will shrink and there will be a much higher percentage of people aged between 45 and 65 who are available for the labor market. Additionally, in a response to demographic change, several countries have extended, or removed, default retirement ages to encourage people aged between 65 and 70 to continue working. However, in many European countries, older employees are considered a disadvantaged group.

Older workers can face difficulties in becoming re-employed once they lose their jobs, with many employers seeming reluctant to hire older workers, as reflected by their lower re-employment rate. In Germany, for example, younger workers have a three-fold higher chance to become re-employed compared to older workers of 55 + years (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2013). Despite anti-age discrimination policies, there continue to be age-related stereotypes about abilities and performance declining after 50 years of age (see e.g., Bal, Reiss, Rudolph, & Baltes, 2011). Even HR managers responsible for designing and implementing age-related policies often hold stereotypical views of older (and younger) workers (Parry & Tyson, 2009). There are several reasons older employees face discrimination. Specifically, this may be due to the widespread deficit hypothesis, which assumes a general decline of skills, abilities, and performance with age (e.g., Hertel & Zacher, 2018). This view coincides with a socio-political debate, which argues that it is wise to retire older employees to give younger people a greater chance of

employment. Also, younger people often are cheaper to employ than older workers because of legal and tariff regulations.

The deficit hypothesis can appear plausible as there are obvious deteriorations of physical skills and abilities such as diminishing eyesight or decreasing physical strength (Maertens, Putter, Chen, Diehl, & Huang, 2012), and of basic cognitive abilities, such as reaction time, perception, or dual task performance (Lindenberger & Ghisletta, 2009). Older people have also been found to have more difficulties in learning and handling new technologies (McGregor & Gray, 2002), to be less open to organizational change, and to have more sickness-related absence (Tillsley, 1990). Importantly, though, the large-scale meta-analysis of Ng and Feldman (2008) showed no relation between age and performance and, indeed, reported minor positive correlations favoring older workers. This implies that there must also be advantages of older workers. For example, their greater knowledge and experience (Baltes, Freund, & Li, 2005), and more positive work-related attitudes (see Chapter 21 of this volume), and work motivation (Ng & Feldman, 2010; see also chapter 20 of this volume).

What has found little focus in the workplace literature on older workers, however, are social and emotional competencies, and their potential positive impact despite indications from non-work related (everyday life) research that older employees may be more competent than younger employees in these areas. This is the focus of this chapter, where we look at social and emotional competencies of younger and older workers. As more than 70% of all employees in Western countries are service workers (e.g., Eurostat, 2016) who most frequently interact with customers or clients, we especially focus on service interaction but will, of course, also consider studies focusing on interactions with supervisors, subordinates, or colleagues.

Age. We refer to chronological age in this chapter and the focus is on the psychological implications of age and life experiences (Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dikkers, 2011; Scheibe & Zacher, 2013), which may help individuals to cope successfully with social situations. Chronological age cannot be easily separated from length of *overall work experience* because chronological age and overall work experience are very highly positively correlated (e.g., .88 in the study of Johnson, Holdsworth, Hoel, & Zapf, 2013). This is different for *job age*, defined as the length of time working in the current job. At the conceptual level, it is, of course interesting, whether competencies have developed in the course of one's life or whether doing a job for a few years has the same effects as life experience. From a practical perspective, it would not be possible to use the potential positive effects of life experience as an argument to employ older workers, if any positive benefits they would bring could also be offered by someone with a few years' work experience. We focus on chronological age and, if available, compare results with the effects of job age. In this way we can identify whether age

(i.e., length of life experience including past work experience) or experience in the present job is more important.

In this chapter, we will combine theories from lifespan development and organizational psychology (Baltes, Rudolph, & Bal, 2012; see also Chapter 1 of this volume). This is related to the issue of when individuals are considered "older." Lifespan literature takes into account the entire lifespan. Thus, people from about 60 or 80 years (e.g., Birditt, 2014; Blanchard-Fields, 2007) may be seen as old. Work does not play a central role in this literature where individuals defined as older adults are mostly already retired from work. In contrast, organizational psychology focuses on the lifespan during working life. Therefore, employees prior to retirement are considered as being older workers. Often the age of 40 or 45 is used as the lower cutoff (e.g., De Lange et al., 2010; Ng & Feldman, 2012). More recently, in the European Union, there is a tendency to consider 55 + years as older because a much higher percentage of the 55−65 group is still working. Retirement age, which was traditionally 65 years in many countries, is usually the upper threshold though many countries have extended retirement age and, as a result, people are working to older ages than was previously the case.

Service Work. In the service industry, social and emotional skills are necessary to cope successfully with job requirements (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2012). Service employees are expected to cope with the stress of demanding customers; to meet emotional work demands such as being friendly to customers, to exhibit positive attitudes to work, the organization and customers, and to behave toward customers according to "display rules," for example, to behave in a pleasant manner (Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996). The customer does not have a similar duty to behave with good manners and may introduce tension and conflicts to the service employee (Rafaeli, 1989). This unequal relationship within the customer-service provider relationship can contribute to a negative impact on employee's health and well-being (e.g., Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Hochschild, 1983). Customer interactions are often short and low-control situations, in which service employees have little impact on customer behaviors and are restricted by organizational demands. Customer orientation and a friendly service mentality need to be maintained, even when being treated disrespectfully (Zapf, 2002). Thus, service employees need to exert self-control (e.g., hiding negative emotions and keeping up motivation to serve unpleasant customers), which can deplete resources and lead to burnout (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In the absence of control over service interactions, employees need to develop effective strategies to cope with the stressful situation, to manage conflicts, and to create opportunities to offer solutions, and meet customer demands. Thus, the management of low control situations is a particular demand in service work and key questions are how people manage such situations, and whether this changes across the lifespan.

Below we outline two key lifespan theories referring to the development of social and emotional competencies and to the change of major motives. We consider emotional labor and emotional regulation, conflict, and stress management in service interaction.

Age and Motivation. One of the most prominent theories is socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; see also Chapter 6 of this volume). This theory posits that people's social goals are subject to change over their lifespan, leading to age-related differences in handling social relationships. With increased age, future time becomes more and more limited, resulting in a shift of social motives. While young people are motivated to acquire knowledge and to expand their social networks, older individuals value emotion regulation goals and pay attention to positive rather than negative emotional aspects of life to preserve well-being. They strive for emotional satisfaction, intensify existing positive relationships, and maximize social and emotional gains. At the same time, older people dissociate themselves from annoying relationships, thereby minimizing social and emotional risks (Carstensen et al., 1999). According to socioemotional selectivity theory, older individuals are, for example, less likely to engage in destructive conflict management strategies, which may harm social relationships. Dynamic integration theory (Labouvie-Vief, 2003) makes similar predictions assuming that older adults are motivated to optimize well-being, but conceptualize the focus on positive events as a compensatory response to declines in cognitive resources (see Scheibe & Zacher, 2013).

Age and Emotional Competence. Emotional competencies may develop through life and via training (e.g., Doerwald, Scheibe, Zacher, & Van Yperen, 2016; Nelis et al., 2011), and consensus among researchers is emerging (Doerwald et al., 2016; Roberts, MacCann, Matthews, & Zeidner, 2010) about the following main subdimensions of emotional competence: perception, understanding, using, and managing emotions (cf., Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). *Perceiving emotions* describes the ability accurately to recognize and appraise the emotional state of another person. *Understanding emotions* refers to knowledge on emotional processes and the vocabulary that describes these properly. *Using emotions* involves sensitivity to intuition and the readiness to use emotion-related information for decision-making. *Managing emotions* or regulation of emotions is often distinguished into managing oneself or others. *Managing self* refers to the regulation of one's own emotions, such as calming oneself when being provoked or upset. *Managing others* corresponds to the ability consciously to influence another person's mood, like knowing when and how to cheer someone up. However, some measures of emotional competence are even more fine-grained, involving numerous single facets of these subdimensions (e.g., see Bar-On & Parker, 2000). Though there are many factors influencing

the development of emotional competencies, one important factor may be the accumulation of experiences and expertise in dealing with social interactions due to an increase in crystalized cognition (Doerwald et al., 2016). Based on their literature review, Doerwald et al. conclude that older workers are better or at least as good as younger workers in all components of emotional competence.

AGE AND EMOTION WORK

Service organizations need to be customer oriented (Wilson et al., 2012), which usually means that employees have to interact with customers in a positive way. In this sense the "friendly smile" becomes a job requirement (Hochschild, 1983). It is assumed that organizations have either explicit or implicit *display rules* (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), which prescribe what kind of emotions have to be shown in a service interaction. Most often, emotional labor or emotion work means showing positive emotions, for example, as Hochschild described, flight attendants having to be friendly and cheerful even when dealing with difficult passengers. But there are also other emotions required. Nurses have to show sympathy emotions (Zapf, Seifert, Schmutte, Mertini, & Holz, 2001), and bill collectors are required to display negative emotions (Sutton, 1991). Emotion work also may imply retaining a neutral appearance, thus not expressing emotions (usually, negative ones). Thus, the core of emotion work is the required expression of appropriate emotions during face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions (Hochschild, 1983).

Hochschild (1983, p. 7, footnote) suggested to "use the term emotional labor to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is *sold for a wage* and therefore has exchange value. I use the synonymous terms emotion work or emotion management to refer to the same acts done in a *private context* where they have use value." However, Hochschild's assumption that everything the worker is doing during work time is paid work has been criticized (e.g., Bolton, 2005), because from this perspective it is, for example, impossible to do a customer a personal favor and smile at him/her. In contrast, other authors (Bolton, 2005; Niven, 2016; von Gilsa & Zapf, 2013) suggest there are more motives to regulate emotions at work than just adhering to display rules. One strong personal motive is the protection of one's self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Semmer, Jacobshagen, Meier, & Elfering, 2007). For example, service workers might try to hide embarrassment or fear when having committed an error because they want to make a professional impression. In some jobs, it is therefore difficult to say if something is directly part of one's job requirements and therefore what Hochschild refers to as 'emotional labor' or motivated by other considerations such as self-esteem. Furthermore, in the present context there is no need to not consider

unpaid work. Therefore we prefer to speak of emotion work rather than emotional labor.

Research into emotion work report two key aspects: (1) emotion work requirements and (2) the emotion work process (Grandey, 2000; Zapf, Semmer, & Johnson, 2014). The emotion work requirements perspective focuses on how frequently emotions have to be displayed at a particular job and the different types of emotions that are required (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000). In addition to the requirement to show (or not show) emotions, one can also distinguish jobs with regard to sensitivity requirements: knowing how other people feel. Employees dealing with others, especially vulnerable people (e.g., patients or trauma victims), need to be able to detect emotions, even if they are not explicitly expressed (Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, & Isic, 1999).

Empirical studies show that it is not the requirement to display an emotion as such that is stressful. Rather, it is stressful if an emotion has to be expressed that does not match how a person feels. Holman, Martínez-Iñigo, and Totterdell (2009) called the dissonance between *expected* and *felt* emotion *emotion rule-dissonance* in delineation to Hochschild's (1983) *emotional dissonance* which refers to dissonance between *displayed* and *felt* emotions. Emotion rule-dissonance is related to psychological strain (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011).

There is hardly any research on the relation between age and emotional job requirements. The studies available (Bausch, Holz, & Zapf, 2007; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000; Zapf et al., 2001; Zapf, Isic, Bechtoldt, & Blau, 2003) suggest there is either no or a small negative relation between age and the requirement to display positive emotions and the requirement to sense the interaction partner's emotions. However, there is a small-to-medium negative relation for age and emotion rule-dissonance. As most service workers have to display positive emotions, they are a good indicator of how much a person has to interact with customers. Findings of stronger declines of emotion rule-dissonance may be explained by the older workers' emotional competence: if they are better able to contribute to positive interactions with customers, then less emotion rule-dissonance will occur.

Emotion work requires people to regulate their emotions to bring them in line with the emotions required by the organization. This is the *emotion work process*. There are different ways of dealing with these requirements, that is, surface and deep acting (Hochschild, 1983), automatic emotion regulation (Zapf, 2002), and emotional deviance (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

Surface acting is when employees try to manage the display of emotions that appear on the "surface," that is, mimics, gestures, and voice, while inner feelings remain unchanged. Surface acting implies a state of emotional dissonance between inner feelings and outer expression, which persists during the interaction. An example of surface acting is smiling at a customer even when you would rather be shouting at them. Grandey (2000)

related surface acting to the concept of response-focused emotion regulation of Gross (1998). Surface acting is a form of "expression regulation" (Lawrence, Troth, Jordan, & Collins, 2011), including processes such as suppressing, faking, masking, or amplifying emotions.

Deep acting is where individuals not only focus on their outside behavior, but also try to influence what they feel. Such deep acting may, for instance, occur when we tell ourselves that a customer who is behaving inappropriately behaves in this way not in order to offend us but because he or she is stressed, due, say, to his/her child's illness. Our anger might then disappear and give way to sympathy; the emotional dissonance is resolved. This mechanism corresponds to the concept of antecedent-focused emotion regulation of Gross (1998) including strategies such as attentional deployment and cognitive change.

Automatic emotion regulation is where required emotions correspond to emotions automatically elicited by the situation (Zapf, 2002). Hochschild (1983) called this passive deep acting, others called it expressing genuine (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) or naturally felt emotions (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005). Gross, Sheppes, and Urry (2011) suggested that emotional reactivity to a discrete event is the result of two interactive processes, emotion generation and emotion regulation, whereby emotion generation refers to the initial emotional response that arises when persons encounter a situation that impedes or facilitates their personal goals. In the case of automatic emotion regulation, the emotion generation process generated the emotion required by the display rule so that no further conscious emotion regulation is necessary. In a diary study by Tschan, Rochat, and Zapf (2005) and the cross-sectional study of Diefendorff et al., automatic emotion regulation was by far the most frequently applied strategy. An example of this is a nurse feeling care and sympathy for a patient who is in pain, without having to actively engage in a deep-acting strategy.

Finally, *emotional deviance* (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987) occurs if employees do not show expected emotions so that displayed emotions clash with the display rules of the situation. There is little research on this maladaptive strategy. We also found no research on age and emotional deviance and will not consider it any further.

Although most developmental research is not directly studied in a work context, it has been proposed that age can be an influencing factor in the successful use of emotion regulation strategies at work (Diefendorff, Stanley, & Gabriel, 2015; Doerwald et al., 2016; Lawrence et al., 2011; Scheibe & Zacher, 2013). In the following section, we will discuss the use of emotion work strategies of younger and older workers.

Most emotion work researchers assume that deep acting is a preferable strategy. Although it is an emotional regulation strategy that should consume resources, there are only marginally positive correlations with exhaustion

(.09 in the meta-analysis of Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011; and .05 in the meta-analyses of Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013 and of Wang, Seibert, & Boles, 2011). Deep acting is positively correlated with personal accomplishment, emotional performance, and customer satisfaction, and marginally positively correlated with job satisfaction (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2011). It has been argued that *deep acting* could be easier for individuals who can draw on past experiences to help them feel the required emotion (Bono & Vey, 2007). A distinction has been made between situational and anticipative deep acting (Johnson, Machowski, Holdsworth, Kern, & Zapf, 2017; von Gilsa, Zapf, Ohly, Trumpold, & Machowski, 2014). With situational deep acting, where people deep act *during* the encounter, some workers may have more expertise and confidence in dealing with situations as they arise and in showing the required emotion. With anticipative deep acting, where people deep act *before* the encounter, with experience employees may be able to better anticipate and prepare for situations. Older workers have more experiences and emotional memories than younger workers and may therefore be better able to engage in both situational and anticipative deep acting. Also, deep acting may promote autonomy and a sense of accomplishment, which could enhance employees' intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As age is positively related to intrinsic motivation (Kooij et al., 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2010; see also Chapter 20 of this volume), this may suggest older workers are more likely to engage in deep acting. von Gilsa et al. (2014) support this conjecture and report three motive categories for emotion regulation: pleasure, prevention, and instrumental. The pleasure motive category includes developing and maintaining the positive relationships that are related to deep acting and, as mentioned previously, focusing on positive relations is a key element of socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999). This all supports the view that age is positively related to deep acting. Empirical studies have reported that either a positive or no relationship exists between age and deep acting (Doerwald et al., 2016). Johnson et al. (2017) updated the meta-analysis of Wang et al. (2011) reporting a sample size weighted correlation of $r = .11$ (12 studies, $N = 3763$) indicating a small positive effect of age on deep acting which also corresponded to their own results. Deep acting is correlated to personal motives but uncorrelated to instrumental motives in the study of von Gilsa et al. (2014). This suggests that, because of their motivation to keep positive relationships according to socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999), older workers primarily use deep acting because they are intrinsically motivated to do so and not so much to fulfill display rules.

Automatic emotion regulation is about unconsciously regulating (as opposed to reacting to) one's emotions without making any effort. Mauss, Bunge, and Gross (2007) propose these strategies arise from overlearned habits, approaches learned in early life as well as sociocultural norms, and as

we grow older we remember more positive emotions. Thus, older workers may use automatic emotion regulation to their benefit. Dahling and Perez (2010) describe older adults as more motivated to be positive, as proposed by socioemotional selectivity theory (e.g., Carstensen, 2006), and show a positive link between age and automatic emotion regulation. Cheung and Tang (2010) report age is positively correlated with automatic emotion regulation, suggesting that older workers may have more "learned" automatic responses. Walsh and Bartikowski (2013) argue that being authentic in emotional display, that is, deep acting (and therefore automatic emotion regulation) would be less emotionally draining for older workers than not being authentic, that is, surface acting, as older workers prefer to display authentic emotions. However, Johnson et al. (2017) found no relationship. Thus, more research is needed here.

Meta-analyses (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2011) show that surface acting is positively related to psychological strain and emotional exhaustion and negatively related to personal accomplishment, job satisfaction, and performance. Therefore, if older workers engage in emotion work more competently, they should use less surface acting than should younger workers. Since the literature suggests that age and deep acting are positively linked (e.g., Cho, Rutherford, & Park, 2013), the converse should also hold. That is, in the absence of the higher levels of deep acting seen in older workers, younger workers are more likely to surface act. It is assumed that younger people who focus on knowledge-related goals (Carstensen, 1992) will fake emotions if they perceive conflicted goals between themselves and customers. Contrary to older people, they could therefore prefer surface acting instead of deep acting. Johnson et al.'s (2017) update of Wang et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis lead to a sample size weighted correlation of $r = -.10$ (13 studies, $N = 4383$), indicating that most of the studies report a negative small effect size correlation for the age-surface acting relationship. This was also supported by Johnson et al.'s study (2017).

In sum, older workers use more automatic emotion regulation and deep acting and less surface acting. As this pattern of strategy use is positively related to well-being and performance and negatively related to strain, we conclude older individuals seem to be better emotion workers in support of Diefendorff et al.'s (2015) proposal that older adults are less likely to experience negative outcomes as a result of emotional labor. However, quantity says little about how successfully strategies were applied. Indirect evidence comes from the study of Johnson et al. (2017). When service workers were exposed to difficult situations with high customer stressors (Dormann & Zapf, 2004), using deep acting led to higher feelings of professional efficacy for older compared to younger workers. Older workers would likely not report high professional efficacy if they did not manage the situations well.

AGE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict is a ubiquitous phenomenon in organizations with managers spending substantial time managing conflicts (Thomas, 1992) and customer conflict an everyday experience for many service employees (Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). In this section we discuss the use of conflict management strategies by younger and older employees.

Conflict and Conflict Management Strategies. A conflict can be defined as "the process that begins when one party perceives that the other has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that he or she cares about" (Thomas, 1992, p. 653). There is a wide consensus on five global conflict management strategies proposed by the dual concern model (De Dreu, Harinck, & van Vianen, 1999; Thomas, 1992; Van de Vliert, 1997): avoiding, yielding, compromising, problem solving, and forcing. Conflicts are differentiated according to how they are functional for one's self-interests and serve one's own concern and in how far they take the concern of others into consideration (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986).

Yielding (low self and high other concern) involves adaptation and obligingness toward the conflict partner's concern, the acceptance and incorporation of his/her will, and unconditional and non-reciprocal concessions. *Forcing* (high self and low other concern) focuses on the accomplishment of one's own goal without considering the conflict partner's concerns. The imposition of one's will may imply persuasion, threats, or bluffs. *Problem solving* (high self and other concern) involves integrating the interests of both conflict parties as much as possible. This approach incorporates the willingness to collaborate in order to achieve a win−win solution. *Compromising* (intermediate self and other concern) relates to the search for a solution that matches the aspirations of both conflict parties by engaging in mutual sacrifices in order to find compromise. *Avoiding* (low self and other concern) implies reducing the personal importance of the conflict issue and relates to behaviors aimed at the prevention of conflict escalation.

Conflict management strategies are effective when they reduce the conflict issue and the potential for conflict escalation, when they improve the relationship between conflict parties, and when they limit or reduce negative consequences such as health impairment (Davis, Capobianco, & Kraus, 2004; Thomas, 1992). In this sense, conflict management strategies are commonly assigned to the two dimensions *constructive − destructive* and *active−passive* (e.g., Birditt & Fingerman, 2005; Davis et al., 2004). The active−passive dimension relates to the way in which problems are approached. An individual may confront the conflict partner with the problem, or may sort it out for him- or herself (Davis et al., 2004). The constructive−destructive dimension refers to the impact of conflict strategies on the relationship between conflict partners where strategies can be beneficial or harmful to the relationship (Birditt & Fingerman, 2005). Avoiding and

obliging are passive strategies and forcing, problem solving, and compromising are active strategies encompassing overt behaviors directly approaching the problem. Although there is good reason to believe that for each strategy there are situations where it makes sense to apply that strategy (Van de Vliert, 1997), forcing is generally considered a destructive strategy as it is potentially harmful to a relationship. Active destructive conflict strategies such as forcing have been shown to be associated with exhaustion (Dijkstra, De Dreu, Evers, & van Dierendonck, 2009; Gross & Guerrero, 2000) and reduced psychological well-being (De Dreu, van Dierendonck & Dijkstra, 2004), whereas problem solving, compromising and yielding are constructive strategies as they are potentially beneficial for relationships and conflict resolution. The yielding strategy encompasses passive behaviors, such as giving in, contributing to conflict de-escalation and improving the conflict partners' relationship. Thus, it can be assigned a passive constructive strategy (Birditt, Fingerman, & Almeida, 2005).

Whether the passive strategy avoiding is constructive or destructive is difficult to determine (Davis, Kraus, & Capobianco, 2009), as it encompasses less obvious behavioral manifestations, which can have constructive and destructive intentions (De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001). Avoidant behavior in terms of a passive constructive strategy, such as avoiding different opinions, doing nothing, or accepting the situation, are likely beneficial for reducing tension and conflict, and for the prevention of conflict escalation (Birditt et al., 2005). However, avoidant behavior, such as ignoring the conflict party, pretending they do not exist, or denying one's responsibility in the conflict can be assigned to passive destructive strategies, as it potentially harms the relationship and likely contributes to conflict escalation (Birditt & Fingerman, 2005). The mix of constructive and destructive elements in avoiding may explain why mixed effects were found for the age−avoidance relationship (Doerwald et al., 2016).

Beitler, Scherer, and Zapf (2018) recently reviewed the literature on age and conflict management. Their review showed there is only a limited number of studies available that converge in a few cases, but in others are shown to be contradictory.

Problem solving. Beitler et al. (2018) reported 10 studies assessing age and problem solving indicating heterogeneous results. An age-related increase in the use of problem solving strategies was demonstrated in three studies in work contexts (Balay, 2007; Beitler, Machowski, Johnson, & Zapf, 2016; Davis et al., 2009). Two studies indicated a negative age effect for problem solving in unspecified conflict settings (Yeung, Fung, & Chan, 2015; Yeung, Fung, & Kam, 2012). According to the authors, these differences pertain to sample nationality and conflict setting. With regard to nationality, studies showing positive age effects comprised western nationalities and addressed work conflicts. In contrast, Yeung and colleagues showed negative age effects for two Chinese samples within unspecified conflict

settings. An explanation could be that individualistic nations generally prefer resolving conflicts in a direct, confrontational, and solution-oriented manner (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007). Although Chinese samples used problem solving in interpersonal conflict as well, the older age groups engaged in this to a lesser extent. Their compliance to the sociocultural norm of harmony in collectivistic countries might be reinforced by the age-related social motive to preserve harmony and emotional comfort in relationships (e.g., Carstensen et al., 1999). Thus, with regard to problem solving, age effects might be balanced (Beitler et al., 2018).

A study comparison revealed that older people more strongly engaged in problem solving in professional contexts than younger people, while the reverse effect emerged for unspecified conflict settings (Beitler et al., 2018). Emotional competence may play a role here. Age is suggested to relate positively to the development of emotional competencies (e.g., Doerwald et al., 2016) and to a greater focus on emotion regulation (Mather & Carstensen, 2005). With regard to the work context, Doerwald et al. concluded that older workers' emotional competencies, such as perception, comprehension, and regulation of emotions, are equally well or even better than those of younger employees. Several studies consistently demonstrated a positive effect between emotional competence and the use of problem solving (Beitler et al., 2018; Doerwald et al., 2016), thus confirming theory positing that individuals high in emotional competence more often engage in active constructive conflict management strategies than individuals low in emotional competence. This is because the emotional competence of perceiving another person's emotional state or needs has been shown to be highly relevant for constructive conflict resolution (Zhang, Chen, & Sun, 2015). This may be explained by the recognition of the conflict partner's viewpoint, which facilitates collaboration. In conclusion, older workers may engage in problem solving behavior if they are high on emotional competence, hold individualistic norms of social behavior, and face workplace conflict as opposed to conflict in private situations (Beitler et al., 2018).

Compromising. In the Beitler et al. (2018) review, only four studies assessed age and compromising, with three reporting a positive correlation (Bergstrom & Nussbaum, 1996; Grossmann et al., 2010, 2012). None of the studies revealed a negative age effect. Because of the small number of studies and small reported effect sizes there is a possibility the relationship between age and compromising is not significant despite the reported effect (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015). Nevertheless these results indicate a trend for a positive age − compromising relationship.

Forcing. Beitler et al. (2018) found an interesting disparity between studies in private and work settings. Three studies in private conflict settings reported older participants were less likely to engage in forcing behavior compared to younger individuals (Bergstrom & Nussbaum, 1996; Birditt & Fingermann, 2005; Birditt et al., 2005), which is in accordance with

socioemotional selectivity theory (e.g., Carstensen et al., 2003). However, four studies in work contexts did not find any age differences (Balay, 2007; Beitler et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2009; Yeung et al., 2015) and none of the studies reported a positive age-forcing relationship. An explanation for this may be found in the age-emotional competence literature. Individuals high in emotional competence sometimes actively use forcing or domination though it is considered a highly uncooperative strategy. Forcing is seen appropriate or necessary, for instance, in order to fulfil a joint task within a certain time frame (e.g., Jordan & Troth, 2004; Zhang et al., 2015). Forcing has also been noted as being effective when used in combination with problem solving (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Moreover, forcing may be used to end an unproductive never-ending conflict so that (further) conflict escalation may be avoided (Van de Vliert, 1997). Hence, the forcing strategy may be an effective, and dependent on the specific context, sometimes necessary strategy for reaching a solution. In this regard, time pressure might play a key role as a contextual factor that determines if the need for task orientation overrules a preference for cooperation and interpersonal harmony. In sum, older individuals seem less likely to behave in a dominating manner during interpersonal conflict in private settings if they have the choice, but these age differences diminish in work settings because of situational requirements that overrule the "natural" preferences of older individuals resulting in zero effects.

Positive/neutral Avoiding. Beitler et al. (2018) report six studies with an age-related increase in positive/neutral conflict avoidance (Beitler et al., 2016; Birditt et al., 2005; Birditt, Cichy, & Almeida, 2011; Blanchard-Fields, Mienaltowski, & Seay, 2007; Luong & Charles, 2014; Yeung et al., 2012). This finding again provides support for the propositions put forward by age theories, such as socioemotional selectivity theory (e.g., Carstensen et al., 2003; see also Chapter 6 of this volume), that older people have a strong motivation to experience positive as opposed to negative emotional interactions and therefore increasingly engage in conflict avoidance when facing interpersonal conflict.

Five studies lacked evidence for an age effect (Balay, 2007; Bergstrom & Nussbaum, 1996; Birditt & Fingerman, 2005; Birditt et al., 2011; Yeung et al., 2015) possibly because there are two contradictory underlying mechanisms. The first is the motivation to avoid negative emotions, as detailed above. The second is that although as in the case of forcing, avoiding is seen as a conflict strategy in its own right (Van de Vliert, 1997), the dominating view is that conflict avoidance is not effective (e.g., Hopkins & Yonker, 2015). Following a resource-oriented approach, individuals high in emotional competence should be capable of handling conflicts, be aware of their strengths, and not be afraid to face disputes. As age is positively correlated with emotional competence older workers should therefore use less rather than more avoidance. However, empirical findings suggest that fear is not the reason for avoidance (Bell & Song, 2005). Rather, it is argued that a

concern for harmony may underlie the strategy of preventing open conflict, for instance when it is chosen to ensure peaceful relationships, especially when collectivistic values are essential (Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Dos Santos Pearson, & Villareal, 1997). Hence, in settings that require people orientation rather than target/production orientation (cf., Gross & Guerrero, 2000), emotionally competent individuals who are known to be sensitive to and concerned about other's emotions, such as older individuals, may opt to avoid open conflict.

Moreover, in the stress literature (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), control is identified as an important moderator (Semmer & Beehr, 2014). If control is high, active strategies such as problem solving are possible. If control is low, situations often cannot be changed and only intra-psychological strategies and avoidance are possible (e.g., Begley, 1998; Semmer & Meier, 2009). As outlined above, service interactions often are low-control situations suggesting avoiding a conflict may indeed be an emotionally competent response. Beitler et al. (2016) carried out moderator analyses and found that frequent use of avoiding resulted in increased professional efficacy for older workers, suggesting the older workers in this study considered avoiding a reasonable strategy. For younger workers, this relation was not found. In a similar vein, in Doerwald et al.'s (2016) review, three studies found that older individuals use avoidance more effectively.

In conclusion, though there are good reasons, especially for emotionally competent and older workers, not to use conflict avoidance, the age-related motivation to save resources (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; see also Chapter 5 of this volume), to prevent conflict escalation and to experience positive emotions with important social interaction partners would seem to be the prevailing reasons for older workers to use avoidant conflict behavior.

Negative Avoiding. In comparison to positive/neutral avoiding, less is understood about the age and negative avoiding relationship. In two studies reported by Beitler et al. (2018) using a hypothetical scenario technique, a positive age trend was found (Blanchard-Fields et al., 2007; Blanchard-Fields, Chen, & Norris, 1997), whereas a study on experienced conflicts showed no age effect (Birditt & Fingerman, 2005). More research is needed to better understand the interaction of age and negative avoiding conflict behaviors.

Yielding. Finally, three studies (Balay, 2007; Beitler et al., 2016; Yeung et al., 2015) examining age and yielding in working contexts did not find any age effects (Beitler et al., 2018). Clearly, yielding is generally not a preferable strategy in a work context. Interestingly, Beitler et al. (2016) found a marginally positive age-yielding relationship became marginally negative when controlling for job age, whereas the positive job age-yielding relationship slightly increased when controlling for age. This indicates that applying yielding in the work context requires very specific job knowledge rather than more general life experience, for example, knowing details about the

relationship with a particular long-term customer that may mean an exception from the rule is needed.

In sum, studies regarding age-related conflict management suggest a positive age trend for compromising and for positive/neutral avoiding. Moreover, the results revealed a negative age trend for forcing. While findings on age and problem solving were mixed, a positive age trend for problem solving at work occurred for individualistic countries. No age effects emerged for the yielding strategy.

AGE AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

Although there is a general belief that as we age we increasingly struggle with health problems, empirical evidence shows that older workers often report lower strain than younger or middle-aged colleagues (Beehr, Grosch & Adams, 2019; see Chapter 15 of this volume). For example, older workers reported less emotional exhaustion in the meta-analyses of Brewer and Shapard (2004) and Ng and Feldman (2010). One explanation for this might be that older workers are better able to cope with stress.

In their transactional model, Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 19) define psychological stress as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being." Two processes play a crucial role in this model: appraisal processes and coping. Primary appraisal refers to categorizing situational aspects as irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. Stress appraisals comprise harm/loss, threat, and challenge. Secondary appraisal refers to what can be done in the face of a stressful encounter, i.e., the coping options available. On the basis of such primary and secondary appraisals, individuals start their coping processes that can lead to reappraisal processes.

With regard to stress management, younger and older workers may first differ in how they appraise stressful situations (Scheibe & Zacher, 2013). Life experience and knowledge of a variety of stressful situations may influence the appraisal processes of older workers so that they tend to appraise situations as less stressful than do younger workers. Indeed, the meta-analysis of Ng and Feldman (2010) shows that age is negatively correlated with a variety of job stressors such as role conflict and role overload. In the present context, stressors referring to the social work environment are of particular interest. In Ng and Feldman's meta-analysis, relationship conflicts were negatively related to age and interpersonal trust was positively related to age. In a similar vein, in Beitler et al.'s (2016) and Johnson et al.'s (2013) studies age was negatively related with social stressors occurring in service provider-customer interactions such as being exposed to disproportionate customer expectations or customer verbal aggression (see Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Dudenhöffer & Dormann, 2015). Thus, a first explanation is that older

workers have a positivity bias in their appraisals (e.g., older adults prefer positive information and inhibit negative ones; Scheibe & Zacher, 2013) and respond to stimuli less negatively than younger adults (Charles & Carstensen, 2010). Another explanation is that "objective" stressors, that is, stressors independent of an individual's appraisal (Frese & Zapf, 1999), are lower for older workers. Older workers may be less likely to be exposed to conflicts with customers because of their socio-emotional competencies, which help to prevent conflict situations, and because of their higher motivation to create and maintain positive social relationships.

In addition to how stressful situations are appraised, a second important aspect is how to cope with them successfully using effective stress management strategies. Coping strategies can be divided into two higher order categories: "managing or altering the problem (problem-focused coping), or regulating the emotional response to the problem (emotion-focused coping)" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 179). Problem-focused (active) coping includes taking steps to develop plans and engage in actions directly to tackle the problem (e.g., seeking out information, confronting the problem, or planful problem solving). Emotion-focused strategies are argued to be diverse, ranging from proactive, appraisal-oriented approaches, such as cognitive restructuring (e.g., downplaying events), or controlling emotions (e.g., withholding inappropriate emotions), to more passive approaches, such as denial, avoidance, and escape from the incident (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Most studies report positive effects of active coping at work (e.g., Semmer & Meier, 2009). A recent meta-analysis (Shin et al., 2014) found a negative relationship between problem-focused coping and burnout. In contrast, avoidance coping showed a positive relation with psychological strain in most studies (Semmer & Meier, 2009). It is more difficult with emotion-focused coping. Most studies report negative effects of emotion-focused coping (see Shin et al.'s 2014 meta-analysis). However, in many studies the focus on coping is not clear. Many items of emotion-related coping measure actual affect stress responses, or the inability to do so, rather than trying effectively to manage the stress situation (Semmer & Meier, 2009). Positive effects can be expected for active emotion-focused coping. Such active emotion-focused coping includes, for example, self-reflection and regulation of perceptions and feelings related to a stressful situation (Hertel, Rauschenbach, Thielgen, & Krumm, 2015).

There is little research on age-related preferences in selecting stress management strategies. Contradictory results have been reported for problem solving in the context of stress, for example, active coping (Doerwald et al., 2016). Some studies proposed that younger adults prefer problem-focused strategies, such as problem solving or seeking support (e.g., De Lange et al., 2010; Folkman, Lazarus, Pimeley, & Novacek, 1987). However, older workers reported more active problem-focused coping in the study of Hertel et al. (2015). The authors refer to lifespan theories of control (e.g., Heckhausen &

Schulz, 1995; see Chapter 5 of this volume), suggesting this is because older workers have developed more skills and internal resources.

Other studies did not find any relationships between age and problem solving or active coping (e.g., Johnson et al., 2013). Older workers have, on one hand, developed more skills and have more experience in dealing with social situations, which helps in problem solving. On the other hand, investing in stress-oriented problem solving may expose older workers to the negative situation and negative emotions that they like to avoid, according to socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999). Compatible with both theories however, is the successful application of strategies rather than its frequency. The mere frequency of strategy use actually does not tell us much. If the use of a particular strategy is related to more positive outcomes, this would be an indication that the strategy was successfully applied. In the study of Johnson et al. (2013), age was not related to problem solving, however, there was a significant interaction effect. For older workers, problem solving showed a tendency for emotional exhaustion to decrease, whereas for younger workers exhaustion increased with increased problem solving.

Active emotion-focused coping should be more likely for older workers due to higher self-regulation skills (e.g., Charles, 2010; Labouvie-Vief, Hakim-Larson, DeVoe, & Schoeberlein, 1999). Blanchard-Fields, Stein, and Watson (2004) proposed that, in everyday life, adults aged 40−64 prefer proactive emotion-focused strategies, such as confronting negative emotions in order to cope with them, and looking at the situation from the other's point of view. They again refer to lifespan theories of control (e.g., Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995; Heckhausen et al., 2010) and argue this may partly be explained by this age group being at their peak of personal control and power. Moreover, in high emotional conflict situations, younger adults are more inclined to try not to think of, or feel, emotions about the situation (Blanchard-Fields et al., 2004). Diehl, Coyle, and Labouvie-Vief (1996) described middle-aged adults as using more cognitive restructuring such as emotional control than younger adults, whereas younger adults use more psychologically immature coping strategies such as blaming someone else. The latter may help to restore self-esteem, in line with self enhancement theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), but can also lead to conflict with others which can create problems in the workplace.

It has been suggested that control is a moderator for the usefulness of coping strategies. Whereas problem solving can only work when there is at least some control, emotional coping strategies such as positive reinterpretation as well as avoidance, denial, or "doing nothing," may actually be more useful in low-control situations (e.g., Begley, 1998; Semmer & Meier, 2009). We have already pointed out that service interactions are potentially low-control situations (Rafaeli, 1989) in which these strategies may be preferable. Studies suggest that in everyday life, as individuals get older, they may be better at controlling which emotions they experience or express (e.g., Gross

et al., 1997) and demonstrate more effective use of emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Support for this view is provided by socioemotional selectivity theory (e.g., Carstensen, 1995), which stresses that with age comes the search for emotionally meaningful goals, even in conflict relationships. This implies that, as individuals age, emotion control and other types of emotion-focused coping might be used to calm otherwise stressful situations with the aim of achieving a successful customer service interaction (Folkman et al., 1987). Employees who are older may therefore have an advantage over younger employees in adopting more effective types of strategies as they increasingly favor emotional coping strategies (Diehl et al., 1996), which appear to be more suitable to the low-control situation of the service sector. This could also intimate that the life experience that age brings to a customer service role may be as valuable as relevant job experience. All in all, although a few studies did not find relationships (e.g., Zacher, McKenna, & Rooney, 2013), the majority of studies supports the positive age − emotion control relation (Doerwald et al., 2016).

Johnson et al. (2013) confirmed the positive age-emotion control relationship in a work context. Looking at whether strategies were applied successfully, they found interaction effects with emotion control positively related to exhaustion for younger employees, but negatively related for older employees. Moreover, they found no direct and two way-interaction effects for downplaying as a strategy of cognitive restructuring, although the expected effect did occur when customer stressors were high (i.e., when coping efforts were necessary). The relationship between customer aggression and exhaustion for older workers was higher for those who did not use a downplaying strategy compared to those who did. For younger workers this was the other way around: The relation between customer stressors and exhaustion was stronger for those younger workers who used the downplaying strategy.

In conclusion, there is a tendency for older workers to use more problem-focused and more active emotion-focused coping, although in many studies no effects were found. However, it seems that older workers are able more successfully to apply problem solving and active emotion-focused coping; that is, they are experiencing less strain when they use these strategies whereas this is not the case for younger workers.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter we have shown that the assumption of a general decline of older workers' skills and abilities does not apply when it comes to using socio-emotional competencies at work in the form of emotion regulation, conflict, and stress management. Positively evaluated strategies such as deep acting in doing emotion work, problem solving, and compromising as conflict management strategies and emotion control are either more often used by older workers or used to a similar extent by older and younger workers.

Moreover, less-preferred strategies such as surface acting in doing emotion work, forcing as a conflict management strategy, and avoidance coping are used less often by older workers. Contrary to expectations, conflict avoidance was used more often by older workers. There are several points to note.

1. Overall, this review supports the view that older compared to younger workers prefer adaptive strategies with positive outcomes. An exception is conflict avoidance. This exception may be explained by specific characteristics of work situations. We characterized service work as situations with little control. In the context of work stress it has been shown that otherwise maladaptive strategies show positive effects under low-control conditions. This may explain why older workers use avoidance more often and more successfully. Moreover, these results are in line with Baltes and Baltes' (1990) model of selective optimization with compensation (see also Chapter 4 of this volume) and the motivational theory of lifespan development (Heckhausen et al., 2010; see Chapter 5 of this volume), which assumes that older people have to be increasingly selective in their investment of resources. They may, therefore, in cases prefer passive intrapersonal rather than active interpersonal strategies.

2. Looking at how frequently strategies are used by younger and older workers may not always lead to clear results. Strategies are often situation specific (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addition, in many studies it is not clear whether or not an applied strategy was successful. In Johnson et al.'s (2013) study, for example, there were not many direct effects of age on strategies. However, for several stress management strategies, it could be shown that their use had more positive consequences for older workers compared to younger workers. That is, we assume that more age effects would be found if effectiveness rather than frequency of strategies and behaviors would be considered.

3. Working conditions may be an important variable in the analysis of age effects. There is evidence that older workers are exposed to less socioemotional stressors (e.g., Johnson et al., 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2010). This may, for example, mean that older workers have less reason to apply stress or conflict management strategies at all. This mechanism works against positive age trends, for example, in the use of problem solving. More effects might be found if job stressors would be used as control or moderator variables.

4. A specific property of social stressors is that a contributing factor to the stressor is the worker's behavior. In service interactions, older workers may be better able to create a positive atmosphere, which makes customer negative behaviors less likely. This also applies to emotion work. Older workers are less exposed to emotion rule-dissonance and as emotion rule-dissonance is highly related to surface acting (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011), one can argue that there is less need to surface act for older workers. Surface acting is often considered a maladaptive strategy

(e.g., Doerwald et al., 2016). In a sense this is true because of its negative effects on workers' health and performance. On the other hand, surface acting is the only choice in negative customer interactions given that service workers would normally not be able to turn true negative feelings into true positive ones so that deep acting is unrealistic. The alternative would be doing nothing and venting one's true (negative) emotions (emotional deviance). Semmer, Messerli, and Tschan (2016) showed that, of course, surface acting is much better than venting. Therefore, it is a possibility that older workers do not use surface acting less often than younger workers because they consider it a maladaptive strategy, but because they are less often exposed to negative interactions where surface acting is the only reasonable option.

5. There are hardly any studies that compare effects of chronological and job age (years doing a particular job). In our view, it makes little sense to contrast chronological age and overall work experience (total years working). If the samples cover the full possible range of age (e.g., 18−65 years), then correlations between chronological age and overall work experience are likely higher than $r = .80$ (e.g., Beitler et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2013, 2017) and therefore lead to almost identical effects. Only if samples with substantial range restrictions (e.g., very young samples, as in the study of Hur, Moon, & Han, 2014) are considered one may find substantially lower correlations among the variables. It is important to show that it is chronological rather than job age that is responsible for effects. First, only if the effects can be traced back to chronological age can results be seen as supporting lifespan theories. Second, from a practical perspective, effects of job age may be compensated by short-term training and would therefore not support the view of specific competencies of older workers.

6. Effects of age on strategies represent small effect sizes (Cohen, 1992). This means results of studies may often not be reported as significant, because a lack of statistical power makes it easier to find non-significant effects (Schmidt & Hunter (2015).

7. Work and organizational psychologists studying age effects are often confronted with the healthy-worker effect: Healthy and more competent workers are arguably more likely to remain in organizations and postpone their retirement. Unhealthy and less competent workers, in contrast, may have a higher likelihood of losing their job and might also be more motivated to stop working as early as possible. If this were true, then a tendency toward supporting the hypotheses studied in this chapter would take place because less competent older workers who would use less optimal strategies would be excluded from the samples, thus skewing the results. However, combining work and organizational studies with studies in lifespan development, which are usually carried out outside work, is a strategy to circumvent the healthy worker effect bias.

CONCLUSION

There is a clear need for further research in some of the areas we discuss in this chapter. However, the overall indication is that older workers have greater socio-emotional competencies at work than younger workers, which will likely result in better individual (e.g., reduced burnout) and organizational (e.g., improved customer satisfaction) outcomes. We therefore conclude that the deficit hypothesis that assumes a general decline in skills and abilities with age is both incorrect and ill-informed. Against the backdrop of increased longevity and the related trend to work later in life than was previously the case, knowledge and understanding of older worker competencies is increasingly important. The evident increase in research investigating later life working is welcome and needs to continue to inform existing gaps in our understanding.

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