

Person-job fit across the work lifespan – The case of classical ballet dancers[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how employees assess demands-abilities and needs-supplies across their work lifespan, and how they better adjust to their work. Based on person-environment fit theory, the job design and the lifespan literatures, and using interviews with a sample of 40 professional ballet dancers, our research shows how the interplay between demands, abilities, needs, organizational resources, and regulation strategies contributes to a process of adjustment, and consequently enhances psychological well-being across the work lifespan. Additionally, we contribute to literature on well-being by presenting evidence of how organizational resources are perceived differently across the work lifespan and why. We also extend theory on job crafting by showing that crafting is partly a function of the phases of one's lifetime and by presenting evidence of forms of crafting among older workers. With increased longevity, individuals will need to remain working or recraft a career after reaching retirement age. Addressing age-related changes and considering the importance of organizational resources to well-being can help promote active aging.

1. Introduction

Psychological well-being at work is achieved through a process of adjustment between organizational members and their work environments (Feldman & Vogel, 2009). Aging constitutes one of the most influential reasons for misalignments between individuals and their workplaces (Feldman & Vogel, 2009), since it affects a person's abilities, goals, and needs (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Carstensen, 1995; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Individuals can play an agentic role in order to increase their person-job fit and maintain their well-being by engaging in different regulation strategies (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). With the expected career lengthening caused by an increasingly aging workforce, three questions arise: (1) how do workers assess their job demands, their abilities, and their needs across their work lifespan?, (2) what regulation strategies do workers engage in to better fit and why?, and finally (3) which organizational resources are perceived to contribute to the process of adjustment and why?

The purpose of the current study is to build and enrich theory by providing evidence of how workers better adjust to their work in

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the process of aging. We selected a short physical career (ballet) in which the process of aging is intensified, and examined the differences at three career life stages: young, middle, and old. Specifically, we addressed the question of *how* workers assess demands, abilities, needs, and organizational resources, and *what* regulation strategies they adopt to better adjust to their work. By conducting this study, we respond to the calls for: (1) empirical evidence about the differences in needs and motives among individuals throughout their working life (Bal, Kooij, & Rousseau, 2015); (2) studies that integrate aging, person-environment fit, and well-being (Zacher, Feldman, & Schulz, 2014); (3) empirical evidence of crafting among older workers (Kooij, Tims, & Kanfer, 2015).

The context of professional ballet dancers was selected for two main reasons. First, the depletion of a dancer's main physical capital (Bourdieu, 1984), the body, is inevitable and visible. The decline of physical strength is especially difficult for the dancer because it is a means of expression and part of a dancer's self-identity (Wainwright & Turner, 2006). Therefore, regulation strategies are expected to emerge. Second, dancing professionally ends prematurely when compared to other careers in terms of lifespan (i.e., it lasts no longer than 20 years). Hence, dynamics of resource losses and gains are more pronounced among ballet dancers, as they have relatively short careers in which they have to cope with these changes. What we can learn from these short careers is how workers better adjust to their work and sustain psychological well-being by engaging in different regulation mechanisms across their work lifespan. Dancers deal with the perception of being too old to continue to dance while they are still too young to stop working. This perception of being too old and simultaneously too young is a reality for the workforce in general. With increased longevity, most individuals will either extend their careers and work longer or will find new careers before or after reaching retirement age (Eurostat, 2015).

Our primary contribution is a framework that shows how the interplay between demands, abilities, needs, organizational resources, and regulation strategies across the work lifespan contributes to a process of adjustment, and consequently enhances psychological well-being at work. Additionally, we contribute to literature on well-being by presenting evidence of how organizational resources are perceived differently across the work lifespan and why. Finally, our study extends the theory on job crafting (Kooij et al., 2015; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) by showing that crafting is partly a function of the phases of one's lifetime and by providing evidence of forms of crafting among older workers. By studying how workers assess fit or misfit between demands and abilities, needs and supplies, and better adapt to their work environment during the aging process, our study helps organizational behavior scholars and practitioners to manage an increasingly age-diverse workforce and contributes to the challenge of how to promote active aging (Eurostat, 2015). The purpose of our research is to study how employees better adjust to work in order to sustain psychological well-being across their work lifespan.

2. Theoretical framework

Psychological well-being at work is experienced as a sense of fulfillment, the realization of human potential, and meaningfulness (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Workers' psychological well-being can be affected when they lack personal or organizational resources to meet the demands of work (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Hobfoll, 2011) or when rewards fall short of their needs or goals (Edwards, 1992). Thus, inherent to psychological well-being is the perception of congruence between the demands of the job and the resources of the employee (i.e., demands-abilities fit), as well as the resources provided by the organization and the needs and goals of the employee (i.e., needs-supplies fit; Edwards, 1991; Scroggins, 2008).

Equally important to psychological well-being is the perception of correspondence between work task and work role (Kahn, 1990; Scroggins, 2008). Work is experienced as meaningful when it is consistent with an individual's perceptions of who they are or who they want to become (Scroggins, 2008). Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) named this concept "work identity integrity", the "consistency between what one is and what one does" (p. 241). The strong identification to the work role resonates in accordance to living as the true self, thereby establishing a sense of authenticity that enables full engagement (Kahn, 1990). Alignment or misalignment between work content and work role influences emotions and behaviors, such as frustration and coping reactions (Kira, van Eijnatten, & Balkin, 2010; Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016). As careers progress, work role and identity changes will occur, and demands related to the self will emanate (Billett & Pavlova, 2005; Pratt et al., 2006).

Aging, in its multiple conceptions (Kooij & Van de Voorde, 2015; Sterns & Miklos, 1995), is the major motive for the need of adjustments between individuals and their work environments (Feldman & Vogel, 2009). For instance, the performance-based conception of age analyzes the gains and losses in abilities to complete a task, such as the decline in physical strength or the increase in experience (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). From the perspective of organizational age, as seniority increases and professionals' competencies enhance (Eraut, Alderton, Cole, & Senker, 2000), demands become more intense and greater extrinsic rewards are expected (Noonan, 2005). Additionally, psychosocial age affects the perception of time (e.g., remaining in a career), which will have as a consequence the reorganization of priorities and goals. On the other hand, the lifespan conception of age evaluates the changes resulting from the combination of career and life events (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999; Sterns & Miklos, 1995). For example, middle-aged employees experience more work-family conflict than young and older employees (Zacher & Winter, 2011). Even though age is central to person-environment fit, there is scarce research that integrates aging, well-being, and person-job fit. Furthermore, there is still the need to answer the "when", "how", and "what" strategies employees adopt to establish person-job fit (Zacher et al., 2014).

Since life-span theories consider biological, psychological, and social changes that occur throughout life, they constitute a pivotal framework for the study of how age affects psychological well-being at work. Kanfer and Ackerman's (2004) framework suggests that aging involves losses in fluid intelligence (i.e., working memory, attention, and processing of novel information) and gains in crystallized intelligence (i.e., general knowledge, extent of vocabulary, and verbal comprehension). As a result, individuals engage in regulation strategies, such as avoidance (aversion to fluid intelligence tasks) or compensation (increased interest in crystallized

intelligence tasks). The socioemotional selectivity theory (SST; Carstensen, 1995) states a reorganization of goals as a result of the perception of time, age, or when endings are salient. When perceived as an open-ended future time perspective (“life lived from birth”), social interactions are driven by resource acquisition goals (i.e., learning technical skills). However, when time is perceived as limited (“life left”), emotional goals are prioritized (i.e., meaningful experiences). The model of selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC; Baltes & Baltes, 1990) suggests that individuals adopt processes of adjustment toward three goals in life: growth (i.e., reaching higher levels of functioning), maintenance (i.e., preserving current level of functioning), and regulation of loss (i.e., functioning at lower levels). Goals are selected (over others), either to achieve a desired state (elective selection) or in response to resource loss (loss-based selection). To reach an optimal level of functioning in the selected goals, resources need to be acquired, allocated, and refined (optimization). Finally, when confronted with loss or decline in goal-relevant means, compensatory strategies (compensation) are needed to replace the loss of resource by using new or an unused resource (e.g., taking additional breaks, asking for help or rehabilitation following injury).

In a similar way, the crafting literature (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) stresses that employees proactively engage in self-initiated actions (i.e., bottom-up approach) to change tasks or relational boundaries of their work in order to improve person-job fit, meaning, work identity (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), or to balance job demands and job resources with their personal abilities and needs (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2012). Not all employees will resort to crafting, but those who feel that their needs are not being met are more likely to do so (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). As job crafting is a type of proactive person-job fit behavior (Niessen, Weseler, & Kostova, 2016; Tims et al., 2016; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), it is also a way to adapt to age-related changes. In fact, Kooij et al. (2015) have suggested that crafting is important for successful aging since it offers older workers mechanisms to continuously adjust their job to their intrapersonal changes that occur in the aging process. Kooij et al. (2015) have suggested three primary forms of job crafting among older workers: (1) developmental crafting toward growth, such as attending training to sharpen knowledge and skills; (2) utilization crafting toward the optimization of resources, such as taking on tasks that activate unused skills; (3) accommodative crafting toward regulation of losses, such as hiring an assistant or looking for alternative ways to achieve goals. However, the authors built upon the SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) and Kanfer and Ackerman's (2004) framework to suggest forms of crafting among older workers. The way older workers *effectively* craft lacks empirical evidence (Kooij et al., 2015).

Taken together, life-span theories and job crafting (i.e., job design literature; Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Carstensen, 1995; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Kooij et al., 2015) advocate that individuals proactively adopt different behaviors toward effective functioning and well-being throughout life. These regulation strategies toward a better fit involve various levels of action: selecting and changing goals, allocating resources, increasing tasks, reducing demands, prioritizing social interactions, and enriching roles. Yet it is still not clear what strategies employees adopt to establish person-job fit and why, and how organizational resources contribute to the process of adjustment over time.

3. Method

3.1. Research design and context

With the aim of examining how workers assess demands, abilities, and needs, and how they better adjust to their work environments, from a phenomenological perspective, we adopted an inductive approach and followed the precepts of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

We searched for a context that could serve as an “extreme case” (Eisenhardt, 1989) by offering a transparent view of the phenomenon under study. Professional ballet dancers embrace “embodied careers”, that is, those careers in which bodies are crafted for work and in which workers perform physically with their bodies (Coupland, 2015). Success and the length of their careers are dictated by their bodily capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Inevitably, aging implies a decline in physical strength, and slows the recovery from injuries (Wainwright & Turner, 2006).

Professional ballet dancers are typically highly intrinsically motivated, driven by their passion for dance and/or by a sense of calling (Wainwright & Turner, 2006). The decision to embrace ballet is taken at a very early age, mostly during infancy, leading to a strong self-identification with the role. Daily dedication is so demanding that it constrains the consideration of alternative selves. The strong identification to the role and the lack of alternative selves make endings of ballet dancing difficult career transitions (Coupland, 2015). The short-term career has two main implications. First, most dancers need to (re)create a new career after retiring from ballet (Coupland, 2015). Second, it generates a pressure to obtain and sustain resources, especially those related to physical capital.

3.2. Setting

The ballet company investigated is a state-owned Portuguese company existing since 1977. Its classical, contemporary, and author's repertoire constitute an appealing context for dancers from all over the world. Hierarchy is composed of five rungs: intern, corps de ballet, demi-soloist, soloist, and principal. The higher in the structure, the greater the amount of time performing alone on stage, and the greater the importance of the character. From the 80 dancers that comprise the company's workforce, approximately 40 are not dancing either because they are suffering from physical injuries, or they are considered too old to perform but too young to retire. Some of the older dancers decide to stay in the company and perform acting roles (i.e., interpretative roles that do not demand physical strength), while others embrace different careers. They may engage careers that represent an extension of ballet such as choreographer, *répétiteur* (i.e., tutor or coach of ballet dancers), physical trainer, or not (e.g., management).

3.3. Empirical material

The field study was conducted between October 2013 and October 2014. The first three months were dedicated to observation, for a total of approximately 150 h. Because the organization gave the researchers full access to the site, the first author was able to attend classes, rehearsals, meetings, and performances. Observations indicated that there was a difference in the dancer's routine depending on age. The majority of "older" dancers would stay only for a class in the morning. The exception was for those interpreting acting roles.

Forty formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 dancers (80% of the active workforce), 6 ex-dancers who continue to work at the organization, 1 prima ballerina who is now retired, and 1 prima ballerina who was responsible for managing the company. Sixty-five percent are women. Hierarchically, the sample is composed of 3% internship, 44% corps de ballet, 15% demi-soloist, 16% soloist, and 22% principal.

Differences were examined in three age groups: young age, dancers under 25 years of age ($n = 7$; ranging from 20 to 25); middle age, dancers between 26 and 35 years of age ($n = 12$; ranging from 2 to 35); and old age, dancers and ex-dancers who are above the age of 36 ($n = 21$; ranging from 36 to 60). In this way, we were able to cover the perceptions of the dancers during their entire career, as well as of those who embraced different careers. As the cut-off between young and old workers is not fixed, thresholds were defined based on the information provided through the interviews, which were then confirmed within the literature (Wainwright & Turner, 2006).

We draw primarily on the data that emerged from the 40 semi-structured interviews to support our arguments. Depending on the dancer's availability, interviews lasted between 30 min and 1.5 h, were recorded, and transcribed *verbatim*. These interviews were semi-structured, deliberately broad in scope, and covered topics such as the career trajectory of the dancers, positive and negative aspects of their jobs, and the company's functioning. Intentionally, we did not refer to aging. An interview guide is presented in Appendix A.

Because of the first author's previous experience as a ballet dancer (11 years cumulative, not professionally), we were able to leverage some of the benefits of insider/outsider research in these conversations (Bartunek & Louis, 1996). Overall, the raw data amounted to about 300 pages (double-spaced). The final number of interviews resulted from a state of conceptual saturation (O'Reilly, 2012).

3.4. Data analysis

Data analysis progressed in three steps as recommended by grounded theory (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012).

Step 1: Producing provisional categories and first-order codes. In an iterative fashion, data were simultaneously coded and analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Informants' statements were organized according to their commonalities, forming provisional categories and first-order codes. Three members of the research team coded the first interviews together. Agreement was calculated based on the number of agreements divided by the total number of statements (i.e., meaning units) in a given transcript. The level of agreement between the coders did not fall below 85% at any point. We used the NVivo 2.0 software program to enter quotes and organize codes; 258 meaning units were coded from the 40 interviews. In this phase it became clear that young, middle-aged, and older dancers emphasize different aspects of their psychological well-being at work. Therefore, we decided to split the analysis into three age groups, which led us to exclude codes that are common to the three groups. For example, when making sense of how they decided to become ballet dancers, most dancers relied on the calling dimension (e.g., "I didn't choose the ballet. The ballet chose me"). The code "calling" generated 52 meaning units and was equally representative in the three groups of age. By removing common aspects, the final meaning units amount to 185 codes, allowing us to focus on the objects of the study.

Step 2: Creating theoretical themes. First-order concepts were transformed into second-order themes, relying upon the interpretation of data collected as well as the revision of existing theory. Then, by travelling back and forth between the data and an emerging structure of theoretical arguments, categories were consolidated (Locke, 2001). Categories were discussed among the full research team and consensus was achieved after a few meetings.

Step 3: Aggregating theoretical dimensions. We looked for dimensions underlying these categories in an attempt to understand how different categories fitted together into a coherent picture. Some categories seemed more like behaviors (e.g., "developing", "crafting"), others more like demands (e.g., "self-confidence"), or abilities (e.g., "physical strength", "technical skills").

Fig. 1 provides a graphic depiction of how we progressed from raw data to first-order codes, theoretical themes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012). The aggregated theoretical dimensions explain how dancers assess abilities versus demands, and their needs versus organizational resources, and what regulation strategies were adopted to better adjust to their work. We use light to dark grey to differentiate among the three cohort groups.

4. Results

As we analyzed the data from each group of dancers, it became evident that dancers in our study assessed the demands of their work, their abilities to perform, their needs, and their goals differently according to age. Distinct regulation mechanisms were adopted to enhance person-job fit. Following the literature (Dawis, 2002), we asked which supplies (i.e., organizational resources) would be useful to dancers at that specific moment in order to sustain well-being. Distinct organizational resources emerged for each life stage. Fig. 2 provides a framework of the interplay of demands and abilities, needs and organizational resources, and regulation strategies in the three groups of age leading to the process of adjustment. Assessing abilities and demands refers to how dancers in our

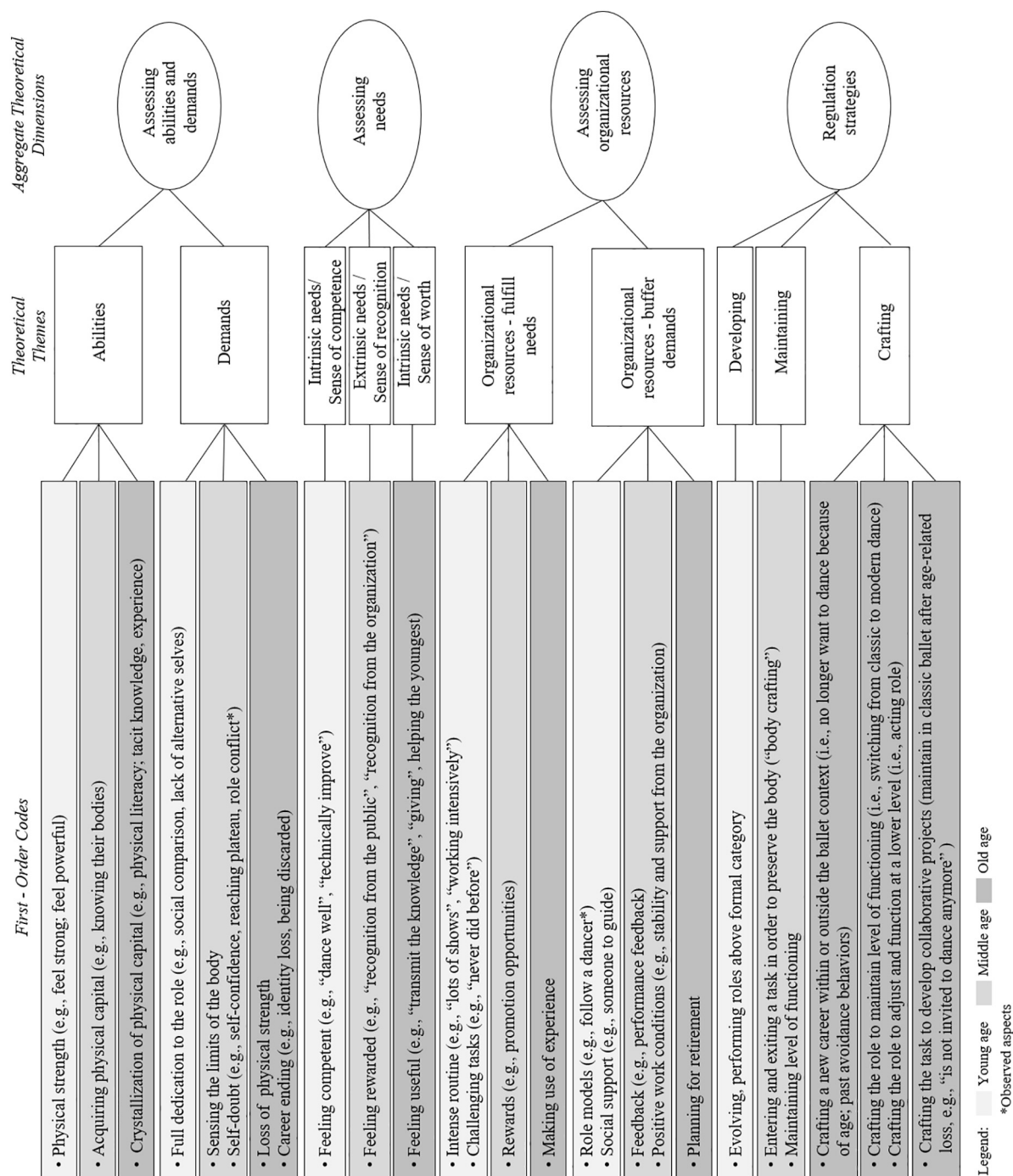


Fig. 1. Data structure.

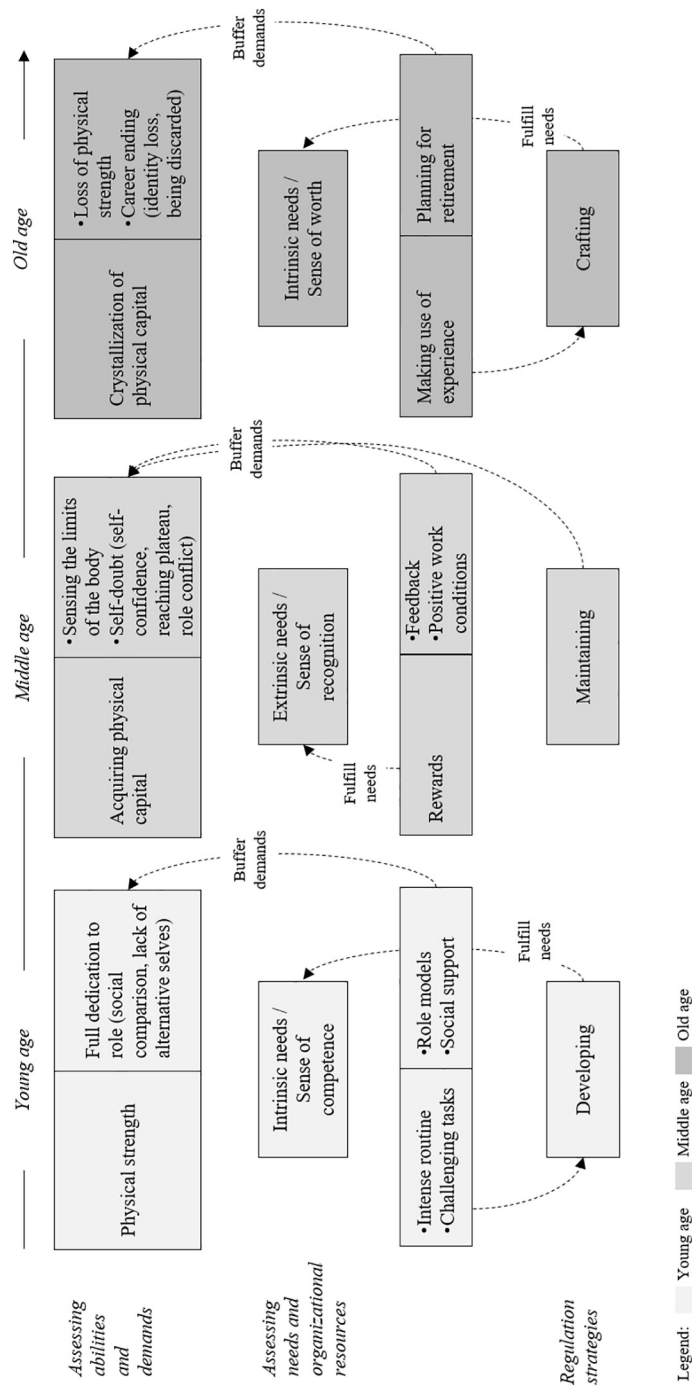


Fig. 2. The interplay of demands and abilities, needs and organizational resources, and regulation strategies across the work lifespan.

study perceive the congruence between the demands that emanate from the work role and the work task, and their abilities (e.g., skills and resources) to fulfill those demands. Assessing needs and organizational resources relates to how dancers evaluate the correspondence between the resources provided by the organization and their needs and goals at that life stage. Regulation strategies are self-initiated actions that dancers adopt when a misfit between demands *and* abilities or needs *and* organizational resources is appraised. To orient the reader, we now summarize our findings by age cohorts.

4.1. Young age (dancers under 25 years of age)

The young dancers in this study feel intrinsically motivated to dance. They see ballet as a vocation rather than a job. Dancing technically well is a goal and a requirement in ballet, so young dancers in this study engage in developing strategies in order to increase their technical skills and to dominate their “wild horses”.

4.1.1. Assessing abilities and demands

Physical strength. Young dancers in this study feel full of physical strength. Physical demands seem to reinforce that ability:

I feel my body is strong. I love to jump. I feel powerful.

[Corps de ballet, female, 19 years old]

Full dedication to role (social comparison, lack of alternative selves). Young dancers in this study struggle with the emerging identity of becoming professional ballet dancers, and compare their lives with others who are not in ballet, questioning their career choice:

Because I am 20... For the moment the least positive thing... It is true that ballet took away part of my childhood... you don't have a life like other people... There are some days that I wonder if it is right to live like this, if I shouldn't be like the others, and be with my family...

[Corps de ballet, female, 20 years old]

Ballet demands full dedication from a very early age. The full dedication to ballet affects the possibility of alternative selves. This may be especially prominent in the case of ballet dancers, as they will need to re-craft a career after retiring from ballet, and they are so dedicated and absorbed that they lack time to consider and invest in alternatives.

I should have started thinking about this [about what to do after finishing the career] but I feel very young and have so much to do ... It was impossible to start planning but now I feel that I should. I am still too absorbed.

[Corps de ballet, female, 25 years old]

4.1.2. Assessing needs and organizational resources

Intrinsic needs/Sense of competence. In our study, professional dancers in their early ages seem to be driven by intrinsic needs such as the need to dance well, evolve, and feel technically prepared. Young dancers' main goal, in our study, is to perform. When asking the dancer what drives her as a dancer and what she aims to achieve, intrinsic motives emerged. The lack of extrinsic goals to achieve the highest level is evident:

Becoming a principal, I don't think I want this... I want to dance, that's for sure.

[Corps de ballet, female, 20 years old]

Intense routine and challenging tasks. Important to young dancers in our study are those organizational resources that enable the acquisition of technical skills, since they are especially important to perform classical ballet (i.e., increasing the abilities to perform). Even an intense routine, which would be typically perceived as a demand, is assessed positively:

I feel fulfilled when I had a class with an invited professor, and a rehearsal, and another... When I go home feeling that I worked intensively.

[Corps de ballet, female, 21 years old]

Job complexity and challenging tasks seem to give meaning to work since they fulfill the need to perceive competence:

I enjoy being challenged, doing difficult performances, things I have never tried before, dancing with someone I have never danced with.

[Corps de ballet, female, 23 years old]

Challenge is so important for young dancers in our study that the possibility of breaking the relationship with the employer emerged when dancers perceived that they were not being challenged enough.

Role models and social support. Young dancers in this study also refer to a role model as important for them to feel motivated at work as it can help in their identity construction as professional ballet dancers, creating an ideal to emulate. In fact, the first author observed that during classes young dancers followed older dancers that they consider to be an example. Social support seems to be important to young dancers in our study, especially because the ballet context is characterized by the absence of a formal leader-follower relationship:

I feel abandoned sometimes. We have the material [the body] ... and it depends on you to happen. I think it is important to have someone to guide you, for you to know where to go.

[Corps de ballet, female, 25 years old]

4.1.3. Regulation strategies

Developing. Dancers in this study adopt what we interpreted as a developing strategy, toward growth. Growth is achieved with the feeling of accomplishment, a sense of competence:

[Describing a good day at work] *...I have worked hard and well. I had rehearsals all day long, and I feel pain from the top of my head. But I feel I did things correctly and that I had evolved in something.*

[Corps de ballet, female, 25 years old]

Performing roles above their hierarchical level is assessed as positive since it gives responsibility and a sense of evolving. To illustrate:

For example, I am corps de ballet and I already performed as a soloist, and this is important because it gives responsibility.

[Corps de ballet, female, 24 years old]

4.2. Middle age (dancers between 26 and 35 years of age)

In this study, middle-aged dancers perceive limitations in their bodies at the same time they acquire physical capital to know how to control their bodies. Perceiving physical constraints as well as reaching a plateau in their career makes dancers engage in maintenance behaviors. Midlife dancers in this study are extrinsically motivated and expect to be recognized.

4.2.1. Assessing abilities and demands

Acquiring physical capital. Middle-aged dancers in this study start to realize the extent of the limitations of their bodies. Bodily cues give the dancer immediate feedback on their ability and boundaries, which may be perceived positively, as a source of competence (i.e., physical capital), that will allow a better control over the body:

The most positive aspect is that through ballet you learn the limits of your body, and you know more than anyone else how to use it... For example, if an old person falls down... if he is a dancer, he would react in a different elaborated manner, just as a gymnast or an athlete would.

[Soloist, male, 29 years old]

Sensing the limits of the body. There are dancers in this study who perceive the limitations in their bodies negatively:

The negative side of ballet is the pain that I have started to feel.

[Corps de ballet, male, 29 years old]

Self-doubt (self-confidence, reaching plateau, role conflict). Middle-aged dancers in this study struggle with the lack of self-confidence, which may be related to the awareness of the limitations of the body and the anticipation of future losses in physical strength. This is visible in the extract below, in which a dancer alludes to the negative aspects of dancing professionally:

Less positive is the constant struggle with criticism... You are never perfect.... you are not good enough. So, it is a little bit of a fight. It is finding a balance between doing your best and coping with people's criticism.

[Corps de ballet, male, 29 years old]

Middle-aged dancers in this study also feel the pressure for reaching a plateau in their careers. As the career is short, this demand is amplified:

I had a tough time last year because you come to a time in your career when you have a realization of either you are not going to achieve what you are hoping for or you are getting to an age and think of doing something else.

[Corps de ballet, male, 29 years old]

Additionally, role conflicts emerge from the accumulation of roles from inside and outside working lives, such as being a dancer and a mother, and lacking time to dedicate to family. This was observed by the authors, who saw children watching their father and mother performing during their school break.

4.2.2. Assessing needs and organizational resources

Extrinsic needs/Sense of recognition. Middle-aged dancers in this study appear to be motivated by extrinsic motives, in the form of recognition from either the public or the organization. Recognition is fundamental in this stage to their motivation. The following quote gives an example of a dancer who feels recognized by the organization and by his public (i.e., needs-supplies fit):

I feel good working here. They recognize my talent and make me go further..... I have always been lucky to never have had "normal" roles, I have always performed as a soloist or principal dancer and these are the most rewarding. And I came to this company looking for the recognition of the public, of my name as an individual. In the company where I was before, it was the appreciation of the group by the public, while here the appreciation of the public is for the dancer...

[Demi-soloist, male, 27 years old]

Rewards. In contrast to young dancers to whom performing roles above their formal categories was perceived as positive because it reinforced their sense of competence, middle-aged dancers in this study expect to be formally compensated:

I was evolving. I got roles of principals and soloist... But then, I got no promotion so I don't feel recognized.

[Corps de ballet, male, 34 years old]

Middle-aged dancers in this study emphasize the fit (or misfit) between what the job offers them and what they are looking for in a job. The following statement represents how a prima ballerina perceives the misfit, and how it causes her a sense of frustration:

Even though I have a huge passion for ballet, I know that the organization is not going to promote me, I will not perform a lot of shows... All my ambitions will not be reached. I have a salary, a profession, but it is my basic need, what I wish I will not get.

[Principal, female, 33 years old]

Feedback and positive work conditions. Dancers in this study receive short-term feedback during classes and rehearsals, but they lack general performance feedback, which seems to be instrumental for them to climb the ladder:

There should be feedback individually because it is never too late to become a better dancer. It's never too late to achieve the next level.

[Corps de ballet, male, 29 years old]

Additionally, positive work conditions, such as stability from the organization, the infra-structure, and constant support to the dancer, are mentioned as supplies that support the dancers in their daily work.

4.2.3. Regulation strategies

Maintaining. Midlife dancers in this study sense limitations in their bodies and so they adopt an active behavior toward maintenance of their current functioning. We named this mechanism “body crafting”, that is, intentionally balancing between attaching or detaching the body in specific circumstances in order to preserve it. It seems that the knowledge that they have acquired of their bodies is what makes “body craft” possible, resulting in a sense of control over the body:

When I joined the company, I wanted to show what I was able to do. Now I can control what I do... If the show is in two months, I am not going to kill myself today... The body will evolve until then.

[Corps de ballet, male, 27 years old]

Middle aged dancers in this study emphasize that they do not need to do every act as they used to do in the past. This is because now “they know”, meaning that they have acquired the skills needed to control their bodies and that they are conscious that they have to look after their physical condition by making decisions to preserve it:

We have to realize that it ends up not being about giving less, it is knowing how to use the dynamics. It's the same thing if I know that I have a 100-km marathon, I am not going to run like crazy the first 50-km.... When I say I'm in a new phase, it is because I now realize that I do not have to do all the acts anymore, not that I would not enjoy it but I do not need to anymore.

[Corps de ballet, female, 34 years old]

4.3. Old aged (dancers and ex-dancers with age of 36 years old or above)

Older dancers in this study perceive the loss of physical strength but the crystallization of the physical capital. They aim to make use of the accumulated experience to still be part of the workforce when dancing is not possible anymore. They engage in four different crafting strategies, compensating for the loss of physical strength.

4.3.1. Assessing abilities and demands

Crystallization of physical capital. Physical literacy, that is, physical confidence, competence, and tacit knowledge is a resource gained through experience. In our study, physical literacy resides in the knowledge and the control that dancers exert over their bodies. Losses in physical strength seem to be compensated by gains in experience and maturity:

The most negative part of it is to accept that your body has limits and that at a certain age, and even though your “head” is at a higher stage and you have a different perception of your body, the body responds less.

[Soloist, male, 40 years old]

Loss of physical strength. Older dancers in this study experience the loss of physical strength and perceived it negatively. Pain is now inherent to this stage of their careers. In this study, dancers' self-appraisal is that, when young they have physical strength but lack the knowledge that would allow dancers to take full advantage of their bodies. This feeling generates a sense of frustration, as can be interpreted from this retrospective account:

In a career of a dancer, we reach an age when we have all the knowledge to perform in a way but we are not physically able anymore... it is frustrating.... when I was evolving, I had the physical capacity but not the knowledge.

[Soloist, male, 44 years old]

Career ending (identity loss, being discarded). In this study, older dancers' psychological well-being is affected mostly by the perception of limited time left as dancers. This seems to be especially traumatic for those who combine *what they are* with *what they do*, to whom the identification with ballet came at a very early age:

[The transition to the end of the career] ... was very hard. My life has always been the dance. Always on stage. I started at a very early age because my parents were also dancers. They had a school and choreographed for me. I was already dancing when I was 7 years old things made just for me. And that is my life. I do not know how to explain it. There is nothing else I enjoy as much as ballet.

[Principal, female, 41 years old]

Expressions such as “sense of loss” and “sense of emptiness” emerged:

There are people who go through that [the transition to retirement] without any problems. For me it was the opposite. Also for “Matilda” and “Claire”. “Matilda” had a deep depression and was not able to recover. It happens to whom dancing was everything. I asked the help of a psychologist who told me that I have to find myself again as a woman. But I don't know how to be a woman. I just know how to be a dancer. I was a prima ballerina. One day I have everything and the next day I don't exist anymore. It is too violent... I have a child but it is not the same thing.

[Principal, female, 41 years old]

Additionally, older dancers in this study feel that they are being discarded as they are not invited to dance anymore, and no support is given to dancers in their transition to retirement. However, there are dancers to whom the transition to retirement constitutes a natural part of life. They make a clear separation in time (“time for dance and time to stop dancing”), and transfer meaning from inside to outside work, for example by giving support to their families.

4.3.2. Assessing needs and organizational resources

Intrinsic needs/Sense of worth. In this study, older dancers, like younger dancers, are intrinsically motivated. However, they differ in the sense that they want to continue to feel useful. This feeling of self-worth and being a valuable member of the organization, seems to be crucial for their intention to continue working:

I am very close [to retirement] but I will stay as long as I feel I am useful and wanted.

[Répétiteur, past: soloist, female, 53 years old]

Older dancers in this study reorient their goals through meaningful work, such as transmitting the experience that they have acquired to the youngest, teaching, mentoring colleagues or “giving back” (i.e., generativity). To quote:

[Important for me in that stage] is to give. When you cannot give in a way [dancing], you find another way to give...teaching, helping, choreographing, transmitting your knowledge to others.

[Soloist, female, 40 years old]

Making use of experience. By making use of the experience acquired over the years, dancers in this study can compensate and adjust their tasks more easily to their current capabilities:

[What is necessary for people to be fully engaged] ...This possibility of having projects where people can be used, taking full advantage of their potential... We should have creative labs to develop projects... we can include old dancers.

[Demi-soloist, male, 36 years old]

Planning for retirement. During the transition to the retirement stage, older dancers in this study need guidance in finding a new direction after ballet:

I think a good transition would be to prepare the dancer with psychological help at least a year or two before. And help the person to have something else to follow so as not to fall into a void.

[Principal, female, 41 years old]

4.3.3. Regulation strategies

Crafting. Older dancers in this study adopt different strategies to cope with age-related changes. From our data, four strategies emerged. The first form of crafting we called “career crafting”, the case of dancers who no longer want to dance because of age, and craft a new career within or outside the context of ballet. The new career represents a new goal, following losses in physical strength (i.e., loss-based selection). When the new career is within the context of ballet, it gives a dancer the sense of continuity:

Teaching is an extension of my passion for dance. In fact, everything in my life is influenced or will be by ballet. I think I could not radically change my life... I feel the need to stay close to dancers even if they do not dance anymore, and close to the stage, even if it is backstage.

[Corps de ballet, female, 40 years old]

However, the re-crafted career does not generate the same level of fulfillment. It seems to be a way to extend employability:

The longing that I felt... not as much for dance or being on stage, but for that joy that I felt when getting up in the morning to go to work. Honestly, I never felt it again... The passion for teaching is not even half of the passion that I have for ballet.

[Retired, past: principal, female, 56 years old]

During career crafting (i.e., the transition to a new career), and when dancers in this study perceive the loss in their ability to perform classical ballet (when compared to what they were able to do in the past), they protect their self-concept by adopting avoidance behaviors toward classical performances. An example is presented by a prima ballerina:

I am not telling you that I will not dance. I will, except classical dance. I know that if I do, I will not dance as I danced before, so I prefer not to dance classical anymore... I want people to remember me as I was once. I don't have the same conditions anymore.

[Principal, female, 41 years old]

The second form of crafting is what we call “role activating crafting” toward modern dance. Dancers in this study compensate physical decline by moving to modern dance, maintaining their level of functioning. Modern dance is less physically demanding, roles are not influenced by age (e.g., performing the princess in classical ballet requires a young dancer), and is not regulated by formal hierarchies (as is classical ballet, the princess being a prima ballerina). Dancers can take full advantage of their unused skills (i.e., their accumulated experience and physical capital), falling back on the autonomy provided by modern ballet to create their own pieces. The first author was able to attend initial rehearsals in classical and modern dance. While in classical ballet dancers must watch a ballet on the TV and replicate it; in modern dance the choreographer and the dancers brainstorm and create a new piece together. This idea is reflected in the extract below:

When we start getting older, it becomes easier to perform modern dance because of the pain. Classical is too demanding, so anti-nature ... In most modern dances, we are the ones to create the story.

[Demi-soloist, female, 36 years old]

Role identification emerged as a validation mechanism to the shift to modern dance:

I would say that I identify myself more in this period of my career with modern dance, as opposed to the beginning of my career when I identified myself only with the technical aspect of classical dance.

[Demi-soloist, male, 36 years old]

The third form of crafting among older workers we named “role adjusting crafting” toward character roles, which means that they will not need to dance anymore but to accept acting roles, lowering the level of functioning. It is a process of regulation after the loss of physical strength:

I am this old and I will not be the prince anymore but I can do other roles... I was an obsessed classical dancer and that has always been my path. I started to try other things because I couldn't anymore. It forced me to look at dance in another way.

[Principal, male, 48 years old]

Role enrichment validates the shift to character roles and gives meaning to work:

I am lucky because I am still active by playing character roles.... I persevere... They are also very demanding roles and imply study... When you are younger you don't realize that it is equally important and enriching... It is not just executing steps... Knowing how to tell a story is the key point in ballet.

[Soloist, female, 47 years old]

The fourth strategy we named “collaborative crafting”. In our study a group of older dancers developed a project to perform in several public schools, with three main objectives in mind: to dance, to make use of their extended knowledge, and to stimulate art in children (as they may be the audience for ballet in the near future). Based on their shared experience, they have created something specific for children, answering to their intrinsic need to feel self-worth.

5. Discussion

This study has shown how workers assess abilities and demands, needs and organizational resources, and how they better adjust to their work environments through different regulation strategies across their work lifespan. Our primary contribution is a framework that presents how the interplay between demands *and* abilities, needs *and* organizational resources, *and* regulation strategies contributes to a process of adjustment, consequently enhancing psychological well-being. We argue that psychological well-being at work depends on the level of correspondence between demands and abilities and needs and supplies, which varies according to age (e.g., chronological or organizational). When a misfit is perceived, workers engage in different self-initiated strategies to better adjust to their work environment. Our work contributes to the scant literature that integrates aging, well-being, and person-job fit (Zacher et al., 2014).

Moreover, our study has shown that, as needs change with age, organizational resources will be valued differently in each life stage, leading to the process of adjustment as long as they respond to specific career stage needs. For example, in an initial stage, an intense routine and challenging tasks impact positively on the well-being since these demands (i.e., intense routine and challenging tasks) enhance the sense of competence (through developing). However, in a later stage, an intense workload would help to reinforce the decline in physical strength, causing a negative impact on the need to feel useful. Midlife workers are extrinsically oriented, and focus on what the job has to offer them in reward. It seems that the effort to obtain self-efficacy from the previous life stage is now expected to be compensated through recognition, a sense of return on investment (Kahn, 1990). Older workers need to compensate for age-related losses making use of their experience so they can fulfill their intrinsic need to feel self-worth (through crafting). In line with Demerouti et al. (2001), our study has shown that organizational resources can be classified in accordance to its purpose: those that fulfill needs (in our study intrinsic and extrinsic needs), and those that are instrumental to achieve work goals or buffer the impact of demands on well-being. An intense routine, challenging tasks, rewards, and making use of experience are critical because they fulfill needs. Role models, social support, feedback, positive work conditions, and planning for retirement emerge as buffers of

stress in the relationship between demands-abilities and well-being. Our study contributes to the job demands-resource (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) by showing that organizational resources will be valued differently in each life stage, since they will respond to specific goals that lead to the process of adjustment.

Our study further suggests different regulation strategies according to life stage. Young workers' motivation to increase abilities (i.e., technical skills) drives developing strategies, which is in line with growth orientation and resource acquisition goals from the SOC and SST models (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Carstensen, 1995). We did not consider developing as crafting since it is not a proactive bottom-up approach (we interpreted *expecting to be challenged* as a non-proactive top-down approach). Our findings may indicate that young workers do not actively craft for developing because they do not feel prepared to. In fact, there is recent evidence of the need to feel self-confident as an antecedent of crafting (Niessen et al., 2016). In a similar vein, Eraut et al. (2000) found that confidence is a requirement to proactively seek learning opportunities in the workplace, especially for novices and experienced workers in mid-career. The authors found a triangular relationship between confidence, support, and challenge. Confidence arises from successfully meeting challenges at work, and confidence to take on such challenges depends on feeling supported (Eraut et al., 2000). Our work has shown that support and challenge are important organizational resources for young workers.

During midlife, perceiving the remaining time in their careers, workers engage in a preserving behavior in order to maintain their current level of functioning. Maintenance goals are consistent with the SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Different from what earlier research suggested, our study shows that detaching the body in specific circumstances to preserve it (what we named "body crafting") does not express lack of engagement (Kahn, 1990). The preservation of the body may generate an increase in psychological well-being by enhancing a dancer's sense of discretion, which is a basic human need and motive to craft (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Maintaining is a source of control over one's career and secures longer employability. Thus, we argue that maintaining strategies will lead to psychological well-being.

Our research further contributes to the literature on crafting by providing evidence of four forms of crafting among older workers. The first is career crafting. Workers engage in a new career, taking advantage of the knowledge accumulated over the years in their past profession. This career crafting is consistent with loss-based selection (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) since it follows age-related losses. Avoidance behaviors emerged, in line with SST (Carstensen, 1995). The second form of crafting among older workers is role activating crafting, through which workers maintain their level of functioning, using resources that are not being optimized. There are two main advantages of adopting this type of role crafting: (1) role is chosen according to expertise, not age; (2) workers are involved in the decision process (choreographing in the case of ballet). By doing so, the impact of age dilutes. The third form is role adjusting crafting, lowering the level of functioning, what Kooij et al. (2015) consider accommodative crafting. The last type of crafting among older workers is task collaborative crafting. By adopting this regulation strategy, older workers, who feel that they are being discarded, better adjust by developing a shared meaningful project, fulfilling their need to feel self-worth. This goes in line with the concept of compensation for losses in the SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Different from what Kooij et al. (2015) argued, our study does not provide evidence for developmental crafting among older workers.

Our results show that young workers focus on *enhancing* their personal resources via increasing demands in order to grow. They increase abilities in order to adjust the demands-abilities (D-A) equation. Midlife workers focus on *preserving* their personal resources so they can maintain D-A. Older workers focus on *compensating* for their losses in personal resources by finding a new goal (e.g., starting a new career), using an inactivated resource or by changing their task. These results are consistent with the SOC model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990): when young, individuals focus on growth (higher level of functioning), during midlife on maintenance (preserving the same level of functioning), and when older on regulation of losses via compensation (lowering the level of functioning). However, our work further suggests that, via "role activating crafting", workers are able to maintain the same level of functioning when older. "Role activating crafting" appears as a strategy to adapt to age-related losses and to stay longer in the workforce. Role enrichment and role identification arise as mechanisms of validation for role crafting (Pratt et al., 2006). Thus, our study gives examples of behavioral (role crafting) and cognitive crafting (role enrichment or role identification), and shows that cognitive and behavioral crafting can be deployed simultaneously.

The study's findings are potentially limited by several factors. First, the specific context in which our proposed relationships were examined may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Resources that are valued in one context might not be beneficial in another setting. Second, our study focuses on inter-individual differences, making possible the evaluation of cohort differences. Future research may be necessary to analyze intra-individual differences. Third, professional ballet dancers progress in traditional linear careers. Future research may consider boundaryless careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) or protean careers (Hall, 1996). By disentangling age and tenure, it will be possible to understand how workers assess fit or misfit when embracing a new career. Last, our study focused on the concept of crafting introduced by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and further developed by Tims et al. (2012). However, it is important to have in mind that other authors had previously noticed that employees proactively change their jobs via self-initiated actions to change tasks or relational boundaries of their work in order to improve person-job fit, meaning, and work identity, giving it different labels, such as social shaping, workplace learning, or self-directed learning (see for example Ellinger, 2004; Kulik, Oldham, & Hackman, 1987).

This study has several implications for theory. First, crafting emerges as an adaptive process to respond to lifespan changes and is partly a function of the phases of one's lifetime. As far as we know, no other study has empirically differentiated crafting across the work lifespan. Second, and in line with the lifespan conception of age, our study has shown that the dynamic of gains and losses is conditioned by an individual's career and life events (Baltes et al., 1999). Third, we contribute to literature on well-being by showing that organizational resources may be central to fulfill intrinsic needs that are specific to life stages. In line with other well-being theories (e.g., the Job Demands-Resources model; Demerouti et al., 2001), our work shows that organizational resources may fulfill intrinsic needs, be instrumental to achieve goals, or buffer the impact of demands on well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001). Our study

presents evidence of how organizational resources are perceived across the work lifespan and why.

Simultaneously, this study also has several implications for practice. Consistent with both lifespan psychology and organizational psychology literatures (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), our work has shown that when experiencing the loss in a main resource, other resources may be re-activated through crafting. Thus, even employees in embodied careers actively shape their work environment in order to better adapt to it. The importance of this is more evident for older workers to whom the loss of the physical strength is inevitable, and other careers in which age is determinant (e.g., fashion models, professional athletes, manual occupations). Both maintaining and crafting may be important strategies to extend employability and to promote active aging. Further, our framework will help HR managers to track their employees' fit perceptions across time. Moreover, our study has presented evidence of age-related changes that derive not only from the task itself, but also from the role performed. HR managers may clarify role expectations and provide employees with career planning, in which expectations and accomplishments are monitored and adjusted over time. Practitioners should support employees in their transition to retirement, smoothing this transition and helping to envision *what is next*.

6. Conclusion

This paper has three main contributions. First, by proposing an interplay of demands and abilities, needs and organizational resources, and regulation strategies that work in tandem to the process of adjustment, sustaining psychological well-being at work. The study has found that a process of adjustment between individuals and organizations is dynamic and involves variables that are related to the work task, to the work role, and to individuals' needs and goals. Second, by showing that organizational resources contribute differently across the work life span since they respond to specific goals that lead to the process of adjustment. Finally, we provide empirical evidence of forms of crafting across the work lifespan and among older workers.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Filipa Rocha Rodrigues:Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Formal analysis, Resources, Investigation, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization.**Miguel Pina e Cunha:**Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Resources, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.**Filipa Castanheira:**Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Resources, Writing - review & editing.**P. Matthijs Bal:**Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing.**Paul G.W. Jansen:**Validation, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing, Supervision.

Appendix A. Key questions for interview guide

Note: The sequence of questions varied according to the responses provided.

- When did you decide to become a ballet dancer?
- Could you please describe the main moments of your career?
- What are the most positive aspects of your career? And the least positive ones?
- How would you describe the typical routine of a ballet dancer?
- Which tasks do you prefer at work, and why?
- Please describe moments in your career when you felt fully engaged
- What drives you as a dancer?
- How could an organization (not this one but any ballet company) contribute to increase the dancer's level of psychological well-being?
- Do you feel happy and fulfilled?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years' time? And in ten years? Why?

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