

## ABSTRACT

How do people influence their own development within biological, societal, and resource constraints? The action-theoretical conceptualization of the model of selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC-model; M. M. Baltes & P. B. Baltes, 1990; Freund & P. B. Baltes, 2000) proposes that setting and pursuing personal goals plays an important role in this respect. People usually have more than one goal at a time. The present study investigated how the *relations among goals* affect adaptive life management. Such relations can take the form of conflict, mutual facilitation, or independence. To obtain objective information on the participant's goal involvement, I used the goal of starting to exercise as a common goal for all participants. Younger ( $n = 99$ ;  $M = 25$  years) and older ( $n = 46$ ;  $M = 64$  years) exercise beginners participated in a questionnaire study with two sessions at an average interval of 4.2 months. A subsample of 52 younger and 29 older participants also took part in a diary phase. All participants reported three personal goals besides the common goal of starting to exercise. Of prime interest were the interrelations among these four goals (one exercise goal and three additional goals). Through use of a new assessment instrument, the study showed that two independent properties can be used to characterize intergoal relations: the degree to which a person's goals *conflict* with each other, and the degree to which these goals *facilitate* each other. Both intergoal conflict and intergoal facilitation were related to indicators of effective life management. Intergoal conflict was negatively related to various facets of psychological well-being. Intergoal facilitation was associated with an increased intensity in pursuing one's goals (according to subjective and objective indicators). Older adults tended to report less intergoal conflict and more intergoal facilitation than younger adults. They also were more effective in maintaining their desired change in lifestyle (i.e., regular physical exercise) over a longer period of time. The more integrated goal relations of older participants appear to play a decisive role in their higher exercise adherence. In all, the results are in line with developmental theories that propose that adult development is not only characterized by developmental losses, but also by a potential for developmental gains (e.g., increasing goal integration and life-management competence). The results further show that the selection of nonconflicting and facilitative goals helps people in their attempts to actively influence their own life course.