

Researchers concerned about young people's responsibility for their work ability

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Credit: University of Gothenburg

Young people in working life see themselves as solo players responsible for maintaining their own work ability. They regard themselves as holding the ball when the job requires new knowledge and motivation, according to research from the Sahlgrenska Academy.

"It is really serious when [young people](#) feel that they must assume responsibility for their own [work ability](#). The employer, of course, has a large responsibility for creating good conditions in working life and one should not expect young people to assume such a large responsibility,"

says Maria Boström, ergonomist/qualified physiotherapist and doctoral researcher in Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

She has previously been noted for her research into how young adults (21-25 years) act in relation to working life and work ability. To have control over the job, receive support and not have their [private lives](#) affected negatively have been shown to be capable of improving work ability.

Major requirements

In one of her studies 24 persons aged 25-30 years were interviewed in depth about their perception of their own work ability, what it meant to have work ability and what was it that made it fluctuate over time.

"They perceived that it is up to them. I'm the one who has to experience working life as being meaningful and I'm the one who has to possess knowledge and then be able to solve everything myself. I believe it is unfortunate that they perceive things in that way," says Maria Boström.

Half of those interviewed were women, half were men, with varying educational levels and a wide spread within the labor market. There was the cleaner, the restaurant employee, the carpenter, the fitter, the doctor, the engineer, etc. and, common to them all was the perception that work ability was their own responsibility.

Low expectation

"They perceive that if the boss is friendly, warm and provides support, work ability is enhanced, but they do not expect the boss to create conditions for a good work ability. The role of the union in that context is not mentioned at all in the interviews," notes Maria Boström.

She emphasizes concepts such as introduction, guidance and mentorship. Tools which need to be developed in order for young people to enter working life in the right way.

"There are many players who can be of importance in order for people to be able to both enter, and deal with, working life. One needs to know when one can speak out and when one should speak out, for example when one has too much to do. Recovery is important, not least of all for young people in working [life](#). Moreover, [young adults](#) assess a balance between work and leisure, which benefits recovery and work ability," says Maria Boström.

More information: Maria Boström et al. Experiences of work ability in young workers: an exploratory interview study, *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health* (2015). [DOI: 10.1007/s00420-015-1101-7](#)

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