

Taking stock early on is crucial for working late in life

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Do you want to keep working until you're 70, or even 75? Then, it's good to give this some thought before you turn 50. New research now calls for early planning, and at the same time shoots down prejudices against working seniors.

"We initially believed that [people](#) who worked late in [life](#) had an arranged situation that they just stepped into. That they, for example, handled the bookkeeping for the family's market garden or continued on in the academic world based on their previous position. But, that was not the case. One of our central findings was instead that they began changing their career relatively early on. Completely free, beyond contemporary norms, and often without role models," says Kerstin Wentz, PhD researcher and licensed psychologist at the department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Sahlgrenska Academy and University Hospital.

The study, published in the *Journal of Business and Economics*, is based on qualitative interviews in [focus groups](#) of five to eight people, all ranging in age from 69 to 75 and actively working at least part-time 50%. A total of 43 people participated in four locations in Västra Götaland.

Kerstin Wentz and her colleague Kristina Gyllensten, Dpsych researcher and licensed psychologist at the department of *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, handled different focus groups in the study, and then made the analysis together.

The common denominator of the participants was that they had already taken stock of their future working situation when they were middle aged. For some, it was at their own discretion while for others it was because they worked in industries where job security was questionable. Many changed gears and were self-employed or worked as a consultant, while those who remained employees began what researchers call career crafting. Work was an aspect of how they flourished as a human being, and the choices they made were based on joy and job satisfaction.

Learning and flexibility

"They took themselves seriously and thought about what they wanted out of life. They acted proactively and maintained their ability to grow and learn new things. One had earned chainsaw certificate at the age of 70, while the scholars of the study continued taking courses even in advanced years. They worked with exactly what they wanted to and said no to everything else, continuously crafting and being flexible without being jerky," says Kerstin Wentz.

In the Swedish job market, older people are a minority that is expected to grow. Despite this, there are no qualitative studies in this area according to Kerstin Wentz. The purpose of this research was to explore living experiences of ongoing and successful participation in working life, and illuminate socioeconomic and psychological processes.

The participants in the study often encountered an environment that had little understanding for them. While family members were on board with it, their peers would sometimes ask whether they were ever going to stop working. However, the participants thought that combining a part-time job with an active social life meant more to them than moving abroad, for example. They felt that life without a job meant a risk of getting bored.

Change of direction at 45

"Our interviewees were exceptionally creative and were part of a group that chose to keep working before it became politically correct. But, society needs structures in place so that more people have the opportunity to change direction at a relatively early age. We should have vocational counseling and individual evaluation for 45-year-olds the same as we have for teenagers. We think this is a must if we want people to be able to work longer," says Kerstin Wentz.

Another change she wants to see relates to the right to take out student loans, which is currently limited to age 47. She thinks that ten years or more should be added to give people more freedom and control.

"Self-determination combined with enjoying your work favors recovery. Being able to control is, in and of itself, resource generating - all while working," she states.

More information: Link to the article:
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