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LATER LIFE WORKERS: EXPLORING HOW WE CAN SUPPORT OUR CLIENTS



DR CATHY BROWN AND GILLY FREEDMAN CONSIDER HOW CAREER DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS CAN BETTER HELP THEIR CLIENTS IN THEIR LATER-LIFE CAREERS

Why is it relevant for us to consider this? With our increasing longevity, many of us are finding ourselves contemplating having to work in our later years (Gratton and Scott, 2017). This leaves us with a question; ‘how can we work for longer without facing boredom or burnout?’

Although there are no formal definitions to distinguish older workers, as stated in 2022 by Claire Brader in the House of Lords Library, here we will define later-life as being age 60+ years, as distinct from our mid-life as being age 45-60 years. Whilst mid-life challenges have been explored (for example Brown and Wond, 2020; Walker, 2019), the pressures facing us in our later-life are less understood.

However, despite being under-researched, this is an area of increasing relevance. With inadequate pension provision compounded by the cost-of-living crisis, more people are needing to work into their 60s and 70s (Gratton and Scott, 2017). In 2022 the Office of National Statistics declared that people working in the UK above the age of 65 is now at record levels.

As well as being a growing part of our workforce, there can be intricate dynamics facing later-life workers. With thousands leaving the workforce during the pandemic, many are now rejoining in a move of ‘unretirement’, as termed by the Guardian on 16th August 2023. Such individual complexities in career decision-making are often compounded by managing personal ill health, along with caring responsibilities.

Putting ourselves in the shoes of our later-life clients

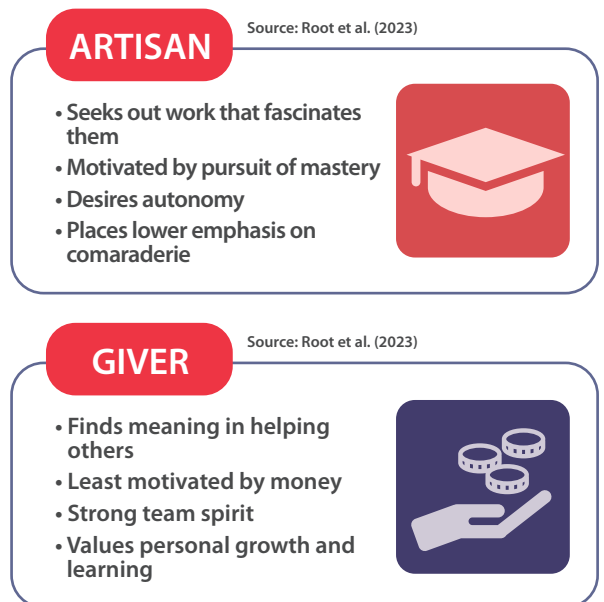
Here, we can draw upon an extensive survey by Bain and Company, where they engaged with 40,000 workers in 19 countries, across all sectors and job types, to understand their experiences of work (Root et al., 2023). Whilst they identified six archetypes across all workers, when we focus on workers over 60 years, they consistently related to the two archetypes of Artisan and Giver from the six archetypes identified, the other four being Striver, Pioneer, Explorer and Operator. (Figure 1)

Interestingly, similar findings were borne out within our own independent primary research of clients aged over 60 years (through 14 interviews and 13 questionnaires). When we put ourselves in their shoes, some interesting findings emerged.

When this primary research cohort shared what they regarded most highly within work, this was (in order): being valued for contribution, doing meaningful work, helping others, having flexibility and autonomy, having

social interaction, and being challenged. Interestingly, what they valued least was promotion, financial compensation and job title.

Figure 1: Two archetypes of Artisan and Giver



However, these later-life workers experienced some barriers to performing well. These included internal barriers, such as memory loss, slower ability to process information, gaps in IT and social media skills, and loss of self-esteem. As well as internal barriers, some organisational barriers were experienced as well, including lack of access to training courses (which were available for younger employees), less availability of challenging roles, and absence of career discussions focusing on their future at work.

What does this mean for organisations?

Given this growing number of later-life workers within the workforce, several organisations are already recognising the value in actively targeting older workers, including Aviva, Boots, B&Q and Next (Source: restless.co.uk). With many organisations facing increasing numbers of unfilled job vacancies and talent shortages, compounded by restrictions on immigration, later-life workers can become a valuable part of a talent attraction and retention strategy.

Given the complexities of individuals’ situations and experiences, what would organisations need to be mindful of when attracting, integrating and retaining



such workers into their workforce? Our survey results, combined with Root et al. (2023) and CIPD (2022), inform these suggested pointers:

- With many later-life workers wanting to fit work into the context of their lives, flexible, part-time/zero-hours working contracts are often craved by older workers;
- With many wanting more social contact in their life, being part of a team can become an even more important consideration in the workplace;
- Having fluidity in job design allowing for flexibility in managerial roles, key projects and mentoring and coaching opportunities can complement such agile contracts;
- Despite having reached the latter chapter of their careers, later-life workers still want to learn, train and develop, meeting a personal desire for progression;
- Having supportive, tailored benefits can be greatly valued, such as paid carers leave, private healthcare services and access to occupational health, thereby removing barriers that sometimes inhibit later-life workers from being active contributors to the workforce.

With organisations needing to evolve to embrace the opportunity that later-life workers provide, what does supporting clients in their later-life mean for us as career practitioners?

Implications for career practitioners

We can support our clients in their later-life, by:

- Reminding them of the continued valuable expertise they bring and the additional qualities age can offer workplaces, helping them to side-step age bias and stereotyping;
- Encouraging them to upskill or reskill, as employers value skills above experience;
- Helping them to identify what gives their work meaning and how they can give back – important satisfiers for later-life workers.

Tips for career practitioners

We need to consider what types of tools and activities we can use with our clients in their later-life. These may include:

- Enabling this age group to connect with what really matters now, what their purpose is and what 'lifts their hearts'; for example, legacy or later big birthday speeches;
- Widening their potential opportunities, for example thinking through whether they want to maintain, pivot, accelerate or retire;
- Reminding them of the qualities they bring pertaining to maturity, for example wisdom, emotional intelligence and intuition;
- Encouraging reverse mentoring for skills swap;
- Taking a holistic approach by inviting discussion of current, aspirational and outside work priorities.

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25

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