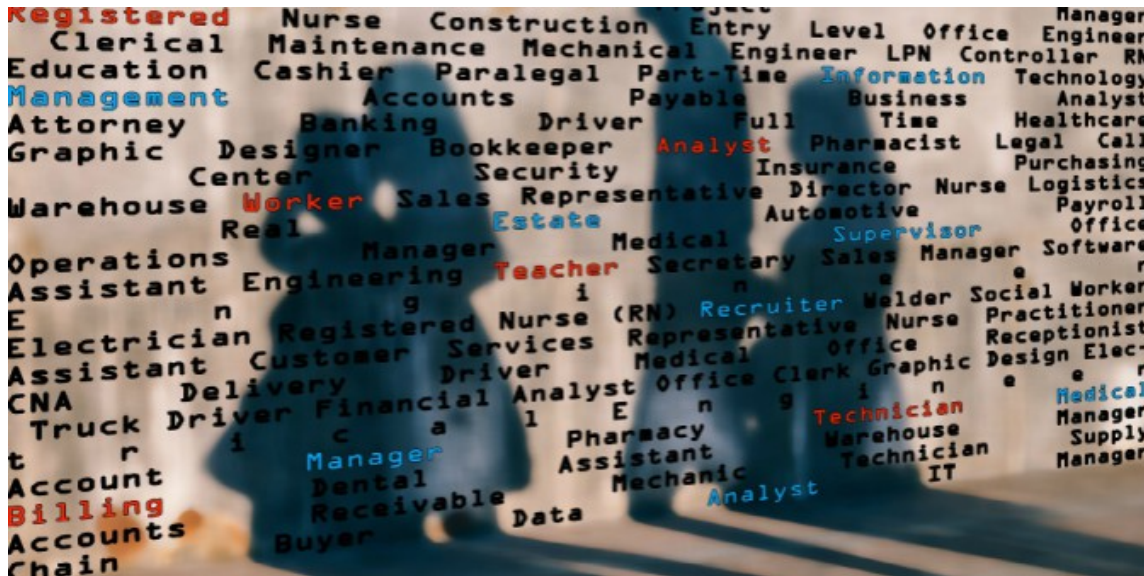


# We need to have a career plan B up our sleeves



Our societies, especially in developed countries, will soon have a majority of their adult population in the over 50 group. The UK will reach [this point](#) in the mid 2030s. This increasing healthy [longevity](#) means that at age 50 we likely have [25-30 years](#) of health and energy to look forward to. At the same time, most of us leave our mainstream employers in our early to mid 50s. When finding that the job market is ageist and similar positions are not forthcoming for many, the only option is early retirement. This equation is not adding up – for society or individuals. How is society going to economically support our longevity? What are we personally going to do with all this time?

As Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott say in their seminal book '[The 100 Year Life](#)': we need to redefine our ideas of our careers from 'study-earn-retire' – financing 30+ years of retirement from a 35-40-year career is difficult – to seeing our lives as a series of shifts with different ways of working (full-time, part-time, employed, self-employed) interspersed with periods of learning and recharging.

There is every reason – from personal, economic, physical and mental wellbeing, to not being a burden on the next generation – as to why we should stay economically active for much longer, and no good reason – apart from ill health – why we could not.

After the financial crisis hit, I noticed a new question emerging from senior executives: 'Next, I would like to do work that makes a difference in the world. Can I do this and still earn a living?' I had much anecdotal evidence that this could be done, but to discover a repeatable model, I conducted research over a three-year period including interviews with over 90 executives from various sectors and geographies.

## Job-crafting

This resulted in a paper on organisational [best practices](#) for executive's later career development and the companion [book](#) for individual executives. With a second 25-30-year work period ahead of us, we will all need to learn how to constantly develop new work options for ourselves – it will become a vital life skill going forward. The 'secret sauce', the research found, is what HR academics call '[job-crafting](#)': we all naturally adapt our jobs to fit our particular experience and interests:

*Most executives who successfully transitioned to meaningful (and financially rewarding if needed) new careers found a way of fitting the societal issue they were passionate about into the organisation's strategy.*

*This meant that they could use some time and resources in working on their Purpose topic. As a result, they created good business for their employer, affected change in the organisation, helped impact societal issues – while learning the skills and building the networks necessary for a future career. A real win-win.*

To discover what topic to 'job-craft' with and develop it into something that makes a material difference to your organisation and external stakeholders, you cannot sit in your office and try to figure it out. You need new inputs to process into insights and decisions. This means getting out of your comfort zone, experiencing new things, building new strategic networks – to figure out how you could contribute to solving an issue, what skills you need to learn to be effective in this space and become known as a valued contributor to the community working on solving 'your' issue. This is how we become natural candidates when a new job-opportunity emerges.

[Richard Gillie](#)'s story (from my book) is a practical example for how 'job crafting' can work. When chief procurement officer of Marks & Spencer, he wondered: "Could there be a way for M&S to have only 'green energy'?" No business had done this before. He spent time 'skunk-working' to find out. Timing was good and his idea got included in the now famous M&S [Sustainability Plan A](#) and Richard spent 10 per cent of his time on this exciting project.

They achieved their goal, Richard became chief sustainability officer of M&S and later for Kingfisher, before becoming a highly sought-after advisor. He was, unwittingly, laying the groundwork for the [Re100 movement](#) (corporates committing to 100 per cent renewable energy) with giants like Apple recently [announcing](#) achieving this goal.

Without this 'job-crafting', Richard would have taken a very different career route and a much longer time lapsed before corporates could see the possibility of running their operations on 100 per cent green energy.

With our ageing work force and the prospect of AI [taking away](#) up to 50 per cent of even white collar jobs, learning how to develop new career options for ourselves will become a vital life-skill. This is done by constantly exploring and developing other options, while we are working away at our current job, so we can pivot to a new job – without a 'cliff edge' exit and cold job-search start – should it become necessary.

A practical approach is to 'job-craft' while in your current job, as described above. This helps create great business for your employer, helps affect change on societal issues AND create new career options for you. Once you have learned to create new career options, you can do it again and again – for as many years as you wish.



Notes:

- This blog post is based on the author's book [Purpose & Impact: How Executives are Creating Meaningful Second Careers](#), Routledge, 2018.
- The post gives the views of its author, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.
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