

# Exploring the 100-year life

Understanding the 100-year life, why it's important to consider and preparing ourselves for what it means



## What do we mean by the 100-year life?

Our lives are lengthening, and we will all be touched by this.

"A child born in the West today has > 50% chance of living until over 105, [...] a child born a century ago had <1% chance of living until that age."

Gratton and Scott, 2016: page 2

If we are now 20, we have 50% chance of living to over 100, if we are 40 we have an evens chance of reaching 95, and if we are 60 we have a 50% chance of making 90 or more.

## Why is it important to consider?

We are in the middle of an extraordinary transition that few of us are prepared for. If we get it right, it will be a real gift; if we fail to prepare, it could be a curse (Gratton and Scott, 2016: 1). Besides, there is not a lot written about it to help us.

Imagine that our life expectancy has increased, that our retirement age is fixed. We have to face into this problem of not being able to afford this increased pension unless we work for longer or live on less.

However, with this extra gift of time, life is full of possibilities. How we choose to use and structure this time is at the heart of our response. We will move away from the constraints of a three-stage life: education, work, retirement, to one that is multi-staged, with more variety where there will be more opportunities to craft our own path rather than following pre-set expectations.

Already we are seeing this within the 18-30 year population, who are already responding by keeping their options open, turning away from commitments past generations had made at that stage and pursuing other lifestyles and choices. However, this is relevant for all of us, not just the young.

Moreover, it will be challenging for organisations, institutions and governments to evolve their policies, infrastructure and legislation to be fit for purpose for this multi-staged living.

## How could this impact my work?

"If you live 100 years, save around 10% of your income and want to retire on 50% of your final salary, at what age will you be able to retire?."

Gratton and Scott, 2016: page 6

The answer is 80. Given this, more of us will be working until our 70s or 80s. However, it is likely that we may have a variety of careers, with intervening breaks and transitions. We may have one career that maximises our financial earnings, another that enables us to balance work with other commitments and another that provides social contribution.

We will need to continually invest in our skills and knowledge. With a three stage life, it was possible that the knowledge and skills gained our 20s could last a full working career; now this is unlikely.

There may be different ways of being in work at different times. At times we may be an explorer,

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searching for answers, or having adventures with no goals. At others, we may be an independent producer, experimenting in new areas with pop-up solutions and prototypes. On other occasions, we may craft portfolios pursuing a combination of activities.

## What are some other implications for my life?

“Transitions will become the norm.”

Gratton and Scott, 2016: 9

When we transition between phases, it may work less well to purely take time out, recharging our vitality, but letting our networks and skills erode. Instead, it may work better for us to have ‘re-creation’ transitions where we invest in new skills, knowledge whilst building new networks. By doing this we can bridge into new stages, rather than returning to the past.

It may be prudent to develop our full range of assets. As well as our tangible assets, for example: money, property, it may be also wise to invest in our intangibles:

- **Productive assets** – skills, knowledge, networks
- **Vitality assets** – physical and mental wellbeing, our friends and family relationships
- **Transformational assets** – self-knowledge, openness to new experiences

Furthermore, generating a deeper sense of self may be wise. The moral philosopher, Derek Parfit, describes this in terms of psychological connectedness. When we live a longer life, our single thread of personal identity, connecting the past-present-future will be

even more crucial – and challenging – to help us with our psychological continuity.

Furthermore, our relationships may evolve. Our key relationships may last longer, and experience greater changes in our life situations. Consequently, such partnerships will need to flex with our evolving personal contexts.

In addition, our work stages will not be age dependent and will be cross-generational. It is likely that we will mingle more with people from different age groups, encouraging us to take multiple perspectives and stretch our view of the world.

## What sorts of things would be helpful to consider?

1. **Building enabling capabilities** – cultivating youthfulness and plasticity, an ability to play and improvise together with novel action taking where we question old habits and challenge stereotypes are likely to facilitate our life varying life stages. In addition, developing our ability to anticipate and manage transitions will undoubtedly ease our life journey
2. **Strengthening our relationship with ourselves** – investing further in personal reflection, where we can deepen our sense of self will support the cultivating of our personal identify and psychological cohesiveness
3. **Reviewing your assets** –sense-checking our full range of tangible and intangible assets will be helpful. We can consider what do we need to develop and what may we need to let go of

## What are my next steps?

1. **Opening up new conversations with life partners** – helping us to stay aligned with our ever-evolving work and life stages
2. **Identifying fellow pioneers** – providing a creative community within which to explore challenges and create possibilities
3. **Taking a deeper dive** – reading further into this area may be of value

### Top tip



If you'd like to explore in more depth the topics that this article has raised, then I would totally recommend reading:

The 100-year life: Living and working in an age of longevity by Lynda Gratton and Andrew Scott  
Bloomsbury: 2016

It is an insightful read



### About the writer

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Cathy Brown is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist, consultant and author. She runs Evolve Consulting Services Limited which works with individuals, teams and businesses to manage transition and change.

She works as a transition coach and a career counsellor with individuals and teams. She is also a guest lecturer at University of Derby. In addition, Cathy is a founding trustee of the Evolve Transition Trust, which supports disadvantaged people through life transitions.