23. AS TIME GOES BY

Geronto Guidance

ABSTRACT

Demographic trends are leading to increased and extended workforce participation by older workers, raising the requirement for career guidance to serve this population. This chapter argues that older people have distinctive career guidance needs. Drawing upon a small-scale research study, it identifies characteristics of older people and their largely unmet guidance needs. It goes on to propose particular considerations to be borne in mind in planning to meet the needs of older workers.

INTRODUCTION

Most guidance activities are aimed at young people or at adults who are going through education or employment transitions (Watts & Sultana, 2004). With an ageing population, this will have to change. Few guidance activities currently focus on one of the later, but important transitions in life, the process of retiring (Plant, Bakke & Barham, 2018). This chapter explores some aspects of guidance for older people, i.e. Geronto Guidance (from *gerón* (greek): old man, elders). It uses Norwegian research with female academics to suggest that for many this transition is not smooth, nor easy, nor dignified. This small sample of academics does not depict the general situation of retiring people, but it points to a blind spot in lifelong career guidance.

AGEING – A DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE

Population trends in Nordic countries reflect the demographic trend of most European countries, which are getting older. This is reflected in the European population ‘pyramid’, which, tellingly, no longer has the shape of a pyramid, due to low birth rates and increased longevity (Figure 23.1). Finland and Denmark come closest to matching the European trend, while Iceland presents a more stable pyramid. In no Nordic country except Iceland do the younger age cohorts equal the larger cohorts of those who are due to leave the workforce in the coming decade (Grunfelder, Rispling, & Norlén, 2018, pp. 24–35).

Figure 23.1. Age distribution, European Union, 2016 (Source: Index Mundi, 2018)

An ageing population creates new challenges to policies and practice across Europe (Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2017), with the specific nature of the challenge varying between countries. One common policy response has been pension reforms, enacted in Nordic countries in the first decade of the 21st century, both delaying the age of eligibility for state pension and giving greater freedoms over retirement timing (Hinrichs, 2004). Accompanying measures include providing financial incentives for older workers to remain in work beyond this age (e.g. Andersen, Määtänen, & Volkonen, 2014). Hinrichs (2004) notes that these changes have the effect of transferring to employees, especially older ones, more individual responsibility for complex retirement decisions and pension arrangements.

Least risky amongst the new freedoms is that of working more (Hinrichs, 2004). The demographic shift and policy responses have led to increasing employment rates of older workers, and a lengthening of working life. The European Trade Unions (ETUI), in their Benchmarking Europe analysis (ETUI, 2013, p. 26) make a point of the high rates of Nordic labour market participation (SE: 70%; DK & FI: 60%) of older workers (aged 55–64). In comparison, in Malta, the corresponding figure is 30%. With respect to lengthening working lives, between 2000 and 2017 the effective age of retirement increased in Denmark to age 64.6 (up 1.4 years), in Finland to 65.4 (up 3.6 years), in Norway to 65.4 (up 1.4 years) and Sweden to 66

(up 2.3 years), only declining slightly in Iceland, but from a higher starting point (to 69.8 from an earlier 70.3 years) (OECD, n.d.).

Alterations to pension policy, individualisation of decisions and risks, and later retirement all occur within a social context which – despite anti-discrimination legislation – may include extensive stereotyping of older people. Nordic countries generally evidence less negative attitude towards older people than is apparent in southern and eastern Europe, but still some 20% of older people report some experience of discrimination concerning work (Salomon, 2012). In a Finnish study, this leads Pärnänen (2012) to raise the question ‘Policies can be changed, but can also the behavior of employers and employees be changed?’ (p. 68). Noting that issues are complex as neither party exists in a vacuum, this study nevertheless records age segregation in parts of the workforce, a preference by employers for recruiting younger workers, and some expectation that ‘older workers should give up their jobs for younger colleagues’ (p. 76). There is widespread evidence that older workers are a group at high risk in terms of discrimination and social exclusion (e.g. Clayton, Greco, & Persson, 2007; Ford & Clayton, 2007; Truxillo, Finkelstein, Pytlovany, & Jenkins, 2018). This evidences a paradox where employers are content with older workers, but they may be reluctant to hire, retrain or even retain them, often due to negative stereotypes, such as lack of swiftness, more days of sick-leave, or other outdated attitudes (Kirk & Belovics, 2005).

These broader contexts indicate a range of external factors which influence individual people’s decisions to continue working into older age. Alongside these sit personal factors including health and well-being, intrinsic job satisfaction, autonomy, work prospects and job security, personal finances, and those working conditions balanced between the workplace and the individual: work–life balance, flexible hours of work, psychosocial aspects of the workplace, and the prospects for alternative meaningful activity. The decisions faced by older workers, in Nordic countries and elsewhere, are at least as complex as those faced by young workforce entrants, but receive only a fraction of the attention from the career guidance profession.

AGEING – A SOCIAL INCLUSION CHALLENGE

The aim of including older people in the labour market has both social inclusion and macro-economic drivers. With regard to social inclusion, work provides one important setting for connecting to other people in one’s social and cultural environment (Blustein, 2006) by providing the framework for social contacts, for social recognition, and, in some countries, for access to social services. For each individual, how central work is to their sense of social inclusion will influence their decision about the desirability and the timing of leaving the workforce.

But there is also a macro-economic drive for engaging the older workforce and extending their working years, as pointed out by Cedefop (2010, 2012, 2015) and

Eurofound (2017). We face a paradox that labour-market participation rates of older people could drop over the coming years due to age-related discrimination (Loretto, Vickerstaff, & White, 2007) at a time when the cohort of younger entrants to the workforce is significantly smaller than the age cohort likely to retire.

This leads to the conclusion that truly life-long guidance (European Council, 2004) will be needed even more than previously, as older people could find themselves excluded from meaningful work, and from the links to society that work and other forms of active societal participation (e.g. voluntary work) provide, with the result that national economies lose the employee numbers and skills that they need.

‘AGE’ AS A CONSTRUCT

One complexity in discussing ‘older workers’ is defining the group: how old is an ‘older worker’? According to the EU Lisbon benchmark the priority group of older workers is those between 55 and 64 years of age (see e.g. European Commission, 2009, p. 64). In the past, statisticians tended to take the age of 45 as the demarcation between being a younger (24–44 years) or an older worker (45–64 years), but the extension of working lives and healthy lifespans has contributed to a more common demarcation at age 50, as productivity is reported to increase until at least that age (Nilsson, 2016).

The UK’s commission into the future for lifelong learning (Schuller & Watson, 2009) argued that the traditional model (Table 23.1) of the life course was outdated. They proposed a new model to reflect both later young-adult transitions into full adult roles, and an extended ‘third age’ period of active life, including employment and voluntary work, before the limitations of ageing affect the majority of people.

Table 23.1. Proposed model of life-course and transitions (from Schuller & Watson, 2009)

	0–20	21–25	25–50	50–65	65–75	75+
Current model	Youth	Adult/worker			Retired/pensioner	
Proposed model	Extended youth		Adult/Worker	Third age		Fourth age

Further questions arise both on the experience of age and on perceptions of age. ‘Chronological age’, a simple measure of years since birth, may not align with ‘biological age’, which reflects the physical and mental wellbeing of each individual and their life expectancy. Both health services and insurance providers pay considerably more attention to the latter in providing services and setting individualised charges, although other provisions, such as entitlement to state pension payments, attend only to chronological age.

From an extensive literature review on the conceptualisation of ageing, particularly as related to extending working life, Nilsson (2016) identifies two further aspects of

ageing: social ageing, and mental/cognitive ageing. Social ageing is significantly influenced by the attitudes of others, including in the workplace, and affects each individual's sense of possibility for social inclusion, in the workplace and elsewhere in society. Mental/cognitive ageing is partly influenced by hereditary and lifestyle factors. It is also affected by organisational and societal factors offering possibilities, stimulation and motivation.

Perception of age changes for each individual over time. For an adolescent the age of sixty is 'old', but by later middle age, that perception may change significantly. Perception of age can therefore be viewed as a social construct, subject to considerable variation depending on the measurement perspective applied. This has implications for the concept of lifelong guidance, which will need to take these individual perspectives into account, through providing varied guidance services in response to highly differentiated guidance needs. Ambivalence about experience and perceptions of age will be evident in the research participants whom we discuss later.

CAREER GUIDANCE THEORY – FOR OLDER WORKERS?

Career guidance, if it is to be lifelong (NOU, 2016), should encompass the transition to retirement. This transition requires a comprehensive reorganisation of life roles, a change of position in society, and associated developmental and transition tasks. Career guidance theory and practice are however, mainly developed through research and experience in guiding students and young workers. Few guidance activities currently focus on older workers (Plant et al., 2018). Canaff (1997) claims that this 'blind spot' may be connected to the way older workers are portrayed, especially in developmental theory, referencing Super's, Havighurst's and Eriksson's theories that concur that (working) life is over at age 65. She writes: 'this negative stereotype has permeated our culture and influenced our belief that one is no longer productive after 65' (Canaff, 1997, p. 87). Conversely, today, older workers both wish and are encouraged to stay longer in working life. Lytle, Foley, and Cotter (2015) argue that retirement should be considered as a career stage, and ask for additional research to investigate empirically how well prevalent career theories apply to older adults.

Developmental theories, such as Donald Super's (1957) work, addressed the normative stages of career growth, exploration and maintenance at a time of greater workplace stability than now exists. Later exposition of his theory includes life-span and life-space perspectives that are relevant to older workers who are both reaching the end of work 'life-span' and rebalancing activities within their 'life-space'. Career construction theory (CCT) (Savickas, 2005) addresses the need for individuals to maintain a sense of self throughout career development stages in an era when workplaces are less settled or predictable. The concept of adaptability, central to CCT, is relevant to retirement considerations in the 21st century. Adaptability resources include having a degree of concern about the future, the ability to take control of one's own occupational planning, curiosity about roles one might adopt, and the

confidence to pursue one's goals (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Career adaptability, a state of psychological preparedness for choice and change, is interrelated with the individual's experience of ageing (positive and negative), and is mediated by belief about time remaining, and opportunities left until retirement (Fasbender, Wöhrmann, Wang, & Klehe, 2019). The challenge to career guidance is not only to help older workers apply career adaptability in making work and retirement decisions, but to raise awareness of the positive and negative experiences of ageing, and to address future time perspectives:

When aiming to motivate older workers to actively plan for late career, the most direct route to this effect may not be to raise their career adaptability, but to change their thinking about the time and opportunities available to them related to work. (Fasbender et al., 2019, p. 33)

Research shows that older workers benefit from guidance aiming to support reflection on their own occupational role, and how the role is played out in various contexts (Simon & Osipow, 1996). It is also pinpointed that counselors have to be extra sensitive to older workers' particular situation (Canaff, 1997; Brewington & Nassar-McMillan, 2000). Moving from work to retirement, the whole pattern of social roles need to be reorganised as the role of paid worker decreases in centrality.

Fundamental questions about identity are raised as people switch the balance of their attention ... with the prospect of full retirement visible on the horizon. While work identity may typically have had greatest salience for men, it is also important for women who gained much of their sense of identity through work. (Barham & Hawthorn, 2010, p. 264)

Identity is formed through processing social and personal experiences, as an answer to the basic question: Who am I? But this is not a question to be posed just once in lifetime. Working with people in their fifties, Hawthorn (2007) identified 'unfinished business, either educational, emotional or in ambition' (p. 5) which led to them addressing the question 'Who do you want to be now?' This question persists into the last stage for the world of work.

Identity develops through recognition from others. Here we draw upon Honneth's work (1995) on recognition of identity which reflects and extends the processes outlined by Super (1957; Super et al., 1996) and Erikson (1950) in their delineations of developmental stages. Recognition, according to Honneth (1995), starts with a spontaneous claim from each of us: I require you to acknowledge the value I assign to myself, in relation to family and friends, the law and society. You recognise me through letting me experience myself as independent, equal and valuable. Recognition in personal relations, which are the most fundamental dimension according to identity and self, is expressed through emotional and physical closeness. In the legal system, it is a question of equality and being a legal entity. The third dimension points to a recognition of traits and abilities in society. Is contribution to society from the group whom I am associated with (or belong to), appreciated? Recognition is central in all

spheres of life, including the workplace. The recognition sought from society will change over time: it may shift from a claim for recognition of ambition and potential when younger, to recognition for experience and wisdom in older age (Erikson, 1950).

In the Nordic countries, older workers have the same rights and obligations as other people, but the reality may differ. This tendency is confirmed in a yearly published enquiry to map attitudes relating to older workers (Senter for seniorpolitikk, 2018). Here older workers, for example, say they do not have the same access to new knowledge as younger colleges. This can create a feeling of disrespect. Disrespect may be a consequence of not being recognised (Honneth, 1995, 2007). Both recognition and disrespect have consequences for the sense of identity and the self-concept.

With this backdrop, the need for developing Geronto guidance moves up the societal agenda, both in terms of research, and in terms of guidance activities. But how is this need perceived by the people who are affected by downsizing, structural re-organisation, or age-related discrimination? In order to provide some insight into these issues, we conducted research with a small sample of female academics during their final working period. This piece of research is presented below, and it serves as an illustration of some of the life-stage related issues which these women face. Recognition is one such important issue.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND INFORMANTS

This study investigates how Norwegian academic employees experience self and the transitional phase between working life and retirement. Older female academics belong to a group of workers who stay in working life the longest. They represent a group that has benefited from Norwegian education becoming more accessible to all from the 1960s. This entailed both the possibility to finance one's own studies through the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, and increased possibilities for women from all social classes to study. The proportion of women in the higher education sector has gradually increased, although men are still over-represented in the highest echelons of the academic workforce.

Informants were recruited as an opportunity sample of eight females between 63–66 years who work in teaching and research positions. Information, consent and contact processes met the stipulations of the NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data). The study used a narrative approach to capture the individual's experience of her work situation through a loosely structured interview, striving to allow the individual to talk freely about her own educational and professional choices, and about the experience of being in the final phase of professional life. All interviews were transcribed in full.

A hermeneutic interpretation of the data has been made (see Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Individual statements and the text as a whole are viewed in relation to each other, and each text is understood in light of what it says thematically about the

transition between working life and retirement. Challenges inherent to this phase, as well as the need for some guidance, were also thematised.

The interpretation has taken place at several levels (see Thagaard, 2018) and includes both the informants’ interpretation of their own life situation (interpretation of first degree) and the researcher’s interpretation of the reality that the informants have already interpreted themselves (interpretation of the second degree). In addition, an attempt is made to interpret the experiences in terms of their underlying meaning (third degree interpretation). As a result, central themes emerged, and are presented and discussed here.

The researcher’s interpretation in the second and third phases is not free of pre-conditioning. Knowledge of and personal experiences within the context in which the individual stories are embedded, may have had an impact.

Table 23.2 provides an anonymised overview of the key characteristics of the informants who come from two different higher education institutions, where they represent five different faculties, and have worked variously for between 16 and 40 years in the higher education sector. Three of the informants had been on leave from academia for certain periods in order to work in their field of practice. One of the informants had opted for a contractual pension half a year before the interview took place, another had reduced her position to 60% with the intention of reducing it further. One works in an 80% position, and the other five hold 100% positions.

Table 23.2. Informants

Informant	Age	Years in academia	Position category	Position appointment
Gunn	64	39	Lecturer ^a	100%
Berit	66	26	Lecturer	0%
Lise	65	17	Teacher ^b	60%
Else	66	34	Associate professor	100%
Astrid	63	21	Associate professor	100%
Kirsti	66	40	Professor ^c	100%
Inger	66	29	Lecturer	80%
Klara	65	29	Professor	100%

^a Secondary education teacher with a master’s degree
^b Secondary education teacher with a bachelor’s degree
^c Full professor

THE OCCUPATIONAL SELF-CONCEPT

Super, Savickas, and Super’s (1996) ideas of life-span, life-space and self-concept contribute a framework for understanding the underlying structure of meaning that each person ascribes to events in the past, expectations for the future, and how they

prioritise between different developmental tasks in the present. Each individual's basic personal values are considered to be the most fundamental aspect of their occupational self-concept, as they infiltrate life themes, give meaning to choices and are what the individual manoeuvres after.

This study depicts eight female academics who are highly committed to their work: it is not only their career, but also their calling. Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, and Velez (2018, p. 426) frame calling as an approach to work that reflects seeking a sense of overall purpose and meaning, in order to help others or contribute to the common good. In this study, women academics explain that they are emotionally attached to, and identify with, their professional role. Their basic values are closely connected to their career, and most women say they want their work 'to make a difference'. According to Duffy et al. (2018, p. 427), there is a difference between perceiving a calling and living a calling. The women in this study invest time and energy in what they consider to be their vocation, rather than just a job, and they seek satisfaction and a sense of purpose from work. The female academics say their discipline is their passion, and they describe themselves as hard-working 'project people', who have been engaged in work more fully than usual. Having this strong commitment to work is connected to living out one's calling, and refers to the level of commitment one has to an occupation or career field. All the academics certainly seem to have lived out their calling – according to their own account, often at the expense of social life and private time with their families.

Nevertheless, most women are of the opinion that it has been worth the effort, and that all-in-all, there has been an adequate balance. As Kirsti says:

Having had a fairly long working life, I think I have had a good one. It has been very joyful. It has meant a lot, it has been a very important part of my life, I think. And if I judge it myself, I think I've been able to balance the combination of family and working life. Maybe sloppy in ways. Sloppy with the wisdom and understanding, as my former boss said. Maybe it's something I could have done better ...

REORGANISATION OF LIFE STRUCTURE

Nordic work culture is traditionally characterised by so-called collectivistic individualism (Bakke, 2018; see also Bakke, Chapter 2, this volume). Collectivistic individualism refers to both supporting strong states and strong forms of collective organisation, and believing that one can act in one's own interests and be autonomous. This may also apply to academia. The female academics consider that their organisations have developed to be more individualistically oriented. The work situation has become more complex and demanding, and they believe that the introduction of the 'New Public Management' approach in higher education has changed values and patterns of thought, and that the focus has shifted from teaching and student learning processes to individually profitable work. This

responds to developments in Norwegian working life in general, as described by both Bakke (2018) and Kjærgård (2018). Attention to younger colleagues in doctoral programmes is mentioned by several as a dominant feature of the working environments represented in this study. All the women have noted that these developments in academia have led them repeatedly to consider quitting before the retirement age. In most cases, this was because the workload was too large, the changes in the organisation happened too quickly, or undermined the personal values which they brought to their work. Some of them say that *'my time is over'* and refer to values and working methods that have changed. They also experience that their own expertise is no longer as sought by management as before, or they feel less appreciated than younger colleagues. Inger said she felt that she *'perfectly matched the wallpaper'*.

On the other hand, these women experience that the skills they have developed are recognised by colleagues and students. They prioritise teaching and counselling, they still work hard and they pose great demands on themselves. At the same time, they feel that their own working capacity has changed. Else puts it thus:

We are not very attractive ... from 50 on. But then there is really a lot of expertise and working power to offer. When you reach 60 and over, you are not as vibrant. But boy, the kind of experience and overview we have. But it doesn't go as quickly; I notice that.

Time has gone by quickly and respondents find it difficult to make peace with the fact that they soon will have reached retirement age. For most of the interviewees, the certainty that 'the hourglass is about to run out' is perceived as an existential crisis. As Astrid says:

All of a sudden, age is important. This annoys me. I really don't need to be old.

All eight women except one say that heavy workload over the years has made them feel weary now, and all of them have experienced health challenges. However, six of the women think they still have much to contribute: they are not ready to leave working life, or not yet. Their identity is strongly linked to their work in higher education, and several say that they are afraid of losing this when the employment relationship ends. Kirsten says:

I don't know what will happen to me on the day I won't be coming here. If I've ever felt off-colour, I would nevertheless feel better upon arriving here.

On the other hand, facing the imminent transition to retirement, two of the women (Berit and Lise) have begun to ask questions like *'What does quality of life mean for me?'* They muse more often that life should be more than work, and both say they long for something more. Berit chose to quit when she was 65. She says:

Choosing to quit, is just as much about the longing for something else. Something that gives me something personal.

However, all women look forward to having greater control over how they use their time. They perceive the need to reorganise their life structure, they see opportunity to reconnect with old friends, and also have partly-formed plans to cultivate interests or hobbies in which they have not been able to invest time and effort for years. One says she wants to spend time with her grandchildren, and three have plans to engage in social causes. In this way, these three persons envisage that the values that they held throughout their working life may be transferred to other activities in their life as a retiree, so called bridging activities.

RECOGNITION AND DIGNITY

Social appreciation implies that individuals are recognised as persons possessing abilities of fundamental value to society. Retirement means to step down from paid work, to contribute to a lesser degree. In this study, all the women have begun thinking about how to step down, and they want to do it in a dignified way. They are aware that their working life has an ever-shortening time horizon, and therefore do not want to engage in long-term binding tasks. The women are also concerned with how their own skills can be advanced in the organization, and want a dialogue with the management on these issues. It does not seem as though the institutions are able to comprehend the fact the women wish to discuss this. For example, two have mentioned to their immediate superiors that they plan to reduce the scope of their position or to step down in a couple of years, but without receiving any response. Both talk about leaders who do not know what questions they should ask, or which words they should use.

Only three of the women say they have a close relationship with their immediate superior. However, all women express that it is vital to be able to decide when and how to end a career. They feel that they have ‘something they must finish first’ and they wish to leave working life with dignity. As Kirsten says,

Still, I hope I’ll go out with the feeling that I’ve done an important job, that has meant something. For the discipline. This is my hope. Would have been very hard if I had gone out after that period in which I really thought about it. It does not have to be the ultimate exit, but still with dignity. I hope it would be.

A successful transition to retirement requires good planning. With the exception of Berit, Lise and Inger, who have gradually reduced working time starting at the age of 62, none of the five others have made plans for workload reduction. They express their attitude that they will *keep going for as long as they can or just wait and see what happens*. Most women have participated in a retirement course organised by the trade union, but say they had little benefit from the information about public

service pension schemes. They estimate that 67 years is a natural retirement age given the existing social security schemes. Beyond this, they have not investigated the possibilities of staying in working life after the age of 67, nor for preparing for a life as retirees.

Stepping down from work is perceived as one of the most demanding transitions in life. However, most of these women state that they feel alone in this process. They are aware of the absence of their own ageing as a theme in employee conversations, and lack support in making comprehensive plans for how to step down in a way that would be best for themselves, their working environment, and the institution. Thus, they seem to be invisible to the employer in the retirement process. To be visible, is an elemental form of recognition (Høilund & Juul, 2005). To be invisible, is perceived as offensive. In this study, the women argue that the lack of attention from the employer's side is perceived to be directly hurtful. Lise, who will be stepping down after the coming school year, says:

When I reduced the scope of my position to 60%, no one was talking to me. No one said 'Now, we must have a chat' ... Not one! No one asked what I was going to do and whether we should reduce workload, no one! Had to figure it out myself. Had to endure. It's a bad policy, indeed!

It is a fundamental feature of our study that ageing in academia is a dignity project that the women themselves must handle to the best of their ability. Throughout a long career, they have developed professional integrity and fought for a valued position, and they want to leave working life in a worthwhile manner. In short, they call for a genuine dialogue with the institution. By contrast, two of the women on their way to retirement found that the employer was only interested in the retirement date: they saw this as highly offensive. Lise sums up her experiences thus:

They put a bit too much pressure on me. In regard to finding out when I will be stepping down ... OK! Wrote an email to the head of department ... And he thanked me ... Then I felt that patience was running out. And that they were more concerned about it, than about how I was faring at work.

Berit who is the only one of the women who was already retired at the time the interviews were conducted, is very upset by how little attention she herself received when she retired:

But there's something to the fact a person has worked for almost 30 years within education ... there should maybe have been ... a conversation. If you've only worked for half a year somewhere, it might not be so important. But after all, it's a person who has spent time on this educational environment and this institution ... I think it's utterly crazy!

Others note that ceremonies around retirement seem random and poorly thought through. One of the women mused, for example, on how a thank you for a long career

could be a piece of cake at an institute meeting. Berit summarises her experiences as follows:

Yes, the organisations dealing with working life have, after all, ensured ... that there's going to be a proper ending, one should think about this, that and that. But a university college or university, they do not follow any of the rules. If it's not management, there's no round-off. They do not follow the formalities, it's ... just off-handed ... It's absolutely terrible, really!

DISCUSSION: WHAT KIND OF CAREER GUIDANCE DO OLDER WORKERS NEED?

This study confirms that transition to retirement is experienced as challenging: one of the major transitions in life. It is associated with grief in letting go of lifelong commitments that have fundamental importance for self-esteem. All the female academics express that they have been dedicated to their work, often at the expense of other life roles. Their identity is strongly related to work, and work is for most of them perceived as a calling. However, the passing of time is irrevocable. At a certain point, everyone is touched by aspects of ageing, and this is so also for female academics. Leaving working life with dignity is strongly emphasised by all of them. Moreover, some of the female academics had to struggle to be recognised and valued during the final years of the careers. They felt invisible and devalued, and rejected when they tried to start a dialogue with the employer about issues concerning the termination. Avoidance of dealing with issues related to ageing can be an example of employers being afraid to discriminate (Women and Equalities Committee, 2018). On the other hand, omissions can be felt personally as violations (Heggen, 2002). This is what we see in this study. If communication is exclusively about clarifying the date of termination, it is perceived as extra humiliating, or as disrespectful, in Honneth's (1995, 2007) terms.

This finding corresponds with earlier research (Clayton et al., 2007; Ford & Clayton, 2007) which pointed out that elderly people are at risk of both discrimination and exclusion at the workplace. According to Honneth (2007), negative experiences, as seen here, can be linked to principles of recognition institutionalised in a society. Subjects only experience disrespect in what they can grasp as a violation of the normative claim of recognition. The lack of recognition of older workers may – as we have seen in this study – be an institutionalized pattern. Organisations should be encouraged to strengthen the culture of life-long learning and development, and to include the workforce in the process (Fasbender et al., 2019). Failure to do so may reflect underlying attitudes towards older workers in general.

As the situation is today, policies regarding senior employers at the organisational level seems to be scarce in the parts of academia included in this study. This supports the impression that management of age-related transitions has increasingly become more individualised (see Hinrichs, 2004). This makes the individual more

vulnerable. However Honneth (1995) reminds us that in order for the individual to be recognised, the contributions of the group he or she belongs to must be valued. Career guidance both on individual and organisational level could contribute in a positive way. In this study none of the female academics mention that they have had any kind of late-career guidance, nor have they looked for it. They have felt that they have been left to their own devices. Career guidance may contribute to a positive change and remind the organisations of the importance of providing a framework for a better process providing time and space for each worker to prepare for the coming transition. Similarly, the employer would have been encouraged to plan how the senior's competence could be disseminated within the organisation, and not disappear with the employee who retires. From this study, we argue that this could be a way both to recognise competence and to safeguard the individual's dignity.

Facilitation of this process can also contribute to more flexibility and freedom of choice when it comes to how long each individual chooses to continue working. It could also help individuals to find 'bridging activities' which enhance the chances for basic values to be continued through activities in settings other than the previous profession. As Erikson and Erikson (1997) and Fasbender et al. (2019) remind us, a healthy progression into older age is linked to informed concern for life itself. In this respect, the organisations' facilitation can be a focal point in achieving the social policy objective of helping people to stay employed longer, and then to continue active engagement in other spheres, thus contributing both to working life and to society.

Recognition is crucial, and applies to all life-stages, including old age. Honneth's (1995) three 'patterns of recognition' are necessary for each individual's development and maintenance of a positive attitude to oneself. Wellbeing in retirement and older age is dependent on traversing the transition to retirement with such attitudes intact:

For it is only due to the cumulative acquisition of basic self-confidence, of self-respect, and of self-esteem ... that a person can come to see himself or herself, unconditionally, as both an autonomous and an individuated being and to identify with his or her goals and desires. (Honneth, 1995, p. 169)

CONCLUSIONS

If only for the demographics, Geronto guidance, i.e. guidance for older people, will be a growing field in the coming years, both in terms of service delivery, and as a field of research. But there is more at stake in terms of the traditional boundaries of career guidance and ties to employment as a means to live a full life, with an income and status. These issues will be challenged to expand into the Geronto guidance field, as depicted above in the study of the retirement years of female Norwegian academics. Honneth's concept of recognition is helpful in this context, as the question for this group, as well as for other less privileged groups, will be: 'Who do you want to be

now?’ (Hawthorn, 2007), i.e. now that working life is drawing to an end. This is in essence an existential question which reaches far beyond working life, as Super has illustrated in his life-span approach. It points to a 3D approach to guidance: lifelong, life-wide, and life-deep in nature (Plant, 2006).

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