LATE-CAREER REEMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS
How Unemployed Older Knowledge Workers Rejoin the Labor Force

Insights From a 2013 Michigan Case Study

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Graphic from Hayutin, Beals, & Borges, 2013 (see References). PLEASE NOTE: Graphics used in this presentation, either from the author’s dissertation or from other cited sources, are intended for non-commercial educational use only and are not to be reproduced or republished in general public media without the express consent of their copyright owners.
Nearly one in three workers aged 60 and older are now in the civilian labor force, having either remained or returned (Weber, 2013).

Not surprising, since median U.S. net worth dropped 38.8% from 2007 to 2010 (Bricker, et al., 2012), to 1992 levels (Mui, 2012).

Figure 3. American labor force participation by workers aged 60 and older, 2002-2012. U.S. Department of Labor data from Weber (2013).
The Older Worker Profile project was announced by the U.S. Census Bureau on June 18, 2007 to study employment and retirement trends among Americans over age 45.

“The retirement of baby boomers will have a huge impact on the work force,” said Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon. “Businesses and planners need a better understanding of labor force trends, the loss of experienced workers and the payout of retirement benefits.”
Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois were not included in the 31-state Census Bureau study of older-worker employment and retirement patterns.

The most recent Indiana reports were published before the Great Recession began, and Wisconsin data three months after. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007)
Gray areas - Age 55-and-over displaced workers (red outline) who are “not in the labor force” do not indicate significant interest in early retirement.

Orange - Displaced older jobseekers were unemployed at rates three or more times the rates of their age groups.

Women (all ages) were less likely to be reemployed than men.

*(Adapted from Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012)*
The “Math” of Late-Career Reemployment Transitions

Persistently low reemployment rate (unused existing labor supply) +
Increasing aspiration to continue working late in life (increasing supply)

The result: large and growing group of older knowledge workers in career transition
Studying Late-Career Reemployment Transitions

What is “late-career reemployment” (LCR)?

• Early career stage: Entry level, learning
  • Mid-career stage: Career building, advancement
    • Late-career: Senior position, power, less focus on growth/advancement, thinking about an “exit”

• “Career” is associated with knowledge work
  • Work, workers, and even the labor market in “career” occupations tend to grow and change more than in non-career jobs based on manual labor
  • Includes employment in organizations and solo entrepreneurship or professional work
  • Different transition issues and support systems than manual-labor occupations
Studying Late-Career Reemployment Transitions

What is reemployment in the knowledge economy?

• Returning after a departure, by choice or otherwise

• A process, a journey—not enough just to want to do it

• Like leaving your usual seat in a commuter train and wanting to get back on
  • You wait for the next train
  • You might not find a place in the part of the train, let alone the seat you want
How would you describe an LCR transition to a client?  A suggestion . . .

• Not like deciding to join a health club or a social group because it’s good for you—a real commitment is required

• Maybe better to think of it as you would a decision to run for an elected office where few people know you
  • You need to be resilient and resourceful
  • You must build a strong support network
  • People in power [employers, hiring managers] need to see you as “electable” and not be biased against you
“Elephants in the Room” – Clues to LCR Barriers?

• Cultural paradigms about retirement and “unretirement”

• Age bias – Is age a workplace diversity issue?
How I Studied LCR Transitions

1. Personal experience, including building professional networking relationships with many others in various stages of LCR transitions
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2. Reading books, research journals, and quality journalistic reporting
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1. Personal experience

2. Books, research journals, and quality journalistic reporting

3. Formal, published qualitative research
2013 Michigan Late-Career Reemployment Study

- Purpose, approach, objectives
- Participant group
- Literature research
- Questions explored
- Conceptual models
- Key findings and conclusions
- Summary of recommendations
Key purpose of the study: Learn best practices for successful late-career reemployment

The approach: Ask 10 Michigan residents who succeeded in their job searches after leaving previous employment in the 2007-2009 recession to share their experiences
Objectives

Discover how late-career jobseekers successfully transition from unemployment to reemployment,
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Build on the foundation of existing employability theory to develop new theory and practice concepts regarding LCR transitions,
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Discover how late-career knowledge-work jobseekers successfully transition from unemployment to reemployment,

Build on the foundation of existing employability theory to develop new theory and practice concepts regarding LCR transitions,

and address the real-world problem that only half of displaced jobseekers at ages 55-64, and one in four 65 or older, succeed in becoming reemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012)
Who were the 10 case study participants?

Knowledge workers

Ages 49-68

5 women, 5 men

From four distinct Michigan economic regions

Variety of former occupations

Different lengths of unemployment
More qualitative research is needed with regional perspective, 50+ age-group focus, and post-recession context to explore how and why LCR success is achievable.

Examples of recent research (there’s not much):

- 2004 Midwestern study of college graduates (Ebberwein et al.)
- 2007 Australian study of 30s age group (McArdle et al.)
The Importance of Employability

“Employability is the [pre-existing condition] of employment over which the jobseeker has the greatest amount of control. . . . [It] is more likely to ensure continued employment than seniority or other traditional assets.”

(Arthur & Rousseau, 1996)
Research Question 1

What occupational strength attributes and behaviors enable senior jobseekers in knowledge occupations to make successful LCR transitions?
Research Question 2

How do labor market intermediaries (LMIs) support senior knowledge workers effectively in reemployment transitions?

For a larger version of this graphic, see Slide 37. (In PowerPoint® presentation mode, click the button below.)
Research Question 3

How do employers contribute to successful late-career reemployment?
Research Question 4

How do other supportive influences beyond LMIs and employers positively influence workforce participation among senior knowledge-work jobseekers?

For a larger version of this graphic, see Slide 37. (In PowerPoint® presentation mode, click the button below.)
Late-career knowledge workers achieved successful LCR transitions by:

a. Accurately assessing their situation in terms of challenges, assets, and barriers
   • Relatively simple but pivotal process

b. Demonstrating commitment and ability to do what was necessary to succeed
   • More complex process involving 29 concepts in five theme groups
Dimension 1: Jobseeker Success Factors (5 themes, 29 concepts)

- Positive transition mindsets (7 concepts)
- Transition strengths (7)
- Employability assets (6)
- Skill in interacting with employers (5)
- Job search skills (4)

Source: Dissertation, Table 7b
Labor market intermediaries (LMIs) and other sources of support helped late-career knowledge workers achieve successful LCR transitions by:

a. Providing access to practical resources that were well matched to client needs
   - Labor market knowledge
   - Financial assistance
   - Retraining
   - Access to employment networking resources

b. Providing inspiration and emotional support
Conclusions Based on Finding #2

Dimension 2: Sources of Support Success Factors (9 themes, 20 concepts)

- LMI accessibility to LC knowledge workers (1 concept)
- Reliable LMI training for knowledge workers toward LCR (4)
- Effective LMI direct support for knowledge workers toward LCR (5)
- LMI financial support (2)
- Ability to customize LMI services (1)
- Professional and personal networks (2)
- Public policy favorable to LC knowledge workers (1)
- Non-LMI financial support (2)
- Other sources of support (2)

Dissertation, Table 7c
Key Finding #3

Employers supported jobseekers in LCR transitions by:

a. Demonstrating that their cultural values are favorable to late-career knowledge workers

b. Implementing fair and effective talent acquisition processes

In cross-case comparative analysis, employer practices were credited for contributing to LCR success in more participant interviews than any other factor
Conclusions Based on Finding #3

Dimension 3: Employer Success Factors (2 themes, 4 concepts)

- Employer culture, values, and practices favorable to LC knowledge workers (3 concepts)
- Fair and effective employer selection processes (1)

*Dissertation, Table 7c*
Significance of Themes Across 10 Cases By Dimension of Inquiry

- Supportive employer practices (D3) - 90%
- Jobseeker strengths/behavior (D1) - 77%
- Support systems (D2) - 67%
- Other supportive influences (D4) - 64%

Mean Cross-Case Support For Significance of Themes By Dimension of Inquiry, %

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Importance Scores for Themes in Cross-Case Analysis, %

- Employer culture, values, and practices: 100%
- Fair and effective employer selection processes: 90%
- Ability to customize LMI services: 90%
- Jobseeker employability assets: 88%
- Professional and personal networks: 85%
- Jobseeker skill in interacting with employers: 82%
- Employer engagement with LC knowledge work: 80%
- Jobseeker transition strengths: 80%
- Jobseeker positive transition mindsets: 73%
- Public employment policies favorable to LC workers: 70%
- LMI financial support: 70%
- Other sources of support: 65%
- Reliable LMI training for knowledge workers: 63%
- Jobseeker job search skills: 60%
- LMI accessibility to LC knowledge workers: 60%
- Effective LMI support for knowledge workers: 50%
- Non-LMI financial support: 35%

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Conceptual Models

- Sustainable Employability Model

- Late-Career Employability Transition Model

- Late-Career Reemployment (LCR) Engagement Model

- LCR Success Factors Model (16 defined theme groups in three dimensions, encompassing 53 concepts)

- LCR Transition Model (applying the Success Factors Model in four progressive stages)
Conceptual Models

Figure 1. Sustainable Employability Model.
Late-Career Employability Transition Model

Renewed employability

Effective late-career transition toward reemployment

RQ1: INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE AND SKILL SET

RQ2: EFFECTIVE INTERMEDIARY SUPPORT

RQ3: FAVORABLE EMPLOYER ASSESSMENT

Support networks, family/friends, other support

Identity, transition skills, adaptability, marketable expertise

Learning:

Aligned with career stage and desired employment

Search skill practice

Other support

Person-organization fit, competence

Work history, ending in displacement or voluntary exit

Contributing factors

Linkage with research problem (RP) and questions (RQ)

Varying relative significance

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Figure 7. Late-Career Reemployment (LCR) Engagement Model of progressive advancement in transitions from nonemployment to reemployment.
Figure 8. Late-Career Reemployment (LCR) Transition Model.
Successful knowledge-work LCR jobseekers:

✧ Demonstrate motivational and functional competitiveness

✧ Are persistent and resourceful in building strong support networks

✧ Strategically target age-friendly employers that have risen above cultural biases about older workers
Help LCR jobseekers become contenders in the competitive arena of selection processes by thinking more like hiring managers (applies to support counselors/coaches/mentors as well as jobseekers)

Develop existing and new LMI and employer activities to remove doubt about candidates from the minds of hiring managers

Focus on making the jobseeker-employer connection: The critical person-organization cultural match
Beliefs about unemployed knowledge workers over age 50 that the study confirmed

- Their current situation was *not* their career plan
- Most are not proficient in job search and are surprised that their traditional job search knowledge is no longer effective
- Many are highly motivated to seek support and guidance—most understand the magnitude of the challenge
Questions and Comments
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This presentation is a brief summary of the complete text of a research study conducted in 2013 for the author’s doctoral dissertation at Baker College Center for Graduate Studies, Flint, Michigan.

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Presentation References


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Late-Career Reemployment: More Knowledge Resources

Some of my favorite sources on late-career reemployment transitions and labor market conditions affecting older knowledge workers

The Sloan Center on Aging and Work at Boston College

John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development (Rutgers University)

Southeast Michigan Workforce Information Network (WIN)

Michigan Economic Development Corporation’s Michigan Shifting Gears program

Michigan Department of Technology, Management & Budget Labor Market Information

U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics

U.S. Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED), St. Louis

AARP

Encore Careers