

# FROM STRIVING TO THRIVING

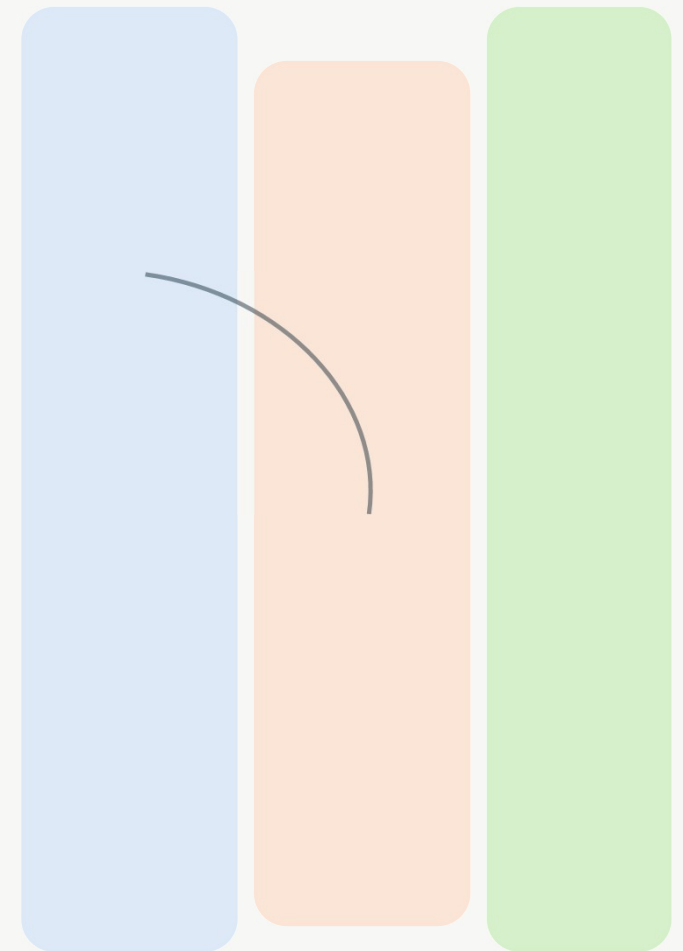
Fulfilment when work is no longer  
the organising centre of life

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**Dr Denise Taylor**

Chartered Psychologist · Author · Later-life researcher

NICEC / CDI At The Cutting Edge · 8 October 2026



## A LITTLE ABOUT ME

# 52

YEARS OF  
WORKING LIFE

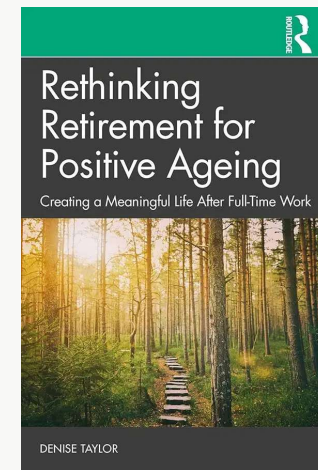
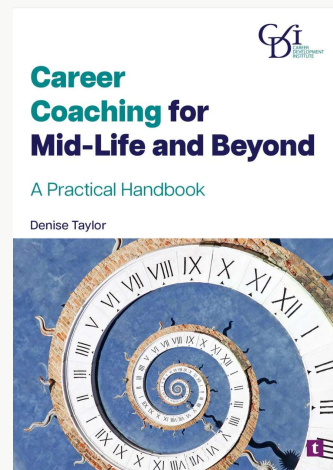
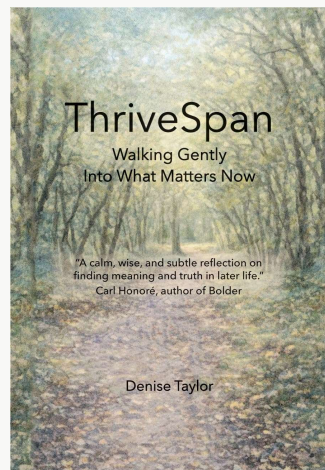
## Psychologist • Researcher • Writer

Chartered Psychologist, AFBPsS

Professional Doctorate, Birkbeck, University of London

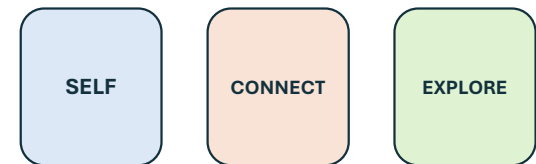
Researching meaning and purpose in later life

Writing on ageing, work and olderhood for the i paper, The Independent, Psyche and The Telegraph



## FULFILMENT

**What happens to fulfilment when work and externally defined achievement no longer occupy quite the same position within a life?**



**What matters now?**

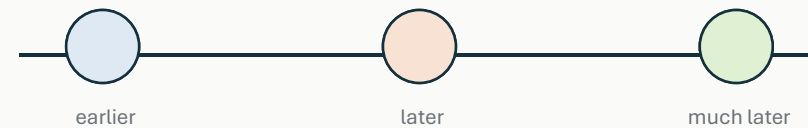
## THE TERRITORY

# Stage, not age

**I am not trying to define another age band or fixed life stage.**

I am using Olderhood as a lens for understanding what changes when the organising structures of adult life begin to shift.

## THE TIMING VARIES



### OLDERHOOD

A period in which the organising structures of adult life may begin to shift.

**No birthday defines it.**

## THE TERRITORY

# What happens when paid work stops holding first claim on the architecture of life?

Career-development theory is very good at helping us think about entering, developing and changing work.

It has rather less to say about the period when work itself may become less central.

## WHAT MATTERS NOW?

**SELF**

**CONNECT**

**EXPLORE**

A career-development conversation, even when the question is no longer simply 'what job next?'

WHAT MIGHT CHANGE?

## Three shifts help illuminate this territory

01



### WORK CENTRALITY

What happens when work becomes less central?

02



### TIME

What changes when future time feels more finite?

03

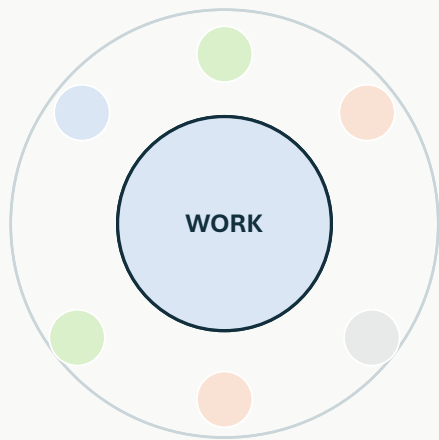


### IDENTITY & MEANING

Who am I now — and what matters now?

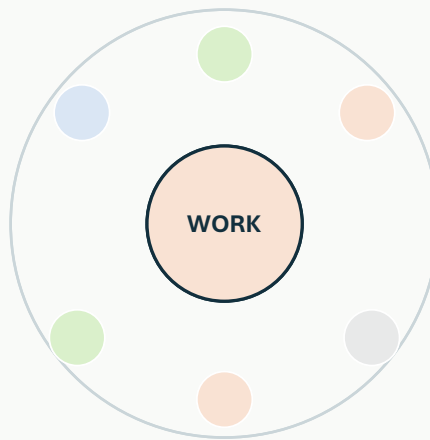
## WHEN WORK CHANGES POSITION

### Three possibilities: continuation • redesign • decentring



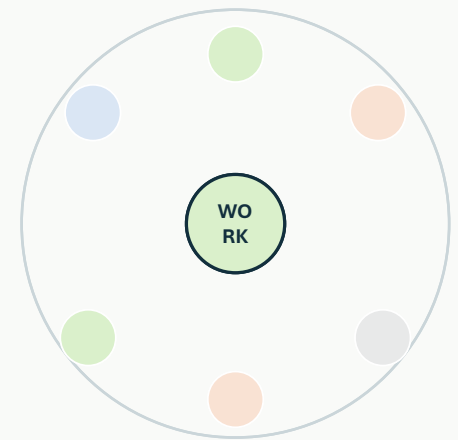
#### CONTINUATION

Work remains the principal organising structure.



#### REDESIGN

Work changes form, but may remain central.



#### DECENTRING

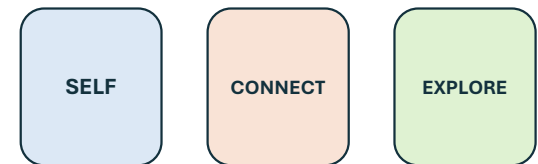
Work may continue, but no longer has first claim.

The difference lies less in the quantity of activity than in the relationship between activity, identity and control.

## TIME & FINITUDE

# What matters enough to deserve the time I have?

An awareness of finitude can sharpen choice.

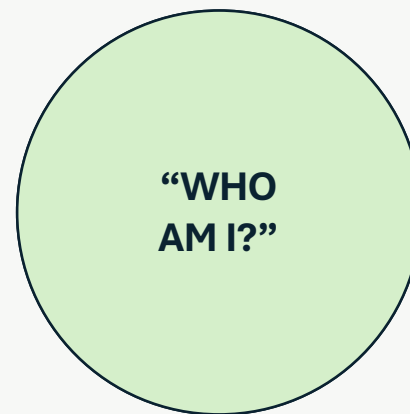
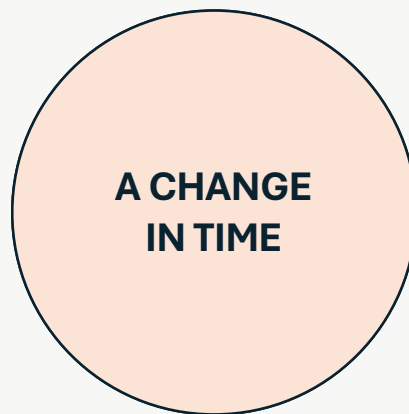


**What matters now?**

## A BRIDGE BETWEEN THEORY AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

# My doctoral research

Interpretative phenomenological analysis · 7 participants · meaning after retirement



Meaning emerged as  
an ongoing process  
of:

**reflection  
integration  
adjustment**

**More freedom over Tuesday afternoon - while also knowing you do not  
have unlimited Tuesdays.**

Time can expand in the week and contract across the lifespan.

*“The architecture of fulfilment may be more stable than we expect;  
what changes is the context in which it is lived.”*

## What theory gives us

### SUPER

#### Career is lifelong and life-wide

A strong disciplinary bridge — but traditional stage language remains occupationally weighted.

### BALTES

#### Development includes gains, losses and adaptation

A useful antidote to both decline narratives and relentless “positive ageing”.

### CARSTENSEN

#### Perceived future time shapes motivation and priorities

Selectivity and emotionally meaningful goals become especially relevant.

#### SUPPORTING LINEAGE

Levinson  
Late Adult Transition

Erikson  
Generativity & integrity

Tornstam  
Gerotranscendence

Cohen  
Later-life development

**Important pieces of the jigsaw — but not the whole territory.**

## AN INTEGRATIVE, NON-PRESCRIPTIVE FRAMEWORK

# ThriveSpan

A conversational map for exploring what matters now.

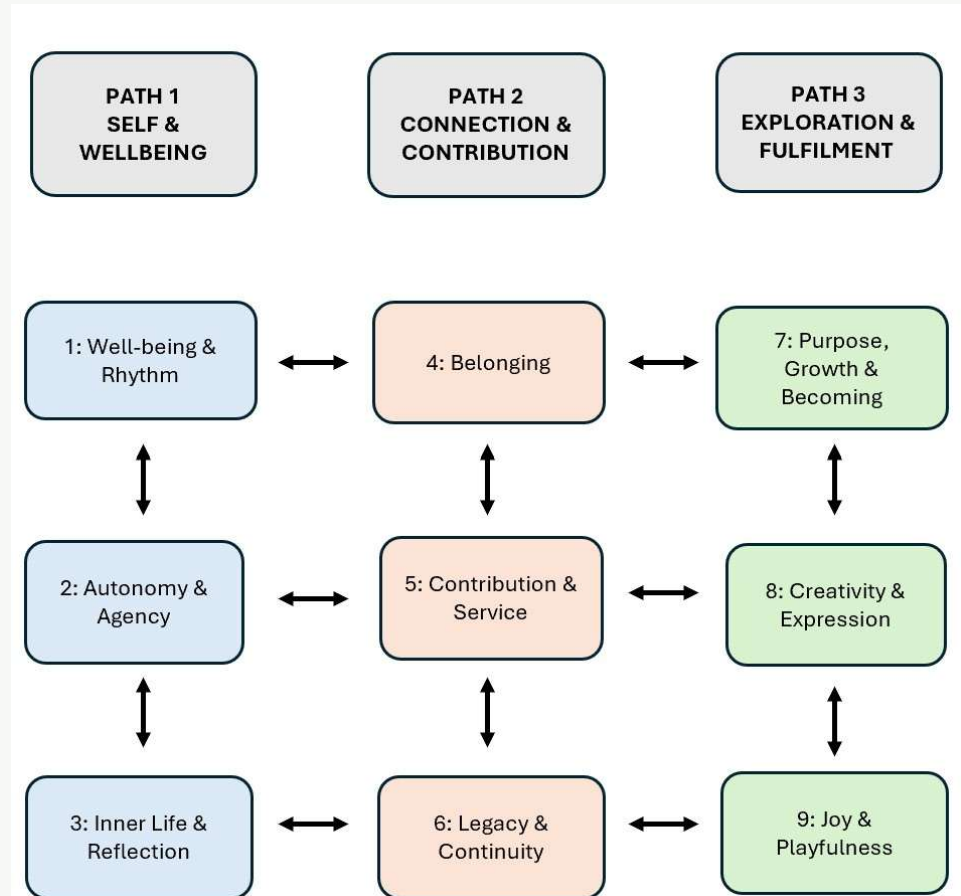
NOT STAGES

NOT A HIERARCHY

NOT A CHECKLIST

Thriving can include expansion and activity, but also selectivity, sufficiency, reflection and quiet realignment.

**WHAT MATTERS NOW?**



## Three examples from ThriveSpan

2

### Autonomy & Agency

Greater control over time.  
Working on different terms.  
Saying no more often.

5

### Contribution & Service

Care. Volunteering. Mentoring.  
Community. Creative work.  
Contribution without a job title.

7

### Purpose, Growth & Becoming

Learning. Creating. Becoming.  
Going deeper — not always  
doing more.

### Growth does not always mean more.

Sometimes it means discernment, depth and making room for what matters now.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

# Widen the career conversation

A 67-year-old client says:

**“I could carry on. I’m good at what I do. They value me. But I’m beginning to wonder whether I want work to take up this much of my life anymore.”**

There may be nothing to fix — but there is a significant career-development conversation to have.

FROM

**“What job next?”**



TO

**“What do you want work, contribution and meaning to look like now?”**

How central do you want paid work to be?

What do you want to retain?

What might you gain — and lose?

What choices are actually available to you?

**Hold both agency and constraint.**

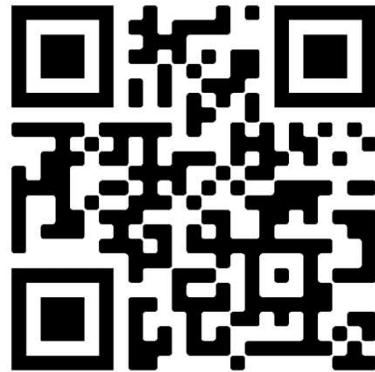
## Further reading

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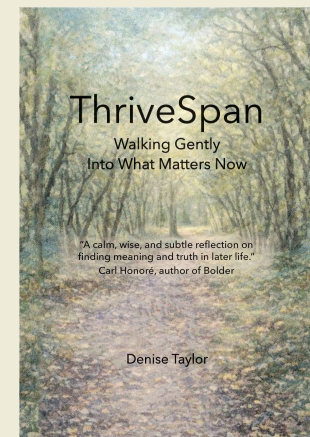
### *When Work No Longer Has First Claim: Laslett, Olderhood and a New Map of Later Life*

Conceptual paper • ResearchGate  
Denise Taylor, 2026

**DOI:**  
**10.13140/RG.2.2.16570.76482**



Scan for paper



### **ThriveSpan**

A practical framework for reflecting on what matters now

[denisetaylor.co.uk/thrivespan](https://denisetaylor.co.uk/thrivespan)

Dr Denise Taylor

## STAGE, NOT AGE

**If work no longer had to be the central organising structure of your life, what might thriving look like for you?**

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Discuss in your group

**10 minutes**



**What matters now?**