The Emergence of **Long Life Learning**

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Abstract

With increased longevity and a more volatile world, a growing number of people are bewildered by the middle of their adult life. They are advised that lifelong learning will help them compete in an increasingly competitive workplace, but most lifelong learning programs focus little on the unique challenges and needs experienced by those navigating midlife. There is a gap in the educational landscape that presents an opportunity for established institutions of higher education and educational startups. Some universities as well as private enterprises have started developing curriculum in line with *"long life learning*." "Long life learning" focuses on developing a sense of purpose and personal well-being by understanding the positive aspects of aging congruent with established adult development theories to create more resilience through midlife transitions. These new programs foster communities of midlife peers who cultivate, harvest, and share wisdom with one another. As such, graduates of these programs may be better prepared to live lives that are as deep as they are long. Reviewing research on midlife development and featuring the efforts of pioneering institutions, this document provides a platform for thinking about "long life learning" that can catalyze universities, non-profits, and private institutions to develop new offerings that support individuals throughout midlife and prepare them for elderhood, much as public junior and senior high schools have done for adolescents about to enter adulthood.

Introduction

During the past century, life was perceived as comprising three linear stages organized around modern work: learn, earn, and retire (Gratton & Scott, 2016). These stages were typically age-segregated with "learn" ending by one's early to mid-twenties, the "earn" period representing a four-decade marathon, and the "retire" stage lasting the last decade or so of one's life. But, in an era when an increasing number of people live to 100 years old (Gratton & Scott, 2016) and people are working longer, by both choice and necessity, a growing percentage are feeling bewildered and irrelevant in a time that feels nothing like what their parents experienced.

Our increasing life expectancies and job market volatility have made midlife a period marked by constant change and transition. And, amidst this evolving sense of what it means to be in midlife, most mid-lifers are saddled with an outdated, depressing narrative on aging. Beyond physical health and job performance maintenance, society has not equipped those in midlife with the mindsets, skills, and knowledge to navigate this challenging period of their lives in a way that supports purpose and well-being. There is little obvious educational support for those who seek to learn how to navigate life's challenges. Topics such as stages in adult life development, the concepts of mindset and resilience, psychological well-being, intergenerational collaboration, and navigating midlife transitions are insufficiently addressed by the variety of educational options available to mid-lifers like traditional educational

institutions, community colleges, corporate learning and development programs, and MOOC's (Massive Open Online Courses). These existing options tend to focus more on knowledge acquisition and career re-skilling or, in other words, avocational instruction.

While there are adult education programs inspired by the idea of lifelong learning, some of these are used as a human resource tool "to increase competitiveness and innovation at a time of intensifying global trading pressures" (Field, 2001), while others are a form of "edutainment." In addition, lifelong learning is often presented as "one size fits all," whether you're thirty or sixty years old. The category of lifelong learning has become increasingly broad, encompassing everything from brands like Master Class and Road Scholar to elite executive education and personal growth retreat centers.

Quite often, lifelong learning does not address the unique needs of mid-lifers who seek an entirely different set of objectives in their fifties than they did in their twenties. Wikipedia defines lifelong learning as "on-going, voluntary, and self-motivated," but this definition misses the growing spiritual awareness, social wellness, community- and purpose-driven parts of the equation of one's forties, fifties, and sixties. It also neglects the value of cultivating and harvesting wisdom. This might be because "very little is known about midlife" (Infurna et al., 2020) as a life stage. In fact, midlife has not gotten the academic and public policy support that two other 20th century "discoveries" - adolescence and retirement - have received (Infurna et al.,

2020). Midlife seems to be the bastard child of these three “new” life stages. Midlife is misunderstood.

As a result, individuals are left to navigate their challenges and transitions without much guidance or any kind of roadmap. Society often thinks of midlife adults as fully developed. While an increasing number of mid-lifers are hearing the “call” to rethink their life perspective and focus on their own evolution as humans and their desire to give back to society, many of our current educational offerings insufficiently address this need at scale. The structural lag between mid-lifers needs and institutional responses provides a unique opportunity for institutions of higher education and educational entrepreneurs to support mid-lifers who want to learn how to live a life as deep and meaningful as it is long. In short, a prolonged life and a more volatile world provide opportunities for institutions to develop new educational offerings and flip the narrative from lifelong learning to "long life learning.”

Midlife: From Crisis to Calling

Midlife has become the longest period of one's life, partly due to our increased longevity. Some researchers suggest it starts as early as 35 (Freund & Ritter, 2009) and ends with the onset of old age as late as 75 (Lachman, 2004). While academics and authors have suggested many ways to further categorize and name the middle of adult life, this document will focus on a deliberately broad and inclusive definition as there are no longer crisp markers of entry to or exit from adulthood (Moen, 2016). This means the concept of midlife is hard to generalize as it depends on one's personal development and circumstances. Due to societal advances and changes, individuals of the same physical age can have vastly different life experiences, which renders previous markers such as marriage, "becoming a parent," or retirement obsolete. While the timing of these and other changes varies, it is clear that a number of serious transitions are happening in the middle of one's adult life.

Generally, the core period of midlife has been considered ages 45 to 65, although it could be argued that midlife is as much a "stage" as it is an "age." This has been recognized in work by multiple authors (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989; Morison et al., 2006; Waxman, 2016) who proposed to call the decade-long (approximately occurring in one's fifties) core transitional period "middlescence." Much like a bookend to adolescence, it is a newly-recognized and named life stage accompanied by physical, social, and emotional changes.

Cultural anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson helps illuminate why midlife can be such a vexing period for so many in their careers and why taking time for oneself during midlife can be valuable. She suggests, "A metaphor may be helpful. Adding a room to a house is likely to change the way all the rooms are used. Mid-career renewal is potentially a more dramatic change: Rather than building something on at the back, we are moving the walls and creating an atrium in the center. The atrium is filled with fresh air and sunlight, and it presents an opportunity for reflection on all the rooms that open off of it...We are accustomed to lives that unfold according to a familiar rhythm of preparation and achievement, arrivals and departures, excitement and quiescence. But our mental model of these stages and transitions is fast becoming outdated. Adulthood simply goes on too long without punctuation. The famous midlife crisis is a search for that punctuation, for the feeling that one is making a new start. How much fresh energy, creativity, and loyalty would senior management reap from employees if it could provide that feeling on the job?" (Pfeffer, 2005)

Midlife is unique partly due to its "high density of life events" (McGinnis, 2018; Tripathi & Messias, 2020) including career and relationship changes, menopause (and the lesser-known andropause for men), simultaneously taking care of parents and children, and personal health issues that often lead to a growing interest in one's internal life. Further, midlife is a preparatory stage for elderhood, assuring "midlife is a critical juncture" in life (Tripathi & Messias, 2020) with elderhood often comprising

the last couple decades of one's life (just like childhood comprises the first couple decades of one's life). Given this confluence of life-altering events, midlife bears some resemblance to adolescence, a time of profound change in anticipation of a new era in one's life. While adolescents have all kinds of schools, tools, and rituals to help prepare them for this threshold to adulthood, mid-lifers have very little in the way of education or community support to help navigate their midlife transitions. Life transition is a skill we need to master in an era of both increased longevity and increased change.

The Crisis Myth

Life expectancy in the U.S. grew by thirty years during the 20th century (although, admittedly, the size of this longevity increase has not been socio-economically universal), which, consequently, prolonged and heightened the importance of midlife. Despite being the longest and, arguably, the most significant life period marked by frequent life transitions, most people do not know much about midlife aside from the popular myth that portrays it as a crisis.

The idea of the midlife crisis was first proposed by Canadian psychoanalyst and social scientist Elliott Jaques in 1965. Jaques coined the term "midlife crisis" in (2006) based on his own life experience and a pattern that he detected studying the lives of artists. Inspired by Jaques work, popular science writers, magazines, novelists, and movies started to popularize the premise that midlife was a dark, moody period. A period when one felt the end of their youthful adulthood and was faced with the onset of dreaded elderhood. Recent research efforts, however, have shown that life crises are not necessarily limited to midlife. Empirical studies (Lachman, 2004; Wethington, 2000) reveal that 10-20% of people experience a midlife crisis, about the same number say they experience crises at other points in their lives.

While "crisis" may not be the best way to characterize midlife, there is evidence today's working world has become more challenging for those in midlife. Labor

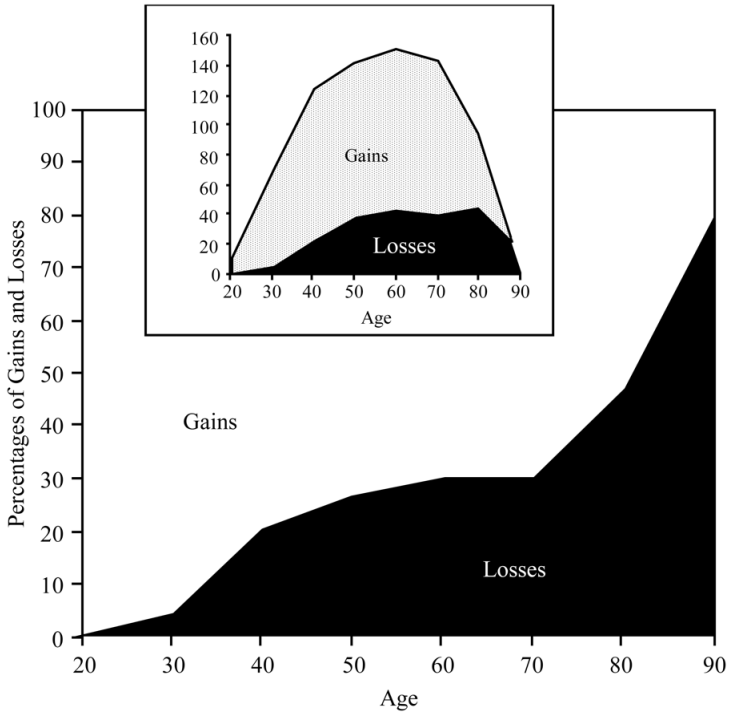
market statistics show that mid-lifers are the most likely to be laid off during economic downturns (Infurna et al., 2020). Further, a growing number of midlife stressors relate to financial issues (Joo et al., 2020) due to increased globalization and an increasingly digital workplace. In many industries from technology to advertising, the average age of CEO's and senior company leaders has been declining in the 21st century (Frick, 2014), rendering mid-lifers as too old for the job.

Together, life events and stressors may explain a general low psychological well-being (happiness) and a heightened risk and prevalence of depression between the ages 46 and 49 (Patten et al., 2010). These challenges possibly also explain the increased use in anti-depressants, seeing a mental health professional (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2016), and growth of suicide by nearly 50% amongst mid-lifers in the past twenty years in the United States (Reddy, 2018). And, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health response have created a new risk for those sixty and older.

In his book, "The Happiness Curve: Why Life Gets Better After 50," Jonathan Rauch (2018) cites social scientists who prefer to see this as a "midlife slump" or "reboot." Citing multiple midlife stories, Rauch suggests that a predominant reason for the "crisis" narrative is because there has been so little socialization about the concept of midlife, so the variety of transitions thrust upon someone in midlife can be overwhelming and disorienting.

The public narrative supporting the crisis myth is in stark contrast to a growing body of studies that provide empirical evidence of midlife as a period still dominated by gains. As one can see in Figure 1, it is not until one's eighties that losses outweigh gains. This research underlines the fact that the midlife crisis myth of decline is in stark contrast with the real world experience of mid-lifers and that a more balanced view is overdue. Another key aspect of Figure 1 is that losses do start to grow exponentially in one's thirties and forties. Thus, people enter midlife with an expectation of being at their peak of their performance and fully educated, but without educational support that allows them to grow and thrive despite the challenges and life transitions they experience. Taken together, our modern society has created a public health risk by having the personal and public narrative on aging so at odds with our lived experience.

Figure 1: Qualitative relation of circumstantial and emotional gains and losses across the adult life span. Percentages and absolute numbers Adapted from Heckhausen et al. (1998).



Midlife Gains – Neglected Evidence

In the comprehensive Special Issue (May-June 2020) of American Psychologist (Journal of the American Psychological Association) entitled “Rethinking Adult Development: New Thinking for New Times,” the final white paper is “Optimizing Aging: A Call for a New Narrative” (Diehl et al., 2020). The authors outline three essential misconceptions about aging: (a) Aging is not all loss and decline; (b) Adults have more control over their aging than they believe; and (c) Age-related losses may be reversible. These misconceptions are partly fueled by myths like the midlife crisis and the sparse dissemination of research showing midlife and later life gains.

Gain-related research provides evidence for improvement in emotional experience (Carstensen & Turk-Charles, 1994), crystalized ability (Schaie & Willis, 1994), creativity (Seligman et al., 2016), and control beliefs (Lachman, 2004) in and beyond midlife. It highlights midlife as a period marked by peak achievement in earnings (Perez, 2019), comfort with one's physical appearance (McCarthy, 2014), and increase in emotional intelligence, EQ (Fariselli et al., 2008). Further, Carstensen et al. (2011) have shown that over a ten-year period, aging was associated with more positive overall emotional well-being, greater emotional stability, and greater emotional complexity. And, many of these positive improvements in one’s life continue far into elderhood.

And, while this evidence for gains suggests a more balanced picture, these findings are at odds with the prevalent, negative age-stereotypes in the United States. Research on the topic of midlife crisis found that 90% of Americans can relate to and sufficiently define a midlife crisis (Wethington, 2000) despite it likely being a myth. This might seem harmless, but according to Levy and colleagues (2009), negative age-stereotypes decrease peoples' life expectancy significantly. The researchers found that older people with a positive mindset on aging—who felt worthy, happy, and hopeful as they got older—lived seven and a half years longer than those with a negative perspective. This increase is bigger than one gained from starting to exercise or quitting smoking (Levy et al., 2002).

Thus, increasing awareness of these gains and changing the midlife age-stereotype is long overdue. Doing so would not only significantly improve the quality and length of our second half of life, it would also positively impact ageism.

Midlife as a Calling – Changing the Age-Stereotype

Although midlife has received far less research attention than other age periods, the situation is improving. The Midlife in the United States Study (MIDUS) is considered "instrumental in bringing to light the importance of explicitly studying individuals in midlife across psychosocial, cognitive, and health developments" (Infurna et al., 2020). Overall, this landmark study and related research confirmed that midlife "is a pivotal period in the life course in terms of balancing growth and decline, linking earlier and later periods of life, and bridging younger and older generations" (Lachman et al., 2015).

Studies have proposed the average low point of adult life satisfaction is 47.1 in developed countries (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008). Focusing exclusively on the decline or the low point, however, is diverting attention from what is really happening. The decline starts in our twenties, bottoms out in our late forties, and starts rising in our fifties and continues to rise for two to three decades of later life. Mapping positive and negative developments (Blanchflower & Graham, 2020) support the now widely-known idea of the "U-curve of happiness" (Rauch, 2018). While the evidence underlying this research is heavily debated, it illustrates the idea that midlife can be a turning point towards a brighter future.

This midlife turning point is not necessarily a crisis or the beginning of the end, but, instead, the end of the beginning of one's adulthood. It is a point at which adults start to experience a number of changes that call them to re-examine their lives. Answering their call for the first time, they start to re-evaluate, reflect, and evolve their views of life. At its core, the call represents a pathway entering the second half of life which is marked by physical, economic, and social changes resulting in questioning one's view of life and triggering a search for meaning. Taking this path leads to a reorientation, the re-establishment of a new sense of meaning and purpose, and a modification of one's expectations about the last half of life.

This is why Waxman and others (Dychtwald & Flower, 1989; Morison et al., 2006; Waxman, 2016) have proposed to call this core transitional period "middlescence." Middlescence is not a time for crisis but, instead, the middle of midlife and defined by an awakening to the value of meaning. Further, late midlife is marked by the dawning of elderhood. Hence, just like adolescence prepared us for adulthood, midlife is preparing us for elderhood.

The necessity to answer one's "midlife call," to find one's way through middlescence, has been metaphorically explained by the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung. Jung famously drew attention to the fact that "we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life's morning, for what was great in the morning will be little at evening and what in the morning was true, at evening will have become a lie" (Jung et al., 2001, p. 111). Jung warned "'it is a duty and necessity to give serious

attention to himself," engaging in reflection and re-evaluation and an ultimate adjustment of one's expectations and ideas of life in order to answer one's call.

Society does precious little to warn mid-lifers of the upcoming twists and turns on the roadmap of life, nor do mid-lifers receive hints about the unexpected pleasures and benefits of aging and how to attain them. Nor do we tell them all of this is normal. It's time that we, as a society, help people prepare for and navigate their midlife transitions and prepare for what Erik Erikson referenced (Erikson, 1994) as the seventh stage of psychosocial development: the conflict between generativity and stagnation.

“Long Life Learning” – A Way to Answer the Midlife Call

“Wholly unprepared, they embark upon the second half of life. Or are there perhaps colleges for forty-year-olds which prepare them for their coming life and its demands as the ordinary colleges introduce our young generations to a knowledge of a world and of life? No, there are none. […] that is not quite true. Our religions were always such schools in the past, but how many people regard them as such today? How many of us older persons have really been brought up in such a school and prepared for the second half of life, for old age, death, and eternity?”

Carl Jung’s quote (1933, p. 108) highlights our need for a new kind of educational institution, an institution that allows mid-lifers to revisit their truths and ideals, and reflect on what it means to live a long life - which is what we will refer to as “long life learning.” As such, midlife education should not only focus on acquisition of knowledge, but it needs to be learner-centric in supporting the cultivation of wisdom and well-being.

In conceiving of the first university-based program dedicated to helping successful midlife leaders to repurpose themselves (Harvard’s Advanced Leadership Institute, 2020), Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Rakesh Khurana and Nitin Nohria outlined this need in 2005 when they wrote, “In the past, as we have noted, higher education in America has responded to the challenges and opportunities presented by changes in the

external environment by transforming its own structures [...] the opportunity presented by this historical moment is to again become proactive in the ongoing effort to achieve and maintain alignment between its internal structures and culture and the needs and demands of society" (Kanter et al., 2005, p. 9).

"Long Life Learning" – Requirements of Midlife Education

Erikson (1968) suggested "I am what survives me," which is a succinct way of defining "generativity," the desire to "leave a mark" or a legacy. Lachman et al. (2015) describe midlife as a pivotal period that requires: (1) "a balance and peak of functioning at the intersection of growth and decline, (2) its linkage with earlier and later periods of life, and (3) as a bridge to younger and older generations."

Given these points, the foundational elements of midlife education need to address: (1) personal well-being and fulfillment and how to navigate life transitions and develop resilience and a growth mindset, (2) the establishment of meaning and purpose in later life, (3) best practices as gleaned from life stages and adult development theories, and (4) approaches to enhance intergenerational relations. Encore.org founder and CEO Marc Freedman, who has written extensively about the value of intergenerational collaboration, suggests, "The real fountain of youth is ... the fountain *with* youth" (Freedman, 2018, p. 21). Focusing on the three requirements

outlined by Lachman et al., research on psychological well-being, transition, and midlife are at a stage in which they can support the development of an early educational framework for "long life learning."

To achieve fulfillment and life satisfaction, mid-lifers have been found to benefit from understanding the nature of their development (Degges-White & Myers, 2006) which can help them build a psychological resilience, including the development of a sense of growth and purpose (Tripathi & Messias, 2020). Additional factors that influence midlife resilience include managing uncertainty, exploring spirituality, developing emotional objectivity, understanding adversity, encouraging humor, and being open to a changing philosophy (Tripathi & Messias, 2020). In line with these factors, Keyes and Ryff (1999) proposed six factors that determine psychological well-being (happiness) during midlife:

1. Self-Acceptance - holding healthy attitudes towards self. "Self-acceptance is crucial to mental health. The absence of an ability to unconditionally accept oneself can lead to a variety of emotional difficulties, including uncontrolled anger and depression." (Carson & Langer, 2006)
2. Positive Relations with Others - developing and maintaining warm, authentic, and trusting interpersonal relationships with others. Developing these relationships is crucial given that they increase life expectancy by 50% compared to poor relationships.

3. Autonomy - the capability to comfortably make decisions independently and regulate behavior based on internal standards. Autonomy also "involves perceiving that one's activities are endorsed by or congruent with the self" (Reis et al., 2000, p. 241) and were found to significantly contribute to personal well-being (ibid.)
4. Environmental Mastery - the ability to choose or create environments in line with personal needs. Here, individuals who are "able to choose contexts suitable to personal needs, to see themselves as growing and expanding, and to perceive themselves as self-satisfied" are found to be more resilient (Sagone & De Caroli, 2014, p. 881).
5. Purpose in Life - a sense of goal, intention, and direction that makes life meaningful. Increased purpose has shown to positively affect happiness (Diener et al., 2012), health (Roepke et al., 2014), cognitive abilities (Boyle et al., 2010), reduce mortality (Alimujiang et al., 2019) and thus affects life expectancy (Cohen et al., 2016). Often, this sense of purpose involves contributing to the greater good and the well-being of future generations which has been evident in representative U.S. studies on midlife (Emerman et al., 2018).
6. Personal Growth - a feeling of "striving towards exploration and development." As midlife comes with the societal stigma of decline, mid-lifers will not only benefit from career, or psychological growth, but from the development of a "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2017). Harvard psychologist Dan Gilbert suggests that "human beings are works in progress that mistakenly think they're finished" (Gilbert, 2014). Fostering a growth mindset is considered central to defying the

> societal stereotype of reduced options and decline. This makes it essential as a foundational part of any midlife education curriculum. As such, it should not be confused with the interest in purely learning, or, as author Ken Dychtwald (2020, personal communication) suggested, "It is not just the openness to learn but the willingness to be as curious and humble as a student."

Beyond these six qualities that foster well-being, there is growing evidence that developing a mastery for navigating life transitions is a core skill for those in midlife and beyond (Gratton & Scott, 2016). Historically, Bridges' writing (Bridges & Bridges, 2019) on life transitions – which mirrored anthropologist van Gennep's rites of passage work (van Gennep, 2019) – illuminated the consistency of three phases that happen in all transitions - severance from the past, the liminal time, and the new beginning. More recently, Feiler (2020) conducted 225 in-depth interviews investigating how individuals handled one or more of fifty-two kinds of life transitions. His work sheds light on some of the newer wrinkles of mastering change in the 21st century.

It should be pointed out that most of these factors are not entirely new to the midlife learner. Mid-lifers have a tremendous amount of life and career experience, and have been found to have cultivated inner as well as outer wisdom to different degrees (Staudinger, 1999). Kaufman states that "wisdom tends to increase with age and is most common among those with high levels of openness to experience, the capacity for self-examination and introspection, a motivation for personal growth, and the

willingness to remain skeptical of one's self-views, continually questioning assumptions and beliefs, and exploring and evaluating new information that is relevant to one's identities" (Kaufman, 2020). As such, any midlife education needs to integrate the wisdom of its participants so it can be repurposed in new ways.

It has long been known that the motivation of adult learners differs from young learners. Young learners are generally seen as extrinsically motivated, while most adult learners are intrinsically motivated (Brookfield, 1986). Mid-lifers are seen as generally concerned with "generativity, caring, and concern for others in the work and family spheres" and "meaningful work (paid or unpaid), health, and well-being" (Lachman, 2004, p. 306) and balancing the two.

Further, Staudinger (2020) has shown that resilience and growth are hallmarks of learning for those in midlife. But her research also showed a decline in "openness to new experiences" with advanced age (ibid.). With increasing age, adults become, on average, less behaviorally flexible and show decreasing motivation to seek out new and varied experiences and ideas by adopting what Dweck labeled a "fixed mindset" (Dweck, 2017).

Carstensen sees this not so much as avoidance or a lack of openness but instead a growing selectivity which is defined as socioemotional selectivity theory. As people age and become increasingly aware of mortality, they are reluctant to waste time and focus even more on investing time in what really matters. Rather than grounded in

past experience, decisions are grounded in the perception of time left (2006). Whether you adhere to Staudinger or Carstensen's perspective, any program focused on midlife education, will have to take this unique psychological development into account, and help mid-lifers to develop and maintain their openness, drawing on intrinsic motivators, to help mid-lifers foster a growth mindset (Staudinger, 2020).

Taken together these factors represent a first list of requirements (Table 1) that any midlife educational institution would need to address in order to support individuals in answering their midlife call. Developing programs that address these "long life learning" requirements will help mid-lifers navigate their unique transitions and develop a growth mindset around aging. Engaging in this type of education could help someone in their fifties welcome the onset of elderhood much like a teenager welcomes the onset of adulthood. Further, these requirements allow us to investigate existing offers of education available to individuals in midlife.

Table 1: "Long Life Learning" Requirements

Supporting mid-lifer's psychological well-being / happiness	
Self-Acceptance	Environmental Mastery
Positive Relations with Others	Purpose in Life
Autonomy	Personal Growth
Foster mid-lifer's resilience	
Adversity Level	Humor
Emotional Objectivity	Spirituality
Managing Uncertainty	Evolving Philosophy
Midlife development (underpinning)	
Theories and research that support individuals' understanding of self during midlife. Helping mid-lifers understand midlife as a calling to adjust to the unfoldings of life and foster a growth mindset.	
Long Life Learning Objectives: • *The overall objective is to support mid-lifers to develop an understanding of what it means to live and transition through a long life, and develop the abilities to foster psychological well-being.* • *Self-Awareness and thus Wisdom-Cultivating - Develop self-awareness (inner wisdom) and an understanding of their own development (outer wisdom) that allows individuals to manage growth and decline during midlife, including various life transitions. This will positively influence their autonomy.* • *Meaning-Making - Support the reflection on, and the linking of earlier and later periods of life in an effort to support individuals to find meaning, purpose, and generativity in life.* • *Interpersonal Skills - To successfully bridge older and younger generations, enhance environmental mastery, and foster positive relationships that contribute to more social bonding and intergenerational collaboration.* • *Development and Maintenance of a Growth Mindset - as it is seen as fundamental in benefiting all other learning objectives and opening up new possibilities.*	

Existing Midlife Educational Options

Beyond religious and spiritual institutions, which are not in the scope of this document, a variety of university, workplace, and general marketplace offers exist. Most of them have been inspired by the idea of lifelong learning (Field, 2001).

In general, institutions of higher education offer continuing studies and, in some cases, degree-based programs, that are knowledge-based offerings, unlinked to any defined outcome. They are often peripheral or tangential to the main focus of the college or university, sometimes focused on alumni or the community, but separate from the curriculum offerings for undergraduate or graduate students. These programs are typically not focused on addressing personal psychological development in the midlife stage, nor do they often have as an explicit intention the creation of a support network of peers that create a sense of community of fellow learners.

When it comes to the workplace and general marketplace offers, the recent demand for digital intelligence (DQ) can be seen as a representative example of what drives the demand and the focus of many lifelong learning initiatives. It can be fueled by the economic demands on workers to effectively leverage technology as a competitive advantage out of fear of falling behind competition (Curran et al., 2017). The World Economic Forum estimates that 101 hours of retraining and upskilling will be necessary for all employees between 2018 and 2022 to address the tech revolution

(Leopold et al., 2018; Stefanova Ratcheva & Leopold, 2018). Observing this trend, some have questioned if it is wise to train individuals in their mid-50's to become software developers after they've often spent their careers becoming "soft skills developers" (Conley, 2018). Focusing on market demands like DQ, some universities have been criticized for a disproportionate focus on knowledge and skills development that get graduates ready for a competitive labor market and less on addressing the whole individual (Barnett, 2007, p. 51).

Similarly, most corporate learning and development (L&D) programs have economic ambitions that focus on employee upskilling, which is seen as an investment in "human capital." Most of these programs are regarded as costly initiatives with questionable effectiveness (Glaveski, 2019). In addition, most corporate L&D programs focus more on newer, younger employees than existing, older employees (Farrell, 2017). While potentially beneficial to the firm and individual career ambitions, "labor-force participation rates and participation in lifelong learning are declining in most developed economies even though there has been an increase in later-life employment as compared to the 1980s" (Staudinger et al., 2016).

As mentioned, the "key drivers underlying the adoption of lifelong learning are the need to upskill the population to meet the challenge of the information and knowledge society and the need for accessible and flexible access to education" (Anderson et al., 2006). Focusing on "learning to know," lifelong learning has overlooked "learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be" (Laal & Laal,

2012). This bias leaves little room for essential topics including wisdom, humor, relationships, spirituality, midlife development theories, and for contemplating the meaning in and purpose of life.

Because many in midlife don't have the time, money, or access to university or corporate programs, they often turn to alternative offers such as community colleges, MOOCs, coaches, self-help books, and the spiritual development industry. In other words, the lack of options forces mid-lifers to attempt a trial-and-error, DIY-based (Do It Yourself) approach to answer their call to master their midlife transitions. And while some of the available options go beyond "learning to know," very few are learner-centric to midlife and fewer still deliver on all the requirements of "long life learning."

American philosopher John Dewey (1933) suggested, "We do not learn *by* experience, we learn *from* experience as we reflect on it and reconstruct it." But, this takes a learning environment in which mid-lifers "can leap into the unknown, and a safety net that can catch them if they fall" (Fisher-Yoshida et al., 2009, p. 98). This kind of transformation will not likely come from a MOOC, a self-help book, or a correspondence course. Creating personal development and a mindset shift appropriate for this stage of life requires an experiential, residential learning environment that allows and encourages them to navigate their midlife transition while learning from peers who are going through a similar experience. Or, in

reference to Mary Catherine Bateson's earlier quote, people need a midlife "atrium" where they can curate a blueprint for the rest of their life.

Taken together, much of education available to mid-lifers is focused on human capital development, and less focused on human development (Table 2). To address the needs of mid-lifers, these programs would need to become more "whole person assessments" (Ackerman & Kanfer, 2020). Society needs institutions that go beyond generic lifelong learning and focus themselves on "long life learning" to support mid-lifers on how to live a life as deep and meaningful as it is long (Table 2).

Table 2: Comparing Lifelong and "Long Life Learning" programs

Predominant focus of Lifelong Learning:	**Potential focus of "Long Life Learning":**
Support human capital development	Support human development
Extrinsic motivators (e.g. grades, certificates)	Intrinsic motivators
Upskilling-focused	Personal development-focused
Learning to know	Learning to know, be, reflect, discern
Work- and knowledge-focused	Whole person- and wisdom-focused
Individual endeavor learning from teacher to many	Community learning with support network

Notable Exceptions Amongst Educational Institutions

Given the variety of educational offers, it should be mentioned that some notable exceptions to lifelong learning options exist. Most of them are pioneers that focus on midlife learners and all of them address some of the central aspects of "long life learning." The identified institutions are categorized into two categories, institutions within and outside of higher education.

Higher Education Institutions That Embrace “Long Life Learning”

Prominent programs, such as Harvard’s Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI) and Stanford’s Distinguished Careers Institute (DCI), have spurred greater interest in how colleges and universities can meet new needs. Thanks to a grant by the Hewlett Foundation, Stanford was enabled to engage with more than 100 colleges and universities who are exploring programmatic initiatives for those in midlife. They all focus on the core principles of purpose, community, wellness and intergenerational engagement that underlie the DCI program.

Founded in 2009, four years after founder Rosabeth Moss Kanter et al. (2005) wrote a paper called “Moving Higher Education to its Next Stage,” Harvard’s Advanced

Leadership Institute (ALI) provides an interdisciplinary education designed to support successful "learner-leaders" to become "change agents for society" who "potentially impact the world" (Harvard's Advanced Leadership Institute, 2020). Kanter writes, "It is a place of action, not the passive acquisition of knowledge." The year-long program offers individuals in late career stages education on topics of "Advanced Leadership" around major global issues. The course exposes "fellows" (mid-lifers with at least twenty years of leadership experience) to frameworks and tools for leading change, combining faculty lectures, facilitated case and open discussions, with the aim to develop a written analysis and an action plan to be executed after the course, often with the support of the network of other fellows in the ALI program (Kanter, 2020) . Fellows are encouraged to audit courses and engage with students throughout the University. Upon graduation, many fellows meet at least once a year, and become part of the "ALI Coalition," an alumni network that organizes gatherings and offers opportunity for engagement and continuous learning.

Stanford's DCI program serves midlife individuals focusing on the three pillars of purpose, wellness, and community (Pizzo, 2020). Pizzo states that DCI was founded in 2015 based on insights that education later in life significantly contributes to life quality and longevity (Béchard, 2020). DCI curates a program for up to forty fellows who participate in classes and facilitated discussions. They discuss experiences and life goals, looking for the through-line of their life path to-date, fostering deeper relationships in the process. According to Pizzo, DCI is "built on the platform of a residential college education with many of its components designed to provide the

tools and knowledge to improve the [overall] life journey." It has also incorporated elements from Stanford University's "Designing Your Life" Program. The program synthesizes well-established research findings into a holistic program to improve the lives of participants and address evolving needs of institutions and society more broadly.

Notre Dame's Inspired Leadership Initiative (ILI) is animated by the belief that in order to flourish later in life with purpose one must first discover, then discern, before designing one's life. This process of discovery, discernment and design is facilitated by their program which intentionally opens the fellow's aperture to their potential through its core academic programming, including in-depth exposure to the Great Books of the Western World which gives them renewed confidence in their intellectual capacity, and access to virtually all classes offered on campus. Fellows also work individually with psychologists to better understand their motivating question as they leverage the academic and, for those interested, spiritual resources at the university to then discern their path. The experience is capped by Designing an Inspired Life, a course which provides the tools to create a personal compass which can provide guidance throughout one's life. Like other "long life learning" programs, the cohort community is an essential part of the experience.

The Ignatian Legacy Fellows program (Loyola University Chicago, Boston College, Santa Clara University, and Georgetown University) offers a program dedicated to intentional and meaningful retirement in service of others. Other programs are

growing at state universities like the University of Minnesota (UMAC) and the University of Texas (Tower Fellows Program).

Further, there are other organizations such as the Bernard Osher Foundation that are creating programs like Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes Program that financially supports 250 colleges and universities in the United States to “provide a distinctive array of non-credit courses and activities specifically developed for seasoned adults aged 50 or older who are interested in learning for the joy of learning.” Additionally, the Age Friendly University (AFU) network of universities seeks to make higher education “more age-friendly in their programs and policies” (Morrow-Howell et al., 2019). Based upon all these examples, the advantages of age-diverse education seem to be that it “ensures labor force relevancy, educates to succeed in age-diverse settings, stimulates innovation for a gaining society, meaningful engagement, social connection, and cognitive health in later life” (Morrow-Howell et al., 2019).

Given that “education is often treated as a constant, unchanging for adults throughout the life course” (ibid. based on Riley & Foner, 1968), midlife-focused institutions provide a valuable alternative for individuals. While not explicitly dedicated to "long life learning," they address some of its elements, supporting mid-lifers beyond knowledge and skill acquisition. Most importantly, they offer environments that are crucial for creating a renewed sense of purpose in what is a supportive, peer-focused community.

One of the key factors of these programs is they typically have a face-to-face residential component to them in which the learners are living close to each other. Schapiro (2009, p. 295) draws attention to the importance of residential retreats and group interaction for midlife education that are central to the listed programs:

> "The learning experience is not just a transaction between faculty and student but a more circular transaction among a group, in which everyone is learning from and with everyone else. Critical reflection on ourselves and the contexts in which we are embedded can be deepened and facilitated by taking time away from our regular lives. This sort of distance from our day to day responsibilities and relationships is one of the functions provided by residential retreats as part of the adult learning experience. If we do not provide such opportunities, then adult learners immersed in busy work and family lives, treat their adult learning experiences as another consumer event where they are shopping and getting something and not engaging with their full selves and do not detach enough from their regular life settings in order to get more perspective on them."

Writing about these programs in the Harvard Business Review, Freedman (2014) suggests, "While both the Harvard and Stanford programs target elite audiences, it's important to recognize that they are responding to universal needs for new routes, and rites of passage into the second half of life. Notably, both are premised on the understanding that adults making this transition are, for the most part, hungry for

more than intellectual stimulation or even career retooling alone. They are looking for a cohort and a community during a momentous shift, one that is developmental in nature and often entails rethinking both identity and priorities. These individuals need adequate time and a secure zone to go from one mindset to another, while preparing for a period that could last as long as the middle years in duration and be just as significant."

Dedicated "Long Life Learning" outside of Higher Education

While some "long life learning" progress has been made in higher education in the past decade, a shift and a rethinking of midlife requires these efforts to scale. Historically, scaling educational offers to the general population were often achieved by new educational institutions (Kanter et al., 2005), as they were free from having to worry about administrative costs, reputation, risk, and preconceived notions of what education should look like. New schools can focus on the midlife learner and prepare them for their transition to and their journey through elderhood, allowing the learner to focus on their personal well-being, meaning and the cultivation and harvesting of their wisdom. A collaboration with these new schools might support what Pizzo sees as one of the main challenges with university based education: "making the model scalable—capable of supporting the educational needs of millions" (Béchard, 2020). While viable examples are rare, here are two new examples, which exclusively focus on midlife and were founded to explore what a "long life learning" school can look like outside of academia.

The Modern Elder Academy (MEA) is a social enterprise focused on providing mid-lifers with knowledge, tools, and rituals to celebrate the passage through midlife and help cultivate midlife personal wisdom. More than sixty years ago, management theorist Peter Drucker presciently predicted the future world would be run by "knowledge workers" (Drucker, 2011). The MEA founders believe that, at a time when

we're awash in knowledge, maybe it's time to retire Drucker's phrase and replace it with a new one for the 21st century: "wisdom workers." This new kind of worker can embody the human skills that complement artificial intelligence including creativity and intuition, values-centered thinking, and understanding the nuance of humans and their emotions. Thus, the necessity for a new kind of "midlife wisdom school" to emerge.

The Mexico-based program has operated its campus since 2018 and has 750 alumni from 24 countries. MEA's mission of socio-economic diversity requires that more than 50% of its alums receive a scholarship offered by the Academy which means a typical weekly cohort of eighteen people might include a firemen, a nurse, an elementary school teacher as well as an investment banker and a small business owner. All potential participants must apply to seek admission for a limited number of spaces.

The founders and their guest faculty have developed five- and seven-day workshops. These focus on topics like: midlife brain development, legacy and purpose, how to shed an identity that no longer serves ("the Great Midlife Edit"), intergenerational collaboration, developing awe and curiosity in one's life, crafting one's encore career, and entrepreneurship in midlife and beyond. Indicative of just how broad midlife has become, while the average age of participants is 54, participants' age ranges have been from 30 to 88. This fact illustrates that anyone, at any age, can be interested in "long life learning," but it's been clear that those solidly in midlife seem to be most attracted and attuned.

While the workshops vary in subject, they are dedicated to supporting participants in developing a *growth mindset* (Dweck, 2017). Further, all workshops share a common teaching approach and philosophy that "wisdom isn't taught, it's shared." This creates a collaborative learning environment that allows students and faculty to learn from and with each other. Through personal reflection, participants are encouraged to share recognized patterns, behaviorally and mentally - which are seen as a proxy for wisdom - with each other through various peer-learning exercises and experiences. MEA has expanded the learning experience beyond the classroom, offering experiences such as bread baking (teaching collaboration), stone balancing (a metaphor for mentoring), and learning how to surf (developing a growth mindset) as ways to help the students somatically learn the MEA curriculum and approach to "long life learning."

The main challenge with the current offering is the brevity of the immersive experiences. It is difficult to sustain what one has learned without support beyond the week-long workshops. To overcome this challenge, many alumni cohorts have formed self-organized support groups and regional clubs globally. In addition, MEA has started to experiment with advanced programs that are offered to alums in an online format. Most importantly, though, the world that participants go back to has not gone through any kind of age-related education, which is why alumni are still confronted with age stereotypes that they have to overcome.

A second enterprise that addresses "long life learning" is the Elevation Barn, focused on successful organizational leaders and entrepreneurs. Elevation Barn focuses on the variety of societal and emotional influences that impact midlife. With a primary focus on purpose (as distinct from MEA's focus on mindset), the Elevation Barn helps its participants understand how they can have a larger societal impact in the second half of their lives, not just individually but as a collective as well. Comparable to ALI in scope, Elevation Barn offers residential retreats and events in a variety of exclusive locations around the world as an onboarding to their international community. Once in, leaders unite on business and philanthropic grand challenges applying their true and, often, newly-celebrated "superpowers."

It is remarkable that almost all of the programs listed in the last few pages are less than a decade old, so "long life learning" is a new phenomenon in an era of increased longevity. What is common throughout is an emphasis on helping mid-lifers understand the second half of their adult life. By helping students understand this much-misunderstood life stage in a comprehensive and holistic way, these "long life learning" schools help their students to *grow whole* while they're also *growing old*. This helps individuals to see a bigger, more meaningful picture, understand the natural life transitions that exist in midlife and beyond, and consider the various ways they can be generative and relevant to society.

More and more of these programs recognize that "long life learning" is more than a vocational transition. It's a developmental life shift that requires the practical

application of life stage psychology and the cultivation of wisdom in a safe, peer-focused community. And while each of these institutions is unique, their efforts are seen as complementary especially as their investigation of outcomes matures.

Conclusion

Increased longevity has led to midlife being the longest period of one's life. Traditionally assumed to be a phase of continuity, career advancement, and family creation, this potentially forty-year marathon is full of life transitions. And, yet, most mid-lifers have no preparation for the twists and turns of midlife. On the contrary, most have been influenced by the myth of a midlife crisis, an age-stereotype that negatively affects life expectancy.

While the idea of the midlife crisis has been debunked, midlife has been found as a unique time as it confronts individuals with the highest density of life events. A period which challenges individuals to learn how to navigate frequent growth and loss experiences. Taken together, these experiences challenge the individual in a way that might be best understood as a "midlife call." A call to reflect, plan, and cultivate the wisdom necessary to navigate and transition given one's unique life circumstances. Mid-lifers are answering their call to meaning, purpose and generativity, navigating their transitions, and preparing for their next life stage, elderhood, when many positive changes continue.

With limited, specialized solutions available, many mid-lifers trying to answer this call turn to a career coach, self-help books, or, increasingly, a socially-bereft online course full of thousands of people. But, in an era in which mid-lifers need to become

increasingly proficient at managing and designing their lives and navigating transitions, we need new learning programs dedicated to the unique needs of mid-lifers.

At their core, these new programs need to consider the midlife learner, their unique experiences, motivations, and learning styles. Being learner-centric means involving individuals in their education, helping them to develop a growth mindset and supporting them to recognize and harness their intrinsic motivation and life wisdom. As the education focuses on their midlife experience, they are active participants, not spectators in this learning process. This creates a basis for educational offers that educate mid-lifers about a long life, how to navigate age-related developments, develop resilience, manage transitions, foster personal well-being and meaning, and learn how to be generative to and collaborative with each other as well as future generations.

Just like childhood shapes adulthood, midlife health and well-being often shapes elderhood. “Middle-aged adults are at high risk of turning negative age stereotypes against their own person - a process that happens unconsciously most of the time” (Levy, 2017). Another reason for focusing on middle-aged adults is that they are often still in good health and not yet affected by serious chronic illnesses and or comorbidities and have many years of life ahead of them. Thus, middle-aged adults are the perfect audience to take advantage of opportunities to learn about optimal and healthy aging (Diehl et al., 2020).

While the knowledge and the need for "long life learning" programs exists, traditional lifelong learning educational institutions rarely address these unique demands. Some of the notable exceptions are Harvard's Advanced Leadership Institute (ALI) and Stanford's Distinguished Careers Institute (DCI). More recently, the Modern Elder Academy in Baja California Sur (Mexico), has emerged as one of the first non-university-based educational institutions solely dedicated to providing and scaling "long life learning."

A Call for Action

The development of new schools by for- and not-for-profit entities is a great starting point, but certainly not enough to address the needs of more than 150 million Americans who are in midlife plus those in the broader world. Traditional educational institutions, educational entrepreneurs, policy makers, and researchers are called upon to support mid-lifers through the development and funding of "long life learning" curricula and institutions.

We need research that helps us to develop a deeper understanding of the calling of midlife and the rites of passages embedded in this life stage. Here, the New Map of Life™ initiative by Laura Carstensen (Stanford Center on Longevity) is one

extraordinary example. The map “aims to envision a society that supports people to live secure and high-quality lives for a century or more” (Stanford Center on Longevity, 2020). While these initiatives are outstanding, we need continuous and focused research on the topics of midlife and middlescence as life stages, the disparity between our social and personal narratives on aging, the need for more “emotional insurance” or “social wellness” during this era of life, and the best practices on how to support midlife learning.

Given the time people need to educate and reorient themselves, we need policies that incentivize and support individuals to save for and invest in their midlife education (Gratton & Scott, 2016). This shouldn’t be limited to just upskilling for the job market, but also should offer programs that provide life-enhancement in midlife and beyond. Tax-exempt education savings accounts, much like those a parent uses for their children (known as “529 plans”), or new kinds of legislation like what was enacted in the wake of World War II in the U.S. with the G.I. Bill (the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) could help individuals who seek an educational gap year or sabbatical in midlife to pursue "long life learning." There are also starting to be non-profits formed (like AGE, Association of Growth and Education) to provide scholarship funding to institutions focused on “long life learning.”

We live in a time in which higher education is under assault (Christensen, 2010). Maybe it is time to disrupt it in a collaborative manner. Learning from and partnering with emerging "long life learning" programs can offer new opportunities

for traditional educational institutions. While traditional institutions have the reach, credibility, and knowledge to offer long life education, higher education intrapreneurs often stumble over internal red tape, a system that is perceived as faculty-centric (rather than learner-centric), and lengthy as well as costly processes. A collaboration with startups can provide an opportunity to reimagine the learning experience, speed up development, mitigate risk, and experiment with new offerings with the possibility to scale them at a quicker rate for the benefit of society as a whole.

To guarantee their survival, traditional educational institutions would benefit from embracing this movement for "long life learning." Further, collaborating with startups would allow them the ability to decentralize and develop age-appropriate offerings and programs more effectively. And, in certain cases, converting a small liberal arts college that has historically focused on twenty-year-olds to become a campus of fifty-year-olds may be the way for that college to survive. Or, creating more age-diverse college campuses could lead to an educational “intergenerational potluck.” Maybe community colleges, that have provided utilitarian skill building certificates in “adult education” programs, could broaden and deepen their offerings to include “long life learning” which might help them grow a new community of midlife students? Taken together these efforts have the potential to dramatically improve the well-being for a large percentage of the adult population. It will not only support their resilience in times of crisis like our current COVID-19 pandemic, but it will also positively affect the age-stereotypes and contribute to increased longevity and happiness.

Taken by themselves, these “long life learning” measures are not enough to resolve the ageism and the mistaken narrative much of the world has about aging and midlife. But, it does stimulate a healthy discourse about the value of intergenerational collaboration that allows all of us, no matter what our age, to have a voice in influencing the betterment of society.

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