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Mid life existential crisis

Leer en español Ler em português In a paper published in 1965, Elliott Jaques, then 48 and a relatively unknown psychoanalyst and organizational consultant, he coined the term “half-life crisis”. Jaques wrote that at this time, we are faced with our limits, our limited possibilities and our mortality. In his own life and beyond, however, Jaques did not seem to live with a sense of limitations. In the 38 years between the publication of that newspaper and his death in 2003, at the age of 86, he wrote 12 books; consulted the United States Army, the Church of England and a wide range of companies; he married Kathryn Cason, who was his wife and collaborator for more than 30 years; and, with Cason, he founded a consultancy company dedicated to spreading their ideas. Elliott Jaques, you could say, he lived twice. At the end of his first life, in the mid-1940s, he had earned two doctorates, one in medicine and another in psychology. He had followed psychoanalytic training and had gained a lot of experience both as an organizational consultant and as a psychoanalyst. In his second life, Jaques became a truly independent thinker. He has greatly expanded the range of organizations he has worked with, and has created the concepts and theories for which he is most famous. He formulated some of his most original ideas at the end of the 1990s, when he was in the late 1970s and early 1980s. People tend to react to the life of Jaques with wonder: “How can a person remain productive for so long?” In these pages, however, we argue that a life like Elliott Jaques lived should not be considered unusual. People’s age conceptions are hopeless out of contact with reality. Life expectancy in the West is about 80 years old and continues to grow. This means that at 53 years, the median age of people in the generation of the boom(those born from 1946 to 1964)—the average child boomer will live another 30 years. Stop and think about it for a moment: From people enter the workforce until they have completed their training - usually when they are in their 20s - the average child boomer has many years of productivity ahead of her as she has behind her. As life expectancy increases, changes in the average age will become an existential necessity for many businessmen. Some of these changes will be driven internally. Executives can feel that their work is no longer satisfactory and that they want new challenges, for example, or can decide that it is time to branch. Other half-age changes will be triggered by external events: A managing director may face an unresolvable conflict with the board of directors; an executive may fear being fired; a manager can be passed for promotion and think that his chances of reaching the next level are subtle. If a person goes willingly, or is pushed out, a half-life change is inevitable. But despite the need and frequency of such change, the half-life (about 43-62 years) remains a very difficult period and one for which people are, overall, unfortunately prepared sick. Two opposite myths relieve the fears of many people about half-life, inhibiting the change of half-life success. The first, the myth of midlife as the beginning of decline, is rooted in historically obsolete conceptions. According to this myth, people end their productive life and retire to 65 years. Sixty-five is not a magic number, however. It was introduced as a retirement age in Germany in 1916. Twenty-seven years earlier, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had established 70 years as age to start receiving a pension. When asked how the state could afford such a magnitude, Bismarck replied that almost no one would have reached this age anyway. She was right. According to a source, expectationlfe in germany at the time was 49, the second myth is the notion of average life as a magical transformation. This myth, fruit of the last decades, has been fed by countless books of self-help and magazine articles, and by acultural atmosphere. The myth tries to sell the illusion that if people have enough vision and willpower, they can be anything or anyone who wants to be. Paradoxically, this doesn’t make half-life career easier - it makes them more scary. In front of stories of doctors who wake up one morning knowing that they want to become chefs, housewives who have a sudden vision of business empires that are about to build, and lawyers who one day have clear plans for high-tech businesses, real-life human beings are required to feel inadequate. They have fears, doubts, and vague ideas in the best of cases, so better stick to their shirt. Our theory that a belief in one of these myths inhibits the change of half-life of success is based on our decades of work with entrepreneurs and executives in many fields, our qualitative and quantitative studies of the age group greater than 50 years, and the most important theories of personality in humanistic and psychoanalytic traditions. In the following pages, we will explore myths in more detail and demonstrate how they lead to a dysfunctional approach to half-life. What we have learned is that managers who can see beyond these myths can make life and career changes of great success. The key is that they remain open to the range of possibilities for which their experience has actually qualified them, but remain realistic on what they can achieve. Finally, we will examine the ways in which cutting-edge companies are beginning to help managers make the transition in their second life. Debunking the Myth of Midlife Decline The ideas that media life marks the beginning of decline, and that acceptance of increasing limitations is the only mature way to deal with ageing, are still generally accepted as common sense. However, the common sense can be overrated.It is exciting because it is a time when people have the opportunity to reexamine their most fundamental hypotheses. Don’t get me wrong. We are not trying in any way to target the targetthat arise with the average life, there is the inevitable question of how old citizens will maintain the standard of living most of them are used without full-time business occupation. Moreover, people at half age face more physical limitations, health becomes a pervasive concern, as a doctor once told us, “If you are 50 years old and nothing hurts, you are most likely dead!” in particular in the United States, which do not offer universal health insurance, an important disease can lead to a financial catastrophe. (see the sidebar “The risk of not managing average life.”) add to this the fact that the cultural atmosphere makes it increasingly difficult for people in the 1950s to find work, and it is not surprising that many middle-aged people experience a huge anxiety, some readers will certainly feel that despite the potential advantages, making drastic changes in the half-life is simply too risky. First, it may seem dangerous to give up pension benefits. Secondly, in particular in the United States (where there is no universal health cover,) it can be silly to move away from the corporate health plan. Given the high cost of private health insurance, it may seem preferable to stick to the protective environment of the corporate world, these fears are certainly understandable, the generation currently in average life was born in a world where companies inspired confidence and made workers feel safe. The instincts of most people said that staying within a large organization was to play safe, but increasing life expectancy, increasing health care costs and global competition have made it much more difficult for companies to meet their health care and pension obligations. remember when gm was the world’s largest society andunbearable? Now the union of automotive workers, generally untransigent standing for the rights of their members, has renegotiated the terms of GM health insurance benefits because the company has no way to satisfy its actuarial debt of \$55 billion. billions.company could collapse under this weight. The facts no longer support the strategy of sitting tight within a large organization. In fact, this is bad risk management. Psychologically, we all prefer the status quo when you feel safe. But fixing the future on corporate security is a bet, not a no-risk strategy. People must take their own fates, thinking in terms of not security networks but active risk management. Such a change in mentality has serious implications. Many people know very soon that there may be good reasons for a career change. Some may be in danger of losing work; others can realize that their hearts are no longer in what they are doing and hanging for a moment. The notion, however, that the chances to slip away with age is based on a false premise. Young people have no infinite possibilities - that is, an illusion, created by our limited knowledge of ourselves and the world when we are young. First of all, we make decisions on the basis of scanned evidence of our true abilities. After all, in our last teenagers and early 1920s, we know little about what we are good and what we like. Many careers evolve through a trial and error process partly governed byexternal (society A rather than society B gave me a job) and our successful images (“I must become an executive Wall Street!”). The illusion of freedom of young people is also based on retroactive idealization. Let’s forgetpressures we have faced: We had to enter a good school, get high grades, land a great first job, get to such an e-that positio of 30 years, and so on. And in the midst of these demands, we had to shape our identities, develop our abilities and establish our self-esteem. For the half-life, for many people, the pressures have lost much of their urgency. No longer induced by anxiety that they cannot be good at nothing, or by the need to prove that they are good at everything, they have the freedom that only knowledge of themselves can impart. They are also generally less in a hurry. Most executives considering career changes do not need to act immediately. They have time to listen to themselves, map their possibilities in the world, and create their new lives with care. The journey can take strange twists and turns before they end up in a satisfactory place. Consider Judith, an Israeli woman in the mid-1950s. He had done well for himself with most measures: He was a partner in one of the largest international accounting companies; had a beautiful house; the youngest of his three children was about to graduate from a prestigious college. But there was a big problem: Last year, Judith had found it harder to go to work in the morning. He was afraid to go through his list of things to do; every time the phone played, it was overcome by the temptation to tell his assistant to inform the caller who was in a meeting. There was nothing at work that she was looking forward to; neither meetings with customers nor strategy interactions with her peers and video conferencing with the company’s foreign offices. Judith was going through a midlife crisis. Although he felt he needed a career change, he simply didn’t know where to start, Judith had lived his life long well defined lines. she had married early, becoming accounting had made a choice that his family could easily accept; and had not suffered great disorders in the execution of his lifehis family had instilled a strong work ethics in her, time was not considered wasted time. “No wonder I became an accountant,” he joked. The first step in Judith’s midlife transition was surprising, and had little to do with career change. For Judas, an observant Jew, religion had always been important. But at some point he felt that his practice of Judaism had become a routine activity. “For a long time I felt there was no use swinging the boat,” he said. “There were children to be educated, and I had no alternative to the established ways of our congregation. A secular lifestyle never appealed to me.” With the impetus of a personal advisor, Judith began to read on various threads of Judaism. Although very intelligent, he had never really considered the option of actively thinking about religion. After several months of reading a variety of works of religious thinkers, he began to have a gleam in the eye. “These people are opening my head! I can’t believe I was lost in this!” Judith soon began to organize reading groups of similar people, and her husband became an enthusiastic partner in the search for new ways of experiencing Judaism. It was not that Judith’s religious expansion turned into a new career for her. Instead, he served as a catalyst for further changes. He talked more to people. He realized that his vision of himself as a creature of habit that could not do anything new was very limiting. One of his responsibilities at work was to advise companies in mergers and acquisitions. He had gained a lot of experience in this field, but he was finding repetitive and tiring work. However, the thought of moving to the side of investors - “to enemy territory”, as he put it - was immensely threateningShe. In fact, it was apprehension when an acquaintance suggested that Judith spoke with a risk capital fund. “I’m too old,” he said. “No venture capital funds would bein me.” In fact, the first fund he spoke with age is relatively young age. Many people have to start thinking about alternatives that fit their abilities and personalities when they still have two or three productive decades ahead of them. In this way, they can discover the possibilities that will allow them to work much longer and thus ensure their financial well-being. Our point is that while between you and your partners by the end of your first year, you will be offered a partnership. The fit was excellent, and within two years, Judith had made a successful half-life transition, Judith’s story exemplifies a ubiquitous model. He made use of a half-life transition not only for a career change, but also to connect to his desires and become a more independent, self-directed woman. For people like Judith, average life can be a particularly valuable period. Their lives can enrich themselves beyond recognition while moving towards what Carl Jung called identification: the process of becoming your true self. Like Judith, many executives who successfully negotiate half-life changes finally have the freedom to wonder what they want and believe. Debunking the Myth of Magical Transformations What Judith did particularly well was to aspire to a realistic change. But this is not always the path that people take to life. An opposing character on middle-aged transitions has flooded our culture in recent years, in part, we suspect, in reaction to the long-standing vision that media life inevitably leads to a loss of freedom. This new myth says that where there is a will, there is a way. Nike’s immortal “Just do it!” sums up the message spread by countless self-help books, inspirational workshops and business interviews that are “electrical”, “high”, and “motivating”. Take a closer look, and you will find ideas of oriental philosophies mixed with slogans that are completely inconsistent. Nevertheless, we have seen serious, experienced and andbusinessmen looking over the texts to find some unfathomable truths that are not there. One problem is that this myth of magical transformation collides with science. Our brains consist of billions of neurons connected to each other through myriad paths. Changing basic patterns of thought, feeling and action requires billions of new connections to be formed. This process must be fed by constant experiential input and is therefore inevitably gradual. Our brains are organic structures, not computers on which new programs can simply be downloaded. We accept that the fact when it comes to sensory skills such as playing squash but tend to forget it when it comes to affecting psychological models, which are not less complex. The myth of the magical transformation through vision and will force also fails the proof of daily experience. Magical transformations do not happen. We never met anyone who rose in the morning with a round vision in his mind and then followed a straight path to realize it. The fleshy and bloody human beings we work with cross a lot of fear, confusion, proof and error on the road of transformation, and the serious coaches we talked to over the years confirm it. At one point, most people come to recognize that radical transformation is unrealistic. But the disappointment of that realization can be debilitating. We’ve seen hundreds of people coming back from intensive talks and workshops that believe their lives are about to change forever. But the model is always the same: Magic lasts for several days, and within a couple of weeks the vast majority of participants no longer understand why they thought that the pep talks they heard would turn them. Subsequently, they feel confused — notewhich in which direction they would like to evolve, so they abandon their efforts to change. Paradoxically, therefore, the same doctrine that aims to encourage change in peopleto suffocate him. The myth of magic transformation has become pervasive because it feeds the all-too-human tendency towards desirable thought. We all have fantasies about what we could have been in a different life: actors, singers, writers, tycoon, political leaders. Although most of us don’t talk about these fantasies, they can have a strong grip on our psychology, as Freud demonstrated convincingly. We often feel like butterflies bordered by the cocoon of our real life, waiting to be released. This fantasy is expressed in fairy tales and films, and as long as it remains clearly understood as a fairy tale that has no problems. But when people buy in the message that fantasy is a potential reality, they get into trouble. To understand this problem, one must recognize the difference between dream and fantasy. British psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott has characterized the dream as the use of imagination to create possible scenarios where our potential can come to fruit. But to be productive, dreams must be linked to our potential. Otherwise, they’re indolent fantasies. So the ability to distinguish between dreams and fantasies is crucial. Without dreams, we are unlikely to make any change, but losing ourselves in fantasies is not only a waste of energy, but it can also become an impediment to real change. To be productive, dreams must be linked to our potential. Otherwise, they’re indolent fantasies. Consider Albert. He was a senior vice president of marketing in a large bank and had recently found a hugely successful new way to promote the latest financial instrument of the bank. The vine was buzzing with rumors that Albert would become the next CEO of the bank. Suddenly, he began to have chest pains. After numerous checks, his doctor suspected Albert’s pains were psychosomatic and reported it.one of the authors, Carlo Strenger, for advice. Albert accepted that his symptoms could be partly psychological and relatedhis age (he approached 50), but he kept wondering why he should be in trouble now when his career was going so well. If his body was telling him that the corporate game was no longer for him, what should he do? I was just thinking about leaving the bank, making Albert shiver and sweat. “I’ve been a banker all my life! it would be crazy to throw it away all now,” he said. Tree fears were natural. it is never easy for people to leave a home base that gave them state, income and security. After a period of intense anxiety about the future, they followed a couple of months in which Albert was constantly talking about becoming a screenwriter and film director. promised by self-help books promising that it could be everything he wanted, Albert planned to enter the highly competitive world of film production. He also sat down a weekend and tried to write a script. but after thinking about things through counseling, Albert realized that this was not a realistic field for him. he had always loved the movies, and his knowledge of the history of cinema was remarkable, but when pushed he admitted that the closest he had ever come to direct had taken the videos of his children: “When I wanted to turn videos of a holiday into something more, I gave it to a student of movies to edit; He didn’t even pass my head to do it alone,” he said. albert was realizing that becoming a director or screenwriter was more a fantasy than a dream. At this point, Albert became visibly depressed. not surprisingly, the myth of magic transformation had a paralyzing effect on him. felt he had no goto and traction of the people described in the inspiring literature and self-help. “They must be really special, and they are not. It will be better to stay in the bank until the retirement age,” he said. This was the stage whereneeded input from the outside world to crystallize a new vision. The personal advisor prompted Albert to wonder what attracted him to the movies. First, he loved theSecond, he thought that being in the movie would give him the opportunity to work with different types of people. “I’m not sure I can bear the idea of seeing the brooch clothes around me for much longer!” se complains. But he also had a deeper motivation. Albert had felt crucial in his adult life that some films helped him understand what he was going through. His intense interest in this artistic form has been pushed partly by the desire to make films that could help others in the same way. After some tests of reality, Albert realized that even if he could not do everything he fancied of, putting his mind to it could still do a lot. He loved to motivate people; he loved to generate ideas, and was good at it; He liked to develop strategies and had a record tried for that. In the end, after a lot of networking and some consulting, Albert met a group of people who had decided to break from a great company in the media industry. They wanted a smaller operation and a more direct contact with creative people. But they needed funds, and none of them was going to run a company. Albert had what they needed. He was good in strategy and had connections to funding sources. Most of all, it appreciated the process of sifting through scripts, generating ideas, and bringing them to fruition. It took a while to accept that there was a financial risk involved in the collaboration with this group. He was afraid that he felt humiliated if he was driving a less luxurious car than his peers did or jumped into less exclusive vacation spots. But because his self-esteem was sufficiently stable, Albert, with the support of his wife, was able to elaborate a detailed plan of cost cutting. In his surprise, when he gave up his large corner office with a view onand the company’s car, felt much less loss than he thought it would. Several years later, he reported, not only was his new most creative life of his bank life had been, but hisEven the pains were gone. Albert’s transition was possible because he could eventually distinguish between dreams and fantasies. No one would think that at the age of 50 it is realistic to start playing the piano with the aim of becoming an international concert pianist. It is also very rare for midlife career changes to involve a transition from banking to script writing in Hollywood. People can get rid of the illusion of omnipotence by focusing on the connection between their abilities and aspirations. You may not become a professional pianist, but you may become a conductor. Managing Career Change The good news for executives approaching average life is that changes in the labour market in recent decades have increased opportunities for half-life career moves. For example, there have emerged many professions and functions that did not exist even 30 years ago. In addition, large companies tend to outsource more and more tasks and functions, creating opportunities for professionals from various fields to market their services. More executives are aware of the skills they have developed over their working life, the more they can exploit these opportunities. Of course, as the examples we described show, getting to a realization of possibilities is a challenging task, which often requires the help of a personal consultant, coach, or therapist with a certain understanding of career development. Reaching self-awareness can also be a long process. It took more than a year to admit that it should contemplate a career change, and had the impetus of increasing health concerns to report the problem. Often the process, as Judith pointed out, requires a non-professional project that acts as a catalyst. The executives may, perhaps, find suchin their home communities or in CSR projects their studies sponsor. Many leaders can respond that the needs of their work at this stage of their livesa time investment in activities not related to their work. We firmly believe, however, that such activities can help managers discern the need for a transition; can also highlight the direction that the transition could take. Half-life transitions are not just an exercise of self-management, however. Companies and their investors need to prepare for the possibility that senior managers seemingly on the track to become CEO (like Albert) can in fact contemplate a very different path. On the contrary, middle-aged transitions offer companies the opportunity to import perspectives and skills from people trying to move into new areas of activity, as Judith did. Since the midlife transition is a problem (and an opportunity) that addresses companies for the first time on such scale, there are still no good practices. However, some companies are trying to deal with the situation. Most simply send managers to short seminars and programs that sell a simple message, such as “holding in motion.” “find the potential not exploited within you,” or “thinking out of the box”. These events can be useful, but companies that want to be serious about the half-life changes of managers must realize that it will take time. A three-day workshop can best push managers to start change, but can never complete the job for them. Organizations must take radical measures to help their leaders understand that given the current life expectancy, everyone in the company will start at some point and start a second life. The only question is at what age. Organizations must take radical measures to help their leaders understand that everyone in the company will start at some point and start a second life. To create this mentality, companies must help managers tofor a second life in politics. We believe that all managers over 45 should have regular meetings with trainers or consultants forplan their second career. Companies should also establish a continuing training fund that managers can draw on developing knowledge, skills and interests that serve their personal development, not only their performance in their current work. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Rakesh Khurana and Nitin Nohria suggested, the business world must cooperate with higher education institutions to develop programs and courses oriented towards that end. Companies can also find it useful to establish links with business and non-business organizations that offer opportunities for managers to collaborate on specific projects. Of course, such investments cost money, but the return is valuable for as long as the managers stay in the company. Through various development activities, managers will become all-round professionals, which is a competitive asset in itself. More importantly, perhaps, encouraging people to think about their lives after they leave the organization can help them stop equating the end of employment with death—a belief that can cause panic to infiltrate the culture of organization. If people have developed other interests, knowledge bases and skills, they will have greater self-confidence and feel less paranoid, and the organization will be more productive. Companies also need to learn how to deal with a talented influx from the child’s boom generation. While many leaders in the middle of life will find that they need to find places outside the corporate world, others will want to enter. Organizations that are willing to be creative in finding ways to use the skills and experience of midlife executive can get a competitive advantage on the market. A large financial company, for example, understood that the child’s boomers constituted a highly lucrative segment of itsMany people in this generation have accumulated substantial assets and seek good management for their money. To attract this cohort, the company has built a new midlife-oriented midlife-orientedaround a group of executives who were themselves in their 50s. These managers understood the specific needs of target customers, knew what services they wanted, and were able to earn their trust in marketing efforts. Because it is still so early in the game, few of the corporate responsibilities and opportunities for middle-age transitions have been completely thought out. But this is certain: Solutions such as therapy and training are at the best stopgap measures. Realistic programs will have to be developed to help the growing number of senior executives pass through the long process of finding a vocation for the second half of their adult life. • • The generation of the child’s boom is getting older, but its work is far from the end. Many people can anticipate and enjoy a second life, if not a second career. The task at your fingertips is not as easy as the self-help “only do” culture promises, however. The true transformation in half life does not reside in us, waiting to emerge as the butterfly from the cocoon. Authorization is a work of art. It must be achieved through effort and endurance and skill. Fortunately, life force does not extinguish only at the age of 65. In fact, there is no time more suitable for growth and inner development than for intermediate, when many people learn to listen to their own inner self—the first step necessary in the path of self-realization. A version of this article appeared in the February 2008 issue of Harvard Business Review. Review. mid life crisis vs existential crisis. what are existential crisis. is it normal to have an existential crisis. why am i having an existential crisis

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