

Executive summary

By Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.

For years, pollsters have reported that the vast majority of the nation's 78 million baby boomers plan to work well beyond traditional retirement age. But what kind of work will boomers—now entering their sixties at the rate of nearly 8,000 every day—do? And how will the kind of work boomers choose affect their lives, their communities, and the life of the nation?

The *MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures Encore Career Survey* finds that a surprisingly large number of people between the ages of 44 and 70 are already doing work that combines income and personal meaning with social impact. These individuals—5.3 to 8.4 million of them—have moved from the end of midlife careers not to leisure-based retirements, but to a new stage of work for the greater good, a stage of work that Civic Ventures has come to call the “encore career.”

The survey results suggest that the number of people choosing encore careers could grow rapidly. Of those between 44 and 70 not already in encore careers, half say they are interested in moving into jobs in such fields as education, health care, government, and the nonprofit sector.

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These numbers provide early evidence of a trend and suggest that those who have already launched encore careers may be the leading edge of a significant social movement, providing an encouraging example to millions of others looking to add purpose and meaning to work in the second half of life.

These are among the key findings from a new nationwide telephone survey of 1,063 people between the ages of 44 and 70 conducted from February 23 to March 5, 2008 by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. To gain greater precision, the telephone survey was followed by an Internet survey of more than 2,500 people from March 26 to April 1, 2008. The statistical margin of sampling error for the telephone survey is plus or minus 3 percentage points. A more detailed description of the survey methodology is included in Appendix A of this report (page 39).

The findings of the *MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures Encore Career Survey* confirm and expand upon learnings from the 2005 *MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures New Face of Work Survey*. That survey, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, found that half of all Americans age 50 to 70 want work that helps others.

Three years later, the 2008 survey findings expand on that knowledge by separating respondents into three categories—those currently in encore careers, those interested

in encore careers, and those not interested in encore careers—and asking about motivations, impressions, barriers, concerns, and satisfactions. Most of those now in encore careers are pleased with their choice. To their cohorts thinking about putting a toe in the pool, the message is, “Come on in, the water’s fine.”

Who are the people already in encore careers?

The encore career concept is new and evolving, and this survey is the first to attempt to count the number of people currently engaged in encore careers (CECs). We’ve established two ways to quantify that number. Nearly one in 10 (9.5%) of the telephone respondents answered a detailed set of questions qualifying them as currently in encore careers. A more conservative framing of the definition of an encore career provides a solid lower-limit estimate of 6 percent. (For a complete discussion of these numbers, see the full report, page 26.)

Those currently in encore careers have some notable characteristics.

- The majority (about 60%) are between 51 and 62. About one quarter (24%) are between the ages of 44 and 50, while another 16 percent are between 63 and 70.
- By 56 to 44 percent, they are more likely to be female than male.
- Most (52%) come from professional or managerial careers, and an additional 28 percent come from other white-collar occupations. But nearly one in five (18%) come from blue-collar jobs.
- The largest group of people in encore careers lives in suburbia (42%), while 30 percent live in urban areas and more than one quarter (28%) live in small town and rural areas.

What do these encore careers look like? And what do those in encore careers think of their work?

- Those in encore careers are working in education (30%), health care (23%), government (16%), other non-profit organizations (13%), and for-profit businesses that serve a public good (9%).
- Those in encore careers seem to be able to combine commitment and flexibility. Most in encore careers (59%) work 40 hours per week or more, with three-quarters (73%) saying that they have the flexibility they need and want, and more (85%) saying they have the time to do the things outside of work that are important to them.
- Answering a series of true-false questions about their actual experience, people in encore careers express very high job satisfaction. Overwhelming majorities say they feel good about the work they are doing, see the positive results of their work, know that they are making a difference, feel appreciated, are able to use their skills and experience, and are learning new things.

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Who are the people interested in encore careers?

Assuming 9.5 percent of the entire 44-70 population is currently engaged in encore careers, the remaining 90.5 percent divide almost evenly between those interested in encore careers (44.7%) and those not interested (45.8%).

The most interested are the youngest: 50 percent of trailing-edge boomers, age 44-50, say they want to join the 7 percent of their group already in encore careers. About a third (34%) of the pre-boomers, age 63-70, are interested in joining the 8 percent of their group already in encore careers. And 46 percent of the leading-edge boomers, age 51-62, are interested in joining the 12 percent of their age cohort already in encore careers.

Attitudes about retirement are highly predictive of whether a person is interested in an encore career. Seven in 10 of those already in encore careers (72%) and those interested in encore careers (71%) say retirement is a time to begin a new chapter in life, compared to 43 percent of those who say they are not interested in encore careers.

Why are people interested in encore careers?

Several mutually reinforcing interests are leading boomers toward encore careers. Survey findings show that the primary motivations include a desire to stay active, productive, challenged and learning. More than a third of those in encore careers and those interested in them cite practical needs for continuing income and health benefits. A majority are looking for flexibility in the work that they do.

Beyond these general interests, choosing work for the common good reflects the desire of those in encore careers and those interested in them in finding work that provides both meaning and accomplishment. More than half (54%) of those in encore careers and two-thirds (64%) of those interested say it is very important to them to use their skills and experience to help others.

What concerns people interested in encore careers and do those in encore careers have the same concerns?

People interested in encore careers have misgivings about taking the plunge, but most of those actually in encore careers now say they are very satisfied. The experience of these early adopters should give others confidence about moving forward.

Issues of job flexibility top the list of concerns about possible encore careers. Most of those interested in encore careers (80%) are concerned about being able to take time off when they need to, but only 27 percent of those in encore careers cite this as a problem. Most of those interested in encore careers (71%) are concerned that they might not have time to do things they need to do, like take care of family members, but only 15 percent of those in encore careers cite this as a problem.

A majority of those interested in encore careers worry that they will not earn enough income (56%) or maintain the benefits they need (59%). But 76 percent of those already in encore careers say they do get the pay and benefits they need. This pattern repeats for most of the respondents' other concerns, including finding the right job, encountering age discrimination, and experiencing health problems that make work difficult.

What kinds of policy and workplace changes could turn interest into action?

The research identifies several steps employers and policy makers could take to encourage those interested in encore careers to pursue them. A few changes in workplace and government policy could entice large numbers of baby boomers to move from merely being interested in serving their communities to becoming active participants in the civic labor force.

Access to affordable health care tops the list, as it has in surveys of other age groups. There is also strong support for an end to financial penalties for continuing to work (72%), online resources to make finding encore jobs easier (64%), and education and training to meet new job requirements (61%).

Employers who want to tap the potential of this group could consider reshaping job descriptions to offer part-time and flexible work options.

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Where does that leave us?

This survey tells us that the encore career option is highly attractive for a large number of workers in the second half of life. As spelled out in the full report, the issues that give people pause about pursuing encore careers are chiefly practical ones—flexibility in hours and job duties, health benefits, training needs, financial obligations, fitting in, being competent, losing status. These barriers are very real for many people, but on balance, most who have made the leap to encore careers feel a high degree of satisfaction.

Those currently working in encore careers and those who are interested in encore careers seem realistic about the encore experience. They understand that their income, seniority and status might be less in social purpose work environments, but they hope to retain some benefits and gain flexibility in their work schedules. They want to give back to their communities and neighbors by continuing to use their talents and experiences in ways that help give meaning and purpose to their lives.

The millions now in encore careers constitute a new social phenomenon with promise for individuals and society. The tens of millions interested in joining them could add up to one of the most unexpected and significant consequences of an aging America. ■