

# BACK TO BASICS – STRAGIES FOR TRAINING AND STATUS

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## Introduction and research questions

It is not always easy for hardworking, and sometimes overachieving, people in the middle of their careers to fit physical activity into the crowded schedule of everyday life. However, in Sweden a growing number of people (not least women) succeed and more and more of them integrate their training into a personal career and identity development. A lot of the activities carried could be considered as “back to basics”. Connected to this, we have witnessed a growing number of participants in running, bicycling, cross-country skiing and triathlon events.

This study aims at increasing the knowledge about physical activity and strategies behind it among adults in the middle of their careers by answering the following research questions:

How do people (in Sweden), age 30-50 and employed within knowledge-based sectors, reason about physical activity and time in everyday life? How do these persons develop strategies for physical activity and training? What activities are requested within the target group? How could the increased interest in basic activities like running and cross-country skiing, and the increased interest in performing in these activities, be explained?

## Theoretical departures and methods

The theoretical framework includes perspectives on time use and perception, strategies for physical activity, and status perspectives on training (see for instance Robinson & Godbey, 2000; Zuzanek, 2004; Engström, 2010). Also, studies of the Swedish population’s health and exercise constitute background material. Physical activity refers to the whole scale from light to intense activities, with a special focus on training in this specific presentation. Methods used: 550 surveys at three knowledge-based work places in Malmo, interviews with gym owners regarding training trends, field studies and in-depth interviews with six persons within the target population. Moreover, material concerning participation in running, triathlon and cross-country skiing events has been gathered. Finally, the back to basics trend, and the event development connected to this, has been problematized from a commercial, media and personal performance/status perspective.

## Results

The majority of full-time employees within knowledge-based sectors has an ambition to be physically active (and a majority is). A high preoccupation with the importance of exercising also results in feelings of pressure and guilt.

Difficulties in finding time for physical activity make individuals develop different strategies, such as: preferences for time-efficient and flexible activities, using lunch breaks for gym-session or for walks, exercising early mornings on the way to work, active transports, creating challenges in order to push themselves, etc. A lot of the activities carried out could be categorized as basic activities, which are easy to access, carry out, efficient and don’t demand coordination with other individuals. Also the fitness centres experience a growing demand for efficient, basic activities like cross-fit and outdoor running.

The growing number of people participating in running or other back to basics events could be explained in different ways, for instance like this:

Running (or cross-country skiing, or bicycling) is chosen as an activity because it is individual, easy, flexible and chaperform increases (among your friends, colleagues and individual, easy solution to a external performance indicator (also without the field of physical activity) performance - although you underline that it is only about creating a personal challenge.  
Or, as a combination of the above and this:

Running (or cross-country skiing, or bicycling) is chosen as an activity because it is individual, easy, flexible and efficient . The amount of people carrying out the specific activity increases. An industry is developed around the activity. With more participants/actives the industry could be differentiated. Nisched products and events develop. You feel inspired to be part of an event as an exciting experience - as that’s the image of it.

The back to basics trend is not as basic as it might seem. It is often a conscious strategy behind it and the activity is used as a trend and status marker, which the market is eager to exploit.

## References

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