

Sustainable Talent Management for Multigenerational Workforces

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Abstract

The simultaneous presence of employees at different career and life stages has made sustainable talent management an increasingly important organizational concern. Conventional approaches to multigenerational workforce management frequently assume that employees belonging to particular generational categories possess predictable attitudes, motivations, communication preferences, or technological capabilities. Such assumptions can encourage stereotyping and obscure the substantial variation that exists within age groups. This study develops an alternative framework in which sustainable talent management is conceptualized as a life-course and age-inclusive system designed to maintain employability, engagement, knowledge continuity, work ability, and equitable career opportunity over extended working lives.

A structured integrative review of peer-reviewed research and institutional evidence published between 2007 and August 2026 was conducted. The analytical corpus focused on age-inclusive human resource practices, diversity climate, employee retention, flexible work design, lifelong learning, intergenerational knowledge transfer, work engagement, and sustainable human resource management. Evidence was synthesized through thematic coding and an author-developed Evidence-Synthesis Priority Index rather than through fabricated primary employee data. The findings identify age-inclusive human resource practices and an anti-discrimination climate as the strongest foundations of sustainable multigenerational talent systems.

Continuous reskilling, reciprocal knowledge exchange, employee work ability, and flexible career architecture also emerge as strategically important. The analysis further indicates that organizations should replace age-based assumptions with needs-responsive practices that remain accessible across career stages. Sustainable talent management is therefore most effective when recruitment, development, promotion, mentoring, performance management, flexibility, and succession processes operate as an interconnected architecture rather than isolated generational programs. The proposed framework contributes to talent-management research by integrating sustainability, age diversity, organizational support, knowledge continuity, and career development within a single life-course perspective. It provides organizations with a practical basis for retaining expertise while developing emerging talent without reinforcing generational stereotypes.

Keywords: Sustainable Talent Management; Multigenerational Workforce; Age-Inclusive HRM; Talent Retention; Intergenerational Learning; Knowledge Transfer; Workforce Sustainability; Diversity Climate; Lifelong Learning; Employee Engagement

1. Introduction

Organizations increasingly employ individuals whose careers span substantially different stages, from employees entering professional life to experienced workers continuing employment beyond conventional retirement expectations. Population aging, longer working lives, technological transformation, changing employment relationships, and demand for specialized knowledge have intensified the strategic significance of age diversity. OECD evidence emphasizes that balanced age structures can support organizational productivity and that longer working lives depend not only on retaining older employees but also on providing lifelong learning, mobility, flexible working arrangements, and suitable employment throughout the career cycle. Sustainable talent management must consequently address how organizations attract, develop, engage, deploy, and retain capabilities over time while simultaneously preventing the premature loss of knowledge and maintaining opportunities for emerging employees.

The widespread use of labels such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z has encouraged organizations to design differentiated employment practices on the assumption that each cohort possesses distinctive work values. Empirical evidence, however, requires considerably greater caution. Costanza et al. analyzed 20 studies involving 19,961 participants and found that many differences in job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions attributed to generational membership were small or effectively negligible. Parry and Urwin similarly questioned the empirical consistency of generational explanations. Consequently, managing employees according to presumed cohort characteristics can generate new stereotypes rather than meaningful personalization. Sustainable talent management should instead consider individual capabilities, career stage, work demands, developmental expectations, personal circumstances, and organizational experience.

Age diversity itself is neither inherently beneficial nor inherently problematic. Its consequences depend substantially on organizational conditions. Kunze, Boehm, and Bruch demonstrated that age diversity may become problematic when accompanied by perceptions of age discrimination, whereas Boehm, Kunze, and Bruch subsequently showed the strategic importance of age-inclusive HR practices in developing an age-diversity climate. Contemporary research involving 983 employees across 48 organizations further demonstrated that age-inclusive HR practices can contribute to work engagement through age-diversity climate and perceived organizational support. These findings shift attention away from demographic composition alone and toward the organizational systems through which employees experience fairness, inclusion, opportunity, and support.

Sustainable talent management therefore requires a more integrated perspective than conventional recruitment and succession planning. Organizations must simultaneously preserve critical expertise, develop new capabilities, support career mobility, prevent skill obsolescence, facilitate reciprocal knowledge transfer, promote employee health and work ability, and maintain equitable access to advancement. The OECD has similarly argued that age-related workplace initiatives should not operate as isolated interventions for particular groups but should be embedded within a broader life-cycle approach to an age-diverse workforce. Against this background, the present study develops an evidence-informed framework for sustainable talent management that treats multigenerational workforce capability as a continuously renewable organizational resource.



2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 Conceptual Objective

The first objective is to develop a theoretically coherent understanding of sustainable talent management in multigenerational organizations. Rather than defining workforce generations as fixed behavioral categories, the study examines talent sustainability through career stage, age inclusion, employability, organizational support, skills renewal, and employee work ability. This approach aims to establish a framework capable of accommodating individual diversity within as well as across age groups.

2.2 Analytical Objective

The second objective is to identify the talent-management practices most consistently associated in existing research with sustainable workforce outcomes. Particular attention is given to age-inclusive HR systems, lifelong learning, intergenerational knowledge transfer, diversity climate, flexible career arrangements, employee engagement, retention, and work ability. The study also evaluates how these practices interact rather than treating each HR intervention independently.

2.3 Managerial Objective

The third objective is to translate the accumulated evidence into a practical architecture for organizations managing employees across multiple career stages. The study seeks to determine how recruitment, development, performance management, mentoring, flexible working, career mobility, succession planning, and knowledge management can jointly contribute to long-term workforce resilience.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Moving Beyond Generational Stereotypes

The concept of generational differences remains popular in management discourse because it provides an apparently simple explanation for variations in workplace behavior. However, the empirical literature provides limited justification for deterministic assumptions about generational groups. Costanza et al. reported that generational differences across important work attitudes were generally small, while Parry and Urwin concluded that available evidence did not consistently support the strong distinctions commonly presented in practitioner literature.

This does not imply that employees at different ages or career stages possess identical needs. Ng and Feldman's meta-analysis identified meaningful relationships between chronological age and several job attitudes, while Kooij and colleagues demonstrated that work motives can change over the career lifespan. The distinction is important: age-related developmental processes, accumulated work experience, career stage, health, tenure, and changing personal priorities should not automatically be interpreted as effects of generational membership.

Sustainable talent management should therefore avoid designing rigid programs such as one benefit system for Millennials and another for older employees. A stronger approach creates differentiated options that remain accessible according to employee circumstances rather than demographic labels.

3.2 Age-Inclusive Human Resource Management

Age-inclusive HR practices involve providing equitable access to recruitment, training, career development, promotion, participation, and managerial support regardless of age. Boehm, Kunze, and Bruch established age-inclusive HR practices as an important antecedent of a positive age-diversity climate. Rudolph and Zacher subsequently demonstrated through a six-wave longitudinal study involving 355 employees that age-inclusive practices were associated with work ability through age-diversity climate at the between-person level.

Fan and colleagues extended this perspective by showing that age-inclusive HR practices can influence work engagement through perceived organizational support and age-diversity climate. The implications extend directly to talent management. Employees are more likely to remain organizational resources when development, recognition, advancement, and meaningful work do not become artificially restricted by age expectations.

Sustainable HRM literature provides complementary evidence. Cachón-Rodríguez and colleagues examined the relationship between sustainable HRM, social capital, employee loyalty, and retention, reinforcing the view that workforce sustainability requires long-term investment in human relationships rather than short-term labor utilization.

3.3 Reciprocal Learning and Knowledge Continuity

Knowledge continuity is particularly significant within multigenerational organizations. Employees with longer organizational tenure may possess tacit operational knowledge, customer relationships, institutional memory, problem-solving routines, and contextual understanding that cannot easily be replaced through recruitment. Younger or newer employees may simultaneously contribute recently acquired technical knowledge, digital capabilities, alternative professional perspectives, and emerging methodological expertise.

Fasbender and Gerpott consequently conceptualize knowledge transfer between younger and older employees as a bidirectional process, rather than assuming that knowledge moves exclusively from senior employees toward junior colleagues. They argue that both younger and older employees can operate as knowledge senders and receivers and that age-inclusive HR practices can reduce barriers generated by status competition and social comparison.

This perspective strengthens the case for reciprocal mentoring, mixed-career project teams, communities of practice, structured succession knowledge transfer, and collaborative learning. Sustainable talent management consequently involves not simply retaining employees but maintaining the organizational circulation of their knowledge.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study adopted a structured integrative literature-review and conceptual-synthesis design. This design was selected because no original employee survey or organizational dataset was supplied for the present study. Accordingly, the paper does not report invented respondents, regression coefficients, significance tests, or experimental results. Instead, conclusions are derived from established empirical studies, meta-analyses, conceptual research, and authoritative labor-market evidence.

4.2 Information Sources and Search Strategy

Academic evidence was identified through publisher databases and scholarly search resources, including Springer Nature, Wiley, Oxford Academic, Cambridge University Press, Elsevier, and related scholarly repositories. Institutional evidence from the OECD and International Labour Organization was incorporated where directly relevant to aging, employability, workforce inclusion, and working-life sustainability.

4.3 Eligibility and Evidence Coding

Publications were retained when they directly examined at least one element connecting age or career diversity with HR practices, employee development, engagement, retention, knowledge transfer, work ability, organizational climate, or sustainable workforce management. Purely descriptive discussions of generational characteristics without identifiable theoretical or empirical foundations were excluded from the analytical core.

Table 1: Methodological Framework for Evidence Synthesis

Component	Specification
Research approach	Structured integrative literature review
Primary analytical period	2007–August 2026
Evidence types	Empirical studies, meta-analyses, conceptual studies, institutional reports
Core research domains	Age-inclusive HRM, sustainable HRM, diversity climate, retention, work ability, knowledge transfer, learning and flexibility
Main unit of analysis	Organizational talent-management practice
Coding approach	Thematic comparative coding
Primary outcome domains	Engagement, retention, employability, work ability, knowledge continuity and organizational resilience
Exclusion principle	Unsupported generational stereotypes and non-relevant demographic descriptions

4.4 Evidence-Synthesis Priority Index

To make the conceptual comparison more transparent, an Evidence-Synthesis Priority Index (ESPI) was constructed. The index is not an empirical employee score. It is an analytical ranking developed from the reviewed evidence.

Five criteria informed the synthesis:

1. consistency of evidence across studies;
2. demonstrated relationship with retention or engagement;
3. contribution to organizational knowledge continuity;
4. applicability across different career stages; and
5. practical organizational implementability.

The index ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values representing stronger strategic priority within the proposed sustainable talent-management architecture.

5. Analysis

5.1 Strategic Components of Sustainable Talent Management

The synthesis identifies six mutually reinforcing components. Age-inclusive HR practices receive the highest priority because they influence recruitment, development, promotion, support, and perceptions of fairness simultaneously. An anti-age-discrimination climate follows closely because formal HR practices can deliver limited value if employees continue to perceive age-related exclusion.

Continuous learning and reskilling constitute the third major component. Longer careers and accelerating technological change mean that employability cannot be maintained through qualifications acquired only at career entry. OECD analysis similarly emphasizes lifelong learning and career development as necessary components of productive longer working lives.

Reciprocal knowledge transfer is also highly important. Sustainable talent systems cannot allow organizational knowledge to disappear through retirement, turnover, restructuring, or technological transition. At the same time, they should avoid assuming that expertise moves only from older to younger employees. Fasbender and Gerpott's framework supports mutual knowledge exchange across age-diverse employees.

Table 2: Evidence-Based Priorities for Multigenerational Talent Sustainability

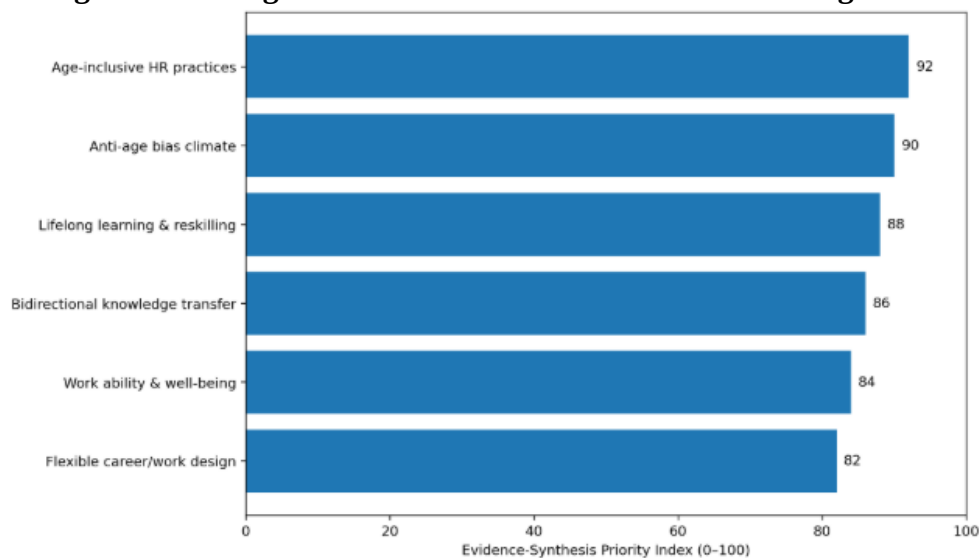
Talent-Management Dimension	ESPI Score	Principal Organizational Contribution
Age-inclusive HR practices	92	Equitable access to recruitment, development, promotion and support
Anti-age-discrimination climate	90	Trust, fairness, inclusion and reduced age-based categorization
Lifelong learning and reskilling	88	Employability, technological adaptability and internal mobility

Talent-Management Dimension	ESPI Score	Principal Organizational Contribution
Bidirectional knowledge transfer	86	Institutional memory, reciprocal learning and succession continuity
Work ability and employee well-being	84	Sustainable performance and longer productive careers
Flexible career and work design	82	Retention, career-stage adaptation and continued participation

Note: ESPI values represent an author-developed conceptual evidence synthesis and must not be interpreted as survey percentages or population estimates.

5.2 Evidence-Synthesis Priority Pattern

Figure 1: Strategic Priorities for Sustainable Talent Management



The priority pattern demonstrates that sustainable management of multigenerational talent begins with the organizational system rather than the employee's generational category. The relatively narrow range between the six dimensions is also significant. No single practice is sufficient independently. For example, training availability may increase employee capability but have limited retention value if promotion opportunities remain age-biased. Similarly, flexible work may support longer employment but cannot preserve institutional knowledge without deliberate knowledge-transfer processes.

5.3 Proposed Sustainable Multigenerational Talent Architecture

The findings support an integrated architecture built around five interconnected processes.



Inclusive talent entry and mobility. Job advertisements, selection criteria, internal mobility systems, high-potential identification, and promotion processes should be reviewed for direct and indirect age bias.

Continuous capability renewal. Learning should remain available throughout employment rather than becoming concentrated among early-career employees. Reskilling should combine technical, digital, managerial, interpersonal, and role-specific capabilities.

Reciprocal knowledge infrastructure. Organizations should complement traditional mentoring with reverse mentoring, peer learning, job shadowing, communities of practice, cross-career project teams, and structured succession documentation.

Flexible career sustainability. Alternative career pathways, lateral mobility, role redesign, flexible scheduling, phased transitions, project assignments, and different leadership trajectories can retain employees whose capabilities remain valuable even when their preferred working arrangement changes.

Work ability and well-being. Long-term talent availability requires attention to workload, autonomy, psychological safety, health, meaningful work, managerial support, and work-life compatibility. Employee sustainability and organizational sustainability should therefore be treated as mutually dependent rather than competing priorities.

6. Discussion

6.1 From Generation Management to Capability Management

The most important theoretical implication is that sustainable multigenerational workforce management should not be structured around stereotypical generational profiles. Costanza et al.'s meta-analysis provides particularly strong justification for this position because many presumed differences in work-related attitudes were small or negligible. Organizations may therefore achieve more accurate talent decisions by examining employee needs, capabilities, career trajectories, work characteristics, and individual circumstances directly.

This shift can be described as movement from generation management toward capability management. The question changes from “What does this generation want?” to “What capabilities does this employee possess, what capabilities require development, what conditions enable sustainable contribution, and how can this knowledge remain available to the organization?”

Such an approach simultaneously improves inclusiveness and managerial precision.

6.2 Sustainable Talent Management as a Mutual Investment System

The literature also suggests that sustainable talent relationships are reciprocal. Employees contribute expertise, effort, learning, mentoring, adaptability, and organizational knowledge. Organizations provide opportunity, development, fairness, support, flexibility, recognition, and psychologically sustainable working conditions.

Age-inclusive HR practices are particularly important because they communicate whether such organizational investment remains available throughout the employment lifespan. Research by Fan and colleagues indicates that age-diversity climate and perceived organizational support help explain how inclusive HR practices translate into engagement. Sustainable talent management should therefore be

assessed not solely according to recruitment numbers or annual turnover rates but also according to continued employability, internal career movement, learning participation, knowledge exchange, work ability, and perceived fairness.

6.3 Managerial and Organizational Implications

Organizations seeking to implement the framework should begin by auditing talent processes for unnecessary age assumptions. Terms such as “digital native,” “young and energetic,” “overqualified,” “too senior,” or “not ready because of age” may reveal hidden categorization that interferes with evidence-based talent decisions.

Development budgets should also be examined by employee age and career stage to determine whether particular groups are systematically underrepresented. Succession planning should include both the identification of successors and structured mechanisms for transferring tacit expertise before critical employees leave.

Mentoring programs should operate in two directions. Experienced employees may transmit contextual expertise, professional judgment, organizational memory, stakeholder knowledge, and problem-solving heuristics. Employees with more recent technical exposure may contribute contemporary digital practices, emerging tools, new disciplinary knowledge, and different market perspectives.

Finally, workforce analytics should distinguish age from capability. Age data may legitimately support monitoring of fairness and workforce planning, but age should not function as an automatic proxy for adaptability, productivity, ambition, technological competence, or learning capacity.

7. Conclusion

Sustainable talent management for multigenerational workforces requires organizations to move beyond simplistic assumptions about generational identity and develop employment systems capable of supporting talent throughout changing career and life stages. The evidence reviewed in this study indicates that workforce age diversity produces organizational value primarily when it is supported by inclusive HR practices, equitable opportunity, positive diversity climate, continuous learning, reciprocal knowledge exchange, flexible career structures, and sustainable work conditions.

The proposed framework positions age-inclusive HR practices as the foundation of the system while recognizing that fairness alone is insufficient. Sustainable organizations must continually renew employee capabilities, preserve organizational knowledge, support work ability, and create career pathways capable of accommodating changing circumstances. Intergenerational knowledge exchange should be deliberately reciprocal, allowing both experienced and emerging employees to operate as sources and recipients of strategically valuable knowledge.

The study also challenges the assumption that effective multigenerational management requires separate HR strategies for predefined generations. Evidence concerning generational differences remains substantially less consistent than popular management discourse often implies. A life-course and capability-based approach is therefore more defensible academically and more adaptable managerially. Because the present study is based on structured secondary evidence rather than original organizational data, future research should empirically test the proposed Sustainable Multigenerational Talent



Architecture across industries, national contexts, organizational sizes, and occupational groups. Longitudinal studies could particularly examine whether age-inclusive practices influence retention, employability, knowledge continuity, work ability, innovation, and career sustainability over time. The central conclusion remains that sustainable talent management is achieved not by managing generations as stereotypes, but by creating organizational conditions in which capabilities can be developed, exchanged, retained, and renewed throughout working life.

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