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# Responsible aging: integrating individual and intergenerational well-being

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this article is to introduce and explicate the concept of responsible aging, defined as the lifelong, proactive pursuit of personal well-being in ways that also support the well-being of other generations. The article also examines the antecedents and outcomes of responsible aging and outlines directions for future research.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This conceptual paper offers a critical review of the extant literature, aiming to develop new theoretical insights. We develop a comprehensive framework with key aspects that are essential for understanding the nature, antecedents, and outcomes of responsible aging.

**Findings** – The proposed framework illustrates the relationship between aging and multiple dimensions of well-being, highlighting that aspirations, intentions, and behaviors converge in the pursuit of responsible aging. It reveals reciprocal associations between responsible aging and both individual and contextual characteristics. It also emphasizes the active role of individuals across all age groups in promoting responsible aging practices and fostering intergenerational well-being.

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**Research limitations/implications** – The article broadens the aging literature by integrating individual and intergenerational well-being, thereby unlocking the transformative potential of aging. It reconceptualizes aging from a narrative centered on individual loss to a collaborative, multi-generational process focused on sustaining well-being across age cohorts. The responsible aging framework contributes to the research in service, marketing, and innovation, particularly by encouraging scholars to explore aging as a dynamic, relational phenomenon that involves shared responsibilities, co-creation of value, and systemic innovation across generations.

**Practical implications** – The article assists organizations and service stakeholders by identifying key factors relevant to developing inclusive practices for aging populations. The framework offers a foundation for healthcare providers, service organizations, and other societal actors to reflect on how systems and services can better accommodate, support, and engage individuals across generations.

**Social implications** – Responsible aging carries important societal implications, as it offers an intergenerational perspective that supports social cohesion, shared responsibility, and the sustainable well-being of aging populations. By encouraging individuals to contribute not only to their own well-being but also to the betterment of others, it fosters a more inclusive and resilient society.

**Originality/value** – This article presents a novel perspective on aging, emphasizing intergenerational well-being for sustainable and equitable outcomes in aging societies. It challenges traditional views of aging as an isolated experience and presents responsible aging as a dynamic, multifaceted process with far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and society at large.

**Keywords** Well-being, Aging, Responsibility, Sustainability, Intergenerationality, Proactive behavior, Inclusive practices

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

The global population is aging rapidly, presenting significant challenges for both individuals and society. Aging is a complex process shaped by societal fears of physical deterioration, cultural glorification of youth, and economic concerns about retirement and healthcare (Levy and Myers, 2004; North and Fiske, 2015a). By 2050, over 20% of people worldwide will be 60 or older (WHO, 2024). This demographic shift increases pressure on healthcare systems, housing, and economic stability. Previous studies have focused on how older adults maintain physical and mental health (e.g. Rowe and Kahn, 1997; Wheeler and Giunta, 2009). While existing aging frameworks emphasize well-being, the interdependence between generations is overlooked. For decades, there have been calls for a more holistic and integrative approach towards aging that acknowledges the interconnectedness of individual and well-being across generations (e.g. Baltes and Baltes, 1990; Erikson, 1950; Havighurst, 1961; Veenhoven, 2009). This is a critical omission for several reasons. First, financial behavior varies fundamentally across one's life cycle (Mason *et al.*, 2016). Second, social sustainability requires an intergenerational approach (Komp-Leukkunen and Sarasma, 2024).

Aging societies result in financial and generational tensions such as the consequences of extending the retirement age or reallocating resources from younger populations (Rabaté *et al.*, 2024). To ensure long-term sustainability, aging-related policies must strike a balance between supporting older adults' well-being and preserving opportunities for younger generations to thrive. In other words, the future of an aging society depends on its sustainability (Brundtland Commission, 1987). The latter requires efforts beyond introducing environmentally friendly practices and implies shifting aging individuals to behave more responsibly and overcome the self-other trade-off (White *et al.*, 2019).

Given the importance of an intergenerational approach to well-being, and in line with the call for aging frameworks that recognize the interconnectedness of well-being across generations (Veenhoven, 2009), this article introduces a conceptual framework of responsible aging. Responsible aging is defined as *the lifelong, proactive pursuit of personal well-being in ways that also support the well-being of other generations*. In addition to the intergenerational component (operationalized as individual well-being vs intergenerational well-being), the conceptual framework also integrates aspirations, intentions, and behaviors to better delineate the dynamics of intergenerational well-being. To actively implement and manage the idea of responsible aging, the impact of different personal and contextual characteristics is part of the framework.

Following existing guidelines for conceptual research (Heinonen and Gruen, 2024; Jaakkola, 2020; MacInnis, 2011), we approach aging from an innovative perspective, proposing “responsible aging” as a dynamic and comprehensive concept. MacInnis (2011) highlights the importance of surpassing existing paradigms to generate new ideas. In this spirit, we carried out a critical review of existing research, leading to a reconceptualization of aging from a positive perspective. This reconceptualization shifts the focus of aging from decline or health maintenance to active engagement, lifelong growth, and contributing to the enrichment of one’s own life and the lives of others. The framework highlights that responsible aging is not merely an individual pursuit but a dynamic interplay between individual, contextual, and intergenerational dynamics, fostering well-being throughout the aging process.

This paper offers three primary contributions. First, the concept of responsible aging offers an expanded understanding of aging that moves beyond traditional, individual-focused models by placing intergenerational well-being at its core. This broader perspective is essential for addressing the complex social and economic challenges posed by an aging population, highlighting the need for mutual support and shared responsibility across generations. Second, the article introduces a responsible aging framework as a central tool for guiding the implementation and management of this approach. By articulating how well-being can be pursued both personally and across generations, the framework unlocks the transformative potential of responsible aging. It offers a conceptual framework that sheds light on how different generations can actively support one another’s well-being, creating a foundation for more inclusive, sustainable aging practices. Third, building on the responsible aging framework, we propose a research agenda to advance understanding of responsible aging across individual, organizational, and societal levels. The concept and its accompanying framework enrich both theoretical and practical discussions on aging by integrating economic, social, and intergenerational dimensions. Together, they offer a foundation for promoting a more sustainable, inclusive, and fair vision of aging.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. We begin by reviewing the existing literature on aging and well-being. Then, we define the concept of responsible aging and propose the responsible aging conceptual framework. Finally, we propose a research agenda to stimulate future research on the socially and economically important topic of responsible aging.

## Well-being in aging

Perspectives of aging shape societal attitudes and policy decisions, thereby influencing the development and implementation of initiatives aimed related to aging populations. Traditionally, aging was predominantly associated with decline, shaped by social fears of physical deterioration, cultural glorification of youth, and economic concerns about retirement and healthcare (Levy and Myers, 2004; North and Fiske, 2015a). From this perspective, aging is an inevitable process that universally diminishes well-being. In contrast, recent research offers a more nuanced perspective on aging, and modern perspectives (e.g. healthy aging, resilient aging) increasingly challenge the traditional narrative of loss, instead framing aging as a transition phase and a process of development and maturation (Vaillant and Mukamal, 2001). This shift emphasizes a growing recognition of aging as an opportunity to achieve well-being, particularly through technological advancements, sustainability, continued engagement, and intergenerational solidarity (Boudiny, 2013; Fernández-Ballesteros, 2019). Table 1 summarizes key themes and perspectives on aging, contrasting traditional decline-based views with frameworks addressing positive perspectives. These positive perspectives emphasize opportunities for growth, engagement, and well-being in later life.

One well-established concept is *successful aging*, which emphasizes the maintenance of low risk for disease and disability, high levels of physical and cognitive function, and (2021) engagement in meaningful activities (Rowe and Kahn, 1997). However, this perspective has been criticized for being overly idealistic, as it fails to account for structural inequalities, chronic conditions, and disabilities that make these criteria unattainable for many (Kabadayi

Table 1. Perspectives on aging

Theme	Key points	References
Negative perspectives on aging	Physical decline, cultural glorification of youth, economic concerns Associated with physical, social, and role-related losses	Levy and Myers (2004); North and Fiske (2015a) Kim <i>et al.</i> (2021)
Positive perspectives on aging	A “crisis” event resulting in reduced life satisfaction, increased psychological distress A transition phase linked to wisdom, contentment, and opportunities for pursuing passions and life goals Viewed as development and maturation rather than decline Aging seen as an opportunity for well-being through technology, sustainability, and intergenerational solidarity Prominence of concepts like successful, healthy, active, resilient, productive aging	Elwell and Maltbie-Crannell (1981); Bossé <i>et al.</i> (1987); Drentea (2002) Anderson <i>et al.</i> (2013); Beier <i>et al.</i> (2018); Sohler <i>et al.</i> (2021); Wang and Shi (2014) Vaillant and Mukamal (2001) Boudiny (2013); Fernández-Ballesteros (2019); Bengtson and Roberts (1991) Michel and Sadana (2017)

Source(s): Authors’ own work

*et al.*, 2020; Fernández-Ballesteros, 2019). Moreover, its focus on objective measures of success neglects the subjective dimensions of aging—such as life satisfaction and emotional well-being—which play a crucial role in shaping individuals’ aging experiences.

The *healthy aging* concept, widely endorsed by health organizations, is understood as “the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age” (WHO, 2021). The main idea is that aging is more than the absence of disease, and it is necessary to recognize the lifelong interaction of aging individuals with their environments. However, it still tends to prioritize functional ability and well-being in ways that may not fully account for the diversity of aging experiences. For instance, it assumes that creating supportive environments will universally enable older adults to achieve their goals, which may not be feasible in resource-limited settings or for those with significant health challenges. Furthermore, the framework’s broad focus on lifelong interactions with the environment can be difficult to operationalize and measure in practice, making it less actionable for policymakers and practitioners (Angelsen *et al.*, 2024).

Similarly, *active aging* focuses on enhancing the quality of life and well-being of older adults through the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security (Paül *et al.*, 2012). Examples of such optimization are investments in improving health and social services, promoting behavioral changes, building a supportive physical environment, and providing social and economic support. While active aging encourages social inclusion, it often assumes that older adults have equal access to opportunities for engagement, ignoring barriers such as socioeconomic disparities, health limitations, or caregiving responsibilities (Fernández-Ballesteros *et al.*, 2013).

*Resilient aging* frames aging as a process of overcoming adversity and reinforces traditional views of aging as inherently challenging (Aldwin and Igarashi, 2015). While it highlights personal strengths, it may underplay the role of external support systems and social determinants of health (Hicks and Conner, 2014). This framework also risks normalizing adversity as an inevitable part of aging, potentially diverting attention from efforts to prevent or mitigate such challenges through broader societal changes. The expectation to “bounce back” from difficulties can also be unrealistic, particularly for those facing cumulative disadvantages.

Finally, *productive aging* promotes older adults’ economic and social contributions, emphasizing labor force participation, civic engagement, and caregiving (Wheeler and Giunta, 2009). While it recognizes the value of older adults, it risks framing aging in purely

instrumental terms, measuring well-being through productivity rather than intrinsic quality of life (Kaye *et al.*, 2003). This approach may also perpetuate ageist narratives by suggesting that older individuals must “earn” their place in society through continued work or service.

Overall, these aging perspectives play a crucial role in reshaping societal views of aging and prompt the development of public policies aimed at addressing the economic and social implications of aging societies. However, they often impose rigid expectations, overlook diversity in aging experiences, and insufficiently address structural and contextual aspects of well-being in aging. Many of the efforts promoted by these perspectives can be costly and not necessarily effective, as they may create pressure on younger generations (e.g. requiring a later retirement). Therefore, a more holistic approach to well-being in aging should integrate flexibility, inclusivity, and recognition of individual, intergenerational, and systemic dimensions.

Broadly defined, well-being reflects the state of living a good life (Fischer, 2014), supported by various personal and contextual resources. These include physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and financial resources that enable individuals cope with challenges and pursue meaningful goals (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Schimmack, 2008; Mele *et al.*, 2023). However, as discussed below, these dimensions take on new significance with age, as individuals adjust to physical changes, cognitive development, emotional growth, evolving social roles, and shifting financial realities.

*Physical well-being* refers to optimal functioning, including good health, mobility, and the absence of illness (Seligman, 2008). With aging, physiological changes become more pronounced, increasing the importance of maintaining physical activity, nutrition, and preventive healthcare to preserve function and independence (Vaillant and Mukamal, 2001). *Cognitive well-being* pertains to the brain’s health and performance, especially regarding memory, attention, information processing, problem-solving, and learning (Luo and Waite, 2005). While cognitive abilities naturally evolve with age, maintaining mental agility through lifelong learning, social engagement, and cognitive training can mitigate decline and enhance adaptability (Kahneman *et al.*, 1999). *Emotional well-being* encompasses positive affect, self-esteem, and resilience in managing emotions, including challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Keyes and Waterman, 2003). Aging often brings shifts in emotional regulation, with older adults prioritizing positive experiences and meaningful relationships while demonstrating greater emotional stability than younger counterparts (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). *Social well-being* reflects the quality of social relationships, including an individual’s formal and informal interactions with family, friends, neighbors, and other people. Aging can alter social networks due to life changes such as retirement, relocation, or bereavement, making social integration and connectedness essential for maintaining well-being (Larson, 1993). Financial well-being reflects an individuals’ sense of security and control over their economic resources, which implies the ability to meet monetary obligations, plan for longevity, and maintain economic stability (Brüggen *et al.*, 2017). As aging individuals transition from income-earning years to retirement, financial well-being becomes critical in maintaining autonomy and a desired standard of living (Guo *et al.*, 2013; Netemeyer *et al.*, 2018).

By adopting a broad approach to well-being in aging, we highlight its dynamic nature, shaped by life course transitions and adaptive strategies that support individuals across different stages of life. Addressing aging-related challenges within each well-being dimension can foster resilience, enhance quality of life, and promote longevity. Although recent positively oriented aging frameworks emphasize the importance of well-being, a critical shortcoming remains their narrow focus on individual well-being, despite acknowledging its different facets. That is, in all the facets outlined above, the well-being of others, especially across generations, is neglected. Failing to account for intergenerational well-being inherently creates intergenerational tension (North and Fiske, 2015a). For example, reallocating resources from younger generations (e.g. decreasing childcare support for working parents) to older generations (e.g. support for high medical costs) implies that the well-being of one

generation comes at the expense of the other generation (see also [Mele et al., 2023](#)). Hence, and following [White et al. \(2019\)](#), to ensure a long-term sustainable approach to aging, we argue that an aging framework is needed that shifts the pursuit of the well-being of an aging population from an exclusively individual process to a process that recognizes intergenerational well-being. This line of reasoning forms the foundational premise of the responsible aging framework, which is further developed in the subsequent section.

### **Responsible aging: conceptualization and framework**

We define responsible aging as *the lifelong, proactive pursuit of personal well-being in ways that also support the well-being of other generations*. Responsible aging, like existing aging perspectives, addresses the well-being of individuals as they age. However, unlike other approaches, it introduces an intergenerational dimension that emphasizes the commitment to and interdependence of well-being across generations.

The interdependence of individual and intergenerational well-being has been the common theme of most philosophical and sociological traditions, with the understanding that neither humans can exist without a society, nor societies can exist without their members ([Veenhoven, 2009](#)). In the responsible aging framework, combining attention to one's well-being (i.e. self-orientation) with consideration for the well-being of others (i.e. other-orientation) becomes a key distinguishing feature. The intergenerational dimension reflects a need for resource and responsibility sharing, mutual support, and social cohesion between older and younger generations in a well-developed and robust society, regardless of family ties. Pursuing and maintaining solely one's own or own family's well-being (i.e. self-orientation dominant) can harm other members of society, possibly backfiring and causing long-term ill-being for the individual ([Crocker and Canevello, 2015](#)). In turn, prioritizing the well-being of others (i.e. other-orientation dominant) may result in neglect of one's own needs, potentially reducing the individual's quality of life. It is the combination of the two foci that creates the synergy required for an aging approach that warrants sustainable well-being across generations. Moreover, and synergistically with the intergenerational perspective, the concept of responsible aging expands the temporal perspective and argues that aging is not just a phase that starts in later life but is an ongoing, cumulative process that begins at birth and continues throughout one's life. This is well illustrated through the example of Australia's "HomeShare" program that pairs older adults with younger tenants, exchanging affordable housing for companionship or caregiving. This arrangement fosters mutual support, reducing isolation for seniors and providing mentorship opportunities for younger participants, thereby increasing the well-being of both generations involved.

[Figure 1](#) depicts the responsible aging framework, highlighting the connections between aspirations, intentions, and behaviors, as influenced by personal characteristics and contextual aspects, such as societal expectations (e.g. social views of aging), as well as access to technology and societal infrastructure such as healthcare, education, and community support. Our framework positions well-being as both a personal and intergenerational concern, emphasizing that individual choices and actions are embedded in broader social and temporal contexts. Although the framework is microfoundationally rooted at the individual level—emphasizing personal agency and responsibility in the pursuit of well-being—it is explicitly designed to operate across levels of analysis. Individual practices, choices, and values of responsible aging, such as maintaining health, planning for the future, and contributing to others, serve as the starting point, but these are inherently shaped by and contribute to broader social, institutional, and policy contexts. The framework can thus bridge micro-level agency and macro-level structures and be applied to understand and inform practices within families, communities, organizations, and society at large. By tracing how individual-level insights aggregate and interact with collective norms, structures, and systems, the framework helps illuminate the dynamics of responsible aging. This multilevel applicability enables researchers

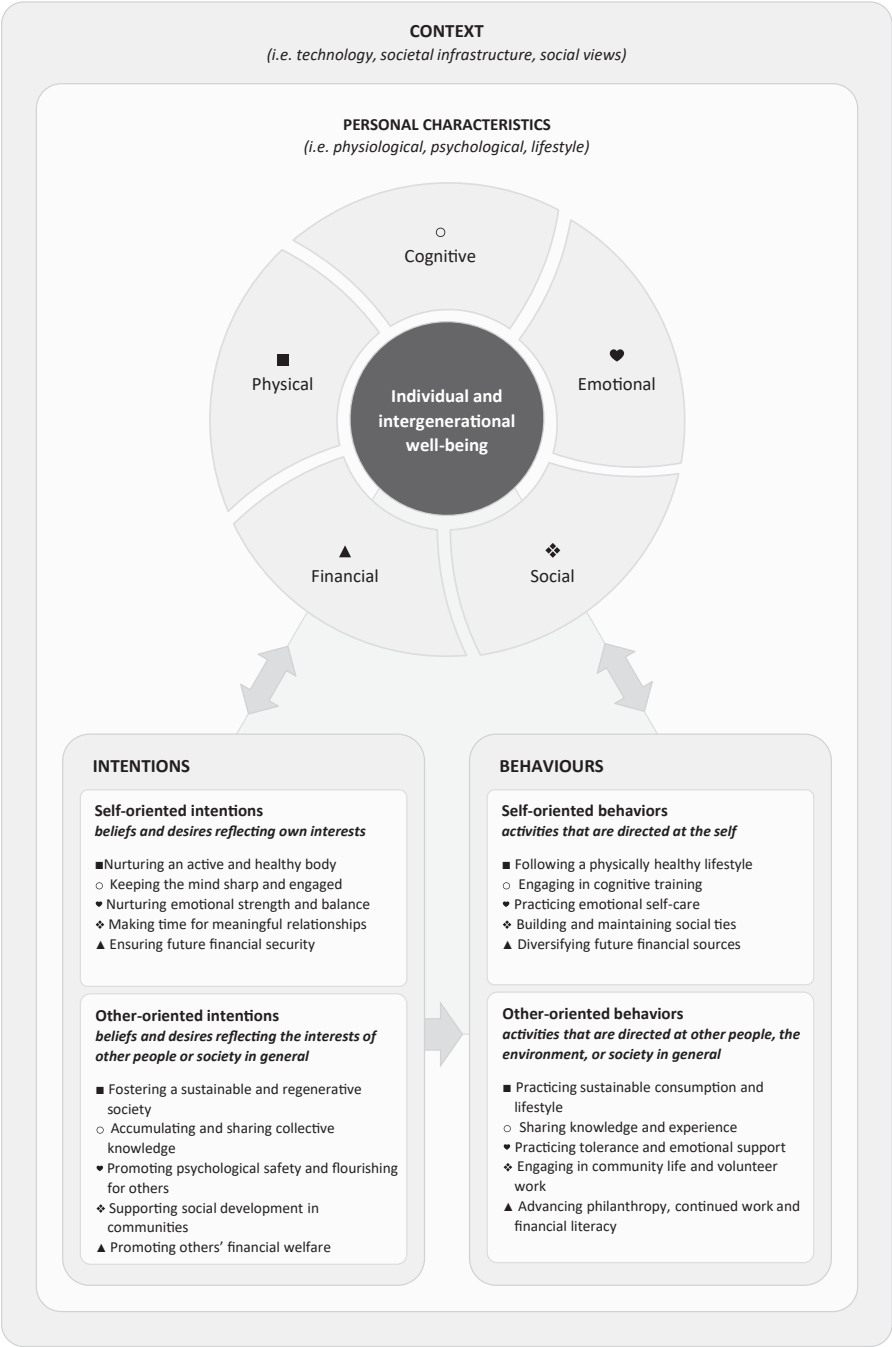


Figure 1. Responsible aging framework. Source: Authors' own work



### *Aspirations, intentions, and behaviors*

An aspiration is an ideal state that an individual hopes to attain (Haller, 1968; Morgan, 2007). As an expression of personal hopes for future well-being in its various dimensions,—physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and economic—aspirations serve as the overarching objective of aging-related interventions. In particular, the aspiration for intergenerational well-being informs intentions and guides behaviors aimed at attaining this ultimate goal (e.g. Bagozzi, 2010; Elster, 2015; Ajzen, 1991). In this sense, responsible aging *intentions* can be viewed as steps at lower levels of a “goal ladder” (Koo and Fishbach, 2010) leading to the well-being of oneself and others through responsible aging *behavior*. *Self-oriented intentions* include the individual’s beliefs and desires reflecting the individual’s interests, such as physical fitness, cognitive health, emotional resilience, social life, and financial security in the case of responsible aging. In contrast, *other-oriented intentions* include the individual’s beliefs and desires reflecting the interests of other people or society in general, such as a sustainable and regenerative society, collective knowledge accumulation, others’ psychological safety and happiness, community social development, and the financial welfare of others.

In terms of behavior, *self-oriented behaviors* encompass the individual’s activities that are directed at the self, such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle, engaging in cognitive training, developing emotional self-regulation, fostering social capital, and diversifying future income sources. *Other-oriented behaviors* involve the individual’s activities that are directed at other people, the environment, or society in general, such as practicing sustainable consumption and lifestyle; sharing knowledge and experience; offering emotional support and tolerance; volunteering, engaging in philanthropy, and working after retirement.

As illustrated by the bullet points in Figure 1, there are clear parallels between the well-being dimensions, responsible aging intentions, and responsible aging behaviors. Each point, marked with a distinct symbol, distinguishes the well-being dimensions; however, there is a high degree of interdependence among them. For example, the intention to improve physical fitness may lead to both adopting healthy habits and forming new social connections, such as with training partners, one of whom might be an employer offering a lucrative job opportunity that can enhance financial well-being.

To illustrate the links between responsible aging intentions, behaviors, and aspirations, Table 2 summarizes research findings on how intentional, goal-directed actions [1] influence both individual and intergenerational well-being (e.g. Bherer, 2015; Borg et al., 2006; Bourassa et al., 2017; Falck et al., 2019; Hubbard et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2017; Lauenroth et al., 2016; Lubans et al., 2012; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Pillemer et al., 2009; Rijken and Groenewegen, 2008).

### *Personal characteristics influencing responsible aging*

Personal characteristics influencing responsible aging include individual differences that account for variations in both the willingness to engage in responsible aging and the likelihood of successfully initiating and maintaining such efforts. The role of these differences in responsible aging can vary, from influencing an individual’s initial state and their ability to adhere to responsible aging practices, to regulating the scope and intensity of its effects. Three key personal characteristics in the context of responsible aging include physiological characteristics (e.g. genetics, anatomy, key bodily systems such as the cardiovascular system), psychological characteristics (e.g. self-efficacy, trust, beliefs), and lifestyle (existing habits and tendencies). *Physiological characteristics* influencing an individual’s engagement in responsible aging may include functional abilities, chronic diseases and morbidities, hormone and vitamin levels, metabolism, and body mass and waist circumference (Glanz et al., 2015; Özsungur, 2020; Pruchno et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2019; Stanworth and Jones, 2008). For



**Table 2.** Examples of self-oriented and other-oriented actions and their potential effects on individual and intergenerational well-being

Actions	Potential effects on . . . Physical well-being	Cognitive well-being	Emotional well-being	Social well-being	Financial well-being
<i>Self-oriented actions</i>					
Engaging in regular physical training; adopting healthy eating habits; maintaining routines that include physical activity	Reduced chronic diseases, extended lifespan, improved body mass and function	Maintained or improved cognitive function	Reduced risk of depression and anxiety	Building connections with training and health-promoting communities	Saving public resources (reduced need for treatment of preventable diseases)
Engaging in activities that challenge the brain: solving puzzles, learning new skills, or taking part in educational courses	Maintained or improved bodily control	Maintained and enhanced cognitive function, increased self-efficacy	Feelings of pride, curiosity, empowerment, confidence; reduction of anxiety and depression	Maintained or improved social function	Better economic and financial decision-making
Actively taking measures to reduce stress, such as mindfulness and meditation, and seeking enriching experiences, such as pursuing hobbies and leisure activities	Extended lifespan, enhanced immunity and cardiovascular function, reduced prevalence of chronic diseases	Enhanced motivation, improved attention, heightened creativity	Increased positive emotions, including pleasure, excitement, serenity, amusement, inspiration	Greater social engagement, stronger social connections	More active investment and saving behavior, spending fewer resources
Actively maintaining existing relationships; engaging in social activities, making new friends, and staying connected	Extended lifespan, enhanced cardiovascular function, functional support, and assistance	Increased self-efficacy, increased access to collective knowledge and experience	Lower stress level and depression risk, more appraisal and more self-esteem	Greater social engagement and a bigger social network	Greater financial security, job opportunities
Developing and maintaining an individual pension plan; planning for retirement and managing finances	More resources to mitigate eventual morbidities	Increased access to cognitively stimulating experiences	Reduced stress and anxiety, increased confidence and pride	Maintained or enhanced social functioning	Financial independence, opportunities to indulge oneself
<i>(continued)</i>					

Table 2. Continued

Actions	Potential effects on . . . Physical well-being	Cognitive well-being	Emotional well-being	Social well-being	Financial well-being
<i>Other-oriented actions</i>					
Consuming sustainable food; using digital technologies instead of physical traveling	Improved health due to a cleaner environment and more healthy diets	Strengthened cognitive function, stimulated visuospatial functioning (e.g. experiencing VR)	Increased positive feelings and pride in saving the planet	Being a part of a sustainable consumption community; better relations among distant relatives and friends	Saving resources on travel; better local economy (e.g. support of local farmers)
Giving lectures, telling stories, mentoring, or participating in community education programs	Maintained or improved health due to physical activity	Preserved knowledge, improved cognitive skills and function, increased self-efficacy	Increased positive feelings of curiosity, empowerment, creativity, confidence	Building connections with learning communities	Opportunities for additional income Job opportunities
Making others happy through organizing social events, offering emotional support, and creating joyful environments	Longer life, better cardiovascular function, less chronic diseases	Maintained or improved planning, reasoning, and decision-making skills	Increased positive emotions, excitement	Meaningful connections (e.g. members of organizing committees)	Opportunities for additional income Job opportunities
Volunteering and community service, caring for neighboring kids, or working in nursing homes	Improved physical shape, longer life, better cardiovascular function	Increased knowledge	Increased positive emotions, empathy	Enhanced sense of belonging and mutual support, strengthened community bonds	Saving public resources
Retiring later and continuing participation in the workforce	Improved physical shape	Maintained and enhanced cognitive function	Increased positive emotions and sense of being needed	Meaningful and engaging workplace connections	Financial independence; reduced financial burden on younger generations

Source(s): Authors' own work

example, sufficient levels of vitamin D and calcium as well as a high bone mineral density accumulated at a young age may prevent osteoporosis and bone fragility fractures in aging individuals (Veldurthy *et al.*, 2016). Preventing such physical ailments can enhance an individual’s ability to remain physically active and independent, supporting physical well-being as well as emotional well-being by reducing the anxiety and depression often linked to physical decline. Additionally, it fosters social well-being by enabling individuals to participate more fully in their communities.

In turn, *psychological characteristics* directly influence the individual's perceptions of responsible aging behavior and willingness to engage in it. Examples of psychological characteristics may include general trust in other individuals and post-materialist values (Frazen and Vogl, 2013), the extent of temporal discounting (Hall and Fong, 2007), self-neglect (Özsungur, 2020), depressive disorders (Vaillant and Mukamal, 2001), prior beliefs, knowledge, and self-efficacy (Glanz *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, individuals' beliefs and expectations about their aging process may influence their cognitive and physical well-being. Studies show that older adults with more positive self-perceptions of aging tend to engage in healthier activities, such as regular physical activity, which enhances physical well-being and contributes to cognitive health by keeping the brain engaged and active (Levy and Myers, 2004). Whereas depression can lead to social withdrawal and loneliness and worsen emotional distress, trust and positive attitudes can encourage social engagement, strengthening connections, and emotional resilience (Vaillant and Mukamal, 2001). Individuals with a negative outlook on their future or those prone to self-neglect may be less likely to plan financially, leading to greater financial insecurity as they age (Glanz *et al.*, 2015). Group identification, such as with athletes or environmentalists, and social comparison can motivate responsible aging behaviors, enhancing physical, social, and emotional well-being (Dionigi, 2015).

Finally, existing *lifestyles* can have a broad impact across various dimensions of well-being as well. Especially habits opposing responsible aging can hinder adopting new behaviors. For example, the habit of driving often forms during family-raising years and persists into retirement. This might reduce aging adults' willingness to use sustainable transportation alternatives and increase the risks of accidents associated with driving (Nakanishi and Black, 2016).

#### *Contextual characteristics influencing responsible aging*

Contextual characteristics encompass various environmental conditions surrounding the individual, both within immediate reach (e.g. physical surroundings, family situation) and beyond (e.g. local communities, urban development, national policy, global changes). Importantly, contextual characteristics are largely malleable through policy interventions. The importance of one's personal or immediate environment increases with age, as older adults tend to spend more time at home, place greater demands on the functionality and ergonomics of their living space, and attach more value to personal objects (Koncelik, 2003). Such immediate surroundings can be both enabling and hindering responsible aging practices. For example, lighting levels and the reflection rate of objects may alleviate or aggravate the effects of age-related vision changes (Özsungur, 2020), which may influence senior adults' perceptions of their aging process. The social environment, including the quality of relationships with family, friends, and neighbors, influences perceptions of aging and motivates sustained engagement in responsible aging behaviors (Wu and Sheng, 2019). Responsible aging also depends on the characteristics of the local society, such as neighborhood, village, and city, as well as the broader regional, national, and international context. For example, the urban landscape can both facilitate and hinder responsible aging. Proximity to an urban park and short walking distances to various facilities can encourage senior adults to exercise, while nearby coffee shops may pose a barrier to quitting smoking (Loo *et al.*, 2017; Yi *et al.*, 2022).

Some of the contextual characteristics are ubiquitously present both in the personal and the wider contexts. Of these, we deem technology, societal infrastructure, and social views on aging as of particular importance, based on available research.

The integration of *technology* into the lives of the elderly plays a crucial role in promoting responsible aging. Technology, when adopted early and used consistently, has the potential to significantly enhance well-being across various dimensions of life (Mele and Russo-Spena, 2024). For instance, smart devices, such as those that monitor food intake or fall risks, can promote healthier lifestyles by encouraging physical activity, tracking dietary habits, and supporting preventive care, thereby helping older adults maintain physical well-being (Mele

*et al.*, 2021). Cognitive well-being can also be reinforced through technology that aids responsible aging by keeping the mind sharp and engaged (Pino *et al.*, 2020). In turn, social well-being benefits from technologies such as social media platforms, online communities, and social robots (Odekerken-Schröder *et al.*, 2020).

The healthcare system is central to the societal infrastructure for enabling responsible aging, whereas informal healthcare systems and networks of family and friends function as an indispensable extension of the formal healthcare system (Sweeney *et al.*, 2015). Recent research especially highlights the importance of improving the age-readiness of living spaces for an aging population (Das *et al.*, 2022). This goes beyond simply removing potential barriers (doorsteps, stairs) in one's residential area and includes meeting the needs and wants of different generations as well as facilitating interaction among generations. For example, Wohnmodell Flora in Switzerland is a cooperative housing project where different generations live together, focusing on mutual help and community engagement (Housing Innovation Collaborative, n.d.). Residents participate in shared decision-making and community activities, creating a supportive living environment.

*Social views on aging* and older adults influence behaviors towards this group, while also shaping the expectations and behaviors of older individuals themselves. For example, negative perceptions of aging foster ageism, which refers to prejudice and discrimination against people based on their age (Hogg and Vaughan, 2011) and which can negatively affect the well-being, health, and functioning of older adults (Officer *et al.*, 2020; Burnes *et al.*, 2019).

#### *Responsible aging as a reciprocal loop framework*

Responsible aging involves multiple reciprocal loops, where actions and experiences continuously shape and are shaped by individual and societal factors. These reciprocal loops involve the continuous interaction between behaviors, outcomes, and personal or contextual factors. Some effects of responsible aging, such as the release of endorphins after exercise or the smiles of grateful individuals, can be felt or observed immediately. Others, however, may take longer to manifest. Regardless of the timeline, all outcomes—along with their anticipation and experience—ultimately influence personal and contextual characteristics. These, in turn, shape an individual's mindset, motivation, and environment, affecting their responsible aging behavior.

This feedback mechanism extends beyond the individual. The integration of self-oriented and other-oriented behavior can contribute to building a more positive view of aging and attenuating intergenerational conflict (Hess *et al.*, 2017; Urick *et al.*, 2017). As a result, younger individuals may be more likely to adopt a responsible aging lifestyle. Even the mere intention to engage in responsible aging can enhance well-being, while the experience of well-being may, in turn, reinforce those intentions and behaviors. This dynamic interplay is illustrated in Figure 1 and explored through the following hypothetical examples.

Example 1: An older adult aspires to promote environmental sustainability while fostering intergenerational bonds (aspiration). Aware that younger generations often lack opportunities to connect with nature (context), they plan to start a community garden where seniors and young people collaborate (intention). By mentoring children and teenagers on gardening, nutrition, and sustainability (behavior), they not only improve the local environment but also strengthen social ties, pass down valuable knowledge, and enhance the well-being of both age groups.

Example 2: A retired engineer aims to reduce the digital skills gap between generations while maintaining cognitive sharpness (aspiration). Realizing that many seniors struggle with technology while younger people lack patience in teaching them (personal characteristics), they aim to establish a local "Tech Buddy" program pairing older adults with tech-savvy youth (intention). Through weekly learning sessions (behavior), seniors gain digital literacy and confidence, while younger participants develop empathy, teaching skills, and stronger social bonds with older generations, fostering mutual well-being.

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### Future research avenues

The responsible aging concept represents a paradigm shift in how aging is perceived and managed. The key distinguishing feature of responsible aging is its dual focus on the well-being of both self and others, fostering intergenerational well-being as a sustainable approach to dealing with an aging population. Building on the responsible aging concept and framework outlined above, we suggest several potential avenues for future research in service management and related domains such as innovation and healthcare. Table 3 summarizes potential research questions divided over three domains outlined below.

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**Table 3.** Avenues for future research

Research area	Research question
Validating the construct, exploring the mechanisms of the framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the current conceptualization of responsible aging valid? Are there key elements missing?</li><li>• How can we measure responsible aging quantitatively?</li><li>• In terms of nomological validity: what are the antecedents of responsible aging?</li><li>• What methods are available to operationalize the idea of intergenerational well-being?</li><li>• What is the relationship between different elements of (intergenerational) well-being and responsible aging?</li><li>• Which self-oriented and other-oriented actions have the largest impact on different elements of (intergenerational) well-being?</li></ul>
Intergenerationality of responsible aging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the factors that influence (positive/negatively) individuals' and communities' readiness and capacity to adopt a responsible aging mindset?</li><li>• How does the balance between self-interest and concern for others influence whether people follow through on responsible aging intentions?</li><li>• How to ensure that one generation's well-being does not come at the expense of another's?</li></ul>
Personal and contextual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Which personal characteristics influence (positively/negatively) the contribution to responsible aging intentions and behaviors?</li><li>• How to effectively nudge individuals to prepare society for responsible aging?</li><li>• What role does technology play in promoting responsible aging among individuals and across generations?</li><li>• How can technology bridge intergenerational divides?</li><li>• How do different models of age-friendly urban planning (e.g. mixed-use developments, accessible public spaces) affect intergenerational well-being?</li><li>• What are the effects of ageism reduction programs, particularly those targeting younger adults, on the well-being of senior adults, and how can these programs be scaled to achieve broader societal change?</li><li>• What factors can facilitate cross-generational dialog and collaborative problem-solving?</li></ul>

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

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*Validating the construct, exploring the mechanisms of the framework*

This work introduces a conceptual framework for responsible aging, emphasizing the need for further research to refine its definitions, establish a clear and consistent nomenclature, and validate the framework in diverse contexts. This requires additional qualitative research (e.g. interviews) but eventually should evolve into a stream of research that allows the quantitative assessment of the notion of responsible aging. Similarly, further exploration and validation are needed for other components of the proposed framework related to responsible aging. Moreover, in terms of nomological validity, empirical research is needed to better understand the relationships among the different components of the framework. Understanding these relationships can provide deeper insights into the dynamics of aging and intergenerational interaction and support.

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*Intergenerationality of responsible aging*

Intergenerational well-being, fundamental to responsible aging, involves social cohesion and mutual support between different generations. However, the concept itself, including how aging individuals perceive their responsibilities toward other generations and how these perceptions impact their well-being remains underexplored. Future research can further clarify the role of intergenerationality in aging and its contribution to well-being across generations. Furthermore, intergenerational well-being likely varies across cultures and social contexts. Thus, more research is needed to understand the dynamics of intergenerationality, particularly focusing on the balance between self-orientation and other-orientation and how these factors influence the transition from intention to consistent actions in responsible aging, across different cultures and social contexts. Gaining insights in these areas could lead to more sustainable and age-friendly societies.

*The role of personal and contextual characteristics*

Personal and contextual characteristics are central in influencing responsible aging both independently and through their interaction. As the framework suggests, personal characteristics ultimately impact intentions and behaviors that help to realize the aspirational of well-being. While it is tempting to identify personal characteristics that positively impact well-being, we cannot ignore personal factors that act as potential inhibitors. For instance, the extent to which individuals across different age groups understand and appreciate the principles of responsible aging will vary, thereby influencing the potential of responsible aging as a new perspective to deal with aging populations.

The context represents the levers policymakers probably can most easily alter and therefore represents a key domain for future research. Research in this area especially has large implications for business practice and policy making. Furthermore, the interaction between personal characteristics and the context is important to investigate, as well as the feedback loop between them and responsible aging. Technological literacy, which likely varies significantly across generations, can greatly impact an individual's ability to age responsibly. Therefore, research exploring the influence of technology on responsible aging might yield significant insights for policymakers and service providers in reducing digital inequality, designing age-friendly technology, and enhancing the value and relevance of these technologies for users. There is a need for more research on how investments in infrastructures can reduce healthcare costs and foster a more equitable distribution of resources, aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to good health and well-being, reduced inequalities, and sustainable cities and communities (WHO, 2015).

How societies, including younger generations, perceive aging profoundly impacts the well-being of senior adults. Persistent problems like ageism and negative stereotypes can have harmful effects on senior adults' self-esteem, health, and social inclusion. Future research

should assess the role of media and societal narratives in shaping public views on aging and explore how reshaping these narratives could enhance intergenerational well-being and strengthen aging policy initiatives. Additionally, studies can investigate how fostering intergenerational well-being can reduce negative perceptions about aging and promote positive aging experiences. Insights from such research would be invaluable in developing initiatives that combat negative aging stereotypes and promote actions in favor of responsible aging.

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### **Discussion and implications**

The agentic perspective of responsible aging suggests that individuals can actively shape their aging process through their choices and behaviors. It assumes that individuals have the capacity and responsibility to make proactive decisions that contribute to their future well-being, for example, by nurturing strong relationships, maintaining physical activity, or keeping a positive mindset. This perspective contrasts with traditional views of aging, which often focus on the passive experience of biological or societal aging. It thus highlights the importance of resilience and self-efficacy. Moreover, responsible aging requires that an individual takes a proactive approach toward not only issues that affect their welfare directly, but also toward the collective welfare. Such expectations of intergenerational well-being differ from self-interest perspectives fraught with intergenerational conflict over welfare spending (North and Fiske, 2015b). Importantly, responsible aging does not automatically imply altruistic behavior, because maintaining one's own body and mind well, ensuring that the environment is clean and comfortable, and contributing to making surrounding people happier entails that even individuals driven by pure self-interest will eventually be better off.

Nevertheless, our framework presents responsible aging as a constructive approach that highlights its broader benefits and long-term value. For the aging individual, it is essential to recognize personal autonomy and choice, as individuals may prioritize personal goals, independence, or lack interest in responsible aging. Yet, individuals have varying resources and capacities to engage meaningfully in intergenerational activities. Socioeconomic status, health disparities, systemic inequalities, and other contextual factors influence an individual's ability to take responsibility for their well-being and contribute to future generations. Thus, responsible aging must be understood as a balance between individual agency and structural support, emphasizing that it is not solely an individual responsibility but a collective effort requiring supportive policies, community initiatives, and institutional frameworks. Societies must also mitigate the risk of over-responsibilization, ensuring that individuals, particularly those experiencing systemic disadvantages, do not face undue pressure to engage in intergenerationality. Policies and initiatives should facilitate, rather than mandate, participation in responsible aging, acknowledging that willingness to engage varies among individuals. By framing responsible aging as a flexible and inclusive process, society can create opportunities for intergenerational engagement while respecting individual circumstances and choices.

### *Theoretical contribution*

Responsible aging is a novel concept that considerably broadens the analytical scope of aging and contributes to the shift from viewing aging as an isolated, individual journey to recognizing it as a dynamic, intergenerational process. This concept bridges the gap between individual-centric and societal approaches to aging. Integrating self-oriented and other-oriented well-being within a dynamic framework redefines aging as a collaborative journey. The intergenerational perspective positions aging as an opportunity for societal regeneration, emphasizing mutual contributions between generations. This approach extends and



complements existing aging frameworks by highlighting shared responsibilities and sustainable outcomes. It represents a dynamic and proactive, rather than reactive, approach that supports a life course aligned with both individual fulfillment and societal betterment. As such, this approach advances a regenerative lens, emphasizing not only the maintenance of well-being but also the active renewal and growth of individuals, communities, and ecosystems across generations. The responsible aging framework has implications for multiple research fields, including service research, marketing, and innovation.

Our framework has profound implications for service research and, particularly, transformative service research (TSR), addressing several research priorities such as sustainability and well-being (Ostrom *et al.*, 2021) and having the potential to become a new research priority. The concept of responsible aging encourages scholars to rethink multiple facets of service value creation, including value propositions, the design of service delivery and experience, customer relationship management, and the environments in which service takes place (Grönroos and Voima, 2013; Kurtmollaiev *et al.*, 2022). Such components are crucial for facilitating purposeful and responsible life transitions across diverse age demographics. This will call for the interdisciplinary development of more dynamic, adaptive, and responsive services as well as new metrics for the measurement of success and service performance.

Service scholars might explore how responsible aging's regenerative lens allows individuals and communities to cultivate sustainable cycles of growth, where the actions and contributions of today's aging population enhance the well-being of future generations and contribute to ecological stewardship. This intergenerational orientation promotes social cohesion, meeting the needs of the elderly while involving younger generations in meaningful engagements with the aging population, thereby strengthening community resilience and shared well-being. In this light, responsible aging aligns with TSR's mission of individual and societal well-being (Rosenbaum, 2015; Rahman *et al.*, 2024), presenting new avenues for service interventions that harmonize personal goals with broader, community-focused values.

The research presents significant implications also for marketing, emphasizing the critical roles of intergenerational marketing and inclusivity. A broadened perspective on intergenerationality highlights how responsible aging operates across all levels of the system, guiding researchers to consider a diverse range of aging-related dynamics at the individual, collective, and societal levels. This includes the aging individuals, their families, the local community, policymakers, and even the global community. Through these interconnected layers, responsible aging transcends individual life spans to the broader customer ecosystem, encompassing the well-being of multiple stakeholders across generations. Marketing strategies should, therefore, move beyond isolated aging experiences to support shared, interconnected generational well-being. For instance, marketers must design proactive well-being offerings that resonate with diverse age groups and promote shared value creation across generations. In a similar vein, marketers should create shared platforms that facilitate community-building and engagement, such as spaces or services that enable collaboration, learning, and mutual support among generations.

The responsible aging framework also has implications for innovation research by challenging conventional theories of adoption and diffusion (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Davis, 1985; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Rogers, 1962). Unlike these established models, which emphasize individual decision-making and short-term adoption patterns, responsible aging involves a dual focus on own well-being and the well-being of others in the long term. This shift opens new research implications for understanding how responsible aging practices emerge, spread, and become embedded in society.

Our framework expands the scope of innovation for sustainability (e.g. Seebode *et al.*, 2012) by highlighting the need to examine innovation strategies that balance immediate user appeal with long-term sustainability. This shifts the focus toward understanding how

innovation can be both relevant today and contribute to responsible aging over time. For example, assistive technologies can enhance mobility as well as promote active lifestyles to delay future dependence on care services. Similarly, financial innovations tailored for aging populations can integrate incentives for preventive health and retirement investments, ensuring long-term financial security while enabling individuals to maintain their preferred lifestyle and afford daily comforts without excessive financial strain. Responsible aging therefore carries important theoretical implications for developing frameworks that 1) consider the balance between current and future well-being—both for individuals and for future generations (e.g. [Mele et al., 2023](#))—and 2) emphasize the role of individual agency in making responsible aging choices. The effectiveness of ensuring this balance and finding holistic solutions may depend on collaborative innovation for sustainability (e.g. [Kurtmollaiev et al., 2024](#)), but the unique “wicked problems” of responsible aging call for exploring new collaborative innovation models to facilitate collaboration among multiple stakeholders across various sectors, including public, private, and non-profit organizations.

### *Practical implications*

From a societal perspective, responsible aging is a reciprocal process, where individuals consider the impact of their actions on others across generations. It requires individuals to take an active role in shaping their well-being across life stages. This means embracing lifelong learning to stay adaptable, maintaining financial independence through proactive planning, and prioritizing physical and mental health. Ultimately, individuals are not just affected by intergenerational dynamics—they shape them through their choices, interactions, and willingness to bridge divides. Whether as employees, mentors, caregivers, or community members, fostering mutual understanding and adaptability can help create a society where all generations thrive together.

For governments and organizations, responsible aging requires contributing to a foundation that fosters shared responsibility and intergenerational care. It calls for ensuring access to resources, opportunities for engagement, and shared voices in shaping the social structures that affect both the aging population and younger generations.

[Table 4](#) outlines the managerial implications of implementing the principles of responsible aging across the five well-being dimensions. Each dimension is accompanied by specific actions that organizations and governments can take to support the well-being of individuals as they age and across generations. By addressing these areas, organizations can create environments that promote overall health, engagement, and security, while governments can provide the necessary support and resources to enhance these efforts.

Responsible aging demands a coordinated effort from both private and public sector leaders to create environments where individuals can thrive throughout their lives. By focusing on the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and financial well-being, leaders can help individuals maintain their health, independence, and dignity as they age. Moreover, by fostering intergenerational well-being and promoting a culture of collective responsibility, both sectors can ensure that aging is not seen as a burden, but as an opportunity for growth, renewal, and continued contribution to society.

**Table 4.** Practical implications for organizations and governments

Dimension	Implications for organizations	Implications for governments
Physical well-being	<i>For individuals:</i> Promote healthy workplace environments through wellness programs, ergonomic design, regular physical activity, and health screenings <i>Across generations:</i> Provide caregiver support programs	<i>For individuals:</i> Provide incentives for companies to prioritize employee health. Fund public health campaigns and preventive care resources <i>Across generations:</i> Implement phased retirement plans. Promote policies that support caregivers and encourage multigenerational housing solutions
Cognitive well-being	<i>For individuals:</i> Provide digital literacy training for employees. Offer continuous learning opportunities and lifelong learning platforms to keep employees mentally active and adaptable <i>Across generations:</i> Establish intergenerational mentorship and reverse mentoring programs. Foster knowledge transfer through cross-age collaboration	<i>For individuals:</i> Fund lifelong educational programs for retraining and improving digital literacy. Support research on cognitive resilience and workforce adaptability <i>Across generations:</i> Fund intergenerational learning centers. Promote lifelong learning policies that bridge generational skill gaps
Emotional well-being	<i>For individuals:</i> Create psychologically safe and supportive workplaces. Provide mental health resources, such as counseling services and stress management programs <i>Across generations:</i> Provide mental health support tailored to different career stages and cross-generational team dynamics. Create inclusive cultures where different generations feel valued	<i>For individuals:</i> Expand mental health services and mitigate stigma around emotional challenges. Support policies promoting work-life balance and caregiving leave <i>Across generations:</i> Develop cross-age mental health initiatives. Support intergenerational community programs that foster emotional resilience
Social well-being	<i>For individuals:</i> Encourage workplace inclusion and team-building across age groups. Support flexible work arrangements to accommodate social needs <i>Across generations:</i> Create mentorship programs to foster intergenerational connections and mutual respect and reduce age-related biases	<i>For individuals:</i> Promote social participation through community programs. Support initiatives for active social engagement across all life stages <i>Across generations:</i> Promote social inclusion policies that integrate older and younger generations in work and community life. Support community spaces and intergenerational co-housing arrangements to support social engagement
Financial well-being	<i>For individuals:</i> Offer transparent wages, financial planning services, and career transition support to help employees prepare for retirement and manage long-term financial goals <i>Across generations:</i> Develop equitable compensation and benefits structures that consider different generational financial needs. Offer support for phased retirement and career re-entry programs	<i>For individuals:</i> Create strategies supporting financial literacy and provide resources for flexible retirement planning. Ensure fair employment regulations and social safety nets. Develop policies for pension security and long-term financial resilience <i>Across generations:</i> Ensure sustainable pension systems and fair taxation across generations. Implement policies that balance financial security for both younger and older populations

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

**Note**

1. For analytical clarity, [Table 2](#) integrates intentions and behaviors into actions, as intentional behavior is considered a defining characteristic of action ([Elster, 2015](#)). In the framework, we use the broader term behavior for describing any observable activity or response of an individual.

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