

Longevity, AI, and the HR Agenda: Navigating Long Working Lives — Lynda Gratton



What happens when careers get longer, but the shelf life of our skills gets shorter?

That's the tension at the heart of Chapter 5 of *The Age of HR*. Lynda Gratton argues that longer lives are fundamentally changing the way we need to think about careers and work. The traditional three-stage model — education, work, retirement — is giving way to multi-stage working lives, where people may move repeatedly between learning, earning, caring, stepping back and re-engaging. AI makes this shift even more significant: a career may now span 40–50 years, while the skills we depend on can become outdated much faster. The challenge for HR isn't simply helping people progress through a career — it is helping them remain capable, adaptable and engaged throughout it.

1. Enable multi-stage careers

pathways with multiple entry, exit and re-entry points

2. Support care and relationships

make flexibility genuinely career-sustaining

3. Make continuous learning a norm

reward adaptability and learning velocity, not only expertise

4. Challenge ageism

recognise experience and judgment — age is not a proxy for potential

Four HR priorities for long working lives — design for sustainability, not just progression.

THE HABIT

In your next talent review, ask two questions of every role: where is the re-entry point, and how fast has this person learned something new this year? If you can't answer both, you're managing a career — not sustaining a working life.

My take: perhaps the biggest shift is this: HR needs to stop thinking only about managing careers and start thinking about sustaining working lives. When people may work for several decades through multiple life stages, energy, learning, relationships, health and adaptability become part of long-term performance. HR's role is to create systems that support these capabilities rather than exhaust them.

From Chapter 5, "Longevity, AI, and the HR Agenda: Navigating Long Working Lives," by Lynda Gratton, in *The Age of HR* (eds. Nyberg, Kehoe, Ulrich, Wright, 2026) — free to read under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

As working lives become longer and skills become more transient, is your organisation designing careers for progression — or working lives for sustainability?