
**Human resource management —
Sustainable employability
management for organizations**

*Management des ressources humaines — Management de
l'employabilité durable pour les organisations*

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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Introduction

0.1 General

Sustainable employability is a relatively new term reflecting a component or strand of the larger business sustainability movement. The term “sustainability” itself refers to the capacity to endure, and in this instance reflects a commitment to creating value for a business, its workforce, industry, community, society and the economy through embedding the capabilities and capacities necessary to deliver enduring or ongoing employment over the long term.

Broadly, sustainable employability also refers to a person’s ability to gain or maintain quality work throughout their working lives, and to have the opportunity and the appropriate work context to be able to transfer knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to another job, organization or future role. In addition, sustainable employability refers to an organization’s commitment to balancing the well-being and job requirements of workforce members [1][2].

Globally, the world of work for both large and small-to-medium-sized organizations is in the middle of fundamental changes resulting from factors including demographic shifts, technological advances, changes in types of work, globalization, the increased interest of individuals in working at the location and hours of choice, and the diminishing viability in the world economy of some industries. Among the most significant changes is the fact that in most economies, the concept of a “job for life” is no longer applicable for all industries or for individuals. A manifestation of different methods of work involves flexible workforces at different professional levels in different industries and with different working patterns. However, as organizations and individuals also operate in very fast-paced and competitive environments, the new world of work requires workforce and skills planning, as well as a workforce that is agile and adaptable to regularly learning new skills, in order to keep pace with organizational and industry/discipline developments.

0.2 Benefits of focusing on sustainable employability

The phrase “war for talent” was first coined by Hankin of McKinsey and Co. in 1997, before being adopted by Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelroad as the title of their book in 2001[3]. The phrase emphasizes the importance of talent (in the form of KSAs) to an organization’s success. This can also refer to the demand for certain KSAs at a given time. Organizations can find that they lack the necessary KSAs when needed. At the same time, organizations can find that they have a surplus of KSAs that they no longer need. Either factor or both can result in excessive spending on recruitment and buying in talent, expensive layoffs of workforce members that are no longer needed and/or falling behind in the organization’s market. However, an approach of sustainable employability can help organizations save money and build agility into their own operations.

Such an approach involves:

- assessing market requirements;
- planning the workforce’s KSA needs and retraining and redeploying its workforce to meet changing business imperatives;
- considering workforce members’ individual life cycle and lifestyle requirements.

Sustainable employability also relates to the balance between the physical and mental demands of the job and the physical and mental abilities of workforce members.

Competitive organizations support, nurture and promote sustainable employability for their workforce through monitoring and keeping an inventory of KSAs necessary for current business requirements and the workforce’s existing KSAs, training workforce members in under-represented KSAs and looking ahead to changing business conditions to ensure workforce members are prepared to adapt to KSAs required in the future. On a macro level, organizations also promote sustainable employability by working with industry and local, regional and national authorities on KSA availability inventories and by exploring the nature of transferrable KSAs in diminishing industries which can be redeployed in others.

While it is widely acknowledged that the financial impact of environmental sustainability on business profits has been difficult to measure, metrics for determining the value created through sustainable employability are more tangible because of costs resulting from laying off staff, recruiting new staff, lack of organizational continuity and other related financial impact. The white paper “Sustainability Value Management: Stronger metrics to drive differentiation and growth”^[4] asserts that consistent application of new valuation approaches to identify and measure the value of sustainability to business and society will foster better decision making and value generation.

At the time of publication, there are already metrics available in the area of sustainability that can also function for sustainable employability. For example, the Global Reporting Initiative defines environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors and metrics for sustainability. Savitz and Weber connect environmental, social and economic factors with sustainable organizations^[5].

NOTE Human resource metrics are addressed in other documents developed by ISO/TC 260, notably ISO/TS 30407.

Benefits of focusing on sustainable employability include the following:

- reduction in:
 - absenteeism;
 - burnout;
 - costs related to recruitment, absenteeism, liability and outplacement;
 - workplace accidents and incidents;
 - underemployment and unemployment;
 - liability;
- improvement in: <https://standards.iteh.ai/catalog/standards/sist/f08d2a9d-fd11-46f5-bebb-cfa03a9ed113/iso-tr-30406-2017>
 - positioning as an organization of choice;
 - staffing cost management;
 - workforce commitment, attitude and loyalty;
 - flexibility;
 - innovation;
 - organizational agility and ability to adapt in changing markets;
 - planning capabilities;
 - productivity and performance;
 - product quality;
 - right talent at right time;
 - staff retention;
 - workforce morale;
 - labour relations;
- quality improvement programmes:
 - map and track organization’s overall sustainable employability;
 - map and track an organization’s health profile long term.

0.3 Aim of this document

This document can form a bridge between human resources and other business units such as the executive board, management, operations and occupational health and safety.

This document can be used to start a conversation in an organization about sustainable employability and its relationship with the future of the organization and the individual.

This document can be linked to strategic and tactical, or short-term to medium-term, objectives.

There are multiple solutions to improve sustainable employability within an organization. This document can assist in identifying which elements can be important for an organization.

This document has been developed to assist organizations and the workforce to sustain employability.

This document describes a transferable methodology for organizations of any size or type, whose purpose is:

- a) to help facilitate a common understanding of sustainable employability;
- b) to build capacity and capability.

For each sector and organization, the importance of the factors that affect sustainable employability differ, which gives an organization an organizational and/or industry-specific mix of policies. In addition, sustainability policy cannot be separated from general policy, quality policy, the improvement cycle, etc., but forms part of this.

[Figure 1](#) displays the three clusters of sustainable employability and the relationship between organization, person and business performance. If within an organization, attention is paid to all factors (i.e. to effective workforce planning, opportunities provided through the work environment, and to organizations' and individuals' attention to skills development and well-being issues), a beneficial impact will be felt on both organization and individual, as well as more broadly on the economy.

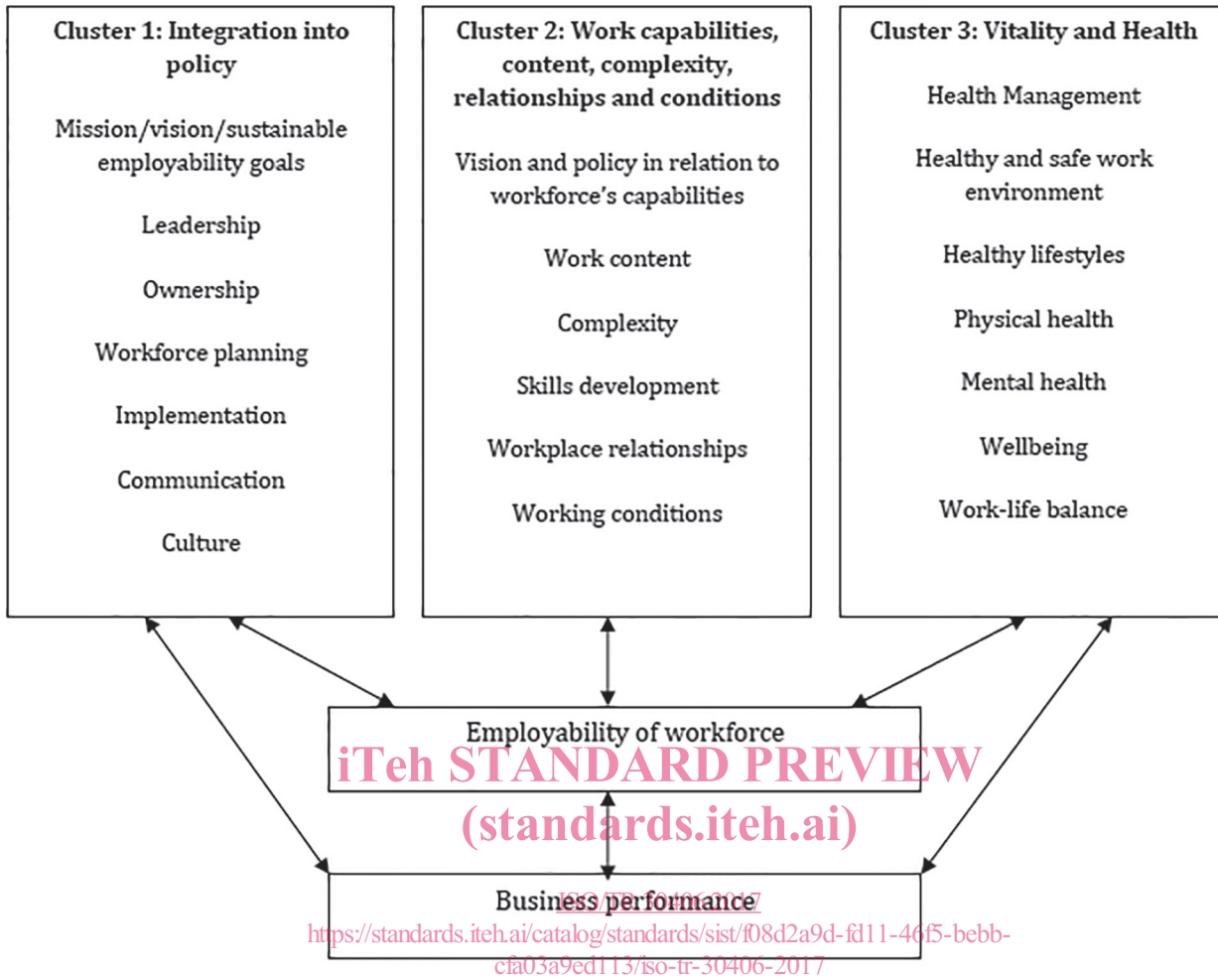


Figure 1 — Sustainable employability: Relationship between organization, person and business performance

Human resource management — Sustainable employability management for organizations

1 Scope

This document provides guiding principles for developing and implementing sustainable employability policies.

Sustainable employability is relevant on different levels: government, organizational and individual. This document focuses exclusively on the organizational level.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 30400, *Human resource management — Vocabulary*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 30400 and the following apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <http://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

sustainable employability

long-term capability to acquire or create and maintain work

Note 1 to entry: Sustainable employability can be the responsibility of people, organizations or governments.

3.2

sustainable employability for the individual

long-term capability to acquire, create and maintain employment, through adaptation to changing employment, economic and personal conditions throughout different life stages

3.3

sustainable employability for employing organizations

long-term and agile approach to acquiring, creating, developing and training, retaining, redeploying and supporting workforce members to meet changing economic, legislative and market requirements and conditions

Note 1 to entry: This definition applies to organizations in all sectors, both private and public.

3.4 sustainable employability for public sectors

long-term approaches and initiatives to encourage, promote and support value-driven employment benefitting constituents, employing organizations, economic development and all relevant stakeholders

Note 1 to entry: Approaches could include, but are not limited to: frameworks, funding and legislation to support anti-discrimination and anti-exploitation in the workplace; flexible working; pathways to return to work (parents with children, careers, long-term sick or unemployed); career-advisory programmes; knowledge and skills development and training; incentives for foreign direct investment; business and tax incentives for organizations that invest long-term in their workforce.

4 Sustainable employability on different levels

4.1 General

Sustainable employability is the end result of a complex interaction of different factors. It is useful to distinguish between governmental, organizational/industry and individual level and to define flexible workforces.

4.2 Sustainable employability at government level

At government level, the political and economic reality is critical, as is the functioning of the labour market. A graphic presentation of sustainable employability in a universal sense is set out in [Figure 2](#). At this level, governments are often active in developing and implementing sustainable employability policies, practices and programmes.

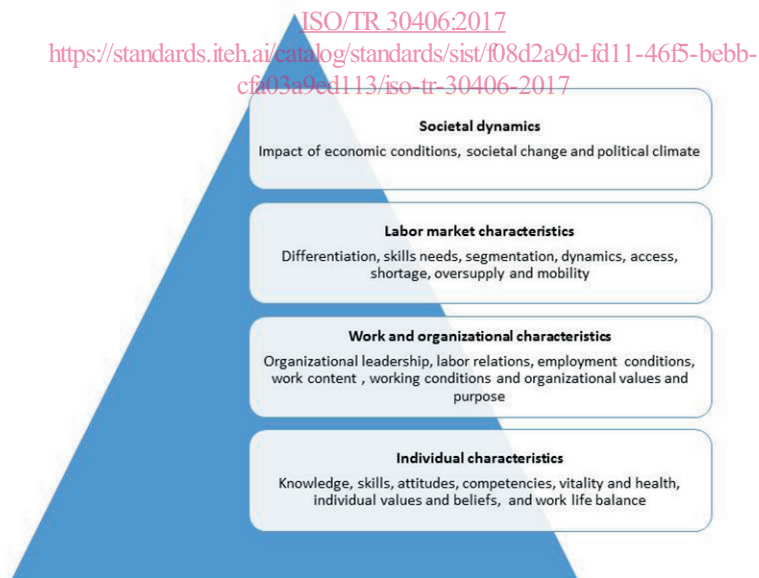


Figure 2 — Sustainable employability at macro level

4.3 Sustainable employability at industry, sector or organizational level

Sustainable employability can also be organized by industry, sector or organizational level. The initiatives will depend on the requirements and the current developmental phase of the sector, industry or organization, e.g.

- addressing specific key issues (i.e. technology, market, legislative);
- anticipating future expectations (i.e. workforce planning, merger/acquisition, new technology);
- developing competencies (i.e. training).

4.4 Sustainable employability on individual level

Sustainable employability on an individual level involves a combination of various elements, including motivation, skills, health and social skills. An organization might not be in a position to influence/impact the external environment. However, it can play a facilitating role in development of the elements mentioned above.

4.5 Flexible working and flexible workforce

The terms “flexible working” and “flexible workforce” have a variety of meanings around the world.

Flexible working can apply to the daily scheduling pattern of individual workers in a work environment, such as starting and ending the work day at different times to other workforce members. Other examples of flexible working could be working from home or combining shifts of working from home with days of working at the official workplace.

Flexible workforce can apply to those engaged in numerous industries, including agriculture, call/contact centres, construction, craftwork, farming, hospitality, mining, oil and gas, manufacturing, retail, tourism, and office-based sectors. Examples of flexible workforce usage include employing workers at only certain times of a given period (seasonal) (e.g. in agriculture, retail or tourism), piece work for which workers are paid by the item produced, project work, fixed-term contracts, casual/temporary workforce alignment to business peaks and troughs, and casual/temporary replacement work (e.g. to cover the absence of regular workforce members).

5 Guiding principles

This document constitutes a tool for determining an organization’s current performance in the area of sustainable employability. An example of how an organization could organize the implementation of sustainable employability is given in [Annex A](#).

The essential steps that all organizations are recommended to follow in order to incorporate sustainable employability are given below. The recommended method is related to the continuous improvement cycle described in quality management system standards (e.g. ISO 9001). The reason for incorporating the continuous improvement cycle mechanism is that sustainable employability is by nature fluid and ongoing and needs constant development, reworking and improvement.

- **Step 1:** Since not all the factors have the same value for every sector or organization, integrating sustainable employability into an organization starts by determining the importance for the organization of all the different factors (see Clusters 1, 2 and 3).
- **Step 2:** The organization measures the current state of sustainable employability within their organization by measuring the level of implementation of the sustainable employability factors into their organization.
- **Step 3:** The organization decides how far its present state differs from the desired state.
- **Step 4:** The organization moves continuously through the improvement cycle. Applying this method enables the organization to move from problem-oriented management (e.g. an individual is stuck