
**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).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation on the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 260, *Human resource management*.

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:
 - 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.

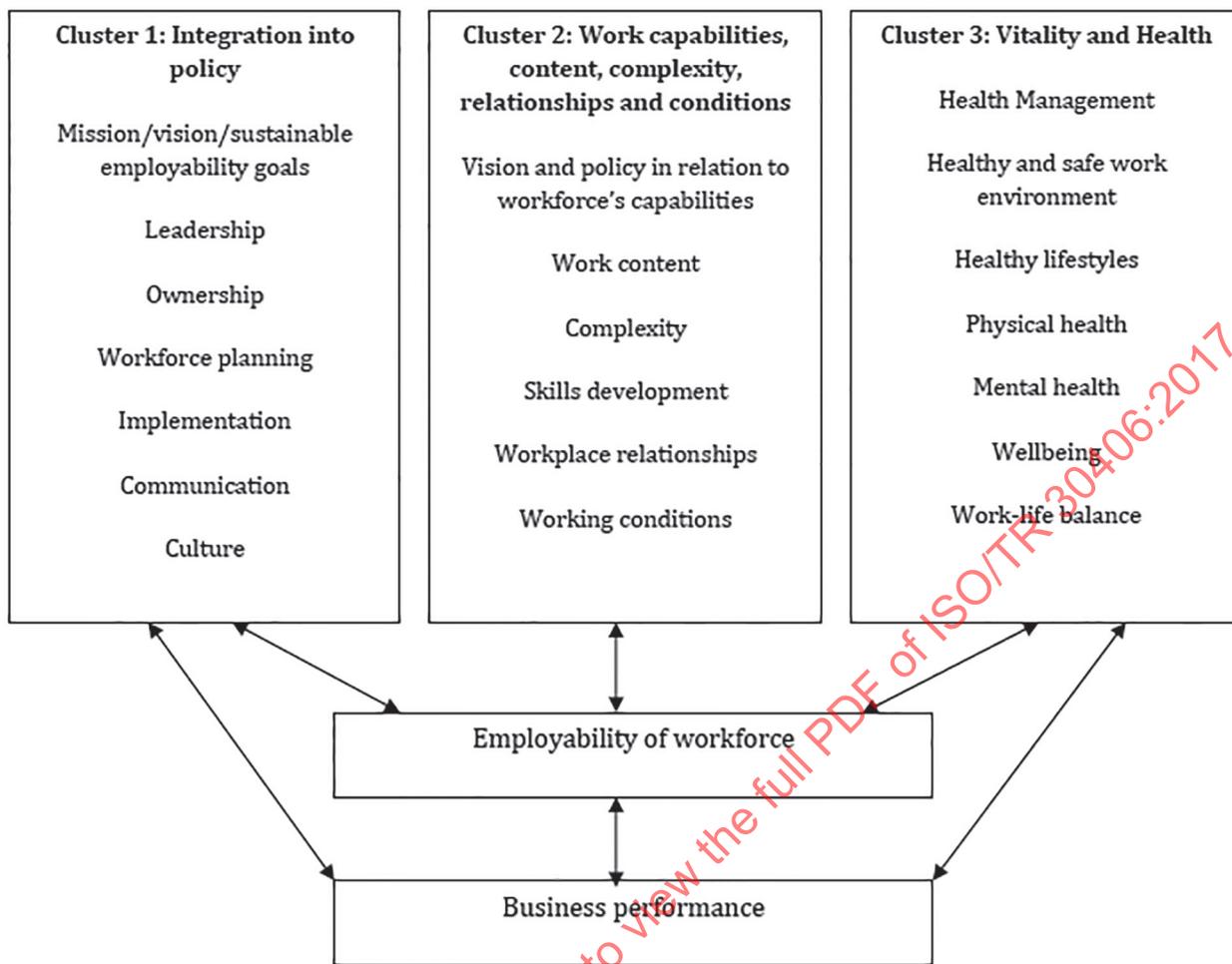


Figure 1 — Sustainable employability: Relationship between organization, person and business performance

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.

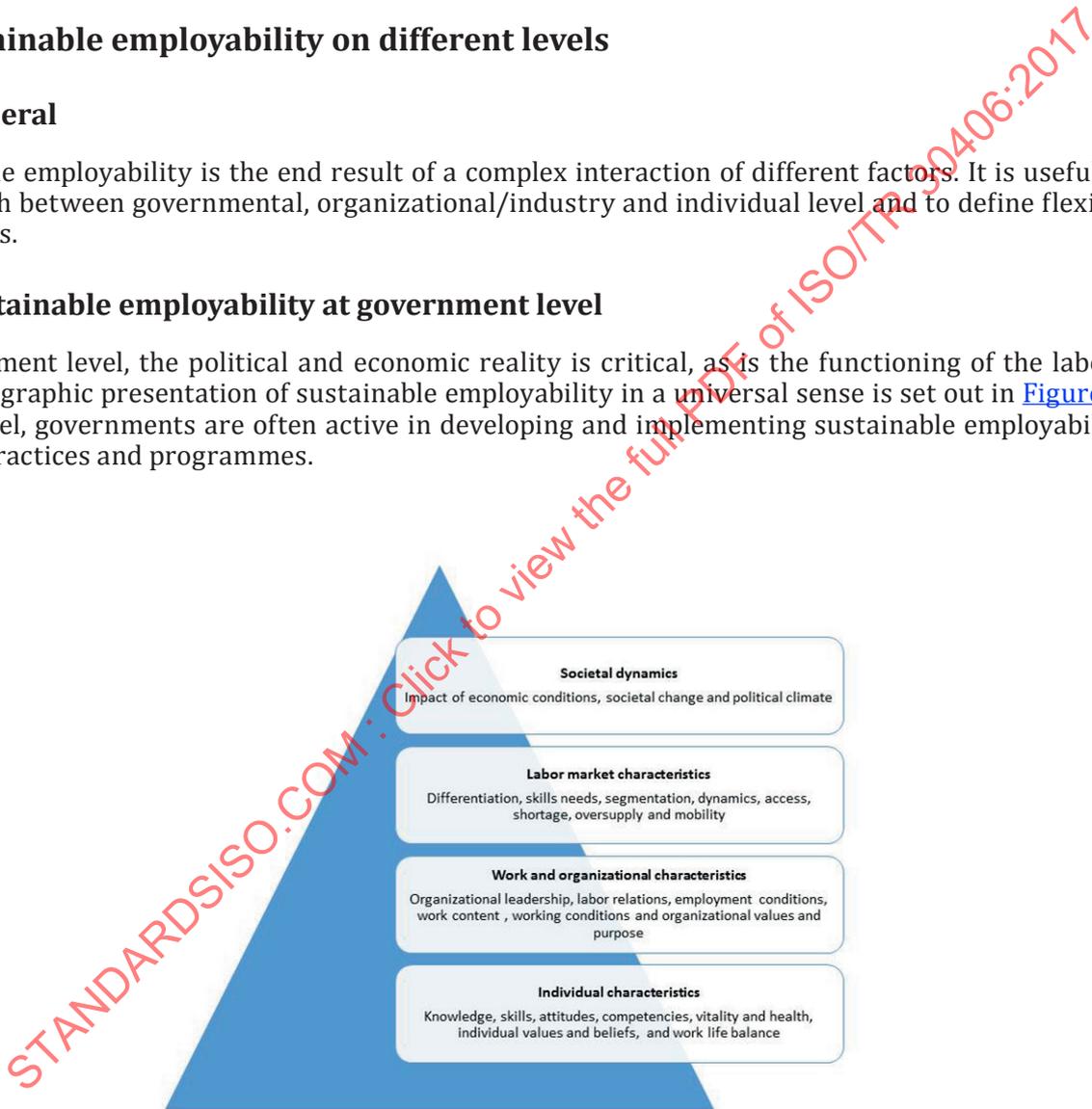


Figure 2 — Sustainable employability at macro level

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

in a job for which there is a limited future need) to a systematic approach in which sustainable employability is consistently promoted.

The following conditions are assumed:

- a) safe working conditions are implemented with workforce members sharing this responsibility;
- b) the organization operates a human resources policy, with structural work consultation and annual reviews (performance and assessment reviews);
- c) there is an active human resource management and occupational health and safety policy, with an aim for continuous improvement in which an active contribution by the workforce is required;
- d) there is support from top management for setting up a structural policy aimed at embedding sustainable employability and vitality that involves input from the workforce.

Working on sustainable employability suggests that the organization aims to create and sustain its future business success by creating conditions under which a workforce continues to develop its knowledge, skills and competencies, and to maintain and enhance their vitality.

The three clusters of sustainable employability are discussed in Clauses 6, 7 and 8.

6 Cluster 1: Integration of sustainable employability into policy

6.1 General

This cluster deals with the extent to which the organization has integrated sustainable employability into its policies. This includes exploring whether the business strategy, vision, mission, values and goals of the organization align with sustainable employability. It includes issues such as style of leadership and management, communication, culture and organization of work (implementation and workforce planning). It also assesses the extent to which the workforce can take responsibility for its own sustainable employability. The elements are also aimed at ensuring sustainable employability for workforces if organizations are sold or shut down.

6.2 Mission/vision/sustainable employability goals

- a) The sustainable employability approach in the organization is aligned with the business strategy.
- b) The organization has formulated a clear mission/vision and specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound (SMART) goals to maintain and improve sustainable employability within the organization now and into the future.
- c) The organization is aware of and understands how internal and external developments affect the quantity and quality (i.e. the KSAs) and the well-being of its workforce.
- d) The organization has a well-defined approach to promoting and achieving sustainable employability for itself and its workforce.

6.3 Leadership

- a) Top management owns the sustainable employability agenda and actively supports and promotes sustainable employability practices.
- b) All levels of management have developed key performance indicators (KPIs) in relation to sustainable employability and follow them.
- c) All levels of management understand which measures should be used to ensure and improve sustainable employability for, and of, the workforce.

- d) All levels of management support organizational departments in collaborating and cooperating to nurture best practice in sustainable employability.

6.4 Ownership

The organization works with relevant internal and external interested parties to improve and maintain sustainable employability.

6.5 Workforce planning

- a) The organization ensures it understands workforce supply and demand risks, including KSAs, for the current, transition and future workforce and has implemented workforce risk mitigation strategies required to achieve strategic business goals.
- b) The organization regularly assesses the KSAs of its workforce and provides feedback so that it is aware of improvements needed to ensure sustainable employability.
- c) The workforce is informed about measures that will be necessary to improve its employability and receives guidance to make use of available opportunities.
- d) The organization recruits not only individuals offering KSAs for current needs, but also those who demonstrate potential to learn and develop, and are committed to continuous learning.

6.6 Implementation

- a) The sustainable employability strategy and policy are a standard item during management and staff meetings.
- b) The sustainable employability policy is implemented in the workplace in tangible, practical ways.
- c) Strategic workforce planning is aligned with sustainable employability goals and plans.
- d) Human resources support leadership, managers and the workforce towards achieving sustainable employability for all.

6.7 Communication

- a) The organization has a specific communication tool to explore, review and share opportunities to embed sustainable employability practices.
- b) The organization has platforms where active workforce engagement is the norm and their action items are incorporated and reviewed by management.
- c) The entire workforce (permanent, temporary, interim, part-time, etc.) understands how its roles, KSAs, performance and behaviour fit into sustainable employability and its planning.
- d) Sustainable employability is a standard item during performance reviews.

6.8 Culture

- a) The organization recognizes that a sustainable employability culture promotes trust, workforce engagement, loyalty, productivity, initiative, creativity, and overall physical and mental health.
- b) The organization recognizes that a practical and stimulating learning and development environment is essential for its workforce's sustainable employability.
- c) The organization recognizes the value in involving the workforce in deciding how its KSAs are used in the workplace, and that members of the workforce have opportunities to develop in new and different directions if they choose.

- d) The organization recognizes the value of providing the mechanism to allow the workforce to express its views on issues relating to sustainable employability and to put forward ideas to improve related conditions and take steps to achieve them.

7 Cluster 2: Work capabilities, content, complexity, relationships and conditions

7.1 General

An organization's reason to exist will be the product(s) and/or service(s) it delivers to external clients or customers. Work distributed across an organization is aimed at producing or delivering product(s) or service(s), and at providing infrastructure such as business support services (finance, human resources, facilities management, etc.) to ensure the product(s) and/or service(s) is/are delivered. Individuals need to be employed to do specific jobs which ultimately contribute to the production or delivery of the organization's product(s) or service(s).

The content of those jobs will depend on the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) the organization needs to carry out its business. The organization needs to fully understand its current KSA needs, as well as have an awareness of what KSAs it will need to adapt to changing market conditions.

The workforce needs to fully understand the breadth and depth of KSAs that it currently applies to its work, i.e. why KSAs are required. It also needs to work in partnership with the organization to build and further develop its KSAs to improve its employability/career prospects, to adapt to changing market conditions and to any personal circumstances that could affect its work, such as caring responsibilities or illness.

7.2 Vision and policy in relation to the workforce's capabilities

- a) The organization seeks to fully understand and implement the training and development for maintaining or upgrading the workforce's existing KSAs to meet organizational goals.
- b) The organization recognizes that creating, developing and sharing of knowledge are a prerequisite to develop a sustainable workforce.
- c) The organization recognizes that its KSA needs constantly evolve in line with changing business and market conditions, and assists in developing the KSAs of its workforce in line with its own ambitions so that it remains employable over time.
- d) Manager and workforce regularly discuss the workforce's existing and deployable KSAs and its alignment with the organization's goals.

7.3 Work content

- a) All levels of management periodically discuss with workforce members the extent to which the latter's jobs and tasks are challenging, and explore options or requirements for training and development to improve and progress KSAs.
- b) All levels of the organization are encouraged to think about the content of its roles and stretching its KSAs, with supervisors empowered to support this further development.
- c) As business and organizational needs change, the workforce participates in planning how to incorporate existing KSAs into new roles with different content.
- d) Organizations work with the workforce to develop adaptations to work content that may result from personal circumstances, such as a physical/mental condition or caring requirement.

7.4 Complexity

- a) The organization ensures that the workforce's responsibilities are appropriate to individual KSAs and can include mentally stimulating tasks.

- b) Information is provided within the workplace to support the workforce in its tasks.
- c) The organization supports the workforce's KSAs to perform complex tasks to a high level of quality.

7.5 Skills development

- a) The organization ensures that resources are allocated to train and develop the workforce.
- b) The organization is committed to building on its workforce's existing skills through channels including coaching, mentoring and training (classroom, online, practical) to support professional development of its individual workforce members and overall workforce.
- c) Workforce members' work skills are documented in both their individual records and in an organization-wide inventory, of which the latter can be shared with pertinent external stakeholders.
- d) The organization monitors and documents the skills that will be needed in the sector/industry going forward, and develops and carries out plans to introduce to and train its workforce in such skills.

7.6 Workplace relationships

- a) The organization is characterized by transparency in how it acknowledges the KSAs needed to do business, job design and its view of how changing market and business conditions may affect work content of the future.
- b) Managers and workforce treat each other with respect, regardless of status within the organization.
- c) The appraisal of supervisors is based in part on how well they actively support its directly-reporting workforce in developing its career potential.
- d) Managers and workforce encourage each other to improve performance while taking into account individuals' strengths and weaknesses.

7.7 Working conditions

- a) The organization takes an active approach to maintaining and promoting individual health and work-life balance.
- b) The organization allows for flexible working arrangements in terms of working hours, location, salary, performance, and learning and development when this is reasonable and practical.
- c) The organization encourages internal mobility, allowing workforce members to continuously learn and develop within their current job or future jobs and within and outside their current organizations.
- d) The organization provides safe, ergonomic and well-maintained working conditions that promote effectiveness, productivity and well-being.

8 Cluster 3: Vitality and health

8.1 General

Vitality includes elements such as enthusiasm, energy, inspiration and the workforce's motivation. The organization and workforce have a shared interest and responsibility to improve vitality.

8.2 Health management

- a) The workforce may be actively involved in contributing to the planning and implementation of voluntary policies and practices aimed at creating and maintaining optimum physical and mental health.

- b) Occupational health support may be provided to workforce members with physical/mental ill health or injuries that affect their capability to do their jobs.
- c) Health management is periodically evaluated and optimized if needed.
- d) The human resources policy is aimed at managing absenteeism and promoting a rapid return to work.

8.3 Healthy and safe work environment

- a) The organization guarantees that workforce members will work in a safe and healthy environment by systematically conducting risk assessments and audits, and addressing or controlling identified risks.
- b) The workforce members identify and report unsafe and unhealthy working conditions and actively contribute to improved occupational health and safety, within their capabilities.
- c) The organization has clear and established systems and procedures that lead to a safe and healthy work environment.
- d) The organization may support the maintenance and promotion of individual health and a good work-life balance throughout workforce members' life stages.

8.4 Healthy lifestyles

- a) The organization has a systematic and quantifiable approach to encouraging healthy lifestyle behaviour, and acts upon related issues when necessary.
- b) The organization encourages the workforce to enhance healthy lifestyle behaviour at individual or group level.
- c) The organization provides support mechanism(s) to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

8.5 Physical health

- a) The organization supports workforce members' physical health, and acts upon related issues when necessary.
- b) The organization encourages the workforce to enhance its physical health at individual or group level.
- c) The organization provides support mechanism(s) to achieve a balance between the physical demands of the job and the workforce member's physical capabilities/health.
- d) Together, the manager and workforce member discuss regularly how best to maintain a balance between the physical demands of the job and the workforce member's physical capabilities/health.

8.6 Mental health

- a) The organization supports the workforce's mental health and acts upon related issues when necessary.
- b) The organization encourages the workforce to enhance its mental health at individual or group level.
- c) The organization provides support mechanism(s) to achieve a balance between the mental demands of the job and workforce members' mental capabilities/health under routine operating conditions.
- d) The organization explores and implements means of helping the workforce maintain and enhance mental health/capabilities when it is undergoing VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) working and market conditions.
- e) Together, the manager and workforce member discuss regularly how best to maintain a balance between the mental demands of the job and the workforce member's mental capabilities/health.

8.7 Well-being

- a) The organization supports the workforce's well-being, and takes action when necessary.
- b) The organization encourages the workforce to enhance its well-being at individual or group level.
- c) The organization provides support mechanism(s) to achieve the workforces' well-being in the workplace.

8.8 Work-life balance (caring roles/self-care)

- a) The organization focuses on results and allows flexibility on working hours and schedules when possible to accommodate the workforce member's personal life needs.
- b) The organization and workforce members aim to accommodate workforce members who are (temporarily) required to spend more time at home due to personal circumstances.
- c) Workforce members are given the opportunity to create their own balance between work and home life.

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