

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

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In many industrialized countries, the aging population causes an increasing pressure on organizations and their employees. Due to aging, retirement- and healthcare costs are continuously increasing (Alemayehu & Warner, 2004; Rice, 2004). In general, health and several functional capacities deteriorate with age. Therefore, it could be more difficult for aging workers to meet their job demands. Moreover, the demands on the working population change as rapid technological and organizational change affect the nature of work and increase skill demands in the workplace (Autor, Levy, & Murnane, 2003; Machin & van Reenen, 1998). To cope with the increasing costs, governments have increased the eligibility for public pensions or abolished mandatory retirement. Consequently, employees not only face higher and different demands but also face these demands for a longer period of time. In light of these developments, the topics of sustainable employability and sustainable employment become increasingly important for policymakers, HR managers as well as employees themselves.

Despite their importance, sustainable employability and sustainable employment have not been defined and operationalized properly yet. The few definitions and operationalizations in the international literature are generally too narrow as they tend to focus on only one aspect of sustainable employability (e.g. employability skills (Watts, 2006), workability (Koolhaas, 2014) or post-intervention absenteeism (Noben, Nijhuis, de Rijk, & Evers, 2012)). We recognize the importance of these constructs in the context of sustainable employability and employment, but argue that given the complexity of what constitutes an individual's ability to work, a more integrative approach is required (cf. van der Klink et al., 2010). Moreover, we argue that time should by definition be incorporated in both definitions and operationalizations and that for research on sustainable employment a longitudinal design is a prerequisite.

Sustainable employment is defined as a current situation in which the way individuals are employed does not negatively affect their ability to function in current and future work (i.e. employability) over time. Current employment is shaped by various variables (i.e. characteristics of the job, the work environment, and the employee). However, sustainable employment cannot be observed directly as the sustainability of employment is inferred from the outcomes (i.e. sustainable employability) of interactions between the variables it consists of.

Sustainable employability then means that an individual's employability is not negatively affected by employment over time. Given the complexity of what constitutes functioning, we view employability as a construct that is much broader than its traditional conceptualizations describe (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Sanders & de Grip, 2004). Specifically, we operationalize employability as a multidimensional latent construct that includes competence, health, and well-being related variables. This selection of dimensions is based on the variables that are considered to be the most important indicators of functioning adequately at work within the disciplines of labor economics (i.e. productivity, skill-gap, and employability), occupational epidemiology (i.e. need for recovery, fatigue, subjective health, and work ability), and work and organizational psychology (i.e. motivation and job satisfaction), respectively. The sustainability component can then be captured by measuring this latent construct at multiple time points and computing a slope over time using Latent Growth Curve Modeling (LGCM) (Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2006). By using our conceptual model, the effects of employment variables on employability over time can be modeled with LGCM, thus identifying the factors that comprise sustainable employment and determine sustainable employability.

We tested the dimensionality of (sustainable) employability using data from the 2012 measurement wave of the Maastricht Cohort Study (MCS) (Mohren, Jansen, van Amelsvoort, & Kant, 2007). The MCS is a large-scale longitudinal study that started in 1998 and still runs. During follow-up repeated measurements took place, including work related variables as well as health outcomes. The 2012 measurement wave includes 4,789 participants (1,207 women), $M_{\text{age}} = 57.27$, $SD = 8.44$. Confirmatory factor analyses revealed that (sustainable) employability can be conceptualized as a second-order factor consisting of the proposed dimensions (RMSEA = .033, CFI = .899, TLI = .890).

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