

# Towards New Framework for Employability in the Changing World of Work

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**Abstract:** *Abstracts: Employability in today's rapidly evolving labor market extends beyond traditional technical and basic soft skills, requiring a broader framework that integrates continuous learning, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and digital competence. This shift is driven by technological advances such as AI and automation, demographic changes, and new organizational paradigms, all of which demand a dynamic and holistic understanding of employability as an interplay between individual capabilities and systemic supports. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the critical role of digital competence and flexibility, accelerating the shift toward hybrid work environments and lifelong learning imperatives. Contemporary research situates employability at the intersection of individual capability and systemic support. External factors such as labor market volatility, organizational culture, and educational frameworks significantly influence individuals' ability to acquire, retain, and advance in employment. Higher education institutions are increasingly embedding employability into curricula through transferable skills development, career integration, and industry collaboration. Initiatives such as micro-credentials and modular learning are enabling continuous, personalized, and accessible education that aligns with rapidly evolving job requirements. Additionally, universities are addressing inclusive employability by enhancing support for marginalized groups, thereby promoting broader economic participation and social cohesion. To meet future labor market demands, a collaborative, future-oriented approach to employability is necessary—one that unites individuals, organizations, educational institutions, and policymakers. This integrated model must emphasize lifelong learning, psychological resilience, ethical responsibility, and global citizenship. Such a holistic framework ensures that the workforce remains adaptable, inclusive, and capable of meaningful contribution in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.*

**Keywords** - Career adaptability; Digital literacy; Employability; Higher education; Lifelong learning

## Introduction

Employability is widely conceptualized as the amalgamation of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and personal attributes that enable individuals to obtain and sustain employment while adapting to evolving workplace environments. Yorke and Knight (2004) define employability as a constellation of achievements, including skills, understanding, and personal qualities that increase the likelihood of securing and succeeding in one's chosen occupation, thereby benefiting individuals, the workforce, the community, and the broader economy. More broadly, employability pertains to the possession of competencies that enhance an individual's potential for employment within business enterprises and the wider labor market. Dearing (as cited in Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010) further emphasizes that employability encompasses the capacity to secure employment commensurate with an individual's educational qualifications.

Recent scholarship has expanded the traditional notion of employability to incorporate continuous learning, adaptability, and emotional intelligence as core components. Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth's (2004) concept of "career adaptability" exemplifies this shift, highlighting the psychological resources individuals utilize to navigate career transitions and workplace changes. This evolution reflects the

increasing complexity and dynamism of modern labor markets, which require employees to be flexible and resilient. Contemporary research also acknowledges that employability is not merely an individual attribute but is influenced by external factors, including organizational support, labor market conditions, and educational systems. For instance, the World Economic Forum's 2021 report underscores the critical role of lifelong learning and digital skills in sustaining employability amid rapid technological advancements such as artificial intelligence and automation (World Economic Forum, 2021). Furthermore, Rothwell and Arnold (2020) emphasize employability as a proactive process, where individuals engage in career self-management through networking, skill development, and resilience-building. Collectively, these perspectives portray employability as a dynamic, multifaceted construct requiring both personal initiative and structural facilitation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated workplace transformations, intensifying the importance of flexibility and digital competence as integral facets of employability. Kniffin et al. (2022) demonstrate how remote work and digital collaboration have redefined essential employability skills, placing heightened emphasis on adaptability and technological fluency. Consequently, employability is best understood as an evolving interplay between individual capabilities and contextual influences, equipping workers to

thrive in uncertain and rapidly changing employment landscapes. Given the pace of technological innovation, globalization, and shifting work patterns, employability has become a pivotal attribute in the contemporary labor market. Success in securing and retaining meaningful employment increasingly depends not only on technical proficiency but also on soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence, which enhance workforce agility and resilience.

Recent investigations highlight the centrality of lifelong learning and continuous skill enhancement in employability. The World Economic Forum's 2023 *Future of Jobs Report* identifies growing demand for critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy across diverse sectors (World Economic Forum, 2023). Correspondingly, McKinsey & Company (2022) stress the imperative for workers to reskill and upskill in response to automation and AI integration, which are fundamentally reshaping occupational roles worldwide. These developments underscore employability as a continuous, adaptive process requiring ongoing engagement in learning and professional development.

Moreover, employability is closely linked to economic stability and social inclusion. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) asserts that enhanced employability contributes to reducing unemployment and underemployment, thereby improving living standards and fostering social cohesion. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized this relationship, as many workers rapidly adapted to new work modalities and digital tools, underscoring the critical role of adaptability and digital competence within employability frameworks. Consequently, employability remains essential for navigating continuous labor market changes, securing job stability, and contributing effectively to economic development. It is imperative that organizations and policymakers prioritize skills development and lifelong learning initiatives to support employability and address emerging workforce challenges.

### **The Historical Context of Employability: Lifelong Learning and Labor Market Evolution**

Prior to the 21st century, employability was predominantly understood as a fixed set of technical skills and formal qualifications aligned with relatively stable and predictable labor market demands. During the industrial and post-industrial eras, employability was largely synonymous with technical proficiency and educational credentials necessary for specific occupational roles. Mid-20th-century vocational training and formal education systems were primarily designed to equip individuals with specialized skills tailored to particular industries, reflecting a linear and structured model of career progression (Brown, 2001). Employability thus focused narrowly on job-specific performance, with limited emphasis on adaptability or lifelong learning.

The labor market of the 20th century was characterized by well-defined occupational roles and an expectation of long-term employment within single organizations. This period, marked by the rise of the "organizational career," entailed stable and predictable career trajectories supported by employer investment in employee training and development (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). Employability was tightly coupled with fitting into this stable structure, emphasizing reliability, loyalty, and job-specific competencies. Employers predominantly controlled skills development within this framework.

However, from the late 20th century onwards, employability began to evolve significantly in response to globalization, technological advancement, and labor market deregulation. The static model of employability, centered on fixed skills, gave way to a dynamic conception emphasizing flexibility, transferable skills, and lifelong learning. Yorke (2006) contended that employability extends beyond technical knowledge to encompass a broad range of personal attributes, including problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and proactive adaptability. This reconceptualization reflected labor market uncertainty and the growing expectation that individuals assume responsibility for managing their careers.

Educational institutions also adapted, expanding their remit to include "soft skills" and broader employability attributes, thus better preparing graduates for a competitive and rapidly evolving workforce (Harvey, 2001). This paradigm shift laid the foundation for the contemporary focus on lifelong learning and self-directed career management, representing a decisive break from previous generations' emphasis on technical training and stable employment pathways. Understanding this historical trajectory is essential to comprehending the complexities of employability in today's dynamic labor market.

### **The Changing World of Work: Navigating the Intersection of Technology, Talent, and Well-Being**

The contemporary world of work is experiencing rapid transformation driven by technological innovation, evolving employee expectations, and novel organizational paradigms. A major catalyst is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into daily operations, leading to "blended work environments" where human workers collaborate with AI systems contributing to decision-making, creativity, and routine tasks. For example, companies such as Microsoft and JPMorgan Chase have implemented workforce reductions, leveraging AI to sustain productivity with smaller teams—a trend documented by *Business Insider* (2025) in their analysis of "the great shrinking corporations" (Business Insider, 2025).

Simultaneously, organizations are investing substantially in reskilling and upskilling initiatives to help employees adapt to shifting job requirements. Continuous learning has become a strategic imperative essential to retaining talent and

maintaining competitiveness within the digital economy (IMD, 2024). Emerging roles increasingly demand competencies in data analytics, AI oversight, and digital collaboration, prompting firms like IBM and Accenture to launch comprehensive internal training programs aimed at equipping their workforce with future-ready skills (IMD, 2024).

Employee well-being has ascended to a central position in corporate agendas, with companies expanding mental health support, flexible work options, and wellness initiatives to enhance engagement and productivity. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated awareness of the critical link between health and organizational success. Mental health days, counseling access, and ergonomic home office arrangements have become standard benefits (IMD, 2024). This cultural shift is particularly pronounced among younger generations who prioritize work-life balance and meaningful work experiences (IMD, 2024).

Leadership styles are evolving from traditional hierarchical models to more empathetic, inclusive, and adaptive approaches. Modern leaders emphasize emotional intelligence, active listening, and fostering psychological safety within teams—an essential evolution for managing hybrid and distributed workforces (Forbes, 2024). Such leadership practices enable organizations to balance technological efficiency with the human needs for creativity, collaboration, and trust (Forbes, 2024).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have progressed from compliance-driven activities to integral elements of corporate strategy. Organizations employ data analytics and AI-powered tools to detect and address biases in hiring, promotion, and pay equity. Companies like Netflix and Unilever have adopted transparent pay policies and utilize AI systems to monitor diversity metrics and ensure accountability (LinkedIn, 2025). This evolution reflects recognition that inclusive workplaces foster innovation, employee satisfaction, and business performance.

The very concept of work is being reconsidered, with the four-day workweek gaining traction as a viable alternative to traditional schedules. Early adopters such as Microsoft Japan and Perpetual Guardian (New Zealand) have reported productivity gains, reduced burnout, and improved employee morale following reduced work hours, challenging conventional assumptions linking hours worked with output and highlighting a broader prioritization of results and quality of life (Forbes, 2024).

In nutshell, the contemporary world of work in 2025 is defined by the complex interaction of technology, talent development, employee well-being, and inclusion. Organizations that proactively integrate AI, foster continuous learning, promote empathetic leadership, and prioritize health and diversity will be better equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern

workplace. As these trends continue, the future of work promises greater flexibility, equity, and human-centeredness.

### Statement of the Problem

The contemporary labor market is experiencing unprecedented transformation driven by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and evolving organizational paradigms. Traditional conceptions of employability—primarily centered on technical proficiency and fundamental soft skills—are increasingly inadequate in addressing the demands of this dynamic environment. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and automation are reshaping occupational roles, elevating the importance of continuous learning, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and digital competencies. Despite the clear necessity of these broader skill sets, individuals, organizations, and educational institutions frequently encounter challenges in effectively cultivating and sustaining such capabilities.

Moreover, external factors including labor market volatility, variable organizational support, and disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic complicate the maintenance of employability within uncertain contexts. These challenges underscore the imperative to reconceptualize employability as a dynamic interplay between individual skill development and systemic support mechanisms. Addressing this interplay is critical for fostering economic stability, enhancing social inclusion, and ensuring workforce resilience amid ongoing socio-economic changes.

The labor market's ongoing metamorphosis is further shaped by demographic shifts and evolving workforce dynamics. The World Economic Forum projects that approximately 40% of workers' core skills will undergo significant change in the near future, highlighting the necessity of lifelong learning and flexibility. AI and automation are diminishing the demand for routine tasks while accentuating the value of creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. Concurrently, demographic trends—including aging populations in developed nations and expanding youth cohorts in emerging economies—demand tailored, inclusive labor strategies.

In addition to these factors, diversity, equity, and inclusion have emerged as strategic imperatives, with empirical evidence linking diverse teams to superior performance outcomes. The rise of the gig economy introduces both flexibility and challenges related to job security and access to benefits. In response, governments and international organizations have launched initiatives such as the World Economic Forum's Reskilling Revolution to address evolving skills gaps. Employers increasingly implement "skills-first" strategies, leveraging AI-powered learning platforms. Furthermore, emerging sectors such as the green economy and new workplace models emphasizing mental health, remote collaboration, and digital leadership underscore the multifaceted complexity of employability in the 21st century.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate employability as a dynamic construct shaped by the interaction between individual competencies and systemic support, with the goal of informing policies and practices that enhance workforce adaptability and resilience in an era of continuous change.

## The Role of Higher Education in Reconceptualizing Employability

### From Knowledge Transmission to Skills Integration

Historically, higher education institutions prioritized the dissemination of academic content and specialized knowledge within discrete disciplinary boundaries. However, the accelerating evolution of the labor market necessitates the cultivation of a broader spectrum of competencies that transcend purely theoretical understanding. Contemporary universities increasingly acknowledge the imperative to equip students with transferable skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, collaboration, creativity, and emotional intelligence. These competencies enable graduates to navigate diverse professional roles and unforeseen challenges within dynamic work environments effectively. The concept of the “T-shaped professional” encapsulates this dual emphasis on deep disciplinary expertise complemented by a broad range of cross-disciplinary skills that enhance adaptability and innovation. This paradigm shift reflects an educational commitment to fostering graduates capable of integrating knowledge across domains, employing holistic problem-solving approaches, and contributing substantively to complex real-world contexts (Chan & Yeung, 2019).

### Embedding Employability in the Curriculum

There is a growing trend in higher education to embed employability as an integral component of academic curricula rather than treating it as an ancillary or external outcome. This integration encompasses career readiness, ethical awareness, entrepreneurial thinking, and digital competencies directly within course design and learning outcomes. Curricula are thus structured to cultivate not only intellectual rigor but also practical capabilities aligned with the evolving demands of the contemporary workforce. For instance, the University of Sydney’s graduate qualities framework foregrounds attributes such as inventiveness, intercultural competence, ethical identity, and global citizenship, reflecting an educational philosophy aimed at developing responsible, resourceful graduates. By situating these attributes at the core of academic programs, universities demonstrate a commitment to preparing learners who are both employable and capable of making positive societal contributions across multiple dimensions (University of Sydney, 2024).

### Partnerships with Industry

Collaborative engagements between universities and industry stakeholders have become pivotal in ensuring academic relevance and alignment with labor market requirements. Such partnerships take various forms, including co-designed

curricula, industry placements, mentorship schemes, and project-based collaborations, thereby affording students practical experience and exposure to workplace cultures and expectations. This symbiotic relationship benefits both parties: employers influence curricular priorities to reflect current skill demands, while students gain experiential knowledge that enhances their employability prospects. The MicroMasters initiative pioneered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, led by Sarma and Beshimov, exemplifies such strategic university-industry alliances. This program delivers modular, flexible credentials tailored to workforce needs, facilitating targeted upskilling and reskilling opportunities (Sarma & Beshimov, 2016).

### Focus on Lifelong and Life-wide Learning

In response to career fluidity and rapid technological disruption, the traditional conception of education as a singular event is increasingly inadequate. Higher education institutions are advancing lifelong and life-wide learning frameworks that support continuous skill development throughout an individual’s career trajectory. These approaches acknowledge the likelihood of multiple career changes across sectors and roles, necessitating adaptable learning pathways. Modular courses, micro-credentials, digital badges, and stackable qualifications enable learners to incrementally acquire expertise tailored to their evolving professional contexts. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) 2023 report highlights the vital role of micro-credentials in democratizing educational access, enhancing employability, and fostering adaptability amid fast-paced economic and technological shifts (Kato, Gyorf, & Weko, 2023).

### Incorporating Career Services into Academic Structures

Career development services have transitioned from optional supplements to essential elements embedded within the academic experience. Universities now integrate career coaching, job search strategy instruction, interview preparation, and personal branding workshops directly into degree programs. This systemic integration ensures that students receive continuous and proactive career guidance, linking academic learning to tangible employment pathways. Furthermore, advances in artificial intelligence have enabled the deployment of personalized career support tools, such as predictive analytics that align student profiles with labor market trends and virtual advisors delivering customized recommendations at scale. These technological innovations promote equitable and accessible career services, supporting students from diverse backgrounds in effectively navigating the transition from education to employment (OECD Skills and Work Blog, 2023).

### Addressing Equity and Inclusive Employability

An inclusive framework of employability actively addresses structural inequalities disproportionately affecting marginalized student groups. Universities are expanding

support systems to ensure equitable access to career development resources for underrepresented populations, including first-generation learners, students with disabilities, and international students. The integration of AI-driven educational technologies and modular learning designs facilitates personalized learning experiences that accommodate diverse needs and prior knowledge. Policies and practices aimed at minimizing outcome disparities not only foster individual success but also advance broader social mobility and economic inclusion. The OECD underscores that such inclusive approaches are critical for cultivating diverse, resilient workforces equipped to meet future challenges (OECD Skills and Work Blog, 2023).

#### Building Resilience and Future-Mindedness

Employability now encompasses psychological resilience, adaptability, and proactive self-direction alongside technical qualifications. Pedagogical strategies increasingly focus on cultivating futures literacy—the capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and influence uncertain futures. Curricula incorporate elements of design thinking, mindfulness, and well-being education to support students in managing stress, reframing setbacks as opportunities, and developing confidence in navigating complex career landscapes. Empirical research by Kovalev, Stefanac, and Rizoiu (2024) corroborates the efficacy of combining traditional degree programs with supplementary certifications to align graduate competencies with labor market demands, thereby emphasizing the importance of adaptability and continuous learning amid technological and economic volatility.

#### Global Citizenship and Ethical Employability

In an interconnected global economy, employability entails the ability to operate ethically and effectively across cultural and national boundaries. Higher education institutions foster global citizenship through international exchange programs, cross-cultural communication training, and curricula that emphasize sustainability, diversity, and social responsibility. Graduates are thus prepared not only to excel professionally but also to understand and act upon the environmental and social ramifications of their work. The University of Sydney's focus on ethical identity and global citizenship exemplifies this broadened conceptualization of employability, preparing graduates to contribute conscientiously to local communities and the global society (University of Sydney, 2024).

Higher education institutions are evolving from traditional knowledge transmitters to architects of a comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-looking employability framework. Through strategic curriculum innovation, sustained industry partnerships, credentialing advancements, and commitments to equity and resilience, universities are equipping graduates for immediate job readiness as well as lifelong adaptability and meaningful societal contribution. This holistic approach is imperative to address the complex demands of the 21st-

century workforce, characterized by rapid technological progress, globalization, and social transformation.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

Employability within today's labor market is a complex and evolving concept that transcends the traditional boundaries of technical proficiency and basic soft skills. The contemporary world of work—characterized by rapid technological advancements such as artificial intelligence and automation, demographic changes, and emerging organizational paradigms—necessitates the adoption of a broader and more integrative framework for employability. This framework must encompass continuous learning, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and digital literacy, while concurrently acknowledging the critical impact of external determinants, including organizational support structures, labor market dynamics, and inclusive policy environments. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted these imperatives by emphasizing the need for flexibility and digital fluency, thereby illustrating that employability today is best understood as a holistic amalgamation of individual capabilities and systemic support mechanisms.

Additionally, the transformation of work environments—particularly the proliferation of remote and hybrid working models—demands increased attention to mental well-being, inclusive leadership, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives by both employees and organizations. Organizations that proactively invest in reskilling and upskilling initiatives, cultivate empathetic leadership styles, and integrate DEI principles into corporate strategy are better positioned to succeed amid rapid labor market shifts. These dimensions not only enhance individual employability but also contribute to improved organizational performance and social cohesion. Consequently, employability should be conceptualized as an ongoing, collaborative process involving individuals, employers, educational institutions, and policymakers.

Higher education institutions occupy a pivotal role in this redefinition of employability, shifting from traditional knowledge dissemination to the integration of comprehensive skills development. Embedding employability within academic curricula through transferable skills, lifelong learning frameworks, and strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders ensures that graduates are better prepared to navigate the complexities of modern career trajectories. The inclusion of career services, micro-credentials, and digital tools further facilitates student success and equitable access to opportunities. Universities must continue evolving as inclusive environments that foster resilience, global citizenship, and ethical employability, thereby preparing graduates to contribute meaningfully to a diverse, interconnected, and technologically sophisticated workforce.

### Recommendations

In response to these insights, several recommendations are proposed to enhance employability frameworks within the evolving world of work:

- Policymakers should promote lifelong learning by incentivizing flexible educational pathways, including micro-credentials and modular programs, to support continuous skills development.
- Organizations are encouraged to implement “skills-first” recruitment and talent management approaches, alongside fostering inclusive workplace cultures and comprehensive mental health support to retain and develop human capital effectively.
- Higher education institutions must strengthen collaboration with industry partners to ensure curricular relevance and responsiveness, while simultaneously expanding support mechanisms for underrepresented populations to promote equitable employability outcomes.
- It is essential to cultivate a mindset of adaptability, resilience, and proactive career management among individuals. This entails fostering futures literacy, emotional intelligence, and digital competencies from early education through to lifelong professional development.

By embracing this comprehensive, synergistic approach, uniting individual agency, organizational commitment, educational innovation, and policy facilitation—societies can cultivate a workforce that is not only employable but also empowered to navigate and shape the future of work sustainably and inclusively.

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