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From Work Capacity to Job Crafting: A Bibliometric Mapping of Sustainable Employability Research

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ABSTRAK

Sustainable employability—sejauh mana pekerja mampu dan dimungkinkan untuk tetap berfungsi secara produktif dan sehat sepanjang kehidupan kerjanya—menjadi prioritas seiring menuanya populasi dan perubahan pekerjaan akibat teknologi digital, namun belum jelas variabel apa yang rutin diteliti bersamanya dan variabel apa yang masih jarang diuji. Penelitian ini memadukan tinjauan literatur sistematis berpedoman PRISMA dengan analisis bibliometrik terhadap 225 artikel Scopus berbahasa Inggris (2004–2026) menggunakan analitik Scopus, indikator berbasis Python, dan pemetaan ko-okurensi kata kunci VOSviewer. Jumlah publikasi meningkat pesat; 64,0% artikel terbit sejak 2021. Belanda masih memimpin (128 artikel), tetapi porsinya turun dari 78,6% menjadi 47,2%, sementara kepenulisan bersama lintas negara naik dari 7,1% menjadi 34,0%. Open Universiteit, ZonMw, *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, dan van der Klink merupakan institusi, penyandang dana, sumber, dan penulis paling produktif. Terdapat lima klaster tematik. *Workplace*, *work capacity*, *job satisfaction*, *workload*, dan *mental health* paling sering diteliti bersama *sustainable employability*, sedangkan *job crafting*, *capabilities*, *vitality*, *labour market*, *leadership*, *teaching*, dan *learning* masih jarang diteliti bersamaan dengan variabel tersebut dan menjadi peluang riset yang sedang berkembang. Penelitian ini mengusulkan kerangka integratif serta agenda riset berbasis teori–konteks–karakteristik–metodologi bagi peneliti dan praktisi sumber daya manusia.

Kata kunci : ***analisis bibliometrik; job crafting; sustainable employability; VOSviewer; work ability***

ABSTRACT

Sustainable employability—the extent to which workers are able and enabled to keep functioning productively and healthily throughout their working lives—has become a priority as populations age and work is reshaped by digital technologies, yet it is unclear which variables are routinely studied together with it and which remain largely untested. This study combines a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review with a bibliometric analysis of 225 English-language Scopus articles (2004–2026), using Scopus analytics, Python-based indicators and VOSviewer keyword co-occurrence mapping. Output has accelerated, with 64.0% of all articles published since 2021. The Netherlands still leads (128 articles), but its share fell from 78.6% to 47.2% while international co-authorship rose from 7.1% to 34.0%. Open Universiteit, ZonMw, *Sustainability (Switzerland)* and van der Klink are the most productive institution, funder, source and author. Five thematic clusters emerge. Workplace, work capacity, job satisfaction, workload and mental health are most frequently studied with sustainable employability, whereas job crafting, capabilities, vitality, labour market, leadership, teaching and learning are still rarely studied together with it and form emerging frontiers. An integrative framework and a theory–context–characteristics–methodology agenda are proposed for researchers and human resource practitioners.

Keywords : ***bibliometric analysis; job crafting; sustainable employability; VOSviewer; work ability***

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1. INTRODUCTION

Populations are ageing, working lives are lengthening, and work is being reshaped by digitalisation, automation and artificial intelligence. These forces have shifted the central labour-market question from whether people can find a job to whether they can remain able, and be enabled, to work productively, healthily and meaningfully throughout their working lives. The stakes are considerable: depression and anxiety alone cost the global economy nearly US$1 trillion each year through about 12 billion lost working days (World Health Organization, 2022). Demographic pressure is also intensifying in emerging economies. In Indonesia, 11.97% of the population is now aged 60 years or older, indicating that the country has formally entered an ageing-population phase (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2026).

Sustainable employability (SE) has emerged as a key construct for addressing these challenges. Rather than treating health, work ability and employability as separate outcomes, SE integrates them into a long-term view of labour-market participation, typically captured through employability, vitality and work ability (Jabeen et al., 2022) The capability-based conceptualisation of van der Klink (van der Klink et al., 2016), which views SE as having both the ability and the real opportunity to achieve valuable work functionings, has become the field's main reference point and has been operationalised in validated instruments (Gürbüz, Joosen, et al., 2022). Nevertheless, reviews note the absence of a commonly accepted definition and unified measurement criteria (Alcover et al., 2021); (Deng et al., 2021), and a recent Delphi study still found considerable fragmentation regarding the factors, practices and policies that shape SE (Contage & França, 2026).

Several reviews have consolidated parts of this literature, including an integrative review of SE in mid and late career (Alcover et al., 2021), a review of its antecedents (Jabeen et al., 2022), a systematic review of digital transformation and SE (Shah & Mola, 2026) and an umbrella review of healthcare workers' SE (Van De Voort et al., 2025). The only bibliometric study, by (Van De Voort et al., 2025), analysed 170 Web of Science articles published between January 2014 and January 2024. Three gaps remain. First, this coverage misses the field's most productive period; 86 of the 225 articles analysed here were published between 2024 and 2026. Second, no study has systematically distinguished the variables that are routinely studied together with SE from those that are rarely examined alongside it, or examined how recently these topics emerged. Third, the implications of the field's geographical diversification for non-Western contexts remain unexplored; none of the 225 articles includes an Indonesian affiliation.

This study therefore combines a systematic literature review with a bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed SE research from 2004 to October 2026, building on the hybrid approach previously applied to talent management (Murti, 2025). It asks: (RQ1) how SE research has developed and how it is distributed across countries, institutions, funders, sources and authors; (RQ2) which documents are most influential; (RQ3) which thematic clusters structure the field; (RQ4) which variables are most and least frequently studied together with SE, and which are emerging; and (RQ5) what agenda should guide future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Sustainable Employability

The capability approach frames SE in terms of the work values people find important and the extent to which they are able and enabled to realise them (van der Klink et al., 2016). (Gürbüz, Joosen, et al.,

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2022) showed that the capability set for work questionnaire converges with person–job fit, strengths use and opportunities to craft one's job, and predicts work ability, work engagement, job satisfaction and task performance. Alternative conceptualisations coexist. (Jabeen et al., 2022) proposed that personal and social support resources are the key antecedents of perceived SE, (Deng et al., 2021) redefined SE on the basis of the swAge model, and (Caballero et al., 2026) modelled perceived SE as a function of work ability, life–work interference and a health and well-being culture. Measurement work has also extended to prediction: an SE index predicted assured workability two years later among older postal employees (Neupane et al., 2023). Despite this progress, the lack of an agreed definition continues to limit cumulative knowledge (Alcover et al., 2021); (Contage & França, 2026).

Determinants and Outcomes of Sustainable Employability

Much of the empirical literature draws on the job demands–resources perspective. Managerial support and co-worker relationship quality stimulate job crafting, which in turn fosters SE (Irfan et al., 2023)(Irfan et al., 2024). Among South African emergency nurses, robust, inadequate and weak capability sets differed in job resources and job demands (Barnard et al., 2023), and in a Dutch healthcare organisation, psychosocial work characteristics, lifestyle and a health-oriented culture jointly explained work ability and vitality (Kraaijeveld et al., 2026). Leadership and human resource management (HRM) form a second set of determinants. Inclusive leadership and high-involvement HR practices are positively associated with SE through strengths use (Gürbüz, van Woerkom, et al., 2022), developmental HR practices foster SE through proactive career behaviours (Yang et al., 2025), and balancing employee-centric and employer-centric practices produces mutual gains, including lower turnover (Annosi et al., 2025).

With regard to outcomes, SE predicts task performance over time through work engagement (Gürbüz et al., 2023), and work capabilities are linked to a broad range of work and well-being outcomes (Gürbüz et al., 2024). Related Indonesian evidence points in the same direction: work engagement fully mediated the effects of job satisfaction and transformational leadership on performance (Suherni & Maryatmi, 2026), social support was related to caregivers' burnout (Ali & Susilarini, 2026), and workload, tight deadlines and after-hours technology use undermined the work–life balance of millennial employees in Jakarta (Murti & Utami, 2026). Although these studies do not use the SE label, they address the vitality, health and engagement mechanisms on which SE depends.

Recent Developments

Recent work has broadened SE research in three directions. The first is technological change. Digital transformation research emphasises a human-centred approach and a changing perception of work (Shah & Mola, 2026); SE policies improved the task performance of workers collaborating with cobots through their capabilities (Picco et al., 2024); and generative artificial intelligence has been flagged as a new challenge for SE (Adiasto, 2024). Technology can also threaten SE, as service-robot performance was associated with job loss insecurity and turnover intention (Sarfraz et al., 2026). The second direction concerns extended working lives, including job design for older workers (Den Boer et al., 2021), the strain of demanding occupations such as firefighting (Egdell et al., 2023) and the association of menopausal symptoms with lower work ability (Oude Hengel et al., 2023). The third links SE to education and labour-market entry through soft skills,

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psychological capital and digital competencies (Alhaderi, 2026);(Ingusci et al., 2026); (Mohan et al., 2025). Intervention evidence, however, remains limited and mixed (Hazelzet et al., 2024); (Heijkants et al., 2025).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a hybrid design that combines a systematic literature review with bibliometric analysis. The bibliometric component follows the logic of performance analysis and science mapping recommended by (Donthu et al., 2021) and the guidelines of (Mukherjee et al., 2022), while the selection process was reported in line with PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021) and the SPAR-4-SLR protocol (Paul et al., 2021). Scopus was chosen because of its broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals in the social, behavioural and health sciences and its rich metadata, including keywords, affiliations, funding and citations (Lim et al., 2024).

The search was conducted on 29 October 2026 without a start-date restriction. A search of titles, abstracts and keywords for the terms *sustainable employability* returned 1,503 documents. Records that did not contain the exact phrase "sustainable employability" were then excluded (n = 1,190), leaving 313 records. Screening by document type removed 70 records, namely 26 book chapters, 17 conference papers, 13 reviews, 5 notes, 5 books, 2 editorials, 1 short survey and 1 erratum, leaving 243 journal articles. Finally, 18 non-English articles were excluded, resulting in a final dataset of 225 English-language articles published between 2004 and 2026, 112 of which (49.8%) contain the phrase in their title.

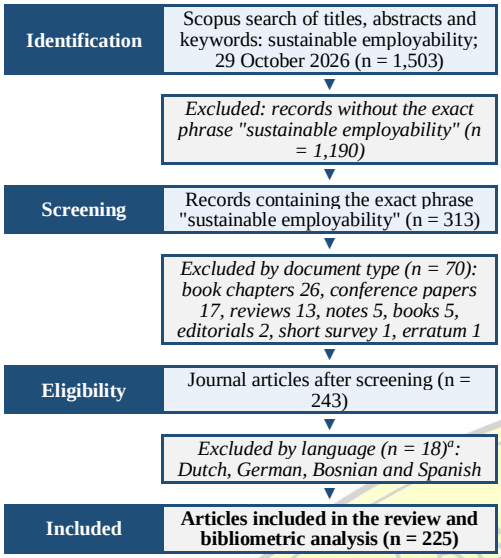
Full records were exported in CSV format. Performance analysis used the Scopus "Analyze search results" function for documents by year, country, affiliation, funding sponsor, source and author, while additional indicators (citations, h-index, g-index, multi-country publications, growth rate and citations per year) were computed in Python. Science mapping used VOSviewer co-occurrence analysis of all keywords with full counting. Of the 1,482 unique keywords, 119 met the minimum of five occurrences. The list was then screened, and generic, geographic or overly broad descriptors (e.g., questionnaire, Netherlands, psychology, occupational health and major clinical study) were deselected. The retained keywords were ranked by total link strength (TLS): the highest-ranked group was interpreted as the variables most frequently studied together with SE, and the lowest-ranked group as variables rarely studied together with SE. For each keyword, the average publication year and average citations of the documents containing it were computed, and these indicators were combined with TLS in a strategic diagram divided at the median average year (2020.9) and at a TLS of 150. Counts derived from the exported records matched the Scopus dashboards and the occurrences reported by VOSviewer exactly.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study Selection and Main Information

Figure 1 summarises the selection process, which reduced 1,503 initial records to 225 articles published in 105 sources. Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the dataset. The articles were written by 646 authors (4.23 per article) and have received 3,465 citations (15.40 per article); 83.1% have been cited at least once. The h-index of 30 and g-index of 49 indicate a compact but influential body of work, and 76.4% of the articles are available through open access.

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[a] Scopus language facets: Dutch 32, German 2, Bosnian 1 and Spanish 1; facet counts overlap because a document may be indexed in more than one language

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process

Table 1. Main information about the dataset

Description	*Result*
Timespan	2004–2026
Sources (journals)	105
Documents (journal articles)	225
Annual growth rate	16.78%
Average document age	4.82 years
Total citations	3,465
Average citations per document	15.40
Documents cited at least once	187 (83.1%)
h-index / g-index	30 / 49
Authors	646
Co-authors per document	4.23
Single-authored documents	19
International co-authorship	67 (29.8%)
Contributing countries	50
Author / indexed keywords	772 / 857
Funded documents	90 (40.0%)
Open-access documents	172 (76.4%)

Note: Search date 29 October 2026; annual growth rate computed for 2004–2025. Source: Authors' calculations based on Scopus data

Publication Growth

Figure 2 shows that three early records (2004, 2005 and 2008) mention SE only tangentially; the first two articles explicitly built around the concept appeared in 2011 in the Dutch journal *Gedrag en Organisatie* (van der Klink et al., 2011); (van Vuuren et al., 2011). Output then grew from 25 articles in 2011–2015 to 53 in 2016–2020 before accelerating sharply: 144 articles (64.0%) have been published since 2021, and the 32 articles published in 2026 up to the search date already make it the most productive year. Between 2004 and 2025, output grew at a compound annual rate of 16.8%. Because recent articles have had less time to accumulate citations, average citations are much lower for 2021–2026 (7.5) than for 2016–2020 (31.8).

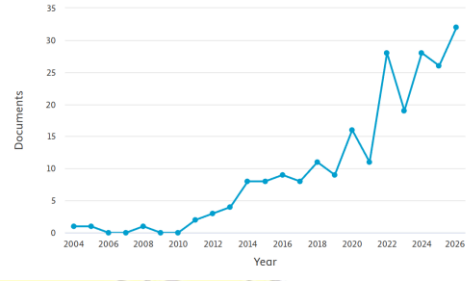


Figure 2. Annual number of sustainable employability publications, 2004–2026

Countries and Internationalisation

The Netherlands dominates with 128 articles, followed by China (18), South Africa (17), the United Kingdom (14), Italy (11), Belgium (10), India (10), Pakistan (9), Spain (8) and Norway (6) (Figure 3). All Chinese articles were published from 2021 onwards, and 14 of the 17 South African articles appeared between 2021 and 2023. Table 2 shows that this diversification is structural. The Dutch share fell from 78.6% in 2004–2015 to 47.2% in 2021–2026, while the number of contributing countries rose from 5 to 48 and international co-authorship increased from 7.1% to 34.0%. SE has thus evolved from a largely Dutch research and policy agenda into an international field, confirming and extending the observation by (Arokiasamy et al., 2024) that the Netherlands leads the field. Southeast Asia, however, remains almost absent, with one Malaysian and no Indonesian article.

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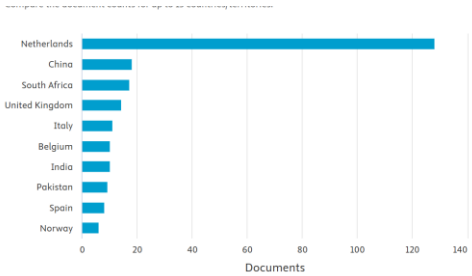


Figure 3. Number of articles by country or territory (top 10)

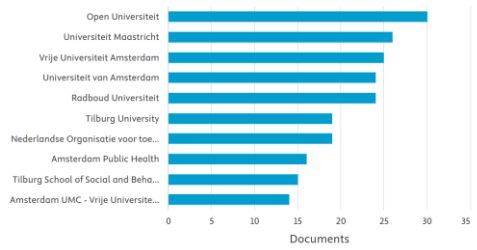


Figure 4. Number of articles by affiliation (top 10)

Table 2. Growth and internationalisation by period

Indicator	*2004–2015*	*2016–2020*	*2021–2026*
Documents (%)	28 (12.4%)	53 (23.6%)	144 (64.0%)
Avg. citations per document	24.9	31.8	7.5
Contributing countries	5	16	48
Dutch share	78.6%	71.7%	47.2%
International co-authorship	7.1%	30.2%	34.0%

Note: Dutch share = documents with at least one Dutch affiliation; international co-authorship = documents with affiliations in two or more countries

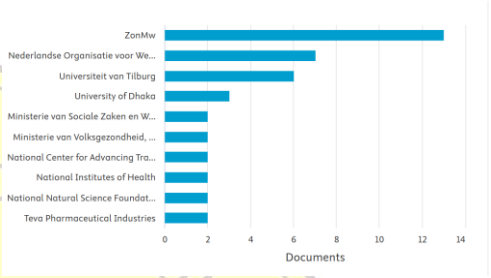


Figure 5. Number of articles by funding sponsor (top 10)

Institutions, Funders, Sources and Authors

The most productive affiliations are all Dutch: Open Universiteit (30 articles), Universiteit Maastricht (26), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (25), Universiteit van Amsterdam (24), Radboud Universiteit (24), Tilburg University (19) and the applied research organisation TNO (19) (Figure 4). Funding shows a similar pattern (Figure 5): ZonMw, the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development, supported 13 articles, followed by the Dutch Research Council (7) and Universiteit van Tilburg (6), with the University of Dhaka (3) the only non-European funder among the top four. The prominence of Dutch public funders and ministries underlines the policy relevance of SE in the Netherlands.

The ten most productive sources account for half of all articles. *Sustainability (Switzerland)* leads with 21 articles, followed by *BMC Public Health* (19), *Frontiers in Psychology* (14), *Tijdschrift voor Bedrijfs- en Verzekeringsgeneeskunde* (11) and *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* (11). Figure 6 reveals a clear shift in outlets. The *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health* published eight of its nine SE articles before 2021, and all 11 articles in the Dutch insurance-medicine journal appeared between 2014 and 2018, whereas 18 of the 21 articles in *Sustainability (Switzerland)* were published from 2021 onwards. Impact nevertheless remains concentrated in occupational health outlets: the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health* has received 655 citations from only nine articles.

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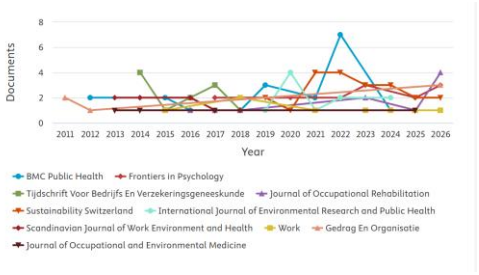


Figure 6. Number of articles per year by source (top 10 sources)

J. J. L. van der Klink is the most productive author (ten articles), followed by S. Brouwer and A. Burdorf (nine each) and U. Bültmann, S. J. W. Robroek, B. I. J. M. Van der Heijden and T. van Vuuren (eight each) (Figure 7). All top-ten authors are affiliated with Dutch institutions; the most productive author outside the Netherlands is S. Rothmann (six articles), whose work on the capabilities of teachers and nurses has made South Africa a secondary hub.

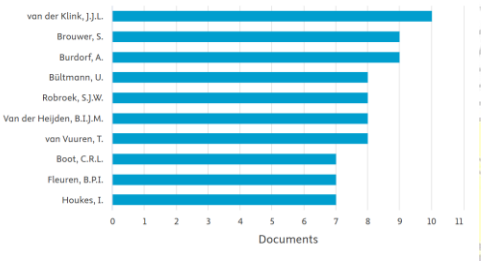


Figure 7. Number of articles by author (top 10)

Most-Cited Documents

Table 3 lists the ten most-cited articles. The capability-based definition of SE by (van der Klink et al., 2016) is by far the most influential (264 citations; 24.0 per year), followed by (Ybema et al., 2020) on HR practices for enhancing SE. The list combines conceptual and measurement work (Abma et al., 2016); (Fleuren et al., 2020), research on older workers' health and work ability (Cloostermans et al., 2015); (Leijten et al., 2014) (Leijten et al., 2015), learning and HR perspectives (Van der Heijden et al., 2016) and career and skills perspectives (Donald et al., 2020); (Sousa & Wilks, 2018). All ten were published between 2014 and 2020, showing that the field's foundations were laid before the post-2020 surge.

Table 3. Ten most-cited sustainable employability articles

No	*Article and focus*	*TC*	*TC/ year*
1	van der Klink et al. (2016[61]): capability-based definition of SE	264	24.0
2	Ybema et al. (2020[66]): HR practices for enhancing SE	133	19.0
3	Leijten et al. (2014[36]): chronic health problems, work ability and productivity of older employees	109	8.4
4	Van der Heijden et al. (2016[59]): workplace learning and SE, moderated by age	105	9.5
5	Abma et al. (2016[1]): capability set for work questionnaire	100	9.1
6	Donald et al. (2020[17]): sustainable graduate careers	93	13.3
7	Sousa & Wilks (2018[56]): sustainable skills in the digital age	86	9.6
8	Fleuren et al. (2020[20]): comprehensive conceptual framework of SE	81	11.6
9	Leijten et al. (2015[35]): work factors, engagement and health of older workers	73	6.1
10	Cloostermans et al. (2015[13]): interventions for ageing workers (review)	72	6.0

Note: TC = total citations on 29 October 2026; TC/year = TC divided by years since publication, including the publication year

Thematic Clusters

Figure 8 presents the keyword co-occurrence network, in which sustainable employability occupies the centre (111 occurrences; TLS 823). Five clusters can be distinguished. The red cluster, *health, work capacity and work participation*, contains work capacity, work capacity evaluation, work ability, workload, mental health, sick leave, disability and retirement, and represents the field's occupational health roots. The green cluster, *learning, sustainability and labour-market transitions*, groups sustainability, labour market, learning, education, teaching, motivation and capabilities. The blue cluster, *workplace conditions and lifestyle*, includes workplace, working conditions, fatigue, job performance and lifestyle. The yellow cluster, *work attitudes and psychological outcomes*, includes job satisfaction, work

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engagement and burnout. Finally, the purple cluster, *core construct, agency and leadership*, links sustainable employability with job crafting, leadership and well-being; the peripheral position of job crafting and leadership indicates that they are connected to the core construct but only weakly embedded in the network.

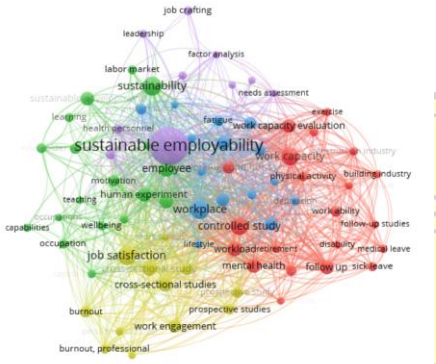


Figure 8. Keyword co-occurrence network of sustainable employability research

Most and Least Frequently Studied Variables

Table 4 lists the selected keywords with the highest TLS, that is, the variables most frequently studied together with SE: workplace (TLS 481), controlled study (472), work capacity (471), job satisfaction (434), employee (373), workload (350), follow up (320) and mental health (316). SE research has thus concentrated on the work environment, work capacity, workload and job satisfaction, relying heavily on controlled, follow-up and cross-sectional designs. This core is supported by robust evidence linking psychosocial work characteristics and health-oriented cultures to work ability and vitality (Kraaijeveld et al., 2026), and work ability and life–work interference to perceived SE (Caballero et al., 2026). The high average citations of work capacity evaluation (46.7) and work capacity (36.1) confirm that this is the field's established and influential core, although experimental evidence remains scarce (Hazelzet et al., 2024); (Heijkants et al., 2025).

Table 4. Keywords most frequently studied together with sustainable employability

No	*Keyword*	*Occ.*	*TLS*	*Avg. year*	*Avg. cit.*
1	sustainable employability	111	823	2021.8	16.5
2	workplace	28	481	2020.5	26.1
3	controlled study	23	472	2019.7	14.3
4	work capacity	23	471	2019.0	36.1
5	job satisfaction	25	434	2021.8	17.6
6	employee	19	373	2019.7	18.0
7	workload	17	350	2019.8	21.1
8	follow up	15	320	2017.7	25.2
9	mental health	16	316	2020.8	17.9
10	human experiment	15	296	2020.2	11.1
11	work capacity evaluation	14	293	2018.5	46.7
12	worker	14	289	2020.4	15.9
13	cross-sectional study	17	282	2020.9	15.2
14	cross-sectional studies	16	267	2021.2	15.9

Note: Only keywords selected in the VOSviewer screening are reported, ordered by total link strength (TLS). Occ. = occurrences

Table 5 lists the selected keywords with the lowest TLS. These variables appear in only five to nine articles each and have weak links with the rest of the network; in other words, they are still rarely studied together with SE. They include job crafting (TLS 11), capabilities (17), vitality (37), labour market (43), leadership (45), teaching (46), learning (49), older workers (56), education (56), disability (63), capability approach (67), well-being (75), job stress (76), personnel turnover (79) and work ability (80). Several of them are conceptually central to SE; vitality and work ability, for example, are two of its three core components (Jabeen et al., 2022). Their low connectivity therefore signals that they have mostly been examined in isolated contributions rather than as an integrated research stream.

Table 5. Keywords rarely studied together with sustainable employability

No	*Keyword*	*Occ.*	*TLS*	*Avg. year*	*Avg. cit.*
1	work ability	9	80	2021.1	17.9
2	personnel turnover	6	79	2022.3	4.5
3	self report	5	79	2020.4	20.8
4	job stress	5	76	2019.8	6.2
5	well-being	6	75	2021.3	23.2
6	occupations	5	68	2021.8	11.6

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No	*Keyword*	*Occ.*	*TLS*	*Avg. year*	*Avg. cit.*
7	capability approach	6	67	2019.5	32.0
8	factor analysis	5	67	2022.4	8.0
9	disability	5	63	2021.6	20.8
10	education	8	56	2021.1	6.4
11	older workers	9	56	2019.7	12.6
12	sustainable employment	5	51	2020.6	7.2
13	learning	7	49	2021.1	9.9
14	teaching	5	46	2022.6	5.4
15	leadership	6	45	2023.0	12.0
16	labor market	7	43	2023.3	6.6
17	vitality	5	37	2019.8	11.8
18	capabilities	6	17	2022.7	14.0
19	job crafting	7	11	2024.6	12.1

Note: Only keywords selected in the VOSviewer screening are reported, ordered by TLS; the last rows have the weakest links with the network

Established Versus Emerging Themes

Figure 9 combines TLS with the average publication year and average citations of each keyword. The *established core* (upper left) includes work capacity evaluation (average year 2018.5), work capacity (2019.0) and workload (2019.8). The *current mainstream* (upper right) contains sustainable employability and job satisfaction (both 2021.8). The *mature niche* (lower left) includes job stress, vitality, older workers and the capability approach (2019.5–2019.8). The *emerging frontier* (lower right) contains weakly connected but recent themes: job crafting (2024.6; all seven articles published since 2021), labour market (2023.3), leadership (2023.0), capabilities (2022.7), teaching (2022.6) and personnel turnover (2022.3). Figure 10 synthesises these findings into an integrative framework in which five established themes and six under-explored frontiers converge on SE and point towards a future research agenda.

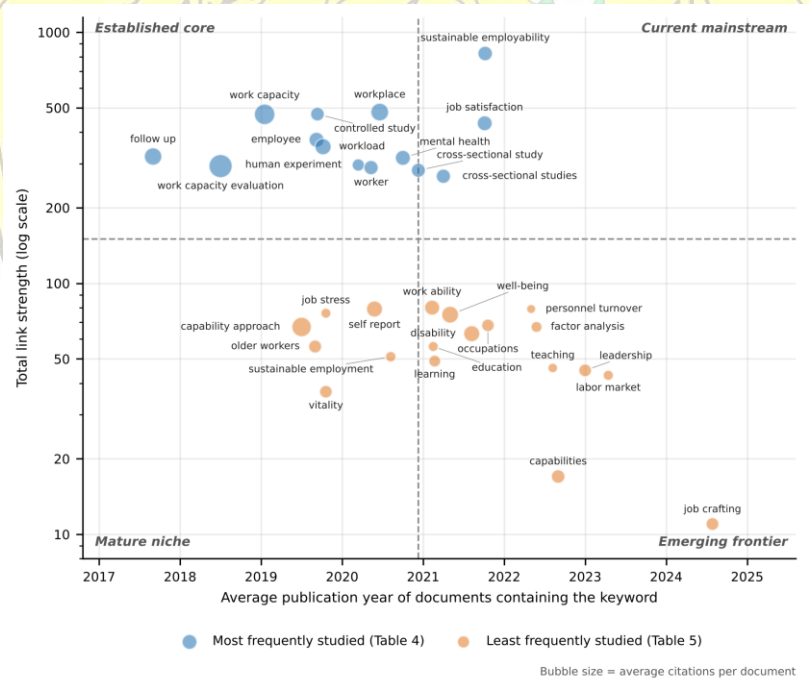


Figure 9. Strategic diagram of established and emerging themes in sustainable employability research

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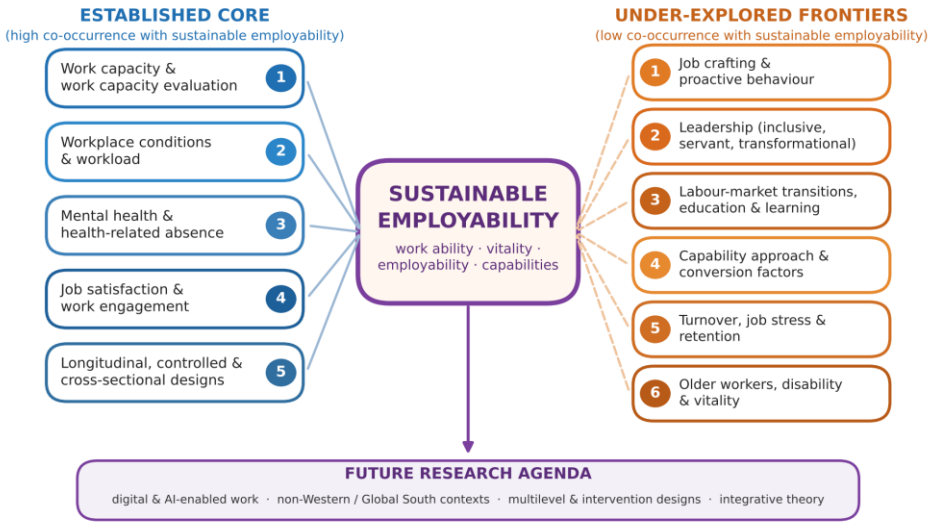


Figure 10. Integrative framework of established themes and under-explored frontiers

Under-Explored Frontiers

The low-frequency keywords reveal where the field's frontiers lie. First, *job crafting* has the weakest link strength but the most recent average year. Managerial support and co-worker relationships promote SE through job crafting (Irfan et al., 2023)(Irfan et al., 2024), leader–member exchange and job characteristics promote sustainable employment through the same mechanism (Kohli & Priyadarshi, 2025), and job crafting relates to SE through self-determination (Afnek & Khadem, 2026). As a bottom-up and low-cost strategy, job crafting is especially promising for organisations with limited HR budgets. Second, *leadership* is rarely studied together with SE even though the available evidence is consistently positive for inclusive, servant, transformational, professional-development and intergenerational leadership (Barkat et al., 2024); (Gürbüz, van Woerkom, et al., 2022); (Saleh et al., 2025); (Saxena & Srivastava, 2026); (Yanık et al., 2026); each style, however, has been tested only once or twice.

Third, *labour market, education, learning and teaching* connect SE with the transition from education to work and with lifelong learning. Soft skills, psychological capital and digital competencies shape graduates' readiness for sustainable careers (Alhaderi, 2026); (Ingusci et al., 2026); (Mohan et al., 2025), skills mismatch has long-term consequences for well-being and employability (Koopmans et al., 2025), the shift towards sustainable practices is redefining the competencies required in construction (Silvestru et al., 2024), and active labour-market policies moderate the employment disadvantages of migrant women (Lee, 2026). Fourth, *capabilities and the capability approach* remain weakly connected despite underpinning the field's most-cited definition, although studies of conversion factors show their potential for explaining contextual differences (Meerman et al., 2022). Fifth, *personnel turnover and job stress* are surprisingly rarely studied together with SE, even though SE-oriented HRM can reduce turnover (Annosi et al., 2025) and retention depends on individual, team and organisational factors (Seller-Boersma et al., 2026). Sixth, *older workers, disability and vitality* belong to the mature niche and deserve renewed attention given ageing populations (Neupane et al., 2023); (Šerá et al., 2026).

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Future Research Agenda and Implications

Table 6 organises these insights into a theory–context–characteristics–methodology (TCCM) agenda. Theoretically, SE research should move beyond the capability approach and the job demands–resources model by integrating conservation of resources, self-determination and career construction perspectives. Contextually, studies are needed in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America and among informal, platform and older workers. In terms of characteristics, the frontier variables and the implications of artificial intelligence (Adiasto, 2024); (Picco et al., 2024); (Singh et al., 2026) deserve priority, while methodologically, multi-wave, multilevel and intervention designs and cross-cultural validation of SE measures are required.

Table 6. Future research agenda based on the TCCM framework

Dimension	*Gaps and illustrative research questions*
Theory	Gap: reliance on the capability approach and the job demands–resources model. RQ: Through which mechanisms do job crafting and leadership build SE over time? How can capability, conservation of resources and career construction perspectives be integrated?
Context	Gap: 56.9% of articles have a Dutch affiliation; no Indonesian and only one Southeast Asian study. RQ: How is SE experienced in ageing emerging economies such as Indonesia? Which conversion factors enable SE among informal, platform and older workers?
Characteristics	Gap: job crafting, leadership, labour market, capabilities, vitality, turnover and job stress are rarely studied with SE; AI-related change is only emerging. RQ: Does SE reduce job stress and turnover intention? How do AI adoption and digital competencies shape SE?
Methodology	Gap: cross-sectional, self-report and single-country designs; few and inconclusive interventions. RQ: What do multi-wave, multilevel and randomised studies reveal about the causal drivers of SE? Are SE measures invariant across cultures and occupations?

Source: Authors' synthesis of the bibliometric results and reviewed literature

For HR practitioners, the findings suggest that SE requires more than health management: organisations that already monitor work ability, workload and mental health can strengthen SE by enabling job crafting, developing inclusive and developmental leadership and aligning employees' skills with changing job demands (Gürbüz, van Woerkom, et al., 2022); (Irfan et al., 2023); (Yang et al., 2025). For policymakers in ageing emerging economies such as Indonesia, SE offers a framework that connects occupational health, lifelong learning and active labour-market policies. For Indonesian researchers, existing work on job stress, burnout, work engagement and work–life balance (Ali & Susilarini, 2026); (Murti & Utami, 2026); (Suherni & Maryatmi, 2026) provides a natural starting point for testing SE models in a non-Western context. This study is limited by its reliance on a single database, English-language journal articles and keyword co-occurrence, by the researchers' judgement involved in keyword screening, and by the partial coverage of 2026; future studies could combine Scopus with Web of Science and apply co-citation and bibliographic coupling analyses.

5. CONCLUSION

This study mapped 225 Scopus-indexed articles on sustainable employability published between 2004 and 2026. Research output has accelerated markedly, with 64.0% of all articles published since 2021. The field remains anchored in the Netherlands in terms of countries, institutions, funders and authors, but it is internationalising rapidly, as the Dutch share fell from 78.6% to 47.2% and international co-authorship rose from 7.1% to 34.0%, while publication outlets have shifted from occupational health journals towards multidisciplinary sustainability and psychology journals. The keyword network comprises five clusters: health, work capacity and work participation; learning, sustainability and labour-market transitions; workplace conditions and lifestyle; work attitudes and psychological

outcomes; and core construct, agency and leadership. Workplace, work capacity, job satisfaction, workload and mental health are the variables most frequently studied together with SE, whereas job crafting, capabilities, vitality, labour market, leadership, teaching, learning, turnover and job stress are still rarely studied together with it, with job crafting, labour market and leadership forming the field's emerging frontiers.

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