

Section 3

A capability-led work-life inspired employment guidance model

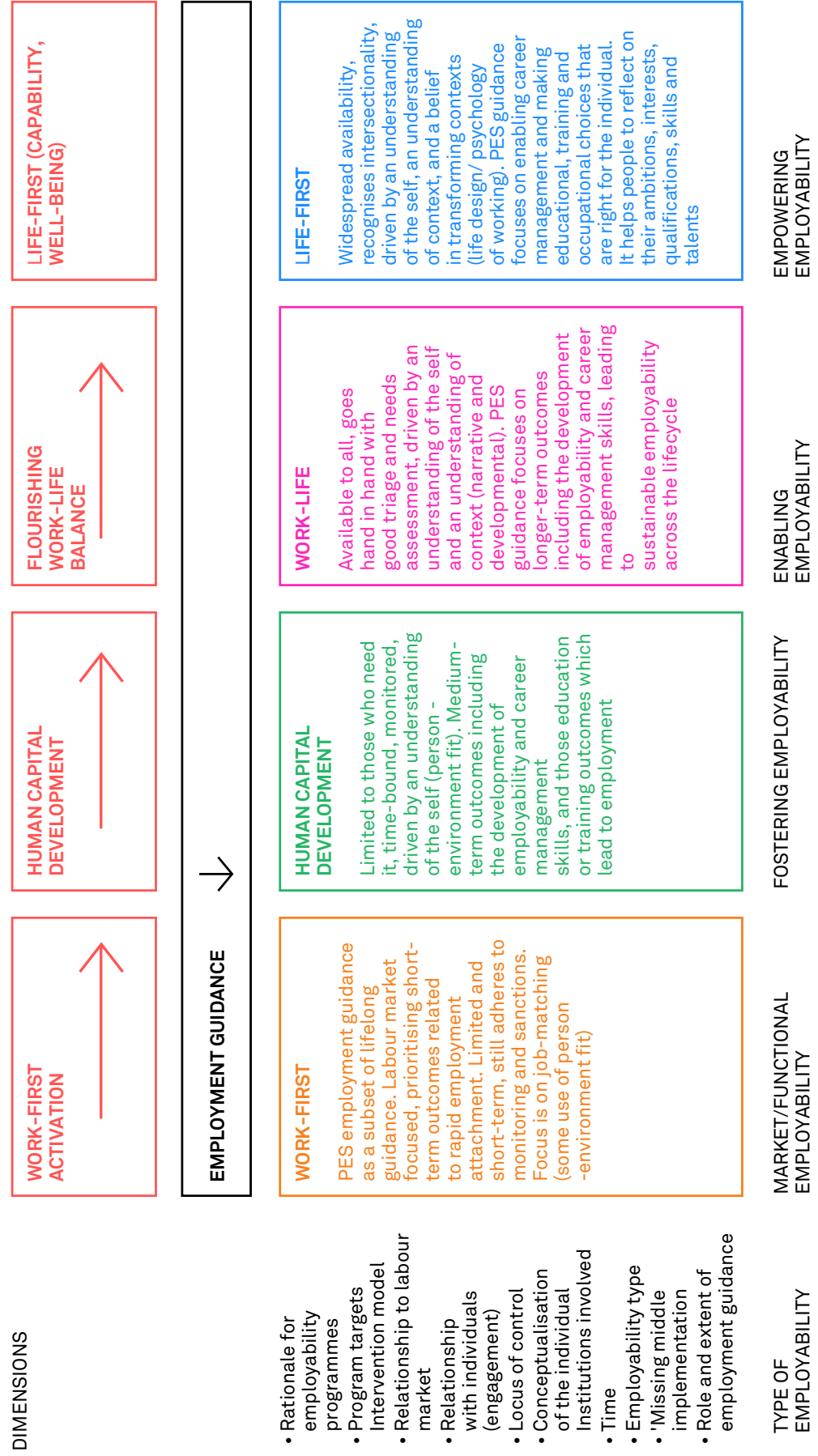
3.1 Employment guidance and labour market policy

In this section we use an employability continuum to explain the various labour market policy options available to governments and PES (see Figure 3.1). We position the dominant Work-First model at one end and the Life-First capability informed model at the other. Between these models are the Human Capital Development and the Work-Life Balance models.





Figure 3.1. An employability continuum (Whelan, Murphy, and McGann, 2021: own elaboration based on examples and theoretical developments in Dean, 2003; Dean et al., 2005; Lindsay et al., 2007; McQuaid, & Lindsay, 2005; Peck and Theodore, 2000; Lindsay, 2016; Bussi, 2014)



Each of these employability models has been defined in terms of a number of dimensions (Dean, 2003; Dean et al., 2005; Lindsay et al., 2007; Peck and Theodore, 2000; Lindsay, 2016; Bussi, 2014; Whelan, Murphy, and McGann, 2021) related to activation and labour market policy, from for example, the rationale for the programme to the ensuing type of employability. Our approach in this toolkit aims to conceptually expand the notion of employability to include the role of employment guidance and to illustrate that the extent and delivery of employment guidance is determined by the labour market policy in place at that time.

For example, in Ireland, the predominant model in recent years has used a **Work-First approach**, characterised by intensive job search, which in its most basic form aims to move people from welfare into unsubsidised jobs in the shortest time possible. This quick return to the labour market proposes that any job is better than no job (Mead, 2003). It uses short education, training and work experience to overcome barriers to employment while also monitoring job seekers levels of activity and compliance, and uses sanctions rather than trust, 'or carrots and sticks' as a way to motivate the unemployed (Sol & Hoogtanders, 2005).

This approach aims to avoid prolonged unemployment, particularly for the young, which can cause long-lasting 'scars' on future earnings, employment prospects and health and well-being. Critiques of Work-First models (Lindsay, 2010) link it with a low paid supply side policy direction, increasing pressure on the unemployed to access the labour market as soon as possible. Others have applauded its ability to keep people connected to the labour market but highlight the need for quality support and the availability of decent work. For those who require further support in terms of skill development, and overcoming barriers to employment, this model has been found to be less effective (Card, Kluve & Weber, 2015; Martin, 2015; Whelan et al., 2021).

It is limited in its employment guidance provision as its focus is on job matching or functional employability, leaving little reason or time for career exploration. It is responsive to the needs of employers rather than the career ambitions of the individual.

The **Human Capital Development model** aims to facilitate skill and competence development, thereby improving sustainable access to the labour market, long-term employability and in-work transitions. It requires well-funded education and training and recognises the importance of integrated services (e.g. links to health providers, care sector) to address work related barriers. It also has a social inclusion function as it assists those marginalised from the labour market into employment and society. This model fosters employability through guidance into active labour market programmes or education and training for those who need it (rather than being accessible to all). Employment guidance in this context focuses on person-environment fit and promotes upskilling and career reorientations (e.g. reskilling manual and semi-skilled older workers) to meet the needs of the labour market.





The Work-Life Balance model, informed by the capability approaches of Sen and Nussbaum, recognises the need to work as an essential need within an individual's life, but only insofar as it is capability and well-being enhancing. It sees participation in meaningful work as important for well-being for most people but prioritises well-being over employment. It aims to empower individuals to develop capabilities while also allowing them freedom to choose. This means having the freedom to refuse participation in, for example, activation programmes. It encourages co-design of appropriate interventions and services. It aims to improve long-term individual employability and achieve sustainable labour market access for all, promoting well-being and quality of life. It sees the individual within a life context and uses holistic and tailored individual coaching to attend to people's work needs, life balance and (career) aspirations, promoting life-long learning and career development (Murphy et al., 2020). Employment guidance within this model is available to all. It aims to enable employability through narrative and developmental guidance approaches to self-reflection and strengths identification, and sees the process as well-being enhancing in itself.

The Life-First approach is holistic, prioritising the life needs of individuals above an obligation to work. It promotes the right to work, rather than the opportunity or obligation to work, and emphasises human capabilities and well-being as ways to realise this right. It acknowledges the time and space required to realise potential and to resolve life problems as they arise. The life needs of people who face multiple challenges, who may be vulnerable and marginalised in the labour market and in society are balanced with the need to work. Viewed from this perspective, employment guidance empowers people to make life choices some of which may relate to employment on the open labour market. It is informed by Savickas' narrative life design paradigm where 'people use stories to organize their lives, construct their identities, and make sense of their problems' (2015, p.9). Importantly this model promotes adequate time and benefits to support people 'without actively promoting employment as the best choice for individuals' (Laruffa, 2020, p. 6).

3.2 Delivering a work-life employment guidance model

While this toolkit attempts to move towards a life-first approach it is anchored in the more pragmatic work-life employment guidance model.

The rationale for using this type of approach is to improve people’s long-term employability in decent work. This means achieving sustainable, meaningful, long-term labour market access for all people, and building a resilient labour force that promotes well-being and quality of life for all workers.

Its aims to develop short-term goals towards longer term career plans which build upon strengths and choice and which enable both life and work choices.

The person is considered within the context of their life (not only as a job seeker), often with multiple roles, talents, interests, agency, capabilities and needs.

The type of intervention used to achieve these aims includes holistic tailored support, co-production of services and interventions, the use of robust triage and needs identification.

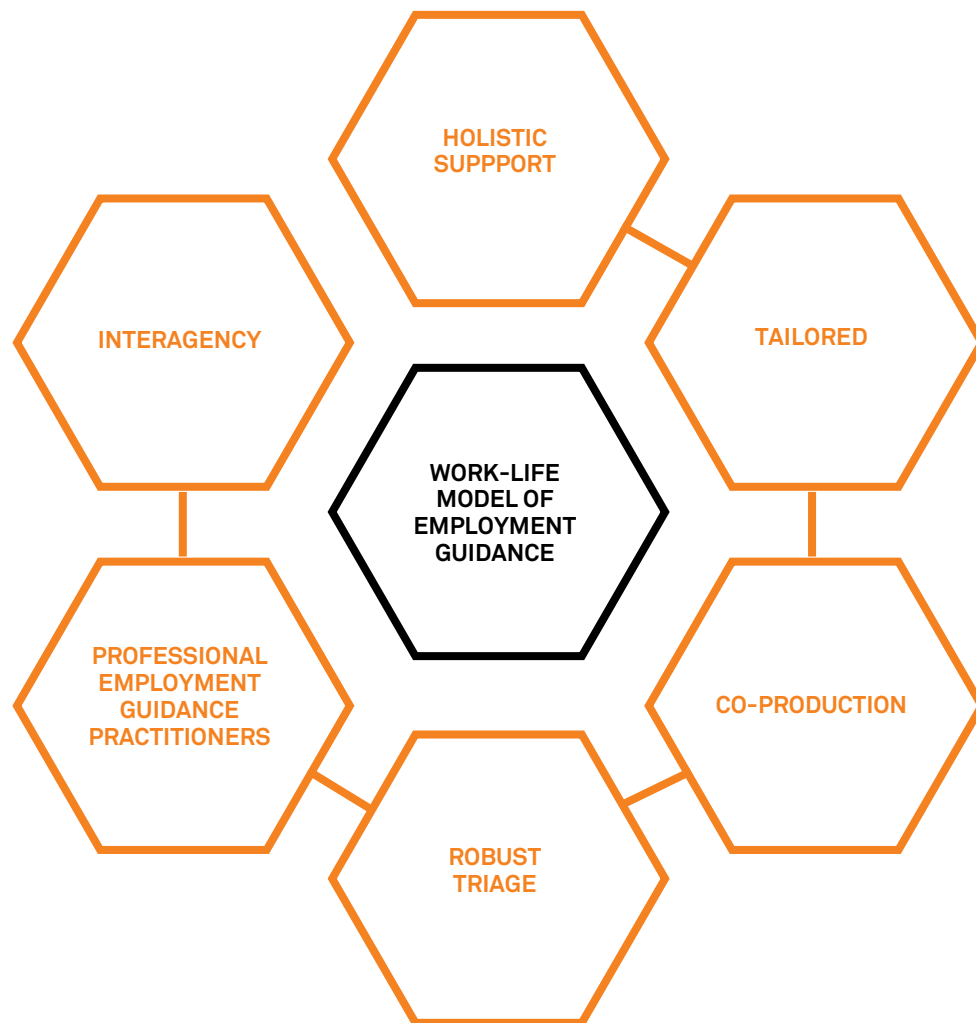


Figure 3.2
Elements of a work-life model of employment guidance





Services are delivered by skilled employment guidance practitioners who use coaching approaches and have access to a range of interventions and supports. They operate in an interagency way and draw on local supports, while also providing supports to other organisations and their clients. Practitioners attend to people's work needs, their life balance and career and life aspirations.

Using this approach, services promote upskilling so as to enable access to a wider range of opportunities, therefore increasing choice and adaptability within the labour market for people who are job seeking. To achieve this, practitioners encourage life-long learning and career development, and in-work transitions.

Employment guidance within this context starts with an exploration of the individual's relationship with the world of work. Methods, including the use of tools such as mind maps, narrative inquiry and psychometrics, are used to uncover strengths, interests, dreams and aspirations and to support self-awareness and reflection leading to decision making. The practitioner's role is to support the individual in their self-exploration, while also researching and providing career information relating to jobs, the future world of work, career paths, levels of pay etc. So while one aspect relates to understanding the self and the work-life relationship, the other part of the process relates to resource/information investigation and research, and information provision. This process requires commitment by both the individual and practitioner so that well-informed career decisions can be made.

The benefits of this type of holistic service can be maximised through voluntary participation and co-production.

3.3

Co-production and co-creation

Co-production is defined here as the process by which job seekers 'produce and shape their own services' (Lindsay et al., 2018c, pg. 39) in collaboration with their guidance practitioner. It uses 'active dialogue' and 'engagement' between service users and services (Burns, 2013, pg.31). It recognises individual strengths, talents and aspirations but also unique needs and promotes tailored services to support individuals meeting those needs.

These principles of co-production expand beyond the individual – practitioner relationship enabling the possibility to create new partnerships or interagency working to support other needs that the employment service may not have the capacity to meet. These include training and education, health including mental health, disability, addiction, housing, social care, criminal justice and other specific needs.

Services of this nature are driven by principles of quality, empowerment, and collective engagement. They are underpinned by a recognition that people are untapped sources of expertise in their own lives, and affords them equal voice in decision-making. They require an environment where mechanisms of co-management and co-governance at an inter-organisational level facilitate inter-agency collaboration. This type of approach is built upon trust, relationships and an ethic of care. It is delivered sensitively and skilfully. It requires time, a non-threatening and informal environment, and a commitment to collaboration and shared responsibility.

It acknowledges the barriers which hinder agency and choice, and supports and empowers the individual to recognise and manage these barriers.

It is available to all job seekers and job changers. Its success requires good triage and needs assessment at the outset, ensuring as far as possible that compatible individual and practitioner relationships are enabled. This requires services to be substantively personalised, person-centred and reflective, with skilled and knowledgeable triage staff rather than seeing triage merely as an administrative process.

