

Academy of Management Submission Number: 14185

Title: The Employability Management Paradox: Beauty Or The Beast?

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Keywords: employability; management paradox; careers; human capital

The Employability Management Paradox: Beauty Or The Beast?

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Aim Of The Symposium

Employability - “an individual’s chance of a job in the internal and/or external labor market” (Forrier & Sels, 2003b: 106) - is no longer an imperative only for employees but also for employers in today’s extremely competitive business landscape. The importance of this claim was strongly reinforced by the global economic crisis and its lingering high unemployment and competition for talent. Similarly, employers across industries and borders rely on human capital to provide competitive advantage and must attract and retain valued employees. Employability therefore is an important characteristic for both individuals and organizations.

For the individual, the importance of employability is mostly related to the erosion of the traditional career. In the new career era, individuals should safeguard their employment security and develop a successful career by investing in the appropriate capacities and competencies for being continuously employable in the internal and external labor market during their working life (Clarke, 2008; Forrier & Sels, 2003b). Consequently, research has largely focused on factors tied to the person, for example on different career competencies (Akkermans Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, & Blonk, 2013a, 2013b), and finds proof of beneficial employee outcomes related to investments made in employability such as decreased job insecurity (De Cuyper, Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Mauno, & De Witte, 2012; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall, 2007), increased well-being (De Cuyper, Mauno, Kinnunen, & Mäkikangas, 2011a) and career success (e.g., Van der Heijden, de Lange, Demerouti, & van der Heijde,, 2009).

From the employer’s perspective, many still debate the outcomes of investing in the employability of employees. On the one hand, investing in employees’ competencies and

development boosts their value to the organization, increasing the likelihood they will be attracted to and remain with the organization. On the other hand, such practices also make an organization's employees more valuable to competitors and risk the potential of training employees for the competitor's benefit if they leave. This scenario presents a "*management paradox*" and is an important HR policy challenge for employers today (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011). Unfortunately, little existing empirical research explores the potential downsides of employability investments, as it most commonly focuses on the benefits (e.g., De Cuyper, Van der Heijden & De Witte, 2011b).

The central theme of this symposium therefore deals with the question whether or not it is beneficial for employers to invest in the employability of their employees. We bring together a collection of papers on different facets of the management paradox. In particular, we aim to probe: (1) potential advantages of employability investments, (2) potential disadvantages of employability investments, and (3) an integration of the two perspectives.

This symposium makes a number of valuable contributions. Theoretically, we focus on the employer perspective in a literature that has largely taken an employee perspective. We also complement the majority of existing research that assumes employability investments are positive, as we account for possible drawbacks of such investments. Methodologically, the component papers provide diverse and rich samples, data, and analytic approaches. In addition, the participating scholars represent an international network of researchers from Australia, Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, UK, and the USA. Finally, this symposium provides valuable guidance for HR policy and practice related to employability.

Advantages And Disadvantages Of Employability Investments

Employability investments provide many potential benefits for employers. Notably, workers with high levels of employability generally possess valuable human capital, such as relevant knowledge, skills, and experience (Wittekind, Raeder & Grote, 2010). Theory and research illuminate at least four benefits for human capital on employability. First, the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) suggests that human capital leads to organizational success (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011), implying that employability-investments are important for the organization's economic viability. Second, an employable workforce may also increase flexibility within the company's workforce and increase individual, unit, and organizational adaptability and performance (Forrier & Sels, 2003b). Third, assuming that employable workers seek out jobs in which they can use and enhance their human capital and that fit their career goals and ambitions (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004), employability-investments may help to attract and retain workers with strong professional profiles. In this way, employability-investments can also be used for employer branding. Fourth, employability provides workers with a sense of control that promotes well-being (De Cuyper et al., 2012), even in times of increasing levels of insecurity (e.g., Berntson, Näswall, & Sverke, 2010; De Cuyper et al., 2012; Kang, Gold, & Kim, 2012). This is particularly important given that feelings of job insecurity are often based on factors beyond the employers' control (e.g., the larger economic environment). Taken together, employability-investments can be seen as a form of responsible employership and a means for increasing both employee and employer well-being.

However, investing in the employability of employees may also include risks. Perhaps the most obvious risk lies in the seemingly close relationship between employability and turnover (De Cuyper et al., 2011a; see also Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992). The reasoning is that employability is positively related to job alternatives, and it may at the same

time reduce organizational commitment (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011). Furthermore, because employable workers tend to have good knowledge of the labor market (Wittekind et al., 2010) and possess good job search strategies (Fugate et al., 2004), they may be less loyal and quit the organization because they *can*. A critical factor in the employability literature is openness to change (Fugate et al., 2004; Wittekind et al., 2010), which may mean that employable workers (pro)actively seek out opportunities. These factors increase the likelihood that they are less dependent on any given employer and are more *willing* to quit.

Since employers are competing in a war for talent with other organizations, they may refrain from investing in employability if the risks are considered more important than the benefits. Why would they invest in the employability of their employees if it makes them more attractive to other employers? Our symposium provides insights into answers to this important question and helps resolve the associated management paradox.

This Symposium

The first part of our symposium focuses on the advantages of employability investments with contributions from van Harten, Knies and Leisink (Utrecht University School of Governance, The Netherlands), Stoffers and Van der Heijden (Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands), Van der Horst and Klehe (Justus-Liebig University, Germany), and Bal and De Lange (University of Bath, UK). Van Harten et al. demonstrate that employer investments in terms of job design and supportive HR practices contribute to employee employability and subsequently to employee well-being and performance. In a similar vein, Stoffers and Van der Heijden that good employment relationships with the supervisor and colleagues relate positively to employability and, through employability, to innovative work behaviors. Van der Horst and Klehe present an empirical test of an online intervention, and they demonstrate that this

intervention can enhance employees' career adaptability and employability. Finally, Bal and De Lange (University of Bath, UK) demonstrate using multiple samples that employability related HR policies are positively associated with employee attitudes and then performance. What these studies show is that investments in employability can take different forms, and that workers seem to reciprocate these investments through optimal functioning.

The second part of the symposium provides an account of potential downsides associated with employability investments. Clarke's (University of Adelaide, Australia) qualitative study of public sector employees highlights the need to invest in employability of such personnel in the light of increasing job insecurity and the need to attract qualified personnel. A potential risk, however, is that such investments are costly, perhaps too costly in view of increasing competition between public and private organizations.

The third part of the symposium examines both the advantages and disadvantages of employability investments. Philippaers, De Cuyper, and Forrier (KU Leuven, Belgium) argue that employability may affect performance in two ways. On the positive side, they hypothesize a direct positive relationship from employability to performance. On the negative side, they argue for an indirect negative relationship through organizational and team commitment.

We are excited to have Dr. Mel Fugate as discussant in our symposium. Dr. Fugate is affiliated to the Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, USA, and his work on employability has been published in highly ranked journals such Academy of Management Journal and Journal of Management. Dr. Fugate will provide critical and constructive insights into the management paradox of employability. He will give special attention to the conference theme - The Power of Words. For instance, his comments will underscore how employability has different meanings to different audiences, and how the conceptualization of employability in this symposium provide valuable tools for both employee and employer well-being and performance.

Divisions For This Symposium

First, this symposium is of interest to the Careers Division. Employability is important for individuals to develop a career both with their current employer and with other employers. Insights in the employability investments made by employers may shed light on the extent to which employability is a shared responsibility with investments from both employees and employers versus the sole responsibility of the employee. In addition, this symposium can provide a better understanding of the interactions between employability and career success.

The symposium is also of interest to the Human Resources (HR) division. Most studies on relationships between HR policies and organizational outcomes have not included employability. However, because employers are increasingly facing labor shortages and are competing in a war for talent with other employers, the effective use of human capital in organizations is crucial for gaining a competitive advantage. Therefore, it is important to gain more insight in the importance of investments in employability and how they may be an addition to HR policies in organizations.

Finally, the symposium also fits in the Organizational Behavior (OB) division. Although empirical studies on the effects of employability mainly focus on the individual level, this symposium explicitly focuses both on individual effects and organizational effects. Furthermore, the studies in this symposium examine the relationship between employability on the one hand, and topics such as job design and employee well-being and performance on the other hand. Therefore, this symposium is closely related to OB topics such as learning, motivation, turnover, stress, and performance.

Symposium Format

We propose a format of this symposium of 6 individual presentations of about 15 minutes each, followed by reflections of the discussant (15 min.). This leaves room for about 15 minutes of questions and discussion from the audience. Total time needed is 2 hours.

Employer Investments In Hospital Workers' Employability: A Study Of The Potential Benefits

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Introduction

Employable workers are believed to be resources for organizations to achieve high performance and (sustained) competitive advantage (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Research shows for instance that employees who report high levels of employability are willing to adapt to changing job demands (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008) and report high levels of performance (Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, Mauno, Siponen, & Näti, 2009). These are valuable assets for organizations, such as hospitals, that are confronted with environmental pressures and technical developments which threaten to render their employees' existing skills and competencies obsolete (Loon & Casimir, 2008; Townsend & Wilkinson, 2010; Van Emmerik, Schreurs, De Cuyper, Jawahar, & Peeters, 2012). Therefore, it is argued that employers should take responsibility for enhancing their employees' employability by offering them challenging jobs and organizational support. But do such employer investments pay off?

Prior research provides some evidence for positive effects of job and organizational characteristics, which can be regarded as representing the investments employers make, on their employees' employability (e.g. De Vos, De Hauw, & Van der Heijden, 2011; Van Emmerik et al., 2012;). However, studies that provide evidence for positive effects of employees' employability on organizational commitment (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011), well-being (Berntson & Marklund, 2007), and job performance (Kinnunen et al., 2011) do not include the

effects of job and organizational characteristics on such outcomes. Consequentially, research that integrates employer investments, employability, and the resulting outcomes is lacking.

This study aims to make a contribution to the literature by taking an integrated approach in which the relationships between both job and organizational characteristics, employability, job performance and well-being are examined. This leads us to the following research question: *‘To what extent do job and organizational characteristics relate to well-being and job performance and to what extent does employability mediate these relationships?’* By taking into account not only economic outcomes such as job performance but also employee well-being, this study takes a balanced approach to assess employability outcomes (Boselie, Brewster, & Paauwe, 2009).

Theoretical Assumptions

Following various authors (e.g. Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Nauta, Van Vianen, Van der Heijden Van Dam, & Willemsen, 2009), we believe that an individual’s employability not only consists of capabilities to perform a variety of jobs but also of the willingness to change. As a result of changing job requirements, employees have to be willing to adapt to such changes (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) and stay up-to-date in their expertise (Farr & Ringseis, 2002). Therefore, we define employability as the extent to which an employee is able, conceptualized as up-to-date expertise, and willing, conceptualized as willingness to change, to perform productive labor. We examine individuals’ own appraisals of the level of employability because it is argued that individuals act upon their perceptions (e.g. Van Emmerik et al., 2012).

We expect that employees’ employability positively affects their job performance and well-being. The feeling that their expertise is becoming obsolete – so, a lesser employability - may make employees think that their employment opportunities are decreasing and it may also lead to negative effects such as frustration, burnout or decreased performance (Loon & Casimir,

2008). Prior studies indicate that employable individuals perceive their job situations as positive and consequentially experience less strain and feel more capable to perform their current job tasks (Berntson and Marklund, 2007; Kinnunen et al., 2011). Next, we assume that core job characteristics that relate to employees' opportunities to use and develop their expertise (in this study: job autonomy, task variety, and workload) and organizational support or characteristics (in this study: supportive HR practices and supervisor support) are related to employees' employability, well-being and job performance. We base this on prior research showing that a challenging job and organizational support result in positive outcomes (e.g., Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Snape & Redman, 2010). We expect direct effects of job and organizational characteristics on well-being and job performance and also indirect effects through employability.

Methodology

The data come from a study of employability of employees in three Dutch hospitals. 3970 participants were invited for an online survey, the final sample consists of 1649 respondents (response rate of 41.5 per cent). The study's hypotheses are tested using structural equation modelling and are conducted in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2010).

Preliminary Results And Conclusions

The preliminary results support our hypothesis that job and organizational characteristics affect self-rated job performance ($R^2=.22$) and well-being ($R^2=.44$) directly as well as indirectly via employability. For example, task variety has indirect effects on well-being and job performance via up-to-date expertise (resp. $\beta =.25$, $p<.001$ and $\beta =.08$, $p<.001$) and supportive HR practices have a direct effect on well-being ($\beta =.20$, $p<.001$).

These results indicate that employability investments pay off for both employers and employees. Our integrative approach shows that by offering employees challenging jobs and organizational support, an employer can affect employees' well-being and job performance both directly and indirectly through employability. Investing in employability creates an environment in which employees feel valued and are willing to perform, as is shown by increased well-being and job performance. Healthy, happy and productive employees are likely to lead to increased organizational performance and competitive advantage in the long term (Kroon, Van de Voorde, & Van Veldhoven, 2009).

Towards An Hrm Model Of Innovative Work Behavior Enhancement:**A Moderated Mediation Analysis**

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Introduction

In order to better understand how innovative work behavior of employees can be enhanced, suitable (HRM) predictor variables were hypothesized after having conducted a thorough literature review and in-depth interviews that were held with highly innovative professionals and entrepreneurs. The quality of relationships with supervisors, as defined by LMX (Leader-member Exchange) (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982), was assumed to correlate with innovativeness (Volmer, Spurk, & Niessen, 2011). *Hypothesis 1a: Leader-member exchange correlates positively with innovative work behavior.* It was also hypothesized that employees are eager to contribute in an innovative way, far more than their official roles and job descriptions prescribe (Naqshbandi & Kaur, 2011); this behavior has been defined as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) by Organ (1988). *Hypothesis 1b: Organizational citizenship behavior correlates positively with innovative work behavior.*

However, to achieve a continuous flow of innovations, employees need to be willing and competent to innovate as well (De Clippeleer, De Stobbeleir, Dewettinck, & Ashford, 2009; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). Employees should be able to assimilate new occupational expertise and, subsequently, apply it to new areas of work (De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntston, De

Witte, & Alarco, 2008). This will, in turn, increase both employability (or career potential) (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and, through this, their (future) innovative work behavior.

Previous research has already indicated that a positive relationship with a supervisor enhances an employee's employability (Van der Heijden, Scholarios, Bozionelos, Van der Heijde, Epitropaki, 2005). *Hypothesis 2a: Leader-member exchange correlates positively with employability.* Voluntary employee behavior to improve knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform better in current or future positions in the organization, and to expand contributions to the organization is a key dimension of OCB (George & Brief, 1992). *Hypothesis 2b: Organizational citizenship behavior correlates positively with employability.*

Previous research using a competence-based approach of employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) supports the predictive validity of competences in the light of innovative work behavior (Stoffers & Van der Heijden, under review). *Hypothesis 3: Employability correlates positively with innovative work behavior.*

As a result of LMX and OCB, improved knowledge, skills, and abilities can be achieved, hence representing employees' employability (career potential). Subsequently, as a result of the increased amount of knowledge, skills, and expertise (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998), the amount of innovative work behavior that employees show is expected to rise as well. On the basis of previous research, we expect that LMX and OCB can enhance employees' innovative work behavior through employability. *Hypothesis 4a: Employability (partially) mediates the relationship between leader-member exchange and innovative work behavior.* *Hypothesis 4b: Employability (partially) mediates the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and innovative work behavior.*

relationships among important (HRM) variables: LMX, OCB, innovative work behavior, employability, and organizational politics, we tested a baseline model and modified subsequent models based on previous results.

Results

As hypothesized, LMX and OCB both correlate positively with employability, and employability, in its turn, is positively associated with innovative work behavior. It is interesting to note that all relationships in the fully mediated model were significant and more favorable in comparison with the partially mediated model. Consequently, employability appears to be a construct fully mediating the relationship between LMX and OCB, on the one hand, and innovative work behavior, on the other hand. As hypothesized, organizational politics negatively moderated the relationship between employability and innovative work behavior (see Figure 2).

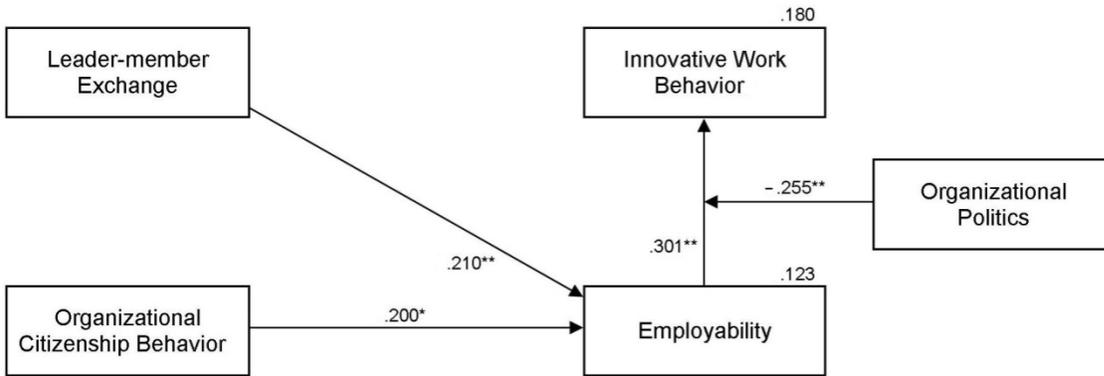


Figure 2. Moderated Mediation Model

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

**Making Career Guidance More Efficient,
Affordable And Self-Directed**

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Introduction

The uncertainties and demands of a rapidly changing labor market call for more flexible and self-regulated career paths, with the result that today's workers need to be both adaptive and employable (Arnold & Jackson, 1997; Sullivan, Carden, & Martin, 1998). Employability describes the "continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the optimal use of one's competences" (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006: 453). Career Adaptability is the "readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for changes in work and work conditions" (Savickas, 1997, 2005) and describes attitudes, behavior and cognitions that help people cope with current changes on the labor market by making themselves more flexible and easily adjustable. Current conceptualizations suggest four components (Savickas, 2005):

(1) **Career control** means that people feel responsible for constructing their own careers.

Relevant is a sense of self-directedness and of decidedness.

(2) **Career curiosity** denotes a curious and open view towards career possibilities, a broad-minded focus and the ability to generate new solutions (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Behaviorally, career curiosity shows in self-exploration (exploring personal needs and values, interests and goals, skills and experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of oneself at work) and in exploring the environment (collecting information on jobs, organizations, occupations, or industries to gain a clearer view of potential career opportunities and their

expectations) (Hall, 1986; Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983; Werbel, 2000).

(3) **Career concern** implies a sense that one needs to prepare for the future. Planfulness, i.e. outlining future career developments, building a career vision and translating this vision into concrete career goals predicts successful careers (Ng & Feldman, 2009), likely because goals in general predict effort and effort predicts performance (Locke & Latham, 1990).

(4) **Career confidence** describes one's self-efficacy or the perceived ability to successfully execute the actions needed to achieve one's career goals (Hirschi, 2009; Savickas, 2005). Self-efficacy makes people work harder, react less defensively when discovering that their goals require more learning and development, and helps them persist in the face of setbacks and obstacles. Moreover, they are better able to focus on and collect relevant information, make sound decisions, and take appropriate action without being distracted by feedback that might otherwise appear discouraging (Bandura, 1986).

Also organizations increasingly shift accountability for career management from the employer to the employee (Kossek, Roberts, Fischer, & Demarr, 1998), seeking efficient and effective interventions that support employees' employability and career adaptability. The classic intervention career guidance by a counselor generally does seem to have a positive effect on clients' career development (Fretz, 1981; Holland, Magoon, & Spokane, 1981; Myers, 1986; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Swanson, 1995; Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003), yet guidance by a counselor is expensive, time consuming and often only available to the top (talent pools, high potentials) and bottom performers (employees who are made redundant, employees with problems like burn out, etc.) in organizations. Therefore there is a need for a more scalable intervention that everyone can use and that helps all employees gain career adaptability and employability.

Methodology

Intervention. For this study we developed an intervention that is easy accessible (online) and that aims to stimulate employees' self-directedness. The intervention contains a Talent Scan and a one-day Event. The scan is an ePortfolio with two validated online questionnaires that employees can access at any time or place. One questionnaire gives employees insight in their current employability, the other is a Big 5 personality questionnaire. After filling in the questionnaires, employees receive a digital report. During the Talent Event, a presenter explains why working on your career is important and how employees can do so. Through workshops employees reflect on their test results and become more familiar with terms like sustainable employability and mobility, but also receive guidance in answering questions like “what are my talents?”, “does my current job fit me well?” and “is my knowledge still up to date?”.

Setting. To find out whether the Talent Scan and Event help increase career adaptability and employability, we validated the intervention at a regional government owned organization. Originally a lifetime employer, the organization was planning on reorganizing and also on cutting personnel in the near future and was offering the intervention to employees on a voluntary basis.

Sample. As participation in the study was voluntary, it happened largely independent of the study. The final sample consists of 51 employees, 75% female, age $M = 42.2$ ($SD = 9.6$). The treatment group (TG) consisted of 23 employees who participated in the scan and the event, 88.9% female, age $M = 42.3$ ($SD = 8.5$). The control group (CG) consists of 29 employees who did not participate, 65.4% female, age $M = 42.2$ ($SD = 10.46$).

Measures. To assess the effect of the intervention on the four dimensions of employees' career adaptability and their employability, we measured these concepts before and six months after the intervention with employees of both the treatment and the control group. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

Career control was assessed with two scales, one directed towards the person and the other towards the environment: 6 items assessed participants' sense of personal awareness (e.g., "I know what is important to me and what inspires me"; $\alpha = .85$ at T1 and $.82$ at T2) and 5 items taken and adapted from the Career Decision Scale addressed career decidedness (Osipow, Carney, & Barak, 1976; e.g., "I can list the alternative career options"; $\alpha = .70$). *Career curiosity* was measured on the trait level via a self-developed 5-item learning orientation measure (e.g., "I like learning new skills", $\alpha = .77$ at T1 and $.78$ at T2) and on the behavioural level via Stumpf et al.'s (1983) measure of self-exploration (e.g., "in the last 6 months I have thought about what my personal qualities and abilities are." $\alpha = .90$) and of environmental exploration (e.g., "investigated career possibilities", $\alpha = .92$). *Career concern* was measured via a 7-item career planning scale based on Gould (1979; e.g., "I have a strategy to attain my career objectives"; $\alpha = .93$ at T1, $.89$ at T2). *Career confidence* was measured via an adapted 6-item self-efficacy in job-search scale (Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992; Ellis & Taylor, 1983) asking participants how confident they felt about being able to execute certain actions (e.g., "make the best impression and get points across in an interview"; $\alpha = .76$ at T1 and T2). Finally, *employability* was measured with a 4 item scale (e.g., "I know where to easily find alternative work"; $\alpha = .68$ at T1 and $.69$ at T2).

Results

A series of 2x2 ANOVAs supported the intervention's effectiveness for most of the studied variables: Participants in the treatment group reported greater increases in their personal awareness, career decidedness, environmental exploration and planning than participants of the control group, and marginally greater increases in their self-exploration and perceived employability, whereas no effects emerged on learning orientation and self-efficacy, possibly because most participants scored relatively high on these dimensions to begin with. Post-hoc *t*-

tests confirmed that the treatment group improved on most dimensions whereas the control group did not. Results also revealed, however, that both groups weren't fully equivalent at Time 1, as particularly employees low on perceived personal awareness, career decidedness, and self-efficacy participated in the intervention.

Discussion

These results indicate that it is possible to offer employees an efficient, affordable and easily accessible option for career guidance. We found that after the Talent Scan and Event, employees know more about what they find important in their job and what their personal qualities are (self-awareness), they have better knowledge about what their career options are (career decidedness), they are more actively searching for information about different career options (environmental exploration) and they construct more career goals and take more action to reach these goals (planning). It also seems like employees have spent more time thinking about what they are good at and what they find important in their jobs (self-exploration) and they know more about how to keep themselves employable and invest more in their personal network (employability). At the same time, employees did not gain more confidence on being able to find another job (self-efficacy), and did not become more interested in learning (learning orientation).

Using this intervention could help more employees to gain career adaptability and employability in a self-directed and more affordable way. As a big part of the intervention is online, employees can decide themselves when they want to participate and they can manage their own results. The event, in turn, can welcome large numbers of participants simultaneously, which makes the intervention more efficient than one on one coaching.

Limitations of this study obviously lie in participants' voluntary participation and thus self-selection and in the small sample size.

From Flexibility Hrm To Sustainable Employability Across The Lifespan:**A Multi-Sample Study**

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Introduction And Theoretical Background

Many countries across the world face rapid demographic changes, such as the aging of the workforce, and the entrance of a new generation of employees, the so-called Generation Y (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). Therefore, organizations have to invest more effort in being attractive employers for younger as well as for older workers. It has been proposed that key to the retention of ageing workers is to sustain employability across the lifespan. To ensure sustainable employability, organizations increasingly offer workplace flexibility, so that flexibility enables older workers to remain engaged and productive (Hill, Grzywacz, Allen, Blanchard, Matz-Costa, Shulkin, et al., 2008). However, theory of workplace flexibility has not yet incorporated a lifespan perspective, and therefore, the current study aims to bridge this theoretical and empirical gap in the literature.

Workplace flexibility is an increasingly popular term in both scientific research and popular press (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013; Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012). Contemporary perspectives on flexibility describe it as the degree to which employees are able to make choices and arrange core aspects of their working lives (Hill et al., 2008). We adopt a broad view of flexibility in the workplace, and consequently define it in line with Hill et al. (2008: 152) as “the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where and for how long

they engage in work-related tasks". Organizations use HR systems to facilitate employees to become employable, motivated and productive (Arthur & Boyles, 2007). However, because HR systems have primarily been designed for younger workers (Bal, De Jong, Jansen, & Bakker, 2012), it is necessary for organizations to adjust HR systems to the needs of older workers (Kooij, Guest, Clinton, Knight, Jansen, et al., 2013), as well as the needs of new younger generations (Hess & Jepsen, 2009) in order to become employable.

Flexibility in work arrangements has been described as crucial in maintaining employee motivation and performance to regulate stressful demands at work or home (Atkins & Parker, 2012). Both literatures on younger workers (Hess & Jepsen, 2009) and older workers (Bal et al., 2012; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008) have stressed the importance of flexibility in how employees conduct their work, and how work is combined with other aspects in life. Generation theory (Twenge et al., 2010) reveals why younger workers may attach more value to flexibility at work, while lifespan theory is used (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999) to explain why older workers need more flexibility. Despite these widely acknowledged notions of importance of flexibility for younger and older workers, the flexibility literature has been primarily devoted to flexibility for parents having children at home, and not younger or older workers (Allen et al., 2013; Leslie et al., 2012). Only very few studies have taken into account that flexibility HRM may have important implications for the motivation and productivity of younger and older workers (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

In the current study, we therefore investigate the role of age in the effects of flexibility HRM on job attitudes and job performance, while distinguishing between availability and use of flexibility HRM (Allen et al., 2013), as well as two types of flexibility HRM. More specifically, we investigate the mediating role of employee engagement and job satisfaction in the relations between flexibility HRM and job performance. Moreover, we investigate the effectiveness of

flexibility HRM for younger and for older workers. We present two studies in which we ascertain these relationships. Figure 1 shows the research model that will guide the current study.

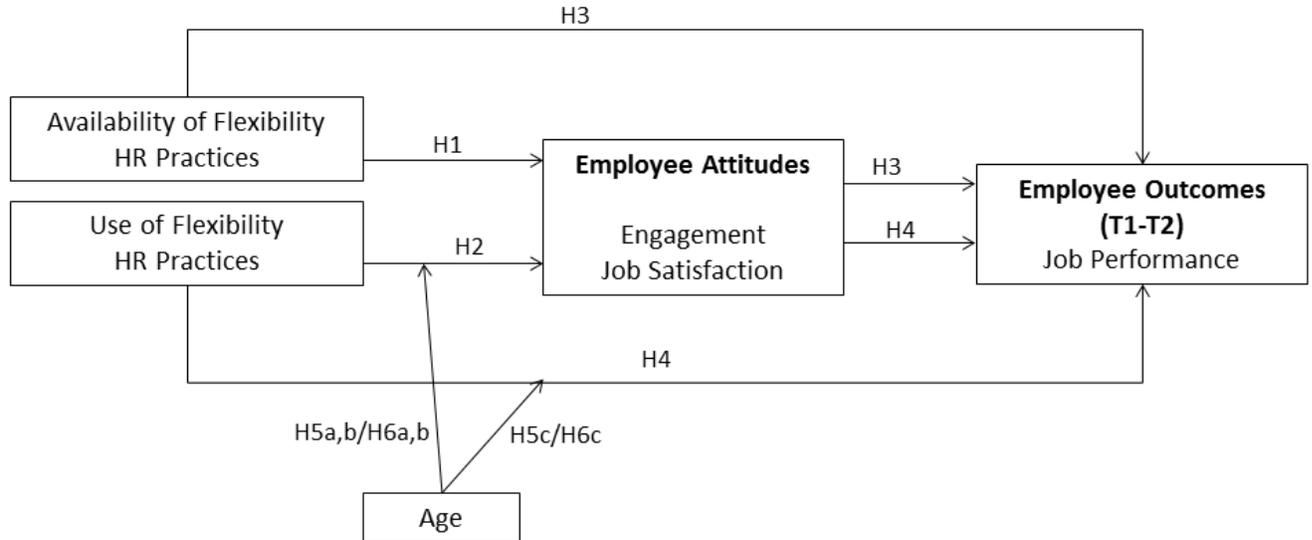


Figure 1. *Research Model of the Current Study*

Methodology

The current multi-sample study concerns a cross-validation of our hypotheses among a US and an international sample. In the first study, we tested the hypotheses among almost 700 employees working in different US organizations. Longitudinal relationships of two types of flexibility HRM (availability and use) with employee engagement, satisfaction, and job performance were ascertained, using a time lag of six months. Subsequently, we tested the hypotheses in a cross-country validation study in order to ascertain whether the relationships hold across different cultural contexts (Masuda, Poelmans, Allen, Spector, Lapierre, et al., 2012). A study among more than 2,000 employees in office jobs from 11 countries served to test whether the relationships were stable across industrialized countries, and developing countries (World Bank, 2013). Masuda et al. (2012) found that in industrialized regions, which tend to be more individualistic

and thus more focused on individual arrangements with the employer (Peretz & Fried, 2012), flexible work arrangements were more likely to be used and more strongly related to work outcomes than in developing countries, which tend to be more collectivistic. Hence, we argue that the expected relations will be more prominent among industrialized countries than in developing countries.

Results And Discussion

First, we found that availability of flexibility HRM positively related to employee engagement and job satisfaction, which subsequently predicted job performance across the two studies. While flexibility use was unrelated to job attitudes, it was only related positively to job performance in industrialized countries. Hence, the availability of flexibility HRM was a stronger predictor of outcomes than use of flexibility HRM. This gives strong support for signaling theory (Spence, 1973) within the context of human resource management: the awareness among employees that flexibility practices are available to them when they need it, will enhance their motivation and performance. For use of flexibility HRM, we found that it was only significantly related to job performance in industrialized countries. One crucial factor here is employee age (Bal et al., 2012); because younger people may have different reasons to use flexibility from older people, their reactions might also be different. This was exactly what we found; however, the age-related differences in reactions towards use of flexibility HRM also depended upon the type of outcome, as Study 1 has shown. Use of accommodative HRM and flexible workload HRM were negatively related to job performance among younger workers, while use of flexible workload was positively related to engagement among younger workers. This can be explained based on the reasons why younger generations nowadays choose to use flexibility. Studies have shown that younger generations have a stronger sense of entitlement towards receiving inducements from

their employer (Twenge et al., 2010). Hence, when they are able to fulfill their stronger desire for flexible work arrangements, they feel a stronger fit with their work, and become more engaged. These results were validated in study 2, where we found that in particular in industrialized countries, younger workers became more engaged and satisfied when they used flexibility HRM. However, at the same time, their job performance may suffer because the freedom that flexibility offers to employees also comes with responsibility to fulfill the core job requirements and to perform well, and this may be more difficult for younger workers.

Among older workers, use of flexibility increased their job performance directly, which was in contrast to younger workers. Flexibility enables them to retain a healthy work-life balance, and hence experience the opportunity to perform at work (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000). Thus, lifespan theory was supported such that older workers can use flexibility HRM as a way to counteract age-related losses in capabilities, and to be able to follow an individualized approach to maintaining job performance. These results were cross-validated in Study 2.

Employability In The Public Sector

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Introduction And Theoretical Background

Public sector employment was traditionally seen as safe, secure and long-term. Gaining a public sector position guaranteed a job for life and many people who entered this sector did in fact stay throughout their entire career. However, in recent years the public sector has experienced many of the structural changes previously only seen in the private sector such as downsizing, outsourcing and delayering. As a consequence job security, a key factor in attracting employees to public sector jobs, has been eroded and employees have become aware that they are no longer immune from the effects of budgetary cuts and structural change. This poses a new challenge for the public sector. If security of tenure is no longer guaranteed then how can it compete for talent in the labour market and how can it attract and retain quality employees? One strategy is move to a psychological contract based on employability.

Baruch (2001: 545) describes “the essence of employability” as a process in which in exchange for loss of job security employers support the development of generic skills that will make an individual attractive to future employers. That is, the organization provides opportunities for training and development that will assist the individual in the “accumulation of human capital” (Moss Kanter, 1989: 321-2) and in preparing for their next job. In the private sector there are clear indications that the shift from job security to job employability has taken place and that both parties acknowledge that responsibility for career development now lies with the individual rather than the organization (Van Dam 2004). In the public sector the shift has been less explicit despite widespread outsourcing and the introduction of short-term contracts as a standard human

resource management practice. So, on the one hand it would appear that the public sector has embraced a more contingent approach to staffing while on the other hand it may not yet have accepted that embracing employability is a necessary counter balance to loss of job security.

Older employees may struggle with the shift to an employability-based contract, research but suggests that younger employees (Gen X and Gen Y) do not expect, and perhaps do not even want, lifelong employment in the same organization (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). They are prepared to take responsibility for employability and expect opportunities for training, development and career progression (Baruch, 2004a; Baruch, 2004b). If these expectations are not met then they will not hesitate to seek opportunities elsewhere. Public sector organizations may not be able to offer salaries that are as attractive as private sector organizations so the offer of career and personal development leading to enhanced employability is important in the attraction and selection of high quality employees. In this regard it helps promote a positive image as a potential employer which is significant when competing in the labor market.

The actual training and development this is offered is important for a number of reasons. First, it ensures that new employees gain a comprehensive understanding of the workings of government and the role of public sector organizations thus enabling them to develop skills and knowledge in key areas. This then enables them to make a useful contribution to the organization from the early stages of their employment. Second, it sends a signal that the organization values them and is willing to invest in their development, an important factor in employee motivation. Investment in training is linked with employee satisfaction while failure to invest is likely to lead to dissatisfaction, disillusionment and turnover. Third, while public sector employees may not remain in the same role long-term there is often movement between departments as individuals seek opportunities for career growth. This is potentially beneficial in that individuals are more employable in the internal labor market, not just the external market (Forrier and Sels 2003a).

Furthermore, even though investment in the employability of individuals may not have short-term benefits for a specific department, it has the potential to benefit the broader public sector in the longer-term.

Methodology And Results

The problem for public sector organizations is that intensive training and development programs are costly. In a sector under increasing budgetary pressures the critical question is whether this investment is justifiable and what the possible consequences of not making this investment might be. To explore this issue the argument for supporting an employability-based employment contract is presented through a qualitative study of an Australian public sector graduate recruitment program. The case study provides a framework in which to identify the factors that contribute to an employability contract from an employee perspective. In this study in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty three participants of a one year graduate entry program based around structured development activities. The findings of this study provide a rationale for investing in the employability of new graduate employees suggests that the costs are likely to far outweigh both long and short-term benefits.

Perceived Employability: Good And/Or Bad For Job Performance?

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Introduction And Theoretical Background

Perceived employability (PE) refers to the perception of one's possibilities of getting a new job elsewhere. Overall, PE is believed to enhance performance because employable workers possess (updated) skills and knowledge (e.g. De Cuyper et al., 2011b). However, the idea of PE as truly good for workers' effective functioning is still debated. Our study hopes to contribute to the debate in three ways. First, we argue that different paths between PE and performance exist, namely a direct positive path, and an indirect negative path through commitment: PE may reduce commitment and then performance. Second, we introduce 'new' performance indicators. Existing employability research has mostly focused on in-role performance, and has excluded positive (i.e. helping behavior) and negative (i.e. organizational counterproductive behavior; CWBO) discretionary behavior. Third, we apply two foci to commitment: commitment to the organization and to the team.

From PE to Performance: A Positive Path

The direct path from PE to job performance is expected to be positive. First, PE is thought to contribute to in-role performance because employable individuals can use (updated) skills and knowledge they possess (e.g. De Cuyper et al., 2011b). Skills and knowledge in se are known to enhance in-role performance (Ng & Feldman, 2009). Second, based on the Conservation of

Resources theory (COR theory; Hobfoll, 1989), one can expect beneficial links with helping behavior and CWBO. According to COR theory, people tend to invest their resources in view of building stronger 'resource caravans'. Furthermore, they want to protect their resources, hence avoiding actions that may compromise them. Thus, employable workers may invest in helping others as this may strengthen their position by expanding the social networks they belong to. Moreover, employable workers may refrain from harming their employer to prevent, for example, negative employee references. In all, we assume that: *H1: PE has a positive cross-lagged effect on a) in-role performance and b) helping behavior, and c) a negative cross-lagged effect on CWBO.*

The Role of Affective Organizational- Versus Team Commitment: Two Negative Paths

We expect PE to negatively affect commitment: perceiving job chances elsewhere can directly reduce the desire to remain with the current employer and team (e.g. Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). Alternatives carry the potential to psychologically pull the individual out of the current employment relationship (see also Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Since PE implies the perceived availability of alternatives, we expect that PE reduces affective organizational commitment (AOC; for evidence, see De Cuyper, Notelaers, & De Witte, 2009) and likewise also team commitment (TC). In all, we hypothesize that: *H2: PE has a negative cross-lagged effect on a) AOC and b) TC.*

We then expect a positive effect of affective organizational and team commitment on job performance. The attitude-behavior model (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) states that individuals tend to tailor behavior to their attitudes. Affective organizational and team commitment concern positive attitudes, and hence induce positive behaviors (i.e. in-role performance and helping

behavior) and reduce negative behaviors (i.e., CWBO). In all, we expect that: *H3: AOC and TC have a positive cross-lagged effect on in-role performance and helping behavior, and a negative cross-lagged effect on CWBO.*

Furthermore, we expect the relationships between AOM and in-role performance, respectively, CWBO, and between team commitment and helping behavior to be particularly strong: the object of the attitude, organization and colleagues, matches the behavioral target, which follows the “principle of compatibility” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

Methodology

Data are being collected among Dutch-speaking Belgian workers, belonging to 13 different organizations from different sectors. Respondents are asked to fill out an online or paper- and pencil survey twice, with a six month time lag. Data collection will be completed by the end of 2013, with responses retrieved from 4080 workers at time 1 (i.e., period January-March 2013).

All measures apply a five-point answering scale. Higher scores confirm the construct. *Perceived employability* (e.g. “I am optimistic that I would find another job elsewhere, if I looked for one”; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011) is measured with four items; *in-role performance* (Abramis, 1994) with six items, respondents indicate how well they completed certain tasks during the last week (e.g. decision making); *helping behavior* (e.g. “Helped colleagues with heavy workloads”; based on Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990) with four items; *CWBO* (e.g. “Taken office property from work without permission”; Bennett & Robinson, 2000) with eight items, respondents indicate how often they showed each behavior over the past six months; *AOC* (e.g. “I feel emotionally attached to this organization”; Isaksson, Mohr, Rigotti, Schalk, De Jong, Claes, et al., 2007) with four items; and finally, *TC* (e.g. “In my work, I let

myself be guided by the goals of my team"; Ellemers, De Gilder, & Van den Heuvel, 1998) with five items.

Preliminary analyses will entail drop-out and descriptive analyses (i.e. looking at internal consistencies, means and standard deviations as well as (auto-)correlations). To fully test our hypotheses we will use structural equation modeling, while taking directionality into account by comparing normal (or hypothesized) to reversed causation models.

Acknowledgements

This study is funded by a grant from the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO; G0987.12) and the Research Fund KU Leuven (OT/11/010). We thank Hans De Witte, Jill Nelissen, Ellen Peeters and Marijke Verbruggen for granting us the use of this data.

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