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## Special issue of international human resource management journal HRM and employability: an international perspective

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## Special issue of international human resource management journal HRM and employability: an international perspective

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### Rationale and aims

Employability concerns the individual's chances in the internal and/or external labor market (Forrier, Verbruggen, & De Cuyper, 2015; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). It is emerging as an important policy issue in HRM against the background of ongoing developments such as technological changes, ageing populations, and an increasingly competitive organizational environment. This has led to a sharp growth in employability studies in recent years and from an increasingly international scholarship. Although employability is regarded as a management and political concern (Froehlich, Beausaert, & Segers, 2015; Thijssen, Van der Heijden, & Rocco, 2008), surprisingly few studies have addressed the role and impact of employer policies and practices and the national context. In addition, employability outcomes should be probed in greater detail: this probing could address different levels of analysis, for example individual well-being, organizational effectiveness or even societal well-being (cf. Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015). Such research would elucidate whether employability, and HRM investments in employability, is beneficial to all parties involved or whether there are unintended outcomes. This has been subject of academic and practitioner debates, as reflected in the so-called employability management paradox that questions whether managerial benefits of investing in employability outweigh the costs (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; Nelissen, Forrier, & Verbruggen, 2017).

This Special Issue is therefore intended to be a catalyst for attracting and advancing research on the impact of HRM on workers' employability and subsequent outcomes. Examining HRM and employability together is particularly relevant, given that employability is widely viewed as an essential aspect of contemporary

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employment security in today's ever turbulent employment landscape (Clarke, 2008; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). Employees may view employability as something to be nurtured in order to achieve job security, optimal well-being and career success (Kirves, Kinnunen, De Cuyper, & Mäkikangas, 2014). For employers, employability, especially within the organization, may be viewed as a basis for competitive advantage which means that employers take advantage of boosting their workers' employability through relevant HRM policies and practices (Clarke, 2008; Van der Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006; Van Harten, Knies, & Leisink, 2016). In contrast, some organizations may fear that use of HR practices to enhance employability will increase external mobility of talented workers, and hence organizations may be reluctant to make employability-related investments. Ultimately, investigating the role of HRM in workers' employability and subsequent outcomes helps to integrate and inform the employer's perspective with that of employees.

It is likely that researchers focusing on HRM could apply their theories and knowledge to inform employability research, and vice versa. This Special Issue provides a valuable opportunity to cross-pollinate and expand two heretofore separate research streams. We especially invite multidisciplinary contributions to help bridge this gap. In addition, the role and impact of HRM policies that might affect employability are likely to be influenced by national economic circumstances such as levels of unemployment, as well as varying national policies to address employment and employment security. Flexicurity policies in Denmark provide one illustration of this. We therefore particularly welcome papers that give appropriate weight to national and comparative contextual factors.

Taken together, the objective of the proposed Special Issue is to provide an analysis and to progress our understanding of how HRM affects workers' employability. In particular, we invite both theoretical and empirical contributions that illuminate the central question as to how and under what circumstances HRM impacts workers' employability and subsequent outcomes. We focus our Special Issue call in two primary yet broad areas. The first research avenue focuses on the content of HRM as well as its implementation, to understand how HRM impacts employability and subsequent outcomes. The second avenue considers the micro, meso and macro level circumstances under which HRM affects employability and subsequent outcomes.

### ***Content and implementation of HRM***

The limited existing research exploring the links between HRM, employability and subsequent outcomes has largely focused on development HRM including training and development practices. While this has been helpful in making the connection between employability and HRM, a wider array of HRM policies and practices should be accounted for. One opportunity (and not to exclude other HRM concepts) lies in the area of HR bundles (cf. Kooij et al., 2013), which could be used to generate insight into the particular combination of practices most likely to impact employability, and whether this leads to (un)wanted outcomes.

To deepen our understanding of the impact of HRM on employability, it seems important not only to include a broad range of HR practices, but also to critically examine various employability forms, such as internal and external employability, and different employability conceptualizations. Employability has been considered as a set of competences (Van der Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006) or dispositions (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008), or as perceptions of job chances (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011). We welcome research that critically considers these differing perspectives while relating HRM to employability.

Another important route that could enhance research and practice is to examine how HRM is best implemented so that it impacts workers' employability, with specific attention to the role of the supervisor. The HRM literature offers relevant insights, such as the notion of people management that connects line managers' supportive leadership behavior (i.e. supervisor support) with their ways of implementing general and tailor-made HR practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

### ***Micro, meso and macro level circumstances***

HRM may not follow a 'one size fits all' logic: the dominant universalist model has been criticized in general (Guest, 2011), and such criticism may extend to the realm of employability research. Therefore, a further route is to better comprehend under what micro, meso and macro level circumstances HRM impacts employability.

Taking micro-level moderators (e.g. personal characteristics or attributes) into account enhances employability knowledge, but would also contribute to the HRM literature that, according to Guest (2011, p. 8), needs to build in micro issues to understand the processes that link HRM and performance outcomes. Examining micro-level moderators would also provide insight into what individual circumstances call for a general or targeted HR approach to employability. Further, examining the impact of circumstances at the organization level (e.g. organizational size and structure) and cross-sector comparisons could help to gain a more evidence-based insight into assumptions such as that employability is especially relevant in a turbulent work context. Finally, it will be important to consider national factors such as institutional contexts, cross-country differences in labour markets and national labour market policies to understand how these affect organizational HRM policy and practice with respect to employability to grasp the circumstances under which HRM affects workers' employability.

The following general and specific research questions are examples (and not to exclude others) that could be examined by Special Issue contributions:

- To what extent and in what ways does HRM impact workers' employability and subsequent outcomes? And what do employers hope to achieve by utilizing HR practices to enhance employability, are there potential unintended

consequences? Do HR investments in employability pay off in terms of its impact on organizational and individual outcomes?

- What HR practices and/or combinations of practices have an effect on workers' employability? To what extent does this depend on the understanding of employability and what is the most useful way of conceptualizing and operationalizing employability?
- How significant is the role of line managers in affecting workers' employability?
- To what extent is it feasible to use HRM to develop organization-specific employability as opposed to general employability?
- What sort of HR policies and practices might inhibit employability (for example policies with respect to flexible employment and towards older workers)?
- What factors tied to the individual worker affect the relationships between HRM, workers' employability and subsequent outcomes? Under what circumstances should employers adopt a general or targeted approach to employability?
- What meso-level circumstances play a role in the impact of HRM on workers' employability and subsequent outcomes?
- How do macro-level national economic circumstances and associated national policies affect related HR practices in organizations and their impact on employability and how does this vary across countries?

### Submission guidelines

Manuscripts should be submitted online using the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* ScholarOne Manuscripts site (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rijh>) no later than 1st August 2018. The format of papers must follow the guidelines of the *IJHRM*: [www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=rijh20&page=instructions](http://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?journalCode=rijh20&page=instructions). All submissions will go through the *IJHRM* regular double-blind review process and follow the standard norms and processes.

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