



# Employability: The New Deal of Short-Term Employment

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## Abstract

*Employability concerned about competency to perform tasks, competency to remain employment, and competency to obtain new employment, if required. It came up with changing in employment contract undergoing shift and transitioning from long-term employment to short-term ones and from hierarchical to multidirectional growing. This article was, therefore, aimed at pinning the point of today changing employment and contemporary concept of careers. Main argument of the article is pertaining to the idea of employability as a new covenant or a new deal of employment. Instead of a promise of life-long employment, the point is that organizations should support their contract employees to gain much more employability as much as possible. Developing employability does not specifically belong to the roles of someone, but various sectors in the community should take collective action and responsibility. The cases discussed in the paper encourage stakeholders such as organizations, education institutions and government sector to pay much more attention to workforce skill gaps and employability development.*

**Keywords:** *Employability, Careers, Employment, Human Capital*

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## ความสามารถในการมีงานทำ: พันธสัญญาใหม่ของการจ้างงานระยะสั้น

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### บทคัดย่อ

ความสามารถในการมีงานทำ คือ ความสามารถในการปฏิบัติงานหน้าที่ปัจจุบัน ความสามารถที่ส่งผลต่อการพิจารณาการต่อสัญญาการจ้างงาน และความสามารถที่ทำให้บุคคลสามารถก้าวสู่งานใหม่เมื่อจำเป็นต้องเปลี่ยนงาน แนวคิดนี้มาพร้อมกับความเปลี่ยนแปลง ในเรื่องสัญญาการจ้างงาน จากการจ้างงานระยะยาวสู่การจ้างงานระยะสั้น และจากแนวคิด การเจริญเติบโตตามแนวตั้งภายในองค์การเพียงอย่างเดียวสู่แนวคิดที่การเจริญเติบโตทางอาชีพมีความหลากหลาย โดยในบทความนี้ได้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงความเปลี่ยนแปลงที่เกิดขึ้นในระบบ การจ้างงานและแนวคิดที่เกี่ยวข้องกับอาชีพในมุมมองร่วมสมัยที่มองว่า เมื่อองค์การไม่สามารถให้ความมั่นคงในการจ้างงานได้ พันธสัญญาใหม่หรือลีสท์ที่องค์การครอบให้แก่พนักงาน คือ การสนับสนุนให้พนักงานมีความสามารถในการมีงานทำ ตลอดจนการชี้ให้เห็นถึงบทบาทของผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสีย อาทิ องค์การ สถาบันการศึกษา และรัฐบาล ในการมีส่วนผลักดัน ความสำเร็จในการส่งเสริมความสามารถในการมีงานทำ

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## Introduction: Changing in Employment Contract

In the past, jobs were activities linked to somewhat changing tasks rather than specific positions with clearly defined boundaries (Clarke, 2007). Thus, craftsmen and itinerant workers had responsibility for their own employability by which they were moving around, seeking work, and updating their skills as they were required (Bagshaw, 1997). Contracts, therefore, tended to be short-term and for the duration of a particular piece of work.

The emergence of the organizational career resulted from a growth in the manufacturing and finance sectors. In these organizations, jobs became more structured, and roles were specifically defined (Clarke and Patrickson, 2007). As a result, longer-term employment contracts began. Employees expected that the organization would offer a job security for their life. In turn, they were expected to pay on-going loyalty to the organization (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Employees invested themselves in the organization and in return the organization provided job and career security.

Due to job security, careers were dominantly managed by the employer with hierarchical, and relatively secure. Employability under job security focuses on somewhat quantifiable criteria, such as having appropriate qualifications, a particular job title, identification with an organization, and years of experience in a certain company or in a specific field (Clarke, 2007).

However, at the end of the twentieth century, career and employment patterns changed significantly due to the ongoing downsizing and restructuring of an organization in order to respond to a severe competitive pressure (Cascio, 1993). Under such circumstances, organizations were not able to promise job security as they could before. Since then, lifetime employment had begun to be replaced by short-term contracts.

Employability is not the brand-new concepts because it revealed since the early 1800s and came back again the end of the twentieth century. Apparently, the contemporary view of employability has shifted back to the pre-industrial model. The emphasis is now on individual responsibility for, and engagement with, employability as a precondition for career success (Baruch, 2006). Individuals

are forced to take responsibility themselves for ongoing job security by ensuring that their skills are current and marketable. They are expected to manage their own career and develop their employability (Bates and Bloch, 1996).

It could be said that employability in the twentieth first century differs from the previous one because of a system which organizations are living in. Of course, in the era of organizations in an open system, workers rather face with the changing of global market in which there are more competitors, various kinds of emerging careers, and changing of new marketable skills than the past.

## What is employability?

Researches and practices in employability have increased specifically in the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe in terms of social policy (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005) and in the United States in terms of individual skill development (Thijssen, et al., 2008). The originality of a contemporary concept of employability is due to the changing of organizational structure that required flexibility in structure and, therefore, in contract of employment. Consequently, emerging career patterns and decrement of job security have led to an increasing emphasis on employability (Garavan, 1999). Since what so-called 'new deal' has been emerged, individual are encouraged to moving around, seeking work where it is available and upgrading their skills as required. Organizations have to maintain and enhance individual employability rather than try to retain workers with firm-specific skills (Ibid).

Another aspect of employability is workers are only guaranteed a job, not their careers, while the organization has need of their specific and general skills (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Jobs are more likely to be short-term financial relationships, requiring flexible and highly skilled workers (Atkinson, 2004).

Scholars (Hillage and Pollard, 1998) said that employability composes of a variety of skills and abilities, necessary to find employment, to remain in employment, or to obtain new employment. From this perspective, the difficulty is that the skills and abilities necessary for the current job may not satisfy the future job of the existing and/or prospective organizations.

Continuously lifelong learning is the key important factor determining employability (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004). Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006: 453) explain that employability is defined as “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competences.” Employability is not only skills and abilities, but includes personal attributes and other characteristics that are valued by current and prospective employers and, thus, encompasses an individual’s career potentiality.

In other words, employability is competencies of workers to perform tasks, remain employment, and obtain new employment, if required (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Garavan, 1999; Fugate et al., 2004; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006). One of the important employability competencies is the adaptability for changing and remaining employment in the internal and external organizations (Fugate, et al., 2004; Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006). It could be noticed that competency to perform tasks is implied by functional competency, but competency to remain and obtain new employment is more or less related with personal competency, especially learning ability and flexibility.

## **Employability as the New Deal of Employment**

Employability is closely related with the concept of careers that has changed from long-term hierarchical careers and promised job security or lifetime employment to multidirectional careers that promote flexibility and short-term contract of employment (Baruch, 2004; Hall and Mirvis, 1996; Arthur, 1994; Bird, 1994; Bagshaw, 1996; Waterman et al., 1994; Atkinson, 2004). Baruch (2004) calls this situation as transforming careers.

Baruch’s framework of transforming careers came up from what so-called protean careers (Hall and Mirvis, 1996; Hall and Moss, 1998), boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994; Bagshaw, 1996; Atkinson, 2004), new deal (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995) and new psychological contract (Rousseau, 2004).

DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) are one of the predominant scholars who use the term “boundaryless careers”. This term is a byproduct of boundaryless and changing in nature of jobs. Reaching for career success is beyond hierarchical

career path in one organization. In other words, the boundary of careers is blurred and more open, but less structured. Career success tends to be controlled by workers who can move from one organization to another as their competency and preference. In boundaryless careers, however, careers are not totally controlled by workers. A process of employment depends on choices and bargaining power of each other.

Another concept of contemporary careers is Hall's framework of the "protean career" (Hall and Mirvis, 1996; Hall and Moss, 1998; Hall, 2002). Hall focused on the individual and lifelong career process of personal life rather than the roles of organization. Individuals are growing through their careers that depend on personal choices and self-fulfillment.

All above-mentioned concepts represent what Peiperl and Baruch (1997) called "post-corporate career". Careers are undergoing shifts and transitions (Baruch, 2006). Workers therefore need to gain employability rather than secure employment (Ghoshal, et al., 1999; Baruch, 2001) and new psychological contract rather than security of employment (Baruch, 2006).

The "New Deal" (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995) and the "New Psychological Contracts" (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) are the new agreement and commitment between organizations and workers. Instead of agreement to secure employment, organizations are expected to provide the opportunities for the workers to development (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Baruch, 2004). In the organizational level, employability could be defined to where employers provide interesting jobs and opportunities to develop skills for a mobile career (Pearce and Randel, 2004).

Under multidirectional career context in which flexibility and short-term contract of employment become dominant themes, transforming careers does not refer to a totally change of career forms. Careers are undergoing shifts and transitions rather than a complete change of traditional career paths to a new one. Baruch's concept encourages organizations to invest in employability and promotes individual, organizational and national responsibility of managing careers in the future (Baruch, 2004). Accordingly, investing in HRD has to be strengthened in order to provide the workers with the opportunities to develop and fulfill the

skills to meet current and possible future job demands (Werner and DeSimone, 2006) that are not only the demands from inside of an organization, but they also include demands of individual to remain employment.

## **Human Capital Theory and Employability**

Investment in human capital would lead to higher workforce mobility. Human capital theory implies that when employees participate in training and development programs, they would be able to learn new skills, able to perform tasks, and share their new knowledge to others. It could be said that labor market will be more flexible due to human capital investment (Groot and Maasen, 2000). By the logical consequences of investment in human capital, employability is increased by human resource development.

In the research named “Predicting perceived employability: human capital or labor market opportunities” conducted by Berntson, Sverke, and Marklund (2006), it found that education is one of key successes in employability. Meanwhile some researches show that work experience is also a condition of employability (Becker, 1993; Judge and Bretz, 1994; Berntson, et al, 2006)

However, a study conducted by Groot and Maasen (2000) found that only formal training had a significant positive impact on employability. While the variables such as educational level and tenure do not have impact on employability. This has implied the roles of an organization as the investor to its employees' employability.

Regarding to Garavan, Morley, Gunnigle, and Collins (2001) in their article 'human capital accumulation: the role of human resource development', the conceptualization of HRD surrounding organizational strategy through both individual and organizational perspectives. Based upon this concept, the notions of employability, performance and career development are of most concerns to increase capabilities of employees. The core competencies and the tacit knowledge or social community perspective are developed in people via education and experience. This implies that HRD practices potentially increase the human capital accumulation within the organization. This idea also aligns with that of Huselid (1994) who argues human capital accumulation as a key outcome of HRD.

Having networks inside and outside of the work environment is concerned as values in terms of human capital accumulation. Building networks is concerned as one of important elements of employability. Having said that employability is more or less underpinned by social capital theory, the differences in networks produce inequality in respect of career attainment (Garavan, et al., 2001).

Another related issue of human capital theory and employability is competence development of workforce or how the accumulation of human capital determines employability. In this point, Judge and Bretz (1994) gave an explanation that training, experience and other types of human resource development may affect to higher compensation and better chances to be promoted. It could be said that, human capital will increase through work experience due to formal and informal development. This implies that tenure is one of the human capital factors affecting compensation and promotion opportunities or career status (Judge and Bretz, 1994).

Based on the theoretical perspectives of human capital accumulation, education, competency development and job experience will be crucial path ways for enhancing employability. People, therefore, may perceive themselves as the human capital whose investment in themselves in some ways would create their potential chance for employment or reemployment if required (Berntson, Sverke, and Marklund, 2006).

One of the predominant works on employability is “employability: a psycho-social construct, its dimensions, and applications” proposed by Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004). In their work, the heuristic model of employability was proposed. The model was a combination of three dimensions that is career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital. They asserted that in the context of careers and work, employability captures the aspects of each of the three dimensions that facilitate the identification and recognition of career development within and across organizations. They further explained that career identity is a coherent representation of career goals and experiences.

In the heuristic model of employability, personal adaptability is one of the three dimensions embedding employability. This means the ability of individual to adapt to changing situations surrounding their career (Chan, 2000). Propensity

to learn is a foundation for adaptability due to the reason that people with high employability level will have job search ability and learn what skills, knowledge and experience are needed. They will then be able to compare the market opportunities with their expectation and their qualification (Fugate, et al., 2004).

Social and human capital, a third dimension of the heuristic model of employability implies that individuals and organizations invest in social and human capital for probability of future or long-term returns (Jackson and Schuler, 1995). In social capital side, interpersonal relationship enhances individuals' influence via his/her networks (Adler and Kwon, 2002). The benefits of social capital and its influence on employability assist individual in the job search behaviors since it extends an individual's ability to search identify and realize opportunities among organizations, across industries, and over entire careers (Fugate, et al., 2004).

Increasing employability or opportunity to be employed not only relies on social capital, but also depends on the factors called human capital such as experience, job performance and emotional intelligence (Fugate, et al., 2004).

Although investment in human capital potentially increases employability, it expenses as a cost of an organization and it is quite high (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008). In other words, organizational implementation of employability is not cheap and there is no guarantee that those who complete their development will stay or leave. Under changing employment conditions, organizations which are not able to promise job security as they could before, have to initiate or launch an employability process in order to attract the workers (Rousseau, 2004). This is one of the conditions of a new psychological contract between employers and employees.

## **Employability: Marketability and Internal and External Employability**

Since the concept of careers has transformed, employability came up with the word so-called 'marketability'. This word is defined as beliefs that one is valuable to the current or to other prospect employers (Eby, Butts and Lockwood, 2003). De Vos, et al. (2011) differentiated marketability from employability. The latter comprise the employee's competencies that could fulfill, acquire or create new employment, if required. Meanwhile marketability refers to the perceptions of

one's added value at the internal or external labor market. Consequently, marketability is an important criterion of career success (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). It could be said that: in theoretical aspect of human capital, an investment in employability will increase people's value in the marketplace (Becker, 1993). Fugate et al. (2004) further explained this point that investing in people's knowledge and skills, especially knowledge and skills that could be generalizable and transferable, would lead to greater employee's job mobility within and among organization.

Organizations could assist their employees in developing employability by training and development. Some scholars (e.g., Rousseau, 2004; Clarke and Patrickson, 2008) pointed out that training and development are crucial variables in the psychological contract. In the article "the new covenant of employability", Clarke and Patrickson (2008) put much of their discussion on the roles of organizations in developing employability as the new covenant between employers and employees.

A wide variety of generic and transferable skills, such as communication skills, teamwork and interpersonal skills, should be promoted and arranged in organizations. Moreover, some specific skills focused by certain types of firm or industry are also needed to be promoted. A focus on assisting employees to develop employability is particularly on the thing called self-evaluation and self-promotion. That means employees should have an opportunity to learn how to evaluate themselves and how to be marketability.

To become employability and marketability, employees have several ways to do. Employees would be promoted by organizational policy, practices of developing people, and general or organizational-specific training options. Another indirect way in developing employability is gained by working with a well-known organization or joining a well-known project (Baruch, 2001).

There are several ways to become employable and marketable. Employability can be promoted by organizational policy and practices. Another indirect way of developing employability is by working with a well-known organization or joining a well-known project (Baruch, 2001).

## Employability and Stakeholders' Roles in Supporting Employability

Employability programs are one of the significant domains in organizations (Houtzagers, 1998). Success of employability programs depends on collaboration among three layers of stakeholders; individual, organizations, and government sector (Fugate, et al., 2004; IBM Global Services, 2001). Generally, the type of employability programs is revolved around training and learning programs (Carbery and Garavan, 2005). Since these kinds of programs are underpinned by the theories and concepts of new careers, they are likely to involve with career development of the workers.

Employability is much more applied in the organizations located in the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). In the United Kingdom, enterprise education has become established in many UK university courses as well as internationally, with a wide diversity of approaches (Hannon, 2005). Driving a success of employability programs, leadership is required to connect the activities and facets of employability across the institutions (Rae, 2007) as it could be seen the initiative agencies in UK such as Enterprise in Higher Education, Science Enterprise Challenge, and Centers for Excellence in Teaching and Learning had enabled many institutions to develop enterprise education.

In the document 'Employability Challenge' conducted by UK Commission for Employment and Skills or UKCES (2009) reported the progress of employability program in UK which is based on the contributions of just over 200 organizations active in the program. Twenty of these organizations were picked up as case studies in which Deloitte Employability Initiative has been concerned as a distinct project. Nine Deloitte Employability Centers have purposed to carry a program called "train the trainer course". The targeted number of the trainers is up to 800 trainers. These new Deloitte employability trainers have to teach in the Deloitte employability course up to 40,000 people by 2011 (Ibid).

In Europe, there are the two important groups of private companies have played the important roles in the program are the IBM Foundation and Career-Space, both of which have a focus on Information Communication Technology (ICT)-related employment. IBM foundation competencies for IBM non-management

employees are communication, problem-solving, adaptability, client focus, drive to achievement, passion for the business, taking ownership, trustworthiness, collaboration and teamwork. IBM program involved with the participation around 27,000 people worldwide (IBM Global Services, 2001). Meanwhile, Career-Space was established by a collection of nine major ICT companies; Microsoft Europe, Cisco Systems, IBM Europe, Intel, BT, Philips Semiconductors, Siemens AG, Nokia, Thales and EICTA, and the European Information, Communications and Consumer Electronics Industry Technology Association with the support of the European Commission. Career-Space cooperating with over twenty educational institutions in Europe worked together in order to develop new ICT curriculum framework and guidelines (McQuade and Maguire, 2005).

## Remarks and Recommendations

In a macro level, as it was mentioned the cases, driving success of employability programs, human resource management in a whole country and individual organization levels should reinvent in order to tackle the problems of employment which is now sensitive to an increasing of integrating economy. In a country level, skill-gap widening of workforce demands and supplies in terms of skill quality and quantity would probably be a major concern. While in an organization level, major concerns are on the existing workforce and forwards emphasis on the new prospect workforce. Accordingly, human resource management and development system should be designed for responding to the changing of employment contract and individual career perspective.

Short-term and various forms of employment illustrate incrementally transforming careers. It has moved from hierarchical to multidirectional paths by which the workers can pursue job and position in their current organization or move to another one. To alleviate the negative impacts of short term employment, employability is probably a solution of choice as some scholars (such as Baruch, 2004; Fugate and Kinicki, 2008; Ghoshal et al., 1999) state that since organizations have tried to become more flexible and effective, employment security tends to be replaced by employability. New agreement from employers is to provide interesting jobs and opportunities to develop employees' employability. Meanwhile, employees

will return the ultimate contributions though their contract. This is one of the conditions of a new psychological contract between employers and employees.

The possibilities for the enlargement of employability are determined by two types of conditions: personal conditions, that is, the presence of personal learning competencies (for example, the capability and willingness to acquire new job qualifications during a formal training program), and/or contextual conditions (for example, training facilities that are offered at an organization level or even at the national level). Assigning the opportunity to work with a well-known organization or a well-known project also increase internal and external marketability to the employees.

Enhancing employability means an accumulation of human capital. It implies that when employees participate in training and development programs, they are able to learn new skills, perform tasks and share their new knowledge with others. Although an investment in employability is sometimes expensive and probably leads to workforce mobility, the returns on investment encourage employer branding. Concerning themselves as a giver first (i.e., enhancing employee's employability), employers will then benefit from their investment (i.e., being perceived as an employer of choice).

Last but not least, employees have to take responsibility for their careers that depend on personal choices and their competencies to adapt to different situations and the various demands of employment within an organization the variation of management. Employability is also perceived as marketability which is valued by the current or to other prospective employers. A set of competencies that demonstrate understanding of employability includes the ability to search for the opportunity for new employment, self-promotion in obtaining new employment, and the ability to transfer and adapt to a new workplace. All of these mentioned competencies are a crucial part of learning ability. This is a transformative concept from lifelong employment to lifelong learning. The wheel of employment period is shorter, and a quick learner will optimize the challenge.

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