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**IS WHAT'S PAST PROLOGUE? A REVIEW AND AGENDA FOR  
CONTEMPORARY EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH**

Journal:	<i>Academy of Management Annals</i>
Manuscript ID	ANNALS-2018-0171.R5
Document Type:	Article
Keywords:	CAREERS, HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

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Manuscripts

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3 **IS WHAT'S PAST PROLOGUE? A REVIEW AND AGENDA FOR**  
4 **CONTEMPORARY EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH**  
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52 **Acknowledgments**

53 The authors are extremely grateful for the truly skillful guidance of Associate Editor Matt  
54 Cronin. His time and insights were indispensable, and he epitomized what it means to be a  
55 developmental partner in the process. Our paper is far better because of Matt. Thank you!  
56 Ans De Vos' contribution was supported by the Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek—No.  
57 30987235.  
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3 **IS WHAT'S PAST PROLOGUE? A REVIEW AND AGENDA FOR**  
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5 **CONTEMPORARY EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH**  
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9 **ABSTRACT**  
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14 Employability, commonly conceptualized as one's ability to realize job opportunities within  
15 and between employers over time, has attracted considerable attention from diverse academic  
16 disciplines for decades. Research in these disciplines has largely evolved independent of the  
17 others, thus limiting the accumulation, validation, advancement, and utility of employability.  
18  
19 Two central stakeholders in much of this research are employers and employees, yet the vast  
20 majority of studies since the year 2000 fails to explicitly consider this interdependence, and it  
21 instead is characterized by an overwhelming emphasis on the employee and individual  
22 agency. Conversely, the comparatively limited research examining the employer perspective  
23 often excludes consideration of the employee. Our review highlights these characteristics,  
24 along with outlining other common critical issues and recommendations for overcoming  
25 them. We also articulate how Social Exchange Theory (SET) can serve as an underlying  
26 mechanism to integrate research within and between disciplines, and we also present the  
27 strategic employability architecture (SEA) framework based on strategic human resource  
28 management to facilitate integration of employer and employee perspectives.  
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3 **IS WHAT'S PAST PROLOGUE? A REVIEW AND AGENDA FOR**  
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5 **CONTEMPORARY EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH**

6  
7 **INTRODUCTION**  
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10 Academics and lay people alike commonly equate employment with employability.

11  
12 While the first refers to having a job, the second concerns the ability to realize job  
13 opportunities within and between employers over time (Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009). It has  
14 been presented as the new employment security for employees by academics, employers, and  
15 policy makers. Employability is thus far more complex than simply having a job, and it is  
16 instead a dynamic interplay between the employees (fulfilling job), employers (competitive  
17 advantage), and the economy/society (full employment) over time.  
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26 It is of course inappropriate to discount the importance of having a job, as it is the  
27 primary means by which people across the globe provide both necessities and luxuries for  
28 themselves and their families. Employment is far more than a paycheck and source of  
29 sustenance for many employees, as it also provides purpose and meaning for many people's  
30 lives (Ahonen, Fujishiro, Cunningham, Flynn, 2018; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). As such,  
31 employment provides opportunities for self-development, realizing and utilizing one's  
32 potential, as well as serving and unifying with others (Savikas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder,  
33 Duarte, Guichard, & Van Vianen, 2009; Weeks & Schaffert, 2019). The current reality for  
34 employees is made even more complex due to globalization, dynamism in jobs and careers,  
35 and the ever-changing employer-employee relationship (Horney, Pasmore, & O'Shea, 2010).  
36  
37 This scenario in turn has made employment prospects less predictable (Arthur & Rousseau,  
38 1996) and shifted responsibility for employment opportunities and security away from  
39 employers and towards employees (Forrier, De Cuyper, & Akkermans, 2018). For employers,  
40 employability provides the potential to match human capital with strategic objectives, as well  
41 as to help manage the supply and demand for talent in ever-changing internal and external  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 labor markets (Thijssen, Van der Heijden, & Rocco, 2008). Employers may therefore want to  
4 attract employable workers and invest in the development of employability attributes that are  
5 relevant for achieving organizational goals, making employability a valuable aspect of  
6 strategic approach to human resource management. We therefore posit that employability is  
7 an appropriate and valuable lens through which to understand the inherent complexity of the  
8 employer-employee relationship, which is the ultimate focus of our review and  
9 recommendations for advancing contemporary employability research.

19 The interest and value of employability, for both employees and employers, is reflected  
20 in the fact that it is studied in multiple disciplines and levels in the academic universe, such as  
21 labor economics (Hasluck, 2001), education (Knight & Yorke, 2004), vocational counseling  
22 (Brown & Krane, 2000), careers (Akkermans & Tims, 2017), human resource management  
23 (HRM; Nilsson & Ellström, 2012), and work and organizational psychology (Cascio, 1995).  
24 As shown in Table 1, each discipline in which employability has been studied has its own  
25 perspectives, associated stakeholders, key responsibilities, and outcomes. Although our initial  
26 review encompasses much of the employability research landscape, ultimately, we focus on  
27 research that directly examines the employer and employee as primary stakeholders, which is  
28 largely found in careers, HRM, and work and organizational psychology literatures. The  
29 reason for this is that despite the undeniable importance of both employers and employees in  
30 all employability research, our review revealed that rarely if ever has one stream drawn on  
31 any of the others. Such segregation of employers and employees impedes comparison,  
32 accumulation, refinement, and application, and it thus handicaps research across disciplines  
33 from benefiting from the insights of those from the others (Forrier, Verbruggen, & De  
34 Cuyper, 2015; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Thijssen et al., 2008). We therefore endeavor to  
35 integrate existing employability research, not only to penetrate existing siloes, but also to  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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2  
3 highlight and help resolve critical issues, tensions, and paradoxes found in current scholarly  
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5 work on the topic.  
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8 Further motivating our ultimate focus on the employer-employee relationship is the fact  
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10 that employers (can) no longer guarantee lifelong employment, and in turn, employability has  
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12 evolved and been presented as the new employment security for employees the world over.  
13  
14 This fundamental change in the relationship between these two stakeholders means that  
15  
16 employees must cultivate their employability to remain relevant and satisfied in the workforce  
17  
18 over time (Fugate, 2006; Wilthagen & Tros, 2004). The emphasis on employee agency  
19  
20 appears to dominate employability research since the 2000's, with the role of the employer  
21  
22 largely absent. This observation is fundamentally problematic given the fact that most  
23  
24 employees remain embedded in an interdependent employment relationship, meaning their  
25  
26 employability is not entirely under their own control (Forrier, De Cuyper, & Akkermans,  
27  
28 2018). Moreover, employers across the globe are competing intensely for talent, and this  
29  
30 competition has compelled them to identify alternative, innovative, and effective ways to  
31  
32 attract, develop, retain, and motivate employees (Trank, Rynes, & Bretz, 2002). Put plainly,  
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34 employers and employees need each other to compete, survive, and thrive, which means both  
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36 will need to be increasingly proactive, strategic, and collaborative to meet their respective and  
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38 collective challenges.  
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45 We address this reality and support our claim by pursuing three fundamental and  
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47 cumulative goals. First, we identify overarching themes in employability research in the new  
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49 millennium that investigates either employers *or* employees (Goal #1). Our initial review  
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51 shows that the employee perspective is most dominant and that the employers and employees  
52  
53 are treated, intentionally or not, as segregated stakeholders. Second, and drawing from our  
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55 observations associated with Goal #1, we narrow our focus to research that explicitly embeds  
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57 employability within the employer-employee relationship, hence including both primary  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 stakeholders. From this we then identify and outline notable critical issues and recommended  
4 solutions to bring the employer-employee dynamic to the fore (Goal #2). Lastly (Goal #3), we  
5 explicate means for integrating and advancing employability research. In particular, we build  
6 on social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) as an underlying integrating mechanism for  
7 employability research within and between disciplines. We use SET to create the strategic  
8 employability architecture (SEA) framework, which is grounded in strategic HRM research  
9 and provides guidance for future researchers on how to examine the dynamic and  
10 interdependent employer-employee relationship. Before pursuing these three fundamental  
11 goals, however, we first present a historical overview of employability research. This  
12 overview offers researchers a high-level overview of the employability domain, as well as a  
13 context for our review, themes, critical issues and recommendations, and eventual integration.

### 28 **THE HISTORY OF EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH**

30 The earliest reference to employability was in the mid 1950's by Feintuch (1955), and  
31 over the ensuing decades the concept of employability and associated research have evolved  
32 in parallel with changes in the labor market and the employer-employee relationship  
33 (Thijssen, et al., 2008). For instance, the "normal" career was often characterized by decades-  
34 long employment with a single employer, wherein lifelong job development and security was  
35 exchanged for employee loyalty. Research from the 1950's through the 1970's focused  
36 largely on the macro-level and the aim of full employment. The 1950's and 1960's were  
37 characterized by a high need to add people to the workforce in order to meet the ever-  
38 increasing labor demands of consistent post-war growth. Employability in that period was  
39 mainly about stimulating unemployed and 'difficult to place persons' to participate in the  
40 labor market (e.g., Feintuch, 1955; Wadsworth et al., 1961). The 1970's included large layoffs  
41 and unemployment due to recessions, but perhaps the most notable change in employability  
42 research during this period was the increased interest within the domain of vocational  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 counseling, and the increased importance of understanding how unemployed people sought  
4 and found employment (Gottfredson, 1981). It also spawned interest from labor economists  
5 who focused on full employment within and between particular segments of the labor force  
6 (blue versus white collar workers, and both college-educated and not). More generally, from  
7 the 1950's through the 1970's employability research focused almost exclusively on adding  
8 people to the workforce, reflecting a macro perspective. Macro-level employability research  
9 focused on full employment, and interventions were mainly undertaken at a national level  
10 (Feintuch, 1955; Forsyth & Mininger, 1966; Orr, 1973). Interventions and activities involved  
11 government programs intended to increase the labor market qualifications of disadvantaged or  
12 unemployed workers, and little attention was given to career development. The lack of  
13 attention to career development can in part be explained by the reality at that time -- a  
14 dominance of employer-managed careers within a single organization (Magnum, 1976; Orr,  
15 1973).

16  
17 A notable milestone occurred in 1976 when Tim Hall foreshadowed a changing  
18 employment landscape, one in which employees would be confronted with far less stability  
19 and much greater complexity, and these changes would necessitate employees to be more  
20 adaptable and engage in career self-management (Hall, 1976). This change was spurred by  
21 employers who were challenged by increased uncertainty and competition due to emerging  
22 technologies and growing globalization. With these developments attention in employability  
23 research shifted to the meso or organization level in the 1980s. Employers were the focal  
24 actors and used employability as a means for matching talent supplies with changing  
25 organizational demands (Thijssen et al., 2008). Employers looked for strategies, policies, and  
26 practices to enhance their organizational flexibility and competitiveness. An employable  
27 workforce was a means to achieve this flexibility (Murphy, 1985). This manifested in the  
28 notion of the so-called flexible firm (Atkinson, 1984) in which employees were categorized as  
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3 core (permanent), periphery (temporary), and external (free agents). These categories and  
4 associated responsibilities and investments were intended to distinguish employees'  
5  
6 respective roles in increasing employers' flexibility. Employability became an HR initiative  
7  
8 intended to optimize the deployment of employees (Forrier & Sels, 2003a), and each  
9  
10 employee category was associated with different employer-employee relationships and  
11  
12 degrees of career management. Training and development opportunities were mainly focused  
13  
14 on the core workers with the others ignored or left to their own devices (Hakim, 1990). The  
15  
16 resulting inequality between the three categories created numerous conflicts between  
17  
18 employers, employees, unions, and government organizations (Platt, 1986; Pollert, 1988;  
19  
20 Procter, Rowlinson, McArdle, Hassard, & Forrester, 1994). Employers wanted to maximize  
21  
22 flexibility while limiting resource commitments to core workers, while labor unions battled  
23  
24 for collective agreements for all workers. To summarize, employability in the 1980's was  
25  
26 seen as a means of flexibility for organizations, and its purpose was efficient and effective  
27  
28 human resource utilization. Important interventions and activities pertained to the  
29  
30 management of intra-organizational staffing problems, assuming both quantitative (number of  
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32 periphery workers) and qualitative flexibility (employability or functional flexibility of core  
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34 workers) within the context of the 'flexible firm.'

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42 Beginning in the 1990's, research evolved along with the changes in the employer-  
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44 employee relationship, and employability became the individual employee's responsibility  
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46 (Thijssen et al., 2008). The traditional, linear, single organization, hierarchical career was  
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48 proclaimed dead (Arthur, 1994; Hall, 1996; Mirvis & Hall, 1994). New career paradigms,  
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50 such as the boundaryless (Arthur, 1994) and protean career (Hall, 2004), reflected the idea  
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52 that employees could no longer rely on one employer to develop a sustainable career (Iles,  
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54 1997). The increasing interest in these new career paradigms was connected to changing  
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56 notions of the psychological contract (Hiltrop, 1995) between employer and employee. The  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 so-called modern psychological contract (Altman & Post, 1996) or the new protean career  
4 contract (Hall & Moss, 1998) that emerged, enabled changes in employers' and workers'  
5 perceptions and expectations of each other, regarding responsibilities for employability  
6 management (Herriott, 1992, 1995; Rousseau, 1995). The emphasis in employability research  
7 also shifted and began to transition from the employer to the employee (De Vos, Dewettinck,  
8 & Buyens, 2009). As a result, employability research from the 1990's onwards concentrated  
9 on the employee's ability to cope with changes in both internal and external labor markets and  
10 obtain gainful if not also fulfilling employment (Thijssen et al., 2008). Scholars in the field  
11 began identifying characteristics of employees that would enable them to adapt effectively in  
12 the new and evermore unstable career landscape, one in which they themselves assumed  
13 primary responsibility for opportunities and outcomes within and between employers over  
14 time (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003). Consistent with this trend,  
15 researchers presented employability as a "personal resource" (De Cuyper, Mäkikangas,  
16 Kinnunen, Mauno, & De Witte, 2012), a set of competencies (Van der Heijde & Van der  
17 Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden, Notelaers, Peters, Stoffers, De Lange, Froehlich, & Van der  
18 Heijde, 2018), or a "personal asset" (Forrier et al., 2018) that employees should strive to  
19 acquire in order to effectively cope and grow.  
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42 This micro level focus, however, has been criticized for becoming overly agentic  
43 (Forrier et al., 2018). This critique parallels larger societal changes, such as the aging of the  
44 working population, evolution of the gig and shared economy, and the increased value given  
45 to corporate social responsibility. Scholars have responded, including presenting the notion of  
46 *sustainable* employability (e.g., Veld, Semeijn, & Van Vuuren, 2015), inspired by the  
47 sustainable career paradigm (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2015). The premise is that not all  
48 careers are equally sustainable and that many factors potentially impact one's employability  
49 throughout the course of one's working life. They advocate a multiple-stakeholder perspective  
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3 that focuses on the employer-employee relationship and its mutually beneficial consequences  
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5 (De Vos, Van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2020). Dello Russo, Parry, Bosak, Andresen,  
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7 Apospori, Bagdadli et al. (2020) put forth a similar approach, one that stresses both employee  
8  
9 career ownership and the role of the employer to provide developmental HRM practices. This  
10  
11 notwithstanding, the notion of sustainable employability still focuses on the employee's  
12  
13 ability to cope with changes, but it also re-introduces the employer as an important  
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15 stakeholder.  
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19 To conclude, from the 1990's and beyond, employability was conceptualized and  
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21 studied as a means for safeguarding and fostering the individual's job and career opportunities  
22  
23 in both internal and external labor markets (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).  
24  
25 Employability was relevant to all employees, not only the unemployed, and careers were seen  
26  
27 as largely self-managed. This employee-centric focus of employability research continued in  
28  
29 the new millennium, and it is the transition point between the historical context and our  
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31 investigation of scholarship since the year 2000. Next, we outline the major themes that  
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33 emerged from our initial review (Goal #1), along with the associated methods.  
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37 **GOAL #1: MAJOR THEMES IN EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH IN THE**  
38  
39 **2000's**  
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42 To identify major themes in employability research since the 2000's, we conducted a  
43  
44 systematic search using the following search string--"employability" or "employable" crossed  
45  
46 with "employer", "employee" or "worker"--in Web of Science, Business Source Complete, and  
47  
48 Business Source Premier databases in 2019. This kept our search open but still with a clear  
49  
50 focus on the employment relationship. The result was 938 hits, suggesting considerable interest  
51  
52 in academic literature over the past two decades. This number was subsequently pared to 641  
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54 after refining the search and manually inspecting the articles. The excluded studies fell in one  
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56 or more of three broad categories. First, the largest category contained studies on educational  
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3 practices (e.g., action learning, Groves et al., 2018; extra-curricular activities, Tran, 2017) to  
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5 enhance employability among students. The second category involved studies that were not  
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7 data-driven, such as conceptual papers (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), systematic reviews (Smith,  
8  
9 2010; Sullivan, 2019; Wo et al., 2015), and critiques or discussions (e.g., Christie, 2017; Forrier  
10  
11 et al., 2018). The third and smallest category was a miscellaneous collection of studies in which  
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13 employability was a key word, yet not defined and/or operationalized in the manuscript. To  
14  
15 clarify, in the excluded studies employability was only referred to in very general terms in the  
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17 introduction or as a possible outcome in research with a different focus (e.g., referred to in a  
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19 section on practical implications).  
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24 Our protocol for identifying major themes involved four steps. In Step 1, the 641  
25  
26 articles were divided into two sets which were reviewed by two members of the author team.  
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28 They independently identified themes using abstracts and keywords which generated 8 themes  
29  
30 each. Two different members of the author team compared and aggregated these themes (Step  
31  
32 2). Six common themes emerged, namely: (a) employability as a resource for coping with job  
33  
34 insecurity; (b) employee benefits of employability; (c) employer benefits and risks (mentioned  
35  
36 as one category by one author and two categories by the other author); (d) initiatives and  
37  
38 practices to enhance employability; (e) employability at a macro-level; and (f) individual and  
39  
40 contextual antecedents of employability. These themes were then further refined and  
41  
42 organized in those with outcomes associated with employability (themes a–c), and those  
43  
44 pertaining to antecedents of employability (themes d-f). Themes mentioned by one but not the  
45  
46 other author in Step 1 were: (f) employability scales and measures; (g) narratives and sense-  
47  
48 making; and (h) specific target groups (e.g., older workers and disabled workers). Step 3 was  
49  
50 a discussion among the entire author team to arrive at a final categorization, giving particular  
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52 attention to discrepancies. This resulted in a final categorization excluding themes (f)  
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54 employability scales and measures, (g) narratives and sense-making, and (h) specific target  
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3 groups. The main decision criterion was the number of studies in those specific categories.  
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5 Furthermore, studies of specific target groups could easily be reclassified into one of the other  
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7 themes, and studies on employability scales and measures were less relevant from a content-  
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9 perspective. Finally, in Step 4 we double-checked the initial coding of studies when distilling  
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11 the different themes.  
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14 To conclude, our comprehensive and initial review of employability research since the  
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16 year 2000 ultimately revealed six broad themes that cut across disciplines, stakeholders, and  
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18 years. These six themes were further categorized into two—those in which employability is  
19  
20 an explanatory variable, and those that focus on factors explaining employability. A high-  
21  
22 level description of each theme is provided below, along with example articles (see Table 2).  
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### 25 **Employability as an Explanatory Variable**

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28 Three themes emerged from our review focusing on employability as an explanatory  
29  
30 variable: 1) employability as a resource for coping with job insecurity, 2) employee benefits  
31  
32 of employability, and 3) employer benefits and risks associated with employability.  
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35 *Theme 1: Employability as a resource for coping with job insecurity.* Studies in this  
36  
37 theme occurred in the context of persistent changes in internal and external labor markets, and  
38  
39 the resulting turbulence and diversity in employment trends and careers, such as  
40  
41 unemployment, part-time vs. full-time employment, flexwork, self-employed, bridge  
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43 employment, among others. Common in this theme are studies related to employee job  
44  
45 (in)security (e.g., involuntary job loss). One manifestation of this is the so-called flexicurity  
46  
47 debate in a number of mostly Scandinavian studies (see e.g., Berglund, Furaker, & Vulkan,  
48  
49 2014), wherein employers' need for flexibility intersects with workers' need for security.  
50  
51 Employability in these studies, largely found in occupational health and to a lesser extent  
52  
53 labor economics literature, is presented by some as a coping resource (Chen & Lim, 2012),  
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55 and by others as a buffer against perceptions of job insecurity (Chiesa, Fazi, Guglielmi, &  
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3 Mariani, 2018; De Cuyper, Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Mauno, & De Witte, 2012; Dickerson &  
4  
5 Green, 2012) and the associated strain (Berntson, Näswall, & Sverke, 2010; Green, 2011;  
6  
7 Silla, De Cuyper, Gracia, Peiro, & De Witte, 2010). It is worth noting that strain is defined  
8  
9 quite broadly in employability research, including general and occupational health and well-  
10  
11 being, as well as employee attitudes and behavior. Examples are psychological distress  
12  
13 (Giorgi, Shoss, & Leon-Perez, 2015), burnout (Qiao, Xia, & Li, 2016), job dissatisfaction  
14  
15 (Giorgi et al., 2015), and bullying (De Cuyper, Baillien, & De Witte, 2009). Studies in this  
16  
17 theme mainly focus on employees whose jobs are inherently insecure, such as temporary  
18  
19 workers or those on fixed-term contracts (e.g., Gracia, Ramos, Peiró, Caballer, & Sora, 2011;  
20  
21 Silla, Gracia, & Peiró, 2005). This work explains how employability can provide additional  
22  
23 opportunities and benefits with the same employer, another employer, or with employment  
24  
25 agencies. Studies included in this theme all consider the possible negative consequences of  
26  
27 employment relationships becoming more unstable and volatile, and address how  
28  
29 employability can be a buffer against these negative consequences. It also is worth noting that  
30  
31 the employer's role in this theme is background or secondary, as it is generally used only to  
32  
33 describe the precariousness of employees' employment situations.

34  
35  
36  
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38  
39  
40 ***Theme 2: Employee benefits of employability.*** While employability researchers in  
41  
42 Theme 1 examined employability as a means for avoiding undesirable outcomes and  
43  
44 circumstances, studies in Theme 2 explore how employability benefits employees and  
45  
46 highlight opportunities that changing employment relationships and the increased focus on  
47  
48 individual agency may provide. Notably, employees who possess high employability are  
49  
50 better equipped to benefit from a volatile and competitive environment, one that is  
51  
52 characterized by fast-changing and with more demanding job requirements (Gunz, Evans, &  
53  
54 Jalland, 2000). Employability has been found to be an important predictor of both objective  
55  
56 career success (number of promotions, income, and periods of unemployment) and subjective  
57  
58  
59  
60

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1  
2  
3 career success (job satisfaction and life satisfaction; Hennekam, 2015; Sersic & Thomas,  
4  
5 2014; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

6  
7  
8 Another interesting stream of work in this theme pertains to non-career outcomes,  
9  
10 such as one's resiliency and the ability to deal with challenging situations (Rossier, Ginevra,  
11  
12 Bollmann, & Nota, 2017) or job search behavior (McArdle et al., 2007). Berntson et al.  
13  
14 (2008) reported that self-perceived employability predicts self-efficacy, an important  
15  
16 individual attribute for survival at the 21<sup>st</sup> century labor market. Other researchers have found  
17  
18 positive relationships between employability and work engagement and life satisfaction (De  
19  
20 Cuyper et al., 2008), vigor at work and job satisfaction (Kirves et al., 2014), and affective  
21  
22 commitment and positive emotions related to organizational change (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008).  
23  
24 More generally, these studies suggest that employability enables employees to protect, and  
25  
26 ideally, further enhance both positive career- and non-career outcomes, often beyond their  
27  
28 current employment relationship.  
29  
30  
31

32  
33 ***Theme 3: Employer benefits and risks of employability.*** Other researchers examined  
34  
35 the potential benefits and risks of employability for the employer. This research is most often  
36  
37 studied in the disciplines of careers and work and organizational psychology. An example is  
38  
39 research related to the so-called employability paradox (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011), which  
40  
41 describes the tensions (top)managers often experience when contemplating investments in  
42  
43 employee development. On the one hand, opportunities for training and other forms of  
44  
45 development are highly valued by employees and can serve as effective means for attracting  
46  
47 and retaining talent and enhancing performance (De Cuyper, Van der Heijden, & De Witte,  
48  
49 2011). A study among South-Korean employees and their supervisors, for instance, found that  
50  
51 perceived employability was positively related to in-role, adaptive, and extra-role  
52  
53 performance (Hahn & Kim, 2018). On the other hand, these same investments can increase an  
54  
55 employee's value and opportunities in the external labor market, which in turn may increase  
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1  
2  
3 voluntary turnover and erode competitiveness for the employer (Forrier, Verbruggen, & De  
4 Cuyper, 2015; Nelissen, Forrier & Verbruggen, 2017). Research on this topic suggests that the  
5 relationship between employability and turnover is complex and may depend on contextual  
6 elements—job control (De Cuyper, Mauno, Kinnunen, & Makikangas, 2011), job security  
7 (Acikgoz, Sumer, & Sumer, 2016), and promotions (Benson, 2006).  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13

14 Another interesting revelation from our initial review relates to the relationship  
15 between employability and competitive advantage. Although the idea of an employable  
16 workforce as a source of competitive advantage is prevalent in both popular and practitioner  
17 press (e.g., Davies, Diemand-Yauman, & Van Dam, 2019), it is quite striking that most  
18 studies in our review were at the employee level and did not include the employer (see  
19 Baruch, 2001, for an exception). They largely deal with the individual worker as a career  
20 agent who decides on whether or not to leave a particular employer, and as such, seems to be  
21 relatively more in control of the employer-employee relationship. In other words, the  
22 employer perspective is mostly ignored in the scholarly work that was included in our initial  
23 review. No studies were found directly addressing the implications of employability for  
24 employer competitiveness.  
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#### 40 **Factors Explaining Employability**

41  
42 Three of the themes from our initial review illuminated numerous factors proposed to  
43 contribute to, enhance, or otherwise foster employability: individual and contextual  
44 antecedents of employability, employability-enhancing initiatives and practices, and  
45 employability at the macro-level.  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51 *Theme 4: Individual and contextual antecedents of employability.* Studies in this  
52 theme consider the impact of individual and contextual (organizational and/or labor market)  
53 factors that foster individuals' employability and help explain why some employees are more  
54 employable than others (Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009; for cogent conceptual arguments see  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
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1  
2  
3 Forrier, De Cuyper, & Akkermans, 2018). This research occurs in multiple disciplines—work  
4 and organizational psychology, labor economics, HRM, , and employment relations.  
5

6  
7 Employability is studied as transitions into employment (Lu, 2011), labor (under)utilization  
8 (Baum, Bill, & Mitchell, 2008), promotion (Buckman, Johnson, & Alexander, 2018),  
9 employability perceptions of employees (Berntson, Sverke, & Marklund, 2006; Croucher,  
10 Ramakrihnan, Rizov, & Benzinger, 2018) employability perceptions of employers (Batastini,  
11 Bolanos, & Morgan, 2014; Bricout & Bentley, 2000) and hiring probability (Ahmed,  
12 Granberg, & Lang, 2017).  
13  
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20

21 Factors at the individual level explaining employability include various individual  
22 differences, such as education, current job-related skills, transferrable skills, and willingness  
23 to change jobs (Wittekind, Raeder, & Grote, 2010), movement capital (Forrier & Sels, 2003),  
24 and career competencies (Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, & Blonk, 2013; DeFillippi &  
25 Arthur, 1994). The implication is that such employees are better equipped to meet the  
26 challenges in today's volatile labor market. Other research in this theme focuses on contextual  
27 factors that explain employability, such as organizational changes (Agrawal & Tambe, 2016)  
28 or the strength of the local labor market (Bailey, Chapain, & De Ruyter, 2012; Berntson et al.,  
29 2006). Agrawal and Tambe (2016) found that many employees of companies acquired by  
30 private equity investors gained transferable, IT-complementary human capital that increased  
31 their long-term employability and wages.  
32  
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47 Many studies within this theme focus on employability of a specific group of  
48 employees: ethnic minorities (Aeberhardt, Coudin, & Rathelot, 2017; Goldman, Cooper, &  
49 Kugler, 2019), vulnerable workers (Croucher et al., 2018), older workers (Guilbert et al.,  
50 2018), or dismissed workers (Bailey et al., 2012). Most of these studies utilize employee  
51 samples. Others, however, take the employer perspective and examine employers' hiring  
52 decisions and perceptions of the employability of specific vulnerable groups, like disabled  
53  
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1  
2  
3 employees (e.g., Bricout & Bentley, 2000), migrant workers (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan,  
4  
5 2004), or former criminals (e.g., Batastini et al., 2014). Discrimination is a central topic in  
6  
7 these studies, which are frequently experimental and where one or more characteristics of  
8  
9 applicants are manipulated. Notably, we did not find any studies addressing the role of other  
10  
11 contextual (i.e., organizational and/or labor market factors) in explaining employability from  
12  
13 the employer's perspective.  
14  
15

16  
17 ***Theme 5: Initiatives and practices to enhance employability.*** Studies in this theme  
18  
19 conceptualize employability as a malleable quality which can be influenced by numerous  
20  
21 actors (e.g., manager and mentors) and initiatives (e.g., training and development) (Forrier &  
22  
23 Sels, 2003b). Theme 5 is prevalent in HRM, career studies, vocational counseling, and labor  
24  
25 economics. First, HRM practices are examined as key means by which employers foster the  
26  
27 employability of their workers, such as providing diverse work experiences and opportunities  
28  
29 for development (e.g., Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Schaufeli, & Blonk, 2015; De Vos, De  
30  
31 Hauw, & Van der Heijden, 2008), or formal and informal learning opportunities (Van der  
32  
33 Heijden, Boon, Van der Klink, & Meijs, 2009).  
34  
35  
36

37  
38 Second, several studies addressed the initiatives taken by employees to enhance their  
39  
40 employability. These have mostly been published in the career literature and fall within the  
41  
42 so-called 'new career' paradigm (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2004) in which employee  
43  
44 agency is central (Forrier, De Cuyper, & Akkermans, 2018). Examples are the influence of  
45  
46 individual career management practices (e.g., De Vos & Soens, 2008).  
47  
48

49  
50 Third, leaders influence their subordinate's employability via supportive and  
51  
52 inspirational behaviors, particularly those associated with transformational leadership (Van  
53  
54 der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014; Xie, Baranchenko, Lin, Lau, & Ma, 2019).  
55  
56 Transformational leaders influence employees' attitudes and behaviors through individualized  
57  
58 support and intellectual stimulation, which have been found to enhance their employability  
59  
60

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1  
2  
3 (Bottcher, Albrecht, Venz, & Felfe, 2018; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011). Interestingly,  
4  
5 our initial review only revealed studies on transformational leadership in relation to  
6  
7 employability, and not on any other form of leadership.  
8  
9

10 Fourth, several studies also looked at active labor market policies enhancing  
11  
12 individuals' employability. While some studies focus on supply-side interventions targeting  
13  
14 individuals (e.g., Campolieti, Gomez, & Gunderson, 2009), other studies look at demand-side  
15  
16 interventions targeting employers. The latter often critique the sole focus on the supply-side in  
17  
18 employability policies and question the agency idea emphasizing the individual's  
19  
20 responsibility for employability enhancement (Forrier et al., 2018). Gore (2005), for instance,  
21  
22 argued for a stronger involvement of employers and studied the influence of demand-led labor  
23  
24 market policies in the UK in improving employability. In a similar vein, a study in the  
25  
26 Netherlands articulated a national intervention aimed at expanding and extending employment  
27  
28 options for older workers (i.e., their employability), central to which are effective  
29  
30 communication and policies intended to mitigate obstacles (e.g., stereotypes) and to inform  
31  
32 capabilities and opportunities for these workers (Van Selm & Van der Heijden, 2013).  
33  
34  
35  
36

37 Considered together, studies in the fifth theme suggest that employability is malleable  
38  
39 and can be developed by employees and others. However, as with previous themes, from our  
40  
41 initial review, we may conclude that the employer perspective is largely absent, although  
42  
43 some studies stress the importance of demand-side interventions.  
44  
45  
46

47 ***Theme 6: Employability at a macro level.*** Economic and other public policies have  
48  
49 been investigated as means for fostering employability at the industry, regional, and country  
50  
51 level, including policies specific to pensions, unemployment, and education. They are mainly  
52  
53 situated in disciplines such as social policy and educational sciences, and they examine the  
54  
55 impact of government policies on employability outcomes such as the overall employment  
56  
57 rate or the skill level in a country. For instance, Vodopivec (2002) explicated how  
58  
59  
60

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1  
2  
3 employability policies incentivizing the flow of workers between the Estonian labor market  
4  
5 and those of its neighbors, facilitated the transition of Estonia’s economy from communism to  
6  
7 an open market. Another example is the study of McQuaid and Bergmann (2016) who  
8  
9 identified which career and development policies are needed to create employment in the  
10  
11 renewable energy sector in Scotland. Employability research at a macro level also reflects a  
12  
13 preoccupation with or focus on the employee while ignoring the added value of employability  
14  
15 for employers.  
16  
17

18  
19 Now that we explicated the major themes that emerged from our broad review, we  
20  
21 next provide a brief conclusion before moving on to Goal #2.  
22

### 23 **Conclusion from Our Review (Goal #1)**

24  
25 Table 2 summarizes our major conclusions from the review and clearly shows that  
26  
27 existing employability research predominately focuses employees, sometimes on employers,  
28  
29 but rarely on both key stakeholders. This focus or bias was evident across all themes. More  
30  
31 specifically, the vast majority of the factors influenced by employability (i.e., outcomes), as  
32  
33 well as those that foster employability (i.e., antecedents), essentially “reside” within  
34  
35 employees or employers. This is unfortunate as nearly all employability research, even that  
36  
37 related to public policy, either implies or explicitly describes employability as a function of,  
38  
39 or relationship between, these two parties. Despite acknowledging the fact that both  
40  
41 perspectives are intertwined, an overwhelming proportion of research in our initial review  
42  
43 examined the employee perspective without empirical data about or explicit consideration of  
44  
45 the employer. The limited number of studies which did focus on the employer perspective  
46  
47 most often did so without overt consideration of the employee (e.g., Bricout & Bentley,  
48  
49 2000). Most rare, in fact, was employability research explicitly examining both the employee  
50  
51 and employer perspectives simultaneously.  
52  
53  
54  
55  
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57

58 This remarkable finding is problematic and leads to Goal #2, namely a focused account  
59  
60

## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

1  
2  
3 of employability research simultaneously studying both the employer and employee. Not only  
4  
5 does this focus align with what emerged from our initial review, but it also enables us to more  
6  
7 clearly identify challenges and opportunities for future researchers, as well as a means for  
8  
9 integrating existing research. To this end, we next describe how we arrived at a narrower  
10  
11 selection of relevant literature, which is followed by an account of the critical issues revealed  
12  
13 by this subset of employability studies.  
14  
15

16  
17 **GOAL #2: EMPLOYABILITY WITHIN THE EMPLOYEE-EMPLOYER**  
18  
19 **RELATIONSHIP**  
20

21 Our second goal is to provide an account of employability research since 2000 that  
22  
23 includes both the employee and employer. This is a means for validating the findings of our  
24  
25 initial and broader review, along with identifying a number of critical issues which when  
26  
27 addressed, can guide and advance future research. We selected 69 primary studies that  
28  
29 explicitly referred to the employee-employer relationship, and while this culling may appear  
30  
31 substantial on the surface, we interpreted the employee-employer relationship quite broadly.  
32  
33 Specifically, included were studies that mentioned the employee and the employer in the  
34  
35 literature review, even when one of the perspectives was not included in the design of the  
36  
37 study, and/or not thoroughly incorporated in the theoretical framework or discussion of the  
38  
39 results. This was done with the purpose of capturing the breadth of such research.  
40  
41  
42  
43

44 To elaborate, studies from the initial, broader review were excluded for three reasons.  
45  
46 First, we excluded studies that sampled individuals who were not currently embedded in an  
47  
48 employment relationship: graduates, students, job applicants, unemployed, retired, ill, those  
49  
50 with criminal records, and immigrants entering the labor market. Second, and overlapping  
51  
52 with the first exclusion criterion, we eliminated studies on policy interventions or  
53  
54 implications, as described under Theme 6 (“employability at a macro level”). Third, we  
55  
56 deleted studies that focused exclusively on the employee or on the employer. Employee-only  
57  
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1  
2  
3 studies were by far the largest group, more than half of the studies in the broader review.  
4  
5 Many of the excluded studies concerned scholarly work under Theme 1 (“employability as a  
6  
7 resource for coping with job insecurity”), Theme 2 (“employee benefits of employability”)  
8  
9 and to a lesser extent Themes 4 (“individual and contextual factors explaining employability”)  
10  
11 and 5 (“initiatives and practices to enhance employability”). In stark contrast, employer-only  
12  
13 studies comprised roughly one tenth of those from the broader review, and most of these  
14  
15 related to labor market discrimination (see Theme 4). The fact that so many themes were  
16  
17 excluded confirms our finding from the initial review (#Goal 1) that existing employability  
18  
19 research rarely explicitly examines both the employee and employer perspectives  
20  
21 simultaneously. Also, it underscores the finding that the employee-centric and agentic  
22  
23 perspective continues to dominate employability research. This agentic storyline reads as  
24  
25 follows: Employees are responsible for their own careers, and they have to be employable to  
26  
27 cope with uncertainty (Theme 1) and develop a successful career (Theme 2). To do this,  
28  
29 employees need the appropriate forms of human capital (Theme 4) and must continually learn  
30  
31 and adapt to enhance their own employability (Theme 5).  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36

37  
38 Concerning time of publication, a steep increase was found in empirical employability  
39  
40 studies focusing on the employee-employer relationship in recent years. Approximately one  
41  
42 fifth of the scholarly work in our focused review was published between 2000 and 2009, the  
43  
44 remainder between 2010 and 2019. This trend may suggest a growing interest in  
45  
46 employability research that includes both the employer and employee perspective. Studies  
47  
48 conducted in Europe were by far the largest proportion, followed by Asia, the United States,  
49  
50 and Australia. European samples represented 13 countries across the continent.<sup>1</sup>  
51  
52  
53

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54  
55  
56 <sup>1</sup> While this could be interpreted as meaning that employability research is context-specific, a more  
57  
58 accurate interpretation perhaps is that the employee-employer relationship has always been high on the  
59  
60 European research agenda. More generally, employee activism and calls for employee-friendly work  
environments are increasing around the industrialized world, and the European context may simply

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2  
3 Our focused reviewed initially revealed three perspectives—that of the employee  
4 (Perspective 1: Employee-Centric), the employer (Perspective 2: Employer-Centric), and both  
5 (Perspective 3: Employer-Employee Reciprocity). These perspectives were determined  
6 independently by two members of the author team, and any discrepancies in coding were  
7 discussed and resolved. The discussion also resulted in the inclusion of an additional  
8 perspective--vulnerable employees (Perspective 4: Vulnerable Employees). We noticed that  
9 many articles focused on specific vulnerable groups, such as temporary or older workers. This  
10 perspective cuts across observations in the themes identified under Goal #1 and perspectives  
11 identified under Goal#2. Unique to this perspective, for instance, is a focus on a potential  
12 imbalance in the employment relationship, often favoring the employer. These four  
13 perspectives are explained next.

**Perspective 1: Employee-Centric**

14  
15 First, it is important to note that findings from our focused review confirmed and helped  
16 validate those of the initial and broader review. Specifically, even in research that includes  
17 both the employer and the employee, the employee perspective dominates. Studies also  
18 mainly come from Theme 5 of the broader review (initiatives and practices to enhance  
19 employability).

20  
21 The employee-only perspective fits within the latest phase in the history of  
22 employability research, which positions employability as a means to safeguard and foster job  
23 and career opportunities in uncertain labor markets. This also is part of the foundation of the  
24 emerging sustainable career concept noted in history section above. The starting-point in these  
25 studies is that employability is essential for employees to survive and thrive in their careers,  
26 both short- and long-term. Studies in this perspective tend to focus on initiatives and

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27  
28 foreshadow this larger trend. If true, then our study is particularly timely in guiding and increasing the  
29 impact of future employability research.  
30



## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

1  
2  
3 practices, generic or more specific, as determinants of individuals' employability. Examples  
4  
5 of generic initiatives and practices are perceived employer's support for competence  
6  
7 development (De Vos et al., 2001; Drange, Bernstrøm, & Mamelund, 2018) or perceived  
8  
9 organizational support (Guilbert et al., 2018). Examples of more specific initiatives and  
10  
11 practices are formal and informal learning (Froehlich et al., 2014; Groot & Maassen van den  
12  
13 Brink, 2000; Van der Heijden, Boon et al., 2009), training and task flexibility (Sanders & De  
14  
15 Grip, 2004), or learning value of the job (Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011).  
16  
17  
18

19  
20 When theory is used it is most often human capital theory (Becker, 1994), and the  
21  
22 underlying premise is that investment in employability enhances the employees' human  
23  
24 capital and thus their employability (De Vos et al., 2011; Drange et al., 2018; Groot &  
25  
26 Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Heijden, Boon et al., 2009). However, the use of  
27  
28 human capital theory also is employee-centric and highlights only how it helps or hurts the  
29  
30 employee and not the employer. Potential advantages for the employer, if touched upon at all,  
31  
32 are only briefly discussed in the introduction to these studies.  
33  
34

35  
36 Moreover, all studies are quantitative, mostly using only employee data. Those that  
37  
38 include employer data typically only measure supervisor's perceived employability of  
39  
40 subordinates (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011).  
41  
42 Although this has the potential to make valuable contributions, such data is mainly used to  
43  
44 address concerns regarding potential common-method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, &  
45  
46 Podsakoff, 2012). Most studies also are cross-sectional (for exceptions, see e.g., Drange et al.,  
47  
48 2018; Sanders & De Grip, 2004), which reflects a fundamental disconnect between  
49  
50 conceptualizations of employability as a quality whose benefits are realized over time and  
51  
52 study designs.  
53  
54

### 55 56 **Perspective 2: Employer-Centric**

57  
58 Only a few studies, mostly from Theme 3 (employer benefits and risks), take the perspective  
59  
60

## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

1  
2  
3 of the employer. They present employability as a human resource that should enhance  
4  
5 competition and facilitate staffing flexibility. Flexibility, as noted previously, was part of the  
6  
7 history of employability in the 1980s. This research investigates employers' motives to invest  
8  
9 in employability development (Baruch, 2011; De Vos et al., 2015; Scholarios et al., 2008),  
10  
11 including the added value of an employable workforce for the organization (Arocena, Ninez,  
12  
13 & Villanueva, 2006). The rationale is that employers make employability investment  
14  
15 decisions in terms of competitive advantage enhancing potential.  
16  
17  
18

19  
20 Theories used in this perspective are consistent with the focus on competitive  
21  
22 advantage, such as human capital theory (Scholarios et al., 2008) and the efficiency wage  
23  
24 model (Arocena et al., 2006). Strategic HRM and the resource-based view of the firm are the  
25  
26 dominant lens in the study by De Vos et al. (2015), wherein employers aim to develop  
27  
28 employee competencies that align with the organization's strategy and contribute to  
29  
30 organizational functioning. Competency management then becomes a human resource tool,  
31  
32 with employees as key assets.  
33  
34

35  
36 More generally, employer-centric studies are mainly qualitative and based on  
37  
38 employer interview data (Baruch, 2011; De Vos et al., 2015; Scholarios et al., 2011); an  
39  
40 exception is the study by Arocena et al. (2006) that used an employability index at the  
41  
42 organization level. They also examine what employers do (e.g., policies and practices), but do  
43  
44 so without considering employees' perceptions or reactions.  
45  
46

### 47 **Perspective 3: Employee-Employer Reciprocity**

48  
49 A subset of the selected studies, fewer in number than Perspective 1 but greater than  
50  
51 Perspective 2, connects the employee and the employer. Unlike Perspectives 1 and 2, this  
52  
53 third perspective acknowledges that employment relationships are reciprocal. Investments  
54  
55 from one party are reciprocated by the other party, so that ultimately both parties gain from  
56  
57 the relationship. Or conversely, a lack of investments from one party leads the other party to  
58  
59  
60

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1  
2  
3 withdraw from the relationship. Some of these studies seem to be only slightly removed from  
4  
5 the employer-centric view in the 80's and from the employee-centric view since the 90's. For  
6  
7 instance, this research suggests that employability investments made by either party are  
8  
9 mutually beneficial, and in turn an active role by both employees and employers is optimal.  
10  
11 Such studies come in two streams, though mostly from Themes 3 (employer benefits and  
12  
13 risks) and to a lesser extent from Theme 1 (employability as a resource to cope with job  
14  
15 insecurity).

16  
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18  
19       Regarding employer investments in employability, such investments can be generic  
20  
21 (e.g., perceived investments in development, Solberg & Dysvik, 2016) or specific (e.g.,  
22  
23 training, Benson, 2006; learning practices, transformational leadership, Camps & Rodrigues,  
24  
25 2011; Camps & Torres, 2011; human resource practices, Liu, 2018; on and off the job  
26  
27 training, job design, Nelissen et al., 2016). The returns on those investments for employees  
28  
29 are enhanced employability. Employees reciprocate with loyalty (e.g., commitment, reduced  
30  
31 turnover intention, internal employability orientation) and/or improved performance. Other  
32  
33 studies make such investments conditional, such that employers invest only if their employees  
34  
35 do too. For example, Veld, Semeijn and Van Vuuren (2015) show that human resource  
36  
37 development practices relate to employability when employees are willing to be mobile.  
38  
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41  
42       A second stream examines individuals' employability as a resource that employees  
43  
44 possess that potentially benefits the employer in the form of loyalty and/or performance. This  
45  
46 is however conditional in that the employer investment is a way to "return the favor". For  
47  
48 example, Hahn and Kim (2018) and De Cuyper, Van der Heijden and De Witte (2011) argue  
49  
50 that employability leads to performance when employees perceive to have a high-quality  
51  
52 employment relationship. Along similar lines, De Cuyper, Mauno et al. (2011) hypothesize  
53  
54 and demonstrate that employable workers stay with the organization when they have a  
55  
56 resourceful job. Conversely, employers may face losses when their investments in employable  
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3 workers are insufficient, as employable workers are more inclined to leave the organization  
4  
5 (Acikgoz et al., 2016; Berntson et al., 2010).  
6

7  
8         If theory is made explicit, which again is not always the case (e.g., Berntson et al.,  
9  
10 2010), social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964) dominates. Employer investments in  
11  
12 employability create a sense of indebtedness in employees, and this triggers positive attitudes  
13  
14 and behavior from them in return. The pattern in those studies is as follows: employer invests  
15  
16 in employability → employee gains employability → employee reciprocates. Employee  
17  
18 reciprocation is seen as an outcome in most studies and as a moderator in a few studies (e.g.,  
19  
20 Veld et al., 2015). Conversely, employable workers are highly valuable to the employer due  
21  
22 to their stock of knowledge and skills, performance potential, and flexibility. As such, these  
23  
24 attributes should be perceived as valuable and thus rewarded by the employer. The typical  
25  
26 pattern is employee employability → employer gain, with employer (lack of) investment as  
27  
28 moderator in this relationship.  
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31

32  
33         With a few exceptions (De Cuyper, Mauno et al., 2011; Nelissen et al., 2017;  
34  
35 Philippaers et al., 2017; Solberg & Dysvik, 2016), studies are cross-sectional and include only  
36  
37 employee data. If other-rated data is used, it assesses performance as an indicator of  
38  
39 employer gain, such as ad hoc supervisor ratings (Camps & Rodriguez, 2011) or yearly  
40  
41 performance review ratings (Hahn & Kim, 2018). No studies were found directly addressing  
42  
43 outcomes of employability on employer competitiveness.  
44  
45

#### 46 **Perspective 4: Vulnerable Employees**

47  
48 Two particular employee groups emerged in our focused review--temporary and older  
49  
50 workers. This aligns with trends in the labor market, namely changing demographics, and the  
51  
52 inherent need for increasing contractual flexibility. These groups reflect potential tension in  
53  
54 the employment relationship which is not explored in other studies. On the one hand,  
55  
56 employability is critical for both temporary and older workersd: Temporary workers have to  
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1  
2  
3 line up for jobs and older workers have to prove their value vis-à-vis younger (and less costly)  
4  
5 workers. Accordingly, the need for employability development is high for those categories of  
6  
7 workers (Forrier & Sels, 2003b; Martin et al., 2014). On the other hand, employers may not  
8  
9 feel compelled to fulfill this need given the shorter timeframe of the employment relationship  
10  
11 for both types of employees (Forrier & Sels, 2003b; Loretto & White, 2006). This scenario  
12  
13 characterizes imbalanced employment relationships in which employers have more control;  
14  
15 similar to many of the relationships in Perspective 4.  
16  
17  
18

19         Studies adopting a one-sided employee perspective show that temporary workers  
20  
21 (Forrier & Sels, 2003b; Hakansson & Isidorsson, 2015, Lindsay et al., 2013) and older  
22  
23 workers (Lindsay et al., 2013; Van der Heijden et al., 2018) receive less training. This is  
24  
25 unfortunate, as employability investments by employers, such as training (Picchio & Ours,  
26  
27 2018), constructive learning climate (Van der Heijden et al., 2018), or i-deals (Oostrom,  
28  
29 Pennings, & Bal, 2016) can enhance the employability of vulnerable groups. Those studies  
30  
31 mainly build on human capital theory (Becker, 1994), often in combination with age-related  
32  
33 theories about lifespan development (Van der Heijden et al., 2018). Studies adopting an  
34  
35 employer-only perspective investigate employer motives, for instance motives to train older  
36  
37 employees (Fleischmann et al., 2015; Loretto & White, 2006; Martin et al., 2014). Building  
38  
39 on economic thinking about wage-productivity relationships and shorter pay-off periods, they  
40  
41 hypothesize and then show that employers are reluctant to train older employees.  
42  
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47         Studies on reciprocity are comparatively few and show that employer investments are  
48  
49 often reciprocated by the employees through commitment and performance. Chambel and  
50  
51 colleagues (Chambel & Sobral, 2011; Chambel Sobral, Espada, & Currel, 2015), for  
52  
53 example, show that training strengthens commitment of temporary workers, as it is seen as a  
54  
55 signal of longer-term commitment by the employer. Other studies highlight that the employer  
56  
57 only makes such investments when a return is likely. For instance, Fleischmann and Koster  
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59  
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(2018) found that employers are more willing to provide training, including to older workers, when workers are interested in participating in further training. Willingness to participate in training is seen as commitment to the organization, and it thus is likely to be reciprocated by the employer. Such investments vary depending on age, however, as investing in older workers (55 or older) are perceived as less likely to provide a sufficient return on investment between time of training and retirement. Particularly striking was the observation that none of these studies considered what value temporary or older employees brought to the employment relationship, which further illustrates the imbalance in the employer-employee relationship.

Now that we described the primary perspectives of our focused review, we next articulate critical issues that emerged. The intent of delineating these critiques is to highlight what we see as key opportunities for future researchers to advance employability research.

### **CRITICAL ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

It is important to note that we arrived at a similar conclusion in our focused review as in the broader one. Specifically, even in research that includes both the employer and employee, the employee perspective dominates. Our focused review did however reveal additional insights that can guide and advance future research. What was most notable to us were a number of critical issues that cut across the six themes outlined earlier. These critical issues, we believe, help to explain why employability researchers in the 2000's have segregated employees and employers in their research, and addressing these same critical issues is vitally important to advancing the field. We substantiate these assertions in the following section, wherein we outline these critical issues, along with recommended solutions that surfaced from our focused review.

#### **Critical issue #1—Segregated Stakeholders**

Despite narrowing our subset of studies to those containing both employers and employees, about two in three were exclusively employee centric. This, however, should not be

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1  
2  
3 interpreted as meaning that the employer perspective is well covered in one third of the  
4  
5 studies. To the contrary, most empirical work that does exist examines supervisor ratings of  
6  
7 their subordinates' characteristics or job opportunities (Liu, 2018), or of job abilities as a  
8  
9 proxy for the same (Jansson, Bjorklund, Perseius, & Gunnarsson, 2015). Several studies by  
10  
11 Van der Heijden and her colleagues used supervisor ratings of the same competencies on  
12  
13 which employees rated themselves (e.g., Stoffers & Van der Heijden, 2018; Van der Heijden  
14  
15 & Bakker, 2011; Van der Heijden et al., 2010). More generally, employer considerations are  
16  
17 commonly limited to methodological concerns (abating concerns of bias), or to the extent to  
18  
19 which employees themselves think employers support/facilitate employees' development  
20  
21 interests. This is inconsistent with HR and other research that portrays employees as valuable  
22  
23 assets and critical means for cultivating organizational flexibility, sources of competitive  
24  
25 advantage, and thus worthy of investment (Nyberg & Wright, 2015).  
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31 When considered in the context of our historical overview, it seems that the pendulum  
32  
33 has swung too far and over-corrected from earlier times when employability research had a  
34  
35 predominately macro or national economy focus. Employability research, therefore, is in dire  
36  
37 need of an explicit integration of employee and employer perspectives that considers the  
38  
39 dynamism in this relationship. To elaborate, capturing the interdependence between employers  
40  
41 and employees (Forrier et al., 2018) requires more than simply assuming the perceived value  
42  
43 or reaction of one to the other. It is instead necessary to include both employers and employees  
44  
45 in each study, explicitly identifying what each party values in the other, their respective  
46  
47 evaluations and reactions, changes, and exchanges over time.  
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### 51 **Critical Issue #2—Blind to Inherent Dynamism**

52  
53 The vast majority of existing employability research portrays the employer-employee  
54  
55 relationship in terms of discrete, unidirectional exchanges. For example, the assumption in the  
56  
57 employee-centric perspective is that employer investments lead to employability (e.g., Drange  
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3 et al., 2018; Guilbert et al., 2018); in the employer-centric perspective that investments in the  
4  
5 “right” competencies lead to competitive advantage (De Vos et al., 2015); and in the  
6  
7 perspective on vulnerable groups that employer investments may not yield sufficient return  
8  
9 for employers (Fleischmann et al., 2015, Loretto & White, 2006; Martin et al., 2014).

10  
11 Although studies within the employer-employee reciprocity perspective explain why  
12  
13 investments can generate mutual gains, we posit that they do so from either an employer or  
14  
15 employee perspective—discrete and unidirectional. Employer investments, for instance,  
16  
17 enhance employability, which then improve employee performance (e.g., Camps &  
18  
19 Rodriguez, 2011; Liu, 2018; Nelissen et al., 2017). Employable workers provide the employer  
20  
21 with valuable skills, in return for employer investments in additional employability  
22  
23 enhancements (e.g., De Cuyper, Mauno et al., 2011; Hahn & Kim, 2018).

24  
25 We argue that this unidirectional view fragments the employment relationship into  
26  
27 simple or discrete exchanges. It therefore insufficiently captures the true nature of the  
28  
29 employment relationship, wherein employees and employers are embedded in longer-term  
30  
31 exchange relationships that unfold over time. This short-term view is reinforced by the  
32  
33 observation that the vast majority of employability studies in our focused review are cross-  
34  
35 sectional and represent one moment in time. Although two wave studies exist, they too fail to  
36  
37 capture the dynamics in the employment relationship wherein both employers and employees  
38  
39 give and take. Future research, therefore, needs to conceptualize and examine employability  
40  
41 as a dynamic, ongoing phenomenon in which employers and employees engage in multiple  
42  
43 exchanges over time.

44  
45 To elaborate, a dynamic perspective appropriately recognizes the fundamental  
46  
47 importance of time in employability research and can be understood along three core  
48  
49 properties--feedback loops, inertia, and asymmetric influence (see Cronin & Vancouver, 2018  
50  
51 for a discussion of properties of dynamic processes). *Feedback loops* allow exchanges to be  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 connected in reinforcing cycles or balancing cycles. Reinforcing cycles constitute causal  
4 chains that go in one direction (positive or negative). A positive reinforcing cycle, for  
5 instance, occurs when employer investments make employees feel more employable, which  
6 they then reciprocate with improved performance and commitment, thus contributing to the  
7 organization's goals. This then instigates new investments from the employer. A negative  
8 reinforcing cycle is illustrated when vulnerable employees (e.g., temporary or older workers)  
9 receive less employability-enhancing investments from their employers, due to a perceived  
10 lack of return on investment. These workers' employability is further eroded, making current  
11 and future employers even less inclined to invest in them in the future. This brief primer  
12 reveals considerable opportunity for future researchers to explore the role of reinforcing  
13 cycles, such as their role in the obsolescence of employee skills and diminishing employer  
14 investments (Van Loo, De Grip, & De Steur, 2001), as well as the bifurcation of labor  
15 markets into haves and have nots (Forrier et al., 2018).

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33 Balancing cycles, in contrast, are self-correcting and may reach an equilibrium. For  
34 example, the employability paradox explained earlier may initiate a balancing cycle (Van der  
35 Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Employable employees may receive more employability-  
36 enhancing investments from their employers as a means to attract and retain them. This may  
37 then increase these employees' employability, and thus also their employment opportunities  
38 with other employers. The fear of potentially losing such employees may motivate employers  
39 to limit (further) employability enhancing investments, and in turn this may abate employees'  
40 employability. When played out over time the presumption is that a balance is reached  
41 between employer investments and employee contributions, thus embedding the  
42 employability paradox in the employer-employee relationship. This balancing cycle may  
43 explain why empirical results on the employability paradox are not conclusive and  
44 simultaneously point to both a retention-stimulating path and a turnover-stimulating path  
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3 (Nelissen et al., 2017). Appropriately conceptualizing, designing, and testing these assertions  
4  
5 can illuminate theory, research, and practice related to employability and strategic human  
6  
7 resource management.  
8

9  
10 A dynamic view of employability is illuminated further using the concepts of *inertia*  
11  
12 and *asymmetric influence*. Inertia involves the idea that some phenomena are difficult to  
13  
14 change. Kirves et al. (2014) unknowingly illustrated inertia in their longitudinal person-  
15  
16 centered study that found employability to be stable over time, even when examined in  
17  
18 contexts wrought with change. We further assert that inertia can be applied to employability  
19  
20 itself or to constructs influencing employability (cf. Cronin & Vancouver, 2018). Our  
21  
22 rationale is that if employability has inertia, then this questions the assumptions and findings  
23  
24 of studies that suggest that employability is malleable or easily changed. For instance, studies  
25  
26 often assume that employer investments lead to “quick wins” in employee employability,  
27  
28 which in turn leads to quick performance gains. Such considerations need to be considered  
29  
30 and veracity tested, as confirming or refuting these assumptions can have fundamental  
31  
32 implications for a large section of employability research. Inertia can also be related to other  
33  
34 constructs that influence employability, such as employee loyalty, organizational career  
35  
36 opportunities, or external labor market conditions. The notion of inertia helps to understand  
37  
38 why careers are more often characterized by stability rather than change, despite the desire to  
39  
40 make a career change (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020).  
41  
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46  
47 Asymmetric influence comprises the idea that factors that increase employability are  
48  
49 not necessarily the same factors that decrease employability. To illustrate, employability  
50  
51 studies often see employer investments as a way to increase employability, such as studies on  
52  
53 vulnerable workers which assume that the lack of such investments depletes employability.  
54  
55 However, such suppositions need empirical testing, as it is entirely possible that a lack of  
56  
57 investment has no effect on the employability levels of these employees. To further make the  
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3 point, being fired can send a negative signal to future employers and thus harm an employee's  
4 employability, whereas never having been fired does not increase one's employability.  
5

6  
7 Analogously, being in temporary employment is often seen as a negative signal. However, for  
8 a vulnerable worker, being in permanent employment is not necessarily a positive signal (e.g.,  
9  
10 De Cuyper, De Witte, & Van Emmerik, 2011).  
11  
12

13  
14 When considering inertia and asymmetric influence simultaneously, questions arise  
15 not only as to what increases or depletes employability, but also whether both processes  
16 follow the same pace. For instance, employability-enhancing activities may only increase  
17 employability in the long run, while being fired is a career shock and can instantly decrease  
18 employability. Obviously, the notions of feedback loops, inertia and asymmetric influence  
19 depict a much more complex picture and require more advanced research, such as those with  
20 multiple waves of data, true longitudinal designs, and cross-lags. We advocate for such efforts  
21 to refine and advance employability theory, research, and practice.  
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### 32 **Critical issue # 3—Inadequate Theorizing**

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34 Common to both our broad and focused reviews is the insufficient use of theory. We either  
35 found theory to be absent altogether, or to be interpreted and applied narrowly. Human capital  
36 theory, for instance, was the most frequently used in employee-centric research, and despite  
37 explicitly accounting for exchanges between the two stakeholders, it was most often applied  
38 only from one direction (the employee or the employer) in any particular study. As an  
39 example, researchers have examined how employer investments in human capital lead to  
40 employee benefits, but not how these same investments benefit the employer (De Vos et al.,  
41 2011; Drange et al., 2018; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Heijden et al.,  
42 2009). Conversely, studies using the resource-based view of the firm (Boxall, 1999)  
43 illuminate the employer's perspective, and accordingly argue that competency management is  
44 a strategic HRM tool for competitive advantage (e.g., De Vos et al., 2015). These studies,  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 however, are yet to test the implicit assumption that what benefits the organization will also  
4  
5 benefit the employee (Guest, 2017).  
6

7  
8 Social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964) is commonly used in research either testing  
9  
10 or implying reciprocity between employers and employees. Most studies adopting this  
11  
12 perspective, however, highlight how employer investments in employability lead to mutual  
13  
14 gains, that is enhanced employability for employees and loyalty and performance for  
15  
16 employers (Camps & Torres, 2011; Philippaers et al., 2017). Similar mechanisms were  
17  
18 discussed in empirical work on temporary workers (Chambel et al., 2015; Chambel & Sobral,  
19  
20 2011). Other studies presented employability as an employee asset for performance that  
21  
22 instigate investments from the organization (De Cuyper, Mauno et al., 2011; Hahn & Kim,  
23  
24 2018).  
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27

28  
29 Studies using SET are encouraging in the sense that they highlight both the employee  
30  
31 and employer perspectives, as well as the input and output side of the exchange relationship.  
32  
33 However, the employer-employee relationship is not examined as a series of interdependent  
34  
35 exchanges over time, but instead as isolated exchanges in which the employee is either  
36  
37 independent from the employer or entirely dependent on the employer. To illustrate, scholarly  
38  
39 work concludes that employable workers are “tempted” to excellent performance only when  
40  
41 employers invest in the relationship, but they easily withdraw when such investments are  
42  
43 insufficient (De Cuyper, Van der Heijden et al., 2011; De Cuyper, Mauno et al., 2011). Such a  
44  
45 conclusion assumes that employees are entirely in control and can act independently of  
46  
47 employer actions (investments). Conversely, studies involving temporary and older workers  
48  
49 suggest that those workers as entirely dependent on the employer, such that the employer can  
50  
51 refrain from making investments seemingly without any costs. The assumption of  
52  
53 independence is surprising, given that interdependence is at the heart of social exchange  
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58 (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).  
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3 To conclude, we see three critical issues which if addressed appropriately would help  
4 advance employability research. The first critical issue concerns the need to include both the  
5 employee and employer view. While the employee view is well-covered, the employer view  
6 has attracted comparatively little attention, and their simultaneous consideration has received  
7 virtually no attention. Concurrent consideration is needed to understand how each party brings  
8 their own interests to the employment relationship and how those interests can be aligned. A  
9 second critical issue focuses on the need to understand employability as an integral part of an  
10 evolving employment relationship, one that is a dynamic process and explicitly considers  
11 time--past, present, and future. A third critical issue pertains to the lack of theoretical rigor  
12 and coherence. The theories used in existing research address the employment relationship but  
13 typically from the view of only one party. This work therefore neglects the interdependency  
14 inherent in many employment relationships today.

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Thankfully, part of the solution to these issues emerged from our review. We contend that by more fully developing and applying SET to employability research scholars will not only mitigate the aforementioned issues, but they will also be able to integrate this work within and between disciplines (Goal #3). To this end, in the final section of our paper, we explicate means for integrating existing employability research. We first describe how SET is an underlying integrating mechanism for employability research, and then show how this can be used in a framework grounded in strategic HRM that explicitly considers both employer and employee perspectives.

**GOAL #3: INTEGRATING AND ADVANCING EMPLOYABILITY****RESEARCH**

Management research generally substantiates the important influence that the context has on the individual, as well as the effect of the individual on the context (e.g., Schneider, 1987). This means that focusing on either the employer or the employee while ignoring the

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2  
3 other is problematic and presents a true opportunity for future employability researchers. The  
4 interdependent relationship and critical roles of these respective stakeholders strongly suggest  
5 an exchange relationship. Accordingly, we contend that SET is an effective and appropriate  
6 means for integrating diverse streams of employability research, as well as serving as a call to  
7 future researchers to explicitly consider both employer and employee perspectives in their  
8 studies. The following explication is not presented as a (new) theory of employability, but it is  
9 instead intended to make explicit what has heretofore largely only been implied or  
10 insufficiently developed and applied in existing research. We begin by outlining three core  
11 elements of SET and then describe how these elements are foundational to employability  
12 within the employee-employer relationship. Next, we identify the gaps and explicate the  
13 relevance of each element for current employability research.  
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**Social Exchange Theory as a Foundation for Employability**

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30 Employees and employers engage in a series of interdependent interactions in which  
31 each participant provides something the other values (Mitchell, Cropanzano, & Quisenberry,  
32 2012), and the same is true in employability research. Three elements can be used to  
33 characterize these exchanges: 1) resources exchanged (inducements and contributions), 2)  
34 backward- and forward-looking exchanges, and 3) the processes of exchange. Employers and  
35 employees exchange resources, such that employer inducements are provided for employee  
36 contributions, and employee contributions, in turn, motivate additional employer inducements  
37 (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Employers offer an array of employability-enhancing  
38 investments, such as job design (learning value of the job, job quality), aspects tied to the  
39 supervisor (e.g., LMX, attitude towards older workers, leadership, support for training and  
40 development, and general support), overall climate (general, age-supportive, employability  
41 culture, learning climate), as well as career management. Employees, in turn, make various  
42 contributions in the form of positive attitudes, such as job satisfaction (De Cuyper et al.,  
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3 2009), affective organizational commitment (Chambel et al., 2015; De Cuyper et al., 2009;  
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5 Espada & Chambel, 2013; Philippaers et al., 2017), workgroup commitment (Philippaers et al.,  
6  
7 2017), as well as desirable employee behaviors—in-role performance (Camps & Torres,  
8  
9 2011; Hahn & Kim, 2018;), extra-role efforts (Hahn & Kim, 2018), and reduced  
10  
11 counterproductive work behaviors (Philippaers et al., 2017).  
12  
13

14         The various inducements and contributions are motivated by conceived as backward-  
15  
16 and/or forward-looking exchanges (Cook, Cheshire, Rice, & Nakagawa, 2013). Backward-  
17  
18 looking exchanges are based on reinforcement principles such that one's reactions are based  
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20 something received in the past, and forward-looking exchanges are based on the anticipation  
21  
22 of future rewards. The employer-centric perspective, building on strategic HRM, adopts  
23  
24 utilitarian economic thinking and comprises forward-looking exchanges (i.e., the expectation  
25  
26 of productive employees). The central strategic question for employers is if and which  
27  
28 employability-related investments in employees will lead to future organizational benefits  
29  
30 (e.g., De Vos & Dries, 2013; Lepak & Snell, 1999). This perspective does not sufficiently  
31  
32 consider implications for the employee, such as if the employee actually values or benefit  
33  
34 from the employer investments. In contrast, the reciprocity perspective in employability  
35  
36 research is mostly about backward-looking exchanges. Employees, for instance, show  
37  
38 commitment because of past employer investments in employability (e.g., Camps & Torres,  
39  
40 2011; Chambel et al., 2015; Philippaers et al., 2017) or employers invest because of past  
41  
42 employee contributions (Fleishmann & Koster, 2018).  
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49         The lack of attention for forward-looking exchanges is surprising since employability  
50  
51 (and human capital) concerns an individual's future potential (Forrier et al., 2018; Philippaers  
52  
53 et al., 2017). Moreover, employee contributions to the relationship are not only driven by past  
54  
55 employability enhancements but also by expected future investments and career opportunities.  
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57 To clarify, we are not recommending that future employability researchers use forward-looking  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 exchanges to replace backward-looking exchanges, but we instead advocate consideration of  
4 both types of social exchanges, simultaneously. Furthermore, considering the dynamic  
5 approach explicated above, the mechanisms explaining backward- versus forward-looking  
6 employability exchanges may differ (Cronin & Vancouver, 2018).  
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12 Exchange processes are a function of the degree of reciprocity between employer and  
13 employee. Both parties are interdependent, yet this interdependence does not necessarily  
14 mean balance, as one party may be more dependent on the relationship than the other and  
15 consequently invests disproportionately (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). Employability  
16 researchers have pursued two paths. One portrays employees as seemingly independent  
17 (Forrier et al., 2018) and align with new career models in which employees are no longer tied  
18 to employers [e.g., the boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994) and the protean career (Hall, 2004)].  
19 They withdraw from the employment relationship when employer investments in their  
20 employability are deemed unsatisfactory. Investigations of the relationship between  
21 employability and turnover intentions and behaviors are illustrations of this idea (e.g.,  
22 Berntson, 2010, De Cuyper, Mauno et al., 2011; Nauta et al., 2009; Nelissen et al., 2017). The  
23 other research path highlights how vulnerable workers are dependent on their employers to  
24 support their employability (e.g., Forrier & Sels, 2003b; Hakansson & Isidorsson, 2015,  
25 Lindsay et al., 2013; Van der Heijden et al., 2018). The distressing plight of these employees  
26 is intensified when their current employer does not invest in their employability (Forrier et al.,  
27 2018).  
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### 50 **Social Exchange Theory as a Means for Integrating and Advancing Employability**

#### 51 **Research**

52  
53 The core elements of SET have been insufficiently considered in existing employability  
54 research. We thus posit that a more complete application could enhance theoretical rigor  
55 pertaining to employability research, as well as facilitate efforts to overcome the critical  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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2  
3 issues outlined under Goal #2. Moreover, a social exchange approach may also assists in  
4  
5 integrating human capital and strategic HR approaches in employability research, which we  
6  
7 contend is both valuable and necessary to advance employability research in the future. In the  
8  
9 following paragraphs, we elaborate how researchers might apply the core elements of SET to  
10  
11 advance employability research (see also Figure 1).  
12  
13

14  
15 First, the resources of exchange have been examined by employability researchers, yet  
16  
17 the employer's view is largely absent. For example, one stream of studies starts from the idea  
18  
19 that the employee is grateful for employability investments made by the employer and  
20  
21 reciprocates with positive attitudes and behaviors. What remains unknown tough is why,  
22  
23 under which conditions, and towards whom the employer is more or less inclined to provide  
24  
25 inducements, and for which categories of employees or under which conditions these  
26  
27 inducements might result in desired employee contributions. A second stream of research sees  
28  
29 employability as a personal resource that employees bring to the employment relationship and  
30  
31 for which they expect a return. Employability is framed in terms of an individual's  
32  
33 competencies (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2018),  
34  
35 individual differences (Fugate et al., 2004), or perceptions (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011;  
36  
37 Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). However, little is known about whether and which competencies,  
38  
39 individual differences, or perceptions are valued by current or prospective employers and how  
40  
41 this is affected by (changes in) the broader socio-economic and labor market context. This is  
42  
43 fundamentally problematic in our view, and considerations of both parties to the exchange  
44  
45 should be acknowledged and explored in future research.  
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50  
51 Second, social exchange relationships develop over time through the mechanisms of  
52  
53 both backward- and forward-looking exchanges. The vast majority of existing studies  
54  
55 investigate employees looking back on past inducements, and how these relate to their  
56  
57 attitudes and behavior. However, employee contributions are also based on expected future  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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2  
3 investments and career opportunities. It certainly is reasonable to expect that some employees  
4  
5 are committed to their employers due to past investments and some based on anticipated  
6  
7 future investments (Cook et al., 2013). Temporary workers, for instance, may be committed  
8  
9 based on the anticipation of landing a permanent job (e.g., Chambel et al., 2015). Employer-  
10  
11 centric studies imply forward-looking exchanges as employers see qualified employee's  
12  
13 future potential, as noted in the strategic HRM literature (e.g., De Vos & Dries, 2013). During  
14  
15 tight labor markets, however, employers benefit not only from investing in those with future  
16  
17 potential, but also from rewarding past behavior and creating a sense of loyalty. In short, both  
18  
19 backward- and forward-looking exchanges, from both parties, more accurately reflect reality.  
20  
21 Considering these facts is a means for valuable advances in future research.  
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26 Third, the degree of employee and employer reciprocity over time shapes the quality  
27  
28 of the employment relationship. High-quality social exchange relationships can trigger  
29  
30 positive reinforcing cycles or balancing cycles, and conversely, low-quality social exchange  
31  
32 relationships may trigger negative reinforcing cycles. Positive reinforcing cycles are more  
33  
34 likely in interdependent social exchange relationships. For example, an employer may  
35  
36 repeatedly invest in high potentials with the expectation or hope that this will bind them to the  
37  
38 organization and thus reap a return. Yet, employer investments may ultimately attenuate if  
39  
40 they fear that continued investment increases the perceived risk of losing these high potentials  
41  
42 to other employers. This means that positive reinforcing cycles may be limited, causing  
43  
44 employers to carefully consider their employability investments. In such instances, positive  
45  
46 reinforcing cycles may turn into balancing cycles leading to an equilibrium in inducements  
47  
48 and contributions. Negative reinforcing cycles, in contrast, are more likely in imbalanced  
49  
50 exchanges in which one party to the employment relationship is more dependent on the other  
51  
52 party, than vice versa. Several employability scholars have expressed concerns related to  
53  
54 underinvestment in employability enhancement for particular groups (for a general discussion,  
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1  
2  
3 see Forrier et al., 2018), such as temporary (e.g., Forrier & Sels, 2003b) and older workers  
4  
5 (e.g., Van der Heijden et al., 2018).  
6

7  
8 To summarize, we see three ways to advance employability research using social  
9  
10 exchange. First, the use of SET compels researchers to directly consider both the employee  
11  
12 and the employer and thus overcome the absence of the employer found in existing research  
13  
14 (Critical issue #1). If future researchers consider the actual exchanges between employers and  
15  
16 employees, then doing so will likely motivate them to explicitly identify particular  
17  
18 characteristics (e.g., competencies, dispositions, and perceptions), policies, and practices  
19  
20 valued by each party. Second, SET highlights that exchanges between employees and  
21  
22 employers occur over time, and that the associated exchanges can be both backward- and  
23  
24 forward-looking. This dynamic view contrasts with the relatively static, unidirectional  
25  
26 perspective that dominates existing research (Critical issue #2). Third, the use of SET can add  
27  
28 more theoretical rigor in employability research (Critical issue #3). In the next section, we  
29  
30 build on the above recommendations by presenting and unpacking the Strategic Employability  
31  
32 Architecture (SEA), a framework intended to extend the utility of SET and assist in bridging  
33  
34 the employer-employee divide in employability research.  
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### 39 40 **INTEGRATING EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES USING** 41 42 **THE STRATEGIC EMPLOYABILITY ARCHITECTURE (SEA)** 43

44  
45 The Strategic Employability Architecture (SEA) framework (Figure 2) is an adaptation  
46  
47 of the human resource architecture developed by Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002), and it furthers  
48  
49 our understanding of the interdependency between employers and employees and the nature  
50  
51 of the exchanges between them. Lepak and Snell argued that an employee's uniqueness--the  
52  
53 extent to which others in the available labor market possess similar knowledge, skills,  
54  
55 abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs)--and contribution to competitiveness (potential to  
56  
57 impact critical organizational objectives) are the basic means for valuing and differentiating  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

1  
2  
3 human capital and guiding strategic investments in human resources (see also Miles & Snow,  
4 1984). These, in turn, are key determinants of the nature of the relationship between  
5  
6 employers and their employees (see also Kang, Morris, & Snell, 2007). Crossing these two  
7  
8 dimensions results in a 2 X 2 and four types of employer-employee relationships—  
9  
10 commitment (high uniqueness and high competitiveness contribution), acquisition (low  
11  
12 uniqueness and high competitiveness contribution), contract (low uniqueness and low  
13  
14 competitiveness contribution), and alliance (high uniqueness and low competitiveness  
15  
16 contribution). Lepak and Snell (2002) used these modes as the basis for describing the nature  
17  
18 of the employer-employee relationship at the organizational level, as well as various types of  
19  
20 human resource practice configurations appropriate for each employment mode. We modified  
21  
22 and applied Lepak and Snell's (2002) work to create the SEA framework, and we explain in  
23  
24 the following section how it uses SET to help integrate and inform employability research  
25  
26 from both the employer and employee perspectives.  
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### 32 **The Strategic Employability Architecture**

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35 Paralleling that of Lepak and Snell, our underlying premise is that individuals'  
36  
37 employability attributes are valuable to the extent they are unique (other available employees  
38  
39 do not possess the same set of attributes) and contribute to an organization's competitiveness.  
40  
41 However, we extend Lepak and Snell's employer-centric view, and use it also to describe the  
42  
43 employees' perspective, thereby providing a means for understanding and studying  
44  
45 employability in the context of the employer-employee relationship as a dynamic series of  
46  
47 exchanges over time, each party anticipating, reacting to and shaping the other's actions (i.e.,  
48  
49 using inducements and contributions through backward- and forward-looking exchange).  
50  
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52

53  
54 The SEA is intended to guide future employability research in three principle ways.  
55  
56 First, the SEA helps contextualize employability research within the dynamic and  
57  
58 interdependent employee-employer relationship. We contend that to advance the field, future  
59  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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2  
3 employability researchers need to purposefully examine employability within the context of  
4  
5 employer-employee relationships in which it resides. Employability is valuable to neither  
6  
7 party independent of the other. Second, the SEA provides a theoretically grounded means for  
8  
9 explicitly and simultaneously considering both employer and employee interests and  
10  
11 investments in employability. As we have argued extensively already, joint consideration of  
12  
13 these stakeholders is essential to realize the potential of employability for research, theory,  
14  
15 and practice. Third, the SEA outlines the nature and of and bases for employer-employee  
16  
17 exchanges. We argued above that the content and perceived value of exchanges between  
18  
19 employees and employers have heretofore been rather crude (e.g., training or education  
20  
21 benefits) or simply implied. The SEA will help future researchers add fidelity to these  
22  
23 exchanges, enabling them to more precisely hypothesize and test the substance and value of  
24  
25 employability to both employers and employees. Each of the four employability modes and  
26  
27 associated characteristics is discussed next and illustrated in Figure 2.  
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33       **Commitment employability mode.** A *commitment* employability mode (Quadrant 1,  
34  
35 Figure 2) is characterized by employees with highly unique attributes that also contribute to  
36  
37 the organization's competitiveness. From an employer's view, those profiles are of strategic  
38  
39 value and warrant significant and direct employer inducements and further development.  
40  
41 Inducements commonly take the form of investments described as high performance work  
42  
43 systems (HPWS) and are intended to increase productivity, effectiveness towards  
44  
45 organizational goals, while also enhancing employee commitment and retention (Beltran-  
46  
47 Martin, Roca-Puig, Escrig-Tena, & Bou-Llugar, 2008). For their part, employees expect or  
48  
49 anticipate inducements based on KSAOs they bring to the employment relationship. These  
50  
51 same employees are likely to have other attractive and attainable opportunities in the external  
52  
53 labor market, and also are likely to seek employers who will meet their expectations by  
54  
55 utilizing their skills and experience and committing to further development.  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 This mode leads to a process in which employers' inducements serve to attract  
4 employees with strategically relevant human capital, while employees gain direct and  
5 meaningful employability investments. Moreover, employees may look back and increase  
6 contributions (e.g., commitment) in an attempt to reinforce employer inducements and  
7 facilitate positive reinforcing cycles. It is also possible, or even reasonable, that employers  
8 limit their investments once employees are on board to minimize losses associated with  
9 employee turnover, so that ultimately balance is achieved (see our earlier discussion on the  
10 employability paradox).

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21 **Acquisition employability mode.** An acquisition employability mode (Quadrant 2, Figure 2)  
22 represents an employment relationship in which employees' KSAOs are highly impactful on  
23 the organization's competitiveness, yet readily available in the external labor market. An  
24 employer may be inclined to hire employees who already possess these skills, rather than to  
25 invest resources to further develop the employability of these individuals. By doing so, an  
26 organization can reap the employability benefits immediately (upon hire) without incurring  
27 unnecessary development and other costs. Employees may make considerable employability  
28 investments to ensure that their KSAOs remain valuable for a specific employer, particularly  
29 in view of the many likely employee competitors in the external labor market. The result is  
30 that employees contribute relatively more to the employment relationship than the employer.  
31 Taking a process view, the employer may cater to the employee's desire of need for  
32 employability enhancement, thereby reciprocating an employee's inducements while at the  
33 same time maximizing their own gains (i.e., keeping the employee motivated without  
34 incurring excessive risk).

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53 **Contract employability mode.** Quadrant 3 describes the *contract* employability mode,  
54 wherein an individual's employability attributes are neither unique in the labor market nor  
55 impactful to an organization's competitiveness. These scenarios suggest that employers would  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 provide few inducements (i.e., make little investment in employability-enhancing practices for  
4 these employees), and the relationship would be largely transactional if not literally  
5 contractual--precise specification of tasks and limited/flexible relationship duration.  
6  
7

8 Employees, therefore, should expect development to be self-initiated and likely external to the  
9 organization. Paradoxically, employees in this predicament often find themselves dependent  
10 on the employer for employment, and over time, this may create negative self-reinforcing  
11 cycles wherein less value begets less investment and so on.  
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18 **Alliance employability mode.** An alliance employability mode is exemplified by employees  
19 whose attributes may be quite unique in the available talent pool, while making relatively  
20 little contribution to their organization's competitiveness (Quadrant 4, Figure 2). At first  
21 glance, one might conclude that employees with such attributes will garner employer  
22 inducements, but like the attributes themselves, such investments most often do not  
23 sufficiently contribute to organizational competitiveness and thus are limited (cf. Lepak &  
24 Snell, 1999). This may lead organizations to invest in employability enhancements and  
25 provide some retention-oriented rewards to benefit from these employees' unique skills, but  
26 these will be limited to opportunities with specific benefits to the organization (e.g., a new  
27 product or service, new software, a special project). Otherwise stated, these investments are  
28 not optimal per se in the light of actually contributing to the employability enhancement of the  
29 employee over time, herewith possibly endangering their career sustainability. This  
30 notwithstanding, the alliance mode often generates relational employer-employee  
31 arrangements that are built upon principles of reciprocity and forward- and backward looking  
32 exchanges, yet only for a small sample of employees with unique employability attributes. To  
33 clarify, even though a particular employer may not view the specific employee's skills as  
34 central to its competitiveness, the fact remains that the skills are relatively rare in the market,  
35 and in case the organizational benefit is clear, although limited, the employer will support  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 their development by selective investments. This should afford the employee external  
4 opportunities as well, and if s/he is unsatisfied and desires an employer who is more  
5 committed to their development, then they are likely to leave.  
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10 **ENSURING THE FUTURE DOES NOT REPEAT THE PAST: AN AGENDA FOR**  
11  
12 **FUTURE RESEARCH**  
13

14 Our broad (Goal #1) and focused (Goal #2) reviews of the employability literature  
15 clearly revealed multiple insights, notably a lack of integration of employee and employer  
16 perspectives (Critical Issue #1: Segregated Stakeholders), insufficient consideration of  
17 dynamism and time in the employer-employee relationship (Critical Issue #2: Blind to  
18 Inherent Dynamism), and deficient theoretical development and application (Critical Issue #3:  
19 Inadequate Theorizing). We aimed to guide and advance employability research by  
20 addressing these issues, and in the process we articulated how SET is foundational to our  
21 recommendations (Goal #3). When combined with the SEA, our paper provides conceptually  
22 sound guidance for future researchers to advance employability research, while at the same  
23 time discouraging the continuation of clearly established shortcomings. Building on this, we  
24 present a future research agenda based on two central themes—interdependence and  
25 dynamism.  
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42 **One Without the Other? Employer-Employee Interdependence**  
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44 The case we have made throughout this paper is that the employer-employee relationship is a  
45 matter of exchanges--employer inducements for employee contributions and vice versa. While  
46 these exchanges are mutual, they may not always be equal. Each party provides and expects  
47 something from the other, and the perceived value of what one party offers determines the  
48 level of investment or contribution by the other party. The SEA framework helps to illuminate  
49 the characteristics of these exchanges. Employers seek to enhance organizational  
50 competitiveness by inducing or otherwise developing employees with strategically relevant  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 employability attributes, and the nature and quantity of employer inducements is partly a  
4  
5 function of the value and availability of relevant employability attributes in the labor market.  
6  
7 For their part, employees look for ways to enhance their employability and fulfill their own  
8  
9 career aspirations. The uniqueness and contribution to competitiveness of current and  
10  
11 prospective employers further influences the extent to which employees are dependent on  
12  
13 inducements of their employer to achieve their job and career goals. The degree of  
14  
15 sustainability in the resulting employer-employee relationship is determined by the dynamic  
16  
17 interplay of these factors. Using this as background, we appeal to future researchers to  
18  
19 explicitly acknowledge and examine the interdependencies between both parties in terms of  
20  
21 employability development. To this end, we offer two pointed suggestions that emerged from  
22  
23 our review.  
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28  
29 First, we implore researchers to verify or refute the heretofore implied or assumed link  
30  
31 between employability and organizational competitiveness. This is similar in many ways to  
32  
33 the challenges human resources scholars have confronted in substantiating the claim talent is a  
34  
35 strategic imperative. The SEA framework provides guidance on this very point by showing  
36  
37 when (i.e., under which conditions) employability investments from the employer afford  
38  
39 competitive advantage. For example, within a commitment employability mode (high  
40  
41 uniqueness and high competitiveness contribution), employers may make investments  
42  
43 intended to retain employees with unique and strategically relevant profiles to the  
44  
45 organization. The SEA framework also helps assuage concerns addressed in the employability  
46  
47 paradox literature that investing in employability precipitates turnovers and diminishes  
48  
49 organizational competitiveness. Within an acquisition employability mode (low uniqueness  
50  
51 and high competitiveness contribution), such employee attributes are abundant in the labor  
52  
53 market, attenuating employer's concerns of involuntary turnover, but perhaps instead  
54  
55 motivating these same employees' to contribute with appropriate inducements. Yet,  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 employers may not be concerned about employee turnover as employee attributes are  
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5 abundant in the labor market (i.e., can easily be replaced). Overall, we believe a valuable  
6  
7 track for future employability research is to explore which employability attributes valuable  
8  
9 (unique and contribute to competitiveness) within a particular job and organization. Such  
10  
11 details and understanding would not only test the veracity of our assertions and  
12  
13 recommendations, but also prove extremely valuable to realizing the value of employability  
14  
15 for both employee- and employer- oriented research.  
16  
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18  
19         Second, the SEA has particular value for (future) researchers interested in particular  
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21 employee groups. The first group pertains to employees characterized as having careers  
22  
23 largely independent of their employers, who also are responsible for own development and  
24  
25 career sustainability. The second group focuses on vulnerable employees who are highly  
26  
27 dependent on their employers for their future employability. These groups correspond to the  
28  
29 alliance and the contract employability modes, respectively, within the SEA. The SEA  
30  
31 framework identifies two additional employee groups that have been unnoticed in recent  
32  
33 employability research and may have different employability stakes. Notably, large numbers  
34  
35 of employees still find themselves in traditional careers, characterized by a commitment  
36  
37 employability mode, and rely on their employer for development and opportunities. These  
38  
39 employees are not free agents which have attracted considerable academic and popular press  
40  
41 over the past two or three decades, but they instead value employers who are committed to  
42  
43 their employability development and have the expectation that the employer will continue to  
44  
45 do so over time.  
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50  
51         The acquisition employability mode is another that has received little attention by  
52  
53 researchers. Here, employees have valuable employability attributes and might thus easily  
54  
55 move to another employer, but because their KSAO's are highly important for organizational  
56  
57 competitiveness, those employees might want to stay because of expected future  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 employability investments. More generally, the SEA framework can enhance understanding  
4  
5 of what is at stake for employees, and how those stakes influence their contributions.  
6

7  
8 Researchers who pursue such contributions are also encouraged to be mindful of and consider  
9  
10 internal *and* external labor markets, as both are important to evaluate availability of particular  
11  
12 employability attributes.  
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14  
15 Finally, the main asset of the SEA framework is the simultaneous consideration of  
16  
17 employee and employer interests, the associated inducements and contributions for each  
18  
19 party, and potential (im)balance between them. Our review revealed great disparities in not  
20  
21 just the (perceived) employability of workers, but also in the investments made in their  
22  
23 employability by their employers. Such differences were epitomized in the research related to  
24  
25 vulnerable workers. Given these findings, future research based on the SEA framework could  
26  
27 identify specific, that is to say, the most relevant inducements and contributions for a  
28  
29 particular situation. A valuable contribution could also be to get more insight regarding the  
30  
31 conditions under which employability investments are actively shared or done in concert  
32  
33 between employers and employees. The SEA framework outlines specific characteristics or  
34  
35 elements on which to base such shared arrangements. Examinations of such coordinated or  
36  
37 collaborative efforts between employers and employees would not only be groundbreaking  
38  
39 and valuable, but also an excellent opportunity for those interested in action research or field  
40  
41 experiments. These designs would reflect the tailored focus for HRM practices advocated by  
42  
43 Lepak and Snell (2002), and they would provide a robust test for the role of idiosyncratic  
44  
45 deals in employability research.  
46  
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### 50 51 **Changing Employability Modes Over Time—Capturing the Inherent Dynamism**

52  
53 Our review and associated critique clearly established that employability research remains  
54  
55 blind to the inherent dynamism in the employer-employee relationship. Our elaboration of the  
56  
57 SET, paying attention to both backward- and forward-looking exchanges, establishes the  
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## ANNALS-2018-0171.R5—Past and Prologue--Employability

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3 important but often insufficiently considered role of time. Employability, like the employment  
4 relationship in which it is embedded, extends from the past to the future. Hopefully, our paper  
5 articulates both the need and the path for future studies that explore a more dynamic  
6 perspective. To this end, we delineated three dynamic processes identified by Cronin &  
7 Vancouver (2018) – feedback loops, inertia and asymmetric influence—and explicate  
8 potential applications to employability.  
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17 Feedback loops offer a conceptually grounded means for linking employer  
18 inducements and employee contributions such that they form reinforcing- or balancing-cycles.  
19 Examination of such feedback loops is needed to determine whether, why, and under what  
20 conditions they might vary between different employability modes. For example, a  
21 commitment mode may lead to a positive reinforcing cycle. Employers, for instance, may  
22 invest in the employability of employees with particularly relevant skill sets to retain them,  
23 which presumably will enhance the same employees' employability and thus motivate still  
24 greater future investment. A contract mode, on the contrary, may lead to a negative  
25 reinforcing cycle wherein employers perceive little value in investing in particular employees.  
26 Over time, a lack of investment may result in these employees' employability diminishing  
27 further still, making them vulnerable in the internal (and external) labor market. Reinforcing  
28 cycles, both positive and negative, are unstable because they portend continued growth or  
29 loss. Future research is needed to explore these suppositions, including the means and  
30 situations in which to interrupt such cycles and turn them into more stable balancing cycles.  
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49 Feedback loops can also help understand why employability modes may change over  
50 time. The commitment employability mode, for instance, may result in a positive spiral of  
51 employer inducements and employee contributions over time, such that these employees'  
52 employability attributes become so focused and refined to the idiosyncrasies of a given  
53 employer, that they become less valuable in the external market. This scenario depicts one in  
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3 which commitment and reciprocity could potentially make certain employees less  
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5 employable, more dependent, and more vulnerable over time. This phenomenon has been  
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7 described under the notion of the locked-in effect (Stengard et al., 2016). Ultimately, an  
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9 employer may diminish investments and further deplete the employee's internal  
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11 employability, thus shifting to a contract employability mode. More generally, we encourage  
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13 researchers to explore the various situations in which an employment relationship may evolve  
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15 over time from one employability mode to another due to the inherent dynamic processes.  
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19 Next, investigations of inertia can further illuminate and advance a dynamic  
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21 perspective of employability. Although the notion of inertia explains how some phenomena  
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23 are difficult to change, the question remains whether inertia is a characteristic of  
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25 employability, and if it is, then is employability more or less malleable than portrayed in  
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27 existing research? Relatedly, we then need to identify and understand which contextual  
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29 factors influence this inertia, such as career management programs and job transitions. It also  
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31 would be valuable to understand the relationship between inertia and different employability  
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33 modes. Inertia, for instance, may be more likely to be an aspect of factors influencing  
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35 employability in a commitment mode than in a contract or alliance mode. A commitment  
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37 employability mode creates a safe and predictable environment for employees with well-  
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39 established and stable career systems. These factors could presumably help stabilize  
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41 employability. In a contract mode or an alliance mode, employees may experience less  
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43 predictable external labor market conditions, meaning that the value of their KSAO's and thus  
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45 also their perceived employability might be more volatile. Seasonal workers, whose skills  
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47 may only be needed during specific periods of the year, illustrate this scenario. We encourage  
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49 future researcher to investigate whether, how, and why certain employability modes are more  
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51 prone to inertia than others.  
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Asymmetric influence the third intriguing opportunity for employability research.

Existing studies investigate factors (e.g., development, job characteristics, career systems) that enhance employability, and although not actually tested, there is a clear implication or assumption that a lack of such factors decrease employability. An additional future research question is therefore how different types of employer inducements may asymmetrically influence--increases versus decreases--employability over time. For example, a promotion may benefit an employee's employability as s/he will be offered new challenges that stimulate the development of new competencies, while a lack of a promotion (or a missed promotion) may not have the opposite effect of diminishing employability. Here again, differences may exist between different employability modes, as certain modes suggest increasing employability (e.g., commitment mode) and others decreasing employability (e.g., contract mode). Unravelling what enhances and what decreases employability over time in different employability modes, thereby considering asymmetric influences, offers a promising track for future research.

Before concluding, it is important to note that a dynamic view of employability that includes feedback loops, inertia, and asymmetric influence requires more advanced research questions and designs, such as those with multiple waves of data, valid measures, appropriate time lags, and explicit consideration of particular exchanges between employers and employees. Accordingly, it is our position that the ideas outlined above provide some of the most notable means for meaningfully and significantly advancing the value of employability research, theory, and practice.

### CONCLUSION

We hope that our review, critiques, and recommendations both inspire and guide scholars to advance employability research over the next 20 years. Perhaps the most compelling message from our review is that there are two conflicting trends future researchers should be mindful

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3 of and seek to remedy rather than exacerbate. The first trend is the shift towards career self-  
4 management due to the demise of the life-long, paternalistic employment relationship. The  
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6 management due to the demise of the life-long, paternalistic employment relationship. The  
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8 second trend is the increased view of employees as a genuine and sustainable source of  
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10 competitive advantage (Vance & Vaiman, 2008). In the former, employability is viewed as a  
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12 contemporary form of job security and in the latter as an emerging and viable means for  
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14 strategically managing talent. Caution is warranted in both cases, as they imply the risk of  
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16 intensifying the growing skills gap and Matthew Effect (rich get richer and poor poorer), such  
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18 that those with already low employability lack the resources needed to improve their own  
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20 predicament and are also neglected (i.e., not invested in) by employers. While the converse  
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22 happens for employees whose attributes are relatively unique and otherwise valuable. This  
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24 scenario is even greater justification for integrating multiple stakeholders, not only employees  
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26 and employers, but also education, vocational, and government policies and practices.  
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28 Collaborative and sustained efforts are necessary to ensure future researchers realize the  
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30 potential of employability, while not duplicating the pitfalls of the past.  
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**TABLE 1:** Select Employability Disciplines, Associated Stakeholders, Key Responsibilities and Example Outcomes

<b>Employability Perspective</b>	<b>Focal Stakeholders</b>	<b>Key Responsibilities</b>	<b>Example Outcomes*</b>
Labor Economics	Workforce (national, regional, industry)	Employment levels	Unemployment rates Labor participation rates
Education	Students Schools Employers	Job search skills and processes, and curriculum design and content	Graduation rates, (quality of) employment, enrollments, high-performing talent
Vocational counseling	Clients Counselors Employers	Content, processes, counselor competence, and employer/employee engagement	Quality employment, client satisfaction, repeat contracts
Careers	Employees Employers	Self-directed development of KSAOs and other individual differences (e.g., competencies and dispositions)	Employment, objective and subjective career success
Human resource management	Employers (HR and managers) Employees	Recruitment, selection, development, promotion, and rewards	Quality applicants, high- performing and committed employees
Work and organizational psychology	Employees Employers	Individual differences, career management,	Low stress, motivation, career development, domain-specific and general well- being

\*Note: It would be appropriate to add “sustained” to most of the outcomes given the inherent importance of time (e.g., quality employment over time).



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TABLE 2: Employability Themes in the 2000s

Themes Goal #1	Research questions	Core variables	Some research samples	Main measures	Disciplines	Example papers	Perspective Goal #2
<i>Employability as explanatory variable</i>							
<b>Theme 1: Employability as a resource for coping with insecurity</b>	Does employability prevent job insecurity or help to cope with job insecurity?	Job insecurity, employee strain, ...	Temporary employees, agency workers employees in reorganizations, ...	Perceived employability, re-employment	Occupational health, Labor economics	Berntson & Marklund (2007) De Cuyper et al. (2012) Dickerson & Green (2012)	Perspective 3: employee & employer reciprocity
<b>Theme 2: Employee benefits of employability</b>	Does employability lead to gains for the employee?	Objective career success, subjective career success, employee motivation, resilience, ...	Employees, professionals, managers, university researchers, young workers, older workers, unemployed, ...	Perceived employability, employability competences, re-employment	Career studies, Occupational health	Kirves et al. (2014) McArdle et al. (2007) Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden (2006)	
<b>Theme 3: Employer benefits and risks of employability</b>	What are the benefits and risks of an employable workforce for employers?	Turnover (intentions), commitment, performance, ethical behavior, ...	Employees, HR directors, ...	Perceived employability, employability competences	Career studies, Work and organizational psychology	Acikgoz et al. 2016 Hahn & Kim (2018) Nelissen et al. (2017)	Perspective 2: Employer-centric Perspective 3: employee and employer reciprocity
<i>Factors explaining employability</i>							
<b>Theme 4: Individual and contextual</b>	Which individual and/or contextual factors are	Demographics (gender, age, ethnicity,	Employees, ethnic minorities; workers;	Transition into employment; labor	Work and organizational psychology,	Bailey et al. (2012)	

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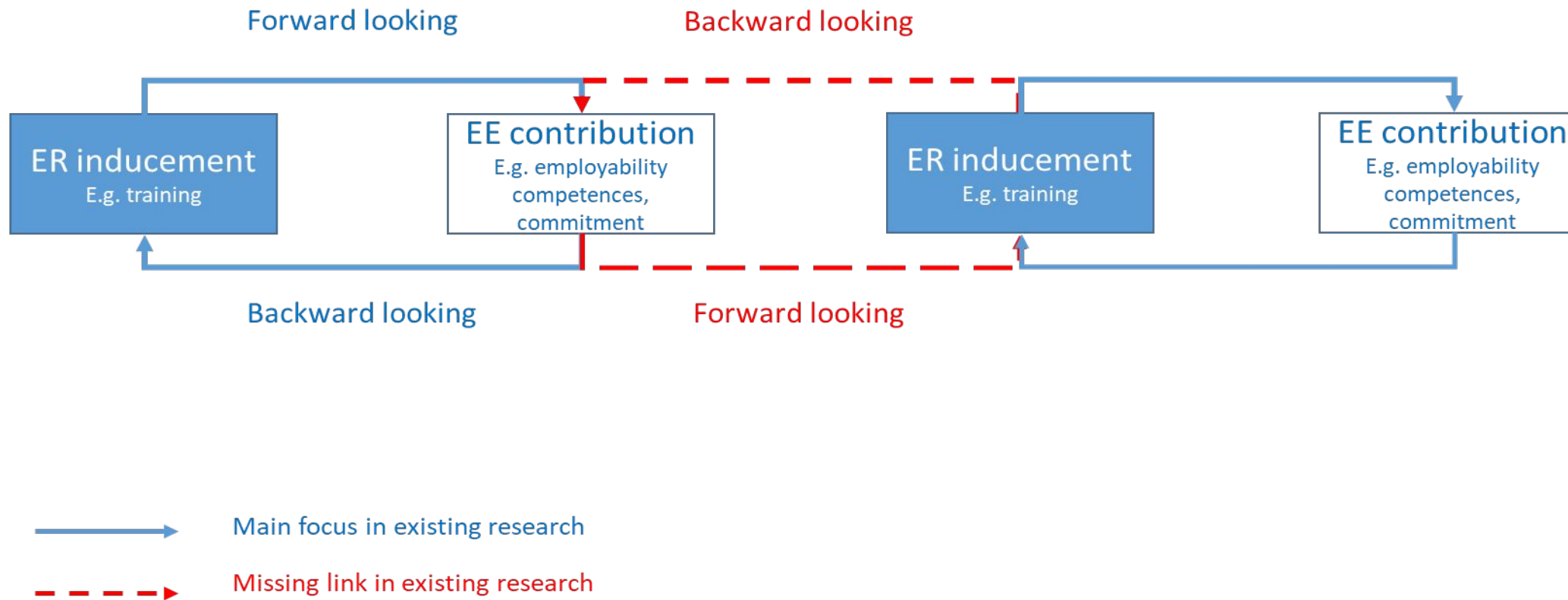
<b>antecedents of employability</b>	explaining individual employability?	disability...), human capital, income; household characteristics, geographical mobility; local labor market strength, ...	older workers: dismissed workers; potential employers of fictitious applicants, ...	underutilization; promotion, perceived employability (by employees, or by employers), hiring probability	HRM, Labor Economics, Employment relations	Bricout & Bentley (2000) Wittekind et al. (2010)	
<b>Theme 5: Initiatives and practices to enhance employability</b>	How do employability practices and interventions influence individual employability?	Employability activities; career development interventions, individual career management; impression management; employment and career counseling; training; transformational leadership; income support programs; demand side interventions, ...	Employees in specific sectors; platform workers; older workers; persons with disabilities; low-income female migrant domestic workers; temporary workers, ...	Perceived employability, employability competences (re)employment; intention to retire; continued employment	HRM, Career studies, Vocational counseling, Labor economics	Akkermans et al. (2015) De Vos & Soens (2008) Gore (2005)	Perspective 1: Employee-centric
<b>Theme 6: Employability at a macro-level</b>	What is the impact of public policies on macro-level employability?	Pension policies; unemployment policies; activation policies; education system;	Older workers; students, ...	Employment rates; general skill level	Social policy, Educational science	McQuaid & Bergmann (2008) Vodopivec (2002)	Excluded from Goal # 2

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		minimum wage policies, ...					
<b>Conclusion across themes</b>	Most research questions concern employability as a valuable asset that helps employees to survive and/or thrive in the labor market. Exceptions are theme 3 (employer) and theme 6 (society). Research questions addressing both employee and employer perspectives simultaneously is rare.	Most core variables are at the level of the individual employee, with the exception of a small set of studies on employer or governmental interventions and policies.	Most studies comprise employee data, very few studies with employer/organization data, even fewer combining employee and employer perspectives simultaneously, herewith largely ignoring the relationship between those two parties.	Most measures are at the employee level, mainly self-reports but also employment indicators. Lack of multi-source ratings (e.g., employee and their supervisor) or indicators at the employer level.	–	–	

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**FIGURE 1:** Employability-Related Social Exchanges



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