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A systematic review of current understandings of employability

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A theoretical framework is essential for the effective evaluation of employability (Clarke, 2008; Harvey, 2001). However, there are a wide range of definitions of employability coexisting in current literature (Harvey, 2001; Nauta, van Vianen, van der Heijden, van Dam, & Willemsen, 2009). A review into existing ways in which employability has been conceptualised is needed to inform a better understanding of the nature of contributions made by various employability development opportunities, and appropriate assessment of these contributions. A systematic review is presented, assessing the similarities and differences between the components of employability conceptualisations, focusing on employability at an individual level (Thijssen, Van der Heijden, & Rocco, 2008). Relevant publications were identified through a sensitive search strategy of eight electronic bibliographic databases from 1960 to 2014. Data was extracted from 16 eligible manuscripts. Capital, career management and contextual dimensions were identified as unifying themes in these components. Findings indicate that success in developing employability needs to be contextualised within a conceptualisation of employability as a multifaceted construct.

Keywords: employability; review; career management; capital; signalling.

Introduction

Over the decades the way in which employability has been described has fluctuated, along with the changing contexts in which individuals have sought employment (Grazier, 1998). A review of the concept of employability from the 1940's to 1990's indicates a move from a dichotomy of either being employable or not, to a consideration of employability as having a dynamic adaptive nature (Grazier, 1998). Thus, theories of employability have become increasingly complex, and multi-dimensional.

Although there is agreement around the 'changing' nature of employability, defining employability in today's society is more difficult, with a wide range of definitions coexisting in present literature (Harvey, 2001; Nauta et al., 2009). A discussion paper by Harvey (2001) identified trends in conceptualising employability as both continuous and distinct from employment, being constantly developed through an accumulation of new knowledge and experience throughout an individual's lifetime. This personal development merely increases the probability of gaining employment but does not guarantee it. Employability is also often acknowledged to be variable depending on the context in which it is viewed; the country, timeframe and economic situation will influence the nature of employability.

Nevertheless, definitions have varied in their incorporation of these above components as well as their consideration of other components such as job satisfaction, employer satisfaction, job success, maintaining and retaining employment, and employee potential (de Grip, van Loo, & Sanders, 2004; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Van Der Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006). Indeed it may be considered naive to think that a single dominant definition of employability exists. In reality one must first identify the perspective from which the term is being applied. A plurality of stakeholders take a perspective on employability, each holding a different approach and scope and serving to highlight different issues and domains of action in which they work.

Thijssen, Van der Heijden, and Rocco (2008) distinguished between three perspectives from which employability can be viewed, 1) societal, referring to employment rates and economic health, 2) company or organisational, focusing on the individuals within that company and whether supply meets demand; and 3) individual, which pertains to *'an indicator of his or her opportunity to acquire and to keep an attractive job in the internal or external labour market'* (Thijssen et al., 2008, p.168).

Focus on the individual level of employability, as suggested from Grazier's (1998) documentation of changes throughout the decades, has gained considerable momentum. Discussion of the protean career and the rise in discussion of the boundariless career indicate that focus on the individual's perspective on employability is becoming ever greater.

Given the investment required from individuals to develop and maintain their employability, both in terms of time and money, it is important to access accurate information around the contributions of development opportunities. Presently, dissatisfaction has been voiced around how employability is assessed, for example within Higher Education (HE) (Harvey, 2001). The current approach to this assessment has been referred to as subverting the operationalisation process, failing to first define the construct of employability and identifying its components before offering recommendations as to their relevant indicators (Harvey, 2001). This sentiment is supported by Clarke (2008) who argues that a theoretical framework is essential for the effective evaluation of employability. This situation suggests that there is merit to a clearer discussion of components playing out in employability.

The present review is performed in light of the significance of this individual level of employability to current debates in the literature, and the need for accurate information around the relative success of various employability development opportunities. The objective of this review is to provide the first systematic review of existing conceptualisations of employability. Differences and similarities between the components within employability conceptualisations will be identified. This will inform an understanding of methodologies for enhancing employability at the level of the individual, informing the employability development processes of both individuals and organisations.

Method

Search strategy

Relevant manuscripts were extracted using a sensitive search strategy. The following eight bibliographic databases were searched for relevant publications from January 1960 to May 2014; *PsycArticles*, *PsycINFO*, *Business Source Elite*, *Educational Research Complete*, *Psychology and Behavioural Science Collection*, *Web of Science*, *SCOPUS* and *Expanded Academic*. Additionally, *ProQuest Databases* and *Index to Theses in Great Britain* were explored for the purposes of identifying grey literature.

Additional citations were subsequently gathered through the reviewing of reference lists of appropriate manuscripts pertaining to employability.

The search strategy included the following keywords to identify appropriate sources: *defin**, *operationali**, *model*, *framework*, *concept**, *theor**, *holistic* and *perspective*. These were combined with the term ‘employability’.

Selection strategy

To capture all pertinent titles, inclusion criteria were kept broad. Initially, titles and/or abstracts were included and full manuscripts were retrieved for further scrutiny if the manuscript referred to a conceptualisation (e.g. a model, framework or theory) of employability. Where the title or abstract provided insufficient information regarding its relevance to the inclusion criteria the full manuscript was retrieved and reviewed before a decision regarding inclusion was made.

Manuscripts that met the following inclusion criteria were accepted into the review; those that (1) were written in the English language; (2) aimed to provide a holistic conceptualisation of employability; (3) concerned the development of an individual's employability.

Review strategy

A data extraction form was applied systematically to each eligible manuscript that met the inclusion criteria. Components within the conceptualisation (e.g. those that make up the conceptualisation) were then extracted. Components were identified as such through review of model illustrations and the use of lists or categories presented by the authors of the reviewed manuscripts.

Components were subcategorised for the purposes of the present review through the use of a content analysis approach. Descriptions/definitions of components were used to identify overlaps in these components and thus allow grouping across different conceptualisations. For example, similarities in the definitions of Hillage and Pollard's (1998) 'assets' and Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden's (2006) 'occupational expertise' as ingredients that could be utilised to indicate economic gain for the individual resulted in these components being grouped together.

Procedure

Following the retrieval of full manuscripts of eligible publications that met the initial inclusion criteria, each manuscript was systematically scrutinised via the data extraction sheet process. Fifty percent of the extracted manuscripts were examined by co-authors as a reliability precaution.

Results

Trial flow

The initial systematic search strategy identified a total of 3744 potentially relevant citations. Of these, 463 were duplications; a further 3265 were disregarded for not

meeting the initial inclusion criteria. Full manuscripts were then retrieved for the 16 remaining manuscripts and these were subject to a full data extraction. See table one for details of extracted manuscripts.

Table 1. Details of extracted papers from which the latest information regarding employability conceptualisations is sourced

Author	Year	Aim of paper	Type of paper	Sample	Method	Main outcomes
Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Kaiser	2013	To bridge the gap between psychological theory and employers perceptions of employability determinates	Position paper	na	na	Presentation of a proposed model for understanding the determinates of employability
Bridgstock	2009	To present a conceptualisation of desired graduate attributes which incorporates career management skills	Position paper	na	na	Production of a conceptual framework made up of the following components; Self-management and career building skills. Acquisition, display and use of discipline specific skills and generic skills. As well as underlying traits and dispositions.
Thijssen, Van der Heijden, and Tonette	2008	To offer a critical analysis of employability including its components	Review of literature	na	na	Development of the employability-link model
Tomlinson	2007	Explore how students leaving higher education	Empirical paper	53 final year pre 1992 undergraduate	Semi-structured interviews.	Identification of two different orientations and attitudes to

		understand and manage their employability		students	Analytical technique unknown.	work: Passive/active career development (means) Market/ non market career aspirations (end)
Dacre Pool and Seweller	2007	Introduce a practical model of employability to be used by students to develop their employability	Position paper	na	na	Development of the 'key to employability' model
Van Der Heijden and Van Der Heijden	2006	To present an instrument for measuring employability	Empirical paper	314 employees and 334 immediate supervisors (290 pairs)	Ratings on items designed by authors to measure Occupational Expertise, Anticipation and Optimisation; Personal Flexibility; Corporate Sense; and Balance	Results supported the reliability and validity of the measurement tool and identified that Occupational Expertise, Anticipation and Optimisation; Personal Flexibility; Corporate Sense; and Balance explained a significant amount of variation in objective and subjective measures of career success.
McQuaid and	2005	To analyse current and previous applications of	Review of	na	na	Present conceptualisation of

Lindsay		the term employability and its value as an exploratory concept and a framework for policy analysis. (p. 197)	literature			employability.
McArdle, Waters, Briscoe and Hall	2007	To empirically test Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth's 2004 model (p. 247).	Empirical paper	416 unemployed Australians	Longitudinal survey study. Follow up at six months. Surveys included; Bateman and Crant's (1993) proactivity personality scale; Stumpf, Colarelli and Hartman's (1983) Identity Awareness scale; Messer and Harter's (1985) self-esteem scale; and Kinicki and Latack's (1990) Job search behaviour scale	The paper offered support for identity awareness, proactive personality, self-esteem and job search components on job searching and reemployment outcomes within an unemployed population
deGrip, Van loo and Sanders	2004	Presentation of an Industry Employability Index for cross-sectorial analysis of employability	Empirical research	13 sectors of the Dutch economy	Statistical analysis of secondary data sourced from multiple locations including; the labour supply and labour demand survey, labour	Sector comparisons of employability index.

					<p>force survey</p> <p>the labour supply and labour demand surveys of the Organisation for Strategic Labour Market Research (OSA)</p> <p>and the labour force survey of Statistics Netherlands (CBS).</p>	
Forrier and Sels	2003	<p>To develop a conceptual model of the 'employability process' (p. 102)</p>	Position paper	na	na	A conceptual model is presented
Brown, Hesketh, and Williams	2003	To examine the concept of employability and to identify flaws in the way employability is typically defined within official statements	Position paper	na	na	The application of positional conflict theory to employability
Knight and Yorke	2003	Review current responses to expectations around HE as an employability development system.	Position paper	na	na	Presentation of the USEM employability model

		Including an analysis of the concept of employability				
Harvey, Locke, and Morey	2002	To report on the links between higher education and the world of work	Report	Sixteen higher education institutions	Case studies	Recommendations to CSU and other HE agencies, institutions, employers and their representative bodies for the enhancement of links between HE and the world of work
Kluytmans and Ott	1999	To explore how employers can offer security for employee's (p. 261)	Position paper	na	na	Identifies those employees with little training as most vulnerable within the labour market. Suggest combining functioning and broadening tasks to increase job security
Hillage and Pollard	1998	To help inform future policy development (p. ix)	Report	DfEE officials and external experts and commentators. N= unknown	Interviews	Development of conceptual framework. Response from interviews unknown
Eby, Butts and Lockwood	2003	To examine three career competencies important for a boundariless career. These mirror Arthurs	Empirical paper	458 alumni of a single university	Questionnaires. 'knowing why' predictors (proactive personality, openness	Twenty-six percent of variance in measures of perceived career success (career satisfaction, internal marketability and external

		original conceptualisation			to experience and career insight) ‘knowing whom’ predictors (experience with a mentor, internal networks, and external networks) and ‘knowing how’ predictors (career/job-related skills and career identity networks)	marketability). The unique contribution of knowing how components was higher (46%, than for knowing why (30%) and knowing whom (20%)
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N.b. where subsequent testing of the model has occurred this paper replaces original conceptualisation

Characteristics of employability conceptualisations

Eighty-eight components were identified from the 16 conceptualisations. Components were seen as any aspect explicitly labelled as a core part of the overall conceptualisation. Unifying themes in these components were identified, providing one superordinate dimension, capital, which can be separated into four subordinate dimensions (human, social, cultural, and psychological). The value of this capital in contributing towards the achievement of beneficial employability outcomes is then mediated by career management and contextual components. Table two presents a breakdown of papers according to their contributions to each dimension. Each of these will be defined in turn and a description of their development and empirical support will be presented.

Dimension 1: Capital components

Definition and core features

The unifying dimension of capital is broadly defined here as anything an individual possesses that can be seen as leading to an increased probability of positive economic outcomes, or other personal outcomes relating to the area of work. The core features of this dimension are properties of the individual that elicit demand or functionality in the workplace.

This superordinate dimension was further subdivided into four subordinate categories; human, social, cultural, and psychological. Fifteen of the 16 conceptualisations incorporate components of this kind (see table 2). The aspects of capital given centre stage vary.

Dimension 1.1: Human capital

Definition and core features

Human capital was referred to by Becker (1962) as information and skills that the individual possesses that are perceived as contributing to the production process. This capital cannot be separated from individuals and elicits favourable outcomes. Training and schooling are seen as investments in this capital.

As such, this dimension explains employability in terms of providing added functionality to the employer through an enhancement of the skills and knowledge available to them e.g. knowledge of the latest techniques or software that could lead to

economic gain for the company. Employability from this dimension therefore relates to the degree to which the human capital someone possesses allows them to compete for their 'desired' job role. This desire will be informed by other dimension of employability.

Dimension development

Within the extracted manuscripts the first author to offer an employability conceptualisation that refers to components which can be understood in terms of human capital is Arthur, Claman, and DeFillippi (1995). Linked to employability by Eby, Butts and Lockwood (2003), Arthur et al's 'knowing how' component referred to the knowledge and skills that individuals bring to the firm through formal and experiential learning.

This dimension is then developed further within a later employability conceptualisation developed by Hillage and Pollard (1998). In this report capital is represented in the component 'assets'. There is then further subdivision into three categories; Baseline Assets, referring to basic skills and essential personal attributes; Intermediate Assets, referring to occupational specific skills, general key skills and key personal attributes; and High Skills, referring to skills that help contribute to organisational performance.

Since these conceptualisations, human capital components have been incorporated to varying degrees by others. For example, Knight and Yorke (2003) include a 'skills' component alongside reference to 'understanding'; Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) include 'degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills' and 'Generic skills'; Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden (2006) include 'occupational expertise' which the authors stated was growing in importance as a result of *'the intensification of knowledge'* (p.454): and within Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Kaiser (2013) human capital is present as *'abilities, expertise and know-how which employers perceive as the candidates ability to 'do the job' (p.12).*

All of these components refer to the properties an individual needs to possess to ensure functionality in the workplace and can be traded within the job market for economic gain. Employability is understood in terms of the match between this capital and the required capital of the desired post.

The gaining of capital is also discussed within these conceptualisations. Harvey, Locke, and Morey (2002) highlight the opportunities HE and extra-curricular experience offer for developing employability. This is brought forward and broadened by Dacre-Pool and Sewell (2007) who refer to the impact of both work and life experience on student employability development.

Despite regular inclusion within employability conceptualisations, it has proven difficult to pinpoint the necessary capital required for varying roles, due in part to the

fluctuating nature of job requirements within today's society. Nevertheless, the role of capital in developing variables such as job performance and career consequences has been supported by a range of publications (QUINONES, Ford, & Teachout, 1995; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012).

Within the extracted literature evidence for human capital's role in enhancing perceived career satisfaction, internal and external marketability was provided within Eby et al., (2003). This is confirmed by data extracted through consultation with key stakeholders (Hillage & Pollard, 1998), reports from 314 employees and 334 immediate supervisors (290 pairs) (Van Der Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006), reports from 458 alumni (Eby et al., 2003), as well as reports from 416 unemployed Australians (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007). It is undoubtedly a critical aspect of employability.

Notwithstanding the value of this capital, economic theory and wider empirical research suggest that human capital in and of itself may be considered too narrow a concept when looking at the properties of individuals which can lead to economic gain. More expansive discussions of capital have therefore dominated existing employability conceptualisations.

Dimension 1.2: Social capital

Definition and core features

Social capital was identified by Bourdieu (2008) as social obligations or connections seen as convertible to economic capital.

Social capital further explains the concept of employability through the additional value of existing relationships which can be utilised to enhance the economic capital of the company as a result of recruiting an individual e.g. Illustrating connections with investors that have previously been reluctant to engage with the company, who may reconsider given awareness of the new employee's involvement. Thus, from this dimension employability is the degree to which the potential employee possesses social connections that can be utilised to enhance their functionality in the workplace.

Dimension development

In Arthur et al., (1995) knowledge career framework – 'knowing whom' – was named as an important component for career success. Arthur et al., (1995) described this as career-related networks and contacts. Not long after this Fugate et al., (2004) also adopted 'social capital' as a component of their employability conceptualisation alongside 'human capital'.

Both of these conceptualisations have been empirically tested and support for the unique contribution of this social element is provided (Eby et al., 2003; Fugate et al., 2004). External to these extracted papers, independent support for the role of social capital in employability understandings is offered in a number of works (e.g. Kwon & Arenius, 2010; McArdle et al., 2007; Rynne, 2014).

Dimension 1.3: Cultural capital

Definition and core features

Dissatisfaction within the economic literature as to the narrow nature of human capital also introduced consideration of cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to situations which the individual has experienced that are perceived as enhancing the properties of the individual, which lead to functionality in the workplace (Bourdieu, 2008). This capital can also be converted into economic capital when needed.

This group of components offers an explanation of employability in terms of the impact of fit between the employer's ideas, customs and social behaviours and those of potential employees.. Enhanced similarity, or fit, provides increasing motivation to engage in the company's expected work practices, to strive for company goals and to thus enhance an individual's employability.

Dimensions development

A less dominant presence appears to be given to the importance of culture on the employability of individuals within the extracted manuscripts. Nevertheless, this dimension offers explanatory value to the overall conceptualisation of employability.

Cultural capital provides a link to a fuller understanding of the role of components such as the value of a degree and other experience (Harvey et al., 2002; Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007) as well as current labour market positions (Forrier & Sels, 2003) on employability. These components represent investments of time and/or money which introduce new levels of cultural capital. By engaging in these activities, individuals access prestige or enhance their status within a given setting.

Representations of fit between employer and employee have become increasingly prevalent in recent conceptualisations of employability. Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden (2006) introduced a 'balance' component, which represents the need to find a compromise between the values and expectations of the organisation and the values and expectations of the individual. More recently, Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic and Kaiser (2013) introduce the concept of employability as a form of socially desirable behaviour in which individuals are perceived by employers as 'fitting in' with the organisation to greater or lesser degrees. Again, this model emphasises the importance of social compatibility as one determinate of employability.

In addition to these links to cultural capital presented within the extracted papers, external research indicates the presence of discrimination in selection processes (Forrier & Sels, 2003; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). This discrimination evidences a judgment of 'in' and 'out' groups within recruitment processes and an impact of these on process outcomes. Whilst certain acts of discrimination are tackled by legislation – e.g. discrimination on the basis of age, race, religion etc. – not all forms of 'in' and 'out' group comparisons are excluded in this way. This suggests potential value for social group membership and demographic components in developing our understanding of employability.

Dimension 1.4: Psychological capital

Definition and core features

Within the extracted manuscripts an additional distinct category of capital can be identified. Psychological capital relates to psychological capacities offering strengths within the job market. Described by its campaigner Luthans (2002), psychological capital relates to *'positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace'* (Luthans 2002, p.59). This includes states such as confidence, hope, resilience, positive self-evaluation and personality traits such as conscientiousness.

Psychological capital adds to previous forms of capital, explaining employability from the standpoint of the individual's ability to offer optimal performance within the role offered e.g. providing confidence levels that will add credibility to their performance.

Dimension development

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the description of the most recent wave of employability definitions (Grazier, 1998), adaptability and resilience are dominating aspects of psychological capital within the extracted manuscripts. Adaptability is defined here as the ability to change, or to be changed, to fit new circumstances. This was first considered within conceptualisations as 'willingness to be mobile' (Kluytmans & Ott, 1999), followed by 'willingness to develop' (Harvey et al., 2002) and subsequently by 'willingness to move' and perceived 'ease of movement' (Forrier & Sels, 2003), which Forrier and Sel termed 'movement capital'. Further references are made to this adaptability within McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) in the individual factors 'adaptability and mobility' and 'personal flexibility' and Eby et al.'s (2003) operationalisation of 'knowing why' to include 'readiness to adapt to circumstances'.

Adaptability as proactivity was discussed by Fugate et al., (2004) who acknowledged five individual differences relevant to personal adaptability; optimism,

propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control, and generalised self-efficacy. Later, Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden (2006) developed Fugate et al.'s work into their anticipation and optimisation component, which related to being proactive or self-initiated. Van der Heijde and Van Der Heijden also discussed 'personal flexibility'. This component represented an individual's ability to adapt to change forced on them, presenting a smooth transition. Issues of resilience and coping were mentioned within this conceptualisation.

This aspect of psychological capital was further developed by de Grip et al., (2004) who conceptualised employability as three aspects of personal motivation to adapt; willingness to 'engage in training', willingness to 'be mobile' in reference to movement across job roles, and willingness to engage in 'functional flexibility' which brings this mobility into a consideration of current job role flexibility – seen as a method of developing capital. This emphasis on being functionally flexible to promote capacity to move beyond that role was later echoed by Thijssen et al., (2008) in which an individual's learning skills and mobility skills influence an individual's ability to broaden their capital and transition to other positions.

In addition to references around adaptability, self-efficacy (Knight & Yorke, 2003; Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007) openness (Bridgstock, 2009), and ambition (Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Kaiser, 2013) have also been discussed in relation to conceptualisations of employability. In more recent work Bridgstock (2009) notes the role of '*underpinning traits and dispositions*' and Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic and Kaiser (2013) discuss candidate's profiles, which includes a consideration of ambition, work ethic, and drive.

There is an array of supporters for this strong presence within the extracted papers of the role of psychological capital. McArdle et al., (2007) present a longitudinal study within the unemployed population, supporting a positive relationship between proxy measures of adaptability with measures of employability. Similarly, literature exploring the boundariless career mind-set emphasises a fluid approach to employability that goes beyond set job roles (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; De Vos & Soens, 2008). There is also a wealth of research into the protean personality /attitude towards work, which identifies adaptability as a career meta-competence that facilitates a protean career (Hall, 2004).

There is also an abundance of support for the role of self-efficacy in understanding employability. A meta-analysis by Judge and Bono (2001), showed a positive relationship between generalised self-efficacy and job satisfaction and performance. Further empirical research into the impact of self-efficacy on employability related variables suggests that, as with other work addressing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), a specific focus on career self-efficacy is of value to this discussion (e.g. McArdle et al., 2007; Nauta et al., 2009).

Despite the core focus on capital within the majority of these conceptualisations, evidence from the review also points towards an equally important role for communication of this capital within the process of job searching and application.

Dimension 2: Career management

Definition and core features

Evident within the extracted manuscripts is an ever-increasing importance placed on career management as a component of employability. This indicates the need to consider employability in terms of competencies and skills beyond performance in a set job role, as well as the role of career goals/ orientation in outlining an individual's desired employment.

This dimension's core features relate to the explanation of employability in terms of an individual's competence in navigating the labour market in order to achieve their personal career goals through access to relevant training and employment opportunities. A distinction is made here between two aspects of career management; signal-management and self-management. This dimension of employability conceptualisation was eluded to within 13 of the 16 conceptualisations (see table 2).

Dimension 2.1: Signal management

Definition and core features

An alternative to previously mentioned perspectives on capital comes from the work of Spence (1973) on signalling theory. This theory postulates that inferences are drawn around the 'capital' of individuals through signals rather than directly. It is these interpretations of signals that influence the attainment of economic and other gains.

Signalling is made up of three key aspects, the first being the ***signaller***, e.g. the job candidate, who holds private information that would be of benefit to the other party. The second is the ***signal***, intentionally indicating positive or negative information of value to the other party. Lastly there is the ***receiver***, e.g. the recruiter, the 'other party' involved in the decision making process who benefits from the communication of accurate signals (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011).

Within this dimension signalling processes are further expanded to include the role of skills and knowledge necessary for the identification of relevant signalling opportunities and understanding of how to present these signals effectively. As such employability viewed from this dimension relates to an individual's ability to navigate and engage with selection and recruitment opportunities, which will lead them closer to their desired career goals.

Dimension development

The process of signalling was referred to in connection with holistic conceptualisations of employability by Forrier and Sels (2003), who suggested its value in understanding the abilities offered by potential employees. The role of both presenting signals and understanding the processes and opportunities that require these signals are presented within the majority of extracted employability conceptualisations.

Hillage and Pollard (1998) refer to the role of recruitment and selection behaviour and the job matching process as well as job searching and strategic approaches to securing employment. This supports the need for knowledge and skills around the selection of signalling opportunities. They also include the component of articulating your assets (Capital), which links to the importance of effectively presenting signals. This aspect of employability was carried forward by Harvey et al., (2002) as ‘articulation of employability’, another component Harvey saw as having a ‘core impact’ on employability. Subsequently, ‘job seeking’ (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005), career development learning (Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007), cooperate sense (Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden (2006) and career building skills (Bridgstock, 2009) have been linked to employability.

Connections have also been made to the role of networking and social capital in navigating signalling opportunities. Hillage and Pollard (1998) discuss having access to important networks as an aspect of their deployment component. Not long after this Kluytmans and Ott (1999) introduced ‘job market know-how’, which included engaging in regular exchange of information through formal and informal networks.

Additionally, this dimension encompasses an understanding of how objectified and institutionalised forms of cultural capital factor into our understanding of employability. These offer signals in the form of qualifications and possessions, demonstrating common ways of thinking (cultural capital) that are seen as representing increased employability.

These contributions emphasise the wider role of managing signals through knowledge and awareness of signalling processes and opportunities to so present effective signals. Whilst empirical support for the contribution of signalling and signalling processes is absent within the extracted manuscripts, support has been offered by papers supplementary to those reviewed (e.g. Arkes, 1999; Connelly et al., 2011; Smetherham, 2006; Werbel, 2000).

It must also be highlighted that – perhaps in an attempt to justify employee selection within otherwise matched samples of applicants – employer requirements for qualifications, such as degrees, have increasingly been applied to roles that arguably do not require the levels of knowledge advertised for and assessed against. This in turn has resulted in a field categorised by employability literature as under-employment, in which the full potential of individuals is not developed by a role, not necessarily as a

result of that individual's values or goals as represented within the self-management dimension, but rather as a result of inappropriate signals required by employers within their selection processes. An example would be the requirement for degree-level study of information technology for predominantly script-based technical support roles.

Dimension 2.2: Self- management skills

Definition and core features

Complimenting signal-management in our understanding of employability, self-management skills are modelled here on the definition provided by Bridgstock (2009). This dimension represents the impact of '*the individual's perception and appraisal of themselves in terms of values, abilities, interests and goals.*' (Bridgstock, 2009, p37).

These values, interests and so forth provide a context in which that individual sees employment. These issues will inform the way in which they approach the world of work and the outcomes they aim to achieve from it and from signalling processes. Encompassed within this dimension is an awareness of the importance of career identity. Whilst career identity informs acceptable career goals and means of achieving these goals, based on an individual's interests, values and motives, the present self-management dimension expands upon this to include the importance of accurately appraising one's abilities and values.

The core features of this dimension are elements of an individual's feelings or values influencing how they relate to the working world. This in turn influences which opportunities presented in the context are pursued, and what actions to develop or apply capital (and thus develop or present 'signals') the individual is motivated to engage in. As such employability derived from this dimension relates to the achievement of 'personal goals' and 'employee career satisfaction' through the matching of these goals with available opportunities.

Dimension development

Hillage and Pollard (1998) integrate this component into their conceptualisation in the form of 'deployment'. Deployment refers to the awareness an individual has of their capital and how this awareness is actively used. Since Hillage and Pollard (1998) the process of reflection and evaluating has been considered in terms of employability (Harvey et al., 2002; Dacre-Pool & Sewell, 2007), as has metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2003). Furthermore, Harvey et al. (2002) highlighted 'self-reflection' as another of the core impacts on employability. Without this self-awareness individuals are unable to present necessary signals to their capital irrespective of their possession of the capital and participation in the relevant signalling processes.

In addition to the role of self-reflection/awareness regarding the capital an individual possesses, there is also an important part to be played by the personal identity of the individual. It is this identity that leads to drive, individual goals and opportunity preferences. Identity is referred to in relation to a conceptualisation of employability within Fugate et al. (2004) as a psychosocial construct encompassing '*goals, hopes, and fears; personality traits; values, beliefs, and norms; interaction styles; time horizons; and so on*' (p. 20).

Moreover, Tomlinson (2007), who identifies his conceptualisation as being one of employability, presented an identity model with two distinct aspects of how an individual positions themselves in terms of their approach to work and development, and to their career goals. This link between identity and how an individual approaches work evidences the relationship between identity and 'drive' or 'ambition'; motivational components included within Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Kaiser's (2013) conceptualisation of employability in which they see employers interpreting this as a 'willingness to work'. This could also be linked to 'willingness' components mentioned within the psychological capital grouping presented earlier.

Support for the role of identity within these extracted manuscripts is again prolific. Investigations into the perceived career success and perceived internal and external marketability of alumni students by Eby *et al.*'s (2003) found that 'knowing why' components, incorporating aspects of identity, contribute to an overall explanation of 44% of the variance in these employment outcomes. Furthermore, results from research into the impact of identity on career suitability and outcomes provides support for variations in career identity and for the impact of these on employment outcomes (Brown & Hesketh, 2004).

Whilst representation of orientation models such as Tomlinson's is limited in this review due to the stated inclusion criteria, this literature shows support for the role of career identity in understanding employability (e.g. Nauta et al., 2009; Van Dam, 2004).

Given this dimension's prevalence within extracted manuscripts, further consideration of career management and orientation models may be beneficial to the development of a more complete understanding of employability.

Dimension 3: Contextual components

Definition and core features

This final dimension refers to the surrounding events and systems that make up each individual employment opportunity. As with career management components, these negotiate the impact of capital components on employability. The core features of this dimension are external circumstances that influence the capital demanded of an

individual. Therefore, employability as seen from this dimension relates to the fit between the individual and the employer's current requirements compared to the fit of other individuals applying for this role. This dimension illustrates how the weights of various aspects of capital vary within each recruitment scenario.

Context was discussed in relation to all conceptualisations, but was explicitly incorporated as components within 11 conceptualisations out of the 16 (see table 2). *Dimensions development*

Perhaps the most significant theoretical development in relation to contextual factors is the work of Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003). This conceptual framework presents employability in terms of Positional Conflict Theory. This theory goes beyond a consideration of a meritocratic context, in which those most qualified receive job opportunities, to an expansion of Conflict Theory that discusses employability in terms of a justification for unequal opportunities. Employability is seen as not just the outcome of absolute employability, being the capital held by an individual, but also relative employability, being the comparison between our capital and the capital of those we are compared to. As such, the work of Brown and colleagues explores the roles of globalisation and mass education on labour market demand.

Another significant contribution to our understanding of the employability context is the work of de Grip et al., (2004). Alongside a consideration of the individual's mobility, training and functional flexibility, this work presents a taxonomy of development that leads to changes in the demand for employability as presented by employers. This work provides support, at the sector level, for the effect of demographic, economic, organisational and technological developments in obsolescing previous human capital and adding value to alternative human capital. For further details and illustrations of these contextual factors, the reader is advised to consider review of de Grip et al., (2004).

In addition to these major contributors to the development of contextual components of employability, *Personal circumstances* such as 'caring responsibilities, disabilities, and household status' (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p.86) access of opportunities (McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) and Thijssen et al., (2008) and broadening and transition conditions are also represented within the extracted papers as impacting upon the ability of individuals to navigate the labour market.

Support for the role of context in employability is strong. A review of the human resource development and economic literature by de Grip et al., (2004) concludes this '*clearly show[s] that it [an understanding of employability] has to encompass both individual and contextual factors*' (de Grip et al., 2004, p.212).

The nature of this dimension supports the statement by Cremin (2009) that there can be no formal or static definition of employability as individuals active within a competitive job market context strive constantly to keep ahead of others, and thus

employability is a 'condition that can never be fulfilled' (p.131). Employability levels fluctuate with capital demand, resulting in higher requirements for employment in instances of under demand, wherein employers may be regarded as occupying a stronger bargaining position, and lower thresholds for employment in circumstances of over demand.

Table 2. Dimensions present within extracted conceptualisations.

Conceptualisations	Dimensions present within conceptualisation						
	Capital			Career Development		Contextual	
	Human	Social	Psychological	Signal-management	Self-management	Capital Demand	Culture
Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Kaiser	Abilities, expertise, know-how				Ambition, work ethic, drive		Social/interpersonal compatibility
Bridgstock	Discipline specific skills Generic skills		Underpinning traits and dispositions	Career building skills	Self-management skills		
Thijssen, Van der Heijden, and Tonette	Current employability of human resources					Transition conditions and Broadening conditions (contextual)	Transition conditions and Broadening conditions (personal)
Tomlinson					Passive/active career development (means) Market/non market career aspirations (end)		
Dacre Pool and Seweller	Degree subject knowledge, understanding		Emotional intelligence	Career development learning			Experience (Work and Life)

	ding and skills Generic skills		Self-esteem Self-efficacy Self-confidence				
Van Der Heijden and Van Der Heijden	Occupational Expertise		Anticipation and Optimisation Personal Flexibility				Balance
				Corporate Sense			
McQuaid and Lindsay	Individual factors (Employability skills and attributes)		Individual factors (adaptability and mobility)	job seeking		External factors (Demand factors; enabling support factors)	Demographic characteristics; health and wellbeing; Personal circumstances (Household circumstances; work culture; access to resources)
Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth	Human Capital	Social Capital	Personal adaptability		Career Identity		
deGrip, Van Loo et al	Capability			Capability	Willingness	Capability	
			Willingness				
Forrier and Sels	Movement Capital (MC) Activities to maintain or enhance		Willingness to maintain or enhance MC	Transition		Context Opportunity to maintain or enhance	Labour market position Shock Event Opportunity

	MC Willingness to move		Ease of movement			MC	to maintain or enhance MC
Brown, Hesketh, and Williams	Absolute employability					Relative employability	
Knight and Yorke	Understanding Skills Metacognition		Efficacy				
Harvey, Locke, and Morey	Subject area		Willingness to develop	Recruitment process Self-promotional skills Articulation of employability Employer		External factors Graduate Employability development opportunities	External factors
	Employability attributes Engagement reflection pedagogy						Extra-curricular experiences HEI
Kluytmans and Ott	Applicable know-how and skills		Willingness to be mobile	Know-how job market			
Hillage and	The Assets an individual			Deploym		The	The context

Pollard	possesses in term of knowledge, skills and attitudes (baseline, Intermediate, High level)			ent of those assets Presentat ion of those assets		context within which they seek work (labour market circumstances)	within which they seek work (personal circumstances)
Arthur, Claman, and DeFillippi	Knowing how	Know ing whom			Knowing why		

Conclusions

This manuscript offers the first systematic search of English language employability literature, adding an index to the employability field that can be used to signpost relevant literature and areas of consensus.

A total of 16 conceptualisations were identified herein, consisting of 88 components with three overarching dimensions that describe the nature of these components. Consideration of how these dimensions have developed following successive publications and interpretations suggests that more recent publications do not add to all dimensions of employability, and that the development of dimensions is inconsistent with a continuous progression of this concept.

Rather than illustrating the superiority of a single theory in understanding employability, this review provides evidence for a need to combine theorising around capital, signalling, identity, career management and labour market demand so as to better understand employability. What is more, this review offers a justification for the inclusion of theoretical developments within the areas of perceived employability, orientation models, career management, capital, and demographic components such as age and health status, within a holistic conceptualisation of employability. Only through the consideration of this plurality of factors can we truly further the conceptualisation of employability and therefore successfully inform the design and measurement of employability development interventions.

The current review must be considered within the context of its limitations. Given the diversity of the empirical testing for these conceptualisations, influenced by varying descriptions of what employability is (e.g. adaptability, knowledge and skills), the proceeding review does not include consideration of the quality of empirical support for these conceptualisations. Furthermore, whilst efforts have been made to consider a holistic view of employability at an individual level, not all of these manuscripts express employability from the same perspective or for the same purpose. Researchers are therefore advised to utilise this review as a map of existing literature from which to extract those conceptualisations that best inform their viewpoint.

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