

Employability, a complex concept

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Employability concerns the individual's chance of obtaining and retaining a job. Although the concept dates back to the 1950s, it has recently attracted renewed attention from both policy makers and researchers from disciplines as diverse as management science, economics, psychology and sociology. Current employability research has been criticized for being 'fuzzy' and a scattered field of stand-alone studies using different conceptualizations and measures of employability. A first aim of my talk is to bring conceptual clarification. I will discuss a conceptual model and empirical study integrating the different notions of employability. A second aim of my talk is to unravel the employability paradox, a common concern among employers. Having a highly employable workforce may also present a risk for employers, because these employees may be more likely to leave the organization for another employer. Current research has mainly looked at employees' perceived employability in the external labour market and its relationship with turnover. I will demonstrate that it is necessary to look at both perceived employability in the external and internal labor market, and at employee and supervisor perceptions. These findings put the employability paradox in perspective and offer insights for practice in the retention of an employable workforce.