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## Understanding the factors that promote employability orientation: The impact of employability culture, career satisfaction, and role breadth self-efficacy

Aukje Nauta<sup>1\*</sup>, Annelies van Vianen<sup>2</sup>, Beatrice van der Heijden<sup>3</sup>,  
 Karen van Dam<sup>4</sup> and Marja Willemssen<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Amsterdam and Randstad HR Solutions, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

<sup>2</sup>University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

<sup>3</sup>Maastricht School of Management, Open University of The Netherlands, and University of Twente, The Netherlands

<sup>4</sup>Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands

<sup>5</sup>TNO Quality of Life – Work and Employment, Hoofddorp, The Netherlands

This study among 702 Dutch employees working in the health care and welfare sector examined individual and organizational factors that are related to workers' employability orientation and turnover intention. Additionally, push and pull motives were examined of employees who aimed to leave their job. Results indicated that a strong employability culture adds extra variance over and above individual factors such as career satisfaction and role breadth self-efficacy in the explanation of employability orientation, turnover intention, and push motives of employees who aim to leave their job. That is, employability culture is positively related to employability orientation, but negatively related to turnover intention and to push motives of those who aim to leave. Pull motives of employees who want to leave are explained by individual factors only, such as career dissatisfaction and role breadth self-efficacy, but not by employability culture. These findings suggest that organizations that need to adapt to changing environments should implement a strong employability culture, because such a culture stimulates employability orientations among their employees while simultaneously decreasing turnover intentions.

Employability is a critical requirement, both for organizations that need to compete in a changing environment and for individuals who aim for career success

\* Correspondence should be addressed to Dr Aukje Nauta, Department of Psychology, Work and Organizational Psychology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam 1018 WB, The Netherlands (e-mail: a.nauta@uva.nl).

(Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Employability refers to the 'continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the optimal use of one's competences' (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, p. 453). Highly employable workers enable organizations to meet fluctuating demands for new products and services. Changes in organizational structure, technology, and job assignments require workers to adopt new roles, modify existing work behaviour, and acquire new skills (Chan, 2000; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). Employees' openness to develop themselves and to adapt to changing work requirements has been referred to as '*employability orientation*', which has been shown to be an important precursor of actual employability (Van Dam, 2003, 2004).

Organizations may try to stimulate their workers' employability orientation by creating a culture that supports individual development (Schneider, Brief, & Guzzo, 1996). For example, KPN, a large Dutch telecom company tried to increase the employability orientation of their personnel by implementing an 'employability website' through which their employees could spend a special budget on training and education, career guidance, and mobility workshops. By doing so, they hoped that their employees would be more prepared for change, because this company is constantly changing and simultaneously needs to downsize and keep their valuable employees committed to the organization (Nauta, 2007; Sjollema, 2007).

Research has shown that employees react more positively to organizational changes when they perceive the culture to be development oriented (Tierney, 1999; Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008). However, organizations face a dilemma between stimulating workers' employability orientation on the one hand, and retaining their employees on the other hand (Legge, 1995). Employability-oriented workers may easily identify and anticipate career opportunities, inside and outside the organization (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Stimulating employability orientation may thus result in increased turnover, thereby threatening the firm's flexibility and continuity. Efforts to prevent turnover through attractive human resources practices may at the same time lower employees' employability orientation (Ng, Butts, Vandenberg, DeJoy, & Wilson, 2006; Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefoghe, 2005; Van Dam, 2005).

Given this dilemma, an important question is to what extent employees' employability orientation can be advanced in a way that is beneficial for both individuals and organizations. Although the dilemma between flexibility and turnover prevention has received some attention in the 1990s (see Legge, 1995), the simultaneous effect of employability culture on employability orientation and turnover intentions has not been investigated before. Moreover, most previous studies have used an individual difference framework when addressing employability and employability orientation (Bezuijen, 2005; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007; Van Dam, 2004; Van der Velde & Van den Berg, 2003). Less attention has been paid to situational determinants of employability and employability orientation, such as employability culture.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationships of organizations' employability culture with workers' employability orientation and turnover intention, in addition to relationships with individual characteristics (i.e. career satisfaction and role breadth self-efficacy). By incorporating employability culture into the research model, this study extends previous research that examined individual antecedents of employability orientation (e.g. Cordery, Sevastos, Mueller, & Parker, 1993; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Van Dam, 2003). Our aim is to provide organizations with valuable information about how to enhance employability orientation while retaining their employability-oriented workers at the same time.

The study was conducted within the Dutch health care and welfare sector. In this sector, large personnel shortages are expected in the near future. Van Essen, Paardekooper, Talma, and Van der Windt (2006) write that there were 21 job vacancies per 1,000 jobs in 2006, compared with 11 vacancies per 1,000 jobs in 2005, and the number of job vacancies is still increasing. The workforce in this sector is ageing rapidly, not only because the Dutch labour force as a whole is ageing, but also because the sector has recently welcomed many women returning to work, after taking care of their children. These women often work part-time, which may decrease their employability (72% of all employees in health and care work part-time, vs. 37% in the total Dutch working population). Both employees and employers indicate lacks of career development opportunities in the sector. Because of the increasing personnel shortages, the ageing and mainly part-time working workforce, and the lack of career development practices, it is of utmost importance to enhance employability and prevent turnover in this sector.

### **Three perspectives on employability**

Employability has been in the spotlight since the 1990s (Forrier & Sels, 2003), but the historical antecedents of the current debate can be traced back almost a century (see Gazier, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Employability has been conceptualized from three different perspectives, the economic-social, the individual, and the organizational (Van Dam, Van der Heijden, & Schyns, 2006).

Within the economic-social perspective, employability refers to the ability of different categories of the labour force to gain and maintain employment (Finn, 2000). This perspective distinguishes between the employable and the unemployable (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), a distinction that is closely related to governmental interventions aimed at encouraging unemployed people to enter the labour market (Forrier & Sels, 2003). Over time, these interventions have been targeted at different groups, ranging from the physically and mentally disadvantaged people in the 1960s, women in the 1970s, to young drop-outs and minorities in the current age.

Since the 1990s, an individual perspective on employability has emerged, shifting attention from the underprivileged unemployed to the entire population. Careers have increasingly become boundaryless. To date, more boundaries (e.g. occupational, departmental, and organizational) are crossed in comparison with earlier and more predictable hierarchical careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000). Employees need to be focused on their adaptability for attaining a job within or outside their organization. As such, employability has been considered an alternative to job security (Forrier & Sels, 2003). Definitions of employability within the individual perspective are abundant (see Forrier & Sels, 2003; McArdle *et al.*, 2007; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), emphasizing career aspects such as adaptability (Fugate *et al.*, 2004), mobility (Van Dam, 2005), career development (Sterns & Dorsett, 1994), occupational expertise (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and personal development and lifelong learning (Bezuijen, 2005; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007).

In addition to the economic-social and individual perspectives, employability has been addressed from an organizational perspective, where employability has been related to organizations' functional flexibility. The increased internationalization, competition, and technological changes that have characterized the past decades, required organizations to become more adaptive to changing demands. One way to

become more adaptive was to increase the workers' employability through the possession of broader skills, together with a willingness to change freely between tasks (Guest, 1987). From an organizational perspective, employability thus represents an HR practice to optimize the deployment of staff.

The present study addresses employability from an organizational perspective. We focus on how organizations can increase their workers' employability orientation, that is, their openness to adapt to changing work requirements through developing flexible and broader skills and a readiness to change tasks and jobs (Van Dam, 2004). Employability-oriented workers are likely to have or develop up-to-date knowledge and skills. This is especially relevant in the health and care sector, with its continuous technological, medical, and market developments. However, employability-oriented workers might focus more on their career than on the organization (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; McArdle *et al.*, 2007). As a consequence, intentions to leave the current employer and continue one's career in another work setting might develop accordingly. Van Dam (2005) indeed found a positive relationship between employees' openness towards different job changes and their turnover intention.

Employability from an organizational perspective means focusing on HR practices that may help organizations to manage the dilemma between having flexible and broadly employable workers on the one hand and turnover prevention on the other hand. More insight into this dilemma will be gained by simultaneously examining the individual and organizational antecedents of employability orientation and turnover intentions.

### **Antecedents of employability orientation and turnover intentions**

What determines whether individuals are oriented towards employability and whether they intend to leave their job or even the organization? And if they want to leave, what determines their motives for leaving? Van Vianen, Feij, Krausz, and Taris (2004) distinguished between two motives for turnover: push and pull. Push motives are related to dissatisfaction with one's current work situation, whereas pull motives refer to available opportunities to improve one's career opportunities on the external labour market.

There is extensive evidence that job dissatisfaction causes intended and actual job changes (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Maertz & Campion, 1998), whereas job satisfaction causes employees to be less oriented towards employability and mobility (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000; Van Dam, 2005). Given the relevance of development for workers' careers, an even stronger predictor of employability orientation and turnover intentions, compared with job satisfaction, may be peoples' *career* satisfaction. Career satisfaction refers to individuals' perceptions of their up-to-date career accomplishments and prospects for future advancement (Gattiker & Larwood, 1986; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995). In case of career dissatisfaction, employees may be strongly inclined to search for possible career improvements.

There may also be positive factors that initiate peoples' job change orientations. People select those actions or activities that they feel they are capable of (e.g. Bandura, 1986; Deci & Ryan, 2000). People may feel self-confident regarding specific task domains, which is the typical task-related conceptualization of self-efficacy (e.g. Wood & Bandura, 1989). Yet, within the context of workers' flexibility, Parker (1998; Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997) has developed the concept of *role breadth self-efficacy*, which refers to 'the extent to which people feel confident and feel that they are able to carry out a broader and proactive role, beyond traditional prescribed technical requirements'

(Parker, 1998, p. 835). Employees who have a high role breadth self-efficacy are likely to be oriented towards role or job changes. Research has shown that employees with a high role breadth self-efficacy are more open to organizational changes (Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008), report more learning and innovative behaviours (Van Dam & Seijts, 2007), and engage in more development activities (Bezuijen, 2005) compared with employees with a low role breadth self-efficacy. Moreover, a high role breadth self-efficacy may decrease employees' interest in their current job, because they feel over-qualified and therefore start thinking about leaving their job.

In the present study, we examined the role of career satisfaction and role breadth self-efficacy for individuals' employability orientation and turnover intention. Furthermore, we investigated to what extent these individual antecedents were related to individuals' push motives (i.e. dissatisfaction with the current job) and pull motives (i.e. improving one's career opportunities) among those who aimed to leave their job. We hypothesized the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Career satisfaction is negatively related to employability orientation (1a) and turnover intention (1b), as well as to push (1c), and pull motives (1d) of those who aim to leave.

*Hypothesis 2:* Role breadth self-efficacy is positively related to employability orientation (2a) and turnover intention (2b), as well as to push (2c), and pull motives (2d) of those who aim to leave.

Whether people are employability-oriented and/or intend to leave does not only depend on individual factors, but on situational factors as well. For example, Brown, Hesketh, and Williams (2003) argue that whether one intends to leave will also depend on the state of the external labour market, such as the demand for one's occupation and skills and the number of job openings. However, organizations cannot control the external labour market. Still, it is important for organizations to influence the employability orientations and turnover intentions of their employees. Many organizations, especially larger ones, foster HR practices that focus on the internal mobility of their personnel, such as training and education, regular career interviews with supervisors or HR advisors, and having a career centre for supporting employees who want to or have to change jobs (e.g. Heemskerk, Van der Wolk, & Nauta, 2007). In this study, we focus on situational factors that can be controlled by organizations. Additionally, we will control for the influence of the state of the external labour market (Brown *et al.*, 2003).

Whatever policies organizations have, their success will depend upon the attitudes and behavioural patterns they foster. When employability policies are part of a sound employability culture, employees will feel stimulated to orient themselves on their employability. Organizational culture is often described as the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, and patterns of behaviour within an organization (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Organizational culture can guide behaviour and attitudes within the organization (Schneider *et al.*, 1996). Those organizations that succeed in implementing an employability culture are likely to have employees with positive attitudes towards job changes. An employability culture represents the cognitive facet of organizational culture (Ostroff, 1993), because this facet (as opposed to the affective and instrumental facets of organizational culture) is concerned with peoples' involvement in work activities, such as their personal growth. Research has shown relationships between the cognitive facet of peoples' organizational culture perceptions and their willingness to stay in the organization (Carr, Schmidt, Ford, & DeShon, 2003).

Besides affecting employability orientation, an employability culture may also affect employees' intention to leave their job. An organization with a strongly embedded employability culture stimulates employees to develop themselves, and grants them autonomy to learn and do new things, inside and outside their jobs. Owing to the many opportunities for self-development within one's current organization and the presence of a challenging work environment, employees will perceive fewer push factors and will be less inclined to search for other jobs, inside or outside the organization. We therefore expect employability culture to be negatively related with turnover intention as well as with peoples' push motives for changing their job. No specific relationship is expected between employability culture and pull motives, because these motives are particularly dictated by peoples' upward career ambitions and relate to opportunities outside their current job or organization (Van Vianen *et al.*, 2004).

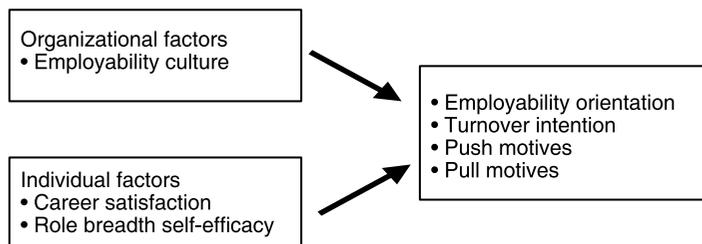
*Hypothesis 3:* Employability culture is positively related to employability orientation (3a), but negatively related to turnover intention (3b) and, for those who aim to leave, to push motives (3c).

Figure 1 summarizes the relationships that will be tested between career satisfaction, role breadth self-efficacy, and employability culture on the one hand, and employability orientation, turnover intention, and push and pull motives for those who want to leave on the other hand (for reasons of parsimony, we have omitted the demographic variables in Figure 1). The hypotheses as depicted in Figure 1 reflect main effects of individual factors and employability culture on peoples' employability orientations. Interactionist models in organizational literature assume that the *interaction* of the person and the environment influences human behaviour (Endler & Magnusson, 1976; Lewin, 1935). We will therefore also explore possible interaction effects of employability culture on the one hand and career satisfaction and role breadth self-efficacy on the other hand, upon employability orientation and (motives for) turnover intention.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

Our sample comprised 702 employees (588 women and 114 men) working in health care and welfare institutions, such as nursing homes, public assistance, youth care, day care, mental health care, hospitals, ambulance transportation, care for the mentally disabled, and domestic social services. They were all members of a so-called Internet panel. The Internet panel company pre-selected a total of 8,229 members that were registered as people working in the health care and welfare sector (15% of the Dutch



**Figure 1.** Antecedents of employability orientation and turnover intention.

labour force works in this sector). These 8,229 panel members received an e-mail in which they were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their work and their career. A total of 1,137 (13.82%) panel members responded; 702 of them still worked in health care or welfare and had not recently (i.e. during the last year) changed their job. This latter group comprised the sample in the current study, because we were interested in explaining employability orientation of employees who have been performing their jobs for quite some time. Respondents' mean age was 35.4 years ( $SD = 10.56$ ), mean organizational tenure was 6.44 years ( $SD = 6.06$ ), and mean hours of employment per week were 25.31 ( $SD = 10.68$ ). The latter is consistent with recent research on the labour market in the Dutch healthcare and welfare sector, which shows that 72% of the employees in this sector work part-time (Van Essen, Paardekooper, Talma, & Van der Windt, 2006); 31.6% of the participants held a bachelor or a master's degree, while 68.4% had received lower levels of professional education. Participants had an executive function in the area of care or welfare (70%), a management position (2%), a staff position (12%), or other types of jobs (16%).

The survey contained measures for perceived employability culture of the organization, career satisfaction, role breadth self-efficacy, employability orientation, turnover intention, push and pull motives, and demographic characteristics. Additionally, we included items on respondents' labour market perceptions because people's turnover intentions may also be affected by their perceptions of the labour market, that is, whether they think that finding another job will be difficult. Unless otherwise indicated, respondents could respond on a five-point scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5).

*Employability culture* was measured with eight items that were developed for the purpose of the present study. Items are: 'My organization encourages people to change their jobs on a regular basis'; 'My organization wants employees to be flexible'; 'My organization encourages employees to broaden their skills'; 'Experimenting is supported in this organization'; 'The many rules and regulations in this organization prevent people from trying out new things' (reverse-scored); 'My organization gives employees the opportunity to perform very different activities'; 'In my organization it is perceived as normal that employees stay in the same job for years and years' (reverse-scored); and 'In my organization it is perceived as normal that employees change their job on a regular base'. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .73.

*Career satisfaction* was measured with one item: 'I am satisfied with my career'. The scale anchors ranged from 'not at all' (1) to 'very much' (5).

*Role breadth self-efficacy* was measured with six items derived from the role breadth self-efficacy scale (Parker, 1998). These items were presented after a general question, asking: 'How confident would you feel if you were asked to perform the following task?' An example item is: 'Making suggestions to management about ways to improve the section's work procedures'. The response scale ranged from 'not at all confident' (1), to 'very confident' (5). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .85.

*Employability orientation* was measured by means of four items dealing with respondents' receptivity towards employability within their current organization (Van Dam, 2004). An example item is: 'If the organization would offer me an opportunity to obtain new work experiences, I would take it'. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .82.

*Turnover intention* was measured with one item: 'How likely is it that you will change your job in the coming year?' The scale anchors ranged from 'very unlikely' (1) to 'very likely' (5). Respondents ( $N = 204$ ) who reported a job change in the coming year as being 'likely' or 'very likely' were asked for their motives.

*Push and pull motives* were measured by asking respondents with a turnover intention to indicate what motives they would have to change their job in the near future. We derived these measures from a recent study on job employability by Van Vianen *et al.* (2004). *Push motives* were measured with four items, referring to the amount of dissatisfaction with the content of the job and the work conditions. An example item is: 'I would change my job because of dissatisfaction with my current job'. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .81. *Pull motives* were measured with two items, referring to possible promotion and pay improvement. The two items were: 'I would change my job because it would be an opportunity to increase my pay' and 'I would change my job because it would be an opportunity to improve my position'. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .80.

*Perceived state of the labour market* was measured with three items by asking respondents to what extent they thought it would be difficult to find another job in their profession, their sector, and their region. The response scale ranged from 'not at all difficult' (1), to 'very difficult' (5). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .91.

*Demographic characteristics.* Each respondent indicated his or her age (in years), tenure (in years), gender (female = 0, male = 1), job type (an executive function in the area of care or welfare (nurse, physician), management, staff, and other), and education (lower education = 0, higher education = 1).

## Results

It was first tested whether demographic characteristics were related to the dependent variables. Gender, age, educational level, tenure, and hours of work, but not job type, were significantly related to one or more of the dependent variables. Except job type, all demographic variables were included as control variables in subsequent analyses. Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients among the variables under study.

Generally, the relationships among the study variables were modest. We nevertheless examined whether the scales that showed intercorrelations higher than .20 were different constructs. The overall fit of the measurement model to the data was performed with AMOS-5 (Arbuckle, 2003). Furthermore, the seven-factor model (including employability culture, career satisfaction, role breadth self-efficacy, employability orientation, turnover intention, push motives, and pull motives) was compared with a one-factor model (including all scale items). The seven-factor model yielded a significantly better fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 435.02$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $df = 271$ , CFI = .91, IFI = .91, TLI = .89, RMSEA = .0546) than the one-factor solution ( $\chi^2 = 1,662.05$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $df = 299$ , CFI = .25, IFI = .26, TLI = .18, RMSEA = .1499). Thus, the data presented statistical support for treating the scales as separate constructs.

## Hypotheses testing

The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analyses. We conducted four analyses, with employability orientation, turnover intention, push motives, and pull motives as the dependent variables, respectively. The latter two regression analyses only concerned respondents who aimed to leave their job ( $N = 204$ ). The demographic characteristics were entered as control variables in the first step of the analyses. The second step included perceived state of the labour market, employability culture, career satisfaction, and role breadth self-efficacy. The interaction terms

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.16	0.37	—											
2. Age	35.40	10.56	.13**	—										
3. Education <sup>b</sup>	0.32	0.47	.16**	-.13**	—									
4. Tenure	6.44	6.06	.06	.53**	-.10**	—								
5. Hours work	25.31	10.68	.27**	.10**	.25*	.10**	—							
6. Perceived state of the labour market	2.95	1.14	.03	-.09*	.03	-.03	-.01	—						
7. Employability culture	2.94	0.59	.01	-.10**	-.01	-.06	.11**	-.07	—					
8. Career satisfaction	3.90	0.96	-.06	.01	.01	.10**	.14**	-.14**	.30**	—				
9. Role breadth self-efficacy	3.29	0.71	.16**	.14**	.20**	.05	.16**	-.05	.03	-.10**	—			
10. Employability orientation	3.84	0.77	.09*	-.05	.03	-.11**	.04	.11**	.07	-.14**	.25**	—		
11. Turnover intention	2.68	1.34	.02	-.19**	.13**	-.21**	-.11**	.12**	-.18**	-.37**	.03	.17**	—	
12. Push motives	3.11	1.12	.10	-.09	.12	-.02	.09	.07	-.32**	-.30**	.08	.00	-.00	—
13. Pull motives	3.59	1.21	.19**	-.11	.10	-.14	-.03	.10**	-.09	-.35**	.24**	-.24**	.32**	-.32**

Note. Due to missing variables N ranges from 624 to 702; N ranges from 178 to 204 when push and pull motives are involved; these were measured only among respondents high on turnover intention. Hence, the correlation of these motives with turnover intention could not be computed because of zero variance on the latter variable in this subsample.

<sup>a</sup>Women = 0, men = 1.

<sup>b</sup>Lower education = 0, higher education = 1.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

(career satisfaction  $\times$  employability culture, and role breadth self-efficacy  $\times$  employability culture) were entered in the third step of the regression equation. In order to reduce the impact of multicollinearity, all independent variables in the equations were centred. Thereafter, the product terms were computed. *Post hoc* analyses to estimate the statistical power of the regressions showed that the statistical power of all equations was 1.0.

As can be seen in Table 2, for three out of four regression equations the first step was significant, indicating that some of the demographic variables were significantly related to employability orientation, turnover intentions, and pull motives.

**Table 2.** Regression of employability orientation, turnover intention, push motives, and pull motives on demographic variables, perceived state of the labour market, employability culture, career satisfaction, and role breadth self-efficacy

	Employability orientation <sup>a</sup>	Turnover intention <sup>a</sup>	Push motives <sup>b</sup>	Pull motives <sup>b</sup>
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
<b>Step 1</b>				
Gender <sup>c</sup>	0.05	0.03	0.07	0.19**
Age	-0.06	-0.14**	-0.29**	-0.14
Education <sup>d</sup>	-0.05	0.11**	0.08	0.07
Tenure	-0.13**	-0.10*	0.14	-0.06
Hours worked	0.01	-0.09*	0.17*	-0.02
$R^2$ change	.04	.08	.04	.06
$F$ change	4.86**	11.42**	1.39	2.33*
<b>Step 2</b>				
Perceived state of the labour market	0.09*	0.05	0.02	-0.03
Employability culture (EC)	0.10*	-0.08*	-0.29**	-0.01
Career satisfaction (CS)	-0.16**	-0.32**	-0.29**	-0.37**
Role breadth self-efficacy (RS)	0.30**	-0.01	0.09	0.23**
$R^2$ change	.13	.13	.20	.17
$F$ change	24.51**	25.05**	11.88**	9.69**
<b>Step 3</b>				
CS $\times$ EC	0.08*	-0.03	-0.07	-0.02
RS $\times$ EC	0.02	-0.02	0.05	0.01
$R^2$ change	.01	.00	.01	.00
$F$ change	2.05	0.39	0.82	0.03
Full-model $R^2$	.18	.21	.25	.23
Full-model $F$	11.87**	15.13**	5.24**	4.74**

Note.  $\beta$ -weights concern the equations in step 3, including all independent variables. Statistical power of all equations is 1.0.

<sup>a</sup>  $N = 624$ .

<sup>b</sup>  $N = 178$ .

<sup>c</sup> Women = 0, men = 1.

<sup>d</sup> Lower education = 0, higher education = 1.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

The second step was meant to test the hypotheses and to establish whether the study variables could explain additional variance in the dependent variables. Hypotheses 1a-1d predicted negative relationships between career satisfaction and the dimensions of employability orientation. Conforming to the prediction, career satisfaction was negatively related to employability orientation, turnover intention, push motives, and

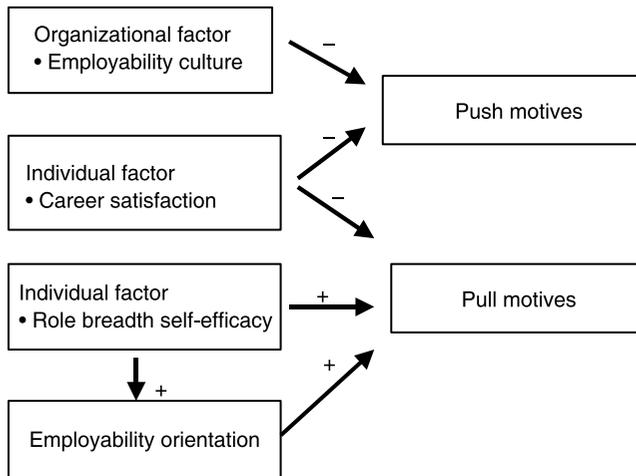
pull motives. Employees who were satisfied with their career appeared to be less oriented towards intra-organizational job changes and had a lower turnover intention. Those employees who aimed to leave their job reported stronger push and pull motives for an eventual job change if they were less satisfied with their career as compared with those who were satisfied. These results support Hypotheses 1a-1d.

Hypotheses 2a-2d predicted positive relationships between employees' role breadth self-efficacy and the dimensions of employability orientation. Role breadth self-efficacy showed positive relationships with employability orientation and pull motives, but no relationship with turnover intention and push motives. Therefore, the results supported Hypotheses 2a and 2d, but not Hypotheses 2b and 2c.

According to Hypotheses 3a-3c, employability culture would be positively related to employability orientation, but negatively related to turnover intention and push motives. In support of these hypotheses, the results showed a significant positive relationship with employability orientation, and significant negative relationships with turnover intention and push motives. No relationship was found with pull motives. Hypotheses 3a-3c were supported.

The third step of the regression equation, including the interaction terms, could not explain additional variance in the criterion variables. Furthermore, the beta weights of the full regression model (see Table 2) show that only one of the eight interactions was significant and that this effect was rather modest.

Employability orientation was operationalized as individuals' receptivity towards employability *within* their current organization. Yet, employability orientation may also reflect a general positive attitude towards external mobility. As such it may be related to turnover intentions and push and pull motives as well. We explored this option in additional regression analyses. Turnover intention, push motives, and pull motives, respectively, were regressed on the control variables (step 1), employability orientation (step 2), and perceived state of the labour market, employability culture, career satisfaction, and role breadth self-efficacy (final step). Employability orientation was significantly related to turnover intentions ( $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $t(613) = 3.07$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and pull motives ( $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $t(167) = 2.85$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not to push motives ( $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $t(167) = -0.09$ , *ns*). Explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of the full model was .22 ( $F(10, 613) = 17.14$ ,  $p = .00$ ) for turnover intention, .26 ( $F(10, 167) = 5.81$ ,  $p = .00$ ) for pull motives, and .25 ( $F(10, 167) = 5.73$ ,  $p = .00$ ) for push motives. Notably, the inclusion of employability orientation in the second step of the equations did not change the relationships between the dependent variables in the final step and the criterion variables as compared with the first series of regressions (not including employability orientation). This indicates that employability orientation did not operate as a mediator of the relationships between the focal independent variables (employability culture, career satisfaction, and role breadth self-efficacy) and the criterion variables. Most interestingly, both career satisfaction and organization's employability culture were negatively related to individuals' push motives, whereas employability culture was not related to individuals' pull motives (see Figure 2). Instead, pull motives were mainly related to personal factors and employability orientation. Furthermore, because the regression analyses explaining push and pull motives only concerned employees who aim to leave their job, we regressed employability orientation on control variables (step 1), perceived state of the labour market, employability culture, career satisfaction, and role breadth self-efficacy (step 2) for this group of employees. Results showed that only role breadth self-efficacy was significantly and positively related to employability orientation ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $t(168) = 3.31$ ,  $p < .01$ ; total model:  $R^2 = .09$ ;  $F(9, 168) = 1.94$ ,  $p < .05$ ).



**Figure 2.** Antecedents of push and pull motives of employees aiming to leave their job.

## Discussion

Stimulating workers' employability orientation is advantageous for both organizational and employee outcomes (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Recent research (Van Dam, 2005) however suggests that employees who are satisfied with their current career situation are less oriented towards their broader employability and less likely to make any career steps. Hence, organizations and their employees might run the risk of 'experience concentration', a situation in which it is difficult to assign other, new tasks to employees, while the circumstances necessitate this. This is a serious problem for many organizations, because rapid (technological) changes and high competition ask for changing competencies of firms and their employees, while at the same time the 'half life' of these competencies is becoming shorter (Van der Heijden, 2005). Although satisfaction is an important value in itself, employees' career inactivity due to their satisfaction can sometimes trap them, namely in situations where change is needed and employees do not have the skills or attitudes to meet the changing demands.

An important question is therefore how organizations can stimulate their employees to orient themselves towards their employability, even when they are currently happy with their job and career. The objective of this study was to address this theoretically and practically relevant question.

The results indicated that, comparable to previous studies (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Lee *et al.*, 2000; Maertz & Campion, 1998; Van Dam, 2005), career satisfaction was negatively related to employability orientation and turnover intention. Employees who were satisfied with their career felt less urge to change their current work situation and perform different tasks or to move to another job within or outside their organization than employees who reported lower career satisfaction. Those employees who aimed to leave their job were less sensitive to push and pull motives if they were satisfied with their career. The latter suggests that satisfied employees experience less urgency to leave, and will therefore be less likely to actually make a career step despite their turnover intention, compared with less satisfied employees. It should be noted, however, that career satisfaction was less strongly related to employability orientation than to turnover intention.

Besides the negative role of career satisfaction, as predicted, role breadth self-efficacy had a positive and strong relationship with employability orientation, and with pull motives for those who aimed to leave their job. Employees with a higher role breadth self-efficacy were more open to job and task changes within the organization and perceived more pull motives for a job change, compared with employees with a lower role breadth self-efficacy. Our findings support the results from previous studies that have shown positive relationships of role breadth self-efficacy with flexible role orientations (Parker, 2000), openness to organizational changes (Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008), learning and innovative behaviours (Van Dam & Seijts, 2007), and engagement in development activities (Bezuijen, 2005). However, high and low self-efficacy employees did not differ in their intention to leave their job or in their perception of push motives.

Together, these outcomes indicate that organizations could focus upon enhancing employees' role breadth self-efficacy in order to increase their employability, and to guarantee organizational flexibility, without running the risk of losing these employees to another company. Moreover, by investing in their role breadth self-efficacy, organizations will stimulate their employees to focus on positive motives for developing their employability, namely self-development. Especially in large organizations that have suffered from downsizing operations in their recent past, many employees are enabled to be actively involved in employability enhancement when organizations really invest in fostering their role breadth self-efficacy, for example by means of learning opportunities on-the-job, and in the context of training and education.

Finally, employability culture appeared to be associated with employability orientation, turnover intention, and, for those aiming to leave their job, push motives. The negative relationships of employability culture with turnover intention and push motives indicate that a climate that fosters individual development and employability decreases employees' intentions to leave their job, or their negative motives in case they had already decided to leave. This suggests that employees who leave an organization with a strong employability culture are likely to be good ambassadors of their former organization, which may help to attract new employees or customers. The findings also showed a positive but modest relationship between employability culture and employability orientation, suggesting that such a culture stimulates employees to engage in task changes and development opportunities.

Our findings match with the existing literature that demonstrates how (career) satisfaction may decrease orientations towards employability and mobility (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Lee *et al.*, 2000; Maertz & Campion, 1998; Van Dam, 2005), whereas role breadth self-efficacy actually increases such orientations (Bezuijen, 2005; Parker, 2000; Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008; Van Dam & Seijts, 2007). Moreover, they add to the literature by demonstrating the positive impact of employability culture upon employability orientation. In previous research, employability is sometimes perceived as a (necessary) human resource strategy to demonstrate that 'lifetime employment' has to be replaced by 'lifetime employability' and a new, more balanced and unattached psychological contract, in order to meet continuously changing job and market demands (e.g. Herriot, 2001; Janssens, Sels, & Van den Brande, 2003; Rousseau, 2004). Our findings show that organizations can implement such a strategy in a positive way, namely, by realizing an employability culture, in which it is perceived as normal to change jobs and tasks on a regular basis and to continuously invest in keeping knowledge and skills up-to-date.

### **Limitations and recommendations for further research**

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, all data have been collected using surveys opening up the possibility of response set consistencies. Since all data have been gathered from one and the same source, a so-called 'common-method bias' might exist (Doty & Glick, 1998; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Recently however, several authors have noted that this methodological problem is often overstated, especially with regard to self-report survey studies (e.g. Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Spector, 2006). In this study, only 7 out of 64 correlations (11%) were higher than, or equal to the absolute value of .30 (Spector, 2006), whereas 31 correlations were lower than, or equal to the absolute value of .10, suggesting that there were far more correlations close to zero than significant and strong. Future research using employees' self-assessments and supervisor assessments is advocated because supervisors and employees have been found to differ regarding facets of employability and development issues (Bezuijen, 2005; Van der Heijden, 2000; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Secondly, all data have been collected at one point in time, that is, the study is cross-sectional. Our study focused on peoples' attitudes rather than actual behaviours, thus further research is needed to address the issues of behavioural causality. Research using multi-wave designs can provide more specific information about the stability and change of the variables, and about cross-lagged (i.e. over time) relationships (De Lange, 2005; Taris & Kompier, 2003).

Thirdly, our concept of employability orientation is a limited operationalization that touches upon the workers' employability or career potential. Future research can benefit from more elaborate conceptualizations, not only of how employees orient themselves towards employability, but also of the concept of employability itself (see e.g. Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Fourthly, our measure of turnover intention was somewhat ambiguous, referring to either an intended *internal* job change or an intended *external* job change. Future research should distinguish between two or even three types of turnover intention (intention to leave one's job but not the organization, intention to leave one's organization but not the sector, and intention to leave the sector). This will show more clearly the factors that have differential impacts upon employability orientation, internal turnover intention, and external turnover intention.

A fifth limitation of our study is that we used a single-item measure of career satisfaction. Although multi-item scales are preferred above single-item measures, in some studies they are less feasible (e.g. Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2006). The current study was developed in the first place to give many practical answers as to enhance the employability of workers in health care or welfare. Wanous, Reichers, and Hudy (1997), in their research on job satisfaction, argued that single-item measures can be appropriate in situations where multi-item scales are less feasible. We argue that career satisfaction, like job satisfaction, is a sufficiently narrow and unambiguous concept to measure it reliably with one item only (Sackett & Larson, 1990).

Also, further approaches that include commitment are relevant to undertake. For example, the work by Tsui, Pearce, Porter, and Tripoli (1997) indicated that employees perform better, demonstrate more citizenship behaviour, and express higher levels of affective commitment if an employer invests heavily in developmental opportunities and facilities. However, a study by Janssens *et al.* (2003) shows that employees with so-called 'strong' psychological contracts score higher on affective commitment but lower on employability compared with employees with 'unattached' psychological

contracts, suggesting that affective commitment and employability may be negatively related. These opposing results suggest that including both commitment measures and employability in our models and methods may increase our understanding of employability. By doing so, we can examine whether developmental opportunities and facilities provided by employers may increase affective commitment, with or without simultaneously increasing employability orientation and actual employability.

Likewise, there may be other organizational factors than employability culture that may also have direct and/or moderating effects upon employability orientation and turnover intention. For example, employees' intention to leave might also be influenced by the specific employment brand, which refers to the perceived desirability of the organization as a place to work, to mention but one relevant contextual factor.

Finally, our results are not directly applicable to sectors outside health care and welfare in which the distribution of men, women, full-time, and part-time employees is more equal.

### ***Practical recommendations***

In this study, we aimed to contribute to practice by paying attention to the dilemmas that many human resource practitioners face: how can organizations stimulate their employees to constantly increase their employability, when we know that (1) most people only start to work on their career when they get dissatisfied with their current position and (2) by helping people enhance their employability, organizations may encourage their most valuable employees to leave? This study has shown that there is no real conflict of interest underlying these dilemmas, but a paradox only. Although economic writers in the field of human capital theory (e.g. Becker, 1993) propose that organizations should not invest too much in general training and development because employees may use these investments in their human capital to get a better job with a higher salary elsewhere, this study shows the opposite. The findings indicate that an employability culture is positively related with employability orientation and negatively related with turnover intention. Moreover, an employability culture is not related with pull motives but is negatively related to push motives of those who aim to leave. In short, these results suggest that organizations can retain their employees just by creating opportunities that facilitate leaving. Although such facilities may indeed encourage some employees to leave their job (as is indicated by the small but positive relationship between employability orientation and turnover intention), they will do so for positive reasons, and are therefore likely to be good ambassadors of their former organization. Moreover, it may well be the case that in a sound employability culture, people are likely to change their job internally instead of externally, although future research should explore this suggestion further.

To conclude, we believe that organizations will gain a lot by creating an employability culture. For example, when (top) management successfully stimulates a constant dialogue between employees and their direct supervisors about self-development, when they create challenging work assignments with many learning opportunities, and when both organization and employees invest time and/or money in training and development, it is likely that employees will be triggered to search for new challenges not because of dissatisfaction with their career, but because 'change' and 'seeking opportunities' are normal parts of their core activities within the organization.

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