

Beata Buchelt

Contextual Conditions as Factors Depreciating the Meaning of the Employability Concept among Physicians

The dynamism of the environment in which organizations operate today, including the ones in the healthcare sector, should encourage them to seek opportunities to acquire and maintain a competitive advantage by using internal resources, including human resources. One of the concepts of management suited to this assumption is employability relative to both the organization and the individual. In the article the author defines the concepts of employability and refers it to one of the key groups of medical staff—physicians. Additionally, the paper includes an identification of barriers that prevent the concept from being implemented on not only an individual level, but on an organizational one.

Key words: employability, physicians, healthcare sector

Introduction

The dynamics of changes taking place in contemporary organizations—the effect of the growing turbulence of the surroundings in which they operate—means that organizations that are today striving to achieve and maintain sustainable competitive advantage are reaching for ever new human resource management (HRM) methods and tools with ever increasing frequency. A concept that has been growing in attractiveness over recent years is *employability* and its related management on both individual and organizational levels. Employability is not a new concept. It traces its origins to the first half of the 20th century [McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005]. However, it was not until the nineteen–nineties that the concept gained in popularity. This was thanks to the increasing dynamics of change in the environment of organizations, changes taking place inside the organizations themselves, and changes in

employee–organization relations as seen in changes to the psychological contract. In Poland, the term *employability* was first used by Pocztowski [2007, p. 322]. However, exploration of this concept does not yet draw the attention of a broad segment of researchers, especially in the context of the dynamically changing healthcare sector. Thus, the objective of this article is an attempt to identify contextual factors that point to a need to explore the concept of *employability* with respect to the key group of medical personnel—physicians—as well as to define the concept of *employability* itself with respect to the indicated group. This article has been developed within the framework of the “Human Capital Management in Hospitals” research project, which is financed thanks to the resources of the Polish National Science Center [NCN] on the basis of Decision No. DEC–2013/11/B/HS4/01062.

The Concept and Meaning of Employability

An analysis of topical literature indicates that views on employability have been evolving over recent decades. During the nineteen–seventies, employability was associated with finding and maintaining employment [Clarke, 2008]. In the nineteen–eighties, mainly as a result of a growing dynamics of change in the environment of organizations as well as their resultant efforts at organizational adaptation involving a search for new management methods, including managing the personnel function, the concept of *employability* began to be associated with the adapting of the employee to the requirements of a given job. Marzec [2010] indicated that it should be associated with the term *professional usefulness*. As of the end of the nineteen–neties up to today, employability has become the subject of several English–language publications. It is now possible to observe various efforts at categorizing ongoing research in topical literature. There are three approaches to employability analysis that are usually identified.

The first approach is the economic–social stream in which employability is associated with various groups of people active on the labor market who are trying to find employment or maintain it [Finn, 2006]. It is within this stream that it is possible to identify people who have the capacity to be employed, but also those who, for various reasons, have skills, but they are limited in scope or who are completely excluded from the labor market [McQuais and Lindsay, 2005]. The state undertakes diversified intervention facilitating and stimulating activity on the part of people excluded from the labor market—e.g., the disabled, older workers, and recent graduates [Forrier and Sels, 2003].

A second approach to research into employability is an organizational approach. It is within the framework of this stream that researchers concentrate on how or-

ganizations should shape their human resource management policies so they foster the solving of the dilemma of, on the one hand, the employment of flexible and highly employable workers and, on the other hand, how to keep those workers in the organization. The objects of detailed analyses within the framework of this stream are those instruments of human resource management that are aimed at developing an employability orientation among employees. Such an orientation is defined as an openness on the part of employees to adapting to changing job requirements by way of increased flexibility, the development of skills, and a readiness to change tasks and job positions [Van Dam, 2004]. It is on the basis of research conducted to date that it has been determined that practices linked with a broadly understood development of human resources and a shaping of organizational culture are of greatest importance in this case. At the same time, attention is also called to the fact that organizations capable of successfully managing employees characterized by the attribute of high employability should themselves have the quality of significant functional flexibility [Nuta, van Vianen, van der Heijden, van Dam, and Willemsen, 2009].

The third approach to the concept of employability that can be identified on the basis of an analysis of topical literature, of which this article is a part, is the individual approach. In this approach, researchers concentrate on defining, or rather looking in greater detail, at the essence and attributes of employability on an individual (worker) level. Thus, Sanders and de Grip [2004] describe employability as the capacity and desire to be and continue to be attractive on the labor market by predicting changes in job tasks and reacting to such changes in a proactive manner. For Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth [2004], employability is a specific skill encompassing active adaptation in the labor context. This makes it possible for workers to identify potential for employment and to utilize it. On the other hand, Clarke [2008, p. 262] perceives employability as the potential of the given person applied in the achieving and maintaining of employment in line with the current labor market situation. Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden [2006], for their part, see the analyzed approach as the ability to continuously maintain, achieve, and create work through the optimum utilization of professional competencies held by the given persons.^{1, 2} Topical literature also contains proposals stressing the dynamic character of the concept of employability with greater clarity. Thus, Forries and Sels [2003] define employability as a process during which, as time passes, the same cause may lead to different

1 The indicated definition also encompasses what is known as the competency stream in research on the concept of employability. More in Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006.

2 Topical literature includes an alternative concept for employability—i.e. dispositional employability, which Fugate and Kinicki [2008] defined as the set of individual qualities predestining the individual to adapt to a job and career in a specific way.

solutions depending on both various arrangements of contextual factors and the individual's characteristics, skills, and behavior.

Bearing in mind the cited definitions, it may be stated that employability is an aggregated set of skills, attitudes, and behaviors leading to an individual (worker or job seeker) who is attractive on both the internal and external job markets. What components make up this aggregate? Dench [1997, p. 191] indicates a set of skills that are desired by employers. The author classifies them into three categories, specifically: (1) personal attributes, e.g., honesty, loyalty, and credibility; (2) interpersonal skills, e.g., skills in communications, working in groups, and in undertaking decisions; (3) technical skills associated with skills acquired during education and work, also referred to as specialized skills in topical literature. The indicated look at the set of elements making up employability is a narrow view. It mainly applies to skills. More up-to-date publications present employability as a construct that is much more complicated. Thus, Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden [2006] point to the following set of employability components: personal flexibility, professional knowledge, optimization and anticipation, a sense of belonging to the organization (a sense of being a part of a group or organization), and balance. The cited set of employability components, referred to as dimensions in topical literature, contains both specialized and general competencies, which also means those that make it possible for the individual to move on both the internal and external labor market. The most detailed proposal for employability components was presented by Clarke [2007] who also identified a set of key components such as skills and talents (competencies),³ attitudes and behaviors, and individual characteristics.

Taking into account the analysis of employability components, worth observing is the fact that there are both relatively stable elements, such as personality traits, and variable ones, like attitude and behavior, at the base of employability constructs. There are also elements specific to the organization in which the individual works or worked as well as universal elements increasing the attractiveness of the individual not only on the internal, but also on the external labor markets.⁴ Additionally, worth noting within the context of this article is the fact that employability is determined by factors over which the individual has influence as well as ones over which the individual has none. These, in turn, can be subdivided into those associated with the individual and contextual ones. Among contextual factors, it is the labor market

3 Also worth stressing is that fact that, in her publications, the author narrowed the concept of competencies primarily to skills and talents. However, it should be remembered that the concept of competency is usually defined more broadly in topical literature, where it includes other elements such as knowledge, attitudes, and even behaviors. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the objective of this article, it is the view proposed by the author that shall be applied.

4 This is a discussion regarding elements facilitating movement on the internal and external labor markets, e.g., transferable competencies.

that is of greatest importance, or rather conditions on it that are favorable or unfavorable to employment.

In summarizing the discussion on employability, worth stressing is that the importance of employability may be examined on three levels: the individual, the organization, or society. An individual having employability has an easier time moving effectively around the internal labor market, adapting to new tasks, responding adequately to challenges ushered in by a knowledge-based economy, and is also improving on a permanent basis. Such an individual is more prone to work applying flexible forms of employment as well. Managing employee employability also provides benefits for the organization. However, this is only true of those organizations that are capable of understanding the essence of the employability worker attribute while developing that attribute appropriately through an adequately shaped configuration of the human resource management system. However, the fact remains that current topical literature provides few studies devoted to the benefits of using employability as a determinant of human resource management in the organization. Thus, Barnett and Bradley [2007] proved that organizations in which employees have possibilities for developing their careers and participating in training can boast greater employee involvement, work satisfaction, and increased work efficiency. For their part, Lips-Wiersma and Hall [2007] indicated that organizations that invest in employability are those in which employees feel appreciated and are therefore more motivated and involved. The failure to understand the concept of employability leads to linking improved employee employability to possible increased employee fluctuation and difficulties in maintaining employable employees in the given organization. Research has not supported this to date. The opposite is actually true [Nuta, van Vianen, van der Heijden, and van Dam, Willemsen, 2009]. A key benefit to employability as viewed through the socio-economic prism is that individuals having this attribute are quicker at finding a job, have greater ease in moving around the labor market, and need support on the part of the state for a shorter period of time.

Barriers to Perceiving the Essence and Meaning of Employability in the Healthcare Sector

In analyzing the environment of healthcare entities in Poland, it may be noted that the proper perceiving of employability is upset by the presence and strengthening of several factors tied not only with the functioning of the healthcare sector in its broadest sense, but also in the operation of the personnel function in medical entities. The first key contextual factor influencing the perception of the essence and meaning of the employability of physicians in healthcare entities in Poland is

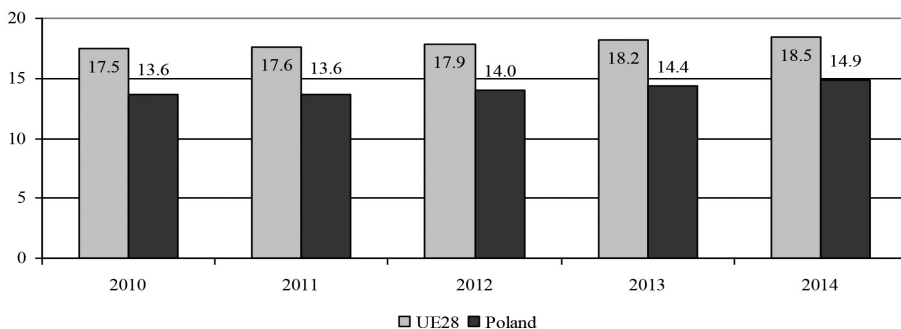
the aging of society and the related phenomenon of increased demand for medical services. The life expectancy for women as well as men is increasing in Poland, as is the case in the European Union (see Table No. 1). Currently, the life expectancy for women is 80.5 years while the figure for men is 72.4. The share of people aged 65 and over in the population of the EU as well as among Polish citizens is also increasing. In Poland, the share of people aged 65 and over has increased by 1.30 percent over the past five years. The growth of this group of citizens is more dynamic than in the case of the EU as a whole (see Figure No. 1). A positive phenomenon is the fact that Poles are living a longer life in good health, but at the same time they are benefiting from medical services dedicated to people of mature age for a longer period of time (see Table No. 2).

Table No. 1. Average life expectancy in the European Union (EU-28) and in Poland over the years 2009–2013

	Years				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU-28	79.0	79.3	79.6	79.6	no data
Women	81.9	82.1	82.4	82.4	no data
Men	75.7	76.3	76.7	76.8	no data
Poland	75.3	75.8	76.2	76.2	76.5
Women	79.5	80.1	80.4	80.4	80.5
Men	71.0	71.5	71.9	72.0	72.4

Source: Own research on the basis of <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed on May 11, 2015.

Figure No. 1. Percentage share of the population aged 65 and over in the European Union as a whole (EU-28) and in Poland over the years 2010–2014



Source: Own research on the basis of <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed on May 11, 2015.

Table No. 2. Difference between life expectancy and life expectancy in good health in the European Union (EU–28) and in Poland over the years 2009–2012

	Years			
	2009	2010	2011	2012
Life expectancy in good health in the EU	no data	62.7	62.2	62.1
Difference between life expectancy and life expectancy in good health in the EU	no data	16.6	17.4	17.5
Life expectancy in good health in Poland	62.5	62.3	63.3	62.9
Difference between life expectancy and life expectancy in good health in Poland	12.8	13.5	12.9	13.3

Source: Own research on the basis of <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed on May 11, 2015.

The increasing demand for medical services is not matched by supply. This is not as great a problem facing the healthcare system as shortages in the main groups of medical personnel, including physicians,⁵ which is significant. In Poland in the year 2012, there were 221 physicians for every 100,000 citizens. This is the lowest level of this indicator in the EU. For comparison, at the same time the indicator of physicians per 100,000 citizens amounted to 490 physicians in Austria, 314 in Lithuania, and 367 in the Czech Republic [*Practicing Physicians...*, 2015]. According to the Polish Chamber of Physicians and Dentists (NIL), there were 140,976 registered physicians on May 30, 2015, where 128,570 were professionally active [“Numerical Data on Physicians ...,” 2015]. At the same time, the territorial breakdown of persons practicing medicine is diversified (see Table No. 3). The largest numbers of physicians are concentrated in agglomerations and around academic centers. The number of physicians practicing in other areas is lower. The unfavorable situation in terms of numbers of physicians is exacerbated by their age structure. According to data provided by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) for the year 2013, the share of physicians aged 65 and over amounted to 29 percent with 26 percent in the 55–64 age bracket [*Health and ...*, 2014]. This unfavorable tendency—the growing share of physicians aged over 55, the aging of physicians—is aggravated by the following phenomena: Firstly, the small number of medical school graduates—3,800 in the year 2013. Secondly, the relatively high number of certificates issued by the Polish Chamber of Physicians and Dentists to physicians striving for recognition of their

5 The objective of this publication as well as its scope puts limits on possibilities for characterizing the strategic problems facing the healthcare sector, such as the shortage of nurses.

qualifications in other EU countries. A total of 9,288 such certificates were issued as of the year 2015, which accounts for 7.2 percent of the population of physicians practicing medicine [*Number of Certificates ...*, 2015].

Table No. 3. Three highest and lowest membership District Chambers of Physicians in Poland

Highest membership District Chambers in Poland	Physicians	Physicians practicing medicine	Lowest membership District Chambers in Poland	Physicians	Physicians practicing medicine
District Chamber of Warsaw	23,585	20,516	District Chamber of Gorzów Wielkopolskie	848	749
Silesian Chamber of Katowice	13,264	12,475	District Chamber of Płock	1,083	1,053
District Chamber of Cracow	12,498	11,945	District Chamber of Tarnów	1,252	1,179

Source: Own studies based on “Numerical data on physicians ...,” 2015.

The final barrier to the proper perceiving of the essence and meaning of employability in the healthcare sector, especially with respect to physicians, is the implementation of the personnel function in healthcare entities. Research to date in this area indicates that the practice of performing the personnel function, especially in public entities providing medical services, is closer to the administration of personnel matters than concepts of human resource management [Sanak and Buchelt, 2008; Jończyk, 2008]. Thus, the conclusion that the level of development of the personnel function in healthcare entities makes impossible the application of modern medical personnel management tools such as talent management, employer brand management, or employability as analyzed in this article seems justified.

The Employability of Physicians

From time immemorial the profession of physician has been assigned special treatment, probably due to the fact that “its essence consists of actions aimed at the protection of the universally recognized values of health and human life” [Paździoch and Gibiński, 2012, p. 1].” The Act of December 5 1996 on the Profession of Physician and Dentist indicates that “the practice of the profession of physician involves the providing of medical services by a person holding the required qualifications, certified by relevant document. Such services specifically include exami-

nation of the state of health, identification and prevention of disease, treatment and rehabilitation of the ill, providing medical advice, and the issuing of medical opinions and decisions ... The performance by a physician of research work in the field of medicine, the promotion of health, and the teaching of medicine are also considered the practice of the profession of physician [Act on the Profession..., 1996].”⁶

In undertaking an effort at defining the essence of employability of physicians, it is important to articulate the fact that employability is a specific aggregate of knowledge, skills, and attitudes expressed in the behavior of the individual. The basic component of the employability construct of a physician is knowledge and its continuous improvement. The recognizing of knowledge as a basic attribute of employability stems from the following premises: Firstly, a physician is legally bound to continue his or her education, specifically “a physician is obliged to practice his or her profession in accordance with the indications of current medical knowledge” [Act on the Profession..., 1996]. Secondly, the physician is so obligated by the Hippocratic Oath, which obligates him or her to “continuously expand medical knowledge and provide information to the medical world of anything and everything that is successfully discovered and improved” [The Code..., 2004]. And thirdly, as stemming from the specifics of the healthcare sector that is frequently defined as a knowledge intensive sector, where in accepting knowledge as the foundation of the employability of physicians, it is also necessary to accept the assumption that the physician is capable of utilizing gained knowledge in practice in the performance of undertaken tasks. This signifies that the physician holds adequate specialized skills expressed in his or her behavior.

However, knowledge and specialized skills are not exclusive factors determining the employability of physicians. It is possible to identify several competencies that a modern physician should have on the basis of the provisions of the “Medical Code of Ethics” (see Table No. 4).

A physician’s employability construct is supplemented by competencies that should make up the qualities of a modern physician, which stem from trends found in Polish healthcare. A basic competency that should be among the qualities of the physician in the context of the restructuring of the healthcare sector in Poland is orientation for change. An awareness of the striving of healthcare entities to increase their efficiency means that the physician should also have basic knowledge in the area of economics and management as it is the decisions of the physician

6 The cited legislation also indicates other activities that can be undertaken within the framework of the profession of physician, where they are not reference points with respect to analyses conducted in this article.

that determined the costs of undertaken procedures. At the same time, matters of economic efficiency of undertaken medical procedures should not and cannot be in opposition to the basic obligation of the physician, which is *salus aegroti suprema lex est*. The striving of healthcare entities towards flexible employment as well as acknowledging the profession of physician as being of the freelance type implies the assuming of certain entrepreneurial attitudes among those practicing the profession of physician. The greatly facilitated universal access on the part of society to information regarding diseases thanks to the Internet means that today's physician must be skilled in persuasion and argumentation.

Table No. 4. Competencies making up the employability construct of physicians

No.	Provisions of the Medical Code of Ethics	Competencies making up the employability construct of physicians
1	Work alleviating suffering and the prevention illness in line with the best available knowledge.	Responsibility, the ability to work under stress, and skills
2	Provide help to all who are ill without any differentiation.	Tolerance of variety and openness
3	The physician has freedom of choice in the area of methods of proceeding.	Skill in undertaking independent decisions and assertiveness
4	The physician should conduct all diagnostic procedures, treatment, and preventive procedures with due care, devoting the necessary time.	Diligence, conscientiousness, and skill in time management
5	The physician should treat patients in a kind and cultured manner, respecting their personal dignity as well as their right to intimacy and privacy. In the event of prognoses that are not favorable to the patient, the physician should provide information to that patient in a tactful and careful manner.	Communication skills
6	Patient–physician relations should be based on mutual trust	Skill in building relations
7	If the scope of activities exceeds the physician's skill, then that physician should turn to a more competent colleague. The physician should approach medical and ancillary personnel with due respect and in a cultured manner.	Skill in collaborating with others
8	In undertaking care over the ill, the physician should strive to guarantee continuity of treatment and, if necessary, the assistance of other physicians.	Planning skills and skill in coordinating the work of others
9	Experienced physicians should provide counsel and assistance to less experienced colleagues, especially in difficult clinical cases.	Skill in sharing knowledge

Source: Own studies.

Summary

The context of operations of healthcare entities, including primarily the growing demand for medical services and the increasing shortage of medical personnel in Poland, significantly restricts a proper look at the employability of physicians. At the same time the specifics of this personnel group as well as the changing paradigm of the functioning of healthcare entities indicates that the adapting of this concept would bring benefits not only to physicians, but also to the healthcare entities. Physicians are a special group encompassed by medical personnel. The qualities of a physician are close to those of knowledge workers. Physicians are a group whose domain is the independent taking of decisions with respect to performed medical procedures for the effects of which they take complete responsibility. Prerequisite to the effective performance of tasks by physicians is the continuous development of knowledge and skills. An additional specific feature of the profession of physician as well as contextual conditions for the practicing of this profession mean that a physician who has the attribute of employability should also hold additional competencies, including those making it possible to build positive relations with patients. At the same time, organizations providing medical services are changing in significant ways. Rigid hierarchical structures are changing into more flexible ones that are based on projects. Organizations are striving to make employment more flexible. Is a change in orientation towards a pro-efficiency one finally becoming visible? Summing up, it must be stated that looking at what has been considered in this article, the statement that employability may or even should be an area of further investigation subject to conditions of healthcare entities is justified. Research work should be continued on both the level of the individual and that of the organization whose human resource management should be molded so as to support the employability of employees.

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"Zestawienie liczbowe lekarzy i lekarzy dentyistów wg przynależności do okręgowej izby lekarskiej i tytułu zawodowego z uwzględnieniem podziału na lekarzy wykonujących i nie wykonujących zawodu" [Numerical data on physicians and dentists by membership in District Chambers of Physicians and by professional title of physicians active and not active in their professions], *NIL*, accessed on May 28, 2015, http://www.nil.org.pl/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/100834/Zestawienie-nr-01.pdf

Uwarunkowania kontekstowe jako czynniki deprecjonujące znaczenie koncepcji zatrudnialności wśród lekarzy

Streszczenie

Turbulentność otoczenia w jakim funkcjonują współczesne organizacje, również te z sektora ochrony zdrowia, sprawia, że powinny one poszukiwać możliwości pozyskiwania i utrzymywania przewagi konkurencyjnej z wykorzystaniem zasobów wewnętrznych, w tym zasobów ludzkich. Jedną z koncepcji zarządzania wpisującą się w przyjęte założenie jest zatrudnialność do organizacji, jak i jednostki. W artykule autorka przybliżyła koncepcje zatrudnialności i odniosła ją do jednej z kluczowych grup personelu medycznego jaką są lekarze. Wątkiem kluczowym stało się również wskazanie barier implementacji zatrudnialności przede wszystkim lekarzy, jak i zatrudniających ich organizacji.

B e a t a B u c h e l t – Ph.D., Adjunct Professor at the Department of Human Capital Management of the Cracow University of Economics. Awarded the degree of Doctor of Economics in Management Sciences in 2006 by the Faculty of Economics and International Relations, CUE. From 2002, associate auditor for the "Leader in Human Resource Management" National Competition, organized by the Institute of Labor and Social Studies in Warsaw. Researcher, lecturer, consultant, and trainer in the field of human resource management, strategic management, performance management, and human resource management in the healthcare. Author of numerous publications devoted to human resource management.