



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Prepare and pursue: Routes to suitable (re-)employment

Koen, J.

Publication date
2013

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Koen, J. (2013). *Prepare and pursue: Routes to suitable (re-)employment*.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

“Seeds of great discoveries are constantly floating around us, but they only take root in minds well prepared to receive them”

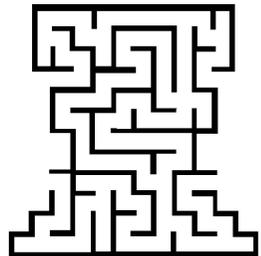
– Joseph Henry

“You know where nice people end up? On welfare.”

– Kelly Cutrone

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”

–Einstein

Searching for a job tends to be a tedious, frustrating and discouraging task, especially during unemployment when the stakes are high. Days are filled with scouring newspapers and the internet trying to find a suitable vacancy, visiting job agencies, revising resumes, rewriting the application letters, and waiting for invitations that may never come. It is hardly surprising that job seekers tend to lose their motivation and tend to lessen their job search activities over time (Wanberg, Zhu, Kanfer, & Zhang, 2012). The job search process becomes more stressful and frustrating when the job offers stay away, when each application is followed by a rejection, or when organizations fail to respond. Job seekers even compare their search for employment to a black hole –a region of spacetime from which nothing, not even light, can escape (Wanberg, Basbug, Van Hooft, & Samtani, in press, p.16). Not surprisingly, unemployment has an increasingly negative impact on people’s well-being and can literally be a sickening experience (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009).

Yet, research on finding (re-)employment dictates that the key to finding a job is searching for one (e.g. Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2005; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002; Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005; Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hooft, 2010). Numerous studies have found and replicated that the harder people search for a job, the more likely they are to actually find one. However, the relationship between job search and reemployment success is not as straightforward as one might expect. In fact, in many cases, searching for a job is not enough to foster reemployment success (Wanberg, Watt, & Rumsey, 1996). For example, just searching hard for a job does not suffice when the labor market is tight and suitable vacancies are scarce. Likewise, just searching hard for a job is unlikely to lead to reemployment for long-term unemployed people who have often lost their marketable skills and their career identity. Maybe even more importantly, just searching hard for a job is not enough when attempting to find employment of high quality. As a matter of

fact, most of the relationships between the amount of job search and measures of reemployment quality are near zero, indicating that a greater job search does not necessarily result in a more desirable employment situation (Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012; Wanberg, 2012).

In other words, there is more to successfully finding reemployment than job search. Accordingly, the aim of this dissertation is to examine which factors can contribute to successful reemployment in situations where job search is not enough. Here, I adopt the view that people's employability (i.e., their skills, knowledge and attitudes that together form the possibility to find and keep a job, cf. Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004) contributes to their reemployment success, above and beyond how hard they search. I will show that employability is crucial in the reemployment process of the long-term unemployed, while each employability dimension plays a different role in this process. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how reemployment interventions can be effective in increasing unemployed people's employability and job search, and how career identity can be rebuilt after unemployment. Finally, I propose that the dimension of adaptability –when regarded as preparation in the reemployment process– may provide people with resources that can result in better job search methods and better employment quality. People's preparation in the (re-)employment process may foster the quality of employment, since a better preparation can help individuals to successfully seek and find employment (e.g., Creed & Hughes, in press; Hirschi, Niles, & Akos, 2011; Jepsen & Dickson, 2003; Koivisto, Vinokur, & Vuori, 2011; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Taken together, I believe that the findings in the present dissertation indicate that research and practice dealing with the (re-)employment process should shift their focus from job search to the more comprehensive concept of employability, and from finding (re-) employment to finding suitable (re-)employment.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will start by discussing why a successful reemployment process is so important. Thereafter, I will give an overview of research on job search and reemployment success to date. I will then elaborate on the role of employability in the reemployment process, after which I will discuss the role of preparation in finding qualitatively good reemployment. This introduction will end with a brief overview of the studies conducted for this dissertation.

Unemployment

Unemployment is a highly negative experience for most people. By losing their job, people also lose a stable income, identity, daily routine and social networks associated with employment (Jahoda, 1982; Wanberg et al., 2012). Research on the impact of unemployment shows that it can result in a number of negative psychological consequences, such as clinical distress, depression, psychosomatic problems, lower self-esteem, and lower well-being in general (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009). Alongside these psychological consequences, unemployment also affects people's physical health. To illustrate, being fired increases the odds of a new health problem by 43%. Unemployed people often portray higher levels of stomach pain, chest pain, diabetes and hypertension, show increases in cortisol levels, and tend to use more tobacco and alcohol (cf. Wanberg, 2012 for an overview). Moreover, unemployment is associated with an increased risk of suicide (Classen & Dunn, 2012; Platt & Hawton, 2000). In general, unemployed people show lower physical and psychological well-being, and these effects become increasingly stronger as the time of unemployment lengthens (Paul & Moser, 2009). Prolonged unemployment is not only likely to aggravate the negative consequences of unemployment, but can also decrease people's chances of finding reemployment due to the loss of job-skills, motivation, and job-related networks (Aaronson, Mazumder, & Schechter, 2010). After years of being unemployed, finding reemployment is therefore even harder for long-term unemployed people than it is for regular unemployed job seekers: they face a range of personal-circumstantial barriers to work, such as a lack of work experience, depleted job networks (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000), stigma associated with long-term unemployment (Gallie & Russell, 1998; Heslin, Bell, & Fletcher, 2012; Vishwanath, 1989) and physical and psychological barriers to work (cf. Lindsay, 2002; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002; Wanberg et al., 2002).

The problem of unemployment and long-term unemployment has grown worse since the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, producing the highest unemployment rates in western society since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Within two years, unemployment rates have more than doubled, reaching 9.4% in the U.S. (BLS, 2011) and 10.1% in Europe (Eurostat, 2012b), and unemployment rates have remained over 9.0% both in the U.S. (BLS, 2012) and in Europe (Eurostat, 2012d) in subsequent years. Although there have been signs of fragile recovery of the economy (ILO, 2011), this

upturn is unlikely to lift employment prospects during 2012 (Eurostat, 2012c). For newcomers to the labor market and at-risk groups such as the long-term or disadvantaged unemployed people, prospects are even worse. Compared to a better economy, youth unemployment rates are about twice as high (BLS, 2011; Eurostat, 2012d) and it can take both newcomers and the long-term unemployed up to twice as long to find a job (Eurostat, 2012a; ILO, 2011).

Besides the negative individual consequences associated with unemployment and long-term unemployment, there are also negative consequences for society as a whole. Unemployed people often receive social benefits and do not contribute to economy production (cf. Stenberg & Westerlund, 2008; Wanberg et al., 2002). On top of that, many governments deploy expensive interventions to speed up the process of reemployment and to break through the vicious cycle of long-term unemployment. It is thus of utmost importance to both society and unemployed individuals themselves to designate the factors that can foster a successful reemployment process.

Reemployment Quality

Finding reemployment does not per se constitute a successful reemployment process. When seeking to establish long-lasting reemployment, a suitable and qualitatively good job is far more likely to foster stable reemployment than just *any* job. Although one would expect that having a job of low quality would be better than having no job at all, the negative consequences of underemployment –i.e., working in a job that is below the employee’s full working capacity– are rather similar to those of unemployment in terms of lower well-being, lower life satisfaction and more physical and psychological strain (e.g. Feldman, 1996; Kinicki, Prussia, & McKee-Ryan, 2000; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Moreover, a mismatch between someone’s preferences, needs, and the characteristics of the job or organization can lead to low job satisfaction, burnout, decreased productivity and even turnover (Kristof, 1996; van Vianen, 2006), leading people to end up right where they started: unemployed. Research on the reemployment process should thus look beyond finding reemployment as an outcome and consider the perceived quality of the job obtained. Only then can we genuinely speak of successful reemployment.

Research on reemployment

Given the importance of successful reemployment for both unemployed people and society, it is hardly surprising that the reemployment process has attracted quite some research attention in the past decades. The most extensively studied factor in this regard has been unemployed people's job search behavior. Job search behavior involves spending time, effort and resources on job search activities such as preparing a resume, reading job advertisements and contacting employers. Numerous empirical studies and meta-analytic findings have shown that the amount of time and effort unemployed people spend on these job search behaviors is associated with the likelihood of finding reemployment (known as the intensity-effort dimension, cf. Kanfer et al., 2001; Prussia, Fugate, & Kinicki, 2001; Saks, 2005; Wanberg et al., 2005). In fact, the intensity with which people search for a job is the most consistent predictor of finding reemployment known to date. This does not, however, signify a strong relationship. To the contrary, the meta-analytical findings of Kanfer et al. (2001) show that the intensity and effort of job search are relatively weakly related to finding reemployment ($r_c = .18$ and $r_c = .30$ respectively).

Despite the relatively weak relationship between job search and finding reemployment, most reemployment studies focus on factors related to job search. In attempting to understand the individual differences in job search during unemployment, research has yielded a long list of job search antecedents. These predictors of job search behavior and subsequent reemployment success can broadly be categorized into situational and personal factors (Boswell et al., 2012). Situational factors include factors such as financial need, social support and networks, caring responsibilities and labor market demand. Personal variables include demographic factors such as age, gender, education and work experience, but also personality factors and motivational factors such as employment commitment, goal orientation and motivation control (for overviews, see Boswell et al., 2012; Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, 2012).

Apart from the amount of research on the intensity-effort dimension of job search, some work has examined the daily dynamics in the job search process (temporal-persistence dimension, cf. Kanfer et al., 2001) and the quality of the job search process (content-direction dimension, cf. Kanfer et al., 2001). Central to the

temporal-persistence perspective is the idea that job search can be conceptualized as “a purposive, volitional, self-directed and dynamic pattern of activity directed toward the goal of gaining employment” (Kanfer et al., 2001, p.412). Research on the temporal dynamics of job search shows that job seekers with higher employment commitment and higher core self-evaluations (i.e., someone’s fundamental evaluation about themselves, their abilities and their control) are more likely to persist in their job search activities over time (Wanberg et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 2010). In general, however, job seekers’ mental health and the time spent on job search declines over time (Wanberg et al., 2010; Wanberg et al., 2012). Although studies indicate that self-regulation strategies may help the unemployed in persisting in job search and in protecting mental health during unemployment, the factors related to persistence in job search and coping with unemployment remain largely unknown.

In contrast to the intensity-effort and temporal-persistence dimensions of job search, the content-direction approach focuses on the methods of job search rather than on the intensity of job search. For example, Van Hove, Van Hooft and Lievens (2009) showed that spending time on networking during job search was related to the number of job offers. Additionally, Saks (2006) showed that the use of informal sources in job search (contacting friends, family and acquaintances) was negatively related to the number of job offers. In her review of the literature on job search, Wanberg (2012) recommends that a successful job search should consist of an array of search methods, such as networking, employment offices, newspapers, online advertisements and direct contact with employers.

Research on the methods of job search also provides a more promising outlook on establishing reemployment quality than research on the quantity of job search. In fact, most of the research on the quantity of job search and reemployment quality has been unable to find significant relationships between the two (cf. Boswell et al., 2012). However, regarding the strategies that people use when searching for a job, Crossley and Highhouse (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; 2007) showed that the use of an exploratory strategy (fully examining all options and being open to arising opportunities) was related to later job satisfaction, that the use of a focused strategy (searching for jobs that meet one’s specified criteria) was related to the number of job offers, and that the use of an haphazard strategy (applying for all job opportunities

without a plan) was negatively related to offers and later job satisfaction. Additionally, Saks and Ashforth (2002) found that job seekers who engage in career planning during job search report a better fit with their later job. Zikic and Klehe (2006) reported similar findings: in their study among unemployed outplacement attendees, career planning and career exploration were positively related to later employment quality. Despite the fact that the approach involving job search strategies and career related behaviors is promising when investigating reemployment quality, research so far has been scarce and has failed to examine why individuals rely on one strategy or the other.

Taken together, putting time and effort into job search is necessary for finding reemployment (Prussia et al., 2001), and there is tentative evidence that the methods and strategies used during job search affect subsequent employment quality (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). While acknowledging the progress that has been made in reemployment research and the importance of job search in the reemployment process, two key problems remain with the focus on job search when seeking to establish successful reemployment. First, job search intensity is relatively weakly related to finding reemployment and the range of variables related to job search can explain little variance in outcomes of reemployment success (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002; Wanberg, 2012). These findings may be due to the fact that the specifics of the job seeker's situation or other contextual variables are disregarded (cf. Boswell et al., 2012; Saks, 2005; Wanberg, 2012). During economic crises or for at-risk groups such as long-term and disadvantaged unemployed people, job search alone may not suffice to establish reemployment success. Other factors –like having sufficient skills, motivation, or solving barriers to reemployment– are often necessary for a successful reemployment process. Second, spending more time and effort on job search does not result in better reemployment quality (Boswell et al., 2012), although research on the quality of job search is promising in this regard. These two key problems leave us with the question of what one can do to establish successful reemployment when job search is not enough. There is thus a significant need to understand the aspects of a successful reemployment process beyond the role of job search. In this dissertation, I propose that these key problems may be solved by shifting the focus in reemployment research from job search to employability.

The role of employability

Employability can be defined as the skills, knowledge and attitudes that together form the ability to find and keep a job (cf. Fugate et al., 2004). It facilitates movement between jobs both within and between organizations (Morrison & Hall, 2002) and, in reemployment terms, enhances the likelihood of gaining reemployment (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007). Employability may be an especially useful construct for reemployment research, as Fugate et al. suggest that employable individuals suffer less from job-loss and unemployment, are more likely to engage in job search activities and are more likely gain high-quality reemployment. In other words, the concept of employability taps into the key problems that have been discussed above. First, employability might play an important role in establishing successful reemployment, especially among long-term unemployed and other at risk groups. Second, employability might contribute to (re-)employment quality. Additionally, employability might give people the possibility to deploy better search methods and to persist in searching. In that sense, a focus on employability can possibly kill two birds with one stone: it may contribute to reemployment success and job search simultaneously, maximizing job seekers' chances on successfully finding reemployment. Yet, it has not empirically been shown if, how and why employability and its dimensions play a role in establishing successful reemployment. In the present dissertation, I therefore seek to answer these questions.

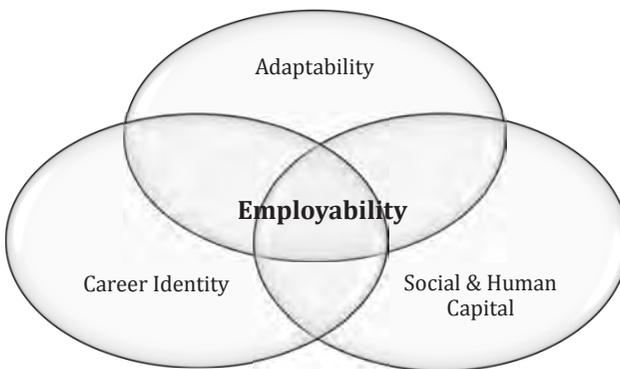


Figure 1.1 *Model of Employability* (cf. Fugate et al., 2004).

Employability is conceptualized as ‘a form of work specific active adaptation that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities’ (Fugate et al., 2004, p.16). Fugate et al. (2004) developed a model of employability that comprises three dimensions: adaptability, social & human capital and career-identity (see Figure 1.1). In this dissertation, however, I will regard social and human capital as two separate dimensions, because social capital and human capital may affect the reemployment process differently –for example, social capital may be particularly important in coping with unemployment and finding suitable vacancies, whereas human capital may be particularly important when applying for a job and receiving an offer.

Each employability dimension consists of different skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that together create the ability to find and keep a job. The first dimension of employability is adaptability: a readiness to cope and a willingness to explore one’s career possibilities (Savickas, 2005). Adaptability includes looking around (i.e. career exploration) and ahead (i.e. career planning) at different career options (Savickas, 2002). Exploring one’s possibilities and engaging in career planning activities such as setting and pursuing career goals has been shown to play an important role in the reemployment process in terms of gaining reemployment (McArdle et al., 2007) and for the quality of the reemployment gained (Zikic & Klehe, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). The second dimension, social capital, reflects a more interpersonal aspect of employability, and describes someone’s social skills as well as the social network and support that they can draw upon. Here, it concerns both formal and informal job-related networks –or ‘knowing-whom’ competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)– known to facilitate reemployment success (e.g. McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 1999). The third dimension, human capital, refers to personal factors that may affect one’s chances of finding reemployment. These ‘knowing-how’ competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) include experience, training, skills and knowledge. Finally, the fourth dimension of employability comprises career identity: a ‘cognitive compass’ to navigate career goals. Career identity reflects ‘knowing-why’ competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) such as individual work values and motivation to work (Fugate et al., 2004). With regard to reemployment, career identity concerns the centrality that unemployed people place on certain employment, which provides guidance in making decisions and establishing reemployment goals (McArdle et al., 2007).

McArdle et al. (2007) empirically tested Fugate et al.'s (2004) employability model among active job seekers and found that employability was positively related to finding reemployment. They argued that adaptability is beneficial to the individual as well as attractive to potential employers (McLaughlin, 1995), that social capital can provide access to potential employers, and that career identity provides employment goals and directions to pursue reemployment. McArdle et al. also found a strong positive relationship between employability and job search, suggesting that employable individuals are more likely to take a proactive approach to engage in goal-directed behavior such as job search. In general, employability can foster job search by providing people with more resources to engage in job search activities. Improvements in employability are not only characterized by an increase in adaptability, social capital, human capital and career identity (Fugate et al., 2004), but employability may also increase the possibility to subsequently utilize these assets through job search (McArdle et al., 2007; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). All in all, McArdle et al. (2007) supported the assumption that for active job seekers, employability enhances their ability to regain employment.

Next to enhancing people's chances on finding reemployment in general, employability may help them to cope with unemployment and to persist searching. To illustrate, the challenges faced by unemployed people –such as a threat to their social networks, a weakening career identity and a tight labor market– may be counteracted by employability. The dimensions of employability may give people the resources for adequate adaptational responses, needed to persist in searching and in finding reemployment (cf. Wanberg et al., 2012). Employability might therefore have a double advantage during unemployment: not only does it raise one's chances on finding reemployment; it may also help to direct and sustain one's job search efforts. In this dissertation, I therefore propose that an additional focus on employability in reemployment research –instead of on job search alone– might give more insight into the routes to reemployment success among unemployed people in all sorts of contexts. However, considering the fact that many long-term or stigmatized unemployed people seem to lack one or more of the dimensions of employability, it is worth to first investigate whether and how their employability plays a role in their reemployment success.

Reemployment Interventions

When examining the reemployment process, one cannot disregard the interventions that aim to speed up this process. Indeed, part of the reemployment research has focused on the effectiveness of various types of reemployment interventions. Job search training, for example, has been shown to increase the likelihood of finding reemployment (Wanberg et al., 2002; Zikic & Saks, 2009). Likewise, Van Hooft and Noordzij (2008; Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009) tested an intervention in which job seekers' goal orientation was trained, and showed that people who had received a learning goal orientation training were more likely to find reemployment than a control group or people who had received a performance goal orientation training. Another effective intervention is Wanberg, Zhang and Diehn's (2010) self-guided inventory in which unemployed job seekers gain self-insight to improve their job search activities. Similarly, studies on the reemployment intervention JOBS –an intervention that aims to simultaneously enhance job search skills and help participants prepare for rejections and demoralization during the reemployment process (cf. Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich, & Price, 1991; Vinokur, Schul, Vuori, & Price, 2000)– have reported significant effects on reemployment success, although people who were unemployed for a moderate amount of time rather than long-term benefitted most from the intervention (Vuori, Silvonen, Vinokur, & Price, 2002).

Not surprisingly, most of the reemployment interventions that have been examined in reemployment research aim to improve the job search process. Interventions that aim to increase unemployed people's employability are less common, albeit exist. Such reemployment interventions generally aim to increase people's job search and employability simultaneously, and with that their chances of eventually finding reemployment (cf. Dolton & O'Neill, 2002; Graversen & Van Ours, 2008; Klepinger, Johnson, & Joesch, 2002; Kyyrä & Ollikainen, 2008; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Petrongolo, 2009). However, research shows that many of these (often governmental) reemployment interventions are not very successful in reaching the intended goals, especially not among the long-term unemployed (Andersen, 2011; Dahl & Lorentzen, 2005; Dijk, Nijkamp, Pen, & Tordoir, 2008; Gerfin & Lechner, 2002; Lindsay, 2002).

The weak positive and sometimes even negative effects of these reemployment interventions have led politicians, reemployment practice and research to question whether (governmental) reemployment interventions are worth the effort, as the benefits are often too meager to justify their costs (Dijk et al., 2008; Van den Berg & Van der Klaauw, 2006). A dominant response to the heterogeneous effects is often to blame unemployed people's motivation, and to place even greater pressure on them to participate in different compulsory interventions and subsidized employment (i.e., 'activation programs'). Unfortunately, these policies tend to reinforce the distinction between those who are thought to have positive attitudes towards employment and those who are seen as lazy freeloaders who lack work ethic. Unemployment is thus reduced to 'bad motivation' and 'bad attitudes' (White & Cunneen, 2006). In the current dissertation, I therefore look at whether 'bad motivation' can explain the differential effects of reemployment interventions, and whether 'bad attitudes' can evolve into positive work attitudes. By doing so, I attempt to answer to recent calls in reemployment research to investigate why some individuals benefit more from the same intervention than others (Boswell et al, 2012; Wanberg, 2012).

Based on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985b; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vansteenkiste, Lens, DeWitte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004; Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte, & Feather, 2005), I propose that people's *quality* of motivation instead of the quantity of their motivation can explain the differences in effectiveness of reemployment interventions. Although it is generally believed that unemployed people's level of motivation is important for a successful reemployment process, I argue that their type of motivation is crucial in the effectiveness of reemployment interventions: people with a more autonomous motivation (i.e. those who want to find reemployment) will benefit more from a reemployment intervention than people with a more controlled motivation (i.e. those who feel pressured to find reemployment). In turn, however, I hypothesize that the quality of motivation may be a consequence of the pressure to participate in compulsory interventions and their experienced usefulness for finding reemployment.

Additionally, I look into the career identities of unemployed young adults who have experienced many spells of unemployment. In the employability framework, career identity is conceptualized as the centrality placed on paid work or someone's commitment to certain employment (Fugate et al, 2004; McArdle et al., 2007; Rowley &

Feather, 1987; Warr & Jackson, 1984). Whereas work is a central part of identity for some people, working or having a career seems less important for others (Wanberg et al., 2010). In fact, unemployed people often tend to lower the centrality they put on work as the time of unemployment lengthens (e.g. Aaronson et al., 2010; Meeus, Deković, & Iedema, 1997; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012; Warr & Jackson, 1985). This is unfortunate because career identity is a key driver of employability and contributes to job seekers' chances on finding stable employment (McArdle et al., 2007). In this dissertation, I seek to answer whether the loss of career identity is a reversible process, and investigate the process by which young adults with interrupted career trajectories can build their career identity. Likewise, I investigate what motives underlie such a process of building one's career identity. I thus examine why and how career identity is constructed.

The role of preparation

As discussed before, research on reemployment has typically focused on quantitative outcomes such as the number of job interviews, job offers, and reemployment status. More qualitative outcomes of reemployment success such as job satisfaction, person-organization fit and subjective career success have largely been overlooked. In this dissertation, I propose that the employability dimension of adaptability may play an important role in establishing reemployment quality. More specifically, I propose that career adaptability (Hall, 2004; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) can serve as a preparatory mechanism in the (re-)employment process and foster reemployment quality, by guiding job seekers through job search and providing the resources to use proper search methods until they have found suitable reemployment.

Career adaptability, defined as the "readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by the changes in work and work conditions" (Savickas, 1997, p. 254), is a central construct in career preparation (Skorikov, 2007). It has been conceptualized in the past in a number of ways, such as by planfulness, exploration, decision-making, information and realism (Super, 1974), by career planning and career exploration (Zikic & Klehe, 2006), by a boundaryless career mindset (McArdle et al., 2007) or by career planning, career decidedness and career confidence (Skorikov, 2007). The concept of

career adaptability as presented by Savickas (1997; 2002) represents the readiness and different adaptive resources that arguably help people to prepare for and manage career transitions such as a move from unemployment to reemployment. According to Savickas (1997; 2002; 2005; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), career adaptability includes looking ahead to one's future career (*concern or planning*), knowing what career to pursue (*control or decision-making*), looking around at various career options (*curiosity or exploration*) and having a feeling of self-efficacy to successfully execute the activities needed to achieve one's career goals (*confidence*). Together, these four facets represent a multidimensional measure of career adaptability (cf. Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Recent research on these different facets of career adaptability supports the usefulness of each facet for predicting reemployment quality (Morrison & Hall, 2002; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). More specifically, during unemployment, perceiving a sense of competence (confidence), examining one's career options (curiosity/exploration) and planning one's career (concern/planning) can increase the odds of finding suitable employment (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Research on the school-to-work transition has furthermore shown that adolescents higher in career adaptability are more successful in mastering transitions (Creed, Muller, & Patton, 2003; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Patton, Creed, & Muller, 2002) and have a lower chance of prolonged unemployment (Fouad, 2007).

Yet, past research has not been able to clarify the means by which career adaptability influences reemployment quality. In this dissertation, I propose that people's career adaptability influences the way in which they search for jobs and the subsequent quality of reemployment. To illustrate, unemployed people who lack adaptive resources to resolve their current state of unemployment may use different and less beneficial search strategies than those who do have these resources (also see Wanberg et al., in press). Thus, unemployed people who show less career adaptability may find a less satisfying job, show more turnover intentions and end up right where they started.

Summary and overview of this dissertation

Although research on reemployment has made tremendous progress in the past decade, it has often failed to move beyond job search and its antecedents in predicting reemployment. Moreover, the amount of job search does not necessarily result in finding qualitatively good reemployment (Boswell et al., 2012), although quality is crucial in establishing stable reemployment. In the present dissertation, I therefore examine if employability and its dimensions can contribute to reemployment success in situations where job search does not suffice. More specifically, I investigate the role of employability and its dimensions among the long-term unemployed, the effectiveness of interventions to speed up reemployment, and the role of preparation (in the form of career adaptability) when aiming to find high quality reemployment.

In the first empirical chapter of this dissertation (Chapter 2), I investigate the value of employability among long-term unemployed people. Given the range of personal and economical barriers that particularly the long-term unemployed face, employability might not play a significant role in these people's reemployment process and investing in their employability might be hard or not even worth the effort. Chapter 2 therefore examines whether employability is applicable among the long-term unemployed and whether it raises their chance on finding reemployment after accounting for the barriers to employment that the long-term unemployed face. To achieve this, I have examined the employability of 2541 unemployed people at two points in time. Results showed that employability fosters job search and long-term unemployed people's chances on finding reemployment, although not all employability dimensions contributed equally to job search and reemployment. Whereas career identity predicted both job search and finding reemployment, adaptability was mainly important for persisting in job search, and social and human capital were mainly predictive of finding reemployment. Moreover, reemployment interventions contributed to people's development of employability, even though the effects were small.

In Chapter 3, I further investigated these relatively small effects of reemployment interventions. My aim was to show why and when interventions can be effective. I hypothesized that people's quality of motivation, as depicted by Self-Determination Theory, and the fact that these courses are compulsory, could explain the varying effects

found in the literature. In a two-wave study among 643 participants of a compulsory reemployment course, I assessed people's course experiences (perceived choice and experienced usefulness), their quality of motivation for finding reemployment and their employability and job search before and after the reemployment course. Results showed that the experienced usefulness of a course was positively related to a more internalized (i.e. more autonomous) motivation, which was in turn related to higher job search intensity and employability after the course. A high perceived choice was particularly beneficial to people who experienced a course as useful for finding reemployment, but it led to a less internalized motivation in combination with low experienced usefulness. These results imply that the usefulness of a reemployment course is much more important than its compulsory nature, and that compulsory participation is not necessarily detrimental for people's motivation, employability and job search, as long as they experience the course as useful for finding reemployment.

Following the results of Chapter 2 that career identity played such a crucial role in the reemployment process, I decided to examine the dynamics of unemployed people's career identity in more detail. Although reemployment research shows that people's career identity declines during unemployment, our knowledge about the reversed process in which career identity is built is scarce. Chapter 4 therefore took an inductive and qualitative approach to investigate why and how career identity can be built. I used a purposive sample of 29 unemployed young adults without a strong sense of career identity. Participants took part in an apprentice program ("Jamie Oliver's Fifteen"), in which they were trained to become professional chefs. Interview data was analyzed using NVivo and complemented with quantitative data on participants' employment status one year later. The interview data revealed two main findings. First, most participants did not make a conscious decision to participate in the program by reflecting upon their goals or possibilities, which contradicts employability and reemployment research on career identity. Second, participants indicated that they experienced a stronger sense of career identity since the apprentice program had started. They were building their career identities by discovering new competences, via role models, and by actively withdrawing themselves from the unemployed identity. Essentially, the findings add to the literature by underlining the crucial role of social context and of the withdrawal from the former unemployed identity.

In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I focused on the quality of reemployment instead of reemployment status as an outcome. I hypothesized that job seekers' career adaptability would play an important role in establishing reemployment quality. In Chapter 5, I examined if this was indeed the case, and if so, why. I hypothesized that engaging in career adaptability would help job seekers to deploy a better job search strategy, which would in turn lead to higher reemployment quality. In a two-wave study, 248 unemployed people indicated their career adaptability and job search strategies at Time 1, of which 73 indicated the number of job offers they had received and their reemployment quality at Time 2. The use of a focused and exploratory strategy contributed to the number of job offers, whereas the use of an exploratory strategy reduced the quality of reemployment eight months later. Moreover, career control and career confidence had a positive and direct effect on reemployment quality.

Following the result that career adaptability plays a crucial role in finding reemployment of high quality, I developed a training to enhance people's career adaptability. A longitudinal field quasi-experiment compared the development of each dimension of career adaptability between a training group ($n = 46$) and a control group ($n = 47$) over three points in time (pre-training measurement, post-training measurement and follow-up measurement six months later). Repeated measures analyses showed an overall increase in concern, control and curiosity within the training group, whereas there was no increase (concern) or even an overall decrease (control and curiosity) within the control group. Consequently, the training group showed higher control and curiosity than the control group at the follow-up measurement, implying that the training succeeded in enhancing participants' control and curiosity. Furthermore, among participants who had found employment half a year later, training participants reported higher employment quality than did members of the control group. In sum, these results show that training career adaptability can help people to enhance their career adaptability and raise their chances on finding a qualitatively good job.

The final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 7, discusses the main findings from the empirical studies and seeks to integrate them. In this concluding chapter, I propose that finding reemployment does not only depend on people's job search but also on their employability and its different dimensions. In essence, employability can provide both

the resources to engage and persist in proper job search methods and to eventually find reemployment, making it a more fruitful and possibly less frustrating focus when seeking to establish reemployment success. Furthermore, I discuss the implications of these findings from both theoretical and practical points of view.¹

¹ Please note that all empirical chapters (Chapter 2-6) were written as independent manuscripts and may also be read as such. This has, however, resulted in some overlap in the theoretical introductions.