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

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## CHAPTER THREE

### JOB SEARCH AND EMPLOYABILITY AFTER COMPULSORY REEMPLOYMENT COURSES: THE ROLE OF CHOICE, USEFULNESS AND MOTIVATION

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This chapter is based on Koen, J., Klehe, U.C. & Van Vianen, A.E.M. (under review). Job Search and Employability after Compulsory Reemployment Courses: the Role of Choice, Usefulness and Motivation.

Unemployment harms both the unemployed (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009) and societies overall (e.g. Dijk et al., 2008) –and the problem has grown worse since the start of the economic crisis in 2008. Unemployment rates more than doubled since then and remained over 9.0% both in the U.S. (BLS) and in Europe (Eurostat, 2012d) for the following years. Usually, the harder people search for reemployment (i.e. job search intensity), the higher their chances are of finding a job (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002). However, just searching hard for a job might not suffice in the absence of suitable job openings, especially for unemployed people with few marketable skills. In order to enhance their chances of finding reemployment, many unemployed people are re-skilling and up-skilling themselves in the hopes of becoming more employable and thus better positioned in the labor market. Past research (McArdle et al., 2007) has indeed shown that the chance of finding reemployment increases with people’s employability (i.e., their skills, knowledge and attitudes that together form the ability to find and keep a job; cf. Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth (2004)). More specifically, employability provides people with choices and alternatives that can make them less vulnerable during economic recessions (De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, De Witte, & Alarco, 2008; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002) and more employable job seekers tend to search more intensely and more likely gain reemployment in the end (McArdle et al., 2007).

In line with these findings, many governments in western societies have introduced compulsory reemployment courses for unemployed people to enhance their job search activities and employability, and their chances on finding reemployment (cf. Dolton & O’Neill, 2002; Graversen & Van Ours, 2008; Klepinger et al., 2002; Kyyrä & Ollikainen, 2008; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Petrongolo, 2009). In these courses, participants learn basic work-related skills, practice their social skills with group exercises, explore their career opportunities and receive training and education to increase their human capital. The courses are reasonably comparable to welfare-to-work programs such as the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program (JOBS; see Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & Van Ryn, 1989; Vinokur et al., 1991), although they require mandatory attendance, are often more time intensive, and take six months or longer.

While we would expect unemployed people to acquire more employability and enhance their job search efforts during compulsory reemployment courses, participants

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react differently to these courses: some become more employable and search for reemployment with new motivation, while others stagnate or get demotivated and stop searching at all (Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). A growing empirical literature shows that participation in reemployment courses has heterogeneous effects on positive reemployment outcomes, providing a reason to abolish these costly courses all together (Andersen, 2011; Dahl & Lorentzen, 2005; Gerfin & Lechner, 2002). When searching for possible reasons for the diverging effects, the compulsory nature of the reemployment courses has been a subject of debate in reemployment practice. Several politicians, reemployment counselors and researchers argue that unemployed people should not be obligated to participate in a reemployment course, as obligatory courses' benefits are often too meager to justify their costs (Dijk et al., 2008; Van den Berg & Van der Klaauw, 2006). It would greatly contribute to this debate to give insight into the conditions and mechanisms that support or hinder the benefits of a reemployment course.

To date, however, there is no consistent research on the mechanisms that can explain the heterogeneous effects of compulsory reemployment courses. Since the outcome of any training largely depends on trainees' motivation (Cheng & Ho, 2001; Mathieu & Martineau, 1997; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992), the current study focuses on participants' motivation and the antecedents of their motivation as the mechanism behind the differences in participants' job search activities and employability after a reemployment course. The primary purpose of our study is to investigate the role of people's *experience* of a reemployment course on their motivation to reach the intended outcome of this course (finding reemployment), which in turn should enhance their job search activities and employability. More specifically, we propose that the perceived choice to take part in a reemployment course and the experienced usefulness of a course are related to people's *quality* of motivation –i.e. the reason why people engage in a certain behavior– for finding reemployment, which in turn affects people's job search behavior and acquisition of employability (see Figure 3.1).

In this study, we combine three streams of research that have so far, to the best of our knowledge, stood largely side by side, namely research on reemployment (e.g. Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002), training effectiveness (e.g. Mathieu & Martineau, 1997; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT: Deci

& Ryan, 1985a; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, our study is the first to apply SDT to the reemployment setting in a longitudinal design, using the theory to address change over time in job search and employability. Through its focus on the quality of motivation, SDT seems particularly useful to examine and explain the varying outcomes of compulsory reemployment courses and the conditions under which such courses may be fruitful for enhancing employability and job search.

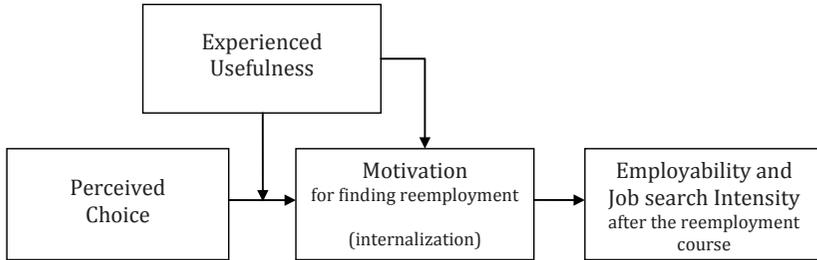


Figure 3.1 *Theoretical Framework*.

### **Job search, Employability, and Finding Reemployment**

Although finding reemployment can depend on numerous factors, the best predictor known to date is job search intensity: the frequency and scope of engagement in job search behaviors such as looking at employment advertisements or calling potential employers (e.g. Kanfer et al., 2001; Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987; Wanberg et al., 1999; Wanberg et al., 2002). Searching and finding reemployment is a dynamic self-regulatory and goal-oriented process that is driven by individuals' ability and motivation to find work (Kanfer et al., 2001).

To address the notion of ability in finding reemployment, Fugate et al. (2004) introduced the concept of employability into reemployment research. They presented employability as a person-centered psycho-social construct for reemployment research, as employable individuals may be less psychologically harmed by unemployment, may engage in more job search and may be more likely to gain high-quality reemployment. Indeed, employability enhances the likelihood of gaining reemployment among the

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unemployed (McArdle et al., 2007) and relates to job-related and general well-being among employees (De Cuyper et al., 2008).

Fugate et al.'s conceptualization of employability comprises four dimensions: adaptability, social capital, human capital and career-identity, each of which consists of different skills, knowledge and behaviors that together create the ability to find and keep a job. Adaptability describes the readiness to cope and willingness to explore one's career possibilities (Savickas, 2005). Exploring one's possibilities has been shown to play an important role in gaining reemployment (Koen et al., 2010; McArdle et al., 2007). Social capital reflects the interpersonal aspect of employability and concerns 'knowing-whom' competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Social capital is constituted from one's social network and social support, both known to impact and facilitate reemployment success (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 1999). Human capital refers to personal factors that may affect one's chances on finding reemployment. These 'knowing-how' competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) include education, experience, training, skills and knowledge. Finally, career identity reflects 'knowing-why' competencies such as individual work values and employment commitment (Fugate et al., 2004). With regard to reemployment, career identity can provide guidance in making decisions and establishing reemployment goals (McArdle et al., 2007).

Unfortunately, not all job seekers show the level of employability and job search intensity needed for finding reemployment, and past research has shown that unemployment itself can further aggravate the situation with unemployed people losing their career identity, job-skills and job-related networks (Aaronson et al., 2010), and even deteriorate in their well-being (Paul & Moser, 2009). While reemployment courses are initiated to buffer against this decline in employability and job search, participants react differently to these courses. However, past research has not yet been able to identify the key factors in successfully enhancing employability and job search intensity or buffering against the decrease of these two important predictors of finding reemployment. Therefore, research is needed to understand the factors that foster or hinder the acquisition of employability and job search intensity during these courses (Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004).

## The role of motivation for finding reemployment

In order to understand unemployed people's individual differences in their job search and acquisition of employability in a reemployment course, it is essential to address their motivation. First, Ployhart (2008) and Dalal and Hulin (2008) argued that it is crucial to consider the role of motivation in a dynamic and real-world setting –such as the reemployment process. Second, motivation shows strong links to engagement in training and training outcomes (cf. Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992), also in compulsory treatment programs (De Leon, Melnick, & Hawke, 1999). Consequently, motivation may well account for heterogeneous effects of compulsory reemployment courses. When attempting to explain these heterogeneous effects, it might be particularly helpful to differentiate between participants' likewise heterogeneous reasons for finding reemployment, as recognized in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985a; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

*Self-Determination Theory.* A basic tenet of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985a; Deci & Ryan, 2000) is that not only the *quantity* of someone's motivation but much more the *quality* of their motivation predicts behavior –i.e. the reason why they engage in a certain behavior. There is a general consensus among psychologists that those reasons can be classified into two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsically motivated people engage in an activity because they find it enjoyable and interesting, whereas extrinsically motivated people engage in an activity because it is instrumental to reaching a certain outcome. Yet, SDT also states that people can internalize extrinsically motivated activities to varying degrees –they can make it of personal value to them. The more someone has internalized the outcome of a certain behavior, the more autonomously motivated the person will be when enacting the behavior. Autonomously motivated people act with a sense of volition and endorsement of the activity. A less internalized or more controlled form of motivation involves acting because one feels pressured to do so or forced by some external or internal force. Accordingly, SDT views intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in terms of a continuum instead of a dichotomy, containing different forms of motivation that each reflect differing degrees of internalization.

*External regulation* is the most controlled and thus least internalized form of motivation and represents being motivated to do something in order to obtain external

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rewards or avoid external punishments. *Introjected regulation* represents a less controlled and thus more internalized form of motivation and involves behavior that is performed to decrease feelings of guilt or shame or to enhance self-esteem. Next along the continuum of internalization is a more autonomous and therefore more internalized form of motivation called *identified regulation* which involves an acceptance of the behavior that needs to be performed as personally important, closely followed by *integrated regulation* which holds that people engage in an activity or behavior because the behavior is congruent with their personal goals and values: it is internalized. Still, the latter two types of behavioral regulation are considered less autonomous than *intrinsic motivation*, because identified and integrated regulation are instrumental to attaining a personally important outcome, whereas intrinsically motivated behavior is performed out of interest and enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Numerous studies have supported the taxonomy of the different forms of motivation (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002), providing empirical support for the construct validity of the continuum of internalization (cf. Vallerand, 1997). Moreover, the consequences and outcomes of these forms of motivation –such as behavior, performance and well-being– are found to be increasingly positive as we go from controlled to more autonomous types of motivation (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2008). For example, the internalization of extrinsic motivation has been linked to persistence, effective performance, job-satisfaction and organizational commitment (e.g. Gagné, Chemolli, Forest, & Koestner, 2008; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). More specifically, Vansteenkiste et al. (2004) showed that an autonomous job search motivation was associated with higher job search intensity.

SDT states that intrinsic motivation concerns the experience of activities as interesting and satisfying, whereas internalized extrinsic motivation concerns experiencing activities as personally important for reaching one's goals. This distinction is especially helpful in the context of reemployment, since the activities undertaken for reaching the goal of finding reemployment are not necessarily interesting or satisfying in themselves, but can be experienced as important for reaching the goal of reemployment. Moreover, SDT suggests that the internalization of extrinsic motivation is particularly effective in predicting engagement and persistence on activities that require discipline and persistence (cf. Gagné & Deci, 2005). Therefore, we assume a

more internalized motivation to be highly relevant as well when attending a compulsory reemployment course or engaging in job search. Following SDT, the more internalized people's motivation is, the more personally important is the prospect of regaining reemployment. A more internalized motivation for finding reemployment should foster a stronger engagement in the respective behavior (i.e. the reemployment course), creating the opportunity to reach the intended outcome (i.e. increasing employability and job search in order to find reemployment). In other words, by providing people with the energy to engage in the reemployment course, a more internalized motivation may thus foster the acquisition of employability and job search intensity during and after the course. Thus, we expect that:

*Hypothesis 1.* A more internalized motivation for finding reemployment will be positively related to employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course.<sup>2</sup>

### **Facilitating a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment**

Participating in a compulsory reemployment course and searching for reemployment are thus often externally regulated activities and can be experienced along the continuum of internalization as rather obligatory (i.e. more controlled) or more volitional (i.e. more autonomous) (Deci, Egharri, Patrick, & Leone, 1994). In order to achieve a more autonomous motivation, unemployed people participating in such a course may have to internalize the intended outcome of the course –finding reemployment. Past research suggests that both the choice of participation and the experienced usefulness of a training play an important role in predicting participants' motivation (e.g. Quiñones, 1995). Likewise, SDT stresses that perceived choice of participation and usefulness of an activity are important factors for internalizing the intended outcome of that activity (Deci et al., 1994).

**Perceived Choice.** The perception of choice is a core aspect of numerous psychological theories and many studies have shown that a feeling of choice is related to motivation and learning (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Karasek, 1979; Warr, 1990). While a feeling of choice can facilitate internalization, thus promoting a more autonomous motivation (e.g. Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989), a feeling of

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<sup>2</sup> When controlling for participants' initial employability and job search intensity.

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compulsion or pressure can foster a less internalized and thus more controlled motivation to engage in that activity (e.g. Koestner, Zuckerman, & Koestner, 1987). Hence, a higher sense of choice in taking part in a reemployment course may lead to a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment, which in turn should advance employability and job search intensity (see Hypothesis 1).

While participating in a reemployment course may be compulsory and mandated by the government, unemployed people can still vary in their perception that they have been coerced to participate (cf. Deci & Ryan, 1995). Coercion or compulsory attendance is not necessarily an either/or phenomenon. The perception of coercion can depend on numerous factors such as the way in which people experience the introduction of the course, the conditions and consequences of not attending, and the enforcement of those consequences (Young, 2002). For example, research on compulsory addiction treatment programs highlights the distinction between objective and perceived choice of participation (Wild, Cunningham, & Ryan, 2006; e.g. Young, 2002). Wild et al. (2006) showed that there was no one-on-one relationship between objective and subjective choice and, more importantly, that objective choice of participation did not predict engagement in the treatment program, whereas subjective choice of participation did. In this study, we therefore consider the subjective choice of participation in the reemployment course. Thus, we propose:

*Hypothesis 2a.* Perceived choice of participation will be positively related to a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment.

*Hypothesis 2b.* Perceived choice of participation will be positively related to employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, perceived choice does not always seem to be positively associated with motivation and training effectiveness. For example, Mathieu, Martineau and Tannenbaum (1993) found no relationship between choice of participation and subsequent motivation in a skill-development training. They assumed that the usefulness of the training might have played a role in the apparently absent effect. That is, participants might have considered the voluntary training to be less instrumental to reach the intended skill development. Reeve et al. (2003) made a similar suggestion by proposing that perceived choice does not necessarily lead to a more internalized

motivation, whereas perceived choice in the context of additional facilitating factors such as providing a rationale for an activity does (also see Deci et al., 1994). Also Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens and Sideridis (2011) pointed out that the provision of a rationale might be more beneficial for students' engagement in a physical education class than the provision of choice alone. Furthermore, Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) and later Baldwin and Magjuka (1997) argued that the combination of participants' perceived usefulness of a training and the mandatory attendance might explain the different findings regarding the effect of choice. Together, these prior findings suggest that a high sense of choice may only foster a more internalized motivation and better training outcomes when people also perceive the training as useful.

**Experienced Usefulness.** Previous studies have indeed found that the belief that a training is useful plays a crucial role in motivation and engagement during training (Jang, 2008) and the subsequent effectiveness of the training (cf. Mathieu & Martineau, 1997). Although this finding pertains to both the expected and the experienced usefulness during training (Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennett Jr, Traver, & Shotland, 1997; Tai, 2006), we focus on the *experienced* usefulness of the course. The experienced usefulness seems particularly relevant when it comes to compulsory reemployment courses, because people often know little about the content of the course or even about the reemployment process itself before they participate in the course.

According to SDT, experienced usefulness –i.e., understanding why the outcome of an (uninteresting) activity can have personal value and how that activity can be useful for reaching the intended outcome– is expected to enhance internalization and subsequent effort (Deci et al., 1994; Jang, 2008; Reeve, Jang, Hardre, & Omura, 2002). Reeve et al. (2002) experimentally manipulated the experience of usefulness by providing students with a rationale during an uninteresting but potentially personally useful learning task (learning conversational Chinese) and found that providing a rationale increased students' effort: they experienced a more internalized motivation during the learning task and subsequently invested more effort. Jang (2008) strengthened these findings with 3 studies based on different theoretical models of motivation. She concluded that having a rationale can help people generate a more internalized motivation, which facilitates constructive engagement in uninteresting but personally important tasks. In terms of reemployment, we thus assume that when

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someone experiences the (externally regulated) reemployment course as personally useful for finding reemployment, it can help him or her to achieve a more internalized motivation towards finding reemployment. As a consequence, a more internalized motivation can help unemployed people to engage constructively in and learn from the course and therefore acquire more employability and increase job search. We thus propose that:

*Hypothesis 3a.* The experienced usefulness of the reemployment course will be positively related to a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment.

*Hypothesis 3b.* The experienced usefulness of the reemployment course will be positively related to employability and job search intensity after the course.<sup>2</sup>

When considering the combined experiences of the reemployment course (i.e. perceived choice and experienced usefulness), previous research leads us to believe that these two might interact and thus not function independently from one another. In fact, the experienced usefulness of a course might outweigh its perceived choice when it comes to motivation and effectiveness. To illustrate, Assor, Kaplan and Roth (2002) showed that ‘fostering relevance’ played a more important role in predicting students’ engagement in schoolwork than ‘choice provision’. They argued that providing a rationale for tasks with an extrinsic origin (i.e. compulsory academic school activities) can help students to feel more autonomous regarding schoolwork. They emphasized that, in an educational context, the essence of effectuating a more internalized motivation and engagement was not to maximize freedom of choice, but to help people understand the connection between a task and their personal goals by showing them the relevance of the activity. Based on this prior research, we expect that perceived choice will positively relate to the quality of motivation for finding reemployment and the subsequent outcomes of the course particularly when unemployed people experience a reemployment course as useful for finding reemployment. We propose:

*Hypothesis 4a.* The relationship between perceived choice of participation and a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment is moderated by the experienced usefulness of the course. This relationship is positive when the course is experienced as useful.

*Hypothesis 4b.* The relationship between perceived choice of participation and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course<sup>1</sup> is moderated by experienced usefulness. This relationship is positive when the course is experienced as useful.

The expectations of Hypotheses 2-4 suggest that the experience of a reemployment course influences participants' motivation and course outcomes simultaneously. However, as implied in Hypothesis 1, we believe that a more internalized motivation fosters participants' job search and employability and thus acts as a mediating mechanism between the experience of the reemployment course (i.e. perceived choice and experienced usefulness) and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course. In other words, internalized motivation might explain how and why the experience of a course influences the outcomes of that course and therewith account for the heterogeneous effects of compulsory reemployment courses. This assumption is in line with Kanfer et al. (1991)'s distal-proximal framework of motivational theories, which states that variables more distal from performance outcomes influence these outcomes through more proximal variables. In the context of our study, the experience of a course can be regarded as the more distal factor, whereas the motivation for finding reemployment can be regarded as the more proximal factor in reaching the intended course outcome (i.e. increasing employability and job search in order to find reemployment). It thus suggests that the experience of a course impacts its outcomes by affecting participants' motivation. This idea is consistent with the majority of models on training motivation and training effectiveness that state that the relationship between individual or situational variables and training outcomes are mediated by motivation (e.g. Baldwin & Magjuka, 1997; Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Mathieu et al., 1993; Mathieu & Martineau, 1997; Quiñones, 1995). Altogether, we expect that a more internalized motivation mediates the proposed relationships between perceived choice and experienced usefulness on the one hand, and course outcomes on the other hand. At the same time, we expect that the experienced usefulness of a course affects the direction of the relationship between perceived choice and participants' motivation for finding reemployment, thereby affecting the subsequent outcomes of the course. Hence, we also propose a mediated moderation.

*Hypothesis 5a.* The relationship between perceived choice and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course is mediated by a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment.

*Hypothesis 5b.* The relationship between experienced usefulness and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course is mediated by a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment.

*Hypothesis 5c.* The moderating effect of experienced usefulness on the relationship between perceived choice and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course<sup>1</sup> is mediated by motivation for finding reemployment.

## Methods

### Participants and procedure

Data collection for the current study took part in the context of a larger project on employability among long-term unemployed people. For testing the current hypotheses, we used a sample of people ( $n = 643$ ; 365 women (56.8%) and 278 (43.2%) men) who had participated in a compulsory reemployment course and had responded to two voluntary paper-and-pencil questionnaires set one year apart, one before (Time 1) and one after (Time 2) the reemployment course. Participants' average age was 46.4 ( $SD = 9.0$ ) and their average length of unemployment was 75.3 months ( $SD = 88.9$ ). Among the respondents, 29.6% had preliminary school as the highest completed level of education, 31.7% high school or basic training, 20.3% had undergone vocational training, 12.3% held the Dutch equivalent of a Bachelor's degree, and 5.9% held a Master's degree.

### Reemployment Courses

A defining criterion for the participation in the current study was that participants were obligated to attend a reemployment course, which happened as soon as participants were unemployed for over 3 months, received regular governmental welfare benefits as determined by welfare law and were physically and psychologically able to work. These reemployment courses are offered to participants by a reemployment counselor, after an intake and assessment of the participant's preferences concerning the area of work (e.g. gardening, nursing, administrative,

financial, etc.). Although different in focus, all reemployment courses aim to enhance the unemployed's employability and job search activities within about half a year in order to enhance people's chances on finding reemployment. Attendance of reemployment courses is obligatory in such a way that not attending will be followed by a reduction of welfare benefits.

## Measures

All variables were assessed with existing scales and were answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*low agreement*) to 5 (*high agreement*). Where necessary, items were translated from English into Dutch and translated back into English to ensure the comparability of the items. Given the high proportion of low educated respondents, most of the items were simplified in collaboration with reemployment consultants.

*Job search intensity* at Time 1 was assessed with a single item asking participants how many hours per week on average they spent on searching for a job (Barron & Mellow, 1981). This measure serves well as an indicator of job search intensity among unemployed people (Wanberg et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 2010). Job search intensity at Time 2 was measured with Blau's (1994) 12-item scale with adaptations from previous studies (Van Hooft et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 1999). Participants had to indicate how often (1 = *never [0 Times]* to 5 = *very frequently [at least 10 Times]*) they had engaged in diverse job search behaviors in the past 3 months, such as "*used the internet to locate job openings.*"

*Employability* was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 by assessing every dimension of employability separately, as proposed by McArdle et al. (2007). Adaptability was reflected by *career adaptability* (Savickas, 2005) and measured in the same way as by Zikic and Klehe (2006) by combining two subscales: career planning (Gould, 1979) and environmental exploration (Stumpf et al., 1983). An example item for career planning is "*I know what I need to do to reach my career goals*" and of career exploration "*I investigate career opportunities*". Social capital was reflected by *social skills* and measured with the Perceived Social Competence Scale (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2008). An example item is "*I ask others if I can be of help*". We operationalized human capital with *qualifications*, for example with the item "*an employer would be impressed with my*

*qualifications*”, following the practice and scale of Wanberg et al. (2002). *Employment commitment* reflected career identity and was measured with a six-item scale by Warr, Cook and Wall (1979), containing items such as “*having a job is very important to me*”.

*Motivation for finding reemployment* was assessed at Time 2 with the 16-item Job search Self-Regulation Questionnaire, which represents four regulatory styles applicable to job search (SRQ-JS: Vansteenkiste et al., 2004; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). In line with previous research (Van den Broeck et al., 2011; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004), no distinction was made within this scale between identified and integrated regulation. Items were slightly simplified and adapted to reflect motivation for finding reemployment, by replacing ‘job search’ with ‘finding reemployment’. The questionnaire asked the question ‘why do you want to find reemployment?’, followed by items such as “*because I enjoy putting effort into finding reemployment that would interest me*” (reflecting intrinsic motivation), “*because finding reemployment is personally meaningful for me*” (reflecting identified regulation), “*because it is my duty as an unemployed person to find reemployment*” (reflecting introjected regulation) and “*because I need the money*” (reflecting external regulation). In line with SDT and to reduce the number of variables for further analyses, we calculated the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) from the different motivational subscales to reflect the level of internalization. This was done by ascribing each subscale a different weight and combining them in the order from the least to the most fully internalized (cf. Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000). To form the RAI, the external regulation subscale was assigned a weight of -2, the introjected regulation subscale was assigned a weight of -1, the identified regulation subscale was assigned a weight of +1 and the intrinsic motivation subscale was assigned a weight of +2. In other words, the more autonomous one’s motivation is to find reemployment, the larger its positive weight; the more controlled one’s motivation is to find reemployment, the larger its negative weight. Numerous studies have proven the usefulness of the RAI to reflect internalization and to predict its behavioral consequences (e.g. Guay & Vallerand, 1996; Senecal & Guay, 2001; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004).

*Perceived Choice and Experienced Usefulness* were assessed at Time 2 with two 7-item scales of the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (e.g. Deci et al., 1994). Participants had to indicate to which degree they felt like they had a choice in participating in the reemployment course (e.g. “*I felt like it was not my own choice to participate in this*

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*reemployment course*") and how useful they thought the reemployment course was for finding reemployment (e.g. *"I believe that participating in this reemployment course can help me to find reemployment"*).

Gender, age, education and length of unemployment are often reported as correlates of job search intensity and reemployment status (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002) and were thus assessed at Time 1 as demographic control variables. However, initial analyses revealed that gender and education were uncorrelated with the dependent variables (job search intensity and employability at Time 2) after controlling for their associated Time 1 variables. In line with methodological recommendations (cf. Becker, 2005) these were therefore left out of further analyses to preserve sufficient statistical power.

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

Prior to examining our hypotheses, we performed two statistical procedures to determine the extent of common method variance in our data. Following the recommendation of Podsakoff et al. (2003), we used a common latent factor approach with structural equation modeling and found that the method factor accounted for only 14% of the variance, which is less than the average amount of method variance in organizational research as observed by Williams, Coté and Buckley (1989) or by Podsakoff et al. (2003). As a second test, we conducted Lindell and Whitney's (2001) latent marker variable technique with SEM (cf. Williams, Hartman, & Cavazotte, 2010) with general life satisfaction<sup>3</sup> as a marker variable and found method factor loadings of .35, suggesting that the items were contaminated by a source of method variance. However, the square of these factor loadings indicates the percentage of variance in the factors associated with the marker variable, and thus shows that the amount of method variance in each factor was only 12%, which is again less than average (Williams et al., 1989). Together, these two statistical tests suggest that common method variance is not

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<sup>3</sup>General life satisfaction was measured with the Dutch version (van Hooft, Born, Taris, & van der Flier, 2002) of Diener et al.'s (1985) 5-item scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

Table 3.1 Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Age in years	46.44	8.98	(-)																		
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>	.43	.50	.14**	(-)																	
3. Education <sup>oo</sup>	2.33	1.20	.04	.09	(-)																
4. Unemployment Length <sup>ooo</sup>	75.30	88.90	.20**	-.02	.10	(-)															
<i>T1 variables</i>																					
5. Job-Search Intensity <sup>oooo</sup>	19.34	12.7	-.12**	.09	.02	-.13*	(-)														
6. Adaptability: Career Planning	3.04	1.14	-.13**	.08	.24**	-.11	.13*	(.91)													
7. Adaptability: Career Exploration	2.41	1.04	-.10*	.11*	.20**	-.18**	.19**	.44**	(.89)												
8. Social Capital	3.73	.71	-.07	-.06	.25**	-.06	.04	.43**	.25**	(.88)											
9. Human Capital	2.83	1.04	-.07	.20**	.45**	-.07	.08	.58**	.44**	.47**	(.85)										
10. Career Identity	3.68	.84	-.20**	.03	.12*	-.17**	.18**	.36**	.28**	.36**	.37**	(.80)									
<i>T2 variables</i>																					
11. Experienced Usefulness	3.24	1.01	-.12**	-.05	-.09	-.07	.04	.15**	.06	.12**	.10*	.23**	(.95)								
12. Perceived Choice	2.88	.93	-.02	.00	-.12*	.07	-.03	.00	-.09	-.02	-.03	.03	.20**	(.86)							
13. Motivation (RAI)	.00	1.00	-.11*	-.07	.06	-.03	.09	.28**	.21**	.22**	.22**	.33**	.26**	.02	(-)						
14. Job-Search Intensity	1.76	.75	-.14**	.13**	.10*	-.22**	.22**	.35**	.29**	.41**	.34**	.21**	-.05	.27**	(.93)						
15. Adaptability: Career Planning	2.80	1.19	-.15**	.05	.12*	-.09*	.04	.53**	.27**	.21**	.34**	.26**	.35**	.10	.20**	.34**	(.89)				
16. Adaptability: Career Exploration	2.48	1.11	-.18**	-.07	.09	-.23**	.10	.29**	.38**	.25**	.32**	.33**	.27**	-.04	.32**	.69**	.47**	(.91)			
17. Social Capital	3.73	.73	-.05	-.05	.22**	.02	-.07	.28**	.24**	.63**	.41**	.29**	.21**	.03	.25**	.35**	.24**	.29**	(.89)		
18. Human Capital	2.97	1.02	-.11**	.15**	.35**	-.15**	.03	.48**	.40**	.39**	.73**	.36**	.23**	.03	.27**	.45**	.39**	.40**	.51**	(.87)	
19. Career Identity	3.62	1.08	-.21**	-.01	.14**	-.12**	.13*	.34**	.28**	.33**	.36**	.63**	.34**	.05	.40**	.43**	.39**	.49**	.41**	.46**	(.87)

Note: Coefficient alphas are on the diagonal in parentheses.  $N = 643$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed), \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed)

<sup>a</sup>Gender categories include 0 = female, 1 = male. <sup>oo</sup>Education categories include 1 = preschool, 2 = basic training, 3 = vocational training, 4 = bachelor, 5 = master.

<sup>ooo</sup>Unemployment Length was assessed in months. <sup>oooo</sup>Job-search Intensity at T1 was assessed in hours per week.

COMPULSORY REEMPLOYMENT COURSES

Table 3.2 Hierarchical Multiple Regression on Job search Intensity and Employability at Time 2.

Predictors	Job-Search Intensity (T2)			Environmental Exploration (T2)			Career Planning (T2)		
	<i>b</i>	SD <i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	SD <i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	SD <i>b</i>	$\beta$
Step 1									
Age	-.01	.01	-.08	-.01	.01	-.12*	-.01	.01	-.08
Unemployment Length	-.00	.00	-.18**	-.00	.00	-.15**	.00	.00	-.02
Variable at T1 <sup>o</sup>	.01	.00	.18**	.36	.06	.34**	.54	.05	.52**
Step 2									
Age	-.01	.01	-.06	-.01	.01	-.10†	-.01	.01	-.08
Unemployment Length	-.00	.00	-.18**	-.00	.00	-.15**	.00	.00	-.02
Variable at T1 <sup>o</sup>	.01	.00	.17**	.31	.06	.29**	.53	.05	.50**
Motivation (RAI)	.18	.04	.25**	.28	.06	.25**	.06	.06	.05
Multiple R step 2			.38**			.49**			.54**
$\Delta R^2$ step 2			.06**			.06**			.00
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> total			.14**			.23**			.28**

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed); \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed); †  $p < .05$  (1-tailed)

<sup>o</sup> associated with the variable at T2 as reported in each column header

Predictors	Social Skills (T2)			Qualifications (T2)			Employment Commitment (T2)		
	<i>b</i>	SD <i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	SD <i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	SD <i>b</i>	$\beta$
Step 1									
Age	-.00	.00	-.02	-.01	.00	-.04	-.01	.01	-.08*
Unemployment Length	.00	.00	.07†	-.00	.00	-.09**	-.00	.00	-.01
Variable at T1 <sup>o</sup>	.66	.04	.64**	.71	.03	.70**	.79	.05	.61**
Step 2									
Age	-.00	.00	-.01	-.00	.00	-.03	-.01	.01	-.07†
Unemployment Length	.00	.00	.07†	-.00	.00	-.09**	-.00	.00	-.01
Variable at T1 <sup>o</sup>	.63**	.04	.61**	.68	.03	.70**	.70	.05	.54**
Motivation (RAI)	.08	.03	.12**	.11	.04	.11**	.22	.04	.21**
Multiple R step 2			.65**			.75**			.66**
$\Delta R^2$ step 2			.01**			.01**			.04**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> total			.41**			.56**			.43**

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed); \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed); †  $p < .05$  (1-tailed)

<sup>o</sup> associated with the variable at T2 as reported in each column header

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a pervasive problem in our study.

### Hypotheses testing

Table 3.1 presents the means, standard deviations, internal consistencies and correlations between all variables. Hypothesis 1 stated that a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment would be positively related to employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course. We tested this hypothesis with the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) as an indicator of the motivation for finding reemployment<sup>4</sup>. Regression analyses (see Table 3.2) confirmed that motivation played an important role in predicting job seekers' level of job search intensity and employability at Time 2, after controlling for these variables at Time 1. With the exception of career planning, the results showed that a more internalized motivation was associated with higher job search intensity ( $\beta = .25$ ), adaptability (career exploration:  $\beta = .25$ ), social capital ( $\beta = .12$ ), human capital ( $\beta = .11$ ) and career identity ( $\beta = .21$ ), largely confirming Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the perceived choice of participation was positively related to a more internalized motivation (2a) and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course (2b). However, we did not find a significant main effect on internalized motivation (see Table 3.3), nor on job search intensity and employability at Time 2 (see Table 3.4). Hypothesis 2 was thus not confirmed.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that experienced usefulness would be positively related to a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment (3a) and to employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course (3b). Regression analyses (see Table 3.3) revealed that the experienced usefulness of a reemployment course was indeed positively related to a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment ( $\beta = .25$ ). Results also showed that experienced usefulness was positively related to job search intensity ( $\beta = .19$ ), adaptability (career exploration:  $\beta = .24$ , career planning:  $\beta$

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<sup>4</sup> We used the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) as an indicator of the degree of internalized motivation for finding reemployment in testing all of our hypotheses. To assure that this composite measure indeed represented a more internalized (i.e. more autonomous) motivation for finding reemployment, we re-ran all analyses with the separate subscales representing autonomous motivation. These analyses showed a similar pattern of results, although the correlation and regression coefficients were slightly higher when using the subscale of intrinsic motivation.

=.26), social capital ( $\beta = .14$ ), human capital ( $\beta = .15$ ) and career identity ( $\beta = .20$ ) at Time 2 (see Table 3.4). Hypothesis 3 was thus confirmed.

Table 3.3 *Hierarchical Multiple Regression on Motivation (RAI) for Finding Reemployment.*

Predictors	<i>b</i>	SD <i>b</i>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Age	-.01	.01	-.08
Unemployment Length	.00	.01	.01
Perceived Choice	-.04	.05	-.04
Usefulness	.25	.04	.25**
Step 2			
Age	-.01	.01	-.07
Unemployment Length	.00	.01	-.01
Perceived Choice	-.01	.05	-.01
Usefulness	.25	.05	.25**
Usefulness*Choice	.11	.04	.14**
Multiple R			.27**
$\Delta R^2$ step 1			.07**
$\Delta R^2$ step 2			.02**
Adjusted $R^2$ total			.08**

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed); \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed); †  $p < .05$  (1-tailed)

Hypothesis 4 proposed that experienced usefulness would moderate the relationship between perceived choice and a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment (4a) and between perceived choice and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course (4b). To avoid multicollinearity, all variables were centered first (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). We found a significant interaction of perceived choice and experienced usefulness on motivation for finding reemployment ( $\beta = .14$ ), confirming Hypothesis 4a (see Table 3.3). To analyze the interaction effect in more detail, simple slope analyses were conducted (Aiken & West, 1991). The slope for low experienced usefulness was significant ( $\beta = -.12, p = .02$ ) and the slope for high experienced usefulness was marginally significant ( $\beta = .10, p = .09$ ) (see Figure 3.2). The results showed that the relationship between perceived choice and motivation was moderated by experienced usefulness, in such a way that a high

perceived choice was related to a more internalized (i.e. more autonomous) motivation when experienced usefulness was also high. At the same time, a high perceived choice was associated with a less internalized (i.e. more controlled) motivation when the experienced usefulness was low.

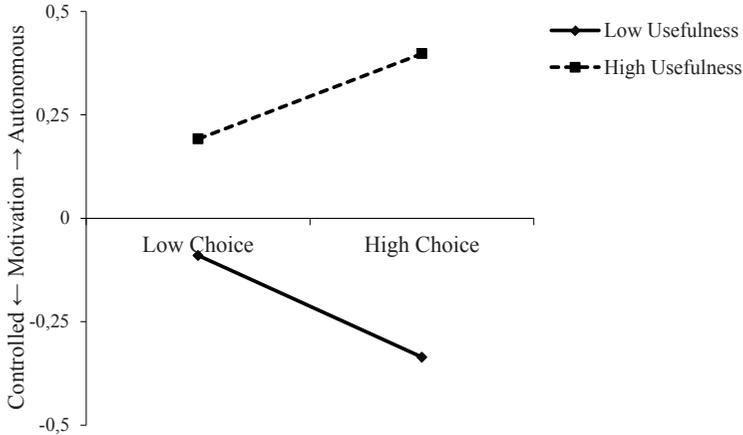


Figure 3.2 *Interaction effect of perceived choice and experienced usefulness on the internalization of motivation for finding reemployment.*

Regarding Hypothesis 4b, we found significant interaction effects (see Table 3.4) of perceived choice and experienced usefulness on job search intensity ( $\beta = .16$ ) and social capital ( $\beta = .08$ ) at Time 2, after controlling for Time 1. Simple slope analyses for job search intensity showed that only the slope of low experienced usefulness was significant ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p = .02$ ), indicating that a low perceived choice was especially associated with less increase in job search intensity when the experienced usefulness was also low (see Figure 3.3). Concerning social capital, we found that only the slope of high experienced usefulness was significant ( $\beta = .08$ ,  $p = .04$ ), showing that a high perceived choice was only associated with more social capital when the experienced usefulness was also high (see Figure 3.4).

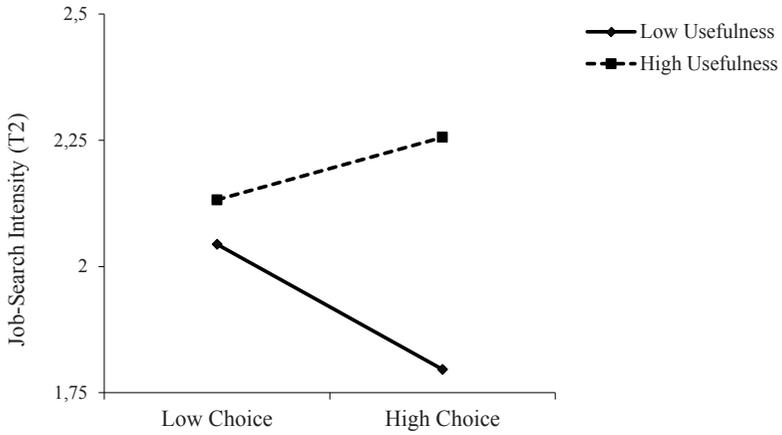


Figure 3.3 Interaction effect of perceived choice and usefulness on job search intensity after the reemployment course (Time 2), after controlling for the level of job search intensity at Time 1.

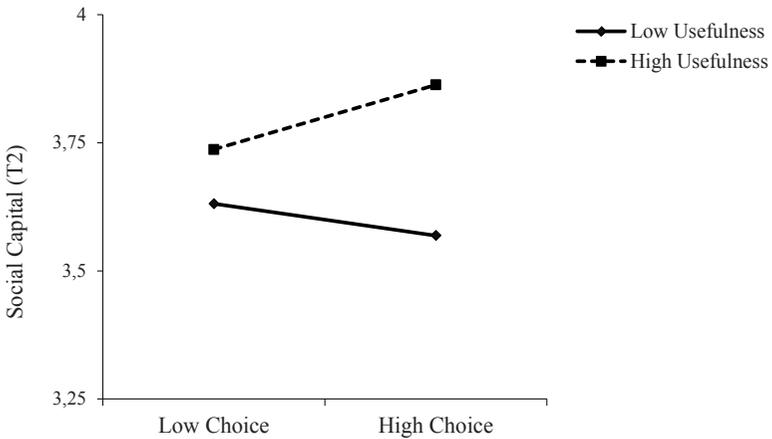


Figure 3.4 Interaction effect of perceived choice and usefulness on social capital after the reemployment course (Time 2), after controlling for the level of social capital at Time 1.

Hypothesis 5a proposed that the relationship between perceived choice and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course would be mediated by participants' internalized motivation for finding reemployment. Given the fact that perceived choice had no main effect on motivation nor on employability and job search intensity, Hypothesis 5a can be rejected.

Hypothesis 5b stated that the relationship between experienced usefulness of a reemployment course and employability and job search intensity after the course would be mediated by participants' internalized motivation for finding reemployment. Results (see Table 3.4) showed that the effect of experienced usefulness of the training on job search intensity at Time 2 was partially mediated by motivation ( $Z = 2.89, p = .00$ ). Motivation also partially mediated the relationship between experienced usefulness and adaptability (career exploration:  $Z = 3.05, p = .00$ ), social capital ( $Z = 1.92, p = .05$ ), human capital ( $Z = 2.06, p = .03$ ), and career identity ( $Z = 3.24, p = .00$ ) at Time 2. Only the relationship between experienced usefulness and career planning at Time 2 was not mediated. Hypothesis 5b was thus largely confirmed.

Hypothesis 5c assumed a mediated moderation, stating that the moderating effect of experienced usefulness on the relationship between perceived choice and course outcomes would be mediated by the motivation for finding reemployment. Following Muller, Judd and Yzerbyt (2005), we used a moderated causal steps approach in which Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal steps procedure for testing mediation is applied to test moderation in a regression equation before and after controlling for the mediator. In this approach, mediated moderation is established when the regression coefficient of the interaction term (i.e. usefulness  $\times$  choice) is no longer significant when the mediator (i.e. motivation) is added to the equation (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). We found that for job search intensity, the standardized regression weight of the interaction dropped slightly when adding motivation to the regression equation (see Table 3.4), indicating a partial but significant mediated moderation ( $Z = 2.33, p = .02$ ). For social capital, the regression weight was no longer significant after adding motivation to the regression equation, indicating a mediated moderation. However, the Sobel test revealed that this mediated moderation was only marginally significant ( $Z = 1.69, p = .09$ ). Hypothesis 5c was thus only slightly confirmed.

Table 3.4 Hierarchical Multiple Regressions on Job Search Intensity and Employability at Time 2.

Predictors	Job-Search Intensity (T2)			Adaptability: Exploration (T2)			Adaptability: Planning (T2)		
	b	SE b	$\beta$	b	SE b	$\beta$	b	SE b	$\beta$
Step 1									
Age	-.01	.01	-.06	-.01	.01	-.09†	-.01	.01	-.06
Unemployment Length	-.00	.00	-.16**	-.00	.00	-.13*	.00	.00	-.01
Variable at T1°	.01	.00	.18**	.35	.06	.33**	.51	.05	.48**
Perceived Choice	-.06	.05	-.07	-.06	.06	-.05	.06	.06	.05
Usefulness	.14	.04	.19**	.26	.06	.24**	.31	.06	.26**
Step 2									
Age	-.00	.01	-.05	-.01	.00	-.09†	-.01	.01	-.05
Unemployment Length	-.00	.00	-.18**	-.00	.00	-.14*	.00	.00	-.02
Variable at T1°	.01	.00	.19**	.31	.06	.32**	.51	.05	.48**
Perceived Choice	-.05	.05	-.04	-.05	.06	-.03	.06	.06	.06
Usefulness	.10	.04	.19**	.21	.06	.24**	.31	.06	.26**
Usefulness*Choice	.09	.04	.16**	.06	.05	.07	.05	.05	.05
Step 3									
Age	-.00	.01	-.04	-.01	.00	-.08	-.01	.01	-.05
Unemployment Length	-.00	.00	-.18**	-.00	.00	-.14*	.00	.00	-.02
Variable at T1°	.01	.00	.17**	.31	.06	.28**	.51	.05	.48**
Perceived Choice	-.03	.05	-.04	-.05	.06	-.03	.06	.06	.05
Usefulness	.10	.04	.14**	.21	.06	.19**	.31	.06	.26**
Usefulness*Choice	.08	.04	.13*	.04	.05	.05	.05	.05	.06
Motivation (RAI)	.06	.02	.19**	.09	.03	.20**	-.00	.03	-.02
Multiple R step 3									
$\Delta R^2$ step 1	.43**								
$\Delta R^2$ step 2	.13**								
$\Delta R^2$ step 3	.02**								
$\Delta R^2$ step 3	.03**								
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> total	.16**								
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> total	.26**								

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed), \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed), †  $p < .05$  (1-tailed)

° associated with the variable at T2 as reported in each column header

Table 3.4 (continued). Hierarchical Multiple Regressions on Job Search Intensity and Employability at Time 2.

Predictors	Social Capital (T2)			Human Capital (T2)			Career Identity (T2)		
	<i>b</i>	SE	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	SE	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	SE	$\beta$
<b>Step 1</b>									
Age	-.00	.00	-.01	-.00	.00	-.03	-.01	.01	-.07†
Unemployment Length	.00	.00	.07†	-.00	.00	-.09*	.00	.00	.00
Variable at T1°	.64	.04	.62**	.70	.03	.71**	.73	.05	.57**
Perceived Choice	.01	.03	.01	.02	.04	.02	-.00	.05	-.00
Usefulness	.10	.03	.14**	.15	.04	.15**	.21	.04	.20**
<b>Step 2</b>									
Age	.00	.00	-.01	-.00	.00	-.02	-.01	.01	-.07†
Unemployment Length	.00	.00	.06	-.00	.00	-.09*	.00	.00	.00
Variable at T1°	.63	.04	.61**	.69	.03	.71**	.73	.05	.57**
Perceived Choice	.02	.03	.02	.03	.04	.03	-.00	.05	-.00
Usefulness	.10	.03	.14**	.15	.04	.15**	.21	.04	.20**
Usefulness*Choice	.05	.02	.08*	.02	.03	.02	.00	.03	.00
<b>Step 3</b>									
Age	.00	.00	.00	-.00	.00	-.02	-.01	.01	-.07†
Unemployment Length	.00	.00	.06	-.00	.00	-.09*	-.00	.00	-.00
Variable at T1°	.62	.04	.60**	.68	.03	.69**	.67	.05	.52**
Perceived Choice	.02	.03	.02	.03	.04	.03	.00	.05	.00
Usefulness	.09	.03	.12**	.13	.04	.13**	.18	.04	.16**
Usefulness*Choice	.04	.02	.07†	.01	.03	.02	-.02	.03	-.02
Motivation (RAI)	.03	.01	.08*	.03	.02	.08*	.08	.02	.18**
<b>Multiple R step 2</b>									
Multiple R step 1	.66**								
$\Delta R^2$ step 1	.43**								
$\Delta R^2$ step 2	.01*								
$\Delta R^2$ step 3	.01*								
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> total	.43**								
Multiple R step 2	.68**								
$\Delta R^2$ step 1	.57**								
$\Delta R^2$ step 2	.44**								
$\Delta R^2$ step 3	.00								
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> total	.03**								
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> total	.45**								

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed); \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed); †  $p < .05$  (1-tailed)

° associated with the variable at T2 as reported in each column header

## Discussion

Many reemployment services have introduced compulsory reemployment courses, aimed at enhancing people's chances on finding reemployment by stimulating their job search activities and employability. The goal of the current study was to explain individual differences in employability among unemployed people after their participation in reemployment courses –reflected in the dimensions of adaptability, social capital, human capital, and career identity (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al., 2007)– and job search intensity (Wanberg et al., 2002).

By combining research on training effectiveness with that on SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), we assumed that the mechanism underlying the differences in acquisition of employability and job search intensity during the reemployment course could be explained by people's experience of a reemployment course and their quality –the 'why'– of motivation for finding reemployment. Derived from Deci et al. (1994), Reeve et al. (2003) and Mathieu et al. (1993), we expected that the perceived choice in participating in a course and the experienced usefulness of the course would interact in such a way that a high perceived choice of participation would lead to a more internalized motivation for those who experienced the course as useful for finding reemployment. Results confirmed our expectations but also revealed that a high sense of choice was associated with a less internalized motivation when people did not experience the course as useful for finding reemployment. We found a comparable pattern for two of the intended course outcomes: the employability dimension of social capital and people's job search intensity. The combination of a high choice of participation and a high experienced usefulness was particularly beneficial for people's social capital, whereas the combination of a low choice and a low experienced usefulness was particularly detrimental for people's job search intensity.

We furthermore assumed that the effects of perceived choice and experienced usefulness on employability and job search intensity would be mediated by participants' internalized motivation for finding reemployment, which was partially supported by our results. In more detail, we found that motivation partially mediated the relationship between experienced usefulness and employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course. Also, the moderating effect of usefulness on the relationship

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between choice and job search intensity after the course was partially mediated by motivation for finding reemployment. Overall, however, participants' internalized motivation seems not to be the only mechanism accounting for the relationship between the experience of a reemployment course and course outcomes. Rather, participants' experienced usefulness remained a significant predictor throughout these analyses. These results suggest that the more distal factors such as the usefulness of a course for finding reemployment are critical, but also that other, more proximal mechanisms besides internalized motivation can play a role.

Together, these findings show that participants of a compulsory reemployment course can still perceive a sense of choice and volition which –given that they experience the course as useful for finding reemployment– contributes to their motivation, and job search and employability after the course. The results also imply that the compulsory nature of a reemployment course is not necessarily detrimental for people's motivation and their employability and job search, as long as they experience such a course as useful for finding reemployment. At the same time, the experienced usefulness of a course appears to be most essential for people's motivation and course outcomes. The fact that we did not find an overall main effect of perceived choice in participating in a reemployment course on either motivation or job search intensity and employability after the course strengthens this notion: the experienced usefulness of a course is more important than perceived choice when participating in that course. This assumption corresponds with prior findings in an educational context (Assor et al., 2002). As argued by Reeve et al. (2003), perceived choice by itself does not necessarily foster positive outcomes, but perceived choice in the context of other autonomy-supportive factors – such as experienced usefulness– does. In other words, the combination of a high choice of participation and a high experienced usefulness of a reemployment course is most beneficial.

Another interesting result was that some of the dimensions of employability showed an overall decrease between measurements. This result is, unfortunately, not a stand-alone finding within reemployment research (Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). Especially when it comes to the long-term unemployed, people tend to lose their career identity, job-skills, motivation, and job-related networks (Aaronson et al., 2010) as the time of unemployment lengthens. Wanberg et al. (1999) stated that sustaining job

search intensity and motivation is especially important among these long-term unemployed people, for example with reemployment interventions. Vinokur et al.'s (1991) JOBS program –generally comparable to the reemployment courses in our study– helped to enhance participants' ability to maintain motivation and persist in job search, to be ready to cope with setbacks and counter the loss of motivation (Vinokur & Schul, 1997). In other words, reemployment courses may help to counteract the overall decrease in some of the dimensions of employability and, at the same time, help to enhance other dimensions of employability and job search. However, a negative change may not be counteracted when usefulness and choice are both low, which may explain the overall decrease in career identity and career planning in this particular study.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Previous studies on the utility of compulsory courses have reported mixed findings on the relationships between perceived choice of participation, motivation and subsequent training effects. Some studies have even found that the lack of choice to participate may have no effect or a negative effect on motivation and performance-related outcomes (Patall, Cooper, & Wynn, 2010). In that light, the major contribution of our paper lies in the interaction between the perceived choice and experienced usefulness of a reemployment course, since it can provide insight on why perceived choice can be both beneficial and detrimental for motivation and training outcomes. Our results show that a feeling of choice when participating in a reemployment course only fosters employability and job search when unemployed people experience such a reemployment course as useful for finding reemployment. However, the results also show that having a sense of choice when taking part in a reemployment course is not always as beneficial for people's motivation and subsequent outcomes. On the contrary, a high sense of choice about participating in a reemployment course that at the same time falls short of people's expectations can lead to a less internalized (i.e. more controlled) motivation for finding reemployment and thus to relatively lower employability and less job search.

The fact that we found that a higher perceived choice to be beneficial when a course is experienced as useful is in line with a tenet of SDT that suggests that providing a rationale can prevent undermining effects of compulsory tasks and can support a more

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internalized (i.e. more autonomous) motivation (Deci et al., 1994; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Reeve et al., 2002; Reeve et al., 2003). Moreover, Patall, Cooper and Wynn (2010) suggested that providing rationales for the usefulness of engaging in tasks may be more effective than providing alternatives to support a more internalized motivation. Similarly, Katz and Assor (2007) showed that having a choice in itself is not sufficient to support motivation, but that choices need to be relevant to people's interests and goals. As such, having chosen a reemployment course that is experienced as relevant for the goal of finding reemployment is more beneficial than a course that is not experienced as relevant for finding reemployment. In other words, while the experience of usefulness of a course seems to outweigh the perceived choice of participation, the combination between both is most ideal when it comes to motivation, employability, and job search intensity.

However, our findings also showed that when a course is not experienced as useful for finding reemployment, high rather than low perceived choice is associated with less internalized motivation. In their meta-analysis on the different effects of choice on intrinsic motivation, Patall, Cooper and Robinson (2008) briefly discussed the possibility that there can be circumstances under which the positive effects of choice are diminished or even reversed, for example when the consequences of making choices becomes greater. In line with their thoughts, Leotti, Iyengar and Ochsner (2010) posed some questions for future research on the conditions under which choice might be undesirable. They pointed at the subjective value of choice contents and argued that, since people are motivated to choose the best option, choosing a non-optimal option may result in negative consequences. In other words, when people consider a reemployment course to be useless, choice may harm their motivation and subsequently their employability and job search.

These assumptions are supported by the findings of an experimental study by Baldwin, Magjuka and Loher (1991) in which all participants had to attend a mandatory training. They found that allowing people to specify the type of training increased their motivation and learning, but only when the training matched their expectations. If the training was not what they expected, participants were even less motivated and learned less than the people who were not allowed to specify their choice at all. Indeed, in light of our findings, people with a higher sense of choice of participation in a reemployment

course that is later experienced as useless can be considered as having chosen a non-optimal option which may result in negative consequences, i.e. a less internalized motivation, a relatively lower employability, and less job search intensity. Hence, it can be more detrimental for people's motivation, employability and job search, to have chosen a useless reemployment course than to have been obliged to take part in that same useless reemployment course.

It is important to note that perceived choice of participation is not the same as the provision of choice in itself. According to Reeve, Nix and Hamm (2003), the perception of choice will only lead to a more internalized motivation when the choice of the action itself (i.e. action choice: whether or not to participate in a reemployment course) is considered, instead of the choice of different options of that action (i.e. option choice: choosing between different reemployment courses). By reviewing previous studies on option choice and action choice (e.g. Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Schraw, Flowerday, & Reisetter, 1998), they stated that when perceived choice holds the possibility to choose between counselor-determined options, the provision of choice does not tap into someone's self-determination and will thus not lead to a more internalized motivation. If, on the other hand, perceived choice holds a sense of choice to participate in an activity because it is, for example, in line with someone's personal values and goals, this sense of choice does tap into someone's self-determination and will lead to a more internalized motivation. In this study, we believe that we have examined the perceived choice of participation in the reemployment course as an action choice, since our measure of perceived choice reflects the extent to which participants felt they had a choice to attend the course and not whether participants felt like they could choose between different (previously determined) courses. However, we cannot fully state that we have measured action choice, because we did not explicitly distinguish between both types of choice. The distinction between action and option choice is an important one to consider in future studies in this line of research.

Taken together, our results provide insights into the context and mechanisms that can make choice beneficial for motivation and performance-related outcomes. The findings also add to our knowledge about the conditions under which choice can be undesirable and thus to our knowledge on the utility of compulsory courses in an often called-for real-life setting (e.g. Drenth, 2008; Katz & Assor, 2007; Leotti et al., 2010).

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Consequently, our results also bear a number of practical implications.

### **Practical Implications**

First of all, our study shows that the ‘why’ of motivation for finding reemployment is important for the utility of reemployment courses. The more people *want* to find reemployment, the more they benefit from the reemployment course by enhancing their employability and job search activities. People who feel like they *have to* find reemployment do so less. It thus seems important for reemployment practice to be aware of why unemployed people strive to finding reemployment, in order for a reemployment course to be beneficial.

More important for reemployment practice, however, is to be able to stimulate a more internalized motivation among the participants of a reemployment course. This study suggests that the motivation for finding reemployment can become more internalized when people experience the reemployment course as useful for finding reemployment. Communicating the usefulness of a course for finding reemployment may help people to internalize the outcome of the course and therefore boost their employability and job search activities. Moreover, higher levels of employability and more job search activities subsequently raises people’s chances on finding reemployment (McArdle et al., 2007).

The compulsory nature of the reemployment courses is a subject of debate in reemployment practice. It is sometimes regarded as an unnecessary costly enterprise to offer a reemployment course to someone who does not want to take part in that course nor benefits from the course (Dijk et al., 2008). Our study shows that obligating people does, in this case, not have to be detrimental for people’s employability and job search after the course, as long as they can see the usefulness of what they are doing. Therefore, reemployment practice should put effort in making participants understand the usefulness of such a course for finding reemployment. A similar finding has been pointed out in goal setting literature, where Locke, Latham and Erez (1988) showed that the ‘tell and sell’ style of assigning goals was more beneficial for people’s goal commitment and performance than the ‘tell’ style alone, and about as beneficial as freely chosen goals. In other words, a ‘tell and sell’ style when assigning unemployed people to reemployment courses is probably the best way to enhance the utility of such a course.

## Limitations and Future Research

Our study is not without its limitations. Since we were not able to form a control group within this sample, we cannot state that people's employability and job search activities changed as a consequence of the reemployment course. Additionally, because people participated in different reemployment courses and we were dependent on the available registration system, we can say little about the exact content of the reemployment courses. However, the aim of our study was to show under which conditions people benefit more from a course, and not to test the utility and contents of specific courses. Among the people who followed a course, we found that differences in the way they experience any of the courses can influence employability and job search activities, which was the aim of our study.

Unfortunately, we were not able to measure people's motivation for finding reemployment before the reemployment course at Time 1. It is imaginable that people's initial level of motivation might have affected their perceived choice to participate or their motivation after the course, although we believe that it would not have altered the results described in the current paper. After all, we focused on investigating if and how the experience of the course (in terms of perceived choice and experienced usefulness) could facilitate a more internalized motivation, employability and job search intensity. However, such relationships between people's initial motivation and course outcomes are definitely worth a closer look in future studies.

Like most studies in this line of research, our study relied mainly on self-report measures. Although we statistically showed that common method variance is not a pervasive problem in our study, it is important to note that we took several procedural precautions to prevent common method variance, such as temporal separation of the data and clear labeling of separate sections in the surveys (cf. Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, Evans (1985) concluded that method variance is not likely to inflate results with more complex analyses such as our moderated regression analyses. Spector and Brannick (2010) even stated that method variance tends to lessen interaction effects in regression analyses, implying that our results are conservative estimates of the studied relationships. All in all, we believe that our results are not flawed by common method variance.

An experimental or quasi-experimental study could, if ethically viable, rule out most of the limitations of the current study. Conducting such a study within the same framework as our study could confirm the finding that the experience of a course influences the quality of motivation and subsequent levels of employability and job search, but could also elaborate our findings by empirically excluding other factors outside the reemployment course. Additionally, the importance of experienced usefulness in our study raises numerous questions and calls for future studies on the determinants and moderating factors of experienced usefulness and motivation quality. For example, we considered the usefulness of a reemployment course for the more distal goal of finding reemployment. Finding reemployment as a goal may, however, have different personal value for unemployed people and could be valued as an intrinsic goal or as an extrinsic goal (cf. Ryan & Deci, 2000). A more internalized motivation to pursue an intrinsic reemployment goal as opposed to an extrinsic reemployment goal may lead to different outcomes in terms of job search, reemployment and subsequent job quality. The latter is especially important to consider to foster long-lasting reemployment and to prevent people from leaving their job and having to start all over again.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to examine and explain the individual differences in employability and job search among unemployed people who participated in a compulsory reemployment course. We showed that the influence of the compulsory nature of these courses is conditional upon their experienced usefulness: perceived choice can be particularly beneficial when participants find the course useful for finding reemployment. When they do, people tend to have a more internalized motivation and benefit more from the course in such a way that they portray higher levels of employability and more job search activities. If, however, people experience a course as useless for finding reemployment, perceived choice can be detrimental for their motivation and course outcomes. For reemployment practice, this implies that counselors should put effort in making participants understand the usefulness of such a course for finding reemployment.