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

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES AND REEMPLOYMENT QUALITY - THE IMPACT OF CAREER ADAPTABILITY

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This chapter is based on Koen, J., Klehe, U.C. & Van Vianen, A.E.M. (2010). Job Search Strategies and Reemployment Quality – the Impact of Career Adaptability. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77, 126-139.

Unemployment can be a stressful, depressing and literally sickening experience (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009; Price, Choi, & Vinokur, 2002). Most unemployed people will therefore try to end this unfortunate state as soon as possible by searching for a new job. Yet, job seekers' job search activities are not always successful: a successful job search does not only imply finding just *any* job, but also finding a suitable and qualitatively *good* job to foster long-lasting reemployment. A mismatch between the job seeker's needs and the characteristics of the job can lead to low satisfaction with the new job, high employee burnout, turnover intentions and decreased productivity (Kristof, 1996). Moreover, the negative consequences of such a mismatch are similar to the negative effects of job-loss for people who remain unemployed, such as depressive feelings and a low satisfaction with life (Feldman & Leana, 2000; Leana & Feldman, 1995; McKee-Ryan, Virick, Prussia, Harvey, & Lilly, 2009). Therefore, the focus in reemployment research should be on the quality of reemployment, instead on solely on finding reemployment.

Past research on the intensity with which people search for a new job (Kanfer et al., 2001) has failed to predict meaningful variance in the quality of reemployment (Hanisch, 1999; Saks, 2005). In the current study, we try to diminish our lack of understanding about the determinants of reemployment quality by combining two streams of relevant literature that have so far remained unconnected. More precisely, we examine the impact of people's direct behaviors in searching for a job in the form of the job search strategies as well as the impact of people's readiness and preparation to search for a job, as reflected in their career adaptability.

The different *strategies* that job seekers use when searching for reemployment have received little scientific attention, despite preliminary indications that these strategies might well impact job seekers' subsequent reemployment quality (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). For example, job seekers may focus on one specific type of job during their search and may keep searching until they find precisely what they are looking for, or they may fully explore all their options by examining various types of jobs (Stevens & Beach, 1996). The basic premise of the current paper is that the use of these different strategies will impact the number and the quality of the jobs found. Furthermore, we assume that the degree to which people use these strategies will depend on people's mental readiness and resources to seek reemployment, that is, their career adaptability.

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Career adaptability, generally defined as the ability to change in order to fit into new career-related circumstances, has been conceptualized in the past in a number of ways, such as by planfulness, exploration, decision-making, information and realism (Super, 1974) (Super, 1974), by career planning and career exploration (Zikic & Klehe, 2006), by a boundaryless 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) may be particularly helpful in understanding the job search process as this conceptualization represents the readiness and different adaptive resources that arguably help people to prepare for and manage career transitions such a move from unemployment to reemployment. According to Savickas (1997; 2002; 2005), career adaptability includes looking ahead to one's future career (*planning*), knowing what career to pursue (*decision-making*), looking around at various career options (*exploration*) and having a feeling of self-efficacy to successfully execute the activities needed to achieve one's career goals (*confidence*). Recent studies show that these four dimensions well represent a multidimensional measure of career adaptability (e.g. Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009; Hirschi, 2009). Moreover, research on these different facets of career adaptability supports the usefulness of each facet for predicting reemployment quality (Morrison & Hall, 2002; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Yet, past research has not been able to clarify the means by which career adaptability influences reemployment quality.

We propose that people's career adaptability influences the way in which they search for jobs and the quality of their reemployment. Job seekers who lack adaptive resources to resolve their current state of unemployment may use a different and less beneficial search strategy than those who have these resources. As a consequence, job seekers portraying less career adaptability may find a less satisfying job, show more turnover intentions and end up right where they started.

Thus, the aim of the current study is to offer a theory-driven approach in predicting reemployment quality by combining mental preparation and preparatory activities in the job search process (i.e. career adaptability) with actual job search activities (i.e. job search strategies). First, we aim to predict the use of job search strategies of unemployed individuals from the readiness and beliefs that reflect the dimensions of career adaptability. Second, we aim to investigate how each job search

strategy relates to different outcomes of job search, such as the number of job-offers and the quality of the obtained job (see Figure 5.1 for a conceptual framework).

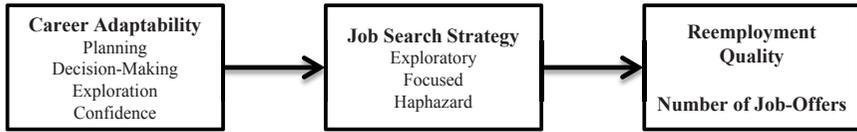


Figure 5.1. *Conceptual Framework*

### Job search Strategies

The most commonly studied job search behavior in reemployment research is job search intensity: the effort that people make during their search for a new job (Blau, 1994). Job search intensity is usually measured via the frequency and scope of engagement in job search behaviors, such as looking at employment advertisements or calling potential employers (Wanberg et al., 2002). In general, the higher an individual's job search intensity, the higher is the chance of finding reemployment (Wanberg et al., 1996). However, successful reemployment may not only depend on job seekers' job search intensity but also on the specific strategies with which they search for a job (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Kanfer et al., 2001; McArdle et al., 2007).

Past literature distinguishes three types of job search strategies: an exploratory strategy, a focused strategy and a haphazard strategy (Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stevens & Turban, 2001). Job seekers who use a more *exploratory* strategy are dedicated to their search and are motivated to fully explore their options. Inherent in the use of an exploratory strategy is the openness to arising opportunities. Exploratory job seekers actively gather job-related information from various sources, such as friends, family and former employers. People use a more *focused* strategy when they identify their top choices early in their search and have clear employment goals. They tend to concentrate their search efforts on a small number of carefully screened employers and only apply for jobs that fit their needs, qualifications and interests. Finally, job seekers who employ a more *haphazard* strategy use a trial and error approach during job search, switching tactics without rationale and passively gathering information both inside and outside of

one's area of education or previous work experiences. Crossley and Highhouse (2005) argued that job seekers using this strategy often have low and unclear employment standards and tend to settle for the first acceptable job that comes along. In comparison, both exploratory and haphazard job search strategies are less goal-directed than a focused job search strategy. At the same time, both exploratory and focused job search strategies are aimed at finding a pleasant and matching job, while a haphazard strategy is aimed at finding any job, no matter what type of job.

Existing research has shown effects of the different strategies on job search outcomes, such as the number of job-offers and job-satisfaction (e.g. Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). However, no research has examined the factors that make individuals rely more or less on the different strategies. We propose that career adaptability explains people's use of different job search strategies, since career adaptability arguably represents the mental preparedness preceding actual job search. We will now discuss the concept of career adaptability and address the link between career adaptability and job search strategies. Finally, we will explore the relationships between job search strategies and the quality of reemployment.

### **Career Adaptability and Job search Strategies**

In today's constantly changing society, workers need the mental resources and self-regulating abilities to manage new career-related circumstances such as job-loss and finding reemployment (1997; 2002; 2005; Super & Knasel, 1981). Career adaptability comprises an individual's ability to face, pursue or accept changing career roles and to successfully handle career transitions (e.g. Savickas, 1997; 2002; 2005), such as ending a state of unemployment by looking for a job. Thus, career adaptability should also be relevant for finding suitable reemployment. More precisely, we argue that the four dimensions of career adaptability, career planning, decision-making, exploration and confidence, will represent job seekers' preparation and mental readiness to use different job search strategies, which in turn should influence their reemployment outcomes.

**Career planning.** Career planning reflects a future career orientation and planfulness – a sense that it is important to prepare for tomorrow. Planning inclines people to outline their future career developments and to engage in planning activities,

i.e., in setting and pursuing career goals. Past research has found career planning to foster more successful and satisfying careers (Morrison & Hall, 2002; Super & Hall, 1978). Planning is not an once-in-a-lifetime but ongoing activity that will arguably be especially pertinent during career transitions following job loss. Given that planning includes the setting and pursuing of career goals, it should induce the use of a focused job search strategy, given that the use of a focused strategy implies clear employment goals that direct job seekers' search along narrowly defined screening criteria in regard to job seekers' needs, qualifications and interests. At the same time, planning is likely to lessen the use of a haphazard strategy since such a strategy implies a lack of clear employment standards and goals. Hence, we propose:

*Hypothesis 1.* Career planning (a) relates positively to the use of a focused job search strategy and (b) relates negatively to the use of a haphazard job search strategy.

**Career decision-making.** Decision-making, or career decision, reflects the certainty with which one knows what career to pursue (Creed et al., 2009; Savickas, 2005; Skorikov, 2007). Being decisive in one's career can help individuals to engage in job search activities, rather than to procrastinate and avoid these activities (Savickas, 2005). Even when confronted with a limited number of career options, a feeling of decidedness can make these options personally meaningful. Decision-making increases if someone has sufficient information about possible career alternatives and is able to project the possible outcomes of different career choices (Pitz & Harren, 1980). Consequently, job seekers who show a high level of career-related decision-making likely know what they want in their future job. Decision-making should thus foster the use of a focused job search strategy. A low level of career-related decidedness on the other hand may bring about a rather aimless search, which will reduce the motivation to persist searching for a suitable job (Locke & Latham, 1990). Consequently, we propose that a lack of decision-making will lead to a rather haphazard search strategy.

*Hypothesis 2.* Career decision-making (a) relates positively to the use of a focused job search strategy and (b) relates negatively to the use of a haphazard job search strategy.

**Career exploration.** Exploration concerns exploring one's career options in order to learn about the type of work one wants to do (Flum & Blustein, 2000; Savickas,

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2005). The importance of the concept of exploration in career adaptability is reflected by the prime place it has been given in previous research (e.g., Blustein, 1988; 1992; 1997; Stumpf et al., 1983; Zikic & Hall, 2009). Because career exploration entails openness towards gathering information in a broad and explorative way, it shares major features with an exploratory job search strategy. In comparison though, exploration is more reflective in focus and more preparatory in nature, whereas an exploratory job search strategy represents actual job search activities. Thus, the use of an exploratory job search strategy seems the logical consequence of someone's readiness to broadly explore possible careers. At the same time, high career exploration will likely counteract the use of a focused job search, given that a focused job search relies on a narrow rather than a broad focus. People high on exploration may not limit their search activities to one kind of job or branch, but rather expand their search activities to different kinds of jobs or branches. Thus, we propose:

*Hypothesis 3.* Career exploration (a) relates positively to the use of an exploratory job search strategy and (b) relates negatively to the use of a focused job search strategy.

**Career confidence.** The final dimension of career adaptability, career confidence, denotes one's feeling of self-efficacy or the perceived ability to successfully execute the activities needed to achieve one's career goals (Hirschi, 2009; Savickas, 2005). Numerous studies have shown that self-efficacy is crucial in the job search process, increasing job seekers' job search intensity and thus their chances on finding reemployment (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002). As for job search strategies, we propose that career confidence is positively linked to the use of an exploratory strategy, because one's self-efficacy to successfully engage in job search activities may not only foster the intensity of searching, but also the scope of job search activities in order to find reemployment. More career confidence might therefore lead to a broader, or more exploratory, search. Previous studies have also shown that the confidence in one's ability to engage in job search activities facilitates the initiation of such activities, in order to explore one's career opportunities (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Nauta, 2007). Therefore, we propose:

*Hypothesis 4.* Career confidence relates positively to the use of an exploratory job search strategy.

## Outcomes of Job search Strategies

Existing reemployment research has mainly focused on job search intensity as a predictor of quantitative reemployment outcomes such as finding a job, the number of job-offers obtained and the time needed to find reemployment. Yet, these studies have failed to predict meaningful variance in the quality of reemployment, such as how satisfied people are with their jobs and how well their new job fits their needs (Kanfer et al., 2001; Vinokur & Schul, 2002; Wanberg et al., 2002). The effort that one puts into job search activities is apparently no guarantee for finding a fitting job. More likely, it is the direction that this effort takes that influences the quality of reemployment. Hence, we propose that job search strategies will affect the quality of the new found job.

The quality of reemployment is best represented with multiple measures, such as needs-supplies fit, job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Wanberg et al., 2002). Needs-supplies fit comprises perceptions of congruence between the needs of an employee and the rewards (e.g. pay, promotion opportunities) they receive for their contribution to the job (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Job satisfaction and turnover intentions are two of the most frequently studied variables in work- and organizational psychology, both as dependent variables and as predictors (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Whereas turnover intentions, the “conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization” (Tett & Meyer, 1993, p. 262) presents the best predictor of subsequent turnover, job satisfaction presents one of the best measures of evaluative reactions towards one’s job (Wanberg, 1995). Next to these measures of reemployment quality, we will measure the number of job-offers one receives as an indicator of quantitative job search success, given that multiple job-offers allow seekers to choose between different options and thus indicate a more successful job search than do fewer job-offers.

An exploratory strategy is generally not only associated with more search behavior and job-applications, but also with search behavior aimed at finding a qualitatively good job (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). This strategy may thus lead to more job-offers and a better quality of reemployment. A focused strategy, on the other hand, implies narrowing one’s employment options and thus the number of job-applications one sends out. This strategy may therefore reduce the number of job-offers. It may, however, enhance the quality of reemployment due to the careful screening in an

early stage of the job search process. Finally, the use of a haphazard strategy arguably implies low standards and unclear employment goals and people may settle for the first acceptable job that comes along (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). Consequently, this strategy should reduce both the number of job-offers and the quality of the reemployment found. These expectations lead to the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 5a.* The use of an exploratory job search strategy relates positively to the number of job-offers and to the quality of reemployment several months later.

*Hypothesis 5b.* The use of a focused job search strategy relates negatively to the number of job-offers and relates positively to the quality of reemployment.

*Hypothesis 5c.* The use of a haphazard job search strategy relates negatively to the number of job-offers and the quality of reemployment several months later.

## Methods

### Participants and Procedure

In 2007, we randomly selected 1250 candidates from the database of a large reemployment agency in the Netherlands. These individuals all received unemployment benefits from the government as well as job search support from the reemployment agency during a period of six months. At Time 1, participants were invited to participate in the study by filling out a questionnaire. After 8 months, participants were asked to fill out a follow-up questionnaire (Time 2). Both questionnaires were created with an online tool and accessible through an internet-link.

A total of 248 eligible individuals completed the questionnaire at Time 1, 113 people (45.6%) of whom completed the follow-up questionnaire at Time 2. The response rate of 19.8% at Time 1 is somewhat higher than the response rates of other studies among unemployed people (e.g. Van Hooft et al., 2004). The response rate at Time 2 is also somewhat higher than earlier research had lead us to expect.

The sample at Time 1 consisted of 138 women (55.6%) and 110 men (44.4%). Participants' average age was 43.5 years ( $SD = 10.3$ ). Among the respondents, 7.3% ( $n = 18$ ) had preliminary preschool as the highest completed level of education, 31.4% ( $n =$

78) high school or basic training, 35.5% ( $n = 88$ ) had undergone vocational training, 18.5% ( $n = 46$ ) held the Dutch equivalent of a Bachelor's degree, and 7.3% ( $n = 18$ ) held a Master's degree. More than half of the participants (53.6%) lived with a partner and 54% had one or more children, for which 32.8% ( $n = 44$ ) were the sole caretaker and 61.9% ( $n = 83$ ) shared caring responsibilities. About half of the participants ( $n = 127$ , 51.2%) had been unemployed for more than 12 months, with an average of 22 months. Tenure at the last job was longer than one year for 65.7% ( $n = 163$ ) of the respondents with an average of 5.5 years. The distribution of the sample was representative of the distribution of the total population of unemployed people at the reemployment agency.

At Time 2, the sample consisted of 44 men (39.6%) and 67 women (60.4%) with an average age of 44.6 years ( $SD = 10.4$ ). Two participants did not indicate their gender. The distribution of education level and family situation was practically the same as at Time 1. At Time 2, 73 participants (64.6%) had found reemployment.

## Measures

All variables were assessed with frequently used and validated scales for each variable on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*low agreement*) to 5 (*high agreement*). The high proportion of low educated participants in the current sample required that some items were simplified. The internal consistencies of all variables are presented in Table 5.1.

**Planning.** We measured career planning with Gould's (1979) career planning scale, which has been frequently used in other studies with internal consistencies above .70 (e.g. Abele & Wiese, 2008; Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). The scale contained 6 items such as "*I have a plan to obtain my career objectives*", rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Decision-making.** Since decision-making represents the certainty with which one knows what career to pursue, we used Germeijs and de Boeck's (2003) career indecision scale to measure career-related decision-making. We reverse-coded 14 items of this scale that were applicable to the reemployment context, leaving out 3 items that were aimed particularly at students. Examples of items are "*I don't have an overview of my different career alternatives.*" and "*I can list the alternatives.*" Responses on the items

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were made on a scale of 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*exactly like me*).

**Exploration.** Career exploration was measured with Zikic and Klehe's (2006) adapted version of Stumpf, Colarelli and Hartman's (1983) frequently used career exploration scale. Participants were asked to answer to which degree they had engaged in seven career-related preparatory activities such as "*Investigated career possibilities.*" in the last 3 months. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*).

**Confidence.** Career confidence denotes one's self-efficacy to successfully execute the activities needed to achieve one's career goals. Since participants' prominent goal in the current situation was to find a new job, we measured career confidence with a six-item job search self-efficacy scale used in most job search research (Ellis & Taylor, 1983; Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992; Wanberg et al., 1996). Candidates had to rate on this scale how confident they felt about being able to execute each job search activity successfully (such as "*Make the best impression and get points across in an interview.*"), ranging from 1 (*not at all confident*) to 5 (*very confident*).

**Job search strategy.** The 16-item measure presented and validated by Crossley and Highhouse (2005) was created by combining a typology of the strategies (Stevens & Beach, 1996) with measures of the strategies (Stevens & Turban, 2001). This scale served to assess the degree to which participants engaged in an exploratory (6 items, e.g., "*I follow up on every lead to make sure I don't miss any golden opportunities*"), focused (6 items, e.g., "*I gather information only for jobs that I am really interested in*") and haphazard job search strategy (4 items, e.g., "*My approach to gathering job-related information could be described as random.*"). Crossley and Highhouse (2005) found internal consistencies of  $\alpha = .64$  for a focused strategy,  $\alpha = .70$  for an exploratory strategy and  $\alpha = .77$  for a haphazard strategy. Responses were made on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Number of job-offers** was assessed at Time 2 by asking participants how many job-offers they had received between Time 1 and Time 2.

**Reemployment quality** was assessed for individuals who had obtained a job at Time 2. *Job satisfaction* was assessed with an extensively validated (Judge, Heller, &

Klinger, 2008) 5-item scale developed by Judge, Erez, Bono and Thoresen (2003). An example of an item is: *"Most days I love my job"*. Turnover intentions was assessed with Colarelli's (1984) original 3-item scale previously used by Saks and Ashforth (2002) and Zikic and Klehe (2006). An example of an item is: *"I frequently think of quitting my job"*. Need-supplies fit was assessed with a 3-item scale created by Cable and deRue (2002) with previously reported alpha's of around .90. An example item is: *"The attributes that I look for in a job are fulfilled very well by my present job"*. Answers on all scales measuring reemployment quality ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Control Variables.** Gender, age, education, marital status, caring responsibilities, labor market demand, tenure at the last job, length of unemployment, financial hardship and social support are often reported as correlates of job search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002) and were therefore used as control variables in the current study. We also included job search intensity at Time 1 via the 12-item scale developed by Blau (1994) with adaptations made in previous studies (Van Hooft et al., 2004; Wanberg et al., 1999) in order to test the incremental value of job search strategies over and above intensity in predicting the proposed outcomes. Participants indicated how frequently (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.

## Analyses

Following recommendations by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), analyses were performed in two steps. First, confirmatory factor analyses tested the fit of our measurement models at Time 1 and Time 2. Second, path analyses of the data collected at Time 1 and Time 2 served to test our Hypotheses.

## Results

### Measurement Model

We tested the conceptual distinctness of our scales with the help of confirmatory factor analyses, using AMOS 17.0 (Arbuckle, 2003). We subsequently compared our proposed measurement models with models that emerged as possible alternatives. To

test how well each model fit the data, we used the overall model  $\chi^2$  measure and the  $\chi^2/df$  ratio, which should be below 3 and generally as low as possible (Byrne, 1998). The fit of a model is further indicated by a normed fit index (NFI), an incremental fit index (IFI), a Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and a comparative fit index (CFI) of at least .90, as well as by a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of at most .08 (Byrne, 1998). Models were compared using the  $\chi^2$ -difference test. Although fit indices such as CFI >.90 have been considered to represent a good fit in the past, Hu and Bentler (1999) suggested the use of somewhat stricter criteria. Consequently, we will consider models with CFI values < .90 and RMSEA values > .08 as deficient, models with CFI  $\geq$ .90 to .95 and RMSEA > .06 and  $\leq$  .08 as acceptable, and models with CFI  $\geq$ .95 and RMSEA < .06 as good (Mathieu & Taylor, 2006).

**Time 1 measurement model.** The original Time 1 measurement model (Table 5.2, Model 1) assumed the presence of eight correlated factors which represent the constructs career planning, decision-making, exploration and confidence, as well as job search intensity, and haphazard, exploratory, and focused job search strategy. Each factor was defined by the respective scale's original 4 to 12 items. The item-based model's fit was poor. Likely due to the simplification, eight items showed low loadings (< .40) onto their respective factor and were excluded from further analyses. The excluded items were the same items that showed low factor loadings in the original scales of career planning (cf. Gould, 1979), career indecision (cf. Germeijs & De Boeck, 2003), a haphazard job search strategy and a focused job search strategy (cf. Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). Deleting these items lead to an improved model-fit (Table 5.2, Model 2) and an increased validity and reliability, but did not meaningfully change the operational definition of the scales. At the same time, some factors correlated relatively highly with one another, namely career exploration and job search intensity on the one hand and career planning, decision-making and haphazard job search strategy on the other hand. To ensure that these factors still represent distinct constructs, we compared the adjusted Model 2 with three alternative models. As expected, Model 2 fit the data significantly better than a common factor model (Table 5.2, Model 3) or a model that assumed exploration and job search intensity (Table 5.2, Model 4), or planning, decision-making and haphazard job search strategy (Table 5.2, Model 5) to represent a common factor. These findings support the distinct nature of the scales we used.

However, Model 2's fit is not optimal yet. A likely reason for this is the high ratio of items ( $k = 52$ ) to the number of factors ( $l = 8$ ) and sample size ( $N = 248$ ). We therefore followed the practice to parcel items belonging to the same factor and retest the model with the resulting item-parcels. This serves to represent a more accurate overall fit of the measurement model when the number of indicators per factor is high, especially in relatively small sample sizes (Hall, Snell, & Singer Foust, 1999). We followed the recommended procedure to minimize possible bias caused by parceling, by scrutinizing our items before parceling both on a content-level and with exploratory factor analyses to create smaller, more unidimensional subscales (Hall et al., 1999; Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). We established three parcels per factor by combining the original items per construct into three groups of items, using the averages of each item-group as the measured indicators of the respective factor (cf. Hall et al., 1999). The resulting model (Table 5.2, Model 6) showed a more than acceptable fit to the data and fit the data significantly better than a common factor model (Table 5.2, Model 7) or a model that assumed either career exploration and job search intensity (Table 5.2, Model 8), or planning, decision-making and haphazard job search strategy (Table 5.2, Model 9) to represent a common factor. In sum, results support the accuracy of the measurement model underlying the current analyses.

**Time 2 measurement model.** Next, we tested the outcome variables included at Time 2 in a separate measurement model, using the data provided by the 73 participants who had found reemployment. Specifically, we compared three models: in the first and proposed model, the items of three indicators (job satisfaction, turnover intentions and needs-supplies fit) loaded onto their respective factors which in turn loaded onto a common second-order factor of reemployment quality (Table 5.2, Model 10). In the second model, the items formed three separate and uncorrelated factors for job satisfaction, turnover intentions and needs-supplies fit (Table 5.2, Model 11). Finally, the third model represented a one-factor model in which the items together formed one factor of reemployment quality (Table 5.2, Model 12). Results revealed that the assumption of three factors forming a second-order factor of reemployment quality fit the data significantly better than the other two models. This second-order factor model also accounted for the high intercorrelations between the three primary factors while also acknowledging their unique variances. These results suggest that needs-supplies fit,

job satisfaction, and turnover intentions represent three distinct yet closely related indicators of a common underlying factor of reemployment quality.

### **Structural Model**

Table 5.1 presents the means, standard deviations, internal consistencies and correlations between the variables measured at Time 1 and Time 2. To test our hypotheses, we used a structural equation model comparison procedure (Byrne, 1998) following the proposed procedure of Mathieu and Taylor (2006). For testing the relationships between career adaptability and job search strategies, path analyses were based on all participants of Time 1 ( $N = 248$ ). Path analyses for the relationships between the predictor variables and reemployment outcomes were based on the participants who had found reemployment at Time 2 ( $n = 73$ ), using maximum likelihood estimation procedures. Models included in this comparison were (a) a saturated model assuming direct as well as indirect relationships between all variables included in the analysis, (b) a direct model, assuming only direct relationships between career adaptability and reemployment outcomes while assuming no links with job search strategies, (c) an indirect model, assuming only indirect relationships between career adaptability and reemployment outcomes via job search strategies, (d) the proposed model (see Figure 5.2), which is a more parsimonious version of the indirect model and (e) the final model, which represents the proposed model adjusted for two additional direct paths that turned out to be relevant in the prior models (see Figure 5.3), thus following the recommendations of Mathieu and Taylor (2006). Finally, we tested for the stability of the final model when including the different control variables and job search intensity (f). Table 5.3 summarizes the results of the SEM-analyses for the competing models.

**Saturated model.** The saturated model (Table 5.3; Model a) provided an acceptable fit to the data. The model showed two non-hypothesized direct effects of career-related decision-making and career confidence on reemployment quality.

**Direct model.** The direct model (Table 5.3; Model b) exhibited very poor fit indices and differed significantly from the saturated model, which indicates the relevance of the indirect links via job search strategies (Mathieu & Taylor, 2006).

Table 5.1 Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Coefficient Alphas

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
<b>Control Variables</b>																								
1. Age	43.24	10.83																						
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.56	0.50	-0.17**																					
3. Education <sup>b</sup>	2.58	1.38	.10	-0.07																				
4. Tenure in last job <sup>c</sup>	69.76	117.35	.24**	-0.08	.06																			
5. Unemployment length at T1 <sup>d</sup>	22.65	26.72	.04	-0.01	.03	-0.08																		
6. Marital Status <sup>e</sup>	0.54	0.50	.34**	-0.27**	-0.03	.26**	-0.08																	
7. Caring Responsibilities <sup>f</sup>	1.24	1.34	.17**	-0.22**	.00	.14**	.08	.49**																
8. Labor Market Demand	2.86	0.75	.03	-0.08	.09	.06	.02	-0.06	-0.02	(.66)														
9. Financial Hardship	3.73	0.73	.04	-0.08	.10	-0.13**	.11	-0.19**	-0.09	.00	(.65)													
10. Social Support	2.78	0.96	.15**	-0.19**	.04	.22**	-0.14**	.49**	.22**	.01	-0.02	(.73)												
<b>Career-adaptability</b>																								
11. Concern	3.34	0.65	.01	-0.05	.09	.00	-0.09	-0.06	-0.09	.09	.02	.19**	(.79)											
12. Control	2.69	0.62	.07	-0.05	.20**	-0.08	-0.08	.01	-0.04	.26**	-0.05	.17**	.62**	(.85)										
13. Curiosity	2.51	0.85	.02	-0.04	.16**	.03	.02	.05	.00	-0.03	.13**	.20**	.26**	.30**	(.83)									
14. Confidence	3.71	0.59	.02	-0.14**	.06	-0.07	-0.06	.10	.04	.05	.03	.28**	.35**	.44**	.29**	(.83)								
<b>Job-search Behavior</b>																								
15. Job-search Intensity	2.90	0.69	.02	-0.04	.19**	-0.03	.01	.02	-0.06	.07	.18**	.19**	.24**	.30**	.67**	.29**	(.79)							
16. Exploratory Job-search Strategy	3.40	0.61	.02	.00	.09	.02	-0.05	.03	-0.03	-0.04	.15**	.17**	.23**	.27**	.36**	.26**	.39**	(.74)						
17. Focused Job-search Strategy	3.15	0.66	-0.09	-0.05	-0.03	.02	-0.02	-0.04	.11	.13**	-0.12	-0.06	.07	-0.03	-0.17**	.02	-0.22**	-0.24**	(.70)					
18. Haphazard Job-search Strategy	2.66	0.70	-0.05	.06	-0.09	-0.03	.04	-0.01	.01	-0.08	.04	-0.07	-.49**	-.16**	-.19**	-.21**	-.12	.12	(.59)					
<b>Recruitment Outcomes (T2)</b>																								
19. Number of job-offers	2.30	5.60	-0.15	.11	-0.02	-0.08	-0.04	-0.13	-0.10	-0.08	.05	-0.08	.17	.14	.18	.20**	.08	.17	.20**	.08	(-)			
20. Job Satisfaction	3.85	0.76	-0.01	.22	-0.16	-0.04	-0.02	.03	-0.15	.06	-0.05	.09	.36**	.43**	.05	.30**	-.12	-0.02	.10	-.28**	.12	(.89)		
21. Turnover Intentions	2.24	1.10	-0.04	-0.09	.16	-0.10	.15	-0.16	.06	-0.04	.10	-0.17	-.28**	-.38**	-.03	-.31**	.04	.14	-.08	.26**	-.05	-.77**	(.92)	
22. Needs-Supplies Fit	3.03	1.04	.25**	.11	-0.10	.18	-.08	.20	-0.08	.29**	.01	.21	.29**	.33**	.04	.19	.02	-.13	.17	-.32**	.00	.68**	-.74**	(.95)

Note. Coefficient alphas are on the diagonal in parentheses.  $N = 248$  at T1,  $N = 73$  at T2.

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

<sup>a</sup> Gender categories include 0 = male, 1 = female. <sup>b</sup> Education categories include 0 = preschool, 1 = high school, 2 = basic training, 3 = vocational training, 4 = bachelor, 5 = master. <sup>c,d</sup> Tenure was assessed in years, length of unemployment was assessed in months. <sup>e</sup> Marital status categories include 0 = single/divorced/widow, 1 = with partner. <sup>f</sup> Caring responsibilities categories include 0 = none, 1 = shared responsibilities, 2 = sole caretaker.

Table 5.2 Goodness-of-Fit Indices and Model Comparisons for the Measurement Models tested

	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2/df$	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	RMSEA			$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	p
										upper	90%	Model Comparison			
<i>Time 1 Measurement Models</i>															
1: Original Model (60 items on 8 factors)	3428.40	1663	.00	2.06	.56	.71	.68	.71	.07	.07	.07				
2: Adjusted Model (52 items on 8 factors)	2237.47	1214	.00	1.84	.67	.82	.79	.81	.06	.06					
3: Common factor model	3383.30	1242	.00	2.72	.50	.61	.56	.60	.08	.09			1145.83	28	.00
4: Model with common factor exploration-intensity	2264.53	1221	.00	1.85	.67	.81	.78	.81	.06	.06			27.06	7	.00
5: Model with common factor planning-decision-haphazard	2345.66	1227	.00	1.91	.64	.80	.77	.79	.06	.06			108.19	13	.00
6: Parcel model	385.41	224	.00	1.72	.87	.94	.92	.94	.05	.06					.00
7: Parcel common factor model	1681.87	252	.00	6.67	.42	.46	.35	.45	.15	.16			1296.46	28	.00
8: Parcel model with common factor exploration-intensity	482.36	231	.00	2.09	.83	.91	.87	.90	.07	.07			96.95	7	.00
9: Parcel model with common factor planning-decision-haphazard	568.07	237	.00	2.40	.80	.88	.84	.87	.07	.08			182.66	13	.00
<i>Time 2 Measurement Models</i>															
10: Model with second-order factor of reemployment quality	83.20	41	.00	2.03	.90	.95	.91	.94	.06	.08					
11: Model with three separate factors of reemployment quality	199.56	44	.00	4.54	.76	.80	.69	.80	.12	.14			116.36	3	.00
12: One factor model	239.69	44	.00	5.45	.71	.75	.61	.74	.13	.15			156.49	3	.00

Note: N = 248; NFI = Normed Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation

**Indirect model.** The indirect model (Table 5.3; Model c) provided an acceptable fit to the data, even though the fit indices were significantly lower than the fit indices of the saturated model. This indicates that one or more of the paths included in the saturated model but not in the indirect model –the career adaptability components– had a direct effect on reemployment outcomes several months later. In line with the hypotheses, this model showed several significant relationships between different facets of career adaptability and the job search strategies, and between the job search strategies and reemployment outcomes. Yet, the analysis revealed no significant paths that had not been suggested in our proposed model. Together, both the direct model and the indirect model suggest that job search strategies might play an important role in indirectly linking career adaptability and reemployment outcomes (Mathieu & Taylor, 2006).



Figure 5.2. *Proposed Structural Model. Solid lines indicate hypothesized positive relationships. Dashed lines indicate hypothesized negative relationships.*

**Proposed model.** The proposed model (Table 5.3; Model d) provided a good fit to the data and supported most of the proposed links. Yet, the model still fit significantly worse than the saturated model. This finding shows that both indirect effects and direct

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effects between career adaptability and reemployment outcomes play an important role (Mathieu & Taylor, 2006). As a result, we included those two direct paths in our final model that had been significant in the saturated model, namely the effects of career-related decision-making and career confidence on reemployment quality.

**Final model.** Our final model (Table 5.3; Model e) yielded an excellent fit to the data, better than the proposed model and no different from the saturated model. In line with Hypotheses 1a and 1b, career planning showed a positive link to the use of a focused strategy and a negative link to the use of a haphazard strategy. In line with Hypothesis 2b, decision-making was negatively linked to the use of a haphazard strategy. Yet, after adding the non-proposed direct path, decision-making directly fostered reemployment quality at Time 2 instead of showing a positive impact on the use of a focused strategy (Hypothesis 2a). Supporting Hypotheses 3a and 3b, career exploration showed a positive impact on the use of an exploratory strategy and a negative impact on the use of a focused strategy. Finally, career confidence fostered the use of an exploratory strategy, thus supporting Hypothesis 4, but also showed a non-proposed direct positive impact on reemployment quality eight months later. Hypotheses 5a to 5c had proposed relationships between the job search strategies and reemployment outcomes. Results revealed that the more exploratory job seekers searched for a new job, the more offers they received, supporting part of Hypothesis 5a. At the same time, the use of an exploratory job search strategy predicted the quality of reemployment, but not in the proposed positive direction. Instead, the more exploratory job seekers sought for their new job, the lower the quality of their new job was. Little support was found for Hypothesis 5b; a focused job search strategy did not reduce but increased the number of job-offers and showed no link to reemployment quality. Results disconfirmed Hypothesis 5c; a haphazard job search strategy showed no links to any of our reemployment outcomes. In total, 43% of the variance in reemployment quality was explained by the use of an exploratory job search strategy, career decision-making and career confidence eight months earlier. The use of a focused and an exploratory strategy explained 15% of the variance in the number of job-offers (see Figure 5.3).

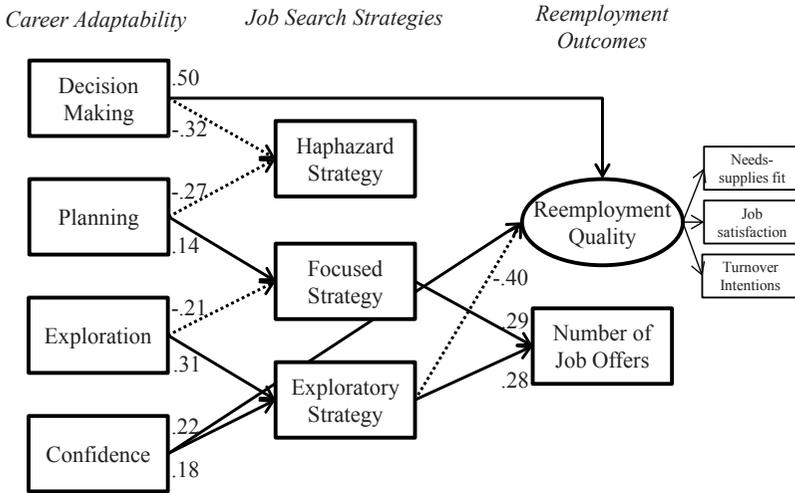


Figure 5.3. *Final Model*. Solid lines indicate significant positive relationships. Dashed lines indicate significant negative relationships.

**Indirect effects.** In sum, these results suggest that job search strategies function as a connecting link between career adaptability on the one side and reemployment outcomes on the other side. To test whether the data supported the indirect effects, we calculated Sobel tests on each indirect effect. The *unstandardized* weight of an indirect effect is in this case defined as the product of the path from career adaptability to job search strategy and the path from job search strategy to reemployment outcomes (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). In particular, the data supported an indirect effect of the use of an exploratory strategy in linking career exploration with the number of job-offers ( $b = .57$ ;  $SE_b = .22$ ; Sobel = 2.69,  $p = .00$ ) and with reemployment quality ( $b = -.16$ ;  $SE_b = .05$ ; Sobel = 3.21,  $p = .00$ ), as well as in linking career confidence with the number of job-offers ( $b = .47$ ;  $SE_b = .23$ ; Sobel = 2.15,  $p = .03$ ) and with reemployment quality ( $b = -.13$ ;  $SE_b = .06$ ; Sobel = 2.21,  $p = .03$ ). As for the use of a focused strategy, the data supported indirect effects of using a focused strategy in linking career exploration ( $b = .41$ ;  $SE_b = .18$ ; Sobel = 2.29,  $p = .03$ ) and career planning ( $b = .31$ ;  $SE_b = .20$ ; Sobel = 1.71,  $p = .09$ ) with the number of job-offers, although the latter effect was only marginally significant.

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**Control variables and job search intensity.** To test whether the significant relationships in our proposed model would hold when controlling for demographic variables, financial hardship, labor market demand and social support, we allowed these control variables to covary with each component of career adaptability and to have a link to each job search strategy and the reemployment outcomes (Table 5.3; Model f). The regression weights of the relationships reported in the final model did not change and the model still provided an excellent fit to the data. The same stability of results was found when we allowed job search intensity to covary with the variables in the final model. Also, job search intensity showed no meaningful relationships with the dimensions of career adaptability, except for a significant link with career exploration, and did not add to the prediction of either of the two reemployment outcomes. This finding supports the idea that the primary effects on reemployment outcomes are due to *how* people search for a job instead of how hard they search. The findings furthermore imply that, even when controlling for variables known to have an impact on reemployment success (cf. Wanberg et al., 2002), the effects of career adaptability and job search strategies on reemployment remain prominent.

### Discussion

Past research on the predictors of finding reemployment has predominantly focused on job search intensity and reemployment status. These studies showed that job search intensity predicted whether people would find a job, but showed that job search intensity had little effect on the quality of reemployment (Wanberg et al., 2002). The current study assumed that the quality of reemployment would be better predicted by the strategies that people use during their job search than solely by the intensity with which people search (Crossley et al., 2007). This was confirmed by our finding that job search intensity did not show any incremental validity in predicting reemployment quality, while job search strategies did.

Additionally, the current study responded to the lack of understanding about the determinants of job search strategies. For this purpose, we integrated the classification of job search strategies proposed by Stevens and Turban (2001) with the concept of career adaptability. Career adaptability has been proposed to be particularly

Table 5.3 Goodness of Fit Indices and Model Comparisons for the Structural Equation Models tested

	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2/df$	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	RMSEA upper 90%	Model Comparison	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	p
(a) Saturated Model	29.21	20	.08	1.46	.95	.98	.94	.98	.04	.07				
(b) Only Directs	193.73	38	.00	5.10	.64	.69	.44	.68	.13	.15	(a) - (b)	164.52	18	.00
(c) Only Indirects	52.46	28	.00	1.87	.90	.95	.88	.95	.06	.08	(a) - (c)	23.25	8	.00
(d) Proposed Model	59.20	33	.00	1.79	.89	.95	.89	.95	.06	.08	(a) - (d)	29.99	13	.01
											(a) - (d)	6.74	5	.24
(e) Final Model	44.81	35	.12	1.28	.92	.98	.96	.98	.03	.06	(a) - (e)	15.60	15	.61
											(c) - (e)	7.65	7	.36
											(d) - (e)	14.39	2	.00
(f) Final model with control variables and job-search intensity	199.00	167	.05	1.19	.80	.96	.94	.96	.03	.04				

Note: N = 248; NFI = Normed Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation

relevant during career transitions such as unemployment (Savickas, 2002) and has previously been found to predict reemployment quality (Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Since career adaptability comprises the mental strategies to cope with career transitions such as seeking reemployment (Savickas, 2005), we proposed that career adaptability would enable and foster different job search strategies.

Results showed that career adaptability served well as an indicator of job seekers' preparation and mental readiness to engage in different job search strategies. Job seekers primarily employed an exploratory job search strategy when they were both curious to seek new career opportunities and confident that they were able to achieve their career goals. Seekers primarily used a focused strategy when they had a clear career plan in mind, but at the same time were less curious to learn about their alternative career possibilities. This shows that the use of a focused strategy can be the result of both planful behavior and of following a narrow and securely-looking path. Finally, results indicated that seekers used a haphazard strategy when they did not have a clear career plan in mind and were undecided about what kind of career to pursue.

Concerning the consequences of job search strategies, our results showed that an exploratory and a focused job search strategy contributed to the number of job-offers people received. This corroborates earlier findings of Crossley and Highhouse (2005). Arguably, a broad, exploratory job search leads to more job-offers since people using this strategy generally apply for more jobs and sustain searching for a long time. Although not hypothesized, it is also arguable that a focused job search fosters more job-offers – though fewer applications. People using this strategy only apply for jobs for which they are highly motivated and suited, enhancing their chances on being invited for an interview and receiving an offer.

In contrast to our assumptions, the use of an exploratory strategy was associated with a decrease in job seekers' reemployment quality a few months later. Two possible reasons may explain this finding. From a conceptual standpoint, the use of an exploratory strategy may lead people to apply widely for different types of jobs that may not always suit their respective needs and offer a truly satisfying experience. Additionally, such effect may well be amplified by the reemployment situation of our participants. In our context of reemployment, people may feel some pressure from the

reemployment agency to accept job-offers. When using an exploratory job search strategy, the gap between the job they then accept and their preferred job opportunities might increase, resulting in a lower *perceived* reemployment quality. In other words, the specific reemployment context and the encouragement to accept a job-offer may explain the negative effect of an exploratory job search strategy on reemployment quality. It would be interesting to examine whether our results generalize to situations in which job seekers have more freedom to choose (e.g., career starters).

The indirect model had revealed the expected negative link between the use of a haphazard strategy and reemployment quality, but this link disappeared when the non-hypothesized direct link between decision-making and reemployment quality was added to our model. Hence, the negative effect of the use of a haphazard strategy on reemployment quality can be attributed to a lack of career-related decidedness: the use of a haphazard strategy is more a symptom than the source of poor reemployment quality. Both low reemployment quality and the use of a haphazard strategy are thus a function of low career decision-making.

Last but not least, we found several indirect effects of career planning, exploration and confidence via the use of exploratory and focused job search strategies on reemployment outcomes. These indirect effects confirm our overall idea of career adaptability playing a preparatory role in the job search process. This idea is further supported by Skorikov's (2007) finding that most of the dimensions of career adaptability represent a latent construct of career preparation. The use of a particular job search strategy is thus mainly a function of job seekers' preparation and mental readiness to seek reemployment. In addition, we found direct effects of decision-making and confidence on reemployment quality, implying that job seekers who know what they want in their future career and are confident about their opportunities in the job search process have a higher chance on finding a qualitatively good job, irrespective of how they actually search for it.

### **Implications**

Our results indicate that both career-related decision-making and career confidence are important for finding high-quality reemployment and that the use of an exploratory job search strategy should be avoided when searching for a suitable job, at

least when people feel pressured to accept job-offers. Keeping this in mind, the current results bear a number of implications. First, the study gives witness to the relevance of career adaptability during unemployment among a heterogeneous sample of individuals. Earlier studies on career adaptability have mainly focused on earlier life-transitions (e.g. Flum & Blustein, 2000) and higher educated professionals (e.g. Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Our study underlines that career adaptability is relevant among all sorts of job seekers, including the poorly educated or long-term unemployed.

Second, the results show that job search strategies and even reemployment outcomes can be influenced through addressing job seekers' career adaptability. Counselors may particularly address job seekers' planning and exploration when the goal is to increase the number of job-offers that job seekers receive, and job seekers' decision-making and confidence when the goal is to enhance their chances on finding satisfying, long-lasting reemployment. As an example, counselors may oftentimes find job seekers using a haphazard job search strategy, a strategy that is usually perceived as suboptimal. Yet, instead of simply advising seekers to use a more active exploratory or focused strategy, our current results suggest that a haphazard strategy is oftentimes the result of poor career-related decision-making. Consequently, rather than focusing on the job search strategy itself, counselors may attempt to help job seekers to clarify their career options and goals and thus develop more career-related decidedness.

Third, guiding job seekers to use a focused or exploratory strategy when searching for a job can foster the number of job-offers they receive and thus enhance their chance on reemployment. When the goal is to find high-quality reemployment, the use of an exploratory strategy should be avoided among a sample of reemployment candidates equal to our sample. Our data suggest that the use of an exploratory strategy may cause disappointment in the job that people are encouraged to accept and therefore lower the quality of reemployment. Conceptually speaking, the use of a focused search strategy may foster successful reemployment in this case and might therefore be preferable to the use of an exploratory strategy.

### **Limitations and directions for future research**

Like most studies in this line of research, this study relied on self-report measures. Common method variance might have inflated the relationships found

between the measured variables (cf. Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, we do not believe this to have been a major issue in the current case because the correlations among our same-source variables varied widely and were generally modest, which shows that it is doubtful that common method variance inflated the correlations (Spector, 2006). Additionally, the most significant findings of our study, the prediction of reemployment quality, were obtained over a time-period of eight months, which is a sufficient time span to exclude memory or consistency-effects that might otherwise threaten the internal validity of the findings.

Finally, as Crossley and Highhouse (2005) noted, the use of job search strategies may have a more dynamic nature than the current study assumes. Individuals may for example start out with a predominantly exploratory job search strategy and grow less exploratory and more focused in their search after gaining more insight in their career goals, or start out with a focused strategy and turn more exploratory after numerous rejections. At the same time, the taxonomy of three job search strategies might have to be extended in order to improve the prediction of reemployment outcomes. For example, an exploratory strategy may be top-down in nature in that people start their search narrow (but without specific employment goals) and explore their possibilities during the job search process, or may alternatively be bottom-up in which case people start their search broadly and then narrow their options down by exploring their actual possibilities. Another possible search strategy might be a 'fake' strategy with which people apply for jobs while their goal might not be to find reemployment but to keep their unemployment benefits. Such a strategy might especially arise in a legal context in which people are obliged to apply for jobs even though they may actually lack motivation to find reemployment. In other words, challenges for future research lie in further studying the dynamic, motivational and self-regulatory process behind the use of job search strategies.

## **Conclusion**

In general, the job search process can be divided into two dimensions of searching: intensity (searching hard) and strategy (searching smart). The current study shows that job search strategies serve well as a predictor of successful reemployment and can explain more variance in reemployment quality than the much studied job

search intensity. Results supported the role of job seekers' career adaptability as an important preparatory mechanism in the job search process, influencing both one's job search strategy and reemployment quality. The four dimensions planning, decision-making, exploration and confidence are all either directly related to reemployment outcomes or indirectly related to reemployment outcomes via the use of specific job search strategies.

The current study has also shown the consequences of using a specific job search strategy. An exploratory strategy decreased reemployment quality, while a focused and exploratory strategy increased the number of job-offers. A haphazard strategy did not show any links to either of these reemployment outcomes, but conceptually remains an inaccurate strategy to enhance the chances on successful reemployment. In sum, our study shows that old wisdom applies in the job search process of finding reemployment, because -as they say- "well prepared is half done".