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

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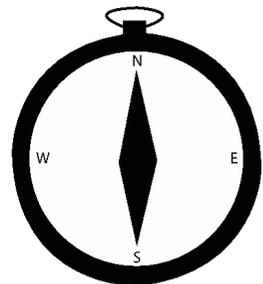
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CHAPTER SEVEN

GENERAL DISCUSSION



In the pursuit of (re-)employment, searching for a job is oftentimes not enough. Although putting time and effort in job search activities is undeniably necessary for finding a job, there are many situations in which job search does not result in suitable employment –such as for long-term or disadvantaged unemployed people, or in times of economic crisis when there are few suitable vacancies. Just searching hard is also insufficient when attempting to find high quality (re-)employment, since the amount of time spent on job search does not necessarily result in a more desirable job (Boswell et al., 2012; Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, 2012). A suitable and qualitatively good job is, however, the key to genuine reemployment success since high quality (re-)employment is far more likely to foster stable reemployment than just any job. Thus, it is essential to move beyond job search and to focus on other aspects that can contribute to a successful reemployment process.

In the introduction of this dissertation, I raised the question what one can do to establish reemployment success when job search is not enough. I proposed that the answer lies in people's employability, i.e., in their adaptability, social and human capital and career identity. Based on Fugate et al. 's (2004) suggestion that employable individuals suffer less from unemployment, are more likely to persist in their job search and to gain high-quality reemployment, I adopted the view that employability may foster reemployment success in situations where job search does not suffice. In essence, I proposed that employability and its different dimensions contribute to job search and reemployment success simultaneously, maximizing job seekers' chance on reemployment success –even among at-risk groups such as long-term and disadvantaged unemployed people. By examining each dimension of employability separately among different types of samples with different methods, I was able to answer if, how and why employability can foster genuine reemployment success. Additionally, I investigated how reemployment interventions contributed to unemployed people's reemployment process.

The empirical chapters in this dissertation give answers to these questions. Chapter 2 addressed *if* employability contributes to long-term unemployed people's chances on finding reemployment, and concluded that employability does indeed play an important role above and beyond long-term unemployed people's barriers to reemployment. This chapter also addressed *how* employability contributes to the

reemployment process by showing that its dimensions play different roles in the reemployment process. At the same time, reemployment interventions only contributed little to the increase of people's overall employability. Chapter 3 and 4 therefore took a closer look at the added value of reemployment interventions. First, Chapter 3 examined why intervention effects were relatively small. Results showed that people's quality of motivation is essential for the effectiveness of reemployment interventions. Second, Chapter 4 addressed how career identity was rebuilt during an apprentice program for unemployed young adults. Results revealed that building career identity was not necessarily a deliberate process, but also that it seemed important to actively move away from the unemployed and stigmatized identity in order to build career identity and find stable employment. Chapter 5 and 6 subsequently addressed *why* employability contributes to reemployment success by zooming in on career adaptability as a preparatory mechanism in the (re-)employment process. The findings of these two last chapters suggest that employability fosters reemployment success because of the dimension of adaptability: career adaptability can guide job seekers through job search and provide the resources to use proper search methods until job seekers have found suitable reemployment. Below I will discuss the core findings of the studies that underlie these conclusions. Afterwards, I will highlight the most important implications of these findings, and conclude that employability and its dimensions serve as a construct that is useful in all (re-)employment processes and situations.

The role of employability in the reemployment process

When it comes to the long-term unemployed –those who have been unemployed for over a year–, employability plays a crucial role in securing stable employment. As the negative consequences of unemployment increase with the time of unemployment, people's chances of finding reemployment decrease due to a range of personal-circumstantial barriers to work: a lack of recent work experience, depleted job networks (Wanberg et al., 2000), stigma associated with long-term unemployment (Gallie & Russell, 1998; Heslin et al., 2012; Vishwanath, 1989) and physical and psychological barriers to work (cf. Lindsay, 2002; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002; Wanberg et al., 2002). Considering this multitude of barriers, it is questionable whether the recommendations issued in the regular unemployment literature also apply to the long-term unemployed. More specifically, although employability and job search have been found to increase the

chances of finding reemployment among regular job seekers (e.g. Kanfer et al., 2001; McArdle, et al., 2007; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), they may play too little a role in finding reemployment when taking long-term unemployed people's barriers into account. Chapter 2 therefore examined whether employability can foster job search and the chance on finding reemployment above and beyond the barriers that long-term unemployed people so often face.

To examine the role of employability in long-term unemployed people's reemployment process, I surveyed 2541 long-term unemployed people receiving unemployment benefits in the Netherlands, of whom 897 (35.3%) responded to the follow-up questionnaire one year later. The results showed that employability does indeed contribute to long-term unemployed people's job search and to their chances on finding reemployment. Moreover, finding reemployment largely depended on long-term unemployed people's employability and only slightly on their job search activities. The latter finding supports the idea that job search is insufficient to find reemployment for long-term unemployed people. Instead, it is particularly employability that is important for a successful reemployment process. The findings of Chapter 2 furthermore showed that each dimension of employability plays an important yet distinct role in the reemployment process, with adaptability being crucial in persisting in job search, social and human capital being crucial in finding reemployment, and career identity being crucial for both. Additionally, this chapter examined whether reemployment interventions introduced by governments to reduce the risk and amount of long-term unemployment contributed to the development of long-term unemployed people's employability. The results showed that reemployment interventions did contribute to people's development of employability, although the effects were relatively small. Taken together, Chapter 2 demonstrates the significant role of employability in the reemployment process, thereby extending the importance of employability from active members of the workforce to the long-term unemployed.

The effectiveness of reemployment interventions

The findings in Chapter 2 showed that reemployment interventions contributed relatively little to the development of people's employability. This finding is, unfortunately, not a stand-alone finding in reemployment research. In fact,

governmental reemployment interventions seem hardly successful in reaching the intended goal of helping unemployed people to find reemployment (Andersen, 2011; Dahl & Lorentzen, 2005; Dijk et al., 2008; Gerfin & Lechner, 2002; Lindsay, 2002). Additionally, unemployed people show much variability in their skill development, job search activities and attitude towards work during such interventions (Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 aimed to investigate why this was the case. More specifically, I investigated why some people benefit more from a reemployment course than others in Chapter 3, and examined how unemployed young adults with interrupted career trajectories build their career identity while participating in an apprentice program (i.e. “Jamie Oliver’s Fifteen”) in Chapter 4.

A possible explanation for the heterogeneous effects of reemployment interventions may be found in participants’ likewise heterogeneous motivations to take part in the intervention. In Chapter 3, I therefore employed the concept of motivation quality –as depicted in Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000)– to explain the differences in the development of employability within the group of unemployed people. SDT is especially applicable to the context of reemployment, because the theory states that an extrinsically motivated activity such as participating in a reemployment course can be experienced as more or less useful for reaching the goal of reemployment –it may be internalized. In general, SDT states that internalization leads to better performance and to enhanced well-being (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2008), and that it is particularly effective in predicting engagement and persistence on activities that require discipline and persistence (cf. Gagné & Deci, 2005). Indeed, Vansteenkiste et al. (2004) showed that a more internalized motivation was associated with higher job search intensity. In Chapter 3, I therefore proposed that a more internalized motivation for finding reemployment would foster the acquisition of employability and job search during and after the course. In turn, I proposed that the internalization of motivation may depend on people’s perceived choice to take part in the reemployment course and its experienced usefulness.

To test these assumptions, I used a sample of 643 participants of a compulsory reemployment course, who filled out a questionnaire before (Time 1) and after (Time 2) the course. Results gave insight into the mechanisms that support or hinder the benefits of a reemployment course. First, results showed that a more internalized motivation was

associated with higher employability and job search intensity after the reemployment course. Although there was no direct relationship between perceived choice of participation and the internalization of motivation or course outcomes, results did reveal that experienced usefulness was positively related to internalization, employability and job search intensity after the course. The results furthermore showed interaction effects of perceived choice and experienced usefulness on motivation quality, social capital and job search intensity after the course: perceived choice had the expected positive effect when the reemployment course was experienced as useful for finding reemployment, but surprisingly, perceived choice had a negative effect when the reemployment course was experienced as useless for finding reemployment. Taken together, the results imply that the experienced usefulness of a reemployment course is essential for participants' motivation and course effectiveness. Without it, a compulsory course is likely to result in a more controlled (i.e., less internalized) motivation and lower employability and job search after the course. The absence of a main effect of perceived choice underlines the important role of usefulness: perceived choice by itself does not necessarily foster positive outcomes, but perceived choice in the context of experienced usefulness does (also see Reeve et al., 2003). Finally, the results of Chapter 3 imply that the compulsory nature of a reemployment course is not necessarily detrimental for its effectiveness, as long as the course is considered useful for finding reemployment.

An interesting result in Chapter 3 was that participants' career identity decreased between Time 1 and Time 2 of the study. Although reemployment courses may have helped to counteract the decrease of career identity among some participants in this particular study, reemployment research has shown before that people tend to lose or lessen their career identity as the time of unemployment lengthens (Aaronson et al., 2012; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). Yet, career identity plays an essential role in the reemployment process: it is a key driver of employability (cf. Fugate et al., 2004) and is strongly related to job search activities and to obtaining reemployment (cf. McArdle, 2007). Indeed, the results of Chapter 2 also showed that career identity fostered both job search and finding reemployment. Given its important role in the reemployment process, I took a closer look at the dynamics of career identity in Chapter 4. Although researchers have suggested that building career identity should be central to career

development practices (Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989; Meijers, 1998), we know surprisingly little about the motives and processes of building career identity.

In Chapter 4, I therefore explored why and how career identity can be built among unemployed young adults with interrupted career trajectories (i.e., career trajectories characterized by many spells of unemployment). I interviewed a group of disadvantaged unemployed youth during their participation in a unique apprentice program (“Jamie Oliver’s Fifteen”). Fifteen’s apprentice program aims to give disadvantaged young adults the opportunity to participate in society and to stay away from imminent long-term unemployment by providing them with necessary training and education to become a professional chef. The qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed using computer assisted qualitative data analysis (NVivo 9) to identify emerging themes in participants’ narratives. The narratives revealed two main findings regarding the motives (‘why’) and methods (‘how’) of building career identity. First, apprentices’ motives for applying for the program were often serendipitous and less deliberate than one would expect from research on employability and reemployment. Second, career identity could be built through different methods, such as discovering competence, identifying with or distinguishing from the group, and comparing alternative identities. Some additional quantitative analyses showed that participants who had found stable employment referred to serendipity as a reason for participating just as much, if not more, as those who were unemployed or had unstable employment one year after graduation. In contrast, participants who remained unemployed after graduation often referred to obtaining a diploma as a reason to participate. Competence, distinguishing from people with the same stigmatized identity and comparing alternative identities seemed to be fruitful methods for building career identity and for securing stable employment, whereas identifying with other apprentices in the group seemed less fruitful. In essence, the results suggested that methods that help to withdraw from the former, stigmatized identity of being unemployed are most beneficial for the subsequent reemployment process. Additionally, none of the participants who had found stable employment portrayed a lack of career identity construction in their narratives. Chapter 4 thus suggests that successful reemployment requires building one’s career identity, but also shows that the motives underlying this process can be rather serendipitous.

The role of preparation

The findings from Chapter 2, 3 and 4 stress the importance of employability and its dimensions in the reemployment process. I illustrated that employability facilitates finding reemployment, and that people's quality of motivation plays an important role in the success of reemployment interventions. The results of these chapters furthermore stress the essential role of career identity for both job search and finding reemployment, and provide insight on how such career identity can be built. Another lens through which I wanted to look at reemployment success in this dissertation was by focusing on the quality of the (re-) employment found (i.e., a good match between the person, job and organization, cf. Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Prior literature has highlighted the importance of (re-)employment quality for securing stable employment and subsequent career prospects (Feldman & Leana, 2000; McKee-Ryan et al., 2009; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011; Morrison, 2002; Ng & Feldman, 2007). A job of high quality essentially leaves someone satisfied and willing to remain in the job for the foreseeable future (Friedland & Price, 2003; Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard, 2006), thus constituting genuine (re-)employment success. To date, however, research has failed to predict meaningful variance in the quality of (re-)employment (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002; Vinokur & Schul, 2002). In the introduction of the present dissertation, I proposed that the dimension of adaptability –when regarded as preparation in the reemployment process– may provide people with resources that can result in better job search methods and better employment quality. Now that we have seen that the construct of employability can provide the overall resources to engage in job search and to find reemployment, I take a closer look at the dimension of adaptability to answer why employability may also lead to genuine reemployment success.

People's preparation in the (re-)employment process may foster the quality of employment, since a better preparation can help individuals to successfully seek and find employment (e.g., Creed & Hughes, in press; Hirschi et al., 2011; Jepsen & Dickson, 2003; Koivisto et al., 2011; Saks & Ashforth, 2002). In this dissertation, I proposed that career adaptability is central to this preparation. Career adaptability consists of different resources: looking ahead to one's future (*concern or planning*), knowing what career to pursue (*control or decision-making*), looking around at options (*curiosity or exploration*), and having the self-efficacy to undertake activities needed to achieve career goals

(*confidence*). According to prior research, these career adaptability resources can help people to master vocational transitions (Creed et al., 2003; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Patton et al., 2002) and can enhance the chance on finding a suitable job, career success and well-being (Hirschi, 2010; Skorikov, 2007). Yet, it remains unclear how career adaptability influences reemployment quality, and whether it is possible to enhance people's career adaptability resources through training. I therefore aimed to clarify the means by which career adaptability influences reemployment quality in Chapter 5. To this purpose, I examined the impact of career adaptability on different job search strategies that people use in the pursuit of (re-)employment. Subsequently, in Chapter 6, I developed and tested a training aimed at increasing university graduates' career adaptability in order to enhance their employment quality.

Chapter 5 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 they search (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Crossley et al., 2007). Therefore, Chapter 5 aimed to examine whether and how career adaptability relates to job search strategies and to finding a suitable job. These job search strategies were classified into exploratory, focused and haphazard strategies (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Stevens & Beach, 1996). Job seekers using an exploratory strategy are dedicated to their search, fully explore their options and are open to arising opportunities. They do, however, not necessarily start out with clear goals about their reemployment. Job seekers using a focused strategy do have clear employment goals and identify their top choices early in their search. They apply only for jobs that fit their needs, qualifications and interest, and therefore concentrate their search on only a few job options. Finally, job seekers using a haphazard strategy often have low and unclear employment standards. They use a trial and error approach, often switching tactics without any rationale, and tend to settle for the first acceptable job available. In Chapter 5, I argued that job seekers' career adaptability would influence the use of different job search strategies, which in turn would influence the quality of reemployment. I proposed that the use of an exploratory strategy was a function of high career exploration (*curiosity*) and high career confidence; that the use of a focused strategy was a function of high career planning (*concern*), high decision-making (*control*) and low career exploration (*curiosity*); and that the use of a haphazard strategy was a function of low career planning (*concern*) and low decision-

making (control). In turn, I argued that the use of an exploratory or focused strategy would contribute to the quality of reemployment, whereas the use of a haphazard strategy would impair the quality of reemployment.

I tested these hypotheses by assessing the career adaptability and job search strategies of 248 participants of a reemployment course. Eight months later, 113 of them completed the follow-up questionnaire regarding the number of job offers they had received and, in the case that they had found reemployment ($n = 73$), their reemployment quality. Results confirmed the important role of career adaptability in the job search process and in finding high quality reemployment. More specifically, the results showed that job seekers primarily used an exploratory strategy when they were curious and confident, that they primarily used a focused strategy when they were less curious but had a clear plan, and that they primarily used a haphazard strategy when did not have a clear plan and were undecided about what kind of career to pursue. In turn, the use of an exploratory and focused job search strategy led to more job offers. Unexpectedly, the use of an exploratory strategy also led to lower reemployment quality –possibly due to the context of reemployment in which unemployed people have to accept a job offer that may not resemble their preferred job. Although results confirmed that the use of one or the other strategy is a function of people's career adaptability, they also revealed that some career adaptability resources had a direct positive effect on reemployment quality. This strengthens the idea that career adaptability plays a preparatory role in the (re-)employment process. Taken together, the findings of Chapter 5 indicate that job seekers' preparation and mental readiness to seek reemployment can contribute to finding a qualitatively good job, irrespective of how they actually search for it.

Given the crucial preparatory role of career adaptability in the pursuit of high quality reemployment, I developed a training to provide university graduates with these career adaptability resources and to foster their employment quality. In Chapter 6, I proposed that the career adaptability resources may provide the necessary 'tools' to cope with the transition from school to work and to help university graduates to find a suitable job, even during economically hard times. I aimed to create a unique theory-driven training that contributes to graduates' career adaptability and subsequent employment quality, and to simultaneously answer the question as to whether career

adaptability can be enhanced. The theoretical foundation of the training was derived from scholars' recommendations to incorporate exercises to acquire and utilize each career adaptability resource through planning, decision-making, exploration and problem-solving (Hartung & Taber, 2008; Savickas, 2002; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009). The structure of the training was derived from the critical ingredients for effective career interventions as identified by Brown and Ryan Krane (2000; Brown et al., 2003).

The training was tested in a longitudinal field quasi-experiment among recent university graduates, by studying the differences in the development of each dimension of career adaptability between an experimental group ($n = 32$) and a control group ($n = 24$), over three points in time (pre-training, post-training and a follow-up measurement 6 months later). Results revealed that the development of career control, career concern and career curiosity was significantly different for the training group as compared to the control group. More specifically, the training group experienced an overall increase in career concern, control and curiosity, whereas there was no increase (concern) or even an overall decrease (control and curiosity) within the control group. Interestingly, the differences between training group and control group were detectable post-training, but were significantly stronger at the follow-up measurement 6 months after the training. Results furthermore showed that employed participants who had taken part in the training reported higher employment quality (higher job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, higher person-organization fit and higher career success) than employed participants who had not taken part in the training. In sum, the results of Chapter 6 show that the training provided participants with career adaptability resources and helped to buffer against a decrease of career adaptability, mainly in the long run. Additionally, the training contributed to the quality of employment found.

Overall Conclusion

There is a widespread consensus in reemployment research and -practice that the best route to finding a job is searching for one. In the introduction, I have identified two key problems with focusing solely on job search when seeking to establish successful (re-) employment. The first problem revolves around the specifics of job seekers' situation and contextual factors (Boswell et al., 2012; Saks, 2005; Wanberg,

2012): searching for a job is often not enough to find reemployment in times of economic crisis, or for long-term and disadvantaged unemployed people. The second problem revolves around the idea that searching for a job does not necessarily result in better reemployment quality (Boswell et al., 2012; Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002). To date, research on un- and reemployment has not been able to designate the routes to genuine reemployment success beyond the role of job search.

I have proposed that the concept of employability may solve these key problems because it may play an important role in establishing successful reemployment, especially among long-term unemployed people and other at risk groups. Additionally, I proposed that one of the dimensions of employability in particular –adaptability– can serve as a preparatory mechanism that contributes to the quality of reemployment. Indeed, the results of Chapter 2, 3 and 4 show that employability and its dimensions can contribute to both persistence in job search and finding reemployment among the long-term unemployed, and that employability can be enhanced through reemployment interventions. At the same time, choice of participation or having a clear career identity is not a prerequisite for the effectiveness of such interventions, as long as interventions are useful for finding reemployment (Chapter 3) and yield opportunities for constructing a career identity (Chapter 4). Moreover, the results of Chapter 5 and 6 confirm that preparation in the (re-)employment process by means of career adaptability can influence the way in which they search for jobs and more importantly, the subsequent quality of (re-)employment.

The findings in this dissertation yield conclusive evidence that employability offers a comprehensive approach to fostering genuine reemployment success: a focus on employability provides a better route to finding suitable reemployment than a focus on job search alone. I have shown that employability and its dimensions serve as a construct that is useful in all employment processes, and does not only apply to regular job seekers. I have also shown that one of the dimensions of employability, career adaptability, plays a crucial part in establishing high quality employment, both for long-term unemployed people pursuing reemployment and for higher educated graduates who have just entered the labor market. Thus, whether we look at regular job seekers, the long-term unemployed, stigmatized disadvantaged young adults or university graduates, employability is crucial in achieving genuine reemployment success.

Implications - the pursuit of reemployment

The results discussed in this dissertation indicate that employability can be applied to the long-term unemployed, and therewith provide a useful framework for examining their pursuit of reemployment. Employability plays an important role above and beyond the barriers that long-term unemployed people so often face. It is, however, noteworthy that not all dimensions of employability equally predicted job search intensity and/or finding reemployment. This differential prediction suggests that the employability dimensions play distinct roles in the pursuit of reemployment. More specifically, next to the importance of the motivational dimension (i.e. career identity) for both job search and finding reemployment, it is the cognitive dimension (i.e. adaptability) that fosters job search, whereas it is the ability-related dimension (i.e. social and human capital) that fosters subsequent reemployment success. Arguably, a state of mind directed at reemployment can help people persist in searching for a job, but job seekers still need the actual skills to get hired in the end.

Career identity had a crucial role in the pursuit of reemployment. It fostered both job search and the chance on finding reemployment, perhaps because career identity helps to steer job search activities and raises the chances on getting hired (McArdle et al., 2007). Interestingly, many of the long-term unemployed participating in the current studies still perceived themselves as workers –which was reflected in their relatively high score on career identity. This continued sense of career identity contradicts the typical image of long-term unemployed people as freeloaders preferring to live on unemployment benefits. Hence, the absence of work does not necessarily imply the absence of career identity: even for people who have been unemployed for years, career identity is not per se intertwined with being unemployed. However, career identity did decrease between measurements over the course of one year, which replicates earlier findings within reemployment research (Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012): people tend to lose their career identity, job-skills, motivation, and job-related networks as the time of unemployment lengthens (Aaronson et al., 2010). Nevertheless, rebuilding career identity after a period of unemployment can be accomplished. Although often not a goal-directed or deliberate process, the key to building career identity and finding stable employment seems to be to withdraw from one's former identity. It is important to note in this regard, that the construction of career identity does not necessarily arise

from one's own initiative. Rather, the participants in Chapter 4 that had found stable employment often reported to have ended up in the apprentice program serendipitously. They seemed to build their career identity during Fifteen's apprentice program, step by step. Notwithstanding, in Chapter 4 as well as in the preceding chapters, career identity played an essential part in eventually securing stable employment.

Implications - the added value of preparation

In Chapter 2, results showed that adaptability predicted people's job search intensity, but could not directly predict their reemployment success. This finding is in line with the findings in Chapter 5 and 6 that showed that adaptability did not directly increase people's chances on finding reemployment, but did increase the quality of the reemployment found. Career adaptability thus seems to function as a more preparatory mechanism in the reemployment process. In essence, higher levels of career adaptability go together with better job search methods, which in turn can increase people's chances on finding suitable (re-) employment. The studies in this dissertation stress the relevance of career adaptability during unemployment among a heterogeneous sample of individuals. Prior 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). The current dissertation underlines that career adaptability is relevant among all sorts of job seekers, including the poorly educated or long-term unemployed.

Additionally, the results of Chapter 5 show that job search strategies and even reemployment outcomes can be influenced through addressing job seekers' career adaptability. Although 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 can thus enhance their chances on reemployment–, results also indicate that the use of an exploratory strategy should be avoided among job seekers that have to attend to the demands of reemployment practice. When job seekers are pressured to accept any job offer, the use of an exploratory strategy may cause disappointment in the job they have to accept and may result in a lower quality of reemployment. When seeking to establish genuine reemployment success in this case, the use of a focused search strategy might be preferable to the use of an exploratory strategy. Despite the impact of different job search strategies on reemployment quality, I discussed that counselors may attempt to

help job seekers clarify their career options and goals and thus invest in their career adaptability, rather than focusing on the job search strategy itself.

Indeed, as seen in Chapter 6, providing job seekers with the resources necessary to engage in career adaptability fosters employment quality. In fact, providing these resources may help job seekers to enhance and maintain their career adaptability in the long run, and therefore to handle any current or future vocational transitions more easily. It is especially noteworthy in this regard that university graduates' career adaptability had a general tendency to decrease. The training discussed in Chapter 6 may help to buffer this decrease as it gives the possibility to acquire and utilize these career adaptability resources, also in the long run.

Implications - reemployment interventions

When it comes to increasing the odds on finding reemployment, the results of Chapter 2 and 3 showed that receiving a reemployment intervention can contribute to the development of people's employability. However, the results also showed that this contribution was relatively small, and that there are some boundary conditions to the effectiveness of reemployment interventions. The overall small effect might be due to the fact that the match of long-term unemployed people to available reemployment interventions is currently inefficient. People's employability is seldom assessed before starting an intervention, and interventions are often aimed at developing job search skills (Hillage et al., 1998). Consequently, reemployment interventions may not always fit people's developmental needs. A more person-adaptive approach in which interventions aim to develop the necessary dimensions of people's employability may therefore be more beneficial. A shift from stimulating job search to stimulating employability may be particularly beneficial for the long-term unemployed, as their employability turned out to be more important for finding reemployment than their amount of job search activities. Such a person-adaptive approach would allow the long-term unemployed to gain sufficient employability as a first step towards finding reemployment, thereby maximizing their chances on reemployment success.

A focus on developing unemployed people's employability also fits well with the procedures and policies of reemployment practice. To date, reemployment practice has mainly used the number of people finding reemployment as a criterion of success. The

applicability of employability for long-term unemployed people offers a valuable addition in this regard, because it allows reemployment practice to monitor people's personal development over time. When shifting the focus to enhancing people's employability, reemployment practice can measure progress in a more adequate manner and long-term unemployed people can set realistic and attainable goals for themselves instead of having to strive for the apparent unattainable goal of finding reemployment. After all, unreachable goals will only discourage people and diminish their chances on success even more (Locke & Latham, 2002). Note that reemployment practice should simultaneously incorporate overcoming barriers and promoting employability amongst the long-term unemployed. In other words, effective reemployment interventions must not simply address people's gaps in employability, but take a more profound approach by including people's barriers to employment. Thus, any intervention aimed at this group should not lose sight of the fact that many of them lack basic skills and accordingly find themselves at a disadvantage to other job seekers.

Another way to increase the effect of reemployment interventions on the development of employability can be found in participants' motivation to take part in the intervention, as discussed in Chapter 3. The results of this chapter show that the 'why' of motivation for finding reemployment is important for the utility of reemployment courses. The more people *want* to find reemployment (i.e. having a more internalized or autonomous motivation), 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 (i.e. having a less internalized or more controlled motivation) benefit less from the reemployment course. It is thus important for reemployment practice to be aware of why unemployed people strive for reemployment, but also to stimulate a more internalized motivation among the participants of a reemployment course. Chapter 3 suggests that the motivation for finding reemployment can become more internalized when people experience the reemployment course as useful for finding reemployment. Thus, explaining why a course is useful for finding reemployment can help people to internalize the outcome of the course, which contributes to their employability, job search activities, and subsequent chances on finding reemployment.

The compulsory nature of the reemployment interventions is a major subject of debate in reemployment practice (cf. Dijk et al., 2008; Van den Berg & Van der Klaauw, 2006). In the Netherlands and other Western-European countries, unemployed people can only receive benefits under the condition that they participate in reemployment interventions. This obligation might foster a more controlled motivation to search, particularly if people have low voice in choosing a particular intervention (Deci et al., 1994). Chapter 3 shows that obligating people to participate does not have to be detrimental for their employability and job search after the course, as long as they can see the usefulness of what they are doing. It is therefore all the more important for reemployment practice to explain why a course is useful 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.

Contributions and Future Directions

In this dissertation, I have used different methods to answer the question of what one can do, besides job search, to find suitable (re-)employment. The use of several longitudinal field studies, a quasi-experimental field study and a qualitative study together contribute to the robustness and generalizability of the assumption that employability and preparation play a critical role in finding suitable (re-)employment. Together, the findings in the current dissertation represent some valuable theoretical contributions, because the results form a solid base for understanding and further examining the process of pursuing suitable reemployment. Where research on un- and reemployment has, up to now, largely failed to shed light on the (re-) employment process beyond the role of job search, the results from this dissertation provide a new and unique perspective with employability and its dimensions at the core. This employability perspective answers to the call in un- and reemployment research to deepen our understanding of the reemployment process, and to look beyond reemployment status as an outcome but consider the quality of the reemployment found (cf. Boswell et al., 2012; Saks, 2005; Wanberg, 2012). At the same time, several questions

arise from the contributions of the current dissertation that may be interesting to continue exploring.

The results in this dissertation repeatedly showed that employability plays an important role in both the process of reemployment and the outcomes of reemployment, offering an overarching approach that allows us to study process and outcomes simultaneously. The results also yield new information on the distinct roles of the employability dimensions in the reemployment process, with human and social capital being particularly important for reemployment outcomes, career identity being particularly important for the reemployment process, and adaptability being important for both the process and the outcomes. The consistent findings on the importance of career adaptability in establishing (re-)employment quality furthermore add to the literature by providing a sound theoretical construct that is helpful for finding suitable reemployment. I have additionally clarified the process by which career adaptability can influence (re-)employment quality: it can function as a preparatory mechanism in the reemployment process, thereby influencing people's persistence in searching and their choice of job search methods when pursuing reemployment. It is important to note that the important role of employability and career adaptability is not bound to a specific sample or situation. In fact, the findings discussed here are consistent among different types of samples and different types of methodologies. In that sense, the current dissertation offers a robust and comprehensive approach to genuine reemployment success.

Following the idea that reemployment research and practice should focus on unemployed people's employability, it is worthwhile to investigate the effectiveness of reemployment interventions and their contribution to people's employability in more detail. In the current discussion, but also in Chapter 2 and 3, I have argued for a more person-adaptive approach to enhance the effectiveness of reemployment interventions. With a person-adaptive approach based on people's level of employability, more adequate reemployment interventions can be offered. Although the results of the studies in this dissertation suggest that such person-adaptive approach would pay off, it has yet to be empirically demonstrated. Additionally, a more refined categorization of reemployment interventions than deployed in the current dissertation –one that distinguishes between different types of interventions– may give some insights for

developing a more person-adaptive approach, as it would allow researchers to investigate which type of intervention is suitable at a given level of employability. Distinguishing between different reemployment interventions is thus of utmost importance for future research among the long-term unemployed.

This dissertation furthermore contributes to the literature by shedding light on the mechanisms involved in the reemployment process. Understanding individual differences in pursuing suitable reemployment is a central concern in un- and reemployment research, and there have been calls to address this concern by embedding un- and reemployment research into grander psychological theories (cf. Feather, 1990; Vansteenkiste & Van den Broeck, in press). I believe that I have answered to this call by applying both Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to the process of pursuing suitable reemployment. Both theories have helped to deepen our understanding on individual differences in the reemployment process, and the results discussed in this dissertation have, in turn, made supplemental contributions to both theories.

Concerning Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000), the findings in this dissertation underline the importance and applicability of motivation quality in the reemployment process. The distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation turns out to be particularly applicable the context of reemployment, since the activities undertaken when pursuing reemployment are not necessarily interesting or satisfying in themselves, but can be experienced as important for finding suitable reemployment. When pursuing reemployment, the quality of motivation can explain variability in the way that unemployed people experience their unemployment (cf. Vansteenkiste et al., 2004; 2005), and can also explain the varying outcomes of reemployment interventions (see Chapter 3). Additionally, the results of this dissertation add to the literature by illuminating the conditions under which such interventions are beneficial or detrimental for people's quality of motivation: choice of participation in an intervention is only beneficial for the quality of motivation when the intervention is experienced as useful for finding reemployment. Choice of participation can, however, lead to a more controlled motivation when the intervention is experienced as useless for finding reemployment. The quality of motivation, in turn, impacts the further reemployment process. Thus, applying Self-Determination Theory to the context of pursuing

reemployment has provided a deeper understanding on the individual differences in the reemployment process, and on why and when reemployment interventions can be effective.

It is noteworthy that most research on un- and reemployment considers the reemployment process to be a self-regulatory, dynamic process of job search (e.g. Kanfer et al., 2001). Indeed, searching for a job is regarded as a highly autonomous process and is characterized by self-motivation, coping with uncertainty and rejections, and persisting in one's job search efforts (Wanberg et al., 2010). The results of the current dissertation, however, suggest that the reemployment process is not a highly autonomous, self-organized and loosely structured job search process for all job seekers. Rather, the reemployment process is oftentimes a process that is externally regulated and directed by requirements of reemployment practice (Vansteenkiste & Van den Broeck, in press). This distinction is critical, because autonomous and externally regulated activities bring about different results –as we have seen in Chapter 3. Thus, especially in situations where reemployment practice requires unemployed job seekers to apply once a week and participate in compulsory reemployment interventions, people's quality of motivation should be taken into account.

The distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation may additionally clarify why job seekers' efforts decline over time, and how they may persist in their efforts when facing prolonged unemployment. Presumably, an autonomous motivation (i.e., wanting to put effort in reemployment activities) will help job seekers to sustain their efforts, whereas a controlled motivation (feeling pressured to put effort in reemployment activities) will diminish their efforts. At the same time, however, job seekers' motivation may be affected by the extent to which reemployment activities fit their needs and abilities: some individuals may benefit more than others from information on how to structure their search efforts (Wanberg et al., 2010). Given that these reemployment activities often differ in the amount of self-regulation they require, the fit between the required self-regulation and the need or ability to self-regulate may affect people's motivation and effort to pursue reemployment. Thus, while offering the freedom to self-regulate in the pursuit of reemployment may increase autonomous motivation for some participants, it can be detrimental to those who are not willing or able to self-regulate their job search. A randomized field experiment would, if feasible,

allow strong conclusions on the value of reemployment activities and the presumably important role of people's quality of motivation.

Regarding Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the findings in this dissertation underline the crucial role of career identity in the reemployment process, but also provide new information on its nature and how career identity can be built. Next to the fact that career identity influences both the reemployment process and the -outcomes, this dissertation showed that career identity in itself does not necessarily function as a goal to direct the reemployment process (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Fugate et al., 2004), nor is career identity necessarily constructed by consciously reflecting upon one's possibilities (Marcia, 1966) or pursuing desired 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Yost et al., 1992). Rather, building career identity can be part of the reemployment process, and may just as well be triggered by contingent events and later on be developed by 'working and doing' (Van Maanen, 1998; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Essential in this regard is that career identity is reflective of social identification and partly arises through one's chances to find employment, thereby supporting Social Identity Theory (Mean Patterson, 1997; Meijers, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). At the same time, however, the findings in the current dissertation yielded a new perspective on constructing identity by suggesting that it is essential to actively withdraw from the former unemployed identity to be able to build career identity. All in all, the process of building career identity turned out to be a less goal-oriented and deliberate process than previously depicted in the literature. In line with LaPointe's (2010) approach to career identity as a discursive process, it seems that building career identity can be a step-by-step process.

In addition, the combination of Social Identity Theory with Self-Determination Theory may shed light on the individual differences of building career identity. Drawing upon Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985; 2000), it may be that one's motivation quality influences the construction of career identity. Given that the findings in this dissertation suggest that it is important to actively withdraw from the former unemployed identity to be able to build career identity, it may be that those who pursue reemployment with an autonomous motivation –as opposed to those who feel pressured to pursue reemployment– are more willing and are better able to 'make the switch' from unemployed identities to employed futures. A first finding in support of this idea can be

found in Chapter 4, in which the quantitative analyses suggest that participating in Fifteen's apprentice program for obtaining a diploma was not a fruitful motive for finding stable employment in the end. The 'diploma' motive may have reflected a controlled motivation, that may have hindered the construction of career identity during the apprentice program (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011). To deepen our understanding of building career identity –which is, according to my findings, essential in a successful reemployment process–, it is worthwhile to investigate the relationships between the quality of motivation and identity construction. This remains something to be tested in the future.

Concluding Thoughts

On the first page of this dissertation, I referred to Einstein's quote that 'insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results' to illustrate how difficult and frustrating searching for a job can be when it does not lead to (re-) employment. Especially for long-term unemployed people who are generally less attractive to employers than regular job seekers, more job search activities do not always translate into better chances on finding a job, let alone a suitable job. In the remainder of the dissertation, I have shown that there are routes above and beyond job search that can lead to suitable (re-)employment. Essentially, finding reemployment does not only depend on people's job search, but also depends strongly on their employability. In that regard, employability may –by providing both the resources to engage and persist in proper job search methods and to eventually land suitable reemployment–, be a more fruitful and possibly less frustrating focus when striving for genuine reemployment success.

Nevertheless, although job search intensity indeed contributed little or nothing to finding suitable (re-)employment in the studies discussed in this dissertation, it should not be completely disregarded. Searching for a job remains, after all, necessary to actually find that job. However, it may not so much be the intensity but much more the strategy used while searching that influences genuine reemployment success –which in turn seems to originate in people's preparation (i.e., career adaptability). Thus, in the quest for suitable (re-)employment, employability and preparation are essential in steering proper job search and maximizing the chances on finding a suitable job.