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How experienced autonomy can improve job seekers' motivation, job search, and chance of finding reemployment

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ABSTRACT

Job seekers can have different motivations to search for jobs. Some search to find a better job, others because reemployment guidance stimulates them to do so. Understanding how reemployment guidance impacts these different types of job search motivation, and how these types of motivation impact job search behavior, is important in fully comprehending the reemployment process. This study examined how experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance relates to job seekers' types of motivation, how these types of motivation relate to high-quality job search behavior and, in turn, how high-quality job search behavior predicts finding reemployment. In a three-wave field study ($n_{T1} = 440$; $n_{T2,T3} = 172$), we assessed unemployed people's need for autonomy, experienced autonomy, job search motivation, and job search behavior quantity and quality. Unemployed participants were surveyed at the start of reemployment guidance (T1) and six weeks thereafter (T2). Their reemployment status was assessed six months later (T3). Results showed that experiencing more autonomy was directly associated with autonomous job search motivation and indirectly associated with high-quality job search behaviors and a higher chance of finding reemployment, regardless of job seekers' individual need for autonomy. Additionally, experiencing less autonomy was directly associated with amotivation, and indirectly associated with low-quality job search behaviors and a lower chance of finding reemployment. The implications of our findings for the reemployment process and for reemployment guidance are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Job loss and unemployment are disruptive life events with a far-reaching impact on people's lives. Research has shown that unemployment is associated with a variety of negative consequences, ranging from decreased physical and psychological well-being to increased mental health problems and mortality rates. Additionally, unemployment bears negative consequences for society: unemployed people often receive welfare benefits and do not contribute to economy production (for an overview, see Wanberg, 2012). It is thus of utmost importance that individuals find suitable reemployment. Although there are several factors beyond the individual's control that can influence reemployment success (e.g., labor market demand, discrimination), research indicates that individuals themselves can significantly enhance their chances of finding reemployment through their job search behavior (cf. Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012; Wanberg, 2012).

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Job seekers can engage in different kinds of job search behavior. They can, for example, use the internet to locate job openings and/or send out resumes to potential employers. According to most research, job seekers are more likely to find reemployment when they put more time and effort in these job search activities (i.e., show higher job search intensity: cf. Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002). More recently, however, researchers have begun to emphasize the importance of the quality of job search in addition to its quantity (Saks, 2005; Van Hooft, Wanberg, & Van Hoye, 2013; Vinokur & Schul, 2002). After all, spending more time and effort on searching will be less effective when one searches in an unsystematic, thoughtless, and haphazard way (Van Hooft et al., 2013). In other words, research has proposed that job seekers may be more likely to obtain reemployment with high-quality rather than low-quality job search behavior.

Sustaining such high-quality job search behavior, however, can place significant strain on job seekers (Lim, Chen, Aw, & Tan, 2016) and requires them to self-regulate how to search, when to search, and what jobs to pursue (Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hooft, 2010). As such, motivation plays a crucial role in the job search process (Van Hooft et al., 2013; Wanberg, Zhu, Kanfer, & Zhang, 2012). Yet, we know very little about how high-quality job search behaviors are affected by job seekers' different motivations, which can range from autonomous (i.e., engaging in an activity because it is enjoyable or important) to controlled (i.e., engaging in an activity because people feel pressured to do so) (cf. Self-Determination Theory; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Understanding how these different types of job search motivation impact job search behavior is particularly important in fully comprehending the reemployment process, because many countries provide reemployment guidance that involves compulsory job search or substantial interference from counselors (e.g., Koen, Klehe, & van Vianen, 2015; Lindsay, in press; Vansteenkiste & Van den Broeck, in press). Consequently, job seekers may engage in job search because they believe that finding reemployment is important (i.e., autonomous motivation) or because others – such as reemployment counselors – require them to do so (i.e., controlled motivation).

One critical factor that may determine job seekers' motivation in the reemployment process is their experience of autonomy during reemployment guidance (i.e., volition, willingness and choice with respect to a behavior or experience one is engaged in; cf. DeCharms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). However, it remains unclear how autonomy exactly influences job seekers' motivation, because scholars articulate different views on the role of autonomy. Some theoretical perspectives, such as SDT and Reactance Theory, state that experiencing a sense of autonomy fosters optimal motivation and behavior, while situations or environments that fail to satisfy individuals' need for autonomy can lead to suboptimal motivation and behavior (e.g., Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Brehm, 1966; DeCharms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 2000). These perspectives specifically assume that the need for autonomy is a universal, innate psychological need – thus, all job seekers would benefit from experiencing autonomy during reemployment guidance. However, other theoretical perspectives suggest that the relationship between experienced autonomy and individuals' motivation and behavior depends on individual differences in the strength of their need for autonomy (e.g., Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Van Vianen, 2005). In that case, job seekers will only show optimal motivation and job search behavior when reemployment guidance affords them as much autonomy as they desire. Reemployment guidance that provides either less autonomy or more autonomy than desired will, then, result in suboptimal motivation and poorer job search behavior.

The aim of the present study was to investigate how experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance related to the subsequent reemployment process (i.e., job seekers' different types of motivation, the quality of their job search behavior, and their chance of finding reemployment). As such, this study bears four important contributions. First, while previous research has stressed that the quality of job search is a key dimension of job search effectiveness (e.g., Manroop & Richardson, 2015; Van Hooft et al., 2013; Vinokur & Schul, 2002), empirical studies have paid relatively little attention to this presumably important determinant of finding reemployment. Our study seeks to fill this void by including both the degree and the type of people's job search behavior. Second, despite its theoretical and practical relevance for understanding the reemployment process, SDT has received relatively little attention in the job search literature (with the exception of da Motta Veiga & Gabriel, 2016; Koen et al., 2015; Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004). Our study extends previous research by detailing the process by which different types of motivation may affect the reemployment process, that is, job seekers' job search behavior and their chance of finding reemployment.

Third, this study contributes to motivation theory by examining whether the need for autonomy moderates the relationship between experienced autonomy and job seekers' motivation. Interestingly, despite scholars' different views on the universal versus idiosyncratic effects of experiencing autonomy, very few studies have directly investigated the moderating influence of the need for autonomy (also see Chen et al., 2015). By doing so, this study may also have important implications for reemployment practice. That is, understanding how experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance relates to subsequent job search motivation and job search behavior can help counselors to decide how much autonomy should be provided in interventions, and how job seekers can be guided to search in more optimal ways. Finally, while research has examined the role of job search motivation and job search behavior at particular points in the reemployment process, our study examines unemployed job seekers at several points throughout the reemployment process (i.e., from registration at reemployment services, to reemployment guidance, to job search, to reemployment).

1.1. The reemployment process

Job search intensity is one of the most frequently examined predictors of reemployment success, although its contribution is modest (cf. Boswell et al., 2012; Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, 2012). Research has therefore proposed that reemployment success may not only depend on the amount of time and effort job seekers dedicate to their search (i.e., the quantity of job search

behavior), but also on other dimensions such as self-regulation and job search strategies, i.e., the quality of job search behavior (Saks, 2005; Van Hooft et al., 2013; Vinokur & Schul, 2002).

1.1.1. Job search behavior: self-regulation

One indicator of high-quality job search behavior is self-regulation (cf. Van Hooft et al., 2013). Self-regulation refers to "those processes that enable an individual to guide his/her goal-directed activities over time and across changing circumstances" (Karoly, 1993, p. 25). Self-regulation involves setting goals, developing plans, monitoring and analyzing one's progress toward goal accomplishment, and self-reflection (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994; Van Hooft et al., 2013). Job seekers need self-regulation to persist searching and to adapt their job search activities in the face of setbacks that often characterize the reemployment process (Wanberg et al., 2010). Research shows that the use of self-regulatory activities (e.g., goal-setting, planning, monitoring, reflection) during job search is positively related to the number of resumes that job seekers submit and to the number of job interviews that they receive (Turban, Stevens, & Lee, 2009). These findings suggest that self-regulation during job search enhances job seekers' chance of finding reemployment.

1.1.2. Job search behavior: search strategies

Another indicator of high-quality job search behavior is the use of proper job search strategies (cf. Van Hooft et al., 2013). The job search literature generally distinguishes between three types of job search strategies: an exploratory strategy, a focused strategy and a haphazard strategy (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic, & Nauta, 2010). An *exploratory* strategy implies that job seekers are dedicated to their search and fully explore their options. A *focused* strategy implies that job seekers have clear employment goals and persevere in their job search until they find what they are looking for. Lastly, a *haphazard* strategy implies a trial and error approach with unclear employment standards. In comparison, 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.

The conceptual definitions of the three search strategies suggest that they are independent of one another and/or negatively related (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). Empirically, however, job seekers usually do not rely on the one or the other job search strategy for the course of their search. Rather, job seekers can use the three different job search strategies to a greater or lesser extent (Koen et al., 2010). Still, these search strategies tend to influence reemployment outcomes differently. For example, Crossley and Highhouse (2005) found that the more exploratory people searched, the more job offers they received, whereas job seekers received fewer offers the more haphazardly they searched. Likewise, Koen et al. (2010) found that the degrees to which people used a focused and an exploratory strategy were positively related to the number of job offers. Accordingly, the use of focused and exploratory strategies rather than haphazard strategies likely increases job seekers' chance of finding reemployment.

In sum, research suggests that high-quality job search behavior can be characterized by high job search intensity, high self-regulation and the use of proper job search strategies. We therefore expect that high-quality job search behavior will be positively related to people's chance of finding reemployment. More specifically, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1. (a) Job search intensity, (b) self-regulation, (c) the use of a focused strategy and (d) the use of an exploratory strategy will be positively related to finding reemployment, and (e) the use of a haphazard strategy will be negatively related to finding reemployment.

1.1.3. Job search motivation

Job seekers' motivation is crucial in fostering the high-quality job search behaviors that should lead to reemployment (Van Hooft et al., 2013; Wanberg et al., 2012). To date, this motivation has been conceptualized with constructs such as employment commitment (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001) or job search intention (e.g., Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005). However, these conceptualizations refer to the degree of job search motivation rather than to the reason behind engaging in job search. Given that there can be different reasons behind job seekers' search behavior –especially in situations where job seekers receive reemployment guidance–, we build on SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) to define these reasons, and propose that they differentially relate to high-quality job search behaviors.

SDT states that motivation does not only vary in degree (i.e., low and high motivation), but also in type (i.e., autonomous and controlled motivation). Autonomous motivation occurs when people engage in a certain behavior because it is in line with their own goals and values, while controlled motivation occurs when people engage in a certain behavior because they feel pressured to do so. Additionally, people can be amotivated, which stands in contrast to both autonomous and controlled motivation and represents a lack of motivation and no intention to engage in an activity at all (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000). In general, SDT postulates that a more autonomous rather than controlled motivation leads to more optimal outcomes. Indeed, autonomous motivation is positively related to effort, learning, persistence, effective performance and job satisfaction. Amotivation, in contrast, is related to maladaptive behaviors such as low effort and little persistence (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998, 1999).

The differentiation of these types of motivation may be especially helpful in explaining high-quality job search, because they are likely to induce different behaviors (cf. Gagné & Deci, 2005). For example, autonomous motivation is related to higher job search intensity (Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte, & Feather, 2005; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004), to greater use of metacognitive strategies (da Motta Veiga & Gabriel, 2016), and to better outcomes of reemployment interventions (Koen et al., 2015). Controlled

motivation is unrelated to job search intensity (Vansteenkiste, Lens, et al., 2005; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004) and negatively related to the use of metacognitive strategies in the early stages of job search (da Motta Veiga & Gabriel, 2016). Lastly, amotivation is related to poorer job search and to a lower chance of finding reemployment (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004).

Extending this line of research, we propose that autonomous job search motivation will help job seekers to engage in high-quality job search. Because autonomous motivation entails that the goal of finding reemployment is personally important to job seekers and should lead to greater effort, learning and understanding of the job search process (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Van Hooft et al., 2013), it may help job seekers to analyze and monitor their progress toward this desirable goal and to persevere until they find what they are looking for (i.e., engage in more job search activities, self-regulate and use a focused strategy). Likewise, autonomously motivated job seekers tend to experience more interest and enjoyment during the job search process, which may help them to set their own goals (i.e., self-regulate) and to collect extensive information and fully explore their options (i.e., use an exploratory strategy). Controlled motivated job seekers, however, do not necessarily want to search for a job but feel rather pressured to search. It is plausible that these job seekers do search for a job (i.e., engage in job search activities), but do so in a poor way (i.e., use a more haphazard, a less focused and a less exploratory strategy). They may also be less likely to set, monitor and pursue goals themselves (i.e., self-regulate), given that they only search because they feel forced by some external or internal source (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). In contrast, amotivated job seekers completely lack the motivation to search for a job and attach little importance to the goal of finding reemployment. This lack of motivation may cause them to search in a minimal and disaffected way, if they search at all (i.e., engage in less job search activities, less self-regulation, and use a more haphazard, a less focused and a less exploratory strategy).

In sum, we expect that autonomously motivated job seekers will engage in more and better job search behaviors, whereas controlled job seekers will engage in poorer job search behaviors, and amotivated job seekers will engage in less and poorer job search behaviors. We propose:

Hypothesis 2. Autonomous motivation will be positively related to (a) job search intensity, (b) self-regulation, (c) the use of an exploratory strategy and (d) the use of a focused strategy, and negatively related to (e) the use of a haphazard strategy.

Hypothesis 3. Controlled job search motivation will be negatively related to (a) self-regulation, (b) the use of an exploratory strategy and (c) the use of a focused strategy, and positively related to (d) the use of a haphazard strategy.

Hypothesis 4. Job search amotivation will be negatively related to (a) job search intensity, (b) self-regulation, (c) the use of an exploratory strategy and (d) the use of a focused strategy, and positively related to (e) the use of a haphazard strategy.

Taken together, a reemployment process characterized by autonomous job search motivation and high-quality job search should result in a higher chance of finding reemployment. Although reemployment guidance attempts to stimulate high-quality job search, this guidance is not always as effective (Koen et al., 2015). Hence, an important question is why and under what conditions reemployment guidance may succeed or fail. Here, we propose that job seekers' experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance relates to their job search motivation, and, consequently, to their job search behavior and chance of finding reemployment.

1.2. Experienced autonomy

Autonomy is one of the central features that drives motivation and optimal behavior, suggesting that experiencing autonomy during reemployment guidance is critical for a successful reemployment process. Various studies have shown that the satisfaction of people's need for autonomy relates positively to autonomous motivation and optimal behavior across different domains, age groups, and cultures (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008; Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens, 2005). Thwarting this need for autonomy, in contrast, can lead to controlled motivation, amotivation, and suboptimal behavior and maladjustment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Although SDT acknowledges that individuals can differ in the relative strength or salience of their need for autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 75), the theory conceptualizes autonomy as a universal need and assumes that all people benefit from the experience of autonomy –even those who report a low need for autonomy (Chen et al., 2015).

Yet, several scholars argue that the environment should match individual needs and that people especially benefit from the satisfaction of needs they desire (e.g., Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; McClelland, 1987; Van Vianen, 2005). They emphasize individual differences in the strength of people's needs and suggest that individuals with a high need for autonomy will benefit more from environments that provide autonomy as compared to individuals with a low need for autonomy. Indeed, Hackman and Lawler (1971) found that employees who desired high autonomy and who held jobs that required high autonomy reported higher work motivation and job satisfaction, and received higher performance ratings than employees who did not desire high autonomy. As another example, Iyengar and Lepper (1999) showed that Asian American children were less motivated by autonomy than European American children. Thus, individual differences in the need for autonomy may moderate how much people benefit from experiencing autonomy.

These two perspectives render different expectations on how experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance will affect the reemployment process. Following the first, "universal need" perspective (Brehm, 1966; Deci & Ryan, 2000), experiencing autonomy taps into the satisfaction of basic needs and should result in autonomous motivation and high-quality job search behavior. If reemployment guidance violates job seekers' need for autonomy, this should result in controlled motivation, amotivation,

and low-quality job search behavior. Following the second, "person-environment fit" perspective (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; McClelland, 1987; Van Vianen, 2005), however, experiencing autonomy may particularly –if not only– foster autonomous job search motivation and high-quality job search behavior when job seekers have a high need for autonomy. Likewise, experiencing autonomy may be less effective for people with a lower need for autonomy. In this study, we will test these two different perspectives. Thus, we will examine whether experienced autonomy will be directly related to job search motivation, and whether job search motivation will depend on the extent to which experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance matches job seekers' need for autonomy.

Hypothesis 5a. Experienced autonomy will be positively related to job search motivation (i.e., more autonomous motivation, less controlled motivation and less amotivation).

Hypothesis 5b. The relationship between experienced autonomy and job search motivation will be moderated by job seekers' need for autonomy, in such a way that the positive relationship between experienced autonomy and job search motivation (i.e., more autonomous motivation, less controlled motivation and less amotivation) will be stronger when job seekers have a higher need for autonomy.

Altogether, we propose that job seekers' experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance relates to their job search motivation, and, consequently, to their job search behavior and chance of finding reemployment. In other words, we expect an indirect relationship between experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance and the chance of finding reemployment via job search motivation and subsequent job search behaviors:

Hypothesis 6. Experienced autonomy is indirectly related to finding reemployment through their job seekers' job search motivation and job search behavior.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design and context

In this study, we aimed to examine how experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance affected the reemployment process. To this purpose, we collected data among newly registered unemployed welfare recipients in the Netherlands before they received reemployment guidance. As such, we could make sure that we captured how the experience of autonomy *during* reemployment guidance set the reemployment process into motion (i.e., affected job seekers' job search motivation, their job search behavior and chance of finding reemployment). That is, we assessed job seekers' job search motivation both immediately after registration (Time 1) and after six weeks of reemployment guidance (Time 2). This allowed us to control for people's initial job search motivation, so that we could particularly focus on how job seekers' job search motivation was affected by their experience of autonomy during the first weeks of reemployment guidance. We believe that this research design enabled us to examine the full reemployment process as outlined in the introduction, and to rule out that our results would be driven or altered by job seekers' initial job search motivation.

In the Netherlands, job seekers generally receive reemployment guidance during unemployment after they apply for welfare benefits. Job seekers who are physically and psychologically able to work receive such reemployment guidance. During reemployment guidance, active job search behavior is mandatory and job seekers are expected to apply for jobs regularly. However, the type of reemployment guidance can differ. For example, job seekers can receive individual or group-based job search supervision: they may regularly meet with a reemployment counselor to discuss and evaluate their job search activities or conduct their job search in a peer group lead by reemployment professionals. Therefore, this sample of unemployed job seekers newly registered at reemployment services likely contains sufficient variance in experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance and is well-suited to examine our hypotheses.

2.2. Sample and procedure

We conducted a three-wave field study among newly registered unemployed welfare recipients. The first questionnaire (Time 1) was sent a week after they applied for welfare benefits. Six weeks later, a follow-up questionnaire (Time 2) was sent to participants who had completed the first questionnaire. After six months, participants' reemployment status was assessed through the reemployment services' official database (Time 3). To enhance our response rate, participants received a €10 incentive to complete the first questionnaire within two weeks. Participants received another €10 if they also completed the second questionnaire.

A total of 440 out of 2657 unemployed job seekers (16.6%) returned the first questionnaire in time, that is, within two weeks after they had received the questionnaire. Of these, 183 (41.6%) participants also responded to the second questionnaire, of which 172 (39.1%) participants fully completed the questionnaire. These response rates are comparable to response rates reported in other studies among unemployed welfare recipients in the Netherlands (Koen et al., 2010; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004). At Time 1, the sample consisted of 196 (44.3%) women and 244 men (55.2%). Participants' average age was 38.3 years ($SD = 10.5$). Of the participants, 16.3% ($n = 79$) indicated that high school was their highest completed educational degree, 17.7% ($n = 86$) completed a basic training degree, 25.1% ($n = 122$) a vocational training degree, 13% ($n = 63$) a

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, internal consistencies and correlations.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Demographic variables																			
1. Gender[1]	.55	.50	(-)																
2. Age	38.34	10.53	.12*	(-)															
3. Education[2]	2.95	1.35	-.11	-.13**	(-)														
Time 1																			
4. Need for autonomy	3.71	.81	-.08	-.05	.12*	(.83)													
5. Autonomous job search motivation	4.30	.64	-.16*	-.08	.15**	.03	(.78)												
6. Controlled job search motivation	3.17	.72	-.00	-.10*	-.06	.05	.31**	(.88)											
7. Job search amotivation	1.44	.66	.09	.09	-.11*	.00	-.53**	-.02	(.78)										
Time 2																			
8. Experienced autonomy	3.36	.76	.01	.08	.09	.08	.18*	.02	-.07	(.79)									
9. Autonomous job search motivation	4.26	.64	-.16**	-.05	.16*	.08	.61**	.22**	-.32**	.26**	(.80)								
10. Controlled job search motivation	3.23	.73	-.05	-.15	-.12	.06	.15*	.61**	.04	-.11	.33**	(.89)							
11. Job search amotivation	1.44	.58	.04	-.03	-.13	.01	-.36**	-.00	.48**	-.17*	-.44**	.01	(.81)						
12. Job search intensity	2.92	.72	-.07	-.08	.06	-.10	.19**	-.07	-.07	.18*	.28**	.05	-.15*	(.84)					
13. Self-regulation	3.26	.94	-.13	.04	.03	-.01	.41**	.12	-.23**	.18*	.39**	.12	-.29**	.59**	(.89)				
14. Haphazard search strategy	2.45	.94	.06	-.01	-.16*	-.15*	-.16*	.15*	.22**	-.24**	-.12	.18*	.29**	-.16*	-.23**	(.57)			
15. Exploratory search strategy	3.51	.82	-.11	.02	.01	-.08	.22**	.07	-.08	.07	.27**	.12	-.15	.47**	.48**	.08	(.75)		
16. Focused search strategy	2.54	.84	-.01	.03	.01	.05	-.13	.04	.14	-.02	-.18*	.07	.23**	-.12	-.06	-.02	-.29**	(.60)	
Time 3																			
17. Reemployment status$_{T2+6\ months}$[3]	.27	.44	-.02	-.16**	.17*	.09	.19*	-.00	-.11	.13	.09	-.01	-.14	.14	.18*	-.29**	.07	-.06	(-)

**$p < .01$ *$p < .05$ (2-tailed)
NB. $n_{T1} = 440$; $n_{T2,\ T3} = 172$
[1] categories include 0 = female; 1 = male;
[2] categories include 1 = no degree; 2 = basic training; 3 = vocational training; 4 = bachelor; 5 = master;
[3] categories include 0 = unemployed; 1 = employed

bachelor's degree, and 16.5% ($n = 80$) completed a master's degree. At Time 2, the sample of respondents who fully completed the questionnaire consisted of 79 (46.2%) women and 92 (53.8%) men. The average age of participants was 39.3 years ($SD = 11.1$). 22% ($n = 37$) of the participants at Time 2 completed a high school degree, 15.5% ($n = 26$) a basic training degree, 25.6% ($n = 43$) a vocational training degree, 14.3% ($n = 24$) a bachelor's degree, and 22.6% ($n = 38$) completed a master's degree. Of the participants who responded to both questionnaires, 26.7% ($n = 46$) had found reemployment within six months after registration at reemployment services (Time 3). The demographics of our sample are comparable to those of the general population registered at reemployment services (51% men and 49% women; median age group 25–44 years; reemployment rate 27.5% within six months after registration) and to the overall reemployment rates among welfare recipients in the Netherlands (9.6% within three months after registration and 41.0% within two years after registration, cf. Monitor Arbeidsmarkt, 2013).

Comparisons between participants who only responded at Time 1 and participants who responded to both questionnaires (Time 1 and Time 2) revealed no significant differences in terms of gender, $\chi^2(1) = 0.31$, $p = 0.58$, age, $t(438) = -1.49$, $p = 0.14$, education, $t(428) = -0.60$, $p = 0.55$, need for autonomy, $t(423) = 0.24$, $p = 0.81$, controlled job search motivation, $t(434) = -0.21$, $p = 0.84$, or reemployment status at Time 3, $\chi^2(1) = 0.95$, $p = 0.33$. They did, however, (marginally) differ on their autonomous job search motivation, $t(433) = -1.92$, $p = 0.06$ and their job search amotivation at Time 1, $t(432) = 2.25$, $p = 0.03$: participants who only responded to Time 1 showed slightly lower autonomous job search motivation (MD = 0.12) and slightly higher job search amotivation ($MD = 0.14$) than participants who responded to both questionnaires.

2.3. Measures

Unless stated otherwise, we used 5-point Likert scales for the measures described below, ranging from 1 (*low agreement*) to 5 (*high agreement*). Table 1 presents internal consistencies.

2.3.1. Need for autonomy

At Time 1, the need for autonomy was measured with five items from existing scales that intend to measure autonomy or the satisfaction of need for autonomy (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Karasek, 1979; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010). We selected those items that reflected different facets of autonomy (i.e., decision-making, freedom, control and independence; cf. DeCharms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999) and that were applicable to the reemployment context in our study. Some items were slightly altered to ensure that we measured the individual need for autonomy instead of the satisfaction of need for autonomy. The items that measured participants' need for autonomy during unemployment at Time 1 were: (1) *"I want to be the one who decides what I do"* (2)*"I want to feel free to do what I think is best"* (3) *"I want to have control over what I do and the way that I do it"* (4) *"I want to be the one who determines when I do things"* and (5) *"I want other people to interfere with me as little as possible."*

2.3.2. Experienced autonomy

At Time 2, we assessed experienced autonomy with five items similar to the items used for measuring participants' need for autonomy. The items were preceded by an introductory text ("*Lately, you have been in contact with reemployment services about your reemployment process. The questions below refer to this.*"). Participants were then asked to think about the last month and indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following items: (1) *"I was the one who decided what I did"* (2)*"I was able to do what I thought was best in my job search"* (3) *"I had control over what I did and the way that I did it"* (4) *"I was the one who determined when I did things"* (5, reversed) *"other people interfered with my job search."*

2.3.3. Job search motivation

Job search motivation was assessed at Time 1 and Time 2 with a 20-item scale developed and validated by Vansteenkiste et al. (2004), Vansteenkiste, Lens et al. (2005) and Vansteenkiste, Zhou et al. (2005), which represents autonomous and controlled motivation as well as amotivation to search for a job. The questionnaire asked 'why do you want to find reemployment?', followed by items such as *"because I like working"* and *"because working is personally meaningful for me"* (reflecting autonomous motivation, 6 items), *"because I feel pressured to search for reemployment"* and *"because the money would allow me to buy anything I want"*(reflecting controlled motivation, 8 items). In line with SDT's construct definitions (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000) and previous research that has used this scale (Chemolli & Gagné, 2014; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000), we formed one variable from the items of autonomous job search motivation, and one variable from the items of controlled job search motivation. Job search amotivation was assessed with 3 items such as *"I don't see why I would want to work"*.

2.3.4. Job search behavior

Job search behavior was assessed at Time 2 and consisted of job search intensity, self-regulation, and job search strategies. Job search intensity was measured with Blau's (1994) 12-item scale with adaptations from Van Hooft et al. (2004). Participants indicated how often (1 = *never [0 times]* to 5 = *very frequently [at least 10 times]*) they had engaged in diverse job search behaviors in the past month, such as *"used the internet to locate job openings."* Self-regulation was assessed with Turban et al.'s (2009) 6-item scale that captures facets of self-regulatory activities and metacognition during job search. Participants indicated the extent to which they had engaged in activities in the last month, such as *"set personal goals to guide job search activities"* and *"monitored my progress toward finding a job"*. For measuring job search strategies, we used the 9-item (Koen et al., 2010) version of the measure developed by Crossley and Highhouse (2005). This shortened scale assesses the degree to which participants engaged in an

exploratory (4 items, e.g., *"I follow up on every lead to make sure I don't miss any golden opportunities"*), focused (3 items, e.g., *"I gather information only for jobs that I am really interested in"*) and haphazard job search strategy (2 items, e.g., *"My approach to gathering job-related information could be described as random"*).

2.3.5. Reemployment status

The reemployment status of the participants who had responded to both questionnaires was retrieved from the database of the reemployment service at Time 3, i.e., six months after participants had received the second questionnaire.

2.3.6. Demographic- and control variables

Gender, age and education are often reported as demographic correlates of job search and finding reemployment and were therefore assessed in the current study. Correlational analyses revealed that education and age were correlated with reemployment status. In line with methodological recommendations and to preserve sufficient statistical power (cf. Becker, 2005), we included education and age as control variables in our analyses. Additionally, the measures of job search motivation at Time 2 were adjusted for their baseline measures at Time 1 to control for their time-varying nature.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, internal consistencies and correlations between all variables in this study. We used Mplus 7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to test a path model with both multiple indirect effects and a dichotomous, nonnormally distributed, dependent variable. The logistic path model was estimated via robust maximum likelihood (MLR) with Monte Carlo integration. The control variables and measures of job search motivation at Time 1 were allowed to covary, as well as the measures of job search motivation at Time 2. Given that we formulated directional hypotheses for all relationships in the model, our confirmatory analyses were tested with one-tailed significance testing (cf. Cho & Abe, 2013).

3.1. Hypothesis testing

3.1.1. Model fit

We first tested the hypothesized model, followed by four alternative models that isolated the effects for each independent variable (i.e. autonomy, job search motivation, and job search behavior) to establish the validity of the proposed sequence of indirect effects (cf. Mathieu & Taylor, 2006). We compared these four alternative models to the hypothesized model: (a) a direct paths model, which restricted all indirect paths to reemployment status to zero; (b) a model in which we restricted all paths to and

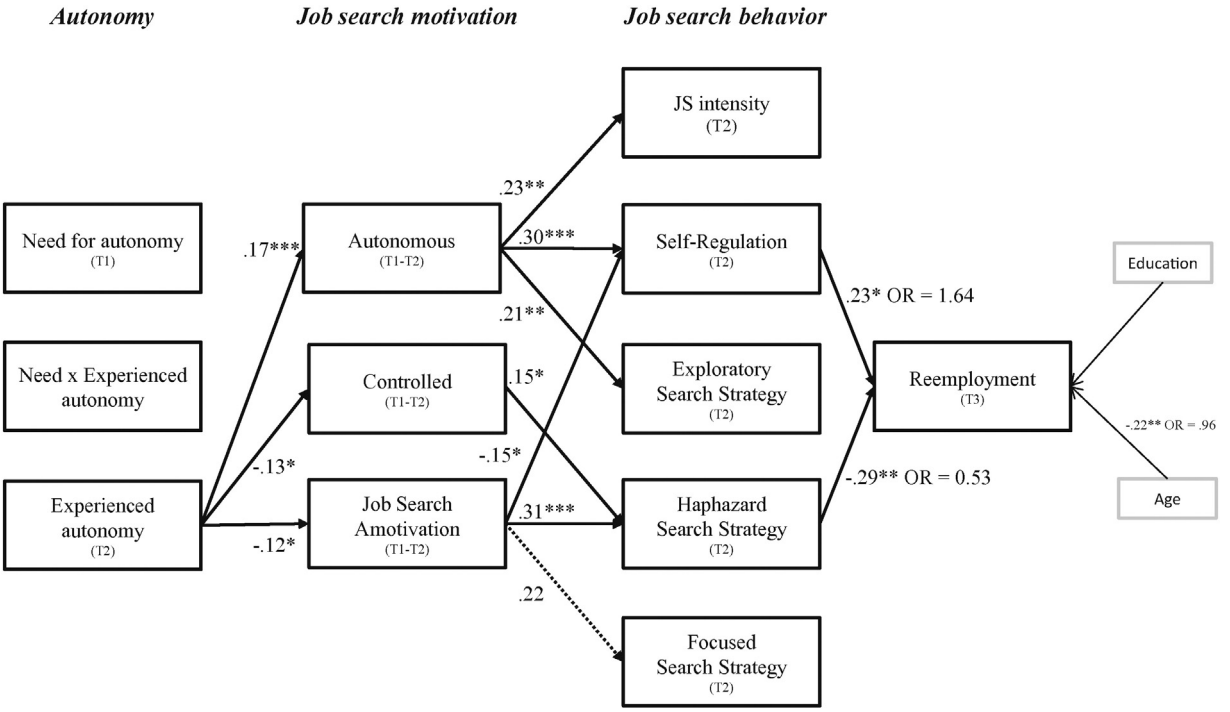

Fig. 1. Path coefficients for the hypothesized model. *Note.* Solid lines represent significant hypothesized paths. The dotted line represents a non-hypothesized path that emerged from exploratory analyses. Non-significant hypothesized paths are included in the analyses but not displayed for clarification purposes. $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$ (1-tailed).

from the motivation variables to zero; (c) a model in which we restricted all paths to and from the job search variables to zero; and (d) a saturated model with all direct and indirect paths to reemployment status. Because Mplus does not provide common SEM fit indices (e.g., chi square, RMSEA, CFI) for logistic MLR models, we examined the significant changes in fit between the hypothesized model and the alternative models using the BIC and Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square difference test with log-likelihood comparisons (cf. Satorra & Bentler, 2001, 2010). Note that a difference in BIC of >10 is considered as very strong evidence that the model with the lower value is the better fitting model (cf. Raftery, 1995). Results showed that the hypothesized model resulted in a significantly better fit than (a) the direct paths model (ΔBIC = 67.80, TRd(18) = 85.76, $p = 0.00$), (b) the model restricting job search motivation (ΔBIC = 52.42, TRd(9) = 65.31, $p = 0.00$), and (c) the model restricting job search behaviors (ΔBIC = 63.84, TRd(17) = 82.06, $p = 0.00$). The fit of the hypothesized model did not significantly differ from the fit of (d) the saturated model (ΔBIC = 6.72, TRd(21) = 29.29, $p = 0.11$). Given its parsimony, we report the path coefficients of our hypothesized model.

3.1.2. Hypothesis testing

The results of the structural model are represented in Fig. 1. The first hypothesis proposed that high-quality job search behavior would be positively related to finding reemployment (Hypothesis 1a–e). Results showed that the use of a haphazard strategy was negatively related to the chance of finding reemployment ($Est_{std} = -0.29$, $p < 0.01$, OR = 0.53), and that self-regulation was positively related to finding reemployment ($Est_{std} = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$, OR = 1.64). These findings support Hypothesis 1b and 1e. However, job search intensity (H1a), the use of a focused strategy (H1c) and the use of an exploratory strategy (H1d) were unrelated to finding reemployment.

Next, we hypothesized that job seekers' types of motivation would be related to their job search behavior. Hypothesis 2a–e stated that autonomous job search motivation would be positively related to high-quality job search behavior. The results showed that autonomous job search motivation was positively related to job search intensity ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$), self-regulation ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$) and the use of an exploratory strategy ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), which supported Hypothesis 2a, b and c. However, autonomous job search motivation was unrelated to the use of a focused strategy (H2d) and the use of an haphazard strategy (H2e). Hypothesis 3a–d stated that controlled job search motivation would be negatively related to high-quality job search behavior. Results only revealed a significant path between controlled job search motivation and the use of a haphazard strategy ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 3d. The paths between controlled job search motivation and self-regulation (H3a), the use of an exploratory strategy (H3b) and the use of a focused strategy (H3c) were not significant. Hypothesis 4a–e stated that job search amotivation would be related to lower job search intensity and low-quality job search behavior. Results showed that amotivation was positively related to the use of a haphazard strategy ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), and negatively related to self-regulation ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 4b and e. However, the expected relationships between amotivation and job search intensity (H4a), the use of an exploratory strategy (H4c) and the use of a focused strategy (H4d) were not found.

Finally, we examined whether experienced autonomy would be directly related to job search motivation (Hypothesis 5a), or whether this relationship would depend on job seekers' need for autonomy (Hypothesis 5b). The results supported Hypothesis 5a: experienced autonomy was positively related to autonomous job search motivation at Time 2, after controlling for autonomous job search motivation at Time 1 ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$). Experienced autonomy was negatively related to controlled job search motivation at Time 2, after controlling for controlled job search motivation at Time 1 ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.04$) and to job search amotivation at Time 2, after controlling for job search amotivation at Time 1 ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.04$). In contrast to Hypothesis 5b, results showed no significant interaction effect between need for autonomy and experienced autonomy on job search motivation. Thus, these findings support Hypothesis 5a rather than 5b.

3.1.3. Indirect effects

We additionally examined the indirect effects of experienced autonomy on reemployment status through job search motivation and job search behavior. We found no significant indirect effects of experienced autonomy on reemployment status. Hypothesis 6 was thus not confirmed. However, the indirect effects of experienced autonomy via autonomous job search motivation on job search intensity, self-regulation, and the use of an exploratory strategy were significant (Est = 0.04, $p = 0.03$; Est = 0.06, $p = 0.01$, 0.04, $p = 0.03$ respectively), as were the indirect effects of experienced autonomy via amotivation on the use of a haphazard strategy (Est = −0.05, $p < 0.05$), and of amotivation on reemployment status via the use of a haphazard strategy (Est = −0.32, $p = 0.03$).

3.2. Exploratory analyses

In contrast to our hypotheses, the confirmatory analyses did not reveal the expected positive relationships between job search motivation and the use of a focused strategy nor between the use of this strategy and finding reemployment. Additionally, we found no relationship between job search intensity and reemployment status. This is surprising in light of previous research (e.g., Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Wanberg et al., 2002). One explanation for the lack of these relationships in our study may be that the context in which our participants searched for jobs differed from previous research: our participants all received reemployment guidance and were expected to apply for jobs regularly. This may have altered the proposed relationships. We conducted exploratory analyses using two-tailed significance testing to examine alternative directions of the non-significant relationships. The results of the previously described structural model remained stable, although the decrease in power turned some relationships marginally significant. Surprisingly, results revealed a *positive* rather than negative relationship between job

search amotivation and the use of a focused strategy ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). These findings indicate that amotivated job seekers used a more focused job search strategy within our sample.

4. Discussion

The aim of this paper was to examine the joint role of experienced autonomy during reemployment guidance and the individual need for autonomy in fostering a high-quality reemployment process. Our results showed that higher experienced autonomy related to a higher quality reemployment process, independent of individuals' need for autonomy. The more autonomy job seekers experienced during reemployment guidance, the more autonomously motivated, the less controlled motivated and the less amotivated they were to search for a job. In turn, autonomous motivation was positively related to job search intensity, self-regulation, and the use of an exploratory search strategy, and amotivation was negatively related to self-regulation and positively related to the use of a haphazard strategy –as was controlled motivation. Finally, self-regulation was associated with a higher chance of finding reemployment, and the use of a haphazard search strategy was associated with a lower chance of finding reemployment. These findings extend reemployment research by supporting Manroop and Richardson's (2015) and Van Hooft et al.'s (2013) theoretical propositions that job seekers' chances on finding reemployment depends on their type of motivation and the quality of their search behavior. Additionally, we uncovered what reemployment practice can do to optimize the reemployment process and maximize job seekers' chances of finding reemployment: providing autonomy can improve job seekers' motivation, job search behavior, and their chance of finding reemployment.

4.1. Theoretical implications: the reemployment process

Our work provides insight into the antecedents and consequences of high-quality job search behavior. First, our study expands the application of SDT to the reemployment process and adds to the literature by providing empirical evidence of the proposition that different types of motivation differentially relate to people's behavior. This was illustrated by our finding that not all types of job search motivation were related to the indicators of high-quality job search behavior. For example, autonomous motivation seemed to be especially related to indicators of 'good' job search behavior whereas amotivation seemed to be especially related to indicators of 'bad' job search behavior. Controlled motivation was unrelated to most indicators of high-quality search behaviors. Thus, these types of motivation do not just foster or hinder certain behavior, but bring about completely different types of behavior. This underlines the importance of taking into account the reasons that drive people to search for a job. Our results suggest that controlled motivation is idle when it comes to optimal job search behavior, that amotivation fosters dysfunctional job search behavior, and that autonomous motivation is preferable in the job search process (also see da Motta Veiga & Gabriel, 2016; Van Hooft et al., 2013; Vansteenkiste, Lens, et al., 2005; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004).

Second, our study shows that the quantity of job search (i.e., intensity) did not explain unique variance in job seekers' chance of finding reemployment above and beyond the quality of job search (i.e., self-regulation and job search strategies). Although the non-significant relationship of job search intensity with reemployment status may seem to contradict previous research (i.e., Kanfer et al., 2001), it should be noted that the correlation of 0.14 in our study is not that different from the uncorrected correlation reported in Kanfer et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis (i.e., 0.16). In other words, when taking both the amount and content of job search activities into account, our results indicate that it is the content of job search activities (i.e., quality) that is more important in predicting people's chance of finding reemployment. Thus, this finding supports the idea that reemployment research should examine the quality of people's job search behavior in addition to its quantity (e.g., Manroop & Richardson, 2015; Van Hooft et al., 2013; Wanberg, 2012).

Third, amotivation turned out to be positively rather than negatively related to a focused search strategy. Although using a focused job search strategy may not be a sign of low-quality job search behavior at first sight (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2010), it could be an indicator of low-quality job search in certain contexts. That is, job seekers who use a focused strategy may either have clear employment goals that they are pursuing, or may be restricting themselves to a small number of options for reasons of saving effort. Unfortunately, the current measurement of job search strategies does not distinguish between these two forms of focused search behavior. In the context of our study –job seekers were expected to apply for jobs regularly during reemployment guidance–, the use of a focused strategy may thus have reflected that job seekers spent as little effort as possible on their job search, rather than that they were pursuing clear employment goals.

Alternatively, contextual factors may have influenced the use and effectiveness of job search strategies. For example, in a difficult labor market with insufficient job openings, it may be better to gather information about all possible job opportunities (i.e., use an exploratory strategy) rather than to set out for a specific job (i.e., use a focused strategy). Likewise, job seekers may particularly reap the benefits of using a focused or exploratory strategy in a later stage of job search, when they have had more time to prepare and have access to more information. Such information may not be available in the initial stage of their search, but may be crucial to generate positive reemployment outcomes such as finding a job that fits one's needs and abilities (cf. Lopez-Kidwell, Grosser, Dineen, & Borgatti, 2013). Thus, the use of a focused strategy may reflect low-quality rather than high-quality search behavior in the beginning of the job search process or in a difficult labor market, and may thus not enhance job seekers' chance of finding reemployment. We recommend future research to look into such context-dependent effects of job search strategies.

Finally, it should be noted that the strength of the relationships found in our model was relatively small, which may also be the reason that we found no indirect effects that covered the entire reemployment process from experienced autonomy to finding

reemployment. However, the statistical strength of an effect is not the only way to conclude that an effect is meaningful: if effects are found on a dependent variable that is difficult to influence, statistically small effects can still be important (cf. Prentice & Miller, 1992). As noted in the beginning of this paper, finding reemployment is a dependent variable that is difficult to influence – for example, the corrected correlations generally reported in meta-analyses range from $r_c = 0.21$ to $r_c = 0.28$ for the relationship between job search intensity and finding reemployment (cf. Kanfer et al., 2001; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). We believe that the fact that we were able to find solid relationships between indicators of job search behavior and finding reemployment despite these difficulties is, therefore, not only important but also encouraging for future research and reemployment practice.

4.2. Theoretical implications: autonomy

Our findings also shed light on the role of autonomy in predicting people's motivation and behavior. We found support for a "universal need perspective" (e.g., Brehm, 1966; Deci & Ryan, 2000): experienced autonomy fostered autonomous motivation and high-quality job search for everyone, regardless of the strength of their need for autonomy. This suggests that the benefits of experiencing autonomy – or the costs of lacking autonomy – do not depend on individual differences in the need for autonomy. Even if people indicate to have a low need for autonomy, they still benefit from experiencing autonomy. Likewise, if people indicate to have a high need for autonomy, they do not benefit more from experiencing autonomy than others.

The fact that the merits of autonomy do not – at least not in the current study – depend on the strength of individual needs seems to contradict Person-Environment Fit perspectives. After all, these perspectives assume that people will show optimal motivation and behavior in environments that afford them as much autonomy as they desire (e.g., McClelland, 1987; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Van Vianen, 2005). However, we believe that our findings do not necessarily contradict the assumptions of PE fit perspectives, but rather uncover that both theoretical perspectives contain an element of truth – depending on the conceptualization of autonomy. For example, the need for autonomy may differ from the desires or values that are often investigated within the PE fit tradition. In our study, we conceptualized autonomy as volition in carrying out one's activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). If autonomy is conceptualized as such, it seems that the need for autonomy is indeed a universally essential need rather than a desire that needs to match the environment.

However, autonomy can also be conceptualized as the possibility to function independently and not rely on others' help. For example, Bandura (1989) defined autonomy as acting independently of any external influences. Likewise, Hackman and Oldham (1976, p. 258) defined autonomy in terms of 'substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out'. Also Iyengar and Lepper (1999) equated autonomy with not relying on others. Following the guidance of others, then, implies a lack of autonomy. If autonomy is conceptualized as such, the consequences of experiencing autonomy in the reemployment process may be different. In fact, the amount of autonomy –or independence– that should be provided during the reemployment process may be a matter of fit. We recommend future research to further explore these ideas.

Alternatively, our rather general operationalization of the need for autonomy may explain why the benefits of experiencing autonomy did not depend on job seekers' individual need for autonomy. To assess job seekers' individual need for autonomy, we used a general measure that aligned with SDT's operationalization of autonomy as a basic psychological need. To assess experienced autonomy, however, we used a measure that was contextualized to the job search domain. It may be that a similar contextualized measure of job seekers' need for autonomy would have produced different results. That is, the lack of a frame-of-reference in our general measure of need for autonomy may have caused different interpretations of the same items. Likewise, some participants may have a rather high need for autonomy for job search activities but a rather low need for autonomy for other tasks. Our general measure of need for autonomy cannot capture these important distinctions. Thus, the use of a contextualized measure could have enhanced the incremental validity of the need for autonomy (cf. Bing, Whanger, Davison, & VanHook, 2004). Whether or not the merits of experienced autonomy would, then, still be independent of job seekers' individual need for autonomy remains something to be tested.

4.3. Practical implications

Our findings have some clear implications for reemployment practice. First, given that experiencing autonomy was beneficial for all job seekers, it is recommendable to create autonomy-supportive environments and use autonomy-supportive behaviors during reemployment guidance. Such environments and behaviors involve encouraging job seekers to reflect on their job search activities, their interests and competencies, avoiding external resources such as incentives, using informational and noncontrolling language, providing rationales for the activities, acknowledging job seekers' negative affect without trying to change it, and encouraging persistence and improvement in job seekers' activities (cf. Reeve & Jang, 2006). Note that an autonomy-supportive environment does not mean that reemployment practice should stop providing support for unemployed job seekers. After all, as we argued earlier, not providing support is not the same as providing job seekers with autonomy.

Second, our results imply that reemployment services should focus on the quality of people's search behavior in addition to the quantity of their search behavior. After all, we did not find a positive link between job search intensity and finding reemployment. Evidently, if job seekers put effort in their job search but search rather haphazardly, such effort is unlikely to result in reemployment. Helping job seekers to improve their job search may thus be a better approach than solely encouraging them to apply for jobs more often. Additionally, counselors may want to improve job seekers' search activities through their autonomous

job search motivation. To achieve this, counselors can –next to creating autonomy-supportive environments– explain the possible value and usefulness of reemployment interventions to participants: understanding the usefulness of specific interventions can enhance job seekers' autonomous motivation (cf. Koen et al., 2015).

4.4. Limitations and future directions

The current study has a few limitations that need to be noted. First, the use of survey data limits our ability to infer causal relationships between experienced autonomy on the one hand and motivation, job search behavior and reemployment status on the other hand. However, the three-wave design of our study allowed us to temporally separate the measurement of experienced autonomy from the measurement of job search motivation and job search behavior. As such, we were able to examine the relationship between experienced autonomy, motivational processes, different search behaviors and objective reemployment outcomes in a real-life setting.

Second, we should note that there were only six weeks between the measurements of Time 1 and Time 2. We intentionally chose this timeframe to assess participants' job search motivation as close to the baseline measure of job search motivation as possible, while still allowing them to sufficiently experience the autonomy that was provided during reemployment guidance. However, we cannot be sure that this timeframe gave participants sufficient experience of the autonomy that they received during reemployment guidance. In fact, a somewhat longer timeframe –for example, a three months– may have been more applicable to our context, given the fact that most reemployment interventions last about six months. The relationships between experienced autonomy and job search motivation may, then, have been stronger.

Third, the internal consistencies of two of the three job search strategies scales were relatively low, prompting some caution in interpreting the corresponding results. These lower levels of internal consistency are probably due to the use of shortened scales. Nevertheless, the internal consistencies are comparable to prior studies measuring job search strategies (e.g., Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2010). Additionally, low levels of internal consistency are likely to attenuate relationships between variables of interest. As such, the relationships between job search strategies and the other variables reported in the current study are likely to be an underestimation of their true relationships (cf. Schmitt, 1996). That said, the use of scales with higher internal consistencies is still preferable. We therefore urge other researchers to either use Crossley and Highhouse's (2005) original scale, or to develop an improved scale for measuring job search strategies in the future. Following our idea discussed earlier –that the current measure of the use of a focused strategy may both imply that job seekers are pursuing clear employment goals and that they are dedicating as little effort as possible to their search–, an improved scale may also differentiate between searching in a focused way and searching in a minimal way.

Finally, we collected our data in a somewhat difficult labor market. Although we deliberately focused on factors that are under the control of job seekers and/or reemployment services, it is conceivable that labor market conditions may have influenced the relationships between job search behaviors and individuals' chance of finding reemployment. For example, we found no relationship between the use of a focused strategy and reemployment status, whereas this strategy should –theoretically speaking– increase individuals' chance of finding reemployment (cf. Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). As discussed before, it may be the case that the effectiveness of search strategies also depends on macro factors such as labor market conditions.

5. Conclusion

The present study shows that experiencing autonomy during reemployment guidance contributes to job seekers' motivation, job search behavior and subsequent chance of finding reemployment, regardless of the strength of their individual need for autonomy. This suggests that job seekers who do not explicitly desire autonomy still benefit from experiencing autonomy. If reemployment guidance offers sufficient autonomy, job seekers tend to be more autonomously motivated, search harder and better, and have a higher chance of finding reemployment. If reemployment guidance does not offer sufficient autonomy, however, job seekers tend to be more controlled motivated or even amotivated, search in a restricted and dysfunctional way, and have a lower chance of finding reemployment. Thus, providing autonomy during reemployment guidance is essential and can help to improve job seekers' motivation, job search behavior, and their chance of finding reemployment.

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