



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

The pursuit of an employment relationship

Managing people in a flexible labor market

Federici, E.

Publication date

2019

Document Version

Other version

License

Other

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Federici, E. (2019). *The pursuit of an employment relationship: Managing people in a flexible labor market*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights

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

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

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

Chapter 2

Quality of Employment Among New Entrants: A Latent Growth Modeling Approach to the Job Search Process¹

¹ This chapter is to be submitted for publication as:

Federici, E., Boon, C., & Den Hartog, D. N. Quality of employment among new entrants: A latent growth modeling approach to the job search process.

The authors acknowledge the financial support of the Eduworks Marie Curie Initial Training Network Project (PITN-GA-2013-608311) of the European Commission's 7th Framework Program. All support is without any involvement in the design or writing of the study.

Abstract

Building on a self-regulatory conceptualization of the job search process, we examined whether the baseline and growth in job search behaviors and job search self-efficacy for job search outcomes (JSSE-O) would increase job seeker's likelihood of employment attainment and employment quality indicators (i.e., stress, work engagement, person-job fit, and overqualification). We collected data among 219 college students graduating in a Master of Business Administration in The Netherlands. Job search behaviors and JSSE-O were measured three times during the six months before their graduation, and employment attainment and employment quality were measured three months after their graduation. The results of latent growth models with time invariant covariates and distal outcomes indicated that the growth factor of job search behaviors related to higher distal level of stress, whereas the JSSE-O growth factors positively related to all indicators of employment attainment and employment quality. Theoretical and practical implications for the characteristics and development of the job search process are discussed in light of the findings.

2.1 Introduction

In times of instability of employment relationships, boundaryless careers and flexible job markets, job search processes have become increasingly important for individuals and consequently have also attracted scholars' attention (e.g., Liu, Wang, Liao, & Shi, 2014; Saks, Zikic, & Koen, 2015; Wanberg, 2012). Searching for a job is a process aimed at pursuing not only mere (re)employment, but also (re)employment quality (Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987). In order to maximize the match between workers and jobs, job search success is therefore aimed at not only finding a solution to unemployment, but also at finding a *sustainable* solution to unemployment. Thus, beyond just finding a job (indicators related to employment attainment), broader indicators of employment quality are also relevant outcomes of job search processes (Leana & Feldman, 1995; Saks & Ashforth, 2002).

The literature on job search however, has mainly focused on predicting job search success outcomes such as employment status, number of job offers, and length of the job search (Saks, 2005). With only some notable exceptions (Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Van Hooff, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2005; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000), there is a paucity of research investigating job search antecedents of quality of employment. In their meta-analytic review on job search processes, Kanfer and colleagues (2001) for example, could not include quality of employment and satisfaction with the obtain employment due to the lack of primary studies investigating those outcomes, hence pointing at the need of more research in this area. Given the well-established relevance of attitudinal and health-related indicators of fit between employees and their jobs (e.g., Cable & DeRue, 2002; Maynard, Brondolo, Connelly, & Sauer, 2015; Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006), providing consistent empirical support for such relationships is of paramount importance.

Common antecedents of finding (re)employment in previous research included job seekers' perceived job search self-efficacy (JSSE) (Saks et al., 2015) and the effort or intensity exerted in implementing actual job search behaviors (Saks, 2005). Indeed, extant research agreed in conceptualizing job search as a recursive self-regulated process, where patterns of repeated actions as well as self-evaluative beliefs concur in dynamically influencing the identification of goals, the activation of behaviors, and the assessment of progress until the goal is accomplished or abandoned (Kanfer et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2014; Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hooft, 2010). JSSE refers to a self-regulatory variable defined as individuals' beliefs in their ability to accomplish a task or goal, such as confidence in successfully completing job search behaviors and/or obtaining employment (Bandura, 1997; Kanfer et al., 2001). Job search behaviors are a variety of goal-directed activities (such as preparing a resume, going to a job interview, or looking for vacancies) which the job seeker engages in over a specific time period, and which are generally measured in terms of number of times or hours dedicated to them (Kanfer et al., 2001). Meta-analytic results show that both JSSE and job search behaviors are positively related to the chances of finding (re)employment and the number of job offers received, and negatively related to unemployment duration (Kanfer et al., 2001).

However, as noted much less is known about whether and how job search behaviors and JSSE relate to (re)employment quality. Few and contrasting results can be found in previous research. On the one hand, some studies report a positive relation between job search behavior and employee attitudes such as person-job and person-organization fit, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit (e.g., Saks & Ashforth, 2002), but others find no relation between job search behavior and job satisfaction or level of agreement between the obtained and the wanted job (e.g., Van Hooft et al., 2005). On the other hand, JSSE has been found to be related

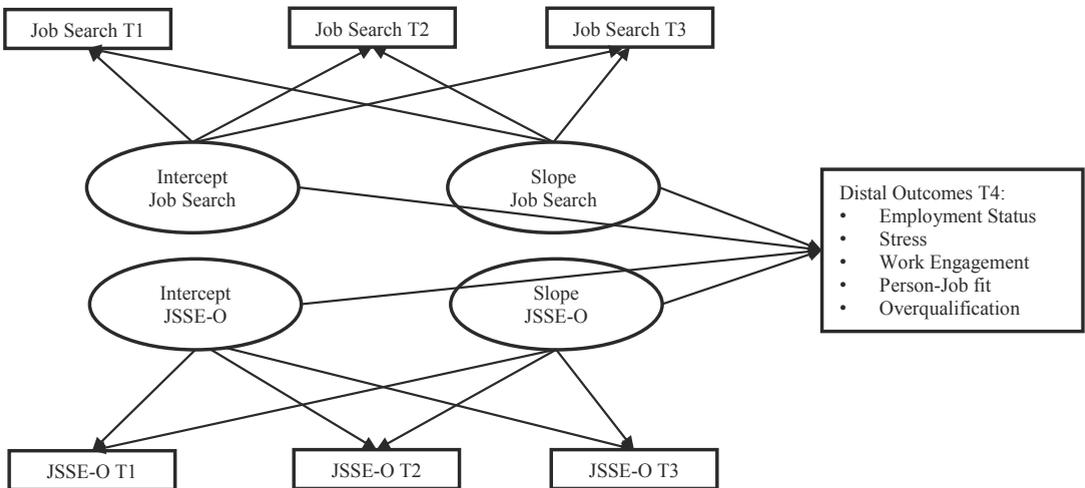
to a number of indicators, such as person-job fit in a cross-sectional design (Saks, 2006), the number of offers received from preferred employers (Moynihan, Roehling, LePine, & Boswell, 2003), and anxiety symptoms (Rusu, Chiriac, Sălăgean, & Hojbotă, 2013). Moreover, while the antecedents of the chances of finding employment as well as job search intensity have been thoroughly investigated using longitudinal designs aimed at unravelling the within and between components of such relationships over time (Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2018; Sun, Song, & Lim, 2013), the studies focusing on predicting employment quality instead, generally relied on cross-sectional data or data collected at two time points (e.g., Saks & Ashforth, 2002), thus leaving questions around the development over time of such relationships unanswered.

Therefore, this study sets out to investigate whether and how JSSE and job search behaviors relate not only to employment attainment, but also to indicators of employment quality over time. Self-regulatory theories indicate that individuals differ in terms of their ability to successfully manage their emotions, actions, and effort, which proved to be relevant in the job search process (Wanberg, 2012). Hence, we expect that over time, individual differences in the ability to self-regulate impact not only the chances of finding a job, but also the chances of finding a job which fits the person's interests, qualifications, and expectations. In order to have a comprehensive picture of employment quality, we focus on variables that refer to workers' health, attitudes, and cognitive evaluations of congruence between their skills and the demands of their jobs. Therefore, as distal outcomes we examine job seekers' stress, work engagement, perceptions of fit with their job, and perceptions of overqualification.

Overall, building on a self-regulatory framework of the job search process, we conduct a longitudinal study aimed at disentangling the characteristics of the development of JSSE and job search behaviors, and their effects on the employment status as well as the employment quality of

new entrants. More specifically, the aim of this study is twofold. First, we investigate whether, as individuals get closer to their entrance in the labor market, they experience meaningful self-regulatory change in their JSSE as well as job search behaviors over time. Second, we expect that this change represents a truly critical one, in that it affects not only one’s chances of finding a job (i.e., employment attainment), but also one’s chances of finding a sustainable job (i.e., employment quality). That is, we examine whether distal outcomes measured at a later point in time (i.e., stress, work engagement, person-job fit, and overqualification) will vary as a direct function of that change. In doing so, we aim to contribute to the job search literature by testing whether self-regulatory dynamics during job search are predictive of both employment, and employment quality of new entrants. We test the proposed latent growth model (Figure 1) on a sample of 219 college students graduating in a Master of Business and Administration in The Netherlands, whom we surveyed three times during the six months before their graduation and once three months after their graduation.

Figure 1. Research Model



2.2 Theoretical Background

2.2.1 *Employment Attainment and Employment Quality*

Engaging in and managing the job search process is crucial for unemployed individuals who are looking for re-employment, as well as for new entrants in the labor market such as fresh graduates (Sun et al., 2013). Entrants especially might run into difficulties related to a number of employment barriers which could prevent them from starting their careers in an optimal way. The critical role of one's first steps in the labor market and the documented negative effects of unemployment on individuals' health, attitudes and beliefs, highlight the practical relevance of studying the dynamics associated with new entrants' job search processes (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006), and their relationship with job search success. Job search success has been operationalized by using a wide array of criteria, which can be grouped into four main categories (Saks, 2005): (1) job search outcomes, which occur during the job search process, (2) employment outcomes, that are resulting from the job search process, (3) employment quality outcomes, which occur during post-entry, and (4) psychological well-being during job search. Here, we focus on employment and employment quality outcomes.

Employment outcomes are generally operationalized in terms of employment status or employment attainment (i.e., whether the individual reports having obtained a job), which is one of the most studied outcomes in the job search literature (Kanfer et al., 2001). Meta-analytic results report that job search behavior, personality traits (i.e., extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness), self-evaluation variables (i.e., self-efficacy and self-esteem), and financial needs (Kanfer et al., 2001) are significant antecedents of employment status, speed of employment (i.e., the length of time the individual has looked for a job), and of number of job offers and/or follow-up interviews obtained in a certain period of time. Furthermore, the relation

between job search behaviors and employment attainment seems to be stronger for employed job seekers, compared to new entrants and unemployed job seekers (Kanfer et al., 2001).

Employment quality instead refers to job search outcomes which occur once the job seeker has found a job and begun employment. It can encompass different aspects of the obtained job that relate to the fit of the job with personal and contextual characteristics, and therefore qualifies as an important indicator of success for job seekers (Schwab et al., 1987). Economists for example, considered improvements in wages as an indicator of reemployment success, whereas psychologists examined job improvement, person-organization fit, and turnover intentions (Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002). Research has shown that employment quality is related to higher life satisfaction (Leana & Feldman, 1995), lower economic discrepancy and replenished coping resources (Kinicki, Prussia, & McKee-Ryan, 2000). The anxiety and psychological distress experienced by unsatisfactorily (re)employed workers led some to argue that settling for an unsatisfactory new job may result in worse health related consequences than staying unemployed (Hanisch, 1999; Liem, 1992). More recently, research on (re)employment quality has focused on demographic variables such as age, gender, and belonging to minorities (Jensen & Slack, 2003), career planning, and the use of careful and deliberate job search strategies (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic, & Nauta, 2010; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). However, we still have limited knowledge on job search – related antecedents of employment quality (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, 2012), and how this process unfolds over time.

Here, we focus on indicators of employment quality related to individuals' health, as well as attitudes and beliefs about their job. That is, we include as outcomes (1) stress, (2) work engagement, (3) person-job fit, and (4) perceived overqualification. Perceived stress is a subjective assessment of stress, referring to the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as

stressful. Its relevance builds on the assumed centrality of cognitive appraisal processes, where stressor events are expected to occur when a certain situation is appraised as demanding and simultaneously insufficient resources are available to cope with it. Perceived global stress has been shown to be related to a number of well-being indicators, such as social anxiety, depressive symptomatology, and physical symptomatology (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Work engagement instead refers to the ability to deal well with one's work-related demands, and captures a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2006). That is, it refers to a state of high energy, involvement, and full concentration in the job, which has shown to be negatively related to burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Person-job (PJ) fit and overqualification refer to workers' perceived cognitive assessment of fit with their own jobs. While person-job fit focuses on general judgments of congruence between employees' skills and job's demands, as well as between employees' needs and rewards they receive in return (Cable & DeRue, 2002), overqualification explicitly focuses on perceptions of having more education, experience, knowledge skills, or abilities than required by the job. We focus on these four outcomes as a proxy of quality of employment, in that they allow us to capture both positively and negatively valenced variables related to wellbeing at work, and perceived match with the job.

2.2.2 Job Search as a Self-Regulatory Process

The job search process has been conceptualized as a pattern of self-regulatory goal-directed behaviors, which begins with the perceptions of a discrepancy between the current situation and the desired situation (i.e., current and desired employment status) and hence the identification of and commitment to achieving an employment goal (Kanfer et al., 2001). Such discrepancy triggers

a series of purposive and volitional actions aimed at reaching the employment goal, which implies the investment of personal resources (e.g., time, effort, social support) in looking for a job. While doing so, job seekers continuously assess their progress, by using feedback from the environment to adjust their strategies, effort, and distance from the goal, thus making the job search process a highly dynamic one. Over time, this process is characterized by a considerable level of autonomy, which requires the job seekers not only to undertake a series of actions aimed at pursuing the specific goal of searching for a job, but also to self-organize, evaluate themselves, and manage their emotions. All in all, the self-regulatory conceptualization of the job search process highlights the relevance of both the behaviors enacted towards the achievement of a goal (i.e., job search behaviors), and the self-evaluations of individuals throughout this process (i.e., JSSE).

Job search behaviors have been conceptualized and operationalized in multiple ways, focusing on different aspects, such as job information sources, job search intensity, effort, assertive-job seeking behaviors, and networking intensity (Saks, 2005). Job information sources can be either formal (i.e., the use of public intermediaries such as employment agencies) or informal (i.e., the use of private intermediaries such as acquaintances), depending on how job seekers learned about different job opportunities. Job search intensity and effort are aimed at capturing the extent to which individuals engage in a series of activities, with the first one measuring the frequency with which certain specific behaviors are carried out, and the latter one referring to the amount of time and effort devoted to the job search. Assertive job-seeking behaviors instead is a more specific and less frequently used measure of job search (Saks, 2005), which focuses on behaviors such as making follow-up calls to learn about the status of a job application or to arrange meetings, and which refers to the individuals' ability to identify their rights and choices in this process. Finally, networking intensity explicitly captures the individual's

frequency and thoroughness of using networking (i.e., contacting friends, acquaintances or other people) as a job search strategy, and it has shown to be related to reemployment, even though not above and beyond general job search intensity (Wanberg et al., 2000). Overall, most studies focus on a general measure of intensity and/or effort in the job search to capture the amount of time or effort job seekers devote to job search activities (Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2018). Research shows that job search intensity and effort are positively related to employment status, the number of job interviews and job offers, and the speed of employment (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005).

Self-efficacy is the most frequently studied construct in the self-regulation domain (Vancouver & Day, 2005). Self-efficacious individuals are thought to perform better in that they set more difficult goals for themselves, exert more effort in pursuing them, and show persistence (Bandura, 1997). In the context of job search, JSSE is a cognitive-motivational variable which refers to the job seekers' belief that they can successfully perform job search behaviors and obtain employment (Saks, 2005). Self-efficacy is the product of a self-evaluation process, where individuals can have different levels of confidence in their ability to have an impact on the attainment of a specific goal, here the job search and/or employment success. Despite the wide consensus on the relevance of such self-evaluations in the job search process, there is little consistency on how to measure JSSE, in terms of item content, number of items, and scale reliability (Saks et al., 2015). Some even argue that differences in measurement were responsible for contrasting results found around the outcomes of JSSE in the job search literature (Wanberg et al., 2010). Recent work therefore pointed at the need of distinguishing between two different types of JSSE: (1) job search self-efficacy behavior (JSSE-B) and (2) job search self-efficacy outcomes (JSSE-O) (Saks et al., 2015). While JSSE-B refers to the belief or confidence that one can successfully perform specific job search behaviors (e.g., plan and organize a weekly job search

schedule), JSSE-O refers to the belief or confidence that one can successfully obtain job search outcomes (e.g., obtain good job offers) (Saks et al., 2015). Given the aim of this study to focus on employment quality, here we include JSSE-O and not JSSE-B, following the indication of Saks and colleagues (Saks et al., 2015) that studies focused on predicting job search behaviors should use measures of JSSE-B and studies focused on predicting job search outcomes (such as the present one) should use measures of JSSE-O. Using JSSE-B to predict job search outcomes would result in a mismatch, in that it would imply using a measure of self-efficacy that does not correspond to the performance domain being predicted.

JSSE was found to be positively related to employment status, number of job offers, and speed of employment (Kanfer et al., 2001). A recent study found JSSE-B to be more strongly related to job search intensity and job search behaviors than to the number of job offers, whereas JSSE-O showed the opposite pattern, being more strongly related to the number of job offers than to job search intensity and job search behaviors (Saks et al., 2015). The question whether JSSE-O could be crucial in achieving also another job search outcome (i.e., employment quality), naturally follows.

2.2.3 The Relationship between Self-Regulatory Job Search and Employment Quality

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, there is limited evidence on whether and how job search behaviors and JSSE predict the quality of employment. The available evidence shows for example that the use of formal job information sources was positively related to individual's perceptions of PJ fit, which in turn were positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment and negatively related to turnover intention and stress symptoms (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Also, career planning was found to be positively related to pre-entry PJ fit perceptions, which in turn was positively related to an overall score of employment quality including job

satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational identification, and intentions to quit (Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Therefore, even though there seems to be some indication of the relevance of JSSE and job search behaviors for the employment quality of job seekers, empirical evidence supporting this relation is still limited and somewhat conflicting. Hence, here we are interested in examining how the dynamic job search self-regulatory process predicts distal employment status as well as distal employment quality of job seekers. In doing so, we build on (1) theoretical considerations around how beliefs and actions relate to each other in the job search process, and (2) the role of time in predicting such distal outcomes.

Generally speaking, the relationship between JSSE and job search effort can be conceptualized in different directions building on two main theories: social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) and control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981). Social cognitive theory emphasizes the agentic side of self-efficacy, proposing that self-efficacious individuals tend to engage in a discrepancy *creation* mechanism, where they set goals for themselves that are higher than the status quo (e.g., current employment status or previous performance level). As a consequence, they exert more effort into pursuing those goals, and are more capable of persisting after setbacks or failures (Bandura, 2012). According to social cognitive theory therefore, self-efficacy is expected to have a positive relationship with both performance and persistence, which has received some empirical support in the job search literature (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005). In contrast, control theory proposes that highly self-efficacious individuals are driven by a discrepancy *reduction* tendency, where their confidence in being able to reach a certain goal translates into higher optimism regarding the favorability of the current state. Thus, individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to anticipate a lower level of resources needed to reach a certain goal, and self-regulate by exerting less intensity and effort into pursuing that specific goal (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Liu et

al., 2014). Therefore, according to control theory, there is a negative relationship between self-efficacy and subsequent behavioral effort and job search performance, which has received some empirical support as well (Vancouver, Thompson, & Williams, 2001).

Furthermore, the relevance of time is well-established in drawing conclusions around the job search process (Kanfer et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2013). The continuous assessment, self-evaluation, and processing of environmental feedback implied in such self-regulatory process make time-related dynamics crucial in understanding the importance of job search behaviors and JSSE for the employment attainment and employment quality of job seekers. Individuals' job search behaviors and beliefs unfold over a period of time, and as such they may increase, decrease or remain stable (Sun et al., 2013). The development of these behaviors and beliefs over time could thus be viewed as self-regulatory strategies themselves, where job seekers increase or decrease their effort according to personal characteristics or in response to certain events. Because of this, the number of studies investigating within- and between-person variations in this field is steadily increasing. Indeed, studies have shown inconsistent relationships of self-efficacy with a number of outcomes depending on the time horizon adopted in the research design; that is, in cross-sectional designs such relationships were stronger than in longitudinal designs (Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2019). Therefore, we adopt a longitudinal design where we track the development of JSSE-O and job search behaviors across three measurement points, and relate it to distal outcomes measured at a fourth point in time.

Different time spans may track different dynamics, depending on the aim of the study. For example, previous research interested in capturing immediate affective and behavioral reactions to perceived job search progress adopted a daily (Wanberg et al., 2010), semiweekly (Liu et al., 2014), or bi-weekly (Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2018) design for up to ten weeks. Their slightly

different results pointed at the relevance of the time lag choice. Da Motta Veiga and Turban (2018) for example, argued that in a short temporal focus individuals tend to perceive their actions in terms of progress made towards goal accomplishment (thus maintaining or reducing their effort), whereas in a long term temporal focus they tend to think about the commitment toward the goal (thus increasing their effort). Here, we are interested in investigating how the development of job search behaviors and of JSSE-O impact distal outcomes related to the quality of employment. Hence, we opted for a wider monthly time span (i.e., three measurements across six months) rather than a more intensive daily or weekly assessment, in order to capture dynamics in behaviors and self-confidence in reaching employment outcomes over a longer period of time. Furthermore, because of the focus of this paper on predicting distal outcomes such as employment quality, we expect that the mechanisms described by social cognitive theory might be more appropriate in capturing the broader self-regulatory job search process of college students during the last few months before their entry in the labor market. That is, being characterized by an increasing level of JSSE-O and job search behaviors is expected to have a beneficial effect on the job seekers, leading them to self-regulate, perform and persist in the pursue of their employment goal(s).

Thus, a positive change in both JSSE-O and job search behaviors across such a relatively wide time span is likely to be the expression of a self-regulatory virtuous job search process as described by social cognitive theory, therefore associated not only with a higher likelihood of employment attainment, but also higher employment quality. Furthermore, given that we focus on the six months preceding the graduation of MSc students, we do not have expectations regarding the impact of the baseline level of job search behaviors on the distal outcomes. The growth in job search behaviors instead is expected to be associated to an increased likelihood of finding employment and finding a higher quality employment.

Hypothesis 1. There is a positive relationship between the increase in job search behaviors and employment status, work engagement, person-job fit, and a negative relationship with overqualification and stress.

On the other hand, we do expect a positive effect of both the baseline level as well as the increase in JSSE-O on the distal outcomes we study. That is, a high initial level of JSSE-O, even though assessed six months before the entry in the labor market, is expected to be beneficial for the job seekers, in that it captures the preliminary level of confidence in successfully obtaining employment. Also, similarly to what we expect for job search behaviors, its positive growth over time can represent a virtuous self-regulatory job search process.

Hypothesis 2a. There is a positive relationship between the intercept of JSSE-O and employment status, work engagement, person-job fit, and a negative relationship with overqualification and stress.

Hypothesis 2b. There is a positive relationship between the intercept of JSSE-O and employment status, work engagement, person-job fit, and a negative relationship with overqualification and stress.

2.3 Method

2.3.1 Sample and Procedure

This study relies on primary data collected among two cohorts of students who enrolled in 2015 (cohort 1) and in 2016 (cohort 2) to the Master degree (MSc) in Business Administration (BA) in a University in The Netherlands. Students were invited to voluntarily participate in this longitudinal study during the second semester of their final year, by means of a link to the first survey shared and/or paper questionnaires distributed during the classes of courses which took place 6 months before the end of the MSc program. Prospective participants were informed that

they would complete three questionnaires at 2-month intervals (Time 1 [T1], Time 2 [T2], and Time 3 [T3]), and one questionnaire 3 months after the end of the MSc program (Time 4 [T4]). In order to increase the response rate, different incentives were administered across the two cohorts. The participants of the first cohort were offered a number of raffles of vouchers for a Dutch shopping website in each wave of data collection. The participants of the second cohort who filled in all the 4 waves of data collection were compensated with 40 euros each. Because of the different incentives used, the procedure of invitation to the four waves slightly differed across the two cohorts. In the first cohort of data collection we invited all the participants who were eligible for being part to the study (i.e., the students enrolled to the MSc in BA in the current academic year) both in T1 and T2, whereas invitations with the links of the surveys of T3 and T4 were sent via email to all those who participated to the first two waves. In the second cohort of data collection instead, we invited all the eligible participants (using the same eligibility criteria) in T1; all the participants of T1 were subsequently sent an invitation via email to participate to T2, T3, and T4. In all data collection time points a cover letter accompanied the questionnaires, explaining the general aim of the study and ensuring the students that participation to the study was entirely voluntary and that the data collected would be treated as strictly confidential. Two weeks after the link to each questionnaire was sent to the students' personal email addresses they provided in T1, a follow-up link was sent to individuals who had not participated reminding them of the aim of the study. All the questionnaires were coded according to the wave and cohort of data collection, and the individual data was matched across the 4 different time points by means of their personal email address.

Of the 442 students invited in the first cohort, 177 responded to the questionnaire at T1 (40.0%), 187 responded at T2 (42.3%), 86 responded at T3 (19.5%), and 95 responded at T4

(21.5%). Of the 171 students invited in the second cohort, 110 responded to the questionnaire at T1 (64.3%), 63 responded at T2 (36.8%), 55 responded at T3 (32.2%), and 56 responded at T4 (32.7%). Overall, across the two cohorts we invited 613 students, of which 365 (59.5%) participated to at least one wave of data collection. Of the students who filled in at least one questionnaire of this study, 219 (60%) participated to two waves, 149 (40.8%) to three waves, and 94 (25.8%) to all four waves of data collection of this study. Because of the amount and different patterns of missing data, we restricted the analyses to all the participants who completed at least two time points across the four waves of data collection, thus yielding to a final sample size of $N = 219$ for our analyses. In order to determine whether this selection, as well as attrition, produced any detectable difference in the variables of interest for this study, we conducted two one-way ANOVAs, by examining whether the scores in JSSE-O as well as job search behaviors measured at T1 would differ between the participants who completed any 2 measurement points and those who completed only one. Both univariate analyses of variance were not significant, $F(1,283) = 0.934, p = 0.335$, and $F(1,283) = .000, p = 0.985$, respectively. Thus, the sample selection did not appear to create bias on the primary variables of interest.

In the study sample, 136 participants were females (63%), and 80 males (37%), with an average age of 24.64 years ($SD = 1.79$). 69.3% of the participants indicated to have a Dutch nationality, the rest of the sample indicated their nationality to belong to 20 different countries, with no more than 6 participants per country (e.g., Romania, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Germany, Spain, Greece, Mexico), thus mirroring the heterogeneity of cultural backgrounds of the students in the MSc program.

2.3.2 Measures

All questionnaires were administered in English. Unless otherwise stated, all items were

measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”, 5 = “strongly agree”).

JSSE-O was measured at T1, T2, and T3 with the 10-item subscale referring to the job search outcomes dimension of the job search self-efficacy scale developed by Saks and colleagues (Saks et al., 2015). Participants were asked to indicate how confident they were that by the end of the current year they would achieve different job search results on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = “not at all confident” to 5 = “totally confident” (e.g., “*Get a job offer in an organization that you want to work in*”). The reliability of this scale is high across the three time points ($\alpha_1 = 0.93$; $\alpha_2 = 0.94$; $\alpha_3 = 0.95$).

Job search behaviors was measured at T1, T2, and T3 with 8 items adapted from the active job search behaviors scale (Blau, 1994) and the job search behaviors scale (Holmstrom, Russell, & Clare, 2015). Participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they carried out a list of behaviors during the past two months, on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = “never (0 times)”, to 5 = “very frequently (more than 10 times)” (e.g., “*Filled out a job application*” or “*Visited networking sites such as LinkedIn to help network for potential job openings*”). The reliability of this scale is adequate across the three time points ($\alpha_1 = 0.84$; $\alpha_2 = 0.86$; $\alpha_3 = 0.88$).

Perceived stress was measured at T4 with a reduced 10-item version of the perceived stress scale (Cohen et al., 1983). Participants were asked to indicate how often they felt or thought in a certain way, on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = “never”, to 5 = “very often” (e.g., “*In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”*”). The reliability of this scale is adequate ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Employment status was measured at T4 with one item “*At this moment in time, have you already accepted a job offer*” (0=No; 1=Yes) (Saks, 2005). The following measures referring to different indicators of participants’ employment quality were asked in the same questionnaire at

T4, and only to those who answered “Yes” to this question.

Work engagement was measured with the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Participants were asked to indicate whether they ever feel in certain ways about their jobs, on a 6-points scale ranging from 0 = “Never” to 5 = “Always” (e.g., “*When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work*”). The reliability of this scale is adequate ($\alpha = 0.93$).

Person-Job fit was measured with the 6-item scale that includes both needs-supply fit and demands-abilities fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the subsequent items referring to their jobs (e.g., “*There is a good fit between what my job offers me and what I am looking for in a job*”). The reliability of this scale is adequate ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Perceived overqualification was measured with 9-item scale of perceived overqualification (SPOQ) (Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard, 2006). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with the subsequent items referring to their jobs (e.g., “*My education level is above the education level required for my job*”). The reliability of this scale is adequate ($\alpha = 0.92$).

In our analyses, we controlled for gender (1 = Male; 2 = Female), age (year of birth), and year of enrolment (“*Did you enroll in the Master Programme at the Amsterdam Business School in the current academic year?*”, 1=Yes; 2=No) as a proximal indicator of GPA, as these control variables are generally included in studies on job search processes of college students (Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2018; Sun et al., 2013).

Measurement invariance. We conducted measurement invariance test in order to ensure that the factorial structure, as well as the factor loadings and intercepts would be equivalent across the three time points for both JSSE-O’s and job search behaviors’ items. Given the number of

items used to measure JSSE-O and job search behaviors, and the fact that they were measured in three points in time, we firstly computed parcels of those items, by adopting the balancing approach described by Little and colleagues (Little, Rhemtulla, Gibson, & Schoemann, 2013). We therefore paired, within each scale, the item with the highest item-scale correlation with the item with the lowest item-scale correlation to form the first parcel, the next highest with the next lowest to form the second parcel, etcetera. We evaluated the different measurement model solutions in terms of fit with the observed data using different indices, namely: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). We considered the configural, weak, and strong invariance tests² passed when the change in CFI would not exceed .002 (Meade, Johnson, & Braddy, 2008), which is stricter than the .01 threshold also often adopted in literature (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Table 1 presents the results of the measurement invariance test, for the parcels measuring job search and JSSE-O respectively. In addition to exhibiting high fit indices, the solutions including the invariance constraints do not imply a change in CFI bigger than 0.002, thus indicating that in this study the assumption of invariance is tenable for both constructs measured at T1, T2, and T3.

Table 1. Results of Measurement Invariance Test for Job Search and JSSE-O

	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI	Δ CFI	Δ TLI
Job Search Configural	83.040	39	<0.001	0.072	0.054	0.964	0.939		
Job Search Weak	86.177	45	<0.001	0.065	0.061	0.966	0.951	-0.002	-0.012
Job Search Strong	95.202	53	<0.001	0.060	0.069	0.966	0.957	0.000	-0.006
JSSE-O Configural	102.900	72	0.010	0.044	0.044	0.987	0.982		
JSSE-O Weak	110.780	80	0.013	0.042	0.055	0.987	0.984	0.000	-0.002
JSSE-O Strong	121.264	90	0.016	0.040	0.057	0.987	0.985	0.000	-0.001

² Measurement invariance is a prerequisite of LGM, and in this context it refers to whether the characteristics of measurements remains unchanged across multiple measurement time points. Configural (or structural) invariance holds when the nature of the construct operationalized remains unchanged (i.e., the factorial structure) across time. Weak (or metric) invariance refers to the equivalence of factor loadings across measurement times. Strong (or scalar) invariance refers to the equivalence of indicator intercepts across measurement times.

2.3.3 Analytical Strategy

All analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS v.25 and MPlus v.7.31. Once we established measurement invariance, we proceeded in our analyses by testing a series of latent growth models (LGM) with maximum likelihood estimation, by simultaneously modeling two latent intercepts (one for JSSE-O and one for job search behaviors), and two latent linear slopes (one for JSSE-O and one for job search behaviors). The factor loadings of both latent intercepts were fixed at 1.0 as part of the growth model parameterization, and the factor loadings of the latent slopes were fixed at 0.0, 2.0, and 4.0 for the variables measured at T1, T2, and T3 respectively, in order to mirror the number of months corresponding to the different time lags between the measurement points. Six LGM were tested, including an empty model, and five models where we added the time-invariant covariates (i.e., age, gender, enroll) as well as each one of the distal outcomes separately (i.e., employment status, stress, work engagement, overqualification, and person-job fit). Missing data were handled by using the expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm, which optimizes the complete-data loglikelihood (Muthén & Muthén, 2009). The goodness-of-fit of all estimated LGM were evaluated by examining the RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and SRMR.

2.4 Results

Table 2 presents the zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics of the study variables. All correlations were in the expected direction, and all variables showed strong reliabilities, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.84 to 0.95. Both job search behaviors and JSSE-O increased from T1 to T2, and from T2 to T3.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations among the Study Variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	24.64	1.79	(-)													
2. Gender	1.63	0.48	-0.18**	(-)												
3. Enroll	1.10	0.31	0.01	0.03	(-)											
4. Job Search T1	2.18	0.73	0.02	-0.03	0.07	(-0.84)										
5. Job Search T2	2.46	0.83	0.00	0.10	-0.03	0.48**	(-0.86)									
6. Job Search T3	2.64	0.91	-0.07	0.06	-0.18	0.32**	0.64**	(-0.88)								
7. JSSE-O T1	3.15	0.75	0.07	-0.27**	0.01	0.09	0.08	-0.03	(-0.93)							
8. JSSE-O T2	3.25	0.82	0.03	-0.11	-0.01	0.04	0.16*	0.08	0.61**	(-0.94)						
9. JSSE-O T3	3.31	0.86	-0.10	-0.19	0.02	0.23*	0.25*	0.13	0.45**	0.65**	(-0.95)					
10. Employment Status	0.53	0.50	-0.14	0.10	-0.16	0.12	0.15	0.20	0.25**	0.16	0.12	(-)				
11. Stress	2.53	0.69	0.17*	0.05	0.04	-0.04	0.08	0.29*	-0.31**	-0.38**	-0.32**	-0.33**	(-0.88)			
12. Work Engagement	4.46	0.81	0.10	0.06	0.17	0.06	-0.14	-0.19	0.21	0.25*	0.18	†	-0.41**	(-0.93)		
13. Overqualification	3.17	0.92	-0.10	-0.02	0.03	0.06	-0.15	-0.06	-0.34**	-0.09	-0.39*	†	-0.08	-0.48**	(-0.92)	
14. Person-Job Fit	3.69	0.89	0.03	-0.02	0.04	-0.06	-0.01	-0.13	0.25*	0.22	0.53**	†	-0.28*	0.69**	-0.68**	(-0.92)

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. † cannot be computed because "Employment Status" is constant. Alphas are in parentheses.

The aim of this study was to examine whether the intercept and growth factors of job search and JSSE-O measured during the last six months of university studies would predict the employment status of college graduates three months after graduation, as well as their stress, work engagement, person-job fit, and overqualification. We present the results of six latent growth models, where the first one corresponds to the unconditional model including only job search and JSSE-O parcels at three time points and related level and growth factors, and the second to the sixth models include three time-invariant covariates (i.e., age, gender, and year of enrolment to the MSc program) and one manifest distal outcome variable per model (i.e., employment status, stress, work-engagement, overqualification, and person-job fit).

Table 3. Model Fit Indices of Latent Growth Models

	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	AIC	BIC	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Unconditional model	9.462	7	0.221	2088.496	2156.278	0.040	0.039	0.989	0.976
Employment status	33.078	27	0.195	2170.503	2267.152	0.033	0.054	0.973	0.958
Stress	33.473	27	0.182	2239.329	2335.977	0.034	0.057	0.973	0.957
Work engagement	30.234	27	0.304	2151.301	2247.95	0.024	0.056	0.985	0.976
Overqualification	35.191	27	0.134	2167.438	2264.087	0.038	0.062	0.962	0.941
Person-Job fit	33.674	27	0.176	2166.265	2262.914	0.035	0.057	0.969	0.952

The fit indices of all six growth models (see Table 3) are excellent. In the unconditional model, both job search behaviors and JSSE-O had a significant latent intercept mean ($\text{mean}_{\text{search}} = 2.19, p < .01$; $\text{mean}_{\text{jsse-o}} = 3.16, p < .01$), thus indicating that the average score at T1 was significantly different from zero, as well as a significant variance around it ($\text{variance}_{\text{search}} = .31, p < .01$; $\text{variance}_{\text{jsse-o}} = .50, p < .01$), thus indicating variance in our sample around the average score at T1. Furthermore, the latent linear growth factors of both job search behaviors and JSSE-O had a significant mean ($\text{mean}_{\text{search}} = .13, p < .01$; $\text{mean}_{\text{jsse-o}} = .06, p < .01$), indicating a linear significant increase in both job search behaviors and JSSE-O across the three measurement points. Moreover, there seemed to be variance across students in their rates of variance of the latent growth factor of both job search and JSSE-O ($\text{variance}_{\text{search}} = .03, p < .05$; $\text{variance}_{\text{jsse-o}} = .04, p < .01$). Finally, the only significant correlation among the latent intercepts and means of

job search and JSSE-O was the one between the intercept and slope of JSSE-O (-.06, $p < .05$), thus suggesting that a higher initial level in JSSE-O seemed to be negatively related to its increase.

Table 4 presents the results of the five latent growth models including the time-invariant covariates and distal outcomes. Employment status seems to be positively affected only by the intercept of JSSE-O ($b = .21, p < .01$), whereas the level of stress is positively related to the slope of job search ($b = 1.35, p < .01$), and negatively related to both the intercept ($b = -.44, p < .01$) and slope ($b = -1.02, p < .05$) of JSSE-O. Furthermore, the intercept of JSSE-O seems to increase work engagement ($b = .56, p < .05$), and person-job fit ($b = .75, p < .01$), and decrease overqualification ($b = -.78, p < .01$). Finally, the slope of JSSE-O seems to increase person-job fit ($b = 2.10, p < .01$). As indicated by the R^2 values reported in Table 4, approximately 21% of variance of employment status, 34% of stress, 31% of work engagement, 35% of overqualification and 33% of person-job fit are accounted for by our models. Overall, concerning the growth factors of job search behaviors, the results provide no support for hypothesis 1, with only stress being positively rather than negatively related to the job search behaviors slope. The intercept of JSSE-O instead was related to all the outcomes under examination, thus fully supporting hypothesis 2a, whereas the slope of JSSE-O was related only to stress and person-job fit, thus providing partial support for hypothesis 2b.

Table 4. Results of Latent Growth Models

	Employment Status	Stress	Work Engagement	Overqualification	Person-Job Fit
Age	-0.02(.02)	0.07(.03)**	0.03(.06)	-0.06(.06)	0.04(.06)
Gender	0.15(.08)	-0.04(.11)	0.18(.19)	0.02(.21)	-0.03(.20)
Enroll	-0.20(.12)	0.13(.16)	0.62(.34)	-0.06(.37)	0.29(.36)
Intercept Job Search	0.18(.11)	0.16(.16)	-0.11(.27)	0.06(.32)	-0.24(.29)
Slope Job Search	0.50(.35)	1.35(.5)**	-1.01(.95)	-1.65(1.19)	0.37(1.10)
Intercept JSSE-O	0.21(.08)**	-0.44(.11)**	0.56(.22)*	-0.78(.22)**	0.75(.22)**
Slope JSSE-O	-0.17(.33)	-1.02(.49)*	0.49(.79)	-1.33(.78)	2.19(.81)**
R-square	0.21(.08)**	0.34(.10)**	0.31(.12)*	0.35(.16)*	0.33(.15)*

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Unstandardized coefficients are presented. Standard errors are in parentheses.

2.5 Discussion

In this study, we examined the development over time of job search behaviors and self-efficacy beliefs of new college graduates. By applying a self-regulatory approach to the job search process (Kanfer et al., 2001), we related the development of job search behaviors as well as JSSE-O over the last six months of students' MSc program to their employment attainment and employment quality three months after graduation. The results partially supported our hypotheses. Both job search behaviors and JSSE-O increased over the considered time span. Their development however had a different impact on the distal outcomes under examination. Contrary to our expectations, the increase in job search behaviors was related only to higher perceived stress three months later. JSSE-O instead, was relevant both in terms of its baseline level (which was related to increased chances of finding a job, lower levels of stress and overqualification, and higher levels of work engagement and PJ fit) and of its positive growth (which was related to lower stress and higher PJ fit). The behavioral and motivational dynamics involved in the job search process therefore seem to be not only relevant for finding a job, but also, if not more so, for finding a job which fits and matches the job seeker.

The first finding which stands out from our results is the rather prominent role of JSSE-O compared to job search behaviors in predicting both employment attainment and employment quality. A possible reason why JSSE could be more relevant in terms of job search success beyond the actual effort implemented during the process of looking for a job might be related to the affective connotation of the self-regulation implied in the job search. According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs are supposed to have beneficial effects in the related performance domain by influencing both goal setting and goal monitoring processes. That is, there is a relevant affective component in the self-regulatory search for a job, where individuals with higher levels of JSSE are more likely to persist in difficult tasks they deem of value, and therefore react better to failures or setbacks (Kanfer et al., 2001). The buffering role of a

different type of JSSE in this process was supported by recent meta-analytic results, where JSSE-B showed stronger relations with psychological outcomes such as life satisfaction and anxiety, than with tangible employment attainment outcomes (Kim et al., 2019).

Furthermore, our results suggest the particularly beneficial effect of the intercept of JSSE-O, compared to its slope. That is, the intercept of JSSE-O is related to all outcomes we considered, including employment attainment, whereas its slope is related to two indicators of employment quality (i.e., reduced stress and higher PJ fit) and not to employment attainment. This seems to indicate that one's score at the beginning of the job search process might be even more important than one's development of JSSE-O during the process itself. This might be partially in line with recent evidence on the beneficial effect of between-person chronic employment self-efficacy compared to the negative effect of within-person transient employment self-efficacy (Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2018). If we take into account the negative association between the latent intercept and latent slope of JSSE-O (which could be interpreted in terms of a ceiling effect), this finding becomes even more relevant.

Job search behaviors however, were found not to be related to most of the distal outcomes included in the present study. The previously established relationship between job search behaviors and employment attainment (Kanfer et al., 2001) has already been questioned, with mixed results indicating that this relationship might not be as direct as it had been suggested by previous literature. Saks (2006) for example, highlighted the sequential unfolding steps involved in the job search process, where job search behaviors influence job search interviews, which influence the number of job offers, which eventually influence employment status. Saks therefore argued that being invited for job interviews might be the most proximal criterion of success for job search behaviors, whereas employment attainment might be a more distal success criterion. A similar reasoning might apply to the lack of support of the job search behavior - employment quality relationship (here: work engagement, overqualification, and

person-job fit). On the basis of a conceptualization of the job search process as a virtuous self-regulatory one where job seekers continuously manage their effort and monitor their progress towards achieving their goal, we expected that the increase over time in job search behaviors would be associated with a higher likelihood of obtaining an employment of high quality. Our results however do not support this hypothesis. A possible explanation could be that this relationship might be an indirect one (as mentioned above) or a conditional one, with the presence of certain moderating factors. For example, in previous work, financial hardship was found to moderate the relationship between job search intensity and job improvement, such that this relationship was present for job seekers with low economic hardship, and absent for those with high economic hardship (Wanberg et al., 2002).

Notably however, the only distal effect of a linear increase in job search behavior over time detected in the present study was an increase rather than a decrease in perceived stress, hence pointing at a rather cumulative negative effect which prolonged and growing job search might have on job seekers (Wanberg, 2012). Indeed, the length of unemployment and therefore of the job search process has been shown to be related to the magnitude of the effect of unemployment on job seekers' well-being and mental health, arguably because of cumulative stress or anxiety factors (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). In our study, the linear increase in JSSE-O had the opposite effect on the distal level of stress, being associated with its decrease. The contrasting influences of these variables on stress found in this study are surprising, pointing not only at the different instrumental value of increasing behaviors or JSSE-O beliefs, but also at their opposite affective ramifications, with the first triggering stress, and the second reducing it.

Finally, here the development (i.e., slope) over time of JSSE-O was not related to the development of job search behaviors, thus contributing to the debate on whether the relationship between JSSE and job search behaviors is positive, negative, or null. Here we explicitly focused

on self-efficacy beliefs with job search outcomes (i.e., JSSE-O) and not with behaviors (i.e., JSSE-B), a distinction which has already been suggested to help explain contrasting results for this relationship (Wanberg et al., 2010). Our results indeed suggest that (the development in) JSSE-O is related to job search outcomes rather than job search behaviors.

2.5.1 Theoretical Implications

Despite the considerable body of empirical research on the job search process, a number of issues of both theoretical and methodological nature limited our understanding of the self-regulatory dynamics implied in this process, thus making the contribution of the present study to this literature threefold. First, the necessity of expanding the criterion space defining what constitutes job search success has been partially overlooked in the literature to date, with the majority of studies focusing on predicting only job seekers' employment attainment (Wanberg, 2012). The increased likelihood of finding not only any job, but a sustainable job which matches the needs and qualities of the job seeker should be the criterion against which to evaluate successful self-regulatory behaviors and beliefs. In this study, we found a prominent role of JSSE-O's baseline and growth in increasing this likelihood compared to the more limited role of implementation of actual job search behaviors. This finding contributes to extending our knowledge on the long-term consequences of the increase over time of self-regulatory behaviors and beliefs in the job search process.

Second, the well-established self-regulatory conceptualization of the job search process relies on the assumption that focal constructs are in reciprocal and dynamic relations with each other, hence putting time-related issues at the center of the attention. As confirmed by more recent empirical contributions, research in this area should move beyond the assessment of cross-sectional relations, thus focusing on developmental trajectories of job seekers and related antecedents and outcomes. Here, we did not focus on the relationships between constructs assessed at different points in time, but examined the presence and effect of their development

over time. If we adopt the conceptualization of job search as a self-regulatory process, then its characteristics should be captured over time, and antecedents and outcomes of their development should be investigated. Our results indicated that, even though both job search behaviors and self-efficacy beliefs increase over time, only the latter was relevant in terms of the outcomes under examination. This leads to insights in the consequences of managing and handling the job search process over time, which would not have been possible to obtain when assessing such behaviors and beliefs in a cross-sectional manner.

Third, the contrasting results found in the literature around job search self-efficacy and its relationship with a number of other relevant variables pointed at the importance of the operationalization of this construct. Building on recent scale developments (Saks et al., 2015), we were able to isolate the assessment of self-efficacy beliefs with the employment outcomes, thus preventing any confounding effect that might be due to its conjoint measurement with self-efficacy beliefs with job search behaviors. On the basis of our results, both the baseline and the linear rate of change in this specific type of self-efficacy showed to be related to job seekers' increased chances of employment attainment and employment quality. This, together with the contrasting effects of job search behaviors' development on the considered outcomes, indicates that looking specifically at JSSE-O is relevant for job search success.

2.5.2 Practical Implications

By highlighting the relevance of self-efficacy beliefs (JSSE-O) not only in terms of employment attainment but also in terms of the employment quality reached, this study reiterates the importance of efficacy-enhancing interventions among job seekers. On the basis of our results, we do foster the use of previously developed intervention frameworks aimed at identifying their strengths and weaknesses in terms of skills, motivation, and job search behaviors (Wanberg et al., 2002). Given that both baseline and development were relevant in predicting outcomes, we would suggest that these interventions start as early as possible, for

example during educational programs. The first step of such intervention should be discussing the job search success criteria with the job seeker, to identify his/her priority in terms of what should be the characteristics (if any) the job he/she is looking for should have. Beyond the recommendations on what job search activities to perform, we point at the need for instructions on self-regulation and management of employment goals not only at the beginning of the intervention, but also throughout the job search process itself. After all, as already stated by Sacks (2005, p. 175), “job search is not the only factor that can influence job search success”.

2.5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The current study has several limitations which should be addressed in order to provide boundaries around the conclusions that can be drawn from our study. First, not all constructs considered here were measured on different occasions. Although distal outcomes were assessed later in time than our predictors, JSSE-O and job search behaviors were measured at the same points in time. Their time-specific relationships therefore might be inflated due to common method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012) and should be interpreted with caution. The same applies to the set of distal outcomes included in the present study.

Second, the participants of this study were new college graduates, who were entering the labor market for the first time and therefore constitute only one specific type of job seekers. On the basis of our results it is not possible to draw conclusions about the impact of JSSE-O and job search behavior over time on the employment attainment and quality of other groups such as involuntarily laid-off individuals, or employed job-to-job seekers. The type of sample was a significant moderator in a meta-analysis of the relationship between JSSE-B and job search outcomes (Kim et al., 2019), and was found to be greater for the undergraduate sample compared to the laid-off sample. This might also hold for JSSE-O. Future research should investigate the relevance of the development of these different types of self-efficacy and job search behaviors for one’s employment quality also among laid-off and employed job-to-job

seekers.

Third, our study was conducted in The Netherlands. Even though some of our participants had a different nationality, the majority of the sample was Dutch. The context plays an important role in one's job search process, with meta-analytic results indicating that JSSE-B has a stronger positive relationship with the frequency of job search behaviors in collectivist cultures compared to individualistic cultures (Kim et al., 2019). Indeed, the greater value associated to job security in collectivist countries seems to be associated with higher levels of employees' stress and lower levels of environmental stability (Probst & Lawler, 2006). Future research could replicate our study in different contexts to explore the role of cultural features in the influence of job search dynamics on employment quality.

Fourth, as mentioned above, the length of employment was shown to have an impact on outcome expectations and, in general, on factors related to the job search process. According to social cognitive theory for example, the slower the perceived goal progress, the lower can be individuals' self-efficacy beliefs. Future research could therefore consider studying a sample more diversified in terms of length of their employment and explore its role in setting conditions under which JSSE-O and job search behaviors can affect one's employment attainment and employment quality.

Fifth, more research is needed around the relationship between job search development and employment quality outcomes. Possible mediators or moderators might play a role in this, by either fully mediating or setting conditions under which increasing one's effort in searching for a job is differentially related to one's chances of not only obtaining job interviews/offers, but also of obtaining a job which actually matches one's needs and abilities. Particularly interesting is the finding of the positive relationship between the increase in job search behaviors and stress, pointing at the affective ramifications of the job search process. Intervention studies might thus consider investigating the potential buffering consequences of

providing psychological support during this process.

Sixth, future research could consider extending the results of the current study, by identifying dispositional characteristics of job seekers which could account for individual differences around the growth of their job search behaviors and JSSE-O during the process of looking for a job. In our results, even though behaviors and beliefs were characterized by a linear increase over time, they both had significant variance, indicating that the rate of change varied across individuals. Individual variability in agency (e.g., proactive personality) could give account not only for different levels of job search behaviors and JSSE-O, but also for different growth trajectories.

2.6 Conclusions

Overall, the present study aimed at investigating the dynamic characteristics and effects of the self-regulatory process of job search on both employment attainment and employment quality indicators. Results showed that the increasing level of job search behaviors did not correspond to any beneficial effect, thus heightening only the level of stress of job seekers. The positive rate of change in JSSE-O instead, decreased subsequent stress and increased the chances of finding a job which fits the job seeker. Finally, the baseline level of JSSE-O showed to have the greatest relevance in terms of predicting employment quality and employment attainment, by affecting all outcomes considered in this study. Based on these findings, we echo previous literature's call to expand the criterion space of what is considered to be job search success, and to do so by means of sound longitudinal designs and specific constructs' operationalization aimed at disentangling the different self-regulatory dynamics behind the job search process.