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Problem- and emotion-focused coping

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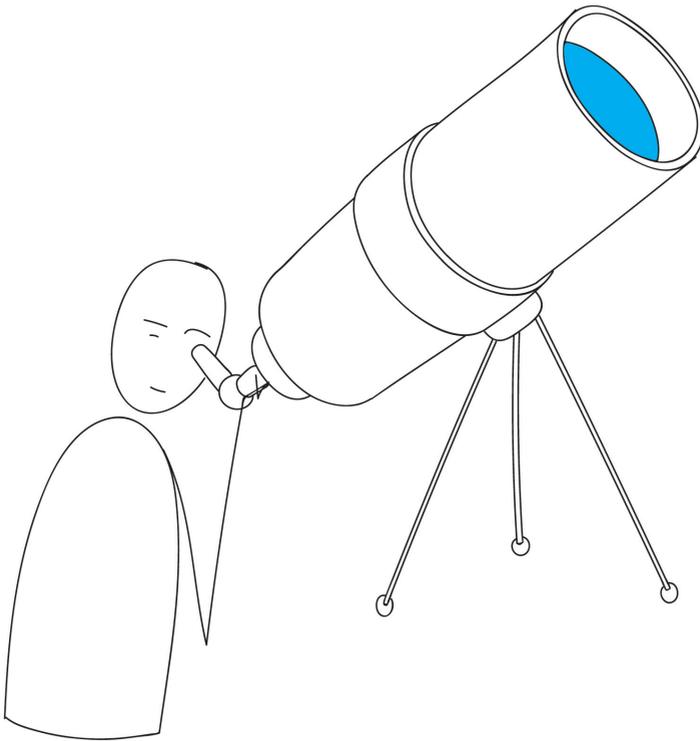
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Chapter 2

If You Want a Job, Don't just Search Hard, Search Systematically:
A Field Study with Career Starters



Abstract

After finishing school, career starters face the challenge of finding a suitable job. Job search is a difficult process because there is no clear pathway to obtaining employment. Furthermore, spending time on job search relates negatively to mental health. In the present study, we aim to uncover a way of searching that increases the chance of obtaining a job. We identify job search systematicity, in addition to job search intensity, as an important dimension of job search behavior that may predict the likelihood of obtaining a job. A highly systematic way of searching indicates an adaptable and persistent approach towards job seeking, while a non-systematic way of searching reflects a more random hit-or-miss job search approach. We explored whether job search systematicity was related to increased chances of finding a job and whether it changed over time. In addition, we explored its predictors (goal clarity, employment commitment, and activating affect). The results of our field study among 217 job seeking career starters using a five-wave correlational design showed that systematic job search increased over time. Furthermore, job search systematicity was positively related to job search success, controlling for job search intensity. Moreover, our study showed that goal clarity, employment commitment, and activating affect were positively associated with job search systematicity. These findings extend theory by broadening the conceptualization of job search, and inform job seeking career starters and employment and career counselors about how to approach the job search process.

Keywords

Job search behavior, job search quality, employment status, goal clarity, goal valence, affect

After finishing school, career starters face the challenge of finding a suitable job. Job search is a difficult process because there is no clear pathway with predetermined steps to obtaining employment, and the job search process is full of obstacles. Especially new labor market entrants are confronted with a challenging paradox. After having just finished their degree they face rejections because they lack work experience. However, the only way to gain work experience is by being hired. Negative job search experiences, such as rejections that job seekers encounter, cause distress (Song et al., 2009). Cumulative research provides compelling evidence of the negative impact of job search on job seeking individuals' physical, mental, and social functioning (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Furthermore, unemployment forms a psychological burden for both unemployed individuals and their families and for society as a whole (Song et al., 2011). It is therefore crucial for career starters to find a job.

One way in which job seekers can increase their chance of finding a job is to allocate more time to their job search. Previous research has generally shown that the more time job seekers engage in job search behavior (e.g., surfing the internet for jobs, having network conversations, visiting temporary employment agencies, writing application letters) the higher the likelihood of obtaining a job (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001). But, even though spending more time on job search is better than spending less time, the explained variance of job search intensity in employment outcomes, such as job offers and employment status, is generally relatively limited (Kanfer et al., 2001). To be able to inform job seekers on how to spend their time effectively to obtain a job, it is therefore important that we learn which other aspects of job search contribute to an increased likelihood of finding a job.

In addition to the time job seekers spend on job search (i.e., job search intensity), extant theory has suggested that other dimensions of job search behavior may also be important in predicting employment outcomes (Kanfer et al., 2001; Stumpf,

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Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983; Van Hooft et al., 2013). Building on this theorizing we identify systematic versus non-systematic job search as an important dimension of job search behavior that may predict the likelihood of finding a job. A systematic way of searching indicates an adaptable and persistent approach towards job seeking, while a non-systematic way reflects a more random hit-or-miss job search approach.

In the current study we had three aims. Given that there is no previous research that assesses job search systematicity, our first interest was to explore whether systematic job search is predictive of the likelihood of finding a job (beyond mere job search intensity). Subsequently, when systematic job search indeed increases the likelihood of finding a job, the development of systematic job search over time and its antecedents are also of interest. Therefore, exploring whether systematic job search is stable or not over time, and exploring antecedents of systematic job search were our second and third aim. Based on recent models and research on job search (Liu, Wang, Liao, & Shi, 2014; Song et al., 2009; Wanberg et al., 2010) we propose that both stable between-individual differences (i.e., job search clarity, financial need, and employment commitment) and more momentary within-individual differences (i.e., different types of affect) are related to systematic job search. To test these propositions, we conducted a field study among higher educated new labor market entrants using a five-wave correlational design, following job seekers every four days over the course of three weeks.

Our study contributes to the job search field by broadening the construct space of job search behavior. Even though the relevance of other dimensions of job search in addition to intensity is recognized by job search scholars (Kanfer et al., 2001; Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic, & Nauta, 2010; Saks, 2005; Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009; Wanberg et al., 2002, 2000), more empirical research is needed to specify these additional dimensions and their possible role in the job search process. By examining the systematicity with which people engage in job search, as well as its antecedents and

outcomes, we aim to extend current theorizing on beneficial job search behaviors. Practically, this knowledge may benefit job seekers and employment and career counsellors in providing direction on how job seekers may spend their time most efficiently to optimize employment outcomes.

Job Search Behavior

Job search behavior can be defined as a dynamic, recursive, self-regulated process in which the goal to find a job drives behavior to reach that goal (Kanfer et al., 2001). Job search behavior entails a broad range of activities (e.g., networking, contacting employment agencies, searching for vacancies, writing motivation letters) and the use of a variety of resources (e.g., time, effort, social resources). Especially the amount of time and effort that people spend on looking for employment (or the number of job search activities that people engage in), conceptualized as job search intensity, have been the focus in most of the empirical research on job search (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2013). Meta-analytic studies report a positive association between job search intensity and the likelihood of obtaining employment (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft, Wanberg, Kanfer, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Basbug, 2015). Although it is encouraging that putting time into job search increases the chance of obtaining employment, meta-analyses have yielded only modest effect sizes. For example, in the Kanfer et al. (2001) meta-analysis job search intensity and effort explained only about 3-10% of the variance in employment outcomes such as job offers (i.e., 5.29-10.89%) and employment status (i.e., 3.24-5.76%). This may in part be explained by the fact that finding a job also depends on a range of non-search factors, such as job seekers' social capital or (re)employment constraints, labor market demands, and hiring discrimination (Wanberg et al., 2002).

Another explanation pertains to the idea that individuals may differ in *how* they spend their job search time. Previous theorizing has distinguished between different dimensions of job search

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behavior other than its intensity. For example, in describing the process of job search several authors make a distinction between systematic and focused job search versus random or fortuitous job search (Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983). Stumpf and colleagues (1983) argued that systematic and focused job search should result in more positive job search outcomes. Further, Kanfer and colleagues (2001) conceptualize job search behavior as referring to a pattern of thinking, affect, and behavior that can be evaluated along three different dimensions: (a) intensity-effort (frequency and effort with which job seekers engage in job search activities), (b) content-direction (the activities job seekers engage in and the quality of these activities), and (c) temporal-persistence (job seekers' persistence and changes over time in search dimensions). These dimensions reflect practical descriptions of searching effectively for a job, which suggest that job seekers who (1) use multiple and diverse search tactics, and (2) persist at the task increase their likelihood of finding a job (Kanfer et al., 2001). Using multiple tactics exemplifies the content-direction dimension, and persistence at the task exemplifies the temporal-persistence dimension of job search behavior. Both dimensions go beyond job search intensity and can be qualified as behaviors that may enhance job search success.

In addition to these perspectives, Van Hooft and colleagues (2013) proposed a model in which they identified and delineated the components of job search quality. Similar to the notion that job search is the outcome of a dynamic, recursive, self-regulated process (Kanfer et al., 2001), they distinguished different cyclical phases which contribute to job search quality (i.e., goal establishment, goal planning, goal striving, and reflection). A high-quality job search process enables job seekers to learn, and adapt their job search activities in such a way that these meet the expectations of those parties at the labor market that make decisions about whom to give jobs to (e.g., recruiters, selecting organizations, hiring managers), hereby increasing the likelihood of getting a job (Van Hooft et al.,

2013). Integrating this perspective with Kanfer et al.'s (2001) content-direction dimension of behavior, high job search quality is characterized by using multiple tactics and assessing which tactics are effective through reflection on one's current job search activities and the progress that is being made towards the job search goals. For example, active feedback-seeking may inform job seekers in adapting their job search behaviors such that these result in greater success (Van Hooft et al., 2013). When considering Kanfer et al.'s (2001) temporal-persistence dimension of job search behavior, high job search quality is characterized by processes involving (sustained) goal-directed behaviors and goal-shielding, which refers to keeping the job search goal accessible and active and shielding it from interference of competing goals (Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010). A high-quality job search process aiming at reaching a goal (i.e., finding employment) requires focus and persistence such that alternative goal pursuits are put aside while striving for the job search goal and temptations that thwart goal progress are avoided. This will allow resources to be available for the pursuit of attaining a job. Building in routines can help freeing resources for the task at hand as routines partly rely on automated behavioral patterns which require less cognitive resources than deliberate self-control (Verplanken, 2006). Building in routines in the job search process may therefore help job seekers to use their resources adaptively and persist at searching for a job (Baay, De Ridder, Eccles, van der Lippe, & van Aken, 2014).

Job Search Systematicity

Integrating these prior theoretical notions, in the current study we conceptualize the systematicity of job search as ranging from a systematic job search to a non-systematic job search. Systematicity of job search can be described in behaviors along the content-direction and the temporal-persistence dimensions of job search behavior. Highly systematic search is characterized by being systematic in (1) being persistent and undistracted from pursuing job

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search, and building in routines in using various search channels, and by being systematic in (2) being adaptive, trying divers search channels, and seeking feedback to improve the effectiveness of job search behavior. Low systematic job search is the opposite of systematic job search and is thus characterized by behaviors that are less persistent and adaptive, or in other words more volatile, fortuitous, or random.

Job search behavior that is adaptive, persistent, and makes use of routines is likely more effective than behavior that is fortuitous and led by distractions. Integrating theory and research on job search behaviors (Kanfer et al., 2001; Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stumpf et al., 1983) and job search quality (Van Hooft et al., 2013) into the concept of systematic job search, we expect that job search systematicity will relate positively to job search outcomes such as finding employment.

In addition, we expect that job search behavior likely changes over time shaped by input that is acquired during the process (Van Hooft et al., 2013). This input can be acquired through personal experience, through observing and talking to others, or through reading about job search in popular literature (e.g., Bolles, 2015). According to a learning based perspective on job search change (Barber et al., 1994), over time job seekers learn more efficient and effective search methods (e.g., building in routines, asking for feedback). These methods will facilitate future job search. We expect that, based on the above, as job seekers go about their job search in an adaptive and persistent manner, the systematicity of their job search will increase over time.

Goal-Related Antecedents of Job Search Systematicity

When systematic job search proves to be effective for finding a job, it is important to uncover the factors that may promote this effective search behavior. Considering the conceptualization of job search as a goal-directed process (Kanfer et al., 2001), goal establishment is necessary to initiate and guide an effective self-regulated job search (Van Hooft et al., 2013). In the present study we

therefore examine two likely goal-related antecedents of systematic job search that pertain to goal establishment: goal clarity and goal valence. In the context of job search there are various possible goals (e.g., staying informed about job alternatives, strengthening your position in negotiations with an employer, creating and staying in touch with a professional network), however, the most common goal is finding employment (Boswell, Boudreau, & Dunford, 2004; Van Hove & Saks, 2008). In the context of this study, we focus on career starters who newly enter the job market and who may regard finding employment as their main goal. Goal clarity (i.e., job search clarity) and goal valence (i.e., employment commitment and financial need) examined in our study pertain to this particular goal.

Goal clarity with regard to finding employment, or job search clarity, is the extent to which job seekers have a clear idea of their job search objectives, for example concerning the type of job they desire (Wanberg et al., 2002). These job search objectives can help steer the search process in the right direction. Without a clear idea about the type of job one is searching for, job seekers will less likely target their applications to those vacancies that match their qualifications. According to goal setting theory, having a clear goal is paramount for successful goal striving behavior (Latham, Mawritz, & Locke, 2018). Indeed, we can infer from empirical findings that job search effectiveness gets undermined by a lack of job search clarity (Côté et al., 2006; Wanberg et al., 2002; Zikic & Saks, 2009).

Considering that we defined systematic search as being adaptive and persistent, a clear goal will facilitate systematic search in two ways. Firstly, clear job search goals allow job seekers to assess the effectiveness of their search tactics better than vague job search goals. The effectiveness is evaluated based on the extent to which one's continuous job search activities contribute to progress that is being made towards the job search goal. Having a better understanding of the effectiveness of job search tactics will likely facilitate behaviors that contribute to the systematicity of the job search. Not having a clear goal, will impair the evaluation process

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because the criterion of this evaluation is vague. This will result in more random search activities and thus lower systematicity of the job search. Secondly, a clear goal makes it easier to distinguish between behavior that is intended to reach that goal and behavior that distracts from the goal. This will facilitate the process of keeping attentional resources available for and focused on the current task pursuit and persistence towards goal attainment, thus enhancing the systematicity of the job search. Without a clear goal, attentional resources may be scattered over various tasks, making it harder to persist at job search. This will result in less focus on search activities and lower systematicity of the job search. Consequently, we expect that job search clarity will positively relate to the systematicity of job search.

In addition to goal clarity, we examined goal valence as goal-related antecedent of job search systematicity. Goal valence refers to the value an individual attributes to a goal. The value job seekers attribute to finding employment may be of an intrinsic (i.e., employment commitment) and/or extrinsic nature (i.e., financial need). Some individuals conceive their work as an essential part of their personal identity. They are intrinsically motivated to work and will have a high employment commitment. Employment commitment is the extent to which work is intrinsically important to an individual (Kanfer et al., 2001). Others may primarily view their work as a means to earn money and are extrinsically motivated to work. When experiencing financial need, these individuals will be motivated to find work (i.e., to earn money). Given our focus on career starters, in the present study financial need refers to the extent to which job seekers would have financial difficulties if they would not find a job in the upcoming months.

Goal and motivation theories describe a positive relation between the value individuals attribute to a goal and whether they perform goal directed behavior. According to motivational theories (Theory of Planned Behavior; Ajzen, 1991; Expectancy-Value Theory; Feather, 1982), goal-directed behavior is guided by motivation, which depends on the value attached to the goal. When a

higher value is attributed to the outcome (e.g., finding a job), the goal becomes more important, which will make job seekers more persistent and less distracted, contributing to the systematicity of job search. Assuming that employment commitment and financial need both exemplify value given to the goal of attaining a job, they will both foster the systematicity of job search. Therefore, we expect that employment commitment and financial need will positively relate to the systematicity of job search.

Next to the relatively stable between-individual differences in goal clarity and goal valence, more momentary within-individual differences such as affect are also important for effectiveness in goal pursuit and self-regulatory behaviors (Carver, 2003; Carver & Scheier, 1990, 1998). Therefore, we also examine affect as a likely antecedent of systematic job search.

Affect as Antecedent of Job Search Systematicity

Job seekers experience many ups (e.g., finding a suitable vacancy, being invited to a job interview, having a nice network conversation) and downs (e.g., receiving a rejection, not hearing back after having send an application) during job search, resulting in a “roller-coaster of emotions” (Wanberg et al., 2010). Affect plays an important role in the job search process (e.g., Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014; Kreemers et al., 2018; Song et al., 2009; Turban et al., 2013, 2009; Wanberg et al., 2010). For example, negative job search experiences such as difficulties and low job search progress relate to an increase in negative affect and a decrease in positive affect (Kreemers et al., 2018). Affect, in turn, impacts job search behavior. For example, Song and colleagues (2009) have shown that distress can lead to an increase in job search intensity. Furthermore, Turban and colleagues (2009) have shown that positive emotions positively relate to motivation control and meta-cognitive activities during job search.

Previous research on affect during job search typically distinguishes between positive and negative affect. However, in

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addition to the hedonic tone of affect (i.e., positive vs. negative), emotion researchers have identified a second component of affect, that is, its activation level (i.e., activating vs. deactivating affect; Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998; Russell, 2003; Yik et al., 2011). Combining the hedonic tone and activation level, we can qualify affect into four categories: negative affect with a high (e.g., feeling tense, angry or distressed) or a low (e.g., feeling disappointed or down) activation level, and positive affect with a high (e.g., feeling energized or enthusiastic) or a low (e.g., feeling at ease, calm or relaxed) activation level (Yik et al., 2011). Given that the job search process is characterized by such a versification of emotions, we chose to specify activation level in addition to hedonic tone.

Research from different fields (Alexander, Hillier, Smith, Tivarus, & Beversdorf, 2007; De Dreu, Baas, & Nijstad, 2008; Dreisbach & Goschke, 2004; Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Rowe, Hirsh, & Anderson, 2007) provides evidence for different cognitive and behavioral responses to different types of affect. For example, Baas and colleagues (2008) showed in their meta-analysis that different levels of affective activation lead to different levels of creative performance (i.e., dual path way to creativity model). For example, creative fluency (number of ideas or insights) and originality are facilitated by activating moods (e.g., happy, fearful, or angry), but not by deactivating moods (e.g., sad or serene). More specifically, when hedonic tone is negative, activating moods facilitate creative performance through increased persistence, while when hedonic tone is positive through increased cognitive flexibility.

Another theoretical perspective pertains to the effects of positive and negative emotions on the mind. According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), positive emotions broaden people's attention, cognition, and action, widening the array of perception, and action present in the mind, while negative emotions shrink these same arrays. Evidence for this idea comes from experiments indicating that

individuals who experienced positive affect show patterns of thought that are flexible, inclusive, integrative, creative, and efficient, and that they accept a broader range of behavioral options and have an increased preference for variety (for an overview see Fredrickson, 2004).

Self-regulatory theory also makes predictions about the role of affect for allocating resources toward reaching goals. The affect-as-information model of control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 2003) holds that people can infer how much effort they need to put in to reach their goal, from how they feel. For example, activating negative affect (e.g., frustration or anger) signals to individuals that their goal is still unfulfilled. The elevated arousal level can be used to mobilize energy for continued goal pursuit (Carver, 2001, 2004; Taylor, 1991). In contrast, deactivating negative affect (e.g., disappointment or sadness), signals to individuals that they endured loss and uncontrollability and it may help to come to terms with the loss. The low arousal levels allow individuals to preserve energy (Carver, 2001, 2004; Streubel & Kunzmann, 2011). Similarly, positive activating affect (e.g., excitement) could mobilize energy for goal pursuit, while positive deactivating affect (e.g., contentment) follows once a goal has been accomplished and resources can be preserved (Carver, 2003).

Based on the above research lines, theoretical perspectives and self-regulation theory, we can develop different expectations for the four different types of affect. Positive activating affect may facilitate the systematicity of job search. The dual pathway to creativity model posits that positive activating affect leads to better creative performance through enhanced cognitive flexibility. Furthermore, according to the broaden-and-build theory positive emotions broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires, eliciting a wider range of thoughts and actions than individuals typically engage (Fredrickson, 2001; e.g., explore, play, and integrate; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). This flexibility and broader range of thoughts and actions will likely aid the creative process of coming up with new job

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search tactics to diversify the job search process. The increased breadth of attention associated with positive activating affect (Rowe et al., 2007) likely also facilitates active feedback seeking, allowing job seekers to be adaptive to expectations of demanding parties on the job market. In addition, according to self-regulatory theory (Carver, 2003), positive activating affect could mobilize the energy to engage in goal pursuit. Therefore, we expect that positive activating affect will positively relate to the systematicity of job search.

Positive deactivating affect (e.g., content), according to the affect-as-information model of control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 2003), is likely a result of having peace with the status quo. It signals that you are well on track and can afford to focus your energy elsewhere (Carver, 2015). Similarly, the dual pathway to creativity theory (De Dreu et al., 2008) advocates that creativity benefits most from positive mood states that are activating (e.g., happiness) rather than deactivating (e.g., relaxed). So according to these theoretical perspectives, job seekers with positive deactivating affect will likely coast, and cease or postpone further efforts. The broaden-and-build theory, however, presumes a similar role of positive activating and deactivating affect. Regardless of activation level, different positive emotions (e.g., contentment or amusement) would each have broadening effects relative to neutral states (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). This broadening as explained before could facilitate systematic job search. Based on aforementioned literature and theory we arrive at competing expectations. Positive deactivating affect could both positively and negatively relate to the level of systematic job search.

The same applies to the relation between negative activating affect and the systematicity of job search. On the one hand, the cognitive focus and narrowed scope of attention associated with negative activating affect (for a review see Derryberry & Tucker, 1994) may facilitate goal shielding and goal maintenance as it helps to keep alternative goals at bay. On the other hand, the narrow focus

also relates to impaired cognitive flexibility (Alexander et al., 2007), which may hinder the systematic search process of seeking new information. Combining the aforementioned lines of research and theories, negative activating affect could both positively and negatively relate to the level of systematic job search.

Lastly, negative deactivating affect is associated with the preservation of energy and goal detachment (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Fulford, Johnson, Llabre, & Carver, 2010; Wrzus et al., 2015), while systematic job search is indicative of allocating resources toward goal pursuit. Therefore, negative deactivating affect would likely relate to less systematic job search. Literature shows that when people feel down, mood regulation will take precedence over self-control (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001). Job seekers may not disengage from their goal altogether, but they could resort to non-systematic search which requires less deliberate action, and they could be more easily distracted. Therefore, we expect that negative deactivating affect negatively relates to systematic job search.

Method

Design, Participants and Procedures

We used a multi-wave correlational design with five measurement points (Time 1-5), each four days apart. Choosing episode of four days enabled participants enough time to engage in job search behavior, but also to enable them to accurately recall their affective states and their job search behavior. We purposefully recruited job seekers who engaged in job search activities every four days at minimum. In the Time 1 baseline measurement we assessed individual differences in goal clarity, employment commitment, and financial need. At each measurement point we assessed for the past episode of four days how job seekers felt, how much time they spent on job seeking, and how systematically versus non-systematically they searched. Two and five months after the fifth measurement time point (Time 6 and 7) we assessed whether participants had found a job.

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Career starters were recruited via the alumni office of a university in the Netherlands, employment agencies, and social media in the months April and July of 2015 and January of 2016, to participate in a study on effective job search behavior. To meet the study eligibility criteria, participants had to be under 36 years old, highly educated, and had to graduate within 6 months or had to be graduated for maximally a year. In return for completion of the Time 1 measure participants received a gift card of €5. When additionally completing the Time 2-5 measurements, participants received an additional gift card of €20. After completion of the Time 7 measurement participants received a list of job search tips. A total of 348 individuals started the registration questionnaire. Of these, 227 met the inclusion criteria (active search, to be graduated within 6 months or graduated maximally one year ago, higher educated, maximally 35 years old) and finished the Time 1 survey. The final sample consisted of 217 participants¹, of which 129 (59.4%) completed all five repeated measures (Time 1-5). Two months after the fifth measurement time, 116 participants (53.5%) filled in the Time 6 measurement and five months later 76 participants (35.0%) filled in the Time 7 measurement.

The mean age was 25 years ($SD = 2.45$). The majority (77.0%) of participants were women ($n = 167$). Most participants (70.0%) were recently graduated ($M = 8.18$ months), while 30.0% of the participants were to graduate within 6 months ($M = 3.49$ months). Most respondents (73.7%) had a paid (student) job. Participants with a (student) job worked on average 23.21 hours a week ($SD = 12.69$), mostly in a temporary job (81.1%), while some were tenured (16.9%) or self-employed (7.5%). The sample was higher educated (73.7% university master degree, 15.2% university bachelor degree, and 11.1% higher vocational education). The mean job search duration at the time of the first questionnaire was 2.85 months ($SD = 2.93$).

¹ Data of 10 “participants” were deleted because, due to a suspicious amount of overlap in the personal sign in information (e-mail address, phone number, ip-address, timing), we suspected that two individuals made up these data.

Measures

The Time 1 baseline survey included the following measures²: Job search clarity, employment commitment, financial need, and demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, employment position, job search duration). The repeated measure surveys (Time 1-5) included: affect during the prior four days (i.e., activating and deactivating negative and positive affect), job search intensity in the prior four days, and systematic job search in the prior four days. At each measurement we assessed whether the participant had found a job. Cronbach's alpha's are displayed in Table 2.1.

Job search clarity. Job search clarity was assessed with four items (e.g., "I have a clear idea of the type of job that I want to find") from Wanberg et al. (2002). Participants responded on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Employment commitment. Employment commitment was assessed with four items (e.g., "Having a job is an important part of my daily life") based on Van Hooft et al. (2004). Participants responded on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Financial need. Financial need was measured with three items based on Van Hooft and Crossley's (2008) items for financial need. Participants were asked to indicate how difficult their financial situation would get if they would not find a job in the coming months (i.e., "How difficult will it be to make ends meet if you do not find a job in the upcoming months?", "If you do not find a job in the coming months, will you have financial difficulties?", "How much do you expect to have to give up your normal standard of living if you do not find a job in the coming months") on 5-point scales ranging from *not*

² The data were collected as part of a larger data collection in which we addressed various research questions. We have written Chapter 3 (Study 3.2) on another part of the data. Apart from the demographics, the only overlapping variable is affect, which is a predictor in this chapter and the outcome in Chapter 3. We included several other variables for Chapter 3 and exploratory purposes. At Time 1 we also measured: action state orientation, learning goal orientation, challenge and threat appraisals, core-self evaluations, and self-compassion.

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at all difficult (1) to *very difficult* (5) or *not at all* (1) to *very much* (5).

Affect. Affect was assessed with 16 emotions from the PANAS (Crawford & Henry, 2004). We selected those emotions that clearly fall within one of the four affect categories of the emotion circumplex (Yik et al., 2011). We asked participants to indicate to what extent they had felt the emotions in the last four days (i.e., “The next questions are about how you feel about your job search experiences in the last four days. Please indicate to what extent you experienced the following emotions.”) on 5-point Likert scales ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The specific emotions were nervous, stressed, frustrated, and jittery for negative activating affect, sad, disappointed, down, and downcast for negative deactivating affect, enthusiastic, cheerful, lively, and energetic for positive activating affect, and at ease, calm, relaxed, and laid back for positive deactivating affect.

Job search intensity. Job search intensity was assessed at all five measurement times with a 12-item behavioral index, consisting of a list of job search activities selected based on existing measures for job search behavior (Blau, 1994; Van Hooft et al., 2004), including both formal and informal, and both preparatory and active job search activities. We added one item to the index used by Van Hooft et al. (2004), pertaining to the use of social media to search for a job. Participants were asked to indicate how much time (in hours) within the last four days they had spent on each of 12 tasks (e.g., writing a motivation letter, search information about an organization I would like to work for, preparing for a job interview, talking to friends and family about job leads). Response categories ranged from *0 hours* to *32 hours or more*. The sum of the nine items was used as a composite job search intensity score, with a lower score indicating less time was spent on job search in general in the past four days. We capped the maximum sum score at 40 hours as reasonable maximum in four days (this applied to two participants). Cronbach’s alpha ranged between .51 and .77. Similar reliabilities are reported in prior

studies (e.g., .64 in Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009; .71 in Wanberg et al., 2000). It should be kept in mind that job search behavior is measured with a behavioral checklist which should be considered a causal indicator measure in which items are not interchangeable indicators of an underlying construct (Edwards & Bagozzi, 2000). A high internal consistency is therefore not to be expected. Validity was further supported by the fact that the job search behavior index strongly related (correlations on different time points ranging from $r = .87$ to $r = .92$, $p < .001$) to participants' scores on the question "Altogether, about how many hours did you spend on your job search in the last four days?", asked as validity check.

Job search systematicity. High job search systematicity is characterized by being adaptive, by seeking feedback and trying divers search channels as well as being persistent, undistracted from pursuing job search and building in routines in using various search channels. Low job search systematicity is characterized by behaviors that are less adaptive, and less persistent, or in other words more volatile, fortuitous, or random. Based on these descriptions, we developed items to measure the extent to which job seekers searched systematically (see Appendix). Items were written based on extant theoretical notions and models on job search (e.g., Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Kanfer et al., 2001; Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stumpf et al., 1983; Van Hooft et al., 2013). We selected and adapted items such that some items related to (1) being persistent and following routines, some items related to (2) actively seeking feedback and using diverse search channels to improve, and some items related to (3) a random way of searching (reversed coded). Job seekers were asked to indicate the extent to which each item applied to them in the past four days on 5-point Likert scales ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

To test the psychometric properties of the systematic job search scale we pilot tested our measure in a sample of active job seekers ($N = 99$) which was part of another study (reference omitted for the purpose of blind review). Participants varying in age, gender,

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and educational level were recruited via employment agencies and social media in the months April and July of 2015. Mean age was 40.83 ($SD = 14.04$), 61.6% were women ($n = 61$), and participants were generally highly educated (35.4% university degree, 43.4% higher vocational education, 15.2% intermediate vocational education). Of the participants, 57.6% were unemployed, 19.2% had a part time or student job, 7.1% were studying while searching for a job, 4.0% had temporary employment, and the remaining 15.2% was freelancer, intern, or volunteer. The median job search duration was 6 months ($SD = 9.77$).

Exploratory factor analyses of the 15 items indicated that all but one item clustered into three components of systematic job search behavior: persistence, adaptability, and fortuitous search behavior. After exclusion of one item, the remaining 14 items had an Cronbach's alpha of .83. In the main study, confirmatory factor analyses of systematic job search at Time 1 ($N = 217$) showed that a factor model with the three components loading on a second-order factor had an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(74) = 234.88$, $p < .001$, CFI = .92, SRMR = .079, and all factor loadings were $\geq .44$, $p < .01$. Cronbach's alpha of the 14 items ranged between .84 and .91 across the different measurement points.

Job attainment. Whether job seekers had found a job was measured at Time 2 to 5 by asking participants whether they were still searching for a job. One of the response options was "no, I stopped searching because I accepted a job". In Time 6 and 7 measurements we include the question: "Did you accept a job offer in the last two months?". Job attainment was coded as 1 when participants answered that they had accepted a job in response to one or two of these questions. Job attainment was coded as 0 if they answered that they did not accept a job. When participant data at a measurement time was missing regarding this question we used the last available information on job attainment.

Control variables. Age, gender, job search duration (in months), education (bachelor or master degree), graduation status

(graduated or not) and employment position (employed or unemployed) were assessed as control variables because previous meta-analytic findings indicated that these relate to job search outcomes (Kanfer et al., 2001). For reasons of parsimoniousness and power, in the analyses we included only those three control variables that were not only theoretically logically but also empirically related to our dependent variables (cf. Becker, 2005): Job search duration, graduation status, and measurement time.

Results

Table 2.1 displays the descriptive statistics and between-individual correlations for the baseline measures and aggregated repeated measures. On average participants spent 1 hour and 43 minutes per day on job search over the 20 days of the study.

To explore whether systematic job search relates to the likelihood that job seekers had found a job within five months, we conducted a hierarchical logistic regression. We first tested a model with only the constant (Step 1), then we entered the Time 1 control variables job search duration, and whether a participant was graduated in Step 2. We added the aggregated average of job search intensity over time points 1 to 5 in Step 3 and the aggregated average of systematic job search over time points 1 to 5 in Step 4. As shown in Table 2.2 this logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 265.06, p < .01$. The model explained 11% (Cox & Snell R^2) of the variance in finding a job, and correctly predicted 58.2% of job seekers. The results indicate that, while job search intensity was not significantly related to the likelihood of obtaining a job, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.97, p > .05$, systematic job search was significantly related to an increased likelihood of obtaining a job, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.51, p < .01$. The odds ratio larger than 1 indicates that as the systematic job search increases, the odds of attaining a job increases.

Table 2.1
Descriptive Statistics and Between-Individual Correlations

	N	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. Age	217	25.00	2.45														
2. Gender ^a	217	0.23	0.42	.28**													
3. Search duration ^b	217	2.85	2.93	.19**	.06												
4. Education ^c	217	0.74	0.44	.28**	-.02	-.06											
5. Graduated ^d	217	0.70	0.46	.21**	-.05	.26**	-.28**										
6. Goal clarity	217	3.21	0.78	.03	-.04	.15*	.07	.16*	.78								
7. Employment commitment	217	3.94	0.68	.01	-.08	.08	.06	.07	.20**	.79							
8. Financial need	217	7.86	0.86	.02	.02	.07	-.01	.11	.03	-.12	.89						
9. Negative activating ^e	217	2.80	0.85	-.02	-.13	.24**	-.12	.18**	-.12	.05	.21**	.84-.93					
10. Negative deactivating ^e	217	2.51	0.82	.05	-.10	.28**	-.09	.24**	-.06	-.05	.24**	.83**	.90-.95				
11. Positive activating ^e	217	3.16	0.70	.00	.05	-.05	.03	-.05	.13*	.13	-.07	-.23**	-.28**	.93-.97			
12. Positive deactivating ^e	217	3.25	0.72	.05	.26**	-.16*	.07	-.11	.11	-.01	-.12	-.62**	-.54**	.58**	.93-.96		
13. Job search intensity ^f	217	6.87	4.89	.14*	.13	.09	-.10	.18**	.02	-.08	.31**	.35**	.35**	.07	-.05	.51-.77	
14. Systematic search ^g	217	3.03	0.54	.06	-.04	.20**	-.10	.19**	.26**	.21**	.09	.19**	.16*	.20**	-.01	.39**	.84-.91
15. Job attainment ^h	208	0.48	0.50	.02	-.03	-.08	.00	.22**	.21**	.12	.08	.01	-.03	.21**	.09	.05	.21**

Note: ^a0 = female, 1 = male; ^bmeasured in months; ^c0 = no master degree, 1 = master degree; ^d0 = not graduated, 1 = graduated; ^eaffect; ^fsum of time spent on job search activities averaged over measurement times 1 till 5; ^gjob search systematicity score averaged over measurement times 1 till 5; ^h0 = no job, 1 = job. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2.2

Logistic Regression with Job Attainment as Dependent Variable

	Step 1 Exp(B)	Step 2 Exp(B)	Step 3 Exp(B)
Job search duration ^a	0.89*	0.89*	0.87*
Graduated ^b	3.19**	3.16**	2.96**
Job search intensity ^c		1.00	0.97
Systematic job search ^d			2.51**
χ^2	273.83	273.80	265.06
$\Delta\chi^2$		0.03	8.74***
Cox & Snell R^2	0.07	0.07	0.11

Note. $N = 227$; ^ameasured in months; ^b0 = student, 1 = graduated; ^csum of time spend on job search activities averaged over measurement times 1 to 5. ^djob search systematicity score averaged over measurement times 1 to 5.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Next, we explored the antecedents of job search systematicity. Our data has a two-level structure with the five measurement times (Level 1) nested within participants (Level 2). We first examined to what extent job search systematicity actually varied on both the within- and between-individual level, by comparing two intercept-only models (i.e., with the intercept fixed or random). For systematic job search, 42.9% of the total variance was between individuals and 57.1% within individuals. This shows that some individuals searched more systematically than others, and that individuals searched more systematically at one episode than at another. These analyses show sufficient within- and between-individual variance in the job search systematicity over time, hereby supporting both conducting repeated measures and using multi-level regression analyses.

To explore whether goal clarity, employment commitment, financial need, and the four different types of affect related to systematic job search we performed a multi-level multiple regression analysis with

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systematic job search as dependent variable. Our control variables job search duration, and graduation status, and our predictors goal clarity, employment commitment, and financial need are Level 2 variables as these were measured once at the baseline measure and therefore differ between but not within individuals. Measurement time and the four different types of affect are Level 1 predictors as these differ between measurement times within individuals. We grand-mean centered the Level 2 variables and person-mean centered the Level 1 variables, except for measurement time (i.e., 0-4). Several authors recommend building up multi-level models starting with a model with all parameters fixed and then adding random coefficients and exploring extra variables (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Twisk, 2006). Consistent with these recommendations, we first tested the intercept-only models. We found support for a random intercept as the random-intercept model fit significantly better than the fixed-intercept model ($\chi^2_{\text{MODEL0}} = 2030.05$, $\chi^2_{\text{MODEL1}} = 1810.27$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 219.77$, $p < .01$). In all subsequent models we therefore included a random intercept. In Model 1, we included the control variables only, in Model 2 we added the Level 2 predictors, and in Model 3 the different types of affect.

Table 2.3 presents the results. Model 3 shows that there is a positive relationship of measurement time with systematic job search, which means that job seekers' systematic job search increased across the five episodes. Furthermore, in line with our expectations goal clarity and employment commitment were positively related to systematic job search. Contrary to our predictions financial need was unrelated to systematic job search. The results concerning the relation between affect and systematic job search show that the two activating affects (i.e., negative activating affect and positive activating affect) were positively related to systematic job search. In contrast, both deactivating affects (i.e., negative deactivating affect and positive deactivating affect) were not related to systematic job search.

Table 2.3
*Multi-level Regression Results for Systematic Job Search as
 Dependent Variable*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	2.81***	2.84***	2.83***
<i>Control variables</i>			
Job search duration ^a	0.03*	0.02	0.02
Graduated ^b	0.21*	0.16*	0.16*
Measurement time ^c	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***
<i>Level 2 predictors</i>			
Job search clarity		0.13**	0.13**
Employment commitment		0.13*	0.13*
Financial need		0.06	0.06
<i>Level 1 predictors</i>			
Negative activating affect			0.12**
Negative deactivating affect			-0.03
Positive activating affect			0.22***
Positive deactivating affect			-0.01
<i>Random effects</i>			
Var.error (e_{ij})	0.29***	0.29***	0.27***
Var.intercept (u_{0j})	0.20***	0.18***	0.19***
-2 Log-likelihood	1782.85	1765.82	1706.71
Parameters in model	6	9	13

Note. For individuals $N = 217$; for number of observations $k = 5$. SPSS Mixed models analyses was used with the variance components variance-covariance structure. Level 2 predictors are grand mean centered, Level 1 predictors are person mean centered. ^ameasured in months; ^b0 = student, 1 = graduated; ^c0-4 five measurement times. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

In most research on job seeking, job search behavior is operationalized as how much time and effort job seekers spend or how many job search activities they engage in to obtain (re)employment (i.e., job search intensity; Kanfer et al., 2001). The present study aspired to broaden the construct space of job search behavior to move the job search literature beyond job search intensity. We integrated previous conceptualizations that describe other components of job search (i.e., content-quality and temporal-persistence; Kanfer et al., 2001; systematic vs. fortuitous; Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stumpf et al., 1983) with theorizing on job search quality (Van Hooft et al., 2013) to define job search systematicity as an important component of job search behavior that may predict the likelihood of finding a job. The present study provides empirical support for the usefulness of broadening the domain of job search behavior beyond intensity. Specifically, our findings show that systematic job search positively predicted job attainment. This implies that searching in an adaptive (e.g., through feedback seeking and using diverse search channels) and persistent (e.g., through using routines and low distraction) manner as opposed to a more random hit-or-miss job search approach is beneficial for finding employment. This finding may encourage other scholars to look beyond job search intensity and take job search systematicity into account as a relevant predictor of job search outcomes.

Job search systematicity differs from the concept of job search strategies (i.e., focused, exploratory, and haphazard strategy) that have been described in previous research (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). These job search strategies pertain to the width of the potential job opportunities that are targeted by job seekers. Focused job seekers search with a specific job profile in mind, exploratory job seekers search for a wide range of job options, and haphazard job seekers lack clear ideas of what to search for. Although previous research shows that a haphazard strategy (which actually represents a lack of strategy) is negatively related to employment

outcomes, the findings for the focused and exploratory strategies yield a more mixed pattern (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; De Battisti, Gilardi, Guglielmetti, & Siletti, 2016; Koen et al., 2010; Koen, Van Vianen, Van Hooft, & Klehe, 2016). For example, Crossley and Highhouse (2005) only find support for a positive relation between an exploratory (and not focused) strategy and job offers, while De Battisti and colleagues (2016) show that a focused strategy increased the likelihood of reemployment. Koen et al (2010) found a positive relation between both exploratory and focused strategies and job offers, while Koen et al (2016), found no support for the relationship between exploratory and focused strategies and reemployment. Furthermore, unlike job search strategies, job search systematicity can be considered as an indicator of job search quality. Future research is needed to examine how job search systematicity relates to or interacts with an exploratory and focused search strategy, as conceptually these strategies could be done with high or low systematicity.

We used a five-wave design to be able to explore the development of job search systematicity over time during the course of our study. In line with a learning based perspective on job search change (Barber et al., 1994), our results showed that job search behavior changes over time, such that the extent to which job seekers search in a systematic manner increased during the time of the study. Future research could test whether this learning based perspective is applicable to a highly educated job seekers only or generalizes over all groups of job seekers. In addition, future research could examine how to facilitate positive change in job search systematicity among job seekers.

In line with motivation theories (Theory of Planned Behavior; Ajzen, 1991; Expectancy-Value Theory; Feather, 1982) and self-regulatory models of job search (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2013), results showed that job search clarity and employment commitment (reflecting the intrinsic valence that job seekers attribute to their employment goal) were positively related to systematic job

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search. Having clear job-search objectives, for example regarding the type of desired job, and being intrinsically motivated for work, are thus not only important for job search intensity (Wanberg et al., 2002, 2010) but also for the systematicity of job search.

Contrary to our expectations financial need (reflecting the extrinsic valence that job seekers attribute to their employment goal) was not significantly related to systematic job search. Apparently, the prospect of having financial difficulties when one would not succeed in finding a job in the upcoming months does not stimulate nor hinder job search systematicity. The incentive performance literature may explain this finding. Various meta-analyses (e.g., Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014; Jenkins, Mitra, Gupta, & Shaw, 1998) indicate that intrinsic motivation explains more unique variance in the quality of performance, whereas incentives are better predictors of the quantity of performance. Employment commitment and financial need represent different conceptualizations of valence, that is, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for employment, respectively. Considering that systematic job search is an indicator of job search quality, the intrinsic motivation of employment commitment rather than the extrinsic motivation of financial need relates to the quality of job search. In contrast to job search intensity, which is positively associated with both employment commitment and financial need (Kanfer et al., 2001).

Our results further showed that emotions of different activation levels related differently to job search systematicity, such that positive and negative activating affect were positively related to systematic job search, and positive and negative deactivating affect were unrelated to systematic job search. Our results provide support for the notion that activation level is a valuable additional distinction within affect (in addition to the positive-negative distinction) to take into account when studying the relation between affect and job search behavior. The results are in line with the dual pathway to creativity model that also highlights the importance of including the activation level dimension by positing that especially activating affect

contributes to creative performance (Baas et al., 2008; De Dreu et al., 2008). Furthermore, the results suggest nuancing the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004), which assumes similar roles for activating and deactivating positive affect.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations should be taken into consideration. First, because our data are based on self-reports, common method bias and social desirability may have influenced our results (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To decrease the concern of social desirable responding we emphasized the anonymity of our participants (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Furthermore, exploring within-individual dynamics reduces some of the social desirability concerns, because its effects would be similar within individuals across different the measurement times. To further counteract confounding influences other sources (e.g., counselor reports; see Van Hooft, 2014) should be included in future research that assess job search behavior and its antecedents.

Second, our correlational design does not allow us to draw causal conclusions. For example, in our theoretical reasoning affect precedes job search systematicity. However, considering that affect and systematic job search were both measured within individuals in the same time span, one can reason that the directionality could be reversed and systematic job search could (also) lead to activating affect. Future research could disentangle the direction of the relationships by exploring how the job search process unfolds over time in more detail. To fully understand the dynamic process of job search, time should be taken into account. By including time, we found that systematic search changes over time. Future research could test the various circumstances that affect these changes in job search systematicity. Future studies could focus on examining factors that influence changes in systematic search, uncovering the learning process. For example, individual differences may explain why some job seekers improve their search systematicity more than others. A

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meaningful individual difference in this context could be learning goal orientation. Previous research has already indicated that a learning goal orientation facilitates the job search process (e.g., Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009). Indeed, a learning goal orientation may promote finding a job through its positive influence on developing a more systematic job search. Testing this proposition could give additional insight into why some job seekers become increasingly better at their search while others do not. Another way to more thoroughly incorporate job search dynamics would be to examine lagged effects and growth models. In addition, continuing in the line of Song et al. (2009) and Wanberg et al. (2010) future work may examine how systematic job search and job seekers' affective responses develop at a day-to-day level.

Another limitation is the decreasing response over measurement times, which is a common finding in longitudinal studies. By sending participants reminders and by incentivizing finishing the whole study with both money and job search tips, we tried to reduce the attrition of participants.

Lastly, as this is the first study assessing systematic job search as an indicator of job search quality, more research regarding this construct is needed. A logical next step would be to build a nomological network of job search systematicity that represents how other relevant job search concepts relate to it. For example, in addition to testing how job search systematicity relates to specific job search strategies (i.e., haphazard, exploratory, focused; Crossley & Highhouse, 2005), future research could also look at the relation with job search self-efficacy (Saks, Zikic, & Koen, 2015), career adaptability (i.e., concern, commitment, curiosity and confidence; Koen et al., 2010), and reemployment quality.

Conclusion

The results of this study broaden existing approaches to studying job search behavior by identifying job search systematicity as an important indicator of job search quality, predicting job

attainment. This study may inspire researchers to continue along this line and further explore how job seekers can invest their time effectively to increase their chances of finding a job. While future research is needed to test the robustness and generalizability of our conclusion, the practical implications of addressing job search systematicity are promising. As we further our understanding of job search behaviors that are most effective for finding a job, we can inform job seekers and career and employment counselors about how best to spend time on job search (i.e., if you want a job, don't just search hard, search systematically) and about the factors that foster more systematic job search (i.e., job search clarity, employment commitment, and activating affect).

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Appendix Items of the Systematic Job Search Scale

Job seekers were asked to indicate the extent to which the statement in each item applied to them in the past four days on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Items with an asterisk were reversed coded.

- 1 ...I continued searching for a job even though at times it was tedious.
- 2 ...I had a fixed routine when searching for a job.
- 3 ...I persevered during my job search even though I was afraid things wouldn't work out.
- 4 ...I used a standardized approach when searching and applying for a job.
- 5 ...I tried to figure out how I could improve my job search.
- 6 ...I asked others for advice and ideas on how I could improve my job search.
- 7 ...I thought of different ways to find a job than I had already tried.
- 8 ...I adjusted my search strategy based on what I learned while searching for a job.
- 9 ...I tried new ways to search for a job.
- 10 ...I did not have a plan or strategy to search for a job.*
- 11 ...I only had vague ideas on how I could search for a job.*
- 12 ...I was easily distracted from my job search by other things.*
- 13 ...I used a hit or miss approach when searching for information about jobs.*
- 14 ...I searched for jobs without giving it deliberate thought.*