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Kreemers, L.M.; van Hooft, E.A.J.; van Vianen, A.E.M.

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If you want a job, don't just search hard, search systematically: A field study with career starters

Loes M. Kreemers, Edwin A. J. van Hooft and Annelies E. M. van Vianen

Department of Psychology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

After finishing school, career starters face the challenge of finding a job. Job search is a difficult process because there is no clear pathway to obtaining employment. We identify job search systematicity, in addition to job search intensity, as an important dimension of job search behaviour that may predict the likelihood of obtaining a job. Job search systematicity is defined as the extent to which people have an adaptable and persistent rather than a volatile and fortuitous approach towards job seeking. We explored whether job search systematicity relates to increased chances of obtaining employment and explored potential antecedents of job search systematicity (i.e., job search clarity, employment commitment, anticipated financial need, and affect). The results of our field study among 217 job seeking career starters using a five-wave correlational design show that job search systematicity positively relates to job attainment, controlling for job search intensity. Moreover, job search clarity, employment commitment, and activating affect (both positive and negative) 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 counsellors about how to approach the job search process.

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After finishing school, career starters face the challenge of finding a suitable job. Job search is a difficult process because it is full of obstacles and there is no clear pathway with predetermined steps to obtaining employment. Especially new labour market entrants face a challenging paradox: They are confronted with rejections because they lack work experience, but to gain work experience they need to obtain employment. Negative job search experiences such as setbacks or rejections are emotionally burdening (Kreemers et al., 2018; Song et al., 2009; Wanberg et al., 2010). Furthermore, unemployment forms a psychological burden for both unemployed individuals and their families and is detrimental for society as a whole (Klehe & Van Hooft, 2018; song et al., 2011). It is therefore crucial to understand how career starters can find employment.

An important determinant of finding employment is job search behaviour. Current models and studies on job search among career starters have mostly focused on indicators of the time and effort devoted to job search activities as core determinant of finding employment (e.g., job search intensity; Brown et al., 2006; Saks, 2018; Turban et al., 2013). Although previous research has generally found positive relationships of job search intensity with employment outcomes such as job offers and employment status, the explained variance is relatively limited (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2021). Furthermore, spending time on job search has negative consequences for job seeker's mental health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Since just spending much time on job search activities reaps meagre results, an important question is how job seekers should approach their job search, and how they can efficiently and effectively search for employment.

Rather than focusing on time spent on job search (i.e., job search intensity), we build on previous theorizing (Kanfer et al., 2001; Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stumpf et al., 1983; Van Hooft et al., 2013) to introduce and examine an alternative component of job search behaviour, that is job search systematicity. This study aims to contribute to the literature by developing an alternative conceptualization of job search behaviour, which extends current theorizing on the relationship between job search behaviour and employment success and provides clear pointers to job seekers how to search for a job systematically and effectively. Integrating the theoretical notion of systematic versus haphazard search strategies (Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stumpf et al., 1983) with Kanfer et al.'s (2001) and Van Hooft et al.'s (2013) models of job search, we first conceptualize systematic job search as an adaptable and persistent (in contrast to a volatile and fortuitous) approach towards job seeking. Second, adopting a self-regulation perspective towards job search (Bandura, 1989; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lord et al., 2010; Van Hooft et al., 2013), we explore the change in job search systematicity over time. Third, to further clarify the meaning of job search systematicity, it is important to specify some of its consequences and antecedents (cf. Podsakoff et al., 2016). Regarding consequences, we explore whether systematic job search is predictive of the likelihood of finding a job (beyond mere job search intensity). Regarding antecedents, we draw from self-regulation theory (Bandura, 1989; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lord et al., 2010) to identify goal-related factors (i.e., between-individual differences in job search clarity,

CONTACT Edwin A. J. van Hooft e.a.j.vanhooft@uva.nl

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anticipated financial need, and employment commitment) that induce job search behaviour, and signalling factors (i.e., momentary within-individual differences in affect) that adjust job search behaviour.

To examine job search systematicity and its antecedents and consequences, we conducted a field study among career starters using a five-wave correlational design over the course of 3 weeks. Career starters transitioning from school to work differ from more experienced samples of job seekers, as they may not have a clear idea of what job suits them best or how to approach their job search (Saks, 2018). Career starters' job search therefore occurs while developing or refining their career preferences and plans (Boswell et al., 2012), which likely amplifies the need to conduct the job search in an adaptable and persistent manner (i.e., job search systematicity). Our study contributes to the job search field by broadening the construct space of job search behaviour. Even though the relevance of other components of job search in addition to intensity is recognized by job search scholars (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001; Koen et al., 2010; Saks, 2005; Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009; Van Hoye, 2018; Wanberg, Ali et al., 2020; Wanberg et al., 2002, 2000), more empirical research is needed to specify these components 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 behaviours. Practically, this knowledge benefits job seekers and employment and career counsellors in providing direction on how job seekers should approach their job search to optimize employment outcomes.

Job search behaviour

Based on self-regulation theory (e.g., Bandura, 1989; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lord et al., 2010), job search behaviour can be defined as a self-regulated and dynamic goal striving process, instigated by an employment goal (e.g., the goal to find a job; Kanfer et al., 2001). Job search behaviour 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). Empirical research mostly conceptualized job search behaviour as the amount of time and effort that people spend on looking for employment or the number of job search activities that people engage in (i.e., job search intensity or job search effort; Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg, Ali, et al., 2020). Other conceptualizations have focused on the nature of the job search process, suggesting that job search behaviour can vary between systematic/deliberate and random/fortuitous. For example, in describing how people approach their search, Stumpf et al. (1983) noted that individuals may gather information in a systematic and intended fashion or in a fortuitous and random fashion. Based on economic job search models they assume that more systematic search behaviour is beneficial for employment success. Stevens and Beach (1996) theorized that job seekers may either have a clear or a fuzzy image of the desired job, which instigates a deliberate and focused search versus an ill-defined and haphazard search. However, they did not further conceptualize these search strategies.

In their empirical study on job search and choice processes, Crossley and Highhouse (2005) operationalized information search strategies to gather job-relevant information, distinguishing between a haphazard search strategy (i.e., a non-systematic strategy, using a trial-and-error approach towards information search) on the one hand, and two more deliberate, goal-directed information search strategies on the other hand, that is a focused and an exploratory search strategy. The focused and exploratory search strategies pertain to the width of the potential job opportunities targeted by job seekers, with a focused strategy referring to directing search efforts to a limited number of potential employers and applying only to jobs with a specific job profile that fits one's interests and qualifications, and an exploratory strategy referring to examining a wide range of job options and being open to job opportunities that come along. Theoretical predictions and empirical findings converge in indicating that a haphazard search strategy is detrimental for employment success (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2010, 2016). However, it is theoretically unclear to what extent focused and exploratory search strategies are beneficial, and empirical findings yielded a mixed pattern. 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 et al. (2016) show that a focused strategy increased the likelihood of re-employment. Koen et al. (2010) found a positive relation of both exploratory and focused strategies with job offers, while Koen et al. (2016), found no support for the relationship of exploratory and focused strategies with re-employment.

These ambiguous findings suggest the necessity to rethink the theoretical notion of systematic job search (Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stumpf et al., 1983) for conceptualizing how people can efficiently and effectively search for employment. To develop a clear conceptualization of job search systematicity, it is useful to identify its opposite meaning and clarify the underlying attributes (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Whereas indications of the non-systematic pole and its underlying attributes can be specified based on previous research (i.e., a random, haphazard, hit-or-miss approach to job search; cf. Crossley & Highhouse, 2005), the systemic pole remains conceptually fuzzy. We therefore build on Kanfer et al.'s (2001) conceptualization of job search behaviour and Van Hooft et al.'s (2013) prescriptive self-regulation model of job search quality to identify the underlying attributes of job search systematicity.

Conceptualizing job search systematicity

Kanfer et al. (2001) conceptualized job search behaviour as referring to a pattern of thinking, affect, and behaviour 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 present practical descriptions of searching effectively for a job, suggesting that job seekers should (1) use multiple and diverse search tactics, and (2) persist at the task to 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 behaviour. These descriptions of effective search go beyond the intensity-effort dimension and can be qualified as behaviours that may enhance job search success.

Van Hooft et al. (2013) further elaborated the content-direction and temporal-persistence dimensions, and proposed a model in which they identified and delineated the components of a high-quality job search. Similar to the notion that job search is a dynamic, recursive, and self-regulated process (Kanfer et al., 2001), they distinguished different cyclical phases that 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 labour 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 behaviour, 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 behaviours 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 behaviour, high job search quality is characterized by processes involving (sustained) goal-directed behaviours and goal-shielding, which refers to keeping the job search goal accessible and active and shielding it from interference of competing goals (Lord et al., 2010). A high-quality job search process 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 behavioural 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 et al., 2014).

Integrating these prior theoretical notions, we conceptualize job search systematicity as ranging from highly systematic to non-systematic job search, consisting of attributes that can be described along the content-direction and the temporal-persistence dimensions of job search behaviour. Highly systematic search is characterized by (1) systematicity in terms of being persistent and undistracted from pursuing job search, and building in routines in using various search channels, and (2) systematicity in terms of being adaptive, trying diverse search channels, and seeking feedback to improve the effectiveness of job search behaviour. Low systematic search is the opposite of highly systematic search, and is thus characterized by low persistence and adaptability, or in other words being distracted and volatile, taking a fortuitous approach to job search.

It should be noted that our definition of job search systematicity suggests that low systematicity includes elements of the previously identified concept of haphazard search strategy (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Stevens & Beach, 1996). However, previous research did not substantively define what the opposite of a haphazard approach to job search could entail (other than not random, not haphazard, or not having a "hit or miss" approach). Therefore, based on Kanfer et al.'s (2001) and Van Hooft et al.'s (2013) theorizing we conceptualize high systematicity as being persistent and adaptive. This conceptualization is theoretically different from Crossley and Highhouse (2005) focused and exploratory search strategies (which refer to the width of the search strategy) and allows for more unambiguous theorizing on its relationship with employment success outcomes. Appendix A presents a detailed overview of the conceptual similarities and differences between job search systematicity, Crossley and Highhouse (2005) search strategies, and job search intensity.

Change in job search systematicity

Self-regulation theories (Bandura, 1989; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lord et al., 2010) suggest that when people strive towards a goal, they periodically compare their present state (i.e., input function) with their goal, and if a discrepancy is noted, they adjust their behaviours (i.e., output function). Lord et al. (2010) notes that self-regulation is a multilevel dynamic process, suggesting that self-regulated behaviour both differs between individuals and fluctuates over time. Adopting a self-regulatory perspective to job search, this implies that job search behaviour differs between individuals but also 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, through reading about job search in popular literature, or through feedback on job search efforts (e.g., Bolles, 2015). This input facilitates learning such that over time job seekers likely learn more efficient and effective search methods (e.g., building in routines, asking for feedback), which will benefit future job search. Self-regulation theory therefore suggests that as job seekers progress over time with their job search, they will develop a more persistent and adaptive approach in their job search. We therefore expect that although job search systematicity may fluctuate within individuals from one episode to the other, it will generally increase over time.

Consequences and antecedents of job search systematicity

Podsakoff et al. (2016) note that in order to help clarifying the meaning of a concept, it is important to specify parts of its nomological network, such as the theoretical relationships of the concept with potential consequences and antecedents. An important consequence in the job search context is job attainment. Self-regulation theory (Bandura, 1989; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lord et al., 2010) proposes that if people detect a discrepancy between their current and their desired state, they perform behaviour aimed at reducing the discrepancy, persisting until the desired state is achieved. When noticing

that the discrepancy does not decrease, people need to adapt their behaviour. In the context of the job search process, self-regulation theory suggests that a persistent and adaptive approach is needed to achieve the desired state (i.e., job attainment). More specifically, high job search systematicity indicates an approach towards job seeking that is adaptive, persistent, and makes use of routines, which are elements that have been theorized to enhance the likelihood to obtain employment (Baay et al., 2014; Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2013). In contrast, low job search systematicity indicates an approach towards job seeking that is fortuitous, lacking plans, and led by vague ideas and distraction, which likely harm the chances to find employment (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2016; Van Hooft et al., 2013). We therefore expect that job search systematicity will relate positively to job search outcomes such as finding employment.

Based on self-regulation theory (Bandura, 1989; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lord et al., 2010) we focus on two categories of antecedents of job search systematicity. Self-regulation theory states that goals play a central role in the self-regulatory process, as these form the reference values against which people compare their present state. A discrepancy between the goal and present state instigates action to reduce the discrepancy. This suggests that *goal-related* factors likely form important antecedents that influence subsequent job search behaviour. Self-regulation theory further states that people monitor their progress towards the goal, and that affect functions as a signal whether the perceived rate of progress is conform the desired rate of progress. The resulting affect subsequently serves as input that may lead to adjustment of people's behaviour. Therefore, in addition to goal-related factors, *affect* is posed to form an important antecedent of job search behaviour.

Goal-related antecedents of job search systematicity

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 et al., 2004; Van Hoye & Saks, 2008). In the present study we focus on career starters who newly enter the job market and who may regard finding employment as their main goal. Core elements of goals refer to whether the goal is specific or vague (*goal clarity*) and whether the anticipated outcome of the goal is valuable to people or not (*goal valence*) (Bandura, 1989; Latham et al., 2018; Van Hooft et al., 2013). We focus on one indicator of goal clarity (i.e., job search clarity) and two indicators of goal valence (i.e., employment commitment and anticipated financial need), and explore these as antecedents of job search systematicity.

Job search clarity is the extent to which job seekers have a clear idea of their job search goals, for example, concerning the type of job they desire (Wanberg et al., 2002). Self-regulation theory suggests that explicit and specific goals create a guide for action, and are needed to regulate goal-striving behaviour and evaluate progress (Bandura, 1989; Carver & Scheier, 1990). Thus, clear job search goals help steer the job search process (i.e., goal striving) 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. 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 job search as being adaptive and persistent, a clear goal will facilitate systematic job 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 behaviours that contribute to the systematicity of the job search. Not having a clear goal, will impair this evaluation process 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 behaviour that is intended to reach that goal and behaviour 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 job search clarity, we examined two indicators of goal valence as potential antecedents of job search systematicity. The value that job seekers attribute to having employment may be of an intrinsic (i.e., employment commitment) and/or extrinsic nature (i.e., anticipated financial need). Employment commitment is the extent to which work is intrinsically important to an individual (Kanfer et al., 2001). When individuals conceive their work as an essential part of their personal identity, they are intrinsically motivated to work and thus will have a high employment commitment. Anticipated 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. Individuals anticipating financial hardship are extrinsically motivated to work in order to earn money and resolve their financial worries.

Self-regulation theory (Bandura, 1989) identifies the anticipation of outcomes as an important motivational driver of behaviour. When people attribute greater value to an outcome, they are more motivated to perform goal-directed behaviour to achieve that outcome. Thus, when a higher value is attributed to the outcome of being employed, the goal of attaining a job 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 anticipated financial need both exemplify value attributed to the outcome of being employed, they will both foster the systematicity of job search. Therefore, we expect that employment commitment and anticipated financial need will positively relate to the systematicity of job search.

Affect as antecedent of job search systematicity

In addition to the relatively stable between-individual differences in goal clarity and goal valence, self-regulation theory suggests that momentary within-individual differences in affect are important factors in self-regulatory goal pursuit (Bandura, 1989; Carver, 2003; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lord et al., 2010). Affect has indeed been shown to play an important role in the job search process (e.g., Kreemers et al., 2018; Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014; Song et al., 2009; Turban et al., 2013, 2009; Wanberg et al., 2010). 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). In line with self-regulation theory, negative job search experiences such as difficulties and low job search progress (which indicate a discrepancy between one's current state and one's goals) relate to an increase in various negative emotions and a decrease in various positive emotions (Kreemers et al., 2018; Wanberg et al., 2010). Further, as predicted by self-regulation theory, affect impacts subsequent job search behaviour. For example, Song et al. (2009) have shown that distress can lead to an increase in job search intensity.

Previous research on affect during job search typically distinguishes between positive and negative affect. However, in 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 include both activation level and hedonic tone.

Self-regulation theory makes predictions about the role of different types of affect for allocating resources towards reaching goals. The hedonic tone of affect is posed to signal to individuals how they are progressing towards their goal and how much effort they need to put in to reach their goal (i.e., information function; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 2003), with negative emotions signalling low progress and positive emotions signalling high progress. In addition, the activation level of affect has a motivational function such that activating affect mobilizes energy and effort while deactivating affect leads to inactivity (Baas et al., 2008; De Dreu et al., 2008). Combining the information and motivational function of affect, we can develop expectations for the relationships of the four types of affect with job search systematicity.

Specifically, negative activating 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). Furthermore, the cognitive focus and narrowed scope of attention associated with negative activating affect (e.g., Derryberry & Tucker, 1994; De Dreu et al., 2008) may facilitate goal shielding and goal maintenance as it helps to keep alternative goals at bay. Therefore, we expect negative activating affect to positively relate to systematic job search.

In contrast, negative deactivating 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). Furthermore, when people feel down, immediate mood regulation takes precedence over self-regulation towards their longer term goals (Tice et al., 2001). Based on these theoretical notions, we propose that job seekers may not disengage from their goal altogether when experiencing negative deactivating affect, but they likely resort to non-systematic search which requires less deliberate action, and they likely are more easily distracted. Thus, because negative deactivating affect is associated with the preservation of energy and (temporary) goal detachment (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Fulford et al., 2010; Wrzus et al., 2015), while systematic job search is indicative of allocating resources towards goal pursuit, we expect negative deactivating affect to negatively relate to systematic job search.

Self-regulation theory further suggests that positive activating affect signals that one is approaching the goal, and as such could mobilize the energy to engage in further goal pursuit (Carver, 2001). Positive activating affect allows for cognitive flexibility and broadening of attention (Baas et al., 2008; Carver, 2003; De Dreu et al., 2008). This flexibility and broader range of thoughts will likely aid the creative process of coming up with new job 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. Therefore, we expect that positive activating affect will positively relate to the systematicity of job search.

Lastly, self-regulation theory poses that positive deactivating affect (e.g., contentment) signals to individuals that they are well on track and can afford to focus their energy elsewhere (Carver, 2015). When experiencing positive deactivating affect, people will likely coast, and cease or postpone further efforts (Carver, 2003). Self-regulation theory thus would suggest that when job seekers experience positive deactivating affect, they likely reduce the energy devoted to their job search, and shift their focus to other activities. We therefore expect positive deactivating affect to negatively relate to systematic job search.

Method

Design, participants, and procedures

To investigate job search systematicity and its antecedents and outcomes, we focus on active job seeking career starters. We used a multi-wave correlational design with five measurement points (Time 1–5), each four days apart. We opted for an episode of four days, which would be long enough for participants to engage in job search activities, but also short enough to ensure accurately recall of their affective states. We

purposefully recruited active job seekers, which we delineated as those who engaged in job search activities every four days at minimum. In the Time 1 baseline measurement we assessed individual differences in job search clarity, employment commitment, and anticipated 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. We opted for this spacing because application procedures for jobs requiring higher education usually take at least several weeks. Thus, to allow for enough participants to be able to have found a job, we assessed their employment status two and five months after measuring their job search. Measures of job search systematicity were not used for these time points, since these measures would not reliably capture job search for all participants (but likely only for those who have not found a job yet and are not in selection procedures). All surveys were administered online. Respondents were informed on the study procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, the rewards for participation, and the confidential treatment of the data, after which they could provide their informed consent. Participants were asked to make up a username and password, which provided access to the online surveys.

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 behaviour. To meet the study eligibility criteria, participants had to be under 36 years old, highly educated, and had to graduate within six 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 six 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 participants,[1] of which 160 (73.7%) 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 5 months later 76 participants (35.0%) filled in the Time 7 measurement. If participants reported to have obtained a job, they were no longer invited for the remaining measurements.

The mean age was 25.0 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, *SD* = 3.03), while 30.0% of the participants were to graduate within 6 months (*M*= 3.49 months, *SD* = 2.11). Most respondents (73.7%) had a paid (student) job. Participants with a (student) job worked on average 23.21 hours a week (*SD* = 12.66), mostly in a temporary job (63.1%), while some were tenured (16.9%) or self-employed (7.5%). The sample was higher educated (73.7% university master's 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).

Measures

The Time 1 baseline survey included the following measures[2]: Job search clarity, employment commitment, anticipated 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 1.

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).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and between-individual correlations.

	M	*SD*	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. Age	25.00	2.45														
2. Gender[a]	0.23	0.42	.28**													
3. Search duration[b]	2.85	2.93	.19**	.06												
4. Education[c]	0.74	0.44	.28**	−.02	−.06											
5. Graduated[d]	0.70	0.46	.21**	−.05	.26**	−.28**										
6. Job search clarity[e]	3.21	0.78	.03	−.04	.15*	.07	.16*	**.78**								
7. Employment commitment[e]	3.94	0.68	.01	−.08	.08	.06	.07	.20**	**.79**							
8. Anticipated financial need[e]	2.86	0.86	.02	.02	.07	−.01	.11	.03	−.12	**.89**						
9. Negative activating affect[e]	2.80	0.85	−.02	−.13	.24**	−.12	.18**	−.12	.05	.21**	**.84–93**					
10. Negative deactivating affect[e]	2.51	0.82	.05	−.10	.28**	−.09	.24**	−.06	−.05	.24**	.83**	**.90-.95**				
11. Positive activating affect[e]	3.16	0.70	.00	.05	−.05	.03	−.05	.13*	.13	−.07	−.23**	−.28**	**.93-.97**			
12. Positive deactivating affect[e]	3.25	0.72	.05	.26**	−.16*	.07	−.11	.11	−.01	−.12	−.62**	−.54**	.58**	**.93-.96**		
13. Job search intensity[f]	6.87	4.89	.14*	.13	.09	−.10	.18**	.02	−.08	.31**	.35**	.35**	.07	−.05	**.51-.77**	
14. Job search systematicity[g]	3.03	0.54	.06	−.04	.20**	−.10	.19**	.26**	.21**	.09	.19**	.16*	.20**	−.01	.39**	**.84-.91**
15. Job attainment[h]	0.48	0.50	.02	−.03	−.08	.00	.22**	.21**	.12	.08	.01	−.03	.21**	.09	.05	.21**

Note. N = 217 for Variables 1–14 and 208 for Variable 15. [a] 0 = female, 1 = male; [b] measured in months; [c] 0 = no master degree, 1 = master degree; [d] 0 = student, 1 = graduated; [e] response scale 1 to 5; [f] sum of time spent on job search activities averaged over measurement times 1 till 5, measured in hours per four days; [g] job search systematicity score averaged over measurement times 1 till 5 on response scale 1 to 5; [h] 0 = no job, 1 = job.
* p< .05. ** p< .01.

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).

Anticipated financial need

was measured with three items based on Van Hooft and Crossley (2008). 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 at all difficult* (1) to *very difficult* (5) or *not at all* (1) to *very much* (5).

Affect

was assessed at all five measurement times 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

was assessed at all five measurement times with a 12-item behavioural index, consisting of a list of job search activities selected based on existing measures for job search behaviour (Blau, 1994; Van Hooft et al., 2004), updated by including items on the use of internet and social media to search for a job. The 12 items included both formal and informal, and both preparatory and active job search activities. Participants were asked to indicate how much time (in hours) within the last four days they had spent on each of 12 activities (e.g., searching information about an organization I would like to work for, talking to friends and family about job leads, writing an application letter, preparing for a job interview). Response categories ranged from *0 hours* to *32 hours or more*. The sum of the 12 items was used as a composite job search intensity score, with a lower score indicating less time was spend 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 .61 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 intensity is measured with a behavioural 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 intensity index strongly related (correlations on different time points ranging from $r = .83$ 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 diverse 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 behaviours that are less adaptive, and less persistent, or in other words more volatile and distracted, fortuitous, or random. Based on these descriptions, we developed items to measure the extent to which job seekers searched systematically (see Appendix B). 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 and distracted way of searching (reversed coded). At all five measurement times 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 (Study 1; Kreemers et al., 2018). Participants varying in age, gender, 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. Exploratory factor analyses of the 15 items indicated that all but one item clustered into three components of systematic job search behaviour: persistence, adaptability, and fortuitous search behaviour. After exclusion of one item, the remaining 14 items had a 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. The components persistence, adaptability, and fortuitous (reverse coded) load respectively are .75, .56, and .45 on the overall factor systematicity (all $ps < .01$). The factor loadings for

the items were all ≥ .44, all *p*s < .01. Cronbach's alpha of the 14 items ranged between .84 and .91 across the different measurement points.

Regarding the discriminant validity of job search systematicity, we examined whether the job search systematicity components are empirically distinct from (a) job search clarity and (b) job search intensity. First, we performed a series of CFAs in which we compared a four-factor model with the three job search systematicity components and job search clarity modelled as separate factors with three three-factor models in which job search clarity was subsequently collapsed with one of the job search systematicity components. The results support the discriminant validity of job search systematicity since the four-factor model with the job search systematicity components and job search clarity modelled as separate factors fit the data significantly better, $\chi^2(129) = 306.68$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.93, SRMR = 0.074, than each of the three-factor models in which job search clarity was collapsed with one of the job search systematicity components, $\Delta\chi^2(3)$ varies between 183.02 and 382.59 (all *p*s < .001), and ΔCFI varies between 0.05 and 0.10. Second, we performed a series of CFAs in which we compared a four-factor model with the three job search systematicity components and job search intensity modelled as separate factors with three three-factor models in which job search intensity was subsequently collapsed with one of the job search systematicity components. The results support the discriminant validity of job search systematicity since the four-factor model with the job search systematicity components and job search clarity modelled as separate factors fit the data significantly better, $\chi^2(293) = 771.12$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.86, SRMR = 0.084, than each of the three-factor models in which job search intensity was collapsed with one of the job search systematicity components, $\Delta\chi^2(3)$ varies between 314.05 and 1065.74 (all *p*s < .001), and ΔCFI varies between 0.06 and 0.19.

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.

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 measured as potential 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 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 with job attainment as dependent variable. We included job attainment as between-individuals variable because it indicates accomplishment of the goal and as such termination of the job search process. We first tested a model with only the Time 1 control variables job search duration and whether a participant was graduated (Step 1). We added the aggregated average of job search intensity over Time 1 to 5 in Step 2, and the aggregated average of systematic job search over Time 1 to 5 in Step 3. As shown in Table 2 this logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 22.99$, $p < .01$. The model explained 10.46% (Cox & Snell R^2) of the variance in finding a job. The results indicate that, while job search intensity was not significantly related to the likelihood of obtaining a job, Exp(*B*) = 0.97, $p > .05$, job search systematicity was significantly related to the likelihood of obtaining a job, Exp(*B*) = 2.50, $p < .01$. The odds ratio of 2.50 (i.e., larger than 1) indicates a positive relationship between job search systematicity and job attainment, such that with each one-unit increase in job search systematicity the odds of attaining a job increase with 2.50.

Next, we explored the antecedents of job search systematicity. Given that the dependent variable job search systematicity was measured at Time 1 through Time 5, 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). The model with a random intercept fit significantly better than the model with a fixed intercept, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 219.77$, $p < .01$. Furthermore, of the total variance in job search systematicity, 42.87% was at the between-individual level, and 57.13% at the within-individual level. 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

Table 2. Logistic regression with job attainment as dependent variable.

	Job attainment[e]		
	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**	3.15**	2.96**
Job search intensity[c]		1.01	0.97
Job search systematicity[d]			2.50**
χ^2	14.21**	14.23**	22.99**
$\Delta\chi^2$		0.03	8.75**
Cox & Snell R^2	0.07	0.07	0.10

Note. *N*= 208; [a] measured in months; [b] 0 = student, 1 = graduated; [c] sum of time spent on job search activities averaged over measurement times 1 till 5, measured in hours per four days; [d] job search systematicity score averaged over measurement times 1 till 5 on response scale 1 to 5; [e] 0 = no job, 1 = job.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

variance in the job search systematicity over time, hereby supporting both conducting repeated measures and using multi-level regression analyses.

To explore whether job search clarity, employment commitment, anticipated financial need, and the four different types of affect related to systematic job search we performed a multi-level multiple-regression analysis with job search systematicity as dependent variable. Our control variables job search duration, and graduation status, and our predictors job search clarity, employment commitment, and anticipated financial need are Level 2 variables as these were measured once at the baseline measure and therefore differ between individuals 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 centred the Level 2 variables and person-mean centred 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). Because the random-intercept model fit significantly better than the fixed-intercept model, we included a random intercept in all subsequent models. 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 3 presents the results.

Model 3 shows that there is a positive relationship of measurement time with job search systematicity, which means that consistent with our expectation job seekers' systematic job search increased across the five episodes. Furthermore, in line with our expectations job search clarity and employment commitment were significantly positively related to job search systematicity. Contrary to our expectation anticipated financial need was not significantly related to job search systematicity.

Table 3. Multi-level regression results with job search systematicity as dependent variable.

	Job search systematicity		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	2.81**	2.84 **	2.83**
Control variables			
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**
Level 2 predictors			
Job search clarity		0.13**	0.13**
Employment commitment		0.13*	0.13*
Anticipated financial need		0.06	0.06
Level 1 predictors			
Negative activating affect			0.12**
Negative deactivating affect			−0.03
Positive activating affect			0.22**
Positive deactivating affect			−0.01
Random effects			
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	1706.72
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 centred, Level 1 predictors are person-mean centred. [a] measured in months; [b]0 = student, 1 = graduated; [c] 0–4 five measurement times.

* p< .05. ** p< .01.

The results concerning the relationships between affect and systematic job search show that the two activating affects (i.e., negative activating affect and positive activating affect) were significantly positively related to job search systematicity. In contrast, both deactivating affects (i.e., negative deactivating affect and positive deactivating affect) were not significantly related to job search systematicity.

Discussion

In most research on job seeking, job search behaviour is operationalized as how much time and effort job seekers spend or how many job search activities they engage in to obtain employment (i.e., job search intensity; Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hoye, 2018). Such conceptualizations of job search behaviour only weakly predict employment success (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2021). Because organizations nowadays may use a broad variety of recruitment channels, present-day job search has become increasingly complex and opaque (Van Hooft et al., 2021). These developments require broadening the construct space of job search behaviour, moving beyond mere job search intensity. In the present study we introduced and developed the construct of job search systematicity. As such, we aimed to offer a theory-based conceptualization of job search that predicts employment success and provides clear pointers to job seekers on how to approach their job search. We integrated previous theorizing on job search conceptualizations (i.e., content-quality and temporal-persistence components of job search; Kanfer et al., 2001; systematic vs. fortuitous search strategies; Stevens & Beach, 1996; Stumpf et al., 1983) with theorizing on job search quality (Van Hooft et al., 2013) to define job search systematicity in terms of being adaptable and persistent rather than fortuitous and volatile. Our findings provide empirical support for the usefulness of broadening the domain of job search behaviour beyond intensity, as we found that systematic job search positively predicted job attainment, beyond job search intensity. 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 and distracted 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 information search strategies (i.e., focused vs. exploratory strategy; see Appendix A) that has been described in previous research (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). These search strategies pertain to the width of the potential job opportunities that are targeted by job seekers. While focused job seekers search with a specific job profile in mind, exploratory job seekers search for a wide range of job options. Because previous theorizing and empirical findings revealed an ambiguous pattern regarding the relationships of these search strategies with employment outcomes (De Battisti et al., 2016; Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2010, 2016), it remains unclear whether a focused or exploratory strategy can be considered as beneficial. In contrast, job search systematicity was conceptualized as an indicator of job

search quality, suggesting it should benefit job seekers' employment outcomes. Nevertheless, future research could examine how job search systematicity relates to or interacts with an exploratory and focused search strategy, as conceptually both these strategies could be done with high or low systematicity.

We used a five-wave design to be able to explore the change in job search systematicity over time during the course of our study. In line with self-regulation theory suggesting that self-regulated behaviour is a multilevel dynamic process (Lord et al., 2010), our results indicate that job search systematicity both differs between individuals and fluctuates within individuals across the four-day job search episodes. Furthermore, indicating that job seekers learn over time, our results show 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 process applies to highly educated job seekers only or generalizes to other groups of job seekers. In addition, future research could examine how to facilitate positive change in job search systematicity among job seekers (e.g., through an intervention).

Supporting self-regulation theory and self-regulatory models of job search (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2013), our results show that job search clarity and employment commitment (reflecting the intrinsic valence that job seekers attribute to their employment goal) positively relate to systematic job 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.

While financial need (reflecting the extrinsic valence that job seekers attribute to their employment goal) is usually positively related to job search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2021), our results show that it does not relate to job search systematicity. Apparently, the prospect of having financial difficulties when one would not succeed in finding a job in the upcoming months does not stimulate job search systematicity among career starters. The incentive performance literature may provide a theoretical explanation for our finding. Specifically, various meta-analyses (e.g., Cerasoli et al., 2014; Jenkins et al., 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 may be interpreted as an indicator of job search quality, the intrinsic motivator of employment commitment rather than the extrinsic motivator of financial need relates to the quality of job search. These findings distinguish job search systematicity from job search intensity, which is positively associated with both employment commitment and financial need (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2021). However, future research is needed to examine whether our findings on anticipated financial need generalize to other samples of job seekers, as Wanberg, Van Hooft, et al. (2020) found that higher financial need urges unemployed job seekers to prioritize their job search, resulting in a more intense but also higher-quality job search.

Lastly, our findings support the notion of self-regulation theory that affect may serve as impetus for behaviour (Carver, 2003; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Lord et al., 2010). Specifically, our results show that emotions of different activation levels relate differently to job search systematicity, such that positive and negative activating affect positively relate to job search systematicity, while positive and negative deactivating affect were unrelated to job search systematicity. These findings support the value of distinguishing between affect types based on their activation level (in addition to their hedonic tone) when studying the relation between affect and job search behaviour. Our results are in line with research on creativity 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). Interestingly, our results suggest nuancing the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004), which assumes similar roles for activating and deactivating affect, positing that positive emotions broaden people's attention, cognition, and action, widening the array of perception and action present in the mind while negative emptions shrink these same arrays.

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 et al., 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). 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., counsellor reports; see Van Hooft, 2014) should be included in future research that assess job search behaviour 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 job search systematicity were both measured within individuals in the same time span, one can reason that the directionality could be reversed and job search systematicity 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 job search systematicity changes over time. Future research could test the various circumstances that affect these changes in systematic job search. 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 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., Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014; Van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009). Possibly, 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 job search systematicity and job seekers' affective responses develop at a day-to-day level.

A third 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 exploring the value of job search systematicity as an indicator of job search quality, more research regarding this construct is warranted. Given the exploratory nature of our study, future confirmatory (preregistered) research is needed to test the antecedents and consequences of job search systematicity. A logical next step would be to further examine the position of job search systematicity in a broader nomological network of other relevant job search concepts. For example, future research could look at the relation with job search self-efficacy (Saks et al., 2015) and career adaptability (i.e., concern, commitment, curiosity and confidence; Koen et al., 2010). Importantly, although we theoretically argued for the value of job search systematicity, future research is needed to empirically examine the discriminant validity of job search systematicity in relation to Crossley and Highhouse (2005) haphazard, exploratory, and focused search strategies, as well as the comparative utility of job search systematicity versus these search strategies in predicting employment success outcomes. Furthermore, in the present study we focused on job attainment as outcome of job search systematicity. Future research is needed to examine a broader range of outcomes of job search systematicity, distinguishing between quantitative and qualitative job search outcomes and employment outcomes (Saks, 2005; Van Hooft et al., 2021). For example, future work should assess to what extent job search systematicity not only contributes to finding any job, but also to finding a high-quality job. To adequately examine the impact of job search systematicity, employment quality should be assessed both pre-entry and post-entry (Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Also, given that the present study focused on highly educated career starters, future work is needed to examine whether our findings generalize to other samples, such as lower-educated job seekers and unemployed job seekers.

Conclusion

The results of this study broaden existing approaches to studying job search behaviour by identifying job search systematicity as an important component of job search predicting job attainment. This study may inspire researchers to continue along this line and further explore how job seekers can engage in a systematic and efficient job search to increase their chances of finding a job. While future research is needed to test the robustness and generalizability of our findings, the practical implications of addressing job search systematicity are promising. As we further our understanding of job search behaviours that are most effective for finding a job, we can inform job seekers and career and employment counsellors 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).

Notes

1. Data of 10 "participants" were deleted because, due to a suspicious amount of overlap in the personal sign in information (email address, phone number, ip-address, timing), we suspected that two individuals made up these data.
2. The data were collected as part of a larger study in which we addressed various research questions. We have written a paper on another part of the data(see Study 2, Kreemers et al., 2018). Apart from the demographics, the only overlapping variable is affect, which is a predictor in this paper and the outcome in the other. We included several other variables for the other paper and for 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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Notes on contributor

Loes M. Kreemers is now at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands. Edwin A. J. van Hooft and Annelies E. M. van Vianen, Work and Organizational Psychology, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

ORCID

Edwin A. J. van Hooft http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6625-5362
Annelies E. M. van Vianen http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3931-0394

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Appendix A

Overview of the Conceptualization of Job Search Systematicity as Compared to Other Job Search Constructs

Construct	Definition	Theoretical dimension of job search	Type of scale	Low pole	High pole
Job search systematicity	The extent to which people have an adaptable and persistent rather than a volatile and fortuitous approach towards job seeking	Content-direction and temporal-persistence dimensions of job search behaviour (Kanfer et al., 2001)	Agreement with 14 statements describing adaptive, persistent, and distracted/volatile (reverse coded) approaches to job search	Low systematicity in terms of low adaptability, low persistence, and being distracted and volatile in one's job search	High systematicity in terms of high adaptability, high persistence, and being undistracted in one's job search
Haphazard job search strategy	Search strategy involving passively gathering information both inside and outside of one's area of expertise, using a trial and error approach, and switching tactics without rationale (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005)	Information search strategy to gather information about possible jobs (Stevens & Turban, 2001)	Agreement with four statements describing random, hit or miss approaches towards gathering job-related information	Undefined (other than not having a haphazard or random approach to gather job-relevant information)	Highly haphazard or random approach to gathering job-relevant information
Focused job search strategy	Search strategy involving concentration of search efforts on a small number of carefully screened potential employers, applying only for jobs within one's expertise (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005)	Information search strategy to gather information about possible jobs (Stevens & Turban, 2001), referring to the width of the job search efforts	Agreement with six statements describing gathering job-related information for a small number of specific jobs one is qualified for	Undefined (other than not having a focused approach to gather job-relevant information)	Highly focused approach to gathering job-relevant information, geared towards a small number of job options that fit with one's qualities
Exploratory job search strategy	Search strategy involving examination of several potential employment options and actively gathering job-related information from various sources, remaining open to opportunities (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005)	Information search strategy to gather information about possible jobs (Stevens & Turban, 2001), referring to the width of the job search efforts	Agreement with six statements describing gathering job-related information and pursuing a wide range of jobs	Undefined (other than not having an exploratory approach to gather job-relevant information)	Highly exploratory approach to gathering job-relevant information, geared towards all available job opportunities
Job search intensity	The frequency and scope of job search activities, or the amount of time and effort that people spend on job search activities (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft et al., 2021)	Intensity-effort dimension of job search behaviour (Kanfer et al., 2001)	Scales typically including a list of job search activities of which individuals indicate how many times or hours they have engaged in each activity over a specific time period	A low amount or no time spent on the listed job search activities	A high amount of time spent on the listed job search activities

Appendix B

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.*