

Job Search as Goal-Directed Behavior: Objectives and Methods

Greet Van Hoye

Ghent University, Belgium

Alan M. Saks

University of Toronto, Canada

Greet Van Hoye, Department of Personnel Management, Work and Organizational Psychology, Ghent University, Belgium; Alan M. Saks, Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, University of Toronto, Canada.

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Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Greet Van Hoye, Department of Personnel Management, Work and Organizational Psychology, Ghent University, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium. Phone: +32 9 264 91 39, Fax: +32 9 264 64 94, E-mail: greet.vanhoye@ugent.be

Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between job search objectives (finding a new job/turnover, staying aware of job alternatives, developing a professional network, and obtaining leverage against an employer) and job search methods (looking at job ads, visiting job sites, networking, contacting employment agencies, contacting employers, and submitting applications). In a sample of 205 employed individuals from Belgium and Romania, job search objectives were significantly related to job search methods even after job satisfaction was controlled. Furthermore, particular objectives predicted specific methods. While the finding a new job/turnover objective predicted all search methods, staying aware of alternatives predicted using job ads and sites; the network objective predicted networking and contacting employers; and the leverage objective predicted contacting employers. Results suggest that search objectives are important for understanding job seekers' search behavior and support the view that job search is a self-regulatory process that begins with objectives which activate search behavior.

KEYWORDS: Job search; job seeker; job search behavior; job search objective; job search method; turnover; job alternatives; network; leverage; job satisfaction.

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The mobility of the workforce has increased drastically over the last decade as individuals search for work following job loss and pursue opportunities to advance their careers (Saks, 2005). Job search has become so pervasive and frequent that it is now considered to be an integral part of people's worklife (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). At the same time, there has been a dramatic increase in research on the prediction of job search behavior and employment outcomes (Saks, 2005). In their meta-analysis, Kanfer et al. (2001) found that personality traits, self-evaluations, motives, social context, and biographical variables were significantly related to job search behavior and that job search behavior was related to employment outcomes.

Given that job search is typically conceptualized as a self-regulatory process initiated by goals (Kanfer et al., 2001; Saks, 2005), an important limitation of previous research has been the failure to consider the role of job search objectives. As noted by Boswell, Boudreau, and Dunford (2004), there is little understanding of job seekers' goals or objectives for engaging in job search. This is perhaps not so surprising given that most research assumes that the main if not only objective of job seekers is to find a new job (Kanfer et al., 2001). However, job search does not always result in turnover or employment and there are many other reasons for job seekers to engage in job search, especially for employed individuals, such as seeking bargaining leverage to improve one's present job situation (Boswell et al., 2004). Research on job search objectives is important because job seekers' search behavior is likely to depend in large part on their job search objectives. For example, if job seekers' objective is to develop a network of professional relationships, they might make more use of search methods allowing them to meet and talk to other people. Thus, the study of job search objectives is important for better understanding the job search process (Kanfer et al., 2001).

In addition, previous research has typically operationalized job search behavior as

overall job search intensity, a composite measure of various search methods (Kanfer et al., 2001). Although some research has investigated general job search categories (e.g., preparatory versus active, Blau, 1994) or strategies (e.g., focused versus exploratory versus haphazard, Crossley & Highhouse, 2005), we know very little about job seekers' use of specific job search methods. However, a few recent studies have found that job seekers vary in their use of particular search methods (e.g., looking at job ads versus contacting employment agencies, Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005) and that some methods (e.g., networking) have specific determinants (e.g., networking comfort) that are not predictive of other methods (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000).

Along these lines, the present study contributes to the job search literature by investigating the relationship between distinct job search objectives (i.e., what the job seeker wants to achieve) and specific job search methods (i.e., the activities that the job seeker will engage in to achieve his/her objectives). We believe that job seekers' variation in the use of specific search methods might be explained by the extent to which they are pursuing different job search objectives. On a theoretical level, the current study aims to enhance our understanding of job search as a self-regulatory process that begins with objectives that activate job search behavior. While most unemployed job seekers probably engage in job search primarily to find a job, employed individuals are likely to show more variation in their pursuit of job search objectives. Therefore, similar to Boswell et al. (2004), we test our hypotheses in a sample of employed job seekers. In the next section we discuss job search objectives in more detail followed by the study hypotheses.

Job Search Objectives

The importance of goals and objectives in job search has been recognized for some time (Kanfer & Hulin, 1985). The strongest case was made by Kanfer et al. (2001) who conceptualized job search as a "purposive, volitional pattern of action that begins with the

identification and commitment to pursuing an employment goal. The employment goal, in turn, activates search behavior designed to bring about the goal.” (p. 838). Thus, when viewed as a self-regulatory process, job search behavior is defined as goal-directed activities. Yet, given the lack of previous research, goals were not included in Kanfer et al.’s (2001) meta-analysis.

However, two other variables in the Kanfer et al. (2001) motivational self-regulatory framework are goal-related constructs that can motivate an individual to search more intensely. Employment commitment refers to the importance or centrality that an individual places on employment whereas financial need consists of the financial hardship experienced by a job seeker. Meta-analytic results revealed small to medium size relationships for these goal-related constructs in predicting job search behavior (Kanfer et al., 2001).

Job search goals and objectives have been recognized in other models of job search as well. For example, based on a review of the job search literature, Saks (2005) developed an integrative self-regulatory model of job search predictors, behaviors, and outcomes in which employment goals and job search goals predict job search behaviors. Latack, Kinicki, and Prussia (1995) developed a coping with job loss model in which coping goals directly influence coping strategies (e.g., actively searching for employment) that are intended to achieve one’s goals. Along these lines, Prussia, Fugate, and Kinicki (2001) found that unemployed manufacturing workers’ reemployment coping goals were positively related to job search effort and that job search effort was positively related to reemployment.

Recently, Wanberg, Hough, and Song (2002) introduced the concept of job search clarity (i.e., the extent to which job seekers have clear job search objectives and a clear idea of the type of work desired) and found that this goal-related construct was positively related to job-organization fit and lower intention to quit in a sample of unemployed job seekers. Côté, Saks, and Zikic (2006) found that job search clarity was positively related to the job search

intensity of graduating university students and mediated the relationship of positive affectivity and job search self-efficacy with job search intensity.

With respect to the goals and objectives of employed job seekers, several theoretical models of turnover have recognized the existence of multiple paths toward job search and turnover (Steel, 2002). Whereas traditional turnover research has mostly focused on job dissatisfaction and perceived job alternatives as major precursors of job search and turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000), Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model of voluntary employee turnover suggests that people follow different psychological paths that are often precipitated by unexpected events or shocks when they decide to leave an organization. Empirical findings support the notion that voluntary turnover is not always preceded by job dissatisfaction or a deliberate search for job alternatives (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999; Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996; Van Vianen, Feij, Krausz, & Taris, 2003).

Although previous research has investigated several goal-related constructs, we know of only one published study that has focused specifically on job search objectives. Boswell et al. (2004) investigated the predictors and outcomes of two types of job search objectives: leverage-seeking search objectives (i.e., job search for the purpose of obtaining leverage against one's current employer) and separation-seeking search objectives (i.e., job search for the purpose of changing jobs). In their study of employed high-level managers, they found that separation-seeking objectives were positively related to voluntary turnover and leverage-seeking search objectives were positively related to leverage use one year later. The authors concluded that "a more explicit treatment of job search goals in future research may enhance our understanding beyond the traditional implicit assumption that individuals search only to find a new position after deciding to leave." (p. 1089).

In an unpublished paper, Boswell, Boudreau, and Dunford (2002) describe some additional measures (i.e., a greater number of job search objectives as well as preparatory and

active job search behavior) collected in the same sample as Boswell et al. (2004), indicating that job search behavior might vary as a function of job search objectives. For example, the search objective to find a new job was most strongly related to active job search behavior while other objectives (e.g., to stay aware of alternative job opportunities) were more strongly related to preparatory job search.

In summary, despite their crucial role in theoretical models of job search, very little research attention has been given to job search objectives and only one study has investigated the relationship between job search objectives and job search behavior. However, a limitation of the Boswell et al. (2002, 2004) study is that it only measured two general categories of job search behavior (preparatory and active) which might explain the mixed support for some of their hypotheses. As the authors note, it would be useful for future research to adopt finer distinctions of job search methods. Furthermore, the Boswell et al. (2002, 2004) study involved a sample of high-level managers whose search objectives and methods might differ from lower-level managers and non-managerial job seekers. As described in the next section, the present study examines the relationship between four types of job search objectives and six specific job search methods in a sample of managerial and non-managerial employees.

Job Search Objectives and Job Search Methods

In the present study, we distinguish between four job search objectives on the basis of Boswell et al.'s (2002, 2004) classification: finding a new job/turnover, staying aware of alternative job opportunities, developing a network of professional relationships, and obtaining leverage against an employer. As described below, we expect each of these search objectives to be related to specific job search methods. Based on composite measures of job search behavior used in previous research (e.g., Blau, 1994) as well as on Wanberg et al.'s (2005) classification of specific search methods, we identified six distinct job search methods for inclusion in the present study (see method section for more details): looking at job ads in

newspapers or journals; visiting job sites; contacting relatives, friends, and acquaintances (labeled as networking in previous research on job search behavior, Wanberg et al., 2000); contacting employment agencies; contacting employers; and submitting applications.

Finding a New Job/Turnover Objective

Previous research on the job search behavior of employed individuals has typically assumed that employees engage in job search activities because they intend to quit their job with their current employer and are looking for a new job (Blau, 1994). Meta-analytic findings indicating that employed job seekers' search behavior is positively related to voluntary turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000) and to finding new employment (Kanfer et al., 2001) support the idea that, at least to some extent, employees' job search behavior is motivated by finding a new job/turnover objectives.

Individuals looking for a new job are likely to cast a wide net and make use of a variety of job search methods and strategies to gather information on job opportunities (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Kanfer & Hulin, 1985). In fact, models of job search suggest that job seekers first search broadly to identify as many opportunities as possible (Blau, 1994). Thus, employees who want to find a new job are likely to begin with an initial extensive search that requires them to cast a broad net (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994). Therefore, we expect the finding a new job/turnover objective to be associated with all six job search methods. This is in line with the positive relationship of general job search intensity (measured as a composite of various search methods) with voluntary turnover and with finding new employment reported in previous research (Griffeth et al., 2000; Kanfer et al., 2001). In addition, Boswell et al. (2002) found that the search objective to find a new job was positively related to both preparatory and active job search behaviors.

Hypothesis 1. The finding a new job/turnover objective will be positively related to (a) looking at job ads, (b) visiting job sites, (c) networking, (d) contacting employment

agencies, (e) contacting employers, and (f) submitting applications.

Staying Aware of Job Opportunities Objective

Although previous research has focused on turnover as the main objective driving employees' job search behavior, there are other reasons that employed job seekers might engage in job search. In fact, previous research has found that job search does not always result in turnover (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994). One of the reasons for this (besides the failure to find more suitable job alternatives or changes in the current job that make it more desirable to stay) might be that employed job seekers also search for job information to stay aware of job opportunities available in the labor market (Boswell et al., 2002).

In practice, employed individuals motivated by this job search objective are sometimes referred to as "passive job seekers", a target group of potential applicants much sought after by recruiting organizations. They are not actively looking for a new job, but still want to stay aware of possible job opportunities (Steel, 2002). Thus, they are most likely to use passive job search methods such as skimming through job postings in the newspaper or on the internet. Along these lines, Boswell et al. (2002) found that the objective to stay aware of alternative job opportunities was more strongly related to preparatory than to active job search behavior.

Hypothesis 2. The staying aware of job opportunities objective will be positively related to (a) looking at job ads, and (b) visiting job sites.

Developing a Network of Professional Relationships Objective

Employed individuals might also engage in job search activities to develop and maintain a network of professional relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career (Wanberg et al., 2000). The importance of developing a network as a career management strategy has increased in recent years as careers have become more "boundaryless" (Forret & Dougherty, 2001).

Individuals guided by the network objective would not be interested in gathering job

information per se, but rather in meeting and talking to others who might be important for their work or career (e.g., others in their profession or headhunters) (Boswell et al., 2002). Therefore, they are likely to make use of job search methods that involve human contact, such as networking, contacting employment agencies, and contacting employers. Contrary to their expectations, Boswell et al. (2002) found that the objective to develop a professional network was more strongly related to preparatory than to active job search behavior. However, it makes more sense to investigate the relationship of this objective with specific search methods, as some of the methods involving human contact are traditionally classified as preparatory job search (i.e., networking) whereas others are categorized as active job search (i.e., contacting employment agencies and employers) (Blau, 1994).

Hypothesis 3. The developing a network of professional relationships objective will be positively related to (a) networking, (b) contacting employment agencies, and (c) contacting employers.

Obtaining Leverage Against an Employer Objective

Employees might also engage in a job search to gather information on job alternatives that they can use to improve their bargaining position in negotiating their terms of employment with a potential or current employer (Boswell et al., 2002). Along these lines, Boswell et al. (2004) found that the obtaining leverage objective was positively related to the actual use of job alternatives as bargaining leverage against the current employer but was not related to voluntary turnover. Conversely, the turnover objective was positively related to voluntary turnover whereas its relationship with the use of leverage was not significant.

The use of job alternatives as bargaining leverage requires specific information about job opportunities (e.g., compensation or responsibilities) that might not be provided in job postings or through intermediary persons or agencies. Therefore, we expect that employees motivated by the obtaining leverage objective will be more likely to contact employers

directly to gather the employment information they require. In addition, job seekers will have stronger leverage if they actually obtain job offers, compelling their current or potential employer to make a better counteroffer (Boswell et al., 2004). Thus, they would have to submit applications to other employers even though they are not really looking for a new job.

Hypothesis 4. The obtaining leverage against an employer objective will be positively related to (a) contacting employers, and (b) submitting applications.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The participants consisted of higher educated employed individuals in advanced education. These individuals are likely to be concerned about their career, to engage in job search activities, and to vary in their pursuit of different job search objectives. In addition, they represent an important group of potential applicants that recruiting organizations typically compete for. Specifically, to be included in the current study, participants were required to have obtained a master's degree, to be employed in a job that requires a master's degree, and to be enrolled in advanced academic studies (e.g., MBA). In addition, to enhance the generalizability of our results, data were collected in two different countries, Belgium and Romania. In Belgium, a university forwarded an e-mail to its students enrolled in advanced academic studies, inviting them to participate in the current study, given that they met the requirements stated above. If they agreed, they could complete the survey online on a website especially created for this study. Given that the students were not directly contacted by us, we do not know how many of them were actually approached nor how many of those approached met our inclusion criteria. Therefore, we were not able to calculate an exact response rate. In Romania, a research assistant attended several classes in various advanced academic programs offered by a university to introduce the study and to explain the participation requirements. If students agreed to participate, they could complete the survey immediately

by paper-and-pencil. Given this classroom approach, the response rate was nearly 100%.

In total, 222 responses were returned. Of these, 17 were removed from further analyses because they had not engaged in any job search activity in the past six months. Therefore, our final sample consisted of 205 individuals, including 104 Belgians (51%) and 101 Romanians (49%). More women (72%) than men (28%) participated and age ranged from 21 to 48 years ($M = 28.36$, $SD = 5.94$). Whereas 25% of the participants were employed as a manager, 75% had a non-managerial job. Tenure with the current employer ranged from 1 to 340 months ($M = 42.40$, $SD = 51.27$). The only observed difference between countries was in gender composition, $\chi^2(1) = 6.35$, $p < .05$, as more of the participants were female in Romania (80%) than in Belgium (64%). There were no differences in age, $t(193) = -.65$, $p > .05$; job type, $\chi^2(1) = 2.98$, $p > .05$; and tenure, $t(154) = -1.89$, $p > .05$. Both country and gender were entered as control variables in all of the analyses (as well as some other variables, see below).

Measures

Job search objectives. In line with Boswell et al.'s (2002, 2004) classification, we measured four different objectives for engaging in job search activities, namely finding a new job/turnover, staying aware of alternative job opportunities, developing a network of professional relationships, and obtaining leverage against the current or a potential employer. Whereas Boswell et al. (2002, 2004) used single item measures, we developed three items to measure each specific objective. Consistent with Boswell et al. (2002, 2004), participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each item explained their objective for engaging in any job search activities in the past six months on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *no extent* to 5 = *to a very great extent*. Sample items are "Finding a new job" (*finding a new job/turnover*, $\alpha = .81$), "Staying aware of possible job alternatives" (*staying aware*, $\alpha = .85$), "Developing new professional relationships" (*developing network*, $\alpha = .91$), and "Obtaining leverage against your current or a potential employer" (*obtaining leverage*, $\alpha = .92$).

Confirmatory factor analysis showed an acceptable fit for this four-factor model, $\chi^2(48) = 125.55, p < .01$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, root mean square error of approximation ($RMSEA$) = .09. Inspection of the factor loadings revealed that each item had a significantly high loading on the factor it was purported to measure. In addition, the four-factor model fitted the data significantly better than a model in which all items loaded on one single factor, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 435.95, p < .01$, as this one-factor model produced a poor fit, $\chi^2(54) = 561.50, p < .01, CFI = .66, RMSEA = .22$.

Job search methods. To identify specific job search methods, we scrutinized composite measures of job search behavior used in previous research (Blau, 1994; Kanfer et al., 2001; Kopelman, Rovenpor, & Millsap, 1992; Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2000, 2002; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van Der Flier, & Blonk, 2004; Wanberg et al., 2002; Wanberg et al., 2000). Consistent with Wanberg et al.'s (2005) classification of specific search methods, six frequently recurring methods were observed, namely looking at job ads, visiting job sites, networking, contacting employment agencies, contacting employers, and submitting applications. On the basis of these previous measures, two or three items were developed to measure each method. Following Blau (1994), participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they had carried out each activity in the past six months on a 5-point rating scale, with 1 = *never (0 times)*, 2 = *rarely (1 or 2 times)*, 3 = *occasionally (3 to 5 times)*, 4 = *frequently (6 to 9 times)*, and 5 = *very frequently (at least 10 times)*. Sample items are "Looked at job ads in newspapers or journals" (*looking at job ads*, $\alpha = .76$), "Looked for job postings on the internet" (*visiting job sites*, $\alpha = .92$), "Asked people you know about possible job leads" (*networking*, $\alpha = .90$), "Contacted temporary employment agencies" (*contacting agencies*, $\alpha = .72$), "Contacted employers for information about jobs" (*contacting employers*, $\alpha = .64$), and "Sent application letters" (*submitting applications*, $\alpha = .83$).

Confirmatory factor analysis showed a good fit for this six-factor model, $\chi^2(89) =$

137.46, $p < .01$, $CFI = .96$, $RMSEA = .05$. The factor loadings indicated that each item loaded significantly high on the factor it intended to measure. Moreover, the six-factor model fitted the data significantly better than a model in which all items loaded on one single factor, $\Delta\chi^2(15) = 458.06$, $p < .01$, as this one-factor model produced a poor fit, $\chi^2(104) = 595.52$, $p < .01$, $CFI = .63$, $RMSEA = .16$.

Control variables. Given the high correlation between age and tenure ($r = .67$, $p < .01$), only tenure was used as a control variable. In addition, we controlled for country, gender, and job type in the analyses. Finally, job satisfaction was entered as a control variable because it has been found to be a major determinant of employed individuals' job search behavior (Blau, 1994; Bretz et al., 1994; Van Hooft et al., 2004). Therefore, we were able to investigate whether job search objectives explain incremental variance in job search methods beyond this important antecedent. A single item was used to measure overall job satisfaction, given that previous research has found single-item and multiple-item measures of job satisfaction to be highly correlated (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement: "All in all, I am satisfied with my current job" on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among all the study variables. The correlations between the job search objectives and the job search methods ranged from a low .13 ($p > .05$) to a high .58 ($p < .01$). It is also worth noting that consistent with previous research (Blau, 1994; Bretz et al., 1994; Van Hooft et al., 2004), job satisfaction was significantly and negatively related to all six job search methods. In addition, job satisfaction was negatively related to the four job search objectives.

To provide a stringent test of our hypotheses, we conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses with the six job search methods as the dependent variables (see Table 2).

In each of these analyses, country, gender, tenure, job type, and job satisfaction were entered in the first step as control variables, followed by the four search objectives in the second step.

For *looking at job ads*, the control variables explained significant variance ($R^2 = .10, p < .01$). Job seekers who were less satisfied with their current job reported looking at job ads more frequently ($\beta = -.25, p < .01$). In Step 2, the job search objectives explained significant incremental variance ($\Delta R^2 = .15, p < .01$). In support of Hypotheses 1a and 2a, job seekers were more likely to look at job ads if their objective was to find a new job/turnover ($\beta = .21, p < .01$) and to stay aware of job opportunities ($\beta = .34, p < .01$).

The control variables also explained a significant amount of variance in *visiting job sites* ($R^2 = .16, p < .01$). Romanian job seekers ($\beta = -.18, p < .05$), job seekers with less tenure ($\beta = -.17, p < .05$), and less satisfied job seekers ($\beta = -.23, p < .01$) were more likely to visit job sites. The job search objectives accounted for significant incremental variance in the second step ($\Delta R^2 = .34, p < .01$). Both the finding a new job/turnover objective ($\beta = .43, p < .01$) and the staying aware of job opportunities objective ($\beta = .39, p < .01$) were positive predictors in support of Hypotheses 1b and 2b.

For *networking*, the control variables explained significant variance ($R^2 = .20, p < .01$). Romanian job seekers ($\beta = -.32, p < .01$), job seekers with less tenure ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$), and less satisfied job seekers ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$) more frequently contacted other people for information about jobs. In Step 2, the job search objectives explained significant incremental variance ($\Delta R^2 = .19, p < .01$). As predicted by Hypotheses 1c and 3a, job seekers were more likely to network if their objective was to find a new job/turnover ($\beta = .21, p < .01$), and to develop a network of professional relationships ($\beta = .32, p < .01$).

For *contacting agencies*, the control variables explained significant variance ($R^2 = .11, p < .01$). Romanian job seekers ($\beta = -.27, p < .01$) were more likely to contact employment agencies. The job search objectives accounted for significant incremental variance in the

second step ($\Delta R^2 = .08, p < .01$). In support of Hypothesis 1d, job seekers contacted employment agencies more frequently if their objective was to find a new job/turnover ($\beta = .18, p < .05$). The developing a professional network objective was only marginally significant ($\beta = .14, p < .10$), providing limited support for Hypothesis 3b.

The control variables explained a significant amount of variance in *contacting employers* ($R^2 = .11, p < .01$). Romanian job seekers ($\beta = -.20, p < .01$), men ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$), and job seekers who were less satisfied with their current job ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$) reported contacting employers more frequently. In Step 2, the job search objectives explained additional significant variance ($\Delta R^2 = .14, p < .01$). In support of Hypotheses 1e, 3c, and 4a, the objectives to find a new job/turnover ($\beta = .17, p < .05$), to develop a professional network ($\beta = .19, p < .05$), and to obtain bargaining leverage ($\beta = .15, p < .05$) were all significant.

Finally, for *submitting applications*, the control variables explained significant variance ($R^2 = .12, p < .01$). Romanian job seekers ($\beta = -.15, p < .05$), job seekers with less tenure ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$), and less satisfied job seekers ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$) were more likely to submit applications. In Step 2, the job search objectives explained significant incremental variance ($\Delta R^2 = .18, p < .01$). Job seekers submitted applications more frequently if their objective was to find a new job/turnover ($\beta = .34, p < .01$) in support of Hypothesis 1f. However, the obtaining leverage objective was not a significant predictor, failing to support Hypothesis 4b. The objective to develop a professional network was marginally significant ($\beta = .13, p < .10$).

Summary

In each regression analysis, the job search objectives explained significant incremental variance in employed job seekers' use of specific job search methods beyond the control variables including job satisfaction. Moreover, whereas job satisfaction significantly predicted five out of six job search methods in the first step, it was no longer significant in the second step after entering the search objectives. As hypothesized, the finding a new job/turnover

objective positively predicted all search methods whereas the objective to stay aware of job alternatives was only a significant predictor of passive search methods (i.e., looking at job ads and visiting job sites). The objective to develop a network of professional relationships was a positive predictor of networking and contacting employers, and to a lesser extent, of contacting employment agencies and submitting applications. Finally, the obtaining leverage objective positively predicted contacting employers but not actually submitting applications.

Discussion

The present study contributes to and extends the job search literature by examining the relationship between four types of job search objectives and six specific search methods in a sample of employed job seekers. Our study yields several important conclusions that enhance our knowledge of the job search process. First, we found that job search objectives explained incremental variance in employed job seekers' use of particular search methods, beyond their level of satisfaction with their current job. Moreover, job satisfaction was no longer a significant predictor of search methods once the objectives were entered into the regression analyses. Given that previous research has found job satisfaction to be a strong predictor of employees' search behavior (Blau, 1994; Bretz et al., 1994; Van Hooft et al., 2004), this finding provides an important extension of research on job search and employee turnover.

Second, we found that job search objectives were differentially related to job search methods, indicating that they can help explain variation in job seekers' use of distinct search strategies (Wanberg et al., 2005). This is in line with Kanfer et al.'s (2001) conceptualization of job search as a self-regulatory process, "that begins with the identification and commitment to pursuing an employment goal. The employment goal, in turn, activates search behavior designed to bring about the goal." (p. 838). This suggests that different objectives are likely to elicit the use of different search methods that are most suited to accomplish those objectives.

In line with our expectations, we found that job seekers who engaged in job search to

find a new job/pursue turnover were likely to use all job search methods more frequently. This corroborates previous research reporting a positive relationship of general job search intensity with voluntary turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000) and with finding new employment (Kanfer et al., 2001). Furthermore, this suggests that finding a new job/turnover remains an important objective for explaining employees' job search behavior. However, the extent to which employed individuals engaged in various job search activities was predicted by other objectives as well. In fact, for some search methods, the finding a new job/turnover objective was not the strongest predictor. This is in line with previous research indicating that job search behavior does not always result in turnover (Bretz et al., 1994).

As predicted, passive job seekers who engaged in job search to stay aware of alternative job opportunities were more likely to use passive job search methods such as looking at job ads and visiting job sites. This supports Boswell et al.'s (2002) finding that the staying aware objective was more strongly related to preparatory than to active search behavior. However, given that job search is a dynamic, recursive process, the results of this passive job search (e.g., the identification of attractive job alternatives) might subsequently stimulate job seekers to pursue a finding a new job/turnover objective, which in turn would trigger other search methods as well (Griffeth et al., 2000; Kanfer et al., 2001; Steel, 2002).

By comparison, job seekers who were motivated by the objective to develop and maintain a network of professional relationships were more likely to apply search methods involving human contact such as networking and contacting employers, and to a lesser extent contacting employment agencies and submitting applications. Conversely, the network objective was not a significant predictor of more passive methods such as looking at job ads and visiting job sites, which would not allow job seekers to meet other people who might be able to assist them in their work or career (Forret & Dougherty, 2001). This demonstrates how understanding job seekers' objectives for engaging in job search helps to explain their use of

particular search methods aimed at obtaining those specific objectives.

With respect to the objective of obtaining bargaining leverage against a current or potential employer, we only found a positive relationship for contacting employers and not for submitting applications. This was unexpected given that the pursuit of job offers (through submitting applications) is likely to enhance job seekers' bargaining position by compelling the employer to make a better counteroffer (Boswell et al., 2004). However, the results of previous research have been mixed as well. Whereas Boswell et al. (2002, 2004) observed a positive relationship between the leverage objective and employees' use of job alternatives as bargaining leverage against their employer, the objective to obtain leverage was not significantly related to active job search behavior. Future research might shed more light on this issue by including the actual number of job offers received by job seekers as an outcome.

Implications for Research and Practice

The results of this study support the call for future research on job search objectives to enhance our understanding of job search and job seekers' use of particular search methods (Boswell et al., 2002, 2004). A first interesting avenue for future research would be to investigate search objectives among unemployed job seekers. Even though most unemployed people are likely to engage in job search primarily to find a job, they might have additional reasons for applying specific search methods, such as developing their professional network. Moreover, other objectives might be relevant for unemployed job seekers (e.g., searching to comply with the requirements for receiving unemployment benefits).

A second fruitful area for future research would be to broaden the criteria of job search success. Most previous studies have operationalized job search success as the number of job offers, search duration, and finding employment (Kanfer et al., 2001). However, the current study suggests that job search outcomes should be measured in terms of job seekers' specific objectives (Kanfer et al., 2001) as different objectives might be related to different outcomes.

Along these lines, Boswell et al. (2004) found that the obtaining leverage objective was related to actual leverage use but not to turnover, whereas the turnover objective was associated with turnover but not with leverage use.

A third area for future research would be to investigate the relationships between job seekers' objectives, use of particular search methods, and success in obtaining their objectives. Although the current results indicate that search objectives are associated with specific search methods, we do not know if those search methods lead to the accomplishment of the objectives. This is an important topic for future research to provide guidance to job seekers as to which methods are most effective for achieving particular objectives.

A final promising direction for future research would be to investigate personality and situational variables as predictors of different job search objectives to better understand why job seekers have particular search objectives (Kanfer et al., 2001). For example, Boswell et al. (2004) found that work attributes and individual differences (e.g., importance of work-related rewards) predict leverage-seeking and separation-seeking search objectives.

Several practical implications follow from our study. Both employed and unemployed job seekers should first identify their search objectives as part of a job search strategy and carefully consider what specific search methods to use to accomplish those objectives. Job search and career counselors should help job seekers in identifying their search objectives and choosing appropriate search methods in light of those objectives. In addition, organizations should be aware that not all employees who engage in job search activities are actually looking for a new job and are going to quit. Similarly, not all job seekers who apply to an organization are intending to accept job offers. Thus, organizations might benefit by better understanding the search objectives of employed and unemployed job seekers as it has implications for employee retention (e.g., what to do when an employee has a finding a new job/turnover objective versus a networking objective) and applicant attraction (e.g., how to

attract job seekers with a finding a new job/turnover objective versus a leverage objective).

Study Limitations

This study has a number of limitations that require some caution in the interpretation of the results. First, we relied on self-report measures gathered by a single survey. As a result, the relationships between the variables in our study might be partly a result of common method variance. In addition, the cross-sectional design does not allow us to draw causal conclusions between search objectives and search methods. Moreover, consistent with previous research (Blau, 1994; Boswell et al., 2002, 2004), participants were asked to report their job search objectives and methods for the past six months. Therefore, it might be that their responses were to some extent affected by retrospective bias. Along these lines, future longitudinal research with multiple time waves or a diary design would help to better capture the dynamic nature of the relationship between job search objectives and methods.

In addition, even though we found that job search objectives were differentially related to job search methods, we were not able to determine their relationship with specific job search outcomes (e.g., turnover, network extension). As noted above, future research should investigate the relationships between job search objectives, methods, and outcomes. Finally, in line with previous research (Boswell et al., 2002, 2004), we tested our hypotheses in a sample of employed job seekers. Therefore, our results cannot be generalized to unemployed job seekers without further research. On the positive side, our sample included managerial and non-managerial employees from two countries which should increase the generalizability of the results to other employed job seekers.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that job seekers have different job search objectives that are differentially related to their use of job search methods. This finding supports the view that job search is a self-regulatory process that begins with search objectives and goals that activate job search behaviors.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
<i>Control variables</i>																	
1. Country ^a	.51	.50	-														
2. Gender ^b	.72	.45	-.18*	-													
3. Age (in years)	28.36	5.94	.05	-.17*	-												
4. Tenure (in months)	42.40	51.27	.13	-.12	.67**	-											
5. Job type ^c	.25	.44	-.12	-.24**	.34**	.19**	-										
6. Job satisfaction	3.58	1.02	.34**	-.17*	-.13	.02	.00	-									
<i>Job search objectives</i>																	
7. Finding a new job/turnover	2.58	1.12	-.10	.07	-.02	-.13	-.13	-.40**	-								
8. Staying aware	2.78	1.03	-.22**	.11	-.10	-.15*	-.02	-.28**	.41**	-							
9. Developing network	2.64	1.17	-.27**	-.01	-.12	-.13	.03	-.18*	.38**	.54**	-						
10. Obtaining leverage	2.22	1.14	-.34**	-.03	.04	.03	.01	-.27**	.31**	.34**	.43**	-					
<i>Job search methods</i>																	
11. Looking at job ads	2.34	.94	-.02	.15*	-.07	-.15*	-.13	-.24**	.36**	.40**	.15*	.13	-				
12. Visiting job sites	2.76	1.37	-.24**	.01	-.10	-.21**	-.12	-.28**	.58**	.55**	.35**	.26**	.45**	-			
13. Networking	2.11	1.01	-.38**	.11	-.10	-.20**	-.06	-.27**	.40**	.40**	.50**	.29**	.33**	.45**	-		
14. Contacting agencies	1.39	.67	-.30**	.09	-.02	-.15*	-.01	-.15*	.28**	.27**	.32**	.23**	.32**	.51**	.35**	-	
15. Contacting employers	1.46	.62	-.24**	-.08	-.03	-.13	.04	-.21**	.33**	.29**	.38**	.34**	.30**	.38**	.46**	.38**	-
16. Submitting applications	1.78	.98	-.22**	.11	-.15*	-.22**	-.11	-.22**	.46**	.33**	.36**	.26**	.42**	.61**	.48**	.57**	.53**

Note. *N* = 205.

^a 0 = Romania, 1 = Belgium. ^b 0 = male, 1 = female. ^c 0 = non-managerial, 1 = managerial.

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

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression of Job Search Methods on Job Search Objectives

Predictor	Looking at job ads		Visiting job sites		Networking		Contacting agencies		Contacting employers		Submitting applications	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
<i>Control variables</i>												
Country ^a	.09	.10	-.18*	-.17**	-.32**	-.26**	-.27**	-.22**	-.20**	-.11	-.15*	-.11
Gender ^b	.09	.08	-.11	-.12*	-.01	.02	.02	.04	-.15*	-.11 [†]	.01	.04
Tenure (in months)	-.13 [†]	-.07	-.17*	-.07	-.14*	-.08	-.11	-.07	-.12 [†]	-.08	-.18**	-.12 [†]
Job type ^c	-.07	-.05	-.13 [†]	-.09	-.08	-.06	-.02	.01	.00	.03	-.09	-.05
Job satisfaction	-.25**	-.09	-.23**	.03	-.15*	-.02	-.05	.06	-.16*	-.03	-.16*	.02
<i>Job search objectives</i>												
Finding a new job/turnover		.21**		.43**		.21**		.18*		.17*		.34**
Staying aware		.34**		.39**		.07		.07		.03		.06
Developing network		-.11		-.07		.32**		.14 [†]		.19*		.13 [†]
Obtaining leverage		.00		-.03		-.02		.04		.15*		.05
R^2	.10**	.25**	.16**	.49**	.20**	.39**	.11**	.19**	.11**	.24**	.12**	.30**
Adjusted R^2	.08**	.21**	.13**	.47**	.18**	.36**	.09**	.15**	.09**	.21**	.10**	.26**
ΔR^2	.10**	.15**	.16**	.34**	.20**	.19**	.11**	.08**	.11**	.14**	.12**	.18**

Note. $N = 205$. The values in the table are standardized beta weights (β).

^a 0 = Romania, 1 = Belgium. ^b 0 = male, 1 = female. ^c 0 = non-managerial, 1 = managerial.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.