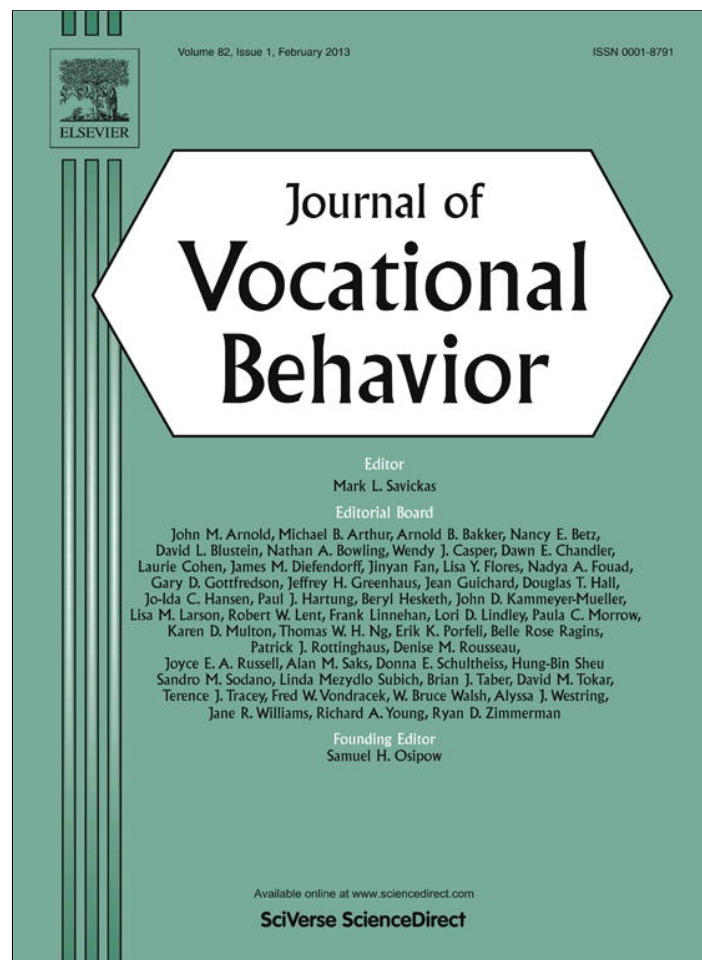


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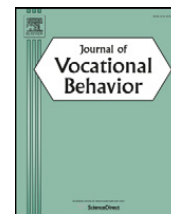
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## Employability among the long-term unemployed: A futile quest or worth the effort?

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### ABSTRACT

Unemployment bears many negative consequences for both individuals and societies. Particularly the long-term unemployed face poor chances of finding reemployment, and many recommendations issued in the regular unemployment literature may not apply to them. Therefore, the current study investigates whether employability (Fugate et al., 2004) may help finding reemployment among those who have been unemployed for years. Specifically, we examine whether employability can foster job search and the chance on finding reemployment above and beyond the barriers that long-term unemployed people so often face. Additionally, we investigate whether reemployment interventions can contribute to long-term unemployed people's employability. The present study assessed long-term unemployed people's employability at two points in time ( $nT1 = 2541$ ,  $nT2 = 897$ ). Results show that employability fosters job search and the chance on finding reemployment among long-term unemployed people, although not all employability dimensions contributed equally to job search and reemployment. Moreover, reemployment interventions contributed to people's development of employability, although the effects were relatively small. Taken together, our study demonstrates the significant role of employability in the reemployment process, thereby extending the notion of employability from active members of the workforce to the long-term unemployed. We discuss that reemployment research and practice should focus on longterm unemployed people's employability, and that reemployment services should take a more personcentered approach in helping them to find reemployment.

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### 1. Introduction

Unemployment is a very costly problem for both societies and individuals. For societies, it bears costs in the social welfare system and in economy production (cf. Sinfield, *in press*; Stenberg & Westerlund, 2008), whereas for individuals, it means a loss of earnings and job-skills, and often a negative impact on their psychological well-being and that of their families (cf. McKee-Ryan & Maitoza, *in press*; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). As the time of unemployment lengthens, these negative consequences are likely to aggravate and people's chances of finding reemployment decrease due to the loss of job-skills, motivation, and job-related networks (Aronson, Mazumder, & Schechter, 2010). To reduce the risk and amount of long-term unemployment, many governments have introduced reemployment interventions. Such interventions generally aim to increase people's job search activities and employability (i.e., their skills, knowledge and attitudes that together form the ability to find and keep a job; cf. Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004), and with that their chances of eventually finding reemployment (cf. Dolton & O'Neill, 2002; Graversen & Van Ours, 2008; Klepinger, Johnson, & Joesch, 2002; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Petrongolo, 2009).

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Although past research has shown that the chances of finding reemployment increase with job seekers' employability and job search activities (e.g. McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005), it remains unclear whether these findings are equally applicable to the long-term unemployed – those who have been unemployed for over a year. After years of being unemployed, finding reemployment is not as easy as it is for regular unemployed job seekers: long-term unemployed people face a range of personal-circumstantial barriers to work, such as a lack of work experience, depleted job networks (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000), stigma associated with unemployment (Gallie & Russell, 1998; Heslin, Bell, & Fletcher, 2012; Vishwanath, 1989) and physical and psychological barriers to work (cf. Lindsay, 2002; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002). For some, even participation in society can pose serious challenges (Groot et al., 2008; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002). The decreased chance of finding reemployment faced by the long-term unemployed might not necessarily be due to their lack of employability as such, but rather to the fact that employability plays too little a role in finding reemployment when taking these barriers into account. For example, when struggling with physical or psychological problems, these problems may overshadow someone's skills and knowledge when trying to find reemployment.

In this study, we investigate whether employability raises the chance on finding reemployment among the long-term unemployed above and beyond the barriers to employment they face. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to address the role of employability in finding reemployment among this currently understudied group. By empirically investigating the relationship between employability and reemployment success among the long-term unemployed, we aim to extend the notion that 'one can be employable without necessarily being in employment' (McArdle et al., 2007, p.248) to those who have been unemployed for years. Additionally, given that reemployment interventions aim to enhance people's employability, it is important to study if these interventions are also beneficial for the long-term unemployed. That is, if they increase their employability. All in all, it is of high practical relevance to get more insight into the precise role that employability may play in finding reemployment for the long-term unemployed, as it can help to improve these reemployment interventions.

### 1.1. Employability

Fugate et al. (2004) presented employability as a useful person-centered psycho-social construct for reemployment research, as employable individuals may suffer less psychological harm from job-loss and subsequent unemployment, may more likely engage in job search and more likely gain high-quality reemployment. Employability is conceptualized as 'a form of work specific active adaptation that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities' (Fugate et al., 2004, p.16). Employability likely facilitates movement between jobs both within and between organizations (Morrison & Hall, 2002) and, in reemployment terms, enhances the likelihood of gaining reemployment (McArdle et al., 2007).

Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability comprises four interrelated dimensions: adaptability, social capital, human capital and career identity. While social and human capital provide the ability-related foundations of employability, adaptability and career identity offer more of the cognitive-affective and motivational foundations (cf. Fugate et al., 2004). Each dimension consists of different skills, knowledge and behaviors that together create the ability to find and keep a job. The first dimension of employability is adaptability: a readiness to cope and a willingness to explore one's career possibilities (Savickas, 2005). Career adaptability includes looking around (i.e. career exploration) and ahead (i.e. career planning) at different career options (Savickas, 2002). Exploring one's possibilities and engaging in planning activities such as setting and pursuing career goals has been shown to play an important role in the reemployment process, both in terms of gaining reemployment (McArdle et al., 2007) and for the quality of the reemployment gained (Koen, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic, & Nauta, 2010; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). The second dimension, social capital, reflects a more interpersonal aspect of employability, and describes someone's social skills as well as the social network and support that they can draw upon. Here, it concerns both formal and informal job-related networks – or 'knowing-whom' competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) – known to impact and facilitate reemployment success (e.g. McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999). The third dimension, human capital, refers to personal factors that may affect one's chances of finding reemployment (McArdle et al., 2007). These 'knowing-how' competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) include experience, training, skills and knowledge. Finally, the fourth dimension of employability comprises career identity: a 'cognitive compass' to navigate career goals. Career identity reflects 'knowing-why' competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) such as individual work values and motivation to work (Fugate et al., 2004). With regard to reemployment, career identity reflects the centrality that unemployed people place on employment, which provides guidance in making decisions and establishing reemployment goals (McArdle et al., 2007).

### 1.2. Employability among the long-term unemployed

McArdle et al. (2007) empirically tested Fugate et al.'s (2004) employability model among active job seekers and found that employability was positively related to finding reemployment 6 months later. They argued that adaptability is beneficial to the individual as well as attractive to potential employers (McLaughlin, 1995), that social capital can provide access to potential employers, and that career identity provides employment goals and directions to pursue reemployment. McArdle et al. also found a strong positive relationship between employability and job search, suggesting that employable individuals take a proactive approach to engage in the labor market: they may be responsive to their situation of unemployment by engaging in goal-directed behavior such as job search. Thus, improvements in employability are not only characterized by an increase in adaptability, social capital, human capital and career identity (Fugate et al., 2004), but employability also increases the possibility to subsequently

utilize these assets through job search (McArdle et al., 2007; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). All in all, McArdle et al. (2007) supported the assumption that for active job seekers, employability enhances the ability to regain employment.

Conceptually, employability should also foster job search and finding reemployment among the long-term unemployed. However, the reemployment processes that apply to more commonly studied populations might be quite different from the understudied population of the long-term unemployed (Heslin et al., 2012), since long-term unemployed people face a range of personal and situational problems that affect their chances on finding reemployment. To illustrate, many long-term unemployed people lack basic skills and vocational qualifications, limiting their ability to move towards stable employment. They further face disadvantages due to their lengthy periods of unemployment and lack of recent work experience, often emphasized as the single most important hiring criterion by employers – particularly those recruiting for lower skilled positions (Manning, 2000). Other barriers among the long-term unemployed include a lack of transportation, caring responsibilities and physical and psychological barriers to work (cf. Lindsay, 2002; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002; Wanberg et al., 2002). The question arises whether employability is even applicable in the context of long-term unemployment, or, in other words, whether employability remains a stable predictor of job search and finding reemployment when the barriers that affect long-term unemployed people's chances on finding reemployment are taken into account.

Alternatively, long-term unemployed people's employability might be too low to have any meaningful effects upon finding reemployment at all, given that the loss of employability aggravates over time. After years of unemployment, people's work-related skills (i.e. human capital) and social networks (i.e. social capital) have often been unutilized. Additionally, prolonged unemployment tends to reduce the degree to which people regard themselves as a worker (i.e. career identity), let alone the degree to which they look around and ahead to possible career options (i.e. adaptability).

Despite these pessimistic views on the reemployment chances of long-term unemployed people, we rely on previous research that emphasized the importance of employability for people's job search behaviors and for finding employment (Chen & Lim, 2012; Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al., 2007). Furthermore, we rely on prior literature that noted that a lack of employability might be the major factor accountable for long-term unemployed people's relatively low chance on finding reemployment (Lindsay, 2010; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002; Thomsen, 2009). In other words, employability (adaptability, social and human capital, and career identity) should contribute to long-term unemployed people's chances on finding reemployment despite the barriers they face. We therefore hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 1.** Employability is positively related to job search intensity, above and beyond the influence of barriers.

**Hypothesis 2.** Employability is positively related to obtaining reemployment, above and beyond the influence of barriers.

### 1.3. Increasing employability

Governmental policies attempt to break through the vicious cycle of long-term unemployment by offering interventions to improve employability and job search activities, and therewith to increase the chance on finding reemployment. Dijk, Nijkamp, Pen, and Tordoier (2008) reported that providing these reemployment interventions can cost society up to €573.000 per unemployed person. However, the above-mentioned barriers to employment faced by long-term unemployed people might preclude the positive effects of employability and job search on finding reemployment (e.g. McArdle et al., 2007). The question arises as to whether investing in long-term unemployed people's employability is worth the effort.

Despite the fact that research has generally found small but positive effects on reemployment probabilities, researchers have questioned the added value of these reemployment interventions for the long-term unemployed (Andersen, 2011; Dahl & Lorentzen, 2005; Dijk et al., 2008; Gerfin, Lechner, & Steiger, 2005; Lindsay, 2002). Several authors have argued that increasing long-term unemployed people's employability can be hard or even impossible, since finding reemployment may be a bridge too far for them – considering their numerous barriers to employment (Gelderblom, de Koning, & Kaoutar-Lachhab, 2007). However, based on prior studies that have noted that reemployment interventions can be helpful for increasing long-term unemployed people's employability (Lindsay, 2007; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), we propose that efforts to increase their employability will be worthwhile for eventually obtaining reemployment. In other words, while acknowledging that long-term unemployed people may indeed face more barriers to reemployment, investing in their employability may nevertheless be worth the effort. We propose:

**Hypothesis 3.** Reemployment interventions will be positively related to the development of employability, above and beyond the influence of barriers.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Sample and procedure

We surveyed a representative sample of long-term unemployed people receiving unemployment benefits in The Netherlands. At Time 1, 2541 individuals who were registered at the reemployment service filled out a questionnaire. One year later (Time 2), a total of 897 (35.3%) individuals completed a follow-up questionnaire, from which 111 people (12.4%) had found reemployment.

Between T1 and T2, 636 people participated in a reemployment intervention and 261 did not. At Time 2, 565 people who had received an intervention and 221 people who had not received an intervention were still unemployed. At Time 1, the sample consisted of 1477 women (58.1%) and 1064 men (41.9%). The average age of the respondents was 44.8 years ( $SD=9.6$ ), the average length of unemployment was 81.2 months ( $SD=75.6$ ). Nearly half of the respondents had been unemployed for over 3 years (48.1%). The distribution of demographics at Time 1 was representative of the total population of unemployed people receiving benefits from the reemployment service, and comparable to Time 2: 521 women (57.2%) and 391 (42.8%) men responded to the follow-up questionnaire. Participants' average age was 46.4 ( $SD=9.4$ ) and their average length of unemployment was 89.1 months ( $SD=80.9$ ).

## 2.2. Reemployment interventions

Information about reemployment interventions that participants had received between Time 1 and Time 2 was derived from the official reemployment service's database and categorized into two groups: participants who had received one intervention and participants who had not received any intervention. These reemployment interventions were offered to participants by a reemployment counselor, after an intake and assessment of participants' preferences concerning the area of work (e.g. gardening, nursing, administrative, financial, etc.). Although different in focus, all reemployment interventions aimed to enhance people's employability and job search activities within about half a year in order to enhance their chances on finding reemployment.

## 2.3. Measures

All variables were assessed at Time 1 and Time 2 with somewhat simplified versions of existing scales. Items were tested for comprehensiveness in a pilot study among an independent sample of long-term unemployed people ( $n=36$ ). The items that participants of the pilot sample independently perceived as ambiguous were simplified before incorporating them in the main study. The internal consistencies of the scales in the main study were all amply sufficient and are presented in Table 1.

### 2.4. Employability: adaptability

Adaptability was measured with two components of career adaptability (Savickas, 2005) that have been proven useful in reemployment research by Zikic and Klehe (2006), namely *career exploration* and *career planning*. *Career exploration* was measured with a simplified version of Stumpf, Colarelli, and Hartman's (1983) 6-item environmental exploration scale. Participants were asked to answer to which degree they had engaged in activities such as "Investigated career possibilities" in the last 3 months. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*). *Career planning* was measured a shortened version of Gould's (1979) career planning scale. The scale contained the 3 positively phrased items of the original scale such as: "I have a plan to obtain my career objectives", rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

### 2.5. Employability: social capital

Social capital was measured by combining items from the Perceived Social Competence Scale (Anderson-Butcher, Iachini, & Amorose, 2008) with social skills rated by reemployment experts to be important in reemployment practice. Participants rated 8 items such as "I am good at making friends" and "I can share my opinion in a friendly way" on a scale from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*exactly like me*).

### 2.6. Employability: human capital

To assess human capital, we measured qualifications such as experience, skills and abilities with a simplified version of Wanberg et al.'s (2002) self-reported qualifications scale. The scale contained six items such as: "My level of education is sufficient for getting the job that I want" and "My last employer was satisfied with me", rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*exactly like me*).

### 2.7. Employability: career identity

The dimension of career identity reflects the centrality of employment in one's life (Fugate et al., 2004). We used the four items of the original six-item employment commitment scale developed by Warr, Cook, and Wall (1979) that were applicable to long-term unemployed people to reflect career identity, such as: "Having a job is very important to me." Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*exactly like me*).

### 2.8. Job search intensity

Job search intensity at Time 1 was assessed by asking participants how many hours per week on average they spent on searching for a job. This one-item measure of job search intensity has been shown to be correlated with multiple-item measurements of job search intensity (Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005; Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hoof, 2010). Job search

**Table 1**  
Means, standard deviations, correlations and coefficient alphas.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
<b>Control variables</b>																								
1. Age	44.81	9.58	(-)																					
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>	.42	.49	.18**	(-)																				
3. Education <sup>b</sup>	2.22	1.19	.05	.11**	(-)																			
4. Work experience (years)	9.85	9.48	.41**	.24**	.19**	(-)																		
5. Length of unemployment (months)	81.20	75.56	.30**	-.12**	-.07*	-.11**	(-)																	
6. Barriers: basic skills	3.99	.89	-.21**	-.12**	.16**	.01	-.18**	(.94)																
7. Barriers: personal barriers	1.82	.76	.15**	.16**	-.10**	-.01	.11**	-.41**	(.60)															
8. Barriers: reemployment constraints	2.40	.92	.19**	-.11**	.03	.00	.07**	-.24**	.03	(.53)														
<b>T1 variables</b>																								
9. Adaptability: career exploration	2.50	1.07	-.05*	.08**	.20**	.21**	-.21**	.25**	-.17**	-.10**	(.89)													
10. Adaptability: career planning	3.13	1.15	-.18**	.02	.22**	.07**	-.18**	.35**	-.25**	-.15**	.43**	(.81)												
11. Social capital	3.74	.75	-.10**	-.08**	.19**	.12**	-.14**	.49**	-.24**	-.24**	.30**	.45**	(.88)											
12. Human capital	2.81	1.05	-.10**	.12**	.45**	.37**	-.25**	.41**	-.23**	-.22**	.44**	.57**	.52**	(.85)										
13. Career identity	3.71	.89	-.19**	.00	.11**	.09**	-.20**	.30**	-.18**	-.14**	.30**	.36**	.44**	.40**	(.80)									
14. Job-search intensity (hours)	20.68	13.41	-.09**	.15**	.06	.07*	-.15**	.17**	-.16**	.03	.26**	.24**	.13**	.19**	.25**	(-)								
<b>T2 variables</b>																								
15. Adaptability: career exploration	2.46	1.12	-.17**	.05	.11**	.08*	-.20**	.17**	-.15**	-.18**	.39**	.31**	.23**	.31**	.29**	.12*	(.91)							
16. Adaptability: career planning	2.77	1.18	-.18**	.01	.14**	-.02	-.16**	.21**	-.14**	-.18**	.29**	.51**	.23**	.34**	.24**	.07	.52**	(.89)						
17. Social capital	3.74	.73	-.07*	-.08*	.19**	.11**	-.15**	.33**	-.19**	-.16**	.25**	.28**	.64**	.42**	.29**	.00	.28**	.26**	(.89)					
18. Human capital	2.93	1.03	-.11**	.12**	.36**	.31**	-.25**	.25**	-.21**	-.14**	.42**	.48**	.41**	.73**	.33**	.10*	.39**	.40**	.53**	(.87)				
19. Career identity	3.58	1.11	-.22**	-.03	.12**	.02	-.20**	.20**	-.14**	-.15**	.28**	.33**	.32**	.35**	.59**	.19**	.48**	.38**	.40**	.41**	(.87)			
20. Job-search intensity	1.74	.76	-.17**	.12**	.11*	.15**	-.23**	.24**	-.18**	.17**	.52**	.38**	.26**	.39**	.32**	.26**	.67**	.38**	.35**	.45**	.43**	(.93)		
21. Reemployment status	.12	.33	-.06	-.04	.12**	.05	-.12**	.14**	-.19**	.04	.17**	.22**	.11**	.19**	.13**	.11*	.05	.06	.08*	.20**	.10**	(-)	(-)	

Note. Coefficient alphas are on the diagonal in parentheses.  $n = 2541$  at Time 1, and  $n = 897$  at Time 2.

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

<sup>a</sup> Gender categories include 0 = female, and 1 = male.

<sup>b</sup> Education categories include 1 = preschool, 2 = basic training, 3 = vocational training, 4 = bachelor, and 5 = master.

intensity at Time 2 was measured with the 12-item scale developed by Blau (1994) with adaptations made in previous studies (Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004; Wanberg et al., 1999). Only participants who had not found reemployment at Time 2 ( $n = 786$ ) indicated how frequently (1 = *never [0 Times]* to 5 = *very frequently [at least 10 Times]*) they had engaged in diverse job search behaviors in the past 3 months, such as “used the internet to locate job openings.”

### 2.9. Reemployment success

To measure reemployment success, we assessed participants' reemployment status at Time 2 by asking participants whether they had found reemployment. We then verified their responses by comparing them with the database of the reemployment service at Time 2.

### 2.10. Barriers

Barriers concern personal and situational factors that hinder unemployed people from participating on the regular labor market and prevent them from working. According to reemployment practice and research (e.g. Lindsay, 2002; Wanberg et al., 2002), such matters include a lack of basic skills to function in society, personal barriers and reemployment constraints. *Basic skills* were measured with the 11 applicable items from the GARS (Groninger Activities Restriction Scale; Kempen, Doeglas, & Suurmeijer, 1993), a Dutch scale aimed at people with less formal education. Example items are “I can do my own grocery shopping” and “I am able to make my own appointments”, rated from 1 (*I can not do that at all*) to 5 (*I can do that very well*). *Personal barriers* were measured with a five-item composite measure. The items were constructed by combining information from the database of the reemployment service with information from reemployment counselors about the most prevalent barriers among the long-term unemployed. Example items include “I can not get a job due to physical problems” and “I cannot get a job due to my criminal past”, rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). *Reemployment constraints* were measured with Wanberg et al.'s (2002) reemployment constraints scale, another composite measure containing five items such as: “I have no transportation to get to work or job interviews.” Items were rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). We furthermore included *demographic variables* known to impact people's chances on finding reemployment such as age, gender, level of education, work experience and length of unemployment. An older age, being female, less formal education, less work experience and a longer length of unemployment are often reported as factors that decrease the chance on finding reemployment (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002).

## 3. Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, internal consistencies and correlations between the study variables.

### 3.1. Employability and job search

We first tested the predictive validity of employability on job search intensity above and beyond the demographics and barriers (Hypothesis 1). We performed multiple hierarchical regression analyses with the demographics and barriers as control variables (step 1) and the employability dimensions at time 1 as independent variables (step 2). The regression predicting job search intensity at Time 2 (Table 2) showed that both the first step ( $F(8,406) = 9.96, p = .00$ ) and the second step were significant ( $F(13,401) = 16.93, p = .00$ ). The additional variance in job search intensity explained by the employability dimensions was 19% ( $R^2 = .19, F_{\text{change}}(5,401) = 23.63, p = .00$ ), resulting in an adjusted  $R^2$  of .33. Adaptability and career identity were significantly and positively related to job search intensity, whereas social and human capital showed no significant relationship with job search intensity, implying that the variance in job search intensity was mainly explained by the more cognitive–affective and motivational dimensions of people's employability.

### 3.2. Employability and reemployment

To test whether the employability dimensions contributed to finding reemployment above and beyond the demographics and barriers (Hypothesis 2), we conducted a logistic regression analysis with reemployment status at Time 2 as the dependent variable (see Table 3). In order to estimate the predictive power of the control variables, the employability dimensions, and job search intensity separately, variables were entered into the regression in three steps. The demographic variables and barriers were entered in step 1, followed by the employability dimensions in step 2 and job search intensity at Time 1 in step 3. The chi-square of the model including only demographic variables and barriers was relatively low ( $\chi^2(8) = 30.60, p = .00$ ), but adding the employability dimensions yielded a significant increase in chi-square ( $\chi^2(13) = 71.76, p = .00; \Delta\chi^2(5) = 41.16, p = .00$ ). Including job search intensity further enhanced the chi-square of the model ( $\chi^2(14) = 79.27, p = .00; \Delta\chi^2(1) = 7.51, p = .01$ ). This indicates that the addition of employability and job search intensity to the model significantly enhances the model's predictive power. The final model explained 16% of the variance in finding reemployment (Nagelkerke's  $R^2 = .16, p = .00$ ).

In sum, finding reemployment was mostly dependent on people's employability, but also on their job search intensity. More specifically, social capital, human capital, and career identity were significantly related to reemployment status at time 2. When including job search intensity, these employability dimensions did not decline in strength or significance. Taken together, our

**Table 2**  
Hierarchical multiple regression on job-search intensity at Time 2.

	<i>b</i>		<i>SD b</i>		$\beta$	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
<i>Step 1: control variables</i>						
Age	-.01	-.01	.00	.00	-.17**	-.10**
Gender	.21	.15	.08	.07	.14**	.10**
Education	.02	-.04	.03	.03	.03	-.06
Work experience	.01	.00	.00	.00	.17**	.06
Length of unemployment	-.00	.00	.00	.00	-.10*	-.04
Barriers: basic skills	.11	.01	.05	.04	.13**	.01
Barriers: personal barriers	-.11	-.06	.05	.05	-.11**	-.06
Barriers: reemployment constraints	.09	.07	.04	.04	.11**	.08*
<i>Step 2: employability</i>						
Adaptability: career exploration		.27		.03		.37**
Adaptability: career planning		.06		.04		.10*
Social capital		-.03		.05		-.03
Human capital		.07		.05		.09
Career identity		.09		.04		.11**
Multiple R					.41**	.60**
$\Delta R^2$					.16**	.19**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>					.15**	.33**

\*\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (1-tailed).

results imply that finding a job was both related to ability-related and motivational dimensions of people's employability together with their job search behaviors.

### 3.3. Development of employability

Finally, we tested whether receiving a reemployment intervention contributed to long-term unemployed people's development of employability (Hypothesis 3). First, we examined whether participants who had received a reemployment intervention differed in employability at Time 1 from participants who had not received such intervention. ANOVA showed no differences regarding adaptability (career exploration:  $F(1,513) = .10, p = .76$ ; career planning:  $F(1,506) = .25, p = .62$ ), social capital ( $F(1,847) = 1.68, p = .20$ ), human capital ( $F(1,800) = 3.02, p = .08$ ), and career identity ( $F(1,869) = 2.17, p = .14$ ).

Next, we regressed the Time 2 employability dimension scores on their corresponding Time 1 scores and group (intervention vs. no-intervention). By doing so, we followed the recommendations of Smith and Beaton (2008) to adjust for baseline scores in

**Table 3**  
Logistic regression on reemployment status at Time 2.

Predictors	<i>b</i>			Wald			Exp (B)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<i>Step 1: control variables</i>									
Age	-.01	-.01	-.01	1.46	.20	.11	.99	.99	.99
Gender	.32	.29	.23	3.03	2.30	1.46	1.38*	1.34	1.26
Education	.02	-.10	-.10	.07	1.47	1.62	1.02	.91	.90
Work experience	.01	-.00	-.00	.93	.06	.05	1.01	.99	.99
Length of unemployment	-.00	.00	.00	.42	.00	.04	.99	1.00	1.00
Barriers: basic skills	.58	.27	.28	17.70	3.24	3.23	1.79**	1.32*	1.32*
Barriers: personal barriers	-.03	.02	.04	.03	.01	.06	.97	1.02	1.04
Barriers: reemployment constraints	-.09	-.11	-.11	.90	1.17	1.14	.92	.90	.90
<i>Step 2: employability</i>									
Adaptability: career exploration		.11	.07		1.51	.59		1.12	1.08
Adaptability: career planning		.11	.08		1.16	.59		1.12	1.08
Social capital		.37	.41		4.45	5.25		1.45**	1.51**
Human capital		.30	.32		4.89	5.41		1.35**	1.38**
Career identity		.29	.25		5.26	3.99		1.33**	1.29**
<i>Step 3: job-search</i>									
Job-search Intensity			.02			7.44			1.02**

Note. Step 3:  $R^2 = .12$  (Cox and Schnell), and .16 (Nagelkerke). Hosmer and Lemeshow  $\chi^2 = 22.76, p = .00$ .

\*  $p < .05$  (1-tailed).

\*\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).



modeling change as an outcome variable. Results showed that receiving an intervention contributed to the development of each dimension of employability, with the exception of social capital. More specifically, we found small significant effects of reemployment interventions for the development of human capital ( $\beta = .08, p = .01$ ) and career identity ( $\beta = .09, p = .00$ ), and marginally significant effects on adaptability (career exploration:  $\beta = .07, p = .08$ ; career planning:  $\beta = .07, p = .06$ ) – after controlling for demographics and barriers at Time 1 in step 1 of the regression equation (see Table 4). In other words, results showed that receiving an intervention slightly contributed to long-term unemployed people's development of employability regardless of their barriers, with the exception of social capital.

#### 4. Discussion

The aim of the current paper was to investigate the role of long-term unemployed people's employability in finding reemployment. More specifically, we questioned whether employability would be a valid predictor of job search and finding reemployment for this specific group, while considering their barriers to employment. By doing so, our study was the first to apply Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability to the context of long-term unemployment, thereby extending its external validity. Moreover, we aimed to investigate whether investing in long-term unemployed people's employability with reemployment interventions would be a futile quest or worth the effort.

Our results show that employability explains meaningful additional variance in both job search intensity and reemployment status. This supports the contention that employability plays an important role in predicting job search intensity and in finding reemployment among the long-term unemployed, above and beyond the influence of their barriers. At the same time, we found that the dimensions of employability were distinct in predicting job search and finding reemployment. On the one hand, adaptability and career identity were positively related to job search intensity one year later, indicating that the more employable people are, the more job search activities they portray. This is in line with McArdle et al.'s (2007) and McQuaid and Lindsay's (2002) suggestion that improvements in employability increase the possibility to subsequently utilize these assets through job search. On the other hand, social and human capital – but again also career identity – predicted reemployment success. Our results furthermore indicated that finding reemployment depends largely on long-term unemployed people's employability and slightly on their job search activities. Finally, we showed that reemployment interventions contributed to long-term unemployed people's development of employability, with the exception of their social capital. All in all, our findings show that employability can predict job search and reemployment success among the long-term unemployed and that reemployment interventions aimed at enhancing employability are not futile as a first step to increase the likelihood of finding reemployment.

##### 4.1. Scientific and practical contributions

Long-term unemployed people are traditionally regarded a difficult group to study, given their low likelihood of success in finding reemployment and the lack of development and initiative that researchers may perceive them to undertake. However, our results suggest a strong case for addressing employability among the long-term unemployed, since they show that these people's employability pays off in terms of finding reemployment. The majority of respondents had less formal education, had little qualifications and had been excluded from the active labor market for a number of years. Still, employability remained important for finding reemployment. Hence, the results of our study bear a number of conceptual and practical contributions to the literature.

**Table 4**  
Hierarchical multiple regressions on the dimensions of employability.

	Adaptability: career exploration			Adaptability: career planning			Social capital			Human capital			Career identity		
	b	SD	$\beta$	b	SD	$\beta$	b	SD	$\beta$	b	SD	$\beta$	b	SD	$\beta$
<i>Control variables</i>															
Age	-.02	.01	-.14**	-.01	.00	-.05	.00	.00	.00	-.01	.00	-.08**	-.01	.01	-.09**
Gender	.12	.10	.05	.04	.10	.02	-.06	.05	-.04	.07	.06	.03	-.06	.08	-.03
Education	.02	.04	.02	.04	.04	.04	.04	.02	.06*	.04	.03	.04	.06	.03	.06*
Work experience	.00	.01	.04	-.01	.01	-.05	.00	.00	.02	.01	.00	.07*	-.00	.01	-.01
Length of unemployment	-.00	.00	-.06	-.00	.00	-.06	-.00	.00	-.06	-.00	.00	-.05	-.00	.00	-.07*
Barriers: basic skills	-.01	.06	-.01	-.02	.06	-.01	-.01	.03	-.01	.10	.04	.09**	-.04	.05	-.03
Barriers: personal barriers	-.10	.07	-.07	-.02	.07	-.01	-.03	.04	-.03	-.09	.04	-.07**	-.02	.06	-.01
Barriers: reemployment constraints	.14	.05	.11**	.12	.05	.09**	.00	.03	.01	-.01	.03	-.01	.03	.04	.03
<i>Predictors</i>															
Variable at T1	.35	.05	.34**	.49	.05	.47**	.60	.04	.61**	.67	.04	.69**	.70	.05	.56**
Intervention <sup>a</sup>	.18	.11	.07*	.20	.11	.07*	.01	.06	.00	.18	.07	.08**	.23	.09	.09**
Multiple R			.45**			.53**			.65**			.75**			.62**
R <sup>2</sup>			.20**			.28**			.42**			.56**			.38**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> total			.19**			.27**			.41**			.55**			.37**

\*\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

\*  $p < .05$  (1-tailed).

<sup>a</sup> No intervention = 0, and intervention = 1.

From a conceptual perspective, the current research extends the notion of employability from active members of the workforce to the long-term unemployed. We combined Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability with McQuaid and Lindsay's (2002) barriers to employment and showed that employability plays an important role above and beyond these barriers. In fact, according to their relatively high score on career identity, many long-term unemployed people still perceive themselves as workers. This sense of career identity demonstrated by many of the long-term unemployed contradicts the classic image of them preferring to live on unemployment benefits. Hence, the absence of work does not necessarily imply the absence of career identity: even for people who have been unemployed for years, career identity is not necessarily intertwined with being unemployed. This notion is strengthened by the fact that participants reported to be active job seekers in terms of their job search intensity. Apparently, they themselves haven't given up the hope on finding reemployment.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that not all dimensions of employability equally predicted job search intensity and/or finding reemployment. Whereas adaptability could not predict people's reemployment success, it did predict people's job search intensity a year later. This is in line with previous studies that showed that adaptability did not directly increase people's chances on finding reemployment, but that it did increase their quality of reemployment (Koen et al., 2010; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). In other words, higher levels of adaptability go together with more appropriate job search activities, which in turn may increase people's chances on finding qualitatively good reemployment. In contrast, social capital and human capital could not predict people's job search activities, yet did predict the likelihood of finding reemployment. Career identity fostered both job search and the chance on finding reemployment, perhaps because it provides guidance and direction in the otherwise unstructured period of unemployment, and thereby helps to steer job search activities as well as the chance on getting hired (McArdle et al., 2007). The differential prediction of the dimensions of employability on job search and finding reemployment raises the thought that next to the important role of the motivational dimension (i.e. career identity), it is the cognitive-affective dimension (i.e. adaptability) that fosters job search, whereas it is the ability-related dimension (i.e. social and human capital) that fosters subsequent reemployment success. Taken together, one could argue that a state of mind directed at reemployment can help the long-term unemployed persist in searching for a job, but that they need the actual skills to get the job in the end.

In this study, however, job search intensity could explain relatively little additional variance in reemployment success as compared to prior research that found stronger relationships between the two (e.g. Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002). A possible explanation for this relatively weak relationship is that not so much the intensity but much more the strategy used while searching may influence reemployment success. For example, past research suggests that those who take a more focused approach in their job search have a higher chance on reemployment success compared to those using a hit-or-miss approach. Although the focused job seekers send out less applications – and thus portray lower job search intensity –, they put more effort in their applications and target the right employers, thereby enhancing their chance to get hired (cf. Koen et al., 2010). Note that long-term unemployed people are generally less attractive to employers than short-term unemployed job seekers (cf. Aaronson et al., 2010) and that for the long-term unemployed, more job search activities may not always translate into better chances on finding a job. At the same time, we found that the ability-related dimensions of employability could predict whether people had found reemployment. Hence, also for long-term unemployed people, having the right skills seems to improve one's job options.

When it comes to increasing the odds on finding reemployment, our study showed that receiving a reemployment intervention can contribute to people's employability. However, this contribution was relatively small, which might be due to a number of reasons. It might be that the match of long-term unemployed people to available programs is currently inefficient. Interventions are often aimed at developing job search skills (Hillage, Pollard, & Britain, 1998), but reemployment services only seldom assess people's employability before starting an intervention. Consequently, reemployment interventions may not always fit people's developmental needs. Interventions that aim to develop each employability dimension could be more beneficial for the long-term unemployed as they allow a more person-adaptive intervention. For example, someone low on human capital needs an intervention aimed at enhancing work-related qualifications, rather than job search skills. At the same time, someone who already possesses sufficient human capital may be better off with an intervention aimed at job search skills. With such a person-centered approach, the long-term unemployed can gain sufficient employability as a first step towards finding reemployment. Another possible explanation for the small effect of reemployment interventions on the development of employability might be found in participants' motivation to take part in the intervention. Since participation in these interventions is obligated, the feeling of compulsion might lower people's motivation to engage in and benefit from the intervention. Indeed, many studies have shown that a feeling of choice in participating is related to motivation and learning (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Karasek, 1979; Warr, 1990).

From a practical point of view, our study fits well with the actual procedures and policies of welfare institutions. Within Europe, there is a strong need for evidence-based reemployment interventions and a criterion to measure their effectiveness. To date, however, reemployment practice has mainly used the number of people finding reemployment as a criterion of success. The applicability of employability for long-term unemployed people offers a valuable addition in this regard, as it allows reemployment services to monitor people's development over time. Employability regards both the path of development as much as the potential end product (finding reemployment), as we can conclude from our results. When focusing on people's employability, reemployment services can measure progress more adequately and long-term unemployed individuals can set realistic and attainable goals for themselves, instead of having to strive for the seemingly unattainable goal of finding reemployment. After all, unreachable goals will only discourage people and diminish their chances on success even more (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Our results also confirm the need for reemployment policies that simultaneously incorporate overcoming barriers and promoting employability among this disadvantaged group. In other words, effective reemployment interventions must not simply address people's gaps in employability, but take a more profound approach by including people's barriers to employment.

After all, both barriers and employability play an important role in predicting reemployment success among the long-term unemployed.

#### 4.2. Limitations and directions for future research

Like most studies in this line of research, this study relied for a large part on self-report measures. A strong feature of our study is, however, that we used a two-wave design with one year in between measurements. Common threats to survey studies such as common method variance or memory effects are less likely to have driven our findings, particularly since the correlations among study variables differed in size (e.g. Spector, 2006).

The correlation between job search intensity at Time 1 and at Time 2 was relatively low, which may be explained by the fact that we used different measures of job search intensity due to questionnaire length constraints. Although these two measures may tap into different content domains of job search intensity (time spent in general versus intensity of different job search behaviors), the shared variance meaningfully represents the overall amount of time spent on job search activities. Yet, it is only logical that behavioral measures such as job search show less stability than individual difference variables such as human or social capital. Additionally, there are a number of factors that may have influenced the relationship between job search intensity at Time 1 and Time 2. For example, while some participants may have gained new motivation to search for reemployment, others may have lost their motivation and stopped searching at all (cf. Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & De Witte, 2010; Vansteenkiste, Lens, DeWitte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004).

Unfortunately, we were not able to classify all reemployment interventions in a conceptually sound manner since we were dependent on the available registration system. Instead, we used a broad categorization of reemployment interventions versus no intervention, which puts constraints on investigating links between receiving an intervention and the development of employability. Consequently, the small influence of interventions might be due to the fact that we could only distinguish an intervention group from a nonintervention group. A more refined categorization, distinguishing different types of interventions, might have resulted in stronger links to specific employability dimensions. Such categorization may also provide insights for developing a more person-adaptive approach, because it would allow researchers to investigate which type of intervention is suitable at a given level of employability. With that, adequate reemployment interventions can be offered to long-term unemployed people, based on their current level of employability and job search behavior. Distinguishing between different reemployment interventions is thus of utmost importance for future research among the long-term unemployed. Additionally, a randomized field experiment would, if feasible in this line of research, allow researchers to draw strong conclusions on the added value of reemployment interventions.

One striking finding in our study was the differential prediction of the dimensions of employability on job search (i.e., career identity, adaptability) and finding reemployment (i.e., career identity, social and human capital). Although previous research on Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability has not addressed the possible differential influence of each dimension, our results imply that each dimension does in fact play a different role in the (re-) employment process. Additionally, our study was the first to apply Fugate et al.'s (2004) employability model to the context of long-term unemployment. While this study extends the external validity of the employability model, it is worth investigating the role, formation and possible change of each dimension in more detail to further enhance the model in the future.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to apply the concept of employability to the context of long-term unemployment. Our results show that even among the long-term unemployed, employability can foster job search and the chance on finding reemployment, above and beyond the barriers that long-term unemployed people so often face. Remarkably, the predominantly cognitive–affective dimensions of employability foster job search, whereas the predominantly ability-related dimensions of employability foster subsequent reemployment success. We also showed that reemployment interventions slightly facilitated the development of one's employability and argued that more person-centered interventions are needed. Taken together, our study demonstrates the significant role of employability in the reemployment process. This implies that the goal of reemployment services should be to assess and foster people's employability first, before supporting them in searching for and finding reemployment. This will, we hope, help reemployment practice to become more efficient.

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