

The Effects of Goal Orientation on Job Search and Reemployment: A Field Experiment Among Unemployed Job Seekers

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Because unemployment has detrimental effects on the well-being of unemployed people, it is important that unemployed individuals move back to work. The present study aimed at improving the understanding of the job search and reemployment process by applying goal orientation theory to job seeking. Using a 3-group field experimental design among 109 unemployed job seekers, the authors examined the effects of situational learning and performance goal orientation on participants' job search intentions, job search behavior, and reemployment status. A situational focus on learning goals was found to be beneficial for the job search process, leading to more search intentions, more search behavior, and higher reemployment probabilities. These effects seemed to be independent of people's dispositional goal orientation. Findings indicate that goal orientation is a promising construct for both science and practice in the field of job seeking.

Keywords: job search, goal orientation, training, reemployment counseling

Unemployment is a pervasive issue and has detrimental effects on the well-being of unemployed people and their families (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). Therefore, it is important that unemployed individuals move back to work. Job search has been characterized as a crucial coping strategy for unemployed people trying to get back to work (DeFrank & Ivancevich, 1986; Leana & Feldman, 1988), and its intensity has been shown to relate positively to reemployment probability (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Kanfer et al. (2001) defined job search as a dynamic self-regulatory and goal-oriented process, occurring as a response to a discrepancy between people's employment goals and their current situation. In contrast to this definition, previous studies have focused mostly on predictors of job search, such as personality (e.g., extraversion, self-esteem) and situational factors (e.g., financial need, social support), that are relatively stable and unchangeable by the job seeker. The only exception of a widely studied self-regulatory and changeable predictor is job search self-efficacy (e.g., Eden & Aviram, 1993; Saks & Ashforth, 1999; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999). Although studies recently began addressing self-regulatory and goal-related constructs in the

context of job seeking (e.g., Saks, 2005; Song, Wanberg, Niu, & Xie, 2006; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2005; Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002), much remains to be done in this area.

Adopting a self-regulatory and goal-oriented perspective, the present study focuses on the concept of goal orientation (Dweck, 1986) in the job search context. Goal orientation refers to people's goal preferences in achievement situations (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007). Two classes of goal orientations are usually distinguished: (a) *learning goal orientation* (LGO), characterized by a focus on increasing competence and mastering something new, and (b) *performance goal orientation* (PGO), characterized by a focus on demonstrating competence and thereby gaining positive judgments and avoiding negative judgments about one's competencies (Dweck, 1986). Further, the two goal orientations differ in terms of the standard used for evaluating and defining performance (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Whereas individuals with a strong LGO evaluate their competence according to whether they have mastered the task or developed their skills (i.e., an absolute or intrapersonal standard), individuals with a strong PGO evaluate their competence according to how they performed compared to others (i.e., a normative standard). Originally, goal orientation was described as an individual difference variable, related to people's implicit theories of ability (Dweck, 1986). Specifically, conceiving one's ability as malleable (*incremental theory*) induces an LGO, and conceiving one's ability as fixed (*entity theory*) induces a PGO. Empirical research, however, has not always followed this perspective. Button, Mathieu, and Zajac (1996) distinguished between correlational studies measuring goal orientation, implying that goal orientation is a stable trait, and experimental studies manipulating goal orientation, implying that goal orientation is a changeable situational characteristic (see also DeShon & Gillespie, 2005). Combining these perspectives, goal orientation can best be described as a quasi-trait or a personal preference that may be influenced by situational characteristics (Button et al., 1996; Payne

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et al., 2007). Meta-analytic reviews of correlational and experimental studies have both demonstrated the importance of goal orientation as a predictor of motivation and performance (Payne et al., 2007; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999; Utman, 1997).

Given its demonstrated importance in the motivation and self-regulation literature, the concept of goal orientation is likely to help increase the understanding of job search as a self-regulatory process. Furthermore, because goal orientation is an individual preference that can be changed or trained, it may have important practical implications for job seekers and reemployment counseling. The present study, therefore, aims to contribute to the literature by (a) synthesizing theory and prior findings on goal orientation and job seeking, (b) developing a theory-driven intervention aimed at changing people's situational goal orientation toward job seeking, and (c) testing the effects of the intervention among unemployed job seekers. Specifically, taking a situational perspective to goal orientation, we developed a workshop on setting learning goals, a workshop on setting performance goals, and a control group workshop.¹ In a three-group field experiment, we assessed the effects of these workshops on participants' job search process and reemployment status, using a three-wave longitudinal design.

Job Search as a Self-Regulatory Process

Guided by Kanfer et al.'s (2001) characterization of job search as a dynamic and self-regulated process, and consistent with Soelberg's (1967) job search model and Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB), we conceptualized the job search process as comprising an intentional and a behavioral phase, ultimately leading to reemployment. The *intentional phase* is a deliberative phase during which job seekers process available information. This phase ends with the formation of a goal intention, reflecting the type of behavior (i.e., job search activities) that people are planning to perform and the effort they plan to exert (cf. Ajzen, 1991). This intentional phase largely parallels the goal establishment phase that is distinguished in many motivation and self-regulation process theories (Diefendorff & Lord, 2008). Goal or task choice is usually described as related to "the allocation of time and energy across behaviors, tasks, or projects" (Klein, Austin, & Cooper, 2008, p. 102). As such, similar to Ajzen's (1991) view of intentions, goal choice not only incorporates the type of behavior that people choose to engage in, but also the effort that people intend to allocate toward performing the behavior. The intentional phase is followed by a *behavioral phase*, characterized by acting according to the goal intention and trying to achieve the goal. This behavioral phase parallels the goal-striving phase distinguished in motivation and self-regulation theories (Diefendorff & Lord, 2008). Specifically, job search behavior reflects the intensity or time and effort that individuals invest in job search activities (e.g., networking, looking for job ads, sending resumes; Blau, 1994). The behavioral or goal-striving phase is followed by *goal attainment*. As Kanfer et al. (2001) theorized, higher exertion of effort toward a goal should result in a greater probability of attaining the goal. The most prevalent indicator of goal attainment in the job search literature is employment status (Saks, 2005), that is, whether unemployed job seekers find reemployment.

Several studies have investigated the relationships between these three phases in the job search process. In support of Soel-

berg's (1967) job search model and Ajzen's (1991) TPB, job search intentions have consistently been found to relate positively to job search behavior (e.g., Song et al., 2006; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004; Van Hooft & De Jong, 2009; Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992; Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005; Zikic & Saks, 2009). Furthermore, supporting their self-regulatory model of job seeking, Kanfer et al. (2001) found that job search behavior generally relates positively to finding reemployment.

Goal Orientation and the Job Search Process

The three job search phases of intention, behavior, and reemployment parallel the distinction among goal/task choice, task pursuit, and task performance that Dweck (1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) made in describing the consequences of goal orientation. Integrating Dweck's goal orientation theory with the job search literature, we propose that goal orientation affects these three interrelated phases in the job search process as shown in Figure 1. In the following sections, we build specific hypotheses—based on the goal orientation literature—for the influence of learning and performance goal orientation on each of these three job search phases.

Regarding task choice, individuals who are focused on learning goals likely choose difficult and challenging tasks, which enable them to develop their competencies (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Effort is viewed positively because it is perceived as a means toward accomplishment (Dweck, 1986). Individuals focused on performance goals, in contrast, likely avoid difficult and challenging tasks, rather choosing easier tasks that enable them to show others their competencies (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Exertion of effort is viewed negatively because it is perceived as indicative of low ability (Dweck, 1986). Empirical evidence has supported these principles of goal orientation theory. For example, Payne et al. (2007) reported that trait LGO had a positive relationship and trait PGO had a negative relationship with self-set goal level. Furthermore, Stevens and Gist (1997) reported that learning goal trainees planned to exert more effort in the trained task than performance goal trainees. Job seeking can be characterized as a complex task with a multiplicity of strategies and stages (e.g., Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994; Saks, 2006; Soelberg, 1967), that for most people is novel and ambiguous. Leana and Feldman (1988), for example, noted that job search is likely to be unfamiliar

¹ In addition to the distinction between LGO and PGO, more recent theorizing on goal orientation has posed that these goal orientations should be further differentiated on the basis of the approach-avoidance motivation concept (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; VandeWalle, 1997). This has resulted in a 2 × 2 framework with four types of goal orientations: (a) learning approach (i.e., developing competence), (b) learning avoid (i.e., avoiding incompetence or loss of competence), (c) performance approach (i.e., demonstrating competence), and (d) performance avoid (i.e., avoiding demonstration of incompetence). Although the 2 × 2 framework is a very fruitful addition to goal orientation theory, in the present study we especially focused on the learning-performance distinction. Both the learning and performance goals workshops were directed at the approach rather than the avoidance dimensions of goal orientation, because training unemployed job seekers on avoidance goal orientations would have been unethical.

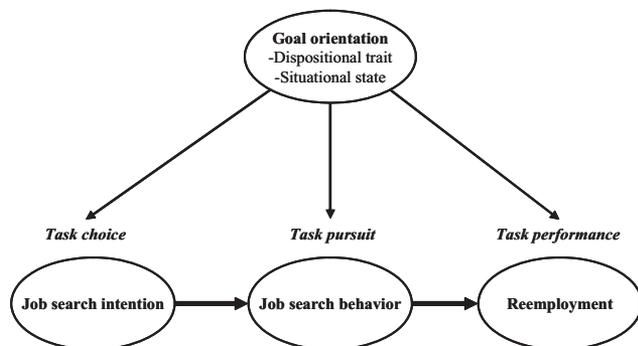


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the role of goal orientation in the job search process.

to those who have lost their jobs and that it places individuals in uncertain situations that require changes in their routines. Because job seeking is a difficult and challenging task and because an LGO causes individuals to be more likely to choose and engage in difficult and challenging tasks, an LGO training should increase people's job search intentions. In addition, because an LGO is characterized by viewing effort as predictive of success (rather than as a sign of low ability), an LGO training should result in increased levels of intentions to devote time and effort to job seeking as compared to the PGO and control training. Thus, we hypothesized that unemployed job seekers who are trained in setting learning goals for their job search would be more likely than others to be motivated to devote time and effort to job seeking, resulting in higher job search intentions (Hypothesis 1).

Regarding task pursuit, individuals high on LGO tend to interpret outcomes as diagnostic of their effort (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). When performance is poor or when facing failure, LGO individuals interpret this as useful feedback on their effort level. Because of their incrementalist view of competence, poor performance and failure causes them to increase effort or to analyze and change their strategies (Dweck, 1986). Individuals high on PGO, in contrast, tend to interpret effort and outcomes as diagnostic of their ability (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). High effort levels are interpreted as a consequence of low ability. Furthermore, persistence is less likely because performance goals undermine intrinsic motivation and interest (Dweck, 1986). When performance is poor or when faced with obstacles or failures, PGO individuals attribute this to low ability. Because of their entity view of competence, poor performance and failure are regarded as predictive of future failures, leading to refraining from further effort and to withdrawal (Dweck, 1986). In support of these premises of goal orientation theory, Payne et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis of correlational studies showed positive relationships of trait LGO with learning strategies and feedback seeking. Rawsthorne and Elliot's (1999) meta-analysis of experimental studies showed that learning goals led to more task interest and persistence than performance goals. First, on the basis of goal orientation theory and these findings, we expected that unemployed job seekers who were trained in setting learning goals for their job search would be more likely than others to put continued effort into job seeking, resulting in more job search behavior (Hypothesis 2A). That is, LGO is associated with persistence (rather than withdrawal) in the face of obstacles/

failures. Because job seeking is a complex task, during which obstacles, failures, and setbacks are common, and because job seekers almost inevitably have to deal with rejections from potential employers, the LGO training was expected to increase people's job search behavior relative to the PGO and control training. Second, on the basis of Ajzen's (1991) TPB, the effect of goal orientation on job search behavior should be mediated by job search intention (Hypothesis 2B). We expected partial rather than full mediation because an LGO would result in more job search behavior not only because of a higher level of intentions, but also because of a higher level of sustained effort and persistence when facing obstacles and failures in the job search process.

Regarding task performance, goal orientation theory suggests that an LGO is more beneficial than a PGO. That is, individuals with high LGO are likely to demonstrate adaptive response patterns characterized by greater task effort, more persistence in the face of difficulties, and generation of effective task strategies, all of which foster increased task performance (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Individuals with high PGO are vulnerable to maladaptive helplessness response patterns that are characterized by low task effort, use of defensive strategies, and withdrawal in the face of difficulties, all of which foster impaired performance (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Indeed, meta-analytic results showed positive relationships of trait LGO with academic and job performance, whereas the relationships of trait PGO with these outcomes were generally less positive, zero, or negative (Payne et al., 2007). Also, in experimental studies, learning goals are generally found to result in higher task performance than performance goals, especially on complex tasks (Utman, 1997). First, on the basis of the goal orientation literature, we expected that unemployed job seekers who were trained in setting learning goals for their job search would be more likely than others to find reemployment (Hypothesis 3A). That is, learning goals have been theorized to lead to increased performance, especially on complex tasks. Because job seeking is a difficult and challenging task, we expected that training learning goals would increase reemployment probabilities as compared to the performance goals and control conditions. Second, on the basis of the TPB and Kanfer et al.'s (2001) self-regulatory model of job search, the effect of goal orientation on reemployment should be mediated by job search intention and behavior (Hypothesis 3B). We expected partial rather than full mediation because an LGO would result in higher reemployment probability not only because of higher intensity of job search behavior, but probably also because of higher quality of job search behavior, resulting from mechanisms such as feedback seeking (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), monitoring (Wolters, 2004), and use of more effective strategies (Butler, 1993; Winters & Latham, 1996).

As discussed earlier, goal orientation theory and previous research have suggested that both dispositional and situational goal orientation affect task choice, pursuit, and performance. We therefore controlled for dispositional goal orientation in examining the effects of our situational goal orientation interventions. As such, we were able to investigate the independent effects of both dispositional and situational goal orientation on the job search process. In addition to these main effects, we explored whether dispositional goal orientation may interact with our interventions in predicting job search intentions, behavior, and reemployment status. Specifically, on the basis of previous research (Chen &

Mathieu, 2008; Linnenbrink, 2005), we investigated two competing hypotheses: (a) the supplementary fit/matching hypothesis, suggesting that a situational goal orientation inducement is most effective when it matches the people's dispositional goal orientation, and (b) the complementary fit/buffering hypothesis, suggesting that a situational goal orientation inducement is most effective when it contrasts and therefore compensates for people's dispositional goal orientation.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 109 unemployed job seekers registered with a reemployment counseling agency in The Netherlands (52.3% female, 47.7% male; mean age of 45.9; level of education varied among 56.0% primary school/lower vocational training, 36.7% high school, and 7.3% college/university). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: LGO workshop ($n = 35$), PGO workshop ($n = 32$), or control condition workshop ($n = 42$). All workshops were introduced as workshops on effective job seeking. Neither participants nor the reemployment-counseling agency's staff were aware of the content of the workshops at the time of assignment. The workshops were given from April through June 2006, in groups of, on average, 5 people. Questionnaires were used to assess covariates and demographics at the start of the workshop (T0) and job search intention directly after the workshops (T1). Structured phone interviews were held to assess participants' job search behavior 2 weeks later (T2; $n = 91$; 83.5% response rate) and their reemployment status 8 weeks after the workshop (T3; $n = 77$; 70.6% response rate). To check for selective attrition, T2 participants were compared with participants who did not participate at T2. Logistic regression analysis (cf. Goodman & Blum, 1996) of training condition and the T0 and T1 variables demonstrated no signs of nonrandom attrition. Further, to compare T3 participants with nonparticipants, we used the same variables plus T2 job search behavior. Some signs for nonrandom attrition were found because the odds ratio for trait PGO was significant ($p = .05$). A subsequent t test showed that those higher on trait PGO were marginally more likely to remain in the sample, $t(106) = -1.67$, $p = .10$.

Workshops and Measures

The situational goal orientation workshops were developed on the basis of goal orientation theory (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) and previous goal orientation training studies (e.g., Gist & Stevens, 1998; Kozlowski et al., 2001; Stevens & Gist, 1997). The workshops were given by Gera Noordzij. All workshops took 2 to 3 hr and had the same structure: (a) a general framing, (b) an introductory round to set an LGO or PGO mental framework for the training (cf. Stevens & Gist, 1997), (c) explanation of theory and examples of learning versus performance goals, (d) practice in setting learning versus performance goals, (e) feedback, and (f) a take-home exercise. Consistent with previous studies (Gist & Stevens, 1998; Kozlowski et al., 2001; Linnenbrink, 2005; Stevens & Gist, 1997), within this set structure, multiple cues were used to induce a situational LGO versus a PGO toward job seeking.²

Specifically, the LGO workshop started with the general framing, "view this workshop as a useful aid to increase your job seeking skills" (cf. Stevens & Gist, 1997). In the introductory round, people were asked to explain what they had learned about job seeking until now, both about positive and negative events. Next, learning goals were explained: Participants were told that a proper learning goal should be specific, attainable, and moderately difficult and that it should stimulate learning. Examples were given of learning goals in job seeking. Participants were then given an exercise book with information on learning goals and were invited to practice with setting learning goals in their exercise book. Feedback was given, both positive and negative, to ensure a climate of development and improvement (Linnenbrink, 2005; Stevens & Gist, 1997). Possible obstacles were identified (cf. Gist & Stevens, 1998; Stevens & Gist, 1997). Participants were encouraged to focus on learning different strategies, on viewing errors as learning opportunities, and on searching for challenges and ways to improve their job search skills (cf. Kozlowski et al., 2001). Participants were asked to use their exercise book at home to help them in setting learning goals.

The PGO workshop started with the general framing, "view this workshop as a useful aid to get the best results in searching for employment" (cf. Stevens & Gist, 1997). In the introductory round, people were asked to mention something (preferably related to job seeking) at which they had recently succeeded. Next, performance goals were explained, stating that a proper performance goal should be specific, attainable, and measurable. It was emphasized that people generally perform better when they compete and that goals can be used to achieve superior outcomes (cf. Stevens & Gist, 1997). Examples were given of performance goals in job seeking. Participants were then given an exercise book with information on performance goals and were invited to practice with setting performance goals in their exercise book. To ensure a climate of competition and outperforming others, only positive feedback was given (cf. Gist & Stevens, 1998; Stevens & Gist, 1997), and participants were given compliments. Participants were encouraged to focus on positive outcomes, to compete with others, and to reward themselves when performing well (cf. Kozlowski et al., 2001; Stevens & Gist, 1997). Participants were asked to use

²The LGO and PGO workshops were aimed at changing people's situational goal orientation toward job seeking. Unfortunately, no manipulation checks were administered in the present study. However, supporting the content validity of the workshops, it should be noted that the learning and performance goal workshops were developed with close reference to goal orientation theory as well as previous goal orientation training studies that have demonstrated the validity of such training sessions. In addition, in follow-up research (Noordzij, Van Hooft, Van Mierlo, & Born, 2009), we developed a four-item context-specific state LGO measure, based on Breland and Donovan's (2005) State Goal Orientation Scale (sample item: "The next six weeks when I am searching for a job, I want to really understand the activities and procedures about job-search"; $\alpha = .91-.93$), and we tested whether the LGO workshop led to a higher state LGO as compared to a control workshop. Supporting the validity of the LGO manipulation, an analysis of covariance of state LGO after the workshop, which controlled for state LGO before the workshop, was significant, $F(2, 174) = 8.12$, $p < .01$, indicating that state LGO was higher for participants after the LGO workshop than for participants after the control workshop.

their exercise book at home to help them in setting performance goals.

The control workshop had the same structure but focused on the exploration of one's personality according to the enneagram model (e.g., Kale & Shrivastava, 2002). The general framing was, "view this workshop as a way to explore yourself as related to job seeking." In the introductory round, participants could say whatever they wanted to say about themselves or their job search. Next, the trainer explained the enneagram background. Participants were then given an exercise book with information on the enneagram and were instructed to fill out the enneagram questionnaire and to calculate their personality scores. The scores were discussed and related to job seeking. Participants were given their exercise book to take home and were asked to review the information and their scores.

Measurement of covariates. Trait goal orientation, past job search behavior, and preworkshop job search intentions were assessed at T0 and used as covariates in the analyses because these variables are likely to relate to our dependent variables. Trait goal orientation was assessed with Button et al.'s (1996) two-dimensional measure (response options: 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).³ To keep the T0 questionnaire as short as possible, three items of the original eight-item scale were removed on the basis of pilot data. Supporting the two-factor structure, confirmatory factor analysis showed that a two-factor model with LGO and PGO items loading on separate latent factors demonstrated better fit, $\chi^2(34, N = 108) = 49.51, p < .001$, comparative fit index = .96, standardized root mean square residual = .079, than a single-factor solution, $\chi^2(35, N = 108) = 141.96, p < .001$, comparative fit index = .81, standardized root mean square residual = .13, $\chi^2_{diff}(1, N = 108) = 92.45, p < .001$. All factor loadings in the two-factor model were significant ($p < .001$) and greater than .30. Past job search behavior was assessed at T0 by an eight-item index of job search activities based on Blau (1994; for details, see Van Hooff, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2004). This index asked participants to indicate how much time they had spent on each activity (e.g., contacting employment or recruitment agencies, sending out application letters) in the past 2 weeks (response options: 1 = *no time at all* to 5 = *very much time*). Job search intention was assessed at T0 with the same items, but participants were asked to indicate how much time they intended to spend on the various job search activities in the next 2 weeks.

Measurement of dependent variables. Job search intention was assessed at T1 with the same measure as at T0. Job search behavior was assessed in the T2 phone interview with the same measure as for T0 past job search behavior. Reemployment status was assessed in the T3 phone interview by asking whether the participants had found a job (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*).

Analyses and Results

Table 1 presents reliabilities, descriptive information, and correlations. The effectiveness of the random assignment was tested by examining differences among the three conditions on demographics and T0 covariates. A multivariate analysis of variance showed no significant differences on age and the T0 covariates, Wilks's $\lambda = 0.86, F(10, 190) = 1.47, p = .15$. Chi-square tests demonstrated no significant differences on level of education, $\chi^2(4, N = 109) = 2.82, p = .59$, but a nearly significant difference

on sex, $\chi^2(2, N = 109) = 4.69, p = .10$, with 65.6% of the participants in the PGO, 54.3% in the LGO, and 40.5% in the control condition being female. Because prior research (Kanfer et al., 2001) showed that sex may relate to job search and reemployment, we controlled for it in our analyses.

Hypotheses 1 and 2A, stating that the LGO workshop would result in higher T1 job search intentions and T2 job search behavior than the other workshops, were tested with regression analyses. We used two dummy variables for the LGO and PGO conditions (see Table 2). Results demonstrate significant positive small-sized main effects of the workshops on both T1 intention and T2 behavior (Hypothesis 1 and 2A supported). Additional analyses of covariance for T1 intention and T2 behavior (including the significant covariates from the regression analyses) demonstrated significant or almost significant effects for condition, $F(2, 102) = 3.22, p < .05$, and $F(2, 83) = 2.91, p = .06$, respectively. Contrast analyses indicated that the participants in the LGO condition scored significantly higher on job search intentions directly after the workshop, $M_{adjusted} = 3.09 (SE = 0.06)$, than the participants in the other two experimental conditions: $M_{adjusted} = 2.94 (SE = 0.06)$, in the PGO condition, $p < .05$ (one tailed), and $M_{adjusted} = 2.89 (SE = 0.05)$ in the control condition, $p < .01$ (one tailed). Furthermore, contrast analyses indicated that the participants in the LGO condition scored significantly higher on job search behavior as reported 2 weeks later, $M_{adjusted} = 2.49 (SE = 0.08)$, than the participants in the control condition, $M_{adjusted} = 2.25 (SE = 0.07)$, $p < .05$ (one tailed). No significant difference was found with the PGO condition, $M_{adjusted} = 2.41 (SE = 0.08)$, $p = .23$ (one tailed).

Hypothesis 2B, stating that the effect of the LGO workshop on T2 job search behavior would be partially mediated by T1 job search intention, was tested by Baron and Kenny's (1986) four requirements for mediation. In support of the first three requirements, the LGO dummy was positively related to T1 intention and T2 behavior, and T1 intention was positively related to T2 behavior (see Tables 1 and 2). In support of the fourth requirement, the beta weight of the LGO dummy decreased somewhat when T1 intention was included in the regression of T2 behavior (see Step 3 in Table 2). However, the indirect effect was not significant (two-tailed Sobel test: $z = 1.53, p = .13$). Thus, T1 intention did not mediate the effect of the LGO workshop on T2 behavior (Hypothesis 2B not supported).

Hypothesis 3A stated that the LGO workshop would result in more reemployment than the other workshops. The raw reemployment percentages indicate support: 33.3% ($SD = 0.48$) of the participants in the LGO workshop were reemployed, as compared with 9.1% ($SD = 0.29$), $t(43.93) = 2.17, p < .05$, in the PGO workshop, and 10.7% ($SD = 0.31$), $t(44.64) = 2.06, p < .05$, in the control workshop. Furthermore, the correlation between LGO dummy and reemployment status was significantly positive ($r = .29, p < .05$), whereas the correlation between PGO dummy and reemployment status correlation was not significant ($r = -.15, p = .20$; see Table 1). We formally tested Hypothesis 3A, using a two-step hierarchical logistic regression with T3 reemployment

³ As noted by Chen and Mathieu (2008) and Payne et al. (2007), this measure largely reflects the approach rather than the avoidance goal orientations, thus aligning with our situational goal orientation workshops, which also focused on the approach component of goal orientation.

Table 1
Reliabilities, Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Study Variables

Variable	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Time 0 variables															
1. Sex ^a		0.52	0.50	—											
2. Age		45.85	9.56	-.22*	—										
3. Level of education ^b		1.51	0.63	-.01	-.04	—									
4. Learning goal condition ^c		0.32	0.47	.03	-.04	-.03	—								
5. Performance goal condition ^d		0.29	0.46	.17 [†]	-.17 [†]	.08	-.44**	—							
6. Trait LGO	.84	3.93	0.67	.02	-.10	.11	.05	.03	—						
7. Trait PGO	.69	3.65	0.68	.09	.00	-.07	-.17 [†]	.22*	.28**	—					
8. Past job search behavior	.82	2.74	0.72	.03	-.07	-.02	.11	-.07	.28**	.08	—				
9. Job search intention	.83	2.88	0.69	.01	-.09	-.04	.08	-.08	.37**	.10	.78**	—			
Time 1 variable															
10. Job search intention	.80	2.97	0.64	.08	-.10	-.06	.15	-.06	.24*	.22*	.73**	.83**	—		
Time 2 variable															
11. Job search behavior	.64	2.37	0.56	-.02	-.18	.11	.20 [†]	-.01	.29**	.02	.69**	.65**	.59**	—	
Time 3 variable															
12. Reemployment status ^e		0.18	0.39	.08	-.19	.09	.29*	-.15	.08	-.16	.05	.00	-.02	.11	—

Note. Scores for Variables 6–11 may vary between 1 and 5. Because of incidental missing values, for correlations between Time 0 and Time 1 variables, *N* varies between 102 and 109; for correlations with Time 2 variables, *N* varies between 81 and 87; for correlations with Time 3 variables, *N* varies between 73 and 77. LGO = learning goal orientation; PGO = performance goal orientation.

^a 0 = male, 1 = female. ^b 1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high. ^c Dummy variable with 0 = performance goal or control workshop, 1 = learning goal workshop. ^d Dummy variable with 0 = learning goal or control workshop, 1 = performance goal workshop. ^e 0 = not reemployed, 1 = reemployed. [†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

status as the dependent variable and with the T0 variables sex, trait LGO and PGO, past job search behavior, and job search intention as control variables in Step 1. The total model was not significant, $\chi^2(5, N = 76) = 4.27, p = .51$. Addition of the two condition dummies as predictors in Step 2 resulted in an almost significant improvement of the model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(2, N = 76) = 5.23, p = .07$. Whereas the PGO dummy was not significantly related to reemployment status, odds ratio ($\text{Exp}[B]$) = 1.24, Wald test = 0.04, $p = .84$, the LGO dummy was almost significant, odds ratio =

5.17, Wald test = 3.51, $p = .06$. Thus, supporting Hypothesis 3A, participants in the LGO condition were 5.17 times more likely to be reemployed than the others. No support was found for the hypothesized mediation of T1 intention and T2 behavior (Hypothesis 3B), because these variables were not significantly related to reemployment status (see Table 1).

Last, we tested whether dispositional goal orientation influenced the effects of the workshops by adding the interaction terms of trait LGO and PGO with the LGO and PGO condition dummies (using

Table 2
Regression Analyses Examining the Effects of the Workshops on Job Search Intention and Job Search Behavior

Predictor	T1 job search intention (β)		T2 job search behavior (β)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Step 1: Covariates					
Sex ^a	.06	.05	-.02	-.05	-.06
Trait learning goal orientation	-.13*	-.14*	.02	.00	-.02
Trait performance goal orientation	.16**	.19**	.00	.00	-.03
Time 0 job search intention	.86**	.85**			
Time 0 job search behavior			.70**	.70**	.56**
Step 2: Training conditions					
Learning goal condition ^b		.14*		.19*	.17 [†]
Performance goal condition ^c		.03		.12	.12
Step 3: Mediator variable					
Time 1 job search intention					.22*
Multiple <i>R</i>	.85**	.86**	.70**	.72**	.74**
ΔR^2		.02 [†]		.03 [†]	.02*
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.71	.73	.47	.49	.51

Note. Because of incidental missing values, *N* is 108 for job search intention and 86 for job search behavior. ^a 0 = male, 1 = female. ^b Dummy variable with 0 = performance goal or control workshop, 1 = learning goal workshop. ^c Dummy variable with 0 = learning goal or control workshop, 1 = performance goal workshop. [†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

centered scores; Aiken & West, 1991) to the regression analyses of intention, behavior, and reemployment status. No support was found for either the matching or the buffering hypothesis because none of the interaction terms were significant.

Discussion

The current study integrated goal orientation and job search literature, by proposing that situational goal orientation affects the job search process, characterized by job search intentions, job search behavior, and reemployment status. On the basis of goal orientation theory and previous training studies, theory-driven interventions on situational goal orientation were developed. Results demonstrated that, independent of job seekers' dispositional goal orientation, a workshop on setting learning goals led to more intentions to engage in job seeking and higher reemployment probabilities than workshops on setting performance goals or setting no specific goals and led to more time and effort spent on job search behavior than a workshop on setting no specific goals. These beneficial effects of learning goals align with previous correlational (e.g., Elliot & Church, 1997; VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999; Wolters, 2004) and experimental studies (Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999; Stevens & Gist, 1997; Utman, 1997) that demonstrated positive effects of LGO on task choice, task pursuit, and actual task performance. The present study adds to this body of research by testing the premises of goal orientation theory, using experimental methods in an important work-related field setting, rather than in a classroom or lab setting as most previous research did. Further, because of its motivational and self-regulatory nature, job seeking seems a very suitable and practically relevant behavior to further test and extend goal orientation theory. Regarding the unemployment literature, the positive reemployment effects of a situational LGO are promising because previous research has generally reported rather meager results for predictors of reemployment other than job search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2002). Furthermore, studies on job search interventions are relatively scarce. Our findings thus indicate that goal orientation is a promising construct for both science and practice in the field of job seeking.

Although the adaptive effects for learning goals that we found align with goal orientation theory and the majority of empirical research, there is some debate on whether performance goals can be adaptive too (e.g., Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002). In the light of this debate, it is important to pay attention to some boundary conditions of our findings. First, it has been noted that performance goals may be adaptive when they focus on approach rather than avoidance motivation (McGregor & Elliot, 2002). Consistent with previous training studies (e.g., Stevens & Gist, 1997), and because training avoidance motivation would have been unethical, we addressed only approach components in both the LGO and PGO workshops. The avoidance motivation argument therefore cannot account for our findings. Nevertheless, to further develop goal orientation theory, future research should investigate the effects of trained goal orientation, using the complete 2×2 framework in a controlled lab setting. Second, the learning goal advantage that we found may relate to the type of task: finding reemployment. That is, previous studies on manipulated goal orientation demonstrated that learning goals are especially adaptive for complex tasks (Seijts, Latham, Tasa, &

Latham, 2004; Utman, 1997). Similarly, several researchers have found that performance goals become dysfunctional when tasks are ambiguous and individuals do not know the effective strategies (Winters & Latham, 1996), when tasks are novel and have multiple stages (Earley, Connolly, & Ekegren, 1989), or when people do not have the abilities to perform well (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Our results further illustrate this notion and extend it to the important field setting of finding reemployment, which is generally perceived as a complex, novel, and ambiguous task. However, because individual differences may exist in such perceptions, future research should measure individual differences in anticipated and experienced task difficulty to further specify goal orientation theory. A third boundary condition relates to the idea that the motivational effects of goal orientation may differ depending on individual differences. Dweck (1986), for example, noted that the effects of learning and performance goals are especially divergent when perceived ability is low. Elliot and Harackiewicz (1994) reported that learning goals are especially beneficial for individuals low on achievement motivation. In our sample, levels of perceived ability and achievement motivation are likely to be low as a result of previous negative events related to job loss and failure to find new employment. Therefore, future research should further investigate whether the beneficial effects of learning goals also hold in other groups of job seekers, such as graduating students and employed job seekers who likely have higher levels of achievement motivation. An interesting issue relates to the question of whether PGO is less harmful or even beneficial when people have not had negative experiences with job seeking. Another issue worthy of future research relates to how people's dispositional goal orientation relates to the effectiveness of goal orientation training. Although we did not find significant interactions (probably caused by lack of power), future research should test whether PGO individuals benefit most from a complementary learning goal treatment (which may, e.g., decrease the negative effects of trait PGO) or a supplementary performance goal treatment (see Chen & Mathieu, 2008; Diefendorff & Lord, 2008; Linnenbrink, 2005).

As depicted in Figure 1, goal orientation was hypothesized to influence job search behavior and reemployment status both directly and indirectly. In contrast to the consistent support for the direct effects, no support was found for the hypothesized indirect effects. First, the effects of goal orientation on job search behavior were not mediated by job search intentions. Although this finding may seem inconsistent with Ajzen's (1991) TPB, which outlines intention as the most immediate determinant of behavior, the TPB also proposes a second determinant of behavior: perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and resembles the concept of self-efficacy. Thus, instead of intention, people's perceived control over their job search behavior or their self-efficacy for performing job search activities may be an important mediating mechanism in the relationship between LGO and job search behavior. Another possible explanation for the lack of mediation may be that individuals with an LGO are more likely to translate their intentions into actual behavior, for example, when facing difficulties. Future research is needed to further examine these potential mediating mechanisms. Second, no support was found for the mediating role of job search behavior in the goal orientation–reemployment status relationship. This lack of support

was due to the nonsignificant relationship between job search behavior and reemployment status. Although this finding seems to contradict Kanfer et al.'s (2001) results, it should be noted that their uncorrected correlation between job search behavior and reemployment status among those who had lost their jobs was .16, which is not too different from ours (i.e., $r = .11$). Furthermore, nonsignificant correlations between job search and job attainment are not uncommon (Saks, 2006; Song et al., 2006; Taris, 2002). Nevertheless, our findings seem to suggest that the effects of situational goal orientation on reemployment status are explained by mechanisms other than the intensity of people's job search. Future research is needed to identify and test these mediating mechanisms. Building on previous goal orientation research and job search studies, these may include job search quality (e.g., use of more effective strategies; Butler, 1993; Winters & Latham, 1996), differentiation in strategy use, the occurrence of task-related versus off-task thoughts (e.g., escapist thoughts; Button et al., 1996; self-focused attention, Van Dyck, Van Hooft, De Gilder, & Liesveld, in press), use of metacognitive strategies such as regulation and monitoring (Wolters, 2004), learning during the job search, feedback seeking (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), and capacities for dealing with setbacks.

Practical Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion

To assist job seekers in finding employment, numerous organizations have specialized in offering assistance, coaching, and training for unemployed people. However, most of these methods are based on practical knowledge, and their effects have not been empirically tested. Among the few exceptions are Eden and Aviram's (1993) job search self-efficacy training and the JOBS program (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & Van Ryn, 1989; Vinokur, Price, & Schul, 1995). The present study extends the literature on job search interventions, suggesting that a learning goals workshop may be a powerful tool in increasing unemployed job seekers' motivational engagement and reemployment probabilities. It should be noted that the effect sizes were relatively small. Nevertheless, as Prentice and Miller (1992) noted, small effect sizes can be impressive, for example, in circumstances where the outcome variables are important but are distal to the independent variables and hard to influence. Reemployment status most certainly classifies as such an outcome variable. In addition, the workshop took only 2 to 3 hr and thus was a relatively small intervention. An extended workshop would most likely result in larger effects.

The essence of the learning goals workshops is very different from common practice in reemployment counseling, in which performance goals and results-oriented guidance techniques are the standard (e.g., UWV, 2009). Our findings suggest that counseling techniques should be altered to incorporate learning goal oriented methods. For example, employment counselors should help job seekers view their job search as a learning situation, rather than as a performance situation. Related to this issue, ethical concerns can be raised in the present study for exposing the participants to a performance goal or control workshop. These workshops, however, closely resemble the standard way of working in reemployment counseling in The Netherlands. Further alleviating possible ethical concerns, reemployment percentages among participants in the performance goal and control groups were comparable to general reemployment percentages in the

Netherlands in the year of the study (i.e., 9.9%; Kok, Hop, & Alla, 2008; UWV, 2006).

As a first limitation, the small sample size may pose a threat to the study generalizability. Although sample size was adequate to detect medium and large effects (cf. Cohen, 1992), future research is needed to test the robustness of our findings. Second, although longitudinal designs have the advantage of being able to study developments over time and of temporally separating the measurement of proximal and distal outcome variables, respondent attrition is a disadvantage of such designs. We made an effort to retain as many respondents as possible (e.g., by using phone interviews), but we could not avoid having some attrition. Comparison of respondents with nonrespondents mostly indicated that attrition did not pose a large threat to the validity of our conclusions. A third limitation is the use of self-report measures. The measure of job search behavior, for example, might not have captured people's actual behavior adequately, even more so because of the relatively broad scale anchors. Previous research, however, has supported the validity of such job search measures, because they correlate with measures that have more exact anchors (e.g., Saks, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 2002) and with objective behavioral outcomes, such as number of job interviews and job attainment (e.g., Saks, 2006; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2004). Nevertheless, future research should seek to replicate our findings with measures that are not self-report measures (e.g., observations by employment counselors). Last, as a distal outcome, we assessed only reemployment status. Future research should examine the effects of goal orientation on other important outcomes, such as type and quality of the newfound job and job satisfaction.

In conclusion, the present study illustrated the importance of goal orientation in the context of job seeking. This study adds to the job search literature by demonstrating the viability of studying job seeking as a self-regulatory process and adds to the motivation literature by integrating goal orientation theory and the TPB. Our findings may have important implications for reemployment counseling, suggesting that job seekers' context-specific goal orientations can be changed with short workshops. Workshops on learning goals may provide an especially powerful tool for reemployment agencies, because these raised unemployed people's motivational engagement in job seeking and their reemployment probabilities.

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