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Goal orientation, self-regulation strategies and job-seeking intensity in unemployed adults

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## Goal orientation, self-regulation strategies and job-seeking intensity in unemployed adults

### Abstract

At T1, we surveyed 277 unemployed adults using measures of human capital, goal orientation, self regulation (emotion control, motivation control, work commitment) and job-seeking intensity. At T2, four months later, 155 participants indicated their re-employment outcomes of number of job interviews and number of job offers. Using T1 data, we tested the predictors of job-seeking intensity and whether self-regulation mediated between goal orientation and job-seeking intensity. Using T1 and T2 data, we tested for predictors of re-employment outcomes and whether job-seeking intensity mediated the relationship between T1 antecedent variables and the re-employment outcomes. Learning goal orientation and self-regulation predicted job-seeking intensity, and self-regulation mediated between learning goal orientation and job-seeking intensity. Job-seeking intensity did not mediate the relationship between human capital, goal orientation and self regulation variables and re-employment outcomes.

**Keywords:** goal orientation, job-seeking intensity, self-regulation, emotion control, motivation control, work commitment, human capital

Unemployment remains a major social problem in most Western countries, including Australia. The unemployment rate in Australia during the period of this study was 4.8%, equating to some 514,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Unemployment has a large economic cost for the individual and the community, including loss of earnings, foregone tax revenue, reduced productivity for the economy, and welfare support (Saunders & Taylor, 2002). Unemployment also has pervasive adverse consequences for the individual, their families, and society at large (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Saunders, 2002). Thus, understanding the experience of unemployment remains an important focus for social scientists.

Previous studies have shown that unemployed people's job-seeking is strongly associated with re-employment (Gregory, Fugate, & Kinicki, 2001; Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005). Job-seeking has been conceptualised from a self-regulatory and a goal setting perspective, that is, as "...a purposive, volitional, self-managed, and dynamic pattern of activity directed toward the goal of gaining employment" (Kanfer et al., p. 412). However, few studies have examined the self-regulatory processes that constitute job-seeking, and there have been calls to examine re-employment goal-setting from a broader perspective than previously (Prussia, Fugate, & Kinicki, 2001). Consequently, the present study had two aims: (a) to test the relationship between goal-setting approach, self-regulation and job-seeking intensity in unemployed people, and (b) to test the relationship between these variables and re-employment outcomes for participants.

#### *Job-seeking Intensity*

Job-seeking involves the expenditure of time, effort and resources on activities such as preparing a resume, reading job advertisements and contacting employers. Typically, it has been operationalised as the intensity of energy expended, with job-seekers being asked to indicate how many times they have engaged in a particular activity. Kanfer et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis identified a long list of antecedent variables to job-seeking intensity, grouped under headings of personality, generalised expectancies, self-evaluations, motives, social contexts and human capital variables. Importantly, research has not yet determined the relative contributions of these antecedent variables.

One cluster of antecedent variables that has been shown to be important in job-seeking intensity and re-employment centres on human capital, that is, the skills, abilities, effort and time possessed by the individual and invested in the job-seeking process (Davenport, 1999). In particular, the human capital variables of age, gender, education and length of unemployment are related to job-seeking intensity and re-employment, with unemployed males who are younger, better educated and unemployed for shorter periods having an advantage (Kanfer et al., 2001; Kulik, 2001; Prussia et al., 2001; Warr & Jackson, 1984). The current study included these variables and tested for the effects of self-regulation and goal-setting approach over and above the contributions they made.

#### *Goal-setting*

We examined goal-setting from a goal orientation perspective. Goal orientation, defined as the striving approach taken to attain performance goals (DeShon & Gillespie, 2005), can be considered to fall into the category of generalised expectancies, identified by Kanfer et al. (2001) as being important to job-seeking intensity and re-employment. Goal orientation has become the leading paradigm in achievement motivation research (DeShon & Gillespie), although no previous studies have applied goal orientation to job-seeking behaviour. Kanfer et al. argued that job-seeking was analogous to performing autonomous

work such as sales, which has been shown to be influenced by goal orientation (Porath & Bateman, 2006; VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999). Thus, it is likely that job-seeking intensity will similarly be influenced by goal orientation. Further, Porath and Bateman suggested that research on goal orientation and self-regulation needs to be conducted in areas where resilience is required. Job-seeking meets this criterion as it is a difficult activity associated with ongoing stress and rejection (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005).

Dweck (2006) proposed two possible goal orientations in achievement situations: a learning orientation focussed on gaining competence, and a performance orientation focussed on demonstrating competence to others. A learning orientation is equivalent to a “growth mindset”, in which the fundamental belief is that “...your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts” (p. 7). A performance orientation is equivalent to a “fixed mindset” in which the fundamental belief is that “...your qualities are carved in stone” (p. 6). Flowing from these beliefs, a person with a learning orientation attributes success to effort, whereas a person with a performance orientation attributes success to ability. A learning orientation results in more positive achievement outcomes than a performance orientation (VandeWalle et al., 1999; Yeo & Neal, 2004).

Other researchers have separated performance orientation into performance-prove and performance-avoid dimensions and found that only performance-avoid was associated with negative performance outcomes (Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, & Elliot, 2002; Sideridis, 2005). Elliot and Thrash (2002) offered an approach-avoidance framework to explain this. In approach orientations, such as learning and performance-prove, individuals are focussed on the possibility of success. They have a greater awareness of positive stimuli, view difficulties as challenges, and are more likely to experience positive affect. Those with an avoidance orientation, such as performance-avoid, are focussed on the possibility of failure, are more aware of negative stimuli, see difficulties as threats to the self, and engage in self-protective withdrawal strategies (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). From this, it seemed likely that job-seeking intensity and subsequent re-employment success would be associated with both learning and performance-prove orientations, but would not be associated with, or would be negatively associated with, a performance-avoid goal orientation.

#### *Self-regulation*

Elliot and Thrash (2002) also argued that self-regulation influenced the effect of goal orientation on performance by adding adaptability and flexibility to behaviour that would otherwise be pre-determined by individual tendencies to approach or avoid. Self-regulation strategies steer an individual towards meeting a goal through the allocation of time, attention and effort to goal-relevant activities (Elliot & Thrash; Maes & Gebhardt, 2000). Self-regulation consists of the self-monitoring of behaviour and consequences, the self-evaluation of performance against a relevant goal, and self-reactions of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with progress (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1989). Self-regulation can be considered to overlap with the category of self-evaluation, identified by Kanfer et al. (2001) to be among the antecedents important to job-seeking and re-employment.

In general, self-regulation is seen to mediate between an individual and performance (Kuhl, 1985; Pintrich, 2000). Thus, we expected goal-orientation to be associated with the self-regulatory strategies employed by the individual. Those with learning and performance-prove goal orientations (approach orientations) tend to use adaptive self-regulatory patterns, such as maintaining effort in goal pursuit in order to further learning and develop competencies as in the case of the learning orientation, or to gain approval or favourable comparisons with others as in the case of a performance-prove orientation

(Radosevich, Viadyanathan, Yeo, & Radosevich, 2004). Performance-avoid individuals, on the other hand, are more likely to use self-protection strategies rather than goal attainment self-regulation (Radosevich et al.). Thus, learning and performance-prove orientations are likely to be positively associated with self-regulatory strategies, and performance-avoid orientation to be negatively associated.

We examined three self-regulation strategies as mediators between goal orientation and job-seeking intensity: emotion control, motivation control and the individual's commitment to having a job. Emotion control strategies permit individuals to manage disruptive emotions when they tackle a task (Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997; Kuhl, 1985). Unemployment often involves feelings of shame, embarrassment, anger and depression that must be managed in a successful job-search (Song, Wanberg, Niu, & Xie, 2006); thus, positive management of mood should be associated with high job-seeking intensity. Motivation control strategies allow individuals to maintain focus and effort on goal attainment despite dissatisfaction with their current achievement (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1996). Motivation has dimensions of both effort and persistence, and motivation control involves strategies associated with the enhancement of both (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999), such as using self-talk or visualising outcomes (Kuhl, 1985). Motivation control has been shown to be positively associated with job-seeking (Wanberg et al., 1999). Finally, work commitment, which reflects the person's desire to reduce the discrepancy between the goal of being in employment and the state of being unemployed (Paul & Moser, 2006), has been found to be positively related to job-seeking (Feather, 1990; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 1999). Thus, we expected all three self-regulation strategies to be positively related to job-seeking intensity.

#### *Return-to-Work*

We have argued that job-seeking intensity will be related to the human capital variables of age, gender, length of unemployment and education; that the job-seeker's goal orientation will also be related to job-seeking intensity; and that goal orientation will be mediated by the self-regulatory strategies brought to the target behaviour of job-seeking. Job-seeking intensity, in turn, has been shown to be related to re-employment outcomes (Gregory et al., 2001; Kanfer et al., 2001; Wanberg et al., 2005). Further, Kanfer et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis of job-seeking and re-employment found much stronger associations between antecedent behaviours and job-seeking intensity than between antecedent behaviours and employment outcomes, indicating that job-seeking behaviour is likely to mediate many of the antecedent behaviours. From this, we expected that job-seeking intensity would be positively associated with re-employment outcomes, operationalised as the number of job interviews and the number of job offers, and that job-seeking intensity would mediate the relationship between the antecedent variables measured in the current study and the re-employment outcomes.

From the above, we formulated four formal hypotheses to be tested:

*H1: Human capital - age and length of unemployment will be negatively associated with job-seeking intensity; education will be positively associated; males will exhibit higher intensity.*

*H2: Goal orientation - (a) learning and performance-prove goal orientation will be positively associated with job-seeking intensity; performance-avoid will not be associated, or will be negatively associated; (b) learning and performance-prove orientations will be positively associated with self-regulatory strategies; performance-avoid will be negatively associated.*

*H3: Self-regulation - (a) emotion control, motivation control and work commitment will be positively associated with job-seeking intensity; (b) emotion control, motivation control and work commitment will mediate the relationship between goal orientation and job-seeking intensity.*

*H4: Job-seeking intensity and re-employment - (a) job-seeking intensity will be positively associated with the re-employment outcomes of number of job interviews and number of job offers; (b) job-seeking intensity will mediate the relationship between human capital, goal orientation and the self-regulatory variables and re-employment outcomes.*

## Method

### *Participants*

At T1, we distributed approximately 400 surveys to unemployed people attending two offices of the national government employment agency. We received 346 surveys in return, although we discarded 63 (18.2%) as the respondents indicated they were not seeking a job (e.g., because of medical condition, pregnancy) and a further six (1.7%) as they had missing data and were unusable. The remaining 277 participants comprised 145 females (52.3%) and 132 males and had an average age of 29.5 years ( $SD = 10.7$ ). Thirty-nine (14.1%) reported having nine years of education, 55 (19.9%) 10 years, 156 (56.3%) 11 to 12 years, and 27 (9.7%) tertiary studies. One hundred and ninety (68.6%) reported being unemployed with no paid part-time work, and 87 reported being unemployed with some paid part-time work. The average duration of unemployment was 3.32 months ( $SD = 2.2$ ).

At T2, approximately four months later, 157 (56.7%) participants responded to a mail survey. Of these, 47 (29.9%) were unemployed with no paid part-time work, 56 (35.7%) were unemployed with some paid part-time work, 52 (33.1%) were full-time employed, and 2 (1.3%) had withdrawn from the labour market (these two participants were excluded from the T2 analyses). There were 79 females (51%) and 76 males; average age was 31.1 years ( $SD = 11.9$ ); 20 (12.9%) had 9 years of education, 27 (17.4%) 10 years, 91 (58.7%) 11 to 12 years, and 17 (11.0%) reported tertiary studies.

### *Measures at T1*

*Job-seeking Intensity:* We used 10 items from a 16-item job search measure devised by Blau (1993). We removed six items from the original scale as they were specific to job-changing rather than seeking a job from unemployment, and modified some of the remaining items to suit the Australian context (e.g., we included reference to web-based resources). Participants were asked to rate, "How often in the past 12 week weeks did you: (a) Read the job advertisements in a newspaper, noticeboard, job agency or on the touch screens/internet? (b) ...contact a job network or other recruitment agency?", using a 5-point Likert scale with endpoints of *never* (1) and *very frequently* (5). Previous internal reliability coefficients have been satisfactory with both employed (.74; Blau) and unemployed samples (.86; Wanberg et al., 1999). With 10 items, we obtained .86.

*Goal Orientation:* We used Vandewalle's (1997) 13-item scale, which was designed for the work domain and validated with adults. Five items assessed learning goal orientation, four assessed performance-prove, and four assessed performance-avoid. We modified several items to make them suitable for an unemployed sample (e.g., "I am willing to select a challenging work assignment that I can learn a lot from", became "I am willing to apply for a challenging job that I could learn a lot from" [learning goal], and "I prefer to work on projects where I can prove my ability to others", was changed to "I prefer to apply for jobs where I can prove my ability to others" [performance-prove]). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale with endpoints of *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (5).

VandeWalle reported internal reliability coefficients of .89, .85 and .88, respectively. We obtained corresponding coefficients of .83, .71 and .78.

*Motivation Control:* We used Wanberg et al.'s (1999) 5-item Motivation Control scale. Participants indicated their agreement to statements such as, "I set specific goals for myself", and "I plan my job-search activities ahead of time", using a 5-point Likert scale with endpoints of *not at all true of me* (1) and *very true of me*(5). Wanberg et al. reported an internal reliability coefficient of .74. This was .75 with the current sample.

*Emotion Control:* We chose the 4-item measure of emotion control used by Porath and Bateman (2006; originally devised by Kuhl, 1985), which we modified to suit an unemployed sample, as the items were consistent with an active self-regulation stance. Participants were asked to think about their job-seeking over the past 12 weeks and respond to items such as, "I manage my moods so that job searching flows more easily", and "I put myself in the mood I need in order to keep on track", using a 5-point Likert scale with endpoints of *not at all true of me* (1) and *very true of me* (5). Porath and Bateman reported an internal reliability coefficient of .82. We obtained a value of .79.

*Work Commitment:* We used the 8-item Employment Commitment Scale (Rowley & Feather, 1987), which has been widely used in occupational settings. Participants responded to items such as, "I hate being on the dole", on a 5-point Likert scale with endpoints of *disagree a lot* (1) and *agree a lot* (5). Rowley and Feather reported an internal reliability coefficient with an unemployed sample of .85. This was .82 with the current sample.

*Human Capital:* Participants reported their exact employment situation, how long they had been unemployed, their highest level of education, and their age and gender.

#### *Measures at T2*

At T2, participants reported the number of job interviews and job offers they had received in the previous four months and their exact employment situation.

#### *Procedure*

Participants were surveyed on two occasions, 4 months apart, which we considered sufficient time to allow for job-seeking and changes to occur in occupational status. The study was conducted with the approval of the authors' university ethics committee.

### Results

#### *Predicting Job-seeking Intensity and Testing Mediation*

We used a hierarchical regression analysis to assess the predictors of job-seeking intensity, and followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure to test for mediation. To meet the criteria for mediation, a predictor must be associated with the mediator, the mediator must predict the outcome, and the effect of the predictor on the outcome must be reduced when the mediator is included. Full mediation holds if a predictor has no effect once the mediator is included in the equation; partial mediation occurs if there is a significant reduction in the effect of the predictor when the mediator is included.

To test H1, that human capital would be associated with job-seeking intensity, we included the variables of age, gender, length of unemployment, education and the additional variable of employment status at T1 (having none vs. having some paid part-time work) at Step 1. To test H2a, that goal orientation would be associated with job-seeking intensity, we included the learning, performance-prove and performance-avoid goal orientation variables at Step 2. To test H3a, that self-regulation would be associated with job-seeking intensity, we included emotion control, motivation control and work commitment at Step 3. To test H3b, that self-regulation would mediate the relationship between goal orientation and job-seeking intensity, we examined the standardised beta



weights of the learning, performance-prove and performance-avoid goal orientation variables at Step 3 after we included the self-regulation variables.

At Step 1, the human capital variables did not significantly predict job-seeking intensity,  $F(5, 271) = .70, p = .63$ . Thus, H1 was not supported. At Step 2, the goal-orientation variables contributed 11.3%,  $F_{Change}(3, 268) = 11.34, p < .001$ , although only learning goal-orientation contributed significant, unique variance. Thus, H2 was partially supported. At Step 3, the self-regulation variables contributed 13.3%,  $F_{Change}(3, 265) = 15.86, p < .001$ , with emotion control, motivation control and work commitment all contributing significant, unique variance. Thus, H3a was supported. This final model explained 25.7% of the variance in job-seeking intensity,  $F(11, 265) = 8.34, p < .001$ . Emotion control ( $\beta = .23, sr^2 = 3.88\%$ ), motivation control ( $\beta = .20, sr^2 = 2.40\%$ ), work commitment ( $\beta = .17, sr^2 = 2.16\%$ ) and learning goal orientation ( $\beta = .18, sr^2 = 2.16\%$ ) all contributed significant, unique variance. See Table 1 for bivariate correlations and Table 2 for results of this analysis.

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here

In this analysis, the three self-regulation variables (emotion control, motivation control, work commitment) and learning goal-orientation met the criteria for mediation by being significantly associated with job-seeking intensity. When the self-regulation variables were included at Step 3, their effect was to reduce the standardised beta weight of learning goal-orientation from .28 (Step 2) to .18 (Step 3), indicating a partial mediation effect. This confirmed that the self-regulation variables in concert partially mediated the effect of learning goal orientation on job-seeking intensity. We then assessed the effect of each self-regulation strategy individually. To do this, we (a) conducted standard regression analyses to test the effect of learning goal-orientation on each mediator, while controlling for the human capital and other goal-orientation variables, and (b) conducted three hierarchical regression analyses to test the effect of learning goal-orientation on job-seeking intensity while controlling for the human capital and goal orientation variables and each mediator (motivation control, emotional control, work commitment) in turn (these analyses are not reported). We calculated Sobel's (1982) statistic to assess if the individual self-regulation strategies significantly mediated the relationship between learning goal-orientation and job-seeking intensity.

From the standard regression analyses, learning goal orientation did not significantly predict emotion control; thus, this mediation was not tested. From the hierarchical regression analyses, when tested individually, motivation control reduced the standardised beta weight for learning goal orientation from .28 to .23 (Sobel  $z = 2.36, p = .018$ ), and work commitment reduced it to .23 (Sobel  $z = 2.50, p = .012$ ). Thus, H2b was partially supported as learning goal orientation was significantly associated with two self-regulation variables (performance-prove goal orientation was significantly associated with all three; performance-avoid was not associated with any); and H3b was partially supported as motivation control and work commitment mediated the relationship between learning goal orientation and job-seeking intensity.

#### *Predicting Re-employment Outcomes and Testing Mediation*

Prior to testing the predictors of the re-employment outcomes we conducted an attrition analysis to determine if the 122 participants who withdrew from the study (i.e., did not complete the T2 survey) differed from the 155 who remained in the study on any of the T1 variables. Dropouts did not differ from stayers on any variable, except that they were

younger,  $t(275) = -2.54, p = .012$  (dropout  $M = 27.63$  years,  $SD = 9.55$ ; stayers'  $M = 30.88$  years,  $SD = 11.35$ ), indicating minimal attrition bias.

We conducted two hierarchical regression analyses to test the relationship between job-seeking intensity and the re-employment outcomes of number of job interviews and number of job offers (H4a), and whether job-seeking intensity mediated the relationship between the human capital, goal orientation and self-regulatory variables and number of job interviews and number of job offers (H4b). In these analyses we included the human capital, goal orientation and self-regulation variables at Step 1, and job-seeking intensity at Step 2. The outcome variables were number of job interviews and number of job offers.

The human capital, goal orientation and self-regulation variables accounted for a significant 13% of variance in number of job interviews at Step 1,  $F(11, 142) = 1.92, p = .041$ . The addition of job-seeking intensity at Step 2 accounted for a further 3.7% of the variance,  $F_{Change}(1, 141) = 6.29, p = .013$ . At this final step, 16.7% of the variance in number of job interviews was accounted for,  $F(12, 141) = 2.35, p = .009$ . Unique contributions were made by job-seeking intensity ( $\beta = .23, sr^2 = 3.72\%$ ) and employment status at T1 ( $\beta = -.17, sr^2 = 2.56\%$ ). In partial support of H4a, those who had no paid work at T1 and engaged in more job-seeking reported more job interviews at T2. When job-seeking intensity was included at Step 2, it had the effect of reducing the standardised beta weight of job status at T1 from  $-.18$  to  $-.17$ , which was not significant, indicating that job-seeking intensity did not mediate the relationship between any Step 1 variable and the number of job interviews reported at T2. Thus, H4b was not supported. Results are reported in Table 3.

The human capital, goal orientation and self-regulation variables and the number of job interviews accounted for a significant 18.6% of the variance in the number of job offers at Step 1,  $F(12, 141) = 3.91, p < .001$ . The inclusion of job-seeking intensity at Step 2 failed to account for additional variance,  $F_{Change}(1, 140) = .54, p = .46$ . At this final step, 18.3% of the variance in job offers was accounted for,  $F(13, 140) = 3.64, p < .001$ . Unique contributions were made by the number of job interviews reported at T2 ( $\beta = .39, sr^2 = 12.74\%$ ), learning goal orientation ( $\beta = .23, sr^2 = 3.31\%$ ), employment status at T1 ( $\beta = .19, sr^2 = 2.89\%$ ), performance-prove goal orientation ( $\beta = -.21, sr^2 = 2.34\%$ ), and age ( $\beta = -.17, sr^2 = 2.13\%$ ). In partial support of H4a, participants who received more job offers were higher on learning goal orientation, lower on performance-prove goal orientation, had some paid work at T1 and who were younger reported more job offers. Job-seeking intensity was not associated with job offers and thus did not meet the criteria for mediation. H4b was not supported. Results are reported in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

#### Discussion

We examined variables from three clusters of antecedents identified by Kanfer et al. (2001) as being important for unemployed people in relation to job-seeking intensity and becoming re-employed. These were human capital, goal orientation and self-regulation. As self-regulation has largely been conceptualised as mediating between the person and performance (Kuhl, 1985; Pintrich, 2000), we viewed goal orientation and human capital variables as distal to job-seeking intensity, and self-regulation as more proximal and as mediators between goal orientation and job-seeking intensity. We also expected that higher job-seeking intensity would be associated with better re-employment outcomes and hypothesised that job-seeking intensity would mediate between the antecedent variables and re-employment outcomes.

The results revealed a robust relationship between learning goal orientation and job-seeking intensity. This is consistent with the general findings in the goal orientation area (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Porath & Bateman, 2006) and highlights the importance of this general expectancy variable for unemployed people. Thus, job-seeking intensity was associated with behaviours focused on increasing competence and self-improvement and characterised by increasing effort and persistence in the face of difficulties. Importantly, job-seeking intensity was not associated with a performance-prove approach, which is typified by wanting to demonstrate competence and gain favourable judgements from others; nor was job-seeking intensity associated with a performance-avoid approach, which reflects a desire to avoid situations that would expose one's incompetencies to others and bring negative judgments. Other studies have identified advantages associated with a performance-prove orientation, although it has been suggested that such an orientation may be more suited to situations where the tasks are routine and can be mastered by rehearsal (Davis, Carson, Ammeter, & Treadway, 2005). This does not reflect job-seeking, which is anything but routine and is conducted in the context where the individual is constantly being evaluated by family, friends and employers. Thus, the positive aspects of holding a performance-prove approach may be offset by these challenges in job-seeking situations where resilience is required to manage rejection and failure.

Learning and performance-prove orientations were positively associated with the self-regulation strategies, whereas performance-avoid was not associated with any. This result highlights the value of differentiating between the two performance orientation types, and further points to the advantage of holding an approach orientation rather than an avoidant orientation to job-seeking. This is consistent with other studies that have shown a poor relationship between an avoidant orientation and accomplishment (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Harackiewicz et al., 2002; Sideridis, 2005). Holding an approach orientation was associated with a stronger goal to be employed and a self-reported capacity to maintain motivation and manage disruptive emotions. Holding a learning orientation was especially useful, as this orientation was also directly related to job-seeking intensity. Dweck (2006) showed that people respond to training that seeks to explain and modify goal orientations. Thus, training programs aimed at assisting job-seekers might profitably include a focus on explaining and strengthening an approach orientation, in particular a learning performance approach, over an avoidant approach.

All three self-regulation strategies were positively associated with job-seeking intensity. The relationship between emotion control and outcome has been found in other populations (Gumora & Arsenio, 2002; Totterdell, & Holman, 2003) and shown here for unemployed people. Those who can manage the stress and negative affect associated with joblessness will be better placed to achieve the goal of re-employment. The result for work commitment confirmed other studies with unemployed people that have found having a goal of being employed is positively related to job-seeking intensity (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Lastly, the finding for motivation control and job-seeking intensity highlights that unemployed people who have the capacity to maintain concentration and effort in the face of the inherent difficulties in job-seeking will be better placed to find work. Reeve (2005) argued that self-regulation strategies are learned behaviours that can be taught, and that they may need to be explicitly shown to people operating in unfamiliar contexts. Job-seeking is a novel situation for most people, and while interventions often include training in the more practical aspects of job-seeking, such as preparing a resume, trainers need to consider a focus on self-regulation strategies. Further research needs also to examine other

self-regulation strategies, such as feedback-seeking, social competence (Porath & Bateman, 2006), effort and planning (VandeWalle et al., 1999) in relation to job-seeking.

The self-regulation strategies together with learning goal orientation accounted for a meaningful 26% of the variance in job-seeking intensity, and importantly showed that a higher learning goal orientation and greater use of self-regulation strategies were associated with more job-seeking behaviour. Unlike in other studies (e.g., Prussia et al., 2001), the human capital variables did not contribute significantly to job-seeking intensity. A partial explanation for this may lay in the requirements set for all unemployed people in Australia, who, no matter what their status, are required to diarise their job-seeking efforts and meet with an employment officer on a regular basis to discuss their efforts. These government imperatives may have overshadowed individual effects based on the individual's accumulated capital.

Consistent with previous research (Saks, 2005), the most important predictor of the number of job interviews reported at T2 was job-seeking intensity, with not having a part-time job at T1 also contributing unique variance. The most important predictor of the number of job offers was, in turn, the number of job interviews obtained. Thus, unemployed people with the goal of re-employment need to give attention to their job-seeking intensity to increase their number of interviews with employers, which is then associated with the number of job offers received. Learning goal orientation was also positively associated with the number of job offers received. Thus, not only was having a learning goal orientation positively associated with the self-regulation and job-intensity variables, it was also directly associated with return to work.

The present study has made a contribution to the unemployment literature by demonstrating that individual differences in learning goal orientation were associated with job-seeking intensity for unemployed people. It has also highlighted the important role played by self-regulation strategies in this context. However, the study is not without its limitations. Although we were able to collect data on two occasions, the main analyses examining job-seeking intensity were conducted on cross-sectional reports, which had the potential to inflate the correlations among the study variables. It would have been useful to have re-measured goal orientation and self-regulation at T2, which would have allowed us, for example, to test more rigorous change-over-time models. We also relied on self-report data for all variables, whereas it would have been more desirable to have obtained confirmation of attitudes, and especially behaviours, from other sources. Further, participants in the study were at different stages of their job-search, with only a small proportion of job-seekers at the beginning by being recently unemployed. This meant that the sample examined was somewhat select. Commencing the study with a sample of recently unemployed people, where all participants were starting their job search, would have been a more rigorous test of the hypotheses. In conclusion, however, it seems clear from the study that those working with unemployed people need to give attention to the promotion of personal agency through the enhancement of a learning approach and the development of skills and knowledge around self-management and regulation.

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Table 1  
*Bivariate Correlations for all Variables at T1 (N = 277) and T2 (N = 155)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Job-seeking intensity	34.93	7.56	.32***	.20**	-.10	.35***	.35***	.30**	-.05	-.07	.03	-.02	-.08	.25**	.15
2. Learning goal orientation	20.65	3.43	-	.45***	-.13*	.33***	.25***	.37***	-.01	.05	.18**	.02	-.03	-.07	.11
3. Performance-prove goal orientation	14.67	3.05		-	.14*	.37***	.33***	.40***	-.00	-.11	.05	.05	.03	-.08	-.05
4. Performance-avoid goal orientation	11.85	3.92			-	.02	.02	-.03	-.00	.05	.00	-.06	.04	-.03	-.06
5. Motivation control	18.33	3.76				-	.49***	.31***	-.17**	.17**	.10	.07	-.01	-.01	.07
6. Emotion control	14.77	3.30					-	.17**	-.16**	.02	.15*	.13*	.01	.03	.07
7. Work commitment	32.08	6.10						-	-.05	-.03	-.04	-.02	.02	.11	.07
8. Gender									-	.16**	-.05	-.09	-.07	-.01	-.02
9. Age										-	-.05	.06	.24***	-.16*	-.18*
10. Education											-	.10	-.13*	-.02	-.02
11. Employment status (T1)												-	.08	-.19*	.08
12. Length of unemployment													-	-.19*	-.16*
13. Job interviews														-	.41***
14. Job offers															-

\* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < .001$



Table 2

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis with Job-seeking Intensity regressed on Human Capital (Age, Gender, Length of Unemployment, Education, Employment Status at T1), Goal Orientation (Learning, Performance-prove, Performance-avoid) and Self-regulation (Motivation Control, Emotion Control, Work Commitment); N = 277.*

Variables	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$
Age	-.03	.05	-.04	-.03	.04	-.04	-.08	.04	-.11
Gender	-.79	.94	-.05	-.79	.89	-.05	.51	.85	.03
Length of unemployment	-.26	.23	-.07	-.25	.22	-.07	-.18	.20	-.05
Education	.18	.55	.02	-.29	.53	-.03	-.43	.50	-.05
Employment status at T1	-.35	.99	-.02	-.46	.95	-.03	-.76	.88	-.05
Learning goal orientation				.62	.15	.28***	.40	.14	.18**
Performance-prove goal orientation				.20	.17	.08	-.24	.17	-.10
Performance-avoid goal orientation				-.14	.12	-.07	-.12	.11	-.06
Emotion control							.54	.14	.23***
Motivation control							.40	.14	.20**
Work commitment							.21	.08	.17**

*Note:*  $R^2$  at Step 1 = .01 (Adjusted  $R^2$  = .00),  $R^2$  at Step 2 = .12 (Adjusted  $R^2$  = .10),  $R^2$  at Step 3 = .26 (Adjusted  $R^2$  = .23). \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

Table 3

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis with Number of Job Interviews and Number of Job Offers regressed on Human Capital (Age, Gender, Length of Unemployment, Education, Employment Status at T1), Goal Orientation (Learning, Performance-prove, Performance-avoid) and Self-regulation (Motivation Control, Emotion Control, Work Commitment); N = 157.*

Variables	Predicting No. of Job Interviews						Predicting No. of Job Offers					
	Step 1			Step 2			Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$
Age	-.05	.03	-.16	-.04	.03	-.13	-.04	.02	-.16	-.04	.02	-.17*
Gender	.01	.60	.00	-.12	.59	-.02	.10	.42	.02	.12	.42	.02
Length of unemployment	-.19	.15	-.11	-.17	.15	-.10	-.11	.10	-.09	-.11	.10	-.09
Education	.03	.37	.01	.02	.37	.01	-.35	.26	-.11	-.34	.26	-.11
Employment status at T1	-1.37	.64	-.18*	-1.31	.63	-.17*	1.05	.45	.19*	1.05	.45	.19*
Learning goal orientation	-.07	.10	-.07	-.12	.10	-.11	.16	.07	.22*	.17	.07	.23*
Performance-prove goal orientation	-.20	.13	-.16	-.14	.13	-.12	-.18	.07	-.19*	-.19	.09	-.21*
Performance-avoid goal orientation	-.02	.08	-.02	-.00	.07	-.00	.02	.05	.04	.02	.05	.03
Emotion control	.11	.11	.10	.04	.11	.03	-.02	.07	-.02	-.00	.08	-.00
Motivation control	.02	.10	.02	-.04	.10	-.04	.10	.07	.14	.11	.07	.15
Work commitment	.10	.05	.17	.07	.05	.12	-.01	.04	-.02	-.00	.04	-.01
Number of job interviews							.28	.06	.38***	.29	.06	.39***
Job-seeking intensity				.11	.04	.23*				-.02	.03	-.07

*Note:* For number of job interviews,  $R^2$  at Step 1 = .13 (Adjusted  $R^2$  = .06),  $R^2$  at Step 2 = .17 (Adjusted  $R^2$  = .10); for number of job offers,  $R^2$  at Step 1 = .25 (Adjusted  $R^2$  = .19),  $R^2$  at Step 2 = .25 (Adjusted  $R^2$  = .18). \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .