



Action–state orientation and the theory of planned behavior: A study of job search in China [☆]

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Abstract

Job search is an important element of people's careers and is especially critical for unemployed individuals. The current study surveyed a sample of 328 unemployed job seekers in China to test hypotheses related to the theory of planned behavior and action–state orientation theory. Results of the three-wave longitudinal study demonstrated that the theory of planned behavior was effective in modeling job-search intention and job-search intensity. Action–state orientation moderated the relationship between attitude and intention, as well as the relationship between intention and intensity. The current study sheds light on the motivational and self-regulatory process of job search and reemployment for Chinese unemployed job seekers.

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Every year, millions of workers worldwide lose their jobs as the outcome of layoffs or terminations. Because job search has been conceptualized as the major behavioral pathway leading to reemployment (Vinokur & Schul, 2002), research examining the antecedents of, and mechanisms by which, job search behavior is translated into reemployment has gained significant interest. A recent review and meta-analysis of the job search literature by Kanfer, Wanberg, and Kantrowitz (2001) argued that job search is a goal-directed behavior, subject to self-regulation processes such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reactions. While this formulation of the job search as a self-regulated, motivational process is valuable and has attracted some research (e.g., Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2005), adequate empirical examination of job search from this theoretical perspective is not yet available.

The current study extends the literature by examining the role of self-regulation in the job search and reemployment process within the context of the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985, 1991), a theory that has been productively applied to the study of job search by other scholars (see, for example, Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992). Our study was conducted with job seekers in China using a 3-wave longitudinal design. Examination of job search and reemployment within the Chinese context is a critical need at this time. Due to high-speed economic development, mass layoffs in state-owned enterprises, and redundant labor forces in the countryside, the question of how to promote reemployment has become one of the most critical social issues in China today. Because very few empirical studies have been published on job search and reemployment in China, this country's burgeoning role in the world's economy has made research on this topic in this location imperative. Although our study is not comparative (e.g., we do not compare results across different cultures), we discuss the role of the Chinese culture in the application of the TPB to job search.

1. The theory of planned behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB, Ajzen, 1985, 1991) was formulated to explain how goals and plans guide behavior. The TPB proposes an individual's intention to perform a given behavior is the immediate determinant of his or her behavior. In the job-search context, for example, specific intentions regarding how hard an individual plans to look for a job should predict how much effort the individual subsequently puts into his or her job search.

According to the theory, intention to perform a behavior is influenced by the person's attitude toward the behavior, his or her subjective norm, and his or her perceived control over perceived difficulty of performing the behavior. In the job-search context, *attitude* toward the behavior is reflected by an unemployed individual's cognitive or affective evaluation about putting effort into his or her job search. For example, one individual may think it is useless or even foolish to try hard to find a job, whereas another might believe it is quite beneficial to try hard to find a job. *Subjective norm* refers to the extent to which unemployed individuals believe their significant others expect them to exert effort toward finding a job. Finally, *perceived behavior control* has been operationalized as job-search self-efficacy, an individual's confidence in performing job-search behaviors well (e.g., Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992).

Perceived behavior control has been conceptualized as not only affecting behavior through intentions, but as also having direct effects on behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (1991) offers two rationales to explain the direct effect of perceived behavior control on behavior: first, individuals with higher perceived control may demonstrate stronger persistence in their efforts and second, perceived behavior control may reflect real factors that impede the

behavior. In the job-search context, for example, low job-search self-efficacy may reflect a real lack of skill or knowledge about how hard one should look for a job (should one spend all day each day engaged in job search, or just an hour a day). Such lack of skill or knowledge would not only affect job-search behavior through reducing job-search intentions but could also be expected to reduce job-search behavior directly.

It is valuable to address the extent to which the Chinese context may affect the application of the TPB to the study of job search. Research has portrayed the Chinese culture as collectivist, compared to most western cultures such as the United States or Netherlands that are more individualistic (Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). The defining element of collectivism is the importance of social group as a central aspect of identity and influence, with a high value being placed on maintaining harmonious relationships and sacrificing personal desires for others or the common good. In contrast, individualism is characterized as a focus on personal rights rather than on duties to others. Although a concern exists for immediate family, central to individualistic cultures is the significance placed on personal autonomy, self-fulfillment, and freedom of choice (Oyserman et al., 2002).

The attitude component of the TPB is largely an individually-based construct. Subjective norm, on the other hand, are more other-based, concerned with what others think the person should do. The conceptualizations of these constructs along with the tendency of individuals in the Chinese culture to be more collectivist than individuals in other cultures lead us to expect that subjective norm will have a stronger influence on job-search intention and behavior in China than will attitudes. This expectation provides an interesting contrast to findings from largely non-collectivist cultures. For example, in a recent meta-analysis of the TPB, Armitage and Conner (2001) found that the mean subjective norm–intention correlation based on 185 studies was significantly weaker than the attitude–intention and the perceived control–intention correlations. Similarly, other job-search studies incorporating the TPB in the US or Netherlands have shown a smaller role of subjective norm (Van Hooft, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2004; Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992; Vinokur, Price, & Schul, 1995). Based upon the above discussion, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. *Individuals' (a) job-search attitude, (b) subjective norm, and (c) job-search self-efficacy are positively related to job-search intention.*

Hypothesis 2. *Job-search intention is positively related to job-search intensity.*

Hypothesis 3. *Given the Chinese context, subjective norm is a stronger predictor of: (a) job-search intention and (b) job-search intensity than job-search attitude.*

Hypothesis 4. *Job-search intention fully mediates the relationship between: (a) job-search attitude and (b) subjective norm on job-search intensity.*

Hypothesis 5. *Job-search intention partially mediates the relationship between job-search self-efficacy and job-search intensity.*

2. Action–state orientation

Action–state orientation was constructed by Kuhl (1985) to reflect the individual differences in volitional control ability in the framework of self-regulation theory. The construct reflects the ability to initiate and commit to action, manage time properly,

avoid distractions, and be persistent on tasks when facing setbacks and failures (Diefendorff, Hall, Lord, & Streat, 2000; Kuhl, 1992). The unstructured and emotional nature of job search suggests that the action–state orientation construct may help us to better understand why individuals exert different efforts in their job search. For example, while unemployed, individuals lack the structure of a work day. Other activities may distract them, or the mere length of the day may falsely make individuals believe they have unlimited time to accomplish tasks. In addition, being without a job often involves feelings including shame, embarrassment, confusion, anger, or depression, feelings that must be overcome to conduct a positive job search. Because of the compelling theoretical importance of self-regulation within this context, this study examines the role that action–state orientation, an index of self-regulation, plays in the job-search process, specifically in relation to those hypotheses suggested by the theory of planned behavior.

Action–state orientation is a bipolar construct: action orientation represents stronger self-regulation ability while state orientation represents weaker self-regulation ability. Kuhl (1992, 1994) distinguished three dimensions of action–state orientation: disengagement, initiative, and persistence. Individuals who are more action orientated are better able to avoid irrelevant thoughts (disengagement), plan and initiate actions without difficulty (initiative), and continue over time on an activity even when tempted with other external activities (persistence) than individuals with lower levels of action orientation. Due to the association of action–state orientation with behaviors such as job performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Diefendorff et al., 2000), individuals who are more action orientated are expected to demonstrate higher levels of job-search intensity during unemployment.

It is also meaningful to evaluate the extent to which higher levels of action orientation can aid job seekers in the translation of their: (a) attitude and subjective norm into intentions and (b) their intentions into behavior. First, because of the low motivational tendency to act and plan, attitudes may not transform into intentions for individuals who are not action orientated. According to Bagozzi, Baumgartner and Yi (1992), high action orientation provides a motivational tendency to put forward the action, whereas attitudes provide directions and objects for actions. Because both are important, the relationship between attitudes and job-search intentions is expected to be stronger for individuals with higher, rather than lower, action orientation.

Second in contrast, subjective norm may facilitate the formation of intentions among individuals low in action orientation. Kuhl (1992) suggested that individuals who are low in action orientation have a tendency to internalize others' beliefs, wishes, and expectations. His formulation suggests that the relationship between subjective norm and job-search intentions will be stronger for individuals with low, rather than high, action orientation.

Finally, Bagozzi et al. (1992) suggest that action–state orientation may play an important role in translating intentions into actual behavior. In the job-search context this makes sense: job-search intentions may be more highly predictive of job-search behavior among individuals with high, rather than low, action orientation due to the ability of these individuals to implement intended behavior while avoiding both emotional and physical distractions in the environment.

Based on this literature, we propose:

Hypothesis 6. *Action–state orientation moderates the relationship between: (a) job-search attitude and intention, and between (b) subjective norm and intention. We expect that those*

who are more action oriented demonstrates a stronger attitude–intention relationship than those who are less action oriented. We expect that those who are less action oriented demonstrate stronger subjective norm–intention relationship than those who are more action oriented.

Hypothesis 7. *Those who are more action orientated have higher job-search intensity.*

Hypothesis 8. *Action–state orientation moderates the relationship between job-search intention and job-search intensity. Those who are more action oriented demonstrate a stronger intention–job-search intensity relationship than those who are less action orientated.*

3. Reemployment goal attainment

This study examined goal attainment using the index of reemployment speed, supplemented with an assessment of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction in the newly obtained job has been used by other researchers as a reemployment quality measure (e.g., Kinicki, Prussia, & McKee-Ryan, 2000). Reemployment quality is important to assess for a holistic understanding of whether antecedents simply predict faster reemployment or also satisfactory employment as well. While meta-analysis has supported positive relationships between job-search intensity and indicators of reemployment speed (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001), the relationship between job-search intensity and reemployment satisfaction has been less consistently supported.

We expect action–state orientation to be related to both reemployment speed and satisfaction. Holding other factors constant, action oriented individuals should organize their jobs search in a timely fashion, be more persistent despite failures or setbacks, and be more effective in allocating cognitive resources to the employment goal. It is also possible that in the employment selection process, employers prefer to hire those who have stronger ability to initiate their work in a timely manner and to stay focused on their work at hand. We propose:

Hypothesis 9. *Job-search intensity has a positive relationship with: (a) reemployment speed and (b) with job satisfaction for those reemployed.*

Hypothesis 10. *Those who are more action orientated have higher: (a) reemployment speed and (b) job satisfaction in their new jobs.*

4. Methods

4.1. Sample and procedures

The participants were registered unemployed individuals in Xicheng District of Beijing, China. Those who had been registered unemployed in the district employment office for fewer than six months and had not reported reemployment were potential candidates to join in the study. Employees in the employment office made phone calls to them to examine their eligibility and invite those eligible to participate. Participants were required to meet four eligibility criteria: still actively looking for job, no expectations of retiring within the next year or of being recalled to their former jobs, and no strong preference to be self-employed. Those who were eligible and agreed to participate came to their community centers to complete the survey.

Three waves of surveys were administered. The Time 1 survey (March of 2004) was used to assess control variables, TPB variables, and action–state orientation. Of 429 individuals invited, 397 returned the Time 1 survey (92.5%). For various reasons, 31 Time 1 surveys were invalid (e.g., had more than two pages without answers). The Time 2 survey, one month later, asked individuals to report job-search behavior in the last month. Among 366 Time 2 surveys sent out, 355 were turned back (97%). The Time 3 survey was administered eight months after Time 1. This survey inquired about individuals' reemployment situation. Among 355 surveys sent out, 328 were turned back (93%). The total response rate for three waves was 82.6% (328 out of 397 Time 1 responses). The participants were on average 41.12 years old ($SD = 7.95$). Fifty-two percent of participants were male and most (87.8%) finished high school. On average, participants had been unemployed for 3.04 months ($SD = 1.75$) at Time 1. The mode of the unemployment duration at Time 1 was 2 months.

Since most instruments used in the study were developed in English, careful forward-back translation (Behling & Law, 2000) procedures were used to translate and pilot the inventories. Specifically, a bilingual subject matter expert translated items from English to Chinese. Then, another bilingual translator who had no knowledge of the original English inventories translated the Chinese back to English. The back-translated version was compared with the original English version by a researcher whose native language was English. As needed, the Chinese version was revised and further translation-back translations were conducted to ensure all discrepancies were resolved. Two pilot studies and a focus group of professionals were then used to ensure the items were appropriate in the Chinese context. Minor changes were made as needed while retaining the original meaning.

The ACS-90 scale has a relatively complex factorial structure and responses to items are dichotomous. As such, a very large sample is needed to examine its factorial structure. An on-line survey was administered in a two-week period in China. There were 5325 responses collected. Both item level and parcel level Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were performed to determine the factorial structure of the instrument. Based on results, one item from each subscale of ACS-90 was dropped. The 3-factor model using the revised scale had satisfactory model fit (detailed information about the model and instrument can be obtained from the first author upon request).

4.2. Measures

Planned behavior variables. *Job-search attitude* (e.g., “How useful is it for you to spend enough effort in the next month to find a job”) was measured with a 3-item scale from Vinokur and Caplan (1987). Anchors ranged from 1 (very useless) to 5 (very useful). *Subjective norm* (e.g., “In the next month, how much effort does your spouse or the person closest to you think you should spend to get a job?”) was measured with two items (Vinokur & Caplan, 1987). Responses ranged from 1 (no effort) to 5 (a lot of effort). *Job-search self-efficacy* was measured with an item reading “How confident do you feel about being able to do the following activities successfully,” followed by eight activities such as “Making the best impression and getting your point across in an interview” (Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992). Responses ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). *Job-search intention* was assessed via two items (Vinokur & Caplan, 1987; e.g., “In the next month, how hard do you intend to look for a job?”). Responses ranged from 1 (no effort) to 5 (a lot of effort).

Action–state orientation. Action–state orientation was assessed by the revised Chinese version of Action Control Scale-90 (Kuhl, 1994). There are three subscales in this inventory

(disengagement, initiative, and persistence), each with 11 items. A sample item in the initiative subscale is, “When I have to solve a difficult problem: (a) I usually don’t have a problem getting started on it or (b) I have trouble sorting things out in my head so that I can get down to working on the problem.” Option (a) indicates an action-orientation and (b) indicates a state-orientation. Responses are summed for each subscale. Higher scores reflect higher levels of action orientation, while lower scores reflect lower levels of action orientation.

Control variables. Gender, age, education attainment, perceived social support, and economic hardship served as control variables. Social support was measured with 8 items (4-point scale) from Xiao’s Chinese Social Support Inventory (1999). The economic hardship measure was translated from three items (5-point scale; Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992). Control variables were chosen based on the relevance of these variables to job-search or reemployment. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that higher education, younger age, and higher financial need are associated with faster reemployment while higher education, younger age, being male, and having higher social support is associated with higher job search intensity (Kanfer et al., 2001).

Job-search intensity. Time 2 Job-search intensity was adapted from a 12-item scale (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999). Individuals were asked about the extent (1 = never to 5 = very frequently) they had engaged in a variety of job-search activities (e.g., “send out applications,” “prepared/revised resume” and “telephoned a prospective employer”) in the last two weeks.

Reemployment speed was calculated from the first reemployment date reported at Time 3 and job loss date reported at Time 1. To reduce recall error, a calendar was provided within both Time 1 and Time 3 surveys. *Job satisfaction* among those reemployed was assessed with 3-items (e.g., “All in all, I am satisfied with my job”) (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1983). Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

5. Results

Descriptive statistics appear in Table 1. Table 2 presents the results for the TPB hypotheses. Partially supporting Hypothesis 1, job-search attitude and subjective norm, but not job-search self-efficacy, were positively associated with job-search intentions (column 1). Supporting Hypothesis 2, job-search intentions measured at Time 1 were related to higher job-search intensity at Time 2 (column 3). In both models predicting job-search intention and intensity, effect sizes for subjective norm were larger than those of job-search attitude, which supported Hypothesis 3.

Hypotheses 4 and 5 proposed mediating effects of job-search intention. Baron and Kenny’s (1986) multiple regression mediation approach was used to test these hypotheses. For example, for job-search intentions to fully mediate the relationship between Time 1 job-search attitude and Time 2 job-search intensity, job-search attitude must be associated with both job-search intentions and job-search intensity respectively, and the relationship between job-search attitude and job-search intensity must become non-significant when job-search intention is in the equation. Failing to support Hypothesis 4, the examination of Table 2 indicates that job-search intention did not fully mediate the relationship between either job-search attitude or subjective norm and job-search intensity. The data did indicate, however, that job-search intention *partially* mediated the relationship between subjective norm at Time 1 and job-search intensity at Time 2. More precisely, intention mediated

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability alpha coefficient estimations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Gender ^a	1.48	0.50	—														
2. Age	41.12	7.95	<u>-.13</u>	—													
3. Education	2.87	0.64	<u>.25</u>	<u>-.35</u>	—												
4. T1 social support	10.87	2.88	<u>-.12</u>	<u>-.10</u>	.08	.71											
5. T1 economic hardship	10.98	2.89	<u>-.12</u>	<u>.16</u>	<u>-.18</u>	-.09	.87										
6. T1 job-search attitude	9.92	2.99	<u>.07</u>	<u>-.03</u>	<u>-.03</u>	<u>.11</u>	<u>.17</u>	.84									
7. T1 subjective norm	7.23	1.94	-.08	<u>.09</u>	<u>-.15</u>	<u>-.07</u>	<u>.49</u>	<u>.39</u>	.87								
8. T1 job-search self-efficacy	17.73	5.84	.03	<u>-.30</u>	<u>.27</u>	<u>.30</u>	<u>-.17</u>	<u>.13</u>	-.09	.84							
9. T1 job-search intention	7.11	1.94	-.01	<u>-.02</u>	<u>-.11</u>	<u>.04</u>	<u>.44</u>	<u>.54</u>	<u>.68</u>	.03	.80						
10. Action–state orientation: disengagement	17.28	2.92	-.08	<u>-.16</u>	<u>.18</u>	<u>.25</u>	-.09	.10	-.05	<u>.24</u>	-.02	.77					
11. Action–state orientation: initiative	18.38	2.40	.05	<u>-.07</u>	<u>.22</u>	<u>.30</u>	-.10	.07	-.04	<u>.26</u>	.02	<u>.54</u>	.69				
12. Action–state orientation: persistence	18.68	1.95	.02	<u>-.07</u>	<u>.12</u>	<u>.14</u>	-.08	-.04	-.03	<u>.17</u>	-.09	<u>.14</u>	<u>.39</u>	.52			
13. T2 job-search intensity	28.43	7.31	.01	<u>-.18</u>	<u>.19</u>	<u>.16</u>	.04	<u>.13</u>	<u>.19</u>	<u>.30</u>	<u>.23</u>	<u>.12</u>	<u>.12</u>	.05	.84		
14. T3 reemployment status	0.42	0.49	.10	<u>-.05</u>	<u>.09</u>	<u>.10</u>	-.03	.10	-.05	<u>.07</u>	<u>-.02</u>	-.03	<u>.04</u>	.01	-.01	—	
15. T3 job-satisfaction	9.81	1.59	<u>.21</u>	<u>-.13</u>	.16	<u>.26</u>	-.12	-.13	-.11	-.03	-.05	.03	-.01	.05	.02	—	.75

Note. $N = 328$ for variables 1–14. $N = 137$ for the variable 15. Alpha coefficients were in bold. Significant correlation coefficients at the .05 level are underlined. T1 = Time 1, T2 = Time 2, and T3 = Time 3.

^a 1 = male, 2 = female.

Table 2
Predicting Time 1 job-search intention and Time 2 job-search intensity with TPB variables

Predictor	T1 Job-search intention (β)	T2 Job-search intensity (β)	
	(1)	Without intention (2)	With intention (3)
<i>Control variables</i>			
Gender ^a	.02	-.04	-.04
Age	-.07	-.08	-.07
Education	-.05	.13*	.14*
T1 social support	.04	.09	.09
T1 economic hardship	.14**	.01	-.02
<i>TPB-variables</i>			
T1 job-search attitude	.30**	.00	-.05
T1 subjective norm	.51**	.23**	.16*
T1 job-search self-efficacy	.02	.24**	.23**
T1 job-search intention			.16*
R^2	.58**	.17**	.18**
Adjusted R^2	.57**	.15**	.16**

Note. $N = 328$. T1 = Time 1, T2 = Time 2.

^a 1 = male, 2 = female.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

36% of the subjective norm's effect on job-search intensity (Alwin & Hauser, 1975). Hypothesis 5 was not supported. Job-search self-efficacy was not significantly related to job-search intention, and thus job-search intention could not partially mediate the relationship between job-search self-efficacy and job-search intensity. Job-search self-efficacy was, however, directly related to higher job-search intensity.

Hypotheses 6a and b concerned the proposed moderating role of action–state orientation on relationships between attitude and intention and subjective norm and intention. Table 3 presents these results (see models 1–3). In these equations, the main effects and interaction effects of disengagement, initiative, and persistence (respectively) were added into the regression model. To avoid multicollinearity of the interaction terms with their corresponding main effects, measures were first mean centered, then were calculated for the interaction terms. Supporting Hypothesis 6a, interaction terms for attitude were all significant and positive in predicting job-search intention. However, even though the coefficient estimations of the interaction terms for subjective norm were in the right direction, Hypothesis 6b was not supported.

The moderating effect of disengagement subscale on the relationship between Time 1 job-search attitude and intention are plotted in Fig. 1A using the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991). We plotted job-search intention at high (1 standard deviation above the mean) and low levels (1 standard deviation below the mean) of action–state orientation and attitude. Fig. 1A suggests there is a stronger relationship between attitude and intention for individuals who are high, rather than low, in disengagement. The moderating effects of the other two dimensions, initiative and persistence, are similar to that depicted in Fig. 1A.

Hypotheses 7 and 8 suggested that action–state orientation would be related to higher levels of job-search intensity and would moderate the relationship between job-search intention and job-search intensity. Table 3 presents these results. In Table 3, models 4–6 represent effects of disengagement, initiative and persistence respectively. Since all main effects of the self-regulation subscales were not significant in any regression models,

Table 3
Predicting Time 1 job-search intention and Time 2 job-search intensity with action–state orientation

Predictor	T1 job-search intention (β)			T2 job-search intensity (β)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>Main effects</i>						
Gender ^a	.01	.02	.02	-.04	-.05	-.04
Age	-.09*	-.08	-.07	-.06	-.07	-.06
Education	-.04	-.05	-.03	.14*	.13*	.14*
T1 social support	.06	.03	.05	.08	.09	.10*
T1 economic hardship	.16**	.17**	.16**	-.02	-.02	-.03
T1 job-search attitude	.32**	.32**	.32**	-.06	-.07	-.07
T1 subjective norm	.47**	.47**	.48**	.16*	.16*	.18*
T1 job-search self-efficacy	.03	.02	.04	.23**	.22**	.22**
T1 job-search intention				.16*	.15	.15*
Disengagement	-.05			.02		
Initiative		.02			.01	
Persistence			-.01			-.01
<i>Interactions</i>						
Disengagement \times Attitude	.12**					
Initiative \times Attitude		.13**				
Persistence \times Attitude			.08*			
Disengagement \times Subjective norm	-.03					
Initiative \times Subjective norm		-.05				
Persistence \times Subjective norm			-.01			
Disengagement \times Intention				.01		
Initiative \times Intention					.12*	
Persistence \times Intention						.13**
R^2	.59**	.60**	.59**	.18**	.19**	.19**
Adjusted R^2	.58**	.58**	.58**	.15**	.16**	.17**

Note. $N = 328$. T1 = Time 1.

^a 1 = male, 2 = female.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

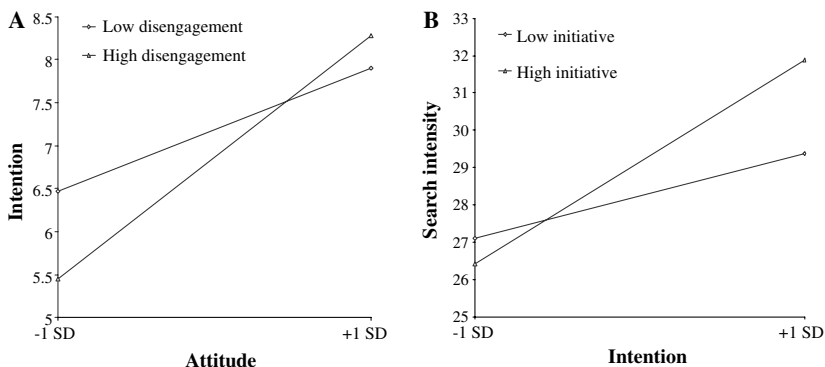


Fig. 1. (A) Moderating effect of disengagement on the relationship between Time 1 job-search attitude and intention. (B) Moderating effect of initiative on the relationship between Time 1 job-search intention and Time 2 job-search intensity.

Hypothesis 7 was not supported. However, with the significance of two interactions for initiative and persistence, Hypothesis 8 was partially supported. Fig. 1B portrays the relationship between Time 1 job-search intention and Time 2 job-search intensity for individuals with high versus low initiative. This figure suggests a stronger relationship between job-search intention and later actual search behavior for individuals who are high, rather than low, in initiative. The moderating effect of persistence is similar to that depicted in Fig. 1B.

At Time 3, 160 respondents (48.78%) reported that they had found a job in the last eight months, while 168 reported they had not found a job. Survival analysis, well suited for data with right censoring (where some individuals have not yet experienced reemployment at the end of the study) was used to concurrently examine predictors of reemployment (finding a job) as well as reemployment speed (time to reemployment). An excellent discussion of this statistical method can be found in Singer and Willett (1991). Significant coefficients over 1 represent a positive relationship between the predictor variable and reemployment speed/probability whereas significant coefficients less than one represent a negative relationship between the variable and reemployment speed/probability. Two significant predictors were found: Time 1 subjective norm ($b = 1.15, p < .05$) and Time 2 job-search intensity ($b = .97, p < .05$). Ordinary least square regression was used to predict Time 3 job satisfaction among those individuals who had found jobs. Only Time 1 social support was found significantly related to job satisfaction ($\beta = .27, p < .01$). Perusal of the results above suggests that Hypotheses 9a and 10a were not supported. Job-search intensity was not associated with job satisfaction among those reemployed, and was associated with lower reemployment speed/probability in the survival analysis. Hypotheses 9b and 10b were also not supported. The self-regulation subscales were not significantly related to the reemployment outcomes.

The results regarding job-search intensity were intriguing to us. Contrary to our prediction, job-search intensity was negatively (rather than positively) associated with reemployment speed/probability. Based on discussions with employment professionals, we examined whether these results were due to a hidden moderator effect stemming from the economic and social context for older unemployed job seekers in China. Specifically, job seekers who are older than 40 (if female) or 50 (if male) years in China are considered disadvantaged and are qualified to be enrolled in a nation-wide reemployment program named “4050” to receive extensive assistance in locating new jobs (see Huang, 2004, for a discussion of this program). Post hoc analyses showed that the relationship between job-search and reemployment speed was indeed affected by inclusion in this group. The coefficient in survival analysis of Time 2 job-search intensity was negative and statistically significant ($b = .95, p < .01$) for those who were qualified for “4050” reemployment program and was not significant ($b = .99, p > .05$) for those who were not qualified.

6. Discussion

Action–state orientation shows clear promise as a variable for understanding job search. Individuals may have a positive attitude about looking for a job, but this attitude is only apt to translate into intentions to actually engage in search behavior among individuals who are higher in action-orientation. Results of this study also suggest that action–state orientation helps individuals channel intention into action. While individuals with low action orientation may have intentions to look for a job, they are less likely to translate this intention into action. Interestingly, the current study did not show that action–state orien-

tation moderates the subjective norm–intention relation. The strength of the relationship between job-search intention and subjective norm was not significantly different across different levels of action–state orientation. It is possible that the collectivistic culture in Chinese societies imposes strong social norms on the formation of goal and intention of individuals. Individual characteristics, such as action–state orientation, thus have less influence on the subjective norm–intention relation. Since the study only sampled individuals from a single cultural background, this explanation cannot be confirmed without further comparison of samples in different cultures.

The theory of planned behavior, involving the core components of job-search attitude and subjective norm, was used as a theoretical framework underlying our investigation of action–state orientation. As expected, our results portrayed individuals' subjective norm as positively associated with job-search intention as well as later job-search intensity, with effect sizes that were stronger than for attitude. These results suggest the particular importance of social factors in the job-search and reemployment process of Chinese unemployed job seekers and extend findings of cross-cultural studies of TPB (e.g., Bagozzi, Wong, Abe, & Bergami, 2000; Chan & Lau, 2001; Lee & Green, 1990) on other behaviors; these studies all reported subjective norm to be more important in predicting intention and behavior in collectivistic cultures than individualistic cultures.

The negative relation between job-search intensity at Time 2 and reemployment speed at Time 3 was counterintuitive and inconsistent in direction with past research (see, for example, Kanfer et al., 2001). Vinokur and Schul (2002) suggest that, in a free market society, individuals are responsible for and are free to choose their own employment. Thus, reemployment is a behavioral outcome in a free market society. However, in the current study, the negative relationship between job-search intensity and reemployment speed casts doubt on whether their employment outcomes are related to individual effort. Post hoc analysis depicted that, for those older-aged job seekers who were qualified for the “4050” reemployment program, their job-search intensity at Time 2 was negatively and statistically significantly related to reemployment speed, while the relationship was not significant for those who were not in the program. These results suggest that for the “4050” program participants, reemployment is less likely the outcome of job search, but is instead the outcome of willingness to take government subsidized jobs which are often not well paid. This negative relationship between job-search intensity and reemployment to some extent indicates the success of government intervention to help disadvantaged job seekers to find a new job. On the other hand, this is also an indication of failure of the market mechanism: self-initiated job search does not pay off in the labor market. The strong government intervention also may reduce the motivation of job seekers to look for a job by their own effort. This controversial finding reflects the dilemma that the Chinese government is facing of establishing a free market economy on the one hand, while having to rely on strong non-market interventions to assist disadvantaged populations on the other hand.

Our findings should be viewed in light of several limitations. Although quite compatible to the English version of ACS-90 (e.g., Diefendorff et al., 2000), reliability alphas for the Chinese version were not high. Especially, the reliability alpha for persistence subscale was only .54. It is possible that the underlying construct indicated by this subscale is not unidimensional, although our CFA results in another sample did support the factorial structure of the instrument.

Another limitation is related to the generalizability of the findings. Most participants in the current study were relatively old unemployed job seekers who lacked marketable skills

and job-search experience. Some received extensive government assistance. Even though these internal and external situations are common for millions of unemployed job seekers in China, other types job seekers in China such as college graduates, immigrant workers from the countryside, and managers and professionals face different situations. Unemployed job seekers in other countries also may have different characteristics. The findings of the current study may not be able to directly generalize to these populations.

In conclusion, research on the topic of job search has made great strides in the past 20 years. Yet, although self-regulation has been suggested to play a role in the job-search process (e.g., Kanfer et al., 2001), previous studies have not looked closely at self-regulatory variables in the job-search realm. This 3-wave longitudinal study provided interesting insight into the role of action–state orientation in the job-search process, and took an important first step in conducting job-search research in China. Continued attempts should be made, through both qualitative, quantitative, and intervention research, to examine more specifically how individuals with poor self-regulation are hampered in their job search and how they can be helped.

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