

Change in Job Search Behaviors and Employment Outcomes

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This study examined the change in job-search behaviors and employment outcomes of 121 recent university graduates who had not found employment in their final term prior to graduation. Participants completed a questionnaire prior to graduation and again 4 months later. The results of repeated measures analysis of variance indicated that job seekers increased their active job search behavior, formal job-source usage, and search intensity and decreased their job-search anxiety. Although self-esteem and job-search self-efficacy were related to job-search behaviors and outcomes, they did not moderate the change in job seekers' search behavior. As well, change in job-search behavior was related to the number of job interviews and employment status, and the relation between change in job-search behavior and employment status was mediated by the number of job offers received. © 2000 Academic Press

Job-search research has been criticized for failing to study the dynamics and change of the job-search process (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994). Previous research has used cross-sectional designs and treated job-search as a static process (Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987). As a result, job-search research has failed to examine how job seekers' behaviors change during the course of their search—even though there is evidence that job-search behaviors do change over time (Barber et al., 1994).

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Change in job-search behavior is especially important for job seekers who have been unsuccessful. How these job seekers respond and change their job-search efforts is likely to influence the outcomes of their job-search. For example, some job seekers might "go back to the drawing board," retrace their steps, and begin anew by planning and preparing for a new search. Others might simply "pound the pavement," intensify their efforts, and focus on what works best. Still others might become demoralized, experience increasing levels of anxiety, and simply give up. Currently, it is unclear what job seekers are likely to do and if their chosen course of action is likely to lead to employment outcomes.

There are, however, several job-search models which provide some clues regarding the changes that job seekers are likely to make. For example, the *sequential model* proposes that job search follows a logical sequence of stages in which "search activities change sequentially and systematically over the duration of search" (Barber et al., 1994, p. 742). Job search begins with a preparatory or planning stage followed by a more active phase and intensive search. According to the sequential model, at the end of the sequential search process job seekers who remain unemployed will "reopen" their search and return to the early stages of job search (Barber et al., 1994). Therefore, job seekers are likely to change their job-search behavior toward more planning-related activities or what Blau (1993, 1994) has referred to as preparatory job-search behavior. Preparatory job-search behavior involves gathering information and finding potential leads. The sequential model also predicts an increase in the use of formal job sources (e.g., newspaper advertisements, university placement) because they are necessary for the identification of job opportunities and are part of a more extensive search (Barber et al., 1994). Job seekers who revert back to the early stages of the sequential model are also likely to increase the intensity of their job search (Barber et al., 1994).

According to the *learning model* of job search, job seekers learn more efficient and effective search techniques during their job search (Barber et al., 1994). Thus, they are likely to change their job-search behaviors in ways that generate more positive outcomes. Blau (1993, 1994) has referred to these behaviors as active job-search behavior. Active job-search behavior involves activities associated with the actual job search and choice process such as sending out resumes and interviewing with prospective employers. In addition to an increase in active job-search behaviors, the learning model also predicts an increase in the use of informal job sources and job-search intensity because both are likely to lead to employment outcomes (Barber et al., 1994; Granovetter, 1974; Schwab et al., 1987).

Finally, the *emotional response model* asserts that job seekers experience high levels of stress and frustration that "may cause searchers to expand, contract, or otherwise modify their search activities, regardless of the utility of those activities" (p. 741). The emotional responses that result can lead to avoidance, helplessness, and withdrawal (Barber et al., 1994). Therefore, based on the emotional response model, job-search anxiety is likely to increase. As well,

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