



Job search and the theory of planned behavior: Minority–majority group differences in The Netherlands[☆]

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Abstract

The labor market in many Western countries increasingly diversifies. However, little is known about job search behavior of “non-traditional” applicants such as ethnic minorities. This study investigated minority–majority group differences in the predictors of job search behavior, using the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Data were collected in a two-wave longitudinal design among 697 temporary employees in The Netherlands. Results showed that the ethnic minorities’ perceptions of social pressure predicted intentions to search for a (new) job more strongly than their personal attitudes did. The opposite was found in the native-Dutch group. Self-efficacy did not contribute to the prediction of job search intention. Job search behavior related significantly to job search outcomes, such as job attainment.

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1. Introduction

The process of pursuing (new) employment, or job search behavior, is an important aspect of people's work lives. That is, job search behavior determines the opportunity set of potential jobs from which job seekers may choose (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994), and influences outcomes such as employment status and employment quality (Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987). Job search behavior can be defined as "the specific behaviors through which effort and time are expended to acquire information about labor market alternatives" (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994, p. 278). It includes activities such as preparing a resume, reading personnel advertisements, making inquiries to prospective employers, and going to job interviews. Previous research has investigated the antecedents of job search behavior and employment outcomes among both individuals entering the workforce, and unemployed and employed individuals. In a recent meta-analysis, Kanfer, Wanberg, and Kantrowitz (2001) quantitatively reviewed this literature. Kanfer et al. (2001) concluded that the vast majority of studies investigated job search behavior among job losers and college graduates, whereas only a few studies reported data from employed samples. Moreover, hardly any of the studies focused on job search behavior of "non-traditional" applicants such as ethnic minorities. In the present time of culturally diversifying workforces (Chemers, Oskamp, & Costanzo, 1995; Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994), this is a serious omission in the literature.

In the current longitudinal study we, therefore, investigated and compared job search behavior and its predictors among ethnic minorities and the majority group in The Netherlands. We used a sample of individuals who worked or recently had worked for a temporary employment agency. Job search behavior is especially salient in this group because their employment position is relatively unstable and uncertain compared to the position of permanent employees. In addition, the workforce increasingly consists of temporary workers (e.g., Berchem, 2002; Feldman, Doeringhaus, & Turnley, 1994; Pot, Koene, & Paauwe, 2001), whilst little research has been conducted in this group (cf. Ellingson, Gruys, & Sackett, 1998). Also, the proportion of ethnic minorities is substantially larger among temporary workers than in the total workforce (Van der Ende, Donker van Heel, Koene, & Nauta, 2002).

We investigated the predictors of job search behavior among ethnic minorities and the Dutch majority using the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985, 1991). Although two previous studies already used the TPB to predict job search behavior (Caska, 1998; Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992), the current study extends the existing literature in three ways. First, previous research examined the applicability of the TPB in US samples of unemployed individuals (Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992) and graduating students (Caska, 1998). The current study extended the generalizability of the TPB by using the theory to predict job search behavior in a non-US sample of temporary employees. Second, the current study used a longitudinal design and assessed both the predictors and the outcomes of job search behavior. Third, although some studies investigated job search behavior of ethnic minorities (Green,

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