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Isabelle Fort, Flora Puget

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Dimensions d'auto-efficacité et stratégies de recherche d'emploi

Self-efficacy dimensions and job search strategies

Isabelle Fort et Flora Puget

Isabelle Fort, Centre de Recherche en Psychologie de la Connaissance du Langage et de

l'Emotion (PsyCLE), Aix-Marseille Univ ; Flora Puget, Aix-Marseille Univ

Correspondance à envoyer à Isabelle Fort, Centre de Recherche en Psychologie de la
Connaissance du Langage et de l'Emotion (PsyCLE), 29 avenue Robert Schuman, 13621 Aix-
en-Provence Cedex 1, France.

E-mail: isabelle.fort@univ-amu.fr

Self-efficacy dimensions and job search strategies

Summary

Objective. - This study explored the paths between dimensions of self-efficacy and job search strategies. An examination of social cognitive career theory and career adaptability enabled us to consider several paths between dimensions of self-efficacy and job search strategies, as well as among self-efficacy dimensions.

Method. - Scales measuring these concepts were administered to a sample of 120 jobseekers.

Results. - Structural analyses allowed us to confirm expected paths. Barrier coping efficacy is significantly related to career decision self-efficacy. Career decision self-efficacy and job search self-efficacy are related to exploratory strategy and to job search strategy.

Conclusion. - Results are discussed with reference to the literature and in terms of practical implications. They highlight the need to implement interventions in order to increase barrier coping efficacy and career decision self-efficacy.

Keywords

Barrier coping self-efficacy, career decision self-efficacy, job search self-efficacy, job search strategies

Résumé

Objectif. - Cette étude porte sur les relations entre dimensions d'auto-efficacité et stratégies de recherche d'emploi. L'examen de la théorie socio-cognitive de l'orientation et du concept d'adaptabilité de carrière a permis d'envisager des liens non seulement entre certaines dimensions d'auto-efficacité et stratégies de recherche, mais également entre les différentes dimensions d'auto-efficacité (à faire face aux obstacles, à gérer sa carrière et à chercher un emploi).

Méthodologie. - Des questionnaires d'évaluation de ces concepts ont été administrés à un échantillon de 120 personnes en recherche d'emploi.

Résultats. - Les analyses structurales ont permis de confirmer les relations attendues. L'auto-efficacité à faire face aux obstacles est liée à l'auto-efficacité à gérer sa carrière. L'auto-efficacité à gérer sa carrière et l'auto-efficacité à chercher un emploi sont liées respectivement au recours à une stratégie exploratoire et au recours à une stratégie focalisée.

Conclusion. - Les résultats sont discutés en lien avec la littérature et en termes d'applications pratiques. Ils mettent en évidence la nécessité de mettre en place des interventions visant à augmenter le niveau d'auto-efficacité à faire face aux obstacles et le niveau d'auto-efficacité à gérer sa carrière.

Mots clés

Auto-efficacité à faire face aux obstacles, auto-efficacité à gérer sa carrière, auto-efficacité à chercher un emploi, stratégies de recherche d'emploi

Introduction

The mobility of the workforce has increased over the past decade, meaning that individuals must now expect to change jobs during their working life. As these transitions involve psychological processes and the learning of skills (Saks, 2005; Van Hooft et al, 2021), it seems important to identify the variables and processes that ensure successful transitions. One of these variables, which is regularly mentioned in the literature, is self-efficacy.

Dimensions of self-efficacy involved in career management

Self-efficacy refers to people's belief in their abilities to attain their goals. One feature of this concept is its specificity, in that self-efficacy is specific to a given task. Different dimensions of this concept have therefore been investigated in the domain of career management and job

search, and some have been included in two career self-management models derived from social cognitive career theory (Lent & Brown, 2013). Both models stipulate that behaviors and the results of behaviors are influenced not only by psychological variables (self-efficacy, goals, outcome expectations), but also by contextual variables (social support and perceived barriers). By contrast, they differ on the domains to which these variables relate. In the first model, self-efficacy pertains to career exploration and decision making, and behaviors are focused on exploratory and decisional behaviors. In the second one, self-efficacy pertains to job search, and behaviors are focused on job search behaviors.

Paths between self-efficacy and behaviors have been investigated with reference to these models. Within the framework of the model applied to career exploration, the path between career decision self-efficacy and exploratory behaviors appears significant and positive (Gushue, Clarke, et al., 2006; Gushue, Scanlan, et al., 2006; Lent et al., 2019; Pérez-López et al., 2019; Rogers & Creed, 2011). Within the framework of the model applied to job search, the path between job search self-efficacy and job search behaviors also appears significant and positive (Bao & Luo, 2015; Crossley & Stanton, 2005; Kim et al., 2019; Song et al., 2006; Wanberg et al., 1999).

According to Lent and Brown (2013), the two career self-management models relate to different periods in vocational development, with each period being characterized by the use of specific behaviors. The model applied to career exploration relates to the exploratory period, which is characterized by the exploration of opportunities and vocational decision-making. The model applied to job search relates to the establishment period, which is characterized by job search and adjustment to work requirements.

Can these dimensions have an effect on other variables?

In studies focusing on career self-management models, behaviors have been assessed in terms of their frequency and intensity. However, these behaviors can be conceived of in other ways

too. Drawing on decision theory literature, Crossley and Highhouse (2005) identified two different strategies: an exploratory search strategy, which “involves examining several potential employment options and actively gathering job-related information from various sources” (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005, p. 257); and a focused search strategy, which “involves concentrating search efforts on a small number of carefully screened potential employers” (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005, p. 257). The use of these strategies appears to be linked to indicators of successful job search, number of offers (Koen et al., 2010), and reemployment (De Battisti et al., 2016). The exploratory period elicits the use of an exploratory strategy, while the subsequent establishment period, when individuals have to take a decision, elicits the use of a focused strategy. It therefore seems relevant to include strategies in career self-management models, with paths between strategies and self-efficacy dimensions. As such, we expected to observe significant positive paths between career decision self-efficacy and use of an exploratory strategy (H1), and between job search self-efficacy and use of a focused strategy (H2).

Toward a sequential organization of career self-management models

If we refer to Lent and Brown (2013)’s developmental framework, we can consider that models applied to job search follow on from models applied to career exploration. This sequential organization has already been adopted in some studies, with authors conceiving of exploratory behaviors as the antecedents of job search self-efficacy. This path appears to be significant (Saks et al., 2015; Zikic & Saks, 2009).

We therefore expected to observe a significant positive path between exploratory strategy and job search self-efficacy (H3), and on the basis of H1 and H3, we postulated that exploratory strategy mediates the path between career decision self-efficacy and job search self-efficacy (H4).

Determinants of these self-efficacy dimensions

In an attempt to identify the conditions in which individuals are ready to engage in these processes, some authors have developed the concept of career adaptability. According to Koen et al. (2010, p. 127), “this conceptualization represents the readiness and different adaptive resources that arguably help people to prepare for and manage career transitions such as a move from unemployment to reemployment”. Some studies have highlighted the impact of career adaptability on career decision self-efficacy and job search self-efficacy (Duffy et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2013; Guan et al., 2014). Career adaptability has several dimensions, including confidence, defined as “the degree to which people feel able to overcome potential vocational barriers” (Duffy et al., 2015, p. 47). This dimension seems similar to barrier coping efficacy, defined as “beliefs about one’s ability to negotiate specific obstacles” (Lent & Brown, 2013, p. 561). The importance of this dimension has been stressed in the literature (Lent et al., 2000; Raque-Bogdan et al., 2013). According to Byars-Winston and Fouad (2008, p. 427), “coping efficacy affects emotional reactions as well as behavior, especially related to anxiety, and stress reactions to unfamiliar or potentially aversive situations”. Job search can be regarded as a potentially aversive situation. It is therefore relevant to investigate the role of this dimension in models of career self-management. We expected to observe significant positive paths between barrier coping efficacy and career decision self-efficacy (H5), and between barrier coping efficacy and job search self-efficacy (H6). Inasmuch as we expected to observe significant paths between career decision self-efficacy and job search self-efficacy, and between barrier coping efficacy and job search self-efficacy, we expected career decision self-efficacy and exploratory strategy to mediate the path between barrier coping efficacy and job search self-efficacy (H7).

All these expected paths are displayed in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The present study therefore had three goals: 1) investigate the relationships between different self-efficacy dimensions and different strategies, based on career self-management models; 2) examine whether the path between exploratory strategy and job search self-efficacy is significant; and 3) examine the paths between variables of career self-management models and other self-efficacy dimensions, such as barrier coping efficacy.

Method

Sample. Participants were 120 adults (36 men, 84 women) aged 19-60 years ($M = 32.8$, $SD = 8.32$), with an education level of 6-20 years ($M = 13$, $SD = 2.80$). Participants had been looking for a job for a mean period of 19 months ($SD = 16.22$). They all had work experience ($M = 8.41$ years, $SD = 7.88$), and 67.5% of them stated that financial constraints required them to rapidly find a job.

Procedure. Participants were recruited via Internet and at two centers offering help to jobseekers (Cité des Métiers and Association Régionale en Economie Sociale). Only volunteers were given the questionnaires, which they completed on the spot.

Measures

Self-efficacy scale. A scale was developed specifically for this study, based partly on psychometrically valid scales available in French (Gelpe, 2009; Vieira & Coimbra, 2008). It contained six items assessing career decision self-efficacy (e.g., “Identifier un ou des métiers en lien avec mes compétences”), eight items assessing job search self-efficacy (e.g., “Prendre contact avec un employeur”), and five items assessing barrier coping efficacy (e.g., “Surmonter les difficultés que je rencontre dans mes recherches d’emploi”). These items described various activities, and participants had to indicate the extent to which they were confident in their ability to perform these activities on a 6-point scale, ranging from *Not confident at all* to *Very confident*. Internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach’s alpha, was

.89 for career decision self-efficacy, .88 for barrier coping efficacy, and .86 for job search self-efficacy. A high score indicated a high level of self-efficacy.

Job search strategies. We developed a French version of the scale designed by Crossley and Highhouse (2005). This scale contains 16 items probing participants' engagement in exploratory (e.g., "I follow up on every lead to make sure I don't miss any golden opportunities") or focused (e.g., "I only gather information for jobs that I am really interested in") strategies. The scale was translated by two English-speaking persons. In case of disagreement, translators determined which translation best rendered the meaning of the original item. In the original version, participants rate each item on a 5-point scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*, but in our French version, participants answered on a 4-point scale, so that we had a similar response format for both our scales. Internal consistency of the original version, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, is .64 for focused strategy and .70 for exploratory strategy (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005), but for our French version, it was .80 for focused strategy and .75 for exploratory strategy. A high score indicated frequent use of the relevant strategy.

Results

Descriptive statistics and a correlation matrix are displayed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

We performed confirmatory factorial analyses to verify the structure of our scales, using AMOS 16.0. Analyses were performed on sample covariances, and we used maximum likelihood as our method of estimation. Two fit indices are reported: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and comparative fit index (CFI), with cutoff values of .06 for RMSEA and .95 for CFI (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

For the self-efficacy scale, we highlighted one factor for each self-efficacy dimension, but these factors were in turn influenced by a more general factor. This model provided a fairly

adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 220.1$, $df = 135$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .07). All items significantly loaded onto the expected factor. Loadings varied between .57 and .85. For the strategy scale, we highlighted one factor for each strategy. This model provided a fairly adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 72.5$, $df = 48$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .07). All items significantly loaded onto the expected factor, but loadings were weak for one item for each strategy (“I tried to get my résumé out to as many organizations as possible” and “I only gathered information for jobs that I knew I would qualify for”). We computed a new factorial analysis without these items. This model provided an adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 37.6$, $df = 32$, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .04). Loadings were all significant, varying between .46 and .81.

We then conducted path analyses, using AMOS 16.0 to test our hypothetical model. The first model corresponded to our hypothetical model, but was not a good fit ($\chi^2 = 87.8$, $df = 5$, CFI = .65, RMSEA = .37). We correlated error variances for the two strategy dimensions and two self-efficacy dimensions (career decision self-efficacy and job search self-efficacy), in order to estimate the paths between these dimensions, controlling for measurement problems. The model fit was good ($\chi^2 = 1.2$, $df = 3$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .01). All paths were significant and positive, except for the path between exploratory strategy and job search self-efficacy. This path was marginal, only partially corroborating H3. Career decision self-efficacy was significantly related to exploratory strategy, and job search self-efficacy was significantly related to focused strategy, in line with H1 and H2. Barrier coping efficacy was significantly related to the other self-efficacy dimensions, in accordance with H5 and H6. We then tested mediation hypotheses by bootstrap analysis. H7 postulated that career decision self-efficacy mediates the path between coping efficacy and job search strategy, but results indicated that this mediation was not significant ($\beta = -.01$, $SE = .01$, 95% CI [-.01, .05]). H4 postulated that exploratory strategy mediates the path between career decision self-efficacy and job search

self-efficacy, but this mediation was also nonsignificant ($\beta = .07$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI [-.01, .07]). The paths we observed are displayed in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion

The present study had three aims. The first was to investigate the paths between self-efficacy dimensions and search strategies, based on social cognitive career theory. The second was to examine whether the path between exploratory strategy and job search self-efficacy is significant, while the third was to examine the path between variables identified in social cognitive career theory and other self-efficacy dimensions (e.g., coping self-efficacy).

Consistent with the career self-management model applied to career exploration, we expected to find significant paths between career decision self-efficacy and exploratory strategy. This path was indeed significant, in line with literature findings (Gushue, Clarke, et al., 2006; Gushue, Scanlan, et al., 2006; Pérez-López et al., 2019; Rogers & Creed, 2011). In a similar vein, consistent with the career self-management model applied to job search, we expected to find a significant path between job search self-efficacy and focused strategy. This path was also significant, in line with the result observed by Taggar and Kuron (1996). Results relative to this first goal highlighted the relevance of introducing other behavioral variables in models based on social cognitive career theory.

The path between exploratory strategy and job search self-efficacy was marginally significant. A significant (but moderate) path between exploratory behaviors and job search self-efficacy has been reported in the literature (Saks et al., 2015; Zikic & Saks, 2009). The fact that our sample was smaller than in previous studies may explain why this path was only marginally significant in our study. This result partially corroborates the hypothesis that the model applied to career exploration precedes the one applied to job search. Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that the use of an exploratory strategy mediates the path between career decision

self-efficacy and job search self-efficacy. Our results confirm the need for further studies with larger samples.

Concerning the other two self-efficacy dimensions, barrier coping efficacy was significantly related to career decision self-efficacy and to job search self-efficacy, in line with literature findings (Duffy et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2014). We observed a direct path between barrier coping efficacy and job search self-efficacy, highlighting the role of coping efficacy in models based on social cognitive career theory. Our results also highlighted paths between self-efficacy dimensions and other variables.

Limitations

The present study had several limitations. First, our data were obtained using self-rating scales. This method can artefactually increase correlations, particularly when the design is cross-sectional, as it was in our study. Second, we could not interpret the paths we observed as causal relationships. A longitudinal study would enable us to compensate for this limitation and to take the time dimension into account. Third, some correlations were high, potentially entailing multicollinearity. These results therefore have to be interpreted with caution. The present study focused on the path between self-efficacy dimensions and search strategies. It would be appropriate to introduce other variables contained in models based on social cognitive career theory, such as search result, outcome expectations, goals, personality, social support, and perceived barriers. In a similar vein, we only considered one dimension of career adaptability. However, studies have shown that other dimensions are correlated with the variables we explored (Duffy et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2013). A study including all career adaptability dimensions could be performed.

Practical implications

Our results highlight the need to implement interventions in order to increase levels of self-efficacy dimensions. Regarding career decision self-efficacy, several interventions already

exist. Self-efficacy is stimulated through performance accomplishment (e.g., learning of skills related to job search or decision making), vicarious learning (e.g., observation of other group members making decisions) and social persuasion (e.g., support provided by the trainer or other group members) (Falco & Summers, 2019; Fouad et al., 2009; Lam & Santos, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2000; Scott & Ciani, 2008; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000). Studies exploring the effect of these interventions have highlighted beneficial effects on career decision self-efficacy (Falco & Summers, 2019; Fouad et al., 2009; Lam & Santos, 2018; Scott & Ciani, 2008; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000). This dimension also increased following an intervention that consisted in writing a résumé (Krieshok et al., 2000). Barrier coping efficacy was targeted in an intervention designed to improve career adaptability (Koen et al., 2012). This dimension “was not explicitly targeted in a separate exercise, but was incorporated in the training throughout the different exercises” (Koen et al., 2012, p. 399). The intervention had beneficial effects on all dimensions of career adaptability, except for barrier coping efficacy. However, the effect of another intervention on career adaptability was investigated in a subsequent study (Green et al., 2019). A session of this intervention is devoted to the identification of barriers. Contrary to the previous intervention, this program had beneficial effects on all dimensions of career adaptability. In a similar vein, the JOBS Program includes an activity called *inoculation against setbacks*. This activity is supposed to enable participants to acquire the ability to anticipate potential barriers and to overcome them. The program has been shown to have a beneficial effect on this ability (Vuori & Vinokur, 2005). Given that performance accomplishment can influence self-efficacy, we can assume that improving this ability in an intervention would have a beneficial effect on barrier coping efficacy.

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Appendix

Questionnaire used

Voici une liste d'activités. Indiquez à quel point vous vous sentez confiant dans votre capacité à réaliser chacune d'entre elles. Pour cela, utilisez l'échelle en 6 points suivante et entourez le nombre correspondant à votre réponse dans la colonne degré de confiance :

1	6
Pas confiant du tout	très confiant

Capacité à :

Dire avec précision quels sont mes goûts professionnels.

Rédiger un CV qui met mon parcours en valeur.

Ne pas me décourager quand je ne reçois pas de réponse à mes candidatures.

Prendre contact avec un employeur.

M'intégrer dans une nouvelle équipe de travail.

Identifier un ou des métiers en lien avec mes compétences.

Réaliser toutes les tâches que l'emploi que je recherche exige.

Surmonter les difficultés que je rencontre dans mes recherches d'emploi.

Trouver des informations sur des entreprises pour préparer une candidature.

Convaincre un employeur de mes qualités et de mes compétences professionnelles lors d'un entretien.

M'adapter aux exigences d'une nouvelle situation de travail.

Ne pas renoncer à chercher un emploi malgré plusieurs refus de candidatures.

Me tenir informé des offres d'emploi.

M'adapter aux changements et à la nouveauté dans le travail.

Persévérer dans mes recherches d'emploi après plusieurs entretiens d'embauche infructueux.

Rédiger une lettre de motivation personnalisée.

Identifier ce qui motive mes choix d'orientation professionnelle.

Utiliser mon réseau pour obtenir un emploi.

Identifier avec précision mes qualités professionnelles.

Continuer à penser que je vais trouver un emploi malgré le contexte économique défavorable.

Identifier des étapes qui me permettront d'atteindre mon objectif professionnel.

M'organiser dans mes recherches d'emploi.

Faire ce que l'on attend de moi dans une situation de travail.

Etre sûr de mes choix d'orientation professionnelle (métier, poste, entreprise...).

En vous basant sur vos démarches de recherche d'emploi sur le dernier mois, indiquez à quel point vous vous sentez en accord avec les propositions suivantes. Pour cela, utilisez l'échelle en 4 points suivante et entourez le nombre correspondant à votre réponse dans la colonne degré d'accord :

Pas du tout d'accord

tout à fait d'accord

Ma recherche d'emploi est plus ou moins guidée par le hasard.

J'essaie d'envoyer mon CV au maximum d'entreprises possible.

Je recueille des informations uniquement pour les postes pour lesquels je sais que je suis qualifié.

Je consulte toutes les sources de renseignements disponibles (Pôle Emploi, amis, sites internet, agences d'interim, etc...).

Ma technique pour rassembler des informations pour ma recherche d'emploi peut être décrite comme aléatoire.

J'oriente ma recherche d'emploi vers un petit nombre d'employeurs.

Je donne suite à la plupart des pistes d'emploi, même si elles ont peu de chances d'aboutir.

Je recueille des informations uniquement sur les postes qui m'intéressent vraiment.

Je n'ai pas vraiment établi de plan pour organiser ma recherche d'emploi.

J'ai une idée claire de ce que je recherche dans un emploi.

Je rassemble des informations sur toutes les offres d'emploi possibles, plutôt que sur celles concernant un poste spécifique.

Je donne suite à toutes les pistes pour être sûr de ne rater aucune opportunité.

Je collecte des informations uniquement sur les offres d'emploi qui correspondent à ce que je souhaite.

Je rassemble autant d'informations que possible au sujet d'un maximum d'entreprises.

Pour chercher du travail, ma méthode est plutôt aléatoire.

Mes efforts pour rassembler des informations sont dirigés vers des postes spécifiques.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Coping efficacy	3.61	1.08				
2. Career decision self-efficacy	4.06	1.08	0,645**			
3. Job search self-efficacy	4.10	0.91	0,686**	0,801**		
4. Exploratory strategy	2.51	0.60	0,130	0,252**	0,281**	
5. Focused strategy	2.66	0.64	0,156	0,218*	0,178	-0,365**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1

Modèle théorique des liens entre dimensions d'auto-efficacité et stratégies de recherche

Theoretical model of paths between self-efficacy dimensions and job search strategies

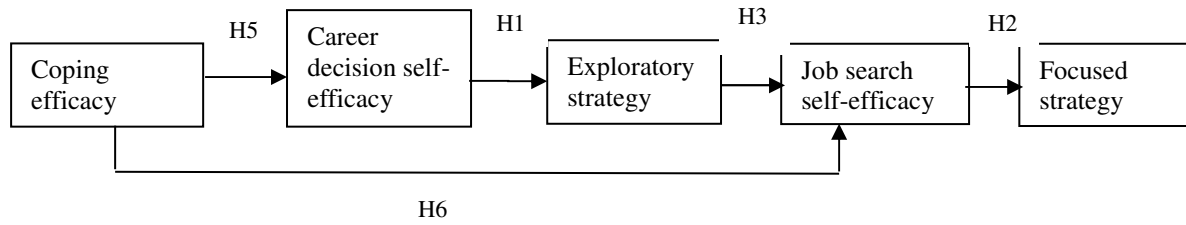
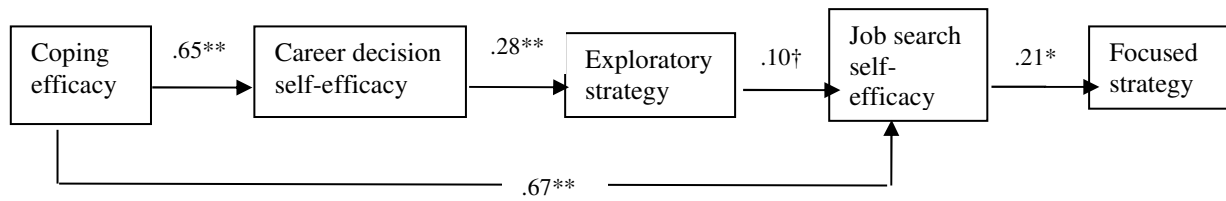


Figure 2

Coefficients de piste standardisés entre dimensions d'auto-efficacité et stratégies de recherche

Standardized path coefficients between self-efficacy dimensions and job search strategies



† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$,