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Employability during Unemployment: Adaptability, career identity and human and social capital.

Sarah McArdle

Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Commerce,
The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Vic. 3101, Australia

Lea Waters

Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Commerce,
The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Vic. 3101, Australia

l.waters@unimelb.edu.au

Jon P. Briscoe

Department of Management, College of Business,
Northern Illinois University, Barsema Hall, 245 H, DeKalb, IL 60115-2897, USA

Douglas T. (Tim) Hall

School of Management, Boston University,
595 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, USA

Correspondence to Lea Waters, University of Melbourne, l.waters@unimelb.edu.au

Today's career environment is fundamentally different to that of the past. Careers that were once characterised by vertical progression and job security now involve lateral movements across organisations, increased instability and unemployment. In this insecure environment, the concept of employability has emerged as a new key to career success. Recently, Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) defined employability as a psycho-social construct comprised of 3 dimensions: (i) adaptability; (ii) career identity; and (iii) human and social capital. The aim of the current paper was to empirically test this model in a sample of unemployed Australians. Specifically, this research explored employability in relation to three aspects of unemployment: (1) self-esteem during unemployment; (2) job search during unemployment; and (3) re-employment. Overall, the results of this study provide broad support for the employability dimensions identified by Fugate et al. (2004) and suggest that employability is highly applicable to the unemployment context.

Key Words: *Employability; unemployment; job loss; career; employment; adaptability; career identity; job search; re-employment.*

Introduction

Unemployment is now a persistent social problem in many Western countries. Recent changes in the employment environment indicate that the incidence of unemployment is set to increase in countries such as England, Canada, Australia and the United States of America

(Garavan, 1999; Rousseau, 1997; Raelin, 1997; Winefield, Montgomery, Gault, Muller, O'Gorman, Reser & Roland, 2002). Eby, Butts and Lockwood (2003), together with Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003) and Rousseau (1997) argue that careers that were once characterised by stability, vertical progression and job security, are now likely to involve lateral

movements across organisations, increased instability, and periods of unemployment for most workers.

In this insecure environment, the concept of 'employability' has emerged as a new key to career success (Bagshaw, 1997; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004; Garavan, 1999). Employability can be broadly defined as the ability to gain and maintain employment, both within and across organisations (Finn, 2000). This definition, however, provides little indication of the personal factors that contribute to one's employability. Indeed, very few articles discussing employability offer insight into what it really means. Many authors use uni-dimensional, outcome-based definitions, labelling an individual as employable retrospectively based on their ability to gain employment (eg. Finn, 2000; Ritchie, 2000 and Van der Heijden, 2001). However, if career practitioners, government bodies, researchers, organizations, and individuals are to use the concept of employability effectively (in both research and practice), such vague definitions are inadequate. It is primarily for this reason that the current paper adopts the more comprehensive model of employability recently presented by Fugate et al. (2004).

Fugate et al. (2004) present employability as a person-centred, psycho-social construct. By situating employability within the individual, it is separated from the external determinants of employment, focussing instead on personal factors. According to Fugate et al., employability comprises three separate, yet inter-related, dimensions: (i) adaptability; (ii) career identity; and (iii) human and social capital.

An individual's adaptability refers to their willingness and ability to change their behaviours, feelings and thoughts in response to environmental demands (Fugate et al., 2004). Fugate et al. propose that adaptability encompasses: (1) optimism (2) a propensity to learn; (3) openness; (4) an internal locus of control; and (5) generalised self-efficacy. Furthermore, Savickas (1997) has linked adaptability to planfulness, a readiness to cope and a willingness to explore oneself and one's environment. Encompassed in the dimension of adaptability is the construct of proactive personality. According to Seibert, Crant and Kraimer (1999)

and Bateman and Crant (1993) proactive individuals are able to effect environmental change, remaining relatively unimpeded by situational constraints. Proactive personality has been linked to identifying and acting on opportunities; feelings of control; career initiative; perseverance; self-efficacy; self-direction; coping; information-seeking; and effective career management (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000; Seibert et al., 1999; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001; Thompson, 2005). According to Hall (1996a; 2004) adaptability is essential to success in the current era of career insecurity.

Career identity represents the way individuals define themselves in the career context, acting as a 'cognitive compass' used to navigate career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004). Career identity reflects the 'knowing-why' competencies identified by Defillippi and Arthur (1994). 'Knowing-why' competencies encompass attributes, such as career motivation, personal meaning and individual values. Given that career trajectories are less externally defined in the new career environment (McGreevy, 2003), the use of an 'internal career compass' has become critically important in providing the direction needed to achieve career success, especially when the individual finds him/herself outside of the boundaries of an employing organization. Hall, Briscoe and Kram (1997) suggest that, in today's turbulent career environment, identity needs to be decoupled from a specific job or organisation, instead representing an individual's personal values, motivations and broader career interests. In support of this, Anakwe, Hall and Schor (2000) found that teaching MBA students to reflect on their career-related values, needs and motivations (assisting the formation or consolidation of career identity) facilitated effective career management, goal-setting and decision-making.

Human capital refers to the personal variables that may affect one's career advancement, including age, gender, education, work experience, training, skills and knowledge. Human capital encompasses the 'knowing-how' competencies outlined by Defillippi and Arthur (1994). 'Knowing-how' competencies refer to career-related knowledge and skills, built via occupational learning and professional devel-

opment activities. Social capital reflects the interpersonal aspect of employability, incorporating Defillippi and Arthur's (1994) 'knowing-whom' competencies concerning formal and informal career-related networks. Empirical work has demonstrated that interpersonal connections (who one knows) are crucial in shaping individuals' self-perceptions (Eby et al., 2003), fostering effective career management (Anakwe et al., 2000), and providing access to information, resources and career sponsorship (Seibert, Kraimer and Liden, 2001). A particularly important aspect of social capital during unemployment is social support. Social support can serve to ameliorate the destructive consequences of stressful events, such as unemployment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) and has been consistently linked to increased mental health and life satisfaction during unemployment (McKee-Ryan et al., 2004).

1. EMPLOYABILITY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Given the likelihood of periods of unemployment for many people today, an effective definition of employability must encompass attributes that assist individuals both in and out of employment. Fugate et al.'s definition of employability serves this function as it is not determined by one's employment status, therefore maintaining applicability across varied employment contexts, including unemployment. The psycho-social model may, therefore, be highly useful in helping individuals to cope with unemployment, and to recognise that their employability can be self-altered. In their conceptual piece, Fugate et al. (2004) propose that employable individuals are (a) less likely to be psychologically harmed by job loss, (b) more likely to engage in greater job search and (c) more likely to gain high quality re-employment. However, to date, these assertions have not been empirically tested. The current studies address this by empirically investigating: (i) The relationship between employability, self-esteem and job search during unemployment (study 1); and (ii) the relationship between employability, self-esteem, job search and re-employment (study 2).

Employability and Self-Esteem during Unemployment

Self-esteem can be defined as "one's evaluation of one's worth as a person, based on an assessment of the qualities that make up the self-concept (Shaffer, 2002, p. 428)". Research has consistently shown that self-esteem is a key psychological factor that is negatively affected by unemployment (see, for example: Hanisch, 1999; Jahoda, 1982; Winefield, Tiggemann & Winefield, 1992; Winegardner, Simonetti, & Nykodym, 1984). This paper proposes, however, that employable individuals are less likely to suffer from low self-esteem during unemployment. The planfulness and readiness to cope that are associated with adaptability may lessen the shock of unemployment, allowing individuals to be prepared for change, and, hence, maintain a positive self-evaluation (Savickas, 1997). According to Eden and Aviram (1993) unemployment can be a significant blow to an individual's self-concept and, consequently, their self-esteem. This is likely to be especially so if the individual has invested much of their identity in a particular job or organization. However, the self-esteem of those individuals who define themselves more broadly in terms of their career (i.e. have a strong career identity) may not suffer such a devastating blow, as their identity is decoupled from a particular firm or position.

Various elements of social and human capital may also serve to buffer self-esteem during unemployment. As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue, social capital (and social support in particular) can help individuals cope with stressful situations. According to McIntosh (1991) individuals who have strong social support are more likely to feel valued and, as a result, have higher self-esteem. Furthermore, the possession of human capital and social resources can provide important sources of identity consolidation (Shaffer, 2002), leading to minimal damage to the self-concept and self-esteem. In accordance with the above contentions, the first hypothesis addressed in this research is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: *Employability (adaptability, career identity, human and social capital) will be positively related to self-esteem during unemployment.*

Employability and Job Search

This paper further contends that employability will be positively associated with job search. Adaptability and proactive personality are associated with active engagement in the labour market, feelings of control, optimism, information-seeking, initiative and self-efficacy, which are likely to encourage the individual to undertake job search (Crant, 2000; Fugate et al., 2004; Savickas, 1997). Moreover, career identity may provide the individual with direction during unemployment, preventing them from becoming overwhelmed and, consequently, allowing them to take a more positive, problem-focussed approach to unemployment, by engaging in job search. The self-awareness and motivation associated with career identity can also help structure and focus job search activity. Additionally, social capital provides individuals with access to networks, informational resources and social support during the job search process (Fugate et al., 2004; Seibert, Kraimer & Liden, 2001). According to Kanfer et al. (2001) social supporters can influence individuals to see job search as a worthwhile pursuit, as well as providing advice and practical assistance throughout the process. Furthermore, social support is an important source of encouragement and reassurance when the individual is rejected (Vinokur and Caplan, 1987). Taking the above into account, the second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Employability (adaptability, career identity, human and social capital) will be positively related to job search during unemployment.

Self-esteem has also been linked to job search in the research literature. Kanfer et al. (2001) found that higher self-esteem was linked to increased job search intensity in an unemployed sample. Furthermore, Shamir (1986) found that individuals with high self-esteem were more likely to show initiative and assertiveness during unemployment, obtaining greater information from their environment. Interestingly, however, low self-esteem may also motivate job search by encouraging indi-

viduals to pursue re-employment in an attempt to alleviate feelings of low self-esteem. Nonetheless, in accordance with Kanfer et al. (2001) this paper takes the former perspective. Hence, assuming hypothesis 2 holds, employability may also be indirectly related to job search, via self-esteem:

Hypothesis 3: Employability will be indirectly, positively, related to job search during unemployment, via its positive effect on self-esteem.

Employability and Re-employment

Employable individuals may also be more successful than their less employable counterparts at achieving re-employment (Kanfer et al., 2001). Certainly, research by Eby et al. (2003), Prussia et al. (2001) and Wanberg et al. (2001; 2002) indicates that human capital, networking (social capital) and job search intensity are all positively associated with re-employment. The proactivity, optimism, openness, self-efficacy, willingness to explore and tolerance for uncertainty encompassed by adaptability (Crant, 2000; Fugate et al., 2004; Savickas, 1997) may prevent feelings of paralysis during times of turbulence, encouraging individuals to actively pursue re-employment. Furthermore, career identity may facilitate re-employment by giving individuals much needed direction and focus during periods of transition (Hall, 1996a). Consequently, it is hypothesised that employability will enhance the ability of employable individuals to regain employment:

Hypothesis 4: Employability (adaptability, career identity, human and social capital) will be positively related to obtaining re-employment.

According to Kasl (1982) self-esteem may also play a role in re-employment. Kasl's 'reverse-causation hypothesis' proposes that positive psychological health (in general) and high self-esteem (in particular) facilitates re-employment. As mentioned earlier, unemployment is typically associated with low self-esteem, however, Kasl proposes that having low self-esteem may be detrimental to the unemployed, by inhibiting their ability to gain re-employment. Kasl's reverse-causation hy-

pothesis has been supported by authors such as Winefield and Tiggeman (1985) and Vinkour and Schul (1997). Nonetheless other research (see for instance Waters and Moore, 2002a, and Crossley and Stanton, 2005) has found no relationship between self-esteem and re-employment. To investigate this relationship further, the current paper adopts Kasl's original hypothesis, proposing a positive relationship between self-esteem and re-employment:

Hypothesis 5: *Self-esteem will be positively related to obtaining re-employment.*

Wanberg (1997), Wanberg et al. (2001), and Kanfer et al. (2001) have also found a positive relationship between job search and re-employment. Accordingly, it is hypothesised that job search will also be associated with re-employment:

Hypothesis 6: *Job search intensity will be positively related to obtaining re-employment.*

The six hypotheses outlined above are visually represented in Figure 1:

Insert Figure 1 here

Method and Results

Design

The current research was conducted as two studies following the same sample using a longitudinal, survey design¹. Unemployed participants for Study One were accessed via Job-Network agencies and were re-contacted 6 months later with follow-up questionnaires for Study Two. Both the Study One and Two surveys were self-administered by participants.

Study One

Sample

The Study One sample consisted of 455 unemployed people (62% male and 38% female) with a mean age of 33.52 years ($sd=11.17$). Respondents reported a variety of education levels: 39.9% had finished high school, 21.5% had completed university, 13.6% had obtained a TAFE (Training And Further Education) qualification, 10.8% had completed part of a university course, and 6.6% had completed an apprenticeship.

1) Measures

Adaptability, career identity, human capital, social capital, self-esteem and job search were all assessed in Study One. With the exception of human capital, all items were assessed using a 5-point likert scale from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. In all scales, a higher score indicated a higher presence of the construct.

Proactive personality was used as a proxy measure for adaptability. Participants were assessed using the ten-item version of Bateman and Crant's (1993) Proactive Personality scale. The proactive personality scale includes items such as: "I excel at identifying opportunities". The reliability for this scale in the current study was $\alpha=0.87^2$.

Stumpf, Colarelli and Hartman's (1983) Identity Awareness scale was used to assess career identity. The Identity Awareness scale includes 8 items, such as: "I have reflected on how my past career and activities matches my future career". The reliability of this scale was $\alpha=0.82$.

The demographic variables of age, gender and education were used to assess human capital. These factors have been recognized in the literature as important aspects of human capital, and are commonly utilized as human capital measures in job loss research (eg. Wanberg, et al., 2002). Participants provided their age in years and were asked to indicate their gender (M/F) and highest level of education. Gender and education were coded dichotomously as follows: males were coded as '1', and females as '0'; those who had engaged

¹ The data collected in the current study came from a survey distributed as part of a larger study by Waters, Briscoe and Hall.

² Tests of validity for all scales will be presented in the results section.

in further education following high-school were coded as '1' and those who had not gone beyond high-school were coded as '0'. Age was treated as a continuous variable.

Social capital was measured by a single social support proxy item: "I have been supported by my family and friends". Measuring a construct via a single item is an undesirable situation, however, other items considered for inclusion (eg. "attended various networking meetings and workshops to learn about new career options") were ultimately rejected due to conceptual overlap with the job search measure. This issue has been encountered by other researchers such as Wanberg et al. (2002).

Self-esteem was measured using Messer and Harter's (1985) 5-item scale. Sample items include: "I am very happy being the way that I am". Messer and Harter reported strong internal reliability for the scale ($\alpha=.92$) and this scale has also been used validly in unemployment research by Waters and Moore (2002b) and Waters and Muller (2003). In the current study, however, factor analysis indicated that two items did not validly represent the underlying construct (loading < 0.4). Consequently, these items were dropped. The reliability of the resultant 3-item scale was $\alpha=0.79$.

Kinicki and Latack's (1990) Job search behaviour scale was used to measure job search intensity. This scale consists of 5 items, such as: "since being unemployed I have focused my time and energy on job search activities". This scale was found to have a reliability of $\alpha=0.84$. Kinicki and Latack's (1990) scale has been used successfully in the job loss literature by researchers such as Lai and Chan (2002) and Wanberg (1997).

2) Procedure

Participants were accessed via the Victorian JobNetwork system. JobNetwork is an Australian government initiative which provides unemployed individuals with access to a number of private and community organisations that can assist in the job search process (JobNetwork, 2005). One-thousand surveys were placed at the front counter of JobNetwork offices by the researchers, along with a plain language statement (PLS), and pre-paid return-addressed envelope. Surveys were left in

the offices for a one-month period. Of the 1000 surveys distributed, 752 were taken by JobNetwork clients. Four-hundred and fifty-five surveys were returned to the researcher, resulting in an overall response rate of approximately 60%. On receipt of the initial survey, participants were given a study code and their contact details were recorded. On completion and return of the survey, respondents were paid \$10 via cheque. Incentives such as this are used to indicate appreciation for the time taken by participants, and are also useful in increasing the response rate (Salant & Dillman, 1994; Wanberg, Kanfer and Banas, 2000, Wanberg, Kanfer and Rotundo, 1999). Responses were then entered into SPSS for analysis.

a) Results

Prior to hypothesis testing, the validity of the study scales was tested using Exploratory Factor Analysis, with the number of factors specified at four. On examination of the scree plot, this number of factors was revealed to be appropriate. Two self-esteem items failed to meet the 0.4 cut-off loading and were dropped from the analysis (as noted in the methodology section). The final factor structure is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

Missing values for identity awareness, proactive personality, social support, job search and self-esteem were replaced using Estimation Maximisation (EM). In EM information from all the variables of interest is used to predict the missing items. No more than 19 values (4%) were missing on any one item. Missing values on the human capital measures were not replaced, as they were unable to be estimated by scores on other items. This left a total of 37 cases (approximately 8%) with missing values.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables assessed in the study. As Table 2 shows, age was not significantly correlated with any other variable. Gender was significantly negatively correlated with identity awareness and job search. Education was negatively associated with social support and positively associated with

re-employment. Proactive personality, identity awareness, social support, job search and self-esteem were all positively correlated with each other. Re-employment was positively correlated with education and proactive personality.

Insert Table 2 here

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. Prior to entering the data, scale items for proactive personality, identity awareness and job search were grouped into 3 parcels. By parcelling scale items this way, the data is reduced, facilitating model fit by reducing the number of parameters (Landis, Beal & Tesluk, 2000). Self-esteem items were not parcelled, as there were only three items in the final scale. Factor analysis was used to parcel items appropriately, by creating a 3 factor structure for each scale.

Study variables were entered into AMOS (Version 4) for modelling. Prior to assessing the structural model, the measurement model for the latent constructs (proactive personality, identity awareness, job search and self-esteem) was assessed. Given the positive correlations between each construct (as identified in the preliminary analyses) double arrows were used to indicate assumed covariance between the latent constructs. The measurement model is depicted in figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 here

All parcelled items were significantly related to the latent constructs, indicating high convergent validity. However, as the largest covariance was .49, there is also evidence for divergent validity between the constructs. The goodness of fit indicators for the measurement model were: chi-square (48) = 118.496, $p < .05$; GFI=0.959; NFI=0.935; TLI=0.945; CFI=0.960; RMSEA=0.057. While the chi-square test was significant (which indicates poor fit), Hox and Bechger (1998) argue that, when large sample sizes are used, the chi-square test is almost always significant. According to Raykov, Tomer and Nesselroade

(1991) large samples have high statistical power, resulting in almost all reasonable models being rejected when only the chi-square value and its associated probability are considered. Consequently, it is important to examine the other values. Analysis of the other indicators suggests that the model fits the data well. In particular, as the TLI and NFI exceed the .90 acceptance level, and the CFI and GFI exceed the .95 level, this model is accepted as a good fit for the data (Hox & Bechger, 1998). Ideally, an RMSEA score of below .05 is required to accept a model (Hox & Bechger, 1998), however, Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (2004) and Hu and Bentler (1999) suggest that an RMSEA of less than 0.06 is acceptable.

In testing the structural model, age, sex, education and social support were entered as observed variables, while job search, self-esteem, identity awareness and proactive personality were entered as latent variables reflected by the parcelled items. Age, sex, education and social support were not found to load onto an underlying, latent 'human and social capital' factor, and were entered individually. The final model is presented in figure 2. Age, sex and education were dropped from the model as they were not found to be significantly related to the outcome variables. The pathways between self-esteem and job search, and identity awareness and self-esteem were also not significant and are not included in figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 here

All the pathways retained in the model (figure 3) were significant at the 0.05 level. The goodness of fit indicators for this model were as follows: chi-square (58) = 137.281, $p < .05$; GFI=0.956; NFI=0.927; TLI=0.941; CFI=0.956; RMSEA=0.055. Again, the chi-square test was significant, however, the other indicators suggest that this model fits the data well. Figure 3 demonstrates that 16% of the variance in self-esteem can be explained by the independent variables of proactive personality and social support. Twenty-six percent of the variance in Job Search is explained by all three factors: proactive personality, identity awareness and social support.

Study Two

Sample

The Study Two sample consisted of 143 of the 455 people who originally participated in Study One. Forty-three of these people had gained re-employment, while 100 remained unemployed. Of the re-employed group, 56% was male and 44% female with a mean age of 33.88 years ($sd=10.97$). In terms of education, 34.9% had completed university, 25.6% had finished high-school, 20.9% had a TAFE qualification, 9.3% had gained an apprenticeship, and 4.7% had completed part of a university course.

Of the unemployed group, 63% was male, and 37% female with a mean age of 35.40 ($sd=12.61$). Again, there was a range of education levels. Forty-one percent had completed high-school, 16% had finished university, 14% had a TAFE qualification, 11% had undertaken part of a university course, and 7% had completed an apprenticeship.

Measures

The variable of interest in Study Two was re-employment. Individuals were asked to indicate their employment situation in the survey. Individuals were coded as re-employed ('1') if they had obtained full-time re-employment and as unemployed ('0') if they were unemployed with little to no work of any sort.

Procedure

Six months after the initial survey, all Study One participants were contacted by mail with the Study Two questionnaire. In Study Two, participants were asked to report their employment status. One-hundred people remained unemployed, while 43 people had gained full time re-employment. Respondents were paid \$25 for completion of the follow-up survey. Upon return the questionnaires were coded to match each participant to their Study One data.

Results

Given the smaller sample size and binary nature of the outcome variable in Study Two, SEM was not considered appropriate in

testing hypotheses 4, 5 and 6. Instead, hierarchical binary logistic regression analysis was used. Binary logistic regression is appropriate when the dependent variable has only two values (Hair et al., 1998). Furthermore, Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) suggest that hierarchical regression is useful when the researcher wants to investigate the effect of groups of independent variables sequentially.

Employability was entered at the first step of the regression (age, sex, education, proactive personality, identity awareness and social support) as the independent variable (IV). Self-esteem and job search were entered as the IVs at step 2. The step 1 regression model was found to be significant: chi-square (6)=13.843, $p < .05$. The Nagelkerke R-square was .145, indicating that the IVs explained approximately 14.5% of the variance in re-employment status. The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness of fit test was non-significant: chi-square (8) = 4.206, $p > .8$, indicating that the regression model fit the data well (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Analysis of the beta coefficients indicated, however, that age ($\beta = -.01$) and identity awareness ($\beta = .07$) were contributing very little to re-employment. As a result, these variables were removed from the model. The new model was significant: chi-square (4)=13.593, $p < .01$; with a Nagelkerke R-Square of 0.142. This indicated that the removal of age and identity awareness did not greatly affect the explanatory power of the model.

On examination of the final beta coefficients it was found that being male was negatively related to re-employment ($\beta = -.38$), whilst proactive personality ($\beta = .89$), education ($\beta = .90$) and support ($\beta = .23$) were positively related to re-employment. Education and proactive personality were found to be significant univariate predictors ($p < .05$) and when entered alone were found to predict approximately 10% of the variance by themselves (Nagelkerke R-Square = .096). At step 2, job search and self-esteem were entered into the regression analysis, however, the addition of these variables did not significantly contribute to the model.

Discussion

The aim of the current paper was to explore the role of Fugate et al.'s (2004) employability dimensions (adaptability, career identity, human and social capital) during unemployment and upon obtaining re-employment. Specifically, this paper investigated the relationship between employability and (i) self-esteem during unemployment; (ii) job search during unemployment; and (iii) re-employment. Overall, the results of the two studies provide support for the employability dimensions identified by Fugate et al. (2004) and demonstrate the applicability of employability to unemployment.

Individually, hypotheses 1, 2 and 4 were partially supported. Sixteen percent of the variance in self-esteem was explained by proactive personality and social support (H1). Twenty-six percent of the variance in job search was explained by identity awareness, proactive personality and social support (H2). The human capital variables (age, sex and education) were not related to either self-esteem or job search. Identity awareness did not contribute to the variance in self-esteem. In combination, proactive personality, social support, education and sex were found to explain 14.2% of the variance in re-employment (H4). Proactive personality and education were significant univariate predictors, explaining 10% of the variance in re-employment between them. Age and identity awareness did not offer any explanatory power.

Hypothesis 3, that employability would be indirectly, positively related to job search via self-esteem was not supported. Additionally, hypotheses 5 and 6, that self-esteem and job search would be positively related to obtaining re-employment, were not supported. Taken together, the results of this study provide partial support for the model depicted earlier in figure 1. Of particular interest is the finding that the employability dimensions relate to the outcomes in different ways, indicating that some dimensions are more important depending on the outcome of interest.

Adaptability (measured via proactive personality) was found to be a significant univariate predictor of all three outcomes:

self-esteem, job search and re-employment. The relationship between proactive personality and self-esteem supports Crant's (2000) findings that proactive personality is linked to positive self-assessment and increased self-esteem during unemployment. This may be because proactive personality can lead people to appraise negative events as a challenge rather than a threat (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). According to Folkman and Lazarus (1985), the appraisal of negative events as challenging, rather than threatening, is related to positive emotions, such as confidence and hope, helping individuals to maintain more favourable self-assessments during times of stress. Proactive personality was also positively related to job search and re-employment. This may be due to the relationship between proactive personality and initiative, information-seeking, innovation and network building, as discussed by Crant (2000) and Thompson (2005). This finding supports the idea that proactive individuals, even during unemployment, are able to effect environmental change, identify and act on opportunities and remain relatively unimpeded by situational constraints (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000; Seibert et al., 1999; Seibert et al., 2001).

Career identity (measured via identity awareness) was the strongest predictor of job search. This may be because identity awareness acts as an internal compass, helping individuals navigate career opportunities in times of uncertainty (Fugate et al., 2004). The direction and self-knowledge associated with identity awareness may provide a source of motivation, encouraging individuals to actively engage in job search in the labour market. Interestingly, however, identity awareness was not significantly related to self-esteem or re-employment. Following Hall et al. (1997) it was expected that having a strong identity connected to one's career (rather than a particular job or organisation) would prevent a drop in self-esteem during unemployment. This proposal was not supported, suggesting that having a strong career identity does not necessarily lead to positive self-esteem. More generally, while an individual's self-concept and self-esteem are inter-related, simply having a clear idea of one's self-concept did not necessitate positive

self-evaluation in the current unemployed sample. Identity awareness was also not predictive of re-employment. It may be that individuals with strong identity awareness engage in job search, but not simply to find a job. Instead they may devote time to this activity in order to find the *best* job, in terms of person-job fit. Consequently, identity awareness may not facilitate re-employment *per se*, but may instead increase re-employment quality, when the identity-aware individual does accept a job (Waters, Hall & Briscoe, 2005).

By and large, human capital (assessed via age, sex and education) was not found to play a strong role in relation to the outcomes. Neither age nor sex was related to any of the outcomes investigated in the study³. Education was, however, found to be a significant univariate predictor of re-employment, but was not related to either self-esteem or job search. The lack of a relationship between age, sex and the outcome variables is not especially surprising. According to Creed and Watson (2003) the literature surrounding age and gender effects during unemployment is inconclusive. In their study, they found no association between gender and well-being, although they did find some age effects on outcomes such as social support, well-being and time structure. In the future it may be beneficial to look at other aspects of human capital (such as skills, experience, knowledge), which are variables over which the individual has an element of control, rather than using variables such as age and sex which are outside the individual's control.

Education was not related to self-esteem or job search in the current study. However, education was assessed quite crudely, as a binary construct and hence, some relationships may have been distorted or obscured. Drawing finer distinctions between levels of education may produce different findings in the future. Interestingly, education was found to significantly explain the variance in re-employment. This supports Wanberg et

al.'s (2002) proposal that education may work as a 'key' to employment. Employers may use the level of education as a heuristic device in making recruitment decisions, which would create an advantage for those with education beyond the high school level.

Social support was significantly related to both job search and self-esteem during unemployment⁴. According to McIntosh (1991) social support may enhance, or buffer, self-esteem by making individuals feel valued, serving to reaffirm their identity and self-worth. The emotional element of social support may be particularly relevant to self-esteem during unemployment as it provides an outlet for stress and negative feelings, while providing reassurance and comfort (McIntosh, 1991). Social support may also encourage job search by allowing individuals to vent the frustration and grief associated with unemployment. Such emotion-focussed coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) can help individuals to 'bounce back' from job rejections and unsuccessful interviews, helping them continue with the job search process (Kanfer et al., 2001; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987). Instrumental and informational social support may also facilitate job search by promoting problem-focussed coping. High levels of social support may provide access to contacts and informal networks (such as family and friends) that may help in the job search process.

Self-esteem was not significantly related to either job search or re-employment in this study. This finding contradicts research by Kanfer et al. (2001) who found that individuals higher on self-esteem engaged in greater job search. Crossley and Stanton (2005) recently found, however, that distress was also linked to job search intensity. Taken together, Wanberg et al.'s (2002) and Crossley and Stanton's (2005) results may suggest that individuals undertake job search for different reasons, associated with both high and low self-esteem. This may be explained in terms of Higgins' (1997)

³ Sex did contribute to the combined variance in re-employment when considered in combination with proactive personality, education and social support. It was not, however, a significant univariate predictor.

⁴ Social support did contribute to the combined variance in re-employment in concert with education, proactive personality and sex. However, it was not a unique predictor of this outcome.

Regulatory Focus Theory, which proposes that individuals will approach important goals through either a prevention or promotion focus. A prevention focus centres on alleviating or avoiding negative outcomes, while a promotion focus is associated with attaining positive outcomes (Higgins, 1997; Idson & Higgins, 2000). An individual low on self-esteem may engage in job search as part of a prevention focus, in order to alleviate the distress associated with unemployment. Individuals who are high on self-esteem may engage in job search via a promotion focus, seeking to attain the positive outcomes of employment and self-expression through work (eg. pursuing Hall's (1996b) 'path with a heart'). This may indicate that the association between job search and self-esteem is more complex than a simple uni-directional link.

Self-esteem, as an independent variable, was also not related to re-employment. This does not support Kasl's (1984) reverse causation hypothesis but is, instead, consistent with Waters and Moore's (2002a) finding that the two variables are not related. According to Shamir (1986) individuals who are higher on self-esteem are more discerning in terms of re-employment and are unwilling to accept less-than-ideal jobs. This suggests that individuals who are higher on self-esteem will only accept a job if it is congruent with their desires and expectations, while individuals who are lower on self-esteem may be more likely to accept the first job they are offered. This would, therefore, be unlikely to lead to a clear-cut association between self-esteem and re-employment. Perhaps future researchers should consider assessing not only whether re-employment was or was not obtained but also the quality of the re-employment and the person-job fit obtained in the new job. It could be that self-esteem plays a stronger role in these latter two aspects of re-employment.

Job search was not significantly related to re-employment. This finding contradicts Wanberg (1997), Wanberg et al. (2001) and Kanfer et al.'s (2001) findings of an association between the two. The current finding may reflect the fact that job search is internally driven by the individual, while re-employment is controlled by a third party (the employer).

Those engaging in high job search intensity may not necessarily be the most attractive to employers.

Study Limitations

As the first empirical study to explore Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability, this study addresses a gap in the literature. The use of a longitudinal design, large sample, and established measurement scales, lends validity to the findings. Nonetheless, certain limitations were encountered. Firstly, a number of the employability dimensions were assessed via proxy measures. For instance, social capital was measured via social support and adaptability via proactive personality. It would be beneficial in the future to use multiple measures to assess each underlying dimension of employability. For instance, it may be useful to incorporate other aspects of human capital such as knowledge and experience when assessing this variable in the future. Similarly, including other aspects of adaptability, such as job mobility, optimism and self-efficacy may provide a richer picture. Given that this study was the first to operationalise the employability dimensions proposed by Fugate et al. (2004), it drew on existing scales and, subsequently, serves somewhat of an exploratory function. The relationships identified thus far, however, provide early support for the model, encouraging further investigation in the area.

In assessing Fugate et al.'s (2004) psycho-social model of employability, this paper focussed on examining the relationships between *each* of the employability dimensions (adaptability, career identity, human and social capital) and the outcomes of interest (job search, self-esteem and re-employment). Support for the separate roles played by each of the dimensions was found, however, this paper did not investigate the way these dimensions may work in concert. Fugate et al. theorise that employability is a synergistic combination of adaptability, career identity and human and social capital. They conceptualise employability as an aggregate multi-dimensional construct (MDC), proposing that the three dimensions 'cause' a higher-order factor, known as employability. Their proposal of an aggregate MDC is presented in contrast to a latent MDC

(in which the dimensions reflect an *underlying* factor of employability). The current study did not test the dimensions in relation to either an aggregate or latent MDC, instead focussing on the direct relationships between each dimension and each outcome. This was considered an appropriate aim, given that this study is the first to empirically test the model. It was decided that the individual contributions of the employability dimensions should be established first, prior to investigating an aggregate model.

Future researchers may investigate the structure of the construct further, testing both the aggregate and latent MDC structures. This paper has taken the first step, ascertaining the existence of relationships between the dimensions and outcomes of interest. If, as Fugate et al. argue, it is in concert that employability is manifested, this remains to be seen. A potential problem in focussing on employability as a global MDC (whether latent or aggregate), however, is that the individual (direct) relationships of each dimension may be obscured. The current study demonstrated that some dimensions are more important than others, depending on the outcome of interest. For instance, identity awareness had the strongest relationship with job search but did not contribute to self-esteem.

Practical applications

In terms of the practical use of this construct by careers counsellors and unemployment care-workers, there needs to be recognition of the individual effects of each dimension as well as the effect that a global measure of employability may have. The results of this study indicate that counsellors need to prioritise certain dimensions over others depending on the outcome of focus. For instance, to encourage job search, it may be most important to focus on identity awareness, as this was found to be the strongest predictor of job search in the current study. Counsellors could help build identity awareness by providing unemployed individuals with access to resources and information that can help them to consolidate their career identity and integrate their previous work experiences into a coherent identity narrative. Individuals could also be encouraged

to engage in self-reflection, in order to better understand their career-related experiences, aspirations and values. If the aim is to build self-esteem, however, it would be more beneficial to concentrate on developing proactive personality in unemployed individuals. Strategies for achieving this could include assisting individuals to reframe the way they view the experience of unemployment, so that it is seen as a career and learning opportunity, rather than a career failure.

Conclusion

The current study was the first to empirically test Fugate et al.'s (2004) psycho-social model of employability. The results provide broad support for the model, and demonstrate the significant role played by the various dimensions of employability in relation to self-esteem, job search and re-employment. Overall, this study indicates that employability is highly applicable to the unemployment context. Given the increasing labour market insecurity in Australia, and the likelihood that many Australians will experience periods of unemployment during their career, research into the factors that help people cope with, and manage unemployment is essential. Further investigation into employability may benefit both individuals, and career practitioners in developing new and improved methods of coping with, and alleviating, the experience of unemployment.

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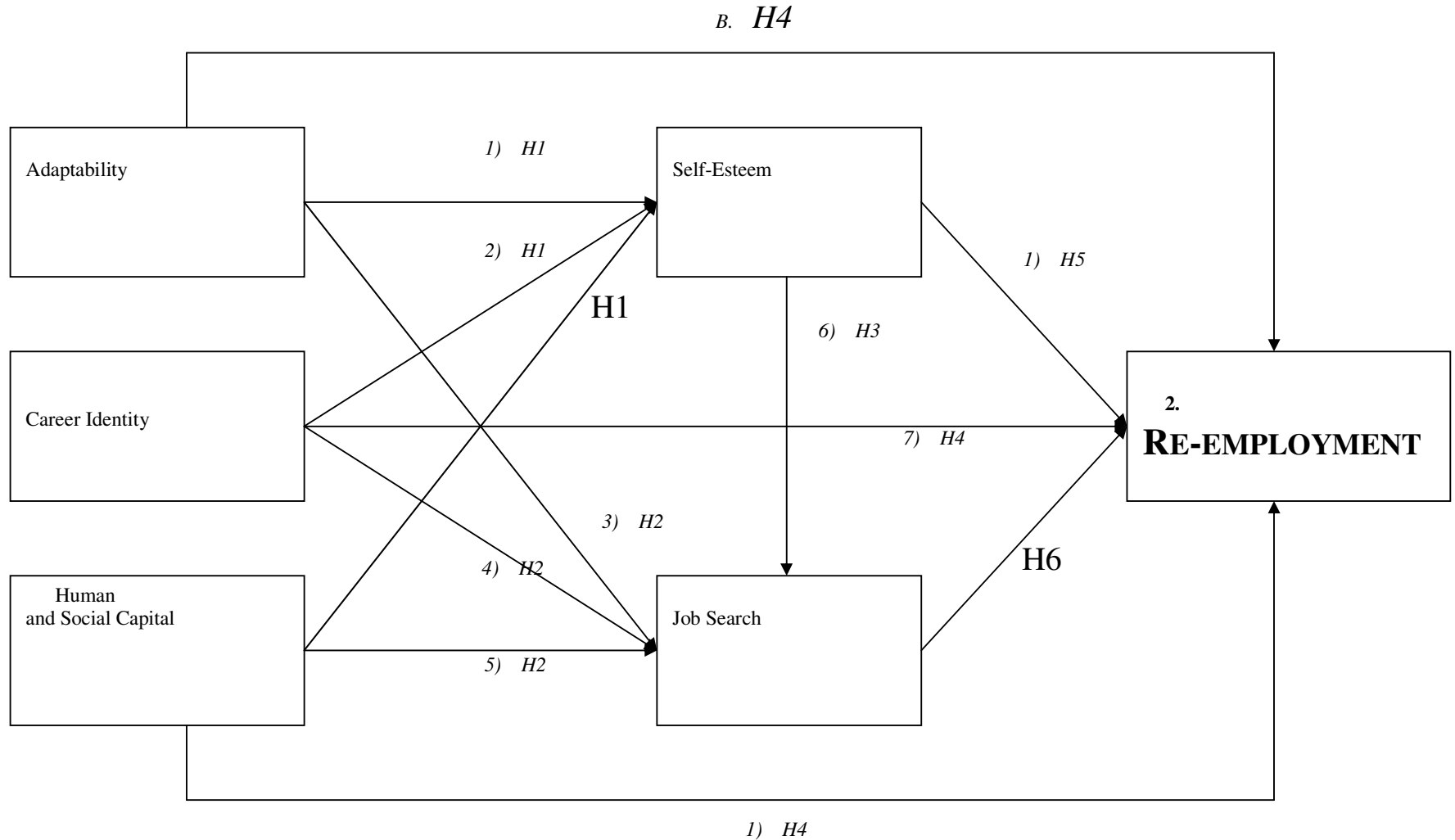


Figure 1: An illustration of the hypothesised relationships between employability (career identity, adaptability, human and social capital), self-esteem, job search and re-employment during unemployment. (H=Hypothesis)

Table 1: *The pattern matrix of the factor structure of proactive personality, identity awareness, self-esteem and job search*

Scale Item	Factor 1*	Factor 2*	Factor 3*	Factor 4*
Proactive Personality Q1	.434			
Proactive Personality Q2	.538			
Proactive Personality Q3	.590			
Proactive Personality Q4	.483			
Proactive Personality Q5	.817			
Proactive Personality Q6	.629			
Proactive Personality Q7	.715			
Proactive Personality Q8	.645			
Proactive Personality Q9	.788			
Proactive Personality Q10	.652			
Identity Awareness Q1		.487		
Identity Awareness Q2		.606		
Identity Awareness Q3		.498		
Identity Awareness Q4		.708		
Identity Awareness Q5		.639		
Identity Awareness Q6		.600		
Identity Awareness Q7		.694		
Identity Awareness Q8		.573		
Job Search Behaviour Q1			.867	
Job Search Behaviour Q2			.949	
Job Search Behaviour Q3			.469	
Job Search Behaviour Q4			.452	
Job Search Behaviour Q5			.779	
Self Esteem Q1				.842
Self Esteem Q2				.906
Self Esteem Q5				.465

* All factor loadings below .25 were suppressed and are not included in the matrix

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	33.54	11.17	1.00								
2. Education 0 = up to high school 1 = past high school	0.57	0.49	0.02	1.00							
3. Sex 0 = female 1 = male	0.62	0.49	-0.01	0.01	1.00						
4. Proactive Personality	3.69	0.59	0.01	-0.06	-0.02	1.00					
5. Identity Awareness	3.60	0.70	0.04	-0.01	-.018**	0.37**	1.00				
6. Social Support	3.55	1.28	-0.08	-0.11*	-0.06	0.13**	0.26**	1.00			
7. Self-Esteem	3.37	0.89	-0.05	0.04	-0.06	0.36**	0.14**	0.15**	1.00		
8. Job Search	3.77	0.77	0.04	-0.06	-0.12*	0.29**	0.34**	0.22**	0.09*	1.00	
9. Re-employment (time 2) 0 = unemployed 1 = re-employed	0.30	0.46	-0.06	0.18*	-0.07	0.20*	0.11	0.14	0.13	0.10	1.00

- Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tail)

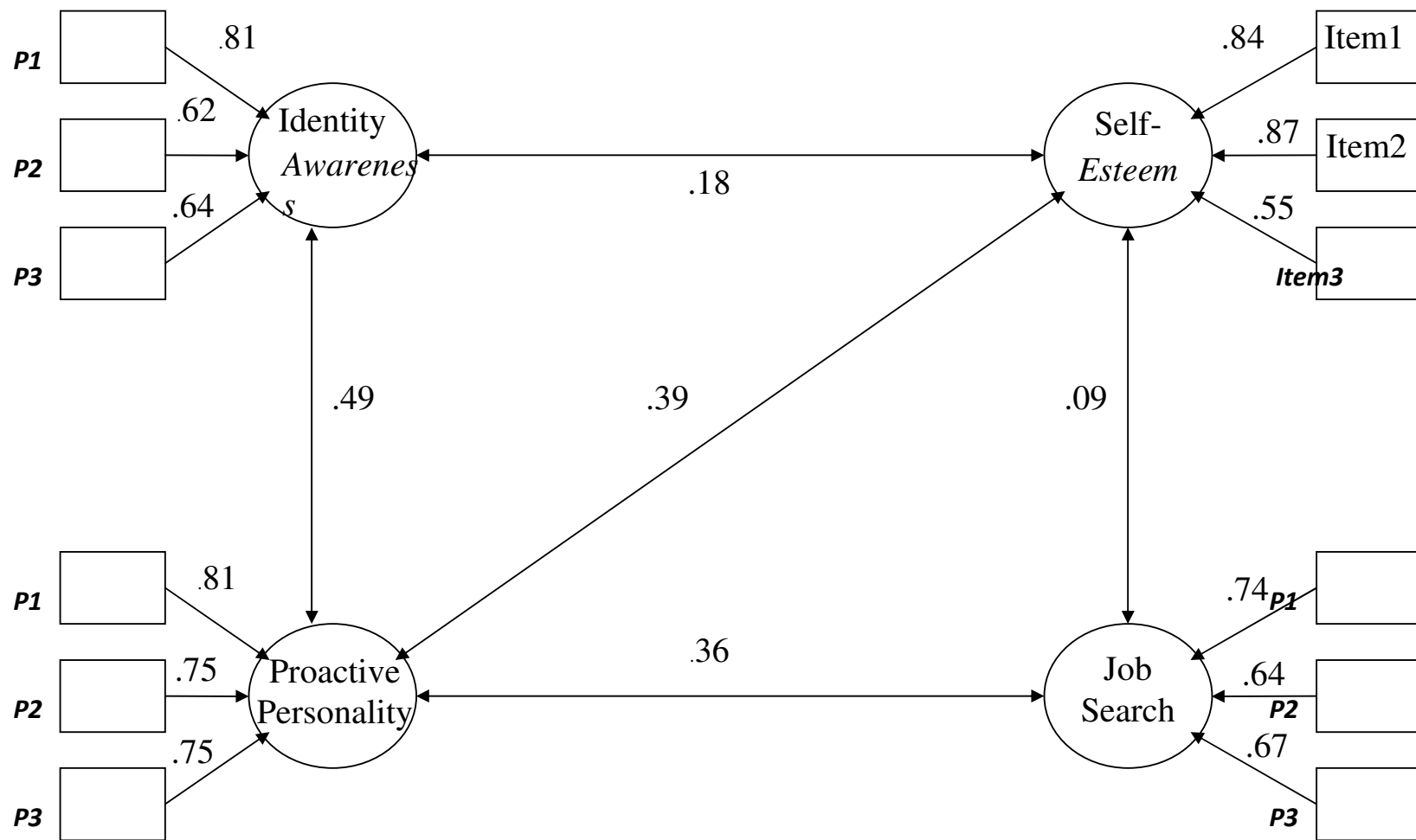


Figure 2: The measurement model of the latent constructs (identity awareness, proactive personality, self-esteem and job search).

Note: P = parcel

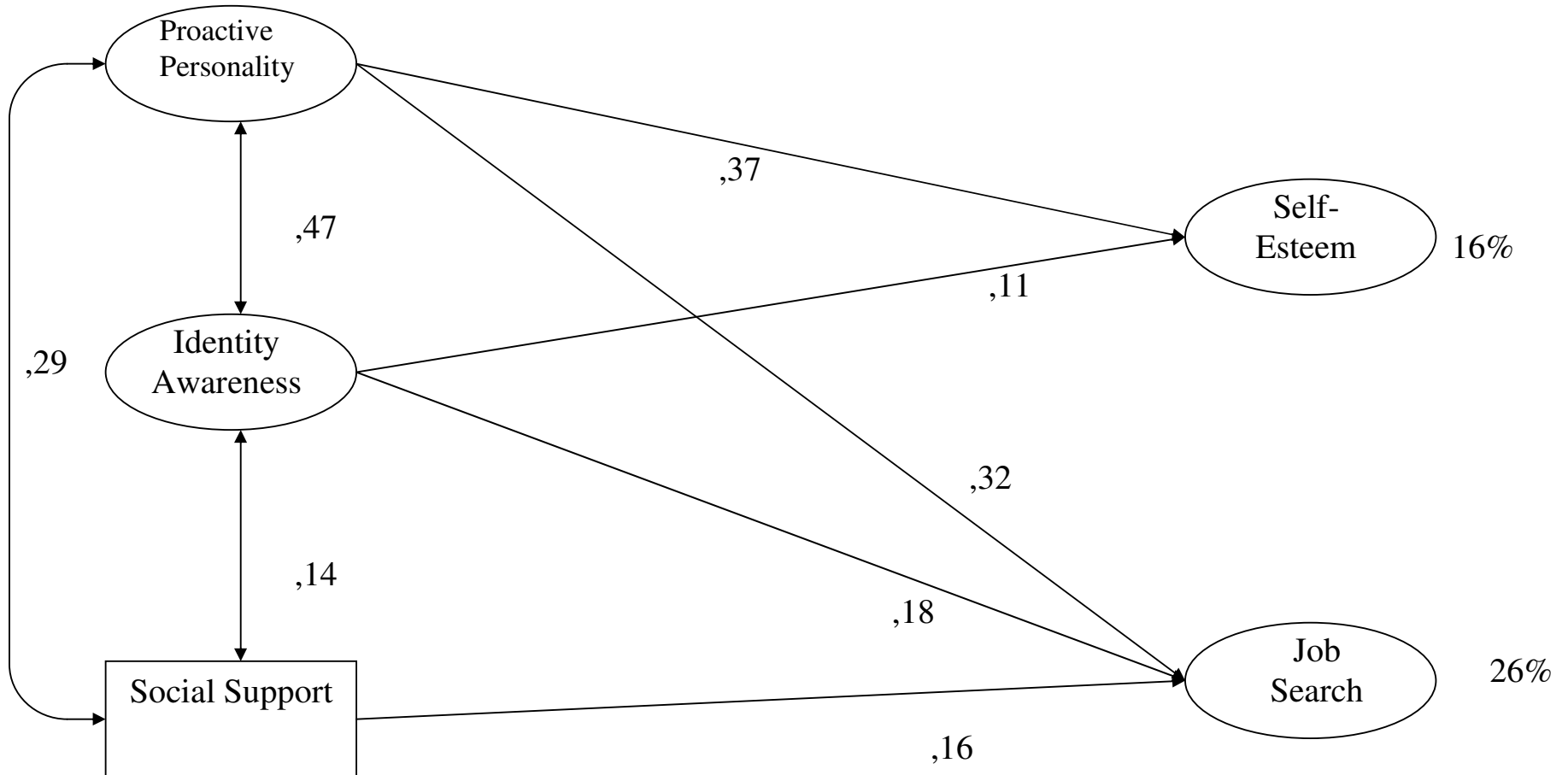


Figure 3: The relationships between identity awareness, proactive personality, social support, self-esteem and job search during unemployment.