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Psychological Capital and Job Search: A Systematic Literature Review and Agenda for Future Research

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Abstract

Purpose: There is consistent evidence that a positive mindset could foster the job search process. Psychological capital, defined as a tendency to hold cognitions and positive appraisals of one's ability, could highlight the importance of individual cognitive appraisal in the job search process. Nevertheless, psychological capital's impact on job seekers is still unclear.

Methods: The purpose of the present study was to explore the role of psychological capital in the job search process. The author conducted a systematic review following the PRISMA-P guidelines. This systematic review sought answers to three questions: 1) What theories are applied to explain the relationship between psychological capital and the job search process? 2) How is the association between psychological capital and the job search process? 3) Did the psychological capital interventions positively influence the job search process? The review focused on quantitative studies carried out between 2007 and 2021 on job seekers. Finally, 11 studies fit the inclusion criteria.

Results: Overall, the literature review supports the significant association between psychological capital and the job search process. On the one hand, the studies analyzed have shown the resonance of psychological capital on the job search outcomes and job seekers' well-being. On the other hand, the results showed insufficient evidence to make any firm conclusions concerning psychological capital interventions' effects on the job search process improvement.

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Conclusion: It is concluded that psychological capital may be a valuable advantage for helping job seekers engage in their job search process. The results presented in this study could have important implications for job seekers and public and private employment agencies. Even so, it is necessary to continue contributing to its development. Particularly, there is still considerable scope for improvement in the study of psychological capital and the job search process in terms of the study design we apply, the variables we study and their measure, and the theoretical background we use to explain the previous relationship.

Keywords: Psychological Capital, Job Search, Unemployment, Job Seekers, Vocational Education and Training, VET

1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in analysing job search process backgrounds. As the job search is the main route for obtaining a job, it is important to find resources for promoting the job search process and helping job seekers to overcome the difficulties of this arduous process (Georgiou & Nikolaou, 2019; Klehe & Van Hooft, 2016).

Certainly, it is generally agreed that contextual variables are involved in the job search process. Some research carried out in the economic field suggests that labor market institutions have a direct impact on jobseekers' activities, especially in relation to the interaction between job seekers and employers (Arpaia & Mourre, 2005; Buscher et al., 2005). Without going any further, in a recent review, Wanberg et al. (2020) claimed that even the geographical region, country, or broader culture within which the job search process occurs is relevant for the experience of job search. Nevertheless, previous research has also suggested that certain individual features such as attitudes, cognitions, and motivations can also influence the chances of getting a job (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hooft, 2014).

Recent research efforts have mainly focused on the need for a positive mindset for helping people to adopt positive attitudes and behaviours related to the job search process (Georgiou & Nikolaou, 2019; Moorhouse & Caltabiano, 2007). Luthans et al. (2007) propose psychological capital as a second-order construct composed of four dimensions (optimism, resilience, hope, and self-efficacy). It is referred to as a tendency to hold cognitions and positive appraisals of one's ability (Luthans et al., 2007; Harms et al., 2018). Several studies have pointed out that individuals who appraise the job search process more positively find it easier to cope with stress, difficulties, and obstacles during their job search process (Klehe & Van Hooft, 2016; Wanberg et al., 2005; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). In line with this argument, psychological capital could be positively associated with the job search process (Chen & Lim, 2012; Georgiou & Nikolaou, 2019; Lim et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the systematic reviews performed to date have been mainly focused on psychological capital and work-related variables (Avey et

al., 2011; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Newman et al., 2014). Hence, this paper aims to identify, evaluate, and summarize the findings of relevant studies analyzing the direct or indirect influence of psychological capital on the job search context carried out by the active population. For that purpose, the author presents a systematic review focused on quantitative studies carried out between 2007 and 2021 on job seekers following the PRISMA-P guidelines. The main question this study would like to answer is if the psychological capital is a beneficial resource when people are searching for a job.

1.1 Theoretical Approach to the Concept of Job Search

There is broad agreement in the literature that job search consists of gathering information about potential employment opportunities to analyse different offers and select the most suitable among the existing ones (Barber et al., 1994). Next, a brief introduction to the main traditional theories applied to job search is offered. Aramburu-Zabala (1998) brings together the main psychological theories that have been applied to the field of job search and propose three large groups (cognitive theories, behavioural theories and cognitive-behavioural theories). Within the cognitive theories, in turn, further clarification could be made. On the one hand, the *motivation search theories*, whose objective is to analyze the decision-making process of people who are looking for a job. Hence, the *motivation search theories* include the Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1987), the Attribution Theory (Weiner, 2012) and the Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977). On the other hand, there are theories dedicated to analyzing the causes that lead to the choice of an option between different alternatives. Accordingly, theories related to *decision-making* encompass the Search Hypothesis (Evans, 2002) and the Decision Theory and Confirmation (Levi, 1961). About behavioural court theories, it is necessary to mention the Theory of Reinforcement (Skinner, 1958). Whereas concerning the group of cognitive-behavioural theories, the Learned Helplessness Theory (Seligman, 1972) is remarkable.

Nevertheless, current literature supports the importance of the job search process for re-employment (Amato et al., 2016; Kanfer et al., 2001; Lopez-Kidwell et al., 2013; Wanberg et al., 2005). The prevailing hypothesis in the literature is that job search is a self-regulatory process, as it depends totally on the unemployed (Amato et al., 2016; Kanfer et al., 2001; Lopez-Kidwell et al., 2013; Van Hooft, 2016). The main characteristic of the job search process is that it is a process that depends totally on the job seeker. In line with this self-regulatory approach, some empirical evidence has suggested that beliefs about prospects positively influence job placement (Dickerson & Green, 2012; Knabe & Rätzl, 2010). The job seeker is the one that should identify, initiate and perform different actions to achieve a job. Hence, for those individuals who establish a clear employment goal and are committed to the search, the process is largely autonomous and subject to the ability to self-regulate activities, effort

and emotions (Wanberg et al., 2016). Thus, job seekers with high expectations of getting a job seek more intensely than those with low expectations (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005). Similarly, those who think the job search process is under their control dedicate more time and effort to looking for a job (Baay et al., 2014; Kanfer et al., 2001). Following the self-regulated approach, several authors have proposed an explanatory model of the job search process. This paper is framed in the Theory of Planned Job Search Behavior (TPJSB) proposed by Van Hooft (2016) because integrates the main perspectives that are important in the job search process, the motivational and the self-regulatory one. Regarding the motivational perspective, as the job search process is a difficult and complex task, keeping motivated could be the key to persisting in the job search process. Nevertheless, as for many people looking for a job could be also boring and unpleasant, job seekers need to be able to self-regulate their job search activities. The main premise of this theory is that job search intention is the immediate antecedent of job search behaviours. In turn, job search intention is preceded by job search attitude (the individual's -positive or negative- evaluation of job search and job attainment), subjective norm (or perceived social pressure to look for a job) and the degree of perceived control over job search behaviours (people's belief they can perform effectively when looking for a job) (Van Hooft, 2016). As a result, the more positive features people have of getting a job and the stronger they value these features, the more likely they are to persist in their job search process (Fernández-Valera et al., 2020; Van Hooft, 2016). This indicates that individuals could engage differently in job search behaviour (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005; Wanberg et al., 2005) and highlights the importance of analysing psychological resources that reinforces jobseekers' perception of the possibilities of inserting themselves in a specific labour market.

1.2 The Theoretical Foundation of Psychological Capital

Luthans et al. (2007) propose psychological capital as a second-order construct that brings together four resources (optimism, resilience, hope, and self-efficacy). Psychological capital could be defined as the tendency to hold cognitions and positive appraisals of one's ability characterised by: Having the confidence to face challenges and complex tasks (self-efficacy); making positive attributions about the present and future triumphs (optimism); visualise and persevering in the goals, as well as redirect the objectives when necessary to achieve success (hope); and recover and even emerge stronger from adversity (resilience).

Two fundamental theories support the construction of psychological capital: the Conservation of Resources Theory by Hobfoll (2001) and the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions by Fredrickson (2004). The Conservation of Resources Theory by Hobfoll (2001) defends that resources can be treated independently or integrated into more complex models. Herewith, the author pointed out that some psychological concepts are better understood as the representation of a global multidimensional factor. That is, this theory defends the

positive synergy between specific resources when they are part of a second-order construct (Luthans et al., 2015). Given the above, psychological capital research indicates that its four dimensions have an underlying common bond, making it a second-order construct. This argument means that, if we take into account the four dimensions of psychological capital as a whole, instead of focusing on them individually, their effects will have a more significant impact than each of the four dimensions separately (Avey et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2007; Luthans et al., 2015).

The second perspective applicable to the theoretical construction of psychological capital is the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions by Fredrickson (2004). The research framed in this theoretical model suggests that people, both individually and in groups, work with better cognitive functioning when they report higher levels of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2004). Although the feelings analysed under this model are different from the cognitive aspects examined in psychological capital, other research suggests a strong link between cognition and emotions (Lazarus, 1993). Supporting the premise that the relationship between emotions and positive cognitions would help explain the impact of psychological capital on other variables, such as performance (Luthans et al., 2015), job satisfaction (Luthans et al., 2007), well-being (Avey et al., 2010) or the job search process (Chen & Lim, 2012).

In line with the previous argument, a positive cognitive evaluation could help potentially negative or neutral situations be reinterpreted mentally in a more positive way (Luthans et al., 2015). Hence, several studies have pointed out that individuals who appraise their job search process more positively find it easier to cope with stress, difficulties, and obstacles (Van Hooft, 2016; Wanberg et al., 2005; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Thus, psychological capital, as is referred to as a tendency to hold cognitions and positive appraisals of one's ability (Luthans et al., 2007; Harms et al., 2018), could have particular impact to the job search process (Chen & Lim, 2012; Georgiou & Nikolaou, 2019; Lim et al. 2016).

1.3 Psychological Capital as a Potential Motivator of the Job Search Process

For understanding how psychological capital could act as a direct or indirect antecedent of the job search process, Van Hooft (2016) proposes Vallerand's Hierarchical Model of Motivation (1997) as a useful frame to extend the Theory of Planned Job Search Behavior for analyzing which resources can help people to be engaged in the job search process. Vallerand's Model could be applied to any performance environment and explain motivation top down and bottom up from three hierarchical levels which vary in generality, stability and proximity to behaviour: a) Global-level motivating factors are generalized constructs that are stable over situations and apply to all life domains. They combine personality factors and individual perceptions; b) contextual-level motivating factors concern specific life domains (e.g.,

employment); and, c) situational-level motivating factors refer to specific behaviours, namely real-time, real-world actions, feedback, and consequences (e.g., the job search process) (Fernández-Valera et al., 2020; Taylor, 2015). In line with those arguments and following Fernández-Valera et al. (2020), psychological capital could be advanced as a global-level job search process motivator as it is defined as a tendency to hold cognitions and positive appraisals of one's ability, and motivational research has indicated that perception of positive situations could result in positive affective, behavioural, and cognitive consequences (Taylor, 2015). This model also indicates that probably the association of psychological capital with the job search process is not direct, and could be mediated or moderated by other variables (e.g., contextual-level motivating factors).

Indeed, most previous research has linked psychological capital dimensions and the job search process individually. Regarding self-efficacy, job search intensity, number of job interviews, number of job offers received as well as job achievement has been positively related with this variable (Saks et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2013; Wanberg et al., 2005). About optimism, empirical evidence shows that optimism moderated the effect of unemployment on psychological health (Kirves et al., 2014; Victor, 2016). Finally, among studies that analyse resilience and the job search process, results show, on the one hand, how resilience mediates the relationship between social support, job-seeking behaviours (Ślebarska et al., 2009), and length of unemployment (Fernández-Valera et al., 2019). On the other hand, Moorhouse and Caltabiano (2007) stated that job seekers with higher levels of resilience indicated fewer depressive symptomatology than those with lower levels, even though their job search process time was longer.

In short, following Chen and Lim (2012), job seekers who have high levels of psychological capital: Could be more likely to be confident about their skills and abilities to look for a job, hold optimistic views about their reemployment chances, can find pathways to attain their reemployment goals, and are resilient to usual job search process setbacks.

The main question of this systematic review is: What is the effectiveness of psychological capital for promoting the job search process and getting a job?

For that purpose, this paper has three specific research questions concerned with the content of papers included in the systematic review grouped in two largest categories (descriptive – question 1, and content-related questions – 2 and 3):

1. What theories are applied to explain the relationship between psychological capital and the job search process?
2. What kind of relationships are between psychological capital and the job search process?
3. Did the psychological capital interventions positively influence the job search process?

2 Method: A Systematic PRISMA-P Literature Review of Psychological Capital and the Job Search Process

Before the review, the author developed a protocol according to best practice PRISMA-P reporting guidelines (Gessler & Siemer, 2020; Page et al., 2020) to choose the criteria for including or excluding studies. This protocol was registered on PROSPERO, The International Prospective Register for Systematic Reviews (ID: CRD42020187767).

2.1 Criteria for Including or Excluding Studies for the Review

The author followed the PICOS approach to operationalise the inclusion/exclusion criteria research questions.

Population: The author considered any studies focused on the job search process in the active population.

Intervention: The review should identify studies that examined the relationship between psychological capital and the job search process. A study could be included if: The psychological capital variable should follow the definition proposed by Luthans et al. (2007) exposed above (that is, understanding psychological capital as a tendency to hold cognitions and positive appraisals of one's ability accepted as a second-order construct composed of optimism, resilience, hope and self-efficacy) and, in case of an interventional study, corroborates the existence of a control group whereas a pre-test and post-test strategy.

Comparators: The author were interested in knowing how psychological capital is related to the job search process but did not intend to compare specific features of job seekers. Ideally, in the case of intervention studies, the author wanted to be able to compare groups who had been subject to a psychological capital intervention in the context of job search process with a control group who had not.

Outcomes: Studies were included if they measure a change in the job search process or employment status concerning participants' psychological capital levels. For quantitative studies, following De Silva et al. (2005), the author used the following method for grouping the results. Each effect estimated was grouped into one of three categories: a) A positive relationship between psychological capital and the job search process at least significant at the 5% level; b) no evidence of association (effect not statistically significant at 5% level); c) an inverse relationship between psychological capital and the job search process (effect estimates significant at least at 5% level).

Study design: The author included only quantitative research (cross-sectional, longitudinal, or interventional studies).

Other: The author included empirical research published in peer-reviewed journals. Also, the searches were restricted to English and Spanish language because the author could not

search beyond these. The searches were limited to papers published between 2007 and 2021. This decision was based on the view that psychological capital under Luthans et al. (2007) consideration was released starting in that year.

2.2 Search Strategy

The electronic searches were performed up to the 22nd December 2021 on the following databases: Academic Search Premier, Medline, Econlit, Education Source, PsycArticles, PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Psycodoc, Social Sciences Full Text, Social Sciences, Web of Science and Scopus. The search terms were developed based on the research questions and the inclusion/exclusion criteria detailed above. The terms used in the searches were the following: (Psychological Capital OR PsyCap) AND (Job Search OR unemployment OR reemployment).

2.3 Selection of Studies

The author aimed to identify all quantitative studies investigating the association between psychological capital and the job search process. The author sifted each paper's titles and abstracts independently against agreed criteria with a collaborator. Cohen's Kappa scores indicated a good level of agreement between the reviewers (Kappa = 0.84). In case of disagreement, it was resolved by discussion between the two reviewers.

Then, full papers were screened independently by two reviewers. Again, disagreements were resolved by discussion between the two reviewers. In this case, Cohen's Kappa scores indicated a good agreement between reviewers (Kappa = 0.89). Under these conditions, it were identified 161 records through the database search. Additionally, were identified another 2 records through a hand search and contacting directly to the author. In the following step of the search, 37 records were excluded because they were duplicated between the databases used. Next, after a detailed title and abstract shift, were excluded 108 records mainly because both variables (psychological capital and job search) did not appear in either the title or the abstract. For example, in some papers appeared job search and social capital (but not psychological capital), or appeared psychological capital but related to work-related variables and not to job search. Then, after an exhaustive full paper shift were excluded 6 records. Based on the PICO's strategy defined before, 2 of them were excluded because they did not follow the psychological capital definition by Luthans et al. (2007). Another 2 papers were entirely qualitative. One of them, even though contained job search and psychological capital in the abstract, its aims were not related to job search or labour insertion. And finally, in the last one, the authors did not work with psychological capital as a whole construct but with the four dimensions separately. Thus, after the data extraction followed during the process, the final number of records included in the systematic review was 11 (see Figure 1).

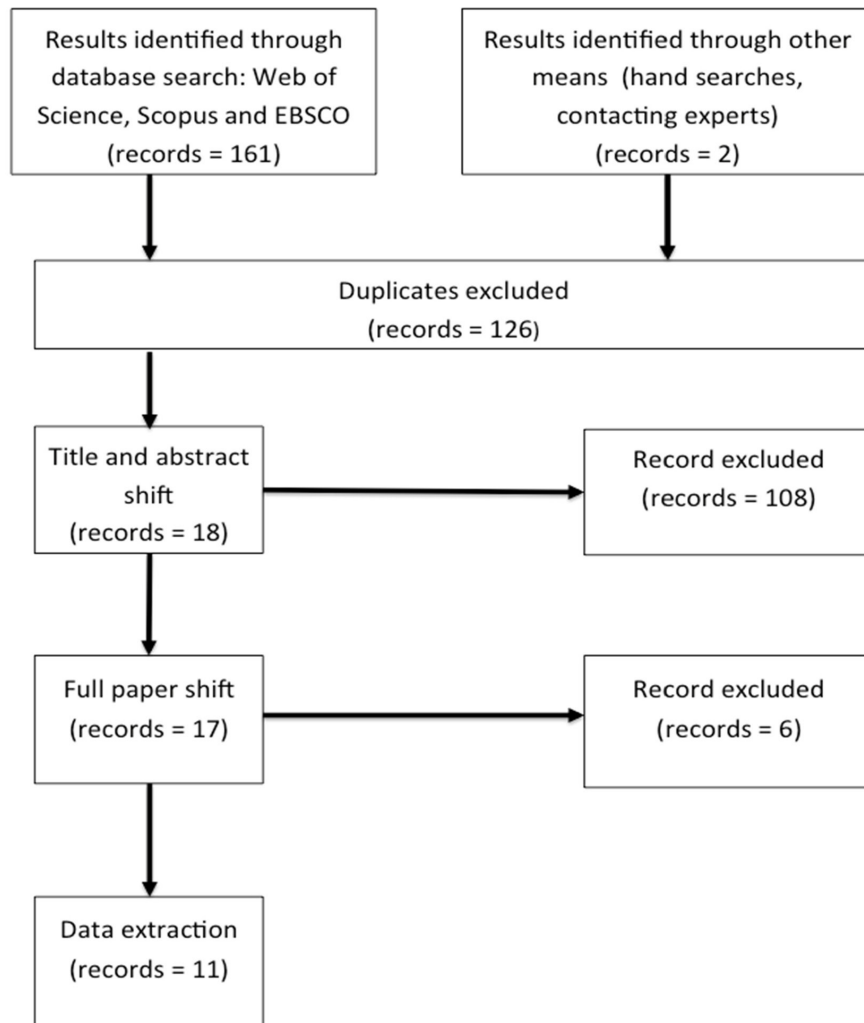


Figure 1: Selection of Studies

3 Results

Of the eleven studies reviewed, seven [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10] were carried out in unemployed samples. In contrast, one was implemented in a sample of active workers [1], and the other is a sample of displaced employees [7]. In another study, the participants were Syrian refugees in Greece and the Netherlands [8]. Finally, the sample of one of the studies was also composed

of labour counsellors and job seekers [11]. Additionally, three of the studies were an intervention [4, 5, 6], and of the eight remainders being purely quantitative, six were cross-sectional [2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11], and three were longitudinal (one of the articles performed two studies, one longitudinal and one intervention) [1, 4, 7]. Keeping in mind the research questions exposed above, next, the studies will be described (see Appendix Table 1).

3.1 Theories Applied

Firstly, regarding theories applied for explaining the relation between psychological capital and the job search process, the great majority of studies choose The Conservation of Resources Theory by Hobfoll (2001) [1, 4, 5, 7, 11]. Nevertheless, the rest of the studies are pretty divided as far as the choice of explanatory theory is concerned. Hence, the Reverse Causation Model by Kasl (1982) [2], the Job Demand Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014) [6], the Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2002) [8], and the Luthans' et al. (2007) Multidimensional Model [10] have been chosen by other studies. Finally, some authors combined the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 2001) with Seligman's (1972) Concept of Learned Helplessness [4] and the Crossover Model by Westman (2001) [11]. Also, one study applied the Theory of Planned Job Search Behavior (Van Hooft, 2016) and Vallerand's (1997) Hierarchical Model of Motivation [3]. It is also necessary to mention that one does not cite any theory [9].

3.2 Psychological Capital and the Job Search Process Association

Secondly, according to the main findings and outcomes of the studies examined, the literature review supports the significant associations between psychological capital and the job search process. However, the associations were mixed because of the wide range of outcomes found. Only one study has been carried out in a sample of active workers (Avey et al., 2009) [1]. It aimed to examine some implications for combating occupational stress. As far as psychological capital and the job search process is concerned, they showed a significant and negative association between psychological capital and voluntary turnover. Specifically, they found that combining positive psychological resources such as efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience could help employees to face occupational stress and, in turn, reduce their intentions to quit and their job search behaviours for finding another job.

Furthermore, a group of studies has analysed the associations between psychological capital and the job search process [2, 3, 8]. In all of them, the association was indirect. In one study [2], the authors distinguish between preparatory and active job search and relate them with psychological capital, perceived employability, and coping strategies among displaced employees in Singapur. The researchers observed a significant and positive associa-

tion between psychological capital and perceived employability. Likewise, those displaced employees with higher levels of psychological capital tend to perceive themselves as more employable than those with lower levels. Besides, their results suggest that psychological capital influences the job search process indirectly through perceived employability and coping strategies. Even in an adverse situation like unemployment, when job seekers have more positive prospects about their future, they will persevere harder in their job search process. Likewise, the study of Fernández-Valera et al. (2020) [3] showed that those unemployed youngsters who possessed high levels of psychological capital perceive more control over their job search process. The increase in perceived control over job search process was directly connected with their job search intention and will impact their final job search activities. In contrast with the previous study, the authors observed that psychological capital (in comparison with perceived employability) seems to be a more beneficial resource for keeping unemployed youngsters engaged in their job search process in an adverse economic context. Additionally, Pajic et al. (2018) [8] studied a sample of post-Syrian refugees in Greece and the Netherlands. They investigated the associations between psychological resources (e.g., psychological capital), career barriers, and job search self-efficacy. In line with the previous studies, their results showed that those participants with higher levels of psychological capital performed better in their job search process because of their career adaptability levels.

Another group of studies decided to focus on the job search outcomes as the employment status or the reemployment quality [4, 7]. Correspondingly, in Study 1 of Georgiou and Nikolaou (2019) [4], the authors linked the psychological capital with job search success in a sample of unemployed job seekers in Greece. Their results indicated that job search behaviour mediated the association between job seekers' psychological capital and the number of job offers, job interviews, and employment status after three months. Thus, the results of Lim et al. (2016) [7] provide additional support to the idea that psychological capital is also related to reemployment quality. They performed a study in a sample of displaced employees in Singapur to determine if financial difficulties and social exclusion could lead to job search fatigue. At the same time, psychological capital serves as a personal resource that reduces it. The authors observed that job search fatigue mediated the relationships between job seekers' social, financial, and psychological capital and their perceptions of reemployment quality. Job search success was estimated via affective commitment and intentions to stay within the new organisations after a year.

Concerning the studies [9, 10] that examined the role of psychological capital and unemployed job seekers' mental health, Rani (2015) [9] conducted a study in a sample of Indian unemployed people. The author exposed a positive and significant association between psychological capital levels and psychological well-being perceptions during unemployment. In line with this argument, Sabaitytė and Diržytė (2016) [10] also found positive and significant

correlations between psychological capital, life satisfaction, and self-compassion in Lithuanian youth unemployed people.

Lastly, Schmidt and Flatten (2021) [11] offer an original approach where job seekers' psychological capital is the outcome itself. Based on the crossover model, the authors examined if, because of the frequent interactions between employment counsellors (a formal tie) and job seekers, counsellors' psychological capital could cross over to job seekers to increase their psychological capital levels. The results indicate that job seekers acquire psychological capital by interacting with formal ties through the perceived social support from counsellors, which lowers their stress during unemployment.

Briefly, after evaluating the results of these papers as a whole, all of them have planned and shown a mediation model where psychological capital was related to job search related-outcomes (job search behaviour, active and preparatory job search, job search attitude, job search intention, job interviews, employment status, reemployment quality, job search self-efficacy and stress symptoms) through the influence of different mediators variables as perceived employability, job search strategies, job search fatigue, career adaptability and even the perceived social support of labour counsellors. None of the studies examined has shown a moderation model for explaining the association between psychological capital and job search. In general, these results indicate that those individuals with higher psychological capital are more confidently engaged and persistent in their job search behaviour as well as the quality of reemployment is also affected. Following the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 2001) this effect could be mostly due to their resource availability and coping strategies. Also following Vallerand's Hierarchical Model of Motivation (1997), psychological capital (a global-level motivator factor) impacts the job search process (a situational-level motivator factor) through mediator variables (e.g., perceived employability or career adaptability) categorized as contextual-level motivator factors.

3.3 Psychological Capital Intervention

Thirdly, regarding the interventional studies [4, 5, 6], the results generally support that psychological capital interventions positively influence the job search process.

Notably, two of them [4, 5] applied the validated Psychological Capital Intervention (PCI) training model developed by Luthans et al. (2006) to a group of job seekers registered in a business school career office and a recruitment agency. The findings suggested that psychological capital could be developed among job seekers through the PCI training model. Moreover, the results indicated that half of the people who participated in the PCI training found employment earlier than the control group participants. However, in the Georgiou and Nikolaou (2019) study [4], the control group participants also increased their Psychological

Capital levels. Nevertheless, both studies provide evidence of the usefulness of PCI training in the job search context (Georgiou et al., 2021).

Concerning the remaining study compressed in this category [6], Hulshof et al. (2020) designed the Job Search Demand-Resources (JSD-R) intervention based on the Job Demand Resources Model. It aimed to enhance the levels of reemployment crafting (understood as the self-initiated job search behaviours undertaken by the unemployed) and the psychological capital of unemployed people to increase well-being, job search behaviour, and reemployment chances. The results showed that the proposed intervention enhanced reemployment crafting and psychological capital levels. Hence, the JSD-R intervention could protect the well-being and foster job search behaviour. Remarkably, the intervention prevented decreased motivation while searching for a job. Also, it was responsible for increasing personal goal attainment, career exploration, and networking quality. Nevertheless, the authors could not show a significant effect of the intervention on reemployment status six months after.

4 Discussion

The present review aimed to explore the association between psychological capital and the job search process. This systematic review sought answers to the three questions exposed above.

Concerning the first question as the descriptive category, the Conservation of Resources Theory by Hobfoll (2001) was found to be the most applied one for explaining the association between psychological capital and the job search process, either alone or combined with other theoretical models. Hobfoll (2001) exposed the idea of "resources caravan" for defending that some psychological concepts are better understood as representing a global multi-dimensional factor. In line with this argument, Luthans et al. (2007) began to lay the foundations of the psychological capital construct and its synergy between the four dimensions. In addition to serving as a foundation for the construction of psychological capital, the loss and gaining resources cycle exposed in the Conservation of Resources Theory has been used to explain the impact of psychological capital in the job search context.

About the content-related questions category, concerning the second question, on the one hand, the association between psychological capital and the job search process is well-established. As only one study has been carried out in an employees sample, psychological capital has been found as a positive and significant antecedent of perceived employability, coping job search strategies, perceived control over job search, job search intensity, and job search self-efficacy. On the other hand, psychological capital has also significantly impacted job search success. Those participants with greater levels of psychological capital received more job offers, job interviews, and even higher quality jobs than those with low psychological capital levels. Psychological capital can also be seen as a personal resource able to protect

job seekers' well-being and prospects in the face of difficulties when looking for a job. In that line, some studies have exposed a significant and positive relationship between psychological capital with psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and self-compassion of job seekers. Lastly, an exciting finding put in great value the role of labour counsellors. A recent study exposed that job seekers could acquire higher levels of psychological capital by simply the formal interaction and perceived social support from their employment agency counsellors. In the studies analyzed, the association between psychological capital and the job search process was indirect, as it was mediated by perceived employability, voluntary turnover, job search activities, job search fatigue, career adaptability and social support from job seekers' counsellors.

Finally, about the third question, only three studies have performed an interventional design to improve psychological capital and examine its impact on the job search process. One of the tremendous psychological capital interests is it has been argued that its components are states open to change and development and therefore could be developed through training programs. Nonetheless, only two studies have investigated the Psychological Capital Intervention (Luthans et al., 2006) in the job search context. Their results suggest that those who participated in the experimental group increased their level of psychological capital and even found a job earlier than the control group. The remaining study proposes an intervention based on the Job Demand Resources Model, whose one of its outcomes is increasing job seekers' psychological capital. The results showed increased psychological capital, job seekers' motivation, and job search perseverance.

5 Gaps in the Literature and Future Research

This systematic review provides a helpful picture of what areas require more investigation regarding the impact of psychological capital on the job search context. The following areas are worthy of more discussion and research: theoretical development, psychological capital and job search outcomes, and fostering psychological capital interventions.

Firstly, all the studies reviewed cover relevant literature in their introduction section. One of the problems faced by most studies on the job search process is that empirical research has not been accompanied by a parallel development of the theory in this specific area. That could be why most of the studies analysed in this review have applied psychological theories developed in domains other than the job search process. Thus it is necessary to promote direct observation of the job search process to offer psychological theories arising directly from the object of study. Therefore, this would offer a more accurate explanation of the underlying mechanism of the relationship between psychological capital and the job search process.

Secondly, one of the difficulties detected during this systematic review is the lack of homogeneity when discussing the job search process. Almost every study has adopted a different way of analysing it. To face the lack of homogeneity next is offered different suggestions. Firstly, it is essential to consider examining the job search process from quantitative and quality paths. In this regard, along with the different scales for measuring the job search process from a quantitative perspective, a recent study has developed a scale for measuring job search quality to optimise the process of looking for a job (Van Hooft et al., 2022). Maybe, future studies could apply a double perspective. Secondly, it is also important to point out the need of unifying the consideration of job search success. When could someone say the job search process has been successful? If the job seeker has been able to dedicate a lot of time to looking for a job? If the job seekers have finally gotten the job? Or for example, if the job seeker has maintained the job for a long time? From the point, of view of the author, a more concise definition of job search success is also essential.

Thirdly, the impact of psychological capital interventions on reemployment status needs further investigation. Only three studies have implemented an interventional design. Only two have been based on the Psychological Capital Intervention (Luthans et al., 2006). Bearing in mind that great interest of psychological capital is the possibility of its development through intervention and the promising results of previous research, it is necessary to promote interventional studies in different contexts and populations.

The present systematic review has highlighted the association of psychological capital and the job search process. The results presented in this study could have important implications for job seekers and public and private employment agencies. The main practical implication is the necessity of fostering the job seekers' psychological capital development.

It is concluded that psychological capital may be an outstanding advantage for helping job seekers engage in their job search. Nevertheless, although psychological capital has experienced substantial growth since its emergence a little over a decade ago, it is necessary to continue contributing to its development through research to answer the questions still open. Particularly, there is still considerable scope for improvement in the study of psychological capital and the job search process in terms of the study design applied, the variables studied, and the theoretical background used to explain the previous relationship.

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Ethics statement

An ethics statement is not applicable because this study is based exclusively on retrieve and synthesise data from already published studies.

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Appendix

Table 1: Description of Papers Included in the Systematic Review

| No | Author (s) & Year | Study Design | Sample | Theory Applied | Main Findings/Outcomes |
|----|--------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| 1 | Avey et al. (2009) | Analytical and comparative, Observational and Longitudinal | Working adults from a wide variety of jobs and industries (N = 416) | Psychological Resources Theory | The study findings indicate that employees' Psychological Capital has a significant negative relationship with their intentions to quit and job search behaviours, both indicators of voluntary turnover. |
| 2 | Chen & Lim (2012) | Analytical and comparative, Observational and Cross-Sectional | Unemployed adults with at least tertiary education completed (N = 179) | Reverse Causation Model | The relationship between psychological capital and preparatory and active job search was mediated by perceived employability and problem-focused coping. |
| 3 | Fernández-Valera et al. (2020) | Analytical and comparative, Observational and Cross-Sectional | Unemployed youngsters (N = 459) | Theory of Planned Job Search Behavior and Vallerand's Hierarchical Model of Motivation | Results showed that job seekers who possess high levels of psychological capital have a higher perception of control over their job search process, directly linked with the amount of time they spend looking for a job. Analyses also revealed that psychological capital seems to be a more beneficial resource for keeping unemployed youngsters engaged in job search in an adverse economic context instead of perceived employability. |
| 4 | Georgiou & Niko-lau (2019) | Study 1: Analytical and Comparative, Observational and Longitudinal Study 2: Analytical and Comparative, Interventional (Quasi-experimental design) | Unemployed job seekers. [Study 1: N = 447; Study 2: Treatment group (N = 220) and Control group (N = 141)] | Conservation of Resources Theory and Seligman's concept of learned helplessness. | Study 1: Psychological capital was positively and significantly related to job search behaviour. Therefore, job search behaviour mediated the relationships between psychological capital and job search outcomes. Study 2: Job seekers who received the psychological capital training intervention demonstrated an increase in psychological capital levels compared to the participants in the control group. However, the control group also demonstrated some change in psychological capital levels. |
| 5 | Georgiou et al. (2021) | Analytical and Comparative, Interventional (Quasi-experimental design) | Unemployed job seekers. (Treatment group: N = 220 Control group: N = 447) | Conservation of Resources Theory | Participants who received the Psychological Capital Intervention training had higher job search behaviour levels than participants in the control group. In this sense, results demonstrate significant and positive effects of the training intervention on job search behaviour three months following the intervention compared to the control group. |

| | | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| 6 | Hulshof et al. (2020) | Analytical and Comparative, Interventional (Quasi-experimental design) | Unemployed job seekers. (Treatment group: N = 146; Control group: N = 275) | Job Demands-Resources Model | The results show that the proposed intervention could protect the well-being and foster job-search behaviour. More specifically, not only was the intervention able to enhance levels of reemployment crafting and psychological capital among participants, but the analyses also showed that both constructs were responsible for the changes observed in job search performance. |
| 7 | Lim et al. (2016) | Analytical and Comparative, Observational and Longitudinal | Displaced Employees (Time 1: N = 180; Time 2: N = 89) | Conservation of Resources Theory | On the one hand, financial difficulties and social exclusion were positively and significantly related to fatigue, while psychological capital was negatively and significantly related. On the other hand, Time 1 fatigue mediated the relationships between financial difficulties, social exclusion and psychological capital with Time 2 reemployment quality. |
| 8 | Pajic et al. (2018) | Analytical and Comparative, Observational and Cross-Sectional | Post-2014 Syrian refugees in Greece and the Netherlands (N = 330) | Career Construction Theory | This study shows how psychological capital represents an antecedent of Job Search Self Efficacy through its impact on career adaptability. In line with this, individuals who are more hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and assured in accomplishing the goals they set for themselves are also more confident in engaging in job search behaviour in the destination country. |
| 9 | Rani (2015) | Analytical and Comparative, Observational and Cross-Sectional | Unemployed Youth (N = 375) | No related | The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between psychological capital and psychological well-being between Indian unemployed youth. |
| 10 | Sabaityte & Diržytė (2016) | Analytical and Comparative, Observational and Cross-Sectional | Young Unemployed People (N = 80) | Luthans' et al. (2007) multidimensional model (PsyCap) | This study showed significant correlations between psychological capital, self-compassion and life satisfaction of unemployed youth. |
| 11 | Schmidt & Flatten (2021) | Analytical and Comparative, Observational and Cross-Sectional (Dyadic and multilevel design) | Counselors and unemployed job seekers from a branch office of an employment agency. (Counselors: N = 45; Job seekers: N = 209) | Conservation of resources theory and the Crossover Model | The results highlighted that job seekers acquire certain levels of psychological capital by interacting with their employment agencies counsellors. Furthermore, they show that the crossover of psychological capital within formal ties occurs indirectly through perceived counsellors' social support. |