CHAPTER 1

Psychological determinants of career development in a changing labour market

An introduction
The labour market in the Netherlands has gone through considerable changes over the past few decades. Prior to these changes, like in many Western countries, lifetime employment had been the norm for many years and an individual career was often spent working within a single or a limited number of organizations (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). It was usual rather than exceptional to remain in the same job for 25 years or longer, and many Dutch employers cared for their employees from ‘the cradle to the grave’. Work settings were organized according to detailed prescriptive regulations as opposed to the broad goals and wide-ranging parameters that are more common today. Technological developments and globalization, among other factors, have led to more job insecurity and instability in employment contracts in recent years. It is currently difficult in the Netherlands to secure a permanent contract and many people work under temporary contracts. Moreover, even permanent contracts today are not as stable as they were in the twentieth century (Nauta, 2012). Since the global economic crisis began in 2008, organizational downsizings and closures have resulted in involuntary job losses for many adult workers not only in the Netherlands but also in other Western countries. In the Netherlands the current unemployment figure stands at 469,000 (i.e., 6% of the Dutch labour force) (CBS, 2016). Consequently, searching for jobs has become a common experience in people’s working life (Liu, Wang, Liao, & Shi, 2014).

Another important change in the labour market is the Dutch government’s decision gradually to abolish early retirement, to increase the retirement age from 65 to 67, and to link the retirement age to the development of life expectancy from 2021 onwards. These measures have constrained the ability of employees to leave the labour market and to retire early, even when they have difficulty meeting the demands of their job in today's labour market (Henkens, Van Solinge, Damman, & Dingemans, 2016). In addition, the content of most jobs has changed and people are required to perform at work in a more result-oriented way. In other words, reaching goals at the organizational, team, and personal level has become an important feature of current work settings. Finally, new technologies have not only changed the way in which people work, but also the expectations about work and the workplace held by employers and organizations. Technology makes it possible for employees to be available at all times and consequently employers expect this from employees, resulting in social changes at work (Weinberg, 2005).
In this new environment, employees need to determine a hierarchy of work-related values and accordingly, a job should serve these needs (Weinberg, 2005). Organizations therefore are expected to provide an infrastructure for their human capital including, for instance, career paths and learning and development. As a result of these changes, demands have increased with respect to people’s competencies and interpersonal relationships at work. Therefore, for many if not all people, it will become necessary to ‘keep up’ with their skills or profession (Schippers, 2015). Moreover, diversity in the life courses of individuals as well as changes in the demographics of the labour market make necessary a variety of instruments that can help people to choose new directions in their life and in regard to the labour market. This will provide the opportunity for people continuously to adapt their careers to their personal circumstances, and integrate work and family demands (Lewis, 2003; Schippers, 2001).

In order to remain healthy, flexible, and competitive, it is essential for organizations to attract the best qualified employees and to match them to jobs to which they are best suited. Many employers value soft skills as well as technical skills, but often find it difficult to attract candidates who meet these requirements (Robles, 2012). Values such as work orientation and work ethic are regarded as essential qualities that enable employees to be successful in today’s labour market (Hill & Petty, 1995). These values are acquired through experiences and relationships with others, and frequently parents are considered to be the most important relationship in this respect (Grusec, 2002). Values influence behaviour and goals, and are reflected in normative standards used to judge and choose among alternative behaviours (Latham & Pinder, 2004). Work orientation refers to values, expectations, and feelings that workers bring to the work situation (Calhoun, 2002). One’s work ethic implies not only how one feels about work but also how one deals with one’s responsibilities (Perkumienė & Kleinienė, 2012).

According to many theorists, it is a central life task for adults to work effectively from adulthood to retirement (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). In today’s labour market, this issue has become more relevant than ever. Not only are organizations searching for ways to best facilitate work motivation and create conditions to promote employee’s health, employees themselves are also held responsible for remaining employable and healthy. To survive in a dynamic labour market the employee him/herself also has to be dynamic (Nauta, 2012).
Currently, employees are increasingly viewed as proactive and relational agents who are able to influence their own adaptive outcomes by self-regulating, planning, exerting self-control, and pursuing goals proactively (Karoly, Boekaerts, & Maes, 2005; Morf, 2006). Changes and developments at work offer people the opportunity to grow and develop. However, not every person seems equally able to deal with these challenges. It is important to investigate the psychological processes that underlie why some people adapt easily and others fear or avoid these challenges.

This dissertation investigates different variables related to the challenges that people experience at work in today’s labour market. It is assumed that attachment to others plays an important role in these challenges. In addition, it is supposed that the development of work values begins early in life and is influenced by the parent-child relationship. Ideally, this parent-child relationship includes warmth, attachment, and reciprocity and these aspects all contribute to the development of the individual. The attachment system will be activated in times of stress or the exploration of new situations such as applying for another job. However, for many people applying for a job is a difficult process and requires that they are able to self-regulate their own behaviour in order to be successful.

Self-regulation is one of the key elements that can aid understanding of human behaviour and cognition in all domains of life, including work life. The ability to self-regulate is a powerful and necessary skill enabling people to deal successfully with many facets of life, including life transitions (McLelland, Ponitz, Messersmith, & Tominey, 2010). Self-regulation has been described from different perspectives in organizational research. One of these theoretical perspectives is derived from cybernetic control formulations of self-regulation processes (Kanfer, 2005). In these models, self-regulation involves three key components: 1) setting goals, or the processes by which people determine which goals to pursue, 2) monitoring one’s own behaviour in relation to these goals, or the processes by which people evaluate the degree to which they are making progress towards achieving their goals, and 3) changing one’s attitude, thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and environment in order to achieve these goals (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Carver & Scheier, 2000; Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2011). Goals may be chosen by the individual or assigned to them as a result of their environment or circumstances (Righetti, 2012). When self-regulation fails, procrastination
may occur. Procrastination seems to be on the rise in Western countries and appears to influence negatively several work-related issues, including job search processes.

Furthermore, given the fact that one of the challenges of today’s labour market is to remain healthy and employable for a longer period, self-regulation of one’s mental health has become an important issue for many employees. Currently, burnout at work is one of the biggest psychosocial problems in the Netherlands. Of all employees 14% experienced burnout symptoms in the year 2014, and this figure was 15% for those between the age of 45-55, and 16.1% for those in the age group of 55-65 (CBS, 2015). Burnout can lead to absenteeism and substantial healthcare costs. It is important to understand the mechanisms that lead to work-related burnout in order to move towards working conditions that lower the frequency of burnout.

The remainder of this introduction is made up as follows: In section 1.1, a brief overview is given of the research that guides two of the chapters in this dissertation, attachment theory and the literature on attachment styles in work settings. Thereafter, sections 1.2 to 1.5 provide an overview of each empirical chapter in this dissertation. In section 1.2, the relationship between attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety and job search behaviour is described. Section 1.3 briefly describes the influence of the relationship with an individual’s parents at the age of 15 on the development of work values. In section 1.4, the relationship between procrastination and the job search process is outlined. In section 1.5, the relationship between burnout and older worker’s intentions to retire early is considered.

1.1 Attachment theory
Attachment theory states that at an early stage in life children develop an emotional relationship with at least one primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1969/1982). The attachment system works in a goal-directed manner to achieve the set-goal of proximity in which a child evaluates the progress he or she is making and adapts the behaviour to produce the most effective action sequence (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). The elements of goal-directed behaviour in this system are included in all models of cybernetic control systems of self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). Efforts to attain proximity and achieve perceived security are important aspects in people’s lives, along with the maintenance and promotion of mental health, interpersonal functioning, and psychological growth (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).
Attachment theory has become an important framework for understanding interpersonal processes and the importance of self-regulation at work (Fuendeling, 1998; Simmons, Gooty, Nelson, & Little, 2009). Bowlby (1969/1982) viewed the attachment behavioural system as a motivational system, in which people who are being threatened, have an inner drive to adapt to a greater or lesser extent to changes in the environment. The attachment system becomes especially active in times of threat. The theory distinguishes between the ‘secure’ and the ‘insecure’ styles of attachment. The ‘secure’ base allows an infant to leave the caregiver and to explore the environment in comfort. Doing so offers a child the possibility of building a sense of confidence and of acquiring appropriate resources to deal with whatever is encountered in life (Little, Nelson, Wallace, & Johnson, 2011). ‘Insecure’ attachment is rooted in experiences in which caregivers are not available emotionally (which leads to an avoidance style of attachment) or in which caregivers react inconsistently to children’s needs (which leads to an attachment style characterized by anxiety). In times of stress, children with an avoidance attachment style tend to avoid proximity and contact with their parent(s), whereas anxiously attached children are constantly looking for excessive contact and proximity with their parent(s) (Cummings & Cummings, 2002).

Early attachment security provides people with a sense of confidence in exploring their environment and learning. Bowlby (1988) viewed the concept of a secure base as crucial to understanding healthy emotional development. The attachment system continues throughout the life span, remains active in adolescent and adult life, and seems to be relatively constant or stable (Fraley, 2002; Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Repeated experiences in which the primary attachment figure is or is not available may have an enduring effect on intra psychic organization and interpersonal behaviour (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). Insecure attachment can have a profound effect on the life of both adolescents and adults. For instance, in a longitudinal study of children initially aged 13, Doyle and Markiewicz (2005) found both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety to be associated with decreases in self-esteem over time. Insecure attachment was significantly related with depression, anxiety, and worry in a study of parental attachment in late adolescence (Vivona, 2000). In adulthood, insecure attachment may result in an increase in interpersonal and intergroup conflict (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).
Hazan and Shaver (1990) broadened the theory of attachment styles to apply it to the workplace, especially to the idea that adult attachment supports work activity in a similar way as infant attachment supports exploration. Both the results of their study and subsequent research have shown various relationships between adult attachment styles and work-related variables. For example, more securely attached people report a relatively positive approach to work and do not allow their work to jeopardize their health or relationships. In contrast, insecure attachment has been related to burnout (Pines, 2004; Ronen & Mikulincer, 2009; Simmons et al., 2009; Vanheule & Declercq, 2009), anxiety about work performance (Hardy & Barkham, 1994), poor adjustment to work, difficulties at work and in finishing work projects (Hazan & Shaver, 1990), and procrastination (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). However, despite the growing interest in the application of attachment theory to work settings, relatively little research on attachment focuses on adult workers (e.g., Harms, 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Krausz, Bizman, & Braslavsky, 2001; Richards & Schat, 2011; Schirmer & Lopez, 2001; Towler & Stuhlmacher, 2013).

1.2 Attachment and job search behaviour
In the study presented in Chapter 2 the relationship between attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and four different job search variables was investigated (job search intention, job search self-efficacy, job search self-esteem, and job search attitude). Respondents were 180 employees of an international technical organization in the Netherlands who lost their job due to closing a part of the company. The central research question was whether attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety in employees who have lost their job has a negative effect on subsequent job search processes. Attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety were measured in relation to three different attachment relationships (attachment to the mother at the age of 15, attachment to the father at the age of 15, and attachment to the partner). Attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety can influence self-evaluations such as job search self-efficacy, job search self-esteem, and job search attitude. In turn, these variables might affect job search intention. Therefore, another aim of this study was to investigate whether these variables mediated the relationship between attachment avoidance as well as attachment anxiety, and job search intention.

Applying for a new job is a goal-oriented and dynamic process in which self-regulation is an important aspect that enables the candidate to be successful
in finding another job. People have to set employment goals, monitor their behaviour, and change their strategies in response to direct or indirect self-assessment or feedback from the environment (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Krantowitz, 2001). In their meta-analytical review, Kanfer et al. (2001) found that job search behaviour was positively related to reemployment. Higher levels of job search intensity were associated with shorter job searches and successes in finding another job, although these relationships were stronger for laid-off individuals than for new entrants to the labour market or employed people who were looking for another job. Van Hooft, Wanberg, and Van Hoye (2012) defined the quality of the job search process as “the extent to which a job search is self-regulated, that is, the extent to which a job search is conducted by cycling through the four sequential self-regulatory phases of goal establishment, planning of the goal pursuit, goal striving, and reflection” (p. 10).

Although the job search process may seem simple because the end-goal is well-defined, people have to find a job, the process is uncertain and long-lasting because it can be unclear which actions will lead to success (Knaus, Klarreich, Grieger, & Knaus, 2010). Zikic and Saks (2009) described job search behaviour from a social cognitive theoretical perspective that considers self-related processes such as self-efficacy and goals as important elements contributing to one’s personal motivation to self-regulate one’s performance. These authors investigated the relationships between job search self-efficacy and job search intention, and between job search clarity and job search intensity. Job search self-efficacy relates to people’s confidence that they are able to enhance successful job search behaviour (Van Hooft, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2005; Zikic & Saks, 2009). According to Wanberg, Hough, and Song (2002) job search clarity is the extent to which people have clear ideas of the job they desire. They found job search self-efficacy to be positively related to job search intention and job search clarity to be a significant predictor of job search intensity.

Attachment theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding individual differences in the job search process. Nevertheless, attachment styles have not yet been subject to research with respect to the prediction of job search behaviour. Individual attachment orientations may increase or decrease one’s confidence in one’s personality and skills and one’s ability to maintain a sense of trust in oneself even under threatening situations such as job loss or unemployment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). Attachment styles have been
associated with many important aspects of human health and functioning, including occupational functioning. Indeed, numerous studies have shown the importance of attachment styles in work related issues (i.e., Harms, 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Little et al., 2011; Richards & Schat, 2011). The study in Chapter 2 builds on earlier work that links early attachment to phenomena in adulthood. Moreover, it expands this line of research to the work domain by exploring attachment style as another individual characteristic in the job search process. It thereby enhances our understanding of this process and the results may support career counsellors to develop effective interventions to strengthen employees’ job search skills and attitudes in preventing long-term unemployment. To examine this issue further, the following research questions were formulated: a) To what extent do attachment styles significantly predict job search variables? b) Do job search variables mediate the relationship between attachment styles and job search intention?

1.3 Relationship with parents and work orientation and work ethic

In Chapter 3, the relationship with one’s parents at the age of 15, as a proxy for attachment styles, is examined in relation to people’s work orientation and work ethic. In this study data were obtained from a large survey (N = 3841) conducted as part of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) (Dykstra et al., 2012). The central question in this chapter is whether a positive relationship with one’s parents is related to a more positive work orientation and a stronger work ethic. These work values are important parameters of success in today’s labour market. Children’s attitudes towards work are influenced by their parents’ work attitude and are in part a result of the parent-child relationship. People do not function in a social vacuum. Values and attitudes develop in a relational context either with their parents or within current relationships (Kinniburgh, Blautstein, Spinazzola, & Van Der Kolk, 2005; Sanders & Mazzucchelli, 2013) and are a hallmark of successful socialization (Barni, Ranieri, Scabini, & Rosnati, 2011). Attachment to others might evolve into internalized goals and ambitions (Flum, 2001). According to social cognitive theory, people internalize behavioural standards via socialization (Bandura, 1986) and these standards guide behaviour by monitoring that behaviour, as well its determinants and effects (Bandura, 1991). Socialization refers to “the way in which individuals are assisted in the acquisitions of skills necessary to function successfully as members of their social group” (Grusec, 2002, p. 143).
Internalization of values is a complex reciprocal process wherein parents and children continuously influence each other’s beliefs, values, and practices (De Mol, Lemmens, Verhofstadt, & Kuczynski, 2013). Adolescence is an important phase for the transmission of values from parents to children because identity development takes place in this period. Voluntary acceptance of values and standards allows self-regulation and the ability to resist one action in favor of another (Barni et al., 2011; Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). For instance, self-regulatory mechanisms such as guilt and shame prevent people from behaving unethically at work (Klebe Treviño, Den Nieuwboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014). In addition to one’s parents, relationships with others such as partners or colleagues, may contribute to the development of values. In Chapter 3, research on work values in the workplace was expanded, with the aim of responding to the following research questions: a) Do people with a more positive relationship with their parents have more positive work values? b) To what extent does the relationship with one’s partner mediate this relationship?

1.4 Procrastination and individual differences in the job search process
In Chapter 4, procrastination in outplacement situations was investigated. Procrastination literally means: ‘putting of until tomorrow’. In this chapter the central questions were whether individual difference variables were negatively related to procrastination and whether both these variables and procrastination were related to finding another job. Procrastination is seen in the literature as an inability to self-regulate (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1996). People who procrastinate seem to have more difficulty applying the different components of self-regulation than those who procrastinate less. Procrastination might be viewed as a defensive interference in the self-regulatory process to protect oneself from future dissatisfaction and negative affect. In addition, the behaviour limits personal growth and undermines successful adaption to goals and situations (Zimmerman, 2000). In modern Western countries procrastination seems to increase because these societies impose many commitments and deadlines (Steel, 2007). This is a serious problem because the behaviour can have a profoundly negative effect on health, career, and environment. Procrastination was referred to even in ancient times. Around 800 BC, Hesiod provided one of the earliest mentions of procrastination:
‘Do not put your work off till tomorrow and the day after; for a sluggish worker does not fill his barn, nor one who puts off his work: industry makes work go well, but a man who puts off work is always at hand-grips with ruin. (Works and Days, l.413)’

In relation to the job search process, procrastination may create problems in finding another job. Self-regulation is important in increasing the probability of successfully finding a new job. For instance, in a job search people need to set goals for how much time they are willing to spend on looking for a vacancy, and they have to plan and monitor their actions, and evaluate their progress in reaching goals. Although many individual characteristics related to the job search process have been investigated, research on the relationship between personality factors, procrastination, and the job search process is limited. In a meta-analytic and theoretical review of procrastination, Steel (2007) found that people who procrastinate are more often unemployed than people who do not. Wanberg, Zhu, and Van Hooft (2010) investigated action-state orientation as an index of self-regulation among unemployed people. Action-state orientation reflects the ability to initiate and commit to actions and prioritize the implementation of tasks, and is characteristic of the opposite of procrastination. They found that when unemployed people had a higher action-state orientation, they were more actively looking for a new job over a time period of three weeks.

In Chapter 4, the relation between several individual difference variables (locus of control, professional self-efficacy, job search self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and positive fear of failure) and procrastination was investigated. In the job search process, some people may feel less confident about themselves when applying for a new job and may therefore have a tendency to procrastinate when undertaking job search activities. Subsequently, this might lead these people to experience more problems in finding another job than those who do not procrastinate. Therefore, we also examined whether procrastination mediated the relationships between these individual difference variables and reemployment success. From the literature, there seems to exist a relationship between procrastination as a form of self-regulation failure and the job search process. In this dissertation this issue will be further examined through an investigation of the following research questions: a) Do different personality variables significantly predict procrastination? b) To what extent are
these personality variables and procrastination related to finding another job, and does procrastination mediate the relationship between these variables and finding another job?

1.5 **Burnout and older worker’s intentions to retire early**

In Chapter 5, the relationship between job characteristics, social support, and burnout among older workers is investigated. The central question is whether there is a relationship between burnout and work characteristics and the intention of older workers to retire. Burnout is defined as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, increased cynicism with respect to one’s job, and a lack of accomplishment at work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The ‘conservation of resources’ (COR) theory is a theoretical model that seeks to explain what causes burnout (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). A key element of the COR theory is the idea that people have an innate drive to protect resources that are related to survival and well-being (for instance attachment to significant others and self-esteem) (Gorgievski & Hobfoll, 2008). The theory also posits that job demands and factors that are seen as opportunities (job resources), determine people’s motivation to take part in the workforce. The work environment and characteristics of the job, such as the degree of autonomy, challenge, and growth potential (resources) as well as the workload and physical aspects of the job (demands) play a large part in explaining burnout (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004).

A second theoretical model used in research on burnout is the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). This model assumes that burnout develops when the job demands are high and the job resources are limited. Job demands are the physical, social, and organizational aspects of a job that require constant physical and mental effort and are therefore associated with psychological costs (such as exhaustion or depletion of energy) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources are factors that may contribute to the achievement of personal goals and that help to reduce the demands of the job and stimulate personal growth and development (Demerouti et al., 2001). Besides personal characteristics, burnout is also influenced by social and environmental factors, for instance, supervisor support or work climate (Demerouti et al., 2001; Halbesleben, 2006; Kenny & McIntry, 2005). The emergence of burnout is multifaceted and assumed to be linked to continuous changes in one’s job and to the work environment (Kickul & Posig, 2001; Maslach, 2000; Shirom, 2003). The process of psychological withdrawal
from the job and decreased productivity has extensively been studied in relation to burnout, but little attention has been paid to (early) retirement. In this study, we investigated whether a relationship exists between the burnout dimensions exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment and the retirement intentions of older workers. In this dissertation the relationships between job characteristics, social support, and burnout among older employees was investigated, along with the extent to which these variables contributed to the intention to retire early. In order to examine these issues, the following questions were asked: a) To what extent do older workers experience burnout, and how can we explain this? b) To what extent does burnout have an impact on the intentions of older workers to retire early?
References


