CHAPTER 6

Summary, conclusions, and future research
Until recently, many employees worked their entire life for the same organization, and employers considered the welfare of their personnel from the day they joined until the day they retired. However, the labour market in the Netherlands has changed considerably over the past few decades, and numerous employees have felt the consequences of these changes. Business closures, downsizing, and restructuring have led to job losses for many. Other factors have also contributed to an unstable labour market, for instance the transfer of jobs to low-wage countries with the consequential increasing losses of lower-level paid jobs. In addition, the flexibility of the labour market has led to an increase in the number of people with two or more jobs, and for many people job security is a utopia. Furthermore, measures taken by the Dutch government to increase the retirement age and the removal of protections against dismissal have also made the labour market less stable.

In general, employees have responsibility for their careers in order to remain healthy and to be able to work until retirement. These developments may be the reason why many working people in the Netherlands experience symptoms of psychological illness. Burnout is currently viewed as one of the main causes of work-related psychological ill health and sick leave. About 1 million Dutch citizens have reported burnout complaints and among these are many relatively young people between 25 and 35 years (17%). Organizations have become more complex and their organizational structures and work processes are constantly changing. To survive in today's labour market, both employees and employers need to be flexible and agile if they are to adapt to these changes. As a consequence, employees must take more responsibility for the course of their careers than they did in years gone by. At the same time, organizations are supposed to be more dynamic to adjust to processes in the market: the demands are not easy for either group.

In this dissertation, four studies were presented aiming to examine from different perspectives, the consequences of some of the challenges faced by employees in today's labour market. In Chapter 2, it was considered whether attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety of employees who lost their job had a negative effect on the job search process. In Chapter 3, the question was whether a positive relationship with one's parents was related to a more positive work orientation and a stronger work ethic. In Chapter 4, the central issue was whether individual difference variables were negatively related to procrastination and whether these variables and procrastination were related to
finding another job. Finally, in Chapter 5 it was considered whether there was a relationship between burnout and intention to retire in older workers.

The outline of this Chapter is as follows: In section 6.1, the results of the different studies described in this dissertation are summarized. Section 6.2 contains a general discussion of the results of the different studies, as well as suggestions for future research. Finally, in section 6.3 some practical implications of the results of this dissertation are discussed.

6.1 Summaries and research findings

Attachment and job search behaviour
The study in Chapter 2 was a survey of 180 employees in an international technical organization in the Netherlands who lost their job due to the closure of part of the company. Respondents were invited to fill out an online questionnaire. It was examined whether attachment styles influenced: 1) job search intention, 2) job search self-efficacy, 3) job search self-esteem, and 4) job search attitude. It was hypothesized that both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety are negatively related to job search variables, and that job search self-efficacy, job search self-esteem, and job search attitude would mediate between attachment styles and job search intention.

The results indicate that avoidantly attached individuals had lower intentions to search for a job. In addition, these people were less convinced that they could successfully undertake job search behaviour, and that their attitude towards this process was more negative. However, avoidant attachment did not influence their feelings of self-worth with regard to the job search process. In addition, avoidant attachment negatively influenced the attitude toward the job search process, which resulted in their looking for another job to a lesser degree. Furthermore, it was found that attachment avoidance had a negative effect on the belief that one could successfully perform the job search behaviour, and this in turn led to a lower intention to look for a job. Together, these findings suggest that attachment avoidance is associated with dysfunctional attitudes toward the job search process.

Counter to expectations, no relationships were found between attachment anxiety and the different job search variables. Although anxiously attached
people fear being rejected by others, when they have to apply for another job this does not seem either to have an impact on their self-esteem or to result in negative attitudes towards this process. However, the findings suggest that avoidantly attached people tend to experience more problems in the job search process than anxiously attached people. Attachment avoidance may influence the quality of the job search process and consequently the speed of reemployment. Attachment avoidance may in turn contribute to a longer period of unemployment.

**Relationship with parents and work orientation and work ethic**
The study in Chapter 3 refers to data obtained from a large survey (\(N = 3841\)) conducted as part of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) (Dykstra et al., 2012). The central research question was whether an individual’s relationships with parents and partner influenced work values. Moreover, it was supposed that respondents with a more positive relationship with their parents would have a more positive work orientation and a stronger work ethic, and that social support and the quality of the relationship with the partner would mediate between these variables.

Results showed that respondents with a more positive relationship with their parents during adolescence indeed had a more positive work orientation and a stronger work ethic than those with a less positive relationship. The relationship with the father had, for both men and women, more influence on the willingness to work hard for an organization than the relationship with the mother. With regard to their commitment to their work and career, the relationships with both the father and the mother were relevant but only for men. Furthermore, it turned out that for women only, a more positive relationship with both parents was related to a good relationship with the partner and this in turn positively influenced their beliefs and attitudes at work. The findings in this study suggest that the parent-child relationship during early adolescence may have an impact on the development of work-related values, although the effects were rather small. However, it appears that parents influence these values differently and that the relationship with the father seems more central in this process than the relationship with the mother.

**Procrastination and individual differences in job search behaviour**
In Chapter 4 the relationships between procrastination and various personality variables (locus of control, professional self-efficacy, job search self-efficacy,
achievement motivation, and positive fear of failure) were investigated. Moreover, it was considered whether both procrastination and these variables were associated with finding another job after dismissal. This time the respondents (N = 134) were employees of various profit-and non-profit organizations in the Netherlands who had lost their job due to company closure or restructuring. Respondents filled out an online questionnaire. First, it was supposed that employees with an external locus of control, lower professional self-efficacy, lower job search self-efficacy, lower achievement motivation, and lower positive fear of failure would have a stronger tendency to procrastinate than their counterparts. In addition, it was expected that these different personality variables and procrastination would be related with finding another job, and that procrastination would mediate the relationship between these variables and finding another job.

The results showed that respondents who believed that they have less control over their lives were more inclined to procrastinate then respondents who believed that success in their lives was the result of their personal efforts and abilities (Landy & Conte, 2010). The belief that one can influence certain aspects of the job search process may have an impact on the outcome of this process. This may then lead to less procrastination, suggesting that an internal locus of control might be a critical factor in a successful search for another job. Another finding was that people who were less motivated to be active and work hard in order to achieve their goals procrastinated more than people who were more motivated to achieve their goals. Contrary to expectations, both professional self-efficacy and job search self-efficacy were not correlated with procrastination. This implies that the beliefs people have in their own abilities at work and the skills they used to apply for a job do not result in procrastination. However, it was found that people who were more confident in their job search skills were reemployed sooner after a four-month period than people with less confidence in themselves. Finally, the results showed no relationship between procrastination and finding another job. Therefore, the expectation that procrastination should influence the relationship between the different personality variables and finding a job could not be further investigated. Possibly other factors, such as the situation on the labour market, the financial position, or the family situation, may contribute to less procrastination in the job search process.
**Burnout and older workers’ intentions to retire**

In Chapter 5 the relationships between different work variables, aspects of social support at work and social support of the partner, and burnout in older workers were examined. The relationship between burnout and the intention to retire was also considered. Data ($N = 2.892$) for this study were derived from a survey among older Dutch workers (50+) and their partners in different organizations in the Netherlands, conducted by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) in The Hague (Henkens & Van Solinge, 2003). It was supposed that different job characteristics and a lack of social support contribute to burnout, and that people with burnout complaints show a stronger intention to retire.

The results of the study showed that burnout was related to different aspects of the work environment, whereby it was found that the three dimensions of burnout were related to different aspects of the job and the social environment. For the first dimension, exhaustion, older workers who had to deal with a high workload and those who found their jobs less challenging experienced greater feelings of exhaustion than older workers who did not experience these problems. Furthermore, where the job was physically demanding and the opportunities to grow at work were limited, people felt more exhausted. Different aspects of social support were also related to feelings of exhaustion, and people who felt less supported by their colleagues and managers also experienced more exhaustion. By contrast, employees who engaged in a moderate range of activities with their spouse reported feelings of exhaustion rather less.

With respect to the second dimension of burnout, cynicism, it was found that respondents who experienced a high workload and a lack of challenge had a more negative, indifferent attitude to their work. Furthermore, people who perceived fewer growth opportunities at work and a lack of support from colleagues were also inclined to more negative views. Regarding the third burnout dimension, reduced efficacy, the results revealed that older employees felt more competent because they experienced more challenges, greater autonomy, and a lighter workload than employees with less challenge, less autonomy and a heavier workload. As employees received more social support from their colleagues they felt more competent than employees who received less social support. People also felt more competent when they had a good relationship with their spouses.
Furthermore, the results showed that respondents who felt more exhausted and
who emotionally distanced themselves more from their work had a stronger
intention to retire. Interaction with one’s partner is seen to be indicative of
marital quality (Davey & Szinovacz, 2004). The findings showed that people
with a close relationship with their spouses also had a stronger intention to
retire, suggesting that retirement intentions are influenced by non-work related
factors.

In sum, different job characteristics are related to burnout complaints among
older employees. In addition, feelings of exhaustion and a negative attitude
towards work influence the intention to retire. At the same time, the intention
to retire is also related to the quality of the relationship with one’s spouse.

6.2 General conclusions and future research

Attachment and job search behaviour
Forced resignation may be considered as a negative event in a person’s career
development. To be able to deal with this, individuals must explore new
situations, which makes attachment theory relevant in this context. People
with an insecure attachment style seem to show less confidence in exploring
new situations such as applying for a job. Attachment avoidance might be a
particularly serious problem in the job search process. Although the results
for attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety differed in this study,
the findings suggest that attachment styles might be a relevant individual
characteristic influencing the job search process. To understand fully the
influence of personality variables on the job search process it is important to
investigate both the joint and the independent influence of attachment styles
and other individual characteristics, for instance the different dimensions of the
Big Five. It may also be considered whether attachment styles influence success
in reemployment. Another avenue for future research may be an investigation
of whether the difference between attachment avoidance and attachment
anxiety can be confirmed by other researchers, as far as applying for new jobs
is concerned. Attachment styles may not only influence the job search process
but also other aspects of job loss. One suggestion for future research may
therefore be to investigate whether people with certain attachment styles are
more prone to job loss or how attachment styles influence the way people deal
with the termination of employment (Albert, Allen, Biggane, & Ma, 2015).
According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2010), the theory of attachment is both an evolutionary theory as well as a theory of personal development. These authors assume that the idea behind this theory implies that both an organic and a development background determines individuals’ behaviour and this consideration may be included within organizational theories and research to better understand behaviours at work. The findings in this dissertation extend previous research on attachment theory and support the suggestion of several researchers in terms of the further examination of attachment theory in relation to work-related issues (e.g., Harms, 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Littman-Ovadia, Oren, & Lavy, 2013; Meredith, 2009). Leiter, Day and Price (2015) provided a new questionnaire to measure attachment styles at work, in the Short Work Attachment Measure (SWAM). These authors used this measure to investigate to what extent attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety were related to collegial relationships and burnout. In future research this short questionnaire might be expanded to other work-related issues aimed at obtaining more insights into the impact of attachment styles at work.

**Relationship with parents and work orientation and work ethic**

Generally, the basis for a good and healthy life is established during childhood and adolescence (Kinniburgh, Blaustein, & Spinazzola, 2005; Moffitt et al., 2011). Studies have found that the degree of bonding is important for the healthy development of the individual and that the quality of this attachment may have an influence on multiple aspects of life including work aspects (Harms, 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). One of these work aspects is the value people ascribe to work. Values and standards are seen in the goals that people pursue, which may contribute to a healthy development of the individual and his/her attitudes to work (Bandura, 1991; Donkers & Geertsema, 2013). To a large extent, parents determine what types of behaviour, skills and values they wish to transmit to their children in order to affect positively the well-being of their children (Sanders & Mazzucchelli, 2013). Also, their own attitudes to work may affect how children experience work as adults. People are influenced in their attitudes and behaviours by their social environment within early childhood, with parents having the greatest impact (Grusec, 2002). The most important development of values takes place at a young age and during adolescence, but this continues into maturity.
The results in Chapter 3 reveal that a positive relationship with one's parents during adolescence contributes to more positive work values later in life. These findings could be important because work values, in terms of a positive work orientation and a strong work ethic, contribute to the employability of the individual and thus the effectiveness of an organization (Desivilya, Sabag, & Ashton, 2006). It should be realized that the development of standards and values is dynamic and complex (Bandura, 1991). People establish a set of values under the influence of significant others in their lives. This may be achieved through parental upbringing, education, and imitation, or the social environment in which people respond to the behaviour of others. It is therefore generally assumed that a person’s values do not necessarily have to be learned or prescribed. Perhaps this explains the finding that the relationship with one’s parents at an early age predicts the work values of interest only to a limited extent, suggesting that other environmental factors could influence these values more strongly. For instance, new and changing roles as adults during life changes (for example in response to work conditions, marriage or family) can also create new values (Hill & Roberts, 2010).

As previously mentioned, in the Netherlands many people experience job insecurity and in addition it is hard to find a permanent contract. In consequence, worsening work conditions raise the possibility of longer and more frequent periods of unemployment, which could in turn affect work values (Johnson, Sage, & Mortimer, 2012). Uncertainty about one’s job may contribute to a reduced loyalty to an organization and to a tendency to value other things in life more highly, such as work-family balance or leisure. These thoughts are in line with those of other scholars, that the life course of individuals as well as changes in the demographics of the labour market requires a variety of instruments for facilitating new positions throughout a person’s life including those of work (Lewis, 2003; Schippers, 2001). However, employers’ success in recruiting and retaining the most attractive and talented employees may depend on how employers react to these shifts in work ethic (Izzo, 2001). Employees in different cohorts might be more or less attached to different values as a result of, and influenced by, developments in the “new” workplace (e.g., globalization, more technological and prolonged working lives). To better understand employees' values in future research, the influence of social and labour market changes on the development and stability of work values of people of all generations should be investigated.
Procrastination and individual differences in job search behaviour

Within social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is seen as one of the most important mechanisms in self-regulation, and plays a central role in the exercise of entrepreneurship at work. Research has shown that lower self-efficacy is associated with procrastination (Steel, 2007). The convictions people have about their capacity to be successful influences their choices and ambitions, and how much effort they put into certain behaviours in order to achieve valued goals (Bandura, 1991). Although one would expect that procrastination would reduce the chance of finding a new job, there was no evidence of this in the study described in Chapter 4. Finding another job, apart from the individual characteristics of job seekers such as their job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivation, also depends on other factors such as supply and demand in the labour market (Brouwer, Bakker, & Schellekens, 2015). This probably explains why although people may be inclined to procrastination, they do not postpone their search for a job, under pressure from these environmental factors. Research conducted by Nguyen, Steel and Ferrari (2013) showed, for example, that high levels of procrastination were associated with shorter periods of employment along with a greater probability of being unemployed. In consequence, people who procrastinate must therefore apply for a job more often than those who do not. Future research would be important to examine more extensively the relationships between procrastination and different aspects of the job search process.

Another finding was that the strength of belief people have in their job search skills does not result in procrastination. This could relate to the method used to measure procrastination in this study. In the theoretical analysis and review of Azjen and Fishbein (1999) it was revealed that more association is found in search results where specific attitudes are measured in relation to the behaviour being investigated. Therefore, it may be more relevant to study procrastination specifically related to job search rather than procrastination in general. In a recent study, Klingsieck (2013) investigated procrastination in different life domains, including academic and work domains. The results revealed that procrastination exists in all six life domains investigated, and revealed it to be domain-specific, though not extremely so. Respondents tended to procrastinate more in the academic and work domain, in every day routines and obligations, and in health domains, rather than in leisure, family and partnership, and social contact domains. In another study, it was also found that workplace procrastination could be distinguished from general procrastination.
An understimulating work environment, characterized by low job demands and low job resources, was associated with procrastination resulting from boredom (Metin, Taris, & Peeters, 2016).

Although the problem of procrastination is familiar to many students, research on adult procrastination and particularly in relation to work is still scarce (Mann, 2016). This is remarkable because 15-20% of adults demonstrate this maladaptive behaviour in various life domains (Harriott & Ferrari, 1996). In today’s labour market people furthermore face many challenges such as a more results-oriented style of working, in which self-regulation is increasingly important. In addition, procrastination in the work place can be very costly (Nguyen et al., 2013; Steel, 2007). The results of studies by Klingsiek (2013) and Metin et al. (2016) may encourage researchers to further investigate the characteristics of procrastination at work, for instance whether procrastination is related to lower job performance or the role of self-efficacy as a key element of self-regulation at work.

Burnout and older workers’ intentions to retire

In the Netherlands, the government raised the retirement age with the aim of reducing the pension liabilities of an ageing population and to guarantee the sufficiency of the labour force. People must therefore work longer than they did in years gone by. Employees must also become more responsible for their health and employability prior to retirement. The results in Chapter 5 showed that unfavourable working conditions lead to burnout in older workers and to their intention to retire. These findings are important in view of the fact that many employees experience problems in reaching retirement age in a healthy condition. Employees must deal with factors at work such as a high workload or work that is physically demanding, thus maintaining one’s health and vitality could be a problem (Houtman & Van Den Bossche, 2010).

The intention to retire is, in addition to burnout, also influenced by factors outside the work environment. A positive relationship with one’s spouse contributes to this intention. However, in raising the retirement age, it has by any measure become very difficult to leave the labour market early even if one wants to. The pressure to postpone retirement may have negative consequences such as decreased motivation (Frins, Van Ruysseveldt, Van Dam, & Van Den Bossche, 2016); this in turn could finally lead to burnout. In future research it may be relevant to investigate whether the incidence of burnout
in older workers is on the increase due to measures used to force people to remain in the labour market for longer. An important research question may also be whether changing the work conditions and opportunities of employees for training and development could eventually reduce burnout and permit people to remain at work for longer.

Beyond advantageous working conditions, the more personal resources people bring to the work force, the easier it will be to resist any possible loss of resources at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, little is known about the influence of early life experiences and the development of burnout later in life. Some evidence is found that attachment styles are related to the different burnout dimensions (Pines, 2004; Vanheule & Declerq, 2009). This implies that attachment could be further investigated in relationship to burnout and retirement intentions. More research on the relationship between early life experiences and the emergence of burnout may offer new insights into people’s behaviour at work and enhance the understanding of underlying psychological mechanisms. More knowledge about these mechanisms could support those involved within organizations in the development and use of people’s talents to deal with the increasing demands on employees in today’s labour market.

### 6.3 Practical implications

Employees are increasingly viewed as proactive and relational agents who are able to construct their own work experiences by planning, exerting self-control, and pursuing goals proactively, thereby achieving personally valued work outcomes (Karoly, Boekaerts, & Maes, 2005; Vancouver & Day, 2005). The results of the different studies described in this dissertation show that such behaviour might be influenced by different factors. The implications in this section may be of practical significance both for managers and professionals who support organizations and individuals in dealing with the challenges in today’s labour market.

The development of attachment as a dimension of the relationship with parents and the development of work values takes place outside the work environment and transcends the responsibilities of organizations. However, attachment styles and the values people attach to their work may affect the performance
and well-being of employees. Managers should be aware of the fact that difficulties faced by employees in changing their behaviours are possibly rooted in influences early in life and are ultimately the reason why employees are not able to deal effectively with changes at work (and in life). To facilitate employees’ career management the quality of the employee-line manager interpersonal relationship might be given more emphasis (Crashaw & Game, 2015) and varying leadership approaches might be ideal for employees with different attachment styles (Boatwright, Lopez, Sauer, VanDerWege, & Huber, 2010). Therefore, managers would probably benefit from a greater knowledge of the theory of attachment or of parents’ influence on the development of work values, and must recognize that the development history of an individual may influence his/her work behaviour. Knowledge of these psychological processes may help managers to identify accurately any signals of problems in employees’ functioning and to understand that poor performance could also be the result of their own failing to understand employees’ attachment styles (Albert et al., 2015). Understanding employees’ attachment styles, as well as their own, may provide managers with helpful instruments to maintain relationships with individuals, and if necessary to offer professional career counselling or coaching both to individuals and teams in order to bring about behavioural changes at work.

Another way of dealing with the influence of early childhood experiences on work is to integrate concepts of the theory of attachment in a model of mentoring as a tool for learning and development, or as a tool for the socialization of new employees. In this model, it is important if possible to take account of the properties and individual characteristics of both the mentor and the learner (Germain, 2011). Interventions to change certain aspects of peoples’ behaviours are difficult, though not impossible, but it might be important to ask the question of whether this actually solves the problems at work if the working conditions that influence the emergence of these problems remain the same. In practice, for example, after burnout an employee is individually guided to return to work as soon as possible. There is a possibility that an employee fails to return because the work environment remains unchanged, after which (s)he finally ends up leaving the organization altogether. The quality of leadership, the characteristics of the group, and the physical setting in which one must work are all aspects of an organization that can influence a successful return to work after burnout. Organizations can set up work processes so that varied work, and work where new things are learned, provide favourable conditions
for the employability of workers. These innovative conditions are currently viewed as important for the labour market of the future (Houtman & Van Den Bossche, 2010).

Because attachment styles can affect the job search process, for career counsellors who guide people in the process of returning to work, it makes sense to have some knowledge of the theory of attachment styles and the potential impact on the process of applying for another job. At the beginning of the counselling process people could complete a short questionnaire measuring their attachment style, for instance the ECR-RS (Fraley, n.d). This could enable counsellors to provide personalized support and set appropriate interventions related to the client's personal characteristics. Job seekers with an avoidant attachment style may benefit most from this support whenever attention is drawn to the (unconscious) barriers they may experience as a result of their attachment style. To be able to change behaviour in a counsellor-client relationship, it is important that counsellors are aware of the attachment style of the job seeker, of their own attachment style, and the implications of these patterns for possible interventions (Meredith, 2009). Research has shown that perceived attachment security in a client-counsellor relationship might enhance the range and effectiveness of career exploration (Littman-Ovadia, 2008). Creating a secure attachment relationship between counsellor and job seeker can help to increase the breadth and effectiveness of a person’s job search skills, leading to success in the job search process.

The findings in Chapter 4 suggest that procrastination, as a form of self-regulation failure, might be a problem for employees. This could have implications for the HR policies of organizations. In addition to the need to sustain employability and remain healthy, it may be worthwhile to include self-regulation as an important competence related to the performance and well-being of employees, contributing to their long-term employment. In addition, organizations might pay attention to the organizational structure or design of the work and the impact of these constructions on self-regulation. It would seem important to determine how work could be designed to be as functional as possible to make self-regulation optimal for both individuals and teams (Wood, 2005). Understanding the importance of self-regulation in procrastination offers the opportunity to develop effective interventions to reduce procrastination at work, leading to greater organizational productivity (Lonergan & Maher, 2000), and preventing shorter durations of employment.
(Nguyen et al., 2013). Interventions such as restructuring an organization and redesigning jobs might also contribute to the prevention of burnout, for instance by increasing levels of autonomy, offering more challenging work and more social support.

**Conclusions**

In sum, the main purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the possible determinants of some of the challenges employees face in today's labour market. An important conclusion is that an individual’s relationship with his/her parents during one's youth can influence various aspects of work, including people's job search behaviour and their attitudes towards work. A more positive relationship with the parents seems to contribute to more healthy behaviour at work and a less positive relationship to more strains in dealing with these challenges related to work. Furthermore, personality characteristics as locus of control and achievement motivation are related to the tendency to postpone necessary activities in situations in which people have to apply for a job. Procrastination often unfolds in adolescence, a time when parental influence in the development of their children is still important, but procrastination is disclosing itself also in older age groups and may influence various aspects of work. People are not only influenced by their parents, but also by their current social environment. Indeed, the present research underlines again that social factors are among the major underlying causes of burnout leading to the intention to retire. It is a challenge for both organizations and employees to keep (older) workers employable and healthy in order to survive in today's labour market. By investigating different aspects of these challenges, the findings in this dissertation contribute to enhancing our understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms of people's behaviour at work. For those involved in supervising or consulting employees it is important to realize that the way people behave at work may be partly rooted earlier in life, that many people are not always aware of these early influences, and to realize that these processes are more complex than they seem.
References


Summary, conclusions, and future research


