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# Explaining the Pathways Between Approach-Avoidance Personality Traits and Employees' Job Search Behavior

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*Research suggests that certain personality characteristics lead to greater (or lesser) withdrawal from work, yet little research has examined exactly how personality translates into withdrawal behavior. To address this question, the present study demonstrated that the approach-avoidance personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism each showed simultaneous positive and negative effects on job search behaviors of employed individuals depending on the mediating mechanism involved (i.e., ambition values, job search self-efficacy, perceived job challenge, work burnout, perceived financial inadequacy, and job satisfaction). The authors' findings extend theoretical insights on the pathways linking dispositional traits and employee withdrawal behaviors and suggest how employers can more precisely anticipate and mitigate employees' search for new employment.*

**Keywords:** *personality; job search; extraversion; neuroticism; job satisfaction*

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The popular press and economic literature suggest that an aging workforce, increased globalization, greater reliance on intellectual capital, and related labor market factors will make employee retention increasingly critical. One important component of retention is job search behavior because, unlike work-related attitudes or intentions, it is a specific action undertaken by the individual to seek employment elsewhere. Thus, job search behaviors may reveal unique insights about the employee turnover process but earlier in the process than actual departure. Job search behavior is also an important construct to understand because employees may engage in such behavior for reasons other than turnover intentions, including networking with other professionals within the field, utilizing job offers as leverage when renegotiating employment contracts, and comparing current employment with alternative employment opportunities (Blau, 1993; Boswell, Boudreau, & Dunford, 2004; Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994). Therefore, job search behavior is an important outcome as organizations expend many resources to both replace individuals who use search behavior to leave and to manage relationships with employees who have other objectives for engaging in job search activity.

A long tradition of research focuses on situational variables that influence employees' withdrawal behaviors, but only recently has attention been given to dispositional factors, such as personality, that affect the likelihood of job search and separation (e.g., Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2006; Boudreau, Boswell, Judge, & Bretz, 2001; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010; Wright & Bonett, 2007; Zimmerman, 2008). Prior research in this area has typically examined the joint effects of personality traits and contextual factors by regressing job search behavior on contextual factors first, followed by personality, with the increase in the variance explained demonstrating the incremental effect of personality traits. While useful, this approach fails to explain *how* personality traits affect job search behavior. Similarly, some research has examined the relationship between personality and job search and withdrawal behavior in meta-analytic terms (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Zimmerman, 2008), which demonstrates overall bivariate relationships but does not explain how personality motivates this behavior. Importantly, hidden within the overall bivariate effect, there may be both positive and negative effects of the same personality trait on job search depending on the mediating mechanism involved.

To address this gap, we develop and test a model of the motivational pathways that transmit the effects of personality onto job search. Our model builds on the personality-motivational perspective of job search (Kanfer et al., 2001) with a hedonic perspective of motivation, which argues that individuals are motivated to approach pleasure and avoid pain (Elliot, 1997, 1999; Higgins, 1998). Beginning with two dimensions of personality, extraversion and neuroticism, we investigate how critical motivational forces transmit the effects of these traits on job search. In addition, in contrast to previous research with recent college graduates or unemployed individuals who are looking for work (e.g., Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006; Kanfer et al., 2001; Tay, Ang, & Van Dyne, 2006), we focus on employed individuals. Thus, we study job search behavior from a perspective of retaining current employees rather than a perspective of unemployed individuals trying to find work.

Our model and results offer two primary contributions. First, we provide theoretical understanding and an empirical test of the mechanisms through which personality influences job search, including examining possible differential effects of the same personality trait on job

search behavior. Second, our model suggests that in addition to focusing on the more stable elements of personality, managers can also focus their retention efforts on the more malleable motivational pathways linked to these personality traits that are proximal to employee job search.

### *Personality and Job Search Behavior*

Job search has been defined as a self-regulation process involving a “purposive volitional pattern of action that begins with the identification and commitment to pursuing an employment goal” (Kanfer et al., 2001, p. 838). According to this perspective, when people perceive a discrepancy between their current job and their employment goal, job search behavior is activated (Kanfer et al., 2001). Thus, job search is inherently a goal-directed behavior.

As argued by Elliot (1997, 1999), goal-directed behaviors are driven by motivational tendencies to approach and/or avoid goals. In particular, the approach and avoidance framework (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Elliot, 1997, 1999; Higgins, 1997, 1998) argues that although goal-directed behavior can be influenced by the external environment, individuals’ motives and goals are initially determined by their neurobiological makeup (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). That is, portions of the brain correspond to activation and inhibition tendencies (Gray, 1987), and these tendencies influence whether individuals pursue approach and/or avoidance goals (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). People who pursue approach goals to a greater extent are sensitive to the presence or absence of positive stimuli (e.g., rewards) and are primarily concerned with accomplishments and advancements (Higgins, 1987). In contrast, those who pursue avoidance goals are sensitive to the presence or absence of negative stimuli (e.g., punishments) and are primarily concerned with duties and obligation (Brockner & Higgins, 2001), using avoidance as their goal attainment strategy (Higgins, 1997). One can be motivated by approach and avoidance goals simultaneously (Elliot & Thrash, 2002) because in any given situation individuals may perceive both potential rewards and punishments.

### *Approach-Avoidance Pathways to Search Model*

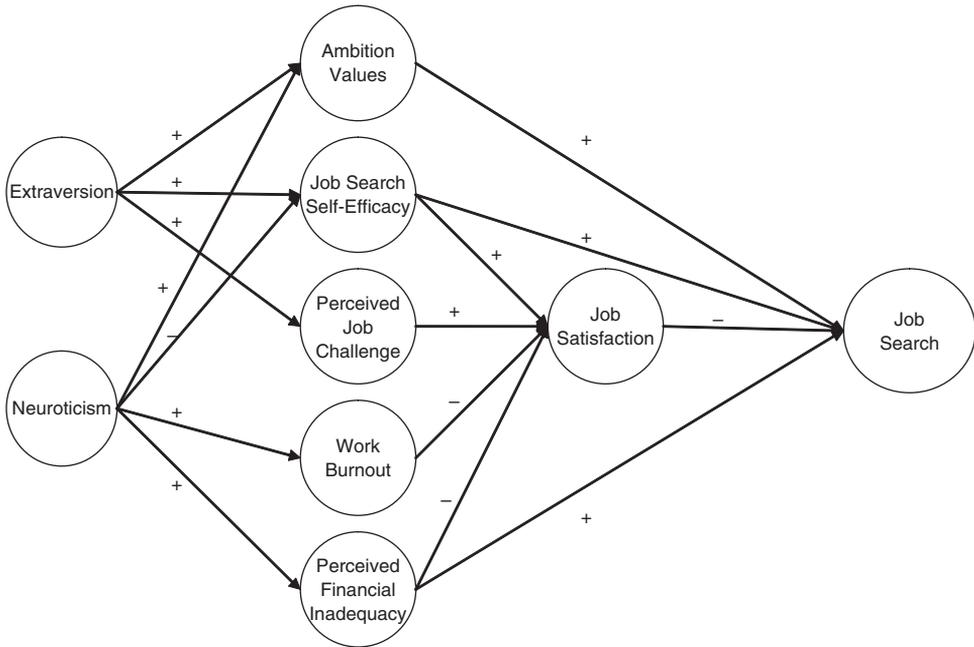
Based on the approach-avoidance perspective, we propose our model of job search, which has two basic premises. First, employees search because they have the desire and perceived ability to advance in their careers and/or because of a desire to avoid negative aspects of their current job or organization. This is likely particularly true given that the participants in this study are high-level professionals who have been with their organizations for several years and who have also been proactively identified by an executive search firm. *Approach* motives correspond to a desire to “get ahead,” which can lead to job search when individuals seek advancement or growth via higher level positions, enhanced reputation, and the like (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). *Avoidance* motives correspond to a desire to escape the current work situation, which can lead to job search when employees are burned out (e.g., Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, de Chermont, & Warren, 2003) or perceive financial inadequacies (Tang, 1995; Tang, Furnham, & Davis, 2002). Thus, approach and avoidance motives both lead to job search but for different reasons (i.e., through different pathways).

Second, our model proposes that approach and avoidance motives are differentially related to personality, with extraversion and neuroticism being the two personality dimensions most closely linked to these motives (see Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Extraversion and neuroticism are core personality traits that can be found in almost all major models of personality, including the five-factor model (Costa & McCrae, 1985; Norman, 1963; Tupes & Christal, 1961) and three-factor models (Clark & Watson, 1999; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975; Tellegen, 1985). In addition, both personality traits are strongly correlated with trait affect such as positive and negative affectivity (Clark & Watson, 1999; G. J. Meyer & Shack, 1989) and corresponding neurobiological temperaments that motivate behavior through activation and inhibition (e.g., Broke & Battmann, 1992; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Pickering & Gray, 1999).

As extraversion and neuroticism are the underlying foundation of approach and avoidance motives (Carver, Sutton, & Scheier, 2000; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2002), they are therefore the most appropriate personality traits to examine from the approach-avoidance theoretical lens. Accordingly, we draw on approach-avoidance models of motivation (Elliot & Thrash, 2002) to propose that extraverts are likely to have *approach*-related motives and neurotic employees are likely to have *avoidance*-related motives to look for alternative jobs. Specifically, extraverts are likely to be motivated to “get ahead,” reflected in a strong desire for increased pay, recognition, and reputation as well as the belief that they are capable of finding a better position, even though they are also likely to be satisfied with their current position (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). On the other hand, neurotic individuals are more sensitive to negative stimuli and more likely to have negative work-related attitudes (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002) and thus engage in job search as a means to evade (i.e., “avoid”) the negative aspects of the current position or organization. However, we also expect that neurotics may wish to avoid the negative feedback that an unsuccessful job search might bring. Thus, a particular trait might simultaneously have both positive and negative indirect effects on job search depending on how it influences the various mediating forces. If this is true, then both theory and practice can be enhanced with a more precise understanding of how these simultaneous positive and negative effects occur and combine into overall effects on job search.

To test our model, we selected five mediating variables that reflect approach and/or avoidance motives related to job search: ambition, job search self-efficacy, perceived job challenge, burnout, and financial inadequacy. These five mediators were chosen based on their prominence in the job search literature as well as representing both individual and situational factors influencing employees’ job search behavior (Boudreau et al., 2001). However, these five variables have neither been studied in unison, nor have they been included in a process model linking personality with withdrawal behavior. We classify each of the mediators based on Elliot’s (1999) distinction that approach motives reflect positive or desirable goals, whereas avoidance motives reflect negative or undesirable possibilities. In particular, we conceptualized perceived job challenge as being affected by approach motives because job challenge has been conceived as a positive motivating factor that increases both employees’ job performance and job satisfaction (Fried & Ferris, 1987; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Judge, 2000; Morgeson & Campion, 2003). In contrast, we suggest that work burnout and perceived financial inadequacy are associated with avoidance motives as both induce stress in employees and encourage those with higher levels of these two constructs to seek out new

**Figure 1**  
**Hypothesized Model**



work environments that alleviate these negative factors (Blau, 1994; Furnham & Argyle, 1998; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Leiter & Maslach, 1988). However, we posit that ambition values and job search self-efficacy can represent either approach and avoidance motives, depending on the perspective of the individual. That is, ambition values can be motivated by a desire to get ahead through advancement and growth (Hogan et al., 1994; Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000) or be motivated by perceptions of inequity or feelings of envy (Costa & McCrae, 1985; Digman, 1990; Hogan, 1983; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). Similarly, job search self-efficacy may positively correlate with approach motives through optimism and confidence in a larger social network (Clark & Watson, 1999; G. J. Meyer & Shack, 1989; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000) or negatively associate with avoidance tendencies due to a fear of failure or a desire to avoid situation that induce anxiety or insecurity (Gray, 1987; Shaver et al., 1987; Zuckerman, 1995). Finally, we also incorporate the key role of job satisfaction (Mobley, 1977) in the model as a potential mediator between the approach/avoidance mediating mechanisms and job search behaviors. In the section that follows, we develop our specific hypotheses regarding the role of these mediating factors in linking the personality traits extraversion and neuroticism to job search behavior. Our overall model representing these relationships is presented as Figure 1.

*Extraversion.* Despite being thought of as primarily “sociability,” extraversion is a complex trait with several different facets representing approach tendencies. In fact, ongoing debate has focused around whether the core of the trait is best represented as reward sensitivity/ambition (Hogan et al., 1994; Lucas et al., 2000), social attention (Ashton, Lee, & Paunonen, 2002), or positive emotionality (Watson & Clark, 1997). Furthermore, as a dispositional representation of state positive affect, extraversion reflects individuals’ tendencies to be optimistic, energetic, prideful, and ascendant (Shaver et al., 1987; Watson & Clark, 1997). Given its complexity, extraversion likely affects employees’ job search behavior through multiple approach-related mechanisms.

Approach-avoidance motivation theorists argue that extraversion is a key building block of approach temperament (Elliot & Thrash, 2002), suggesting that extraverts are likely to seek opportunities for growth. Extraversion has also been linked to key self-regulatory processes. For example, theorists have argued that extraverts are more likely to have a promotion focus than a prevention focus in their self-regulatory approach (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Moreover, psychobiological research has linked extraversion to the behavioral activation system that is characterized by approach behavior and the striving for rewards (Gray, 1987; Zuckerman, 1995). These arguments are consistent with research demonstrating that extraverts have a tendency to be ascendant and seek growth opportunities (Shaver et al., 1987; Tokar, Fischer, & Subich, 1998; Watson & Clark, 1997). Therefore, the ambition and ascendance aspects of extraversion would likely increase employees’ desire to leave and have a positive effect on job search behavior due to their wanting to approach achievement goals, such as “getting ahead” in their careers by obtaining a higher level position, greater income, or increased reputation beyond what their current employers provide (Hogan et al., 1994). Extraverts are also more likely to have high job search self-efficacy due to their positive (i.e., “approach”) tendencies (Clark & Watson, 1999; G. J. Meyer & Shack, 1989) and because they have greater social networks to facilitate the job search process (Wanberg et al., 2000). These arguments are consistent with evidence that extraversion is related to generalized self-efficacy (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002).

However, employees who are higher in extraversion are also more likely to perceive themselves and their surroundings more positively and recall more positive than negative information about the work environments (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Zimmerman, 2008). Therefore, extraverted employees are likely to have more positive views of their jobs through increased perceptions of job challenge (Shaw & Gupta, 2004; Spector, Jex, & Chen, 1995) and job satisfaction (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Thoresen et al., 2003) thus motivating an interest in maintaining these desirable job features. This would help counter the previously discussed positive effects on search by decreasing the desire to leave. Indeed, Zimmerman (2008) found that higher levels of extraversion associate with overall lower levels of turnover intentions among employees. Thus, based on prior work (Zimmerman, 2008) we propose that extraversion will have an overall negative relationship with job search behavior, but this will be the result of indirect effects that are both positive and negative through differing motivational forces.

*Hypothesis 1:* Extraversion will be (a) positively related to ambition values, (b) positively related to job search self-efficacy, (c) positively related to perceived job challenge, (d) positively related to job satisfaction, and (e) negatively related to job search behavior.

*Neuroticism.* The personality trait of neuroticism has been consistently defined as being anxious, insecure, depressed, and fearful (Costa & McCrae, 1985; Digman, 1990; Hogan, 1983). Just as extraversion has been linked to positive emotionality, neuroticism has shown a strong relationship with negative emotionality (Clark & Watson, 1999; G. J. Meyer & Shack, 1989). As a dispositional representation of state negative affect, neuroticism reflects the general tendency to be discontent, nervous, and envious (Shaver et al., 1987). Neuropsychological researchers (Gray, 1987; Zuckerman, 1995) have tied neuroticism to the behavioral inhibition system that is characterized by people engaging in behaviors that would allow them to avoid situations that would cause stress, increase anxiety, or heighten insecurity. In general, these facets of neuroticism are expected to increase employees' desires to avoid negative aspects of their work environment and thus have a positive overall effect on job search. In terms of the specific mechanisms driving this effect, because job attitudes are considered affective in nature, neurotic individuals are likely to have negative perceptions of their work environments, including lower job satisfaction (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Thoresen et al., 2003).

This dissatisfaction with all aspects of the job, along with the general tendency for neurotic individuals' to be discontented with their current situations, may lead such people to desire better opportunities elsewhere, such as greater pay or promotion opportunities. In addition, those lower in self-esteem, an important component of neuroticism, have been shown to attach greater value to monetary elements (Tang, 1995; Tang et al., 2002). We thus expect that people higher in neuroticism are likely to be more sensitive to monetary cues that indicate that they may not be as valued as other employees, which may translate into such individuals placing greater weight on status-related indicators such as rewards, recognition, and reputation (i.e., higher ambition values) as well as avoid the situation of perceiving themselves as undervalued by their current employers by seeking out greater rewards. Consistent with this, research by Tang and colleagues has shown that people with lower self-esteem are likely to believe that they fail to undertake proper financial planning and perceive an overall inadequacy regarding their financial standing (Tang, 1995; Tang et al., 2002), which may motivate them to search for employment alternatives to elevate their financial standing. Employees higher in neuroticism are also likely to experience more work-related burnout given the tendency toward anxiety, insecurity, and the like. This is supported by previous meta-analytic research showing a strong relationship between neuroticism and work-related stress (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Therefore, neurotic individuals would seek to avoid workplace burnout by seeking a new work environment that may offer escape from their job-related stress and anxiety.

Recent meta-analytic evidence indicates that neuroticism relates to higher withdrawal cognitions and behaviors (Zimmerman, 2008). However, Zimmerman found a weak, but significant, *negative* direct effect between neuroticism and actual turnover decisions after controlling for job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. He argued that neurotic individuals may dislike their jobs and intend to quit but also doubt their ability to find other employment or be insecure about exposing themselves to evaluation on the job market. This theorizing is consistent with the insecurity aspects of neuroticism as well as the tenets of avoidance motivation and suggests that there may be a negative relationship with job search self-efficacy due to lower perceptions of their ability to leave. In essence, although neurotic employees may wish to avoid the negative feelings induced by their current work

environment, they would also wish to avoid the possibility of receiving negative feedback while seeking new employment (i.e., not receiving a job offer). Thus, whereas we expect an overall positive relationship between neuroticism and job search behavior, there are likely to be both positive and negative motivational mechanisms acting on search behavior.

*Hypothesis 2:* Neuroticism will be (a) positively related to ambition values, (b) negatively related to job search self-efficacy, (c) positively related to work burnout, (d) positively related to perceived financial inadequacy, (e) negatively related to job satisfaction, and (f) positively related to job search behavior.

We focused above on linking the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism to job search behavior and the underlying mechanisms explaining the relationship. In this section, we focus explicitly on the relationships among these mediating motivational forces, job satisfaction, and job search behavior. We then offer hypotheses for the overall model linking the personality traits (extraversion and neuroticism) to job search.

*Ambition values.* Higher levels of ambition, defined as one's goal to achieve higher levels of ascendancy and power (Hogan et al., 1994; Hogan & Hogan, 1995), are likely to compel employees to engage in job search by increasing their desire to seek upward mobility (Bretz et al., 1994). Searching for a new job is often seen as a key way to obtain work-related indicators of ascendancy and power, such as higher pay, recognition, and reputation. Receiving an alternative employment offer can be used either as leverage to obtain a promotion and/or increased pay from a current employer (Boswell, Boudreau, & Dunford, 2004) or as an opportunity to transition to a job with greater rewards. In support of this, prior research has found positive relationships between ambition and job search behavior (Boudreau et al., 2001; Bretz et al., 1994). Interestingly, one's ambition may have little to do with level of satisfaction with the current job because both individuals who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied can be driven by their ambitions to continually search for new and better opportunities regardless of whether they like their current jobs. This rationale is supported by previous research that found weak relationships between the importance of rewards and job satisfaction (Tang & Gilbert, 1995; Tang & Kim, 1999) and between ambition and job satisfaction (Boudreau et al., 2001; Bretz et al., 1994). Furthermore, Tang, Kim, and Tang (2002) showed that employees with a high rewards orientation were just as likely to leave regardless of their level of job satisfaction. Therefore, we suggest ambition positively relates to job search behavior but do not hypothesize a link between ambition and job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 3:* Ambition values will be positively related to job search behavior.

*Job search self-efficacy.* Self-efficacy involves individuals' expectancies regarding their abilities to successfully attain performance goals (Bandura, 1977), with task-specific self-efficacy reflecting their beliefs that they can perform on a specific task (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Individuals with stronger levels of self-efficacy tend to dedicate their effort to the task-specific demands, have higher levels of confidence in meeting those demands, and will exert more effort and show greater persistence when encountering situations that prove

difficult or demanding. Job search self-efficacy refers specifically to individuals' beliefs that they are capable of performing the behaviors required to obtain a new job (Kanfer & Hulin, 1985). That is, higher job search self-efficacy will increase employees' perceptions of their ability to be successful in the search for alternative employment, thus leading them to be more likely to initiate a job search. Several studies (Blau, 1994; Kanfer & Hulin, 1985; Moynihan, Roehling, LePine, & Boswell, 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1999) have found that job search self-efficacy positively affects job search behavior.

However, we also expect that job search self-efficacy will be positively related to job satisfaction, thus also having an indirect negative effect on job search. First, generalized self-efficacy has been found to have moderate to strong positive relationships with both job satisfaction and job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001). As generalized self-efficacy reflects how people typically feel about their ability to perform various tasks, we believe that the relationships with satisfaction and performance will also hold true for job search self-efficacy. Second, although employees who are better performers will likely perceive themselves as more marketable, they are also likely to receive greater rewards from their employers thereby enhancing their job satisfaction (Allen & Griffeth, 1999; Trevor, Gerhart, & Boudreau, 1997). Third, employees who perceive themselves as being able to leave if they so desired would not feel "trapped" in their current job, which would relieve some of the negative affect attributable to less desirable aspects of the job. Thus, we propose,

*Hypothesis 4:* Job search self-efficacy will be (a) positively related to job satisfaction and (b) positively related to job search behavior.

*Perceived job challenge.* Organizational researchers have long sought to identify aspects of the work performed that influence job attitudes and withdrawal behaviors (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Maslow, 1954). Based on this, organizations have attempted to "enrich" jobs to make them more desirable and motivating. Recent research in the work design literature (e.g., Judge, 2000; Morgeson & Campion, 2003) suggests that job scope is an important aspect of work design consistent with the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), representing employees' judgments regarding the breadth and depth of the work they perform. The benefit of increased job scope is feeling challenged in one's job through greater use of one's skills and abilities. This feeling of increased challenge is often related to positive work attitudes and retention (Boswell, Olson-Buchanan, & LePine, 2004; Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007), such as increased job satisfaction (Fried & Ferris, 1987) and reduced turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Accordingly, greater perceptions of job challenge are expected to increase job satisfaction and decrease search for alternative employment.

*Hypothesis 5:* Perceived job challenge will be (a) positively related to job satisfaction and (b) negatively related to job search behavior.

*Work burnout.* Work burnout is a psychological syndrome that involves chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors at one's job and the individual's subsequent responses to the work environment, particularly when one's efforts fail to produce the desired results

(Freudenberger, 1974). The conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993) suggests that to cope with burnout, one may engage in coping responses including increased negative attitudes regarding the work environment and withdrawal from the workplace (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). In support of this, a meta-analysis by Lee and Ashforth (1996) found that burnout has moderate to strong effects on both job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Two primary studies have found moderate relationships between burnout and job search behavior (Boswell, Olson-Buchanan, & LePine, 2004; Jackson, Schwab, & Schuler, 1986). Thus, we expect that work burnout will associate with lower job satisfaction and greater search for alternative employment.

*Hypothesis 6:* Work burnout will be (a) negatively related to job satisfaction and (b) positively related to job search behavior.

*Perceived financial inadequacy.* Perceived financial inadequacy is a subjective judgment by individuals that their monetary standings are insufficient to meet their financial obligations and goals. These subjective evaluations are important as employees may not feel financially secure even when their objective incomes are high (Furnham & Argyle, 1998; Oswald, 1997). People who believe that they are not financially secure are more apt to seek to resolve this situation, typically not by reducing spending but rather by increasing income (cf. Furnham & Argyle, 1998). As the majority of individuals receive most of their income through employment, the primary way to increase income is by obtaining higher pay in the current job or by finding a higher paying position elsewhere (Furnham & Argyle, 1998). Furthermore, this dependency on employment for income is likely to cause people who believe that they are not financially secure to see their employers, at least partially, as the source of their economic woes because it is their employers who make pay decisions (Furnham & Argyle, 1998). Although we recognize that employers often provide the wealth their employees do possess, they are also the primary target for employees who believe that they should be paid more either based on performance, need, or relative standing versus peers. Therefore, these employees would hold negative attitudes toward the job and have a greater desire to search for new employment where compensation may be more aligned with their needs and goals. Consistent with this, research by Tang and colleagues has shown that people who fail to undertake proper financial planning tend to have lower job satisfaction (Tang & Gilbert, 1995; Tang & Kim, 1999). Furthermore, Blau (1994) found that financial need was negatively related to job satisfaction and positively related to job search behavior, with the overall effect on job search twice as large as the effect on job satisfaction. Therefore, we expect perceived financial inadequacy to predict both job satisfaction and job search behavior.

*Hypothesis 7:* Perceived financial inadequacy will be (a) negatively related to job satisfaction and (b) positively related to job search behavior.

*Job satisfaction.* As a key work-related attitude, job satisfaction plays an important role in employee withdrawal. Attitudes toward the job influence beliefs about the utility of leaving the organization, which eventually leads to job search and turnover behavior. Hoppock (1935: 5) stated, "Whether or not one finds his employment sufficiently satisfactory to continue in

it . . . is a matter of the first importance to employer and employee.” As such, organizational researchers often place job satisfaction as the primary antecedent in the turnover process. In fact, almost all withdrawal models incorporate the relationship between work-related attitudes and withdrawal cognition and behavior at their core. Based on Mobley’s (1977) process model of withdrawal, job satisfaction does not directly affect turnover; instead, job attitudes are translated into withdrawal cognitions and job search behavior. Two meta-analyses (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Tett & Meyer, 1993) have found strong negative relationships between job satisfaction and withdrawal behaviors, and Bretz et al.’s (1994) job search study showed job dissatisfaction to be the strongest predictor of search behavior. Thus, we propose,

*Hypothesis 8:* Job satisfaction will be negatively related to job search behavior.

### *Mediational Effects*

As we have demonstrated based on the approach-avoidance framework (Higgins, 1997), we expect that the pathways from extraversion and neuroticism to employee job search behavior will be mediated by variables that derive from both approach- and avoidance-related motives. Furthermore, given the above arguments, two of the relationships between the motivational forces (i.e., job challenge and burnout) and job search are expected to be fully mediated by job satisfaction, with the remaining motivational forces having direct (or both direct and indirect) effects to job search. First, the effect of ambition on job search is not expected to be mediated through job satisfaction based on research that shows that ambition and job satisfaction are not related (Boudreau et al., 2001; Bretz et al., 1994; Tang et al., 2002; Tang & Gilbert, 1995; Tang & Kim, 1999). Second, job search self-efficacy is expected to have a *negative* indirect effect on job search through its *positive* effect on job satisfaction but also a *positive* direct effect on job search. Third, perceived financial inadequacy will have both positive direct and indirect effects (through job satisfaction) on job search. In sum, we put forth three final hypotheses regarding the mediational relationships and an overall model (see Figure 1) that reflects all of our hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 9:* The effects of extraversion on job satisfaction and job search behavior will be fully mediated by ambition values, job search self-efficacy, and perceived job challenge.

*Hypothesis 10:* The effects of neuroticism on job satisfaction and job search behavior will be fully mediated by ambition values, job search self-efficacy, work burnout, and perceived financial inadequacy.

*Hypothesis 11:* The effects of perceived job challenge and work burnout on job search behavior will be fully mediated through job satisfaction, while the effects of job search self-efficacy and perceived financial inadequacy on job search behavior will be partially mediated through job satisfaction.

Taken together, the above hypotheses compose a model (Figure 1) of the motivational pathways linking approach-avoidance personality traits, extraversion and neuroticism, to employee job search. Although prior research has considered the relationships among some

of the variables in the model examined here, the present study seeks to understand the complex process by which employees' dispositional tendencies linked to the desire to get ahead and/or escape negative aspects of the current situation motivate the search for alternative employment.

## Method

### *Sample and Procedure*

We surveyed high-level professionals listed in the databases of a search firm over two time periods to minimize possible percept-percept bias. The initial survey, which assessed all study variables except job search behavior, was sent to each person listed in the database (approximately 10,000 high-level professionals). Because Mobley's (1977) process model of withdrawal suggests that work attitudes do not affect job search behavior until after an intervening period of withdrawal cognitions, job search over the preceding 6 months was assessed on a follow-up survey distributed to initial survey respondents 1 year later. This helped ensure that all job search behavior asked about in the survey occurred after the employees reported their work-related attitudes and perceptions and that sufficient time elapsed to capture the search process. A total of 587 employees (of 1,601 initial survey respondents; 37% follow-up response rate) responded to both surveys. No incentives were used for either survey. After listwise deletion and removing individuals who were not employed by the same organization across the two time periods (188 people indicated that they were no longer employed by the same organization), the analyses and results were based on a final sample of 362 employees. In comparing those individuals included in the final sample to those who were no longer at their prior employers when job search was assessed (follow-up survey), the latter group had significantly lower job satisfaction ( $M_{\text{stayers}} = 4.7$ ,  $M_{\text{leavers}} = 4.5$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and higher job search behavior ( $M_{\text{stayers}} = 1.8$ ,  $M_{\text{leavers}} = 2.0$ ;  $p < .05$ ), though the magnitude of the differences was small. None of the other study variables (e.g., extraversion, neuroticism) or demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, industry, level) were significantly different.

It should be noted that the search firm operates on retainer by its client companies and does not accept resumes from people searching for jobs; rather, it identifies candidates in response to client needs through publicly available information (e.g., professional association lists, organizational charts, corporate directories). That is, the hiring organizations are the search firm's customers, not the participants in the sample. Thus, participants of this study are likely to be typical of the general population of professionals in their search activity. The search firm serves clients of all sizes, industries, and regions, further suggesting that this sample is representative of the target population.

The surveys were prepared and mailed by the search firm. Participants were instructed to return the survey (business reply envelope included) directly to the researchers, under assurances of strict confidentiality. Surveys were encoded so that they could be matched across time periods. Respondents were primarily male (89%) and married (89%) and had been in their jobs an average of 3.0 years and with the present organization 5.6 years. The average respondent was 49 years old (range = 29-68). Respondents represented various industries

including the manufacturing (33%), services (28%), finance (14%), transportation (7%), and retail (2%) sectors. Respondents were from throughout the United States, with 15% from the West, 27% from the Midwest, 13% from the Southwest, 18% from the South, and 27% from the Northeast. Of the respondents, 35% indicated that they were not actively searching for a new job, while 65% were actively looking to some extent. Over the period of time that the data were collected, the average national unemployment rate was 4.6%, with industry-specific unemployment at 5.2% for manufacturing, 4.9% for retail, 4.3% for transportation, 4.9% for information services, 2.9% for finance, and 5.6% for other services.

It was difficult to estimate the overall response rate precisely as it was unknown how many initial surveys were undeliverable due to incorrect and/or outdated contact information in the search firm database. However, we examined sample representativeness by comparing our respondent sample to the survey population on information contained in the search firm's database (e.g., compensation, demographics, hierarchical level, industry, company size). Only age ( $M_{\text{respondent}} = 51.5$ ,  $M_{\text{nonrespondent}} = 50.0$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and being from the financial sector ( $M_{\text{respondent}} = 0.14$ ,  $M_{\text{nonrespondent}} = 0.19$ ;  $p < .05$ ) revealed statistically significant differences, and the magnitudes of the differences were small, suggesting sample bias was not an issue.

Comparing those individuals who responded to both surveys to those who responded to only the first survey revealed that the former group had higher job tenure ( $M_{\text{respondent T1-T2}} = 3.0$ ,  $M_{\text{respondent T1 only}} = 2.7$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and reported lower burnout ( $M_{\text{respondent T1-T2}} = 2.4$ ,  $M_{\text{respondent T1 only}} = 2.5$ ;  $p < .05$ ), though the magnitudes of the differences were again quite small. None of the other study variables (e.g., extraversion, neuroticism, job satisfaction) or demographic or work variables (e.g., age, gender, industry, level) were significantly different.

## Measures

*Extraversion and neuroticism.* We used Saucier's (1994) "mini-markers" scale to assess the personality traits. Eight adjectives represented each personality trait, and respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each trait accurately describes them (1 = *extremely inaccurate*, 7 = *extremely accurate*). Sample items include bold and energetic (extraversion,  $\alpha = .85$ ) and fretful and temperamental (neuroticism,  $\alpha = .78$ ).

*Ambition values.* We used six items drawn from Wollack, Goodale, Wijting, and Smith's (1971) work value scale to assess the extent to which a respondent attached importance to work characteristics related to upward mobility including "promotion," "high pay," "recognition from others in the field," and "build a professional reputation" (1 = *very unimportant*, 6 = *very important*;  $\alpha = .80$ ).

*Job search self-efficacy.* Job search self-efficacy was assessed with Moynihan et al.'s (2003) three-item measure. A sample item includes "I feel secure about my ability to get the job I want" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .82$ ).

*Perceived job challenge.* We assessed perceptions of job challenge with a two-item measure (McCauley, Cavanaugh, & Noe, 1996). The items include "My position is very challenging"

and “To be successful in my position requires all my skill and ability” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Burnout.* Burnout was assessed with three items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (1986; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Respondents were asked to indicate how often they had certain feelings at work (emotionally drained, burned out, frustrated; 1 = *never*, 4 = *always*;  $\alpha = .75$ ).

*Perceived financial inadequacy.* We used Furnham’s (1984) money inadequacy scale, which consists of five items designed to measure the extent to which respondents feel that their incomes are inadequate. Sample items include “The amount of money I have saved is never quite enough” and “Most of my friends have more money than I do” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .78$ ). A higher number on this scale indicates that respondents felt a greater sense of financial inadequacy.

*Job satisfaction.* We used the three-item measure of job satisfaction from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1983). An example item included “All in all, I am satisfied with my job” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .84$ ).

*Job search behavior.* Job search behavior was measured with a 12-item scale from Blau (1993). Individuals were asked to report the frequency (1 = *never [0 times]*, 5 = *very frequently [10 or more times]*) in which they engaged in various search behaviors (e.g., sent out resumes, interviewed with prospective employers) in the past 6 months. The search behaviors were combined to create the scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ). As explained above, this measure was administered in the follow-up survey one year after the other variables.

## Analyses

The covariance matrix was analyzed with latent path analysis using LISREL 8.7 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2004). All of the variables were corrected for measurement error based on their coefficients alpha. We tested three models to compare the mediating effects of the study variables. Model 1 tested a strong form of our hypotheses by testing the relationship between personality and job search as fully mediated through the motivational forces. To relax these constraints, we tested two alternative models. The second model added two direct paths from extraversion and neuroticism to job satisfaction, and, in contrast, the third model added two direct paths from extraversion and neuroticism to job search. As such, for comparison purposes, Models 2 and 3 are both nested in Model 1.

We used several criteria to evaluate model fit. We report the chi-square test statistic but note that it is largely affected by sample size (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). We also examined a variety of fit indices including the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990), the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), the goodness of fit index (GFI; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996), the normed fit index (NFI; Bentler & Bonett, 1980), and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR).

**Table 1**  
Means, Standard Deviations, Intercorrelations, and Reliabilities

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Extraversion	5.15	0.90	.85								
2. Neuroticism	2.84	0.85	-.08	.78							
3. Ambition values	4.67	0.62	.21*	.10*	.80						
4. Job search self-efficacy	5.07	0.76	.30*	-.21*	.10*	.82					
5. Perceived job challenge	4.51	1.14	.21*	-.08	.18*	.22*	.87				
6. Work burnout	2.43	0.75	-.09	.35*	-.08	-.15*	-.20*	.75			
7. Perceived financial inadequacy	3.43	0.87	-.04	.19*	.04	-.20*	-.17*	.19*	.78		
8. Job satisfaction	4.68	1.05	.17*	-.21*	.02	.28*	.54*	-.45*	-.33*	.84	
9. Job search behavior	1.77	0.59	-.16*	.15*	.10*	-.06	-.22*	.21*	.32*	-.35*	.83

Note: *N* = 362. Reliabilities are on the diagonal.

\**p* ≤ .05.

**Table 2**  
Fit Indices for Confirmatory Factor Analysis

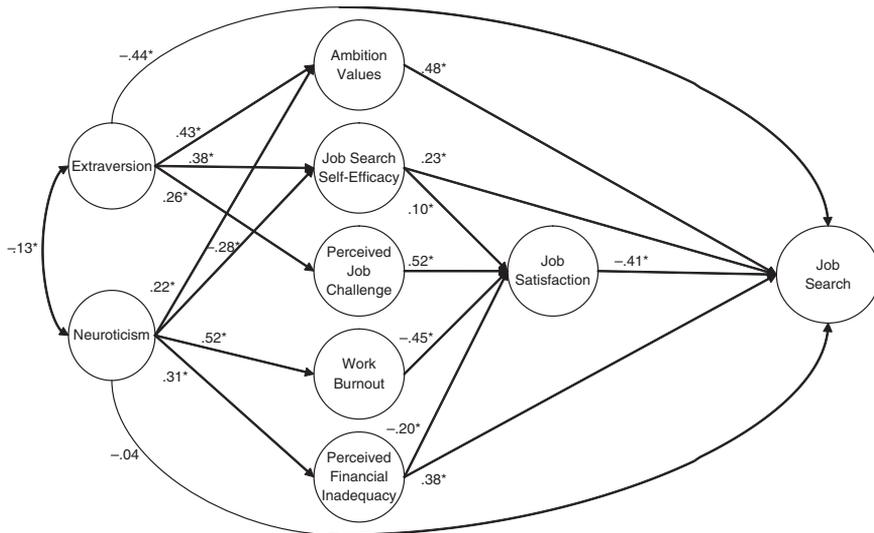
Model	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	SRMR	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	NFI
Model 1: Fully mediated	77.72	20	.073	.089	.95	.91	.88
Model 2: Partially mediated to job satisfaction	74.88	18	.072	.093	.95	.91	.89
Model 3: Partially mediated to job search behavior	63.16	18	.068	.083	.96	.93	.91

## Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 and fit statistics for the three models we tested are presented in Table 2. We used the best-fitting model (out of our hypothesized model and two alternative models) and the standardized path coefficients from the best-fitting model to test our hypotheses.

All three models produced at least moderately good fit as indicated by the fit indices (Bollen, 1989; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Kline, 2005). To test whether the fit of Model 1 was improved by adding paths from extraversion and neuroticism to satisfaction (Model 2) or to job search (Model 3), we examined the differences in the fit indices after adding the additional paths and we performed a chi-square difference test between each model and Model 1. The fit statistics of Model 2 were the same or worse than Model 1, with Model 2 possessing fewer degrees of freedom. In addition, the chi-square difference between the two models was not significant, indicating a preference for the more parsimonious Model 1. In addition, the direct paths from extraversion and neuroticism to job satisfaction were not significant. However, the fit statistics for Model 3 were generally better than those for Model 1. Furthermore, the chi-square difference between Model 1 and Model 3 was significant ( $\chi^2_{\text{diff}} = 7.28, p < .05$ ). This result suggests that Model 1 fit improved by adding direct paths between personality and job search and that the best fitting model of the effects of personality on job search is partially mediated. Thus, we used Model 3 to test our hypotheses with the standardized effects presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
**Standardized Path Estimates for Model 3**



Note: \*  $p \leq .05$ . The direct effects from extraversion and neuroticism were not part of the original hypothesized model.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that extraversion would be positively related to ambition, job search self-efficacy, perceived job challenge, and job satisfaction but negatively related to job search. As shown in Figure 2, the path coefficients between extraversion and the three mediating forces were statistically significant at .43, .38, and .26 for ambition, job search self-efficacy, and perceived job challenge, respectively. In addition, the total effects of extraversion on job satisfaction and job search were .16 and  $-.22$  (both  $ps < .05$ ), respectively. These results support Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that neuroticism would be positively related to ambition, work burnout, perceived financial inadequacy, and job search but negatively related to job search self-efficacy, perceived job challenge, and job satisfaction. The path coefficients between neuroticism and the mediating forces were statistically significant at .22, .52, .31, and  $-.28$  for ambition, work burnout, perceived financial inadequacy, and job search self-efficacy, respectively. Neuroticism had total effects on job satisfaction and job search behavior of  $-.32$  and .24 (both  $ps < .05$ ), respectively. These results support Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that ambition would be positively related to job search. A significant path was found ( $\beta = .48, p < .05$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3. Hypotheses 4-7 dealt with the motivational forces predicting job satisfaction and job search, and Hypothesis 8 then predicted a negative relationship between job satisfaction and job search. Job search self-efficacy was positively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = .10, p < .05$ ) as well as directly related to job search behavior ( $\beta = .23, p < .05$ ; total effect of .19,  $p < .05$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 was supported as perceived job challenge was positively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = .52, p < .05$ ) and had a negative total effect on job search of  $-.21 (p < .05)$ . Hypothesis 6 was supported given that burnout was negatively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.45, p < .05$ ) and had a positive total effect on job search ( $.19, p < .05$ ). Hypothesis 7 was supported as perceived financial inadequacy was negatively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.20, p < .05$ ) and also had a positive direct effect on job search ( $\beta = .38, p < .05$ ; total effect of  $.46, p < .05$ ). In support of Hypothesis 8, job satisfaction was negatively related to job search behavior ( $\beta = -.41, p < .05$ ).

Hypotheses 9-11 involved the mediating mechanisms for the relationships discussed. Hypothesis 9 predicted that the effect of extraversion on satisfaction and job search would be fully mediated by ambition, job search self-efficacy, and perceived job challenge. The best fitting model (Model 3) demonstrated that though the effects of extraversion on job satisfaction were fully mediated by ambition, job search self-efficacy, and perceived job challenge, extraversion affected job search behavior above and beyond these variables. The total indirect effects of extraversion on job satisfaction was  $.17 (p < .05)$  and on job search was  $.22 (p < .05)$ , with the latter composed of both negative indirect effects through perceived job challenge and job search self-efficacy ( $-.07$ ) and positive indirect effects through ambition values and job search self-efficacy ( $.29$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 9 is not supported as we found only partial mediation of the relationship between extraversion and job search.

Hypothesis 10 proposed that the effects of neuroticism on job satisfaction and job search would be fully mediated by ambition, job search self-efficacy, perceived job challenge, work burnout, and perceived financial inadequacy. We did find full mediation of neuroticism with a total indirect effect on job satisfaction of  $-.32 (p < .05)$  and a total indirect effect on job search of  $.29 (p < .05)$ , with the latter composed of both negative indirect effects through job search self-efficacy ( $-.07$ ) and positive indirect effects through the other mediating constructs ( $.36$ ). Although the best fitting model included a path from neuroticism to job search, this path was nonsignificant ( $p > .05$ ). The combination of a nonsignificant direct effect between neuroticism and job search with the previously discussed significant mediating relationships supports Hypothesis 10.

Hypothesis 11 predicted that job satisfaction would fully mediate the effects of perceived job challenge and work burnout on job search and partially mediate the effects of job search self-efficacy and perceived financial inadequacy on job search. To test this, we added paths to Model 3 from all of the motivational forces to both job satisfaction and job search behavior. With the addition of these paths, the chi-square was not significantly improved ( $\chi^2_{\text{diff}} = 0.92, p > .05$ ), the SRMR, GFI, CFI, and NFI statistics were unchanged, and the RMSEA was worse ( $.091$ ). In addition, the direct paths from perceived job challenge and work burnout to job search were not significant. Based on these results, we concluded that the more parsimonious mediating model (Model 3) provided at least equivalent fit, which supports Hypothesis 11.

## Discussion

Based on the approach-avoidance framework (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Elliot, 1997, 1999; Higgins, 1997, 1998), our research suggests that employees with different personality traits may be differentially motivated to search for alternative employment. Yet the existing

job search literature has largely overlooked such explanatory factors, revealing little about *how* personality influences search activity. We note that while some of the variables included in this study may have been previously examined as bivariate relationships or incremental effects in a regression analyses, such methods do little to explain the complexity of the relationships within a process model of job search behavior. In the absence of research examining such mediating mechanisms, the job search literature provides managers with little guidance about how to best prevent employees with different personalities from searching for new employment opportunities. We found that extraversion and neuroticism had statistically significant unique effects (average  $\beta = |.34|$ ) on the mediating motivational forces, which in turn had significant unique effects on job satisfaction (average  $\beta = |.32|$ ) and job search behavior (average  $\beta = |.31|$ ). As such, we contribute both theoretical and practical insight to explain “why” employees may be predisposed to seek alternative employment.

Focusing first on extraversion, our results showed that extraverted individuals exhibit higher ambition and job search self-efficacy, which are subsequently related to greater job search. However, by perceiving greater job challenge and feeling as if they could find another job if needed, such individuals are also more satisfied with their jobs, which ultimately related to a decreased tendency to search for alternative employment. Taken together, these findings suggest counteracting positive and negative effects of extraversion on job search that, on one hand, may influence an individual to seek new employment (i.e., through ambition and search self-efficacy) but, on the other, may facilitate retention in the present job (i.e., through perceived job challenge and job satisfaction). These findings may help explain the weak effects (and/or suppressor effect) often found in prior research on the relationship between extraversion and job search (e.g., Boswell et al., 2006; Boudreau et al., 2001).

We found similar counteracting effects for neuroticism on job search behavior. In particular, neuroticism was associated positively with ambition, burnout, and perceived financial inadequacy. These motivational forces then were associated with greater job search, directly and mediated through lower job satisfaction. On the other hand, neuroticism was associated with lower job search self-efficacy, which in turn was related to reduced job search. Again, these findings reveal important insight regarding the divergent pathways by which dispositional tendencies motivate job search behavior.

We note that there appear to be stronger countervailing mechanisms at work for extraversion than for neuroticism, where the effects were more consistently positive in relation to job search. Yet the findings that both extraversion and neuroticism may simultaneously increase and decrease the likelihood that an individual would engage in job search behavior supports the importance of greater precision in conceptualizing and measuring the complex goal-directed nature of personality traits in predicting behavior. Models linking personality to employee withdrawal should thus consider the possible opposing tendencies fostered by one’s disposition.

Our findings are consistent with the approach-avoidance theoretical perspective of personality (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Elliot, 1997, 1999; Higgins, 1997, 1998), along with related perspectives such as self-regulatory theory (McAdams & Pals, 2006) and the psychological approach (Gray, 1987; Zuckerman, 1995). The positive and negative effects of extraversion on job search behaviors were explained through motivational forces consistent with allowing one to “get ahead” through growth or advancement mechanisms either in the

current position or in a new job, including higher ambition values, stronger job search self-efficacy, and greater perceived job challenge. Conversely, the positive and negative effects of neuroticism on job search were explained by motivational forces consistent with avoiding negative work-related experiences, such as feelings of being undervalued, burned out, financially inadequate, and rejected by the job market.

Interestingly, though we examined an array of important and theoretically justified forces through which dispositions influence job search behavior, extraversion still had a significant direct effect on job search. As the effects of extraversion on job satisfaction were fully mediated, any unmediated effect for extraversion on job search is above and beyond motivational forces related to job satisfaction. One construct that might explain the remaining effect is the concept of embeddedness (Allen, 2006; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). Specifically, Mitchell and colleagues argued that the more links that employees have to others within their organizations, the harder it would be to leave. Because extraverts are more likely to seek out social relationships, they are more likely to have a greater number of links to others within their organizations (McCrae & Costa, 1997) and therefore would be less likely to seek alternative employment. As the number of links would not necessarily affect how employees' felt about their particular jobs, it may help explain the negative effects from extraversion to job search that were not mediated through the variables examined here.

### *Practical Implications*

Our findings suggest that the link between personality and search for alternative employment is much more complex than simply a main and/or clear directional effect. Though recent meta-analytic work (e.g., Zimmerman, 2008) suggests the overall effect on withdrawal-related cognitions is negative for extraversion but positive for neuroticism, the present study reveals that there are varying motivational forces operating that will help to explain one's tendency to search. Thus, although hiring applicants higher on extraversion or lower on neuroticism may yield employees who are less likely to subsequently engage in job search behavior, employers can reinforce these traits in more nuanced ways to reduce job search and potentially increase retention. For example, our findings suggest that extraverts will more likely have higher ambition and greater job search self-efficacy, indicating that if these individuals do not perceive opportunities for greater achievement in their own organizations, they may seek them elsewhere. Therefore, organizations that attract extraverts can capitalize on this and reinforce the negative effect of extraversion on job search by providing clearly targeted employee development opportunities, particularly for high performers. Our findings suggest that providing employees with a clear sense of the path to meet their ambitions may be particularly useful in reducing job search for those high on extraversion.

Regarding our findings for neuroticism, employees higher on the trait demonstrated a tendency to experience greater burnout and greater financial inadequacy. Thus, effective retention efforts for neurotic employees include participative management practices and job redesign interventions to mitigate potential burnout tendencies. Employees high on neuroticism may benefit from greater resources during periods of increased workload, perhaps in the form of employee assistance programs or counseling to alleviate felt stress and/or financial

worries. Implementation of retirement savings plans may also minimize the likelihood of job search due to financial worries. In sum, the present findings illuminate how and why individual differences lead to different work-related values, attitudes, and beliefs, which may allow managers to preempt employees from engaging in job search. This may be more effective than trying to retain an employee who has already made the decision to leave and found an opportunity elsewhere.

Although not the primary contribution of our study, our findings also extend beyond the specific effect for those high in extraversion or neuroticism to any individual who may experience the motivational forces examined here. For example, employees who perceive greater job challenge will be more satisfied with the job and less likely to search while those with higher ambition values will be more likely to search regardless of the level of job satisfaction. Or those employees who are experiencing work burnout will be less satisfied with their jobs and thus more likely to search for new employment, while those with greater perceptions of financial inadequacy will be more likely to search, with some of the effect independent of their level of job satisfaction. Therefore, our findings also inform managers on how to enhance job satisfaction as well as prevent all types of employees from seeking alternative employment based on the five work-related motivational forces examined in this study.

We would like to note that while the countervailing forces for each personality trait may first appear to pose a conundrum to managers in that the differential effects within each trait could “wash out” whether specific people would be more or less likely to quit, in actuality these countervailing forces give managers more of an opportunity to influence their employees’ job search behaviors as each effect through one of the mediators could be separately targeted. For example, although extraverts are more ambitious, which leads to greater job search, they also perceive greater job challenge, which leads to less job search. Therefore, managers can work to address both issues and have a greater impact on extraverts searching for jobs. That is, as a key contribution of this study, by breaking down the effects of personality through various pathways, managers can more effectively address what may lead certain individuals to search. It is when the pathways are not understood (e.g., focusing only on the overall bivariate effect) that managers would miss important pieces to the puzzle.

A key difference in this study compared to most other job search research is our emphasis on job search of current employees versus unemployed job seekers. This distinction is important for two reasons. First, our study informs organizations on how to minimize employee job search behavior, thus taking a proactive approach to mitigating potential turnover. Second, currently employed individuals have a different set of factors that influence their search behavior. These differences can result in the same antecedents of search behavior to influence people in starkly contrasting ways. Specifically, while previous research on *unemployed* job seekers has found that individuals higher in extraversion were more likely to search for a job (Kanfer et al., 2001), our findings suggest that *employed* individuals who are higher on extraversion were less likely to search for a new position. Although both employed and unemployed extraverts are more ambitious and possess higher job search self-efficacy (both of which have positive effects on job search behavior), employed extraverts also tend to have more positive views of their work environments and higher job satisfaction, which leads them to actually engage in less job search behavior. Therefore, the context of the job search behavior is critical to understanding the underlying mechanisms that are related to such behavior.

### *Limitations, Strengths, and Future Research Directions*

It is important to note both the limitations and strengths of this study. First, there may be some concerns regarding the representativeness of the sample used in our study. Although the sample included employees from a wide array of industries and professions, the focus on high-level professionals may constrain our ability to generalize to employees at lower hierarchical levels within an organization. Furthermore, because the search firm does not accept resumes from job seekers, this could contribute to a “high-performer” bias in the sample. However, as the search firm broadly identifies candidates from several sources of information (e.g., organizational charts, directories) that would include all professional-level employees, this should reduce concerns about only high performers being included in our sample. In addition, those individuals who were no longer employed by the same organization across both time periods were dropped from the analyses to ensure that subsequent job search behavior could be conceptually linked to the work attitudes and perceptions assessed the prior year. This did eliminate some employees who had been searching for a new job (though some may have left for involuntary reasons) and thus could affect the relationships with job search behavior observed in this study. However, the mean comparisons of respondents to nonrespondents as well as the comparison to those who were no longer employed by the same organization indicate sample bias was not a significant concern.

A second limitation is that common method variance may be an issue because the variables examined here were generated from self-reports. On the other hand, an important strength of this study was the data collection over two periods, which helps to reduce concerns related to common-method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) for the primary outcome of interest in this study (i.e., job search behavior). In addition, the magnitude and pattern of the observed correlations tend to allay concerns about common method variance (Spector, 2006). That is, instead of correlations that are consistently high across all relationships, the magnitudes of the relationships varied and were typically moderate. Nevertheless, future research could examine these variables, the motivational forces in particular, as reported by coworkers or family members.

Another limitation related to our method involved the focus on job search behavior as the dependent variable. Though job search is a strong predictor of actual turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000) and an important variable in its own right as an indicator of employee attachment to an organization, a more complete model would include other withdrawal-related variables including voluntary turnover. Furthermore, focusing on an array of different mediating mechanisms allowed us to explain an overall model of the pathways linking extraversion and neuroticism to job search. Yet future research could seek to explain the remaining unmediated effect for extraversion, such as its possible effect on “embeddedness” in the organization. Finally, as we included only the two personality traits most relevant based on the theoretical framework of focus here, future process models could explore how the remaining five-factor traits affect job search behavior and, in turn, actual turnover. A post hoc analysis of data collected on the remaining traits in the five-factor model of personality (conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience) revealed nonsignificant relationships between these personality traits and job search behavior ( $-.02$ ,  $-.06$ , and  $.04$ , respectively).

We see several additional avenues for future research. First, it would be interesting to investigate the potential moderating role of industry in the relationships examined here as differences in industry norms and mobility opportunities may facilitate differences in an employee's career focus and motivations for job search. Second, as the data were collected during a period of relatively low unemployment, it would be important for future research to assess the generalizability of our results to periods of higher unemployment levels. Both of the aforementioned situational factors may also attenuate the effect of personality traits due to the strength of the external environment (R. D. Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010). Third, because our hypothesized model was based on full mediation, our reliance on an alternative model with a significant direct effect between extraversion and job search behavior could be influenced by capitalization on chance and therefore should be replicated (and, as discussed previously, expanded on to identify other potential mediators) in future research. Finally, one might expect narrower (facets of) personality traits to be more strongly related to some of the mediating variables. We chose to use broad measures of extraversion and neuroticism in this study for two reasons. First, job search behavior is conceptualized as a broad behavior (although composed of narrower activities), just as overall job performance is a broad behavior (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996), thus supporting the focus on predictor variables (i.e., personality) at the broader level. Second, the magnitude of the covariance between facets and the challenges in interpreting such a complex model including specific facets and the array of potential links suggest the value of first investigating broad personality traits as in this study. It would be fruitful for future research to examine narrower personality traits when the focus is on either individual mediators and/or specific job search behaviors.

## Conclusion

This study advances previous literature by drawing on the approach-avoidance theory of personality (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Elliot, 1997, 1999; Higgins, 1997, 1998) to build a framework to investigate the motivational pathways linking personality and job search behavior. We found that employees with higher levels of extraversion and neuroticism are likely to experience several motivational forces related to advancing their careers and/or avoiding negative aspects of the job that influence their job search behavior. Moreover, each personality trait had both positive and negative effects on job search, depending on the specific mediating mechanism. These findings underscore the practical value of understanding employees' diverse motives for job search and suggest that managers can utilize their knowledge of employees' personalities to better anticipate and mitigate tendencies that lead to the search for alternative employment. As the process by which individuals' dispositions affect their withdrawal behaviors has only recently been studied, continued research in this area is warranted.

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