Job search motivation of part-time or unemployed Japanese college graduates

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Abstract We clarify how individuals actively interact with socio-cultural contexts to attain regular employment in Japan. Based on a large sample (N = 3,512) of part-time employed and unemployed college graduates (23–39 years old), we found that: Career decision making self-efficacy predicted job search; a lack of both hope and fulfillment motivated job search, while having hope promoted it; wishing for perfect vocation and being free from both inclination towards personal interests and passivity motivated job search. Clients’ desire for “a perfect vocation,” should not necessarily be considered as a career barrier but, perhaps, rather as an asset for motivating job search. Counselors should seek to better understand the influence of clients’ socio-cultural contexts on their career attitudes.

Keywords Job search · Re-employment · Career development

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Résumé. La motivation à la recherche d’emploi de diplômés japonais à temps partiel ou au chômage. Nous clarifions la façon dont les individus interagissent activement avec les contextes socioculturels pour atteindre un emploi régulier au Japon. Sur la base d’un échantillon de grande taille (\(N = 3,512\)) composé de diplômés en situation d’emploi à temps partiel ou au chômage (âgés de 23 à 39 ans), nous avons constaté que: le sentiment d’auto-efficacité lié à la carrière prédit la recherche d’emploi; le manque à la fois d’espoir et d’accomplissement motive la recherche d’emploi, tout en voyant l’espoir renforcé; souhaiter une vocation parfaite et être exempt de propension à la fois vers des intérêts personnels et la passivité motive la recherche d’emploi. Le désir des clients pour « une vocation parfaite », ne doit pas nécessairement être considéré comme un obstacle, mais peut-être plutôt comme un atout pour motiver la recherche d’emploi. Les conseillers devraient chercher à mieux comprendre l’influence des contextes socioculturels de leurs clients sur leurs attitudes de carrière.

Zusammenfassung. Motivation zur Stellensuche von teilzeitbeschäftigten oder arbeitslosen japanischen Hochschulabsolventen. Wir klären, wie Individuen aktiv mit sozio-kulturellen Kontexten interagieren, um eine reguläre Beschäftigung in Japan zu erreichen. Basierend auf einer großen Stichprobe (\(N = 3,512\)) von teilzeitbeschäftigten und arbeitslosen Hochschulabsolventen (23 bis 39 Jahre alt), fanden wir, dass: Selbstwirksamkeitserwartung in der beruflichen Entscheidungsfindung Stellensuche vorhersagte; ein Mangel an sowohl Hoffnung als auch Erfüllung die Stellensuche motivierte, während Hoffnung zu haben sie förderte; der Wunsch nach perfekter Berufung und keine Neigung zu persönlichen Interessen und Passivität motivierte die Stellensuche. Der Wunsch nach “einer perfekten Berufung” der Klienten sollte nicht unbedingt als ein Hindernis für die Karriere betrachtet werden, sondern vielleicht als eine Ressource zur Motivation der Stellensuche. Berater sollten sich bemühen, den Einfluss der sozio-kulturellen Kontexte der Klienten auf deren Karriere-Einstellungen besser zu verstehen.

Resumen. Motivaciones de Búsqueda de Trabajo de Empleados de Medio Tiempo o Desempleados Universitarios Japoneses. Clarificamos como los individuos interactúan activamente con contextos socio-culturales para alcanzar empleo regular en Japón. Basado en un amplia muestra (\(N = 3,512\)) de empleados de medio tiempo y desempleados universitarios (23 a 39 años), encontramos que: la autoeficacia en la decisión de carrera predice la búsqueda de trabajo; una falta de esperanza y cumplimiento motivaba la búsqueda de trabajo mientras que la esperanza la promovía; el deseo de una vocación perfecta y la libertad de inclinación hacia intereses personales y pasividad motivaron la búsqueda de trabajo. El deseo de los clientes de “una vocación perfecta”, no debe ser necesariamente considerado una barrera de carrera, pero, de pronto, un activo para la motivación de búsqueda de empleo. Los consejeros deberían considerar estos aspectos para entender mejor la influencia de los contextos socio-culturales de los clientes en sus actitudes de carrera.
Introduction

Historically, in Japan, as well as throughout the world, careers have followed a fairly predictable path. However, as a result of globalization, careers now tend to be characterized by change and unpredictability. Young people are facing challenging circumstances following this social change, particularly in Japanese society. School leavers (dropouts) in Japan made a smooth transition to employment until the early 1990s and their careers tended to follow a steady progression of advancement. Then, the picture changed radically. Youth unemployment rates increased to 10 % in 2003 compared with a stable 4–5 % in the early 1990s. In addition, long-term unemployment for youth more than doubled during this period, exceeding the average for member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2008). Because of the scarcity of regular, long-term employment, a large number of young people were forced to seek lower paying or irregular jobs. This trend continues and now includes college graduates as well as individuals in their late 30s. There is a growing concern that the part-time employed and unemployed will lose their motivation to seek full-time employment.

The present study explores how young people engage in the process of searching for a lifelong career using a large sample of Japanese part-time employed or unemployed college graduates. We consider several factors, such as self-efficacy, time perspectives, and career consciousness, each of which plays an important role in job searching in contemporary Japan. Among these factors, time perspective, defined as the totality of an individual’s views of his/her psychological past and future at a given time (Lewin, 1951), is specifically important. Young adults set their future goals and make a great deal of effort to realize some of them (Nurmi, 2004; Seginer, 2009), but uncertainty about their future life course in contemporary society may demand a type of flexibility where one is involved in continuous negotiations (Heinz, 2009; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). Despite the importance of clarification of the transition to a lifelong career in Japan, very few studies have been reported. One example is the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT, 2012), which examined social and psychological determinants related to how young people progress from irregular to regular employment. These findings are valuable and stimulating; however, there is a lack of theoretical grounding or an ordinal framework for explaining these findings.

Social changes challenge the traditional theories and practice of career development and counseling. One approach that can be applied to career counseling is based on motivational systems theory (MST; Ford & Smith, 2007). MST has been used in a growing body of research supporting the notion that mutually reinforcing patterns of goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotions can have a powerful motivating effect that leads individuals to engage in new challenges and opportunities rather than adopt a stagnant or defensive posture (Patton, 2008; Vondracek, Ferreira, & Dos Santos, 2010; Vondracek & Porfeli, 2008). In MST, positive representations of future outcomes, called capability beliefs, reflect judgments about whether one has the knowledge, skills, and biological capabilities needed to attain a goal. This is similar to Bandura’s (1986) concept of self-efficacy, defined as ‘people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of
performances” (p. 391). Self-efficacy may be one of the best predictors of adaptation as it relates to job search behavior (Saks, 2005). In a meta-analysis, Kanfer, Wanberg, and Kantrowitz (2001) obtained an effect size of .27 between self-efficacy and job search behavior. They also found that self-efficacy predicted job search outcomes such as search status, duration, and the number of offers received. Therefore, we expect that capability beliefs will positively predict job search factors.

MST also argues that emotions serve as a force that either promotes or inhibits behavior, which is channeled by goals to achieve a desired endpoint. The role of emotions in vocational development has often been minimized. Emotional wisdom represents the ability to invest the right amount of emotional energy in daily activities to achieve core personal goals (Ford & Smith, 2007; Vondracek & Porfeli, 2008). Some emotions encourage exploration and further investment in promising goal options (e.g., interest, satisfaction, and affection). Others inhibit the pursuit of goals associated with unproductive, inappropriate, or dangerous behavior patterns (e.g., discouragement, guilt, and disgust). As Ford and Smith (2007) discussed, emotions are inherently temporary phenomena that cannot have a motivational impact unless they are continually activated either through new events or memories of previous events.

We believe that the idea of emotional wisdom is useful in explaining the process of flexibility of time perspective. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) explained that time perspective refers to “the mental ability to switch flexibly among time perspectives (TPS) depending on task features, situational considerations, and personal resources rather than be biased toward a specific time perspective that is not adaptive across situations” (p. 1285). Such mental ability assumes both that the anticipation of the positive consequences may promote goal-directed behavior and that the negative consequences may alter a goal to one that is suitable to the changed context.

If one anticipates negative consequences from continuing a current unstable status, then s/he may regulate energy to switch to stable employment. This may seem counter-intuitive, a situation where negative anticipations fuel positive energy for change. However, Ciairano, Menna, Molinar, and Sestito (2009) found a positive relationship between stress regarding the future and active coping mechanisms. Carless and Arnup (2011) also highlighted that job insecurity tends to predict career change. Dissatisfaction with a current occupation may lead to withdrawal of energy from maintaining it, therefore, increasing motivation to search for a new job (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002; Vansteenkiste, Lens, Dewitte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004). Sverke and Hellgren (2002) suggested that job insecurity was associated with reduced work motivation and led to a withdrawal response manifested by a greater intention to change jobs. In addition, remembering unpleasant experiences of unstable employment may promote job search behavior. Therefore, we assume positive expectations collaboratively acting with negative expectations toward the future, and negative recall of present and past employment status will be motivating factors in the process of job searching.

It may be useful to differentiate between environment and context. Environment refers to all types of phenomena (both proximal and distal) surrounding a specific reference point. Context refers only to that part of one’s environment with which one can currently interact. It follows that to understand individuals’ potential and actual career-related behaviors one must focus on activities performed in specific types of
contexts for specific purposes. Given this background, it is important to understand that young people in Japan operate within a very unique cultural context. In particular, some studies of Japanese youth have reported that their career consciousness affects their social situation and vocational behavior. Adachi (2006) described the career consciousness among Japanese young people as being characterized by three orientations, namely “belief in the idea of a perfect vocation” (tekishoku shinko), “inclination toward personal interests” (yaritaikoto shiko), and “passivity” (ukemi). According to Adachi (2006), “belief in the idea of a perfect vocation” refers to the tendency to “wait for an encounter with the perfect vocation while entertaining hope and optimism about their future and believing that they will find a suitable job an their natural calling” (p. 32). However, being too persistent in pursuing one’s chosen vocation sometimes leads to unwillingness to change and results in missing employment opportunities. Adachi’s (2006) “inclination toward personal interests” (p. 33) refers to an orientation that gives priority to personal interests, resulting in choosing a career on the basis of likes or dislikes; this is frequently observed in part-time or irregular workers in Japan. For example, in a Japan Institute for Labour (JIL, 2000) interview survey, young irregular workers made statements such as “I do not care whether I am an irregular or regular employee as long as I can do the type of work I like” and “I do not care what other people think of me. I just pursue what I like.” Adachi’s (2006) “passivity” orientation refers to people who do not treat career choice as a critical task, but allow it take its own course. Young irregular workers tending toward passivity entertain such thoughts as “My future will be okay somehow” or “There is no use in worrying about the future” (JIL, 2000).

Adachi’s three orientations to career development may be either specific to Japanese young adults or related to Berzonsky’s (1989) more generalized conceptualization of identity-processing styles. The belief in the idea of a perfect vocation could be a “normative” style focusing on internalized conventions, standards, and expectations. An inclination toward personal interests as a job determinant could be an “information” style involving actively searching for, elaborating, and evaluating personal issue-relevant information. Passivity in career choice could reflect a “diffuse” style of avoiding or procrastinating until the affective cues in a given situation dictate behavioral reactions. Importantly, Adachi (2006) proposed that these three orientations may be systematically related to job search outcomes. She suggested that a belief in the idea of a perfect vocation and/or an inclination toward personal interests is associated with career exploration for unemployed young people. Therefore, we expect that both these career consciousness orientations, i.e., belief in the idea of a perfect vocation and inclination toward personal interests, will be associated with job searching among young people, but passivity will not.

Personal demographic characteristics also influence how these capability beliefs, time perspectives, and career consciousness orientations may influence job search behavior. For example, people with a higher level of education perceive their resources to be adequate for dealing with contextual demands and believe that these resources are within their own control, which is likely related to their capability beliefs (Ciabirano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, & Callari, 2010). They are also more likely to have increased freedom in career decision making and in creating their own career paths (Kanfer et al., 2001). Regarding gender, males are more likely to
change their jobs than females (Carless & Arnup, 2011). Japanese employment practices tend to be age-based (OECD, 2008), which may influence an individual’s job search. In addition, at least in the US, young workers are more likely to switch occupations or industries (Parrado, Caner, & Wolff, 2005). Marital status seems to be another important factor in decision making in transition to regular employment, given that women often have responsibilities including taking care of children, maintaining a home, and volunteering in the community (Bobek & Robbins, 2005). Some research in Japan has shown a gender and marital status interaction in which unmarried women were engaged in more vigorous job searching than married women; however, there were no such differences found for men.

In a recent longitudinal study, job seeking intention and perceived progress are part of a progression leading to employment that has been found to be consistently related (Wanberg, Glomb, Song, & Sorenson, 2005). However, at any given time, an individual is at only one point on this continuum, and the time course cannot be predicted. Saks (2005) commented that the most common outcome measure in job search research is employment status, but not all studies have found support for a relationship between job searching and employment. This may be because employment is not only dependent on job search behavior but also on the behavior of employers, which is beyond the influence of job seekers (Sverko, Galic, Sersic, & Galesic, 2008). Therefore, we investigated the perceived progress of the job search process, rather than actual outcome measures of employment, which is consistent with the use of MST as a motivational model.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate how young people are engaged in the process of searching for a job using a large sample of Japanese part-time employed or unemployed college graduates. We consider several factors, namely the relationship among factors of capability beliefs (i.e., self-efficacy), time perspectives, and career consciousness as they relate to job search intentions and perceived progress in finding a job. We also address demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, current employment status, and education as they affect these factors in relation to perceived progress in job searching. This study examined the following hypotheses. First, capability beliefs will positively predict a more effective job search. Second, positive expectations collaboratively acting with negative expectations toward the future and/or negative recall of present and past employment status will motivate the process of job searching. Finally, career consciousness orientations, as identified by Adachi (2006), such as belief in the idea of a perfect vocation and/or inclination toward personal interests, will have a positive effect on job searching, but passivity will not.

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants were 3,512 Japanese college graduates: 985 males and 2,527 females; 47.2% were married. The age distribution of the participants was 24.7% for 23–25 year-olds, 24.9% for 26–29 year-olds, 25.4% for 30–34 year-olds, and
25.1% for 35–39 year-olds. Of this sample, 64.4% were irregular or part-time workers and 35.6% were unemployed. Those who were irregularly employed consisted of part-time workers (43.1%), contract employees (27.7%), and temporary agency workers (25.5%). These sample characteristics corresponded closely to the irregular employee profile in the 2007 National Employment Status Survey (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, as cited in Nitta, 2009).

Instruments

**Capability beliefs**

Career decision-making self-efficacy (i.e., capability beliefs) was measured using 25 items based on Adachi’s (2001, 2006) Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale. Participants were asked to indicate how confident they were about successfully engaging in each of the job search behaviors using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all confident, 5 = totally confident); and scale scores for each person are the totals divided by the number of items for each of the five sub-scales. Reliability was found to be .96 in the current study. Adachi (2001) provided validation evidence of her scale in terms of its relationship with career exploration intentions, measured using items from Betz and Voyten (1997), and career exploration behavior, measured using items from Stumpf, Colarelli, and Hartman (1983). The items were modified to be suitable for university graduates. The scale is composed of five sub-scales: career choice self-efficacy (e.g., “Choose a career that fits an ideal lifestyle”), problem solving self-efficacy (e.g., “Continue an effort to realize a desired career in spite of previous failure and defeat”), planning self-efficacy (e.g., “Plan what I should do now for my future career”), self-appraisal self-efficacy (e.g., “Accurately understand my aptitude and ability related to career”), and information gathering self-efficacy (e.g., “Gather information related to career through newspapers, magazines, TV programs, and web”).

**Time perspectives**

The Experiential Time Perspective Scale (ETPS; Shirai, 1994) measures the participant’s positive or negative attitude toward the past, present, and future (Nuttin & Lens, 1985) on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = do not agree, 5 = agree). Evidence for the validity of this scale has been reported in a number of studies (Shirai, 1996, 1997, 2000). From this scale, we used three sub-scales: hope (e.g., “I am confident that I will be able to carve out a future for myself”; four items, \( \alpha = .78 \)), fulfillment (e.g., “Everyday life is full and rewarding”; five items, \( \alpha = .81 \)), and accepting the past (e.g., “I am able to accept my own past”; four items, \( \alpha = .79 \)). The scale scores for each person are the totals divided by the number of items of each sub-scale.

**Career consciousness**

We used Adachi’s (2006) Career Consciousness Scale. Adachi (2008) reported the validation of her scale in terms of its relationship with self-exploration and
environmental exploration. This scale is composed of three sub-scales: belief in the idea of a perfect vocation (e.g., “I have a feeling that I will encounter some big opportunity in the future”; nine items, \( \alpha = .80 \)), inclination toward personal interests (e.g., “I want to be in an environment where I can do what I want to do”; 10 items, \( \alpha = .82 \)), and passivity (e.g., “I can think about my future when that time comes”; nine items, \( \alpha = .84 \)). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all, 5 = a great deal). The scale scores for each person are the totals divided by the number of items for each sub-scale.

**Job search intention**

Job search intention was measured by one 4-point Likert-type item to indicate the extent of intention to seek regular employment (1 = no, 2 = probably no, 3 = probably yes, and 4 = yes).

**Job search perceived progress**

Job search perceived progress is conceptualized as being composed of self-regulatory processes to activate setting employment goals, planning a job search, and pursuing goal-directed behaviors to obtain regular employment. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they made efforts in these activities to become full-time employed on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = Have not thought about it at all, 2 = have not thought about it with any concern for reality, 3 = Have only made a plan, 4 = Am moving forward according to my plan, 5 = Am getting very close to finding a regular job, 6 = Have already found a regular job). The rationale of this response sequence is based on previous studies that indicated such progression from job search intention, assessments, behaviors, and outcomes (Saks, 2005). Data in the current study is also supported this, showing a significant correlation (\( r = .33, p < .01 \)) between this variable and another variable of “turn over” that was measured using the same response options used in this study. We conducted a logistic regression analysis by distinguishing six options into two categories, “no progress yet” (intention, assessment, and planning; values 1, 2, and 3) and “in progress” (behavior and completion; values 4, 5, and 6), newly coded by 1 and 2, respectively. The two new categories accounted for 71.8 % of the total sample (1 = 42.2 %; 2 = 29.6 %), indicating that the distribution was heavily skewed.

**Procedure**

Data were collected in early 2007 using a self-report questionnaire. The survey was administered online using a link from a Yahoo website that was popular in Japan. Yahoo members were asked to participate in this study. Their responses were completely anonymous to the researchers. The participants received reward tokens from Yahoo upon completion of the questionnaire. We restricted the sample to university graduates. The data were originally collected using a 2 (gender) × 2 (experience of regular or irregular employment during the first 3 years after
graduation) $\times 4$ (age group: 23–25, 26–29, 30–34, 35–39 years) design. Each cell contained more than 500 participants, resulting in a total sample of 8,336, from which students and full-time employees were excluded. This study selected a sample of 3,512 part-time employed, or unemployed participants at the time of the investigation.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables. First, capability belief was positively related to job search intention and perceived progress. Second, hope, fulfillment, and accepting the past were negatively related to job search intention, but hope was positively related to job search perceived progress. Third, for career consciousness orientations, the belief in the idea of a perfect vocation was positively related and passivity was negatively related to job search intention and perceived progress, while inclination toward personal interests was positively related to job search intention. Finally, there was a significant positive correlation between job search intention and perceived progress, which is consistent with the finding of a recent longitudinal study (Wanberg et al., 2005).

We conducted hierarchical multiple regressions of the research variables for the predictions of job search intention and hierarchical logistic regressions of the research variables for the predictions of perceived progress because these variables were heavily skewed. We adjusted the significance level to $p < .01$ in order to minimize the probability of a Type I error. To provide a rigorous test of the hypotheses, all demographic variables were also entered. We avoided the risk of multicollinearity by removing the non-contributing variables from the independent variables. The variance inflation factors, ranging from 1.22 to 2.25 for individual independent variables, were not large, which suggests that there was no multicollinearity.

First, job search intention was regressed on capability beliefs, time perspectives, and career consciousness. As shown in Table 2, the demographic variables explained a significant amount of the variance ($R^2 = .17, p < .001$), as did capability beliefs, time perspectives, and career consciousness ($\Delta R^2 = .06, p < .001$). The regression coefficients were significant for capability beliefs ($\beta = .12, p < .001$), two of the time perspectives (hope, $\beta = -.22, p < .001$; fulfillment, $\beta = -.08, p < .001$) and three of the career consciousness orientations (belief in the idea of a perfect vocation, $\beta = .14, p < .001$; inclination toward personal interests, $\beta = -.09, p < .001$; passivity, $\beta = -.06, p < .001$). In addition, the regression coefficient was significant for six of the demographic characteristics (gender, $\beta = .12, p < .001$; age, $\beta = -.05, p < .01$; education, $\beta = .06, p < .001$; current employment status, $\beta = .10, p < .001$; marital status, $\beta = -.16, p < .001$; gender $\times$ marital status interaction, $\beta = .06, p < .01$). The interaction indicated that unmarried women had much greater job search intentions than married women, but small differences in the same direction were found for men. Therefore, the results indicated that job search intentions were predicted by higher capability beliefs associated with a belief in the idea of a perfect vocation and lower levels of all of time perspective of hope, fulfillment, and inclination toward personal interests and passivity.
Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of variables

|     | M   | SD  | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9     | 10    | 11    | 12    | 13    | 14    | 15    |
|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1.  | Gender\(^a\) | 1.28 | 0.45 | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 2.  | Age  | 30.13 | 4.81 | –.21** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 3.  | Education\(^b\) | 2.45 | 0.99 | .38** | –.22** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 4.  | First employment status\(^c\) | 1.69 | 0.46 | .27** | –.26** | .24** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 5.  | Current employment status\(^d\) | 1.64 | 0.48 | .30** | –.25** | .22** | .30** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 6.  | Marital status\(^e\) | 1.47 | 0.50 | –.45** | .45** | –.30** | –.36** | .55** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 7.  | Capability beliefs | 3.34 | 0.69 | .05*  | –.07** | .10** | .01   | .08** | –.02 | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 8.  | Hope  | 3.06 | 0.83 | –.13** | .02   | –.03  | –.10** | –.08** | .20** | .54** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 9.  | Fulfillment | 3.10 | 0.90 | –.18** | .09** | –.04  | –.10** | –.06** | .20** | .27** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 10. | Accepting past | 3.37 | 0.94 | –.11** | .08** | .00   | –.12** | –.08** | .17** | .23** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 11. | Belief in the idea of a perfect vocation | 3.09 | 0.64 | .08** | –.11** | .05*  | .03   | .08** | –.07** | .46** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 12. | Inclination toward personal interests | 3.69 | 0.56 | .12** | –.09** | .09*  | .12** | .12** | –.19** | .29** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 13. | Passivity | 2.75 | 0.66 | –.04  | .05*  | –.07** | –.01  | –.05* | .03   | –.30** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 14. | Job search intention | 2.24 | 1.16 | .28** | –.22** | .21** | .17** | .29** | –.37** | .06** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 15. | Job search perceived progress | 1.13 | 0.34 | .24** | –.18** | .15** | .07** | .13** | –.20** | .14** | –     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |

8. Hope
9. Fulfillment .53** –
10. Accepting past .41** .40** –
11. Belief in the idea of a perfect vocation .34** .05* .06** –
12. Inclination toward personal interests .09** –.03 – .03 .48** –
13. Passivity –.28** –.11** –.11** .05* .13** –
14. Job search intention –.20** –.21** –.13** .11** .05* –.05* –
|   | 8    | 9    | 10   | 11   | 12   | 13   | 14   | 15   |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 15. | Job search perceived progress | 0.05* | −0.04 | −0.01 | 0.08** | 0.03 | −0.09** | 0.23** | − |

N = 3,512

a 1, women; 2, men
b 1, college (2 years); 2, university diploma (4 years); 3, graduate school
c 1, yes; 2, no. It was for part-time and irregular employment experiences during the first 3 years after graduation (no one left out of employment during this period)
d 1, out of employment; 2, irregular employment
e 1, single; 2, married

* p < .01, ** p < .001
Second, job search perceived progress was regressed on capability beliefs, time perspectives, career consciousness, and job search intention using the logistic regression analysis. As shown in Table 3, entry of the demographic variables produced a significant model ($R^2 = .17$, $p < .001$), as did capability beliefs, time perspectives, career consciousness ($R^2 = .20$, $p < .001$), and job search intention ($R^2 = .23$, $p < .001$). The odds ratios were significant for capability beliefs (OR = 1.67, $p < .001$), one of the time perspectives (hope, $\exp(\beta) = 1.34$, $p < .01$), and job search intention (OR = 1.50, $p < .001$). In addition, five of the demographic variables were significant (gender, $\text{OR} = 4.03$, $p < .001$; age, $\text{OR} = 0.93$, $p < .001$; first employment status, $\text{OR} = 0.67$, $p < .01$; marital status, $\text{OR} = 0.58$, $p < .01$; gender × marital status interaction, $\text{OR} = 6.38$, $p < .001$). The interaction indicated that unmarried women had greater job search perceived progress than married women, but the opposite was found for men; married men had greater job search perceived progress than unmarried men. In summary, the results indicated that job search perceived progress was predicted by higher capability beliefs associated with hope when controlling for job search intention.

Altogether, the results indicate that capability beliefs predicted job search intention and perceived progress. In addition, a lack of both hope and fulfillment predicted job search intention, but hope predicted job search perceived progress. Finally, belief in the idea of a perfect vocation predicted job search intention, while inclination toward personal interests and passivity negatively predicted job search intention.

Table 2 Multiple regression of job search intention

| Predictor                                      | Intention           |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Demographic variables                         |                     |
| Gendera                                        | .16**               |
| Age                                            | -.05*               |
| Educationb                                     | .06*                |
| First employment statusc                       | -.00                |
| Current employment statusd                     | .10**               |
| Marital statusc                                | −.20**              |
| Gender × marital status interaction            | .07**               |
| Capability beliefs                             | .12**               |
| Time perspectives                              |                     |
| Hope                                           | -.22**              |
| Fulfillment                                    | -.08**              |
| Accepting past                                 | -.01                |
| Career consciousness                           |                     |
| Belief in the idea of a perfect vocation       | .14**               |
| Inclination toward personal interests           | -.09**              |
| Passivity                                      | -.06**              |
| $R^2$                                          | .17**               |
| $\Delta R^2$                                   | .06**               |

$N = 3,512$. The values in the table are standardized beta weights ($\beta$)

a 1, women; 2, men

b 1, college (2 years); 2, university diploma (4 years); 3, graduate school

c 1, yes; 2, no. It was for part-time and irregular employment experiences during the first 3 years after graduation (no one left out of employment during this period)

d 1, out of employment; 2, irregular employment

e 1, unmarried; 2, married

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$
Although previous studies have shown that demographic variables tend to be weak predictors of job search behaviors and outcomes (Saks, 2005), results of the present study suggest that gender, age, and marital status can significantly influence the approach to job search in Japanese university graduates. In particular, the gender by marital status interactions demonstrated that married women engaged in more vigorous job search perceived progress than unmarried women. These findings may reflect the fact that women tend to perceive barriers to work (Betz, 2005). In particular, many Japanese women believe that they should bear the major responsibility for child rearing; therefore, they should leave their life-long careers when they have children.

**Table 3** Logistic regression of job search perceived progress

| Predictor                                      | Perceived progress |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------|
|                                               | Step 1    | Step 2    | Step 3    |
|                                               | $\beta$   | OR        | $\beta$   | OR        | $\beta$   | OR        |
| Demographic variables                         |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| Gender$^a$                                     | 1.50      | 4.50**    | 1.50      | 4.46**    | 1.39      | 4.03**    |
| Age                                           | −.09      | .92**     | −.08      | .92**     | −.08      | .93**     |
| Education$^b$                                  | .21       | 1.24*     | .18       | 1.20      | .15       | 1.16      |
| First employment status$^c$                    | −.43      | .65*      | −.39      | .68*      | −.41      | .67*      |
| Current employment status$^d$                  | .04       | 1.04      | −.06      | .95       | −.11      | .89       |
| Marital status$^e$                             | −.57      | .56**     | −.71      | .49**     | −.54      | .58*      |
| Gender × marital status interaction            | 1.90      | 6.69**    | 1.98      | 7.25**    | 1.85      | 6.38**    |
| Capability beliefs                             |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| Hope                                          | .16       | 1.18      | .30       | 1.34*     |           |           |
| Fulfillment                                   | −.15      | .86       | −.10      | .90       |           |           |
| Accepting past                                | −.03      | .97       | −.03      | .98       |           |           |
| Time perspectives                              |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| Belief in the idea of a perfect vocation      | .08       | 1.08      | −.02      | .98       |           |           |
| Inclination toward personal interests          | −.36      | .70*      | −.29      | .75       |           |           |
| Passivity                                     | −.08      | .92       | −.04      | .96       |           |           |
| Career consciousness                          |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| Intention                                     | .41       | 1.50**    | .20**     | .23**     |           |           |

$N = 3,512$. $R^2$ are the values of the Nagelkerke index

$^a$ 1, women; 2, men

$^b$ 1, college (2 years); 2, university diploma (4 years); 3, graduate school

$^c$ 1, yes; 2, no. It was for part-time and irregular employment experiences during the first 3 years after graduation (no one left out of employment during this period)

$^d$ 1, unemployment; 2, irregular employment

$^e$ 1, single; 2, married

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$
Our main findings can be summarized as follows. First, we found that job search is positively related to capability beliefs (i.e., self-efficacy). This supported our hypothesis that self-efficacy predicts job search because of its characteristic as a personal agency belief. Capability beliefs reflect judgments about whether one has the knowledge, skills, and biological capabilities needed to attain a goal (Ford & Smith, 2007). Job seekers who reported higher capability beliefs had stronger commitments to transition to regular employment, spent more time in collecting information to attain regular employment; improved skills; obtained certification through professional schools, correspondence courses, vocational training programs; and applied for lifelong careers, which led to perceived progress in the transition to stable employment. These findings are consistent with MST that describes how personal agency beliefs such as self-efficacy tend to amplify motivation (Ford & Smith, 2007).

Second, we found that “lack of hope” and “lack of fulfillment” predicted job search intention. We interpret the results as showing that unemployed and part-time employed participants had negative perceptions toward the present and future because of their current unstable status, which motivated job change to achieve a more stable status. This is consistent with the previous research (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Ciairano et al., 2009; Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, JILPT, 2012; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002; Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). These findings supported our hypothesis, which maintains that positive perceptions collaboratively act with negative perceptions toward the future and the presence of unstable job status to predict job search behavior among part-time employed and unemployed individuals, although negative perception of the past was not a significant influence.

Since time perspectives are neither emotion- nor wisdom-based, it should be noted that we did not deal with emotional wisdom itself. However, we suppose negative perceptions toward the present and future may arouse emotions about upcoming negative consequences, such as fear or anxiety. Therefore, the finding could demonstrate that emotions associated with negative perceptions toward the future and the presence of an unstable job status may facilitate the process for individuals to transition to full-time employment.

In general, hope is associated with optimism. Optimism is defined as generalized expectations about the occurrence of positive outcomes or the belief that good as opposed to bad things will occur in one’s life (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Optimism may promote job search as a goal-directed behavior and self-regulatory process. In fact, job search optimism predicted motivation to search for a job among a group of unemployed individuals (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). However, in a meta-analytic study, optimism was not significantly related to job search behavior (Kanfer et al., 2001). This suggests an ambivalent characteristic of optimism or hope, at least in the context of an exploration such as a job search. Here, it may be useful to distinguish between two types of optimism or hope. One is hope as an agency reflecting someone’s determination that goals can be achieved, while the other is hope as an expectation that goals can be achieved (Snyder, 1994). The second formulation is novel, not found in other formulations of optimism as an individual difference (Peterson, 2000), and relates to the aspect of hope dealt with in this study. On the basis of this distinction, we argue that “lack of hope,” which is situated in the context
of intention to switch employment status, may reflect the general expectation that the current situation (i.e., unemployment or a part-time employment) might lead to a worse future. This speculation may be far removed from the data, but we believe that it is one of the possible explanations for the results of our study, and is consistent with evidence from previous studies (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Ciairano et al., 2009; JILPT, 2012). Ciairano et al. (2009) found a positive, rather than negative, relationship between active coping and stress regarding the future. At the same time, it might lead to another possible explanation, shifting our focus from being on an expectation for the future to on the context of exploration itself. Blustein and Phillips (1988) suggested that contextual anxiety and specific and immediate stressors such as needing to acquire information about educational and vocational alternatives in career exploration facilitated exploratory activity. While this proposal predicts that “lack of hope” should connect with job search behavior, it is inconsistent with our findings. We found that “lack of hope” predicted job search intention; however, it did not predict job search perceived progress. This may be because individuals’ career exploration improves their job opportunities and prospects as they proceed with their job search (Saks, 2005; Werbel, 2000). Therefore, our focus on general expectation becomes a more plausible explanation. Both anticipation of negative consequences due to remaining in an unstable employment and that of positive consequences as people pursue their goals to transition to regular employment may be motivational factors helping individuals to sustain job searching and to ultimately attain a lifelong occupation. Therefore, the findings may imply that the meaning of hope varies on the basis of contexts.

Next, the results show that the career consciousness of younger Japanese generation (23–39 years old) is not particularly maladaptive. Instead, it is apparent that their career consciousness is generally adaptive in view of the context within which their job search takes place. This supports our hypothesis that the career consciousness that is prevalent in contemporary Japan will likely have good effects on job searching among young people. We found that desiring “a perfect vocation” and being free from both “inclination toward personal interests” and “passivity” enhanced the motivation to engage in job search behavior. Believing that there is a “a perfect vocation” may be useful in motivating vocational behavior among workers and those preparing to enter the workforce, although the rationale itself may not always be adaptive (Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2009). In addition, the finding regarding “passivity” is consistent with the evidence that structured activity, as distinct from unstructured or aimless activity in terms of both belief and action, is better for the psychological wellbeing of unemployed youth (Creed & Macintyre, 2001). All of these findings may contribute to our understanding of how young people can adjust their career consciousness according to changing circumstances.

Unexpectedly, there was a negative prediction involving inclination toward personal interests for job search intention. We expected that exploring one’s own interests, values, and experiences might facilitate a clearer understanding of individual career ambitions as well as increase confidence in the ability to search for and find the right job (Zikic & Saks, 2009). According to Savickas (2002, 2005), however, individuals who do not have career adaptability, in terms of adaptive fitness for coping with career concerns, have difficulty connecting with their
communities and constructing their careers. Therefore, career exploration should help individuals consider community expectations to succeed in transition to lifelong occupations.

Our results demonstrate the application of MST (Ford & Smith, 2007) for predicting job search. Consistent with the theory, we found that personal motivation varies on the basis of the changing contexts in the process of transition to full-time employment. This implies that young people actively adapt their career attitudes and such adaptive behavior supports the premise of MST that humans are self-constructing, self-organizing, and self-regulating living systems (Ford & Smith, 2007; Vondracek et al., 2010). In addition, our findings also confirmed that emotions collaboratively act with negative perceptions toward the future, present, and past, coupled with a positive perception of future goal attainment (i.e., self-efficacy), can motivate job switching and job search. Although a career consciousness variable is not situated within the MST framework, the findings demonstrated the premise behind the theory that suggests the dynamic interactions between person and environment, proposing that individuals are both shaped by and shape their environment over a lifelong (Fouad & Kantamneni, 2008). As such, this study illustrated the core conception that mutually reinforcing patterns of goals, personal agency beliefs, and emotions can have powerful motivating effects leading individuals to engage in new challenges and opportunities (Ford & Smith, 2007; Vondracek et al., 2010).

In conclusion, we have explored and analyzed the circumstances surrounding job and career issues for Japanese university graduates in times of economic upheaval and uncertainty. Although there are clear similarities between Western developed economies and their labor markets and the current situation in Japan, there are enough differences to make such a study informative and of interest to the larger international community. We demonstrated that under conditions of social change and uncertainty, young people actively attempt to reduce discrepancies between their life plans and perceived resources to attain a lifelong occupation.

Limitations and implications

One of the limitations of this study concerns the interpretation regarding the positive effect of “lack of hope” on job search behavior, which must still be characterized as tentative. Confirmation of this finding would require a combination of quantitative and qualitative research that more explicitly explores how participants imagine their future and translate this into their job search behavior in current Japanese society. Another limitation of this study is that the cross-sectional design does not allow us to make causal conclusions about the relationships of self-efficacy, time perspectives, and career consciousness with the transition to full-time employment. Given that we measured both sets of variables at the same time, one has to be cautious in making a causal connection. It is possible to envision an inverse causal relationship as job search and re-employment may affect capability beliefs, time perspectives, and career consciousness. To study causal relationships, longitudinal and experimental studies are needed (Shirom, Vinokur, & Price, 2008). We also believe that longitudinal data are needed in order to explain more appropriately the findings using MST.
In addition, there is a limit on the generalizability of our findings. Because we limited our sample to college graduates, our results may not generalize to other samples, such as high school graduates (Ciairano et al., 2010). Another limitation for the application of MST is that this study does not refer to the thriving with social purpose (TSP) conceptual framework. The centerpiece of the TSP motivational pattern is an active approach goal orientation informed by a fundamental concern for others (social purpose); it also emphasizes positive (discrepancy increasing) feedback cycles that accelerate learning and competence development, facilitate meaningful change, and promote personal and social well-being (Ford & Smith, 2007). Moreover, the amount of variance explained by the variables that were selected in the study was relatively small. This suggests that people have many and varied reasons for pursuing (or not pursuing) full-time employment and the modest findings may reflect this. Again, MST suggests TSP as a core of its conceptual framework. Accordingly, planning marriage is one of the factors appearing to compel males to search for a lifelong occupation (JILPT, 2012). Another factor contributing toward progress to regular employment is a period of part-time employment (JILPT, 2012). Finally, the time perspectives are neither emotion- nor wisdom-based and there seems to be a mismatch between theory and measurement. Although we used the idea of emotional wisdom in order to take into account the mechanisms underlying flexibility of time perspective, further research that directly deals with emotional wisdom is needed. Despite the above limitations, this study is unique in its applied focus and in its use of MST to explain job search and the transition to regular employment. The strength of the study is the large sample from a non-Western country and the inclusion of career development theory to explain the phenomena of job search.

A potential implication of the present study’s results is the understanding that helping young people to increase their self-efficacy is fundamental for promoting the self-regulatory process of career development (Betz, 1992). Career counselors should focus on increasing job seeker’s capability beliefs that enhances career planning, career exploration attitudes, and skills to overcome perceived barriers (Cardoso & Moreira, 2009). The results also revealed that a pessimistic outlook may motivate job search and promote persistence in making alternative paths to re-employment among Japanese young people. This suggests that counselors should encourage clients’ realistic perception of the current circumstances, coupled with a positive perception of future attainment. Counselors should understand that although an emotional pattern of downheartedness—discouragement—depression facilitates the termination of unsuccessful behavior episodes, and is therefore associated with personal failure and incompetence (e.g., discouraged or hopeless personal agency beliefs), the same pattern may have a positive impact because it helps the person avoid unproductive activities (e.g., wasting time trying to achieve an unrealistic goal; Vondracek & Kawasaki, 1995).

The most important thing is that the findings indicate how young people actively interact within a given context to promote job search and employment. Along this line, career consciousness unique to a younger generation in Japan, which had been indicated by examining 18–31 year-olds (JIL, 2000), such as desiring “a perfect vocation,” should not necessarily be considered a career barrier but quite possibly...
an asset to motivate job search. Therefore, counselors should understand the
dependence of clients’ career attitudes on the socio–cultural contexts in which they
operate. They should also realize that clients have the potential to become agents of
social change, and therefore, at the same time, may foster social justice (Vondracek
et al., 2010). We agree with Coutinho, Dam, and Blustein (2008) who proposed that
“counselors can help clients become more critically conscious, encouraging them to
reflect the broader social and political world, to ultimately become active
participants in civic society” (p. 16).

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