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Is the devil in the details? A qualitative exploration of differentiated mindsets during job search

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Abstract

The literature on mindsets about the plasticity of personal attributes is largely comprised of between-person studies examining the self-regulatory implications of fixed and growth mindsets. Less attention has been paid to whether mindsets differ at the within-person level, such that individuals simultaneously hold differentiated mindsets about specific abilities. In the context of a looming job loss, we conducted a qualitative investigation into whether job seekers hold different mindsets regarding their job-related networking, vacancy searching, interviewing, and negotiating abilities. Beyond the present study providing evidence of differentiated mindsets about abilities, it illustrates how qualitative methods can enable the detection of more nuance in mindsets than is currently captured in the almost universally quantitative mindset literature. These nuances include observations of how mindsets are deduced from one's experiences, the prevalence of mixed mindsets wherein individuals hold both fixed- and growth-oriented views, and that self-labeling is not only the province of fixed mindsets. Such insights have important implications for both updating assumptions about the ontology of mindsets, as well as for

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facilitating job seekers' engagement in various job search initiatives.

KEYWORDS

differentiated mindsets, job search, mixed mindsets, qualitative, self-labeling, within-person

INTRODUCTION

In the face of changing technologies, economic instability, and personal motivations to pursue more meaningful work, an effective job search is ever-important for securing (re)employment. Yet the job search process is rarely without frustration, often fraught with seemingly insurmountable challenges (Jiang et al., 2023; Newman et al., 2018; Wanberg et al., 2012, 2020). Research reveals that individuals who are more extraverted, conscientious (Kanfer et al., 2001) and proactive (Brown et al., 2006) more easily navigate the job search process, as well as those with higher self-efficacy (Eden & Aviram, 1993) and a learning goal orientation (van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009). Such research has enriched the job search literature by highlighting the kinds of personal characteristics that facilitate job search.

Yet a critical avenue for extending job search theory and research involves understanding within-person variation during the job search process. Wanberg et al. (2010, p. 803) underscore that 14% to 72% of the variance in different job search-related constructs (e.g., positive and negative affect, time spent in search) “lay at the within-individual level ... suggest[ing] that a within-individual approach has substantial possibilities for enhancing theory and research in the context of job seeking.” A meta-analysis by Liu et al. (2014) further suggests that large variations in the effectiveness of job search facilitation initiatives could be better understood by more closely examining the within-person characteristics that hinder wholehearted engagement in them. In recent years, scholars have taken up these calls, demonstrating that changes in job seekers' more dynamic characteristics and experiences can prompt them to be more or less effective in their job search efforts (see Song et al., 2018 for a review).

Mindsets have been proposed as an important, within-person phenomenon for understanding how job seekers navigate and learn from a tumultuous job search (Heslin & Keating, 2016). Mindsets, originally known as lay implicit theories of personal attributes (Dweck, 1986, 1999), are assumptions about the plasticity of such attributes (e.g., intellectual ability and personality) that influence one's thoughts and actions in challenging situations, particularly those wherein an individual perceives that failing is a possibility (Dweck, 1986, 2017a). A *fixed mindset* presumes that personal attributes are largely static and cannot be cultivated very much. A *growth mindset* presumes that attributes are malleable and amenable to being developed. These simple beliefs about the extent of malleability have important implications for self-regulation; specifically, the types of goals people set, the quality of strategies they generate, their effort beliefs, attributions for failure, and their ability to regulate disruptive emotions in order to overcome any obstacles to attaining their objectives (Burnette et al., 2013; Keating & Heslin, 2015).

Over the last two decades, mindsets have been studied in more specific ability domains than broad intellectual ability and personality, such as mindsets about negotiating ability (Kray & Haselhuhn, 2007), leadership ability (Hoyt et al., 2012), and networking ability (Kuwabara et al., 2020). However, by only examining mindsets regarding one specific ability at a time, these

studies do not directly compare mindsets simultaneously held across different ability domains. In the current study, we investigate whether mindsets vary at the within-person level, such that people hold differentiated mindsets about specific abilities in the context of an imminent job loss. In doing so, the study makes three scholarly contributions. The first is to add to the underdeveloped research stream on differentiated mindsets about abilities. Although Dweck (2006) suggests that people can hold different mindsets about specific abilities, there is little research directly examining this notion. Indeed, the only study (to our knowledge) that simultaneously examines mindsets in different ability domains observed similar mindsets across these domains (e.g., verbal, mathematical, and musical ability; Hughes, 2015). Other ostensibly relevant studies that measure more than one type of mindset examine the relationship between mindsets about an ability and either (a) higher level mindsets (e.g., mindsets about personality; Kuwabara et al., 2020) or (b) mindsets beyond the realm of abilities, such as implicit beliefs about culture (Chao et al., 2017) or race (Kung et al., 2018).

Second, although mindsets are described as personal lay theories that are particularly important for facing obstacles across one's life, mindset research is overwhelmingly quantitative and often focuses on examining students' reactions to hypothetical challenges (e.g., Chiu et al., 1997; Gervey et al., 1999; Rattan & Dweck, 2018). By contrast, the present study prompted working adults to verbalize their mindsets during a personal, real-time potential crisis. Doing so revealed fresh insights regarding characteristics of fixed and growth mindsets that are not readily captured by the traditional quantitative approach. These include (i) how individuals' mindsets are informed by their (challenging) life experiences, (ii) the existence and prevalence of "mixed mindsets" wherein people simultaneously endorse both fixed- and growth- minded perspectives, and (iii) that growth mindsets are also associated with self-labeling, despite self-labeling typically being framed in the mindset literature as a prototypical hallmark of a fixed mindset (e.g., Dweck, 2017a; Dweck et al., 1995a; Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

Finally, this study extends the mindset literature into the realm of job seeking by providing an initial empirical examination of Heslin and Keating's (2016) proposal that differentiated mindsets are salient in how job seekers frame the job search abilities of networking, vacancy searching, performing in job interviews, and negotiating a job offer. Given the role of mindsets in whether individuals engage in developmental initiatives (Hong et al., 1999; Kuwabara et al., 2020) and learn from feedback (Mangels et al., 2006), the present study provides a foundation for diagnosing impediments to acquiring job search capabilities and learning from job search interventions.

We begin by summarizing mindset research in achievement contexts, as well as in the context of job search, before introducing the research questions of the current study. Next, we describe the research design, followed by the analytic procedures and findings. Implications for the ontology of mindsets, research, and practice are then discussed.

MINDSETS

Similar to how researchers develop theories to describe the phenomena they examine, individuals hold lay implicit theories about the plasticity of personal attributes. These mindsets serve as a mental framework that "incorporates beliefs about the stability of an attribute and organize [s] the way people ascribe meaning to events" (Burnette et al., 2013, p. 657). An *entity lay theory* (Dweck, 1986), relabeled as a *fixed mindset* (Dweck, 2006), assumes that personal attributes are essentially static. Instances of mediocre performance or failure are thereby perceived to reflect

low innate ability, while success is construed as underscoring endowed talent. An *incremental lay theory* (Dweck, 1986), also known as a *growth mindset* (Dweck, 2006), assumes that these attributes are malleable. Through the lens of a growth mindset, failure to exhibit high performance is indicative of inadequate effort or inappropriate strategies, while successful performance reflects sufficient investment in developing task-relevant abilities.

Mindsets are typically presumed to be domain-specific (Burnette et al., 2013; Dweck, 2006), measured via items such as “You have a certain amount of leadership ability and you can’t really do much to change it” (e.g., in the leadership domain; Hoyt et al., 2012, p. 260). Mindsets can also cut across the broad domains of intelligence and personality. A sample item measuring this domain-general, kind-of-person mindset is “Everyone is a certain kind of person and there is not much that can be done to really change that” (Dweck et al., 1995a, p. 269). The notion that mindsets can be both general and domain-specific is in line with research on implicit theories that highlight their hierarchical structure (e.g., Lord et al., 2002, 2020) such that, at the highest, most abstract level, people can hold a general belief about a particular phenomenon (e.g., generally believing that one cannot change), as well as more nuanced, specific beliefs at lower levels (e.g., believing that one cannot change their leadership ability), with both levels of beliefs potentially shaping one another. In line with the widespread focus on domain-specific mindsets across the mindset literature over the last two decades (cf. Dweck, 2017a, 2024), the present work focuses on the domain-specific mindsets regarding a range of job search abilities—and whether these mindsets distinctly vary from one another.

Studies across diverse populations have revealed that mindsets are typically uncorrelated with level of education (Dweck et al., 1995a), self-esteem (Niiya et al., 2004), and the Big Five trait dimensions (Chao et al., 2017). Mindsets are conceptually distinct though empirically related to two other prominent social cognitive variables: self-efficacy and goal orientation. Self-efficacy pertains to beliefs about the adequacy of one’s capabilities to perform a particular task or endeavor, in contrast to the presumed plasticity of the abilities involved in doing so. The empirical relationship between these variables was illuminated by Wood and Bandura’s (1989) observation that self-efficacy is less diminished by setbacks when individuals hold more of a growth than a fixed mindset. Goal orientation pertains to an individual’s relative concern in achievement contexts with setting goals focused on learning, demonstrating their competence, or avoiding negative judgments of their capabilities (Dweck, 1986). Dweck and Leggett’s (1988, p. 256) assertion that “individuals’ implicit theories orient them toward particular goals” is supported by Burnette et al.’s (2013) meta-analytic finding that growth mindsets positively and negatively predict setting learning and performance goals, respectively.

Between-person studies comparing the implications of fixed and growth mindsets reveal that they affect individuals’ attributions, beliefs about effort, and the types of strategies they deploy in the face of challenges. A fixed mindset cues a tendency to avoid challenges that could potentially expose an underlying and innate weakness (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), attribute setbacks and failures to immutable ability (Levy & Dweck, 1998), characterize effort and persistence to overcome difficulties as likely to be fruitless (Mueller & Dweck, 1998), ignore valuable feedback (Mangels et al., 2006), and avoid trying to learn from the success of others (Nussbaum & Dweck, 2008). A fixed mindset concern with validating abilities, rather than developing them, prompts individuals to pass up opportunities to engage in activities that could help them attain their objectives (Hong et al., 1999). A growth mindset concern with cultivating presumably malleable personal attributes prompts individuals to construe setbacks as a signal that they need to exert more effort, deploy better strategies, or further develop the abilities required to successfully complete the task at hand. This focus on learning leads individuals to

pursue more difficult goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), embrace challenges (Hong et al., 1999), seek and learn from negative feedback (Zingoni & Byron, 2017), be inspired by high performers (Hoyt et al., 2012), and strive to learn from them (Nussbaum & Dweck, 2008).

Although mindsets can be stable over at least a 1- ($r = .72$) and 3-year ($r = .64$) period (Robins & Pals, 2002), mindsets are conceptualized as “relatively stable but malleable personal qualities, rather than fixed dispositions” (Dweck et al., 1995a, p. 279). Given that mindsets can be experimentally induced (Burnette et al., 2022; Heslin et al., 2005; Yeager et al., 2019), studies on mindsets typically involve examining the correlates of chronic mindsets, as well as experimental research examining the effects of induced mindsets.

THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF MINDSETS DURING JOB SEARCH

The phenomenon of mindsets was first introduced in the context of education (Dweck, 1986). In the subsequent few decades, the mindset literature has largely been dominated by studies examining the mindset dynamics of school children or college undergraduates with regard to academic achievement and performance. Heslin and Keating (2016) proposed that the mindset dynamics of students would generalize to the cognitions, affect, and behaviors of adults in a job search context. They suggested that mindsets play an important role in the context of adults seeking (re)employment, given the potentially derailing nature of setbacks encountered during the job search process. Specifically, Heslin and Keating (2016) argued that the mindset job seekers hold in the specific domains of networking, vacancy searching, being interviewed for a job (henceforth described simply as interviewing), and job offer negotiations could prompt patterns of functional or dysfunctional thoughts, feelings, and actions in those respective areas, that ultimately affect the speed and quality of their (re)employment.

An underlying assumption of Heslin and Keating (2016) is that individuals hold differentiated mindsets about various job search abilities. This assumption is conceptually consistent with Dweck et al.'s (1995a) observation that individuals can hold different mindsets in the broad domains of intelligence and personality (e.g., an individual simultaneously holding a fixed mindset about intelligence and a growth mindset about personality). Although it seems intuitive that ability-specific mindsets vary within individuals similarly to their mindsets in broad domains, other research suggests that this may not necessarily be the case. For instance, Hughes (2015) observed that people largely hold the same mindset about different intellectual abilities (e.g., verbal, mathematical, and musical ability), such that a fixed mindset in one domain was highly correlated with a fixed mindset in another. In light of this limited empirical support for theorizing that people can hold different mindsets across different abilities (e.g., Dweck, 2006; Heslin & Keating, 2016), the first objective of the present field study is to explore whether working-age adults simultaneously hold differentiated mindsets about their abilities for navigating a challenging (job search) endeavor.

Research Question 1: Can individuals simultaneously hold differentiated mindsets about various abilities, such as different mindsets about their networking, vacancy searching, interviewing, and negotiating abilities?

We focus on the job search abilities of networking, vacancy searching, interviewing, and negotiating for three reasons. First, focusing on these abilities provides an empirical test of Heslin and Keating's (2016) theorizing that job seekers' hold differentiated mindsets across these four specific domains. Second, while there are many job search abilities or activities that individuals can respectively draw on or engage in, each of the aforementioned job search

abilities are consequential for effectively navigating job search for a wide range of jobs (e.g., Liu et al., 2014; van Hooft et al., 2021; Wanberg et al., 2010, 2020). Finally, limiting the focus on exploring mindsets across these four job search abilities enables the qualitative data to be amenable to manual coding though also allows for potentially differentiated mindsets to emerge.

Musing about mindsets

To identify mindsets, researchers generally use or adapt an established, brief psychometric survey, such as those in the appendix of Dweck (1999), that is often administered in a controlled, laboratory setting (e.g., Hoyt et al., 2012; Zingoni & Byron, 2017). Mindset studies have rarely used qualitative methods. When they have been employed, they have generally been used to assess the fruits of mindsets by asking children to describe how they would respond to hypothetical situations, such as interacting with an antisocial (Erdley & Dweck, 1993) or struggling student (Heyman & Dweck, 1998), as a function of their mindset. In one of the few studies employing qualitative methods to assess mindsets, Bempechat et al. (1991) interviewed grade-school children individually for 30 min to measure their mindset, though did so by asking forced choice questions that pitted a fixed against a growth mindset.

Not only have adults' mindsets generally not been captured in ways that enable them to surface their presumptions about the fixedness or plasticity of their attributes, the few studies noted just above that have employed qualitative methods have largely called for children to comment on manufactured scenarios. Collecting qualitative data from job seekers thus represents an opportunity to explore the more nuanced ways adults seeking re-employment conceptualize and articulate their mindset in a real-world context, as well as what these narratives reveal about how they frame their job search experiences.

Research Question 2: How do adults verbalize their mindset(s) about job search challenges?

METHOD

Research context and sample

The present study was conducted in one of Australia's government-funded industry skills councils that was undergoing a process of defunding. Employees' roles encompassed identifying workforce development needs and specifying qualifications, competencies, and skill sets that formed national industry standards. In light of employees' pending job loss, the CEO called for recruitment specialists to provide job search support, such as cover letter and résumé writing, to prepare employees who would lose their jobs. We contacted the CEO about the research objectives and with his support, provided an information session where we invited all employees to participate in the present study on the basis that the insights obtained might facilitate their imminent job search. We underscored that participation was neither required by the CEO nor necessarily instrumental in securing their next role. Twenty-two employees, including the CEO, signed up to participate in the study. Eighteen participants were women, and the average age and tenure was 43 and 3.8 years, respectively.

The CEO recruited external specialists in cover letter and résumé writing, vacancy searching, and interviewing to work with employees in enhancing these specific skills. We thus offered a workshop on networking and negotiating strategies to employees participating in the

study so as to make all job search abilities targeted in the present study (i.e., networking, vacancy searching, interviewing, and negotiating) salient in the minds of employees. The networking and negotiating workshop was delivered by the second author who has extensive experience in providing such job search workshops. The workshop involved highlighting the potential benefits of networking and negotiating, reflecting on assumptions that can impede engaging in networking and negotiating, participating in practical activities (e.g., developing and practicing an elevator pitch), recording priorities for future negotiations, and providing multiple rounds of peer coaching and discussing what they learned from these exercises. Like the vacancy searching and interviewing preparation, there was no exercise targeting mindsets. The networking and negotiating workshop lasted approximately 3 h and was provided at no cost to participants or their organization.

Table 1 provides an overview of the timeline of data collection activities, which are described in more detail below.

Data collection: First phase

A week before participants engaged in any job search facilitation initiatives, and about a month before the interviews were conducted, participants completed a brief online questionnaire regarding their mindset about the four focal job search abilities so as to avoid potentially influencing the interview responses. One-item measures for each of the four ability-specific mindsets were administered to be used as a convergent validity check on the mindsets revealed by the interview data (Shadish et al., 2002). This approach was consistent with Tabernero and Wood's (1999, p. 125) observation that because mindsets are "a simple belief about the plasticity or fixedness of ability ... asking the same question in different ways will not enhance the construct validity of the measure."

Participants answered the following four items adapted from Dweck (1999): "You have a certain amount of networking ability and you can't really change it that much," "You have a certain amount of job search ability and you can't really change it that much," "You have a certain amount of interviewing ability and you can't really change it that much," and "You have a certain amount of negotiating ability and you can't really change it that much." Responses were provided on a 6-point Likert scale with the anchors 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*).

TABLE 1 Timeline of data collection activities.

Activity	
First phase	
Week 1	Participants respond to baseline (quantitative) measures of their mindsets regarding their networking, vacancy searching, interviewing, and negotiating abilities
Week 2	Participants engage in job search facilitation initiatives, including workshops in cover letter and résumé writing, vacancy searching, and interviewing, as well as networking and negotiating
Week 3	No data collection or research-related activity undertaken
Second phase	
Week 4	One-on-one interviews conducted with participants
Week 5	One-on-one interviews conducted with participants

Using the standard procedure in this literature, responses were reversed-scored, such that higher scores indicated more of a growth mindset. At the end of the questionnaire, we collected participants' demographic information.

Data collection: Second phase

In the following weeks, the first author conducted 1 h, one-on-one interviews that explored any challenges participants foresaw in each job search realm and why they believed each of them might be challenging (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). As mindsets guide the way people construe anticipated challenges and setbacks, we considered instances when participants talked about innate, static ability or having their search blocked by the “kind of person I am” as indicative of a fixed mindset (see Dweck, 2006, 2017a; Dweck et al., 1995a). Consistent with this, we deemed attributions to “not yet” having developed the requisite competencies as indicative of a growth mindset. During the interview process, the first author reflected back to participants the challenges they foresaw within each job search domain to ensure that their responses were correctly captured.

Conducting interviews enabled us to study the meaning interviewees ascribed to their career transition challenges and what these descriptions revealed about their mindsets (cf. Gephart, 2004). It is also important to note that unlike much of the mindset literature that focuses on assessing one's mindset and then having that individual perform (or indicate intentions) within a manufactured scenario (e.g., Chiu et al., 1997; Gervey et al., 1999; Rattan & Dweck, 2018; Yeager et al., 2011), the current methodology involved participants sharing their lived experiences in their own words *while* that experience was unfolding (i.e., participants discussed job search challenges in the midst of searching for new employment). This likely allowed for more spontaneous and personally meaningful accounts of participants' mindsets and views on their job search endeavors.

Data analysis

The first author transcribed and analyzed all interviews prior to interpreting the quantitative survey responses to avoid such responses potentially influencing the interview coding process. As a preparatory method, the first author first categorized the data into sections focused on networking, vacancy searching, interviewing, and negotiating for each participant (cf. Miles et al., 2014). In instances where employees simultaneously spoke of two abilities, the data were categorized into both respective domains. We used the NVivo software program for data management and to facilitate analysis. All interview data were thematically analyzed.

To address the first research question regarding whether people can simultaneously hold differentiated mindsets about specific job search abilities, the first author began by identifying sub-themes in the interview data for each ability category. These themes were a priori, based on what the mindset literature suggests are indicators of fixed and growth mindsets (Dweck, 1999, 2006, 2017a). For instance, fixed mindsets are associated with attributing performance to abilities that are unable to be substantially developed and thus initiatives in this regard as prone to being largely fruitless. Growth mindsets cue a focus on malleable psychological mediators (e.g., effort, persistence, and strategies) that contribute to under- or enhanced performance (Hong et al., 1999). Examples of these sub-themes include “exerting effort” and “seeking

feedback” (i.e., words associated with growth mindsets; Burnette et al., 2013; Dweck, 1999, 2017a) and “innate” and “avoid” (i.e., words associated with fixed mindsets; Dweck, 1999, 2017a). This enabled fixed- and growth-oriented sub-themes to be collated into the dominant themes of a fixed or growth mindset in each ability domain (King, 2004).

For vacancy searching, a theme of fixed or growth mindset did not emerge for half of the participants. When asked about the challenges they foresaw in searching for new roles, many participants did not discuss their ability to search nor their beliefs about that ability, but instead discussed the necessity of searching, irrespective of how they felt about the endeavor. It was thus not possible to gauge their mindset about vacancy search based on their responses. This might suggest that mindsets are relatively inconsequential for those abilities perceived as fundamental to attaining a valued goal (e.g., engaging in vacancy search to secure new employment is relatively more necessary than networking, though research suggests that networking can lead to positive job outcomes; Wanberg et al., 2010). We thereby proceeded to only use the interview data on networking, interviewing, and negotiating to compare and analyze participants' mindsets.

There were also instances of a roughly equal number of fixed and growth themes in a particular domain, leading to the development of a “mixed mindset” theme, defined as holding both fixed- or growth-oriented beliefs. Although including this theme is conceptually consistent with mindsets occurring on a continuum, mindset theory and research consistently discusses people in terms of the fixed or growth mindset dichotomy. Research also sometimes labels those whose mean psychometric survey responses are in the 3 to 4 range on the 6-point scale as “undefined” or “uncertain” before discarding their data from further analysis (e.g., Dweck et al., 1995a; Plaks et al., 2001). We asked a colleague not involved in the current study (though familiar with the mindset literature) to provide a consistency check on the fixed, growth, and mixed mindset categorizations of all participants by reviewing sections of the transcripts that had been organized into each ability domain. The reliability between our initial, independent categorizations was $\kappa = .71$ ($p < .001$). We subsequently discussed any discrepancies to arrive at a consensus for the mindset that participants held in each specific ability domain. Based on this discussion, it was agreed that as well as fixed and growth mindsets, “mixed mindset” was a materially prevalent theme.

Addressing the second research question regarding how adults verbalize their mindsets involved a more exploratory approach. The first author reviewed all transcripts again and engaged in values coding. This involved applying codes to the data that reflected participants' perspectives or views that would ultimately be pulled into more dominant themes (Saldaña, 2013). This method of analysis is appropriate given that we were interested in understanding participants' unique attitudes and beliefs with regard to their networking, interviewing, and negotiating ability. Although values coding subsumes values, attitudes, and beliefs, it was not the objective of the current analysis to differentiate between them. Analysis involved simultaneously mapping the data with codes and arranging them in a hierarchy. In other words, rather than look for higher order themes only after all the data were coded, the first author was attentive to themes as coding unfolded (cf. Kreiner et al., 2015).

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: Differentiated mindsets about job search abilities

As a check on the viability of categorizing interview responses as indicative of fixed, mixed, or growth mindsets, we compared participants' mindsets identified in the interview data with

participants' mindsets observed in the quantitative survey conducted a month earlier. Following Dweck et al. (1995a), we categorized survey responses of 3 or below and 4 or above as a fixed or growth mindset in each domain, respectively. We observed a 71% convergence between the mindsets revealed during the interviews and survey responses (see Table 2). We expected some discrepancy between the survey and interview responses, given that the interviews allowed scope for more nuanced reflection upon one's career transition challenges and beliefs about the malleability of their abilities to navigate them (and thus allowing for mixed mindsets to emerge). We thereby proceeded to use the mindsets identified from the interview data to categorize participants' mindset in each ability domain as either fixed, mixed, or growth.

TABLE 2 Mindsets observed across survey and interview data.

Participant	Mindset about networking		Mindset about interviewing		Mindset about negotiating	
	Survey	Interview	Survey	Interview	Survey	Interview
Participant #1-female	3 ^a	Fixed	5	Growth	3	Mixed
Participant #2-female	5	Growth	5	Growth	5	Growth
Participant #3-female	5	Growth	5	Growth	5	Growth
Participant #4-male	6	Growth	6 ^a	Fixed	3 ^a	Growth
Participant #5-female	6	Growth	6	Growth	6 ^a	Mixed
Participant #6-female	3 ^a	Growth	6	Growth	6	Growth
Participant #7-male	5	Growth	5	Growth	5 ^a	Mixed
Participant #8-male	5	Growth	5 ^a	Mixed	5 ^a	Fixed
Participant #9-female	4	Mixed	5 ^a	Fixed	5 ^a	Mixed
Participant #10-female	4 ^a	Growth	4	Mixed	4 ^a	Growth
Participant #11-female	3	Mixed	3 ^a	Growth	3	Mixed
Participant #12-female	3	Mixed	4 ^a	Growth	4	Mixed
Participant #13-female	6	Growth	6	Growth	6	Growth
Participant #14-female	4	Mixed	4	Mixed	4 ^a	Growth
Participant #15-female	4 ^a	Fixed	6	Growth	6	Growth
Participant #16-female	6	Growth	6	Growth	6	Growth
Participant #17-female	2	Fixed	2 ^a	Mixed	2	Fixed
Participant #18-female	6 ^a	Fixed	6	Growth	6	Growth
Participant #19-female	6	Growth	6	Growth	6	Growth
Participant #20-female	4	Mixed	5	Growth	5	Growth
Participant #21-female	5 ^a	Mixed	5	Growth	5	Growth
Participant #22-male	4	Mixed	5	Growth	2	Fixed

Note: Responses to each survey item were reversed-scored, such that higher scores indicated more of a growth mindset. Vacancy searching is not included in the table above, given that a mindset theme in this domain did not emerge in the interview data for half of the participants.

^aDenotes misalignment between survey and interview responses.

We observed that consistent with the theorizing of Heslin and Keating (2016), participants held different mindsets regarding the specific abilities of networking, interviewing, and negotiating (though not vacancy searching, as a mindset theme did not emerge for several participants). Specifically, 16 of the 22 participants held differentiated mindsets across the three job search ability domains. We also found that 13 participants held a mixed mindset in at least one domain. The prevalence of mixed mindsets in discussions with job seekers highlights the imperative to distinguish a mixed mindset from what is traditionally presumed to be an “uncertain” mindset in quantitative research (i.e., survey responses between 3 to 4 on a 6-point scale; Dweck et al., 1995a; Dweck, 1999; Plaks et al., 2001). Indeed, the mixed mindset code emerged to account for those participants for whom both fixed and growth beliefs resonated, in contrast to participants being uncertain about either belief.

We also observed that of the six participants who held the same mindset across all ability domains, the mindset across these domains was growth. No participant held a fixed mindset regarding all abilities. This might be because the context of a pending job loss made salient the imperative for a growth mindset regarding at least some facets of job search. The observation that no participant in the current sample held a fixed mindset across all job search domains also raises the question about existing mindset research wherein individuals are categorized as overall “fixed”: Are these individuals who are deemed as holding a fixed mindset, based on their Likert-scale responses, indeed categorically fixed, or would a more mixed mindset have been detected had they had the opportunity to verbally express their beliefs?

Research Question 2: How adults verbalize their mindsets

Interviews provided an opportunity to explore the ways adults articulate their mindsets in their own words. Such accounts often complemented conceptions of fixed and growth mindsets established in the mindset literature, though also revealed previously undocumented hallmarks of fixed and growth mindsets, as described below.

Fixed mindsets

Attributions to personality

When participants spoke of a specific ability as unable to be developed or as something that they “just don’t have,” it implied that they held a fixed mindset about that ability. When describing their typically mediocre performance or failure in a domain, some participants presumed that their innate personality inhibited them from performing effectively. Attributions to personality were often mentioned when they discussed their (limited) networking or negotiating ability, suggesting that their inherent introversion would impede them from achieving a favorable outcome, as exemplified below:

I think my introversion might always get in the way. I think I could learn some things, but again it’s hard to make that call ... my gut feel is I think my introversion will always [get in the way].

(Participant #20-female)

Such attributions are consistent with the observation in the mindset literature that fixed relative to growth mindsets incline people to accord greater weight to traits in explaining behavior and performance outcomes (Heyman & Dweck, 1998; Levy & Dweck, 1998).

Fixed mindsets were also associated with invoking others' personality as evidence that some job search abilities are a reflection of an unchangeable trait that cannot really be cultivated:

We've got a forty [year] school reunion coming up. The person organizing it was always organizing things ... leading things ... it's obviously something in his blood. It's the same with my nephew who's, I don't know, 22 ... 23. He's very outgoing, always has been. He's just decided to be a real estate agent. He'd be the one out of the crowd leading the war cries at rugby union matches and things like that so has no inhibitions, if that's the right word, so I think there's a fair element of inherent outgoingness.

(Participant #22-male)

Despite the fact that networking and negotiating often yield favorable job search outcomes (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Wanberg et al., 2010), participants with a fixed mindset expressed reluctance to engage in these initiatives based on the presumption that they did not have the "right" personality. They referred to their own personality in justifying this belief, as well as made reference to the rigidity of others' traits in formulating a cynical prognosis regarding the scope for cultivating their networking or negotiating ability.

Construal of ability requirements in a vague, disheartening manner

Rather than consider the range of possible tasks involved in, for example, networking (e.g., updating social media platforms, following-up on emails with important contacts, or providing resources and/or information to contacts), participants holding a fixed mindset tended to paint a rudimentary picture of what a specific ability in action looked like. For instance, when discussing her networking ability, one participant noted that "I can't just walk into some place and, you know, with a glass of wine in my hand, and schmooze." Although metaphors regarding what is involved in enacting a specific job search ability can be enabling (e.g., depicting networking as an opportunity to make new friends), the depictions of job search endeavors by those holding a fixed mindset framed them in a rather more threat-laden, unnerving manner:

In my mind, networking is ... everyone standing in a room and everyone's like in little groups chatting or in couples chatting and it's chatting—I'm not a good chatter.

(Participant #15-female)

Networking is like going into a schoolyard full of strangers and hoping someone wants to play with your ball with you, you know?

(Participant #18-female)

This finding mirrors evidence from the quantitative survey-based mindset literature that fixed mindsets generally impede individuals from considering a range of factors that may contribute to their behavior and performance (e.g., the effort they exert or strategies they use), by

instead focusing them on presumably static attributes (e.g., whether they are a “good chatter”) as the prime cause of their behavior, performance, and subsequent outcomes (Levy & Dweck, 1998; Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

Growth mindsets

Learning from others

Research shows that when students hold a growth mindset, they are more likely to be inspired by leaders (Hoyt et al., 2012) and learn from others who have outperformed them, rather than protect their ego by making downward comparisons—as their fixed-minded counterparts tend to do (Nussbaum & Dweck, 2008). In a similar vein, a growth mindset regarding a specific ability was associated with learning from others in the workplace about how to develop a skill they felt needed improving:

I've developed some very good skills because I have an excellent manager and I've watched the way that she works and how she negotiates for what she wants ... I think what I've learnt from her will allow me to negotiate a lot better.

(Participant #19-female)

Job seekers holding a growth mindset also spoke of learning from their colleagues, as exemplified by two participants who noted how they draw on their peers to cultivate their networking ability:

I always want to learn from my colleagues that are always so confident in talking.

(Participant #10-female)

I sort of reflect on it and I do talk to colleagues about it and I watch other people do it.

(Participant #5-female)

Participants holding a growth mindset drew on insights from colleagues in the way they, for example, networked or negotiated at work, and not necessarily from how others engaged in job search initiatives themselves. This suggests that adults holding a growth mindset might regularly take cues from others about how to improve (e.g., noting how a manager negotiates with a client), even before the imperative to do so arises (e.g., needing to find (re)employment).

Learning with maturation

Although the abilities of younger people are typically perceived to be more malleable than those of older individuals (Neel & Lassetter, 2015), growth mindsets were expressed through comments about participants having developed themselves with age. Rather than presume that “you can't teach an old dog new tricks,” they instead used their age and what they had learned over time as evidence for their potential to continue growing and to successfully develop and enact various job search abilities:

I think a shift I've made out of my twenties into my thirties, as you mature in your career, it is learning that ... because then you start hiring people and you're looking for people who understand what you really need and how to make your life easier and that switched my mindset in terms of how [to] go about [networking].

(Participant #2-female)

I think what I have learnt over time is how to manage the [networking] process like, for example, no one ever follows up. I always do, always and quickly. I don't wait a week, I wait the next day.

(Participant #16-female)

Framing age and related experience as evidence of change and development is not currently discussed in the literature as a hallmark of a growth mindset. These participants reflecting on their age and experience were not, however, overly optimistic about securing a new role. Many acknowledged the prevalence of ageism as a possible obstacle to their career transition, irrespective of their mindset. Such an acknowledgement underscored the reality that regardless of their mindset, participants' goal to find new work may be hindered by age-specific stereotypes about their perceived competence and capacity to develop it (e.g., Keating & Heslin, 2022; Kite et al., 2005).

Hallmarks of both fixed and growth mindsets

Labeling

Through the lens of a fixed mindset, good performance reflects an innate gift, while poor performance is construed as having low ability to successfully complete the task at hand. Those holding a fixed mindset thus tend to categorize or label themselves as, for example, inherently “gifted” or “stupid” (Dweck et al., 1995a; Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Consistent with research on mindsets and labeling, those holding a fixed mindset about specific job search abilities would often use labels to rationalize why they perceived those abilities to be largely static, as exemplified by a participant who noted that “I'm not very good at selling myself. I don't feel very good at selling myself because ... I'm not a salesperson” when discussing her networking ability.

Although labeling is traditionally only associated with fixed mindsets (Dweck, 1999, 2017a), those holding a growth mindset in a particular domain also labeled themselves:

I'm a trainer ... it's all about learning ... I learn more from my students than they probably learn from me and I used to tell them that quite often and they'd go “How is that possible?” Because learning is not a one-way thing ... I'm always learning; it's why I keep doing courses—keep the brain active.

(Participant #6-female)

It is noteworthy that participants with a fixed or growth mindset *both* applied labels to themselves, though these labels functioned in different ways. The fixed-minded self-labels tended to be pejorative, imply that their abilities were rigid, and suggest little could be done to cultivate and successfully enact the relevant job search ability. Labels used by participants

holding a growth mindset suggested that the relevant ability was amenable to development, via initiatives such as engaging in relevant training.

Framing life experiences as evidence of (im)mutability

To our knowledge, there are no published studies that explore the role that mindsets might play in how people draw on their life experiences to form judgments about their presumably (im)mutable abilities. When asked why they thought a specific ability was unlikely to be substantially cultivated, those holding a fixed mindset made references to life experiences that culminated in recognizing their presumably static ability. For instance:

Even not when networking profession[ally], but even networking socially, I struggle with it. Even making friends and stuff doesn't, is not something that comes very easily.

(Participant #20-female)

Holding a growth mindset involved drawing on life experiences that were more positive and that reiterated participants' scope for future development, as exemplified by a participant explaining why he thought his networking ability was malleable:

In the work that we do, we go out and present to people so you're always talking at conferences and stuff like that ... I suppose that kind of assisted me in being able to go and talk to people ... I think if you'd ask me this a few years ago, my answer would have probably been quite different, but because I've had to [do that] through this role ... I think I could go and do it if I was put in that situation.

(Participant #7-male)

Those holding a growth mindset also spoke of negative experiences, though cast them in a manner that highlighted the lessons they learned from them, ultimately construing them as positive:

I think for me, having a really bad interview was the best thing that ever happened because that just made me go ... I really need to rethink the way I prepare for an interview, what I should have done ... I learnt not to turn up to something unprepared.

(Participant #6-female)

These findings suggest that fixed and growth mindsets could play a role in the way that adults use life experiences to frame and make judgments about their job search abilities. Such experiences may then undermine or facilitate job seekers' job search efforts by virtue of reminding them of prior discouraging or inspiring events, respectively.

DISCUSSION

Mindset research has drawn stark contrasts between the self-regulatory inclinations exhibited by individuals with a prototypical fixed or growth mindset (cf. Dweck, 1986, 1999, 2017b, 2024).

The present study explored whether it is overly simplistic to characterize individuals with the broad brush of having either a fixed or growth mindset, by conducting an investigation into whether those on the verge of an imminent, involuntary job loss simultaneously hold different mindsets regarding their networking, vacancy searching, interviewing, and negotiating abilities. The results obtained from this qualitative study provide empirical support for the notion that individuals can hold different mindsets about specific abilities, though also reveal several other important insights for both mindsets and job search theory and research.

Ontological implications for mindsets

... to ensure that only participants with clear theories are included, participants are classified as entity theorists if their overall implicit theory score is 3.0 or below and classified as incremental theorists if their overall score is 4.0 or above. Using this criterion, about 15% of participants are typically excluded ...

(Dweck et al., 1995a, p. 269)

... children may come to believe either that their talents and abilities are largely fixed (a fixed mindset) *or* that they can be developed (a growth mindset; see Dweck, 1999).

(Dweck, 2017b, p. 698, italics added)

In the decades since Dweck et al. (1995a) stated that mindsets are indicated by the average of responses to mindset scale items that are within two scale points of the most extreme fixed (i.e., entity, with a mean score of 1) or growth (i.e., incremental, with a mean score of 6) prototypes, hundreds of studies (e.g., Burnette et al., 2013; Chiu et al., 1997; Heslin et al., 2005; Kuwabara et al., 2020) have (at least in part) adhered to this bifurcated conceptualization of mindsets. An unexpected finding of the present study was the prevalence of mixed mindsets, defined here as individuals simultaneously holding both fixed- or growth-oriented beliefs. Although mixed mindsets are in line with Dweck et al.'s (1995b) early observation that beliefs about both fixedness or malleability are cognitively accessible to most individuals, discussions within the extant mindset literature has continued to be largely founded on Dweck's (1999, 2017a, 2017b) depiction of people as holding *either* a fixed *or* a growth mindset. This dichotomous conceptualization of mindsets has likely been reinforced by virtually universal reliance on (and adaptation of) the traditional 6-point Likert-scale measures (see Dweck, 1999, pp. 177–180) to capture mindsets, that originally enabled these categorizations. While mindset research routinely also assesses mindset implications using continuous mindset measures that do not exclude the data of individuals with a mean mindsets score between 3 and 4, to our knowledge, there has been little substantive questioning of whether mindsets are merely dichotomous (see Darley, 1995; Lüftenegger & Chen, 2017; Wigfield, 2024 for exceptions).

Our qualitative data, however, not only show that both beliefs can be simultaneously accessible, but that they can also be concurrently endorsed, such that individuals can hold beliefs about their abilities that are ambivalent and contradictory, rather than neither belief distinctly resonating with them. The frequency of these mixed mindsets also raises the question of whether there is value in studying them as a substantive phenomenon. For instance, are there meaningful self-regulatory differences between having a mixed mindset wherein fixed and

growth views resonate with an individual, and an “uncertain” mindset wherein neither view is strongly endorsed? Following a more provocative line of inquiry, to what extent do uncertain mindsets even exist? Indeed, are uncertain mindsets predominantly an artifact of presuming that Likert-scale responses falling between 3 and 4 suggest that people do not identify with either mindset when, instead, they might identify with both mindsets when given the chance to verbalize them? This possibility is consistent with Dweck et al.'s (1995b, p. 332) notion that: “implicit theories may be knowledge structures that we have available to us and that become differentially accessible” that has seldom since been discussed or studied within the mindset literature.

In the midst of challenges, mindsets have important implications for self-regulation. Our research both confirms and extends some of the major established correlates of mindsets (Dweck, 2017a, 2024). These include fixed mindsets being associated with attributions to innate personality and growth mindsets being associated with learning from others. On the other hand, labeling has exclusively been associated with fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2006, 2024; Dweck et al., 1995a; Mueller & Dweck, 1998) and has been used to identify and challenge people's fixed mindsets (Heslin et al., 2021; Heslin & Keating, 2016). This reflects a key premise in the mindset literature that a fixed mindset leads to attributing performance outcomes to who someone is, rather than what they did; that is, the developmental processes they engaged in (Dweck, 2024; Hong et al., 1999; Mueller & Dweck, 1998). The finding that participants holding a growth mindset also assigned labels to themselves suggests that growth mindsets similarly involve focusing on who one is, though in a way that is aligned with a growth-oriented identity (e.g., as “a lifelong student” who can continually develop). This unexpected finding paves the way for re-examining the traditional distinction between fixed and growth mindsets, such that growth mindsets conceivably also lead individuals to focus on the person by labeling themselves, though in ways focused on the process of cultivating their targeted abilities.

Despite suggestions that people can hold different mindsets about various abilities (Dweck, 2006, 2017a), to date, evidence in this regard has been unclear (Hughes, 2015). The findings regarding differentiated mindsets about specific abilities contributes to this underdeveloped research stream, as well as calls for understanding how such differentiated mindsets could affect each other in ways that are consequential for how people approach their various challenges. For instance, mindsets “activate” allied constructs (e.g., attributions, goals, and effort beliefs) that ultimately result in approach or avoidance behavior (Dweck, 2017b, 2024; Heslin et al., 2019). Mindsets made salient by a particular goal might similarly activate and potentially influence mindset beliefs about other specific, relevant abilities. For example, a job seeker's growth mindset about interviewing might cue more growth-oriented beliefs about networking when their goal is to secure (re)employment, even though they typically hold a fixed mindset about networking. The potential for a growth mindset about interviewing to cue similar beliefs about networking may be less likely to occur in the absence of such an overarching goal that connects these abilities. This possibility suggests that whether mindsets about different abilities are more or less similar to one another may thus depend on whether there is a particular goal that calls for those abilities to be enacted in tandem.

To summarize, the ontological contributions to mindset research are to challenge the established dichotomous conception of mindsets by illuminating the existence of mixed mindsets, to reveal that self-labeling is not merely the province of fixed mindsets, and to show that mindsets may be derived from reflecting on life experiences, as discussed below.

Limitations and future research

One limitation of the present study is the single field research context. Future research that utilizes more heterogeneous samples is thus needed to build upon the present findings. The interviews conducted nonetheless provided preliminary nuanced data that enabled exploring how adults verbalize their mindsets and relate them to their job search challenges, which revealed unique insights into mindsets. For instance, we observed that job seekers' beliefs about their abilities seemed to be conceptualized and informed by an array of personal and professional experiences. These experiences served as evidence of their fixedness or malleability (or both), underscoring that mindsets are not ahistorical or context independent, and potentially suggesting that they can be shaped well beyond childhood. However, it cannot be deduced from the present qualitative methodology whether these experiences are a *source of* mindsets or whether they *flow from* mindsets. The former possibility may be explored via research on whether mood primes the nature of the mindset-related life experiences recalled. According to the affect infusion model (Forgas, 1995, 2023), mood shapes judgments in part via priming the retrieval of mood-congruent memories. Research might examine whether mood plays a role in the recalling of mindset-aligned life experiences we observed, such that optimistic moods are associated with recalling instances that conjure a growth mindset, versus more pessimistic moods that invoke recounting instances of failing to develop and thereby holding more of a fixed mindset.

It also cannot be concluded from this study whether the hallmarks of fixed and growth mindsets, such as abstract construals of ability and learning from others, respectively, are a source or consequence of mindsets. Although these hallmarks potentially serve to both cue and reinforce a particular mindset, future experimental research that manipulates mindsets is needed to establish the causal link between mindsets and the hallmarks identified. Such research endeavors are likely to benefit from employing longitudinal designs that enable exploration of the potential reciprocal relationship between the sources of mindsets and what flows from them.

In the present study, participants' roles entailed developing industry standards for training and development. This day-to-day focus on development potentially made the current sample more growth-oriented about their own abilities, relative to job seekers in other fields that focus less on development. An imminent job loss and indeed participating in this study could have also arguably made salient the imperative to adopt more growth-oriented beliefs about relevant abilities for job search. Future research thus needs to explore whether individuals hold more of a growth mindset in less growth-oriented contexts and when the situation is relatively "weak" (e.g., when voluntarily searching for a new job), rather than "strong" (e.g., being forced to look for new employment).

The number of mixed mindsets that emerged in the interview data, as well as the various ways job seekers verbalized their fixed and growth mindsets, emphasize an imperative for future mindset research to utilize qualitative methods. Drawing on such methods could also be used in conjunction with traditional quantitative approaches to measure mindsets, such that those who fall within the "uncertain" mindset category are given the opportunity to express whether they are indeed uncertain about their beliefs, or whether both fixed and growth beliefs resonate with them. More broadly, a qualitative approach could provide individuals with the opportunity to articulate their lay theories in their own words and potentially enable deeper insight into mindsets and the processes whereby they affect thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

Consistent with Heslin and Keating's (2016) theorizing, participants revealed that their mindsets about abilities relevant to the task of job search can differ. Such findings contribute to the growing within-person literature (e.g., da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2018; Watermann et al., 2021) in job search by potentially explaining why an otherwise effective job seeker might exhibit dysfunctional tendencies in a particular area (i.e., when she/he holds a fixed mindset in that domain). Future research could examine whether inculcating growth mindsets regarding multiple job search abilities leads to more functional outcomes in those domains (e.g., more positive thoughts, affect about, and engagement in networking when one holds a growth mindset about networking; cf. Kuwabara et al., 2020), compared with job search domains wherein a growth mindset is not cultivated. Such research would allow for understanding the differential impact of differentiated mindsets with regard to job seekers' thoughts, feelings, and (in)action as they navigate a potentially tumultuous job search.

Practical implications

In the present study, job seekers verbalized their mindsets in their own words as they discussed their job search challenges. Job search interventions could similarly involve discussions about job seekers' mindsets as they relate to anticipated challenges and challenges they have already overcome, such that they have scope to identify and address any current limiting beliefs. Our discovery of mixed mindsets also opens the specter of job search interventions being tweaked to tap into and build upon any existing growth tenants within individuals who "on average" hold a mixed mindset about a particular job search ability. For instance, growth-oriented beliefs about a certain job search ability that already resonate with a job seeker could be drawn out in discussions with them, which are then emphasized and generalized to inculcate more of a growth mindset in that domain. Indeed, perhaps a growth mindset that is cultivated as a result of doing so is more robust in the face of potential future setbacks, given its grounding in an existing, personally held belief (cf. Aronson, 1999), rather than one that is offered from an external source (e.g., from a career coach).

The evidence of growth-oriented self-labeling suggests that growth mindset interventions might be enriched by seeking to source or cultivate positive self-labels that could provide the basis of productive, enabling identities. Heslin et al. (2005) observed that an intensive growth mindset intervention, involving reflecting on instances of personal development, prompts managers to adopt a growth mindset that lasts for at least 6 weeks. Perhaps such interventions can be enhanced by explicitly prompting people to crystalize such instances into growth-oriented identities (e.g., "I am a ..." "learner," "student," "apprentice," "grower of talent"). Given that the effects of mindset primes in experimental settings may be short-lived, research is needed on the potential, sustained impact of identity-based growth mindset interventions.

Prior to the present study, it could have seemed unnecessary or pedantic to determine the specific mindsets individuals hold about particular job search abilities. Yet the current results have revealed that the devil may indeed reside in the details, such as being burdened by a fixed mindset regarding one specific job search ability despite being growth minded or "mixed" in other areas. These findings thereby provide an empirical basis for the development and use of multi-domain instruments, like those used in this study, to measure mindsets regarding different aspects of job search or other multifaceted endeavors. Before participating in job search facilitation programs, these surveys could be used to identify areas wherein job seekers hold a fixed mindset that might otherwise go undetected and derail their learning. Applying a suitable

brief growth mindset intervention (Heslin et al., 2005; Heslin & Keating, 2016; Yeager et al., 2019; for a review see Burnette et al., 2022) to address such fixed mindsets may then enable people to more proactively engage with and profit from job search interventions.

CONCLUSION

As a simple assumption about fixedness or plasticity, mindsets are obviously only one of the many factors that play a role in navigating a tumultuous job search. These beliefs are nonetheless salient in the context of an impending job loss. We have shown how mindsets can simultaneously differ in the realms of networking, interviewing, and negotiating, as well as how they manifest when individuals are given the opportunity to discuss their career transition challenges. In doing so, the present study contributes to a growing body of research on within-person dynamics in mindsets and in job seeking, though also provides initial momentum to potentially shift the consensus that mindsets are essentially dichotomous, ahistorical, and that self-labeling is only the domain of fixed mindsets.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

In line with ethical approval (such that the anonymity of participants is preserved), data are not shared.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethics approval was obtained prior to data collection.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Sample Introductory Questions

1. How do you feel about being defunded?
2. What roles have you considered moving into next?

Networking

1. How do you feel about the prospect of networking to learn about potentially suitable jobs?
2. What challenges do you foresee?
3. Why will ... be so challenging?

Vacancy Searching

1. How do you feel about the prospect of searching for a potentially suitable new job?
2. What challenges do you foresee?
3. Why will ... be so challenging?

Interviewing

1. How do you feel about the prospect of attending job interviews?
2. What challenges do you foresee?
3. Why will ... be so challenging?

Negotiating

1. How do you feel about the prospect of negotiating your next job offer?
2. What challenges do you foresee?
3. Why will ... be so challenging?