CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This chapter discusses the conceptual background of the study. This chapter is split into two sections. The first section gives the definitions of the constructs used in the study, followed by the theoretical framework used to develop the research model. This would be helpful in understanding the concepts and their linkages that are discussed in the literature review given in the next chapter.

2.1 Definition of the Constructs

2.1.1 Career Planning Attitudes

“Career planning is the deliberate process through which someone becomes aware of his/her personal skills, interests, knowledge, motivations, and other characteristics; acquires information about opportunities and choices; identifies career-related goals; and establishes action plans to attain specific goals” (Dessler, 2009, p. 198). Thus, career planning deals with identification of career-related or employment goals that is determined on the basis of individual abilities, skills, and knowledge and the labor market opportunities and alternatives. Career planning also involves deciding the roadmap to accomplish the career-related goals such as acquiring relevant knowledge, undergoing training to meet the requirements of the job, and applying selectively for the jobs that match one’s candidature. Career planning builds confidence among individuals to take greater responsibility for their self-development (Hall, Waddell, Donner, & Wheeler, 2004; Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Chakraborty et al., 2017). Empirical studies conducted in the past have suggested that career planning is the preliminary stage of a successful job search activity (Swain, 1984; Fondas & Stewart, 1994; Folsom & Reardon, 2003;
Zikic & Klehe, 2006; Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012; Arnold & Barrett, 2017; Sarchielli, Fraccaroli, & Sverke, 2017). In this regard, Rottinghaus, Day, and Borgen (2005) identified three career planning attitudes namely, career adaptability, career optimism, and perceived knowledge of job market to assess the involvement of graduating students in career planning activities. Rottinghaus et al. (2005) defined career planning attitudes as the predisposition which reflects the degree of engagement in career planning activities such as listing down career-related goals; identifying career-related opportunities; programming education, work and other related task in a sequential manner for attainment of career-related goals such as joining the job market after passing out from the university (Stoeber, Mutinelli, & Corr, 2016; Corr & Mutinelli, 2017). The present study follows the definition of career planning attitudes by Rottinghaus et al. (2005) as it is a well established definition and various studies have examined the influence of different components of career planning attitudes on career decisiveness, goal clarity, and employment success amongst youth across both western and Asian countries (Gunkel et al., 2010; Rottinghaus, Buelow, Matyja, & Schneider, 2012; Tyrance, Harris, & Post, 2013; Chatterjee, 2014; Garcia, Restubog, Bordia, Bordia, & Roxas, 2015; Stoeber et al., 2016). Hence, the three components of career planning attitudes are relevant for the use of job search strategies as they are largely driven by employment goals and career decisions. The next section provides an overview of the three career planning attitudes, namely, career adaptability, career optimism, and perceived knowledge of job market as noted by Rottinghaus et al. (2005) to be used in this study.

2.1.1.1 Career Adaptability (CA)

According to Savickas (1984), career adaptability reflects an individual’s potential to cope with existing and anticipated work trauma, occupational transitions, and development tasks. In other words, career adaptability describes an individual’s potential to accept and cope with the
alterations or changes in the career roles and to effectively handle the career transitions (Savickas, 2002), such as school-to-work transition or ending the unemployment state by searching for a job. This implies that career adaptability is considered important for students as well as working adults. Career adaptability is also recognized as a key competency in one’s successful career (Super and Knasel, 1981; Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, Koen, & Buyken, 2012; Koen et al., 2012; McIlveen, Burton, & Beccaria, 2013; Zacher, 2014; Guan et al., 2014; Bocciardi, Caputo, Fregonese, Langher, & Sartori, 2017). Building on this premise, Rottinghaus et al. (2005) defined career planning attitudes as the “propensity affecting the way individuals perceive their ability to alter and regulate career plans, especially during the phase of unforeseen events” (p. 3). Furthermore, the dimensions of career adaptability as noted by Savickas (2005) include career planning, decision making, exploration, and confidence. This implies that individuals who lack career adaptability do not have a career plan when compared to individuals with good career adaptability (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). Accordingly, career adaptability represents job-seekers' mental preparedness to use a particular job search strategy, which in turn influence their job search outcomes (Koen et al., 2010).

2.1.1.2 Career Optimism (CO)

Career optimism reflects an individual’s confidence regarding his/her ability to decide, persevere and proceed in a pertinent career (e.g. Friedman, Kane, & Cornfield, 1998; Hennessey, Rumrill, Fitzgerald, & Roessler, 2008). As a component of career planning attitudes, Rottinghaus et al. (2005) defined career optimism as “a tendency to expect the best possible outcome for the future career and lay emphasis on the most promising features of one’s career development” (p. 11). Thus, it describes an individual who is “intensely interested in his/her future career, enthusiastically engaged in learning that is directly related to the visualized future, and the one
who feels comfortable that he/she is on the appropriate path of career success” (McIlveen et al., 2013, p. 230). Furthermore, it describes the individuals’ state of being positive concerning the prospects of their career development and feel comfortable with completing career planning tasks, such as acquisition of career-related information about self (interest, skills, values) and work (organizational opportunities); identification of desired outcomes or goals; and development of a strategy to attain the desired outcomes or goals (Dessler, 2009). This definition by Rottinghaus et al. (2005) has remained the focus of recent studies on career optimism (e.g. Gunkel et al., 2010; Chatterjee, Afshan, & Chhetri, 2015; McIlveen & Perera, 2016).

2.1.1.3 Perceived Knowledge of Job Market (PJK)

Rottinghaus et al. (2005) defined perceived knowledge of job market as the perception of how effectively an individual comprehends the job market and the employment trends. People indulge in exploration of job market and interpretation of employment trends in order to foster progress in their career development (Gunkel et al., 2010; McIlveen & Perera, 2016; Stoeber et al., 2016). Getting adequate information about the job market is relevant at the time of unexpected events and career transitions such as job loss or school-to-work transition. It also allows individuals to adjust to a set of challenges by effectively dealing with the unforeseen events (Flum & Blustein, 2000; Taveira & Moreno, 2003; Mol, Born, Willemsen, Van der Molen, & Derous, 2009; McIlveen et al., 2013; Nota, Ginevra, Santilli, & Soresi, 2014). Perceived knowledge of job market also includes exploration of career alternatives by proactively gathering information about occupations, jobs, organizations, and industries that allows an informed career decision making. Indulging in such exploration activities may help in developing an in-depth understanding of individual career ambitions and specific work activities or desired work contexts (Tyrance et al., 2013; Chatterjee, 2014).
2.1.2 Social Support

Since 1970s, there has been an increased interest in the study of social support due to its direct impact on health and psychological well-being. Social support emerged as an immensely popular and highly important construct in the mental health and clinical psychology literature as a coping resource. Lin, Ensel, Simeone, and Kuo (1979) defined social support as “support accessible to an individual through social ties and other individuals, groups, and the larger community” (p. 109). Cobb (1976) defined social support as “information belonging to one or more of the following: information leading one to believe that he/she is loved and cared for; information leading one to believe that he/she is valued and respected; and information leading one to believe that he/she belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation” (p.300). Later in 1979, the author referred these three aspects of social support as emotional, esteem, and network support. In contrast, Kahn and Antonucci (1980) defined social support as interpersonal transaction that includes one or more of the elements like affect, affirmation, and aid. Affect is further defined as expression of admiration, respect, liking or love under one heading of what Cobb (1979) termed as emotional and esteemed support. Affirmation refers to expression of approval or acknowledgement of the probity or righteousness of some act or statement of other individuals. Lastly, aid refers to transaction in which assistance is given in the form of money, material, time, and information. Early literature on social support suggests that there was a considerable consensus amongst scholars about the general nature of social support but considerable disagreement over the specific types of social support, until House (1981) proposed four potential forms of social support namely; emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. House (1981) defined the four types of social support in the following manner. Emotional support was defined as a combination of “esteem, affect, trust, concern, and listening”
Informational support consists of recommendations, guidance, instructions, and information. Appraisal support includes evaluative feedback and information helpful for self-evaluation. Lastly, he defined instrumental support as tangible aid and financial assistance. Subsequent studies on social support have examined social support based on the four dimensions laid down by House (1981) and reported their differential impact on the different outcomes (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Brown, 1986; Antonucci & Johnson, 1994; Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Rueger, Malecki, & Demaray, 2010; Leahy-Warren, McCarthy, & Corcoran, 2012; Federici & Skaalvik, 2014; Demaray & Malecki, 2014; Tennant et al., 2015; Rouhani et al., 2016; Wood, Smith, Varjas, & Meyers, 2017; Borja, Nastasi, & Sarkar, 2017). Thus, it is evident from the literature that House’s classification stand as the most acceptable forms of social support amongst scholars across different research domains.

The present study uses the classification of social support by House (1981) due to the relevance of social support types in the job search context. Although, past studies on job search have reported the vital role of social support in encouraging job seekers to indulge in job search activities (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987; Slebarska, Moser, & Gunnesch-Luca, 2009; Van Hoye et al., 2015; Lim, Chen, Aw, & Tan, 2016), social support was considered as a holistic construct. Job search literature also highlights social support as a coping mechanism when job seekers experience setbacks and anxiety during the job search process (Rife & Belcher, 1993; Song, Wanberg, Niu, & Xie, 2006; Zikic & Saks, 2009; Lim et al., 2016). However, the impact of each social support type has been sparsely examined in the job search context (Russell, Holmstrom, & Clare, 2015). From the lens of extant literature that follows classification by House (1981), it is likely that availability of informational, instrumental (financial), appraisal,
and emotional support will have differential impact on the dimensions of job search behavior including job search strategy. However, as appraisal support is broadly defined as feedback and communication of information that is pertinent to self-evaluation, it has been included in the informational support category (Dennis, 2003; Heisler, 2006; Thoits, 2011; De Vries et al., 2014; Li & Chen, 2016). Therefore, following the principle of parsimony, the three broader social support types, namely emotional, financial (i.e. a component of instrumental support), and informational support have been considered for the current study.

2.1.3 Job Search Strategies

Job search intensity has remained the most widely studied dimension of job search behavior in vocational psychology (Blau, 1994; Saks & Ashforth, 1999; Werbel, 2000; Creed, Fallon, & Hood, 2009; Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2013; Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2014; Lim et al., 2016) and employment literature (Kulik, 2000; Kanfer et al., 2001; Bloemen, 2005; Zacher, 2013; De Coen, Forrier, De Cuyper, & Sels, 2015). Job search intensity is defined as the effort and time spent by job seekers to search for a job (Blau, 1994). Job search intensity is most commonly measured as the frequency of involvement in job search activities, such as writing and revising resume, viewing or going through job advertisements, contacting the potential employers, submitting job applications etc. (Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002; Zikic & Saks, 2009; Van Hoye et al., 2015). Past studies have demonstrated that the higher the job search intensity, the greater is the chance of obtaining a job or employment (Wanberg et al., 1996; Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Saks, 2005; Saks et al., 2015). However, finding a job does not depend solely on the frequency of engagement in job search activities rather on specific job search strategy followed to search for the job (Kanfer et al., 2001; Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; McArdle et al., 2007; Koen et al., 2010; Koen et al., 2016).
Stevens and Turban (2001) identified three distinct job search strategies based on a qualitative study, namely Focused Search Strategy (FSS), Exploratory Search Strategy (ESS), and Haphazard Search Strategy (HSS), which are used to gather job related information and obtain job leads. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 56 undergraduate and MBA students in the US at different points in their job search and found three distinct job search strategies followed by them. The authors suggested that focused search strategy involves directing search efforts on a few potential employers identified in the initial stage of job search process. Job seekers applying this strategy are likely to identify their occupational choices early in the process of job search and apply for only those jobs they are interested in and qualified for. Furthermore, the job seekers using this strategy are likely to sustain their job search efforts unless they find precisely what they are searching for. Use of this strategy implies that the job seekers have a clear employment goal and are indulged in career planning activities.

Exploratory search strategy involves examining several potential employment opportunities and alternatives and actively gathering job related information from various sources such as colleagues, friends, alumni, employment agencies, company website etc. According to the authors, job seekers using this strategy are likely to begin their job search with an idea of what they want, while remaining open to opportunities that might come to their notice. Use of this strategy implies that the job seekers are fully motivated to explore the job alternatives and they do not restrict their job search to specific types of jobs or employers so as to generate as many alternatives to choose from.

Finally, haphazard search strategy involves passively collecting information on occupations and jobs that are not necessarily congruent with one’s area of academic study or prior work experience (Steven & Turban, 2001). Use of this strategy reflects fuzzy employment
goals and unclear employment standards. Haphazard search strategy implies that the job seekers lacks career planning and apply randomly to different job openings they come across. Furthermore, due to lack of goal clarity and career plan, the job seekers using this strategy are likely to accept or settle for any initial job offer that comes their way (Taggar & Kuron, 2016).

Although, both exploratory and haphazard search strategies are broad in terms of nature of jobs and types of organizations searched and applied for, exploratory search strategy is aimed at generating many job alternatives to be able to choose a pleasant and matching job, while haphazard search strategy is aimed at finding any job.

**2.1.4 Outcomes of Job Search Strategies**

**2.1.4.1 Quantity of Job Search Outcomes**

Extant literature on job search has largely focused on the employment status (Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Van Hoye, Hooft, & Lievens, 2009; Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012; Guan et al., 2013; Koen et al., 2013) number of interview calls (Wanberg, Zhu, Kanfer, & Zhang, 2012), number of applications submitted (Van Hoye & Saks, 2008; Taggar & Kuron, 2016), number of job offers received (Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hoye et al., 2009), and speed of getting employment (Vansteenkiste, Lens, De Witte, De Witte, & Deci, 2004; Wanberg et al., 2012) to measure job search success of the job seekers. As multiple job offers received by the job seekers allow them to choose from various alternatives, it is considered as a parameter to measure a successful job search process. With respect to job search strategies, Crossley and Highhouse (2005) in their study found that haphazard search strategy was negatively related to the number of job offers obtained, while exploratory search strategy was found to positively predict number of job offers obtained by job seekers during a job search. Furthermore, the authors noted that focused search strategy had no significant impact on the number of job offers
received. One of the possible reasons for this finding could be the retrospective nature of data collection adopted in the study, where the respondents were asked to recollect and respond about the number of job offers received by them. On the contrary job seekers following exploratory search strategy apply to different job positions in the process of exploring several job alternatives, leading to higher number of job offers obtained. Similarly, Koen et al. (2010) noted that haphazard search strategy was negatively related to number of job offers, while exploratory search strategies was positively related to number of job offers received by the job seekers. Additionally, a recent study by Taggar and Kuron (2016) noted that focused and haphazard search strategy were negatively related to the number of applications submitted by the job seekers while exploratory search strategy was positively related to the number of applications submitted while searching for a job. Koen et al. (2016) in their study found that haphazard search strategy was negatively related to finding a job, reflecting the consequence of unclear employment goals and lack of career plans. However, past studies have focused either on the number of job offers received (Van Hoye et al., 2009; Koen et al., 2010) or number of applications submitted (Taggar & Kuron, 2016), but none of these studies have taken into account the ratio of number of offers received to number of applications submitted for measuring the job search success. Measuring the number of job offers to determine job search success without considering the number of job applications submitted is likely to result in misleading inferences about effectiveness of job search process. It is because receiving five job offers may be considered as high in one study while mediocre in another study when a reference point (i.e. number of applications submitted) is not available. Considering the number of offers received with respect to the number of application submitted is likely to provide an objective inference about the effectiveness of job search behavior. The present study, therefore, includes the
percentage of success i.e. the ratio of number of job offers received to number of applications submitted as one of the quantitative outcomes of job search strategies; in addition to the number of job offers received.

2.1.4.2 Quality of Job Search Outcomes

Obtaining job offers determines the success of job search behavior exhibited by the job seekers. However, number of job offers received does not necessarily determine the quality of employment obtained such as how satisfied the job incumbents are with their jobs and how well their needs are fulfilled by the jobs they hold (Kanfer et al., 2001; Vinokur & Schul, 2002; Wanberg et al., 2002). The frequency of getting engaged in job search activities apparently provides no assurance of finding a job that matches the interest of the job seeker i.e. in sync with the interest, motivation, qualification, skills, and previous work experience of the job seeker. At the same time, it provides no guarantee that the needs and requirements of the job seekers will be fulfilled by the job and that the organizational values will be compatible to the values and beliefs of the job seekers. Employment quality results from Person-Job fit (P-J fit) and Person-Organization fit (P-O fit) ensured by the job seekers during their job search process (Wanberg et al., 2002). Kristof (1996) defined P-J fit as the match between an individual’s abilities and the requirements of a job and the needs of an individual and what is supplied by the job. P-O fit is defined as the compatibility between an individual’s fundamental characteristics and attributes and that of the organization (Carless, 2005; Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016). Inadequate career planning coupled with following an unfavorable job search strategy could lead to a poor P-J and P-O fit. This in turn may result in poor employment quality depicted through high turnover intention, job burnout, absenteeism, and lower level of job satisfaction (Neumann, 2016; Boon & Biron, 2016). Therefore, person-job and person-organization fit plays a significant role in
determining employment quality. Person-job fit (Koen et al., 2010), job satisfaction (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005), and turnover intentions (Koen et al., 2010) are the most widely studied outcomes of job search strategies to measure the employment quality. Furthermore, Saks and Ashforth (2002) noted that pre-entry person-job fit and pre-entry person-organization fit perceptions are strong predictors of employment quality, reflected through high levels of job satisfaction, organizational identification, organizational commitment, and low turnover intention or intention to quit the job. Pre-entry fit perceptions are the early perceptions of person-job fit and person-organization fit formed on the basis of job and organizational related information and interactions with the representatives and members of the organization (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991). Given the vital role of pre-entry person-job fit and pre-entry person-organization fit perceptions in determining the employment quality, the present study included these constructs as measures of qualitative job search outcomes.

2.2 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977) is one of the most prominent theories explaining human behavior (Van Ryn & Vinokur, 1992; Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2006; Phillips, Gully, McCarthy, Castellano, & Kim, 2014). It suggests that human behavior is influenced by the intention to exhibit a particular behavior, and such intention is formed based on the attitude towards the behavior in question and the subjective norm. Attitude towards a behavior is determined on the basis of evaluation of the behavior as being favorable or unfavorable by oneself. Similarly, evaluation of a behavior by others is known as the subjective norm. TRA suggests that attitude towards a behavior when coupled with subjective norm forms an intention to exhibit or not exhibit the behavior in question (Moore & Benbasat, 1996; Yousafzai, Foxall, & Pallister, 2010; Mishra, Akman, &
Mishra, 2014). To elaborate further, a positive attitude towards a behavior coupled with the positive subjective norm forms an individual’s intention to engage in a behavior; which in turn leads to an outcome. Theory of Reasoned Action also suggests that an intention to engage in a behavior is a good predictor of the behavior itself (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Ajzen, 1991). In the context of job search, intention to engage in job search activities or job search behavior is an outcome of job seekers’ attitude towards the behavior (in this case career planning attitudes) in addition to the subjective norm (in this case social support) i.e. evaluation of job search activities or behavior by others in the social network of job seekers. Additionally, subjective norm also reflects the expectation of others from the job seekers to engage or disengage in job search behavior based on their evaluation. The present study uses this framework to explain the relationship between career planning attitudes and social support and the use of focused, exploratory and haphazard search strategies by the entry-level job seekers. In the present context we expect that an individual following a particular job search strategy, is a result of job search intention formed by the job seeker due to career planning attitudes (i.e. attitude towards one’s career) and social support (i.e. subjective norm). To elaborate further, career planning attitudes which form the intention of the job seeker along with subjective norm which refers to social support, help shape job search behavior which in this case is following a particular job search strategy. Theory of Reasoned Action is based on the assumption that job search behavior is predicted by the willingness of job seekers to engage in job search behavior i.e. job search intention formed on the basis of career planning attitudes and social support. The relationship between intention to perform the behavior and exhibition of actual behavior has been confirmed by several studies in the past (Chandon, Morwitz, & Reinartz, 2005; Agudo-Peregrina, Hernández-García, & Pascual-Miguel, 2014; Kroshus, Baugh, Daneshvar, Nowinski, & Cantu, 2015; Wood et al., 2016).
This chapter provides an overview of the constructs and the theoretical framework used in the study. The present study investigates the impact of job search strategies on job search outcomes. It further explores the role of career planning attitudes and social support in determining the usage of one job search strategy over the other. The study builds a path model which demonstrates the potential relationships between the study constructs and result in job search outcomes for the employment seekers. To understand the process of job search behavior and the impact of different job search strategies on employment outcomes, the study uses the theoretical lens of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The path model is divided into two parts. The first part presents that the components of Theory of Reasoned Action (career planning attitudes and social support) are the predictors of job search strategies (focused, exploratory, and haphazard search strategies) followed by the job seekers. The next part shows that the job search strategies in turn are predictor variables for job search outcomes (number of job offers, percentage of success, and pre-entry fit perceptions). The review of relevant literature discussing the concepts and relationship between the constructs are presented in the next chapter.