

Perceived Fairness and Coping After Job Loss

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ABSTRACT

Job loss is a major risk factor for the psychological and physical health of those affected. Perceived fairness has arisen as a positive predictor of re-employment after job loss but has yet to be explained by a sound theoretical framework. This thesis attempts to establish such a framework by combining the literature on perceived fairness and coping. Problem-focussed coping (PFC) and Emotion-focussed coping (EFC) are tested as mediators between perceived fairness and re-employment after job loss. In addition, two supplementary studies measure partial links of this construct. Results indicate that PFC is a clear mediator, while the results on EFC are mixed, suggesting a more complex relationship requiring further investigation.

Job loss and unemployment pose a serious threat to an individual's well-being (Schuring et al., 2011). The negative effects of unemployment on psychological health, such as depression and suicide, are clearly established (Deady et al., 2020). Meanwhile, job losses will likely increase in the future due to economic reasons (Alewell & Hauff, 2013; Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). Consequently, the likelihood of an employee facing job loss during their career is increasing in correspondence (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). Besides the individual health risks, the process of job loss can also pose a challenge for a company who is planning to lay off employees due to economic reasons (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020).

Since the way people perceive their job loss is highly relevant in how they deal with it (Dalbert, 2006; Kieselbach, 2001; Lerner, 1980), a clear understanding about the working mechanisms of a job loss is of organizational interest to protect the health of former employees. Moreover, it is in the interest of the internship outplacement counselling company Quotac to optimize their process of helping people find re-employment through establishing clear predictors and mechanisms behind the process of finding re-employment after a job loss.

Research investigating an effective way to deal with job loss and reduce its negative effects on a psychological level is scarce (Dalbert, 1997, Dalbert, 2006). Re-employment, finding a job after a job loss, is the most effective countermeasure against the negative effects of job loss (Deady et al., 2020). An established predictor of re-employment after job loss is the perceived fairness of the job loss process by the former employee (Dalbert, 2006). The concept of perceived fairness in job loss describes to which degree an individual perceives the process of their job loss as fair (Kieselbach, 2001). Individuals with high perceived fairness show higher re-employment, independently of the structural circumstances of the job loss (Dalbert, 2006; Heuven et al., 2009).

The link between perceived fairness and re-employment has been theoretically justified through its connection to coping (Dalbert, 2006). Although untested, the theoretical framework on perceived fairness after job loss connects to the findings of the coping literature (Dalbert, 2006). The coping literature presents problem-focussed coping (PFC), which tackles the problem directly and emotion-focussed coping (EFC), which aims to change the individual perception of the problem, as predictors of re-employment after job loss (Havlovic et al., 2009; Rim, 1986). According to the research, individuals with high perceived fairness use a combination of coping styles effectively to find re-employment (Dalbert, 2006). It is the goal of this thesis to further the knowledge of the role of coping in the link between perceived fairness and re-employment.

A former employee's perceived fairness is dependent on unquestioned assumptions around the world (Bartholomaeus & Strelan, 2019). Therefore, certain misconceptions, though not accurate, are highly adaptive for mental health, well-being, and coping (Carver & Scheier, 2002). One of these adaptive beliefs is a belief that the world is fair, associated with high perceived fairness in the case of a job loss (Bartholomaeus & Strelan, 2019). Concretely, research suggests that high perceived fairness, due to a tendency to see the world as fair, is

associated with higher PFC and EFC because individuals tend to align their actions with their belief (Dalbert, 2006).

Consequently, an employee who perceives their job loss as fair might be more inclined to engage in effective coping to find re-employment, while someone with low perceived fairness might not feel that it is worth it (Alewell & Hauf, 2013). Crucially, this happens even if the job loss process is objectively unfair because the belief is more important in predicting re-employment than the actual fairness of the job loss process (Alewell & Hauff, 2013). In connection to job loss coping, research suggests that individuals with high perceived fairness show a highly adaptive combination of PFC and EFC (Dalbert, 1997; Dalbert 2006). The use of both coping styles, in turn, is positively associated with re-employment.

A possible connection between the two constructs can be drawn as follows: In the case of an experienced injustice, like an involuntary job loss, an individual with a high perceived fairness is more determined to move on to a new job. Research suggests that perceived fairness is a general belief. According to the perceived fairness literature, this possible solution can be completed by finding re-employment through PFC and EFC (Bartholomaeus & Strelan, 2019). Thus, high perceived fairness is associated with high PFC and EFC (Dalbert, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1991; Solove et al., 2014).

In job loss, PFC is the act of exerting effort to deal with the problem by tackling the problem directly to change the reality of the situation, for instance by updating the CV and sending out applications to find re-employment (Solove et al., 2014). It is often cited as the more adaptive element in dealing with a job loss, because individuals who display PFC are likely to act and thereby find re-employment (Havlovic et al., 2009). Thus, PFC is positively connected to successful re-employment in individuals facing job loss (Havlovic et al., 2009).

In the event of a job loss, EFC is the act of exerting effort to target a problem through decreasing the negative emotional impact of the problem (Mantler et al., 2005). EFC could consist of consulting friends and family to talk about the issue of the job loss. EFC works indirectly by building up confidence (Carver & Scheier, 2002) and optimism (Lai & Wong, 1998). Higher confidence and optimism, in turn, are associated with re-employment (Wanberg, 2012). Further investigations on coping with professional transitions confirm that high EFC is positively associated with re-employment (Heuven et al., 2009; Kieselberg, 2001; Pavlova & Silbereisen, 2013). Thus, both coping styles have been established as clear positive predictors of re-employment (Heuven et al., 2009; Mantler et al., 2005).

The links between perceived fairness and coping are drawn merely theoretically. Furthermore, the literature on perceived fairness in job loss in combination with the coping literature has not been tested in an applied setting. Research combining the perceived fairness and coping literature with regards to re-employment is scarce. This is the research problem of this thesis. This problem leads to the following research question: What role does coping play in the connection between perceived fairness of job loss and re-employment?

To answer this research question, coping styles are tested as mediators between perceived fairness and re-employment. In line with previous research (Dalbert, 2006), it is hypothesized that perceived fairness is a positive predictor of re-employment (1). It is further hypothesized that perceived fairness is associated with PFC (2a) and EFC (3a). Moreover, it is hypothesized that PFC (2b) and EFC (3b) are confirmed as predictors of re-employment. Lastly, both PFC and EFC are hypothesized as mediators between perceived fairness and re-employment (2c, 3c). Study 1, testing all hypotheses, is supplemented by two studies investigating two links 2a and 3a, as well as 2b and 3b in detail. The set-up of the three studies is introduced below.

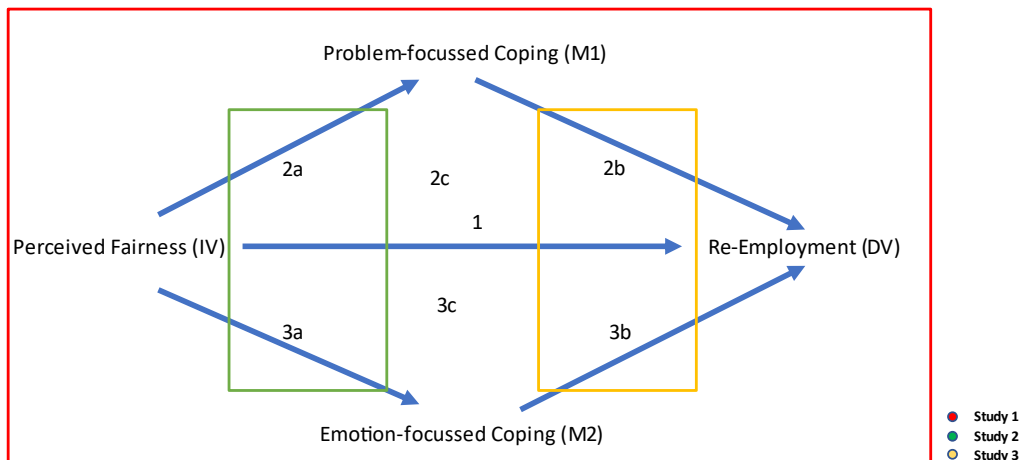
Study 1 investigates the relationship of perceived fairness and job loss in connection to PFC and EFC, testing all hypotheses. The mediation analyses are the main quantitative analysis of this thesis. All used data was collected at the beginning of the intervention for the measurements of perceived fairness, PFC, and EFC. Longitudinal measurements of re-employment were taken at the end of the intervention, when clients had either been re-employed, or the period of the intervention, one year, was over. It investigates the mediating function of PFC and EFC between perceived fairness and re-employment via two quantitative mediation analyses. The analyses feature only one measurement per variable. Therefore, study 1 is supported by supplementary investigations through study 2 and 3.

Study 2 provides context for the link between fairness and coping styles, operationalized in hypotheses 2a and 3a. These interviews feature a qualitative analysis of the responses with regards to the connection between fairness perception and coping. As a qualitative study, it helps to put the findings of study 1 into a context where participants had the opportunity to express themselves freely through semi-structured interviews with current participants of the counselling program at Quotac.

Study 3 provides context for the connection between coping styles and re-employment, hypothesized in 2b and 3b through a Chi² test for independence. Data about the coping styles was collected at the beginning, data concerning re-employment and labour market confidence was collected at the end of the intervention, in the same questionnaire as study 1. It adds to study 1 by supplementing it with findings on the connections between coping styles and re-employment, as well as labour market confidence, an indicator of successful coping (Lai & Wong, 1998), concretely by testing PFC and EFC as predictors of re-employment. The relationships between doubts, expectations and wishes of the participants with regards to their association with re-employment and labour market confidence as are investigated indicators of successful job-loss coping.

Figure 1

Path diagram of the three studies and their respective hypotheses tested



Note. Study 1 investigates all hypotheses, while study 2 is a qualitative investigation of hypotheses 2a and 3a. Study 2 investigates hypotheses 2b and 3b through a quantitative test of coded qualitative variables.

Methods Study 1

Participants

All participants were in the Quotac outplacement counselling intervention. Participants had a mean age of 43 ($SD = 10.34$) years at the point of entering the outplacement counselling program. 403 participants out of 1351 were eligible for this analysis due to having filled out all questions used in this analysis. Out of these 403, 84 were male, 31 female and 288 did not indicate their gender. Participants were originally asked to fill out a questionnaire including questions about the variables perceived fairness, PFC, EFC and re-employment in the beginning and end of the outplacement counselling intervention by Quotac. No reimbursement was given for filling out the questionnaires. Measurements were taken at the beginning of the intervention through questionnaire T1 and at the end through T2, marked either by successful re-employment or the passing of the intervention duration of up to one year. The questionnaires exist for the purpose of optimizing the transfer process from job loss to re-employment by learning from previous participants.

Materials

All materials were originally in German and were translated for the purpose of this thesis. Materials for study 1 and 3 were pre-collected questionnaire data from Quotac. Questions were asked regarding the perceived fairness of the job loss as independent variable (IV; “How fairly do you feel treated by the company [previous employer]?” “1: very unfairly” – “4: very fairly”). Indicators of PFC (M1; “The success of the program is dependent on your active participation in this intervention. To what extent are you able to cooperate fully?” (“1: I am still undecided” – “3: I am determined and ready to get started”) and EFC (M2; “Concerning your professional future: How would you rate yourself?” (1: “very optimistic - 6: “very pessimistic”)) as mediators. The participants employment status as the dependent variable was coded into a binary variable (DV; “What is your current employment status?” (0: “currently searching for work”, 1: “re-employed, self-employed, pursuing further education”)) and collected at the end of the intervention.

Data Analysis

The minimum sample size of 89 indicated by a power analysis was met ($N = 366$). The data cleaning indicated no outliers (Hoaglin & Iglewicz, 1987). Out of 442 participants, 366 participants were eligible for the mediation analysis due to having filled out all relevant answers. The sample was not normally distributed, and eligible for the non-parametric mediation analyses. The analyses were completed separately, due to the intercorrelation of mediators. The two mediation analyses were completed in SPSS with the process macro by Hayes (Hayes, 2017). PFC (Mediation analysis 1) and EFC (Mediation Analysis 2) were the mediators. All hypotheses were tested.

Table 1

Variable		1	2	3	4
1. Perceived fairness	Pearson Correlation	--			
	N	432			
2. Problem-focussed coping	Pearson Correlation	.046			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.338			
	N	431	438		
3. Emotion-focussed coping	Pearson Correlation	.287**	.178**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	429	435	436	
4. Employment status	Pearson Correlation	.024	.459**	.595**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.644	.000	.000	
	N	367	371	369	372

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note. Correlation table of all tested variables in study 1

Results Study 1

Mediation analysis 1 ($N = 366$) tested PFC as a mediator between perceived fairness and re-employment. The mediation of PFC between perceived fairness and re-employment was significant ($b = 0.50$, $se = .18$, 95% CI [0.29; 0.79]). Perceived fairness was significantly associated with re-employment ($b = -0.50$, $p = .0051$, 95% CI [-0.85; -0.15]). Thus, high perceived fairness was associated with low re-employment. The association between perceived fairness and PFC was significant, and positive ($b = 0.38$, $se = 0.06$, $p < .0001$, (95% CI [0.27; 0.50])). Thus, high perceived fairness was associated with high PFC. The link between PFC and re-employment was significant ($b = 1.31$, $se = 0.16$, $p < .0001$, (95% CI [1.00; 1.63])). Thus, high PFC was associated with high re-employment.

Mediation analysis 2 ($N = 366$) tested EFC as a mediator between perceived fairness and re-employment. The mediation of EFC between perceived fairness and re-employment was not significant ($b = .23$, $se = 0.13$, 95% CI [-0.01; 0.51]). Perceived fairness was not significantly associated with re-employment ($b = -0.17$, $se = 0.18$, $p = .347$, 95% CI [-0.53; 0.19]). Perceived fairness and EFC were significantly associated ($b = 0.14$, $se = 0.07$, $p = .048$, 95% CI [0.00; 0.29]). Thus, high perceived fairness was associated with high EFC. EFC was significantly associated with re-employment ($b = 1.57$, $se = 0.16$, $p < .0001$, 95% CI [1.25; 1.89]). Thus, high EFC was associated with high re-employment.

Discussion Study 1

This study investigated all hypotheses by testing the two coping styles (PFC and EFC) as mediators. The mediation analysis 1 regarding PFC was significant, indicating PFC as a mediator between perceived fairness and re-employment, supporting hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c. Based on the significant indirect effect, the mediating effect of PFC explains the perceived fairness-re-employment link better than the direct link. The links between perceived fairness and PFC, as well as PFC and re-employment were positive, as expected. The link between perceived fairness and re-employment was negative, thereby rejecting hypothesis 1. Thus, perceived fairness was negatively associated with re-employment.

The second mediation analysis investigated the role of EFC between perceived fairness and re-employment. The mediation 2 analysis did not confirm EFC as a mediator between perceived fairness and re-employment. Concretely, hypothesis 3a and 3b were supported, while the mediation hypothesis 3c was not. Furthermore, hypothesis 1 was rejected, as the link between perceived fairness and re-employment were neither significant nor positive. EFC is positively associated with perceived fairness and re-employment but was not confirmed as a mediator between the two.

In study 1, data was taken only from a limited source of one measurement per variable, as well as measuring indicators for perceived fairness, PFC, and EFC. This is problematic, because a limited measurement per variable may result in less representative data of the construct of interest. The collected data and therefore the analysis have only limited construct validity concerning the relationship in investigation. Therefore, the results of study 1 are supplemented through qualitative analyses to increase the representativeness of the data. Concretely, semi-structured interviews were administered for the hypotheses testing the link between perceived fairness, PFC (2a) and EFC (2b) in study 2. Furthermore, a supplemental Chi² test for independence on the link between PFC (2b) and EFC (3b) in association to re-employment was carried out in study 3.

Methods Study 2

Participants

All interviewees ($N = 11$) were participants of the outplacement counselling intervention while interviewed. The mean age was 39 ($SD = 12.89$). The participants largely were from a diverse background of companies and jobs, including blue- and white-collar professions, as well as leadership positions. No information on the participants gender was collected, and no reimbursement was given.

Materials

All interviews loosely followed a prepared semi-structured interview protocol. Protocols were prepared to guide the interviewee into giving answers with regards to all measured variables. Questions were asked regarding perceived fairness (“Did you feel treated fairly by your previous employer?”), PFC (“What did you do to tackle the practical problems of job loss?”) and EFC (“What did you do to tackle the emotional problems of job loss?”).

Participants were encouraged to share their own perspective freely and add further information beyond the initial questions.

Procedure

All interviewees were initially contacted via their consultants at Quotac. After signing an agreement on the interviews, participants were interviewed with an optional audio recording of the interview for purposes of later review. Notes were also taken during the conversation, and subsequently used for a qualitative analysis of the collected material with regards to associations between perceived fairness and coping styles. The qualitative analysis was adapted for the purpose of this study. Consequently, it was analysed with regards to hypotheses 2a and 3a. This analysis was completed using the notes, with the aid of the program Microsoft Word. Statements from the interview notes were colour coded for PFC and EFC, as well as the degree of perceived fairness. Afterwards, they were counted and put in connection in the whole sample and between individual participants.

Results Study 2

Regarding perceived fairness, 55% interviewees felt treated unfairly by their previous employer. Of all individuals, 28% mentioned a lack of personal communication on the side of the employer as the reason for this feeling (“I felt treated unfairly, because I received the information on my job loss in an impersonal way.”). Regarding PFC, most of the interviewees 91%, stated that updating their CV and furthering their education were helpful in tackling their job loss practically. Furthermore, interviewees also reported that the practical tackling of the problems was an additional help in EFC.

The majority of the interviewees (91%) engaged in EFC. Coping techniques included relying on the social support of family and friends to talk to (“It helped a lot to get

reassurance through talking to my family”) and finding calmness in accepting the job loss as an end to a chapter in their life (“I see this as an end to one chapter of my life, and now the next one begins”). PFC was connected to EFC in eight individuals (73%). However, perceived fairness showed an indication for higher coping in individuals only for a about half of the employees 46%. Individuals high in perceived fairness (46%) showed PFC and EFC in all cases, while individuals low in perceived fairness (54%) showed PFC and EFC in lower numbers (18%, “I only took this outplacement counselling because I wanted to take more money from my previous employer.”). Perceived fairness was an indicator of PFC and EFC in 46% of the participants. However, 54% of participants showed coping despite low perceived fairness.

Discussion Study 2

In study 2, the relationship between perceived fairness, with PFC and EFC was tested through a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews. The results support a connection of the two coping styles. People who felt treated fairly, generally showed more stable PFC and EFC. Perceived fairness was associated with PFC, and EFC. However, over half of the sample who indicated low perceived fairness still engaged in PFC and EFC. Although everyone who indicated high perceived fairness also showed high coping, not everyone displaying high coping also indicated high perceived fairness. Thus, the results of this study do not clearly suggest that perceived fairness is positively connected to PFC and EFC. The results further suggest that perceived fairness is not a clear predictor of coping or re-employment, as suggested by individuals who engaged in coping despite low perceived fairness.

Study 2 only investigated part of the tested model in detail by focussing on hypotheses 2a and 3a. To test hypotheses 2b and 3b, a Chi² test for independence was carried

out to supplement the measurement on the link between PFC (2b) and EFC (3b) in association to re-employment.

Methods Study 3

Participants

Data was taken from the same data set as study 1. The data set originally included 403 participants, out of which 377 were eligible for this analysis due to having answered all questions included in this analysis. No measurements about the education or economic background of the participants were taken.

Materials

All materials were originally in German and were translated for the purpose of this thesis. For the original materials, please see the appendix. Materials for study 1 and 3 were pre-collected questionnaire data from Quotac. All data collection was completed as part of a longitudinal design, taking measurements at the beginning and the end of the intervention with a duration of approximately one year. The open-ended questions were asked regarding expectations (“Please describe your expectations with regards to the outplacement counselling program. My expectations are:”), doubts (“If you have any doubts or worries regarding the counselling program, you can specify them here:”) and wishes (“What is the most important thing for you as part of the counselling? (What should definitely be part of the program?)”).

Doubts, wishes and expectations were coded regarding a predominant notion of either PFC or EFC, and are therefore used as indicators of a focus on the predominantly detected coping style. All coded questions were tested for their association with the DV of

study 1 (“What is your current employment status?”), as well as labour market confidence (“To what extent has this program contributed to you being able to move on the labour market?”). Since the employment status is highly dependent on outside circumstances, labour market confidence was added as a measurement indicating the success of the and PFC EFC on an internal level, since labour market confidence is a predictor of re-employment (Carver & Scheier, 2002).

Data Analysis

The open questions were coded into qualitative variables using SPSS. Variables were coded binarily for predominant signs of PFC or EFC in doubts and expectations (1: PFC, 2: EFC), and wishes (1: EFC, 2: PFC). The coding was done to test whether doubts, expectations and wishes with regards to PFC or EFC showed any association with the re-employment, and labour market confidence as an indicator of successful coping. Further analyses were done as Chi² tests for independence examining the association with the coded variables of doubt, expectations and wishes with regards to the DV employment status and labour market confidence as binary variables.

Results Study 3

A Chi² test for independence was carried out among the same participants as in study 1 ($N = 377$). Expectations and employment status ($N = 372$, $\chi^2(1) = 9.49$, $p = .002$), showed a significant association. Employed individuals ($M = 1.10$, $SD = 0.30$) had expectations with a tendency towards help with practical support than unemployed individuals ($M = 1.22$, $SD = 0.41$). Thus, employed individuals tended to expect support with regards to PFC more than unemployed individuals.

Wishes and employment status ($N = 371$, $\chi^2(1) = 5.34$, $p = .021$) showed a significant association. Unemployed individuals ($M = 1.27$, $SD = 0.45$), showed more wishes for emotional support than employed individuals ($M = 1.17$, $SD = 0.38$). Doubts with regards to PFC and EFC and employment status did not show a significant association ($N = 79$, $(N-1)\chi^2 = 0.17$, $p = .681$)

Expectations and labour market confidence ($N = 377$, $\chi^2(1) = 5.44$, $p = .020$) showed a significant association, low confidence individuals showed higher wishes for practical support ($M = 1.10$, $SD = 0.30$) compared to high confidence individuals ($M = 1.19$, $SD = 0.39$). Wishes and labour market confidence did not show a significant association ($N = 376$, $\chi^2 = 0.12$, $p = .734$). Doubts and labour market confidence ($N = 71$, $(N-1)\chi^2 = 3.28$, $p = .068$) did not show a significant association. Further implications are discussed anon.

Discussion Study 3

The associations of expectations and wishes with regards to employment status suggest that a preference for PFC is associated with higher re-employment. The significant association of expectations and labour market confidence suggests that wishes for practical support are associated with lower labour-market confidence.

This analysis showed a clear connection between wishes and expectations with regards to problem-focussed coping and re-employment. Doubts did not show a significant association with either dependent variable. Furthermore, wishes for emotional support were associated with higher labour market confidence, an indicator for successful emotional coping.

General Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to promote the understanding of the role of coping styles in connection to perceived fairness and re-employment. The research question of this article was: What role does coping style play in the connection between perceived fairness of job loss and job loss coping? The results consistently suggest that PFC acts as a mediator between perceived fairness and re-employment (2c), while the results on EFC are inconsistent. Building on these outcomes, two key findings emerge from the present research. First, the results suggest that PFC serves as an important link between perceived fairness of the job loss and re-employment (2a, 2b, 2c). Second, EFC showed significant associations with perceived fairness and re-employment (3a, 3b), albeit not in a mediating function (3c).

The results on PFC in connection to perceived fairness and re-employment were consistent and clear across all studies. The findings consistently suggest that PFC explains the link between perceived fairness and re-employment through a mediating function. The previously found link between perceived fairness and re-employment might not be a direct link, but a correlation indicating that perceived fairness is connected to coping, which is in turn related to re-employment. Built on these conclusions, the theoretical implications for PFC as a mediator are given below.

In line with previous research (Solove et al., 2014), the findings of study 1, 2 and 3 suggest that PFC is associated with higher re-employment and predicted by perceived fairness. This theoretical link as part of the model is in line with the findings of this thesis, suggesting a successful combination of the literature on perceived fairness and coping (Dalbert, 2006; Heuven et al., 2009; Kieselberg, 2001; Pavlova & Silbereisen, 2013). Unexpectedly, the findings further suggest that perceived fairness is negatively associated with re-employment. This negative link between perceived fairness and re-employment, though not in line with the hypothesis 1, suggests that not perceived fairness, but PFC in its

connection to perceived fairness might explain the positive correlation previously found in research (Dalbert, 2006; Kieselbach, 2001).

Not in line with the aforementioned literature (Mantler et al., 2005), the results suggest no association between perceived fairness, EFC, and re-employment in a mediation (3c). Against the suggestions of previous research (Wanberg, 2012), wishes or expectations suggesting EFC were not associated with labour market confidence either, an indicator of effective EFC (Carver & Scheier, 2002). Thus, the theoretical framework connecting EFC and PFC as mediators to perceived fairness and re-employment could only be confirmed for PFC (Dalbert, 2006), while EFC was not confirmed as a mediator. Nevertheless, the findings give some suggestions for methodological implications.

Methodological Implications

The findings on the role of EFC between perceived fairness and re-employment were inconsistent. EFC was confirmed as a predictor of re-employment by study 1, but not by study 2. These results may suggest that the role of EFC between perceived fairness and re-employment is more complex than previously assumed. Research stating that the effect EFC has on unemployment is indirect (Carver & Scheier, 2002; Lai & Wong, 1998), supports the idea that EFC works through building confidence and optimism, which in turn leads to re-employment. This may support the notion that a precise measurement of EFC requires a more nuanced measurement process. Thus, to further test the role of EFC in the relationship between perceived fairness and re-employment, further research should account for its possible indirect effect via optimism, or via PFC, suggested by their high intercorrelation.

In addition, further analyses should account for the high intercorrelation between the two coping styles. This could be done, for example, by investigating the relationship of the two coping styles via a sequential model 6 mediation (Hayes, 2017). Moreover, the link

between perceived fairness and re-employment was unexpectedly negative in both mediation analyses. As this is not in line with the current literature (Dalbert, 2006; Kieselbach, 2001), further investigations are required, taking into consideration the role of coping as a direct mediator between perceived fairness and re-employment. Therefore, this research is only a first step into exploring the role coping styles play in the relationship between perceived fairness and re-employment.

Limitations

There are at least three limitations regarding the results of this study. First, the construct validity of the measurement. Because the variables in study 1 were measured by one item each, the data might have limited representativeness for the theoretical construct in focus. Furthermore, the items were not specifically designed for the measurement of the variables but were used as their respective indicators. Thus, the data might have a low construct validity. To counter this problem, two supplementary studies were completed (study 2 and 3). Still, an inaccurate measurement of perceived fairness, as well as the PFC and EFC cannot be ruled out completely.

The second limitation is the generalizability of the results. Since all participants belonged to one preselected group of outplacement counselling participants, their data can only be generalized with caution and further research outside this sample should be conducted.

A third limitation is the measurement accuracy of the DV employment status. It also marked individuals as unemployed, who chose to retire within the timeframe of the intervention. This might have affected the results, because retired employees would not count as unemployed from the line of reasoning of this research. It is hard to ascertain the number

of this group, as participants also decide to retire early, and there is no clear age range indicating this group.

Practical Implications

Despite these limitations, the results suggest several practical implications. Taken together, our findings indicate the importance of PFC and EFC as predictors of re-employment in connection to perceived fairness. The results attempt to demonstrate a linking of the literature on perceived job loss fairness and coping in applied research.

Perceived fairness alone was not linked to re-employment in a consistent manner based on the results of this research. Thus, no implications can be suggested with regards to modifying dismissals in a particular way as an HR department. However, clear suggestions can be drawn from the results of the investigations concerning the connection of perceived fairness and coping styles, which are relevant in the outplacement counselling process observed in this thesis. Both PFC and EFC are suggested to be strong positive predictors of re-employment. Therefore, questionnaires should be implemented at the start of the outplacement counselling intervention.

Based on the low scores regarding PFC and EFC, risk groups for low re-employment could be formed. These high-risk individuals could receive additional help in their PFC and EFC, for example through offering more help in writing CVs and applications (PFC), as well as being encouraged to talk about their emotional states to the consultants (EFC). Building such a risk group could provide more effective and individual help for the outplacement counselling, as well as a higher chance of re-employment through improved PFC and EFC.

In general, consultants are recommended to offer help to improve PFC and EFC to all participants for a better chance of re-employment. These implications relate back to the organizational problem from the beginning of this thesis, because building a risk group based

on the PFC and EFC measurements could increase the rate of re-employment among outplacement counselling participants, thereby improving the success of the consulting company as well as having a beneficial effect on the mental health of the quickly re-employed outplacement counselling participants.

Managerial Summary

It is in the interest of Quotac to find re-employment for all counselling participants. Finding an explanation for the link between perceived fairness and re-employment is essential to better understand the individual variance in re-employment. In addition, these findings aid in identifying risk groups for unemployment, thereby increasing re-employment because of individualized support by Quotac to participants. Both problem-focussed coping and emotion-focussed coping, the two major coping styles, were identified as positive predictors of re-employment in connection to perceived fairness. Furthermore, problem-focussed coping could explain the link between perceived fairness and re-employment.

The direct positive link between perceived fairness and re-employment established in literature and previous investigations was not confirmed when the analyses accounted for coping style as an explanation. Thus, results suggest that coping style predicts re-employment better than perceived fairness. Nevertheless, perceived fairness is suggested to be associated with problem-focussed coping, indicating that problem-focussed coping is a linking explanatory element between perceived fairness and re-employment. Concrete implications are discussed below.

To further an increase of re-employment, a better assessment of coping styles, as well as a more nuanced understanding about the suggested relationships between coping styles and re-employment should be drawn. Measures on coping styles as well as perceived fairness in the questionnaires administered to participants could be improved by including more in-depth

questions on problem-focussed coping as well as emotion-focussed coping. This could for instance be taken from a reliable, more detailed coping questionnaire (Carver et al., 1989).

Additionally, using problem-focussed coping and emotion-focussed coping as predictive measurements for re-employment, questionnaires administered at the beginning of the outplacement counselling intervention could be used to form risk groups for high risk of unemployment in the beginning of the intervention. Due to inconsistent findings and a comparatively low effect size, perceived fairness should not be included at this stage of research. People who score low in problem-focussed and emotion-focussed coping could be grouped as high risk for low re-employment. To avoid low re-employment in high-risk groups, special attention could be paid with regards to coping behaviour by Quotac. The high risk group could be helped to find a job with extra support, as well as instructions on how to engage more in more problem-focussed coping.

Lastly, based on the findings that suggest both coping styles having predictive power regarding re-employment, and can therefore increase the rate of re-employment among clients. Based on the combined results of study 1 and 3, it is suggested that a combination of support by consultants for both coping styles may be the most effective way to aid the re-employment of the client. Clients cited both support for their problem-focussed coping, as well as for their emotion-focussed coping as an important step in dealing with their job loss and putting effort into finding re-employment. Quotac consultants therefore should aim to offer support for both coping styles to their clients.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research can be seen as a first step towards integrating the two lines of research concerning perceived fairness and coping style in the case of job loss. The results strongly imply that coping plays an important role in re-employment, and is strongly

associated with perceived fairness in the case of PFC. Since EFC was not confirmed as a mediator, but showed significant associations with perceived fairness and re-employment, its effect might be more indirect and therefore require further investigation. The present research, therefore, contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that a combination of coping styles plays an important role in the link between perceived fairness and re-employment.

Perceived fairness might have been confirmed as a predictor previously because research did not account for the role of coping styles. With further investigations of this relationship, the growing literature on perceived fairness of a job loss could be gradually integrated with the coping literature for a more holistic understanding of why individuals deal with a job loss so differently. It is hoped that the current research will stimulate further investigation of this important area of connecting these theoretical frameworks.

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Appendix

Study 1

Table 2

Original items in German

Perceived Fairness	Fühlen Sie sich von der Firma fair behandelt? (sehr fair, fair, unfair, sehr unfair, Sonstiges)
PFC	Der Erfolg des Programms hängt davon ab, inwieweit die Teilnehmer sich aktiv an der Maßnahme beteiligen. In wiefern sind Sie bereit "voll mitzuarbeiten"? (Momentan noch unentschlossen und warte erst mal ab, eher skeptisch und muss mich noch überzeugen lassen, bin entschlossen und bereit loszulegen)
EFC	Was Ihre eigene berufliche Zukunft betrifft: Wo auf dieser Skala würden Sie sich einstufen? Bitte kreuzen Sie an, wie Sie Ihre berufliche Zukunft einschätzen. (sehr optimistisch, optimistisch, eher optimistisch, eher pessimistisch, pessimistisch, sehr pessimistisch)
Employment Status	Wie ist Ihr momentaner beruflicher Status? (habe eine neue Stelle gefunden, befinde mich in einer Weiterbildungsmaßnahme, bin arbeitssuchend gemeldet, habe mich selbständig gemacht, Sonstiges)

Note. Translated items are featured in the method section.

Study 2

Original Information letter and consent form in German

ZUSTIMMUNGSFORMULAR

Dieses Dokument muss vor dem Interview vom Teilnehmer ausgefüllt werden für die Teilnahme an wissenschaftlichen Forschungen: „Die Rolle von Fairness im Umgang mit Arbeitsplatzverlust“ [This document must be completed by the participant before the interview for participating in scientific research: "The role of fairness in dealing with job loss"]

Ich bestätige hiermit, dass: [I hereby confirm that:]

- Ich die Informationen zu dieser Studie gelesen und verstanden habe. [I have read and understood the information about this study.]
- Ich informiert wurde, dass diese Studie von Jasper Müller als Teil seiner Masterthese ausgeführt wird. [I was informed that this study is conducted by Jasper Müller as part of his Master thesis.]
- Ich die Gelegenheit erhalten habe, Fragen zur Studie zu stellen. [I have the opportunity to ask questions about the study.]
- Meine Fragen zufriedenstellend beantwortet wurden. [My questions have been answered to my satisfaction.]
- Ich reichlich Gelegenheit erhalten habe, sorgfältig über die Teilnahme an der Studie nachzudenken. [I have had plenty of time to carefully think about participating in this study.]
- Ich ganz freiwillig an der Studie teilnehme. [I am participating in this study on a voluntary basis.]

Ich verstehe, dass: [I understand that:]

- Ich das Recht habe, die Studie jederzeit, ohne die Angabe von Gründen abzuberechen. [I have the right to cancel the study at any time without giving reasons.]
- Ich das Recht habe, meine Einwilligung zur Verarbeitung meiner personenbezogenen Daten zu widerrufen [I have the right to withdraw my consent to the processing of my personal data.]
- Meine personenbezogenen Daten werden gemäß den geltenden europäischen Datenschutzbestimmungen anonym verarbeitet (<https://www.ru.nl/english/vaste-onderdelen/privacy-statement-radboud-university/>). [My personal data are processed anonymously in accordance with the applicable European data protection regulations (<https://www.ru.nl/english/vaste-onderdelen/privacy-statement-radboud-university/>).]

Vor- und Nachname [First and last name]

Geburtsdatum [Date of birth]

Datum der Zustimmung [Date of consent]

Wir danken Ihnen für Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Umfrage. [Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire.]

Ihre Antwort wurde erfasst. [Your answer has been recorded.]

Table 3

Original items in German

fairness	fair	I felt as though the process was fair, I also received a large dismissal wage
	unfair	I felt treated unfairly, the dismissal was given our anonymously, and I feel like I was disadvantaged due to being on parental leave

coping	PFC	I focussed on tackling current issues, such as taking care of my children to pass the time, and on my new education as a yoga teacher
	EFC	I have ended the previous chapter of my life, and now look forward to the next

Interview protocol semi-structured interviews

What phase of the outplacement counselling process are you currently in? [In welcher Phase des Transferprozesses sind Sie momentan?]

What are you currently dealing with in the outplacement counselling program? [Womit beschäftigen Sie sich gerade im Rahmen der Transfergesellschaft?]

Can you describe, how you perceived the behaviour of your previous employer at the time of the dismissal? [Können Sie beschreiben, wie Sie das Verhalten Ihres früheren Arbeitgebers bei der Angabe der Kündigungen wahrgenommen haben?]

What did you feel when you heard of your dismissal? [Was haben Sie gefühlt als Sie von Ihrer eigenen Entlassung erfuhren?]

Did you feel treated fairly by your previous employer? [Haben Sie sich von Ihrem früheren Arbeitgeber fair behandelt gefühlt?]

How did you deal with these consequences, emotionally and practically? [Wie sind Sie mit diesen Auswirkungen umgegangen, praktisch und emotional?]

What were your thoughts after your dismissal? [Was waren die praktischen Herausforderungen nach Ihrer Entlassung?]

How do you feel in your current situation? [Wie fühlen Sie sich in Ihrer momentanen Situation?]

Study 3

Table 4

Original items in German

Wishes	Was ist für Sie persönlich das Wichtigste an der Beratung? (Was sollte zum Beispiel unbedingt Bestandteil des Programms sein?)
Expectations	Bitte schildern Sie uns nun Ihre Erwartungen an das Beratungsprogramm in einigen kurzen Stichworten. Vom Beratungsprogramm erwarte ich:
Doubts	Falls Sie Zweifel oder Befürchtungen hinsichtlich des Beratungsprogramms haben können Sie diese hier beschreiben:
Labour market confidence	In welchem Maß hat das Beratungsprogramm dazu beigetragen, dass Sie sich gut auf dem Arbeitsmarkt bewegen können? (Garnicht, kaum, etwas, in hohem Maß)
Employment Status	Wie ist Ihr momentaner beruflicher Status? (habe eine neue Stelle gefunden, befinde mich in einer Weiterbildungsmaßnahme, bin arbeitssuchend gemeldet, habe mich selbständig gemacht, Sonstiges)

Note. The translated items can be found in the method section of study 3

Table 5

Example grading of PFC and EFC

wishes	PFC	To receive work
	EFC	Finding calmness and trust in a new employer as well as the labour market
expectations	PFC	Receiving practical help to finding a new professional path
	EFC	Good assistance with my reintegration into the labour market
doubts	PFC	To be helped with a successful job transfer
	EFC	I am doubtful whether it will work out