

# **How Social Class Shapes Job Search Experiences and Career Development Among Employees**

*A qualitative study on social background, job search  
behaviour, and professional growth.*

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## Preface

I am proud to present you my master's thesis which represents the culmination of my studies at Radboud University.

At the end of 2024, I was kindly gifted the book '*De Zeven Vinkjes*' (The Seven Checkmarks). This book sparked my curiosity about privilege and the invisible norms that shape access to opportunity in the Netherlands. It made me more aware of my own position, and I started engaging in conversations about the (social) disparities with people around me. This growing interest led me to explore the concept of social class more deeply and its relevance to the field of human resources, hoping to spark this interest in others as well.

I would like to thank my supervisor, dr. Roel Schouteten, for being flexible and providing valuable feedback throughout the writing process. Besides, I want to express my gratitude for giving me the opportunity to participate in the European Human Resource Management programme. A project which has thought me a great deal about myself, cross-cultural collaboration, and academic skills.

Moreover, I would like to thank the participants who were willing to share their experiences with me, as their stories were extremely valuable to my thesis. In addition, I am grateful to everyone who helped me find participants for data collection. Without their help, I would not have been able to gather the rich data which forms the foundation of this thesis' results.

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### **Abstract**

While social class is an important factor in social sciences, its implications in organisational science are under-researched. Therefore, knowledge on how social class effects employees' job search behaviour is also limited. This thesis explores how employees from different social classes engage in job search behaviour and how they view its impact on their career development. The relevance of this topic is evident as global developments deteriorate social mobility and equality of opportunity, leaving valuable human capital unused. By integrating Bourdieu's capital theory and dimensions of job search behaviour, a qualitative research design is adopted. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with job searching employees from different social classes shows class-based differences. These differences are shaped by the unequal distribution of the capitals of social class. The upper class engages in structured and strategic job search behaviour, the middle class shows more exploratory behaviour, and the lower-class engages in pragmatic, necessity-driven behaviour. Nevertheless, results show that job search helps all classes in clarifying their career development. Overall, the findings suggest that social class in the context of organisational science requires more attention. Besides, pathways should be created where opportunities are equally distributed, and less human capital is wasted.

**Keywords:** social class, employment, job search behaviour, career development, capital theory, JSSE

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

In recent years, social mobility and equality of opportunity have faced increasing threats. The impact of COVID-19, the rising inflation, and megatrends such as digitalisation have caused existing divides across social groups to expand even further (Balestra & Ciani, 2022). This divide has not only been highlighted by academic literature but has also given rise to a stirring public debate which is reflected by the release of several documentaries and books. In 2022, the opinion writer Sander Schimmelpenninck developed a documentary series on the growing divide between the rich and the poor in the Netherlands, highlighting the consequences that the wealth inequality has on societal factors (Schimmelpenninck & Schut, 2022). Subsequently, author Joris Luyendijk contributed to the debate on privilege and social mobility with his book *‘De Zeven Vinkjes’* (The Seven Checkmarks). In this book, Luyendijk (2022) argues that a privileged group of white, heterosexual men with highly educated parents and academic background experience a structural advantage in Dutch society. According to the author, this group does not face discrimination and feels no need to adapt to others, which is surprising since these people account for only 3% of the Dutch population. By highlighting this contradictory issue, Luyendijk (2022) emphasises that these traits significantly increase an individual’s chance of success, reinforcing the role of social class and resulting in a waste of human potential.

Through stressing these issues, the authors reach a broader audience, hoping to spark conversations on the societal implications of class-based disparities and encouraging the recognition of the need for change. In Europe, for example, recent trends reveal a clear inequality in employment based on educational attainment and migration background. The statistical office of the European Union published a dataset showing that 86.3% of individuals who completed higher education<sup>1</sup> were employed in 2023, whereas only 58.3% of those who completed solely lower education were employed during the same period (Eurostat, 2024). Additionally, Statistics Netherlands published that between 2021 and 2023, 74% of Dutch-born individuals aged between 15 and 75 were employed, compared to only 14% of migrants belonging to the same age group in the Netherlands (CBS, 2024). These statistics suggest that factors such as educational attainment and migration background influence the access to employment opportunities. However, these are not the only factors that influence employment. As Luyendijk (2022) argues, employment opportunity is also shaped by cultural capital and

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<sup>1</sup> Levels 5-8 of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) refer to higher education, while levels 0-2 of the ISCED refer to low education.

social networks. These elements, which directly point to social class, contribute to the structural barriers that shape inequality of opportunity (Bourdieu, 1987).

Social class represents an individual's position within the social hierarchy and is a prominent predictor of how individuals act and think within organisations (Côté, 2011; DeOrtentiis et al., 2022). While class-based disparities are widely researched among different fields, such as medicine (e.g. Chen, 2004), sociology (e.g. Roy, 1984) and psychology (e.g. Roberts et al., 2007), its implications on career development are under-researched. This gap in organisation science offers a focus for this thesis, in which different experiences regarding job search behaviour and career development are studied.

The lack of attention to social class in organisation science not only limits our understanding of organisational behaviour, it also contributes to the persistence of broader social disparities. These inequalities can be linked to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10.3, which aims to “ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard” (United Nations, 2015). Failing to address class-based inequality violates this SDG by reinforcing economic, cultural, and social inequalities that limit an individual's potential. It is for this reason that neglecting social class in organisations is problematic, since equal treatment is both a basic human need and a fundamental ethical value (Barry, 2005). Yet, global awareness of class-based discrimination remains limited. In 2024, the United Nations mentioned that 7% of the population surveyed, experienced discrimination based on their social origin or socio-economic status, however, this only accounts for 20% of the countries, since the remaining did not monitor this form of inequality (United Nations, n.d.). This lack of data further underscores the neglect of class-based inequality on a global level.

The importance of studying social class in relation to career development is also highlighted by DeOrtentiis et al. (2022) who mention that social class not only shapes organisational behaviour, but also job search behaviour. Kanfer et al. (2001) define job searching as “a purposive, volitional pattern of action that begins with the identification and commitment to pursuing an employment goal” (p. 838). It is a process that requires several actions, which individuals often take without external guidance. This behaviour is affected by the presence of social class. According to DeOrtentiis et al. (2022), unemployed job seekers from lower social classes display a lower job search intensity compared to job seekers from higher social classes. This is a result of lower job search self-efficacy, lower perceived social support and higher perceived financial hardship. This relationship between social class and job

search behaviour is further clarified by Gabriel et al. (2025). They suggest that unemployed individuals from lower social classes may struggle with the job search process due to fewer available resources and higher job insecurity whereas unemployed individuals from higher social classes benefit from greater job control, recognition, and social support which ultimately enhances their job search success. This difference affects qualitative job search, which has shown to have a positive influence on employment success outcomes and employment quality, which in turn is related to sustained career development (van Hoof et al., 2021).

### **1.1 Problem Statement & Research Question**

While research has studied the influence of social class on job search behaviour of unemployed individuals, the influence on job search behaviour of employed individuals remains unknown. Yet, job searching while employed occurs often. Employees may seek new opportunities for multiple reasons such as better pay, career development, or improved work-life balance. In fact, over 20% of current employees engage in active job searching behaviour (Faberman et al., 2022). This highlights the importance of this group for understanding organisational behaviour. DeOrtentiis et al. (2022) argue that social class plays a versatile role in this job search behaviour and therefore requires more attention within organisation science. Thus, the limited research regarding the experience of employed job seekers should also be examined. The behaviour of this group might differ from unemployed individuals as their motivations, strategies, and struggles might differ from those of unemployed individuals. For example, Faberman et al. (2022), show that the job search behaviour of employed individuals is more efficient compared to unemployed individuals, however the effect of social class on this behaviour has not been studied yet. DeOrtentiis et al. (2022) suggest that social class plays a role in this, since employees belonging to a lower social class might constantly look for other jobs which offer better wages and benefits.

Without a clear understanding of these class-based inequalities, organisations risk preserving disparities in career development and access to career-advancing roles. Given the lack of research on this topic, this thesis will take an exploratory approach, aiming to provide insights into the way social class shapes employees' job search behaviour, the mechanisms that drive these experiences and the perceptions on the implications for career development. Consequently, this study aims to answer the following research question:

**RQ:** How do employed individuals from different social classes engage in job search

behaviour, and how do they view its impact on career development?

## **1.2 Contribution & Outline**

Answering this research question provides relevant insights into employees' job search behaviour, specifically regarding the perceived influence of social class and the subsequent effects on career development. The study will address a research gap mentioned by DeOrtentiis et al. (2022), by analysing the role social class has in the process that employees go through when searching for a new job and its implications on their career. In doing so, this thesis will provide a deeper understanding of how class-based inequalities occur in organisations and explore how job search behaviour differs among employees.

From a societal perspective, this study aligns with SDG 10.3, by demonstrating how structural inequalities tied to social class ultimately affect career advancement. Moreover, the findings should raise awareness regarding the neglected influence of social class in organisations. Furthermore, understanding how social class influences employees' job search behaviour is crucial for identifying potential inequalities that effect career development. For example, organisations may be biased against applicants from lower social classes which might cause these applicants to engage in different job search behaviour (DeOrtentiis et al., 2022).

Lastly, the findings of this thesis contribute to practice by offering organisations insights into factors influencing employees' job search behaviour. By understanding how class-based inequalities effect employees' job search behaviour, organisations can identify hidden barriers within their recruitment process, which hinder candidates from entering organisations. Therefore, using this thesis' outcomes, organisations could review their selection criteria to resolve these barriers. In addition, this study can address invisible forms of inequality by evaluating the inclusivity of organisations, ultimately informing organisations' diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies and unlocking unused human potential.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical review of the literature available regarding social class, job search behaviour, and career development, clarifying the conceptual elements of this thesis and highlighting the theoretical significance of the study. In Chapter 3, the research design and methodology are discussed, explaining the necessary steps taken to come to an answer to the research question. This is followed by Chapter 4, where the results of the research are elaborated. The final chapter includes the conclusion, discussion, and implications of the results of the thesis.

## Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

By providing the relevant theoretical framework for social class, job search behaviour and career development, the main concepts of the research question are put into context. The objective of this chapter is to provide a foundational review of theories and conceptualizations which help to answer the research question. To this end, it is important to understand the dimensions of social class and its relation to job search behaviour and career development.

Against this background, subsection 2.1 examines the conceptualizations of social class and its four dimensions according to the capital theory, linking it to self-efficacy in job search. Subsequently, subsection 2.2 examines job search behaviour among employed individuals followed by its effect on career development, which forms subsection 2.3. Finally, subsection 2.4 summarises the chapter by providing the concluding remarks.

### 2.1 Social Class

The concept of social class has been conceptualised by many theorists and sociological thinkers, resulting in different perspectives on its definition. In 1848, Marx and Engels published '*The Communist Manifesto*', in which they defined social class based on an individual's relation to work, ownership and the means of production, focusing on only one dimension of social class, economic factors. Using this definition, Marx argued that society is divided into two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1848). Max Weber expanded upon Marx's definition by introducing multiple dimensions of social class. He proposed that class is determined through economic position, social prestige, and political power (Gane, 2005). By highlighting the multidimensional core of social class, Weber underscores how not only economic ownership defines an individual's social class, but also social status and politics. Although these definitions provide foundational perspectives, their approaches primarily focus on economic dimensions, neglecting the cultural and social resources which help shape career opportunities. The French sociologist Bourdieu (1987) offers the concept of social class through the capital theory, which does cover cultural and social dimensions. His theory proposes that social class differentiates people through four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. By offering a multidimensional and dynamic definition of social class, Bourdieu provides a comprehensive understanding of how multiple forms of capital interconnect and shape an individual's position within the social hierarchy.

### *Economic Capital*

Economic capital refers to all financial resources an individual has, including money, wealth, and access to material assets (Bourdieu, 2005). It involves all monetary resources and all other resources which can be converted into money, such as property, cars, or shares (Flemmen et al., 2018). Economic capital is capital which can be inherited and gives, for example, easier access to houses and schools. Subsequently, it can pay for higher education, or it can “indirectly function as a ‘cushion’ or ‘insurance’ against the risks involved in ambitious career choices” (Flemmen et al., 2017, p. 1293). Consequently, individuals from wealthy families have greater career opportunities compared to individuals born into poorer families (Flemmen et al., 2017). Building on this, Bourdieu (1986) argues that while greater economic capital allows individuals to acquire certain material resources, effectively using these resources requires an individual to have access to cultural capital.

### *Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital encompasses the available resources that can be used or exchanged to maintain or enhance one’s social status. These are resources such as verbal skills, cultural awareness, educational qualifications, and aesthetic preferences (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu (1986) states that cultural capital exists in three states: the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state. The embodied state is defined as “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 193). These ‘long-lasting dispositions’ refer to behaviour and thoughts that individuals have developed over time through socialisation (Cederberg, 2015). The objectified state is acquired when cultural capital is turned into cultural material such as books (Bourdieu, 1986). This type of cultural capital requires economic capital and can therefore be easily exchanged between people who have material resources (Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2010). Thirdly, the institutionalised state refers to when embodied cultural capital is recognised through the form of credentials and qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). This includes educational degrees, certifications, and professional titles, mostly related to educational attainment. By providing access to valuable social networks, cultural capital can ultimately be converted into social capital (Cederberg, 2015).

### *Social Capital*

The term social capital has been defined by many authors such as Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1994), and Putnam (1995). Bourdieu views social capital as the benefits individuals have from their social networks. However, his approach has often been criticised since he neglects the

collective benefits of social capital (Field, 2016). On the other hand, Coleman's view on social capital tends to emphasise the functional aspects of social capital, neglecting to mention how social capital may reinforce social inequalities and power dynamics (Field, 2016). Hence, Putnam (1995) defined social capital as “[the] features of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (p. 664-665). Through this definition, Putnam highlights that social capital is about knowing the right people and having a social network which could help the individual to achieve their goals. The three features of social capital - networks, norms and trust - increase when they are used and decrease when they are left unused (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009).

### *Symbolic Capital*

Once economic, cultural, or social capital is recognised, symbolic capital can be generated (Bourdieu, 1986). This capital refers to resources based on reputation, prestige and legitimacy and is often associated with status and positive reputation (Terjesen & Elam, 2009). Symbolic capital can be transformed into other kinds of capital. To illustrate this transformation, an example is provided. When applying for a job, internships at prestigious firms act as symbolic capital, since they increase an applicant's perceived value even when the work experience at the prestigious firm might be similar to the experience one would gain at a smaller company. Terjesen and Elam (2009) conclude that individuals use their symbolic capital to benefit from their relationships and recognition to gain power, ultimately helping them to pursue their goals.

These four forms of capital are deeply interconnected and collectively shape an individual's social class (Bourdieu, 1986). For example, economic capital provides access to higher education which is part of one's cultural capital. Following this, one is more likely to form greater social networks (social capital) which, in turn, grants individuals prestige and reputation, connecting it to symbolic capital. This interplay effects the job search behaviour among individuals, since job seekers who have more capital benefit from higher job search self-efficacy (JSSE) along with lower financial strain (DeOrtentiis et al., 2022).

Building on this, research often includes JSSE as a predictor of job search behaviour (Saks et al., 2015). JSSE refers to an individual's belief that one can effectively perform job search behaviours related to the job search process to obtain employment (Saks et al., 2015). Individuals who have higher JSSE, attain better outcomes when it comes to their job search (Petruzzello et al., 2021). This suggest that the likelihood of successfully achieving job search goals increases when an individual is confident of being capable to succeed. Therefore, JSSE

is an important predictor of job search behaviour and a relevant concept to consider when exploring how employees across social classes engage in job search behaviour. The reason being that JSSE is the mechanism through which social class influences job search intensity, which is a dimension of an individual's job search behaviour (DeOrtentiis et al., 2022; Van Hoyer, 2018).

## **2.2 Job Search Behaviour Among Employees**

Job search behaviour refers to a dynamic, self-regulated process which begins by individuals identifying and committing to an employment goal (Kanfer et al., 2001). Following this definition, Van Hoyer (2018) mentions that job search behaviour consists of three dimensions: effort-intensity, content, and dynamics. The first dimension, effort-intensity, refers to the dedication and persistence one invests in their job search, which is measured by the time, frequency and energy devoted to job search (Van Hoyer, 2018). Secondly, the content of job search behaviour is best defined as the specific activities, and the quality of these activities, job seekers engage in to find a job (Kanfer et al., 2001). Lastly, job search behaviour is likely to change in intensity as outcomes influence the self-regulation of job seekers which affects their behaviour (Kanfer et al., 2001). This change in behaviour is defined as the job search dynamics. Understanding job search behaviour through these three dimensions helps to comprehend how individuals navigate through their job search process.

Although job search behaviour is often studied among unemployed individuals, research has also shown that job search behaviour is common among employed individuals. More specifically, around 20% of employed individuals search for work each month, highlighting the importance of job search behaviour among employees (Faberman et al., 2022). Besides, their job search process generates more, and better job offers compared to those of unemployed individuals, ultimately supporting their careers (Faberman et al., 2022). Moreover, van Hooft et al. (2004) show that the mechanisms driving job search differ between employed and unemployed individuals. For the unemployed, job search behaviour is often shaped by necessity, whereas employed individuals often commence their job search due to job dissatisfaction (van Hooft et al., 2004). Because employed job seekers already hold a position, they are often able to delay or strategise their search efforts to possibly enhance their career development, which alters their job search behaviour.

### **2.3 Career Development**

Individuals' job search behaviour and class of origin influence their career development. Rivera (2012) mentions that job seekers from lower classes often lack fit with the employer when attending networking events or career fairs during their job search process, directly linking it to the possession of social capital. This makes the job search process for lower-class individuals a more challenging and frustrating process than for people from higher classes. Besides, once an individual from a lower-class background finds a higher-class position, the transition is found to be a struggle (Swidler, 1986). These individuals must learn how to act, speak and adapt to new contexts to fully fit in. The connection between social class and career development is also shown by Zikic and Saks (2009). They mention that self-regulation is closely related to the social cognitive career theory (SCCT), a theory used to provide a deeper understanding of career development processes (Lent et al., 1994). SCCT explains how individuals' environments shape the career-related activities they engage in which influence their self-efficacy and career choices (Lent et al., 1994). In short, it explains how individuals' backgrounds influence their career development. This shows that social class influences individuals' access to job opportunities and the way they navigate through career transitions. Wang et al. (2022) substantiate this argument by emphasising that social class has far-reaching impacts on career development, where individuals from higher social classes have more advantages compared to individuals from lower social classes.

### **2.4 Concluding Remarks**

Ultimately, this chapter provides a theoretical lens, aiming to understand the relations between social class, job search behaviour, employment, and career development. Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory demonstrates how the four types of capital shape an employee's social class. Furthermore, literature shows that social class influences individuals' JSSE. This, in turn, alters the job search behaviour of employees, ultimately effecting their career development. Altogether, this chapter provides the foundation to address the research question, since it connects social class, job search behaviour, and career development in one lens.

To answer the research question, further understanding of the interplay between the above-mentioned theoretical concepts needs to be explored. More specifically, the research focuses on employees' job search behaviour based on their social class. Additionally, exploring how employees view this impact on their career success will provide insights into class-based differences.

To understand these perceptions, this thesis' methodological approach will be structured to capture employees' experiences from different social classes. The sensitising concepts such as various forms of capital, JSSE and job search effort-intensity, guide the data collection and analysis. Subsequently, the following chapter, Methodology, elaborates how the research is designed to explore employees' job search behaviours and the choices made to capture their personal experiences.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology

The previous chapter highlighted the theoretical connections between the main concepts of this thesis. However, it also highlighted the need to capture employees' job search experiences and perspectives on career development. Therefore, this chapter will elaborate on how employees' experiences and perceptions will be documented. First, an explanation and justification of the research design will be presented, followed by the methods for data collection. Next, the operationalisation and methods for data analysis are described before concluding with ethical considerations.

### 3.1 Research Design

To answer the research question this study has adopted a qualitative, explorative research design, since detailed, descriptive data was needed. Through this type of data, this thesis aims to collect the nuanced experiences and perceptions of employees when searching for a new job. By performing qualitative research, insights were gathered in the lived job search experiences of employees from different social classes, following the aim of this thesis.

Subsequently, this research has taken on a subjective epistemology and ontology. This means that the acquired knowledge is socially constructed and influenced by individuals' experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For example, job search behaviour is not a fixed, measurable phenomenon but rather a subjective process which is shaped through social class. Therefore, it is expected that employees experience their job search process differently based on their social class. These different experiences and perceptions are essential when trying to answer the research question.

Since this study addresses inequality and social class, one should acknowledge the positionality of the researcher. The researcher is a first-generation university student, who mainly grew up in a terraced house in a suburb. Based on the four types of capital, the researcher can be classified as someone from a middle-class background with limited experience in the job search process, which shapes how participants' stories were perceived. It is for this reason that the researcher has a perspective partially as an insider and partially as an outsider. Due to this position, limitations in fully capturing the experiences of individuals from other social classes were present. To avoid misinterpretations, the need for reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis should be highlighted. Therefore, the study seeks to recognise potential biases and ensure that participants' experiences remain central to the interpretation.

### 3.2 Data Collection

For this research, primary data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with employees from different social classes. These interviews allowed the researcher to deeply explore how these employees navigate their job search process and how they perceive its impact on career development. To ensure consistency throughout all the interviews, the interview guide in Appendix 1 was created. This guide provided room for follow-up questions to dive deeper into the participants' stories (Bleijenbergh et al., 2023). To collect rich data which helps to answer the research question, the interview guide included open-ended questions focusing on the main concepts of the research objective. This generated data which allows for deep exploration of how employees engage in their job search behaviour, and how they perceive the influence of their job search on their career development.

The interviews were held face-to-face and through online meetings depending on the availability and preference of the participants. In the context of this thesis, conducting face-to-face interviews was particularly helpful because it helped to establish trust. Trust was crucial since the interviews discuss sensitive, private topics such as career aspirations and job search struggles. Lastly, face-to-face interviews were preferred since the interviewer could analyse the participant's body language. This was important for this study because participants might hesitate to verbally express emotions such as frustration or anger when it comes to their job search. Interviews via audio-visual platforms were conducted when the participant could not attend a face-to-face interview or whenever a participant felt more comfortable to meet online. Even though face-to-face interviews were preferred, research suggests that interviews via online platforms provide a similar experience to face-to-face interviews, showing that this was an appropriate alternative to capture rich data on how employees engage in their job search behaviour (Sullivan, 2012).

This study employed a purposive sampling method, where participants were selected based on predefined criteria which were relevant to the research question. To participate, individuals were required to either be employed while seeking a new job at the time of the interview or have been in this situation within the six months preceding the interview date. This six-month window was chosen since it was challenging to find enough individuals who were searching for a job at the time of data collection. Limiting the time frame helped to mitigate recall bias, because extending the time frame further would increase the risk of gaining less reliable stories. Therefore, the window was not extended too far back, ensuring that the collected stories were both recent and relevant. The participants were recruited through

personal networks, LinkedIn, and referrals. Since the target groups consisted of specific criteria and individuals might be hesitant to disclose that they are looking for a job, snowball sampling was applied. Using this method, participants were able to refer to other potential participants who fit the criteria which is especially useful when finding hard-to-reach populations (Parker et al., 2019).

The number of interviews in qualitative research depends on when data saturation has been achieved. Saunders and Townsend (2016) emphasise that achieving a balance between the quality of answers and representativeness is crucial when it comes to obtaining sufficient information. Thus, the number of participants is not a concern if the data provided is rich enough. As a guideline, Kuzel (1992) propose that for heterogeneous populations, 12-20 interviews are likely to be sufficient. This thesis used a heterogeneous population since employees from different social classes were interviewed. Therefore, the guideline mentioned was applied, where 18 interviews were conducted.

To accurately categorise participants in social classes, standard classification schemes have been developed to group individuals based on Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory. Smallenbroek et al. (2024) state that the most frequently used social class schemes are driven by employment relations and is therefore the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP) scheme. This scheme is often used in research on social mobility and social inequalities and differentiates between ten classes. For the sake of this study, and to avoid complexity, these ten categories are divided into three social classes: upper class (salarial), intermediate class, and working class (Smallenbroek et al., 2024). The division of these classes is based on the labour market and occupations and can be found in Appendix 2 (Brauns et al., 2000). Here, the ten-class model is based on the paper published by Erikson et al. (1979) whereas the division among the three classes is based on a project by the University of Essex (2021) focused on EGP-like schemes. EGP-like schemes are substantial since the placement of individuals in the three classes display good criterion validity, according to Smallenbroek et al. (2024), who examined the EGP scheme across 31 different countries. Another strength of the EGP scheme is that it is indirectly linked to Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory, since the EGP classes reflect varying access to economic, cultural and social capital. For instance, the salariat class mainly consists of all managerial and professional jobs and are characterised by higher levels of economic, cultural, and social capital (Smallenbroek et al., 2024). Hence, for the remainder of this study, employees have been divided into class according to the EGP scheme: salariat class, intermediate class, and working class.

To gain an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences, the duration of the

interviews was between 45 and 60 minutes. Interviews longer than 60 minutes may lead to participant fatigue whereas interviews shorter than 45 minutes decrease the richness of responses. Since this study relies on lived experiences, participants needed enough time to share their stories in detail. The language of the interviews was Dutch, which was the native language of all participants. This allowed participants to feel comfortable to share their experiences more freely, without a language barrier. To preserve nuances, the transcriptions were not translated during the data analysis.

### **3.3 Operationalisation**

To establish a consistent and coherent approach to this data collection, this thesis operationalised the main concepts to use them in the interviews. Through this operationalisation, the interview guide in Appendix 1 was created.

#### *3.3.1 Social Class*

For this thesis, social class has been defined using Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory. Using the EGP scheme, the participants were divided into three different classes: salariat, intermediate, and working class. The questions which referred to the identification of a participant's social class were divided into questions about their economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. For example, the question 'Could you describe your educational background?' aimed to discover the participant's cultural capital. Similarly, the question 'Do you have family or friends who have helped you in your career? If so, in what way did they help?' relates to the participant's social capital.

#### *3.3.2 Job Search Behaviour*

Employees' job search behaviour refers to the dynamic, self-regulated process beginning by employees identifying and committing to an employment goal (Kanfer et al., 2001). This is influenced by job search effort-intensity, content, and dynamics (Van Hoyer, 2018). Questions like 'How many jobs have you applied for in the last six months?' aimed to discover participant's job search effort-intensity. Job search content is defined through asking what types of vacancies employees applied for and what channels they used. Lastly, job search dynamics were found by asking participants how they have adapted their search strategies over time and perceived challenges. This related to the employee's JSSE which was investigated through

asking about individuals' confidence in finding a new job or asking them how they handle rejection.

### *3.3.3 Career Development*

Lastly, employees' perceived impact on their career development was asked. This was done by asking employees to reflect on how their strategies have influenced their career prospects and what challenges they have faced during the process. For this thesis, Tuckman's (1974) definition of career development was used, where he described the concept as an individual's ability to become self-aware, become aware of his/her environment and occupation, and to make career choices. In the context of this thesis' research question, career development is related to how employees navigate job search opportunities, and how they use their four capitals to overcome potential barriers.

## **3.4 Data Analysis**

After conducting the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Teams for online interviews and Evernote AI for face-to-face interviews. Since the use of AI is not sufficiently reliable, all transcriptions were closely reviewed for accuracy by the researcher, which also helped with data familiarisation. Considering that participants shared personal data, pseudonymisation techniques had to be applied to protect the participants' privacy and to ensure confidentiality. This made it more comfortable for participants to share their stories. The pseudonymisation was done manually by replacing all identifiable information in the transcripts with pseudonyms.

Second, a deductive approach to thematic analysis was applied, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis (Appendix 3). Even though Chapter 2 offered a helpful framework for interpreting employees' experiences, it did not fully capture the nuances of their experiences and job search behaviour. For example, to investigate the navigation of the job search process, the coding process focused on the effort-intensity, content, and dynamics, however other themes regarding the job search also emerged. Therefore, the theoretical framework served as a guide during the coding, leaving room for inductive additions during the coding process. Both a priori codes and emerging codes were documented in a thematic map (Appendix 4). To minimise subjective bias, the codes were applied prior to classifying the participants into their social classes. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases

of thematic analysis, similarities and differences across the three social classes could be identified, ultimately leading to the results. During the initial coding phase, the transcripts were analysed in ATLAS.ti, where interview segments were assigned to codes. Once the coding was complete, themes were identified to assess how well the theory aligned with the collected data. From this a conclusion was drawn.

### **3.5 Research Ethics**

There are several ethical issues which have been considered when conducting this research. The first ethical issue considered is voluntary participation. All participants were free to choose whether they wanted to participate, without feeling any pressure. Prior to each interview, participants were sent information about the study and asked to sign a consent form, which are presented in Appendix 5 and 6. By providing a consent form, the interviewer made sure to have consent to audio record the interviews. This ensured that the quality of the interviews was maintained, and no information was left out of the transcription. In addition, participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point, which was stated in the information document and verbally communicated at the beginning of each interview. For participants with limited reading skills, a simplified information document was provided to prevent miscommunications. Finally, the interview questions were designed to make sure that participants did not experience any distress or harm, avoiding triggering topics. This was done to make the participant feel as comfortable as possible, feeling free to share their story appropriately. Sensitive topics were identified by pre-testing the interview with non-participants, allowing them to give feedback on awkward or triggering questions.

## Chapter 4 – Results

After collecting and analysing the data, the (emerging) codes have been categorised into three main themes: capitals of social class, job search behaviour, and career development. In this chapter, the results are presented by social class, discussing each main theme within the context of that class. These themes are discussed using the most applied codes shown in Appendix 4. To preserve the nuances of the participants' experiences, the original Dutch quotes are shown in Appendix 7.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the participants have been categorised into the social classes using the EGP scheme, where participants' profession serve as a main indicator for their social class. Table 1 shows the list of participants and their categorisation into the social classes.

**Table 1**

*Overview of Participants<sup>2</sup>*

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age category</b>	<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Position when searching</b>	<b>Found a job</b>	<b>Classification</b>
1	Female	46-55	HBO Bachelor	Data Engineer	Not yet	Salariat Class
2	Female	26-35	HBO Bachelor	Store Cashier	May/25	Working Class
3	Female	18-25	University Bachelor	Campaign Employee	Not yet	Salariat Class
4	Male	18-25	MBO4	Technical Specialist	Not yet	Working Class
5	Female	26-35	University Master	Communication Advisor	Jul/25	Salariat Class
6	Male	46-55	University Master	Academy Manager	Not yet	Salariat Class
7	Female	26-35	HBO Bachelor	Marketing & Sales Employee	Not yet	Intermediate Class
8	Male	18-25	MBO4	Receptionist	Jun/25	Intermediate Class
9	Female	26-35	University Master	Management Assistant	Aug/25	Intermediate Class
10	Male	46-55	MBO3	Working Foreman	Not yet	Working Class
11	Female	46-55	University Master	Legal Quality Officer	Not yet	Salariat Class
12	Male	18-25	MBO4	Fish Department Employee	May/25	Working Class
13	Male	46-55	HBO Bachelor	Business Unit Manager	Jun/25	Salariat Class
14	Female	18-25	Secondary School	Intermediary	Aug/25	Intermediate Class
15	Male	36-45	HBO Bachelor	Senior Copywriter	Jun/25	Salariat Class
16	Female	18-25	HBO Bachelor	Store Manager	Not yet	Intermediate Class
17	Female	26-35	University Master	Implementation Manager	Not yet	Salariat Class
18	Female	26-35	MBO2	Store Cashier	Not yet	Working Class

The following sections follow the same structure: first, it is described how participants' background and resources shape their job search behaviour, second, the way participants engage in their job search behaviour is presented, and last, the perceived influence on their career development is discussed.

<sup>2</sup> Interview 3 was not recorded due to technical circumstances. However, detailed notes were taken during the interview, and the transcript was checked immediately after the interview to preserve accuracy.

## 4.1 Salariat Class

### 4.1.1 Capitals of Social Class

Each class begins by discussing the three most mentioned capitals of social class: economic, social, and cultural capital. For the salariat class, a recurring theme across transcripts was the role of economic capital. The majority received financial support from family, which influenced their educational and career opportunities. This group generally emphasises that having their studies funded by their family gave them an advantage when entering the labour market, since it reduces financial stress and gives them a sense of security. Participant 17 recognises this advantage: *“I think it was an advantage that my parents paid for my studies. Because of that I don’t have a huge student debt to pay off now.”*

In addition, salariat participants also mention their social capital as an advantage in their job search and career. Many rely on parents or other relatives with professional experience or networks, such as the following participant: *“My aunt, for example, [...] helped me a lot. [...] And my father too, because he had his own business, so he knows a lot about business matters, so my father definitely helped me too”* (Participant 5). These connections offer advice, guidance, or support throughout the job search and career development. However, some participants also mention they want to build their career independently, even when connections are available. This highlights that the salariat group often uses their social capital for informational and emotional support rather than direct access to new opportunities.

Cultural capital, often rooted in upbringing and family background, also shapes the way salariat participants perceive their career and approach their job search. The majority of the group described internalised motivation and their passion for work, rather than financial necessity. This highlights that, due to their embodied cultural capital, most do not feel any pressure when searching for a job and developing their career. Instead, this group mainly focuses on finding a job which they enjoy doing, such as Participant 1: *“I do think, because of the example I had, that I was motivated to, well, not necessarily to pursue a career, but to do something that I... where a passion lies and to pursue that.”*

Institutionalised cultural capital is often described as a shaping factor in participants’ career development and opportunities during their job search. Multiple salariat participants describe the role of higher education as a key to stable careers. When being asked what factors have helped their career development, responses such as *“my education, definitely”* (Participant 1) were given. This is substantiated by a participant who highlights that her educational background has given her access to different jobs and opportunities to develop:

*“So I think that, if you look at it positively, it was simply the good, solid education that helped me to keep developing and move from job to job” (Participant 11).*

In summary, salariat participants generally benefit from a rich economic, social, and cultural capital, which provides stability and guidance in their career paths. Their economic capital reduces financial stress which enables them to prioritise professional growth. Their social capital typically offers access to networks and guidance, often through their family, though not all salariat participants choose to use these networks. Lastly, the participants’ cultural capital frequently results in a confident and proactive attitude towards their career development. Most participants do not feel pressured and perceive work as something they should enjoy doing rather than a financial necessity.

#### *4.1.2 Job Search Behaviour*

The transcripts primarily show that salariat participants have a desire for new experiences or personal growth, which motivate their job search behaviour. In general, salariat participants were motivated to search for a different job because of the lack of challenge in their current job, such as Participant 3: *“[...] I actually enjoyed it at the beginning because I could learn a lot, but once I had learned everything there was to learn, I realised that I didn’t find it very interesting and that I had little challenge”*. For others, the search is driven by the personal need to change their scenery occasionally, which Participant 11 highlights: *“I’ve been working at my current job for five years now, and then I always start to get an itch [to change]”*.

The participants’ motivations not only shape the decision to search for a new job, it also influences the way they approach their job search. In general, salariat participants describe a structured and discreet approach to their job search, combining online channels with strategic preparations. LinkedIn and local vacancy websites are often mentioned as the main approach for job search. Most participants prefer these channels over discussing their job search with their professional networks, such as this participant: *“I don’t broadcast that I want to leave, but quietly looked at job boards, looked on LinkedIn” (Participant 15)*. In addition, multiple participants mentioned a systematic approach, where they create mood boards, prepare targeted questions, and list potential employers. Participant 5 highlights this structured search:

*“So, I had a mood board with all the interesting companies I like, and I was just... basically on a daily basis stalking them a bit, so every day I went back and looked at the whole list like “What have they posted on their website?””*

Salariat participants generally rely on discretion, online channels, and organised methods during their job search. Their approach indicates a prepared and resourceful job search behaviour, which is often in line with their job search effort-intensity. For instance, one participant mentions that *“I obligated myself that I had to note down a company or a person or send a message to something or someone about once a day”* (Participant 3). Even though the efforts remain structured, the salariat’s job search behaviour does change over time. These dynamics are typically related to different circumstances. For example, some adapted the intensity of their efforts based on the urgency, such as Participant 5:

*“At a certain point, I didn’t enjoy it anymore and they had a similar idea about that. So, then we just decided together to not renew the contract and when the end date was approaching, I thought ‘\*\*\*\*, I really have to have something.’”*

Overall, the transcripts show structured job search behaviours among salariat participants, but the intensity of their efforts is adapted according to changing circumstances, such as increased urgency.

During the interviews, participants also reflected on their confidence in finding a job. In general, the salariat class shows high levels of JSSE, often framing rejections as part of the job search process rather than personal shortcomings, such as this participant: *“And just because you didn’t get it, doesn’t mean that you didn’t do a good job [...] No, I mainly try to learn from it”* (Participant 6). Here, the participant suggests that rejection can be considered as a learning opportunity. Another participant acknowledges this perspective, as he shows frustration over his own rejection. He questions why they turned him down, especially since he considers himself to be a strong applicant for the position:

*“I have to say, it always affects me. Then I think, ‘How could they not want me?’. But no, that sound crazy, but I think, ‘Yes, I do have quite a bit of experience and the vacancies that were available were not necessarily positions for which I was underqualified [...] On what basis are you rejecting me?’”* (Participant 15)

The participants commonly show moments of self-reflection, however, high levels of self-efficacy enable them to continue their job search. This behaviour also drives their proactive approach to rejections. Often, participants proactively contact the employer to uncover why

they have been rejected. The salariat group mentions that this process can be exhausting. One participant says she constantly has to prove herself to others: *“You’re constantly proving yourself and that is quite... it just takes a lot of energy”* (Participant 5). Others acknowledge this exhausted feeling: *“It really drains me, looking for a job”* (Participant 17). These excerpts show that the job search process is an emotional process. Most participants mention negative emotions such as exhaustion and frustration, highlighting emotional burdens when looking for work.

In addition, salariat participants also mention structural constraints which impact their job search behaviour. A recurring theme is the limited job opportunities or sector-specific cutbacks, also mentioned by the following participant:

*“That’s not easy at the moment because there are significant cutbacks in education, right? So normally, I think I could have taken concrete steps earlier. There are just very few options available of jobs I’m looking for.”* (Participant 6)

Besides, most participants are also uncertain about their own interests and goals, which further complicates their search for a suitable job. For some, this self-doubt can sometimes be traced back to their upbringing, as is the case for Participant 11: *“I don’t dare to just go and do something different. And I think that has more to do with my upbringing. And with that... Yes, that emphasis on security”*. The transcripts show that all salariat participants experience structural constraints, in addition to emotional burdens, limiting this groups’ job search behaviour.

In sum, salariat participants generally commence their job search due to their desire for a new challenge or change of scenery. To find this, they often engage in structured and strategic job search behaviour, where they have greater access to opportunities due to their rich economic, social, and cultural capital.

#### *4.1.3 Career Development*

The transcripts show that while job search behaviour is shaped by participants’ motivation, emotions, and constraints, it is also connected to long-term outcomes. First, participants’ career aspirations reveal how they engage in their job search behaviour. The majority of the salariat participants emphasised their aspiration to develop, where they aim to move towards strategic roles, societal impact, or knowledge-sharing. When looking at the way participants think their

job search has affected their aspirations, salariat participants mention similar perspectives: “So, *actually when I started applying for jobs, I did think about whether I could change my current career path. And then I realised that I just prefer to do things that I really enjoy*” (Participant 1). This participant’s quote shows that her job search has helped her reframe her career perspective, which is shared by the majority of the salariat group. By orienting on vacancies, participants mention they gain a clearer understanding of what possibilities arise and which suit their goals best.

When participants were asked how their social background has influenced their career progress, mixed responses were received. Some mentioned that their embodied work ethic and loyalty have driven their career advancement. At the same time, these qualities also led some into paths they do not truly enjoy, as is the case for this participant:

*“Still, I think that at home... perhaps too much emphasis was places on your level and that you are good at learning. But then less attention was paid too... What are your personal characteristics, so what can you handle? [...] What are you good at, but also, for example, what causes you stress?” (Participant 11)*

Overall, the findings suggest that job search encourages salariat participants to reflect on their career development. While their backgrounds provide discipline and motivation to succeed, in some cases, it has steered participants towards the wrong career choices.

## **4.2 Intermediate Class**

### *4.2.1 Capitals of Social Class*

The transcripts show that all intermediate participants grew up in financially stable environments. They often felt secure because their family offered a safety net, which is explicitly highlighted by Participant 14: “*With that, my parents were always able to support me, and I always had a kind of fallback. So that might make you more willing to try things, because not everything depends on it or anything*”. For most, this financial security shapes the way they approach their job search. Typically, intermediate participants are confident and are willing to take risks when looking for a new job, which illustrates how financial security translates into freedom in the job search process.

In addition, the intermediate class mentions their access to a rich social capital, which mainly consists of family and friends. This social capital primarily offers encouragement and

advice during the job search process. This emotional support often builds confidence in the intermediate's job search, even though their network does not offer direct job opportunities. This confidence is also felt by the following participant:

*“Just a good environment. Also support from people around me, so I can just go to them with questions. Or if I... If things aren't going well for a while, I know I can go to them, you know, that's just a really nice feeling, just self-confidence and that helps too, yes.”*  
(Participant 8)

The transcripts show that these participants primarily use their social capital for emotional support rather than career connections.

Additionally, intermediate-participants' embodied cultural capital is typically expressed through their independence, which is often a result of their upbringing. Most participants mention they had the freedom to try new career paths, such as Participant 7: *“I think I have been raised to be independent [...] And I think that has made it possible that I can be independent at work too, and I just have this attitude of 'just give it a try'”*. This sense of freedom and confidence generally enables participants to approach new environments with curiosity instead of fear, which helps them to take risks in their job search.

Contrarily, intermediate participants showed less confidence when talking about their institutionalised cultural capital. Most participants mention constraints in relation to their educational background, such as Participant 14: *“What really has held me back was mainly the fact that, yes, that I didn't complete my education, which made me feel very insecure”*. This participant shares her frustrations with regards to her access to opportunities, which is related to her limited educational credentials. However, some participants also mentioned some aspects which increased their access to opportunities. Most participants acknowledged their privilege and social capital as enablers to opportunities, such as Participant 16: *“I don't think I would be where I am today otherwise. I would still be behind the cash register”*. This participant confesses that she would not have been this far in her career without the access, which was granted to her, showing her awareness of her privilege.

To conclude, the intermediate class typically benefits from financial stability and emotional support during their job search. Overall, their upbringing taught them independence and confidence to take risks, however, they sometimes feel constrained by their educational credentials.

#### 4.2.2 Job Search Behaviour

For the intermediate class, the motivation to start their job search depends on personal context, rather than social class. Based on the transcripts, participants are mainly motivated to start their job search due to lack of satisfaction and challenge in their current job. Additionally, the intermediates' job search content ranged from using standard platforms such as LinkedIn and Indeed to more proactive methods. Often, intermediate participants mentioned they send open applications during their search. For example, Participant 7 mentions the following: *"Then I just googled event agencies in the region, so not even looking at vacancies, but purely at companies themselves. And then I sent an open application"*. This demonstrates initiative and the willingness to create opportunities outside of existing vacancies. This proactive behaviour is further highlighted by some participants who mention they specifically searched for organisations and even visited these organisations during their search. This less structured and more informal job search content aligns with intermediate's job search effort-intensity. Here, multiple participants mention that they had *"just looked casually"* (Participant 8), highlighting the relaxed approach to their job search. Participant 9 further highlights this casual approach: *"I actually always have my job vacancies open. So yes, I wasn't really looking very actively. It was just a bit on the background"*. However, this relaxed behaviour often occurred later in the job search process. Multiple participants started their search obsessively and gradually shifted into a more focused search as time passed, such as the following participant:

*"Well, what I had at first was that I was really looking obsessively and thinking about everything like: 'Yes, could this be it and should I do this?', and then I spent way too much time on it [...] At first, I thought, 'Yes, everything is better than this.'"*  
(Participant 9)

This shows the stressful start of the job search process, where participants know they want to leave their current job but are unsure what their next step will be. Another participant confirms this change in behaviour by saying: *"So, I think that I adjusted it by just taking a moment to collect myself. And just 'OK, what do you want? And what does fit you best?'"* (Participant 14). Both quotes show a self-reflecting behaviour, where participants start asking themselves questions about their aspirations, ultimately helping their job search. This reflective behaviour illustrates participants' JSSE, since participants gain more clarity about their aspirations and confidence in their ability to find a suitable job. However, most intermediate participants also show lower levels of JSSE compared to salariat participants. As highlighted in this participant's

response:

*“With that level, I have that... Yes, I don’t know, that was kind of a limit or something and that my head says: ‘no, that’s probably not going to happen anyway’, so then I don’t even try it.” (Participant 8)*

Here, the participant shares his hesitant behaviour towards vacancies which ask for a higher educational level. This behaviour often leads to frustration and search fatigue among intermediate participants, since they keep searching but cannot seem to find the right job for their skillset. Even though most participants show insecurities, they also reveal proactive behaviours during their job search, stating they directly contact employers or initiate open job applications. In doing so, these participants show that risk-taking is necessary to find a suitable job.

During the intermediate participants’ job search, emotions emerge as a central aspect of job search behaviour. The participants mention they think the job search process is *“a bit frustrating” (Participant 8)* and emotionally exhausting: *“Emotional, that’s what it makes me a bit. I can cry over every little thing then... [It] gives a very bad feeling about yourself” (Participant 14)*. By saying this, the participant underlines that she experiences the job search as an emotional process. Intermediate participants typically mention negative emotions such as exhaustion and frustration, highlighting emotional burdens when looking for work.

Besides emotional burdens, intermediate participants also experience other constraints, impacting their job search behaviour. The most frequently mentioned constraint is that participants do not know what their next step in their career should be. Participants generally mention they are unsure of what their goals are and what position they want to fill, such as Participant 7: *“What I am realising now that I am searching is that I find it very difficult and I’m also getting a bit stuck. Like, what do I really enjoy? I notice that I’m struggling with that”*. This uncertainty not only influences participants’ job search behaviour, it also alters their perception of their career development.

Concluding, intermediate participants primarily show a casual approach to their job search behaviour, where they proactively contact potential employers to increase their chances of finding a job. Their search is often shaped by self-doubt and uncertainty about their future career direction.

### 4.2.3 Career Development

Even though participants explain they do not know what position they would enjoy taking, they did share their long-term career ambitions. These ambitions differ per participant, where some aspire to seek vertical career progression, such as Participant 7: *“So, I would just like to gradually build up a nice ladder, so to speak. But yes, end up higher”*. This quote shows that the participant, among others, aims to gain responsibility and upward mobility in the future. However, not all intermediate participants share this ambition, some want the opposite and responded, *“I don’t want to be a manager, absolutely not”* (Participant 9). Here, the participant explicitly mentions that she does not want to gain more responsibilities, highlighting that intermediate participants can have different career ambitions. When being asked how intermediate participants view the impact of their job search on their career development, multiple participants confess that it decreases their motivation for their current jobs. The following quote shows that job search can cause intermediate participants to mentally distance themselves from their current job:

*“I think it sometimes has a slightly negative effect on my motivation, because I think, ultimately, I’m going to leave anyway. So maybe I think about some things like, well, that’s not really my problem, because in the long run it’s not my dream job, so to speak, and I’m looking now, so when I’m gone, I’m gone.”* (Participant 16)

To conclude, the intermediate class has advantages due to their financial security, emotional support and independent upbringing. These factors typically encourage a casual, proactive and self-reflective job search behaviour. Nevertheless, intermediate participants sometimes face limitations due to their educational background and uncertainty about their career direction, which creates frustration and exhaustion. Lastly, intermediate participants typically mention that the job search process demotivates them in their current profession.

## 4.3 Working Class

### 4.3.1 Capitals of Social Class

Across the transcriptions, most working-class participants perceive their upbringing as modest but financially stable. They often had hard-working parents and were taught to value financial security. For the majority, financial stability was something that should be maintained through

employment. For example, one participant mentioned that he stopped his job search to pay off his student debt:

*“And then I actually made a deal, because things weren’t going well at all with my current employer and of course they didn’t want to lose me. So, I made a deal that I would stay for another six months and then I would have paid off my student debt.”*  
(Participant 4)

This highlights that, to ensure financial security, financial prospects are more central drivers in the working-class career decision-making.

While their economic capital influences how working-class participants could navigate their job search, their social capital shows how they accessed opportunities during this process. The transcripts show that working-class participants often relied on family, friends, and colleagues during their job search. These people offered encouragement and direct leads to job opportunities. The working class is aware of the importance of their social capital, as one participant expressed: *“It’s not what you know, but who you know. [...] Sometimes it’s just handy to have a few connections left and right”* (Participant 10). This quote demonstrates how social networks make up for limited institutionalised cultural capital. Many of the working-class participants have no tertiary educational attainment, which affects their job search. Participants frequently describe their educational level as a barrier, as Participant 4 explains: *“You just can’t get in with secondary vocational education”*. This illustrates how their educational attainment narrows the range of opportunities, leaving them with less options to choose from.

In addition, working-class participants are often shaped by their early exposure to hard work, loyalty, and self-reliance. These individuals are commonly raised with the belief that you must work hard to maintain yourself, such as Participant 2:

*“But I think that in our family it’s been drummed that you just have to work really hard, so to speak. But yes, I think it’s more about just working hard and what you do doesn’t really matter so much as long as you work hard.”*

This illustrates that working-class participants often have a deeply rooted work ethic, valuing job security and stability once they start their job search.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the code ‘access to opportunity’ was barely present across

the five working-class transcripts (10 quotations with no clear pattern), whereas the intermediate (14 quotations), and especially the salariat participants (31 quotations) discussed this theme more extensively. This suggests that the working class has no common access to job opportunities.

To summarise, this section shows that the working-class pragmatic job search behaviour is shaped by their limited institutionalised cultural capital and reliance on their social capital. Their strong work ethic typically guides their career choices, however, they often feel restricted by the limited opportunities available.

#### *4.3.2 Job Search Behaviour*

Due to the limited job opportunities for the working class, their motivation to start their job search primarily stems from the necessity to leave their current employer. Factors such as contract termination, toxic working environments, and increasing work pressure causes the working-class participants to commence their job search. The latter was also mentioned by Participant 18: *“Yes, it’s all fun and games what they want, but it means that the workload increases enormously. Yes, and that’s just not feasible”*. This participant mentions that the pressure she receives from her employer affected her wellbeing, which is why she started looking elsewhere. Like other working-class participants, her job search behaviour was more reactive than strategic, relying on personal networks and recruiters because these offer greater trust compared to online platforms. Participant 10 also mentioned the help of a recruiter in his job search process: *“I tapped into an old connection. That’s a recruiter. [...] I had an interview there last month and he got me [...] two job applications”*.

In addition to a less structured job search content, the job search effort-intensity also tends to show a less organised behaviour. This is also shown in the following response: *“Then I looked when I had ten minutes to spare, then I looked, but not systematically”* (Participant 10). The quote suggests that this participant does not follow a structure when it comes to the intensity of their job search, like the other working-class participants. The job search dynamics for this class differ per participant. One participant mentions he plans on looking more seriously and another wants to search more actively. This difference in dynamics suggests that their job search behaviour tends to be more situational since their job search is often driven by immediate needs instead of long-term planning.

Besides the way working-class participants approach their job search, the interviews also reflect on their confidence to find a job. Generally, the working class expressed initial

insecurities due to missing educational degrees or gaps in CVs. The latter was specifically mentioned by Participant 2:

*“For a long time, I panicked, thinking, I’ve been out of work for three years now, so to speak. Nobody wants me anymore, that’s what I mainly had, because at a certain point, you have quite a big gap in your CV.”*

However, this group also explains that rejections often lead to motivation, showing resilient behaviour next to their insecurities. Participant 10 highlights this motivation: *“That only strengthens me [...] That I will show people that I can find work [...] That doesn’t discourage me. No, for me, it’s even more motivation to show how wrong a company is not to hire me”*. This resilient behaviour recurs in their proactive behaviour by calling the employers directly, which the following participant also did: *“So, I thought, I simply call her, because then I’ll have had some contact right away” (Participant 2)*. This participant explains how she directly contacted an employer after seeing an interesting vacancy. Other participants shared this behaviour, explaining they also contact employers after being rejected, asking for feedback.

During the interviews, the working class also explained how emotions shape the job search behaviour. Overall, the group expresses insecurities and stress when talking about their job search process. Some even expressed anger when addressing an unfair rejection they received during their job search: *“Yes, I was a bit angry then, let’s say that [...] Yes, that gave me stomach ache for a few days” (Participant 10)*. This shows that for working-class participants, the job search process mainly evokes negative emotions. Besides these emotional burdens, the working class also faces some structural constraints during their job search. These vary from contextual to educational constraints. A share of participants mention they feel excluded from certain opportunities due to their educational attainment.

In sum, the results show that the working class mainly displays a reactive job search behaviour, mostly motivated by the need to leave their current employer. To help them with their job search, they rely on the help of recruiters and personal networks. Despite their insecurities about employability, the group often shows resilience and proactivity, suggesting they are determined to find a new job soon.

#### *4.3.3 Career Development*

When focusing on the working-class career aspirations, varying results are presented. Some

want less responsibility in their job whereas others explicitly look for more authority, such as Participant 4: *“I’m looking for positions with more responsibility. Maybe a bit of project management. Or at least having to arrange things”*. The transcripts show no consistent pattern in career goals for the working class, however, most participants did share that their job search has helped them to reframe their career perspectives. One participant explicitly mentions: *“I do think that the more I see certain vacancies and certain job descriptions, the better I know what I want and what I seem to like. And where my ambitions really lie”* (Participant 4). The majority of the group shared this perspective, explaining that by orienting on vacancies, participants gain a clearer understanding of what possibilities arise and which suit their goals best.

Lastly, working-class participants demonstrate how their background has influenced their career development. Most of the group highlights how their early work experiences and upbringing have taught them values, such as loyalty, consistency, and self-reliance. Participant 10 highlights that these experiences have influenced his career:

*“I was 14 when I started working with my father on Saturdays. From the age of 16 to 18, I worked in the rose gardens. From 18 to 20, 21, I was a postman. Those are all things. Those are experiences that you take with you.”*

Participants are often unsure whether these values have influenced their career development positively or negatively, as they feel that others often take advantage of their strong work ethic and loyalty.

#### **4.4 Overview of the Results**

To create a clear overview of the results, the most important findings per social class are summarised in Table 2. This overview shows that the salariat class generally benefits from financial stability, direct access to opportunities, and high JSSE, which allow for strategic and structured job search. The intermediate class shows similar financial stability but less confidence which results in a more exploratory, inconsistent job search behaviour. Lastly, the working class faces more financial and educational constraints which leads to pragmatic, necessity-driven job search behaviour.

**Table 2***Overview of the results*

		<b>Classes</b>		
		<b>Salariat Class</b>	<b>Intermediate Class</b>	<b>Working Class</b>
<b>Capitals of Social Class</b>	<b>Economic Capital</b>	Little financial stress allows focus on personal growth and career exploration	Financial stability allows risk-taking and confidence	Limited financial resources, career decision based on financial needs
	<b>Social Capital</b>	Family/friends provide guidance and advice	Family/friends provide emotional support and encouragement	Family/friends/colleagues provide direct job leads and encouragement
	<b>Institutionalised Cultural Capital</b>	Higher education, access to more opportunities	Some constraints, lower confidence in high-level roles	Restricted in opportunities
	<b>Embodied Cultural Capital</b>	Work ethic and passion result in positive approach to job search	Independence and confidence results in risk-taking and curiosity	Work ethic, loyalty and self-reliance result in pragmatic approach
	<b>Access to Opportunity</b>	Some had direct access, usage depends on person	Moderate access, mostly self-driven	Little access
<b>Job Search Behaviour</b>	<b>Motivation for Job Search</b>	Desire for challenge or change of scenery	Desire for challenge, unsatisfied	Necessity due to pressure or contract
	<b>Job Search Content</b>	Structured and strategic	Casual	Reactive and pragmatic
	<b>Job Search Effort-Intensity</b>	High and structured	Casual intensity overall	Situational
	<b>Job Search Dynamics</b>	Adaptive to urgency	Starts obsessively, later focused	Little change over time
	<b>JSSE</b>	High, confident, self-reflective	Moderate, self-doubt	Moderate, insecure but resilient
	<b>Proactive Behaviour</b>	High, self-reflective	High, open applications	High, direct contact
	<b>Emotions in Job Search</b>	Frustration, exhaustion, motivated	Frustration, stress, exhaustion, uncertain	Stress, insecure, anger, determined
<b>Career Development</b>	<b>Constraints &amp; Barriers</b>	Lack of suitable opportunities, uncertainty own needs	Educational credentials, uncertainty own needs	Limited opportunities, educational credentials
	<b>Aspirations &amp; Goals</b>	Develop skills, strategic roles, societal impact, knowledge-sharing	Varies, more or less responsibility	Varies, more or less responsibility
	<b>Career Decision-Making</b>	Deliberate, influenced by intrinsic motivation, values, available opportunities	Exploratory, influenced by curiosity and reflection	Pragmatic, necessity driven
	<b>Career Perception</b>	Enjoyment and growth	Job search clarified aspirations	Job search clarifies aspirations

## Chapter 5 – Discussion

This research aims to answer how employed individuals from different social classes engage in job search behaviour, and how do they view its impact on career development. Based on the results presented in Chapter 4, this chapter provides an answer to the research question of the thesis. Moreover, the theoretical and practical implications of the research conducted will be discussed. Finally, the limitations of the study will be addressed, leading to suggestions for future research.

### 5.1 Conclusion & Implications

The results reveal consistent patterns within each social class, yet differences were found across these three groups. First, the findings indicate that job search behaviour is often shaped by participants' forms of capital, which are unequally distributed across the classes. Salariat participants benefit from their rich capitals. Their financial stability and family network reduce pressure, which gives them space to enable a structured, proactive, and reflective job search behaviour. This group approaches their career development strategically and perceives their job search as an opportunity for self-development and goal orientation. The intermediate class also enjoys financial stability and emotional security from their network. However, this class shows varied confidence and less structured job search behaviour. This group often approaches their job search more exploratory and self-reflective but sometimes feels constrained by their educational attainment and uncertainty about their future. Lastly, the working class presents a pragmatic and reactive job search behaviour. This is often triggered by the need to leave their job, due to contract termination or toxic working environments. During their job search, working-class participants rely more on their personal network and recruiters than on online platforms, as these channels offer greater trust. This group shows resilience during the search even though their JSSE is lower compared to the other classes.

Nevertheless, the results also show similarities across the social classes when looking at their job search behaviour and its impact on their career development. All classes experience their search as emotionally demanding. They mention feeling frustrated, exhausted and stressed during their job search. Additionally, the social classes experience the same impact on career development since participants across classes emphasise that their job search has provided clarity about their professional aspirations. Specifically, it has encouraged them to re-evaluate their career paths.

Conclusively, employees from different social classes engage in job search behaviour

according to their available resources, capitals, and motivation. Yet, the job search process has given all three social classes clarity regarding their career paths.

### *5.1.1 Theoretical Implications*

The answer to the question supports and expands on the literature outlined in Chapter 1 and 2. Consistent with Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory, the results show how individuals categorised in higher social classes have richer capitals. The observed differences between the classes represent the unequal distribution of economic, social, and cultural capital. For example, participants categorised in the salariat class benefit from higher economic capital. This shaped their job search behaviour since it gave them financial stability during their job search, causing them to be more strategic when looking for a new job. In contrast, the working class felt more pressure to find a job due to their limited financial resources, which reflects their lower economic capital. Hence, they commence their job search out of necessity rather than lack of challenge. This aligns with DeOrtentiis et al. (2022), who state that "individuals of a higher social class can expend greater time and energy on job search activities than those of a lower social class" (p.453). The results acknowledge this by showing that job seekers from the salariat class take the time to structure their job search behaviour, whereas the working class shows a more direct, pragmatic behaviour. These findings do not only confirm that the capitals of social class are unequally distributed, they also show how this inequality influences the strategic job search behaviour of employees. This adds a new empirical insight to Bourdieu's (1986) theory in the context of job search behaviour.

In addition, DeOrtentiis et al. (2022) mention that job seekers from lower social classes have lower JSSE compared to higher classes, which is supported by this research's results. The intermediate and working classes have presented less confidence during their job search. They mention feeling insecure due to their educational attainment and CV which results in a less effective job search (DeOrtentiis et al., 2022). The results do not only confirm the study by DeOrtentiis et al. (2022), they also add that participants with lower JSSE overcome their initial lack of confidence by showing resilient and persistent behaviour.

Moreover, the findings show how individuals' employment status shapes job search motivation and strategies across social classes. While van Hooft et al. (2004) mentioned that employed individuals often start their job search because of dissatisfaction at their current job, the results of this study show that this varies per social class. Indeed, salariat and intermediate participants search for growth and challenge. However, the working class searches reactively,

driven by necessity. This adds a new addition to the theory of job search behaviour since it is not only shaped by employment status but also varies per social class.

Lastly, literature described that higher social classes have more advantages during the development of careers compared to lower social classes due to self-regulatory behaviour (Lent et al., 1994; Wang et al., 2022). Even though the results describe struggles regarding confidence and recognition for intermediate and working classes, this study also shows determination, resilience, and self-reflection among these groups. These findings suggest that, contradictory to literature, lower social classes also engage in self-regulatory strategies to overcome their constraints and pursue a career. This brings nuance to the existing image of the lower social class and suggests that theories about job search behaviour should not only focus on constraints but also on coping mechanisms of lower social classes.

### *5.1.2 Practical Implications*

In addition to theoretical implications, this study offers multiple practical implications for organisations and the broader society seeking to understand how social class shapes job search behaviour and career development opportunities. The findings show that the salariat and intermediate classes are uncertain about their own needs, causing them to feel overwhelmed by the vacancies available. Employers can help these employees by offering career coaching, where employees are guided through uncertain times. A career coach can facilitate salariat and intermediate employees in finding their true career aspirations by clarifying the employees' goals, values and beliefs. In doing so, employers not only help their salariat and intermediate employees but also enhance retention and internal mobility within their organisation. This is due to the alignment between individuals' goals and organisational goals, which is created through career coaching. Additionally, career coaching helps with the development of self-reliance among employees (Hudson, 1999).

The present study reveals that the intermediate and working classes have lower JSSE compared to the salariat class. Even though these individuals show resilient behaviour, they often feel limited due to their educational attainment. Some miss opportunities because of the requirements in vacancies or are rejected after employers have seen their CV. To reduce this inequality of opportunity, their employers should be more aware of this finding. Therefore, employers should offer confidence building sessions for these employees, focusing on enhancing self-efficacy. This can lead to higher employee motivation and retention for organisations.

Finally, the need to recognise class diversity as part of DEI strategies becomes evident from this study. Participants across classes expressed their struggles and showed differences in job search behaviour, highlighting the invisible barriers for each social class. Some lack confidence, others are uncertain about their own goals. The transcripts have shown that social class remains an overlooked factor in shaping professional experiences. By offering awareness training and inclusive communication practices for managers, recruiters, and HR professionals, organisations can create a culture where all employees are valued. Through this increase in awareness on class-based disparities, organisations can also unlock the unused human potential of the intermediate and working class.

In fact, these implications go beyond organisational level. Recognising class diversity can contribute to society as a whole by reducing structural inequality, enhancing social mobility, and promoting awareness. By actively involving all classes in the workplace, organisations can help reshape societal norms regarding access to opportunities. This way, not only employees and employers benefit from class awareness, but also the society by reducing polarisation and creating fairer labour markets.

## **5.2 Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insights into social class, job search behaviour, and career development, a few limitations should be considered to evaluate the findings and guide future research. First, this research's sample size is modest due to time constraints. While this is a common limitation, it is particularly important for this study. Because of the limited sample size, the diversity of experiences for each social class cannot be fully captured. For example, when looking at the career aspirations of the groups, responses varied per group, which indicates that saturation was not always reached.

In addition, though the snowball sampling technique was convenient for the purpose of this study, it also caused sampling bias. Since participants were reached through referrals, participants often shared similar educational or professional backgrounds, limiting the generalisability of the sample. For instance, two of the salariat participants had followed the same study at the same university, which could have influenced the institutionalised cultural capital and, subsequently, their job search behaviour. Moreover, the homogeneity of the sample should also be addressed. The salariat group is 60% bigger than the intermediate group and the working-class group. This again questions the generalisability of the results since this distribution is not representative for the actual population.

Furthermore, the way in which the participants have been categorised into their social classes should be evaluated. The EGP class scheme was used since it is a popular tool linked to Bourdieu's (1986) capital theory and proofs to have good criterion validity (Smullenbroek et al., 2024). However, one must acknowledge the downsides of this classification tool. First, the classification by the researcher can be biased, since the researcher often had personal relationships with the participants. Second, the EGP class scheme is mainly economic in character (Tittenbrun, 2014). This means that it has a clear focus on economic capital, rather than social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Therefore, the nuanced understanding of the social class dynamics is too limited to one capital. In fact, this research and existing theory suggests that the other forms of capital are equally important when it comes to exploring social class in relation to job search behaviour.

Lastly, the study is limited since it relies on one source of primary data: interviews. While the interviews have provided rich and qualitative insights, the absence of triangulation, such as data from focus groups, surveys, or employers' perspectives, limits the robustness and reliability of this study. However, this approach would have been beyond the scope of this study.

### **5.3 Future Directions**

The findings and limitations of this study provide room for future research. Building on the qualitative findings of this study, future research is needed to examine the influence of social class on job search behaviour on a quantitative level. This would allow for a more generalisable and broader understanding of the factors that influence job search behaviour. Another way to collect more generalisable data is to extend the sample size. Hence, future research could conduct the same study but with a bigger sample size, which is representative of the population. In doing so, one gets stronger implications for theory and practice.

Second, one could re-conduct this study using a different social class classification method. The reason being that a classification scheme which focuses on the multidimensionality of social class is more appropriate. Since the EGP scheme mainly focuses on economic capital, a more multidimensional scheme should present a deeper understanding of how the different capitals interact to shape participants' job search behaviour and career development. This would allow research to better understand the different experiences of the social classes.

Third, one could investigate how personal factors play a role in job search behaviour.

Due to the variety of responses within the classes, other factors might shape employees' job search behaviour and career development. Factors such as age, geographical context, and sector might influence the way individuals approach their job search process. By investigating this, more efficient job search strategies per class could be found.

Finally, it is important to further investigate the role of social class in organisation sciences. This further research is particularly important because of the increasing threats on social mobility and equality of opportunity. Following this, it is key to keep the public debate going and to further boost the awareness on issues such as inequality of opportunity and the growing divide between social groups. In line with Luyendijk (2022), we should not only recognise the need for change but also create a pathway for organisations and society in which opportunities are equally distributed, and no human capital is wasted.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

#### Interview Guide

##### CONSENT FORM

Before we begin with the interview, I would like to ask whether you are giving permission for me to audio record this interview. The audio recording will be transcribed and used as research data. By signing this consent form, you are allowing me to audio record the interview.

##### INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating in this study. My name is Daphne van Tienen, and I am currently writing my master's thesis. The aim of my thesis is to explore how employees from different social classes engage in their job search behaviour and how they perceive its impact on their career development.

This interview will be semi-structured, meaning I have prepared some questions, however there is room for you to elaborate on your experiences and perceptions. Feel free to share as much detail as you feel comfortable with. The interview will take around 45-60 minutes and your responses will be pseudonymized, any identifying information will be removed during the transcription process.

If at any point during the interview, you wish to skip a question or stop the interview, do not hesitate to let me know.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

##### PART 1 – SOCIAL CLASS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The first part of the interview will help me to establish your background.

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself? (age, gender, nationality, current job, industry)
2. Have you completed any educational program? (cultural capital)
  - a. If yes: what is the highest level of education obtained? What type of education was it?
3. What is your current job title and the belonging responsibilities? (EGP classification)

- a. How long have you had this current role?
4. Do you have any career aspirations on the short and long term? (JSSE, career development)
  - a. If yes: which ones and why?
  - b. If no: does that mean you are content at the moment?
5. When you were growing up, how would you describe your family's socio-economic situation? (economic capital)
6. What were their professions when you were growing up? (cultural capital)
7. Did/Do your parents/guardians have higher education degrees? (HBO or higher) (cultural capital)
  - a. Was their field of study related to their profession?
8. How important was it to your parents/guardians that you performed well in school or that you built a successful career?
  - a. Can you give examples?
9. Do you have family or friends who have helped you in your career? (social capital)
  - a. If yes: how did they help you?
  - b. If no: did you do everything by yourself? How?
    - i. Have you missed any help? Or did you decide not to use it?
      1. If yes: why?
      2. If no: why?
10. Have you experienced any challenges related to your background in your career?
  - a. If so, elaborate.
11. Have you experienced any advantages related to your background in your career?
  - a. If so, elaborate.

## **PART 2 – JOB SEARCH PROCESS**

The second part of the interview will explore how you approach job searching and how you experience your class of origin to have influenced this process.

12. Can you describe your situation in terms of job searching?
  - a. Why did you start?
  - b. How did you start?
  - c. How long have you been searching?
  - d. What goals did you set?

- e. Are you looking for a job within your current employer or outside, or both?
13. Can you describe your recent experiences in terms of job searching?
    - a. How do you prepare for job interviews?
    - b. Did you already have a job interview?
      - i. How are these interviews going?
    - c. How are you experiencing the search?
  14. How many jobs have you applied for in the last six months? Please give an indication. (job search effort-intensity)
  15. What type of vacancies do you apply for? (job search content)
    - a. Through what channels do you find these vacancies? (job search content, social capital)
  16. How do you decide which jobs you apply for? (self-regulation)
    - a. What factors matter in this decision?
  17. What challenges have you experienced while searching for a job?
  18. How do you handle rejection? (JSSE)
  19. Have you adapted the way you search for job over time? (job search dynamics)
    - a. If so, how?

### **PART 3 – CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

This last part examines how you perceive the impact of the challenges/advantages you experience during the search on your career development.

20. How do you think your job search process has influenced your career development?
21. Do you feel your background has had any influence on your career progress?
  - a. If so, how?
22. What factors do you feel have helped your career development?
23. What factors do you feel have hindered your career development?

### **CONCLUSION**

I would like to thank you for sharing your experiences. Before we end the audio recording, do you have anything you would like to add that might be relevant to this research?

Your insights are greatly appreciated. If you want to hear more about the results of this study, feel free to contact me through e-mail!

## Appendix 2 – Classification Social Class

EGP Ten-Class Model	EGP Three-Class Model
1. Higher professionals and managers	Salaried class
2. Lower professionals and managers	
3. Routine non-manual workers	Intermediate class
4. Small proprietors with employees	
5. Small proprietors without employees	
6. Lower grade technicians and manual supervisors	
7. Skilled manual workers	Working class
8. Unskilled and semiskilled manual workers	
9. Self-employed farmers	
10. Agricultural labourers	

## Appendix 3 – Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Data familiarisation	Transcribing of the data, (re-)reading the transcripts, writing down first ideas.
2. Generation of initial codes	Interesting parts of the data are coded in a systematic way.
3. Searching for themes	Categorising codes into potential themes.
4. Reviewing of themes	Checking whether the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, creating a thematic ‘map’
5. Defining of themes	Ongoing analysis to refine details and stories of each theme, labelling and defining the themes.
6. Production of the report	Polishing and modifying of the analysis in relation to the research question and literature.

*Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 35)*

## Appendix 4 – Thematic Map<sup>3</sup>

Themes	Codes	Times Applied
<b>Social Class</b>	EGP Scheme	28
	Economic Capital	110
	Social Capital	149
	Embodied Cultural Capital	105
	Institutionalised Cultural Capital	65
	Access to Opportunity	55
	Symbolic Capital	3
	Objectified Cultural Capital	21
<b>Job Search Behaviour</b>	Motivation Job Search	73
	Job Search Content	256

<sup>3</sup> Red cells show codes not mentioned in the results due to limited findings and absence of pattern.

	Job Search Effort-Intensity	88
	Job Search Dynamics	67
	JSSE	111
	Proactive Behaviour	67
	Emotions in Job Search	124
	Constraints/Barriers	220
<b>Career Development</b>	Aspirations/Goals	154
	Career Decision-Making	71
	Career Perception	80
	Career Transitions	36
	Perceived Fit	41

## Appendix 5 – Information Document

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY:

#### *How Social Class Shapes Job Search Experiences and Career Development among Employees*

#### Introduction

You have been invited to participate in a scientific study at Radboud University. Before you decide whether you want to participate, you have received an explanation of what the study entails. Please read this information carefully.

#### What is the study about?

This study aims to explore how employed individuals from different social classes navigate the job search process, and how they view its impact on career development.

#### What is expected of you?

In this study, you will be interviewed by Daphne van Tienen. If you consent, an audio recording and notes of this interview will be made to ensure the accuracy of the study. The recording and notes will be used as research data. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. In the interview we will ask you questions about your job search process, your experience, challenges, social class, and career progression. Examples of questions are:

- What challenges have you experienced while searching for a job?
- Have you adapted the way you search for job over time? Why/Why not?
- What factors do you feel have helped your career development?

#### Voluntary participation

You decide whether to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary. You may say no at any time. You do not have to answer questions you would rather not answer, and you can stop your participation and withdraw your consent at any time during the study. You do not have to indicate why you are stopping. You can also have your research data and personal data deleted up to two weeks after participation, by sending an email to Daphne van Tienen ([daphne.vantienen@ru.nl](mailto:daphne.vantienen@ru.nl)).

### **What will happen to my data?**

Your participation in this study is confidential. All research data will be stored on Radboud University's secure servers, according to the university's protocol. This protocol is in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Recordings are deleted as soon as the interview report is finished. The interview notes are pseudonymized meaning that it is nearly impossible to trace data back to you. We do this by removing all information leading to you as an individual from the research data (such as your name, contact information, or any other mentioned individuals) and replacing it with a pseudonym.

The list of participants and pseudonyms is encrypted and stored in a secure environment to which only the researchers from the direct research team have access. Once this is done, the researchers will only work with the pseudonymized data, which will also be used for presentations. The pseudonymized data will not be used for other studies. The notes will be stored on the Radboud network for ten years to ensure scientific integrity. The list of participants and pseudonyms will be deleted at the end of the study.

### **Ethical review and complaints**

Should you have complaints or problems you can always contact the main researcher. You may also file a complaint with the Scientific Integrity Confidential Advisors ([vertrouwenspersonen@ru.nl](mailto:vertrouwenspersonen@ru.nl)) or with the Radboud University Scientific Integrity Committee ([m.steenbergen@bjz.ru.nl](mailto:m.steenbergen@bjz.ru.nl), 024 3611578) Administrative & Legal Affairs.

If you have questions or complaints about the processing of your personal data, we recommend that you first discuss them with the main researcher, Daphne van Tienen. You can also contact Radboud University's Data Protection Officer ([mijnprivacy@ru.nl](mailto:mijnprivacy@ru.nl)). Or you can file a complaint

to the [Data Protection Authority](#).

### **Consent Statement**

If you want to participate in this study, we will ask you to sign a consent form. Your written consent indicates that you have understood the information and agree to participate in the study.

### **Do you have any questions about the study?**

If you would like to know more about the study or storage of the research data, please contact the main researcher:

Name: Daphne van Tienen

E-mail address: [daphne.vantienen@ru.nl](mailto:daphne.vantienen@ru.nl)

Telephone number: +31 6 25 49 83 77

## **Appendix 6 – Consent Form**

### **Consent Form**

For participation in the study: *How social class shapes job search experiences and career development among employees.*

#### **Statement of the participant:**

I have been informed about the purpose of the study. I was able to ask questions about the study. I am participating in the study voluntarily. I understand that I may stop at any time during the study if I wish. I understand how the data from the study will be kept and what it will be used for. I agree to participate in the study as described in the information document.

In addition, I consent to (please check the appropriate box):

**Yes No**

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | process the following data: gender, age category, education level, occupation               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | making audio recordings of this interview   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | storing audio recordings internally for a period of 10 years to ensure scientific integrity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | have the audio recording pseudonymized and transcribed                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | use the pseudonymized transcriptions for scientific research                                |

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher: Daphne van Tienen

Date:

Signature:

### Appendix 7 – Translation Quotes

	English (Translated)	Dutch (Original)
1	<i>“I think it was an advantage that my parents paid for my studies. Because of that I don’t have a huge student debt to pay off now.”</i>	“Ik denk dat het een voordeel was dat mijn ouders mijn studie hebben betaald. Dat ik daardoor geen gigantische studieschuld heb nu.”
2	<i>“My aunt, for example, [...] helped me a lot. [...] And my father too, because he had his own business, so he knows a lot about business matters, so my father definitely helped me too.”</i>	“Mijn tante bijvoorbeeld [...] heeft mij heel veel geholpen. [...] En mijn vader ook omdat hij ook een eigen bedrijf heeft gehad weet hij veel van zakelijke dingen af, dus mijn vader ook zeker.”
3	<i>“I do think, because of the example I had, that I was motivated to, well, not necessarily to pursue a career, but to do something that I... where a passion lies and to pursue that.”</i>	“Ik denk wel, toch vanwege het voorbeeld wat ik heb gehad, dat ik daar toch wel zelf ook gemotiveerd voor was om, ja, niet per se carrière te maken, maar wel iets te doen wat ik... waar een passie ligt en dat door te zetten.”
4	<i>“my education, definitely”</i>	“mijn opleiding, sowieso”
5	<i>“So I think that, if you look at it positively, it was simply the good, solid education</i>	“Ik denk dus dat het, als je het positief bekijkt, dat het gewoon wel ook de goede,

	<i>that helped me to keep developing and move from job to job.”</i>	gedegen opleiding is geweest, die mij heeft geholpen om gewoon steeds te kunnen ontwikkelen en van baan naar baan te kunnen gaan.”
6	<i>“[...] I actually enjoyed it at the beginning because I could learn a lot, but once I had learned everything there was to learn, I realised that I didn’t find it very interesting and that I had little challenge.”</i>	“[...] eigenlijk vond ik het aan het begin leuk omdat ik veel kon leren, maar toen eigenlijk het leerstukje erop zat, kwam ik erachter dat ik het toch niet heel boeiend vond en best wel weinig uitdaging had.”
7	<i>“I’ve been working at my current job for five years now, and then I always start to get an itch [to change].”</i>	“Ik werk nu vijf jaar op mijn huidige plek en bij mij ging begint het dan sowieso wel zo standaard wel te kriebelen.”
8	<i>“I don’t broadcast that I want to leave, but quietly looked at job boards, looked on LinkedIn.”</i>	“Ik ga dan niet aan de grote klok hangen dat ik weg wil, maar rustig op vacaturebanken gekeken, op LinkedIn gekeken.”
9	<i>“So, I had a mood board with all the interesting companies I like, and I was just... basically on a daily basis stalking them a bit, so every day I went back and looked at the whole list like “What have they posted on their website?””</i>	“En ik had dus een moodboard met allemaal interessante bedrijven die ik leuk vond, en die was ik gewoon... eigenlijk dagelijks was ik die een beetje aan het stalken, dus ik ging elke dag opnieuw ging ik naar het hele lijstje kijken van ‘Wat hebben zij zelf op de website geplaatst?’”
10	<i>“I obligated myself that I had to note down a company or a person or send a message to something or someone about once a day.”</i>	“Ik moest van mezelf dan ongeveer één keer per dag óf een bedrijf noteren óf een persoon óf een berichtje sturen naar iets of iemand.”
11	<i>“At a certain point, I didn’t enjoy it anymore and they had a similar idea about that. So, then we just decided together to not renew the contract and when the end date was approaching, I thought ‘****, I really have to have something.’”</i>	“Op een gegeven moment had ik het niet meer leuk vond en zij hadden dat idee ook bij mij. Dus toen hebben we gezamenlijk gewoon besloten van het contract wordt niet verlengd en toen die einddatum in zicht kwam, dacht ik, ‘****, ik moet echt

		iets hebben.”
12	<i>“And just because you didn’t get it, doesn’t mean that you didn’t do a good job [...] No, I mainly try to learn from it.”</i>	“En dat jij het niet wordt, betekent niet dat je het niet goed hebt gedaan [...] Nee, ik probeer er vooral van te leren.”
13	<i>“I have to say, it always affects me. Then I think, ‘How could they not want me?’. But no, that sound crazy, but I think, ‘Yes, I do have quite a bit of experience and the vacancies that were available were not necessarily positions for which I was underqualified [...] On what basis are you rejecting me?’”</i>	“Het raakt me altijd wel moet ik zeggen. Dan denk ik, van ‘Ja, hoe kun je mij nou niet willen?’ Maar nee, dat klinkt gek hoor, maar ik denk van ‘Ja, ik heb best wel een bak ervaring en de vacatures die open stonden, dat waren nou niet per se functies waarvoor ik ondergekwalificeerd was [...] Op basis waarvan wijs je me af?”
14	<i>“You’re constantly proving yourself and that is quite... it just takes a lot of energy.”</i>	“Je bent jezelf continu aan het bewijzen en dat is best wel... kost gewoon heel veel energie.”
15	<i>“It really drains me, looking for a job.”</i>	<i>“Dat zuigt echt alles uit me, zoeken naar een baan.”</i>
16	<i>“That’s not easy at the moment because there are significant cutbacks in education, right? So normally, I think I could have taken concrete steps earlier. There are just very few options available of jobs I’m looking for.”</i>	“Dat is op dit moment niet makkelijk omdat er in het hoger onderwijs flink bezuinigd wordt, hè? Dus normaal gesproken had ik daar, denk ik, al eerder concrete stappen in kunnen zetten. Er is nu gewoon ook heel weinig aanbod van functies die ik zoek.”
17	<i>“I don’t dare to just go and do something different. And I think that has more to do with my upbringing. And with that... Yes, that emphasis on security.”</i>	“Ik durf niet zomaar echt iets anders te gaan doen. En dat heeft meer dan met opvoeding te maken, denk ik. En met toch dat... Ja, die nadruk op zekerheid.”
18	<i>“So, actually when I started applying for jobs, I did think about whether I could change my current career path. And then I realised that I just prefer to do things that I really enjoy.”</i>	“Dus eigenlijk op het moment dat ik ben gaan solliciteren, heb ik ook wel nagedacht of ik mijn huidige carrière anders kon inrichten. En dan ben ik er eigenlijk achter gekomen dat ik gewoon graag het liefst

		gewoon dingen doe die ik echt leuk vind.”
19	<i>“Still, I think that at home... perhaps too much emphasis was places on your level and that you are good at learning. But then less attention was paid too... What are your personal characteristics, so what can you handle? [...] What are you good at, but also, for example, what causes you stress?”</i>	“Toch denk ik vanuit thuis ... dat er misschien te veel nadruk is gelegd op je niveau en dat je goed kunt leren. Maar dan minder aandacht is geweest voor... Wat zijn jouw persoonskenmerken, dus wat kun je aan hè? [...] Waar ben je goed in, maar ja, ook bijvoorbeeld, waar krijg je stress van?”
20	<i>“With that, my parents were always able to support me, and I always had a kind of fallback. So that might make you more willing to try things, because not everything depends on it or anything.”</i>	“Daarin konden mijn ouders mij altijd ondersteunen en had ik altijd een soort terugvalbasis. Dus dat maakt wel misschien dat je misschien sneller dingen durft, omdat niet alles ervan afhangt ofzo.”
21	<i>“Just a good environment. Also support from people around me, so I can just go to them with questions. Or if I... If things aren't going well for a while, I know I can go to them, you know, that's just a really nice feeling, just self-confidence and that helps too, yes.”</i>	“Gewoon een goede omgeving. Ook support van de mensen om me heen, waardoor ik gewoon met vragen terecht kan. Of als ik even... Als het even niet lekker loop of dat ik daar ook terecht kan, weet je wel, dat is gewoon echt een fijn gevoel, gewoon zelfvertrouwen en dat helpt ook wel mee, ja.”
22	<i>“I think I have been raised to be independent [...] And I think that has made it possible that I can be independent at work too, and I just have this attitude of 'just give it a try.' ”</i>	“Ik ben wel zelfstandig, denk ik, opgevoed [...] En dat heeft denk ik wel gemaakt dat ik ook in mijn werk dus zelfstandig kan zijn en gewoon zoiets heb van ‘gewoon proberen’”
23	<i>“What really has held me back was mainly the fact that, yes, that I didn't complete my education, which made me feel very insecure.”</i>	“Wat mij echt belemmerd heeft, is vooral echt dat, ja, dat ik geen opleiding heb afgerond waar ik daar heel onzeker dan door werd eigenlijk.”
24	<i>“I don't think I would be where I am today otherwise. I would still be behind the cash</i>	“Ik denk dat ik anders niet was waar ik nu sta. Dan was ik gewoon nog lekker achter

	<i>register.”</i>	de kassa beland.”
25	<i>“Then I just googled event agencies in the region, so not even looking at vacancies, but purely at companies themselves. And then I sent an open application.”</i>	“Toen heb ik gewoon gegoogeld naar evenementenbureaus in de regio, dus niet eens naar vacatures, maar gewoon puur naar bedrijven zelf. En toen heb ik een open sollicitatie gestuurd.”
26	<i>“just looked casually”</i>	“gewoon rustig gekeken”
27	<i>“I actually always have my job vacancies open. So yes, I wasn’t really looking very actively. It was just a bit on the background.”</i>	“Ik heb eigenlijk altijd mijn vacatures open staan. Dus ja, het was eigenlijk niet heel actief. Het was gewoon een beetje op de achtergrond.”
28	<i>“Well, what I had at first was that I was really looking obsessively and thinking about everything like: ‘Yes, could this be it and should I do this?’, and then I spent way too much time on it [...] At first, I thought, ‘Yes, everything is better than this.’”</i>	“Nou, wat ik sowieso eerst had, was dat ik echt obsessief zat te kijken en dat ik dan bij alles dacht van ‘Ja, zou dit het dan zijn en moet ik dit dan gaan doen?’, en dan was ik er wel echt veel te lang mee bezig [...] Eerst dacht ik van ‘Ja, alles is beter dan dit.’”
29	<i>“So, I think that I adjusted it by just taking a moment to collect to myself. And just ‘OK, what do you want? And what does fit you best?’”</i>	“Ik denk dus wel dat ik het heb aangepast door even tot mezelf te komen vooral. Even gewoon ‘OK, wat wil je dan? En past dat dan wel bij jou?’”
30	<i>“With that level, I have that... Yes, I don’t know, that was kind of a limit or something and that my head says: ‘No, that’s probably not going to happen anyway’, so then I don’t even try it.”</i>	“Met niveau heb ik dat... Ja weet ik niet, dat was dan soort van grens of zo en dat dat in mijn hoofd zegt dan van ‘nee, dat gaat waarschijnlijk toch niet worden’, dus dan probeer ik het eigenlijk ook niet.”
31	<i>“a bit frustrating”</i>	“een beetje frustrerend”
32	<i>“Emotional, that’s what it makes me a bit. I can cry over every little thing then... [It] gives a very bad feeling about yourself.”</i>	“Emotioneel, zo word ik daar ook altijd een beetje van. Ik kan dan echt van elke scheet kan ik dan huilen ... [Het] geeft een heel erg slecht gevoel over jezelf.”
33	<i>“What I am realising now that I am</i>	“Ik merk nu ik aan het zoeken ben dat ik

	<i>searching is that I find it very difficult and I'm also getting a bit stuck. Like, what do I really enjoy? I notice that I'm struggling with that."</i>	het dus heel erg lastig vind en ook een beetje op vastloop. Van ja, wat vind ik nou echt leuk? Ik merk dat ik daar dat ik daar in struggle."
34	<i>"So, I would just like to gradually build up a nice ladder, so to speak. But yes, end up higher."</i>	"Dus ik zou dat gewoon geleidelijk een mooi trappetje willen opbouwen, zeg maar. Maar ja wel, hoger eindigen."
35	<i>"I don't want to be a manager, absolutely not."</i>	"Ik wil geen leidinggevende zijn, absoluut niet."
36	<i>"I think it sometimes has a slightly negative effect on my motivation, because I think, ultimately, I'm going to leave anyway. So maybe I think about some things like, well, that's not really my problem, because in the long run it's not my dream job, so to speak, and I'm looking now, so when I'm gone, I'm gone."</i>	"Ik denk dat het soms wel een beetje negatief is in mijn motivatie, omdat ik denk, uiteindelijk ga ik toch weg. Dus misschien denk dat ik bij sommige dingen denk van nou, dat is niet helemaal mijn probleem, want het is op lange termijn is het toch niet mijn droombaan, om het zo te zeggen, en ik ben nu aan het zoeken, dus als ik weg ben, ben ik weg."
37	<i>"And then I actually made a deal, because things weren't going well at all with my current employer and of course they didn't want to lose me. So, I made a deal that I would stay for another six months and then I would have paid off my student debt."</i>	"En toen heb ik eigenlijk een deal gesloten, want bij mijn huidige werkgever ging het helemaal niet goed en wilde ze mij natuurlijk ook niet kwijt. Toen had ik een deal gesloten dat ik dan nog een half jaar langer zou blijven en dan zou ik mijn studieschuld kwijt zijn."
38	<i>"It's not what you know, but who you know. [...] Sometimes it's just handy to have a few connections left and right."</i>	"Het is niet wat je kent, maar wie je kent. [...] Het is af en toe ook gewoon handig dat je links en rechts wat connecties hebt."
39	<i>"You just can't get in with secondary vocational education."</i>	"Dan kom je gewoon niet binnen met een mbo4."
40	<i>"But I think that in our family it's been drummed that you just have to work really hard, so to speak. But yes, I think it's more"</i>	"Maar ik denk dat in ons gezin wel erin is gestampt van je moet gewoon echt hard werken, zeg maar. Maar ja, het is denk ik

	<i>about just working hard and what you do doesn't really matter so much as long as you work hard."</i>	meer vooral van je moet gewoon hard werken en wat je doet maakt niet zoveel uit als je maar hard werkt."
41	<i>"Yes, it's all fun and games what they want, but it means that the workload increases enormously. Yes, and that's just not feasible."</i>	"Ja, het is allemaal leuk en aardig wat ze willen, maar dat komt erop neer dat die werkdruk gigantisch omhoog wordt. Ja, en dat is gewoon niet te doen."
42	<i>"I tapped into an old connection. That's a recruiter. [...] I had an interview there last month and he got me [...] two job applications."</i>	"Ik heb een oude connectie aangeboord. Dat is een recruiter. [...] Daar ben ik vorige maand een keer op gesprek geweest en die heeft, [...] twee sollicitaties opgehaald."
43	<i>"Then I looked when I had ten minutes to spare, then I looked, but not systematically."</i>	"Dan keek ik even als ik even tien minuten tijd had, dan keek ik, maar niet structureel."
44	<i>"For a long time, I panicked, thinking, I've been out of work for three years now, so to speak. Nobody wants me anymore, that's what I mainly had, because at a certain point, you have quite a big gap in your CV."</i>	"Ik had heel erg lang paniek dat ik dacht, ik ben er nu 3 jaar uit geweest, zeg maar. Niemand wil mij weer, dat had ik vooral, want op een gegeven moment heb je best wel een groot gat op je CV."
45	<i>"That only strengthens me [...] That I will show people that I can find work [...] That doesn't discourage me. No, for me, it's even more motivation to show how wrong a company is not to hire me."</i>	"Dat sterkt mij alleen maar aan [...] Dat ik mensen even zal laten zien dat ik wel werk kan vinden [...] Dat laat me niet uit het veld slaan. Nee, dat is voor mij nog meer een motivatie om te laten zien hoe mis zo'n bedrijf het heeft door mij niet aan te nemen."
46	<i>"So, I thought, I simply call her, because then I'll have had some contact right away."</i>	"Dus ik dacht, ik bel haar gewoon, want dan heb ik meteen gewoon contact gehad."
47	<i>"Yes, I was a bit angry then, let's say that [...] Yes, that gave me stomach ache for a</i>	"Ja, toen was ik een beetje boos, laat ik maar zeggen [...] Ja, daar heb ik een paar

	<i>few days.”</i>	dagen buikpijn van gehad.”
<b>48</b>	<i>“I’m looking for positions with more responsibility. Maybe a bit of project management. Or at least having to arrange things.”</i>	“Ik zoek wel functies met meer verantwoordelijkheid. Misschien een stukje projectmanagement. Of in ieder geval dingen moeten regelen.”
<b>49</b>	<i>“I do think that the more I see certain vacancies and certain job descriptions, the better I know what I want and what I seem to like. And where my ambitions really lie.”</i>	“Ik denk wel dat hoe meer ik bepaalde vacatures en bepaalde functieomschrijvingen zie, dat ik daardoor wel beter weet wat ik wil en wat me leuk lijkt. En waar dan mijn ambities echt in liggen.”
<b>50</b>	<i>“I was 14 when I started working with my father on Saturdays. From the age of 16 to 18, I worked in the rose gardens. From 18 to 20, 21, I was a postman. Those are all things. Those are experiences that you take with you.”</i>	“Ik was 14 jaar toen ging ik met mijn vader meewerken op zaterdag. Ik heb vanaf de 16 tot mijn 18 bij een rozenkweker gewerkt. Ik heb van 18 tot mijn twintigste, eenentwintigste, ben ik postbode geweest. Dat zijn allemaal dingen. Dat zijn ervaringen, die neem je mee.”