



OVERCOMING BEHAVIORAL BIASES IN JOB SEARCH: THE VALUE OF ACTION PLANNING

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KEY MESSAGES

- Job search is a largely self-regulated process, subject to behavioral biases that lead to sub-optimal search and employment outcomes.** Existing studies show that search intensity depends on job seekers' biases in beliefs about returns to search efforts, on their level of impatience, on their locus of control, as well as on their self-confidence and willpower.
- Within this context, we designed, implemented and tested an action-planning tool to promote greater job search intensity.** Through a field experiment in South Africa, we evaluated the effect of an action planning intervention in tandem with job counseling, on the efficiency and effectiveness of search among unemployed youth.
- We find that action planning helps unemployed youths to follow through on their job search intentions, and adopt a more efficient and effective search strategy.** Participants who completed a detailed job search plan increased the number of job applications submitted, but not the time spent searching.
- Greater search efficiency and effectiveness translates to sizeable improvements in employment outcomes.** Participants in the action planning group receive more job offers and have greater likelihood of employment.

Given that a rising number of young people globally are not enrolled in education, employed, or searching for work it is particularly important to understand how to optimize the job search process. There is suggestive evidence that in the

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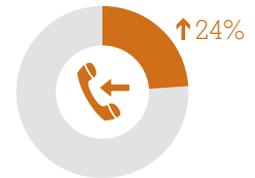
The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) conducts impact evaluations of development interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to generate evidence on how to close the gender gap in earnings, productivity, assets and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 50 impact evaluations in 21 countries with the aim of building an evidence base with lessons for the region.

The impact objective of GIL is increasing take-up of effective policies by governments, development organizations and the private sector in order to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa, particularly in terms of women's economic and social empowerment. The lab aims to do this by producing and delivering a new body of evidence and developing a compelling narrative, geared towards policymakers, on what works and what does not work in promoting gender equality.

DESIGNING THE ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

Contact Info	Name:							
	Phone no:							
When	Day	Time of Day	Activity	Details				
	Monday	When	What	Where/How				
	Tuesday							
	Wednesday							
	Thursday							
	Friday							
	Saturday							
	Sunday							
Goal Setting	Weekly Goals			Completed?				
				Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	
	1. Each week I plan to identify _____ job opportunities .							
	2. Each week I plan to submit _____ applications .							
Peer Support	Peer Support							
	Research has shown that peers (like friends and family members) can help us to follow our plans.							
	Can you think of someone who could help you follow through with your plan?							
	Is this person a member of your community?							
	What is the name of this person?							
	What is your relationship with this person?							
To help with your action plan, may we send an SMS message to this person?								
If you agree, can you provide this person's cell phone number?								

Job seekers in the plan-making group received 24% more responses from employers



and 30% more job offers



and were 26% more likely to be employed at the time of follow-up.



presence of high and persistent unemployment, South African youth are becoming increasingly discouraged in their job search. Indeed, we find that in our sample of youth who are motivated enough to come to a labor center, job seekers spend an average of 11 hours per week searching for jobs, and only submit about 4 job applications per month. They do want to intensify their job search, and they set aside the time and make plans to search but their behavior falls short of their intentions. The question is how to ensure that they follow-through on their goals.

SO WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

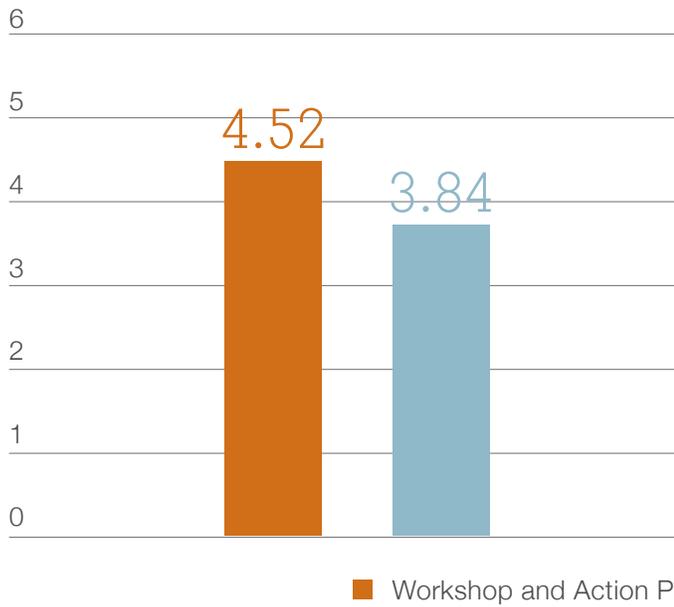
We draw on insights from the psychology literature regarding the use of plan-making prompts to bridge the gap between intention and behavior. Evidence shows that planning and scheduling tasks help people follow through on a variety of behaviors, ranging from voting to exercising. To extend this

research to the novel domain of job search, the World Bank's Africa Gender Innovation Lab, in collaboration with the Jobs Group, researchers from Middlebury College, Stellenbosch and Cape Town universities, and the South African Department of Labour, designed a job search action plan template and launched an experiment to identify the impacts of action planning on job search and employment.

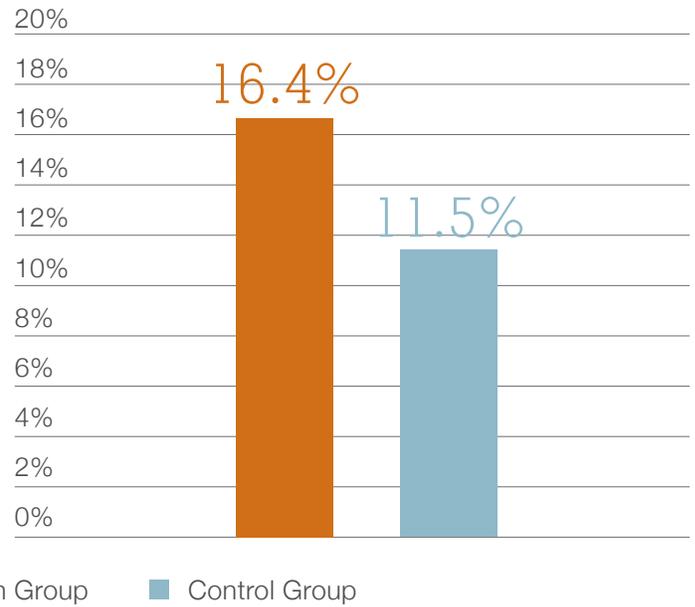
HERE'S WHAT WE DID

We tested the effect of plan-making on job search behavior and employment in a field experiment with a sample of 1,100 unemployed South African youth who participated in the standard 90-minute career-counseling workshops conducted by the Department of Labour. During the workshop, career counselors cover topics such as job search strategies, CV creation, interview techniques, and access to information and resources for job search. Layered on top of this standard workshop,

NUMBER OF JOB APPLICATIONS



EMPLOYMENT LIKELIHOOD



we prompted job seekers to complete an action plan template consisting of a weekly chart with detailed day-by-day entries for whether, where, and how they will search. We then asked them how their entries add up to weekly goals, how many hours they plan to search and how many applications they plan to submit.

HERE'S WHAT WE FOUND

Our analysis revealed an intention-behavior gap at baseline in job applications submitted but it did not show this gap in hours searched. We constructed a measure of the intention-behavior gap by comparing respondents' search intentions with reported behavior at baseline. Respondents aimed to submit 6.6 more applications per week than they actually did and planned to spend 3.4 hours *less* on job search (but this is centered around zero).

Following the action plan intervention, we found increases in job search intensity in accordance with the intention-behavior gap which led to increased efficiency and effectiveness... Five to twelve weeks after the intervention, we found no effect of the action plan on the number of hours spent searching but a significant increase in the

number of job applications submitted. At follow up, the action plan group submitted 0.7 additional applications, 15% more than the group receiving standard job counseling and 18% more than the pure control group. While this is a sizable increase relative to the low number of applications at baseline, it only partially closes the intention-behavior gap.

We also found that the action plan group diversified its search strategy, which translated into significant gains in employment. Participants who completed the plan-making significantly increased the number of visits to employment agencies and the frequency of online searching. To the extent that search channels have decreasing returns to efforts, a diverse portfolio of search activities is expected to improve job search effectiveness.

Gains in search efficiency and effectiveness resulted in sizeable improvements in employment outcomes. Job seekers in the plan-making group received 24% more responses from employers and 30% more job offers, and were 26% more likely to be employed at the time of follow-up, relative to the group who only participated in the standard career counseling workshops.



We observed gender differences in efficiency but not effectiveness.

We saw the action plan intervention resulted in men spending fewer hours searching per application, increasing their overall efficiency. However, women's search hours did not change, as they were already marginally more efficient than men. This could be a case where women were already optimally allocating their time and the action planning tool allowed men to “catch up” to women in terms of their overall efficiency. There were no gender differences in the effect of the action plan in increasing number of applications submitted.

NEXT STEPS

Our results indicate that completing a detailed plan-making helps unemployed youth to follow through on their intentions and adopt a more efficient and effective search strategy.

Plan-making is a low-cost, easy to implement addition to existing active labor market policies that have typically yielded modest results. Although our results clearly show the benefits of planning prompts, some questions are left unanswered, particularly around the mechanism driving the effect. Moreover, our study focuses on relatively short-term behavioral changes. It remains to be seen whether the effects of the plan-making can be sustained, especially if job seekers' efforts are unsuccessful. Future research should explore interventions that can help sustain the (short-term) effects of plan-makings, as well why women job seekers aren't searching more if efficiency and follow through on their intentions is not the issue.

For more information on this study, see the Policy Research Working Paper:

Abel, M., R. Burger, E. Carranza, P. Piraino (2017). *Bridging the Intention-Behavior Gap? The Effect of Plan-Making Prompts on Job Search and Employment. Policy Research Working Paper. WPS8181.* The World Bank.

The Jobs Group was created to support World Bank Group (WBG) client countries in the design and implementation of integrated, multi-sector, jobs strategies to reduce poverty and ensure inclusive growth. These jobs strategies articulate policies and programs which address three main challenges most countries face to varying degrees: creating jobs in the formal, private sector; improving the quality of informal jobs; and expanding access to (better) jobs for certain population groups (e.g., women, youth, the poor). The Jobs Group develops solutions to the main jobs challenges and measures the impact of these solutions on jobs outcomes.

www.worldbank.org/en/topic/jobsanddevelopment

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