

Job Insecurity and the Willingness to Undertake Training: The Moderating Role of Perceived Employability

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training, accounting for perceived employability. Drawing on conservation of resources theory, we hypothesize that job insecurity negatively relates to the willingness to participate in training to strengthen the internal and external labor market position and that perceived employability has a buffering effect on this relationship. The hypotheses were tested among 560 Belgian employees using structural equation modeling. The results did not provide support for the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the position inside the organization. We did, contrary to expectations, find a significant positive relationship with the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the position outside the organization. Furthermore, the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the external labor market position was weaker with increasing levels of perceived employability.

Keywords

job insecurity, workplace learning, career development, employment prospects, conservation of resources theory

Participating in training opportunities is one of the most important ways for employees to respond to societal and industrial changes and to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date (Kyndt, Govaerts, Dochy, & Baert, 2011). An essential element for participation in training is the willingness to undertake training: The wish to be involved in development is a valuable first step toward subsequent

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involvement (Kyndt & Baert, 2013; Maurer, Weiss, & Barbeite, 2003) and a signal of taking responsibility over own development (Kyndt, Onghena, Smet, & Dochy, 2014).

Some employees may benefit more than others from participation in training, such as job-insecure workers. Job insecurity has been defined as an overall concern about the continued existence of the job in the future (van Vuuren, 1990). On the one hand, participating in training might protect from dismissal by allowing employees to adjust to new demands in their job. On the other hand, training might help prepare for future job changes by reducing the chances of long-term unemployment.

However, a broad body of research has demonstrated that perceptions of job insecurity typically lead to a state of lassitude, in which employees experience a lack of energy and withdraw from work (see Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002, for two meta-analyses). Although previous research has not directly studied the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training, this provides indirect evidence for the expectation that job insecurity may lead to a lower willingness to participate in training. This presents an interesting paradox: While job-insecure individuals might benefit more from participating in training activities, they may be less inclined to do so. By withdrawing from training, employees might not achieve sustainability in career-related matters.

The current study distinguishes between the willingness to partake in training to strengthen the internal labor market position and the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the external labor market position, as different development activities may be pursued depending on the training motives one holds. There are training activities that convey “general” skills, which improve the productivity of labor across organizations and increase external job opportunities (Benson, 2006; Chambel, Sobral, Espada, & Curral, 2015). These skills are mostly valuable for employees who want to strengthen their external labor market position, although workers who want to increase their position within the organization might also benefit from developing them. Training can also develop “specific” skills, such as those that increase the productivity of labor within a single organization (Benson, 2006). These development activities will mostly serve employees who want to strengthen their internal labor market position and ensure continued employment inside the organization. Both forms of training willingness are increasingly relevant in view of job insecurity, as enhancing the position inside and outside the organization may protect employees from an increasingly unstable work environment.

We examine this relationship against the background of perceived employability, that is, the individual’s perception of his or her possibilities for obtaining employment (Berntson & Marklund, 2007). Perceived employability is particularly salient in the current turbulent economy, as it provides a sense of employment security when job stability is not granted (De Cuyper, Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Mauna, & De Witte, 2012; Forrier & Sels, 2003). As prior research has demonstrated that job-insecure individuals with low perceived employability have an even stronger stress response (Berntson, Näswall, & Sverke, 2010; Silla, De Cuyper, Gracia, Peiró, & De Witte, 2009), it would be expected that these individuals will be even less willing to participate in training, leading to a double vulnerability. We draw upon conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a guiding framework to examine these relationships.

Job Insecurity and the Willingness to Undertake Training

As a stress and motivational theory, COR theory can be used as a theoretical lens in explaining how job insecurity and willingness to undertake training relate (Hobfoll, 2001). COR theory defines stress as a reaction to the environment in which there is (1) a threat of resource loss, (2) an actual resource loss, or (3) a lack of resource gain after resource investment (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516). Job insecurity constitutes the threat of losing a resource (i.e., employment) and is thus stressful. COR theory consists of two tenets, namely, a “resource acquisition” and a “resource conservation” tenet (Ng & Feldman, 2012, p. 219), and these tenets introduce two competing hypotheses in predicting the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to train to strengthen the internal and external labor market position.

The resource acquisition tenet suggests that when threatened with resource loss, individuals do not wait for this loss to occur but instead actively try to reposition themselves and their resources in an advantageous way (Hobfoll, 2001). In doing so, employees may resort to different mechanisms of resource investment, in which they try to restore the threatened resource and gain additional resources. Applied to job insecurity, this entails that employees might be more willing to partake in training activities because they view it as instrumental in reestablishing job security and remaining attractive in the external labor market.

The resource conservation tenet, in contrast, argues that as resources are threatened, employees adopt a defensive posture in an attempt to preserve their resources (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 356). Consequently, employees will scale back on resource investment and withdraw from activities that further demand their resources. This defensive attitude uses up additional resources, as defense mechanisms are energy consuming, and energy is considered to be a resource (De Cuyper et al., 2012). Since participating in training often requires employees to invest time and energy both on and off the job (Baert, De Witte, Govaerts, & Sterck, 2011; McEnrue, 1989), it can be argued that job-insecure individuals may be less willing to undertake training to strengthen the internal and external labor market position.

Although both tenets have their merits, this study will build on the resource conservation thesis based on the extensive body of research that suggests that employees cope with job insecurity by psychologically distancing from the work environment to decrease the negative impact of possible job loss (Cheng & Chan, 2008; De Witte, Pienaar, & De Cuyper, 2016; Vander Elst, De Cuyper, Baillien, Niesen, & De Witte, 2016). The cognitive theory of stress and coping can provide further guidance as to why we expect the resource conservation tenet to be more salient (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Prior research has demonstrated that job insecurity leads to a decline in perceptions of control (Vander Elst, Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2014). According to the cognitive theory of stress and coping, uncontrollable stressors (e.g., job insecurity) are more likely to trigger emotion-focused rather than problem-focused coping strategies. As job-insecure individuals have a lower likelihood of managing the problem, they may be less inclined to view training activities as instrumental in restoring their job security. Indeed, previous research findings have demonstrated that job-insecure individuals rather try to regulate their emotions than manage the problem (Vander Elst et al., 2016). In keeping with the aforementioned theoretical and empirical arguments, we hypothesize that

Hypothesis 1a: Job insecurity negatively relates to the willingness to follow training in order to strengthen the position within the organization.

Hypothesis 1b: Job insecurity negatively relates to the willingness to follow training in order to strengthen the position outside the organization.

The Moderating Role of Perceived Employability

Research regarding the negative consequences of job insecurity often includes potential moderators that can mitigate these negative effects. Along these lines, perceived employability has been probed as a possible buffer (Berntson et al., 2010; Sverke et al., 2002). Perceived employability concerns the individual's perception of his or her possibilities to obtain new employment (Berntson & Marklund, 2007). The perception of these opportunities is based on personal factors, structural factors, and their interaction (Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & De Witte, 2014). Personal factors are at the level of the individual (e.g., perception of one's abilities, capacities and skills), while structural factors refer to contextual aspects that are tied to the job (e.g., networking), the organization (e.g., ratio internal/external employment), or society (e.g., number of jobs available; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Vanhercke et al., 2014). The combination of these perceptions gives rise to a coherent self-image of one's possibilities for obtaining new employment, that is, one's perceived employability.

We focus on this definition of perceived employability due to the parallels that can be drawn with job insecurity, namely, both concepts refer to perceived chances and have a future time perspective (De Cuyper, Van den Broeck, & De Witte, 2015). Despite these parallels, perceived employability and job insecurity also have important differences. Perceived employability refers to obtaining other employment, whereas job insecurity refers to maintaining current employment. In addition, perceived employability is a solely cognitive construct, while job insecurity also entails an affective component (e.g., feeling insecure).

Perceived employability has attracted much research attention as a way to secure employment in the context of increasingly fragmented careers, economic pressure, and volatile organizational landscapes (Forrier, Verbruggen, & De Cuyper, 2015). In this regard, prior research has demonstrated that job insecurity has less detrimental consequences when employees perceive many rather than few job opportunities (Berntson et al., 2010; Silla et al., 2009). To date, no other studies have focused on perceived employability as a moderator in the relation between job insecurity and the willingness to train to strengthen the position inside and outside the organization. The interaction effect can be understood drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

According to COR theory, those who are endowed with resources are less negatively affected by the stress owing to resource loss (Hobfoll, 2002, p. 318), implying that resources have a stress-buffering effect. Perceived employability can be viewed as a critical personal resource in contemporary working life with particular resonance to feelings of job insecurity (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003, p. 632): While job insecurity induces lack of control, perceived employability implies an element of control (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008). It can be argued that job-insecure individuals who perceive themselves as employable will have a less strong stress response, leading to a less negative influence from job insecurity on the willingness to train.

At the same time, COR theory argues that resource investment becomes more difficult for individuals who have fewer resources, thereby increasing the salience of a threatened or lost resource (Hobfoll, 2001). Applying this to job insecurity, this entails that job-insecure individuals with lower perceived employability are even more vulnerable, generating an increasingly defensive response, in an attempt to preserve the resources they still do have. Along these lines, we argue that the perception of being employable may function as a buffer that attenuates the negative relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the internal and external labor market position. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived employability moderates the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to train in order to strengthen the internal (a) and external (b) labor market position in such a way that the negative relationship between job insecurity and the above willingness to train is weaker when perceived employability is high.

Method

Procedure and Participants

Data were collected as a side project of the Psycones project (Guest, Isaksson, & De Witte, 2010). Written questionnaires were distributed in six retail organizations and one industrial organization. Response rates ranged from 33% to 88%. One organization had a response rate of 21%, probably due to the lack of a human resource department that supported the research goals. Participation in this study was completely voluntarily and anonymous.

A total of 560 employees filled out the questionnaire. More females than males participated in this study (65%). The average age of the respondents was 34.55 years (standard deviation [*SD*] = 10.03). The sample consisted of more blue-collar workers (65%) than white-collar workers. The respondents followed, on average, 11.75 years (*SD* = 3.75) of full-time education. The average tenure of the

Table 1. Means (*M*), Standard Deviations (*SD*), and Correlations for the Study Variables and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Scores for Latent Variables.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Male	—	—	—	—								
2. Age	33.91	9.92	—	.00	—							
3. White-collar worker	—	—	—	-.19***	.04	—						
4. Education	12.03	3.77	—	.02	-.11*	.13**	—					
5. Permanent contract	—	—	—	.13**	.37***	-.03	.05	—				
6. Job insecurity	2.51	0.89	.60	-.03	-.14**	-.23***	-.05	-.37***	(.87)			
7. Perceived employability	2.86	0.97	.69	.17***	-.33***	.04	.01	-.05	-.18***	(.91)		
8. Training willingness internal position	4.04	0.79	.59	-.01	-.11*	-.09	.07	-.10*	.10*	.10*	(.78)	
9. Training willingness external position	3.60	0.99	.57	.10*	-.32***	-.20***	.08	-.06	.28***	.20***	.49***	(.78)

Note. *n* = 560. Cronbach's α between parentheses on the diagonal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

participants was 9.99 years ($SD = 9.38$). Since the Psycones study was mainly aimed at respondents with temporary employment, the sample consisted of more temporary employees than one would normally find in a similar sample (35%).

Measures

Means, *SD*, correlations between the variables, and average variance extracted (AVE) scores are demonstrated in Table 1.

Job insecurity. Job insecurity was measured using the 4-item Job Insecurity Scale (JIS; De Witte, 2000). The items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) and assess employees' concern about the existence of their job in the future. A sample item is "I feel insecure about the future of my job." This scale has been validated by Vander Elst, De Witte, and De Cuyper (2014) across five European countries. Construct validity and criterion validity (with respect to affective organizational commitment, perceived general health, and self-rated performance) of the JIS were demonstrated. The Cronbach's α reliability of the scale varied between .85 and .88, depending on the country in which it was assessed. In this study, α was .87.

Perceived employability. We measured perceived employability with 4 items from De Witte (1992). This measure assesses employees' perception of labor market possibilities. Participants responded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). This scale has been extensively used in different European countries and employment settings (Guest et al., 2010). The items were "I could easily find another job, if I wanted to"; "I am confident that I could quickly get another job"; "I am optimistic that I would find another job, if I looked for one"; and "I will easily find another job if I leave this job." This scale has been successfully used in other studies, demonstrating a Cronbach's α ranging from .85 to .90 (De Cuyper et al., 2014; De Cuyper, van der Heijden, &

De Witte, 2011). In the current sample, α was .91. Perceived employability scores have been shown to be positively related to worker's in-role performance (De Cuyper et al., 2014).

The willingness to undertake training. The willingness to undertake training was measured with 7 items based on the scale of Forrier, Sels, Van Hootegem, De Witte, and Vander Steene (2002). Respondents were asked to what extent they were willing to participate in training, given a certain motive. Respondents had to indicate their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Exploratory factor analyses (principal factor analysis, oblique rotation) resulted in two factors. The first factor concerned motives related to strengthening one's position outside the organization and consisted of 3 items, namely, (1) "I am willing to participate in training to be able to apply for another job," (2) "I am willing to participate in training to strengthen my labor market position," and (3) "I am willing to participate in training to earn more." The second factor related to the willingness to undertake training to strengthen one's position within the organization and also consisted of 3 items: (1) "I am willing to participate in training to improve the performance of my current job," (2) "I am willing to participate in training to improve my skills and qualifications," and (3) "I am willing to participate in training to be able to maintain my current job." Both scales had a Cronbach's α of .78. One item, that is, "I am willing to participate in training to get a promotion," scored high on both factors and was not included in either of the scales. As the adapted version of this scale has not yet been employed in other studies, no additional reliability or validity information exists.

Control variables. The development and training intentions of employees, which are conceptually closely related to the willingness to participate in training, have been found to vary by gender (Sanders, Oomens, Blonk, & Hazelzet, 2011), age (Sanders et al., 2011), educational level (Greenhalgh & Mavrotas, 1994), occupational group (Elman & O'rand, 2002), and contract type (Kyndt et al., 2011). Hence, following the recommendation of Becker (2005) to include control variables that are likely to relate to the dependent variable, we included age (in years), educational level (in years), occupational position (0 = *blue-collar worker*, 1 = *white-collar worker*), gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), and contract type (0 = *fixed term*, 1 = *permanent*) as control variables.

Analysis

Before testing the structural paths between the latent variables, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to investigate the measurement model. The CFAs were performed using the maximum likelihood method. We compared the hypothesized four-factor measurement model to three alternative models, that is, a three-factor model in which job insecurity and perceived employability loaded on the same factor, a three-factor model in which both forms of training willingness loaded on one factor, and a single-factor model. Subsequently, we calculated AVE scores for each of the factors of the best fitting model and used these to demonstrate internal convergent validity and external discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Several indices were used to evaluate the goodness of fit of the models, that is, the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the value of standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). CFI and TLI values of 0.90 indicate an acceptable fit (Bentler, 1990), whereas values higher than 0.95 indicate a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). SRMR values have a cutoff point of 0.08 for a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). RMSEA values between 0.06 and 0.08 indicate an acceptable fit, and lower than 0.06 a good fit (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003).

The proportion of missing data in our sample ranged from 0.0% to 4.5% for the variables in our moderation model. We employed Little's missing completely at random (MCAR) test, which rejected the hypothesis that all of the missing values were MCAR, $\chi^2(N = 560, df = 440) = 508.23, p = .01$.

Table 2. Fit Indices of Competing Nested Factor Models, Standardized Maximum Likelihood Estimates.

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI	Model Comparison	$\Delta\chi^2$
Model 1	2,689.998	77	.246	.221	.299	.172		
Model 2	1,556.481	74	.189	.166	.602	.511	|Model 2 – Model 1|	1,133.517*
Model 3	514.559	74	.103	.069	.882	.855	|Model 3 – Model 1|	2,175.439*
Model 4	246.979	71	.067	.053	.953	.939	|Model 4 – Model 3|	267.58*

Note. Model 1 = one-factor model; Model 2 = three-factor model (job insecurity and perceived employability load on same factor); Model 3 = three-factor model (internal and external willingness to undertake training load on same factor); Model 4 = four-factor model; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.

* $p < .001$.

Therefore, we used Mplus's (Version 7) maximum likelihood estimation to produce parameter estimates for our structural model. To test our hypotheses, structural equation modeling with latent variables was performed. Our structural model included the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the internal as well as the external labor market position. We standardized our predictor and moderator to aid the interpretation of our main effects. Educational level was not included as a covariate as it did not significantly correlate with either of the training willingness outcomes and including control variables that are uncorrelated with the dependent variable reduces statistical power (Becker, 2005). The covariates gender, age, occupational position, and contract type were included in the structural model.

Results

Measurement Model

The four-factor measurement model provided an adequate fit to the data, $\chi^2(71) = 246.979$, CFI = 0.953, TLI = 0.939, RMSEA = 0.067, SRMR = 0.053. Moreover, this model resulted in a significantly better fit than either of the three-factor models or the one-factor model as indicated by the χ^2 difference test (see Table 2). The factors all demonstrated internal convergent validity, as all of the AVE scores were above .05. In addition, the results provide support for external discriminant validity since every factor's AVE score exceeded each of its squared correlations with other factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Hypothesis Testing

The results did not support Hypothesis 1a, as we did not find a statistically significant relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training to increase the internal labor market position ($B = .05$, $p > .05$; Table 3). We did find a significant relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to participate in training to strengthen the external labor market position ($B = .28$, $p < .05$). However, contrary to our hypotheses, this relationship was positive. This implies that job-insecure individuals are more willing to participate in training in order to strengthen their position outside the organization.

The results did not support Hypothesis 2a, as the interaction term between job insecurity and perceived employability did not significantly relate to the willingness to follow training to strengthen the position within the organization. Perceived employability did moderate the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to partake in training activities to strengthen the position outside the organization, as predicted in Hypothesis 2b ($B = -.09$, $p < .05$). In accordance with our hypothesis, perceived employability attenuated the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to train

Table 3. Linear Model of the Predictors of the Willingness to Partake in Training to Strengthen the Internal and External Labor Market Position.

Variables	Training Willingness Internal Position				Training Willingness External Position			
	B	SE B	t	p	B	SE B	t	p
Male	-.02	.08	-0.29	$p > .05$	.09	.09	0.99	$p > .05$
Age	.00	.00	-1.07	$p > .05$	-.03	.01	-5.07	$p < .05$
White-collar worker	-.11	.08	-1.42	$p > .05$	-.28	.09	-3.03	$p < .05$
Permanent contract	-.12	.09	-1.38	$p > .05$	.20	.11	1.93	$p > .05$
Job insecurity	.05	.04	1.13	$p > .05$	.28	.06	5.00	$p < .05$
Perceived employability	.10	.04	2.35	$p < .05$	.15	.05	3.03	$p < .05$
Job Insecurity \times Perceived Employability	.04	.04	1.10	$p > .05$	-.09	.05	-2.06	$p < .05$

Note. SE = standard error.

in order to improve the external labor market position (see Figure 1). However, since the nature of the relationship differed from what we expected, the interpretation of the moderation effect also changes. The positive relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to train to increase the external labor market position is less strong for employees who report high levels of employability than for employees who perceive themselves as less employable.

Discussion

The goal of this study is to examine the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to follow training to strengthen the internal and external labor market position and to advance perceived employability as a possible moderator in this relationship. The findings of the present study suggest that job-insecure individuals are only more willing to undertake training to strengthen their position outside the organization. Perceived employability did not moderate the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to train to strengthen the position inside the organization. Our results did provide support for an interaction effect between job insecurity and perceived employability on the willingness to follow training to strengthen one's position outside the organization in such a way that when perceived employability was low, job insecurity and this training motive related more strongly compared to when perceived employability was high.

Contrary to our predictions, our results suggest that the more job-insecure employees are, the more they are willing to engage in training to improve their external labor market position. The present study drew on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which consists of a resource conservation and a resource acquisition tenet. Building on the resource conservation perspective, we hypothesized that the threat of a resource (i.e., employment) leads to employees scaling back on resource investment in an attempt to protect their remaining resources. We used this tenet as a guiding framework based on the growing body of literature that has demonstrated that employees respond to job insecurity by withdrawing from the stressful situation. Our results, however, support the resource acquisition rather than the resource conservation tenet, as we found a positive relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to strengthen the external labor market position. This indicates that job-insecure employees might want to prepare for future job changes. In line with this, education and competence development have been proven to increase one's perception of how easy it would be to acquire new employment (Berntson, Sverke, & Marklund, 2006).

The reason why we found a resource acquisition rather than a resource conservation perspective might lie in the contrast between being willing versus being able to invest resources. The current study

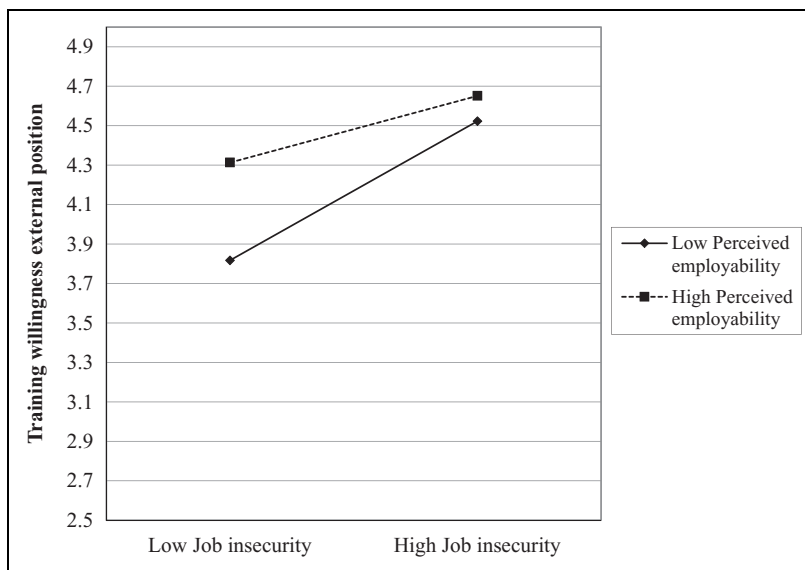


Figure 1. The interaction between job insecurity and perceived employability for the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the external labor market position.

only tapped into an individual's willingness to invest resources, which pointed to a resource acquisition pathway. However, Wright and Hobfoll (2004, p. 393) state that "from a COR theory perspective, employees must not only be willing, but also able, to invest valuable resources," which is likely to be hindered under circumstances of resource threat (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004). Along these lines, it is possible that job insecure is more willing, but less able, to invest in training. Future research could benefit from exploring whether a resource conservation pathway becomes more salient when it comes to actual investment in training and education.

We did not find a significant relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the internal labor market position. A possible explanation for this finding can be found in the assumption that individuals become increasingly strategic in their resource investment when faced with potential resource loss, especially since poor investment of resources has been proven to relate to increasing levels of strain (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Since employees might lose their jobs regardless of behavioral efforts (e.g., when an organization or department closes down), investing in training as a means to maintain the current job might be perceived as less instrumental in regaining a sense of employment security. Accordingly, efforts aimed at increasing the external labor market position might be considered more strategic as they have a higher likelihood of leading to a positive outcome.

Perceived employability proved to be a significant moderator, attenuating the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to follow training to strengthen one's position outside the organization. A possible explanation for this finding can be found in the previously mentioned notion that individuals become more strategic in their use of resources when faced with potential resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001). This implies that resources need to be allocated in such a way that their fit with the environment is maximized (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014). Thus, job-insecure employees with high perceived employability might not consider pursuing training as the most strategic option. After all, they already hold a strong labor market position, which might lead them to designate their resources in a more strategic way (e.g., by looking for new employment). However, employees who are less employable may lack the resources to secure their position and therefore

may try to cope with the insecure situation by learning how to increase one's position in the labor market through training. This aligns with prior research that suggests that individuals who experience higher employability tend to show stronger reactions to job insecurity in terms of a higher intention to quit (Berntson et al., 2010).

Limitations and Future Research

A few limitations of the current study should be addressed. Perhaps the main limitation of this study concerns the use of cross-sectional data, which does not allow for causal inferences to be made. In addition, the use of cross-sectional data does not allow to generate strong tests of alternative models. Therefore, longitudinal research is needed to fill this gap.

A second limitation concerns the use of self-report surveys, which can cause common method variance. The problem of possible inflation of relationships due to common method variance should not be overestimated (Spector, 2006). Additionally, in view of reducing common method bias, we employed the suggestions of Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee & Podsakoff (2003) regarding questionnaire design. We ensured anonymity, emphasized that there are no right or wrong answers and informed the respondents that participation was voluntarily. Furthermore, we used measures from validated scales and tested their factor structure.

Third, our sample consisted of more temporary workers than in the population. As prior research has demonstrated that temporary employment positively relates to perceptions of job insecurity (De Cuyper & Witte, 2006), it is possible that our sample contained respondents with relatively high levels of job insecurity. However, the mean score of job insecurity in this study was comparable to the obtained scores in other studies (Vander Elst, DeWitte, & De Cuyper, 2014), suggesting that this may not have heavily impacted on our results. Future research would benefit from using a nationally representative sample for the working population.

Fourth, the absence of support for the moderating role of employability in the relation between job insecurity and the willingness to train to strengthen the internal labor market position could be due to the operationalization of perceived employability. Our measure of perceived employability did not explicitly differentiate between the perceptions of opportunities in the internal or external labor market. Current research, however, often distinguishes between perceived internal employability and perceived external employability (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). It is possible that the internal versus external variant of perceived employability has a stronger effect on their respective forms of the willingness to undertake training. In this regard, it might be that our participants interpreted "labor market" as solely referring to the external variant, which might explain why we only found a significant interaction effect with the willingness to train to improve the external labor market position. Hence, future research could benefit from separately including both forms of perceived employability.

Implications

This study makes a number of important theoretical contributions. We investigated the relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the internal and the external labor market position, which has not been addressed in previous studies. Prior research has, however, investigated the link between job insecurity and employees' training intentions, which is conceptually closely related to the willingness to participate in training. The nature of this link was rather equivocal, as researchers hypothesized a positive versus negative relation depending on the tenet that was chosen (Blau et al., 2008; Sanders et al., 2011). This study grants further clarity by theoretically addressing both tenets, and by providing support for a resource acquisition pathway, in which job-insecure individuals become more willing to invest in obtaining new resources.

Our study also advances insights on COR theory, by focusing on an outcome that has not been linked to COR theory yet. In addition, we give an impetus to future research to examine whether job stressors are more likely to instigate a resource acquisition response when it comes to the willingness to exert a certain behavior and whether a resource conservation perspective becomes more salient when it comes to actually engaging in this type of this behavior. All in all, the present study provides one more piece in the complex puzzle of resource investment by contributing to the understanding of the way in which individuals under stress marshal their resources. Additionally, our results provide support for the premise that employees under threat become increasingly strategic in their investment of resources.

This study also has important practical implications. Some managers perceive job insecurity as a challenge stressor that might increase employees' motivation. Our study demonstrates that job insecurity can "activate" employees to a certain extent, although not in the anticipated way. This positive relationship between job insecurity and the willingness to undertake training to strengthen the external labor market position may be seen as a form of "exit behavior," which is in line with prior research findings that have demonstrated that job insecurity elicits intentions to leave the organization (Cheng & Chan, 2008). As our results suggest that employees prepare to leave the organization in times of job insecurity, it becomes important to consider the way in which organizational changes are made and to stimulate and improve communication and participation opportunities in times of changes (Berntson et al., 2010; Vander Elst, Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2010).

From a career coaching perspective, our results are quite promising. The findings of the current study suggest that employees who would benefit the most from participating in training, namely, job-insecure workers with low perceived employability, are also the most willing to participate in training to strengthen their external labor market position. Yet, this observation is in contrast with previous research that has demonstrated that exactly these employees participate less in training. Low-skilled workers, who have higher perceptions of job insecurity, are less likely to partake in training and development activities (Kyndt & Baert, 2013; Näswall & De Witte, 2003). Hence, the problem does not seem to relate to these employees' willingness to participate in training but rather to the extent to which they perceive training opportunities. Therefore, career coaching could be aimed at guiding workers to view development opportunities and facilitating accessibility to training.


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