

Boundaryless Career Orientation: A Help or Hindrance in the Face of Job Insecurity in the USA and Belgium?

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Abstract

Given recent economic turbulence, researchers are increasingly interested in the notion of a Boundaryless Career Orientation (BCO) in which individuals have a preference for psychological and/or physical mobility in their career path. The purpose of this study is to test the extent to which BCO moderates the impacts of job insecurity (JI) on work-related strain (i.e. job burnout), general related strain (i.e. life satisfaction) and psychological coping reactions (i.e. job turnover intentions). Based on prior research (Vander Elst et al., 2014) suggesting psychological contract breach (PCB) mediates the effects of JI on strain outcomes, the current 2-country study tested a moderated mediation model in which BCO is posited as a potential direct moderator of the JI → outcomes relationships, as well as a moderator of employee responses to PCB (i.e., the path between PCB and the outcomes of interest). The first path is predicted on appraisal theory, given that individuals with high BCO may view JI in a less negative light. The second path is predicted on Conservation of Resources theory, which would suggest that BCO may serve as a valuable resource in coping with the stressor of PCB. To test our model, data were obtained from two heterogeneous samples: $N= 1001$ American and $N= 348$ Belgian employees. Results from Study 1 (US) revealed that PCB mediated the association between JI and burnout, life satisfaction and turnover. In addition, BCO buffered relationship between JI and life satisfaction, but surprisingly exacerbated the relationship PCB and turnover. Analysis of the Belgian data in Study 2 indicated that PCB also consistently mediated the relationship between JI and burnout, life satisfaction and turnover. Additionally, BCO buffered the relationship between JI and life satisfaction and turnover; however it exacerbated the relationship between JI and burnout. Moreover, BCO did not significantly interact with PCB to predict any of the outcomes. Together, the results clearly indicate that BCO plays a potentially important role in determining how employees interpret and react to JI. However, the inconsistency in the pattern of these effects across the two samples suggests that there may be additional untested explanatory variables (e.g., cultural and/economic contextual differences).

Keywords: boundaryless career orientation, psychological contract breach, job insecurity, moderating effect, mediating effect

Introduction:

Job insecurity as a comprehensive work-related psychological threat is influencing organizations and employees across the world (Davy, Kinicki, & Scheck, 1997; De Witte et al., 2012).

An internal aspect of this threat comes from the potential role of job insecurity known as a loss (VanderElst et al., 2014). The loss concept is a common aspect between the old definitions of job insecurity which look at job insecurity as the degree to which employees perceive their job to be threatened and feel powerless to do anything about it (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) and newer definitions of job insecurity which look at job insecurity as overall concern about the continued existence of the job in the future (Vander Elst, De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011). In spite of the old and new definitions, this loss concept always exists. This loss (or more precisely anticipation of loss) may equally produce severe negative consequences as strong as loss itself (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In fact, anticipation of a job loss may lead to the perception that the employer is unable to fulfill her/his promises (psychological contract breach), which in turn may result in negative outcomes. Thus, we study the role of psychological contract breach (PCB) as a potential mediator that may influence the job insecurity-outcomes relationships.

An external aspect of this threat comes from the recent economic crises in the world. These crises in particular in US and many other European countries have led to different occupational reactions among employees (Briscoe et al., 2012). Some employees in these countries choose to hold their current jobs while others may decide to go beyond organizational boundaries by developing wider range of occupational/organizational skills (Segers et al., 2008). The different reactions introduce a new organizational conceptualization in our academic literature known as boundaryless career orientation (BCO). People with a BCO are characterized by high mobility and prefer to navigate physically and/or psychologically across many organizations (Sullivan & Arthur 2006; Volmer & Spurk, 2011). In fact, BCO might be resulted from the reaction to such uncertain and insecure economic and occupational situation (Çakmak-Otluoğlu, 2012). When employees feel insecure they expectedly may start to react to the insecure situation by seeking for more secure job opportunities in the same organization or alternative organizations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, we study the role of BCO as a potential moderator that may increase (boost) or decrease (buffer) the job insecurity-outcomes relationships.

Given this introduction, the current study firstly aims to extend knowledge on the theoretical explanations of the outcomes associated with job insecurity by integrating the two previously presented mechanisms of PCB (as mediating path) and BCO (as moderating path) into one comprehensive model.

Secondly, we will test our hypotheses on two mediating and moderating paths across the two countries of USA and Belgium. This helps us to estimate to what extent the results can be stable or variable across these countries as well as to calculate which path is more important in the job insecurity-outcomes relationships.

Thirdly, a various range of outcome variables is taken into consideration, covering general-related outcome (i.e., life satisfaction), work-related outcomes (i.e., job burnout) and psychological coping reactions (i.e., turnover intentions).

Job insecurity, strain and coping reactions:

According to appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), personal resources and situational characteristics result in situational appraisals (i.e. primary & secondary). Primary appraisals refer to the evaluation of the stakes with respect to one's goals, motives and well-being in a particular situation (i.e. evaluation of job loss). Secondary appraisals concern evaluations of factors such as the resources to adjust with the stressful situation and the fairness of that situation (Barsky, Kaplan, & Beal, 2011; Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999; Vander Elst et al, 2014). These appraisals may evoke strain (i.e. work or general strains) and may predict endeavors to deal/cope with the stressful situation (i.e. coping reactions).

Following appraisal theory, job insecurity can be considered as a stress or pressure toward possible job loss in the future and this comes from the nature of being subjective of job insecurity which is resulted from an individual perception and interpretation of the actual work environment (De Witte, 2005; Sverke et al., 2002), and may lead to negative outcomes (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Vander Elst, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011; Probst, 2002).

By considering the appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) all the job insecurity outcomes can be easily classified. Firstly job burnout and life satisfaction can be labeled as work-related strain and general-related strain respectively. In fact, that is an affective and physiological reaction to demands or stressors. Secondly, work-related attitudes or behaviors can be considered as coping reactions, as they are directed to at dealing with a demanding stressor/situation (e.g., job insecurity or loss) in a psychological or behavioral way. Therefore, job turnover can be labeled as psychological coping reaction to demands or stressors.

The mediating role of psychological contract breach

Many workers today, in Belgium and in most other European countries, have a psychological contract based on job security, for example through employment on open-ended permanent contracts. Moreover, job security has long been promoted by unions as a signal of excellent personnel management (Sverke & Hellgren, 2001; Waddington & Whitston, 1997). Additionally, several scholars explicitly present job security as part of the more specific relational psychological contract, which refers to employees' expectations regarding a fair exchange between loyalty and effort by the employee, and job security and rewards by the employer (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007).

Psychological contract comprised of beliefs about reciprocal obligations between employees and organization (Robinson & Morrison, 2000) concerning their obligations (i.e., what they will do for the employer) and their entitlements (i.e., what they expect to receive in return)" (Parks, Kidder, & Gallagher, 1989). Until the contract continues well the employees feel secure toward their job in the organization. Nonetheless, employees sometimes perceive that their organization is unable to adequately fulfill the contract obligations. One of these situations may occur when the employees perceive or estimate occurrence of a job loss in the future. Indeed, anticipation of a job loss may lead to breach/s in the psychological contract between employee and organization (VanderElst et.al, 2014), in particular when it goes over the threatened job situation may result in negative outcomes (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Vander Elst, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011).

Psychological contract is mainly based on social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity (Telkib & Taylor, 2003). According to the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), when employers do not fulfill their promises and obligations, the employee reciprocates by altering his or her contributions to the organization (e.g. by reducing their efforts and performance). Following this theory, if employees consider providing a secure job as one of their entitlements and employer fails to fulfill it, so that it can be perceived as a “bad promise” or “breach” from employee’s side and may negatively affect the dynamic exchange between organization and employee. This may become more critical in a situation in which employees look at the loyalty of psychological contract as an important duty of employer.

By perceiving psychological contract breach, employees may react differently. They may cope with the experienced psychological contract breach in a reactive way (Schwarzer, 2001), or may try to regain the balance by accounting their investments, for instance with showing low effort or low loyalty or both at workplace (Conway & Briner, 2005). Indeed, it may be a reaction to their feelings of being unfairly treated and to the employer who made the problem by intentionally limiting their loyalty and effort at work. More appraisal of a psychological contract breach may further draw out general (i.e. life satisfaction), work-related (i.e. job burnout) strain and coping reaction (i.e. turnover intention) (e.g. De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006, 2007; Kuppens et al., 2003 cited by VanderElst, 2014).

In all, we argue that job insecurity may connote a breach in the psychological contract, which in turn may have negative outcomes in terms of strain and coping reactions. This hints at the mediating role of psychological contract breach and in the relationship between job insecurity and the outcomes. Of course, it has recently been tested (i.e., Vander Elst, 2014) but our persistence is to re-approve it based on two reasons: First is to test our hypotheses across US too and second is to test our moderated mediation effect in the next step. We may therefore expect the following hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 1: PCB mediates the positive relationship between job insecurity and job burnout (as indication of work-related strain) among American employees (H1a) and Belgian employees (H1b).*
- *Hypothesis 2: PCB mediates the negative relationship between job insecurity and life satisfaction (as indication of general-related strain) among American employees (H2a) and Belgian employees (H2b).*
- *Hypothesis 3: PCB mediates the positive relationship between job insecurity and job turnover (as indication of a psychological coping reaction) among American employees (H3a) and Belgian employees (H3b).*

The moderating role of boundaryless career orientation and job insecurity

During the last two decades, substantial changes and super competitive condition have changed the face of careers (e.g., Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2002; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) as well as the tendency of employees to spend their entire career with only a single company/organization (Baruch, 1998; Meyer, Allen, & Topolnysky, 1998). These changes in the tendencies of employees developed the “boundaryless careers orientation” conceptualization (Pang, 2003; Dany, 2003; Guest 2004; Ackah & Heaton, 2004).

Many researchers have tried to classify the conceptualization from different angles to fully reflect the original meanings of the BCO. For example, Sullivan and Arthur (2006) suggested the boundaryless career can be split into “physical mobility” (i.e. intra- and inter organizational moves, geographical relocations, etc.) and “psychological mobility” (i.e. an individual’s career-related openness and curiosity).

Based on the earlier classification, physical mobility is an actual movement of employee across boundaries of jobs, occupations, organizations and even countries. It has been said that people who are tended to physical mobility are suffered from a lack of job predictability while working continuously for an organization and that is why seeking for an employment opportunity elsewhere might be considered as a more advantageous option compared with staying in an organization where they are well-known (Briscoe et al., 2006). Individuals who are physically mobile may be directed by a dynamic tendency for personal growth, knowledge, and the desire to get more favorable benefits from elsewhere (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Briscoe et al., 2006; Gunz et al., 2000). The psychological mobility dimension of BCO refers to when employees do not physically elapse but only exists in the mind of the career performer (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Briscoe et al., 2006). It means that career actors will vary in the attitude that they hold toward initiating and pursuing work-related relationships across organizational boundaries. Psychological mobility enhances the knowledge and skills of an employee as it gives access to other people’s capacity beyond an employing organization (Briscoe et al, 2006).

Researchers believe that BCO may be resulted from the new realities of the current economy, such an emerging sense of job insecurity (e.g., Cappelli, 1999). According to appraisal theory when employees perceive or anticipate a threat such a job loss, it may evoke different levels of BCO as a natural reaction. Some may show more preference to move physically or psychologically from a career to a different one or different organization either some may give more preference to remain and to assess it as a challenging situation in which they can grow (Lazarus & Hakman, 1984; Vander Elst et.al, 2014).

The differences in BCO level of employees may differently influence the job insecurity-outcomes relationships. Accordingly, employees with high BCO may be less-influenced by job insecurity and show less general (i.e. life satisfaction) or work (i.e. job burnout) stress. In addition, job insecurity is more likely to influence the coping reactions (i.e. intention of job turnover) in those who are in a higher level of BCO. As we already are unsure about these effects so that we are willing to know how job insecurity influence general and work stresses as well as coping reactions in employees with low and high BCO level by testing the following hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 4: BCO buffers the positive relationship between job insecurity and job burnout (as indication of work-related strain) among American employees (H4a) and Belgian employees (H4b).*
- *Hypothesis 5: BCO buffers the negative relationship between job insecurity and life satisfaction (as indication of general-related strain) among American employees (H5a) and Belgian employees (H5b).*
- *Hypothesis 6: BCO boosts the positive relationship between job insecurity and job turnover (as indication of a psychological coping reaction) among American employees (H6a) and Belgian employees (H6b).*

The moderating role of BCO and psychological contract breach

To date, it is well-documented that breaches of psychological contracts have a damaging impact on different work outcomes such as job attitudes and performance (Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood, & Bolino, 2002; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003; Pate, Martin, & McGoldrick, 2003; Zhao et al, 2008). Thus, there is no doubt that PCB can obviously produce negative outcomes. As the previous studies demonstrated that not all individuals react equally to contract breaches (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002; Restubog & Bordia, 2006), therefore a deeper question that can still be made is why certain employees are influenced by psychological contract breaches more strongly than others?

To answer this, we should be looking for variables which can dynamically influence the psychological contract breach-outcomes relationships. Accordingly, some researchers have made suggestions regarding situational factors such as trust, organizational support, organizational justice, or leader-member exchange that strengthen or reduce the impact of psychological contract breaches on outcomes (Chrobot-Mason, 2003; Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson, & Wayne, 2008; Dudley, & Cortina, 2008). As an example, high-perceived justice may weaken the relations between breach and outcomes. Consistent with the mentioned moderators we apply BCO as new potential moderator which may be able to influence the same association. This likelihood comes from a prediction provided by social exchange theory (Teklib & Taylor, 2003).

According to the social exchange theory, when a contract is signed between employers and employees, under such the transactional contract employees exchange loyalty and commitment with a secure job (Mirvis, & Hall, 1996). Observing, perceiving, feeling or anticipating any lack in the established contract may reduce loyalty and commitment in terms of dissatisfaction (general-related stress), intention to leave a job (coping reaction) or may increase experienced work pressure in terms of job burnout (work-related stress). Unlikely, people with high BCO may perceive less frightening such the threats (breaches in contract) and may experience less negative outcomes as they might think that they will always have the opportunity to move across different careers/organizations and catch a new job. Therefore, we are expecting that BCO plays a moderated mediation role that may buffer or boost the association between psychological contract breach and outcome in the following ways:

- *Hypothesis 7: BCO as a moderated mediation buffer the positive relationship between PCB and job burnout (as indication of work-related strain) among American employees (H7a) and Belgian employees (H7b).*
- *Hypothesis 8: BCO as a moderated mediation buffers the negative relationship between PCB and life satisfaction (as indication of general-related strain) among American employees (H8a) and Belgian employees (H8b).*
- *Hypothesis 9: BCO as a moderated mediation boosts the positive relationship between PCB and job turnover (as indication of a psychological coping reaction) among American employees (H9a) and Belgian employees (H9b).*

Moving to an integrating model of research variables:

As it mentioned earlier, our purpose is to explain the relationship between job insecurity and outcomes using two mechanisms, namely psychological contract breach and BCO. While these mechanisms relate to different theoretical streams, we have advanced social exchange theory and appraisal theory as possible routes for the integration (Figure 1).

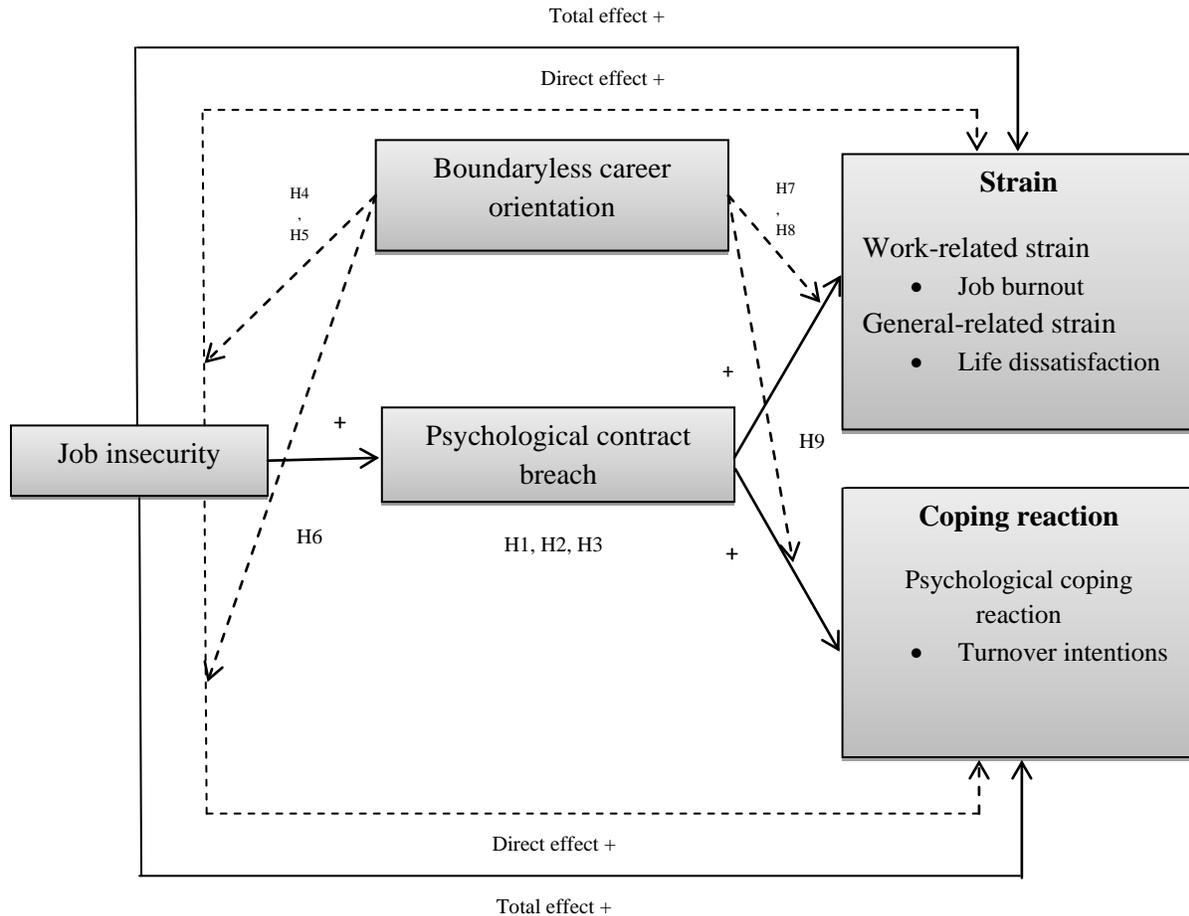


Figure 1. Theoretical model of different mechanisms influencing job insecurity-outcomes relationship

Method: Study 1

Participants and procedure

In order to test our hypotheses, surveys were administered to 1001 employees from 23 non-academic units and 11 academic units ($M = 112$, $SD = 72$) at six different campuses of a large public university of United States. The mean unit sample size was 65 employees ($SD = 10$) and ranged from 1 to 244. The mean response rate across units was 30% ($SD = 27$). The median age of participants was 47.27 years. Most of participants had a bachelor degree ($N = 378$), a college degree ($N = 162$), or a graduate degree ($N = 251$). The rest of participants had a high school or diploma degree ($N = 210$). 47.3% had a self-service/staff position and 52.7 hold an administrative professional position. Moreover, 6.3% of the participants had a temporary contract and 93.7% were working under a permanent contract.

Measures

Job insecurity. Nine items from the Job Security Satisfaction Scale (JSS; Probst, 2003) were used to measure affective job insecurity. Respondents indicated on a three-point scale (yes, don't know, no) the extent to which each adjective or phrase described affective reactions to their perceived level of job security (i.e. 'upsetting how little job security I have,' 'nerve-wracking', 'looks optimistic'). Responses were scored such that higher scores reflect more job insecurity. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale was .89.

Psychological contract breach. This construct was measured using two items of the scale developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). An item example is "In general, my organization has lived up to its promises". Respondents were asked to rate the items of these measurements on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Responses were scored such that higher numbers reflect more PCB. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale was .90.

Boundaryless career orientation. BCO was measured by 5-item organizational mobility subscale and in 7-pt Likert scale (Briscoe et al., 2006). One of the sample items was "In my ideal career, I would work for only one organization" which coded such that higher numbers reflect greater preference for organizational mobility. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale was .84.

Life satisfaction. This scale designed by Diener and his colleagues (1985). It has five items, which examines life satisfaction of individual in a seven degree of Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) which individual could achieve score of 5-45 on this scale, Diener and his colleagues have reported adequate validity (convergent and discriminative practices) and also adequate reliability for this scale.

Job Burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) was used to measure burnout. The MBI-GS has three sub-scales: Exhaustion (five items; e.g. "I feel used up at the end of the workday"), Cynicism (five items, e.g. "I have become less enthusiastic about my work") and Professional Efficacy (six items, e.g. "In my opinion, I am good at my job"). All items are scored on a 7-point frequency rating scale ranging from "0" (never) to "6" (daily). High scores on exhaustion and cynicism, and low scores on professional efficacy are indicative of burnout.

Job turnover. The scale developed by Hanisch and Hulin (1991) was used to measure turnover intention. Sample items are "How often do you think about quitting your job?", "How likely is it that you will quit your job in the next several months?" and "All things considered, how desirable is it for you to quit your job?" (Reverse coded). The scale is composed of four items and its Cronbach's alpha was .70.

Results

Primarily we standardized the variable scores and then we used simple correlation using SPSS to show the associations between our research variables. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for each of the study's measures and their inter-correlations in American sample. The results consistent with prior studies (e.g., Vander Elst et al, 2014) showed job insecurity is significantly linked to all examined research variables. Due to missing data on one or more of these variables, the effective sample size was reduced to 1001.

Table 1. Covariance matrix among research variables ($N= 1001$)

Variable	Items	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Job insecurity	9	1.29	.94	-	.320 **	-.248 **	.245 **	.337 **	-.092 **
2 Job burnout	4	3.63	1.28		-	-.308 **	.479 **	.330 **	.065 **
3 Life satisfaction	5	4.65	1.25			-	-.243 **	-.261 **	-.100 **
4 Job turnover	4	2.10	.09				-	.343 **	.314 **
5 Psychological contract breach	2	4.40	1.49					-	.106 **
6 Boundaryless career orientation	5	2.84	1.00						-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

In order to test our hypotheses, a regression model was constructed using SPSS software in which job insecurity was modelled as a continuous independent variable. In a next step, PCB was set as mediator between job insecurity and work-related strain and coping reactions using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2012). Finally, we used BCO as moderator between job insecurity and outcomes (as a moderator) and between PCB and outcomes (as a moderated mediation) running the same program. The result of single mediator test is displayed in table 2. As the table shows PCB mediated the relationship between job insecurity and all outcomes. Overall, evidence was therefore found for hypotheses H1a, H2a and H3a.

Table 2. Results of the single mediator and single moderator analyses ($N= 1001$)

Effect	United States			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Job insecurity to PCB	.34	.02	11.47	.0000
	$R^2 = .11$; $F(1, 1003) = 131.69$, $p < .0000$			
PCB to life satisfaction	-.25	.04	-6.19	.0000
Direct effect of job insecurity on life satisfaction	-.23	.04	-5.81	.0000
Indirect effect of job insecurity on life satisfaction through mediator	-.08	.02	-5.67	.0000
PCB x boundaryless orientation on life satisfaction	.01	.04	.47	ns
Job insecurity x boundaryless orientation on life satisfaction	.11	.04	2.92	.003
	$R^2 = .11$; $F(5, 995) = 26.07$, $p < .0000$			
PCB to turnover	.22	.02	7.82	.0000
Direct effect of job insecurity on turnover	.18	.02	6.53	.0000
Indirect effect of job insecurity on turnover through mediator	.07	.01	6.55	.0000
PCB x boundaryless orientation on turnover	.05	.02	1.99	.0462
Job insecurity x boundaryless orientation on turnover	.03	.02	.74	ns
	$R^2 = .23$; $F(5, 1001) = 60.10$, $p < .0000$			
PCB to burnout	.29	.04	7.24	.0000
Direct effect of job insecurity on burnout	.32	.03	8.09	.0000
Indirect effect of job insecurity on burnout through mediator	.09	.01	8.04	.0000
PCB x boundaryless orientation on burnout	.05	.03	1.66	ns
Job insecurity x boundaryless orientation on burnout	-.03	.03	-.91	ns
	$R^2 = .16$; $F(5, 999) = 38.44$, $p < .0000$			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

As table 2 shows, the result of single moderator analysis with BCO in the relationship between job insecurity and outcomes only buffered the relationship between job insecurity and life

satisfaction ($\beta = .11, p = .00$) but was not found any moderating effect between job insecurity with job burnout and job turnover. Therefore, evidence only was found for the hypothesis H5a and hypotheses H4a and H6a were not confirmed (see figure 2).

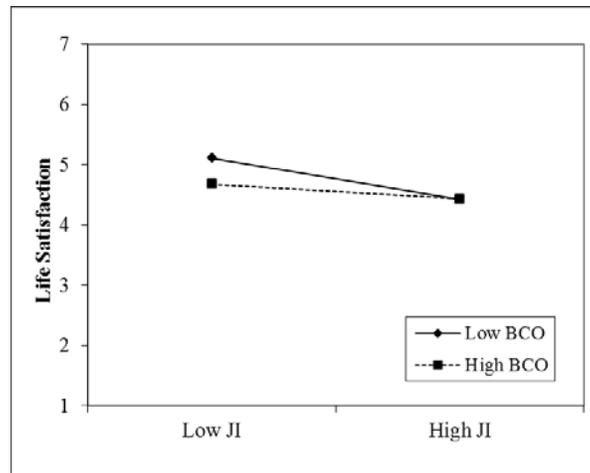


Figure 2. Interaction Job insecurity \times BCO on life satisfaction

Considering table 2, the result of single moderator analysis with BCO in the relationship between PCB and outcomes only boosted slightly the relationship between PCB and job turnover ($\beta = .05, p = 0.04$) but was not seen any moderating effect between PCB with life satisfaction and job burnout. Thus, evidence only was found for H9b and hypotheses H7a and H8a were not gained support (see figure 3).

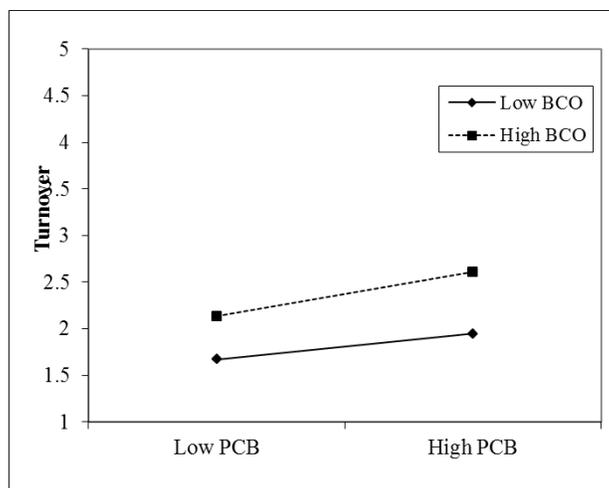


Figure 3. Interaction PCB \times BCO on turnover

Method: Study 2
Participants and procedure

Study 2 was carried out to attempt to reproduce and generalize our findings from Study 1 to a different cultural setting. This will allow us to observe the differences and similarities between our findings across our studied countries as well as to find out underlying mechanisms that can produce these similarities or differences in our samples.

Surveys were administrated to 348 employees from 14 different small and medium-sized public and private company/organization in Belgium. The mean of organizational sample size was 37.5 employees. 28.16 % of respondents were male and 71.84 % female. The age range category of participants was from 21 to 64 years ($M= 38.82, SD = 11.12$). 90.8% of respondents had a permanent contract, 7.5% had a fixed-term contract and 1.7% had a temporary contract. Finally, 231 (66.4%) respondents were full-time employees, and 117 (33.6%) were part time employees. Most of participants had a bachelor degree ($N= 86$) and a college degree ($N= 211$). The rest of participants had a high school or diploma degree ($N= 51$). 67.2% had a self-service/staff position and 32.8% hold an administrative professional position.

Measures

The survey did contain all the measures previously described in Study 1. All the survey scales were translated into Belgian from the English version and items were checked by the authors of the two countries. The only different was the number of items in the scale of intention of job turnover which in American sample was 4 items but in Belgian sample is 2 items.

Results

Primarily we standardized the variable scores and then we used simple correlation using SPSS to show the associations between our research variables. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for each of the study’s measures and their inter-correlations in Belgian sample. The results consistent with prior studies (e.g., Vander Elst et al, 2014) showed job insecurity is significantly linked to all examined research variables (see table 3).

Table 3. Covariance matrix among research variables ($N= 348$)

Variable	Items	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Job insecurity	9	2.36	.712	-	.148 **	-.307 **	.200 **	.203 **	.029
2 Job burnout	4	2.87	1.02		-	-.257 **	.381 **	.283 **	.081
3 Life satisfaction	5	4.86	1.01			-	-.296 **	-.351 **	-.158 **
4 Job turnover	2	1.66	.80				-	.392 **	.448 **
5 Psychological contract breach	2	3.47	.90					-	.220 **
6 Boundaryless career orientation	5	2.72	.777						-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

In order to once again test our hypotheses, a regression model similar with figure 1 was constructed. Due to missing data on one or more of these variables, the effective sample size was reduced to 348. The result of single mediator test is displayed in table 4. As the table shows the

result of the single mediator analysis with psychological contract breach mediated the relationship between job insecurity and all outcomes. Overall, evidence was therefore found for hypotheses H1b, H2b and H3b.

Table 4. Results of the single mediator and single moderator analyses ($N= 348$)

Effect	Belgium			
	B	SE	t	p
Job insecurity to PCB	.19	.05	3.59	.0004
	$R^2 = .04$; $F(1, 346) = 12.90$, $p < .0001$			
PCB to life satisfaction	-.28	.05	-5.42	.0000
Direct effect of job insecurity on life satisfaction	-.23	.05	-4.45	.0000
Indirect effect of job insecurity on life satisfaction through mediator	-.05	.05	-4.75	.0000
PCB x boundaryless orientation on life satisfaction	-.00	.06	-.00	ns
Job insecurity x boundaryless orientation on life satisfaction	.14	.06	2.43	.0147
	$R^2 = .21$; $F(5, 342) = 18.17$, $p < .0000$			
PCB to turnover	.22	.04	5.88	.0000
Direct effect of job insecurity on turnover	.11	.04	2.96	.0032
Indirect effect of job insecurity on turnover through mediator	-.04	.03	3.23	.0013
PCB x boundaryless orientation on turnover	.07	.04	1.75	ns
Job insecurity x boundaryless orientation on turnover	-.10	.04	-2.47	.0138
	$R^2 = .33$; $F(5, 342) = 34.42$, $p < .0000$			
PCB to burnout	.27	.05	4.94	.0000
Direct effect of job insecurity on burnout	.15	.06	2.73	.0065
Indirect effect of job insecurity on burnout through mediator	.05	.05	2.57	.0106
PCB x boundaryless orientation on burnout	.01	.06	.27	ns
Job insecurity x boundaryless orientation on burnout	.14	.06	2.38	.0176
	$R^2 = .11$; $F(5, 342) = 8.35$, $p < .0000$			

As the table 4 shows, the result of single moderator analysis with BCO in the relationship between job insecurity and outcomes buffered the relationship between job insecurity with life satisfaction ($\beta = .14$, $p = .01$) but it unexpectedly buffered the association between job insecurity and job turnover ($\beta = .10$, $p = .01$). Moreover, it surprisingly boosted the relationship between job insecurity and job burnout ($\beta = .14$, $p = .01$). Therefore, evidence was only found for the hypothesis H4b, and our results did not support the H5b and H6b (See figures 4, 5 and 6).

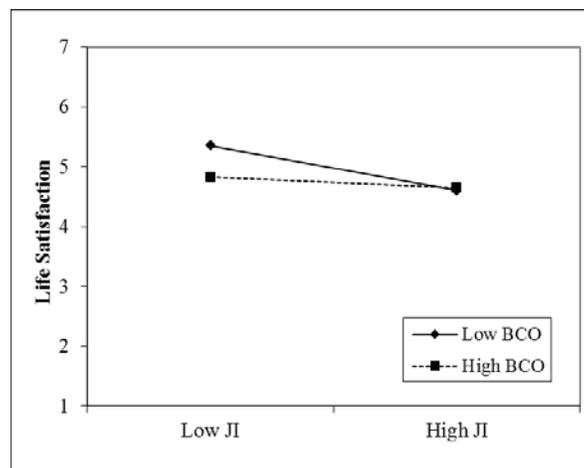


Figure 4. Interaction Job insecurity × BCO on life satisfaction ($N=348$)

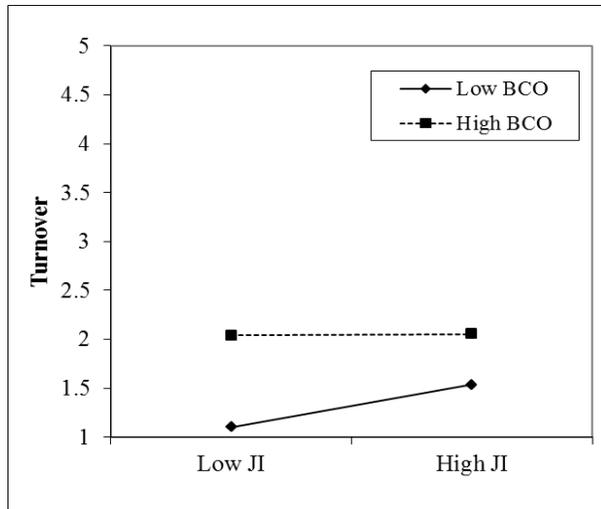


Figure 5.Interaction job insecurity ×BCO on turnover (N=348)

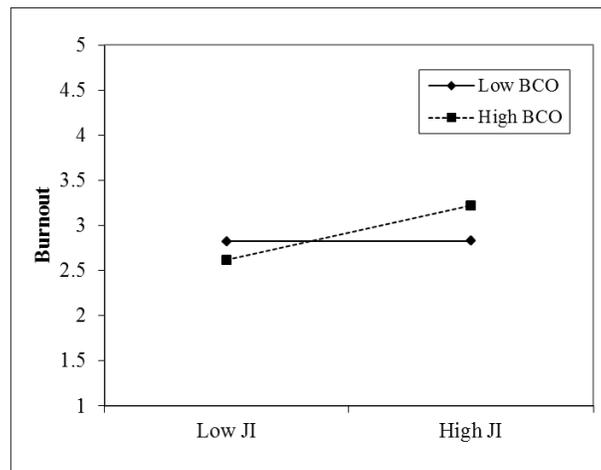


Figure 6.Interaction Job insecurity ×BCO on burnout (N=348)

Considering the table 4, the result of single moderator analysis with BCO in the relationship between PCB and outcomes showed that there is no moderating effect between PCB and life satisfaction, job turnover and job burnout. Thus, no evidence was found for hypotheses H7b, H8b and H9b and they were not confirmed.

Discussion

In the present study, we figured out a theoretical integration of two different mediating and moderating paths through which job insecurity is connected with outcomes. We named BCO as mediating path and BCO as moderating path. These two explanations originate from different theoretical frameworks (psychological contract theory& appraisal theory, respectively). Additionally, a range of positive and negative outcomes of job insecurity were considered, including general related strain (i.e. life satisfaction), work-related strain (i.e., job burnout), and psychological coping reactions (i.e., turnover intention).

Firstly, the analysis of primary path on American and Belgian samples revealed that PCB mediates the relationship between job insecurity and strains (job burnout & life satisfaction) in both countries. This aligns with psychological contract theory pointing at the intensive negative emotions following from PCB (Conway & Briner, 2005), which may also be reflected in work-related outcomes (Schwarzer, 2001). PCB also mediated the relationship between job insecurity and psychological coping reactions across the two countries. Yet PCB was more important mediator for coping reaction in Belgium. This is in line with appraisal theory which predicts employees with an perceived job insecurity may take distance from the job and the organization as an alternative way to psychologically withdraw from an uncontrollable work condition (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Vander Elst et al, 2014), and because they want to restore the reciprocity in terms of reduced loyalty in a work situation in which the PCB was hurt (Conway & Briner, 2005; Vander Elst et al, 2014).

Secondly, the second path on American and Belgian samples can be divided into two sub-paths where BCO may moderate the direct impact of job insecurity on outcomes and where BCO may moderate the indirect impact of job insecurity (through PCB) on outcomes. In the first moderating sub-path, BCO similarly buffered the job insecurity impact on general-related strain (life satisfaction) in both countries. In addition, unlike our expectation BCO boosted (not buffered) the impact of job insecurity on work-related strain (job burnout) in Belgian sample; while we did not find any buffering effect for the American sample. This draws our attention to select and to test further new moderators on American context in the future. While BCO did not produce any buffering effect between job insecurity and coping reactions (turnover intentions) across US sample, but it surprisingly produced a boosting effect in Belgian sample which was in conflict with our hypothesis as we expected to find a buffering effect. In the second moderating sub-path BCO only boosted the association between PCB and coping reactions (turnover intention) in American sample. Other interaction effects were not statistically significant. This shows that BCO plays a better moderating role in the direct impact of job insecurity on outcomes compared with its indirect impact on the same outcomes.

In general, PCB equally mediated the direct impact of job insecurity on both of strains and psychological coping reactions in two samples. This allows us to generalize the mediating role of PCB across the two countries. This finding can be matched with assumptions of appraisal theory which assumes employees experiencing more job insecurity may assess their resources to control the work situation as insufficient, which in turn may lead to withdrawal from the job, for instance reflected by low investments at work. In addition, they may also put little effort into their work to react to the unfair work situation in which the employer has not fulfilled his or her promises.

The Comparison of moderating effects of BCO in the relationship between job insecurity and outcomes showed that although BCO is a very strong buffer in the relationship between job insecurity and general-related strains (i.e. life satisfaction) in US and Belgium samples but the effect of BCO on indirect effect of job insecurity-outcomes was considerably weaker and it only boosted the association between PCB and turnover intention in US. This can be understood by citing to appraisal theory: Job insecure workers may show high boundaryless tendency as a way to withdraw from an uncontrollable and threatened work situation to reduce their stress (i.e. life dissatisfaction or burnout). These findings also maximize this likelihood that Belgian job insecure employees may not want to intentionally put low effort/loyalty in their job out of fear of

job loss (Staufenbiel & König, 2010). Instead, they may unintentionally want to withdraw from a stressful situation by mobility across different jobs or organizations. Indeed, this may be more severely reaction than decreasing loyalty or effort in their current job.

Practical implications:

The obtained findings have important implications for employees, employers and organizations in our studied countries. First, our result replicated the direct impact of job insecurity on general-related strain, work-related strains and coping reactions across two different cultural contexts (US & Belgium). Such consistent replication across cultural contexts and measures lends additional weight to the validity of our findings. This is practically important as it allows us to understand employees in both countries equally react to the perceived job insecurity. Moreover, it may apply to educate employees how they and others similarly perceive job insecurity and how it can affect their psychological reaction. Given these, we help them to draw a better understanding of job insecurity impacts.

This finding also provides important implication for employers to realize the importance role of psychological contracts that they establish with their employees. This importance can be noticed from two angles. Preliminarily, they may get a better understanding about the potential role of PCB as a threat or potential loss. Secondary, they may avoid showing or intensifying any lack of promise in their contract with employees. Thirdly, this discloses different initial reactions toward same phenomenon in these two samples that would be interesting for employers to know.

In organizational level, by better understanding the link between job insecurity and employee general and work-related strain and coping reactions, organizational practitioners may use these findings and knowledge in precluding job insecurity to result in negative outcomes for both employees and organizations, especially in times of change when appraisements of job insecurity seem imminent. In this respect, practitioners should stand up interventions directed at the mechanisms underlying the job insecurity-outcome relationship. They may therefore use from implementing actions that reduce the appraisal of a breach of the psychological contract. This may, for example, be fulfilled by applying a direct, clear, realistic and pragmatic communication programs and with the participation of employees in the organization (Vander Elst, Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2010; Vander Elst et al, 2014) or establishing a reward/punishment system to avoid or compensate occurrence of any breach in employers promises or contracts (Probst et.al, 2013). Such actions may promote employees' understanding of real and tolerable job insecurity, and may reduce potential severe reactions such as general and work-related strains or coping reactions.

Theoretical implications

From a theoretical standpoint, we can highlight the contribution of this study to the job insecurity literature through the job insecurity influential mechanisms on its outcomes from multiple ways: Firstly, this study gives a replication of previous studies in which the mediation effect of psychological contract breach was investigated and strongly approved (e.g. De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Vander Elst et al., 2011; Vander Elst et al., 2014). Secondly, this study adds to the existing studies by investigating 'novel' outcomes such as life satisfaction, which has not been linked to the explanations of PCB previously. Thirdly, we generalized a new categorization of

job insecurity outcomes in terms of general/work strains and coping reaction across two different countries. This categorization reflects the ‘reason’ or ‘function’ of a reaction, and allows for the formulation of specific theoretical predictions regarding the possibly differential effects of job insecurity on both types of outcomes (Taris et al., 2001; Vander Elst et al., 2014). Fourthly, our study provided the opportunity to test both paths within two different cultural contexts including US and Belgium countries. Fifthly, the findings allow us to compare the strength of mediating effect of PCB on job insecurity-outcomes relationships separately in these two contexts. Sixthly, this study compares the ability of moderating effect of a new moderator (BCO) on direct and indirect impacts of job insecurity-outcomes relationships. All these contributions strongly enrich the job insecurity-mediator/moderator-outcome relationship literature.

Conclusion:

Overhand, this study demonstrates that the previously presented mechanisms of PCB are indeed important in explaining the job insecurity-outcome relationship. PCB explained a considerable proportion of the relationships between jobinsecurity and a wide range of outcomesand can thus be considered as supplementary explanations. This is consistence with appraisal theory maintaining that people simultaneously gain multiple appraisals of the same situation (Lazarus, 1999), each of those may have an impact on strain and coping reactions.

If we want to briefly answer to the primary question of our paper title that BCOis a help or hindrance in the face of job insecurity? The first short answer would be it depends! The first reason that can make this short answer is that as our findings suggested BCO is more likely to moderate the direct impacts of job insecurity on the outcomes than indirect impact (via PCB). The second reasonthat can be made is the context-related issues. Our findings obviously showed that BCO may serve as a better moderator in Belgium than US. It highlights the role of two important factors including the job insecurity-outcomerelationship type (direct/indirect) as well as the context type (Belgium/US).As this study offers initial evidence on the supplementary, mediating and moderating mechanism using PCB and BCO, future studies may further substantiate our findings.

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