Research Review: Job Security and Insecurity

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Abstract: With the development of the knowledge economy, flexible employment has become a relatively large employment method in the contemporary labor market. With the development of this employment method, the stable job security of employees has gradually been broken and rebuilt. This article collects the existing research on job insecurity in the academic community, summarizes the definitions from the two directions of job security and insecurity, explores the pre-dependent variables of job insecurity from the three directions of individual, social context, and organization, and analyzes the outcome variables of job insecurity from the two levels of individual and organization. It is found that job insecurity has more impact on the organizational level, and has an impact on turnover intention, organizational commitment, Job Satisfaction, organizational trust, organizational loyalty, organizational support, innovative self-efficacy, and organizational citizenship behavior. Finally, it also looks forward to the research on job insecurity in different cultural scenarios in the future and the mechanism of job insecurity.

Keywords: job insecurity, job security, employment security

1. Introduction

Currently, against the backdrop of rapid economic development, drastic changes in the work environment, gradually intensifying competition, and accelerating pace of life, employees are often in a tense state. Phrases such as "35-year-old crisis", "graduation", "optimization", and "wanting to lie flat" are often mentioned on the internet, which not only affects the nature of employees' work and even their personal lives, but also makes them lack a sense of security about their work and overall future development. Due to various factors, the reasons for employees' job insecurity vary. According to the report "Riding the Trend: Talent Mobility and Migration 2022" released by Maimai, a professional community platform with many users, the ratio of talent supply and job demand in China's Quarter 1 in 2022 has increased by 9% compared to 2021, and the increase in competitive pressure has made professionals pay more attention to "security". The report shows that in terms of the sources of "workplace security", more than half of professionals choose "sufficient savings" and "self-inner strength", and 47.6% choose "sustained competitiveness". Workers no longer hope for a stable job, but value their own savings.

More and more people who lack job security cannot be ignored. This job insecurity will to some extent affect employees' work enthusiasm and enthusiasm, resulting in job burnout, which not only reduces employees' personal performance, but also has a negative impact on the production efficiency of enterprises, hindering the good development of enterprises. This article focuses on the research history and direction of job insecurity, laying the foundation for subsequent research on the construction mechanism of employee job insecurity.

2. Definition of job insecurity

Early researchers often discussed job security with thoughts about job insecurity. Early researchers regarded job security as the source of motivation for people's work, focusing on the internal needs and motivations of employees. Therefore, they defined job security as 'the situational characteristics that enable employees to work continuously in the same company and position" (Herzberg, 1959), which is a dominant need and the main reason why people work" (Super, 1957), and is "a very important factor for any job" (Chant, 1932).

In the 1980s, with the rise of corporate change, job stability became increasingly unstable, and the discussion of job insecurity became louder and louder. In the initial stress research, job insecurity was defined as "an individual's perception that the expected promotion in the organization is threatened, and even the possibility of being fired in the short term." Obviously, this definition is relatively rough. In 1984, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt gave a more refined definition - "In a threatened work situation, employees perceive a sense of powerlessness to maintain the expected continuity."[1] In this definition, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt emphasized three aspects: First, job insecurity is a subjective perception formed by employees' cognitive processing of objective threats. Second, objective threats include both job loss and loss of valuable job characteristics, such as loss of promotion opportunities. Employees' perception of threats is mainly through three information

channels: formal notices from the organization, unintentional organizational leads, and rumors. Third, job insecurity is related to employees' ability to deal with threats. When employees feel that they are capable of dealing with threats, they will not produce job insecurity.[2]

Subsequently, as the research deepened, researchers who joined continuously explored the connotation and attributes of job security and job insecurity from different perspectives, and gave multiple definitions. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Definitions of job security and job insecurity

Researchers	Time	Definition of job security
Super	1957	A dominant need and the main reason why people work
Herzberg	1959	Work context characteristics that enable employees to work continuously in the same enterprise and position
Brog, Elizur	1982	Job security refers to emotional security and job cognitive security. The former refers to the psychological perception that there is a high probability of being emotionally recognized and not easily unemployed, while the latter refers to the perception that work has certain security and stability.
Researchers	Time	Definition of job insecurity
Ashford et	1989	Threats of job loss and deteriorating employment relationships, such as demotion or lack of Career Development opportunities.
Rosenblatt & Ruvio	1996	A holistic concern about the survival of future work.
Davy, Kinicki & Scheck	1997	The individual's expectation of continuity in the work context.
Sverke, Hellgren & Naswall	2002	Subjective expectations of major and involuntary events.
Wong, Ngo & Liu	2005	An individual's subjective judgment is based on cognitive factors (the likelihood of losing their job) and emotional factors (the fear of losing their job).
Zheng, Diaz and Tang	2014	Subjective judgments about potential future unemployment and lack of confidence in maintaining job stability in the future.

3. Research on the antecedents of job insecurity

Job insecurity not only occurs as a situational factor, but is also dominated by individual subjective consciousness. It can be seen that there are mainly two types of factors that affect employees' job insecurity: individual factors and organizational factors. Such as personality traits[3] (De Witte, Einarsen, and Notelaers, 2010; Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 2010), work status[4] (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2009), employability ability (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2011; Fatimah[5] et al., 2012), and social support, etc.

Personal factors such as gender, age, personality orientation, and socio-economic status may lead to job insecurity among employees. Empirical research has also found that men have higher job insecurity than women[6] (Kinnunen et al., 1999; Rosenblatt, Talmud, and Ruvio, 1999), and older people have higher job insecurity[7] (Mohr, 2000; Naswall and De Witte, 2003). The more internal control-oriented people are, the less job insecurity they have.

Among organizational factors, expected organizational changes may lead to the loss of individual status, autonomy, and resources[8] (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), leading to job insecurity. The type of employment contract also affects employees' job insecurity. For example, temporary workers with fixed contract terms have higher job insecurity than full-time employees (Sverke et al., 2000).[9]The relationship between social support and job insecurity can be understood from the perspective of union setting. Research has found that union members have lower job insecurity than non-union members[10] (Sverke et al., 2004).

In addition, a small number of studies have focused on the role of social situational factors in promoting job insecurity, such as the inconsistent attitudes of different countries towards the threat of job loss in individualistic and collectivist cultures.

4. Study on the consequences of job security

4.1 From the individual level of employees

Because job security makes people worry about the possibility of losing their current job, it may have a strong psychological impact on employees. According to the potential deprivation model of Jahoda (1982), work brings material and social satisfaction to employees, building a bridge for personal development. If employees are fired by the company and it is involuntary, then these satisfactions cannot be achieved. Although research has shown that job security is not necessarily related to unemployment, work-stress theory points out that the cause of employee anxiety is often their expectation and

psychological perception of stressor events related to stress and roles (Lazs and Folk, 1984).

4.2 From the organizational level

Wong's (2005) research shows that job insecurity has an impact on organizational citizenship behavior[11]. Currently, some scholars have studied the impact of job insecurity on employee behavior, and compared the job insecurity and organizational citizenship behavior of employees under different ownership systems with Chinese enterprise employees as samples. The results of Ito and Brotheridge (2005) show that if an organization's human resource practices reduce employees' safety levels at work, it will lead to a decrease in employees' loyalty to the organization and an increase in their intention to leave.[12] The research results of Chinese scholars Zhang Hong and Zhao Shuming (2010) prove that hiring guaranteed employees, that is, the safer the employee's job, the more beneficial it is to the organization's citizenship behavior and the greater the trust in employees.

Job insecurity affects various variables in the organization by affecting employee attitudes and behaviors. Organizational commitment, Job Satisfaction, organizational trust, organizational loyalty, and organizational support have been widely studied as outcome variables. The specific research situation is shown in Figure 1.
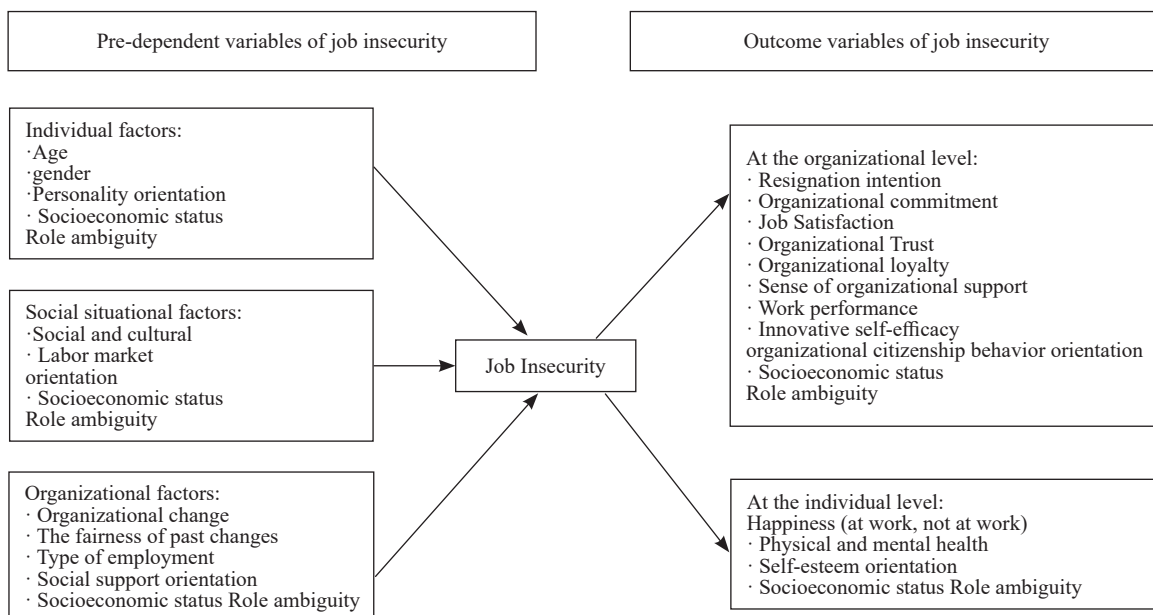

Figure 1. The antecedent and outcome variables of job insecurity

5. Research review

Overall, there are many and comprehensive studies on job security or insecurity in the academic community, which provides favorable theoretical support for further research. Based on these achievements, subsequent research can also consider the following directions to achieve the goal of enriching the research system.

5.1 Mediating variables on job insecurity

Many past literature have conducted detailed research on the negative impact of employee job insecurity at both organizational and individual levels, including organizational commitment, attrition rate, personal health, etc. In fact, there is little research on the mechanism of employee job insecurity. For example, past research on its antecedent variables has mostly been generalized to organizational change, and there is almost no research on the process of how change leads to employee job insecurity. When enterprises must change, it is necessary to control the generation of employee job insecurity, avoid various drawbacks, and open the black box of job insecurity.

5.2 Research on job insecurity in different cultural contexts

As mentioned earlier, social culture will affect the public's views on job loss or working conditions. As a group with

a strong collectivist concept, relationships are the basis for effective cooperation among Chinese people under the unique cultural background of China. Therefore, local research in China should pay attention to controlling the indirect effects of the following pairs of job insecurity, or use relationships as a regulatory variable to conduct relevant empirical research. In addition, Chinese people's sense of face will also have a certain impact on their job insecurity. Especially for managers with a certain status in the organization, the impact of face on their job insecurity may be more sensitive. Therefore, further research on employees' reactions to job insecurity in the Chinese context will help the development of job insecurity-related theories in China. Especially in the special context of China's transformation, it can provide valuable reference for enterprise talent development and management.

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