Content, Causes, and Consequences of Job Insecurity: A Theory-Based Measure and Substantive Test
Author(s): Susan J. Ashford, Cynthia Lee, Philip Bobko
Published by: Academy of Management
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/256569
Accessed: 16/06/2010 09:14

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=aom.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
CONTENT, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES OF JOB INSECURITY: A THEORY-BASED MEASURE AND SUBSTANTIVE TEST

SUSAN J. ASHFORD
Dartmouth College
CYNTHIA LEE
Northeastern University
PHILIP BOBKO
Rutgers University

This research assessed the causes and consequences of job insecurity using a new theory-based measure incorporating recent conceptual arguments. We also compared the measure's reliability and construct validity to those of two existing global measures of job insecurity. Results indicated that personal, job, and organizational realities associated with a perceived lack of control are correlated with measured job insecurity. Job insecurity in turn leads to attitudinal reactions—intentions to quit, reduced commitment, and reduced satisfaction. These results generally support the utility of our new measure and provide important directions for future research.

Organizations have been downsizing, restructuring, and merging with increasing frequency over the past decade. For employees, these major changes have caused feelings of anxiety, stress, and insecurity concerning the nature and continued existence of their jobs (Jick, 1985; Romzek, 1985; Schweiger & Ivancevich, 1985). Employees may have good reason to feel insecure. For example, Magnet (1984) and Walsh (1988) reported that relocation of employees and loss of jobs, status, benefits, and opportunities are common outcomes of mergers or takeovers. Jacobsen (1988) documented demoralization, suspicion, helplessness, and stress as reactions to a potential layoff. Other research has highlighted insecurity as a primary outcome of layoffs (see Brockner [1988] for a review). In response to these realities, unions have begun bargaining for contract clauses that ensure the long-term security of their members' jobs (Bolt, 1983; Cappelli, 1985; Hoerr, 1983). In turn, employers, who have historically underestimated the importance that employees place on extrinsic job factors such as security (Giles & Field, 1984).
have recently begun to consider the organizational benefits of offering workers long-term employment security (Gutchess, 1985; Rosow & Zager, 1985).

Despite the importance of job security and insecurity to both employers and employees, academicians have not yet given them adequate theoretical or empirical attention. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) argued that lack of a theoretically sound measure of the insecurity construct has deterred progress. A review of the relevant literature suggests that researchers have often treated job insecurity in an ad hoc manner, including it in many studies as a secondary or incidental focus. Job insecurity has been measured with a single item, with scales created specifically for the research reported, or with scales having unknown theoretical bases and psychometric histories (cf. Arnold & Feldman, 1982; Hamner & Tosi, 1974; Viega, 1983).

Given that job insecurity is likely to persist as an important phenomenon in organizations that are coping with competitive pressures, researchers need to develop the capability to study this construct systematically. Only then will there be a basis for helping managers and employees cope with its effects. The present research contributes to the study of job insecurity in two ways: First, we developed a new job insecurity measure based on recent theory; second, we used this measure to test several substantive hypotheses about the antecedents and consequences of job insecurity suggested by prior theory.

THE CONTENT OF JOB INSECURITY

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) critiqued prior empirical research on job insecurity for its lack of conceptual development and clarity and offered a theoretical model of the job insecurity process, within which they defined job insecurity as “powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation” (1984: 438).

In their model, the job insecurity construct is multidimensional, consisting of five components. The first four make up what Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt labeled “the severity of threat” (1984: 440), or the degree of perceived threat to continuity in a job situation. This threat may pertain to various features of a job or to the entire job. Thus, the first component of the job insecurity construct is perceived threat to various job features such as opportunities for promotion and freedom to schedule work. The more features that an individual perceives to be threatened, the greater the job insecurity. However, as in expectancy-valence formulations (cf. Vroom, 1964), in Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt’s model the perceived importance of each feature to an individual—the second component of the insecurity construct—weights the first dimension. To achieve this weighting, researchers would multiply the perceived threat to each feature by its importance and then sum the scores for each feature to obtain an overall severity rating. This operation relies on the assumption that a threat to an important job feature will contribute more to job insecurity reactions than will a threat to a minor feature (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984).
The construct’s third component is the perceived threat of the occurrence of various events that would negatively affect an individual’s total job; being fired or laid off for a short while are examples. The fourth component is the importance attached to each of those potentialities. These two components would also combine multiplicatively and, when summed, yield a weighted rating of the severity of the threat to a total job.

The fifth component of the job insecurity construct is powerlessness. Although Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt did not explicitly define powerlessness, it seems to encompass an individual’s ability to counteract the threats identified in the first four components. Thus, even if they perceive a threat to their jobs or job features, people who have the power to counteract threats—those who are low in powerlessness—should not experience much job insecurity. According to Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt’s theoretical formulation, an investigator would multiply powerlessness scores by the perceived severity of a threat to generate a measure of overall perceptions of job insecurity. In sum, in Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt’s model the job insecurity components just described should combine as follows: job insecurity = [(Σ importance of job feature × likelihood of losing job feature) + (Σ importance of job loss × likelihood of job loss)] × perceived powerlessness to resist threat.

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) argued quite strongly that job insecurity is a complex phenomenon and that existing scales, such as those developed by Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau (1975) and by Johnson, Messe, and Crano (1984), are limited in that they tap simple, global constructs rather than the multifaceted reality of job insecurity. We tested the validity of this argument by examining the relationships of (1) a multidimensional measure based on Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt’s theoretical arguments and (2) two existing global job insecurity measures to a variety of related constructs. We sought to provide evidence for the construct validity of the new measure. The first objective of this research was to test the proposition that a theory-based multidimensional measure of job insecurity would show adequate convergent validity with, and superior predictive validity to, previous measures of job insecurity.

Finding support for this proposition would provide a firm basis for the central purposes of this research: the development of a job insecurity measure and the testing of substantive predictions regarding the theoretical relations between job insecurity and other organizational constructs that Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt and others have posited. We now present the basis for these predictions.

Antecedents of Job Insecurity

Previous research has suggested that employees and organizations enter into a psychological contract in which it is clear what each will give and receive (Schein, 1980: 22). Such contracts give individuals a sense of mastery—a sense that they can reasonably control (or failing that, at least predict) events in their personal worlds. Given the importance of a sense of
control or predictability in people's lives (cf. Staw, 1977; Sutton & Kahn, 1986), organizational, job, or personal characteristics that threaten such control should induce strong reactions, one of which will be feelings of insecurity. This study considered four factors that affect an individual's sense of mastery and thus should be related to perceptions of job insecurity.

One frequently named threat to employees' sense of control is major organizational change. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt mentioned changes such as mergers, downsizings, reorganizations, new technologies, and new physical dangers as sources of threat (1984: 442). Brockner (1988) highlighted layoffs as direct causes of job insecurity among employees surviving staff cuts, and Schweiger and Ivancevich (1985) argued that mergers negatively affect individuals by creating uncertainty and insecurity.

Changes of this magnitude abrogate employees' psychological contracts with a firm, causing them to experience lack of control and attendant anxiety (Tagiuri, 1979). Changes sometimes threaten such contracts because jobs will, in fact, be either dramatically altered or eliminated. However, even when top managers are not contemplating such actions, rumors abound in change situations. To the extent that individuals use this often inaccurate and frequently inconsistent information source to anticipate the personal consequences of organizational changes, they may experience unwarranted insecurity (Schweiger & Ivancevich, 1985). Thus, anticipating major organizational changes should increase job insecurity. Stated formally,

Hypothesis 1: The greater the number of organizational changes anticipated in an organization, the greater the perceived job insecurity.

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt also pointed out that researchers should not be concerned just with massive changes that cause widespread insecurity, but also with individuals' experiences of job insecurity when there is no group-wide threat (1984: 440). Two job conditions, role ambiguity and role conflict, and one personal factor, locus of control, are important causes of individualized feelings of job insecurity.

Role ambiguity and role conflict both threaten an individual's sense of control and thereby may create perceptions of job insecurity. Role ambiguity denotes a lack of information about job requirements and procedures, and role conflict occurs when "role set members" send conflicting messages regarding these issues (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Although perhaps only extreme levels of role ambiguity and conflict will cause levels of job insecurity high enough to interfere with people's functioning, both role ambiguity and role conflict should induce some anxiety in them about fulfilling their part of the psychological contract with their employer. Such anxiety should heighten feelings of job insecurity. Moreover, our speculation on organizational change is probably also relevant for situations involving role ambiguity: given a scarcity of concrete information about roles, people may speculate about a variety of events that might negatively affect their jobs.

Hypothesis 2: The greater the perceived role ambiguity, the greater the perceived job insecurity.
Hypothesis 3: The greater the perceived role conflict, the
greater the perceived job insecurity.

Finally, locus of control is a personal factor that should directly relate to
the perceived powerlessness dimension of job insecurity. Compared to peo-
ple with an external locus of control, those with an internal locus of control
generally see environmental events as having less impact and believe that
they have the power to counteract whatever threats their environment might
pose (Mitchell, Smyser, & Weed, 1975; Rotter, 1960). Anderson, Hellriegel,
and Slocum (1977), for example, found that people with an internal locus
reported less objective threat than did those with an external locus when
faced with potential flood damage. Anderson (1977) also showed that
“internals” took more active steps to directly address the threats of a busi-
ness loss. Thus, individuals with an internal locus of control are not likely
to be easily threatened.

Hypothesis 4: The greater degree to which locus of control
is internal, the lower the perceived job insecurity.

Consequences of Job Insecurity

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) conceptualized job insecurity as a
source of stress involving fear, potential loss, and anxiety. One outcome of
such stress is strain in the form of somatic complaints like lack of sleep,
dizziness, and loss of appetite. Taber, Walsh, and Cooke (1979) suggested
that strain from perceived job insecurity can increase somatic complaints
and hypertension. Popular accounts of major organizational changes have
also cited strain-related complaints as an outcome of insecurity engendered
by transition periods (cf. Ackerman, 1982). Such outcomes are not only
important from a humanitarian perspective, but also place real financial
burdens on firms in the form of health-care costs and absenteeism (Matteson
& Ivancevich, 1987). Since firms often must bear stress-related health costs,
the relationship between job insecurity and somatic complaints is practi-
cally, as well as theoretically, important.

Hypothesis 5: The greater the perceived job insecurity, the
greater the number of reported somatic complaints.

Strains induced by job insecurity are also important because of their
effects on turnover. Like any stressor, job insecurity may be related to a
withdrawal response—an attempt to avoid the stress altogether. Thus, job
insecurity should have a positive relationship to intentions to quit (Arnold
& Feldman, 1982; Smith & Kerr, 1953; Stogdill, 1965).

People experiencing job insecurity may also leave for rational reasons—
it would be rational for employees worried about continuity of employment
to seek more secure career opportunities (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984:
443). Thus, whether they are experiencing strains or not, employees who can
easily find employment elsewhere might be expected to react to situations
that induce insecurity by seeking new jobs. Indeed, turnover—particularly
among high performers—is a primary reason for organizational concern
about job insecurity.
Hypothesis 6: The greater the perceived job insecurity, the greater the intention to seek a new job.

Research has also indicated that people develop affective and attitudinal attachments to firms over time (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), which show up as high levels of commitment, satisfaction, and trust. Feelings of job insecurity may threaten such basic attachments to a firm. Employees count on organizations to dependably uphold their end of the psychological contract between them (cf. Buchanan, 1974). Perceived job insecurity may reflect an individual’s perception that a firm has abrogated the psychological contract—important features seem threatened, the job itself seems at risk, or both. Loyalty should consequently be negatively affected (Romzek, 1985).

Steers (1977) presented evidence consistent with this perspective. Individuals who perceived their organizations to be undependable in carrying out their commitments to employees were, in turn, less committed to their organizations. We hypothesized that job insecurity would be negatively related to both employees’ commitment and their trust in a firm (Forbes, 1985). These relationships occur primarily because insecure employees lose faith in the dependability of organizations, and their attachment to the firms may diminish accordingly. Such employees may also become more self-interested (Freedman, 1986; Romzek, 1985; Rosow & Zager, 1985).

Hypothesis 7: The greater the perceived job insecurity, the lower the organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 8: The greater the perceived job insecurity, the lower the trust in an organization.

Perceptions of job insecurity should be negatively associated with measures of job satisfaction. One previous study (Oldham, Julik, Ambrose, Stepina, & Brand, 1986) found that employees with lower perceptions of job security than various comparison referents (including themselves at previous times) were less satisfied with their jobs than were their referents. We hoped to replicate that finding with the new measure of job insecurity. Researchers have typically defined job satisfaction as an affective response to job and task events (Locke, 1969). People respond affectively to jobs in terms of how they cognitively represent or perceive the jobs (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). To the extent that job insecurity represents a constellation of perceptions regarding possible negative task events, it will be likely to have a negative effect on job satisfaction as the primary affective response to a job. Thus,

Hypothesis 9: The greater the perceived job insecurity, the lower the job satisfaction.

The last outcome of job insecurity we considered was reduced job performance (Mooney, 1984). Again, a major reason firms adopt guaranteed security programs is the boost such programs give to employees’ job performance (Bolt, 1983; Rosow & Zager, 1985). Such programs increase performance by giving employees a sure sense of employment continuity. Conversely, organizational leaders implementing major changes often complain about declines in performance during periods of change, when employees
perceive job insecurity as high and focus narrowly on personal concerns (Ackerman, 1982).

Brockner (1988) suggested an argument contrary to this prediction. Citing his own laboratory evidence, he suggested that if employees feel they can enhance their job security by working harder, job insecurity might heighten work performance. However, past research regarding work effort has not found this to be the case (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Further, since the measure of job insecurity offered here includes the notion that there is little a person can do to control or alter a situation in which insecurity arises, we would therefore expect perceived job insecurity to be negatively related to performance.

Hypothesis 10: The greater the perceived job insecurity, the lower the job performance.

METHODS

Respondents and Procedures

Employees from a variety of organizations in the northeastern United States were respondents. One group consisted of 59 industrial hygienists who were members of the Delaware Valley Section of the American Industrial Hygienist Association. A second group consisted of 71 internal auditors, members of the Philadelphia chapter of the Institute of Internal Auditors. We sent members of those two associations copies of the questionnaire by mail, with a cover letter written by the presidents of their respective associations explaining the purpose of the survey and noting that their participation was voluntary. All participants were assured of confidentiality and given self-addressed, stamped envelopes in which to return their completed questionnaires to the senior author. The response rate for the industrial hygienists was 24 percent, and for the internal auditors, it was 25 percent.

The third group of respondents consisted of 35 registered nurses attending an evening and weekend nursing program at a major university in the Northeast. Questionnaires were distributed by the program’s instructors, who explained the purpose of the study and noted that participation was voluntary. The response rate for the nurses was 35 percent. The last group of respondents consisted of 18 part-time students who were employed full-time in various organizations and attending a class offered by the second author. These respondents were also assured of confidentiality and given self-addressed, stamped envelopes in which to return their completed responses to the senior author.

The total group of 183 respondents can be characterized as follows: 60 percent were men and the mean age was 38.5 years. Most respondents indicated that they had had some graduate training. Their mean level of company tenure was 8.7 years, and their average tenure in their current divisions was 4.7 years. They represented a variety of professions and organizations, a beneficial heterogeneity in that data restricted to one organization could
have limited variance on either the criterion variable or on several predictor variables.

Measures

Preliminary development of the new job insecurity scale. As mentioned previously, the work of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) suggested that job insecurity is best measured as the interaction of several components. These are: the importance of and threat to various job features, the importance of and threat to a job itself, and powerlessness to prevent a loss. We constructed a measure composed of subscales assessing those three components. The complete measure, which we called the Job Insecurity Scale (JIS), appears in the Appendix.

A 17-item subscale was constructed to include a comprehensive list of relevant job features. We drew on Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt’s (1984) theoretical suggestions, empirical work in the job characteristics literature (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Stone & Gueutal, 1985), and other research on factors that have been shown to underlie job satisfaction (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). We tried to include a broad range of job features to capture as extensively as possible the job features important to the employees studied. Items concern promotion opportunities, freedom to schedule work, quality of supervision, access to organizational resources, task variety, and so forth. Respondents were asked to rate both the importance and likelihood of loss of each feature on 5-point scales.

Subscales measuring both the importance and the likelihood of changes affecting total jobs were developed on the basis of suggestions in Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984). We measured the components with ten items each, using different stems and response categories (5-point scales) to reflect importance and likelihood. Sample items are: “How important to you personally is the possibility that you may be moved to a lower level job in the organization?” and “How likely is it that you might be laid off for a short while?” We summed responses to these items separately to form importance and likelihood measures for the total job. Finally, to measure powerlessness we devised a subscale of three items with 5-point response formats ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” A sample item is: “I have enough power in this organization to control events that might affect my job.”

To increase the psychometric quality of the job insecurity measure, we took a number of preliminary steps before the final study. The initial stage of instrument construction consisted of writing items that appeared to reflect the dimensions of job insecurity. As the initial items were developed, we pretested the working questionnaire using 80 respondents: professional colleagues, operating room nurses, employees of a legal firm, and employees of a public university in the eastern United States. After examining the results from these preliminary respondents, we revised the working questionnaire by clarifying ambiguous wording, including more items on job features, and simplifying the response format by changing it from a 7- to a 5-point scale.
This preliminary study resulted in the modified questionnaire used in this study. All data presented in this article are from the main research (N = 183) with the modified questionnaire.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and coefficient alphas for all components in the new measure of job insecurity and all other scales used in this research. Each insecurity component had an adequate reliability estimate, with alphas ranging from .74 to .92, and we computed the overall job insecurity scale according to the formula detailed above.

Two other job insecurity measures were used to evaluate the convergent validity and utility of our measure. The first was a four-item scale, developed by Caplan and colleagues (1975), which reflects the amount of certainty a person has about his future job and career security. The items, using a 5-point response format, include “How certain are you about what your future career picture looks like?” and “How certain are you about what your responsibilities will be six months from now?” The alpha coefficient of the Caplan scale in this study was .73.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales and Components</th>
<th>Number of Items and Response Format</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Importance of job features</td>
<td>17 items, 5-point</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Likelihood of feature’s continuation</td>
<td>17 items, 5-point</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Importance of possible changes in total job</td>
<td>10 items, 5-point</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Likelihood of changes to total job</td>
<td>10 items, 5-point</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Powerlessness</td>
<td>3 items, 5-point</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Multiplicative job insecurity scale</td>
<td>54 items</td>
<td>753.9</td>
<td>330.9</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Caplan job insecurity scale</td>
<td>4 items, 5-point</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Johnson job insecurity scale</td>
<td>7 items, 5-point</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Role ambiguity</td>
<td>6 items, 5-point</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Role conflict</td>
<td>8 items, 5-point</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Locus of control</td>
<td>5 items, 5-point</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Anticipated organizational change</td>
<td>6 items, 5-point</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Intentions to quit</td>
<td>5 items, 5-point</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Commitment</td>
<td>9 items, 7-point</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Trust in organization</td>
<td>2 items, 5-point</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Satisfaction</td>
<td>5 items, 7-point</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Somatic complaints</td>
<td>10 items, 3-point</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Performance</td>
<td>6 items, 7-point</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second job insecurity measure was a seven-item subscale taken from Johnson, Messe, and Crano's (1984) 35-item Work Opinion Questionnaire, a measure of job-related attitudes with five subscales: cooperation, self-confidence, maturity, security, and fairness. Johnson and colleagues validated these five subscales with data from 670 Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) participants. We used the job security subscale, whose items include "The thought of getting fired really scares me," "Working hard would keep me from getting fired," and "I am worried about the possibility of being fired." In the original research, the subscale's alpha was .75; in the current study, however, it was .44, a low reliability that suggests that results for this measure need to be interpreted cautiously.

The scales just described were chosen for the following reasons: First, though they critique it, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt called the Caplan (1975) scale "Perhaps the best attempt to measure the insecurity construct" (1984: 438). We included the Johnson scale because it focuses on the emotional aspects of insecurity. Whereas the Caplan scale focuses on a general cognitive uncertainty about future security, the Johnson scale taps various feelings about job security.¹ In combination, the two scales offer a useful benchmark against which to assess the contribution of a new multifaceted insecurity measure.

**Antecedents.** Role conflict and ambiguity were measured using Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) scales, which Schuler, Aldag, and Brief (1977) evaluated psychometrically (α = .79 for both scales).

Locus of control was measured with an eight-item scale developed and evaluated by Levenson and Miller (1976). Blau (1984) investigated the factor stability and reliability of this scale and of the Rotter (1960) locus of control measure and suggested that the former was more factorially stable. However, for the current data, the alpha for the scale was .52. After three items were dropped to improve reliability, the alpha for the resultant five-item scale was .70.

To measure the extent of anticipated organizational changes, respondents rated the likelihood of six potential changes, including their employing organization's "going into decline," "undertaking a major restructuring," "accepting new technologies that may eliminate jobs in the organization," and asking employees "to undertake dangerous work" (α = .70).

**Outcomes.** Intentions to quit were measured with the scale presented in Walsh, Ashford, and Hill (1985). Respondents are asked to indicate if they "intend to leave the company within the next six months" and if they may "start to ask friends and contacts about other job possibilities" (α = .92).

Commitment was measured with Mowday, Steers, and Porter's (1979)

¹ Although their originators refer to the two scales as measures of job security, for consistency with the focus of this research we refer to the Caplan and Johnson scales as measures of job insecurity.
organizational commitment scale. Mowday and his colleagues discussed the psychometric properties of this nine-item scale (α = .91).

Trust in the employing organization was measured with the following items created explicitly for this research: “I trust this organization to look out for my best interests” and “I believe in the top management of this organization” (α = .78).

Job satisfaction was assessed with the five-item general satisfaction scale of the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; α = .81).

Somatic complaints were measured to tap symptoms of strain. We used the ten-item scale developed and evaluated by Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison, and Pinneau (1975); it asks how frequently in the past month (never, once or twice, three times or more) symptoms like “heart beating hard,” dizzy spells, trouble sleeping, and so forth have occurred (α = .77).

To assess performance, we asked respondents to give their superiors a one-page questionnaire to fill out and received completed questionnaires from 91 superiors. The questionnaire asked superiors to rate the general performance level of the employees and the quality and quantity of that performance on seven-point scales. We summed these items to form the performance scale (α = .82).

Finally, data measuring several demographic variables were also obtained. These variables—age, gender, educational level, and organizational and job tenure—were collected in response to Mitchell’s argument that researchers should “actively try to conceptualize and measure those variables that may serve as potential confounds” (1985: 196). We controlled for these variables in the regression analyses performed.

**Analyses**

Several analyses were undertaken to test the construct validity of the new measure of job insecurity. First, we performed a correlational analysis to assess the covariance among the components of the JIS and the measure’s association with the Caplan and Johnson scales. Second, to assess the utility of the new scale, we compared the predictive capacities of the three job insecurity measures and their relationships with the antecedent variables using regression analysis. These same regressions provided data for testing Hypotheses 1 through 10.

**RESULTS**

Table 2 presents the correlations among the three job insecurity scales and the components of the new scale. Table 3 presents the correlations between the scales (and components) and the antecedent and consequence variables. For a scale to demonstrate convergent validity, the correlations between it and other scales designed to measure the same construct must be (1) significantly different from zero and (2) of large magnitude (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). The new scale generally met these criteria, demonstrating a
correlation of .48 (p < .01) with the Caplan scale and of .35 (p < .01) with the Johnson scale. Between the Johnson and Caplan scales, the correlation was .30.

Our central proposition also predicted that the JIS would, overall, correlate more highly with the antecedents and consequences of job insecurity than would either its components or the other job insecurity scales. Visual inspection of Table 3 indicates support for that prediction. Additionally, we conducted t-tests for correlated correlations (cf. Cohen & Cohen, 1975: 53) between the JIS and the Caplan and Johnson measures for each antecedent or consequence measure. Given the low reliability the Johnson scale showed in this study, we expected the relationships of variables to this scale to be attenuated. Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, the JIS scale was a significantly (p < .05) better predictor than the Johnson scale for all antecedents and consequences except somatic complaints, ratings of performance, and anticipated organizational changes. Further, the new job insecurity scale was a

\[ \text{TABLE 2} \]

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{tabular}{lrrrrrrrrrr}
\hline
Variables & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 \\
\hline
1. Importance of job features & & & & & & & & & \\
2. Likelihood of feature's continuation & & & & & & & & & \\
3. $1 \times 2$ & $.27^{**}$ & $.93^{**}$ & & & & & & & \\
4. Importance of possible changes in total job & $.44^{**}$ & .01 & .12 & & & & & & \\
5. Likelihood of changes in total job & -.09 & $.48^{**}$ & $.42^{**}$ & .05 & & & & & \\
6. $4 \times 5$ & .12 & $.41^{**}$ & $.42^{**}$ & $.42^{**}$ & $.91^{**}$ & & & & \\
7. Powerlessness & -.05 & $.21^{**}$ & $.21^{**}$ & .01 & $.27^{**}$ & $.27^{**}$ & & & \\
8. Multiplicative job insecurity scale (JIS) & .03 & $.67^{**}$ & $.67^{**}$ & $.14^{*}$ & $.61^{**}$ & $.61^{**}$ & $.83^{**}$ & & \\
9. Caplan job insecurity scale & -.14$^{*}$ & $.26^{**}$ & $.22^{**}$ & -.04 & $.35^{**}$ & $.36^{**}$ & $.38^{**}$ & $.48^{**}$ & \\
10. Johnson job insecurity scale & $.20^{**}$ & $.22^{**}$ & $.29^{**}$ & $.18^{*}$ & $.37^{**}$ & $.41^{**}$ & $.17^{**}$ & $.35^{**}$ & $.30^{**}$ \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{footnotesize}

\footnotesize{$^{a}$ $N = 152-180.$}
\footnotesize{\text{* $p < .05$}}
\footnotesize{\text{** $p < .01$}}
TABLE 3

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Job Insecurity Scales and Components, with Antecedents and Consequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of job features</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>- .09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of features</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of possible changes in total job</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>- .28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of changes in total job</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>- .40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>- .40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplicative job insecurity scale</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>- .47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caplan job insecurity scale</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity scale</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>- .15*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Anticipated Organizational Changes</th>
<th>Supernervisory Ratings of Job</th>
<th>Somatic Complaints</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated of organizational changes in role ambiguity</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>- .27**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of possible changes in total job</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of changes in total job</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplicative job insecurity scale</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caplan job insecurity scale</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity scale</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>- .04</td>
<td>- .04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N = 84-183. ** N = 84-89 for these coefficients.

High scores indicate an internal locus of control.

*p < .05 ** p < .01
significantly (p < .05) better predictor than the Caplan scale for satisfaction, commitment, trust, role ambiguity, and anticipated organizational changes.

Using hierarchical regression analysis, we accomplished a more precise test of the unique predictive contributions of the new scale. Table 4 shows the relationships of the antecedents to job insecurity. We entered the demographic variables—age, gender, education, and tenure in company and division—in the first step of the hierarchical regression analysis. In the next step, we entered the four antecedents and calculated regression coefficients, repeating this procedure for each insecurity measure. Supporting the new measure's utility, more of the antecedents were uniquely related to the JIS scale than were related to the Caplan or Johnson scale. The change in \( R^2 \) for variables entered at this stage was nearly twice as large for the new scale's predictions as it was for the predictions of either other scale.

Table 5 presents further evidence for our basic proposition. In this analysis, we regressed each of the six outcome variables separately on each of the job insecurity scales after controlling for the demographic variables. For example, intention to quit was regressed first on the new scale, then separately on the Caplan scale, and then separately on the Johnson scale. We tested each of the other outcome variables in the same fashion, in separate equations repeated for each of the insecurity measures. Looking down the columns in Table 5 demonstrates that the JIS explained more of the variance in intentions to quit, commitment, trust in an organization, and job satisfaction than did either the Caplan or the Johnson scale. The Caplan scale was the only insecurity measure related to the frequency of somatic complaints, and no scale was significantly related to performance. On the average, the JIS explained more variance in the dependent variables than either other insecurity measure.

These findings suggested that the new measure could be used in tests of the substantive hypotheses. Table 4 gives data relevant to the antecedents of job insecurity.\(^2\) The significant, positive beta (\( \beta = .34, \ p < .01 \)) linking anticipated organizational changes and job insecurity supports Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 receives similar support from the positive coefficient (\( \beta = .32, \ p < .01 \)) linking role ambiguity and job insecurity. In contrast, role conflict was not related to job insecurity among our respondents (\( \beta = .05, \ \text{n.s.} \)), disconfirming Hypothesis 3. Finally, locus of control was significantly and negatively related to job insecurity (\( \beta = -.17, \ p < .01 \)), providing support for Hypothesis 4. Taken together, these antecedents accounted for 36 percent of the variance in job insecurity.

Table 5 presents data relevant to the outcomes of job insecurity. Disconfirming Hypothesis 5, job insecurity was not associated with increased somatic complaints (\( \beta = .08, \ \text{n.s.} \)). However, consistent with Hypothesis 6,
TABLE 4
Results of Regression Analyses for Antecedent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent Variables</th>
<th>Multiplicative Job Insecurity Scale</th>
<th>Caplan Job Insecurity Scale</th>
<th>Johnson Job Insecurity Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated organizational change</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role ambiguity</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of control</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\Delta R^2)</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>20.4**</td>
<td>9.8**</td>
<td>4.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall adjusted (R^2)</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F)</td>
<td>9.7**</td>
<td>4.8**</td>
<td>3.2**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a N = 99-183. \) Age, gender, educational level, and company and job tenure were controlled. Values for antecedent variables are standardized betas.

\(b \Delta R^2 \) refers to the difference in \(R^2\)s after the demographic variables (age, gender, educational level, and company and job tenure) were controlled.

\(c \) Overall adjusted \(R^2 \) refers to the \(R^2\) including antecedents and demographic control variables.

\* \(p < .05\)

\** \(p < .01\)

Intentions to quit were positively related to increased job insecurity (\(\beta = .43, p < .01\)). Hypotheses 7, 8, and 9 also received support. Job insecurity was negatively associated with commitment (\(\beta = -.44, p < .01\)), trust in an organization (\(\beta = -.50, p < .01\)), and job satisfaction (\(\beta = -.43, p < .01\)). Finally, there was no support for Hypothesis 10; job insecurity had no significant impact on performance as rated by employees’ supervisors (\(\beta = .16, \text{n.s.}\)). On the average, job insecurity explained 14 percent of the variance in the outcome variables.

DISCUSSION

To summarize, data from the present research supported seven of the ten hypotheses derived from the Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) model, and the new job insecurity scale was found to have reasonable construct validity. We now discuss the implications of the substantive findings and the JIS’s construct validity.

Antecedents of Job Insecurity

The pattern of results presented in Table 4 supports the argument that perceived lack of predictability and control may induce perceptions of job insecurity. Organizational changes, role ambiguity, and external locus of control were all associated with increased job insecurity, consistent with the argument that those elements engender a feeling of lack of predictability and control. However, role conflict was unrelated to job insecurity. It appears that although receiving conflictual cues may be stressful, conflicting expec-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>Outcome Variables</th>
<th>Somatic Complaints</th>
<th>Intentions to quit</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Trust in Organization</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Supervisory Performance Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Adjusted</td>
<td>Overall Adjusted</td>
<td>Overall Adjusted</td>
<td>Overall Adjusted</td>
<td>Overall Adjusted</td>
<td>Overall Adjusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplicative job insecurity scale</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>-.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caplan job insecurity scale</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>-.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson job insecurity scale</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ N = 91-183. Age, gender, educational level, and company and job tenure were controlled.

$^b$ $\Delta R^2$ refers to the difference in $R^2$s after the demographic variables (age, gender, education, and company and job tenure) were controlled. Overall adjusted $R^2$ refers to the $R^2$ for the regression equation including the insecurity predictor variable and the demographic variables. Betas are standardized.

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
tations may stem from interrole conflict or role overload, conditions that may not affect perceptions of the continuity of job features or of a job itself.

These findings have several implications. First, they suggest the potential importance of information in reducing job insecurity. In ambiguous settings, positive and benign information can reestablish a person’s sense of control and predictability. Organizations can sometimes take steps to provide people in ambiguous roles or in organizations undergoing transitions with adequate information regarding likely future outcomes, thereby reducing their insecurity.

Second, the findings suggest that individuals’ tendencies to take active steps to gain control over their situations may play an important role in the job insecurity process. Latack found that people in ambiguous roles who engaged in such “control-oriented coping” (1986: 383) as meeting with their supervisors to discuss their situation experienced less anxiety than did those who coped by trying to physically or mentally escape their situations. Such coping strategies may be similarly related to job insecurity. Given the benefits of control-oriented coping mechanisms, organizational leaders could facilitate their occurrence by setting norms that promote asking for information or problem-solving help and sharing worries and concerns. One caveat to this prescription, however, is that encouraging information seeking will reduce job insecurity only if information actually exists regarding likely outcomes and that information is relatively benign. In Ashford’s (1988) study of employees during an organizational transition, seeking feedback was associated with more, not less, strain. Ashford suggested that this relationship occurred because at certain stages of the transition, no information or feedback existed and, therefore, seeking was a futile exercise and probably contributed to strain.

Outcomes of Job Insecurity

The pattern of relationships between job insecurity and outcomes (Table 5) suggests some of the organizational costs job insecurity may bring. These costs concern the affective and attitudinal bond between individuals and organizations. Thus, in support of Hypotheses 6 through 9, Table 5 shows that job insecurity is associated with declines in commitment, trust in an organization, and job satisfaction and with a rise in intentions to quit. It may be that the notion of exchange, which appears to govern employee commitment processes (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Steers, 1977), operates here as well. If individuals decide what to give a firm (i.e., their commitment, their continued efforts) on the basis of what the firm provides them (Eisenberger et al., 1986), an abrogation of this informal contract, manifested in perceived job insecurity, may diminish their sense of attachment and responsibility to the firm.

In documenting the costs of perceived job insecurity, the present data provide empirical support for recent articles in the popular press decrying the seeming loss of corporate loyalty that has followed the recent waves of major changes, downsizings, and restructurings undertaken by organizations
Although these major organizational changes may reduce labor or overhead costs, they may have some significant indirect costs through their effects on employee job insecurity.

The data did not support Hypotheses 5 and 10. Job insecurity was unrelated to either somatic complaints or performance. In retrospect, the lack of relationship between the JIS and the somatic complaint scale is not surprising, given the highly cognitive flavor of the conceptualization suggested by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984). In their scheme, job insecurity is a constellation of perceptions and interpretations. The resulting measure is nearly devoid of any affective component—fear, anxiety, and so forth. This finding suggests there may be other outcomes, such as anxiety and stress, that are more strongly related to job insecurity than are somatic complaints. Such an interpretation is consistent with Cobb and Kasl’s (1977) findings regarding response to job loss. They found that job loss was correlated with high levels of anxiety and tension but, unexpectedly, to low reported levels of psychophysiological symptoms of strain.

Job insecurity also did not correlate significantly with supervisory ratings of job performance, despite previous accounts of a negative relationship between the two variables (cf. Mooney, 1984). Given the respondents for this research, we may have captured chronic perceptions of insecurity rather than the acute insecurity that might follow, say, a series of layoff rumors. If that were so, the level of job insecurity tapped in this research may not have been high enough to result in performance decrements. Alternatively, it may be that job insecurity perceptions are related to effort (Greenhalgh, 1984) but that other performance predictors, such as ability, the economic condition of a firm, and the availability of resources, overwhelm the effect of effort on subsequent performance. With these qualifications, however, these data do suggest that job insecurity has important consequences, although they may not be the performance- and strain-related outcomes that organizational leaders have historically been concerned with. Rather, leaders might do well to recognize the attitudinal cost of job insecurity perceptions and to focus their attention on maintaining the bond between their organizations and the people employed in them.

**The Measurement of Job Insecurity**

To establish the construct validity of a new measure, researchers must (1) specify the domain of a construct and assure that the new measure relates predictably (2) to other measures purporting to measure the same construct and (3) to other constructs (Nunnally, 1978). These three steps formed the framework for the measurement development portion of this research. As our specification of the construct’s domain, we primarily relied on Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt’s (1984) definition of job insecurity, a conceptualization suggesting a complex and multifaceted measure. Nunnally’s (1978) second step required that we demonstrate that the new measure of job insecurity correlated with alternative measures of the
same construct. Alternative measures may be either the various items making up a scale or separate scales intending to measure the construct in question. This research offers evidence regarding both meanings of alternative measures. First, the data in Table 2 appear to indicate that the component parts of the overall job insecurity measure converge on the construct, as indicated by the correlations between the components and the total scale, which averaged .46. It is notable that the highest component-total correlations were for the powerlessness and likelihood items rather than for perceptions of importance. The components themselves also show adequate reliabilities that are higher than those of the scales developed by either Caplan (1975) or Johnson (1984) and their respective colleagues. Second, the data in Table 2 also show that convergent validity exists between the three alternative measures of job insecurity. The correlations between our overall job insecurity scale and the Caplan and Johnson scales, though of moderate magnitude, were positive and statistically significant in every case. Because the new scale taps a broader content domain than do the two earlier job insecurity scales, the moderate size of the correlations among the three scales was not unexpected.

To take Nunnally’s (1978) final step for assessing construct validity, we tested the three measures in a nomological network of theoretically related constructs, seeking to show that the new measure correlated with theoretically related constructs (Nunnally, 1978: 103). Such correlations can be positive or negative; in this case, because the new measure was proposed as an improvement, it should also have shown a higher degree of relationship to its hypothesized antecedent and outcome variables than the existing measures.

The bivariate correlations between the overall JIS and the hypothesized antecedent and outcome variables and the regression analysis results both provided evidence regarding the performance of the new measure. The bivariate correlations were all in the predicted direction and, with two exceptions, statistically significant (p < .05). Further, the multiplicative, theory-based job insecurity measure had, in general, higher correlations with the antecedent and outcome variables than did its component parts. These results justify the use of the multiplicative measure rather than that of the component parts alone. Tests of the bivariate correlations further indicate that the new measure performed significantly better than the Johnson scale and moderately better than the Caplan scale.

Results of the regression analyses comparing the multiplicative measure to the job insecurity measure developed by Caplan, Johnson, and their respective colleagues provide additional support for the JIS. In most cases, the overall JIS was more strongly related to the antecedent variables than was either other measure. The change in $R^2$ for these variables was significantly larger for the new scale than it was for the Caplan or Johnson scale. Further, although none of the job insecurity measures were related to performance, for every other outcome variable (except somatic complaints) the new mea-
sure explained significantly more variance than either the Caplan or Johnson scale. These results support the construct validity of our proposed measure of job insecurity.

Limitations and Future Directions

Antecedents and consequences. Although this research tested several variables related to individuals’ sense of control, other job insecurity predictors need further research attention. First, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) proposed that studies include measures of objective threats to individuals’ jobs. Ratings from key informants regarding which jobs are at risk might be one such measure. Then, researchers could investigate both organizational communications and individual perceptual processes as important influences on subsequent job insecurity. Brockner (1988), for example, suggested that the social accounts that an organization provides to explain why a layoff, an objective threat to other employees, has occurred and the procedures by which it handles the layoff should influence subsequent job insecurity and reactions. Individuals might also cope with an objective threat by denial, thereby eliminating their job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Further, how individuals and organizations frame an objective threat—as a problem or as an opportunity (Dutton & Jackson, 1987)—might affect job insecurity perceptions. Clearly, organizational interventions (carried out within ethical boundaries) can affect the way individuals frame objective threats in a way that reduces subsequent job insecurity.

Second, situational factors that contribute to an individual’s sense of control should also be tested for their relationship to job insecurity. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) mentioned several factors, including lack of labor market demand for skills and the extent to which a job yields a high proportion of a family’s income, that make individuals highly dependent on their current jobs. The more these factors are operative, the more insecure individuals should feel in light of objective threats or ambiguous situations that they could interpret as threatening. Third, the existence of social support is a situational variable that might enhance people’s sense of control and thereby reduce their job insecurity. All these situational factors, as well as the communication factors, perceptual processes, and control-oriented coping strategies detailed above, are important areas to pursue in future research efforts. Given the importance of job insecurity, understanding the factors that influence it will provide a basis for preventative programs.

This research did not test all the potential outcomes of job insecurity Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) suggested. The effect of job insecurity on effort and resistance to change and the secondary impact of all outcomes on subsequent organizational effectiveness are important areas for future research. Such research might also assess the behavioral consequences of insecurity, focusing on such behavioral manifestations of withdrawal as absenteeism and turnover and loss of corporate loyalty, whether a decline in citizenship behavior or an increase in sabotage. Second, moderators of the link between job insecurity and outcomes also remain to be empirically
established. Potential moderators might include individual difference variables like self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) or self-esteem (Brockner, 1988) and organizational practices that reestablish individuals' sense of control. Organizations that take steps to enhance employees' sense of control by explicitly renegotiating the psychological contract between employee and organization or by providing employees with information that allows them to predict the impact of, say, an organizational change, might help reduce job insecurity.

Clearly, longitudinal research designs are now needed to assess the strength and duration of job insecurity’s effects on outcomes. Longitudinal efforts might examine which aspects of insecurity are associated with which outcomes. It may be, for instance, that insecurity regarding losing job features has different effects than insecurity concerning a total job. It may also be that insecurity perceptions engendered by different antecedents produce different effects. Thus, the insecurity associated with working in a job with antiquated technology might have effects different from those associated with working in a turbulent organizational environment. These two situations may differ in the perceived resolvability of the antecedent conditions and the clarity of paths toward a solution. Longitudinal assessments of the job insecurity process might shed some light on these issues.

**Measurement.** Although the data presented offer support for the new measure of job insecurity and for our central proposition, three important questions remain. First, this research provided little evidence regarding the discriminant validity of our job insecurity measure. To establish discriminant validity, it must be shown that the JIS not only correlates as expected with other theoretically related constructs, but also that it is not highly correlated with other variables from which it is intended to differ. Thus, future research in this area might consider incorporating, for example, measures of the propensity to give socially desirable responses or of job complexity in order to demonstrate that job insecurity is indeed separable from those constructs.

Second, this research tested a complex multiplicative measure of job insecurity based on Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt’s (1984) arguments by comparing it to two existing global measures. However, research in other areas, such as job design and expectancy theory, has questioned the benefits of multiplicative formulations over additive ones. Given these questions, a comparison of our formulation to a simple additive model in which all the JIS’s items are summed may also be relevant.

We can report some initial evidence regarding our measure’s performance relative to that of a simple additive measure. First, the multiplicative job insecurity scale correlated as high or higher than an additive version (a standardized summed score) with all the antecedent and consequence variables measured in this research, except somatic complaints. Second, results of a test for correlated correlations (Cohen & Cohen, 1975) revealed that the multiplicative scale had a significantly ($p < .05$) greater correlation than the additive version for six out of the ten antecedent and consequence variables. Third, when we included the JIS in the equation predicting each of the
outcomes after entering the additive formulation in a previous step, the change in the squared multiple correlation was statistically significant for all variables except somatic complaints and performance. These results suggest that the multiplicative formulation has explanatory power above and beyond that provided by a simple additive formulation, and they provide additional confirmation of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt’s conceptualization. Nevertheless, further examination of this issue is needed.

More evidence is also needed regarding the cross-sample reliability and predictive validity of the new scale. Research on this issue might seek out specific contexts in which to assess this job insecurity measure. For example, since layoffs are a cause of perceived job insecurity, longitudinal studies examining how job survivors cope with their insecurity would provide a useful opportunity to examine the new scale’s construct validity. Similarly, researchers could further assess the validity of the new measure using two groups that could be expected a priori to differ in their level of job insecurity, such as employees of two companies in the same industry or of two divisions within the same firm, tenured and untenured faculty members, or unionized and nonunionized workers. Finally, the data here were self-report measures of the antecedents and outcomes of insecurity, except for the performance measure. Future studies might also incorporate independent measures of antecedent and outcome variables to rule out any response-response bias.

The results of this research suggest that attitudinal and affective reactions important to organizations accompany job insecurity. Efforts to diminish job insecurity thus become important undertakings. For example, it may be that job insecurity is not an inherent outcome of role ambiguity or organizational change. Rather, organizations might be able to take steps to prevent job insecurity from occurring in these situations. In this regard, the development of a psychometrically sound measure of job insecurity has practical as well as theoretical payoffs. With the measure developed here, companies could diagnose their current situations, pinpoint particular job features and perceptions of total jobs that are problematic, and attempt to prevent or reduce future job insecurity. Such preventive measures require the ability to describe employees’ job insecurity perceptions validly. The current research helped to establish a valid job insecurity measure. Its results suggest that future research efforts to use and enhance this scale are warranted.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Job Insecurity Scale

To capture the importance of job features, we asked “In your worklife, how important are each of the following features to you personally?” (very unimportant, 1; unimportant, 2; neither important nor unimportant, 3; important, 4; very important, 5).

1. Geographic location?
2. Having promotion opportunities?
3. Maintaining your current pay?
4. Maintaining opportunities to receive periodic pay increases?
5. The status that comes with your position in the organization?
6. The freedom to schedule your own work?
7. The freedom to perform your work in the manner you see fit?
8. Access to resources (people, materials, information) in the organization?
9. A sense of community in working with good coworkers?
10. The feedback you receive from your supervisor about your performance?
11. The quality of the supervision you receive?
12. The physical demands your job places on you?
13. The opportunity to interact with the public?
14. A job where you do a variety of tasks?
15. A job where you do an entire piece of work from start to finish?
16. A job that has significant impact on others?
17. A job in which you can tell how well you are doing as you do it?

To capture the perceived threat to job features, we asked “Looking to the future, what is the probability that changes could occur—changes you don’t want or might disagree with—that would negatively affect each of these features?” (negative change very unlikely, 1; negative change unlikely, 2; negative change neither likely nor unlikely, 3; negative change likely, 4; negative change very likely, 5).

1. Your geographic location?
2. Your potential to get ahead in the organization?
3. Your potential to maintain your current pay?
4. Your potential to attain pay increases?
5. The status that comes with your position in the company?
6. Your current freedom to schedule your own work?
7. Your current freedom to perform your work in the manner you see fit?
8. Your current access to resources (people, materials, information) in the organization?
9. Your current sense of community in working with good coworkers?
10. The amount of feedback you currently receive from your supervisor?
11. The supervision you receive?
12. The physical demands your job places on you?
13. The opportunity to interact with the public?
14. The variety of tasks you perform?
15. The opportunity to do an entire piece of work from start to finish?
16. The significance of your job?
17. The extent to which you can tell how well you are doing your job as you do it?

Total Job

To capture the importance of possible changes to a total job, we asked “Assume for a moment that each of the following events could happen to you; how important to you personally is the possibility that:”

1. You may lose your job and be moved to a lower level within the organization?
2. You may lose your job and be moved to another job at the same level within the organization?
3. The number of work hours the company can offer you to work may fluctuate from day to day?
4. You may be moved to a different job at a higher position in your current location?
5. You may be moved to a different job at a higher position in another geographic location?
6. You may be laid off for a short while?
7. You may be laid off permanently?
8. Your department or division’s future may be uncertain?
9. You may be fired?
10. You may be pressured to accept early retirement?

To capture the perceived threat to a total job, we asked “Again, thinking about the future, how likely is it that each of these events might actually occur to you in your current job?” (very unlikely, 1; unlikely, 2; neither likely nor unlikely, 3; likely, 4; very likely, 5).

1. Lose your job and be moved to a lower level job within the organization?

a The response scale was the one used for questions on the importance of job features.
2. Lose your job and be moved to another job at the same level within the organization?
3. Find that the number of hours the company can offer you to work may fluctuate from day to day?
4. Be moved to a higher position within your current location?
5. Be moved to a higher position in another geographic location?
6. Lose your job and be laid off for a short while?
7. Lose your job and be laid off permanently?
8. Find your department or division's future uncertain?
9. Lose your job by being fired?
10. Lose your job by being pressured to accept early retirement?

**Powerlessness**

We asked “Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements” (strongly disagree, 1; disagree, 2; neither agree nor disagree, 3; agree, 4; strongly agree, 5).

1. I have enough power in this organization to control events that might affect my job.
2. In this organization, I can prevent negative things from affecting my work situation.
3. I understand this organization well enough to be able to control things that affect me.

*Susan Ashford* is an associate professor of organizational behavior at the Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dartmouth College. She received her Ph.D. degree from Northwestern University in 1983. Her research interests are feedback processes, managerial effectiveness, and organizational change.

*Cynthia Lee* is an assistant professor of human resources at Northeastern University. She received her Ph.D. degree from the University of Maryland. Her research interests include Type A behavior patterns and goal setting.

*Philip Bobko* is a professor in and the chairperson of the Department of Management, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. He received his Ph.D. degree from Cornell University. His research interests include measurement, research methods, and human resource management.