Job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement among staff in an open distance learning institution

A.N. Moshoeu & D.J. Geldenhuys

A B S T R A C T

The objective of this study was to explore the relationship between job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement among staff in an open distance learning institution. The research was conducted through computer-aided telephone interviews and self-completion techniques. A cross-sectional survey design was conducted among 260 employees in an open distance learning institution. The measuring instruments included the job insecurity scale, organisational commitment questionnaire and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. The results demonstrated statistically significant relationships between job insecurity and organisational commitment, and between job insecurity and work engagement. A practically significant relationship between variables was also determined; however, the effect was too small to yield a practically significant relationship between the variables. The results revealed that a component of job insecurity (likelihood of loss of job features), together with a component of work engagement (vigour), explains 25% of the total variation of organisational commitment and that the remaining 75% was attributed to factors beyond the scope of this study. This study demonstrated that employees would not always reduce their commitment and work effort when confronted with uncertainty as suggested by several studies. Nevertheless, it could be assumed that the survey participants fear being unemployed and feel trapped because of a lack of alternative employment opportunities.

Key words: vigour, dedication, absorption, affective, continuance, normative, perceived powerlessness

Ms A.N. Moshoeu is a Researcher at the Bureau of Market Research, University of South Africa. Prof D.J. Geldenhuys is Chair of the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, University of South Africa. E-mail: moshoan@unisa.ac.za

Introduction

Since early 1997, the South African higher education system has undergone significant changes with the reduction, through mergers, of 36 universities and technikons to 23 institutions (Chipunza & Gwarinda 2010; Rothmann & Pieterse 2007). Numerous reports have identified the rationale for such changes as a way, among other reasons, to redress the injustices of the past within the higher education system. However, changes of this nature have direct and/or indirect effects on the well-being of employees and consequently the organisation as a whole. This necessarily implies that changes can possibly stimulate feelings of job insecurity affecting individual employees' commitment and engagement towards their organisation.

It is generally believed that employment security is an important aspect of employees' quality of life (Bosman, Buitendach & Rothmann 2005b; De Cuyper, De Witte, Vander Elst & Handaja 2010). For instance, Jahoda (1982) demonstrates that being employed satisfies a considerable number of individual needs, such as earning income, establishing social contacts outside the family, and most importantly the need for personal and social growth. Thus, the threat of being unemployed could possibly result in the frustration of these needs (Buitendach & De Witte 2005; Clark, Knabe & Rätzel 2010), particularly with fewer employment opportunities being created in the South African labour market.

In addition, Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois and Callan (2004) assert that the experience of job insecurity is one of the main reported psychological states occurring through organisational change. For them, and for Elman and O'Rand (2002), employees who find themselves in such situations not only feel insecure about the changing priorities of the organisation and the probability of redundancies, but also about losing valued job features such as career advancement, status and working hours. It is therefore imperative to examine the extent to which change in various job features as components of job insecurity can influence employees' commitment and engagement in an open distance learning institution.

Despite numerous studies on job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement, however, the relationship between these constructs is still not clear. Whereas numerous studies have linked the perception of job insecurity to a decline in organisational commitment and increased disengagement (Ashford, Lee & Bobko 1989; Bosman et al. 2005b; De Cuyper & De Witte 2005; Meyer & Parfyonova 2010), other studies, such as those reported on by Sverke and Hellgren (2002), state that not all studies have found that job insecurity is in fact related to impaired job-related attitudes. It is therefore not without reason that Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (2010), in their 25 years' overview of research on job insecurity, acknowledge that more

research is required to better understand the precise organisational mechanisms that prompt employees to have feelings of job insecurity.

It was not the intention of this study to replicate previous studies, but rather to draw attention to the conflicting debate arising from previous studies on job insecurity and its potential outcomes. As a result, the study seeks to explore how individual employees perceive the effects of job insecurity and its job-related attitudes (organisational commitment and work engagement) within an open distance learning environment. The study focused not only on employees' overall concerns about job continuity, such as the unidimensional (global) perspective, but also integrated the perceived threat to valuable job features, which is an area taken for granted by previous studies.

The main purpose of the study was thus to explore the relationship between job insecurity and two job-related attitudes, namely organisational commitment and work engagement, in an open distance learning institution. The study further aimed to determine the extent to which components of job insecurity and components of work engagement can predict organisational commitment. Firstly, the study provides a theoretical exposition of what multidimensional job insecurity entails and its effects on the selected job-related attitudes (organisational commitment and work engagement), followed by the objectives of the research study. Thereafter, the research methodology guiding the research study is set out and the research results presented. The study concludes with a discussion of the results and conclusions, with particular reference to implications for future research studies.

Job insecurity construct

It is surprising, after decades of research, that consensus on a definition of job insecurity has not yet been reached (De Witte 1999). On the basis of an extensive literature review, it is evident that job insecurity is conceptualised from two distinct perspectives, namely a global (unidimensional) and a multidimensional perspective (Ashford et al. 1989; De Witte 2005; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984; Sverke & Hellgren 2002), with most studies using the global perspective (Bosman, Buitendach & Laba 2005a; De Witte 1999, 2005).

According to the global perspective, job insecurity has been defined as the threat of job loss or job uncertainty (Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti & Happonen 2000). This implies that employees who experience job insecurity are uncertain whether they will be able to continue working or whether they will lose their jobs in the near future.

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) were the first researchers to consider job insecurity as a multidimensional concept. They define job insecurity as "the perceived powerlessness to maintain the desired continuity in a threatened job situation"

(Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984: 438). Their definition serves as a starting point for understanding the concept of job insecurity as represented by two core dimensions, namely the severity of the threat (the importance and probability of losing the job and/or job attributes) and the extent of powerlessness to counteract the threat. In other words, they maintain that employees only feel insecure about their jobs if they perceive the threat to their job to be severe and simultaneously feel powerless to do anything about their situation.

The theoretical framework of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984), later expanded by Ashford et al. (1989), categorised job insecurity into five related components, namely importance and likelihood of a loss of job features, importance and likelihood of job loss, and perceived powerlessness.

Importance of job features entails the importance of the job aspects such as schedule, work, pay and promotional opportunities. According to Ashford et al. (1989), the more features employees perceive to be threatened, the greater the feeling of job insecurity. In addition, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) note that the loss of any valuable job features is an important aspect of job insecurity that is often overlooked.

Likelihood of loss of job features is accompanied by feelings that important job features are being threatened. The likelihood of losing job features is computed by multiplying the perceived threat to each job feature by its importance and then adding the score for each feature to obtain an overall severity rating for the importance and likelihood of loss of job features (Ashford et al. 1989; Cheng, Huang, Lee & Ren 2012; Lee, Bobko & Chen 2006).

Importance of job loss relates to the perceived threat of the occurrence of various events that would negatively affect the employee's entire job, such as being laid off or fired, while likelihood of job loss refers to the perceptions of losing one's job. According to Mauno and Kinnunen (2002), the likelihood of various changes that may occur in an employee's work situation is related to the cognitive or rational concept of job insecurity. Perceived powerlessness entails the employee's relative inability to control threats related to his or her job (Ashford et al. 1989).

Job insecurity can also be clustered into quantitative and qualitative forms of job insecurity (Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson 1999). Quantitative job insecurity, being similar to global perspectives, entails worrying about losing the job itself, while qualitative job insecurity, echoing the multidimensional perspectives, pertains to losing important job features. The qualitative stance relates to potential loss of quality in the employment relationship, particularly a decline in working conditions, demotion, lack of career opportunities, decreased salary development and concerns about person-organisation fit in the future. The views of multidimensional job

insecurity, as expanded by Ashford et al. (1989), serve as the theoretical framework adopted in this study, since they assess job insecurity in terms of losing both valuable job features and the total job itself, as well as perceived powerlessness.

Organisational commitment

An important aspect regarding organisational commitment is the identification of factors that induce employees to stay with or leave the organisation in times of unpleasant organisational situations (Newstrom & Davies 2007). Organisational commitment is viewed as a vital variable in facilitating the understanding of an employee's attitudes and behaviour in the workplace (Hui & Lee 2000). It is also valuable to set up blueprints for the continued existence and success of an organisation during unpleasant organisational situations (Allen & Meyer 1990). According to Salami (2008), the concept of organisational commitment has the potential to cultivate a healthy organisational climate, increase morale, motivate employees and increase productivity. Salami (2008) identifies a need for employees to be committed to the success and effectiveness of the organisation.

Although organisational commitment has been defined in a wide variety of ways over the years, no consensus has yet been reached on the precise definition of commitment (Allen & Meyer 1990). For instance, earlier studies have defined commitment as a unidimensional construct based on employees' emotional attachment to the organisation (attitudinal perspective) (Mowday, Steers & Porter 1979; Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian 1974), while others define it in relation to the costs associated with leaving the organisation (behavioural perspective) (Becker, as cited in Meyer & Allen 1991, 1997; Powell & Meyer 2004).

In the attitudinal perspective, research has been directed largely towards identifying factors that contribute to the development of commitment and the behavioural consequences of such commitment (Allen & Meyer 1990). The attitudinal perspective of commitment is primarily based on the process through which people come to think about their relationship with the organisation. Hence, considerable studies have devoted their research to understanding the relative strength of an employee's identification with and involvement in the organisation (Buitendach & De Witte 2005; Mowday et al. 1979).

Following the earlier work of Porter et al. (1974) and Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982), numerous studies have classified the theoretical framework of commitment into three unified attributes, namely a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values; a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation; and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organisation.

According to Mowday et al. (1979), an employee can only express his or her commitment to the organisation provided he or she exhibits all three attributes. A positive spinoff of high commitment is an employee who is happier at work, spends less time away from work and is less likely to leave the organisation (Allen & Meyer 1990). Similarly, Zangaro (2001) stresses that employees who are not committed to the organisation are unable to exhibit all three attributes, and consequently the organisation is able to predict turnover intention based on employees' attitudes.

Another unidimensional construct is the behavioural perspective, which focuses primarily on identifying conditions under which behaviour, once exhibited, tends to be repeated, and also examines the effects of such behaviour on attitude change (Allen & Meyer 1990). In this perspective, commitment is described as a "consistent line of activity" resulting from the accumulation of "side bets", which could be lost if such activity were terminated (Becker, as cited in Meyer & Parfyonova 2010). According to Meyer and Allen (1991), commitment as a side bet exists the moment something significant to individual employees, such as pension and seniority, becomes contingent upon continued employment in the organisation. In essence, commitment as a side bet indicates that individual employees value their investment in their organisation, which simply makes leaving the organisation difficult in terms of an uncertain job situation. In a situation where the labour market is not creating any employment, individual employees are also forced to remain loyal to their organisation because of a lack of alternative work arrangement elsewhere in the labour market.

The behavioural approach of commitment relates to processes through which employees feel trapped in a certain organisation (Jaros 1997; Mowday et al. 1982). Both Mowday et al. (1982) and Zangaro (2001) assert that employees become committed to the organisation because of fringe benefits, salary as a function of age or tenure, which are too valuable to employees for them to leave or to look for alternative work elsewhere. Thus, employees who remain with the organisation primarily to avoid costs associated with leaving have little incentive to do more than is required of them, and they can easily reduce their work effort as a result of resentment, caused by feeling trapped in the organisation (Jaros 1997; Mowday et al. 1982; Zangaro 2001).

Many definitions of commitment have been presented since the work of Mowday et al. (1979). However, the conceptual framework of Allen and Meyer (1990) actually identified the three distinctive components of commitment, namely affective, continuance and normative commitment, as discussed briefly below.

Affective commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation (Allen & Meyer 1990; Meyer & Allen 1991, 1997). It is generally believed that affectively committed employees continue working with great devotion on a voluntary basis. The antecedents of affective commitment

comprise job characteristics such as task autonomy, task significance, task identity, skill variety and supervisory feedback, organisational dependability as well as perceived participatory management (Newstrom & Davies 2007; Salami 2008; Zangaro 2001).

Continuance commitment refers to commitment based on the cost implication that employees associate with leaving the organisation (Allen & Meyer 1990; Meyer & Allen 1991, 1997). Continuance commitment is responsible for and associated with ensuring that employees retain their organisational membership. The antecedent of continuance commitment includes age (availability of job opportunities in the labour market), tenure (non-transferable investment), career satisfaction and intention to leave (Zangaro 2001).

Normative commitment reflects employees' feelings of obligation to remain with an organisation (Allen & Meyer 1990; Meyer & Allen 1991, 1997). The antecedents for normative commitment include colleagues' commitment, organisational dependability and participatory management (Zangaro 2001).

Although the dimensions of organisational commitment may possibly result in differing outcomes, they can also predict commonalities (Jaros 1997). Meyer and Allen (1997) posit that employees can experience more than one mindset simultaneously. For example, according to Meyer and Allen (1997) it is possible for employees to feel both a desire and an obligation to remain with the organisation. As a result, they propose that individual employees should have a commitment profile reflecting the relative strength of their affective, continuance and normative commitments.

Work engagement

Work engagement is important because it is associated with positive organisational outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, organisational commitment, motivation and low turnover intention, while it improves the health and well-being of employees (Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli 2003; Chughtai & Buckley 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker 2004). More importantly, employees who are engaged in their work roles are likely to be committed to the organisation, while those who are disengaged are more likely to demonstrate less commitment and a greater intention to leave the organisation (Saks 2006). Chughtai and Buckley (2008) maintain that investing in conditions that foster work engagement among employees is vital for the growth and profitability of the organisation.

The earliest definition of engagement was based on the work of Kahn (1990), which involves the expression of the self through work and other employee-role activities. According to Kahn (1990), engagement entails the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self in task behaviours that

promote connections to work and to others. His definition considers a person's physical, emotional and cognitive make-up as relevant. He also gives reasons for engagement and disengagement at work with specific reference to factors that could contribute thereto. In terms of Kahn's (1990) definition, work engagement relates to the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles in which they employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances. Engaged employees become physically involved in their tasks, cognitively alert and emotionally connected to their jobs and hide their true identity, thoughts and feelings during role performances (Coetzee & De Villiers 2010; Kahn 1990; Olivier & Rothmann 2007).

In a similar vein, May, Gilson and Harter (2004) describe engagement in terms of physical, emotional and cognitive resources, which sustain role-related tasks when individuals engage themselves in work activities. For them, engagement is concerned with how individuals employ themselves during the performance of their work activities. They maintain that engagement entails the active use of emotions and behaviours, which are separate from cognition.

Researchers such as Roberts and Davenport (2002: 21) define engagement as a person's enthusiasm and involvement in his or her job. They maintain that people who are highly engaged in their work activity and identify personally with it are often motivated by the work itself. According to them, engaged employees constantly report that their work makes good use of their skills and abilities, is challenging and stimulating, and provides them with a sense of personal accomplishment.

Other studies identified two different but related approaches to the understanding of engagement (Rothmann 2003; Storm & Rothmann 2003). The first approach is outlined by Maslach and Leiter (1997) and considers engagement as the antithesis of burnout. They consistently rephrase the definition of burnout as the erosion of work engagement with the job. For them, engagement is characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy, which are the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions, namely, exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy.

Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker (2002) take a different approach and criticise the approach of Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) for incorporating and operationalising engagement with the same instrument as burnout. However, Schaufeli et al. (2002) acknowledge that burnout is the antithesis of engagement, but argue that engagement cannot be measured by the opposite profile of burnout, namely the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) scores. For them, engagement should be operationalised in its own right and with different instruments from the MBI, as suggested by Maslach and Leiter (1997).

Schaufeli et al. (2002), as well as Schaufeli and Bakker (2003), define engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by three interrelated dimensions, namely vigour, dedication, and absorption". They assert that engagement does not refer to a momentary and specific state, but rather that it is a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behaviour (Schaufeli & Bakker 2003; Schaufeli et al. 2002). The following dimensions are considered relevant for work engagement:

- Vigour is characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, not being easily fatigued and persistence even in the face of difficulties (Schaufeli et al. 2002).
- Dedication is characterised by deriving a sense of significance from one's work, by feeling enthusiastic and proud about one's job and by feeling inspired and challenged by it (Schaufeli et al. 2002).
- Absorption is characterised by being totally and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulties detaching oneself from it. Time passes quickly and one forgets everything else (Schaufeli et al. 2002).

The relationship between job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement

Based on the theoretical framework of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984), job-related variables are interdependent. The framework implicitly and explicitly states that employees' feeling of job insecurity is derived from both the subjective and objective threat (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984) experienced in the work situation. However, the subjective feelings of job insecurity have a proclivity to influence job-related attitudes such as organisational commitment and work engagement.

Like other work-related stressors, job insecurity is considered detrimental to the individual employee and the organisation (De Witte 1999; De Cuyper & De Witte 2005) because of negative job-related attitudes. Numerous studies have linked the perception of job insecurity to a decline in organisational commitment (Ashford et al. 1989; Bosman et al. 2005; Buitendach & De Witte 2005; Meyer & Parfyonova 2010; Silla, De Cuyper, Gracia, Peiró & De Witte 2009) and increased disengagement. It is also linked to less enthusiasm about jobs, less willingness to expend time and energy (De Cuyper & De Witte 2005; De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, De Witte & Alarco 2008;), decreased job satisfaction and job involvement as well as intention to quit (Cheng & Chan 2008).

However, in the meta-analyses conducted by Sverke and Hellgren (2002), such negative job-related attitudes (namely lack of organisational commitment and work engagement) are insignificant because employees are unique and they each interpret their situation differently. Hence, two individuals would differ in terms of their experience and interpretation of their immediate work situations (De Witte 1999, 2005; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984), because employees do not necessarily respond in the same way when faced with uncertain situations.

Other researchers have argued that the fear of losing their job may motivate employees to engage in individual action to actively cope with the threat (Hirschman 1970; Sverke & Hellgren 2002). For example, employees might think that by increasing their performance effort, they might lower the possibility of losing their job. It is further assumed that if employees are engaged, their subjective assessment of the objective threat will be affected in such a way that they do not experience job insecurity as much as anticipated (Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas & Nätti 2005) This can further be explained through the conservation of resources theory (COR theory of Hobfoll & Shirom 2001), which suggests that an individual strives to gather and maintain various resources. According to the COR theory, such resource losses, whether anticipated or realised, are likely to accumulate, signifying that a resource loss in one area easily leads to resource losses in the other areas, thus strengthening the negative outcomes of job insecurity.

In addition, Sverke and Hellgren (2002) note that, even though findings could be similar, the magnitude of the relationship differs substantially between studies. This implies that the extent to which employees feel that they possess the necessary resources for handling the consequences of a realised threat differs from employee to employee as well as from country to country.

According to May et al. (2004), individuals who feel psychologically safe are likely to engage themselves more fully in their work activities. Thus, it could be assumed that a person in a psychologically unsafe situation (job insecurity) would most likely be less engaged in their work activities. In addition, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) explain that engaged employees perform better than those who are not engaged, because they are emotionally more positive (happy, joyful and enthusiastic) and enjoy better health. More importantly, engaged employees have the personal and job resources to motivate them to perform.

However, Luthans and Youssef (2007) note that when employees are concerned about the possibility of losing their job, they might initially tend to respond by working harder and longer to show their value to their organisation in the hope of securing their employment. They further state that if such extraordinary work efforts persist for too long, they might have unintended negative consequences,

including work performance quality deficits, job burnout and health problems such as increased stress, anxiety and depression. Some employees with very low levels of engagement, who may be defined as having active disengagement, may match what highly engaged colleagues are trying to accomplish. Therefore, encouraging work engagement is especially needed during uncertain times or when there is a threat of job loss.

Purpose of the study

This article set out to add empirical research to the current conceptual base concerning multidimensional job insecurity (particularly in an open distance learning institution) and related components, and how these relate to employees' organisational commitment and work engagement. Furthermore, the aim was to investigate whether job insecurity and work engagement can be used to predict organisational commitment.

Based on the purpose of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H_1: There is a significant relationship between job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement amongst staff in an open distance learning institution.

H_2: The various components of job insecurity and work engagement will predict the total variance of organisational commitment.

Research design

Research approach

A cross-sectional survey design was used to describe the behaviour of the selected participants at one time.

Participants

For the purpose of this research study, the population consists of all employees ranging from unskilled workers to professionals in an open distance learning institution. The survey population/units of analysis were selected using a two-stage stratified probability sample proportional to size across the different departments. A sample size of $n=260$ was drawn from an entire population of $N=4\,460$ employees working across different strata, representing a 5.8% sample ratio of the population.

The descriptive information of the survey participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the survey participants

Items	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	121	46.5
	Female	139	53.5
Age group	21 to 34 years	40	15.4
	35 to 44 years	84	32.3
	45 to 54 years	78	30
	55 years or older	58	22.3
Education	Matric or lower	49	18.8
	Matric and post-matric certificate/diploma	53	20.4
	Bachelor's degree	30	11.5
	B (Hons) degree (or equivalent)	40	15.4
	Master's degree	46	17.7
	Doctorate	42	16.2
Tenure	Less than a year	5	1.9
	One year to less than two years	24	9.2
	Two years to less than five years	34	13.1
	Five years to less than ten years	41	15.8
	Ten years or more	156	60

The sample population for the survey consisted of more female (53.5%) than male (46.5%) employees. Over half the participants (52.3%) were older than 45. Almost half of the participants (49.3%) had completed a postgraduate degree. The majority of the participants (60%) reported that they had been with the organisation for ten years or more.

Research instruments

The Job Insecurity Scale (JIS) was used to measure the levels of job insecurity with respect to the severity of the threat (importance and likelihood of job features, and importance and likelihood of possible changes in the total job) and perceived powerlessness. In short, the job insecurity scale as formulated by Ashford et al. (1989) is computed as follows: job insecurity = [(Σ importance of job features × likelihood of losing job features) + (Σ importance of job loss × likelihood of job

loss)] × perceived powerlessness to resist threat. The importance of job features consists of attributes such as promotional opportunities, freedom to schedule work and current salary level. The probability of losing job features refers to any changes that could negatively affect the job attributes. The greater the extent to which the individual perceives job features to be threatened, the greater the job insecurity. The importance of total job relates to the current job and consists of attributes such as being demoted, fired or forced to take early retirement. The survey participants were requested to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unimportant/very unlikely) to 5 (very important/very likely). An option of 'not applicable' was also included in the instruments.

The Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) consists of 24 items that summarise affective, continuance and normative commitment arranged along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A typical question that measures affective commitment would be "I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation". An example for continuance commitment would be "It would be difficult for me to leave my organisation at the moment, even if I wanted to", and an example for normative commitment would be "Things were better in the days when people stayed with one organisation for most of their careers". Heymans (2002) reported a total of 0.80 internal consistencies in a study done in South Africa.

The 17 items on the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) were used to measure work engagement. The UWES consists of three dimensions, namely vigour, dedication and absorption, using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example of a typical question for vigour would be "At my work, I feel bursting with energy". An example of a question relating to dedication would be "I feel happy when I am working intensely", and a typical example of absorption would be "I get carried away when I'm working".

Research procedure

Permission to conduct the study was approved by the Ethics Committee at the institution. The questionnaires were self-administrated paper-based or administered via computer-aided telephone interviews (CATI). The objectives of the study were explained to the participants, and verbal consent was required prior to the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Statistical analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 2010 version 21) software program was used to perform the required statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean and standard deviation) were analysed to determine the levels of job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement. Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) was used to determine the internal consistency of the measuring instruments (Clark & Watson 1995). Product-moment correlation coefficients were used to specify the relationships between the variables. A 95% confidence interval level ($p \le 0.05$) was set for statistical significance. The cut-off point for practical significance of correlation between variables was set according to the guidelines established by Cohen (1988), meaning correlation is practically significant if $r = 0.10$ (small effect), $r = 0.30$ (medium effect) and $r = 0.50$ (large effect). A multiple linear regression analysis (R^2) was used to determine the proportion of the total variance of one variable that is explained by another variable.

Research results

Means, standard deviations and Cronbach's alpha coefficients

The descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients of the measuring instruments are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha coefficients and correlations

	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Job insecurity	3.63	0.58	0.90									
Importance of job feature	4.26	0.19	0.90									
Likelihood of losing job feature	3.35	0.14	0.95	.183**								
Importance of job loss	3.98	0.12	0.90	.149*	-.173							
Likelihood of job loss	2.59	0.32	0.90	.108	.256**	.125						
Organisational commitment	**3.38**	**0.30**	**0.77**									
Affective commitment	3.46	0.25	0.74	.138*	.062	-.063	-.156	.304				
Continuance commitment	3.45	0.23	0.83	.017	.147*	.022	.074	.065	.156			
Work engagement	**3.79**	**0.232**	**0.93**									
Vigour	3.79	0.18	0.77	.130*	.023	.028	.016	.346**	.441*	.205*		
Dedication	3.95	0.16	0.87	.114	.024	.035	-.052	.350**	.415**	.202**	.821**	
Absorption	3.70	0.26	0.83	.040	.055	.062	-.001	.279**	.333**	.257**	.803**	.761**

** Correlation is significant at a 0.01 level (2-tailed)
 * Correlation is significant at a 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Based on Table 2, the internal consistencies for the measuring instruments were satisfactory (0.90; 0.77; 0.93 respectively). The results further show that the mean scores of the instruments are above the mid-point of 3 with the exception of the likelihood of job loss (2.59), suggesting that survey participants do not anticipate the possibility of losing their job. The results also show that there is a positive significant relationship between the variables. Thus, in terms of Hypothesis 1 (relationship between job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement), the results are partially accepted.

Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analyses were used to test the proportion of the total variance of one or more variables that is explained by another variable. The results of a multiple regression analysis with organisational commitment as the dependent variable and job insecurity and work engagement as independent variables are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Model summary of the regression analysis between job insecurity and work engagement and organisational commitment

Model	Variables	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	Constant	22.530	3.751		6.007	.000
	Importance of job features	.031	.045	.040	.686	.493
	Likelihood of job features	.097	.030	.184*	3.187	.002*
	Importance of job loss	-.029	.040	-.430	-.738	.461
	Likelihood of job loss	-.056	.050	-.065	-1.119	.264
	Perceived powerlessness	.337	.224	.090	1.504	.134
	Vigour	.536	.247	.242*	2.169	.031*
	Dedication	.215	.207	.106	1.038	.300
	Absorption	.198	.169	.115	1.169	.243

a. Dependent variable: Organisational commitment

* Significant at 0.05

Table 4: Model summary of linear multiple regression analysis for JIS, OCQ and UWES

Model	R square	R	Adjusted R square	F	Sig.
1	.275	.525[a]	.251	11.534	.000[a]

a. Predictors: (constant), importance of job features, likelihood of job features, importance of job loss, likelihood of job loss, perceived powerlessness, vigour, dedication, absorption

It can be seen from Table 4 that job insecurity and work engagement explain 25% of the variation in organisational commitment, and the remaining 75% can be attributed to factors beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, according to Table 3, the standardised beta for vigour ($\beta=.242$) explains more variance of the dependent variable than the standardised beta for likelihood of loss of job features ($\beta=.184$). This result suggests that the linear multiple regressions are significant ($F=11.534$, $p<0.01$), implying that the model fits the data (regression coefficients). Thus, the hypothesis that job insecurity and work engagement predict organisational commitment is supported.

Turning to Hypothesis 2, the result of the multiple linear regression analysis showed that job insecurity (likelihood of job features) and work engagement (vigour) predicted 25% of the total variance of organisational commitment. Although the effect was insubstantial (25% of variance was explained), to provide any practical implication, Hypothesis 2 is partially accepted.

Discussion

The theoretical and empirical studies illustrated the prevalence of a relationship between job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement. The results showed that job insecurity was positively correlated with both organisational commitment and work engagement. This suggests that higher levels of job insecurity among the survey population could have resulted in higher levels of organisational commitment and work engagement.

However, the nature of this correlation was weak, and the small effect is incongruent with the findings of previous studies. One explanation for the inconsistency could be associated with the labour market prospects where such studies were conducted. The perception of labour-market risk or attachment (the employed person's job security and the unemployed person's employment prospects) is indeed an important determinant in subjective well-being. In a labour market that is characterised by a high rate of unemployment and limited job creation as well as a high degree of

mismatch in employee employability in the labour market, individual employees tend to embrace their opportunities.

In support hereof, Sverke and Hellgren (2002) assert that employees' reactions to organisational situations often depend on a number of factors, such as characteristics of the labour market, employability, personal characteristics and family responsibilities. For instance, the South African labour market is increasingly inflexible, and as a result individual employees cannot afford to leave their jobs despite being dissatisfied or insecure in their current employment.

Another explanation for the inconsistency can be related to the fact that subjective feelings of job insecurity are not the same for all employees exposed to similar work situations (De Witte 1999, 2005; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984), because employees do not necessarily respond in the same way to uncertain situations. In a similar vein, Sverke and Hellgren (2002), in their meta-analyses, maintain that negative job-related attitudes are insignificant, because employees are unique and they each interpret their situation differently.

The theoretical framework of exit, voice, loyalty and neglect formulated by Hirschman (1970) can also be utilised to explain the inconsistency between this empirical study and previous studies. It is well documented that exit and voice are the main economic and political alternatives that individual employees will select, particularly when an organisation is experiencing unpleasant situations. Hirschman maintains that during organisational decline, disgruntled employees who have better job prospects elsewhere in the labour market will normally quit the organisation (exit), while some will remain to improve the situation (voice) and/or others will remain to support the organisation (loyalty). In his framework, Hirschman describes loyalty as the product of factors that bind the individual employee to the organisation, which makes exit costly and undermines voice. This implies that individual employees can attempt to stave off losing job features as well as the total job by simply demonstrating their willingness and loyalty to remain with the organisation. In support of this, Sverke and Hellgren (2001) also emphasise that employees who perceive possible threats to their jobs and/or job features may increase their commitment and work effort in order to be more valuable to the organisation.

Luthans and Youssef (2007) also note that when employees are concerned about the possibility of losing their jobs, they might initially tend to respond by working harder and longer to show their value to their organisation in the hope of securing their employment. They further state that if such extraordinary work efforts persist for too long, there might be unintended negative consequences, such as work performance quality deficits, job burnout and health problems, including increased stress, anxiety and depression.

Some employees with very low levels of engagement, who may be defined as having active disengagement, may match what highly engaged colleagues are trying to accomplish. Therefore, encouraging engagement is especially needed during times of uncertainty or when there is a threat of job loss. A sense of organisational identification may prevent employees from becoming alienated (job insecurity) and may be an important precondition for the general feeling of being committed and engaged.

Other researchers have argued that the fear of job loss may motivate employees to engage in individual action in order to cope actively with the threat (Hirschman 1970; Sverke & Hellgren 2002). Furthermore, Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas and Nätti (2005) assume that if employees are engaged, their subjective assessment of the objective threat will be affected in such a way that they do not experience high job insecurity. For example, employees might think that by increasing their performance effort, they might lower the possibility of losing their job.

Limitations

This study had various limitations. Firstly, all data were collected using self-reporting questionnaires, which might raise the possibility of responses being affected by a common method. Secondly, the data were collected at one point in time, making it difficult to assess causal relationship. As a result, longitudinal research is recommended to establish whether causal relationships prevail between job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement. Thirdly, this study cannot be compared to other previous studies, because the South African labour market dynamic is different from that of other countries. For instance, the current South African labour market status favours skilled and professional workers to unskilled workers, resulting in the latter remaining with the organisation employing them because of the difficulty of finding other employment.

Conclusion

The relationship between job insecurity, organisational commitment and work engagement was investigated. A statistically significant relationship was observable, although the practical relationship was weak and had a small effect. This suggests that survey participants who fear that they will lose their job might increase their chances of security (employment) by remaining with the organisation and being dedicated to their job roles. Further research is needed to understand the potentially differential effects of various dimensions of job insecurity and its outcomes.

References

Allen, N.J. & Meyer, J.P. 1990. 'The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normal commitment to the organization', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 63(1): 1–18.

Ashford, S.J., Lee, C. & Bobko, P. 1989. 'Content, causes and consequences of job insecurity: a theory-based measure and substantive test', *Academy of Management Journal*, 32(4): 803–829.

Bakker, A.B. & Demerouti, E. 2007. 'The job demands-resources model: state of the art', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3): 309–328.

Bakker, A.B., Demerouti, E. & Schaufeli, W.B. 2003. 'Dual processes at work in a call centre: an application of the job demands-resources model', *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 12(4): 393–417.

Bordia, P., Hobman, E., Jones, E., Gallois, C. & Callan, V.J. 2004. 'Uncertainty during organisational change: types, consequences and management strategies', *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 18(4): 507–532.

Bosman, J., Buitendach, J.H. & Laba, K. 2005a. 'Job insecurity, burnout and organisational commitment among employees of a financial institution in Gauteng', *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 31(4): 32–40.

Bosman, J., Buitendach, J.H. & Rothmann, S. 2005b. 'Work locus of control and dispositional optimism as antecedents to job insecurity', *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 31(4): 17–23.

Buitendach, J.H. & De Witte, H. 2005. 'Job insecurity, extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment of maintenance workers in a parastatal', *SA Journal of Business Management*, 36(2): 27–38.

Cheng, G.H.L. & Chan, D.K.S. 2008. 'Who suffers more from job insecurity? A meta-analytic review', *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 57(2): 272–303.

Cheng, T., Haung, G., Lee, C. & Ren, X. 2012. 'Longitudinal effects of job insecurity on employee outcomes: the moderating role of emotional intelligence and the leader-member exchange', *Asian Pacific Journal of Management*, 29(3): 709–728.

Chipunza, C. & Gwarinda, S.A. 2010. 'Transformational leadership in merging higher education institutions: a case study', *SA Journal of Human Resources Management*, 8(1): 1–10.

Chughtai, A.A. & Buckley, F. 2008. 'Work engagement and its relationship with state and trait trust: a conceptual analysis', *Journal of Behavioural and Applied Management*, 10(1): 47–71.

Clark, A.E., Knabe, A. & Rätzel, S. 2010. 'Boon or bane? Others' unemployment, well-being and job insecurity', *Labour Economics*, 17(1): 52–61.

Clark, L.A. & Watson, D. 1995. 'Constructing validity: basic issues in objective scale development', *Psychological Assessment*, 7(3): 309–319.

Coetzee, M. & De Villiers, M. 2010. 'Sources of job stress, work engagement and career orientations of employees in a South African financial institution', *Southern African Business Review*, 14(1): 27–57.

Cohen, J. 1988. *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioural Sciences* (2nd edition). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

De Cuyper, N., Bernhard-Oettel, C., Berntson, E., De Witte, H. & Alarco, B. 2008. 'Employability and employees' well-being: mediation by job insecurity', *Applied Psychology: an International Review*, 57(3): 488–509.

De Cuyper, N. & De Witte, H. 2005. 'Job insecurity: mediator or moderator of the relationship between type of contract and various outcomes?', *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology,* 31(4): 78–86.

De Cuyper, N., De Witte, H., Vander Elst, T. & Handaja, Y. 2010. 'Objective threat of unemployment and situational uncertainty during restructuring: associations with perceived job insecurity and strain', *Journal of Business Psychology*, 25(1): 75–85.

De Witte, H. 1999. 'Job insecurity and psychological well-being: review of the literature and exploration of some unresolved issues', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 8(2): 155-177.

De Witte, H. 2005. 'Job insecurity: review of the international literature on definitions, prevalence, antecedents and consequences', *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 31(4): 1–6.

Elman, C. & O'Rand, A. 2002. 'Perceived job insecurity and entry into work-related education and training among adult workers', *Social Science Research*, 31(1): 49–76.

Greenhalgh, L. & Rosenblatt, Z. 1984. 'Job insecurity: toward conceptual clarity', *Academy of Management Review*, 9(3): 438–448.

Greenhalgh, L. & Rosenblatt, Z. 2010. 'Evolution of research on job insecurity', *International Studies on Management and Organisation*, 40(1): 6–19.

Hellgren, J., Sverke, M. & Isaksson, M. 1999. 'A two-dimensional approach to job insecurity: consequences for employee attitudes and well-being', *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 8(2): 179–195.

Heymans, D.R. 2002. Job insecurity, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Unpublished master's dissertation, Potchefstroom University for CHE, South Africa.

Hirschman, A.O. 1970. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hobfoll, S., & Shirom, A. 2001. 'Stress and burnout in the workplace', In Golembiewski, R. (Ed.), *Handbook of Organisational Behaviour* (2nd edition). New York: Dekker.

Hui, C. & Lee, C. 2000. 'Moderating effects of organisational-based self-esteem on organizational uncertainty: employee response relationships', *Journal of Management*, 26(2): 215–232.

Jahoda, M. 1982. *Employment and Unemployment: a Social-psychological Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jaros, S.J. 1997. 'An assessment of Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model of organisational commitment and turnover intentions', *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 51(3): 319–337.

Kahn, W.A. 1990. 'Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work', *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4): 692–724.

Kinnunen, U., Mauno, S., Nätti, J. & Happonen, M. 2000. 'Organizational antecedents and outcomes of job insecurity: a longitudinal study in three organizations in Finland', *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 21(4): 443–459.

Lee, C., Bobko, P. & Chen, Z.X. 2006. 'Investigation of the multidimensional model of job insecurity in China and the USA', *Applied Psychology: an International Review*, 55(4): 512–540.

Luthans, F. & Youssef, C.M. 2007. 'Emerging positive organisational behaviour', *Journal of Management*, 33(3): 321–349.

Maslach, C. & Leiter, M.P. 1997. *The Truth about Burnout: How Organisations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do about It*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W.B. & Leiter, M.P. 2001. 'Job burnout', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52: 397–422.

Mauno, S. & Kinnunen, U. 2002. 'Perceived job insecurity among dual-earner couples: Do its antecedents vary according to gender, economic sector and the measure used?', *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, 75(3): 295–314.

Mauno, S., Kinnunen, U., Mäkikangas, A. & Nätti, J. 2005. 'Psychological consequences of fixed-term employment and perceived job insecurity among health care staff', *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 14(3): 209–237.

May, D.R., Gilson, R.L. & Harter, L.M. 2004. 'The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work', *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, 77(1): 11–37.

Meyer, J.P. & Allen, N.J. 1991. 'A three-component conceptualisation of organisational commitment', *Human Resource Management Review*, 1(1): 61–89.

Meyer, J.P. & Allen, N.J. 1997. *Commitment in the Workplace: Theory, Research, and Application*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Meyer, J.P. & Parfyonova, N.M. 2010. 'Normative commitment in the workplace: a theoretical analysis and re-conceptualisation', *Human Resource Management Review*, 20(4): 283–294.

Mowday, R.T., Porter, L.W. & Steers, R.M. 1982. *Employee-organisation Linkages: the Psychology of Commitment, Absenteeism, and Turnover*. San Diego: Academic Press.

Mowday, R.T., Steers, R.M. & Porter, L.W. 1979. 'The measurement of organisational commitment', *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 14(2): 224–247.

Newstrom, J.W. & Davies, K. 2007. *Organisational Behaviour: Human Behaviour at Work* (12th edition). New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Olivier, A.L. & Rothmann, S. 2007. 'Antecedents of work engagement in a multinational oil company', *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 33(3): 49–56.

Porter, L.W., Steers, R.M., Mowday, R.T. & Boulian, P.V. 1974. 'Organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover among psychiatric technicians', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 59(5): 603–609.

Powell, D.M. & Meyer, J.P. 2004. 'Side-bet theory revisited and the three-component model of organisational commitment', *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 65(1): 157–177.

Roberts, D.R. & Davenport, T.O. 2002. 'Job engagement: why it's important and how to improve it', *Employment Relations Today*, 29(3): 21–29.

Rothmann, S. 2003. 'Burnout and engagement: a South African perspective', *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 29(4): 16–25.

Rothmann, S. & Pieterse, J. 2007. 'Predictors of work-related well-being in sector education training authorities', *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 10(3): 298–312.

Saks, A.M. 2006. 'Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21: 600 –619.

Salami, S.O. 2008. 'Demographic and psychological factors predicting organisational commitment among industrial workers', *Anthropologist*, 10(1): 31–38.

Schaufeli, W.B. & Bakker, A.B. 2003. Test manual for the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Unpublished manuscript, Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Available at: http://www.schaufeli.com. Accessed: 1 July 2010.

Schaufeli, W.B. & Bakker, A.B. 2004. 'Work engagement and the measurement of a concept', *Gedrag & Organisatie*, 17(2): 89–112.

Schaufeli, W.B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V. & Bakker, A.B. 2002. 'The measurement of engagement and burnout: a two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3(1): 71–92.

Silla, I., De Cuyper, N., Gracia, F.J., Peiró, J.M. & De Witte, H. 2009. 'Job insecurity and well-being: moderation by employability', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 10(6): 739–751.

SPSS PASW version 21. 2010. *Software Computer Package*. Chicago: SPSS Institute.

Storm, K. & Rothmann, I. 2003. 'A psychometric analysis of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale in the South African Police service', *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 29(4): 62–70.

Sverke, M. & Hellgren, J. 2001. 'Exit, voice, loyalty reactions to job insecurity in Sweden: do unionised and non-unionised employees differ?', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 39(2): 167–182.

Sverke, M. & Hellgren, J. 2002. 'The nature of job insecurity: understanding employment uncertainty on the brink of a new millennium', *Applied Psychology: an International Review*, 51(1): 23–42.

Zangaro, G.A. 2001. 'Organisational commitment: a concept analysis', *Nursing Forum*, 36(2): 14–21.