

Towards a research agenda for job insecurity in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this research was to develop a research agenda for job insecurity in South African organisations, for which little published research exists. This agenda was developed by conceptualising and defining job insecurity, determining which valid and reliable measuring instruments of job insecurity exist, investigating trends in South African research and finally incorporating the views of South African managers. A qualitative, descriptive research design was followed to perform content analysis and an extensive literature review. Results were enhanced with content analysis of semi-structured interviews with managers from different organisations ($N = 24$). Results were integrated into a proposed model for job insecurity in order to serve as a guideline for future research and as a tool for managers to recognise, prevent and manage job insecurity.

Key words: job insecurity

INTRODUCTION

The increase in research and literature on the topic of job insecurity over the past ten years emphasises the rapid increase in concern about this phenomenon, both nationally and internationally (De Witte 1999; Elbert 2002; Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson 1999; Heymans 2002; Labuschagne, Buitendach & Bosman 2005; Nolan, Wichert & Burchell 2000; Sverke & Hellgren 2002; Sverke, Hellgren, Näswall, Chirumbolo, De Witte & Goslinga 2004). A major challenge and concern to South African organisations and managers is the increase in perceptions of job

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insecurity among employees at all levels of the organisational structure (Elbert 2002; Labuschagne et al. 2005). The emergence of job insecurity in South Africa has become a given within the current business, economic and political environment (Sauer 2003; Snoer 2005). South African organisations cannot afford the additional material and psychological costs that may result from experiences of job insecurity, yet the impact of job insecurity on individuals and organisations has become inevitable (Botha 2006; Van Schalkwyk 2005; Van Zyl 2005). The question is no longer about the existence of job insecurity in South African organisations, but the emphasis has shifted to measuring its impact on the individual, the organisation and the social environment, as well as the creation of possible interventions to minimise such impact.

From the literature, it is evident that job insecurity has been conceptualised and defined in different ways by various researchers and writers (Ashford, Lee & Bobko 1989; Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison & Pinneau 1975; De Witte 2000; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984; Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans & Van Vuuren 1991; Johnson, Messe & Crano 1984; Reisel 2002; Sverke et al. 2004). The common factor in the relevant publications is that job insecurity can be conceptualised as a perception that has predictive value as a cause of stress and that it implies consequences for the individual and the organisation. Due to the subjective nature of this perception, individuals will have different reactions to this possible stressor (Sverke et al. 2004).

Job insecurity has become an important organisational phenomenon and therefore a response to its impact, not only on the individual, but also at the organisational level, is needed. A study by Sverke and Goslinga (2003) revealed that job insecurity has immediate consequences, which may affect the attitudes of individuals and have possible long-term consequences that may affect an individual's health and behaviour. According to different studies, job insecurity is also related to work and organisational attitudes (Davy, Kinicki & Scheck 1997; Green, Felstead & Burchell 2000; Human 2002; Orpen 1993). Knowing the individual and organisational consequences of job insecurity and all its dimensions emphasises the need to investigate possible processes and factors that may moderate and mediate its effect. Ignoring or neglecting the current and evident future presence of job insecurity may result in dramatic and negative results for individuals, organisations and global growth of business in South Africa (Bothma 2005; Reynders 2005).

OBJECTIVES OF THE ARTICLE

The focus of this study was to investigate the current state of research on the phenomenon of job insecurity in South African organisations by analysing existing

national and international research conducted in this field. Studies include investigations into the dimensions and measurement of job insecurity, predictive factors, consequences and possible moderators. A need to consolidate and integrate the findings into a proposed model was identified in order to capture the strings of individual research and to consolidate and summarise existing knowledge.

The necessity to set a research agenda for job insecurity in South African organisations has become a task of priority to guide researchers to choose relevant, practical, significant and feasible research projects in order to prepare managers to intervene with respect to job insecurity issues in their organisations. It is important that future researchers and current managers have clear guidelines and tools to steer effective and relevant research and to support healthy individual and organisational development. The support of a theoretical model to serve as a research agenda for future research will not only provide guidance and structure to further research, but will also provide a fresh view on the methodology of investigation into the matter of job insecurity in South African organisations.

METHOD

In developing aims for a research agenda regarding job insecurity in South Africa, we followed two separate processes and in both employed content analysis. Content analysis is defined as “an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify contents in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner” (Bryman & Bell 2007: 304). Thus, although it is firmly considered as a qualitative research approach (Bryman & Bell 2007), it also allows for the quantitative description of qualitative content (Berelson 1952). Firstly, a complete review regarding job insecurity, antecedents of job insecurity and consequences, mediators and moderators of job insecurity was conducted in the form of qualitative, descriptive and explorative research. Secondly, interviews with managers were conducted to explore the construct in the South African context.

An explorative and descriptive investigation into existing literature on the construct of job insecurity and its related concepts was conducted. This was done in order to identify relevant publications and sources of information and research regarding job insecurity. Several national and international publications in subject journals were identified, as well as a number of books and a large body of previously unpublished South African research in the form of theses and dissertations. Once these sources had been identified, data were structured through qualitative content (textual) analysis. This involved classifying variables previously studied in relation to job insecurity into categories that emerged as relevant, such as *antecedents*,

mediators, moderators and consequences. Upon analysis, it became clear that sub-categories could be developed to further explicate the current body of work on the topic of job insecurity, for example, consequences could further be broken down into *individual, organisational and social* consequences. The analysis also yielded categories of interest to the construct of job insecurity itself, which included *theoretical conceptualisation, definition and measurement*.

In the second phase of our analysis, semi-structured interviews¹ with selected managers in South African organisations were conducted. Managers were selected mostly through convenience and purposive sampling. Sampling was purposive in the sense that managers in a variety of organisations were targeted, in order to represent the business sector as fully as possible. The sampling procedure can also be described as convenient, as only managers willing to take part in the research and sacrifice time for the interview were included. Also, some new participants were contacted based on referrals from interviewed managers (by means of snowball sampling).

The interviews focused on five themes, namely: the definition of job insecurity, levels of job insecurity experienced in the various organisations, exploring differences between national and global causes and predictors of job insecurity, consequences of job insecurity in South African organisations and the role of future research. The information gathered during interviews was classified into this coding scheme, and words were used as the unit of analysis and counted to gauge the relative importance of sub-themes within the five themes.

Finally, a research agenda for job insecurity in South African organisations is advanced by proposing a theoretical model that flows from the integration of interview results and existing literature.

RESULTS

Conceptualisation of job insecurity from international literature

Job insecurity has been conceptualised widely in the international literature (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984; Hartley et al. 1991; Hellgren et al. 1999; Roskies & Louis-Guerin 1990). As early as 1965, researchers and writers identified job insecurity as a phenomenon to be considered in the changing world of work (Kronhauser 1965). Throughout the literature, job insecurity has been conceptualised from two distinct perspectives; namely global and multidimensional. The global perspective underwrites the assumption that job insecurity can be conceptualised as the overall

concern about the future of one's job (Hartley et al. 1991). The literature shows the use of this conceptualisation in the context of change or crises, such as political change, mergers or reorganisations. In these cases, job insecurity is normally considered to be the phase prior to unemployment (Dooley 2003). Multidimensional conceptualisations conversely hold the viewpoint that job insecurity is a more complex phenomenon than only the fear of losing a job and includes dimensions such as the fear of losing job features, including job stability, positive performance appraisals and promotions (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984; Jacobson 1991).

The wide range of conceptualisations in the literature shows the importance and relevance of this phenomenon to the industrial and business environment. Many researchers and leaders in the academic field led the search to arrive at a common conceptualisation of job insecurity and to embed it into a structured model (Näswall 2004). Up to this point, no single conceptualisation or model has been developed and commonly accepted. Sverke and Hellgren (2002), after an extensive literature review, came to the conclusion that much still needs to be done in order to understand the full extent of the nature of job insecurity and to develop psychometrically valid and reliable measures. Studying the conceptualisation of job insecurity from a global and multidimensional perspective in the international literature led to the identification of five common themes in its conceptualisation, as discussed in the following sections.

Job insecurity as the perceived probability of job loss

Hartley et al. (1991) and Johnson et al. (1984) conducted their research from this perspective. They hypothesised that the fear of losing one's job will be significantly higher for employees working in an organisation undergoing change or a crisis. It is clear that a global conceptualisation will fit perfectly into this context, where most – if not all – employees should be experiencing a certain level of job insecurity. Both studies found higher levels of job insecurity among individuals involved in organisations undergoing major changes such as restructuring and downsizing. Hartley et al. (1991) were especially concerned with the coping of individuals during organisational crises and found that some individuals could cope better than others. These researchers found that individuals with an internal locus of control, high value attributes of their work and a lower need for security showed more efficient coping strategies to perceived feelings of job insecurity than individuals with an external locus of control, low value attributes of their work and a high need for security. Johnson et al. (1984) found that job performance among individuals who were affected by feelings of job insecurity due to organisational change was significantly lower than that of individuals who showed less inclination towards such feelings.

Job insecurity consists of objective and subjective components

One of Jacobson's (1991) distinctions of the multidimensionality of job insecurity from the global dimension was to conceptualise job insecurity as either an objective or subjective phenomenon. According to Jacobson, job insecurity can be conceptualised as an individual's subjective experience. Mauno, Kinnunen, Mäkikangas and Nätti (2005) suggested that job insecurity is a subjective estimation of one's chances of losing a job, which is based on the objective circumstances. According to Mauno et al., these objective circumstances become the antecedents of the job insecurity equation. Jacobson (1991) further argued that the objective available cues in the environment can be perceived by the individual as threats to his/her current job and/or position. These environmental cues may include things such as restructuring, retrenchments and downsizing.

Job insecurity has cognitive and affective components

Another distinction to the multidimensionality of job insecurity is the assumption that job insecurity has a cognitive and an affective quality (Jacobson 1991). The cognitive quality refers to concern about the likelihood of losing one's job, while the affective quality includes the concern, beliefs and feelings about the insecurity (De Witte 2000). According to De Witte, perceptions of job insecurity start with a cognitive appraisal of the future situation, which triggers emotions based on the meaning connected with the potential job loss, or the loss of job features.

Job insecurity has qualitative and quantitative dimensions

Isaksson, Pettersson and Hellgren (1998) gave new dimensionality to the conceptualisation of job insecurity by adding quantitative and qualitative values to the conceptualisation of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984). Where Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) conceptualised job insecurity as an affective subjectivity, Isaksson et al. (1998) expanded on this definition by regarding job insecurity as thoughts on quantitative and qualitative losses of job features. Quantitative job insecurity is concerned with the perceived threats of losing one's job itself, while qualitative job insecurity refers to the threats to, or uncertainty about, losing important job features and values, such as promotions, salary increases and future career development (De Witte 2005a).

Job insecurity is a stressor in relation to its predictors and outcomes

Mauno and Kinnunen (1999) conceptualised job insecurity as a stressor irrespective of its conceptualisation as global or multidimensional. This view includes the

application of stress theories to research on job insecurity. Some research has been done from the stress framework, which holds that stressors such as demands placed on the employee and the employee's experienced levels of the strain may produce feelings of job insecurity (Ashford et al. 1989; De Witte 2000; Mauno & Kinnunen 1999; Siegrist 1996; Sverke et al. 2004). Probst's (2002) integrated model of job insecurity confirms the perspective that job insecurity is a job stressor.

Determining the dimensionality of job insecurity from international literature

Definitions of job insecurity

Ashford et al. (1989) argued that developing a specific definition of job insecurity was problematic, because job insecurity was often measured as a secondary variable. Job insecurity definitions vary with regard to the context of dimension, from global (also referred to as uni-dimensional) to multidimensional definitions (Bartrum 2006).

Definitions of job insecurity were broadened over time by the increased interest in research of this phenomenon. The definition of Caplan et al. (1975: 812) of job insecurity as "general cognitive uncertainty about future security" is one of the first formal definitions. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984: 438) broadened this definition by adding a multidimensional context, "job insecurity can be defined as a feeling of powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a work situation". This definition introduced a subjective, affective component.

Roskies and Louis-Guerin (1990: 346) referred to job insecurity as "a concern about the possibility of employment uncertainty" and thereby included both a cognitive and affective component. The definition of Jacobson (1991: 31), "job insecurity is a perceptual phenomenon", underscores the subjective experience of the insecure situation from the objective nature thereof. Isaksson et al. (1998) added the terms 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' job insecurity to the definition of job insecurity. Reisel (2002: 90) took the stance that a multiplicative approach to job insecurity would offer greater conceptual clarity and defined job insecurity as "the sum of (cognitive threat + worry)". Reisel (2003) departed from research that defined job insecurity as powerlessness and stated that job insecurity is not only a function of its antecedents, but also an addition of the emotional reactions to these antecedents. Probst (2003: 452) defined job insecurity as "the perceived stability and continuance of one's job as one knows it". This definition does not explicitly include attitudinal or affective reactions to the perceived job insecurity. According to

De Witte (2005a), the definition of job insecurity must include the assumption that job insecurity is a stressor, consisting of the cognitive probability of losing a job and the affective experience of the concern thereof.

Antecedents of job insecurity

An antecedent of job insecurity is the collective term for the variables that either predict or cause the perception of job insecurity in individuals (De Witte 2005a). Sverke et al. (2004) showed a variety of possible antecedents to job security, for example restructuring, downsizing and economic globalisation. Mauno et al. (2005) were convinced that the objective circumstances of an insecure job situation can be defined as the antecedents of job insecurity.

When studying the antecedents of job insecurity, it is important to remember that individual appraisals of the environment are influenced by individual characteristics (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Ashford et al. (1989) defined antecedents as the individual and background factors predicting job insecurity. A summary of the possible antecedents found in the reviewed literature and research is reflected in Table 1.

Very little research to determine or measure the antecedents of job insecurity was found. Studies mostly assume the possibility that the context in which the study is taking place may cause or predict job insecurity. According to Näswall (2004), there is a lack of international research that focuses on the possible antecedents of job insecurity.

Mediators of job insecurity

Mediators of job insecurity can be defined as the variables that reflect the way in which an independent variable influences job insecurity (Baron & Kenny 1986). Mediators of job insecurity will intervene between the antecedents of job insecurity and the consequences of job insecurity, which will imply a causal order among the variables in the job insecurity model (Bartrum 2006).

The mediating effect of performance appraisal and coping strategies has been researched internationally (Ferrie, Shipley, Marmot, Stansfeld & Davey-Smith 1998). These studies found that effective performance management, which is perceived as fair to all employees, significantly mediates the relationship between the antecedents and the consequences of job insecurity. Probst (2002) investigated the possibility that powerlessness can be better considered as a mediating variable, rather than an aspect of job insecurity itself, and found that a sense of power may have a mediating effect on the work attitudes of some individuals. Mauno et al. (2005) and Feather

Table 1: Results from the analysis of antecedents of job insecurity found in international and national studies

Categories of job insecurity antecedents	Antecedent		South African studies
	International studies		
Organisational	Acquisitions	Burke & Nelson 1998; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	
	Consolidation	Lee et al. 2004	
	Corporate downsizing	Brockner 1992; Burke & Nelson 1998; De Witte 2005b; Cheng et al. 2005; Kets de Vries & Balazs 1997; Lee et al. 2004; Näswall & De Witte 2003; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	Human 2002; Laba et al. 2004; Sauer 2003
	Mergers	Burke & Nelson 1998; De Witte 2005a; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	Elbert 2002; Tshabalala 2004
	Organisational change	Lord & Hartley 1998; Nickell et al. 2002; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	Human 2002; Rannonna 2003; Sauer 2003
	Privatisation	Burke & Nelson 1998	
	Restructuring	Cheng et al. 2005; De Witte 2005a; Hellgren & Chirumbolo 2003; Mauno et al. 2005; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	Moeletsi 2003; Peverett 1994
	Technological change	Sverke & Hellgren 2002	
	Affirmative action	Cheng et al. 2005	Peverett 1994
	Deregulation of labour	Sparrow 1998	Bothma 2005
Political	Employment legislation	Davey et al. 1997	
	Political change and new government policies	Cheng et al. 2005; De Ruyter & Burgers 2000; Domenighetti et al. 2000; Ferrie 1997	
	Unemployment	Cheng et al. 2005; Näswall & De Witte 2003; Pelfrene et al. 2003; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	Labuschagne et al. 2005; Rani 2005; Reynders 2005
	Global competitiveness	Lee et al. 2004	
	Intense market competition	Cheng et al. 2005; De Ruyter & Burgers 2000; Dooley 2003; Mauno & Kinnunen 2002; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	
	Recession	Domenighetti et al. 2000; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	Snoer 2005
	Unpredictable economic situation		

Table 1 (continued): Results from the analysis of antecedents of job insecurity found in international and national studies

Categories of job insecurity antecedents	Antecedents	International studies	South African studies
Job features			
Need for flexibility	Burchell 2002; Chirumbolo & Hellgren 2003; De Witte 2005a; Green et al. 2000; Klein Hesselink & Van Vuuren 1999; Näswall & De Witte 2003; Sverke & Hellgren 2002		
Non-permanent employment	De Witte & Näswall 2003; Green et al. 2000; Mauno et al. 2005; Näswall & de Witte 2003; Strazdins et al. 2004; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	Botha 2006	
Work conditions	Cheng et al. 2005; Domenighetti et al. 2000; Manski & Straub 2001; McDonough 2000; Strazdins et al. 2004		Bosman 2005; Labuschagne et al. 2005; Reynders 2005; Snoer 2005; Van Greunen 2004; Viljoen 2004
Biographical			
Age			Bosman 2005; Botha 2006; Bothma 2005; Heymans 2002; Human 2002; Jorge 2005; Laba 2004; Leach 2006; Marais 2005; Peverett 1994; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003; Sauer 2003; Snoer 2005; Van Greunen 2004; Van Schalkwyk 2005; Van Zyl 2005 Maree 2004
Core self-evaluations			Bosman 2005; Botha 2006; Bothma 2005; Elbert 2002; Heymans 2002; Jorge 2005; Laba 2004; Leach 2006; Marais 2005; Maree 2004; Orpen 1993; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003; Snoer 2005; Van Greunen 2004; Van Schalkwyk 2005; Van Zyl 2005; Viljoen 2004
Cultural group or first language	Manski & Straub 2001		
Employability	Domenighetti et al. 2000; Sverke & Hellgren 2002		
Gender			Botha 2006; Bothma 2005; Heymans 2002; Jorge 2005; Labuschagne 2005; Leach 2006; Marais 2005; Peverett 1994; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003; Van Greunen 2004; Van Zyl 2005
Level of education or qualification	Domenighetti et al. 2000; Lee et al. 2004; Manski & Straub 2001; McDonough 2000; Näswall & De Witte 2003; Green et al. 2000; Strazdins et al. 2004		Bosman 2005; Botha 2006; Bothma 2005; Heymans 2002; Human 2002; Jorge 2005; Leach 2006; Marais 2005; Peverett 1994; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003; Sauer 2003; Van Greunen 2004; Van Zyl 2005; Viljoen 2004
Tenure			Bosman 2005; Botha 2006; Heymans 2002; Jorge 2005; Laba 2004; Leach 2006; Maree 2004; Marais 2005; Peverett 1994; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003; Sauer 2003; Snoer 2005; Van Greunen 2004; Van Schalkwyk 2005; Van Zyl 2005; Viljoen 2004

and Rauter (2004) studied the role of fixed-term employment compared with a permanent job and concluded that under conditions of high perceived job insecurity, having a fixed-term employment status mediates the relationship between job insecurity and job attitudes and well-being. Permanently employed individuals had more secure feelings about their jobs and engaged in more responsibilities and tasks. The assumption that the harmful effects of job insecurity can be mediated by the violation of the relational psychological contract was investigated by De Cuyper and De Witte (2006), who concluded that no support for such a hypothesis was found and recommended further research.

Davey, Kinicki and Scheck (1997) showed that job satisfaction and organisational commitment mediated the relationship between job insecurity and withdrawal cognitions. Dooley (2003) confirmed job insecurity as a mediator of health impacts on individuals during recessions. Chirumbolo and Hellgren (2003) found that the effect of job insecurity on turnover intention is mediated by organisational commitment and job satisfaction, which are usually defined as consequences themselves. They further showed that work attitudes partially mediate the effect of job insecurity on mental health complaints.

Moderators of job insecurity

Moderators of job insecurity can be defined as variables that will change the impact of job insecurity on the consequence variables. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) postulated that individual differences such as gender and age could moderate the relationship between the experience of job insecurity and reactions to it.

The multiple consequences of job insecurity, derived from the different studies, indicate the necessity to find preventive or buffering variables against the negative effects of job insecurity on both individuals and organisations (De Witte 1999). Reisel (2003) found that powerlessness can moderate the effect of antecedents on job insecurity. This implies a two-way possibility to buffer both the level of job insecurity caused by the antecedents and the effect of job insecurity on the individual and the organisation. Variables that may act as moderators of the consequences of job insecurity, as identified in the national and international literature, are shown in Table 2.

Consequences of job insecurity

Consequences of job insecurity can be defined as the short- and long-term consequences, outcomes, results and effects of perceived job insecurity for individuals and/or organisations (Chirumbolo & Hellgren 2003; De Witte 1999).

Table 2: Results from the analysis of moderators of job insecurity found in international and national studies

Category of job insecurity moderator	Moderator	International studies	South African studies
Personal	Affectivity	Hellgren et al. 1999; Näswall et al. 2005	
	Age	Charles & James 2003; Domenighetti et al. 2000; Feather & Rauter 2004; Lee et al. 2004; Lim 1997; Manski & Straub 2001; McDonough 2000; Näswall & De Witte 2003; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	Fourie 2005 Bothma 2005
	Coping		
	Future literacy		
	Gender	Charles & James 2003; Cheng et al. 2005; Domenighetti et al. 2000; Feather & Rauter 2004; Lim 1997; Manski & Straub 2001; Mauno & Kinnunen 2002; McDonough 2000; Nickell et al. 2002; Rosenblatt et al. 1999; Strazdins et al. 2004; Sverke & Hellgren 2002	
	Job tenure	Bender & Sloane 1999; De Ruyter & Burgers 2000; Green et al. 2000; Lim 1997; Nickell et al. 2002	
	Locus of control	Näswall et al. 2005	Elbert 2002; Human 2002; Labuschagne et al. 2005; Van Greunen 2004; Van Schalkwyk 2005
	Powerlessness/Psychological empowerment	Reisel 2003	Moeletsi 2003; Mokhobotloane 2005; Reyn- ders 2005; Sauer 2003
	Resilience		Leach 2006
	Self-efficacy		Bothma 2005; Elbert 2002; Human 2002
Socio-economic position	Sense of coherence		Elbert 2002; Human 2002; Van Schalkwyk 2005
	Socio-economic position	Cheng et al. 2005; Domenighetti et al. 2000; Ferrie 1997; McDonough 2000	

Table 2 (continued): Results from the analysis of moderators of job insecurity found in international and national studies

Category of job insecurity moderator	Moderator	International studies	South African studies	
Organisational	Company size	Cheng et al. 2005; Strazdins et al. 2004		
	Organisation type	Domenighetti et al. 2000; Strazdins et al. 2004		
	Organisational communication	Mauno & Kinnunen 2002		
	Organisational culture	Charles & James 2003		
	Organisational support	Lim 1997; Rosenblatt et al. 1999	Rani 2005	
	Organisational trust	Kets de Vries & Balazs 1997	Botha 2006	
	Psychological contract	King 2000; Sutton 1987		
	Workplace control	Barling & Kelloway 1996; Büssing 1999; Domenighetti et al. 2000; Mauno & Kinnunen 2002		
	Job feature	Job position or Job category	Dooley 2003; Ferrie 1997; Lee et al. 2004; Strazdins et al. 2004	Heymans 2002; Laba 2004; Leach 2006; Marais 2005; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003
		Temporary work		Botha 2006
Social structure	Cultural differences	Probst & Lawler 2006; Yousef 1998		
	Family responsibility	Sverke & Hellgren 2002		
	Marital status	Lee et al. 2004; Mauno & Kinnunen 2002; McDonough 2000; Strazdins et al. 2004		
	Racial disparities	Wilson et al. 2006	Orpen 1993	
	Social support	Büssing 1999; Kramer 2004; McDonough 2000	Makhobotloane 2005; Rani 2005	
	Union support or union membership	Bender & Sloane 1999; Green et al. 2000; Hellgren & Chirumbolo 2003; Sverke & Goslinga 2003; Sverke & Hellgren 2001	Heymans 2002; Leach 2006; Rannona 2003; Van Greunen 2004	

Some researchers also tend to include a social consequence of job insecurity (Charles & James 2003; De Ruyter & Burgers 2000; Sverke & Goslinga 2003).

A whole range of possible consequences of job insecurity have been investigated. Table 3 shows the results of the analysis of various consequences found in national and international studies.

Although the consequences of job insecurity to the individual and the organisation have been studied extensively, this does not negate the further need for research. According to De Witte (2005a), it is necessary to repeat research topics in different countries in order to facilitate the generalisation of results across the world.

Measurement of job insecurity in international research

According to Probst (2003), a shortfall in job insecurity research is the lack of comprehensive conceptualisation and the development of valid and reliable measures. Operationalisation of the concept of job insecurity was driven by the conceptualisation and structural models (De Witte 2005a). The variety of measurements (Ashford et al. 1989; Borg & Elizur 1992; De Witte 2000; Hartley et al. 1991; Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti & Happonen 2000), and the different uses thereof, seem to indicate that job insecurity is best conceptualised as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon.

Measurement approaches used in different studies depend on the accepted assumptions and definitions integrated into the study. Existing measures can be divided into global and multidimensional measures with one to many items in a scale. According to Jacobson (1991) and Manski and Straub (2001), global measures can be defined as measures that tap only one dimension, namely the fear of losing one's job. Multidimensional measures, however, tap into dimensions such as the fear of losing one's job as well as the fear of losing some important job features.

Two separate studies have been conducted by separate researchers in different contexts to investigate and clarify unsolved issues in the debate related to measuring job insecurity (Reisel 2002; Sverke & Hellgren 2002). The results of both studies imply that more research, with extensive and new perceptions, needs to be done to possibly arrive at a final model, which will include a clear conceptualisation, definition and measurement of job insecurity as an integrated industrial phenomenon.

The measure of Ashford et al. (1989) appears to be used most frequently in international studies. Lee, Bobko and Chen (2006) investigated the latest critique on the measure of Ashford et al. (1989) that job features and powerlessness should be eliminated from the measure. Their results suggested otherwise, and they argued for the continued validation of the current measure. Reisel and Banai (2002)

Table 3: Results from the analysis of consequences of job insecurity found in international and national studies

Categories of job insecurity consequences	Consequence		
	International studies	South African studies	
Individual consequences	Job satisfaction	De Cuyper & De Witte 2006; De Witte 2005b; De Witte & Näswall 2003; Feather & Rauter 2004; Gillespie et al. 2001; Lim 1997; Mauno et al. 2005; Noblet & Gifford 2002; Probst & Lawler 2006; Sverke et al. 2002; Tavis 2002; Yousef 1998	Heymans 2002; Labuschagne et al. 2005; Marais 2005; Moeletsi 2003; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003; Selepe 2004; Tshabalala 2004; Van Zyl 2005
	Physical health/ General health	Barling & Kelloway 1996; De Ruyter & Burgers 2000; Domenighetti et al. 2000; Ferrie 1997; Ferrie et al. 2001; Cheng et al. 2005; Lee et al. 2004; McDonough 2000; Nolan et al. 2000; Pel-frene et al. 2003; Sverke & Hellgren 2002; Sverke et al. 2002; Strazdins et al. 2004	Fourie 2005; Leach 2006; Mokhobotloane 2005; Marais 2005; Rani 2005; Selepe 2004; Snoer 2005; Van Zyl 2005; Viljoen 2004
	Burnout	Dekker & Schaufeli 1995; Mauno et al., 2005; Strazdins et al. 2004	Bosman 2005; Laba 2004; Makhobotloane 2005; Marais 2005; Selepe 2004; Van Greunen 2004; Viljoen 2004; Van Zyl 2005
	Career loyalty	King 2000	
	Psychological health	Büssing 1999; Chirumbolo & Hellgren 2003; De Ruyter & Burgers 2000; De Witte 1999; Domenighetti et al. 2000; Dooley 2003; Ferrie 1997; Hellgren & Chirumbolo 2003; Kinnunen et al. 2000; Mauno & Kinnunen 2002; McDonough 2000; Mohr 2000; Probst & Lawler 2006; Strazdins et al. 2004; Sverke & Hellgren 2002; Sverke et al. 2002	Makhobotloane 2005; Marais 2005; Orpen 1993; Van Schalkwyk 2005; Viljoen 2004
	Resistance to change	Rosenblatt et al. 1999	
Organisational consequences	Absenteeism	De Ruyter & Burgers 2000	
	Job involvement/ Work engagement	Kuhnert & Palmer 1991; Mauno & Kinnunen 2002; Sverke et al. 2002	Bosman 2005; Makhobotloane 2005; Reynders 2005; Selepe 2004; Van Greunen 2004; Van Zyl 2005; Viljoen 2004
	Job performance	De Cuyper & De Witte 2006; De Ruyter & Burgers 2000; Jordan et al. 2000; King 2000; Rosenblatt et al. 1999; Sverke & Hellgren 2002; Sverke et al. 2002; Yousef 1998	
	Job safety	Feather & Rauter 2004; Probst & Brubaker 2001	
	Job withdrawal	Davey et al. 1997; Probst 2002; Probst & Lawler 2006; Sverke et al. 2002	
Organisational citizenship	Feather & Rauter 2004; King 2000	Jorge 2005	

Table 3 (continued): Results from the analysis of consequences of job insecurity found in international and national studies

Categories of job insecurity consequences	Consequence	International studies	South African studies
Organisational consequences (continued)	Organisational commitment	Burchell 2002; Davey et al. 1997; De Cuyper & De Witte 2006; De Witte & Näswall 2003; Feather & Rauter 2004; Jordan et al. 2000; Lord & Hartley 1998; Rosenblatt et al. 1999; Sverke et al. 2002; Yousef 1998	Heymans 2002; Jorge 2005; Laba 2004; Marais 2005; Moeletsi 2003; Peverett 1994; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003; Selepe 2004; Tshabalala 2004
	Organisational loyalty	King 2000	
	Organisational trust	Sverke et al. 2002	
	Turnover intention	Chirumbolo & Hellgren 2003; Davey et al. 1997; Näswall & De Witte 2003; Sverke & Hellgren 2001; Sverke & Goslinga 2003; Sverke et al. 2002; Mauno et al. 2005; Probst & Lawler 2006; Rosenblatt et al. 1999	
	Work wellness		Bosman 2005; Reynders 2005; Selepe 2004; Van Greunen 2004
Social consequences	Household stability	Charles & James 2003;	
	Quality of family life	De Ruyter & Burgers 2000	
	Unemployment	De Ruyter & Burgers 2000	
	Union loyalty	Sverke & Goslinga 2003	
	Withdrawal from union membership	Sverke & Goslinga 2003	

suggested that the job feature dimension of multidimensional measures did not explain significant additional variance in the outcome variables. However, these results have not been replicated.

Many international studies used self-developed measures consisting of one or more questions to measure levels of job insecurity in different situations (Wilson, Eitle & Beshin 2006), while others used compiled instruments made up of different validated measures (Sverke & Goslinga 2003). Several studies adopted one or more items from Karasek's (1979) Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) to measure the presence and level of job insecurity. This can provide proof of the assumption that the intensity, perception, antecedents and consequences of job insecurity may vary under different circumstances and in different contexts (Probst 2003). Mauno, Leskinen and Kinnunen (2001) highlighted the limitation of job insecurity in that the measures, up to now, were developed to perform job insecurity research in times of organisational change.

Research trends of job insecurity in South Africa with reference to international studies

All research done in South Africa on the topic of job insecurity that could be traced was investigated. Content (textual) analysis of the available dissertations, theses and other research studies was conducted. The results of a total of 28 studies in the field of job insecurity in South African organisations were analysed.²

Our analysis shows that some variables have been studied repeatedly, while others have been neglected. With the exception of five studies, all others used the Job Insecurity Survey Inventory (JISI) of De Witte (2000). This implies that the majority of studies were conducted from the conceptualisation that job insecurity in South African organisations has a cognitive and an affective component and can be defined as a work stressor.

The most notable agreements between the studies were shown for correlations of job insecurity with general and psychological health as well as studies done on the correlation between job insecurity and organisational commitment. Findings generally indicate that higher levels of job insecurity are related to lower levels of organisational commitment. Studies conducted with burnout as a variable also show confirming results, in that job insecurity is positively associated with burnout. All studies that applied the JISI of De Witte (2000) agree on the construct validity of the measure for South African use.

Perceptions and views of South African managers

Practical relevance was added to the proposed model by conducting semi-structured interviews with managers in the industrial and business environment in order to assess and incorporate their views regarding job insecurity in South African organisations.

A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in nine different industrial and business areas. The population included both male and female participants from a range of positions, ages, language groups and years of tenure. Companies in the provinces of Gauteng, Mpumalanga, the Free State and the Western Cape were included. The biographical information on interviewees is summarised in Table 4 to indicate the distribution of biographical variables. The type of company is listed alphabetically.

Participants were mostly female, Afrikaans speaking and at a managerial level. The age of most of the participants ranged between 31 and 50 years. Most had between 0 and 10 years' tenure. The information collected during the interviews was analysed, interpreted and categorised into the five identified themes, which will be discussed individually.

Theme 1: Defining job insecurity

All participants agree that job insecurity is a feeling of uncertainty, an awareness of the possibility of being replaced. Most ($n = 19$) agree that the concern is about the long-term continuity of a permanent job. Concerns are mostly about the job itself as well as the job position and future job prospects being threatened in some way. Job insecurity includes a strong uncertainty factor about the future of the job. Not only is the uncertainty about the possible loss of one's job a strong factor, but the uncertainty of re-employment and the fear of not finding alternative employment due to high unemployment rates were also highlighted. A large number of the interviewed participants ($n = 14$) emphasise the uncertainty of the current role in a specific position. Interestingly enough, seven of the participants independently said that job insecurity exists when the employee does not feel completely certain about the future of his/her current job. Two of the participants claim that job insecurity is the stress an employee needs to perform to his or her best ability. A new point of view came from one of the participants, who explained his concept of job insecurity as a necessary factor to survive, involving the need for flexibility and learning to overcome resistance to change. Eight participants agreed that job insecurity leaves the individual feeling powerless. One of the participants had a very strong definition of job insecurity as a destructive negative state of affection that robs an individual of valuable positive energy.

Table 4: Summary of the biographical information of the participants

Type of company	Gender		Position			Age in years					Language			Tenure in years	
	Male	Female	MD	Manager	Other	20-30	31-40	41-50	> 50	Afr	Eng	Other	0-10	11-20	> 20
							40	50							
Chemical	2			1	1		1	1		2			1	1	
Education	1			1			1				1				1
Financial		3		3		3				3			3		
Human resource	2	2	3		1	1	2	1	2	2	2		2	1	1
Manufacturing	1	1		2		1	1	1	2	2				2	
Medical		3		3		1	1	1	3			3			
Mining		1		1			1				1		1		
Petrochemical	3	1	1	3		1	2	1	3	1		1	1	1	2
Services	2	2		3	1	1	1	1	3	3	1*	3	3	1	
Totals	11	13	4	17	3	3	9	9	3	18	5	1	14	6	4

Note: MD = Managing Director; Afr = Afrikaans; Eng = English

* This participant indicated Hindi as the home language.

Theme 2: Levels of job insecurity in the various organisations

One of the participants in the chemical industry reported high levels of job insecurity, while the other said that it was risky to high, but at this stage *delicately* stable. The one participant in an educational setting believed that job insecurity in educational institutions is at a medium level and will vary from individual to individual across different socio-political backgrounds. All participants from financial organisations ($n = 3$) agreed that job insecurity in their companies is high. The four participants from human resource environments, mostly working as consultants, reported that the clients they work with do experience levels of job insecurity that are not necessarily healthy and may have negative consequences. Job insecurity in manufacturing organisations seems to be an evident problem in the sense that both the participants from this environment reported high levels of perceived job insecurity due to constant cost-saving practices, where more has to be done with less and a high need for flexibility exists. Two of the participants from medical settings reported no feelings of job insecurity in their organisations, while another working in the medical department of a mining company reported job insecurity to be problematic in her department. The one participant in a senior management position of a leading mining company in South Africa also reported his concern about the perceived levels of job insecurity in his company. Only one of the participants from a petrochemical organisation reported the risk of job insecurity perceptions, while the others felt sure that job insecurity is not such a serious concern when compared to, for example, their experienced skills shortage.

The participants from the services environments were divided in their opinions. Some indicated concern about the level of job insecurity, while others felt that their clients experience high levels of job insecurity. The participants from a telecommunication company and an insurance company reported concerns about the levels of job insecurity. The concern from the telecommunication side was in respect of the organisation itself, since this sector is diversifying, while from the insurance perspective, insecurity is felt in holding on to their clients. The participants from a law firm and a real estate organisation respectively did not report any evidence of job insecurity in their organisations. Twenty of the participants agreed that job insecurity is a higher risk for white employees than for black employees, 18 are convinced that males will have higher levels of job insecurity than females, and ten argued that the highest rates of job insecurity will be among white males over the age of 50.

Theme 3: Differences between national and global causes and predictors of job insecurity

All the participants with the exception of one agreed that levels of job insecurity and its possible causes in South African organisations may be the same as elsewhere

due to global organisational characteristics, but may also differ due to political, economic and cultural differences. Most of the participants ($n = 16$) agreed that differences in levels of job insecurity will exist between developing and developed countries. Participants mostly ($n = 13$) agreed that the perceived unstable political, economical and social situation of South Africa itself causes employees in all South African organisations to have feelings of job insecurity on a continuum from very little to unbearable. Most of the participants consider the most important political, economical, organisational, biographical and job-related causes and predictors of job insecurity to be the education system, global competitiveness, organisational communication, cultural differences and the greater need for flexibility, respectively.

Theme 4: Consequences of job insecurity in South African organisations

Almost all participants ($n = 19$) stated that feelings of job insecurity leave employees with the responsibility of choices. The participants have a strong belief that employees have a choice as to how they respond to their own feelings or perceptions of job insecurity. According to the participants, these choices will be affected by the severity of the causes or predictors of job insecurity and by the intrapersonal and psychological fitness of the individual, as well as the availability of support systems. The consequences of job insecurity will be the result of the choices employees make.

It is important to note that, according to the participants, job insecurity does not always result in negative consequences but may have positive and sometimes necessary consequences if managed effectively. More than half of the participants ($n = 14$) said that job insecurity in manageable quantities will help employees to remain relevant to the reality of the organisation and will lead them to continuously update their knowledge and competencies. The largest concern to most of the participants is the loss of skills to other companies as well as the 'brain drain' of South African competence and knowledge to other countries. At the individual, organisational and social levels, participants view stress ($n = 16$), absenteeism ($n = 13$) and the so-called 'brain-drain' ($n = 14$) as the most important consequences of job insecurity, respectively.

Theme 5: Plea for future research

The greatest concern expressed by almost all of the participants ($n = 21$) was that thousands of Rands and hours of time are invested in research, but the knowledge

and results are not communicated or shared with the relevant stakeholders who may actually benefit from it. The plea was mainly to close the gap between theory and practice. Half of the participants ($n = 12$) indicated that their organisation could benefit from the current research studies on job insecurity in South Africa if results and recommendations could be shared through knowledge management. More than half ($n = 17$) indicated the need for interventions that could assist employees to become fit for the future in order to be empowered to make better choices when feelings of job insecurity increase. A few ($n = 8$) indicated the need to assess and explain the role of leadership support in times of increased perceptions of job insecurity. A large number of the participants ($n = 17$) requested that the possible positive value of job insecurity to both the individual and the organisation be investigated. Another need that was identified was to create interventions to help white South Africans to overcome their perceived feelings of job insecurity due to political changes. Nine of the participants indicated that the focus of research should now move to the development of interventions to alleviate the effects of job insecurity and its consequences.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to outline a research agenda for job insecurity in South African organisations in order to serve as guidance to future research and as a management tool for addressing job insecurity. The results obtained from the investigation into the international and South African research on job insecurity, as well as the results from semi-structured interviews with managers from various South African organisations, provided the background for the proposed theoretical model.

Studying the different conceptualisations of job insecurity in the international literature and research studies identified five distinct themes in the conceptualisation of job insecurity, namely job insecurity as a perceived probability of job loss (Hartley et al. 1991); job insecurity as consisting of objective and subjective (Jacobson 1991), cognitive and affective (De Witte 2000) and quantitative and qualitative dimensions (Isaksson et al. 1998); and job insecurity as a stressor (Probst 2002). Most South African studies worked from the assumption that job insecurity is a stressor and consists of cognitive and affective components. South African studies were furthermore conducted from a multidimensional perspective, which assumes that job insecurity is more complex than only fearing the loss of a job – in contradiction to the global view of De Witte (2000). Future research must be cautious not to underestimate the relevance of this conceptualisation in studying the existence and

level of job insecurity in organisations undergoing change and crises. For example, in the South African context, the gold mining industry is expected to shed 65 000 jobs by the end of this century (Lünshe & Paton 2007). The South African work context is also characterised by major transformation in order to meet employment equity and affirmative action targets. None of the South African studies added to the growing theoretical background of conceptualising job insecurity and rather applied existing measures and conceptualisations to the South African context.

Regarding objective and subjective components of job insecurity, only a few South African studies of job insecurity were based on this conceptualisation (Leach 2006; Makhobotloane 2005; Peverett 1994). These studies identified corporate downsizing, restructuring, organisational change and privatisation as important environmental cues to feelings of job insecurity for employees in the South African organisations that they studied. Most of the studies carried out in South Africa on the topic of job insecurity were conducted from the perspective that it presents with both cognitive and affective components (Bosman 2005; Botha 2006; Elbert 2002; Laba, Bosman & Buitendach 2004; Moeletsi 2003). Only one South African study (Fourie 2005) considered the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of job insecurity. Most research on job insecurity in South African organisations adapted the assumption that job insecurity must be considered as a type of job stressor (Heymans 2002; Jorge 2005; Leach 2006; Maree 2004; Rannona 2003).

Although similarities between South African and international organisations certainly exist, this study underscores the importance of the political, economic and social background as important and influencing contextual variables. Results from the study indicate that some of the antecedents in national and international research are the same. South African research has, for example, not considered organisational factors such as technological change (see Sverke & Hellgren 2002), acquisitions (see Burke & Nelson 1998; Sverke & Hellgren 2002), consolidation (see Lee, Colditz, Berkman & Kawachi 2004), the deregulation of labour (see Cheng, Chen, Chen & Chiang 2005) and what could be quite significant for a young, transforming democracy, namely, political change and new government policies (see Davey et al. 1997). Moreover, factors such as recession (see for example Sverke & Hellgren 2002), intense market competition (see Lee et al. 2004) and individuals' employability (see Domenighetti, D'Avanzo & Bisig 2000; Sverke & Hellgren 2002) have not been considered. Information from interviews also indicated that factors such as employment legislation, unemployment and current education systems, economical influences such as global competitiveness, instability and exchange rates, as well as social background variables including family relationships, quality of life and the 'brain drain' need to be understood in relation to job insecurity.

Studying the moderating variables of the impact of job insecurity on the consequences thereof resulted in four categories of possible moderators, namely, personal, organisational, job features and social variables. The results of the investigation of mediating variables of job insecurity are vague. Very little research on mediating variables was found, and the influence of and the place in the theoretical model of such research is not clear-cut from existing literature. While international research has considered factors such as affectivity (see Hellgren et al. 1999; Näswall, Sverke & Hellgren 2005), gender (see for example Cheng et al. 2005; Strazdins, D'Souza, Lim, Broom & Rodgers 2004), socio-economic position (see for example Cheng et al. 2005; Domenighetti et al. 2000), age (see for example Charles & James 2003; Feather & Rauter 2004), job tenure (see for example De Ruyter & Burgers 2000; Nickell, Jones & Quintini 2002), the psychological contract (see King 2000; Sutton 1987), company size (see Cheng et al. 2005; Strazdins et al. 2004), organisational type (see Domenighetti et al. 2000; Strazdins et al. 2004), organisational culture (Charles & James 2003), workplace control (see for example Barling & Kelloway 1996; Mauno & Kinnunen 2002), organisational communication (see Mauno & Kinnunen 2002), cultural differences (see Probst & Lawler 2006; Yousef 1998), marital status (see for example Lee et al. 2004; Strazdins et al. 2004) and family responsibility (see Sverke & Hellgren 2002) as moderators, the operation of these variables in the South African context remains unclear due to the absence of systematic research.

The results from the analyses of the consequences of job insecurity in national and international studies showed two very definite categories, which have been properly researched, namely, individual and organisational consequences. One relevant but neglected category, namely social consequences, has also been identified, but has not received much attention until recently in international research and no attention in any South African studies. The social consequences of job insecurity seem very relevant in the South African context, as international research has linked job insecurity to factors such as household stability (Charles & James 2003), union loyalty and withdrawal from union membership (Sverke & Goslinga 2003) and quality of life and unemployment (De Ruyter & Burgers 2000). Intuitively, all these consequences are of interest in a country with many socio-economic ills, a long history of unionisation and high levels of unemployment.

A large degree of similarity exists between the consequence variables in national and international studies. Career loyalty (see King 2000) and resistance to change (see Rosenblatt Talmud & Ruvio 1999) as individual consequences and job performance (see for example De Cuyper & De Witte 2006; Sverke & Hellgren 2002), job withdrawal (see for example Probst & Lawler 2006; Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall 2002), job safety (see Feather & Rauter 2004; Probst & Brubaker 2001),

turnover intention (see for example Chirumbolo & Hellgren 2003; Näswall & De Witte 2003), organisational trust (see Sverke et al. 2002), organisational loyalty (see King 2000) and absenteeism (see De Ruyter & Burgers 2000), as organisational consequences of job insecurity, were not studied by any South African researchers. Work wellness, defined as maintaining high individual performance through balance in life, balance at work as well as a productive workplace, was studied as an organisational consequence in a few South African studies (Bosman 2005; Reynders 2005; Selepe 2004; Van Greunen 2004), but not in any international studies.

Measures of job insecurity are divided into global and multidimensional measures, measuring the fear of job loss on the one hand, and the fear of job loss and of losing important job features on the other. The multidimensional measure of Ashford et al. (1989) appeared to be used most frequently in international research, while the global, 11-item measure of De Witte (2000) was mostly used in South African research. Regarding the validity of the measure for South African use, Viljoen (2004) and Bosman (2005) found that item 2 (“There is only a small chance that I will become unemployed”) of the measure did not load on the cognitive or affective components underlying the measure and suggested that item 2 should be excluded from the measure when used in South African organisations. Convincing reliability evidence exists for both the affective (Van Zyl 2005; Viljoen 2004) and cognitive components (Heymans 2002) of job insecurity in South African research. Future studies of job insecurity in South African organisations need to investigate the possible use and validation of other relevant measures in the South African context, since only three measures have been used in South African research. These include the Job Insecurity Survey Inventory (JISI) (De Witte 2000), Job Insecurity Survey (JIS) (Isaksson et al. 1998) and Job Insecurity Questionnaire (JIQ) (Ashford et al. 1989). One study (Orpen 1993) used an integrated approach by combining elements from different measures. The validity of job insecurity measures under stable circumstances in South African organisations also needs to be tested, and further work regarding validation in a multi-cultural context is warranted.

The textual (content) analysis of the 28 South African research studies resulted in important information, such as the variables studied, measures used as well as conformation and contradiction in national and international research. The results showed that cultural group, age, tenure, qualification and gender were studied the most. These variables were mostly measured as possible antecedents to job insecurity. Consequence variables that were studied regularly are organisational commitment, job satisfaction, general health and burnout. Variables that appear in one study only are the psychological contract, coping, core self-evaluations, temporary work, resilience and organisational citizenship behaviour. The impact

of antecedents from various categories such as organisational, economical, political and specific job features was never measured as variables in any of the studies, but research was conducted on the assumption that the presence of these variables would lead to increased feelings of job insecurity. Some variables from international studies that have not yet received any attention in South African studies and might be of importance are technological change, deregulation of labour, unemployment, employment legislation and intense market competition.

The results from the semi-structured interviews showed evidence of the gap between theory and practice and emphasised the importance of a real-world background in research studies. A conclusion to the different definitions supplied by the participants will include the fear of losing one's permanent job, supported by the fear of losing important job features such as benefits. This laypersons' definition contains many elements noted in international research (see for example Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt 1984; Lee et al. 2006). This fear adds to existing stress levels and decreases energy levels. The results indicated that perceptions regarding levels of job insecurity differ in various organisations. Some organisations reported low or no presence of job insecurity, while others reported higher levels. The reasons for these differences indicated in interviews allude to factors such as the availability of the preferred skills, organisational culture and the efficiency of communication and leadership strategies within the different organisations.

Participants agreed that job insecurity is a higher risk for white employees than for their black counterparts, that males will have higher levels of job insecurity than females and that the highest rates of job insecurity will be among white males over the age of 50. One has to consider that most of the participants were Afrikaans-speaking ($n = 18$) and of these, 11 were males. This distribution may have skewed the results. Comparing the information gleaned from interviews with South African research, however, it can be seen that research results are inconsistent. For example, it has been found that there is no difference between white and black employees (Jorge 2005), as well as that white (Bosman 2005; Laba et al. 2004; Labuschagne et al. 2005, Maree 2004; Selepe 2004; Viljoen 2004) and black (Elbert 2002; Orpen 1993; Rannona 2003; Van Zyl 2005) employees experience greater job insecurity. Similarly, most studies find that there is no difference in terms of the experience of job insecurity between different age groups (Bosman 2005; Heymans 2002; Jorge 2005; Marais 2005; Rani 2005; Snoer 2005; Van Zyl 2005), yet it has also been found that it is the youngest (Van Schalkwyk 2005) and the oldest (Bothma 2005; Rannona 2003) employees that experience the highest levels of job insecurity. In terms of gender, results are consistent in showing that there are no differences between males and females (Bothma 2005; Jorge 2005; Marais 2005; Rani 2005; Rannona 2003; Van

Zyl 2005). Clearly, the phenomenon of job insecurity in terms of the biographical markers of age and race is not yet clearly understood.

Focusing lastly only on the results from the interviews, participants reported quite a number of variables that could possibly cause or predict job insecurity that have not been studied or mentioned in previous studies. Employment legislation, political ideologies, the unemployment rate, recruiting of foreign skilled workers, union communication, social uncertainty, education systems, economic instability, exchange rates, stock prices, organisational communication, company size, organisational culture, structural changes, the constant need for cost savings, work ethics, the offer of voluntary severance packages, the need for flexibility, the unstable job market, ruthless performance management, demands for longer hours of work, high-risk jobs, levels of strategic involvement, feelings of incompetence, fitness for change, future literacy and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS form part of this list. These predicting factors were divided into political, economic, organisational and biographical factors and factors related to the job itself.

The highest political factors indicated by the interviewed participants were the education system ($n = 17$), followed by unemployment ($n = 15$) and employment legislation ($n = 13$). Managers felt strongly that the current South African education system does not deliver the required skills and competencies needed in the South African working environment. The two highest economic factors were indicated as global competitiveness ($n = 14$) and economic instability ($n = 11$). To be able to compete in the international market, organisations in South Africa apply different measures to ensure maximum productivity and minimum costs (Robbins, Odendaal & Roodt 2004). The assumption of the participants that global competitiveness of organisations may predict levels of job insecurity perception must be tested in future research. High organisational factors were indicated as organisational communication ($n = 16$) and cost saving ($n = 8$). Managers tend to recognise the importance of effective communication systems in the organisation in order to ensure healthy and productive working conditions for all employees. Cost savings have become an evident part of strategic planning in surviving businesses. Factors of job features with the highest scores were the need for flexibility ($n = 13$) and the demand for longer hours of work ($n = 7$). The abilities to adapt and to show a wide range of competencies have become preconditions to employability. In addition to the need for flexibility, organisations demand productivity increases, and employees are forced to work longer hours, not necessarily with additional reward. The highest biographical factors were indicated as cultural differences ($n = 15$), followed by feelings of incompetence ($n = 11$). Cultural differences seem to be an evident issue in South African organisations and need to be investigated

in order to help managers and employees to understand and cope better with this sensitive issue. Connecting feelings of incompetence with studies on the current South African education system may lead to useful results.

A number of consequences from the interviews were identified for the individual, the organisation and the social contexts, most of which had not been studied before. These include draining of energy, fight-or-flight reactions, a lack of creativity, irrational thinking and decision-making, and job-hopping as individual consequences. Loss of skills, absenteeism, lack of loyalty, distrust and work errors were noted as organisational consequences. The so-called 'brain drain' (which refers to the loss of skilled workers to the workforce of foreign countries), activities of unions, family relationships and social conflict that fosters political and economical instability, unemployment and quality of life were identified as social consequences.

The highest individual consequences were indicated as stress ($n = 16$), followed by a loss of job satisfaction ($n = 13$). Stress as the highest individual consequence, as indicated by the participants, is no surprise and could be predicted due to the current concern about stress as a negative influence on the individual in the workplace (Rothmann, Jackson & Kruger 2003). The highest ratings for organisational consequences were absenteeism ($n = 13$), a loss of skills ($n = 12$), as well as turnover intention ($n = 12$). Managers report absenteeism to be high and are concerned about the hours of work lost due to absenteeism. The loss of skills and the intention to leave the company are related issues in South African organisations. The validity of including these constructs in a model for job insecurity needs further investigation. The indicated consequences of job insecurity for the social environment were 'brain drainage' with the highest rating ($n = 14$), followed by unemployment ($n = 8$).

In conclusion, an interpretation of the findings and conclusions of the results of this study are integrated in a final proposed theoretical model (Figure 1). The model was adapted and expanded from the integrated model of job insecurity of Probst (2002: 144). The final model is derived from international and national research, as well as from the results of the interviews.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should investigate different dimensions and conceptualisations of job insecurity in the South African context. Much work also remains in validating existing measures in the multi-cultural South African context and investigating reliability, equivalence and (differential) item functioning across diverse cultural and language groups.

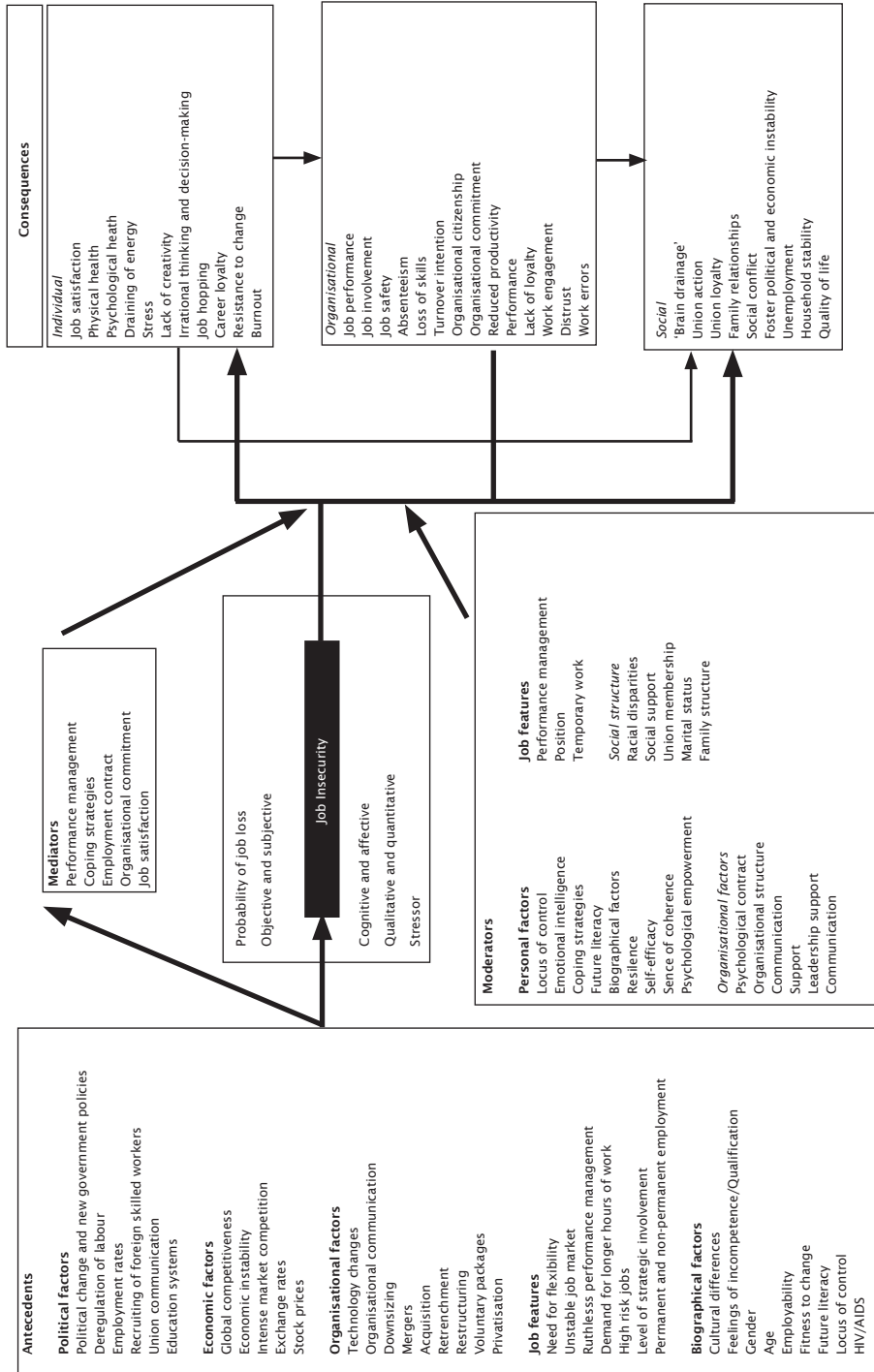


Figure 1: Theoretical proposed model as research agenda for job insecurity in South African organisations

The important contribution of local context has to be borne in mind. The current South African political, economic and social situation may definitely have an effect on the perceived feelings of job insecurity of employed individuals. This notion was confirmed by the results of the semi-structured interviews held with managers of various organisations.

Eminent hypotheses emerging from the semi-structured interviews, which need to be tested in future research, may include: “White employees in South African organisations experience higher levels of job insecurity than their black counterparts” and “White men over the age of 50 will have the highest perceived levels of job insecurity in South African organisations”.

NOTES

1. Participants were asked seven questions: (1) How will you define the concept of job insecurity in South African organisations? (2) Do you think job insecurity is a problem in your company and/or the companies you are working with? Why do you say that? (3) How will you describe the current intensity level of those that do experience job insecurity in your organisation? (4) What do you think are the main causes (or predictors) of job insecurity in your company? And in South Africa? (5) What consequences do you think job insecurity has, or could have, on the individual and/or your company? And what will the effect be on the economic and political situation of the country? (6) Do you think a) the levels of and b) the causes of job insecurity in South Africa differ from other countries? And what will you say is the reasons for this? (7) How do you think research must address the construct/phenomenon of ‘job insecurity’ in order for your organisation to benefit from it?
2. The demographic information, the various variables included and the different measures used are available from the second author upon request. The studies included in the investigation are indicated with an asterisk (*) in the reference list.

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