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Peng, Kelly Z., Wu, Chia-Huei

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Job Insecurity and Discretionary Behaviours at Work: A Discrete Emotions Perspective

Emily Guohua Huang, Bingjie Yu, and Cynthia Lee

Worldwide technological and societal changes in the past three decades or so has changed the nature of work dramatically. In such a changing world, job insecurity (JI), referring to perceptions about the threat to the continuity and stability of one’s present employment (Shoss, 2017), has become an increasingly prominent focus for both management practitioners and scholars. Numerous studies, including several meta-analyses, have shown its significant impact on employee well-being, attitudes, and performance (Lee, Huang, and Ashford, 2018). Recent JI research calls for more studies on how JI influences employee discretionary behaviours. That is, what would employees do when they perceive JI (Huang et al, 2017; Lee, Huang, and Ashford, 2018)? Given the increasing importance of employee proactive behaviours (such as voice and information-seeking) to organizations in uncertain times, it is crucial for management researchers and practitioners to understand how employees react proactively when they perceive JI and the psychological mechanisms explaining the effects. However, as our review in the next section shows, research on these questions is still very limited and findings are mixed. In this study, we focus on one particular perspective to examine the impact of JI on proactive behaviours – the perspective of discrete emotions. Our goal in this chapter is to develop a conceptual model regarding the relationships among JI, discrete emotions, and discretionary
behaviours and to suggest future research directions for this line of research.

JI is a perception of threats to one’s employment. One of the key messages we could learn from the JI literature is – people respond to the actual work environment very differently. According to the appraisal theories of emotion (for example, Arnold, 1960; Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1968; Roseman, 1979; 1984; Scherer, 1984; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985), people react differently to similar situations based on their appraisals of the situation and these appraisals elicit specific emotions in each person. Each specific emotion has specific behavioural response components (Roseman, 2013) that predict actions. Thus, understanding the different discrete emotions triggered by JI offers us a lens to make sense of employee behaviours when perceived JI. In the literature, much evidence shows that perceptions of JI generate various negative feelings which in turn affects employee attitudes and behaviours (Huang et al, 2010; 2012; Probst, 2002; 2003). However, there is not much theorization on what and why specific discrete emotions are associated with JI.

In the emotion literature, efforts have been devoted to categorizing discrete emotions using dimensions such as pleasantness–unpleasantness, arousal–activation, and approach–avoidance (Elliot, Eder, and Harmon-Jones, 2013; Russell, 1980). One dimension that is of particular importance for understanding emotional reactions to JI and its behavioural consequences is to what extent specific emotions may be construed as emerging from, sustaining, and/or impelling approach versus avoidance motivations (Elliot, Eder, and Harmon-Jones, 2013; Roseman, 1994; 2013). While approach-oriented emotions (such as joy and anger) drive people to take actions toward a target, avoidance-oriented emotions (such as fear and contempt) drive people to take actions away from a target. According to the appraisal theories, whether JI may elicit specific approach- or avoidance-oriented emotions depends on how employee perceive the situation. In this research, we theorize JI can elicit four specific negative emotions: anger and frustration, which are approach-oriented, and fear and shame, which are avoidance-oriented. The different emotions in turn determine what behavioural outcomes will be triggered, including positive proactive behaviours such as voice, feedback-, information- and helping-seeking behaviours, as well as negative avoidance behaviours, such as workplace deviant behaviours and turnover. We further propose employee approach/avoidance temperament and employee attributions of JI as conditions that determine the mediating effects of the four discrete emotions.
Job insecurity and employee discretionary behaviours

Proactive behaviours refer to self-initiated and future-focused actions to change oneself or the situation (Parker, Wang, and Liao, 2019). Existing studies have explored the relationships between JI and proactive behaviours. However, the research is still limited, and there are mixed findings. While most studies found that JI hinders proactive behaviours, some scholars found positive or curvilinear relationships.

Negative relationships between JI and a variety of proactive behaviours have been reported. For example, Staufenbiel and König (2010) found that JI, as a hindrance stressor, negatively affects organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) via reducing job satisfaction and organizational commitment. De Spiegelaere et al (2014) found that JI hinders innovative work behaviours because it reduces work engagement. Niesen et al (2018) found that JI reduces idea generation of supervisors via psychological contract breach. Based on threat-rigidity theory and broaden-and-build theory, Probst et al (2019) found that JI has a negative effect on creativity via cognitive failures and decreased job-related affective well-being. Based on conservation of resources theory and psychological contract theory, Van Hootegem and De Witte (2019) found that qualitative JI (that is perceptions about the threat to desired job features) has a negative effect on information-seeking and feedback-seeking via decreased occupational self-efficacy and psychological contract breach. Based on self-determination theory, Breevaart et al (2020) found that weekly JI thwarts the fulfillment of psychological needs, thus undermining voice behaviours.

In contrast, positive relationships and non-linear relationships have also been reported. For example, Staufenbiel and König (2010) found that JI, as a challenge stressor, directly motivates employees to engage in OCBs in order to preserve jobs. Viewing proactive behaviours as active job preservation strategies, Shoss (2017) proposed that employees may demonstrate their worth by engaging in noticed and valued behaviours, such as OCBs. Based on social exchange theory and research on personal control, Lam et al (2015) found a U-shaped relationship between JI and OCBs, which was argued as a proactive attempt to preserve jobs. From a job preservation perspective, Yang et al (2019) found that the relationship between JI and taking charge is U-shaped. Buonocore et al (2020) based on activation theory proposed and found an inverted U-shaped relationship between JI and cognitive crafting.

Researchers proposed a number of individual and contextual factors that moderate the relationships between JI and proactive behaviours. For example, Sverke and Hellgren (2001) found that, compared
with employees who belong to a trade union, non-affiliated workers engage in more voice when they perceive JI. Berntson, Näswall, and Sverke (2010) found that employability strengthens the negative effect of JI on voice. Schreurs et al (2015) found that JI is mostly a hindrance stressor than a challenge stressor, but the negative effect of JI on voice is weaker for employees with high reward sensitivity. Jiang (2018) found that self-affirmation and work-affirmation buffer the negative effect of JI on creativity. Yang et al (2019) found that job embeddedness attenuates the negative effect of qualitative JI on taking charge. Li, Long, and Er-Yue (2018) proposed and found that for employees who perceive high level of organizational support, JI is negatively related with feedback-seeking according to social exchange theory; when perceived organizational support (POS) is low, JI is positively related with feedback-seeking based on uncertainty reduction theory.

In her review paper, Shoss (2017) summarized four mechanisms by which employees react to JI: stress-related mechanism, social exchange-related mechanism, job-preservation motivation and proactive coping. Our review of the JI-proactive behaviours relationships research seems to suggest that most scholars focus on the stress-related mechanisms (JI as a hindrance stressor) and social exchange-related mechanisms, both of which suggest negative relationships. From the perspective of job preservation motivation, most scholars found positive or curvilinear relationships. That is, JI stimulates the motivation to preserve jobs and avoid potential loss, thus facilitating extra efforts. Shoss (2017) called for more research on the underexplored mechanisms of job preservation and proactive coping. We further advance the perspective of discrete emotions to provide additional theoretical insights on the effects of JI on proactive behaviours.

Although our focus is on proactive behaviours, we also include other behaviours that are at employees’ discretion including organizational deviance and voluntary turnover in order to enrich the model and to cover the most commonly studied negative discretionary behaviours. By discretionary behaviours we mean voluntary activities that employees do for themselves or their organizations (Christian, Eisenkraft, and Kapadia, 2015). Turnover or quitting one’s job is a voluntary decision to leave the organization for good. Organizational deviance is a type of employee discretionary behaviours that harm the organization and/or its members (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). While many studies found JI to be positively related to turnover and deviance, our model from the discrete emotions perspective can add to our knowledge about why and under what conditions JI leads to these actions.
Job insecurity and employee discretionary behaviours: a discrete emotions perspective

In the JI literature, although much evidence has been found linking JI to outcomes through emotions (Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018), these studies only tell us that JI leads to a generally negative emotional experience. There is no research on what specific discrete emotions are driven by JI, why and when these emotions are generated. Perhaps the lack of study on how JI generates specific discrete emotions is because JI research has studied affective JI as one particular dimension of JI. It is recognized that the perception of the likelihood of losing one’s job or desired features of the job (cognitive JI) is different from the emotional elements of the JI experience, such as being concerned, worried, or anxious about losing the job or job features (affective JI: Huang et al, 2012). Meta-analysis evidence (Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018) has found that affective JI had stronger relations with the majority of outcomes and correlates than did cognitive JI and, in most cases, affective JI mediated the relationships between cognitive JI and its outcomes. While this conceptual clarification has greatly contributed to JI research, we posit that the study of affective JI (AJI) should not preclude research on how cognitive JI leads to specific discrete emotions for the following reasons.

First, research on AJI to date did not clarify what specific emotions should be covered in the construct domain. AJI scales (for example, Huang et al, 2012; Probst, 2003) typically aggregate various kinds of negative emotions (such as worry, fear, anxiety etc; see Table 6.1 for a summary of the existing measures) without explaining why these specific emotions are chosen. While affect is oftentimes used as an umbrella term for emotions, feelings, and mood (Elfenbein, 2007), emotions typically refer to discrete and intense but short-lived experiences that are reactions to specific stimuli and have a range of possible consequences (Frijda, 1993). In emotion research, it is well documented that various discrete emotions do not only differ in the hedonic dimension from positive (pleasant) to negative (unpleasant), but they also differ in many other aspects such as intensity and relevance (refer to for example, Elfenbein, 2007 for a review on different framework). One particular aspect that is of interest to this research is that emotions can be differentiated by whether they elicit approach or avoidance behavioural responses. For example, as Ferris et al (2016) noted, ‘experiencing anger results in individuals experiencing approach-oriented action tendencies that facilitate assertion of the self’ while ‘experiencing anxiety results in individuals experiencing avoidance-oriented action tendencies that facilitate preservation of the
self”. Hence, studying the relationship between cognitive JI and each relevant discrete emotion (rather than a generally negative emotional experience as reflected by AJI) can offer a nuanced picture of the JI and behaviour linkage.

Second, there is little research regarding how AJI influences proactive behaviours, perhaps because researchers could only theorize a negative relationship between AJI and proactive behaviours in general, due to the lack of clarity of the emotions involved. Emotion research has clearly demonstrated particular emotions are linked to characteristic patterns of behaviours. There is an increasing number of calls for research linking discrete emotions to organizational behaviours (for example, Ashkanasy and Dorris, 2017). Hence, we believe discrete emotion constitutes a unique perspective to understand the impact of cognitive JI on proactive behaviours.

To our awareness, there is only one study that examined specific discrete emotions as consequences of JI (Reisel et al, 2010) in which the authors studied anger and anxiety as consequences of cognitive JI mediated by job satisfaction. Although their results support a positive impact of JI on the two emotions, unfortunately there is no clear theoretical reason offered for why anger and anxiety were chosen and why job satisfaction mediates the relationships between JI and the two emotions. In this research, we identify specific discrete emotions elicited by a cognitive perception of JI, theorize how these emotions shape different behavioural responses to JI, and explore boundary conditions for these effects. Our overall model is presented in Figure 6.1. We elaborate the proposed relationships below.

**Approach-oriented and avoidance-oriented emotions: anger, frustration, fear, and shame**

As a critical feature of emotions, motivational direction is used to categorize discrete emotions (Elliot, Eder, and Harmon-Jones, 2013; Roseman, 2013). Approach motivation of emotions refers to ‘the impulse to go toward, without specifying the valence of stimuli toward which the impulse is directed, indeed, without the requirement of any evoking stimulus’ (Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, and Price, 2013) and avoidance motivation refers to a tendency to avoid stimuli, regardless of the valence of stimuli (Ferris et al, 2016). Traditionally, approach motivation is linked with positive emotions, while avoidance motivation is linked with negative emotions (for example, Russell and Carroll, 1999; Watson et al, 1999). However, more recent research suggested that the emotional valence (positive or negative) and
motivational direction as separate features of discrete emotions (for example, Elliot, Eder, and Harmon-Jones, 2013; Ferris et al, 2016). For example, anger is a negative emotion, but it is also approach-oriented (Carver and Harmon-Jones, 2009).

Among the major emotional experiences of JI, we focus on two approach-oriented emotions – anger and frustration, and two avoidance-oriented emotions – fear and shame, for several reasons. First, they are among the mostly included JI-related emotional terms used in the current affective JI measures (Table 6.1). Moreover, they are relatively clearly defined discrete emotions compared with many other emotions used in the JI literature such as the mostly frequently used terms ‘concern’ or ‘worry’. In addition, they are process-instead of result-focused emotions such as depression or strain, which are typically studied as well-being outcomes of JI. Finally, there are relatively clear evidence regarding their approach–avoidance motivation in the literature, which we discuss below.

Among the appraisal theories of emotions, Roseman’s (2013) emotion system model provides a framework directly applicable for understanding the approach–avoidance motivation of the discrete emotions we study. According to this model, three fundamental appraisals elicit four types of emotions. Appraisal of whether the situation is consistent versus inconsistent with one’s motives is the most fundamental one. Situations perceived as satisfying their motives (that is, high motive consistency) likely elicit contacting emotions (for example, joy, pride, love, hope, etc) that increase the individuals’ contact and interaction with the situation. As JI is a perception about threats
Table 6.1: Affective job insecurity measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Job insecurity construct</th>
<th>Scale (emotion terms italic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Messe, and Crano, 1984</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>1. The thought of getting fired really <em>scares</em> me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. I am <em>worried</em> about the possibility of being fired</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Working hard would keep me from getting fired</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. If I get fired, I will not know how to tell people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. If I do good work, my job would be safe</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. I am so <em>worried</em> that I would do almost anything to keep my job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. I am <em>worried</em> about the <em>disgrace</em> of being fired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borg and Elizur, 1992</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>1. The thought of losing my job <em>troubles</em> me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. The thought of losing my job <em>worries</em> me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. The thought of losing my job <em>scares</em> me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probst, 2003</td>
<td>Job security satisfaction</td>
<td>1. Never been more secure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Makes me <em>tense</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. <em>Satisfactory</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. <em>Nerve-wracking</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Sufficient amount of security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. <em>Cause for concern</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. <em>Acceptable</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. <em>Discouraging</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. <em>Inadequate</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. More secure than most in my job or profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11. <em>Worrisome</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12. Looks <em>optimistic</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13. Makes me <em>anxious</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14. <em>Upsetting</em> how little job security I have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15. Excellent amount of security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16. <em>All right</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17. <em>Stressful</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18. <em>Positive</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19. Unacceptably low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20. <em>Troubling</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ito and Brotheridge, 2007</td>
<td>Job loss strain</td>
<td>1. I am <em>concerned</em> about the possibility of being laid off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. The possibility of losing my job puts a lot of <em>strain</em> on me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to one’s employment or desired job features, it is obviously motive inconsistent (that is, the motive is to keep the job and desired features, but the situation is perceived as inconsistent with this motive – ‘I may lose them’) and thus not eliciting contacting emotions.

The second appraisal is about control potential. When individuals appraise a situation as low motive consistency and perceive a low chance of reducing the inconsistency (that is, low control potential), distancing emotions (for example, fear, sadness, regret, etc) are likely to occur, which make the individuals move away from the situation. In particular, uncontrollable threats trigger fear. Thus, to the extent that individuals think their JI situation is uncontrollable, they will experience fear (for example, ‘I may lose the job and there may be nothing I can do about it’).

The third appraisal is about how to contend with motive-inconsistent situations, when one has the potential to do so. The appraisal governing whether to move against or away from the stimulus is instrumental versus intrinsic problem type. When individuals appraise a situation as low motive consistency and they can reduce the inconsistency (that is, high control potential) by changing some attributes of the situation because the inconsistency is merely caused by these attributes (that is,
instrumental problem), they tend to experience attack emotions (for example, anger, frustration, guilt, etc), which makes people move against the problematic attributes of the situation. Further, when individuals perceive a clear target responsible for the instrumental problem, anger is experienced, whereas when there is no such target, frustration is experienced. Accordingly, when individuals attribute reasons for JI to the organizationally controllable reasons (for example, unfair procedures of organizational change), they tend to experience anger toward the organization (for example, ‘I may lose my job and this is because the organization didn’t do things as they should have done’), whereas these attributing to organizational uncontrollable reasons or unknown reasons (for example, industrial changes) tend to experience frustration (for example, ‘I may lose my job and this is because the organization doesn’t know how to manage the situation’).

When individuals appraise a stimulus as low motive-consistency and high control potential, but the stimulus is an intrinsic (instead of instrumental) problem, they experience rejection emotions (for example, shame, disgust, contempt, etc) and are likely to enact the behavioural tendency of moving the stimulus away from the self. Thus, JI could lead to shame if individuals attribute JI as their own responsibility (for example, ‘I should have performed better to keep my job but I haven’t’). In sum, according to Roseman’s model, anger and frustration as attack emotions have an approach-orientation while fear as a distancing emotion and shame as a rejection emotion have a clear avoidance-orientation. The four emotions can all be elicited by cognitive JI under different conditions, which is summarized in Table 6.2. Empirical evidence for the action tendencies associated with these discrete emotions will be reviewed next.

Discrete emotions and discretionary behaviours at work

Behaviours that are at the employees’ discretion are different from other behaviours at work such as task performance in that they are not required by the organization and are typically done for personal reasons. Such behaviours are oftentimes more easily shaped by emotions than by cognitions or judgements. We categorize discretionary behaviours using the approach- and avoidance-motivation framework discussed in the above for categorizing emotions, following prior literature (for example, Ferris et al, 2016). Specifically, approach-oriented behaviours involve actions where individuals move toward the situation (for example, fighting for resources when threatened) while avoidance-oriented behaviours involve these where individuals move away from
Table 6.2: Job insecurity and discrete emotions in Roseman’s emotion system model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First appraisal – motive consistency (that is, satisfying individuals’ motives)</th>
<th>Contacting emotions (for example, joy, pride, love, hope, etc) likely to enact the behavioural tendency of having more contact and interaction with the situation</th>
<th>Distancing emotions (for example, fear*, sadness, regret, etc) likely to enact the behavioural tendency of moving away from the situation; uncontrollable threats trigger fear, whereas irrevocable losses make people sad. *JI elicits fear if the situation is perceived as uncontrollable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second appraisal – control potential (that is, chance of reducing the inconsistency)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third appraisal – instrumental problem (that is, can reduce the inconsistency by changing some attributes of the situation because the inconsistency is merely caused by these attributes)</td>
<td>attack emotions (for example, guilt, anger*, frustration*, etc) likely to enact the behavioural tendency of moving against the problematic attributes of the situation; a clear target responsible for the instrumental problem triggers anger, whereas unclear target make people frustrated. *JI elicits anger if the situation is perceived as controllable and the organization is perceived as accountable. *JI elicits frustration if the situation is perceived as controllable and there is no clear target perceived as accountable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third appraisal – intrinsic problem (that is, some potential to reduce the inconsistency by moving the stimulus away from the self because the stimulus is intrinsically negative)</td>
<td>rejection emotions (for example, shame*, disgust, contempt, etc) likely to enact the behavioural tendency of moving the stimulus away from the self. *JI elicits shame if the situation is perceived as controllable and as a result of one’s own failure.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
the situation (for example, fleeing when threatened). Evidence for
the links between approach-oriented emotion and approach-oriented
behaviours and between avoidance-oriented emotion and avoidance-oriented
behaviours can be readily found in the literature. For example,
Harmon-Jones (2003) found that anger is positively related with
behavioural activation system (BAS), which is sensitive to rewards and
causes movement to goals. Ferris et al (2016) found that anger causes
approach-oriented counterproductive work behaviours. Similar to
anger, frustration is associated with much anticipated effort (Carver,
2006; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones,
and Summerell (2017) proposed that frustration belongs to the anger
family and drives approach-motivated behaviours.

Neuropsychologists’ research found fear is linked to right-prefrontal
cortical activity, which is associated with withdrawal motivation
(Harmon-Jones and Sigelman, 2001). Experiencing fear means a sense
of situational control and a lack of efficacy (Lebel, 2017; Lerner and
Keltner, 2001). Fear makes individuals estimate risk pessimistically
and avoid risky choices (Lerner and Keltner, 2001). Finally, shame
results from a failure to live up to an ego-ideal (Lazarus, 1991) and
typically the failure cannot be easily repaired (Lewis, 1992; Poulson,
2000). Although evidence is relatively limited, the prevailing view is
that shame makes people take actions to avoid the failure (Gilbert and

In this chapter, we study five approach-oriented behaviours – voice,
feedback-, information-, and help-seeking behaviours, and approach
deviance, and two avoidance-oriented behaviours – turnover and
avoidance deviance. Voice has been used in the management literature
to represent the intentional expression of work-related ideas and
opinions (Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero, 2003). Feedback-, information-, and help-seeking are viewed as informal learning processes (Emanuel Froehlich et al, 2014; Van Hootegem and De Witte, 2019). Feedback-seeking refers to conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behaviours for attaining valued end states (Ashford and Cummings, 1983); information-seeking refers to a proactive search for non-evaluative information that is acquired via formal or informal sources in organizations (Noe, Tews, and Marand, 2013); and help-seeking refers to the search for others’ assistance, information, advice, or support (Hofmann, Lei, and Grant, 2009). Voluntary turnover is a typical form of avoidance by leaving the organization. Organizational deviance (Bennett and Robinson, 2000) can take approach-oriented forms such as violence, theft from coworkers, and damaging company property, or avoidance-oriented
forms such as taking unnecessary leave, delaying work, and avoiding others at work. We refer to the former type as approach-oriented workplace deviance and the later as avoidance-oriented workplace deviance following Ferris et al. (2016).

We expect a positive link between anger and approach-oriented discretionary behaviours of voice and approach-oriented deviance. As discussed in the above, the experience of anger means individuals perceive their JI situation is dissatisfying, can be changed, and hold the organization as accountable. It motivates individuals to correct negative events or act against the source of blame (Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz, 1994). For example, Lebel (2017) proposed that anger can elicit proactive behaviours, which include speaking up with suggestions. Moreover, anger can even cause attack or harm to others. It has been found to be positively related with deviant or counterproductive work behaviours (Ferris et al, 2016; Rodell and Judge, 2009; Wang et al, 2018).

Proposition 1: cognitive job insecurity is positively related to employee voice and approach-oriented deviance at work via anger.

The experience of frustration means individuals perceive their JI situation is dissatisfying, can be changed, but have no clear target for blame. In such situation, frustration drives employees to speak up ideas and questions (Grant, 2013; Liu and Perrewé, 2005) in order to improve their work situation. In addition, frustrated employees may seek information, feedback, and support (Bindl, 2019) in order to contend with the ambiguous situation. Diefendorff, Richard, and Yang (2008) found that frustration is linked to situational modification strategies, which involves changing the situation, trial to solve problems, and perspective-taking strategies (for example, considering how another person feels). Thus, when perceive JI, employees feeling frustrated tend to have voice, feedback-, information-, and help-seeking behaviours.

Proposition 2: cognitive job insecurity is positively related to employee voice, feedback-seeking, information-seeking, and help-seeking behaviours via frustration.

The action tendencies of fear are avoidance or escape (Lazarus, 1991). Fear causes individual to avoid and generates escape or flight tendencies. In the literature, it has been found that experiencing fear following JI increases turnover intentions (Akgunduz and Eryilmaz, 2018) and it is suggested that fear causes counterproductive withdrawal behaviour.
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(Gooty, Gavin, and Ashkanasy, 2009) and organizational deviance (Wang et al, 2018).

Proposition 3: cognitive job insecurity is positively related to employee turnover and avoidance-oriented deviance at work via fear.

When shame is experienced as a result of JI, it makes people avoid the situation which is viewed as a personal failure. Poulson (2000) proposed that shame can lead to increased workplace dysfunction and employee turnover. Peng et al (2019) also proposed that shame is associated with turnover intentions. Besides escaping (for example, turnover), shame motivates individuals to deny, hide, and withdraw the shame-inducing situation (Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek, 2007).

Proposition 4: cognitive job insecurity is positively related to employee turnover and avoidance-oriented deviance at work via shame.

Boundary conditions

Appraisal theories of emotion suggest that cognitive appraisals cause experienced emotions. When individuals perceive JI, their appraisals of the overall situation such as their level of control, reasons for the job threats, should determine which discrete emotions will be experienced. Based on the emotion system model (Roseman, 2013) informing the JI and discrete emotions relationships proposed in the above, we propose two moderators that we deem as fundamental factors affecting the relationships: one individual difference factor – approach–avoidance temperament, and another situational factor – attribution of the job threat.

Individual approach–avoidance temperament

Elliot and Thrash (2002; 2010) suggested that two latent factors account for the shared variance among all personality differences. Approach temperament is defined as a general neurobiological sensitivity to positive (that is, reward) stimuli (present or imagined) that is accompanied by a perceptual vigilance for, an affective reactivity to, and a behavioural predisposition towards such stimuli. Avoidance temperament is defined as a general neurobiological sensitivity to negative (that is, punishment) stimuli (present or imagined) that is accompanied by a perceptual vigilance for, an affective reactivity to,
and a behavioural predisposition towards such stimuli. Approach–avoidance temperament is theorized as rudimentary biologically based individual differences that make it distinct from other conceptually related constructs such as promotive and preventive self-regulatory focus, and positive and negative emotionality (Bipp and Demerouti, 2015; Elliot and Thrash, 2010). In other words, approach–avoidance temperament is not affected by external factors like job threats. Due to these features, we adopt it in our examination of the associations between JI and the discrete emotions.

Specifically, we posit that approach temperament weakens the extent that JI would trigger anger, frustration, fear, and shame, while avoidance temperament strengthens the extent that JI would trigger fear and shame. Individual with a high level of approach temperament have a general neurobiological sensitivity to positive instead of negative stimuli. The threat of JI should in general be less impactful on these individuals. For two persons who perceive the same level of job loss likelihood, the one who have a higher level of approach temperament tends to look at the positive side of their job situation and see more possibilities (for example, ‘change for a better job’, or ‘good if I do something new’) or put more attention on other aspects of life. Thus, they respond to JI with less negative emotions. In contrast, individual with a high level of avoidance temperament are not only neurophysiologically sensitive to negative stimuli such as loss of job, but they also have a predisposition to move away from such stimuli. JI tends to be more salient in drawing their attention and causes more responses, cognitively, emotionally, as well as behaviourally. Because of the strong natural tendency to see the worse part of the situation, think negatively and ruminate, they are impelled to escape from the situation of JI. The more they try to avoid, the more feelings of fear and shame are produced. However, we do not predict the effect of avoidance temperament on the JI and anger/frustration relationship. On the one hand, high avoidance temperament people may have more anger when faced with JI because they are more sensitive to the negative stimuli of JI than lower avoidance temperament; on the other hand, they may have lower anger and frustration because they avoid direct interaction with the stimuli, thus decreasing chances for triggering the approach-oriented emotions.

Proposition 5: effects of cognitive job insecurity on anger, frustration, fear, and shame are weaker for individuals who have high approach temperament than for these low-approach-temperament individuals.
Proposition 6: effects of cognitive job insecurity on fear and shame are stronger for individuals who have high avoidance temperament than for these low-avoidance-temperament individuals.

Individual attribution of JI: self, organization, and environment

JI can result from not only organizational changes such as downsizing, restructuring, or layoffs as typically described in the literature, but also environmental factors such as industrial restructuring and economic downturn, or individual own reasons such as unsatisfied performance and bad interpersonal relationships. Although these factors oftentimes work together in forming a perception of reasons for JI, individuals’ primary attribution of the situation determine how one sees it and thus plays a critical role in shaping the main emotions experienced. Attribution theory (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967) is among the oldest psychological theories about how individuals make sense of what happens to and around them. One central idea of the attribution theory is that people are like scientists seeking to understand ‘why’ something happens. Such causal attributions are regarded as the underpinnings for further judgments, emotional reactions, and behaviours. In our case, individuals faced with JI will ask, consciously or unconsciously, ‘why does this happen?’ and their answers to this question will make a difference in what emotions are generated and, in turn, the behavioural responses. Because JI involves an employment relationship, both the employee and employer are relevant parties that can be attributed as the reason for JI. In addition, individuals may also attribute the threats to the environment external to the organization, such as industrial, technological, or societal reasons.

When employees attribute JI to their own reasons, they will experience more shame that involves intrinsic problems and is felt toward the self (Roseman, 2013). An internal attribution of JI means individuals believe they themselves fail to keep their jobs. Such sense of failure further strengthens the sense of powerlessness and individuals tend to develop more avoidance emotions and behaviours in order to flee from further loss of their self-esteem. However, it is worth to note that an internal attribution is less likely because the JI literature suggests that it is generally a result of various organizational changes and some JI studies use organizational or higher level of changes as proxies or objective indicators of JI (Huang et al, 2012; Jiang and Lavaysse, 2018; Lee, Huang, and Ashford, 2018), which implies an external attribution of JI is more typical. In addition, the ‘fundamental attribution error’ suggests that individuals tend not to attribute negative outcomes or
failures to their own, as a way to protect self-esteem (Heider, 1958), which also explains why an internal attribution of JI is less likely than the other types of attribution.

When employees attribute JI to organizational reasons, we predict that they tend to experience more anger toward the organizations. When employees make attributions that organization is responsible for the threat of the continuity and stability of their present employment, they have a clear target to blame and thus experience anger. When employees attribute JI to external environment reasons that are related to neither themselves nor the organization, they do not have a clear target to blame. In Roseman’s emotion system model (2013), when the emotion-eliciting stimulus is caused by circumstances, individuals will experience more emotions felt toward circumstances, such as fear and frustration. Thus, we predict that employees with the attributions of JI to environmental reasons will experience more fear and frustration. Based on the above reasoning, we propose:

Proposition 7: individuals who attribute job insecurity to their own reasons tend to experience shame; individuals who attribute job insecurity to organizational reasons tend to experience anger; individuals who attribute job insecurity to environmental reasons or who have no clear attribution tend to experience fear and frustration.

Discussion

When perceive JI, some employees voice; some seek feedback, information and/or help from others; some do counterproductive things; and others quit. Why? In this chapter, we develop a theory-informed model to answer this question, from the perspective of discrete emotions. Overall, the model suggests moderated mediation effects governing the relationships between JI and the behaviours – JI interacts with individual approach–avoidance temperament and attribution of job threats to determine the experienced emotion(s), which determines whether people would voice, do feedback/information/help-seeking, go deviant, or quit.

This model makes several contributions and is worth further development. First of all, it contributes to the literature of employee proactive reactions to JI. Very limited and mixed findings exist in the literature about the relationships. Most scholars focused on the negative effects of JI on proactive behaviours based on stress-related mechanisms or social exchange-related mechanisms. By exploring
the mediating roles of discrete emotions, this study provides a new theoretical perspective to examine the relationships. Based on the appraisal theories of emotion and Roseman’s emotion system model in particular, we propose that cognitive JI make employees experience more or less anger, frustration, fear and/or shame, which in turn shapes the behaviours. This is the first step to explore the JI–discrete emotion–workplace behaviours relationships. Using this framework, future research can continue to explore other types of proactive behaviours and the corresponding discrete emotions. For example, employees may contend with JI by job crafting or job-searching behaviours when experiencing frustration; shame may motivate employees to take actions to reduce hindrances, depending on how repairable individuals perceive the situation is.

Second, our proposed model has important implications for the JI research. It informs JI researchers what specific emotions can be generated by JI using the framework of approach–avoidance motivation of emotion. Prior research on affective JI or affective outcomes of JI predominantly focus on the valence dimension of emotion only and thus can only suggest that JI leads to negative (versus positive) emotions. Using the framework of approach–avoidance motivation, we identify anger and frustration as typical approach-oriented emotion responses to JI and fear and shame as typical avoidance-oriented emotion responses to JI. If this model is supported by empirical evidence, future JI research should adopt this approach in order to make more precise predictions about how people respond to JI.

Further, we identify the boundary conditions of the JI discrete emotions relationships. Approach and avoidance temperament as latent factors from trait adjectives, affective dispositions, and the motivational system are fundamental individual difference dimensions that influence appraisals and thus the experienced emotions under the JI situation. We postulate that various individual trait moderators to the JI effects (Lee et al., 2018) found in prior research such as self-esteem and affectivity may be explained by this factor. We examine attributions of job threat (to individual, organizational, or external reasons) as a JI-specific situational factor instead of an individual difference in attributional style, which is likely to be influenced by or has overlaps with individual differences such as approach and avoidance temperament. This particular situational variable is a proximate factor influencing individual responses to JI that potentially captures many other contextual factors. In other words, conditional factors to JI effect found in prior research such as employability and organizational climate (Lee, Huang, and Ashford, 2018) likely work through their influences
on how individuals attribute the sources of JI. Moreover, using this model, we can better understand the impact of different environmental features on employee typical emotional and behavioural responses to JI. For example, in the global COVID-19 pandemic, do job-insecure employees typically experience fear and frustration? Future research can examine these ideas.

Finally, this model has implications for the proactivity research. According to Parker, Bindl, and Strauss’s (2010) model of the motivational pathways of proactivity, affect energizes people to do proactive behaviours. However, extant research mainly focuses on the cognitive pathways, which were referred to as ‘can do’ and ‘reason to’ motivational states in the proactivity literature but the ‘energized to’ pathway is much less studied. Moreover, the limited research on affect and proactivity is primarily focused on positive affect as energizers. Our model suggests approach-oriented emotions such as anger and frustration (which is typically viewed as ‘negative’) also energize proactivity such as voice, feedback-seeking, information-seeking, and help-seeking. Thus, further tests and development of the model are also worthwhile in this aspect.

References


