

The Effects of Job Insecurity on Employee Voice Behavior

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Abstract. In this study, we examined the curvilinear relationship between employees insecurity and voice behavior. Meanwhile, we investigated the meditated influence of organization-based self-esteem and felt obligation for constructive change. Results totally supported this framework. Specifically, they include: (1) quantitative job insecurity was associated with promotive voice and prohibitive voice in the inverted U-shaped relationship; (2) qualitative job insecurity was negatively correlated with promotive voice and prohibitive voice; (3) the organization-based self-esteem and the felt obligation for constructive change played a mediated role in the relation of job insecurity and employee voice behavior. Implication and limitations, as well as future directions were discussed by the end.

Keywords: job insecurity; voice behavior; organization-based self-esteem; felt obligation for constructive change.

1. Introduction

All The last decade witnessed dynamic changes in business world, and now more organizations engage in continuous downsizing and reorganization. Although these dramatic changes have caused a lot of unemployment, those who remained at the organization are affected too [1]. Employees are frequently exposed to intensive competition and revolution, and stick into a fear of losing job. In other words, they face job insecurity. To flight back this unpleasant feeling, usually, people engage in exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect to respond to job insecurity. At present study, we focus on employees' voice, an extra-behavior and pivotal aspect, which can benefit organizational efficiency [2]. It was defined as employees' constructive ideas that would promote organization's development as well as functioning smoothly, besides, or the concerns about existing problems which may be harmful to organization [3]. However, employees are usually reluctant to voice, and previous studies showed inconsistent results in terms of the link between job insecurity and employ voice behavior [4]. We reckoned the mixed findings were due to that they regarded these two variables as a whole without considering the possibilities of different dimension may have different effect. Besides, though a host of researches has emerged, most of them focused on such as coping strategies or personality, with the ultimate goals to eradicate the negative effect of insecurity and costs, while little research has focused on organization-level variables and the potential positive influence of job insecurity [5]. However, according to Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) transactional theory, it is personal perception towards environment and stressors that determines subsequent coping strategies [6]. Hence, it is necessary to search for potential moderators and mediators of organizational level in the aforementioned relationship. Thepurpose of this study is to investigate how voice behavior is affected by job insecurity and expand Sverke & Hellgren' s (2001) EVLN theories, and then we will discuss the two mediating effects of organization-based self-esteem and felt obligation for constructive change. From theoretical perspectives, we hope to provide a new angle to explain previous inconsistent results. Also, understanding the framework of job insecurity and voice will help manager identify effective prevention and inspiration.

2. Literature Review

We use the most widely accepted promotive-prohibitive voice framework to distinguish different kinds of voice behaviors [7]. Promotive voice refers to the voice that will help the whole organization function appropriately, accompanied with suggestions, or specifically speaking, the

innovative ideas, and while prohibitive is aimed at pointing out the potential factors which may undermine work units, so it acts as an alarming message to reduce the likelihood of losses [3]. Job insecurity is defined as the mental strain associated with being in a powerless position and ambiguity about the future. As a one of the complex stressors, it can be divided into quantitative and qualitative job insecurity. The former describes a threatened situation in workplace, or a worry about the job itself, while the later referred to the possibility of losing valued job features. According to Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress, individual's appraisal towards stressors determines the subsequent emotional responses and outcomes [6]. So we reckon that the different appraisal processes towards these two kinds of job insecurity would lead to different outcomes.

In the present study, we use some theories about employability to examine how quantitative—qualitative job insecurity contribute to explain variance in employee's voice behaviors. Although employees engage in exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect, when they are faced with insecurity, employability supplies employees the sense of control and security, as well as the freedom to act as their own wishes. When feeling quantitative job insecurity, an individual perceives that valuable features are damaged, thereby taking measures so as to reduce the possibility of losing important resources in organization doing so that he could attain more control towards the environment, and feel less uncertainty. Hence, moderate quantitative job insecurity witnesses an increment of voice. But employees would lose motivation to invest but protect existing resources as a copied method when they found the external environment lacks resource [8]. It's reasonable that employees' motivation of voice reduces when faced with the accompanied high risk. However, according to Herzberg's (1959) hygiene-motivational factors theory, job features fall into the range of motivational factor, so an individual who is in qualitative job insecurity would not be satisfied and thus the motivation of voice weakens [3]. On the other hand, important job feature is more precious than the job itself, and the strategies of adopting voice to relieve qualitative insecurity might fail when they are confronted with quantitative job insecurity, which result in the decrement in behaviors and commitment. Therefore, we predict that:

Hypothesis 1: Quantitative job insecurity have an inverted-U relationship with voice behavior;

Hypothesis 2: Qualitative job insecurity have a negative relationship with voice behavior;

Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) is defined as the degree of self-perceived value that individuals have of themselves as organization members acting within an organizational context. It reflects how individuals perceive themselves as capable and worthy to an organization and whether ones' self-esteem is met by acting roles in workplace. Employees experiencing high OBSE will regard themselves as important and meaningful in their roles in the organization and feel satisfied. Job insecurity not only undermines employees' control of environment but also damages their valued job features, and internal resources. For example, Dyne & Pierce (2004) argued that if individuals gain more control of demands and environment, they believe they are valuable and thus their self-esteem increased too [9]. Hence Job insecurity is negatively related to OBSE. This process triggers their self-protect strategies to avoid risks; Lee (2003) found that there exists a negative relationship between job insecurity and organization-based self-esteem [10]. Overall, as we noted before, lower OBSE individual is reluctant to contribute to organization, therefore there is a positive relationship between OBSE and voice behaviors. Therefore, we predict that:

Hypothesis 3: Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) mediates the relationship between job insecurity and voice behavior.

One's felt obligation for constructive change (FOCC) is defined as the extent that employee is committed to bring about constructive change and correct problems. In line with Hackman & Oldham's (1976) job characteristic theory, positive job characteristics provide employees more positive feeling, which will increase the likelihood of employees' positive outcomes [11]. Hence, employee in high level of FOCC is more likely to feel obligated and engage to improve undesirable practices in work units. As we noted above, employees in high level of job insecurity feel that organization fails to provide them reward with resources, thus reducing motivation and commitment

as well as obligation [11]. Eisenberger (2001) suggested that as to workers, the more support organization provides, the higher feeling of responsibilities will be [12]. Bryan & Marler (2006) claimed that one's access to resources is highly related to feeling of responsibilities [13]. So there is a negative relationship between voice and felt obligation for constructive change and we proposed hypothesizes below:

Hypothesis 4: Felt obligation for constructive change (FOCC) mediates the relationship between job insecurity and voice behavior.

3. Methods

A self-reported questionnaire was used for our research. We collected data from MBA students in a college in the Northern China and finally sifted 404 valid questionnaires from a total of 483 online and tangible questionnaires(questionnaire efficiency = 83.6%). 55.45% of the participants were male, with an average age of 29.8; The average working experience is 6.14 years; they predominantly have a bachelor degree(77.48%); Participants had stayed at their current position for 4.81years; The occupations of participants were Ordinary Employee(43.32%), Junior Manager (33.91%), Middle Manager (19.8%), and Senior Manager (2.97%).

We used the 7-item job insecurity scale by Sverke et al.(2002), which is regarded as an effective measure that can encompass more of the job insecurity experience and generate a higher degree of content validity [4]. Four items captures qualitative insecurity ($\alpha_1=0.84$) and other three items are designed for measuring quantitative insecurity ($\alpha_2=0.78$). Example items are “My development in this organization is promising”, “I am worried about having to leave my job before I would like to”, rate on a 7-point scale from 1(strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree).

A 10-item voice behavior scale was used by Liang & Farh(2012), with 5 items tapping promotive voice ($\alpha_1=0.92$) and 5 items tapping prohibitive voice($\alpha_2=0.83$) [3]. Example items are “Proactively develop and make suggestions for issues that may influence the unit”, “Advise other colleagues against undesirable behaviors that would hamper job performance”, “Proactively report coordination problems in the workplace to the management”.

We used a 10-item scale by Pierce et al. (1989) to measure organization-based self-esteem [14]. Sample items include “I play an important role of this organization”, “I count around here”.

Felt obligation for constructive change was assessed by Liang and his colleagues' 5-item scale, a sample item is “I have an obligation to the organization to voice my own opinions” [3]. All the items in both scales ranges from 1(“strongly agree”) to 5(“strongly disagree”).

4. Results

The Pearson correlation among variables are showed in Table 1. Before proceeding direct effect test and indirect effect test, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).The six-model measurement model indicated (Qualitative Insecurity, Quantitative Insecurity, Promotive Voice, Prohibitive Voice, OBSE, FOCC) showed the best fit (CMIN/DF=1.876, RMSEA=0.056, GFI=0.921, AGFI=0.916, NFI=0.933, IFI=0.966, TLI=0.962, CFI=0.966).

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among study variables.

Person correlation	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
QTJI	2.23	0.92	1					
QLJI	2.84	0.85	0.12*	1				
PHV	3.16	0.78	-0.11*	-0.25**	1			
PMV	3.46	0.86	-0.17**	-0.27**	0.54*	1		
OBSE	3.75	0.64	-0.21**	-0.35**	0.32*	0.50*	1	
FOCC	3.93	0.68	-0.16**	-0.18**	0.42*	0.53*	0.38*	1

Note: $p^* < 0.05$, $p^{**} < 0.01$

To test hypotheses 1, we calculate quadratic product indicators and standardized all the variables. The paths between quadratic job quantitative insecurity items with promotive voice ($\beta = -0.358$, $p < 0.05$) and prohibitive voice behavior ($\beta = -0.432$, $p < 0.05$) are significant, suggesting support for H1; Meanwhile, there is significant negative relationship between qualitative job insecurity and promotive voice ($\beta = -0.231$, $p < 0.05$) and prohibitive voice behavior ($\beta = -0.245$, $p < 0.05$), indicating support for H2.

Next, we divided our model into several sub models. Quantitative insecurity was negatively related to OBSE ($\beta = -0.212$, $p < 0.05$) and FOCC ($\beta = -0.165$, $p < 0.01$); OBSE and FOCC was positively related to prohibitive voice behavior ($\beta = 0.319$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.416$, $p < 0.05$, respectively) and promotive voice ($\beta = 0.490$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.512$, $p < 0.05$). However, we found non-significant relationship between quantitative insecurity and prohibitive voice behavior ($\beta = 0.056$, $p > 0.05$; $\beta = 0.057$, $p > 0.05$) and promotive voice ($\beta = -0.064$, $p > 0.05$; $\beta = -0.083$, $p > 0.05$). As we had examined the nonlinear relationship before, and in line with Wen et al. 's (2012) advice, we did not have to adopt bootstrapping approach to examine indirect effect. Therefore, we concluded that OBSE and FOCC partly mediated the relationship between quantitative insecurity and voice. Similarly, qualitative job insecurity is found to be negatively related to OBSE ($\beta = -0.350$, $p < 0.05$) and FOCC ($\beta = -0.180$, $p < 0.05$); OBSE and FOCC have a positive relationship to prohibitive voice behavior ($\beta = 0.253$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.375$, $p < 0.05$, respectively), and promotive voice ($\beta = 0.466$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.492$, $p < 0.05$). Also, qualitative job insecurity is negative related to prohibitive voice behavior ($\beta = -0.157$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = -0.181$, $p < 0.05$) and promotive voice ($\beta = -0.157$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = -0.180$, $p < 0.05$). Overall, hypothesis 3 and 4 are fully supported.

5. Discussion

Although the importance of employees' voice was widely recognized in the literature, and massive studies were conducted to exam the relationship between voice and job insecurity, their findings were sometimes inconsistent or opposite. This study expanded our understanding by dividing these two variables into four dimensions and discussed different combinations respectively. Results are consistent with prior research [3]. Overall, we found that though both types of insecurity led to resource depletion, moderated qualitative job insecurity is negatively related to voice by undermining valued job features in workplace, while quantitative insecurity would evoke one' s motivation to gain more control thus resulting problem-solving strategies (i.e. Voice behavior). However, when employee is in higher level of insecurity, whether quantitative insecurity or qualitative job insecurity, he/she would judge that the organization fails to obey reciprocal contract, and would experience a loss of resources, therefore adopts self-protect strategies to prevent future lost and frustration. Second, our findings, pushed forward the boundaries of knowledge about FOCC and OBSE, which gained fewer attentions before. We predicted OBCE and FOCC were the principal mediators linking job insecurity and voice behavior, and the results supported

hypothesizes. Two types of insecurity were negatively related to OBSE and FOCC, which were positively related to voice. Those employees who are in high degree OBCE believe they are value and meaningful to the organization, or who are in high degree FOCC reckon themselves feel obligated and engage to improve undesirable practices in work units. Conversely, when there exists potential threats to personal growth and development, employees would regard the psychological contract is breached. As Bakker et al. (2005) suggest, extra-performance derives from psychological contract between employees and organization [11]. If the organization fails to obey reciprocal rules, say, provide job resources, employees would reduce their motivation and commitment of organizational citizen behaviors [11].

Our findings also have some practical implications. Firstly, considering the beneficial effect, managers could identify some institutional arrangements to moderately stimulate employees' quantitative job insecurity, such as knock-out system, performance appraisal system, etc. When employees are experiencing high level of quantitative job insecurity, manager should supply psychological consultation or individual career developing training. Meanwhile, the factors in workplace which may bring out qualitative job insecurity should be eradicated by vocational training, clearer career ladder or flexible job designs. On the other hand, in order to encourage employees to voice, managers could increase employees' OBSE and FOCC, since they are important indicators of psychological contract which is closely related to their willing to contribute to organization. Specifically, the interventions should be identified to assist employees to tackle job demands and remind of them to obey reciprocal rules in organization. Meanwhile, considering discrepancy among employees' need, manager should integrate different kinds of methods. All in all, employees want themselves to be noticed and comforted when they have sense of powerless and helpless facing this ever-changing world.

This study has several limitations that should be mentioned. Firstly, we used self-reported and measures which raises possibility about CMV. We used Harman's single factor test to detect CMV and found that the first factor could only explain 22% variance before rotation, so present study might not be affected seriously by CMV. Moreover, cross-sectional methods limit the strength to infer causality. Therefore, future research should adopt a longitudinal study and obtain data from different sources. Second, though our sample included employees from a wide-range of backgrounds, we suggest more researches should be conducted to examine our external validity of findings. Although our study supported the mediating effect of OBSE and FOCC, there might exit other possible mediators to explain the relationship between job insecurity and voice better. More importantly, we only focused on qualitative-quantitative insecurity and promotive-prohibitive voice framework, the most widely acceptable dimensionality, thus we call on future research try other possibilities, where other types of job insecurity and voice behavior can be taken into consideration. So future studies should figure out other contextual factors or leadership style which may also have effect on voice behavior. What's more, it is also interesting to consider the darkness of voice, though previous research overwhelmingly regarded it as an effective method to improve productivity or competitiveness. We suppose it would open up a new domain of voice and deserve more attention.

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