

**JOB INSECURITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND WORK  
ENGAGEMENT IN A GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION**

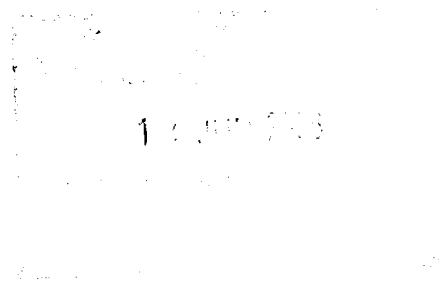
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Mini-dissertation submitted in the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Industrial Psychology in the School of Behavioural Sciences at the North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus.

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November 2005



## REMARKS

The reader is reminded of the following:

The references as well as the editorial style as prescribed by the Publication Manual (*4<sup>th</sup> edition*) of the American Psychological Association (APA) were followed in this thesis. This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology at the North-West University.

This mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to various individuals who supported me throughout the completion of this mini-dissertation.

- First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my Creator and God, who blessed me with the ability and opportunity to complete this research.
- A very special word of thanks to Mr M. W. Stander, for his expert guidance, motivation and support.
- Thanks to Dr J. Bosman and Mrs A. Oosthuizen, for their support and advice regarding the statistical processing.
- I would also like to express my gratitude to the management of the participating organisation, as well as the employees of the organisation for the completion of the questionnaires.
- To my husband, Jaco for all his patience, encouragement and support throughout the completion of the mini-dissertation.
- My parents, Hans and Hanne van Deventer, for their motivation and support.
- My friend Marelize van Eck, thanks for all the hours on the phone supporting and motivating me.

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## SUMMARY

**Title:** Job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement in a government organisation.

**Key words:** Job insecurity, psychological empowerment, work engagement, work wellness, government organisation

In South Africa, organisations are exposed to economical, political, social, demographical and technological forces that encourage change. Tremendous pressure is placed on organisations to improve their performance and increase their global competitiveness in this continuously changing world of work. As organisations focus on competition and profit margins, workers are confronted with real or anticipated job loss, causing many to feel insecure about their jobs and future work life. Employees who consider themselves empowered, experience reduced emotional strain. Empowered employees thus derive a sense of meaning from their work, and this results in work engagement.

The entire population of employees working at a government organisation in Gauteng was targeted for this research. The study population included workers from all levels, ranging from semi-skilled to professionals. A cross-sectional survey design was used to obtain the research objectives. Three standardised questionnaires were used in the empirical study, namely the Job Insecurity Inventory, the Measuring Empowerment Questionnaire and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale.

Results indicated lower levels of job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement compared to previous studies. No correlations were found between job insecurity and psychological empowerment or between job insecurity and work engagement. Psychological empowerment showed a positive correlation with work engagement. Regression analysis indicated that meaning did not show a significant predictive value towards cognitive job insecurity, but indicated significant predictive value towards affective job insecurity and towards work engagement. Cognitive job insecurity predicted work engagement significantly. Conclusions and limitations of the current research were discussed and recommendations for future research were made.

## OPSOMMING

**Titel:** Werksonsekerheid, psigologiese bemagtiging en werksbegeestering in 'n staatsorganisasie.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Werksonsekerheid, psigologiese bemagtiging, werksbegeestering, werkswelstand, staatsorganisasie

In Suid Afrika word organisasies blootgestel aan ekonomiese, politiese, sosiale, demografiese en tegnologiese kragte wat verandering aanmoedig. Geweldige druk word op organisasies geplaas om hul werksverrigtinge asook hul wêreldmededingendheid in die voortdurend veranderende wêreld van werk te verbeter. Soos organisasies fokus op kompetisie en wins, word werknemers gekonfronteer met werklike of verwagte werksverlies. Dit lei daartoe dat baie werknemers onsekerheid ervaar ten opsigte van hul werk en hul toekomstige werkslewe. Werknemers wat hulself as bemagtig beskou, beleef verlaagde vlakke van emosionele spanning. Bemagtigde werknemers beleef dus sinvolheid in hul werk, wat lei tot werksbegeestering.

Die totale werknemerspopulasie van 'n staatsorganisasie is geteiken vir die navorsing. Die studiepopulasie was verteenwoordigend van alle organisasievlakke, van semi-geskoolde arbeiders tot professionele persone. 'n Dwarsneeopname-ontwerp is gebruik om die navorsingsdoelwitte te bereik. Drie gestandaardiseerde vraelyste is gebruik in die empiriese navorsing, naamlik die "Job Insecurity Inventory", die "Measuring Empowerment Questionnaire" en die "Utrecht Work Engagement Scale".

In vergelyking met vorige studies, dui bevindinge laer vlakke van werksonsekerheid, psigologiese bemagtiging en werksbegeestering aan. Geen korrelasies is tussen werksonsekerheid en psigologiese bemagtiging asook werksonsekerheid en werksbegeestering gevind nie. Psigologiese bemagtiging het 'n positiewe korrelasie met werksbegeestering getoon. Regressie-analise het aangedui dat sinvolheid nie 'n beduidende voorspelwaarde ten opsigte van kognitiewe werksonsekerheid gehad het nie, maar wel 'n betekenisvolle voorspelwaarde ten opsigte van affektiewe werksonsekerheid en werksbegeestering het. Kognitiewe werksonsekerheid voorspel wel beduidende werksbegeestering. Gevolgtrekkings is gemaak, beperkinge uiteengesit en aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing is aan die hand gedoen.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement of employees in a government organisation.

In this chapter the problem statement, the research objectives and the research methods are discussed. Thereafter, a chapter division will follow.

### 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The South African work environment has been characterised by enormous economic and socio-political change since 1994 when South Africa was reabsorbed into the dynamics of the global economic arena. South African organisations are under constant pressure to deal with rapid technology transfer, more immediate direct and intense international competition, the intensified pressure for social and economic transformation, black economic empowerment, and changes to the legislative framework as it applies to organisations as well as the eroding impact on productivity of HIV/Aids (Van Tonder, 2005). The need for continuous organisational change and adaptability is a fundamental imperative for organisational survival and profitability (Ndlovu & Parumasur, 2005).

The changing world of work is characterised by life-long learning, risk taking, speed and change, networking and measuring outputs (Wentzel & Geldenhuis, 2005). Within this constantly changing operating context, organisations face continuous challenges that require ongoing adaptation (Van Tonder, 2005). Organisations have to be flexible and innovative in their adaptive responses to change in order to survive in the competitive environment (Ndlovu & Parumasur, 2005). According to Van Tonder (2005), these adaptive responses have taken the form of strategic repositioning, reorganisations, mergers, acquisitions and buy-outs. The manner in which these challenges are negotiated by organisations becomes a burdensome management issue. Managers need to demonstrate the willingness to take risks by adopting an entrepreneurial attitude that implies looking at the big picture, finding the competitive edge, formulating plans, taking risks, assuming responsibility and operating with

minimal resources in a hands-on manner to accomplish organisational objectives (Alexander, 1998).

Change causes incongruence between the thinking and behaviour of individuals and organisations, and incongruence between organisations and individuals. The problem that individuals and organisations face does not lie in change as such, but in the incongruence created by that change (Wentzel & Geldenhuis, 2005). The incongruence has become a primary source of job stress, which is detrimental to the health and well-being of the organisation as it leads to reduced performance (Van Tonder, 2005). Probst (2002) suggests that job insecurity can be viewed as a job stressor. If organisations want to eliminate job stressors and thereby improve organisational performance, it is necessary to investigate literature in order to clarify the concept of job insecurity.

Job insecurity has been conceptualised in literature as a job stressor and as a global or multidimensional concept (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). According to De Witte (2005), job insecurity induces a lot of strain for the worker involved. Consequently, they have to put specific efforts, energy and time in to adapt to these pressures. It is clear that job insecurity critically influences the work-related objectives and effectiveness of an organisation where job insecurity is experienced (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Yousef, 1998). De Witte (2005) warns that job insecurity could create a downward spiral for the organisation, by explaining that reduced organisational attitudes (e.g. dissatisfied and less committed workers) could affect organisational behaviours in a negative way. This in turn weakens the effectiveness and competitiveness of the organisation in the short term, which further increases feelings of job insecurity. Job insecurity thus risks creating more job insecurity in the long term (De Witte, 2005).

Therefore, managers have to understand the concept of job insecurity and implement strategies to reduce the levels of job insecurity in order to increase organisational effectiveness (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). In order to gain full insight into the antecedents and consequences of job insecurity, one can keep the person-environment fit theory of stress at the back of one's mind. Based on this perspective, job insecurity is perceived, by an employee, as a change or antecedent to change demanding adaptation. This may be difficult to meet. Failure to cope with potential future unemployment or loss of job features may have significant consequences (Probst, 2002).

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984:438) define job insecurity as the 'perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation'. Mauno and Kinnunen (2002) elaborate on this definition by stating that job insecurity consists of the importance and the probability of losing a dimension of the total job or a job feature, and powerlessness, referring to the employee's relative inability to control threats related to his or her job. Smithson and Lewis (2000) found that employees make a distinction between short-term insecurity, which is generally viewed as "acceptable" and long-term insecurity, which is seen as undesirable. One significant issue linked to increased job insecurity is the psychological distress often experienced by employees (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). Therefore, the sense of powerlessness experienced by employees is an important element of job insecurity, because it intensifies the experienced threat (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984).

Conger and Kanungo (1988) suggest that employees' experience of powerlessness can be positively influenced through psychological empowerment. Buckle (2003) identifies increased productivity, performance and motivation, quality products and services, lowered absenteeism and turnover, as well as more creative employees as advantages of psychological empowerment for the organisation. Job satisfaction, commitment, energy, high performance and willingness to learn are identified as some of the advantages for the individual. Seibert, Silver and Randolph (2004) find that the relation of psychological empowerment to performance and job satisfaction is significant and positive. Empowering employees enhances their belief of their own self-efficacy and Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000) found that this results in higher levels of job performance. Spreitzer (1995) explains that effectiveness and innovative behaviour are two consequences of psychological empowerment, which has great potential to contribute to reaching organisational objectives.

Psychological empowerment is defined as a process whereby an employee's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Kaminski, Kaufman, Graubarth and Robins (2000) define empowerment as a process that promotes an active approach to problem-solving, increased political understanding, and an increased ability to exercise control in the environment. According to Robinson (1997), the common thread through most definitions of empowerment is the concept of providing more information, more skills and decision-making ability on how to perform their work to

everyone in the organisation. Wilkinson (1998) refers to empowerment as a form of employee involvement initiative and focus on task-based involvement and attitudinal change.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) as well as Smith and Mouly (1998) distinguish between concepts of empowerment which are relational and motivational. As a relational concept, empowerment is concerned with issues related to management style and employee participation. As a motivational construct empowerment is individual and personal, it is about discretion, autonomy, power and control. This motivational aspect of empowerment becomes the defining feature of the initiative. Empowerment is a way of motivating and bringing “togetherness” in organisations (Lwehabura & Matovelo, 2000).

Argyris (1998) explains that internal commitment is participatory and very closely related to empowerment. Spreitzer's (1995) model defined empowerment as intrinsic motivation manifested in four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role. The four cognitions are meaning (subjective assessment of importance of the job), competence (personal sense of efficacy), self-determination (one's sense of control and autonomy, freedom of choice) and impact (one's belief in an employee's ability to influence the environment where he/she is working). Together these four cognitions reflect one's active (an orientation in which the individual wishes and feels able to shape his or her work role and context) rather than passive orientation to a work role.

Dobbs (1993) states that in order for empowerment to take root and thrive, organisations must encourage participation, innovation, access to information and accountability of employees. According to Wilkinson (1998), employers must provide employees with the opportunity to be involved, with the rationale that highly committed and empowered staff are more likely to engage in a beyond contract effort.

Work engagement provides a complex and thorough perspective on an individual's relationship with work, focusing on the work itself (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Based on Maslach and Leiter's view, Rothmann (2003) describes work engagement as characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy. Maslach et al. (2001) indicate that Schaufeli has defined work engagement as a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romà and Bakker (2002) define engagement as a positive,

fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour generally refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, dedication to deriving a sense of significance from one's work, a feeling of inspiration, pride and strong involvement in one's work, and absorption to being totally concentrated and happily immersed in one's work (Ford & Poms, 2005; Rothmann, 2003). A greater match between the person and six domains of his or her job environment, namely workload, control, rewards, community, fairness and values (Maslach et al., 2001) can increase the probability of work engagement with work.

Based on the conceptual model of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), an interdependent relationship between job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement is possible. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's (1984) conceptual model of job insecurity indicates that employees' subjective threat is derived from the objective threat. They will interpret the threat based on three basic sources of data, namely official organisational announcement, unintended organisational clues evident to employees and rumours created during times of threat when official messages are scarce. Given the scope of the objective data to which employees might attend, employees vary in their assessment of a subjective threat. The subjective threat involved in job insecurity is multifaceted and these facets can be grouped into two basic dimensions, the severity of the threat and powerlessness to counteract. One can therefore, assume that if employees are empowered, their subjective assessment of the objective threat will be affected in such a way that they do not experience job insecurity to a large extent. Individuals' reactions to job insecurity include reduced work effort (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), implying that their level of work engagement will be affected by job insecurity.

Researchers agree that perceived powerlessness (lack of psychological empowerment) is undoubtedly an important variable in the study of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Probst, 2003). According to De Witte (2005), job insecurity induces strain for the worker involved. In response to this, Greasley, Bryman, Price, Soetanto, and King (2004) found that workers who consider themselves empowered have reduced levels of emotional strain.

Disempowered individuals have to put specific efforts, energy and time in to adapt to the pressures of job insecurity. It is clear that this energy cannot then be used for working

towards achieving organisational goals (De Witte, 2005). The lack of high levels of energy may be indicative of a lack of vigour, which implicates low levels of work engagement (Maslach et al., 2001).

Maslach et al. (2001) identified dedication as one of the subscales of work engagement. Dedication is characterised by feeling inspired and challenged by work stimuli. By welcoming challenges that are worth engaging with, one will experience meaning (subscale of psychological empowerment) in his work (Strümpher, 2003).

The level of work engagement can be increased by matching the person and domains of his or her job environment, for instance, feelings of control and meaningful and valued work (Maslach et al., 2001). Spreitzer (1995) has identified both of these domains as subscales of psychological empowerment, implicating that psychological empowerment can increase the probability of work engagement.

One of Spreitzer's (1995) cognitions identified in his model, competence (self-efficacy), relates well to work engagement. Engaged employees see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of their jobs (self-efficacy) (Shaufeli et al., 2000). Maslach et al. (2001) mention the existence of a strong correlation between self-efficacy and engagement.

No other literature indicative of a relationship between the three constructs, namely job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement could be found. It is the researcher's objective to determine the nature of these relationship and the effects thereof on the employee and the organisation.

The entire population of 500 employees working in a government organisation in Gauteng will be targeted in this research. The population will include workers from all levels, ranging from semi-skilled to professionals. The lowest level employees are of a literacy level adequate enough to allow for the valid completion of the questionnaires. The organisation was experiencing high levels of absenteeism, and management related that to their perceived low levels of work wellness of employees in the organisation. Employees also experience high levels of job insecurity due to the uncertainty of future promotional prospects in their current posts, changes in law, policies and procedures, political pressures and their

continuous perceptions of restructuring in the organisation. Based on the above-mentioned, it is clear that the study is relevant and necessary.

## **1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

### **1.2.1 General Objective**

With reference to the above formulation of the problem, the general objective of this research is to determine the relationship between job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement of employees in a government organisation.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives are:

- To conceptualise job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement and the relationship between these constructs in literature;
- To determine the levels of job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement of employees in a government organisation;
- To determine the relationships between job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement of employees in a government organisation;
- To determine whether psychological empowerment can be used to predict the level of job insecurity of employees in a government organisation;
- To determine whether job insecurity can be used to predict the level of work engagement of employees in a government organisation;
- To determine whether psychological empowerment can be used to predict the level of work engagement of employees in a government organisation.

## **1.3 RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method of the article, which is submitted for the purposes of this mini-dissertation, consists of a brief literature review and an empirical study.

### **1.3.1 Research Design**

A cross-sectional survey design will be used to reach the research objectives. Use will also be made of a correlation design (Huysamen, 1993). This design can be used to assess interrelationships among variables at one point in time, without any planned intervention. According to Shaughnessy and Zechmeister (1997), this design is ideally suited when the aim of the study is predictive and descriptive by nature.

### **1.3.2 Study Population**

Employees working in a government organisation in Gauteng will be targeted in this research. The study population will include workers from all levels ranging from professional to semi-skilled. The sample will consist of 500 respondents.

### **1.3.3 Measuring Instruments**

Three standardised questionnaires will be used in the empirical study, namely the Job Insecurity Inventory (De Witte, 2000), the Measuring Empowerment Questionnaire (Spreitzer, 1995) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002). A biographical questionnaire will also be included in the measuring battery regarding participants' cultural group, gender, age, qualification and tenure.

The *Job Insecurity Inventory (JII)* (De Witte, 2000) was primarily developed to measure employees' feelings towards job insecurity. It consists of eleven items that summarise both the cognitive and affective dimensions of job insecurity. These items are arranged along a 5-point scale with one indicating, "strongly disagree" to five "strongly agree". De Witte (2000) reported that the items of the questionnaire measuring global insecurity, displayed a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,92. Elbert (2002) obtained an alpha coefficient of 0,84, Sauer (2003) an alpha coefficient of 0,75 and Van Greunen (2004) an alpha coefficient of 0,84 in their South African studies. De Witte (2000) reported that both scales (cognitive and affective) seemed highly reliable with the six items measuring cognitive job insecurity displaying a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,90 and the five items of affective job insecurity having a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,85. Sauer (2003) obtained 0,83 for the alpha coefficient of the cognitive scale and 0,86 for the affective scale. Van Greunen (2004)

reported alpha coefficients of 0,65 (cognitive job insecurity) and 0,81 (affective job insecurity). De Witte (2000), Elbert (2002), Sauer (2003), Moeletsi (2003) and Van Greunen (2004) reported acceptable levels of validity for the questionnaire.

The *Measuring Empowerment Questionnaire* (Spreitzer, 1995) will be used. This scale contains three items for each of the four sub-dimensions (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) of psychological empowerment. Items are arranged along and measured on a 7-point frequency scale, ranging from one “strongly disagree” to seven “strongly agree”. Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000) reported that the construct validity of each of the four sub-dimensions of the scale found to contribute to the overall degree of felt empowerment: meaning (0,92); competence (0,77); self-determination (0,85) and impact (0,86). Sauer (2003) found an overall Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,92 and reported alpha coefficients for the subscales of 0,92 (meaning), 0,90 (competence), 0,91 (self-determination) and 0,84 (impact).

Liden et al. (2000) reported that the construct validity of each of the four sub-dimensions of the scale found to contribute to the overall degree of felt empowerment: meaning (0,92); competence (0,77); self-determination (0,85) and impact (0,86). Convergent and discriminate validity of the empowerment measures in the industrial sample indicate an excellent fit (AGFI) (Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index) = 0,93, RMSR (Root-Mean-Square Residual) = 0,04, NCFI (Non-Centralised Normal Fit Index) = 0,98. Spreitzer, (1995) suggests the need for continued work on discriminant validity.

The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)* (Schaufeli et al., 2002), a 17-item questionnaire will be used to measure work engagement. This questionnaire is arranged along a 7-point frequency scale with zero indicating “never” to six “daily”. The UWES has three scales, namely vigour (6 items), dedication (5 items), and absorption (6 items). High levels of vigour, dedication and absorption point to an individual who experiences a high level of work engagement. Cronbach alpha coefficients were between 0,68 and 0,91 (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Storm (2002) obtained alpha coefficients of 0,78 (vigour), 0,89 (dedication) and 0,78 (absorption) in her study with the South African Police Service.

Factor analysis done by Schaufeli et al. (2002) indicates that the three factor model fits reasonably well to the data with the RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)

and the CFI (Comparative Fit Index) satisfying their criteria of 0,08 and 0,09, respectively, and NFI (Norm Fit Index) and NNFI (Non-Normed Fit Index) approaching 0,09. According to Van Zyl (2005) the goodness-of-fit statistics in her South African study indicate acceptable levels of model fit for the TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) and CFI (Comparative-Fit Index). The RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) value was lower than 0,08 and is indicative of acceptable fit. The GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index) = 0,83, AGFI (Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index) = 0,78; PGFI (Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index) = 0,63 and NFI (Normed-Fit Index) = 0,83 were below the acceptable levels of fit. The three-factor model obtained an overall good fit with the data.

#### **1.3.4 Statistical Analysis**

The statistical analysis will be carried out with the SPSS programme (SPSS, 2003).

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) will be used to analyse data. Cronbach alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) and inter-item correlation coefficients will be used to assess the internal consistency of the measuring instruments (Clark & Watson, 1995). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients will be determined to indicate the extent to which one variable is related to another in addition to statistical significance. The level of statistical significance is set at  $p < 0,01$ . Steyn (2002) criticises the sole use of statistical significance testing and recommends that effect sizes be established to determine the importance of a statistically significant relationship. While the reporting of effect sizes are encouraged by the American Psychological Association (APA) in their Publication Manual (APA, 1994), few of these measures are ever found in published reports (Kirk, 1996; Steyn, 2002). Therefore, effect sizes will be computed to assess the practical significance of relationships in this study. A cut-off point of 0,30, which represents a medium effect (Cohen, 1988; Steyn, 2002), is set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients. A multi-regression analysis will be done to determine the percentage variance. A correlation can be better understood by determining  $R^2$  (Cohen, 1988). The square of the correlation coefficient indicates the proportion of variance in any two variables, which is predicted by the variance in the other.

## **1.4 CHAPTER DIVISION**

Chapter 1: Introduction, problem statement and objectives.

Chapter 2: Article: *Job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement in a government organisation.*

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

## **1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the problem statement and motivation for the research were discussed and the general and specific objectives formulated. The research method including the literature review, empirical study, research design, study population, measuring battery, data analysis and research procedure was discussed and lastly a chapter division was given. In chapter 2 (research article), job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement will be conceptualised, and the empirical study as well as the empirical results will be discussed in detail.

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**CHAPTER 2**  
**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# **<sup>1</sup>JOB INSECURITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND WORK ENGAGEMENT IN A GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The primary objective of this research was to examine the relationship between job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement of workers at a government organisation. The measuring instruments that were used included the JII, the MEQ and the UWES. A cross-sectional survey design was conducted among 500 employees at a government organisation. A response of 297 completed questionnaires was obtained. Results demonstrated a significant relationship between psychological empowerment and engagement. No significant relationship was found between job insecurity and psychological empowerment, or between job insecurity and engagement. Regression analysis indicated that meaning has significant predictive value towards affective job insecurity and engagement. Cognitive job insecurity predicted engagement significantly.

## **OPSOMMING**

Die hoofdoelstelling van hierdie navorsing was om die verhouding tussen werksonsekerheid, psigologiese bemagtiging en werksbegeestering van werknemers in 'n staatsorganisasie te bestudeer. Die meetinstrumente wat gebruik is, sluit die JII, die MEQ en die UWES in. 'n Dwarssneeopname-ontwerp is gebruik. Deelnemers aan die navorsing was 500 werknemers van 'n staatsorganisasie. Terugvoer van 297 vraelyste is ontvang. Resultate dui op 'n prakties beduidende verband tussen psigologiese bemagtiging en werksbegeestering. Daar is nie 'n prakties beduidende verband tussen werksonsekerheid en psigologiese bemagtiging, of tussen werksonsekerheid en werksbegeestering gevind nie. Regressie-analise dui aan dat sinvolheid beduidende voorspellingswaarde teenoor affektiewe werksonsekerheid, asook werksbegeestering het, en dat kognitiewe werksonsekerheid werksbegeestering voorspel.

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<sup>1</sup> \* The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are that of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

Organisations around the globe are constantly subjected to numerous changes on different organisational levels. In South Africa, organisations are exposed to economical, political, social, demographical and technological forces encouraging change. Tremendous pressure is placed on organisations to improve their performance and increase their global competitiveness in this continuously changing world of work (Van Schalkwyk, 2004).

The changing world of work is characterised by life-long learning, risk taking, speed and change, networking and measuring outputs (Wentzel & Geldenhuis, 2005). Within this constantly changing operating context, organisations face continuous challenges that require ongoing adaptation, which typically assumes the form of mergers and acquisitions, downsizing, re-engineering, leveraged buy-outs, strategic refocusing and continuous improvement strategies (Van Tonder, 2005). Organisations are concerned with being effective, especially in today's difficult economic environment and in the face of fierce global competition (Ndlovu & Parumasur, 2005).

In the highly competitive environment, the first fundamental consideration for most organisations is their profitability (Van Schalkwyk, 2004). As organisations focus on competition and profit margins, workers are confronted with threats to their identities based on real or anticipated job loss, causing many to feel insecure about their jobs and their future work life (Holm & Hovland, 1999).

Heightened employee perceptions of job insecurity may cause organisations to suffer financially due to the associated costs of increased absenteeism and sickness resulting from lowered employee well-being (Sparks, Faragher & Cooper, 2001). Other organisational concerns caused by perceived job insecurity, include the increased turnover of employees, a decrease in worker productivity, and lowered levels of commitment, job satisfaction, loyalty and trust in employers (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Holm & Hovland, 1999; Smithson & Lewis, 2000). All of these factors have become primary sources of job stress, which result in reduced performance, which in turn increases job insecurity (Van Tonder, 2005). Managers have to understand the concept of job insecurity and implement strategies to reduce the levels of job insecurity to increase organisational effectiveness (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984).

In order to gain full insight into the antecedents and consequences of job insecurity, one can keep the person-environment fit theory of stress in mind. Definitions of stress falling within

the person-environment fit theory of stress emphasise the relationship between the person and environmental characteristics (Probst, 2002). Stress will occur when a person perceives a situation to exceed his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being. The stress value depends on the perceived imbalance between an individual's perceptions of the demands made by the environment and the individual's perceived ability and motivation to cope with those demands. Based on this perspective, job insecurity is perceived, by an employee, as a change or antecedent to change demanding adaptation. This may be difficult to meet. Failure to cope with potential future unemployment or loss of job features may have significant consequences (Probst, 2002).

Job insecurity is usually conceptualised from two points of view, namely, either as a global or as a multidimensional concept. According to the global view, job insecurity is defined as the threat of job loss or job uncertainty (Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002). In this paradigm, De Witte (1997, 1999) explains that the subject of job insecurity relates to people in their work context who fear they may lose their jobs and become unemployed.

The multidimensional definition of job insecurity holds that job insecurity refers not only on an affective level to the measure of uncertainty an employee feels about his or her job continuity (fear of job loss), but also on a cognitive level to the continuity of certain dimensions of the job (job certainty) (Borg & Elizur, 1992; Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002). According to the first multidimensional definition proposed by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984:438), job insecurity refers to 'powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation'. Mauno and Kinnunen (2002) elaborate on this definition by stating that job insecurity consists of the severity of the changes – the importance and the probability of losing a dimension of the total job or a job feature – and powerlessness, referring to the employee's relative inability to control threats related to his or her job.

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) emphasise the importance of considering powerlessness by explaining that the sense of powerlessness experienced by employees intensifies the experienced threat. However, according to Probst (2003), perceived powerlessness is more likely to be a moderator of job security than an aspect of job insecurity, as explained two decades before by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984). Despite their differences, these authors agree that perceived powerlessness is undoubtedly an important variable in the study of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Probst, 2003).

According to Conger and Kanungo (1988), the experience of powerlessness can be positively influenced through empowerment. Menon and Hartmann (2002) explain that, in the organisational context, to be empowered is to remove or reduce powerlessness and increase feelings of control over one's work and work environment. Conger and Kanungo (1988) describe empowerment as a process whereby conditions that foster powerlessness are identified and removed by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information, enhancing an employee's belief in his or her self-efficacy. Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000) support this view and add that enhanced efficacy results in higher levels of job performance.

Empowerment has great potential to contribute towards organisations reaching their objectives (Spreitzer, 1995). While the primary motive of empowerment is usually to improve the economic performance of the organisation, benefits to the individual employee have also been identified (Greasley, Bryman, Price, Soetanto & King, 2004). Buckle (2003) identifies increased productivity, performance and motivation, quality products and services, lowered absenteeism and turnover as well as more creative employees as advantages of empowerment for the organisation. Job satisfaction, commitment, energy, high performance and willingness to learn were identified as some of the advantages for the individual. Seibert, Silver and Randolph (2004) find that the relation of psychological empowerment to performance and job satisfaction is significant and positive.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) as well as Smith and Mouly (1998) distinguish between relational and motivational empowerment. As a relational concept, empowerment is concerned with issues related to management style and employee participation. As a motivational construct, empowerment is focused on the individual and personal aspects of the individual, including discretion, autonomy, power and control.

Menon (2001) defines motivational (psychological) empowerment as a cognitive state characterised by a sense of perceived control, competence and goal internalisation. Spreitzer's (1995) model defines empowerment as intrinsic motivation manifested in four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role. The four cognitions are meaning (subjective assessment of importance of the job), competence (personal sense of efficacy), self-determination (one's sense of control and autonomy, freedom of choice) and impact (one's belief in an employee's ability to influence the environment where he/she is

working). Together these four cognitions reflect one's active (an orientation in which the individual wishes and feels able to shape his or her work role and context) rather than passive orientation to a work role.

Employees who consider themselves empowered have reduced role conflict and role ambiguity, as they have the ability to control (to a certain extent) their own environment. This reduces emotional strain on the employee (Greasley et al., 2004). In other words, empowered employees derive a greater sense of meaning from their work (Avolio, Zhu, Koh & Bhatia, 2004). Frankl (as cited in May, Gilson & Harter, 2004) has argued that individuals have a primary motive to seek meaning in their work. Meaningfulness is experienced when work stimuli are perceived as motivationally relevant, in the form of welcoming challenges that are worth engaging with, and investing oneself in (Strümpher, 2003). The restoration of meaning in work is seen as a method to foster an employee's motivation and attachment to work, thus resulting in work engagement (May et al., 2004).

Work engagement provides a complex and thorough perspective on an individual's relationship with work with its focus on the work itself (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of their jobs (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzáles-Romá & Bakker, 2000).

Maslach, et al. (2001) describe work engagement as being characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy. Work engagement can be defined as a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2000; Maslach et al., 2001). Vigour is characterised by high energy levels and mental resilience when working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, not easily being fatigued, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to strong involvement in one's work, characterised by enthusiasm and pride about one's job, and feeling inspired and challenged by it. Absorption is characterised by being fully concentrated on one's work. It refers to a pleasant state where one is totally immersed in one's work and one forgets everything around. Time passes quickly and one has difficulty detaching oneself from it. A greater match between the person and six domains of his or her job environment, namely sustainable workload, feelings of control, appropriate recognition and rewards, a supportive work community, fairness and

meaningful and valued work (Maslach et al., 2001) can increase the probability of engagement with work.

Based on the conceptual model of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), an interdependent relationship between job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement is possible. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's (1984) conceptual model of job insecurity indicates that employees' subjective threat is derived from the objective threat. They will interpret the threat based on three basic sources of data, namely official organisational announcement, unintended organisational clues evident to employees and rumours created during times of threat when official messages are scarce. Given the scope of the objective data to which employees might attend, employees vary in their assessment of a subjective threat. The subjective threat involved in job insecurity is multifaceted and these facets can be grouped into two basic dimensions, the severity of the threat and powerlessness to counteract. One can therefore assume that if employees are empowered, their subjective assessment of the objective threat will be affected in such a way that they do not experience job insecurity to a large extent. Individuals' reactions to job insecurity include reduced work effort (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), implying that their level of work engagement will be affected by job insecurity.

Researchers agree that perceived powerlessness (lack of psychological empowerment) is undoubtedly an important variable in the study of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Probst, 2003). According to De Witte (2005), job insecurity induces strain for the worker involved. In response to this, Greasley et al. (2005) found that workers who consider themselves empowered have reduced levels of emotional strain.

Disempowered individuals have to put specific efforts, energy and time in to adapt to the pressures of job insecurity. It is clear that this energy cannot then be used for working towards achieving organisational goals (De Witte, 2005). The lack of high levels of energy may be indicative of a lack of vigour, which implicates low levels of work engagement (Maslach et al., 2001).

Maslach et al. (2001) identified dedication as one of the subscales of work engagement. Dedication is characterised by feeling inspired and challenged by work stimuli. By

welcoming challenges that are worth engaging with, one will experience meaning (subscale of psychological empowerment) in his work (Strümpher, 2003).

The level of work engagement can be increased by matching the person and domains of his or her job environment, for instance, feelings of control and meaningful and valued work (Maslach et al., 2001). Spreitzer (1995) has identified both of these domains as subscales of psychological empowerment, implicating that psychological empowerment can increase the probability of work engagement.

One of Spreitzer's (1995) cognitions identified in his model, competence (self-efficacy), relates well to work engagement. Engaged employees see themselves as able to deal completely with the demands of their jobs (self-efficacy) (Shaufeli et al., 2000). Maslach et al. (2001) mention the existence of a strong correlation between self-efficacy and engagement.

Hotta, Kawaguchi and Yoshizawa (2005) define engagement as the dynamic relationship between an organisation and its members and how they contribute to each other's growth. May et al. (2004) note that in order for the human spirit to thrive at work, individuals must be able to engage themselves cognitively, emotionally and physically. Kahn (1990) proposes that three psychological foundations of engagement can be identified, being meaningfulness, availability and safety. According to May et al. (2004), meaningfulness and availability play significant roles in leading to engagement. Meaningfulness is the psychological energy resulting from the feeling that job tasks are valuable and make a difference, while availability refers to maintaining the psychological, emotional and physical resources to immerse the self in work (Ford & Poms, 2005). Nelson and Simmons (2003) state that meaningful work promotes engagement, even if the situation is demanding.

According to May et al. (2004), individuals who feel psychologically safe are likely to feel safer to engage themselves more fully. One would thus expect that a person in a psychologically unsafe situation, for example a less empowered or job insecure employee, would be less engaged.

No other literature indicative of a relationship between the three constructs, namely job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement could be found. It is the

researcher's objective to determine the nature of these relationships and the effects thereof on the employee and the organisation.

The entire population of 500 employees working in a government organisation in Gauteng was targeted in this research. The population will include workers from all levels, ranging from semi-skilled to professionals. The lowest level employees are of a literacy level adequate enough to allow for the valid completion of the questionnaires.

Based on the above-mentioned research problem, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H<sub>1</sub>: A significant relationship exists between job insecurity and psychological empowerment.

H<sub>2</sub>: A significant relationship exists between job insecurity and work engagement.

H<sub>3</sub>: A significant relationship exists between psychological empowerment and work engagement.

H<sub>4</sub>: Psychological empowerment predicts job insecurity.

H<sub>5</sub>: Job insecurity predicts work engagement.

H<sub>6</sub>: Psychological empowerment predicts work engagement.

### **AIM OF THE STUDY**

The general objective of this research is to determine the relationship between job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement of employees in a government organisation.

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

A cross-sectional survey design was used to reach the research objectives. This design can be used to assess interrelationships among variables at one point in time, without any planned intervention (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1997). Since no intervention was planned, a correlation design was utilised (Huysamen, 1993). According to Shaughnessy and Zechmeister (1997), this design is ideally suited when the aim of the study is predictive and descriptive by nature.

### **Participants**

The entire population of 500 employees working at a government organisation in Gauteng was targeted for this research. A response rate of 297 participants (59%) was obtained. The study population included workers from all levels, ranging from semi-skilled to professionals. The lowest skilled level employees have an adequate level of literacy to allow for valid completion of questionnaires. The biographical characteristics of the study population are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 indicates that 62% of the study population represented the black cultural group. An almost equal percentage of males (49%) and females (48%) participated in this study. The majority of participants (35%) fell in the 25 to 35 years group and 47% had a Grade 10 to 12 level of education. The majority of the study population has been employed by the organisation for periods of between two to five (25%) and six to ten (23%) years. Missing responses from the respondents on the five items varied between 4% (gender and tenure) and 10,8% (age).

Table 1

*Compilation of Study Population (N = 297)*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Cultural group</b>	Black (1)	185	62,3
	White (2)	56	18,9
	Other (3)	34	11,4
	Missing Responses	22	7,4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male (1)	145	48,8
	Female (2)	141	47,5
	Missing Responses	11	3,7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>	24 years and younger (1)	27	9,1
	25 – 35 years (2)	105	35,4
	36 – 45 years (3)	69	23,2
	46 – 55 years (4)	47	15,8
	56 years and older (5)	17	5,7
	Missing Responses	32	10,8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Qualification</b>	Grade 10 to 12 (1)	139	46,8
	Diploma (2)	77	25,9
	Degree (3)	55	18,5
	Post-graduate Degree (4)	24	8,1
	Missing Responses	2	0,7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Tenure</b>	Less than 1 year (1)	47	15,8
	2 – 5 years (2)	74	24,9
	6 – 10 years (3)	68	22,9
	11 – 20 years (4)	59	19,9
	Longer than 20 years (5)	37	12,5
	Missing Responses	12	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100</b>

## Measuring instruments

Three standardised questionnaires were used in the empirical study, namely the Job Insecurity Inventory (De Witte, 2000), the Measuring Empowerment Questionnaire (Spreitzer, 1995) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Biographical information was also gathered regarding participants' cultural group, gender, age, qualification and tenure.

The *Job Insecurity Inventory (JII)* (De Witte, 2000) was primarily developed to measure employees' feelings towards job insecurity. It consists of eleven items that summarise both the cognitive and affective dimensions of job insecurity. An example of a question relating to cognitive job insecurity would be, "I am sure I can keep my job", whereas an example of a question relating to affective job insecurity would be, "I am worried about keeping my job". These items are arranged along a 5-point scale with one indicating, "strongly disagree" to five "strongly agree". De Witte (2000) reported that the items of the questionnaire measuring global insecurity, displayed a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,92. Elbert (2002) obtained an alpha coefficient of 0,84, Sauer (2003) an alpha coefficient of 0,75, Moeletsi (2003) an alpha coefficient of 0,93 and Van Greunen (2004) an alpha coefficient of 0,84 relating to global insecurity in their South African studies. De Witte (2000) reported that both scales (cognitive and affective) were shown to be highly reliable with the six items measuring cognitive job insecurity displaying a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,90 and the five items of affective job insecurity having a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,85. Sauer (2003) obtained an alpha coefficient of 0,83 for the cognitive scale and 0,86 for the affective scale. Moeletsi (2003) obtained an alpha coefficient of 0,91 for the cognitive scale and 0,86 for the affective scale. De Witte (2000), Elbert (2002), Sauer (2003), Moeletsi (2003) and Van Greunen (2004) reported acceptable levels of validity for the questionnaire.

The *Measuring Empowerment Questionnaire (MEQ)* (Spreitzer, 1995) was used. This scale contains three items for each of the four sub-dimensions (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) of psychological empowerment. One of the items of the meaning sub-dimension is "The work I do is meaningful to me". Competence is partially determined by the item "I have mastered the skills necessary for my job". The sub-dimension of self-determination is measured by an item such as "I have significant autonomy in determining

how to do my job” and one of the items that is indicative of impact as a sub-dimension of psychological empowerment is “I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department”. Items are arranged along a measured on a 7-point frequency scale, ranging from one “strongly disagree” to seven “strongly agree”. Buckle (2003) reported Cronbach alpha coefficients of 0,89 for total psychological empowerment, 0,91 (meaning), 0,79 (competence), 0,83 (self-determination) and 0,91 (impact) in her study within a chemical industry. In the steel manufacturing environment, Sauer (2003) found an overall Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,92 and reported alpha coefficients for the subscales of 0,92 (meaning), 0,90 (competence), 0,91 (self-determination) and 0,84 (impact). In her study of empowerment within a packaging environment, Moeletsi (2003) reported overall internal consistency of 0,93. She found Cronbach alpha coefficients of 0,88 (meaning), 0,85 (competence), 0,91 (self-determination) and 0,92 (impact).

Liden, Sparrowe and Wayne (2000) reported that the construct validity of each of the four sub-dimensions of the scale found to contribute to the overall degree of felt empowerment, meaning (0,92); competence (0,77); self-determination (0,85) and impact (0,86). Convergent and discriminate validity of the empowerment measures in the industrial sample indicate an excellent fit (AGFI) (Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index) with the value of 0,93, RMSR (Root-Mean-Square Residual) with a value of 0,04 and NCNFI (Non-Centralised Normal Fit Index) with a value of 0,98. Spreitzer, (1995) suggests the need for continued work on discriminant validity.

The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)* (Schaufeli et al., 2002), a 17-item questionnaire, was used to measure work engagement. This questionnaire is arranged along a 7-point frequency scale with zero indicating “never” to six “daily”. The UWES has three scales, namely vigour (6 items), dedication (5 items), and absorption (6 items). Examples of items relating to the three dimensions are the following: "I am bursting with energy in my work" (vigour); "I find my work full of meaning and purpose" (dedication); and "When I am working, I forget everything around me" (absorption). High levels of vigour, dedication and absorption point to an individual who experiences a high level of work engagement. Cronbach alpha coefficients were determined between 0,68 and 0,91 (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Storm (2002) reported alpha coefficients of 0,78 (vigour), 0,89 (dedication) and 0,78 (absorption) in her study with the South African Police Service. Durán, Extremera and Rey (2004) reported alpha coefficients of 0,82 (vigour), 0,85 (dedication) and 0,81 (absorption).

Ford and Poms (2005) reported Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,67 (vigour), 0,87 (dedication) and 0,68 (absorption) respectively.

Factor analysis done by Schaufeli et al. (2002) indicates that the three factor model fits reasonably well to the data with the RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) and the CFI (Comparative Fit Index) satisfying their criteria of 0,08 and 0,09, respectively, and NFI (Norm Fit Index) and NNFI (Non-Normed Fit Index) approaching 0,09. According to Van Zyl (2005), the goodness-of-fit statistics in her South African study indicate acceptable levels of model fit for the TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) and CFI (Comparative-Fit Index). The RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) value was lower than 0,08 and is indicative of acceptable fit. The GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index) indicated a value of 0,83, AGFI (Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index) a value of 0,78; PGFI (Parsimony Goodness-of-Fit Index) a value of 0,63 and NFI (Normed-Fit Index) a value of 0,83, which were below the acceptable levels of fit. The three-factor model obtained an overall good fit with the data.

### **Statistical analysis**

The statistical analysis is carried out with the SPSS programme (SPSS, 2003), making use of descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha and inter-item correlation coefficients, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and multiple regression analyses.

Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) were used to analyse the data. Cronbach alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) and inter-item correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) were used to assess the internal consistency of the measuring instruments (Clark & Watson, 1995). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to specify the relationships between variables. The level of statistical significance is set at  $p < 0,01$ . Steyn (2002) criticises the sole use of statistical significance testing and recommends that effect sizes be established to determine the importance of a statistically significant relationship. While the reporting of effect sizes are encouraged by the American Psychological Association (APA) in their Publication Manual (APA, 1994), few of these measures are ever found in published reports (Kirk, 1996; Steyn, 2002). Therefore, effect sizes will be computed to assess the practical significance of relationships in this study. A cut-off point of 0,30, which represents a medium effect (Cohen, 1988; Steyn, 2002), is set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients.

Regression analyses were carried out to determine the percentage variance in the dependent variable that is predicted by the independent variables. A correlation can be better understood by determining  $R^2$  (Cohen, 1988). The square of the correlation coefficient indicates the proportion of variance in any two variables, which is predicted by the variance in the other.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha coefficients and the inter-item correlation coefficients of the JII, MEQ and UWES for employees working in a government organisation are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach Alpha Coefficients and Inter-Item Correlation Coefficients of the Measuring Instruments*

Measuring Instrument	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Inter-item $r$	$\alpha$
Cognitive job insecurity	2,62	0,69	-0,08	-0,17	0,21	0,62
Affective job insecurity	2,78	0,83	0,00	0,19	0,35	0,73
<b>Job Insecurity (Total)</b>	<b>2,69</b>	<b>0,67</b>	<b>-0,18</b>	<b>0,07</b>	<b>0,39</b>	<b>0,82</b>
Meaning	4,90	1,51	-0,64	-0,15	0,55	0,79
Competence	5,25	1,40	-0,93	0,54	0,42	0,67
Self-determination	4,65	1,40	-0,47	-0,08	0,49	0,74
Impact	4,35	1,46	-0,36	-0,23	0,47	0,73
<b>Psychological Empowerment (total)</b>	<b>4,78</b>	<b>1,13</b>	<b>-0,57</b>	<b>0,74</b>	<b>0,35</b>	<b>0,86</b>
<b>UWES</b>	<b>3,84</b>	<b>1,39</b>	<b>-0,33</b>	<b>-0,45</b>	<b>0,47</b>	<b>0,94</b>

The information reflected in Table 2 indicates that the scores on all subscales have a normal distribution (skewness and kurtosis smaller than one). Acceptable Cronbach alpha coefficients were obtained on all the scales, with the exception of the cognitive job insecurity subscale (0,62) and the competence subscale of psychological empowerment (0,67), which fell marginally below the 0,70 cut-off point (see Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). The inter-item correlation coefficient of the meaning subscale of psychological empowerment exceeded the cut-off point of 0,50 (Clark & Watson, 1995). A possible reason for this high score may be the fact that the items are narrowly defined. Moeletsi (2003) reported an inter-item

correlation of 0,74 for the meaning subscale in her study. Inter-item correlations of all the other scales were consistent with the guideline of  $0,15 < r < 0,50$  suggested by Clark and Watson (1995). It can be concluded that the results obtained from the measuring instruments are reliable.

A simple principle components analysis was conducted on the 11 items of the JII on the total sample of employees at a government organisation. Analysis of eigenvalues (larger than one) and scree plot indicated that two factors could be extracted, explaining 47% of the variance. Literature (De Witte, 2000; Elbert, 2002; Sauer, 2003; Moeletsi, 2003; Van Greunen, 2004) confirms that job insecurity, as measured by the JII, has a two-factor structure, namely cognitive job insecurity and affective job insecurity.

A simple principle components analysis was conducted on the 12 items of the MEQ on the total sample of employees at a government organisation. Analysis of eigenvalues (larger than one) and scree plot indicated that three factors could be extracted. Upon closer inspection, a fourth factor with an eigenvalue of 0,89 could be extracted. The four-factor structure of psychological empowerment as measured by the MEQ, namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, was confirmed by literature (Spreitzer, 1995; Malan, 2002; Buckle, 2003; Moeletsi, 2003; Sauer, 2003).

A simple principal component analysis was conducted on the 17 items of the UWES on the total sample of employees in a government organisation. Analysis of eigenvalues (larger than one) and scree plot indicated that only one factor could be extracted, explaining 50% of the total variance. However, Schaufeli et al. (2002) reported that the UWES has a three-factor structure, namely vigour, dedication, and absorption. Durán et al. (2004) also confirmed a three-factor structure in their study of work engagement in Spain. Storm (2002), Van Greunen (2004) and Van Zyl (2005) confirmed the three-factor structure in their South African studies. However, Naudé and Rothmann (2004) found a two-factor structure in their South African study. According to Naudé and Rothmann (2004), Storm and Rothmann (2003) found that a one-factor model fitted the data best in a sample of police members in South Africa (N=2396). For the purpose of this study, a one-factor structure will be used. Further research is necessary regarding the construct validity and factor structure of the questionnaire within the South African context. Next, the levels of job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement are discussed.

The total score on the job insecurity scale provides an indication of the study population's total level of job insecurity. The average score obtained in this study is 2,69 with a standard deviation of 0,67, which is above average. This implies that employees are concerned about their job continuity (fear of job loss), and the continuity of certain dimensions of the job (job certainty).

Both the cognitive and affective subscales were above the average range, with cognitive job insecurity at 2,62 and affective job insecurity at 2,78. This indicates that employees are experiencing higher levels of uncertainty about their job continuity (affective job insecurity) than about the continuity of certain dimensions of their job (cognitive job insecurity). Van Greunen (2004) reported mean scores of 2,35 (total job insecurity), 2,26 (cognitive job insecurity) and 2,46 (affective job insecurity) in her South African study of a government organisation. Sauer (2003) reported a mean score of 2,33 for total job insecurity, with mean scores of 2,26 for cognitive job insecurity and 2,52 for affective job insecurity. Moeletsi (2003) found a mean score of 2,24 for total job insecurity, with mean scores of 2,22 for cognitive job insecurity and 2,26 for affective job insecurity. Similarly, a higher mean score was obtained on the affective level of job insecurity in this study. Elbert (2002) found a mean score of 3,31 for total job insecurity, with mean scores of 3,12 on the cognitive dimension and 3,27 on the affective dimension. For the purposes of interpretation of her data, a higher job insecurity score was indicative of lower job insecurity, implying higher felt affective job insecurity in comparison to cognitive job insecurity. It seems that in comparison to previous research, the research participants of this study experienced higher levels of job insecurity (total scale and subscales). When comparing the job insecurity subscales, it is found that previous studies also indicated the experience of higher levels of affective job insecurity than cognitive job insecurity.

The average mean score for psychological empowerment is 4,78, with a standard deviation of 1,13, indicating that employees in the organisation experience an above average level of psychological empowerment. Mean values for the subscales of psychological empowerment were above average, with 4,90 for meaning, 5,25 for competence, 4,65 for self-determination and 4,35 for impact. The competence subscale obtained a slightly higher mean score and the impact subscale a slightly lower mean score in comparison with the other subscales of psychological empowerment. This indicates that employees experience a personal sense of efficacy and confidence in their ability to do their job well. Sauer (2003) found a mean score

of 5,26 for total psychological empowerment, with mean scores of 5,62 for meaning, 5,75 for competence, 4,95 for self-determination and 4,72 for impact. Moeletsi (2003) reported a mean score of 5,37 for total psychological empowerment, with mean scores of 6,13 for meaning, 6,00 for competence, 4,63 for self-determination and 4,40 for impact. Buckle (2003) found a mean score of 5,36 for total psychological empowerment, with mean scores of 5,81 for meaning, 6,12 for competence, 5,18 for self-determination and 4,33 for impact. Hlalele (2003) reported a mean score of 4,87 for total psychological empowerment, with mean scores of 5,01 for meaning, 5,59 for competence, 4,77 for self-determination and 4,10 for impact. In this study, lower levels of psychological empowerment were indicated in comparison with the levels reported in previous studies.

With regard to the levels of work engagement of employees, a mean score of 3,84 was obtained, with a standard deviation of 1,39. Factor analysis indicated a one-factor structure, and therefore only the total scale's mean score is reported. Durán et al. (2004), who reported a three-factor structure, found mean scores for the three subscales, namely vigour (4,99), dedication (5,07) and absorption (4,58). Van Greunen (2004) reported mean scores of 4,30 for total work engagement, 4,29 for vigour, 4,46 for dedication and 4,19 for absorption. The total level of work engagement of the study population was not very high and could be improved.

Next, the correlation coefficients between the JII, MEQ and UWES for employees working in a government organisation were analysed. The results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

*Correlation Coefficients between the JII, MEQ and UWES*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>1. Job Insecurity (total)</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Cognitive job insecurity	0,71*††	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Affective job insecurity	0,96*††	0,59*††	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>4. Psychological Empowerment (total)</b>	-0,13	-0,21*	-0,11	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Meaning	-0,16*	-0,22*	-0,13	0,81*††	-	-	-	-	-
6. Competence	-0,08	-0,15	-0,05	0,77*††	0,63*††	-	-	-	-
7. Self-determination	-0,06	-0,11	-0,06	0,80*††	0,50*††	0,44*†	-	-	-
8. Impact	-0,10	-0,16*	-0,12	0,74*††	0,39*†	0,33*†	0,58*††	-	-
<b>9. Work Engagement (total)</b>	-0,28*	-0,38*†	-0,25*	0,36*†	0,45*†	0,28*	0,17*	0,22*	-

\* Statistically significant  $p \leq 0,01$

† Correlation is practically significant  $r \geq 0,30$  (medium effect)

†† Correlation is practically significant  $r \geq 0,50$  (large effect)

Table 3 shows that no practically significant correlation coefficients were found between the job insecurity scale and the psychological empowerment scale or its sub-dimensions. This implies that high levels of job insecurity will not always be associated with low levels of psychological empowerment, and vice versa. Sauer (2003) confirms insignificant correlations between the job insecurity scale and psychological empowerment as well as its sub-dimensions. Moeletsi (2003) reported a practically significant negative correlation of medium effect between total job insecurity and total psychological empowerment ( $r = -0,48$ ). She reported practically significant negative correlations of medium effect between cognitive job insecurity and competence ( $r = -0,30$ ), self-determination ( $r = -0,36$ ) and impact ( $r = -0,43$ ). She reported practically significant negative correlations of medium effect between affective job insecurity and competence ( $r = -0,41$ ), self-determination ( $r = -0,48$ ) and practically significant negative correlations of large effect between affective job insecurity and impact ( $r = -0,61$ ).

No practically significant correlation was obtained between job insecurity and work engagement. In other words, the level of job insecurity experienced will neither affect levels of psychological empowerment nor work engagement significantly. A practically significant negative correlation of medium effect was obtained between the cognitive job insecurity subscale and the work engagement scale. This indicates that higher levels of cognitive job

insecurity will be associated with lower levels of job work engagement. According to May et al. (2004), individuals who feel psychologically unsafe (job insecure) are likely to be less engaged. In her study with employees of a government organisation, Van Greunen (2004) found no practically significant correlations between job insecurity and work engagement.

No practically significant correlation coefficients were found between affective job insecurity and any of the other scales.

Psychological empowerment showed a practically significant positive correlation of medium effect with the work engagement scale, implying that increased levels of psychological empowerment are associated with higher levels of work engagement. A practically significant positive correlation of medium effect was obtained between meaning and work engagement. This shows that when employees' levels of meaning related work increase, their levels of work engagement also increase. Nelson and Simmons (2003) confirm this by stating that even if the situation is demanding, meaningful work promotes engagement.

Next, multiple regression analyses were performed to test whether the subscales of psychological empowerment, namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (as measured by the MEQ) predict cognitive job insecurity, as well as affective job insecurity (as measured by the JII). A regression analysis with the subscales of job insecurity, namely cognitive and affective job insecurity, was performed to determine whether job insecurity predicts work engagement. Lastly, a regression analysis was performed to test whether the subscales of psychological empowerment, namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (as measured by the MEQ) predict work engagement (as measured by the UWES).

Table 4

*Regression Analysis – Meaning, Competence, Self-determination and Impact: Cognitive Job Insecurity*

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE					
Dependent variable: Cognitive Job Insecurity					
	Source of variation	<i>df</i>	Sum of squares	Mean Square	
<i>R</i> : 0,24					
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> : 0,06					
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> : 0,04	Regression	4	7,47	1,87	
Standard Error: 0,67	Residual	272	122,10	0,45	
	<i>F</i> = 4,16 <i>p</i> = 0,003				
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION					
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	B	SEB	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Meaning	-0,09	0,04	-0,20	-2,47	0,014*
Competence	-0,01	0,04	-0,02	-0,26	0,794
Self-determination	0,03	0,04	0,06	0,73	0,463
Impact	-0,05	0,03	-0,11	-1,47	0,142

\* Statistically significant  $p \leq 0,05$

From Table 4, it is evident that meaning was found to have a statistically significant amount of predictive value with regard to cognitive job insecurity ( $p \leq 0,05$ ). An adjusted  $R^2$  of 0,04 was obtained, suggesting that subjective assessment of importance of the job (meaning) predicted only 4% of the variance in cognitive job insecurity. Competence, self-determination and impact did not have significant predictive value with regard to cognitive job insecurity.

Next, the possible predictive value of psychological empowerment and affective job insecurity was investigated.

Table 5

*Regression Analysis – Meaning, Competence, Self-determination and Impact: Affective Job Insecurity*

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE					
Dependent variable: Affective Job Insecurity					
	Source of variation	<i>df</i>	Sum of squares	Mean Square	
<i>R</i> : 0,42	Regression	4	109,87	27,47	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> : 0,17	Residual	269	529,19	1,96	
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> : 0,16	<i>F</i> = 14,04 <i>p</i> = 0,000				
Standard Error: 1,40					
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION					
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	B	SEB	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Meaning	0,40	0,08	0,39	5,21	0,000*
Competence	0,03	0,08	0,02	0,32	0,747
Self-determination	-0,11	0,08	-0,10	-1,33	0,185
Impact	0,12	0,07	0,12	1,73	0,085

\* Statistically significant  $p \leq 0,05$

As indicated in Table 5, it was found that meaning has a statistically significant amount of predictive value with regard to cognitive job insecurity ( $p \leq 0,05$ ). An adjusted  $R^2$  of 0,16 was obtained, suggesting that subjective assessment of importance of the job (meaning) predicted 16% of the variance in affective job insecurity. Results further showed that competence, self-determination and impact did not have a significant amount of predictive value with regard to affective job insecurity.

Next, work engagement was regressed on cognitive and affective job insecurity. The results of which are provided in Table 6.

Table 6

*Regression Analysis – Cognitive Job Insecurity and Affective Job Insecurity: Work Engagement*

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE					
Dependent variable: Work Engagement					
<i>R</i> : 0,39	Source of variation	<i>df</i>	Sum of	Mean Square	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> : 0,15			squares		
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> : 0,15	Regression	2	82,10	41,05	
Standard Error: 1,29	Residual	273	451,07	1,65	
	<i>F</i> = 14,04 <i>p</i> = 0,000				
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION					
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	B	SEB	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Cognitive Job Insecurity	-0,73	0,14	-0,36	-5,30	0,000*
Affective Job Insecurity	-0,08	0,12	-0,05	-0,66	0,510

\* Statistically significant  $p \leq 0,05$

Table 6 shows that cognitive job insecurity has a statistically significant amount of predictive value with regard to work engagement ( $p \leq 0,05$ ). An adjusted  $R^2$  of 0,15 was obtained, suggesting that cognitive job insecurity predicted 15% of the variance in work engagement. It was found that affective job insecurity did not have a significant amount of predictive value with regard to work engagement. Van Greunen (2004) reported that 10% of the variance in work engagement is predicted by the two job insecurity subscales.

Finally, the possible predictive value of psychological empowerment and work engagement was investigated. The results of which are provided in Table 7.

Table 7

*Regression Analysis – Meaning, Competence, Self-determination and Impact: Work Engagement*

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE					
Dependent variable: Work Engagement					
<i>R</i> : 0,46	Source of variation	<i>df</i>	Sum of	Mean Square	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> : 0,21			squares		
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> : 0,20	Regression	4	108,55	27,14	
Standard Error: 1,25	Residual	263	410,40	1,56	
	<i>F</i> = 17,39 <i>p</i> = 0,000				
VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION					
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	B	SEB	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Meaning	0,43	0,07	0,46	6,12	0,000*
Competence	-0,00	0,07	-0,00	-0,03	0,973
Self-determination	-0,12	0,07	-0,12	-1,71	0,089
Impact	0,11	0,06	0,11	1,67	0,096

\* Statistically significant  $p \leq 0,05$

From Table 7, it is evident that meaning was found to have a statistically significant amount of predictive value with regard to work engagement ( $p \leq 0,05$ ). An adjusted  $R^2$  of 0,20 was obtained, suggesting that subjective assessment of importance of the job (meaning) predicted 20% of the variance in work engagement. Competence, self-determination and impact did not have a significant amount of predictive value with regard to work engagement.

## DISCUSSION

The objectives of this research were to determine the levels of job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement and the relationships between the three constructs. Further objectives included determining whether psychological empowerment can be used to predict the level of job insecurity, whether job insecurity can be used to predict the level of work engagement as well as whether psychological empowerment can be used to predict the level of work engagement of employees in a government organisation.

The total study population group obtained a higher mean score on the affective job insecurity subscale and a lower mean score on cognitive job insecurity. This implies that employees

experienced more uncertainty about his or her job continuity (fear of job loss), than about the continuity of certain dimensions of his or her job (job certainty). In comparison to previous research, the participants of this study experienced higher levels of job insecurity (total scale and subscale). When comparing the job insecurity subscales, it is found that previous studies also indicated the experience of higher levels of affective job insecurity than cognitive job insecurity.

Lower levels of psychological empowerment were indicated, in comparison with the levels reported in previous studies. Higher levels of psychological empowerment were indicated on the competence subscale and lower levels of psychological empowerment were indicated on the impact subscale. This indicates that employees experience a personal sense of efficacy and confidence in their ability to do their job well. The level of work engagement was not very high compared to other studies and the organisation should implement interventions to increase work engagement for maximum organisational effectiveness.

No practically significant correlation coefficients were found between the job insecurity scale and the psychological empowerment scale or its sub-dimensions. Sauer (2003) confirms insignificant correlations between the job insecurity scale and psychological empowerment as well as its sub-dimensions. In other words, the level of psychological empowerment experienced will not affect perceived levels of job insecurity significantly. These findings are contradicting other available literature, where researchers agree that perceived powerlessness (lack of psychological empowerment) is an important variable in the study of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Probst, 2003). Greasley et al. (2004) found that workers that perceive themselves as empowered, experience reduced levels of job insecurity (emotional strain). Moeletsi (2003) reported a practically significant negative correlation of medium effect between total job insecurity and total psychological empowerment. She reported practically significant negative correlations of medium effect between cognitive job insecurity and competence, self-determination and impact. She reported practically significant negative correlations of medium effect between affective job insecurity and competence, self-determination and practically significant negative correlations of large effect between affective job insecurity and impact. Based on the above mentioned, hypothesis 1, stating that a significant relationship exists between job insecurity and psychological empowerment, will therefore be rejected.

No practically significant correlation was obtained between total job insecurity and work engagement. No practically significant correlation coefficients were found between affective job insecurity and work engagement. Van Greunen (2004) also found no practically significant correlations between job insecurity and its subscales, and work engagement and its subscales. However, a practically significant negative correlation of medium effect was obtained between cognitive job insecurity subscale and the work engagement scale. This indicates that higher levels of cognitive job insecurity will be associated with lower levels of job work engagement. Literature confirms that job insecure individuals will be less engaged towards their work (May et al., 2004). Based on the above mentioned, hypothesis 2, stating that a significant relationship exists between job insecurity and work engagement, can therefore only be accepted partially.

Psychological empowerment showed a practically significant positive correlation of medium effect with the work engagement scale, implying that increased levels of psychological empowerment are associated with higher levels of work engagement. A practically significant positive correlation of medium effect was obtained between meaning and work engagement, showing that when employees' levels of meaning related to work increase, their levels of work engagement also increase. Literature indicates that disempowered individuals have to put specific efforts, energy and time in to adapt to the pressures of job insecurity. It is clear that this energy cannot then be used for working towards achieving organisational goals (De Witte, 2005). The lack of high levels of energy may be indicative of a lack of vigour, which implicates low levels of work engagement (Maslach et al., 2001). A significant relationship is confirmed between psychological empowerment and work engagement. Based on the above mentioned, hypothesis 3 stating that a significant relationship exists between psychological empowerment and work engagement, can therefore be accepted.

Regression analysis indicated that the subjective assessment of importance of the job (meaning) predicted 4% of the variance in cognitive job insecurity and 16% of the variance in affective job insecurity. This suggests that subjective assessment of importance of the job predicted cognitive and affective job insecurity. Results further showed that competence, self-determination and impact did not have a significant amount of predictive value with regard to either cognitive or affective job insecurity. Due to the fact that only one of the subscales indicated predictive value, hypothesis 4 stating that psychological empowerment predicts job insecurity, can be partially accepted.

Cognitive job insecurity predicted 15% of the variance in work engagement. It was found that affective job insecurity did not have a significant amount of predictive value with regard to work engagement. This indicates that job certainty can predict work engagement. Van Greunen (2004) reported that both job insecurity subscales predicted 10% of the variance in work engagement. Literature supports these findings by stating that individuals' reactions to job insecurity include reduced work effort (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). These job insecure individuals have to put specific efforts, energy and time in to adapt to the pressures of job insecurity (De Witte, 2005) and will not be able to focus the energy towards their work. The lack of high levels of energy may be indicative of a lack of vigour, which implicates low levels of work engagement (Maslach et al., 2001). It can be concluded that job insecurity can predict the level of work engagement a person will experience. Hypothesis 5, stating that job insecurity predicts work engagement, can therefore be partially accepted (only cognitive job insecurity predicted work engagement).

Meaning (subscale of psychological empowerment) predicted 20% of the variance in work engagement. Competence, self-determination and impact did not have a significant amount of predictive value with regard to work engagement. According to May et al. (2004), meaningfulness and availability play significant roles in leading to engagement. Meaningfulness is the psychological energy resulting from the feeling that job tasks are valuable and make a difference, while availability refers to maintaining the psychological, emotional and physical resources to immerse the self in work (Ford & Poms, 2005). Nelson and Simmons (2003) found that meaningful work promotes engagement. Based on the above mentioned, hypothesis 6 stating that psychological empowerment predicts work engagement, can therefore be partially accepted.

In conclusion, lower levels of job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement were obtained from employees in a government organisation if one compares it to the findings of previous research. A significant relationship between psychological empowerment and engagement was found. No significant relationship was found between job insecurity and psychological empowerment, or between job insecurity and engagement. Regression analysis indicated that meaning has significant predictive value towards affective job insecurity and engagement. Cognitive job insecurity was found to predict work engagement significantly.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

One of the limitations of this study was the one-factor structure of the UWES indicated by the results. Further research is needed to establish the validity, reliability and usefulness of the MEQ and the UWES within the South African context. One must keep in mind that the results were obtained from a relatively small sample of employees in a government organisation in South Africa. These findings need to be replicated with other larger samples before drawing conclusions about the factor-structure of the measuring instruments.

The results related to the relationship found between the three constructs do not have very high levels of generalisability. In this regard it would be most useful if a larger sample group could be involved to increase confidence that study findings would be consistent across other similar groups. Stratified random sampling might also ensure sufficient representation of different groups and increase generalisability. Longitudinal research is recommended to establish the levels of job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement over a period.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the conclusions and limitations regarding the literature and the empirical study are discussed. Recommendations for the organisation and future research are also made.

#### **3.1 CONCLUSIONS**

Next, conclusions regarding the specific theoretical objectives and the results of the empirical research are made.

##### **3.1.1 Conclusions regarding the specific theoretical objectives**

In line with the first specific objective stated in chapter 1, job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement, as well as the relationships between these constructs, were conceptualised from literature.

Job insecurity has been conceptualised in literature as a global or multidimensional concept and as a job stressor (Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999). According to the global view, job insecurity is defined as the threat of job loss or job uncertainty (Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002). In this paradigm, De Witte (1997, 1999) explains that the subject of job insecurity relates to people in their work context who fear they may lose their jobs and become unemployed. The multidimensional definition of job insecurity holds that job insecurity refers not only on an affective level to the amount of uncertainty an employee feels about his or her job continuity (fear of job loss), but also on a cognitive level to the continuity of certain dimensions of the job (job certainty) (Borg & Elizur, 1992; Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002). The person-environment fit theory of stress was used in an attempt to study the antecedents and consequences of job insecurity. Based on this perspective, job insecurity is perceived by an employee as a change or antecedent to change demanding adaptation, which may be difficult

to meet. Failure to cope with potential future unemployment or loss of job features may have significant consequences (Probst, 2002) for both the individual and the organisation. De Witte (2005) warns that job insecurity can create a downward spiral for the organisation, by explaining that reduced organisational attitudes (e.g. dissatisfied and less committed workers) can affect organisational behaviours in a negative way. This in turn weakens the effectiveness and competitiveness of the organisation in the short term, which further increases feelings of job insecurity. Job insecurity thus risks creating more job insecurity in the long term (De Witte, 2005).

Empowerment has great potential to contribute towards organisations reaching their objectives (Spreitzer, 1995). Seibert, Silver and Randolph (2004) found that the relation of psychological empowerment to performance and job satisfaction is significant and positive. Conger and Kanungo (1988) as well as Smith and Mouly (1998) distinguish between relational and motivational empowerment. As a relational concept, empowerment is concerned with issues related to management style and employee participation. Menon (2001) defines motivational (psychological) empowerment as a cognitive state characterised by a sense of perceived control, competence and goal internalisation. In this regard, Spreitzer (1995) identifies four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role namely, meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact.

Empowered employees derive a greater sense of meaning from their work (Avolio, Zhu, Koh & Bhatia, 2004). The restoration of meaning in work is seen as a method to foster an employee's motivation and attachment to work, resulting in work engagement (Nelson & Simmons, 2003; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004).

Work engagement can be defined as a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzáles-Romá & Bakker, 2002; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). A greater match between the person and six domains of his or her job environment, namely sustainable workload, feelings of control, appropriate recognition and rewards, a supportive work community, fairness and meaningful and valued work (Maslach et al., 2001) can increase the probability of engagement with work. It can be concluded that the first research objective of the study has been reached.

### **3.1.2 Conclusions regarding the specific empirical objectives**

The first empirical objective was to determine the levels of job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement of employees in a government organisation. In comparison with previous research, the research participants of this study experienced higher levels of job insecurity (total scale and subscales). Lower levels of psychological empowerment were indicated, compared to the levels reported in other South African studies. The total level of work engagement of the study population was low (compared to previous studies) and could be improved. Therefore, it can be concluded that the first empirical objective has been reached.

The second empirical objective was to determine the relationships between job insecurity, psychological empowerment and work engagement of employees in a government organisation. No relationship was found between job insecurity and psychological empowerment (or its sub-dimensions) or between job insecurity and work engagement. Although cognitive job insecurity showed a negative relationship with work engagement, no relationship was found between affective job insecurity and any of the other scales. This implicates that higher levels of cognitive job insecurity will lead to the individual experiencing lower levels of work engagement. Psychological empowerment showed a positive relationship with work engagement, indicating that the individual's experience of higher levels of psychological empowerment will be associated with higher levels of work engagement. A positive relationship was found between meaning and work engagement. This implies that when one experiences higher levels of meaning in one's work, a higher level of work engagement will probably also be experienced. With this discussion, the second empirical objective has been achieved.

The third empirical objective was to determine whether psychological empowerment could be used to predict the level of job insecurity of employees in a government organisation. Meaning (subscale of psychological empowerment) was found to have a statistically significant amount of predictive value with regard to cognitive and affective job insecurity. Subjective assessment of importance of the job (meaning) predicted 4% of the variance in cognitive job insecurity and 16% of the variance in affective job insecurity. Results further showed that competence, self-determination and impact did not have a significant level of

predictive value with regard to either cognitive or affective job insecurity. In conclusion, the third empirical objective has been achieved.

The fourth empirical objective was to determine whether job insecurity could be used to predict the level of work engagement of employees in a government organisation. Regression analysis indicated that cognitive job insecurity predicted 15% of the variance in work engagement. It was found that affective job insecurity did not have a significant amount of predictive value with regard to work engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that the fourth empirical objective has been achieved.

The last empirical objective was to determine whether psychological empowerment could be used to predict the level of work engagement of employees in a government organisation. Meaning (subscale of psychological empowerment) was found to have a statistically significant amount of predictive value of 20% for the variance in work engagement. Competence, self-determination and impact did not have a significant amount of predictive value with regard to work engagement. In conclusion, the last empirical objective has been achieved.

### **3.2 LIMITATIONS**

The following limitations regarding the research were identified:

- One of the limitations of this study was the one-factor structure of the UWES indicated by the results. Literature reported that the UWES has a three-factor structure, namely vigour, dedication, and absorption (Shaufeli et al., 2002; Durán, Extermera & Rey, 2004; Storm, 2002; Van Greunen, 2004; Van Zyl, 2005). However, Naudé and Rothmann (2004) found a two-factor structure in their South African study. According to Naudé and Rothmann (2004), Storm and Rothmann (2003) found that a one-factor model fitted the data best in a sample of police members in South Africa (N=2396).
- The validity of the MEQ was another limitation. Factor analysis of the MEQ (analysis of eigenvalues and scree plot) indicated a three-factor structure. Upon closer inspection, a fourth factor with an eigenvalue of 0,89 could be extracted. A four-factor structure of psychological empowerment as measured by the MEQ, namely meaning, competence,

self-determination and impact, was confirmed by literature (Spreitzer, 1995; Malan, 2002; Buckle, 2003; Moeletsi, 2003; Sauer, 2003).

- Results were obtained from a relatively small sample of employees in a government organisation in South Africa, which might probably have limited the generalisability of the findings.
- The use of the cross-sectional design does not allow for an assessment of impact or cause and effect (Avolio et al., 2004).

### **3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations are made with regard to the applicable organisation, as well as in regard to future research.

#### **3.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation**

In this study, it was established that the levels of job insecurity experienced by employees of the organisation were slightly higher than other studies. This implies that while the level of job insecurity experienced by the employees in this organisation is not problematic, job insecurity exists and may need to be managed. Results further indicated that cognitive job insecurity contribute toward decreased work engagement. However, it was found that both cognitive and affective job insecurity could be predicted by meaningful work. This means that empowered employees will experience lower levels of job insecurity, which will lead to higher work engagement.

Holm and Hovland (1999) suggest that that the organisation can provide support to their employees by making use of career counsellors to assist employees who feel insecure in their jobs. Counsellors and consultants can take an active role in helping organisations and workers manage job insecurity. The workplace has experienced tremendous change and turmoil in recent years, resulting in job insecurity for many workers. Organisations need to redefine goals and commitments made to employees in the present and future. How these transitions are managed, depend on the skills and resources of those affected (Holm & Hovland, 1999).

Another way of supporting the employees is by developing managers within the organisation to be coaches and mentors for employees. The coach or mentor, who can be anyone from a different department, can observe the employees' work and actions and then teach the skills that are lacking (Sauer, 2003).

Employees must be encouraged to learn transferable skills in order to improve their employment prospects (Sparks, Faragher & Cooper, 2001). The organisation must provide employees with development opportunities to prevent them from leaving the organisation (Sauer, 2003). Management of an insecure workforce can include specific training for career self-management, and encouragement for workers to learn transferable skills, which will increase their employment security (Smithson & Lewis, 2000). Organisations must identify the individual's strengths, match personal aspirations and competencies of the individual to that of the job requirements and provide mentoring opportunities (Sauer, 2003). If the individual's work goal is congruent to his/her own aspirations and ambitions, a sense of meaningfulness will be derived. In other words, by selecting the right employees for particular work roles, work related meaningfulness will be enhanced. Care must be taken to learn more about the personal aspirations and desires of employees in order to fit them to roles that will allow them to better express themselves (May et al., 2004).

Kanter (1994) proposes that companies need to switch incentives from careers, status and promotion, to personal reputation, teamwork and challenging assignments, finding ways of making work challenging and involving so it becomes a source of loyalty, which translates into a new kind of security. Kanter (1994) coins this new type of security, "employability security". From this, it can be concluded that if companies want to retain talented people they have to create an environment where people feel empowered. Wentzel and Geldenhuis (2005) state that to keep the best employees organisations need to offer them freedom of choice and greater participation. Avolio et al. (2004) state that transformational leaders involve followers in envisioning an attractive future and inspire them to be committed to achieving the future. In the process, they enhance followers' level of psychological empowerment.

Organisations will have to make structural changes in order to meet the challenges of working in the dynamic and complex South African world of work (Randolph & Sashkin, 2004). Structural empowerment creates a workplace environment with access to information, resources, support and opportunities to learn. Efforts to improve structural empowerment

may ultimately result in improved employee productivity and retention as well as better work related outcomes and satisfaction. Structural empowerment refers to the perception of the presence or absence of empowering conditions in the workplace, and psychological empowerment is the employee's psychological interpretation or reaction to structural empowerment conditions (Laschinger, 2001). Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian and Wilk (2004) explain that psychological empowerment is an intervening variable between structural empowerment and employee effectiveness.

Psychological empowerment is a logical outcome of managerial efforts to create structural conditions of empowerment (Laschinger, 2001). In this regard, Randolph and Sashkin (2004) identified three interrelated key strategies that can together create structural empowerment in organisations, including sharing accurate information with everyone, creating autonomy via boundaries, and replacing hierarchical thinking with self-managed teams. Laschinger (2001) adds managerial support, provided resources necessary for work accomplishment and the provision of ongoing opportunities for development to the list.

Top management can promote greater feelings of psychological empowerment by communicating an inspiring vision to employees and encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their work at all organisational levels. Goal clarification and a clear specification of tasks, roles and rewards may facilitate feelings of empowerment among employees (Avolio et al., 2004). Leaders can encourage autonomy by giving employees the opportunity to participate in organisational decision-making and having perceived control over their work (Laschinger, 2001).

Research indicates that psychological meaningfulness has been linked to many important attitudinal outcomes in addition to engagement (e.g. job satisfaction) and behavioural outcomes (e.g. performance and absenteeism) (May et al., 2004). Laschinger (2001) reports that satisfied employees are more likely to rise to the challenges of an organisation restructuring and to be more resistant to job strain. Managerial interventions that increase employee feelings of empowerment (and foster meaningfulness through the effective design of jobs) may increase employees' ability to respond more effectively to the extensive changes in the current work environment (Laschinger, 2001; May et al., 2004).

The leadership approach of empowerment focuses on the leader who energises his followers to act with the leader providing future vision (Menon, 2001). Delegation of authority, accountability for outcomes, participative decision-making, information sharing, coaching and developing of people have been identified as leadership behaviours that will empower people (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades & Dragow, 2000; Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Maslach and Leiter (1997) have developed a model that focuses on the degree of match/mismatch between the person and six domains of his/her job environment, being work overload (too much to do in too little time with limited resources), lack of control (e.g. rigid policies and tight monitoring), insufficient reward (both internal and external rewards), breakdown in community (loss of a sense of connection with others in the workplace), absence of fairness (e.g. inequity in workload, pay or promotions) and value conflict (mismatch between the requirements of the job and the employee's principles). If the organisation can increase the match between the individual and the above-mentioned domains of his/her environment, work engagement and organisational effectiveness will increase (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

From the results of the research, the following possible recommendations are made:

- Programmes to prepare people for the changing world of work. Recommendations must be made on different levels, example secondary school, tertiary institutions new entrants into the job market and employees.
- Develop interventions to improve the “marketability” of people.
- Clarifying the role of the individual, organisation, labour union and community in managing uncertainty/insecurity.
- Discussion forum with the South African Government to consider a compulsory psychological well-being audit at least every three years.
- Creation of a continuous learning approach to evaluate the effects of insecurity on individual, organisational and community level.
- Organisations must develop programmes where they orientate employees to become more self-reliant.
- Creation of synergy between academic institutions, organisations, labour unions, department of labour and the community on programmes and interventions to manage the changing world of work. Roles and responsibilities must be clarified.

### **3.3.2 Recommendations for future research**

The two-factor structure of the JII, as well as its internal consistency was confirmed in this research. The MEQ needs further research on a larger sample group to determine the applicability and factor-structure within the South African context. The UWES presented a one-factor structure, rather than a three-factor structure, which corresponds with the findings of some previous research. More research focussing on the dimensionality of this measuring instrument is required. The JII, MEQ and UWES must also be translated into other South African languages.

Results were obtained from a relatively small sample of employees in a government organisation in South Africa, which might probably have limited the generalisability of the findings. In order to increase generalisability, it is therefore, recommended that use be made of a larger population group that is representative of the South Africa population on a national level.

A major problem with regard to the JII, MEQ and UWES is the lack of research setting clinically validated cut-off points. By conducting such research in a variety of occupational groups, norms for occupational groups, professions, organisations and industries can be developed. Such groups can then also be compared and occupations that are most at risk can be identified.

Further research is required into ways in which job insecurity can be effectively managed in organisations, particularly given the impact it has been found to have on employee wellness. Longitudinal research investigating underlying causal inferences of job insecurity is required.

Future studies regarding the relationship between job insecurity and psychological empowerment must be conducted, particularly in organisations where job insecurity is high and takes place over longer periods, for example in organisations awaiting downsizing or restructuring. More research regarding the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement must be undertaken. It is recommended that a more powerful sampling method be used and that longitudinal designs be employed, to enable causal inferences.

### **3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, conclusions regarding the theoretical and empirical objectives were made. The limitations of the research were pointed out and recommendations for the organisation in which the study was conducted, as well as for future research were made. All theoretical and empirical objectives formulated for this research, have been attained.

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