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The buffering effect of coping strategies in the relationship between job insecurity and employee well-being

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Abstract

The modern labour market features job insecurity (JI) as an unavoidable stressor. This study considers the influence of personal coping strategies by combining the conservation of resources with spillover theory. Do coping strategies buffer the negative effects of JI on well-being (work engagement, marital satisfaction and emotional energy at work and home)? A cybernetic coping scale distinguishes five coping strategies and a survey of 2764 Finnish employees reveals that changing the situation and symptom reduction buffer the negative effect of JI on emotional energy at work and home, respectively. Devaluation and accommodation have buffering tendencies in relation to work engagement and marital satisfaction. Thus, more engaged coping strategies reduce the negative effects of JI on employee well-being. Employees who use disengaged coping (i.e. avoidance) instead are less likely to remain engaged at work, such that frequent use of avoidance coping strengthens the negative relationship between JI and employee well-being.

Keywords

Coping strategies, emotional energy, job insecurity, marital satisfaction, work engagement

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Introduction

Job insecurity is a widespread concern, related to the potential involuntary lack of continuity of one's current job (De Witte, 2005; Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984). Growing research reveals that job insecurity negatively affects employees' work attitudes and well-being (for reviews, see Cheng and Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002). Job insecurity may also harm family well-being, though such effects have rarely been studied (e.g. Larson et al., 1994; Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999a, 1999b). In light of such detrimental employee outcomes, a primary question is how to prevent and reduce the adverse impacts of job insecurity – a question that is becoming increasingly important in the modern global economy (Sverke et al., 2002). For example, effective personal coping strategies might help employees coping with job insecurity, especially if the strategies can be learned from appropriate interventions (Hartley et al., 1991; Kets de Vries and Balazs, 1997; Taylor and Stanton, 2007). Adequate coping strategies for those suffering from job insecurity can lower its associated stress and maintain employee's mental and physical health.

Our primary objective is to investigate whether personal coping strategies can help mitigate the negative effects of job insecurity. Prior research has seldom investigated whether and how coping strategies influence the effects of job insecurity on well-being (cf. Amiot et al., 2006; Armstrong-Stassen, 1994; Mantler et al., 2005; Roskies et al., 1993). Although the role of coping has been acknowledged in previous job insecurity research, these studies only explored the overall taxonomies of coping (e.g. control, avoidance) (Armstrong-Stassen, 1994) without focusing on the effects of specific types of personal coping strategies. To address this gap, we investigate whether and how five personal coping strategies (changing the situation, accommodation, symptom reduction, devaluation and avoidance), as outlined in the cybernetic stress theory (Edwards, 1988), buffer the relationship between job insecurity and employees' well-being in both work and home domains (i.e. work engagement, emotional energy at work, emotional energy at home and marital satisfaction). We consider coping as a dispositional (trait-like) personal resource and a stable reaction style that an employee tends to use in the most stressful situations (Carver et al., 1989; Costa et al., 1996). This viewpoint implies that coping can moderate the relationship between stressors and reactions. Despite this type of stability, previous studies show that coping strategies also can be changed through appropriate interventions (Folkman et al., 1991; Taylor and Stanton, 2007), which might be useful for organizations facing global competition and continuous environmental threats.

This study makes several contributions. First, it is the first to investigate the moderating effects of various coping strategies in the job insecurity–well-being relationship. We draw attention to the importance of different personal coping strategies. A traditional taxonomic approach (e.g. problem- and emotion-focused coping) is too narrow to determine its ultimate nature (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 2006; Skinner et al., 2003), because this method includes both adaptive and maladaptive coping styles in each category (see e.g. Carver et al., 1989). Therefore, we study coping strategies in several categories and consider their separate effectiveness. Second, we argue that personal coping strategies are independent of other sources of coping resources, such as those at the organizational level (e.g. control, support). Thus, personal coping strategies may be particularly important in the face of job insecurity, for which other types of coping resources likely are lacking. Job insecurity is detrimental, and at the organizational level it often is

uncontrollable for the employee (e.g. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984; Jacobson, 1991). Instead, personal coping resources, available across a wide variety of situations, might matter more in the presence of job insecurity. Third, this study adds to job insecurity literature by providing further evidence of negative effects on occupational well-being (work engagement) and spillover effects in the family domain (marital satisfaction and emotional energy at home). Previously these consequences have only rarely been studied (for family outcomes: Larson et al., 1994; Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999a; work engagement: Mauno et al., 2007; Vander Elst et al., 2010), and more research evidence is needed, particularly with regard to coping effects in these relationships.

Job insecurity and employees' well-being

Conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and spillover theory (for defining spillover, see Kanter, 1977; Lambert, 1990; Staines, 1980; Wilensky, 1960) indicate the negative effects of job insecurity on employee outcomes. According to the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), the experience of a resource loss, or its threat, causes feelings of stress. People then strive to retain, protect and build their resources including physical objects, individual characteristics, energies and conditions. Employment represents an important condition resource (Hobfoll, 1989), so when employees experience the threat of employment resource loss, they might invest less energy in their current job to prevent further resource losses, due to their uncertainty about the future. They simultaneously start searching for other jobs during work time instead of concentrating on their present job (König et al., 2010). These coping behaviours imply that job-insecure employees are less engaged in their current jobs (e.g. Mauno et al., 2010).

Moreover, in insecure settings marked by workforce downsizing, the workloads of remaining employees may increase (Sverke et al., 2002). To protect resources (i.e. keeping their current position), some employees may work overtime to exceed their employers' performance expectations. This reaction leaves less time and energy to be spent at home (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Furthermore, anxiety about their future employment and household financial resources could diminish employees' perceptions of their ability to fulfil their role as spouses or parents. Marital and family dissatisfaction (e.g. Larson et al., 1994; Voydanoff and Donnelly, 1988) and lowered energy levels at home then could result. In this case, the negative effects of job insecurity spill over into the family domain (Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999a, 1999b). Although these spillover effects of job insecurity have not been studied sufficiently, our reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

> *H1*: Job insecurity relates negatively not only to work but also family well-being (work engagement, emotional energy at work, emotional energy at home and marital satisfaction).

Coping and well-being in cybernetic stress theory

Although coping has been defined in multiple ways (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Pearlin and Schooler, 1978), we rely on the cybernetic stress theory and

define coping as an effort to reduce or eliminate the negative effects of stress on well-being (Edwards, 1988). Specifically, the cybernetic stress theory identifies stress, coping and well-being as the main components of a negative feedback loop, in which the discrepancies between a perceived and a desired state not only damage well-being but also activate *coping*, which then affects the determinants of stress (Edwards, 1992). In line with this reasoning, people adopt coping strategies to alleviate the deleterious impact of job insecurity on their well-being.

The cybernetic stress theory further suggests that stress can be minimized through efforts to actively solve problems, including changing the stressful situation to meet a person's desires (changing the situation), adjusting desires to match the situation (accommodation), lowering the importance related to the discrepancy between perception and desires (devaluation), enhancing perceptions of well-being directly (symptom reduction), or diverting attention away from the situation (avoidance) (Edwards, 1988). Only avoidance is a passive/disengaged coping strategy; the other four are engaged/active ways to cope with stressful situations (see Skinner et al., 2003). However, we also need to move beyond this two-fold taxonomy; accordingly, we study the independent contributions of these five coping strategies in attenuating the negative effect of perceived job insecurity. This approach is consistent with recommendations in current coping research (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 2006; Skinner et al., 2003).

Because engaged coping aims to manage and alter the sources of stress and responses to them, it functions as a protective factor, whether through direct positive effects on well-being or as a moderator of the relationship between stressors and well-being outcomes (Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010; Skinner et al., 2003). Active problem-solving coping is associated with better health and well-being (Parkes, 1990; Penley et al., 2002). For example, in the presence of role stressors, people using active, positive coping strategies are less likely to report job-related anxiety, dissatisfaction (Latack, 1986), or psychological symptoms (Snow et al., 2003). The greater use of planning and positive reappraisal coping strategies also correlates positively with marital satisfaction (Nelson, 2008). Thus, engaged coping seems to result in positive outcomes (Dewe et al., 1993; Penley et al., 2002).

In contrast, disengaged coping and avoidance tend to lead people to ignore direct problem-solving options (Amiot et al., 2006; Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010). Such avoidance relates negatively to well-being and health (Penley et al., 2002; Snow et al., 2003), such that it leads to increased psychological distress (Tyler and Cushway, 1995), anxiety, depression and somatic complaints (Snow et al., 2003). Moreover, a greater use of denial, behavioural disengagement and distraction correlates with low levels of marital satisfaction (Nelson, 2008). Thus, empirical evidence suggests that avoidance is a less effective coping strategy that often results in negative outcomes (Day and Livingstone, 2001; Dewe et al., 1993; Penley et al., 2002; Suls and Fletcher, 1985; Tyler and Cushway, 1995). Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

> *H2*: Engaged coping strategies, including (a) changing the situation, (b) accommodation, (c) symptom reduction and (d) devaluation relate positively whereas disengaged coping strategies, such as (e) avoidance, relate negatively to work and family well-being.

Moderating role of coping between job stressors and well-being outcomes

Many studies show that coping strategies moderate the relationship between job stressors and well-being outcomes (Snow et al., 2003). Some of them have indicated that engaged/active coping strategies buffer the adverse effects of stressors. For example, Parkes (1990) indicated that direct engaged coping mitigated the adverse effects of work demands on mental health outcomes (see also Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2007). Engaged coping reduced the effects of job stressors on job-related outcomes in a study by Koeske et al. (1993), and problem-solving coping buffered the relationship between work stressors and life strain, according to Bhagat et al. (1995). Yet some other studies disagree. For example, Patterson (2003) showed that problem-solving coping exhibited reverse buffering effects, such that the more problem-solving coping employees used, the more distress they reported in a high work stress context. Consequently, the results regarding the buffering role of *engaged coping strategies* are inconsistent (for a review, see Dewe et al., 1993) and require further consideration.

In particular, the moderating role of engaged coping in the relationship between job insecurity and well-being outcomes has rarely been examined. A recent study investigated whether coping strategies buffered the negative effects of employment uncertainty, reported by both unemployed and employed participants, on stress (Mantler et al., 2005). However, these authors failed to find a buffering effect of problem-solving coping. This research also did not study job insecurity specifically, because it included unemployed persons, whereas job insecurity refers to the threat of job loss (Jacobson, 1991). Another study, which focused on the coping processes during a merger, found that engaged coping predicted higher levels of job satisfaction and identification with the merged organization (Amiot et al., 2006), though again without studying job insecurity explicitly. In a pioneering study of layoff survivors, Armstrong-Stassen (1994) also found that employees who used control coping (i.e. engaged/active) reported higher job performance and lower turnover intentions. However, the study covered only two general types of coping strategies (control and avoidance copings), and focused on job attitudes, not on well-being. In general, these prior studies proposed that engaged coping strategies could be adaptive if job insecurity is perceived (e.g. during organizational change), implying a potential buffering role between job insecurity and well-being, in line with the stress and coping theories (Edwards, 1992, 1988; Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Thus, we hypothesize that:

> *H3*: Engaged coping strategies, including (a) changing the situation, (b) accommodation, (c) symptom reduction and (d) devaluation, buffer the relationship between job insecurity and well-being at work and at home, such that job-insecure employees who frequently use these coping strategies will report better well-being than those who rarely use these coping strategies.

There is little empirical evidence to support a moderating effect of *avoidance coping* either (Snow et al., 2003). For example, defensive coping (similar to avoidance coping) may counter-buffer, that is, strengthen the relationship between work role overload and

well-being (Fortes-Ferreira et al., 2006; Parasuraman and Cleek, 1984). Other studies have failed to detect any moderating effects of avoidance coping in the stressor–strain relationship (Koeske et al., 1993; Parkes, 1990; Tyler and Cushway, 1995; Yip et al., 2008). These inconclusive results about the moderating effect of avoidance coping highlight the need for more empirical evidence, particularly when job insecurity represents the stressor. Mantler et al. (2005) showed that avoidance coping moderated the effect of employment uncertainty on perceived stress: avoidance coping strengthened the deleterious impact of employment uncertainty on stress. Furthermore, during a merger, the frequent use of avoidance coping could predict lower identification with a merged organization (Amiot et al., 2006). In addition, Armstrong-Strassen (1994) empirically revealed that avoidance coping strengthened the negative effects of the perceived threat of job loss on performance and turnover intentions. However, as we noted previously, this study examined job attitudes, not well-being. The general implication from these studies – that avoidance represents a harmful coping style in a job-insecure situation – is theoretically plausible, because stress models also suggest that avoidance coping should be maladaptive (Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010; Edwards, 1992; Suls and Fletcher, 1985). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

> *H4*: Avoidance coping moderates (strengthens) the negative relationship between job insecurity and well-being both at work and at home, such that job-insecure employees who frequently use avoidance coping will report poorer well-being than those who rarely use this coping strategy.

Methods

Participants and procedure

The data collection was part of an ongoing research project with an original sample (N = 7511) of employees from the Finnish health and social care and service sectors. Participants were recruited from two Finnish trade unions: Tehy and Pam, whose representatives randomly selected respondents from their membership registrations. It has been estimated that union registration rate in Tehy is 90% and in Pam 65–70% (Böckerman and Uusitalo, 2006). Thus, even though not all health and service sector employees are unionized in Finland, participation rates are pretty high, covering the majority of the workforce in these fields compared to other European countries such as Norway, Germany, Belgium and so on (OECD, 2012).

An electronic questionnaire, distributed to each participant by email in October 2009, collected the focal data during a period when Finland was suffering from a severe economic slowdown, which created a naturally relevant context for studying job insecurity. Indeed, due to the worldwide economic downturn in 2008, Finland experienced a decline in GDP, which is similar to that of the depression in the early of 1990s and also an increase in unemployment rate from 6.4% to 8.2% in 2009 (OECD, 2009). Even though the studied fields (health care and services) were not so dramatically hit by the last recession of 2008 compared to some other fields (e.g. Information and Communication Technologies), they employ a temporary workforce, which is one of the strongest predictors for perceived job insecurity (Mauno et al., 2012; Nätti et al., 2005). In 2009 (the year of data collection),

19% of Tehy members were temporarily employed, and of those who were under the age of 35, 40% had a temporary contract (Makkanen, 2009). In Pam, the respective figures varied between 7 and 16% depending on the segment (Pocket Statistics of Pam, 2009). Furthermore, agency labour, a specific form of temporary work, has also become more popular, especially in the private services. Taking into account these contextual factors, it is reasonable to expect that job insecurity is a relevant phenomenon in these studied fields.

Of the original sample, 2764 respondents participated in this study, giving a response rate of 36.8%, similar to the average response rate in studies that use data collected from organizations (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). Altogether, 1728 health care professionals and 1036 service employees contributed data. Of the respondents, 86% were women, which corresponds well with the real gender distribution in the two Finnish labour unions: 93% of the members of Tehy and 80% of those of Pam are women. The mean age of the respondents was 39.4 (SD = 11.6) years, again comparable to the actual situation in the labour unions, with mean ages of 43 years in Tehy and 40 years in Pam. Thus, our respondents are representative of the target population. Furthermore, 61% of the respondents had a polytechnic or post-secondary education, and 33% had an intermediate vocational or college education. Finally, 85% had a permanent employment contract.

Measures

The measure of *job insecurity* used a three-item scale (e.g. 'I fear I will lose my job', 'I think I can lose my job in the near future'), developed by De Witte (2000; see also Kinnunen et al., 2010). This scale assessed global job insecurity and captured the affective (fear) and cognitive (probability) aspects of perceived job insecurity. The items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1= 'totally disagree', 5= 'totally agree'), produced a Cronbach's alpha value of .92.

Coping strategies were measured using the cybernetic coping scale, which has been validated in Europe (Brough et al., 2005; Guppy et al., 2004). We focused on each of the five sub-scales of coping: *avoidance* (e.g. 'I try to avoid thinking about the problem', α = .80), *changing the situation* (e.g. 'I focus my efforts on changing the situation', α = .69), *symptom reduction* (e.g. 'I try to let off steam', α = .65), *devaluation* (e.g. 'I tell myself the problem is unimportant', α = .73) and *accommodation* (e.g. 'I make an effort to change my expectations', α = .63). Thus, the first sub-scale described avoidance or passive coping, and the remaining four described engaged or active coping. Each sub-scale consisted of three items, rated on a five-point response scale (1 = 'almost never', 5 = 'always').

To measure well-being *at work*, we used work engagement and emotional energy at work scales. *Work engagement* was measured with the UWES-9 (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Short Form) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006). It consisted of three sub-dimensions – vigour, dedication and absorption – and has recently been validated in Finland (Seppälä et al., 2009). The items were rated on a seven-point scale (0 = 'never', 6 = 'daily'). The Cronbach's alpha value for the work engagement scale was .88.

For *emotional energy at work*, we turned to the three-item Shirom and Melamed vigour measure scale (Shirom, 2003) and selected the emotional energy at work sub-scale, which seemed most relevant for health care and service work, with its close social interactions with patients and customer. In the original scale, respondents indicated their feelings towards co-workers and customers; we asked the respondents in this study to rate

their emotions towards customers or patients instead, using the following items: 'I feel able to be sensitive to the needs of patients/customers', 'I feel I am capable of investing emotionally in patients/customers' and 'I feel capable of being sympathetic to patients/customer'. Respondents rated these feelings in the previous month on seven-point rating scales (1 = 'never', 7 = 'always'). The Cronbach's alpha was .89.

Similarly, for well-being in the family domain, we used two scales, emotional energy at home and marital satisfaction. *Emotional energy at home* was measured with three items similar to the emotional energy at work scale, except that we replaced 'patients/customers' with 'family members/significant others' (e.g. 'I feel capable of being sympathetic to family members/significant others'). Respondents rated these feelings at home in the past month on seven-point rating scales (1 = 'never', 7 = 'always'). The Cronbach's alpha was .90. For the *marital satisfaction* measure, we applied the Kansas marital satisfaction scale (Schumm et al., 1986), which consisted of three items (e.g. 'How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse/partner?'). The response scale ranged from 1 ('very unsatisfied') to 7 ('very satisfied'), with a Cronbach's alpha value of .96. We report the means, standard deviations and correlations for all study variables in Table 1.

Results

Analysis strategy

We performed a moderated hierarchical regression analysis to examine the moderating effects of the different coping strategies on the relations between job insecurity and employee outcomes, as follows: in the first step, we included demographic variables (age, gender, education, family size, labour union and contract) to control for their effects. We selected these control variables for three specific reasons: (1) they were relevant in prior job insecurity research (e.g. age, gender, education, contract type; Mauno and Kinnunen, 2002; Näswall and De Witte, 2003), (2) they were important in the study context (i.e. labour union), or (3) they were relevant for the dependent variables (e.g. family size for marital satisfaction). In step 2, we entered job insecurity into the regression. With step 3, we included the moderator variables (five coping strategies) to examine their main effects. Finally, we considered the interaction terms of job insecurity with each of five coping strategies. In addition, we centred the predictor (job insecurity), moderators (five coping strategies) and outcome variables to reduce multicollinearity and facilitate interpretations (Aiken and West, 1991; Hui and Lee, 2000), because our independent variables were correlated (see Table 1). In the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, we used the standardized scores for the variables. Moreover, the interaction effects should be graphically presented, for which purpose mean centred or standardized scores for the predictors are better suited (Aiken and West, 1991).

Direct effects hypotheses

The results in Table 2 indicate that perceived job insecurity exerted *direct effects* on the well-being outcomes. Specifically, job insecurity explained approximately 2% of the

Table1. Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and reliabilities (Cronbach's α) of study variables (N = 2235−2764).

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Age	39.40	11.56	__															
2. Gender (f/m)	__	__	**−.10*****	__														
3. Education	2.59	.65	**.16*****	**.17*****	__													
4. Family size	2.69	3.75	−.01	.03	**.06****	__												
5. Health/service	__	__	**−.38*****	**.26*****	**−.53*****	−.03	__											
6. Contract (p/t)	__	__	**−.20*****	**−.04***	**.06****	.02	**−.06****	__										
7. Job insecurity	2.41	1.40	**−.18*****	**.08*****	**−.14*****	−.01	**.26*****	**.26*****	(.92)									
8. Changing the situation	3.10	.66	**−.06****	−.02	**.08*****	−.04	−.00	.02	.02	(.69)								
9. Accommodation	3.13	.58	.01	**−.06****	.02	.01	.00	−.00	**.05***	**.32*****	(.63)							
10. Devaluation	2.87	.66	.01	−.02	**−.07*****	.00	**.08*****	−.02	.04	**.11*****	**.33*****	(.73)						
11. Symptoms reduction	3.40	.66	**−.08*****	**−.11*****	**.08*****	−.03	−.03	.04	.03	**.33*****	**.32*****	**.25*****	(.65)					
12. Avoidance	2.68	.75	**−.10*****	−.03	**−.08*****	−.02	**.11*****	.02	**.11*****	**.05***	**.22*****	**.54*****	**.32*****	(.80)				
13. Work engagement	5.72	1.21	**.08*****	**−.05***	.01	−.02	.02	.03	**−.11*****	**.07*****	**.07*****	**.04***	−.02	**−.08*****	(.88)			
14. Emotional energy at work	5.51	.81	**.13*****	**−.17*****	**.11*****	−.01	**−.17*****	.00	**−.14*****	**.07*****	**.08*****	.01	.04	**−.12*****;	**.35*****	(.89)		
15. Emotional energy at home	5.40	.83	.03	**−.11*****	**.04***	−.02	**−.07*****	−.02	**−.13*****	**.04***	.04	.02	**.04***	**−.10*****	**.23*****	**.41*****	(.90)	
16. Marital satisfaction	6.06	1.54	**−.19*****	**.10*****	**−.13*****	**−.06****	**.22*****	−.01	.02	−.01	−.00	.03	.01	**−.06***	**.07****	.01	**.31*****	(.96)

Notes: $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$. Contract (p/t) = contract (permanent/temporary). Gender (f/m) = gender (female/male).

Table 2. Results of hierarchical regression analyses of job insecurity and coping strategies on employees' work and family life outcomes.

Independent variables	Work engagement (n = 2322)	Emotional energy at work (n = 2391)	Emotional energy at home (n = 2391)	Marital satisfaction (n = 2028)
	β	β	β	β
Step 1: Controls				
Age	**.12*** **	**.09*** **	−.01	**−.14*** **
Gender(f/m)	**−.06****	**−.15*** **	**−.10*** **	**.05***
Education	**.05***	.03	.01	−.02
Family size	−.02	−.01	−.02	−.04
Health/service	**.11*** **	**−.09*** **	**−.05***	**.14*** **
Contract(p/t)	**.05***	.01	−.03	−.04
ΔR^2	**.02*** **	**.06*** **	**.02*** **	**.07*** **
R^2	**.02*** **	**.06*** **	**.02*** **	**.07*** **
Step 2: Job stressor				
Job insecurity	**−.15*** **	**−.11*** **	**−.12*** **	**−.05***
ΔR^2	**.02*** **	**.01*** **	**.01*** **	**.002***
R^2	**.04*** **	**.07*** **	**.03*** **	**.07*** **
Step 3: Coping strategy				
Changing the situation	**.06****	**.05***	.01	−.03
Symptoms reduction	−.04	.02	**.05***	.04
Accommodation	**.05***	**.07****	.01	−.00
Devaluation	**.10*** **	**.06****	**.10*** **	**.09*** **
Avoidance	**−.13*** **	**−.15*** **	**−.17*** **	**−.14*** **
ΔR^2	**.02*** **	**.02*** **	**.02*** **	**.01*** **
R^2	**.06*** **	**.09*** **	**.05*** **	**.08*** **
Step 4: Interaction				
JI*Sit	−.00	**.06****	−.01	−.00
JI*Red	.03	.03	**.06***	.04
JI*Acc	.01	-.02	.03	**.05***
JI*Dev	**.05***	.03	.00	−.01
JI*Avo	−**.06****	−.01	.01	.01
ΔR^2	.004	**.01****	**.01****	.01
R^2	**.06*** **	**.10*** **	**.06*** **	**.09*** **
F-value	**8.67*** **	**14.87*** **	**8.14*** **	**11.08*** **

Notes: *p < .05; **p< .01; ***p < .001.
β = standardized beta-coefficient from the final step; ΔR^2 = change in exploration rate in each step; R^2 = explanation rate. JI = job insecurity; Sit = changing the situation; Red = symptom reduction; Acc = accommodation; Dev = devaluation; Avo = avoidance.

variance in work engagement and 1% of the variance in emotional energy at both work and home. Perceived job insecurity also appeared related to marital dissatisfaction, though this effect is probably artificial, according to the insignificant correlation (Table 1). Thus, in support of H1, higher perceived job insecurity was associated with lower work

engagement and emotional energy at work and at home, though the explanation rates were relatively low (1–2%).

Coping strategies had main effects on the well-being too, as step 3 in Table 2 reveals. In particular, devaluation and avoidance exerted significant main effects on all well-being outcomes. The frequent use of devaluation was associated with better well-being, whereas the frequent use of avoidance induced poorer well-being, across the outcomes. Changing the situation and accommodation coping strategies predicted work engagement and emotional energy at work: when an employee used these strategies more, (s)he reported more engagement and emotional energy. The symptom reduction coping strategy similarly predicted emotional energy at home. Altogether then, coping strategies explained approximately 2% of the variance of work engagement, emotional energy at work and emotional energy at home; avoidance showed the highest explanation rate across all outcomes. In short, more frequent use of engaged/active coping strategies led to better work and family well-being, whereas avoidance coping was associated with poorer well-being, in support of all the elements of H2. However, the significant explanation rates again were low.

Moderating effect hypotheses

The *moderating effects* of the coping strategies in the relationship between job insecurity and well-being appear under step 4 in Table 2. The interactions between job insecurity and the five coping strategies contributed significantly to variance in emotional energy at work and at home. Specifically, changing the situation buffered the relationship between job insecurity and emotional energy at work ($\beta = .06$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .01$), whereas symptom reduction buffered the relationship between job insecurity and emotional energy at home ($\beta = .06$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .01$). To interpret the directions of these moderating effects, we plotted interaction figures, using the standardized regression coefficients of the regression lines for employees with high (1 standard deviation above the mean) and low (1 standard deviation below the mean) moderator scores. We also estimated separate equations for two levels of coping strategies, because a moderating effect suggests a family of equations with slopes that vary as a function of the moderator (see Figures 1 and 2).

As Figure 1 indicates, employees who relied on changing the situation reported a weaker negative relationship between high job insecurity and emotional energy at work compared with those who rarely used this coping strategy. A simple slope test confirmed the interpretation: The slope of the regression line for low use of this coping strategy was steeper ($\beta = -.20$, $t = -6.97$, $p = .00$) than the slope of the regression line for its high use ($\beta = -.09$, $t = -3.57$, $p = .00$). Figure 2, in turn, shows that employees who more frequently used a symptom reduction coping strategy reported a weaker negative relationship between high job insecurity and emotional energy at home. The slope of the regression line for low use was steeper ($\beta = -.20$, $t = -7.30$, $p = .00$) than the slope of the regression line for high use of this coping strategy ($\beta = -.07$, $t = -2.92$, $p = .004$). Thus, adopting either of these engaged coping strategies buffered the negative effects of high job insecurity on emotional energy at work and at home, in line with H3a and H3c.

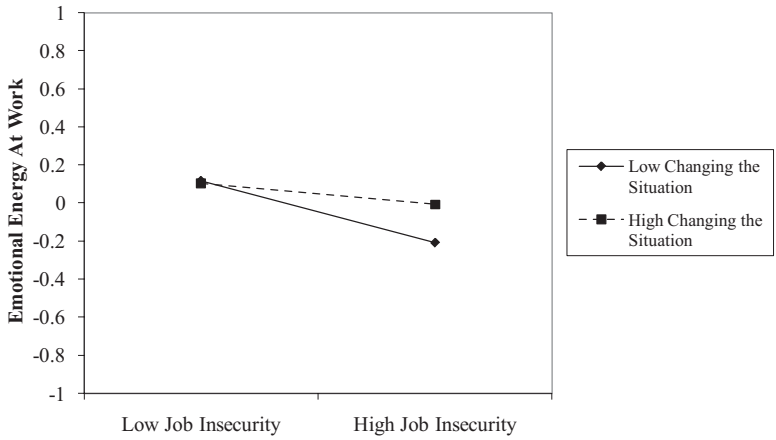

Figure 1. Significant interaction between job insecurity and changing the situation on emotional energy at work.

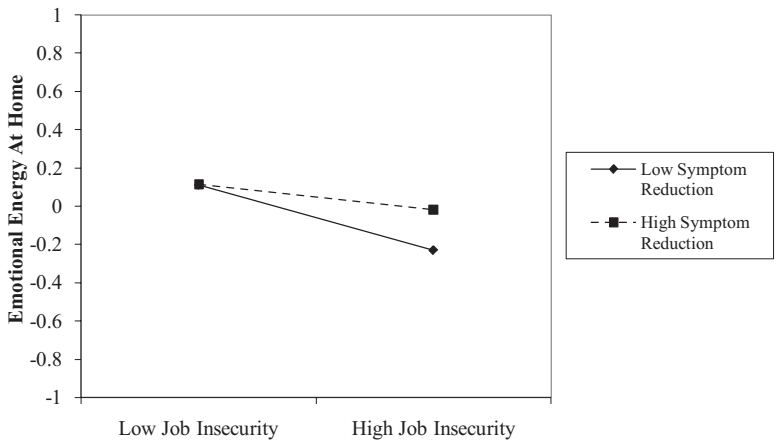

Figure 2. Significant interaction between job insecurity and symptom reduction on emotional energy at home.

When we regressed work engagement and marital satisfaction on the interaction terms between job insecurity and each of five coping strategies, the interaction terms contributed to only a marginally significant increase in variance of work engagement ($\Delta R^2 = .004$, $p = .09$) and marital satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p = .056$). However, both models were significant ($F = 8.67$, $p < .001$ and $F = 11.08$, $p < .001$, respectively). The significant interaction terms in both models prompted us to explore the results further. Specifically, two interaction terms (job insecurity *devaluation; job insecurity *avoidance) were significant in relation to work engagement ($\beta = .05$, $p < .05$; $\beta = -.06$, $p < .01$, respectively). The interaction term

of job insecurity and accommodation was significant for marital satisfaction ($\beta = .05$, $p < .05$). We plotted these interactions in figures (not shown because of limited space, but available on request): employees who more frequently used devaluation coping remained more engaged at work, even when they experienced high job insecurity, in support of H3d. Furthermore, employees who used avoidance coping more often were less engaged at work compared with those who used this strategy less often, which supported H4. With regard to marital satisfaction, employees who used accommodation coping more frequently also reported higher marital satisfaction when they experienced high job insecurity than did those who used it less often, in support of H3b.

Discussion

This study had two main goals: to examine whether job insecurity and coping strategies relate to well-being both at work and at home (direct effects), and to investigate whether coping strategies, and which ones, could decrease the adverse effects of job insecurity on employee well-being (moderator effects). We have shown that job insecurity and personal coping strategies clearly relate to well-being. Specifically, job insecurity and avoidance coping prompt lower well-being, whereas engaged/active coping strategies have reverse effects. With regard to the moderators, engaged coping strategies ameliorated the negative effects of job insecurity on well-being; and the moderator effects also exhibit scale-based variation. Avoidance coping, a form of disengaged coping, has the reverse effect: it exacerbates the negative effects of job insecurity on well-being outcomes.

Job insecurity related to well-being at work and at home (H1)

Consistent with H1, our results indicated that job insecurity was a job stressor, associated with lower well-being at work and at home. Faced with the threat of job loss, employees engaged less at work, and they reported lower emotional energy at work and at home. This finding is consistent with previous studies that report on how job insecurity impairs work engagement (e.g. Kinnunen et al., 2010; Mauno et al., 2010; Vander Elst et al., 2010) and occupational well-being (Cheng and Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002). Theoretically, it also aligns with insights from the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), because when they find no certainty that their jobs will last, employees devote less energy and time to their jobs.

We also showed that job insecurity related negatively to energy levels at home (Larson et al., 1994; Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999a, 1999b), in support of spillover effects (Wilensky, 1960; Ford et al., 2007; Hughes and Galinsky, 1994; Ilies et al., 2009; Lambert, 1990; Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999a). However, the corresponding path to marital satisfaction was not significant, perhaps because this latter relationship might be mediated by more proximal well-being outcomes that originate in the work domain, such as job burnout (see Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999a). We did not test these mediator effects, which fall outside our study aims. We also relied on cross-sectional data, which has limited power to unravel mediator processes. Future longitudinal studies could better clarify these processes.

Coping strategies and well-being (H2)

In line with H2, the coping strategies exerted main effects on well-being outcomes; however, their beneficial effects depended on the type of strategy (Day and Livingstone, 2001; Folkman, 2008; Snow et al., 2003), which implies that coping strategies must be studied beyond narrow taxonomies (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 2006; Skinner et al., 2003). The engaged coping strategies benefited employees' well-being (H2a–d; Penley et al., 2002), whereas avoidance coping related to poorer well-being (H2e; Penley et al., 2002; Skinner et al., 2003). Specifically, changing the situation (i.e. actively solving the problem and thereby changing one's perceptions) and accommodation (i.e. adjusting desires to conform to one's perceptions) revealed associations with higher work engagement and emotional energy at work. Symptom reduction (i.e. attempting to improve well-being directly) instead related to higher emotional energy at home and devaluation (i.e. reducing the importance associated with the discrepancy between perceptions and desires) predicts all four well-being outcomes. Thus, the four coping strategies outlined in the cybernetic stress theory (Edwards, 1988) characterize more engaged/active coping, which is adaptive and results most often in positive outcomes (Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010; Connor-Smith and Flachsbart, 2007; Penley et al., 2002). In contrast, as a form of disengaged coping, *avoidance* showed a different pattern of relations: negatively related to all the well-being outcomes both at work and at home, in support of H2e. Avoidance coping thus appears dysfunctional, irrespective of the presence of stressors (Ingledew et al., 1997; Mantler et al., 2005; Penley et al., 2002). Despite this overall trend, it should also be recalled that in our study, engaged coping consisted of four different, although modestly related, coping strategies that showed different patterns of relationships with the studied well-being outcomes. Such a scale-based variation is possible, and, in fact, was also found in previous studies (e.g. Roskies et al., 1993; Skinner et al., 2003). The most recent coping literature suggested that coping strategies should always be examined as broadly as possible (via sub-scales) (Carver et al., 1989; Skinner et al., 2003), and we followed this recommendation.

On the other hand, it has to be noted that the overall predictive power of coping strategies remained relatively low; they predicted about 2% of the variance in the well-being indicators. This finding raises an important question: What other types of coping resources need to be considered in relation to employee well-being? They might include personality factors (e.g. hardiness, resilience, risk-taking attitudes), various forms of support, or some other material resources (see Taylor and Stanton, 2007). The next step in coping research therefore should be to examine (and compare) the combined effects of different coping resources on well-being in different life domains, as well as identify the most optimal combinations of coping resources. The low explanation rate also could arise if people perhaps use different strategies simultaneously (Aldridge and Roesch, 2008; Shaw et al., 1992); our variable-oriented design cannot reveal the sort of coping combinations people tend to use (Carver et al., 1989). Additional studies should examine coping combinations by adopting a person-oriented analytical approach. Finally, personal coping is difficult to measure (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004; Schwarzer and Schwarzer, 1996), which may explain its modest predictive power in a statistical sense. In our study, scale reliabilities of coping strategies were not very good (< .70), and this

fact may have under-estimated their predictive power (low explanation rates) also in relation to moderator effects, which we discuss next.

Coping in the job insecurity–well-being relationship (H3, H4)

Perhaps the most prominent finding of this study is that different coping strategies moderate the relationship between job insecurity and different well-being outcomes, mostly consistent with our hypotheses about the likely moderator effects (H3, H4). Specifically, *changing the situation* buffered the relationship between (higher) job insecurity and (lower) emotional energy at work, and *symptom reduction* buffered against (lower) emotional energy at home. These effects were the strongest in our study, and significantly changed the explanation rate when we entered their interactions into the model. Employees who made more frequent use of the changing the situation and symptoms reduction coping strategies (describing engaged coping) reported a less pronounced decrease in their emotional energy, at work or at home. This finding is consistent with H3a and H3c, as well as with previous studies on the buffering role of engaged coping (Bhagat et al., 1995; Koeske et al., 1993; Parkes, 1990; Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2007).

Furthermore, several interesting buffering effects arose for other engaged coping strategies, though they were not as robust and did not prompt significant changes in the explanation rate. Thus, we only note trends in job-insecure settings: *accommodation* minimized marital dissatisfaction and devaluation had a similar protective effect in relation to work engagement. Although we consider them trends, we do not want to under-estimate our findings either; interaction effects are hard to detect in non-experimental studies (Aguinis, 1995), so even small effects demand consideration. On the other hand, post hoc analysis showed that engaged coping (the mean of four sub-scales: changing the situation, accommodation, devaluation and symptom reduction) buffered against job insecurity in relation to all four studied outcomes. Although our reported analyses for different sub-scales of engaged coping indicated that not all engaged coping strategies are equally beneficial buffers for high job insecurity, these associations depend also on criterion variables used. Altogether, our results imply that engaged coping should be studied in multiple sub-categories, which might have different outcomes in the presence of stressors (Brough et al., 2005; Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus, 2006; Skinner et al., 2003). We propose that future studies on coping strategies and job insecurity should examine the differential effects of engaged coping strategies.

Finally, in line with H4, the use of *avoidance* coping showed a reverse pattern; again, we can only speak about trends, because the change in the explanation rate was not significant. A frequent use of avoidance strengthened the deleterious influence of job insecurity on work engagement, similar to previous findings in studies with different focus (Day and Livingstone, 2001; Mantler et al., 2005; Parasuraman and Cleek, 1984). Whether coping strategies serve as a buffering or a risk factor depends on the type of coping and strain (Day and Livingstone, 2001; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004); ultimately, no coping strategy is adaptive in all situations (Cohen, 1987). Different stressors activate different coping (for a situational approach, see Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), though longitudinal studies indicate some consistency in coping strategies that

appear to have trait-like properties (Beutler et al., 2003; Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010; Skinner, 1995).

Limitations

The cross-sectional design of this study means that the causal relationships among job insecurity, coping strategies and well-being outcomes cannot be ascertained reliably. Thus, longitudinal designs are strongly recommended for future studies. We relied on a theory-driven stress-buffering hypothesis and predicted that different coping resources should buffer against stressors. Furthermore, previous longitudinal studies have provided some evidence that job insecurity results in impaired well-being, rather than vice versa (e.g. Böckerman et al., 2011; Burchell, 2011; Cheng et al., 2010; Clark and Postel-Vinay, 2009; De Witte, 2005; Hellgren and Sverke, 2003; Kinnunen et al., 1999; Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999b), making our research model reasonable.

We also relied exclusively on self-reports for the measurements, which might lead to common method bias and inflation of the magnitude of the relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Spector, 2006). However, common method variance reduces rather than increases interaction effects (Conway and Briner, 2002); common method bias thus would provide a more conservative test of our hypotheses. Not all relations between the constructs were strong (see Table 1), so common method variance seems unlikely to be a major issue. To minimize this risk though, additional research might adopt varying measure methods. For example, objective health indicators, such as sick leave and stress hormones (e.g. Kivimäki et al., 2001), could be insightful for studies of coping strategies.

The sample was dominated by women and represented only two occupational fields (health care and service). We tried to reach participants through labour union registration. However, in reality, labour unions do not recruit the entire workforce employed in the given occupational fields. The union density is also much higher in the Tehy (90%; health and social care sector) than in the Pam (70%; service sector) (Böckerman and Uusitalo, 2006). On the other hand, these density rates can be considered pretty high compared to some other European countries (OECD, 2012). Of more concern is that individuals from the public sector (i.e. health and social care labour union) are more protected from economic slowdown than those who work in the private sector (i.e. Pam labour union) because the latter is more affected by economic downturn. Nevertheless, temporary contracts are much common in the Finnish social and health care than in the service sector, which, in turn, give foundations to perceived job insecurity (e.g. Lehto and Sutela, 2008; Mauno et al., 2012).

Furthermore, country context is also important: Nordic countries are known for their high public welfare provisions and the strong role of the state in unemployment considerations. There is also quite large and persistent difference in unemployment in different Finnish regions; overall, the unemployment is highest in the northern (10.2%) and lowest in the southern parts (6.3%) of Finland (OSF, 2011). These contextual features are likely to affect how respondents react to job insecurity; comparative studies that take into account different coping resources are thus warranted. In a word, all these factors could limit the generalizability of our findings.

A fifth limitation might relate to the low reliabilities of certain coping sub-scales (changing the situation, accommodation, symptom reduction). We predict that these low reliabilities reflect some cultural differences. The coping scale we used was originally developed in English. Although the structure of coping is relatively consistent across cultures, the exposure to and appraisal of a particular stressor, the availability of coping resources and the acceptability of coping strategies may differ (Connor-Smith and Flachsbart, 2007). Furthermore, coping is hard to measure overall (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004; Schwarzer and Schwarzer, 1996). Thus, some modifications of the cybernetic coping scale items to better match various cultures might be necessary.

Finally, we recognize the response rate of our study (36.8%) as a possible limitation, though it likely reflects our use of email to collect data. That is, email surveys produce lower response rates than paper surveys in general (Kittleson, 1995), and not all employees' email addresses might have been updated. Moreover, because our study was a part of bigger research project, the survey was relatively long (about 10 pages), and a meta-analysis has suggested that response rates begin to fall after four pages (Yammarino et al., 1991). Although rather low, the response rate appears acceptable for our occupation and organization-based research (Baruch and Holtom, 2008).

Implications

For organizations, our results have shown that employees' coping strategies alter the relationship between job insecurity and strain, so stress management interventions should focus on encouraging employees to adopt more active coping methods, such as engaging in active problem-solving, setting realistic goals, thinking about alternative possibilities, minimizing the importance of negative impact of stressful situations and improving their well-being perceptions. Coping strategies can be changed at least to some extent. For example, coping effectiveness training relies on appraisals to distinguish between malleable and immutable aspects of stressors, modify the application of coping strategies to specific stressors and enhance individuals' effectiveness in choosing and maintaining support resources (Folkman et al., 1991; Taylor and Stanton, 2007). According to empirical evidence, coping strategies can be modified by psychosocial interventions that can improve intervention outcomes (Taylor and Stanton, 2007).

However, an organization might be less likely to initiate an intervention programme for employees immediately when they experience job insecurity due to the demand of full attention to implementing restructuring or downsizing. Yet job insecurity remains a relatively uncontrollable stressor, so employees might be likely to adopt avoidance coping initially, which could heighten the negative relationship between their job insecurity and well-being (Amiot et al., 2006). Our results also showed that avoidance coping had the strongest negative effects on employee well-being. Therefore, while noticing the beginning of economic slowdown, government should take steps to prevent the negative impact of job insecurity. In other words, before individuals adopt coping strategies to deal with job insecurity, intervention strategies can be used to encourage employees to shun avoidance coping (Parasuraman and Cleek, 1984), perhaps by defining training goals, teaching employees coping strategies and encouraging them to practise effective

coping strategies. In addition, it would be helpful to design tests of the effectiveness of coping training, including their effects on employees' ability to cope with stress at work (Koeske et al., 1993). All these efforts would help reduce the substantial direct and indirect cost (about 3–4% of GDP in the European Union) for mental health problems (OECD, 2008) as a result of the threat of job loss and high psychological demand at work.

Our study also has implications for job insecurity research. First, our results indicated scale-based variations in coping strategies. Additional studies should adopt broader categorizations, beyond the five coping strategies we consider, or use other coping inventories to assess them. Second, research should focus on the combinations of coping resources that best buffer job insecurity, because personal coping strategies represent only one type of coping resource. Third, more efforts should be devoted to developing a coping scale for a job-insecure situation. Some efforts have begun, but the scales appear to be rarely used. New scales also should account better for the situational nature of coping. Different situations require different coping (Lazarus, 2006; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Fourth, job insecurity is a process, at least in organizational change situations. To unravel its nature and how the process co-occurs with coping strategies, we need a multiwave longitudinal design, as has rarely been applied in job insecurity research (Borg et al., 2000; Garst et al., 2000; Mauno et al., 2001).

Conclusions

Our study results are informative and contribute to literature in several respects. We provide initial empirical evidence about whether coping strategies moderate the relationship between job insecurity and well-being. To do so, we have approached coping strategies broadly, employing the cybernetic stress theory (Edwards, 1988), and distinguishing five separate coping strategies. We also conceptualize well-being broadly by considering both work- and home-related consequences. Our large sample represents the health care and service fields, areas of increasing significance as worldwide life expectancy increases.

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