Consequences of organisational restructuring and job insecurity: An overview of findings from Belgium

Prof. Dr. Hans De Witte
Department of Psychology
University of Leuven (Belgium)

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0. Content

1. Consequences of restructuring?
2. Job insecurity as core issue: definition and prevalence
3. Consequences of job insecurity for individuals: health and well-being
4. Consequences of job insecurity for organisations and trade unions (& society)
5. What can we do? Suggestions for interventions

All this based on Belgian research (and nothing but Belgian research)
1. Organisational restructuring

- Often fails to achieve its goals, due to the neglect of ‘human factors’:
  - Merger of contrasting organisational cultures
  - Neglect of identification with pre-merger organisation
  - Change in job characteristics (e.g. workload)
  - Increase in job insecurity -> focus on this aspect

E.g.: Van Raes, Vanbeselaere, De Witte & Boen, 2009; Van Gucht & De Witte, 2006; Baillien & De Witte, 2009
2. What is ‘job insecurity’?

The perception of a potential threat to the continuity in current job (Heaney et al., 1994)

a. **Subjective**: perceptual phenomenon
   -> *Different* perception of same ‘objective’ situation

b. **Uncertainty about the future**
   -> *Not* ‘certainty of dismissal’ (‘I don’t know’)

c. **Involuntary**
   -> *Discrepancy* between experience and preferences
d. Quantitative or qualitative?

Concern about the continued existence of:

**Quantitative** = the job ‘as such’ (global, overall concern) -> dismissal

**Qualitative** = valued job features (aspects, multidimensional) -> lower pay, new colleagues, higher workload,...
2.1. Do (Belgian) workers feel insecure?

Obviously *yes*…

- **Probability to lose one’s job within 12 months** *(De Witte, 2000a, similar *recent* unpublished data)*:
  - 12% very or rather probable
  - 20% ‘in between’
  - 68% not very probable

- **Depends on ‘time frame’** *(De Witte, 2000b & 2005)*:
  - 5% in near future
  - 20% in distant future
  - 45% in life as a whole
2.2. Who feels insecure?

-> weak/disadvantaged position on the labour market

- *Blue collar workers*, low skilled workers & industry
  (e.g. De Witte, 2000a; De Witte & Vets; 2009)
- *Temporary workers*  (e.g. De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007)
- *Private sector employment*  (e.g. Vandoorne & De Witte, 2001)
- Sometimes *younger workers*
  (De Witte, 2000; Vandoorne & De Witte, 2001)
- Sometimes *women*  
  (Vandoorne & De Witte, 2001; De Witte & Vets, 2009)
- Clear association with *evolution of unemployment*
  (De Witte, 2006; De Witte & Vets, 2009)
3. Consequences for individual health and well-being

Job insecurity is a *stressor*...

-> reduction of *health & well-being*

- **Work-related**: burnout, need for recovery, job dissatisfaction, lower work engagement

- **Broader Well-Being**: mental health, happiness, anxiety & depression, life dissatisfaction

- **Somatic health**: Impaired general (somatic) health, psychosomatic complaints, use of medical services, consulting a GP

*(every study that has been done thus far in Belgium relates to one of these…)*
Quantitative job insecurity is one of the most important job stressors (but not the most important!) (De Witte, 1999 & 2006)

As problematic for well-being as short term unemployment (De Witte, 1999)

Spills over to ‘life’ outside ‘work’, after controlling for work related consequences (De Witte, 2003; Handaja & De Witte, 2007)

Quantitative and qualitative job insecurity are both detrimental (independently of each other) (Bohets & De Witte, 2006; De Witte et al., 2010)

Insecurity at the individual level and as a climate have an impact on well-being (De Cuyper et al., 2009; Sora et al., 2009)
4a. Consequences for organisations

Job insecurity is a stressor, affecting:

- Organisational **attitudes:**
  - Commitment with team members (Scheepers, 2009)
  - Mistrust in management (De Witte, 2005)

- Organisational **productive behaviours:**
  - Performance (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006 & 2007; De Witte, 2000; Van Gucht & De Witte, 2006)
  - Organisational citizenship behaviours (Scheepers, 2009)
Counterproductive behaviours:

- Turnover intention (Brysse, De Witte & Vlerick, 2002)
- Absenteeism (De Witte et al., 2010)
- Presenteeism (Scheepers, 2009)
- Bullying/mobbing at work (De Cuyper, Baillien & De Witte, 2009; Neyens et al., 2007; Notelaers, De Witte & Einarsen, 2010)

Even an indication of causal path between:
organisational restructuring -> job insecurity
  -> bullying at work (Baillien & De Witte, 2009)
4b. Consequences for trade unions

- Job insecurity associated with negative union attitudes among members:
  - Lower satisfaction with union (De Witte et al., 2005)
  - Lower perceived union support (De Witte et al., 2008)
  - Lower union commitment (De Witte, 2000c)

- But strengthens wish to become member among non-union members (in need for protection) (De Witte, 2000c)
  - Can lead to growth of union membership
4c. Political ‘consequences’?

- Job insecurity is indirectly associated with the vote for a ERW-party (De Witte et al., 2001; De Witte & Meuleman, 2007)
5. What can we do?

Suggestions for policy

- Job insecurity
- Communicate
- Participation
- Job control
- Employability
- Well-Being
1. **Reduce** job insecurity (and its harmful components, e.g. *unpredictability*)

   a. **Communication**: full, open, immediate, honest & personal -> less insecurity
      
      (Vander Elst, Baillien, De Cuyper & De Witte, 2010)

      Treated with respect, restore control over life

   b. **Participation** in the process: -> less insecurity
      
      (Vander Elst, Baillien, De Cuyper & De Witte, 2010)

      restore control

      better acceptance of actions taken
c. **Employability**: “individual perception of possibility to achieve a new job”

- > less insecurity

(De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, De Witte & Alarco, 2008)

Increase/strengthen relevant
- **occupational** (e.g. language,..)
- **interpersonal** skills (e.g. coping with changes,..)
2. Try to buffer the negative impact of job insecurity on health & well-being

a. Participation (Vander Elst et al., 2010)
b. Job control (Schreurs, van Emmerik, Notelaers & De Witte, 2010)
c. Employability (Silla, De Cuyper, Gracia, Peiro & De Witte, 2009)

But no effects of... (thus far...)
- Communication (Vander Elst et al., 2010)
- Self-Efficacy (Schreurs et al., 2010)
- Problem solving coping (Bohets & De Witte, 2006)
6. Future

*We need more ‘practice oriented’ research on this topic*

-> **Develop ways to**
   - **reduce job insecurity and**
   - **to cope with it**

-> **Develop and test interventions**
   (e.g. communication, participation,...)