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# **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A MODERATOR OF EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS TO JOB INSECURITY**

## **ABSTRACT**

We present a model linking perceptions of job insecurity to emotional reactions and negative coping behaviors. Our model is based on the idea that emotional variables explain, in part, discrepant findings reported in previous research. In particular, we propose that emotional intelligence moderates employees' emotional reactions to job insecurity, and their ability to cope with associated stress. In this respect, low emotional intelligence employees are more likely than high emotional intelligence employees to experience negative emotional reactions to job insecurity, and to adopt negative coping strategies.

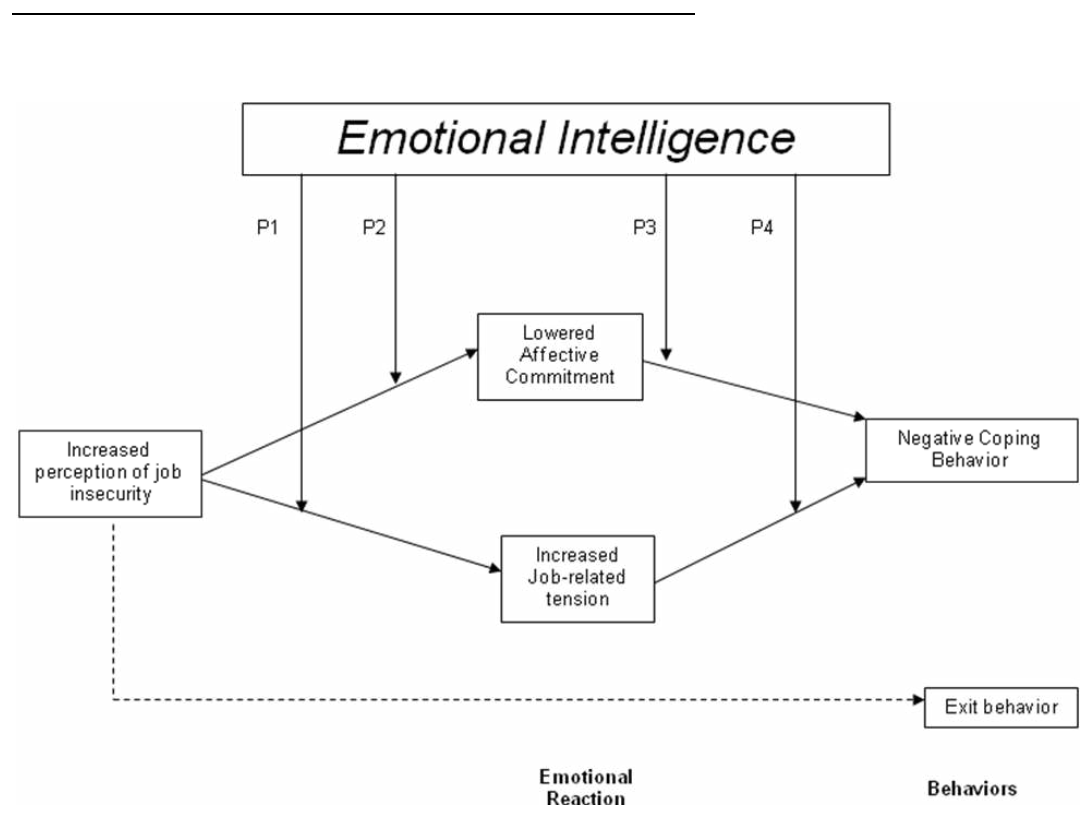
## **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A MODERATOR OF EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS TO JOB INSECURITY**

Job insecurity is defined by Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans, and Vuuren (1991) as a discrepancy between the security employees would like their jobs to provide and the level they perceive to exist. Although job insecurity is a common feature of organizational life in the developed economies of the world (Feldman, 1995), its effect on individual employees and on organizational outcomes continues to generate controversy (e.g., see Jalajas & Bommer, 1999; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). Some researchers (e.g., Galup, Saunders, Nelson & Cerveney, 1997) have reported that job insecurity results in increased work effort and work involvement, while others (e.g., O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1996) have found that job insecurity produces stress and decreased performance. In this article, we aim to reconcile these discrepant findings by examining the effect of emotional and dispositional variables not previously considered. In contrast to previous research, which has focused solely on cognitive reactions to job insecurity (e.g. Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989), the present article considers how emotional reactions to job insecurity might explain the varying outcomes associated with perceived job insecurity. First, we examine the emotional aspects of organizational commitment and job-related tension and argue that these have a direct influence on employees' workplace behaviors. Then, we propose that the dispositional variable, emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) moderates the effect of these variables on individual behavior. This is because emotional intelligence incorporates a broad range of abilities that explain the way individuals manage emotion. Thus, we argue that emotional intelligence moderates the direct effects of employees' perceptions of job insecurity on emotional reactions and behaviors.

In this article, we present a two-stage model of the link between job insecurity and

workplace behavior that conforms to Ortony, Clore, and Collins' (1988) theory of the cognitive processes involved in generation of emotions. Our model, illustrated in Figure 1, is predicated on an emotional trigger that emanates from an employee's perception of job insecurity. Cognitive evaluation of this perception (Ortony et al., 1988) results in two inter-related emotional reactions: lowered affective commitment and increased job-related tension (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964). These two emotional reactions then lead to negative behaviors, conceptualized in our model as negative coping behaviors. As illustrated in Figure 1, we propose that these relationships are moderated by emotional intelligence.

Figure 1: A model linking job insecurity to behavior



Our model also aligns with Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory regarding the consistency of attitudes with behavior, and Zajonc's (1966) notion that individuals under threat revert to familiar strategies that determine subsequent behavior. We have, in effect, applied these general

frameworks to the specific instance of the link between employees' experience of job insecurity and the utilization of negative coping behaviors. In general, coping behaviors are intended to reduce the stress that ensues from perceptions of job insecurity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). We note, however, that coping behaviors can have either negative or positive outcomes in terms of addressing the employee's perceptions of job insecurity. Specifically, we define negative coping as coping behaviors that are either unsuccessful or serve only to avoid or to temporarily reduce perceptions of job insecurity, thereby instituting a dysfunctional cycle.

Finally, we argue that emotional intelligence is a moderator (see Baron & Kenny, 1986) of affective reactions to job insecurity, and that this interaction may explain the contradictory findings in the research to date. Mayer & Salovey (1997, see also Salovey & Mayer, 1990) define emotional intelligence as the ability to detect and to manage emotional cues and information. Emotional intelligence incorporates a number of abilities including the ability to be aware of own and other's emotions, to be able to manage those emotions and to understand the complex relationships that can occur between emotions and likely emotional transitions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). We expand on these abilities later in this article and outline their contribution to managing perceptions of job insecurity, but note at this point that our central proposition is that employees with high emotional intelligence are better equipped than employees with low emotional intelligence to deal with the affective and behavioral implications of job insecurity. Finally, we note that emotional intelligence, included in our model as a moderator variable, is an individual difference. As such, our position reflects the view of House, Shane, and Harold (1996) that dispositional variables continue to be important in organizational behavior research.

### **Job insecurity and its effects**

Dekker and Schaufeli (1995) note that job insecurity is an internalized perception. It

emerges as a result of destabilized employment arrangements, most often through downsizing (Feldman, 1995) but also from alterations to existing individual employment conditions in organizations undergoing structural and strategic changes (Ashford et al., 1989). These phenomena are widespread in industrialized economies (Rousseau & Parkes, 1993) and are a part of the tapestry of organizational life, so it is reasonable to conclude that job insecurity is an issue in most modern organizations in today's workplace.

Consequently, considerable research has been undertaken into the effects of job insecurity. This research has concentrated on outcomes such as its stress-producing effects (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Kuhnert, Sims, & Lahey, 1989; O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1996) and its attitudinal implications (Ashford et al., 1989; Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Hartley et al., 1991; Kanter, 1989; Krecker, 1994; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). As noted earlier, the present article extends this research by focusing on the emotional antecedents of behaviors that emerge from perceived job insecurity, rather than continuing the sole focus on cognitive reactions to job insecurity. This approach addresses Ashforth and Humphrey's (1995) call for more consideration of the role of emotion in organizational research.

The principal impetus for the development of our model is the need to resolve the conflicting literature concerning the effect of job insecurity on personal outcomes. Greenhalgh (1982) found that, correctly managed, perceptions of job insecurity during organizational change can lead to increased organizational effectiveness on the part of employees (see also Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Greenhalgh (1982) concluded that organizational members who feel insecure in their jobs are motivated to work harder because (1) security is usually accompanied by complacency, and (2) employees under threat need to work harder to secure their positions and to maintain access to contingent rewards. This research was supported by Galup et al.

(1997), who noted a link between job insecurity and increased work commitment and effort. Ashford et al. (1989), Dekker and Schaufeli (1995), Hartley et al. (1991), and O'Driscoll and Cooper (1996), in contrast, argue that job insecurity has negative consequences for employees, including reduced work effort, reduced organizational commitment, and reduced work satisfaction. Kuhnert et al. (1989) argue further that job insecurity can lead to health problems owing to the stress involved in coping with ambiguity, and that these problems act to reduce employee performance.

An examination of the research conducted by Galup et al. (1997) and Greenhalgh (1982), however, reveals that, in each instance, exogenous variables were used to explain the links between increased job insecurity and improved work effort. In the case of the Galup et al (1997) study, for example, the active variable was the use of social networks for support, while Greenhalgh (1982) found that specific management techniques resulted in positive outcomes. We argue in this article, that endogenous variables may also affect employee reactions to job insecurity, but do so in a different and more complex manner.

This conclusion is supported by the research of Brockner, Grover, Reed, and Dewitt (1992), who found an inverted U relationship between job insecurity and work effort when examining the employees in a downsizing organization. Brockner and his colleagues, however, were unable explain why this inverted U relationship occurred and suggested that future research may find this explanation in "cognitive or arousal – based theories of motivation" (p. 424). In particular, it remains unclear how or why individuals react differently to perceptions of job insecurity. Why are some organisational members able to manage their perceptions of job insecurity and therefore to maintain high work performance, while other become overwhelmed by their perceptions to the extent that their performance deteriorates (Brockner et al., 1992)?



Essentially, we argue in this article that individual differences contribute to the inverted U relationship. Further, these differences may be explained by examining the role that the personal dispositional variable of emotional intelligence plays in moderating the effect of job insecurity on emotional reactions and behavioral outcomes. The cornerstone of emotional intelligence is emotional awareness and emotional management, so high emotional intelligence employees can be expected to be better equipped than low emotional intelligence employees to deal with the emotional consequences of job insecurity. On the other hand, employees with low emotional intelligence may not be able to manage their insecurities. They would thus be expected to experience a greater deal of work stress that can affect their work effort.

### **Emotional reactions to perceived job insecurity**

In this section, we detail the first stage of our model by examining two potentially detrimental emotional reactions that are likely to follow perceptions of job insecurity: lowered affective commitment and increased job-related tension.

**Affective commitment.** The effect of job insecurity on commitment is discussed in the careers literature. Kanter (1989), for example, noted that many employees now do not seek a career within one organization; they seek instead to maximize their external marketability. As a consequence, organizational members' loyalty, once primarily owed to a single organization with expectations of internal career advancement, must now be balanced between organizational outcomes and career goals (Rousseau & Parkes, 1993). Dekker and Schaufeli (1995) and Kreckler (1994) have also shown that security of employment is a precursor of organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment researchers (e.g., Kline & Peters, 1991; Kreckler, 1994; Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974), however, have primarily portrayed insecurity as a

cognitive process. Indeed, as Tosi, Katz, and Gomez (1993) note, many researchers contend that only incentive alignment and monitoring are needed to ensure an employee's commitment. We argue, consistent with Ashforth and Humphrey (1995), that this relationship is not fully explainable as a cognitive process, and that cognitive rational processes are interwoven with emotional processes. For instance, research has shown that employees often use cognitive processes to justify decisions made in relation to their employment on the basis of *how they feel* about a problem (Fointiat, 1998). Indeed, Allen and Meyer (1990) specifically include affective commitment in their organizational commitment scale. Subsequent research into commitment (e.g. Lucas, 1999) has tended to emphasize the importance of the affective dimension of commitment.

**Job-related tension.** The links between job insecurity and job-related tension have also been well established (Catalano, Rook, & Dooley, 1986; Hartley et al., 1991; O'Driscoll & Cooper 1996). Kuhnert et al. (1989), for example, found that job insecurity is negatively related to employee physical health and wellbeing. Nonetheless, elimination of all sources of workplace stress, as advocated by Kahn and Byosiore (1992) and O'Driscoll and Cooper (1996), may also be inappropriate because moderate stress can produce positive behaviors (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), as long as the level of stress does not become unbearable (see Brockner et al., 1992).

### **Behavioral response to emotional reactions**

In this section, we describe the impact of emotional reactions on coping strategies and behaviors. As we argued earlier, this part of the model stems from the idea that emotional reactions and concomitant attitudes towards work result in specific behaviors. Thus, as Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) have posited, actual behavior can only be interpreted if the intention underlying

the action has been identified.

**Coping behaviors.** Coping behaviors are intended to reduce job-related tension through amelioration of experienced stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) refer to two types of coping strategy. The first type, referred to as *problem-focused* coping, is intended to address the source of the job-related tension directly. The second, labeled *emotion-focused* coping, is aimed at minimizing the emotional ramifications of stress. We argue, however, that problem-focused and emotion-focused behaviors can have either positive or negative effects on individual outcomes. An examination of how these coping behaviors emerge during periods of job insecurity will clarify these potential reactions.

An example of negative problem-focused coping is expression of anger and abuse of immediate supervisors for the organization's failure to provide job security. This type of behavior not only reinforces the employee's own and other employees' perceptions of job insecurity, but may also affect support networks that the employee can draw on in times of stress (see Fitness, 2000, for discussion of the effects of anger). If the employee were to use positive problem focused coping, on the other hand, they may choose to try to understand and thus to resolve the stressful situation they are experiencing. Through cognitive reappraisal (Latack, 1986), for example, the employee can reframe the situation as an opportunity, rather than as a threat. Alternatively, the employee can seek to establish constructive social networks that provide emotional support (Vitaliano, Russo, Carr, Maiuro & Becker, 1985). While the support that emerges from these networks contributes to positive emotion-focused coping, the actions required to set up these networks directly addresses the problem of job insecurity perceptions, and therefore can be considered positive problem-focused coping.

Negative emotion-focused coping behaviors with potential negative outcomes include

withdrawal (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979), self-blame, wishful thinking (Vitaliano et al., 1985), and emotional avoidance (Lazarus, 1979). These behaviors may alleviate short-term concerns, but fail to deal with the underlying stress. Further, the adoption of emotion-focused behavior as an ongoing cyclical response may indicate an inability to manage emotions, because the employee avoids the unpleasant emotion evoking situation, and thus is likely to be unable to resolve the unpleasant feelings they are experiencing (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Nonetheless, there are occasions where emotion-focused strategies can result in longer-term positive outcomes through, for example, relaxation exercises and health improvement advice (Slavery, 1986). The first step in developing positive emotion-focused coping strategies is for the employee to assess the authenticity of his or her felt emotion and then to decide if the emotional reaction is reasonable under the circumstances. Ignoring these feelings can result in inappropriate strategies such as avoidance or blaming. Acknowledging these feelings, however, allows the employee to engage in appropriate emotional management to overcome the emotions that the job insecurity has engendered.

Research into coping behaviors by Catalano et al. (1986) suggests that employees under stress are most likely to attempt to deal with stressful situations by adopting negative coping behaviors, whether problem-focused or emotion-focused. In a similar vein, Mobley et al. (1979) concluded, in a theoretical review, that lower organizational commitment and higher job-related tension lead to withdrawal from the organization. These data suggest that a natural first reaction to stress and job insecurity is a defensive reaction. The consequential flight response thus produces behaviors that are reactive rather than proactive. We refer to such behavior as *negative coping behavior*.

Since job insecurity is primarily a perceived phenomenon (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995), it

is reasonable to conclude that individual perceptions of job insecurity will affect the way they behave in an organization. Thus, by including a dispositional variable in our model that affects the way that individuals perceive, understand, and cope with insecurity, we may be able to predict whether individuals will engage in negative coping behaviors or more positive behaviors. In the following section, we argue that emotional intelligence fulfills this role.

### **Emotional intelligence as a moderating variable**

A key tenet of the arguments we present in this article is that the individual difference construct of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of the contradictory findings concerning the affective implications of job insecurity. While dispositional variables such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), locus of control (Rotter, 1960), and experience have been shown to affect employees' behavioral responses to job insecurity, their proponents (e.g., Ashford et al., 1989, Roskies, Guerin & Fournier, 1993) do not suggest that these variables influence emotional states arising from job insecurity. The construct of dispositional affectivity (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988), has more potential to affect emotional states, and has been applied in organizational settings (e.g. George, 1991). The problem here, however, is that affectivity applies to emotional traits and states, rather than the manner by which individuals deal with emotions such as affective commitment and job-related tension. In this respect, Mayer and Salovey (1997) argue specifically that emotional intelligence is differentiated from other forms of intelligence and personality because it deals directly with the way people recognize and deal with emotions and emotional content. For instance, the focus on recognizing and regulating emotion also differentiates emotional intelligence from impression management (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Snyder, 1979), which is primarily a social skill used in interpersonal relationships.

Although emotional intelligence has been specifically defined only since the beginning of the 1990s (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), interest in the interaction of emotions and intelligence is not new. Piaget (1954/1981) explored theoretical links between affectivity and intelligence, while researchers such as Izard (1985), LeDoux (1989), and Lazarus (1982) have discussed the link between emotion and cognition in the 1980s. In this respect also, Salovey and Mayer's ideas on emotional intelligence are derived from Thorndike's (1920) pioneering work on social intelligence and Gardner's (1983) development of the constructs of interpersonal and intra-personal intelligence.

The most recent model of emotional intelligence (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) includes four components: perception, assimilation, understanding, and management of emotions. In the multidimensional model, perception provides a platform for assimilation that, in turn, provides a foundation for understanding, and understanding then contributes to emotional management. Although, each of the factors can be considered independently, in combination they contribute to emotional intelligence. We discuss each of these factors in the following paragraphs.

**Emotional perception.** Mayer and Salovey (1997) describe the first component of emotional intelligence as an ability to be self-aware of emotions, and to be able to express emotions and emotional needs accurately to others. Mayer and Salovey also note that this includes an ability to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate expressions of emotions, and between honest and dishonest expressions of emotions by others. The issue of emotional awareness is particularly germane in the context of the current article, because emotional self-awareness is a starting point for dealing with the perceptions that emerge from job insecurity. In other words, employees' feelings associated with job insecurity drive the emotional and behavioral consequences that follow. The ability to recognize others' emotions and the sincerity

of those emotional expressions is also of use in dealing with perceptions of job insecurity.

**Emotional assimilation.** The second component of emotional intelligence refers to the ability of an individual to distinguish between the different emotions they may be feeling and to prioritize those that are influencing their thought processes (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In the case of an employee's perceptions of job insecurity, he or she may experience a range of emotions that may include anger, dismay, fear, frustration or grief. Emotional assimilation enables the employee to focus on important information that explains *why* feelings are being experienced. In other words, the employee is able to determine whether these emotions are reasonable in the situation. This factor also includes the ability to adopt multiple perspectives to assess a problem from all sides, including pessimistic and optimistic perspectives. By adopting multiple perspectives, employees can determine the appropriate emotional state to facilitate the solution of the problem, or they can resolve the conflicting emotions they may be feeling. In the present context, adoption of multiple perspectives may provide a key process that may enable employees to break out of the cycle of negativity initiated by perceptions of job insecurity.

**Emotional understanding.** The third factor in emotional intelligence is an ability to understand complex emotions such as a "double-bind", or simultaneous feelings of loyalty and betrayal (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This factor also refers to the ability of individuals to recognize the likely transitions between emotions, moving, for example, from feelings of betrayal to feelings of anger and grief. Recognizing and analyzing the sequence of emotions that emerge from perceptions is an important tool in overcoming negative responses to emotions. Just as generating multiple perspectives may assist in providing a hiatus in negative coping cycles, emotional understanding can contribute to reconciliation of the feelings of emotional dissonance that can emerge from perceptions of job insecurity. In relation to determining the motivations of

other employees, emotional understanding allows the individual to assess the likely transitions other employees may experience, thereby providing insight into others' emotional expressions and behaviors.

**Emotion management.** The fourth and final component of emotional intelligence revolves around the regulation of emotions. This factor refers to the ability to connect or to disconnect from an emotion depending on its usefulness in any given situation (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). For instance, in the case of job insecurity, it may be useful to disconnect from feelings of anger if such feelings are distracting the individual from completing tasks. For instance, Fitness (2000) found that open expressions of anger in the workplace could negatively affect relationships in the workplace and lead to unresolved conflict. Connecting with one's feelings of anger, on the other hand, may be useful if this feeling provides motivation. The emotion management dimension of emotional intelligence separates emotional intelligence from the personality domain, because emotional regulation can vary to suit specific personality traits (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

In essence, we argue that the four abilities encompassed by emotional intelligence combine to create a moderating variable that enables prediction of employee emotional and behavioral responses to job insecurity. In the following sections, we outline in detail our model of the impact of job insecurity perceptions on emotions and subsequent behaviors and we suggest specifically how emotional intelligence moderates these relationships.

While it may seem intuitive that emotional intelligence directly affects, for example, negative coping behavior, such behavior needs first to be triggered by some external source. Our model therefore posits that negative coping behaviors result from emotional reactions to a trigger event (job insecurity), not as a main effect resulting from an individual's personal disposition. In



effect, and in line with Mischel and Shoda (1995), we argue that an employee's behavioral reactions emerge from both situational and dispositional variables.

### **Emotional reactions to job insecurity**

**Affective commitment.** Our first proposition is based on the idea that individuals who have high levels of emotional intelligence will be able to ameliorate the effect of job insecurity on their affective commitment. We argue that, in the early stages of our model, all four factors of emotional intelligence: perception, assimilation, understanding, and regulation, have a moderating influence. This is because employees need first to be self-aware of the emotions they are experiencing as a result of their perceptions of job insecurity. Employees high in the perception factor of emotional intelligence can therefore be expected to be able to assess the emotions they are feeling to confirm if their perceptions are correct or not. Further, employees high on the emotional assimilation component of emotional intelligence should be able to prioritize the information that is most important to their feelings of insecurity, and then to adopt multiple perspectives to determine if their feelings are accurate and reasonable (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). With respect to the understanding component of emotional intelligence, emotionally intelligent employees are likely to foresee possible complex emotions that will emerge from this situation, including whether they have mixed feelings of loyalty and betrayal and how anxiety about their insecurity may lead to feelings of frustration and anger. Finally, employees with high ability to regulate their emotions will be more likely than their low ability counterparts to be able to control their initial emotional reaction to perceptions of job insecurity. This is especially true if they consider these reactions to be unproductive. In this case, regulation of felt emotion may result in the employee increasing his or her affective commitment to the organization by generating enthusiasm for their work (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Alternatively,

employees high in their ability to manage emotions may decide that it is in their personal interest to suppress their feelings of insecurity and merely to increase their normative commitment to the organization for the duration of their employment. Irrespective of which path is adopted, however, the central issue is the employee's ability to exert emotional control. On this basis we propose that:

*Proposition 1. Emotional intelligence will moderate the effect of perceptions of job insecurity on affective commitment. Compared with high emotional intelligence employees, low emotional intelligence employees will manifest lower affective commitment in response to job insecurity.*

**Job-related tension.** According to Brockner and his associates' (1992) inverted U findings, the desired outcome for an organizational member is the achievement of an optimum level of job-related tension that motivates productive behaviors without engendering debilitating negative emotional consequences. We argue here that employees whose emotional intelligence is high are more likely to achieve this outcome than their low emotional intelligence colleagues.

As we argued in respect of affective commitment, employees with high emotional intelligence are more likely to be able to recognize and to express the feelings that emerge from perceptions of job insecurity. This is an important first step in the employee's ability to moderate his or her own emotions. Employees with high emotional intelligence thus could use emotional assimilation to focus on the important information that contributes to their feelings and then to their understanding of emotions. This enables them to evaluate and thus to manage the complex emotions that emerge. Two possible outcomes may ensue from such a self-analysis.

The first possibility is that employees with high emotional intelligence may determine

that their feelings of job insecurity are justified and decide that it is in their best interests to leave the organization. This decision mirrors research showing that, in the face of job insecurity, those employees who are best able to handle the change are most likely to leave (Schwab, 1991; Williams & Livingstone, 1994). This is because these skills and abilities contribute to such employees' potential future employability. The point at which these employees exit the organization can vary, however. Some will leave without securing another position, while others will form an intention to leave and actively seek another job.

Alternatively, the decision might be that the emotional energy required to manage the employee's emotions and to sustain effort in the face of perceived job insecurity is more than she or he is willing to expend. The tendency of high emotional intelligence individuals to exit the organization is not the subject of a formal proposition in this article (and is shown as a dashed line in Figure 1), however, because our focus is on the employees who remain within the organization, not those who leave.

The second course open to an individual with high emotional intelligence is to regulate his or her emotions. In this case, the employee will need to be able to monitor and to understand the complexity of his or her emotional states. Such an employee should subsequently be able to control the level of the emotional reaction that she or he experiences as a result of perceived job insecurity. The subsequent ability to analyze and then to regulate emotional reactions to perceptions of job insecurity is therefore likely to allow the effects of job-related tension to be optimized. This leads to our second proposition:

*Proposition 2. Emotional intelligence will moderate the effect of perceptions of job insecurity on job related tension. Compared with high emotional intelligence employees, low emotional intelligence employees will experience higher dysfunctional job-related tension in response to job insecurity.*

So far, we have argued that perceptions of job insecurity can be expected to lead to lower affective commitment and increased job-related tension, and that emotional intelligence is a moderator of these relationships. Nevertheless, even high emotional intelligence employees still experience some emotional reaction as a result of perceived insecurity. The essence of emotional intelligence is not the ability to ignore emotions, but rather to be aware of emotions and to regulate these emotions in a way that facilitates the realization of valued outcomes. This then brings us to the next stage of our model: the link between emotional reactions and behaviors.

### **Behavioral effects of emotion**

**Coping strategies.** As we noted earlier, employees with low emotional intelligence are not well equipped to deal with the affective consequences of either job-related tension or low affective commitment. Thus, the natural reaction of low emotional intelligence employees is likely to be to engage in negative coping strategies (Zajonc, 1966). For instance, a high emotional intelligence employee may decide to reframe their perceptions of insecurity as an exciting challenge. Alternatively, they may control and redirect their anxiety into productive behavior that will help to make their job more secure. Low emotional intelligence employees, on the other hand, are likely to avoid the issue of insecurity, failing to understand the consequences of their actions. Or they may decide to withdraw from active participation in the organization

and complete the minimum of work required for maintaining their job.

In effect, high emotional intelligence employees use emotional assimilation. This enables them to adopt multiple perspectives and to select from a range of coping strategies that result in amelioration of the emotional reactions to job security in the long term. This is in contrast to low emotional intelligence employees, who are likely to use short-term strategies such as withdrawal or avoidance. These strategies, of course, minimize their immediate anxiety but do not result in the actions required to enhance their security of employment.

Further, the ability of high emotional intelligence employees to analyze and to understand others' emotional reactions to job insecurity may also allow them to assess a greater range of coping strategies. They are therefore able to select from those strategies that appear to be more successful in resolving the threat of perceived job insecurity. The propositions that emerge from this discussion are:

*Proposition 3. Emotional intelligence will moderate the effect of affective commitment on negative coping behavior. Compared with high emotional intelligence employees, low emotional intelligence employees manifesting low affective commitment will be more likely to engage in negative coping behavior.*

*Proposition 4. Emotional intelligence will moderate the effect of job-related tension on negative coping behavior. Compared with high emotional intelligence employees, low emotional intelligence employees experiencing high job-related tension will be more likely to engage in negative coping behavior.*

## **Implications, limitations and future research opportunities**

In this article, we have advanced a model of the effect of employee perceptions of job insecurity on negative coping behavior. We have argued that this effect is mediated by affective reactions to employee perceptions of job insecurity (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). More particularly, we have presented four propositions stating that emotional intelligence, a relatively recently developed individual difference variable, moderates the links between perceptions of job insecurity and affective reactions, and also the links between affective reactions and behavior.

It should be noted, nonetheless, that our model is neither immutable nor necessarily linear. Employee personality (e.g., Roskies et al, 1993), demographics (Krecker, 1994), and organizational climate (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) can also affect the behavior of employees and their responses to job insecurity. Further, organizations are systemic entities involving complex interactions, reciprocity, and feedback loops. In this respect, as we have noted earlier, we recognize that there may be exogenous means to deal with the potentially negative effects of job insecurity. For instance, Galup et al. (1997) found that the alienating effects of job insecurity can be dealt with by developing social networks. There is also research to indicate that high emotional intelligence leaders may energize their work groups to strive for high performance outcomes (George, 2000).

A corollary of this line of reasoning is that the emotional intelligence of managers and leaders may provide additional avenues for future research. In particular, if emotional intelligence moderates stimulus-behavior links at managerial levels, it may have significant consequences for subordinates' ability to work successfully within the organization and therefore for the performance of the organization as a whole. For instance, Fiedler (1986, 1995) proposed that leaders who possess significant cognitive resources might still have reduced performance

during stressful times. Goleman (1998) argues further that emotional intelligence training can help managers to deal with subordinate insecurities, to promote teamwork, and to establish productive relationships. More recently, George (2000) has argued that high emotional intelligence leaders are needed to manage employees' emotional states. If this is the case, such training could assist managers to understand and to analyze the emotions of their subordinates and to manage those emotions to improve performance.

The most critical theoretical implication of our model is the identification of emotional intelligence as an individual difference variable that moderates stimulus-behavior linkages. This represents a substantive advance on the existing literature on coping with workplace stress (see Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Typically, this literature has addressed reactive responses to the stresses associated with critical incidents (e.g., Jamal, 1985; Terry, Tonge & Callan, 1995). The recent proliferation of employee assistance programs (Reddy, 1994) is evidence of how organizations develop programs to respond to critical incidents. Essentially, employee assistance programs focus on a broad range of interventions from financial advice to marriage counselling and work counselling aimed at improving overall employee wellbeing. Our identification of emotional reactions as mediators of the effects of job insecurity, and emotional intelligence as a moderator of this process suggests that a different approach may be more likely to result in improved behavioral outcomes for employees, and consequently improved organizational performance in the face of perceptions of job insecurity. Our model holds that high emotional intelligence employees are likely to be able to recognize and to deal proactively with the emotional consequences of job insecurity, especially job-related tension. Differences in emotional intelligence also provide an explanation of employees' selection of coping mechanisms.

An important and unresolved issue, however, concerns the unity of the emotional intelligence construct. Mayer and Salovey (1997) have proposed that emotional intelligence comprises four distinct components. In this article, we have addressed the four components as far as possible, but the inter-relationships between the components are still largely unknown. While our discussion suggests that emotional awareness and emotional management are of primary importance, we have not differentiated between the components in framing our propositions. Resolution of how the differential effects of the four components of emotional intelligence contribute to dealing with perceptions of job insecurity will require further empirical research.

In addition, we do not wish to advance the notion that high emotional intelligence employees are superior, super-human, or inherently altruistic and ethical. All employees are subject to emotional ups and downs (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1995) and, as we have noted, high emotional intelligence individuals are not immune to negative feelings associated with job insecurity. The point of our argument is that high emotional intelligence employees are more likely to be able to break the sequence of effects linking perceived job insecurity and negative behaviors, although the precise location in the model at which the moderating effects will occur is likely to vary between individuals. Some employees may be better at controlling their initial emotional reaction, while others will be better at dealing with the emotions once they occur. This is another area where empirical research is likely to be fruitful.

Finally, we believe that our theory also has implications for practice. In particular, we question the notion that job insecurity should solely be addressed through interventions aimed at reducing stress and/or enabling employees to deal with the stress flowing from change. Based on our model, we suggest that managers of organizational change need to consider the capacity of



employees to deal with the resulting job insecurity and concomitant stress. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that we are not advocating that organizations should only employ individuals with high emotional intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990, 1997) point out that emotional intelligence is not fixed for life and that emotional intelligence may be improved with suitable training (see also Goleman, 1995). More recently, Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel, and Hooper (in press) have demonstrated that coaching can improve the effectiveness of low emotional intelligence teams so that their performance is functionally identical to that of high emotional intelligence teams. In this respect, our theory carries the implication that emotional intelligence improvement programs may be a means to address some of the problems associated with organizational job insecurity, as well as other emotional reactions in the workplace.

In conclusion, we have argued in this article that emotional intelligence, an individual difference variable, may be a key factor in determining employees' responses to perceptions of job insecurity. We have argued that perceptions of job insecurity lead to emotional reactions including lowered affective commitment and increased job-related tension. These reactions, in turn, result in negative coping behaviors that can affect individual performance. In our model, emotional intelligence moderates the effects of perceptions of job insecurity on emotional reactions, and also moderates the effect of emotional reactions on behavioral strategies. As such, understanding of the effects of employees' emotional intelligence may need to be incorporated in future models of organizational behavior, especially in these days of rapid change and the attendant job insecurity.

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