

Job insecurity and its consequences for individual well-being, performance and attitudes toward society.

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Today

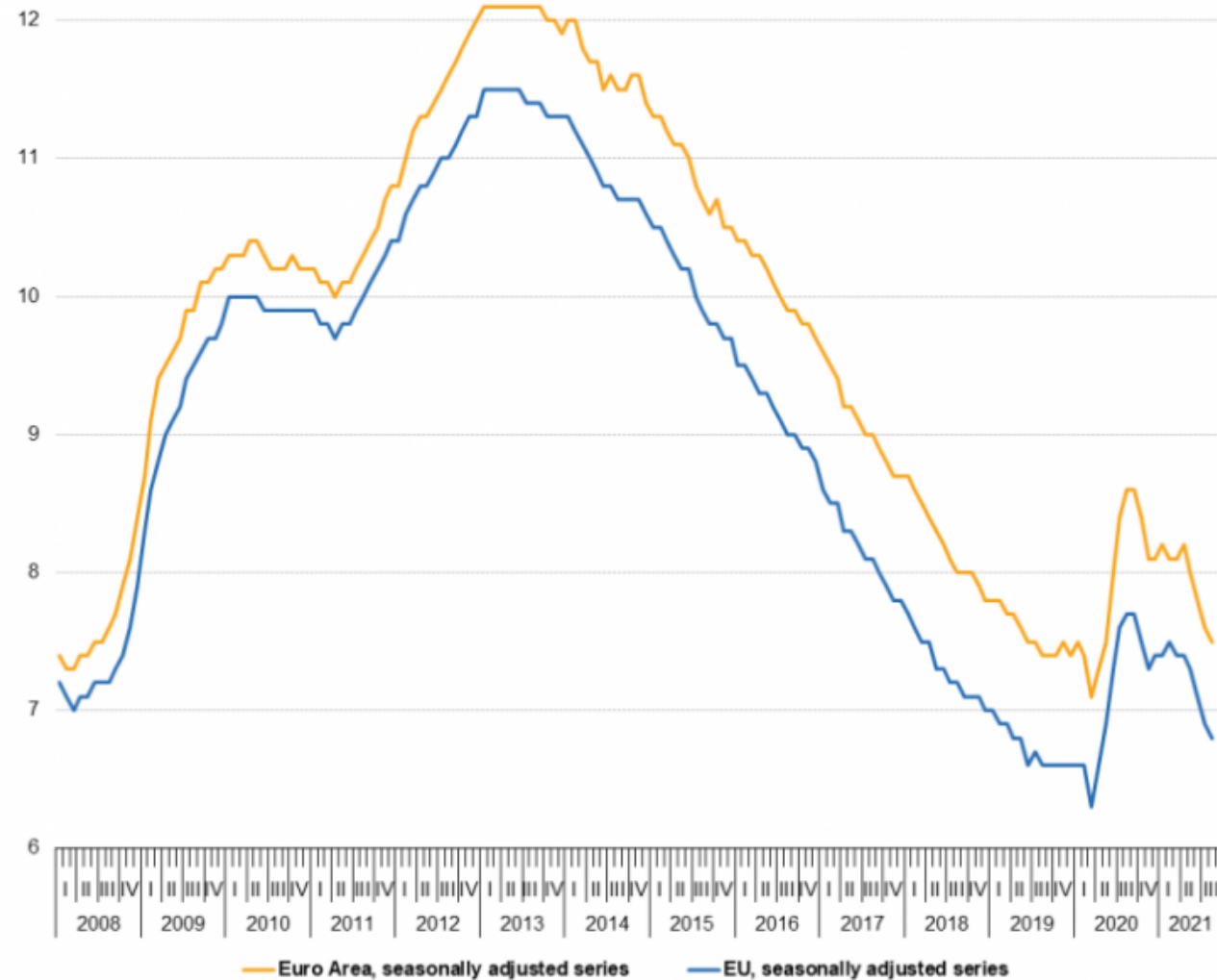
- A short introduction into psychological job insecurity research
 - What is job insecurity
- Consequences of & explanations for job insecurity
 - Well-being, work performance, political attitudes
 - Identity threat?
- What can be done

Uncertainty in the environment...

- Downsizings
- Restructurings
- Temporary employment contracts
- Mergers
- Organisational change

...can translate into job insecurity at the individual level Reisel, 2003

Unemployment rates, EU and EA, seasonally adjusted, January 2008 - August 2021



Source: Eurostat (online data code: une_rt_m)

'Objective' situations – subjective perceptions

- Unemployment level in a country (Brochu & Zhou, 2009; Erlinghagen, 2008)
- Industry sector (Klandermans et al., 2010)
- % of temporary employees in an organisation (Reisel, 2003)
- Rate of restructurings/dismissals in an organisation's past (Reisel, 2003)
- Country's social safety net (Debus et al., 2012; Probst et al 2020)
- Contract type (De Witte & Naeswall, 2003)

Employment type & job insecurity

(Klandermans et al., 2010)

- Subjective JI is an appraisal of one's objective employment status
- Subjective JI = Perceived probability & perceived severity
- Different consequences depending on objective employment status

Table 2. Mean standardized scores (0 = very low; 5 = very high), tests of significance and deviation contrast analysis of workers in five employment status groups, evaluating the probability of losing their job/business and the severity of losing the job/business

	Mean	SD	N	Deviation contrast estimate	Sig.
Probability of losing job/business ^a					
Agency workers	2.59	1.30	203	.124	.000
Employees fixed contract	2.40	1.17	502	.077	.000
Employees permanent contract	1.79	0.88	502	-.075	.000
Independent contractors	1.92	0.81	251	-.041	.003
Entrepreneurs	1.75	0.77	251	-.085	.000
Total	2.08	1.06	1709		
Severity of losing job/business ^b					
Agency workers	2.95	0.99	203	-.110	.000
Employees fixed contract	3.32	0.95	502	-.016	.125
Employees permanent contract	3.60	0.96	502	.052	.000
Independent contractors	3.49	1.01	251	.025	.062
Entrepreneurs	3.59	1.01	251	.049	.000
Total	3.42	1.00	1709		

^a $F = 43.833; p = .000.$ ^b $F = 19.156; p = .000.$



What is *psychological* job insecurity?

Key elements (see also: De Witte, 1999; Shoss, 2017)

- The **perception** of being threatened by job loss (Mohr, 2000)
- An overall concern about the continued existence of the job in the future (van Vuuren, 1990)

- *Subjective* experience
- *Uncertainty* about the future
- *Involuntary* in nature
- *Powerlessness* of the individual

Job insecurity - a recognised psycho-social risk

Psychosocial risks arise from poor work design, organisation and management, as well as a poor social context of work, and they may result in negative psychological, physical and social outcomes such as work-related stress, burnout or depression.

- Excessive workloads
- Conflicting demands and lack of role clarity
- Lack of involvement in making decisions that affect the worker and lack of influence over the way the job is done
- Poorly managed organisational change, **job insecurity**
- Ineffective communication, lack of support from management or colleagues
- Psychological and sexual harassment, third party violence

Source:



How is job insecurity usually assessed?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree a little	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree a little	Strongly agree
<i>I think my job will change for the worse.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I feel insecure about the characteristics and conditions of my job in the future.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>I am worried about how my job will look like in the future.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Chances are, my job will change in a negative way.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Vander Elst et al 2014

De Witte et al 2010

Consequences of job insecurity – and explanations



Well-being and health



Work behavior



Societal attitudes

Job insecurity and health

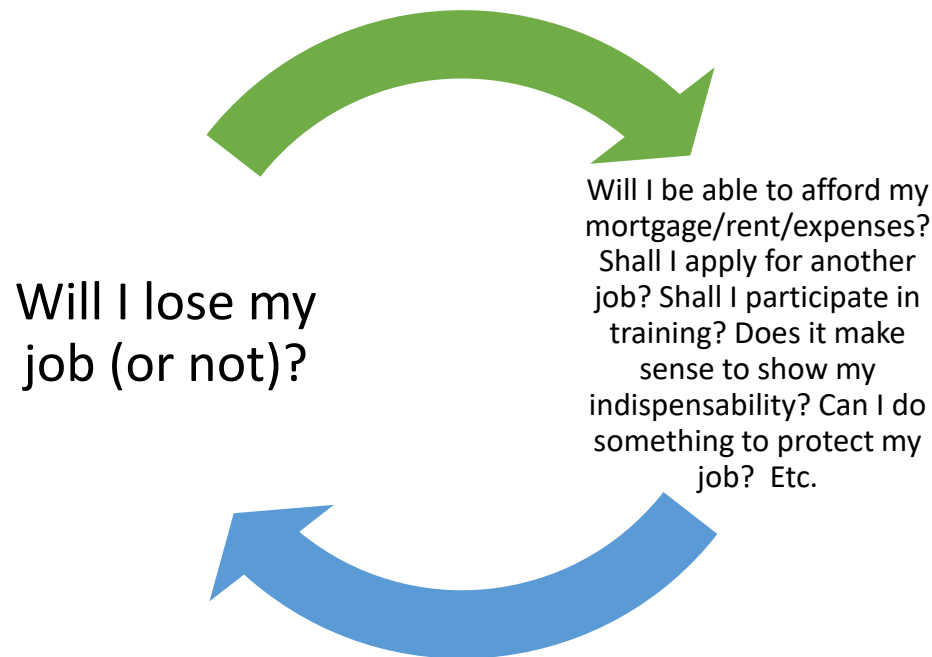
Meta analytical evidence

- Cheng & Chan (2008, APIR)
 - 133 studies, 172 samples, 132,927 employees
 - Correlations w health problems: $-.16$ / $-.20$
 - Correlations w work attitudes: $-.15$ - $-.35$
- Jiang & Lavaysee (2018, JOM)
 - 456 studies, 535 samples
 - Correlations w health outcomes: $-.15$ - $|.25|$
 - Correlations w work attitudes: $-.17$ - $-.41$

<i>Criterion variable</i>	N	k	r
Job Satisfaction	76260	94	$-.32$
Organisational Commitment	38650	83	$-.26$
Turnover Intention	25669	49	$.22$
Psychological Health	72339	77	$-.20$
Physical Health	56934	44	$-.16$
Work Performance	3752	15	$-.16$
Trust	4152	16	$-.35$
Job Involvement	3034	6	$-.15$

Variables	N	k	r
Individual outcomes			
1. Strain	45,467 (64,633)	64 (65)	$.21$ ($.18$)
2. Life satisfaction	14,844	24	$-.19$
3. General health	35,587 (56,851)	35 (36)	$-.15$ ($-.14$)
4. Psychological health	67,119	86	$-.24$
5. Physical health	91,563	101	$-.18$
6. Musculoskeletal disorders	2,318 (23,528)	5 (6)	$.09$ ($.12$)
7. Anger	1,644	4	$.10$
8. Anxiety	7,994	16	$.21$
9. Depression	22,077	27	$.25$
10. Work-life conflict	35,071	33	$.21$

What happens psychologically during job insecurity?



Not knowing whether an event will happen or not can lead to drawn out processes of appraisal & reappraisal, generating conflicting thoughts, emotions behavior (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)



Job insecurity is a threat to important resources

„The threat of unemployment means [...] the loss of important (financial, social, and societal) resources“
(De Witte, 1999, p. 159)

Threat to important resources – stressful (Hobfoll, 1989)

Job insecurity is a threat to the benefits of work

- In a context of loss, such as a job insecurity situation, the meaning of work will become increasingly more salient, as people become more aware of the resources they have (cf. Hobfoll, 2001, p. 343).
- Context of loss = a negative cognitive frame → existing benefits are evaluated more negatively (Hobfoll, 2001; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) .



Selenko, E. & Batinic, B. (2013). Job insecurity and the Benefits of Work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 22, 725-736

Replicated by Van der Elst, T., Näswall, K., Bernhard-Oettel, C., De Witte, H., Sverke, M. (2015). *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*

Threat to the latent benefits of work study

Method



2 wave online survey T1-T2 6 Months

Participants

n(T1) = 295, n(T2) = 236, n(T1&T2)= 173 employed

51 % female, 18-61 years ($M = 36.76$, $SD = 10.07$)

67.7 % in a relationship

70.7% without children

3.4% 10 years of schooling, 24.1% >10 years of schooling, 26.2% high school diploma, 46.3% university/college degree

79.8% no job deterioration between T1 & T2

Measurement instruments

• *Job insecurity*

- cognitive job insecurity scale, 4 Items shortversion (Borg & Elizur, 1992; Staufienbiel & König, 2010)

- “In my opinion I will keep my job in the near future” $\alpha_{T1} = .91$, $\alpha_{T2} = .94$

• *Mental health*

- General Health Questionnaire, 12 Items (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979; Linden et al., 1996)

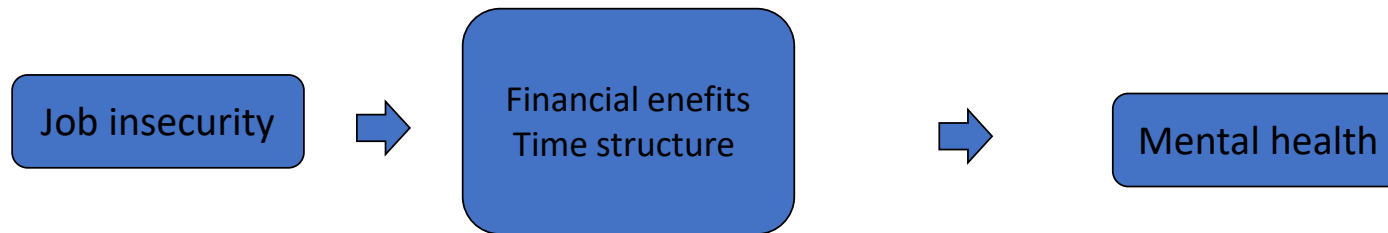
- „Have you felt you could not overcome difficulties ?” $\alpha_{T1} = .86$, $\alpha_{T2} = .87$

• *Benefits of Work*

- *Bipolar latent and manifest benefit scale (Muller et al 2005)*

Findings

(OLS Regressions)



- Job insecurity and the Benefits of work predict changes in mental health over time (controlling for benefits and mental health at T1)
- Mediation effect only within time, not across time
- Replicated & expanded by Vander Elst et al 2016

Selenko, E. & Batinic, B. (2013). Job insecurity and the Benefits of Work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 22, 725-736

Replicated by Van der Elst, T., Näswall, K., Bernhard-Oettel, C., De Witte, H., Sverke, M. (2015). *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*

Job insecurity and performance

Could there be positive effects? (Answer: No)



- Meta analyses point towards a negative effect – but findings are less strong and occasionally mixed.
- Cheng & Chan (2008, APIR):
 - Correlations w work performance: $-.16$
- Jiang & Lavaysee (2018, JOM)
 - Correlations w work performance: $-.11$ - $-.15$

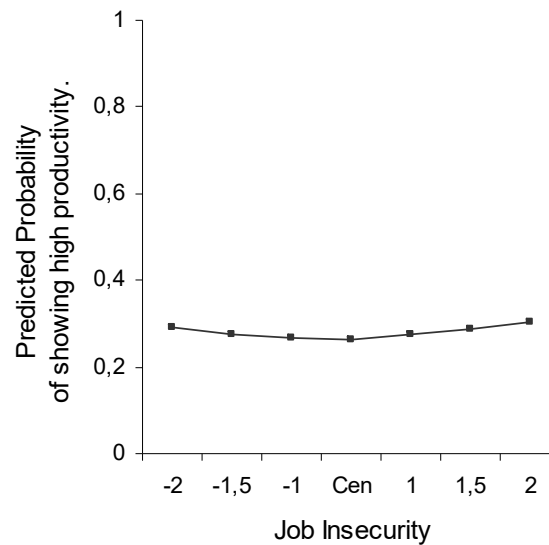
Job insecurity and performance

Could there be curvilinear effects? (Answer: Maybe!)

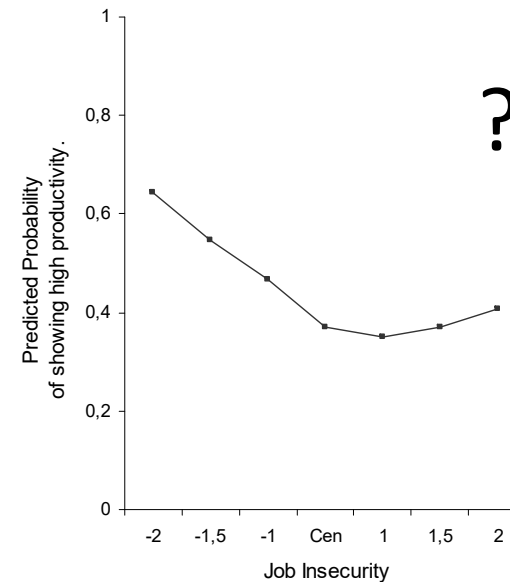
- Survey study among
 - University employees $N_{T1} = 2112$, $N_{T2} = 1296$
 - 42.85 years old (SD = 11.09), 65.8% female, 57.3 % temporary employment
 - Hospital employees $N_{T1} = 902$, $N_{T2} = 302$
 - 41.58 years old (SD = 10.78), 92.5 % female, 72.6 % permanent employment contract.
- Measures
 - Job insecurity
 - Optimism
 - Self-rated in-role performance
 - Griffin et al. (2007)

Job insecurity can have a curvilinear effect on performance

Results of logistic regressions
Curvilinear effects of job insecurity
Controlling for moderators (supervisor support, optimism, vigor)



Universities



Hospital

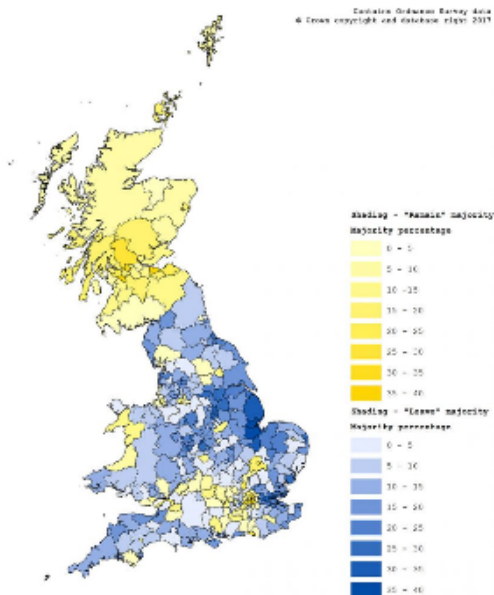
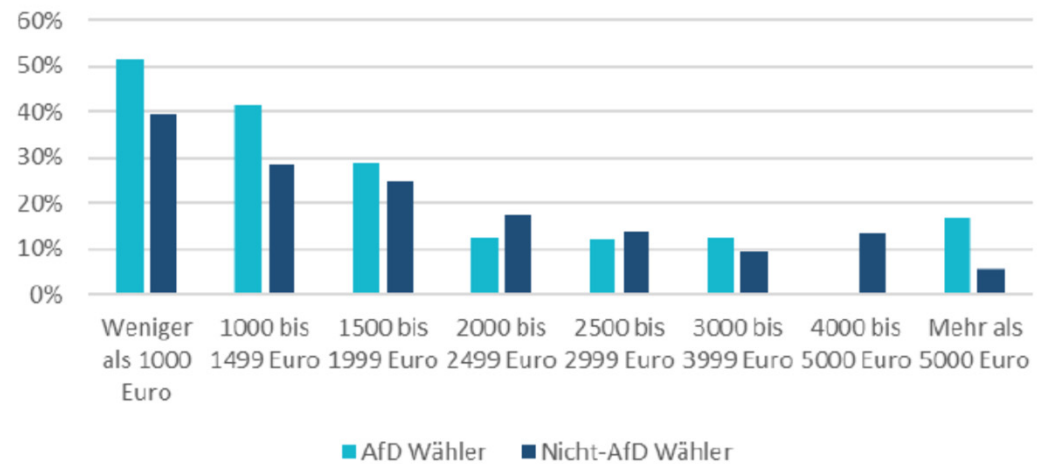


Abbildung 16: Selbsteinschätzung sozialer Abstieg nach Einkommen



Anteil von Personen, die der Aussage zustimmen: „F08: Wenn Sie Ihren persönlichen Lebensstandard mit dem Ihrer Eltern vergleichen, würden Sie sagen, es geht Ihnen schlechter als Ihren Eltern“ nach Einkommen, N= 1.314, Quelle: Online-Erhebung von pmg - policy matters (2017), eigene Darstellung

See: O'Reilly et al 2016

Source: Hans Boekler Stiftung, 2017

Job insecurity & societal attitudes



Job insecurity and political cynicism

“a lost belief in the altruistic and pure motives of politicians with an extremely pessimistic view of society as a whole“

People get the impression that the political system is non responsive to their interests (Emmenegger et al., 2015).

Van Hootegem, An., Van Hootegem, Ar., Selenko, E., & De Witte, H. (2021). Work is political: Distributive justice as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between job insecurity and political cynicism. *Political Psychology*.

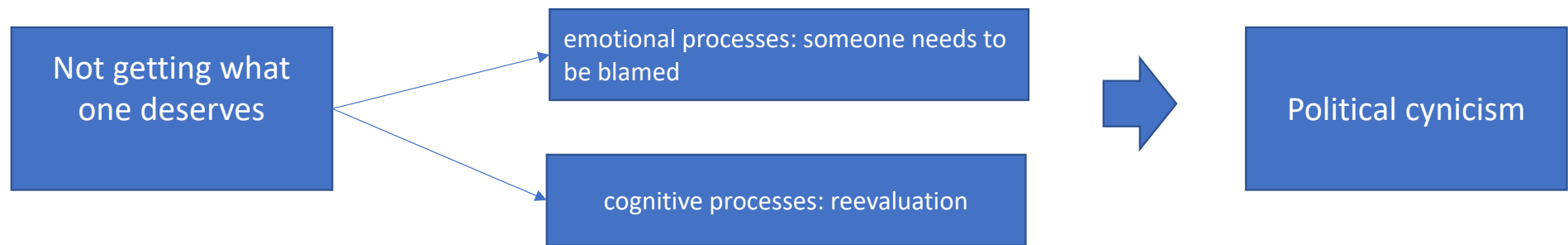
Job insecurity and political conservatism

- Perceived threat, fear, anxiety
- more conservative attitudes
(Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2003)
- Aspects of conservatism:
 - less favour of egalitarian outcomes
 - acceptance of inequality.

Selenko, E. & De Witte, H. (2020) How job insecurity affects political attitudes: Identity threat plays a role. APIR



A violation of justice & deservingness as an explanation?



- Job insecurity can be understood as a violation of deservingness expectations – which is a core-element of distributive justice (Lerner, 2000)

Various consequences:
Could there be a unifying explanation?
Introducing: Identity threat

Identity = the answer to the question “who are you” (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016)

Work contexts – **organisation, occupation, team, previous employment, task** (etc.) - can provide an answer to that question (as can many other contexts as well).

- What happens to a person’s identity when work becomes insecure?



Identity threat caused by job insecurity- predicts reduced well-being and performance

- 3 wave study among n = 377 UK employees
- Job insecurity reduced the identification with the working people and through that affected job role performance and well-being



Selenko, E., Mäkikangas, A., & Stride, C. B. (2017). Does job insecurity threaten who you are? Introducing a social identity perspective to explain well-being and performance consequences of job insecurity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 38(6), 856-875

Identity threat caused by job insecurity- predicts anti egalitarian attitudes

4 –wave survey study among n = 457 UK
employees

- Job insecurity reduces identification with the working population (over time, id w unemployed only cross-sectionally)
- identifying less with the working population led to more anti-egalitarianism



Selenko, E., & De Witte, H. (2021). How job insecurity affects political attitudes: Identity threat plays a role. *Applied Psychology*, 70(3), 1267-1294.

What can be done?

What can organisations do?

- Improve organisational communication (Jiang & Probst, 2014)
 - To reduce rumours, uncertainty
- Reframe change processes (König et al, 2010)
 - To reduce stress appraisals
- Resource (Probst, 2005)
 - To counter threat to resources
 - Unions
 - Participative decision making

What can the state do?

- Provide unemployment protection, social safety net, welfare regime (Sverke et al. 2019)
- Particularly in times of economic turbulence

What can individuals do?

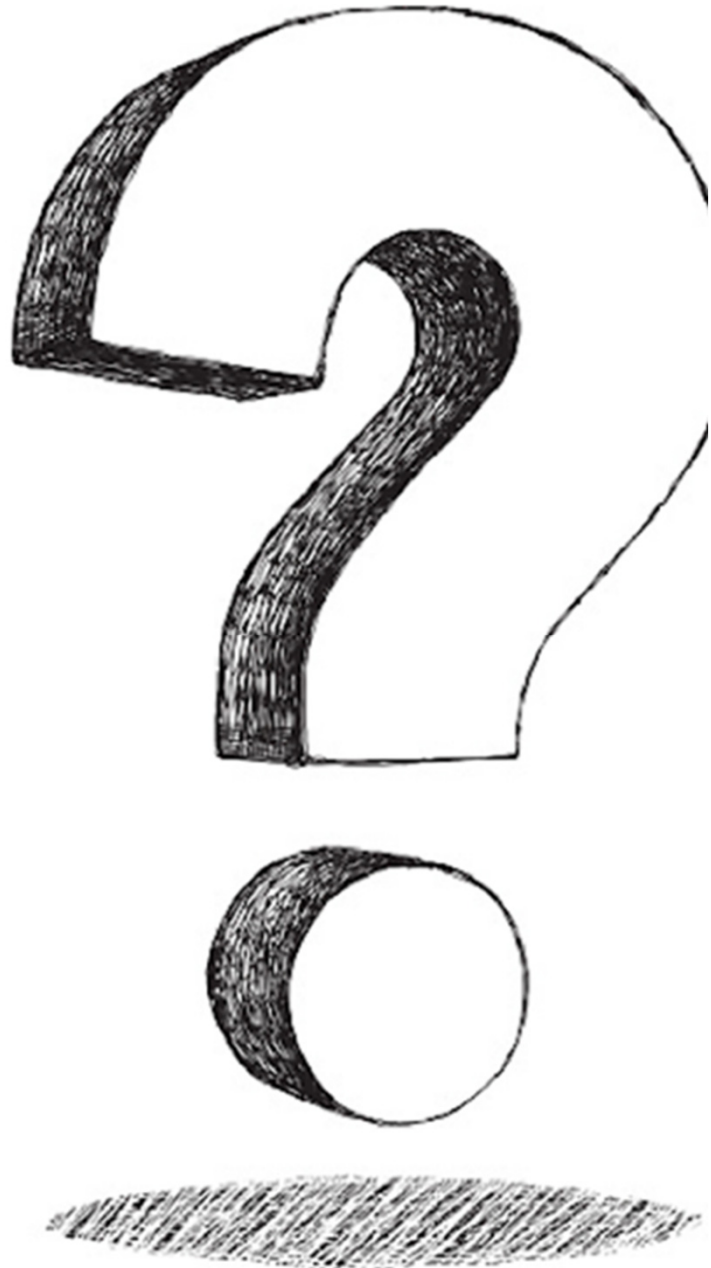
- Enhance your employability (Berntson et al 2010)
- Search for information
- Invest in recovery, relaxation, detachment from work (Kinnunen et al 2010)
 - Eg through volunteering

Wrap up

Job insecurity is a perceptual phenomenon – grounded in economic threat perceptions

Job insecurity is a stressor with negative health, work attitudinal, work performance & political outcomes

Explanations: job insecurity affects appraisal, threatens resources, threatens identity, and is perceived as unfair



Thank you for your interest!

I am interested in your ideas, comments, questions!

Interested in learning more? Or collaborate?

Get in touch!!

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- Twitter: [@EvaSelenko](https://twitter.com/EvaSelenko)

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