

Exploring the Impact of Job Insecurity on Employees' Unethical Behavior

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ABSTRACT: The multitude of corporate scandals has prompted research that examines factors that influence an individual's engagement in unethical behavior. This article extends previous research by examining the psychological processes through which unethical behavior may occur. We develop and test a model that uses self-regulation theory to explain and predict how and under what circumstances individuals are likely to engage in unethical behavior. Results from data collected from 107 professionals at two points in time and 205 employees from various industries confirm that job insecurity increases emotional exhaustion, which subsequently impairs an employee's ability to activate self-regulating processes to avoid engaging in unethical behavior. However, the link between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion as well as the mediated relationship between job insecurity and unethical behavior through emotional exhaustion are weaker for employees who have high adaptability and stronger for employees who are highly embedded in their organization.

KEY WORDS: job insecurity, emotional exhaustion, unethical pro-organizational behaviors, adaptability, job embeddedness

INTRODUCTION

THE SHEER NUMBER of corporate scandals over the past three decades has resulted in an increase in research focused on developing a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of unethical behavior in organizations (Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). In an effort to obtain a better understanding of the ethical decision-making process, researchers have developed several models focusing on factors that influence unethical choices in organizations. For example, researchers have identified culture and climate (Martin & Cullen, 2006; Treviño, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998; Warren, Gaspar, & Laufer, 2014), opportunity, rewards, and sanctions (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1996; Treviño & Weaver, 2003), and support (Field & Abelson, 1982) as situational antecedents that influence ethical decision-making. Although much has been learned from

studying situational factors as predictors of ethical decision-making, additional questions remain regarding how and under what circumstances individuals engage in unethical behaviors.

A situational element that is becoming more prevalent in our current economy that we believe may help answer some of these questions, is job insecurity. Job insecurity is a perceptual phenomenon that focuses on the potential threat to the stability of an individual's current job (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Job insecurity has been highlighted as a predictor of outcomes such as increased levels of stress (Zapf, Dormann, & Frese, 1996) and uncertainty (Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans, & van Vuuren, 1991) and decreased well-being (De Witte, 1999; Hartley et al., 1991) and organizational trust (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Borg & Elizur, 1992). However, less attention has focused on examining specific outcomes of job insecurity such as unethical behavior. To fill this gap, we explore how individuals facing job insecurity utilize self-regulatory agents to avoid or engage in unethical behavior in the workplace.

The purpose of this article is to extend previous research regarding the choice to act ethically by examining the psychological processes through which unethical behavior may occur. Specifically, we predict (see Figure 1) that the constant threat of losing one's job will create emotional exhaustion, or mental and physical tension and strain resulting from job-related stressors (Maslach, 1982). While in this weakened state, individuals will experience a diminished capacity to regulate their behaviors and be tempted to engage in unethical acts. To further develop our understanding of this relationship we examine adaptability and job embeddedness as boundary conditions of this relationship. We posit that adaptability and embeddedness will moderate the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion as well as the mediated relationship between job insecurity and unethical behavior through emotional exhaustion, but in different ways. On one hand, we submit that highly adaptable individuals will be less impacted by the threat of losing their jobs because they will view potential job loss as an opportunity to try something new rather than as a threat to their well-being and thus be less likely to engage in unethical behaviors. On the other hand, we view embeddedness as a condition that would exacerbate feelings job insecurity. Job embeddedness is a collection of factors that create a level of employee attachment that encourage individuals to remain at their jobs (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2011). We suggest that individuals who are highly embedded in their organizations are more threatened by the fear of losing their jobs and are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors than their less embedded colleagues.

We use self-regulation theory (Baumeister, 1998, 2001) to examine the idea that emotional exhaustion is a mediating mechanism that facilitates unethical behavior in individuals who fear job loss. Self-regulation theory suggests that exhibiting self-control requires the use of a finite pool of self-regulatory resources. The use of these self-regulatory mechanisms results in the depletion of these resources which decreases an individual's ability to exhibit the self-control needed to make ethical choices. We undertook two studies to test our theoretical contentions. In both studies

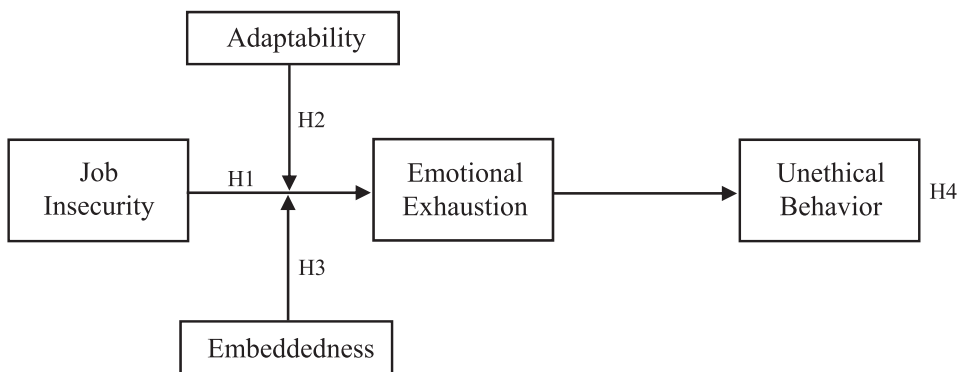


Figure 1: Hypothesized Model.

we examined the core mediated relationship between job insecurity and unethical behavior through emotional exhaustion. In Study 1 we included adaptability as a first stage moderator that we argue will weaken the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion as well as the mediated relationship. In Study 2 we explored job embeddedness as a potential moderator of the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion as well as the mediated relationship, but argue that job embeddedness will strengthen, rather than weaken, these relationships.

Our research contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, whereas previous research has linked several situational factors to unethical behavior, we extend this work by answering the question of *how* job insecurity influences unethical behavior. This research proposes and tests a process model in which emotional exhaustion plays a central role in determining employee's reactions to job insecurity. This is an important extension to the business ethics literature because past research has failed to assess the psychological implications of job insecurity despite research suggesting that individuals apply moral standards differently depending on the characteristics of the situation (Frey, 2000; Jones, 1991).

Second, we apply self-regulation theory (Baumeister, 1998, 2001) to extend our understanding of the role of emotional distress in the process that results in individuals engaging in unethical behavior. A stream of literature has begun to identify factors that influence an individual's decision to engage in unethical behavior (Caruso & Gino, 2011; Chugh, Bazerman, & Banaji, 2005; Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). However, the role of emotional distress in the ethical decision-making process is nascent (Barnes, Schaubroeck, & Ghumman, 2011; Gino et al., 2011; Christian & Ellis, 2011; Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014). We propose that the experience of job insecurity challenges individuals to process, interpret, and understand the causes and consequences of the potential job loss. These self-regulatory activities result in emotional distress in the form of emotional exhaustion, which depletes needed self-resources used to consider whether to respond to job insecurity by engaging in unethical behaviors.

Third, self-regulation theory (Baumeister, 1998, 2001) suggests that an individual's ability to exert control over one's job situation in order to appraise scenarios in a more positive way will reduce feelings of emotional exhaustion. Previous research has found that the dispositional characteristic of personal adaptability can reduce strain when workplace stressors are experienced (Chan, 2000; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Personal adaptability relates to an individual's willingness and ability to alter his or her behaviors, feelings, and thoughts when ambiguous and stressful situations are encountered (Chan, 2000; Fugate et al., 2004; Pearlman & Barney, 2000). We examine the role of adaptability as a boundary condition of the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Specifically, we posit that highly adaptable employees will appraise the threat to their job in a more positive light by considering the situation as an opportunity to grow rather than a threat to their existence. The buffering effect of personal adaptability will result in lower levels of emotional exhaustion and a weaker mediated effect for employees who are highly adaptable as compared to those who have low levels of adaptability.

Last, in addition to examining personal adaptability as a mechanism that decreases the likelihood of an individual facing job insecurity, we examine the role of job embeddedness as a factor that intensifies this situation. This article contributes to the job embeddedness literature by exploring a specific context (i.e., job insecurity) in which job embeddedness may result in negative organizational outcomes such as unethical behavior. While the management literature has recognized the importance of job embeddedness in reducing turnover (Mitchell et al., 2001; Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008), we propose that there are potential negative consequences of being embedded in an organization that does not provide job security. Specifically, employees who are highly embedded within organizations in which they face job loss will experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion and a stronger mediated effect on unethical behaviors than their counterparts who have low levels of embeddedness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SELF-REGULATION

Our study is guided by self-regulation theory (Baumeister, 1998, 2001), which has several key tenets. First, it assumes that effective self-regulation involves three main components: standards, monitoring, and strength (Baumeister & Bushman, 2010). Standards refer to the goals or norms that guide an individual's behavior regarding what actions are considered moral. The second feature, monitoring, focuses on an individual's ability to document the actions he or she wants to regulate in order to achieve his or her goals. The monitoring process occurs through a feedback loop where individuals compare their behaviors to their standards and goals. If the individuals identify a discrepancy, they exert self-control to alter their actions so they are congruent with their goals. The final component is strength or capacity to change and posits that when a person's self-control is depleted, their cognitive resources are stretched and the individual's subsequent executive functioning is hindered (Baumeister & Bushman, 2010; Carver & Scheier, 1981).

Self-regulation theory (Baumeister, 1998, 2001) is often used to examine an employee's ability to regulate their emotions, thinking, and behaviors. Self-regulation

is a highly adaptive trait that allows individuals to alter the way they would otherwise think, feel, or behave to conform to social and other standards (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Baumeister, 1998). Self-regulatory resources allow individuals to control their impulses, emotions, and active decision-making that influence behavior (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004). For example, self-regulatory resources allow an individual who is trying to lose weight to resist the short-term temptation of eating unhealthy food. However, self-regulation is a finite resource (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). Since all acts of self-regulation draw from the same resource pool, performing a self-regulation activity reduces the amount of self-regulatory resources that are available for subsequent self-regulatory encounters (Muraven et al., 1998). Previous research supports the notion that individuals who exerted self-regulation by controlling their emotional expression (Muraven et al., 1998), suppressing their thoughts (Vohs & Faber, 2007), and resisting tempting foods (Vohs & Heatherton, 2000) resulted in reduced future self-regulatory acts.

HYPOTHESES

Job Insecurity and Emotional Exhaustion

Job insecurity is a perceptual phenomenon that focuses on the potential threat to the stability of an individual's current job (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). The literature describes job insecurity as either objective (Pearce, 1998) or subjective (DeWitte, 1999). Objective job insecurity focuses on the anticipation of unemployment generated from organizational cues, such as intended organizational messages, unintended organizational clues, or rumors (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Subjective job insecurity is derived from a previously signaled threat and highlights an individual's perceived fear or worry about the future of his or her job based on their assumed severity of the threat (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). We focus on subjective job insecurity because previous research suggests that subjective insecurity is more consistently related to psychological well-being than objective job insecurity (Ferrie, 2001; Sverke, Hellgren, & Naswell, 2002).

Previous research suggests that job insecurity is positively related to emotional distress and negatively related to physical and mental health (DeWitte, 1999; Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002). From a self-regulatory theory perspective, the perception of job insecurity creates a threat to several types of resources. Initial reactions to job insecurity may include an impaired mood. In an attempt to maintain balance, employees will evoke self-regulatory mechanisms by either suppressing or altering their negative thoughts or emotions (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1997; Hancock & Warm, 1989). For instance, in order to suppress the fear of job loss, an employee might choose to remain calm and work as usual.

Using energy to maintain a positive attitude in the face of the threat of losing one's job depletes self-regulatory resources and modifies individual's psychological processing (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002). For instance, the uncontrollability of the situation and constant monitoring of the uncertain work environment wears on an individual and creates feelings of emotional exhaustion. With the threat of job loss hanging over one's head, valued resources such as a stable income and a

feeling of control over the one's life are under constant threat (Sverke et al., 2002). This threat to valuable resources presents a need for employees to monitor threatening stimuli, such as layoffs, and creates a continuous focus on the uncertainty (Baumeister, 1988). The constant focus on the uncertainty of the situation creates emotional exhaustion for the individual (Cheng & Chan, 2008; DeCuyper, DeWitte, Elst, & Handaja, 2010; Sverke et al., 2002). Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion.

Moderating Effect of Adaptability on the Job Insecurity - Emotional Exhaustion Relationship

Personality is an individual difference characteristic that can influence one's ability to identify unethical issues, make assessments about the related issues, and develop appropriate responses (Bass, Barnett, & Brown, 1999; Christie & Geis, 1970; Jones, 1991; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). The literature has recognized personality traits such as locus of control, self-esteem, (Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008; Treviño, 1986; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990), and self-efficacy (Belar et al., 2001) as predictors of unethical behaviors. In an effort to advance our understanding of dispositional factors on ethical decision-making, we examine personal adaptability. Personal adaptability is an individual's willingness and ability to alter one's behaviors, feelings, and thoughts when encountering situations (Chan, 2000; Fugate et al., 2004). The ability to adapt to changing circumstances is an individual difference that prompts persons to engage in proactively adaptive behaviors (Chan, 2000; Crant, 2000; Siebert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). Previous research suggests the dispositional characteristic personal adaptability can reduce strain when workplace stressors are experienced (Chan, 2000; Fugate et al., 2004).

According to self-regulation theory, individuals exercise a conscious effort to align their behavior with recognized or desired standards (Baumeister, 1988; Baumeister & Bushman, 2010). Self-regulation requires individuals to alter their standard thoughts, feelings, and behavior in order to deter prohibited reactions and to encourage more desirable responses (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Adaptable individuals are willing and have the capability to modify their knowledge, skills, abilities, and behavior to meet the demands of situations they encounter (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Chan, 2000). Adaptive employees have a high tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity and are comfortable when faced with unique organizational situations (O'Connell, McNeely, & Hall, 2008). These qualities suggest that highly adaptive individuals have a positive assessment of their job situation that will likely result in lower perceptions of resources being threatened. This ability to view situations in a positive manner will likely serve as a coping resource for these individuals resulting in more resources available for dealing with job insecurity. These resources are likely to equip individuals with a sense of control, which enables them to react more calmly to the situation and reinforce the belief that they can resolve the situation with their own skills and abilities. Their positive reaction to the uncertain situation will result in fewer resources being depleted when faced with job insecurity (May, Schwoerer, Reed, & Potter, 1997).

In contrast, individuals with low levels of adaptability view themselves and their environment more negatively and feel as if there is a deficiency in their skills and capabilities necessary to obtain positive outcomes (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Chan, 2000). Individuals who have difficulty in adapting to situations are likely to experience high levels of stress when faced with job insecurity because they are likely to feel a sense of helplessness and lack of control over the situation. Feelings of inadequacy in their capabilities result in these individuals continually focusing on job insecurity as a problem rather than an opportunity. Less adaptable employees are also unlikely to exhibit flexibility and openness to new opportunities when faced with job insecurity. The continual negative focus depletes their psychological resources and energy (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1993). Therefore, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2: Adaptability moderates the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, such that the relationship is weaker for those who are highly adaptable and stronger for those with low levels of adaptability.

Moderating Effect of Embeddedness on the Job Insecurity - Emotional Exhaustion Relationship

When an employee encounters job insecurity, the threat to financial resources can be overwhelming. The risk of losing employment also causes employees to consider the threat to their feelings of belongingness and fit within their present organization. Job embeddedness has been described as a sticky web or net through which people at work are connected to one another (Mitchell et al., 2001). The more connections at work one has, the more embedded one is. The literature on job embeddedness suggests a negative relationship with employee turnover (Eberly, Holtmon, Lee, & Mitchell, 2009) as employees who are deeply attached to their jobs feel a strong fit, or the extent to which they think they belong or are compatible with the work environment. Embedded employees also recognize the benefits they gain from the attachment to their job.

Individuals who have a high level of job embeddedness feel a level of comfort and compatibility that results in increased levels of attachment to the organization (Eberly et al., 2009). As it relates to job insecurity, while job embeddedness creates increased levels of attachment to the organization it also creates an inherent level of dependence on the organization (Eberly et al., 2009). Self-regulation theory suggests that individuals enact a conscious effort to align their behaviors with recognized standards (Baumeister, 1988; Baumeister & Bushman, 2010). As a result of increased levels of fit and attachment, employees with higher levels of embeddedness will exhibit behaviors that are aligned with the organization. The threat of the loss of a job with an organization in which they have a high level of attachment, congruent goals, and a strong fit is overwhelming and potentially detrimental. Feelings of ambiguity, betrayal, and the potential loss of organizational fit will deplete their psychological capabilities and may result in emotional exhaustion.

Conversely, individuals with low levels of embeddedness have not established a strong attachment or endearment to the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001).

This lack of fit and interconnectedness to the organization and its members often result in increased levels of turnover. Employees who don't feel a strong level of obligation to the organization will view the potential loss of employment as an avenue to pursue other opportunities. While these individuals may potentially experience some levels of concern when faced with job insecurity, they will be able to cope with the situation by regulating their emotions and making the decision to utilize their skills and abilities within another organization or in becoming entrepreneurs. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 3: Job embeddedness moderates the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, such that this relationship is stronger for those who have a high level of job embeddedness and weaker for those with low levels of job embeddedness.

Mediating Effects of Emotional Exhaustion

Perceived job insecurity usually triggers a stress reaction within individuals. A stress reaction often drives an individual to engage in behaviors that assist him or her in coping with the perceived threat. Research examining regulatory depletion suggests that individuals, who utilize self-regulation to manage their stress, focus on their feelings of fatigue rather than on the task (Vohs & Schmeichel, 2003). Employees who experience emotional exhaustion are likely candidates for focusing on their fatigue rather than on the task.

Self-regulation theory (Baumeister, 1998, 2001) suggests that emotional exhaustion may serve as a mediating step, whereby individuals, who perceive job insecurity, will have increased levels of emotional exhaustion. Emotionally exhausted individuals have lower self-regulatory resources, which may tempt them to ignore their internal moral compass and engage in unethical behaviors. Individuals can engage in unethical workplace behaviors by either acting in their own self-interest or in a manner that benefits the organization. Although self-interested unethical behavior deviates from one's personal moral standards or from established organizational norms, individuals engage in them for positive personal gain. Examples of these behaviors include padding an expense report to receive a higher reimbursement than one is eligible for, claiming credit for someone else's work, or stealing company materials and supplies.

Employees also may engage in unethical behavior in an effort to help the organization. Unethical pro-organization behavior (UPB) is a form of unethical behavior designed to benefit the organization rather than the actor (Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010). Such activities might include providing false information to clients to ensure the organization meets its quarterly goals. While, individuals engage in UPB to help the organization, it is important to note that these acts are unethical and include both direct (e.g., inflating costs incurred while working on a project) and inadvertent (e.g., withholding information about organization practices that are harmful to the public) behavior. Additionally, UPB is neither specified in an individual's job description nor directed by supervisors (Umphress et al., 2010).

As posited by self-regulation theory (Baumeister, 1998, 2001), when individuals' moral regulatory resources have been depleted, their cognitive resources are strained, and their subsequent ability to self-regulate is hindered. Depleted self-regulatory resources allow individuals to make a conscious decision to engage in unethical behavior as a coping mechanism with the thought that these behaviors will either benefit the organization or themselves. For instance, an employee may inflate the cost of a project to clients because this behavior will translate into increased financial rewards for the organization. Employees facing job insecurity may engage in these behaviors under the premise that their loyalty will be reciprocated with continued employment with the organization. However, there is little to no consideration given to the fact that the acts are unethical and can produce subsequent harm to the organization or the public. On the other end of the spectrum, employees also may decide to engage in unethical behavior such as padding their overtime hours in an effort to release some of the frustration they are experiencing regarding their potential job loss. We propose the following:

Hypothesis 4: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between job insecurity and unethical behaviors.

Moderating Effect of Adaptability on the Mediating Effects of Emotional Exhaustion

As previously discussed, employees with higher levels of adaptability experience lower levels of emotional exhaustion as a result of their ability to see the perceived threat to their job as an opportunity rather than as a challenge (Chan, 2000; Fugate et al., 2004). Highly adaptive individuals tend to view personal outcomes as dependent on their own actions and are likely to neutralize the potential threat of job loss as an opportunity to scan the environment to seek employment with a different organization or potentially establish their own entrepreneurial venture (O'Connell et al., 2008). Because highly adaptive people generally believe they can obtain their desired results, they do not need to deactivate their moral self-regulatory compass in order to engage in unethical acts, even if they benefit the organization. Additionally, highly adaptable employees are likely to perceive engaging in unethical acts as potentially damaging to their perception of themselves and professional reputation.

In contrast, individuals with low levels of adaptability have a tendency to be less confident in the efficacy of their skills and abilities and may experience uncertainty and self-doubt when facing ethical dilemmas (Ashford & Taylor 1990; Fugate et al., 2004). These feelings of uncertainty require the use of self-regulatory resources to remain balanced. People who are unable to adapt to uncertainty will have an inclination to use self-regulatory resources to overcome their self-doubt and negative self-views (Fugate et al., 2004). They also will exert energy by not being flexible and not considering new opportunities. The continual focus on uncertainty and personal inadequacies depletes the subsequent energy needed to maintain focus and make decisions that align with moral and organizational standards. This diminished capacity to regulate decision-making will result in employees with low levels of adaptability engaging in unethical behaviors. Because we expect personal adaptability to account for differences in the ability to regulate behavior in stressful

situations, we propose that the influence of job insecurity on unethical behaviors through emotional exhaustion is more evident among employees with low adaptability as compared to highly adaptable employees.

Hypothesis 5: Adaptability moderates the mediated relationship between job insecurity and unethical behavior through emotional exhaustion, such that this relationship will be weaker when adaptability is high as compared to when adaptability is low.

Moderating Effect of Job Embeddedness on the Mediating Effects of Emotional Exhaustion

As argued above, employees who are highly embedded within their organizations and who face the potential loss of their jobs, experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion as a result of their fear of losing the attachment and interconnectedness they enjoy. Embedded employees develop a level of fit within the organization that often translate into increased organizational citizenship behaviors and job performance and decreased absences and turnover (Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004). This level of fit and connectedness to the organization can translate into a strong level of employee dependence on the organization for financial, psychological, and interpersonal needs. The continual focus on their potential departure from the organization becomes overwhelming for these individuals and decreases the self-regulatory resources needed to regulate decision-making. Thus, the link between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion due to the threat of potential job loss may pave the way for them to engage in unethical behaviors to compensate for the perceived loss. Additionally, the loss of their current job would result in the potential sacrifice or loss of benefits and promotional opportunities.

In contrast, employees with low levels of embeddedness have a reduced level of attachment to and dependence on the organization (Lee et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001). These employees may experience levels of uncertainty when faced with job insecurity. However, the decreased fit and attachment will allow these individuals to regulate their feelings and redirect their attention to capitalize on the opportunities that can result from the situation. The lack of dependence does not produce the sense of betrayal felt by those more deeply embedded in the organization reducing the need to pay back the organization through unethical behaviors such as employee theft. Further, employees who are less embedded in their organization will be less likely to engage in unethical behaviors as doing so can potentially tarnish their reputations as they move forward and pursue other opportunities.

Hypothesis 6: Job embeddedness moderates the mediated relationship between job insecurity and unethical behavior through emotional exhaustion, such that this relationship is stronger when job embeddedness is high as compared to when job embeddedness is low.

STUDY 1: METHOD

Sample and Procedure

To test Hypotheses 1, 2, 4, and 5, we designed a time-lagged survey study. We elected to use this methodology because self-regulatory theory, which we

used to develop these hypotheses, focuses specifically on an individual's ability to regulate his or her emotions, thinking, and behaviors. To gain access to data about how an individual thinks, feels, or behaves, asking the individual directly is an appropriate approach. We surveyed currently licensed architects, engineers, and accountants who resided in the southern United States. Because we targeted professionals who served clients, we focused on unethical behaviors designed to help the organization, specifically unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB).

We began by sending an invitation email to all individuals on the active licensed email lists for these three professions ($N = 2000$). The introductory email included information about their rights as participants, assured them of confidentiality, explained that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions found on the survey, and indicated the deadline for completing the survey was in two weeks. Respondents who wished to participate indicated their agreement by clicking on a link to the survey that included our predictor scales of job insecurity and adaptability. Those who elected not to participate were encouraged to click the opt out button. A reminder email was sent to individuals who had not completed the survey or not opted out after one week. The sample was reduced to 1599 by removing those with invalid email addresses or who opted out. Four hundred and thirty-one individuals started the survey (27%) and 243 (15% response rate) completed the survey. Data from 31 respondents were not included in the analysis because of significantly missing data; this left a usable sample of 212 respondents with complete data at time 1.

One month later we sent the 212 respondents from time 1 a second survey to capture our outcome variables of emotional exhaustion and UPB and our control variables. Of the 212, 119 started the survey (56%) and 117 (55%) finished it. Data from 10 respondents were eliminated from the dataset due to missing data resulting in a usable sample size of 107 (50%). The sample consisted of 91 (85%) males and 16 (14%) females with a mean age of 50.5 years. The majority of the sample (103; 96%) was Caucasian. Respondents indicated that they had worked for their organization an average of 11.5 years and for their immediate supervisor an average of 4.1 years.

Measures at Time 1

Job insecurity. We measured job insecurity with the 7-item scale developed by Hellgren, Sverke, and Isaksson (1999). Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*). A sample item includes "I am worried about having to leave my job before I would like to." Cronbach's (1951) alpha for this scale was .83.

Adaptability. Participants provided self-ratings of adaptability using the 6-item scale developed by Morrison and Hall (2001). Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*). Sample items from this measure include "I find it discouraging when the work I do in my job changes" (R), and "It is easy for me to adapt when I change jobs." The Cronbach's (1951) alpha for this scale was .76.

Measures at Time 2

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was measured with five items from Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, and Jackson (1996). A sample item is “I have felt emotionally drained from my work.” Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). Cronbach’s (1951) alpha for this scale was .88.

Unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB). UPB was measured with seven items developed by Umphress et al. (2010). A sample item is “To benefit my organization, I have withheld negative information about my company or its practices from clients.” Responses were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s (1951) alpha for this scale was .87.

Control variables. In an effort to control for alternative explanations for variance in our dependent variable, UPB, we explored the usefulness of including several variables in our analyses as controls. These variables included age, gender, and social desirability. Extant research has demonstrated a relationship between ethical behavior and each of these variables (Borkowski & Ugras, 1998; Franke, Crown, & Spake, 1997; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). However, since none of these variables were significantly correlated with our dependent variable (see Table 1), we followed the advice of Becker (2005) and did not include them in our analyses. Finally, we used Liden and Maslyn’s (1998) 3-item leader-member exchange contribution scale ($\alpha = .98$) as our marker variable. A marker variable is a variable that is collected at the same time and in the same manner as the variables of interest. However, a marker variable must not be theoretically relevant to the study being conducted. If these conditions are met, then the only connection between the marker variable and the variables of interest is how and when it was collected. According to Lindell and Whitney (2001) a marker variable that adheres to these conditions can serve as a proxy for method variance. The variance due to the marker variable can be isolated and removed as a means of addressing common method variance (CMV) in the model. CMV is variance that is shared among the variables of interest that can be attributed to the way in which the data were collected and, when present, can inflate or deflate the actual relationships between the variables of interest.

Analysis

We began by estimating a measurement model using LISREL 8.8 to examine the discriminant validity of our scales. Establishing discriminant validity allows us to infer that the scales we used in our study are separate and distinct from one another. This is an important first step as it provides evidence that the results from our analyses are not due to overlapping relationships (i.e., shared variance) among the variables studied. To examine the fit of our measurement model we used three statistics: comparative fit index (CFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The lower threshold for acceptable values for CFI and NNFI is .90 while the RMSEA should be .08 or less (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Next, we used hierarchical moderated regression analyses via IBM SPSS 22 and the PROCESS Macro written by Hayes (2013) to test our hypotheses.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study 1 Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Time 1</i>									
1. Job Insecurity	2.43	0.71	0.65	-0.14	0.42***	0.21*			
2. Adaptability	3.73	0.59	-0.13	0.61	-0.29**	-0.09			
<i>Time 2</i>									
3. Emotional Exhaustion	2.54	0.72	0.43***	-0.28**	0.77	0.28**			
4. UPB	1.55	0.54	0.20*	-0.09	0.27**	0.70			
<i>Controls</i>									
5. Age	50.50	12.83	-0.10	0.05	-0.30**	-0.08			
6. Gender	1.13	0.37	0.05	0.02	0.10	0.01	-0.03		
7. Social Desirability	1.45	0.14	-0.06	0.26**	-0.20*	0.01	0.03	0.11	
<i>Marker Variable</i>									
8. LMX Contribution	3.23	1.82	-0.06	-0.11	-0.06	-0.01	-0.25*	-0.17	0.02

N = 107. UPB = Unethical pro-organizational behavior. LMX = Leader-member exchange.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.
Note. Values in bold on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance explained which must be larger than all zero-order correlations in the row and column in which they appear to demonstrate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Values above the diagonal are correlations after controlling for the marker variable (Lindell & Whitney, 2001).

The PROCESS macro estimates the bootstrapped conditional indirect effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable through a mediating variable at varying levels of the moderator. Bootstrapping is a process that uses sampling with replacement from the original sample to create a large number of bootstrap samples that have the same properties of the original sample. The process is designed to replicate the population from which the sample was drawn. Results from the analyses conducted on the bootstrap samples are used to create a 95% confidence interval. A confidence interval consists of an upper and lower bound into which a conditional indirect effect, calculated from the same sample, would fall 95% of the time.

STUDY 1: RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for and the correlations among the variables of interest for Study 1. Prior to testing our hypotheses, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.8 on the scales used in our study to ensure that they were independent and that the items produced the expected factor structures. Our measurement model consisted of four factors, one for each of our scales (i.e., job insecurity, adaptability, emotional exhaustion, and UPB). After allowing two pairs of items within the same scale to correlate, the fit indices showed that the 4-factor model adequately fit the data ($X^2(267) = 479, p < .01$; CFI = .90; NNFI = .89; RMSEA = .08) and all of the standardized path loadings were significant ($p < .01$).

Although our CFA results were encouraging, we also conducted a discriminant validity test described by Fornell and Larcker (1981) due to the moderate correlation between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Specifically, we calculated the square root of the average variance explained (AVE) for each of the scales in our study and placed these values on the diagonal in Table 1. According to Fornell and Lackner, discriminant validity is demonstrated when the square root of the AVE exceeds all of the corresponding correlations in the same row and column. For example, in Table 1, the square root of the AVE for emotional exhaustion is .77. This value is larger than the correlations in the row and column in which it resides. This same conclusion is reached for all comparisons in Table 1. The CFA results combined with the Fornell and Lackner discriminant validity test demonstrate support for the independence of our scales.

To minimize the threat of CMV, we followed several procedural and statistical steps suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003). On the procedural side, we collected our independent and dependent variables at two points in time. Introducing a time lag in the data collection effort was designed to help minimize consistency response patterns and demand characteristics. Second, in both survey administrations we guaranteed respondents confidentiality, which should decrease socially desirable responding. Third, we assured participants that there were no correct answers to reduce evaluation apprehension. Finally, we counterbalanced the order of the questions by randomly presenting them to our respondents.

To statistically explore the degree of CMV in our data, we implemented the approach suggested by Lindell and Whitney (2001). Specifically, we included

a theoretically unrelated marker variable in our data collection. Any correlation between the marker variable and our variables of interest serves as a proxy for CMV as the only relationship between the theoretically unrelated marker variable and the constructs of interest are how the data were collected. We selected leader-member exchange contribution (Liden & Maslyn, 1998) as our marker variable. As can be seen in Table 1, our marker variable was not significantly correlated with any of our constructs of interest, and there was minimal change between the zero-order correlations and those with the marker variable partialled out. Thus, we submit that the steps we took to avoid CMV in Study 1 were effective.

Hypotheses Testing

To test the first-stage moderated mediated model shown in the top half of Figure 1, we used IBM SPSS 22 to run the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). The variables included in the interaction analyses were centered around the mean by subtracting the mean from the variables (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Centered variables have a mean of 0 but retain their frequency distribution. Centering variables used in interaction analyses reduces the degree of collinearity among the variables that make up the interaction term and aids in the interpretation of the interaction coefficients. We also employed the bootstrapping option in PROCESS that uses sampling with replacement to create confidence intervals for the indirect effects. Results for these analyses are shown in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that job insecurity at time 1 would predict emotional exhaustion at time 2. As can be seen in Table 2, Hypothesis 1 was supported as the relationship between these two variables was positive and significant. Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion would be moderated by adaptability such that when adaptability was low, the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion be stronger. While the interaction was significant, prior to confirming support for Hypothesis 2 we first needed to graph the interaction so that we could confirm that it matched the form of our prediction. The graph of the significant interaction is shown in Figure 2.

Table 2: Moderated Mediation Regression Results

Variable	B	SE	t	p
DV: Emotional Exhaustion Time 2				
Constant	2.52	.06	41.19	.00
Job Insecurity Time 1	0.36	.09	4.18	.00
Adaptability Time 1	-0.35	.11	-3.28	.00
Job Insecurity X Adaptability	-0.37	.16	-2.30	.02
DV: UPB Time 2				
Constant	1.14	.20	5.61	.00
Emotional Exhaustion Time 2	0.16	.08	2.13	.04
Job Insecurity Time 1	0.08	.08	1.08	.28

N = 107. DV = dependent variable. UPB = Unethical pro-organizational behavior.

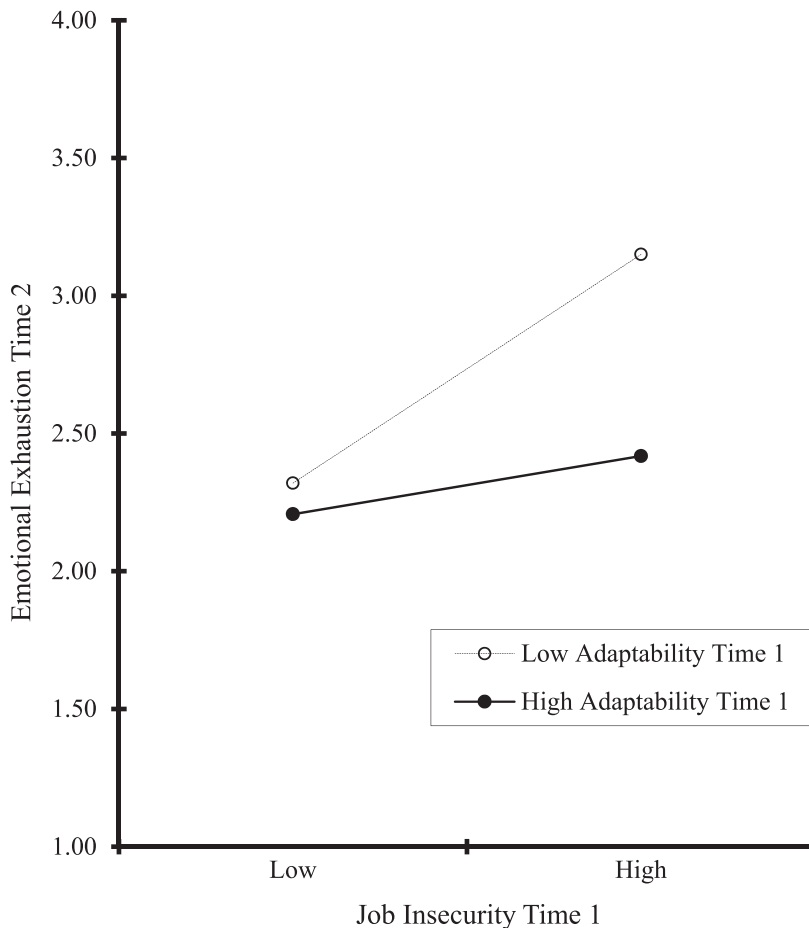


Figure 2: Interaction Between Job Insecurity and Adaptability on Emotional Exhaustion.

The graph in Figure 2 shows that, as predicted, the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion was positive when adaptability was low and flat when adaptability was high. Simple slope analysis revealed that the slope of the low adaptability line was significantly different than zero ($t = 4.97, p < .000$) while the slope of the high adaptability line was not ($t = 1.07, p = .29$). These results offer support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that emotional exhaustion at time 2 would mediate the relationship between job insecurity at time 1 and UPB at time 2. As can be seen in Table 2, full mediation was found. Specifically, the link between job insecurity at time 1 and emotional exhaustion at time 2 was significant ($.36, p < .00$), the link between emotional exhaustion at time 2 and UPB at time 2 was significant ($.16, p < .05$), but the link between job insecurity at time 1 and UPB at time 2 was not significant ($.08, p = .28$). The indirect effect was $.06$, and this effect was significant ($t = 2.00, p < .05$). These results offer support for Hypothesis 4.

Finally, to test Hypothesis 5, we explored the conditional indirect effects of our model. Hypothesis 5 predicted that the indirect effect of job insecurity on UPB

through emotional exhaustion would be stronger when adaptability was low. Results showed that the conditional indirect effects when adaptability was low (.09) or moderate (.06) were significant because the 95% confidence interval did not contain zero (.01, .22; .01, .16, respectively). However, when adaptability was high, the conditional indirect effect (.02) was not significant (95% confidence interval -.03, .14). This finding offers support for Hypothesis 5.

STUDY 1: DISCUSSION

Study 1 was designed to extend previous research by examining the psychological processes through which unethical behavior may occur in individuals. Our results were consistent with previous findings that job insecurity was significantly and positively related to increased levels of emotional exhaustion. Our findings also support the notion that employees who experience emotional exhaustion as a result of the perceived threat of job loss will engage in unethical behavior. These findings, which align with self-regulation theory, highlight the fact that experiencing stressors can diminish an individual's moral self-regulatory capabilities (Baumeister, 1997).

Another goal of our study was to examine whether adaptability mitigated the level of emotional exhaustion individuals experiencing job insecurity felt. This study confirms that highly adaptable employees experience lower levels of emotional exhaustion. Specifically, these individuals are able to cope with the situation by evaluating the potential job loss as an opportunity. Highly adaptable individuals also display flexibility when faced with challenges. Additionally, individuals with low levels of adaptability experience increased levels of emotional exhaustion when faced with job insecurity as they are unable to cope with the potential threat to income and lack the skills and abilities to adjust to uncertainty. Lastly, the role of personal adaptability in attenuating the likelihood that individuals facing job insecurity will engage in unethical behaviors benefiting the organization also was examined. As predicted, we found personal adaptability reduced the inclination of individuals who perceived job insecurity to experience subsequent emotional exhaustion and engage in unethical behaviors that benefit their organization.

However, one may question the veracity of our findings given that we included only a single moderator and a specific form of unethical behavior. In order to demonstrate that our results generalize to other boundary conditions and other forms of unethical behavior, we undertook a second study. In Study 2 we offer a constructive replication (Lykken, 1968) by examining job embeddedness as a boundary condition for the effect of job insecurity on emotional exhaustion and as a moderator of the mediated relationship between job insecurity and unethical behavior through emotional exhaustion. We also broaden our study by utilizing a more generic measure of unethical behavior. Adding a second study allows us to retest the key mediated relationship tested in Study 1 as well as explore whether employees who are embedded in their organizations are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors when faced with job insecurity than employees who are less embedded in their organization.

STUDY 2: METHOD

Sample and Procedure

We invited 169 undergraduate business students from two universities in the southern United States to take part in the study as organizational contacts and 52 participated. We used a “snowball method” where undergraduate students recruited up to 10 working adults (i.e., friend, relative, colleague) to complete the survey. Recruits provided their names and email addresses to the student who passed them on to the researchers. The names and email addresses of these individuals were compiled by the research team and an invitation to complete the survey was emailed to respondents from the research team. The snowball method of data collection has been successfully used in the management literature (e.g., Ambrose, Schminke, & Mayer, 2013; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Marwitz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012; Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012). One week after the initial invitation a reminder email was sent to invited participants.

We recruited a total of 275 respondents and 213 individuals completed the survey (77% response rate). The surveys were administered online and each respondent created a unique identification code to ensure anonymity. We took a number of steps to ensure that the surveys were completed by the correct sources. First, in introducing the study, we highlighted the importance of integrity in the scientific process and articulated to the students that it was critical for the recruits to complete the surveys and that they could only complete one survey. Second, participants were asked to provide their telephone numbers so that they could be contacted to verify their completion of the survey. Participants were randomly called to verify their participation in the study. Two responses were excluded from the study because respondents indicated they did not complete the survey. When respondents completed their online surveys, time stamps and IP addresses were recorded to ensure that the surveys were not submitted at the same time from the same IP addresses. If two surveys were sent from the same IP address within a 5-minute time frame, we contacted the respondents via telephone to verify their completion of only one survey. Two responses were eliminated because they were submitted from the same IP address within a 5-minute time frame. After the completion of the verification process participant phone numbers were deleted from the data used for analysis.

Responses from 209 individuals were included in the data analysis. The participants (66% female) were an average of 37.2 years old. As for their ethnic background, 7% were African American, 2% Asian American, 81% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, and 2% of the respondents listed “other.” They reported an average of 7.93 years of organizational tenure. All participants worked in the United States and in a variety of industries including academia, technology, government, insurance, finance, food service, retail, manufacturing, and healthcare.

Measures

All responses in Study 2 were measured on a 5-point scale with *strongly disagree* the anchor on the low end of the scale and *strongly agree* the anchor for the high end of

the scale. We coded all items so that high values reflect high levels of the concepts studied. We used the same measures for job insecurity and emotional exhaustion that we used in Study 1. The unique scales for Study 2 are described below.

Embeddedness. Embeddedness was measured with six items from Mitchell et al.'s embeddedness scale (2001) that focused on organizational fit. A sample item is "I fit with the company's culture." The Cronbach's (1951) alpha for this scale was .87.

Unethical behavior. Unethical behavior was measured with seventeen items utilized by Akaah (1992), which were adapted from Treviño, Butterfield, and McCabe (1998). Respondents were asked if they had engaged in certain behaviors over the past 6 months. Sample items include "Padded an expense account up to 10%," "Falsified time/quality/quantity reports," and "pilfered company materials and supplies." The Cronbach's (1951) alpha for this scale was .90.

Control variables. In an effort to control for alternative explanations for variance in our dependent variable, unethical behavior, we explored the usefulness of including age and gender as control variables. Extant research has demonstrated a relationship between ethical behavior and these variables (Borkowski & Ugras, 1998; Franke et al., 1997; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008). However, since these variables were not significantly correlated with our dependent variable (see Table 3), we followed the advice of Becker (2005) and did not include them in our analyses. Finally, we used status striving as our marker variable. We measured this construct with 11 items from Barrick, Stewart, and Piotrowski (2002). A sample item is "I focus my attention on being the best employee in the office." The Cronbach's (1951) alpha for this scale was .90.

Analysis

We followed the same analysis procedures that we used in Study 1. We began by estimating a measurement model using LISREL 8.8 to examine the discriminant validity of our scales. Next, we used hierarchical moderated regression analyses via IBM SPSS 22 and the PROCESS Macro written by Hayes (2013) to test our hypotheses. The PROCESS macro estimates the bootstrapped conditional indirect effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable through a mediating variable at varying levels of the moderator, making it an appropriate analytic technique for our study.

STUDY 2: RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables of interest in Study 2. We followed the same procedure as in Study 1 and began our analyses by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.8 on the scales used in Study 2 to ensure that they were independent and that the items produced the expected factor structures. Our four-factor measurement model included a factor each of our scales (i.e., job insecurity, embeddedness, emotional exhaustion, and unethical behavior). After allowing two pairs of items within the same scale to

Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study 2 Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Job Insecurity	2.96	0.52	0.57	0.06	0.29***	0.23**		
2. Emotional Exhaustion	2.78	0.96	0.06	0.86	-0.41***	0.25***		
3. Embeddedness	3.71	0.68	0.30***	-0.40***	0.72	-0.09		
4. Unethical Behavior	1.41	0.40	0.24**	0.25***	-0.07	0.65		
<i>Controls</i>								
5. Age	37.15	13.65	-0.02	-0.06	0.09	-0.13		
6. Gender	1.66	0.48	-0.06	0.07	-0.02	-0.09	0.01	
<i>Marker Variable</i>								
7. Status Striving	3.37	0.66	0.08	0.05	0.10	0.06	-0.31***	-0.20***

Listwise N = 205.
** $p < 01$. *** $p < .001$.
Note. Values in bold on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance explained which must be larger than all zero-order correlations in the row and column in which they appear to demonstrate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Values above the diagonal are correlations after controlling for the marker variable (Lindell & Whitney, 2001).

correlate, we found that the 4-factor model adequately fit the data ($X^2(552) = 1225$, $p < .01$; CFI = .93; NNFI = .92; RMSEA = .08) and all of the standardized path loadings were significant ($p < .01$).

Once again we conducted a discriminant validity test described by Fornell and Larcker (1981) by calculating the square root of the average variance explained (AVE) for each of the scales in our study. These values can be found on the diagonal in Table 3. Discriminant validity is demonstrated when the square root of the AVE exceeds all of the corresponding latent variable correlations in the same row and column (Fornell & Lackner, 1981). This condition was met for all of our scales. Taken together, the CFA results and the Fornell and Lackner discriminant validity test demonstrate support for the independence of our scales.

Just as in Study 1, we followed several steps suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003) to minimize the threat of CMV. For instance, we guaranteed respondent confidentiality, which should decrease socially desirable responding, and we assured participants that there were no correct answers to reduce evaluation apprehension. Finally, we counterbalanced the order of the questions by randomly presenting them to our respondents.

Paralleling Study 1, to statistically explore the degree of CMV in our data, we implemented the approach suggested by Lindell and Whitney (2001) by including a theoretically unrelated marker variable in our data collection. Any correlation between the marker variable and our variables of interest serves as a proxy for CMV as the only relationship between the theoretically unrelated marker variable and the constructs of interest are how the data were collected. We selected status striving (Barrick et al., 2002) as our marker variable. As can be seen in Table 3, our marker variable was not significantly correlated with any of our constructs of interest, and there was minimal change between the zero-order correlations shown on the bottom half of Table 3 and those with the marker variable partialled out on the top half of Table 3. Thus, we submit that the steps we took to avoid CMV in our study were effective.

Hypotheses Testing

Similar to Study 1, to test the first-stage moderated mediated model shown in the bottom half of Figure 1, we used IBM SPSS 22 to run the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). The variables included in the interaction analyses were centered (Cohen et al., 2003). We also employed the bootstrapping option in PROCESS that uses sampling with replacement to create confidence intervals for the indirect effects. Results for these analyses are shown in Table 4.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that job insecurity would be positively related to emotional exhaustion. As can be seen in Table 4, Hypothesis 1 was once again supported as the relationship between these two variables was positive and significant. Hypothesis 3 predicted that the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion would be moderated by embeddedness such that when embeddedness was high, the positive relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion would be stronger. While the interaction was significant, prior to confirming support for Hypothesis 3 we graphed the interaction so that we could confirm that it

Table 4: Moderated Mediation Regression Results for Study 2

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
DV: Emotional Exhaustion				
Constant	2.74	.06	41.19	.00
Job Insecurity	0.37	.12	3.06	.00
Embeddedness	-0.63	.09	-6.76	.00
Job Insecurity X Embeddedness	0.37	.15	2.46	.01
DV: Unethical Behavior				
Constant	1.13	.08	14.07	.00
Emotional Exhaustion	0.10	.03	3.65	.00
Job Insecurity	0.17	.05	3.45	.00

N = 205. DV = dependent variable.

matched the form of our prediction. The graph of the significant interaction is shown in Figure 3.

The graph in Figure 3 shows that, as predicted, the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion was positive when embeddedness was high and flat when embeddedness was low. Simple slope analysis revealed that the slope of the high embeddedness line was significantly different than zero ($t = 3.88$, $p < .00$) while the slope of the low embeddedness line was not ($t = .72$, $p = .47$). These results offer support for Hypothesis 3.

We once again tested Hypothesis 4, which predicted that emotional exhaustion would mediate the relationship between job insecurity and unethical behavior, but substituted a generic measure of unethical behavior for UPB. As can be seen in Table 4, partial mediation was found. Specifically, the link between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion was significant ($.37$, $p < .00$), the link between emotional exhaustion and unethical behavior was significant ($.10$, $p < .00$), and the link between job insecurity and unethical behavior was significant ($.17$, $p < .00$). The indirect effect was $.04$, and this effect was significant ($t = 3.08$, $p < .00$). These results offer additional support for Hypothesis 4.

Finally, to test Hypothesis 6, we explored the conditional indirect effects of our model. Hypothesis 6 predicted that the indirect effect of job insecurity on unethical behavior through emotional exhaustion would be stronger when embeddedness was high. Results showed that the conditional indirect effect when embeddedness was low ($.01$) was not significant because the 95% confidence interval contained zero ($-.03$, $.06$). However, when embeddedness was high ($.06$) or moderate ($.04$), the conditional indirect effects were significant (95% confidence interval $.01$, $.09$ and $.01$, $.15$ respectively). This finding offers support for Hypothesis 6.

STUDY 2: DISCUSSION

The findings from Study 2 also provide an explanation for why individuals who are faced with job insecurity experience levels of emotional exhaustion that may hinder

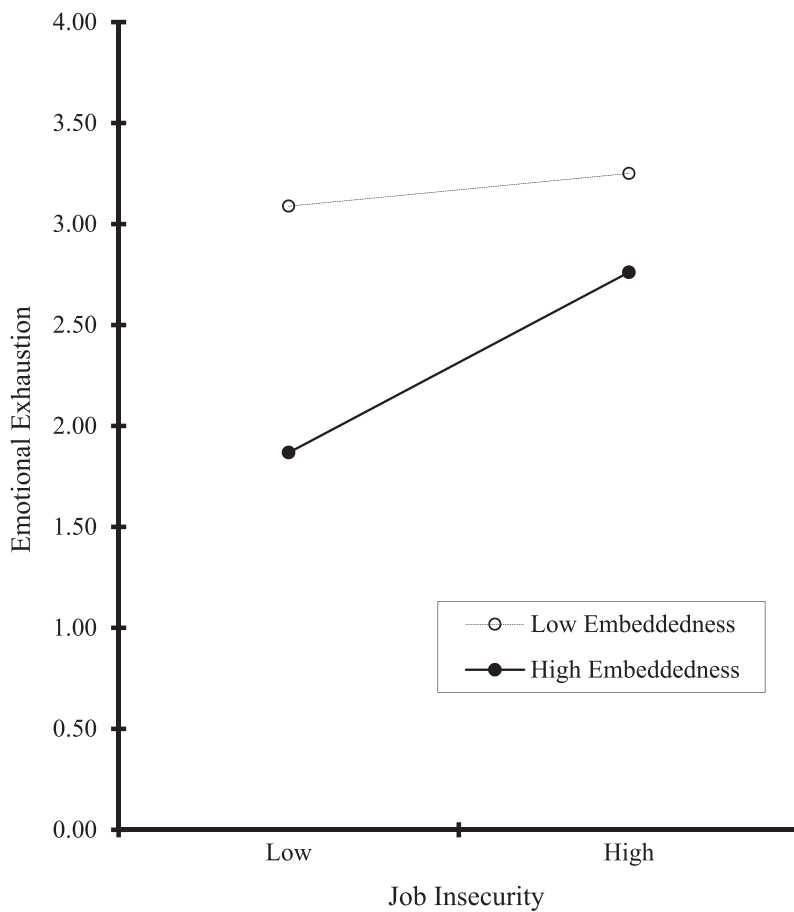


Figure 3: Interaction Between Job Insecurity and Embeddedness on Emotional Exhaustion.

their ability to regulate their ethical decision-making processes. Our findings also demonstrate that individuals who have a high level of job embeddedness experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion. These individuals appear to find the threat of potential job loss as challenging and react by engaging in self-interested unethical decisions. While previous research has highlighted the role of job embeddedness in garnering levels of employee attachment and identification that reduce turnover, these findings highlight potential negative outcomes related to high levels of embeddedness in situations that threaten one's job status.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this article we attempted to obtain an understanding of the psychological process through which unethical decisions are made by employees faced with job insecurity. We utilize self-regulation theory to explain and predict how and under what circumstances individuals faced with potential job loss are likely to engage in unethical behaviors. We examined emotional exhaustion as a mediating

mechanism in the job insecurity and unethical behavior relationship. Our results indicated that employees who encounter job insecurity experience emotional exhaustion, which diminishes the resources available to make ethical decisions (Study 1 and Study 2). Furthermore, we identified personal adaptability and job embeddedness as boundary conditions of the job insecurity—emotional exhaustion link as well as the mediated process. Personal adaptability moderated the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion, which suggests that highly adaptable employees experience lower levels of emotional exhaustion and are able to cope better with the potential threat to their jobs than employees with lower levels of adaptability (Study 1). Adaptability also moderated the proposed mediated chain, creating a stronger indirect effect when adaptability was low. We also found that job embeddedness exacerbated the levels of emotional exhaustion and subsequent unethical behaviors in which individuals facing job insecurity engaged. Specifically, participants who were highly embedded in organizations experienced higher levels of emotional exhaustion and were more likely to engage in unethical behaviors than individuals with low levels of embeddedness (Study 2).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Our article contributes to the ethics literature in several ways. First, it highlights the role of the self-regulation process in promoting unethical behavior by emphasizing the role of stressors (i.e. emotional exhaustion) on various unethical behaviors. Previous research has identified important mechanisms such as moral awareness in the self-control depletion and unethical behavior process (Christian & Ellis, 2011; Gino et al., 2011; Mead, Baumeister, Gino, Schweitzer, & Ariely, 2009; Treviño et al., 2014). We extend this research by showing that feelings of emotional exhaustion result in the depletion of an individual's self-regulatory capabilities. This depletion results in the employee's subsequent engagement in unethical behaviors that are either self-serving or benefit the organization.

Second, a number of studies have examined the influence of various dispositional factors and moral reasoning capabilities on ethical decision-making (Detert et al., 2008; Moore, 2008; Moore et al., 2012). This article extends this line of research by examining how a situational factor, job insecurity, influences engagement in unethical behavior.

Third, we examine the role of the dispositional characteristic adaptability as a factor that diminishes the likelihood that individuals experiencing job insecurity would become emotionally exhausted and subsequently engage in unethical behavior in the form of UPB. Based on our findings it appears that highly adaptable individuals have skills and abilities needed to cope with the uncertainty presented by job insecurity by being open to scanning the environment for new opportunities. On the other hand, individuals with low levels of adaptability found the uncertainty of job insecurity more challenging and exerted energy in performing unethical behaviors to benefit the organization instead of adjusting and seeking alternative solutions or opportunities.

Last, we examine the role of embeddedness as a factor that can exacerbate the likelihood that individuals, who are faced with job insecurity, would engage in unethical workplace behavior. While a majority of the literature on job embeddedness has highlighted multiple benefits of job embeddedness, we found that highly embedded individuals viewed the uncertainty of job insecurity to be overwhelming and were more likely to engage in unethical behaviors as they consider the devastation of the loss of their position with the organization.

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of organizations creating an environment that reduces levels of emotional exhaustion in their employees since it is a pathway to unethical behaviors. To address this issue, organizations should consider implementing and enforcing policies that can reduce levels of emotional exhaustion in employees. Monitoring employee workloads to reduce excessive hours, discouraging electronic communication during certain hours, and requiring individuals to take accumulated vacation are policies organizations can implement to decrease levels of emotional exhaustion in employees.

Prescriptively, previous research also has suggested that organizations can decrease feelings of job insecurity by improving perceptions of supervisor and organizational support (Bussing, 1999; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Halbesleben, 2006). Therefore, organizations should seek to provide an environment that supports, not excludes, employees who are experiencing job insecurity. One way of accomplishing this is by being transparent in communications with employees when considering layoffs. Organizations also can communicate the procedures that are being undertaken in the organization decision-making process if restructuring is being considered.

Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

This article contains several strengths that should be highlighted. First, the samples were appropriate for the questions studied. The respondents in Study 1 were members of professions in which UPB could be undertaken as the professions studied deal with clients and the sample for Study 2 incorporated broader ranges of jobs which mapped well to the more generic unethical behavior measure we employed. Second, we extend previous research by examining the impact of an additional situational factor that is prevalent in today's society, job insecurity, on an individual's willingness to engage in unethical behavior. We highlight how perceptions of job insecurity can diminish an individual's capacity to regulate their behaviors of engaging in acceptable organizational norms. Third, we offer the dispositional characteristic, adaptability, as a coping mechanism that reduces the level of emotional exhaustion employees facing job insecurity experience and the subsequent likelihood that these individuals will engage in unethical behaviors in the workplace. Last, we highlight the increased possibility of individuals, who are highly attached to their organizations and are placed in a situation that potentially threatens their livelihood, engaging in self-serving unethical behavior.

There are also a number of limitations to our research that are worth noting. First, Study 1 examined the proposed relationships using a sample of architects,

engineers, and accountants, which may limit the external validity of our findings. In order to increase the generalizability of our findings, we replicated our study using a more generalizable sample. Additionally, the sample used in Study 1 was predominantly male, which is common in these professions. We offset this limitation by employing a more gender-balanced sample in Study 2. Last, the response rate for Study 1 was low at 15%. However, we addressed this issue by conducting a second study that had a higher participation rate of 77%. What remains to be seen is whether our results hold with a sample from a single organization. We leave this avenue for future researchers.

While this article highlights the role of emotional exhaustion in depleting self-regulatory resources and the role of adaptability and job embeddedness as boundary conditions of this relationship, future research should investigate additional ways to minimize the loss of or restore self-control resources. Conservation of resources theory suggests that individuals strive to acquire and maintain a balance of resources and that they experience stress when they perceive threats to their current resources (Hobfoll, 1988, 1998). To cope with the stress they experience in the work domain due to threatened resources, individuals often pull resources from other life domains (Hobfoll, 2001). As this relates to the current study, social support (i.e., coworker and supervisor support) is a resource that may mitigate the relationship between job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Specifically, if an individual perceives that he or she has the support of others while facing job insecurity, the amount of emotional exhaustion experienced may decrease, even for individuals with low levels of adaptability or high levels of embeddedness. Moral identity also should be examined as a potential boundary condition of the emotional exhaustion and unethical behavior relationship as previous research has demonstrated that moral identity weakens the strength of the self-control depletion and dishonesty relationship (Gino et al., 2011).

Additionally, future research should examine the role of moral disengagement in the decision-making process for individuals facing job insecurity and emotional exhaustion. Moral disengagement is the self-regulatory process through which individuals free themselves from guilt and self-sanctions allowing them to engage in unethical behaviors (Bandura, 1991, 1999). A stream of literature has identified factors that influence an individual's decision to engage in unethical behavior (Caruso & Gino, 2011; Chugh et al., 2005; Gino et al., 2011; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). The inclusion of moral disengagement as a potential mediator of the emotional distress and unethical decision-making process will further the understanding of these complex relationships.

CONCLUSION

This article extends previous research by examining how and under what circumstances individuals are likely to engage in unethical behavior. This research demonstrates how individuals, who are experiencing job insecurity, subsequently engage in unethical behavior. Our findings support the notion that the threat of losing

one's job will translate into feelings of emotional exhaustion in these individuals. While in this weakened state, employees are tempted to engage in unethical acts that benefit the organization or themselves. This article also highlights how personal adaptability can mitigate and embeddedness can exacerbate the level of emotional exhaustion that employees, who are faced with job insecurity, experience. Finally, we demonstrate that the relationship between job insecurity and unethical behavior through emotional exhaustion varies depending on the level of these two boundary conditions.

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