To what extent do core self-evaluations and coping style influence the perception of job insecurity?
TO WHAT EXTENT DO CORE SELF-EVALUATIONS AND COPING STYLE INFLUENCE THE PERCEPTION OF JOB INSECURITY?*

Lena Låstad

Over the last few decades, increased flexibility and lack of stability in employment has made job insecurity a work stressor that keeps affecting more and more employees. This study investigates to what extent core self-evaluations influence the appraisal of job insecurity in a Swedish sample of white-collar workers (N=425). By applying the Preacher & Hayes’ macro for multiple mediation the study also tests if there is a mediating effect of coping style on the relation between core self-evaluations and job insecurity. The results show that core self-evaluations have predictive validity in relation to job insecurity. Core self-evaluations are also associated with task-based coping style. However, no mediating effect of coping style was found on the relation between core self-evaluations and job insecurity.

A major trend in working life today is that the nature of employment is changing (Bauman, 2007). Over the last decades, increased flexibility and lack of stability in employment have more or less become built-in parts of work life (Beck, 2001). Outsourcing and temporary contracts are becoming popular forms of employment, and the changes in work life are visible to all that take part in it. Globalization as well as the pressured economies of organizations has contributed to increasingly tight margins in business. Increasing demands of flexibility in most markets have resulted in a shift of risk “from the state and the economy on to the shoulders of individuals” (Beck, 2001, p.54). It has also been called “the individualization of labor”, referring to the increased demands on the individual to take responsibility for his or her own employment in an increasingly competitive labor market (Allvin, 2004). The described risk shift is seen as a double-edged development (Beck, 2001). On the one hand, increased flexibility can provide freedom, in the sense that the employee can choose which projects to work on and which employers to work for. But at the same time, increased flexibility and lack of stability in employment makes the individuals responsible for staying employable and securing their own employment. By making the employees the risk-bearers, the burden of interpreting the market and the organizations’ situation also becomes theirs to carry. Thus, the employee grows more sensitive to such cues. Research has documented the detrimental effects of job insecurity on various outcome variables (Wichert, 2002). At the individual level job insecurity is associated with negative effects on job attitudes, well-being and health outcomes (Chirumbolo & Hellgren, 2003; Hellgren, Sverke, & Isaksson, 1999; Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2002). Also from the perspective of the organization, taking action against job insecurity perceptions could be a wise investment. For one thing, job insecurity has been associated with higher levels of turnover (King, 2000). Also, job insecurity can lead to decreased productivity, in the sense that perceptions of inequity could lead to employee withdrawal (Lim, 1997). Recent findings show that insecurity regarding one’s job is experienced by many.

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Studies have also found prevalence of job insecurity across continents, with levels of job insecurity ranging up to as much as 20% (Statistics Norway, 2007).

The notion that not all individuals perceive and interpret insecurity in the same way indicates that characteristics of the individual have an impact on the process. Personality theories explain personality traits as a person’s stable ways of interpreting and reasoning about himself and others. Core self-evaluations is seen as a higher-order personality trait that is expressed through the four trait-indicators self-efficacy, self-esteem, locus of control and neuroticism (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). These evaluations are related to the way we perceive and create meaning about the world in general, and therefore also influence our perceptions of insecurity within the work context. Job insecurity is seen as a work stressor in the literature, and consequently it is commonly studied within the stress-framework (Sverke, et al., 2002). Stress has been defined as “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). In other words, experiencing a situation as stressful requires a mental evaluation of threat and available options or resources for coping. Assuming that the way people think and make sense of the world will affect how they evaluate their available options and resources, it could be expected that core self-evaluations influence what coping style each individual has. Further, the way people make general assumptions about the world and themselves, regarding what is controllable, how capable they are, and how optimistic or pessimistic their outlook on life is, will affect what kind of coping is assessed to be possible and appropriate. Strain can be seen as result of a joint venture of both the appraisal of the stressor and what measures the individual takes to act. Having an inefficient coping style means that the stressor remains unchanged. Thereby, the strain also remains.

Research on stress typically follows a design where stressor, stress appraisal, coping and consequences are measured in that order (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, it has also been suggested that one could look at the process as “sequential and cyclical” (Pienaar, 2008). Seeing the stress-process as a cycle, experiences of strain and coping are expected to influence future experiences of strain and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, assuming that previous experiences of stress will influence the perception of stress in the future, a certain stress-pattern or stress-profile will develop. Several studies support this idea, finding that the ways people cope are quite stable over time, and thus reflecting a coping style (e.g., Havlovic, Bouthillette, & van der Wal, 1998). Applied to the context of job insecurity, previous coping attempts could be expected to affect future perceptions of job insecurity as a stressor.

Based on the knowledge that job insecurity can have detrimental consequences at both individual and organizational level, it would be fair to expect a wide variety of interventions aiming at preventing and aiding insecure workers. However, this is not the case (Canaff & Wright, 2004). When it comes to preventive interventions on work-stress in general, one or more of the following three focus areas are addressed: (1) changing the stressor, (2) helping participants modify their stress-appraisals, or (3) improving coping skills (Ivancevich, Matteson, Freedman, & Phillips, 1990). However, partly because of the focus on single personality traits (e.g., negative affectivity,
optimism, locus of control) as predictors in research on job insecurity so far, the predictive strength of core self-evaluations remains unclear.

Identifying if and to what extent perceptions of job insecurity are influenced by core self-evaluations and coping style would contribute to research on job insecurity. The results of this study could also give implications for the potential of preventive interventions in organizations. It is therefore the purpose of this study to examine the relationship between core self-evaluations and job insecurity, and the possible mediating effect of coping style on this relation. The theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Theoretical model of the relationship between core self-evaluations, coping style and job insecurity.](image)

**Job insecurity**

Research in the field of job insecurity has demonstrated that job insecurity is a work stressor that has an impact on several work-related issues, like for instance employee attitudes and well-being (Hellgren et al., 1999). Indeed, the fear of losing one’s job can have more harmful consequences for the individual than actually losing it (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995). Job insecurity has been defined as the “perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation” (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p. 438). In addition to the worry of job loss, which is referred to as quantitative job insecurity, research has also considered the qualitative aspects of job insecurity, namely the anticipation of losing valued job features (Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans, & van Vuuren, 1991). These include working conditions, promotional opportunities and developments in salary (Hellgren et al., 1999). Over the last two decades, a substantial body of research on job insecurity has emerged (for reviews and meta-analyses, see Sverke et al., 2002; Cheng & Chan, 2008). Some have argued that ‘objective’ threats to job security, like downsizing and redundancies should be a criterion for measuring job insecurity (Büssing, 1999). Also, general financial recession has been found to affect the prevalence of job insecurity in the working population (Statistics Norway, 2007). Layoffs in organizations, as well as a general focus on the employees’ responsibility to maintain or increase their employability might also lead to a climate of job insecurity in the general labor market (Adkins, Werbel, & Farh, 2001). There is no doubt that organizational cut-backs and redundancies can affect the perception of job insecurity in an organization. However, such threats to job security are not necessarily a precondition, and most certainly not the only possible precondition for employees’ experience of job insecurity (Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996). It is rather a question of a discrepancy between preferred and perceived experience of the level of security (Hartley et al., 1991). Thus, job insecurity becomes a concern, not only for those facing immediate threats of downsizing, but for the working population in general.
Perceiving a job as insecure involves both cognitive and affective dimensions, where the cognitive aspect is an evaluation of the probability of job loss, and the affective aspect refers to feelings of concern or anxiety (Hartley, et al., 1991). When employees perceive the job as insecure, they go from believing that the work place is a stable organization and that their employment is safe, to realizing that the employment could be at stake (Hartley, et al., 1991). This change in perception and the vulnerability subsequently experienced by the employee is what job insecurity is all about. A job is not necessarily ‘just a job’. It can be central to identity and a sense of self, and it also plays a key role in structuring peoples’ lives. In a work life where boundaries between work and family life are becoming less clear cut, our social contacts on and off the job are also affected (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson, & Lundberg, 2006). Through connecting both a sense of self and social network to the job, in addition to, for instance, economical dependency, makes the individual vulnerable in the case of layoffs or other major organizational changes. There seems to be an agreement on defining job insecurity as a subjective experience dependent on the subjective perception of insecurity in employment (Sverke et al., 2002). This especially goes for situations that are ambiguous, because the difficulty of interpreting the situation will lead to cognitive processes within the individual that are aiming at finding an explanation (Hartley et al., 1991).

Core self-evaluations

At an individual level, new structures in work life play out in different ways. Where some cherish the possibilities that follow increased flexibility and shorter time frames, others perceive the situation as stressful and threatening. Given the definition of job insecurity as a subjective experience, a person’s characteristics will influence how job insecurity is experienced. Individual-level interventions on job insecurity have previously only been addressed by a few authors. For instance, Holm & Hovland (1999) point out that both career counseling and outplacement are potentially useful interventions, but that they are not in themselves sufficient to prevent negative effects of job insecurity. Through developing meta-cognitive skills, like for instance improving self-efficacy, it is argued that more direct and active ways of coping can become possible (cf. Vrugt, 1996).

A limited number of studies have looked at personality traits as individual-level predictors of job insecurity (e.g., Canaff & Wright, 2004; Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti, & Happonen, 1999). Locus of control and dispositional optimism are two examples of traits that have been found to predict job insecurity (Bosman & Buitendach, 2005). However, the approach of investigating links between single traits and work-stressors has been criticized (Johnson, Rosen, & Levy, 2008). The fragmentized nature of this kind of research and findings makes it hard to develop theory further. In their research on job satisfaction, Judge, Locke, Durham and Kluger (1998) found an underlying structure of certain predictors, indicating that they were sub-constructs of a higher-order trait. This trait is called core self-evaluations, and can be defined as “fundamental, subconscious conclusions individuals reach about themselves, other people, and the world” (Judge, et al., 1998, p. 18). This indicates that these evaluations will influence the individual’s appraisal and perception of events. Core self-evaluations are seen as a
broad personality trait which is influencing both cognitive and dispositional aspects. The four trait-indicators that core self-evaluations are measured by are self esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control and neuroticism. Previously, they have all been studied as predictors of job insecurity, but not together.

Research has shown that core self-evaluations can be applied when studying work stress (Johnson, et al., 2008). Taking into account the cognitive and affective aspects of job insecurity, it therefore makes sense to utilize this framework also in the job insecurity context. One of the sub-components of core self-evaluations is self-efficacy. Bandura (1986) explains how self-efficacy is derived from achievements, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and psychological state. Threats to an important arena for achievements, therefore has the potential to alter self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy expectations can be seen as determinants of behavior and has often been treated as a mediator for behavior change stress- and health intervention programs (Yaroch, Reynolds, Buller, Maloy, & Geno, 2006; Strecher, DeVellis, Becker, & Rosenstock, 1986). This approach is based on the assumption that altering self-efficacy can be beneficial when aiming at altering behavior (Linde, Rothman, Baldwin, & Jeffery, 2006). According to Bandura (1986), people need to believe that change is within their control, and that success to a large degree depends on effort. The control motive can be seen as basic to the human condition (Snyder & Lopez, 2005). And regarding locus of control as a trait indicator of core self-evaluations, it is argued that employees with an internal locus of control will feel better suited for coping with job insecurity than employees with external locus of control do (Ito & Brotheridge, 2007). Locus of control has been defined as “a personality variable that concerns people’s generalized expectancies that they can or cannot control reinforcements in their lives” (Spector & O’Connell, 1994, p. 2). Related to job insecurity, Probst (2005) tested the effectiveness of participative decision making as an organizational strategy to encounter negative effects of job insecurity. She found that empowering employees through participative decision making - hence increasing their sense of control - might lead to fewer negative consequences of job insecurity. Neuroticism is another trait indicator of core self-evaluations. In relation to job insecurity, several studies have found negative affectivity to be a predictor. Negative affectivity is a similar personality trait to neuroticism (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). It has been defined as “a predisposition to focus on the negative aspects of the self, others, and the world, as well as a tendency to experience a high level of stress” (Mak & Mueller, 2000, p. 314). Studies on the consequences of job insecurity often control for the effect of neuroticism or negative affectivity. The fourth trait-indicator of core self-evaluations is self-esteem. In a longitudinal study on Finnish employees, researchers found a cumulative relation between self-esteem and job insecurity, in that high job insecurity predicted low self-esteem and that low self-esteem predicted high job insecurity (Kinnunen, Feldt, & Mauno, 2003). Similar results have been found in other studies (e.g., Orpen, 1994).

Coping

Coping is “the process through which the individual manages the demands of the person-environment relationship that are appraised as stressful and the emotions they generate“ (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). In the context of job insecurity, one way of coping could be that the employee takes measures in order to increase the personal
employability. The strength of perceived job insecurity can be seen as “a product of the perceived severity of the threat multiplied by the perceived powerlessness to resist the threat” (Hartley et al., 1991, p. 34). This illustrates how job insecurity is dependent on both the perception of the threat, primary appraisal, and the resources that the individual believes to have, secondary appraisal. The perception of resources can include both the magnitude of resources, as well as a perception of coping skills in the meaning how well the resources are utilized (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The perceived powerlessness referred to previously can in part be caused by the ambiguous nature of job insecurity. Because the employee does not know if the job will be lost or not, there is a risk that coping attempts can become immobilized. In that case the stressor becomes unaffected, and emotion-based coping becomes the only option available. It becomes a process where fear of losing the job is followed by hopes of keeping it. This process of appraisal and reappraisals is likely to create feelings of powerlessness, which in turn could increase the sense of threat experienced by the employee (cf. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Within the context of organizational change, core self-evaluations have been found to predict coping (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999; Kammeyer-Mueller, et al., 2009). Hartley et al. (1991) argue that people select the coping strategies for job insecurity that correspond to the explanations they give for the situation. Related to core self-evaluations as relatively stable ways of understanding the world, it could be argued that coping would take on the same relatively stable form. Following a similar line of reasoning, studies have shown that coping can be relatively stable over time, and thus reflect a coping style (e.g., Gorzynski, Holland, Katz, Weiner, Zumoff, Fukushima, & Levin, 1980). More specifically, coping style could be defined as “a repertoire of strategies available to cope with stressful encounters, specific for an individual” (Heszen-Niejodek, 1997, p. 343). Coping is commonly described either in terms of task-based coping, or emotion-based coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Task-based coping typically involves trying to change the situation or acting to master it, whereas emotion-based coping is related to handling negative emotions associated with the stressful situation. Emotion-based coping styles have been linked to stronger reactions to stress (Felton & Revenson, 1984). Positive core self-evaluations are expected to be related to more direct coping styles than those who evaluate their core self less positively. Low levels of self-efficacy and self esteem combined with an external locus of control and neuroticism are hypothesized to predict an emotion-based coping style. Having no expectation of being able to influence the situation, one chooses to cope through handling negative emotions. More positive core self-evaluations create expectations of being able to influence the situation, an evaluation that motivates a more direct and active approach.

In the case of job insecurity, both the process of evaluating the security or insecurity of the job and coping is something that goes on continuously over time. Because job insecurity has become a built-in part of work life today, the individual will already have experienced perceptions of job insecurity and related coping, and it is assumed that the individual will have developed a coping style. The efficiency of the coping style will to a certain degree determine what consequences job insecurity has for the individual, and so the employees’ perception of job insecurity will in part be depending on the success
of previous coping attempts. Therefore it is hypothesized that coping style will mediate the effect of core self-evaluations on job insecurity:

**Purpose of the study**

Based on the previous discussion, the overall objective of this study is to examine the relationship between core self-evaluations, and both qualitative and quantitative job insecurity. The possible mediating effect of coping style will also be examined. The following research questions will be addressed:

*Research question 1:* Do core self-evaluations predict perceptions of job insecurity?

*Research question 2:* Do core self-evaluations predict coping style?

*Research question 3:* Can coping style predict job insecurity?

*Research question 4:* Is there a mediating effect of coping style on the relation between core self-evaluations and perceptions of job insecurity?

**Methods**

**Participants and context**

The data used in this study was collected as a part of the project † "The salaried employee in the modern working life: Threats and challenges" (Näswall, Baraldi, Richter, Hellgren, & Sverke, 2006). Data from two waves are used in this study, ensuring that conclusions about the direction of causality could be made. Core self-evaluations and coping styles were added from wave 1, and job insecurity was added from wave 2. Wave 1 was collected in November, 2004 and wave 2 was collected approximately one year later. The sample consisted of white collar workers from three organizations (manufacturers, accountants, and administrative personnel). To ensure confidentiality, questionnaires were sent to respondents’ home addresses. Information about the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary was also included in the send-out. The mean age at time 1 was 46.2 years, ranging from 25 to 65 years and 54% of the participants were women. While a total of 606 respondents received the questionnaire at both times, 437 of them also participated twice. This gives a longitudinal response rate of 72%. The internal attrition was approximately 2.7%, which is within the acknowledged limit of 5% (Little & Rubin, 1987). This gives an effective sample of 425 respondents. Regarding the context of the organizations at the time of data collection, there had not been conducted any major organizational changes or redundancies prior to the two points of data collection.

T-tests were conducted in order to control if the internal attrition could have affected the results in this study. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1. Respondents who only participated at time 1 reported significantly higher levels of both qualitative

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† The project was financed by the Swedish National Institute for Working Life through the Joint Programme for Working Life Research in Europe (SALTSA) and Alecta.
and quantitative job insecurity than the respondents who participated in both waves of data collection.

Table 1: A comparison of the participants who participated both times and those who only participated once.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participated both times (Mean/frequency)</th>
<th>Participated at time 1 only (Mean/frequency)</th>
<th>T/X²</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>46.23</td>
<td>44.98</td>
<td>-1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative job insecurity</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative job insecurity</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2.30***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>4.05</td>
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<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>4.25</td>
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<td>-.79</td>
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<td>Locus of control</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
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<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.16</td>
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<td>Core self-evaluations</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task-based coping</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion-based coping</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>-.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n for those who responded at T1 and T2 = 436 and non-responders at T2 = 169.

** p < .01 *** p < .001

Measures

*Independent variable: Core self-evaluations.*

The concept of core self-evaluations consists of four dimensions: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control and neuroticism. All scales measuring core self-evaluations were based on a Likert scale type format ranging from 1 to 5 with 1 being ‘does not apply’ and 5 being ‘applies fully’. *Self-esteem* was measured by a 10-item scale by Rosenberg (1965), e.g., “I feel that I am a person of worth. At least on an equal basis with others”. *Locus of control* was measured by Judge, et al.’s (2002) 8-item short version of Levenson’s (1981) original Locus-scale which ranges from internal to external locus of control (e.g., “I can pretty much decide what is going to happen in my life”). *Generalized self-efficacy* (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998) was measured by 8 questionnaire items, one of which was: “I usually feel I can handle the typical problems that come up in life”. *Neuroticism* (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968) was measured by a 12-item scale, exemplified by “I am a worrier”.

*Mediating variables: Coping style.*

Coping style was measured using 9 items from a 15-item version of Guppy, Edwards, Brough, Peters-Bean, Sale and Short’s (2004) questionnaire. A Likert Scale from 1 to 5 was used, and respondents were asked to agree or disagree with three types of assertions about how the respondent usually copes with problems. Emotion-based coping was estimated through the merging of the two subscales “Reappraisal” and “Avoidance”, consisting of three items each (e.g., “I tell myself that the problem is not important”). The 3-item subscale used for measuring task-based coping was “Change the situation”, exemplified by “I try to change the situation in order to achieve what I want”.

*Dependent variable: Job insecurity.*

Job insecurity was also measured with Likert scales ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 as a strong sense of job insecurity. Qualitative job insecurity was measured with 4 items
based on Hellgren, et al. (1999), and an exemplary item was: “I’m concerned that I will have less stimulating tasks in the future”. Quantitative job insecurity was measured with 3 items based on Hellgren et al., (1999), e.g., “I’m afraid that I’m going to lose my job”.

**Control variables.**

Previous research on job insecurity has found that age can be a predictor of job insecurity (Näswall & De Witte, 2003). More specifically, older workers have been found to experience higher levels of job insecurity. Gender has also been found to interact with job insecurity. In a Finnish study, for instance, female employees reported higher levels of job insecurity than their male colleagues (Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti, & Happonen, 2000). However, the opposite was found in a recently published Swedish study (Richter, Näswall, & Sverke, 2010). Putting the ambiguity of these findings aside, it seems clear that an interacting effect of gender on job insecurity could be expected. Therefore, both these factors were controlled for when studying the partial mediation between self core-evaluations, coping strategies and job insecurity.

**Analysis**

The psychometric properties of all the scales included in the study were calculated. Testing the research questions required using a multiple mediator model for assessing indirect effects. This was conducted by using Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) macro for multiple mediation. Using the INDIRECT.SPS script for PASW makes it possible to test the effect of multiple mediators simultaneously, a more sophisticated approach than testing each mediator separately. “A mediator is a third variable that links a cause and an effect” (Wu & Zumbo, 2008, p.368). In short, the mediation analysis is testing whether the independent variable (IV) is causing an intervening variable - the mediator (M), which in turn causes the dependent variable (DV) (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). The effect of the independent variable onto the dependent variable is referred to as the total effect and is expressed as the c-path. The effect of the independent variable onto the mediator is called path a and the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable, where the effect of the independent variable is partialled out is called path b. The direct effect, the c’-path refers to the sum of the direct effect and the indirect effect (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). The Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) macro also makes it possible to control for effects of other variables in that they can be included as covariates in the analysis. Any effect of the covariates will be partialled out both in the model of the mediator and in the dependent variable model.

Because the sampling distribution typically is asymmetrical, Hayes (2009) argues that indirect effects should be tested with bootstrapping, a resampling method and a non-parametric test which does not require a normal distribution. The bootstrapping procedure can be described as follows: By treating the obtained sample as a population, and drawing a high number samples from this ‘population’, where all cases have an equal probability of being included every time, one can get repeated estimates of the size of the indirect effect. Typically, 5000 resamples are recommended. By ranging the effect sizes in ascending order, one can create a percentile-based bootstrap confidence interval for the effect size. Through setting the upper and lower bound of the confidence interval, one can conclude that there is evidence of a mediating effect if the value zero is not found within these bounds (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).
Mediation models aim at explaining how chains of variables are interrelated, and are therefore causation models (Wu & Zumbo, 2008). Preconditions for claims of causation have always been debated in the sciences. In this study, the direction of effects related to job insecurity will be supported by the longitudinal design. Since both the independent variable and the mediators were measured at time 1, no claim of causation can be made for the relation between these. In the first mediation analysis, core self-evaluations was entered as the independent variable, task-based coping style and emotion-based coping style were treated as mediating variables and quantitative job insecurity was the dependent variable. The possible interacting effects of both gender and age were controlled for in that they were entered as covariates in the analysis. In the second mediation analysis the same variables were included, except that quantitative job insecurity was replaced with qualitative job insecurity as the dependent variable.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics, reliability and correlations of all variables in the study are presented in Table 2. All scales showed good measurement properties with Cronbach’s alpha levels ranging from .76 to .90. The only exception was locus of control, which slipped just below the norm of .70 at .68. As recommended by Judge, Erez, Bono and Thoresen (2003), the scales measuring the sub-components of core self-evaluations were merged into a single higher order construct. This decision was also supported by the high intercorrelations between the scales measuring self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control and neuroticism. They also had quite high loadings (.70 to .92) onto a single factor in an explorative factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation. The neuroticism-scale was reversed before entered into the core self-evaluations-index, because it is the absence of neuroticism, termed as emotional stability, that is theorized together with self-efficacy, locus of control and self-esteem. The factor loadings of each subscale was used to give each scale the appropriate weight when combining them into one index.

Table 2 also shows that the levels of job insecurity are low to moderate for the sample. A mean value of 1.70 (SD=.94) for quantitative job insecurity indicates that most respondents perceive that their employment are secure. The mean value for qualitative job insecurity was more moderate at 2.49 (SD=.93), which shows that insecurity regarding job features and future career opportunities was of some concern to the respondents. Additionally, a significant correlation was found between qualitative job insecurity and gender (r=-.15, p<.01), indicating that in this sample, women experienced more qualitative job insecurity than men. Significant correlations were also found between age and both neuroticism (r=-.15, p<.01) and emotional coping (r=.11, p<.05). Both gender and age will therefore be controlled for in the mediation analysis.
Table 2. Descriptive statistics, reliability and correlations of all variables in the study. Cronbach’s alpha in the diagonal.

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<td>.83</td>
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<td>.77</td>
<td>.64</td>
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\[ N=425, \text{ for } r \geq .10, \text{ } p < .05 \text{ and for } r \geq .14, \text{ } p < .01 \]

Multiple mediation models

Two separate mediation analyses were conducted. The results from the mediation analysis on quantitative job insecurity are presented in Figure 2. For quantitative job insecurity, the total effect of core self-evaluations was \( c = -.61 \) (\( p < .001 \)), whereas the direct effect was \( c' = -.64 \) (\( p < .001 \)). Concluding that a variable has a mediating effect, requires that zero is not in the confidence interval for the mediators. For this sample, with the estimated effects of task-based coping style ranging from -.03 to .12, and between -.04 and .12 for emotion-based coping style, it cannot be concluded that the indirect effect of either mediator is significantly different from zero at \( p < .05 \). In other words, no mediating effect is found here. A significant effect of core self-evaluations on task-based coping style was found (\( \alpha = .56, p < .001 \)). The control variables had no significant effect on the model. The total amount of variance explained by this model was 7.8% (\( p < .001 \)).

![Figure 2](image)

Figure 2. Unstandardized coefficients represent the mediating effect of coping style on the relation between core self-evaluations and quantitative job insecurity. A represents the relation between core self-evaluations and quantitative job insecurity alone, and B represents the relation between the two variables when covariates and suggested mediators are included in the analysis.

\[ N=425, * p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001. \]
Similar results were obtained for qualitative job insecurity, presented in Figure 3. Here, both the total effect of core self-evaluations on qualitative job insecurity was significant ($c=-.66, p<.001$), and so was the direct effect ($c'=-.65, p<.001$). The bootstrap-results showed that the effect of the proposed mediators was not significant, with task-based coping style ranging from -.07 to .09 and emotion-based coping style from -.05 to .01. Thus, no evidence of a mediating effect was found here either. The $a$-path (core self-evaluations on task-based coping style) was significant at .56 ($p<.001$). A small but significant effect of age ($-.01, p<.01$) was partialled out in the model. The total variance explained by this model was 10.7% ($p<.001$).

![Figure 3](image)

Figure 3. Unstandardized coefficients represent the mediating effect of coping style on the relation between core self-evaluations and qualitative job insecurity. A represents the relation between core self-evaluations and qualitative job insecurity alone, and B represents the relation between the two variables when covariates and suggested mediators are included in the analysis. N=425, *** $p<.001$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine to what extent core self-evaluations and coping style influence perceptions of quantitative and qualitative job insecurity. The results of the mediation analysis support research question 1 in that core self-evaluations had a predictive validity in relation to both qualitative and quantitative job insecurity. This was in accordance with what was expected, and indicates that an integrative trait-approach to job insecurity could be of value. Seeing job insecurity as a work stressor, this is similar to recent findings from a sample of white-collar workers, where core self-evaluations predicted work-stress in general (Brunborg, 2008). Further, a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of work-stress reducing interventions found that such interventions have an effect in general and that cognitive-behavioral interventions on work stress are the most effective ones (van der Klink, Blonk, Schene, & van Dijk, 2001). The modest levels of job insecurity found in the present study, indicate that the respondents feel quite secure in their jobs. The relatively calm context of the organizations has probably influenced here. In a study on job insecurity and personality where the organization had undergone major organizational changes, had occurred, Mak and Mueller (2000) found that personality predicted a somewhat larger proportion of the
variance in job insecurity among respondents. This could possibly be an indication of interdependency between personality and situation factors in job insecurity perceptions. The fact that the mean levels of job insecurity indicate that the sample per se is not particularly job insecure could be seen both as an advantage and as a disadvantage. Mediation is a complex process, and when a result is found in this sample, that could be taken as an indication that it is worth to conduct more studies on the subject.

In relation to research question 2, the results show that core self-evaluations and task-based coping style are positively related, but emotion-based coping style is not. In the light of the previous discussion on core self-evaluations, it makes sense that having positive core self-evaluations could lead to task-based coping. In a way, for people to believe that they are able to make an impact on the stressor and actually acting to change it, are two sides of the same coin. The fact that no relation was found between core self-evaluations and emotional coping-style was unexpected, but is supported by similar findings from a recently published study (Kammeyer-Mueller, et al., 2009). Here, the authors found that core self-evaluations predicted problem-solving or task-based coping, but not emotion-based coping. Possibly, this could be related to the question of context, in that previous research has found buffering effects of coping strategies and resources when the stress-level is high (Callan, et al., 1994). Seen in a wider context, western ideals of mastery and individualism are influencing general evaluations of what is seen as the best approach to coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Whereas task-based coping is analogous to mastering a situation, emotion-based coping is typically associated with the opposite, namely failing to master. It could be argued, though, that in the context of job insecurity it might not always be possible to ‘solve the problem’. Emotion-based coping could perhaps prove more instrumental in situations where there is little left for the individual to do.

Regarding research questions 3 and 4, the expectation that coping style would be a mediator in the relation between core self-evaluations and job insecurity was not supported, as no mediating effect was found. This could mean that the style of coping is not related to perceptions of job insecurity. Alternatively, related explanations must be considered. It is possible, that the lack of support for the notion of coping as a mediator could be an indicator of problems with the way coping is measured here. Even though there is a theoretical foundation for the concept of coping style, measuring it the way it has been done here has been criticized. A one-time measure of self-reported coping is probably not the best way to measure coping style. The coping-items are also very general in nature, and could be thought to reflect a ‘coping-with-life’-style rather than a consistent style of coping with job insecurity specifically. Some have suggested that coping should be measured through diary-studies where respondents describe specific events and subsequent coping (e.g. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It would have been interesting to test this in a job insecurity context. However, this kind of data collection is very time-consuming both for researchers and participants. It also requires that participants have the time and ability to reflect on the process of stress and coping. As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) debated, neither perceiving stress nor coping are necessarily fully conscious processes.

In applying a similar theoretical foundation as this study, Knoll, Rieckmann and Schwarzer (2005) tested whether coping was a mediator between personality and stress
outcomes. Personality was measured with the Big Five framework, and coping was modeled as either situation-specific or dispositional, which is similar to the concept of coping style applied here. It should be mentioned that the context of the study was that of cataract patients awaiting surgery. Therefore, parallels to this study should be drawn with caution. However, the authors conclude that dispositional coping did not have a mediating effect on the relationship between personality and stress outcomes. But there was a mediating effect of situation-specific coping. This could be an indicator of the problems associated with the measurement of coping style. As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) state, human behavior is generally not stable, but varies with the situation. The context in general and the stressor specifically would need to be included in the model as well.

Limitations and future research

The data used in this study were collected through self-report questionnaires. The debate on the validity of self-reports have been many (e.g., Howard, 1994; Spector, 1994). One of the arguments from this discussion has particular relevance here and is referred to as levels of specificity (Azjen & Fishbein, 1980). It has been argued that the relation between two variables will come out stronger if the variables match in their level of specificity. In this study, both core self-evaluations and coping styles were operationalized as very general constructs. Measuring a job insecurity-coping style or work-related core self-evaluations (e.g. work-locus of control, work-based self-esteem) would probably have been more appropriate, given that the focus of this study is on job insecurity. It is the recommendation of this author that future research on coping and job insecurity apply more sophisticated ways of measuring coping, involving both repeated measurement and a clearer connection to context. It could also help bring research forward if future research on predictors of job insecurity would focus on more unitary approaches to personality, like for instance core self-evaluations instead of single trait-approaches.

The T-tests showed that there were significant differences in levels of job insecurity between those who responded both times and those who responded at time 1 only. This implies that the results of this study should be interpreted with care in terms of generalizing to other populations. However, if the difference has had an impact on the results in this study, it would be reasonable to expect that the relations have been inflated, rather than exaggerated. This is because the time 1-only responders experienced more job insecurity than those who responded twice.

As reported, core-self evaluations explain about 10% of the variance in job insecurity perceptions in this sample. Hence, there seems to be a link between personality and job insecurity. However, when core self-evaluations make up about 10% of the variance, other factors will explain the remaining 90%. Included in this percentage one could expect to find individual-level factors like subjective job dependency or preferred level of security. But also organizational-level factors have been found to pay an impact on job insecurity (Ito & Brotheridge, 2007). This implies that it will not be appropriate for organizations to lay the sole responsibility of experiencing or handling effects of job insecurity on to the individual. Several aspects of job insecurity can be addressed at an organizational level, and it could be argued that, both financially and morally, it should
be in the interest of the organization to take responsibility for job insecure workers. Due to limitations of the design (Bollen, 1989), conclusions about causality cannot be drawn here. But the longitudinal measurement of the relation between the independent and the dependent variables give some support for the suggested directionality. However, more research is needed before any definite conclusions can be drawn about the nature of these relations. It will also need testing to see if the results are generalizable to other populations. Still, this introduction of the core self-evaluations framework to the context of job insecurity could be a valuable contribution to future research on antecedents to job insecurity.

**Concluding remarks**

Summarized, the results of this study show that core self-evaluations seem to be a predictor variable of job insecurity. As job insecurity is becoming a built-in part of work life for many employees, knowledge about individual factors and their potential impact on job insecurity perceptions could prove to become useful. In work-site interventions focusing at job insecurity, changing ways of appraisal could potentially be of help to job insecure workers. Additionally, though, the relatively low percentage of variance explained by core self-evaluations in this study indicate that also external factors should be taken into account when looking at predictors of job insecurity. There are both moral and economical reasons why it should be in the interest of organizations to focus on helping job insecure workers, and the results of this study implicate that it could be worthwhile to focus on both individual and organizational level predictors of job insecurity.
References


