



Evidence-based HRM: a Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship

Voicing concerns for greater engagement: does a supervisor's job insecurity and organizational culture matter?

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Article information:

To cite this document:

Manish Gupta, Sindhu Ravindranath, YLN Kumar, "Voicing concerns for greater engagement: does a supervisor's job insecurity and organizational culture matter?", Evidence-based HRM: a Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBHRM-12-2016-0034>

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Voicing Concerns for Greater Engagement: Do Supervisor's Job Insecurity and Organizational Culture Matter?

Abstract

Purpose: Scholars argue that supervisor's job insecurity may affect subordinates' work engagement. Moreover, this relationship may be mediated by subordinates' pro-social voice and the relationship between the supervisor's job insecurity and subordinates' pro-social voice may be moderated by organizational culture. Therefore, this study has two main objectives. The first objective is to examine the mediating role of the subordinate's pro-social voice between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinates' work engagement. The second objective is to test the moderating role of organizational culture between supervisor's job insecurity and the subordinates' pro-social voice.

Design/methodology/approach: Data were gathered from employees of a large hospital in India using a face to face cross-sectional survey data collection method. To test the proposed hypotheses, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis was performed on the data obtained.

Findings: The results indicated support for the proposed model in two ways. First, the subordinate's pro-social voice mediated the relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and

the subordinate's work engagement. Second, organizational culture acted as a moderator between supervisor's job insecurity and the subordinate's pro-social voice.

Research limitations/implications: The results add to social exchange theory by identifying the crucial role that voicing concerns plays in reducing the negative impact of supervisor's job insecurity on subordinates' work engagement.

Practical implications: The study findings encourage managers to create an organizational culture that allows subordinates to challenge their supervisor's decisions.

Originality/value: To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this is the first study to test job-insecurity of the supervisors as a predictor of pro-social voice.

Keywords: employee voice; job insecurity; organizational culture; work engagement

Voicing Concerns for Greater Engagement: Do Supervisor's Job Insecurity and Organizational Culture Matter?

1. Introduction

Engaged employees are assets for any organization primarily because they are vigorous, dedicated, and fully absorbed in their work role (Van De Voorde, Veld, and Van Veldhoven, 2016). Therefore, the efforts put in by scholars in the direction of exploring the factors affecting employee engagement are of paramount importance (Akhtar, Boustani, Tsivrikos, and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015). A sizable literature provides evidence that supervisors' positive behavior and other related organizational factors have a strong effect on the level of employee engagement (e.g. Hsieh and Wang, 2015; Pohl and Galletta, 2017; van Dierendonck, 2015; Zhong, Wayne, and Liden, 2015).

Most studies examine the extent to which positive 'motivational' factors enhance work engagement levels of the employees (e.g. Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, and Courtright, 2015; Yadav and Rangnekar, 2015; Joo and Lee, 2017). However, the role of negative factors cannot be completely written off (Ivtzan, Lomas, Hefferon, and Worth, 2015). Factors such as supervisor's job insecurity may reduce employees' attachment with their work (Wrape, 2015) because insecure supervisors perceive subordinates as a threat and tend to create hurdles to ensure that they do not perform (Scharff, 2014).

Therefore, the current study examines if employees voice their concerns to reduce the negative impact of supervisor's job insecurity on their work engagement levels. It also

investigates the role of organizational culture in affecting the negative relationship between a supervisor's job insecurity and the subordinates' voice.

Since inception of 'personal engagement', a term coined by Kahn (1990), researchers have conceptualized engagement at work in different forms such as state engagement, work engagement, employee engagement, and job engagement among others. In the work setting, work engagement consisting of vigor, dedication, and absorption is the most popular among scholars (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker, 2002).

Whereas personal engagement refers to the extent to which individuals discretionarily attach their 'personal self' with their role, work engagement is the degree to which employees are vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed at work. Vigor is defined as deploying high levels of energy and mental resilience with willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication is a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge, whereas, absorption is described as being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work. In summary, work engagement can be conceptualized as a sub-set of personal engagement (Christian, Garza, and Slaughter, 2011). In the present study, the focus is on work engagement and synthesizing it further as it is by far the most researched engagement type that researchers have established.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

The term 'employee voice' has been conceptualized by occupational psychologists in two ways (Dyne, Ang, and Botero, 2003). In one approach, voice refers to the pro-active behavior of

employees in giving suggestions. In another, it signifies due processes that encourage employee participation in managerial decision making. This study is focused on the pro-active behavior approach (Dyne, Ang, and Botero's (2003)) because employees high in pro-social voice are proactive and cooperating in nature instead of being self-protective and fearful. Employees exhibiting pro-social voice behavior propose ways of facing challenges based on cooperation and suggest constructive ideas that can help the organization evolve (see Figure 1).

--- Insert Figure 1 here ---

2.1 Supervisor's Job Insecurity and Subordinate's Work Engagement

According to Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984), job insecurity refers to a feeling of "powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation" (p. 438). Prior studies indicate that supervisors tend to influence the extent to which employees engage at their work. Unlike supportive supervisors who help the subordinates overcoming hurdles, non-supportive supervisors create hurdles for the employees (Rothmann and Rothmann Jr, 2010). Insecure supervisors are expected to diminish the psychological safety of the subordinates and in turn reduce their work engagement levels.

This phenomenon can be explained using social exchange theory (SET). According to this theory, individuals reciprocate what they get from others and it is reflected in the way they behave (Blau, 1964). In the context of workplace, employees who perceive that their supervisor trusts them and finds them valuable, they would respond with positive behavior by increasing their level of engagement at work (Settoon, Bennett, and Liden 1996). In line with this argument, if supervisors are insecure about their job, the subordinates would reduce attaching themselves

with their work in order to make their supervisors feel safe. Studies including Hellgren, Sverke, and Isaksson (1999), Rothmann and Joubert (2007), Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, Witte, and Alarco (2008), and De Spiegelaere, Van Gyes, De Witte, Niesen, and Van Hootegem, (2014) have discovered a significant negative relationship between job insecurity and work engagement. However, these studies examined the job security of the respondent and not of the supervisor.

Croucher, Rizov, and Goolaup (2014a) and Croucher, Rizov, and Goolaup (2014b) argued that the supervisor-subordinate relationship is negatively affected if supervisors do not adequately communicate the strategic decisions taken at the top hierarchical levels of the organization to their subordinates. The authors of this study argue that the supervisors who perceive that their subordinates have potential to replace them are less likely to make their subordinates aware about the on-goings at the top of the organizational hierarchy. Thus, it would be interesting to test the following hypothesis:

H1: Supervisor's job insecurity is negatively related to subordinates' work engagement

2.2 Mediating Role of Subordinates' Pro-social Voice

According to Morrison (2014), supervisor's behavior has a key role in influencing a subordinate's behavior at work. It becomes easier for the subordinates to focus on their work if their supervisors listen to their concerns. However, subordinates often hesitate in raising their pro-social voice to avoid risking their camaraderie with their supervisors who typically control resources and rewards. This hesitation coupled with a supervisor's job insecurity discourages them to voice their concerns (Takeuchi, Chen, and Cheung, 2012). Previous literature suggests that voice thrives when the supervisor solicits inputs and engages in constructive talks (Fast,

Burris, and Bartel, 2013). A study was done by Cheng, Lu, Chang, and Johnstone (2013) using Taiwanese employees to understand the impact of a supervisor's motives on the subordinate's voice behavior. The results of their study indicated that the subordinate's pro-social voice is a function of the supervisor's job insecurity such that an insecure supervisor restricts the subordinate's pro-social voice.

Employee voice is also related to employee engagement. Recently, Rees, Alfes, and Gatenby (2013) conducted a study to understand the relationship between employee voice and employee engagement. The basic premise for their study was that when employees feel that they are valued and involved, they are more likely to invest their energy fully on their work. One of the ways by which employees feel grateful is the availability of the opportunities to convey their views upwards.

Croucher, Rizov, and Goolaup (2014a) and Croucher, Rizov, and Goolaup (2014b) argued that it is not only the communication of strategic decisions through the supervisor to subordinate that is important but also that the role of organizational mechanisms in hearing the subordinates' regular feedback is essential. Therefore, the authors of this study argue that supervisors' job insecurity would affect their subordinates' work engagement through the perception of the subordinates that they voice their concerns. Since the subordinates' voice is affected by supervisors' job insecurity and affects their engagement at work, there are chances that subordinates' voice mediates the direct relationship between the supervisor's job insecurity and the subordinates' work engagement. Thus, we arrive at the following hypothesis:

H2: The subordinate's voice mediates the relationship between the supervisors' job insecurity and the subordinates' work engagement

2.3 Moderating Role of Organizational Culture

The relationship between the supervisor's job insecurity and the subordinate's pro-social voice is also affected by the strength of the organizational culture. Due to the presence of several definitions of organizational culture, Barney (1986) suggested a definition that was consistent with the majority of previous definitions. According to the author, it is "a complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols that define the way in which a firm conducts its business" (p. 657).

Erdogan, Liden, and Kraimer (2006) argued that the organizational culture plays a crucial role in influencing the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Since the organizational culture is a set of norms and values followed by the majority of the employees, it is likely to affect the behaviors of both, the supervisor and the subordinate (Schein, 1990). If the core values are shared among the majority of employees, the culture of the organization is considered strong and any deviation from those values is perceived as a 'wrong' being committed (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, and Rupp, 2001).

According to the argument of Botero and Van Dyne (2009), the employee voice is an 'affiliative organizational citizenship behavior' which is exhibited as reciprocation to the benefits the organization has bestowed to the employee. It is argued that a strong organizational culture would reduce the negative impact of supervisor's job insecurity on the subordinate's pro-social voice (see Figure 1). To this end, we stipulate:

H3: Organizational culture moderates the relationship between the supervisor's job insecurity and the subordinate's pro-social voice.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

In the present study, 168 employees working in a large Indian eye hospital with over 1,700 employees participated. The employees of the hospital work both, in an individual capacity as well as in teams. However, since teams keep on changing, subordinate would hereafter mean vertical subordinate in the organizational hierarchy. The importance of engagement in the healthcare industry has been highlighted by Bright, Kayes, Worrall, and McPherson (2015). A structured questionnaire was administered to 200 employees working in different functions/departments of the organization. They were selected at random. We note a response rate of 84%. The average age of respondents was 29.87 years. About 39% of them were men, and their mean work experience was 5.28 years (min. = 0.17 years and max. = 24.75 years). Their posts varied from floor in-charge to assistant manager. The merit of this sample lies in its wide range of age, designations, and work experience.

3.2 Measures

Job insecurity was measured using a multiplicative of a 10-item importance (sample item: You may be laid off for a short while) and a 10-item likelihood of change (sample item: Lose your job and be laid off for a short while?) sub-scale offered by Ashford, Lee, and Bobko (1989). The items of both sub-scales were identical but different in format. For example, to rate importance,

the respondents were given the following instruction: “Assume for a moment that each of the following events could happen to you; how important to you personally is the possibility that ...”. For likelihood of change, they were given the following instruction: “Again, thinking about the future, how likely is it that each of these events might actually occur to you in your current job?”. The sub-scales were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely to 5 = very likely) (refer to Appendix 1 for all the scale-items).

Employee voice was assessed using Dyne, Ang, and Botero’s (2003) five-item scale. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). A sample item is: “I speak up with ideas for new projects that might benefit the organization”.

Work engagement was captured using Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova’s (2006) nine-item scale on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). A sample item is: “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”.

Organizational culture was measured using the scale used by Deshpande and Farley (1999), with 16 items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always). A sample item is: “My organization is a very personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves”. Here, variation in organizational culture means variation in the perception of participants about the culture of their organization.

3.3 Data Analyses

Data were analyzed in two phases. In the first phase, reliability of the data was checked with the help of Cronbach’s alpha values. Also, correlation coefficients were calculated to ensure that variables are reasonably related to each other. Once the initial tests were satisfactory, the second phase was executed. Specifically, the mediating and moderating effects were checked to test the

study's hypotheses. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was performed to understand these effects. Interaction graphs were drawn to interpret the moderating effect of organizational culture.

4. Results

Reliability coefficients for all the main variables under investigation were more than the minimum threshold of 0.70. It shows that the constructs were internally consistent. Next, all the main variables under investigation were significantly correlated with each other as shown in Table 1. However, job security was comparatively less strongly correlated with organizational culture ($r = -.19, p < .05$). It shows that the relationship between supervisors' job insecurity and organizational culture is significant but weak and negative.

--- Insert Table 1 here ---

4.1 Test for Mediation

To test the mediating role of employee pro-social voice between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinate's work engagement, Baron and Kenny's (1986) criterion was followed. Accordingly, in the first step, the direct relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinate's work engagement was checked and was found to be significant. It indicates support for hypothesis H1. Also, the relationship between employee pro-social voice and work engagement was significant ($\beta = .29; p = .006$). In the second step, on addition of subordinate's pro-social voice in the relationship, the direct relationship became insignificant. This shows presence of full-mediation and supports hypothesis H2. The results are shown in Table 2.

--- Insert Table 2 here ---

4.2 Test for Moderation

The degree to which the interaction between organizational culture with supervisor's job insecurity affects subordinate's pro-social voice was tested by using OLS regression, resulting in three models. In Step 1, only the impact of supervisor's job insecurity was tested (Model 1). The relationship was found to be significant. In Step 2, organizational culture was introduced in Model 1, which led us to Model 2. As expected, both supervisor's job insecurity and organizational culture were still significantly related to the subordinate's pro-social voice. Finally, in Step 3, the interaction term (supervisor's job insecurity \times organizational culture) was introduced, which allowed us to arrive at Model 3. This addition of the interaction term made the relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinate's pro-social voice insignificant. It indicates support for hypothesis H3. The results of the moderation analysis are shown in Table 3.

--- Insert Table 3 here ---

As shown in Figure 2, under a supervisor who is low in job insecurity, employees feel free to voice their concerns. Conversely, under a supervisor who is high in job insecurity employees do not feel free to voice their concerns. Interestingly, when organizational culture is strong, the negative relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinate's pro-social voice becomes stronger. Conversely, when organizational culture is weak, the negative relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinate's pro-social voice becomes weaker.

--- Insert Figure 2 here ---

5. Discussion

This study contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, it supports and augments the results of the previous studies by Settoon, Bennett, and Liden (1996), Cuyper et al. (2008), and De Spiegelare et al. (2014). Second, it questions the mechanism adopted by Erdogan, Liden, and Kraimer's (2006) who suggested that strong organizational culture would have a positive impact on employees. Third, it contributes to and further validates social exchange theory. All these contributions have been detailed in the following paragraphs.

The results of this study are broadly in line with that of prior studies. Support to hypothesis 1 that supervisor's job insecurity is negatively related to subordinate's work engagement confirms the study of Settoon, Bennett, and Liden's (1996). Prior studies including Cuyper et al. (2008) and De Spiegelare et al. (2014), among others, focused only on examining the relationship of work engagement and job insecurity for the same employee. This study augments this finding, suggesting that supervisor's job insecurity is negatively related to work engagement of the employee.

Hypothesis 2's stipulation that subordinate's voice mediates the relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinate's work engagement also found support in this study. This indicates that subordinates voice their concerns to reduce the negative impact of their supervisor's job insecurity on their engagement levels. This finding provides empirical evidence to support the arguments of Fast, Burris, and Bartel (2013), Morrison (2014), and Takeuchi, Chen, and Cheung (2012) that employees would be able voice their concerns when the supervisor wants to listen and encourages discussions and suggestions.

Hypothesis 3 that organizational culture moderates the relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinate's pro-social voice was also supported. Although the present study

finds that Erdogan, Liden, and Kraimer's (2006) argument about the potential impact of organizational culture on employees can be supported, the direction of impact was against expectations. As shown in Figure 2, a strong organizational culture strengthens the negative relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and work engagement of the employees. Such a result is a cause of concern for the organization as it suggests that there are certain inherent characteristics of the organizational culture which restrict employees voice their concerns if their supervisor feels insecure.

The study contributes to social exchange theory in several ways. Most of the prior studies examined the impact of job insecurity of an individual on the same individual's engagement. This study contributes to the theory by suggesting that the supervisor's job insecurity is an important predictor of subordinate's work engagement. The results of this study also augment the theoretical understanding of the intervening role of organizational culture as a moderator to affect the supervisor-subordinate level variables.

The outcome of this study has several implications for managers. First, the result that the supervisors' job insecurity has a negative impact on work engagement may encourage organizations to provide counseling to remove fear of losing their job. Second, the mediating role of the subordinate's pro-social voice may make managers reward their subordinates who are high in voicing their concerns. However, this is suggested only if the supervisors' job insecurity is low. This is because if the subordinate voice their concerns with those supervisors who are high on job insecurity, it may further exacerbate the supervisor's job insecurity. Third, the finding that organizational culture is important in affecting the degree to which supervisor's job insecurity impacts subordinate's pro-social voice provides a trigger for the managers to be careful in assigning a supervisory role to an employee. Fourth, the result that organizational culture

strengthens the negative relationship between job insecurity and employee voice calls for renewed considerations to assess the presence of any weaknesses or loopholes in the prevailing organizational culture.

This study has, of course, some limitations. These include the cross-sectional nature of the data which limits cause and effect related interpretations. Future studies are encouraged to validate the results by carrying out a longitudinal survey design. Another limitation is that the target population was limited to hospitals which might have limited the extent to which the results can be generalized in the other industries. Researchers engaged in future endeavors may wish to conduct studies in diverse industries and multiple contexts.

6. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to understand the role of organizational culture and subordinate's pro-social voice in affecting the relationship between supervisor's job insecurity and subordinates' work engagement. The study results indicated that supervisor's job insecurity impacts subordinates' work engagement through subordinate's pro-social voice. It was also established that organizational culture moderates the relationship between the supervisor's job insecurity and the subordinate's pro-social voice. Interestingly, it moderates such that organizational culture strengthens the negative relationship between job insecurity and subordinate's pro-social voice.

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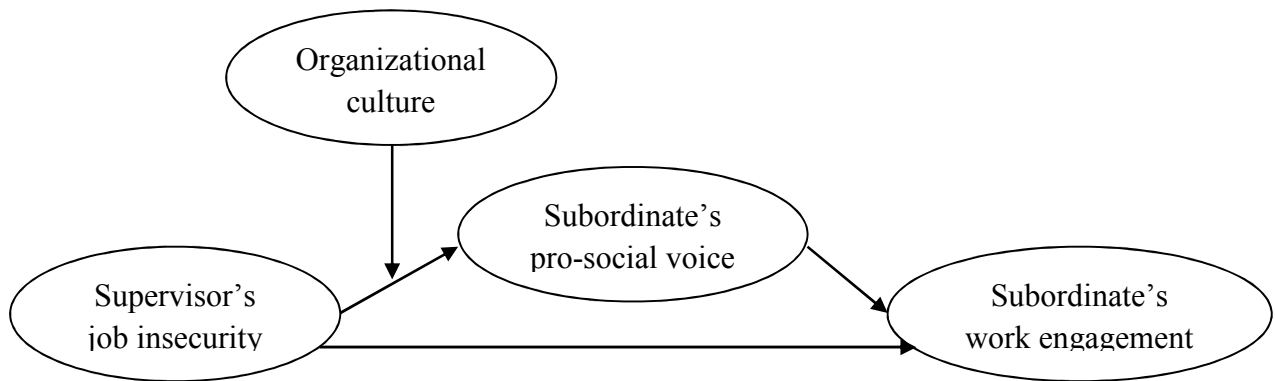


Figure 1. The hypothesized model

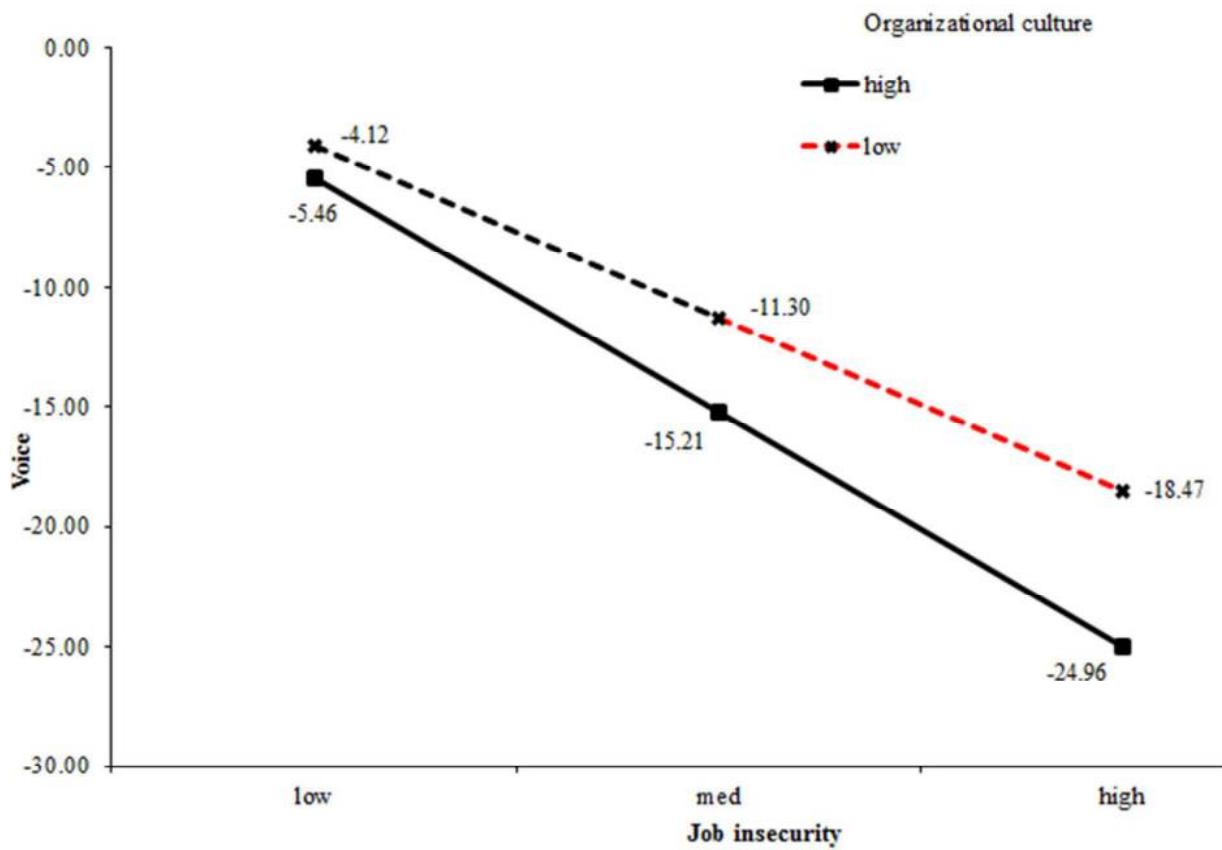


Figure 2. The interaction graph between supervisor’s job insecurity and organizational culture.

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Table 1: Correlation coefficients and reliability values[§]

Construct	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Age	19.00	50.00	29.87	6.38				
1 Job insecurity ^a	1.10	15.80	4.50	2.43	0.81			
2 Organizational culture	2.13	4.88	4.07	0.57	-.19*	0.84		
3 Employee pro-social voice	1.60	5.00	3.77	0.76	-.30**	.28**	0.71	
4 Work engagement	2.11	5.00	4.28	0.56	-.20**	.56**	.32**	0.75

Note. ^abased on the average of the multiplicative of each item of ‘importance’ and ‘likelihood of change’ scales. [§]All the main constructs were measured on Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Table 2: Regression results for the test of mediation

Variable	Work engagement	
	Standardized path coefficient without mediator	Standardized path coefficient with mediator
Job insecurity	-.20**	-.11
Employee voice		.29***
ΔF	6.92	14.21
ΔR^2	.04**	.08***
Total R^2	.04	.12

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

Table 3: Regression results for the test of moderation by organizational culture

Variable	Employee pro-social voice		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Job insecurity	-.30***	-.26**	.97
Organizational culture		.23**	.57***
Job insecurity \times Organizational culture			-1.23**
ΔF	16.83	9.90	9.63
ΔR^2	.09***	.05**	.05**
Total R^2	.09	.14	.19

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Appendix 1

(Scale Items)

Item no. Item

Work Engagement (WE)

- 1 At my work, I feel bursting with energy (WE1)
- 2 At my job, I feel strong and vigorous (WE2)
- 3 I am enthusiastic about my job (WE1)
- 4 My job inspires me (WE4)
- 5 When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work (WE5)
- 6 I feel happy when I am working intensely (WE6)
- 7 I am proud on the work that I do (WE7)
- 8 I am immersed in my work (WE8)
- 9 I get carried away when I'm working (WE9)

Employee's Voice (EV)

- 10 I express solutions to problems with the cooperative motive of benefiting the organization. (EV1)
- 11 I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect the organization. (EV2)
- 12 I communicate my opinions about work issues even if others disagree. (EV3)
- 13 I speak up with ideas for new projects that might benefit the organization. (EV4)

- 14 I suggest ideas for change, based on constructive concern for the organization.
(EV5)

Organizational Culture (OC)

- 1 My organization is a very personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves. (OC1)
- 2 My organization is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks. (OC2)
- 3 My organization is a very formalized and structural place. Established procedures generally govern what people do. (OC3)
- 4 My organization is very production oriented. A major concern is with getting the job done, without much personal involvement. (OC4)
- 5 The head of my organization is generally considered to be a mentor, sage, or a father or mother figure. (OC5)
- 6 The head of my organization is generally considered to be an entrepreneur, and innovator, or a risk taker (OC6)
- 7 The head of my organization is generally considered to be coordinator, an organizer, or an administrator (OC7)
- 8 The head of my organization is generally considered to be a producer, a technician, or a hard-driver. (OC8)
- 9 The glue that holds my organization together is loyalty and tradition. Commitment to this firm runs high. (OC9)
- 10 The glue that holds my organization together is a commitment to innovation and development. There is an emphasis on being first. (OC10)

- 11 The glue that holds my organization together is formal rules and policies.
Maintaining a smooth running institution is important here. (OC11)
- 12 The glue that holds my organization together is the emphasis on tasks and goal accomplishment. A production orientation is commonly shared. (OC12)
- 13 My organization emphasizes human resources. High cohesion and morale in the firm are important. (OC13)
- 14 My organization emphasizes growth and acquiring new resources. Readiness to meet new challenges is important. (OC14)
- 15 My organization emphasizes permanence and stability. Efficient, smooth operations are important. (OC15)
- 16 My organization emphasizes competitive actions and achievement. Measurable goals are important. (OC16)

Job Insecurity - Importance (JI)

- 1 You may lose your job and be moved to a lower level within the organization? (JI1)
- 2 You may lose your job and be moved to another job at the same level within the organization? (JI2)
- 3 The number of work hours the company can offer you to work may fluctuate from day to day? (JI3)
- 4 You may be moved to a different job at a higher position in your current location? (JI4)
- 5 You may be moved to a different job at a higher position in another geographic location? (JI5)
- 6 You may be laid off for a short while? (JI6)

- 7 You may be laid off permanently? (JI7)
- 8 Your department or division's future may be uncertain? (JI8)
- 9 You may be fired? (JI9)
- 10 You may be pressured to accept early retirement? (JI10)

Job Insecurity-likelihood (JI)

- 1 Lose your job and be moved to a lower level job within the organization? (JI11)
- 2 Lose your job and be moved to another job at the same level within the organization? (JI12)
- 3 Find that the number of hours the company can offer you to work may fluctuate from day to day? (JI13)
- 4 Be moved to a higher position within your current location? (JI14)
- 5 Be moved to a higher position in another geographic location? (JI15)
- 6 Lose your job and be laid off for a short while? (JI16)
- 7 Lose your job and be laid off permanently? (JI17)
- 8 Find your department or division's future uncertain? (JI18)
- 9 Lose your job by being fired? (JI19)
- 10 Lose your job by being pressured to accept early retirement? (JI20)