

JOB INSECURITY AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

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Abstract

The current research aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the antecedents of job insecurity, and specifically focused on the perceived job insecurity; importance and probability of events likely to affect one's total job. The aim of the current study was to explore relationships between the perceptions of perceived organisational support (POS), perceived employability, role ambiguity and role overload, and job insecurity. A questionnaire made up of seven separate scales investigated the perceptions of 100 employees from several different organisations experiencing change (e.g. recently been through a change process, currently going through a change process, about to go through a change process in the near future). Results confirmed three of the main hypotheses of the current study, suggesting negative relationships between POS, perceived employability, role overload and the dependent variable job insecurity (probability). Further analyses indicate that POS is a significant predictor of job insecurity (probability), and role overload and employability are significant predictors of job insecurity (importance). Overall, this paper provides support for the relationship between the antecedents highlighted in this study and job insecurity. Practical implications and directions for further research are discussed.

Introduction

The Changing Nature of Work

Working life has been subject to dramatic change over the past decades, with changes in career structures and the work environment including increasing number of women in the workforce, new labour laws, aging workforce, introduction of new technologies and automated work processes (Macky, 2004). Furthermore, current economic conditions, raised by the 2008 global financial crisis, have led to massive restructuring initiatives in organisations worldwide, frequently resulting in downsizing or changes to employment conditions. These changes concern issues such as increased economic dependency between countries, rapidly changing consumer markets, and escalated demands for flexibility within as well as between organisations (Sverke, Hellgren & Näswall, 2006). As a consequence, organisations have been forced to engage in various adaptive strategies in order to overcome new demands, remain competitive and survive in this unpredictable environment. Organisations have two options to cope with these new demands and remain profitable: they can either increase their gains or decrease their costs, often by reducing the number of employees (Cascio, 1998). With these options in mind, many organisations engage in actions like “outsourcings, privatizations, mergers and acquisitions, often in combination with personnel reductions through layoffs, offers of early retirement, and increased utilization of subcontracted workers” (Sverke et al., 2006, p. 3)

Downsizing has been one of the most commonly used strategies by organisations tackling new demands of the current economic climate. Downsizing, by definition, involves methods of personnel reduction. Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) defined downsizing as “the planned elimination of positions or jobs” (p. 11). Downsizing has also been defined as an

organisational decision aimed at reducing the workforce and improving organisational performance (Sverke et al., 2006). This type of reorganisation strategy tends to create feelings of worry and uncertainty amongst the workforce. Such feelings may concern the survival of the organisation as a whole, as well as the future existence of the employee's present job or valued features of the job.

The transformation of working life has brought the issue of insecure working conditions to the forefront and, as result of the social, technological, and economic issues described above, job insecurity has emerged as one of the most important issues in contemporary work life, a phenomenon that has consequently become frequently studied among scholars and researchers (Sverke, Hellgren & Naswall, 2002). The following sections address the conceptualisation and nature of job insecurity, its impact on employees and organisations, and its antecedents.

Conceptualisation of Job Insecurity

The construct of job insecurity and its meaning has shifted from a 'motivator' (job security) during the 1960s and 70s to being defined as a stressor (job insecurity) in the 1980s (Greenlagh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke et al. 2006). Changes in the economic and labour market since the 1980s have resulted in an increase in perceptions of job insecurity (Clarke, 2007; De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Bernston, De Witte & Alarco, 2008; Silla, De Cuyper, Gracia, Peiro & De Witte, 2009). Job insecurity is one of the most significant stressors in modern working life (De Cuyper et al. 2008) and more than two thirds of New Zealand employees will, at some time, be concerned with the security of their job (Macky, 2004).

Greenlagh and Rosenblatt (1984) were one of the first to place job insecurity in a larger conceptual framework and their theoretical model summed up the definitions of job

insecurity and elaborated on the potential causes, effects and organisational consequences of the phenomenon. Greenlagh and Rosenblatt (1984) defined job insecurity as a “perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation” (1984, p. 438). They further maintained that job insecurity is based on the individual’s perceptions and interpretations of the immediate work environment (Sverke et al., 2006). This implies that subjectively experienced threats are derived from objective threats by means of the individual’s perceptual and cognitive processes (Sverke et al, 2006). Many somewhat similar definitions have been presented in the literature since the theoretical starting point of Greenlagh and Rosenblatt’s (1984) conceptual definition of job insecurity. Job insecurity has also been described as, for example:

- “one’s expectations about continuity in a job situation” (Davey, Kinicki, & Scheck, 1997, p. 323);
- “an overall concern about the future existence of the job” (Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996, p. 587);
- “an employee’s perception of a potential threat to continuity in his or her current job” (Heaney, Israel, & House, 1994, p. 1431);
- “a discrepancy between the level of security a person experiences and the level she or he might prefer” (Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans & van Vuuren, 1991, p. 7);
- “the subjectively experienced anticipation of a fundamental and involuntary event” (Sverke et al., 2002, p. 243).

However, agreement has not yet been reached on either the definition of job insecurity or its measurement (Klandermans & van Vuuren, 1999). Nevertheless, job insecurity has usually been conceptualised from two points of view, that is, either as a global or as a multidimensional concept. According to the global view, job insecurity is defined as the threat of job loss or job uncertainty (Kinnunen, Mauno, Natti & Happonen, 1999). However,

those researchers who have adopted the multidimensional definition of job insecurity argue that job insecurity refers not only to the amount of uncertainty an employee feels about his or her job continuity, but also about the continuity of certain dimensions of the job, such as opportunities for promotion or fluctuations in daily work hours (Mauno & Kinnunen, 2002). These two concepts; global and multidimensional, have also been defined as quantitative and qualitative (Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson, 1999). Quantitative job insecurity is similar to the global conceptualisations of the construct. Qualitative job insecurity pertains to perceptions of potential loss of quality in the employment relationship, such as deterioration of working conditions, demotion, lack of career opportunities, decreasing salary development, and concerns about person-organisation fit in the future.

The current study investigates the multidimensional (qualitative) approach of job insecurity, which assesses both the threat of job loss or job uncertainty and the continuity of certain dimensions or features of the job. Furthermore, the perceived threat of the occurrences of various events that would negatively affect an individual's total job and the importance attached to each of these potentialities are also investigated (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989). The measurement of importance and the likelihood of changes affecting total job are treated separately in the current study.

Impact of Job Insecurity

Job insecurity is related to a range of negative individual and organisational outcomes (Silla et al., 2009). The radical change from a traditionally secure working environment to a rapidly changing and insecure one could be expected to have an impact not only on the well-being of the individuals, but also on their work attitudes and behaviour, and, in the long run, on the vitality of the organisation. As phrased by Greenlough and Rosenblatt (1984), "workers

react to job insecurity, and their reactions have consequences for organisational effectiveness” (p, 438).

Generally, findings show that work attitudes and behaviours are adversely affected by job insecurity. For example, job insecurity was associated with decreased trust in organisations (Ashford et al., 1989), decreased organisational loyalty (Loseby, 1992), and a decrease in perceived organisational support (Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996; Ruvio & Rosenblatt, 1999). Job insecurity also affected organisational commitment, resistance to change, and intention to leave (Ashford et al., 1989; Davy et al., 1997). Finally, perceived work performance (but not objective work performance) was negatively associated with job insecurity (Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996; Ruvio & Rosenblatt, 1999).

Antecedents of Job Insecurity

In order to further understand the phenomenon of job insecurity, it is important to take into consideration its potential antecedents. Job insecurity experiences, regardless whether they are qualitative or quantitative, arise from an interaction between situational characteristics and characteristics of the individual that influence the interpretation the individual makes of the environmental factors.

Researchers have categorized antecedents of job insecurity into three groups (Greenlough & Rosenblatt, 1984; Kinnunen et al. 1999):

1. Organizational and environmental conditions (e.g. organizational change and communication)
2. Individual and positional characteristics (e.g. age, gender, socio-economic status, contract type), and
3. Personal Characteristics (e.g. self-esteem, sense of coherence, personality)

The current study will investigate four antecedents that are likely to impact perceptions of job insecurity; *Perceived Organisational Support (Climate perceptions)*, *Employability*, and *Role ambiguity and Role overload (Role Features)*. The study focuses on employees' perceptions of these variables.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS)

Most organisational behaviour models focus on perceptions of the work environment, referred to generally as 'organisational climate' (Patterson, West, Shackleton, Dawson, Lawthom, Maitlis, Robinson & Wallace, 2005), which is understood as an intervening variable between the context of an organization and the behaviour of its members (Patterson et al., 2005). The current study will investigate employees' climate perceptions of their organisations, in particular 'perceived organisational support' (POS) and its relationship with their perception of their level of job insecurity. POS is commonly defined in the literature as the extent to which individuals believe that their employing organisation values their contributions and cares for their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). POS has been shown to be related to a range of positive employee attitudes and behaviours at work, including, for example, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, various forms of citizenship and discretionary behaviour, attendance and intention to stay in the organisation (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Research on downsizing suggests that the turbulence and uncertainty associated with major job elimination programs tend, by and large, to have a negative effect on employee work attitudes and behaviour (Luthans & Sommer, 1999). Excessive downsizing experiences has created a new psychosocial problem called the "survivor syndrome" (Appelbaum, Delage, Labib & Gault, 1997) which refers to the people left after an organisation has

undergone a redundancy or downsizing process (Baruch & Hind, 1998). It has been argued that those who remain within an organisation after significant downsizing or delayering often experience the adverse affects of change as profoundly as those who have left (Baruch & Hind, 1998). Organisations have under-estimated the negative effects of downsizing and do not take into account the difficulties of motivating a surviving workforce emotionally damaged by watching others lose their jobs (Appelbaum et al., 1997). Yet, motivating survivors to achieve greater productivity is essential for company success and employee job security (Appelbaum et al., 1997). Downsizing creates important effects inside and outside an organisational environment. In fact, downsizing results in dividing the organisation into groups; those who stay but watch others leave, those who are expected to leave in the near future but are still working for the organisation, and those that fear they may be made to leave, though there is no objective indication of redundancy (Appelbaum et al., 1997). The impact of downsizing has serious implications for employees' emotions, attitudes and behaviours and as a result can create feelings of uncertainty and negatively affect employees' perceived organisational support (Baruch & Hind, 1999).

POS represents a reciprocal relationship between employees and organisation and POS is expected to be related to one's reaction to restructuring. Consequently, POS may be important in understanding the evaluation of the organisational change processes. For example, if an employee perceives high support from the organisation, restructuring or downsizing may be perceived as less threatening. In line with social exchange arguments, individuals whose job in the organization is insecure and uncertain are less likely to feel a sense of support from the organisation itself (Lee & Peccei, 2007). Thus, one would expect job insecurity to undermine any sense of POS that individuals may have toward the organization Thus, I hypothesise the following:

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative, significant relationship between perceived organisational support and job insecurity, among employees in downsizing organisations

Employability

Nowadays, job insecurity as a result of lack of employability is a risk factor for all individual employees (Van Dam, 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Employability has become a key element in the job insecurity debate, to whether it affects the experience of job insecurity. Unlike job insecurity research, employability research is still scarce. The present study aims to investigate the association between job insecurity and employability. There is no consensus on how to define employability (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004; Kanter 1989; Kluytmans & Ott, 1999). However, most authors agree that employability refers to the employee's chance of finding alternative employment, either on the internal or the external labour market (Forrier & Sels, 2003) and the individual's ability to make labour market transitions. This concept has been assessed using both objective and subjective indicators. Using objective indicators, authors have measured employability relating to human capital or career indicators such as education, occupational position or number of job changes (Elman & O'Rand, 2002; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Van Dam, 2004; Worth, 2002). However, recently authors have defined employability by subjective indicators, such as "the individual's perception of the available alternatives in the internal and/or external labour market" (March & Simon, 1958). Berntson & Marklund (2007) also define employability as "the individual's perception of their possibilities to achieve a new job". The current study adopts this definition of employability when aiming at investigating employee's experience of job insecurity. Subjective indicators may more accurately capture the interplay between contextual and individual factors, which are the key in all employability models (Forrier & Sels, 2003).

Perceived Employability

Individuals' interpretations/perceptions of their work environment and professional attributes have been shown to affect work related attitudes and behaviours, such as perceptions of employability and perceptions of job insecurity (Silla et al., 2009). Perceptions of employability are defined as an individual's perceptions of the characteristics which allow him or her to be proactive and changeable in his or her career (Fugate et al. 2004; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Perceptions of employability include perceptions of one's professional capability, alongside perceptions of employment context variables, such as labour market changes, organisational changes and demand for one's occupation (Fugate et al. 2004).

According to Fugate et al.'s (2004) model, perceptions of adaptability, career identity and human and social capital increase perceptions of employability. Adaptability is comprised of characteristics such as optimism, motivation to learn, openness, internal locus of control and self-efficacy, which increase an individual's ability to be proactive and changeable in their career (Fugate et al., 2004). Career identity is a psychological construct comprised of an individual's hopes, goals, values, beliefs and norms relating to careers (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle & Waters, 2007). Career identity is used to guide an individual's career direction independent of an organisation, which is especially important in times of career transition or job insecurity (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle & Waters, 2007). Human capital comprises perceptions of the level of education, work experience, and cognitive ability acquired by an individual throughout his or her career (Fugate et al., 2004). Social capital is the knowledge gained through social networks and social support, which can guide career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004).

Job Insecurity and Perceived Employability

Authors suggest that perceived employability may reduce the likely unfavourable consequences of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Fugate et al. 2004; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). Specifically, they suggest that the magnitude of the relationship between job insecurity and well-being decreases when employees perceive many rather than few alternative employment opportunities (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Fugate et al. 2004; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). In addition to reducing strain, employability has shown a positive relationship with job satisfaction (Berntson & Marklund, 2007).

Employability has been portrayed as a potential antecedent of job insecurity (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Sverke et al., 2002): high-employable workers may be less likely to perceive job insecurity than low-employable workers. Some theories suggest that perceptions of reduced job insecurity in highly-employable workers result from employment in objectively secure jobs. For example, De Cuyper et al., (2008) suggests that less educated workers are more likely to be employed in insecure jobs than highly educated workers, and thus, they may be more likely to perceive job insecurity, perhaps suggesting education level moderates the relationship between employability and job insecurity.

Another theory to explain the relationship between employability and job insecurity is the Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Employable workers may interpret the contemporary labour market and turbulent economic times favourably as a challenge rather than as a threat, which could imply that they are less likely to perceive job insecurity. In contrast low-employable workers may perceive the organisational turbulence as a threat, with likely higher job insecurity as a consequence (Cuyper et al., 2008). Berntson & Marklund (2007) suggests organisational changes predict job insecurity, particularly in workers who do not feel employable. Silla et al., (2009) and De Cuyper et al., (2008) suggested that

employees with higher perceptions of employability are protected against perceptions of job insecurity and more likely to perceive their jobs as secure.

Specific dimensions of employability have also been found to be negatively related to perceptions of job insecurity. For instance, perceptions of adaptability are likely to buffer against perceptions of job insecurity (McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall, 2007; Siebert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999). McArdle and Waters (2007) found that individuals who were adaptable were more likely to plan for unstable jobs and proactively identify employment opportunities before job loss occurred (Fugate et al. 2004). Perceptions of adaptability are also related to an individual's perceptions of control over his or her career, which are related to perceptions of job insecurity (Silla et al. 2009). Moreover, individuals with a career-focused career concept are likely to view their career as independent from an organisation (McArdle et al. 2007). They may be better able to cope with perceptions of job insecurity than those with organisation-focused career identity, as perceptions of job insecurity are not directly affecting their career self-concept (McArdle & Waters, 2007; McArdle et al., 2007). Individuals with positive perceptions of their human capital may perceive more opportunities in the labour market and may feel more confident to promote themselves within the labour market (Fugate et al., 2004). Social capital has been found to be a strong predictor of coping ability during times of job insecurity and job loss (Fugate et al., 2004). These findings indicate that perceptions of employability attributes are related to lower perceptions of job insecurity. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant, negative relationship between perceived employability and job insecurity among employees in downsizing organisations

Role Ambiguity and Role overload

Work roles hold the potential to cause a number of problems for employees such as stress related reactions. Research on role stress focuses on three main areas: role conflict, role overload and role ambiguity (Von Emster & Harrison, 1998). The present study will focus on two areas – role ambiguity and role overload. Role ambiguity has been defined as a lack of necessary information regarding role expectations for a given organisational position (Fields, 2002). Role overload refers to a situation in which work demands exceed the available resources to meet them (Gilboa, Shirom, Fried & Cooper, 2008).

Role ambiguity is a major source of stress, and a function of the discrepancy between the information available to the employee and the information needed for adequate performance (Kahn, Wolfe & Snoek, 1964). A meta-analysis by Gilboa et al., (2008) investigated the relationships of seven work-related stressors with job performance: role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, job insecurity, work-family conflict, environmental uncertainty, and situational constraints. Overall, they obtained negative relationships between performance and each stressor, including job insecurity, role ambiguity and role overload. These results suggest that role-related issues (e.g. role ambiguity and role overload) and job insecurity may have a detrimental impact on performance. However, the direction of causality could not be implied as the meta-analysis was based mostly on cross-sectional primary studies and the sample size was too small.

Role ambiguity and role overload have been described as a hindrance. However, role overload may also reflect a challenge (Gilboa et al., 2008). Role overload (which refers to a situation in which work demands exceed the available resources to meet them) may have both negative and positive effects on performance. Conceivably, overload could be regarded as a threatening stressor with an adverse effect on performance because it imposes demands on the individual who does not have enough resources (e.g. time) to overcome them. However,

role overload may also occur when high performers take on more tasks and responsibilities and therefore are motivated to perform them well. In this situation, role overload can be perceived as a challenge positively rather than negatively associated with performance (LePine, Podsakoff, LePine, 2005). Indeed, past studies have reported positive, negative, and no associations between overload and job performance (Le Pine, Le Pine & Jackson, 2004; Spector & Jex, 1998), possibly an indication that individual differences affect the relationship between role overload and performance.

The relationships between role ambiguity and overload and job insecurity have not been extensively researched. As individuals with complex job demands are often the most valued workers, it is conceivable that role overload will be negatively related to perceptions of job insecurity. Conversely, it is expected that role ambiguity will be positively related to perceptions of job insecurity. Thus, I hypothesise the following:

Hypothesis 3a): There is a positive, significant relationship between role ambiguity and job insecurity among employees in downsizing organisations

Hypothesis 3b): There is a negative, significant relationship between role overload and job insecurity among employees in downsizing organisations

Current research

The extant body of research has considered job insecurity as a specific job stressor, implying that a variety of stress responses and other negative consequences of job insecurity have been extensively studied, such as psychological and physical symptoms, organisational commitment, job satisfaction and performance. However, the antecedents of job insecurity have received less attention. The current study will examine the experience and the

antecedents of job insecurity among employees from different organisations who have either recently experienced organisational change, are currently experiencing change or are about to experience change in the near future. Thus, I hypothesise the following:

Hypothesis 4): Perceived Organisational Support, Employability, Role Ambiguity and Role Overload independently predict dimensions of Job Insecurity

Method

Participants

A total of 100 participants from around New Zealand volunteered to participate in the study where 63 of these participants completed the questionnaire via pen and paper format and 37 completed the questionnaire online. Participants were recruited through a range of organisations via email and a social networking site. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 68 years, with a mean age of 35.6 years and a standard deviation of 13.5 years. In terms of sex, 71 (71%) participants were female and 29 (29%) participants were male. Participants were employed in a range of different industries (see Table 1). The majority of participants, 71 (71%) were employed as full-time employees, 29 (29%) were part-time employees. In terms of contract type, 77 (77%) participants indicated they had a permanent contract and 23 (23%) indicated temporary contract (for example, fixed term, casual, maternity contract). Participants ranged in tenure from one month to 26.8 years, with a mean tenure of 6.37 years and a standard deviation of 6.03 years. In terms of education, majority of the participants, 73 (73%) obtained a tertiary level of education; within this 46 (46%) obtained tertiary (postgraduate) and (27%) obtained tertiary (undergraduate). The remaining 27 (27%) obtained a high school level of education.

Table 1: Industry Type Frequency Table

Industry Type	Frequency	Percent of total
Aviation	2	2%
Banking & Insurance	2	2%
Consulting	6	6%
Education	10	10%
Government	23	23%
Healthcare	13	13%
Hospitality & Tourism	11	11%
Manufacturing	2	2%
Marketing, Media & Communications	7	7%
Non profit-organisations & religion	4	4%
Performing Arts & Trades	7	7%
Retail	13	13%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100%</i>

Materials

A questionnaire was developed that included an information and consent form, demographic questions (age, sex, education, contract type, employment status, tenure, industry type, change status, size of organisation and size of unit) and pre-validated scales measuring job overload, job role ambiguity, perceived organisational support, employability, job insecurity and neuroticism. Each questionnaire commenced with the information and consent form and demographic questions then the following scales; Job Overload scale (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison & Pinneau, 1980); Job Role Ambiguity scale (Breugh & Colihan, 1994); Perceived Organizational Support (POS) (Eisenberger, Hungtington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986); Employability Scale (Janssens, Sels & Van Den Brande, 2003); Job Insecurity Scale – Abridged (Ashford et al.,1989); and Neuroticism Index (from the Eysenck Personality Inventory) (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975). The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Information page / consent form:

The information page of the questionnaire invited participants to complete a questionnaire that aimed to investigate employees' feelings and opinions toward their current job. The purpose of the study and the procedure of the questionnaire were outlined, including the incentive for participating in the research, a \$1 instant scratch kiwi. Information was given ensuring anonymity, and allowing for withdrawal at any point for all volunteering participants. Names and contact details of the three researchers were also included, should participants have any questions or concerns regarding the research. It was stated that the research had been reviewed and approved by the Psychology Department and Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury. Finally, participants indicated their consent to participate in the study by selecting the appropriate response (Yes or No). By selecting 'Yes' the participants indicated that they had read and understood the information page, understood that the information they would provide would be anonymous and that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary.

Demographic Information Section

This section asked participants to identify their sex (coded; 1 = female, 1 = male, 3 = other), age (in number of years) and their highest level of education obtained (coded; 1 = primary school, 2= high school, 2 = tertiary – undergraduate, 4 = tertiary – postgraduate). Participants were asked to indicate what type of employment contract they currently held (coded; 1 = permanent, 2 = temporary) and their employment status (coded; 1 = full-time, 2 = part-time). Participants were also asked to state how long they had been working with their current organisation, in number of years and months, and also what industry type in which they were employed (see Table 1). Participants were also asked important organisational level questions to indicate the status of their organisation's change process, whether they had

recently been through a change process (pre), currently going through a change process (present) or about to go through a change process in the near future (post), and also indicate the approximate size of their entire organisation and unit, from pre-assigned categories.

Measures

Job Overload Scale

Overload perceptions was measured by the Job Overload scale developed by Caplan et al. (1980). The scale uses eleven items to describe an employee's role overload (see Appendix A, Section B). This focuses on the employee's perceptions of quantitative role overload (rather than their mental strain or psychological pressure) and asks for description of the perceived pace and amount of work. Responses for four of the items were obtained on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = sometimes, 4 = fairly often, and 5 = very often (higher scores indicate higher levels of overload). An example, "*How often does your job require you to work very fast?*". Responses to the other seven items were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = hardly any, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = a lot, and 5 = a great deal (lower scores indicate higher levels of overload). An example, "*How much slowdown in the workload do you experience?*". Coefficient alpha values range from .72 to .81 (Fields, 2002); in the present study a Cronbach alpha of .88 was found.

Job Role Ambiguity Scale

Role ambiguity was measured by the Job Role Ambiguity scale (see Appendix A, Section C) developed by Breugh and Colihan (1994) which uses nine items to measure role ambiguity in three areas: (1) work methods, defined as employee uncertainty about the methods to use to perform a job; (2) work scheduling, defined as uncertainty about the

sequence in which tasks should be performed, the allocation of their time, and the sequence for performing certain tasks; and (3) performance evaluation, defined as employee uncertainty concerning the standards that are used for measuring and assessing whether job performance is satisfactory. Responses were obtained using a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree (lower scores indicate higher levels of ambiguity). The internal consistency reliability of the combined scale was .89 (Fields, 2002); in the present study, a Cronbach alpha of .83 was found.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) Scale

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) was measured by a 9 item scale (short version), developed by Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) (see Appendix A, Section D). Items were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to indicate the extent of the participants' agreement with each item where higher scores indicate higher POS. A sample item is *"The organization values my contribution to its well-being."* Previous research (e.g. Eisenberger et al., 1986) has provided validation evidence for this scale; reliability coefficient $\alpha = .97$; in the present study, a Cronbach alpha of .96 was found.

Employability Scale

The employability scale, developed by Janssens et al. (2003) measured perceptions of employability which can be defined as the perceived ease of movement in the labour market (Trevor, 2001) (see Appendix A, Section E). Employability was measured by three items: *"It will be difficult to find new employment if I leave this organisation"*, *"In case I'm dismissed, I'll immediately find another job of equal value"*, and *"I'm confident that I would find another job if I started searching"*. Participants were asked to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 =

strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree (higher scores indicate higher perceived employability). Coefficient alpha of the employability scale is $\alpha = .80$ (Janssens et al, 2003); in the present study, a Cronbach alpha of .72 was found.

Job Insecurity Scale– Total Job; importance and probability

The Job Insecurity Scale – Total Job used was an 18-item short version measure of the original 57-item JIS developed by Ashford et al. (1989) (See Appendix A, Section F). The JIS – Total Job determined individual perceptions of job insecurity by measuring two subscales; the importance and the probability or likelihood of changes affecting total job. The original 57-item JIS developed by Ashford et al. (1989) incorporated five sub-scales (importance of job features, probability of negative change to these job features, importance of total job changes, likelihood of change to total job and powerlessness). For the purpose of the present study, an 18 item scale was chosen to measure two subscales: the importance of total job changes (9 items) and the likelihood of change to total job (9 items). Participants were asked to rate the importance and likelihood of changes to total job items using a 5-point Likert-type scale for each subscale, where 1 = very unimportant to 5 = very important (measuring the importance of total job changes) and, 1 = very unlikely to 5 = very likely (measuring the probability or likelihood of changes to total job). The JIS – Total Job can be scored in terms of each subscale or as a total score (Ashford et al. 1989). The current study assesses each scale separately. Coefficient alphas of the two subscales of the JIS – Total Job; importance and probability, were $\alpha = .74$ and $\alpha = .75$ respectively (Ashford et al. 1989); in the present study a Cronbach alpha of .83 was found for importance, and .81 for probability.

Neuroticism Index

A measure of neuroticism was also included in the questionnaire. Neuroticism is a relatively stable underlying personality trait that may mark a negative reporting style (Burgard, Brand & House, 2009). A neuroticism index was used, based on the four items from the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975). Participants were asked to “Please indicate how well each of the following describes you – not at all (1), a little (2), some (3), or a lot (4).” Items included in the index were: moody, worrying, nervous, and calm. Scores across items were averaged for all individuals reporting at least two items, and the anchors ranged from 1 (least) to 4 (most neurotic). Coefficient alphas of the Neuroticism Index ranged from .78 to .80 (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975); in the present study a Cronbach alpha of .75 was found.

Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaire by either paper-and-pen format or an online format using *Qualtrics*, a free survey development and administration tool hosted by the University of Canterbury web servers for the Department of Psychology. The use of both formats allowed the collection of more participants.

Version 1 – Paper-and-pen

Firstly, invitations to participate in the study were sent via email and the social networking site *Facebook* outlining the nature of the research and the criteria of participants required for the study. Change was the main criterion of the study thus the following criteria of participants were required:

Employees affiliated with change in their current organisation e.g. recently been through change / currently going through change / going through change in the near future. Examples of change were given e.g. restructuring, downsizing or relocating.

Eligible participants were recruited through a range of organisations within Christchurch to complete the questionnaire via paper-and-pen format. With these methods, a snowballing effect was employed. Participants received the same invitation to complete the questionnaire, but were asked to forward the invitation onto family members, work colleagues and friends who may also be eligible and wish to participate.

Eligible participants received the information and consent form (see Appendix B), the questionnaire and an envelope to seal the questionnaire upon completion to ensure anonymity. Each participant received a \$1 instant scratch kiwi in return for their time.

Version 2 - online

Secondly, to cater for participant interest outside of the Christchurch region, the questionnaire was administered online. Same method was applied as the paper-and-pen format, invitations to participate in the study were sent via email and the social networking site *Facebook* outlining the nature of the research and the criteria of participants required for the study. Invitations contained the information page describing the research and a URL link to the questionnaire, which eligible participants opened in their personal internet browser (See Appendix B for the information page). Participants then viewed the informed consent section and completed the questionnaire if they consented. Due to geographical constraints, online participants did not receive a \$1 instant kiwi in return for their time.

Data analysis was then executed; analyses and results are discussed in next section.

Results

Statistical analyses were conducted on the raw data formulated from the questionnaire.

Version Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to assess whether there were any significant effects of version type (paper-and-pen vs. online) and the relationships between the key variables. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to the scores for each version (1 = paper-and-pen, 2 = online). There were no significant differences in scores for paper-and-pen and online, except for employability which had a significant difference in the mean scores ($t=3.45$, $p<.01$), paper-and-pen version ($M=3.65$) and online version ($M=3.00$), indicating that paper-and-pen respondents perceived greater employability. The relationship patterns across key variables were considered very similar across both versions; thus, both versions were included in the main analyses.

Table 2: t-values and p-values for each variable when comparing versions; pen-and-paper and online

Variable	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-level</i>
Role overload	1.01	.32
Role ambiguity	-.47	.64
Perceived organisational support	.52	.61
Employability	3.45	.00**
Job insecurity – importance	.145	.89
Job insecurity – probability	-1.33	.19
Neuroticism	1.37	.18

Note. ** $p<0.01$

Descriptive Statistics

Outliers in Data Set

Firstly, descriptive statistics were initially inspected to screen the data for errors and outliers. Of the 100 respondents, none were excluded from analyses after inspection of the raw data and descriptive statistics. Table 3 presents the mean, standard deviation and minimum and maximum values of each variable.

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values for each variable

Variable	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean	Standard Deviation
Role overload	2.36	5.00	3.77	.58
Role ambiguity	4.33	7.00	5.75	.70
Perceived organisational support	1.11	7.00	4.59	1.41
Employability	1.00	5.00	3.41	.96
Job insecurity – importance	1.00	5.00	4.22	.63
Job insecurity – probability	1.22	3.78	2.18	.60
Neuroticism	1.00	3.75	2.08	.66

Internal Consistency

Secondly, internal consistency of each scale was measured using Cronbach's alpha, the most widely used measure of reliability. All seven scales used in the questionnaire demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency with each scale having a Cronbach alpha over the recommended .7 cut-off (Nunnally, 1978): role overload $\alpha = .88$; job role ambiguity $\alpha = .83$, perceived organisation support $\alpha = .96$, employability $\alpha = .72$, job insecurity-importance $\alpha = .83$, neuroticism $\alpha = .75$. These results indicate that all items within each different scale measure the same construct; demonstrating comparability across samples of varying age, sex

and tenure etc. However, the original alpha found for the Job Insecurity (Probability) subscale, just shy of the acceptable cut-off of .7 ($\alpha = .699$), along with the substantial increase in reliability upon removal of specific items (items 4 and 5), has led to the removal of these items from further analyses. Upon removal of the items, the reliability obtained for the Job Insecurity (Probability) subscale was $\alpha = .81$.

Correlations

The hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlations to test the hypotheses pertaining to the relationships between POS, Employability, Role Ambiguity, Role Overload and job insecurity.

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative, significant relationship between perceived organisational support and job insecurity, among employees in downsizing organisations

The analyses (see Table 4) indicated that perceived organisational support was negatively associated with job insecurity (probability) as hypothesised in Hypothesis 1, with a significant negative correlation coefficient ($r = -.22, p < .05$), however, POS was also positively associated with job insecurity (importance), with a significant positive correlation coefficient ($r = .30, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant, negative relationship between perceived employability and job insecurity, among employees in downsizing organisations

The analyses (see Table 4) indicated that there was a significant negative relationship between perceived employability and job insecurity (probability), as hypothesised, with a significant negative correlation coefficient ($r = -.26, p < .01$); however, there was no significant relationship found between perceived employability and job insecurity (importance) ($r = .14, n.s$).

Hypothesis 3a): There is a positive, significant relationship between role ambiguity and job insecurity, among employees in downsizing organisations

The analyses (see Table 4) indicated that there was no significant relationship between role ambiguity and job insecurity. Neither job insecurity subscales; importance or probability, conceived significant results ($r=.15, n.s$) and ($r=-.13, n.s$), respectively.

Hypothesis 3b): There is a negative, significant relationship between role overload and job insecurity, among employees in downsizing organisations

The analyses (see Table 4) indicated that role overload was negatively associated with job insecurity (probability), as hypothesised in Hypothesis 3b, with a significant negative correlation coefficient ($r= -.27, p<.01$), however, no significant relationship was found between role overload and job insecurity (importance) ($r=.11, n.s.$).

Table 4: Correlations of key variables and coefficient alphas

Variable	Age	Tenure	Role overload	Role ambiguity	POS	Employability	Job insecurity - importance	Job insecurity - probability	Neuroticism
Age	1								
Tenure	.68**	1							
Role overload	.11	.08	(.88)						
Role ambiguity	.28**	.21*	.00	(.83)					
POS	-.01	-.014	-.05	.34**	(.96)				
Employability	-.35**	-.24*	.11	.01	.21*	(.72)			
Job insecurity – importance	-.05	-.15	.11	.15	.30**	.14	(.83)		
Job insecurity – probability	.07	.04	-.27**	-.13	-.22*	-.26**	-.11	(.81)	
Neuroticism	-.02	-.14	.16	-.11	.03	.01	.11	.22*	(.76)

Note. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Hypothesis 4): Perceived Organisational Support, Employability, Role Ambiguity and Role overload independently predict dimensions of job insecurity

A hierarchical multiple regression on job insecurity–(importance) was conducted to identify which variables independently predict dimensions of job insecurity - importance.

Overall POS, employability, role ambiguity and role overload were regressed onto job insecurity (importance). Overall, POS was the strongest predictor of job insecurity - importance ($\beta = .27, p < .01$), explaining 12% of the variance. The beta-weight indicated that higher overall POS were associated with higher perceptions of job insecurity (importance). Table 5 presents the standardised (beta) and unstandardised (beta) coefficients, standard errors and also the R square change value for Model 4 (all variables included). These results indicate that the addition of other variables to the model did not significantly add to the variance explained in Job Insecurity – importance.

Table 5: Standardised (beta) and unstandardised (beta) coefficients, standard errors and R square change values for the final step of hierarchical multiple regression for Job Insecurity – Importance

Model	Variable	β	μ	SE	R ² Change	<i>p</i>
4	(Constant)		2.79	.66	.12	<i>n.s</i>
	POS	.27**	.12	.05		.01
	Employability	.08	.05	.07		.43
	Role Ambiguity	.05	.05	.09		.60
	Role Overload	.10	.11	.11		.30

1 Predictors: (Constant), POS

2 Predictors: (Constant), POS, Employability

3 Predictors: (Constant), POS, Employability, Role Ambiguity

4 Predictors: (Constant), POS, Employability, Role Ambiguity, Role Overload

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

A hierarchical multiple regression was also conducted on job insecurity (probability) to identify which variables independently predicted dimensions of job insecurity - probability.

Overall POS, employability, role ambiguity and role overload were regressed onto job insecurity (probability); significant differences were found for employability $R^2=.05$, $F(1, 96)$ -2.29, $p<.05$) and role overload ($R^2=.06$, $F(1, 94)$ -2.64, $p<.01$). Overall, role overload was the strongest significant predictor of job insecurity - probability ($\beta= -.25$, $p<.01$) explaining 6.2% of the variance. The beta-weight indicated that higher overall role overload were associated with lower perceptions of job insecurity (probability). The second significant predictor of job insecurity (probability) was employability ($\beta= -.20$, $p<.05$), explaining 4.9% of the variance. Table 6 presents the standardised (beta) and unstandardised (beta) coefficients, standard errors and also the R square change value for Model 4 (all variables included). Results indicate that the addition of other variables to the model (POS and role ambiguity) did not significantly add to the variance explained in Job Insecurity (probability).

Table 6: Standardised (beta) and unstandardised (beta) coefficients, standard errors and R square change values for the final step of hierarchical multiple regression for Job Insecurity – Probability

Model	Variable	β	μ	SE	R ² Change	<i>p</i>
4	(Constant)		4.77	.78	.06	.01
	POS	-.17	-.09	.06		.10
	Employability	-.20*	-.16	.08		.05
	Role Ambiguity	-.07	-.08	.11		.49
	Role Overload	-.25**	-.33	.12		.01

1 Predictors: (Constant), POS

2 Predictors: (Constant), POS, Employability

3 Predictors: (Constant), POS, Employability, Role Ambiguity

4 Predictors: (Constant), POS, Employability, Role Ambiguity, Role Overload

Note. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Neuroticism – High versus Low

Neuroticism responses were divided into two groups; Low Neuroticism - responses between 1 and 2 (coded = 1) and High Neuroticism - responses between 2 and 3.75 (coded = 2). Further analyses were conducted to investigate any differences between High Neuroticism and Low Neuroticism groups. Differences were found between the relationship of employability and job insecurity (importance), where a significant positive relationship was found for low neuroticism ($r = .29, p < .05$) and a non-significant relationship for high neuroticism ($r = -.03, n.s$). Differences were also found between the relationship of POS and job insecurity – importance, where a significant positive relationship was found for high neuroticism ($r = .47, p < .01$) and a non-significant relationship for low neuroticism ($r = .05, n.s$) (see Table 7).

Table 7: Correlation comparison between High and Low Neuroticism groups for each variable and Job Insecurity – Importance

Variable	High Neuroticism	Low Neuroticism
Job Overload	.02	.17
Role Ambiguity	.21	.02
Perceived Organisational Support	.47**	.05
Employability	-.04	.29*
Job insecurity - Probability	.16	-.17

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Differences were also found between the relationship of job overload and job insecurity (probability), where a significant negative relationship was found for high neuroticism ($r = -.32, p < .05$) and a non-significant relationship for low neuroticism ($r = -.17, n.s$) (see Table 8).

Table 8: Comparison between High and Low Neuroticism groups for each variable and Job Insecurity – Probability

Variable	High Neuroticism	Low Neuroticism
Job Overload	-.32*	-.19
Role Ambiguity	-.10	.00
Perceived Organisational Support	-.27	-.26
Employability	-.20	-.14
Job Insecurity - Importance	.16	-.17

Note. * $p < 0.05$

Other Significant Correlations

Although not hypothesised, many significant results were made apparent from the current analyses, that are also worthy of mention (see Table 4). The following results were found; a significant positive relationship between role ambiguity and age ($r = .28, p < .01$), a significant positive relationship between role ambiguity and tenure ($r = .21, p < .05$), a significant positive relationship between perceived organisational support and role ambiguity ($r = .34, p < .05$), a significant negative relationship between perceived employability and tenure ($r = -.24, p < .01$), a significant negative relationship between perceived employability and age ($r = -.35, p < .01$), a significant negative relationship between perceived employability and tenure ($r = -.24, p < .05$), a significant positive relationship between perceived employability and perceived organisational support ($r = .21, p < .01$), and a significant positive relationship between neuroticism and job insecurity – probability ($r = .22, p < .05$). These results are further elaborated in the discussion section.

Post-hoc analyses

Post-hoc analyses were conducted to compare means of each key variable across contract type, employment status and change status groups.

Contract type

Significant mean differences were found between permanent and temporary contract for POS, role overload, job insecurity – importance and job insecurity – probability. Overall, results indicated higher means for all variables except Job Insecurity – probability; indicating that employees who obtain a permanent contract perceived greater POS, role overload and job insecurity – importance. Furthermore, employees who obtain a temporary contract perceived greater job insecurity – probability. Table 9 illustrates variable means for each contract type and corresponding p-value.

Table 9: Mean for each contract type and p-value for each variable type

Variable	Permanent (<i>M</i>)	Temporary (<i>M</i>)	<i>p</i> -value
Perceived organisational support	4.83	3.76	.00**
Employability	3.43	3.33	.66
Role ambiguity	5.82	5.52	.07
Role overload	3.85	3.50	.00**
Job insecurity – importance	4.31	3.91	.00**
Job insecurity – probability	1.93	2.77	.00**

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

Employment status

Significant mean differences were also found between full-time and part-time for POS, role overload, job insecurity (importance) and job insecurity (probability). Overall,

results indicated higher means for all variables except Job Insecurity – probability. Employees who work full-time perceive greater POS, role overload and job insecurity – importance. Employees who work part-time perceived greater job insecurity – probability. Table 10 presents each variable for each employment status and corresponding p-value.

Table 10: Mean for each employment status and p-value for each variable

Variable	Full time (<i>M</i>)	Part time (<i>M</i>)	<i>p</i> -value
Perceived organisational support	4.83	3.76	0.01**
Employability	3.43	3.33	0.31
Role ambiguity	5.82	5.52	0.50
Role overload	3.85	3.50	0.01**
Job insecurity – importance	4.31	3.91	0.00**
Job insecurity – probability	1.95	2.59	0.01**

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

Change status

A one way ANOVA was conducted to investigate the impact of change status on each independent variable. Respondents were asked to indicate their organisation’s change status; (1) recently been through a change process, (2) currently going through a change process, (3) about to go through a change process in the near future. Results indicated a significant difference for role overload $F(2,99) 5.070, p < .01$. Post-hoc Tukey tests revealed significant differences ($p < .01$) in role overload between change status 2 ($M=3.92$) (currently going through a change process) and change status 3 ($M=3.47$) (about to go through a change process in the near future). These results show that participants who indicated that they were currently going through a change process perceived greater role overload than participants who indicated that they were about to go through a change process.

Discussion

The Current Study

The current research was conducted to explore the antecedents of job insecurity including perceived organisational support (climate perceptions), perceived employability, role overload and role ambiguity (role features). Specifically, employees' perceptions of these variables were examined as well as the relationship between these antecedents and two subscales of job insecurity; importance of changes and probability of changes (Ashford et al., 1989). The current study adopted a multidimensional approach to job insecurity (see Ashford et al., 1989; Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999) which measured both the threat of job loss and the threat of losing certain dimensions of the total job. Furthermore, the perceived threat of the occurrence of various events that would negatively affect an individual's total job and the importance attached to each of these potentialities were also investigated (Ashford et al., 1989). The extent to which these antecedents could independently predict dimensions of job insecurity was analysed, as was the relationship between each key variable and job insecurity.

Perceived Organisational Support and Job Insecurity

Hypothesis 1 investigated the relationship between perceived organisational support and job insecurity, and it was hypothesised that there would be a significant negative relationship. Results were found to support the current hypothesis for one job insecurity dimension (JI - probability) and contradict it on the other hand for the other job insecurity dimension (JI – importance). A significant negative relationship was found between POS and job insecurity – probability, as hypothesised, however, a significant positive relationship was also found between POS and job insecurity – importance. In support of hypothesis 1 and social exchange arguments, individuals whose job in the organization is insecure and

uncertain are less likely to feel a sense of support from the organisation itself (Lee & Peccei, 2007). Job insecurity – probability refers to the perceived threat or likelihood of changes to the total job (Ashford et al., 1989) therefore it is logical to expect that the greater the perceived threat to total job changes, the less organisational support an employee will perceive due to the conflicting nature of the variables.

Conversely, and in contradiction to Hypothesis 1, these results contribute to Lee & Peccei's (2007) findings, which provided support to the idea that job insecurity augments the direct positive effect of POS and affective commitment. In conjunction with Lee & Peccei's (2007) findings, the current results also suggest that employees are likely to respond differently to support from the organisation depending on their sense of job insecurity. In particular, because of their greater vulnerability and uncertainty, employees who are less secure in their jobs are more likely to ascribe greater symbolic and practical value to any signs of support from the organisation than are employees who enjoy a greater sense of job insecurity. A given level of organisational support, therefore, is likely to generate a stronger sense of POS among individuals who perceive their job to be less secure than among those who perceive their job to be more secure (Lee & Peccei, 2007). In line with the current results, individuals who are more uncertain about their future in the organisation tend, on the whole, to respond more positively to perceived organisational support and are, therefore, more prone to reciprocate POS than are employees who enjoy a greater sense of job security. Consequently, POS may be important in understanding the evaluation of the organisational processes. For instance, if an employee perceives a high extent of POS, restructuring may be perceived as less threatening. The positive relationship found between job insecurity – importance and perceived organisational support may be explained by the link of the emotional aspect of both POS and job insecurity – importance (Kinnunen et al., 1999). In

other terms, the extent that POS meets employees' needs, employees will develop a positive emotional bond to the organisation and in turn weight more importance on total job changes due to this positive emotional bond (Kinnunen et al., 1999).

Perceived Employability and Job Insecurity

Hypothesis 2 investigated the relationship between perceived employability and job insecurity, and it was hypothesised that there would be a significant negative relationship. Results supported this hypothesis in one job insecurity dimension (probability) where a significant negative relationship was found; however, no significant relationship was found between perceived employability and job insecurity (importance). These results indicate that perceptions of employability minimise perceptions of threat to changes of the total job, thus, the more employable an employee perceives themselves to be, the less perceived threat to job changes. This difference in significance between job insecurity (importance) and job insecurity (probability) could be explained by the difference in dimensions itself. Job insecurity – importance has been considered to be the emotional aspect of the job insecurity, and probability has been considered to be the cognitive or rational aspect of job insecurity (Kinnunen at al.1999).

Employability was hypothesised to be a potential antecedent of job insecurity (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Sverke et al., 2002): high-employable workers may be less likely to perceive job insecurity than low-employable workers. Some theories suggest that perceptions of reduced job insecurity in highly-employable workers result from employment in objectively *secure* jobs (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Sverke et al., 2002). The current study was conducted in objectively *insecure* conditions where the participants were recruited on the basis that they were employees affiliated with organisations experiencing change (e.g. restructuring, downsizing), whether it be past, current or future organisational change. Perhaps the

condition of participants' organisation could be further explored to compare secure and insecure conditions.

Specific dimensions of employability have also been found to be negatively related to perceptions of job insecurity. For instance, perceptions of adaptability are likely to buffer against perceptions of job insecurity (Mc Ardle et al., 2007; Siebert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999). Perhaps defining and measuring specific dimensions of employability, such as adaptability, will further develop the relationships between job insecurity and employability.

These results could be important for practitioners and have implications beyond employability and job insecurity. The observation that employable workers are less likely to perceive job insecurity may provide employers with ample opportunities to create a loyal workforce, given the firm association between job insecurity and organisational commitment and reduced turnover (De Witte, 1999; Sverke et al., 2002). The association between employability and organisational outcomes could be a potentially fruitful avenue for future research.

Role Ambiguity and Job Insecurity

Hypothesis 3a investigated the relationship between role ambiguity and job insecurity, and it was hypothesised that there would be a significant positive relationship. Results did not support this hypothesis: no significant relationship was found between role ambiguity and neither job insecurity scale; importance nor probability.

Role ambiguity has been described as a major source of stress, and a function of the discrepancy between the information available to the employee and the information needed for adequate performance (Kahn et al., 1964). It was expected that role ambiguity, as defined as a work-related stressor would have a detrimental impact on performance and as a result increase perceptions of job insecurity within low performers (Gilboa et al., 2008). Role

ambiguity arises when there are few cues available to a person to guide his or her performance in the role; for example, there may be no job description or a lack of expectations from other work superiors (Elkin & Inkson, 2000). Faced with role ambiguity, an individual may attempt to impose his or own preferred definition of the role, or may attempt 'trial-and-error' behaviour to gauge what others expect. Thus, it would be expected that perceptions of job insecurity would be associated with low performers due to the lack of necessary information regarding role expectations. The relationship between role ambiguity and perceptions of job insecurity should be further researched to explore possible significant results.

Role Overload and Job Insecurity

Hypothesis 3b investigated the relationship between role overload and job insecurity, and it was hypothesised that there would be a significant negative relationship. In line with Hypothesis 3b and relevant research (Gilboa et al., 2008), results were found to confirm this relationship between role overload and job insecurity – probability, however no significant relationship was found between role overload and job insecurity - importance. The difference in findings could be illustrated by the different aspects of each job insecurity scale; job insecurity – importance (emotional aspects) and job insecurity – probability (cognitive aspects) (Kinnunen et al., 1999)

Role overload (which refers to a situation in which work demands exceed the available resources to meet them) has been described as a hindrance (Gilboa et al., 2008). However, as illustrated in the current results role overload may also reflect a challenge (Gilboa et al., 2008). For example, high performers take on more tasks and responsibilities and therefore are motivated to perform them well. In this situation, role overload can be perceived as a challenge positively rather than negatively associated with performance

(LePine, Podsakoff & LePine, 2005). As individuals with complex job demands are often the most valued workers, it is conceivable that role overload is negatively related to perceptions of job insecurity as confirmed by the current study.

Although, role overload may minimise perceptions of job insecurity, it has also been found to be related to other negative outcomes such as stress and burn-out (Elkin & Inkson, 2000). Excessive job demands can be stressful, as can complexity of job relationships. Job changes, such as the increasingly frequent installation of new computer systems, tend to be stressful, and the desire to avoid stress may be a major factor underlying employee resistance to change (Elkin & Inkson, 2000). The relationships between role overload, stress, perceptions of job insecurity and resistance to change may be an area of interest for future researchers to explore.

Antecedents of Job Insecurity

Hypothesis 4 investigated the predictive utility of each independent variable (perceived organisational support, employability, role ambiguity and role overload) on job insecurity dimensions; importance and probability. Results found that perceived organisational support independently predicts job insecurity – importance. These results indicate that the addition of other variables to the model did not significantly add to the variance explained in Job Insecurity –importance. In other terms, perceptions of organisational support are closely related to the importance of changes to total job; this could be explained by the personal or emotional nature of each of these variables. In other terms, the extent that POS meets employees' needs, employees will develop a positive emotional bond to the organisation and in turn weight more importance on total job changes due to this positive emotional bond. In line with the current results, job insecurity – importance has been

considered the emotional aspect of job insecurity (Kinnunen et al., 1999); the different aspects of job insecurity are discussed in more detail later.

Results also found role overload and employability to independently predict job insecurity – probability. These results indicate that the addition of other variables to the model (POS and role ambiguity) did not significantly add to the variance explained in Job Insecurity –probability. As previously discussed, role overload and employability were found to minimise perceptions of job insecurity –probability, indicating that the perceived threat of total job changes is less when role overload and perceptions of employability are high. These findings may be explained by the relationships between role overload and perceptions of employability and high-performers (LePine, Podsakoff & LePine, 2005; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Sverke et al., 2002); high performers take on more tasks and responsibilities and therefore are motivated to perform them well, and high-employable workers may be less likely to perceive job insecurity than low-employable workers due to the individual’s perceptions of the characteristics which allow him or her to be proactive and changeable in his or her career (Fugate et al. 2004; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007).

Job insecurity – Importance versus Job insecurity – Probability

Overall, within the main hypotheses, more significant relationships were found to be present when the dependent variable was job insecurity – probability. This dimension of job insecurity measures the probability or likelihood of various changes that may occur at an employee’s work, encompassing primarily the cognitive or rational aspect of job insecurity. The results contribute to previous studies who have also found the probability scale to have better predictive validity in comparison to the other multidimensional scales or dimensions (Kinnunen et al., 1999). In contrast, the job insecurity dimension – importance, could

potentially be described as the emotional aspect of job insecurity where each respondent was asked to indicate how important personally was the possibility of each of the events. As mentioned previously, the two different dimensions of job insecurity (importance) and job insecurity (probability) measured in the current study, could also be described as a subjective and objective measure of job insecurity, respectively. Although, job insecurity may have its back background in objective organisational circumstance, what is essential is how individuals perceive or appraise these circumstances. Objective circumstances may determine more rational job insecurity (perceived threat of changes), where appraisal processes are more person-based and therefore linked more strongly to emotional job insecurity (perceived importance of changes). Further research is needed to examine whether different dimensions of job insecurity are impacted by different sets of antecedents.

Neuroticism - High versus Low

Further analyses were conducted to investigate any differences between High Neuroticism and Low Neuroticism groups. Differences were found between the relationship of employability and job insecurity – *importance*, where a significant positive relationship was found for low neuroticism and a non- significant relationship for high neuroticism; indicating that the greater employability low-neurotic employees perceived, the more importance was placed to each of the various events that would negatively affect an individual's total job, than high-neurotic employees.

Differences were also found between the relationship of POS and job insecurity – *importance*, where a significant positive relationship was found for high neuroticism and a non- significant relationship for low neuroticism; indicating that the more organisational support high-neurotic employees perceived, the more importance was placed to each of the various events that would negatively affect an individual's total job, than low-neurotic

employees. Neuroticism had a greater influence on relationships involving JI importance, which has been theorised as the emotional aspect of JI; this relates to different aspects of each dimension of job insecurity mentioned earlier

Differences were also found between the relationship of role overload and job insecurity – probability, where a significant negative relationship was found for high neuroticism and a non-significant relationship for low neuroticism; indicating that high-neurotic employees in comparison to low-neurotic employees, experienced less role overload and perceived less threat of the occurrences of various events that would negatively affect an individual's total job. This finding contradicts research linked to the nature of neuroticism which is a relatively stable underlying personality trait that may mark a negative reporting style (Burgard et al., 2009). It would be expected that employees with a high level of neuroticism would perceive greater threat of the changes to total job.

Contract Type and Job Insecurity

Significant mean differences were found between permanent and temporary contract for POS, role overload, job insecurity – importance and job insecurity – probability. Overall, results indicated that employees who obtain a permanent contract perceived greater POS, role overload and job insecurity – importance than employees who obtain a temporary contract. The current findings are logical; POS refers to employees' beliefs concerning the extent to which an organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Van Emmerik & Euwema, 2007). To the extent that POS meets employees' needs, employees will develop a positive emotional bond to the organisation (Van Emmerik & Euwema, 2007); as confirmed by the current results, this bond is more likely to formulate within permanent employees than temporary. The relationship between employees and their organisations is essentially an exchange relationship and POS is a key factor in the social exchange between

employees and their employers (Van Emmerik & Euwema, 2007). Due to the nature of a permanent contract, it is likely that permanent workers will receive more duties and tasks than temporary workers as a matter of hours worked. Furthermore, permanent workers are more likely to place greater importance on the possible changes being made to their total job as they have invested a more psychological and emotional bond to the organisation than temporary workers. The well-being of their position within the organisation and the well-being of the organisation itself are considered more important to permanent workers than temporary workers.

Employment Status and Job Insecurity

Significant mean differences were also found between full-time and part-time employees for POS, role overload, job insecurity – importance and job insecurity – probability. Similar to contract type mentioned above, results indicated that employees who work full-time perceive greater POS, role overload and job insecurity – importance.

Change Status and Job Insecurity

Overall, results indicated that employees who were currently going through a change process experienced or perceived greater role overload than employees who indicated they had recently been through a change process or were about to go through a change process in the near future. Role overload refers to a situation in which work demands exceed the available resources to meet them (Gilboa et al., 2008). One explanation for this finding could be an employee strategy or coping efforts to justify role and secure position within the company by increasing one's workload and profitability. Another explanation could be the increase in workload due to the redundancies already been made during the current change

process and as a result remaining employees may have to take on the tasks of the redundant employees.

Limitations

Whilst the current research has uncovered interesting findings that impact how antecedents play an important role in perceptions of job insecurity, a few considerations need to be taken into account. A key limitation of this study is the use of a cross sectional design. Whilst the current study found some supporting evidence of relationships between the proposed antecedents and job insecurity, the use of cross sectional data design limits the conclusions that can be made regarding casual direction of the relationships between the independent variables POS, employability, role overload, role ambiguity and the dependent variable job insecurity importance and probability. Although, it was beyond the scope of this study to use longitudinal research design, many researchers suggested that longitudinal studies would add to the literature regarding employability and job insecurity (De Cuyper et al., 2008). Longitudinal designs would allow perceptions of job insecurity and its antecedents to be separated as data is collected across organisations at different points in time. Longitudinal designs would also allow for causal directions to be established in terms of job insecurity antecedents and perceptions of job insecurity.

The current study's focus was to measure perceptions of job insecurity and perceptions of the following variables; POS, employability, role overload, and role ambiguity, therefore the study relied on self-report information. Bias or inflation from participants can influence self-report data. Efforts were made to reduce this impact; the questionnaire was designed in-line with recommendations from the University of Canterbury ethics committee, encouraging participants to answer honestly and assuring them that their

answers were anonymous. Future research regarding job insecurity should assess in more depth objective measures such as tenure, education and organisational size in combination with subjective measures.

Whilst the current study found interesting findings regarding the measure of job insecurity – importance and probability (Ashford et al., 1989), additional dimensions of job insecurity could have been included (such as, importance of job features, likelihood of feature's continuation, powerlessness, fear, uncertainty, worry etc.) to gain better insight into the complex phenomena of job insecurity. However, agreement has not yet been reached on either the definition of job insecurity or its measurement (Klandermans & van Vuuren, 1999). Future research should generate a current and updated job insecurity scale that is relevant to today's society and economic climate. Further understanding of the dimensions of job insecurity will allow more complex relationships to be discovered.

Participants were recruited through many different organisations; therefore another limitation of the current study is the inability to make climate-based inferences or contextual insights beyond what was provided at the individual level. Additionally, it was difficult to control the eligibility of the participants needed to participate in the study as questionnaires were administered using a snowball effect.

Finally, in order to make generalisations about the data the sample size should be larger.

Contributions

The current study has provided insight into the examination of the antecedents of job insecurity from a multidimensional approach and has contributed to the indication of different antecedents among these dimensions. Important personality differences were also found

between neuroticism and perceptions of job insecurity and its antecedents which show the differential impact of personality. The current study examined perceptions of job insecurity in insecure conditions of change (e.g. downsizing, restructuring) which previous studies have not extensively researched. The current findings also contribute to the research regarding and contract and employment type.

Conclusions

The findings from the current study add considerably to the research and literature regarding antecedents of job insecurity and the research on perceptions of job insecurity. In particular, perceived organisational support, employability and role overload were found to be significantly related with job insecurity – probability. Perceived organisational support was found to independently predict job insecurity – importance, and employability and role overload were found to independently predict job insecurity – probability. These findings directly support the literature regarding POS, employability, role overload and job insecurity. They also enhance understanding of the antecedents of job insecurity in an employment context where job insecurity is becoming increasingly common. The results from the current study add to the empirical literature regarding job insecurity and provide a basis for further research on the antecedents of job insecurity.

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Appendices

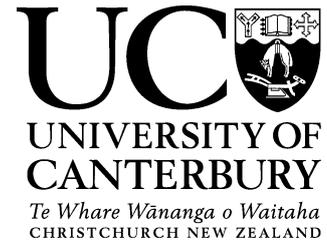
Appendix A: Questionnaire

Appendix B: Information page / Consent form

Appendix A

College of Science

Department of Psychology



Questionnaire

Sections A) Please answer the following questions about you, your job and your organisation:

1. Gender:

Female

Male

Other

2. Age: _____

3. Please indicate the highest level of education you obtained: (please tick one)

Primary school

High school

Tertiary (undergraduate)

Tertiary (postgraduate)

4. Please indicate your contract type: (please tick one)

Permanent contract

Temporary contract (e.g. fixed term, casual, maternity contract etc.)

5. Please indicate whether you currently work full-time or part-time: (please tick one)

Full-time contract

Part-time contract

6. Please state how many years and/or months you have been working with your current organisation:

Years _____ Months _____

7. Please state what industry type best describes your organisation? E.g. hospitality, retail, government etc.

8. Please tick one of the following that best describes your organisation's change process (i.e. restructuring, downsizing etc.).

Recently been through a change process

Currently going through a change process

About to go through a change process in the near future

Appendix A

9. Approximately how many employees work in your entire organisation: (please tick one)

Under 20

21- 50

51 – 100

101 - 200

201 – 500

Over 500

10. Approximately how many employees work in your unit: (please tick one)

Under 10

11 - 20

21 - 50

51 – 100

Over 100

Section B) The following questions ask about the pace and complexity of your job.

Please indicate your response for the following questions by circling one of the five alternatives below each question, where 1 = *rarely*, 2 = *occasionally*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *very often*.

1. How often does your job require you to work very fast?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>rarely</i>	<i>occasionally</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>often</i>	<i>very often</i>

2. How often does your job require you to work very hard?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>rarely</i>	<i>occasionally</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>often</i>	<i>very often</i>

3. How often does your job leave you with little time to get things done?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>rarely</i>	<i>occasionally</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>often</i>	<i>very often</i>

4. How often is there a great deal to be done?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>rarely</i>	<i>occasionally</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>often</i>	<i>very often</i>

Please indicate your response for the following questions by marking one of the five alternatives below each question, where 1 = *hardly any*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *some*, 4 = *a lot*, and 5 = *a great deal*.

5. How much slowdown in the workload do you experience?

1	2	3	4	5
<i>hardly any</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>a lot</i>	<i>a great deal</i>

Appendix A

6. My job is such that I know when I should be doing a given work activity.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

7. I know what my supervisor considers satisfactory work performance.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

8. It is clear to what is considered acceptable performance by my supervisor.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

9. I know what level of performance is considered acceptable by my supervisor.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

Section D) With respect to your own feelings about the particular organization for which you are now working – please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by marking one of the seven alternatives below each statement, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

1. The organization strongly considers my goals and values.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

2. Help is available from the organisation when I have a problem.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

3. The organisation really cares about my well-being.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

4. The organisation is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

5. Even if I did the best job possible, the organisation would fail to notice.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

6. The organisation cares about my general satisfaction at work.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

Appendix A

7. The organisation shows very little concern for me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

8. The organisation cares about my opinions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

9. The organisation takes pride in my accomplishments at work.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

Section E) With respect to your own feelings about your future career – please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by marking one of the five alternatives below each statement, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*.

1. It will be difficult to find new employment if I leave this organisation.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

2. In case I'm dismissed, I'll immediately find a job of equal value.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

3. I'm confident that I would find another job if I started searching.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree *neither agree nor disagree* *strongly agree*

Section F) Assume for a moment that each of the following events could happen to you in your current job.

Please indicate on one of the five alternatives how IMPORTANT to you personally is the possibility of each of the following events, where 1= *very unimportant*, 2 = *unimportant*, 3 = *neither important nor unimportant* 4 = *important*, 5 = *very important*.

1. You may lose your job and be moved to a lower level within the organization.

1 2 3 4 5
very unimportant *neither important nor unimportant* *very important*

2. You may lose your job and be moved to another job at the same level within the organization.

1 2 3 4 5
very unimportant *neither important nor unimportant* *very important*

3. The number of work hours the company can offer you to work may fluctuate from day to day.

1 2 3 4 5
very unimportant *neither important nor unimportant* *very important*

Appendix A

4. You may be moved to a different job at a higher position in your current location.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unimportant</i>		<i>neither important nor unimportant</i>		<i>very important</i>

5. You may be moved to a different job at a higher position in another geographic location.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unimportant</i>		<i>neither important nor unimportant</i>		<i>very important</i>

6. You may be laid off permanently.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unimportant</i>		<i>neither important nor unimportant</i>		<i>very important</i>

7. Your department or division's future may be uncertain.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unimportant</i>		<i>neither important nor unimportant</i>		<i>very important</i>

8. You may be fired.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unimportant</i>		<i>neither important nor unimportant</i>		<i>very important</i>

9. You may be pressured to accept early retirement.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unimportant</i>		<i>neither important nor unimportant</i>		<i>very important</i>

Section G) Again, thinking about the future, HOW LIKELY is it that each of these events might actually occur to you in your current job.

Please indicate your answer on one of the five alternatives below each question, where 1 = *very unlikely*, 2 = *unlikely*, 3 = *neither likely nor unlikely*, 4 = *likely*, 5 = *very likely*.

1. Lose your job and be moved to a lower level job within the organization.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

2. Lose your job and be moved to another job at the same level within the organization.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

3. Find that the number of hours the company can offer you to work may fluctuate from day to day.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

4. Be moved to a higher position within your current location.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

Appendix A

5. Be moved to a higher position in another geographic location.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

6. Lose your job and be laid off permanently.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

7. Find your department or division's future uncertain.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

8. Lose your job by being fired.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

9. Lose your job by being pressured to accept early retirement.

1	2	3	4	5
<i>very unlikely</i>	<i>unlikely</i>	<i>neither likely nor unlikely</i>	<i>likely</i>	<i>very likely</i>

Section H) Please indicate on one of the four alternatives below, how well each of the following describes you, where 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *some*, 4 = *a lot*.

1. Moody.

1	2	3	4
<i>not at all</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>a lot</i>

2. Worrying.

1	2	3	4
<i>not at all</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>a lot</i>

3. Nervous.

1	2	3	4
<i>not at all</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>a lot</i>

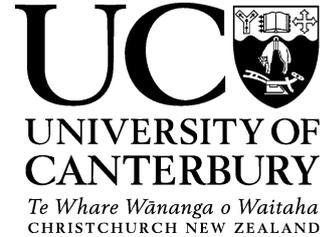
4. Calm.

1	2	3	4
<i>not at all</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>a lot</i>

Thank you for your time and participating in this study.

College of Science

Department of Psychology



INFORMATION & CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate *employees' feelings and opinions toward their current jobs*.

PROCEDURE

If you volunteer to participate in this study, please complete the attached questionnaire, it should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Please indicate your response for each question on the scale provided with either pen or pencil. We are interested in your personal opinions therefore please fill in the questionnaire on your own, without conferring with anyone else. To ensure anonymity, please seal your completed questionnaire within the envelope provided and return to the researcher. As a thank you and in return for your time, you will be given a \$1 instant scratch kiwi.

ANONYMITY

The researchers are very conscious of the need to protect participants' interests. Any information that you provide will be anonymous. Only the principal researcher and the project supervisor will have access to the raw data. Under no circumstances will any data you supply be disclosed to a third party in a way that could reveal its source (assuming this was possible to ascertain from the anonymous questionnaire).

Questionnaire information will be anonymously collected and examined only by the principal researchers. The questionnaire data will be stored on password-protected computers in secured locations in the Psychology department.

Because this research involves anonymous questionnaires you can be assured that your name will not be revealed in any reports or publications generated by this study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Because the information you provide will be anonymous, your responses cannot be retrieved after submission.

RESEARCHERS

The study is being carried out by Caroline Blackmore towards a MSc in Applied Psychology, under the supervision of Dr. Joana Pimentel (Psychology Department) and Dr. Chris Burt (Psychology Department) at the University of Canterbury. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact Caroline at cvb17@uclive.ac.nz (Ph. 385 1885), Joana at joana.pimentel@canterbury.ac.nz (Ph. 364 2987 ext 3635) or Chris at christopher.burt@canterbury.ac.nz (Ph. 364 2231). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Psychology Department and Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

- **I have read and understood this information sheet**
- **I understand that any information I provide will be anonymous**
- **I confirm that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary**

I agree to participate in this study (please tick)

YES

NO

Appendix B