

THE CAUSES OF JOB INSECURITY TRIGGER CAREER CUSHIONING AS A FORM OF SELF-PROTECTION

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Abstract. *Job insecurity has become an increasingly prominent issue in today's dynamic and uncertain labor market. Rapid technological advancements, organizational restructuring, economic instability, and changing employment patterns have increased employees' concerns regarding job continuity. This study aims to examine how perceived job insecurity triggers career cushioning as a form of self-protection among employees. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method involving 112 employees consisting of permanent and contract workers with a minimum tenure of one year. Data were collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The results reveal that job insecurity has a positive and significant effect on career cushioning ($\beta = 0.306$; $p = 0.001$) and self-protection ($\beta = 0.461$; $p = 0.000$). Self-protection also significantly influences career cushioning ($\beta = 0.429$; $p = 0.000$) and partially mediates the relationship between job insecurity and career cushioning ($\beta = 0.198$; $p = 0.001$). The findings indicate that employees experiencing higher levels of job insecurity tend to adopt proactive career management strategies to protect their future career prospects. Therefore, organizations should implement effective human resource management practices to reduce employee insecurity and maintain organizational commitment.*

Keywords: *Career Cushioning; Job Insecurity; Self Protection*

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern work environment is changing rapidly due to technological advancements, digitalization, economic uncertainty, and global competition. These changes have increased employees' concerns about the stability and continuity of their jobs. As a result, job insecurity has become an important issue in today's workplace. According to Langerak, Koen, and Van Hooft (2022), job insecurity refers to employees' concerns and uncertainty regarding the future of their employment.

The development of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) has also contributed to increasing job insecurity. Many employees worry that technological changes may replace certain jobs or make their skills less relevant. Chen et alia. (2024), stated that rapid technological changes require employees to continuously improve their skills in order to remain competitive in the labor market.

In addition, economic instability, organizational restructuring, and workforce reductions can increase employees' perceptions of job insecurity. According to Sheng and Griffin (2023), employees who experience job insecurity tend to have lower levels of well-being and may experience higher levels of stress and anxiety.

To cope with these uncertainties, many employees engage in proactive career behaviors. One of the emerging strategies is career cushioning, which refers to employees' efforts to prepare alternative career opportunities while maintaining their current jobs. These efforts may include improving skills, expanding professional networks, updating résumés, and exploring other job

opportunities. According to He, Wang, and Sun (2022), employees who perceive uncertainty about their future employment are more likely to engage in proactive career behaviors to improve their employability.

Furthermore, Zhang *et alia.* (2024) found that proactive career behavior can help employees reduce the negative effects of job insecurity by increasing their sense of control over their careers. Therefore, career cushioning can be considered a form of self-protection that helps employees prepare for potential career disruptions in an increasingly uncertain labor market.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to examine the causes of job insecurity and how they trigger career cushioning as a form of self-protection among employees.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Job Insecurity

Job insecurity refers to employees' perceptions and concerns regarding the possibility of losing their jobs or experiencing unfavorable changes in their employment conditions. In today's dynamic work environment, job insecurity has become increasingly common due to technological advancements, economic uncertainty, and organizational restructuring.

According to Langerak, Koen, and Van Hooft (2022), job insecurity is a psychological response that arises when employees perceive uncertainty about the continuity of their employment. Employees who experience high levels of job insecurity tend to feel less confident about their future careers and employment stability.

Furthermore, Sheng and Griffin (2023), found that job insecurity is associated with increased stress, anxiety, and reduced mental well-being. Employees who continuously worry about their job stability may experience emotional exhaustion and lower job satisfaction.

Research conducted by Chen *et alia.* (2024), also revealed that job insecurity negatively affects employee engagement and career development. Employees who perceive threats to their jobs are more likely to experience uncertainty regarding their future employability and career growth opportunities.

Based on these findings, job insecurity can be understood as a condition in which employees perceive threats to their employment continuity, leading to negative psychological and organizational outcomes.

2.2 Career Cushioning

Career cushioning is a proactive strategy adopted by employees to prepare for potential job loss or career disruption. This concept has gained attention in recent years as employees increasingly seek ways to protect themselves from employment uncertainty.

According to He, Wang, and Sun (2022), employees facing job uncertainty are more likely to engage in proactive career behaviors to strengthen their employability and career resilience. These behaviors help individuals prepare for possible career transitions and reduce the risks associated with job insecurity.

Career cushioning includes various activities such as developing new skills, obtaining professional certifications, attending training programs, expanding professional networks, updating resumes, strengthening personal branding, and exploring alternative job opportunities.

Volmer, Spurk, Orth, and Göritz (2023), stated that employees with higher career adaptability tend to invest more in career development activities. Such proactive efforts increase their ability to respond effectively to changing labor market conditions.

In addition, Zhang, Li, and Wang (2024), found that proactive career behavior helps employees reduce the negative effects of job insecurity by enhancing their confidence and sense of control over their careers.

Therefore, career cushioning can be defined as a proactive career management strategy aimed at preparing employees for potential career disruptions while improving long-term employability.

2.3 Self-Protection Theory

Self-Protection Theory explains how individuals respond to threats by engaging in behaviors that protect their personal resources, well-being, and future opportunities. In the workplace context, employees often adopt protective strategies when they perceive risks related to their employment and career prospects.

According to Zyberaj and Bakaç (2022), employees who experience career insecurity tend to develop psychological and behavioral resources to maintain career satisfaction and reduce the negative impact of uncertainty. This behavior reflects an effort to protect valuable career-related resources.

Furthermore, Rudolph, Lavigne, and Zacher (2022), explained that career adaptability enables individuals to cope with career-related challenges and uncertainty by actively preparing for future career changes. Such adaptive behaviors are considered important self-protection mechanisms in an unpredictable labor market.

Chen *et alia.* (2024), also emphasized that employees with strong adaptability and employability resources are better able to protect themselves from the negative consequences of job insecurity

Based on this perspective, Self-Protection Theory suggests that when employees perceive threats to their employment, they are likely to engage in behaviors such as career cushioning to preserve their employability, career opportunities, and long-term career security.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey method. The respondents consisted of 112 employees, including permanent and contract workers with a minimum working period of one year. Respondents were aged between 18 and 38 years.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The study examined three variables, namely Job Insecurity (X), Self-Protection (Z), and Career Cushioning (Y).

The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS software. The analysis included evaluation of the measurement model (outer model), structural model (inner model), and mediation effects.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

The study involved 112 respondents consisting of male and female employees. Based on gender, 52 respondents (46.4%) were male and 60 respondents (53.6%) were female.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics Based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	52	46.4
Female	60	53.6
Total	112	100

Based on employment status, 60 respondents (53.2%) were contract employees and 52 respondents (46.8%) were permanent employees

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics Based on Employment Status

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Contract Employee	60	53.2
Permanent Employee	52	46.8

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Total

112

100

The dominance of contract employees indicates that a large proportion of respondents are more vulnerable to employment uncertainty, making them relevant subjects for examining job insecurity and career cushioning behavior.

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated through outer loading analysis. Most indicators demonstrated acceptable loading values ranging from 0.508 to 0.659, indicating that the indicators adequately represented their respective constructs.

4.3 Structural Model Evaluation

Direct Effects

Table 3. Path Coefficients

Relationship	β	T Statistics	P Values
Job Insecurity → Career Cushioning	0.306	3.310	0.001
Job Insecurity → Self-Protection	0.461	6.717	0.000
Self-Protection → Career Cushioning	0.429	4.354	0.000

The results indicate that Job Insecurity has a positive and significant effect on Career Cushioning ($\beta = 0.306$; $p = 0.001$). This finding suggests that employees who perceive higher levels of job insecurity tend to engage more actively in career cushioning behaviors.

Job Insecurity also has a positive and significant effect on Self-Protection ($\beta = 0.461$; $p = 0.000$). Employees experiencing uncertainty regarding their employment are more likely to adopt self-protective strategies aimed at reducing future career risks.

Furthermore, Self-Protection significantly influences Career Cushioning ($\beta = 0.429$; $p = 0.000$). This finding indicates that employees who actively protect themselves are more likely to develop career cushioning behaviors.

Indirect Effects

Table 4. Indirect Effect

Relationship	β	T Statistics	P Values
Job Insecurity → Self-Protection → Career Cushioning	0.198	3.321	0.001

The indirect effect analysis reveals that Self-Protection significantly mediates the relationship between Job Insecurity and Career Cushioning. Since both the direct and indirect effects are significant, Self-Protection functions as a partial mediator.

4.4 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that employees who experience job insecurity tend to engage in career cushioning behaviors as a strategy to secure their future careers. These behaviors include skill enhancement, networking, and exploring alternative career opportunities.

The significant influence of Job Insecurity on Self-Protection supports Self-Protection Theory, which suggests that individuals actively seek to safeguard valuable resources when they perceive potential threats. Employment stability is viewed as a valuable resource that employees seek to protect.

The mediating role of Self-Protection indicates that employees do not respond passively to employment uncertainty. Instead, they adopt proactive strategies that ultimately encourage

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career cushioning. This finding highlights the importance of self-protective behavior in helping employees adapt to uncertain work environments.

CONCLUSION

Job insecurity has become an increasingly important issue in modern workplaces due to economic uncertainty, technological advancement, organizational restructuring, and changing employment arrangements. The results indicate that Job Insecurity has a positive and significant effect on Career Cushioning and Self-Protection. Furthermore, Self-Protection positively influences Career Cushioning and partially mediates the relationship between Job Insecurity and Career Cushioning.

These findings suggest that employees respond to employment uncertainty by engaging in proactive career management behaviors aimed at protecting their future career prospects. Therefore, organizations should provide career development opportunities, transparent communication, and supportive work environments to reduce employee insecurity and strengthen organizational commitment.

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