

Danger as a Catalyst for Change? A Study on the Differential Effects of Job Insecurity on Innovative Behavior

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Abstract

Organizations often face a “dilemma” in employee management and organizational innovation—finding it difficult to provide stable employment yet having to rely on employees to achieve organizational innovation, which makes research on the impact of employee job insecurity on innovative behavior crucial. When employees experience job insecurity stemming from different environmental threats, their innovative behaviors vary. Previous studies have predominantly defined job insecurity based on subjective perception and examined the mechanism through which the overall construct affects innovative behavior primarily from an intrinsic motivation perspective. This paper deepens the concept of job insecurity under a threat focus and explores its differential impact processes on innovative behavior based on both “variable-centered” and “person-centered” research approaches. First, by integrating environmental threat sources with subjective perception, job insecurity is conceptualized as two dimensions: job-focused job insecurity and person-focused job insecurity, for which measurement scales will be developed. Second, through a longitudinal research design and analyzing multi-time-point employee-supervisor dyadic data, this study aims to reveal the negative impact of job-focused job insecurity on innovative behavior and the inverted U-shaped impact of person-focused job insecurity on innovative behavior, through the chain mediating effects of situational regulatory focus and work passion. Finally, adopting a “person-centered” research approach, latent profile analysis will be employed to explore latent types of job insecurity and their impact on innovative behavior. The contributions of this study are mainly manifested in three aspects: First, by considering environmental threat sources in the conceptual definition of job insecurity, deconstructing dimensions based on threat focus, and developing measurement scales, this research will advance conceptual studies and measurement development of job insecurity. Second, adopting a “variable-centered” research approach and grounded in regulatory focus theory and the dualistic model of passion, this study comprehensively

reveals the differential effects of job insecurity dimensions on innovative behavior through motivational and affective response processes, thereby enriching and enhancing mechanism research. Third, responding to the call by Debus et al. (2020), this study adopts a “person-centered” approach, focusing on individual differences to explore latent types of job insecurity and their effects on innovative behavior, which can reveal how different dimensions combine to form overall effects, compensate for limitations of previous “variable-centered” approaches, and provide new directions for in-depth job insecurity research. Additionally, the findings of this study can enable managers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of job insecurity from the essence of threat sources, help them better comprehend the differential impact processes of job-focused and person-focused job insecurity on innovative behavior, and provide guidance for enterprises on how to effectively manage employees and promote innovative behavior in unstable environments.

Full Text

Preamble

Thinking of Change in Times of Danger? A Study on the Differential Impact of Job Insecurity on Innovative Behavior

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Abstract: Enterprises face a persistent “dilemma” in employee management and organizational innovation: they struggle to provide stable employment while simultaneously depending on employees to drive innovation. This makes research on how job insecurity influences innovative behavior critically important. When employees experience job insecurity stemming from different environmental threats, their innovative behaviors vary significantly. This study refines the concept of job insecurity through a threat-focus lens and explores its differential effects on innovative behavior using both variable-centered and person-centered approaches. First, by integrating environmental threat sources with subjective perceptions, we divide job insecurity into two dimensions—job-focus insecurity and person-focus insecurity—and develop a corresponding measurement scale. Second, employing a longitudinal design and analyzing multi-timepoint employee-supervisor dyadic data, we examine the chain mediating roles of situational regulatory focus and work passion. We aim to reveal the negative impact of job-focus insecurity on innovative behavior and the inverted U-shaped relationship between person-focus insecurity and innovative behavior. Finally, adopting a person-centered approach, we use latent profile analysis to explore potential job insecurity profiles and their effects on innovative behavior. Our findings will advance conceptual and utility research on job insecurity and provide practical recommendations for effectively promoting innovation in organi-

zations.

Keywords: innovative behavior, job insecurity, situational regulatory focus, work passion, environmental threats

Classification Code: B849: C93

1. Problem Statement

Modern organizations and employees face escalating threats, changes, and challenges (Huang et al., 2017; Schaufeli, 2016; Wu et al., 2020). The inability to maintain long-term employment has become a universal phenomenon and defining characteristic of today's workplace (Glambek et al., 2018; Hourie et al., 2018). In China, state-owned enterprises undergoing transformation have shifted from status-based to position-based management, shattering employees' "iron rice bowls" and intensifying feelings of insecurity. Employees face job insecurity from two distinct threats. First, their current positions may be at risk and unsustainable. The wave of the information revolution, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, has forced enterprises to transform and adjust business models, causing traditional jobs to disappear (Lee et al., 2018). The digital era threatens both low-skill positions (e.g., drivers, security guards, cleaners, sales clerks, cashiers) and highly skilled roles (e.g., bank tellers, lawyers, doctors, analysts, managers). Additionally, in China's SOE reforms, the principle of "fixed positions with fixed personnel" leads organizations to eliminate redundant, unreasonable, or development-hindering positions during structural changes. Second, employees themselves may be at risk of replacement. To survive intense competition, enterprises often cultivate competitive cultures, foster competitive climates, and implement performance-based elimination systems to maintain workforce vitality and innovation. The "fixed positions without fixed personnel" and "positions determine people" policies create flexible employment mechanisms where employees are no longer as secure as before. Workers must continuously maintain and enhance their capabilities while cultivating good relationships with leaders and colleagues to ensure they remain in their positions.

Since the 19th Party Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized innovation's critical importance for building a modern socialist powerhouse and achieving national rejuvenation. As innovation's primary agents, enterprises must enhance independent innovation capabilities and stimulate employee innovative behavior. However, the contemporary environment creates a "dilemma": technological progress and intensified competition make it difficult for firms to provide stable jobs, severely impacting employees' job security, while simultaneously, organizational competitiveness and advantage depend on employee creativity and innovation. Organizational realities are complex and management processes diverse, with completely different innovation expectations across positions. For jobs that may be replaced by technology or are disappearing, enterprises expect employees to work steadily and complete tasks during transitions, showing little concern for innovation. For future-oriented

positions, firms expect employees to innovate actively under moderate competition to accelerate technological iteration. Correspondingly, employees facing different threats exhibit significantly different innovative behaviors. On one hand, environmental changes and technological advances make employees worry about position disappearance and unemployment, leading them to avoid position-related innovation to prevent mistakes and premature dismissal—a sense of powerlessness and creative paralysis. On the other hand, competitive organizational climates and systems make employees fear replacement by others, motivating them to attempt innovation to improve individual performance or gain leader favor—actively innovating to retain their positions. Innovative behavior is inherently dualistic: it involves uncertainty and risk (Wu et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021), potentially causing losses from failure, yet it may also generate positive expectations, improve performance, or serve as a “signal” for impression management (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). Different threats cause employees to focus on either the “bad” or “good” aspects of innovation, leading to different decisions. Against this backdrop, examining how threat-focused job insecurity differentially affects innovative behavior holds crucial practical significance.

Existing research has made good progress on the job insecurity-innovative behavior relationship, but several limitations remain. First, current conceptualizations of job insecurity focus solely on subjective perceptions while ignoring different threat sources. As job insecurity is a subjective perception built upon environmental threats, directly linked to threat sources (Shoss, 2017), further conceptual refinement and dimensionalization based on threat sources is necessary for conceptual clarity. Second, most research examines the “dark side” or “bright side” of job insecurity as a whole construct to explain its negative, positive, or curvilinear relationships with innovative behavior, ignoring other possibilities. For instance, different dimensions may correlate differently with innovative behavior, requiring dimensional analysis (Sverke et al., 2002). Additionally, inconsistent findings may result from differences across latent job insecurity profiles, an approach Debus et al. (2020) advocated exploring through person-centered research. Third, mechanism research has focused heavily on intrinsic motivation while neglecting other individual motivations. In reality, as a subjective perception of environmental threats—a “reflection” of situational factors in employees’ minds—job insecurity can activate motivations (situational regulatory focus) and emotions (work passion) through organizational cues, thereby affecting innovation.

In summary, this study examines how threat-focused job insecurity influences innovative behavior in organizational contexts, providing valuable theoretical guidance for managers on effectively managing job insecurity and stimulating innovation. We address three key questions: First, how should threat-focused job insecurity be conceptualized and dimensionally structured when considering environmental threat sources? Second, do different dimensions of job insecurity exert different effects on innovative behavior, and what are the mechanisms? Third, using a person-centered approach, what latent types of job insecurity exist, and do they differentially affect innovative behavior? Combining grounded

research with questionnaire surveys, this study aims to advance conceptual research, measurement development, and mechanism exploration of job insecurity from the essence of threat sources, helping organizations and managers achieve organizational goals through more comprehensive understanding and intervention.

2.1 Concept and Structure of Job Insecurity

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) first defined job insecurity as “perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatening job situation.” De Witte (1999) viewed it as “overall concern about future job continuity.” Shoss (2017) defined it as perceived threats to the continuity and stability of current employment. Despite definitional differences, two common features exist: First, job insecurity is a subjective experience (De Witte, 1999; Hu, 2007; Ma et al., 2022), distinct from actual job loss (Ma et al., 2014, 2016). Second, it concerns future potential threats. Not all anticipated job events create insecurity—only those potentially harmful or causing loss. Job insecurity research essentially examines how employees perceive and respond to “imagined loss.” Thus, while a subjective phenomenon, these perceptions are built upon environmental threats, making the connection to threats crucial for deep understanding.

Regarding dimensional structure, both single-dimensional and multi-dimensional views exist (Sverke et al., 2002). The single-dimensional perspective treats job insecurity as a general perception of job loss (Ma et al., 2019; Selenko et al., 2017). Two-dimensional approaches have analyzed “job loss” and “subjective perception” to identify dimensions such as quantitative and qualitative insecurity (Hellgren et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2016) and cognitive and affective insecurity (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Yang et al., 2019). However, these analyses have overlooked environmental threat sources. Jacobson and Hartley (1991) noted that threats to job security may be independent of people or person-dependent. Shoss (2017) further clarified that job insecurity is individuals’ subjective perception of environmental threats, which may involve either job-at-risk threats or person-at-risk threats. These distinctions provide preliminary guidance for threat-focused conceptualization and dimensionalization.

2.2 Research on the Job Insecurity-Innovative Behavior Relationship

Innovative behavior encompasses a series of actions from idea generation to implementation, representing employees’ intentional proposal and execution of new ideas at work (Kleysen & Street, 2001). Existing research on the job insecurity-innovative behavior relationship yields three conclusions: negative, positive, and curvilinear. Most scholars support a negative impact (De Spiegelaere et al., 2014; Hootegeem et al., 2019; Jiang, 2018; Niesen et al., 2018; Zhu & Hu, 2014). Others suggest job insecurity may boost innovation; for instance, Liu et al. (2019)

revealed positive effects based on stress appraisal theory. Additionally, some find an inverted U-shaped relationship, where moderate job insecurity produces highest creativity (Zhou & Long, 2011) and innovative behavior (Yang & Zhang, 2012).

Previous research has primarily adopted a variable-centered approach, treating job insecurity as a whole construct and focusing only on position insecurity while ignoring threats from employees being at risk themselves. Different threat sources may differentially affect innovative behavior, necessitating more detailed dimensional research. Moreover, Debus et al. (2020) called for person-centered approaches to analyze differences across subgroups' job insecurity perceptions and outcome variable performance. Using latent profile analysis to explore subgroups formed by different dimension combinations can answer "which job insecurity profile best stimulates innovative behavior," clarifying optimal conditions for innovation. Combining variable-centered and person-centered approaches can more systematically reveal the job insecurity-innovative behavior relationship.

2.3 Mechanisms of Job Insecurity's Impact on Innovative Behavior

Early research focused on negative effects and mediating mechanisms, while recent studies have recognized "bright side" effects, such as job insecurity leading to job crafting that affects innovative behavior (Liu et al., 2019) or promoting informal on-the-job learning to positively influence creativity (Chen & Zhou, 2020).

Mechanism research has examined organizational commitment, tension, work engagement, psychological contract breach, self-efficacy, and psychological capital, but motivation-based research remains limited and focused solely on intrinsic motivation. Zhou and Long (2011) supported intrinsic motivation's mediating role in the inverted U-shaped relationship between job insecurity and creativity. Zhang and Long (2013) showed job insecurity negatively affects creativity through reduced innovative self-efficacy. Job insecurity frustrates psychological needs, reducing intrinsic motivation (Van den Broeck et al., 2014; Vander Elst et al., 2012). However, employees engage in innovative behavior not only through intrinsic motivation but also through outcome expectations (Yuan & Woodman, 2010) or situational regulatory focus activated by environmental cues (Wang et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020). Therefore, other individual motivations must be examined to fully understand the process.

2.4 Research Gaps and Development Trends

Existing research has meaningfully explored job insecurity's construct, its impact on innovative behavior, and underlying mechanisms, but several gaps require further investigation:

- (1) **Limited understanding of the job insecurity construct**, focusing on subjective perception while neglecting environmental threats. Literature typically addresses job loss from layoffs, mergers, technological change, or restructuring, but largely ignores insecurity when positions exist but employees cannot retain them. Therefore, threat-focused conceptualization and dimensionalization connected to environmental threats is essential for understanding this phenomenon's essence.
- (2) **Inconsistent findings on job insecurity's impact on innovative behavior**. Unlike early research emphasizing negative effects, recent studies recognize "bright side" effects, viewing it as a "double-edged sword" with complex impacts. Most studies treat job insecurity as a whole construct, yet different dimensions likely exert different effects. Therefore, systematically examining both "dark" and "bright" sides across dimensions can improve and develop existing research.
- (3) **Incomplete mechanism research with an unexplored "black box."** While intrinsic motivation has been examined, employee psychological motivations may be more complex. As a subjective perception of environmental threats—a "reflection" of situational factors—job insecurity can activate situational regulatory focus and work passion through organizational cues, affecting innovative behavior. Therefore, examining the chain mediating roles of motivation (situational regulatory focus) and emotional reactions (work passion) can effectively open this "black box."
- (4) **Over-reliance on variable-centered approaches requiring person-centered supplementation**. Variable-centered approaches yield conclusions based on sample averages, revealing variable interactions but ignoring individual differences and subgroup characteristics. Person-centered approaches can address these limitations. Therefore, responding to Debus et al.'s (2020) call, latent profile analysis should be used to explore job insecurity profiles and their innovative behavior effects.

3. Research Design

This study proposes three interrelated sub-studies with an integrated framework (Figure 1). First, we define threat-focused job insecurity by considering environmental threat sources, analyze its dimensional structure, and develop a measurement scale. Second, following the "situation perception—motivation activation—emotional arousal—behavior generation" logic, we comprehensively examine how job insecurity dimensions activate motivation (situational regulatory focus) and emotional reactions (work passion) to differentially affect innovative behavior. Regulatory focus includes trait and situational types; we focus on situational regulatory focus as a short-term, current state (Cao & Xu, 2017). Based on regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997), situational regulatory focus is a psychological state that can be activated by situational cues. As a subjective perception of environmental threats—a "reflection" of situational factors—job

insecurity can activate employees' situational regulatory focus, stimulate work passion, and influence innovative behavior. Finally, using a person-centered approach, we employ latent profile analysis to explore job insecurity profiles and their effects on innovative behavior, providing managers with targeted management and intervention strategies.

Figure 1. Research Framework and Design

Job Insecurity Dimensions → Situational Regulatory Focus → Work Passion → Job Insecurity Profiles
 - Job-focus insecurity → Prevention focus → Obsessive passion → Profiles
 - Person-focus insecurity → Promotion focus → Harmonious passion → Outcomes

3.1 Study 1: Threat-Focused Job Insecurity

Job insecurity results from both objective environmental threats and subjective perceptions. However, previous research has focused only on subjective perception while ignoring its connection to objective threats (Shoss, 2017; Du et al., 2019). To deeply understand job insecurity's essence and manage it effectively, environmental threats must be integrated into the concept. Therefore, Study 1 defines threat-focused job insecurity, explores its dimensions, and develops a measurement scale.

3.1.1 Conceptual Definition of Threat-Focused Job Insecurity

This study's threat-focused job insecurity no longer vaguely addresses employees' subjective feelings about job loss but links subjective perception to environmental threat sources. The primary question is: Where do threats originate? Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984), among few scholars explicitly mentioning "threats," defined job insecurity as "perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatening job situation," but did not specify what threats might be. Jacobson and Hartley (1991) noted that threats may be independent of people (the job itself is at risk regardless of who holds it) or person-dependent (the job remains but specific employees cannot continue). Shoss (2017) further specified that threats may target either the job itself or the employee. Our preliminary interviews with 15 employees in Xi'an, Guangzhou, Wuhan, and Beijing via WeChat voice calls or face-to-face conversations confirmed these academic perspectives: employees mentioned economic downturns, industry changes, technological improvements, organizational restructuring, and strategic adjustments as causes of position disappearance; competitive cultures, strict performance policies, and differentiated leader-member relationships as causes of personal replacement. Additionally, 58 open-ended questionnaires collected in Wuhan revealed that Chinese SOEs' shift from arbitrary "position-for-person" to scientific "position-not-person" management has eliminated some positions, while "position-not-person" and "position-determines-person" policies require employee capabilities to match position qualifications, transforming rigid employment into

flexible, competitive mechanisms.

Drawing on these threat source distinctions and previous definitions, we define job insecurity as: a subjective experience of perceived powerlessness to maintain job continuity when affected by environmental threats, specifically the perceived threat that organizational environmental changes will cause one's current position to disappear (job at risk) or that the position will remain but the employee will be forced to leave (person at risk). This concept has three features: (1) consistent with previous research, it acknowledges job insecurity as subjective perception rather than actual job loss, with threats that may or may not materialize; (2) it links uncertainty perception to threats, emphasizing that perception derives from understanding objective environmental threats, with both objective environment and subjective perception jointly causing job insecurity; (3) it considers threat sources, focusing on two threat foci: job at risk and person at risk.

3.1.2 Dimensional Structure of Threat-Focused Job Insecurity

Based on conceptual definition, literature review, and preliminary interviews, we explore the dimensional structure. As mentioned, threats may target the job itself (job-focus) or the employee (person-focus). Therefore, we propose two dimensions: job-focus insecurity and person-focus insecurity. Job-focus insecurity refers to employees' subjective perception that their current position will cease to exist within a certain period. Person-focus insecurity refers to employees' subjective perception that they will be forced to leave their current position and be replaced by others. This represents preliminary hypotheses based on literature and initial research; further coding and classification of existing interview and questionnaire data, plus additional interviews and surveys, will be needed to validate the final structure.

3.1.3 Scale Development for Threat-Focused Job Insecurity

Developing initial measurement items is crucial. This study will use literature review, in-depth interviews, and open-ended questionnaires to collect items and develop scientifically valid measures. Our preliminary interviews found employees describing job insecurity with statements like "My position might disappear someday" or "Someone new might replace me." Notably, attending to threat causes mentioned during interviews provides valuable reference for developing subscales. When discussing potential position disappearance, employees mentioned economic downturns, industry changes, technological improvements, organizational restructuring, and strategic adjustments—factors beyond individual control. When discussing potential replacement, they mentioned competitive cultures, strict performance policies, differentiated leader-member relationships, and capability-position mismatches—factors individuals could potentially change. While preliminary research has been conducted, more targeted in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires are needed to obtain initial items. We

will strictly follow scale development methods, using pilot and formal studies to finalize the threat-focused job insecurity measurement scale.

3.2 Study 2: Differential Effects of Job Insecurity Dimensions on Innovative Behavior

Following the “situation perception—motivation activation—emotional arousal—behavior generation” logic, job insecurity as a subjective perception of external environment may activate motivation (situational regulatory focus), generate emotional responses (work passion), and thereby affect innovative behavior. Study 2 therefore examines the chain mediating effects of situational regulatory focus and work passion in the relationship between job insecurity dimensions and innovative behavior using longitudinal design. We plan to collect employee-supervisor dyadic data at four time points (T1, T2, T3, T4) to test our theoretical model (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Theoretical Model for Study 2

Job-focus insecurity → Prevention focus → Obsessive passion → Innovative behavior

Person-focus insecurity → Promotion focus → Harmonious passion → Innovative behavior

3.2.1 Differential Effects of Job Insecurity Dimensions on Innovative Behavior

Job insecurity may be a “double-edged sword” with both “dark” and “bright” sides, creating complex relationships with behavioral outcomes. Its specific impact on innovative behavior depends heavily on dimensional distinctions and intensity levels. We explain differential effects from stress and job retention perspectives, hypothesizing that job-focus insecurity negatively affects innovative behavior, while person-focus insecurity has an inverted U-shaped effect.

Stress appraisal theory emphasizes how organizational contexts affect employee cognition, with individuals evaluating job insecurity as either “challenge” or “hindrance” based on coping resources, leading to positive or negative responses (Chen & Zhou, 2020). On one hand, job-focus insecurity largely stems from social environmental changes and organizational strategic choices that individuals cannot reverse, strongly hindering career development and thus 被视为 hindrance stressors that cause negative outcomes like decreased work attitudes, emotional exhaustion, weakened self-regulation, and reduced creativity (Huang & Li, 2016), thereby inhibiting innovative behavior. On the other hand, person-focus insecurity mainly stems from competitive internal environments (competitive culture, climate, strict performance policies, differentiated leader-member relationships) where individuals have agency. Since actual job loss has not occurred, employees can actively adjust to change, making it more likely to be viewed as a challenge stressor (Shoss, 2018). The inverted U-shaped effect oc-

curs because: at low person-focus insecurity, environmental stability creates satisfaction and lacks 变异刺激 to trigger creativity (Zhou & Long, 2011); at high levels, intense job loss concerns make employees adopt safer, more conservative approaches (Yang & Zhang, 2012). Moderate person-focus insecurity optimally stimulates innovation because sufficient 变异激励 prompts new problem-solving approaches without excessive job loss concerns that prevent risk-taking (Zhou & Long, 2011; Yang & Zhang, 2012).

From a job retention motivation perspective, employees' evaluations of whether threats can be countered differ, affecting their motivation to retain jobs through efforts like innovative behavior (Shoss, 2018). Perceiving job threats means individuals cannot prevent position disappearance regardless of who holds it (Jacobson & Hartley, 1991; Shoss, 2017), leading to passive acceptance. As job-focus insecurity increases, employees increasingly disbelieve that effort can retain their jobs, making innovative behavior less likely. Conversely, perceiving person-focus insecurity makes employees aware that job loss has not yet occurred and that innovation could improve performance or impressions (Yuan & Woodman, 2010), prompting active responses. The inverted U-shaped effect occurs because: as person-focus insecurity increases from low to moderate levels, employees maintain optimistic beliefs about preventing job loss through effort, possibly using innovation to avoid future loss (Shoss, 2017); when insecurity rises further, employees perceive the situation as beyond their control and cease active coping.

3.2.2 Mediating Role of Situational Regulatory Focus

Regulatory focus theory proposes two self-regulation systems: promotion focus (regulating reward-seeking behavior, focusing on positive outcomes) and prevention focus (regulating punishment-avoidance behavior, focusing on negative outcomes) (Higgins, 1997). Unlike stable trait regulatory focus, situational regulatory focus is induced by environmental and task framing cues, characterized by short-term, current-state activation (Cao & Xu, 2017). Based on regulatory focus theory, job insecurity as a threat perception—a “reflection” of situational factors—can activate situational regulatory focus. Job-focus and person-focus insecurity expose employees to completely different situational cues, activating different regulatory foci. Prevention focus originates from obligations, “non-loss” situations, and security needs, focusing on duties and safety, 倾向于 avoidance strategies. Promotion focus originates from ideals, “gain” situations, and growth needs, focusing on hopes and success, 倾向于 approach strategies (Higgins, 1997; Wang et al., 2020).

For employees perceiving job-focus insecurity, organizational cues emphasizing potential loss, safety needs, and responsibility fulfillment 倾向于 activate prevention focus. First, as a pure hindrance stressor, job-focus insecurity is perceived as uncontrollable and insurmountable, strongly hindering career development. Continuing in the position serves only to avoid income loss, creating a “non-loss” situation that activates prevention focus. Second, when considering poten-

tial harm, employees focus on postponing unemployment to support their families, activating temporary security needs and prevention focus. Third, to avoid mistakes and losses, employees perform only minimum standard obligations, completing only income-linked duties, activating prevention focus. Higher job-focus insecurity strengthens these loss-focused, security-inducing, responsibility-emphasizing cues, more strongly activating prevention focus. We hypothesize: job-focus insecurity positively affects prevention focus.

For employees perceiving person-focus insecurity, organizational cues emphasizing potential gains, growth needs, and ideal achievement 倾向于 activate promotion focus. First, person-focus insecurity is controllable; employees can outperform others to retain positions and achieve career growth, creating a “gain” situation that activates promotion focus. Second, as a challenge stressor conducive to growth, it arouses growth needs and promotion focus. Third, employees view this challenge as surmountable, stimulating strong ideal achievement needs and promotion focus. Compared to high or low levels, moderate person-focus insecurity makes employees most sensitive to environmental 变异激励 without excessive job retention concerns, strongest in perceiving gain-focused, growth-inducing, ideal-promoting cues, thus activating highest promotion focus. We hypothesize: person-focus insecurity has an inverted U-shaped effect on promotion focus.

Innovative behavior brings reform and opportunity but also uncertainty and risk (Wu et al., 2020). Regulatory focus theory suggests prevention-focused individuals 倾向于 avoidance strategies, while promotion-focused individuals 倾向于 approach strategies (Higgins, 1997). Prevention focus makes employees attend to negative outcomes, with low risk tolerance, error avoidance, and conservative actions that hinder innovation. Promotion focus makes employees attend to positive outcomes, with high risk tolerance, opportunity-seeking, and creative thinking that fosters innovation (Wang et al., 2020). Empirical research shows prevention-focused individuals fear mistakes and stick to routines, while promotion-focused individuals take risks and implement new ideas (Mao, 2017; Wallace & Chen, 2006). We hypothesize: prevention focus negatively affects innovative behavior, while promotion focus positively affects innovative behavior.

Further, job insecurity as a situational threat perception affects regulatory focus, which in turn adjusts behavioral expression (Gorman et al., 2012; Cao & Xu, 2017). Job-focus insecurity creates a “loss” situation that stimulates security needs and responsibility fulfillment, inducing prevention focus and avoidance strategies that inhibit innovation. Person-focus insecurity creates a “gain” situation that stimulates growth needs and ideal achievement, inducing promotion focus and approach strategies that facilitate innovation. We propose mediated effects: job-focus insecurity negatively affects innovative behavior through prevention focus; person-focus insecurity has an inverted U-shaped effect on innovative behavior through promotion focus.

3.2.3 Chain Mediation of Situational Regulatory Focus and Work Passion

As work passion relates to motivation, situational regulatory focus as a motivational construct may stimulate emotional responses like work passion. Work passion is an emotion related to individual motivation. The dualistic model of passion distinguishes obsessive passion (low internalization of external motives) and harmonious passion (high internalization) based on how individuals internalize external motives for passionate activities (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2010). When individuals dislike their work but must engage for reasons like social recognition or economic factors, they experience negative emotions and develop obsessive passion. When individuals love and identify with their work, they spontaneously engage with positive emotions, developing harmonious passion (Song et al., 2020). The dualistic model identifies activity selection, evaluation, and external motive internalization as influencing passion, with internalization being the most important source (Vallerand, 2010; Zhang et al., 2014).

Regulatory focus theory suggests prevention-focused employees pursue “ought selves,” attending to obligations and safety with low intrinsic motivation, while promotion-focused employees pursue “ideal selves,” attending to hopes and success with strong intrinsic motivation for growth and self-realization (Wang et al., 2020). Research shows low internalization correlates with obsessive passion, while high internalization correlates with harmonious passion (Zhang et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2008). We hypothesize: prevention focus positively affects obsessive passion, while promotion focus positively affects harmonious passion.

The dualistic model indicates that employees experiencing different passion types have different emotional experiences and subsequent behaviors. Obsessive passion creates work engagement that is not spontaneous but compelled by external reasons (Curran et al., 2015; Song et al., 2020). This diverts attention (Ho et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2014), narrows information processing and behavioral choices, leading to habitual responses rather than innovative attempts (Wang et al., 2011). Harmonious passion aligns external and intrinsic motives, with intrinsic drive enhancing focus (Ho et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2014), prompting idea generation and creative problem-solving. St-Louis and Vallerand (2015) found artists with obsessive passion showed lower creativity, while those with harmonious passion showed higher creativity. We hypothesize: obsessive passion negatively affects innovative behavior, while harmonious passion positively affects innovative behavior.

Regulatory focus affects emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Job-focus insecurity activates prevention focus, generating obsessive passion and negatively affecting innovative behavior. As job-focus insecurity increases, stronger loss-focused, security-inducing, responsibility-emphasizing cues more strongly activate prevention focus and subsequent chain effects. We propose a chain mediation hypothesis: job-focus insecurity negatively affects innovative behavior by

activating prevention focus and stimulating obsessive passion. Person-focus insecurity activates promotion focus, generating harmonious passion and positively affecting innovative behavior. As previously argued, moderate person-focus insecurity most strongly activates promotion focus and subsequent chain effects. We propose a chain mediation hypothesis: person-focus insecurity has an inverted U-shaped effect on innovative behavior by activating promotion focus and stimulating harmonious passion.

3.3 Study 3: Impact of Job Insecurity Latent Profiles on Innovative Behavior

Study 2' s variable-centered approach effectively reveals dimension-specific effects but analyzes job-focus and person-focus insecurity in isolation, ignoring dimensional interactions and different level combinations. Debus et al. (2020) advocated person-centered approaches to address these limitations. This approach can identify latent job insecurity profiles, demonstrating that job insecurity varies not only quantitatively (overall level) but also qualitatively (dimensional combinations).

In reality, employees face more complex threat situations, simultaneously experiencing varying levels of both insecurity types. Composite perceptions may form specific latent profiles. What latent types exist? How do motivation (situational regulatory focus) and emotional reactions (work passion) differ across types? Do innovative behaviors differ? Study 3 therefore uses a person-centered approach with latent profile analysis to capture individual differences in job insecurity types and examine their consequences for motivation, emotion, and innovative behavior.

3.3.1 Latent Profile Analysis of Job Insecurity

Most job insecurity research treats it as a single construct or uses variable-centered approaches even when distinguishing quantitative/qualitative or cognitive/affective dimensions. Variable-centered approaches use overall scores to represent individual job insecurity levels, assuming similar dimensional cognition across individuals. Even Study 2' s dimensional analysis doesn' t address dimensional combinations. In contrast, person-centered approaches recognize individual differences, treating job insecurity as a combination of dimensions at different levels and classifying psychological and behavioral characteristics to identify latent profiles.

As person-centered approaches are inductive, the exact number and form of profiles cannot be predetermined and must emerge empirically. Theoretically, latent profile analysis should identify at least two profiles. Based on Study 2' s analysis, we preliminarily hypothesize that job-focus and person-focus insecurity each have high, medium, and low levels, potentially yielding nine profiles (Figure 3). This represents the maximum possible types; empirical analysis may reveal

only some of these. Latent profile analysis will determine what profiles exist and their population proportions.

Figure 3. Possible Latent Profiles of Job Insecurity

(Note: Numbers correspond to profile descriptions in text)

3.3.2 Relationship Between Job Insecurity Profiles and Innovative Behavior

Variable-centered research shows high overall job insecurity weakens intrinsic motivation and reduces innovative behavior. Study 2 hypothesizes differential dimensional effects through regulatory focus and passion. Using a person-centered approach, do different profiles relate differently to innovative behavior? This section compares regulatory focus, work passion, and innovative behavior across profiles to identify which situational perceptions best facilitate innovation. Literature rarely addresses person-focus insecurity (when positions exist but employees cannot retain them) or combined job-person threat situations, providing limited theoretical guidance. Therefore, we propose exploratory questions rather than specific hypotheses. Since final profiles will be determined empirically, we illustrate exploratory thinking with three typical examples:

Profile 3 (High job-focus, low person-focus insecurity): When employees know they will retain their positions as long as jobs exist but face high job risk, what is their innovative behavior level? Might they use innovation to impress supervisors for internal transfer or external recommendations through leaders' networks? What are their prevention/promotion focus and obsessive/harmonious passion levels?

Profile 7 (Low job-focus, high person-focus insecurity): When positions are stable but employees face high replacement risk, what is their innovative behavior level? Might they expect innovation to improve performance or attract attention for positive evaluations and job retention? What are their regulatory focus and passion levels?

Profile 8 (Low job-focus, moderate person-focus insecurity): Compared to Profile 9' s extremely stable environment, this may represent the optimal innovation context. When positions are very stable and employees experience moderate insecurity—receiving sufficient environmental stimulation without excessive job retention concerns—will innovative behavior be highest? What are these employees' regulatory focus and passion states?

Answering these questions will deepen understanding of how job insecurity affects innovative behavior and enable targeted management: identifying how different profiles determine motivation, emotion, and innovation levels to suggest overall classification-based management strategies, and predicting innovation sustainability and intervention needs for specific profile types.

4. Theoretical Framework

Job insecurity remains a crucial topic in organizational behavior and HRM. In reality, employees facing different threats show significantly different innovative behaviors: environmental changes and technological advances create powerlessness and creative paralysis, while competitive climates motivate active innovation for job retention. Examining this phenomenon's underlying mechanisms, we argue for linking environmental threats to subjective perception to understand threat-focused job insecurity, deconstruct its dimensions, and simultaneously employ variable-centered and person-centered approaches to explore differential dimensional effects and latent profile impacts.

Based on this conception, this study constructs a systematic theoretical framework through three interrelated, progressively advancing components, offering intervention suggestions for managers. Study 1 addresses the threat-focused job insecurity construct itself—conceptual definition, dimensional structure, and scale development—laying the foundation for subsequent research. Considering environmental threat sources expands conceptual research, deepens understanding, and provides measurement tools. Study 2 uses a variable-centered approach to examine differential dimensional effects and mechanisms, analyzing motivation and emotion mediation to reveal underlying processes. Grounded in regulatory focus theory and the dualistic model of passion, it explores prevention focus and obsessive passion's chain mediation in job-focus insecurity's negative effects, and promotion focus and harmonious passion's chain mediation in person-focus insecurity's inverted U-shaped effects, enriching mechanism research. Study 3 uses a person-centered approach to explore latent profiles' differential impacts on innovative behavior, identifying profiles through latent profile analysis and examining their effects on motivation, emotion, and innovation, addressing variable-centered limitations and providing new research directions.

This study makes three key contributions:

First, considering environmental threat sources to define and dimensionalize job insecurity and develop a measurement scale advances conceptual research and helps researchers and practitioners understand this phenomenon's essence. Unlike previous research treating job insecurity as a whole construct and overemphasizing subjective perception while ignoring environmental threats, this study builds on Jacobson and Hartley (1991) and Shoss (2017) to deconstruct job insecurity into job-focus and person-focus dimensions, developing scales to deepen conceptual understanding.

Second, examining differential dimensional effects and mechanisms, revealing the chain mediation of situational regulatory focus and work passion, provides more nuanced relationship research and richer mechanism exploration. Previous research treated job insecurity as a whole construct and examined only intrinsic motivation. This project explores prevention focus and obsessive passion's chain mediation in job-focus insecurity's negative effects and promotion focus and harmonious passion's chain mediation in person-focus insecurity's inverted U-

shaped effects, providing more comprehensive understanding. Future research could further examine moderating effects of organizational justice, compensation satisfaction, organizational support, social support, and leadership styles.

Third, using a person-centered approach to examine individual differences in job insecurity profiles and their innovative behavior effects reveals how dimensions combine to form overall effects, addressing variable-centered limitations and providing new research directions. Previous job insecurity research has primarily used variable-centered approaches based on sample averages, ignoring individual differences and subgroup characteristics. Responding to Debus et al.'s (2020) call, this study uses latent profile analysis to explore job insecurity profiles and their differential effects on motivation, emotional reactions, and innovative behavior, effectively addressing traditional limitations and providing theoretical support for classification-based management and differential interventions.

This study also has practical significance. Exploring threat-focused job insecurity and its differential effects on innovative behavior provides important guidance for managing employee insecurity and promoting innovation. First, conceptualizing and dimensionalizing job insecurity by threat source enables managers to understand this phenomenon more comprehensively, extending beyond job loss to include situations where positions exist but employees cannot retain them. Second, examining differential dimensional effects, mediating mechanisms, and profile-specific impacts helps organizations and leaders better understand specific influence processes and implement targeted interventions to achieve organizational goals.

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