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Job insecurity, procedural justice and downsizing survivor affects

Sergio Andrés López Bohle^a, María José Chambel^b and
Antonia Diaz-Valdes Iriarte^c

^aDepartamento de Administración, Facultad de Administración y Economía, Universidad de Santiago de Chile, Santiago, Chile; ^bFaculdade de Psicologia, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal; ^cBoston College, School of Social Work, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA

ABSTRACT

The current study developed and tested a mediation model that accounts for the procedural justice in the relationship between the perception of job insecurity and affect. We used a sample of 681 workers, from four private enterprises in the retail industry in Chile, who survived an organizational downsizing process. The hypotheses were tested by using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results indicated that the perception of job insecurity and employees' negative affects was partially mediated by procedural justice. However, the relationship between job insecurity and employees' positive affects was totally mediated by procedural justice. Therefore, such results suggest that it is important during a downsizing process for companies to implement actions to enhance job security in order to develop adequate affect among survivors. Furthermore, it is also seemingly crucial that justice should be an important issue in the downsizing process, and that the company should develop actions that reflect the perception of procedural justice throughout the process. Thus, this research provides evidence that it is useful to simultaneously consider procedural justice and stress reactions in a downsizing process, since neither are independent variables.

KEYWORDS

Downsizing; procedural justice; job insecurity; employees' affect

Introduction

Over the last several decades, downsizing as a means of organizational restructuring has become a favored solution to survive in an international market characterized by high competition (Guthrie & Datta, 2008). Downsizing is intended to be a permanent downscaling in order to reduce the number of paid employees. Downsizing frequently has negative and unexpected effects on the remaining work force, also referred to as survivors (Baumol, Blinder, & Wolff, 2003; Datta,

Guthrie, Basuil, & Pandey, 2010; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2005). Although survivors are not directly affected by the downsizing decision, they are likely to experience stress levels as intense as those who have left, as they observe how the victims were treated, and perceive their work situation as being threatened as well (Baruch & Hind, 1999).

A downsizing operation violates an employee's expectation that the employer will reciprocate his/her positive attitudes and behavior with a stable and positive employment situation. In addition, survivors perceive low control over the downsizing decision and, consequently, job insecurity (Devine, Reay, Stainton, & Collins-Nakai, 2003). When the circumstances and the process by which a staff member has been let go is thought to be unfair, being let go is perceived as particularly negative (Van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012).

The aim of the present study is to investigate the extent to which survivors' perception of job insecurity plays a crucial role in explaining their affect. More precisely, we expect survivors' perception of job insecurity to relate negatively to their positive affect and positively to their negative affect. Secondly, the study sets out to show that it is crucial to take these survivors' perception of procedural justice in this relationship into account. Indeed, we postulate that procedural justice mediates the relationship between job insecurity perceptions and affect.

This study goes beyond previous research on the survivors of downsizing in a number of ways. First, many studies that have analyzed the ramifications of employee downsizing have investigated either stress (Devine et al., 2003) or justice (Van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). Moreover, previous studies focusing on job insecurity in conjunction with procedural justice have considered that organizational justice should moderate the relationship between job insecurity and workers' attitudes and performance (Silla, Gracia, Mañas, & Peiró, 2010; Sora, Caballer, Peiró, Silla, & Gracia, 2010; Wang, Lu, & Siu, 2015). Our study was based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional stress theory which underlines that in a downsizing process, the survivor's perception of procedural justice is a mechanism that explains the relationship between a stressor (i.e. job insecurity) and his/her emotions (i.e. affects) (Spector & Goh, 2001). In keeping with Schaufeli and Taris (2014), who regarded stress models as providing limited insight into the psychological mechanisms that explain the relationship between stressors and employees' reactions, we included procedural justice as one of these concepts. Secondly, most of the studies that have examined the consequences of justice perceptions have tended to focus on attitudes and behaviors, while the affective feelings of individuals have been less studied (Cropanzano, Weiss, Suckow, & Grandey, 2000). Furthermore, in studies which have related justice to emotions, the focus has been geared towards negative affect (Skitka, Winquist, & Hutchinson, 2003). In this study however, the relationship of procedural justice was analyzed by taking both positive and negative affect into consideration. Thirdly, the few studies to have associated justice and affects were carried out with undergraduate participants and performed in a laboratory setting, not in a workplace context

(Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000). This study was conducted with a sample of workers who had survived the downsizing process in their company. Fourthly, research on the consequences of a downsizing process has tended to concentrate on the justice of an allocation or distribution of outcomes, in other words, centered more on distributive justice (Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005; Murphy-Berman, Cross, & Fondacaro, 1999), while information regarding the consequences of this process on procedural justice remains scarce. This study analyzes survivors' perceptions of procedural justice. Finally, the fact that our investigation was conducted in Chile provides a distinct context in which the downsizing process may be studied and contrasted with the vast majority of research which has already been conducted in Europe and North American (e.g. Van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012).

Job insecurity and employees' affect

Job insecurity is defined as the perceived inability to maintain the desired continuity in a threatened job situation (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Job insecurity pertains to employed individuals who feel threatened by the prospect of unemployment; therefore the topic is situated between the states of employment and unemployment (De Witte, 2005). Thus, the perception of potential involuntary job loss is an important issue in the context of downsizing (De Witte, 1999). In fact, job insecurity is a variable that is considered to be exacerbated in survivors of downsizing, given that when they reflect on the situation of those who have been laid off, these employees experience higher levels of unpredictability concerning their own job, and lower levels of control over the possible end of their employment in the organization (Devine et al., 2003). Hence, lack of predictability is related to the survivors' inability to anticipate whether another downsizing process is likely to occur, and if so, who the next employee to be fired will be (Brockner, Grover, O'Malley, Reed, & Glynn, 1993). The fact that survivors may not know if they will be able to adjust to a change of circumstances, or meet the new expectations and properly perform new tasks, is another source of insecurity (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; O'Neill & Lenn, 1995). At the same time, a lack of control arises due to the fact that the survivors are not involved in the dismissal process, the decision-making or in the planning of the organization's future. Therefore, survivors feel that decisions influencing their professional livelihood are beyond their control (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Jordan, Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Hooper, 2002).

Generally, job insecurity is conceptualized as a job stressor (e.g. Ashford et al., 1989; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Mauno, Leskinen, & Kinnunen, 2001) that triggers strain reactions which, in turn, may have consequences for both the individual and the organization (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002). According to the central proposition of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional stress theory, the anticipation of a stressful event is a source of strain as, or perhaps even more, important than the event itself. According to this theory, stress is an emotional response resulting from the relationship between

the person and the environment. The environment or the situation only gains meaning or significance as a stressor following an evaluative process conducted by the individual, which categorizes a situation and focuses on its implications. First, the level of stress experienced depends on how much of a stake the person has in the outcome of the event: if there is no relevance to the person, and no threat, there will be no stress; if the stake is high, the situation will pose a threat and trigger a stress reaction. In fact, according to this theory, the primary appraisal is the motivational significance of the situation which may be divided into three categories: Irrelevant, where the stimuli has no implication for the person's well-being; Benign-positive, where the outcome is deemed as positive with pleasurable emotions; and Stressful, characterized by harm or loss and threat. Second, the level of stress experienced depends on the evaluative judgment of the situation in terms of what can be done to alleviate and manage the situation, particularly in regard to possible coping mechanisms and their expected outcome. In this secondary appraisal, high stress occurs when individuals believe that they have no control over events, thus preventing them from coping with the situation. Therefore, it may be said that survivors in a downsizing process experience a situation of high stress, given that the uncertainty regarding their employment is relevant to their life. However, they also feel that they have little likelihood of controlling this uncertainty.

Consequently, anticipation of the threat to the desired continued employment may have as devastating consequences as the loss of employment itself, possibly leading to negative work-related reactions, such as a reduction in the employee's well-being (e.g. Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002; Sverke et al., 2002). In fact, in a study on the survivors of downsizing, Noer (1993) reported that the premonition of losing something as important as a person's job invokes forceful psychological and behavioral responses. Many of these responses are counterproductive to the purposes of the organization, and can present symptoms as late as five years after the downsizing process.

Employees' emotions (i.e. affects) are the consequence of a stressor in the occupational stress process (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Spector & Goh, 2001). Positive and negative affects are mood concepts used to measure the level of affect. Positive affect can be represented by words such as determined, absorbed, inspired and active, and is also characterized by a state of high energy, full concentration and excitement. Negative affect, on the other hand, subsumes a variety of aversive mood states and refers to feelings of guilt, ashamedness, upset and hostility (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Both positive and negative affects represent affective state dimensions which are relatively independent and have an important role in the individual's subjective experience in terms of job attitudes and behaviors (Ilies, Dimotakis, & Watson, 2010).

Positive affect will be experienced if an employee appraises a situation as enhancing his/her well-being, thus perceiving his/her working environment more positively (Bakker et al., 2010). Conversely, negative affect will be experienced if a

situation is perceived as a threat to one's well-being. For example, anger tends to emerge when goal achievement or a desired condition is threatened; when significant harm is perceived, an anxiety reaction occurs and an emotion of depression is associated with the perceived loss (Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005; Van den Bos, Maas, Waldring, & Semin, 2003).

In this sense, individuals going through a threatening event are more likely to experience negative affect regarding every day issues. Moreover, most of the research on the consequences of job insecurity points to job insecurity leading to negative emotions among employees (Burchell, 1994; Landsbergis, 1988; Mossholder, Settoon, Armenakis, & Harris, 2000).

Based on these arguments, we hypothesize that the affects of downsizing survivors will depend on their job insecurity perceptions.

Hypothesis 1a: Job insecurity is positively related to negative affect.

Hypothesis 1b: Job insecurity is negatively related to positive affect.

Job insecurity and procedural justice

Downsizing is known to bring uncertainty. The more uncertainty a situation presents, namely more job insecurity, the higher a person's need will be to engage in a sense-making process and to use information on procedural justice for this process (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002; Van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). Hence, the perception of procedural justice may be defined as judgments made by employees, based on their perception of the decision-making that is affecting the downsizing process (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980). Procedural justice is promoted through voice during the decision-making process, and the perceived adherence to a number of fair process criteria such as consistency, lack of bias, representation, accuracy, and ethicality (Leventhal et al., 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). However, given the job insecurity involved in this process, employees may feel that the organization has provided incomplete information on the reasons, actions and procedures taken when dismissing its employees. Furthermore, they may also feel they have been left in the dark with regards to how the post-layoff organization has been managed. These factors are more likely to increase a rejection of the downsizing process and for employees to perceive the transition as being unfair (Daly & Geyer, 1994). In fact, a downsizing process may easily give rise to a severe cognitive and emotional assessment of the worker-organization relationship, which occurs as a consequence of unmet expectations and unfulfilled obligations created by an increased perception of job insecurity. Additionally, previous literature has shown that downsizing and layoffs are correlated with perceptions of unfair treatment in the workplace, especially towards the management (Brockner et al., 1994), and that job insecurity may also be perceived as unfair (e.g. Kirkman, Shapiro, Novelli, & Brett, 1996). Thus, given the above background, the perception of job insecurity also alters the

perceived justice of the proceedings, which means that when the perception of job insecurity increases, the perceived injustice of procedures also increases.

Procedural justice and employees' affect

On the other hand, many researchers have associated the violation of justice procedures with negative affects (Barclay et al., 2005; Larsen, Diener, & Cropanzano, 1987; Van den Bos et al., 2003). Taking the appraisal theory assumptions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1991) into consideration, injustice leads to negative affects (Petzall, Parker, & Stoeberl, 2000; Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999). An unfair procedure is first appraised by the individual as unpleasant, since it presents itself as being contrary to his/her goals and values, and when, after a second appraisal, the individual is attributed further responsibility, he/she feels incapable of coping with the demand, which may lead to highly negative affects, that are equally conducive to a reduction in well-being (Lazarus, 1991). Thus, survivors are expected to be hostile and aversive towards unfair procedures in a downsizing process, as this not only represents an obstacle in the accomplishment of their goals, but also an event that they cannot control (Appelbaum & Donia, 2000; Petzall et al., 2000). Furthermore, research suggests that when formal procedures are unjust, they are related to negative emotions (Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998; Paterson & Cary, 2002). Moreover, workers may experience emotional distress, such as anger, hostility, guilt and shame when their expectations are not met (Bies & Tripp, 2002; Devine et al., 2003; Mikula et al., 1998) and this occurs mainly when employees feel that the organization is making unfair decisions (Barclay et al., 2005; Brotheridge, 2003; Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992). Consequently, the perceived procedural justice of downsizing has an enormous impact on the emotions of the survivors (Brockner, DeWitt, Grover, & Reed, 1990).

Conversely, evidence has shown that workers, when treated fairly, are more likely to accept the downsizing process and continue to regard their company and work positively (Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Reichle & Montada, 1994), particularly when the process is appropriate (Cropanzano & Folger, 1989), and when employees are called upon to participate in it. Some scholars have explained that procedural justice reaffirms an employee's sense of status, self-esteem, self-respect, and the perceived legitimacy and trust of organizational authorities (Tyler & Blader, 2002; Tyler & Lind, 1992). For instance, appraisal theories underline the relevance of goals pertaining to events (Lazarus, 1991). In this case, justice is thought to develop a number of foundational goals, including the achievement of significance, self-worth, control and affinity (Barclay et al., 2005).

Procedural justice as a mediator

The abovementioned relationships may be better represented through a mediation model. Job insecurity is more likely to increase a rejection of the downsizing

process and generate a perception of the transition as being unfair (Daly & Geyer, 1994), resulting in more negative affects towards the organization (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). In fact, justice research has shown that such issues regarding one's job security not only cause anxiety, but may be perceived as unfair (e.g. Kirkman et al., 1996), which, in turn, can lead to anger (Conlon & Shapiro, 2002). Insecurity resulting from a downsizing process is associated with feeling unfairly treated (Brockner et al., 1994), which, in turn, has been associated with negative emotions such as anger and resentment, anxiety, disappointment and mistrust (e.g. Conlon & Shapiro, 2002; Paterson & Cary, 2002). Based on the findings of earlier studies, and a combination of the aforementioned job stress theories, this study anticipates that perceived organizational procedural justice is important in explaining the relationship between a stressor (i.e. job insecurity) and employees' reactions (i.e. employees' affect). Therefore, we predict procedural justice as a mechanism to explain the relationship between employees' job insecurity perceptions and their affects:

Hypothesis 2a: Procedural justice mediates the relationship between job insecurity and negative affect.

Hypothesis 2b: Procedural justice mediates the relationship between job insecurity and positive affect.

Method

Participants and procedure

The participants were obtained through a convenience sample. The sample consisted of 681 workers (85% response rate) from four private companies in the retail industry in Chile who had survived an organizational downsizing process during the previous twelve months. This sector is highly competitive and is of great relevance to the country's economy. Over the last two years, the retail industry has been confronted with several restructuring processes, due to organizational changes that have forced them to adjust their endowment of workers, leading to a loss of 1,500 jobs. According to official statements, similar processes are still expected to occur in the near future.

A survey study was conducted to test these hypotheses. Employees from four companies of the retail industry in Chile were invited to take part in the study on a voluntary basis. After receiving approval from the employees, paper-pencil versions of the questionnaire were distributed among them, and they were requested to sign a letter of informed consent to the objectives and purposes of this research study. After obtaining participants' consent, the printed questionnaire was distributed in the meeting rooms of each of the organizations, either before or after employees' working hours, to minimize any interference with their daily workload. A team of research assistants properly trained for the procedure conducted the questionnaire proceedings. Research assistants introduced the project

Table 1. Demographics of the sample.

Sample	Total (n = 681)	Company A (n = 144)	Company B (n = 127)	Company C (n = 267)	Company D (n = 143)	F-values/ χ^2
Age (mean)	35.4 (SD = 10.7)	34.6 (SD = 10.5)	35.8 (SD = 8.79)	36.2 (SD = 9.97)	32.8 (SD = 11.68)	$F(df = 3) = 2.62, n.s.$
Gender (% male)	75.1	79.6	72.6	74.4	75.7%	$\chi^2(df = 3) = 2.02, n.s.$
Education (%)						$\chi^2(df = 12) = 4.36, n.s.$
High school (%)	30.0	27.3	25.1	31.3	28.3	
Professional technical (%)	35.2	32.9	33.5	36.7	35.8	
Job tenure (mean)	7.97 (SD = 6.15)	6.27 (SD = 5.24)	7.23 (SD = 5.83)	8.07 (SD = 7.65)	7.03 (SD = 6.94)	$F(df = 3) = 1.59$
Sector (%)						$\chi^2(df = 18) = 3.06, n.s.$
Operator (%)	28.0	25.8	33.6	28.3	34.9	
Supervisor (%)	20.5	22.0	18.9	21.7	19.8	

to each group, explained the purpose and value of the study, and highlighted participants' rights to anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. In all the surveys, a cover letter accompanying the questionnaire indicated that the survey was being conducted solely for scientific purposes.

Of the total sample, 75.1% were male and 24.9% were female. On average, participants were 35.4 years of age (SD = 10.7; range = 17 to 64 years). In terms of the respective company sectors, 28% of participants were employed at the operating level, 23% had administrative positions, 20.2% held technical positions, 20.5% were supervisors, and 2.7% were managers or assistant managers. Regarding the academic qualifications of the participants, 2.8% had elementary education, 30.0% had high school education, 35.2% had completed some type of professional or technical training, 27.6% were university graduates, and 4.5% had a postgraduate qualification. The mean organizational tenure was 7.97 years (SD = 6.15; range = six months – 45 years). All employees had a permanent contract and were full-time workers. Statistical comparisons showed that the samples are representative of the total population working for the organizations. Finally, analyses were performed across the four organizations, enabling us to conclude that we had a homogeneous population across the respondents (see Table 1).

Measures

Existing and validated scales were used to measure the constructs under study. All the surveys were in Spanish, and the scales were translated and back translated by two native Spanish and English speakers, working independently (Brislin, 1980). In the case of translation discrepancies, the two translators discussed the implications of these differences and defined together a final version for the ambiguous

translations in order to ensure precision. A pilot test of the Chilean version of the questionnaire using 50 employees was conducted to assess its usability.

Job Insecurity was measured with the respective four-item scale developed by De Witte (2000) (e.g. 'I feel insecure about the future of my job'). All items were answered on a five-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *highly disagree* to 5 = *highly agree*, with high scores indicating high levels of job insecurity. Cronbach's alpha was .88.

Procedural justice was measured with a six-item scale by Niehoff and Moorman (1993), which was adapted to the context of downsizing. A sample item is 'My organization clarifies its decisions and provides information on downsizing and on what is required of employees'. All items were rated on a five-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *highly disagree* to 5 = *highly agree*, with high scores indicating high levels of procedural justice. Cronbach's alpha was .86.

Positive and negative affects were measured with the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson et al., 1988), with ten adjectives for each affect (e.g. 'interested' in the case of positive affect and 'upset' in the case of negative affect). All items were answered on a five-point rating scale, ranging from 1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *extremely*, with high scores indicating high levels of affects. Cronbach's alpha was .84 for positive affect and .79 for negative affect.

Control variables

We considered that the companies may have been associated with the study variables; thus, we controlled their effect by coding the companies into three dummy variables. We also considered that position at the company may have had a relationship with the study variables, therefore we controlled its effect by coding position into a dummy variable (0 = without supervisor/manager position; 1 = with supervisor/manager position).

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

Due to the fact that all measures were assessed as self-reports, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine whether the measures indeed represented different constructs (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In general, we compared a model in which all measures loaded on one factor with a respective four-factor model. In order to assess the model fit, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; reference), the Incremental Fit Index (IFI, reference), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA, reference), and the Standardized Root Means Square Residual (SRMR, reference) were used. Levels of .90 or above for CFI and IFI indicate an acceptable fit. RMSEA of .05 or below, in combination with SRMR values below .09 indicate an excellent fit, whereas values below .08 and .10, respectively, indicate a good fit (Byrne, 2010). The different competing models were compared by means of the χ^2 difference test.

The model with four latent factors (i.e. job insecurity, procedural justice, positive affect and negative affect) provided an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(455) = 1171.75$, $p < .01$, SRMR = .06, CFI = .91, IFI = .91, RMSEA = .05) and fit the data significantly better than the one-factor model [$\Delta\chi^2(6) = 3394.32$, $p < .01$], the three-factor model in which positive and negative affects loaded on the same factor [$\Delta\chi^2(3) = 1042.12$, $p < .01$] and the three-factor model in which job insecurity and procedural justice loaded on the same factor [$\Delta\chi^2(3) = 1174.38$, $p < .01$]. Fit indices for the one-factor model were: $\chi^2(461) = 4566.07$, $p < .01$, SRMR = .13, CFI = .46, IFI = .46, RMSEA = .11; for the three-factor model in which positive and negative affects loaded on the same factor fit, indices were: $\chi^2(458) = 2213.87$, $p < .01$, SRMR = .10, CFI = .77, IFI = .77, RMSEA = .08; and for the three-factor model in which job insecurity and procedural justice loaded on the same factor, indices were: $\chi^2(458) = 2346.13$, $p < .01$, SRMR = .09, CFI = .75, IFI = .75, RMSEA = .08.

We further tested an additional model (methods model), in which an unmeasured latent methods factor was added to the four-factor theoretical model. In this model, all items load on their theoretical constructs, as well as on the latent methods factor. The methods model also obtained a good fit ($\chi^2(457) = 1181.26$, $p < .001$, SRMR = .06, CFI = .91; IFI = .91, RMSEA = .05), and the method factor accounted for 29% of the variance, which falls short of the threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although both models include the same observed variables, the methods model cannot be nested within the one-factor model; hence we calculated the CFI difference to compare the goodness-of-fit of these models. The change of CFI between both models was .001, which is below the suggested rule of thumb of .05 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1990). Therefore, we conclude that common method bias is not a major concern in this study.

Descriptive analysis

Means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations are displayed in Table 1.

As may be observed in Table 2, job insecurity was negatively related to procedural justice and positive affect, while it was positively related to negative affect. Moreover, procedural justice was positively related to positive affect, and negatively related to negative affect.

Hypothesis testing

Our hypotheses were tested by means of structural equation modeling. In order to test the mediation relationship, three sets of SEM models were computed. To control for potential confounding effects, the company's organizational positions were inserted in the models as observed variables. First, a mediation model including full mediation of the relationship between job insecurity and employees' affects by procedural justice – (M1: $\chi^2(575) = 1587.16$, $p < .01$, SRMR = .07, CFI = .91, IFI = .91, RMSEA = .05) was analyzed, which showed an acceptable fit. Then, in

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix between the studied variables ($N = 681$).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Company B ^a	–	–							
2. Company C ^a	–	–	–.25**						
3. Company D ^a	–	–	.27**	.25**					
4. Position ^b	–	–	–.10*	–.02	.04				
5. Job insecurity	2.47	.85	–.13**	–.27**	–.05	–.02			
6. Proc. justice	3.34	.75	–.01	–.23**	.01	–.03	–.36**		
7. Positive affects	3.82	.59	.04	–.03	.06	.07	–.12**	.28**	
8. Negative affects	1.78	.50	.06	.03	–.11*	.09*	.18**	–.20**	–.11*

Note: Proc. justice = procedural justice.

^aDummy variable, Organization A was the comparative group.

^bDummy variable: 0 = without supervisor or manager position; 1 = with supervisor or manager position.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

addition to the relationships established in the above mediation model, a partial mediation model was elaborated, which included direct relationships between job insecurity and employees' affects. This partial mediation model also revealed an acceptable fit ($M2: \chi^2(573) = 1569.36, p < .01, SRMR = .06, CFI = .91, IFI = .91, RMSEA = .05$), proving to be significantly better than the full mediation model [$\Delta\chi^2(2) = 17.8, p < .01$].

Additionally, given the cross-sectional design of the study, we tested a third competitive model ($M3$ – reversed mediation model), with job insecurity mediating the relationship between procedural justice and workers' affects. This reverse mediation model also revealed an acceptable fit [$\chi^2(573) = 1569.36, p < .01, SRMR = .06, CFI = .91, IFI = .91, RMSEA = .05$]. However, when the models to be compared are not nested models, a fit index to compare the fit of statistical models is AIC (Akaike, 1987). $M2$ showed a lower AIC value (1755.36) than this reversed mediation model (1793.20). Thus, the relationship between job insecurity and employees' affects was partially mediated by procedural justice. Figure 1 displays this final model. Consistent with Hypothesis 1a, job insecurity was positively related to negative affect ($\beta = .24, p < .01$). However, as far as the expected negative relationship between job insecurity and workers' positive affects is concerned, we observed that this relationship was not significant ($\beta = -.05, n.s.$), thus refuting Hypothesis 1b.

Furthermore, job insecurity was also observed to be negatively and significantly related to procedural justice ($\beta = -.36, p < .01$), which, in turn, was also negatively and significantly related to employees' negative affects ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$), and positively and significantly related to employees' positive affects ($\beta = .34, p < .01$). Thus, the role of procedural justice may be regarded as mediator of the relationship between job insecurity and employees' negative affects, supporting Hypothesis 2a, and the role of procedural justice as mediator of the relationship between job insecurity and employees' positive affects, supporting Hypothesis 2b. Thus, we observed that the relationship between job insecurity and employees' negative affects was partially mediated by procedural justice however, the relationship between job insecurity and employees' positive affects was totally mediated by procedural justice (see Figure 2).

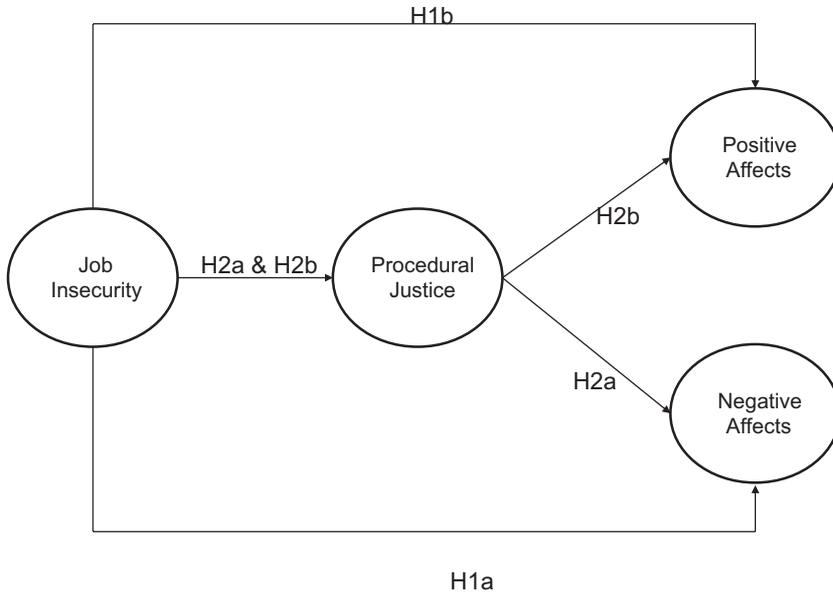


Figure 1. Conceptual mediation model by procedural justice in the relationship between job insecurity and employees’ affects.

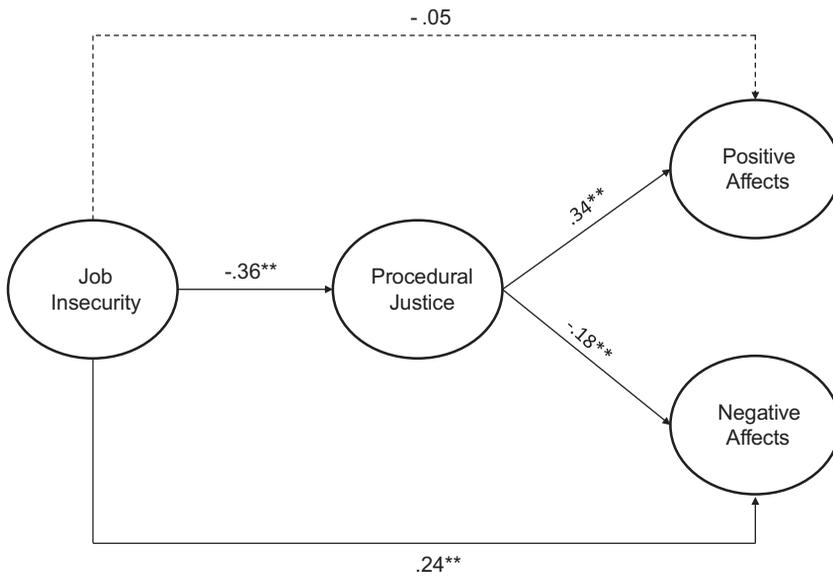


Figure 2. Estimated mediation model by procedural justice in the relationship between job insecurity and employees’ affects.

Discussion

The main purpose of the present research was to test a model positing that job insecurity was related to downsizing survivors’ affects and their procedural justice perceptions. In turn, procedural justice perception was hypothesized to mediate

the relationship between job insecurity and affects. The results of structural equation modeling analyses supported the hypothesized model. These findings lead to a number of implications.

First, previous studies have indicated that employees report higher strain when they perceive their employment to be insecure (e.g. Mauno et al., 2001). The findings of our study are consistent with this prior research. Indeed, aligned with our hypotheses, and in keeping with the predictions of Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory (1984), the present results support that employees' emotions (i.e. affects) are related to a stressor (i.e. job insecurity) in their occupational lives. Downsizing survivors categorize their employment situation as an uncertainty, however they also consider themselves to have little likelihood of controlling this uncertainty, which results in a threat to their well-being and affects. In the present study, we distinguished between two types of affects (i.e. positive and negative). Other studies (Burchell, 1994; Landsbergis, 1988; Mossholder et al., 2000) have pointed to job insecurity in explaining employees' negative affects. Our results revealed that job insecurity is not only related to negative affects but also to positive affects: Those who survived a downsizing process and perceived high insecurity reported higher levels of irritability, guilt, distress and fear, and lower levels of enthusiasm, pride, interest and attention. The distinction between them is therefore useful, since they are relatively independent and both have an important role in explaining employees' attitudes and behaviors (Ilies et al., 2010).

Second, the present results also support that job insecurity is related to employees' perception of procedural justice. We observed that when confronted with uncertainty as to their future in the company (i.e. job insecurity), employees with a permanent contract considered the organization to have breached its obligations, thus perceiving the situation to be unjust (Bernhard-Oettel, De Cuyper, Schreurs, & De Witte, 2011; Piccoli & De Witte, 2015). Hence, we observed that the evaluations of organizational justice appear to be related to the perceptions of job insecurity. This is because justice judgments are formed on the basis of considerations related to the uncertainty of the future of employment (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002) which is present in a downsizing process (De Witte, 1999). Furthermore, our findings are in line with other studies (Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Clay-Warner, Hegtvedt, & Roman, 2005; Hopkins & Weathington, 2006; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002) which have also corroborated that procedural justice is important in a downsizing process, namely in its influence on the reactions of survivors. In fact, we observed significant relationships between survivors' perceptions of procedural justice and their positive and negative affects.

Finally, we observed the mediating role of procedural justice between employees' job insecurity and positive and negative affects. These findings support the view that procedural justice represents a basic mechanism that contributes to the effects of a stressor (i.e. job insecurity) on employees' reactions (i.e. positive and negative affects). In line with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model, employees use procedural justice judgments as situation-specific thoughts (i.e. coping strategy)

to manage the demands resulting from a threatening situation (i.e. job insecurity). Therefore, when a downsizing process fails to provide the employee with job security, this may lead him/her to perceive himself/herself as a victim of unfair treatment (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002), which is then perceived as stressful and is related to his/her affects (Conlon & Shapiro, 2002; Weiss et al., 1999).

Notwithstanding, we observed that procedural justice performs a different mediating role: with employees' negative affects the mediation is partial, but with employees' positive affects the mediation is total. This result reinforces that the distinction between positive and negative affects is useful, and further suggests that the job insecurity caused by a downsizing process is a stressor that is directly related to negative outcomes. This result is in keeping with the propositions of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory that highlights a direct relationship between a situation that is appraised as a stressor and employees' strain, characterized by the presence of negative emotions (i.e. affects). Hence, the job insecurity that characterizes a downsizing situation gives rise to negative affects in survivors, due to the fact that it is perceived as a threatening situation, over which they have no control. On the other hand, the total mediation of procedural justice related to positive affects is in line with organizational justice theories, and concurs with past research on downsizing, which has shown that the higher an employee's perception of justice, the more positive his/her reactions (e.g. Brockner, 2002; Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Reichle & Montada, 1994; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). Thus, our results suggest that in a downsizing process the relationship between the job insecurity of survivors and their positive affects depends totally on their perception of the procedural justice of this process.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The present study has some limitations which may influence the interpretation of results. First and foremost, its cross-sectional design does not enable us to draw any conclusions regarding causality (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Thus, it is important to develop longitudinal studies that allow for causal conclusions among these variables (Campbell & Campbell, 2012). For example, they should seek to replicate the mediating role of procedural justice reported herein, namely by measuring job insecurity during the process of downsizing, procedural justice immediately after and employee affect some months later. Furthermore, only with this longitudinal design can we confirm whether our model is better than an alternative model, considering affects as an emotional response to job insecurity, which results in a perception of justice. Based on Lazarus and Folkman's stress model (1984), we argue that in the downsizing process survivors first develop a cognitive response (i.e. the appraisals of job insecurity and of justice perception), and an emotional response (i.e. affects) at a later stage. However, only a longitudinal study will make it possible to conclude whether this is true, or whether the responses are reversed or occur simultaneously.

Second, our framework underlines the mediating role of employees' perception of procedural justice on the downsizing process however, this process should also be dependent of context variables. The uncertainty management model suggests that when confronted with uncertain or unclear situations (e.g. downsizing process), individuals may access procedural and interactional justice information, as a means to help them better understand the situation and its implications for them (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Thus, a future multilevel study should include moderation by the organizational justice climate in this mediating role (Sora et al., 2010). A downsizing process occurs in a context where employees have a shared perception of justice which can be moderated as employees perceive this process and react to it. Third, the sample used in this study was highly specific, namely consisting of employees from Chile who had survived an organizational downsizing process within companies of the retail industry. Therefore, it is important for future research to evaluate whether our results can be extended to other worker populations. However, it should be noted that the sample of this research study included workers from different companies with different organizational duties and positions; thus, it might be considered heterogeneous. Even so, we suggest that future research examines whether our results can be extended to other industries and populations. Finally, all the measures used in this research are based on self-report questionnaires. Even though self-report is a correct measure to reflect individual perceptions of job insecurity, procedural justice and affect, legitimate concerns have emerged as to the inherent limitations of using self-reports (Keeney & Svyantek, 2000). In addition, research based on self-reported data is potentially subject to the influence of common-method variance, which can synthetically augment the relationship between the constructs at hand (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, following the recommendations of Hinkin (1995) and Podsakoff et al. (2003), several steps were taken to minimize this problem. First, confidentiality was guaranteed in order to avoid participants' editing their answers to make them more consistent and socially desirable. Second, participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers in the questionnaires. Third, when designing the questionnaire, we placed the independent and dependent variables in separate sections with a different set of instructions. These efforts aimed to create a psychological separation between the dependent and independent variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, it was deemed improbable that common method variance would be a serious problem in this study, as suggested by the results from the measure models and reversed mediation model analyses.

Practical implications

The present findings also have some practical implications for promoting the downsizing process efficiently. Our findings suggest that perceived job insecurity leads to a decrease in survivors' procedural justice perceptions, and thus, is related to the development of employees' positive and negative affect. Therefore we argue that perceived job insecurity and procedural justice play key roles in the

promotion of survivors' affect. In light of these results, it appears to be important for the company to implement actions in order to enhance job security and, consequently, to develop adequate affect among survivors. On the other hand, our findings also suggest that a survivor who perceives that the downsizing process has been implemented with fair procedures will experience more positive feelings. Thus, it is seemingly crucial that justice should be an important issue in the downsizing process. The company should develop and provide relevant information on what is being offered in exchange, demonstrate its ability to remedy incorrect decisions and provide information throughout the decision-making process. This is highly relevant given that the sampled employees in our study had a relatively low level of procedural justice perceptions.

Conclusion

In summary, our study points to job insecurity and procedural justice as being crucial to understanding the downsizing process in terms of survivors' affects. In this study, job insecurity was observed to be a stressor related to survivors' affects however, procedural justice was also found to be a mechanism that explained these relationships. In fact, job insecurity perceived by survivors was negatively related to their procedural justice perceptions, which in turn, were positively related to their negative affect and negatively related to their positive affect.

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