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European unions in the wake of flexible production

Papers presented at the XXVII International
Congress of Psychology in Stockholm 2000

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SALISA – JOINT PROGRAMME
FOR WORKING LIFE RESEARCH IN EUROPE
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The papers included in the present publication were all presented at XXVII International Congress of Psychology, Stockholm, Sweden, July 23-28, 2000. At this congress, Magnus Sverke organized a symposium – “European unions in the wake of flexible production: How can the negative consequences of job insecurity for employee attitudes and well-being be mitigated?” – in which a total of five papers from the project were presented. Unfortunately, only four of these papers were completed and included in the present volume because one of the former collaborators, who gave a presentation at the congress, left the project at an early stage.

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Introduction

Magnus Sverke, Katharina Näswall, Johnny Hellgren, Antonio Chirumbolo,
Hans De Witte and Sjoerd Goslinga

A background to the project

During the past decades rapid economic fluctuations, industrial restructuring, and technological change, together with increased competition and globalization have dramatically changed the nature of work (Howard, 1995). Many organizations in the industrialized countries have engaged in restructuring, downsizing and plant closures in their attempts to remain cost effective and improve competitiveness. Along with this trend almost every employer in the industrialized countries are moving toward numerical flexibility in terms of staffing the organization (Purcell & Purcell, 1998; Sparrow & Marchington, 1998). As a consequence, millions of workers have lost their jobs and still others have become involuntarily part-time unemployed, or hired on temporary employment contracts. For many employees, this generates “a fundamental and involuntary change in their sets of beliefs about the employing organization and their place in it” (Jacobson, 1991, p. 2). One frequently experienced shift is the move from secure working conditions toward more insecure ones, thus generating escalating feelings of insecurity concerning the nature and future existence of their jobs (Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans, & van Vuuren, 1991).

This flexibility trend can be summarized in the term downsizing. By definition, downsizing implies that the organization is left with fewer employees who are expected to give of their best in a manner that enhances organizational efficiency and productivity at the same time as the human capital is reduced and organizational memory is disrupted (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997). Given this definition, downsizing involves the use of alternative employment contracts and increased feelings of job insecurity among the remaining employees.

Research has repeatedly found job insecurity and contingent work to associate with impaired employee well-being (e.g., Ashford et al., 1989; Barling & Kelloway, 1996; Hellgren, Sverke, & Isaksson, 1999; Lim, 1996; Noer, 1993). A number of studies have also found feelings of uncertain employment conditions to be related with impaired attitudes towards the job and the organization (e.g., Ashford et al., 1989; Davy, Kinicki, & Scheck, 1997; Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996). Other studies have documented effects such as a reduced willingness to remain with the organization and impaired job performance (e.g., Arnold & Feldman,

1982; Brockner, 1988; Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995 for an overview, see Sverke et al., 2002).

In general, there is no “win-win” situation to downsizing and thus people will be hurt. This is so because the change effort focuses more on financial efficiency goals than human effectiveness goals and because the process is usually dictated by the top management with little or no employee involvement (Covin, 1993). In recent years, however, a growing body of research has examined if and how the negative effects of downsizing can be reduced through fair treatment of the employees. Indeed, research suggests that organizations can take measures to prevent the most negative consequences of job insecurity and contingent work from occurring by, for instance, providing accurate information, enhancing communication, supplying retraining for alternative employment, and training their employees in how to cope with the stress created by job insecurity (Hartley et al., 1991; Heaney et al., 1994; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997).

Research has also examined the moderating effects of social support on the job insecurity-employee reactions relationships. This stream of research focuses on various types of support an employee can draw upon. The underlying logic, derived from stress research, is that these sources of support can mitigate the negative the resulting negative reactions. For instance, Lim (1996) found that nonwork-based support (i.e., support provided by family and friends) moderated the negative effects of insecurity on life dissatisfaction, while work-based social support buffered individuals against the negative effects of job dissatisfaction, proactive job search, and non-compliant job behaviors.

Unfortunately, even though “flexibility” is an increasingly important factor in unionized as well as non-unionized workplaces, very little research has examined if and how union membership relates to job insecurity and its outcomes.

Obviously, the increased use of flexible production faces labor unions with a number of threats and challenges. From the threat perspective, as illustrated in a number of international volumes (e.g., Hyman & Ferner, 1994; Leisink, Van Leemput & Vilroks, 1996; Niland, Lansbury & Verevis, 1994; Sverke, 1997), the changes on the labor market have impaired the preconditions for unions and made recruitment more difficult. On the other hand, the changes can also represent a challenge for the unions. Even if the changes are often initiated by management, unions are not only passive spectators to the changes that take place. Rather, they can – and do – take measures themselves to influence the processes of change and their consequences for the individual.

In order to represent and protect the interests of their members unions have to deal with new issues in the modern working life. The success of the unions in achieving this is reflected in members’ evaluation of the union’s performance. Without the collective support derived from union membership, it may be argued, the more difficulty an employee will have in coping with job insecurity.

A very important area for research into the consequences of flexibility thus involves investigating how unions – by their various strategies and by providing support to the members – can mitigate the negative consequences of job insecurity and contingent work. From a psychological perspective, important factors in this respect concern how the individual member perceives her union, evaluates the support provided, the attitudes she holds toward her union, and the degree to which she herself participates in union activity (Sverke & Hellgren, 2001).

General aim of the project

The overall aim of the project is to shed light on the labor unions' roles in addressing the consequences of the intensified flexibilization of the labor market. More specifically, the project investigates how the negative consequences of contingent work and job insecurity on individuals' well-being (mental and physical health) and work related attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention) can be mitigated by union related attitudes and experiences (union commitment, union satisfaction, union participation, union justice, union support). The project also examines the role played by various demographic characteristics in these relationships. A schematic representation of the model guiding the research is presented in Figure 1. More specifically, the aim of the project is to investigate:

- the relation between flexibility factors (job insecurity and contingent work) and their postulated outcomes (e.g., well-being, work attitudes, union participation);
- the relation between experiences of the union (e.g., union support, attitudes towards the union) and these outcomes;
- differences between various demographic groups in the experiences of job insecurity;
- if the negative consequences of flexible employment conditions and job insecurity on individuals' well-being, work related attitudes, and union participation are mitigated by union-related attitudes and experiences, and;
- the extent to which the results generalize over countries.

These issues are investigated in four European countries based on secondary analysis of existing questionnaire data.

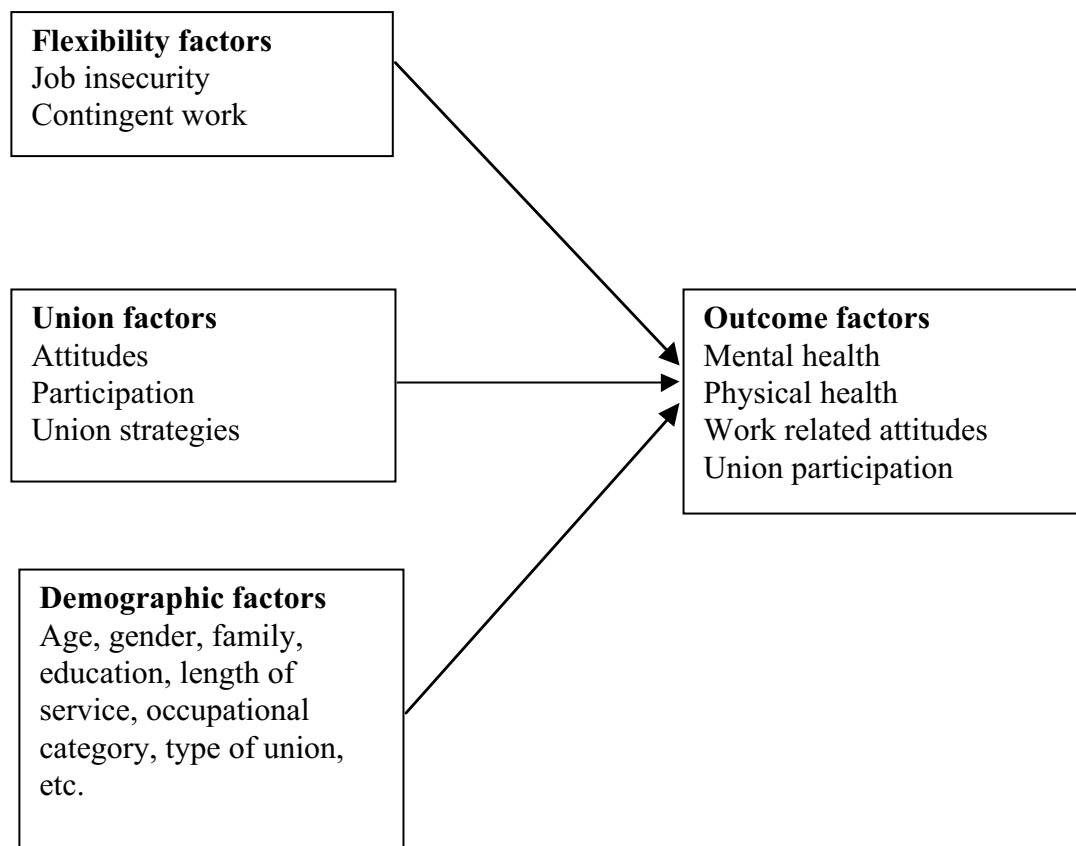


Figure 1. Research model.

Participating countries

The project includes researchers from four European countries: Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden. All participants are psychologists and carry out research concerning downsizing and job insecurity, as well as union member attitudes toward, and participation in, the union. Some comparable data existed prior to the start of the project, whereas other data were collected during the time of cooperation. Altogether eight samples are used to address the research questions of the project. A summary of the sample characteristics is presented in Table 1.

The project collaborator in Belgium is Hans de Witte of the Catholic University of Leuven. Two Belgian samples are included in the project data set. The first sample is from a postal survey in the period of November-December 1998 in the three parts of Belgium (Flanders, Brussels, Wallonia; so two languages were

used: Flemish and French). A large amount of companies (439) with 5 or more employees from a representative range of sector and size were contacted for potential participation. The second sample originates from a telephone survey conducted in the period April-July 1998 in the three parts of Belgium. The sampling was focused on employed wage-earners working in 'larger' plants in the private sector.

Table 1. Summary of sample characteristics.

	Bel1	Bel2	Hol1	Hol2	Ital	Swe1	Swe2	Swe3
Sample	3,003	13,358	1,736	1,590	865	2,455	786	2,564
N	1,120	1,487	896	799	476	1,501	554	1923
Response rate %	37	11	52	50	55	61	71	75
Year collected	1998	1998	1998	1999	2000	1998	1995	2000
% members	49	58	100	100	63	92	-	100
Age (years)	36.9	38.5	46.1	47.5	38.8	42.7	49.4	45.3
% females	34.7	42.0	24.7	25.2	32.5	82.7	55.9	78.4
Blue-collar %	36.6	34.0	-	46.9	29.3	30.7	0	-
White-collar %	35.6	36.7	-	7.9	46.2	51.7	79.3	-
Professional/	27.8	29.3	-	45.3	24.5	17.5	20.7	-
Manager %								
Permanent	94.0	91.8	-	89.5	89.1	82.5	-	92.6
workers (%)								

- Information not available

The main collaborator in the Netherlands is Sjoerd Goslinga from the Department of Social Psychology, Free University (VU), Amsterdam. From the Netherlands we used two samples, both collected within a longitudinal panel-survey among members of the largest trade unions affiliated with the National Christian Trade Union Federation, the CNV. The first data collection occurred in the fall of 1998, the second in the summer of 1999.

The Italian participant in the project is Antonio Chirumbolo, at the University of Rome-La Sapienza. There is one sample from Italy included in the project, and the data collection could be tailored to suit the project. Data were collected between May and July 2000, among employees throughout Italy.

Participating from Sweden are Magnus Sverke, Johnny Hellgren, and Katharina Näswall, Department of Psychology, Stockholm University. There are three Swedish samples included in the data set for the project. The first sample includes staff from two emergency hospitals in the Stockholm area undergoing organizational changes in terms of cost-reduction, organizational restructuring, outsourcing, and layoffs, collected during 1998. The second sample was collected in 1995 in a large Swedish retail-chain company undergoing major organizational restructuring. This sample comprises surviving administrative

white-collar workers at the company headquarters. Data for the third Swedish sample were taken from a national sample of blue-collar workers from the Swedish Municipal Workers Union (Kommunal) affiliated with the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO). These data were collected in 2000, and thus tailored to suit the project.

The samples from the different countries and data collections contained items which were the same, or very similar. For most of the constructs we formed indices containing three items or more, using established measurement scales. For elaborate information on the different measures used in the project, please refer to our technical report (Sverke et al., 2001).

The papers presented in Stockholm

The XXVII International Congress of Psychology was held in Stockholm, July 23-28, 2000. At this congress, Magnus Sverke organized a symposium – “European unions in the wake of flexible production: How can the negative consequences of job insecurity for employee attitudes and well-being be mitigated?” – in which a total of five papers from the project were presented. Unfortunately, only four of these papers were completed and included in the present volume because one of the former collaborators, who gave a presentation at the congress, left the project at an early stage. The four papers address the consequences of employment uncertainty – both job insecurity and contingent work – for the individual, the company, and the union.

In the paper “Can involvement in the union help contingent workers cope with the negative effects of flexibility?”, Magnus Sverke et al. focus on the consequences of contingent work. They note that in recent years there has been increased employer use of alternative forms of employment contracts to supplement more traditional employment arrangements. Although the use of contingent workers allows increased numerical flexibility, research suggests that contingent workers may experience more stress and negative work attitudes than core employees if they are not properly integrated in the organization. However, very limited research attention has gone into understanding the factors that may reduce such negative consequences. Using data from three of the participating countries (Belgium, Italy, and Sweden) the paper examines if the consequences of contingent work differs between union members and non-unionized workers. In Italy and Sweden, contingent workers exhibited more positive work attitudes (job satisfaction and organizational commitment) as compared to permanently employed part-time workers, whereas there were no differences across employment contracts in Belgium. There was also a tendency that work attitudes were more positive among union members than among non-members. No differences

regarding health variables (mental and physical health) were found in any country.

The following paper – “How union membership mitigates the negative consequences of job insecurity: A test in the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden” – elaborates on job insecurity and its consequences. Sjoerd Goslinga et al. address the role of perceived union support in the relationship between job insecurity and work-related attitudes of unionized employees. It is hypothesized that perceived support from one’s trade union moderates the negative effects of experienced job insecurity on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The hypothesis is tested using data from the three countries in the project where data for this issue were available (Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden). Job insecurity was associated with reduced levels of job satisfaction in all three samples and with reduced levels of organizational commitment in two samples. Perceived union support was related to increased levels of job satisfaction in all three samples and to increased levels of organizational commitment in two samples. Multivariate analyses revealed that perceived union support does not moderate the effect of job insecurity on job satisfaction. In two samples (Italy and Sweden) a moderating effect of perceived union support on the relationship between job insecurity and organizational commitment was found. However, the significant interaction effects did not follow the predicted direction and, thus, did not support the expected buffering effect of perceived union support. Consequences of these findings for trade unions and future research on job insecurity are discussed.

The third paper included in the present volume – “Can satisfaction with the union reduce the negative effects of job insecurity? A study within three European countries” – is written by Johnny Hellgren et al. They note that in the context of rapidly changing environmental conditions in numerous organizations engage in restructuring activities, and as a consequence, many employees feel insecure about the future existence of their jobs. However, whereas research suggests that such job insecurity has negative consequences for employee attitudes and well-being, less is known about if and how these negative effects can be alleviated by social support and perceptions of fair treatment from the employer or union. Using data from the same three countries (Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden), the study tests for a potential moderator effect of union satisfaction in the insecurity–mental health complaints relation. The results indicate that job insecurity is associated with mental health complaints in all participating countries and that union satisfaction relates negatively to mental health complaints in two of the participating countries. However, no interaction effects was obtained, thus indicating that union satisfaction does not reduce the effects of job insecurity on mental health complaints.

The final paper included in the present publication – “The interplay between job insecurity, attitudes towards the union, and trade union participation: Test of

some hypotheses among union members in four European countries” – investigates the consequences of job insecurity for union members’ attitudinal and behavioural orientations towards their unions. Hans De Witte et al. note that due to structural developments, such as plant closures and restructuring, the topic of job insecurity has forced itself to the front, and both public opinion and researchers have been focusing on its consequences. Whereas research shows that job insecurity reduces psychological well-being and job satisfaction, and increases psychosomatic complaints and physical strains, less is known about the consequences of job insecurity for unions. The paper focuses on the consequences of job insecurity for (a) the attitudes of workers towards trade unions, and (b) their trade union participation. Using data from all four participating countries, the paper finds most affirmation for the hypothesis that job insecurity is associated with a reduction of perceived union support (in three of the four countries). There was marginal support for the hypothesis that it is also associated with reduced union satisfaction (in one out of four countries). Regarding the association between job insecurity and union commitment two contrasting hypotheses were formulated. In Italy, evidence was found for the hypothesis that the variables are negatively related, based on the idea of a violation of the psychological contract. In Sweden, the opposite pattern was found, in line with Hirschman’s (1970) ‘loyalty’ option: by increasing their loyalty towards the union, people try to control the experience of job insecurity. Finally, the expected correlation between job insecurity and the intention to resign membership was found in two countries. In Belgium and Italy, union members who were uncertain about their jobs showed a stronger membership turnover intention.

Concluding remarks

To summarize the main effects of the flexibility factors addressed in the papers presented at the XXVII International Congress of Psychology (job insecurity and contingent work), our results show the same pattern as in previous research. Job insecurity is negatively related to both work and organizational attitudes as well as to well-being. We also extend previous research by showing that job insecurity is negatively related to various union attitudes, although the results differ somewhat between countries.

Our results also suggest that integration in a union, as a supportive social network, has a positive effect on work-related attitudes and well-being of employees. These results stress the importance of labor unions as a supportive social network for union members. Our project expands these findings by showing that not only mere integration in the union has positive effects on work-related attitudes, but that the level of integration also matters.

A key question is how perceptions of the union can moderate (reduce) the negative effects of job insecurity on attitudes and well-being. The results from our project indicate that union attitudes have direct effects on job and organizational attitudes as well as on well-being and union participation. The results also reveal that union attitudes do not buffer against negative effects associated with job insecurity and contingent work. That is, perceptions of the union appear not to reduce the negative relationships between the flexibility factors and the outcomes under study in this project.

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Can involvement in the union help contingent workers cope with the negative effects of flexibility?

Magnus Sverke, Katharina Näswall, Antonio Chirumbolo, Hans De Witte, Sjoerd Goslinga and Johnny Hellgren

Introduction

Working life has been subject to dramatic change over the past decades as economic recessions, new information technology, industrial restructuring, and an accelerated global competition unceasingly have proved to be crucial and abiding factors influencing the nature of work and organization (Cascio, 1995; Howard, 1995). As a consequence, employers in most countries are moving toward increased flexibility in how they staff their organizations (Purcell & Purcell, 1998). Most notably, employer organizations have shown increased interest in employing workers on the basis of “short” or “fixed term” contracts rather than on the basis of implicit long-term contracts. For instance, in the United States the use of temporary agency workers increased from 512,000 in 1983 to 2,063,000 in 1993 (Beard & Edwards, 1995). Most European countries have witnessed a similar trend, where the largest proportions of workers on temporary contracts are reported in the Southern European countries (e.g., Spain, Portugal, and Greece), but also the Northern countries are characterized by a high rate of contingent employment (Nätti, 1998).

There are several reasons for the growth of fixed-term contracts. One of the most commonly cited reasons is represented by managers’ desire to become more flexible in their ability to expand and contract their organizational workforce (Nollen & Axel, 1996; Sparrow, 1998). The use of contingent employment contracts reduces labor costs by making labor more of a variable rather than a fixed cost, and can also have the effect of reducing direct managerial involvement in the task and time associated with the hiring, training, and evaluation of employees (Messmer, 1994). Furthermore, short-term or contingent employment contracts can also be attractive to employers as a means of gaining immediate and specific access to specialized skills and knowledge, which may not either be available within an organization or needed on a long-term basis. Hence, many companies contract for needed services (e.g., installation or revamping of an office information management system), provided by skilled professionals on a

short term or project basis, without expectation of either party of the traditional long term employment arrangement (Matusik & Hill, 1998).

The trend toward increased use of workers on temporary, fixed term contracts has been referred to by such terms as externalization (Pfeffer & Baron, 1988), peripheralization (Dale & Bamford, 1988), and flexibilization (Sparrow & Marchington, 1998) of the workforce. Clearly, such terms have implicit connotations concerning the consequences of temporary work. For instance, the term “flexibility” is unclear and “comes with the sort of intellectual and moral ‘baggage’ that might, in another forum, provide a fertile ground for textual analysis” (Tregaskis, Brewster, Mayne, & Hegewisch, 1998, p. 62). Unfortunately, despite the growth of contingent work relationships, there has been only limited research focused on the individual consequences of alternative work arrangements. However, in recent years there has been a developing body of empirical research which has attempted to address how workers hired on alternative employment contracts differ from core workers.

According to a widely held assumption, contingent workers are not generally considered “part of the corporate family” (Belous, 1989, p. 6). The limited and short-term nature of contingent contracts reduces employer incentives to provide temporary workers with the on-the-job training and socialization necessary for skill development (Kochan, Smith, Wells, & Rebitzer, 1994). Contingent workers, therefore, are less integrated in the organization and less familiar with work practices than permanent employees. A typical consequence of this externalized relationship with the organization is that contingent workers may represent a threat to workplace safety, and two recent studies indicate that the transitory nature of contingent employment can result in a lack of familiarity with standard operating and safety procedures (Kochan et al., 1994; Rousseau & Libuser, 1997). Furthermore, contingent workers may be assigned the jobs which other organizational members are either unwilling or unable to perform, and find themselves without sufficient co-worker or managerial support for the resolution of work related problems (Rousseau & Libuser, 1997). Thus, it is plausible that the temporary and short term nature of contingent work may result in increased stress and impaired well-being (Sverke, Gallagher, & Hellgren, 2000). Finally, because temporary workers have “less stake in the contingent job, their co-workers or the organization” (Pearce, 1998, p. 36), they are generally expected to express less favorable job attitudes and less commitment to the organization.

Shadowing the growth of contingent work arrangements are questions pertaining to the scope and relevancy of union representation for workers employed under contingent or short-term employment contracts (Carré, Ferber, Golden, & Herzenberg, 2000; Heery & Abbott, 2000). As a factual matter, there exists substantial evidence to suggest that within industrialized economies, contingent workers are significantly less likely to be under the scope of union

representation than employees under more traditional full-time and even part-time work arrangements (Gallie, White, Cheng, & Tomlinson, 1998; Kjellberg, 2000; Zeytinoglu, 1999). On one side of the unionization equation are questions related to the propensity or interest of contingent workers toward union representation. On the other side of the equation is the extent to which unions are fully interested and capable of representing the interests of workers who hold contingent or temporary employment contracts. It may be assumed that unions will be attractive to contingent workers when they find union representation instrumental in meeting their work related interests and needs.

The objective of the present paper was to contribute to the understanding of the consequences of alternative employment contracts. A first goal was to investigate the extent to which contingent workers differ from part-time and full-time core workers with respect to work attitudes (job satisfaction and organizational commitment) and well-being (mental and physical health complaints). The second goal was to analyze if and how union membership affects the attitudinal and health consequences associated with these contract forms. We used survey data to investigate if union membership mitigates these negative consequences, and if the results generalize across three European countries (Belgium, Italy, and Sweden) characterized by differences in unionization rates and industrial relations systems. The data are part of a broader European project comparing the effects of employment uncertainty (see Sverke et al., 2001, for details about the project). The use of data from three countries with differing industrial relations characteristics thus allows for investigating to what extent the differences between workers with different employment contracts and between union members and non-members generalize across cultural settings.

There are several differences between the three countries with respect to labor market characteristics. For instance, as observed in a publication from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Gold & Weiss, 1998), the percentage of workers employed on fixed term contracts in Sweden in 1996 (11.8 percent) was substantially larger than in Belgium (5.9 percent) and Italy (7.5 percent). In addition, the same report shows that the proportion of part-time workers was substantially larger in Sweden (24.5 percent) in comparison with Belgium (14.0 percent) and Italy (6.6 percent). A report from OECD (2001) indicates that also the share of part-time employment of total employment differs between countries. In 2000, the proportion of part-time work in Belgium (19.0 percent) was somewhat higher than in Italy (12.2 percent) and Sweden (14.0 percent).

The countries also differ in terms of the proportion of workers affiliated to labor unions. In 1995, the proportion of unionized workers in Sweden (85 percent) could be contrasted to the rather low union density rate in Italy (32 percent), with Belgium (60 percent) in an intermediate position (Ebbinghaus &

Visser, 2000; Kjellberg, 2001; figures including unemployed workers). These figures also mirror the degree of harmony in the national industrial relations climates. The number of industrial conflicts (strikes and lockouts) in 1995 was very high in Italy (545), while there were rather few in Belgium (46), and none in Sweden (Gold & Weiss, 1998). Another difference concerns the division of the union movement into federations. Whereas the federations are based on political as well as religious grounds in Belgium (Van Gyes, De Witte & van der Hallen, 2000), the Italian union movement is divided on political grounds (Regini & Regalia, 2000), and Sweden has separate federations for blue-collar workers, white-collar employees, and professionals (Kjellberg, 2000).

Method

Sample characteristics

Sample sizes and characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. Efforts were made to obtain relatively heterogeneous samples within countries. However, because the focus of the project is not on cultural differences, no attempts were made to have identical samples across countries. Given that the primary interest rather is cross-validation, the differences between samples enable us to analyze the extent to which results generalize across countries.

Table 1. Summary of sample characteristics.

	Belgium	Italy	Sweden
Original sample	3,003	865	2,455
Participants (N)	1,120	476	1,501
Response rate %	37	55	61
Effective sample (N)	1,010	354	1,366
% members	51	61	92
% contingent workers	6	10	17
% part-time workers	9	7	38
Mean age (years)	37	37	43
% women	34	34	82

The Belgian study was conducted as a postal survey in the period of November-December 1998 in the three parts of Belgium (Flanders, Brussels, Wallonia). The study used a two-stage a-selected sample. First, a representative sample of *companies* from the private sector with at least five employees was selected (the public and health care sectors were excluded). The sample of plants was representative regarding company size and sector in Belgium. In total, 439 companies were contacted. Their personnel manager was interviewed by phone and was asked to distribute questionnaires among the *employees*. The

questionnaires had to be distributed randomly among all employees in the company. In companies with 60 employees or less, all employees were given a questionnaire; in companies employing between 60 and 100 persons, 60 to 80 questionnaires were distributed; in companies between 100 and 500 employees, 100-120 questionnaires were distributed; and in companies with at least 500 employees, 150 questionnaires were handed out. Even though 439 companies were contacted, only 116 personnel managers could be interviewed. Some of them refused to distribute the questionnaires, or did not distribute them after receiving them. This procedure resulted in 3,003 questionnaires being sent to the companies. It is difficult to assess how many of them were actually distributed to the employees. In total 1,120 (37%) useful questionnaires were returned. Correction for internal attrition resulted in an effective sample size of 1,010.

The Italian data were collected in Spring 2000 among a sample of 865 workers, mainly in small groups and at their workplace. Completed questionnaires were received from 476 of these, for a response rate of 55%. After correction for internal attrition, there remained an effective sample of 354 individuals with complete data on the study variables. The participants represented both the service and the industrial sector, mainly in private employment.

The Swedish sample was drawn from the total staff of two urban hospitals. Questionnaires were mailed to the home addresses of all 2,455 employees, and a total of 1,501 questionnaires (61%) were returned to the research team. Listwise deletion for missing values resulted in an effective sample size of 1,366 employees.

Measures

The three data sets used similar scales to measure the variables under study. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and correlations for the study variables. In general, the variables exhibited acceptable reliability in all three countries.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Belgium									
1. Age	1.00								
2. Gender (woman)	-.11	1.00							
3. Contingent work	-.13	.08	1.00						
4. Part-time	.03	.37	.04	1.00					
5. Membership	-.04	-.09	-.02	-.10	1.00				
6. Job satisfaction	.11	-.08	-.01	.01	-.10	1.00			
7. Organizational commitment	.19	-.12	-.04	-.02	-.12	.77	1.00		
8. Mental health complaints	.06	.01	-.06	-.02	.03	-.37	-.20	1.00	
9. Physical health complaints	.11	.02	-.03	.04	.11	-.26	-.15	.33	1.00
Mean	36.68	0.34	0.06	0.09	0.51	3.76	3.45	1.25	1.42
Standard deviation	9.33	0.47	0.23	0.29	0.50	0.77	0.83	0.27	0.55
Alpha	–	–	–	–	–	0.80	0.82	0.76	–
Italy									
1. Age	1.00								
2. Gender (woman)	-.09	1.00							
3. Contingent work	-.25	-.06	1.00						
4. Part-time	-.07	.16	.22	1.00					
5. Membership	.28	-.03	-.12	.01	1.00				
6. Job satisfaction	-.13	-.02	.14	-.18	-.09	1.00			
7. Organizational commitment	.01	-.16	.07	-.16	-.11	.67	1.00		
8. Mental health complaints	.14	.15	-.01	.06	-.02	-.40	-.34	1.00	
9. Physical health complaints	.07	.22	-.03	.04	.08	-.31	-.22	.55	1.00
Mean	37.45	0.34	0.10	0.07	0.61	3.58	3.18	2.08	2.06
Standard deviation	8.86	0.48	0.30	0.25	0.49	0.98	1.00	0.38	0.65
Alpha	–	–	–	–	–	0.82	0.84	0.76	0.81
Sweden									
1. Age	1.00								
2. Gender (woman)	.06	1.00							
3. Contingent work	-.33	-.07	1.00						
4. Part-time	-.05	.14	.07	1.00					
5. Membership	.16	.08	-.24	-.06	1.00				
6. Job satisfaction	.12	.12	-.01	-.01	.06	1.00			
7. Organizational commitment	.29	-.01	-.08	-.09	.11	.54	1.00		
8. Mental health complaints	.03	-.00	.04	.00	-.03	-.45	-.16	1.00	
9. Physical health complaints	.02	.08	-.02	.01	.02	-.32	-.10	.55	1.00
Mean	42.63	0.83	0.17	0.38	0.92	3.81	2.71	1.73	2.12
Standard deviation	10.42	0.37	0.38	0.49	0.27	1.00	0.87	0.39	0.67
Alpha	–	–	–	–	–	0.88	0.65	0.83	0.79

Note. $p < .05$ if $r \geq .10$ (Belgium), $r \geq .13$ (Italy), and if $r \geq .06$ (Sweden); – not applicable
Scale range: variables 2-5 (0-1), variables 6-7 (1-5), variable 8 (1-4, except Belgium: 1-2),
variable 9 (1-5, except Belgium: 1-3).

Independent variables. Age (in years) and gender (0=man, 1=woman), which were used as control variables, were assessed using standard questions. Contingent work was measured using a single item where respondents indicated if they were permanent (0) or temporary (1) workers. Similarly, part-time work was assessed with a dichotomously scored item (0=full-time, 1=part-time). On the basis of these two variables, we constructed the variable Employment status, which distinguishes between contingent employment (irrespective of the number of hours worked), part-time employment (on a permanent basis), and full-time employment (on a permanent basis).

Union membership was measured using a question in which respondents indicated that they were members (1) or not (0) of a trade union.

Dependent variables. Job satisfaction was in Italy and Sweden measured with three items developed by Hellgren, Sjöberg, and Sverke (1997) on the basis of Brayfield and Rothe (1951). In Belgium, the first two of these items were used and supplemented with an item developed by De Witte (2000). Responses to all items were given on a five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). A sample item is “I am very satisfied with my job”.

In all countries organizational commitment was measured with a short-form, four-item version of Allen and Meyer’s (1990) affective commitment scale (e.g., “This organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me”). Also for this variable the response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Mental health complaints were assessed using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ; Goldberg, 1979) in Italy and Sweden. The items refer to an anxiety-depression symptomatology, and participants indicated how frequently (1=never, 4=always) they suffered from various symptoms (e.g., “Been feeling unhappy and depressed”). A seven-item proxy (dichotomously scored) of this measure was used in the Belgian sample.

Physical health complaints were assessed with ten items in Italy and Sweden. The items, which were developed by Andersson (1986) and slightly modified by Isaksson and Johansson (1997), concerned the occurrence of negative physical symptoms (e.g., stomach problems, muscular tension), and the response alternatives ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (always). In Belgium a single item (“How is your health in general?”) with three response alternatives (1=very good, 2=rather good, 3=not so good) was used instead.

Table 3. Main and interaction effects of employment status (E) and union membership (U) on the dependent variables after controlling for age and gender.

	Non-members			Members			Main effects		Covariates	
	Contin-	Part-	Full-	Contin-	Part-	Full-	E	U	E * U	Gender
	gent	time	time	gent	time	time				
Belgium										
Job satisfaction	3.80	3.84	3.85	3.80	3.79	3.66	0.28	0.81	0.65	9.39** 6.48*
Organizational commitment	3.43	3.51	3.56	3.44	3.47	3.33	0.11	0.82	1.10	31.14*** 12.38***
Mental health complaints	1.23	1.22	1.25	1.16	1.25	1.27	1.77	0.01	0.68	3.39 1.02
Physical health complaints	1.47	1.39	1.35	1.29	1.61	1.49	0.93	0.98	2.83	13.56*** 0.72
Italy										
Job satisfaction	3.83	1.63	3.70	4.08	2.89	3.53	13.92***	4.23*	3.82*	2.67 0.23
Organizational commitment	3.49	2.30	3.35	3.31	2.36	3.11	5.36**	0.29	0.15	0.64 5.60*
Mental health complaints	2.09	2.40	2.10	2.18	2.02	2.05	1.03	1.74	1.63	9.89** 8.64**
Physical health complaints	1.99	2.10	2.00	2.15	1.98	2.10	0.01	0.11	0.21	1.50 17.95***
Sweden										
Job satisfaction	3.82	3.60	3.63	3.93	3.76	3.83	1.21	2.06	0.08	17.52*** 18.12***
Organizational commitment	2.59	2.15	2.64	2.78	2.62	2.77	4.27*	8.53**	1.14	107.26*** 0.34
Mental health complaints	1.87	1.65	1.72	1.76	1.72	1.73	3.34	0.09	1.70	3.62 0.01
Physical health complaints	2.20	1.99	1.98	2.06	2.14	2.12	0.56	0.50	1.99	0.09 8.06**

* < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Degrees of freedom for univariate F-tests: Age (1), Gender (1), Union membership (1), Employment status (2), Employment status*Union membership (2), Error (1002 for Belgium, 346 for Italy, 1358 for Sweden)

Scale range: variables 2-5 (0-1), variables 6-7 (1-5), variable 8 (1-4, except Belgium: 1-2), variable 9 (1-5, except Belgium: 1-3).

Results

Multivariate analysis of variance procedures with covariates (MANCOVA) were used to investigate if the levels of work attitudes and health complaints differed between individuals with different employment contracts and between unionized and non-unionized workers. More specifically, the main and interaction effects of employment status and union membership on the dependent variables (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, mental health complaints, and physical health complaints) were tested after controlling for age and gender differences. Table 3 reports the results of these tests for the Belgian, Italian, and Swedish samples.

In Belgium, there were no significant multivariate effects of employment status ($F[8,1998] = 0.82, p > .05$), union membership ($F[4,999] = 0.50, p > .05$), or of the employment status by union membership interaction ($F[8,1998] = 0.99, p > .05$) after controlling for age and gender. Thus, the mean levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, mental health complaints, and physical health complaints did not differ significantly between contingent, part-time, and full-time workers, nor between union members and non-affiliated employees. The only significant results in the Belgian sample concerned the covariates, as reflected in significant multivariate effects of both age ($F[4,999] = 13.97, p < .001$) and gender ($F[4,999] = 3.14, p < .05$). The univariate F tests indicate that older workers reported higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, but also more physical health complaints. The univariate statistics for gender show that men expressed more positive work attitudes as compared to women.

In contrast to Belgium, there were significant multivariate effects of both employment status ($F[8,686] = 4.15, p < .001$) and union membership ($F[4,343] = 3.53, p < .01$) in Italy, but no multivariate interaction effect ($F[8,686] = 1.72, p > .05$). The follow-up univariate tests revealed an effect of employment status on both work attitudes. When age and gender differences between the Italian workers had been taken into account, part-time workers expressed lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment as compared to contingent employees and full-time workers. There was only one univariate effect of union membership. After controlling for age and gender, the mean values in job satisfaction tended to be higher among unionized employees than among non-members. In addition, the significant univariate employment status by union membership interaction effect on job satisfaction indicates that contingent workers reported higher job satisfaction when they were unionized while full-time workers expressed more satisfaction if they did not belong to a union. Also for the Italian sample there were significant multivariate effects of both covariates ($F[4,343] = 4.66, p < .001$ and $F[4,343] = 9.00, p < .001$ for age and

gender, respectively). Older employees expressed more mental health complaints in comparison with younger employees. Men reported higher organizational commitment, while women reported more mental and physical health complaints.

The Swedish data generated fairly similar results to Italy concerning employment status and union membership. A significant multivariate effect of employment status ($F[8,2710] = 3.11, p < .01$) was reflected in a univariate effect on organizational commitment such that part-time workers expressed lower commitment as compared to both contingent and full-time workers. There was also a significant multivariate effect of union membership ($F[4,1355] = 2.44, p < .05$), and the follow-up tests show that organizational commitment was higher among union members as compared to their non-unionized co-workers. However, there was no support for a significant multivariate effect of the interaction between employment status and union membership ($F[8,2710] = 1.29, p > .05$). Similar to both Belgium and Italy, there were significant multivariate effects of both age ($F[4,1355] = 30.54, p < .001$) and gender ($F[4,1355] = 13.17, p < .001$). The levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment were higher among older than younger workers. Women reported more physical health complaints than men but also, in contrast to the other two countries, higher job satisfaction.

Discussion

Although the use of contingent employment contracts and part-time work provides management with increased numerical flexibility, research suggests that both contingent and part-time workers may experience more strain and negative work attitudes than core, full-time employees if they are not properly integrated in the organization. Given the scarcity of research addressing the consequences of alternative employment arrangements, the objective of the present study was to identify the potentially differing consequences of contingent work, part-time work, and full time work for employee attitudes and well-being. Moreover, we addressed the potential impact of unionization in these relationships.

One striking finding is that there were no differences between the three forms of employment contract with respect to mental and physical health complaints in any of the three countries (Belgium, Italy, and Sweden). In contrast to previous research, which has found employees with a fixed contract to express more somatic complaints and more mental distress as compared to employees with non-flexible working conditions (Martens, Nijhuis, van Boxtel, & Knottnerus, 1999), we did not find contingent workers to differ from core full-time and part-time employees with respect to physical and mental health problems. It could be that the contingent workers in the present study took temporary work because it gives them more control over their schedules – when and how much they work –

and that this makes them less vulnerable to health problems, but obviously such an assertion requires empirical examination.

Another important result is that there were differences between the three contract forms with respect to work attitudes in two of the countries. However, whereas the literature suggests that contingent workers will not hold as favorable work attitudes as core employees because they are less integrated in the organization (e.g., Beard & Edwards, 1995), the primary distinction was between part-time employees, on one hand, and full-time employees and contingent workers, on the other. In both Italy and Sweden part-time workers expressed more negative work attitudes (less job satisfaction and lower levels of commitment to their organization). Similar results have been reported also in other research. For instance, Krausz, Brandwein, and Fox (1995) reported similar levels of work involvement among permanent and temporary-help employees, and Kidder (1996) found no differences in normative commitment between full-time and temporary nurses. A review of the literature on part-time employment (Barling & Gallagher, 1996) suggests that part-time workers generally tend to express more negative attitudes to their job and organization as compared to their full-time coworkers.

There are a number of potential explanations to the finding that contingent workers expressed as positive attitudes as core workers. First of all, it might be that the nature of the temporary contract makes a difference. In contrast to traditional or core employment relationships, contingent work arrangements do not, by definition, involve a long-term worker-employer relationship. Rather, contingent work comes in multiple forms, and the nature of employment relationship differs (i.e., worker-employer, worker-employer-client, worker-client). This, in turn, is likely to have important implications for the meaning of contingent workers' work commitment. Although implicit or explicit assumptions concerning differences based on the degree of integration into the organization have characterized the literature (e.g., Beard & Edwards, 1995; McLean Parks & Kidder, 1994), such comparisons are facilitated by the conceptualization and categorization of contingent work arrangements recently provided by McLean Parks, Kidder, and Gallagher (1998). Of particular interest might be the contrast of workers from employer-operated in-house pools as compared with contingent workers hired via third-party temporary-help firms, or independent contractors.

Secondly, along lines similar to research done by Krausz et al. (1995) and Pearce (1998), it would also be helpful to confirm the extent to which the work attitudes and well-being of contingent workers vary by the voluntary vs. involuntary choice of temporary work. Alternatively stated, similar to comparisons between part-time and full time-work (Armstrong-Stassen, Horsburgh, & Cameron, 1994; Barling & Gallagher, 1996), are workers who voluntary choose

temporary employment arrangements more positively receptive of their roles compared to workers who are employed as temporaries due to the lack of a suitable permanent alternative? The growing body of research which suggests that the voluntary choice of alternative employment arrangements might be more important than employment status *per se* clearly warrants further examination.

Finally, workers' attitudes and well-being may be a function of their motivations for undertaking temporary employment. In particular, a worker who sees temporary employment as a means of permanent entry to an organization may express more positive work attitudes than a worker who is satisfied with the prospect of moving from one temporary assignment to another (Beard & Edwards, 1995; McLean Parks et al., 1998). Along similar lines, job related ambiguity and conflict may produce a more problematic employment situation for the worker who is seeking "temp to perm" career compared with the contingent worker who may be indifferent to a long term assignment with a particular employer, and such differences would be manifested also in their work attitudes and well-being (Sverke et al., 2000).

Another important finding of the present research concerns the role played by union membership. We found union members to express stronger commitment to their employing organization as compared to non-unionized workers. This finding is congruent with previous research which has found union membership to be positively related to organizational commitment (e.g., Shaw, Fields, Thacker, & Fisher, 1993; Sverke & Hellgren, 2001). The finding that union membership may lead to increased loyalty also receives support from the work of Freeman and Medoff (1984) and Hirschman (1986). Such beneficial consequences of union presence have obvious practical implications for management. In contrast to this, however, we did not find support for a buffering role of union membership. For part-time workers, where the employment contract was associated with impaired job and organizational attitudes, unionization did not matter. It could be that their unions were not instrumental in meeting the needs of this particular group of workers.

To conclude, the present study suggests that contingent work may not be associated with negative consequences. In contrast, the contingent workers surveyed in Belgium, Italy, and Sweden were similar to core full-time workers with respect to both work attitudes and well-being. The major difference concerned part-time workers who tended to express less job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The fact that this was found in two of the three countries included in the study lends further credibility to the finding. The fact that union membership did not buffer these effects also suggests that unions in many countries are facing the challenge of satisfying the needs of this group of workers and, hence, have to consider the ways in which their particular interests can be represented.

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How union membership mitigates the negative consequences of job insecurity: A test in the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden

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Introduction

The past decades have witnessed a growth of the number of employees who are confronted with (periods of) job insecurity. The 1980s saw many large scale reorganizations and downsizing efforts that meant mass layoffs in many firms in the industrialized countries. In the 1990s the need for more (internal) flexibilization of firms resulted in a growth of temporary or contingent contracts (Purcell & Purcell, 1998). Job insecurity, often defined as the perceived threat of job loss or the loss of valued aspects of a job, is generally viewed as a highly stressful experience for employees (Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans & van Vuuren, 1991). Research shows that job insecurity has detrimental effects for both employees and (the productivity and efficiency of) organizations.

Job insecurity is, first of all, related to several work related attitudes and behaviors of employees. Relationships have been found between job insecurity and reduced job satisfaction (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989; Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson, 1999; Kerkhof, Winder, Tamis, Te Brake & Klandermans, 2000; Lim, 1996; van Vuuren, Van Gastel & Klandermans, 1988; van Vuuren, Klandermans, Jacobson & Hartley, 1991), reduced organizational commitment (Ashford et al., 1989; Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996; Rosenblatt, Talmud & Ruvio, 1999), reduced organizational trust (Ashford et al., 1989; Kerkhof et al., 2000), the intention to leave the organization (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Hellgren et al., 1999), and pro-active job search and non-cooperative behavior at work (Lim, 1996). Furthermore, job insecurity is related to employees' well-being and health (see also De Witte, 1999, for a review). Several studies show that job insecure employees report lower levels of psychological well-being than secure employees (Burchell, 1994; Büssing, 1999; De Witte, 1999; Hellgren et al., 1999; Lim, 1996; Roskies & Louis-Guerin, 1990; van Vuuren et al., 1991). Feelings of mental, emotional and physical exhaustion (burnout) have also been found to be related to job insecurity (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti & Happonen, 1999; Landsbergis, 1988) and in a number of studies

the results indicate that employees who are insecure about their job report physical health complaints more often than employees who do not feel insecure about the future of their job (Burchell, 1994; Heaney, Israel & House, 1994; Hellgren et al., 1999). Most of the research on the consequences of job insecurity is correlational or cross-sectional. However, all longitudinal studies that have been conducted so far, although limited in number, provide support for the causal direction between job insecurity and the work and health related variables (Burchell, 1994; van Vuuren, 1990).

Research has also focussed on the ways in which employees cope with job insecurity and on factors that possibly protect or buffer against the negative consequences of job insecurity. The studies aimed at identifying moderators in the relationship between job insecurity and its consequences are still relatively scarce, especially given the number of studies in which the detrimental effects of job insecurity have been demonstrated. Three factors distinguished by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) have guided this line of research. The first moderator Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt put forward was individual differences. The idea here is that certain personal or personality characteristics determine whether or how effectively people cope with job insecurity. However, the studies in which attention has explicitly been devoted to the influence of these characteristics on the way people cope with job insecurity show far from unequivocal results (Hellgren et al. 1999; Roskies, Louis-Guerin & Fournier, 1993).

The second moderator suggested by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) is the extent to which people are (or feel) dependent on their job for the fulfillment of important needs. The reasoning here is that the (anticipated) loss of a job or certain job features will have more severe effects when there is more at stake. Several factors are deemed important in this respect, such as the proportion of the family income provided by the job and the available alternatives on the job market. One study that indirectly investigated this question, however, provided no support for the assumption that available alternatives on the job market mitigate the negative effects of job insecurity. That is, no significant interaction effect of perceived alternatives on the job market and job insecurity on employee behavior was found (Kerkhof et al., 2000).

The third factor of which a moderating effect is expected is the support from others in the social environment. The literature on other sources of stress at work (for example role conflict and role ambiguity) provides evidence of a moderating effect of social support on the relation between stress and stress reactions. Based on this, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) hypothesized a buffering effect of social support on the relation between job insecurity and the negative consequences for individual employees. The moderating role of different sources of social support on job insecurity reactions has been studied. Lim (1996) found evidence for moderating effects of work-based social support (support from colleagues and

supervisors) and non work-based social support (support from family and friends) on the relationship between job insecurity and several outcome variables. Lim's (1996) study shows that support provided by others at work contributes in buffering insecure employees against job dissatisfaction, proactive job search and noncompliant behaviors at work. Additionally, support derived from family and friends can buffer insecure employees against negative effects such as life dissatisfaction. Büssing (1999) reports similar results. His study shows that support from friends has a (stronger) moderating effect on indicators of well-being and health, while support from supervisor and colleagues has a moderating effect on job (dis)satisfaction. Thus, support seems to provide a powerful moderator of the associations between job insecurity and different outcome variables.

Like previous research, the present study also examines the role of support in the relation between job insecurity and negative outcomes for employees. We will investigate whether support from one's labor union has a (moderating or buffering) effect on the relationship between job insecurity and two work-related attitudes: job satisfaction and organizational commitment. We are not aware of any studies examining the role labor unions play or might play for employees who have to cope with stressors in their working life, such as job insecurity. Attention has been given to the impact of job insecurity on the process of joining a labor union (Bender & Sloane, 1999) and to the effect of job insecurity on union members' contacts and experiences with the union and participation in union activities (Goslinga, 2000).

Potentially, we believe, labor unions could be an important source of information and support for members (and perhaps for employees in general) who are faced with job insecurity. A first reason is that unions are not responsible for the threat of job loss but are usually informed and often involved in organizational change processes. Research on information search behavior of employees in firms that undergo restructuring or downsizing suggests that workers tend to avoid parties responsible for the caused anxieties. Rather, they seek out reliable third parties for information, because interaction with colleagues and supervisors may in itself be stressful (Casey, Miller & Johnson, 1997). Labor unions might function as a third party members can approach when confronted with job insecurity and in need of reliable information and support. Secondly, labor unions have the resources and knowledge to actually help their members, for instance, by providing information about and assistance with legal matters.

The present study derives from a conceptualization of union support that was developed by Shore, Tetrick, Sinclair and Newton (1994). Their work, in turn, was based on Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson and Sowa's (1986) theory of perceived organizational support. This conceptualization of support is somewhat different from social support as used in previous job insecurity studies. The idea

of perceived organizational support is based on social exchange theory. Perceived organizational support reflects employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values the employees' contributions and cares about their well-being. Similarly, perceived union support reflects the member's perception that the union is supportive and committed to its members. The purpose of the present study is to examine whether perceived union support moderates the relationship between job insecurity and work related attitudes.

To sum up, the hypotheses for the present study are: (1) job insecurity has a negative effect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment; (2) perceived support from the union buffers or moderates the relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction as well as the relationship between job insecurity and organizational commitment. In other words, job insecurity will have less detrimental effects for job satisfaction and organizational commitment when perceived support from the union is high. These hypotheses will be tested in three samples of union members from three different countries (the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden). We do not specify hypotheses regarding differences between countries. Rather, because of the nature of the process under investigation, we expect similar results in the different countries.

Method

Participants and procedures

The Netherlands. For this study we used data collected within a longitudinal panel-survey among members of the ten largest trade unions affiliated with the National Christian Trade Union Federation, the CNV. Among these ten unions are six public sector unions and three private sector unions. Data came from one wave of the panel survey, and were collected in the summer of 1999. Members were interviewed by telephone. The response rate was 50%. For the present analyses, the sample was limited to members with a paid job (N=611). The majority of the respondents were male (72.5%). The mean age was 42.8 years, ranging between 16 and 79 years, and the average length of union membership 14.3 years, ranging between 0 and 50 years. Most members had a full-time job (79.7%) and 10.5% were temporary workers.

Italy. For this study data were collected from May to July 2000, and a total of 476 workers were administered a questionnaire, mainly in small groups and at their workplace. For the present study the sample was limited to union members (N = 290). The majority of respondents were males (68.7%), and their age ranged from 22 to 59 years (M = 40.6). The majority had a full time job (93.5%) and

7.5% had a temporary job. On average, participants had their current job for 14.9 years (ranging from less than a year to 37 years).

Sweden. Data were taken from a national sample of blue-collar workers from the Swedish Municipal Workers Union (Kommunal) affiliated with the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO). The sample was randomly selected from a total population of 370,590 members. Questionnaires were sent out to 2,564 workers, and a total of 1,923 usable questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 75%). Cases with one or more missing values in the data set were excluded, resulting in an effective sample size of 1,829 union members. The mean age of the respondents was 45 years, ranging between 19 and 75 years. Average length of membership in the union ranged from 1 to 45 years ($M=16.4$). The majority of the sample were female (78.0%). All respondents had a paid job. Half of them were employed full time (46.9%) and 7.3% were temporary workers. Organizational tenure ranged from 1 to 45 years ($M=14.3$).

Measures

Job insecurity. Job insecurity was assessed with five items in all three data sets. Three of these items were based on Ashford et al. (1989), and two developed by De Witte (2000) (e.g. “I am afraid I will get fired”, “I think I might get fired in the near future”). The response alternatives ranged from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). A high score on any of the items indicates high perceived job insecurity.

Perceived Union Support. This variable was measured using a five-item scale, which is adapted from Shore et al. (1994) (e.g. “I can always call upon my union with questions or problems”, “My union appreciates my opinion”). Response alternatives ranged from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree), such that a high score indicates high perceived union support. Previous research with this measure in the Netherlands yielded a good reliability for the scale (Goslinga, 1996). In Sweden union support was measured with four of the five items used in Italy and the Netherlands.

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction was been measured using various numbers of items in the different data sets. Five items were used in Italy and three of these were used in the Swedish and Dutch data sets (e.g. “I am satisfied with my job”, “I enjoy being at my job”). Three of the five items were developed by Hellgren, Sjöberg, and Sverke (1997) on the basis of Brayfield and Roth (1951); the remaining two were developed by De Witte (2000). There were five response alternatives ranging from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree), and a high score on any item represents satisfaction with the job.

Organizational Commitment. Five items were used in all three data sets, reflecting affective organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) (e.g. “I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization”, “This organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me”). The response scale ranged from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree).

Scale reliabilities

Scale reliabilities were acceptable (Cronbach’s alpha above .70) in almost all cases (Table 1). Exceptions were the job satisfaction measure in the Netherlands and the perceived union support measure in Italy. However, in both cases scale reliabilities did not improve when one or more items were removed from the scale. Therefore, and in order to secure comparability between the different samples, the scales were not changed.

Results

The pattern of correlations was fairly similar for the three samples (Table 1). In line with our first hypothesis, we found that job insecurity was negatively related to job satisfaction in all three samples. In both the Dutch and Italian sample, job insecurity was also negatively related to organizational commitment. In the Swedish sample, however, the relationship between job insecurity and organizational commitment failed to reach significance. For the Italian sample job insecurity was also negatively related to perceived union support, indicating that higher levels of perceived union support associate with lower levels of job insecurity. The correlation between perceived union support and job insecurity was not significant in the Dutch and Swedish samples.

Correlations between job satisfaction and organizational commitment were significant in all three countries, ranging from .41 (Sweden) to .71 (Italy) ($p < .001$). Perceived union support was positively related to both job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the Dutch and Swedish samples. In other words, when more support from the union was perceived, higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment were reported. In the Italian sample perceived union support was also positively related to job satisfaction, but not significantly related to organizational commitment (Table 1).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	Correlations		
				1	2	3
The Netherlands (N=611)						
1. Job insecurity	1.85	.70	.91			
2. Job satisfaction	3.79	.64	.67	-.23***		
3. Organizational commitment	3.52	.65	.78	-.17***	.65***	
4. Perceived union support	3.67	.47	.71	-.03	.13**	.13**
Italy (N=290)						
1. Job insecurity	2.63	.92	.78			
2. Job satisfaction	3.50	.95	.87	-.25***		
3. Organizational commitment	3.09	1.05	.88	-.16**	.71***	
4. Perceived union support	3.39	.74	.60	-.19**	.18**	.05
Sweden (N=1829)						
1. Job insecurity	2.08	1.06	.89			
2. Job satisfaction	3.68	.88	.82	-.11***		
3. Organizational commitment	2.53	.93	.86	.05	.41***	
4. Perceived union support	3.19	.82	.71	-.05	.18***	.29***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

In order to examine the expected moderating effect of perceived union support on the relationship between job insecurity and the two outcome variables, hierarchical regression analyses were performed. The variables were entered in three steps: first, job insecurity was entered, then perceived union support was added to the equations and, finally, the interaction between perceived union support and job insecurity was entered. Before conducting the analyses, both job insecurity and perceived union support were centered (that is, the mean was set to zero without affecting the standard deviation). Next, the two centered predictor variables were multiplied to form the interaction term (see Aiken & West, 1991, for more information on this procedure). This was done separately for each sample (see Table 2).

In the first step we found a significant main effect of job insecurity on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment in all three samples (also in the Swedish sample, while the correlation between job insecurity and organizational commitment failed to reach significance). As expected, this relationship was negative. That is, an increase in job insecurity predicts reduced levels of job satisfaction and reduced levels of organizational commitment. However, in the Swedish sample the effect of job insecurity on organizational commitment was positive, indicating that an increase in job insecurity predicts higher levels of organizational commitment. Adding perceived union support to the regression

equations showed significant main effects of perceived union support on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the Dutch as well as the Swedish sample. For the Italian sample we did find a significant main effect of perceived union support on job satisfaction, but not on organizational commitment (Table 2). In all cases the main effect of job insecurity on the dependent variables was unaffected after inclusion of perceived union support in the regression equations.

Table 2. Results of hierarchical regression analyses of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (standardized regression coefficients).

	Job satisfaction			Organizational commitment		
The Netherlands						
JI	-.23***	-.22***	-.22***	-.17***	-.17***	-.17***
PU		.13**	.14*		.12**	.13**
JI * PU			.08			.01
F	33.29***	22.09***	16.00***	18.77***	14.43***	9.65***
d.f.	1, 609	2, 608	3, 607	1, 609	2, 608	3, 607
R ²	.05	.07	.07	.03	.05	.05
Italy						
JI	-.25***	-.23***	-.23***	-.16**	-.16**	-.16**
PU		.14*	.14*		.02	.01
JI * PU			-.06			-.14*
F	19.87***	12.95***	9.07***	7.68**	3.86*	4.44*
d.f.	1, 287	2, 286	3, 285	1, 287	2, 286	3, 285
R ²	.06	.08	.09	.03	.03	.04
Sweden						
JI	-.11***	-.10***	-.10***	.05*	.06**	.06**
PU		.18***	.18***		.29***	.29***
JI * PU			.04			.05*
F	23.03***	42.01***	28.84***	3.93*	86.25***	59.50***
d.f.	1, 1827	2, 1826	3, 1825	1, 1827	2, 1826	3, 1825
R ²	.01	.04	.04	.00	.09	.09

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

JI = Job insecurity, PU = Perceived union support

Next, the cross-product term representing the interaction between job insecurity and perceived union support was entered in the regression equations. In neither the Dutch, Italian nor Swedish samples had the interaction term a significant beta-weight in the models predicting job satisfaction. Contrary to our expectations the effect of job insecurity on job satisfaction was not moderated by perceived union support. However, the interaction term was significant in both the Italian and Swedish sample in the model predicting differences in organiza-

tional commitment, but failed to reach significance in the Dutch sample. Thus, the effect of job insecurity on organizational commitment was moderated by perceived union support in the Italian and Swedish samples.

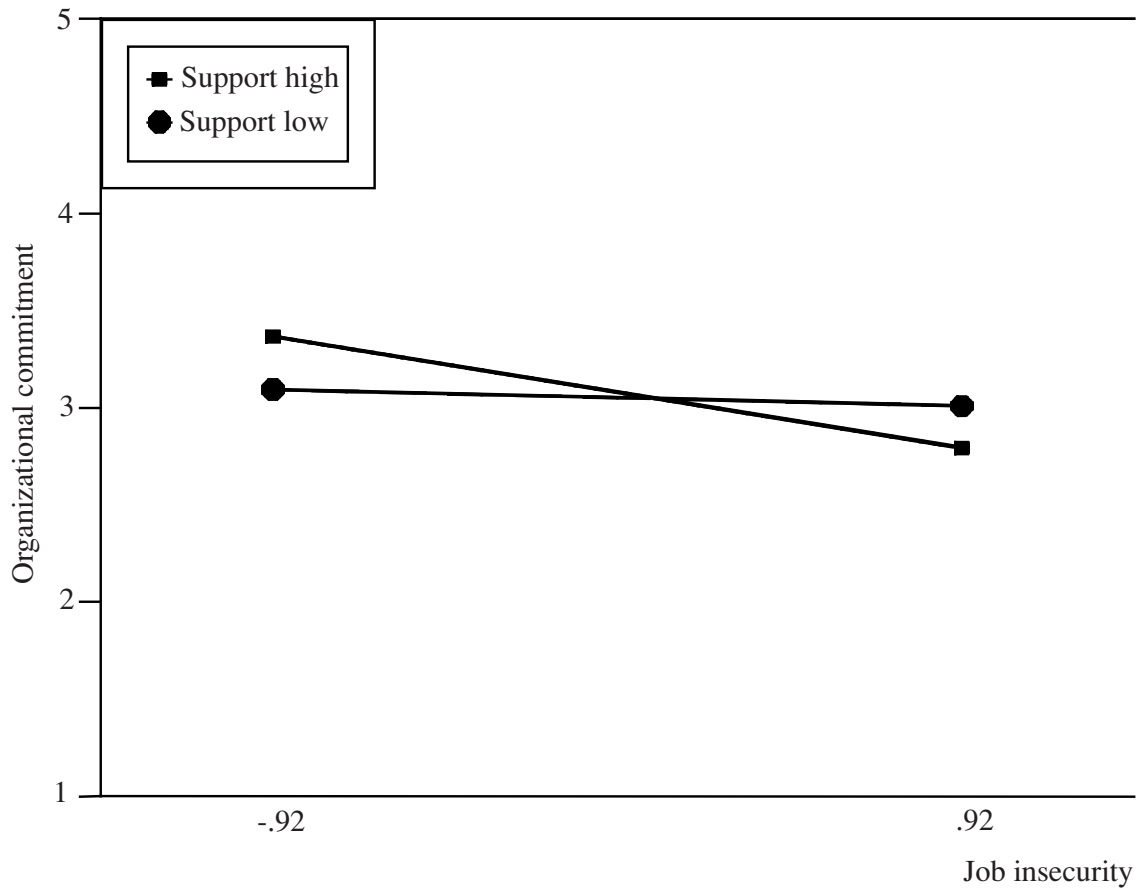
To examine the nature of the interaction effects, predicted values for participants who scored one standard deviation above or below the mean on each variable were calculated. Figure 1 depicts the results for the Italian sample and Figure 2 for the Swedish sample. We expected that increased feelings of job insecurity would only negatively affect organizational commitment for union members whose perceived union support was low, whereas for union members who did experience high support from their union increased feelings of job insecurity would not affect organizational commitment (buffering effect). Contrary to our expectations, however, we found a different pattern in both countries.

For both the Italian and Swedish sample we found that levels of organizational commitment were stable when job insecurity increased for participants who perceived low support from their union. In the Italian sample, organizational commitment decreased when job insecurity increased among participants who perceived high union support (Figure 1). In contrast, in the Swedish sample organizational commitment increased when job insecurity increased among participants who perceived high union support (Figure 2).

Discussion

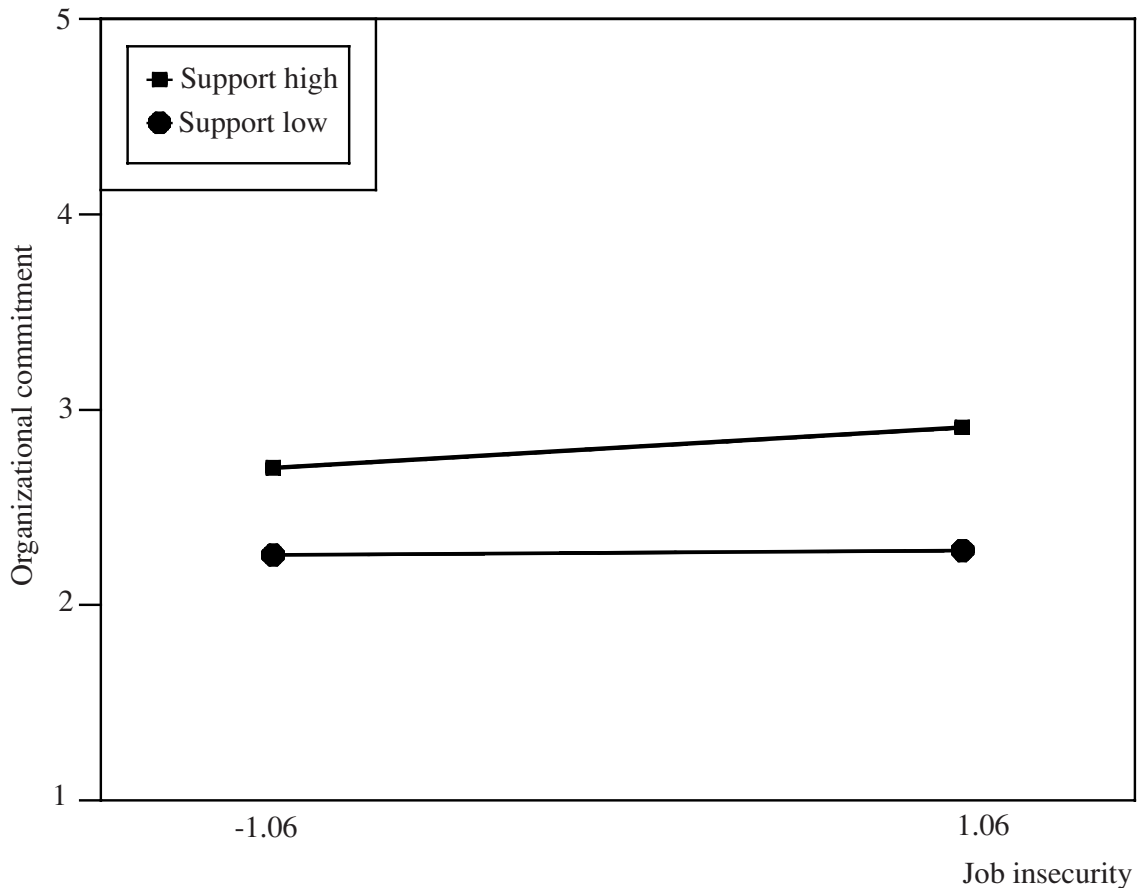
The results of our study first of all replicate previous research and confirm job insecurity to be an important source of stress for employees. Given that job insecurity appears to have detrimental consequences, the major purpose of this study was to investigate whether the support union members perceive from their union has a moderating effect on the relationships between job insecurity on the one hand and job satisfaction and organizational commitment on the other hand. Previous research found that personal work-based social support (support from colleagues or supervisor) moderates the relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction (cf. Lim, 1996). The question whether social support also moderates the relationship between job insecurity and organizational commitment had not been addressed previously. However, Lim (1996) reports a moderating effect of work-based social support on the relationship between job insecurity and pro-active job search. Since organizational commitment and organizational turnover (intentions) are closely related (see Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), a moderating effect of social support on the association between job insecurity and organizational commitment might be expected.

Figure 1. Organizational commitment as a function of perceived union support and job insecurity for the Italian sample.



However, in none of the three samples used in the present study a buffering effect of perceived union support was found on the relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction. We did obtain small moderating effects of perceived union support on the relationship between job insecurity and organizational commitment in two of the samples (Italy and Sweden), but not in the third sample (the Netherlands). Closer examination of the interaction effects, however, revealed that the effects do not support the expected buffering effect. Rather, in both the Italian and Swedish samples organizational commitment is relatively stable when job insecurity increases and support from the union is low, while a decrease in commitment levels was expected. Moreover, in the Italian sample organizational commitment decreases, while in the Swedish sample organizational commitment increases, when job insecurity is higher among members who perceive high support from the union.

Figure 2. Organizational commitment as a function of perceived union support and job insecurity for the Swedish sample.



Perhaps these results reflect differences in industrial relations systems and the meaning of labor unions and labor union membership between countries. Italy is a country with a fairly low union density rate compared to other European countries, with approximately 39% union members in the labor force. Moreover, Italian industrial relations are, more than the other two countries in this study, characterized by conflicts and disputes (Regalia & Regini, 1998). Faced with the threat of losing the job, supported union members seem to psychologically withdraw from the organization, as is reflected in the decrease in organizational commitment. If the union opposes the decisions made by the organization's management and is in conflict with management, this is what we would expect from committed union members. According to the social exchange perspective, union commitment is reflected in the level of perceived union support (Shore et al., 1994). In contrast, in Sweden union density is very high (approximately 83% in 1995) and industrial relations in Sweden often serve as an example of successful cooperative industrial relations (Kjellberg, 1998). Being a committed union member faced with the threat of job loss results in increased organizational

commitment. This might be reflective of increased effort to help the organization to overcome difficult times.

The fact that we did not find the expected buffering effect of perceived union support might be attributed to the type of support we assessed with the measure used in our study. Perceived union support, like perceived organizational support, taps a general feeling of support provided by the organization. This measure does not directly concern personal support from other individuals, such as other union members, union officials or union representatives. Cohen and Wills (1985) concluded after reviewing the literature on the role of support in the relation between stress and well-being that with more general measures of support generally no moderating effects are obtained, but main effects. That is, a general feeling that one is supported or integrated in a large social network appears to have a positive main effect on well-being but does not reduce the negative effects of stress. Evidence for a buffering effect is typically obtained when the support measure captures interpersonal resources that are responsive to the needs elicited by the stressful event (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Previous studies on the role of support in the relation between job insecurity and work-related outcomes used the latter type of measures. In these studies evidence for a buffering effect of social support was found (cf. Lim, 1996). Future studies examining the role of labor union support would benefit from taking the difference between these two kinds of support into account. A question that deserves further attention is whether support provided by individual union representatives or shop stewards has a buffering effect, similar to individual social support provided by colleagues or supervisor. Unions could also try to provide a more supportive environment for members in firms that undergo restructuring or downsizing. Further examination of the type and content of the support insecure members (or employees) need and value could yield information about how to provide and design such a supportive environment.

To conclude, the results obtained in this study are not supportive of a buffering or moderating effect of union support on the relationship between job insecurity and job satisfaction nor the relationship between job insecurity and organizational commitment. However, perceived union support does have an impact on members' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Perceived union support had a main effect on job satisfaction in all three samples and a main effect on organizational commitment in two samples. These results stress the importance of labor unions as a supportive social network for union members.

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Can satisfaction with the union reduce the negative effects of job insecurity? A study within three European countries

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Introduction

Since the end of the twentieth century the labor market has been subject to dramatic changes all over the Western economies. The trend towards increasing competition and globalization has been accompanied by outsourcing, privatization, and downsizing. Today, flexible firms consisting of both a core and a peripheral workforce are part of everyday life for organizations and their employees (Beatson, 1995; Gallie et al., 1998; O'Neill & Lenn, 1995). As a consequence, we have witnessed an escalating movement from secure employment conditions to more insecure ones, resulting in an accelerating sense of job insecurity among the workforce (Gowing et al., 1998; OECD, 1997).

Previous research has identified job insecurity as a stressor that is negatively related to employees' health and well-being as well as to their job and organizational attitudes and performance (e.g., Ashford et al., 1989; Hartley et al., 1991; see Sverke et al., 2002, for meta-analysis results). Most of these studies, however, have focused on the direct association between job insecurity and the various outcome variables, whereas only limited research has investigated factors that may reduce the negative consequences. Some researchers have investigated potential moderators of this relationship, for example social support (e.g., Lim, 1996). However, given the fact that job insecurity is an important factor in unionized as well as non-unionized workplaces, surprisingly little attention has been given to the role played by the union. There are studies investigating the reasons why individuals join trade unions and the influence of unions on variables like pay, productivity, turnover and employee attitudes (Bender & Sloane, 1999). But very little research has investigated if and how union membership and union attitudes associate with job insecurity and its outcomes.

The first purpose of this study was to investigate if job insecurity and union satisfaction predict mental health complaints among union members in three different European countries (Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden). A second purpose was to investigate if union satisfaction can moderate (reduce) the assumed impact of job insecurity on mental health complaints. It has also been

suggested that mental health complaints are associated with demographic variables like age and sex (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Therefore, these variables were controlled in the analyses.

Job insecurity

Job insecurity has been defined as a fundamental and involuntary change regarding the safety and continuity of the present employment (Hartley et al., 1991) and as a perceived uncertainty concerning the continuation of employment itself or features of the job (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984). From these definitions follow that job insecurity is a subjective phenomenon based on the individual's perception and interpretation of the immediate work environment. It also suggests that job insecurity is involuntary, implying that perceived threats against the continuity of the employment derives from an involuntary change from a secure employment condition to an insecure one. The subjective nature of job insecurity also implies that individuals can perceive different levels of job insecurity even though they are exposed to the same objective situation.

Although job insecurity appears to be most evident in organizations facing reorganizations in terms of downsizing, outsourcing, and privatization (Gowing et al., 1998; Heaney et al., 1994; Parker et al., 1997), it has also been argued that feelings of job insecurity can appear in objectively unthreatened situations (Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002).

The negative consequences of job insecurity for outcomes like job attitudes and well-being are by now fairly well documented (e.g., Ashford et al., 1989; Barling & Kelloway, 1996; Davy et al., 1997; De Witte, 1999; Hartley et al., 1991). In a meta-analysis Sverke et al. (2002) divided the consequences of job insecurity into four different categories; job attitudes, organizational attitudes, health and work related behavior. The results of the meta-analysis indicate that job insecurity is significantly and negatively related to outcomes in all four categories. The strongest association was reported for the relation between job insecurity and job and organizational attitudes, with meta-analysis correlations ranging from $-.35$ to $-.49$. The relationship between job insecurity and health outcomes ranged from $-.15$ to $-.24$ and finally for the association between job insecurity and work related attitudes the meta-analysis correlations ranged from $-.20$ to $-.28$. All the health outcomes in the meta-analysis were self-rated measures of health complaints. However, some studies have investigated the relation between job insecurity and physical health outcomes. For instance Siegrist et al. (1990) reported job insecurity to be associated with ischemic heart disease occurrence. Job insecurity has also been found to correlate with neck and shoulder problems (Lindström et al., 1997). Other studies have reported associations between job insecurity and blood pressure (e.g., Ferrie et al., 1998a, 1998b; Kasl, 1979).

As opposed to the direct effects of job insecurity on outcomes less is known about potential moderators of the relationship between job insecurity and its outcomes (Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). It has been argued that different types of support (e.g., family support, managerial support, and union support) may influence or reduce the negative consequences of job insecurity. The assumption underlying this is derived from the stress literature suggesting that various types of social support can mitigate the relationship between stressor and outcome (e.g., Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The different types of social support, however, do not reduce the effects of job insecurity per se, rather social support is postulated to help the individual to cope with feelings of insecurity (Heaney et al., 1995). For example Lim (1996) reported that support provided by family and friends moderated the negative impact of job insecurity on life satisfaction, while work-based social support buffered individuals against the negative effects on job dissatisfaction, proactive job search, and non-compliant job behaviors.

Unions and job insecurity

One important factor in changes concerning the working life is the role played by the union (Hellgren & Sverke, 2001; Sverke & Hellgren, 2001). Although management typically initiates organizational restructuring and personnel cutbacks, unions are not only passive spectators without any influence on the process. Rather, they are highly involved in the reorganizations and can take initiatives in order to influence the changes and, by that, also the consequences for the members. A key aspect of employees' power to control and counteract perceptions of job insecurity lies in the union's collectivity, and the union's ability to address and resolve the interests of their members (Hartley et al., 1991).

Other aspects deemed to be important concern members' expectations on the union, i.e., what comes with membership (cf. theories of psychological contracts; e.g., Rousseau, 1989), and how such expectations color members' attitudes toward the union. Social exchange theory is frequently used to understand work-related attitudes and behaviors; this theoretical framework suggests that people's rational self-interest determines their social interaction (Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995). It has been suggested (Eisenberger et al., 1986) that social exchange theory could be extended also to individuals' relationships with organizations because the individual forms an "anthropomorphic ascription of dispositional traits to the organization" (p. 500). Basically this suggests that people personify the organization and perceive themselves to have a social exchange relationship with the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995). Various aspects of the interaction between individual and organization influence

the way people evaluate the organization. It has been suggested, however, that people form their attitudes toward the organization by evaluating to what extent they perceive the organization to be committed to them, appreciate their contributions, and work for their needs and well-being (Aryee & Chay, 2001; Eisenberger et al., 1986). This implies that favorable perceptions of the union and its activities are likely to generate positive attitudes towards the union in general.

In line with this reasoning, Hartley et al. (1991) concluded that employees perceive their jobs as much more secure when they can depend on strong unions or work councils. It has also been argued that employees perceiving collective support generated through union membership will have less difficulty coping with job insecurity as compared to non-union members (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995). However, in their study Dekker and Schaufeli found no support for a buffering or moderating effect of union membership on the relationship between job insecurity and psychological health. Similarly, Shaw et al. (1993) reported a positive relationship between union membership and attitudes towards organizational change, but no interaction effect of job insecurity and union membership on these attitudes. Along similar lines, Sverke and Hellgren (2001) reported that unionized and non-unionized employees differ in how they react to job insecurity, and found that unionized employees responded with more loyalty and work intensity as compared to non union members. However, also in this study no buffering effect of union membership on the relation between job insecurity and coping strategies was identified.

Despite these empirical results, there are researchers suggesting that unions should have an influence on job insecurity. For example, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) postulated that the union's role in alleviating job insecurity is to mitigate the sense of powerlessness that comes with job insecurity. Further, Johnson et al. (1992) argued that unions may influence the perceived probability of job loss because they are in a position to negotiate in order to enlarge or maintain job opportunities. Hartley et al. (1991) found that employees who felt insecure about their jobs more often engaged themselves in collective action directed at restoring job security. Research also suggests that unions play an important role in communicating reasons and motives for organizational change in order to counteract rumors and gossips about future layoffs (Hellgren & Sverke, 2001).

Union satisfaction

It appears important to investigate if unions, by various strategies and by providing support to the members, can mitigate the negative outcomes associated with job insecurity. From the individual's psychological perspective, one important factor in this respect concerns how the union is perceived and how the support provided by the union is evaluated. Such experiences are likely to

influence the general attitude toward the union. This overall attitude is likely to be manifested in members' satisfaction with the union (Fiorito et al., 1988; Kuruvilla et al., 1993). The conceptualization of union satisfaction is based on Locke's (1976) definition of job satisfaction and adopted to the union context by Fiorito et al. (1988). From this follows that "union satisfaction is a function of the discrepancy between members' expectations and perceptions of union performance on a number of job and union related facets such as internal relations between leaders and rank-and-file members, and improvements in the quality of working life" (Kuruvilla et al., 1993, p. 500). This implies that union satisfaction can be regarded as an attitude reflecting members' overall satisfaction with the union's performance and involvement in issues concerning improvements or deteriorations in the quality of the members' working life.

We find it valuable to investigate if union satisfaction is related to members' mental well-being, and if union satisfaction can moderate the relationship between job insecurity and well-being. This is important in order to increase our understanding of how unions and union activities can mitigate the negative consequences generated by perceptions of job insecurity. Following Baron and Kenny (1986), a moderator is defined as a variable that affects the strength or direction of the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable. Hence, moderation in this form of relationship is detected by looking for interaction effects. In the present study this means that the interaction term of job insecurity and union satisfaction will predict mental health complaints. More precisely, the hypothesis for this study is that union members who perceive a high level of job insecurity in combination with a high level of union satisfaction will experience less mental health complaints as compared to those members perceiving high job insecurity together with low union satisfaction.

Method

Participants and procedure

Data for this study were collected among union members within three European countries: Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

Italy. The data were collected from May to July 2000, and 865 questionnaires were administrated at the respondents' workplaces. A total of 476 usable questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 55%. The analyses in this study are based on the 63% (of 278) that belonged to a union. A total of 28% worked in the industrial sector and 72 % in the service sector. The mean age of the respondents was 39 years (SD=9). The majority of the respondents were men (68%) and union tenure was, on average, 9 years (SD=9).

The Netherlands. Data for the Netherlands come from one wave of a panel survey, and were collected through telephone interviews in Summer 1999. The response rate was 50%, that is, completed questionnaires were received from 799 of the 1,590 members in the original sample. The mean age of the respondents was 48 years (SD=13) and 75% of the respondents were men. The average length of union membership was 19 years (SD=14).

Sweden. The data come from a national sample of blue-collar workers associated with the Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal), and were collected in Spring 2000. The sample was randomly selected from a total population of 370,590 members, and 2,564 questionnaires were sent to the participants' home addresses. A total of 1,923 usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 75%. The average age of the respondents was 45 years (SD=11). Their average length of membership in the union was 16 years (SD=8) and 78% of the sample were women.

Measures

For each country, variable intercorrelations, means, standard deviations, and coefficient alpha reliabilities for the measures are displayed in Table 1. The demographic variables (age and sex) were assessed with single questions. Perceptions of job insecurity and union satisfaction were obtained using Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Job insecurity was measured using five items, three of them developed by Ashford et al. (1989) and two developed by De Witte (2000). Union satisfaction was measured with five items in Italy, six in the Netherlands and four in Sweden. The scale was designed to reflect the overall contentedness with union representation as well as the information and services provided by the union (see Sverke et al., 2001, for details about the measure). Mental health complaints were assessed with the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ; Goldberg, 1979). Participants completed the instrument using a 1 (never) to 4 (always) response mode. Variable indices were constructed using mean values of the items comprised by the respective measures.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Country	1	2	Variable			M	SD	Alpha
	3	4	5					
Italy								
1. Age	-					40.39	8.56	-
2. Sex	-.09	-				1.33	0.47	-
3. Job insecurity	.03	-.04	-			2.63	0.93	0.76
4. Union satisfaction	-.17**	.09	-.23**	-		2.95	0.85	0.87
5. GHQ	.13**	.01	.31**	-.25**	-	2.09	0.37	0.74
The Netherlands								
1. Age	-					42.8	10.2	-
2. Sex	-.11**	-				1.27	0.45	-
3. Job insecurity	-.02	.00	-			1.85	0.70	0.91
4. Union satisfaction	-.04	.11**	.06	-		3.67	0.50	0.75
5. GHQ	.07	.13**	.14**	-.01	-	1.62	0.42	0.82
Sweden								
1. Age	-					45.0	10.8	-
2. Sex	-.05**	-				1.78	0.41	-
3. Job insecurity	-.07**	-.06*	-			2.08	1.05	0.89
4. Union satisfaction	.05*	.14**	-.06*	-		3.07	0.87	0.87
5. GHQ	.03	.04	.20**	-.14**	-	1.98	0.46	0.84

*p<.05, **p<.01.

For Italy n = 279, The Netherlands n = 611, Sweden n = 1800.

Sex was coded 1= male, 2= female. Job insecurity and Union satisfaction were measured on a 1 to 5-point scale and GHQ on a 1 to 4-response mode.

Results

In order to investigate the direct effects of the demographics, job insecurity, and union satisfaction on mental health complaints, as well as the postulated buffering effect of union satisfaction on the job insecurity-mental health complaints relationship, we followed the procedures suggested by Aiken and West (1991). The predictor variables (demographics, job insecurity, and union satisfaction) were centered (i.e., “put in deviation score form so that their means are zero”, p.5). Thereafter the centered job insecurity and union satisfaction predictor variables were multiplied to form the interaction term. This procedure was conducted within the respective countries separately. The variables were

then regressed on mental health complaints with the demographic variables entered first, followed by job insecurity and union satisfaction, before the interaction term was entered. The results of the three regression analyses are presented in table 2.

*Table 2. Results of multiple regression predicting mental health complaints (GHQ) with age, sex, job insecurity, union satisfaction and the multiplicative effect of job insecurity and union satisfaction (Jis * Us).*

Predictor	β	Italy F	β	The Netherlands F	β	Sweden F
Age	.09	2.68	.08	4.19*	.05	4.68*
Sex	.05	0.63	.14	11.82**	.08	11.32**
Job insecurity	.27	22.41***	.14	12.20**	.20	77.53***
Union satisfaction	-.17	8.48**	-.04	0.76	-.14	34.16***
Jis * Us	-.02	0.18	-.01	0.07	-.03	1.45
R ²	.13	12.96***	.04	5.48***	.06	24.99***
N	279	611	1800			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

For the Italian sample, the results show that none of the demographic variables predicted mental health complaints, thus suggesting that both age and sex are unrelated to mental health complaints in Italy. Mental health complaints were significantly predicted by job insecurity ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$) and union satisfaction ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$). The relation between job insecurity and mental health complaints was positive while that between union satisfaction and mental health complaints was negative. This indicates that experiences of job insecurity are associated with higher levels of mental health complaints and that experiences of union satisfaction associate with lower levels of mental health complaints. The interaction between job insecurity and union satisfaction ($\beta = -.02$) was non-significant, suggesting that the level of union satisfaction does not reduce the negative effects of job insecurity on mental health complaints. In total, the model explained 13 percent of the variance in mental health complaints in the Italian sample.

For the Dutch sample, mental health complaints were predicted by age and sex ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$ and $\beta = .14$, $p < .01$, respectively). Both regression weights were positive, thus suggesting that women and older members experience more mental health complaints as compared to men and younger members. Job insecurity predicted mental health complaints in the Netherlands and also this relation was positive ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$). However, union satisfaction and the interaction term failed to reach significance, indicating that union satisfaction is unrelated to mental health complaints both as a direct predictor and as a buffering force

between job insecurity and mental health complaints. In total, the study variables accounted for only a small proportion of the variance in mental health complaints in the Netherlands ($R^2 = .04$, $p < .001$).

In the Swedish sample, mental health complaints were positively related to age ($\beta = .05$, $p < .05$) and sex ($\beta = .08$, $p < .01$), which suggests that also in Sweden women and older employees report higher levels of mental health complaints in comparison with men and younger employees. Also job insecurity ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$) and union satisfaction ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .001$) predicted mental health complaints. Similar to Italy, higher levels of perceived job insecurity were associated with higher levels of mental health complaints, and satisfaction with the union tended to associate with lower levels of mental health complaints. However, neither in Sweden did the results support any buffering or moderating effect of union satisfaction on the relation between job insecurity and mental health complaints ($\beta = -.03$). Taken together, the predictors accounted for 6 percent of the variance in mental health complaints in the Swedish sample.

Discussion

Previous research has identified job insecurity as an important influence on mental health complaints as well as physical health complaints and organizational attitudes (Ashford et al., 1989; Hartley et al., 1991; Hellgren et al., 1999). As a result, several researchers have called for studies investigating potential moderators of these relationships (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Hartley et al., 1991; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002; Sverke et al., 2002). The present study was aimed as a step in that direction by investigating if union satisfaction is related to mental health complaints and if union satisfaction can moderate the relation between job insecurity and mental health complaints.

In all participating countries the relation between job insecurity and mental health complaints was positive. The fact that this result was obtained in all three countries undoubtedly gives credibility to the assertion that a higher degree of perceived job insecurity tends to generate more frequent reports of mental health problems. This finding thus confirms the results reported in previous research investigating the relation between job insecurity and well-being (e.g., Ashford et al., 1989; Heaney et al., 1994; Hellgren et al., 1999). Our results also showed that union satisfaction was negatively related to mental health complaints in two of the participating countries (Italy and Sweden). This could be taken to imply that favorable perceptions of the union are associated with well-being. Similar results were also reported by Hellgren and Sverke (2001) who found perceptions of fair treatment from the union to be positively related with perceived well-being. In contrast to this, however, the results showed no significant association between

union satisfaction and mental health complaints in the Netherlands, thus suggesting that the beneficial effects of union attitudes in Italy and Sweden must be regarded as preliminary evidence awaiting further replication.

Regarding the job insecurity-union satisfaction interaction term, the results failed to reach significance in all participating countries. This suggests that there is no moderating or buffering effect of members' union satisfaction on the relation between job insecurity and mental health complaints. This finding is in line with the results obtained in previous research (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Shaw et al., 1993; Sverke & Hellgren, 2001) which also found that union related variables failed to moderate the relation between job insecurity and its outcomes.

Although we found no support for the postulated interaction effect, the results imply that satisfaction with the union's activities during an era of organizational turmoil can be of significant importance for members' perceptions of mental health. A positive and significant relation between union satisfaction and mental health complaints was found in two of the participating countries (Italy and Sweden). The results imply that union performance may generate perceptions of union satisfaction, which, in turn, is beneficial for members' mental health experiences. In other words, if the union does well, the members are better off.

It can also be argued that union performance is more critical and crucial during organizational turmoil and, therefore, that it is important for the union to have strategies and resources to handle situations of organizational restructuring in order to preserve the members' positive attitudes towards the union and thereby also their mental well-being. This reasoning is in line with theories of social exchange, which suggest that union members evaluate the extent to which the union is committed to them, and work for their needs and interests (Aryee & Chay, 2001; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Further, the results indicate that favorable perceptions of the union and its activities will generate positive attitudes towards the union and, thereby, lower members' experiences of mental health complaints. Our findings could also be taken to suggest that social support in the form of collective action taken by the union is important for members' well-being in times of organizational change (cf. Sverke & Hellgren, 2001).

However, even if unions do support their members in terms of fair treatment or other aspects of social support, they may not be able to do something about the stressor itself – that is, they may be unable to change insecure employment conditions into more favorable ones. On the other hand, union activities may have beneficial effects for the individual if they can prevent the most negative reactions from occurring (cf. Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987). It is also possible that union activities can help individuals to better handle the insecure environment by various forms of social support activities (cf. Heaney et al., 1995).

There are several plausible explanations for the non-significant interaction term, that is, for the lack of a moderating effect of union satisfaction in the job

insecurity–mental health relationship. First, it may be that unions have failed in their strategies to tackle the new working life and therefore are perceived negatively by their members. However, the level of union satisfaction was not dramatically low in any of the three countries (around 3 on a 5-point scale), which mitigates the plausibility of this explanation. Second, it is also possible that unions are doing the wrong thing, i.e., that they do not address or deal with aspects like reorganizations and job insecurity at all. Unions typically focus on more traditional union issues (Allvin & Sverke, 2000; Kjellberg, 1998) and, to the extent this is at the expense of supporting members in times of organizational turmoil, members' attitudes towards their union will be hampered.

A third explanation is that researchers are measuring the wrong variables. It might be that traditional union variables – such as union participation, union satisfaction, union commitment and union support – in a broad sense are too distant, and thereby not sensitive enough to capture more narrow union activities or strategies (cf. Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). It may be that the “traditional” union variables simply do not reflect the new organizational reality, and that scholars need to develop new measures that are more specifically related to issues such as job insecurity, downsizing and flexibility (Howard, 1995). One example of this could be Dekker and Schaufeli (1995). They examined union support in a broad sense, and not support directly associated with the specific union activities regarding a certain event, something that perhaps could explain the lack of a significant interaction effect also in their study. It is possible that union support is a too general concept and, therefore, has less influence on variables like psychological health and well-being. It may also be that union activities need to be operationalized in terms more close to the individual in order to generate a significant impact on various outcomes.

Concluding remarks

Despite these limitations, it needs to be noted that within the Italian and Swedish samples, union satisfaction significantly predicted mental health complaints, and that the relationship was negative. This result suggests that there may be a direct function of members' perceived union satisfaction on their perceptions of mental well-being. From the union perspective, this suggests that actions taken by the union in order to influence employees' sense of union satisfaction may have an impact on their members' mental health. Further, from a managerial perspective, it is obvious that a workforce plagued with stress and mental health complaints cannot perform their best (Hartley et al., 1991), and thereby not make the organization more effective. In this perspective, also the management needs to support union participation in decisions and actions within the organization in order to keep the employees satisfied and thereby more healthy (Heller et al., 1998).

The results make it tempting to speculate about differences between the countries. However, although national employment conditions, local union strategies, and country specific labor market conditions as well as local economic characteristics may all be important in understanding how union attitudes may serve to reduce negative effects of job insecurity, this was beyond the scope of the present study. Our ambition here has been to take a step in the direction of investigating if union attitudes can reduce stressors such as job insecurity in the flexible working life. The positive effects of union satisfaction in two of the countries (Italy and Sweden) may be seen as preliminary evidence of a beneficial positive impact of union attitudes. However, the different results obtained for the Netherlands regarding the impact of union satisfaction on mental health complaints together with the absence of moderator effects in all countries raise challenges for future research.

According to our knowledge, research on the potential impact of union activities on the relation between stressors like job insecurity and their outcomes is still limited, and the role of the union in the “modern working life” is an important factor that needs to be investigated further in the future. We urge researchers to investigate union attitudes in the context of industrial relations characteristics, labor market conditions, and economic indicators to shed more light on how all these factors relate to union attitudes. We also stress the importance of conducting further investigations regarding the potentially buffering role of unions in members’ experiences of an increasingly flexible and unpredictable work environment.

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The interplay between job insecurity, attitudes towards the union, and trade union participation: Test of some hypotheses among union members in four European countries

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Introduction

The last decades have been marked by important organisational changes. In Europe and the United States, increasing international competition brought about large-scale restructuring, fusions, downsizing and plant closings in an attempt to reduce costs and to increase organisational efficiency (Hitt et al., 1994; Koretz, 1997). These interventions usually imply massive staff dismissals (Kozlowski et al., 1993). Simultaneously, in order to meet the need for more (internal) flexibility, the number of temporary employees shows a significant increase (Gallie et al., 1998; Purcell & Purcell, 1998). These developments probably affected employees' job security, resulting in heightened feelings of job insecurity (OECD, 1997).

Job insecurity refers to concern about the continued existence of jobs (van Vuuren, 1990; Hartley et al., 1991). It involves employees' subjective perception of their future: for the employees concerned, there is uncertainty about retaining their jobs or eventually losing them. Definitions also refer to feelings of helplessness in retaining the desired job continuity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), and to the involuntary nature of job insecurity (Hellgren et al., 1999: 181)

During the past decades, extensive research has been done on the effects of job insecurity (see e.g.: Hartley et al., 1991; Klandermans & Van Vuuren, 1999). Research shows that job insecurity decreases the health and well-being of individual employees (for an overview, see De Witte, 1999; Nolan et al., 2000; Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). Job insecurity is consistently associated with lower levels of job satisfaction (Ashford et al., 1989; Rosenblatt & Ruvio, 1996), life satisfaction (Lim, 1997) and more general indicators of mental well-being (Büssing, 1999; Hellgren et al., 1999). Job insecurity is also associated with higher levels of burnout (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Landsbergis, 1988), anxiety and depression (Orpen, 1993; Roskies & Louis-Guerin, 1990) and psychosomatic

complaints (Van Vuuren et al., 1991). Longitudinal research confirmed the causal impact of job insecurity on these indicators (Van Vuuren, 1990; Burchell, 1994; Iversen & Sabroe, 1988; Ferrie et al., 1995).

Job insecurity also influences various organisational attitudes and behaviours, thus also affecting the *organisation*. The perception of job insecurity is frequently linked to reduced organisational commitment (Brockner et al., 1992; Lord & Hartley, 1998), mistrust in management (Ashford et al., 1992; Reisel, 1998) and a decrease in (aspects of) organisational citizenship behaviour (Bultena, 1998). Job insecurity also strengthens intentions to leave the company ('turnover intentions', e.g., Ashford et al., 1989; Barling & Kelloway, 1996; Borg, 1989; Burke, 1998). These effects of job insecurity threaten the organisation's survival (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), since they reduce the work efforts of the employees concerned, whereas the best qualified workers try to leave the company as soon as possible, resulting in the need for renewed and expensive recruiting efforts.

Research on the effects of job insecurity has focussed almost exclusively on the individual employee (e.g., health and well-being) and on the company (e.g., organisational commitment and turnover). Much less attention is paid to the effects of job insecurity on *labour unions* and on *union participation*. These effects are the focus of this article. On the basis of data from four European countries, we will examine the association of job insecurity with various union attitudes and the intention to resign membership. In doing so, we will concentrate on *union members*. After all, the intention to resign membership can only be analysed among the latter, whereas the attitudes examined mainly concern the issue of membership and the services offered to members of a labour union.

Job insecurity among union members

Firstly, we will motivate in a more comprehensive way why we focus on union membership, and will discuss the motives for becoming (and remaining) a union member. Next, we clarify our theoretical perspectives, introduce our independent variables and elaborate our hypotheses.

Motives for union membership

Union participation is not a one-dimensional phenomenon. Klandermans (1996) differentiated participation according to two dimensions: intensity and duration. Participation may require minimal or considerable effort (intensity), while it may also be a one-off or of indefinite duration. In principle, union membership is durable (for an indefinite time), and requires only limited effort from the individual. This form of participation contrasts with activities of greater intensity, such as participating in strikes or taking up a position as an active union member.

In this paper we will concentrate on the most ‘basic’ form of union participation: union *membership*. The choice for this ‘basic form’ of union participation is obvious. Unions depend on their members for survival, while membership numbers also constitute their power-base (Barling et al., 1992; Klandermans, 1992). After all, a large number of members strengthens the union’s bargaining position on a company as well as a national level. A larger number of members increases the union’s strength, because more employees can thus be mobilised for collective actions (Klandermans, 1986, 1992). The latter suggests that, for the individual member, union membership also represents the ‘necessary’ (but insufficient) first step to a more active form of union participation, which demands more energy and dedication (e.g., participation in industrial actions or taking up an active function). For the labour movement, the question of a link between job insecurity and union membership is therefore a crucial one, since a change (rise or fall) in the number of members because of job insecurity has important consequences for the future of the union movement and its strength.

Research into the reasons or motives given by individuals for becoming a member, makes frequent use of the classification developed by Van De Vall (1970; see also De Witte, 1988; Hartley, 1992; Klandermans, 1986). Van De Vall distinguishes between ideological motives (to make the union as strong as possible), social motives (social pressure or because colleagues and family-members have joined) and instrumental motives (financial, juridical and administrative support or protection in case of possible problems). European research shows the *instrumental* motive to be the most important motivation for union membership (Klandermans, 1986, pp. 17-18; Hartley, 1992, p. 171; Visser, 1995, p. 59; Waddington et al., 1997, p. 467; Waddington & Hoffman, 2000, pp. 61-62). In Flanders (Belgium), 69% of union members became members “Because being a member is good protection in the event of problems at work” (De Witte, 1996, p. 281). Similar findings were found in the UK (Waddington & Whitston, 1997, p. 520-521), the Netherlands (Klandermans, 1986; Van De Vall, 1970), Denmark (Waddington et al., 1997, p. 467) and Sweden (Kjellberg, 1998, p. 103), whereas in Italy only a minority became members for ideological motives (Di Nicola, 1997, p. 70). The domination of the instrumental or ‘protection motive’ implies that the union is considered by the majority of its members as an ‘insurance’ against possible problems in the individual or collective sphere. Some authors interpret these trends as the expression of a more individualistic, consumerist attitude amongst members (e.g., Waddington et al., 1997, p. 467). In various European countries, these findings resulted in the development of an extensive individual service package for union members (Visser, 1995, pp. 59-61; Waddington et al., 1997).

The need for protection, which is central to the instrumental motivation of membership, of course includes more than just protection against possible

dismissal or against job insecurity. The latter, however, constitutes an important component of the protection motive. In research in Flanders (Belgium), 32% of union members explicitly refer to job preservation as a reason for becoming a member (De Witte, 1996, p. 281). Factor analysis also shows this motive to be part of the 'instrumental motives' dimension. Quite similar findings emerge from research done in the Netherlands (see, e.g., Van Rij, 1995, p. 76). Research in the United Kingdom equally shows that dissatisfaction with the lack of job security constituted one of the reasons for becoming a union member (Crockett & Hall, 1987; Guest & Dewe, 1988, p. 170). In listing topics to be defended by the union, members highly prioritised the 'job security' topic (Dworkin et al., 1998), whereas more emphasis was placed on this issue by union members than by non-union members (Brown Johnson et al., 1992; Godard, 1997). In the 1990s, Sweden even introduced new legislation concerning job insecurity, containing particular advantages and extra protection for union members should dismissal loom (Kjellberg, 1998, p. 102). It thus comes as no surprise when Visser (1995, p. 60) concludes that the threat of unemployment has motivated many employees to take the precaution of becoming a union member or to remain one. Instrumental motives (and worries about job insecurity) also constitute the main reasons to *remain* a union member, since former members make special reference to a lack of protection, or to the fact that they no longer need this protection, as a motive for resigning their membership (Klandermans, 1997, p. 102).

Theoretical perspectives

In this contribution, we explore the possible effects of job insecurity among union members: is job insecurity linked to specific union attitudes, and to the intention to resign membership? The instrumental 'protection motive' offers a point of departure for developing hypotheses concerning these 'effects'.

The instrumental relation with the union suggests an analogy between the relation between employees and their union, and the relation maintained with their company. In both cases, the relation seems to be based on a business-like transaction: the employees contribute a cost (e.g., a membership fee or efforts), against which the union or the company balances profit (e.g., protection or an income). Both relations may thus be typified in terms of a rational cost/benefit analysis (cf. rational choice theories; see e.g., Klandermans, 1986, 1996). The equation in the relations pertaining to the company and to union membership suggests that some of the effects of job insecurity on the company may also hold true for the attitudes and behaviours regarding the union. After all, job insecurity disturbs the balance of the cost/benefit relation of members with their union, which may, for example, lead to increased dissatisfaction with the union, and to the intention to resign membership.

The effects of job insecurity among union members may thus be viewed from the perspective of the '*psychological contract*' (Rousseau, 1995). The psychological contract encompasses the (largely implicit) expectations of employees regarding that what the organisation (in this case: the union) will offer them. Within this psychological contract, the idea of *balance* is central: the employee needs to feel that what is offered by the organisation (here: the union) balances what the individual (here: the union member) brings into the relation. We assume that job insecurity disturbs this balance. After all, the psychological contract between the employee and the union is not observed in the eyes of the union members: membership seems to offer insufficient protection against insecurity, whereas the very reason why people become members stems from the wish to 'protect' themselves against insecurity. Research shows that the perception that the psychological contract has been violated has negative effects on various organisational attitudes and behaviours (e.g. Robinson, 1996; Robinson et al., 1994; Schalk et al., 1995). Violation of the psychological contract reduces organisational commitment and satisfaction, and increases the intention to leave the organisation (turnover). Similar hypotheses may be developed as regards union members' attitudes and behaviour concerning the union.

The violation of the psychological contract with the union because of job insecurity, suggests that union members become dissatisfied with their union. These feelings of dissatisfaction may also be approached from Hirschman's (1970) theory. Hirschman distinguishes three possible reactions to dissatisfaction: 'exit', 'voice' and 'loyalty'. Dissatisfaction resulting from job insecurity may first of all strengthen the intention to resign membership. This fits into what Hirschman (1970) calls the '*exit*'-option, as an active and destructive reaction to dissatisfaction (Klandermans, 1997, pp. 33-34). '*Voice*' relates to efforts to change the situation in an active way, for instance by lodging protests with management or with shop stewards. '*Loyalty*' is a passive reaction, chosen when the cost of both previous options seems to be too great (see also Sverke & Hellgren, 2001). Individuals who choose this option, display greater commitment with the organisation, in an attempt to control their feelings of dissatisfaction. In the following section we will concentrate on the 'exit' and 'loyalty' options, since the data sets used contain no indicators for 'voice' reactions.

Dependent variables and hypotheses

In this contribution, we first of all explore whether job insecurity is linked to specific *attitudes* towards the union. Three attitudes have been selected, which are also relevant for union membership (and the intention to resign): the extent to which people feel supported by the union, satisfaction with the union, and union commitment. These attitudes are conceptualised by analogy with core organisational variables. Finally, we discuss the intention to resign *union membership*.

The concept of '*perceived union support*' is developed by analogy with research in the context of companies (Goslinga, 1996). In theory and research on the relation between employees and their company, an exchange theory perspective is used, in which the trade (or exchange) between both parties is emphasised (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986). Central is the idea that both parties try to maximise the profits, and minimise the costs of their relationship (cf. the idea of balance discussed above). An advantageous ratio between costs and benefits will strengthen various positive attitudes amongst employees, such as a stronger organisational commitment (Lawler & Yoon, 1996). By analogy with an already existing scale for measuring perceived support by the organisation, Shore and her colleagues (Shore et al., 1994) developed a scale to measure the support members (perceive to) receive from their union. The central idea is that, as a member, one is heard within the union when there is a question or a problem. Shore et al. show that their concept of '*perceived union support*' can be empirically distinguished from other union attitudes, such as union commitment. Other research shows that perceived union support autonomously contributes to the prediction of relevant 'outcome' variables, such as forms of union citizenship behaviour (Aryee & Chay, 2001), union commitment (Goslinga, 1996; Sinclair & Tetrick, 1996), satisfaction with the union and the desire to continue union membership (Goslinga, 1996). Research on the relationship between job insecurity and perceived union support is lacking. Such an association seems obvious, however. For members, the experience of job insecurity implies the violation of their psychological contract with the union. We hypothesise that this leads to the perception that one is not supported by the union (hypothesis 1).

In research within companies, much attention is paid to employees' job satisfaction (e.g. Griffin & Bateman, 1986; Spector, 1997). This is not surprising. Job satisfaction is linked to relevant 'outcome' variables, such as absenteeism and turnover. As a consequence, the concept of 'job satisfaction' belongs to the core concepts of work and organisational psychology. It is not surprising, either, that this concept has been translated to a union context. Within union research, '*satisfaction with the union*' also plays an important role (see, e.g., Barling et al., 1992). This satisfaction plays a crucial role within Hirschman's (1970) theory, as mentioned above. Research shows that dissatisfaction with the union strengthens the intention to resign membership among union members (Goslinga & Klandermans, 2001). The latter conforms to Hirschman's hypothesis that 'exit' behaviour results from dissatisfaction with the organisation to which one belongs. Union satisfaction also contributes to union commitment (Goslinga & Klandermans, 2001) and to union participation (Aryee & Debrah, 1997). The association of union satisfaction and job insecurity, however, has not yet been made in research. Because job insecurity implies the violation of the psycho-

logical contract with the union, we expect job insecurity among union members to be related with lower satisfaction with the union (hypothesis 2).

The concept of organisational commitment, finally, equally occupies a central position in organisational research (see, e.g., Griffin & Bateman, 1986; Van Breukelen, 1986). This variable, too, has been translated into a union context. The concept of *union commitment* was introduced by Gordon et al. (1980). They developed a four-dimensional scale to measure the concept. However, in subsequent research, other operationalisations were developed, such as a two-dimensional structure (Sverke & Kuruvilla, 1995). By analogy with the three components of organisational commitment suggested by Allen & Meyer (1990; see also Meyer et al., 1993), Goslinga (1996, 2001) developed a scale involving three components to measure union commitment. He distinguished affective union commitment, normative union commitment and continuance union commitment. Research has shown that these three components are empirically distinct, and relevant in predicting union participation and union satisfaction (Goslinga, 1996, 2001). In this paper we limit ourselves to the first component: affective commitment to the union. Mainly the affective component of union commitment contributes to union satisfaction, and to the desire to continue membership (Goslinga, 1996). Also, this component corresponds most to other operationalisations of union commitment, such as Sverke and Kuruvilla's (1995) ideological union commitment. From a theoretical perspective, the association between job insecurity and affective union commitment may lead to two opposing hypotheses. Pursuing the argument of the psychological contract theory, we expect reduced (affective) union commitment among members experiencing job insecurity (hypothesis 3a). This may be considered an attempt to bring the perceived imbalance back into equality (cf. Van Vuuren, 1990, p. 31). However, Hirschman's (1970) 'loyalty'-option allows for the opposite prediction. According to this view, job insecurity is associated with strengthened union commitment, as a (constructive, although passive) strategy to deal with the dissatisfaction aroused by job insecurity (hypothesis 3b). This contrasting hypothesis seems equally meaningful within a union context. After all, the union is not responsible for the job insecurity being experienced. Rather, employees probably hold company management responsible. The experience of job insecurity may also reinforce the idea that people need the union to protect job security. This, in turn, may strengthen union commitment.

The fourth and last dependent variable in this contribution is the *intention to resign union membership*. Here again, the similarity with the intention to resign from a job in an organisational context is apparent. It is justifiable to look at intention rather than concrete turnover behaviour, because intention is linked to future action (cf. the theory of reasoned action [Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975] and the theory of planned behaviour [Ajzen, 1975]). Research in a union context has

focussed on the impact of the above-mentioned union attitudes on the intention to resign union membership (see, e.g., Barling et al., 1992, pp. 165-166). It generally shows that all three attitudes contribute autonomously to the intention to resign. No studies could be found in which job insecurity is included as a predictor of turnover intentions. This time, both psychological contract theory and Hirschman's framework lead to the same hypothesis: violation of the psychological contract is supposed to be associated with a heightened intention of resigning membership (hypothesis 4). The reasoning behind this hypothesis is that membership does not seem instrumental: people feel threatened by unemployment, even though they wanted to 'insure' or protect themselves against it. The latter reaction fits Hirschman's (1970) 'exit'-option.

The inclusion of the three union attitudes and the intention to resign membership into the same study enables us to answer an additional research question. When discussing the various union attitudes, it was noted that these variables have an independent impact on the intention to resign. Our hypotheses imply that we expect job insecurity to have an autonomous influence on the three union attitudes *and* on the intention to resign union membership. To this end, we will analyse the extent to which job insecurity autonomously influences turnover intentions, once the association with union attitudes has been controlled for. This also allows to determine the extent to which the association between job insecurity and turnover intention is mediated by (one or more) union attitudes. As this concerns an explorative analysis, we do not formulate any strict hypothesis concerning this issue.

Method

Design

This contribution is part of a broader, European comparative study on the role of unions in decreasing the negative effects of job insecurity (Sverke et al., 2001). Four European countries are involved in this project: Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. In these countries, we tried to collect similar data on this topic. Because we will partly use already existing data (secondary analyses), however, some variables are not operationalised in exactly the same way (see below).

The selection of countries guarantees sufficient heterogeneity concerning union contexts. This suggests that the results of the analyses may be meaningful within a European context. As regards union membership density, the almost complete range within Europe is involved in our design (cf. Visser, 1996; Waddington & Hoffmann, 2000): from countries with a rather low union member percentage (the Netherlands; more or less 25 to 30%), countries from the 'middle

level' (Italy and Belgium; more or less 40 to 50%), to countries with a high degree of unionisation (Sweden, around 87%). In addition, there is sufficient variation as regards the integration of labour unions into the social security system (Ferner & Hyman, 1998): from countries where this integration is rather poor (the Netherlands) to countries where labour unions are strongly anchored in an institutional sense (Italy, Belgium and Sweden). In this contribution, we are especially interested in the robustness of our hypotheses: the main aim of the comparison between the four countries or 'union contexts' is to examine to what extent results regarding the various hypotheses may be *generalised*. The purpose of this analysis is not, therefore, to provide a specific explanation of differences *between* countries, although such differences will (of course) be discussed in the conclusion.

Samples

We briefly discuss the samples and procedures used in the different countries (for more information, see: Sverke et al., 2001).

The *Belgian* data were collected in 1998 via a telephone survey in the three parts of the country. The survey was aimed at employees from the private sector, employed in companies with at least 50 employees. In total, 1 487 employees were interviewed. This constituted a response of more or less 20% in relation to those who could be reached by telephone *and* fitted the criteria to be interviewed. 870 of them were members of a union. They were on average 39 years old and 59% were male. The sample was heterogeneous with regard to social class and educational level, whereas all unions were represented.

In *Italy*, data were collected in 2000 by means of a postal survey. In total, 476 employees returned completed questionnaires (response percentage: 55%). 296 of them were members of a union. The average age was 41 and 67% of the respondents were male. In Italy, the sample was also heterogeneous as far as social class and educational level are concerned, while, in this case, respondents from the public sector were also present in the sample (77% worked in the private sector, the remainder in the public sector).

In the *Netherlands*, the data were collected as a component of the longitudinal panel held amongst CNV members (the National Christian Trade Union Federation). This telephone survey thus concerns only union members. The data were collected in 1998 ('wave 12'; response percentage: 52%). In total, 896 members participated in the survey. Their average age was 46 years and 75% of them were male. In the survey, no inquiries were made about their class position. The sample is heterogeneous concerning educational level.

The data in *Sweden* were collected in the course of 2000 by way of a postal survey. The target group was made up of blue collar workers who were members of one specific union (Kommunal). In total 1 923 union members returned their

completed questionnaires (response percentage: 75%). The average age of the members was 45 years, and 78% of them were women. The questionnaire contained no questions on educational level.

Measures

All surveys contained questions on a number of *background characteristics* such as gender and age. As mentioned above, some background characteristics were not present in every data set (e.g., educational level and social class). In general, several items were used to operationalise the various attitudes. All items were scored on a 5-point scale ('1' = 'disagree' and '5' = 'agree'). Factor analysis was performed per country to determine whether the various items referred to the expected dimension (for detailed information, see Sverke et al., 2001). Subsequently, scales were computed for each concept. The statistics of these scales can be found in Annex 1. These statistics (average, standard deviation, Cronbach alpha and the intercorrelations between the scales) are listed per country.

In Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden, '*job insecurity*' was measured with five items, three of which were derived from Ashford et al. (1989) and two from De Witte (2000). These items refer to two dimensions of job insecurity (cf. Borg, 1992): cognitive (e.g., "I am sure that I can keep my job", reverse scored), and affective (e.g., "I am worried about keeping my job"). A higher score on the scale indicates greater job insecurity. The scales are very reliable: Cronbach Alpha varies between .79 and .91 (see Annex 1). In Belgium, job insecurity was measured with only one item. Respondents had to evaluate the item: "How large, in your opinion, is the probability that you will become unemployed in the near future?" on a 5-point scale ('1' = 'extremely small or impossible' and '5' = 'very high'). Also here, a high score shows greater job insecurity. In previous research in Belgium, factor analysis shows that this (cognitive) item is part of the broader dimension of job insecurity, as measured with five items in the remaining countries (De Witte, 2000; Simoens, 2001). Annex 1 shows that respondents in the different countries on average feel rather secure about their jobs.

In Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, '*perceived union support*' was measured with five items, which Goslinga (1996) derived (and modified) from the scale of Shore et al. (1994). Examples of the items are: "I can always turn to my union with questions and problems" and "My union appreciates my opinion". A high score on the scale expresses the perception of support from the union. The reliability of the scales was limited in Italy (alpha = .59) and rather moderate in Belgium (alpha = .68) and the Netherlands (alpha = .71). In Sweden, only three items were available to measure this concept which did, however, prove to be reliable (alpha = .79). Annex 1 shows that, on average, respondents from Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands feel supported by their union (averages between 3,39 and 3,92). Sweden is the exception, with a rather low score of 1,87.

The concept of '*satisfaction with the union*' was measured in all four countries with the same item: "How satisfied are you with your union?" The respondents could answer on a 5-point scale ('1' = 'dissatisfied' and '5' = 'satisfied'). A high score indicates greater satisfaction. A meta-analysis regarding job satisfaction, suggests that it is possible to measure this concept with only one item (Wanous et al., 1997). We assume that this also applies to union satisfaction. Annex 1 shows that the respondents in the various countries are generally satisfied with their union (averages between 3,14 and 3,80).

Four identical items were used to measure the concept of '*affective union commitment*' in the four countries (examples of items: "I feel a strong sense of belonging to my union" and "My union means a great deal to me personally"). These items were derived from Goslinga's (1997) adaptation of Meyer et al.'s (1993) scale, and from the scale developed by Sverke and Kuruvilla (1995). After factor analysis, reliable scales were computed (Cronbach alpha between .78 and .85). A high score indicates a higher level of (affective) union commitment. Annex 1 shows that union commitment is rather low in Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden (averages around 2,60), whereas Italian respondents express a somewhat stronger committed to their union (average = 3.69).

In each country, the intention to resign membership ('*membership turnover intention*') was measured with one item. In Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, respondents evaluated the item "I would quit my union if I had a good alternative" on a 5-point scale. In Sweden, the following item was evaluated on the same scale: "I considered quitting my union during the past six months". Annex 1 shows that, on average, these items were rejected in the different countries (averages between 2,25 and 2,87).

Analyses

The hypotheses will be tested via (Pearson) correlations and (OLS) regression analysis. Respondents with no scores for one or more variables were excluded from the analysis ('listwise deletion'). This reduced the size of the samples (N = 463 in Belgium, 248 in Italy, 691 in the Netherlands and 1 688 in Sweden)¹. When testing hypotheses, the available background characteristics (gender and age) were controlled for. We chose to limit the 'control variables' to those present in all four data sets, in order to increase the comparability of the results. Controlling for, e.g., the educational level in one data set and not in another makes the results difficult to compare, thus hampering the test of our hypotheses.

¹ The strong reduction of the sample in Belgium is due to the lack of information concerning the age of one third of the Belgium respondents. The impact of this reduction is probably limited, since an analysis with pairwise deletion of missing values (instead of listwise) reveals highly similar results.

Results

Job insecurity and union attitudes

According to hypothesis 1, job insecurity is associated with a reduction in (perceived) union support. Annex 1 shows that there is indeed a negative correlation between job insecurity and perceived union support in three out of four countries. Although these correlations are not very high, they are, however, significant, and in the expected direction (-.14 in Belgium and the Netherlands and -.21 in Italy). In Sweden only, the hypothesised link is absent.

Table 1 contains the results of a regression analysis, with perceived union support as criterion variable, and age, gender and job insecurity as predictors.

Table 1 shows that in Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, the associations between job insecurity and perceived union support remain stable when age and gender are kept under control. In these three countries, there is little difference between the β coefficients for job insecurity and the zero order correlations in Annex 1. No significant job insecurity contribution is found in Sweden. Hypothesis 1 is thus confirmed in three countries, but rejected in Sweden. Table 1 also shows that older people in Italy experience reduced union support, whereas in three out of four countries, women score higher regarding perceived union support. The three predictors together only explain a limited part of the variance.

According to hypothesis 2, job insecurity is associated with reduced satisfaction with the union. Annex 1 shows that the expected correlation is only found in one country: in Italy, a significant, negative zero order correlation between job insecurity and satisfaction is observed. In the three remaining countries, the zero order correlations are not significant. Table 2 shows the results of regression analyses using union satisfaction as criterion and age, gender and job insecurity as predictors. These analyses clearly show that hypothesis 2 is rejected in three out of four countries. Only in Italy, the original (zero order) association remains significant after controlling for background characteristics ($\beta = -.27$, $P < .001$). Note that the pattern of associations with age and gender is identical to that in table 1: in Italy, older people feel somewhat less satisfied with their union, whereas women in Belgium, Italy and Sweden are somewhat more satisfied. The explained variance in the criterion variable (union satisfaction) is also quite low in these analyses.

Table 1. Job insecurity and background characteristics as predictors of perceived union support. Results of a regression analysis in the four countries.

Predictors	Standardised regression coefficients (Bêta)			
	Belgium	Italy	The Netherlands	Sweden
Age	.04	-.17**	.05	.04
Gender	.13**	.12*	-.01	.10***
Job Insecurity	-.15**	-.19**	-.14***	-.03
F-Value	5,86**	8,17***	5,17**	7,09***
Degrees of freedom	(3,459)	(3,244)	(3,687)	(3,1684)
R	.19	.30	.15	.11
R _{adj}	.04	.09	.02	.01

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant

Table 2. Job insecurity and background characteristics as predictors of satisfaction with the union. Results of regression analysis in the four countries.

Predictors	Standardised regression coefficients (Bêta)			
	Belgium	Italy	The Netherlands	Sweden
Age	-.02	-.12*	-.03	.01
Gender	.10*	.14*	.00	.12***
Job Insecurity	-.08	-.27***	-.05	-.03
F-Value	2,53*	10,77***	0,83	8,53***
Degrees of freedom	(3,459)	(3,244)	(3,691)	(3,1684)
R	.13	.34	.06	.12
R _{adj}	.02	.12	.00	.01

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant

Hypothesis 3a implies that job insecurity is associated with reduced (affective) union commitment. Hypothesis 3b, originating from Hirschman's (1970) loyalty thesis, suggests the opposite. Annex 1 shows contradictory results. A significantly negative correlation ($r = -.12$) is found in Italy, in line with hypothesis 3a. A weak (although significantly positive) correlation ($r = .05$) is observed in Sweden, in line with hypothesis 3b. In the two remaining countries, the zero order correlations are not significant.

After regression-analysis with age, gender and job insecurity as predictors, and affective union commitment as criterion variable, the patterns in the above-mentioned zero order correlations are once again confirmed (see table 3). Table 3 shows that hypothesis 3a is confirmed in Italy, whereas hypothesis 3b is

(slightly) confirmed in Sweden. The results are not unambiguous, however, since no significant association between job insecurity and (affective) union commitment is observed in Belgium and the Netherlands. Table 3 also shows that in the Netherlands women feel less committed to their union. In the four European countries, age correlates positively with union commitment: older union members are more strongly committed to their union. The explained variance in the criterion variable is however also rather low.

Table 3. Job insecurity and background characteristics as predictors of affective union commitment. Results of a regression analysis in the four countries.

Predictors	Standardised regression coefficients (Bêta)			
	Belgium	Italy	The Netherlands	Sweden
Age	.17***	.12*	.19***	.18***
Gender	-.00	-.01	-.12**	.01
Job Insecurity	.00	-.13*	.04	.06**
F-Value	4,46**	2,61*	13,75***	20,0***
Degrees of freedom	(3,459)	(3,244)	(3,687)	(3,1684)
R	.17	.18	.24	.18
R _{adj}	.03	.03	.06	.03

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant

Job insecurity and the intention to resign membership

Hypothesis 4 states that union members' experience of job insecurity is associated with a higher intention to resign union membership. From Annex 1 we can observe that, as hypothesised, the zero order correlation between the two variables is positive and significant in Belgium and Italy. In the two remaining countries, the correlation between the variables is insignificant.

Table 4 contains the results of a regression analysis to predict membership turnover intention on the basis of age, gender and job insecurity. Hypothesis 4 is confirmed in Belgium and Italy. As hypothesised, increased job insecurity is associated with a higher intention to resign membership in both countries. These correlations are not very high, however. In the Netherlands and Sweden hypothesis 4 is rejected. This time, only a few additional correlations with background characteristics are observed. In the Netherlands, older union members show a somewhat lower intention to resign membership, whereas in Sweden women have a lower turnover intention. Once again the explanatory power of the analysis is limited, judging by the low R_{adj} value at the bottom of table 4.

Table 4. Job insecurity and background characteristics as predictors of the intention to resign membership. Results of a regression analysis in the four countries.

Predictors	Standardised regression coefficients (Bêta)			
	Belgium	Italy	The Netherlands	Sweden
Age	-.08	.06	-.15***	-.00
Gender	-.01	-.12	-.05	-.08**
Job Insecurity	.11*	.19**	.04	.03
F-Value	2,75*	4,94**	6,09***	4,80**
Degrees of freedom	(3,459)	(3,244)	(3,687)	(3,1684)
R	.13	.24	.16	.09
R _{adj}	.02	.06	.03	.01

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant

To determine whether job insecurity has a direct effect on the intention to resign membership, a final series of regression analyses was performed. This time, the three union attitudes were brought in along with background characteristics (age and gender) and job insecurity to predict membership turnover intention. Table 5 contains the results of this analysis.

We can observe from table 5 that there is no direct association between job insecurity and the intention to resign when union attitudes are statistically kept under control. After the introduction of union support, union satisfaction and union commitment, the significant association in Belgium and Italy (see table 4) disappears. Annex 1 shows that the intercorrelations between these three union attitudes are rather high, whereas all three also correlate with membership turnover intention. After regression analysis, these three attitudes contribute in a significant and autonomous way to the intention to resign. Only in the Netherlands, the contribution of perceived union support is not statistically significant. There is, however, some variation between the four countries regarding the significance of the contribution of the three union attitudes. The contribution of union satisfaction is somewhat more important in the Netherlands and Sweden, while in Belgium and Italy the three union attitudes are roughly of equal importance. In addition, older employees in the Netherlands seem less inclined to resign their membership. This time, the analysis' explanatory power is more substantial, as can be read from the R_{adj}-values at the bottom of table 5.

Table 5. Job insecurity, background characteristics and union attitudes as predictors of the intention to resign membership. Results of a regression analysis in the four countries.

Predictors	Standardised regression coefficients (Bêta)			
	Belgium	Italy	The Netherlands	Sweden
Age	-.04	.03	-.13***	-.02
Gender	.02	-.07	-.06	-.03
Job Insecurity	.07	.06	.03	.02
Union support	-.17**	-.22**	-.05	-.20***
Union Satisfaction	-.17**	-.20**	-.20***	-.29***
Union Commitment	-.18***	-.23***	-.13**	-.07*
F-Value	17,56***	15,91***	15,31***	99,71***
Degrees of freedom	(6,456)	(6,241)	(6,684)	(6,1681)
R	.43	.53	.34	.51
R _{adj}	.19	.28	.12	.26

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant

Summary and Discussion

This study explored the consequences of job insecurity among union members. Little research has been done on the consequences of job insecurity for unions and for union participation. The dominant instrumental (or ‘insurance’) motive for becoming a union member was our point of departure: research in Europe shows that employees first of all join unions to protect themselves (e.g., Hartley, 1992; Klandermans, 1986; Visser, 1995; Waddington et al., 1997; Waddington & Hoffman, 2000). Protection against dismissal is one of the components of this motivation. Members thus enter into a type of business transaction with their union: in exchange for their contribution, the union must provide protection. The fact that one, in spite of union membership, still feels uncertain about the future of one’s job, is possibly experienced as a violation of the psychological contract with the union (cf. Robinson, 1996; Rousseau, 1995). As a consequence, we hypothesised that the perception of job insecurity would correlate with a lower level of perceived union support, less satisfaction with the union, reduced (affective) commitment towards the union, and a higher intention to resign union membership. These reactions run parallel to the organisational consequences of job insecurity (e.g. lower organisational commitment, lower satisfaction, higher turnover intention). The reverse hypothesis is only formulated regarding union

commitment, in line with Hirschman's (1970) 'loyalty' option, as reaction towards dissatisfaction.

Our hypotheses were tested by means of a secondary analysis of data from four European countries: Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. The results only partially support our hypotheses.

Most affirmation was found for the hypothesis that job insecurity is associated with a reduction of *perceived union support*: in three of the four countries, this association was indeed found, even though the standardised regression coefficients were rather limited in magnitude (between $-.14$ and $-.19$; P always $<.01$). These results are in line with the hypothesis that job insecurity is experienced as a violation of the psychological contract with the union. The hypotheses regarding the two other union attitudes in this study were, however, almost completely rejected. The hypothesis that job insecurity is associated with reduced *satisfaction with the union* was only confirmed in one out of four countries. Regarding the association between job insecurity and *affective union commitment*, two contrasting hypotheses were formulated. In Italy, evidence was found for the hypothesis that the variables correlated negatively, based on the idea of a violation of the psychological contract. In Sweden, the opposite pattern was found, in line with Hirschman's (1970) 'loyalty' option: by increasing their loyalty towards the union, people try to control the experience of job insecurity. This correlation was, however, rather weak (regression coefficient = $+.06$; $P <.01$). No correlation was found between job insecurity and affective union commitment in the remaining two countries.

Finally, the expected correlation between job insecurity and the *intention to resign membership* was indeed found in two countries: in Belgium and Italy, union members who were uncertain about their jobs showed a stronger membership turnover intention. However, this association was not significant in the remaining two countries.

Our *end conclusion* thus is that no general trend can be established in the four countries under investigation. None of our hypotheses could be corroborated in all four countries. When compiling all our results, most evidence was found for hypotheses 1 and 4. It seems that job insecurity is especially accompanied by a reduction in perceived union support. In addition, in two countries, job insecurity is also associated with the intention to resign membership. Both conclusions correspond with the idea that union members experience job insecurity as a violation of the psychological contract with their union, resulting in negative consequences for the organisation (here: their union). This suggests that psychological contract theory constitutes a fertile basis for further development of theory and hypotheses in this domain. As far as the remaining union attitudes are concerned, the conclusions are limited, inconsistent or absent.

The results in table 4 and 5 show that the association between job insecurity and the intention to resign membership is mediated by specific union attitudes in two countries. In both Belgium and Italy, job insecurity is associated with both perceived union support and the intention to resign membership. Once all attitudes have been introduced into the same regression analysis, the significant correlation between job insecurity and the intention to resign disappears, whereas the perception of union support shows an autonomous impact on the intention to resign. The association between job insecurity and the intention to resign is thus mediated by the perception of union support (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986). In Italy, the mediation process even appears to be broader. Here, the correlation between job insecurity and the intention to resign was mediated by all three union attitudes: perceived union support, satisfaction with the union and (affective) union commitment.

Especially in Belgium and Italy, job insecurity appears to have negative consequences for the attitudes towards unions and for union members' intention to resign. These consequences seem to be much more limited in scope in the two remaining countries. In the Netherlands, job insecurity was only associated with the perception of reduced support by the union. In the Netherlands, this perception was not correlated with the intention to resign, whereas job insecurity was not associated with the intention to resign either. In Sweden, only one association was found: the association between job insecurity and (affective) union involvement was positive (but weak). At first sight, it is not very clear why these differences are found. The position of the labour union in the various countries could play a moderating role here. It is striking, that the strongest 'effect' of job insecurity was established in countries that find themselves in the 'middle group' as regards the degree of unionisation. It was mentioned above that Italy and Belgium belong to the middle category, whereas the Netherlands displays an exceptionally low density, and Sweden an exceptionally high density (cf. Visser, 1996; Waddington & Hoffmann, 2000). In addition, the labour union in the Netherlands is not well integrated into the social security system, while the reverse is true for Sweden. Maybe there is more margin in countries belonging to the 'middle level' to make stronger correlations with job insecurity feasible.

The conclusions of this study partly substantiate that job insecurity is not only problematic for the individual employee or his/her company, but also for labour unions. After all, in two countries (Italy and Belgium) job insecurity seems to be associated with less favourable attitudes towards unions and with the intention to resign union membership. This underpins the idea that job insecurity (in specific countries) may have a negative impact on unions' membership file. As indicated above, this might threaten the power basis and strength of unions. Some refining is, however, in order. This study only looked at the attitudes and reactions of union members. Job insecurity can, however, also influence non-members. The

latter can, for example, be prompted to become members because of job insecurity, which may compensate for the exodus of union members. The reactions of non-members to job insecurity were not discussed in this study. The outlined consequences for the unions are thus one-sided and incomplete. Future research will have to concentrate on analysing the consequences of job insecurity for members as well as non-members, before more specific conclusions can be drawn.

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Annex 1

Table A1. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between the variables for Belgium (n=463).

	Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	38.52	9.20	-	/	-.12**	-.02 ^{n.s.}	.02 ^{n.s.}	-.03 ^{n.s.}	.17***	-.08 ^{n.s.}
2. Gender	1.41	0.49	-		/	.06 ^{n.s.}	.11*	.10*	-.03 ^{n.s.}	.00 ^{n.s.}
3.. Job insecurity	1.87	1.03	-			/	-.14**	-.07 ^{n.s.}	-.00 ^{n.s.}	+.11*
4. Union support	3.92	0.87	.68				/	.52***	.38***	-.34***
5.. Union satisfaction	3.80	0.94	-					/	.35***	-.33***
6. Union commitment	2.60	1.06	.78						/	-.32***
7. Union membership turnover intention	2.87	1.52	-							/

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant

Table A2. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between the variables for Italy (n=248).

	Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	40.39	8.50	-	/	-.09 ^{n.s.}	.06 ^{n.s.}	-.19**	-.14*	.12 ^{n.s.}	.08 ^{n.s.}
2. Gender	1.30	0.46	-		/	-.05 ^{n.s.}	.15*	.16**	-.02 ^{n.s.}	-.13*
3. Job insecurity	2.62	0.95	.79			/	-.21**	-.28***	-.12*	.20**
4. Union support	3.39	0.72	.59				/	.48***	.36***	-.42***
5. Union satisfaction	3.31	1.16	-					/	.34***	-.41***
6. Union commitment	3.69	0.90	.81						/	-.38***
7. Union membership turnover intention	2.46	1.49	-							/

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant

Table A3. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between the variables for the Netherlands (n=691).

	Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	41.86	10.43	-	/	-.10**	-.04 ^{n.s.}	.06 ^{n.s.}	-.03 ^{n.s.}	.20***	-.15***
2. Gender	1.26	0.44	-		/	-.00 ^{n.s.}	-.02 ^{n.s.}	.01 ^{n.s.}	-.14***	-.03 ^{n.s.}
3. Job insecurity	1.84	0.78	.91			/	-.14***	-.05 ^{n.s.}	.03 ^{n.s.}	.05 ^{n.s.}
4. Union support	3.70	0.51	.71				/	.41***	.30***	-.19***
5. Union satisfaction	3.78	0.54	-					/	.37***	-.27***
6. Union commitment	2.68	0.77	.83						/	-.24***
7. Union membership turnover intention	2.25	1.06	-							/

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant

Table A4. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between the variables for Sweden (n=1 688).

	Mean	SD	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	44.90	10.75	-	/	-.04 ^{n.s}	-.06**	.04 ^{n.s}	.00 ^{n.s}	.17***	-.00 ^{n.s}
2. Gender	1.78	0.41	-		/	-.05*	.10***	.12***	-.00 ^{n.s}	-.09***
3. Job insecurity	2.08	1.05	.89			/	-.03 ^{n.s}	-.04 ^{n.s}	.05*	.04 ^{n.s}
4. Union support	1.87	0.56	.79				/	.68***	.68***	-.45***
5. Union satisfaction	3.14	0.96	-					/	.63***	-.48***
6. Union commitment	2.59	0.96	.85						/	-.39***
7. Union membership turnover intention	2.25	1.42	-							/

* .05>P>.01; ** .01>P>.001; *** P<.001; n.s.: not significant