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Employee's Growth Need Strength and Counterproductive Work Behaviors: The Role of Perceived Job Insecurity*

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the effect of employee's growth needs strength on counterproductive work behaviors. Perceived job insecurity was also examined as a moderating variable on the relationship between the two variables. **Research Design, data and methodology:** This study collected 108 data samples from working individuals from South Korea. The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and the hierarchical regression analysis were used to analyze the data. Hierarchical regression analysis was performed using SPSS 24.0. **Results:** Our research results indicated that employee's growth needs strength has a negative effect on counterproductive work behaviors. Perceived job insecurity moderates the relationship between the two variables. **Conclusions:** Organizations should focus on creating growth opportunities for employees, since facilitating employee's growth need strength will counteract the desire to engage in behaviors that can be detrimental to the organization, and its members.

Keywords : Job Insecurity, Counterproductive Work Behavior, Growth Need Strength

JEL Classification code : M10, L20

1. Introduction

Over the past decades considerable amount of attention has been given to counterproductive work behaviors (CWB), as they are viewed as negative behaviors that employees perform in the workplace that can cause harm to the organization and its members (Spector & Fox, 2002). Counterproductive work behaviors is defined as actions directed towards other employees or the organization that have the potential for producing economic, physical, psychological, or emotional harm (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Many previous research have looked at antecedents of counterproductive work behaviors in order to mitigate the negative effect that the behavior may have. Some of these studies have found that differences in individual traits, situations and personality traits may lead to counterproductive work behaviors (Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Salgado, 2002; O'Brien, 2004; Zhang, Huang & Jiang, 2018). This research also aims to add to the literature by focusing on the role that growth need strength, as an individual trait, will have on counterproductive work behaviors. Even though there are a few research on the mediating

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process that links employee growth need strength to desired personal and organizational outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Shanthakumary, 1998; Elias, 2009), to this researcher's knowledge, studies that links employee's growth need strength to undesirable personal and/or organization outcomes are lacking. Employees might desire, value personal growth in their jobs, however they might not act, or behave in ways that would fulfill such a psychological need (Hirschi, Abessolo & Froidevaux, 2015). Therefore, understanding the mechanism underlying employee's growth need strength on their personal outcomes and to explore the effect that this will have on undesirable organizational outcomes is of great importance (Lin, Qian, Li & Chen, 2016). This research will focus on (1) the relationship between employee's growth need strength and counterproductive work behavior (2) how perceived job insecurity will moderate the relationship between growth need strength and counterproductive work behavior.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Growth need strength and counterproductive work behaviors

Employees engagement in counterproductive work behaviors can have a negative effect on the organization and its members (Spector & Fox, 2002). Therefore, to mitigate the negative effects of these behaviors, antecedents of CWB has been the focus of many previous studies. For example, counterproductive work behavior is believed to occur in response to environmental and individual domains such as stressful work environment, negative emotions, emotion exhaustion, and personality traits (Spector & Fox, 2005; Berry, Ones & Sackett, 2007; Bolton, Harvey, Grawitch & Barber, 2012; Kang, Chay, Hak, Lee & Hur, 2016). In contrast, few studies have paid attention to exploring the role of individual traits in reducing the desire to engage in CWB. Results had shown that individual traits such as emotional regulation (Bicaksiz, Erol-Korkmaz, Johnson & Matto, 2014), high degree of mindfulness (Krishnakumar & Robinson, 2015), high self-efficacy (Fida, Pociello, Tramontano, Barbaranelli & Farnese, 2015), workplace spirituality (Astuti, Maryati & Harsono, 2020) and moral identity (Vadera & Pathki, 2021) are negatively associated with and plays a role in reducing employee's desire to engage in counterproductive work behaviors. Given the complexity of counterproductive work behavior there is the need to further understand the role played by growth need strength as an individual trait in reducing the desire to engage in these behaviors. As mentioned before, whereas there are a few research that linked employee's growth need strength to desired organizational outcomes (e.g. Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Shanthakumary, 1998; Elias, 2009), to date, research on the effect that growth need strength will have on employee's desire to engage in counterproductive work behaviors are lacking.

Growth need strength refers to "an individual's desire to be challenged and to grow on the job or one's need for personal accomplishment, learning, and development on the job" (Hackman & Oldham, 1980, p.85). Growth need strength provides an internal, sustaining force that drives employees to push themselves and to persevere in the face of challenges, inconsistent findings, and performance pressures (Elias, 2009; Shalley, Gilson & Blum, 2009). In other words, individuals with high growth need strength attach more value to their personal growth, development, and achievement (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Based on previous research, high growth need strength positively relates to growth opportunity and productivity (Graen, Scandura & Graen, 1986), job satisfaction (Shanthakumary, 1998), LMX (Phillips & Bedeian, 1994), positive work attitudes (Elias, 2009) and employees' openness to experience (De jong, Van der Velde & Jansen, 2011).

Personal growth initiative benefits organizations because employees who are proactive about their personal development are better equipped to stay healthy, vital, and productive in the face of highly demanding environments (London & Smither, 1999). In addition, employees who have the potential to grow in their jobs and are motivated to accept challenges beyond their job descriptions may engage less in counterproductive work behaviors. We therefore proposed that:

H1: Growth need strength will be negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors.

2.2. Perceived job insecurity as a Moderator

Job insecurity can be defined as 'an overall concern about the continued existence of the job in the future' (De Witte, 1999; Cheng & Chan, 2008). Job insecurity is the fear or anxiety arising from the subjective perception of the possibility of losing one's job and the situation is not desired by the person concerned (Sverke, 2004). Results from previous research linked job insecurity to a variety of negative outcomes such as turnover (Probst, 2008; Cho, 2014), decrease in organizational citizenship behaviors (Reisel, Probst, Chia, Maloles & König, 2010), decrease in organizational commitment (Cho, 2015) and counterproductive work behaviors (Chirumbola, 2015). In terms of counterproductive work behaviors, employees in an

insecure job position tend to experience stress, frustration, and anxiety which they may cope with by engaging in counterproductive work behaviors (Probst, Stewart, Gruys & Tierney, 2007). On the other hand, employees who perceived job insecurity in the organization may believe that engaging in counterproductive work behaviors will result in sanctions such as termination or other consequences associated with job loss, therefore they are less likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (Probst et al. 2007).

Employees experiencing job insecurity have strong intentions to protect their job opportunities, which are valuable resources to them (Shoss, Brummel, Probst & Jiang, 2020). They will more likely pay attention and focus on activities that help them maintain employment relationship (Schumacher, Schreurs De Cuyper & Grosemans, 2021). Even though studies which relate job insecurity to employee growth need strength are scarce, we assume that employees who are growth oriented may see job insecurity as a challenge to overcome and this challenge may be motivation to learn and develop on the job. Therefore, we proposed that:

H2: Perceived job insecurity will moderate the relationship between growth need strength and counterproductive work behaviors, in that, the relationship between the two variables will be stronger when perceived job insecurity is high than low.

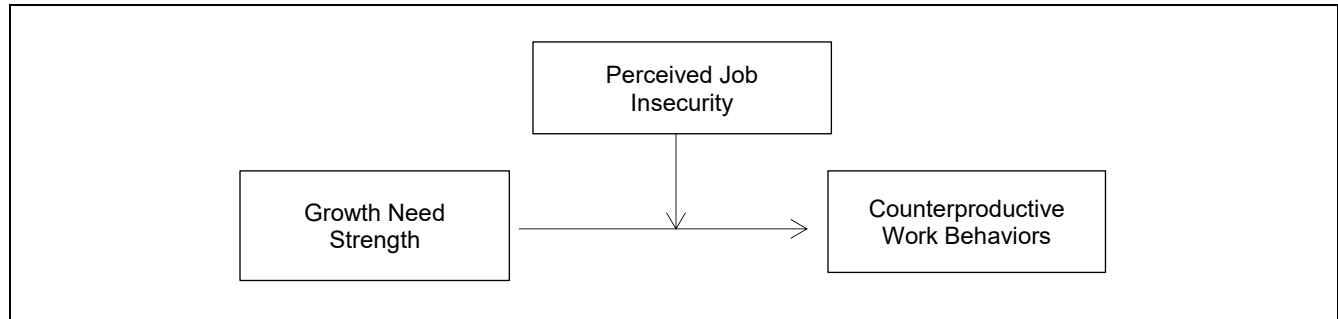


Figure 1: Research Model

3. Research Methods and Materials

A survey was conducted to collect data for this research. The questionnaire was translated to Korean for Korean respondents. From the collected samples, a total of 108 responses were used for analysis after excluding those that were incomplete or inappropriate for the purpose of this research. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 24.0..

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

		South Korea	
Variables	Components	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	43	40%
	Female	65	60%
Age	20	25	23%
	30	65	60%
	40	15	14%
	50	3	3%
Education	High school graduate	2	2%
	College graduate	3	3%
	Undergraduate	73	67%
	Graduate	30	28%
Total		108	

3.2. Measurements

The measurement tools used in this study were based on the questionnaire items verified by previous studies. All variables were measured using a 7-point likert scale (1- strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree). Growth need strength was measured with a modified version of the measure for growth-need strength developed by Hackman & Oldham, (1974) in the Job Diagnostic Survey. The revised GNS scale contained six items, each describing a characteristic of work.

Perceived job insecurity (De Witte, 2000) was measured using 4 items. High scores on this scale indicate high levels of job insecurity.

Counterproductive work behavior was measured with the two subscales Bennett & Robinson, (2000) deviance scale. Participants indicated how often they had exhibited behaviors such as "cursed at someone at work" (7 items for interpersonal counterproductive work behaviors) or "taken property from work without permission" (11 items for organizational counterproductive).

3.3. Exploratory factor analysis

Cronbach's alpha coefficient of each scale was conducted to determine internal consistency. The alpha coefficients of counterproductive work behavior, growth need strength and perceived job insecurity scales in this study were equal to or greater than 0.7. The questionnaire scale in this study had good reliability which makes the measurement model appropriate for this study (see Table 2).

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Variables		1	2	3	Cronbach alpha α
Counterproductive Work Behaviour	CWBQ14	.912	.018	-.040	.751
	CWBQ15	.748	-.006	-.145	
	CWBQ22	.705	-.146	.171	
Growth Needs Strength	GNSQ27	-.255	.869	.003	.874
	GNSQ28	-.123	.866	-.108	
	GNSQ26	.149	.809	-.116	
Perceived Job Insecurity	PJISQ1	.193	.049	.916	.884
	PJISQ2	.106	-.094	.900	
	PJISQ4	.077	.070	.895	
Eigen Value	-	6.337	3.860	3.578	
% of Variance	-	22.633	13.785	12.777	
Cumulative % of variance	-	22.633	36.418	49.195	

4. Results

Bivariate Pearson correlation was used to determine the correlation between the main variables in this research. Results are shown in Table 3 below. Counterproductive work behaviors positively correlate with age (.235^{*}) and education (.205^{*}), but negatively correlates with growth need strength (-.328^{**}). In addition, perceived job insecurity only correlates with gender (.422^{**}). There is also a positive correlation between age and education (.359^{**}).

Table 3: The Result of Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities and Intercorrelations:

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	1.60	.492	-				
2. Age	1.96	.090	.066	-			
3. Edu.	3.21	.581	.103	.389 ^{**}	-		
4. PJIS	16.2	7.10	.422 ^{**}	.102	.098	-	

5. GNS	37.1	9.64	-.145	.157	.074	.072	-
6. CWB	32.2	6.9	.033	.235*	.205*	-.019	-.328**

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01.

(EDU: education, PJIS: perceived job insecurity, GNS: growth need strength, CWB: counterproductive behavior)

4.1. Hypothesis Validation

H1: Regression analysis was conducted to investigate the first hypothesis of employee's growth need strength will be negatively related to counterproductive work behavior. Results from table 4 shows that employee's growth need strength has a negative but significant effect on counterproductive work behavior ($\beta = -.393^{**}$). We can therefore conclude support for hypothesis 1.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Counterproductive Work Behavior			
Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	SE	β
(Const)	48.952	6.114	-
Gender	-3.050	1.746	-.156
Age	3.144	1.352	.227*
Education	1.372	1.614	.083
GNS	-.542	.127	-.393**

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01. (GNS: growth need strength).

In hypothesis 2, perceived job insecurity was expected to moderate the relationship between employee's growth need strength and counterproductive work behavior. Table 5 shows that at model 2 of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated that interactions for employee's growth need strength and perceived job insecurity was significantly related to counterproductive work behavior ($\beta = -1.212$, $t = -2.531^*$). These interactions shows that the negative effect of employee's growth need strength on counterproductive work behavior is stronger in employees with high perceived job insecurity than those whose perception of job insecurity is low (see figure 2). This research can therefore conclude support for hypothesis 2.

Table 5: Moderating effect of Perceived Job Insecurity

Counterproductive Work Behavior				
	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	t	β	t
Gender	-.156	-1.747	-.216	-2.267**
Age	.227	2.320*	.192	2.003*
Education	.083	.850	.154	1.554
GNS (A)	-.393	-4.281**	-.003	-.019
PJIS (B)	-	-	1.252	2.743**
A * B	-	-	-1.212	-2.531*
R^2	.193		.253	
ΔR^2	.162		.208	
F change	6.164**		4.021*	

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. (PJIS: perceived job insecurity, GNS: growth need strength).

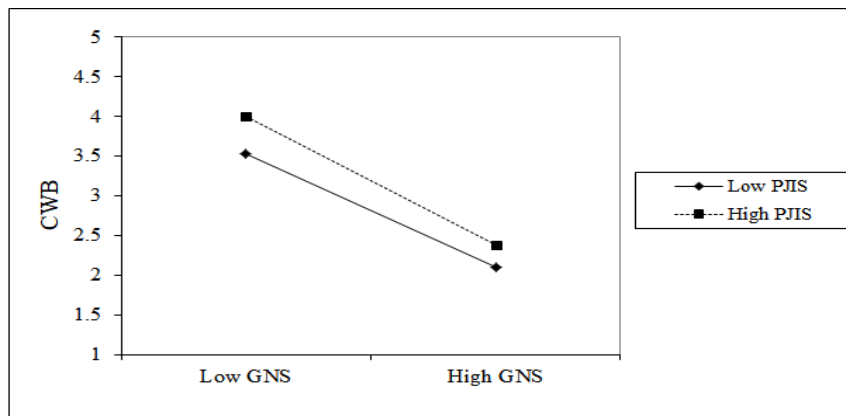


Figure 2: The moderating role of perceived job insecurity on the relationship between growth need strength and counterproductive work behavior.

One of the main objects of the discussion is to set forth a complete and plausible explanation or theory for what was found. No one knows the subject of your research as well as you do; on the other hand, the average reader has no time to re-read the discussion if he/she did not understand it the first time around. You do not want the reader to go through your paper several times to understand it -he/she simply will not. You have to be clear and logical in what you say and explain it in a way that makes sense the first time around. This is the most difficult part of writing a discussion.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined the influence of employee's growth need strength on counterproductive work behaviors. Results from this study showed that growth need strength has a negative effect on counterproductive work behavior. In addition, perceived job insecurity moderated the relationship between employee's growth need strength and counterproductive work behaviors, in that, the negative relationship between the two variables is stronger when perceived job insecurity is high than low. As mentioned before, employee's growth initiative can be beneficial to the organizations because employees who are proactive about their personal development are better equipped to stay healthy, vital, and productive in the face of highly demanding environments (London & Smither, 1999). Unlike other studies that examined the moderating effect of growth need strength (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Shalley et al., 2009; Tieg, Tetrick, & Fried, 1992), this study took a different approach by examining the direct effect that employee's growth need strength will have on undesirable work behaviors. More specifically, this study showed that growth need strength is an important driving force to counteract employees desire to engage in counterproductive work behaviors.

Another important finding is that perceived job insecurity did not buffer the negative relationship between the two variables, instead the negative relationship became stronger when perceived job insecurity is high. This result could be explained by employees who are growth oriented will view job insecurity as more of a challenge for personal growth and development. In addition, as mentioned before, while previous research have shown that job insecurity can cause employees to experience negative reactions and these reactions can then be expressed through engaging in counterproductive work behaviors, other studies have suggested that employees faced with high job insecurity may less likely engage in counterproductive work behaviors for fear of sanctions such as termination of job or the financial repercussions associated with job loss (Probst et al. 2007). Both employees and organizations benefit from personal growth initiative. Therefore, organizations should focus on identifying employee's growth need strength and help them develop by providing more growth opportunities to their workers (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2012). As a result, employees will be better able to cope with challenges in the organization and this will also decrease the urge to engage in counterproductive work behaviors.

Despite a few important findings noted above, we admit that this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the use of self-reported data collection may have led to social desirable response bias when answering the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they engage in undesirable organization behaviors; therefore they may have provided a response that seem more desirable. Social-desirability bias is a type of response bias that is the tendency of survey respondents to

answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others (Krumpal, 2013). Secondly, the sample is rather small for this research. We do hope that the results from this research stimulate future research in this field, especially focusing on specific sector and firms. In addition, future research may need to adopt a more longitudinal research design to avoid social-desirable response bias.

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