

The 'Silent Assassin' in your organization: Can job insecurity climate erode the beneficial effects of a high-quality leader-member exchange?

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The “silent assassin” in your organization? Can job insecurity climate erode the beneficial effect of a high-quality leader-member exchange?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the possible role of job insecurity climate as a moderator in the relationship between leader–member exchange (LMX) and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs).

Design/methodology/approach – Questionnaire data were collected from 466 employees working in 14 organizations from both the private and public sector. Following the core tenets of social exchange theory and occupational stress theories, the authors argue that ideally job insecurity is studied as a climate-level construct, given the fact that intra-group social exchange processes strongly influence the formation of employee perceptions about specific aspects of their work context (e.g. job insecurity).

Findings – In line with one of the hypotheses, multi-level analyses revealed that LMX is significantly and positively related to OCBs. In addition, the authors found support for a negative moderation effect, such that LMX has a less strongly positive relationship with extra-role behaviors that are beneficial to the organization when job insecurity climate is high.

Originality/value – The study contributes to the limited empirical scholarly research on job insecurity climate and its correlates. Management and HR professionals in working organizations are advised to focus on preventive measures (e.g. to invest in the professional development of their employees, that is focus on employability enhancement, in order to reduce job insecurity) as well as on participation-based interventions.

Keywords Quantitative, Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), Leader–member exchange (LMX), Job insecurity climate, Moderation model, Private and public sector

Paper type Research paper



Nowadays, organizations have to rely largely on the leadership skills of their mid-level management representatives in order to provide solutions for critical performance and HRM issues. As the most proximal organizational representative for employees (Kozlowski and Doherty, 1989), managers are in an ideal position to stimulate organizational citizenship

behaviors (OCBs) among their staff members by shaping high-quality leader–member exchange relationships (LMX) (Huang *et al.*, 2014; Liden *et al.*, 2006; Wan, 2011). OCBs refer to employee discretionary work behaviors that benefit the effective functioning of the organization but that are not formally included in the organizational reward system or required by the formal contract (Organ, 1988).

Instead of focusing on interpersonal OCBs (i.e. helping; see Williams and Anderson, 1991), this contribution concentrates on prosocial organization-directed OCBs (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2011), as this is particularly beneficial to groups and organizations (Koopman *et al.*, 2016), for instance, in terms of their efficiency, sales and customer satisfaction (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2009; Spitzmuller *et al.*, 2008). OCBs are more and more critical in the current era, because the willingness of employees to perform “beyond and above the call of duty” serves as a key strategic asset for organizations in the turbulent and highly competitive economic environment (Yunus *et al.*, 2010). That is to say, the potential of an organization to perform well depends on the availability of a pool of employees that are capable to continuously develop, cultivate and maintain fundamental qualifications (Brown *et al.*, 2001), and to enhance their broader employability at the same time (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009).

Obviously, besides the challenges faced by working organizations, the present-day dynamic economic environment has consequences for employees as well. More precisely, in the contemporary labor market all individual workers should adhere to higher standards of performance, due to high-speed changes and increased expertise needs (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2008; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2016), while dealing with the on-going threat posed by job insecurity (Kalleberg, 2011). Job insecurity pertains to an employee’s perceptions and concerns about potential involuntary loss of employment (e.g. De Witte, 1999; Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 2010). Apart from the detrimental effect, actual lay-offs have on those employees who have to leave the organization, a prolonged fear of losing employment has far-reaching negative consequences for the survivors as well (Reisel *et al.*, 2010; Vander Elst *et al.*, 2013). In terms of their effects on well-being, such circumstances of psychological distress, due to employees being worried about losing their job, are comparable to a situation of unemployment itself (Burchell, 2011).

Job insecurity climate is defined as “a set of shared perceptions of powerlessness to maintain the continuity of threatened jobs in an organization” (Sora *et al.*, 2009, p. 130), and such a climate may emerge because employees share perceptions of their environment as being unpredictable and entailing the threat of job loss (Sora *et al.*, 2009). Apparently, a job insecurity climate might be particularly disadvantageous for organizations as they are highly reliant on employee positive attitudes and work behaviors; that is to say, managers are unlikely to evoke positive work attitudes and behaviors if organizations fail to provide stability of employment (Jiang and Probst, 2016). The lack of stable employment opportunities is likely to be seen as a considerable violation of employees’ expectations in this regard and could evoke adverse reactions (Costa and Neves, 2017; De Cuyper and De Witte, 2006; Rousseau, 1995).

Of course, on the one hand, neither the employee’s direct manager nor the top management in working organizations can guarantee absolute job security to all of their staff, particularly in times when organizations need to cope with a multitude of challenges posed by the highly complex and dynamic economic environment (Keim *et al.*, 2014; Molloy and Noe, 2010). However, on the other hand, several earlier studies have shown how impactful job insecurity is, and how it can result in negative work-related attitudes and behaviors (Cheng and Chan, 2008; De Cuyper and De Witte, 2006). Job insecurity causes a serious breach in employee’s expectations that their employer will reciprocate their loyalty and efforts by providing them with a secure employment (Vander Elst *et al.*, 2016).

We argue that managers can play an important role in this regard, as they can greatly influence employee functioning at work by fostering high-quality relationships (Furst and Cable, 2008). That is to say, they are assumed to be a crucial anchor that can provide a sense of stability in a labor market context wherein job insecurity is on the rise (Kalleberg, 2011).

Specifically, managers fulfill the role of a social resource (Ilies *et al.*, 2007), and as such they provide employees with support and motivation to engage in OCBs (Yunus *et al.*, 2010).

The purpose of the current study is to look into the predictive validity of LMX in the light of employee OCBs. Moreover, we aim to better understand to what extent job insecurity climate (as perceived by the employees) might influence this relationship. Despite the reported increase in the number of employees perceiving higher levels of job insecurity (Kalleberg, 2011), due to the developments at today's labor market, to the best of our knowledge, no study thus far has examined how the quality of LMX is related to employee OCBs, and the effect of job insecurity in this relationship. Up until now the research on LMX and job insecurity has mostly developed parallel to one another, implying a lack of insight on their interrelatedness, and their possible impact on employee OCBs.

This empirical study responds to the call for more research taking into account the impact of contextual variables to further understand the nature of OCBs (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2009). As such, it follows up on the exemplary contribution by Schneider *et al.* (2017) who stressed the need for future research to assess the effectiveness of leadership style in different cultural and climate contexts. Our approach will extend both leadership and organizational climate research by integrating two key contextual factors—LMX and job insecurity climate. To date, despite the growing body of research on job insecurity at the individual level (Schaufeli, 2016), there is a significant gap in understanding how job insecurity climate, *i.e.*, incorporated at an aggregated level, in combination with other contextual factors, in our case leadership, shapes employee attitudes and behaviors (Sora *et al.*, 2009). The unique contribution of the current study is that it enables us to demonstrate how negative climate perceptions such as job insecurity climate may impact the assumed positive effect of leadership style on employee OCBs.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

LMX and OCBs

LMX theory has received much research attention over the past two decades (Gooty and Yammarino, 2016; Martin *et al.*, 2005), and has been considered particularly suitable for explaining leadership effectiveness in relation to employee work behaviors (Erdogan *et al.*, 2006; Furst and Cable, 2008). Drawing upon social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), LMX proposes that over time the leader forms exchange relationships with their employees that differ in quality, and that are defined in a dyadic socially constructed (through the interaction between the leader and employee) process (Graen and Cashman, 1975; Martin *et al.*, 2005). While lower-quality transactional relationships are based on economic exchange, high-quality relationships are characterized by mutual respect, trust and liking (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003).

The quality of the exchange relationship between an employee and his/her leader is crucial for an employee's acceptance of the leader's influence, because it has the capacity to trigger wanted and unwanted employee attitudes and behaviors (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Tse *et al.*, 2012). From the perspective of social exchange (norm reciprocity) theory (Blau, 1964), people tend to maintain balanced relationships, *i.e.*, providing benefit to someone obliges the person to repay the benefit; and in case the balance has been disturbed, the person in debt will attempt to restore it by repaying the social "debt" (Blau, 1964).

Over the past three decades, earlier work has largely acknowledged the value of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) in explaining OCBs (Organ, 1988; Organ and Ryan, 1995), and has already stressed the importance of LMX as a key antecedent in this regard (Chen *et al.*, 2008; Sun *et al.*, 2013; Wan, 2011). Applied to the organizational context, high-quality LMX implies that the leader provides the employee with valuable resources and that, in order to reciprocate this positive exchange, the employee is likely to respond by engaging in OCBs (Huang *et al.*, 2014; Wayne *et al.*, 2002). Specifically,

drawing upon cognitive appraisal and coping frameworks (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), scholars (e.g. Organ, 1988) already proposed that individuals appraise each situation by weighing it against a developed standard of fairness. In particular, a fair exchange between the leader or the organization, on the one hand, and the employee, on the other hand, is expected to elicit positive responses (e.g. OCBs), while an unfair exchange is assumed to unlock negative reactions among employees (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

In sum, based on the literature overview given above, high-quality LMX relationships between leaders and employees evoke positive reciprocity, in our case OCBs on the side of employees, owing to the individual's inclination to keep social exchanges (both positive and negative) in balance. Hence, it is proposed that:

H1. LMX is positively associated with employee OCBs.

Job insecurity as a climate-level construct and employee OCBs

Similar to the leader's influence, the working organization as a whole is an important influential factor as it can foster certain employee behaviors through actively shaping, or sometimes simply allowing, a specific social climate to emerge. Especially, through its climate, the organization conveys implicit cues that affect employees' perceptions of and responses to their work context (Jones, 1984; O'Reilly and Caldwell, 1979; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, in the light of this study, we posit that the relationship between LMX and OCBs will be contingent upon the job insecurity climate.

Studying the possible role of job insecurity at a climate level as a moderator in the relationship between LMX and OCBs is particularly valuable, because employee perceptions and behaviors are co-shaped by the organizational climate (Schneider *et al.*, 2017). While the majority of previous job insecurity research has focused on individual job insecurity—conceptualized as an individual's concern about losing his or her job—(see for meta-analyses and reviews, e.g. Cheng and Chan, 2008; Shoss, 2017; Sverke *et al.*, 2002), there is a growing interest in the scholarly field regarding job insecurity as a collective phenomenon. A so-called climate-level construct can account for effects that cannot be explained by individual-level constructs alone, because climate is a function of the interplay between individual and contextual difference effects (Jones, 1984; Kozłowski and Klein, 2000). Furthermore, a specific organizational climate (in our case, a job insecurity climate) can emerge because employees perceive and internalize meaningful social cues from their interaction with colleagues (i.e. by learning from others' experiences in the same context), which may, subsequently, color their perceptions of the work context (Jones, 1984; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978).

In particular, when organizations are confronted with changes that are characteristic for the contemporary labor market, employees' sense-making regarding some key aspects of their work context, such as the stability (or continuity) of their employment, might rely more heavily on the social cues obtained from their colleagues (peers), herewith increasing the chance for job insecurity climate to emerge (European Union, 2013; Keim *et al.*, 2014; Schaufeli, 2016). We contend that especially when job insecurity is high, one would typically reach out to colleagues for much needed information about the future of one's organization, and of one's employment. This information—often largely based on rumors, owing to the limited or lacking official communication (see also Smet *et al.*, 2016)—is usually colored with the interpretations and sense-making of one's peer and can give rise to shared perceptions of job insecurity (e.g. Bordia *et al.*, 2004; Jiang and Probst, 2016).

Perceptions originating from intra-group interactions (that are key to the formation of a specific organizational climate) lie at the basis of employee work-related experiences (O'Reilly and Caldwell, 1979). Reportedly, such perceptions are even stronger predictors of employee experiences of their work context than objective measurements of the work context itself (O'Reilly and Caldwell, 1979). This signifies the considerable influence of

organizational climate on employee experiences of, and reactions to, the organizational context (Schneider *et al.*, 2017).

Typically, informal social cues can help the individual employee to make sense of the contextual stimuli in his/her working organization, and to subsequently select an appropriate response to them. Therefore, the shared social context in an organization can foster the emergence of common or “shared” perceptions that differ to a certain degree from individual social contexts and cannot be explained by research that takes into account individual-level constructs alone (Sora *et al.*, 2009). Previously, advocates of climate research already argued that whereas aggregate constructs may be strongly linked to individual-level ones, they represent a different, that is, higher-level phenomenon that is not captured by its lower-level counterpart (Jones, 1984; Kozlowski and Klein, 2000). In sum, the above-mentioned theoretical argumentation and prior research evidence (e.g. Sora *et al.*, 2009) strongly suggest that organizational-level constructs are different from individual-level ones. In the framework of our study, job insecurity climate might reflect a unique, higher-level phenomenon that indicates similarity in employee perceptions of the risk of being laid off.

In addition, occupational stress theories (e.g. the demand-control model by Karasek (1979), and conservation of resources theory by Hobfoll (2001) lend support to the idea that organizational climate constructs are particularly suitable for measuring stress-related phenomena at work (e.g. job insecurity climate). This is because of the universal way individuals perceive stress stimuli (Peirò, 2001). Specifically, occupational stress theories propose that work stressors can cause distress to a group of individuals that share the same work context, because of a considerable crossover of experiences and emotions that are triggered by a common work stressor (Hatfield *et al.*, 1994; Westman and Etzion, 1995). Moreover, negative emotions are set to be particularly contagious (Hatfield *et al.*, 1994), increasing the likelihood for specific negative job aspects, such as job insecurity, to become a common concern and herewith an organizational climate issue. Altogether, the theoretical underpinnings outlined above suggest that social exchanges and emotional contagion processes (Hatfield *et al.*, 1994) might play a substantial role in the aggregation of individual stress perceptions and, as a result, in the formation of stress climates (Peirò, 2001).

Up until now, only a handful of studies have investigated the relationship between job insecurity climate and employee outcomes (i.e. job attitudes, job demands, work stress, work-family conflict and self-rated health) (e.g. Låstad *et al.*, 2015; Låstad, Näswall, Berntson, Seddigh and Sverke, 2016; Sora *et al.*, 2009, 2013), providing initial evidence on the negative association between job insecurity climate and employee positive job attitudes (see, in particular, Sora *et al.*, 2013).

Moderating effect of job insecurity climate

In earlier management theories (e.g. Kozlowski and Doherty, 1989; Lewin, 1951), both leadership style and organizational climate have already been viewed to be narrowly intertwined, and thus as mutually enhancing (when carefully aligned), or constraining (when not consistent with each other) phenomena. In the light of our contribution, it is conceivable that a climate of job insecurity may cast a shadow over the positive influence of LMX on employee behaviors, due to the general propensity of a negative organizational climate to diminish employee positive behaviors, and to elicit stress reactions (Glisson and James, 2002; Kozlowski and Doherty, 1989; Mäkikangas and Kinnunen, 2003; Paulin and Griffin, 2016; Sora *et al.*, 2009).

Not surprisingly, an organizational climate that signals uncertainty and threat of job loss may interfere with the positive employee experiences that are associated with high-quality LMX (Li *et al.*, 2014). This is because a negative climate may be viewed as a breach of employee expectations about a loyal, open and supportive mutual exchange with their direct manager, which is inherent to high-quality LMX. We suggest that the specific combination of high-quality LMX and a job insecurity climate may decrease the positive impact of sound LMX on

employee OCBs, because employees might view the organizational climate as inconsistent with the approach of their leader. Moreover, the emergence of a job insecurity climate might be perceived as a failure of the leader to provide the expected stability of employment and might weaken his or her credibility. Put differently, in a climate that is characterized by job insecurity, employees might feel less compelled to reciprocate the benefits obtained from the positive transaction with their leader, because the organization (as perceived through the aggregate-level climate construct of job insecurity) has failed to guarantee a sufficient level of certainty regarding the continuity of their employment. While high LMX is deemed to enhance employee motivation (Scaduto *et al.*, 2008) and to stimulate workers to engage in extra-role work behaviors (Harris *et al.*, 2014), job insecurity climate is likely to lessen this positive motivational influence. Based on the line of reasoning given above, we hypothesize that:

H2. Job insecurity climate moderates the relationship between LMX and OCBs. More specifically, when job insecurity climate is low, LMX will have a stronger positive relationship with OCBs; when job insecurity climate is high, LMX will have a weaker positive relationship with OCBs.

Method

Sample

Under the supervision of the second author, eight master students who were enrolled in the program “International Business Administration” carried out the data collection by means of conducting paper-and-pencil surveys. The students contacted 965 employees working in 14 different private and public-sector organizations in Germany and the Netherlands, including retail companies and hospitality providers, and public organizations. Because approximately half of the students were German, and half were Dutch, the data were collected in both countries. Considering that our sample included employees from two different countries, it is important to note that prior studies examining between-country differences have shown that job insecurity is a phenomenon that exists in organizations across countries (László *et al.*, 2010; Sora *et al.*, 2009; Vander Elst *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, previously, scholars (László *et al.*, 2010) have asserted that West European countries, having more similarities in labor market structures and in social security systems in comparison with Eastern European and non-European countries, show a stronger similarity in the way employees experience job insecurity and its outcomes. In fact, together with parts of Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands form an economic region called EU Maas-Rijn region. Finally, and specific to the two countries represented in our sample, i.e., Germany and the Netherlands, empirical evidence from prior research suggests similar relationships between job insecurity and employee outcomes, in particular health (László *et al.*, 2010). This strengthens our confidence in the validity of exploring the hypothesized relationships among LMX, job insecurity climate and OCBs using the current sample.

A total of 466 respondents completed the survey (response rate = 48 percent). Most participants (78 percent) worked for private sector organizations and were male (53.3 percent). The majority (45.1 percent) was younger than 34 years, while 34.1 percent was between 34 and 49 years old, and 22.1 percent was older than 49 years. With regard to employee organizational tenure, 43.1 percent of the respondents indicated that they were employed for less than three years, 34.1 percent were employed between three and less than ten years and 22.8 percent were employed for over ten years. Finally, 12.4 percent of the participants indicated that they were never involved in teamwork, whereas 13.1 percent responded with “seldom,” 20.2 percent with “occasionally,” 21.9 percent with “often” and 32.4 percent with “always” to this item.

Measures

LMX was measured using the LMX scale developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). This scale consists of seven items designed to assess the one-dimensional concept of LMX.

A sample item is: "I feel that my supervisor understands my job problems and needs well." Responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= totally disagree) to 5 (= totally agree). Cronbach's α was 0.91.

Job insecurity was measured using the scale for quantitative job insecurity developed by De Witte (2000). This scale has been further validated by Vander Elst *et al.* (2014) and consists of four items. A sample item is: "I think I might lose my job in the near future." Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= totally disagree) to 5 (= totally agree). Cronbach's α was 0.91.

OCBs were measured using the extra-role performance scale of Eisenberger *et al.* (2010). This scale consists of eight items intended to measure employees' voluntary behaviors (beyond their traditional job description) that are carried out to benefit the organization. A sample item is: "I look for ways to make the organization I work for more successful." Responses were scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= totally disagree) to 7 (= totally agree). Cronbach's α was 0.90.

One of the subscales of the OCB measure developed by Eisenberger *et al.* (2010), that is extra-role performance, was selected in this study for two reasons. First, this subscale fits our conceptual model best as it taps into citizenship behaviors aimed at helping and promoting the organization as a whole, while other scales (e.g. George and Brief, 1992; Katz, 1964; Konovsky and Organ, 1996; Morrison 1996) pertain to extra-role behaviors intended to support colleagues or to foster more efficient work processes. Considering that in our study job insecurity climate is examined as a stressor at the organizational level, from a theoretical point of view, it is most valid to select outcomes that reflect employee's attitudes toward the organization itself.

Second, compared to other tools for measuring OCB, this subscale by Eisenberger *et al.* (2010) is one of the most parsimonious OCB instruments, using nearly half of the number of items included in other scales (see for instance the scale of Konovsky and Organ, 1996). Short scales are particularly valuable when researching individuals at work; this is because of the time and costs associated with surveying larger groups of employees during their working hours. Last but certainly not least, the subscale for measuring extra-role performance by Eisenberger *et al.* (2010) exhibited excellent psychometric properties.

Control variables. Based on the findings in prior studies that indicate significant relationships between certain demographic characteristics, on the one hand, and some of the study variables, on the other hand, we controlled for age, gender and prior experience in teamwork (Debus and Unger, 2017; Mitonga-Monga *et al.*, 2017; Vander Elst *et al.*, 2017).

As our data were collected among German and Dutch employees, and as most of the study scales have not been validated in Dutch or German, the originally English language-worded scales had to be translated to the languages of the participants respectively. In the light of their learning process, the students were assigned in pairs: while one pair was required to translate the scales from English to Dutch (or from English to German), another pair was asked to translate them back (from Dutch to English and from German to English, respectively). In addition, the authors of this paper have conducted the translation-back translation methodology (Hambleton, 1994) in order to safeguard the validity of the resulting measures.

Preliminary analyses. Prior to conducting multi-level analyses, the proposed three-factor structure of our model was examined in SPSS (version 23) using the principal axis factoring method with oblique rotation. As expected, three factors that altogether explained 66.08 percent of the total variance emerged from the data. Importantly, all items loaded on their intended factor without considerable cross-loadings. These findings confirmed the three-factor structure of our model (Tabachnick *et al.*, 2001). Note that our findings are based on robust instruments, since the Cronbach's α for the LMX, the job insecurity and the OCBs scales were all above 0.90.

Table I shows the means, the standard deviations and the correlations of the study variables at within-level.

Aggregation of job insecurity. There are two reasons for assuming that multi-level modeling is most appropriate to test our empirical model. The first reason is a statistical one. As we collected the observations in different units and in different working organizations, the confidence interval around the parameters’ estimates would be biased which makes true *p*-value much higher than the 0.05 one assumes (see Barcikowski, 1981; Kreft and de Leeuw, 1988). To avoid such an inflation of the Type I error, it is recommended to use multi-level modeling. The second reason is a theoretical one: we hypothesized that job insecure climate moderates the relationship between LMX and OCBs. Such a climate is not a pure individual-level feature, it is about the shared perceptions that respondents working in an organization have *vis-à-vis* job insecurity. Job insecurity climate comprises a higher-level (group, department, unit and organization) variable that can be derived by aggregating the individual-level scales of job insecurity (see Sora *et al.*, 2009, 2013) or by aggregating higher-level scales of job insecurity (see Låstad *et al.*, 2015). Hence, given the way in which we collected the data and the nature of the job insecurity climate construct and research hypotheses on their interrelationships, we deem that a multi-level approach is most suitable.

To establish whether we met the requirements for conducting multi-level analyses for analyzing our data, we examined whether individual respondents’ scores could be aggregated. For multi-level analyses to be justified, it is expected that the aggregation statistics exceed certain thresholds: the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) should be equal to or higher than 0.05; and the within-group interrater agreement (*rwg*) should be equal to or higher than 0.70 (LeBreton and Senter, 2008). The results showed that ICC(1) for job insecurity climate was 0.19, while *rwg* was 0.69 (i.e. just slightly below the threshold of 0.70). These results suggested that experienced job insecurity can indeed be aggregated from a first- (individual) to a second- (organization) level construct.

Results

Testing of hypotheses

The study hypotheses were tested in MLwiN (version 2.31) using stepwise estimation of different models (Rasbash *et al.*, 2009). The results of the analyses, including the estimation of model fit and the variance components (i.e. the between- and the within-level variance), are presented in Table II. We entered the study variables stepwise to obtain the variance components and the fit of the different models. Specifically, we added the predictors of OCBs at the within-level by including the individual control variables in the first step, and by second including LMX and job insecurity in the next step. Following the recommendations of Aiken *et al.* (1991), we centered the within-level predictors around the specific organization’s mean. In a subsequent step, and at the between-level, we entered the grand

Variable	<i>M</i>	SD	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Gender							
(2) Age	4.16	2.48	0.06				
(3) Teamwork	3.49	1.38	0.00	-0.10*			
(4) LMX	3.54	0.78	0.08	-0.01	0.09		
(5) Job Insecurity	2.58	0.54	0.03	-0.13**	-0.12**	-0.30**	
(6) OCBs	4.96	1.18	0.25**	0.21**	0.11*	0.31**	-0.16**

Notes: *n* = 466. Age groups: (1) < 25, (2) 25–29, (3) 30–34, (4) 35–39, (5) 40–44, (6) 45–49, (7) 50–54, (8) 55–59, (9) > 60; gender: 1 = female, 2 = male; teamwork: 1 = “never,” 2 = “seldom,” 3 = “now and then,” 4 = “often,” 5 = “always.” **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01

Table I. Means (*M*), standard deviations (SD), and correlations of the study variables

mean centered variable job insecurity climate (Aiken *et al.*, 1991). Finally, we added the two-way interaction between LMX and job insecurity climate. The results showed that ILGS significantly decreased at each step, with all differences between models being larger than 3.84. This indicated an increase in model fit with the inclusion of each predictor.

Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors of the final model (Model 6) are reported in Table III. The results showed a significant positive association between LMX and OCBs ($B = 0.33, p < 0.001$) in support of *H1*. In addition, we found support for *H2*, predicting that job insecurity climate moderates the relationship between LMX and OCBs. The effect was both significant ($B = -0.39, p < 0.01$), and in line with our expectations.

More specifically, we examined the relationship between LMX and OCBs at different levels of job insecurity climate, by means of an additional simple slope analysis. We conducted this analysis using a web tool (RWeb) for two-way cross-level interactions developed by Preacher *et al.* (2006). The analysis incorporated simple intercepts, simple slopes and regions of significance in two-way interactions. We used Case C for cross-level interaction and plotted the interaction effect by means of the web tool (RWeb).

To explore the nature of the interaction effect (LMX \times job insecurity climate), we plotted interactions, using two values of the moderator and the predictor. In particular, we selected values for job insecurity climate that corresponded to one standard deviation beneath and above the grand mean centered job insecurity climate and values for LMX that corresponded with the one standard deviation beneath and above the group mean centered LMX variable. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between LMX and OCBs for the two values of job insecurity climate. The results showed that when the job insecurity climate was one standard deviation lower than the average job insecurity, there was a significant relationship between LMX and OCB ($B = 0.48, SE = 0.082, z = 5.82, p = 0.000$). When the job insecurity climate was 1 standard deviation higher than the average job insecurity climate, the relationship between LMX weakened ($B = 0.19; SE = 0.09, z = 2.0474, p = 0.04$).

Table II.
Model fit and variance components of the study variables tested for OCBs as outcome

Model (M)	Between component	SE	Within component	SE	ILGS
M1. Null model	0.40	0.15	1.17	0.08	1,424.29
M2. M1 + control variables	0.23	0.10	1.00	0.07	1,349.67
M3. M2 + LMX	0.23	0.11	0.92	0.06	1,310.62
M4. M3 + JI	0.23	0.10	0.91	0.06	1,306.12
M5. M4 + JIC	0.17	0.79	0.91	0.06	1,301.90
M6. M5 + JIC \times LMX	0.17	0.79	0.90	0.06	1,295.84

Notes: $n = 466$. LMX, leader-member exchange; JI, individual job insecurity; JIC, job insecurity climate. Included control variables are gender, age, and teamwork

Table III.
Results of multilevel hierarchical regression analyses

Variable	B	OCBs	SE
Intercept	3.54		0.23
Predictor			
LMX	0.33***		0.07
JI	-0.14**		0.06
JIC	0.60**		0.28
LMX \times JIC	-0.39**		0.16

Notes: $n = 466$. LMX, leader-member exchange; JI, individual job insecurity; JIC, job insecurity climate. The study control variables gender, age, and teamwork were included in the regression analyses and were significant. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

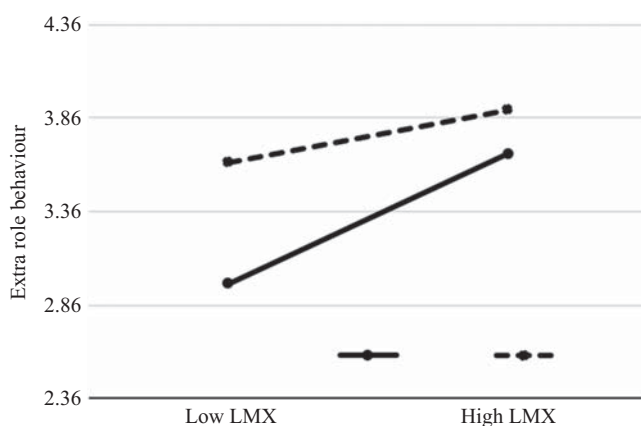


Figure 1.
Interaction between
LMX and Job
Insecurity Climate
(JIC) for employee
extra-role behaviors

The results are plotted in Figure 1 which shows that as stipulated that high job insecurity climate weakened the positive relationship between LMX and OCBs.

Note that all three control variables included in this study were significantly associated with employee OCBs as well. Specifically, employees older than 25 (as compared to those under 25 years) and male (as compared to female) exhibited more OCBs (see Table III). Furthermore, employees who often engaged in teamwork showed more OCBs compared to their peers who did not work frequently in teams. Finally, whereas job insecurity climate was positively related to OCBs ($B = 0.60, p < 0.01$), employee-level job insecurity as a control variable showed a negative association with our outcome variable ($B = -0.14, p < 0.01$).

Discussion

In the current study, we examined the influence of LMX and organization-level job insecurity climate on employee OCBs while accounting for individual-level job insecurity. To support our rationale, we invoked different conceptual frameworks. Drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), we stipulated that employees engage in OCBs as an act of reciprocity to their leader’s supportive behaviors. Stated differently, OCBs represent employees’ way of nurturing the valuable exchange relationship they have with their leader. In line with our expectations and keeping with prior evidence (Hackett and Lapiere, 2004; Ilies *et al.*, 2007), we found that LMX is significantly associated with OCBs. This outcome underscores how important the high-quality dyadic relationship between employee and leader is for the organization, which is the main beneficiary of employees’ OCBs.

In addition, in our theoretical underpinnings we outlined how a crossover of negative experiences triggered by a common stressor may contribute to the formation of psychological stress climates (Peiró, 2001), which (climates) may cast a shadow on the positive influence of high LMX on employee OCBs. We expected and found that when a stress climate, in our case a job insecurity climate, is high, the positive effect of LMX on OCBs weakened, in comparison with a situation wherein a job insecurity climate is low. In our line of reasoning, that was largely built on the premises of social exchange theory (e.g. Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), we posited that negative contextual factors such as a job insecurity climate might disturb the sound balance in the relationship between leader and employee, causing for the initially strong positive exchange (i.e. high LMX on the side of the leader being reciprocated by high levels of OCBs on the side of the employees) to decrease.

We believe that employees may re-appraise (expect less from and invest less in) the relationship with their direct manager, in case they feel that (s)he has failed to protect them

from the climate-level threat of losing their jobs, herewith explaining this moderation effect. In the light of expectancy violations theory (Afifi and Burgoon, 2000), the perceived breach of expectations among employees for security of their employment can trigger a negative interpretation (or evaluation) of this discrepancy between expectations about and perceived job insecurity, resulting in a decrease in positive efforts toward the organization (i.e. OCBs), because the valence of the discrepancy (i.e. insufficient employment security) is being perceived as negative. Evidently, having a high-quality or a low-quality exchange relationship with their manager matters less for employees in the light of engaging in OCBs when they perceive a high job insecurity climate. These results signify the considerable impact a stress climate might have on the propensity of a leader to motivate and inspire employees to initiate pro-social behaviors toward their organization.

Notably, our analyses revealed an unexpected result: job insecurity at the individual level of analysis triggered a decrease in employee OCBs, while at the climate level it boosted extra-role behaviors. This demonstrates the complexity of job insecurity as a contextual stressor and shows that investigating these two concepts (individual job insecurity and job insecurity climate) as two separate meaningful phenomena is worth the attention of future empirical research. The handful of studies that have researched OCBs as resulting from job insecurity have delivered ambiguous evidence (Bultena, 1998; Feather and Rauter, 2004; Reisel *et al.*, 2010). Our findings that job insecurity at the individual level of analysis reduces OCBs are in line with the results reported by Bultena (1998) and with those by Reisel *et al.* (2010).

Besides adding to the limited empirical evidence on the relationship between job insecurity and OCBs, the current study demonstrates that job insecurity climate represents a different construct than job insecurity at the individual level. This became clear from the fact that the relationship between job insecurity and OCBs exhibited a different pattern when tested at an individual as compared to a climate level. Until now, only four studies have examined individual- and climate-level job insecurity simultaneously (Låstad, Näswall, Berntson, Seddigh and Sverke, 2016; Låstad, Vander Elst and De Witte, 2016; Sora *et al.*, 2009, 2013). However, the existing evidence is somewhat ambiguous in terms of the variety in strength of the effects and in the significance of the findings. Whereas Sora *et al.* (2013) found only small differences in the effects of individual- and climate-level job insecurity on employee outcomes, Låstad, Näswall, Berntson, Seddigh and Sverke (2016) found significant effects for the aggregate-climate construct but not for individual-level job insecurity. This ambiguity emphasizes the value of providing more research evidence on the differential impact of individual- and climate-level job insecurity.

An important contribution of our study lies in that it tests job insecurity climate by aggregating perceptions of individual job insecurity at an organizational level. Prior studies have often used work teams as a level of aggregation when probing organizational climate. By aggregating job insecurity at an organizational level, we tap into perceptions that are shared across employees in the organization, framing job insecurity climate as a true organizational phenomenon (i.e. not limited to the unit of the team). In sum, our findings lend strong support to the notion that the job insecurity climate construct differs from the individual job insecurity, construct and indicate that employees may react differently when they perceive job insecurity as a product of organizational climate as compared to when they view it as an individual issue.

More specifically, at the individual level, job insecurity seems to demotivate employees and cause them to withdraw from OCBs. Conceivably, if an employee perceives the threat of job loss to be an individual issue (i.e. being of concern only to her or himself and not to other employees), (s)he may not see much value in engaging in OCBs. If an employee believes that (s) he is more likely to be affected by job loss than her or his colleagues, and, if compared to others, (s)he feels disadvantaged with respect to valuable job conditions (i.e. job security), this might feed into feelings of unfairness. Subsequently, as a means of restoring the balance in the transactional relationship, the specific employee is likely to disengage from behaviors that

would benefit the organization. Alternatively, if the perceived threat of job loss is a common issue that affects a large portion of the employees in the organization, (s)he may choose to devise a more serviceable approach. In an uncertain situation, employees may try to enhance their extra-role behaviors and performance as a means of increasing their value for the organization, aiming to be less at risk (Probst *et al.*, 2007; Staufenbiel and König, 2010). Stated differently, if employees have a shared sense of job insecurity, they might engage in more OCBs in order to enhance the visibility of their contributions to the organization.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

Despite its contributions, the current study has some limitations worth reporting. The sample size with regard to the higher-level unit (number of organizations) was relatively small. Despite this limitation of our data, we were able to obtain significant results from the HLM analyses, which indicates that our findings might be even stronger if tested on a larger sample. Another limitation related to the small number of organizations included in the study concerns the ICC-value of the moderator. The ICC for job insecurity climate was not very high which might cause the relationship between the moderator and the outcome to be underestimated. *rug* approximated the 0.7 threshold, which signifies a sufficient (yet not very high) agreement. Altogether, despite the limited observations at the second-level unit, the obtained significant results indicate that the relationships between the research model variables are, in fact, quite strong. Future studies may replicate our findings using a larger sample, thus enabling a wider generalizability of the model's findings and allowing for a more precise estimation of the strength of the effects.

Moreover, as to date, existing knowledge on the link between job insecurity and OCBs derives mostly from cross-sectional studies and applies only to job insecurity at the individual level (Reisel *et al.*, 2010), we call for more longitudinal designs. The cross-sectional character of our data limits the possibility of drawing causal conclusions. However, while theoretically different relationships between LMX, job insecurity climate and OCBs are also possible the use of group-level interactions and aggregated measures considerably tempers causality concerns in our study (Antonakis *et al.*, 2010). It would of course be valuable for future theory development to examine the moderation effect of job insecurity climate in the relationship between LMX and OCBs across time.

Another limitation of this study is the underrepresentation of public sector organizations in our sample. Future research might wish to examine employee experiences of LMX, job insecurity climate and OCBs in a sample that is representative for the public sector. Such research is needed because compared to employees from the public sector, private sector employees are confronted with relatively more job demands including a higher level of job insecurity (Smulders and Houtman, 2012). As public sector employees typically enjoy better job protection, more favorable terms of employment and report more positive work-related experiences (e.g. organizational commitment; De Witte *et al.*, 2010), the relationships established in this study might exhibit different patterns when tested in a public sector sample. In addition, variations in the findings between public and private sector samples might be due to differences in the motivational mechanisms that steer employee behaviors (Buelens and Van den Broeck, 2007).

Furthermore, it is important to note that generalizing the results of the current study to other countries must be done with great caution. Our findings (based on a sample of Dutch and German employees) might have a higher relevance for the Northern and Western European societies which are more alike in terms of market regulations and social security systems. Other countries that differ to a larger extent regarding their social policies and practices might show stronger differences in employee experiences of and coping with unemployment (László *et al.*, 2010). In sum, social structures and policies may play a key role in mitigating or accentuating consequences related to job insecurity and may account for a considerable amount of the between-country variance in job insecurity-related outcomes.

Finally, the last shortcoming of our study is related to the method of data collection. We used single source (i.e. employees only) self-reported (i.e. survey-based) data, which could raise concerns about common-method bias (CMB) bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012) and inflation of the magnitude of the effects. However, dismissing these concerns, researchers have affirmed that CMB does not affect interaction effects because they are suppressed in regression analyses, making such effects only harder to obtain (Evans, 1985; McClelland and Judd, 1993), herewith making this concern less problematic. Nevertheless, data collected by means of surveys are susceptible to method bias caused by social desirability and negative affectivity. Such bias might have systematically colored employee responses. Particularly with regard to constructs that are key to one's professional and personal identity (e.g. citizenship behaviors and chances of sustaining employment), it is possible that employee responses are affected in a way that would support their positive self-efficacy beliefs (Fisher and Katz, 2008). Future studies may be able to eliminate such bias by using method triangulation, for instance complementing the survey with qualitative data (e.g. observations and interviews).

Implications for practice

In times of high pressure and tight business margins, it is critical for organizations to make the most of the resources they have (Debusscher *et al.*, 2017). The results of the present study revealed that despite the efforts of the managers to foster employee OCBs through maintaining high-quality exchange relationships, organizational factors such as job insecurity climate might weaken managers' positive influence and cause for employees to withdraw from citizenship behaviors. Our findings indicate that not only the line manager, but also the top management in organizations needs to develop strategies for helping employees to deal with their experiences of job insecurity. To this end, in our opinion, two approaches might be particularly useful. On the one hand, preventive measures could be fruitful in limiting the chance for job insecurity to occur in the first place. Organizations can prevent the emergence of job insecurity by providing employees with opportunities for professional development as a means of increasing their perceived employability (Fugate and Kinicki, 2008; Silla *et al.*, 2009; Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2016). Employees who have confidence in their professional skills and abilities, and who believe that they can easily secure other employment are less likely to experience job insecurity (De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008; Silla *et al.*, 2009).

On the other hand, and if a job insecurity climate has already emerged, an employee participation-based job insecurity intervention program might provide means to reduce employees' concerns about possible job loss. To achieve this, organizations may wish to consider some form of employee involvement (e.g. by means of launching work groups) in strategic decision-making (for instance on planning and implementing of organizational restructuring). This might be useful, because participation can provide individuals with a sense of stability, direction and meaningful purpose and can feed into feelings of group belonging (Nielsen and Randall, 2013). Moreover, employee involvement in decision-making also increases their feelings of empowerment (Han *et al.*, 2010) because participation allows voicing concerns and raising ideas.

Conclusions

Our study contributes to the limited research on job insecurity climate (Sora *et al.*, 2009, 2013) and sheds light on its capacity to influence the way LMX relates to employee OCBs. In line with other studies (Låstad, Näswall, Berntson, Seddigh and Sverke, 2016; Låstad, Vander Elst and De Witte, 2016; Sora *et al.*, 2009, 2013), it demonstrates that it is relevant to approach job insecurity as a collective (i.e. climate-level) phenomenon as well, over and above individual insecurity perceptions.

The unique value of our contribution is that it provides evidence about the considerable threat job insecurity climate poses to the relationship between the direct manager and

his/her employees, as job insecurity climate appeared to reduce the positive motivational influence of the manager on employee OCBs, owing to the employee’s perceived breach of expectations for a secure employment (Costa and Neves, 2017). In essence, our findings provide further support for the expectancy violations theory (Afifi and Burgoon, 2000), according to which a breach of employee expectations (e.g. regarding job security) can evoke negative evaluations of the discrepancy between the desired (or expected) and the actual situation. Apparently, organizations should be mindful of the danger this discrepancy may bring along; in particular, negative evaluations of the work context (i.e. individual-level job insecurity) may cause for employees to reduce their positive behaviors toward the organization, either directly (when individual-level job insecurity is high) or indirectly through disturbing the fine or sound exchange balance between the leader and his/her employee (when climate-level job insecurity is high).

Timely and effective measures for dealing with adverse working environments (e.g. environments where job insecurity thrives) are deemed necessary (Costa and Neves, 2017; Nielsen *et al.*, 2008), especially in a highly competitive business environment, where inspiring employees to perform “above and beyond the call of duty” is key for the survival of the organization. “Highly focused micro-interventions and very short training sessions” are recommended as means of reducing job insecurity and for boosting employee positive behaviors toward the organization (Costa and Neves, 2017, p. 389).

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