

## **THE EFFECT OF DESIRE FOR CHANGE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED UNCERTAINTY AND JOB RELATED AFFECTIVE WELL BEING**

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of the study was to investigate the effect of perceived uncertainty on employee's job-related affective well-being (JAW). Desire for change as a response to uncertainty was also examined in terms of its moderating effect on the relationship between these two variables.*

*The research is conducted by 217 participants from different sectors through online survey. Analyses proved that employees' perceived uncertainty was significantly explaining their JAW. Besides, it was seen that desire for change has a partial moderating effect on this relationship.*

*Regarding demographics, there were significant differences found in terms of gender, age, work and organizational tenure groups.*

**Key words:** Perceived uncertainty, job-related affective well-being, desire for change

**JEL Code:** L29

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

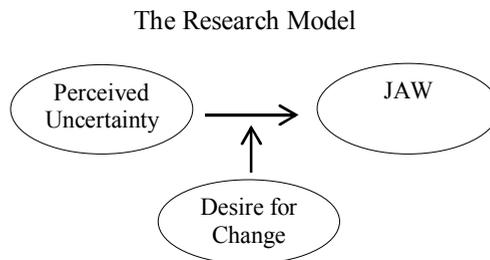
The purpose of this research is to examine the effect of perceived uncertainty on employee's JAW. It is assumed that perception of uncertainty makes a negative effect on well-being whether in personal life or in work life. Research has shown that uncertainty constitutes a powerful stressor (e.g. Monat, Averill, & Lazarus, 1972; Zakowski, 1995). The reason for this is the fear of not having knowledge about situations in the future. On the other hand, individual differences in uncertainty orientation may be an important moderator of the effects of uncertainty on well-being and uncertainty reduction activities (Bordia et al., 2004:355).

During organizational change, employees are likely to experience uncertainty in relation to a range of different organizational issues such as the rationale behind the change, the process of implementation and the expected outcomes of the change (Buono and Bowditch, 2003; Jackson, Schuler & Vredenburg, 1987:412). The stress that uncertainty creates makes negative effects on people. One of the negative effects that it is thought to be created is reduction of well-being.

Endler & Parker (1990:846) conceptualized coping as a response to external, stressful or negative events (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980:233; McCrae, 1984:389). They have stated that coping strategies (or styles) play a major role in an individual's physical and psychological well-being when he/she is confronted with negative or stressful life events. For instance, desire for change, which is a style of coping with uncertainty, may reduce the negative effect of perceived uncertainty on employee's well-being at work because it renders the individual to respond to uncertain situations with excitement instead of stress (Greco & Roger, 2001:525).

In the scope of the research, the research model is demonstrated in Figure 1 and accordingly the hypotheses are presented below:

**Figure-1:**



*H<sub>1</sub>): Perceived uncertainty has a negative contribution on JAW.*

*H<sub>2</sub>): Desire for change moderates the contribution of perceived uncertainty on JAW.*

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. What is Uncertainty?**

Uncertainty has been usually defined as a characteristic of the environment or a psychological state. Milliken (1987:136) defines uncertainty as “an individual's

perceived inability to predict something accurately”. So, the psychological aspect is based on the perception of individual. Tannenbaum (1950:24) states that “whenever the future is anticipated, uncertainty is present.” It is present for two reasons: Firstly, an individual never has the knowledge to determine accurately the nature of the consequences which will follow the choice or the probability of occurring. Secondly, all other related elements such as time and environment will not remain constant (Simon, 1947). Lawrence and Lorsch (1967:28) state that, uncertainty consists of three components: The lack of clarity of information, the long time span of definitive feedback and the general uncertainty of causal relationships.

In the present study, the effect of uncertainty on well-being which is a psychological variable is aimed to be examined. Thus, uncertainty at the individual level is taken in consideration in this study. For instance, during change the employees experience the discomfort of not predicting the consequences of the change. This leads to increase in stress (Ashford, 1988) and in anxiety (Miller and Monge, 1985); and eventually to decrease in job satisfaction, commitment to workplace and trust in the organization (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991). Reduction of uncertainty and increased control over the change are important for employee well-being and adaptation to change (Bordia et al., 2004:350). Because people dislike situations in which they lack of control, they try to regain control by some means.

## **2.2. Well-Being**

Since the early day of psychology as a scientific discipline, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure has been identified as the essential dimension of conscious experience. This feeling is usually described in academic research as “psychological well-being” or “subjective well-being” (Warr, 2007:19). Subjective well-being domain contains evaluation of life through individual’s point of view. These evaluations are assembled on two components: Affect and cognition. Individual’s hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings constitute the affective component of subjective well-being which is bipolar (pleasure vs. displeasure). Whereas the cognitive component consists of both individual’s and others’ information-based appraisal on his/her expectations and envisioned ‘ideal’ life (Diener, 1994:111). Among all components of psychological well-being including affective wellbeing, competence, aspiration, autonomy, integrative functioning and satisfaction; the measure of affective well-being is said to be the most important (Diener & Larsen, 1993:409). It is considered to be the core of mental health (Keyes & Lopez, 2002:51);

JAW differs from affective well-being as it contains frequent experience of positive affects and infrequent experience of negative affects in the work environment (Diener & Larsen, 1993:410). At work, task related stressors such as work overload, concentration demands; uncertainty in terms of role ambiguity and social stressors such as conflicts with supervisors and colleagues, are found to be negatively related with employee's JAW (Grebner et al., 2003:349). If negative affects continue over time, it might cause employee's organizational commitment to reduce and even to leave the organization (Sonnetag & Frese, 2003).

### **2.3. Desire for Change: A Coping Style with Uncertainty**

Folkman and Lazarus (1990:99) define coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person." Individuals characteristically employ different styles of coping when they are faced with stressful experiences. That is why coping strategies (or styles) play a major role in an individual's physical and psychological well-being when he/she is confronted with negative or stressful life events (Endler & Parker, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Miller, Brody & Summerton, 1988). Greco and Roger (2001) have developed an uncertainty response scale (URS) to distinguish individual traits in coping with uncertainty. The URS measures individual differences in the extent to which uncertainty is perceived as stressful. Desire for change is one of the three sub dimensions of this measure. "(It) is characterized by enjoyment of uncertainty, novelty and change..." (Greco & Roger, 2001:525). People who have desire for change are tolerated to change. So, these people, perhaps even change the negative effect of uncertainty to a positive one by perceiving it as a joyful situation.

## **3. METHOD and FINDINGS**

The data were gathered conveniently from a total of 217 employees, who work in companies of different sectors and departments. This study aims to examine employees' affective well-being under uncertain situations. So, in composing this sample, the employees whose organizations were about to go through or just going through merging or downsizing were contacted. Demographic characteristics that were interrogated in the study were gender, age, managerial position, work and organizational tenure, sector and occupation ( $\mu_{\text{age}}=29$ ,  $\mu_{\text{work tenure}}=6.77$  years,  $\mu_{\text{organizational tenure}}=3.28$  years).

In the present study, perceived uncertainty is measured with a 21-item scale, developed by Schweiger and DeNisi (1991). The measurement of desire for

change is conducted by the 16 items of desire for change in Greco and Roger's (2001) URS. To measure JAW, Katwyk and his colleagues (2000) have developed the JAW scale (JAWS), which is based on the model of affective well-being at work. The scale contains some positive and negative adjectives that assess affective well-being. Pleasure axis represents individual's general happiness level with respect to the job, and arousal axis represents individual's psychological motivation level.

The items of the questionnaires were firstly entered in a survey form on an electronic survey web page. Then the link of the survey was sent to the email addresses of the participants. Ignoring the missing data, 217 full responses were collected to be analyzed. Results of this study were evaluated using the SPSS 16.0.

For perceived uncertainty, It was seen that KMO value was 0.92 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ( $p = 0.000 < 0.001$ ); which indicated that the data was adequate and appropriate to conduct factor analysis. Nevertheless, when the factor analysis was conducted, it was seen that the factors were not meaningful. Consequently, the variable of perceived uncertainty was considered as a single factor as it was in previous studies (Schweiger, Ivancevich & Power, 1987). As a whole factor, the reliability analysis of perceived uncertainty revealed high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.931$ ). Desire for change was also found to be a whole factor for the following analyses (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.915$ ). As to JAW, KMO sampling adequacy test (0,901) and Barlett's test of Sphericity ( $p = .000 < .001$ ) demonstrated that the factor analysis could be done for the scale. Finally, two factors were acquired: Positive and negative JAW. Explained variance by positive JAW is 28.263% variance of the scale and by negative JAW, it is 24.864% variance of the scale. In total, they explain 53.126% of the variance.

To examine the relationships between variables, bivariate correlation analysis is done. As it is seen in Table 1, a weak positive relationship between perceived uncertainty and desire for change has been found ( $r = 0.200, p < 0.01$ ). Perceived uncertainty has also significant relationships with both of the factors of JAW. The relationship between perceived uncertainty and positive JAW was found to be negative and weak ( $r = -0.225, p < 0.01$ ). Whereas the relationship between perceived uncertainty and negative JAW is positive and moderate ( $r = 0.378, p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 1 :** Means, Standart Deviations and Correlations for Study Variables

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Percieved Uncertainty</b>	3,55	0,83	1			
<b>2. Desire for Change</b>	2,61	0,86	-,234**	1		
<b>3. Positive JAWS</b>	3,54	0,92	-,225**	0,084	1	
<b>4. Negative JAWS</b>	3,79	0,89	,378**	-,211**	-,604**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

To test the moderating effect of desire for change, hierarchical regression analysis is conducted. Only the regression analysis result for positive JAW is demonstrated in Table 2 because there was no significant result for the moderating effect of negative JAW. In the first model, it is seen that perceived uncertainty could statistically explain the positive JAW ( $R_2=0.05$ ,  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ ). In the last model, when the moderator interacts with the independent variable, it is found that the interaction can statistically explain the dependent variable, ( $R_2 = 0.094$ ,  $p = 0.003 < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2: Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Positive JAW**

<b>Dependent variable: Positive JAW</b>				
	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Step 1</b>				
	Perceived Uncertainty (PU)	-,251	-3,316	,001
R= 0,225; R2= 0,050; F= 10,994; p= 0,001				
<b>Step 2</b>				
	Perceived Uncertainty (PU)	-,237	-3,069	,002
	Desire for Change (DfC)	-,070	-0,879	,380
R= 0,232; R2= 0,054; F= 5,877; p= 0,003				
<b>Step 3</b>				
	Perceived Uncertainty (PU)	-1,300	-3,591	,000
	Desire for Change	-0,974	-3,130	,002
	Interaction (PU*DfC)	0,250	-3,002	,003
R= 0,306; R2= 0,094; F= 7,073; p= 0,000				

In terms of difference tests, non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney rank sum test) were used because the normality condition for the variables was not provided and the sample size of the difference groups was not large enough. Accordingly, there is a significant difference ( $p = 0.035 < 0.05$ ) of desire for change between male and female employees. It means that male employees have more desire for change than female employees ( $\mu_{RankMale} = 125.70$ ,  $\mu_{RankFemale} = 103.85$ ). There is another significant ( $p = 0.047 > 0.05$ ) difference between these groups in terms of negative JAW. So, it can be said that the negative JAW of employees under 33 is higher than those over 33 years of ( $\mu_{Rank < 33} = 110.84$ ,  $\mu_{Rank > 33} = 88.73$ ). Shortly,

younger employees feel more negative emotions than the older ones. Lastly, for both organizational and work tenure, there are significant differences in terms of uncertainty. Employees who are elder in work life and in organization perceive more uncertainty than the younger ones (for work tenure:  $\mu_{\text{Rank}<7\text{years}} = 99.50$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Rank}>7\text{ years}} = 118.89$ ; for organizational tenure:  $\mu_{\text{Rank}< 4\text{ years}} = 101.32$ ,  $\mu_{\text{Rank}>4\text{ years}} = 123.76$ ).

#### **4. CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS**

First of all, reaching to high internal consistency for the perceived uncertainty and the desire for change scales proves that the Turkish translations for these scales have been appropriately done. So, these results are important for the study in the way of contributing to the Turkish literature.

In the analyses, the contribution of the independent variable on both of the factors of the dependent variable was also determined. In other words, the first hypothesis was supported. According to this, it can be said that employees' well-being at work decreases as they perceive uncertainty. In literature, there are findings that support this hypothesis. For instance, in organizations which are going through change such as merging or downsizing, uncertainty is usually highly perceived (Paulsen et al., 2005). In such organizations, employees' negative emotions towards their job such as anxiety, depression, worry etc. are found to be high because not knowing how the change will affect their future in the organization in terms of status, position, control over tasks, etc., may disturb them psychologically (Ashford, 1988; Schweiger & Denisi, 1991; Bordia et al., 2004).

As a result of the hierarchical regression analysis, the moderator effect was only determined on the relationship between perceived uncertainty and positive JAW. Shortly, it is said that the second hypothesis was partially supported. According to this, if employees desire for change, their positive emotions are not negatively affected in the face of uncertain situations. The literature on uncertainty has long noted the role of individual differences in uncertainty orientation (Kramer, 1999:309). How people perceive uncertainty and respond to it, influence the effect of uncertainty on them. Bordia and his colleagues (2004:350) suggest that individual differences in uncertainty orientation may be important moderators on the effect of uncertainty on well-being. By this study, desire for change which is a response to uncertainty is found to be a moderator of the uncertainty effect on employees' positive emotions towards their job. So, the role of such an individual difference - in terms of coping style – in uncertainty orientation is determined.

The mean of negative JAW scores ( $\mu_{\text{negative JAW}} = 3.79$ ) was found to be greater than the mean of positive JAW scores ( $\mu_{\text{positive JAW}} = 3.54$ ). It means that the negative affects are less strongly felt by the participants than the positive affects. This can be related with fatalistic tendencies of Turkish society (Doğru, 2008). Fatalistic individuals easily accept the factors that are against them and learn to live with them. From this explanation, it can be said that the employees who perceive uncertainty at work may not have expressed their negative emotions strongly, despite of feeling them strongly against such a negative situation. They may have believed that this situation was inevitable. The difference between different sexes was found in terms of desire for change. Male employees are found to have more desire for change rather than female employees. This result can be associated to literature findings about openness to change. Research (e.g. Stewart, 1998) shows that men are usually more open to experience than women. In terms of age, there was a difference of JAW between younger and older employees. Older employees were found to feel less negative emotions than the younger ones. It can be explained as; older employees may not experience stress as strongly as the younger ones because older employees may have learned how to cope with stressors (e.g. organizational change) from their past experiences. As it is known, job experience has a moderator effect on perception of stress (Robbins & Judge, 2009:249).

A recommendation about future studies may be investigating other personality typologies that influence person's affective well-being. Effects of affective well-being on job-related attitudes such as organizational commitment; job satisfaction may be investigated in different cultural contexts. In the perspective of a cultural research, the research model of this study may contain cultural traits (e.g. uncertainty avoidance; Hofstede, 2001) as a moderator because application of this research in different cultures may give different results.

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