



Locked at the job

Examining antecedents, consequences
and its process

Merel T. Feenstra-Verschure

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For my dearest Liv and Pippa

Nothing is impossible

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Chapter I

General introduction

Photo | Sint-Michiels bridge, Gent

1.1 Introduction

Growth is painful. Change is painful.

But, nothing is as painful as staying stuck where you do not belong

- N. R. Narayana Murthy -

In this dissertation, I focus on the overarching theme of job immobility. In particular, I study the phenomenon of *'locked at the job'*, an integrative term, derived from related constructs that all focus on job immobility. Reasons for experiencing job immobility can arise particularly when there is a high level of unemployment in a particular country. A lack of vacancies can cause that there are no opportunities for employees to leave. But also more positive circumstances such as current high pay and good terms and conditions of employment may limit voluntary mobility. Finally, if employees are happy in their jobs, they will not feel the need to leave. Thus, there are multiple explanations for job immobility. Currently, there are extremely many vacancies in the Dutch labor market, there are more vacancies than unemployed individuals (CBS, 2021). Yet job mobility in the Netherlands is very low (CBS, 2020; Intelligence Group, 2021) and employees tend to stay with the same employer for a relatively long time; over 32% of Dutch employees have tenure of 10 years or more (CBS, 2018).

The concept of locked at the job refers to the phenomenon where employees stay in their jobs, even if they are no longer satisfied with their job, as they perceive there are limited job opportunities. This phenomenon has a negative influence on today's labor market. A significant number of the Dutch working population remains in their current jobs, resulting in low job mobility. The Intelligence Group asked individuals both in employment and unemployed whether they were actively searching for a job. This resulted in a percentage of job seekers of 10.7% for the Dutch working population, and only 7.2% for those in employment (Intelligence group, 2021), while the demand for staff is high (Intelligence

Group, 2021). When employees despite their dissatisfaction stay in their jobs, it will be increasingly difficult to fill vacancies and this contributes to malfunctioning of the labor market. In addition, it is detrimental for individuals and organizations. Research shows that when employees remain dissatisfied in their jobs, this has negative effects on their productivity (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002), individuals will show less job involvement (Blau, 2001; Sharma, 2019), and they are also less committed to the organization (Blau, 2001; Fisher, Ryan, Sonnega & Naudé, 2016; Sharma, 2019). Furthermore, experiencing a locked at the job situation also results in energy depletion (Edwards & Cooper, 1990; Stengård, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, Leineweber & Aronsson, 2016) and ultimately in poorer physical and mental health (Allen, Peltokorpi & Rubenstein, 2016; Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016).

Job mobility within the Netherlands continues to decline. Employees tend to stay with their employer longer compared to earlier years (Intelligence Group, 2021). There are several relevant trends in today's Dutch labor market why employees are less mobile and tend to perceive fewer job opportunities. Digitalization causes more outsourcing of tasks and work, which means that employees are more likely to be less mobile and secure their position (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Nedelkoska & Quintini, 2018; OECD, 2019). Furthermore, the emergence of different forms of employment - for example, in addition to the permanent contract, the flexible contract and the self-employed contract - has significantly changed the current landscape of contract forms. This changing landscape of contract forms prevents employees from being mobile, in particular when holding a permanent contract, since it is more appealing for employees to stay in a contract form whereby they have favorable exit packages (Hoerberichts, Volkering, Biesenbeek & Van der Meulen, 2021; Stengård *et al.*, 2016; Waaijer, Belder, Sonneveld, Van Bochove, & Van der Weijden, 2017). On top of that, favorable exit packages also tend to make employees wait until they find themselves in a situation where the organization is terminating the contract rather than to resign since this

increases the exit package (Borghouts-Van de Pas, Bosmans, Verschoor, & Wilthagen, 2019). This is especially the case for older employees, who have built many financial advantages and therefore also have to take a relatively bigger risk when they wish to change jobs. Because of these very favorable termination rights for employees in the Netherlands, job immobility is high (TNO, 2015).

To date, the number of available studies within the job immobility literature is limited and varies widely. The urgency of gaining more knowledge on locked at the job as integrative concept of job immobility is evident not only based on the variety but also the diverse approaches and outcomes shown by these studies (Aronsson, & Göransson, 1999; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Hom, Mitchell, Lee & Griffeth, 2012; Muhonen, 2009; Stengård, 2018). These studies show that the number of employees who feel locked at the job is high. Stengård *et al.* (2016; 2017) reported 6.5% of individuals being *locked-in*. In contrast, Muhonen (2010) reported a *double locked-in*, i.e. being in a non-preferred occupation and non-preferred work place, of 61%, whereas Fisher *et al.* (2016) studied *job lock* in the United States and reported 91% job lock due to money and 78% job lock due to health insurance. These figures show fairly high percentages, but also a great diversity in these numbers which can be attributed to the different conceptualizations and operationalizations of these constructs related to locked at the job. I therefore contribute to science by conceptualizing and operationalizing the integrative job immobility construct locked at the job and increasing knowledge on antecedents, consequences and the process of this phenomenon. With these insights we are able to get a better understanding of the concept of locked at the job in order to facilitate practice by informing and educating them on locked at the job, reducing the number of employees becoming locked at the job, minimizing the intensity and shortening the duration of a locked at the job situation.

1.2 Defining locked at the job

Based on an extensive literature study I conceptualized locked at the job. Locked at the job is a concept that consists of two dimensions; 1) feeling dissatisfied in the job and at the same time 2) perceiving limited job opportunities. The first dimension originates from the concept of job satisfaction, which is defined by Locke (1976) as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1304). In contrast to the varied and extensive studies published on the positive state of job satisfaction of employees (Aziri, 2011; Danielsson & Bodin, 2008; Hünefeld, Gerstenberg & Hüffmeier, 2020; Judge Thoresen, Bono & Patton, 2001), I focus on the negative state – job dissatisfaction. The second dimension is composed of the lack of perceived ease of movement by not being able to identify alternative job opportunities (Long & Perumal, 2014). I use the following definition of ease of movement “a function of the number of extra-organizational alternatives perceived, which is, in turn, a function of the level of business activity, number of organizations visible, and personal characteristics of participants” (Griffeth, Steel, Allen & Bryan, 2005; in: March & Simon, 1958; p. 335). A more detailed elaboration on the concept of locked at the job can be found in Chapter 2.

1.3 Aim of this dissertation

With this dissertation I want to fill the current literature gap on job immobility that shows insufficient integration due to various conceptualizations and operationalizations and too little understanding about the phenomenon of locked at the job. I therefore aim to conceptualize and operationalize locked at the job and to create more understanding about the construct. This dissertation explores the following overarching research question: *What is experiencing locked at the job, what are its antecedents and consequences and how does it evolve over time?* With this dissertation I aim to investigate this research question by addressing four key issues of (1) conceptualizing and operationalizing locked at the job based on related

constructs of job immobility, (2) examining consequences of locked at the job, (3) examining antecedents of locked at the job, (4) examining the process of locked at the job. I will now explain these key issues in more detail, followed by an outline of this dissertation.

1.4 Key issues in this dissertation

⇒ *Key issue 1: Conceptualizing and operationalizing locked at the job*

The phenomenon of locked at the job has been examined within various research disciplines such as psychology (Allen *et al.*, 2016; Stengård *et al.*, 2016), environmental health (Fahlén *et al.*, 2009; Huysse-Gaytandjieva, Groot & Pavlova, 2013) and economics (Madrian, 1994). This has resulted in different research foci in which I found nine related constructs that measure job immobility in different ways, namely; job lock (Huysse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013), locked-in (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), turnover (Hom *et al.*, 2012; Woo & Allen, 2014), continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990), involuntary non-mobility (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), career entrenchment (Carson, Philips Carson, Phillips, & Roe, 1996), job embeddedness in adverse work environments (Allen *et al.*, 2016), inability to leave (Martin & Schermerhorn, 1983) and boundaryless and protean careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). These related constructs are not well integrated and have made limited use of the knowledge gained from other conceptualizations. In order to conceptualize locked at the job, I build on the nine related constructs that study job immobility, by integrating these insights into an overarching conceptualization of locked at the job and a conceptual model of antecedents and consequences of locked at the job.

I argue that based on Person Environment (PE) Fit theory (Edwards, 2008), an individual who feels locked at the job experiences multiple misfits between his/herself and the work-environment and hence becomes dissatisfied in the job and experiences limited job opportunities. Therefore I suggest that locked at the job consists of these two dimensions. When both dimensions are present, we refer to this situation as being locked at the job. To

further substantiate locked at the job I build on Aronsson (1989), Aronsson and Göransson (1999) and Stengård *et al.* (2016) who used the theory of control (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Control theory proposes that individuals will strive to achieve their desired situation. Only when individuals are able to continually adjust their attitudes and behaviors, they will achieve this desired situation. If through adjustment in one's behavior this desired situation is not achieved, the individual will modify or even terminate this desired situation (Carver & Scheier, 1982). The same applies to individuals experiencing locked at the job, who are unable to control their own thoughts and actions, making them (temporarily) unable to initiate a change.

To address this first key issue I performed a literature review on the nine related constructs and designed a conceptual model specifying the concept of locked at the job in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I validated the developed scale to measure locked at the job quantitatively and in addition in Chapter 4 I used this validated scale to measure locked at the job in an empirical two-wave study. Further, in Chapter 5 I examined the perceptions and experiences of the concept of locked at the job with a qualitative study.

⇒ *Key issue 2: examining consequences of locked at the job*

To date, there are only a few studies in which the consequences of related constructs of locked at the job are examined (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Muhonen, 2010; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Stengård *et al.*, 2016). We know from research on related constructs that various negative feelings can occur when individuals find themselves in such a situation (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016). In the conceptualization of locked at the job (Chapter 2) I found that experiencing locked at the job influences two types of work outcomes; work attitude and behavioral outcomes and health and well-being outcomes. The available studies focus primarily on the health and well-being outcomes, such as depletion of energy (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), emotional

exhaustion (Allen *et al.*, 2016) and other types of depressive symptoms (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016). In addition, there are a few researchers that studied work attitude and behavioral outcomes in relation to locked at the job, such as organizational citizenship behavior (Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Shore & Wayne, 1993), affective commitment, continuance commitment (Blau, 2001; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Sharma, 2019), and job involvement (Blau, 2001; Sharma, 2019).

To address this second key issue I conducted a quantitative validation study which is described in Chapter 3. In this third chapter primarily work attitude and behavioral outcomes are taken into account to measure the consequences of locked at the job. In Chapter 5, which was qualitative in nature, both work attitude and behavioral and health and well-being outcomes are examined.

⇒ *Key issue 3: examining antecedents of locked at the job*

A combination of several circumstances can cause employees to feel locked at the job (Stengård, 2018). However, a broad understanding of all possible causes is still lacking. Based on the conceptual model from Chapter 2 and the PE-Fit theory (Edwards, 2008), the control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and the self-regulation theory (Baumeister, Schmeichel & Vohs, 2007) I suggest that experiencing locked at the job consists of the two dimensions; 1) job dissatisfaction and 2) the perception of limited job opportunities. These two dimensions are caused by multiple misfits that lead to experiencing locked at the job. These misfits consist of both individual and work environment factors that together are causing a misfit. It takes at least one misfit to cause someone to experience job dissatisfaction. For example, when the employee has certain expectations about how they should be challenged and are not sufficiently challenged by the work environment. Another misfit then causes the perception that there are limited job opportunities. Thus, the individual may have not been using certain skills which then become obsolete, and as a result, the employee may have a

false perception of not having promising alternatives. However, limited studies focus on why employees feel locked at the job, except for a few studies that examine the role of individual factors, such as demographics (Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Furåker, Nergaard & Saloniemi, 2014; Huyse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013; Stengård, 2018), and work environmental factors, such as support (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010) and physical and mental demands of the job (Stengård, 2018).

To address this third key issue I performed a two-wave quantitative study on the demographic factors; age, educational level and tenure. This by focussing on vulnerable groups within organizations and building on previous literature (Benjamin *et al.*, 2008; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Huyse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013), which is reported in Chapter 4. In addition, I addressed this issue in a qualitative study (Chapter 5) by examining the process of locked at the job in which the first phase represents *'becoming locked at the job'*. This study provided insights into factors causing the two dimensions of locked at the job, job dissatisfaction and perceived limited job opportunities.

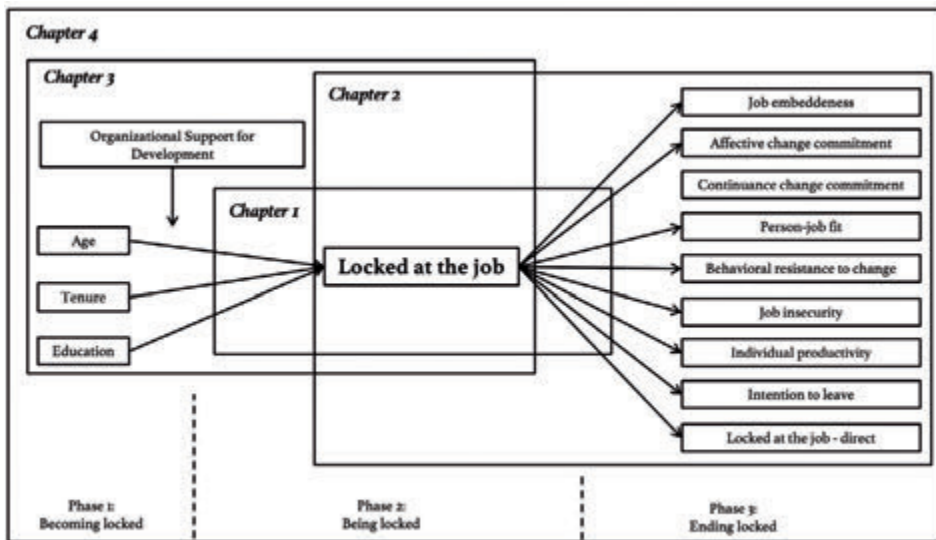
⇒ *Key issue 4: examining the process of locked at the job*

To date, a comprehensive understanding of underlying reasons why and how individuals become locked, are locked at the job and end their locked at the job situation is lacking. There is little understanding of the process and stages employees go through when they feel locked at the job. In addition, it is not clear why employees stay in such a situation. Further, based on Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) I presume that when an individual feels locked at the job certain coping mechanisms are needed. From previous studies it is known that colleagues and the direct supervisor play an important role to be able to cope with the situation (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999). However, we know relatively little about the role of possible other actors and which other coping mechanisms are used to deal with the negative

situation. Finally, no study has focused on how a locked at the job situation can be ended and hence we lack a proper understanding of this phase.

To address this fourth key issue, I performed a qualitative study (Chapter 5) to provide insights into the process of employees experiencing locked at the job. I have examined how such a situation arises, how employees experience such a situation in terms of feelings and thoughts, and how such a situation ends. This process is outlined both from a retrospective point of view and a current perspective of employees who were experiencing a locked at the job situation. Figure 1.2 shows an overview of how these key issues are addressed in the different chapters of this dissertation.

Figure 1.2 *Research model of this dissertation*



1.5 Dissertation outline

To explore the concept of locked at the job, in Chapter 2, I report a literature review on nine related constructs to locked at the job and I outline a conceptual model of locked at the job. I reviewed the literature on the nine related constructs job lock, locked-in, turnover, continuance commitment, involuntary non-mobility, career entrenchment, job embeddedness in adverse work environments, inability to leave and boundaryless and protean careers. In the second part of this chapter a conceptual framework is proposed to further examine locked at the job.

In Chapter 3, the aim of the study was to construct and validate a scale to measure locked at the job. I collected two samples, before and after an organizational change took place at a custodian bank. The first sample involved 271 employees and the second sample involved 101 employees. Convergent validity was measured by testing relationships with affective- and continuance change commitment, job embeddedness and person-job fit. Criterion validity was measured in relation to behavioral resistance to change, job insecurity and supervisor-rated individual productivity. Finally, discriminant validity was examined in relation to intention to leave.

In Chapter 4, I present the results of a two-wave study. The aim was to identify vulnerable employees that remain in an undesired job situation and ultimately end up experiencing locked at the job and how to combat this. Having looked primarily at the consequences in Chapter 3, it was of great importance for the following study to understand what demographic factors might cause a person to feel locked at the job. The demographic factors age, educational level and tenure were studied in relation to locked at the job and in addition I studied the moderating role of organizational support for development. I tested the hypotheses with a two-wave survey study among 131 employees at a custodian bank, with the use of a multiple regression analyses.

- Chapter 1

In Chapter 5, I give an overview of the whole process of individuals who feel locked at the job from a qualitative perspective. I conducted 30 interviews with individuals, both from the public and private sector, who had experienced being locked at the job in the past or currently were experiencing this. Apart from getting an understanding of the full process that individuals experience when being locked at the job, I also examined coping mechanisms used to handle the situation to gain more insights on this specific element.

In Chapter 6, I share the main conclusions of the four key issues addressed in this dissertation. Further, I elaborate and discuss the results of the Chapters 2 – 5. In addition, I describe the practical implications and suggest future research directions on the concept of locked at the job. Table 1.1 shows an overview of the four main chapters and how the key issues are related to the chapters.

Table 1.1 *Overview of the four main chapters*

| Chapter | Goal and contribution | Study design | Sample | Key issues |
|--|--|--|--|-------------|
| 2. Building on job immobility concepts: a conceptual model on locked at the job | Reviewing existing related constructs on job immobility and identifying a conceptual model on locked at the job | Literature review and Conceptual study | 9 related constructs | 1 |
| 3. Introducing and validating the locked at the job scale | Developing and validating a locked at the job scale and examining the outcomes of locked at the job | Validation study | Sample 1: N = 271, May 2017 Sample 2: N = 101, Sept. 2018 | 1 & 2 |
| 4. Demographic factors explaining locked at the job, moderated by organizational support for development | Identifying demographic factors that influence locked at the job and examining the moderating role of support for development needed from the organization | Two-wave survey study | N = 131 T1 = May 2017 T2 = Sept. 2018 | 1 & 3 |
| 5. Locked at the job: A qualitative study on its process | Exploring the process of individuals going through a locked at the job situation | Qualitative study | N = 30 | 1, 2, 3 & 4 |



Chapter 2

Building on job immobility concepts: a conceptual model on locked at the job

The study in this chapter is currently under review as: Feenstra-Verschure, M.T., Kooij, T.A.M., Freese, C., Van der Velde E.G., Lysova, E.I. Building on job immobility concepts: a conceptual model and future research agenda on locked at the job

Photo | Badhuis square, Zandvoort

Abstract

Staying in an unsatisfying job and perceiving limited opportunities to move and apply for another job has many detrimental effects. The existing literature on this situation of job immobility in which the employee is experiencing stuckness in the job is scattered across research domains, limited in scope, and existing constructs are not clearly defined or operationalized. In this conceptual paper we propose the construct 'locked at the job', by reviewing and building on the job immobility literature and the theory of control and self-regulation. We define this concept that consists of two dimensions as feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities. We propose a conceptual model of antecedents and consequences of locked at the job, based on the person-environment fit theory. Finally, we provide a future research agenda.

Keywords: locked at the job, locked-in, job immobility, job-lock, turnover

2.1 Introduction

Over the last decades a wide variety of studies has focused on the positive side of job mobility and employee turnover (e.g., Blau, 1989; Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Hom *et al.*, 2012; Kondratuka, Hausdorf, Korabika & Rosin, 2004; Porter & Steers, 1973; Van der Heijden, Peeters, Le Blanc & Van Breukelen, 2018). In the turnover literature (e.g., Hom *et al.*, 2012) these more positive concepts are referred to as enthusiastic leavers and enthusiastic stayers. However, little research has focused on the more negative side, that is employees who are non-mobile, experience a person-job misfit (Edwards, 2008; Hom *et al.*, 2012) and stay in their undesired work situations (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Stengård *et al.*, 2016), who can be typified as reluctant stayers (Hom *et al.*, 2012).

These employees are 'locked at the job' with potentially severe negative consequences at the individual, organizational, and societal level. For the employee experiencing locked at the job, health issues such as headaches, fatigue, stress and depressive symptoms can arise (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016). At the workplace, locked at the job is related to fewer opportunities in terms of development and learning, and to lower perceived support from supervisors and colleagues (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999), which in turn is related to decreased commitment and performance (Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Shore & Wayne, 1993). This will negatively affect the organization. Despite these negative consequences and the fact that a considerable number of employees feel locked at the job (Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Muhonen, 2010), research on this phenomenon is scattered across different research domains, limited in scope, and the concept has not been clearly defined or operationalized.

Therefore, building on research on job immobility concepts, we introduce the concept of 'locked at the job', that consists of two dimensions, feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities. Inactivity refers to the individual not taking steps to terminate the locked situation. We assume that individuals

cannot achieve their desired situation, because they are not able to take control over their current situation, and we use the theory of control (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and the self-regulation theory (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007) to explore the phenomenon of becoming and staying locked at the job.

Although several job immobility constructs are related to locked at the job, for example locked-in (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), job-lock (Fisher *et al.*, 2016) and reluctant stayers (Hom *et al.*, 2012), there are a number of issues with this literature. First, hardly any of these constructs captures both dimensions of locked at the job, feeling dissatisfied in the job and experiencing limited job opportunities in their conceptualization and operationalization. As a result, these constructs inadequately measure locked at the job because only one dimension was measured. For instance, dissatisfied stayers (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982) represent the dimension feeling dissatisfied, but not the dimension perceived limited job opportunities. Second, the existing literature on locked at the job lacks agreement on the concept, which results in inconsistencies and contradictions in conceptualizations and operationalizations (Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Fisher *et al.*, 2016). For example, Furåker *et al.* (2014) conceptualized locked-in as a “considerable difficulty in finding an equally good job with some other employer” (p.435). In contrast, Fahlén *et al.* (2009) conceptualized locked-in as “stay in undesired work situations related to occupation or place of work or both of these conditions” (p.192). Finally, research on the related constructs has taken place across different disciplines such as psychology (Allen *et al.*, 2016; Stengård *et al.*, 2016), environmental health (Fahlén *et al.*, 2009; Huyse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013) and economics (Madrian, 1994), which has resulted in diverse research foci. For example, scholars within the environmental health discipline examine well-being outcomes of experiencing locked at the job, whereas studies within psychology focus on personality traits as antecedents of locked at the job (Huyse-Gaytandjieva Groot & Pavlova 2012; 2013; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson & Leineweber, 2017). In this article, we build on the

existing studies of different disciplines and integrate the insights into an overarching model specifying antecedents and consequences of locked at the job.

We contribute to the literature on job immobility in three ways. First, by introducing and conceptualizing the construct locked at the job which builds on the conceptualizations of related constructs. We provide additional conceptual clarity about locked at the job which is needed as the current related constructs have diverse theoretical conceptualizations and operationalizations. We also build on the theoretical reasoning of Stengård *et al.* (2016) who has introduced the theory of control (Carver & Scheier, 1982), self-regulation (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007) and the person-environment (PE) fit theory (Edwards, 2008), this is needed to bring the literature further and to have a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the concept locked at the job. Second, we build on this literature by introducing a conceptual model outlining the antecedents and consequences of locked at the job based on previous studies on the related constructs and the PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008). This builds on previous work which has examined the antecedents and consequences of locked at the job related constructs (e.g. Stengård, 2018). Finally, we contribute to this literature by providing a future research agenda on locked at the job that will help advance this literature.

2.2 Locked at the job

Based on an extensive literature review on nine related constructs, we introduce the construct locked at the job, an experience that the individual goes through in a given period in their work situation. As defined here, locked at the job includes two dimensions. The first dimension is feeling *dissatisfied* in the current job and the second dimension is inactivity due to perceived *limited job opportunities*. As such, an employee who is locked at the job experiences a misfit, with the current job, and, with potential alternative jobs. The current job is insufficiently satisfying, while at the same time altering the job or changing jobs seems impossible. In contrast to some locked-in conceptualizations (Aronsson, Dallner, &

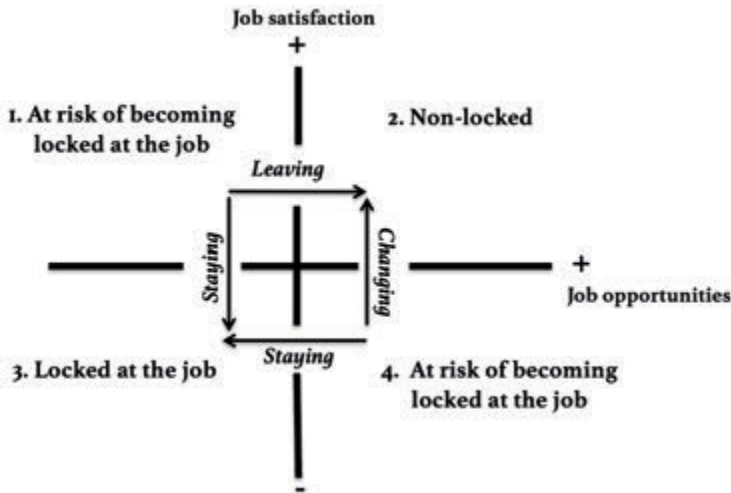
Gustafsson, 2000; Fahlén *et al.*, 2009; Muhonen 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2017), the individual experiences a locked at the *job* state. The organization where the job is performed may be causing the dissatisfying feeling but it is the *job* that leads to limited job opportunities at other organizations, one thus finds oneself locked at the *job*. In addition, this state the individual is experiencing involves a specific job where the individual develops a locked experience. Therefore, when an individual is occupied with multiple jobs, one cannot feel locked at one's career, as with the term career inaction (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020).

For the first dimension, feeling dissatisfaction in the current job, we use the definition of job satisfaction defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p.1304). In contrast to the general use of a positive state of job satisfaction, the current focus is on the reversed: the negative state of dissatisfaction. A possible consequence of this dissatisfaction in the job is the so called resigned job satisfaction (Kovacs, *et al.*, 2018; Bruggemann, 1974) where individuals lower their individual aspirations to meet the current negative aspects of the job, keeping them in these dissatisfying circumstances. Contrary to the dimension used by Stengård *et al.* (2016), who focus on the workplace which “is not their preferred one for the future” (p. 154) we focus on the dissatisfaction about the *current* job of the individual. Being dissatisfied in the current job can have various psychological and behavioral outcomes (Henne & Locke, 1985). Farrell (1983) distinguishes four types of responses that occur when employees are dissatisfied in the current job: exit, voice, loyalty and neglect. Employees either react by leaving the dissatisfying work environment (exit), or by reaching out to higher authorities (voice) (Hirschman, in Farrell, 1983). Leaving and voice can be described as an active response in which the employee takes action to change the dissatisfying situation. The other two responses are passive responses; the employees respond with loyalty if they believe that in time the situation causing the job dissatisfaction will improve, or they respond by neglecting the dissatisfying elements of the work environment by being inattentive and remaining in

the current job. These passive responses, loyalty and neglect, are similar to the inactive situation one is experiencing when being locked at the job.

The second dimension of being locked at the job is inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities. An employee who is experiencing locked at the job lacks perceived ease of movement and is not able to identify other job opportunities (Long & Perumal, 2014). The individual does not perceive other opportunities to be realistic opportunities. By looking at this particular dimension, more depth can be added to why the individual is inactive in his or her choice. It provides a certain direction of why the individual is not altering their situation. Griffeth *et al.* (2005) define perceived ease of movement as “a function of the number of extraorganizational alternatives perceived, which is, in turn, a function of the level of business activity, number of organizations visible, and personal characteristics of participants” (March & Simon, 1958; p. 335). These perceived alternatives need to be comparable (or better) in terms of employment conditions (Stengård *et al.*, 2017) and in line with the employee’s self-set career plans, both inside or outside the current organization (Huyghebaert, Gillet, Audusseau, Fouquereau, 2019). As career plans are not fixed and can change over time, perceived job opportunities can also alter (Kraimer *et al.*, 2011). However, employees who are locked at the job perceive limited job opportunities, and are thus in a freeze from changing their career plans (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Because these employees do not take on new career initiatives, they experience a stagnation in their career (Van de Water & Weggeman, 2017). Combining the two dimensions, employees can be in one of four situations.

Figure 2.1 Locked at the job scenarios, from an employee point of view



As shown in Figure 2.1, employees who feel dissatisfied in the current job and perceive limited job opportunities feel locked at the job (3). In the opposite quadrant employees feel non-locked (2), because they experience high levels of both *dimensions*, feeling satisfied in the current job and perceived many job opportunities. Employees in this quadrant represent the enthusiastic stayers who “remain because they want to stay and feel no external pressure to stay or leave” (Hom *et al.*, 2012, p. 835). The enthusiastic stayers will stay for as long as they feel embedded and engaged or do not wish to change the situation. The two quadrants 1 and 4 represent at risk of becoming locked at the job. Within these two quadrants, with one positive and one negative dimension, the employee either experiences low levels of job opportunities and high levels of job satisfaction (1) or high levels of job opportunities and low levels of job satisfaction (4). These employees are at risk of becoming locked at the job, when they do not take action to change their situation. Furthermore, these employees can both consciously or unconsciously become locked at the job (Baumeister & Bargh, 2014). They will often stay in this situation, as some forces keep them in these partially misfitting situation. Some of the employees in quadrant 1, for example, will not mind their lack of opportunities because they are pleased with the salary they currently earn (Ng &

Feldman, 2007). On the other hand, some of the employees in quadrant 4 might use their current dissatisfying position in a temporary job to eventually grow to another position (De Jong, De Cuyper, De Witte, Silla, & Bernhard-Oettel, 2009).

Employees can move to another quadrant by either I) *staying* resulting potentially in becoming locked at the job, II) *changing* one's mindset or the job to improve the levels of job satisfaction, for instance by crafting their job (Rudolph, Katz, Lavigne & Zacher, 2017) or following a training (Schmidt, 2007) or by III) *leaving* the undesired situation. In this paper, the focus is on the first quadrant, locked at the job.

A characteristic of being locked at the job is that employees are passive and do not take control of their actions. To further understand the concept of locked at the job, we therefore build on the reasoning of Aronsson (1989), Aronsson and Göransson (1999), Stengård *et al.* (2018) and use the theory of control (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Based on the theory of control, it is assumed that individuals will always relate their current situation to their desired situation. In order to achieve this desired situation, the individual will continuously self-regulate by adjusting their attitude and behavior to avoid possible obstructions in achieving the desired situation. However, when (altering) one's behavior does not help to achieve the desired situation, it is likely that this desired situation will be adjusted or even relinquished (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Employees who feel locked at the job are not able to control their own behavior and perceptions and are thus incapable of changing their current and desired situation. As a result, they will remain in their undesired situation.

Similar to the theory of control (Carver & Scheier, 1982), the well-established theory of self-regulation (Baumeister, & Heatherton, 1996; Baumeister *et al.*, 2007; Carver & Scheier, 2012; Duru, Duru, & Balkis, 2014) argues that when employees are capable of self-regulating their behavior, they are able to alter their own inner perceptions and responses (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007). Employees do not all of a sudden feel locked at the job; in many cases this process

will take place gradually (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) making it less easy to adjust this mindset, once someone has ended up being locked at the job (Gollwitzer, 2012). When employees feel locked at the job, they are unable to self-regulate and take charge of their own career and hence fail to take action to improve their satisfaction or look for alternative jobs.

Finally, since locked at the job is characterized by inactivity we use the transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997), to better understand this inactivity. According to the transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) individuals go through six stages of behavioral change. In general, an employee who feels locked at the job, only reaches the first three stages of this behavioral change cycle. Employees will first experience the stage of ‘precontemplation’; not feeling ready to change. In this stage, employees do not have the intention to take action and change their undesired work situation. The second stage ‘contemplation’ is only achieved by employees who recognize that they need to change either their dissatisfaction or the limited job opportunities. It is assumed that a smaller group will reach the third “preparation” stage in which the employee is ready to change and intends to take action. Employees who stay in the third stage fail to self-regulate by intending to alter their situation, but failing to take action (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Due to this failure to self-regulate, locked at the job employees will not reach the next and fourth stage ‘action’, in which the employee takes specific actions to make adjustments in the situation to alter their satisfaction level or create alternative opportunities. Verbruggen and De Vos (2020) define this state of being inactive in one’s career as “the failure to act sufficiently over some period of time on a desired change in one’s career” (p.2). Employees who are career inactive will experience a lack of accomplishment in adjusting the work situation, causing locked at the job (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020).

2.3 Related constructs to locked at the job

In conceptualizing this concept of locked at the job, we build on nine related job immobility constructs. Here, we only used constructs that meet the following criteria; 1) they include one or both dimensions “job dissatisfaction” and “limited job opportunities” of locked at the job, thus leaving out, career inaction (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020), job push (Barkowski, 2015) and psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989); 2) the related constructs incorporate a term in their definition that reflects one’s job immobility, such as the term ‘staying’, ‘remaining’ or ‘unable to exit’; and 3) only related constructs that were either discussed conceptually and/or studied empirically are used. By an intensive literature review, this leads us to the nine related constructs displayed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Summary of Related constructs to Locked at the job

| Nr. | Construct | Sub-construct | Definition |
|-----|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Locked-in | | “Being in a <u>non-preferred</u> workplace while at the same time perceiving low employability” (Stengård <i>et al.</i> , 2016, p. 152) |
| 2 | Job lock | | “Being <u>dissatisfied with the job</u> but remaining in the same job” (Huyse-Gaytandjieva <i>et al.</i> (2013, p. 2). |
| 3 | Job Embeddedness in an adverse work environment | | “Feeling <u>stuck</u> , yet unable to exit a negative situation” (Allen <i>et al.</i> , 2016, p. 1670) |
| 4 | Involuntary non-mobility | | “Dissatisfaction with one’s <u>current job</u> , particularly in combination with perceiving that <u>other job opportunities are lacking</u> .” (Stengård <i>et al.</i> , 2016, p. 153). |
| 5 | Continuance commitment | | “Feeling stuck’ and <u>staying</u> because it is too costly to leave” (Eslami & Gharakhani, 2012, p. 85). |
| 6 | Career entrenchment | | “The magnitude and/or number of investments individuals make and a perceived lack of alternatives” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 4). “ <u>Immobility</u> resulting from substantial economic and psychological investments in a career that make change difficult (Carson <i>et al.</i> , 1996, p. 274) |
| 7 | Turnover | Reluctant stayers Trapped stayers | “Feel they cannot <u>leave</u> (although they would prefer to do so)” (Hom <i>et al.</i> , 2012, p. 835) “Foregoing extrinsic forces <u>keep employees from leaving</u> a job lacking affective, constituent, or calculative forces” (Hom <i>et al.</i> , 2012, p. 842). |
| | | Contractual stayers | “Whose employment contract <u>keeps them in misfitting jobs</u> ” (Hom <i>et al.</i> , 2012, p. 842). |

| | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| | Dissatisfied stayers | “Employees who are <u>dissatisfied with their job</u> but who, for a number of possible reasons, find it <u>impossible to leave</u> ” (Mowday <i>et al.</i> , 1982, p. 180). |
| | Detached stayers | “These individuals exhibit <u>no particularly strong reasons to stay</u> , but appear to be making no effort to leave. (Woo & Allen, 2014, p. 290).” |
| 8 | Inability to leave | “The <u>absence of actual opportunities</u> to withdraw from a situation by changing the location of one’s work or residence” (Martin & Schermerhorn, 1983, p. 655). |
| 9 | Boundaryless and protean careers | Boundaryless careers: “a high physical and/or psychological mobility” (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006, p. 22) Protean careers “a developmental progression and self-fulfillment” (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 4). |

Note. The underlined parts of the definitions listed above were taken into consideration in terms of conceptualizing locked at the job

Locked-in

Locked-in, studied in the discipline of psychology and vocational behavior, has many different conceptualizations and operationalizations as shown in Table 2.2. Stengård *et al.*, (2016) used two dimensions and defined locked-in as “being in a non-preferred or undesired work situation and perceiving low employability” (p. 152). In terms of conceptualizations, Table 2.2 also shows that not all researchers include two dimensions in their conceptualization of locked-in (Aronsson, & Göransson, 1999; Furåker *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the concept of locked-in was conceptualized in several ways, since researchers made a distinction between being locked-in their occupation and locked-in their workplace, but also double locked-in, being locked-in both the workplace and the occupation was measured (Aronsson, Dallner, & Gustafsson, 2000; Bernhard-Oettel, *et al.*, 2018; Fahlén *et al.*, 2009; Muhonen 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2017), making the conceptualization of locked-in quite confusing and inconsistent.

In terms of operationalizations, Table 2.2 shows that locked-in was measured in different ways, with scales using a single item (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Furåker *et al.*, 2014) or multiple items (Muhonen, 2010; Fahlén *et al.*, 2009; Stengård *et al.*, 2016; 2017). Stengård *et al.* (2016) used existing items to measure locked-in. In other words, the definition was not the basis of their measurement, which hinders construct validity (Hinkin, 1995). Fahlén *et al.* (2009) did design four new items (see Table 2.2) to measure experiencing locked at the job, capturing both dimensions of locked at the job, however, without carrying out a construct validation and using a deviating definition by Aronsson *et al.* (2000). Thus, their operationalization is not in line with their definition. In conclusion, only the two-dimensional conceptualization by Stengård *et al.* (2016) and the operationalization of Fahlén *et al.* (2009), including both dissatisfaction and limited job opportunities, are useful in building the construct of locked at the job.

Table 2.2 Conceptualization and operationalization: Locked-in constructs

| Study | Definition | Measure |
|---|---|---|
| Aronsson, & Göransson (1999) | “Remain in their permanent jobs, and thereby with tasks and in occupations they do not regard as desirable.” (p. 152) | 1. ‘Is the company/workplace where you work today the place you wish to work at in the future?’ |
| Fahlén, Goine, Edlund, Arrelov, Knutsson & Peter (2009) | “Stay in undesired work situations related to occupation or place of work or both of these conditions” (From Aronsson <i>et al.</i> , 2000) (p. 192) | 1. ‘How do you like your occupation?’ 2. ‘How are your opportunities to find employment in another occupation?’ 3. ‘How do you like your present place of work?’ 4. ‘How are your opportunities to change your place of work?’ |
| Furåker, Nergaard, & Saloniemi (2014) | “Considerable difficulty in finding an equally good job with some other employer” (p. 435) | 1. ‘In general, what do you think of your chances at present of finding another job which is equal to or better than your current job?’ |
| Muhonen (2010) | “Employees who have tenure, but who are not in their preferred occupation and/or workplace” (p. 200) Double locked-in: “Employees who feel that they are neither in their preferred occupation nor preferred workplace” (p. 200) | 1. ‘Is your current workplace the one you would prefer in the future?’ 2. ‘Is your current occupation the one you would prefer in the future?’ For those participants who were not in their preferred occupation: 3. ‘Do you know which occupation you would prefer?’ 4. ‘Do you have the education required for that occupation?’ 5. Are you taking actions in order to attain your preferred |

| | |
|---|--|
| occupation? | |
| 6. 'Would you rather have temporary employment in the preferred occupation over permanent employment in a non-preferred occupation? | |
| Stengård, Bernhard-Oettel, "Being in a non-preferred workplace while at the same time perceiving low employability" (p.152) | |
| Berntson, Leineweber & Aronsson (2016) | 1. 'Is the company/workplace where you work today the place you wish to work at in the future?' 2. 'How easy would it be for you to get another, similar job without having to change residence?' |

Job lock

The construct of job lock is mainly studied in the disciplines of industrial and labor relations and economics. Job lock focuses on a specific cause of experiencing locked at the job, namely “reluctance to change jobs for fear of losing employer-sponsored health insurance” (Bailey & Chorniy, 2016, p.173). By being eligible to this kind of health insurance, it could be harder for employees to switch jobs due to a possible loss of health coverage (Kapur, 1998). Others define it as “being dissatisfied with the job, but remaining in the same job” (Huyse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013, p. 2), focussing only on the dimension of feeling dissatisfied in the current job. In contrast to the other related constructs, job lock is mainly measured in an objective way (Huyse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013; Stroupe, Kinney, & Kniesner, 2001). Although objective measures have some benefits (Muckler & Seven, 1992), they do not measure perception, which is needed to capture the experience of being locked at the job. Therefore, we did not build on job lock to develop the construct locked at the job.

Job embeddedness in an adverse work environment

The third related construct is job embeddedness ‘in an adverse work environment’ by Allen *et al.* (2016). Although the well-established construct of ‘job embeddedness’ (e.g., Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski & Erez, 2001), focusses on the forces to stay, Allen *et al.* (2016) tested the negative outcomes when employees feel embedded, but are in an adverse work environment. Their results showed that it was unlikely for embedded employees to resign and change their adverse workplace. They define this “dark side” of job embeddedness as “feeling ‘stuck’, yet unable to exit a negative situation” (Allen *et al.*, 2016, p. 1670). This definition includes both job dissatisfaction and difficulty of leaving the current situation. However, this construct was not further empirically studied. Insights relevant for the conceptualization of locked at the job are included in our conceptual model.

Involuntary non-mobility

Many studies on mobility measure job mobility as a positive construct of being able to change jobs (Topel & Ward, 1992). However, when reversing the term job mobility to job non-mobility (Liljegren & Ekberg, 2009), immobility (Huyse-Gaytanjieva *et al.*, 2012; Huyse-Gaytanjieva *et al.*, 2013) or ‘involuntary non-mobility’ (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), a considerably smaller number of studies have been carried out (Huyse-Gaytanjieva *et al.*, 2013; Stengård *et al.*, 2016). Involuntary non-mobility is defined as “dissatisfaction with one’s current job, particularly in combination with perceiving that other job opportunities are lacking” (Stengård *et al.*, 2016, p. 153). This definition is very similar to the locked at the job definition, as it both defines the dissatisfaction in the current job and the perceived limited job opportunities. However this related construct was not further operationalized and can therefore only be used in the conceptualization of locked at the job.

Continuance commitment

Allen and Meyer (1990) introduced continuance commitment as part of the overarching construct organizational commitment which is developed based on two factors “the magnitude and/or number of investments (or side-bets) individuals make and a perceived lack of alternatives” (p. 4). Further Eslami and Gharakhani (2012) use the definition “feeling stuck and staying because it is too costly to leave” (p. 85). In addition, Taing, Granger, Groff, Jackson and Johnson (2011) introduce a new scale for continuance commitment, based on both economic exchange and few job opportunities. However, these definitions or operationalization do not specify whether the employee feels dissatisfied in the current job. In addition, perceived high costs to leave is not necessarily the same as perceived limited job opportunities, as there are more possible reasons for perceived limited job opportunities. Therefore, we will not use continuance commitment to conceptualize locked at the job. However, for the operationalization of locked at the job some items might be taken into

consideration, as one of the two factors of continuance commitment is based on the perceived lack of alternatives (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Career entrenchment

Career entrenchment, which has gained a lot of attention lately (Zacher, Ambiel, & Noronha, 2015) is defined as the “immobility resulting from substantial economic and psychological investments in a career that makes change difficult” (Carson *et al.*, 1996, p. 274). Career entrenchment is composed of two dimensions (1) accumulated costs and (2) limited alternatives (Blau, 2001). Many of the articles on this construct are focused on construct validation. Although limited alternatives is similar to experiencing limited job opportunities, the accumulated costs are different from perceived job dissatisfaction. In addition, the two dimensions of career entrenchment are measured separately and are not combined into one variable making it difficult to draw conclusions on career entrenchment as a construct. However, the dimension limited alternatives is useful for the operationalization of locked at the job.

Turnover – Stayers

Turnover can be defined as “why employees quit or stay in employing institutions” (Hom *et al.*, 2012, P 831). Hom *et al.* (2012) conceptualized two types of stayers: 1) enthusiastic stayers and 2) reluctant stayers. Reluctant stayers are defined as stayers who “feel they cannot leave (although they would prefer to do so)” (Hom *et al.*, 2012, p 835). Reluctant stayers can be categorized into trapped stayers, for whom “foregoing extrinsic forces keep employees from leaving a job lacking affective, constituent, or calculative forces” (Hom *et al.*, 2012, p. 842) and contractual stayers “whose employment contract keeps them in misfitting jobs” (p. 842). In both cases the individuals perceive little control over the current situation. In addition, Woo and Allen (2014) proposed ‘detached’ stayers, described as “individuals who exhibit no

particularly strong reasons to stay, but appear to be making no effort to leave” (p. 690). They suggested that detached stayers are deviant to the concept of reluctant stayers by Hom’s *et al.* (2012), as detached stayers have various possibilities for experiencing this situation. Unfortunately, these definitions do not specify whether employees perceive limited job opportunities. Sheridan, Crossley, Vogel, Mitchell and Bennett (2019) add that their concept has not been further elaborated. As emphasized by Hom *et al.* (2012) there is a need for empirical research on this phenomenon. Another construct that is closely related is ‘dissatisfied stayers’ (Mowday *et al.*, 1982), defined as “employees who are dissatisfied with their job but who, for a number of possible reasons, find it impossible to leave” (Mowday *et al.*, 1982, p. 180). Within this definition the dimension dissatisfaction was included. However, these five types of stayers (also shown in Table 2.1) were not further operationalized and therefore only used in the conceptualization of locked at the job.

Inability to leave

An early construct originating from the stress-health research is the inability to leave, studied by Martin and Schermerhorn (1983). The inability to leave is defined as “the absence of actual opportunities to withdraw from a situation by changing the location of one’s work or residence” (Martin & Schermerhorn, 1983, p. 655). In a later study Martin (1984) redefined the inability to leave as “a situation in which the employee had little behavioral discretion or choice about leaving his or her job.” (p. 974). As the term indicates, this is a construct about the inability of leaving a job situation. This construct is seen as a source of job stress by Martin (1984) and was found to be associated with acute and chronic mental health problems. Apart from this study, the construct of inability to leave has however not been further studied. In addition, the dissatisfaction dimension was not mentioned in the conceptualization or operationalization of inability to leave. Nevertheless, as the first

definition by Martin and Schermerborn (1983) mentioned the absence of opportunities this construct was taken into consideration for the further development of locked at the job.

Boundaryless and protean career

A construct that approaches the opposite of locked at the job is the boundaryless and protean careers that focusses on the career decisions individuals take (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). The boundaryless career is characterized as “a high physical and/or psychological mobility” (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006, p. 22) and the protean career is characterized as “a developmental progression and self-fulfillment” (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 4). Briscoe, Hall and Frautschy DeMuth (2006) developed a scale based on both protean career that consists of self-directed (1) and values driven (2) items and boundaryless career that consists of boundaryless mindset (3) and mobility preference (4). Based on possible combinations of both high and low boundaryless and protean career a career profile is composed of individuals who score low on all four dimensions, called ‘trapped’ or ‘lost’ individuals. It is assumed that these individuals lack direction and lack a perspective on possible options, which restricts them to have control over their situation (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). These individuals are reactive (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999) as they are unable to see beyond their boundaries (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). This construct provides many insights about the lack of opportunity experienced and its theoretical underpinnings. However, this construct lacks the dimension that causes job dissatisfaction.

Conclusion related constructs to locked at the job

Although the above related constructs are similar to locked at the job, they differ from locked at the job in a number of ways. The nine related constructs contain one or two of the dimensions of locked at the job. The constructs job lock, contractual stayers and dissatisfied stayers contain only the dimension dissatisfaction in the current job in their

conceptualization. On the other hand, job embeddedness in an adverse work environment, continuance commitment, career entrenchment, reluctant stayers, trapped stayers, inability to leave and boundaryless and protean careers only include perceived limited job opportunities to find other suitable work in their conceptualization. Only two related constructs contain both dimensions; locked-in and involuntary non-mobility. However, involuntary non-mobility was only discussed conceptually and not further empirically researched. The construct of locked-in was discussed conceptually and empirically researched and is therefore most suitable to use to conceptualize and operationalize locked at the job.

Based on the above, we build on the two-dimensional approach of locked-in (Stengård *et al.*, 2016). In addition, we build on the definition of involuntary non-mobility by Stengård *et al.* (2016; see Table 2.2), using both dissatisfaction and the lack of job opportunities.

2.4 Conceptual framework of locked at the job

Based on a literature review of the nine related constructs and the theories of control (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and self-regulation (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996), we propose a conceptual model of experiencing locked at the job as illustrated in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Conceptual model of locked at the job



Proposed antecedents of locked at the job

An individual's experience of being locked at the job is often caused by multiple factors, leading to a misfit between one's actual and one's desired work situation. Affected by the failure to self-regulate (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996) these individuals will have problems accomplishing these desires. To propose antecedents of becoming locked at the job, we therefore build on the PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008). PE fit theory emphasizes the importance of an optimal fit between the employee's current needs and abilities and the supplies and demands of their work environment (Edwards, 2008), also referred to as the compatibility of employees with their environment (Stengård *et al.*, 2017).

Process PE misfit

Locked at the job may arise when employees experience a PE-misfit between their (changing) individual factors and (changing) work environmental factors, because a misfit is likely to result in job dissatisfaction and/or perceived limited job opportunities (Wheeler, Buckley, Halbesleben, Brouer & Ferris, 2005; Wheeler, Gallagher, Brouer & Sablynski, 2007). The fit literature distinguishes two types of PE fit; needs-supplies fit, which refers to the fit between an individual's needs, values, and preferences and the supplies the environment provides, and demand-abilities fit, which refers to the fit between the demands an environment imposes and the abilities of the individual (Edwards & Shipp, 2007).

Building on the theoretical reasoning on the PE fit theory in relation to locked-in of Stengård (2018), we propose that locked at the job is caused by a minimum of two processes. In the first process, a PE misfit between an individual factor and the work environment causes job dissatisfaction (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). For example, when an employee has high developmental needs (individual factor), which are not fulfilled by the organization (work environmental factor), this employee will experience a misfit and as a result job dissatisfaction. The second process of a misfit between

an individual and the work environment leads to the perception of having limited job opportunities (Jiang, 2017). For example, when employees perceive that their skill level (individual factor) does not correspond to the required skill level of a desired job (work environmental factor), this experienced misfit leads to perceived limited job opportunities.

Individual factors

Relevant individual factors that should be considered according to PE fit theory are values, attitudes, interests, personality traits, knowledge, skills, abilities, preferences, demographic characteristics and goals (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Edwards, 2008; Oh *et al.*, 2014). For example the individual factor age may cause a PE misfit. Research by Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, Kanfer and Dikkers (2011) showed that when individuals get older, their motives will change. When these changing motives are not fulfilled by the work environment, this will induce a PE misfit. In addition, one's educational level can be an important individual factor, triggering a misfit with the work environment (Stengård, 2018; Stengård *et al.*, 2019). A highly educated employee is more likely to have the skill level required for a wider variety of jobs and hence generally has more favorable employment prospects resulting in a proper PE fit (Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Stengård *et al.*, 2019). Thus, we propose the following.

Proposition 1a: Individual factors such as age and educational level may, if not matched with a work environmental factor, either cause job dissatisfaction or the perception of limited job opportunities.

Work environment factors

Relevant work environmental factors that might lead to PE misfit include vocational norms, job demands and job control (Bernhard-Oettel *et al.*, 2018), organizational culture and values, and job characteristics (Oh *et al.*, 2014). For instance, low organizational support for development (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999) can lead to a PE misfit if this means that

employees' work-related growth needs are not fulfilled. In addition, when employees want to develop their skills, but experience low support from one's supervisor or the organization to develop their skills and competences, they might feel stuck in their own development (Muhonen, 2010). Other work environment factors are high physical and mental demands of the job (Stengård, 2018) that exceed individual abilities, thus causing a PE-misfit.

Proposition 1b: work environmental factors such as organizational support for development or high physical and mental job demands may, if not matched with an individual factor, either cause job dissatisfaction or the perception of limited job opportunities.

The role of failure to self-regulate

A PE misfit on itself does not necessarily have to lead to locked at the job. Therefore, we argue that the failure to self-regulate influences this relationship. When employees are not able to properly self-regulate, they are not able to prevent or combat a misfit (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007). The failure of self-regulation is defined by Baumeister and Heatherton (1996) as “problems that arise when one intentionally tries to initiate, alter, or inhibit a specific response or behavior and fails to do so because one does not put in sufficient effort (underregulation) or because one's active efforts are ineffective or counterproductive (misregulation)” (p. 92). In sum, locked at the job originates from two processes of PE misfit between the employee and the work environment combined with failure to self-regulate. Due to this failure to self-regulate, one process of misfit leads to job dissatisfaction and the other process leads to the perception of limited job opportunities, which together form locked at the job.

Various factors can lead to failure to self-regulate. Individuals may lack discipline, be less optimistic, or are not able to control their behaviors, thoughts or emotions as well as their time management (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). In addition, these employees fail to manage power to achieve their goals (Baumeister, & Heatherton, 1996; Baumeister *et al.*,

2007; Duru *et al.*, 2014; Furåker *et al.*, 2014). Baumeister and Heatherton (1996) describe two types of employees who fail to self-regulate, underregulators who lack effort and misregulators who are ineffective. Hence, employees who feel locked at the job either underregulate or misregulate.

Proposition 2: The relationships of individual and work environment factors with locked at the job are moderated by the failure to self-regulate such that a misfit between individual and work environment factors will only lead to locked at the job when individuals fail to self-regulate.

Proposed consequences of becoming locked at the job

When an employee feels locked at the job various consequences may occur. Based on PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008), we argue that locked at the job will influence work attitudes and behavioral outcomes, and health and well-being outcomes. We show empirical evidence of these potential consequences based on the literature review on the nine related constructs and on literature of the PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008).

Work attitude and behavioral outcomes. Locked at the job, caused by a misfit between one's needs and supplies offered by the environment (Edwards, 2008), will have an effect on one's behavior and work attitude towards the job. When individuals do not get what they want from their job, this ultimately will result in less positive attitudes to the job and its environment (Blau, 2001). Individuals will be less likely to achieve their goals and to be in charge of their attitudes and behaviors (Baumeister, & Heatherton, 1996), due to the lack of control over the current situation. Several consequences could emerge from this unfulfilling situation when experiencing a misfit and lacking resources to alter this situation. The lack of job resources may even create risks to well-being and performance (Van Veldhoven *et al.*, 2020). More particularly, when experiencing locked at the job the individual's needs are not fulfilled and therefore negative work attitudes, such as lower levels of career satisfaction (Fisher *et al.*, 2016), less affective commitment, more continuance commitment to the job

(Blau, 2001; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Sharma, 2019), and less job involvement, are experienced (Blau, 2001; Sharma, 2019).

In addition to work attitudes that may be influenced by experiencing locked at the job, locked at the job also influences behaviors. For example, employees who feel locked at the job will show less organizational citizenship behavior (Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Shore & Wayne, 1993) and lower levels of productivity in the job (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). In addition, Furåker *et al.* (2014) typify locked at the job as being the counterpart of job security (i.e. 'granting the continuation of the same job' Gazier, 2007, p. 4). Hence, locked at the job will trigger feelings of job insecurity.

Proposition 3a: Locked at the job will affect work attitudes outcomes such as career satisfaction, affective commitment, continuance commitment and job involvement, as well as behavioral outcomes, such as organizational citizenship behavior, productivity, and job insecurity.

Health and well-being outcomes

Other important outcomes of locked at the job are health and well-being outcomes. A fit between individual needs and work environmental supplies is considered to be the most important predictor of well-being and work-related stress (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). It is expected that when being locked at the job the individual will experience more work-related stress and poorer well-being because the needs of the individual do not match the supplies by the work environment (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Fisher *et al.*, 2016). When an individual does not get what is desired, it can be frustrating for the individual, which may also lead to a depletion of energy (Van der Elst *et al.*, 2012). Hence, when needs are fulfilled, individuals will not only perform their role more effectively, it will also prevent them from being hindered in the job by the possible harmful effects of a stressful work environment (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Feldman & Vogel, 2009).

A misfit may also originate from abilities and demands such that the ongoing load of work is too demanding for the individual and will ultimately lead to health and well-being related issues such as depletion of energy (Edwards & Cooper, 1990; Stengård *et al.*, 2016), emotional exhaustion (Allen *et al.*, 2016) and burnout (Tong, Wang & Peng, 2015), because over time personal resources are depleted. Individuals going through such a situation will often suffer from job stress (Hobfoll, 1989; McGrath, 1970; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Muhonen, 2010) or other types of mental issues in terms of depressive symptoms (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016) and work-family conflict (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). For example, a misfit caused by a lack in abilities compared to requirements of demanding job tasks, may lead to job stress when expectations of the job deviate from available time to do the job.

Empirical research indeed demonstrates that physical effects of locked at the job that are likely to occur are emotional exhaustion and decreases of sleep quality/quantity (Allen *et al.*, 2016; Muhonen, 2010), headaches and fatigue (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999). Eventually locked at the job may also lead to long-term sick leave (Fahlén, *et al.*, 2009).

Proposition 3b: Locked at the job will affect health and well-being outcomes such as energy depletion, emotional exhaustion, burnout, job stress, depressive symptoms, and work-family conflict.

2.5 Discussion

With this paper, we build on existing concepts on job immobility by proposing the concept of locked at the job that consists of two dimensions. Locked at the job is defined as: “feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities”. In our literature review, limited studies were found that conceptualize and operationalize the two dimensions feeling dissatisfied and perceived limited job opportunities. However, no study appointed the *current* state and *inactivity* part when experiencing locked at the job which underlines the need to clearly define and operationalize locked at the job. Building

on the theory of control (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and the associated theory of self-regulation (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996), PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008) and empirical studies on the nine related constructs, we propose a conceptual model of antecedents and consequences. More particularly, building on PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008), we identify individual and work environmental factors as the antecedents, causing locked at the job. These factors are proposed to trigger two processes: a first process of PE misfit causing the first dimension of job dissatisfaction and a second process of PE misfit leading to a perception of limited job opportunities.

Furthermore, building on control and self-regulation theory, we propose that the effects of these antecedents are moderated by failure to self-regulate. Only when employees under- or mis regulate will a misfit lead to the experience of locked at the job. Finally, building on PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008), we propose that the negative consequences of locked at the job involve work attitudes and behavioral outcomes and health and well-being outcomes. With these insights on the conceptualization of locked at the job, underlying theories and proposed antecedents and consequences, this conceptual paper enables researchers to further examine this important research area of job immobility.

Future research agenda

Future research on the construct of experiencing locked at the job should focus on four important directions since existing available evidence comes from research on different related constructs of locked at the job. First, the concept locked at the job needs to be further operationalized. The presented summary of the locked-in construct in Table 2.2 can be used as a starting point for the operationalization of the locked at the job concept and specific items measuring the concept. The majority of the related constructs is tested in a subjective way, using multiple items, however not always containing both dimensions of job dissatisfaction and perceived limited job opportunities. Currently no suitable

operationalization for locked at the job is available, that measures the subjective state of an individual experiencing locked at the job, which is remarkable, given the serious consequences. We propose three criteria to operationalize locked at the job: First, locked at the job represents an experience and a perception that should be operationalized with subjective items. Second, a construct that consists of two dimensions such as locked at the job must be operationalized by multiple items. Third, the items should reflect both dissatisfaction in the current job and perceived limited job opportunities.

The second avenue, should focus on the two scenarios of becoming at risk of locked at the job. We wanted to emphasize in this paper the phenomenon of locked at the job. Nevertheless, we recognize that the proposed scenarios in Figure 1 need to be further conceptualized. The study of Stengard (2018) can be used in this to further conceptualize the at risk of becoming locked at the job scenarios, with high levels of satisfaction and low levels of job opportunities and vice versa. These scenarios are important to be further explored which also needs adequate attention.

A third research avenue, building on the conceptualized construct and operationalization, is to acquire more scientific knowledge on antecedents and consequences of experiencing locked at the job. In our conceptual model (Figure 2.2), suggestions with regard to possible antecedents and consequences of experiencing locked at the job based on the literature review and the underlying theories were made which can be tested. For example, future research can focus on individual factors causing locked at the job. For example, age, educational level but also tenure may influence the level of becoming locked at the job (Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Groot & Verberne, 1997; Huisse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013), and hence should be examined. In addition, future research can also focus on the environmental factors that could cause employees to become locked at the job, such as organizational support, job demands or job characteristics.

With regard to future research questions on the effects of experiencing locked at the job, no studies have yet examined the affective reactions of experiencing locked at the job, such as affective and continuance commitment and job insecurity, or work behaviors, such as individual productivity. It is of particular interest to examine whether employees who feel locked at the job display their feelings towards the organization with the potential of losing their current job, or keep their feelings to themselves to secure their current unfavorable jobs. Another work attitude that has not yet received sufficient attention in the literature on locked at the job is job insecurity. We assume that experiencing locked at the job increases one's job insecurity, due to the perceived limited job opportunities of finding other suitable work. Concerning the health and well-being outcomes affected by locked at the job, future research should acquire a general overview on the relationship between locked at the job and health. This future research should start with the subjective health, one's own assessment of their personal health, in relation to experiencing locked at the job.

A fourth research avenue is gaining more insight in the process of becoming locked at the job, remaining locked at the job including coping mechanisms and escaping a situation of experiencing locked at the job with qualitative research methods. Because locked at the job concerns an employee's perception and situation, qualitative research can increase the knowledge on why employees become locked at the job, which process-steps take place when they experience being locked at the job and how they cope with this situation of experiencing locked at the job. As no qualitative study has yet been conducted, more insights on experiencing locked at the job from a qualitative perspective would provide valuable information, adding to the quantitative research.

Conclusion

In this paper, we conceptualize the concept of locked at the job that consists of two dimensions, feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job

opportunities. Since related job immobility constructs have been studied by researchers from different research areas, using various definitions and techniques, this conceptual paper contributes to the literature in three ways. First, we provide an overview of the existing research on the nine related constructs and use it to clarify and refine the construct of locked at the job. Second, we introduce a theoretically underpinned model outlining antecedents and consequences of locked at the job building on the control, self-regulation and person-environment fit theory. Finally, we developed a research agenda for future research.

Apart from contributing to the scientific literature, this conceptual paper also contributes to practice. Locked at the job is a phenomenon that is often mentioned in practice, but hardly any scientific knowledge is available to guide practitioners dealing with this topic. Why do employees stick around when they are dissatisfied and what keeps them from moving? By advancing research on this phenomenon, practitioners will be provided with potential insights to deal with employees experiencing locked at the job.



Chapter 3

Introducing and validating the locked at the job scale

The study in this chapter will be submitted as: Feenstra-Verschure, M.T., Kooij, T.A.M., Freese, C., Van der Velde E.G., Lysova, E.I. Introducing and validating the locked at the job scale

Photo | Oudezijdsvoorburgwal, Amsterdam

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to construct and validate a scale to measure the concept of locked at the job, an integrative construct related to job immobility. Locked at the job is defined as feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities. Data was collected at two times, before and after an organizational change, in a custodian bank among 271 employees (Sample 1) and 101 employees (Sample 2). For both independent samples (including employee perceptions and performance appraisals by supervisors), we found support for a concept that consists of two dimensions, represented by job dissatisfaction and limited job opportunities. To establish convergent validity, we show that locked at the job correlates positively with continuance change commitment and job embeddedness, and negatively with affective change commitment and person-job fit. Criterion validity of locked at the job was demonstrated by significant positive correlations with behavioral resistance to change and job insecurity and a negative correlation with supervisor-rated individual productivity. Lastly, we demonstrated discriminant validity by showing that locked at the job is unrelated to intention to leave. With this study, we contribute to future research on locked at the job, by further examining a validated scale of locked at the job to measure this construct in future studies.

Keywords: Locked at the job, Feeling stuck, Scale construction, Validation

3.1 Introduction

Today's labor market is changing continuously, for example due to digitalization, making organizational change the current standard (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Rahman, 2004; Stengård, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, & Leineweber, 2017). When employees go through an organizational change process, their work environment is likely to change (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Rahman, 2004). These uncertain situations may often lead to insecurity about possible job loss and hence activates job immobility (Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, & DiFonzo, 2004). Further, these changes cause many jobs to disappear (Frey & Osborne, 2017), which diminishes the available options to switch jobs. In addition, for those staying in the job organizational change might lead to dissatisfaction about the job (Oreg, 2006). When employees are dissatisfied with their current job and perceive limited options to switch, they are "*locked at the job*", which is an integrative term, derived from different related constructs of job immobility. We define it as a "phenomenon that consists of two dimensions of feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities" (Chapter 2, p. 27/28). Previous studies on this type of job immobility show that at least 6,5% of employees feel locked at the job (Stengård *et al.*, 2017), which may have negative outcomes ranging from negative behaviors and attitudes to mental and physical health problems (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Muhonen, 2010; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Stengård, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, Leineweber, & Aronsson, 2016). Furthermore, previous studies have shown that a state in which an employee feels stuck in their current job can decrease their learning and development opportunities and also the (perceived) support from supervisor and colleagues (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999).

Nevertheless, despite the negative consequences of locked at the job, the number of studies on this concept is limited (Chapter 2). In addition, empirical studies on related constructs of locked at the job, such as locked-in (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), job-lock (Fisher *et al.*, 2016) and dissatisfied stayers (Mowday *et al.*, 1982), vary in their approach, thus limiting the

extent to which conclusions can be drawn. These related constructs have made a significant contribution to the development of the concept of locked at the job. However, considering the lack of agreement in their conceptualization and operationalization of the concept (Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Fisher *et al.*, 2016), there is a need for an integrative operationalisation and validation of the construct of locked at the job (Stengård *et al.*, 2016). With this study, we contribute to the literature on this important concept by developing and validating a scale of locked at the job building on the conceptualization from Chapter 2. In doing so, we provide first insights in the relationships with theoretically relevant variables of locked at the job in an organizational change setting.

3.2 Theory

For more than three decades, research on the phenomenon of experiencing a locked at one's job situation has been carried out. Using the term inability to leave, Martin and Schermerhorn (1983) introduced the concept as a source causing job stress. Later, Cooper and Monheit (1993) introduced job lock referring to inhibiting job mobility. A few years later, Aronsson and Göransson (1999) introduced the term locked-in where the focus was on "permanent employment, but not in a preferred occupation" (p. 152). Hence, the literature on job immobility shows a great diversity in available terminologies and definitions on what we define as the integrative construct of locked at the job (e.g., Allen *et al.*, 2016; Huisse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013; Stengård *et al.*, 2017). It is assumed that individuals experiencing locked at the job lack a proactive way of looking at their current state (Stengård *et al.*, 2017). According to Crant (2000) proactive individuals have the ability to make their own choices. Individuals who are locked do not make these choices. Instead, these individuals are passive, show no initiative and allow things to happen instead of acting upon their own interests, ending up locked in an undesired situation (Crant, 2000). Prochaska and Velicer (1997) argue that these employees precontemplate, contemplate and prepare, but never turn intentions

into action. These individuals may also have the intention to change their current situation, but do not succeed due to the failure to self-regulate (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007). Self-regulation involves goal adjustment and strategies aimed at optimizing the fit between individuals and their (work) environment by actively creating and reacting to this environment (Heckhausen, Wrosch & Schulz, 2010; Jopp & Smith, 2006). Employees who fail to self-regulate are not in control of their behavior and cognitions and will therefore be unable to alter their situation of experiencing locked at the job (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Chapter 2). This lack of control and failure to self-regulate, in turn, can lead to a person-environment misfit caused by individual needs and abilities not matching the supplies and demands in the work environment, or vice versa (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Edwards, 2008). This misfit between the individual and one's work environment triggers a process leading to the two dimensions of experiencing locked at the job: job dissatisfaction and experienced limited job opportunities (Chapter 2).

Two dimensions: job dissatisfaction and perceived limited job opportunities

Building on a literature review on job immobility nine related constructs are identified: 1) Locked-in (Muhonen, 2010), 2) Job lock (Huyse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013), 3) Job Embeddedness in an adverse work environment (Allen *et al.*, 2016), 4) Involuntary non-mobility (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), 5) Continuance commitment (Eslami & Gharakhani, 2012), 6) Career entrenchment, 7) Turnover – e.g., Reluctant stayers (Hom *et al.*, 2012), 8) Inability to leave (Martin & Schermerhorn, 1983) and 9) boundaryless and protean careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). These concepts were used to build the integrated construct of locked at the job (Chapter 2). Two dimensions can be theoretically distinguished when defining locked at the job: (1) feeling dissatisfied in the current job and (2) inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities. Our aim with this validation study is to develop and validate a scale of locked at the job consisting of two dimensions. We assume that both dimensions must be present

to capture locked at the job. However, related constructs, such as job lock and locked-in, measured only one dimension (Chapter 2). To solve this issue, locked at the job is measured in a subjective way, to measure the respondents' experience. Multiple items were used that capture the complete phenomenon of being torn between not wanting to be in the present work environment, and at the same time not seeing opportunities to leave.

The first dimension, feeling dissatisfied in the current job, is the opposite of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction can be defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p. 1304). If employees feel dissatisfied in the job various psychological and behavioral consequences can occur (Henne & Locke, 1985; Nantsupawat *et al.*, 2017). According to Farrell (1983) dissatisfied individuals may display one of four potential responses; two active responses, exit and voice, or two passive responses, loyalty and neglect. Individuals experiencing locked at the job will most likely respond with passive behavior, as they stay in their undesired situation (Chapter 2). This passive behavior is either fed by loyalty, because they assume that their dissatisfaction will decrease in time or by neglect in being inattentive to take action (Farrell 1983; Chapter 2).

The second dimension, experiencing limited job opportunities, originates from the ease of movement (Long & Perumal, 2014) defined as “a function of the number of extra organizational alternatives perceived, which is, in turn, a function of the level of business activity, number of organizations visible, and personal characteristics of participants” (Griffeth *et al.*, 2005, p. 335). In line with one's career goals these alternatives should at least be comparable to the current standard or even better (Stengård *et al.*, 2017). When employees do not change jobs or take action in their career, they may find themselves in a career stagnation (Van de Water & Weggeman, 2017) and at risk of becoming locked at the job

(Chapter 2). In sum, experiencing locked at the job is characterized by the two dimensions feeling dissatisfied in the current job and experiencing limited job opportunities.

Convergent validity

We examine convergent validity by examining constructs, relevant within a change setting, that are theoretically related to the locked at the job scale (Van der Velde, Jansen & Dikkers, 2012). As described, a literature study was performed on various related constructs (e.g., continuance commitment and job embeddedness in an adverse work environment) which show conceptual and operational overlap with experiencing locked at the job (Chapter 2). The convergent validity is therefore determined by examining the relationships with four variables closely related to locked at the job namely, job embeddedness (Adams, Webster & Buyarski, 2010), continuance change commitment, affective change commitment (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002) and person-job fit (Tims, Derks & Bakker, 2016). Job embeddedness is conceptualized by Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton and Holtom (2004) with six dimensions, consisting of three key components 1) the links one has with other individuals, 2) the perceived job fit and 3) the anticipated sacrifice one has to make both in an on-the-job and off-the-job setting (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). The lack of a proper fit in an on-the-job setting shows great overlap with the construct of locked at the job. In addition, according to Feldman and Ng (2007, p. 352), job embeddedness represents “the forces that keep people in their present occupations”. The word “keep” in the definition of Feldman and Ng (2007) assumes that employees are hindered to take action and change jobs, which reflects lower levels of perceived alternative job opportunities.

Further, we argue that continuance change commitment, defined as “a recognition that there are costs associated with failure to provide support for the change” (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002, p. 475) is positively related to locked at the job. More particularly, the recognition of possible failure is also part of locked at the job. When experiencing locked at

the job, although an employee might actually want to leave the dissatisfying job, perceived limited opportunities leave them with no other option than to commit to this dissatisfying job. Because of this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Locked at the job is positively related to job embeddedness and continuance change commitment.

Next, we argue that affective change commitment, defined as “a desire to provide support for the change based on a belief in its inherent benefits” (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002, p. 475), is negatively related to experiencing locked at the job. We suggest that employees experiencing locked at the job do not desire to be part of an organization, let alone an organizational change, in which they feel stuck. In addition, it could be hard for individuals to believe in positive outcomes of the change due to their dissatisfaction (Oreg, 2006). Because one may feel the need to leave the work environment (Albrecht & Marty, 2020), affective change commitment can be seen as a construct that is the opposite of experiencing locked at the job.

Finally, following the suggestion of Stengård *et al.* (2017) that individuals experiencing locked at the job have a misfit with their work environment and in line with the two processes described above, we assume that person-job fit is negatively related to locked at the job. These misfit processes will eventually lead to 1) job dissatisfaction and 2) perceived limited job opportunities, resulting in an experience of locked at the job (Chapter 2; Wheeler *et al.*, 2005; Wheeler *et al.*, 2007). Person-environment fit theory (Edwards, 2008) proposes that individuals need to have a good fit with their work environment to experience organization commitment, job satisfaction, physical and psychological well-being and individual productivity (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Ostroff & Schult, 2007). Experiencing a misfit will trigger the opposite and may lead to an experience of being stuck in one’s job (Stengård, 2018).

Based on this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Locked at the job is negatively related to affective change commitment and person-job fit.

Criterion validity

Criterion validity is established by examining external criteria that theoretically argued are outcomes of locked at the job (cf. Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Based on the conceptual model of locked at the job (Chapter 2) and PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008) we argue that besides health and well-being outcomes, which have received considerable attention in the job immobility literature (Stengård *et al.*, 2016, 2017; Aronsson & Göransson, 1999), work attitudes and behavioral outcomes are important effects of experiencing locked at the job (Chapter 2). Based on the PE fit theory we assume that once the individual feels locked at the job, caused by a misfit, this will influence their attitudes and behaviors in the work environment. When a job does not fulfill the needs of the individual employee, this will result in negative work outcomes, such as not achieving intended goals and not taking charge of attitudes and behaviors (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Blau, 2001). Their lack of control ensures that this situation is maintained (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Work outcome measures indicating these adverse attitudes and behaviors at work are behavioral resistance to change (Oreg, 2006), job insecurity (Vander Elst, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2014) and individual productivity (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). First, behavioral resistance to change is expected to be a result of locked at the job. Oreg (2006) defined it as a “component that involves actions or intentions to act in response to the change (e.g., complaining about the change, trying to convince others that the change is bad)” (p. 76). Individuals who feel stuck in their job may not have the capacity to see anything positive emerge from the change and will therefore show resistance and complain about alterations in their current situation as they already experience a misfit and therefore a lack of control in their current job position (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Oreg, 2006). In addition,

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since these employees perceive limited job opportunities, they have comprehensible reasons to resist the change and aim to secure their position (McMurry, 1947). Finally, the uncertainties and stress of the change will lead to even more job dissatisfaction (Bordia *et al.*, 2004).

The second outcome is job insecurity (Vander Elst *et al.*, 2014), defined as “the subjectively perceived and undesired possibility to lose the present job in the future, as well as the fear or worries related to this possibility of job loss” (Vander Elst *et al.*, 2014, p. 377). Building on Dickerson and Green (2012), we argue that when employees feel locked at the job and hence perceive limited job opportunities, this will likely trigger feelings of insecurity about the current job. When individuals are threatened in the security of keeping their job, they will more likely develop a fear of losing it (Dickerson & Green, 2012). We therefore hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Locked at the job is positively related to behavioral resistance to change and job insecurity.

The third outcome we argue to be affected by experiencing locked at the job is job performance as indicated by individual productivity. Since Judge *et al.* (2001) found that job satisfaction is correlated with individual productivity, we expect that when employees feel locked at the job their level of individual productivity will drop. Due to a loss of job satisfaction and a lack in motivation to leave a good impression with the current employer, negative attitudes and behaviors will occur when employees feel locked at the job which will influence one’s productivity (Judge *et al.*, 2001; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Locked at the job is negatively related to individual productivity.

Discriminant validity

A discriminant validity test is performed to determine that locked at the job is unrelated to a theoretically unrelated concept (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In this paper, discriminant validity of locked at the job is examined by establishing the relationship with intention to leave. An obvious reaction when feeling dissatisfied in the current job would be the intention to leave the job (Hellman, 1997). However, when one experiences limited job opportunities and therefore experiences locked at the job, feeling the need to leave the organization will not actually lead to intention to leave (Flinkman, Leino-Kilpi, & Salanterä, 2010). Employees experiencing locked at the job do not get passed the preparation stage of behavior change and hence these employees do not intend to act (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Locked at the job is not related to the intention to leave.

3.3 Method

Participants and procedure

A digital questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was sent out in May 2017 to a population of 563 employees working in a custodian bank in the Netherlands, with additional offices in Great Britain and Germany. This custodian bank has excellent secondary employment and retirement conditions, making it less attractive to leave due to the lack of similar alternatives. This makes it a suitable context to validate the locked at the job scale. The population first received a pre-announcement via e-mail. No specific information was given in this pre-announcement about the topic of being locked at the job to prevent any form of prejudgement. Respondents were told that the topic of the questionnaire concerned their general feelings and behaviors regarding the ongoing organizational change process the organization was going through. Two reminders were sent out to all employees who had not filled out the questionnaire. The response rate was 48.1%, and consisted of 271 respondents,

see Table 3.1 for an overview of the characteristics of Sample 1. The questionnaire was distributed in Dutch and English. For the Dutch questionnaire the scales were translated with the back-translation method (Brislin, 1980).

To further substantiate our validation of locked at the job we incorporate a second sample of 101 respondents also originating from the same custodian bank. In a second wave, the digital questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was sent in September 2018 to a total population of 507 employees, with a response rate of 45.6%. Because there was a substantial percentage of turnover between the first and second measurement and a number of new employees were hired, we were able to generate a second independent sample. Sample 2 consisted of only those who did not participate in the first wave, but did fill in the questionnaire in the second wave. Of the 507 employees who received the questionnaire 101 full responses were therefore eligible in order to generate a second independent sample. In the second wave the five variables job embeddedness, person-job fit, job insecurity, individual productivity and intent to leave were incorporated. The three variables affective and continuance change commitment and behavioral resistance to change were not studied in this second wave.

Sample 1 was generated almost one and a half years earlier compared to Sample 2. The second sample included a larger group of employees who recently joined the organization. To compare Sample 1 ($N = 271$) with Sample 2 ($N = 101$) independent samples t -tests were executed (see Table 3.1). The results of these t -tests show that the samples differ significantly on three variables: 1) Tenure ($t(199.72) = 4.37$; $p < .000$; $M = 11.90$; $SD = 10.94$ and $M = 6.76$; $SD = 9.74$ for Sample 1 and 2 respectively); 2) contract type ($t(145.435) = 4.099$; $p < .000$; $M = .83$; $SD = .37$ and $M = .61$; $SD = .49$ for Sample 1 and 2 respectively); and 3) locked at the job ($t(370) = 2.433$; $p < .015$; $M = 2.40$; $SD = .60$ and $M = 2.24$; $SD = .50$ for Sample 1 and 2 respectively). Sample 2 thus has shorter tenure, more often a temporary contract and are less likely to feel locked at the job. Sample 1 and 2 did not differ on age, employment type and the direct locked at the job scale.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of Sample 1 and Sample 2

| Variable | Sample 1; N = 271 | | Sample 2; N = 101 | | t-test | df | p |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|--------|---------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | | | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | | -1.22 | 171.86 | .224 |
| Women | 86 | 31.7 | 39 | 38.6 | | | |
| Man | 185 | 68.3 | 62 | 61.4 | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | M 41.85, SD 10.97 Range 20-64 | | M 40.58, SD 11.00 Range 20-64 | | .99 | 370 | .325 |
| <i>Educational level</i> | | | | | -1.03 | 370 | .306 |
| High school graduate | 15 | 5.5 | 3 | 3.0 | | | |
| Sec. vocational education | 28 | 10.3 | 8 | 7.9 | | | |
| Higher vocational education | 121 | 44.6 | 48 | 47.5 | | | |
| University | 107 | 39.5 | 42 | 41.6 | | | |
| <i>Tenure</i> | M 11.90, SD 10.94, Range 0-43 | | M 6.76, SD 9.74, Range 0-42 | | 4.37 | 199.72 | .000 |
| <i>Contract type</i> | | | | | 4.10 | 145.44 | .000 |
| Permanent | 226 | 83.4 | 62 | 61.4 | | | |
| Non-permanent | 45 | 16.6 | 39 | 38.6 | | | |
| <i>Employment type</i> | | | | | .36 | 370 | .717 |
| Full-time | 214 | 79 | 78 | 77.2 | | | |
| Part-time | 57 | 21 | 23 | 22.8 | | | |
| <i>Intent to leave</i> | | | | | .58 | 247 | .563 |
| Less than 2 years | 49 | 18.1 | 19 | 18.8 | | | |
| Between 2 and 5 years | 66 | 24.4 | 22 | 21.8 | | | |
| > 5 years, not until I retire | 30 | 11.1 | 14 | 13.9 | | | |
| Until I retirement | 39 | 14.4 | 10 | 9.9 | | | |
| Don't know | 87 | 32.1 | 36 | 35.6 | | | |
| <i>Locked at the job - indirect</i> | M 2.40, SD .60, Range = 1-5 | | M 1.81, SD .29, Range = 1-5 | | 2.63 | 370 | .015 |
| <i>Locked at the job – direct</i> | M 2.05, SD .72, Range 1-5 | | M 2.10, SD .78, Range 1-5 | | -.57 | 166.889 | .568 |

Scale construction

The operationalization of the formative construct (Fleuren, Van Amelsvoort, Zijlstra, De Grip & Kant, 2018) of locked at the job is based on two dimensions in line with Fahlén *et al.* (2009) who measured a 'locked-in position' by two single items measuring satisfaction and opportunities. Locked at the job consists of a formative scale as the indicators are not

interchangeable and contain two separate dimensions of job dissatisfaction and limited job opportunities (Fleuren *et al.*, 2018). To ensure construct reliability, in this study, the scale of locked at the job was extended by developing multiple items to measure the construct. In addition, Fleuren *et al.* (2018) claim that as locked at the job concerns a formative construct it has no added value to calculate the Cronbach's alpha and conduct explorative factor analyses for the overall construct locked at the job, as the construct consists of two unrelated dimensions. Further, as the dimension job dissatisfaction consists of a single item a confirmatory factor analysis was not possible. For the scale construction, first *job dissatisfaction* was measured with one item based on the studies of Wanous, Reichers and Hudy (1997) and Klandermans, Klein Hesselink and Van Vuuren (2010). They argue that satisfaction can be measured with a single item (Wanous *et al.*, 1997; Klandermans *et al.*, 2010). We included their item "In general I am satisfied with my job", with answer categories 1 (=agree) to 5 (= disagree). This item is reverse-coded. The second dimension *limited job opportunities* is measured with three items derived from Griffeth *et al.* (2005)'s measure on the ease of movement. The items "There simply aren't very many jobs for people like me in today's job market", "Given my qualifications and experience, getting a new job would not be very hard at all", and "I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I would be looking" are measured with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= strongly agree) to 7 (= strongly disagree). The latter two items were reverse-coded. To develop the locked at the job concept the limited job opportunity scale had to be simplified from a 7-point Likert scale to a 5-point Likert scale, by conducting the following linear transformation.

$$Y = \left(\frac{2}{3} * X \right) + \frac{1}{3}$$

Respondents choosing 1 got the score 1.00, 2 the score 1.67, 3 the score 2.33, 4 the score 3.00, 5 the score 3.67, 6 the score 4.33, 7 the score 5.00. In addition, the reliability measured by

Cronbach's alpha was tested for the three limited job opportunities items, which showed a good reliability of $\alpha = .80$ for Sample 1 and of $\alpha = .77$ for Sample 2 (see Table 3.2).

Locked at the job therefore consists of four items, a single item for job dissatisfaction and three items on limited job opportunities. To have an equal distribution of items measuring the dimension limited job opportunities and the dimension job dissatisfaction, we used the average of the three limited job opportunities items. The average of limited job opportunities was then used to compute the average of limited job opportunities and job dissatisfaction, resulting in locked at the job. See Table 3.2 for the included items, means, standard deviation on the two dimensions and the Cronbach's alphas and factor loadings on limited job opportunities for Sample 1 and 2.

Table 3.2 Items, means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alphas, and factor loadings of the concept of locked at the job that consists of two dimensions.

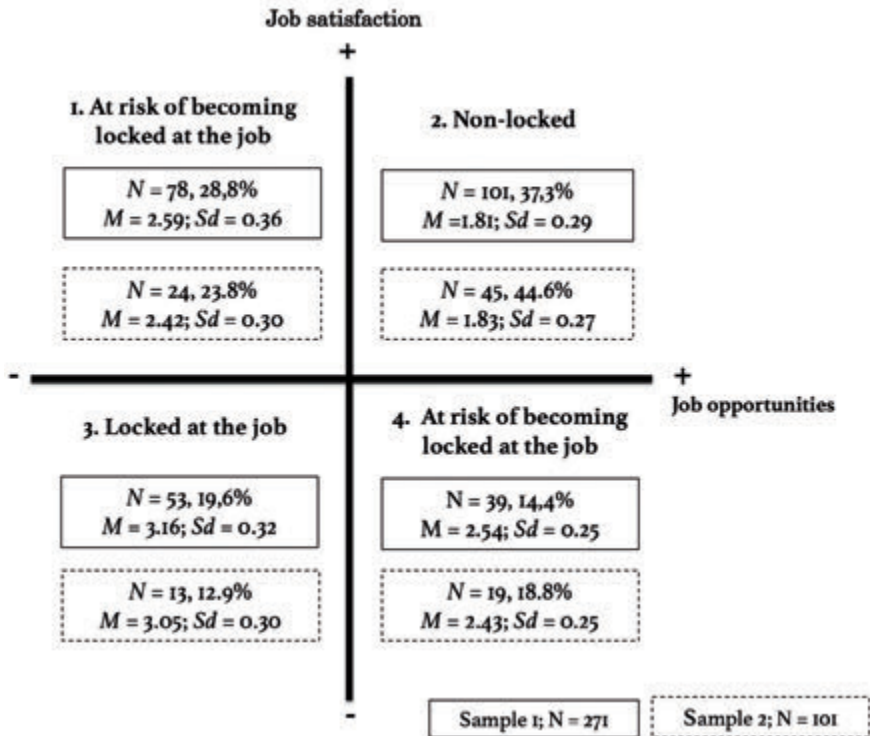
| Items Sample 1 ($N = 271$) | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | α | Factor |
|--|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| | | | | <i>I</i> |
| <i>Job dissatisfaction</i> | | | | |
| In general, I am satisfied with my work (R) | 2.31 | 0.73 | .80 | |
| <i>Limited job opportunities</i> | | | | |
| There simply aren't very many jobs for people like me in today's job market | 3.15 | 1.73 | | .82 |
| Given my qualifications and experience, getting a new job would not be very hard at all. (R) | 3.13 | 1.35 | | .86 |
| I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I was looking (R) | 3.44 | 1.37 | .85 | |
| Items Sample 2 ($N = 101$) | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | α | Factor |
| <i>Job dissatisfaction</i> | | | | |
| In general, I am satisfied with my work (R) | 2.31 | 0.73 | .77 | |
| <i>Limited job opportunities</i> | | | | |
| There simply aren't very many jobs for people like me in today's job market | 2.73 | 1.49 | | .78 |
| Given my qualifications and experience, getting a new job would not be very hard at all. (R) | 2.65 | 1.08 | | .91 |
| I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I was looking (R) | 2.89 | 1.23 | .82 | |

Notes. Questions marked with (R) were reversed coded; Items were translated in English; Limited job opportunities was based on a 7-point Likert scale

To increase confidence that our measure indeed reflects locked at the job, we divided the two dimensions job dissatisfaction and limited job opportunities into high and low levels of the two dimensions, giving us four quadrants (see Figure 3.1). By dichotomizing the first dimension job dissatisfaction, with a cut off at $M = 2.31$ for Sample 1 and $M = 2.31$ for Sample 2, every respondent scoring above the average was marked as feeling dissatisfied and the rest was marked feeling satisfied. The same exercise was carried out for the dimension limited job opportunities. Every person scoring above $M = 2.50$ for Sample 1 and $M = 2.17$ for Sample 2 was marked as experiencing limited job opportunities, and the remaining group was classified as experiencing job opportunities. This created two dichotomized scales that could be used to divide respondents into the four quadrants; 1) at risk of becoming locked at the job, 2) non-locked, 3) locked at the job and 4) at risk of becoming locked at the job. Each quadrant was selected in the dataset and the mean level of locked at the job of the employees categorized in this quadrant was calculated. Quadrant 3 represents locked at the job (Sample 1 $N = 53$; Sample 2 $N = 13$) and consists of both job dissatisfaction and limited job opportunities and showed a $M = 3.16$ for Sample 1 and $M = 3.05$ for Sample 2 on locked at the job. Quadrant 2 represents non-locked (Sample 1 $N = 101$; Sample 2 $N = 45$) and consists of respondents feeling satisfied with their job and experiencing job opportunities and showed an average score of $M = 1.81$ for Sample 1 and $M = 1.83$ for Sample 2 on locked at the job. Quadrant 1 and 4 represent respondents at risk of becoming locked at the job scoring low on one of the dimensions and high on the other dimension. Quadrant 1 represents respondents experiencing high levels of job satisfaction and low levels of job opportunities (Sample 1 $N = 78$; Sample 2 $N = 24$) with an average of $M = 2.59$ for Sample 1 and $M = 2.42$ for Sample 2. Quadrant 4 is the opposite of the third quadrant and had the lowest number (Sample 1 $N = 39$; Sample 2 $N = 19$) of respondents who experienced high levels of job opportunities and low levels of job satisfaction and scored an average of $M = 2.54$ for Sample 1 and $M = 2.43$ for Sample 2 on locked at the job. These calculations show that individuals who are dissatisfied

and perceive limited job opportunities score higher on locked at the job, in contrast to individuals who are satisfied and see opportunities who score lower on locked at the job.

Figure 3.1 *Locked at the job scenario's, from an employee point of view*



As locked at the job is constructed as a formative construct, we also wanted to incorporate a reflective construct to further show construct validity (Fleuren *et al.*, 2018). Apart from the indirect formative approach to measure locked at the job by measuring the level of 1) job dissatisfaction and 2) the experienced limited job opportunities, we also developed a direct reflective measure. To assess whether a person experiencing locked at the job, would acknowledge this experience and is conscious of this state, we developed a direct measure to further substantiate the construct of locked at the job. This variable was measured with a three-item scale. Items were measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging

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from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree). The first item used was: “I feel stuck in my job that I do not like”. The second item was: “I want to change my job, but I can’t because of the circumstances” and the third item “I am staying at <company>, because I feel there is no other option”. A reliability test yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .75 for Sample 1 (Sample 2 α = .82) and the three items had factor loadings between .80 - .83 for Sample 1 (Sample 2 between .85 - .88). A high, significant positive correlation between the direct measure of locked at the job and the indirect measure of locked at the job was found (Sample 1 $r = .62$; $p < .01$; Sample 2 $r = .51$; $p < .01$). All correlations found with the indirect measure of locked at the job also showed similar correlations as with the direct measure of locked at the job and all in the same positive or negative direction, both for Sample 1 and 2.

Measures

Job embeddedness was assessed in both samples using part of the internal occupational embeddedness scale from Adams *et al.* (2010). The word ‘occupation’ in the items was changed into job, as we tested for job embeddedness. As the internal consistency of the three-item scale was too low in Sample 1, one item was eliminated. The two remaining items are, “I would give up a lot if I changed jobs” and “Leaving this job would require substantial personal sacrifice”. Both items were measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from, 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree). Spearman ρ for the two items was .62.

Continuance Change Commitment was assessed only in Sample 1 with part of the six-item scale of Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). Four items were used in this study, all with the highest factor loading (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). An example item of the four remaining items is, “I have no choice but to go along with this change”. All items scored a 7-point Likert scale ranging from, 1 (= strongly disagree) to 7 (= strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for the four items was .74 in Sample 1.

Affective Change Commitment was measured only in Sample 1 with four items of the six-item scale of Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). We used the four items with the highest factor loading (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). An example item of the four remaining items is, “I believe in the value of this change”. One negatively worded item was reverse-coded. All items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 7 (= strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for the four items was .84 for Sample 1.

Person-Job fit was assessed in both samples using the single item, “I feel like I have a good fit with my job” originating from the job embeddedness scale from Adams *et al.* (2010). The item was measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree).

Behavioral Resistance to Change was assessed only in Sample 1 with a five-item scale of Oreg (2006). An example item is “I look for ways to prevent the change from taking place”. One negatively worded item was reverse-coded. All items were measured with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 7 (= strongly agree). As the internal consistency of the five-item scale was too low the item “I present my objections regarding the change to management” was eliminated. Cronbach’s alpha for the four remaining items was .75 for Sample 1.

Job insecurity was measured in both samples using three items of the scale by Vander Elst *et al.* (2014). An example item is, “I feel insecure about the future of my job”. All items were measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for these three-items was .84 for Sample 1 ($\alpha = .67$ Sample 2).

Individual Productivity was measured in both samples using the appraisals in the form of a rating scale issued by the direct supervisors, on an annual basis around January/February. These appraisals are linked to a financial reward also known as a bonus. The total scale has a bandwidth of 15 characters ranging from E- (=1) for the lowest score to A+ (=15) for those who received the highest possible score, with $M = 8.82$ ($SD = 1.52$) for Sample

1 (Sample 2 $M = 8.98$, $SD = 1.83$). The advantage of using this type of measurement is that the outcomes of the ratings are standardized, making mutual comparison possible and it reduces a possible bias from the individual (Aggarwal & Thakur, 2013).

Intention to leave was assessed with a single item. Based on earlier studies we used an item that measures one's plans to stay in the near future, expressed in number of years (Cho, Johanson & Guchait 2009; Hann, Reeves & Sibbald, 2011; Nancarrow, Bradbury, Winona Pit & Ariss, 2014). The item "How long are you planning to stay working with <company>?" was used. The answer options were 1 (= less than 2 years), 2 (= between 2 and 5 years), 3 (= longer than 5 years, but not until I retire), 4 (= until my retirement) and 5 (= don't know). For the analysis the answering option 5 = don't know was removed resulting in $N = 184$ for Sample 1 and $N = 65$ for Sample 2 for the variable intent to leave.

3.4 Results

The three different types of validation, convergent validity, criterion validity and discriminant validity were tested using correlations, both for Sample 1 and 2 in IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

Convergent validity

In total, four variables were hypothesized to have a relationship with locked at the job (Sample 1 in Table 3.3; Sample 2 in Table 3.4). First, as expected, a significant positive correlation was found between job embeddedness and locked at the job (Sample 1 $r = .23$; $p < .01$; Sample 2 $r = .29$; $p < .01$). Second, a significant positive correlation was found between continuance change commitment and locked at the job (Sample 1 $r = .44$; $p < .01$). Third, a significant negative correlation was found between affective change commitment and locked at the job (Sample 1 $r = -.39$; $p < .01$). Fourth, we also found a significant negative correlation between person-job fit and locked at the job (Sample 1 $r = -.38$; $p < .01$; Sample 2 $r = .43$; $p < .01$). Hypotheses 1 and 2 are therefore supported.

Criterion validity

Criterion validity is examined by relating the scale of locked at the job to three external criteria which we argued to be consequences of locked at the job. First, as expected, we found a significant positive correlation between behavioral resistance to change and locked at the job (Sample 1 $r = .42$; $p < .01$). Subsequently, job insecurity had a significant positive correlation with locked at the job (Sample 1 $r = .38$; $p < .01$; Sample 2 $r = .45$; $p < .01$). Finally, individual productivity showed to have a significantly negative correlation ($r = -.26$; $p < .01$, with $N = 271$) with locked at the job in Sample 1. Contrary to the findings of Sample 1, we did not find a correlation between individual productivity and locked at the job ($r = -.05$; $p = .72$, with $N = 54$) in Sample 2. Hypothesis 3 is therefore fully supported and Hypothesis 4 is partially supported.

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was measured by correlating locked at the job and intention to leave. As expected, locked at the job was unrelated to intention to leave (Sample 1 $r = .08$; $p = .26$; Sample 2 $r = -.11$; $p = .39$). To make sure that the results were not biased by respondents with a temporary contract, who have a greater possibility of leaving in the near future, we also tested the correlation of only the respondents with a permanent contract, leaving the one's with a temporary contract out of the sample. This selection of cases also showed an insignificant correlation ($r = .08$; $p = .34$ with $N = 151$) for Sample 1. In contrast, we did find a small significant negative correlation between the intent to leave and locked at the job when eliminating the respondents with a temporary contract in Sample 2 ($r = -.35$; $p = .02$, with $N = 41$). These results therefore partially support Hypothesis 5.

Table 3.3 Inter-correlations, means and standard deviations Sample I (N = 271)

| | M | (SD) | N | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. |
|------------------------------------|------|--------|-----|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|------|
| 1. Locked at the job - indirect | 2.40 | (.59) | 271 | - | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Locked at the job - direct | 2.05 | (.72) | 271 | .62** | - | | | | | | | |
| 3. Job embeddedness | 2.84 | (.62) | 271 | .23** | .18** | - | | | | | | |
| 4. Continuance change commitment | 3.67 | (1.30) | 271 | .44** | .42** | .25** | - | | | | | |
| 5. Affective change commitment | 5.17 | (1.02) | 271 | -.39** | -.39** | -.10 | -.33** | - | | | | |
| 6. Person-job fit | 3.77 | (.80) | 271 | -.38** | -.46** | .44** | -.19** | .22** | - | | | |
| 7. Behavioral resistance to change | 2.13 | (.86) | 271 | .42** | .49** | .11 | .31** | -.67** | -.32** | - | | |
| 8. Job insecurity | 2.7 | (.87) | 271 | .38** | .40** | .13* | .20** | -.29** | -.18** | .25** | - | |
| 9. Individual productivity | 8.82 | (1.52) | 271 | -.26** | -.22** | -.05 | -.16* | .13 | .22** | -.07 | -.24** | - |
| 10. Intention to leave | 2.32 | (1.09) | 184 | .08 | -.05 | -.40** | .01 | .09 | .24** | -.06 | .05 | -.09 |

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

Table 3.4 *Inter-correlations, means and standard deviations Sample 2 (N = 101)*

| | M | (SD) | N | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. |
|---------------------------------|------|--------|-----|--------|--------|-------|------|-----|------|
| 1. Locked at the job - indirect | 2.24 | (.50) | 101 | | | | | | |
| 2. Locked at the job - direct | 2.10 | (.78) | 101 | .51** | | | | | |
| Convergent validity | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Job embeddedness | 2.50 | (.80) | 101 | .29** | .36** | | | | |
| 4. Person-job fit | 3.80 | (.83) | 101 | -.43** | -.55** | -.09 | | | |
| Criterion validity | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Job insecurity | 2.57 | (.75) | 101 | .45** | .34** | .17 | -.10 | | |
| 6. Individual productivity | 8.98 | (1.83) | 54 | -.05 | -.22 | -.24 | .11 | .05 | |
| Discriminant validity | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Intent to leave | 2.23 | (1.04) | 65 | -.11 | .06 | .33** | .22 | .15 | -.11 |

Note. * p < .05; ** p < .01

3.5 Discussion

This study aimed to develop and validate a scale to measure locked at the job. First, we demonstrated convergent validity for the scale measuring locked at the job. In this article we have shown that the concept locked at the job is conceptually positively related to job embeddedness and continuance change commitment, and related in an opposite direction to affective change commitment and person-job fit. We also demonstrate criterion validity, by showing that locked at the job is positively related to behavioral resistance to change and job insecurity and related in an opposite direction to individual productivity. Contrary to Sample 1 we did not find a relation between individual productivity and locked at the job in Sample 2. This could be due to the low number of respondents for individual productivity in Sample 2 ($N = 54$). This sample consists of a fairly large group of individuals who recently joined the organization. Because of this, half of this group did not yet receive their appraisal. Finally, locked at the job also showed discriminant validity, as it was unrelated to intention to leave in both in Sample 1 and 2.

As far as locked at the job is concerned, we are only at the beginning of a new research era. With this study we therefore want to encourage and stimulate researchers to further investigate this important topic which we enable with our newly developed and validated scale. Knowledge on possible antecedents and consequences with regard to locked at the job may help to position this phenomenon in science and determine its nomological network. By generating more knowledge on the causes and effects of this phenomenon, we will be able to enlarge our knowledge and extend the current insights on locked at the job. For example, on the role of individual and work environmental factors in becoming locked at the job, but also its outcomes on affective well-being. With the use of longitudinal data, we will also be able to show the development of this phenomenon over time.

Strengths, limitations and future research

A strength of this study are the various forms of validity and reliability of locked at the job that were confirmed in two independent samples. Further, in order to reduce common method bias, data collected from supervisors was used to measure employee's individual productivity. In addition, information on the purpose of the study was kept general for the respondents and querying of the variables was done in random order (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Also, our study has several limitations and suggestions for future research. First our research was based on employee perceptions and was therefore only measured among 'working' employees. Employees that were absent due to illness, whether or not caused by an experience of locked at the job, were not included. Various researchers (Allen *et al.*, 2016; Fahlén *et al.*, 2009; Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Muhonen, 2010) have stated that outcomes of locked at the job could lead to physical and psychological health problems, resulting in not being able to work. Additional quantitative or qualitative research among respondents who temporally left the organization due to physical and mental health problems could therefore be valuable. Second, the data were collected in the private sector, within the banking industry at just one specific organization, a Custodian Bank. As a result, these findings are not generalizable. As salary and other benefits may be higher in the private sector compared to the public sector (Castagnetti & Giorgetti, 2019), this target group might have different attitudes and behaviors towards experiencing being locked at the job. Future research could replicate this study, for example within the public sector, examining a more diverse group of respondents (e.g., in terms of level of education). Third and last, the low Cronbach alpha of job insecurity could be considered a limitation. It is possible that the difference in Cronbach alphas of job insecurity (Sample 1 $\alpha = .84$; Sample 2 $\alpha = .67$) between both samples can be attributed to different attitudes towards job insecurity. With less job tenure individuals will less likely feel insecure about possible job loss, compared to individuals with more job tenure (Cheng & Chan, 2008).

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Practical implications

Besides contributing to the literature on immobility, our study also has practical implications. Organizations can use our measurement instrument to signal when employees feel locked at the job, and to determine the negative outcomes of this phenomenon and its antecedents. By learning more about how individuals react when they feel (at risk of becoming) locked at the job and factors that lead to this, we will have a better understanding of which interventions can be developed to prevent becoming locked at the job.



Chapter 4

Demographic factors explaining locked at the job, moderated by organizational support for development

The study in this chapter is under review as: Feenstra-Verschure, M.T., Kooij, T.A.M., Freese, C., Van der Velde E.G., Lysova, E.I. Reducing experiences of locked at the job among vulnerable employees: The role of organizational support for development

Photo | World War II bunker VI, Naarden Vesting

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate whether vulnerable employees are more likely to experience undesired job situations with limited job opportunities. We examined age, educational level, and tenure in relation to becoming locked at the job and whether this is buffered by organizational support for development as a moderator. Locked at the job is defined as feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities. In a two-wave study, data of 131 employees were collected in a custodian bank in two measurements. The results show that it is more likely that employees with a lower educational level become locked at the job. In addition, the results showed that organizational support for development moderated the relationships of educational level, age, and tenure with locked at the job. The results show that it is of great importance for organizations to provide these vulnerable employees with sufficient organizational support for development to prevent them from becoming locked at the job.

Keywords: Locked at the job, Age, Tenure, Educational level, Two-wave study, Organizational support for development, Job immobility

4.1 Introduction

The extent to which employees experience job opportunities and feel that they are a valuable asset for the labor market may differ (e.g. Avery, McKay & Wilson, 2007; Stengård *et al.*, 2017). This may especially apply to those who have achieved a lower degree in education, are older and who have been employed by the organization for a longer time (Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Groot & Verberne, 1997; Huisse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013). According to the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals who (feel they) have fewer personal resources at their disposal will more likely try to protect their current personal resources in order to not further lose their personal resources. They are also less likely to pursue new personal resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Hence, vulnerable employees (e.g. lower educated, older, and longer tenured) may stay in undesired job situations with limited job opportunities as they lack personal resources to self-regulate their actions (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007; Chapter 2). When individuals feel they have few job opportunities outside the organization and are dissatisfied with their current job, they will eventually become 'locked at the job' (Chapter 2).

Experiencing locked at the job can have a lot of negative consequences, for example on health and well-being related outcomes (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Chapter 2; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016), but also on work attitude and behavioral outcomes, such as job involvement, performance and job commitment (Blau, 2001; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Chapter 3; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Sharma, 2019; Shore & Wayne, 1993). It is therefore important to prevent employees from becoming locked at the job. One way an organization can prevent locked at the job is by supporting these vulnerable employees in their development, hence providing them valuable personal resources (Kraimer *et al.*, 2011; Steiner, Cropley, Simonds & Heron, 2020; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). Based on the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001), we propose that providing organizational support for development (OSD) will give vulnerable employees more resources (e.g., confidence, empowerment) in altering

their currently misfitting jobs (Edwards, 2008). As a result, vulnerable employees will be able to stay satisfied as long as they receive support for development from their organization. In addition, stimulating employees to develop their professional skills and knowledge can additionally ensure a head start on the labor market, thereby increasing their perceived job opportunities (Kampköttera, Harbring, & Sliwka, 2018). Based on this line of reasoning, we argue that when the organization provides support for development, this will prevent these vulnerable employees (i.e., with lower education, higher age, and more tenure) from becoming locked at the job (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Kraimer *et al.*, 2011). We therefore examine the following research question: “To what extent does organizational support for development buffer the relationship of age, educational level, and tenure with locked at the job”.

We aim to contribute to the literature on locked at the job in three ways. First, by adding scientific insights on demographic factors explaining locked at the job and hence on which employees are at risk of becoming locked at the job. Second, by replenishing the knowledge on organizational support for development as a moderator of these relationships (Kraimer *et al.*, 2011). In doing so, we respond to the request of among others Muhonen (2010) to further examine locked at the job in order to prevent or reduce this phenomenon. Third, by extending the use of the recently developed scale of locked at the job (Chapter 3). We also contribute to the literature on vulnerable employees by providing insights on why they are vulnerable and by examining how organizations can support these employees. Finally, this study has important practical contributions by increasing our understanding of which factors play a role in becoming locked at the job, and which HR activities might prevent this.

4.2 Theory

Locked at the job

Locked at the job is a phenomenon that belongs to the job immobility literature. To date, however, the range of related constructs of locked at the job is limited and inconsistent (Aronsson, & Göransson, 1999; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Hom *et al.*, 2012; Muhonen, 2009; Stengård, 2018). With 'locked at the job', we integrate the existing job immobility studies into an overarching construct, that consists of two dimensions defined as a “feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities” (Chapter 2, p. 27/28). This construct of experiencing locked at the job consists of the dimension *job dissatisfaction*, which is defined as the opposite state of job dissatisfaction, “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p.1304). The second dimension, *limited job opportunities* is defined as “a function of the number of extraorganizational alternatives perceived, which is, in turn, a function of the level of business activity, number of organizations visible, and personal characteristics of participants” (Griffeth *et al.*, 2005, p. 335).

Experiencing locked at the job is often caused by multiple misfits between individual and work environmental factors (Edwards, 2008; Wheeler *et al.*, 2007). The Person-Environment (PE) fit theory assumes that in order to have a demands-abilities fit, one's skills need to match the requirements that belong to the job. For a needs-supplies fit the supplies offered by the environment should satisfy the individual's desires and needs (Edwards, 2008). We assume that when experiencing locked at the job at least two misfits occur. A misfit between needs and supplies causes job dissatisfaction and a misfit between demands of alternative positions and abilities causes the perception of limited job opportunities. In addition, employees experiencing locked at the job lack control over this state; due to the failure to self-regulate (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996), the employee will not be able to improve their current situation and is not in control of one's behavior (Carver & Scheier,

1982). To reach a fit, one should proactively combat the misfits and take control over one's career behaviors (Kira, Van Eijnatten & Balkin, 2010; Kooij, 2015); something that employees experiencing locked at the job are not able to do.

Research has shown that both individual and work environment factors can lead to a long-lasting experience of locked at the job (Chapter 2; Huysse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013). In this study we investigate both individual factors (i.e., age, educational level, and tenure) and, a work environment factor, that is organizational support for development, that may influence becoming locked at the job. We argue that low educated, older and tenured employees run the risk of lacking personal resources to alter misfitting situations (Edwards, 2008; Hobfoll, 2001). These vulnerable employees lack personal resources to get things done and alter their undesired situations (Barratt & Allison, 2014). Ultimately this will lead to various stressful situations (Hobfoll, 2001), such as becoming locked at the job.

Age and locked at the job

When people age, their motives and abilities may change (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). However, their job may not alter simultaneously. When life-span developments, such as getting married or having a baby occur, the likeliness of a misfit increases (Edwards, 2008; Heckhausen *et al.*, 2010; Kooij, Zacher, Wang & Heckhausen, 2020). Since older employees have more limited resources, they will stay in the undesired situation as a lack of resources will lead to defensive attempts to conserve the remaining resources (Stengård *et al.*, 2016). In addition, Fisher *et al.*, (2016), found that retirement benefits induce job immobility among older employees as these older employees will try to control their remaining resources. Cutting of working hours or seeking for less physically demanding work may seem desirable but impossible, as these actions may threaten a sufficient retirement plan (Benjamin, Pransky & Savageau, 2008; Wilkie, Cifuentes, & Pransky, 2011). This may ultimately result in a locked at the job situation. In addition, when people age, their opportunities in the labor

market will decline and their control mechanisms shift from changing the environment to changing one's own goals and values (Heckhausen *et al.*, 2010). Yet as employees become older and transition to another organization their satisfaction increases (Dobrow Riza, Ganzach & Liu, 2015). We argue that age is related to locked at the job as the degree of control over one's own career will drop when an employee becomes older (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Schulz & Heckhausen, 1996). The older the employee, the greater the possibility of experiencing a misfit due to changing abilities to continue to perform their tasks as usual (Edwards, 2008) and changing motives (Kooij *et al.*, 2011).

To date, various researchers examined the influence of age on constructs related to job immobility. These studies suggested that older employees were more likely to become locked at the job (Benjamin *et al.*, 2008; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Huisse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013; Wilkie *et al.*, 2011). However, none of these studies measured locked at the job as two dimensions consisting of job dissatisfaction and perceived limited job opportunities. Although the relationship between age and locked at the job (Chapter 2) has not yet been examined, based on the above, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Age is positively associated with locked at the job.

Educational level and locked at the job

Becker (1993) proposes that training and education is crucial for developing one's human capital. Human capital in turn is needed to achieve a successful career, particularly in industries with specific job requirements such as the financial industry (Bernston, Scerke & Marklund, 2006; Sicherman & Galor, 1990). In line with this reasoning, Furåker *et al.* (2014) found that employees who have achieved a higher level of education will have better job opportunities and will less likely be unemployed. Similarly, González, Sánchez and López-Guzmán (2016) found that individuals with a lower educational level perceive a greater lack of possible job opportunities. Furthermore, research shows that employees who are higher

educated will also experience less negative work-related feelings (Bilgiç, 1998; Aguiar do Monte, 2011). Furåker *et al.* (2014) indeed found that employees who achieve a lower level of education would have a greater chance of experiencing locked at the job (Furåker *et al.*, 2014). Although limited research is carried out on this relationship, we therefore argue that being less educated will increase these negative work-related feelings, such as job dissatisfaction and perceived limited opportunities. Because of this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Educational level is negatively associated with locked at the job.

Tenure and locked at the job

In addition to studying the relationship between age and educational level with locked at the job, we also investigate the relationship with tenure. Age and tenure correlate highly with each other, as individuals who are relatively older are often employed by the same employer for a longer duration, especially in a country where job mobility is low, which is the case in the Netherlands. Groot and Verberne (1997) show that mobility decreases the longer someone has been employed by a particular organization, as long tenure comes with a greater investment in the job and job retention (Groot & Verberne, 1997; Huysse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013). In addition, research has shown that longer job tenure has a negative effect on turnover intention (Ju & Li, 2019). Moreover, the cost of leaving also increases with employment duration (Groot & Verberne, 1997). These so called mobility costs contain both psychological and financial costs that are associated with a change of employer. Both financial as well as psychological ‘switching’ costs are associated with turnover. For employees with long tenure the psychological costs, such as relations with colleagues, will make them less inclined to leave voluntarily (Groot, & Verberne, 1997). Furthermore, the financial mobility costs associated with leaving are also higher for employees with longer tenures. After more years of service employees will be more inclined to stay due to increasing compensation. In addition, it is assumed that employees with more years of service have a

better negotiating position, due to the protection by laws and regulations, such as exit packages, making voluntary job turnover less likely (Buhai, Portela, Teulings, & Van Vuuren, 2008; Deelen, 2012; Groot, & Verberne, 1997). Exiting the company voluntarily may lead to uncertainty with respect to salary retention, which will make it harder and more costly for individuals who feel locked at the job to leave (Deelen, 2012; Groot & Verberne, 1997). Further, Furåker, and colleagues (2014) found that employees with a longer employment duration, in particular, for those employees with a tenure of fifteen years or higher, are less optimistic about the possibilities of finding another suitable job (Furåker *et al.*, 2014). Finally, research by Dobrow Riza *et al.* (2015) shows that as employees were employed longer their satisfaction decreased. This was based on the "honeymoon-hangover" effect (Boswell, Boudreau & Tichy, 2005; Boswell, Shipp, Payne & Culbertson, 2009) in which after a short peak in job satisfaction upon joining the position, the individual will experience a decline, similar to the honeymoon weeks during a marriage. Therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: Tenure is positively associated with locked at the job.

Moderating role of organizational support for development

We argue that support for development by the organization can buffer the relationship of age, educational level and tenure with locked at the job. Organizational Support for Development (OSD) is defined here as "employees' overall perceptions that the organization provides programs and opportunities that help employees develop their functional skills and managerial capabilities" (Kraimer *et al.*, 2011, p. 486). Based on the social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), we argue that individuals who are more vulnerable will be more satisfied and motivated and feel they are a valuable asset to the organization when they feel the organization invests in their development (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Kraimer *et al.*, 2011; Lee & Bruvold, 2003). In addition, according to the organizational support theory (Eisenberg *et al.*, 1986) employees have the general assumption that their organization takes

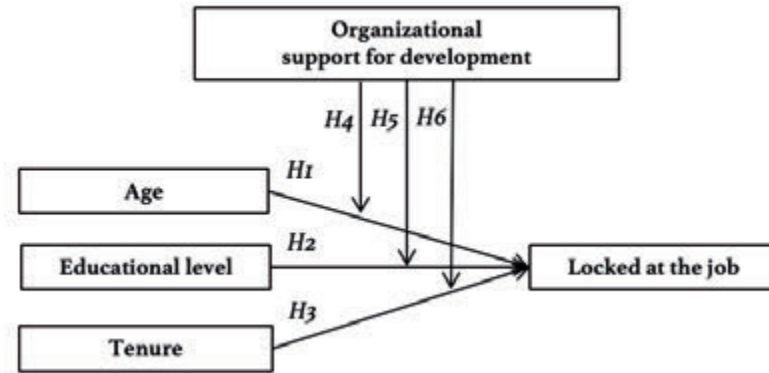
care of their well-being and values their contributions when it offers support for development. Furthermore, in line with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), multiple studies demonstrated that organizational support for development can provide vulnerable employees with valuable personal resources (Kraimer *et al.*, 2011; Steiner *et al.*, 2020; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). These individuals are keen to protect their current resources as well as pursuing new resources. With the help of support for development by their organization, employees can further secure these resources and decreases the possibility that a locked at the job situation will occur (Hobfoll, 1989; Kraimer *et al.*, 2011). In line with this reasoning, research by Kraimer *et al.* (2011) showed that the relationship between organizational support for development and employee turnover is moderated by a person's perceived career opportunities. Kraimer *et al.* (2011) points out that the perception an employee has of the organization can influence their behavior (e.g. job performance and turnover) in the long run. In addition, they found that support regarding development reduced voluntary departure when there was a high level of perceived job opportunities (Kraimer *et al.*, 2011). We therefore argue that OSD moderates the relationship between the hypothesized demographic factors explaining locked at the job and postulate the following three hypotheses (see Figure 4.1):

Hypothesis 4: Organizational support for development negatively moderates the relationship between age and locked at the job, such that the positive association between age and locked at the job becomes less strong when organizational support for development is higher.

Hypothesis 5: Organizational support for development positively moderates the relationship between level of education and locked at the job, such that the negative association between level of education and locked at the job becomes less strong when organizational support for development is higher.

Hypothesis 6: Organizational support for development negatively moderates the relationship between tenure and locked at the job, such that the positive association between tenure and locked at the job becomes less strong when organizational support for development is higher.

Figure 4.1 Conceptual model and hypotheses on age, educational level and tenure



4.3 Method

Participants and procedure

Data collection took place at a custodian bank, with a head office in the Netherlands and offices in Germany and Great Britain. Two digital surveys were administered. After sending a pre-announcement, an invitation email was sent to all 563 employees (T1) and 507 (T2) in the organization, to encourage them to participate. Employees were informed that the survey measured their current overall job related feelings and behaviors, to minimize the response bias. The first measurement (T1) was held in May 2017. During this T1 measure 271 respondents participated, resulting in a response rate of 48.1%. In total 307 respondents started with the questionnaire, resulting in a 88% of respondents who successfully completed the questionnaire. The second measure (T2) took place in September 2018, a time lag of 16 months, which was again sent to the whole population resulting in 232 respondents and a response rate of 45.6%. In total 264 respondents started the questionnaire, which

resulted in a 87% of respondents who completed this second questionnaire successfully. In total 131 respondents were extracted who participated both at T1 and T2, of which 74.8% were male, as shown in Table 4.1. In total 93.9% had a permanent contract. The majority of the respondents had a full-time contract and 20.6% had a part-time contract. The average age was 44.4 years ($SD= 10.56$) and the tenure of these participants was 13.91 years ($SD= 10.78$). Regarding their highest level of education the majority had completed a university degree (41.2%), followed by 40.5% with a higher vocational education, 13.7% with a secondary vocational education and 4.6% who only finished high school.

Table 4.1 Comparison of the cross-sectional sample and the two-wave sample

| Variable | Cross-sectional sample (T1) N = 271 | | Two-wave sample (T1-T2) N = 131 | | t-test | df | p |
|---|---|------|--|------|--------|--------|-----|
| | N | % | N | % | | | |
| <i>Locked at the job</i> | $M = 2.40, SD = .60,$ Range = 1-5 | | $M = 2.38, SD = .61,$ Range = 1-5 | | 1.40 | 269 | .16 |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | | 2.26 | 268.48 | .03 |
| Women | 86 | 31.7 | 33 | 25.2 | | | |
| Man | 185 | 68.3 | 98 | 74.8 | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | $M = 41.85, SD = 10.97,$ Range = 20-64 | | $M = 44.4, SD = 10.56,$ Range = 21-64 | | -1.79 | 269 | .08 |
| <i>Educational level</i> | | | | | -0.19 | 269 | .85 |
| High school graduate | 15 | 5.5 | 6 | 4.6 | | | |
| Secondary Vocational Education | 28 | 10.3 | 18 | 13.7 | | | |
| Higher Vocational Education | 121 | 44.6 | 53 | 40.5 | | | |
| University | 107 | 39.5 | 54 | 41.2 | | | |
| <i>Tenure</i> | $M = 11.90, SD = 10.94,$ Range = 0-43 | | $M = 13.91, SD = 10.78,$ Range = 0-41 | | -1.24 | 269 | .22 |
| <i>Organizational Support for Development</i> | $M = 3.39, SD = 1.23,$ Range = 1-6 | | $M = 3.88, SD = 1.19,$ Range = 1-6 | | 0.79 | 269 | .43 |
| <i>Contract type</i> | | | | | | | |
| Permanent | 226 | 83.4 | 123 | 93.9 | -1.23 | 267.72 | .22 |
| Non-permanent | 45 | 16.6 | 8 | 6.1 | | | |
| <i>Employment type</i> | | | | | -1.36 | 268.26 | .17 |
| Full-time | 214 | 79 | 104 | 79.4 | | | |
| Part-time | 57 | 21 | 27 | 20.6 | | | |

To compare the cross-sectional sample ($N = 271$) with the two-wave sample ($N = 131$), an independent samples t -test was performed on all variables incorporated in this study. These analyses show that there were no significant differences between the variable means of the cross-sectional sample and the two-wave sample, except for a significant difference for gender ($t(268.48) = 2.26, p = .03$), indicating that in the two-wave sample relatively fewer women participated.

Measures

Digital questionnaires, both issued in Dutch and English were administered (see Appendix 1 & 2). The Dutch items of existing English scales were translated by using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1980).

Locked at the job consists of four items. The dimension job dissatisfaction was assessed with the item “In general I am satisfied with my work” by Wanous *et al.* (1997) in Klandermans *et al.* (2010) and was reversed coded. The item was measured with a 5-point Likert scale 1 (= agree) to 5 (= disagree). The dimension limited job opportunities was measured with three items originating from Griffeth *et al.* (2005) measuring the ease of movement. The items are “There simply aren’t very many jobs for people like me in today’s job market”, “Given my qualifications and experience, getting a new job would not be very hard at all” and “I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I was looking”. The latter two items were reverse-coded to negative states. Subsequently, all three items were assessed with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= strongly agree) to 7 (= strongly disagree). After data collection the 7-point Likert scale was simplified to a 5-point Likert scale to get equal distributed subscales for both job dissatisfaction and limited job opportunities. Subsequently, the average of the three items for limited job opportunities was calculated to have an even equal number of items. Next, the average of job dissatisfaction and limited job opportunities was computed resulting in the variable locked at the job. Cronbach’s alpha for

the three items of limited job opportunities was .80 (T1) and .80 (T2). Our measure of locked at the job Time 1 was used as a control variable in the analyses and the Time 2 measure of locked at the job was used as an outcome variable. Results regarding the means of the outcome variable locked at the job show a mean of $M = 2.40$ ($SD = 0.60$) at T1 and a $M = 2.32$ ($SD = 0.57$) at T2 on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being non-locked and 5 being locked at the job.

Demographic variables age and tenure were collected from the internal personnel system of the custodian bank and were merged after collecting the data from the questionnaire. Singular token codes were used to link all the information from the different sources. The variable educational level was measured with a single item: "What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?" The answer options were 1 (= High school graduate), 2 (= Secondary Vocational Education), 3 (= Higher Vocational Education) and 4 (= University). For the variables age, educational level and tenure the Time 1 dataset was used in the analysis.

Organizational support for development was assessed using the six-item scale developed by Kraimer *et al.* (2011). An example item is "My organization has career development programs that help employees develop their specialized functional skills and expertise". All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (=strongly disagree) to 7 (=strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for the six items was .94 (T1). The six items on OSD loaded on one factors with an explained variance of 76.80%. All six items had factor loadings between .85-.92. For the three tested moderations of OSD the Time 1 data was used.

Statistical analyses

The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression in IBM SPSS Statistics 25, supplemented with PROCESS macro version 3.5 (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). To further illustrate interaction effects of our three significant moderation models, we probed the conditional effects by using simple slopes tests and the Johnson-Neyman technique. Since

the power of the two-wave sample was fairly small, we decided to test the three moderation effects separately.

4.4 Results

A correlation matrix including descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study is shown in Table 4.2. In line with our expectations, age (T1, $r = .22, p < .000$; T2, $r = .21, p < .05$) and tenure (T1, $r = .37, p < .000$; T2, $r = .23, p < .05$) correlated positively with locked at the job T1 and T2. In contrast, educational level (T1, $r = -.29, p < .000$; T2, $r = -.30, p = .001$) correlated negatively with locked at the job T1 and T2 as expected. OSD only correlated negatively to educational level ($r = -.19, p = .001$) and was not correlated with age and tenure. Further, organizational support correlated negatively to locked at the job T1 ($r = -.13, p = .034$) and did not correlate with locked at the job T2.

Table 4.2 *Inter-correlations, means and standard deviations*

| | <i>M</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>N</i> | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. |
|-------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. T1 Age | 41.85 | (10.97) | 271 | - | | | | |
| 2. T1 Educational level | 3.18 | (0.83) | 271 | -.28** | | | | |
| 3. T1 Tenure | 11.90 | (10.94) | 271 | .68** | -.43** | | | |
| 4. T1 OSD | 3.30 | (1.23) | 271 | .08 | -.19** | .05 | | |
| 5. T1 Locked at the job | 2.40 | (0.60) | 271 | .22** | -.29** | .37** | -.13* | |
| 6. T2 Locked at the job | 2.32 | (0.57) | 232 | .21* | -.30** | .23** | .10 | .56** |

Notes. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2 (16 months later); OSD = Organizational support for development

The three demographic factors; 1) age, 2) tenure and 3) educational level were included as covariates when not being used as demographic factors in the model. The results remained the same when we excluded them. In contrast to the moderation analyses (Table 4.4 - 4.6), the control variable 'locked at the job T1' was not included in the linear regression analyses as we focussed on the direct effects of the three demographic factors in relation with the outcome variable locked at the job (T2) and as locked at the job did not effect age. In

Table 4.3 the results are shown of the regression analyses for age, educational level and tenure, controlling for the other variables. Hypothesis 1 which stated that age is positively associated with locked at the job is not supported ($\beta = .07, p = .583$). Hypothesis 2 stating that educational level is negatively associated with locked at the job ($\beta = -.24, p = .011$) is supported. The third hypothesis, that tenure is positively associated with locked at the job ($\beta = .11, p = .377$) is also not supported.

Table 4.3 *Regression and Direct effect Analysis Predicting T2 – Locked at the job*

| <i>Direct effect on locked at the job - T2</i> | | | | |
|--|---------|-----|-------|------|
| Predictor variable | β | SE | t | p |
| Constant | .10 | .09 | 1.11 | .267 |
| T1 Age | .07 | .13 | 0.55 | .583 |
| T1 Educational level | -.24 | .09 | -2.58 | .011 |
| T1 Tenure | .11 | .13 | 0.89 | .377 |

Notes. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; All variables were z-standardized

Table 4.4 shows the results of our regression and moderation analyses for Hypothesis 4. The results show that OSD negatively moderated the relationship between age and locked at the job at Time 2 ($\beta = -.23, p = .012$). Hypothesis 4 is therefore fully supported. As the interaction was significant, we probed the interaction using simple slopes tests at one standard deviation below and above the mean. The results of the conditional effects indicate that there was a positive relationship between age and experiencing locked at the job among employees who perceive less OSD ($\beta = .41, p = .01$).

Table 4.4 Results of Regression and Moderated analyses predicting T2 - Locked at the job

| Predictor variable | β | SE | t | p | R ² |
|---|---------|-----|-------|------|----------------|
| <i>Effects on locked at the job - T2</i> | | | | | |
| T1 Age | .15 | .11 | 1.38 | .170 | |
| T1 Organizational support for development | .11 | .08 | 1.26 | .209 | |
| T1 Age * T1 OSD | -.23 | .09 | -2.56 | .012 | |
| Covariate: T1 Tenure | -.12 | .11 | -1.10 | .276 | |
| Covariate: T1 Educational level | -.14 | .08 | -1.68 | .096 | |
| Covariate: T1 Locked at the job | .58 | .08 | 7.05 | .000 | |
| | | | | | .38*** |
| <i>Conditional effects</i> | | | | | |
| One SD below mean | .41 | .15 | 2.63 | .010 | |
| At the mean | .16 | .11 | 1.47 | .145 | |
| One SD above mean | -.09 | .14 | -0.64 | .525 | |

Notes. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; All variables were z-standardized; *** $p < .01$. OSD = Organizational support for development

Table 4.5 presents the results of our regression and moderation analyses for Hypothesis 5. The results show that OSD positively moderated the relationship between educational level and locked at the job at Time 2 ($\beta = .23, p = .004$). The results of the conditional effects indicated that there was a negative relationship between educational level and experiencing locked at the job among employees who perceived less OSD ($\beta = -.43, p = .001$). In addition, there was also a negative relationship between education and experiencing locked at the job among employees who perceived medium OSD ($\beta = -.18, p = .030$). Hypothesis 5 is therefore fully supported.

Table 4.5 Results of Regression and Moderated analyses predicting T2 – Locked at the job

| Predictor variable | β | SE | t | p | R ² |
|---|---------|-----|-------|------|----------------|
| <i>Effects on locked at the job - T2</i> | | | | | |
| T1 Educational level | -.17 | .08 | -2.10 | .038 | |
| T1 Organizational support for development | .08 | .08 | .96 | .341 | |
| T1 Educational level * T1 OSD | .23 | .08 | 2.94 | .004 | |
| Covariate: T1 Age | .14 | .11 | 1.31 | .193 | |
| Covariate: T1 Tenure | -.15 | .11 | -1.32 | .188 | |
| Covariate: T1 Locked at the job | .59 | .08 | 7.17 | .000 | |
| | | | | | .39*** |
| <i>Conditional effects</i> | | | | | |
| One SD below mean | -.43 | .13 | -3.29 | .001 | |
| At the mean | -.18 | .08 | -2.20 | .030 | |
| One SD above mean | .06 | .10 | .61 | .545 | |

Notes. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; All variables were z-standardized; *** p < .01

Table 4.6 presents the results of our regression and moderation analyses for Hypothesis 6. The results show that OSD negatively moderates the relationship between tenure and locked at the job at Time 2 ($\beta = .23, p = .004$). The results of the conditional effects indicate that there is a negative relationship between tenure and experiencing locked at the job among employees who perceive high OSD ($\beta = -.28, p = .037$). Hypothesis 6 is therefore partly supported. The results of Hypothesis 4, 5 and 6 remained the same when the covariates, age, educational level and tenure, were left out of the regression analyses.

Table 4.6 Results of Regression and Moderated analyses predicting T2 – Locked at the job

| Predictor variable | β | SE | t | p | R ² |
|---|---------|-----|-------|------|----------------|
| <i>Effects on locked at the job - T2</i> | | | | | |
| T1 Tenure | -.10 | .12 | -0.89 | .374 | |
| T1 Organizational support for development | .10 | .08 | 1.24 | .218 | |
| T1 Tenure * T1 - Organizational support for development | -.17 | .08 | -2.15 | .034 | |
| Covariate: T1 Educational level | -.13 | .08 | -1.56 | .122 | |
| Covariate: T1 Age | -.13 | .11 | 1.16 | .246 | |
| Covariate: T1 Locked at the job | .57 | .08 | 6.90 | .000 | |
| | | | | | .37*** |
| Conditional effects | β | SE | t | p | |
| One SD below mean | .09 | .15 | .57 | .570 | |
| At the mean | -.10 | .11 | -0.82 | .412 | |
| One SD above mean | -.28 | .13 | -2.11 | .037 | |

Notes. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; All variables were z-standardized; *** $p < .01$

4.5 Discussion

With this two-wave study, we aimed to examine the relationship of age, education and tenure with locked at the job, with OSD moderating these relationships. Our results show that lower educated employees are more likely to become locked at the job, despite the small variation in a highly educated sample. Our findings suggest that the level of education is more important in predicting locked at the job compared to age and tenure. Primarily it is the individual's level of education that matters, not whether they are older or have been employed longer. A possible explanation for this is that a lower level of education is a

stronger predictor of perceived limited job opportunities, which is more difficult to change compared to the perception of being too old or less employable due to higher tenure (Furåker *et al.* (2014).

Additionally, the results of the moderation analyses showed the important role of OSD. When the employee perceives less OSD individuals who are older and are lower educated will be at greater risk of experiencing locked at the job. Hence, the moderation analyses show OSD buffers the relationship with locked at the job. When OSD is high, there is no relationship of age and education level with locked at the job and, hence, older or lower educated employees become locked at the job just as often as any other employee. However, in contrast to our expectations, the results showed that especially for employees who perceive high levels of OSD more tenure will lead to experiencing *less* locked at the job. This implies that employees who receive more OSD and who have a long state of service with the organization, will feel more satisfied and employable, leading to less experience of locked at the job.

Taken together, we see a different mechanism for age and educational level compared to tenure; when the level of organizational support for development is low, older employees and lower-educated employees will have more risk of experiencing locked at the job. On the other hand, when support for development is high, employees with more years of service have lower risk of experiencing locked at the job. When working for an organization that facilitates support for development, employees with high job tenure are less likely to feel locked at the job. A possible explanation is that the organization has invested more in those individuals with more tenure. In sum, when the organization provides sufficient attention to supporting employees in their development, the number of employees experiencing locked at the job can be reduced both for older employees, employees with lower educational levels and more tenure.

Theoretical contributions

This study has important theoretical contributions. Based on the developed locked at the job scale (Chapter 3), we provided additional insights on the factors of becoming locked at the job building on the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). A fairly diverse but limited spectrum of causes of locked at the job has been studied, for example abusive supervision (Allen *et al.*, 2016), effort-reward imbalance (Fahlén *et al.*, 2009), employer provided health insurance (Fisher *et al.*, 2016) and age (Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Huysse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013). However, individual factors, such as tenure and educational level have not been studied before. In addition, we provide theoretical reasons for why older, long-tenured, and lower-educated employees feel locked at the job. These individuals may lack resources to alter their situations and hence they may end up becoming locked at the job (Hobfoll, 2001). Future research should study these underlying mechanisms. In addition, by introducing OSD as a moderator in the relationship with locked at the job, we were able to expand the current insights on preventing locked at the job. Building on the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986) and the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we argued that with organizational support for development, the organization builds the resources of these employees (Kraimer *et al.*, 2011; Steiner *et al.*, 2020; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). This level of support for development by the organization enables employees to secure their personal resources, which decreases the likelihood of a locked at the job situation.

Limitations and future research agenda

In spite of collecting two-wave data by which we provided various valuable insights on the causes of becoming locked at the job, our study has some limitations. First, in the present study just two measurements took place. However, to gain a better insight into the process of becoming locked at the job a longitudinal study with a higher frequency of measurements

would be recommended. Second, when focussing more on the underlying mechanisms through which age, educational level and tenure are associated with locked at the job future qualitative research could provide important insights. For example, to get more insight in the phases an employee is going through when becoming locked at the job. How and when does an experience of locked at the job arise? How does an individual cope with such an experience? And additionally, which factors ensure that the individual is able to leave this situation? Third, of all variables used, OSD and locked at the job were self-reported. However, the employees were not informed about our intent to measure the degree of experiencing locked at the job ensuring that any form of response bias was minimized. We informed the employees that we wanted to study their job related feelings and behaviors. However, at the T2 measure more employees were aware of the true nature of our research. This could have affected the response at T2. By using a multi-item measure for locked at the job, measured with job dissatisfaction and perceived limited job opportunities, and by reverse coding some items, we were able to circumvent this potential issue (Chapter 3; Gregoski, Malone & Richardson, 2005). Fourth, an additional limitation involves the sector and country in which the data were collected. As we collected the data within a private sector company, findings in this paper can only be related to this specific sector. Future research should therefore focus on studying a wider variety of different types of organizations. This makes it possible to show insights into the extent to which causes and effects of locked at the job can differ per sector. It is possible that the financial industry in which the individual is earning relatively higher salary, the so called 'golden cage', or within an institutional context where the ease of switching to another internal job seems easier, can influence the causes and effects of locked at the job. Further, it might be that the private sector in which the research was conducted could have also influenced the percentage of individuals experiencing locked at the job. Especially with high levels of social security and better fringe benefits, employees may be tempted to stay job immobile and when being older even serve

their time until retirement. Future research should therefore focus on a wider spectrum of sectors of within which research should be conducted. In addition, studying locked at the job within different countries could enhance the current understanding on this phenomenon, respecting local rules and regulations. For example, the subjective locked at the job scale, may show significant differences within the United States or Great Britain, compared to the objective job lock scale (Huyse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013; Stroupe *et al.*, 2001) previously measured there.

Practical implications

This research reveals that attention should be paid to the three groups of vulnerable employees; aged, lower educated and more tenured individuals. With respect to the level of education we presume that this relationship with locked at the job might become less of an issue over time, since individuals are becoming more educated and smarter in time (Baker *et al.*, 2015). In addition, we show that the organization can reduce the number of vulnerable employees from getting locked at the job by providing support for development. Organizations can increase the support for development by targeting these vulnerable employees more specifically and offering customized development opportunities for these groups. For example, by offering HR practices in terms of developmental programs especially for aged employees, those with a lower educational level and with more tenure. In addition, someone with a high tenure can benefit greatly from developing personal skills that allow them to see their personal qualities as an individual. The same applies to older people. Furthermore, the organization should offer individuals with a lower education more opportunities to increase their level of education, by offering trainings and courses. By providing these types of support, the number of vulnerable employees who become locked at the job will be reduced.



Chapter 5

Locked at the job: A qualitative study on its process

The study in this chapter is under review as: Feenstra-Verschure, M.T., Kooij, T.A.M., Freese, C., Van der Velde E.G., Lysova, E.I. Locked at the job: A first qualitative view on the process of this phenomenon.

Photo | Alma bridge, Paris

Abstract

Many employees feel *'locked at the job'*. They are not satisfied with their current job and at the same time experience limited job opportunities. This study examines the process that individuals who feel locked at the job go through and the coping mechanisms they use. Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted. Twelve participants were locked at the job at the time of the interview and 18 participants experienced locked at the job in the past. We identified three phases. Regarding the first phase *'becoming locked at the job'* various individual and work-environmental causes could be identified. In the second phase *'being locked at the job'*, we identified three levels; low-, medium and high locked individuals. Emotion regulated coping strategies were mainly reappraisal, positive distraction and behavioral avoidance. The third phase *'ending locked at the job'* revealed that a locked at the job situation often comes to an end either by taking control independently or by external influence. Especially the role of the direct supervisor was decisive during the entire locked at the job process. In the practical implications we suggest to discuss locked at the job throughout the entire workplace and create an open culture where it is acknowledged that individuals may find themselves in such a situation.

Keywords: Qualitative study, Locked at the job, Sustainable careers, Process, Job immobility, Emotion-focused coping

5.1 Introduction

Many employees experience a 'locked at the job' situation at a certain point throughout their careers (Chapter 2 & 3). Locked at the job is a state in which the individual is dissatisfied about the current job and at the same time experiences limited job opportunities to leave the current situation. To date, several quantitative studies have been conducted on locked at the job (Chapter 2) and on related constructs such as locked-in (Stengård *et al.*, 2017), reluctant stayers (Hom *et al.*, 2012) and job-lock (Fisher *et al.*, 2016). These studies found, for example, a negative relation to health and well-being (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016) and to perceived support from supervisors and colleagues (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999). However, we still lack insight in how individuals become locked at the job, how they experience this, and how this situation is ended. Therefore, this study examines the entire process from becoming locked at the job until ending a locked at the job situation. It is of great importance to know what causes lead to combined feelings of both job dissatisfaction and perceived limited job opportunities to minimize the number of individuals who become locked at the job.

Based on the Person Environment (PE) fit theory (Edwards, 2008), we suggest that the causes of becoming locked at the job lead to several misfits that collectively lead to the two dimensions job dissatisfaction and perceived limited job opportunities. Currently there is little understanding of what factors cause these misfits that ultimately lead to job dissatisfaction and the perception of limited job opportunities, which makes someone feel locked at the job. However, we do know that age (Kooij *et al.*, 2011), level of education (Furåker *et al.*, 2014), the role of the supervisor (Muhonen, 2010) and mental and physical job demands (Stengård, 2018) are factors that are associated with becoming locked at the job. Second, we want to examine the feelings, thoughts and emotions that individuals experience when they feel locked at the job. For example, several studies have shown that emotional, mental and

physical issues such as depressive symptoms, stress, exhaustion, headaches and sleep problems can arise (Allen *et al.*, 2016; Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016). Third, to overcome this negative state of experiencing locked at the job, it is important to understand how individuals cope with such negative events and perceptions and make this situation endurable (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Finally, we want to gain more knowledge on the ways to end locked at the job, since this has not been studied yet. Therefore, the goal of this study is to give first insights into the process when experiencing locked at the job.

5.2 Theory

Process of locked at the job

In existing job immobility literature, no previous study has examined the process that individuals go through when they experience locked at the job. However, Stengård *et al.* (2016) hypothesize a situation in which the individual can be at risk of becoming locked at the job, which presumes that one passes through different phases. In addition, the transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) proposes that individuals experience different behaviors in certain stages of change. In the first stage, individuals will 'pre-contemplate' and do not intend to take action, which is also a characteristic for employees experiencing locked at the job. Once individuals reach the end of being locked at the job they will enter the second stage 'contemplation', in which one has the intention to make a change. When the individual enters the third stage called 'preparation' the individual has started to end the locked at the job situation. The individual is willing to actively alter the situation and will take small steps to initiate change. According to Procaska and Velicer (1997), the individual will eventually make the change in the fourth stage 'action' and get out of the locked at the job situation. Despite these conceptual ideas,

empirical research on the process of becoming locked at the job is lacking. Therefore the following research question is investigated:

RQ1. Through which process do individuals progress when becoming locked at the job?

Becoming locked at the job

Crant (2000) proposes that proactive individuals can act based on their own choices, something that individuals who feel locked at the job are incapable of. In addition, research shows that employees failing to self-regulate are unable to control their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). It might be that these employees fail to self-regulate their own behaviors as they do not get enough support from their direct supervisor, peers or even from their family and friends (Heatherton & Baumeister, 1996).

As described by Aronsson and Göransson (1999), there are several reasons why individuals stay in their jobs that they do not consider desirable. Because the concept of locked at the job consists of two dimensions, we distinguish two main causes that lead to experiencing locked at the job: feeling dissatisfied in the current job and perceived limited opportunities to leave the job (Chapter 2). Based on the PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008) we propose that a locked at the job situation is fostered by multiple factors that cause the individual to experience a misfit between the current and desired work situation. Furthermore, due to the lack of self-regulation (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996), the individual is unable to achieve this desired situation (Wheeler *et al.*, 2007).

Job dissatisfaction. Several sub-causes can lead to a feeling of dissatisfaction in the job. Previous literature has shown that the relationship with the direct supervisor is important (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999). When there is insufficient support from the immediate supervisor, this can lead to job dissatisfaction (Ali & Ahmed, 2009; Danish & Usman, 2010; Tessema, Ready & Embaye, 2013). In addition to a negative relationship with the direct supervisor, we also suggest that a bad work atmosphere within the team or the entire

organization can lead to job dissatisfaction, this as Herzberg's Motivation Theory shows that both motivators and hygiene factors, such as interpersonal relationships, are needed, in order to avoid dissatisfaction within the job (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959). Research by Stengård (2018) shows that high levels of physical and mental obligations in the job that transcend the individual's capabilities can also lead to job dissatisfaction and ultimately experiencing locked at the job. In addition, it is proposed that when the abilities of the individual are not adequately utilized, there will also be a misfit resulting in dissatisfaction in the job, for example, because of a lack of challenges and responsibilities in the job (Chapter 2; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017; Wheeler *et al.*, 2007).

Limited job opportunities. There are several causes that may limit the perception of job opportunities. We propose that high income and associated fringe benefits may be a major cause in experiencing locked at the job in the current job position, due to the lack of available job opportunities with similar or better income (Keith & McWilliams, 1995). Further, research shows that higher age or tenure, and lower level of education can lead to a sense of experiencing locked at the job due to lack of opportunities. Kooij *et al.* (2011) show that personal motives change with age, which might result in a misfit if the organization or job does not match these changes. In line with these findings, Benjamin *et al.* (2008), Fisher *et al.* (2016), Furåker *et al.* (2014), Huysse-Gaytandjieva *et al.* (2013) and Wilkie *et al.* (2011) propose that older individuals are more likely to become locked at the job. With respect to tenure, it appears that the higher the years of service the more pessimistic employees are about their chances on the labor market, in particular when they have more than fifteen years of service (Furåker *et al.*, 2014). In addition, it is evident that the level of education promotes or reduces the available opportunities, since a more educated person will have access to a greater variety of jobs (Furåker *et al.*, 2014). However, little empirical research exists on a broad spectrum of all possible causes for becoming both job dissatisfied and perceived limited job

opportunities which results in becoming locked at the job. Therefore, the following first sub-research question is addressed:

SQ1. What are the reasons to become locked at the job?

Being locked at the job

Several studies have been conducted that examined the feelings, thoughts, and emotions that occur when someone is stuck in the job. They are less involved with their jobs (Blau, 2001), experience lower career satisfaction (Fisher *et al.*, 2016) and at the same time perceive insecurity about keeping their current job (Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Gazier, 2007). They experience more work-related stress and poorer well-being (Edwards & Shipp, 2007; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Muhonen, 2010). It is suggested that when being locked at the job individuals experience frustration by which a depletion of energy may occur, as the individual is not able to reach their desired situation (Vander Elst, Van den Broeck, De Witte & De Cuyper, 2012). Also, emotional exhaustion (Allen *et al.*, 2016) may occur. At its peak individuals experiencing locked at the job may even experience depressive symptoms, (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016) or a burnout (Tong *et al.*, 2015) leading to long-term sick leave (Fahlén *et al.*, 2009) as individuals will lack personal resources after a while. As a result, physical effects of being locked at the job will occur, such as decreases of sleep quality/quantity (Allen *et al.*, 2016; Muhonen, 2010), fatigue and headaches (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999). However, the extent to which these effects will similarly develop across different individuals has not been examined to date. The following second sub-research question is studied:

SQ2. How do individuals experience being locked at the job?

Coping mechanisms when being locked

Research indicates that when experiencing negative events, such as a locked at the job state, coping mechanisms are very important to minimize the negative effects (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Coping is defined by Folkman and colleagues (1986) as “the person's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage (reduce, minimize, master, or tolerate) the internal and external demands of the person-environment transaction that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources” (p. 572). Subsequently it can act as counterbalance when the individual perceives stress (Beh & Loo, 2012). In the literature, mainly two types of coping mechanisms are outlined, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping proposes that the individual will solve the problem or address the source of the stressor. This approach will be used when the individual believes that constructive improvements can be made, or is able to take control over the situation. However, locked at the job individuals are passive and not capable of altering their current situation. Therefore, we focus on emotion-focused coping in this study. Emotion-focused coping suggests that the individual will regulate the emotional distress, caused or linked to the situation. This strategy is used when the individual feels that the situation must be endured (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The longer the situation will continue, the more difficult it will be for the individual to cope with this prolonged intense situation (Mabiza, Conduah, & Mbohwa, 2017). Among emotion regulation strategies, there are four types that are more common when experiencing a locked at the job situation (Naragon-Gainey, McMahon, & Chacko, 2017). First, reappraisal where the individual adjusts their perspective and will look more for the positive aspects of the current situation (Izadpanah, Barnow, Neubauer & Holl, 2017; Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017). Second, positive distraction, in which the individual shifts his or her attention. This could include shifting the focus from work to private related aspects in one's life (Loch, Hiller & Witthöft, 2011; Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017). In addition, one can

also apply avoidance strategies, for example, thirdly experiential avoidance is spoken of when one suppresses negative thoughts and emotions related to work (Izadpanah *et al.*, 2017; Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017). Fourth, the individual may also exhibit behavioral avoidance, hereby one avoids the unpleasant situation, individual or environment (Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017). When individuals find themselves in an unfulfilling job for an extended period, it can lead to a depletion of energy as they need to cope with this non-preferred situation (Aronsson *et al.*, 2000; Stengård *et al.*, 2016). In addition, a reason for individuals to postpone their exit and not seek for job opportunities may have to do with reaching specific career goals through their current job (De Jong *et al.*, 2009). In this case, the individual will also use reappraisal or positive distraction strategies and make a conscious decision not to leave and remain locked at the job (Stengård *et al.*, 2016). Given the limited understanding of how individuals cope with a locked at the job situation, further extensive research is needed on this topic. The following third sub-research question is addressed:

SQ3. How do individuals cope with being locked at the job?

Ending locked at the job

Among individuals who feel locked at the job there are two ways through which the situation will come to an end; by their own volition or by force. When the '*being locked at the job*' phase passes into the '*ending locked at the job*' phase, it is important that the individual has taken control of the work situation (Carver & Scheier, 1982), in order to leave the situation. This control can only be achieved when the individual actively behaves and is aware of the change that needs to be made (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020). Job crafting theory proposes that individuals also shape their own work environment (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Furthermore, if individuals cannot repair their misfit by engaging in job crafting behavior, they will try to find a new job. Research shows that individuals prefer to search for job opportunities from within their current job. From this safe and comfortable environment,

individuals often decide whether they should leave when their added value has decreased in their current job (Lévy-Garboua, Montmarquette & Simonnet, 2007). In addition, we propose that there is also a group that will not craft their careers independently but will exit the locked at the job situation due to external influences. The so-called '*reluctant leavers*' (Hom *et al.*, 2012) are laid off, fired or eventually retire. To date, it is unclear what ways individuals have to end their locked at the job situation. An important and fourth sub-research question, also suggested by Huysse-Gaytandjieva *et al.* (2013), is therefore:

SQ4. How does being locked at the job end?

5.3 Method

Research design and procedure

In this study, using a qualitative research design, we sought to gain an in-depth insight into the process individuals go through when becoming locked at the job. To generate a representative, heterogeneous sample we targeted both public and private sector companies, varying from a municipality to a custodian bank (see Table 5.1). To attract respondents who were locked at the job now or in the past a flyer was designed. The following description was used: '*Have you ever had that feeling that you are no longer satisfied with your job or work environment and felt that you could not take any steps to change this situation? For example, because of salary, fear of the unknown or because you are stuck in your job*'. Many participants stated that they were familiar with the topic and confirmed that it was a common phenomenon within their company. However employees were not keen on participating. Notable reactions that we received after flyering came from an employee stating: '*I don't really feel the need to bring up this period anymore. It's taken me enough effort to get back on track and I'm glad that this has worked out anyway*'. Further, while the flyers were distributed, there were several potential participants who indicated that they did not want to disclose their participation in the interview, because they did not want their colleagues to

know. In addition to this form of shame in participating, there was also a lack of trust towards the organization. We received several e-mails in which potential participants expressed doubts about the influence of the organization and did not want any form of communication about the potential interview being recorded on the internal company network (no e-mail or agenda notifications). This demonstrates that there is a great taboo on this phenomenon. Nonetheless, we were able to find 32 respondents who voluntarily shared their experience.

Data collection

In a time period of two weeks (April-May 2018) we were able to conduct the 32 in-depth interviews. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. To avoid interviewer bias, the interviews were conducted by two independent Master's students, who had no relationship to the participants. This allowed the participants to speak freely and did not restrict them in possibly not wanting to express their feelings and thoughts regarding their locked at the job period (Salazar, 1990). In addition to having taken several courses on conducting qualitative interviews, the Master's students were coached and carefully monitored at the end of each interview on how they asked follow up questions and how they placed appropriate emphasis on specific questions. The majority of the interviews were held in person, however four interviews (ID 1, 15, 20, 33) were conducted via telephone, as some respondents were not able to meet in person. Because the interviewers had already conducted several interviews in person, the quality of the interviews could be ensured (Opdenakker, 2006). All interviews were conducted in Dutch. Of the 32 interviews, 2 interviews were found to be unusable as the respondents did not meet the two dimensions of experiencing locked at the job, resulting in a total number of 30 interviews, see Table 5.1.

The interviews started with a brief introduction that included some practical information about who conducted the interview, our request to be as detailed as possible when answering the questions and that all respondents gave their consent on audio

recording the interview. In addition, they were assured that the interview was strictly confidential and that their input would be treated with the utmost care. To put the respondents at ease they were first asked some general questions about their background, the importance of their work (compared to other factors in their lives), and (de)motivators at work. By asking these questions we were able to get some general information, but more importantly, the respondents felt so at ease that almost all of them already began to share their locked at the job experience when asked about demotivating factors.

In accordance to the main research question and 4 sub-research questions the interview protocol was focused on retrieving information on the three phases in the process of locked at the job and the coping mechanisms used while being locked. For the first research question, we focused on the process of locked at the job. For the first phase, the causes of becoming locked at the job, the questions would give more indepth insights in reasons and factors on becoming locked at the job, for example we asked *“Talking about this situation what do you think is/was the biggest cause of you feeling this way and why?”*. Further, the second phase, being locked at the job, we intended to show insights on the feelings, thoughts and emotions while being locked at the job. We therefore asked questions like, *“Can you explain how you feel/felt during this time?”*. Subsequently, regarding the second phase we questioned which coping mechanisms individuals used. Regarding this sub-research question we asked five additional questions in some of the interviews, considering the space the Master’s students were given for their own sub-topic (ID 1 to 16), which enriched the data. Nevertheless, the other participants also mentioned particular coping strategies. Thus, we asked the respondents *“Have you taken any steps to change the situation, if so which ones?”* Furthermore, for the third phase, ending locked at the job, questions were asked to gather information on how participants were able to end their locked at the job situation. For example, we asked the respondents *“How did this period come to an end and why?”* (see Appendix 4. Interview guide).

Sample

Of the total population, 12 participants were locked at the job during the interview and the other 18 participants had experienced a locked at the job situation in a previous job or time period. The sample entailed 15 women and 15 men, ranging from 25 to 60 years of age.

Table 5.1 *Overview of participants*

| ID | Type of organization | Gender | Age | Period | Duration | Coping |
|----|-----------------------|--------|-----|------------------|-----------|--------|
| 1 | Employment agency | Female | 25 | Currently locked | 6 months | X |
| 2 | Municipality | Female | 27 | Past locked | 6 months | X |
| 3 | Employment agency | Male | 27 | Currently locked | 12 months | X |
| 4 | Employment agency | Female | 26 | Past locked | 18 months | X |
| 5 | Financial institution | Female | 51 | Past locked | 96 months | X |
| 6 | Custodian bank | Female | 49 | Past locked | 24 months | X |
| 7 | Custodian bank | Female | 41 | Past locked | 36 months | X |
| 8 | Custodian bank | Female | 42 | Currently locked | 72 months | X |
| 9 | Custodian bank | Female | 39 | Currently locked | 72 months | X |
| 10 | Custodian bank | Male | 57 | Currently locked | 36 months | X |
| 11 | Custodian bank | Male | 57 | Currently locked | 18 months | X |
| 12 | Custodian bank | Female | 48 | Past locked | 36 months | X |
| 13 | Custodian bank | Female | 27 | Past locked | 18 months | X |
| 14 | Municipality | Male | 30 | Past locked | 12 months | X |
| 15 | Custodian bank | Male | 45 | Currently locked | 96 months | X |
| 16 | Financial institution | Male | 27 | Past locked | 6 months | X |
| 17 | Custodian bank | Male | 60 | Currently locked | 30 months | |
| 18 | Law firm | Female | 38 | Past locked | 24 months | |
| 19 | Production company | Male | 41 | Past locked | 18 months | |
| 20 | Pension fund | Female | 47 | Past locked | 24 months | |
| 21 | Custodian bank | Female | 58 | Currently locked | 7 months | |
| 22 | Child day-care | Female | 38 | Currently locked | 18 months | |
| 23 | Custodian bank | Male | 42 | Past locked | 24 months | |
| 24 | Custodian bank | Male | 47 | Past locked | 6 months | |
| 25 | Pension fund | Male | 31 | Past locked | 24 months | |
| 26 | Custodian bank | Male | 41 | Currently locked | 24 months | |
| 27 | Insurance broker | Male | 44 | Past locked | 60 months | |
| 28 | Custodian bank | Male | 59 | Past locked | 48 months | |
| 29 | Consultancy firm | Female | 30 | Past locked | 30 months | |
| 30 | Custodian bank | Male | 37 | Currently locked | 12 months | |

Data analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the two interviewers. After verbatim transcription, the interviews were handed over and thoroughly checked by the team by listening to all audio recordings while reading the manuscripts. For further analysis, the 30 interviews were then uploaded into Atlas.ti. We started coding five random interviews and performed both inductive and deductive coding based on theoretical contributions from previous studies on locked at the job and related constructs. *Open coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used, by carefully reading the manuscript and at the same time listening to the audio recordings, to have a more comprehensive perspective on statements and expressions during the interviews. In addition to the questions posed in the interview protocol, codes that could potentially be linked to related theories such as the PE fit theory (Edwards, 2008), theory of control (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and self-regulation (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007) were also considered. Through this process we were able to design a codebook in Microsoft Excel that corresponded with our three phases and research questions. In addition to this, in order to merge and simplify our 127 general codes concerning the process of experiencing locked at the job into a more simplified code structure we performed *axial coding*. Hereafter we created a code tree with 35 codes, see Appendix 3. Subsequently the remaining 25 interviews were coded, in which we only added three new codes to the previously drafted codes namely; 'life changing event', 'consequence burnout' and 'speaking out about locked at the job'. Concerning the data analyses we then printed all quotations. By printing them we were able to get a good overview and carefully read all quotations per code and make any remarks if needed. Subsequently, we were able to see associations and further elaborate on them in the results section of this paper. To give the data the necessary depth, an excel was then prepared in which the outcomes per respondent were mapped (see Appendix 5). This enabled us to see a connection between the different respondents and the impact their locked at the job situation had on their daily lives.

5.4 Results

Process of locked at the job

According to the results, we can distinguish three phases for all individuals who became locked at the job, which are discussed in more detail below. Figure 5.1 shows how the different phases are related. Regarding the duration, there is a wide variety in how long this process and the different phases of locked at the job lasted. On average, the 30 respondents felt locked at the job for about 30 months (2.5 years). The shortest period in which someone felt locked at the job was 6 months and the longest period indicated was 96 months (8 years).

1. *Becoming locked at the job*

Because every individual has his or her own story of becoming locked at the job, the extent to which someone experiences this situation can vary from person to person. Nevertheless, in all cases, entering the first phase of 'becoming locked at the job' entailed the experience of at least one dimension of locked at the job. The individual either feels dissatisfied in the job or perceives limited opportunities. In earlier studies this was also referred to as being at risk of becoming locked at the job (Stengård *et al.*, 2016). When the individual must deal with both dimensions of the concept of locked at the job, he or she enters the following phase.

2. *Being locked at the job*

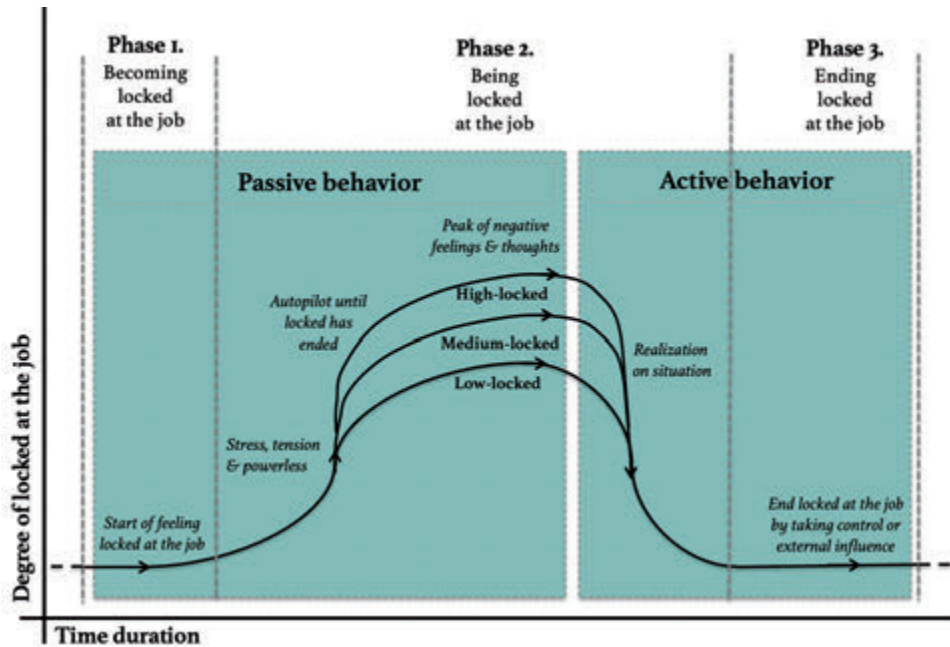
This second phase of 'being locked at the job', starts when both the dimensions of job dissatisfaction and perceived limited job opportunities are being met. Respondents are hindered in their daily life and experience negative feelings and thoughts. For example, 'When I was in the middle of it, I thought, if this is it, I don't know how long I can keep this up.' (ID 14). At the same time, they experience less involvement with their work environment and switch to autopilot. This is followed by feelings getting worse, resulting in a peak of negative feelings and thoughts. The impact of these feelings and thoughts vary by individual, which

will be further discussed in 'levels of 'locked at the job'. All participants first undergo this locked at the job state passively. During the first part of this second phase the individual will also not be conscious of what is happening. For example, one respondent indicated, "*For a very long time, I have not thought about it.*" (ID 20). Other thoughts that then arise are '*I've been here too long*', '*I need to do something else*', '*what am I still doing here*', '*I'm wasting my time*'. The participant is alternating active thoughts '*I have to go do something else*' (ID 8), with passive behavior. As a result, individuals stay in this negative spiral quite long, which also leads to a feeling of guilt and failure because they have been in this situation for too long. However, at the time the individuals experienced this phase they were not consciously aware of this. They found themselves in a tunnel vision, the world was getting smaller and as someone also points out '*I just couldn't get out of that*' (ID 5). Ultimately, a sense of reflection is encouraged in which the participant realizes that the current situation is unsustainable and needs to be ended. This consciousness has been awakened, for example, due to new insights that were offered by colleagues, family or friends related to the individual. As one respondent comments, "*I don't think until I was overworked, which really felt like driving into a wall, that before that I didn't think at all about am I happy in this job. It was just work, work, work and do your best.*" (ID 20). At this point, their passive behavior changes to active behavior, to modify or end their undesirable situation: "*I am in that phase now, making it specific and looking for a job to go with it, and really taking the time for that.*" (ID 22). Participants that were locked at the job in the past reported in retrospect that they themselves have done too little to address the situation in the different phases and should have searched more actively and be more assertive. Some respondents even indicated that they did not know how they should have mobilized earlier or differently. '*When I left, I thought, actually I should and would have taken this step two years earlier and just now I am doing it*' (ID 18).

3. Ending locked at the job

They then transition to the third phase, ‘ending locked at the job’ when they take control of the situation or when the situation is terminated by external influences. When ending the locked at the job period one feels again, ‘kind of in control’ (ID 20). One is guided more by feelings and able to self-regulate more frequently about their current situation.

Figure 5.1 Phases when experiencing locked at the job



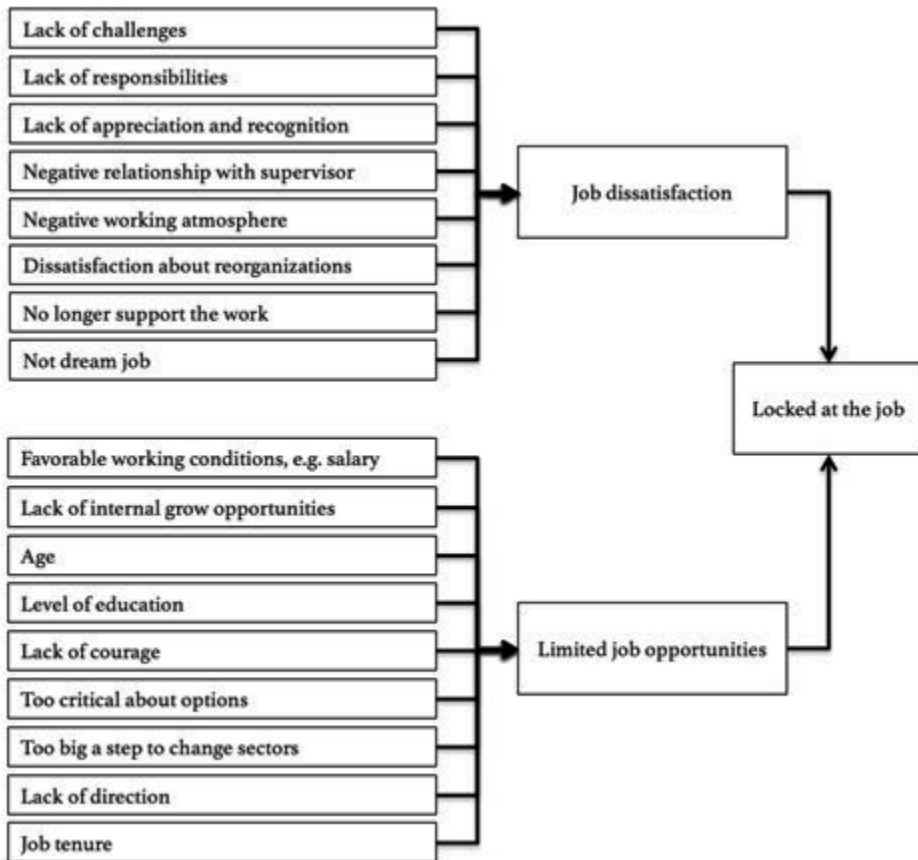
Phase 1: Becoming locked at the job

Causes of becoming locked at the job

Although very diverse, we found a number of regularly occurring reasons why respondents perceive they are stuck, see Figure 5.2. Respondents indicate that it often involves a combination of factors. Not all respondents gave a reason why they felt locked at the job based on the two dimensions, however, all of them indicated experiencing locked at the job. In nearly all interviews, respondents stated more than two aspects per dimension that made

them feel locked at the job. Besides an aspect related to job dissatisfaction, respondents mentioned factors related to their lack of job mobility. For both dimensions there are one or more causes leading to the feeling of dissatisfaction on the one hand and one or more causes leading to the perception of limited job opportunities on the other.

Figure 5.2 Causes of becoming locked at the job



Dimension 1. Job dissatisfaction

The biggest cause for experiencing job dissatisfaction is the lack of challenge in the current job; participants report that they find their jobs boring, or less rewarding. Routine work is often a reason for experiencing this lack of challenge. What is also mentioned a few times, is the underlying cause lack of responsibilities, which leads the participant to believe that the organization is not making sufficient use of their full potential. Another major cause for decreased job satisfaction is the lack of appreciation and recognition for the work done. A participant comments as follows, *'when you don't get the recognition it also makes you feel empty'* (ID 7). What is subsequently indicated, as an important reason for not being satisfied in the job, is the negative relationship with one's direct supervisor. For example, because there is insufficient interest shown in the employee. Although the majority did not mention their relationship with their direct supervisor as a cause, the respondents who did mention this aspect consider this aspect most important. Several respondents mentioned the negative working atmosphere within the team or the organization. Other causes of job dissatisfaction mentioned include the workload, interaction with colleagues, the lack of respect and the negative working atmosphere after going through several reorganizations. Finally, two participants offered two unique yet distinctive causes. One respondent indicated, *'I no longer believed in the work I was doing.'* (ID 14). The other respondent experienced limited job satisfaction because he realized that this is not his dream job. *'If I had to do it over again, my studies, I think I would have done a different study. That's kind of the situation.'* (ID 30).

Dimension 2. Limited job opportunities

Most participants state that their current favorable working conditions, in particular their salary, is a major cause for them to experience limited job opportunities. *'I had a good salary, also secondary, I had many vacation days, a nice car, everything was well organized which also made it difficult to make that switch'* (ID 29). In addition, their exit packages are also very favorable

which makes it more attractive for them to stay. For individuals who are at the upper limit of their salary in their job category, taking a position at a lower level would seem unacceptable. *'That is below my dignity. It also feels a bit like a loss and the best thing to do is just go to another company and make a fresh start and that's what I finally decided to do'* (ID 24). Next, many participants indicate that they experience little or no internal growth opportunities. Their direct supervisor or the organization does not support them in this. A respondent commented as follows, *'the organization does not encourage you to grow, the organization does not encourage you to take on other roles'* (ID 17).

Further, there are two individual factors that are regularly mentioned as causes. The first is age, where many older individuals state that they perceive their age as an obstacle in finding a new job. This mindset prevented them from making any search attempts. The second individual factor is the level of education which makes it impossible for certain participants to find their desired job because, in their view, they lack the right qualifications. Similarly, executing a traineeship keeps individuals from leaving due to their educational obligations. According to respondent 2, *'That was really one of those situations which was not pleasant but I couldn't get out of it because I had to finish my internship to get my degree.'* (ID 2).

Next, there is a smaller group of respondents who feared the unknown. Their lack of courage keeps them from taking steps. One respondent denotes, *'my own courage, of course it's all up to me, I'm just very honest about that'* (ID 17). They literally experienced a barrier to take steps in their career, due to the fear of the unknown as they had been working for the same company for a considerable period. *'This is the only thing I know that makes me think: what is it like somewhere else, will you be able to find your place again, and will I be able to work three days a week and will I have the flexibility that I have built up here?'* (ID 8). Ultimately, these risk averse individuals remained because they felt this would be the safest option as losing their job would feel like a loss.

Furthermore, there are a few respondents who indicated they were unable to find a position that would be a vertical step in their career either internal or external, or in some cases they did not know what their next career step should be. *'I haven't really seen anything that meets all the needs.'* (ID 9), in particular within the group of respondents who felt locked at the job at the time the interview took place. One respondent even mentioned not knowing what career moves would be suitable, hence experiencing a lack of direction.

Many of these causes emerge due to a lack of self-regulation and a lack of control at the time the individual feels locked at the job. One participant says, *'so in that sense I was more stuck in my mind, realistically I knew I could easily go, but I didn't because of all these other reasons so hence I was stuck in my own way'* (ID 29). In many cases, respondents were passive and waited until they would *'get it somewhat more under control'* (ID 11) which makes it difficult to work towards a solution.

Phase 2: Being locked at the job

Experiencing locked at the job

Respondents used a great variety of terms to indicate how they experience being locked at the job. Terms that were mentioned the most were *'rusting in place'*, *'stuck'* and *'imprisoned'* often because they feel they have no direction to go anymore and they basically feel they *'belong to the furniture of the company'*. Metaphorically speaking several respondents used the term *'chained'* and sometimes even more specifically used the term *'golden chain'* referring to the relatively high salary that they earned. This comfortable and well known routinized work environment makes it a greater obstacle to change to the unknown. Eventually the participant *'resigns'* in this *'impasse'* and they settle for the moment and this becomes *'just life'*. An important note is that these individuals feel trapped in their own thoughts, they do not see a way out. These individuals experience a lack of self-regulation and most importantly feel that they are *'anything but in control'* (ID 25). A few respondents did not feel comfortable

with using terms like *'job lock'* or *'imprisoned'*, they claimed that these terms were overstating their experience with experiencing locked at the job and indicated more that because of their passive behavior, they were *'a little stuck in the routine'*.

Levels of locked at the job

The analysis revealed that the degree to which an individual feels locked at the job can vary per person. We were able to distinguish three levels; low-locked individuals (12 respondents), medium-locked individuals (8 respondents) and high-locked individuals (10 respondents). The intensity to which the individual experiences being locked at the job varies in strength and impact in each level. By classifying the intensity of the experienced feelings and thoughts it became clear that low-locked individuals had few disruptions in their daily lives, medium-locked individuals experienced a significant disruption in their daily lives and high-locked individuals were experiencing heavy daily disturbance. The differences per level are based on a variety of feelings and emotions mentioned which suggested differences in the intensity of the experience.

Low-locked individuals. For this group of individuals the experience has low impact. The individuals experience moderately negative feelings, but their daily lives were not fully affected by it. This group was characterized by feelings such as *'insecurity'*, *'shame'* and *'anger'*. They experienced a lack of control to deal with their current situation. At the same time, individuals are frustrated by their own lack of initiative and the constant negative thoughts. They operate mainly based on logic as the work is performed in a routine way. Additionally, they waste time and energy by worrying about the situation. Further, they indicate that this situation does not affect their lives on a daily basis. Respondents indicate for example, that they have to bide their time, that they have ended up in a bad movie, of which the script is already fixed and that they switched to autopilot. One respondent phrased this as follows, *"I wasn't unhappy. ..., it's a passive situation you're in, because of that you're just a bit stuck or so in*

the routine and yes nice and comfortable in the known, and then maybe the threshold for the unknown also gets bigger and bigger.” (ID 18).

Medium-locked individuals. This second group with medium impact experiences additional symptoms on a frequent basis and indicates that it is affecting their lives. This group struggled to get ready for a new workday in the morning and went to work reluctantly. *“I really felt like I couldn’t get through the day” (ID 6).* They indicate that they reluctantly get up and go to work and some even wonder as they get up, why they got up. Furthermore, they experience a hard time to even make it through the day and they serve their time. *“It was just an awful place, an awful place” (ID 2).* Key characteristics of these medium-locked individuals are that they experience *‘lack of energy’, ‘headaches’, ‘stress’ and ‘sadness’.* This uncomfortable work situation also manifested itself in negative feelings and emotions after working hours. The participant expressed feelings with family and friends and in some cases also vented their emotions. For many, home is used as an outlet. They take negative feelings home and react this way to family and friends, which sometimes even resulted in feelings of guilt toward their loved ones. *“You don’t go to work comfortably, and you don’t come home comfortably either.... those days were not very pleasant. My wife noticed that too. ... I was very short-tempered, blamed her for things she wasn’t to blame for. I needed an outlet, and I was not feeling well.” (ID 11).*

High-locked individuals. The group of high-locked individuals experienced even more negative symptoms on top of that. Their mind-set can lead to feelings of *‘desperation’* and causes the experience of being locked at the job to grow stronger and stronger, resulting in a downward spiral. In many cases participants were at or near experiencing symptoms of a burnout. We therefore characterize this group in particular by the fact that they indicated to experience depressive feelings, to be *‘overworked’* or to have a *‘burnout’.* In addition to mental complaints, some also experienced physical symptoms, like sleep deprivation or a disturbed

sleep rhythm, headache and abdominal pain as one respondent indicated: *“my body really locked up”* (ID 12). Some even reported staying longer in their undesired situation due to the lack of stability when leaving the job. This situation provided them with a sense of purposeless and powerlessness. One respondent summarizes these feelings as follows, *“I started to doubt myself a lot and I was very insecure. I felt I couldn't do anything, it made me depressed, exhausted and stressed. I came home with a headache. So, I just didn't like life anymore because I had to be here every day. That was a really horrible period”* (ID 13).

An additional notable outcome that emerged in several interviews is that individuals hold back from sharing their locked at the job feelings. *‘People from my networks, acquaintances, circle of friends are often related to my work in a way and then it doesn't feel safe to tell them I would like to leave, because you never know how and where it will end up’* (ID 27). Thus, on the one hand they felt not able or confident to share these locked at the job feelings and on the other hand the work environment in many cases did not react positively to sharing these locked at the job feelings. *‘This is a topic you don't easily throw on the table’* (ID 10), also because people prefer to share successes and positive stories. In addition, some respondents indicated that they would like to have the opportunity for an open conversation with their superiors or to be able to take them into confidence about their desire to leave. Once individuals speak out about their locked at the job feelings, they often received confirmation from peers who were going through the same situation. As opposed to peers, some supervisors decided to terminate the employment contract, after respondents shared they felt locked at the job.

Coping mechanisms

When the respondents were asked what their coping strategies were, they gave a variety of coping mechanisms, which kept them from changing their current undesired situation. These coping mechanisms caused the interviewees to endure the situation longer, but also

kept them in this situation. We distinguish two categories of coping mechanisms that allowed them to stay in their locked at the job situation, work environmental mechanisms (1) and personal mechanisms (2).

Work environmental mechanisms. The first category concerned aspects related to the work environment that helped in coping with their current situation and prevented them from leaving. A large group was able to cope with the situation because they were attached to their colleagues, one respondent mentioned the following “*I really had a bond with those people, so I found it very difficult to say goodbye. That kept me from leaving.*” (ID 18). In addition, the team spirit and the atmosphere within the company were important aspects of making the situation more bearable. “*Because I can endure somewhere for a very long time even if the work is not fun, that is what I say as long as the work atmosphere is good then I can endure somewhere for a very long time.*” (ID 19). Some participants indicated that they experienced the routine in their job as pleasant, which was their way of coping with the situation. By working on an auto pilot this routine gave them a sense of control. Other participants remained in their locked at the job situation with the goal of investing into future career opportunities. This was their way of coping with the situation, with this clear goal that they had in mind.

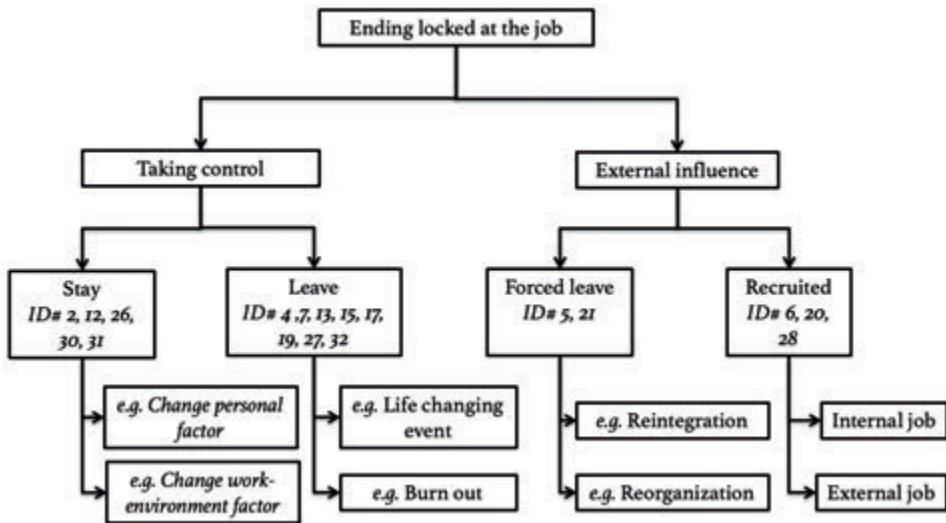
Personal mechanisms. From the second category, participants gave various reasons all related to their personal situations that prevented them from leaving the locked at the job situation. In some cases, for example, individuals experienced an unstable home base, where their work situation acted as a way of coping with their current situation. Thus, there were individuals who went through divorce, or they had a partner with relatively lower income. Their way of coping with their situation meant that, for the time being, they remained in the locked at the job situation. “*From private perspective things are not going so well ... a lot of things are going to change for me, so if so much changes, then I'm not going to change my job. I have that as a piece of security that I still have.*” (ID 30). Further, there were also several individuals who indicated they had different priorities in their lives. They had a different balance in their

work and personal life, which made them feel less of a need to leave and able to cope with the situation. For example, one participant stated to be only working for three days, leaving four days to focus on other, more positive, aspects of their lives.

Phase 3: Ending locked at the job

Locked at the job can end in numerous ways. Often the individuals only had thoughts about solving their current locked at the job, without taking action. These passive thoughts also manifested themselves in passive behavior. Respondents indicated that, in their own words, they did not try to change their situation. An end will come to the locked at the job situation when the individual will either take control and will initiate a change or the change will be initiated externally. See Figure 5.3 for possible ways to end a locked at the job situation.

Figure 5.3 Possible ways of ending a locked at the job situation



Own influence

Some participants took control of their own situation, in two possible ways. Some stayed in the current work environment and some left. Either way one of the two dimensions of experiencing locked at the job will have to be resolved in order to end the phase being locked at the job.

When the individual remained in their current job the dimension job dissatisfaction needed to be altered, either changing an individual factor or a work-environmental factor in order to regain satisfaction. Just a few respondents were able to give a more positive spin to their job dissatisfaction with the aim of getting out of the locked at the job experiencing, for example by altering the number of working hours or by attending training and courses. There were a few respondents who took a step back in function to get more satisfaction in return.

For those who were capable to leave their current work environment both the job satisfaction was greater when they left their work environment, and their perceived limited job opportunities also decreased as they found an alternative job. There are different factors that triggered individuals to leave. For example, by sharing such sentiments with colleagues or others closely related to the individual. *'It was really because other colleagues said to me that I should do something else. Then I started thinking about it myself, that I could give it a try. Then I applied for a job.'* (ID 13). A significant number of respondents ultimately actively searched for new opportunities and possibilities to leave their locked at the job situation. *'At some point I decided for myself that this would not make me happy'* (ID 24). Some of them benefitted from the help of a career counselor. In addition, several respondents indicated that through a life changing event, for example due to the death of a loved one or the birth of a child, they saw the situation from a different perspective and gained new insights about their current situation which enabled them to end their locked at the job situation. Despite the fact that a life-changing event often occurs outside of one's own influence, it was often the individual

him or herself who took action after experiencing such a situation. These life-changing events gave participants a moment to reflect on their current situation and possibly adjust. They were thrown back to the basics and asked themselves, what are the core elements in life? The same is applicable when participants experienced a burnout. In this case, the individual reflected and went on to pursue a career with new insights.

External influence

In addition to being able to regain control of the locked at the job situation by own strength, the locked at the job situation was also be terminated by external influences. Participants were either recruited (internally or externally) or organizational changes led to a change in experiencing locked at the job in their current employment situation.

When the end of the locked at the job situation was imposed it was often beyond the actual control of the individual. Similarly, in the case of a burnout, individuals could be placed in a different department during a reintegration process to advance further recovery. For some respondents, their locked at the job situation came to an end as they were forced to leave their current job. Thus, they were moved to another department due to a disagreement with their supervisor or as a result of a reorganization. *'Eventually in the reorganization I got out and then I started looking more, even more actively I guess and quite by chance this then came my way'* (ID 5). In addition, several respondents also indicated that they had no intention to leave unless the organization or their direct supervisor forced them.

Another way individuals ended their job while experiencing locked at the job were those with a fixed-term contract. Even though most respondents were on permanent contracts, there were a few on fixed-term contracts. This fixed-term contract gave respondents the opportunity to have a planned end to the period they felt locked at the job. However, these individuals continue to feel locked at the job until their contract comes to an end.

Actors that play a role in the process of locked at the job

Respondents indicated that they realized that the responsibility for resolving the situation lies with them. The data also revealed that several surrounding parties play an important role in supporting and guiding the individual while being locked at the job. We categorized four work related parties that play a role, colleagues (1), the direct supervisor (2), human resources management and other professional support such as coaches, psychologists and physicians (3) and senior management (4).

Colleagues

Colleagues do not play a crucial role but in many cases provided valuable advice and support to the participant experiencing locked at the job, by showing that they *'listen'* to what the individual is going through. Respondents often shared these experiences with a limited group of confidants within the organization. *'With colleagues it is pleasant because they understand the situation well, are familiar with it, they sometimes don't experience it that way, but you can then discuss it with each other and you get a lot of good things out of it, that helped me more than my friends and family, to be perfectly honest'* (ID 28). In the vast majority, direct colleagues did not play a negative role while experiencing this locked situation. Only a few did not fit well in the team, which caused them to suffer from their colleagues instead of working as a counterbalance in their locked experience.

Direct supervisor

The relationship the individual has with a direct supervisor appeared to be crucial in this regard. As one respondent pointed out, *'you need someone to help you to move forward'* (ID 16), referring to the phase of ending the locked at the job situation. Respondents indicated that it was essential that the direct supervisor shows empathy, ensures an open culture and the individual is able to *'discuss'* their feelings and thoughts. However, participants did mention

that the direct supervisor should pay more attention to the employees by being concerned with their state of mind and in helping them achieving their desired alternative job. Participants would like, for example, to talk to their direct supervisor on a frequent basis about their current status and prospects, but also about expectations from the direct supervisor. As stated by a respondent, *'at the end of the day, it's about being a people person as a manager and picking up on signals faster. If you notice that your employee is not feeling well or motivated that you sit down and look at where it's coming from. Why you are not motivated and whether that has to do with a personal or work situation'* (ID 16). In just a few cases the direct supervisor was not aware of the situation or did not listen to the respondent. In addition, it is notable that respondents indicated that in some cases direct supervisors had a different perspective and want to keep their employees for the work they provided. This resulted into less effort to get these individuals out of the locked at the job situation and allowed the direct supervisor to either maintain the situation, help by coaching or be the problem solver of the locked at the job situation.

HR and professional support

In addition, there was a role for various actors who were called in to look after the employee's welfare and were there to *'counsel'* the individual. For example, respondents approached the HR department, internal or external coaches, psychologists and the company physician to discuss their situation with. Regarding the HR department, the respondents expected concrete plans from their HR advisor to provide the necessary support to employees who feel locked. However, this was often not the case, as one of the respondents pointed out; *'I have a very bad experience with HR in this. ... I had an HR employee at the time that I confronted her about this. She said, "I am there for the company, not for the employees"'* (ID 11). Nevertheless, respondents do indicate that they received sufficient support from psychologists and HR when they eventually get completely locked at the job or even end up in a burnout.

Regarding the other actors, it was observed that the majority of respondents experienced support from, for example, a coach or psychologist. Despite not being able to leave the locked situation, they managed to arrange professional help, either by their own initiative or with the help of others.

Senior management

In many cases respondents indicated that senior management played a negative role in how they felt, due to a lack of appreciation. They often felt unsupported and unheard by senior management and in addition they felt senior management showed little interest in their personal situation. Furthermore, participants indicated that senior management should have better facilitated while being in these circumstances. Also, there was insufficient incentive in providing job mobility such as providing possibilities to leave with the use of the right terms and conditions, for example, with an appealing exit package. One respondent mentioned, *'a colleague mentioned to me "you'll never get a social plan like that, you have to sabotage the business". I said, "I've only done half my best and they already think it's great"'* (ID 10). Here respondents preferred being locked at the job as they would miss out favorable benefits when leaving voluntary. Accordingly, many respondents also indicated a need for internal career opportunities or job rotation initiated and supported by senior management in order to get out of the locked at the job situation. In addition, several participants mentioned they would like this situation to be talked about more and have more attention from senior management on this topic. They mentioned it is important that the organization initiates a move, in order to *'provide'* for a change in culture.

5.5 Discussion

The aim of this study was to give an insight in the process individuals go through when experiencing a locked at the job situation. Based on 30 interviews we investigated the research questions; *Through which process do individuals go when becoming locked at the job?* The results show that all individuals who experience a locked at the job situation undergo a similar process with three phases; becoming locked at the job, being locked at the job and ending locked at the job. The first phase becoming locked at the job as well as the first part of the being locked at the job phase is unconsciously experienced (Baumeister & Bargh, 2014). Once the participants are locked at the job and are in the phase of being locked at the job they go through several stages of behavioral change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997), from 'precontemplation' till 'action'. Individuals often experience a peak when going through the phase of *'being locked at the job'*. Those who exit their situation independently, often come to insights, a consciousness and active 'preparation' stage. Which is followed by the 'action' stage that occurs in order to exit the situation end enter the 'ending locked at the job' phase (Baumeister & Bargh, 2014; Crant, 2000; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

With regard to the reasons to become locked at the job, participants experience job dissatisfaction, caused by a lack of challenges, responsibilities, appreciation and recognition in the job (Ali & Ahmed, 2009; Danish & Usman, 2010; Stengård, 2018; Tessema *et al.*, 2013). Aronsson and Göransson (1999) found that a negative relationship with the direct supervisor can influence the locked at the job situation, which is also found in this study. Further, the working atmosphere also played an important role, as the positive work environment provided more satisfaction to the individuals (Agbozo *et al.*, 2017). A person experiencing locked at the job will perceive also limited job opportunities, caused by factors such as their current favorable working conditions (Keith & McWilliams, 1995), lack of internal growth opportunities and also lack of courage. In many cases, employees wait until these favorable conditions are met in case of a new job, or they hope for a beneficial termination

arrangement to exit the job. In addition, individual factors such as level of education and age prevent them from seeing opportunities to leave, consistent with the results of Chapter 4.

Participants differed in the level of experiencing the locked at the job situation. The *low-locked individuals* experienced, compared to the other two groups, limited negative effects due to their locked at the job situation. For example, there was frustration and anger over their situation and they were functioning on autopilot. However, their situation did not negatively influence their daily live. The second group, defined as the *medium-locked individuals*, experienced significantly more negative effects. For example, because the situation did affect their daily lives, as they experienced stress (Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Muhonen, 2010), symptoms such as headaches (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999) and had a depletion of energy, as also described by Vander Elst *et al.* (2012). Finally, the *high-locked individuals*, who experienced such negative effects both physically and mentally from their locked at the job situation that at some point they developed depressive feelings, had a disrupted sleep rhythm (Allen *et al.*, 2016), became overworked, or even suffered a burnout, similar to the studies by Aronsson and Göransson (1999), Muhonen (2010) and Stengård *et al.* (2016). Often the participants end up in a vicious circle, stay too long in a locked at the job situation and may end up with a burnout, comparable with outcomes of Tong *et al.* (2015). However, due to the lack of stability and control the participants have difficulty to leave the current situation (Carver & Scheier, 1982).

With respect to coping mechanisms the results showed that the participants used various emotion regulation strategies, regulation of the situation primarily takes place to keep the situation durable and bearable (Carver *et al.*, 1989). We identified two coping categories, work-environmental and personal coping mechanisms. Work-environmental mechanisms mainly concerned the pleasant working atmosphere in which colleagues played an important role. These individuals used a reappraisal strategy and focussed more on other positive aspects in their work environment (Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017). These

individuals felt embedded in the organization and derived energy from their environment (Hom *et al.*, 2012). Another emotion regulation strategy used was the positive distraction in which participants mentioned to focus on the content of their work which was often routine in nature (Loch *et al.*, 2011). Because these individuals were in a passive state and unable to self-regulate, this routine gave them something to hold on to and something that they did have control over (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1982; Crant, 2000). In addition, some respondents also indicated that they used their current position as a career step for a better future position and consciously choose for this temporarily locked at the job situation (De Jong *et al.*, 2009; Stengård *et al.*, 2016). In this case, respondents also used reappraisal and positive distraction strategies (Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017). Personal coping took place in particular through private circumstances, which in some cases was even worse compared to their locked at the job experience. Hereby the individual was able to cope with their current locked at the job situation, which served as a counter balance. These participants showed behavioral avoidance towards particular situations, the environment or sometimes even individuals (Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017). Continuing, there were also participants, although experiencing locked at the job, who found security and stability in their job and wanted to be able to provide for their family members, and hence their norms prevented them from exiting the situation (Hom *et al.*, 2012). In doing so, these participants were encountering a positive distraction, focussing on the stability their income offered them (Loch *et al.*, 2011).

Regarding the ways in which individuals ended their locked at the job situation we distinguished respondents who took control of their locked at the job situation and others who let it depend on external influences. Based on the current interviews, we could not discern a different pattern that could explain why certain participants left the locked at the job situation by taking control or rather with external influence. Regarding the individuals who took matters into their own hands, they either chose to stay in their current position by

changing their job dissatisfaction or they left their undesired situation. This group ultimately was able to craft their own careers and shape their future (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). For other individuals the locked at the job period ended through external influence, either by a forced leave or by being recruited. In both cases this changed their current situation. However, they were not actively behaving to improve their situation and did therefore not accomplish this liberation of their locked at the job situation on their own (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020).

The results revealed that different actors play a role in the process of locked at the job. The colleagues played an important role in '*listening*' to the locked at the job individual. Also the direct supervisor appeared to play an important role and should create space to '*discuss*'. In many cases the participants also expected their direct supervisor to play a supporting role in the whole process. Aronsson and Göransson (1999) also found that individuals lack encouragement and support when experiencing locked at the job from their direct supervisor. As for HR, participants indicated that they should '*counsel*' more in order to give more professional support. Further, there is an important role for senior management according to participants. In particular, they should '*provide*' a more open culture where the individual can speak his/her mind and be listened to. The results show that participants are reluctant to speak out about their locked situation, because of possible job loss. In this study, it emerged that what is most important to participants is that the organization provides a safe environment to talk about this topic and that they are encouraged in their job. Further, the literature shows that the organization also plays an important role in the health and well-being of the individual (Meyer & Maltin, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016; Van Zyl, Deacon & Rothmann, 2010). However, the participants in this study considered well-being and health to be a greater responsibility for the direct supervisor.

With this study we contribute to the existing literature on locked at the job and all related constructs within the job immobility and turnover literature. This first empirical

qualitative study on the concept of locked at the job has brought several new insights about this concept. This study demonstrated that the construct of locked at the job is indeed experienced by employees, through the statements that participants made about how they described and defined their situation. All locked at the job participants experienced, in varying degrees, different phases in which they went through negative feelings, thoughts and behaviors. To date, no study has previously found multiple levels at which individuals experience job immobility. Also, until now it was not clear which coping strategies were used when individuals experience a locked at the job situation. The current study has provided insights that, in particular reappraisal, positive distraction and behavioral avoidance emotion regulation coping strategies are used (Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017). These current insights allow us to make a significant contributed to the scientific literature and expand our current knowledge in the field of job immobility, in particularly that of the construct of locked at the job.

Limitations and future research agenda

The first limitation concerns recollection bias. Recollection bias could have occurred here because for a few respondents this locked at the job experience had taken place several years ago (Bleijenbergh, 2005). However, there was no difference in experiences between participants who felt stuck in their job currently or in the past. In addition, the literature shows that unique events are easier to recall than everyday events (Pillemer, 2009). The moment of data collection is therefore irrelevant. Nevertheless, I urge fellow researchers to study individuals while they go through a locked at the job situation to capture their experiences, from start to finish.

Second, despite gaining very valuable insights on locked at the job, we only found a limited number of individuals willing to participate in this study. Given the sensitivity of this study and the great taboo surrounding the subject, fewer individuals were willing to

participate. In some cases, individuals admitted to having such an experience, but were not open to an in-depth interview where sensitive topics might be raised. Nevertheless, we have received valuable input from the participants to develop additional studies, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In terms of future research, finding individuals who are willing to admit that they have experienced or are currently experiencing locked at the job will be difficult. It is therefore important to create a greater understanding on the importance of research on this topic and to break the taboo on speaking out about this topic on the job.

Third, as shown in the results, we were able to distinguish three levels in which a person can feel locked at the job (low-, medium- and high-locked individuals). This initial qualitative study provided an overall understanding of the three different levels, however, it is unclear how individuals end up in these different levels. Future research would have to reveal the further differences between these levels and, above all, what makes individuals find themselves in these levels. It is conceivable that, for example, personality traits may affect the feelings when being in a locked at the job situation. In addition, it is also possible that specific individual or work-environmental factors influence the intensity with which the individual experiences locked at the job. However, more research is needed to address this in future research.

Fourth, an important finding in our study was the possible outcome locked at the job can have on getting burned out. Even though we did not focus on the relationship between locked at the job and burnout in our study, the results strongly suggested that there were several respondents who became burned out during the peak of their locked at the job experience. Future research should therefore test this relationship and see what factors additionally predict the number of individuals who become burned out after experiencing a locked at the job situation.

A final limitation is concerned with the depth of the different phases. Because the research area of this study was quite broad, the entire process of experiencing locked at the

job was studied. Future research should further explore the different phases in depth in particular phase 2 'being locked at the job'. For example by using a diary study, participants could record on a more frequent base how they feel and what they think at a certain point in time.

Practical implications

This study suggests several implications for practice. First, as demonstrated in this study, all surrounding actors within the organization play a role to a greater or lesser extent to support these locked at the job individuals. In particular, the direct supervisor has an important role when it comes to making the situation open for discussion, and he or she should also ensure sufficient understanding for the feelings of the individual. In addition, it also appears that direct colleagues can serve as a valuable asset in order to provide a social safety net for the individual who feels stuck in their job. By being able to talk about it with colleagues, the individual may be helped more quickly in finding another suitable job by receiving advice and support and they may experience fewer peaks in the degree of locked at the job. The impact this issue has on the individual and the entire organization can only be minimized when attention to this issue is created. A joint effort from all involved actors is therefore needed to address this phenomenon.

Second, the taboo participants experience in speaking out about experiencing locked at the job should be addressed. Experiencing locked at the job or just feeling dissatisfied in the job should be widely accepted in the business and talking about it should be the norm. In this way, individuals will become aware of the situation more quickly and can sooner take control. It goes without saying that it is important that the immediate supervisor is open to such conversations. Only then can it be made easier for individuals who feel this way to express their feelings and they will also dare to take steps more quickly to promote job mobility. In addition, this can prevent unnecessary career stagnation.

Third, in addition to all involved actors, from colleagues to senior management playing a role in the process of someone experiencing locked at the job, there needs to be attention throughout the whole process. Discussing this within the organization could help to prevent individuals from becoming locked at the job, and if they do become locked at the job, to minimize their peaks and to end the locked at the job situation sooner. In addition, it is also important to pay attention in the form of aftercare for individuals who have gone through such a locked at the job situation.

Fourth, a major reason for individuals not leaving their undesired situation are the favorable working conditions and more importantly the exit packages, which they would receive in case of redundancy or dismissal. Because of the accumulated redundancy pay, that individuals would receive if the organization would dismiss them, employees often stay longer in their undesired situation. Therefore, it should be made easier for employees who feel locked at the job and would like to leave the organization. For example, favorable exit packages can be considered for employees who feel locked at the job, as the current employment conditions cause individuals to be dissatisfied in their job and thus nonproductive for the organization.

Conclusion

By conducting a qualitative study, we were able to provide insights about why and how individuals experience locked at the job. Various reasons caused misfits that led to both job dissatisfaction and limited job opportunities which made them temporarily not leave their situation. With this study we were able to provide insight into the process employees go through a process when experiencing locked at the job and how employees experience this process. We also found that there are different levels in which a person can feel locked at the job. These employees used different coping strategies, such as reappraisal, positive distraction and behavioral avoidance. In addition, their locked at the job experience often

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came to an end either by taking control or by external influences. Further, we found that in addition to the urgency for the individual to recognize this situation, there is an important role for all involved actors within an organization, in particular for the direct supervisor and senior management in supporting individuals who experience a locked at the job situation. Breaking this taboo in the workplace is therefore the most important implication of this study.



Chapter 6

Discussion

Photo | Staalmeesters bridge, Amsterdam

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this dissertation was to conceptualize and operationalize locked at the job. More specifically, I conceptualized and operationalized locked at the job in order to measure the antecedents, consequences and the process when experiencing locked at the job. Four key issues were addressed to achieve this aim, namely (1) conceptualizing and operationalizing locked at the job, (2) examining consequences of locked at the job, (3) examining antecedents of locked at the job, (4) examining the process of locked at the job. In this chapter, the main findings and the theoretical contributions related to each key issue are discussed. Further, suggestions for future research are offered, followed by strengths and limitations of this dissertation and practical implications. A summary of these different components can be found in Table 6.1. Finally, an overall conclusion is drawn.

6.2 Main findings and theoretical contributions

⇒ *Key issue 1: Conceptualizing and operationalizing locked at the job*

Main findings

The main findings of Chapter 2 regarding the conceptualization of locked at the job originate from the investigation of nine related job immobility constructs in the literature. Our literature review shows that all of these, to a greater or lesser extent, contribute to our conceptualization of locked at the job. The nine related constructs that measure job immobility in different ways are; job lock (Huyse-Gaytandjieva *et al.*, 2013), locked-in (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), turnover (Hom *et al.*, 2012; Woo & Allen, 2014), continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990), involuntary non-mobility (Stengård *et al.*, 2016), career entrenchment (Carson *et al.*, 1996), job embeddedness in adverse work environments (Allen *et al.*, 2016), inability to leave (Martin & Schermerhorn, 1983) and boundaryless and protean careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). The results show that, although all related constructs contain valuable aspects in order to build locked at the job, the related construct locked-in (Stengård

et al., 2016), consists of two dimensions and is most suitable to use for conceptualizing and operationalizing locked at the job as two-factor construct. However, in relation to the development of the definition of locked at the job, the related construct involuntary non-mobility (Stengård *et al.*, 2016) was used, given that various definitions for the locked-in concept were used.

Furthermore, I introduced a conceptual model based on the literature review of nine related constructs, the control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and the self-regulation theory (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). For this conceptual framework I propose that the antecedents consist of individual and work-environmental factors that trigger multiple misfits including feeling dissatisfied in the current job and perceived limited job opportunities (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). Further, I proposed that the failure to self-regulate (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007) acts as an important moderator as the individual is not able to prevent or counteract these misfits when becoming locked at the job. In addition, I proposed that the consequences of becoming locked at the job mainly consist of work attitude and behavioral outcomes and health and well-being outcomes. I also found confirmation in the qualitative study presented in Chapter 5 for the conceptualization of locked at the job. The participants indicated that they defined locked at the job as *'stuck'*, *'imprisoned'* and also *'(golden) chain'*. In addition, several interviews also revealed that participants experienced a lack of control.

Moreover, with respect to the scale construction and thus the operationalization of the locked at the job scale, I was able to demonstrate convergent validity, criterion validity and discriminant validity based on the validation study (Chapter 3). Using the two-wave study which is shown in Chapter 4, I was able to further extend the operationalization of locked at the job, as it was tested in relation to the antecedents age, level of education and tenure and the moderating variable organizational support for development.

Implications for theory

With this dissertation I contributed to and gained knowledge for theory in a number of ways. First, I was able to bring together the highly scattered and non-integrated job immobility literature and compile it in the literature study shown in Chapter 2, the conceptual paper. This provided a better overview of the existing job immobility literature, and also identified the similarities and differences between these constructs. Second, the conceptual model presented later in Chapter 2 was used to further understand which antecedents and consequences are associated with locked at the job and how this concept relates to these other variables such as productivity, and motivation, as well as which theories are associated with locked at the job. This has allowed me to provide a lead and direction to better direct future research in the area of job immobility and significantly expand the existing limited research. Third, using the validation study (Chapter 3), I was able to develop a measurement tool that would allow future research on locked at the job. This new scale provides a more unified measurement method and in addition the assumed relationships can be better compared with the use of this new locked at the job scale. Fourth, the additional studies in Chapters 4 and 5 then helped in the operationalization of locked at the job by relating it to antecedents and consequences. With these new insights, we are able to establish relationships with other areas of research, for example, the relationship between locked at the job and burnout, which was found in Chapter 5.

⇒ *Key issue 2: examining consequences of locked at the job*

Main findings

Even though some of the previous studies focused on the outcomes of related constructs of locked at the job, which was found in Chapter 2 (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Blau, 2001; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Muhonen, 2010; Sharma, 2019; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Stengård *et al.*, 2016), there are no studies that have yet measured the outcomes of the locked

at the job construct itself. Therefore, with this dissertation I aimed to provide initial outcomes, that would further clarify the effects when being locked at the job and would give new insights into the implications of this phenomenon. In Chapter 3 we presented the validation study of the locked at the job scale, which at the same time gave us insights about the outcomes locked at the job has. The results revealed that locked at the job was positively related to work attitude and behavioral outcomes; job embeddedness, continuance change commitment, behavioral resistance to change and job insecurity. In contrast, locked at the job showed to be negatively related to affective change commitment, person-job fit and individual productivity. This was partially confirmed by earlier studies on job related constructs (Blau, 2001; Fisher *et al.*, 2016; Furåker *et al.*, 2014; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Sharma, 2019).

Apart from the insights collected in the validation study (Chapter 3), we also found insightful results in the qualitative study presented in Chapter 5. In this study, we asked participants about their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors when they felt locked at the job. We were able to distinguish three levels of locked at the job; low-, medium- and high- locked individuals. Low-locked individuals experienced few negative feelings and thoughts and were only frustrated and angry about the situation they had ended up in. The second level, medium-locked individuals, experienced significantly more negative effects, such as stress (Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Muhonen, 2010), depletion of energy (Van der Elst *et al.*, 2012) and were affected in their daily lives by the situation. The third and most disturbing level was experienced by high-locked individuals. These participants often found themselves in a vicious cycle, developed depressive symptoms or worse by ending up in a burnout (Aronsson & Göransson, 1999; Muhonen, 2010; Stengård *et al.*, 2016; Tong *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, the findings also revealed that as a result of experiencing locked at the job, many participants were reluctant to share their feelings because of possible job loss. Something that also emerged from the validation study in which a positive correlation was found between locked at the job and job insecurity (Chapter 3), suggesting that respondents in the quantitative

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sample were also more insecure about possible job loss when experiencing locked at the job. This was consistent with Furåker *et al.* (2014) who indicated that locked at the job can be seen as the counterpart of job security.

Implications for theory

With the validation study presented in Chapter 3 and the qualitative study reported in Chapter 5 we were able to bring new insights into both the work attitude and behavioral outcomes as well as the health and well-being related outcomes of locked at the job. This enabled us to identify a broad spectrum of outcomes on experiencing locked at the job using different research designs. The outcomes not only corresponded with what has already been found in the literature on related constructs, we were also able to come up with new insights, such as the different levels in which one could feel locked at the job as well as the relationship with getting a burnout.

⇒ *Key issue 3: examining antecedents of locked at the job*

Main findings

As shown in the conceptual paper presented in Chapter 2, based on the PE-fit theory (Edwards, 2008), we propose that the employee perceived multiple misfits. Various individual and work environmental factors together cause a misfit which can lead to both feeling dissatisfied in the job and the perception of limited job opportunities, which together represent locked at the job. The results of the two-wave study (Chapter 4) show that lower educated employees are more likely to become locked at the job. We propose that the level of education is more difficult to alter which makes one more likely to perceive limited job opportunities, compared to the perception of being too old or having a high tenure (Furåker *et al.*, 2014). Continuing, we found that organizational support for development can moderate the relationship between age, tenure and level of education with locked at the job. The

results showed that when the organization offers support for development for employees who are older, are lower educated and have more tenure, these individuals are less likely to feel locked at the job.

Further, the qualitative results of Chapter 5 showed that the reasons related to feeling dissatisfied in the job were mainly caused by lack of challenges, responsibilities, appreciation and recognition in the job (Ali & Ahmed, 2009; Danish & Usman, 2010; Stengård, 2018; Tessema *et al.*, 2013). In addition, reasons for perceived limited job opportunities, the second dimension of locked at the job, were mainly caused by the favorable working conditions (Keith & McWilliams, 1995), their level of education and job tenure. Consistent with the results from Chapter 1 and 4, I also found confirmation in the qualitative study (Chapter 5) that participants reported that their age, level of education and their tenure with the organization increased their likeliness to feel locked at the job.

A concluding remark regarding age in relation to locked at the job is that the results from the two-wave study of Chapter 4 showed that age positively significantly correlated with locked at the job. Employees at a higher age are more likely to become locked at the job. However, the results of the qualitative study presented in Chapter 5 showed that employees of all ages, from young to old, can feel locked at the job. For example, this study showed that even employees who just started their career were experiencing locked at the job. This shows that despite the fact that there are individuals in every age group who can feel locked at the job, older individuals are more likely to become locked at the job. These older individuals perceive multiple reasons for remaining in the job, which are largely reinforced by the current labor system in the Netherlands. For example, the current contract landscape and the favorable exit packages make it complicated for specifically older employees to leave voluntarily (Borghouts-Van de Pas *et al.*, 2019; Hoerberichts *et al.*, 2021; Stengård *et al.*, 2016; Waaijer *et al.*, 2017).

Implications for theory

By addressing this third key issue we contribute to theory by merging the existing knowledge on antecedents of locked at the job and by expanding the insights by providing a theoretical explanation for the antecedents. By focusing in this dissertation on what causes a locked at the job situation, we have been able to expand the current understanding on why employees become locked at the job. To date, a limited number of studies existed that measure the antecedents of this phenomenon (Stengard, 2018). In addition, using the qualitative study presented in Chapter 5, we were able to provide a very broad and complete overview of antecedents that influence locked at the job, based on which future research can be conducted.

⇒ *Key issue 4: examining the process of locked at the job*

Main findings

Insights from the conceptual paper (see Chapter 2) show that there are limited and scattered insights on causes and effects of locked at the job. In addition, there is still no understanding on how the process evolves, and which phases an individual goes through when experiencing locked at the job. Further, to date no qualitative study has yet been performed on why and how individuals experience locked at the job. To address this fourth key issue I conducted a qualitative study presented in Chapter 5 in which I examined the process of individuals experiencing locked at the job. The results showed that all participants experience three similar phases; 1) becoming locked at the job, 2) being locked at the job and 3) ending locked at the job. During these phases they progress through different stages of behavioral change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). It starts at the precontemplation stage and ends at the action stage, in which they experience a peak in the intermittant period as they move from a passive state to an active state. The first two phases have been explained in the previous key issues. With regard to the ending the locked at the job situation some

participants were able to take an active stance to change the situation, they were able to take control and craft their career by either staying or leaving the job (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). There are additionally also participants who did not actively behave (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020) and were taken out of their locked at the job situation by external influences, voluntarily or by force. Finally, the results showed that different actors, from colleagues to senior management, play an important role in reducing the number of individuals who become locked at the job, minimizing the peaks while being locked at the job and in ensuring that the end the locked at the job situation is eased

In addition to findings on the process we also collected insights on how individuals cope while experiencing this process of locked at the job in the qualitative study (Chapter 5). I found that while being locked at the job participants used emotion regulation coping strategies such as 1) reappraisal by focusing on other more positive aspects in their work environment, 2) positive distraction through focusing on their work content and 3) behavioral avoidance in which the participant avoided particular elements in their job (Izadpanah *et al.*, 2017; Loch *et al.*, 2011; Naragon-Gainey *et al.*, 2017).

Implications for theory

In terms of contributions, with this fourth key issue we were able to have first qualitative insights on the process of locked at the job. The insights of the participants showed that employees can indeed experience a situation in which they experience both dissatisfaction in the job and perceive they have limited job opportunities, resulting in the fact that participants indicated experiencing locked at the job. To date, no previous studies have examined the process of individuals who are going through a locked at the job situation, including the different levels found within the phase of being locked at the job as well as the

coping mechanisms used when experiencing locked at the job. This research has addressed the need for further expansion and development regarding the concept of locked at the job.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

With this dissertation, knowledge regarding the phenomenon of locked at the job has increased substantially. Based on the findings presented in this dissertation and the four key issues that have been addressed I have six suggestions for future research.

First, in the proposed conceptual model of locked at the job, presented in Chapter 2, we have identified a moderating role for the failure to self-regulate (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). We argue that the failure to self-regulate acts as a moderator on the relationship between antecedents and locked at the job. However, this assumption in the conceptual framework has not been further investigated to date. Baumeister and Heatherton (1996) characterize two groups of employees who are unable to self-regulate, the underregulators who lack effort and the misregulators who are ineffective in their actions. I therefore suggest that future research should not only investigate the moderating effect of the failure to self-regulate, it should also look at which type of regulator weakens or strengthens the relationship between antecedents and locked at the job.

Second, we have gained many new insights when it comes to work attitude and behavioral outcomes, however insights are lacking particularly in the quantitative area of health and well-being outcomes. The conceptual paper in Chapter 2 shows that especially from the related construct locked-in (Stengård, 2018) there are additional insights when it comes to health and well-being outcomes. Further, insights were gained on health and well-being outcomes from a qualitative perspective in Chapter 5. Future research should therefore focus more on health and well-being outcomes in relation to the new locked at the job scale and continue to examine the relationships found in our qualitative study. I suggest to look at the relationship between locked at the job and what health and well-being outcomes may

occur at the different levels (low, medium and high locked) individuals can experience a locked at the job situation.

Third, future research should aim to collect longitudinal data. In this dissertation, a two-wave study in Chapter 4 was conducted in which more insights were gained about how individuals feel locked at the job and perceived organizational support for development over time. There are also insights into the duration of a locked at the job situation through the qualitative outcomes from Chapter 5, in which participants indicated both their current duration of the locked at the job situation as well as how they remembered this in retrospect. In addition, Chapter 5 also provided insights into the different phases through which employees progress when they feel locked at the job. However, there is not enough longitudinal research on how such a situation evolves and how individuals move through these different phases. It would be useful to use longitudinal research to specifically follow employees who go through such a locked at the job situation. In order to closely follow and monitor the entire process of the three underlying phases and the associated patterns of these individuals. For example, to measure what outcomes of experiencing locked at the job occur at what specific moments in the process per level of the low, medium and high locked at the job experience.

Fourth, it is important to complement the longitudinal data with an intervention study. The current data focussed on just two measures in time, however, this process that individuals go through is subject to different phases and therefore also different situations. Based on the transtheoretical model of behavior change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997) I argue that individuals who go through a locked at the job situation undergo different behavioral changes, such as moving from the precontemplation stage to eventually the action stage. If specific interventions were added prior to certain measurements we would gain more insight into how this would affect their behaviors, and what are important mechanisms to facilitate in this process of locked at the job. For example, an intervention may be more focused on

the individual who feels locked at the job, with the goal of minimizing the peaks and ending the locked at the job sooner. For example, by increasing awareness through an information session, so that they move from a passive situation to a more active behavior. In addition, I propose that different interventions are needed for different groups. The results suggest that younger employees have different and possibly fewer causes for experiencing locked at the job. They will feel to a lesser extent too old for a job change, or will experience more job opportunities compared to older employees. The interventions should therefore be altered to specific groups. For example, an intervention that focuses on showing the individual their potential in the current job market could have an effect on how older individuals perceive their job opportunities and therefore minimize the locked at the job duration.

Fifth, it would be interesting to know whether specific individuals are more vulnerable and at risk of becoming locked at the job. We did examine vulnerable groups in terms of demographic factors (i.e. age, educational level and tenure) in Chapter 4. However, future research could examine whether specific personality traits are, to a greater or lesser extent, key predictors of locked at the job. Can certain personality traits be identified in individuals who may be more likely to feel locked at the job than in individuals with a different combination of personality traits? In other words, what personality traits are more common for individuals who feel locked at the job. I would suggest to start with the big five personality inventory (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann Jr., 2003), which include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience, to see which traits are more common for individuals who feel locked at the job. Our qualitative study (Chapter 5) shows that individuals do not dare to talk about their locked at the job situation, which might indicate that these individuals are more likely to be introvert. In addition, the study in Chapter 5 also reveals that those who feel locked at the job experience many different feelings and emotions, which may indicate that those experiencing locked at the job are more emotionally unstable. With regard to openness to experience it is evident

from the construct that individuals are temporarily job immobile, as they are not moving I would presume that these individuals are less open to new experiences. Therefore, I suggest to examine the role of extraversion, emotional stability and openness to experience in becoming locked at the job. Once we can confirm these assumptions through further research we will have more clarity on which individuals might be more at risk of becoming locked at the job. This would allow practitioners to prevent locked at the job, for example by stimulating direct supervisors to guide team members who show more particular traits.

Sixth, and related to the previous suggestion on examining individual differences, we can broaden our insights on locked at the job by linking it to for example Levinson's stages of adult life (1986), in which Levinson proposes six stages of adulthood. It is important to know how ones life stages can have an effect on a locked at the job situation. Research from Chapter 3 shows that locked at the job correlates strongly with age and tenure. However, Chapter 5 also shows that individuals in all stages of adult life can face a locked at the job situation. This is mainly because the causes of such a situation can be very diverse and can be driven from both work and private related settings. For example, a man who is *entering the adult world* stage (Levinson, 1986) and is without a partner will be in a completely different stage in life than a woman in the stage of *settling down*, who is living together with a partner and has recently had a second child. As Levinson (1986) also described, depending on these life stages individuals will make other choices in their career which can also have an effect on the moment when they end up in a locked at the job situation. The decision to leave the locked at the job situation voluntarily can be easier for some than for others. Future research should, for example in combination with Levinson's theory (1986), examine whether locked at the job occurs sooner or more quickly in certain stages of life and whether the causes and effects may vary by the different stages in life.

6.4 Strengths and limitations

This dissertation is characterized by several strengths and limitations. A strength of this dissertation is that a broad spectrum of methods has been used to investigate the phenomenon of locked at the job. For example, a conceptual paper was written, several quantitative studies, including a validation study, were conducted and qualitative research was carried out.

A limitation of this dissertation is that the quantitative research was conducted only within one organization, a custodian bank situated in the Netherlands. As a consequence, the results from the quantitative studies in Chapter 3 and 4 were also only taken from one organization as well as one sector. However, the qualitative data from Chapter 5 were collected in multiple organizations and sectors. In general, the quantitative and qualitative studies show corresponding outcomes. Follow-up research should, however, show whether there are any significant differences, particularly at the quantitative level, when comparable studies into locked at the job are conducted in other organizations in the financial industry and in a different sector. For example, studies could be conducted in the public domain, where possibly other causes will play a more important role in experiencing locked at the job. Second, the data was only collected in the Netherlands and therefore statements can only be made about how employees in the Netherlands experience this phenomenon of experiencing locked at the job. With respect to related constructs, for example, locked-in (Stengård, 2018) has been studied in Scandinavia and job lock (Fisher *et al.*, 2016) mainly in the United States. As a result, the conceptualizations and operationalizations of these concepts are aligned to the context of these settings and continents, such as job lock that primarily measures the objective state of the employee in relation to the employer provided health care. Therefore, research regarding locked at the job needs to focus on other countries taking into account the various context-dependent factors, such as laws and regulations. Third, not all perspectives are included in the current studies, for example, colleagues, the

direct supervisor, HR but also senior management were not surveyed about their perspective. I solely focused on the perspective of the individual, although Chapter 5 shows that all actors in an organization play an important role in reducing the locked at the job phenomenon. The perspective of the supervisor, for example, would have been interesting to include. When there is more insight into how a direct supervisor views employees who feel locked at the job, then the needs of both parties can be better met from a practical point of view.

6.5 Practical implications

Due to this research we are able to conceptualize and measure the phenomenon locked at the job. In addition to addressing a very valuable concept for science, this dissertation also offers valuable practical implications. First, the results show that there is a lot of ignorance among employees about the phenomenon and that it is severely underestimated. The data collection of the qualitative study revealed two striking aspects. 1) The individuals related it in almost all cases to the *golden cage*, because in many cases they only link it to a financial cause for experiencing locked at the job. In this golden cage the employees perceive they are tied to the current job mainly for financial reasons. 2) In addition, almost everyone indicates that they have experienced it themselves or are convinced that in the specific organization they work there are a lot of employees who feel locked at the job, regardless of the various sectors in which these individuals were often employed. Further, it was shown in Chapter 3 that a considerable number of individuals felt locked at the job, between 12.9% and 19.6% of the population. Therefore, with the help of this dissertation, more knowledge about this phenomenon can be shared in organizations. In order to reduce the number of individuals who feel locked at the job, it is important to first remove the stigma on this phenomenon, create disclosure and more knowledge on what this phenomenon entails. Research shows that stigma and barriers are major obstacles in

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creating a sustainable career and the role of the direct supervisor is crucial for disclosure (Bogaers *et al.*, 2021; Dewa, Van Weeghel, Joosen & Brouwers, 2020). It is therefore of great importance that more disclosure is created within organizations.

Second, an important factor with respect to outcomes of Chapter 5 is not daring to admit to be experiencing locked at the job. Results of this chapter also show that on average individuals feel locked at the job for 2,5 years. A time that is relatively long, when considering the negative effects one may experience during this period. In addition, this phenomenon is hardly spoken about on the work floor. On the one hand because individuals strive for perfection and on the other hand because one is afraid to fail (Shaikh, Shah, Shah & Nawaz, 2019; Zhou, Mao & Tang, 2020). This leads to a great taboo that lies on this phenomenon. This in many cases may be reinforced by the current social media pressure (De Lenne *et al.*, 2018). The use of social media for example, causes an increased pressure on individuals to get a false image of themselves. Lives should be perfect, especially the jobs one holds, as this raises the status one represents (Freitas, 2017). Dissatisfied feelings should not be expressed, in contrast, the employee is expected to show happiness and satisfaction at all times (Spicer & Cederström, 2015). This needs to be addressed, with a particular focus on breaking a taboo about feeling dissatisfied and experiencing locked at the job. Chapter 5 already shows that there is a big taboo on the phenomenon of experiencing locked at the job. It is therefore important that this phenomenon is taken out of the taboo atmosphere within the organization, but also outside of the organization. Here we could learn from the phenomenon 'burnout', especially on how employees in the past and today have dealt with this concept (Tong *et al.*, 2015). Where two decades ago burnout was not open for discussion in the workplace, nowadays it is a very accepted and discussed topic in the workplace (TNO, 2019). However, the same maturity level has yet to be reached for the phenomenon whereby someone feels locked at the job. Employees should feel open to admit to being dissatisfied in the job and that they perceive limited opportunities in today's job market. Especially as a

situation of experiencing locked at your job can happen to anyone, from young to old, from low to high educated.

Third, an open dialogue needs to take place in which the individual takes the lead, but in which the individual is supported in his 'coming out' by all actors in the organization. Here, it is mainly important that the direct supervisor and senior management provide an environment in which such a locked at the job situation is made discussible and also a culture is created in which HR and senior management better guide employees in a possible exit process of employees who wish to pursue their careers elsewhere.

Fourth, it is important that employees who feel locked at the job can be identified more quickly. Therefore, in addition to more intensive discussions between the direct supervisor and the employee, there should also be more frequent insights into the extent to which employees feel locked at the job in the specific organization. Many organizations nowadays work with employee-satisfaction-surveys that are often conducted once or twice a year. However, these surveys do not sufficiently look at dissatisfaction that employees experience in their job as well as the extent to which they feel they have no options to leave the job. Organizations should therefore add the developed scale introduced in Chapter 3, for measuring locked at the job to signal more quickly the seriousness and necessity of the population experiencing locked at the job within the specific organization and its teams. It is important for organizations to pay attention to this phenomenon so that the organization also experiences less negative consequences from their employees experiencing locked at the job. In fact, research from Chapter 2 shows that commitment but also productivity decreases when employees feel locked at the job.

Fifth, it is important that training and information sessions take place at team level to create an open culture and generate knowledge on the topic. In this way the individual can be addressed as well as the colleagues and direct supervisor, through which multiple actors are directly involved and informed. In these training and information sessions, first of

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all the phenomenon needs to be explained, second trust needs to be increased in the team to create a safe environment in which this taboo can be discussed and finally employees, colleagues and the direct supervisor need to be provided tools on how to deal with such a situation, from all perspectives.

Table 6.1 Overview of the dissertation

| Key issue | Main findings | Implications for theory |
|--|---|---|
| 1. <i>Conceptualizing and operationalizing locked at the job</i> | Nine constructs found related to job immobility. Conceptual model is based on control, self-regulation and PE-fit theory. Validation for the scale construction was met. | Using the related constructs we were able to clarify and refine the concept of locked at the job and to develop and validate a new scale for locked at the job. |
| 2. <i>Examining consequences of locked at the job</i> | Job embeddedness, continuance change commitment, behavioral resistance to change and job insecurity were positively influenced by locked at the job. Further, affective change commitment, person-job fit and individual productivity were negatively influenced by locked at the job. Locked at the job can be experienced in a low-, medium- and high degree, with divergent symptoms. Ultimately it can lead to burnout. | Broad spectrum of new insights both on work attitude and behavioral and health and well-being related outcomes. |
| 3. <i>Examining antecedents of locked at the job</i> | Lower educated individuals are more likely to become locked at the job. Additionally, organizational support for development can moderate the relationship of age, tenure and level of education with locked at the job. Causes for the dimension job dissatisfaction is mainly lack of challenges and recognition and causes for the dimension limited job opportunities is mainly favorable working conditions. | We expanded the insights and found a wide range of reasons for feeling dissatisfied in the job and perceived limited job opportunities resulting in becoming locked at the job. |
| 4. <i>Examining the process of locked at the job</i> | Three phases identified; becoming-, being- and ending locked at the job. Ending a locked at the job situation can take place either through own influence by taking control or by external influence. The emotion regulation coping strategies, reappraisal, positive distraction and behavioral avoidance were used in order to cope with the situation. | With the use of the qualitative study we were able to expand the insights on the process and different phases experienced when a locked at the job situation occurs. |

| Suggestions for future research | Suggestions research question |
|--|--|
| Examine the proposed moderating effect of failure to self-regulate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Which type of regulators weakens or strengthens the relationship between antecedents and locked at the job? |
| Collect longitudinal data in order to gain more insights into the process of locked at the job. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What patterns do low, medium and high locked individuals show when they move through the three phases of locked at the job? → What patterns over time are of influence for the work attitude and behavioral and health and well-being outcomes when experiencing locked at the job? |
| Perform an intervention study in order to see which interventions are needed to reduce the locked at the job situation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What are important mechanisms to prevent or facilitate ending the process of locked at the job? → In what way does providing an awareness information session have an influence on the level and peak of experiencing a locked at the job situation? |
| Perform a prediction study on personality traits in relation to locked at the job | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What personality traits are more common for individuals who feel locked at the job? → Individuals with which personality traits are more likely to become locked at the job? |
| Examine, based on the Levinson stages of adult life (1986), whether locked at the job occurs more frequently in certain stages of life. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → In what way do stages of life influence the degree to which individuals experience a locked at the job situation? |
| Practical implications | |
| First, improve awareness and create disclosure on the phenomenon of locked at the job by educating the business. | |
| Second, breaking the taboo about sharing experiences of locked at the job. | |
| Third, create an open dialogue within organizations in which all crucial actors are involved. | |
| Fourth, in order to identify locked individuals more quickly, include <i>locked at the job</i> scale into employee surveys. | |
| Fifth, organize training- and information sessions at team level to explain the phenomenon, increase trust and provide tools to better cope with this situation. | |

6.6 Conclusion

In this dissertation I aimed to conceptualize and operationalize the phenomenon of locked at the job and to create more understanding about the overall construct, by studying the antecedents and consequences of this construct and how the process evolves over time. I was able to build a solid foundation regarding the integrative term derived from related constructs for the concept of locked at the job, within an understudied research area. In addition, based on the developed conceptual model the proposed relationships with causes and effects of locked at the job were measured through which a greater understanding is generated for the job immobility literature and related research areas. Moreover, I was able to show that individuals undergo a process at different levels. Since going through such a locked at the job situation has negative consequences not only for the individual but also for the organization, I urge that the number of employees experiencing locked at the job is reduced by counteracting the situations, minimizing peaks and shortening the durations. There will always be employees who will experience a locked at the job situation; unfortunately, this dissertation will not be able to avoid this phenomenon entirely. What can be looked at, however, is how we can better deal with such a situation with the knowledge gained from this dissertation. Because the current labor market does not sufficiently promote job mobility, we are forced to use the insights from this dissertation to focus mainly on increasing awareness about this phenomenon and its causes and effects, breaking the taboo and creating an open dialogue within organizations. In this way, job mobility can be enhanced and more employees can be satisfied and motivated in their jobs, allowing a circular labor market to be created.



Chapter 7

References

Photo | Tower bridge, London

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• Chapter 7

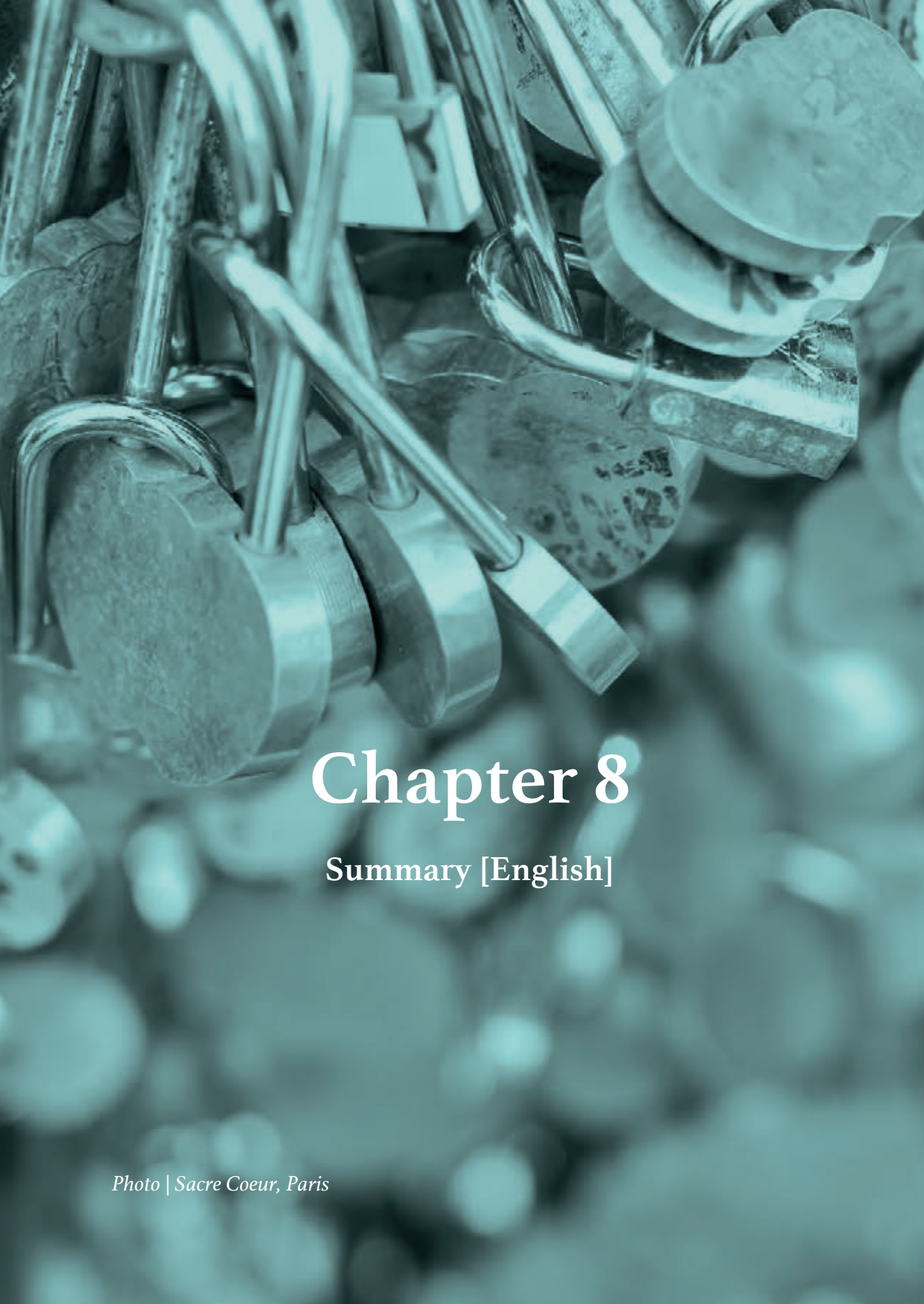
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Chapter 8

Summary [English]

Photo | Sacre Coeur, Paris

Introduction

Experiencing 'locked at the job' is a concept originating from nine related constructs derived from the job immobility literature. An integrative term, which consists of two dimensions, defined as "feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities". When employees remain in such an undesired job situation this can have negative effects in terms of a decrease in productivity, a reduction of job involvement and commitment to the organization, but also a decrease in physical and mental health. Various factors in the labor market foster job immobility conditions such as a high unemployment rate, a lack of vacancies and favorable working conditions.

Current studies on the related constructs have some shortcomings: they originate from different research fields and foci, are not well integrated and have yielded scattered and limited insights. To address these issues, an integrative conceptualization and operationalization of the locked at the job concept and a better understanding of the process of becoming locked at the job is needed. The overarching research question used in this dissertation is:

What is experiencing locked at the job, what are its antecedents and consequences and how does it evolve over time?

I examined this research question by focusing on four key issues, namely: (1) conceptualizing and operationalizing locked at the job based on related constructs of job immobility, (2) examining consequences of locked at the job, (3) examining antecedents of locked at the job, (4) examining the process of locked at the job. I will now explain these key issues and the findings in more detail.

Overview of the main findings for each of the four key issues

⇒ *Key issue I. Conceptualizing and operationalizing locked at the job based on related constructs of job immobility*

The results of the literature review of nine related constructs; job lock, locked-in, turnover, continuance commitment, involuntary non-mobility, career entrenchment, job embeddedness in adverse work environments, inability to leave and boundaryless and protean careers, show that all are valuable for the conceptualization and operationalization of locked at the job. The related construct locked-in, with its two-factor structure, and involuntary non-mobility are most useful for the definition of locked at the job: “feeling dissatisfied in the current job and inactivity due to perceived limited job opportunities”.

A conceptual model was introduced, underpinned with the literature review on the related constructs and the control and self-regulation theory. I propose that locked at the job is caused by multiple misfits that are triggered by individual and work-environmental factors that do not align, based on the person-environment fit theory. Subsequently these misfits in relation with locked at the job are moderated by the failure to self-regulate, as the individual is unable to prevent or counteract the occurring misfits. Similarly, the results show that the locked at the job individual is experiencing a lack of control over the situation. Furthermore, I propose that locked at the job will affect work attitude and behavioral outcomes and health and well-being outcomes. In terms of the operationalization of the locked at the job scale I was able to establish convergent-, criterion-, and discriminant validity and to extend the scale measurement by studying the antecedents age, educational level and tenure and the moderator organizational support for development in relation with the locked at the job scale.

⇒ *Key issue 2. Examining consequences of locked at the job*

Several studies of related constructs have examined the outcomes of this phenomenon. However, various measurement scales were used through which I designed a new scale to measure locked at the job. Therefore, I aimed to find support for existing findings of related constructs as well as to provide insights into new outcomes of locked at the job. As expected, the results of the validation study showed that locked at the job was positively related to work attitude and behavioral outcomes; job embeddedness, continuance change commitment, behavioral resistance to change and job insecurity. In contrast, locked at the job was negatively related to affective change commitment, person-job fit and individual productivity. Further, results from the qualitative study revealed that we can distinguish three levels at which individuals experience a locked at the job situation. Low-locked individuals had few negative feelings and thoughts and were frustrated and angry about their situation. Medium-locked individuals experienced more negative effects, such as stress, energy depletion and most importantly it affected their daily lives. The high-locked individuals, the most alarming group, often experienced a vicious circle, developed depressive symptoms or experienced a burnout. In general, I found that being in this situation had the tendency to make employees reluctant to share their feelings, with for example their direct supervisor, and that there is still a lot unknown about this topic.

⇒ *Key issue 3. Examining antecedents of locked at the job*

The results of the two-wave study showed that lower educated employees are more likely to become locked at the job. In addition, I found that support for development from the organization moderates the relationship of age, tenure and level of education with experiencing locked at the job. This means that when you offer individuals who are older, less educated and longer employed more support to develop, they will be less likely to feel locked at the job. Continuing, the results of the qualitative study showed that the causes for

becoming dissatisfied in the job, the first dimension of locked at the job, are mainly the lack of challenges, responsibilities, appreciation and recognition in the job. The second dimension, perceived limited job opportunities, was mainly caused by the favorable working conditions, their level of education and job tenure.

⇒ *Key issue 4. Examining the process of locked at the job*

Currently we know little about the process of becoming and ending locked at the job. In addition, due to the lack of qualitative research on this topic, the aim was to provide insight on the process, from a qualitative perspective. I found three phases; becoming locked at the job, being locked at the job and ending locked at the job. The first part of the process, becoming and part of the being locked at the job phase, is experienced passively. The transition from a passive state to an active state is preceded by an event, in which feelings and emotions reach their peak. The situation comes to an end when the participant is able to take action, alter their situation and regain control over the situation by crafting their career or themselves or by leaving the job. The locked at the job situation can also be ended by external influences, voluntarily or by force, in which case the individual is not in a state of taking control. Continuing, the results show that all involved actors, from colleagues to senior management, are key players in reducing the number of individuals who become locked at the job, decreasing the peaks while being locked at the job and by easing the ending of the locked at the job situation. In addition, the results show that three emotion regulation coping strategies are used in order to better cope with the locked at the job situation; *reappraisal* in which the individual adjusts his or her current perspective, *positive distraction* in which the individual shifts his or her attention and *behavioral avoidance* in which one avoids unpleasant situations, individuals or environments.

Implications for theory

With this dissertation a contribution is made to theory. First, I was able to integrate the job immobility literature and with the use of a literature review propose a conceptual model of locked at the job. This provided guidance and insights in order to expand the current limited research in the area of job immobility, and particularly locked at the job. Second, the development of the locked at the job scale allows the field to further substantiate future research with a unified measurement tool. Third, with the implementation of the locked at the job scale new insights were gained on multiple research areas, such as locked the job in relation with organizational support for development. In addition, confirmation was found on multiple antecedents and on consequences of locked at the job. An important insight concerning the consequences of a locked at the job situation was the level at which an individual is able to feel locked at the job, which can be further studied with quantitative research. In studying the antecedents, we could provide a broad and comprehensive overview, of both causes that affect the dimension of job dissatisfaction as well as the dimension limited job opportunities. Fourth, by studying locked at the job from a qualitative perspective I was able to gain new insights into the process of locked at the job and to address the coping mechanisms used when being locked at the job.

Practical implications

It is important that locked at the job can be explored not only within science, but that a bridge to practice is also established. First, the results of this dissertation show that there is still a lot unknown about this phenomenon. Thus, awareness should be increased on this topic, as being locked at the job can have many different causes and as it may occur in many different sectors and at different levels of the organization. Second, the results showed that between 12.9% and 19.6% of the sample felt locked at the job. However, it also showed that there is a great taboo on discussing this topic, both in the workplace and outside of the office.

Therefore, it is of great importance to reduce the stigma on this phenomenon, create more transparency within all layers of the organization and gain more understanding of what this phenomenon entails. Second, the results show that it is essential that the employee dares to speak up about experiencing locked at the job, as this may help them to get out of this situation. Because of the great taboo and the outside pressure to meet a certain standard, it is difficult for employees to talk about their experience of being locked at the job. This makes it even more difficult to change this situation. Third, an open dialogue needs to be established in the workplace. The employee must be able to share his or her feelings in a safe and trustful environment. This dialogue can only be achieved if there is support from senior management and the direct supervisor and an open culture. Fourth, an intensive feedback loop, for example on the employee's job satisfaction level, should then be established between the direct supervisor and the employee. It may be helpful for organizations to measure the degree of locked at the job among individuals using a survey to signal the seriousness of locked at the job more quickly. Finally, it is important that training and information sessions take place at the team level to create this open culture and generate knowledge on the topic. Such sessions are important in order to explain the phenomenon, build confidence in the team to talk about it and get tools on how to deal with such a situation, from an employee and employer perspective.

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to conceptualize and operationalize locked at the job and to generate a more solid understanding on the process of this phenomenon. With regard to the conceptualization of the construct I was able to build a solid foundation, based on the existing job immobility literature. This was followed by the operationalization which I was able to validate based on the developed conceptual model including proposed causes and effects, justified with theoretical foundations. Furthermore, I was able to reveal the different

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phases an individual progresses through when becoming locked at the job. These findings ensure that the number of individuals experiencing locked at the job can be reduced, by counteracting the situations, reducing peaks and shortening the durations. Unfortunately, this dissertation will not solve the phenomenon entirely since there will always be individuals who will experience a locked at the job situation for a certain period of time. However, by applying the insights from this dissertation organizations are able to better manage this situation. It is important to create awareness about this phenomenon, and that the taboo can be broken, resulting in an open dialogue on this topic. This may promote job mobility and allow a circular labor market to be created, in which individuals can move from job to job healthy and satisfied.

A teal-tinted photograph of a metal padlock on a chain attached to a metal structure. The padlock is a rectangular metal lock with the words "FEDERAL LOCK" embossed on its front. It is attached to a chain that hangs from a metal hook. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface, possibly a wall or a large window. The overall mood is industrial and somewhat somber due to the monochromatic color scheme.

Chapter 9

Samenvatting [summary in Dutch]

Photo | Prinses Beatrix bridge, Naarden

Introductie

Het concept 'locked at the job' ook wel 'opgesloten voelen in de baan' vloeit voort uit negen gerelateerde constructen die zijn afgeleid uit de literatuur over baanimmobiliteit. Het is een concept, dat uit twee dimensies bestaat, gedefinieerd als "ontevreden voelen in de huidige baan en inactiviteit als gevolg van waargenomen beperkte baankansen". Wanneer werknemers in een dergelijke ongewenste werksituatie blijven, kan dit negatieve effecten hebben in de vorm van een daling van de productiviteit, een vermindering van de betrokkenheid bij en inzet voor de organisatie, maar ook een daling van de fysieke en mentale gezondheid. Verschillende factoren op de arbeidsmarkt werken baanimmobiliteit in de hand, zoals een hoog werkloosheidscijfer, een gebrek aan vacatures en gunstige arbeidsomstandigheden.

Huidige studies naar de gerelateerde constructen hebben een aantal tekortkomingen: ze komen voort uit verschillende onderzoeksdisciplines en aandachtsgebieden, zijn niet goed geïntegreerd en hebben versnipperde en beperkte inzichten opgeleverd. Om deze problemen aan te pakken is een integrerende conceptualisering en operationalisering van het concept locked at the job nodig en een beter inzicht in hoe het proces van locked at the job verloopt. De overkoepelende onderzoeksvraag in dit proefschrift luidt:

Wat is locked at the job, wat zijn de antecedenten en consequenties en hoe evolueert het in de tijd?

Ik heb deze onderzoeksvraag onderzocht door me te richten op vier kernvraagstukken, namelijk: (1) conceptualiseren en operationaliseren van locked at the job op basis van gerelateerde constructen van baanimmobiliteit, (2) onderzoeken van de consequenties van locked at the job, (3) onderzoeken van de antecedenten van locked at the job en (4) onderzoeken van het proces van locked at the job. Ik zal deze kernvraagstukken en de bevindingen nu in meer detail uiteenzetten.

Overzicht van de belangrijkste bevindingen voor de vier kernvraagstukken

⇒ *Kernvraagstuk 1. Conceptualiseren en operationaliseren van locked at the job op basis van gerelateerde constructen van baanimmobiliteit*

De resultaten van de literatuurstudie van negen gerelateerde constructen; *job lock*, *locked-in*, *turnover*, *continuance commitment*, *involuntary non-mobility*, *career entrenchment*, *job embeddedness in adverse work environments*, *inability to leave* en *boundaryless and protean careers*, laten zien dat ze allen waardevol zijn voor de conceptualisering en operationalisering van *locked at the job*. Het verwante construct *locked-in*, met twee dimensies en *involuntary non-mobility* zijn het meest bruikbaar voor de definitie van *locked at the job*: "ontevreden voelen in de huidige baan en inactiviteit als gevolg van waargenomen beperkte baankansen".

Een conceptueel model werd geïntroduceerd, onderbouwd met het literatuuronderzoek naar de gerelateerde constructen en de controletheorie en de zelfregulatietheorie. Ik stel dat *locked at the job* veroorzaakt wordt door meerdere misfits die veroorzaakt worden door individuele en werk-omgevingsfactoren die niet op elkaar afgestemd zijn, gebaseerd op de person-environment fit theorie. Vervolgens worden deze misfits in relatie tot *locked at the job* gemodereerd door het onvermogen tot zelfregulatie, omdat het individu niet in staat is om de optredende misfits te voorkomen of tegen te gaan. Het individu dat zich *locked at the job* voelt, ervaart een gebrek aan controle over de situatie. Verder stel ik dat *locked at the job* invloed heeft op werkattitudes en gedragsuitkomsten en op gezondheid en welzijnuitkomsten. Met de operationalisatie van de schaal van *locked at the job* is convergente-, criterium-, en discriminante validiteit vastgesteld. Daarnaast was ik in staat om de validiteit uit te breiden door de antecedenten leeftijd, opleidingsniveau en het aantal dienstjaren en de moderator *organizational support for development* te onderzoeken in relatie tot de schaal van *locked at the job*.

⇒ *Kernvraagstuk 2. Het onderzoeken van de consequenties van locked at the job*

Mijn onderzoek was erop gericht om ondersteuning te vinden voor de relaties tussen gerelateerde constructen en mogelijke uitkomsten van locked at the job. De resultaten van de validatiestudie tonen aan dat locked at the job positief gerelateerd is aan de werkattitudes en gedragsuitkomsten; job embeddedness, continuance change commitment, behavioral resistance to change en job insecurity. Daarentegen was locked at the job negatief gerelateerd aan affective change commitment, person-job fit en individuele productiviteit. Verder bleek uit de resultaten van de kwalitatieve studie dat we drie niveaus kunnen onderscheiden waarop individuen ervaren locked at the job te zijn. Individuen die zich in lage mate opgesloten voelden hadden weinig negatieve gevoelens en gedachten en ervoeren frustratie en boosheid over hun situatie. Individuen die zich in redelijke mate opgesloten voelden ervoeren meer negatieve effecten, zoals stress, energie-uitputting en het belangrijkste, het beïnvloedde hun dagelijks leven. Individuen die zich in hoge mate opgesloten voelden, de meest verontrustende groep, ervoeren vaak een vicieuze cirkel, ontwikkelden depressieve symptomen of kregen een burn-out. Deze situatie maakte werknemers terughoudend om hun gevoelens te delen, bijvoorbeeld met hun directe leidinggevende en omdat er over dit onderwerp nog veel onwetendheid heerst.

⇒ *Kernvraagstuk 3. Het onderzoeken van de antecedenten van locked at the job*

De resultaten toonden aan dat lager opgeleide medewerkers meer kans hebben om locked at the job te raken. Daarnaast vond ik dat steun voor ontwikkeling vanuit de organisatie, de relatie van leeftijd, het aantal dienstjaren en opleidingsniveau met locked at the job modereert. Dit betekent dat wanneer je mensen die ouder, lager opgeleid en langer in dienst zijn, meer steun biedt om zich te ontwikkelen, zij een minder grote kans zullen hebben om zich opgesloten te gaan voelen. De oorzaken van ontevredenheid in de baan, de eerste dimensie van locked at the job, zijn voornamelijk het gebrek aan uitdaging,

verantwoordelijkheden, waardering en erkenning in de baan, zo blijkt uit mijn kwalitatieve onderzoek. De tweede dimensie, waargenomen beperkte baankansen, werd voornamelijk veroorzaakt door de gunstige arbeidsomstandigheden, opleidingsniveau en arbeidsduur.

⇒ *Kernvraagstuk 4. Het onderzoeken van het proces van locked at the job*

Momenteel is het inzicht in het proces van dit verschijnsel zeer beperkt. Door het gebrek aan kwalitatief onderzoek over dit onderwerp, was het doel om inzicht te geven in het proces, vanuit een kwalitatief perspectief. Ik vond drie fasen; opgesloten raken in de baan, opgesloten zijn in de baan en het beëindigen van een opgesloten ervaring in de baan. Het eerste deel van het proces, het opgesloten raken in de baan en een deel van de fase van opgesloten zijn in de baan, wordt passief ervaren. De transitie van een passieve toestand naar een actieve toestand wordt voorafgegaan door een gebeurtenis, waarbij gevoelens en emoties een hoogtepunt bereiken. De situatie eindigt wanneer de medewerker in staat is om actief zijn of haar situatie te veranderen en de controle over de situatie terug te krijgen door zijn of haar loopbaan of werk opnieuw vorm te geven of door de baan te verlaten. De locked at the job ervaring kan ook beëindigd worden door invloeden van buitenaf, vrijwillig of gedwongen, in dit geval is het individu niet in staat om controle te nemen over de situatie. De resultaten tonen verder aan dat alle betrokken actoren, van collega's tot aan het hoger management, een sleutelrol spelen in het verminderen van het aantal mensen dat vastzit in de baan, het verminderen van de pieken tijdens de locked at the job ervaring en het verlichten van de situatie wanneer men zich in een situatie bevindt van locked at the job. Daarnaast laten de resultaten zien dat drie emotieregulatie coping strategieën worden gebruikt om beter om te gaan met het locked at the job; *reappraisal* waarbij het individu zijn huidige perspectief aanpast, *positive distraction* waarbij het individu zijn of haar aandacht verlegt en *behavioral avoidance* waarbij men onaangename situaties, individuen of omgevingen vermijdt.

Implicaties voor de theorie

Met dit proefschrift wordt een bijdrage geleverd aan de theorie. Ten eerste heb ik de literatuur over baanimmobiliteit geïntegreerd en met behulp van een literatuurstudie een conceptueel model van locked at the job geïntroduceerd. Dit biedt houvast en inzichten om het huidige beperkte onderzoek op het gebied van baanimmobiliteit uit te breiden en in het bijzonder dat van locked at the job. Ten tweede stelt de ontwikkeling van de schaal van locked at the job het onderzoeksveld in staat om toekomstig onderzoek te doen met een eenduidig meetinstrument. Ten derde werden op meerdere onderzoeksgebieden nieuwe inzichten verkregen met de implementatie van de schaal van locked at the job, zoals de relatie met organizational support for development. Daarnaast werd bevestiging gevonden voor meerdere oorzaken en gevolgen in relatie tot locked at the job. Een belangrijk resultaat met betrekking tot de consequenties waren de verschillende niveaus waarop een individu zich locked at the job kan voelen, wat nader onderzocht kan worden met kwantitatief onderzoek. Door de antecedenten te onderzoeken, kon ik een breed en allesomvattend overzicht geven van zowel oorzaken die een invloed hebben op de dimensie van ontevredenheid over de baan als op de dimensie van waargenomen beperkte baankansen. Ten vierde heb ik het concept van locked at the job bestudeerd vanuit een kwalitatief perspectief, waarbij nieuwe inzichten zijn verkregen in het proces en de copingmechanismen die gebruikt worden wanneer men een locked at the job situatie ervaart.

Implicaties voor de praktijk

Er is nog veel onwetendheid over dit fenomeen, terwijl het toch vaak voorkomt. De bewustwording over dit onderwerp dient dan ook vergroot te worden, omdat locked at the job zoveel verschillende oorzaken kan hebben en omdat het in veel verschillende sectoren en niveaus in de organisatie kan voorkomen. Uit de resultaten bleek verder dat tussen 12,9%

en 19,6% van de populatie zich locked at the job voelde. Daarnaast bleek ook dat er een groot taboe rust op het bespreken van dit onderwerp, zowel op de werkvloer als daarbuiten. Daarom is het van groot belang om het stigma op dit fenomeen te verminderen, meer transparantie te creëren binnen alle lagen van de organisatie en meer begrip te kweken voor wat dit fenomeen inhoudt. Ten tweede blijkt uit de resultaten dat het essentieel is dat de medewerker uit durft te komen voor de locked at the job ervaring. Door het grote taboe en de druk van buitenaf om aan een bepaalde norm te voldoen, is het voor werknemers moeilijk om te praten over hun gevoelens tijdens de locked at the job ervaring. Dit maakt het nog moeilijker om deze situatie te veranderen. Ten derde moet er op de werkplek een open dialoog tot stand komen. De medewerker moet zijn of haar gevoelens kunnen delen in een veilige en vertrouwde omgeving. Deze dialoog kan alleen tot stand worden gebracht als er steun is van het hoger management en de directe leidinggevende en er een open cultuur heerst. Ten vierde moet vervolgens een intensieve feedbackcyclus, bijvoorbeeld over de arbeidstevredenheid van de medewerker, tot stand worden gebracht tussen de directe leidinggevende en de medewerker. Het kan nuttig zijn voor organisaties om de mate dat medewerkers zich locked at the job voelen te meten met behulp van een enquête om de ernst van de locked at the job situatie sneller te signaleren. Tot slot is het belangrijk dat er op teamniveau trainingen en voorlichtingsbijeenkomsten plaatsvinden om deze open cultuur te creëren en kennis over het onderwerp te genereren. Dit om het fenomeen uit te leggen, vertrouwen in het team op te bouwen om erover te praten en handvatten te geven over hoe met een dergelijke situatie om te gaan, vanuit werknemers- en werkgeversperspectief.

Conclusie

Het doel van dit proefschrift was om locked at the job te conceptualiseren en te operationaliseren en om een beter inzicht te krijgen in het proces van dit fenomeen. Wat betreft de conceptualisering van het construct is er een solide basis gelegd, gebaseerd op de

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bestaande literatuur over baanmobiliteit. Door de operationalisering in een gevalideerde vragenlijst op basis van het ontwikkelde conceptuele model met voorgestelde oorzaken en gevolgen, gerechtvaardigd met theoretische fundamenten. Ik heb verschillende fases geïdentificeerd die een individu doorloopt wanneer hij of zij een locked at the job ervaart. Deze bevindingen zorgen ervoor dat het aantal individuen dat een locked at the job situatie ervaart kan worden verminderd, door het tegengaan van de situaties, het minimaliseren van de hoogtepunten van een locked at the job situatie en het verkorten van de duur. Helaas zal met dit proefschrift het fenomeen niet volledig worden opgelost. Met de resultaten van dit proefschrift zijn organisaties wel in staat om beter met deze situatie om te gaan, omdat het bewustzijn over dit fenomeen kan worden vergroot, het taboe kan worden doorbroken en een open dialoog over dit onderwerp kan worden gecreëerd. Dit zal de werknemers tevredenstellen, de baanmobiliteit kunnen bevorderen en daarmee ook een circulaire arbeidsmarkt tot stand brengen.



Chapter 10

Dankwoord [acknowledgements]

Photo | Hogeweide bridge, Utrecht

In de afgelopen jaren ben ik een hoop mooie mensen tegengekomen die mij in mijn onderzoek steunde, een luisterend oor boden of hun eigen verhalen met mij deelden, waardoor ik gevoed werd met de realiteit van de huidige arbeidsmarkt en mijn onderzoeksthema. In de zoektocht naar een onderwerp waarmee ik zowel in de wetenschap als in de praktijk een onderscheid kon gaan maken gebruikte ik mijn bedrijfservaringen, in het verleden opgedaan bij verschillende grote corporates. Ik trof hier verschillende fijne collega's die ontevreden bleven zitten in hun baan, maar niet in beweging kwamen om een andere baan te zoeken. De gesprekken die ik destijds met deze collega's voerde om hen te motiveren maar vooral ook te mobiliseren hebben voor mij de basis gevormd om te starten met dit nog vrij onontgonnen onderzoeksgebied.

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Mijn lieve man Richard, mijn steun en toeverlaat, ik wil je bedanken voor jouw onvoorwaardelijke liefde en steun in mij en mijn plannen om te promoveren. Dank dat je mij altijd de ruimte geeft om mijn dromen na te jagen. Jij bent er echt altijd voor mij en echt op ieder moment bood je een luisterend oor of hielp je met het verwoorden van mijn

hersenspinsels. Jij wakkert mijn vlammetje aan dat mij nog beter doet excelleren. Telkens kan ik terugvallen op jou als mijn klankbord. Lieve schat, zonder jou had ik dit nooit gekund, ik hou van jou. Samen met onze prachtige dochters zijn wij een ijzersterk team – *we're all we need*.

Tot slot, mijn allerliefste schatten Liv en Pippa, wat is het een genot om jullie mama te mogen zijn. Twee van zulke lieve meiden die zo ontzettend snel groot, stoer en lief worden. Jullie hebben in deze periode altijd op de eerste plaats gestaan, de prioriteit voor het afronden en schrijven van *'mama's boek'* kwam daarna en juist hierdoor was ik ook in staat om mijn onderzoek succesvol af te ronden. Jullie gaven mij zoveel liefde, inzichten en afleiding wanneer ik het nodig had. Mama is zo ontzettend trots op jullie beiden, Pippa hoe vrolijk jij in het leven staat en altijd maar weer het positieve inziet van alles en zo fijn mama's haren kan borstelen, waardoor ik altijd helemaal ontspannen door kan werken en Liv jouw doorzettingsvermogen, leergierigheid en creativiteit zijn zo aanstekelijk, door jou ga ook ik harder werken. Als ik zie hoe betrokken jullie ook zijn bij het uitbouwen van The People Society, overal en echt aan iedereen delen jullie de 'Op je plek' Check© kaartjes uit, als echte ambassadeurs! Lieve schatten, dit proefschrift draag ik op aan jullie. Hiermee laat ik zien dat alles, echt alles, mogelijk is. Weet dat ik er altijd voor jullie zal zijn, jullie ook altijd overal in zal steunen en ik ontzettend veel van jullie hou.



Chapter II

Over de auteur [about the author]

Photo | Louis Vuitton bag, Naarden



Merel T. Feenstra-Verschure werd geboren op 31 mei 1986 te Roermond. In 2002 behaalde zij haar mavo diploma aan het Bisschoppelijk College Schöndeln te Roermond. Vervolgens behaalde zij aan dezelfde middelbare school in 2004 haar havo diploma. In 2008 runde zij haar bachelor studie Vrijtijdsmanagement af aan de NHTV te Breda, waar zij een afstudeerstage uitvoerde bij Communicatie en Evenement bedrijf SING, een start-up accelerator verbonden aan Nyenrode Business Universiteit. Gedurende deze stage werd haar interesse gewekt voor het gedrag van mensen in organisaties. Zij vervolgde haar carrière aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam waar zij de premaster en vervolgens de master Beleid, Communicatie en Organisatie in 2010 behaalde, aangevuld met een master Arbeids- en Organisationspsychologie die zij in 2011 behaalde. Na het afronden van haar twee master studies heeft zij diverse functies bekleed op het gebied van HR consultancy en Proces

consultancy, onder andere bij ING N.V., ConQuaestor en ABN Amro Bank N.V. In November 2016 startte zij haar externe promotietraject onder begeleiding van prof.dr. Mandy van der Velde vanuit de Universiteit van Utrecht in een samenwerkingsverband met de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam. In haar promotieonderzoek voerde zij een onderzoek uit naar het gehele proces dat mensen doormaken wanneer zij zich opgesloten voelen in hun baan, door haar verwoord als 'locked at the job'. Zij startte in deze periode eveneens met de verzameling van haar onderzoeksdata bij KAS BANK N.V. (nu Caceis) te Amsterdam, waar zij gedurende twee jaar zowel kwantitatieve als kwalitatieve data verzamelde. In december 2018 beëindigde zij succesvol haar dienstverband om zich verder toe te kunnen spitsen op het analyseren en verwerken van haar data en het schrijven van haar artikelen. In november 2019 sloot zij zich aan bij een nieuw promotieteam onder begeleiding van prof.dr. Dorien Kooij en prof.dr. Charissa Freese binnen het departement Human Resource Studies aan Tilburg University. Vanaf augustus 2018 startte zij naast haar promotietraject met een functie als onderzoeksdocent aan de Hogeschool van Amsterdam, eerst binnen de opleiding Human Resource Management en vervolgens binnen de opleiding Bedrijfskunde. Hier begeleidde zij studenten in het succesvol afronden van hun bachelor scriptie. Vanuit deze rol is zij daarnaast betrokken bij de Kenniskring Wendbaar Organiseren van waaruit zij excellente studenten en opdrachtgevers uit het publieke domein samenbrengt met als doel een bevordering van de kennisuitwisseling voor beide partijen. In januari 2020 startte zij haar eigen onderneming The People Society te Naarden, van waaruit zij als organisatiepsycholoog haar kennis en vaardigheden op het gebied van arbeidsmobiliteit met het bedrijfsleven deelt.



Appendices

Photo | Flame of freedom monument, Paris

Appendix 1.

Questionnaire related to Chapter 3 and 4

Appendix 2.

Questionnaire related to Chapter 3 and 4

Appendix 3.

Code tree related to Chapter 5

Appendix 4.

Interview guide related to Chapter 5

Appendix 5.

Highlights per respondent related to Chapter 5

Appendix 1. Questionnaire related to Chapter 3 and 4

XI. Please choose a language:

→ *Dutch ór English*

General questions

(Items in grey were abstracted from the personnel system)

A. Please select you gender

→ *Male*

→ *Female*

B. Please select your year of birth.

→ *<Dropbox with age or year of birth>*

C. What is your contract type?

→ *Temporary, fixed term contract*

→ *Permanent, open-ended contract*

D. How many years have you been working at KAS BANK?

→ *<Dropbox 0 – 45 years>*

E. How many hours per week do you work? (FTE)

→ *Open*

F. Where do you live?

→ *Open*

G. In what salary scale are you in?

→ *Dropbox, 10 t/m 22 scale*

I. Please select your level within the organization

(1. Intern, 2. Individual employee, 3. Middle/First line Manager, 4. Senior Manager, 5. Direct report to executive board/Council Member, 6. Executive Board/Management Council Member)

2. In which domain is your job positioned?

(1. Commercial, 2. Operations/ IT, 3. Supporting staff)

3. What is your marital status?

(1. Single, 2. Married or domestic partnership, 3. Widowed, 4. Divorced)

4. How long are you planning to stay working at with KAS BANK?

• Appendix 1.

(1. Less than 2 years, 2. Between 2 and 5 years, 3. Longer than 5 years, but not until I retire, 4. Until my retirement, 5. I don't know)

5. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

(1. High school graduate, 2. Secondary vocational education, 3. Higher vocational education, 4. University)

6. In general, what is your opinion about your health? (Self-rated health)

(1. Bad, 2. Moderate, 3. Good, 4. Very good, 5. Excellent)

Perceived pay equity

7. To what extent do you believe your current pay reflects your actual contributions to the job?

8. How fairly paid do you feel you currently are on your job?

9. How satisfied are you with your current overall pay level?

(1. Not at all, 2. Slightly, 3. Moderately, 4. Highly, 5. Extremely)

10. Relative to what you feel you should be paid; do you believe your current pay is:

(1. Much too low, 2. A little too low, 3. About right, 4. A little too high, 5. Much too high)

Embeddeness (Sacrifice, organization):

11. I would sacrifice a lot if I left this organization.

12. My promotional opportunities are excellent here.

13. I am well compensated for my level of performance.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Locked at the job - Job dissatisfaction – Job satisfaction

14. In general, I am satisfied with my work?

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Locked at the job - Limited job opportunities - Ease of movement;

15. There simply aren't very many jobs for people like me in today's job market. (R)

16. Given my qualifications and experience, getting a new job would not be very hard at all.

17. I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I was looking.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Locked at the job – Direct scale

18. I feel stuck in the job that I do not like.

19. I want to change my job but I can't because of the circumstances.

20. I am staying at KAS BANK because I feel there is no other option

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Job embeddedness

21. I would give up a lot if I changed jobs.

22. Leaving this job would require substantial personal sacrifice.

23. I feel like I have a good fit with my job.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Job insecurity:

24. I am sure I can keep my job. (R)

25. I feel insecure about the future of my job.

26. I think I might lose my job in the near future.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Change attitude scale: Behavioral component

27. I look for ways to prevent the change from taking place

28. I protest against the change

29. I complain about the change to my colleagues

30. I present my objections regarding the change to management

31. I speak rather highly of the change to others (R)

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Change commitment: Affective change commitment:

32. I believe in the value of this change

33. This change is a good strategy for this organization

34. I think that management is making a mistake by introducing this change (R)



• Appendix 1.

35. This change serves an important purpose

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Change commitment: Continuance change commitment:

36. I have no choice but to go along with this change

37. I have too much at stake to resist this change

38. It would be too costly for me to resist this change

39. Resisting this change is not a viable option for me

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Organizational support for development (OSD)

40. My organization has programs and policies that help employees to advance in their functional specialization.

41. My organization provides opportunities for employees to develop their specialized functional skills.

42. My organization has programs and policies that help employees to reach higher managerial levels.

43. My organization has career development programs that help employees develop their specialized functional skills and expertise.

44. My organization provides opportunities for employees to develop their managerial skills.

45. My organization has career development programs that help employees develop their managerial skills.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Appendix 2. Questionnaire related to Chapter 3 and 4

XI. Please choose a language:

→ *Dutch or English*

General questions

(Items in grey were abstracted from the personnel system)

A. Please select your gender

→ *Male*

→ *Female*

B. Please select your year of birth.

→ *<Dropbox with age or year of birth>*

C. What is your contract type?

→ *temporary, fixed term contract*

→ *permanent, open-ended contract*

D. How many years have you been working at KAS BANK?

→ *<Dropbox 0 – 45 years>*

E. How many hours per week do you work? (FTE)

→ *Open*

F. Where do you live?

→ *Open*

G. In what salary scale are you in?

→ *Dropbox, 10 t/m 22 scale*

I. Please select your level within the organization

(1. Intern, 2. Individual employee, 3. Middle/First line Manager, 4. Senior Manager, 5. Direct report to executive board/Council Member, 6. Executive Board/Management Council Member)

2. In which domain is your job positioned?

(1. Commercial, 2. Operations / IT, 3. Supporting staff)

3. What is your marital status?

(1. Single, 2. Married or domestic partnership, 3. Widowed, 4. Divorced)

4. How long do you plan to stay working at with KAS BANK?

• Appendix 2.

(1. Less than 2 years, 2. Between 2 and 5 years, 3. Longer than 5 years, but not until I retire, 4. Until my retirement, 5. I don't know)

5. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

(1. High school graduate, 2. Secondary vocational education, 3. Higher vocational education, 4. University)

6. In general, what is your opinion about your health? (self-rated health)

(1. Bad, 2. Moderate, 3. Good, 4. Very good, 5. Excellent)

Perceived pay equity

7. To what extent do you believe your current pay reflects your actual contributions to the job?

8. How fairly paid do you feel you currently are on your job?

9. How satisfied are you with your current overall pay level?

(1. Not at all, 2. Slightly, 3. Moderately, 4. Highly, 5. Extremely)

10. Relative to what you feel you should be paid; do you believe your current pay is:

(1. Much too low, 2. A little too low, 3. About right, 4. A little too high, 5. Much too high)

Locked at the job - Job dissatisfaction - Job satisfaction:

11. In general, I am satisfied with my work?

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Locked at the job - Limited job opportunities - Ease of movement:

12. There simply aren't very many jobs for people like me in today's job market. (R)

13. Given my qualifications and experience, getting a new job would not be very hard at all.

14. I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I was looking.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Locked at the job – direct scale:

15. I feel stuck in my job that I do not like.

16. I want to change my job but I can't because of the circumstances.

17. I am staying at KAS BANK because I feel there is no other option

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Locked at the job in the past:

This experience could have taken place at a former employer.

18. In the past, I have experienced a feeling of being stuck in my job that I did not like.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Job insecurity:

19. I am sure I can keep my job. (R)

20. I feel insecure about the future of my job.

21. I think I might lose my job in the near future.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Ten-item personality inventory

Extraversion: 1, 6R;

22. I see myself as extraverted, enthusiastic.

23. I see myself as reserved, quiet. (R)

Agreeableness: 2R, 7;

24. I see myself as critical, quarrelsome (R)

25. I see myself as sympathetic, warm.

Conscientiousness; 3, 8R;

26. I see myself as dependable, self-disciplined.

27. I see myself as disorganized, careless. (R)

Emotional stability: 4R, 9;

28. I see myself as anxious, easily upset. (R)

29. I see myself as calm, emotionally stable.

Openness to experiences: 5, 10R.

30. I see myself as open to new experiences, complex.

31. I see myself as conventional, uncreative. (R)

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Perceived supervisor support

32. My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values.

33. My supervisor really cares about my well-being

- Appendix 2.

34. My supervisor shows very little concern for me (R)

35. My supervisor cares about my opinions

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Organizational support for development (OSD)

36. My organization has programs and policies that help employees to advance in their functional specialization.

37. My organization provides opportunities for employees to develop their specialized functional skills.

38. My organization has programs and policies that help employees to reach higher managerial levels.

39. My organization has career development programs that help employees develop their specialized functional skills and expertise.

40. My organization provides opportunities for employees to develop their managerial skills.

41. My organization has career development programs that help employees develop their managerial skills.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Job-related affective well-being

“Thinking overall about the past weeks how have you felt about your job?”

Positive feelings *(enthusiastic, contented, excited, comfortable, interested, relaxed)*

42. To what degree did you feel enthusiastic

43. To what degree did you feel contented

44. To what degree did you feel excited

45. To what degree did you feel comfortable

46. To what degree did you feel interested

47. To what degree did you feel relaxed

Negative feelings *(tense, anxious, gloomy, depressed, worried and miserable).*

48. To what degree did you feel tense

49. To what degree did you feel anxious

50. To what degree did you feel gloomy

51. To what degree did you feel depressed

52. To what degree did you feel worried

53. To what degree did you feel miserable

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Job embeddedness – (internal, +):

54. I would give up a lot if I changed jobs.

55. Leaving this job would require substantial personal sacrifice.

56. I feel like I have a good fit with my job.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2., Disagree, 3. Partly agree partly disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree)

Affective organizational commitment

57. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.

58. I feel personally attached to my work organization.

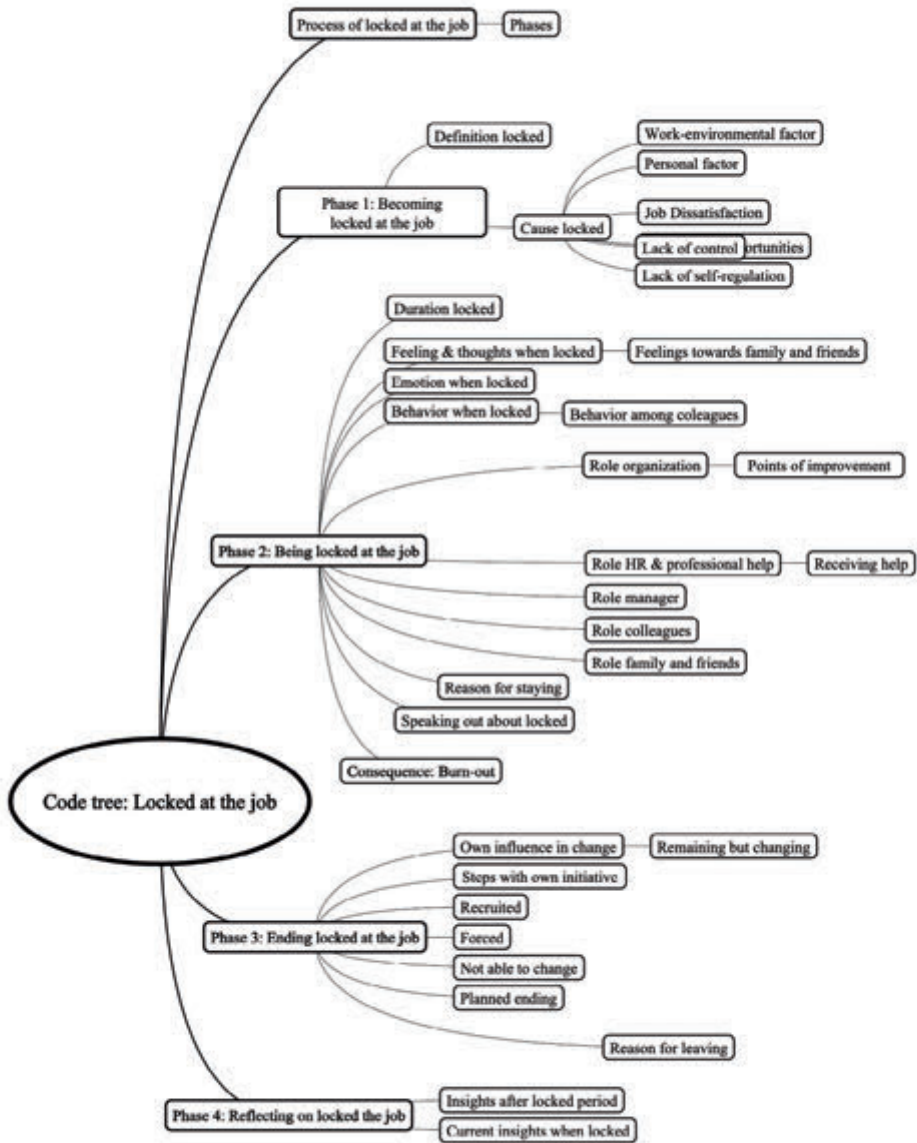
59. Working at my organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me.

60. I would be happy to work at my organization until I retire.

61. I really feel that problems faced by my organization are also my problems.

(1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Moderately disagree, 4. Partly agree partly disagree, 5. Moderately agree, 6. Agree, 7. Strongly agree)

Appendix 3. Code tree related to Chapter 5



Appendix 4. Interview guide related to Chapter 5

"Welcome <NAME>, my name is <NAME>, together with Merel Feenstra-Verschure I am conducting a research and as part of this research I would like to ask you some questions. I would like to ask you to answer as detailed as possible and, where possible, provide an explanation with examples. I would like to record this interview using an audio recorder. This is for the simple reason that I can never write as fast as we talk. To also keep my attention on the conversation I would therefore like to suggest recording it. The audio recording will be treated as confidential as the interview itself. Do you agree to this recording?"

>>> AGREE <<<

1. I am very curious who the person is I am talking to, can you tell me briefly about yourself?

→ Age?

→ Which company?

→ What position and in what department?

→ How many years working for your current employer?

2. How important is your work to you and why?

→ How important is work relatively to other elements in your life?

3. What motivates you or energizes you at work and why?

→ What does not motivate you at all?

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Referring to the the flyer: "Ever had that feeling of not being satisfied in your work environment, but at the same time having the perception of not being able to take steps to change this situation? For example because of salary, fear of the unknown or because you are stuck in your job."

4. Can you indicate what situation you were reminded of when you read or heard this and why?

- Experienced it now or in the past?
- Locked into position or locked into organization?
- Type of employer and position (if in past)?
- How long employed (if in the past)?

5. If you had to put into words how you feel now or felt at the time how would you define this situation and why?

6. Talking about this situation what do you think is/was the biggest cause of you feeling this way and why?

- Were there any other causes that made you feel this way?

7. Did the organization, colleagues and/or direct supervisor also have a role in how you feel/felt, if so why?

8. If you were to attach a time to this situation, how long is this period lasting or has this period lasted and why?

9. Can you explain how you feel/felt during this time?

→ What thoughts were going through you?

→ How do you see the future?

10. How did this period come to an end and why?

→ If still experiencing: What could you do to change this situation?

11. What is/was the cause that you did not end this situation?

→ Why does someone not take this step?

→ What is more important?

Option A: Coping

A.12. You just explained that you felt 'locked at the job', but how does/did that express itself and why this emotion?

→ Toward whom was this expressed?

→ Active / Passive behavior

A.13. Have you taken any steps to change the situation, if so which ones?

→ In the case of "nothing": What kept you from changing the situation?

A.14. In what ways have you experienced help from people in your daily life (inside or outside of work) to deal with this situation?

A.15. What has/had the organization (think colleagues/direct supervisor) done to help you?

- Appendix 4.

→ What else could they do in your opinion?

A.16. What do you think the organization, colleagues and/or immediate supervisor could do to prevent such a situation from occurring in the future?

Option B: Work-Family Conflict

B.12. Now that I know more about your work environment and the situation that you are/were no longer satisfied in, perhaps you could tell me a little about your family situation?

→ What is the marital status, children?

→ Is the interviewee the money maker?

B.13. Can you describe how you and your family experienced this situation?

→ What impact did the situation have on your family and why?

B.14. Can you explain how you feel/felt towards your family during this situation?

B.15. Can you indicate how your family handled this situation, what was the atmosphere like?

→ What was their point of view?

→ Support or discussion?

→ What had this for an effect on yourself?

B.16. Could you talk to certain people about this situation if so, with whom and how did this manifest itself?

Insights if now 'locked at the job'

17. Did this interview give you any new insights on how you might go about changing/ending this situation, if so how?

“We have now gone through all the questions, thank you for your time! I would like to emphasize again that your contribution will help us tremendously. All your answers will of course remain anonymous.”

18. How did you experience this interview?

“Would you like to be informed about the results?”

Appendix 5. Highlights per respondent related to Chapter 5

| ID & Grade | 1. Cause: Job dissatisfaction | 2. Cause: Limited job opportunities | 3. Feelings & emotions when locked | 4. Burn-out | 5. Coping | 6. Ending locked | 7. Lessons learned |
|------------|---|---|--|-------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| 1 | Lack of challenge in job, Lack of recognition, Lack of responsibility | No internal growth opportunities, Too critical about opportunities | Alternating feelings Less motivated Angry Frustrated | X | Colleagues Nice company Security | Not able to end | No concrete insights, Approach more actively |
| 2 | Dissatisfied by work atmosphere | Lack of diplomas | Situation was terrible, Rotten place, Reluctant to go to work. Afraid not to get diploma, Afraid to say anything, Ashamed. Angry | X | Looks good on CV | Taking control: Stay | Feels bad again when she thinks back on it, Didn't tell anyone at the time, Would have liked more openness, Learned from it |
| 3 | Lack of appreciation, Dissatisfied by work atmosphere | Lack of qualifications, Lack of guts, Current working conditions | Uncertainty, Sitting out, Frustration, Powerlessness | X | Loyalty Certainty | Not able to end | Is sometimes very confronting, Approach more actively |
| 4 | Lack of challenge in job, Dissatisfied with manager, Lack of appreciation | Current working conditions, Age keeps you from stepping, Lack of guts | Frustrated, Going to complain, Lack of energy | X | Looks good on CV Colleagues Routine work Familiar Favourable working hours | Taking control: Leave | Would have liked to talk to supervisor more about it, More open in the future, Take a more active approach |

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| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|-----------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 5 | Lack of challenge in job, | Not knowing how to handle it, Age keeps you from stepping up, No internal growth opportunities | No connection, Lack of energy, Thinking a lot, Worrying, Frustrated, Complaining | X | Certainty | External influence: Forced leave | Ended up in tunnel vision (small world), Not knowing how to handle the situation in the future |
| 6 | Lack of challenge in job | Current working conditions | Lack of energy, Unhappy feeling, Not being able to get through the day, Angry and cranky, Sad, Frustrated | X | Energy from private life Colleagues Trusted Certainty | External influence: Recruited | Staying too long, In future, never linger too long again, Wasn't conscious of it at the time, It was pretty deep, This is quite a scar |
| 7 | Dissatisfied due to work atmosphere, Lack of appreciation, Lack of responsibility | No internal growth opportunities | Reluctantly going to work, Your soul stolen, Angry, Sad, Tired, Eating up a lot of energy | Symptoms of a burnout | X | Taking control: Leave | Linger too long |
| 8 | Does not support work | Current working conditions, Lack of guts | Passive behavior, Cynical Advancing, Also moments of softening, Less commitment, Not controlling whole life Scary | X | Trusted Not a day with reluctance Certainty | Not able to end | No more procrastinating, Take a more active approach |
| 9 | Dissatisfied by work atmosphere | X | Staying for too long, Stress, Headache, Bales | X | Certainty | Not able to end | What am I still doing here, anyway, Taking a course can provide insights |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|--------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| 10 | Lack of appreciation | Age prevents you from leaving | Annoying, Wasting my time, Angry, Frustrated, Reluctant to go to work, | Depressed feelings | Colleagues | Not able to end | People are responsible for themselves, Take a more active approach |
| 11 | Dissatisfied by work atmosphere | Lack of qualifications, Age prevents you from leaving | Stress, Reluctance to go to work, Tension, Feeling uncomfortable, Exhausted by work atmosphere, | X | Good employer Well organized company Atmosphere | Not able to end | More active approach |
| 12 | Dissatisfied by work atmosphere | Loyalty | Out of balance, Situation was unhealthy, Pain in my stomach, Angry, I hear everything and absorb everything, Leaving feels like failure | Burnout | Loyalty Not wanting to give up | Taking control: Stay | Lingered too long, Had not been ready for conversation at the time, Didn't let go in time, Now I can talk about it normally again |
| 13 | Lack of appreciation, Dissatisfied with manager | No internal growth opportunities, Current working conditions, Lack of courage | Doubling yourself, Uncertain, Stressed, Headaches, Exhausted, Self-doubt Crying | Depressed feelings | Looks good on your CV Urge to proof | Taking control: Leave | Not realizing that you were locked during period, She wasn't herself then, hated how she felt, Now closed down |

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| | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|--|---------|------------------------|--|
| 14 | Lack of challenge in job, Does not support activities | No internal growth opportunities, Current employment conditions | Locked, Bitter, Poor sleep rhythm, Irritable, Reluctant to go to work, Disappointment, Annoyance, Angry, Sad, Fear | X | Take control: Leave | It was an unreal feeling and I didn't know it existed, but I discovered some pitfalls, learned from them |
| 15 | Lack of appreciation, Dissatisfied with manager, Dissatisfied with reorganizations | Current working conditions, Lack of guts | Angry, Sad, Fear | X | Not able to end | Difficult to talk about feelings, More active approach, Certainty was a big threshold |
| 16 | Dissatisfied with manager, Lack of challenge in job, Lack of confidence | No internal growth opportunities | Despair, Self-doubt, Less self-confidence, Feeling increasingly trapped, Feeling weighed down by emotions, Not being able to be yourself, Pretty intense (emotionally), Anxious | Burnout | Take control: Leave | Future seemed very difficult, but wasn't so bad, Been too passive, Difficult subject |
| 17 | Lack of challenge in job, Lack of appreciation, Lack of challenge in job | No internal growth opportunities, Lack of guts, Age prevents you from leaving | Reluctant to go to work, | Burnout | Not able to end | More about talking to e.g. HR |
| 18 | Lack of challenge in job | Lack of guts | Less desire for work, Less fun at work, Doubts, Not controlling your whole life | X | Take control: Leave | This has to be different I have to do something different, Life is a big learning curve, |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|-----------------------------|--|--|---|
| 19 | Lack of challenge in job, Lack of appreciation | X | Sometimes unpleasant | X | Security Workmates Working atmosphere | External influence; Recruited | It's nice to think about something once in a while, Linger too long X |
| 20 | Lack of appreciation | X | I was tired, Working hard, Experiencing a lot of resistance, Ups and downs becoming more, Feeling alone, | Burnout (overwor ked) | Not wanting to fail Better times are coming | External influence; Forced leave | Did not give enough thought to what was happening Never thought about whether it would make you happy Best thing that ever happened to me! Time to think, Back in control, Now more guided by feelings, Talk about things sooner now |
| 21 | Lack of challenge in job, Dissatisfied with manager, Lack of trust | Age keeps you from stepping out, Lack of alternatives | Not taken seriously, Cutting away, Not being able to talk freely, Takes it easy, Not taking on extra work, | X | Energy from private life Want to keep up with the profession | Not able to end | Advises her children, 'Don't stay in one place too long, It's all a choice you make in life |
| 22 | Lack of challenge in job | Lack of diplomas | Autopilot, Not going to last much longer, I'm a little stuck, Don't know how to get through, Capacities are not being used, Want to feel free | Burnout | Loyalty | Not able to end | Different phases you have to go through, NOW I dare |

• Appendix 5.

| | | | | | | | |
|----|---|--|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 23 | Lack of appreciation | No internal growth opportunities | Feeling crap, Intention to look outside, though, No depression. | Burnout | Working atmosphere | Taking control: Stay | Now have tools to signal better, Further insights not wanting to share (psych discussed) |
| 24 | Lack of challenge in job, Workload | Current working conditions | Not happy in work, Not much fun, Work pressure too high, Not comfortable in your own skin, Powerless, Panic, Not controlling your whole life, Not getting any energy out of it, Stress, Tense more often | X | Certainty | Taking control: Leave | Was just a slightly less enjoyable period |
| 25 | Lack of challenge in job, Dissatisfied with manager, Dissatisfied with salary, Lack of appreciation | X | Injustice, Autopilot, Shame, Guilty that nothing is happening, Self-doubt | X | Colleagues Working atmosphere | External influence: Recruited | Not difficult to talk about it |
| 26 | Lack of challenge in job | Lack of alternatives | Work takes energy, Compensate with fun things, It's getting worse, Terrible | X | Colleagues | Not able to end | Tough decision to make, Interview makes me think |
| 27 | X | Current working conditions, Lack of guts, Step to another sector too big | Sense of loyalty, Alternating feelings, Tired of knowing you're out of place, Cowardice for not taking the step, Frustrating | (wants to prevent a burnout) | Energy from private life | Taking control: Stay | Internal voices feeding back |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|---|------------------------------|---|---|------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 28 | Dissatisfied by work atmosphere, Dissatisfied with reorganizations | Current working conditions | Kind of oppressive, Responsibility to children, Worrying and insecure No depressive symptoms or poor sleep, Not whole life controlled | X | Loyalty | Taking control: Stay | You are not aware of it at first, it is a phase |
| 29 | Lack of appreciation, Dissatisfied by work atmosphere | Lack of alternatives | With ups and downs, Not knowing what, I shouldn't complain, Have a high stress level, Risk averse | X | Security Colleagues | Taking control: Leave | It's a luxury problem, It wasn't so bad after all, It's a waste of opportunities |
| 30 | Not dream job | Move to other sector too big | Fear, Don't do what I'm passionate about | X | Certainty | Not able to end | "I work to live and not the other way around, If I were forced to, I'd leave |

Legend Appendix 5. Highlights per respondent related to Chapter 5

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|---------------|
| High impact |
| Medium impact |
| Low impact |

| | | | |
|---|------------------------------|--|--|
| Column 4: Burnout | Burnout = | | This group experiences feelings and symptoms that affect their daily work and personal lives |
| Column 4: Burnout | Depressed feelings = | | |
| Column 4: Burnout | Overworked = | | This group experiences daily complaints |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Reluctance to go to work = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Lack of energy = | | This group experiences moderate negative feelings |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Stress = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Sitting out/Uncertainty = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Alternating feelings = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Not controlling whole life = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Annoyance = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Autopilot = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Frustrated = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Not following passion = | | |
| Column 3: Feelings & emotions when locked | Must not complain = | | |

This dissertation, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, discusses in a broad spectrum the conceptualization and operationalization of the phenomenon of experiencing a locked at the job situation. In addition, the antecedents and consequences are examined as well as the process that is gone through when such a situation occurs. A dissertation that in addition to being a valuable contribution to science also provides very useful insights for practice.

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