The aim of this study is to examine unemployment and coping behaviour in two occupational groups, journalists and upper middle level managers, at the Finnish labour market during a deep economic recession in 1990-1995. The main task is to clarify the relationship between occupational background and reactions to unemployment, experiences of unemployment, coping with unemployment and the individual strategies for re-employment at the labour market. The social and economical context and the life course of the studied individuals are also taken into account. In general the purpose is to contribute to and specify the results from previous studies on unemployment.

This study makes use of three theoretical starting points, i.e. Maria Jahoda’s relative deprivation hypothesis, David Fryer’s agency restriction hypothesis and, in the welfare state context, the filtering mechanisms of society.

This study uses longitudinal qualitative data (N=17) collected in 1993 and 1995. The data include stories spoken in interviews and written by the studied unemployed journalists and managers. The analysis is based in classification of themes by type, including comparisons of two occupational groups. To be able to understand the possible narrative intentions of the studied individuals tools from text analysis are also used.

The results of this study should be understood as assumptions concerning the relationships between unemployment and coping. This outcome of the study is in accordance with the general hypothesis of the deprivative nature of unemployment. However at the individual level there seems to be a wide range of reactions to unemployment and experiences of relative deprivation. The mental well-being may deteriorate and the level of activity may decline as a reaction to unemployment but this is not necessarily always the case.

This study suggests that occupational background and identity constitute the most important foundations on which the studied journalists and managers base their strategies to cope with long-term unemployment. In other words, journalists and managers can be characterized as committed to their work and being career oriented, with coping strategies based on learned professional skills and internalized occupational self-concepts. Due the possibilities to work as freelancers and due to the creative nature of their work journalists seem to cope better than managers at the labour market. Coping is best understood as a process in which active and passive phases fluctuate. Employment has both intrinsic and instrumental values to both journalists and managers.

The main sources used are the studies on unemployment by Marie Jahoda, David Fryer, Peter Warr, Peter A. Creed, Kari Vähätalo and Eero Lahelma.