

Psychological Contract Violation and its Correlates: A Study

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Contemporary employment relationships are in transition and a major issue is that of psychological contract. Promises are important to employees in the age of dramatic changes. When those promises are in the form of some unwritten contract and are somehow not fulfilled, it becomes more important to study its consequences. The present study was undertaken to examine the relationship between psychological contract violation and the variables of trust, job satisfaction, actual turnover of the organization and intent to remain with the organization among public and private sector employees. A comparative between the two sector employees on the above variables including psychological contract violation was drawn. A sample of 120 employees from public and private sector organizations was taken. Snowball sampling technique was used to collect the data. The results indicated that violation of psychological contract results in decrease in trust in the employer, loss of job satisfaction and low intent to remain with the organization. Also, a significant difference emerged between public and private sector employees on job satisfaction and intent to remain. This study highlights consequences of psychological contract violation and points out how important it is to maintain healthy employment relationships.

Keywords: Psychological contract violation, Trust, Job Satisfaction, Intent to remain.

The world is changing at a fast rate and with that employment relations are also undergoing dramatic changes. At such time, it becomes more important to discuss employees' and employers' mutual obligations, expectations and their fulfillment. Since many of them are implicit in nature, their violation can cause havoc. Psychological aspect of employment relationship, called "Psychological Contract" has received a lot of attention in recent years. Recently, a lot of organizational events took place that shocked the psyche of all Indians. In 2009, due to persistent labor problems Honda Motors threatened to close its Manesar (Haryana) unit; there was a strike by pilots of Jet Airways and Indian Airlines (2009); while the CEO of 'Gradiano' was beaten to death in Noida (2008). All these events that happened in the last few years depicted employees' dissatisfaction with the management and organization overall. These incidents highlighted what happens when employees' demands are not met, when they are denied what was promised to them.

Many a times there are formal contracts established between the employer and the employee but, sometimes the promises are in the form of unwritten rules. Some contracts are psychological in nature and may be understood by only one of the contracting parties (i.e., employer or employee). When employees believe that promises have been made to them by the employer, they often tend to rely on those promises and trust the other party to keep their word. However, when those promises are not fulfilled they often leave individuals feeling frustrated, betrayed, and dissatisfied and the violation of psychological contract may turn tragic. It may be noted that for the above-mentioned events not only the violation of psychological contract was responsible, but many other factors would have played a decisive role but, contract violation was one of them.

Psychological contract as a concept emerged in 1960s but became more important in contemporary times due to changes in employment relationship and other social changes. According to Rousseau (1989) "psychological contract is an individual's belief regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between

that focal person and another party" (p.123). Psychological contract is formed when both the parties believe that a promise of future return has been made (for example pay for performance), some form of contribution has been given (example, some form of exchange) and there has been creation of an obligation to provide future benefits. The concept includes the beliefs of both employers and employees regarding what is given and what is received in return (Roehling, 1997). However, Rousseau's work and research has been criticized for being one-sided (Guest, Isaksson & De Witte, 2010). It is said that Rousseau did not consider both employees and employers perspective. Although both parties have expectations about their relationship, in most research only the employee's perspective is included.

Clutterbuck (2005) describes psychological contracts as the unwritten assumptions employees and employers have about the content of the social exchange between them. Employees and employers might not share these assumptions and the extent to which they hold different assumptions might threaten the psychological contract. These assumptions are basically beliefs and perceptions regarding promises and acceptance. Each party thinks and believes that both parties have made promises and both parties have accepted the same contract terms. Though, it might not be the case. Both parties may or may not share a common understanding of all contract terms. Psychological contracts are established between two individuals, not the entire workforce.

According to Xu (2008) the psychological contract is a set of expectations that employees and employers hold of each other about obligations they have towards each other. A breach of psychological contract then is the perception one party has that the other party has failed to fulfill these obligations (Guerrero & Herrbach, 2008; Pate, 2006; Xu, 2008). When psychological contract is not fulfilled and is breached, it's referred to as psychological contract violation. Raja, Johns and Niallanis (2004) describe psychological contract violation as "the feelings of anger, injustice, resentment and distrust that arise from the realization that the organization has not kept its promise

and violated the psychological contract" (p. 351). Breaches to the psychological contract are regarded as emotional events (Mattijns Bal & Smit, 2012). Atkinson (2007) found that reactions to perception of breaches of the psychological contract include anger, resentment, sense of injustice, dissatisfaction, and the possibility of a dissolving relationship. According to Conway and Briner (2005) violation of employee's psychological contracts may influence work outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, participation in development activities and intention to remain with the current employer.

There are many reasons for psychological contract violation/breach to occur. Breaches can occur due to factors such as pay cuts (a broken promise), delaying bonuses, making employees work for long hours, unexplained or misunderstood changes in perception of what is fair or unfair which leads to incongruence of expectation. Many employers are likely to overpromise job opportunities for growth or development at the time of recruitment. Also, breach is likely to occur when employees, managers and co-workers have different perceptions about existence of obligations. Contracts are believed to emerge under assumptions of good faith and fair dealing (MacNeil, 1985) and involve parties' reliance on the promises of the other; violations of the contract can lead to serious consequences for the parties involved.

Hirschman (1970) provided a framework for understanding employees' responses to breach or violation of psychological contract. It is based on EVLN (exit, voice, loyalty and neglect) typology. It was later expanded by other researchers. According to this framework employees will respond to violation of psychological contracts with:

- Increased turnover (leaving the organization)
- People taking initiative at improving work conditions
- Decrease in loyalty (decrease in number of extra-roles being taken up)
- Absenteeism and lateness, less attention to quality

The framework also suggests different responses to breaches of psychological contracts in different situations (Turnley & Feldman, 1996).

According to Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro (2011) psychological contract breach is followed by immediate emotional response. These emotions are likely to become stronger if the employer's actions responsible for breach are not justified. Emotional reactions might reduce the level of trust in a relationship and deteriorate the employment relationship, if these reactions had a lasting impact on the employee's view of the employer. Hence, a breach of the psychological contract does not automatically and necessarily lead to a violation of the psychological contract. A breach is the perception by the employee that they have received less than what they were promised. Whereas a violation is the depressing emotional state that follows a breach (Suazo & Stone-Romero, 2011).

In today's fast changing world employment relationships are also changing. Short employment contracts have now replaced the long and committed employment contracts. Loss of job security has resulted in redefinition of career expectation and nature of employment relationship (Herriot & Pemberton, 1997). Be it public sector or private, contractual hiring has increased. In today's world where there is rampant unemployment, many individuals hope to get a permanent job after completion of the contract, but the reality is different. They are hired only for the duration of contract and thrown out once the period is over. This leaves them with frustration and hopelessness.

Psychological contract violation and its correlates

The foundation of every relationship is trust be it personal or professional. Trust in the organization refers to "the global evaluation of an organization's trustworthiness as perceived by the employee" (Tan & Tan, 2000, p. 243). Employees are likely to observe the organizational environment while considering whether to trust their organization or not. Organizational processes communicate to the employees their roles, and employees will respond to trust relations communicated by the organization. Employees who trust the

between the employee and the organization, they may experience dissatisfaction with the job, resulting into absenteeism and turnover.

According to Al-Haydar & Bin Taleb (2005), it is the duty of the organization (employer) to develop the satisfaction of its employees by focusing on the factors its employees complain about the most to improve the work environment and create positive feelings. According to Green (2002) there are seven factors that determine job satisfaction in the work environment: the work itself, supervision, the organization and its management, promotion opportunities, pay and other financial benefits, co-workers, and working conditions.

Actual turnover and intent to remain were another construct which the present research intended to explore in relation to psychological contract violation. There are few researchers who have found a positive relationship between PCV and turnover (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Turnley & Feldman, 1996). Feeling of contract violations were likely to have a negative impact on employees' willingness to contribute to the organization and on their intentions to stay with the organization. When employees feel that there has been an unfair exchange, withdrawal from the employment relationship may result. Concluding, the less the psychological contract is fulfilled, the more likely the employee think of leaving the organization (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002; Robinson 1996).

According to Khatri, Budhwar and Fern (2001) poor management practices were the major source of employee turnover in Singapore. In their research they found that the extent of controllable turnover is much greater than uncontrollable turnover. Lacity, Iyer and Rudramunyah (2008) found that in their Indian IT sample, family of the respondents influenced turnover decisions of many of the participants. These are some of the important findings on employee turnover. However, the relationship between the PCV and turnover intention, especially in the era of economic downturn, has not been explored so far, that too in public and private sector organizations.

Intent to remain is the perception of the estimated likelihood of continued membership

in an organization" (Price & Mueller, 1981, p. 544). To facilitate the intent to remain in the organization and subsequently prevent the costs associated with staff turnover it is important to investigate the factors associated with "intent to remain". According to Mobley (1982), Mowday and Spence (1981) intent to remain is negatively correlated with turnover. When an employee's psychological contract is violated the intent to remain will be affected as it mirrors the employee's level of commitment to his organization and the willingness to remain employed. When promises are not kept somewhere the employee feels cheated and neglected. So, the effect of PCV will vary from employee to employee depending on their level of commitment and willingness to stay in the organization.

Psychological contract and its violation are two of the most studied constructs in employment relations in contemporary times (Sutton & Griffin, 2004; Schalk & Roe, 2002; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). However, not much has been done in Indian setting. Recently few researchers have emerged in which the investigators have tried to study the psychological contract violation in organizational setup in Indian setting. Tyagi and Aggarwal (2010) found in their study that psychological contract violation does influence employer-employee relationship in an organizational setting. Bose and Aggarwal (2003) in their study reported that a positive work environment in which there is encouragement of creativity, system support, proves to be important predictors of psychological contract fulfillment. According to Aggarwal and Bhargava (2009), organizational culture does play a role in psychological contract content. Jaffri and Shah Nawaz (2009) in their research explored the factors which lead to the development of psychological contract and impact of breach on some outcome variables in the Indian context. Despite these initial developments, a comprehensive framework on psychological contract and violation in the Indian context is missing. The present study is an attempt to fill that gap.

Objectives

The present study aims to draw the following objectives:

- To compare public and private sector employees with respect to trust, job satisfaction, intent to remain, actual turnover and psychological contract violation.

- To assess the relationship of all the variables (trust, job satisfaction, intent to remain & actual turnover) with psychological contract violation.

Method

Sample and procedure:

The sample of the present study comprised of 120 employees working in public and private sector organizations, out of which 75% were male employees and the rest were female employees in the age range of 25-50 years (Mean age = 27.61, SD = 1.9). Of these participants, 60 were from public sector and the remaining 60 were from private sector organizations (National Thermal Power Corporations, Engineer's India Limited, HCL and NIIT).

For data collection a high rank officer (manager) in each organization was approached. He or she was explained the research objectives in detail and was shown a letter from the university citing the confidentiality and purpose of the research. After the consent of the manager, the employees were approached during their free time (lunch or coffee hours, sometime during designated time assigned by the manager) and they were given the questionnaire along with a brief introduction about the research. All the employees were pre-informed by the manager regarding the visit, so it was easier to co-ordinate.

Snowball sampling technique was used to collect data, so some of them were also approached during off-duty hours (one's whose contact was given by those who already participated). Data was collected individually as the research involves questions related to one's employer, so, special care was taken to ensure that one doesn't feel any kind of discomfort in sharing his/her views. The questionnaire consists of three sections (A, B & C). Trust scale, job satisfaction and first seven items of PCV were intermixed which formed the first section. The second section included one of the two

(1997) seven-item scale. A Cronbach alpha of .88 was observed for these measures. Apart from the scale two more items were used to assess psychological contract violation. The first was a continuous variable assessing contract fulfillment. Respondents were given a 5-point scale where 1 = 'very poorly fulfilled' and 5 = 'very well fulfilled' and the following instructions 'Using the scale below, please indicate - "How well overall your first employer has fulfilled the promised obligations that they owed you" (circle one number). This variable was reverse scored to provide a measure of contract violation.

The test-retest reliability of this measure, across a two-week period, is 0.78, suggesting moderate stability over time. The second measure of violation was a dichotomous measure. Respondents were asked to answer yes or no to the question "Has or had your employer ever failed to meet the obligations that were promised to you"? This measure was dummy coded (0 = experienced no violation; 1 = experienced violation). Fulfillment violation continuum was used as it permits us to examine the scope of contract completion. While the second item provides measure of the respondent's point of view as to whether the contract was violated. Although these measures are moderately inter-correlated ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.01$), by considering them separately we can improve our understanding of how contract violation is construed and where violation thresholds may be crossed in the employment relationship.

Results and Discussion

The data was subjected to descriptive statistics, t-test and Correlation. The analysis of the Table 1 indicated that the two groups differed with respect to job satisfaction and intent to remain with the organization ($t=2.12$, 6.40). No significant difference was found with respect to other variables. Even though the difference in mean of job satisfaction is not that large, with public sector employees scoring just a little higher than private sector employees (Mean=7.71, 7.1 respectively). The difference between public and private sector employees with respect to job satisfaction helps a lot in understanding the difference in the workings of both sectors. From an employee's point of view, job satisfaction is a desirable outcome which they seek. From a managerial or organizational effectiveness viewpoint, job satisfaction is important as it aids "citizenship" behavior such as helping co-workers, assisting customers, and being more cooperative. Also, it impacts absenteeism and turnover, with satisfied employees being less likely to leave the organization.

Pratap and Srivastava (1985) found a difference in job satisfaction of employees between public and private sector banks. They conducted a study in which the results showed that staff and managers in "private" sector banks were more satisfied from various aspects of their job as compared to their counterparts in public sector banks. The Chi-square value showing comparison between staff of public and private sector was 32.90 at 4 df and this value showing

Table 1: Mean, SD and t- values For Public and Private Sector Employees

Variables	Public sector		Private sector		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
TR	25.75	4.22	25.26	4.66	0.59
JS	7.71	1.57	7.1	1.61	2.12*
Intent to remain	10.81	8.02	3.51	3.04	6.40**
Actual turnover	0.63	0.60	0.55	0.50	0.81
PCV (cont.)	17.46	5.65	18.46	4.54	1.44
PCV (dich.)	0.16	0.37	0.11	0.32	0.78

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

TR, trust; JS, job satisfaction; PCV (cont.), psychological contract violation continuous; PCV (dich.), psychological contract violation dichotomous.

Measures Used:

Trust Scale: The trust in organization scale consisting of seven items relating to trust in one's employer was taken from Robinson and Rousseau (1994). Items originally stemming from Gabarro and Alhos (1976; $\alpha=0.80$). A 1 to 5 scale was used, where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree. Responses were coded in such a way that a high score would indicate a high degree of trust in one's employer. Robinson and Rousseau (1994) reported a high reliability of the scale ($\alpha=0.93$). A sample item is "My employer is open and upfront with me." This scale has been used in other study titled "Psychological contract breach and work performance: Is social exchange a buffer or an intensifier?" by Bai, Chiaburu and Jansen (2010).

Job Satisfaction Items:

Employee satisfaction, with both work and organization, was assessed with the following items.

- Working for this organization is very satisfying to me.
- I am satisfied with my job.

These items have an internal consistency reliability of 0.92.

Again, a 1 to 5 scale was used, where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Intention to remain with one's employer and Actual Turnover items:

Intention to remain with one's employer and actual turnover were both measured. Respondents were asked 'How long do you intend to remain with your current employer?' (in terms of years). Actual turnover was also measured by asking respondents 'How many employers they had worked for since graduation'. This information was dummy coded (0 = still with employer; 1 = had left first employer).

Psychological Contract Violation Scale

Psychological contract violation was measured using Morrison and Robinson's

comparison between managers of public and private sector banks was 10.06 at 4 df. Both these values were significant at 1% level of significance. Finally, the significant difference was also found in an overall comparison between public and private sector banks.

Vij, Suri and Singh (2012) in their study did a comparison of job satisfaction of staff in public and private sector banks. Employees of private sector banks (Punjab bank and HDFC bank) showed higher job satisfaction levels as compared to all public-sector banks. A significant difference was found in the job satisfaction of employees of UTI Bank and that of Punjab and Snd Bank. Job satisfaction of employees of private sector bank, ICICI, was significantly lesser as compared to employees of Bank of Punjab. Also, there was a significant difference between the job satisfaction of managers in Bank of Punjab and managers of all public-sector banks. Managers of ICICI bank reported significantly lesser satisfaction from their job as compared to those in Bank of Punjab. Public sector bank employees also showed higher satisfaction from their job with high cooperation among peers, receptiveness to change, team orientation, organizational goal identity and union management cooperation. In private sector banks according to authors it was interpersonal trust that could probably raise employee's satisfaction from job.

Also, in the present study a significant difference was found among public and private sector employees with respect to intent to remain. Employees in public sector were found to remain more with their employer as compared to employees in private sector. The mean for

public sector was higher than private sector and the difference was huge. Turnover management is an important goal for both public and private sectors. In public sectors although some fringe benefits are given to the employees on a regular basis, it does not satisfy them sufficiently. Private sectors offer high salary and other fringe benefits still job security is less. This is one of the main factor for high turnover rates in private sectors than public sectors. Also, an alternative explanation can be provided from the theory of career orientation (Schein, 1990) according to which employees are likely to enjoy and perform well if the job matches an employee's career orientation.

On the other hand, if it doesn't match with one's career orientation there is no guarantee of good performance and more chances of employee looking for another job. Therefore, they will have an intention to leave. When facing this kind of situation, employees with different career orientations will have different solutions. Those employees who have loyalty-based orientations like the one in public sector and aspire for security and stability may tolerate this kind of situation and continue to work in the company. However, people who have independent orientation (mostly the ones in private sector), are career driven and ambitious. They may not have intention to stay and may leave the job (Schein, 1990).

Another reason for public sector employee's high intent to remain with their employer could be the loyal contracts, which binds them to their organization. According to Janssens et al. (2002), public sector employees have strong and loyal contracts as opposed to private

sector employees. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2003) provided data showing that public sector employees reciprocate commitment and citizenship when they perceive that their employer complies with a psychological contract.

It can be seen from Table 2 that when an employee's psychological contract is breached, their level of trust in the employer decreases be it public or private. Also, their satisfaction with the job is on the decline. For private sector employees the intent to remain with the organization also decreased (correlation coefficient is -.37, significant at **p<0.01, though the values for public sector and PCV (dich.) are not significant but, a negative relationship can be observed). A negative correlation between trust and psychological contract was found for both private- and public-sector employees. With increase in psychological contract violation, trust decreases.

According to Tan and Tan (2000), organizational commitment and turnover intentions are the prominent results of trust in the organization. However, PCV bears a significant relation to trust in the organization or with organizational agents (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). The authors were of the view that employee's trust in employer might get damaged as the violation indicates that employer wasn't able to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship. Violations might also significantly reduce the predictability of employer's future course of action. Additionally, Johnson and O'Leary Kelly (2003) established a negative relation between trust and PCV. When rules of friendship are violated, it might be a body blow to trust and decline in respect (Davis & Todd, 1982).

Similarly, when an employer breaks a basic rule in work relationships, such as good faith and fair dealing, the trust of the employees decline. Breach of psychological contract may result in low trust as employees would feel that the organization is no longer committed to what has been promised or what employees expect the organization to fulfill. Like all relations, trust is the foundation of employment relationship. When trust is present within an organization, the employees' work with dedication and are more committed. Nevertheless, when that trust is

broken, due to unfulfilled promises it results in a loss of interest among employees in the job and organization, employee retirement, employee complacency, employee defiance, and increased levels of absenteeism and tardiness.

From Table 2 it can be seen that there is a significant negative relation between PCV & job satisfaction (-.63) and PCV & intent to remain (-.37) for private sector. According to Turnley and Feldman, (2000) the discrepancy between promised and received outcomes results in feelings of inequity and dissatisfaction. Spector (1996) also presented the same argument suggesting that the cause of low levels of job satisfaction is the discrepancy between actual outcomes and expected or wanted outcomes. When an employee, for example, believes that the employer owes him feedback on his work and the employer can very well fulfill this obligation, the employee feels satisfied. Though, when the opposite takes place, the psychological contract is breached, which leads to dissatisfaction. Research shows that feeling of contract violation also has a negative impact on employees' willingness to contribute to the organization and on their intentions to stay with the organization (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002; Robinson, 1996). While psychological contract fulfillment has a significant and positive effect on the decision to remain (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), under-fulfillment (i.e. violation) has a positive effect on the decision to leave the organization. The employee many a times sees no reason in continuing with the organization and the intent to leave often get converted into actual turnover.

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that when employees feel that their psychological contract has been breached, employer has not fulfilled the promise, then their level of trust in the employer and the organization decreases. Also, PCV, results in lack of job satisfaction and interest, resulting in thoughts of quitting, culminating into actual turnover.

The present study has opened several research avenues for future researchers who would like to work on psychological contract. The present research has only considered employer

Table 2: Correlation between Psychological Contract Violation (cont. & dich.) and Other Variables (Job satisfaction, Trust, Intent to remain and Actual turnover) for Private- & Public-Sector Employees

Variables	Psychological contract violation (cont.)		Psychological contract violation (dich.)	
	Private	Public	Private	Public
Trust	-.67**	-.82**	-.33**	-.43**
Job satisfaction	-.63**	-.42**	-.28*	-.26*
Intent to remain	-.37**	-.17	-.18	-.20
Actual turnover	-.14	-.17	-.08	-.12

**p< 0.01, *p< 0.05

violation of the employment contract, future researchers should also attend to employee violation of the contract.

By focusing on violation of psychological contract, the study has also pointed out the importance of successful employment relationships. How important it is to manage expectations for trusting, employee-employer relationship. Another direction for future research can be how both employees and employers try to resolve violations of their psychological contracts. The present study stresses on the fact that psychological contract and its violation is not a static entity, but a dynamic process.

In Indian context, it's important to extend the idea of PCV beyond organizational limits and to include family, friends and important others. In the present research, individual, many organizational and socio-cultural issues which might have diluted the relationship have not been taken into consideration. Future researchers may take up these issues to remove some of the ambiguities of the research.

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Manuscript submitted on April 20, 2017

Final revision received on February 09, 2018

Accepted on March 18, 2018

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