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The Effects of the Psychological Contract Among Professional Employees Working in Non-Professional Organizations
Les effets du contrat psychologique chez les employés professionnels oeuvrant au sein d'organisations non-professionnelles
Los efectos del contrato psicológico de los empleados profesionales que trabajan en las organizaciones no profesionales

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Résumé de l'article

Peu de recherches ont examiné les conséquences de la brèche du contrat psychologique dans le cas particulier des employés professionnels travaillant pour des organisations non-professionnelles. Afin de combler cette lacune et dans le but de gagner en compréhension, cet article a pour objectif de tester un modèle de recherche original englobant la brèche et la violation, le soutien organisationnel perçu, les engagements organisationnel et professionnel, ainsi que l'intention de démissionner. Une recherche a été conduite auprès un échantillon de 329 employé(e)s professionnel(le)s travaillant dans des organisations non-professionnelles. Conformément aux prédictions, notre étude montre une relation positive entre la brèche et la violation, une relation négative entre la violation et l'engagement organisationnel, ainsi qu'une relation négative entre l'engagement organisationnel et l'intention de quitter l'organisation. Toutefois, contrairement aux attentes, les résultats ont indiqué que le soutien organisationnel perçu n'a pas d'effet modérateur sur la relation entre la brèche et la violation, ce qui tend à infirmer les conclusions précédentes de l'étude de Suazo et Stone-Romero (2011). Ce résultat inattendu a conduit au test d'une combinaison différente et documentée dans la littérature auprès d'employés non-professionnels. Ainsi, en conformité avec les résultats de Suazo (2009), les données indiquent que la violation a un effet médiateur sur la relation entre la brèche et le soutien organisationnel perçu. Ce modèle de recherche alternatif suggère de tester un processus de médiation long par lequel la brèche influence l'intention de quitter l'organisation via la violation, le soutien organisationnel perçu ainsi que les engagements professionnel et organisationnel. Ce long processus de médiation a été confirmé par nos données. Finalement, les résultats de cette recherche laissent penser que lorsqu'ils travaillent en contexte non-professionnel, les employés professionnels tendent à réagir aux brèches du contrat psychologique de manière semblable aux employés non-professionnels.

The Effects of the Psychological Contract Among Professional Employees Working in Non-Professional Organizations

Pascal Paillé, Nicolas Raineri and Patrick Valeau

This research investigates the relationships among psychological contract breach and violation, perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, professional commitment, and turnover intention. The goal was first to clarify how perceived organizational support and psychological contract (breach and violation) are related and, second, to examine the effect of this relation upon commitments and turnover intention. The research used a sample of professional employees working in non-professional organizations (N = 329). The findings show that perceived organizational support mediates the effect of the psychological contract upon commitments that in turn decrease the propensity for employees to leave the organization. The findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS: professional employees, psychological contract, perceived organizational support, employee commitment, turnover intention.

Introduction

A great deal of attention has been given to the consequences of a psychological contract breach (hereafter, "PC breach"). In this regard, an overview of how the perception of a PC breach affects work-related outcomes is provided by relative recent meta-analyses (Bal *et al.*, 2008; Zhao *et al.*, 2007). While most of this prior literature concerns non-professional employees, less emphasis has been placed on professional employees (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003). According to Finley, Mueller and Gurney (2003), a professional employee is a worker who holds a high level of education and explicit knowledge, acts in his or her daily job activities by following a formal code of ethics, delivers client-oriented service, and has a large autonomy in work activities and in decision making. When the profes-

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sional employee (e.g., an accountant) works for a professional organization (i.e., an accounting firm), he is assured of a work environment that puts forward these features (Finley *et al.*, 2003). However, Barley and Kunda (2006) have observed an increasing number of professional employees working in non-professional organizations (i.e., a corporation, governmental or parastatal organization). In such a case, by choosing to work for a non-professional rather than professional organization, professional employees often adopt the organizational norms of the employer, which tends to result in the renunciation of some of the above features (Finley *et al.*, 2003). According to Brock (2006), this tendency has led to an abundant literature describing how professional employees adapt to corporations' contexts. However, the examination of the consequences of a PC breach among professional employees remains largely overlooked.

Despite the scarcity of research regarding the consequences of a PC breach among professional employees, recent notable efforts have been undertaken that can be split into two areas. Firstly, researchers have sought to determine which type of breach impacts more upon professional employees. In short, it has been reported that they are more sensitive and less tolerant when a breach affects the ideology that contributes to shaping their profession, and are more lenient and less concerned when the breach concerns the administrative dimensions of their work (Bunderson, 2001; O'Donahue and Nelson, 2007; Thompson and Bunderson, 2003). Secondly, researchers have put the focus on the consequences of a breach on work-related outcomes. Current findings indicate that when professional employees believe that a breach has occurred, their job performance is affected and they become more prone to leaving their job (De Ruyter *et al.*, 2008; Malette, 2007; Orvis, Dudley and Cortina, 2008).

Although this prior research has greatly contributed to shedding more light on the consequences of PC breaches among professional employees, some issues remain unclear. In particular, few attempts have been made to examine whether the detrimental consequences of a PC breach can be avoided when the non-professional organization demonstrates that it is concerned with the wellbeing of its professional employees. Yet, research undertaken in isolation suggests that organizational support in the context of a breach strengthens the professional employees' loyalty towards the organization, as well as the profession, and that this in turn tends to decrease the likelihood that they seek to leave their employer. However, although theoretically consistent, such a research model remains to be empirically tested. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to contribute to filling this gap by integrating these independent findings into a hypothesized model (depicted in figure 1) in order to improve the understanding of the consequences of a PC breach among professional employees working in a non-professional environment.

The paper is structured as follows: a brief review of the main constructs is presented, leading to the development of hypotheses about the consequences of a breach. The method and results of the study are then presented. Finally, the findings are discussed.

Literature and hypotheses

Psychological contract

The psychological contract refers to "the terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization" (Rousseau, 1995: 9). While PC breach refers to the individual's belief that promises made in the past have not been respected by the employer, and, as such, reflects the individual's awareness of a discrepancy between what has been promised and what has been delivered (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002), PC violation refers to an emotional and affective state that may, under certain conditions, arise out of a belief that the employer has failed to maintain the psychological contract (Paillé and Dufour, 2013). Although breach and violation have often been used as synonyms in the psychological contract literature (Zhao *et al.*, 2007), it has been demonstrated that breach and violation are two related but separate constructs (e.g., Morrison and Robinson, 2000).

In this regard, Morrison and Robinson (1997) indicate that the perception of breach does not automatically lead to the feeling of a violation of the psychological contract, suggesting that individuals are able to interpret and balance the cause of a breach. For example, Riggoti (2009) demonstrates "that perceived breaches to the psychological contract only occur when a certain level of breach has been reached" (p. 443). In so doing, Riggoti reports that the relationships between breach and related work outcomes are curvilinear rather than linear, and suggests the existence of a tolerance zone towards the employer or its representatives (e.g., managers). Using a critical incident technique, Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall (2011) have reported that the accumulation of continuous minor events contributes more to the perceptions of breach, rather than a given isolated event. Other research indicates that when individuals perceive that prior promises have been broken, they seek to understand if the breach really occurred in order to infer cause (e.g., Chaudhry, Wayne and Schalk, 2009). When cause is attributed to reasons related to the inability to respect the initial agreement, rather the intentional willingness to not fulfil prior promises, individuals tend to be less inclined to react negatively (Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro, 2011).

In accordance with the work of Morrison and Robinson (1997), the discrepancy is rooted in either reneging or incongruence. Reneging can refer to the inability to respect the initial agreement (explained, for example, by a lower level

of performance provided by the employee than expected when he or she was recruited), to the non-fulfillment of prior promises (related, for example, to the arrival of a new manager who does not know the content of existing agreements) or, in some cases, choosing to ignore promises that were previously made. Incongruence reflects an honest misunderstanding and, following Robinson and Rousseau (1994), can be explained by the fact that "each party believes that both parties have made promises and that both parties have accepted the same contract terms. However, this does not necessarily mean that both parties share a common understanding of all contract terms" (p. 246).

Given that a positive relationship between breach and violation has been recurrently reported among non-professional employees (e.g., Dulac *et al.*, 2008; Raja *et al.*, 2004), as well as professional employees (e.g., Suazo and Stone-Romero, 2011), the following relationship can be expected.

HYPOTHESIS 1   PC breach is positively related to a PC violation.

Consequences of psychological contract breach

Prior literature has also given a great deal of attention to perceived organization support, employee commitment, and turnover intention as important consequences of a PC breach. We propose to briefly define these variables before presenting the research model and the related hypotheses.

Perceived organizational support (POS)

POS refers to an employee's belief that the employer values his/her contribution and demonstrates concern for his/her wellbeing at work (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011). It also reflects the extent to which an employer is committed to its employees (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). However, as suggested by the support theory, the feeling of being supported by the organization implies that supportive actions must be voluntary and not imposed by a government decision or as a result of negotiations with a union (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). For example, if the actions of the employer are imposed by a union (e.g., after a round of negotiations, the organization takes actions that improve the return to work after a long sick leave), employees will tend not to believe that the organization provides support. Conversely, if the actions of the employer are voluntary (e.g., the introduction of a program for promoting fitness or health among employees), employees will tend to feel supported. Prior literature has suggested that organizational support may help employees to overcome frustration generated by their feeling that a PC breach has become a recurrent rather than an exceptional experience (e.g., Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003; Gakovic and Tetrick, 2003). Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005) have reported

a lack of consistency in how scholars have attempted to relate POS and the psychological contract in recent years. More specifically, they indicate that POS has been examined either as a determinant or as an effect of the psychological contract. However, Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005) have remarked that the study of the relationship becomes more consistent when the psychological contract is examined through its two main dimensions (i.e., the breach and the violation). For example, research has shown a negative effect of PC breach on POS (Zagenczyk, Gibney, Kiewitz, and Restubog, 2009). Further research has evidenced a negative effect of POS on PC violation (Tekleab, Takeuchi, and Taylor, 2005). These findings suggest that POS is an intervening variable between PC breach and PC violation that has the capacity to reduce or avoid the triggering effect of breach on violation. Dulac *et al.* (2008) reported a moderating effect by which the positive effect of a PC breach on a PC violation is stronger for employees who perceived low support from their organization. Interestingly, Suazo and Stone-Romero (2011) reported a similar pattern for professional employees. Therefore,

HYPOTHESIS 2   POS moderates the relationship between the PC breach and PC violation.

Employee commitment

Since the early 1960s, the concept of commitment has become one of the key variables that is typically used for describing the employee-organization relationship. This topic has engendered various definitions, measurements and conceptualizations. Numerous critics have addressed it over the years by focusing on either the nature of commitment or its conceptualization (Cohen, 2007; Herscovitch and Meyer, 2001; Morrow, 1985). Recent theoretical and methodological refinements can be found that have attempted to answer some of these recurrent questions (Klein, Molloy and Brinsfield, 2012; Klein, Cooper, Molloy and Swanson, 2014). According to the definition proposed by Herscovith and Meyer (2001), employee commitment refers to "a force that binds an individual to a course of actions of relevance to one or more targets" (p. 301). This definition focuses on two important dimensions: *force* and *target*. First, a force reflects a mindset regarding the nature of the individual linkage that can typically be affective (i.e., the desire to belong to the organization), continuous (i.e., the individual cost of leaving the organization) or normative (i.e., the moral obligation to remain part of the organization). Meyer, Becker and Vandenberghe (2004) and, more recently, Solinger, van Olffen, and Roe (2008), have recommended focusing only on the affective force since prior research shows that—contrary to the affective force—the continuance and normative commitments do not provide convincing findings for the prediction of turnover intents. Second, a target reflects a psychological bond of interest

to which an individual can devote his or her commitment, including among others the organization itself, but also the immediate manager (Lapointe, Vandenberghe and Boudrias, 2013), or the profession (Gendron, Suddaby and Qu, 2009), the team (Kukenberger, and Ruddy, 2012), and more recently, a specific cause (Bingham *et al.*, 2013). This literature on employee commitment raises the question of how an employee deals with these different targets. This concern has a long history and has generated different answers over the last forty years (Cohen, 2003). The main result of this stream of research is that employee commitment towards several different targets at the same time significantly improves the prediction of work-related outcomes. Although this topic is also a recurrent concern in the literature on professional employees (Lee, Carswell and Allen, 2000), the focus has been typically put on two main targets of commitment that are the organization and the profession, defined respectively as an individual's attachment to their employing organization or to the individual's attachment to their profession (Giffords, 2009: 388). Early research undertaken in this literature has been framed by the conflict assumption that means that professional employees do not share their loyalty between the organization and the profession (Cohen, 2003). However, more recent research among professional employees, in which organizational commitment and professional commitment are considered together, provide findings that tend to revise the conflict assumption. In this regard, a mutual reinforcement was found, leading to a positive synergistic effect in the prediction of turnover intention, indicating that professional employees are less prone to leave their organization when their employer preserves inherent professional features (e.g., autonomy, see Hall, Smith and Langfield-Smith, 2005).

Guzzo, Noonan and Elron (1994) have argued that "the psychological contract appears to be a construct useful for understanding membership in and commitment to an organization" (p. 625). Subsequent meta-analyses that stress the consequences of a PC breach have reported recurrent findings that indicate a decreasing effect on organizational commitment (Bal *et al.*, 2008; Zhao *et al.*, 2007), typically explained by the employee's willingness to reduce the strength of the bond with the organization (i.e., the employer). Whereas the relationship between the psychological contract and organizational commitment is well documented, little emphasis has been placed on the relationship with professional commitment in the current literature on psychological contracts. Although scarce, research has been reported that the perception of broken promises also negatively affects the professional commitment (Suazo, Turnley and Mai-Dalton, 2005). Hence, the following relationships can be expected.

HYPOTHESIS 3a PC violation is negatively related to organizational commitment.

HYPOTHESIS 3b PC violation is negatively related to professional commitment.

Turnover intention

The literature on employee turnover typically distinguishes between actual turnover and turnover intention. Briefly, while according to Preenen *et al.* (2011), actual turnover refers to a "departure from an organization despite having the opportunity to remain" (p. 309) and turnover intention refers to an intrapersonal deliberation regarding the possibility of leaving the organization at some unspecified point in the future (Paillé, 2013). Turnover intention is typically conceived as the last stage before departure and is often studied as the best predictor of actual turnover (Holtom *et al.*, 2008). The literature on psychological contracts has accumulated evidence indicating that the perception of a breach can trigger a feeling of violation that, in turn, can lead to the individual decision to terminate his or her relationship with the employer in order to bring to an end an unpleasant work experience (e.g., Orvis *et al.*, 2008).

Research using samples of professional employees has reported that organizational commitment (Carmeli and Wiesberg, 2006) and professional commitment (Mor Barak, Nissly and Levin, 2001) are negatively related to turnover intention. Therefore, the following relationships can be expected.

HYPOTHESIS 4   Organizational commitment is negatively related to turnover intention.

HYPOTHESIS 5   Professional commitment is negatively related to turnover intention.

FIGURE 1
Research model
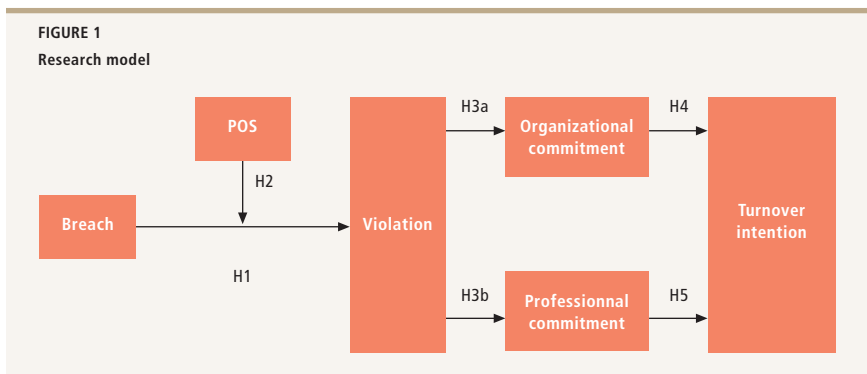
Method

Samples and participants

Townsend *et al.* (2006) have indicated that the retention of occupational therapists is regularly pointed out as an important issue in the relevant literature. Employee retention refers to the ability of an organization to retain its members by reducing their intention to leave (Reus and Lamont, 2009; Paillé, 2013).

As explained above in the theoretical section, breaches of past promises tend to increase the intention of professional employees to leave their employers. Therefore, we chose to investigate the effects of PC breach with the help of the professional association of occupational therapists in Quebec.

The questionnaire and the ethical package (i.e., an invitation to participate, explaining the overall objectives of the study, a consent form summarizing the ethical guidelines of the study, and an information sheet designed to ensure that participation was voluntary, to indicate that the participants were free to withdraw at any time and to emphasize that the responses were anonymous) were sent by the representative of the association to a randomly selected sample of 1,000 registered occupational therapists from the College of Occupational Therapists of Quebec who worked for a non-professional organization. Of these, 414 responses were returned for a response rate of 41.4%. Among these returned questionnaires, 137 were missing data; further, 85 questionnaires were excluded because of too much incomplete data. For another 52 questionnaires, as recommended by Graham (2009), the multiple imputation procedure was used in order to deal with missing data. The final sample consists of data from 329 occupational therapists. Among respondents, 89.9% of the participants were female. The average age of the participants was 34.7 years (SD = 7.7). The average organizational tenure was 8.6 years (SD = 5.9).

Measurements

Psychological contract breach was measured with a 5-item scale (e.g., "I have not received everything promised to me in exchange for my contributions") developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). The scale provided good reliability ($\alpha = .91$).

Psychological contract violation was measured with a 4-item scale (e.g., "I feel extremely frustrated by how I have been treated by my organization") developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). The scale provided good reliability ($\alpha = .93$).

Perceived organizational support was measured with a short form of four items (e.g., "My organization really cares about my wellbeing at work") (Stinglhamber, De Cremer and Mercken, 2006). In the present study, the scale provided good reliability ($\alpha = .91$).

Although Klein *et al*. (2014) have recently proposed a new way to measure commitment that offers several conceptual and methodological advantages in comparison to previous scales, they recognized some limitations such as the lack of warranty regarding cross-cultural invariance. This is a reason why we have chosen to use more established measurements of commitment. Therefore,

organizational commitment was measured by using a three-item scale (e.g., "I am proud to belong to my organization") developed by Bentein, Stinghlamber and Vandenberghe (2002). In the present study, the scale provided good reliability (α = .93). In addition, professional commitment was measured based on a selection of three (e.g., "This is the ideal vocation for my life work") of the eight items scale of Blau (1988). In the present study, the scale provided good reliability (α = .80).

Turnover intention was measured by using the three-item scale developed by Lichtenstein, Alexander, McCarthy, and Wells (2004). (e.g., "There is a good chance that I will leave this organization in the next year"). In the present study, the scale provided good reliability (α =.93).

Finally, for all items in the present research, a 7-point Likert-type scale has been used (1 = "strongly disagree"; 7 = "strongly agree").

Analyses

The two-stage process designed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) has been followed. Whereas the first stage consists of the assessment of the measurement model by examining convergent validity, internal consistency and discriminant validity, the second stage consists of the estimation of the parameters of hypothesized structural relationships among the latent variables.

The Chi-square statistic was used to interpret the data. The lowest value reflects the best fit of the data. Several indices were also calculated. The *Comparative Fit Index* (CFI) and the *Non Normed Fit Index* (NNFI), the *Root Mean Square Error of Approximation* (RMSEA), and the *Akaike Information Criterion* (AIC) were used. For the CFI and NNFI, values above .95 are considered good (Hu and Bentler, 1995). For the RMSEA values, between .05 and .08 are acceptable (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, and Müller, 2003). Finally, for the AIC, the rules of thumb for interpreting AIC comparison between models have been given by Burnham and Anderson (2002). When models are compared, the smallest value for AIC is expected. In addition, the difference should be significant. Following Burnham and Anderson (2002), whereas a difference less than 2 indicates no difference among models, a difference between 4 and 7 indicates that the model with the lower AIC is superior.

Hypothesis 2 implies testing a moderation that has been assessed by using Ping's (1996) approach, since this is consistent with the two-step procedure of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). To avoid multi-collinearity, following Cohen *et al.* (2003), the predictor (PC Breach) and the moderator (POS) have been mean-centered before computing the product terms (POS x PC Breach).

Results

Checking for common method variance

Because the data were collected using self-report measures, it is essential to check if bias due to the common method variance (CMV) is likely to influence (or not) the outcome of this research. Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) have recommended the single-common-method-factor approach when the investigation combines one source of rating, different contexts and an unidentified source of method bias. This approach requires the inclusion of a common factor latent variable in our measurement model (Marler, Fisher and Ke, 2009). Three models were compared; the null model, the measurement model, and the measurement model with an additional common factor. If the measurement model with a common factor fits the data better than measurement model, then we must conclude that bias due to CMV represents a threat.

Table 1 reports results indicating that the measurement model (χ^2 = 504.4, df = 192, p < .001; CFI = .95; NNFI = .94; RMSEA = .07; AIC = 626.4) provided a better fit than the measurement model with method factor (χ^2 = 504.4, df = 191, p < .001; CFI = .95; NNFI = .94; RMSEA = .07; AIC = 628.4). First, the measurement model with the method factor does not provide a better Chi-square. Second, for the AIC, the measurement model provided a smaller value than the measurement model with method factor. In addition, ΔAIC is > to 2, indicating that the fit is better (Burnham and Anderson, 2002). Based on these results, it can be concluded that CMV bias was not a serious threat.

TABLE 1

Results of model comparisons (N = 329)

Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	NNFI	RMSEA	AIC
Null model	6748.9***	231	32.86	–	–	–	–
One factor (all items combined)	3277.6***	207	15.83	.52	.47	.21	3369.6
Four factors	1730.9***	201	8.61	.76	.73	.15	1834.9
Five factors (a)	1361.1***	197	6.91	.82	.79	.13	1473.1
Five factors (b)	874.5***	197	4.43	.89	.87	.10	986.5
Measurement model	504.3***	192	2.62	.95	.94	.07	626.0
Measurement model with common factor	504.4***	191	2.64	.95	.94	.07	628.4

Note.   *** p < .000; Four factors (items of breach and violation together, items of commitments together, support, and turnover intention); Five factors (a) (Items of breach and violation together, items of professional commitment, organizational commitment, POS and turnover intention onto their respective factor); Five factors (b) (Items of commitments together, items of breach, violation, POS and turnover intention onto their respective factor)

We also sought to detect whether a nested model might offer a better goodness of fit than the measurement model. Table 1 reports the result of the comparison. In all cases, the measurement model produced a superior fit to the data than the alternative models.

Two-stage process measurement model and structural equation modeling (SEM)

Assessing the measurement model

The first stage consists of the assessment of the measurement model by examining convergent validity, internal consistency and discriminant validity.

Table 2 reports psychometric properties for PC breach, PC violation, POS, organizational and professional commitments, as well as intentions to leave the organization. Composite reliability (CR), which estimates the extent to which a set of latent construct indicators share in their measurement of a construct, should provide value above 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 1998). For average variance extracted (AVE), which gives the proportion of total variance explained by the latent variable, the expected values should be above 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 1998). Finally, Fornell and Larker (1981) recommend that Jöreskog's ρ, which gives the internal consistency, should be above the 0.70 threshold. While the CR values ranged from .75 (turnover intention) to .98 (PC breach), and the AVE values from .60 (professional commitment) to .84 (turnover intention), Jöreskog's ρ ranged from .81 (professional commitment) to .94 (turnover intention).

TABLE 2

Correlation matrix and psychometric properties (N = 329)

Variables						
PC-B	−					
PC-V	.29**(.08/.73)	−				
POS	-.48**(.23/.70)	-.57**(.48/.75)	−			
OC	-.35**(.12/.75)	-.59**(.35/.80)	.63**(.32/.77)	−		
PC	.01(.00/.64)	-.14**(.01/.69)	.05(.00/.69)	.14**(.02/.71)	−	
TI	.16**(.02/.76)	.42**(.18/.81)	-29**(.08/.78)	-.35**(.12/.83)	-.22**(.05/.72)	−
Mean	20.5	7.4	18.9	15.3	17.5	6.5
SD	3.2	5.0	5.6	4.1	3.1	5.0
CR	.98	.98	.97	.93	.81	.75
ρ	.91	.93	.91	.93	.81	.94
AVE	.69	.78	.72	.82	.60	.84

Notes ** p < .01; * p < .05; PC-B, psychological contract breach; PC-V, psychological contract violation; POS, perceived organizational support. OC, organizational commitment; PC, professional commitment; TI, turnover intention; C.R., Composite reliability; A.V.E., Average variance extracted; ρ, Jöreskog' rhô. Shared variance (R2) appears as the first entry within the brackets; AVE average appears as the second entry within the brackets.

Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing, for each pair of constructs, the average of their respective AVE and their shared variance. Following Fornell and Larker (1981), if for two given constructs the average AVE is higher than the shared variance, then the discriminant validity of the two constructs is evidenced. Table 2 shows also that for each pair of constructs, the requirement has been met. Therefore, the results indicate that discriminant validity was evidenced.

Examining the relationships among the variables

Using AMOS 18 the test of the model was based on the covariance matrix and was estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. The research model provided a poor fit, $\chi^2 = 95.3$, $df = 10$, $p = .001$; CFI = .85; NNFI = .69; RMSEA = .16; AIC = 131.8). The output suggested adding covariance between error terms for improving the fit. The model has been rerun and yielded an excellent fit of the data, $\chi^2 = 14.3$, $df = 7$, $p = .046$; CFI = .98; NNFI = .96; RMSEA = .05; AIC = 56.3). Table 3 reports results for each hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1 was supported since, as expected, we found a positive relationship between PC breach and PC violation ($\beta = .29$, SE = .05, t = 5.48, p. < .001).

Hypothesis 2 was not supported by the data, given that the interaction term was not significant ($\beta = -.01$, SE = .01, t = -1.48, p = .138).

Hypotheses 3 and 4 were supported by the data, since—as expected—negative relationships were found between PC violation and organizational commitment ($\beta = -.59$, SE = .18, t = -13.32, p < .001), and professional commitment ($\beta = -14$, SE = .44, t = -2.56, p < .01), respectively.

TABLE 3

Results of structural equations analysis (N = 329)

| Relationships				Standardized β	Standardized error	Critical ratio
HYPOTHESIS 1	PC breach	→	PC violation	.29***	.05	5.48
HYPOTHESIS 2	POS	→	PC violation	-.50***	.04	-10.75
	POS x PC breach	→	PC violation	-.01***	.01	-1.48
HYPOTHESES 3a and 3b	PC violation	→	Organizational commitment	-.59***	.18	-2.56
	PC violation	→	Professional commitment	-.14***	.44	-13.32
HYPOTHESIS 4	Organizational commitment	→	Intention to leave	-.40***	.06	-3.57
HYPOTHESIS 5	Professional commitment	→	Intention to leave	-.11***	.03	-6.53

Note** p < .01; *** p < .001

Hypotheses 5 and 6 were supported by the data, since—as expected—negative relationships were found between organizational commitment and intention to leave the organization (β = -.40, SE = .06, t = -3.57, p < .001), and between professional commitment and intention to leave the organization (β = -.11, SE = .03, t = -6.53, p < .001), respectively.

Additional analyses

Our finding indicates that Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Contrary to our expectation based on results by Suazo and Stone-Romero (2011), POS did not moderate the effect of PC breach on PC violation. This may mean that POS, PC breach and PC violation are likely associated differently. In this regard, Suazo (2009) has found that PC violation has a mediating effect between PC breach and POS in research involving non-professional employees. Therefore, we propose testing whether a mediation process between the three variables is at work. We tested the mediation by using bootstrap analysis. Following Cheung and Lau (2008), the mediation has been tested by utilizing applied bootstrapping procedures, and 5000 bootstrap samples to generate the results have been used. Briefly, mediation was investigated by directly testing the significance of the indirect effect of the independent variable (PC breach) on the dependent variable (POS) through mediator (PC violation). Mediation is demonstrated when, on the one hand, the indirect effect is significant and, on the other hand, when the confidence interval of the bias-corrected (95%) does not include zero (Taylor, MacKinnon and Tein, 2008). The standardized indirect effect of PC breach on POS through PC violation was .135 with a p-value < .001 for two-tailed significance test (CI 95% = -.194, -.084). The indirect effect is significant since the confidence intervals did not contain 0. It was also confirmed by the Sobel test (z = -4.868, SE = .05, p < .001).

This result suggests testing a long chain of mediation through which the indirect effect of PC breach on the intention to leave the organization would be sequentially mediated firstly through PC violation, POS and organizational commitment (first long chain) and, secondly, through PC violation, POS and professional commitment (second long chain). The PROCESS macro designed by Hayes (2013) was used for testing the long chain of mediation, in particular model 6 with four mediators[1]. Overall, the requirements are the same as those expected for the simple mediation process; that is, the CIs of indirect effect should not contain 0. While the standardized indirect effect through PC violation, POS and organizational commitment was .009 with a *p*-value < .001 for a two-tailed significance test (CI 95% = .002, .021), the standardized indirect effect through PC violation, POS and professional commitment was .001 with a *p*-value < .001 for a two-tailed significance test (CI 95% = -.004, .003). Thus, only the first long chain of mediation is evidenced, contributing to explain 19.92% of the variance

FIGURE 2
Final model

***p <.001
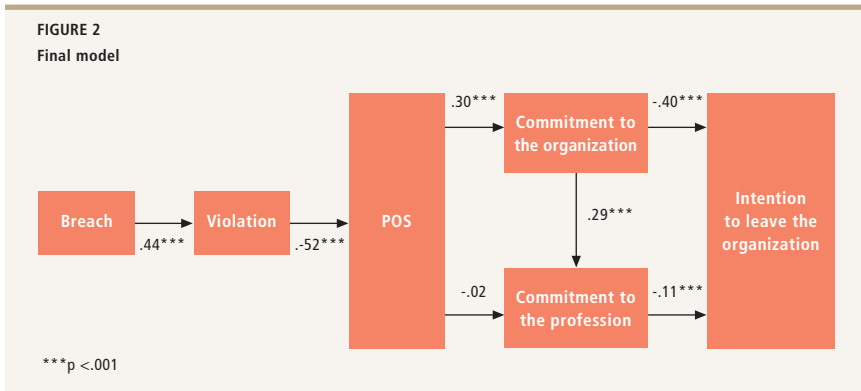
of intention to leave. To provide a more complete picture, we tested an alternative long chain of mediation. In so doing, we stretched the mediation process by placing professional commitment between organizational commitment and turnover intention. This is consistent with prior research among professionals (Mor Barak *et al.*, 2001; McManus and Subramaniam, 2014). The standardized indirect effect of a PC breach on turnover intention through PC violation, POS, organizational commitment and professional commitment was .001 with a *p*-value < .001 for a two-tailed significance test (CI 95% = .0002, .0041) and contributes to explaining 22.58% of turnover intention. The final model depicted in Figure 2 is based on these results.

Discussion

The present study was designed to shed more light on the specific case of professional employees working in non-professional organizations in relation to their reaction to the belief that prior promises have not been respected by their employers. To reach this objective, an investigation has been undertaken among a sample of occupational therapists that held a job at a non-professional organization at the time of the survey. Our findings make several interesting contributions to the literature on the reaction to a PC breach among professional employees working in a non-professional environment.

A result of interest concerns the objective to integrate into the same research model a set of prior scattered results that can be found in the psychological contract literature involving professional employees. Specifically, the findings of this research are consistent with those of Suazo and Stone-Romero (2011), Lamestro (2000), Mor Barak *et al.*, (2001), and Kalbers and Cenker (2007) since we found a positive relationship between a PC breach and PC violation, between POS and organizational commitment, significant negative relationships between professional commitment, and organizational commitment and intention to

leave the organization, respectively. However, contrary to Lamestro (2000), our findings indicated that POS has no effect on professional commitment. Rather, in accordance with prior research (Mor Barak *et al.*, 2001; McManus and Subramaniam, 2014), the results of the present study indicate that POS plays an indirect effect on professional commitment through organizational commitment. Our findings are in line with previous literature regarding the additive effect of organizational commitment alongside professional commitment for the prediction of work-related outcomes among professional employees. In this regard, Gendron, Suddaby and Qu (2009) argued that when professional employees perceive that their present work setting tends to respect their expectations in terms of professional attributes, in addition to the effect of organizational commitment, professional commitment brings additional motivation to stay in the present organization. Hence, considered together, our findings add to current research on the consequences of PC breach among professional employees. This study takes a step further by improving the understanding of the variables that may influence the decision to leave the organization when professional employees believe that their employer has not respected obligations that were made in the past. Organizational support and both organizational and professional commitments play a specific role within the causal chain from PC breach to turnover intention. While support given by the organization tends to absorb the negative effect of emotive reactions (i.e., violation) due to the cognition of a lack of fulfillment (i.e., breach), organizational and professional commitments contribute to the avoidance that professional employees consider the possibility of leaving the organization at some unspecified point in the future.

Given the paucity of research undertaken among professional employees concerning the relationship between POS and the psychological contract, the present research provides findings of interest about this relationship. In one of the rare research studies using a sample of professional employees, Malette (2011) envisioned POS as a determinant of a psychological contract. However, she showed that POS is related positively with the relational contract "based on trust, identification with the organization, and a long-term commitment" (Mallette, 2011: 528), and negatively with the transactional contract "based on economic exchange and do not involve attachments or trust" (Mallette, 2011: 529). By framing her research with social exchange theory, she has shown that nurses who feel supported by their employer are less prone to quit their jobs when the psychological contract is relational, whereas they are more prone to leave when the contract is transactional. In the present research, a somewhat different approach has been taken for the examination of the psychological contract by putting the focus on the two main forms: breach and violation. In this regard, with the notable exception of Suazo and Stone-Romero (2011), most previous studies conducted among professional employees have examined

either breach (e.g., O' Donohue and Nelson, 2007) or violation (e.g., Sutton and Griffin, 2004). By measuring breach and violation together, the present research provides additional insight. Contrary to our prediction based on previous research implying professional employees who reported that POS plays a moderating role between PC breach and PC violation (Suazo and Stone-Romero, 2011), in the present research no moderating role has been evidenced. Rather, our results are consistent with those provided by Suazo (2009), since the post-hoc analysis indicates that PC violation plays a mediating role between PC breach and POS. Overall, whereas we had assumed that POS was associated with PC breach as an antecedent of PC violation, our data have revealed that POS was, rather, an effect of PC violation. Although unexpected, this is an interesting finding indicating that the participants surveyed have clearly distinguished the respective role of the psychological contract and POS regarding their intention to leave the organization and, in accordance with findings by Suazo (2009), seemed to behave in the same way as non-professional employees. Our findings are in line with prior literature suggesting that support given by the employer reduces the negative consequences of breach when professional employees perceive that PC breach can be attributed to causes outside the control of the employer (Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro, 2011).

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations, suggesting a number of avenues for future research. First, Wallace (1993) suggested "that the relation between professional and organizational commitment may vary across occupations, according to the degree of professionalization, and within occupations, according to the individual's position or rank in the employing organization" (p. 345). This means that other occupations might reveal different relationships between professional and organizational commitment in the context of a PC breach. Future investigation might replicate our research by gathering data among other occupations. Second, Finley *et al.* (2003) claimed that "professionals 'adapt' to the non-professional environment by creating a professional microcosm that is more consistent with their professional values" (p. 330). Relevant literature indicates that professional employees tolerate a PC breach if they feel that it does not undermine their professional values. Future studies could examine to what extent for those professional employees who are not able to create a professional microcosm, the perception of a PC breach affects their work-related outcomes. Finally, precautions were taken to avoid spurious findings due to CMV. In addition, the direction of causation between the variables cannot be totally ensured, since the data have been gathered at one point of time. Further research is needed to replicate the findings of this study using longitudinal designs in order to go beyond these limitations.

Notes

1   All models are available by browsing the following link: http://afhayes.com/public/templates.
pdf

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SUMMARY

The Effects of the Psychological Contract among Professional Employees Working in Non-Professional Organizations

Few researchers have sought to examine the consequences of psychological contract breach in the particular case of professional employees working for non-professional organizations. To increase our understanding, the purpose of this article was to test an original research model encompassing psychological contract breach, psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, organizational and professional commitment, and intention to leave the organization. A study was conducted among a sample of 329 professional employees working in non-professional organizations. As predicted, this research shows a positive relationship between psychological contract breach and psychological contract violation, a negative relationship between breach and organizational commitment, and a negative relationship between organizational commitment and the intention to leave the organization. However, contrary to expectations, the results indicated that perceived organizational support has no moderating effect on the relationship between breach and violation. This finding does not confirm previous findings from the study by Suazo and Stone-Romero (2011). This unexpected result led to testing a different combination between perceived organizational support and PC-breach and PC-violation, which is documented in the literature on non-professional employees. Thus, in accordance with previous results by Suazo (2009), the data from our research indicate that the relationship between PC breach and perceived organizational support is mediated by PC violation. This alternative research model suggests testing a long mediation process by which the breach influences the intention to leave the organization via the violation, the perceived organizational support, and professional and organizational commitment. This long mediation process has been confirmed by our data. Finally, the results of this research suggest that when working in a non-professional context, professional employees tend to react to breaches of the psychological contract in a similar way to non-professional employees.

KEYWORDS: professional employees, psychological contract, perceived organizational support, employee commitment, turnover intention.

RÉSUMÉ

Les effets du contrat psychologique chez les employés professionnels œuvrant au sein d'organisations non-professionnelles

Peu de recherches ont examiné les conséquences de la brèche du contrat psychologique dans le cas particulier des employés professionnels travaillant pour des organisations non-professionnelles. Afin de combler cette lacune et dans le but de gagner

en compréhension, cet article a pour objectif de tester un modèle de recherche original englobant la brèche et la violation, le soutien organisationnel perçu, les engagements organisationnel et professionnel, ainsi que l'intention de démissionner. Une recherche a été conduite auprès un échantillon de 329 employé(e)s professionnel(le)s travaillant dans des organisations non-professionnelles. Conformément aux prédictions, notre étude montre une relation positive entre la brèche et la violation, une relation négative entre la violation et l'engagement organisationnel, ainsi qu'une relation négative entre l'engagement organisationnel et l'intention de quitter l'organisation. Toutefois, contrairement aux attentes, les résultats ont indiqué que le soutien organisationnel perçu n'a pas d'effet modérateur sur la relation entre la brèche et la violation, ce qui tend à infirmer les conclusions précédentes de l'étude de Suazo et Stone-Romero (2011). Ce résultat inattendu a conduit au test d'une combinaison différente et documentée dans la littérature auprès d'employés non-professionnels. Ainsi, en conformité avec les résultats de Suazo (2009), les données indiquent que la violation a un effet médiateur sur la relation entre la brèche et le soutien organisationnel perçu. Ce modèle de recherche alternatif suggère de tester un processus de médiation long par lequel la brèche influence l'intention de quitter l'organisation via la violation, le soutien organisationnel perçu ainsi que les engagements professionnel et organisationnel. Ce long processus de médiation a été confirmé par nos données. Finalement, les résultats de cette recherche laissent penser que lorsqu'ils travaillent en contexte non-professionnel, les employés professionnels tendent à réagir aux brèches du contrat psychologique de manière semblable aux employés non-professionnels.

MOTS-CLÉS : employés professionnels, contrat psychologique, soutien organisationnel perçu, engagement des employés, intention de quitter.

RESUMEN

Los efectos del contrato psicológico de los empleados profesionales que trabajan en las organizaciones no profesionales

Pocos investigadores han tratado de estudiar las consecuencias de la ruptura del contrato psicológico en el caso particular de los empleados profesionales que trabajan para organizaciones no profesionales. Para mejorar la comprensión, este artículo se propone poner a prueba un modelo de investigación original que abarca la ruptura del contrato psicológico, la violación del contrato psicológico, la percepción del apoyo organizacional, el compromiso organizacional y profesional, así como la intención de dejar la organización. A este efecto, se realizó un estudio con una muestra de 329 empleados profesionales que trabajan en organizaciones no profesionales. Como se predijo, esta investigación muestra una relación positiva entre la ruptura del contrato psicológico y la violación del contrato psicológico, una relación negativa entre la ruptura y el compromiso organizacional, y una relación negativa entre el compromiso organizacional y la intención de abandonar

la organización. Sin embargo, contrariamente a lo esperado, los resultados indicaron que el apoyo organizacional percibido no tiene un efecto moderador sobre la relación entre el incumplimiento y la violación. Este resultado no confirma los resultados previos del estudio de Suazo y Stone-Romero (2011). Este resultado inesperado condujo a evaluar una combinación diferente entre la percepción del apoyo organizacional y la ruptura del contrato psicológico y la violación del contrato psicológico, la cual está documentada en la literatura sobre los empleados no profesionales. Así, en concordancia con los resultados anteriores de Suazo (2009), los datos de nuestra investigación indican que la violación del contrato psicológico actúa como mediador de la relación entre el incumplimiento del contrato psicológico y el apoyo organizacional percibido. Este modelo alternativo de investigación sugiere la evaluación de un largo proceso de mediación por el cual el incumplimiento influye en la intención de abandonar la organización, en la medida que dicha influencia está mediatizada por la violación, el apoyo organizacional percibido y los compromisos profesional y organizacional. Este largo proceso de mediación ha sido confirmado por nuestros análisis. En conclusión, estos resultados sugieren que cuando trabajan en un contexto no profesional, los empleados profesionales tienden a reaccionar a las rupturas del contrato psicológico de manera similar que los empleados no profesionales.

PALABRAS CLAVES: empleados profesionales, contrato psicológico, apoyo organizacional percibido, compromiso profesional, intención de dejar el empleo.