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# A Conceptual Paper Approach on the Effects of Psychological Contract Breach Among University Employees in Pakistan: Moderating Role of Perceived Organisational Support

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## Abstract

Psychological contract breach (PCB), which is an unwritten expectations-based contract between an employee and an employer, leads to negative attitudes and behaviours. PCB may be avoided by a number of ways. This paper argues that perceived organisational support (POS) may be used to mitigate the negative effects of PCB towards turnover intention (TI), job dissatisfaction (JS) and counterproductive work behaviours (CWB). This study proposes that PCB may be investigated using different samples so that results may be compared within and outside Pakistan. This paper is also presented as a proposed conceptual framework for future research based on theoretical triangulation from previous seminal studies in the international, the Asian and the Pakistani context.

**Keywords:** Psychological Contract Breach, Job Satisfaction, Turnover Intention, Counterproductive Work Behaviour, Perceived Organisational Support.

## Introduction

Employees are considered important asset for organisations (Apoi & Latip, 2019). Organisations endeavour their best to fulfill employees' expectation and retain such a capital (Agarwal & Bhargava, 2013). Psychologically fulfilled employees tend to be satisfied and productive (Lee, et al., 2011). Psychological contracts (PCs) are used to manage employees at the workplaces (Höglund, 2012). PCs are of two types i.e. relational and contractual (Rousseau, 2000). Psychological contract breach (PCB) is considered to be one of the reasons forcing employees to exhibit negative attitudes and behaviours such as job dissatisfaction (Shah, 2017), turnover intention (Adnan & Khan, 2015) and counterproductive work behavior (Ahmed, Kiyani & Hashmi, 2013).

Although a host of research studies have been conducted on PCB in Pakistan: PCB, turnover intention and job satisfaction (Ahmad & Khan, 2015), PCB, work engagement and job satisfaction, (Saboor, Malik & Pracha, 2017), PCB and political skills, work ethic, perceived politics and job attitudes

relationships (Khan, et al., 2018) and also outside Pakistan: PCB and work related outcomes (Zhao, et al., 2007), PCB and turnover intention (Chin & Hung, 2013; Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994; Tekleab, Takeuchi, & Taylor, 2005), PCB: counterproductive work behavior (Ma, et al., 2019), PCB and engagement, job satisfaction and organisational support (Westhuizen, Scheepers & Kele, 2018), yet these studies were limited in terms of coverage and understanding of how psychological contract breach affects Pakistani workforce/workplaces and how perceived organisational support may moderate the relationships between psychological contract breach and job dissatisfaction, turnover intentions and counterproductive work behavior.

This conceptual paper discusses what PCB is all about, how it evolved over decades and what are its effects. Researchers have started taking PCs very importantly especially from the breach aspect in the Asian context (Agarwal & Bhargava, 2013). This paper also discusses the empirical, methodological and theoretical gaps as well. PCs have mainly been studied by employing social exchange theory (Piccoli & De Witte, 2015; Li & Chen, 2018) and/or the norm of reciprocity (Karagonlar, Eisenberger & Aselage, 2015). Little studies have used triangulation of social exchange theory (SET) and organisational support theory (OST). The former postulates that the employees return back what they get from their employers whereas the latter posits that employees return back well if they are given well. Overall, the studies on PCB have been conducted keeping in view its effects only (Agarwal & Bhargava, 2013) that means other structural variable should be used to explore PCB more. Hence, keeping in view both the said theories, the conceptual framework shown in Figure. 1 proposes that perceived organisational support moderates the relationship between PCB and JS, TI and CWB.

### **Literature and Hypothesis Development**

**Psychological Contracts:** A psychological contract means an unwritten agreement between an employee and an employer about the terms & conditions of employment (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). Argyris (1960) introduced the term psychological work contract whereby he advocated that employee-employer relationship is based on mutuality (Conway & Briner, 2005). Rousseau (1989) said that PCs are used to study workplace ties. However, "a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be even dimly aware but which nonetheless govern their relationship to each other" were considered as psychological contract by Levinson, et al. (1962). Such contracts may be relational and/or transactional. There are three dimensions of these contracts i.e. psychological contract fulfilment, psychological contract violation and psychological contract breach.

**Psychological Contract Breach:** PCB is considered an organisational lapse regarding promises extended to employees (Rousseau, 1989). PCB leads to negative job attitudes and behaviours (Malik & Khalid, 2016) and affects performance of employees (Hussain, Gul, Usman & Islam, 2016). The negative attitudes and behaviours as outcomes of breach are many (Conway & Briner, 2002; Raja, Johns & Ntalianis, 2004; Zhao, et. al., 2007; (Bordia, Restubog & Tang, 2008; Ahmad & Khan, 2015). The breach aspect has wide range (Agarwal & Bhargava, 2013) in the Asian context as well (Restubog, Bordia & Robert, 2006). There is little exploration regarding psychological contract breach in the Asian context considering demographic factor (Ahmad & Khan, 2015).

**Job Satisfaction:** The concept of job satisfaction was given due consideration by Maslow

(1943), who introduced the needs hierarchy (theory). Job satisfaction has been defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences”. Job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions are positively associated (Locke, 1976). Researchers believe that “a positive emotional and cognitive evaluation of their jobs is expected to push employees into being engaged with their jobs as reciprocation for the job satisfaction enabled by the organisation” (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Job satisfaction, which is a very much important job attitude, which gets converted into dissatisfaction if employees experience PCB at the workplaces (Katou & Budhwar, 2012). PCB leads to job dissatisfaction (Jamil, Raja, Darr, 2013).

**Turnover Intentions:** Turnover is a behavior and turnover intention (TI) is an attitude caused by job dissatisfaction (Locke, 1976). Tett and Meyer (1993) described turnover intention as an intentional attempt to get a new job outside one’s organisation. Turnover intention has been associated with PCB (Chin & Hung, 2013; Aykan, 2014). PCB causes turnover intentions and job dissatisfaction (Ahmad & Khan, 2015; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). Literature shows that turnover intention leads to actual turnover behaviour (Wang, Li, Wang & Gao, 2017). Studies have revealed that turnover intention has a relationship with PCB (Ahmad & Khan, 2015; Malik & Khalid, 2016). Male and female employees take turnover intentions and turnover differently (Blomme, Van-Rheede, & Tromp, 2010). One of the outcomes of PCB is turnover intention (Zhao, et al., 2007).

**Counterproductive Work Behaviour:** Chen and Spector (1992) held that counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) damages an organisation in four possible ways i.e. ‘damaging the organisational-property’, ‘damaging the organisational-production’, ‘damaging the (senior and/or junior) colleagues by being aggressive’, and ‘damaging the organisational socio-political-image by disseminating fabricated-content about the organisation or its members’. CWB is the outcome of PCB (Malik & Khalid, 2016; Zhao, et. al., 2007). CWB leads to huge losses to organisations (Latto, 2007; Matchulat, 2007). PCB has a positive association with CWB (Chao, Cheung, & Wu, 2011). CWB is provoked by PCB (Griep, Vantilborgh & Jones, 2018; Abela & Debono, 2019).

**Perceived organisational support (POS):** Perceived organisational support (POS) means “an employee’s perception that the organization values his or her work contributions and cares about the employee’s well-being”. Perceived organisational support leads to positive work attitudes and behaviour and thereby increases organisational performance (Eisenberger, Malone & Presson, 2016). The more the organisational support the less employees get psychologically affected (Kurtessis, et al., 2015). Organisational understanding and support reduces PCB and increases employee engagement/retention (Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2015). POS may moderate PCB and job attitudes and behaviours (Westhuizen, Scheepers & Kele, 2018).

Organisations want high productivity and employee retention. Negative attitudes and behaviours damage productivity and cause huge losses to organisations, (Latto, 2007; Matchulat, 2007). A number of research attempts has explored PCB and CWB but this relationship needs further investigation in the Asian context (Chao et al., 2011) especially in Pakistan (Hussain,et. al., 2016). Literature shows that little has been investigated about PCB and job satisfaction in Pakistan (Ahmad & Khan, 2015; Saboor & Malik & Pracha, 2017); PCB and TI (Ahmad & Khan, 2015) and PCB and CWB (Ahmed, Kiyani & Hashmi, 2013; Gulzar, et al., 2014).

Little is known about the relationship between PCB and demographics in Pakistan (Ahmad & Khan, 2015). PCB has more been researched in the western countries (Zhao, et. al., 2007; Rayton & Yalabik, 2014; Westhuizen, et al., 2018). Literature has suggested to investigate PCB more and in the

Asian context as well (Agarwal & Bhargava, 2013) especially in Pakistan (Hussain, et. al., 2016) as it would be unjustified to generalise western results in Pakistan (Bashir, 2011). Investigating PCB in Pakistan is justified as non-western research results have also been reported inconsistent with the western results (Lu, Siu, Spector & Shi, 2009; Madipelli, Sarma & Chinnappaiah, 2013).

Structural equation modelling (SEM) provides better analysis and path-understanding (Kline, 2005). A few studies has used SEM method to study PCB in relation to constructs of the present research together in relation to employees of the Pakistani universities. Besides, a few studies has used questionnaire method to research psychological contract of university administrative and teaching employees. Similarly, little is known about validation of the present study scales in Pakistan especially Pakistani universities. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by using SEM and a questionnaire based quantitative approach to study effects of PCB, its effects and moderating role of POS vis-a-vis the university employees in Pakistan.

A research model must be supported by some relevant theories (Hair, *et al.*, 2010). Previous research depicts that researchers have employed theories such as expectancy theory, self-determination theory, attribution theory, social contract theory, uncertainty management theory, psychological ownership theory, conservation of resources theory, control theory, affective event theory, signaling, theory, social information theory, cognitive dissonance theory, psychological contract theory, perceived organisational support theory and agency theory in order to research psychological contract.

Psychological contract studies mainly rely on only social exchange theory. Therefore, other theories may also be used to research psychological contract (Kutaula, 2014). Nonetheless, literature shows that little studies have employed together the organisational support theory and the social exchange theory to researching PCB and other constructs of the present research. A number of studies/theories have been employed in countless studies from technological advanced countries, which comes to almost no more than one-third of the world-population. Generalization and application of such theories in the non-western cultural-context seems unjustified (Bashir, 2011). Therefore, this research is an attempt to employ the social exchange and the organisational support theories together in order to better understand psychological contract mechanism. Accordingly, this research aims to overcome this shortcoming by employing social exchange and organisational support theories together to study PCB and effects and moderating role of POS.

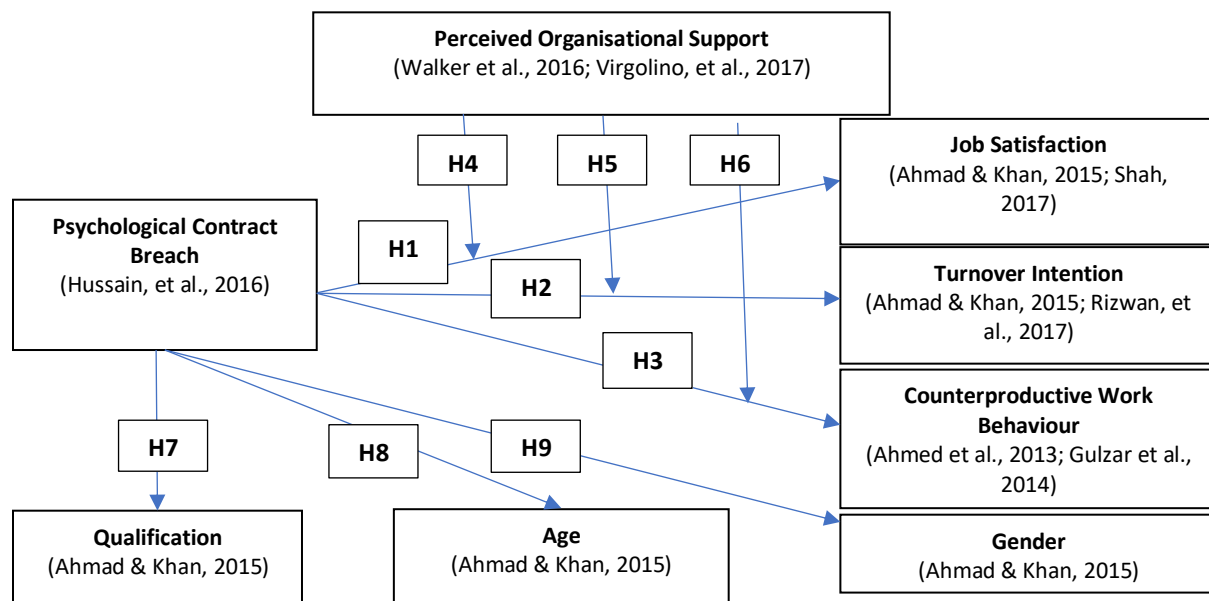
Study objectives and hypotheses are detailed below:

- To examine the effects of psychological contract breach among university employees in Pakistan.
- To examine the role between perceived organisational support and psychological contract breach and its negative attitudes and behaviours such as job dissatisfaction, turnover intention, counterproductive work behaviour and among employees in Pakistani universities.
- To examine if psychological contract breach affects demographic factors such as qualification, gender and age of employees in Pakistani universities?



- H1: PCB has association with JS.
- H2: PCB has Association with TI.
- H3: PCB has association with CWB.
- H4: POS moderates the relationship between PCB and JS.
- H5: POS moderates the relationship between PCB and TI.
- H6: POS moderates the relationship between PCB and CWB.
- H7: PCB has association with qualification.
- H8: PCB has association with age.
- H9: PCB has association with gender.

**Proposed Conceptual Framework**



**Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework showing the Effects of Psychological Contract Breach Among University Employees in Pakistan**

The proposed conceptual framework would help scholars, practitioners and organizations better understand the psychological contract mechanism with reference to its negative attitudes and effects and also the role of POS therein so that all concerned may contribute to the society by providing a psychologically conducive work environment.

**Discussion, Conclusion and Future Research Directions**

Empirical and conceptual studies have been conducted to examine PC and role of PCB regarding attitudes and behaviours of employees. These studies have held that PCB causes negative job attitudes and behaviours. Although PCB has widely been researched in the West yet research on PCB is limited in Pakistani workplaces especially with reference to PCB, JS, TI, CWB and POS.

PCB has been investigated mainly through quantitative research method; researchers may also carry out a longitudinal study and/or qualitative study to better understand this mechanism. The study at hand will prove to be an attempt to understand research on PCB by using a number of

structural and contextual constructs as mediators and/or moderators concerning effective human resource management practices.

PCB leads to negative job outcomes i.e attitudes and behaviours. This breach is required to be mitigated/eradicated by truly understanding the PCB mechanism, which need deeper structural and contextual investigations especially in all sectors of Pakistan. Researchers and practitioners cannot be effective at employee management unless they fully understand the PCB mechanism and its effects on attitudes and behaviours of the employees. Therefore, the research scheme of this study may prove to be a better understanding of the PCB and attitudes and behaviours with a especial focus on Pakistani workplaces i.e. universities.

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