

The Effect of Social Influence on Psychological Contract Breach Evaluation: How it is Related to Deviant Workplace Behaviour

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Abstract: Psychological Contract (PC) breach has a significant impact on employee behaviour. Most researches have studied how individual characteristics, work characteristics and organizational characteristics influence PCB evaluations. But research has overlooked how the social network i.e. positionally similar others and relational others influence evaluation of PCB. This study proposes a conceptual model exploring these relationships. Also, when an employee perceives breach he/she is likely to show deviant behaviour. This study proposes how PCB and categories of deviance behaviour (interpersonal and organizational deviance) are related and how network characteristics like density, centrality and type of ties (expressive ties) could moderate this relationship. This conceptual paper explores how these relationships could play out.

Keywords: Psychological Contract Breach Evaluation, Deviant Workplace Behaviour

Introduction

The increased competition in the business environment and the technological development in business have resulted in the restructuring of the organization as well as the restructuring of the work. This has changed the employment relationships of employees at all levels of the organization (Shore *et al.*, 2004). This has an impact of the psychological contract (PC) that employees have with their organization. Thus, there is an increased academic interest in the study of the employee's relationship with the organization (at different levels) and PC and how this affects the organization. But a large portion of the work in the area of PC is focused on the nature and the content of the contract (Chen *et al.*, 2008) and the consequences of contract breach, violation and change (e.g., Turnley and Feldman, 2000; Chen *et al.*, 2008).

Also, social influence is an aspect that has an influence on work, work relations and work attitudes and behaviors. So, given the relational nature of work (people needing to work in teams) and organizations today, it would be interesting to understand how an employee's social network influences the evaluation of PC breach and how this in turn influences deviant behaviour at work.

Literature Review

Psychological Contract Breach

The psychological contract is defined as the set of implicit mutual expectation that the employees and the employers hold about the terms and conditions about the exchange relationship (Kotter, 1973; Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998). The PC between the parties to the employment leads to the creation of a mental model about the employment relationship and also provides an understanding about the expectations from both parties. It also guides the action of the parties (Rousseau, 2004).

Most of the literature in the area of PC addresses PC breach. PC breach is experienced when one of the parties in the exchange relationship perceives that the other party has failed to fulfill their obligations (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Understanding PC breach (PCB) is important because it has implications for the organization. Perceptions of PCB lead to lower commitment, lower OCB, performance and job satisfaction and higher intention to quit and actual turnover (Bunderson, 2001; Conway and Briner, 2002; Coyle-Shapiro, 2002; Edwards, Rust, McKinley, and Moon, 2003; Hui, Lee, and Rousseau, 2004a; Kickul, Lester, and Belgio, 2004; Raja, Johns, and Ntalianis, 2004 as cited in Chen *et al.*, 2008). Researchers have proposed a model to understand the relationship between PCB and work outcomes. Rousseau (1995) proposed a model where she explained the process beginning from the employees' perception of contract- outcome discrepancy and ends with the perception of breach. Morrison and Robinson's (1997) model also explains how things move from the employee's perception of unmet promises from the organization to PCB to violation. This model focuses on the formal socialization process without addressing the informal influences between employees. Both these models, however, overlook the other social forces that can affect the employee's evaluation of PCB. Most of the research on PC, it seems, is based on the assumption of social vacuum. Thus, there is a lack of research on the impact of social influence on the PC despite the evidence that social influence impacts employee attitudes and perceptions.

Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis can be used to understand how individuals make choice of referents for PC-based information (e.g., Burt, 1982; Coleman *et al.*, 1966). There are two popular network models that have been used to explain the social influence process. They are the relational model (also known as cohesion) and the positional model (also known as structural equivalence) (Burkhardt, 1994; Contractor and Eisenberg, 1990). According to the relational model, social influences operate through the mechanisms of cohesion and solidarity and people are influenced by those with whom they have direct interactions and social closeness i.e. the relational others (Burkhardt, 1994). Example of these are friendship and advice ties; they are easily accessible and allow individuals the opportunity to get information easily and frequently and so the salience of such information is high (Friedkin, 1998). They are characterized by positive interactions (Friedkin, 1984) and so are more likely to be chosen as a source of social information. The other model is the positional model which explains the mechanism for social influence which is competition and socialization (Burt 1987). So, this model states that individuals focus on people who are in positions similar to theirs in the informal structure as social referents. This happens for two reasons: firstly, because positionally similar people are looked upon as substitutes (Sailer 1978) and so there is a competitive orientation between them. So, the individual focuses on such a person's perceptions and behaviours to ensure his standing as equal or superior (Friedkin, 1998). Secondly, on account of the structurally similar positions, the individual and the positionally similar others are likely to have a similar set of people in their network and have the same socialization experiences. So, this makes them both suitable and relevant as a social referent (Marsden and Friedkin, 1993).

There are two concepts to understanding interrelationships between individuals—the structure and the content of the relationship (Balkundi *and* Harrison, 2006). The structure is the pattern of relationships between the parties. Concepts related to this are network density and network centrality (which are explained later). The content determines the nature of the resources that flow through the structure. The two types of tie content are instrumental and expressive ties (Lincoln *and* Miller, 1979). Instrumental ties are related to work-related advice (Ibarra, 1993) and expressive ties are friendships. Instrumental ties emerge from formal relations and the information shared is usually work related. Expressive ties involve more affect and are central to the social support.

Psychological Contract and Organizational Members

Theoretically, there are a number of sources that play a role in the formation of the psychological contract. These include co-workers, supervisors, mentors, HR practices in the organization, individual predispositions, etc. (Rousseau, 1995, 2001). These actors in the organization play an important role in the socialization of the employees and they also influence the perceptions of the employees by providing information and cues about events and how they should be interpreted. They also help the employees to navigate work at the organization and set work norms and behaviour standards (Nelson *and* Quick, 1991; Morrison, 1993). Of these, the most influential actors are the co-workers as well as the supervisors (Rousseau *and* Greller, 1994).

Rousseau (1995) pointed out that individuals who share a common PC are also likely to experience breach, violation and other changes to the contract, based on each other's experience in the organization. Despite this, for over two decades there has been very limited research that has attempted to understand how the internal and external organizational actors influence PC formation and breach evaluation (Raja, Johns, *and* Ntalianis, 2004).

Social Influence and the Psychological Contract Breach

The evaluation of PC fulfilment is a sense-making process in which the employee attempts to evaluate the extent to which the employer meets the expectations of the employee. The sense making theory points to the fact that PC is a subjective perceptual construct which depends on the 'eyes of the beholder' (Robinson *and* Rousseau, 1994, p. 246). Ho (2002) postulated that the evaluation of PC fulfilment or PC breach is contingent not only on one's own perceived discrepancy between the expectations held and the expectations met but also the discrepancy of the individual's social referents. So the evaluation of fulfilment is not just a simple calculation of the discrepancy between what was promised and what is received but it is also a complex, personal and social 'construction of reality whereby referents can offer cues and standards to guide the evaluation process. Consequently, these evaluations are even more likely to be subject to social information processing and influence.' (Ho, 2005 p. 114). Ho (2005) reported that referents like friends and substitutes play an important role in evaluations of PC fulfillment. The same logic can be extended for PCB evaluation. But there is very little other empirical work on the relationship between the patterns of social interaction and PCB evaluation.

When employees have an unfavourable treatment at work they look to their social networks for information and support (e.g., Van Emmerik, Euwema, and Bakker, 2007). The social information processing theory points out that as employees experience more uncertainty their reliance on their social network increases for information and support so as to manage the uncertainty (Lamertz, 2002; Umphress *et al.*, 2003). Also breach undermines the foundation of the employment relationship (e.g., Restubog *et al.*, 2008) and so makes the employees uncertain about their relationship with the organization (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). So, the employees ask their peers for explanations about why they think the breach happened and support from peers can restore positive self-identity. So, peers do have an influence on PCB perception.

There has been research (Orvis *et al.*, 2008; Chiu and Peng, 2008; Restubog and Bordia, 2006) that has focused on dispositional moderators or psycho-social moderators. But there has been a lack of research on the role of informal dynamics which can be a useful framework to understand work related attitudes (e.g. Rice and Aydin, 1991). Given that employees fill the gaps in their expectations on the basis of cues from the environment and signals they receive from the social environment, thus making the context important (e.g., Kickul *et al.*, 2002; Turnley and Feldman, 1999).

Rousseau (1996) has pointed out that the employment relationship comes in the focus when events happen that beg for questions should be asked. Conscious attention is paid to unexpected events and the sense-making process is initiated and as pointed out above negative events come to focus more often than positive events. All these arguments point to the fact that there is a need to study the impact, that social influence has on PCB perceptions as compared to prior work of the same on fulfillment evaluation.

PCB and Social Structure

Theories like the social information processing theory (e.g., Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) and the sense-making theory (e.g., Greenberg, 1995) show the importance of the social context in shaping individual perceptions. Pfeffer and Langton, (1993) have pointed out that social referents play an important role in the judgements that individuals form about their work and organizations. In fact, an individual's evaluation is affected by social influence even when objective information is present (Klein, 1997). Thus, the structural context can play an important role in individual's perceptions and behaviour. On account of the networks that individuals have, they are able to exchange information and form similar perceptions since they are able to vicariously experience another's behaviour about an event (Hackman, 1983). Thus, networks act as mechanisms through which individuals are exposed to other information and influence.

Apart from the formal influences, there exist informal influences that stem from the employee's social interactions. In an organizational setting, social influences can come from immediate local social interactions or influences can be systemic and can stem from large informal structures that individuals are embedded in (Ibarra and Andrews, 1993). Both these network forms have distinct characteristics and can influence behaviour differently (Lincoln and Miller, 1979).

The sources of influence can be cohesive others and positionally similar others. The source can determine which influencing mechanism is dominant. But this depends on situational factors like the type of network. There are two possible relationships: instrumental or expressive ties and these have a differential impact on behaviour. Instrumental ties are weak ties that link people who have different personal characteristics or hold different positions or have differential access to scarce resources (Granovetter, 1983). Expressive ties are strong and intimate and tend to connect people who share similar personal characteristics (Marsden, 1988). They also involve frequent interaction (Krackhardt, 1990). So, instrumental ties are explored for information like advice, expertise, etc while expressive ties provide affect resources like friendship and support. Both of these need to be considered when studying social influence (Ho, 2005) because empirical research suggests that the type of the network affects the amount of social influence and so there is a differential impact of these.

Hypothesis: Employees will rely more on cohesive others than positionally similar others as social referents when evaluating PC Breach.

Hypothesis: The relationship between the influence of positionally similar others on PCB evaluation is stronger for instrumental ties than expressive ties.

Hypothesis: The relationship between the influence of cohesive others on PCB evaluation is stronger for expressive ties than instrumental ties.

A combination of positionally similar ties and cohesive ties results in multiplex ties. This combination of ties results in a unique influence mechanism. Research (Wheeldon, 1969) has shown that multiplex relations are influential and ‘the more different kinds of relationships a dyad includes...the more relevant it is to different kinds of attitudes’ (Erickson 1988, p.103). Multiplicity results in more ease in obtaining information, getting more relevant information because the relationships have more settings within their span and there are also more sources from which information can be sought.

Hypothesis: Employees will more rely on multiplex others (i.e., cohesive and positionally similar) when evaluating PCB.

PCB and Deviance

When an employee’s behaviour is against organizational norms, it is deemed as workplace deviance (Robinson *and* Bennett 1995). WPD is a kind of frustration that organizations bear from employees. Deviance can be categorized into interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance (Robinson *and* Bennett, 1995). When organizational members are the target of behaviour like disrespect, rudeness, etc. it is called interpersonal deviance since the co-workers are harmed. Organizational deviance occurs when the organization is the target of the deviant behaviour. This can include stealing, vandalism, etc. (Giacalone, Riordan *and* Rosenfeld, 1997). Both these categories have different results (Giacalone, Riordan *and* Rosenfeld, 1997) and so need to be studied separately. Bordia and colleagues (2008) categorized deviant workplace behaviour into

minor and major offences. They indirectly reported that PCB had an effect on major offences. Previous researchers (Restubog *et al.*, 2007; Turnley *et al.*, 2003) have also shown that PCB is more strongly linked to organizational deviance than interpersonal deviance.

Theoretically, the negative effects of PCB can be understood using the social exchange theory (Coyle-Shapiro *and* Conway, 2004). The employer - employee relationship is governed by social exchange; so, when the employee perceives that the organization has broken a promise, the employee reciprocates by acting against organizational interests (like withholding effort, exiting). Also Bordia *et al.* (2008) says that provocations in the workplace like injustice, poor work conditions, etc. could lead to a cognition of discrepancy between reality and expectations and this disparity manifests itself in an emotional reaction. A PCB is perceived when there is a disparity and this can act as a provocation to indulge in deviant behaviour. In the social context, the social information processing theory explains that group members work in a shared environment and they receive similar cues from the environment and this can convince them that deviant behaviours are acceptable adaptations to the situation. So, no one attempts to stop or correct the behaviour and it spreads as explained by the social contagion theory. Thus, social influence also has an impact on deviant behaviour.

Hypothesis: PCB will be positively related to interpersonal deviance.

Hypothesis: PCB will be positively related to organizational deviance.

There are a limited number of studies that have examined the role of interpersonal relationships in understanding and predicting behaviour (Settoon *and* Mossholder, 2002; Venkataramani *and* Dalal, 2007). Thus, there is a need to examine the effect of PCB evaluation on deviant behaviour in the context of social networks.

Moderators of PCB and Workplace Deviance

As mentioned above, situational and dispositional variables influence workplace deviance. Seibert *et al.*, (2001) pointed out that when individuals need to form and maintain a network with important colleagues, it requires the individual to invest time and energy. Thus, as the number of connections increase, it becomes more important to maintain a positive image in the network. Thus, variables like centrality in the network and density of the network can impose constraints in terms of engaging in deviant behaviour, since deviant behaviour can lead in reputation loss. Thus, it would be interesting to explore how the structure of the network (like centrality and density) influences response to breach.

Centrality

There are a number of measures of network centrality (Freeman, 1979). One variable that is relevant to our argument is closeness centrality. Closeness centrality is the extent to which an individual can reach all the other individuals in the network with the least number of direct and indirect links (Freeman, 1979). Direct links are weighted as closer than the indirect links. In terms

of workplace deviance, the direct connections cause increased surveillance while the indirect connections determine how many others will find out about the deviant behaviour and it is an indicator of how much loss of reputation can occur. When closeness centrality is high, the surveillance is high and so there is more loss of reputation associated with engaging in deviant behaviour. When people are isolated in networks, they do not lose reputation but as an individual's network increases in size, his/her reputation becomes more important. A highly central actor has more visibility because apart from the actual relationships they are also known to others and this adds more constraints in terms of possible reputation loss.

Hypothesis: Network centrality will moderate the relation between PCB and deviance such that centrality is negatively related to deviant behaviour.

Density

Density is the proportion of network ties compared to the total number of possible ties (Scott, 1991). Jones (1991) pointed out that the density of relations can increase social consensus on issues and this can lead to increased moral intensity, intent and behaviour. Researchers (Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1992; Burt and Knez, 1995) also reached similar conclusions about the relationship between density and trust. When the network has high interconnection, surveillance is high and the possible loss of reputation on account of being deviant is also increased. On the other hand, in a network that is loosely connected, it is more likely that individuals engage in workplace deviance.

Hypothesis: Network density will moderate the relation between PCB and deviance such that density is negatively related to deviant behaviour.

Expressive Ties

Expressive ties play a role in helping prevent or constraint destructive behaviour that are motivated by the emotion of revenge (e.g., Bordia *et al.*, 2008). Brass *et al.*, (1998) also suggested that the structural relations in a social network can play a role in deviant behaviour because of the possible loss of reputation. In order to prevent loss of reputation in the social network, employee may refrain from engaging in bad behaviour (Bass *et al.*, 1998).

Hypothesis: Expressive ties moderate the relationship between PCB and deviance such that expressive ties will constraint deviant behaviour.

Research Gaps and Potential Contribution

Despite the huge amount of research in the area of psychological contracts there are some research gaps that have emerged from the literature. Firstly, most of the research in the area of PC has focussed on the employee outcomes of PCB (Lo and Aryee, 2003) and there is very limited research that has focussed on the contextual factors that can moderate the PCB-outcome relations.

Research has focussed on unfavourable work perceptions like job satisfaction (e.g., Withey *and* Cooper, 1989; Zhou *and* George, 2001) and low organizational support (e.g., Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2007). Over the last decade there has been a call for research that has explored the impact that contextual moderators have on the PCB- outcome relation (e.g., Chen *et al.*, 2008). This study proposes relations that can help understand how the context shapes employee - PCB evaluations. Previous studies have explored how individuals use their social ties as referents to understand their PC obligations (Ho *et al.*, 2006) and PC fulfilment (Ho, 2005) but they have not explored how PCB is influenced.

Another limitation is the lack of evidence to explain the differential impact of PCB on different behavioural outcomes. There are a handful of studies (e.g., Chen, Tsui, *and* Zhong, 2008; Orvis, Dudley, *and* Cortina, 2008; Lo *and* Aryee, 2003; Tekleab *and* Taylor, 2003) that have examined the relationship between PCB and outcomes but they have not considered the theoretical differences and similarities of the behaviours. This limitation is important because otherwise researchers could conclude that OCB has equivalent effects on conceptually and empirically dissimilar constructs (e.g. extra-role and in-role performance).

This study integrates the work of Dabos *and* Rousseau (2004), Ho (2005) and Ho (2008). All of them used the social network theory to gain an understanding of PC fulfilment. Previously researchers (Bashir *et al.*, 2011; Bordia *et al.*; 2008) have explored the relationship between PCB and workplace deviance but they have not used network analysis. By using this approach, an understanding can be gained on how employee social networks can influence how they respond to PCB.

Most of the work in the area of PC has been carried out in the Western context. Employee expectations from the employment are driven by societal settings (Rousseau *and* Schalk, 2000). Also given that PC is perceptual in nature, cultural differences influence the agreement on expectations (Thomas *and* Au, 2000). So, in different cultures, different results are expected. In the work that the researchers have studied, there have been no studies on the impact of social influence on workplace deviance in the Indian context.

Most of the studies in the area of PC study fulfilment or breach. It is very important to study breach because it has more damaging effect than the positive effects of fulfilment (Conway *et al.*, 2011). Research has established that negative effects have a greater effect on the mood than positive events and individuals are also more responsive to negative events (Taylor, 1991).

Rousseau (1989) stated that the defining feature of PCB is the fact that once a promise is broken it cannot be repaired easily and this implies that breach has differential effects and these are more magnified as compared to fulfilment (Conway *et al.*, 2011). When people receive unexpected negative surprises it results in sense-making and this in turn results in counterfactual thinking. So, there is a perceived loss and this perceived loss is more harmful than the pleasure from a gain and so it leads to a stronger response (Jervis, 2004). This points out that it is important to study breach because of the potential damage that it can cause.

The conceptual model as proposed by us is as below:

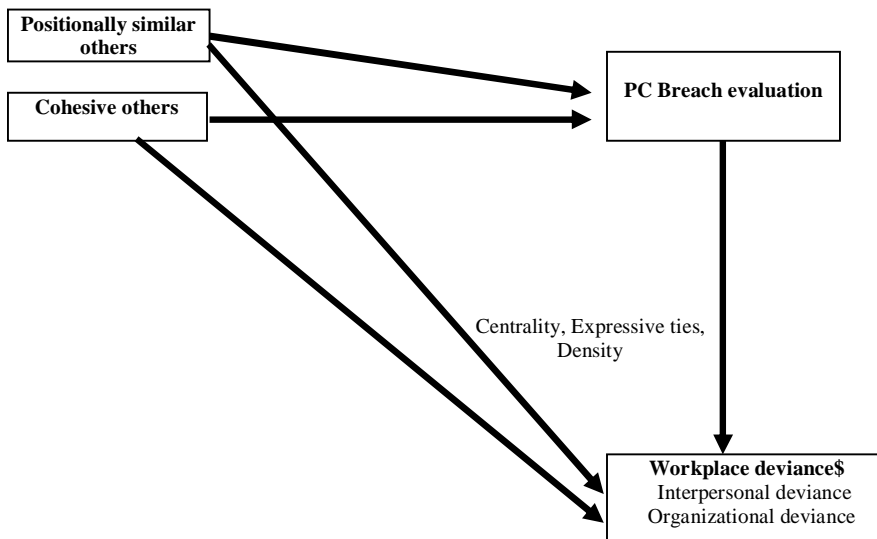


Fig. 1

Conclusion

Psychological contract breach has important implications for the organization because it is related to important work outcomes like performance, commitment, turnover, etc. PCB evaluation will determine whether employees react to the breach or not; and how they would react to the breach. One important source that impacts PCB evaluation is social influence, people we reach out to in order to interpret events. This evaluation, in turn, leads to behavioural outcomes both positive and negative. This paper points out that negative outcomes like workplace deviance can be understood as a resultant of PCB. Also factors like network centrality, density and expressive ties can moderate the relationship between PCB and deviance because they put constraints on what qualifies as acceptable behaviour. This paper presents a conceptual model that can be tested empirically to understand the proposed relationships better.

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