

HEALTHY WORKPLACE, PROPER WORKING; PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS AND ERGONOMICS

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Abstract

The objective of the paper is to review the literature of psychological contract from the start until date to identify and to add another dimension “interactional contract” that seems to be missing until now. The concept of Ergonomics with the psychological contract is being introduced in this review paper. Where the importance of the workplace ergonomics is explored to help and employee being productive and the new concept of interactional contract has been introduced. That narrates the way employees interact with the resources and workplace environment to fulfill their psychological contracts.

Keywords: Psychological contract, workplace ergonomics, interactional contract, Healthy Workplace, Proper Working; Psychological Contracts and Ergonomics.

INTRODUCTION

In the global economy due to augmented globalization, increased technical development and disproportionate economic variability, organizations are facing the challenging condition by constant restriction of the strategies to survive and maintain the competitive edge. These changes mostly involve negotiations and change in employment agreement to keep the pace with changing circumstances (Zhao et al., 2007). These changing situations may cause employees to feel insecure with respect to their job (Westwood, Sparrow and Leung, 2001). Such uncertain situations may pursue the employees to violate the contract (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Violation of

the contract is associated to the negative attitude and behaviors like turnover, absenteeism, mistrust, anger and lower performance (Glibowsky and Bravo, 2007; Turnley and Feldman, 2000)

“O you who believe! Fulfill the obligations.”

(Al Quran, Surah al Ma’ida 5:1)
Psychological contract fulfillment influences the overall productivity of the organization. Small things make a lot of change in this regard like work schedules, work breaks safety standards of the workplace in other words the ergonomics of workplace (Tint et al., 2016). In today’s approach, it is the biggest concern of the management to keep their human resource and equipment

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productive to maintain the efficiency of work (Wilson, 2000). Organizational ergonomics i.e., influence employees being productive and maintain a positive impact on their health. The study is been done with the help of an enormous literature review of psychological contract. The review shows that there is a need to central theoretical assumptions regarding psychological contract literature. Psychological contract has been studied with the concept of relational and transactional view only however, there are other factors as well that implicitly nourish the contract fulfillment. This study opens the horizon by identifying another dimension of psychological contract named as *interactional contract*. Where workplace ergonomics shows an imperative part in fulfillment of psychological contract of employees and employers.

Literature Review

1. Psychological Contract

The psychological contract has gained attention in the eyes of researcher to understand employment relationship. The psychological contract has emerged as an analytical framework to examine the employment relationship (Farndale et al., 2014; Festing & Schafer, 2014). From the research perspective, there has been massive growth in terms of literature within last three decades, followed by the publication of Rousseau (1989) that introduced an entirely new concept of psychological contract. The concept of psychological contract emerged in 1960 and later it urbanized in two main phases: its origin and the early expansion phase that covered the time phase of 1958 to 1988 and from 1989 and ahead.

1.1 A Historical progression of the psychological contract

In finding the developmental concept of psychological contract, influential work by Argyris Levinson, Munden, Mandl and Solley (1962) and Schein (1965) contains utmost importance. They brought up the idea of social exchange theory that helped in theorizing the concept of psychological contract. Argyris (1960) considered psychological contract as an implied relationship between employees and employers and narrates that this association develops in a way that workers interchange higher throughput and low grumbles by accepting the wages and a secure job (Taylor and Tekleab, 2004). The first defining concept of psychological contract considered it as an exchange of perceptible, specific and a major economics resource agreed by the two parties by fulfilling each other's need. Following that, Levinson et al (1962) elaborated the concept of psychological contract, which was predisposed by the work of Menninger (1958). Menninger (1958) proposed that with an increase to tangible capitals these contractual relationships also involves the alteration of intangibles such that the exchange relationship between two parties provide mutual satisfaction level in order to keep the relationship continued (Roehling, 1996). Levinson et al (1962) defined the psychological contract on the data they had collected by interviewing 874 employees who believed that opportunities in the relationship were obligatory in nature. Hence, they defined psychological contract as joint expectations between employee and employers, these opportunities may arise from unconscious reasons as well however, each group may not be aware of their own potentials and the expectations of the other group. Taylor and

Tekleab (2004) considered that the effort of Levinson et al. (1962) added in following ways: the two parties in the contract are individual employees and the association to be represented by directors. The psychological contract shields the complicated issues. Some of the opportunities are widely shared others are more individualized in nature and the nature of these potentials may range from highly specific to very generic. As the parties negotiate in terms of prospects, the changes in the circumstances may arise from the perspective of both parties hence psychological contract is subject to change. Being consistent with this concept Schien (1965) highlighted the understanding of the contract both from the perspective of employee and employer. He went further by explaining the role of culture in expressing the psychological contract.

1.2 Disagreement between early researchers.

The early period in development of psychological contract faced many divergences by different researchers and contributors. As explained Argyris (1960) differentiated in different ways. First, it captures the implied understanding of the exchange of tangible resources between workers and employers. On the other hand, Conway and Briner (2005) explained that the concept of psychological contract is unclear as for example, it does not explain how and on what basis an implicit relationship is formed. Considering this critic Argyris (1960) came up with another yet narrow view of psychological contract with the perspective of tangible resources. Opposing to that Levinson (1962) and Schein (1965) viewed this exchanged contract both in terms of durable and non-durable resources. Although Schein (1965)

and Levinson et al., (1962) theorized psychological contract as incorporating outlooks. Levinson et al., (1962) narrates these expectations are mandatory in nature where each party is certain to perform what is being expected. In the similar period Conway and Briner (2005), critics that Levinson et al., (1962) did not see the psychological contract from the perspective of expectations based on the promises rather based on needs. The outcomes of the contract on the other hand were based upon the degree on agreement between both of the parties regarding its fulfilment. In addition, Schein (1965) emphasized the importance of the organizational viewpoint of contract. Later in 1980 he illustrated that psychological dynamics cannot be understood if we look only to the individual's motivations or according to organizational conditions and practices. The two relate in a multifaceted fashion that requires a systematic approach, capable of dealing with inter-reliant occurrences". Thus, the early phase in the growth of the concept of psychological contract is marked by differing ideas and lack of acknowledgement of conceptualization relating to the previous work. Many ambiguities form a lot of new debates to be continued in the concept of psychological contract.

1.3 Social exchange theory as a speculative introduction of psychological contracts.

Similar to the concept of psychological contract Homans (1958), Blau (1964) and Gouldner (1960) brought an idea of social exchange theory, being swayed by the introductory work done by Mauss (1925). Social exchange theory narrates implicit obligations where one party trusts other in

terms of receiving the benefits as reciprocation. The reciprocation of benefits strengthen the level of trust that would lead to a continuous process of obligation fulfillment. . In short social exchange theory undermines how an exchange relationships progress such that responsibility of personal commitments, gratefulness and faith (Blau, 1964). The actions of single party depends upon the reactions of the other and how they communicate with each other determines how social exchange theory is applicable in employment relationship. Social exchange theory shares the mutual fundamentals with psychological contract theory. Both view exchange relationships formed by tangible and intangible resources followed by rule of reciprocity. Whereas each party comes up with their own level of expectations to be fulfilled.

1.4 Rousseau's reconceptualization of psychological contract.

Rousseau (1989) article on psychological contract leads towards the further exploration of the concept. Considering her work three outlooks of modern research emerged Establishment, content and the breach of the contract. Rousseau's reconceptualization regarding the concept of psychological contract leads to the transition from the early work to the modern era of research. She explains psychological contract as an entity's perception regarding the mutual responsibilities that exists between employee and employer. The mutual obligation may be implicit or explicit in nature and the obligatory fulfillment by one party is dependent upon the fulfillment of obligation through other party. Therefore, psychological contract is a belief about the mutual obligations that exist in exchange between

employee and boss and persistent through norm of reciprocity. This conceptualization varies from the previous research as Conway and Briner (2005) emphasized psychological contract with the concept of the expectation whereas Rousseau defined it in terms of obligation. Rousseau's focus on the concept of psychological contract as obligations brings the definition of psychological contract very close to Blau's (1964) social exchange theory. On the other hand, Rousseau (1989) presented obligation with an idea that a commitment has to be fulfilled to a future action. The idea of responsibilities based on promises is very different from that of Levinson et al.'s (1962) regarding the expectations that arise with needs. Blau (1964) remained confused about the increase in obligations except that they are based on the received benefits. However, the benefit arises from the donor's recognition of need or the donor's promises it will provide benefit. (Blau, 1964). The second point to be considered was brought up by Schein (1965) regarding the matching of expectations between employee and employer. Rousseau (1989), accentuated on individual's awareness to commitment of contract restrained the importance of matched idea. The emphasis on needs as opposed to promises implicate for the aspects that form the psychological contract. Rousseau (1989) emphasize that the promises, the organization's impact on an individual psychological contract through implicit and explicit signs. However, the level to which an organization pursues an individual's psychological contract is dependent on the individual and the way he/she perceives the obligations. The important factor of Rousseau's reconceptualization of psychological contract manly is based on the individual level. Psychological contract works as a psychological model of the exchange that

narrates what contribution an individual has made except that the one agreed upon

1.5 Contemporary approach.

Contemporary research focuses on the contract breach rather than its formation and content. Rousseau (2001) explains that psychological contracts are based on an individual's cognition and feelings related to the employer-employee relationship. This plan initiates at an early age when a person recognizes the values of reciprocity, hard work, peer group, and the family (Hackett et al., 2016). Before even an individual starts working these plans and learnings influences how the individual is going to interpret and understands the signs and signals from the organizations. The vital part of the research agenda is to work on how promises (Implicit or explicit) are formed by employees at the beginning of the newly assigned role (Bankins, 2014). The socialization period plays an important role in terms of organizational perspective as it shapes an individual's psychological contract (Epitropaki, 2013). Once the person schema of interaction is formed, it is very difficult to change. The new comers in the early stages of socialization try to acquire a lot of knowledge to completely form their psychological contract to reduce uncertainty. Newcomers' proactive attitudes and socialization tactics influence his evaluation of their psychological contract during first year (Alho, 2017). Many questions remained unanswered regarding the boundaries of acceptance and tolerance on the psychological contract establishment and its changing nature over the time (Kumakrika et al., 2016). Subjectively researchers have categorized psychological contract in two dimensions: transactional and relational. The difference between the two is based on the legal work that requires their focus, time,

stability, scope and tangibility (Imperatori et al., 2017). Transactional contracts are highly tangible and economic in terms of focus, narrow in terms of scope and finite in their terms and conditions (Killi et al., 2016). In contrast relational contracts contains both tangible and intangible exchange, the contracts are dynamic and open-ended. The scope of the contract is broader and there is a repercussion between individuals work and personal life (Pate et al., 2016). The conceptual distinction between transactional and relational contracts is clear as psychological contract can become relational and less transactional and vice versa (Ruokolainen et al., 2016). Alternately, the empirical distinction between the two is ambiguous. O' Leary-Kelly and Schenk (1999) operationalized transactional and relational contracts in four dimensions i.e., focus, time frame, enclosure and stability by using 15 item measure. Further six dimensions were added by Van den Brande (2004) to include the factor of tangibility (the way psychological contract terms are explicitly identified), Scope (the level according to which the borderline between work and personal life is absorptive), stability (the extent to which the terms of psychological contracts can be changed without the negotiation), time frame (the perceived duration of the relationship), exchange symmetry (the extent to which the relationship is unequal) and contract level (if the contract is structured at individual level or collective level). Relational employer obligations are related to relational employee obligations i.e., Job security for devotion (Hanif et al., 2016). Moreover, transactional employer relationship is related to transactional employee relationship i.e., high pay for high performance (Lu et al., 2016).

1.6 Contract breach and Violation.

Contract breach has mostly been studied from employee's perspective (Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood and Bolino, 2002; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994) and is often experienced by most employees (Conway and Briner, 2002). Psychological contract is breached when employees perceive failure of the organization to fulfill its' obligation (Rousseau, 1989). The concepts of psychological contract breach and its' violation are interchangeably used by many academic scholars. However, Morrison and Robinson (1997) differentiate between them in terms of cognition and emotion respectively. Breach is a perception regarding the un-fulfillment of obligations however, the violation is emotional experiencing that breach has occurred (Robinson and Morrison, 1997). Contract violation includes the anxiety and distress caused by the feeling that obligation by other party has not been fulfilled whereas the other party is working within the boundary of contract and giving its optimum. Breach of the contract on the other hand does not lead to any feeling of violation. Psychological contract violation is still under research from the empirical perspective. In situations where psychological contract holds high value for the employee, the reaction in case of breach is extremely negative (Conway and Briner, 2002). Kickul, Lester and Finkl (2002) explain these perspectives by narrating that procedural and interactional justice are capable of moderating the employee reaction towards the breach. Further on Dulac, Henderson and Wayne (2006) elaborate that the violation itself completely mediates the effect of breach on employees trust and affective commitment. Equity and external locus of control are also known to cement the relationship between breach and violation (Raja et al., 2004). Experimental evidences

(Coyle- Shapiro and Kessler, 2000; Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood and Bolino, 2002; Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003) proves that breach of the contract leads to lower psychological happiness, turnover intention, reduced work satisfaction, trust towards organization, commitment to work and organization and mocking attitudes at workplace (Conway and Briner, 2002; Tekleab and Taylor, 2003; Turnley and Feldman, 1999; Robinson, 1996) Hence, the pragmatic studies supports the negative impact of contract breach on employees' performance.

2. Ergonomics as a Support for the Fulfillment of Psychological Contract

Psychological contract has been studied mostly in terms of transactional and relational contracts, and their breach and violations. The workplace environment plays an important role to fulfill these implicit and explicit contracts, which has not previously been considered. With the help of literature review it has been found out that this concept has previously never discussed that how an environment and presence of proper resources that makes one perform his/her duty in order, is still missing. Ergonomics is concerned with the well-being of person. Royal charter of the Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors (CIEHF) has two major objects; one of which is the elevation of well-being with the help of ergonomics (CIEHF 2014). Nature of the organization also plays an important role in employee well-being for which EU research policy agenda explains the need for ergonomics transformation in terms of occupational health and work related challenges (WHO 2011). However, it is important for the ergonomics practitioners to note that reduced performance and long-term

sick leaves strongly associate with mental health issues (Sahlin, Ahlborg, Matuszyk & Grahn, 2014). In order to support this the nature provides a new paradigm for ergonomics, the beneficial impact of ergonomics and nature indicate how nature help heal with workplace well-being i.e. satisfaction, validity and mood (Cervinka et al., 2012). In addition to bringing the benefits of well-being and innovation to the work, HR practitioners can play an important role in making the place ergonomic friendly (Rucker, 2016). Ergonomical workplace enable a person to properly perform his work by the optimum use of skills and abilities. An ergonomically designed workplace is very healthy in making human-machine interface easy friendly and comfortable. The proper work place ergonomics accomplish a person's characteristics and task demands to be fulfilled by him/her. Proper ergonomically environment leads towards the improved worker productivity and decreased health problems. If organization provides a good environment and consider work ergonomics, it helps the employees' loyalty level to be increased (Cheema et al., 2017). Based on the previous study ergonomically designed place plays an important role in explaining the employees' emotional and physical well-being (Cho, 2016). Ozterkoglu et al. (2016) explains that a workplace with poor ergonomics cause emotional and physical stress, low productivity and low quality of work. Poor ergonomics significantly affect the economic conditions of the workplace by employee dissatisfaction. Low productivity, low emotional and physical health. Low emotional health is explained by depression. Anxiety, distress where as low physical health is manifested by heart diseases. Insomnia, headache. These health problems in total directly impact the employees performance

and eventually the organizational performance such as dissatisfaction, high turnover, absenteeism, irritate eyes, sore throats congestion and excessive mental fatigue (Sen et al., 2016). Ergonomics is a proper solution of having appropriate working conditions and to improve the productivity of the employees, maintain their proper health and cost to be reduced (Eaves et al., 2016). According to the previous literature indoor air quality, lighting, overall ambiance, furnishing and general working context determines the individual's health, well-being, and satisfaction to work and organization (Samani et al., 2016). Proper improvement of ergonomics directly effects the organization's performance (Castillo, 2016).

2.1 Interactional Contract

Ergonomics is a systematic study of people at work with the objective to improve the working conditions and tasks performed (Makhbul, 2013). Implementation of ergonomics in organization is highly beneficial as ergonomically designed workplace minimizes the amount of energy exerted during the completion of tasks. In corporate set up, ergonomics not only refer to the furniture choice (chairs and desks) but the interaction at workplace, teamwork, policy layouts, noise control, lighting and other aspects of working environment (Brooks, 1998; Makhbul, 2013) Proper resources, furnishing requirements, proper lights, good air quality and all other factors that make a place ergonomically strong helps an individual to properly concentrate at their work as well as maintain their attention along with the proper health at work. Employees' psychological and emotional well-being leads them to be productive and be able to properly fulfill the psychological contracts. Considering the dimension of psychological

contract i.e. transactional contracts and relational contracts. The previous literature shows how important is the environmental ergonomics that help an employee to fulfill what is being expected by them to be fulfilled. For that, the term that has been introduced here is “Interactional contract”, which is defined as a proper interaction of ergonomics and employees to ultimately fulfill their psychological contracts. For example, an organization is no entity without its human resource. According to social exchange theory, wherever there are human forces working together there is a communicative and interactive environment. Social exchange theory later derived the concept of psychological contract. An organization is formed with employees and there are always implicit and written contracts between employees and employers. Employees may work better when the organization focuses on their ergonomics as ergonomics focus on the human health safety and overall well-being of employees ((Sahlin, Ahlberg, Matuszyk & Grahn, 2014). Proper air quality, proper seating, proper furnishing automatically helps and employee to work properly and fulfill his/her contracts. However, on the other hand the organization where ergonomics are poor and non-existent in nature, psychological contract lies there as well but employees may feel to be non-productive and have feeling of breach and may violate the contract. Keeping in view that poor ergonomics design significantly impact the organization through job dissatisfaction, poor health symptoms, absenteeism, poor work quality and low productivity (Samani et al., 2016). Considering the importance of transactional and relational contracts to be very important. Ergonomics help employees to be productive and healthy. Similarly, Interactional contracts help an employee to actually perform what is

being expected from him/her and how it has to be performed. However, workplace ergonomics and Interactional contract plays a critically important role in the fulfillment of psychological contracts. *Proposition:* The interactional contract, as a new dimension of psychological contract along with relational and transactional contract, is significant in the fulfillment of psychological contract such that the interactional contract helps employees and employers fulfill their psychological contract and less likely that they violate the contract

Concluding Remarks and Future Study

From the literature, it has been studied that the term Ergonomics is still is not studied from the organizational perspective. It needs more to be researched and made linked with other constructs i.e. Happiness at workplace, thriving etc. Interactional contract has been deduced with the help of literature review. The review paper has emphasized on the importance of newly developed concept of interactional contract that helps employees to fulfill their implicit and explicit contracts properly. It helps the practitioners and managers to identify how important the working context and proper resource availability is for an employee to be productive and fulfill their psychological contract organization. On the other hand, by proving a properly ergonomical place employers fulfil the employees’ expectations and they perform well in reciprocation. The term interactional contract can be studied in terms of proper construct and another dimension of psychological contract after the scale development and proper reliability and validity check. Scale development can be done through the focus group interviews and themes extractions. Similarly, workplace ergonomics can also be studied with many other behavioral and attitudinal based

constructs i.e. job satisfaction, happiness at workplace, thriving, calling etc. there is a lot of room of research for the workplace ergonomics. The relationship between Interactional contract and its impact on reduction of psychological contract breach and violation can also be empirically studies in future.

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