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Psychological Contracts: Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract

We provide a review of psychological contract research, beginning with past conceptualizations and empirical evidence. We tailor this retrospective look by reviewing the antecedents and outcomes associated with psychological contract breach and discussing the dominant theoretical explanations for the breach-outcome relationship. This synthesis of past evidence provides the foundation for reviewing the present emerging and developing themes in psychological contract research. This discussion is organized around the expansion of resources exchanged and the antecedents of contract breach and outcomes, moving beyond reciprocity as an underpinning explanation. We highlight the practical implications of research to date on psychological contracts and end with directions for future research to include the need for greater attention given to ideological currency, employee health, polycontextual approaches, the role of psychological needs, and post-breach/violation.

INTRODUCTION

The employee-organization relationship is a fundamental relationship for employees and has been studied from a number of disciplines and theoretical perspectives (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2004). What is exchanged in that relationship has significant implications for both the organization and the employees. The psychological contract is defined as “an individual’s beliefs regarding the terms of conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party” (Rousseau 1989, p. 123). Social exchange (Blau 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) provide the conceptual basis for much of this work in explaining the consequences of an individual’s evaluation of their psychological contract.

In what follows, we provide a conceptualization of the psychological contract and review the empirical evidence of its antecedents, mediators, and consequences. We aim to provide a representative review rather than a comprehensive one. Against the backdrop of the past, we examine some of the emerging and developing lines of research that expand the resources exchanged to include ideological currency, and we broaden the conceptual domain beyond social exchange theory and the outcome domain beyond organizationally directed outcomes. We review the practical implications of empirical work, with a focus on the management of psychological contracts. Finally, we outline avenues for future research.

PAST CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Rousseau’s work (1989) signaled a new era in psychological contract research, as it departed from prior conceptualizations of the construct. First, the emphasis on the subjective, individual, and promissory nature of Rousseau’s definition is in contrast to prior work that viewed the psychological contract as capturing mutual expectations between employees and their organization or supervisor (Argyris 1960, Levinson et al. 1962, Schein 1965). Rousseau (1989) shifted the terms of the exchange agreement from expectations to promises, accentuating the role of the organization in creating psychological contracts, whereas the prior emphasis on expectations captured numerous influences unrelated to the organization. The focus on the promissory nature of the exchange relationship includes both explicit and implicit promise making. Explicit promises result from employee interpretations of verbal and written agreements, whereas implicit promises refer to interpretations of consistent and repeated patterns of exchange with the employer. Both explicit and implicit promises can be grounded in the observation of behavior as a “key element in communicating a promise in a contract” (Rousseau & McLean Parks 1993, p. 6). Second, Rousseau (1989) shifted the concept from perceptions of the relationship to individual-level perceptions. She emphasized the idiosyncratic view of psychological contracts that exist “in the eye of the beholder” (p. 123) such that an individual may draw upon their interpretations of observations and conversations with supervisors, recruiters, mentors, and colleagues in their organization (Rousseau 1995) to shape their own psychological contract. In this sense, the psychological contract is a subjective perception that is not necessarily shared with the other party (Morrison & Robinson 1997, Rousseau 1989). Consequently, employers and employees may have different views of the terms of their psychological contract and the degree to which they believe each party has fulfilled their obligations.

Although obligations in psychological contracts can cover a range of terms of the exchange (e.g., job security, career development, work-life balance), empirical investigations have focused primarily on two underlying dimensions: relational and transactional contracts informed by the work of MacNeil (1985). Relational and transactional contracts can be differentiated on the basis of their focus, time frame, stability, scope, and tangibility (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall 2008). Relational

contracts are characterized by the long-term exchange of socioemotional resources (Rousseau 1995). In exchange for loyalty, the employee is provided with promotions to ensure career development and/or job security to remain with the organization. In transactional contracts, the focus is instead on the economic exchange. In exchange for flexibility and career self-management, employees are provided with training and career development to ensure their employability. Relational and transactional types of psychological contracts are relative rather than mutually exclusive. Rousseau (1989) argued that the psychological contract exists on a continuum ranging from relational to transactional and that both ends are inversely correlated: The more relational the psychological contract is, the less transactional the psychological contract is, and vice versa (Millward & Hopkins 1998). Later, Rousseau (1995) added the concept of balanced psychological contracts, which are exchange relationships that cover a mix of economic and social components by, for instance, combining an open-ended relational contract with transactional features such as performance-reward contingencies.

Much of the focus of past research has been on examining the consequences of employees' perception of contract breach/violation for organizationally relevant outcomes. A psychological contract can be perceived as fulfilled or broken from the perspective of the employee (Robinson 1996), the employer (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler 2002), or both (Dabos & Rousseau 2004). Psychological contract fulfillment is defined as "the extent to which one party to the contract deems the other has met its obligations" (Lee et al. 2011, p. 204). In contrast, psychological contract breach is defined as "the cognition that one's organization has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one's contributions" (Morrison & Robinson 1997, p. 230). Psychological contract violation is described as "an intense reaction of outrage, shock, resentment, and anger" (Rousseau 1989, p. 129) and captures the emotional and affective response that may arise from a breach (Dulac et al. 2008, Morrison & Robinson 1997, Zhao et al. 2007). These evaluations or experiences of the psychological contract are conceptually and empirically distinct (Morrison & Robinson 1997). Psychological contract fulfillment and breach capture an individual's cognitive judgment and evaluation, whereas violation captures the emotional reaction. As such, an employee may perceive psychological contract breach, but not feelings of violation. Psychological contract fulfillment has the potential to shape the relationship positively, while breach and violation are disruptive signals and may induce negative change.

Empirical Evidence from Past Research: What Do We Know?

Psychological contract breach and its consequences have captured the attention of researchers, and these concepts have dominated empirical investigations in the pursuit of understanding how employees react to broken promises by their organization. Comparatively less attention has been placed on examining how psychological contract breach occurs. Here, we provide a representative review of past research.

Antecedents of psychological contract breach. As restructuring and downsizing are typical in companies' attempts to continually adapt to the global business environment, scholars argue that preventing contract breach has become extremely difficult (Robinson & Morrison 2000). In fact, psychological contract breach is apparently the norm rather than the exception within organizations. Robinson & Rousseau (1994) reported that approximately 55% of the employees in their sample perceived a breach, while Lester et al. (2002) found that approximately 76% of the employees experienced a psychological contract breach. In a diary study, Conway & Briner (2002a) stated that "employees perceive that organizations break promises to employees fairly frequently, with 69% of participants reporting at least one broken promise over the 10-day period" (p. 265).

Given the high prevalence of psychological contract breach, there has been comparatively little research attention given to the factors leading to breach.

Individual. The primary antecedents focus on the impact of an individual's experience, cognitive style, and personality on the susceptibility of that individual to experiencing breach. Individuals who experience breach with one employer are more likely to experience breach with a subsequent employer (Robinson & Morrison 2000), due to their increased vigilance. Other variables such as similarity of gender, race, and cognitive style were also examined as antecedents of contract breach (Suazo et al. 2008). Suazo et al. (2008) found a negative relationship between the similarity of the cognitive style of supervisors and subordinates and contract breach; the frame of reference shared by supervisors and subordinates minimizes potential misunderstandings, resulting in lower levels of perceived breach. Personality was also examined as an antecedent to contract breach. Raja et al. (2004) found that neuroticism and locus of control are positively related to contract breach, whereas conscientiousness is negatively related to contract breach. Neurotic individuals tend to lack trust and are more likely to perceive breach. In the case of individuals high on conscientiousness, the explanation may rely on the fact that these individuals tend to be hard workers, to be high performers, and to be more satisfied with their jobs, and their organizations will be less likely to breach their contracts (Raja et al. 2004).

Organizational. In parallel, researchers have examined organizational factors that lead to perceptions of psychological contract breach and/or fulfillment. Most of the research on the antecedents of contract breach is focused on the organizational level. Empirical evidence shows that the following are important in explaining contract breach: initial trust in the employer (Robinson 1996), employer reneging (Robinson 1996), incongruence between the employee and organization (e.g., Guest & Conway 2002), organizational change (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly 2003, Robinson 1996), perceived organizational support (Dulac et al. 2008), organizational politics (Rosen et al. 2009), justice (Peng et al. 2016, Rosen et al. 2009), and job resources and demands (Vantilborgh et al. 2016). On the one hand, this research highlights that, when employees receive tangible and intangible resources from the organization (i.e., support, trust, fairness, resources), there is a dampening effect on breach perceptions. On the other hand, constructs like reneging, incongruence, organizational change, and organizational politics represent negative actions from the organization, therefore bolstering the likelihood of contract breach occurring.

Consequences of psychological contract breach. Contract breach is arguably the most important aspect of psychological contract theory (Conway & Briner 2005, 2009), and not surprisingly, this represents a dominant strand of research that consistently demonstrates the negative consequences of contract breach (see summary in **Table 1**). Perceived contract breach is associated with decreased attitudes toward the organization such as lower commitment (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler 2000), lower trust (Robinson 1996, Zhao et al. 2007), lower job satisfaction (Raja et al. 2004, Robinson & Rousseau 1994), and decreased organizational trust (e.g., Robinson 1996) and with more cynical attitudes toward the organization (e.g., Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly 2003). Behaviorally, employees are less willing to engage in positive work behaviors (e.g., organizational citizenship behavior, work performance) and are more likely to increase negative behavior (e.g., counterproductive work behavior) as a form of revenge seeking to rebalance the inequity in the exchange relationship (Bordia et al. 2008, Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler 2000, Doden et al. 2018, Lester et al. 2002, Restubog et al. 2010, Robinson 1996, Robinson & Morrison 2000). These findings have been explained by employees' adherence to the norm of reciprocity, wherein they match the perceived behavior of their employer.

Table 1 Psychological contract breach: attitudinal and behavioral consequences toward organization, internal parties, and external parties

	Attitudes	Behaviors
Organization	Affective organizational commitment (Restubog et al. 2006) Turnover intentions (Orvis et al. 2008) Organizational trust (Robinson & Morrison 2000) Job satisfaction (Conway et al. 2011) Perceived organizational support (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway 2005) Organizational cynicism (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly 2003) Organizational identification (Zagenczyk et al. 2013)	Performance (Costa & Neves 2017a) Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Restubog et al. 2010) Voice (Ng et al. 2014) Deviance (Bordia et al. 2008) Absenteeism (Deery et al. 2006) Turnover (Karagonlar et al. 2016)
Internal third parties	Leader-member exchange (Restubog et al. 2011)	Interpersonal deviance (Bordia et al. 2008) Interpersonal OCB (Rosen et al. 2009) Interpersonal harming toward coworkers (Deng et al. 2018)
External third parties	Union commitment (Turnley et al. 2004) Public sector commitment (Conway et al. 2014)	OCB oriented to public service users (Conway et al. 2014) OCB toward the customer (Bordia et al. 2010) Decision-making vigilance for clients (Deng et al. 2018) Work-nonwork conflict (Gracia et al. 2007) Work-family conflict (Jiang et al. 2017)

Two meta-analyses (Bal et al. 2008, Zhao et al. 2007) confirmed the negative consequences of contract breach. In the first meta-analysis, Zhao et al. (2007) integrated social exchange theory (Blau 1964) and affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996) to explain the impact of contract breach on work-related outcomes. The findings demonstrate that breach is associated with attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions) and individual effectiveness (e.g., organizational citizenship behaviors and in-role performance) and that those affective reactions (e.g., violation and mistrust) mediate these relationships (Zhao et al. 2007). The subsequent meta-analysis (Bal et al. 2008) examined the moderating role of age in the relationship between breach and attitudes (e.g., trust, job satisfaction, and affective commitment). Using social exchange theory, life span theory, and AET, Bal et al. found that contract breach is negatively related to employee’s attitudes and that age moderates these relationships. Specifically, for older workers, the negative relationship between (*a*) contract breach and (*b*) trust and organizational commitment was weaker, and the relationship between contract breach and job satisfaction was stronger.

Explanations for the breach-outcome relationship. Why does psychological contract breach lead to negative consequences? Researchers have thought that the detrimental effect of breach is due to the norm of reciprocity, wherein employees follow a tit-for-tat approach with their employer. This is the dominant, but not the only, explanation.

Social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity. The norm of reciprocity helps explain how social exchange relationships develop and how the failure to reciprocate prevents social exchange relationships from developing (Blau 1964). When the organization fails to deliver on its obligations, employees will reciprocate accordingly, and this response is usually targeted toward the

organization. The occurrence of tit for tat or negative reciprocity was assumed rather than empirically tested in many studies. The exceptions are a few studies that demonstrated that the negative norm of reciprocity, captured by revenge cognitions, mediates the effect of breach on employee workplace deviance, reflecting employees' harmful behaviors to rebalance their relationship with the organization (Bordia et al. 2008, Restubog et al. 2012).

Affective events theory. AET (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996) also explains the breach-outcome relationship. Here, psychological contract breach is conceptualized as a negative work event that leads to adverse emotional reactions (conceptualized as psychological contract violation), which in turn influence employees' job attitudes and performance. This idea is supported by Zhao et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis and by Restubog et al. (2013), who demonstrated that psychological contract violation is the reason why breach leads to counterproductive workplace behaviors. Kraak et al. (2017) found that psychological contract violation explains the effect of breach in job content, social atmosphere, organizational policies, and rewards on turnover intentions (although no effect was found for breach in career development and work-life balance).

Organizational identification. Organizational identification provides another explanation for employees' responses to contract breach. Zagenczyk et al. (2013) stated that breach leads "to feelings of rejection which will weaken the employee's psychological attachment to the organization but also cause them to re-evaluate what they believe the organization stands for" (p. 290). A number of studies demonstrate that employees are reluctant to put forth effort for the benefit of the organization as breach reduces their organizational identification (Bordia et al. 2008, Restubog et al. 2008, Wei & Si 2013, Zagenczyk et al. 2011). To illustrate, Restubog et al. (2008) conducted three independent studies and found consistent evidence that organizational identification mediates the relationship between relational (but not transactional) breach and supervisor-rated organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

Summary of What We Know About Psychological Contracts from Past Research

We know that contract breach has negative consequences and these consequences are primarily directed toward the organization. Empirical research supports the underpinning role of the norm of reciprocity to explain the effects of breach, and complementary explanations such as emotions and identification have also received support. From this backward-looking perspective, we now take a look at the present state of research.

PRESENT: EMERGING AND DEVELOPING THEMES

Present work has expanded upon past work in the following ways. First, we examine ideological currency as an expansion of the resources exchanged in psychological contracts. Second, we review an expanded basis for understanding how breach happens before reviewing an extended set of outcomes directed at different targets. Finally, we look at how potential explanations for the breach-outcome relationship have been expanded.

It Is Not All About What I Get: Ideological Currency (Expansion of the Exchange)

Although economic and socioemotional benefits are fundamental to employees' psychological contracts, Blau (1964) considered the role of ideological rewards in social exchange theory and argued

that they are effective inducements because they help “to advance cherished ideals is intrinsically rewarding” (p. 239). The idea that employees’ psychological contracts may include ideological rewards has been broadly overlooked, with a handful of studies examining how an ideologically infused psychological contract explains employee outcomes. Thompson & Bunderson (2003) defined ideological currency as “credible commitment to pursuing a valued cause or principle (not limited to self-interest) that are implicitly exchanged at the nexus of the individual-organization relationship” (p. 574). Therefore, employees with an ideological element to their psychological contract will hold the belief that, as part of the reciprocal exchange, the organization provides the context in which the employee can contribute directly or indirectly to the cause.

Bingham (2005) developed and validated a measure of ideological fulfillment of psychological contracts. Empirically, ideological fulfillment was found to explain additional variance in OCB beyond relational fulfillment (Bingham 2005) and additional variance beyond other facets of psychological contract fulfillment in explaining employee obligations to the employer (Bal & Vink 2011). In a sample of nonprofit employees, Vantilborgh et al. (2014) found that underfulfillment of ideological psychological contracts led to an increase in work effort, whereas underfulfillment of relational psychological contracts led to a decrease in work effort, suggesting that ideological currency operates differently by not adhering to the tit for tat underpinning the norm of reciprocity. In a sample of Tunisian public sector employees, El Bedoui et al. (2011) found that perceptions of fulfillment of the organization’s psychological contract to the public were positively associated with employees’ trust in their organization, which partially mediated the effects of the organization’s psychological contract to the public on employees’ affective commitment to their public sector organization.

These studies have been conducted among volunteers or public sector employees, suggesting that ideological currency may be salient in organizations that have a cause integral to their existence. The emerging and developing empirical research demonstrates that certain employees have ideologically driven obligations; what is less clear at this point is how these obligations, as opposed to economic and socioemotional ones, influence employee attitudes and behavior. We return to this issue below in the section titled Future Directions.

Expansion of the Antecedents of Psychological Contract Breach

Some progress has been made in advancing our understanding of how psychological contract breach develops. Here, we focus on recent work that addresses the role of context and triggers of breach as developing areas of research.

Contextual. The context of the employee-organization exchange is rarely examined yet provides a constraint on the ability of organizations to follow through on their obligations to employees (Coyle-Shapiro 2002). For instance, organizational restructuring and downsizing may alter employees’ perceptions of the employment relationship (Zhao et al. 2007). The uncertainty that organizations face reduces an organization’s ability to fulfill its side of the exchange (Robinson 1996) or, at least, makes employees more vigilant and hence more likely to perceive a breach in their psychological contract (Morrison & Robinson 1997). However, few studies examine these ideas. Three studies reported job insecurity as an antecedent of contract breach (Costa & Neves 2017b, Piccoli & De Witte 2015, Shoss et al. 2016). The underlying reasons provided are that job insecurity leads to perceptions of lack of reciprocity (Piccoli & De Witte 2015); insecure employees seek explanations for the breach and become more vigilant; job insecurity signals that the organization does not value employees’ contributions, increasing the likelihood of a perceived breach (Costa & Neves 2017b); and, as job security is indicated as one of the employer’s

obligations (Robinson 1996), insecure employees may perceive a contract breach (Shoss et al. 2016). In these studies, job insecurity is positively related to contract breach, suggesting that the evaluation of the context damages the employment relationship.

Individual: processual view of breach. Past empirical research treated contract breach as a discrete event (i.e., I didn't get a promised pay raise), yet concurrently, researchers have argued that psychological contracts are, and should be investigated as, dynamic processes (Bankins 2015, Solinger et al. 2016). Aligned with the idea of the breach as a process, Wiechers et al. (2018) conceptually examined breach as a process drawing on neuroscience to understand the intraindividual processes that precede cognitions of breach. Neuroscientists (Lieberman et al. 2002) distinguish between two mental models: the X system and C system. The X system captures unconscious, automatic, and intuitive processing of information. In contrast, the C system is marked by slow, reflective consciousness; serial processing; and logical reasoning. Wiechers et al. (2018) argue that triggers, defined as psychological mechanisms that prompt awareness, lead to a shift from automatic processing to conscious attention to the psychological contract. These triggers can be direct (organizational messages), indirect (social networks), or slow (the procrastination of the organization in meeting its obligations) and are shaped by an individual's work environment and their traits. Triggers are disturbances to an individual's psychological contract that jolt an individual from the X system to the C system; how an employee interprets, and responds to, these disturbances is a uniquely intraindividual dynamic process that may lead to the perception that breach has occurred.

Summary

Contextual factors matter in understanding the occurrence of psychological contract breach, and events external to the organization are essential influences on an individual's judgment of breach. Viewing breach as a process beginning with triggers that jolt an individual into conscious awareness paints a more complex portrayal of breach as a process unfolding over time.

Expansion of Outcomes of Psychological Contract Breach

Recent work has begun to expand the outcomes associated with contract breach as well as the targets of those outcomes. To build a bridge between past and present research, we present an illustration of the research trends.

Figure 1 shows the number of published articles that examine contract breach and organizational outcomes (e.g., affective organizational commitment, turnover intentions, organizational trust, job satisfaction, perceived organizational support, organizational cynicism, organizational identification), contract breach and outcomes directed toward third parties in organizations (e.g., supervisors, coworkers), outcomes directed toward third parties external to the organization (e.g., unions, clients), and health outcomes. When one looks at the number of published papers from 1989 to 2017 in 5-year intervals, an identifiable trend is the focus on organizationally relevant outcomes. Moreover, there has been increasing focus over the last 10 years on health as an outcome of breach. However, there is a paucity of research examining outcomes of breach directed to third parties. We consider outwardly and inwardly directed outcomes as a way of categorizing outcomes associated with contract breach. **Figure 2** shows the influence of contract breach across domains.

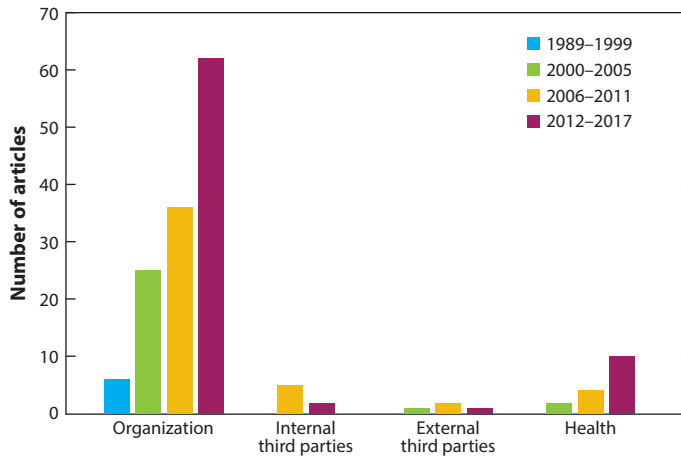


Figure 1

Published articles on psychological contract breach outcomes from 1989 to 2017.

Consequences of contract breach: outwardly focused. The outwardly focused dimension of contract breach encompasses organizational and interpersonal outcomes, which are attitudes and behaviors toward the organization, third parties within the organization or organizational agents (e.g., supervisors and coworkers), and third parties external to the organization (see **Table 1** for a summary).

Outcomes directed toward the organization. The substantial body of research on outcomes directed to the organization is rooted in the past and is sustained in the present, with the majority of studies providing evidence for the detrimental consequences of contract breach. Recent empirical investigations have examined negative work-related concepts, such as neglect and

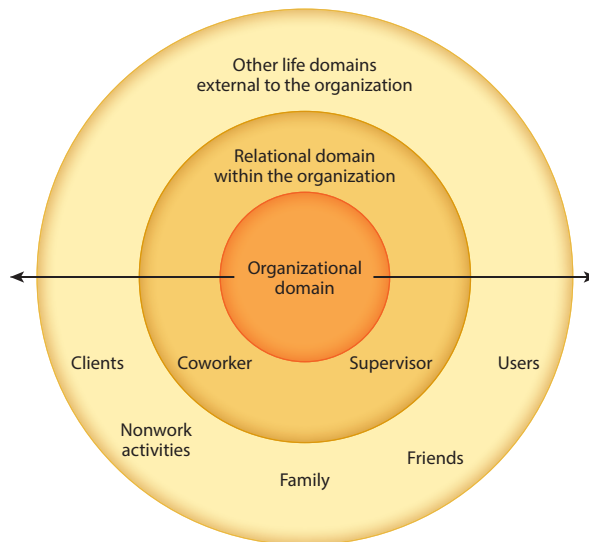


Figure 2

Influence of psychological contract breach across domains.

counterproductive behaviors as outcomes of contract breach, although the prior two meta-analyses (Bal et al. 2008, Zhao et al. 2007) do not include such concepts. Following the negative norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960), employees, as a response to contract breach, may use a passive strategy [i.e., reduce their effort and contributions (Zagenczyk et al. 2015)] or an active strategy [i.e., actively harm the organization (Bordia et al. 2008)] to restore the balance in the relationship. Supporting these arguments, empirical evidence has found a positive association between contract breach and neglect behaviors (Zagenczyk et al. 2015) and between contract breach and deviant behaviors (Bordia et al. 2008, Costa & Neves 2017b, Doden et al. 2018, Restubog et al. 2012, Rosen & Levy 2013).

Outcomes directed toward third parties internal to the organization (supervisors and coworkers).

Cook & Emerson (1978) stressed the need to examine the process of social exchange beyond the dyadic relationship. This approach makes sense in the context of Schalk & Rousseau's (2002) argument that "the organization cannot often be considered as a single party to the psychological contract and it does not speak with one voice. Recruiters, managers, personnel policies/handbooks, and colleagues may all send different messages to employees" (p. 136). This reality can result in a psychological contract as a multifocal construct (Alcover et al. 2017).

Researchers have argued that social exchange theory can predict only the negative behaviors directed at the source of harm because of its emphasis on exchange specificity (e.g., Conway et al. 2014, Robinson 1996). A multifocal perspective entails that an employee tends to hold a psychological contract with several actors in the organization and can consequently develop differential attitudinal and behavioral reactions, depending on who was judged to be responsible for a psychological contract breach (Conway et al. 2014). In earlier work, Heider (1958) and Frijda (1988) theorized that there is an alignment between the source of frustration and the target of the responding attitudinal or behavioral reactions. In other words, the way in which employees respond to contract breach is influenced by whom they identify as the source of a breach and whom they want to blame for the breach.

Theoretical arguments coupled with empirical evidence indicate that contract breach is an antecedent of a (low-quality) leader-member exchange relationship (Restubog et al. 2011). Drawing from attribution theory (Wong & Weiner 1981), Restubog et al. (2011) stated that employees are likely to blame their supervisors because they represent the organization (as they are organizational agents) and are accessible, whereas the organization is intangible. Therefore, psychological contract breach "will undermine good faith, [will] erode trust, and weakens the interpersonal bond between leader-subordinate" (p. 430).

Empirical evidence suggests that contract breach may have consequences for coworker relationships as a result of an increase in deviance (Bordia et al. 2008) or harming behaviors toward coworkers (Deng et al. 2018) and may result in a decline in OCBs oriented toward individuals (Chang 2018, Conway et al. 2014, Rosen et al. 2009). There are different explanations for these findings that oppose the exchange specificity predictions. The first is the displaced aggression explanation. Coworkers are easier targets, as they are closer to the individual than are supervisors and the organization. This idea is reinforced by the assumption that hostility is shifted to another referent when the transgressor is not available or is more powerful (Newhall et al. 2000). In such a situation, the employee who perceived a contract breach would think that their colleague has something to do with the contract breach and somehow represents the transgressor (Bordia et al. 2008), thus justifying the transference effect.

Another explanation is given by the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll 1989). This theory has two key tenets: Work-related stressors drain individuals' resources, and individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect, and foster their resources (Hobfoll 2001). Psychological contract breach is considered a work-related stressor (Costa & Neves 2017a, Gakovic & Tetrick 2003,

Lapointe et al. 2013) that triggers an employee's action to protect their remaining resources. This protection of resources may lead employees to engage in unintentional actions such as harming behaviors toward coworkers (Deng et al. 2018). As employees feel drained by contract breach, they are not able to self-regulate and will therefore be driven to harming behaviors. As Deng et al. (2018) explain, "although coworkers are not responsible for psychological contract violation, they may become victims of depleted employees because the effect of depletion is not directional" (pp. 563–64).

Regarding OCB directed to coworkers, Rosen et al. (2009) found that contract breach negatively affected those types of behaviors. However, Conway et al. (2014) reported a nonsignificant relationship between contract breach and contributions to coworkers providing arguments based on the target similarity model (Lavelle et al. 2007): After an exchange relationship evaluation, employees direct their behavior toward the responsible focal party (i.e., the organization). Similarly, Griep and colleagues (2015) found that, in response to contract violation, employees engage in counterproductive work behavior targeted at the organization, but not in interpersonal counterproductive behavior.

Outcomes directed toward third parties external to the organization. Does an individual's experience of breach have consequences for third parties external to the organization? The limited empirical evidence suggests that it does. Researchers have examined the effects of breach on three external parties to the organization: unions, clients, and family. Employees who perceive breach are more likely to look for ways to restore the imbalance in the employment relationship through collective action in the unions (Turnley et al. 2004). Regarding clients, there are mixed results. On the one hand, Bordia et al. (2010) found a trickle-down effect of contract breach on the quality of customer service delivered by the employee in the private sector. On the other hand, Conway et al. (2014) reported that, in a sample of employees from the UK public sector, contract breach predicted decreases in contributions toward the organization but that the contributions toward customers remained unchanged.

Lastly, we discuss outcomes for other life domains. In the past 30 years, the world of work has undergone significant change (e.g., reflected in the number of women at work, time spent at work, types of work) that impacts an individual's professional and personal life. Three empirical studies examined work-family conflict and work-nonwork balance. Gracia et al. (2007) concluded that the state of psychological contract is associated with work-family conflict. Supporting these results, Jiang et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between contract breach and work-family conflict; Sturges & Guest (2004) found that contract breach was associated with a lower level of work-life balance.

Despite the paucity of studies examining the impact of contract breach on third parties external to the organization, preliminary evidence supports a spillover effect from the employee-organization dyad on external third parties.

Summary. So far, research clearly demonstrates the adverse impact of contract breach on organizational outcomes. Less research has been conducted on the implications for third parties, and the emerging mixed research suggests the presence of boundary conditions as to when a spillover effect occurs or not.

Consequences of contract breach: inwardly focused. The inwardly focused dimension of contract breach presents a novel view of the consequences of contract breach for an employee's health. Does an employee's health suffer as a result of experiencing psychological contract breach? The World Health Organization (1948) defines health as "a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease" (p. 1). Despite the rising importance

of health issues in society (Academy conference theme 2018; see <http://aom.org/meetings/Past-meetings/>) and in organizations (World Health Organization 2013), there have been few empirical attempts to examine the impact of contract breach on employees' health. Results of a meta-analysis on perceived unfairness at work and health (Robbins et al. 2012) demonstrated that contract breach has unique explanatory power (above and beyond injustice) with regard to physical health problems, mental health problems, burnout, stress, and negative state. However, a limited number of studies (ranging from $k = 1$ to $k = 7$) were included in this meta-analysis.

Physical health. Physical health has been examined in the literature in two ways: (a) self-reports and (b) physiological and biochemical evaluations (Robbins et al. 2012). To our knowledge, researchers have relied upon self-report health measures in psychological contract studies. In a sample of 2,413 employees from the public and private sectors, research findings indicated that contract breach is negatively associated with employees' physical health (Vander Elst et al. 2016). Another study reported that contract fulfillment was negatively associated with physical complaints such as [i.e., fatigue, sleep problems, and headache (Karagonlar et al. 2016)] for low reciprocity wary employees. In addition, contract breach was positively related to insomnia ratings from both employees and their spouses (Garcia et al. 2017).

Mental health. Depression, psychological distress, and anxiety have been used as indicators of mental health (Robbins et al. 2012). Empirical evidence suggests that contract breach is negatively related to mental health (resulting in, e.g., downhearted and blue feelings; Vander Elst et al. 2016, Parzefall & Hakanen 2010, Reimann & Guzy 2017). Other studies have explicitly captured established mental health indicators. Garcia et al. (2017) examined psychological distress as a consequence of contract breach, and Rosen & Levy (2013) tested the effect of contract breach on anxiety and tension levels. Both studies found support for the positive effect of breach on psychological distress, anxiety, and tension.

Burnout. Burnout as a consequence of contract breach has received some attention. Cantisano & Domínguez (2005a,b) found mixed results in their studies: In their first study of 107 prison employees, they found no relationship between breach and burnout, and in their second sample of prison employees, they found a positive relationship between breach and burnout. Two additional studies support a positive relationship between breach and burnout: Jamil et al. (2013) in a sample of 361 employees from different organizational settings and Jiang et al. (2017) in a sample of 400 faculty members. A component of burnout—emotional exhaustion—has been demonstrated to be an outcome of contract breach (Costa & Neves 2017a, Gakovic & Tetrick 2003, Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly 2003, Lapointe et al. 2013).

Emotional well-being. Limited empirical evidence suggests that psychological contract breach is an antecedent of low levels of emotional well-being. For instance, in a diary study, Conway & Briner (2002a) found that broken promises have an impact on daily mood (measured with the affective well-being scale from Warr 1990). Conway et al. (2011) as well as Cassar & Buttigieg (2015) reported that contract breach has an adverse effect on emotional well-being.

Summary. Despite the limited number of studies, research has shown that contract breach has a deleterious effect on employees' physical, mental, and emotional health. There is also preliminary evidence of the positive effect of fulfillment on physical health.

Expansion of Explanations: Beyond Reciprocity

We examine additional and complementary explanations for the breach–outcome relationship to include cultural differences, COR, psychological needs, job demands–control (JD-C), and effort–reward imbalance (ERI).

Beyond reciprocity, Part I: Cross-cultural differences in the reactions to contract breach.

Most research on psychological contracts has been conducted in Western countries. Recently, the number of studies in non-Western contexts has multiplied, providing the opportunity to investigate the (non)existence of cultural differences in reactions to psychological contract breach. Despite the impressive number of studies on the consequences of breach, the role of culture has been largely invisible, with few exceptions. Kickul et al. (2004) compared US and Hong Kong Chinese employees in their reactions to breach. These researchers found that American workers had a stronger adverse reaction to breaches of intrinsic outcomes (e.g., control, support, challenging work). In contrast, Hong Kong employees reacted more negatively to breaches of extrinsic outcomes (e.g., security, salary). In a sample of 265 employees from different cultures, Zagenczyk et al. (2015) assessed whether the relationship between breach and outcomes depended on power distance orientation (i.e., cultural value). They found that employees with lower power distance orientations reacted more strongly to breach in terms of exit and voice. Chao et al. (2011) found that, in a sample of 131 Chinese employees, higher power distance orientation boosted the breach–deviant behaviors relationship. These findings suggest that culture may play a role in how employees react to breach. Moreover, a recent meta-analysis examined the role of societal and cultural factors in the contract breach–outcomes relationship. The findings suggest that contract breach impacts employees' attitudes, affect and health and undesirable behaviors, regardless of societal and cultural contexts (Costa et al. 2017). Some differences were found in reactions to contract breach concerning perceptions of social exchange and desirable behaviors, not in terms of direction, but in intensity. For instance, the relationship between contract breach and organizational trust was negatively stronger for members of horizontal-individualistic cultures compared with members of vertical-collectivistic cultures (Costa et al. 2017). This is explained by the characteristics of these cultural configurations. Members of individualistic cultures have their own personal goals, see themselves as independent from others, expect equality in treatment, question authority, and reciprocate accordingly the treatment they receive (Singelis et al. 1995). On the contrary, members from vertical-collectivistic configurations are concerned with the collective goals rather than the individual goals, and they respect and do not question authority figures even when facing unfavorable treatment (Triandis & Gelfand 1998).

Beyond reciprocity, Part II: Theoretical explanations of contract breach: reactions to third parties. Current research is challenging the dominance of social exchange theory by drawing attention to plausible and credible complementary theories that underpin how employees respond to psychological contract breach. The conceptual and inconsistent empirical findings pertaining to how psychological contract breach affects OCB directed toward the organization (OCBO) and OCB directed toward individuals (OCBI) suggest the possibility of a spillover effect in which injury in one domain triggers harm in an unconnected domain. These findings trigger questions as to why and when psychological contract breach affects parties that fall outside the employee–organization dyadic relationship. Psychological needs and COR are two complementary theories that help explain the consequences of psychological contract breach beyond the employee–organization dyadic relationship.

Psychological needs. In the early conceptualization of psychological contract, Levinson et al. (1962) indicated that psychological needs are the foundation of psychological contracts; both the employee and the organization fulfill each other's needs. These needs may be a fundamental reason for the impact of psychological contracts (Conway & Briner 2005). Chang (2018) argued that, when a psychological contract is breached, employees are more likely to experience thwarted psychological need to control in the organization because breach breaks employees' contingency beliefs on the means and ends at work. Psychological contracts provide employees with satisfaction of need to control because it offers the expected contingency in their employment relationship (how both parties will treat each other, at least in the employee's mind), and breach diminishes such contingency. Therefore, thwarted need to control may help explain when spillover effects of breach are likely to occur; when employees' sense of control is mitigated as a result of contract breach, they are less likely to engage in helping behavior directed to others. Thwarted control will lead to feelings of alienation, which reduce an employee's caring and concern for other people at work. The extent to which thwarted control has these effects is dependent upon employees' implicit theory of the employee-organization relationship (EOR), defined as a belief that changeability exists within the EOR. Chang (2018) demonstrated that employees who believe that their employee-organization relationship is unchangeable (an entity view) are less likely to reduce their OCBI in response to breach than are the employees who believe that their employee-organization relationship can be shaped (an incremental view). Employees who possess an entity theory toward EOR have a destiny view in their interactions with the organization (i.e., what happens in their EOR is due to fate). Compared to employees with an incremental view, employees with an entity view are less likely to interpret breach as thwarting their sense of control because they never expected to have control in the first place.

Depletion of resources. The COR theory posits that individuals strive to protect the resources they have and that resource depletion in one domain will activate a tendency to protect resources and demotivate energy exertion in another domain (Halbesleben et al. 2009). Negative work-related experiences are potentially resource depleting (Halbesleben 2006), and Deng et al. (2018) argued that psychological contract violation leads to resource depletion for a number of reasons. First, the emotional distress resulting from psychological contract violation puts employees in a situation in which they have to regulate their emotions to perform their role, and such effort is depleting. Second, contract violation may trigger effortful sense making in an attempt to understand why this negative event happened. Finally, psychological contract violation is likely to trigger rumination, which in turn is likely to deplete an individual's energy as they play back and think about what has happened.

Beyond reciprocity, Part III: Theoretical explanations for the contract breach–health relationship. Several theoretical frameworks may be used to explain the inwardly focused consequences of contract breach. Such frameworks include the JD-C model (Karasek 1979), the job demands–resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al. 2001), the COR model (Hobfoll 2001), and the ERI model (Siegrist 1996).

Job demands–control model. The JD-C model postulates two sources of stress: psychological job demands and job control (Karasek 1979). The strain is a result of the joint effects of demands and control. In a context of high demands and low control, employees will incur a detrimental effect on health. When psychological contract breach occurs, employees may perceive reduced predictability and control, which translate into high levels of stress (Gakovic & Tetrick 2003).

Job demands–resources model. The JD-R framework proposes that jobs have physical, psychological, social, and organizational demands that hinder—and physical, psychological, social, and organizational resources that help and support—employees in their work (Demerouti et al. 2001, Schaufeli & Bakker 2004). When demands are high, stress levels increase, with a deleterious effect on health. In contrast, if employees have resources, they may feel motivated and protected (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004). Job resources contribute to employee health (Hakanen et al. 2008) and can induce “health-enhancing processes” (Parzefall & Hakanen 2010, p. 6). Past research used this model both to conceptualize contract breach as a high job demand (Costa & Neves 2017a, Lapointe et al. 2013), with the potential to hinder one’s job, and to conceptualize psychological contract fulfillment as a resource with motivational capabilities and health-enhancing properties (Parzefall & Hakanen 2010).

Conservation of resources model. The COR model, a theoretical perspective, has the following two central assumptions. First, individuals strive to protect and accumulate resources. Second, when facing a (perceived or actual) loss, individuals can withdraw to avoid more losses and conserve the resources they have, or they can be motivated to acquire and accumulate new resources to offset the loss (Hobfoll 2001). In this sense, contract breach can be viewed as a source of resource loss for employees (Kiazad et al. 2014) that drives these two types of responses. This resource drain generates stress (Hobfoll 2001), unless employees are endowed with other resources that allow them to gain additional resources successfully.

Model of effort-reward imbalance. Siegrist’s work (1996, 2005) in medical sociology explored the theoretical and empirical connection between work and health. The ERI model builds on the notion of reciprocity by using a formula between costs and gains to explain individuals’ outcomes, and this formula is similar to the ratios that employees calculate to examine a psychological breach situation (Morrison & Robinson 1997). In this sense, the failed-reciprocity concept of Siegrist (2005) is analogous to the concept of breach of employees’ psychological contract. According to the ERI model, an imbalance in costs (effort) and gains (rewards) will trigger a strain response. Specifically, employees expect that their high efforts at work will be reciprocated with equitable rewards. If this outcome does not happen, employees will experience negative emotions and suffer from stress-related diseases. Siegrist (1996) explained precisely that “high-cost/low-gain conditions are likely to elicit recurrent feelings of threat, anger, and depression or demoralization” (p. 30) and to increase the likelihood of incident cardiovascular disease, depression, and alcohol dependence (Siegrist 2005).

Summary

The overreliance on social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity has kept alternative explanations and employee health outcomes on the sidelines. In this section, we discussed complementary theories that help explain when and why psychological contract breach affects parties that fall outside the employee-organization dyadic relationship. We also took a closer look at health and potential theoretical models that might explain how contract breach can affect employees’ physical and psychological health.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Notable practical implications emerge from our review. A vast body of research has demonstrated that, when employees perceive psychological contract breach, they reciprocate accordingly by

Table 2 Possible organizational actions for managing psychological contract breach

	Possible organizational actions
Prevention of breach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Take into account individual antecedents of contract breach; recruit and select individuals with low levels of neuroticism (Raja et al. 2004) and high levels of self-control (Restubog et al. 2012) ■ Make realistic promises in the recruitment and socialization process ■ Reassess employees' expectations during performance appraisals or routine meetings ■ Provide support to employees from the beginning of the employment relationship ■ Build a trust-based relationship ■ Communicate in a transparent and consistent way ■ Closely monitor employees in times of high job demands (Vantilborgh et al. 2016) ■ Be careful with declarations of intent, as they become part of the psychological contract ■ Provide space for employees to voice their concerns and needs ■ Be aware of cultural differences (at both the individual and country levels) ■ Understand that not all employees value the same promise
Management of breach aftermath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide credible explanations and evidence for the reasons for the breach ■ Provide a time frame within which the breach will be remedied (Turnley & Feldman 1998) ■ Craft jobs with high resources (Vantilborgh et al. 2016) ■ Have role mentors (Zagenczyk et al. 2009) ■ Have high-quality leader-member exchange (Doden et al. 2018) ■ Provide tools to employees to overcome the breach [e.g., positive psychological capital (Costa & Neves 2017a), resilience (Shoss et al. 2016)] ■ Develop an emotionally healthy (Janssen et al. 2010) and forgiving (Costa & Neves 2017b) climate

reducing their effort in terms of job performance and OCBs and increase harmful behaviors that impact not only organizational outcomes but also other relationships inside and outside the workplace. We now discuss potential strategies for organizations to minimize the occurrence and consequences of contract breach. **Table 2** summarizes a number of organizational actions for the prevention, and management of the aftermath, of psychological contract breach.

The first set of possible organizational actions speaks to preventative strategies. To avoid psychological contract breach, organizations may want to recruit and select individuals with characteristics that minimize the perceptions of contract breach. Employees should also be provided with realistic expectations rather than unrealistic promises from the beginning of the employment relationship, such as during the recruitment and socialization process. Organizations need to constantly monitor and periodically reassess—for instance, during performance appraisals and routine work interactions—the extent to which employees and the organization are “on the same page” (Tekleab & Taylor 2003). Moreover, organizations are advised to build trustworthy relationships with their employees (Robinson 1996), to provide employees with organizational support (Dulac et al. 2008), and to keep job demands and resources balanced (Vantilborgh et al. 2016). Any declaration of intent may become part of the psychological contract, and not all employees value the same promise equally; thus, clear and consistent communication is key to preventing misunderstandings between the organization and its employees. Organizations must consider not only individual differences but also the cultural context; the implication is that managers should be culturally aware to fully understand employees' needs and expectations.

The second set of possible organizational actions emphasizes the management of contract breach. When avoiding a contract breach is not possible, organizations need to provide explanations for and pieces of evidence about the underlying reasons for the breach. Moreover, recognizing that a breach has occurred and providing a time frame for its resolution (Turnley & Feldman 1998) are critical to reducing individuals' negative reactions. The role of supervisors as mentors

can help individuals to make sense of the event and to minimize the strength of their reactions. Organizations should develop an emotionally healthy (Janssen et al. 2010), and forgiving (Costa & Neves 2017a) climate to buffer the deleterious effects of contract breach on employees' health and performance. Besides these actions, organizations should provide tools to employees to help them overcome contract breach. Tools such as positive psychological capital or resilience can be developed through training.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We now highlight future research directions that pertain to (*a*) resources exchanged (ideological currency), (*b*) employee health as an outcome of psychological contracts, (*c*) psychological needs as an important explanatory framework linking psychological contracts to outcomes, (*d*) attention to polycontextual approaches, and (*e*) post-breach/violation and implications for the employee-organization relationship. **Table 3** summarizes key future research questions.

Ideological Currency

Empirical investigation into the role of ideological currency—a new entrant into psychological contract research—is still in its infancy. The work that has been conducted is confined to volunteers, public sector, and not-for-profit employees, which raises the question of the applicability of ideological currency to private sector employees. The initial qualitative evidence suggests that some blue-collar manufacturing employees develop ideologically infused psychological contracts (Krause & Moore 2017), which opens the door for future research to examine the prevalence and saliency of ideological currency in different organizations, occupations, and cultural contexts.

How does ideological currency affect outcomes? Empirical studies are needed that examine (*a*) potential mechanisms to explain why breach or fulfillment of ideological obligations would affect employee outcomes and (*b*) how these explanations might differ from the traditional norm-of-reciprocity explanation. Finally, does ideological currency explain different outcomes? An employee who believes that their organization is fulfilling its obligations to its societal cause may be more likely to engage in self-sacrifice for the organization and, in doing so and over time, facilitate the emergence of an exploitative employee-organization relationship. Does ideological currency ebb and flow over the course of an employee's relationship? Is ideological currency what initially attracts employees to the organization, or does it develop as the employee's relationship with the organization develops? These are a sample of questions for future research.

Employee Health

Additional research examining the relationship between psychological contract breach and employee health is needed. To date, psychological contract breach has been linked to negative emotions, sick leave, and burnout (Cassar & Buttigieg 2015, Conway & Briner 2002b, Deery et al. 2006), which represents a narrow view of health outcomes (an exception is Garcia et al.'s 2017 study on insomnia). Chang et al. (2015) suggest that differentiating between an event-based breach and the accumulation of minor breach experiences would help delineate how different breach experiences impact health. The two types of breach will very likely trigger different emotions (such that event-based breach triggers anger and the accumulative breach process triggers anxiety), which in turn will lead to different health outcomes. Future research could build on such new conceptualization to tackle how breach could predict a variety of health outcomes and also uncover the underlying mechanisms through which contract breach impacts health.

Table 3 Future research questions

Ideological currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How prevalent is ideological currency across organizations, occupations, and cultural contexts? ■ How do organizations signal ideological currency as part of their exchange relationship with employees? ■ Does the saliency of ideological currency change contingent upon employees' individual and organizational circumstances? ■ What explains why breach/fulfilment of ideological obligations would affect outcomes? Are these explanations different from the reciprocity explanation? ■ Does ideological currency explain unique employee and organizational outcomes? ■ Does it buffer or exacerbate the effects of transactional or relational psychological contract breach? When and why might this occur? ■ Do ideologically infused psychological contracts lead to employee exploitation?
Employee health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is there a link between psychological contracts and employee psychological and physical health? ■ Does the breach experience (event based or the accumulation of minor transgressions) have a differential effect on health outcomes? What potential explanations may account for these effects? ■ Are there moderators (e.g., individual dispositions, work-life domain, HR strategy, organizational culture) that accentuate or attenuate the psychological contract-health relationship? ■ Is breach itself a stressor? Is the increasing insecurity after a contract breach the stressor? Is the threat to self-esteem? ■ Are there positive health benefits associated with psychological contract fulfilment? Under what conditions are these likely to occur?
Psychological needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What role do psychological needs play in understanding psychological contracts? ■ Do psychological needs influence the formation and development of psychological contracts? ■ How do psychological needs influence an individual's evaluation of their psychological contract? ■ Does psychological contract breach thwart psychological needs? When is this more likely to occur? ■ How do individuals fulfil their needs after the experience of psychological contract breach?
Polycontextual approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are macroeconomic, cultural, and societal contexts important to understand psychological contract breach? ■ What dimensions of culture and society impact psychological contract breach reactions? ■ Do culture and society explain individual reactions to psychological contract breach? ■ What cultural and societal characteristics buffer or exacerbate the reactions to psychological contract breach? ■ Does cultural context make a psychological contract breach more salient? ■ Does the content of psychological contract differ across cultures and societies?
Post-breach/violation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Do individuals recover from psychological contract violation? If so, how? ■ What is the role of time in the recovery process? ■ What types of methodologies are appropriate to capture the recovery process? ■ Can breach/violation lead to thriving of an individual's psychological contract? What organizational actions make this more likely? How would individual differences affect the likelihood of thriving occurring? Does context matter?

Another line of research could be focused on the positive health effect of contract fulfillment. To date, few studies have used a more positive lens on psychological contract effects. For instance, Karagonlar et al. (2016) found an indirect effect of contract fulfillment on psychosomatic strain, suggesting that a potential benefit of contract fulfillment is the reduction of strain. Additionally, Parzefall & Hakonen (2010) reported that employers “who live up to their promises and keep their part of the deal...energize their employees.... Thereby they can set off both motivational and health-enhancing processes” (p. 17).

Psychological Needs

What role do psychological needs play in understanding psychological contracts? Chang (2018) argued that one function of the psychological contract is to satisfy employees' need to control, implying that a sense of control could be a crucial psychological resource in understanding how employees react to contract breach. In employees' eyes, organizational promises can be very concrete, as in the cases of opportunities for training and promotion and reasonable job security. Such promises can also be implicit, such as in the cases of opportunities for decision making, influence, and reasonable job autonomy, which can be viewed as resources enabling a sense of control for employees.

Baumeister & Leary (1995) argue that, in addition to the need to control, the need to belong is another fundamental psychological need, demonstrating the innate desire to form and maintain stable relationships. The importance of belongingness needs has been alluded to in the discussion of breach and organizational identification (Bordia et al. 2008, Zagenczyk et al. 2011), but it has not been empirically examined. As relational psychological contracts emphasize the long-term exchange of socioemotional resources with the organization, breach may thwart an individual's sense of belongingness. As Meckler et al. (2003) suggest, only when psychological needs are integrated into a psychological contract process can an employee's motivation and behavior be adequately explained. Future research should shed light on when and why psychological needs play a critical role in understanding the development and consequences of an individual's psychological contract.

A Polycontextual Approach to Reactions to Contract Breach

Theoretically, context is essential to fully understand an organizational phenomenon (Johns 2017). Context is "broadly defined as situational or environment constraints and opportunities that have the functional capacity to affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior" (Johns 2017, p. 577). Specifically, in the field of psychological contracts, Rousseau & Schalk (2000) discussed the role of society in limiting the psychological contract through the availability of resources and the imposition of regulations. To date, preliminary evidence points in this direction by showing that some reactions to contract breach depend to a certain extent on cultural (Chao et al. 2011, Costa et al. 2017, Kickul et al. 2004, Zagenczyk et al. 2015) or societal (Costa et al. 2017) factors. On the basis of these theoretical and empirical suggestions, future research can use a polycontextual approach to understand reactions to contract breach. This perspective calls for the inclusion of national and cultural differences because these dimensions do not entirely overlap and can explain differences in organizational behavior across countries (Tsui et al. 2007). The national context includes the physical, historical, political, social, economic, and cultural contexts, which impact the ways of knowing and the meaning of work and organization. All these aspects, in turn, influence employment outcomes regarding attitudes and behaviors at work (Tsui et al. 2007). Therefore, the interpretation of, and the response to, contract breach may be contingent on different contextual factors.

Post-Breach/Violation

Psychological contract breach/violation has a very weak relationship with employee turnover (Zhao et al. 2007), suggesting that, for some employees, their relationship with their employer continues in some fashion. The postviolation model (Tomprou et al. 2015), drawing on self-regulation theory, outlines how psychological contracts can be reestablished by employees following breach.

As such, there are four types of postbreach psychological contracts—thriving, reactivation, impairment, and dissolution (Tomprou et al. 2015)—although this remains empirically untested. However, Bankins (2015) empirically examined psychological contract repair and differentiated between employee actions that repair the breach and those that repair the contract more broadly. Solinger et al. (2016) demonstrated that the emotional impact of breach is negatively related to successful recovery in postbreach commitment trajectories, while perceived organizational support increases the chances of successful recovery in postbreach commitment trajectories.

This embryonic strand of empirical research is a foundation for future research that examines the nature of the process of recovery from contract breach and violation. New methodological methods will be needed to track the unfolding nature of the recovery process as well as the development of postviolation measures. Such developments will facilitate understanding of the ebbs and flows that occur over the lifetime of an employee's psychological contract.

CONCLUSION

Our review of psychological contracts above starts with past research, with its emphasis on psychological contract breach and the predominant use of social exchange theory as the theoretical explanation for why breach triggers negative outcomes. Using this past research as a foundation, we review how emerging and developing research is challenging the simplicity of earlier research by expanding the antecedents of, explanations for, and outcomes associated with psychological contract breach. We select a number of avenues for future research that illuminate the complexity of the resources exchanged and how, when, and why employees recover from psychological contract breach.

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