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Psychological Contract: Structural Explanations of Breach among Secondary School Teachers in Kenya

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Abstract

The study of employer and employee relationship among teachers is important to scholars and human resource practitioners. This paper, in perspective of psychological contract, analyzes the characteristics of psychological contract of secondary school teachers in Kenya, the relationship between psychological contract and psychological contract breach, and the influencing factors of contract breach and gives recommendations to improve on this relationship. The government of Kenya through the Teachers Service Commission which is the sole employer of teachers in public schools has made tremendous steps in the recent years to professionalize teaching, through introduction of registration of trained teachers, introduction of performance contracts (PC) to the heads of schools and teacher performance and appraisal development tool (TPAD). However, despite teachers devoting their time to these policy practices, they find themselves drifting to businesses that have nothing to do with teaching and scientific research which finally cause a misplacement of the primary objectives of these tools because of unfulfilled perceived employment promises. Studies show that psychological contracts impose certain inner drive on human behavior, which influences employees' performances and attitudes to a certain degree. In other words, In order to make secondary school teachers devote themselves to the education cause completely, it is imperative to build up a positive psychological contract between secondary school teachers and their employer.

Keywords: Secondary School Teachers, Teacher Performance, Psychological Contract, Psychological Contract Breach.

Introduction

The Psychological Contract

The psychological contract is a kind of subjective psychological promise between the employee and the organization, in which each party promises to pay for what it should get from the other party. The core is the unwritten duties for each other. The psychological contract concept has been introduced into the management field since 60s in 20th century. An organizational psychologist

Argyris firstly adopts the “psychological work contract” to explain the relationship between an employee and an employer in his book *Understanding Organizational Behavior*. Levinson, the “father of psychological contract”, in his book *Men, Management, and Mental Health* advances that the psychological contract is “the sum of the implicit and unwritten mutual expectations between an organization and an employee”. Based on preceding opinions that focus on expectations, Rousseau (1990, 1995) creatively puts forward that the psychological contract means responsibilities and obligations on the basis of promises. He gives a narrow definition of psychological contract at the individual level, namely: The psychological contract is a perception and belief system for mutual responsibilities and obligations between employees, in the interactive relationship between the organization and employees.

The concept of the psychological contract has become an important focus area for management researchers and practitioners in recent years because of the dominant resource based view of firm. The central premise is that employees are key to sustainable competitive advantage and it follows that relationships between employers and employees are critical to ensuring productivity and the continued release of innovation and creativity (Flood, Turner, Ramamoorthy & Pearson, 2001). Psychological contracts Armstrong and Murlis (1998:22) define the psychological contract as the set of “expectations held by the individual employee that specify what the individual and the organisation expect to give and receive from one another in the course of their working relationship”. Psychological contracts are also defined as distinctly denoting a relationship of exchange (Millward & Brewerton, 2001) and having as their essence, reciprocity (Cappelli, 1997).

Psychological Contract Breach

Effective management of psychological contracts relates to the maintenance of perceived obligations. A met psychological contract will lead to the knowledge worker feeling an obligation to contribute, and in the context of the modern workplace. This includes such behaviors as being a team player, expending extra effort as needed, and generally putting the organization’s interests before one’s own. Flood et al (2001) found that the level of met expectations in a psychological contract have a direct effect on the employee’s commitment to the organization and their intention to stay.

A breach or violation of the contract occurs when an employee perceives that the organization does not deliver on its obligations (Marks, 2001). Morrison and Robinson (1997) define a breach as an affective and emotional experience of disappointment, frustration, anger and resentment that may emanate from an employee’s interpretation of the circumstances surrounding a perceived contravention of the contract. It is a calculative assessment of the employment relationship, whereby employees conclude that the organization did not meet their expectations (Hallier & James, 1997). The perception of noncompliance or non-reciprocation by the other party is of crucial importance as it may adversely affects employees’ exhibition of pro-social behavior to co-workers (Hallier & James, 1997). The principle of reciprocity states that fulfilment of employee obligations is conditional on the organization fulfilling what employees perceive the organization to owe them (Herriot, Manning, & Kidd, 1997). The employees’ perception that the organization has failed to fulfil its obligation is thought to lead to feelings of anger, betrayal, and resentment, which in turn, lead to decreased employee motivation, dissatisfaction, loss of loyalty, and exit from the organization (Rousseau, 1989; Robinson & Morrison, 1997; Turnley & Feldman, 1999).

The breach of psychological contracts is also known to have material effects on the relationship between the employer and employee (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). As the relationship is based on

the principle of reciprocity, when an employee experiences a breach of the psychological contract, employees may withhold their contributions to the organization, and in some instances leave the organization (Restubog, Bordia & Tang, 2006). According to Rousseau (2004), Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) and Rousseau & McLean Parks (1993) breaches of transactional psychological contracts lead to an exit from the organization, while breaches of relational psychological contracts can lead to a variety of reactions ranging from the withdrawal of commitment, reverting to economic (or transactional) contract, turnover, or further actions to diminish the employment relationship.

Secondary School Teachers in Kenya

Secondary school teachers (high school teachers) in Kenya are employed in contract or permanent and pensionable terms by the teachers service commission which is a commission mandated by act of parliament to register, recruit, transfer, discipline, pay, promote teachers and advice the government on matters of education. However, the aspect of education management is run by the ministry of education on issues relating to policy formulation and programs, standardization and quality monitoring among others. At the county level, the teachers service commission is headed by the county director of education primarily dealing with the human resource management functions while the education ministry is headed by the county director of education monitoring education management. The two have distinct but complementary roles.

The minimum employment entry level of a trained teacher in Kenya is a diploma in education certificate, although majority of teachers employed at the entry level are holders of a bachelor degree in education. The recruitment process of teachers is decentralized at the county and sub county level with a selection panel formed by the board of management of the respective institutions. Aspects of teachers orientation, training, appraisal and development are implemented through the school with the head of the institution (Principal) being the immediate supervisor and the accounting officer of both the ministry of education and the teachers service commission. Promotions of teachers in Kenya to higher employment grades is based on performance. The teachers service commission periodically advertises and invites applicants for promotion interviews with key areas of focus being; years of service, value addition to students grades, participation in extra- curricular activities, further training in teaching subjects among others.

Problem of the Statement

Guest (2004) articulates the view that work places have become increasingly fragmented because of newer and more flexible forms of employment. At the same time, managers have become increasingly intolerant of time-consuming and sluggish processes of negotiation under conventional employment relations systems. Given the increasingly idiosyncratic and diverse nature of employment, a framework like the psychological contract breach, reflecting the needs of the individual with implicit and unvoiced expectations about employment, is an appealing, 'alternative' paradigm for studying people at work.

Research shows that breach of the psychological contract is among other things related to an unwillingness to exert more effort than the minimum required (Herriot *et al.*, 1997), decreased job satisfaction (Linde & Schalk, 2005), decreased motivation, decreased organizational commitment (Ivanchevich & Matteson, 2002), increased turnover, increased employee litigation, increased unionisation (Rousseau, 1989) and increased absenteeism (Isaksson, 2006). The principle of reciprocity states that fulfilment of employee obligations is conditional on the organisation fulfilling what employees perceive the organisation to owe them (Herriot *et al.*, 1997). These implies that the

economic and formal aspects of employment are inevitably influenced by informal social interactions, and that employment includes implicit and unspecified expectations which provide the relationship with a strong element of indeterminacy. In that sense, managing people at work is portrayed as containing a strong social dynamic, rather than a purely static and once-off economic transaction. Research done on Psychological Contract in Kenya include: Wanjira (2010) a study of new employee's psychological contract at the Kenya Bureau of Standards which found out that the psychological contract of the employees were more transactional than relational. Longurasia (2008) study on the employees' perceptions of psychological contract, which tested the extent of employees' perception of psychological contract at the Kenya Meat Commission. The study found that employees at Kenya Meat Commission are satisfied with their employer's fulfillment of psychological contract and therefore have a sense of belonging and loyalty and are obligated to the organization. Njeru (2003) studied the effects of psychological contract on employee performance at the Telecom Kenya, which looked at the state and content of psychological contract and found that employees believed that their psychological contracts were violated. They felt that this affected their performance in this organization. Musungu (2013) study on institutional factors influencing breach of psychological contracts among lecturers at the University of Nairobi, which found out that 52% of female lecturers had a positive psychological contract as compared to 48% of their male colleagues. Okoth (2012) study on the influence of perceived psychological contract on employee commitment at the National Cereals and Produce Board in Kenya which found out that perceived psychological contract violation affect employee commitment and recommends human resource strategies based on interactional justice. These studies and others focused on business organizations and recommended further research in other disciplines. No such a study has been done in the secondary school sector and the current study therefore fills the gap by examining the structural explanations of psychological contract breach among secondary school teachers in Kenya.

The Characteristics of Secondary School Teachers' Psychological Contract

Psychological contracts as viewed by employees can be transactional, transitional, relational, or balanced (Rousseau, 2000; Thompson & Bunderson, 2003; Rousseau, 2004). Transactional contracts are of a short term duration primarily focused upon economic exchange with clearly specified roles and responsibilities. Relational contracts are about the exchange of socio-emotional currency in exchange for the organisation providing continued training and development, as well as long-term job security. This type of contract is seen as the more valuable for firm's dependent on employees for their future sustainability as they are encouraged to contribute their commitment and loyalty to the organisation in exchange for their professional development (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993; Flood et al, 2001, Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Balanced psychological contracts are open-ended arrangements with both parties contributing to each other's learning and development, conditioned on the economic success of the employer. Transitional contracts refer to a "state of mind" reflecting the consequences of organizational change and transition that is at odds with a previously established employment arrangement i.e. a disruption to the psychological contract, and is evidenced in mistrust, uncertainty and an erosion of expectations.

Kenyan secondary school teachers' psychological contract is characterized with group culture. It emphasizes on the collectivism and the harmonious interpersonal relationship. Teachers in Kenya have a strong consciousness of team cooperation and group welfare due to the vibrant teachers union which always educate their members on matters relating to labor laws and employee relations. Professional titles, promotions, and trainings are mostly based years of service, what depresses

young teachers' enthusiasm and creativity in work. The disparity in compensation among the job groups is a big concern, the lower job groups earning far much lower compared to the upper job groups both in basic pay and allowances. Stagnation in lower job groups is also a challenge, majority of them being at job group 'L' -the second job group for a graduate teacher, and may take a minimum of ten years before being promoted to the next job group (M). Study leaves are given to teachers after completion of mandatory five years. However, this is pegged to availability of sufficient staff to cover the work load in your absence and the leaves are also bonded which prompts some teachers to opt for unpaid study leaves.

Professional courses are mostly designed for heads of the schools and their deputies which leaves many young and lower cadres teachers with no option but to study over the weekends, online, or take evening classes in available institutions with the hope of carrier growth. Based on the teachers service commission report on teachers performance appraisal and development (TPAD) and performance contract (PC) feedback 2017, out of the seven key competency areas of the TPAD, innovation and creativity is ranked the lowest at 59.4%. The same report identifies teacher lesson attendance and lesson observation, as the lowest ranked with 63.83% and 65.93% respectively, on availability of implementation evidence. These are very critical areas in teaching profession and an in-depth investigation such as a look at positive psychological contract can resolve the impasse.

Secondary School Teachers' Psychological Contract Breach

The breach of psychological contract means individuals' certain emotional experiences based on the recognition that the organization fails to fulfill the psychological contract. Individuals feel certain unfair treatments and find that the organization breaks its commitment (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The breach of psychological contract takes employees' perception as the base and is impacted by individual experiences and values. It is characterized with the prominent individual subjectivity. Morrison & Robinson (1997) advance the development model of psychological contract breach. According to this model, two factors contribute to the breach of psychological contract: the organization refuses to fulfill the commitment in purpose; the organization and employees' different recognitions to the commitment. Turnley & Feldman (1999) sort employees' behaviors that happen after the breach of psychological contract into four types: the first is to quit the job; the second is to decrease the professional performance; the third is to decrease the non-professional performance (mainly organizational citizen behavior, such as refusing to assume more duties, work overtime, or help colleagues); the fourth is certain anti-social behavior (such as revenging, damaging, stealing, and assaulting).

Secondary school teachers in Kenya perceive the breach or violation of psychological contract, a decimal number especially those with exceptional skills and knowledge may choose to quit the profession. Most teachers will decrease their professional or non-professional performances, and choose to engage in secondary occupation for the sake of economic benefits and self-satisfaction. Some may refuse to follow the policies and methods of secondary school teaching, or explore new teaching methods, or lack of the consciousness of updating knowledge, thus wasting their time and teaching resources in a sense. Some may transfer services to other public or private sectors they perceive as having better working conditions or better pay. A good number choose to go for additional papers for professional promotion or search for better jobs.

Factors Influencing Teachers' Psychological Contract Breach

The employee perceived psychological contract breach according to the model of psychological contract breach, is caused by the organization and individuals. According to Anderson and Schalk (1998) the shifts in the balance of the reciprocal agreement between employers and employees (as a result of widespread change) have been one of the driving forces behind psychological contract research as a means of understanding changes in employment relations. They propose the organizational and the individual level factors. Human behavior follows certain institutional norms and teachers' personal development and professional progress rely on certain institutional and management culture. An institution with effective management, and positive school culture that cherishes growth and teachers' welfare can satisfy teachers' psychological expectation to a great extent, which therefore improves the fulfillment of commitment and reduce the breach of psychological contract. Contrary, traditional administrative management practices, ineffective communication, unfair internal promotion, over emphasize on teachers' short-term benefits and neglect of teachers' personal needs and psychological satisfactions will increase breaches of psychological contract.

On the other hand, teachers' individual behavior and response to certain management decisions may lead to psychological contract breach. Teachers with negative attitudes towards the management and the institution culture for example have been identified to be susceptible to perceived contract breach. These teachers may pay more attentions to the negative information of the institutions and as the school faces reforms or changes in operations they may become too critical in a negative sense. Although real breaches may not happen in this institution, they subjectively think breaches have already happened, which will lead to a sense of psychological contract breach in their minds.

We also have teachers with poor interpersonal relationship and lower trust in others and the management. Because of poor interpersonal relationship, these teachers may pay more attentions to external negative factors. Low trust make these teachers doubt the schools' commitment and fulfillment, what will lead to the subjective sense of psychological contract breach. Finally, there is a group of teachers who believe they are indispensable because they play crucial roles in the institution. These teachers have organization citizenship behavior, for example: extraordinary teaching performance, important social relationship with the management, mastering exceptional skills, having served the school for a longer period etc. Therefore, they may expect too much of the institution psychologically, and even hope that the school can satisfy them at will. Therefore, their senses of psychological contract breach are very high.

Recommendations

- (1) **Develop a transformative management system:** Until the last decade, the majority of organizations were described as hierarchical, bureaucratic, and the employment relationship as paternalistic. The organization's structure and employees' current and future place in it were clear. In exchange for loyalty, commitment and acceptable levels of performance, employees received security, regular advancement opportunities, annual pay increases, reward for outstanding or loyal performance in the form of higher paid posts, additional benefits, and investment in training and development (Capelli, 1997; Pascale, 1995; Sims, 1994). They tolerated bureaucratic aggravation and the occasional domineering boss (Blancero, 1997). Changes at the macro level such as, increasing market competition and customer demands, slower economic growth, globalization, rising product innovation and the impact of advanced forms of information technology have placed pressure on

organizations to be flatter, faster and more flexible and to manage change rather than be submerged by it. For example, in a global economy, competition becomes fiercer by the day and customers demand and expect lower prices, faster deliveries and fewer defects.

To control fluctuating demands for labor and increase the flexibility of the workforce, there has been a shift from permanent jobs to contractors, leased employees and temporary workers. As organizations focus less on long term performance, employees are recruited and retained for particular skills, often for only a short time (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Pascale, 1995). There have been increasing demands for: better deployment of capital; outsourcing of non-core activities; fewer management layers; fewer grade jobs; performance related pay; and fewer processes that amalgamate a number of related functions. This therefore calls for a transformative approach in management and schools as organizations are not an exception.

In process of perceiving the contract default to the contract violation a sense of fairness is an important factor that impacts this process (Zhang, 2009). Therefore, schools should build up a fair and transformative management system. Fairness of decision-making process by taking teachers' opinions into consideration can objectively increase understanding and boost fairness. Secondly, establish the fair and reasonable job evaluation and appraisal mechanism. Job evaluation and appraisals serve as important reference for promotions and teachers' professional visions. At the moment, heads of schools and their deputies are still grappling with the institutionalization of the appraisal system in schools in evaluating teachers' performances. Besides, administrative power is concerned with policy compliance than academic and professional strength. Therefore, the management should, consider appraisal and development orientation, balance the relationship between teaching and individual welfare, reduce administrative interferences at the departmental level, explore and design a reasonable job evaluation system for internal promotions. These can effectively reduce the breach of psychological contract, inspire teachers' enthusiasm and creativity.

- (2) **Proper orientation process:** Most of items in psychological contract are formed at the recruiting process during orientation. In the orientation stage, the management should convey real information to teachers and avoid the impractical commitments in order to make the teacher settle for the job. They should be open and inform teachers on circumstances that can satisfy or dissatisfy their expectations. This will make teachers' psychological expectations for and from the school more practical, what will relieve the sense of frustration and dissatisfaction. This lays an objective understanding for teachers on what they should do for the school, creating an equal condition for the school fulfilling its commitment. At the moment many teachers are faced with unclear promises and expectations on; the accommodation facilities, threshold on the number of lessons per week, extra lessons such as life skills and remedials, extra responsibilities in boarding schools, guiding and counselling sessions for students, extra roles in extra-curriculum activities- sports, music, drama and clubs, teacher motivation programs, procedure of internal promotions, among others. These roles often contravenes the employer's policies but the teacher has to comply with the management's decisions.

- (3) **Effective communication:** Upon employment it is a long process from making a commitment to fulfilling it. Therefore, this process is full of changes, what will easily cause misunderstandings and inconsistency. Scholars and human resource practitioners have proposed 'participative management' as a vehicle for change implementation. Researchers (Coch and French, 1948; Vroom, 1964; Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979; Nadler, 1993) claim that participation facilitates the communication of information about what the change will be and why it has come about, which tends to reduce resistance to change. Management texts argue in favor of employee inclusion in the planning and execution of organisation change. Both practitioners and academics speak about employee ownership of change as a means of increasing their motivation and commitment to make the change work. Therefore, effective communication and employee involvement are essential components in change management.

During change, an individual's need for information increases to reduce the uncertainties that it might bring. A conscious process of sense making occurs to develop explanations of why predicted outcomes no longer occur and to understand the terms of the new psychological contract. Evidence shows that if individuals understood the rationale for the change, they perceive the process as fair and they are satisfied with the consequences, they accept and adjust to changes in the psychological contract more readily. Fair treatment through communication and involvement therefore, represent a mechanism for developing new schemas that are more consistent with the new environment. It provides a degree of security, predictability and control because employees know what to expect in their organisation world, even if it has changed. Communication can help to reduce inconsistency and misunderstandings of the contents of psychological contract. Besides, it can adjust the contents psychological contract in time. For secondary school teachers, their work time is internally flexible but avenues for communication are limited. Therefore, schools must communicate with teachers periodically. This can effectively reduce the inconsistency and misunderstandings, decreasing teachers' subjective senses of psychological contract breach.

- (4) **Multi-dimensional motivation mechanism:** Many organizations are changing their reward criteria due to changes in lifestyle. Seniority-based pay increases are being replaced by performance-related pay based on individual or team contribution. Despite organizations being not in a position to offer the traditional rewards, demands on employees are increasing. What organizations currently expect of their employees may be completely different from what they expected in the past. For example, there is an increased emphasis on creating flexibility to achieve better usage of labor, empowering managers and staff so that they perform more functions under one job title and requiring a multiplicity of skills. According to Capelli (1997) and Sims (1994), employees' job descriptions have broadened. They need to develop and extend existing skills to avoid the risk of skills obsolescence as new technologies are applied. They are also required to have knowledge about company products and services together with problem solving, diagnostic and inter-personal communication skills.

Secondary school teachers in Kenya are knowledge workers and they need motivation related to; economic benefits, interpersonal relationship, work environment, and professional development. Different types of teachers have different needs at different stages based on their years of service, family structures and career aspirations. Therefore, the management should considering this diverse needs and build up a multi-dimensional incentive system such as; increasing salaries, improving welfare, offering more chances for trainings or professional promotions, and flexible working systems. A teacher can select certain incentive method or the combination of several incentive methods that can satisfy his or her present needs as much as possible after a period of hard work, which can decrease perceptions of psychological contract breach, improve work satisfaction, and reduce the recessive drain.

Conclusion

The psychological contract is a very subjective concept which influences employees' beliefs and behavior in the workplace. From the recruitment stage of an employee's work to retirement or resignation, it can have a profound effect on the attitudes and well-being of an individual. Although it is an unwritten contract it has a central role in work behavior by better specifying the dynamics of the employment relationship. It is clearly an important ingredient in the work place relationship between employers and employees and can be a powerful determinant of workplace behavior and attitudes. Findings in this study show that there is psychological contract breach among secondary school teachers in Kenya. The study also identifies the institutional culture and the interpersonal relationship of a teacher as the influencing factors of the psychological contract breach. The secondary school teacher, the management and the teachers service commission in Kenya would gain a great deal when taking into consideration the psychological contract breach and its abundant implications.

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