A Socialization Activity's Effect on Reactions to Psychological Contract Breach/Fulfillment

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Abstract

Reactions to psychological contract breach/fulfillment were significantly moderated by participation in a reciprocal interview activity occurring early on in organizational socialization. Participants experiencing the activity showed almost no relation between satisfaction and psychological contract breach/fulfillment. Participants not experiencing the activity mirrored complex reactions to breach/fulfillment identified by previous research.

Introduction

- Psychological Contract Definition
  - defined as an individual's implicit, subjective belief in mutual obligations between that employee and employer (Rousseau, 1989).
  - conceptualized as a schema that helps organize an employee's implicit, subjective beliefs concerning their and their employer's mutual obligations regarding the terms of their exchange agreement (Rousseau, 2001).
- Psychological Contract Fulfillment/Violation
  - Fulfilling psychological contracts associated with increased trust and cooperation (e.g., Conway & Briner, 2002).
  - Violating psychological contracts associated with increased anger, frustration, and intentions to quit (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994).
- Psychological Contract Formation
  - Key Organizational Experiences (Rousseau, 2001).
    - Recruitment phase
      - Employees actively seek to understand the promises each party would be obliged to uphold if an employment relationship was to be established with an organization.
    - Early Socialization Experiences
      - New employees and employers continue to exchange promises.
      - New employee's actively experience the organization.
- Psychological Contract Development
  - Influenced by Quality of Key Experiences (Rousseau, 2001).
    - Quality of information
    - Consistency of information
- This study examined the effects of a reciprocal interview activity designed to provide new employees with **consistent, high quality information** from a trusted source.

Hypothesis 1: Employees that experienced the reciprocal group interview activity would report less contract breach compared to employees that did not experience the activity.

Hypothesis 2: Because they experienced less contract breach, employees that experienced the reciprocal group interview activity, would report higher levels of satisfaction compared to employees that did not experience the activity.

Reciprocal Interview Activity

- Phase 1
  - The employer asks the employee to share their perceptions of both the obligations of the employer to the employee and vice versa.
    - Specifically, the employees inform the employer
      - of their goals within the organization,
      - how the employer can best help them achieve their goals,
      - what they feel are reasonable norms for professional behavior in the workplace.
    - The employer has the opportunity to clarify, reinforce, or correct these perceptions as necessary; thereby providing, high quality, clear, explicit, consistent information to employees.
- Phase 2
  - The employees question and discuss with the employer any other issues they consider relevant to the psychological contract.
- The results of the activity should include more accurate psychological contracts for employee and employer with each party having a clearer understanding of their mutual obligations to one another.

Method

Participants and Procedure

- Respondents were introductory psychology students from a large southwestern university. Respondents average age was 20.2 (SD = 5.59) and 57% of the respondents were women. Eighty-six percent of the respondents were Caucasian, 8% Hispanic, and the rest were African American and Asian. No respondents reported having previously taken a course with the instructor.
- Ten different instructors teaching a total of 16 different sections of introductory psychology participated in the study. The instructors were randomly assigned to either the activity or no activity condition. A total of 5 instructors covering 8 sections were assigned to each condition.
- Data were collected using a 3-stage survey process. At Time 1, surveys were distributed to students at the end of the first week of classes. We chose this time frame as it would have allowed all instructors in the experimental condition to have completed the activity with their students. The survey contained questions about promised inducements and salient features of the psychological contract (e.g., scope, tangibility). A total of 473 surveys were collected. The Time 2 surveys were completed during the 7th week of a 14 week term. These surveys contained questions about delivered inducements and salient features of psychological contracts. Finally, Time 3 data were collected at the end of the 14 week term. These surveys contained questions about student satisfaction. Of the 473 respondents who completed the survey at Time 1, 235 completed surveys at both Time 2 and Time 3 resulting in an overall follow up response rate of 49.6%. Complete data from all three waves were available for 137 respondents.

Measures

Inducements. We adapted measures used by Lambert, Edwards and Cable (2003) assessing the following dimensions feedback, recognition, peer-peer relationships, instructor-student relationships, task variety, skill development, career training, meaningful work and task identity. The number of items per scale, alpha levels, and a sample item from each measure are presented in Table 1.

Promised and delivered levels. At Time 1, respondents indicated how much of each inducement had been promised by the instructor (i.e., "Please rate how much you believe your psychology instructor has promised the following:"). At Time 2, respondents indicated the amount of inducement from the instructor (i.e., "Please rate how much your psychology instructor has done the following:"). All items were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = "Not at All" to 5 = "Very Much."

Outcomes. Satisfaction was measured with a single item (e.g., "How satisfied were you with the course?") measured on a 5-point scale ranging from -3 = "Very Dissatisfied" to 3 = "Very Satisfied."

Results

Table 1.

Names, Number of Items, Sample Items, and Reliabilities for Each Inducement Measure.

Scale	Sample Item	ά (P)[f]	ά (D)[g]
Feedback[a]	"inform you if you are not doing well in this course."	.79	.70
Recognition[a]	"let you know when you do a good job."	.85	.87
Relationships[a] (P – P)[c]	"give you opportunities to get to know other students in the class."	.84	.83
Relationships[a] (I – S)[d]	"give you opportunities to get to know the instructor at a personal level."	.85	.86
Task variety[a]	"do something different in class everyday."	.79	.84
Skill development[a]	"give you opportunities to build new skills and abilities."	.77	.81
Career training[a]	"help you develop skills and abilities that will be useful in your career."	.86	.83
Meaningful work[c]	"assign work in this course that is personally meaningful to you."	.84	.88
Task identity[e]	"assign you work that gives you a sense of personal accomplishment."	.72	.78

[a] These measures were comprised of 3 items.
[b] This measure was comprised of 4 items.
[c] This measure was comprised of 2 items.
[d] (P – P) = Peer to Peer Relationships.
[e] (I – S) = Instructor to Student Relationships.
[f] Promised inducements.
[g] Delivered inducements.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations among Study Variables.

		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	Feedback Promised	3.25	.91																		
2	Recognition Promised	3.23	.90	.74																	
3	Peer Relationships Promised	3.60	.90	.50	.56																
4	Instructor Relationship Promised	3.02	.90	.55	.66	.55															
5	Task Variety Promised	3.31	.75	.49	.58	.51	.64														
6	Skill Development Promised	3.56	.85	.52	.52	.43	.52	.67													
7	Career Training Promised	3.80	.83	.52	.48	.51	.50	.52	.77												
8	Meaningful Work Promised	3.34	.92	.53	.52	.50	.60	.63	.67	.69											
9	Task Identity Promised	3.37	.84	.58	.59	.54	.52	.64	.75	.71	.74										
10	Feedback Received	2.73	.96	.45	.43	.26	.32	.28	.35	.39	.31	.31									
11	Recognition Received	3.18	.97	.36	.45	.22	.39	.24	.29	.25	.28	.24	.68								
12	Peer Relationships Received	3.39	.88	.27	.32	.44	.47	.38	.37	.35	.37	.32	.53	.63							
13	Instructor Relationship Received	2.91	.94	.27	.33	.13	.50	.27	.26	.18	.26	.16	.56	.71	.67						
14	Task Variety Received	3.27	.86	.15	.23	.16	.28	.41	.35	.24	.28	.29	.43	.45	.58	.51					
15	Skill Development Received	3.19	.84	.38	.36	.21	.37	.43	.48	.42	.42	.36	.62	.54	.58	.52	.72				
16	Career Training Received	3.40	.89	.38	.38	.24	.42	.40	.42	.53	.47	.34	.59	.59	.52	.45	.55	.77			
17	Meaningful Work Received	3.33	.98	.41	.39	.33	.44	.38	.41	.48	.53	.41	.61	.60	.49	.52	.56	.74	.80		
18	Task Identity Received	3.19	.87	.36	.37	.23	.35	.44	.46	.38	.44	.44	.63	.58	.54	.53	.62	.76	.71	.74	
19	Satisfaction with Course	2.23	1.16	.13	.12	-.02	.14	.05	.08	.14	.11	.02	.43	.45	.37	.41	.45	.54	.45	.50	.45

Note: N = 137. Correlations greater than or equal to .19 were statistically significant at the p < .05 level.

Table 3

Mean Amounts of Breach for Each Inducement by Experimental Condition.

	Mean Amount of Breach		Standard Deviation	
	Activity (N = 83)	No Activity (N = 52)	Activity (N = 83)	No Activity (N = 52)
Feedback	0.85	0.98	0.68	0.59
Recognition	0.77	0.66	0.72	0.55
Peer Relationships	0.68	0.85	0.60	0.62
Instructor Relationship	0.74	0.74	0.56	0.63
Task Variety	0.65	0.69	0.57	0.57
Skill Development	0.69	0.75	0.52	0.75
Career Training	0.73	0.78	0.55	0.57
Meaningful Work	0.78	0.67	0.54	0.56
Task Identity	0.62	0.80	0.53	0.70

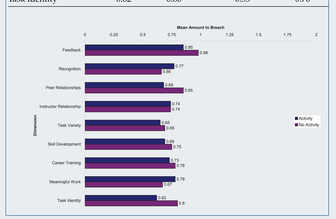

Table 4.

Relationship between Psychological Contract Breach/Fulfillment and Satisfaction Controlling for Experimental Condition.

	Condition	Linear Breach (D + P)			Curvilinear Breach (D^2 + DP + P^2)					
	R^2	D	P	Δ R^2	R^2	D^2	DP	P^2	Δ R^2	R2
Feedback	.074***	.363***	-.123	.095***	.169***	-.162	.035	.182	.040	.209
Recognition	.089***	.449***	-.157	.129***	.218***	-.127	.064	.120	.020	.239
Peer Relationships	.089***	.369***	-.278***	.110***	.199***	-.149	.221*	-.050	.029	.228
Instructor Relationships	.094***	.419***	-.150	.104***	.198***	-.217**	.059	.168	.061**	.259**
Task Variety	.068**	.429***	-.195*	.153***	.221***	-.204*	.261*	.019	.051*	.272*
Skill Development	.089***	.596***	-.252**	.257***	.346***	-.353**	.208*	.053	.072*	.418*
Career Training	.089***	.459***	-.188*	.142***	.231***	-.136	.135	-.006	.014	.245
Meaningful Work	.089***	.491***	-.228**	.162***	.251***	-.237*	.211	.040	.044*	.295*
Task Identity	.079***	.438***	-.248**	.153***	.232***	-.058	.241*	-.033	.037	.268

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 5.

Results of Moderated Polynomial Regression Analysis.

	M(D + P)				M(D^2 + DP + P^2)		
	MD	MP	R^2	MD^2	MDP	MP^2	R^2
Feedback	-.415***	.253	.041*	.628**	-.719*	.379	.046*
Recognition	-.558***	.568***	.090***	.598**	-.859**	.606**	.055**
Peer Relationships	-.381*	.270	.035*	.458**	-.727***	.038	.061**
Instructor Relationship	--	--	.031	--	--	--	.001
Task Variety	-.292*	.302*	.038*	.080	.622***	.466***	.075**
Skill Development	-.336**	.082	.032*	.532**	-.351*	.019	.046**
Career Training	--	--	.017	--	--	--	.008
Meaningful Work	-.574**	.485**	.100***	.499**	-.830**	.634**	.064**
Task Identity	-.369**	.319*	.051**	--	--	--	.009

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 6.

Coefficients for Linear and Curvilinear Components of Psychological Contract Breach/Fulfillment by Condition

	No Reciprocal Interview Activity							Reciprocal Interview Activity						
	D	P	D^2	DP	P^2	R^2	F	D	P	D^2	DP	P^2	R^2	F
Feedback	.540**	-.218	-.588**	.661*	-.220	.348**	4.70	.148	-.041	.074	.029	.147	.070	1.18
Recognition	.418	-.261	-.752*	1.023*	-.487*	.426***	6.99	.296**	.017	.094	-.069	.174	.113	1.98
Peer Relationships	.351*	-.272*	-.396	.562**	-.030	.360***	5.40	.163	-.149	.092	-.061	.006	.048	0.79
Task Variety	.708***	-.602***	-.201	.658**	-.479**	.466***	7.86	.370**	-.115	-.168	.015	.258	.149*	2.73
Skill Development	.459***	-.012	-.529***	.370*	.084	.541***	13.27	.408**	-.179	.044	-.063	.167	.163**	3.03
Meaningful Work	.573***	-.290*	-.508**	.960**	-.481*	.558***	12.14	.244	-.040	.135	-.190	.253	.091	1.57
Task Identity	.508***	-.291*	-.041	.211	-.039	.374***	5.50	.195	-.052	.165	-.056	.144	.080	1.36

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Model 1:
$Y = b_0 + b_1M + b_2D + b_3P + e$
Model 2:
$Y = b_0 + b_1M + b_2D + b_3P + b_4D^2 + b_5DP + b_6P^2 + e$
Model 3:
$Y = b_0 + b_1M + b_2D + b_3P + b_4D^2 + b_5DP + b_6P^2 + b_7MD + b_8MP + b_9MD^2 + b_{10}MDP + b_{11}MP^2 + e$
Note.
Y = Satisfaction with Course
D = Delivered Inducements
P = Promised Inducements
M = Moderator Variable (Participation in Reciprocal Interview Activity)

Figure 1. ***Statistical Models for Examining the Relationship between Psychological Contract Breach and Satisfaction.***

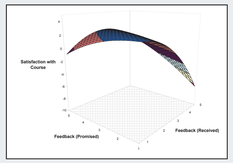

Figure 2a. ***Surface for Relating Satisfaction to Promised and Delivered Inducements for Feedback.***

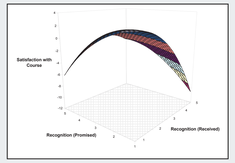

Figure 2b. ***Surface for Relating Satisfaction to Promised and Delivered Inducements for Recognition.***

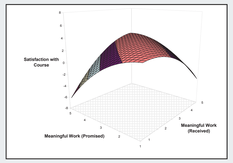

Figure 2c. ***Surface for Relating Satisfaction to Promised and Delivered Inducements for Meaningful Work.***

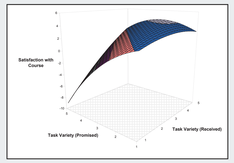

Figure 2d. ***Surface for Relating Satisfaction to Promised and Delivered Inducements for Task Variety.***

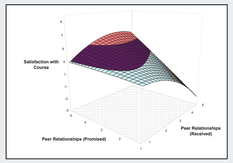

Figure 2e. ***Surface for Relating Satisfaction to Promised and Delivered Inducements for Peer Relationships.***

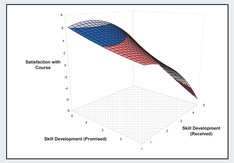

Figure 2f. ***Surface for Relating Satisfaction to Promised and Delivered Inducements for Skill Development.***

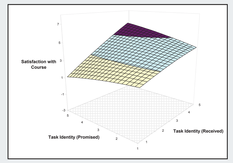

Figure 2g. ***Surface for Relating Satisfaction to Promised and Delivered Inducements for Task Identity.***

Discussion

- Our results showed that the activity did not affect the amount of psychological breach reported by respondents.
- Surprisingly, however, respondents that experienced the reciprocal interview activity were more satisfied with their classroom experience than respondents that did not experience the activity; even though they experienced equivalent amounts of psychological contract breach.
- Furthermore, our study found that the effects of psychological contract breach/fulfillment were moderated by participation in the reciprocal interview activity.
  - Psychological contract breach/fulfillment was strongly related to satisfaction for respondents that did not experience the activity and virtually unrelated to satisfaction for those respondents that did experience the activity.
- Potential explanations for moderating effect:
  - Activity models open communication and increases student comfort with the instructor (Hermann and Foster, in press), contributing to the development of a more positive psychological contract schema and affecting the types of attributions made when experiencing psychological contract breach.
  - Activity fosters open dialogue between subordinate and superior and changes the quality of the psychological contract from transactional to relational.

Limitations

- The sample may not represent the general working population, but rather university students in the classroom.
  - This, however, may have attenuated reactions to psychological contract breach and fulfillment. Consequently, we may expect to find stronger effects in samples drawn from working populations.
- The final sample of 137 students represents only 29% of the original sample surveyed. Consequently, the results we obtained may only apply to a specific subset of students.

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