
MANAGING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT: A NECESSITY FOR POSITIVE ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

Uzoma D. Nosiri

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

&

Tochukwu A. Njemanze

Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo.

Abstract

The degree of harmonious relationship between employers and employees lies on the level of fulfillment of expectations in organization. Therefore, this work critically examined the management of psychological contract in Nigeria public service. It aimed at making a justification for management of psychological contract and identifies appropriate strategies for effective management of psychological contract for positive work related outcomes in Nigerian public service. This work used the secondary source of data collection to gather information while the data were analyzed qualitatively. This research maintained that management of psychological contract is very essential for achievement of positive outcome in Nigerian Public service because psychological contract fulfillment guarantees positive or harmonious relationship (between employers and employee), trusts, job satisfaction, high commitment, achievement of organizational goals, citizenship behavior etc. And this work argued that to effectively manage psychological contract in Nigerian public service, there is need for an effective definition of expectation (during orientation), fairness and justice, effective communication, encouragement of employee involvement, building of transparency, negotiation, etc.

Keywords: Psychological Contract, Psychological Contract violation, Organisational outcomes, Nigerian Public Service.

Introduction

Contracts are ubiquitous and necessary feature of organization which serves to bind together individuals and organizations and regulate their behavior making possible the achievement of organizational goals (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994). Therefore, the level of positive relationship between employers and employees is mainly determined by fulfillment of expectations or contracts in organization.

When a person is employed in an organization, there are paper contract he / she has to sign. However, beyond the paper contract there is also another contract that is not written on paper or articulated. This unwritten expectation (which affects the perceptions and behaviours of workers) is called psychological contract. The issue of psychological contract

talks about the unwritten employees expectations of what the organization has to do and what the organization expect from the employees which serves as a powerful determinants of behaviours (DeNisi & Griffin, 2005).

The study of psychological contract has generated a lot of attention or concern in the past two decades (Uchenna, 2015). This popularity of the concept of psychological contract was as a result of the rapid changes in organization, like growth of globalization, competitiveness, restructuring, downsizing, economic recession or depression, work diversity, commercialization and privatization of public sectors etc which has led to renegotiation and amendment of employment agreement. And based on this, psychological contract have become increasingly important in helping to define the contemporary employment relationship (Turnely, Bolino, Lester & Bloodgood, 2003; Uchenna, 2015, Dhanpat & Parumasur, 2014; Akhtar & Long, 2015).

In organizational level, the concept of psychological contract can be traced to Argyris in his book called “understanding organizational behavior” in 1960. He used the concept to describe the relationship between employees and foremen in a factory (Nam & cap, n.d, Justin & Edwyn, 2012). While the person that used this concept as an analytical framework was Schein in 1965 and later modified by contemporary research by organizational Scholar Denise Rousseau in 1989 and Rousseau and Wade- Benzoni in 1994 (Armstrong, 2009; Knight & Kennedy, 2005).

Studies have shown that the existence of psychological contract fulfillment guarantees positive work-related outcomes in organizations while the violation of psychological contract has posed a threat to the success of an organization.

This work is set to critically make the case for management of psychological in Nigerian public sector for achievement of positive work-related outcomes.

Problem Statement

There has been presence of several psychological contract violations in Nigerian public sectors. As a result of the problem of economic development, fall of oil prices, corruption, privatization and commercialization of public firms, have led to downsizing, retrenchment or sacking of workers, inability of government to cater for the welfare of workers and lack of achievement of workers expectation. The failure of government to fulfill their obligations has generated a lot of negative relations between Nigerian workers (labour) and the government leading to strikes, conflict, grievances and other negative or counter work-related behaviours which posed a threat to organizational survival. (Ogbuokiri, Anyanwu & Iklaki, 2016; Nurudeen, 2016). Based on this, a question was raised: what are the justification and strategies for the management of psychological contract in Nigerian public service? This is the thrust of this research.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this work is to critically examine the management of psychological contract for achievement of positive work-related outcomes in Nigerian Public Service. Specific objectives are:

1. To make a justification for the management of psychological contract towards achieving positive work-related outcomes in Nigerian public service

2. To identify the strategies for management of psychological contract for achievement of positive work-related outcomes in Nigerian public service.

Research Questions

The research questions of this work include:

1. What are the justifications for the management of psychological contract for achievement of positive work-related outcomes in Nigerian public service?
2. What are the strategies for management of psychological contract for achievement of positive work-related outcomes in Nigerian public service?

Conceptual Clarification

a. Psychological contract: Schein (1965 as cited in Armstrong 2009) defined psychological contract as the “unwritten expectations operating at all times between every worker of an organization and the various managers and others in that organization.” He further described or stated that each employee has expectations about such things as salary or pay rate, working hours, benefits and privileges that go with a job....the organization also has more implicit, subtle expectations that the employee will enhance the image of the organization, be loyal, keep organizational secrets and do his or her best. (cited in Wellin, 2007, p.19). Rousseau (2004, p.120) defined psychological contract as “beliefs based upon promises expressed or implied, regarding an exchange agreement between an individual and in organizations, the employing firms and its agents.” Rousseau and Wade-Beneni 1994 (cited in Armstrong, 2009) see psychological contract as “beliefs that individual hold regarding promises made, accepted and relied upon between themselves and another. (In the case of organization, these parties include an employee, client, manager and/organization as a whole).”

Psychological contract is a system of beliefs that encompasses the action employees believe are expected of them and what response they expect in return from their employers and reciprocally, the actions employers believe are expected of them and what response they expect in return from their employees. (Armstrong, 2009). Griffin and Moorhead (2007, p.59) defined psychological contract as a “person’s overall set of expectations regarding what he or she will contribute to the organization and what the organization will provide in return.” A psychological contract is the set of expectation held by an employee concerning what he or she will contribute to the organization (referred to as contributions) and what the organization will provide to the employee in return (referred to as inducements) (DeNisi and Griffin, 20005). The psychological contract is a social or intangible contract that is implicit in organizational membership and it is subjective in nature because it is based on the perception or point of view of different individual or employees on what obligations the organization must fulfill (Hughes and Palmer, 2007; Ballou, 2013).

In a work place, employees expect the organization to fulfill their obligations or promises like pay, job security, benefits, promotion opportunity, challenging and satisfying job, fairness, career development, respect, recognition etc. While the organization or employers expect the workers to put more efforts, show loyalty, give their time, skills and show high competence and high performance in executing their duties, show a sense of responsibility and responsiveness, adhere to rules and regulations, show high sense of commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour etc.

b. Psychological contract violation/ breach: Psychological contract violation/ breach is seen as a situation where employees perceive there is a failure to fulfill their expectation or what they expect to get from the organization. It is the employees' perception towards organizations failure to the delivery of the obligations in psychological contract (Morrison & Robinson, 1997 as cited in Kuang-Man, 2013). The psychological contract breach/ violation is where one party in the relationship perceives another as failing to fulfill his or her promised obligations (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994 as cited in Ugwu & Ogwuche, 2013).

Theoretical framework

This work will use social exchange theory for this study.

Social exchange theory

The social exchange theory was formulated by a sociologist Goerge Homans in work referred to as "Social Behaviour as Exchange" in 1958. Followed by Peter M. Blan (1964), John Thibaut and Harold Kelley (1959) (Social Exchange theory, 2016; Social Exchange, 2003). The social exchange theory is a social psychological and sociological perspective that explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchange between parties. It holds that human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison alternatives (Social Exchange theory, 2016).

This theory believes that in every interaction or relationship between parties, must involve a norm of reciprocity where one party is expected to play its role for the benefit of other parties and vice versa. And failure of one party to fulfill its obligation may lead to disappointment, mistrust, conflict and violation of expectations or contract which will make one party to respond unfavourably or adjust its behavior or contributions.

Social exchange theory holds that obligations are generated through a series of interactions between parties who are in a state of reciprocal interdependence. And that the relationship evolves over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitments as long as the parties abide by certain rules of exchange (Ugwu & Ogwuche, 2013). This means that even though obligations make up a relationship of exchange, the norm of reciprocity is the main mechanism that binds parties to some sets of reciprocal obligations (Cheung & Chiu, 2001). An imbalance always emerges between the contributions of two parties if one party does not reciprocate (Bakewell, 2012).

The Social Exchange theory is based on certain assumptions. This include the assumptions based on human nature (individuals) and assumptions based on exchange relationships

The assumptions based on human nature (individuals) are:

1. Individual seeks to gain rewards and avoid punishment.
2. Individuals are rational being that seeks to minimize cost and maximize profits while interacting with others. And this guides their behaviors through their expectations for rewards and costs.
3. The standards that individuals (human) use to evaluate rewards and costs differ from person to person and can vary over time (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993 as cited in Social Exchange 2003, West & Turner, 2007 as cited in Social Exchange Thoery, 2016).

The assumptions based on the nature of exchange relationship are:

1. Social exchange relationship involves interdependence.
2. Social exchanges are determined by norms of reciprocity, justice and fairness.
3. Trust and Commitment result from the emergent experience of individuals within relationships and helps time and
4. The dynamics of interactions with relationships and the stability of relationships over time result from the contrasting levels of attraction and dependence experienced by the participants in the relationship (Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993 as cited in Social exchange, 2003).

In organization, when workers received several benefits from the organization, the workers will be obliged to fully contribute their own quarter for the success of the organization. The social exchange theory helps us to understand why employees are likely to alter the performance of their tasks based on the extent their perceived expectations are fulfilled which will make employees to reciprocate with a positive action (Cheung & Chu, 2001).

In applying this theory to this study, it indicated that the presence of lack of commitment, low motivation, job dissatisfaction, counter-productive/ negative work behavior of Nigerian Public Servants can be associated with the failure of the management/ government to play their role towards fulfilling the expectations of Nigeria workers. And this non fulfillment of expectations has generated a lot of conflict between the labour and government/ management. So, the relevance of this theory is to enable us to explain the consequences of violation of psychological, contract of workers and the relevance for fulfillment of psychological contract in Nigeria Public Service.

Importance/Reasons for Managing Psychological Contract in Nigerian Public Service

The management of psychological contract brings a lot benefits for the survival of any organization. Effective management of psychological contract will be necessary for achievement of positive work outcomes in Nigerian public service based on the following reasons:

1. **Harmonious Relationship:** Rousseau (2004) viewed that psychological contract is the foundation of employee and employer relationship. Also studies have identified that fulfillment of psychological contract increase the level of harmonious relationship between employers and employees (Stream, 2005; Ugwu & Ogwuche, 2013). Management of psychological contract will go a long way to solve the problem of grievances, complaints, positions, riots, demonstration, strikes, litigation, problem of cooperation and other work-related conflict. The breach of psychological contract has generated to several industrial action in Nigerian public services like: the five months strike of Nigeria universities in 2013 and the months strike of Nigerian Polytechnic. Also, the sack of 3000 health workers by Imo State government in 2016 has generated a lot of tensions between the labour and Imo government leading to the shooting of a medical Doctor (Ogbuokiri, Anyanwu & Iklaki, 2016; Nurudeen, 2016). This examples above, do not augur well for success of public service in Nigeria.

2. **Trust:** In a situation where the psychological contracts of employees are fulfilled, it will contribute to high level of trust of employee on the capability of their employers or

management to cater for their future expectations or promises made for their well-being or welfare. That is why Ballou (2013) argued that if employees perceived that they have upheld their own end of the contract but the organization has not, they are likely to feel let down and betrayed. Also studies conducted by Isci, Artan and Sisman (2011), Keith (2011), Kraft (2008) and Shahawaz and Goswami (2012) maintained that psychological contract violation contributes to decrease of employees trust on the organization. More importantly Shahawaz and Goswami study (2012) indicated that trust was more influenced by psychological contract violation in public sector than in the private sector.

3. Positive work performance: The violation or breach of psychological contract leads to poor performance or counter-productive behavior of employees (katou, 2013; Kuang-man, 2013; Onyishi & Onunkwo, 2014; Turnley, Bolino, Lester & Bloodgood, 2003; Meulen, 2010; Ballou, 2013; Hillmann, 2014; Willems, Janvier & Henderickx, 2004). In a situation employees perceived breach of their expectation (psychological contract) from their management, there is tendencies that it can lead to negative work-related behaviours like: sabotage, reduction in contributions, theft, disloyalty, reduction in citizenship behaviour and task performance. Therefore effective management of psychological contract will help to improve the performance of public servants in Nigerian public organization.

4. Job satisfaction: Studies have shown that poor management of psychological contract has generated to high level of job dissatisfaction. Therefore, psychological contract fulfillment has a link with job satisfaction (Wycliffe, 2012; Knights & Kennedy 2005; Willems, Janvier & Henderickx, 2004; Ballou, 2013; Meulen, 2010). That is why Morrison and Robinson (1997 as cited in Wycliffe, 2012) propose that when an employee perceives a discrepancy in the reciprocal promises made between the employee and the organization, their response may manifest as job dissatisfaction with resultant increase in absenteeism and turnover. The government / management needs to manage the psychological contract of public service to ensure job satisfaction.

5. Job commitment: Studies has shown that psychological contract violation has a relationship with low commitment of employees (Dhanpat & Parumasur, 2014; Joshy & Srilatha, 2011; Maycock & Amasi, 2015; Shanawaz & Goswami, 2012; Bakewell, 2012; knights & Kennedy, 2005). Therefore, the existence of psychological contract violation has a high tendency to increase the level of job turnover or turnover intention. When workers experience high rate of unfulfilled expectation in the workplace, it contributes to low attachment, disloyalty to its organization and develop the intention to quit or leave such organization if opportunity is there. So, fulfillment of psychological contract encourages high level of commitment among public servants in Nigeria (Bankole & Ajagun, 2014).

6. Motivation: The effective management of psychological contract helps to increase the level of motivation of workers (Katou, 2013) if employees perceived that their expectations have not been fulfilled, it may not only decrease their level of commitment, job satisfaction rather it will lower the morale, zeal or willingness of workers to put efforts for the achievement of organizational goal. For example, the current threat of job sack by Nigerian

government (most especially in Imo state) has reduced the morale of public servants to work effectively.

7. Productivity/achievement of organizational goals: The management of psychological contract brings high productivity in organization. Therefore, fulfillment of expectation of employees contributes or encourages achievement of organizational goals (productivity) (Katou, 2013). The existence of poor relationship between employees and employers, job dissatisfaction, mistrust, low commitment, low motivation and negative work-related behavior etc as a result of psychological contract violation, will more likely show that such organization will not achieve productivity. That is organization will find it very difficult to achieve their goals if there is a violation of psychological contract.

Strategies/Techniques of Managing Psychological Contract for Positive Work Outcomes in Nigerian Public Service.

1. Building of Transparency/ Accountability: Effective management of psychological contract requires the demonstration of transparency and accountability (Gottschalk, 2016, the Dying Art, 2014). Once the government or management is highly accountable and shows a high rate of transparency, it will help to understand the real situation on ground thereby eliminating the perceived contract violation. Furthermore, Gottschalk (2016) maintained that “an organization must strive to become transparent from the very inception of the employment relationship especially when addressing area such as future training, development and promotion.”

2. Negotiation: To avoid the issue of psychological contract violations in Nigeria public service, the government or management need to or may go into renegotiation when they realized that some promises made cannot be realistic which may be as a result of certain changes or circumstances in the country (like recessions, fall in oil price, security challenges etc). Negotiating with the labour union or other unions of Nigeria public service will help to reduce the rate of perceived violation or breach of expectations.

3. Building of Flexibility into psychological Contract: Flexibility is highly needed for management of psychological contract in Nigerian public service. Therefore organizations need to be flexible and creative when unexpected events or drastic changes cause losses for employees. This will help to reduce the likelihood that workers will feel that their psychological contract have been violated (Rousseau, 2004).

4. Clear definition of expectation during recruitment and orientation: Psychological contract can be effectively managed if the managers or organization can define and explain the responsibilities of the employees and what the organization will give in return during recruitment and orientation. As the formation of psychological contract begins from the hiring process, the organization should communicate to the hired employees on realistic expectation in order to avoid psychological contract violation (Wangithi & Muceke, 2012). Defining realistically what employees are expected to do and what they will get in return will help to prevent misunderstanding of organizational obligations to them. Ambiguously worded passages in human resource manuals and policy documents may widen the

interpretation of obligations and entitlements, creating greater potential for misunderstanding and perceived violation (Parks and Schmedemann, 1994 cited in Knight and Kennedy, 2005).

5. Fairness and Justice in Organizational Rules / Policies: There is need to ensure that the rules, policies, procedures of organization are able to achieve organizational justice and fairness. These rules must ensure justice or fairness in term of distribution of resources or rewards, decision making processes and respect to others. And any perceived inequity and injustice in the organizational rules and procedures will generate into violation or breach of psychological contract.

6. Performance Review: There is a need for a regular performance review so that employees would be given feedback on the level of their performance, and this will make employees know whether they have fulfill their own obligations to the organization before assessing if the organization has fulfill its own obligations. Wangithi and Muceke (2012) added that performance review is very important because it gives the opportunity for the employee to receive accurate feedback on their performance and dispel any false belief, that they have fulfilled their part of the psychological contract. An unrealistic self-assessment by the employee will impact on the comparison process because without accurate feedback, there is the potential for the employee to misperceive the balance between the fulfillments of their obligations against those of the organization (Morrison & Robinson cited in Knights & Kenndy, 2005, p.68; Wangithi & Muceke, 2012).

7. Effective communication: The organization must ensure adequate channels of communication in order to clearly communicate to employees on what is happening in the organization. There should be a clear and honest communication to employees which would help to reduce perceived contract violations (Gottschalk, 2016). The organization must properly explain and justify why some promises are not met. This will go a long way to make employees less likely to assume breach of obligations and expectations. It is imperative that organization should give adequate explanation and justification for unmet promises, this will make employees to retain their trust and credibility in the face of actual violation (Knight and Kennedy, 2005). Hillmann (2014) posited that “the solution for avoiding and resolving violations is communicating the mutual expectations of both parties involved.” In addition, clear and consistent communication also eliminated conjectures and helps the organization to manage the collective expectations of its employees in a supportive way (The Dying Act, 2014).

8. Employee involvement: Organizations must encourage the participation of employees in decision making process. This will give the workers a sense of belonging and be able to fully understand the reasons why some promises are not met at a particular time. Therefore, employee participation in decision making will guarantee less perceived psychological contract violation, because employees will be able to table down their needs and interest and be in better position to identify whether these needs are realizable base on a particular situation on ground. Workers must be treated as stakeholders by relying on consensus and cooperation rather than control and coercion (Armstrong, 2009).

Conclusion

The understanding of employment relationship requires the understanding of psychological contract. Therefore, the management of psychological contract is highly

necessary for achievement of positive work outcomes in any organization both public and private. This is because psychological contract fulfillment has enhanced job satisfaction, commitment, motivation, trust, positive employee-employer relationship etc in organization.

There have existed several psychological contract violation in most public organization in Nigeria (Ugwu & Ogwuche, 2013) in this contemporary times which poses a threat to organizational growth as a result of negative work related behaviours and attitudes. Based on this, there is need for the management or government to effectively manage psychological contract to reduce the rate of psychological contract violation which has the high tendency to generate mistrust, conflict, poor motivation, low commitment, job dissatisfaction, and other negative work-related behaviours.

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