

Psychological Contracts and Counterproductive Work Behaviors: Employee Responses to Transactional and Relational Breach

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Abstract

Purpose This study extends the research on counterproductive work behavior (CWB) by examining the psychological contract breaches that trigger employee CWB. Specifically, we explored the relationship between transactional and relational contract breach and five forms of CWB (abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal). Further, we considered the role of situational and individual factors that mitigate CWB engagement and examined the moderating effects of organizational policies meant to deter CWB and personality (conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability).

Design/Methodology/Approach A total of 357 employees responded to surveys of transactional and relational psychological contract breach, CWB, knowledge of organizational policies, and personality. Relationships were examined via hierarchical linear regression.

Findings Findings generally supported the notion that transactional and relational breach has differential effects on CWB. However, there was limited support for the

moderating effects of policies and individual differences on these relationships.

Implications Given the consequences of CWB for organizations and individuals, it is important for organizations to understand how transactional and relational contract breach relates to different forms of CWB. In addition, it is important to recognize the limited role that organizational policies and personality have in diminishing CWB.

Originality/Value Our contribution to this area of study is the parsing of the effects of distinct elements of the psychological contract to specific forms of CWB, so that organizations can achieve a better understanding of which aspects of the psychological contract affect CWB and implement targeted interventions.

Keywords Psychological contract · Transactional · Relational · Contract breach · Counterproductive work behavior · Organizational policies · Personality

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) are defined as voluntary acts that violate significant organizational norms and are contrary to the organization's legitimate interests (Sackett 2002). Estimates of the prevalence and costs of CWB vary greatly, depending on the specific behavior of focus. For example, Harper (1990) estimated that 33% to 75% of employees have engaged in behaviors such as theft, fraud, vandalism, sabotage, and voluntary absenteeism. Estimated costs associated with CWB are also substantial. The retail industry alone estimates employee theft to be the largest source of inventory shrinkage, accounting for \$17.6 billion in losses (Hollinger and Langton 2006).

Given the prevalence and cost of CWB, researchers have sought to understand what contributes to these behaviors, such as attitudes and traits (Douglas and

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Martinko 2001; Judge et al. 2006) and contextual variables (Ambrose et al. 2002; Robinson and O’Leary-Kelly 1998). Individual perceptions of whether an employer is meeting obligations, or beliefs about psychological contract breach, have been suggested as affecting engagement in CWB. Specifically, psychological contract breach has been linked to discretionary absenteeism (Deery et al. 2006), anticitizenship behavior (Kickul et al. 2001) and neglect of in-role job performance (Turnley and Feldman 1999). However, the relationship between psychological contract breach and CWB has not been well-examined, and too few studies of this topic were available to include in a recent meta-analysis on the effects of contract fulfillment on behavior (Zhao et al. 2007). Further, within this small body of research, only a limited range of CWB has been examined, there is lack of systematic consideration of individual differences that have been established as affecting engagement in CWB, and situational constraints on engaging in CWB have been ignored.

In this study, we expand the research on CWB and psychological contract breach in several ways. First, we distinguish the various types of CWB to provide greater insight into how employees respond to psychological contract breach. This distinction contributes practical value, providing evidence of the importance of different elements of the contract and indicating specific points of intervention to reduce CWB. Second, we provide rationale as to why different types of psychological contract breach will affect specific CWB categories. Understanding the links between types of breach and specific behaviors not only advances the theory in both the psychological contracts and the CWB literatures, but provides the process information needed to design effective interventions. Third, we examine how individual and situational factors can interact with psychological contract breach to affect different categories of CWB. While the CWB literature discusses factors such as personality characteristics and organizational policies, these factors have not been systematically examined in terms of the relationship of contract fulfillment to CWB. In the absence of policies governing CWB, it can be unclear for employees which behaviors are acceptable and which will not be tolerated (Richards and Daley 2003). As argued by Bowling and Beehr (2006), knowledge of which individual and situational factors have influence on CWB can affect organizational strategy with regard to selection and organizational policy design, as well as potentially enhance the effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce CWB.

We begin by reviewing the literature on CWB and psychological contracts. We describe how perceptions of organizational policies and employee personality affect whether psychological contract breach translates into CWB. We then present specific hypotheses relating breach

of transactional and relational aspects of psychological contracts to certain types of CWB, moderated by policy perceptions and individual personality characteristics.

Counterproductive Work Behaviors

A frequently used framework for discussing CWB is that of Fox and Spector (1999) who suggested that behaviors can be categorized around the target of the behavior: the organization (CWB-O) and other individuals (CWB-I) (see also Robinson and Bennett 1995). Two previous studies on contract breach and CWB (Bordia et al. 2008; Restubog et al. 2007) have found contract breach to relate to both CWB-O and CWB-I.

However, Berry et al. (2007) note that while this is a commonly used categorization scheme, it is not the only one in the literature. In their meta-analysis, while supporting distinctions between CWB-O and CWB-I, Berry et al. (2007) noted that various levels of specificity in describing CWB may be of use depending on the research question involved. Collapsing all CWBs into two categories may eliminate meaningful variance in predicting sub-categories of behavior. In addition, not all types of CWB necessarily have the same antecedents (Spector et al. 2006). Thus, we include five categories of CWB as defined by Spector et al. (2006): abuse against others, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal.

Psychological Contracts

The psychological contract can be defined as the *employee’s* belief regarding the mutual obligations between the employee and the employer (Rousseau 1989). When an employee perceives that the organization has failed to live up to one or more of its promises, scholars have labeled this as violation, breach, and/or low fulfillment (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Robinson and Morrison 2000; Rousseau and McLean Parks 1993).

Several theoretical frameworks have been used to explain an employee’s response to psychological contract breach. According to control theory (Carver and Scheier 1982), when employees perceive a discrepancy between what they were promised by the organization and what they received, they try to eliminate or reduce the imbalance. This theoretical rationale would suggest a specific connection between the type of breach and the type of behavioral response. Social exchange theory (Blau 1964) and resource exchange theory (Foa and Foa 1980) propose that individuals exchange resources (money, information, and services) with each other to maintain a relationship. A symmetric exchange of resources keeps the relationship

in balance. In the context of psychological contracts, individuals exchange resources (time, effort) with their employer for valued outcomes (pay, opportunities). By separating the concept of resource exchange into economic and noneconomic categories (Foa and Foa 1980), we are able to connect the theory of social exchange to two psychological contract elements: transactional and relational.

Transactional and relational contracts have been classified by MacNeil (1985) and Rousseau (1990) according to the focus, time frame, stability, scope, and tangibility of the promise. Transactional contract promises are characterized by specific, economically oriented exchanges between the employer and employee, which happen during a specific period of time (e.g., competitive wages; Rousseau 1990). Relational contract promises are characterized by open-ended noneconomic agreements focused on maintaining the long-term relationship between the employer and employee (e.g., training and development; Rousseau 1990).

Prior research has demonstrated that transactional and relational contract breach have differential relationships with a variety of outcomes. For example, relational contract breach (but not transactional breach) has been directly linked to civic virtue (Robinson and Morrison 1995) and trust (Montes and Irving 2008), whereas transactional (but not relational) breach has been directly linked to cohesion (Ho et al. 2006) and organizational citizenship behavior (Hui et al. 2004). However, previous research on psychological contracts has used composite measures of breach (Conway and Briner 2002), which combine transactional and relational elements into a single scale, and thus cannot speak to the relevancy of various contract dimensions. Moreover, Zhao et al. (2007) noted that one criticism of composite measures of breach is inadequate capturing of the content domain valued by employees. Thus, by measuring aspects of the psychological contract distinctly and by specifying links to specific forms of CWB, we hope to be able to make more accurate predictions of relations.

The theoretical rationale for engaging in CWB in response to contract breach suggests that one goal of the behavior is the restoration of equity. According to fairness theory (Folger and Cropanzano 2001), employees hold people or organizations accountable for workplace transgressions. Depending upon the source and nature of the transgression, the employee may hold different parties responsible for unfair treatment. Thus, the type of CWB will depend upon the employees' assessment of who or what is responsible for violating psychological contract promises, along with the type of exchange (economic or noneconomic) that has been violated.

The act of engaging in CWB can also serve dual goals: expressive and instrumental. Robinson and Bennett (1997) define expressive motivation as CWB that helps employees to vent frustration, release anger, or express outrage.

Instrumental motivation is driven by a desire to repair the situation, redress equity, or improve the current situation. Therefore, we propose that certain CWB will be predicted by both transactional and relational violations; yet, the underlying theoretical rationale for why the employee does so will vary depending upon the employee's desire to either restore equity or retaliate against the transgressor. Specific hypotheses regarding each form of CWB follow.

Abuse

Abuse, or making threats, comments, ignoring, or undermining coworkers or others (Spector et al. 2006), is a form of CWB. When a relational psychological contract breach is perceived, we posit that employees will engage in abusive behavior as a means of retaliating. Recent research by Montes and Irving (2008) suggests that relational contract breach is often accompanied by a lost sense of trust in the employer, as employees may begin to doubt whether the employer truly is concerned about them. Trust violations have also been theoretically and empirically linked to revenge (Bies and Tripp 1996; Buss 1961; Sommers et al. 2002). Moreover, when opportunities for belonging and meaning are thwarted, individuals act out by engaging in CWB directed at others (Thau et al. 2007). Thus, relational contract violations may provoke verbal abuse as a means of employee retaliation.

We also expect a relationship between transactional contract breach and abuse. When economic-oriented promises are violated, employees may target those responsible for inequity. Hershcovis et al. (2007) showed that distributive and procedural injustice, or fairness related to distributions of outcomes and workplace procedures, are both significantly related to supervisor- and coworker-targeted aggression, which includes making threats, nasty comments, or ignoring others. Thus, transactional breaches akin to distributive and procedural injustice may be linked to employee abuse. While the employee cannot redress the tangible loss of outcomes by verbally abusing others, they may be able to restore a sense of equity through threats and inappropriate comments to those deemed responsible for breach. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 1 Abuse is positively related to transactional and relational contract breach.

Production Deviance

We hypothesize that production deviance, or the purposeful failure to perform job tasks the way they are supposed to be done (Spector et al. 2006), is a response to relational contract breach. Lawrence and Robinson's (2007) review of the literature on power suggests there are several forms

of disparity that might lead to CWB. First, employees' feelings of reduced autonomy might lead to frustration and CWB as a means to assert autonomy and control. Second, when individuals feel threats to their desired identity and feel that they are not recognized as having valued attributes, they may engage in CWB to assert themselves. Third, when individuals feel there has been injustice in treatment, they may seek retribution. We propose that relational contract promises are seen as related to respectful treatment and individual dignity. Thus, when employees are presented with challenging work, participation in decision making, and are recognized for their accomplishments, these are viewed as appropriate treatment of others. Production deviance, which is also referred to as insubordination (Klaas and Wheeler 1990), is considered a displaced form of aggression directed at organizational targets (Neuman and Baron 1997). When relational contracts are unfulfilled, we expect employees to react by asserting themselves, regain autonomy and control, and retaliate against the organization by disobeying the boss and not following the procedures.

Hypothesis 2 Production deviance is positively related to relational contract breach.

Sabotage

Spector et al. (2006) define sabotage as actions which deface or destroy organizational property. Sabotage is “a means to redistribute outcomes to restore a state of equity that was motivated by distributive injustice” (Ambrose et al. 2002, p. 952). Thus, we predict that transactional contract breach will lead to employee sabotage, by fulfilling the instrumental motivation of redressing inequity.

Hypothesis 3 Sabotage is positively related to transactional contract breach.

Theft

When an organization fails to uphold promises related to specific, monetized elements of the psychological contract, we posit that employees will respond negatively by engaging in CWB that will restore balance in terms of what the employee believes are “owed” assets. Because the transactional contract focuses mainly on concrete, economically oriented promises, we expect that employees will engage in theft when transactional promises are unfulfilled. Prior research has established that theft is a response to the feeling of unfairly paid (Greenberg 1990), in part, because theft provides employees with the instrumental opportunity to restore balance (Greenberg and Scott 1996).

Hypothesis 4 Theft is positively related to transactional contract breach.

Withdrawal

When an employee perceives contract breach in terms of the way he/she expected to spend time on the job (i.e., workload, meaningfulness of work), restoration of balance should focus on reallocation of time. The employee will attempt to reclaim time that he/she felt should be spent differently by not engaging in work tasks, slacking, or goofing off, all of which are forms of withdrawal, defined as restricting the amount of time working to less than what is required (Spector et al. 2006). Indeed, a lack of flexible work scheduling can lead to greater work withdrawal (Baltes et al. 1999). Thus, a relational breach, which focuses on more open-ended promises regarding how employees should spend their time, will provoke withdrawal behavior.

We also propose that withdrawal will be related to transactional contract breach. Based on equity theory (Adams 1965), employees who feel that they have been shortchanged through salary, benefits, or promotions will seek to regain equity through other distributive means. Lim's (2002) focus on cyberloafing as a type of withdrawal behavior illustrates how employees perceive that they have accumulated “credits” from the work that they have completed. When employees perceive that they have been inequitably rewarded (breach of transactional promises), they “cash in” these credits and engage in withdrawal behavior by cyberloafing, or accessing the internet during work hours to perform nonwork tasks, thereby limiting the amount of time they actually spend on work tasks. Thus, in the mind of the employee, the reduction in time spent working on the job is an even exchange for fewer economic outcomes. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 5 Withdrawal is positively related to transactional and relational contract breach.

Situational Factor: Organizational Policies

As mentioned at the start of this article, the interaction of situational factors such as organizational policies with contract breach has not been extensively researched; yet, organizations routinely use human resource policies as a method of influencing behavior. It is rare to find an employer who does not have specific policies regarding theft, drug and alcohol use, or appropriate ways of handling money or inventory, yet their effectiveness is not always supported. Retail organizations that had formal anti-theft policies had fewer employees steal than those

without (Parilla et al. 1988), but this relationship did not extend to hospitals or manufacturing settings, where employees were older and less transient. While there is a general negative relationship between absenteeism policies and absenteeism, some policies can actually encourage absenteeism (Harrison and Martocchio 1998). Hence, the research on organizational CWB-related policies has not always indicated the effects on CWB, and in some cases, the effects may be opposite to what was expected.

When an employee perceives psychological contract breach, organizational policies on acceptable behavior may be needed to prevent CWB. Theoretically, the study by Rosse and Hulin (1985) and Rosse and Miller (2000) on employee adaptation to dissatisfaction in the workplace proposes that when the opportunity to withdraw or engage in other forms of CWB is constrained by the environment, employees may select a more adaptive response. When employees feel their organization has failed to live up to promises and breached the psychological contract (dissatisfaction), the tendency to act on that breach through CWB will be influenced by the existence of policies (environmental constraint) meant to deter such behavior. Indeed, Parilla et al. (1988) found that a formal antitheft policy was related to lower theft rates in retail organizations. Further support is provided by research demonstrating that those who perceive that they are unlikely to be caught are more likely to engage in theft at work, as are those who perceive little severity in management's response to CWB (Hollinger and Clark 1983). Hence:

Hypothesis 6 The relationship between contract breach and CWB will be moderated by the awareness of policies to deter CWB such that the relationship will be more strongly negative when awareness is high.

Individual Factors: Personality

While some researchers have suggested that personality factors may not be a strong determinant of engagement in CWB (Robinson and Greenberg 1998), others have shown support for individual differences in likelihood of engagement (Douglas and Martinko 2001; Lee and Allen 2002), and considerable attention has been given to the role of personality in predicting CWB. For example, Berry et al. (2007) meta-analyzed the relationships between the Big Five personality dimensions and CWB and found the strongest relationships between CWB and agreeableness (being likable and friendly; $\rho = -.44$), conscientiousness (hard working, dependable, and detail oriented; $\rho = -.35$), and emotional stability (low anxiety, calmness, and low emotionality; $\rho = -.26$). Personality variables have

also been related to psychological contract breach. Raja et al. (2004) found that neuroticism was positively related to perceived breach, and conscientiousness was negatively related to perceived breach. Orvis et al. (2008) found that conscientiousness moderated the relationship between contract breach and organizational loyalty, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and job performance. Finally, Zhao et al. (2007) specifically suggested that agreeable individuals should be more forgiving of unfulfilled promises.

Thus, while personality characteristics have previously been linked to both CWB and perceptions of contract fulfillment, researchers have not examined both personality indicators and contract fulfillment together in predicting CWB engagement. As the focus of this study is on when individuals choose *not* to act on a perceived contract breach, we hypothesize that even when an employee perceives that a promise has been broken, personality traits linked to lower CWB engagement will deter an individual from acting out. This rationale is supported by Folger and Skarlicki's (1998) popcorn model of aggression, whereby situational factors such as injustice (or in our case, contract breach), provoke employees to "overheat" and react negatively. However, not all employees will "pop" immediately in response to violations; rather, people's reactions will be tempered by their personality (e.g., high conscientiousness, agreeableness, or emotional stability). Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 7 The proposed relationships between contract breach and CWB will be moderated by conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability such that the relationships will be more strongly negative when individuals are high in these characteristics.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Currently employed undergraduate students ($N = 357$) from a large Midwestern university received partial course credit for their participation. All participants were employed part-time (fewer than 35 hours per week; U.S. Department of Labor 2007). Participants were between the ages 18 and 35 ($M = 20.1$), the majority were female (80%), and Caucasians were the largest racial group (48%). Employees worked on average 14.2 h per week ($SD = 8.4$). Sixty-five percent of the employees had been employed at their current organization for more than 6 months. Respondents were employed in the food (30%), service (28%), retail (18%), manufacturing (1%), and other (23%) industries.

Measures

Psychological Contract Breach

The measure of psychological contract breach referenced promises made by the organization, as opposed to expectations or obligations, since recent research has called into question the interchangeability of these related constructs (Roehling 2008). By focusing on promises, we sought to capture employee beliefs about *actual* employer commitments as opposed to what employees believed employers generally *ought* to do. Participants were provided with 26 types of organizational promises (e.g., meaningful work, participation in decision making, pay, and benefits) from Kickul et al. (2001) and were asked to indicate whether or not the promise had been made. If the promise was made, the employee was then asked to indicate how much it had been fulfilled (1–5 Likert scale, 1 = not at all fulfilled, 5 = very fulfilled). Low fulfillment is equated with psychological contract breach (Morrison and Robinson 1997, 2000; Rousseau and McLean Parks 1993), and thus, we reversed scored all items so that higher scores indicated contract breach.

Drawing on the work of Montes and Irving (2008), Robinson and Morrison (1995), and Rousseau (1990), items were sorted by two of the authors (88% agreement) into transactional versus relational contract dimensions. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Following the overall scoring procedures described by Kickul et al. (2001), the transactional and relational contract score for each employee was created by taking the mean breach ratings for the transactional items promised and the mean breach ratings for the relational items promised, respectively. In order to calculate the internal consistency of the scales, a pairwise correlation matrix was used because employees rated only those promises that had been made to them. Information from the correlation matrix was used to calculate coefficient alpha for each scale (transactional psychological contract scale; 9 items, $\alpha = .85$; relational scale, 17 items, $\alpha = .90$).¹ A composite scale of all psychological contract items was also created (26 items, $\alpha = .93$).

CWB

Participants responded to an 88-item self-report CWB scale (derived from Ryan et al. 1997). While some may question the validity and reliability of a self-report CWB measure, Ashton (1998) argues that employees are more aware of their own misbehavior, perhaps, more so than their supervisor because many CWB are performed in a private or unobservable manner. Given that this data were collected

confidentially, there was reduced pressure for dishonest responding. Further, Berry et al. (2007) found that validities of predictors of CWB using self-report measures correlated .89 with those using nonself-reports and Fox et al. (2007) found significant convergence in self- and other reports of CWB-I. Items asked respondents to rate the extent to which they engaged in CWB. Items were rated on an 8-point scale with 1 = never, 7 = daily, and 8 = not applicable (e.g., abusing an employee discount would not be applicable where one does not exist). When computing scales, all the items with a response of “not applicable” were coded as missing.

Following the framework, definitions, and example items from Spector et al. (2006), items were sorted by two of the authors (97% agreement) into five categories: abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Seven items from Ryan et al. (1997) were excluded as they focused more on dishonest than counterproductive behavior. A confirmatory factor analysis of the remaining items was conducted on a 5-factor model of CWB using AMOS 6.0 (Arbuckle 2005). Using procedures described in Fitzgerald et al. (1997), four to five manifest indicators were created for each latent construct. Items were assigned to the indicators using an item parceling strategy designed to distribute variance based on classical test theory and item content and the latent constructs were correlated. A review of the fit indices indicated that the data fit the model moderately well (CMIN (X^2) = 595.5, $df = 199$, NFI = .86, CFI = .90, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .073). Compared to a model with 1 overall factor, (CMIN (X^2) = 1380.9, $df = 209$, NFI = .67, CFI = .70, TLI = .63, RMSEA = .122), or 2 correlated factors (CWB-O and CWB-I, CMIN (X^2) = 1023.9, $df = 208$, NFI = .75, CFI = .79, TLI = .74, RMSEA = .102), a 5-factor model provided superior fit. This resulted in five CWB scales with coefficients alpha comparable or higher than those reported by Spector et al. (2006): abuse (15 items, $\alpha = .88$), production deviance (7 items, $\alpha = .70$), sabotage (7 items, $\alpha = .55$), theft (35 items, $\alpha = .85$), and withdrawal (17 items, $\alpha = .88$) (see Footnote 1). Owing to the low reliability of the sabotage scale, we explored whether dropping sabotage from the CWB measurement model would provide a better fitting solution. A review of the fit indices from a 4-factor correlated model of CWB indicated improved fit (CMIN (X^2) = 378.3, $df = 129$, NFI = .90, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .072). Thus, we dropped the sabotage scale from further analysis.

Organizational Policies

The organizational policies measure, derived from Ryan et al. (1997), contained 59 items. Items asked respondents

¹ Items are available from the authors upon request.

to rate their knowledge of organizational policies and procedures governing workplace behavior related to CWB. Items were rated on a 1–6 scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree, and 6 = not applicable. For the purpose of creating scales, all the items with a response of “not applicable” were coded as missing.

Principal components analysis with varimax rotation of the data was conducted. After reviewing the scree plot and factor matrix, three subscales were retained to reference policies regarding (a) employee accountability (18 items, $\alpha = .83$, 17.41% of variance explained), (b) employee monitoring and access (17 items, $\alpha = .69$; 11.90% of variance explained), and (c) preventive theft policies (14 items, $\alpha = .73$, 6.91% of variance explained) (see Footnote 1). Nine items from Ryan et al.’s (1997) original scale were not included in the final measures of policies because they failed to load on a single subscale, and one item was removed because it is illegal in most instances (new employees are given a lie-detector test before being hired).

Individual Differences

Employees responded to the Wonderlic Productivity Index (WPI; Barrick et al. 2003), a 90-item questionnaire based on the 5-factor model of personality. We considered responses to measures of conscientiousness ($\alpha = .88$), agreeableness ($\alpha = .87$), and emotional stability ($\alpha = .88$). These scales have demonstrated acceptable levels of validity in predicting performance and CWB (Barrick et al. 2003). We also used the WPI impression management accuracy index, which captures the potential that the participant was responding in a socially desirable manner, to control possible method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

Each participant was also asked to give survey materials to their immediate supervisor. Participants whose supervisor responded to the survey earned additional course credit, while all supervisors who responded were entered into a drawing for a gift certificate to a local restaurant. Employee participants were assured that all the questions asked about their supervisor would be for information about the organization as a whole, and not about individual employees. A total of 55 supervisors responded to the survey. Almost all (92%) had held their supervisory role for over 6 months. Supervisors were employed in the food (26%), service (31%), retail (9%), and other industries (34%) and responded to the same set of organizational policy questions as did the employees. We refer to supervisory responses as reports of the *existence* of organizational policies related to employee accountability ($\alpha = .82$), monitoring/access ($\alpha = .74$), and preventive theft ($\alpha = .77$). These data were matched to employee survey responses.

Results

Table 1 provides the means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables.

Hierarchical linear regression was used to examine all hypotheses, and all predictors were centered prior to analysis. Impression management was entered in Step 1, followed by the two psychological contract dimensions in Step 2. As there is some agreement that employees’ psychological contracts contain both transactional and relational elements (Montes and Irving 2008), we entered both dimensions in the analysis for parsimony even when we did not predict a relationship for both elements. The relevant policy dimension or personality characteristic (per the hypotheses) was entered in Step 3, and the relevant interaction between contract dimension and policy/personality was then entered in Step 4. For all significant interactions, we followed the guidelines provided by Aiken and West (1991) and plotted the relationship using values of psychological contract breach and the relevant policy or personality dimension, one standard deviation above and below the mean.

The bivariate correlations between the variables of interest indicate significant positive relationships between psychological contract breach and all forms of CWB, consistent with several of our hypotheses. Fewer significant correlations were observed between policy existence and CWB; emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness demonstrated significant negative relationships with almost all forms of CWB.

Contract Breach and CWB

For hypotheses 1–5, results are presented in Table 2.

Abuse

We hypothesized that abuse would be positively related to both transactional and relational contract breach (Hypothesis 1). Results revealed a significant relationship between transactional contract breach ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) and relational contract breach ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$) and abuse (Step $\Delta R^2 = .09$); as such Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Production Deviance

Hypothesis 2 proposed a positive relationship between production deviance and relational contract breach. A significant positive relationship existed between relational breach and production deviance ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$, $\Delta R^2 = .08$), providing support for Hypothesis 2.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations of experimental variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Transactional PC breach	1.81	.74	(.85)													
2. Relational PC breach	1.82	.58	.61	(.90)												
3. Composite PC breach	1.83	.57	.78	.97	(.93)											
4. Impression management	2.55	.45	-.03	-.03	-.03											
5. Conscientiousness	3.66	.47	-.14	-.28	-.27	.22	(.88)									
6. Agreeableness	3.75	.49	-.11	-.28	-.25	.13	.47	(.87)								
7. Emotional stability	3.29	.49	-.08	-.19	-.17	.26	.44	.41	(.88)							
8. Employee accountability policies	3.58	.60	-.12	-.17	-.17	.00	.19	.24	.09	(.83)						
9. Employee monitoring/access policies	2.75	.64	-.01	-.04	-.03	.14	.06	.07	.09	.45	(.69)					
10. Preventive theft policies	2.46	.62	.01	.05	.05	.15	-.05	-.05	.06	.30	.51	(.73)				
11. Abuse	1.86	.90	.26	.29	.30	-.27	-.29	-.15	-.20	-.02	-.09	-.04	(.88)			
12. Production deviance	1.68	.78	.25	.28	.28	-.34	-.38	-.16	-.27	-.06	-.12	-.07	.66	(.70)		
13. Theft	1.36	.45	.12	.15	.14	-.16	-.28	-.10	-.15	-.05	-.03	.02	.41	.50	(.85)	
14. Withdrawal	2.62	1.06	.14	.20	.19	-.38	-.42	-.09	-.33	-.04	-.13	-.08	.56	.63	.53	(.88)

Note: $N = 357$. $r \geq .10$ $p < .05$; $r \geq .14$ $p < .01$. Coefficients alpha are in parentheses along the diagonal

PC psychological contract

Sabotage

As the sabotage scale was dropped from the analysis, Hypothesis 3 could not be tested.

Theft

Hypothesis 4 predicted a positive relationship between theft and transactional contract breach. Results revealed a nonsignificant relationship between theft and transactional breach ($\beta = .03$, $p = ns$), and Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Withdrawal

We hypothesized that withdrawal would be positively related to both transactional and relational contract breach (Hypothesis 5). Results revealed a significant relationship between withdrawal and relational contract breach ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$), but not transactional contract breach ($\beta = .02$, $p = ns$); as such Hypothesis 5 was partially supported.

Supplemental Analyses

One premise of this study was that parsing the effects of psychological contract breach into transactional and relational elements would allow for more accurate predictions than a measure of composite breach. After controlling for impression management, we observed significant, positive relationships between composite contract breach and all four outcomes: abuse ($\beta = .28$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .08$), production deviance ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .07$), theft ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$), and withdrawal ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .03$). We note several important differences between the findings related to our hypothesized relationships and the findings for composite breach. Production deviance and withdrawal were significantly related only to relational contract breach, not transactional breach. The effect linking composite breach to these two forms of CWB is largely driven by the relational elements of the psychological contract. Examining only composite breach would have failed to reveal that breach of the transactional contract had no effect on production deviance or withdrawal. We also note the under prediction of theft, which did not display significant relationships with either transactional or relational breach independently, yet was positively related to composite breach, suggesting that perhaps theft requires a combination of violations to occur.

Policy Moderators

We hypothesized that the main effect relationships between contract breach and CWB would be moderated by

Table 2 Regression results for transactional and relational contract breach on CWB with policy awareness moderators

Variable	Abuse		Production deviance		Theft		Withdrawal	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Step 1		.07**		.12**		.02**		.15**
Impression management	-.27**		-.34**		-.14**		-.39**	
Step 2		.09**		.08**		.02*		.03**
Transactional PC breach	.12*		.12		.03		.02	
Relational PC breach	.21**		.20**		.12		.17**	
Step 3		.01		.01		.00		.01
Employee accountability	.06		.02		-.04		.03	
Employee monitoring/access	-.08		-.09		.00		-.09	
Preventive theft	.00		.00		.07		.00	
Step 4		.04**		.02*		.01		.05**
Transactional \times employee accountability	.15*				-.07		.10	
Transactional \times employee monitoring/access	-.01				.08		-.08	
Transactional \times preventive theft	.00				-.03		.04	
Relational \times employee accountability	.09		.11				.10	
Relational \times employee monitoring/access	-.02		.09				.18*	
Relational \times preventive theft	-.08		-.13*				-.13	

Note: $N = 357$. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

PC psychological contract

employee awareness of policies designed to deter CWB. We observed three significant interactions (Table 2). Transactional contract breach interacted with employee awareness of accountability policies ($\beta = .15, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .04$) to predict abuse (Fig. 1). When employees experienced greater transactional breach, high awareness of accountability policies was related to higher levels of abuse. Thus, awareness of policies did not mitigate CWB engagement.

Relational contract breach interacted with awareness of preventive theft policies ($\beta = -.13, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .02$) to predict production deviance (Fig. 2a). Relational breach, in combination with high awareness of preventive theft policies, was related to less production deviance, which was consistent with our hypothesis. Relational contract breach also interacted with awareness of monitoring/access policies ($\beta = .18, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .05$) to predict withdrawal

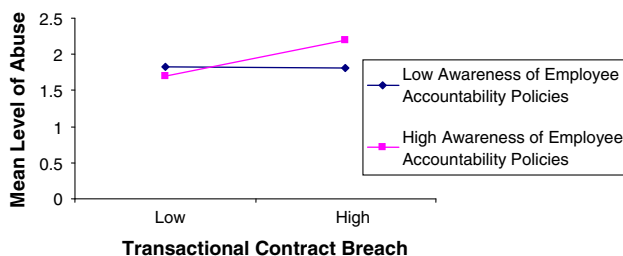


Fig. 1 Relationship between transactional contract breach, awareness of employee accountability policies, and abuse

(Fig. 2b). However, only when relational breach was low, did high awareness of monitoring/access policies relate to less withdrawal. Overall, the results for Hypothesis 6 show little support.

Supervisory Data

In order to see whether the supervisory reports on the existence of organizational policies moderated the relationship between psychological contract breach and CWB in the same way as employee reports of their knowledge of organizational policies, we tested for the interaction of psychological contract dimension (employee report), policy existence (supervisory report), and CWB (employee report) for the 55 cases for which we had matched employee-supervisory data. Two of these relationships were significant, each related to relational contract breach and preventive theft policies. Relational contract breach interacted with the existence of preventive theft policies to predict abuse ($\beta = -.45, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .16$) and production deviance ($\beta = -.32, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .07$). These interactions revealed mixed support for Hypothesis 6. When preventive theft policies existed and employees experienced relational breach, employees engaged in less abuse. However, the relationship with production deviance demonstrated that the level of production deviance was less when breach was low, and policy existence was weak, which was contrary to our hypothesis. Thus, when breach was low, the existence of policies exacerbated CWB

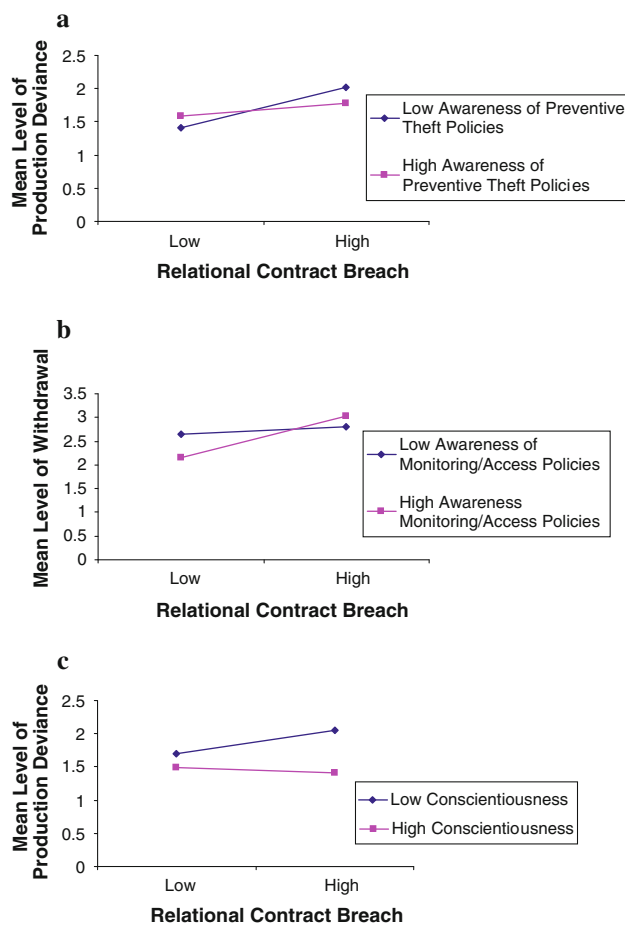


Fig. 2 **a** Relationship between relational contract breach, awareness of preventive theft policies, and production deviance. **b** Relationship between relational contract breach, awareness of employee monitoring/access policies, and withdrawal. **c** Relationship between relational contract breach, conscientiousness, and production deviance

engagement. While only a small sample, the supervisor data lend little support to the role of policies in diminishing CWB.

Personality Moderators

We hypothesized that the main effect relationships between contract breach and CWB would be moderated by employee personality. We observed two significant interactions (Table 3). Transactional contract breach interacted with agreeableness ($\beta = .15, p < .05, \Delta R^2 = .02$) to predict abuse (form similar to Fig. 1). Transactional contract breach, along with high agreeableness, related to greater employee abuse. Relational contract breach interacted with conscientiousness to predict production deviance ($\beta = -.20, p < .01, \Delta R^2 = .03$; Fig. 2c). Highly conscientious employees who experienced relational contract breach also engaged in less production deviance. Overall, however, results for Hypothesis 7 show little support for the moderating effects of personality.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the conditions under which employees may engage in CWB following perceptions of psychological contract breach. We found support for the relationship between relational breach and abuse, production deviance, and withdrawal, and for transactional breach and abuse. The policies that organizations used to control and influence employees had minimal influence on employees' behavior when employment expectations were breached. To date, much of the research

Table 3 Regression results for transactional and relational contract breach on CWB with personality moderators

Variable	Abuse		Production deviance		Theft		Withdrawal	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Step 3		.03**		.07**		.05**		.11**
Conscientiousness	-.19**		-.27**		-.26**		-.30**	
Agreeableness	.04		.08		.06		.07	
Emotional stability	-.05		-.09		-.03		-.14**	
Step 4		.02		.03**		.01		.01
Transactional \times conscientiousness	-.05				-.05		.11	
Transactional \times agreeableness	.15*				-.09		-.05	
Transactional \times emotional stability	-.04				.10		.03	
Relational \times conscientiousness	-.01		-.20**				-.12	
Relational \times agreeableness	-.11		.10				.08	
Relational \times emotional stability	-.03		.02				.01	

Note: $N = 357$. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. The results for Steps 1 and 2 are identical to Table 2

on contract breach and CWB has ignored this relevant contextual factor. We also found that personality factors had little influence on the contract breach and CWB relationship, suggesting that individual characteristics play a small role in how employees react to breach.

One contribution of this study was to examine how breach of aspects of the psychological contract related to specific types of CWB, keeping with the notion that engagement in CWB is an attempt to restore balance. Of the four hypotheses tested linking specific contract breaches to types of CWB, we found support for the relationship between relational contract breach and abuse, production deviance, and withdrawal. We also observed a significant relationship between transactional breach and CWB (abuse). Our findings lend some support to the notion that one needs to look at the specific nature of violations and the specific type of CWB in attempts to understand when employees will respond to contract breach with unique CWB.

Future research on the relationship between elements of psychological contract breach and CWB should consider the explanatory mechanism by which breach leads to CWB. We offered the explanation that employees respond because they perceive inequitable exchange and are motivated to restore balance or redress inequity. Further, we drew on Robinson and Bennett's (1997) model of workplace deviance to suggest that CWB may be driven by an instrumental motivation to resolve disparity or inequity. Specifically measuring employee justice perceptions would better articulate this perspective. However, Rosse and Miller (2000) would also argue that the reason employees engage in CWB is due to increased negative affect in response to contract breach. This is similar to the expressive motivation also discussed by Robinson and Bennett (1997) who propose that employees are driven to CWB because of anger, frustration, or anxiety. Thus, a measure of employee affect would enable examination of this possible mediator.

Our findings show little support for the general hypothesis that awareness of organizational policies can temper the relationship between breach of the psychological contract and CWB. Transactional contract breach, in concert with high awareness of accountability policies, related to greater employee abuse. Overall, these results illustrate that policies detailing accountability and monitoring procedures may not be effective in deterring undesirable behavior. High awareness of preventive theft policies related to less production deviance when employees also perceived relational breach; yet, this relationship showed unexpected effects when considering supervisory reports of policy existence. Many of the other hypothesized interactions were not significant; suggesting that policy awareness or existence has no effect on CWB.

Employees may be aware of policies, but without sanctions or better monitoring of employee behavior, policy awareness in isolation may do little to deter CWB. It is also possible that organizations enact policies to deter CWB when there is already a significant problem with employee misbehavior. Thus, those interactions indicating that policy existence relates to greater CWB may simply be reflective of this: where there is greater CWB taking place, policies are enacted to deter such behavior. Moreover, it is possible that policies which make employees feel as though they are always being monitored may communicate mistrust. Rather than diminishing CWB, these policies may relate to increased misbehavior, particularly when employees feel that the organization has no long-term interest in the employment relationship. Future research examining the relationship between policy awareness, existence, and the conditions under which policies are effective should focus on these differential relationships while striving to capture policy existence in a more robust supervisory sample.

Future research should also expand examination of policies to focus more on policies designed to deter interpersonal CWB, including a code of civility and policies on harassment on all forms of interpersonal CWB. Two recent meta-analyses (Bowling and Beehr 2006; Herscovis et al. 2007) illustrate the pervasive negative effects associated with interpersonal aggression in the workplace, especially for victims of this behavior. As organizations wish to deter negative interpersonal interactions, it is important to understand the extent to which interpersonal CWB policies exist, what forms they take, and their overall effectiveness.

Consistent with previous research, we also examined the effects of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability on CWB directed toward the organization and others. We replicated previous findings regarding these relationships (i.e., 11 out of 12 correlations were significant, see Table 1). Going beyond this work, we considered how these individual differences would interact with employee beliefs about their psychological contract. Conscientiousness did moderate the relationship between relational contract breach and production deviance, although it did not affect the transactional contract breach—CWB relationship.

As Zhao et al. (2007) suggested, agreeableness was a moderating factor in the relationship between transactional contract breach and abuse. However, the effect was in the opposite direction than expected: more agreeable individuals were more likely to react out in response to transactional contract violation. Of the three individual differences, agreeableness was the most weakly related to all three forms of CWB; therefore, in future studies, it may be worthwhile to examine the facets of agreeableness, which

relate to contract fulfillment and CWB, in particular consideration and cooperation, to more fully understand the role that agreeableness plays in the prediction of negative workplace behavior.

Emotional stability was negatively related to relational contract breach and negatively related to all 4 forms of CWB, but it did not moderate the relationship between either aspect of psychological contract breach and CWB. This suggests that those who are low in emotional stability are not more likely to act on contract breach than those who are more stable, although they are more likely to engage in CWB in general and more likely to see contracts as unfulfilled.

While the statistical effects we uncovered are small, the effect sizes are comparable to research examining the relationship between psychological contract (Kickul et al. 2001), policies (Truxillo et al. 2002), and personality (Colbert et al. 2004) with CWB. Given the costs associated with CWB, even small effects can be of value to organizations wishing to reduce the consequences associated with CWB. Our contribution to this area of study is parsing these effects, so that organizations can achieve a better understanding of which aspects of the psychological contract affect CWB and implement more targeted interventions.

Limitations

A limitation with our study concerns collecting data on psychological contract and CWB from the same source. In an effort to address common method bias, we controlled for impression management. As our data were cross-sectional, we could not assess causality. Concerning the validity of our self-report measures, Berry et al.'s (2007) evidence suggests that self-report CWB data do possess reasonable validity. In our experimental procedures, all the respondents were assured that their responses would be kept strictly confidential, giving them little incentive to respond in a socially desirable way. Indeed, the range in responding for these behaviors indicates that individuals were willing to admit to CWB.

The nature of our sample may limit the generalizability of our findings because those working in part-time, transitory positions may not hold high expectations regarding promises from the organization nor may they be highly identified with their job. We were not able to directly test whether there were differences within this sample for employees who may have had a longer versus shorter term commitment to remain with their organization. As part-time, transitory employees comprise a large percentage of workers in the food service and retail industries where CWB is a significant problem; this sample is still a useful one to examine.

Conclusion

Recognizing the expense and effort required for organizations to police and manage CWB, this study was designed to illustrate the elements of the psychological contract affecting employee CWB, and the personal and contextual factors that mitigate negative reactions to psychological contract breach. The results of this study contribute to the academic literature on psychological contracts, CWB, and moderators of this relationship and provide insight for organizations on the relationship between contract breach, negative behavior, and the conditions under which employees are likely to engage in CWB. Our results indicate that researchers who wish to investigate contract breach and CWB need to consider psychological contracts and CWB from a component rather than global perspective, and that more research is needed on the moderating role of situational (policies) and individual (personality) variables, given their implications for CWB prevention.

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