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Psychological Contract and Employee Performance in the Construction Industry in South East Nigeria

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Abstract:

Background: Changes in the work place as a result of globalization of markets, technology and business restructuring have affected relationships in the workplace. This has challenged the erstwhile trust relationship between employers and employees. The traditional psychological contract that allowed for trust and loyalty leading to job security and stability of the job holder has given way to situations where employees now have the responsibility for their career advancement. The construction industry is one of the industries where the effect of this being felt due to the labour intensive nature and the use of various flexible job arrangements. The study thus investigated the relationship between psychological contract and employee performance in the construction industry in South East Nigeria.

Research Methods: The study adopted a survey method using self-structured questionnaire. A total of 274 copies of questionnaire were distributed to employees of the construction companies studied and 220 were validly completed and returned. The validity of the survey instrument was done and reliability conducted using Cronbach alpha. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient.

Results: Pearson correlation coefficient result showed $r = 0.031$. This means that the relationship between the variables is not significant. It can therefore be said from this study that psychological contract

Keywords: Psychological Contract, Employee Performance, Relational Contract, Organisational Citizenship Behaviour, Construction Industry

1. Introduction

Psychological Contract (PC) is viewed as solid agreements beyond the written contract specifying the contributions, expectations, beliefs, promises, and obligations between organisations and their employees (Chaubey & Bisk, 2016). This therefore is very fundamental in the construction and development of individual careers and those of the organisation and society (Baruch & Rousseau, 2018). Though unwritten and defined by an individual's perception, PC is believed to regulate the attitudes and behaviours of employees in the workplace. It has been acclaimed to provide a veritable means of understanding job attitudes and work behaviours.

Every employment relationship is governed by contractual and non-contractual agreements. While the former is the formal employment contract that is written, the later represents those beliefs, expectations and obligations that are not contained in the formal contract and yet regulate the conduct of parties to the employment relationship (Ke, Davies & Jefferies, 2016). The authors asserted that PC provides scope for creativity, innovation and a feeling of long term impact on the environment. The role of PC in the attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of employees with the attendant impact on the organisation itself has attracted the interest of researchers in recent times. Raiden, Dainty, and Neale, (2006) averred that understanding and meeting PC expectations is very essential to the success of any organisation and failure to meet individual employee expectations may result in a breach or violation and a possible breakdown in the employment relationship.

Organisations strive to adopt a good employee relations strategy that ensures that employees are treated very well to guarantee improved performance. These expectations include monetary such as salaries, benefits, training, promotions and other entitlements, and socio-emotional benefits like being treated well, given a voice in decision making, strong communication and so on. Literature has suggested that a convergence of these expectations is necessary for a healthy relationship however; this is not always the case. When employees feel that the balance is not maintained, it results in a feeling of breach leading to counterproductive behaviours that have negative effects on performance.

Contrarily, met expectations lead to good feelings resulting in commitment, Organisational citizenship behaviours and employee satisfaction.

In an era of complex and ever changing business environment, employment relations in the construction industry have suffered severely due largely to pressure of globalization and liberalization. Employees have become dynamic in their expectations from their employers while employers in their bid to respond to the challenges of globalization and other pressures have adopted several restructuring exercises that have greatly altered the employment relationship. There is so to speak, a shift in the traditional contract that allows for long term job security, loyalty and trust to the contemporary practice that motivates employees to manage their careers with the attendant attitudinal and behavioural consequences. Another feature of this present situation is the increased use of temporary and contract workers in the industry. This flexible work arrangement is said to harm relations especially as permanent workers view it as a violation of their psychological contract. Other effects are the loss of trust, loyalty, job security and organisational commitment. Research has shown that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are strong determinants of job security while the continued use of temporary and contract workers in the industry affect the psychological contract of employees.

Globalization, market forces and corporate responses have resulted in the shifting of responsibility for career development from the firm to workers resulting in individualized career management. These corporate responses in the construction industry include downsizing of the workforce, adoption of flexible work arrangements such as casualization, contracting, temporary work arrangements, subcontracting and so on. As a result, the industry now experiences high employee turnover, low morale, burnout and low commitment which of course affect employment relations in the industry and also impinge on employee performance. Many companies in the industry engage workers when the business climate is good and there are ongoing projects only to lay them off when there is a lull. This approach by employers in the industry is detrimental to employer-employee relationship which is critical for industrial harmony and organisational growth and development.

Psychological contract breach has been linked with counterproductive attitudes and behaviours by employees as a response to perceived failure of employers to deliver on their promises. Nektaria (2001) inferred that other responses include reduced commitment to the organisation, decrease in trust in the employer, reduction in output, and withdrawing organisational citizenship behaviour.

In summary failure to fulfill commitments by employers leads to the modification of attitudes and behaviours which ultimately affect performance. In an industry like the construction industry with its significant contributions to the economy of the nation and a key employer of labour, such responses will rub off badly on the performance of the industry and the extension the economy. The broad objective of the study is to examine the relationship between psychological contract and employee performance. Specifically it focused on the relationship between relational psychological contract and Organisational citizenship behaviour.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological Contract

Psychological contract (PC) has been described as the summary of expectations of an employee that emerges from a social exchange relationship with an employer where each party's action is reciprocated in order to engender harmony in the organisation. Unlike the formal employment contract, psychological contract is subjective, unwritten and perceptive in nature. The fact that psychological contract depends on the cognitive ability of the employee implies that there must be differences in the content of psychological contract. These differences are responsible for the dynamic nature of psychological contract as it is influenced by so many factors. Psychological contract literature has identified two major types, namely; transactional and relational contracts (Rousseau, 1995; Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994). Discussing the nature of contemporary employment relationship, Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994) identified time frame and performance requirements as the two major employment conditions that determine the type of contract employees get. Time frame refers to duration (short-term or long term) while performance requirements refers to the degree of specificity of the employment conditions (well specified or weakly specified).

Relational theory of contract popularized by Ian MacNeil posits that parties to a contract develop a relationship that incorporates planning, trust and solidarity that go beyond the original document through interpersonal relationship (Bird, 2005). This involves broad, long term obligations in the exchange of socio-emotional elements like trust and commitment. Relational contract involves offer of loyalty and commitment by employees to the organisation in exchange for security and longer career in the employment relationship. This type of contract is essentially controlled by the employer. Relational obligations involve the exchange of socio-emotional resources with open time frame, unwritten, dynamic, pervasive and generally subjective in nature (Aselage & Eisenberger 2003, Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994) Bird (2005) affirmed that relational contract has the following characteristics:

- The relationship spans over a significant period of time,
- Has substantial open terms and reserved discretion,
- Expects future cooperative behaviour,
- Benefits and burdens are shared,
- Capital investments are made to sustain the contract in terms of training, personal and career development, job security and so on.
- Relationship is characterized by interdependence and altruism leading to parties forging bonds of friendship.
- Provisions are made for resolving trouble that may arise in the normal course of transaction.

- The relationship gains interdependent value apart from exchange.

Rogozinska-Pawelczyk (2012) recommended the following in-house conditions for relational psychological contract to exist.

- A formalized system of vertical and horizontal promotions,
- A large number of employees with long years of service in the organisation,
- Full time and long-term employment, and
- A weak or non-existent external competitive environment.

In summary, relational contract contains both tangible and intangible exchanges that are open-ended and dynamic in nature with broad scope that has implications on individual's work and personal life.

2.2. Organisational Citizenship Behaviour

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is often confused with the related constructs like extra-role behaviour, pro-social Organisational behaviour, civic Organisational behaviour, Organisational spontaneity and contextual performance. Though these constructs are related, there exist some basic differences too (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000). This study however is not to spot the similarities and differences among the constructs but had to be mentioned to help in properly situating the discourse on Organisational citizenship behaviour. Organ (1988) defined Organisational citizenship behaviour as an individual's discretionary behaviour that is not usually recognized by the reward system, but which on aggregate enhance the effectiveness of the organisation. This definition highlighted three important facts that is, that the behaviours are discretionary and are not directly rewarded by the system, which on aggregate enhance the effectiveness of the organisation. By discretionary it means that these set of behaviours are not part of the job description but are incidental to the individual and non-performance is not treated as negligence of duty. So the individual is at will to choose whether to perform them or not. Again, because these behaviours are not part of the job description they may not be easily measured and so do not form part of the reward system. And lastly, the individual impact of these set of behaviours may not be felt but when viewed holistically their contributions make the organisation function effectively. The initial definition by Organ generated so much debates because of the classification of citizenship behaviours as discretionary and not being recognized by the formal reward system. Organ later modified this definition by describing OCB as behaviour that contributes indirectly to the organisation through the maintenance of the organisation's social system (Basu, Pradhan & Tewari, 2017). Basu, Pradhan and Tewari, (2017) described OCBs as being characterized by voluntary initiatives making prosocial contributions toward organisation and coworkers, above and beyond their formal organisation structure or reward system. One thing that is obvious in all the definitions is that OCBs have remarkable implications on Organisational and individual performance, effectiveness and success (Basu, Pradhan & Tewari, 2017).

Literature on OCBs identified five dimensions namely, Helping behaviour (Altruism), organisational compliance, sportsmanship, Organisational loyalty, individual initiative, self-development and civic virtue (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000). Research on OCBs also highlighted antecedents of OCB to include job satisfaction, interpersonal trust, Organisational commitment, employee mood, employee attitude, role perceptions, demographics and stress (Basu, Pradhan & Tewari, 2017). Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Paine and Bachrach, (2000) categorized antecedents into: individual (employee) characteristics, task characteristics, Organisational characteristics and leadership characteristic. Basu, Pradhan and Tewari, (2017), also outlined performance, customer service and satisfaction and sales revenue and financial efficiency as consequences of OCBs.

2.3. Psychological Contract Fulfillment and Employee Performance

Studies have affirmed the relationship between PC fulfillment and employee (Performance) outcomes in terms of attitudes and behaviours (Rousseau, 1995, Coyle-shapiro & Kessler, 2000, Guest & Conway, 2000; Smirti, 2014). Leveraging on the social exchange and perceived organisational support theories, Smirti, (2014) argued that employees exhibit positive attitudes and behaviours when they perceive that their organisation has fulfilled their part of the psychological contract (PC). The following employee outcomes have been identified thus: Job satisfaction, intention to quit, organisational citizenship behaviour, turnover, task performance and absenteeism.

Literature has established a relationship between employer contract behaviour and different employee outcomes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviours, employee contract behaviour and employee performance (Coyle- Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). Moore, (2014) and Bal et al (2013) affirmed that PC fulfillment is related to increase in employee engagement. Also, Moore (2014) citing Hess and Jepsen, stated that there is a relationship between PC fulfillment and three employee cognitive responses such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intentions. Conway and Coyle-Shapiro (2005) support majority opinion in literature that employee perception of employer PC fulfillment/ breach provide the basis for employees to reciprocate. Xiaoman and Xu (2016) also report significant relationship between PC and employee performance.

PC has been said to have a huge influence on a wide range of work- related attitudes and behaviours (De vos 2002), accordingly in a review of empirical studies affirmed that perception of PC breach or violation relate to decreased job satisfaction, increased intent to turnover and actual turnover and reduction in organisational citizenship behaviour. On the other hand, perception of PC fulfillment is related to positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation. De vos (2002) identified four types of employee attitudes which include: satisfaction, commitment, trust and intention to turnover. Also 4 employee behaviour outcomes like organisational citizenship behaviour, performance, actual turnover and contract related behaviour.

Studies by Kishokumar (2018), Xuan and Park (2012) and Bhawna (2019) also reported significant relationship between psychological contract and organisational citizenship behaviour.

2.4. *The Nigerian Construction Industry*

The construction industry in South East Nigeria has undergone different changes as a result of restructuring which involves the dismantling of the traditional labour market, organisational layering and downsizing leading to the dislocation of workers from traditional career paths and limited access to training and development (Okoye & Aderibigbe, 2014). These changes according to the authors also resulted in the wholesale loss of traditional positions with production staff working on short-term contracts and so have placed a strain on the employer-employee relationship in the industry. Research has shown that construction firms employ managers and professional staff to manage project sites while different flexible employment arrangements are made for other workers. The use of external sources of labour namely, sub-contracting, franchising, short and long term temporary work schemes, fixed term employment contracts among others have become a common practice in the construction industry (Ifedapo, 2011; Raiden & Dainty, 2006). This arrangement known as flexible firm model has increased the flexibility in the manner firms manage projects which has resulted in the lack of attention to the psychological contract needs of employees.

The construction industry worldwide is known as a major employer of labour and a highly hazardous industry because of the nature of output (constructed facilities) and heavy equipments involved in their production. Being a significant employer of labour and a high risk sector, it needs skilled and knowledgeable personnel to accomplish its projects. Instead the industry has suffered from high turnover of employees, emotional exhaustion, labour shortages, lack of qualified professionals, lack of job satisfaction and employee burn-out. These no doubt have impacted on employee-employer relationship in organisations with resultant effect on employee performance. Many scholars have attempted to use psychological contract (PC) to address these issues in the construction industry (Chih, Kiazad, Zhou, Capezio, Li & Restubog, 2016).

Low levels of employee engagement and commitment in the construction industry in the south east have been reported in the literature. These have been attributed to the inability of some employers to attract, motivate and retain talented employees for a long time. Also, other reasons put forward include different employment arrangements adopted by companies in the industry among which are casualization, temporary employment, part-time and independent employment. The flexible employment model has received wide acceptance by industry players and so affect employee expectations. Employees come into an organisation with many expectations which are personal, career specific and work environment related. When these expectations are not met it results in attitudinal and behavioural outcomes which affect the productivity of the employee. On the other part, the employers also have a set of expectations from their employees which they are expected to fulfill. These include being productive, loyal and hardworking which also help to advance organisational goals.

2.5. *Theoretical Framework*

The present study is anchored on Social exchange theory (SET) which is described by Emerson (1976) as 'actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others also, as 'a two sided, mutually contingent and mutually rewarding process involving transactions or simply exchange'. Social Exchange perspective by De vos (2002) focuses on the nature and dynamics of social exchange within organisations and on status and power differences created in exchange relationships. The two elements of this perspective are reciprocity and balance. Reciprocity is at the heart of the employment relationship between employer and employee which is explained by the PC framework. The reciprocity in the exchange relationship implies that each party will strive to reciprocate every inducement received in order to achieve a balance. Social exchange as proposed by Blau (1964) is 'an exchange of activity, tangible or intangible and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons'. De Vos (2002) surmised that the central condition of social exchange is the voluntary nature of the parties motivated by expected reward. This feature also described PC as a contract entered into freely by both employer and employee. Social exchange theory (SET) has been referred to as very important in understanding workplace behaviours (Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005). Generally speaking, social exchange defines human interactions based on some assumptions: That individuals are generally rational and weigh the actions in terms of costs and benefits in social exchange; Parties to the exchange which may be two or more, always seek to maximize their benefits from the social exchange relationship; That the exchange process involves rewards, promotes loyalty, trust and commitment, and, that the exchange process leads to differentiation in power and privilege in social system as a result of competition. The employment relationship between the employer and employee is defined by an exchange where the employer promises a fair working condition on the understanding that the employee will show support and commitment to the organisation. In other words employees value beneficial treatment while employers seek loyalty and dedication (Wikhamn & Hall 2012). Blau (1964) inferred that it is a relationship that involves an exchange of benefits that create a sense of obligation on the part of the receiver. The rule of reciprocity is at the heart of the social exchange. The resources exchanged could be economic (financial) or socio-emotional (employee well-being, respect and loyalty) which in turn engender a feeling of obligation, gratitude and trust. By implication positive actions from the organisation could result to pro-organisational activities.

Again, the study will be aligned with Organisational Support theory (OST) propounded by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) in explaining the link between psychological contract and employee performance in the workplace. The theory states that 'employees form global beliefs concerning their contributions and cares about their wellbeing' Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) posited that employees who receive highly valued resources (e.g. pay raises, developmental training opportunities) would feel obligated based on the reciprocal norm, to help the organisation

reach its objectives through such behaviours as increased in-role and extra-role performance and lessened absenteeism.' High levels of POS have been shown to create feelings of obligation, whereby employees are committed to their employers, but also feel an obligation to return the employers' commitment by engaging in behaviors that support organisational goals. Literature has shown that perceptions of being valued and cared about by an organisation engenders employees' trust and motivates employees to exhibit attitudes and behavior that enhance their performance. Empirical evidence shows that employees who are affectively committed to their organisations exhibit better performance, less absenteeism, and less likelihood of quitting (Wikhamn & Hall, 2012). Findings from a study by Wikhamn and Hall, (2012) on the relationship between POS and two work outcomes - affective organisational commitment and personal initiative in a Swedish work environment shows that POS is positively related to affective organisational commitment and proactive behaviour at work. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) outlined antecedents of POS to include, fair organisational procedures, supervisor support and favourable rewards and job conditions while the consequences include affective commitment to the organisation, increased performance and reduced withdrawal behaviours.

3. Research Design

This study adopted a survey research design. The basic research instrument used is a structured questionnaire administered to participants to elicit required responses that helped achieve the purpose of the study. The population of study comprised of workers of the construction companies currently handling projects in South East as provided by the Federal Ministry of Power, Works and Housing. The population of study was made up of both permanent and contract workers of the firms mobilized to construction sites at the time of the study. The study covered all active construction sites owned by these companies in the five South Eastern States of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The study is site based because projects are executed in the construction industry by using teams headed by managers. These teams are made up of engineers, architects, consultants, surveyors, among others. A total of 14 construction companies were selected out of 45 companies using purposive sampling method with a total of 958 employees engaged at the various sites across the South East.

Face and content validity of the instrument were conducted to ensure that the questionnaire achieved its purpose. Face validity was achieved using experts independently who evaluated the adequacy and suitability of the questions in eliciting the desired responses. Their comments were incorporated to produce the final draft of the questionnaire. Content validity was achieved by using content validity ratio (CVR) as proposed by Lawshe (1975). CVR involves the assessment of the judgment of experts known as 'subject matter experts' who evaluated the instrument based on its representativeness, comprehensiveness and clarity. The formula is stated below:

$$CVR = \frac{n_e}{N/2}$$

The panel was asked to rate each individual item of the questionnaire as a representative of the dimensions and sub dimensions as a whole (Pradhan & Jena, 2017) according to the following scales: 'Essential', 'Useful but not essential' and not 'Necessary'. Following Lawshe (1975) prescribed minimum CVR of 0.49 from 15 experts, the test returned a ratio of 0.68 which is above the set minimum standard.

3.2. Reliability of the Instrument

Cronbach alpha were used to test the internal consistency reliability of the instrument of measurement using a pilot survey of 5 companies and 50 copies of questionnaire. Dikko (2016) averred that the instrument of measurement must consistently and without bias measure the concept it is set to measure. Anastaci, (2009) stated that reliability estimates the proportion of total variance of a test that can be attributed to chance. Reliability result for test instrument for psychological contract was 0.536, organisational citizenship behaviour was 0.670. The reliability coefficient for the questionnaire is: 0.612

S/N	Name of Company	Number Sampled
1	IDC Construction Co. Ltd	10
2	Niger Construction Nigeria Ltd	10
3	Arab Contractors	10
4	Setraco Construction Co. Nig. Ltd	10
5	Julius Berger Nig. Plc	10
	Total	50

Table 1: Pilot Study
Field Survey Report 2019

4. Results

Results of the correlation between relational psychological contract and organisational citizenship behaviour in table no.3 below shows that the relationship is not significant $r = 0.031$. The correlation result shows that the relationship between relational psychological contract and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour is not significant at $r = 0.031$. This result shows that r is close to zero (0) and therefore the relationship is not significant.

		Psychological Contract	Performance
Psychological contract	Pearson Correlation	1	.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.647
	N	220	220
Performance	Pearson Correlation	.031	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.647	
	N	220	220

Table 2: Correlations

5. Discussion

This research work empirically examined the relationship between psychological contract and employee performance in the construction industry in South East Nigeria. Specifically, it tried to establish a relationship between relational psychological contract and organisational citizenship behaviour. Relational psychological contract relate to socioemotional factors like employee voice, fairness in the organisational practice and trust. This elicits positive attitudinal and behavioural outcome that help to promote organisational goal. The result of the study shows that the relationship is not significant. Though no similar result has been reported by any of the authors consulted or referenced so far, it calls for a more critical look at the nature of the psychological contract of employee in the country particularly in the construction industry. There no study conducted in the country in this area to enable references to be made. However, studies conducted in other countries like Xuan, and Park (2012), Bhawna (2019), Kishokumar (2018) all reported significant relationship between psychological contract and organisational citizenship behaviour. It is also noted that none of the studies is on employees of construction companies.

6. Conclusion

The result of this study shows that understanding the components and ensuring that the psychological contract of employee are maintained may not be that useful in getting employee of the construction industry to be more committed and exhibit extraordinary behaviour that will ensure that their organisation achieves its goals. Various researches have reported significant relationships between psychological contract and organisational citizenship behaviours in other industry, it is important to recommend that similar studies be replicated in the industry in other climes to test the result of this research.

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