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Linking Job Performance of Civil Servants to Psychological Contracts

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Abstract

This study examined relationship between job performance of civil servants and psychological contracts in the states of the South East geo-political zone. The participants comprised 3062 (males: 1098 and Females: 1964) drawn using purposeful random sampling technique from the population of civil servants in the states of the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria. Three instruments were used for data collection, they include; Psychological Contract Scale which is an 18- item questionnaire, Psychological Contract Inventory (PCI), which is a 14 – item questionnaire and Performance Evaluation Report which is a 12- item questionnaire. Cross-sectional survey design was adopted while multiple regression analysis was applied as statistical tests. The results indicated that jointly, psychological contracts (transactional, relational breach and/fulfillment) jointly predicted civil servants' poor job performance of $R^2 = .008$, $F(3,3058) = 8.64$, $p=.001$ and independently as well. The result, also, showed that psychological contract breach prevailed over psychological contract fulfillment among civil servants in relation to their job performance ($M = 35.90$; $SD = 12.45$) and that psychological contract breach significantly and negatively correlated with job performance of civil servants ($r = -.04$, $p < .01$). It was concluded that that civil servants in South-East geo-political zone are having transactional psychological contract and not relational, in the same vein, they reported having breaches in their psychological contracts which affected their performances poorly.

Keyword: Job Performance, Psychological Contracts, Civil Servants, South Eastern Nigeria.

Introduction

In the world of work, job performance is very vital to the survival and growth of any organisation, whether in the public or private sector. In essence, employers who still want to remain and compete favourably will always emphasize the need and importance of job performance to their employees. Since the job performance of the employee is a crucial construct in an organization, an understanding of the factors influencing job performance are essential for the managers, supervisors, employers and public administrators. This understanding may help the managers and public administrators to understand, explain, predict, measure and change the employees' job

performance (Campbell, McCloy, Oppler & Sager, 1993). More so, many factors influence the job performance of employees in every organization. They include but are not limited to; reinforcement (Elobuike, Onyeneje, Okonkwo, Okoro, et al., 2018), job equity, (Inuwa, 2017), Psychological capital (Sahoo & Sia, 2015), psychological wellbeing (Usnam, 2017; Durrah, Al-Tobasi, A'aqoulah & Ahmad, 2016; Durrah, Alhamoud & Khan, 2016) psychological contract (Dangmei, 2016; Kataria, 2015; Cheng & Xu, 2016).

Therefore, job performance in the form of performance assessment is an essential part of effective public administration and it is a most sought-after developmental intervention in public administration and human resource portfolio (Bateman, & Snell, 2007; Fay & Luhrmann, 2004; Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staudé, Amos, Klopper, et al., 2004). According to Liao, Lu, Huang and Chiang (2012) employee performance is workers' complete ability and productiveness in the attainment of the projected goal and realization of everyday jobs in line with the prescribed procedure and timeline of the organization. So, job performance as an index for improvements, idleness, recompenses, retributions, reviews and remuneration changes, also, represents the desire for employees to realize themselves.

However, previous researches have shown that poor job performance and low productivity are recorded in almost all public sector organisations in Nigeria (Mbogu, 2001; Ezulike, 2001; Iheriohanma, 2006); and findings from other studies (e.g. Tongo, 2005) show that the poor performance and productivity associated with Nigeria's public servants could be reduced if they are provided with a good psychological contract.

A psychological contract plays a vital role in how employees perceive their organizations as well as how they will perform. As simple as it sounds, improving the enthusiasm of employees should be the commitment of every public administrator and Human resources department to effectively improve and give full attention to staff ability to tap the potential of employees and which in turn improves staff performance. According to Cheng and Xu (2016), the psychological contract is the root of the "invisible, informal" psychological link between enterprises and employees, although it has differences with contracts that have legal effects in formal terms, it plays a decisive role in organizational development and staff attitude. Concerning the contract, a psychological contract can reflect their subjective understanding of responsibilities and obligations, therefore the

fulfilment of organizational promises is the basis of employing and maintenance of efficient and high-quality performing employees. Suffice it to say that, psychological contract comprises employees' 'beliefs about what they are entitled to receive, or should receive because they perceive that their employer conveyed promises to provide those things in exchange for their contributions (Robinson, 1996).

Again, psychological contract in essence, is all about the unwritten employee expectations of what the organization has to do and what the organization expect from the employee which serves as powerful determinants of behaviours (DeNisi & Griffin, 2005). The study of psychological contracts has generated a lot of attention or concern in the past two decades (Uchenna, 2015), especially in the public service. For instance, the failure of government to fulfil 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 pose threats to organizational development (Ogbuokiri, Anyanwu & Iklaki, 2016; Nurudeen, 2016). Nosiri and Njemanze (2017) opined that this popularity of the concept of the psychological contract is a result of the rapid changes in organization, for instance, the rise 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 an employment agreement. Based on this, a psychological contract has become increasingly important in helping to define the contemporary employment relationship (Turnely, Bolino, Lester & Bloodgood, 2003; Uchenna, 2015; Dhanpat & Parumasur, 2014; Akhtar & Long, 2015). All these are because, in this competitive era in business and organizational growth, the psychological contract provides an opportunity to fundamental knowledge about the organization-employee and employee-employer relationship (Agarwal & Bhargava, 2009).

The type of psychological contract that exists between the employer and the employee will cast a different light on the employer-employee relationship. Researchers had agreed that a psychological contract is subjective because it depends on the employee's point of view regarding what obligations the organization must fulfil (Bellou, 2009; Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau, 1995). The development of a type of psychological contract begins with subjective points of view that the job applicant holds and can be predicted by the belief that there will be reciprocity once the job

applicant is hired (Hess & Jepsen, 2009). Hence, extensive research has established that psychological contracts can be portrayed in two different ways: transactional and relational.

A transactional contract is based on economic or extrinsic factors, tends to be specifically defined, and its time frame is finite and short-term (Alcover, Martínez-Iñigo, & Chambel, 2012; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006). Employees with a transactional psychological contract may expect financial and material exchanges for their work and have a short-term commitment to their obligations. In essence, employees whose psychological contracts are portrayed as transactional base their contracts on financial rewards, money, and being paid on time (Bellou, 2009; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006; De Hauw & De Vos, 2010). Because transactional psychological contracts are close-ended, specific, and are based on extrinsic and economic factors, employees with this type of contract generally do not envision themselves working for their current organization in the long term.

On the other hand, employees with a relational psychological contract may believe that there is more to their relationships with their organizations than economic exchange. In the words of Ballou (2013), a relational psychological contract is developed through non-economic, socio-emotional, and intrinsic factors founded on trust and organizational commitment. A relational psychological contract is open-ended, indefinite, dynamic, and has a broad scope (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2006; Rousseau, 1990). That is to say, employees whose psychological contracts are portrayed as relational may base their contracts on status, recognition, the chance to be creative (Bellou, 2009), job security, work/ lifestyle balance, training (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010), career development (Bellou, 2009; De Hauw & De Vos, 2010), and promotions (Alcover et al., 2012; Kickul & Lester, 2001; Rousseau, 1995). These psychological types could have a negative or positive relationship with the performances of employees based on their subjective views. Suffice it to say that public civil servants join their organization with different expectations and when these expectations are not met, it affects productivity in the organization.

From the foregoing, the performances of public sector employees are very vital in driving the activities of organizations towards effectiveness and efficiency in the outcomes produced by these organizations. The past two decades have witnessed intensified debate about the role, scope and performance of the institutions and organizations within the public sector (Hookana, 2011). Based

on that, most organizations have realised that the performance of their workers plays a vital role in determining the success of the organisation (Onuka, 2006). Taking cognisance of this, employers and managers alike need to know how to get the best performance out of their employees. One of the antecedent determinants of employee job performance is believed to be the psychological contract. A psychological contract represents how individuals and companies view their relationship, and how expectations and assumptions that set the tone between employee and employer (Edwards & Karau, 2007) are established. It turns out that “the primary vehicle managers have for making firms successful is the psychological contracts they create with workers” (McDermott, Conway, Rousseau, & Flood, 2013). Organizations strategically use employee benefit policies and programmes to guide their employees about the employee-employer relationship (Ko & Hur, 2014) towards achieving higher job performance and productivity.

Theoretically, this study was anchored on Social Exchange Theory (SET). Homans (1958), Blau (1964), and Emerson (1976) were the ground breaking early researchers in SET and shared a widely accepted and still evolving framework that summarized relational behaviours (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). 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 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 fulfil 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 behaviour 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).

In applying this theory to this study, it indicated that the presence of lack of commitment, low motivation, job dissatisfaction, counter-productive/ negative work behaviour of Nigerian Civil 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 fulfilment of expectations has generated a lot of conflict between the labour and government/ management. The relevance of this theory is to enable us explain the consequences of violation of psychological contract of workers and the relevance for fulfilment of psychological contract in Nigerian Civil Service.

Nevertheless, many empirical studies have proven the effect of psychological contracts (Fulfilment, breach and transactional) workers work behaviours especially performance. For instance; Turnley, Bolino, Lester and Bloodgood (2003) in their research found that psychological contract fulfilment is more strongly related to citizenship behaviour directed at the organization than to citizenship behaviour directed at one's colleagues. Cheng and Xu (2016) that psychological contract has significant positive effect on job performance of E-business companies. Also, Che, Tsui, Chen, Lee and Chen (2018) study, found that, psychological contract and organizational commitment are important mediators in the relationships between job performance and job satisfaction. Moore (2014) results suggest that psychological contract fulfilment does relate to employee engagement and can predict 4.9% of the variances in employees' engagement.

On the other hand, on psychological contract breach, Agarwal & Bhargava (2014) results suggest that leader-member exchanges and perceived organization support relate to psychological contract breach, which, in turn, relates to affective commitment, intention to quit and innovative work behaviours. Also, Hussain, Gul, Usman and Islam (2016) found that there was a negative relationship between psychological contract breach and task performance. Li and Chen (2018) posited that psychological contract breach (PCB) may trigger negative attitudes in employees and ultimately cause further negative behaviours. Reimann and Guzy (2017) results support the idea that PCB works as a psychosocial stressor at work that represents a crucial risk to employee health.

Furthermore, on relational and transactional psychological contracts and job performance, Manxhari (2015) results showed that the relational contract provides an organizational commitment around 4 times higher than transactional contract. Oyelakin and Agu (2017) study, relational psychological contract was found to have full mediating effect between workplace

spirituality (inner life, meaningful work and community) and employee turnover intention. Umar and Ringim (2015) transactional psychological contract has a strong positive significant relationship with turnover intention of employee in private organization in Nigeria.

However, in Nigeria as well as in other developing countries, poor performances on the job remain a recurrent phenomenon, especially in the public sector, owing to the physical and psychological problems created by the inability of management to embrace and uphold the positive psychological contract. On that note, therefore, psychological contracts represent unique workplace dynamics. Sometimes, employees may feel fulfilled [i.e. psychological contract fulfilment; the degree to which a company meets its obligations to an employee, from the employee's vantage, and it serves to build upon the social exchange element, resulting in positive employee behaviours (Karagonlar et al., 2016)] like good job performances or a sense of breach [i.e. psychological contract breach; which represents the organizational failure to deliver on an expected obligation, whether written or unwritten (Robinson et al., 1994)] to their employees. Hence, when an organization fails to demonstrate caring behaviours to employees, employees no longer feel an obligation to demonstrate positive behaviour in the workplace (Restubog, Hornsey, Bordia, & Esposito, 2008), like poor job performances. To this end, there seems to be paucity of research on the effects of psychological contracts on job performances of employees in the civil service in Nigeria, hence, there is a lacuna in the understanding of the power of psychological contracts on job performance among this population in Nigeria. Hence, this study, linking job performance of civil servants in the South East Geo-Political Zone to psychological contracts.

Following the trends in the literature reviewed concerning the study variables, these hypotheses were be tested:

1. Psychological contracts jointly will significantly predict civil servants' job performance.
2. Psychological contracts independently will significantly predict civil servants' job performance.

Method

Participants:

Three thousand and sixty-two (3062) civil servants drawn from ministries under the civil service commission of each of the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria comprising 1098 (35.9%)

males and 1964 (64.1%) females between the ages of 24 to 54 years ($M = 37.84$ $SD = 8.81$) were sampled using purposeful random sampling technique from civil service commissions and establishments in, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. The selection choice was made by the researchers on the basis of those who are most representative for the issues involved in the research for example, typical cases that provide requisite data or information (Kalton, 1983). The ministries were randomly sampled in each state to form a representative by using deep picking. This gave credence to the study design and also gave every of the participants in the sample equal opportunity to participate. Other demographic variables of the study population comprised, 1804 (58.9%) are old while 1258 (41.1%) are young. It was interesting to note also that, 2231 (72.9%) of the respondents are with high educational qualifications while 831 (27.1%) are with low educational qualification.

Instrument:

This study made use of the following instruments for data collection:

Psychological Contract Scale: This is an 18- item questionnaire developed by Millward and Hopkins (1998) to measure two dimensions of Psychological Contract which are transactional and relational contract. Transactional contract was measured with 9 - items, using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1='strongly disagree'; 5='strongly agree'). An example item is: "I only carry out what is necessary to get the job done". Relational contract was measured also, with 9 - items, an example being: "I feel this company reciprocates the effort put in by its employees".

Psychological Contract Inventory (PCI), developed by Rousseau (1995). It measures employer's commitment/obligation to employee which will determine whether a participant is having a breach or fulfilment in terms of the contract with his/her organization. It makes use of five-point Likert scales.

Performance Evaluation Report is a 12 – item questionnaire adopted from the personnel unit of the Enugu State Civil Service Commission, developed by the commission and use in the assessment of different aspects of a civil servant's job performances like; foresight, relationship with co-workers, quality of work, output of work, punctuality etc. This is measured using 5-point Likert-type scale (1= 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree'). An example item is foresight:

anticipates problems and develops solution in advance 5 4 3 2 1 Grapples with problems after they have arisen’.

In other to measure the internal consistence of the instruments and also to establish Cronbach alpha coefficients. The researchers, using the Cronbach Alpha method established the following coefficients alphas for the instruments, thus: *Transactional Psychological Contract* .80, *Relational psychological contract* .86, *Psychological Contract Breach/Fulfilment* .76, *Performance Evaluation Report* .61.

Procedure

The researchers distributed and collected the data for this study with the assistance of fifteen research assistants. Five research assistants covered each of the five States while the researchers were in each of the states to coordinate the activities of those posted in that State at a point. As mentioned earlier, the research assistants were duly trained for the task. However, after establishing rapport, the commissions/ministries visited for approval, declined giving official approval to the letter the researchers came with citing bureaucratic and classified nature of the information being sought for by the researcher. Meanwhile, the researchers were advised to carry out the research on the agreement that the information being provided by the ministries will be on personal basis and the identity of the persons involved not disclosed.

Therefore, the researchers, using purposeful random sampling selected ministries to be sampled from and the questionnaire collected within six months. Again, due to the nature of the study, in every ministry visited, those sampled were briefed about the purpose of the study, with an introductory letter attached to the instrument to establish rapport and acquaint participants with the motives for the research. The researchers also assured them of utmost confidentiality of all the information they provided.

At first, the participants were given the first three questionnaires (transactional, relational and psychological contract breach/fulfilment) to complete. Thereafter, their personal data (especially name) was used to submit the fourth questionnaire (Performance Evaluation Report) to the supervisor/head of department in charge of that section, this is to enable him/her identify and rate the performances of a subordinate under him/her in particular. The supervisors were allowed to go home with their questionnaire but other participants were made to complete theirs on the spot.

Finally, the researchers were able to retrieve three thousand seven hundred and fifty four (3754) copies of the questionnaire out of five thousand (5000) copies administered, which amounts to 75% return rate. However, six hundred and ninety two (692) copies were discarded due errors in completion, hence, three thousand and sixty two (3062) copies of the questionnaire were scored and used for the analysis in testing the hypotheses.

Design/Statistics

This study made use of cross-sectional survey design. The researchers in using this design can only employ a relatively passive approach to making causal inferences based on findings. Also, multiple regression analysis was employed for the study. This choice of statistics was made due to the fact that the study was looking for relationships between four variables, transactional, relational, breach and fulfilment psychological contracts and one dependent variable job performance of civil servants in the South East Geo-political zone.

Results

Table 1: Summary Table of Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Matrix among the Study Variables (N = 3062)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1 Job Performance	36.10	12.28	1			
2 Transactional Psychological contract	33.13	6.41	-.07**	1		
3 Relational Psychological Contract	29.41	8.24	-.05**	.04*	1	
4 Psychological Contract Breach/Fulfilment	35.90	12.45	-.04*	.09**	.04*	1

Note: * = $P < .01$, ** = $P < .001$.

From table 1, the results revealed that transactional psychological contract significantly correlated with job performance of civil servants, though, negatively ($r = -.07$, $p < .001$). Meaning that, increases in transactional psychological contracts of civil servants will significantly relate to decreases in the criterion variable, job performance. On the same note, relational psychological contract significantly correlated with job performance of civil servants, though, negatively ($r = -.05$, $p < .001$). Meaning that, decreases in relational psychological contracts of civil servants will significantly relate to decreases in the criterion variable, job performance. However, psychological contract breach prevailed over psychological contract fulfilment among civil servants in relation

to their job performance ($M = 35.90$; $SD = 12.45$). Meaning that, the mean obtained is less than the norm of 40.90, that is, a mean higher than the norm indicates a psychological fulfilment while a lower mean indicates psychological breach. Therefore, psychological contract breach significantly and negatively correlated with job performance of civil servants ($r = -.04$, $p < .01$). Meaning that, decreases in psychological contracts breach of civil servants will significantly relate to decreases in the criterion variable, job performance.

Table 2: Summary table of Multiple Regression on Linking Psychological Contracts of Civil Servants in the States of the South East Geo-Political Zone to Job Performance ($N = 3062$)

Model	B	SE	β	t	P
Transactional Psychological Contract	-.13	.04	-.07	-3.63	.001
Relational Psychological Contract	-.07	.03	-.05	-2.54	.01
Psychological Contract Fulfilment/Breach	-.03	.02	-.04	-1.92	.05
	.008				R^2 value
	.092				R -Value
	8.64				F-value
	.001				P-value

From table 2 above, it was observed that psychological contracts (transactional, relational, breach and/fulfilment) jointly did predict civil servants' poor job performance of $R^2 = .008$, $F(3,3058) = 8.64$, $p = .001$ level of significance, showing that only 0.8% of the variance in the dependent variable could be explained by the independent variables. These results indicated that there was significant relationship between the predictor variables (transactional, relational, breach and/fulfilment) on the criterion variable (job performance) $R = .092$. In the same vein, independently, Transactional $\beta = -.07$, relational $\beta = -.05$, breach $\beta = -.04$ inversely correlated with the dependent variable. Meaning that civil servants in South-East geo-political zone are not having a fulfilled psychological contracts with their employers and as such remarkably predicted their job performance which is poor. So, population regressions coefficients for psychological contracts (transactional, relational and psychological contracts breach/fulfilment) independently inversely predicted job performance of civil servants in South-East geo-political zone.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that transactional, relational, psychological contracts breach/fulfilment jointly predicted civil servants' job performance. More so, the various

dimensions of psychological contracts independently predicted civil servants job performance. All of the above contradicted with the studies of (Bonilla, 2018; Agarwal & Bhargava 2014; Moore, 2014) who found that psychological contracts in any form bring about good work/job outcomes, especially performance. But agrees with Hussain, Gul, Usman and Islam (2016) who found that breach in psychological contracts leads to low task performance. Also, these are in concord with the study of Chaubey and Bist (2016) who found that workers job performance or lack of satisfaction is always affected by psychological contracts in place. The outcomes of the hypotheses are not surprising as participants reported that the psychological contracts they have with their employers are breached, not relational and highly transactional. This could be deduced from the happenings in the civil service where many persons complain of so many infractions in their ministries and commissions.

Implications of the Study

The major implication of this finding was the exposure of the psychological contracts situation in our civil service of which the consequences are obvious, poor performance. From the practical perspective, the unhealthy psychological contracts and low job performance that are ubiquitous in the studied population. Therefore, one can believe, that bad psychological contracts between employees and employers is likely to produce poor job performance among workers. Finally, most of the civil servants reported having a transactional psychological contract with their current organization than a relational psychological contract. This may suggest that civil servants in South-East geo-political zone are finding positions that simply pays for the bills.

Limitations and Suggestion for further Studies

Despite the strengths and new relevant results, this study has certain limitations. Since the results of this study are based on cross-sectional data, it becomes difficult using simple percentage to determine the outcome and as such the researcher could not compare the participants.

The sample size, while sufficient for this study, was not conducive to extensive sub-group analysis, which a larger sample size could afford. The use of supervisors to assess the job performance of the participants posed a serious setback as many participants identify where exposed.

Therefore, the researchers suggested that research in this area of psychological contracts and job performance should be broadened and carried out in a more practical ways by introducing other variables and demographics. Such as, personality, job description, gender, educational level etc.

Finally, in order to cross-validate the outcomes of this study, the sample size should be extended to other geo-political zones. Again, the independent variables should be examined practically in relation to other workplace behaviours, like counter work behaviours, job satisfaction, turnover intentions etc.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this study provided understanding and insight into the effects of psychological contracts on job performance of civil servants in the South-East geo-political zone. This study remarkably demonstrated that independently and jointly, psychological contracts predicted job performance of civil servants. To this end, the researchers concluded that civil servants in South-East geo-political zone are having transactional psychological contract and not relational, in the same vein, they reported having breaches in their psychological contracts which affected their performances poorly. Therefore, ministries, commissions, employers and stakeholders should understudy the outcomes of this study towards improving and renegotiating the psychological contracts of civil servants to remedy the poor job performances been recorded.

Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of this study, the researchers recommended that;

Ministries and commission should revisit the psychological contracts of their employees towards improving their performance. Again, civil servants should be open and vocal in things concerning their welfare as contained in their relational psychological contracts towards boosting their job performance. Finally, a welfare committee should be established in order to cater for the all manner of psychological contracts in various ministries and commission and proffer solutions to such to help improve the psychological wellbeing of the employees and improve their job performance.

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