

# **An exploratory study of the antecedents of psychological contract breach**

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## **Executive Summary**

This research presents a systematic review of literature focusing on the Human Resource Management concept of the Psychological Contract between an employee and their organisation. An initial overview of research on the broader topic is outlined to identify key themes in the field and to identify areas of research to be reviewed in greater detail. The major themes explored at this stage are the basic definition of the concept, the contents of the psychological contract, viewing the concept as a mental model or schema, the current methods used in existing research, how the agreement can be breached, the link to various employee outcomes and how the concept can be managed. The systematic review methodology is then set out to identify the causes or antecedents of breach, the differing ontological perspectives on the psychological contract concept and existing research which integrates the psychological contract with the related concept of employee engagement. 34 studies are examined and results are presented in the form of a narrative synthesis.

Results suggest that the empirical evidence base of antecedents to breach is limited and that numerous potential antecedents to breach have not been fully tested due to limitations in existing research designs. Secondly, a new ontological perspective based on the Critical Realist perspective of Harré (2002) is proposed to develop existing work on the basic definition of the psychological contract concept. Finally, the lack of existing work which integrates both the psychological contract and employee engagement is highlighted with a recommendation for additional research on the ontology of the engagement concept.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# 1. Mapping the Field

## 1.1 Introduction – Defining the Psychological Contract

In terms of current theory in the field of human resource management (HRM), the psychological contract is thought to be a key construct in terms of understanding employee relations which has a significant impact on various workplace outcomes. As it is a particularly complex construct, examining different definitions is important as this has a large impact on how it is subsequently conceptualized and studied in practice. Survey evidence has indicated that it is meaningfully different from legal contracts such as the formal employment contract (Roehling and Boswell, 2004) though the two are thought to run in parallel. It is defined as an employee's beliefs about promises and their related obligations/expectations that comprise the informal exchange agreement between an employee and their organisation (Conway and Briner, 2005). A distinction has been made in the literature about these three components in terms of their contribution to the overall construct as promises, obligations and expectations are thought to be decreasingly central in practice. Earlier definitions such as Schein (1978) focused on either expectations or obligations alone though these are thought to be imprecise given that such concepts may not be clearly linked to the current employment relationship. Viewing the psychological contract in this way delimits research to exclude instances where psychological contracts with previous employers are wholly transferred to the current employment period. As a result, this creates a consistent practical and theoretical foundation for this complex construct.

Existing definitions have viewed the psychological contract as either being employee-centred (Rousseau, 1998; 2001; Lester et al, 2007) or involving multiple agents (Guest, 1998a; 1998b; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004; Tekleab and Taylor, 2003; Levinson et al, 1962). The former definition is most commonly used due to the difficulty in specifying who the 'other party' to the agreement is in practice. Though this is often thought to be the employee's line manager (Restubog et al, 2005), employees could also anthropomorphize the organization or spread contents of the psychological contracts across different organizational actors (Conway and Briner, 2005). As the employee-centred approach of Rousseau (1998) suggests that there is an element of the employee's cognition regarding the 'other party' to the contract, further research is required to identify if this varies from employee to employee.

Mutuality is an important issue which arises from the distinction between the employee-centred and multi-agent perspectives of the concept. With the former perspective, Rousseau (1998) argues that the perception of mutuality rather than actual mutuality is at the heart of the psychological contract and that the concept is by definition about a belief that a reciprocal arrangement exists which is mutually understood. Though such approaches allow for cleaner collection of empirical data, they do present significant problems including clarifying the role of power relations in managing the psychological contract. As an example, Conway (1996) has drawn attention to anthropological approaches to social exchange which highlight the 'myth of reciprocity' which can permit inequity in a relationship to be maintained over time.

The alternative multi-agent perspective potentially addresses such issues as this research focuses on gathering the views of a basket of agents to gain the perspective of the other party to the agreement. However, some organizational agents may have their own understanding of the psychological contract between employee and organization though they may not actually be parties to that contract (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). This delineative uncertainty here creates a significant definitional issue as to which agents are authorized to have active involvement in the psychological contracting process. Though recent studies such as Conway and Coyle-Shapiro (2006) have addressed mutuality, additional research is required to empirically establish the multi-agent view of the construct to prevent fragmentation of research effort here. Though some researchers argue that different messages being sent regarding expectations and obligations are ambiguities that represent the reality of organizational experience (Herriot et al, 1997), I believe that this is a further research is required in this area.

One of the most promising employee-centred definitions of the psychological contract is viewing the concept as a schema (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 2001; Rousseau; 2003; De Vos et al, 2005). This concept was first examined by Morrison and Robinson (1997) though it was more fully developed by Rousseau (2001). Psychological Contract schema are thought to be mental models to guide information processing and subsequent action in dealing with the inherent complexities of the informal side of the employment relationship. Such schema are idiosyncratic to each employee and are used to pragmatically filter information inputs from a wide variety of organisational sources though they are also open to change based on information that is processed as feedback. Schema theory is derived from the field



of Cognitive Psychology and has not been fully explored in terms of its potential to support a process-oriented view of the psychological contract.

The definitional complexities of the concept have also influenced how studies have been conducted and exploring this area is a significant goal of the Systematic Review process. In terms of ontological orientation, hypothesis-driven Critical Rationalism has been the main approach and is exemplified by studies such as Lester et al (2007) which quantitatively examine the relationship between the psychological contract and organisational communication. However, a main avenue of future research is thought to be the use of Phenomenological perspective to better understand the process-oriented nature of the phenomena (Conway and Briner, 2005) and an example of such research is Millward (2006). Such approaches are required to examine the rich qualitative aspects of the concept which have not been fully developed to date. In a similar vein, in terms of power relations in the psychological contracting process, critical perspectives have also been highlighted as being important (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006).

Apart from these main ontological positions, various philosophical aspects of the concept have been explored which will help to precisely delineate the positioning of the concept during the Systematic Review process. One example is where it has been viewed as a nano-level perspective on social contract theory (Thompson and Hart, 2006). Also, from seemingly unrelated research on adapting mainstream ethical theory to business ethics, factor analysis research identified psychological contracting as having a unique ethical dimension (Reidenbach and Robin, 1990; McMahon and Harvey, 2007). In summary, taking such research into account is important as ontological issues will be significant in the final research design due the theoretical orientation of the proposed contribution.

## **1.2 Research Methods**

A broad range of methods have been used to study the psychological contract and this is significant due to the complexity in operationalizing the construct. Questionnaires have been the main method used to collect data on the psychological contract with examples including those used by Guest and Conway (2002; 2003; 2004) and Lester et al (2007). This has helped to promote research on this nebulous concept by providing a foundation of empirical data which can be linked to numerous employee outcomes. Data has been analyzed using both

standard multiple regression and structural equation modelling. Both techniques can accommodate a significant number of background variables which is beneficial for statistical research on complex constructs such as the psychological contract. The numerous variables linked to psychological contract breach in existing research will be critically reviewed to determine if they can be considered to be breach antecedents which are the focus of the systematic review.

Examples of alternative methodologies include unstructured interviews (Dick, 2006), critical incident techniques (Herriot et al, 1997), scenario methodologies (Edwards et al, 2003), diary studies (Conway and Briner, 2002a) and case studies (Green et al, 2001). Such approaches are more qualitative in nature and provide rich data on the psychological contract as a complex ongoing process. Such approaches are necessary to build on statistical work done to date, develop rounded qualitative theory and to provide alternative hypotheses to be explored in quantitative form.

### **1.3 The Formation and Contents of the Psychological Contract**

Psychological contracts are thought to be built up by focused information searching during initial socialisation with the organisation with highlights the conceptual distinction between early formation and ongoing formation of the psychological contract (De Vos et al, 2003; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Thomas and Anderson, 1998; Purvis and Cropley, 2003; Sutton and Griffin, 2004). Assuming that a basic distinction is made between previous and current work roles, previous employment cognition mainly has an influence on this process in terms of the interpretation of current information inputs to form a new psychological contract though this may differ from employee to employee. An example of another study on the issue of previous employment experience is Pugh et al (2003).

Several studies have examined the contents of the psychological contract which can be considered as the basic terms of the conceptual agreement. Theory in this area provides a theoretical foundation for the breach concept which is examined in the Systematic Review. In terms of the employee-centred view of the psychological contract, one of the most comprehensive studies of contents was that of Herriot et al (1997) which examined perceptions of both employer and employee expectations. The twelve employer obligations identified were training, fairness, recognition of employee's personal needs, consultation,

discretion with regards to managerial action, humanity, recognition, creating a safe working environment, justice, pay, benefits and job security. Employee obligations fell into seven main categories which were working contractual hours, doing a good job, being honest, being loyal, respecting company property, maintaining self-presentation and being flexible. This list was particularly strong given the collection of both employee/employer obligations, the good sample size and the clarity in the categories observed.

A number of other studies also address the issue of contents but in a more limited way. One alternative inductive study by Guest and Conway (2002a) produced a clear list of employer obligations which were very similar to those found by Herriot et al (1997). In terms of the study's contribution to existing theory, the additional items of specific performance feedback and opportunities for promotion were highlighted as being potentially significant. The results also showed that the perceived degree of promises made differed depending on the nature of the contract item and had little effect on the subsequent perception of fulfilment. However, its one main weakness was the lack of definitional clarity in terms of if provided responses in their capacity as a HR manager, as an employee or both given that the resulting bias may distort conclusion drawn from this data. Rousseau (1990) also devised a shorter inductive list which addressed the obligations of both parties to the exchange though this was based on a particularly small sample of HR managers. Although the list of items derived is less comprehensive than those noted above, its focus on obligations is more closely aligned to psychological contract theory than the expectations-based list measured in Herriot et al (1997). Other examples of research in this area are based on intuitively derived contents lists such as Robinson (1996) and Porter et al (1998).

The basic content items of the psychological contract have also been divided into those elements that are more transactional and those that are relational in nature (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). This distinction is made to differentiate between the various working relationships that can be found in a modern organisation. There is a degree of overlap here with the broader management research area of trust/distrust in work relationships and an example of work here is Lewicki et al (1998). Examples of transactional elements would be pay or basic workplace safety and relational aspects would include personal development or opportunities for promotion. A potentially promising way of examining this distinction is broaden its focus to include a number of factors in a multi-faceted way. Such 'features-based' approaches examine a range of factors with regards to psychological contracts including

focus, time-frame, stability, scope and tangibility (Rousseau, 1990; Rousseau and McLean-Parks, 1993; McLean-Parks et al, 1998). As a result, such theory potentially provides managers with a conceptual model which better reflects the variety of psychological contracts in an organizational setting. Recent developments in this area include the use of cluster analysis by Janssens et al (2003) to inductively map out a framework as prior research has been intuitively derived. Though a similar number of contract types were found, this study suggested several new factors were significant in features-based analysis including level of affective commitment and employability. Similarly, a recent theoretical study by Sels et al (2004) also considered the factors of exchange symmetry and contract level in a features-based approach which adds to knowledge in this area.

However, the practical impact of making such a distinction does have implications for ongoing management of the psychological contract. Some research does suggest that employee perceptions of contract type can be measured as a dependent variable and is open to significant change based on environmental factors (Lester et al, 2007). This would appear to differ from the view that such perceptions are fundamentally linked to factors such as the particular type of formal employment contract (e.g. fixed term or permanent) currently held by the employee. One study has focused on the degree of balance in psychological contracts at both the transactional and relational levels (Shore and Barksdale, 1998). Achieving balance in contracts at either level was the key focus in terms of preventing psychological contract breach and this may be a particular challenge given the potential variability in perceptions of psychological contract type in practice.

#### **1.4 The Distinction between Breach and Violation**

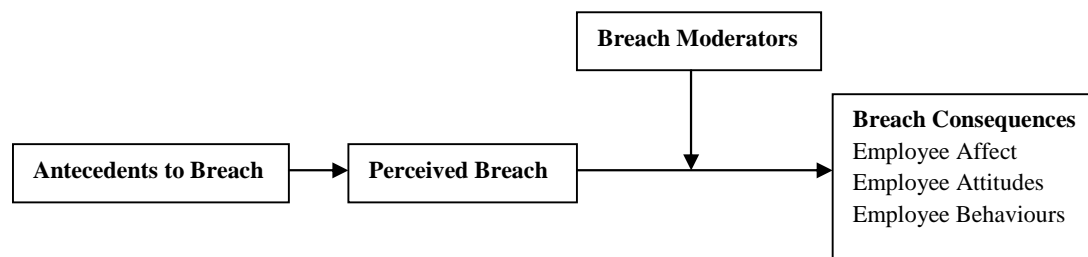
Due to the emotionally charged nature of psychological contract breach, theoretical work has been conducted to clarify this area of research. A key study by Morrison and Robinson (1997) clarified the conceptualization of breach and violation in the psychological contracting process. Perceived breach refers to the cognition that one's organization has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one's contributions. The term violation was reserved for the emotional and affective state that may, under certain conditions, follow from the belief that one's organization has failed to adequately maintain the psychological contract. Due to the perceptual nature of psychological contracts, the development of violation is thought to be a highly subjective and imperfect

process of gathering information and making sense of that information. In terms of affect, most key research linking breach to employee outcomes focuses on this distinction though mistrust can also be considered as an affective outcome. Breach is based on either genuine misunderstandings between contract parties which is termed incongruence or instances where a party deliberately reneges on the deal. Existing psychological contract research has also examined the frequency and manner of breach which have been found to range from numerous smaller instances (Conway and Briner, 2002a) to fundamental perceived breaches linked to a specific organizational event (Edwards et al, 2003).

Following from the emphasis placed on early action on the construct, antecedents to breach are an important research issue which forms the main focus of the systematic review. However, the limited number of studies means that we do not know much about what causes breach or how breach develops (Conway and Briner, 2005). Based on the current scoping study and figure x, further research is required to distinguish empirically supported as breach antecedents factors from breach moderators, breach outcomes and control variables/factors unrelated to the psychological contract. Examples of such factors could be personality traits (Raja et al, 2004), perceived organizational support (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003) and age (Sutton and Griffin, 2004). The systematic review will clarify this area of research in light of the current focus on the psychological contract as an aggregate or nomothetic theoretical model. Though existing research is largely based on cross-sectional studies with numerous specific variables, future research will likely focus on an individualized or idiographic qualitative process of information processing in relation to ongoing organisational events. Taking a longer-term view of the research, I intend to focus on the psychological antecedents to breach specifically which would currently be categorised as factors which influence the interpretation of schematic information inputs. This will hopefully integrate research on the concept of 'engagement' from work by Kahn (1990) which focuses on the role of psychological conditions in allowing employees to become cognitively absorbed in their work. A primary aim resulting from this research was the need to develop a dynamic process model to explain how psychological conditions combine to produce moments of personal engagement and disengagement at work (ibid, 1990). This appears to be closely linked to the psychological contract and this will need to be explored further. However, this issue will be fully addressed once the systematic review is complete.

## **1.5 Linking Breach to Employee Outcomes**

One important issue with existing research linking the psychological contract to workplace outcomes is that measures have focused on either degree of fulfilment or degree of breach in terms of this exchange. Apart from the difficulty in comparing such research, the underlying assumptions of these two perspectives are fundamentally different. With the increasingly dominant breach-oriented perspective, this suggests that the psychological contract is in varying degrees of breach. This is thought to be a realistic practical assumption which focuses on achieving a minimal level of breach. The alternative perspective focuses on the degree of fulfilment of the psychological contract and hence the focus is more on maximising employee outcomes. Although both perspectives could be addressed separately, I believe that future research should retain the pragmatic focus of the breach-oriented perspective though research attention is needed to address the ongoing state of the psychological contract which has been a particular research focus of Guest (1998a; 2004a). As the perception of breach can likely be tied to specific workplace events, this also supports future research in terms of establishing causal linkages in a process-oriented view of the construct.



**Figure 1 – Breach Antecedent Variables in Existing Analytical Frameworks**

Existing research on the psychological contract is mainly in cross-sectional form and existing models reflect this orientation. A recent meta-analysis by Zhao et al (2007) reflects the main links to employee outcomes in examining the impact of breach on affect (violation and mistrust), attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intentions) and behaviours (actual turnover, in-role performance, OCB). In this study, nearly all concepts were found to have a significant link to psychological contract breach with actual turnover being the one exception. This framework forms the basis of the discussion on linking psychological contract breach to employee outcomes. The interchangeable use of the terms

breach and violation has also added complexity in terms of consolidating existing research. Though this is a clear recent distinction of such research, earlier work has focused on a number of subareas and different variants on such factors. Pate et al (2003) examined the link from violation to attitudes/behaviours. In terms of attitudes, a variant of commitment termed 'affective commitment' has also been studied which highlights an emotional aspect of this particular concept (Restubog et al, 2006; Shore and Barksdale, 1998). Job dissatisfaction has been examined in several studies as an inverted variant of this attitudinal outcome (Turnley and Feldman, 2000) and there is also some research in the area of organizational cynicism (Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). However, some alternative research can be easily positioned relative to current overviews of research including measures such as the role of innovative performance (Thompson and Heron, 2006) and absence (Nicholson and Johns, 1985).

Due to the evolution of the field of psychological contract research, some of the above employee outcomes have been examined in a manner that is somewhat detached from the concepts of breach or fulfilment. Studies here have examined overall performance (Turnley et al, 2003; Stiles et al, 1997) and OCBs (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002; Hui et al, 2004). Also, potential moderators of reactions to breach are important for the main systematic review to determine if they can be classified as antecedents to breach. Various factors have been found to mediate responses to breach including perceived organizational support (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003; Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005), organizational justice (Kickul, 2001; Kickul et al, 2001, Thompson and Heron, 2005), equity sensitivity (Kickul and Lester, 2001), breach attribution (Lester et al, 2002), supervisor-subordinate similarity (Suazo et al, 2005), on-the-job training (Georgellis and Lange, 2007) and age (Bal et al, 2008). Other potential factors which could be considered as breach mediators include personality traits (Raja et al, 2004), exchange/creditor ideologies (Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman, 2004), ideology (Bunderson, 2001; Thompson and Bunderson, 2003), equity sensitivity (Restubog et al, 2007), career perspectives (Sparrow, 1996; Sturges et al, 2005) and employer social accounts (Lester et al, 2007), though additional empirical research is needed in this regard.

### **1.6 Developing a Process-Oriented Breach Perspective**

Viewing breach from the perspective of the psychological contract as an ongoing process is an important area for future research and again fits with the schematic perspective mentioned

previously. Though recent work has been done by Schalk and Roe (2007), the key research focusing on this issue is that of Morrison and Robinson (1997). Such research implies that there are specific 'tipping points' to be researched including perception of individual breaches, a specific first cognitive recognition that a multiple breaches have become a significant pattern and, assuming that this is appraised as being 'within tolerable limits', a process leading up to a specific cognitive appraisal where multiple breaches are classified as being 'beyond tolerable limits'. In line with recent research by Zhao et al (2007), the role of affect must also be considered to have an impact on such cognitive appraisals.

In terms of current theory that is more suitable for such process perspectives, research by Turnley and Feldman (1999) focused on the psychological contract in light of frameworks on exit, voice, loyalty and neglect behaviours. This research is particularly important in explaining what is thought to be the temporally sequential link from breach, communicative attempts to resolve the breach situation, emotional feelings of violation negatively influencing the employee's attitudes and behaviours to the employee deciding to leave the firm. With regards to employee voice, this approach is also superior to conceptions of anticitizenship behaviour (such as Kickul, 2001; Kidder, 2005) with regards to issues of employee relations. Such frameworks take a more rounded view on the withdrawal of OCBs in the workplace as they allow for a broader range of explanations including excessive employee bargaining or organisational problems in the area of voice. Further research is required here as definitions of loyalty are vague in this context though separate research has been done by Hart and Thompson (2007) on this issue.

### **1.7 Other Subareas of Breach-Related Research**

A number of other studies have been conducted on psychological contract breach though their individual foci are more fragmented in terms of the above discussion. In terms of work focusing on subareas of psychological contract breach, studies have included social inputs (Ho, 2005; Ho and Levesque, 2005; Ho et al, 2006; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004), organizational culture (Thomas et al, 2003), cultural individualism/collectivism based on national culture (ibid, 2003), organizational identity (Brickson, 2005), the role of violation as a mediator in social exchange theory (Tekleab et al, 2005), contingent workers (McLean-Parks et al, 1998; Kraimer et al, 2005; Conway and Briner, 2002b; Dick, 2006; Gakovic and Tetrick, 2003), flexible employment contracts (Guest, 2004b), union commitment (Turnley et



al, 2004), customer service employees (Deery et al, 2006), job insecurity (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2006) and exceeded promises as breach (Lambert et al, 2003). In terms of national contexts, the main overview of international research is Rousseau (2000) which presents work from fifteen countries though breach has specifically been examined in specific international contexts such as China (Lo and Aryee, 2003; King and Bu, 2005), the Philippines (Restubog et al, 2007) and Australia (Grimmer and Oddy, 2007).

### **1.8 Management of the Psychological Contract**

A key driver of interest in the topic of the psychological contract is the potential to manage relations with workers in a more effective way. Management of the psychological contract is thought to include large-scale change management programmes, communicating promises, negotiating the agreement and employee efforts to manage the psychological contract (Guest and Conway, 2005). In terms of change management programmes, examples here would be the management of perceptions related to downsizing (Edwards et al, 2003) and formal change management programmes to move towards the ideals of a learning organization (Snell, 2002). The organisation is thought to communicate promises in a number of ways including through top-down communication to all employees, through communication during employee socialisation and through informal day-to-day interaction (Guest and Conway, 2002a).

Negotiation of the psychological contract was also examined by Rousseau (2001) in how employees should have the right to consent to or reject the terms of the agreement to promote mutuality. As a result, when each party has input into formation of the employment relationship there is less reason to dissemble or to avoid addressing one's interests (ibid, 2001). Research on employee management of the psychological contract is limited. Existing research focuses on the unique idiosyncratic deals or 'I-Deals' that key employees can create based on their unique bargaining position (Rousseau, 2001; Rousseau et al, 2006). Alternative research examines job crafting where employees make physical or cognitive changes in the task or relational boundaries of their work (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). However, one main problem here is that such action could be perceived as being a form of anticitizenship behaviour in line with research by Kickul et al (2001) and 'an effort to restore equity to the employment relationship by adjusting their extra-role of discretionary behaviours'. Further qualitative longitudinal research is required to examine the potential difficulties in effecting

such changes given that they are largely based on the employee's initiative alone and that such action lacks explicit managerial consent.

In summary, attempts to manage the psychological contract are likely focused on preventing or redressing breach. Prevention of breach is a key overall concern and the aforementioned focus on breach antecedents addresses the need for the systematic review in this area. In terms of redressing breach, an example of such research is the organisation giving 'social accounts' or explanations of organisational decisions (Lester et al, 2007). Research in this area suggests that social accounts likely play a role in an employee's cognitive evaluations of organizational decisions that affect his/her job and the employers ability to fulfil its psychological contract obligations (ibid, 2007). In a similar vein, given the likelihood that psychological contract breach is frequent in practice, one important avenue of future research may be approaches based on managerial sensegiving (Snell, 2002). Particularly given the lack of clarity regarding the 'other party' to the psychological contract, such perspectives can be helpful in trying to tackle potentially significant miscommunication due to the inherent complexity of the construct.

### **1.9 Systematic Review Questions**

In terms of practical benefits of the research, breach is thought to be clearly linked to a number of employee outcomes and this is supported by recent meta-analytical research by Zhao et al (2007). The first aim of the systematic review, in line with recent calls to examine the psychological contract as an ongoing process (Conway and Briner, 2005), is to examine the antecedents of psychological contract breach. From my current understanding of the field, narrowing down further from this focus would be inadvisable as too few papers would exist for an effective systematic review.

The second aim of the systematic review is to clarify the status of research in the field in terms of its ontological orientation. My current belief is that the field appears to be strongly oriented towards deductive, Critical Rationalist research and much research is from a managerialist perspective. In line with a recent paper by Cullinane and Dundon (2006), adopting a Critical perspective on the psychological contract may be a promising way to conduct my research. This will hopefully address the issues of power differences which are

thought to be a key area for future research (Guest, 1998a) whilst retaining a balanced perspective on the various organisational stakeholders in the contracting process.

The final aim of the research is to identify any literature which makes a link between the psychological contract breach and the concept of employee 'engagement' (Kahn, 1990). My systematic review will examine existing research on the antecedents currently linked to psychological contract breach with a particular interest in psychological antecedents if these are found to be a significant subarea. In the longer term, I believe that I will adopt an approach which focuses on the minimization of psychological contract breach through attention to prevailing psychological conditions which will allow 'employee engagement'. A key element of this research by Kahn (1990) is the idea of meeting certain conditions including psychological safety for employees which allow the maximisation of employee outcomes through removing such 'psychological barriers'.

- Identification of current research on antecedents that are explicitly linked to psychological contract breach.
- Exploration of ontological perspectives on psychological contract breach
- Identification of any literature on psychological contract breach which also examines the concept of engagement.

## **2. Systematic Review Methodology**

### **2.1 Purpose and Overview**

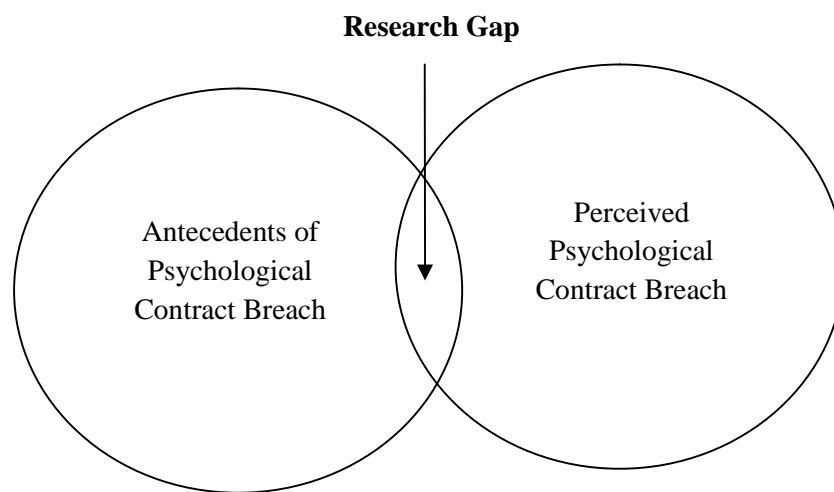
The purpose of the systematic literature review is to produce a rigorous overview of existing research in a specific area. In order to improve the quality of research, attention has to be paid to the existing state of knowledge to make an original contribution to the field. This focuses attention on clearly defined research gaps both to prevent wider fragmentation of research effort and to ensure that all pertinent information is taken into account when original research is designed. The systematic review method was initially developed in the medical sciences... to provide a means for practitioners to use the evidence provided by research to inform their decisions (Tranfield et al, 2003). The systematic review process reduces large quantities of information into a manageable working synthesis, establishes the generalisability of existing research findings, assesses the consistency of key relationships and highlights inconsistencies or conflicts in data (Mulrow, 1994). However, existing literature reviews in management research have been criticised as being overly influenced by author bias due to their lack of rigour and relevance (Tranfield et al, 2003). Preliminary searches have indicated there are few systematic reviews in HRM topics though a recent example is that of Aycan (2005).

Also, whereas medical research enjoys considerable and extensive epistemological consensus, this is untrue of management research in general (ibid, 2003). This is an issue which will be a major factor in the proposed research given the current status of the field. The systematic review process will improve the quality of subsequent research designs by clarifying the ontological and epistemological perspectives in existing research. This is important in the social sciences in general though there is a particular need in the field of human resource management due to the different perspectives that been shown to have an influence on research topics such as the psychological contract.

My own systematic review primarily focuses on the antecedents of psychological contract breach. It is important to precisely identify existing research gaps, which are quite numerous from my current understanding, to develop effective future research designs. The increased interest in the concept of the psychological contract over the past fifteen years has produced a broad literature base to inform the review process. There has been significant research in the area of psychological contract breach and particularly its link to various employee outcomes

such as employee affect, attitudes and behaviours. However, many aspects of this research subarea are theoretically underdeveloped and one key weakness in the literature is the lack of development of perspectives where breach is viewed as being part of an ongoing psychological contracting process. Secondly, in exploring ontology, I believe that refining existing conceptual definitions will help to ground a shift to an alternative ontological perspective on the psychological contract which will have wider implications for the study of the construct. A final goal is to determine if any literature on psychological contract breach refers to the concept of engagement. As the longer term focus of the research is potentially in the area of psychological antecedents to breach, clarifying conceptual links here is particularly useful.

- Identification of current research on antecedents that are explicitly linked to psychological contract breach
- Exploration of ontological perspectives on psychological contract breach
- Identification of any literature on psychological contract breach which also examines the concept of engagement



**Figure 2 – Proposed Research Gap**

## **2.2 Personal Statement**

This systematic review was conducted to build up a theoretical foundation for my proposed PhD research. In examining the antecedents of psychological contract breach, I believe that this will provide precision for my research positioning which will support the challenging direction that I see my future research taking. As my thesis will likely have a strong theoretical contribution, ensuring that I have a clear practical understanding of the field is particularly important. This will help to make my own arguments convincing to those familiar with existing literature and direct research attention to the avenue of research that my thesis will address.

I believe there is a crucial research gap which needs to be filled to understand the nature of psychological contract breach as a process rather than as a phenomenon that can be studied in a cross-sectional way. This also fits with my basic beliefs about the concept of the psychological contract. I consider that there is a basic level of psychological contract breach in most working relationships and that the phenomena should be studied in a way to minimise rather than eliminate breach. This has implications for both research and practice as the underlying causes of excessive levels of psychological contract breach can be particularly difficult to identify due to the emotionally charged nature of the phenomena.

The focus of my subsequent research will likely be on psychological antecedents to breach and creating the optimum psychological conditions for employment. The literature on psychological engagement (Kahn, 1990) has been highlighted by my supervisor as being a strong research lead in the longer term and hence this has been included as a secondary objective of the review. I expect that my ontological orientation will be significantly refined by the proposed systematic review though in the longer term I am strongly considering a more critical perspective in a similar vein to work by Cullinane and Dundon (2006) and Reed (1999). However, this position will be reassessed once the systematic review has been completed.

### **2.3 Consultation Panel**

Dr Clare Kelliher	Thesis Supervisor and Senior Lecturer in Strategic HRM, Cranfield School of Management
Dr Emma Parry	Research Fellow – Organisation Studies, Cranfield School of Management
Dr Donna Ladkin	Senior Lecturer in Organizational Learning and Leadership, Cranfield School of Management
Dr David Denyer	Lecturer, Cranfield School of Management
Ms Heather Woodfield	Information Specialist for Social Sciences, Kings Norton Library (Cranfield)
Dr Neil Conway	Senior Lecturer in Organizational Psychology, Birkbeck College
Professor Rob Briner	Professor of Organizational Psychology, Birkbeck College
Dr John Towriss	Senior Lecturer in Logistics and Transportation, Cranfield School of Management

Dr Clare Kelliher – Clare is my supervisor and will be overseeing my doctoral research. She has provided support at numerous stages to refine my thinking in terms of research positioning. Clare was my primary contact for ongoing general advice with a particular focus on the overall structure and clarity of my systematic review work.

Dr Emma Parry – Emma provided important feedback based on her knowledge of my proposed area of research and also of systematic review methodology.

Dr Donna Ladkin – Donna was a particularly useful contact with regards to exploring the ontological basis of existing psychological contract research to develop the systematic review.

Dr. David Denyer – David is a specialist in the use of systematic reviews in management research and was able to provide advice as my primary contact on all technical aspects of the systematic review process.

Heather Woodfield – As a social science information specialist, Heather provided support on potential databases which could be included in the systematic review process and locating articles which were not available in electronic form.

Dr Neil Conway – Neil is a prominent topic specialist and co-author of the book ‘Understanding Psychological Contracts at Work: A Critical Evaluation of Theory and

Research' in 2005. His detailed understanding of the field was useful to confirm the lack of lesser known work on breach antecedents.

Professor Rob Briner – Rob is another prominent topic specialist and co-author of the book mentioned above.

Dr John Towriss – As a statistics specialist, with regards to the assessment of quantitative research papers in the latter stages of the systematic review, John provided advice on the overlap between research designs and ontology.

## **2.4 Search Strategy**

### **2.4.1 Overview**

- Search of four electronic databases (2 search strings from 11 subject-specific keywords)
- Hand search of 8 subject-specific journals
- Review of specific sections of full text papers
- Cross-referencing of papers at the data extraction phase

### **2.4.2 Key Words/Search Strings**

Several key words and search strings were experimented with in formulating the final search strategy. Firstly, the decision was made to expand from the basic term “psychological contract” to also allow for potential alternative definitions. The terms implied contract, implicit contract, unwritten contract and tacit contract were included and sourced from an article by Guest (1998a). Though the term psychological contract is now well grounded in the literature on human resource management, the additional key words were required to capture any deviations from standard definitions.

Secondly, the number of overall abstracts to be reviewed was at unreasonable levels for the final checking stage using Google Scholar. However, trials with additional key terms such as breach or violation narrowed results down further as expected. It was particularly important to consider both the terms breach and violation in this search string due to their interchangeable



use in the literature though recent definitions are more precise in this regard. Also, the decision was made to include additional key words for these terms based on potential conceptual overlaps highlighted by Conway and Briner (2005) to include inequity, unmet expectations and mistrust. This exploration process completed the formulation of the first search string as narrowing down to include the breach concept produced too few entries to be reviewed. In terms of the second search string, this was completed through adding the term antecedent\* (with a wildcard used to capture both singular and plural usage) to bring the number of Google Scholar results down to manageable levels. Details of the pilot searches can be found in Appendix B.

<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Psychological Contract	Standard term used to describe the construct (e.g. Herriot et al, 1997)
Implied Contract	Synonym – psychological contract
Implicit Contract	Synonym – psychological contract
Unwritten Contract	Synonym – psychological contract
Tacit Contract	Synonym – psychological contract
Breach	Term used to describe one party’s physical underperformance in a realist sense with regards to the psychological contract (e.g. Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Often used interchangeably with the term violation.
Violation	Term used to describe the emotional reaction of a party to a perceived breach (e.g. Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Often used interchangeably with the term breach.
Inequity	Possible conceptual overlap – breach/violation
Unmet expectations	Possible conceptual overlap – breach/violation
Mistrust	Possible conceptual overlap – breach/violation
Antecedent*	Term used to refer to the conditions leading up to a particular event such as breach (e.g. Conway and Briner, 2005).

<b>Search String</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
1. psychological contract OR implied contract OR implicit contract OR unwritten contract OR tacit contract [BASIC]	Ensures that all synonyms for the term ‘psychological contract’ are taken into account to identify non-standard definition use. Also takes into consideration potential conceptual overlaps with the terms breach/violation with regards to the database searches.
2. [BASIC] AND breach OR violation OR inequity OR unmet expectations OR mistrust AND antecedent*	Used to limit the number of entries produced from Google Scholar during the final checking phase

### 2.4.3 Electronic Databases

Database	Rationale and Description
ABI Inform	General business database that provides a manageable number of high quality results. The Global database/Trade & Industry databases consists of nearly 2,550 worldwide business periodicals and provides an in-depth coverage of business and economic conditions, management techniques, theory, and practice of business, marketing, economics, human resources and finance.
EBSCO	General business database that provides a manageable number of high quality results. Business Source Complete covers more than 1,200 journals and is a leading database for full text journals in all disciplines of business, including marketing, management, MIS, POM, accounting, finance and economics.
Google Scholar	General academic search engine which produces a large number of lower quality entries on business topics. Sources of information covered include peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, abstracts and articles from various scholarly organizations.
PsycInfo	Subject-specific database for psychology literature which produces a manageable number of high quality entries. PsycINFO is an abstract database of psychological literature from the 1800s to the present. More than 2,150 titles are covered by this database and 98% are peer reviewed journals.

From the trial search process, it was decided that Business Source Complete would be the primary search database, with ABI Inform/PsycInfo and Google Scholar as the secondary databases. This was based on Business Source Complete having the highest number of high-quality entries, ABI Inform providing a general comparator with regards to business academia, PsycInfo providing psychology-specific literature and Google Scholar having the greatest number of entries though of lower quality. In terms of the first search string and the three databases this was applied to, the adjustments made from the term “psychological contract” narrowed the number of abstracts to be reviewed from 3,600 to 1,050. Due to the particularly large number of responses, the tighter search strings numbered 2 was used for the final check on Google Scholar. Other databases considered included PsycARTICLES and the Social Science Citation Index but these were eliminated due to cost and workload management with respect to the systematic review.

#### 2.4.4 Journals to be Searched by Hand

Journal of Organizational Behaviour
Journal of Applied Psychology
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology
Personnel Psychology
Human Relations
Academy of Management Journal
Human Resource Management Journal
International Journal of Human Resource Management

The eight journals noted above were compiled from comparisons of the reference sections of several articles on the psychological contract and a recent meta-analysis of the literature by Zhao et al (2007). The initial protocol also included a search of two additional journals though these were omitted due to the lack of additional studies identified at this stage.

#### 2.4.5 Alternative Sources of Information

Possible alternate sources of information	Details and current view
Conference papers	These were considered for inclusion but needed to be of particularly high quality given that they have not been officially reviewed.
Books	Books were referred to as there are now several titles which directly address the psychological contract. However, the main search focus was on journals.
Working papers, unpublished papers or internet documents	These were not used in most cases as they have not been reviewed though they were considered if they directly address one of the review questions.
Personal request to subject experts/practitioners	These were used more as a final check once the main database searches were complete
Reports from relevant institutions: companies, public bodies etc.	Certain reports from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) were included though these have been highlighted by the main database searches.

## 2.5 Search Implementation

### 2.5.1 Selection Criteria – Titles/Abstracts

Details of the number of studies selected in each stage can be found in Appendix E. A significant number of articles were filtered from the title of the work and two main exclusion criteria were used here. In terms of the actual terms psychological contract or its synonyms, these were not filtered at the title reviewing stage. Several articles were found through preliminary searches that do not refer to such terms in the title but in several places in the abstract instead.

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Publication Date	Though research is mainly from the 1990s onwards, some work dates from as early as the 1960s.
Sector	Many sectors are represented in existing research such as Guest and Conway (2002b) and this provides a more balanced view of a construct which can apply to any sector in practice
Geography	As detailed in the scoping study, several studies on psychological contract breach are in differing national contexts
Methodology	Given the large number of existing studies which focus on questionnaire data, excluding lesser used methods would be unhelpful
<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Not Related to Business Academia	In broadening the basic search string from the term ‘psychological contract’, this may bring in some articles that are not related to the field of business.
Non-English Language	Only articles that are written in English were considered as preliminary database searches have produced results in both French and Chinese.

Seven main criteria will be used to select abstracts.

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Publication Date	As above
Sector	As above
Geography	As above
Methodology	As above
<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Not Related to General Management or Human Resources	As an example, previous searches have identified the tacit aspects of supplier relationships which were excluded as the relationship being referred to is at the level of the department or organisation in a business to business context.

Poor Abstract Quality	The second selection criterion was based on the prima facie quality of the abstract. This was intended to filter out both practitioner-oriented and academic literature that lacks theoretical rigour. However, this criterion was approached with caution as the process of papers being reviewed multiple times could possibly lead to misalignments between abstract quality and paper quality.
Lack of Appearance of Key Words	The third selection criterion was whether the term psychological contract or its synonyms actually appear in the article abstract. Some articles were found that examine broader managerial issues and only refer to the psychological contract in a tangential way. With borderline cases here, as most articles will be examined in electronic form, a quick search of the document for these terms was used though for workload management purposes these will not be recorded. With regards to this criterion, it has been noted that some journals may refer to key words in a less explicit manner as they work from the assumption that readers are quite familiar with the subject area.

These were the main selection criteria that I used and they had a significant impact on the review. However, if an abstract strongly suggested that it could be useful given my knowledge of the field derived from the scoping study I reserved the right to consider it for inclusion. As discussed in the limitation section, the number of results was slightly higher at this stage than expected. As a first quality control check, requests were made to knowledgeable researchers at this point to identify any lesser known work on psychological contract breach. No papers were highlighted during this check. This complemented the second quality control check where papers were cross-referenced at the data extraction phase mentioned in the subsequent section.

### **2.5.2 Selection Criteria – Full text papers**

This stage was used to reduce the number of relevant papers down to manageable levels. These papers were then critically reviewed in full at a later stage and the majority will be included in the systematic review. The first stage involved reading both the introduction to the article and the discussion/conclusion sections. If the article had no mention of the concepts of breach or violation and also did not contribute to basic structure of the overall argument then it was generally excluded at this stage. It should be noted that a second unplanned stage was included based on reviewing the methods section of research papers. This was due to difficulties in differentiating between studies and although criteria based on methodology can introduce bias into a systematic review (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006), this focused the review on longitudinal empirical studies to identify breach antecedent evidence. Details of the selection criteria here can be found in Appendix C.

### 2.5.3 Data Extraction

Data extraction was based on a ‘critical review’ sheet to highlight the key contributions of each article to the ongoing systematic review. A completed copy of such a form can be found in Appendix D. The first sheet of the critical review of study will focus on the basic contribution of the article, it’s positioning relative to key existing debates and its overall quality ranking. The section on quality is discussed in the following section. The second sheet was used to extract key quotes from the article and formed the backbone of the systematic review content though in practice I referred back to the original articles on an ad-hoc basis.

Cross referencing of papers occurred at this stage as in-depth analysis of each paper was required to highlight any important but more obscure work that is related to the review. As indicated in the final column of Appendix A, the vast majority of key papers were identified by the main database searches though cross-referencing was an important quality control check in terms of being comprehensive in my search efforts.

### 2.5.4 Paper Quality

I made a distinction between papers in terms of if they are qualitative/quantitative or theoretical in nature and all categories were represented in the final systematic review. These are adapted from the guidelines for the Academy of Management Journal by Lee et al (2007) and key differences are highlighted below. Each paper received a score on five main selection criteria which varied depending on the type of paper. An overall quality score was then given to each paper for the purposes of summary and comparison.

Criteria score	Description
1	Excellent
2	Good
3	Average
4	Poor

Overall score	Description
1	Excellent quality
2	Good quality
3	Average quality
4	Poor quality – consider for rejection

#### 2.5.4.1 Qualitative/Quantitative

Criteria	Details
Theory	Does the paper have a well-articulated theory that provides conceptual insight and guides hypothesis formulation? Equally important, does the study inform or improve our understanding of that theory? Are the concepts clearly defined?
Literature	Does the paper cite appropriate literature and provide proper credit to existing work on the topic? Have you offered critical references that the author has missed? Does the paper contain an appropriate number of references (e.g. both in terms of over- and under-referencing)?
Method	Do the sample, measures, methods, observations, procedures and statistical analyses ensure internal and external validity? Are the statistical procedures used correctly and appropriately? Are the statistics major assumptions reasonable (i.e. no major violations)?
Integration	Does the empirical study provide a good test of the theory and hypotheses? Is the method chosen appropriate for the research question and theory?
Contribution	Does the paper make a new and meaningful contribution to the management literature in terms of theory, empirical knowledge and management practice?

#### 2.5.4.2 Theoretical

Criteria	Details
Theory	As Above
Literature	As Above
Framework Basis	Is the proposed theoretical framework reasonably grounded in a related discipline? If conceptual elements are brought together from a number of disciplines, is this done in a coherent way?
Parsimony	Does the proposed theoretical framework have unnecessary elements? Is the framework complexity appropriate for the research question and theory?
Contribution	As Above

The key differences with these criteria (Framework Basis and Parsimony) focused on the degree of speculation being kept to reasonable limits. Once this process was completed and assuming that the paper was not rejected, an entry was then made into the ‘quick reference’ section in an appendix of the main working document. The final version of this list can be found in appendix A and this acts as a tool to facilitate reader comprehension of the final systematic review work.

### **2.5.5 Data Synthesis**

Data synthesis was based on the initial theoretical framework outlined in the scoping study. This was significantly refined during the systematic review process and the narrative synthesis method chosen is detailed in subsequent sections. Though extracted text held in the 'critical review sheets' was transferred to a main working document shortly after each accepted article was read, there was a significant evolutionary component in terms of keeping a consistent structure to integrate text from a number of different authors.



### **3. Narrative Synthesis**

In terms of integrating the results of the review, a narrative synthesis method was used which is where heterogeneous studies are ordered into logical categories rather than basing the synthesis on the statistical reconciliation of relatively homogeneous quantitative studies. The main alternative method, meta analysis, was not selected as such methods 'should only be applied when a series of studies has been identified for review that addresses an identical conceptual hypothesis' (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). This review primarily aims to provide a comprehensive list of variables that are considered to be antecedents to breach rather than measuring the aggregate strength of the breach antecedent-breach perception linkage and the two secondary review questions are primarily qualitative in nature. Also, a realist synthesis method (Pawson et al, 2004) was not used as such approaches are oriented towards reviewing evidence on complex social interventions such as organizational policies. Though this review examines research on an aggregate or nomothetic view of a psychological construct, issues of realism are explored in the recommendations for new ontological perspectives on the psychological contract.

The narrative synthesis will proceed in the following way (adapted from Pettigrew and Roberts, 2006): -

- Organizing the description of the studies into logical categories
- Analyzing the findings within each of the categories
- Assessing robustness of the analysis/evidence
- Synthesizing findings across all included studies

## 4. Antecedents of Psychological Contract Breach

### 4.1 Antecedent Analysis Framework

#### 4.1.1 Current Research

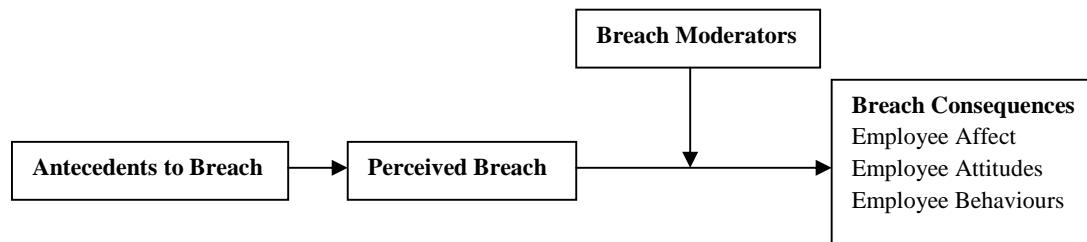


Figure 3 – Breach Antecedent Variables in Existing Analytical Frameworks

Antecedents of breach are those factors that are thought to cause breach (Conway and Briner, 2005). These are analytically distinct from measures that have attracted significant research attention in terms of breach consequences and moderators of the numerous perceived breach-breach consequence relationships. The current status of research in the field of psychological contract breach is important in terms of the structure of the review. Most existing research is in the form of quantitative studies though there are also numerous theoretical and qualitative studies. In terms of classifying a variable as an antecedent to breach, this review requires that it is both temporally and logically prior to perceived breach of the psychological contract. As a result, such antecedents will need to be sourced from longitudinal quantitative studies though these are not common in this field of research. As a result, this review will focus on confirming antecedents to breach but also mapping out potential antecedents to breach based on theoretical, qualitative or cross-sectional quantitative studies. The above model is based on an aggregate or nomothetic model of the psychological contract and hence does not include a contextual element. In reporting potential antecedents to breach, studies that are not based on quantitative data will be reviewed for explicit general themes that fit into a nomothetic framework to allow all existing research to be synthesized. The review will examine antecedents to breach in light of these limitations.

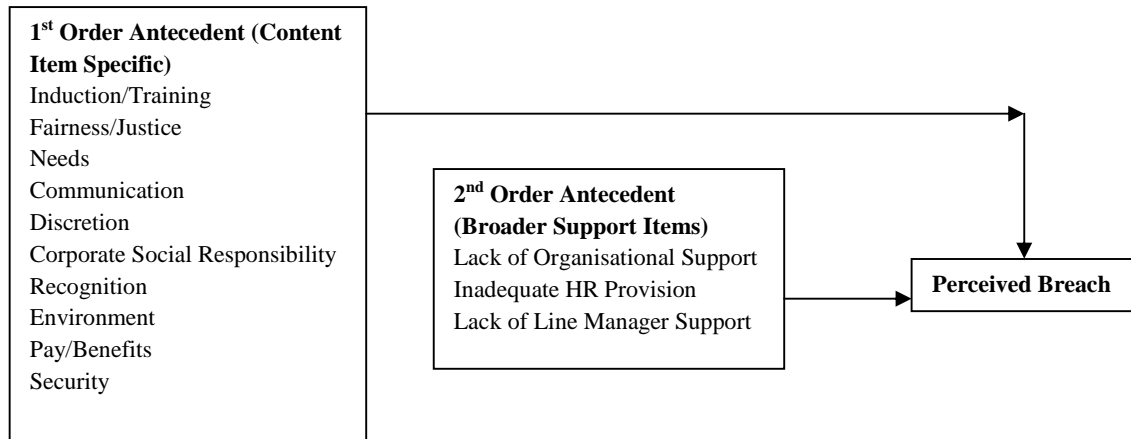
Analysis of temporal priority will likely be straightforward in that the antecedent variable of interest has to be measured at a time point prior to the time point where the breach perception is measured. It can be said without reservation that most theory involves fairly simple relationships of the X-causes-Y variety, with X and Y representing substantive variables other than time (Mitchell and James, 2001). However, temporal relationships can potentially be measured in several ways (ibid, 2001) and any non-standard relationships will be highlighted in the main analysis. Logical priority will be based on the categorization of existing studies to separate full measures of breach in existing studies from control factors (such as age), employee attitudes/behaviours (such as job satisfaction) and partial breach measures (such as perceived obligations).

#### **4.1.2 Complications Caused by Existing Measures of Breach**

The primary goal of the review is to categorize existing research in terms of confirmed antecedents, potential antecedents which require full future empirical testing or variables that are irrelevant to this review question. An initial issue is that the conceptual terms of breach and violation have been used interchangeably in existing research which potentially affects presentation of the results. However, in checking the results of the review, the studies selected use variables which refer to either the desired breach concept or an imprecise use of the term violation to refer to the same phenomena. Breach has been researched using a number of different measures which differ in terms of how well they support such a goal. In terms of quantitative studies on breach, the only form of study which can statistically test an antecedent-breach relationship, the two main breach measures have been termed composite and global measures (Zhao et al, 2007). *Composite measures* refers to items of the psychological contract (e.g. high pay, training and job security) and asks respondents how much the organization has fulfilled its obligation or promise on each item. *Global measures* do not refer to any specific content item but directly addresses subjects' overall perceptions of how much the organization has fulfilled or failed to fulfil its obligations or promises.

This review will focus on global measures, or breach of the overall psychological contract. Composite measures integrate content and degree of breach in single questionnaire measure. As a result, these elements can't be separated to examine temporal priority with respect to antecedent analysis. This strategy fitted well with measures of breach used in the selected review studies and the set of composite measures used in one study by Robinson (1996) were

excluded from the analysis. However, such measures appear to be logical in nature which suggests that content items could be considered as antecedents to breach. These have been combined with the broader potential breach antecedents of organizational, line manager and HR support highlighted by Conway and Briner (2005) to propose the following model: -



**Figure 4 – Dual Order Model of the Antecedents of Psychological Contract Breach**

This review posits that antecedents to breach can be categorized as either a first or second order variable and the focus of the review is on providing a comprehensive framework on this basis. First order variables are based on specific workplace issues which have often been termed the content of the psychological contract. For example, a study on racial discrimination could be categorized as a ‘fair treatment’ antecedent whilst a study on the effect of payroll disruptions could be categorized as a ‘pay’ antecedent. The initial categories in this section were sourced from a seminal study by Herriot et al (1997) on the contents of the psychological contract though these were adjusted slightly in presenting the results of the review.

However, existing breach antecedent research has also focused on broader factors such as organizational, line manager or HR support (e.g. Conway and Briner, 2005). As a result, a second order breach antecedent category has been included in the framework to take into account this separate focus of existing research. In terms of the current review, it should be noted that reconciliation of the first/second orders is prevented by the agency problem in the psychological contract, namely, which organizational party is held responsible for each of the content items by the employee. In terms of future research, the second order antecedents are

likely based on the anthropomorphized attributions for breach of various first order antecedents though this relationship has not been explored to date.

Also, employee breaches of the psychological contract have not been included in the review's analysis framework. As an example, only one cross-sectional study in the review included such quantitative measures and this was reviewed as part of the ontology section due to its multi-agent perspective. Cross referencing confirmed the lack of evidence in this regard. The results of the ontology section have suggested that the psychological contract should be viewed as a self-monitoring based cognitive process. Though beyond the scope of this review, developing the ontology of the concept further will likely involve particular attention on employee breach or mismanagement of the psychological contract.

The initial basis for the model was a short section on the 'antecedents of psychological breach' in the main textbook on psychological contract research by Conway and Briner (2005). This was used to guide my early thinking in terms of a producing an antecedent model though it was expected that the review would provide a different, more detailed overview of existing work due to the amount of time spent on this specific area (a brief email to Rob Briner had confirmed that there had been no systematic review work on the antecedents of breach). The existing framework consisted of the following variables: -

- Lack of HR Support
- Organizational Support
- Line Manager Support
- Negative Employment Experiences from Previous Jobs
- Social Comparisons

These factors were intuitively appealing as breach antecedents, particularly in terms of the first three 'perceptions of support' variables though the lack of more specific factors such as perceptions of pay or workplace consultation seemed to be missing. This was puzzling as these types of variables would arguably be particularly relevant to practising managers in terms of analyzing the causes or antecedents of breach. This was possibly due to these factors falling under discussion of the 'contents of the psychological contract' which is considered to be a separate area of theory to the more evaluation-oriented breach concept. The contents of the psychological contract refer broadly to an employee's perceptions of the contributions

they promise to give to their employer and what they believe the organization promises in return (Conway and Briner, 2005). The organisation is thought to provide things such as promotion, training, pay, respect and feedback (ibid, 2005). As a result, integration of these two areas appeared to require further theoretical work.

I aimed to address this issue through my model. A key starting point was a critique by Conway and Briner (2005) of one of the seminal papers on contents of the psychological contract by Herriot et al (1997). As the [inductive] study asked about occasions when organizations fell short of or exceeded expectations, it could be argued that the data collected tell us more about the contents of violations and exceeded expectations than the contents of psychological contracts as such (ibid, 2005). On this basis, I decided to argue that content items could be considered to be antecedents of breach and that this was useful in developing research in this area.

The list of twelve content items produced by the study of Herriot et al (1997) was tentatively combined with the previously mentioned factors from Conway and Briner (2005). Variables from the former were largely unchanged and comprise the list of first tier antecedents. With the latter, the main elements retained were the line manager, HR and organisational support items due to their multi-agent based definitions (social comparisons was recategorised as a first tier antecedent for model clarity). It should be noted that five content items from the study by Herriot et al (1997) were not supported by empirical data from alternative studies though these were left in for completeness. Though this overall framework didn't change radically, a major contribution of the review was the detail provided on each item such as perceptions of fairness which was represented by seven distinct variables.

Rather than a two-tier model, the results could have been presented as a long list of variables directly linked to perceived breach. Little longitudinal data was identified by the review searches, virtually no research on antecedents of breach involved data collection at more than two points in time and such a model would be in line with existing empirical data. However, there appeared to be added explanatory value in separating the model into two tiers for a construct-specific theoretical reason. This was intended to highlight one key issue in future research in that there is thought to be a problem as to who the other party to the agreement is in practice (this is referred to as the agency problem). Particularly with the broader, arguably reified factors such as Organisational or HR support, there could be interesting empirical links

between the first and second order antecedents. For example, perceptions of fair pay could be examined to see if they are thought to be primarily linked to HR Support rather than Organisational or Line Manager Support. This would help in developing a nomothetic model of the psychological contract (particularly future longitudinal research) though further idiographic qualitative research would be beneficial to balance the field in terms of empirical data.

Overall, this model attempted to address the issue of reification in a limited way as full development of the 'agency issue' requires much additional work in terms on new ontological perspectives on the psychological contract concept. I believe this was a modest addition to existing theory as 'the term reification, to be sure, does still find its way into contemporary theories with no political implications' (Honneth, 2008; 4). Computer science and artificial intelligence experts employ it to mean making a data model out of an abstract concept, certain philosophers use it as a synonym for misplaced concreteness or hypostasization, and some linguists enlist it to indicate a process of turning a predicate or function into an object in a language (ibid, 2008; 4). In this way, I believe the model is useful in developing future research hypotheses given specific theoretical complexity related to the definition of the underlying psychological contract construct.

To conclude, this framework is effective for the following reasons: -

- Allows clear categorization of potential antecedents to breach in a manner that takes into account existing breach questionnaire measures and research on the content of the psychological contract
- Takes into account the agency problem in the psychological contract and the potential different analytical foci based on first/second order antecedents whilst integrating both into one overall conceptual model

Antecedent	Definition	Elements – Full Empirical Support or Theoretical/Partial Empirical Support
Induction/Training	Providing adequate induction and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formal Socialization (Robinson and Morrison, 2000)</li> <li>- Pre-Entry Supervision Expectations (Sutton and Griffin, 2004)</li> <li>- Pre-Entry Job Content Expectations (Sutton and Griffin, 2004)</li> <li>- <i>Pre-Hire Interaction</i> (Robinson and Morrison, 2000)</li> <li>- <i>General Training Provision</i> (Martin et al, 1998)</li> </ul>
Fairness/Justice	Ensuring fairness of selection, appraisal, promotion, disciplinary and redundancy procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General Fair Treatment (Robinson and Morrison, 2000, Hubbard and Purcell, 2001; Hallier and James, 1997a)</li> <li>- <i>Distributive, Procedural and Interactional justice</i> (Pate, 2006; Andersson, 1996; Pate et al, 2003; Tekleab et al, 2005)</li> <li>- <i>Social Comparisons</i> (Ho, 2005; Hallier and James, 1997b)</li> <li>- <i>Counterfactual Thinking</i> (Shu-Cheng and Shu-Chen, 2007)</li> <li>- <i>Inappropriate Performance Appraisal System Format</i> (Davila and Elvira, 2007)</li> <li>- <i>Perceived Fairness of Appraisal System</i> (Davila and Elvira, 2007; Martin et al, 1998)</li> <li>- <i>Perceived Victimization</i> (Hallier and James, 1997a)</li> </ul>
Needs	Allowing time off to meet personal or family needs	- None Identified
Communication	Consulting and communicating with employees on matters which affect them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adequacy of Social Accounts (Lester et al, 2007)</li> <li>- <i>General Communication</i> (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Andersson, 1996; Hubbard and Purcell, 2001; Hallier and James, 1997a )</li> <li>- <i>Role Ambiguity</i> (Andersson, 1996)</li> <li>- <i>Voice Expression</i> (Andersson, 1996)</li> <li>- <i>Delivery of Feedback</i> (Davila and Elvira, 2007)</li> </ul>
Discretion	Minimal interference with employees in terms of how they do their job	- None Identified
Corporate Social Responsibility	To act in a personally and socially responsible way towards employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Goal Displacement</i> (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003)</li> <li>- <i>Value Interpenetration</i> (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003)</li> <li>- <i>Corporate Social Responsibility</i> (Andersson, 1996)</li> </ul>
Recognition	Recognition of or reward for special contribution or long service	- None Identified
Environment	Provision of a safe and congenial work environment	- None Identified
Pay/Benefits	Equitable with respect to market values and consistently awarded across the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-Entry Pay Expectations (Sutton and Griffin, 2004)</li> <li>- <i>Salary Inequalities</i> (Davila and Elvira, 2007)</li> <li>- <i>Perceived Distribution of Benefits</i> (Davila and Elvira, 2007)</li> </ul>
Security	Organizations trying hard to provide what job security they can	- None Identified
Line Manager Support	Support from the individual that the employee reports to in terms of the formal hierarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General Line Manager Support (Tekleab et al, 2005)</li> <li>- <i>Misalignment between Managers Words and Deeds</i> (Simons, 2002; Hubbard and Purcell, 2001; Hallier and James, 1997a)</li> </ul>
Organisational Support	Support from the 'general organisation' in an anthropomorphized sense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General Organisational Support (Tekleab et al, 2005, Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005; Guerrero and Herrbach, 2007)</li> <li>- <i>Work Overload</i> (Andersson, 1996)</li> <li>- <i>Managerial Competence</i> (Andersson, 1996; Hubbard and Purcell, 2001)</li> <li>- <i>Organizational Change</i> (Robinson and Morrison, 2000)</li> <li>- <i>Perceptions of Management Only Pursuing Their Own Interests</i> (Martin et al, 1998; Hallier and James, 1997b)</li> </ul>
HRM Support	Support from the 'general HRM function' in an anthropomorphized sense or from designated HR representatives	- <i>Awareness of HR policies</i> (Guest and Conway, 2002b; 2004)

Figure 5 –Results on the Antecedents of Psychological Contract Breach



## **4.2 Results**

### **4.2.1 Overview – Verified Antecedents**

In this section, the terms ‘confirmed’ or ‘verified’ antecedents to breach refer to those supported by longitudinal quantitative data whilst the remainder of variables are termed ‘potential’ antecedents to breach. Of the thirty one factors identified overall from the twenty three studies reviewed, eight factors met the review’s criteria to be considered as verified antecedents to breach. Six of these were more specific ‘first order’ measures which were formal socialization, pre-entry supervision expectations, pre-entry job content expectations, general fair treatment, the adequacy of social accounts, and pre-entry pay expectations. There were also two broader ‘second order’ measures which were line manager support and organisational support. Each will be examined in detail in the following sections with a particular focus on the quality of empirical evidence. As these are the main focus of this section of the review, the quality of potential breach antecedents will be overviewed in a later section on overall analysis quality due to word count restrictions.

This highlights the need for additional research in a number of areas including research on the broader ‘second order’ measures such as HRM support and the numerous specific ‘first order’ measures to develop current understanding on the antecedents of psychological contract breach. Additional research on the former would be particularly useful in terms of developing existing empirical knowledge and to develop a foundation for subsequent empirical work in terms of more specific ‘first order’ sub-areas.

It should also be noted that pre-entry expectations in a number of areas have been found to link to perceptions of breach. Based on prevailing definitions of the psychological contract concept, it is open to debate whether pre-employment cognition detached from organisational communications can be considered as part of the psychological contract. However, these have been included as being a potential cause of breach despite the likely difficulty in managing such issues directly. The overall balance of results in terms of verified antecedents is slightly skewed towards such factors due to a string of positive relationships from a study by Sutton and Griffin (2004) though most other factors in the overall framework are thought to be manageable to some extent.

#### **4.2.2 Induction/Training**

Formal socialization, pre-entry supervision expectations and pre-entry job content expectations were fully supported as antecedents to breach. Two additional factors in pre-hire interaction and the general provision of training were also identified as potential antecedents.

In terms of formal socialization (Robinson and Morrison, 2000) which is the formal organisational processes by which new joiners are inducted into an organisation, this has been considered as an antecedent to breach in that the lack of a formal socialization could logically cause breach of the psychological contract. Due to a slight limitation in the research design, the empirical evidence here was retrospectively measured at the second data collection point of two. However, the overall research design is particularly strong to support this finding in terms of the reasonable time between survey waves (18 months). Pre-entry supervisor and job content expectations (Sutton and Griffin, 2004) have been included as antecedents to breach though there is some debate in terms of whether broader expectations are strictly related to the psychological contract as mentioned previously. Definitions of the psychological contract vary in terms of the role of promises, obligations and expectations in terms of their centrality in the overall construct (Conway and Briner, 2005). One limitation of the study by Sutton and Griffin (2004) is the lack of attention to issues of how such components interrelate which is potentially problematic in terms of internal validity, though the empirical link between expectations and breach is clearly presented. It should be noted that one other expectation-based finding, that of pay, was categorised differently due to the presence of a specific framework category on this issue. Also, these factors were not considered to be a broader organisational, line manager or HRM support issue as these expectations are most likely closely linked to early formal interaction with the firm.

With pre-hire interaction (Robinson and Morrison, 2000), the research design allowed the variable to be fully tested as an antecedent to breach. However, although no statistical relationship was found, this variable was included as a potential antecedent to breach which requires additional empirical testing. General provision of training was examined in a case study by Martin et al (1998) though in a way that was quite strongly linked to the organizational context. Differing aspects of training were explored including the company's past record of training, provision of training across different worker groups and relevance of training to job demands.

Future research on breach antecedents will benefit from conceptual clarity in terms of the link between general work expectations, pre-hire interaction and formal/informal socialization. This can potentially be addressed through sample selection criteria and the questionnaire measures used in the research design to ensure internal validity. As an example, in the study by Sutton and Griffin (2004), the sample of MBA students was surveyed close to the end of their studies and hence the analytical focus is appropriate for the more general expectation concept (i.e. not linked to a specific role). However, if examining the concepts of obligations or promises, a sample where the individuals are currently in a role or have a confirmed job offer are more appropriate. As an example, Robinson and Morrison's (2000) sample is purposely limited to those who had a confirmed job offer and hence there was a specific reference point thus shifting the focus to issues related to obligations or promises. Also, additional work is required to understand to what extent informal socialization could be considered as an antecedent to breach. This area is somewhat unclear in terms of the second order 'support' antecedents and should be explored further.

#### **4.2.3 Fairness/Justice**

The review confirmed that 'general fair treatment' could be classified as an antecedent to breach and highlighted five other theoretical leads in terms of fair treatment. Theoretical work examined the issues of justice perceptions, social comparisons, counterfactual thinking, perceived inappropriateness of appraisal system format, perceived fairness of the appraisal system itself and perceived victimisation.

Morrison and Robinson's (2000) study examined general fair treatment with a robust longitudinal research design and this factor was also examined in two qualitative case studies (e.g. Hubbard and Purcell, 2001; Hallier and James, 1997a). Hubbard and Purcell (2001) focused on the perceived fairness of managerial action in a mergers and acquisitions context though this research focused on the concept of expectations which is arguably less central to the psychological contract than promise-based approaches. Hallier and James (1997a) examined employee perceptions of managers decisions in terms of moving employees between organisational sites. In some cases, such changes and the related procedures were perceived as violating relational commitments such as equity, care and consent (ibid, 1997a).

Justice perceptions in the form of distributive, procedural and interactional variants were examined in four studies. It should be noted that evidence here is somewhat mixed which has resulted in this being classified as a potential antecedent. A case study based on longitudinal data by Pate (2006) outlines a number of individual cases which indicate that justice variants could be an antecedent to breach. However, an empirical study by Tekleab et al (2005) with a robust research design in terms of empirically testing such a link indicated that there was no link to breach of the psychological contract. In terms of the remaining evidence, the measures used in the quantitative study of Pate et al (2003) were misaligned with specific study of the psychological contract and the framework set out by Andersson (1996) was theoretical in nature. Additional work is required to clarify the relationship between the different justice measure variants and perceptions of breach.

The role of specific 'cognitive comparisons' was theoretically examined in studies on social comparisons and counterfactual thinking. The conceptual link to breach is less direct relative to most other factors in the overall antecedent framework given the difficulty in measuring such phenomena and the fact that comparison could be based on any other first order breach antecedent. Social comparisons (Ho, 2005a; Hallier and James, 1997b) have been included in the fair treatment category as they relate to equitable treatment relative to others in a particular work context. Ho (2005a) examined comparisons with 'cohesive others' or those people in close social proximity such as members of a work team and 'equivalent others' or people in a similar general position in terms of broader social networks in an organisation. Counterfactual thinking (Shu-Cheng and Shu-Chen, 2007) was also included in the review due to its strong conceptual links to social comparisons which have previously been considered as a breach antecedent by Conway and Briner (2005). Counterfactual thinking is where individuals perform mental simulations of 'referent cognitions', or alternative imaginable outcomes, when comparing reality with an alternative (Folger, 1986). In terms of the psychological contract, existing work has focused on expatriates perceptions of alternative outcomes if they had not been sent on an overseas assignment (Shu-Cheng and Shu-Chen, 2007).

One study was also identified which examined cognitive decisions to reconcile following a broken promise which included a prospective element 'perceptions of possible future breach' (Tomlinson et al, 2004). However, this was excluded from the antecedent analysis due to complexities in the paper's unique theoretical framework and to clarify the categorization of

the first order fairness category. Overall, though a somewhat difficult area to study, existing cross-sectional research has shown that social comparison and counterfactual thinking constructs are operationalizable and could be fully tested with a longitudinal research design to determine if they can be considered as a breach antecedent.

Case study evidence also highlighted that the format of a performance appraisal system (Davila and Elvira, 2007) and the perceived fairness of an appraisal system (Martin et al, 1998; *ibid*, 2007) were also possible breach antecedents. Both studies did not include quantitative evidence which precluded classification as a full antecedent under the requirements of the review. Issues highlighted in terms of format included evaluation/appraisal criteria being unclear and the overall system being too standardized preventing the accurate appraisal based on unique aspects of differing business units. In terms of fairness of the appraisal system, employee beliefs that they do not have the opportunity to show what they can do were highlighted as an important issue though overall discussion here was limited. Both studies were slightly limited in that qualitative data was only collected at one point in time. As a key event in the employment relationship, much further research is required to examine how perceptions of the appraisal system relate to psychological contract breach with both quantitative and qualitative data.

Victimization was also examined as an important factor in a case study by Hallier and James (1997a). Though this referred to decisions made in a major change management process, it was considered to be general enough to analytically distinguish it from the specific study context. One example highlighted was where employees were transferred between work sites to balance the age profile in an organisation despite previous communications that the employees would remain at their current work site.

#### **4.2.4 Needs**

No evidence was identified in terms of the neglect of employee's personal needs being considered as an antecedent to breach.

#### **4.2.5 Communication**

This category was renamed from an original category termed 'consultation' for conceptual clarity. In terms of confirmed communication breach antecedents, the one factor identified was the adequacy of social accounts (the reasons given for organisational decisions). Four possible antecedents were identified which were general communication, role ambiguity, voice expression and the delivery of feedback.

With regards to the adequacy of social accounts, such research focuses on the reasons for job-related organisational decisions and is conceptually distinct from related concepts such as voice expression due to its focus on those decisions where the employee as a stakeholder may not necessarily have an input. The longitudinal research design of Lester et al (2007) is particularly robust relative to existing psychological contract research given the shorter time between survey waves (6 months).

General communication has been examined in a number of studies (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Andersson, 1996; Hubbard and Purcell, 2001; Hallier and James, 1997a). This factor has been examined in both theoretical frameworks and qualitative case studies though no statistical evidence was identified to test the antecedent relationship. In terms of breach, such studies examine infrequent or inadequate communication and potential shifts to more informal sources of information (ibid, 1996). Based on the results of the review, general communication in this context has been examined at the organisational level. However, it should also be noted that communication could be examined at different levels of analysis and further work here would help in clarifying this specific antecedent.

Role ambiguity (Andersson, 1996) is the lack of clarity about expected behaviours or performance levels and has been categorized as a communication issue though there is some overlap with the second order support categories, particularly in terms of line manager support. Also, this has been distinguished from the training/induction category as role ambiguity is examined in a broader sense than ambiguity related to new joiners to an organisation. This factor was only examined briefly as part of a broader theoretical framework and hence additional empirical work would be useful. Voice expression (ibid, 1996) refers to employees having the ability to express opinions in terms of issues at work which affect them. This factor is similarly addressed in little detail though there is significant scope to integrate

related fields of research on employee voice for future empirical testing. Additional work would be useful in terms of the different perceptions of individual and collective voice present in a firm and how this links to psychological contract breach.

#### **4.2.6 Discretion**

No evidence was identified in terms of interference in an employee's work being considered as an antecedent to breach.

#### **4.2.7 Corporate Social Responsibility**

Three potential breach antecedents were highlighted by the review in terms of corporate social responsibility issues which were all based on theoretical frameworks. The first, goal displacement, is where employees believe that the core ideological values of the firm have been sacrificed at the expense of administrative survival (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003). The second, value interpenetration, relates to the perception that, in forming relationships with other organizations, the company has diluted its own core ideological values (ibid, 2003). These potential antecedents to breach are quite specific in terms of their focus on the perceived current ideology of the organisation but in a way which integrates a perception of how the ideology has changed over time. In the way that it involves a form of cognitive comparison, it is closely related to the studies identified in the review which examine counterfactual thinking though the focus of analysis in this case is the organisation rather than the individual. Also, it should be noted that these factors will likely only feature as breach antecedents in psychological contracts which are more relational in nature. Future studies which examine this area specifically should integrate theory on counterfactual thinking to refine analysis of such issues. Mixed method research would be particularly useful to empirically ground and qualitatively explore this potential breach antecedent.

Perceived corporate social responsibility or CSR (Andersson, 1996) has also been examined briefly and addresses perceptions of women/minority rights, environmental performance and community relations. This was a particularly strong aspect of the original paper though the level of analysis was somewhat unclear and other elements at the same level were limited in terms of conceptual clarity. The antecedent category of CSR has a degree of overlap with the broader category of organisational support though its focus was considered to be specific

enough to warrant a separate category due to the large amount of research in the general CSR field.

#### **4.2.8 Recognition**

No evidence was identified in terms of the neglect of recognition for special employee efforts being considered as an antecedent to breach.

#### **4.2.9 Environment**

No evidence was identified in terms of the lack of a safe or congenial work environment being considered as an antecedent to breach.

#### **4.2.10 Pay/Benefits**

The categories of pay and benefits from the original outline framework were combined to streamline the final antecedent framework. One verified antecedent was identified which was pre-entry pay expectations and the two potential antecedents were perceived distribution of benefits and salary inequalities.

Pre-entry pay expectations (Sutton and Griffin, 2004) have been included as a confirmed antecedent to breach though again the centrality of expectations to the psychological contract concept is questionable as mentioned previously. Though the other two expectation-based antecedents included in the final framework (those of the line manager and those of job content) have been considered as training/induction antecedents, pay has been categorised differently due to the specific antecedent category in this area.

Both salary and benefit distribution inequalities (Davila and Elvira, 2007) are only mentioned in passing in one qualitative study. Though these were quite closely linked to the study context as discussion focused on seemingly company-specific discrimination of women, these were included as potential antecedents as they are quite general factors. Particularly in terms of understanding the role of pay as a more transactional aspect of the concept, additional work is required to establish the relationship between pay and breach of the psychological contract.



#### **4.2.11 Job Security**

No evidence was identified in terms of a lack of job security being considered as an antecedent to breach.

#### **4.2.12 Line Manager Support**

General line manager support was fully supported as an antecedent to breach in Tekleab et al (2005) though perceived misalignment between a manager's words and deeds was highlighted as a potential antecedent in a number of papers (e.g. Simons, 2002; Hubbard and Purcell, 2001; Hallier and James, 1997a). The overall research design of the study by Tekleab et al (2005) is robust but the three year intervals between data collection is arguably too long and shorter time periods between data collection would have improved the overall findings. With general line manager support, as one of the key aggregate antecedent measures, the presence of only one study which tests the antecedent-breach relationship indicates the need for additional empirical work.

In terms of misalignment between manager's words and deeds, the little existing work is either theoretical or qualitative in nature though the focus of research here is particularly interesting. Simons (2002) examined the issue in a theoretical paper through a separate construct termed behavioural integrity. This construct is thought to be closely related to psychological contract breach in that misalignments could be considered to be breaches in some but not necessarily all cases (ibid, 2002). However, the focus of the concept is thought to be somewhat different in that it can refer to any agent of the organization rather than the employee. This factor was also examined in a more general sense in Hubbard and Purcell (2001), referred to as the 'consistency of action and communication' as part of a broader framework on factors which shape employee expectations during a mergers and acquisitions process. An example highlighted here was the difference between a senior manager's communication to staff which was contradicted by a media report by the CEO, damaging the credibility of the former. Hallier and James (1997a) examined line manager support potentially varying based on the competing demands on middle managers to manage employee psychological contracts and to manage the demands of their own managers. Though existing work does not fully explore the ontological issues of word-deed misalignment, this specific issue could potentially be addressed through perspectives which focus on such

symbolic interchange in the psychological contracting process. Such perspectives are explored in detail in the ontology section of the systematic review.

#### **4.2.13 Organisational Support**

Empirical evidence confirmed that general organisational support could be considered as an antecedent to breach. Four other potential factors were also highlighted which were work overload, perceived managerial competence, organizational change and perceptions that management were 'only pursuing their own interests'. General organisational support (Tekleab et al, 2005) was supported by a robust longitudinal research design though the three year gap between data collection points is something of a limitation here. As with line manager support, additional research on this second order support antecedent would be useful in building the empirical evidence base in terms of the antecedent-breach link.

Work overload (Andersson, 1996) was examined briefly as a potential antecedent to breach. The definition used here was somewhat unclear though in terms of the review this refers to an individual being allocated excessive amounts of work in terms of volume and/or complexity. This has been considered an organisational support issue due to lack of detail in the source framework though it could also be considered to be a line manager or HR support issue. Additional research from a multi-agent perspective would be useful to examine the issues of work overload and the ways in which this issue is perceived by line managers or HR representatives though this would be a departure from the existing framework.

Perceived managerial competence (Andersson, 1996; Hubbard and Purcell, 2001) is categorized as an organisational support item as the likely attributions of such breaches are limited to either senior management or the anthropomorphized 'organisation'. Additional empirical work based on anonymous questionnaire-based research designs would be useful to explore this particularly sensitive antecedent to breach. Though difficult to manage in itself, the degree of organisational change (Robinson and Morrison, 2000) may be a somewhat indirect antecedent to breach based on the assumption that there is likely a degree of underlying change in most organisations. Though sourced from a longitudinal research design, the questionnaire measures used did not allow full testing of the antecedent-breach relationship in this case. Perceptions of management pursuing only their own interests (Martin et al, 1998; Hallier and James, 1997b) is one of the least precise of the breach antecedents

examined. In this form, it could be viewed as an organisational support or a voice issue. However, this has been categorized as the former based on the assumption that employee perceptions will be that senior managers are able to act to address such issues. The alternative would be to explore such issues in terms of the orientation of key stakeholders in terms of pluralism/unitarism though this is beyond the scope of the current review.

#### **4.2.14 HRM Support**

HRM support was highlighted as a potential antecedent to breach in two studies. In this context, the lack of HRM support would be how this factor potentially triggers breach. Existing studies by the CIPD (e.g. Guest and Conway, 2002b; 2004) have been conducted annually to gain empirical data on the state of the aggregate psychological contract of UK employees. The main questionnaire measures have examined experience of HR practices and hence do not directly examine perceptions of HR support. Research on this specific factor would be useful in contributing the field's empirical evidence base. However, though such surveys are consistent in measuring UK employees, the lack of a consistent sample across years prevents any variables from being classified as antecedents to breach as the studies are not strictly longitudinal. Future research examining employee perceptions of HR practices and their effectiveness using a longitudinal design would allow this clear gap in existing knowledge to be addressed.

## 5. Ontological Perspectives on the Psychological Contract

Ontology	Research Strategy	Research Methods/Examples from Psychological Contract Research
Positivism	Inductive	Observation-Based, (No Examples – Definitional Issue)
Critical Rationalism	Deductive	Quantitative Questionnaire (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004), Qualitative Questionnaire (No Examples)
Phenomenological Interpretivism	Inductive	Interviews (Milward, 2006), Diary Studies (Conway and Briner, 2002a)
Critical Realism – Harre	Retroductive	In-Depth Realist Interviewing (No Examples)
Alternative Critical Realists – Habermas, Bhaskar, Giddens, Archer	Retroductive/ Abductive	Case Studies (Hallier and James, 1997a), Critical Ethnography (No Examples)

Figure 6 – Overview of Ontological Perspectives

### 5.1 Existing Research

Nine studies were identified relating to this review question. In terms of reviewing the ontological basis of existing work, a significant issue is the role that theory plays in the different philosophical positions that could potentially be applied to the concept. One of the key issues with ontology is that the term ‘psychological contract’ may not be commonly used by research respondents, though most may be able to readily provide data on their ‘general employment relationship’. This is an important point which highlights that, if research is being pursued on a specific theoretical concept such as the psychological contract or related concepts such as leader-member exchange or social exchange theory, then the research has to be designed in a way to shift the analytical focus on to the specific concept of interest.

Philosophical ontologies are split in this regard in terms of whether knowledge is gained from research respondents by allowing them to discuss issues on their own terms or whether theory should be imposed to potentially produce more rigorous knowledge from the raw data gathered. As a result, certain ontologies are more compatible in terms of the philosophical consistency of research which specifically looks to target the psychological contract concept. The range of ontologies examined is adapted from the overall analytical framework set out in Blaikie (1993) and each will be assessed in terms of its suitability for research on the psychological contract. Definitions of the various positions will be introduced as the discussion explores the varying ways in which the concept has been examined.

The first position, **Positivism**, entails ontological assumptions about an ordered universe made up of discrete and observable events (Blaikie, 2000). In its epistemological assumptions, knowledge is considered to be produced through use of the human senses and by means of experimental or comparative analysis where regularities recorded through such observation form the basis for inductively derived scientific laws (ibid, 2000). However, due to problems with the inductive method (Johnson et al, 2006) being applied to quantitative rather qualitative data, the resulting theories put forward were criticized for extending beyond their underlying empirical support. Based on this specific definition, little research has been conducted on the psychological contract in this manner. The concept in itself is not based on quantitative data as existing quantitative studies are best described as attempts to operationalize a fundamentally more complex construct. However, given that the term positivism is commonly used in scientific research and in differing ways, much research is more accurately classified under the related ontology of Critical Rationalism.

With **Critical Rationalism**, instead of looking for confirming evidence to support an emerging generalization, such approaches indicate that the aim of science is to try to refute the tentative theories that have been proposed (Blaikie, 2000). In this approach to the generation of new knowledge, data are used in the service of deductive reasoning, and theories are invented to account for observations, not derived from them (ibid, 2000). Most studies on the psychological contract are based on this ontology, particularly in terms of the field's emphasis towards quantitative studies and such hypothesis-driven work has been applied to most subareas of research. Examples of such research include Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002) which statistically test such hypotheses as 'psychological contract fulfilment will positively predict employee perceptions of organisational support'. In terms of ontological appropriateness, such research does focus on the psychological contract concept due to the design of research instrument used (e.g. specific wording in terms questionnaire items which shifts the analytical focus as desired). However, as discussed later and in terms of future research, the use of quantitative hypothesis testing may have additional utility as part of a mixed methods research design to support an alternative perspective on the concept.

The general aim of **Phenomenological Interpretivist** analysis, oriented to the epistemological problems of the social sciences, is to analyse the understanding of meaning comprehension by means of a formal description of invariable basic structures of the constitution of meaning in the subjective consciousness of actors (Hitzler and Eberle, 2004). In its epistemology, knowledge is seen to be derived from everyday concepts and meanings (Blaikie, 1993). By definition, such research is based on analyzing subjective respondents accounts without any reference to alternative sources of information (e.g. through triangulation of data sources). Some phenomenological research does refer to psychological contract breach (e.g. Milward, 2006) though, referring to the point mention previously, such approaches technically examine the ‘general employment relationship’. However, the psychological contract concept may be integrated a posteriori with related management concepts in an ad hoc manner to interpret the employees’ basic structures of meaning. In terms of Milward (2006), this effective study examined eight employee accounts of their maternity leave and subsequent work reintegration periods. Breach issues examined included guilt around possibly being unable to fulfil performance expectations due to issues such as fatigue and perceptions that maternity led to an unreasonable obligation for the respondent to prove herself continuously in terms of performance.

The current state of research on the psychological contract is that most studies are based on quantitative methods and, at first sight, appear to be from a hypothesis-driven Critical Rationalist perspective but there is little discussion on ontology to clarify this. Recent quantitative research has made sophisticated advances in terms of quantitatively operationalizing the psychological contract though this has contributed to conceptual understanding in a limited way (examples include Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2002; Tekleab and Taylor, 2003). Also, key recommendations for future research by Conway and Briner (2005) appear to advocate additional work based on the phenomenological perspective though again ontology is not discussed explicitly. However, due to psychological contract theory being applied retrospectively in studies based on this ontology, a rigorous inductive study examining the individual employment relationship could potentially conclude that the psychological contract concept is not relevant as themes should emerge from the raw data collected. As a result, this could fragment research effort if the psychological contract concept is specifically being pursued and limit the consistency of inductive studies if their research design assumptions are unclear. Overall, understanding could be improved through an ontology which addresses the main issues highlighted which are shifting the analytical focus on to the psychological contract through the research design, allows a degree of

idiosyncrasy/individual construction and allows the integration of related theoretical frameworks if appropriate. Explicit discussion of alternative ontological perspectives is useful in efforts to develop this field of study.

## **5.2 Developing a Critical Realist Perspective**

The psychological contract has been considered to be a theoretical construct in a similar vein to job satisfaction and commitment (Guest, 1998a). Such research examines the concept in terms of basic Humean causality, e.g. X causes Y, which makes the concept amenable to statistical analysis of large samples of respondents to support an aggregate or nomothetic view of the concept. However, an alternative definition views the psychological contract as a cognitive schema (Rousseau, 2001). A schema is the cognitive organization or mental model of conceptually related elements which represents a prototypical abstraction of a complex concept, one that gradually develops from past experience and subsequently guides the way new information is organized (Stein, 1992). Thus, individuals use such mental models to 'manage' the complexities of the informal employment relationship. Though idiosyncratic to each employee, aligning such schema with those of key organisational agents is strongly advocated in terms of how the concept should be managed with the focus of analysis being on smaller employee samples. However, Rousseau (2001) does not go into specific detail on the ontological change that is indicated by the definitional shift from theoretical construct to complex cognitive schema or mental model.

In terms of research design, this moves the study of the psychological contract to a Critical Realist ontology. Though such approaches often focus on numerous aspects of management research, theorists such as Harre (2002) have introduced a variant of Critical Realism which specifically develops the ontological basis of psychology research. It has been argued that only within this philosophy of science can sense be made of the project of cognitive psychology to explain psychological phenomena by modelling cognitive processes, most of which we are unaware (ibid, 2002). This shift changes the basis of causality to one where the concept is by definition an adaptive mental model which fully supports the functionality of the term, namely, it being essentially used to 'manage' the informal side of the employment relationship. This is how the concept differs from concepts such as job satisfaction which in themselves are not used to manage a particular activity.

**Critical Realist** epistemology is based on the building of models such that, if they were to exist and act in a postulated way, they would account for the phenomena being explained (Blaikie, 2000). It is based on an ontology where we can legitimately presume not only of what we can perceive but also of what we can conceive within the constraints of the methods of theoretical science (Harre, 2002). In terms of the psychology-based variant of Critical Realism, the core *model* would be the unobservable psychological contract cognitive process by which an employee manages the informal side of the employment relationship. The *phenomena* being explained would be the numerous respondent accounts of the informal side of the employment relationship. However, as the model is of an unobservable cognitive process, the operation of *causal mechanisms* in a given research setting need to be taken in to account. Examples of such causal mechanisms include the reasons that a social actor gives for their own actions (Blaikie, 2000) and those reasons that are offered by other social actors for the same phenomena.

Through collecting data on individual cognition from numerous perspectives, examining such data in the light of cognition as an adaptive phenomenon and using qualitative/mixed methods approaches, improved explanatory power can result from research findings. Since the results of psychological research, translated out of the misleading rhetoric of causes and effects into the more transparent terminology of meanings and rules, expresses the way lives are ordered, disclosing the principles or norms of cognitive and social order can be revelatory (Harre, 2004). In this way, the focus of research on psychological contract breach shifts to gaining detailed understanding of the phenomena given that objectively proving an instance of breach may be extremely difficult in practice. Examples of suitable research methods to examine psychology in this way would include critical ethnography (Forester, 1992) or semi-structured interviews (Smith, 1995).

Such an approach solves the problems with existing research highlighted earlier, namely, how to shift research attention on to the psychological contract, how to allow a degree of individual construction of meaning without adopting a full phenomenological position and allowing analytical frameworks such as self-narratives (as advocated by Conway and Briner, 2005) to be considered as possible causal mechanisms. Such approaches are also more suitable for potentially examining how complex adaptive behaviours such as organisational politics influences the psychological contracting process. In order for a



mental model to be fully adaptive in terms of theory on causality<sup>1</sup>, it has to be oriented towards the management of symbolic interchange with other individuals in a given environment. Further research is required to explore such adaptive cognition in light of symbolic information inputs, both in terms of more routine symbolic interaction between individuals in a research setting but also how more complex political behaviours are interpreted at the individual level.

Finally, there are a number of alternative positions within Critical Realism that are potentially related to study of the psychological contract. The overall reasons for exclusion will be presented though full exploration is beyond the scope of this research as highlighting the perspective of Harre (2002) has been the main ontological contribution of this systematic review. In terms of the role of politics, a theoretical paper by Cullinane and Dundon (2006) has advocated analysing the psychological contract from a discourse analysis perspective to add to the value and empirical utility of the concept, though the discussion is unclear in terms of possible research designs and the precise ontological consequences of such a shift. Also, existing work on Critical Theory is similarly focused on the symbolic analysis of discourse though integrating such an approach with organizational psychology is potentially problematic (Steffy and Grimes, 1992). Additional work is required to determine how the discursive psychology perspective of Harre (2002) relates to the broader field of discourse analysis, particularly in terms of level of analysis and the role of HRM activity.

The remaining positions are either incompatible with the psychological contract or are more suitable for future research once a discursive psychology view of the concept has been sufficiently grounded. The work of Bhaskar (2008) focuses on social structures rather than individual cognition producing social reality (i.e. the interaction of numerous individual psychological contracts) and hence is ontologically inconsistent. A number of papers on the psychological contract have attempted to address the latter perspective (e.g. Edwards and Karau, 2007; Thompson and Hart, 2006) though in a way that is less clear than that set out in theory on Critical Realism. Building on the work of Bhaskar (2008), Giddens (1979) and Archer (1995) take an intermediate position where individuals and existing social structures both have an influence in terms of social reality. Further work is required to examine to what extent such approaches are required to integrate the psychological contract with the broader structure of HRM.

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<sup>1</sup> For expanded discussion of the philosophical concept of intentionality which underpins this argument, further detail can be found in Harre (2002, p.103-104).

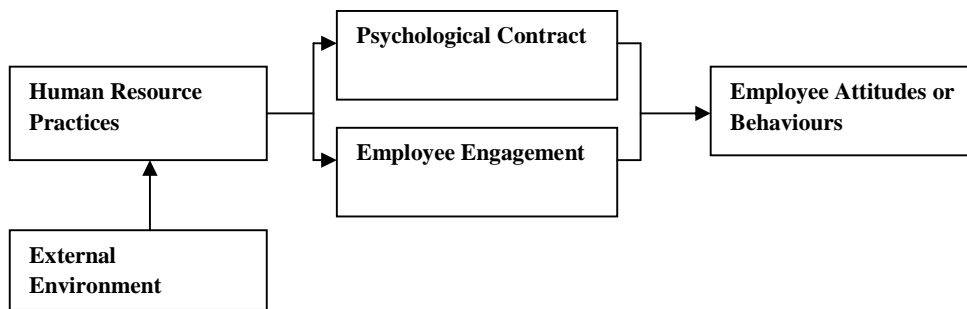
## **6. Exploring Engagement**

### **6.1 Defining Engagement**

In terms of research on HRM, personal engagement refers to the behaviour by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances (Kahn, 1990). Personal engagement is defined as the harnessing of organizations members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances (ibid, 1990). A central aspect of the concept is the role of three key psychological conditions in meaningfulness, safety and availability which are thought to influence the levels of engagement that are displayed by the employee. It is primarily an involvement-oriented construct though there is some overlap with employee affect, attitude and behaviour concepts. As a result, it has been differentiated from a number of related theoretical concepts including job involvement, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviours, organizational commitment and the psychological contract (Aggarwal et al, 2007).

### **6.2 Linking the Psychological Contract with Engagement**

As a secondary objective of the review, the literature on breach was examined for articles which referred to both the psychological contract and engagement though only two studies were identified. Existing models (such as Aggarwal et al, 2007; McBain, 2007) have suggested that the concepts are closely interrelated in that both are anchored in social exchange theory, both focus on the individual level of analysis and that the impact on employee outcomes is similar. For example, both constructs could be logically succeeded by the frequently examined causal chain of employee affect, attitudes and behaviours in the formation of research hypotheses. This is in contrast to studies such as McBain (2007) which examine engagement as an attitudinal construct though lack of discussion on this classification is a major limitation in supporting such a view. Though no empirical research was identified, both studies examined in the review (e.g. Aggarwal et al, 2007; McBain, 2007) advocate the operationalization of the engagement concept through quantitative survey measures in a similar way to most research on the psychological contract. However, based on current research, the two concepts are thought to be conceptually distinct (Aggarwal, 2007). Integration of the two concepts would help to develop research on the psychological contract due to the unique focus of the engagement concept which offers a new perspective on employee outcomes in the workplace.



**Figure 7 – Aggarwal (2007) Linking the Psychological Contract to Engagement**

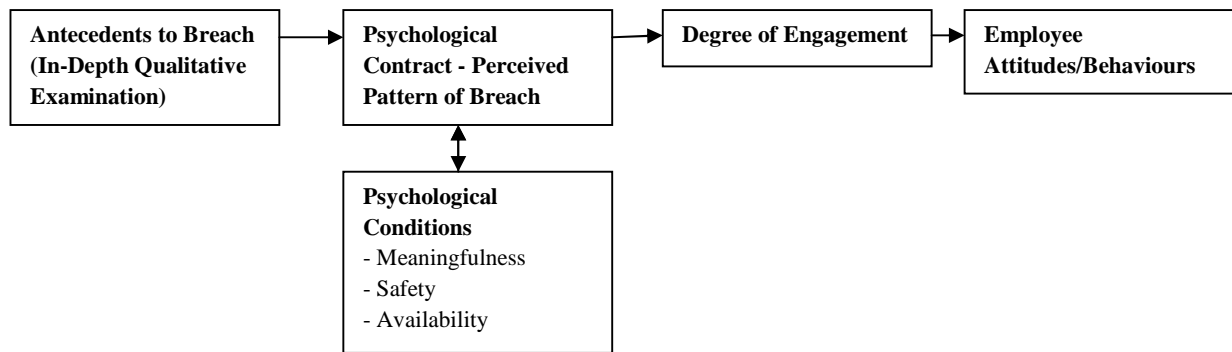
In the above model, engagement is considered to be at the same analytical level as the psychological contract. One main limitation is the lack of discussion of employee affect. There is a degree of overlap between the emotional aspects of engagement and numerous affect constructs such as mistrust or perceived violation which is not fully explored. Similarly, the key role of psychological conditions from the original paper by Kahn (1990) is not recognized in this model. As a result, additional theoretical work is required to build on such models to support future empirical data collection.

However, certain aspects of the engagement construct are potentially problematic in terms of pursuing such an approach. The psychological contract by definition is arguably open to both steady state and processual measurement. However, a basic conceptual problem in measuring both constructs using questionnaires is that engagement as a concept is defined as being one that examines fleeting moments of activity in an organizational setting. For example, if the research was focused on the employee outcome of performance, existing measures are focused more on questionnaire measures of steady state performance rather than performance in a temporally dynamic sense. As a result, research designs would have to be longitudinal with many data collection points to adequately address this particular research focus.

As the concept of Engagement was derived from a grounded theory study (e.g. Kahn, 1990), further examination using qualitative methods seems particularly appropriate. The psychological contract has been measured in mainly quantitative form though future research will likely focus on qualitative, processual approaches. Additional research is required to develop a qualitative process model integrating

the psychological contract and engagement as the little existing work here is either theoretical or lacking in empirical detail.

### **6.3 Developing an Integrated Qualitative Model**



**Figure 8 – A Qualitative Model Integrating the Psychological Contract and Engagement**

This model is qualitative and hence has a different basic structure to the model in the antecedent analysis section which was used to summarise existing research which is predominantly quantitative in nature. The model outlined here has been developed from three main sources. Firstly, in line with the main focus of the review, an ‘antecedent to breach’ component has been included. Secondly, a number of hypotheses have been posited by Aggarwal et al (2007) which are useful to situate the psychological contract and engagement within one model. These were that: -

- A positive imbalance in terms of the psychological contract leads to engagement
- There is a relationship between degree of psychological contract breach/fulfilment and degree of engagement
- Psychological contract fulfilment precedes employee engagement

Finally, a ‘psychological conditions’ component has been included which was a key feature in the original engagement paper by Kahn (1990) and has been closely linked to the employee’s perceived pattern of breach.

This model suggests that the pattern of breach is likely closely related to the perceived psychological conditions that prevail in a working environment and that these factors are the primary drivers of the level of engagement that follows. In terms of how the process unfolds over time, the model suggests that consistent fulfilment of the psychological contract over time is important and this is influenced by its circular relationship with the prevailing psychological conditions in the workplace. As a result, a longitudinal research design with numerous data collection points may be useful in exploring the model fully.

Relative to existing research, the main contributions of this model are the improved theoretical detail and increased conceptual clarity. As mentioned previously, the practical benefit of such a model is that it may have particular utility in terms of examining individual employee outcomes in a more process-oriented and temporally dynamic way. For example, an approach which fully integrates the engagement concept is likely more attentive to the affective dynamics of individual employee performance in terms of complex discretionary behaviours than existing static measures (an example here would be the distinction between the static measures of in-role performance and Organizational Citizenship Behaviours in mainstream research). This may offer a different perspective on the practical impact of the psychological contract and help to build theory as a result.

Further discussion of the ontological basis of the model is limited as the engagement concept has not been sufficiently explored in this regard. However, the findings of the review have suggested that the perspective of Harre and Secord (1972) can be suited to both person concepts such as the psychological contract and involvement-oriented concepts such as engagement. Additional work is required to explore how the two concepts are related within this specific ontological perspective.

## 7. Limitations

### 7.1 Review Design/Synthesis

Review Stage	Description
Database Searches	Based on the use of specific key words and search strings. Basic results were then filtered based on title and abstract selection criteria.
Journal Searches	Hand search of numerous specific journals
Full Text Section Review	Examination of specific paper sections to filter out irrelevant studies
Cross-Referencing	Once full papers had been reviewed, key missing references were identified through reference lists
In-Depth Relevance Review	As part of the quality assessment, several papers were rejected on relevance grounds (i.e. no variables could be considered breach antecedents)

Figure 9 – Research Design Overview

The review design and synthesis had a number of limitations. Firstly, the review design was slightly adjusted from the original protocol due to the difficulty in reducing the number of studies to be examined. This was due to breach being one of the most heavily researched areas of theory on the psychological contract and the number of studies examined at each stage can be found in Appendix E. Following discussion with review advisors, the structure of the full text section review stage was changed to focus the search on studies with data to support the main antecedent analysis review question. The initial protocol was designed to have one main stage where the introduction and conclusion sections were examined to filter out irrelevant papers. However, an additional stage was introduced based on a review of study's methods section and details of selection criteria used here can be found in Appendix C.

Secondly, the hand search of journals could have been reduced to five publications given the detailed database searches conducted prior to this stage. The original review protocol indicated that ten journals would be searched though this was reduced to eight in practice due to the lack of additional studies produced from this review stage. Thirdly, full synthesis of findings across all included studies in terms of ontology could not occur as only the psychological contract was examined. This was highlighted by the unexpected finding that the ontological perspective of Harre can also potentially be applied to

involvement-oriented concepts such as engagement, though this does highlight an opportunity for future research. Finally, the necessary analysis of 'potential' antecedents to breach based on the lack of longitudinal empirical data was possibly limited by the lack of research which integrates related fields such as perceptions of pay/benefits or job security. Additional interdisciplinary research is required to fully explore the range of antecedents to breach.

## **7.2 Study Quality**

The quality of studies varied across the main review questions. In terms of antecedent analysis, this category had the greatest range in terms of overall study quality. However, due to the specific focus of this review question, the main overall limitation here was the lack of longitudinal studies. In terms of longitudinal studies that were identified, one limitation was the variability in time between data collection points. This ranged from six months (Lester et al, 2007) to three years (Tekleab et al, 2005) in existing research. Also, the number of data collection points is generally limited to two which prevents examination of any non-standard temporal relationships. Though rejected at the in-depth relevance review stage due to a lack of antecedent variables, a good example here is Robinson (1996) which examines circular relationships between trust and breach of the psychological contract. Future research designs would be improved by increasing the number of data collection points and limiting the time between them to no more than 18 months to improve the quality of empirical findings.

Studies in the area of ontology were generally of good quality, particularly given the complexity of the subject matter. A main limitation of the studies identified was that existing theoretical work has attempted to link the concept to other complex areas of theory such as social contract theory (Thompson and Hart, 2006) though it is arguable that additional work is required on the philosophical basis of the psychological contract before this can be done effectively. Also, explicit discussion of ontologies which support qualitative research designs is limited, though such work is thought to be a main priority in terms of developing the field. Finally, due to the small number of engagement studies identified, the numerous limitations in one paper meant that discussion was largely based on one good theoretical paper. Though this presents an opportunity for future research, this may have limited discussion in terms of this review question.

## 8. Conclusion

The results of the review have highlighted the limited amount of research on the antecedents of psychological contract breach and the need for additional work in a number of areas. Eight variables including levels of line manager support, perceptions of fair treatment and the adequacy of workplace decision consultation have been identified as antecedents of breach though the review also highlighted twenty three diverse factors that have been explored but not fully tested in empirical terms. Based on the antecedent analysis model proposed earlier, the findings suggest that the broader second order support categories of line manager, organizational or HR support should be examined as a priority to build the foundation of the empirical evidence base. Once these overarching causes of breach have been sufficiently explored, further work is required to test the more specific first order content categories such as perceptions of fairness or perceptions of training provision. In terms of developing the field of psychological contract research, additional research on the antecedents of breach is important to determine the range of potential factors, the weight of empirical evidence for each individual factor and the strength of the antecedent-breach linkage through meta-analysis work once sufficient data is available.

Reviewing the ontological foundation of psychological contract breach has indicated that a Critical Realist perspective is a strong avenue for future research. This is in contrast to most existing research which is primarily based on hypothesis testing with limited discussion of ontology which suggests that Critical Rationalism is the dominant philosophical perspective. Rather than focusing on objective empirical evidence of breach, such approaches are more oriented towards understanding the complexities of breach from a socially constructed view. This may help to develop research by addressing particularly complex instances of breach where empirical data in itself may be limited in terms of its practical utility. Though such research is arguably less generalizable, the improved practical understanding of the psychological contract may help to generate new ideas to develop theory in terms of an aggregate or nomothetic view of the concept. The perspective of Harre (2002), specifically oriented towards the field of psychology, may assist in focusing qualitative analysis on the cognitive process of psychological contracting rather than the general employment relationship in a way that is analytically imprecise. This will help to improve research in the field by adopting a perspective where the role of adaptive cognition is central to explore the management of complex symbolic interchange with multiple organisational agents in the workplace.



Finally, very little research was identified integrating the concept of the psychological contract with engagement. This is a clear gap in existing literature and a tentative model has been proposed to be explored in future work. In synthesizing the review findings across all included studies, a key avenue for future research was highlighted in that both concepts could be individually explored from the perspective of Harre (1972). However, as the review did not explicitly examine the ontology of the engagement concept, further work is required to identify how the two concepts are related within this specific ontological perspective.

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**Appendix A – Final List of Studies Included in the Systematic Literature Review**

<b>Author/Year</b>	<b>Publication</b>	<b>Main Focus</b>	<b>Study Details</b>	<b>Key Quotes</b>	<b>Source</b>
Aggarwal et al (2007)	IIMB Management Review	The relationship between HR practices, the Psychological Contract (PC) and Engagement	Theoretical Paper	Although the PC and Engagement are both dynamic in nature, while Engagement literature focuses on moments of task performance, the PC is assumed to be comparatively more constant and stable	Database Searches
Andersson (1996)	Human Relations	A process model of how breach of the PC links to the outcome of Employee Cynicism	Theoretical Paper	The practical implications of studying cynicism in the workplace lie primarily in employees' attitudinal reactions to environmental, organizational and job factors	Database Searches
Conway and Briner (2005)	Book	Critical review of the current state of research on the PC	Book	This book has identified numerous methodological, theoretical and empirical limitations in existing research	Database Searches
Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005)	Journal of Applied Psychology	The relationship between Organisational Support and the PC	Longitudinal questionnaire survey of 347 employees in the local government sector	The authors argue that integrating both PC and organizational support frameworks provides a more comprehensive understanding of the employee-employer relationship	Database Searches
Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002)	European Journal of Work & Organizational Psychology	Exploration of workplace reciprocity through the PC concept from a multi-agent perspective	Longitudinal questionnaire survey of 1,484 employees in the local government sector	The PC construct has evolved from mutual expectations to reciprocal obligations yet the core idea of reciprocity is visible throughout its development	Database Searches
Cullinane and Dundon (2006)	International Journal of Management Reviews	The role of the PC in critical organizational studies/discourse analysis	Theoretical Paper	This analysis interprets much of the PC literature as a discursive or ideological product of a contemporary neo-liberal society	Database Searches
Dabos and Rousseau (2004)	Journal of Applied Psychology	Exploration of workplace reciprocity through the PC concept from a multi-agent perspective	Cross-sectional questionnaire survey of 80 employee- employer dyads in the higher education sector	The bedrock of functional employment relationships are exchanges between workers and employers characterized by mutuality	Cross Referenced (Lester et al, 2007)

Davila and Elvira (2007)	International Journal of Manpower	Examination of the link between the PC and Performance Management in a Mexican Context	Cross-sectional focus group interviews with 42 employees in the Mexican manufacturing sector	We found that contextual factors such as cultural, structural and economic reasons influence the PC and affect perceptions of performance evaluation	Database Searches
Edwards and Karau (2007)	Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies	Advocate a 'Social Contract Scale' in terms of ideal work relationships and how this differs from the PC	Cross-sectional questionnaire survey of 342 US Undergraduate Students	We believe it is important to distinguish between the two concepts because employee perceptions of the PC could differ sharply from their perceptions of the Social Contract	Database Searches
Guest (1998)	Journal of Organizational Behavior	Extended discussion on the basic definition of the PC concept and advocate additional research	Theoretical Paper	Despite the many problems with the way in which the concept has been developed to date, there is a case for taking the PC seriously	Database Searches
Guest and Conway (2002)	CIPD Report	Provide annual data on the state of the UK PC, with a particular focus on workplace pressure	Cross-sectional questionnaire survey of 1,000 UK employees from numerous sectors	There is some recognition that excessive hours and workload may be damaging to health; for most there is some compensation in reasonable levels of control and social support at work	Database Searches
Guest and Conway (TBC)	CIPD Report		Cross-sectional questionnaire survey of 1,000 UK employees from numerous sectors		Cross Referenced (Conway and Briner, 2005)
Hallier and James (1997a)	Employee Relations	Identification of PC issues arising from an enforced change management process	Longitudinal case study of 41 employees in the air traffic control sector	Management's failure to inform and support staff during this pre-move period was seen as illustrating the way managers now equated efficiency with greater employee direction and control	Database Searches
Hallier and James (1997b)	Journal of Management Studies	Examination of middle manager tensions in managing employee PCs and senior management	Longitudinal case study of 20 middle or senior managers in the air traffic control sector	In effect, a new psychological contract was struck between senior management and middle line managers to support the increasingly commercial objectives of ATC	Database Searches

Herriot et al (1997)	British Journal of Management	Provide empirical data to map out the contents of the UK PC	Cross-sectional Critical Incident Interviews of 184 UK employees and 184 UK managers from numerous sectors	Theoretically, it seems possible that in one national culture, that of the UK, there is a considerable level of agreement about what the PC consists of	Database Searches
Ho (2005)	Academy of Management Review	Examine the role of social networks in the PC process	Theoretical Paper	Despite the prevalence of social influence and comparison in organizations, extant research on PCs has focused little on the effects of fulfilment evaluations	Database Searches
Hubbard and Purcell (2001)	Human Resource Management Journal	Examination of a dual process model of employee expectations in the context of mergers and acquisitions	Cross-sectional case study of 71 UK employees in the Security/FMCG sectors	In this complex management process the management of employee expectations can easily be mishandled or ignored as the financial, legal or strategic issues dominate senior executives attention	Database Searches
Lester et al (2007)	Journal of Organisational Behavior	Examines the role of social accounts (explanations for workplace decisions) in PC fulfilment.	Longitudinal questionnaire survey of 195 employees in the hotel & resort sector	Social accounts likely play a role in an employee's cognitive evaluations of organizational decisions that affect his/her job and the employers ability to fulfil its psychological contract obligations	Database Searches
Martin et al (1998)	Human Resource Management Journal	Examines the training element of the PC in two manufacturing firms	Longitudinal case study of 47 UK employees in the manufacturing sector	The increase value placed on training and development is associated with employees trying to adjust to a climate of increasing job security by making themselves more employable	Database Searches
McBain (2007)	Strategic HR Review	Examine relationship between the PC and Engagement	Cross-sectional interviews of an unspecified number of UK HR practitioners from numerous sectors	Organizations should be clear on the strategic purpose of engagement and why it matters	Database Searches
Milward (2006)	Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology	Explore the maternity leave experiences of women and the resultant impact on the PC	In-depth interviews of 8 UK employees from numerous sectors	Despite legal advances, the findings suggest that women appear to struggle psychologically with the reconciliation of motherhood and work	Database Searches

Morrison and Robinson (1997)	Academy of Management Review	Propose a theoretical framework of breach and distinguish the role of emotion in this process	Theoretical Paper	Violation is an emotional experience, yet it arises from an interpretation process that is cognitive in nature	Database Searches
Pate (2006)	Journal of European Industrial Training	Propose a processual breach framework focusing on various justice concepts	Longitudinal case study of 4 UK employees in the manufacturing sector	In terms of sources of breach, it could be argued that a distributive justice trigger may have a stronger effect than a procedural trigger	Database Searches
Pate et al (2003)	Employee Relations	Exploring how violation of the PC links to employee attitudes and behaviours	Longitudinal case study of 50 UK employees in the manufacturing sector	The model seeks to assess the extent to which organizational justice issues are a necessary and sufficient condition for changes in attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of the PC	Database Searches
Robinson and Morrison (2000)	Journal of Organisational Behavior	Empirically develop a seminal model on the process of how PC breach develops	Longitudinal questionnaire survey of 147 US employees from various sectors	As circumstances change, obligations that were created at one point of time may become more difficult to subsequently fulfil	Database Searches
Rousseau (2001)	Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology	Advocate a perspective of the PC where the concept is viewed as a cognitive schema or mental map	Theoretical Paper	This research examines the mental models or schemas that people hold regarding employment, the promises employment conveys and the extent of agreement between the parties involved	Scoping Study
Shu-Cheng and Shu-Chen (2007)	International Journal of Manpower	Explore the role of counterfactual thinking in the PC process of expats	Cross-sectional questionnaire survey of 135 Taiwanese employees from various sectors	A repatriate, for example, may feel happy about having taken the international assignment and believe that if she did not take it, she would have been worse off than she is now	Database Searches
Simons (2002)	Organization Science	Examine the concept of behavioural integrity or word-deed alignment	Theoretical Paper	Behavioural Integrity is proposed here as a central but manageable antecedent to trust that describes a wider range of organizational experiences than the PC	Database Searches

Sutton and Griffin (2004)	Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology	Examine how pre-entry expectations link to post-entry experiences and PC violation	Longitudinal questionnaire survey of 235 Australian employees from various sectors	The experience of the job and the interaction with the employer regarding what the experience will be like are the primary predictors of job satisfaction	Database Searches
Tekleab and Taylor (2003)	Journal of Organizational Behavior	Examine employee-manager agreement on PC obligations and violations	Cross-sectional questionnaire survey of 130 US employee-manager dyads in the higher education sector	We argue that disagreement on reciprocal obligations may increase each party's perceptions of violation by the other	Database Searches
Tekleab et al (2005)	Academy of Management Journal	Exploring the relationships between organizational justice, social exchange and the PC	Longitudinal questionnaire survey of 191 US employees in the higher education sector	Ultimately, it is employee perceptions of violation rather than organization support that directly determines their job satisfaction	Database Searches
Thompson and Bunderson (2003)	Academy of Management Review	Explore breach of ideological aspects of the PC	Theoretical Paper	Fulfilled obligations on the ideological dimension of the PC may compensate for unfulfilled obligations on the socio-emotional or economic dimensions	Database Searches
Thompson and Hart (2006)	Journal of Business Ethics	Explore the link between the PC and broader Social Contract theory	Theoretical Paper	PCs may be the formative mechanism that, over the centuries, shapes the collective human understanding of macro social contracts as well	Database Searches
Tomlinson et al (2004)	Journal of Management	Examine 'victims' willingness to reconcile following a broken promise in the workplace	Theoretical Paper	The damage incurred by trust violations within professional relationships makes it essential to understand the dynamics of reconciliation.	Database Searches

**Appendix B – Pilot Search of Electronic Databases**

<b>Search String</b>	<b>ABI Inform</b>	<b>Business Source Complete (EBSCO)</b>	<b>Google Scholar</b>	<b>PsycInfo</b>
“psychological contract”	521	925	8,810	1,218
“psychological contract” AND breach	61	105	1,650	332
“psychological contract” AND violation	70	115	2,260	281
“psychological contract” AND antecedent* AND breach OR violation	6	10	1,040	212
“psychological contract” OR “implied contract” OR “implicit contract” OR “unwritten contract” OR “tacit contract” [BASIC]	959	1,367	19,700	1,293
[BASIC] AND breach OR violation	170	241	7,700	465
[BASIC] AND breach OR violation OR inequity OR unmet expectations OR mistrust	173	250	5,330	541
[BASIC] AND breach OR violation OR inequity OR unmet expectations OR mistrust AND antecedent*	7	14	1,390	244

### **Appendix C – Adjustment to Full Text Paper Review Section (Methodology Selection Criteria)**

- Quantitative papers with psychological contract breach measures and longitudinal data
- Theoretical Papers where frameworks suggest that variables discussed are prior to a perceived breach
- Qualitative Papers on psychological contract breach with longitudinal data
- Qualitative Papers on breach which are based on cross-sectional data though retrospectively examine breach issues over time
- Cross-sectional quantitative papers with very strong links to existing antecedent analysis by Conway and Briner (2005, e.g. social comparisons and review paper examining counterfactual thinking)



**Appendix D – Example of Critical Review of Study – Guest (1998) ‘Is the Psychological Contract Worth Taking Seriously?’**

**Overview** A theoretical paper focusing on the definition of the psychological contract, specifically the multi-agent view of the construct

**Why am I reading this?** To gain a better understanding of the debate on ontology. Specifically, I am looking to see how it technically places the concept in terms of social science research and its position in terms of the debate on whether the psychological contract focuses on the employee perspective alone.

**What are the authors trying to do?** He locates the concept as being a hypothetical construct in a similar category to concepts such as commitment though with the added complexity of being between one specific and one nebulous party. Guest is trying to situate the concept in terms of the wider shift in employment where the traditional career is no longer offered. He argues that there are problems with content validity (promises, obligations, expectations), construct validity (in terms of agreement) and testability/applicability of the concept. He advocates viewing the concept from a multi-agent perspective.

**What are they saying that’s relevant to what I want to find out and is it original?** Good technical discussion of the concept’s status, outlines a key argument for the multi-agent perspective and explores numerous interesting issues.

**How convincing is what the authors are saying?** Difficult to access though the technical discussion is of a high quality.

**What use can I make of this?** Clarifies issues of operationalization, the role of theory and how the construct differs from related concepts.

**Quality (Theoretical Paper)**

Criteria	Score	Details
Theory	1	The theory is very clear in this paper. Though difficult to access, the technical discussion is of a high quality and promotes understanding.
Literature	2	The paper cites appropriate literature given the time it was written though the field has moved forward since then. The paper contains a balanced number of references given the length of paper.
Framework Basis	2	The proposed theoretical framework clarifies the positioning of the concept relative to organizational psychology in an effective way.
Parsimony	2	The framework is OK in this regard. Some of the concepts integrated in the main model could have been a bit tighter but overall is quite good.
Contribution	1	Makes a strong theoretical contribution and provides the basis for clarifying the ontology of this complex concept.
<b>Overall Score</b>	1	As the ontological discussion of the concept will likely open up key avenues of future research, this paper is very effective and is still robust relative to when it was written.

## Notes

- Where it sits in analytical terms, argues its not a theory or a measure but a construct drawn from a metaphor. Check the definition of theory, seems obviously not a measure and that the metaphorical approach is not fully appropriate (suggests alternatives could be used such as Morgan).
- Similar to individually focused concepts (such as commitment/motivation) though closer to multi-agent concepts (such as communication/flexibility) but even more complex due to the nebulous 'organisation'
- Could consist of promises, obligations, expectations, perceptions and beliefs. If its all of them there is a parsimony problem.
- Do all employees have psychological contracts? At what point does one form?
- Argues that the focus on employee centred PCs affects the possibility of mutuality, both contracts are 'locked away' and the importance of consent for change. Overcomes the anthropomorphization problem but does not tackle mutuality and the contract nomenclature.
- Discusses dimensions of the psychological contract and weighting of these dimensions. Looks at a relational/transactional dimension, tentatively link this to bounded/ boundaryless thinking.
- If PCs are made explicit, do they cease to be PCs? Do PCs only apply to those with relational contracts?
- Psychological contract is powerful because of its focus on the perceptual issues rather than reality of the labour market
- Specifically talks about the career and job security though it is not 100% clear. Integrate these as part of the contents element?
- Range of violations of the psychological contract, violation the exception rather than the norm.
- How violation differs from dissatisfaction in general, suggests dissatisfaction as the scale for the violation of promises or expectations
- Elaborates on the Morrison and Robinson research on unmet expectation through breach of contract to contract violation (extra one in here)
- The issue of contract violation by employees and overfulfilment of contract being a violation
- In terms of violation issues, parallel with equity theory
- Social construction of exchange relationships, influence of organisational culture and anthropological focus on the 'myth of reciprocity' as context
- Problems with content validity, construct validity and testability of the construct
- Reflects the individualizing of the employment relationship, the ability to focus on the distribution of power and the ability to integrate a number of key organizational concepts.
- Argues for quantitatively-based theory building and assessment of the current state of such contracts
- Advocates a basic model linking causes to content to consequences (has been superceded).
- Restricted nature of PC content from the outset could cause violation in itself
- Advocates expanding the model to multi-agents though is somewhat unclear

## Appendix E – Database Search Statistics

Information Source	Reject – Article Title	Reject – Abstract	Duplicate Entries	To Be Reviewed
ABI Inform	93	721	N/A	173
EBSCO	412	685	141	13
PsycInfo	105	1,142	66	16
Google Scholar	678	252	53	3
<b>Database Search Completed – Total</b>	1,288	2,800	260	<b>205</b>
Journals	Most	Most	c.12	0
<b>Journal Search Completed – Total</b>				<b>205</b>
Study ‘Introduction/Conclusion Review’				-134
<b>Study ‘Introduction/Conclusion Review’ Completed - Total</b>				<b>71</b>
Study ‘Method Section Review’				-32
<b>Study ‘Method Section Review’ Completed - Total</b>				<b>39</b>
<i>NB/ Papers reviewed in detail at this point</i>				
Cross-Referencing				2
<b>Cross-Referencing Completed – Total</b>				<b>41</b>
Study ‘In-Depth Relevance Review’				-7
<b>Study ‘In-Depth Relevance Review’ Completed – Final Total</b>				<b>34</b>