



Background

Since 1995 there has been a great deal of research on aspects of the psychological contract. As a concept the psychological contract is easily understood, on some level or another, by anyone who has ever worked in any kind of organization.

Job satisfaction is often seen as one of the key outcomes in psychological contract research although there is little research that directly links psychological contract content and job satisfaction (Conway and Briner, 2005). Some studies have found job satisfaction to be related to relational aspects of the psychological contract (Guzzo, Noonan and Elron, 1994; Portwood and Miller, 1976; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Cavanaugh (1999) found that employees' level of agreement with relational components of the psychological contract mediate the relationship between work experiences and work outcomes such as job satisfaction.

In terms of the academic psychological contract very little has been published. An exception is Shen's (2010) study of academics in an Australian university. Shen's study finds that academics are more influenced by transactional elements. It also finds that fulfilment of the academics' psychological contract is low, especially in terms of fair promotion, consultation, recognition of contribution, the provision of funding for research, and equal pay.

To date there is limited research that looks at the effect of culture on psychological contracts (see however Rousseau and Schalk, 2000). Thomas, Au and Ravlin (2003) suggest mechanisms through which the cultural profiles of individuals influence the formation of the psychological contract, perceptions of violations of the psychological contract and responses to perceived violations. They make specific reference to individualism and collectivism. The UK has traditionally been classified as Individualistic and sub Saharan African countries such as Ghana as Collectivist. In individualistic cultures such as the UK there is a tendency "to view one's self as independent of others and to be more concerned about consequences of behaviour for one's personal goals" (Thomas et al p455) whereas in more collectivist cultures such as Ghana there is a tendency "to view the self as interdependent with selected others, be concerned about consequences of behaviour for the goals of the in-group, and be more willing to sacrifice personal interests for group welfare" (ibid).

The psychological contract of academics: Satisfied with what they've got and not what they want?

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the psychological contracts of academics in two universities, one in the UK and the other in Ghana, West Africa. 161 academics (51 from Ghana and 110 from the UK) completed a questionnaire which asked respondents about the importance of aspects of their job and the extent to which these were provided by their university. Relational aspects of the psychological contract were found to be a better predictor of job satisfaction than transactional aspects. Levels of job satisfaction were found to be predicted by academics' actual psychological contracts as opposed to their 'ideal' psychological contracts for UK academics.

Procedure

A questionnaire was developed based on an earlier questionnaire Psychological Contract Type Inventory (Gaffney and George, 2006) which was itself based upon Rousseau's (1998) Psychological Contract Inventory. The questionnaire also took elements from a questionnaire derived from the Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997) study and from Guest and Conway (1998). The final questionnaire was in four main sections. The first section asked respondents how important aspects of their job were such as 'Adequate induction and training'. In the second section they were asked the extent to which these aspects were provided in their university; the third section was comprised of a question assessing respondents' overall job satisfaction. The final section comprised of biographical information such as current academic role, length of service, contract of employment, trades union membership, research activities, ethnicity, gender and age. The questionnaire was completed on-line in the UK but both on-line and in hard copies in Ghana. For the on-line version a link was sent with an accompanying email. The hard copies were handed out by members of the research team whilst they were in Ghana.

Interviews were also held with a range of academic staff in both universities. These in-depth interviews which were mainly carried out face-to-face focussed on a cross section of participants across hierarchy, responsibility, age, gender, ethnicity/nationality and length of service. 24 of these interviews were carried out, 12 at each university. The interviews were all semi-structured using standardised interview schedules, one for academic managers and one for non-management academic staff. All interviews were taped and later transcribed verbatim.

Analysis and Results

The hard copies of the questionnaire were entered manually on the survey site. The quantitative data was downloaded from the survey site and entered into an SPSS file. There were 161 questionnaire respondents in all, 51 from Ghana and 110 from the UK. There were 78 female respondents (51%) and 75 male respondents (49%). Ages ranged from 28 years to 70 years with an average age of 46.8 years (SD = 10.6). The majority were Senior Lecturers (38.3%). Most (n = 104, 67.5%) stated that their primary role was teaching. Length of time in their current job ranged from two months to 40 years with an average of 7.58 years (SD = 9.4). The majority were trades union members (n = 97, 64.2%).

A series of multiple regressions were carried out to identify the key predictors of job satisfaction levels:

1. Relational and transactional psychological contract scores: - The results of the multiple regression show that over a third (36%) of the variation in job satisfaction can be explained with the predictor variables, and that the best unique predictor of job satisfaction is the relational psychological contract score.
2. 'Actual' and 'ideal' psychological contract scores: - found a strong positive correlation between job satisfaction and the actual psychological contract, but that the correlation between the ideal psychological contract and job satisfaction is weak. The results of the multiple regression show that 22% of the variation in job satisfaction can be explained with the predictor variables, and that the best unique predictor of job satisfaction is the actual psychological contract.
3. When cultural differences were taken into account the results of the multiple regression show that 38% of the variation in job satisfaction for the UK sample can be explained by the predictor variables, and that the best unique predictor of job satisfaction is the actual psychological contract. However the predictor variables do not predict job satisfaction for the Ghana sample.

