

An event-based approach to psychological contracts: The importance of examining everyday broken and fulfilled promises as discrete events

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Summary

Psychological contract research has typically focused on employees' perceptions of whether the organization has *generally* fulfilled or broken its promises/obligations. However, employees can experience broken and fulfilled promises as *discrete* events on an everyday basis, which may have immediate implications for employees and also influence their generalized psychological contract. Integrating attribution and appraisal theories of emotions, we argue that discrete psychological contract events (i.e., specific instances of a broken or a fulfilled promise) can initiate attribution and appraisal processes that can guide employees' emotional and behavioral responses. Moreover, experiencing a broken versus a fulfilled promise can have distinct implications for employees' outcomes as well as their generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Our hypotheses are generally supported using a daily diary study with event sampling. Theoretical contributions include the importance of (a) examining the attribution and appraisal processes underlying everyday discrete psychological contract events, (b) acknowledging distinctions between broken versus fulfilled promises, and (c) understanding how everyday broken/fulfilled promises can influence generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Practical contributions include the importance of effectively managing broken and fulfilled promises on an everyday basis and ensuring that employees perceive that the organization does not break *and* also fulfills its promises.

KEYWORDS

appraisal theories of emotion, attributions, broken promises, daily diary, fulfilled promises, psychological contract, valence-congruence

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future, making it predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible. — Hannah Arendt

Fulfilling your promises is the easiest way to get elected, and breaking your promises is the easiest way to get fired. — Thom Tillis

Decades of research has established the importance of psychological contracts for workplace outcomes and employer-employee relationships (e.g., Conway & Briner, 2005). For example, employees' psychological contracts have been associated with key employee attitudes (e.g., commitment, job satisfaction, and trust; for a meta-analytic review, see Bal et al., 2008) and behaviors (e.g., performance and citizenship behaviors; for a meta-analytic review see Zhao et al., 2007). Importantly, psychological contract research has focused on generalized perceptions (i.e., the degree to which employees perceive that the organization has *generally* fulfilled or broken its obligations and promises; Lee et al., 2011). For instance, it is common to examine employees' psychological contracts as a composite (e.g., a collection of broken and/or fulfilled promises related to issues such as training, pay, job security, and appropriate treatment) or as a global assessment (e.g., whether an employer generally fulfills their promises) (see Zhao et al., 2007).

However, employees can experience *discrete* instances of broken and fulfilled promises in their everyday working life (i.e., specific instances of a broken promise or a fulfilled promise). These discrete events may initiate psychological processes that can have implications for employees on an everyday basis as well as influence employees' ongoing relationship with the organization (i.e., their generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment). Given the importance of psychological contracts for employees and organizations, this suggests that developing theoretical insights into the underlying mechanisms and impact of everyday discrete psychological contract events is critical to provide practical guidance for effectively managing employees' psychological contracts on an everyday basis, not just in the wake of major psychological contract events (e.g., mass layoffs) or as a generalized phenomenon.

Integrating attribution and appraisal theories of emotions, our general argument is that discrete psychological contract events (i.e., specific instances of a broken or a fulfilled promise) can initiate attribution and appraisal processes as employees attempt to understand the broken or fulfilled promise. In turn, these attribution and appraisal processes can prompt emotions that can guide employees' behavioral reactions and impact their mood. Importantly, we propose that discrete events can impact these outcomes in a valence-congruent manner (i.e., a broken promise relates to negative but not positive outcomes and vice versa). By adopting an event-based perspective, we also create the opportunity to examine how *everyday* discrete broken and fulfilled promises can shape employees' generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. This is

important because it can connect the event-based perspective with the extant literature examining generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment while also shedding light on how these generalized perceptions may change. Taken together, our goal is to provide insights into *discrete* psychological contracts events, including the underlying psychological processes associated with everyday broken and fulfilled promises as well as how these discrete events can shape generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

We aim to make three primary theoretical contributions. First, we illuminate the psychological processes that employees can experience following a broken or a fulfilled promise. By integrating attribution and appraisal theories of emotions, we highlight *how* a broken or a fulfilled promise can influence employees' reactions. In doing so, we answer recent calls to delve into the psychological processes underlying psychological contracts. Indeed, scholars have argued that “a major shortcoming in [psychological contract] research is a lack of attention to psychological processes” (Rousseau et al., 2018, p. 1081) and have called for research examining the implications of broken *and* fulfilled promises (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019). By answering these calls, we highlight how an event-based perspective can offer a complementary approach that can deepen our theoretical understanding of how employees experience psychological contracts events (i.e., a broken or a fulfilled promise) on an everyday basis. These theoretical insights are critically important for providing practical guidance to managers and organizations on how to effectively manage psychological contracts on an everyday and ongoing basis (see Antonakis, 2017).

Second, research examining generalized psychological contract fulfillment has typically treated broken and fulfilled promises as bipolar constructs (i.e., conceptually similar constructs at opposite ends of a single continuum) that have similar but opposite effects on outcomes (i.e., if broken promises have a negative relationship with an outcome, then fulfilled promises should have a positive relationship with the same outcome). However, an event-based perspective suggests that *discrete* events are experienced as *either* negative or positive (e.g., a broken *or* a fulfilled promise). That is, rather than being bipolar, discrete events are bivalent (i.e., negative and positive events are governed by different systems that have disparate functions and initiate valence-congruent outcomes). By recognizing the bivalent nature of events in the context of psychological contracts, we answer calls to further explore the bivalent nature of events (see Cropanzano et al., 2017; Lindquist et al., 2016) and advance the psychological contract literature by exploring how a broken promise can prompt *different* outcomes than a fulfilled promise. In doing so, we highlight the importance of treating a broken or a fulfilled promise as distinct events and how examining broken promises is insufficient for understanding how employees respond to fulfilled promises. That is, fulfilled promises are not only distinct from broken promises but are also important in their own right.

Third, by adopting an event-based perspective, we highlight how *everyday* broken and fulfilled promises that occur during the normal course of employees' working lives can influence employees' generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. In doing so, we enhance our theoretical understanding of *how* and *why* employees'

generalized perceptions of their psychological contract can change as well as identify points of intervention for effectively managing employees' psychological contracts on an everyday and ongoing basis. Taken together, we argue that expanding scholarly attention from generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment (i.e., global perceptions and/or composite scores reflecting generalized perceptions of multiple events) to include a complementary event-based perspective can create novel insights that can illuminate how everyday psychological contract events can impact employees' experiences and their generalized psychological contract perceptions.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Integrating attribution (Weiner, 1986) and appraisal theories of emotion (Lazarus, 1991), we argue that people are motivated to assess and understand why a broken or a fulfilled promise has occurred as well as its implications for the individual. While attributions are important for shedding light on what caused the event, appraisal theories outline how this can generate emotional reactions that can provide guidance to the individual on how the situation should be navigated. More precisely, attribution theories highlight that people are motivated to understand the cause of events (e.g., Weiner, 1986). While the psychological contract literature has shown that attributions can inform generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment (e.g., Morrison & Robinson, 1997), these attributions are typically captured as global impressions across many events and focus on whether the organization is generally perceived to be responsible for breaches (e.g., Conway & Briner, 2002a; Hermida & Luchman, 2013). However, Weiner (1986) established that people typically assess several attribution dimensions to determine the causality of an event: locus of causality ("was the event caused by me or something/someone external to me?"), controllability ("was the event under the other party's control?"), and stability ("is this likely to happen repeatedly or is this an ongoing matter?"). Whereas attributions involving external causality, controllability, and stability typically reflect the organization's responsibility (i.e., attributions "about them"), attributions involving internal causality typically reflect one's own responsibility (i.e., attributions "about me").

Importantly, appraisal theories of emotion indicate that people can experience emotions in response to their assessments of events, which can direct focus and provide guidance on how to navigate one's environment (Lazarus, 1991). Theoretically, negative emotions can focus individuals on addressing the issue at hand (e.g., Lazarus, 1991) whereas positive emotions can focus individuals on engaging with their environment (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001). As such, discrete emotional events have been argued to drive valence-congruent outcomes; negative emotional events may drive negative but not positive outcomes, while positive emotional events may initiate positive but not negative outcomes (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 2017; Lindquist et al., 2016). This suggests that broken and fulfilled promises should be examined as distinct events because positive and negative emotional experiences operate as independent or distinct systems, serving

different functions and addressing the differential demands caused by different types of events.

To test our arguments, we examine negative and positive emotion as general categories. We chose this strategy to align with our research question, which is focused on the general role of negative and positive emotions rather than predictions about specific emotions. For both categories, we selected emotions that are likely to be relevant for employees' psychological contracts (i.e., emotions that include a relational element; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). For negative emotions, we selected anger, frustration, betrayal, and disappointment because these emotions reflect a core theme related to an obstacle to overcome and have similar action tendencies (Lazarus, 1991). For positive emotions, we selected happy, proud, and grateful because these emotions reflect a core theme of pleasure related to fulfillment and reflect a similar tendency to increase engagement with the environment (Fredrickson, 2001).

To test the argument that negative and positive emotions can provide guidance on how to navigate one's environment (Lazarus, 1991), we selected two affect-driven behaviors (i.e., counterproductive work behavior and citizenship behavior). We chose these behaviors because negative emotions should motivate individuals to signal that the negative treatment from the organization will not be tolerated (e.g., engage in counterproductive work behavior) whereas positive emotions should encourage the individual to connect with the environment (e.g., engage in citizenship behavior). These behaviors have also been shown to fluctuate on a daily basis (e.g., Barclay & Kiefer, 2019; Dalal et al., 2009) and also allow for valence-congruent effects to be examined. Moreover, these behaviors have been extensively studied in relation to generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019). However, it is unclear how a *specific instance* of a broken or a fulfilled promise relates to these behavioral outcomes.¹ We also examine negative and positive mood to further test our valence-congruent arguments. Mood has also been theorized to be integral in shaping generalized perceptions (e.g., Schwarz, 1990), which can help connect the event-based perspective to generalized perceptions.

Taken together, by adopting an event-based approach, we distinguish between the effects of a broken versus a fulfilled promise and argue that discrete psychological contract events can prompt valence-congruent effects. That is, negative mood and counterproductive behaviors should primarily emerge from a broken promise whereas positive mood and citizenship behaviors should primarily emerge from a fulfilled promise. By focusing on these outcomes, we highlight why and how event-based reactions may differ from effects identified for generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment (i.e., global or composite evaluations). Below, we outline our

¹Generalized measures reflect global or composite perceptions rather than specific events and also typically collapse breach and fulfillment into one score (for meta-analytic reviews, see Bal et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2007). Whereas "global" perceptions reflect employees' overall evaluations of their psychological contract, "composite" evaluations reflect multiple evaluations across various psychological contract issues (e.g., training, pay, and appropriate treatment) that are collapsed into a single score (see Zhao et al., 2007). These are both distinct from an event-based perspective that focuses on a specific instance of a broken or a fulfilled promise.

theoretical rationale for these relationships, beginning with the psychological processes underlying broken promises.

2.1 | Understanding the underlying psychological processes related to a broken promise

We argue that individuals are motivated to assess a broken promise because this can signal a potential threat to the status quo of the psychological contract (Conway & Briner, 2005). More precisely, we argue that individuals are likely to engage in attributional processes related to the broken promise because this can provide information about the nature of the event and its implications for the individual. In other words, attributions related to the broken promise can inform individuals' appraisals of what the event means for them and how they should respond.

With respect to attributions, an event-based perspective suggests that employees are not only likely to care about whether the organization was responsible for the broken promise (external locus of causality) but also the degree to which the organization is perceived to be responsible for enabling the event to occur (controllability) and the likelihood for a similar event to occur again (stability). This is because attributions related to high external causality (i.e., the broken promise was caused by the organization's actions), high controllability (i.e., the broken promise was under the organization's control), and high stability (i.e., the broken promise was part of an ongoing issue and/or likely to reoccur) reflect that the organization bears some responsibility for the negative event. As such, these attributional dimensions can help individuals assess whether the negative event has created (or has the potential to create) harm for the individual. This appraisal is important because perceiving the potential for harm can prompt negative emotions (e.g., Lazarus, 1991). More precisely, we argue that negative emotions are likely to be elicited in response to perceiving that the status quo of the psychological contract has been negatively impacted.

While individuals may also assess their own personal responsibility (i.e., the degree of internal causality) for the broken promise, we argue that their assessments of the *other* party's responsibility should be especially influential because these assessments can have implications for how they should respond to the event and navigate the relationship (e.g., whether they need to protect themselves from the other party). Moreover, people have a strong tendency to hold the other party responsible for an event that fails to live to one's expectations (e.g., Larson, 1977; Sedikides et al., 1998), suggesting that high "attributions about them" should be especially influential for eliciting negative emotions. Given this theoretical possibility, we explore internal causality but do not provide a formal hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. For a broken promise, attributions about external locus of causality (H1a), controllability (H1b), and stability (H1c) are positively related to negative emotions.

Negative emotions are associated with action tendencies that can help individuals adjust to their environments (e.g., Frijda et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1991). In the context of a broken promise, we propose that attributing the broken promise to the organization can elicit negative emotions, which in turn can propel counterproductive behaviors (e.g., criticizing the organization) because these behaviors can signal that the negative treatment from the organization will not be tolerated (Spector & Fox, 2005). Moreover, we argue that experiencing negative emotions in response to a broken promise can also increase negative mood. More precisely, negative emotions can highlight that the negative event may have potentially detrimental implications for the individual. Given that this can signal that the individual may not experience positive functioning within their environment, we argue that this can prompt negative mood (i.e., a more generalized longer-term affective reaction). Taken together, we propose that attributions related to a broken promise (i.e., external locus of causality, controllability, and stability) are associated with negative outcomes (i.e., increased negative mood, enhanced counterproductive behaviors) via negative emotions.

Hypothesis 2. There is an indirect effect of attributions related to a broken promise (i.e., external locus of causality, controllability, and stability) with counterproductive behaviors (H2a) and negative mood (H2b) via negative emotions.

2.2 | Understanding the underlying psychological processes related to a fulfilled promise

Similar to our theorizing related to experiencing a broken promise, we argue that individuals' attributions for a fulfilled promise can inform their assessment related to the meaning of the event and its implications. More precisely, a fulfilled promise can signal that the organization is upholding their part of the employment relationship (e.g., Conway & Briner, 2005). Given that psychological contracts are about promises made by the organization (or a representative), employees may attribute these events to "them" (i.e., externally caused, under the organization's control, and likely to happen again). While this suggests that these attribution dimensions should inform an employee's assessment related to the nature of the event, this may not be influential for eliciting positive emotions because the organization is simply adhering to their perceived responsibilities and confirming the status quo of the psychological contract. Said differently, while individuals may assess each of the attribution dimensions, only those that indicate to the individual that an adjustment should be made are likely to elicit an emotional response. This is because emotions are elicited to provide guidance on how to respond to a situation (Lazarus, 1991). However, a promise fulfilled by the organization may not require any action from the individual (i.e., the status quo is confirmed) and may therefore be less likely to elicit positive emotions because the individual does not need to adjust to the situation. That

is, attributions that reflect high external causality, high controllability by the organization, or high stability may not be influential for eliciting positive emotions in the context of a fulfilled promise. Given this possibility, we explore the effects of these dimensions but do not make formal hypotheses.

While a promise fulfilled by the organization reflects actions from the organization, we argue that a high internal locus of control may be especially influential because individuals can be biased toward believing that they are deserving of a positive event (e.g., because of one's skills, effort, contributions to the relationship; Larson, 1977; Sedikides et al., 1998). That is, individuals tend to take credit for successes to enhance their feelings of self-worth, confidence, and competence (e.g., Weiner et al., 1979). As such, an event that is assessed as promoting these features is likely to be perceived as having positive implications and therefore likely to elicit positive emotions. Thus, we propose that attributing a fulfilled promise to oneself ("caused by me") can elicit positive emotions.

Hypothesis 3. For a fulfilled promise, internal locus of causality is positively related to positive emotions.

For a fulfilled promise, we argue that attributions to oneself can elicit positive emotions, which should motivate employees to further connect with their environment (e.g., Frijda et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1991). Given that citizenship behaviors can help the individual engage with the environment in beneficial ways (e.g., engage with others in a positive and reinforcing manner), we argue that experiencing positive emotions should encourage employees to engage in citizenship behaviors. Further, experiencing positive emotions in response to a fulfilled promise should convey positive functioning in the environment, which should promote a positive longer-term generalized affective reaction (i.e., increase positive mood). Taken together, we propose that attributions related to a fulfilled promise (i.e., internal locus of causality) are associated with employees' citizenship behaviors and positive mood via positive emotions.

Hypothesis 4. There is an indirect effect of attributions related to a fulfilled promise (i.e., internal locus of causality) with positive mood (H4a) as well as citizenship behaviors (H4b) via positive emotions.

2.3 | Valence-congruent outcomes in the context of a broken or a fulfilled promise

Previous research examining generalized psychological contract perceptions has been aligned with a "bipolarity" approach that treats negative and positive aspects of psychological contracts as opposite ends of a single continuum. That is, generalized psychological contract perceptions reflect a summary evaluation across multiple events (i.e., individuals may feel more or less positive about the degree to

which they perceive that their psychological contract has generally been fulfilled across time and situations). As such, the "low" end of this continuum should relate to the same outcomes as the "high" end of the continuum.

However, discrete events typically operate as independent systems. That is, discrete events are *bivalent* (i.e., either negative or positive) and should therefore be treated as distinct phenomenon that exist on different continuums (see Cropanzano et al., 2017). As Colquitt et al. (2015, p. 280) noted: "events cannot be both consistent and inconsistent, neutral and biased, accurate and inaccurate, equitable and inequitable, truthful and dishonest, or polite and rude." Indeed, empirical evidence supports the notion that events are either negative or positive (e.g., unfair or fair; see Colquitt et al., 2015). For instance, evidence from neuroscience has shown that a negative event has differential demands than a positive event, with negative emotional events activating certain brain regions and positive emotional events activating separate brain regions (see Lindquist et al., 2016). Importantly, these systems operate independently, such that the neural areas that are activated in response to negative events are distinct from and do not provide information to the regions that are activated in response to positive events.

Applying this bivalent approach to psychological contracts, experiencing a broken promise is a negative event for individuals. As such, we expect a broken promise to prompt negative but not positive outcomes since the system underlying a broken promise is focused on preventing further harm. By contrast, we propose that experiencing a fulfilled promise elicits positive but not negative outcomes since this is a distinct system that is focused on further enhancing and engaging with sources of pleasure. This suggests that employees' reactions to a broken promise should predict counterproductive behaviors because this outcome is associated with the system governing "negative" events but should be unrelated to citizenship behaviors because these behaviors are prompted by a separate system. Similarly, experiencing a fulfilled promise should predict citizenship behaviors because this outcome is associated with the system governing "positive" events, but should be unrelated to counterproductive behaviors. With respect to mood, we argue that experiencing a broken promise should have a stronger relationship with negative (versus positive) mood, whereas the reverse should be true for a fulfilled promise. More precisely, a broken promise reflects (potential) harm, which should be more strongly associated with negative mood as compared to positive mood. By contrast, experiencing a fulfilled promise reflects (potential) pleasure, which should be more strongly associated with positive mood as compared to negative mood. Thus, given the bivalent nature of events, we propose that experiencing a broken promise has a stronger relationship with counterproductive behaviors (versus citizenship behaviors) and negative mood (versus positive mood), whereas the reverse is proposed for a fulfilled promise.

Hypothesis 5. Experiencing a broken promise is more strongly associated with negative outcomes (counterproductive work behaviors and negative mood) than

with positive outcomes (citizenship behaviors and positive mood).

Hypothesis 6. Experiencing a fulfilled promise is more strongly associated with positive outcomes (citizenship behaviors and positive mood) than with negative outcomes (counterproductive work behaviors and negative mood).

2.4 | How discrete psychological contract events can influence generalized perceptions

Given the strong emphasis in the literature on generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, it is important to understand how employees' everyday event-based reactions can complement and inform the extant psychological contract literature. Building on the theoretical tenets that discrete events inform generalized perceptions (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 2001), we argue that employees' experiences of everyday broken and fulfilled promises should influence generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.² More precisely, we propose that broken promises should detract from generalized perceptions that the organization is fulfilling the psychological contract while fulfilled promises should enhance these perceptions.

However, scholars have argued that people's generalized judgments typically do not reflect a careful integration of specific event-based reactions, especially since this can be cognitively taxing and difficult to accomplish when people lack complete information (e.g., Clore et al., 2001). Instead, people tend to rely on moods at the time of making the judgment (i.e., people can use their generalized affect as a heuristic to inform their generalized perceptions; e.g., Schwarz, 1990). Indeed, a broad array of studies has shown that global evaluative perceptions can be influenced by affect in a valence-congruent manner (e.g., Barsky & Kaplan, 2007; Thoresen et al., 2003). Given that broken and fulfilled promises can influence negative and positive moods, respectively, and that people can draw on these moods to inform their generalized perceptions, we argue that the relationship between event-based reactions (i.e., aggregated broken and fulfilled promises) and generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment is mediated by work-related negative and positive moods, respectively.

Hypothesis 7. Negative mood mediates the negative relationship between broken promises (aggregated) and generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

Hypothesis 8. Positive mood mediates the positive relationship between fulfilled promises (aggregated) and

generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

3 | METHOD

We used a daily diary method with event-sampling (see Ohly et al., 2010; Reis & Gable, 2000), followed by a survey that was completed 6 weeks after the diary period. By using an event-sampling approach, we reduced retrospection biases by capturing broken and fulfilled promises as they occurred (e.g., Bolger et al., 2003; Ohly et al., 2010; Robinson & Clore, 2002). By supplementing the diary data with a post-diary survey, we were also able to examine the impact of these events on generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

3.1 | Participants and procedure

We invited 1193 employees of a municipal (i.e., "local") government in the United Kingdom. To recruit participants, the organization sent an email invitation to all employees that included a link to sign-up for the study. Employees who were willing to be contacted were then emailed by the researchers to provide informed consent and access to the diary study and survey. To be inclusive, all employees were eligible to participate. A total of 383 employees agreed to participate (32% response rate) with 350 providing usable responses. No monetary incentives were given. At the time of data collection, the government was pursuing austerity measures (e.g., budget cuts of 20%–25%). Given the wide-ranging changes and cost-reduction strategies being experienced, this was an appropriate context to examine employees' psychological contracts.

Consistent with an event-based daily diary approach (e.g., Barclay & Kiefer, 2019; Conway & Briner, 2002a; also see Bono et al., 2013), we assessed the presence or absence of a broken and a fulfilled promise each day.³ When a broken promise was reported, event-contingent measures of attributions about the broken promise and negative emotional reactions to the broken promise were completed. When a fulfilled promise was reported, event-contingent measures of attributions about the fulfilled promise and positive emotional reactions to the fulfilled promise were completed. Given the nature of our theorizing, we measured negative emotions only for a broken promise and positive emotions only for a fulfilled promise.

³Participants were asked to indicate the presence (coded 1) or absence (coded 0) of an event as well as provide a one-sentence description of the event. We collected qualitative descriptions to ensure that the events were consistent with psychological contract content that has been identified by previous research (e.g., broken and fulfilled promises related to training or promotion opportunities, appropriate treatment, appropriate demands etc.). A coding of the responses indicated that the events closely mapped on to categories identified by previous psychological contract research (e.g., Herriot et al., 1997; Rousseau, 1990). This also enhances confidence in the validity of our event-based measure (i.e., that this measure captured specific instances of psychological contract events). Sample event descriptions for a broken versus a fulfilled promise were: "I was promised supervision today...my supervision was cancelled"; "Our Line Manager arranged cover for my team to allow us all to go together on a lunch as promised."

²Given that individuals may experience multiple events during the daily diary period, we examine aggregated promises (i.e., the summed number of reported broken promises and the summed number of reported fulfilled promises; see Chan, 1998).

We made this decision because (a) a defining feature of discrete emotions is that they are targeted at “something” (e.g., Hillebrandt & Barclay, 2017; Lazarus, 1991), (b) negative and positive systems are governed by distinct bivalent systems (i.e., negative emotions should only be elicited by broken promises and positive emotions should only be elicited by fulfilled promises), (c) negative and positive emotions are distinct constructs (i.e., positive emotions do not reflect the absence of negative emotions but rather are a distinct emotional experience; see Fredrickson, 2001), and (d) it is unlikely that a person feels “proud” for a broken promise or “frustrated” by a fulfilled promise.⁴ Thus, we focused on negative emotions related to a broken promise and positive emotions for a fulfilled promise to be consistent with our event-based perspective.

Regardless of whether an event was reported, each diary entry included measures of positive/negative mood, citizenship behaviors, and counterproductive behaviors. Given the extensive demands on respondents, we followed best practices for diary studies by using shortened scales to enhance compliance and reduce fatigue (Ohly et al., 2010).

Prior to starting the diary study, participants completed a brief survey that included demographics and our potential control variables (see below). During the diary period (up to 15 working days), respondents received an email prompting them to complete their diaries at the end of each working day ($N = 3311$ usable person days), with an overall sample size of $N = 350$ who completed the diaries. Of the 350 participants, 62% ($N = 217$) completed the measures for positive and negative mood as well as generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment 6 weeks later. Of the 217 participants, 57 (26%) indicated that no promises had been made to them and were therefore excluded from the analysis, leaving a sample size of $N = 160$ for H7 and H8. The diary sample was 71% female, 89.5% Caucasian (6.1% Asian, 1.7% Black, 2.7% other or did not specify), 47% were managers, 90.6% were employed on a permanent/full-time contract (3.7% on a temporary contract, 15.1% on a part-time basis), and the average tenure was 11.586 years ($SD = 9.695$). Age ranged from 20 to 64, with the average age category being 41–45 years (age was measured using categories with 5-year increments). Participants performed a wide-range of jobs (e.g., front-line services, back-office functions, financial and legal services, human resource management, planning and development, and community and city services, such as education, social work, health, and transportation).

3.2 | Measures

Broken promise and its event-contingent measures. We assessed daily experiences of a broken promise with a modified version of Conway and Briner's (2002a) one-item measure. The original item was, “Has your organization broken any promises to you today?” Consistent with a key premise in the psychological contract literature (see Rousseau, 1995), we revised this to incorporate the possibility that the organization or its agents may have broken a promise: “Did the organization or person acting on behalf of the organization break a promise to you today?” Consistent with the original measure, a dichotomous response scale was used (1 = yes and 0 = no).⁵ If participants responded affirmatively, then they were asked to describe the broken promise in one sentence and respond to event-specific questions related to their attributions and negative emotions about the broken promise. Attributions about a broken promise were assessed with four items that reflected Weiner's (1986) attribution dimensions.⁶ The question stem was, “To what extent was the broken promise ...”. The items were: “caused by your actions?” (internal locus of causality); “caused by the other party's action?” (external locus of causality); “under the other party's control?” (controllability); “an ongoing issue?” (stability). Anchors ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 3 (*to a great extent*). Negative emotions about a broken promise were measured with the negative emotions items from Van Katwyk et al.'s (2000) scale (angry, frustrated, betrayed, and disappointed). The question stem was: “How did this broken promise make you feel?” Anchors ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 3 (*to a great extent*).

Fulfilled promise and its event-contingent measures. We modified the protocol that was used for assessing a broken promise to measure a fulfilled promise and its event-contingent measures. More precisely, we assessed a daily fulfilled promise with the item: “Did the organization or person acting on behalf of the organization fulfill a promise to you today?” Participants indicated their answer with a dichotomous response scale (1 = yes and 0 = no) and were asked to provide a one-sentence description of the fulfilled promise and then respond to event-specific questions related to their attributions and positive emotions about the fulfilled promise. The same attribution measure was used but the question stem was modified to: “To what extent was the fulfilled promise” Positive emotions about the fulfilled promise were measured with the positive emotion items from Van Katwyk et al.'s (2000) scale (happy, proud, and grateful). The question

⁴We tested this assumption of bivalence with a supplemental study. Participants ($N = 200$) were recruited from Prolific and asked them to indicate whether they had experienced a broken or fulfilled promise at work in the last week. Participants that indicated yes were asked to provide a brief description of the broken or fulfilled promise. They were then presented with both negative and positive emotion items and asked to rate the extent to which they felt each emotion in relation to the promise (response anchors ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = to a great extent). Results supported a bivalent approach; broken promises were exclusively associated with negative emotions ($M_{\text{negative emotions}} = 3.51$, $SD = .97$; $M_{\text{positive emotions}} = 1.00$, $SD = .00$; $N = 20$). Fulfilled promises were exclusively associated with positive emotions ($M_{\text{positive emotions}} = 3.08$, $SD = 1.04$), except for one participant who indicated a 2 for frustration ($M_{\text{negative emotions}} = 1.04$, $SD = .20$; $N = 23$). However, a one-sample t-test confirmed that negative emotions following a fulfilled promise did not significantly differ from 1 (not at all), $t(23) = 1.00$, $p = .327$.

⁵Dummy-coded variables are appropriate for representing mutually exclusive categories (e.g., presence or absence of an event) in which participants can only be members of one category. Following best practices for dummy-coding (see Cohen et al., 2003); we used standard 1/0 coding to represent the presence or absence of an event.

⁶We used single item measures to assess the attribution dimensions, which is consistent with recent best practice recommendations for ESM studies and norms within the attributions literature. For example, Gabriel et al. (2019) argued that single item measures are appropriate when assessing psychological constructs with narrow content domains. In these cases, multi-item measures can risk introducing contamination into assessment. Consistent with this, single-item measures have been extensively used for attributions. Indeed, Sweeney et al. (1986) noted in their meta-analysis that this approach has been widely adopted in the attributions literature. Similar to prior research using single-item attribution measures (e.g., Forsyth & McMillan, 1981), we ensured that the question stem reflected our context (i.e., focused on broken or fulfilled promises) and used items that reflected Weiner's conceptual definitions.

stem was, “How did this fulfilled promise make you feel?” Anchors ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 3 (*to a great extent*).

Daily citizenship behavior was measured using three items from Dalal et al. (2009): “I went out of my way to be a good employee,” “I was respectful to other people’s needs,” and “I displayed loyalty to the organization.” The question stem was: “Today ...” Anchors ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*to a great extent*). While the original measure was eight items, we selected the three items that loaded most highly on the original validated scale. This scale was validated for daily assessments and these items have been shown to vary on a daily basis. The selected items also suited the study context. While the reliability of this measure was lower than the traditional threshold of .70, this is consistent with the tendency for abbreviated scales to have lower reliabilities (i.e., reliability is a function of the number of items; Green et al., 1977).

Daily counterproductive behavior was measured using two items from Dalal et al. (2009) that were modified to fit the context: “I criticized Council policies” and “I spoke negatively about Council to others.” The question stem was: “Today ...” Anchors ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*to a great extent*). While the original measure was eight items, we selected these two items to align our operationalization with the theoretical notion that employees were engaging in these behaviors to signal that negative treatment from the organization would not be tolerated. Thus, we focused on behaviors that were targeted at the organization (versus items that were targeted at other sources and/or may reflect disparate motivations, such as simply not working to the best of one’s ability). Importantly, these two items have also been shown to have variance when measured on a daily basis and with an event-based approach (e.g., Barclay & Kiefer, 2019).

Daily positive and negative daily mood was measured with a short version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). We used three items for positive (interested, determined, and inspired) and three items for negative (distressed, upset, and worried) mood. The question stem was: “Indicate the extent to which each of the following applies to how you have felt overall at work today.” Anchors ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*).

Post-diary positive and negative mood was measured with the same items as daily mood but were assessed 6 weeks after the diary. The question stem was, “To what extent have you felt each of the following at work recently?” Anchors ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*).

Post-diary generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment were assessed with a nine-item scale based on items from Robinson (1996) and Robinson and Rousseau (1994). This scale was assessed 6 weeks after the diary study. The stem question was, “Looking back on the last few months to what extent has [the Organization] fulfilled each of the following promises they made you?” Sample items: training opportunities, opportunities for fair pay, fair treatment, and appropriate workload. Anchors ranged from 1 (*not at all fulfilled*) to 5 (*completely fulfilled*). When no promises were perceived to have been made regarding an item, this was coded as a non-response.

Control variables were managerial level (dummy coded 1 = *manager* and 0 = *non-manager*) and a time series variable. Consistent with previous empirical psychological contract research (e.g., Conway & Briner, 2002b) and calls in the literature (e.g., Akhtar et al., 2016), we included managerial level because this has the potential to serve as a biasing factor (i.e., a source of potential contamination that may impact the relationships between the variables; for discussions, see Becker, 2005; Spector & Brannick, 2011). Indeed, in our sample, managers were more likely to report an event. Given our focus on events/days, we did not require a minimum number of diaries for participants to be included in the sample. Instead, a time series variable was included as a control for H1–H6 to account for time dependency (Singer & Willett, 2003).

4 | RESULTS

Given our event sampling methodology, we began by examining the frequency of broken and fulfilled promises over the data collection period (10 working days). On average, 9.7 diary entries were returned per respondent (3311 usable person days). A total of 162 diary participants reported at least one event and 188 (54%) did not report either a broken or a fulfilled promise. Overall, 192 broken and 147 fulfilled promises were recorded. We examined whether those who reported at least one broken or fulfilled promise differed on any demographic or substantive variables versus those who did not experience any events (see Goodman & Blum, 1996). Our analysis did not yield any significant differences, with the exception that managers were more likely to report an event. Given this and the above theoretically-driven explanation, we controlled for this variable in our analyses. We also examined whether our outcome variables fluctuated on a daily basis. Within-person variance accounted for between 33% and 35% in counterproductive work behaviors, 39% and 50% in citizenship behavior, 49% and 56% of the variance in positive mood, and 44% and 51% in negative mood.

Prior to testing our hypotheses, we examined the distinctiveness of our outcome variables using multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (type = complex). A four-factor measurement model with counterproductive behaviors, citizenship behaviors, positive mood, and negative mood was a good fit, $\chi^2(52) = 259.86$; CFI = .98, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .03.⁷ Given that we examined subtle but meaningful daily fluctuations in employees’ emotions, attributions, and behaviors, we collected data from the same focal employee since they are in the best position to report on these variables (e.g., Barclay & Kiefer, 2019). We followed best practices to minimize potential common method bias including using randomized items within

⁷The measurement model fit the data better than alternative models including models in which positive and negative mood were loaded on one factor ($\chi^2(57) = 4409.62$; CFI = 0.49, TLI = .30, RMSEA = .15, $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 7925.09$, $p = .000$), behaviors were loaded on one factor ($\chi^2(57) = 1974.00$; CFI = .77, TLI = .69, RMSEA = .10, $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 3011.10$, $p = .000$), positive mood and citizenship behaviors loaded on one factor ($\chi^2(57) = 769.32$; CFI = .92, TLI = .89, RMSEA = .06, $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 454.96$, $p = .000$), and negative mood and counterproductive behaviors loaded on one factor ($\chi^2(57) = 996.15$; CFI = .89, TLI = .85, RMSEA = .07; $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 725.70$, $p = .000$). All $\Delta\chi^2$ values are corrected for MLR.

question blocks, separating predictor and outcome variables, and using disparate response scales (e.g., Conway & Lance, 2010). Moreover, we also examined common method variance by including an unmeasured method factor in the four-factor model (see Podsakoff et al., 2012). Including an unmeasured method factor significantly decreased model fit, $\chi^2(37) = 218.58$; CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .04; $\Delta\chi^2(15) = 39.37$, $p = .000$, (corrected for MLR), indicating that common method variance had minimal influence.

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for each sub-sample are reported in Tables 1–3 (broken and fulfilled promises are displayed in Table 1, daily measures involving the full diary sample in Table 2, and the aggregate survey data in Table 3).

4.1 | Analytical strategy

We tested all hypotheses using structural equation models in Mplus Version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2011) with maximum likelihood estimation. This method estimates models using all available data (missing data constituted between 0.5%–3.5% of cases). No outliers were detected.

H1–H6 focus on *diary days*. H1 and H2 examine days where the respondent reported a broken promise ($N = 192$ days with a broken promise) whereas H3 and H4 focus on days where a fulfilled promise was reported ($N = 147$ days with a fulfilled promise). Despite having the option to report a broken and/or a fulfilled promise each day, none of our participants reported a negative and a positive event on the same day. Given that our theorizing is premised on the notion that negative and positive events are distinct systems, we conducted our analyses for broken and fulfilled promises separately to align our analytic strategy with our theorizing (i.e., our analyses involving employee experiences related to a broken or a fulfilled promise are based on separate subsamples and variables). These analyses are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

H2 and H4 analyses focus on testing the indirect effect between attributions and outcomes via negative or positive emotions, respectively. Bootstrapping (10,000 resamples) was used. We followed recommendations from Aguinis et al. (2017) and did not include the direct effects between attribution dimensions and our outcomes to ensure that our theorizing is aligned with the analysis (e.g., to avoid adding parameters that are not aligned with our theoretical argument and that may unnecessarily detract from the sample size to parameter ratio).⁸

Our analyses for H5 and H6 include both broken and fulfilled promises (H5: 0 = absence of broken promise and 1 = broken promise present; H6: 0 = absence of fulfilled promise and 1 = fulfilled promise present) and all *diary days* ($N = 3311$, reported by 350 participants). Because *diary days* are nested within participant, we

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations (broken promise and fulfilled promise sub-samples)^{a,b}

	M^a	SD^a	M^b	SD^b	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Managerial level	.05	.22	.12	.32	–	.01	.18***	–.00	.06	–.03	.16	–.04	.28**	–.11	.22*
2. Time series	3.81	2.82	3.92	2.85	.05	–	.12	.07	.13	.04	.07	–.27***	.04	–.13	–.17
3. Internal causality	1.10	.32	1.84	.66	.00	.01	–	–.02	.21*	.01	.34***	–.19	.20*	.01	.12
4. External causality	2.52	.68	2.59	.58	.06	.15*	–.02	–	.43***	.13	.04	–.15	.09	–.02	.05
5. Controllability	2.57	.62	2.60	.59	–.03	.20**	.14**	.60***	–	.12	.05	–.12	–.01	.06	–.02
6. Stability	2.62	.59	2.52	.64	–.09	–.01	–.05	.19**	.09	–	–.08	.02	–.06	.04	.02
7. Negative emotions ³ /positive emotions ^b	2.26	.55	1.89	.60	–.05	–.16	–.04	.07	.15	.26***	(.76/.72)	–.28**	.39***	–.13	.30**
8. Negative mood	2.42	1.29	1.62	.80	–.03	–.19*	–.05	.02	.01	.03	.60***	(.88/.82)	–.18*	.14	.03
9. Positive mood	2.50	1.04	3.40	.89	.13	.01	.02	.01	.04	–.10	–.09	–.19	(.84/.82)	–.14	.51***
10. CWB	1.91	.64	1.50	.70	–.09	–.11	.03	.08	.04	.19**	.24*	.13	–.11	(.73/.71)	–.17
11. OCB	3.04	.62	3.19	.55	.17*	–.05	.03	.07	–.01	.08	–.05	–.08	.40***	–.11	(.62/.60)

Note: Cronbach alphas on the diagonal in parentheses, where applicable (for broken/fulfilled promises sub-samples, respectively).

Abbreviations: CWB, counterproductive work behavior; OCB, citizenship behavior.

^aResults for broken promises presented below the diagonal ($N = 190$, diary days).

^bResults for fulfilled promises presented above the diagonal ($N = 146$, diary days).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

⁸Supplemental analyses indicated that all direct links were non-significant, except for attribution stability to negative mood. However, including this direct link does not impact the significance of the indirect effect. Similarly, the indirect effects for the other relationships were not substantively impacted when the direct links were included.

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations (daily variables and controls for full diary sample)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Managerial level	.07	.26	-							
2. Time series	5.08	3.05	-.01	-						
3. Broken promises	.06	.24	-.02	-.10***	-					
4. Fulfilled promises	.05	.21	.03	-.09***	.13***	-				
5. Negative mood ^a	1.62	.80	-.07***	-.13***	.22***	-.02	(.87)			
6. Positive mood ^a	3.40	.89	.14***	.01	-.13***	.10***	-.17***	(.89)		
7. Counterproductive behavior ^a	1.50	.70	-.08**	-.12***	.28***	.05	.33***	-.18***	(.75)	
8. Citizenship behavior ^a	3.26	.55	.15***	-.07**	.01	.09***	.03	.65***	-.04	(.70)

Note: N = 3311 diary days, reported by 350 participants. Cronbach alphas on the diagonal in parentheses, where applicable.

^aMeans and standard deviation represent values from measured variables rather than latent variables.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

TABLE 3 Means, standard deviations, and correlations for aggregated diary and survey data

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1. Managerial level	.07	.25	-						
2. Aggregated broken promises	.57	1.09	-.10**	-					
3. Aggregated fulfilled promises	.57	1.25	.01	.54**	-				
4. Negative mood (mean)	2.59	1.15	-.08	.02	-.10	(.86)			
5. Positive mood (mean)	3.09	.97	.23***	-.09	.11	-.29***	(.81)		
6. Generalized psychological contract fulfillment	3.11	.88	.08	-.04	.18**	-.26***	.30***	(.71)	

Note: N = 160 participants. Cronbach alphas on the diagonal in parentheses, where applicable.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

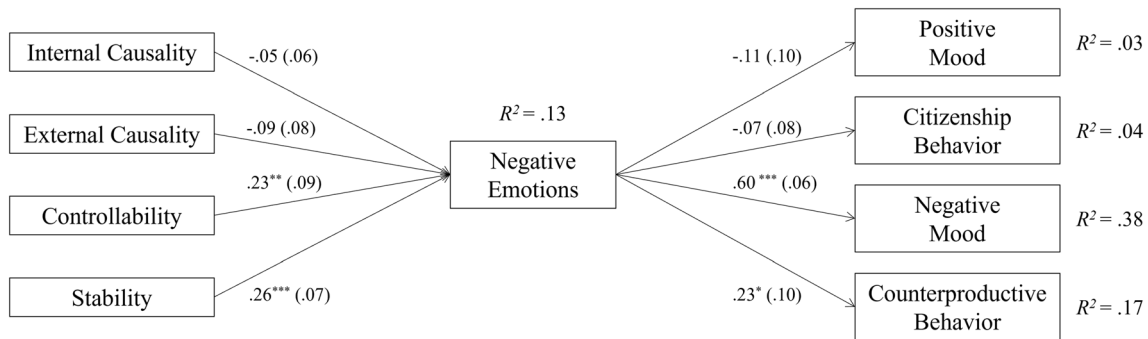


FIGURE 1 Effects of attributions and negative emotions in response to experiencing a broken promise.

Note: N = 192 days with a negative psychological contract event (i.e., a broken promise). Standardized coefficients. For ease of presentation, control variables have been omitted from the figure.

used the population average method of cluster-robust standard errors (type = complex) for H1-H6. This strategy adjusts regression coefficient standard errors to account for nested data structures without requiring the distributional assumptions associated with multilevel modeling, is appropriate when cluster sizes are less than five (i.e., H1-H4), and provides effect sizes and R² estimates similar to a single level model (e.g., McNeish et al., 2017). We used t tests with a formula that ignores the path polarities to test whether the selected paths significantly differed (see Keil et al., 2000). Latent outcome

variables were used for H5 and H6, whereas measured variables were used for all other hypotheses to remain within the suggested ratio of observations to parameters. This is important to provide a stable solution and to avoid potential Type I and Type II errors that can be introduced at low levels of saturation (for a detailed discussion, see Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988).

H7 and H8 aggregated broken and fulfilled promises from the diary data to the employee level (N = 160 participants) and used post-diary survey measures of negative/positive mood and post-diary

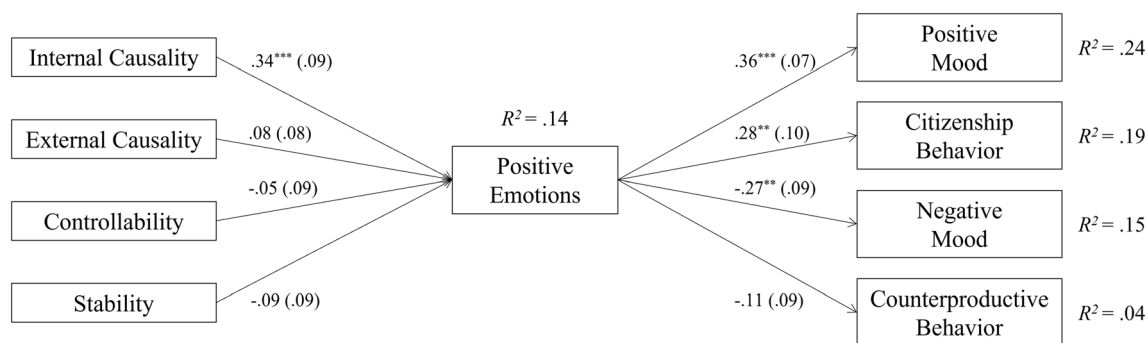


FIGURE 2 Effects of attributions and positive emotions in response to experiencing a fulfilled promise.

Note: $N = 147$ days with a positive psychological contract event (i.e., a fulfilled promise). Standardized coefficients. For ease of presentation, control variables have been omitted from the figure.

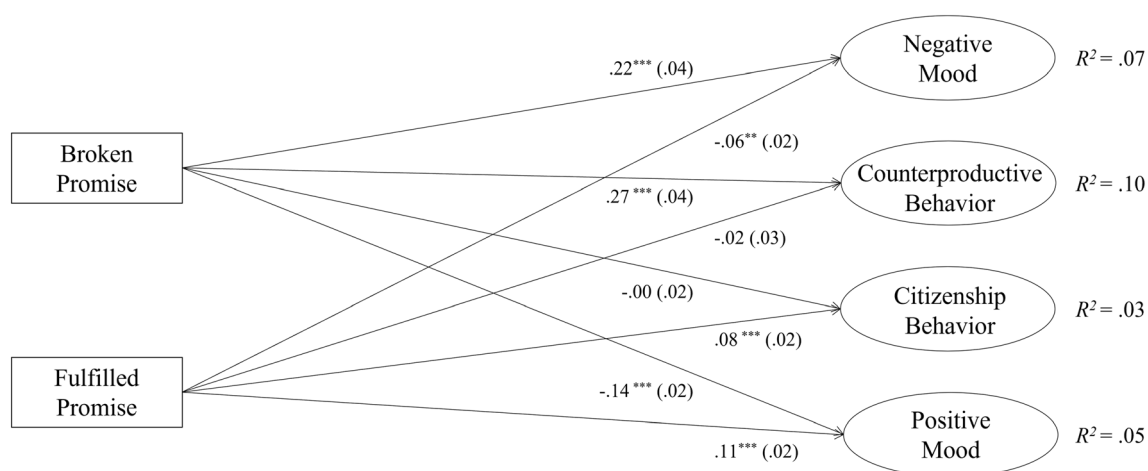


FIGURE 3 Testing the valence-congruent nature of psychological contract events: The effects of experiencing a broken/fulfilled promise on daily mood, citizenship behaviors, and counterproductive behaviors.

Note: $N = 3311$ diary days reported by 350 participants. Rectangles represent measured variables, ovals represent latent variables, coded 1 = event, 0 = no event; ellipses represent latent variables. Standardized coefficients. For ease of presentation, control variables have been omitted from the figure.

survey measures of generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Given that our theorizing focuses on how mood can serve as a mediating mechanism between aggregated promises and generalized perceptions, we include the direct links in these models (for a discussion, see Aguinis et al., 2017).

4.2 | Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1 examines the relationship between event attributions and negative emotions for a broken promise. The model demonstrated a good fit, $\chi^2(16) = 21.51$, $p = .169$; CFI = .96, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .04. For a broken promise, negative emotions were positively predicted by attributions that the cause of the broken promise was controllable ($\beta = .23$, $SE = .09$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [.07, .36]) and stable ($\beta = .26$, $SE = .07$, $p = .000$; 95% CI [.10, .37]), whereas attributions to an internal ($\beta = -.05$, $SE = .06$, $p = .391$, 95% CI [-.32, .14])

or external ($\beta = -.09$, $SE = .08$, $p = .247$, 95% CI [-.20, .06]) locus of causality were not significantly related to negative emotions. H1a was rejected; H1b and H1c were supported (see Figure 1).

Hypothesis 2 predicted an indirect effect between attributions (external locus of control, stability, and controllability) and negative outcomes via negative emotions for a broken promise. For controllability attributions, there was a significant indirect effect via negative emotions for counterproductive behaviors (estimate = .08, 95% CI [.01, .15]) and for negative mood (estimate = .29, 95% CI [.05, .53]). For stability, there was a significant indirect effect via negative emotions for counterproductive behaviors (estimate = .10, 95% CI [.02, .17]) and for negative mood (estimate = .35, 95% CI [.10, .59]). H2 was supported for controllability and stability but not for external locus of causality.

Hypothesis 3 examines the relationship between event attributions and positive emotions for a fulfilled promise. The model demonstrated a good fit, $\chi^2(16) = 7.86$, $p = .953$ CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00,

RMSEA = .00. For a fulfilled promise, internal locus of causality was positively related to positive emotions ($\beta = .34$, $SE = .09$, $p = .000$, 95% CI [.14, .47]). H3 was supported (see Figure 2). Attributions related to external locus of control ($\beta = .08$, $SE = .08$, $p = .351$, 95% CI [-.15, .31]), controllability ($\beta = -.05$, $SE = .09$, $p = .595$, 95% CI [-.28, .19]) and stability ($\beta = -.09$, $SE = .09$, $p = .303$, 95% CI [-.30, .13]) were not significantly related to positive emotions.

Hypothesis 4 predicted an indirect effect between attributions related to internal locus of causality and positive outcomes via positive emotions for a fulfilled promise. Results indicated that there was a significant indirect effect of internal locus of causality via positive emotions for citizenship behaviors (estimate = .08, 95% CI [.05, .11]) and for positive mood (estimate = .16, 95% CI [.10, .22]). H4 was supported.

To test our valence-congruence hypotheses (H5 and H6), positive mood, negative mood, citizenship behaviors, and counterproductive behaviors were regressed on our event-based measures of a broken and a fulfilled promise (see Figure 3). The model, which allowed the outcome variables to correlate to account for potential shared variance among our dependent variables, fit the data well ($\chi^2[66] = 288.39$, $p = .000$; CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .03). Hypothesis 5 stated that experiencing a broken promise is more strongly related to negative versus positive outcomes. Results indicated that experiencing a broken promise was positively associated with counterproductive behavior ($\beta = .27$, $SE = .04$, $p = .000$, 95% CI [.19, .36]) but not with citizenship behaviors ($\beta = -.00$, $SE = .02$, $p = .946$, 95% CI [-.05, .04]); a follow-up *t* test revealed that the slope for the relationship between experiencing a broken promise and counterproductive behavior was stronger than the slope for the relationship between experiencing a broken promise and citizenship behaviors, $t(6618) = 6.04$, $p = .000$. Results also indicated that experiencing a broken

promise was related to negative daily mood ($\beta = .22$, $SE = .04$, $p = .000$, 95% CI [.14, .30]) and positive daily mood ($\beta = -.14$, $SE = .02$, $p = .000$, 95% CI [-.18, -.09]); the slope for the relationship between experiencing a broken promise to negative mood was significantly stronger than the slope for the relationship between experiencing a broken promise to positive mood, $t(6618) = 2.46$, $p = .013$. H5 was supported.

Hypothesis 6 stated that experiencing a fulfilled promise is more strongly related to positive versus negative outcomes. With respect to behaviors, experiencing a fulfilled promise was related to citizenship behaviors ($\beta = .08$, $SE = .02$; $p = .000$, 95% CI [.14, .39]), but not to counterproductive behaviors ($\beta = -.02$, $SE = .03$, $p = .472$, 95% CI [-.07, .15]); a follow-up *t* test indicated that the slope for the relationship between experiencing a fulfilled promise and citizenship behavior was significantly stronger than the slope for the relationship between experiencing a fulfilled promise and counterproductive behaviors, $t(6618) = 6.62$, $p = .034$. Results also indicated that experiencing a fulfilled promise was related to positive mood ($\beta = .11$, $SE = .02$, $p = .000$, 95% CI [.35, .67]) and negative mood ($\beta = -.06$, $SE = .02$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [-.39, -.08]); a follow-up *t*-test revealed that the slope for the relationship between experiencing a fulfilled promise to positive mood was significantly stronger than the slope for the relationship between experiencing a fulfilled promise and negative mood, $t(6618) = 2.14$, $p = .032$. H6 was supported.

Next, we tested our arguments examining how aggregated broken and fulfilled promises relate to generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment via negative and positive mood (H7 and H8). This model used aggregated broken/fulfilled promises that reflected summed scores of the number of events experienced during the diary data collection period along with post-diary measures of negative/positive mood and generalized perceptions of psychological

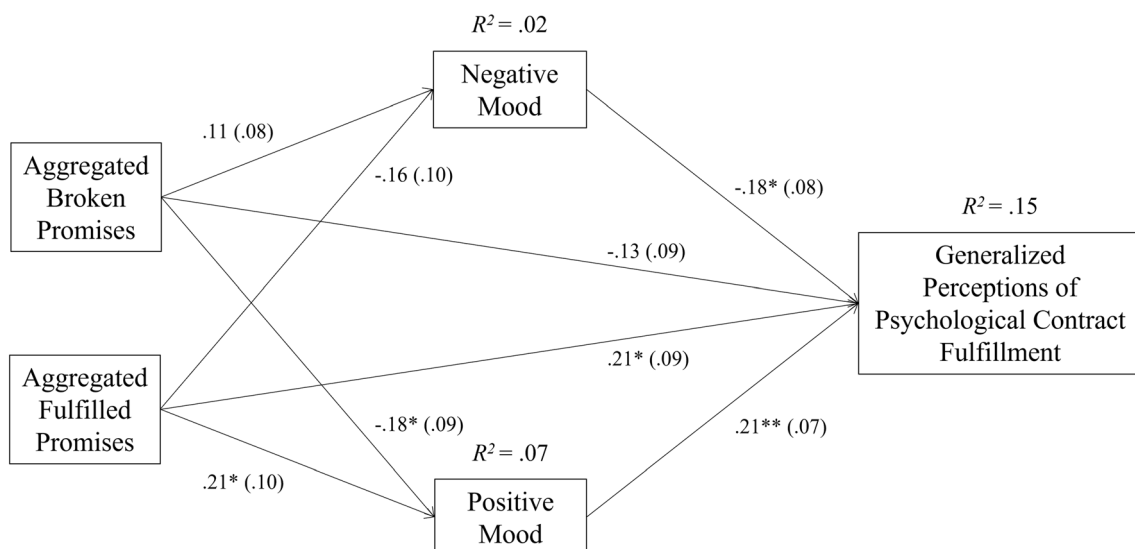


FIGURE 4 Post-diary negative and positive mood as mediators in the relationship between broken and fulfilled promises (aggregated) and post-diary generalized psychological contract fulfillment.

Note: $N = 160$ participants. Standardized coefficients. For ease of presentation, control variables have been omitted from the figure. In this analysis, broken and fulfilled promises reflect the aggregated sum of respective events during the diary period.

contract fulfillment. We allowed our predictor variables (i.e., broken and fulfilled promises) to correlate to account for potential shared variance related to promises. We also allowed our mediators (i.e., negative and positive mood) to correlate to account for potential shared variance related to mood. Consistent with the above analyses, managerial level was included as a control variable. Given that managerial level was only significantly related to positive mood, we included this link in the model but removed the non-significant links. The final model fit the data well ($\chi^2[4] = 4.54, p = .338; CFI = .99, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .03$). Figure 4 displays the results. Results for H7 indicated that the indirect effect between aggregated broken promises and generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment through negative mood was not significant since the confidence interval included zero (estimate = $-.02$, 95% CI $[-.12, .09]$). H7 was not supported. Results for H8 indicated that the indirect effect between aggregated fulfilled promises and generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment via positive mood was significant (estimate = $.04$, 95% CI $[.001, .076]$). H8 was supported.

5 | DISCUSSION

While the psychological contract literature has traditionally focused on *generalized* perceptions (e.g., global and/or composite evaluations), we demonstrate that adopting an event-based perspective (i.e., examining everyday discrete instances of a broken or a fulfilled promise) can provide novel and nuanced insights into the psychological processes underlying events as well as how everyday broken or fulfilled promises can influence generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. We discuss the theoretical importance of our findings below.

5.1 | Event-based and generalized perceptions: A tale of two complementary approaches

Our findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between psychological contract perceptions reflecting global (i.e., generalized assessments of whether an employer generally fulfills their promises), composite (i.e., multiple events across an array of psychological contract issues), or discrete events (i.e., single instances of a broken or a fulfilled promise), especially since these approaches have disparate underlying assumptions and/or psychological processes (e.g., bipolarity versus bivalence). For example, Zhao et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis indicated that global perceptions of breach are negatively related to citizenship behaviors ($r = -.16$, 95% CI $-.23, -.15$), supporting a bipolarity approach for these perceptions (i.e., a “negative” psychological contract aspect is negatively related to a “positive” outcome). By contrast, our results indicated that discrete events have bivalent effects, such that a specific instance of a broken promise is related to counterproductive behaviors (a negative outcome) but unrelated to citizenship behaviors (a positive outcome). Interestingly, Zhao et al.'s meta-analysis also found that a “composite”

measure of breach (i.e., an aggregation of multiple breach events) was not significantly related to citizenship behaviors ($r = -.07$, 95% CI $-.19, .02$). However, the authors were unable to explain this difference between global versus composite measures and instead noted that scholars should simply use global measures because these are more strongly related to outcomes. Our findings suggest instead that these disparate effects reflect important theoretical distinctions related to differences between discrete events, composites of multiple events, and global perceptions.

While recognizing distinctions between these psychological contract perspectives is important, it is also critical to recognize that an event-based perspective can *complement* existing perspectives. Our findings indicate that *everyday* broken and fulfilled promises are relatively frequent (on average, one was reported over a 10-day period). Importantly, these events can prompt psychological processes that can have an immediate impact on employees as well as shape their generalized psychological contract perceptions. By contrast, a generalized approach can shed light on the general/ongoing relationship between an employer and employee. That is, both perspectives are important to provide a comprehensive understanding of psychological contracts on an everyday and ongoing basis. Thus, it is important to recognize distinctions between these approaches as well as consider their interplay. For example, the justice literature has shown that generalized perceptions may influence the way that people interpret specific events (e.g., Choi, 2008) and that specific discrete events may fundamentally reshape generalized perceptions (e.g., Lind, 2001). Similarly, the trust literature has shown that different strategies may be needed to repair events versus relationships (e.g., Kim et al., 2009). Thus, examining the interplay between these perspectives may deepen our theoretical understanding of how psychological contracts can be experienced and effectively managed.

Building on the above, exploring differences between a discrete event (i.e., a single instance) and composite evaluations (i.e., multiple events) may also create novel theoretical insights by illuminating additional psychological processes. For example, while a discrete event can operate in a bivalent manner (i.e., create negative or positive reactions), aggregating broken and fulfilled promises into a composite psychological contract perception reflects that employee can feel negatively and positively toward the organization (i.e., ambivalence) because they have experienced both negative and positive events from this source (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2014).⁹ This suggests that exploring ambivalence may be important when examining composite measures.

5.2 | Understanding the implications of an event-based perspective for psychological contracts

By answering calls in the literature to identify the psychological processes underlying psychological contracts (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019; Rousseau et al., 2018), our research highlights the

⁹We thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this possibility.

importance of attribution and appraisal processes for discrete psychological contract events (i.e., experiencing a broken or a fulfilled promise). While previous research has indicated that attributions of external causality can be influential for generalized psychological contract perceptions (e.g., Hermida & Luchman, 2013; Morrison & Robinson, 1997), our findings indicate that attributions may operate differently for everyday discrete psychological contract events. More precisely, attributions for everyday discrete events are consistent with self-serving biases, such that individuals are more likely to blame the other party in a dyadic relationship for negative events but to take credit for positive events (e.g., Sedikides et al., 1998).

For a broken promise, attributions related to controllability and stability (but not external causality) predicted negative emotional reactions. That is, employees were more likely to have negative emotional reactions to the degree that the broken promise was perceived as being under the organization's control and likely to happen again, respectively. These attribution dimensions may be influential because they can signal hostile intent from the organization (e.g., renegeing or malevolent intentionality) and that future negative events may be likely (e.g., Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Thus, it is not only critical to prevent broken promises, but also to curtail damage when everyday broken promises do occur (e.g., ensuring it remains an isolated event).

With respect to fulfilled promises, extant research examining generalized psychological contract perceptions has assumed that externally attributed fulfillment instills gratitude and obligation toward the organization (e.g., Lambert, 2011; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). While employees may attribute positive events to the organization, our findings indicate that these attributions were not associated with positive emotions. This supports the notion that a fulfilled promise is simply maintaining the status quo. By contrast, attributing a fulfilled promise to a high internal locus of causality can elicit positive emotions. This suggests that it is important for organizations to fulfill promises, but the positive benefits of doing so are most likely to emerge when individuals attribute the event to themselves and/or when the event goes beyond the status quo to create further positive implications for the individual. Thus, organizations are well-served by fulfilling everyday promises, since these event-based processes can facilitate positive outcomes for the employee (i.e., positive mood) and organization (i.e., citizenship behaviors) as well as contribute to generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

5.3 | The importance of fulfillment

Building on the above, an event-based approach highlights that fulfilled promises are important in their own right. Similar to distinctions in the emotions literature (see Fredrickson, 2001), it is critical not to assume that employees experience and respond to a broken promise in the same manner as a fulfilled promise (i.e., a fulfilled promise does not simply equate to the absence of a broken promise) because these are operated by disparate systems. Instead, it is important to recognize the distinct implications that fulfilled promises can have for

employees and organizations. For example, fulfilled promises may not only maintain the employment relationship but also help employees build psychological and emotional resources by generating positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001). Importantly, positive emotional events can enhance employee resilience, create upward spirals that can promote employee well-being, and build interpersonal trust (Burns et al., 2008). In other words, “positive emotions fuel optimal organizational functioning, helping organizations to thrive and prosper” (Fredrickson, 2000, p. 131). Positive emotional events have also been argued to have a buffering effect that can mitigate downward spirals created by experiencing negative emotional events (Fredrickson, 2001). Thus, recognizing the theoretical distinctions between broken and fulfilled promises creates the opportunity to explore the unique processes and outcomes associated with positive discrete psychological contract events as well as the interplay between discrete instances of a broken or a fulfilled promise (e.g., how a fulfilled promise may temper the impact of a subsequent broken promise and/or enable employees to bounce back more effectively from negative experiences by building coping resources).

5.4 | From broken and fulfilled promises to generalized psychological contract fulfillment

Everyday broken and fulfilled promises are also meaningful because they can shape generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment (assessed as a composite measure). Consistent with our theorizing, rather than carefully aggregating the information related to each event, employees may rely on generalized affective reactions (i.e., their mood) to make composite evaluations. While positive mood was a significant mechanism connecting fulfilled promises to generalized evaluations of psychological contract fulfillment, the indirect effect of broken promises to generalized evaluations of psychological contract fulfillment via negative mood was not significant. To shed further light on these effects, we conducted a supplemental post-hoc analysis in which we tested a model without negative and positive mood. Results indicated that both aggregated broken ($\beta = -.19$, $SE = .09$, $p = .033$) and fulfilled promises ($\beta = .20$, $SE = .08$, $p = .008$) predicted generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Further analysis of our full model also indicated that the indirect effect of aggregated broken promises on generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment through positive mood was significant (estimate = $-.04$, 95% CI [$-.079$, $-.004$]). Interestingly, the indirect effect of aggregated fulfilled promises on generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment through negative mood was not significant (estimate = $.03$, 95% CI [$-.07$, $.14$]). Together, these analyses indicate that events are indeed critical for shaping generalized psychological contract perceptions. However, people are more likely to be influenced by the valence-congruent mood, such that positive mood may be more influential when people are evaluating generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment whereas negative mood may be more influential for generalized

perceptions of psychological contract *breach*. If this interpretation is correct, then it may be beneficial to also distinguish between negative and positive aspects of employees' psychological contracts not only for events, but also for composite evaluations (i.e., perceptions of multiple events) and perhaps even global psychological contract perceptions. This is similar to other literatures that have distinguished between the negative and positive nature of constructs to recognize their different antecedents and consequences (e.g., trust versus distrust, Lewicki et al., 1998; adherence to versus violation of justice rules, Scott et al., 2009).

5.5 | Strengths, limitations, and future research

By using a daily diary approach with event sampling, we captured broken and fulfilled promises as they happened and in the context in which they occurred. By pairing the daily diary study with a post-diary survey, we were also able to study the longer-term impact of events on generalized psychological contract perceptions. Importantly, our event sampling approach in the daily diary had the advantage of capturing *everyday* lived experiences while minimizing retrospective biases (e.g., Beal, 2015). This approach can also be especially helpful to delve into psychological processes that may unfold quickly as well as capturing behavioral reactions related to a particular psychological process (e.g., Beal & Weiss, 2003; Gabriel et al., 2019). Given the time-intensive nature of this type of methodology, we collected participant responses on a daily basis to ensure that we were able to capture the events as they occurred while also minimizing response fatigue (versus capturing multiple assessments during a day). We reasoned that this strategy was appropriate given the nature of our research question and the expected frequency of discrete psychological contract events (e.g., participants experienced an average of one event per week). However, we acknowledge that our mood and behavioral measures were assessed on the same day as the broken or fulfilled promise occurred. This leaves open the possibility that the mood and behavioral measures may capture some variance that occurred *before* the event (e.g., people may have engaged in citizenship behaviors before experiencing a broken promise, which would weaken our effects). Alternatively, this measurement approach may also have introduced temporal issues. For example, people's negative or positive mood at the start of their workday may enhance the tendency to perceive broken or fulfilled promises, respectively. Future research would benefit from exploring these possibilities.

We examined our research question on a *daily* basis and captured employees' *immediate* reactions to the event. While our theorizing and empirical findings support the bivalent nature of discrete events, it is possible that individuals may experience ambivalence ("mixed" feelings) as positive and negative events are aggregated. Moreover, feelings of ambivalence may encourage single events to be reassessed or reinterpreted over time. For example, an employee may initially feel happy that the organization fulfilled a promise by providing them with a promotion. However, the employee may later realize that the new position is not as good as they thought it would be, which can create

mixed feelings for the employee. This does not negate the importance of examining how employees react to the fulfilled promise (i.e., the promotion), but rather suggests that the interpretation, meaning, and impact of the event on the employee may change over time. That is, while a single event is likely to be experienced in a bivalent manner (as positive or negative), feelings of ambivalence may prompt individuals to consider new or different information and/or reinterpret the meaning of event as they embed it in the broader context of their relationship with the organization, which may change their feelings about the event over time. This suggests that considering the time of measurement is critical to identify and understand the relevant underlying psychological processes (see George & Jones, 2000). Future research should also further examine these temporal issues, including how events, the meaning of events, and associated psychological processes may be experienced and unfold over time.

Building on the above, we examined how event-based reactions may inform generalized perceptions using an aggregated measure of event-based reactions that summed these events. Future research may benefit from further exploring potential interplay between how multiple events are experienced over time (see Chan, 1998). For example, experiencing a fulfilled promise immediately before or after a broken promise may shape interpretations of the broken promise, thereby revealing additional event-based processes.

We examined general categories of negative (i.e., anger, frustration, betrayal, and disappointment) and positive emotions (i.e., happy, proud, and grateful) that are likely to be influential for broken and fulfilled promises, respectively. Future research may benefit from further expanding the scope of the emotions (e.g., anxiety, disgust, relief, and surprise) and/or examining specific discrete emotions to provide further precision in identifying how emotional responses can propel specific behavioral reactions (e.g., Kiefer & Antoni, 2019). Consistent with the literature, we used a generalized composite measure that focused on *fulfillment* and collapsed multiple assessments of fulfilled promises into a single measure (see Zhao et al., 2007 for a discussion). However, our supplemental analyses indicate that future research may benefit from examining separating *generalized* perceptions into breach and fulfillment to provide more nuanced theoretical insights.

We examined how employees' assessments of external and internal locus of causality, controllability, and stability relate to negative/positive emotions. Future research may benefit from further assessing the individual's own role in controllability and perceived stability. For example, employees who perceive that they have control over a fulfilled promise and that they are able to sustain the fulfillment of this promise may also experience positive emotions. Given the multi-dimensional nature of attributions, future research may also benefit from exploring attribution profiles (e.g., latent profile analysis). For example, employees who experience a broken promise that was caused by the organization, was not controllable, and is unlikely to re-occur may have different experiences than attributions with a different profile, such as a broken promise that was caused by the organization, controllable, but also unlikely to reoccur. Thus, a profile approach may provide nuanced insights into how attributions may

combine in meaningful ways to impact employees' experiences. Future research should examine this possibility.¹⁰

5.6 | Practical implications

Our findings have several important practical implications. First, our study highlighted that employees experience broken and fulfilled promises relatively frequently (e.g., on average, one event per week). This suggests that managers should recognize the importance of managing psychological contract issues on an everyday and ongoing basis, not only after major events. That is, it is important that *everyday* promises are fulfilled and not broken.

Second, while organization should prevent breaking promises where possible, it is also important to carefully manage these events when they do occur, even if the promise appears to be "mundane." Our findings highlight that broken promises that are under the organization's control and likely to reoccur are especially damaging. Although providing an explanation can be beneficial (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019), it may be especially helpful to explain why the broken promise occurred and to provide assurances that all efforts will be made to prevent future events (e.g., identifying concrete action and ensuring that managers follow through).

Third, effectively managing psychological contracts is not just about avoiding breaking promises but also about fulfilling promises. A fulfilled promise can elicit positive emotions, positive mood, and citizenship behaviors as well as positively contribute to employees' generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. While organizations often focus on avoiding breaking promises, our findings indicate that they would also be well served to focus on fulfilling promises since this can promote beneficial effects for employees and the organization.

6 | CONCLUSION

Employees can experience broken and fulfilled promises on an everyday basis, which can initiate important psychological processes and influence generalized perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. As such, we encourage psychological contract scholars to build on this foundation to further illuminate the distinctions between event versus generalized perceptions of psychological contracts as well as examine their potential interplay. Doing so can further enhance our understanding and ability to effectively manage psychological contract events and the employer-employee relationship on an everyday and ongoing basis.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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