

**How administrative and professional ideologies shape the psychological contract of registered nurses. A qualitative study.**

Presentation type: poster

Category Selection: Research

Subcategory: Workforce

Authors: Deboever E, Gemmel P., Trybou J.

**Bio:**

Eva Deboever is a student of the MSc Health Care Management & Policy at Ghent University. Her research focuses on the psychological contract of registered nurses.

Paul Gemmel is professor Health Care & Service Management at Ghent University. He is also Senior Research Fellow at the Vlerick Leuven Ghent Management School.

Jeroen Trybou is assistant professor Healthcare Management & Policy at Ghent University. In addition he acts as advisor for several Health Care Organization.

Abstract:

**Context:** Few studies have explored the content of psychological contracts of registered nurses. The concept refers to nurses' subjective belief, shaped by the organisation, regarding the terms of a reciprocal exchange between individual and organisation. It refers to the way the working relationship is interpreted, understood and enacted by individuals at the interface between themselves and their organization. Our study aims at investigating if nurses' perceived obligations are shaped by professional and administrative work ideologies.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Belgian registered nurses to explore the content of their psychological contracts. Data analysis was based on the constant comparison method. Interview questions were of an open-ended, semi-structured nature designed to allow participants to address issues which they believed to be most significant. During the interviews probing questions were used to ensure the participant's experiences were grounded in concrete situations to increase the validity of the interview. All interviews were transcribed in full and analysis began whilst the data were still being collected. This provided the possibility to explore in further detail each theme that emerged in later interviews. The transcripts were read repeatedly. The initial open data exploration was followed by identification of concepts and their relationships.

**Results:** Our analysis of the transcribed interviews builds on psychological contract theory and yields a rich understanding of how registered nurses interpret and experience mutual obligations. Our results demonstrate that a distinction can be made between administrative and professional obligations. This is induced by differences between models of organizing that are based on administrative and organizational (management) principles and those models that are based on professional and occupational (nursing) organizing principles which converge in a healthcare organizations.

**Discussion:** This study is innovative in that it is among the first to study the content of the psychological contract of registered nurses. Our study confirms that both administrative and professional obligations exist. Nurse executives and leaders should recognize the needs of nurses with respect to both dimensions in order to develop and maintain effective relationships with their nursing staff. Future research should determine registered nurses' responses to perceptions that the organization is not fulfilling its obligations (psychological contract breach). Specifically, it would be interesting to (i) study the effects of breach to patients, colleagues and organizations, (ii) compare the sensitivity to unmet professional obligations compared to unmet administrative obligations and (iii) study how nursing managers can buffer the negative effects of unmet obligations.

**Keywords:** Psychological contract, Registered Nurse, Administrative Obligations, Professional obligations, Qualitative Research, Belgium