The psychological contract has emerged relatively recently as a key concept for understanding people’s attitudes towards work and organizations, their behaviour and their psychological well-being. It has also been identified as a crucial feature of new types of employment relations (Alcover, 2002; Guest, 2004).

Guest and Conway (2002) define the psychological contract, slightly adapting a previous definition by Herriot and Pemberton (1997), as “the perception of both parties to the employment relationship, organization and individual, of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship” (p. 22).

Although it is a construct with a substantial research tradition, recent years have seen the emergence of some critical and innovative approaches (Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway, 2002), in contrast to the traditional perspective of Rousseau and colleagues (Rousseau, 1995). Guest (1998) argues the need to construct a general theory on the psychological contract in order to overcome the restrictions of current research on the topic. For this author, one of its main limitations is its descriptive nature, and he advocates developing theoretical models and studies that would allow researchers to go beyond mere description of the content of the psychological contract.

Guest and colleagues introduce the concept of state of the psychological contract. For these authors, evaluation of the state of the psychological contract should represent a qualitative leap in research on the psychological contract, rendering it more explanatory and less descriptive, and making possible the prediction of diverse variables related to attitudes, behaviour and employees’ health.