

Investigation of Psychological Contracts (PCI) among Male and Female Nurses

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ABSTRACT

Strong psychological contract of employees and employers within organizations can be considered as a key factor to their success. This research aims mainly at the investigation of different psychological contracts among male and female nurses in Iran. Data were gathered using questionnaires among 400 nurses who had been chosen through simple random sampling. Data were analyzed with the use of SPSS and variance analysis test. The results indicated that balanced, relational, and transactional contracts were different among male and female nurses. According to the results, male nurses were particularly stronger in relational psychological contracts while female nurses showed stronger transactional and balanced psychological contracts. Other results indicated the effects of work experience and type of employment on other types of psychological contract.

Keywords

Psychological Contract, Transactional Psychological Contract, Relational Psychological Contract, And Balanced Psychological Contract

Introduction

The psychological contract can be defined as individuals' belief in reciprocal obligations which exist among them and another one, including employers (1). Prediction of such a belief is based on the perception of making such an exchange of promises (such as employment or professional opportunities) that bind both parties. A lot of studies on psychological contracts concentrate on obligations associated with the employment relationships (with an exception of studies which address marketing channels) (2).

Different perspectives are considered in operationalization of psychological contracts. The first thing in this regard is to decide if to concentrate on aspects dimensions of the psychological contract which are thought to be generalizable at a range of individuals and contexts. Morey and Luthans (1984), have differentiated etic points of view and addressed generalizable characteristics, from emic ones, in which the local and idiosyncratic content is emphasized. Assessments with the use of standardized scales to evaluate the extent of workers' experience regarding a "transactional" or

"relational" arrangement with the employers have totally an etic nature, employing a common framework over different situations. On the other hand, ethnographic interviews investigating the workers' subjective experiences, without a priori framework to test, have usually an emic nature (3).

Second, it should be decided if to concentrate on content, characteristics, and/or evaluations (4). The content of psychological contracts reflects the terms as well as elements comprising the contract (e.g., special obligations including job security, or general kinds of obligations consisting of relational or transactional). Features of psychological contracts specify them regarding some element or attribute (such as explicit or implicit, stable or unstable during time). Evaluations reflect assessment of the degree of fulfilment change or violation experienced in the context of the psychological contract. Any or all of these dimensions of the psychological contract have been the focus of researchers' attention.

The PCI consists of both content and evaluation measures. First, different special terms (such as "to train me just for my particular job", "opportunities for promotion") which may arise in

employment are assessed. In the next step, the extent based on which the respondents believe they satisfied commitments made to the employer is assessed along with the question regarding the fulfilment of the employer commitments in turn. The PCI provides an assessment of the individuals' subjective reports in the area of specific employment relationships. Accordingly, the subjective experience of the employment relationships from different frames of reference can be measures including: 1) workers/employees/contractors, 2) supervisors or managers of a special worker or group of workers, or 3) an "ideal" or preferable psychological contract according to the descriptions provided by workers, managers, etc. (5).

Psychological contracts refer to individual beliefs which are formed by the organization and are associated with the transactional agreement between the employee and the organization (6). The concept of psychological contract dates back to the initial works of Argyrols (1960) and the theory of social transactional theory (7). A psychological contract and a legal contract are distinguishable in that the parties in this type of contract are committed to a series of mutual commitments. In other words, a legal contract, despite a psychological one, is an agreement which establishes binding legal commitments for both parties and non-compliance with the terms of the contract will have legal outcomes (8). Psychological contract is more extensive compared to economic and legal ones since it covers numerous conceptual dimensions which are not included in the framework of legal contracts (9). Psychological contracts are known as an important success factor in employment relationships (6). Adherence to psychological contracts between employers and employees can encourage organizational trust and bring about mutual benefits, while lack of commitment to these contracts can have unfavourable outcomes for the organizations (6). Psychological contracts possess a prophetic predictive capability; in other words, they can make the future. Those who are committed to stay loyal can also predict and plan, because their actions for others and themselves will be determined and predictable. Therefore, understanding and realizing psychological contracts in the organizations can be of a significant importance.

It is possible to divide psychological contracts into three classes of relational, exchange, and balanced. The first category revolves around long-term relations that stem in relational and social emotional interactions. Non-material nature of a relational contract indicates loyalty, support, trust, job security, and career development (10). Transactional psychological contract is more evident compared to relational contracts and indicates the other party's contractual commitments. This contract type revolves around short-term employment agreement and focuses on economic exchange, specific responsibilities, and limited duties of organizational staff (11).

The design of Psychological Contract Inventory (PCI) aims at serving two fundamental objectives: 1) as a psychometrically sound instrument to assess the content of the psychological contract which can be generalized to be used in organizational studies, and 2) as a self-scoring evaluation through which executive and professional education can be supported (5).

Scholars such as Macneil (1985) suggested typologies to conceptualize the forms taken by promissory contracts. Macneil used a relational-transactional continuum to conceptualize contracts. Transactional reflects short-term arrangements which concentrate on considerably monetary or economic issues (such as spot market sales). On the other hand, relational reflects open-ended arrangements which include socioemotional and economic terms (such as marriage, friendship). Regarding employment, it is possible to consider transaction, relational or hybrid arrangements (for example in high-performance work teams). A typology which characterizes arrangements of employment across the aspects of duration (short-term against open-ended) and performance-reward contingencies (highly contingent, low or non-contingent) indicates observed variations in psychological contracts throughout people as well as firms (12; 13).

Relational-long-term or open-ended employment arrangements revolve around mutual trust and loyalty. Reward shows just loose associations with performance, derived from being a member and participating in the organizational context.

Balanced-dynamic and open-ended employment arrangements depend on the economic achievements of firms and opportunities of workers for the development of career advantages.

Both workers and firms play a key role in their reciprocal learning and development. Workers are rewarded according to their performance and role in the organizational comparative advantages, especially when the demands are changed because of market pressures.

Transactional-employment arrangements with a short-term or restricted duration, mainly concentrated on economic exchange, special, narrow tasks and restricted worker engagement in organizational context.

Transitional-not a psychological contract form itself, but a cognitive stated representing the outcomes of organizational changes and alterations which are at odds with an already settled employment arrangement (5).

Each dimension was further subdivided into components with conceptual homogeneity for the operationalization of the four dimensions and produce scales which had high convergent and discriminant validity (5).

Relational

1) Stability: Employees have the obligation to stay with the organization and satisfy the requirements to retain the job. Employers have the commitment to offer certain wages and long-term employment.

2) Loyalty: Employees have the obligation of supporting the organization, being loyal and committed to the organizational requirements and benefits, and show desirable organizational citizenship. Employers have the commitment to support the well-being of employees and their families while considering their interests (5).

Balanced

1) External Employability- Career promotion regarding the external labor market. Employees have the obligation to improve their marketable skills. Employers have the commitment to enhance the employees' long-term employability out of the organizational context and inside it.

2) Internal Advancement-Career progress in the internal labor markets. Employees have the obligation to expand skills which are valuable for the present employer. Employers have the commitment to create career development opportunities for the employees across the organization.

3) Dynamic Performance-Employees have the obligation for successful performance of novel and more challenging objectives that can be changed frequently in the future, to facilitate

becoming and remaining competitive for the firms. Employers have the commitment to improve persistent learning and assist employees in successful execution of rapid performance demands (5).

Transactional

1) Narrow-Employees have the obligation of performing just a certain or restricted set of tasks and doing just what they are paid to carry out. Employers have the commitment to provide the employees with just restricted engagement in organizational context, little or no training or promotion of other employees.

2) Short-term-Employees do not feel obliged to stay with the organization, but have the commitment to work just for a restricted time. Employers offer employment for just a certain or restricted time, do not have an obligation to future commitments.

Transitional

1) Mistrust-Employees believe that the organization provides inconsistent and mixed signals considering what it intends, representing their mistrust regarding the organization. Employers have kept critical information from the organizational staff. The organization shows mistrust toward the employees.

2) Uncertainty-Employees are not certain considering the nature of their own commitments toward the organization. Employers' measures assess the extent to which the employees are not certain about the employers' future commitments to them.

3) Erosion-Employees expect to obtain fewer future returns from the role they play in the organization rather than the past and anticipate permanent future reductions. Employers have instituted changes reducing the wage and benefits of employees, diminishing the work-life quality in comparison with the past years (5).

Scholars have identified several negative effects for violation of psychological contracts in organizations (15 & 16). When individuals understand that employers have violated their commitments, there will be two main outcomes. First of all, they reduce their perceptions regarding their mutual commitments to the organization and second, they will represent behavioural tendencies and real behaviours which are harmful to the organization including reduced

job satisfaction, less organizational commitment, and higher tendency to leave their jobs (8).

Almost in all countries, nurses form the main part of health system human resources. Given the high professional sensitivity of nurses, employers' commitment to psychological contracts is very significant and critical, since it can directly affect the quality of services provided by nurses and consequently influence patients' health. Therefore, investigation of psychological contracts among this population can be critical for administrative managers of hospitals and healthcare centres. On the other hand, investigation of different types of psychological contracts based on gender among nurses can be helpful for strategic planning, so that in the case of any differences among male and female nurses from the perspective of psychological contracts, strategic managers can deal differently with these two groups. Therefore, this paper aimed at investigating differences of psychological contracts among male and female nurses.

Methodology

All healthcare nurses of the country made up the statistical population of the current work. Simple random sampling was used to select 400 participants for the study. Questionnaire of psychological contracts by Hui et al (2004) was used as research tool. The questionnaire consists of 35 questions on three types of balanced psychological contract (with 15 items), relational psychological contract (with 10 items), and transactional psychological contract (with 10 items). Academic scholars confirmed the validity of the questionnaire, while Cronbach's alpha coefficient equal to 0.92 was considered to confirm its reliability. Lickert's 5-point scale (1 = very little to 5 = a lot) was used to score the questionnaire items. Cross-sectional data were collected in March 2017.

Results

The results of descriptive analysis of demographic variables are as follows: the selected sample included 50% male and 50% female nurses. Regarding work experience, 55% of the sample has between 1 to 5 years of experience. Regarding marital status, 65.5% of the sample included

married nurses and from education point of view, 66.8% of the sample had bachelor's degree. Table1 indicates the results of descriptive analysis of different exchange, balanced, and relational psychological contracts between these two groups. Naturalness of data distribution has been confirmed using Lorenz test.

Table 1. Descriptive components of scores of psychological contracts in male and female nurses

Group	Indicators	Balanced psychological contracts	Relational psychological contracts	Transactional psychological contracts
Male	Mean	45/64	36/98	35/74
	SD	12/224	11/475	9/353
Female	mean	48/66	33/29	32/12
	SD	12/224	8/361	9/353

The data distribution naturalness was investigated using Lorenz test, and the results indicated that data were distributed naturally in the population. The results are indicated in table2 for each sub-scale.

Table 2. Lorenz test for investigation of data distribution naturalness

Variable	P	F
Balanced psychological contracts	0/355	0/859
Relational psychological contracts	1/34	4/509
Transactional psychological contracts	0/575	0/314

The results showed that all three types of data distribution were normal for three of psychological contract. The use of independent t-test aimed at investigating the differences of psychological contracts in male and female groups. The results are represented in table3.

Table 3. The results of mean differences using t-test

Balanced psychological contracts	Group	Number	Mean	Df	t	gis
	Male	200	48/66	398	-	0/006
	Female	200	33/29	398	-	0/006

	Female	200	45/64		0	
Relational psychological contracts	Male	200	36/67	398	3/322	0/001
	Female	200	23/28			
Transactional psychological contracts	Male	200	32/12	398	4/266	0/0001
	Female	200	35/74			

According to the results, there were significant differences in male and female nurses regarding all three types of psychological contracts. The results showed that balanced psychological contracts with a mean of 48.66 compared to women (mean of 45.66) and significance coefficient of $p=0.006$ and also relational psychological contracts with a mean of 36.67 compared to women (mean of 23.28) and significance coefficient of $p=0.001$ was higher in men. This is while transactional psychological contracts showed higher score in women with a mean of 35.74 compared to men (mean of 32.12) at significance level of $p=0.001$.

Other findings of the study

F test was used to investigate potential differences regarding the effects of work experience on psychological contracts. According to what was found, although the scores of different types of psychological contracts have increased with work experience, this difference has been only significant in balanced psychological contracts ($F= 2.901$ & $p=0.22$) (the following table).

Table 5. The results of variance analysis for investigation of work experience effects on psychological contracts

Source of changes/variable	Sum of squares	Freedom degree	Mean of squares	F statistics	Significance level
Balanced psychological contracts	154/428	4	385/375	2/901	0/022
Relational psychological contracts	104/335	4	104/335	0/971	0/0423

Transactional psychological contracts	116/210	4	29/052	0/387	0/878
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The effects of employment type on psychological contracts indicated that nurses with contractual employment had higher transactional psychological contract scores compared to the other two types of psychological contracts and nurses with fixed term and official employment had higher balanced and relational psychological contract scores compared to the other type, while these differences were all significant. The following table indicates the results.

Table 6. The results of variance analysis for the effects of employment type on psychological contracts

Source of changes	Sum of squares	Freedom degree	Mean of squares	F statistics	Significance level
Balanced psychological contracts	122/658	1	122/658	0/906	0/03
Relational psychological contracts	437/365	1	437/365	4/104	0/043
Transactional psychological contracts	898/209	1	898/378	12/378	0/001

Discussion and Conclusion

Psychological contracts provide opportunities to discover processes and contents of employment relations with an emphasis on somehow clear commitments (7). The present study aimed to investigate different balanced, exchange, and relational psychological contracts between male and female nurses. Based on the results, these psychological contracts were different in male and female nurses. According to the results, balanced psychological contract was higher in male nurses compared to females. Balanced psychological contract means that development of external

employment skills; internal growth and prosperity as well as dynamic performance are committed by both staff and employers (11). In other words, in this type of psychological contract the staff are committed to career development in external job market, improvement of their exchangeable skills, development of their valuable skills for their current employer in the organization, and successful implementation of organizational objectives along with supporting the organization to survive in the arena of competitions. On the other hand, employers are committed to improve long-term employment skills inside and outside the organization, create new job opportunities, and provide constant learning opportunities for the staff. As shown by the results, female nurses were more committed to development of internal and external employment skills and also dynamic performance compared to male nurses. Despite higher scores of balanced psychological contracts in male nurses compared to females, analysis of the results indicated that the difference was not significant. In other words, despite this difference, both male and female nurses used balanced psychological contracts in an effective way.

On the other hand, relational psychological contract was higher in male nurses compared to females. This type of contracts is defined with two dimensions of stability and loyalty. Stability means that the staffs know themselves committed to constant performance in the organization and try to keep their positions; the employers are committed to provide fair salaries and long-term employment for the staff. Loyalty means that staff is committed to support and help the organization in dealing with organizational interests and demands, while the employers are also committed to support staff welfare, benefits, and their families (18). Employees who have relational psychological contract with their organization respect their relationships with the organization and want to keep a long-term employment relationship (16). They usually behave as an organizational citizen and act beyond their

responsibilities and tasks to promote organizational success (17). As it was shown in this study, male nurses are stronger in loyalty and stability compared to female nurses.

Regarding transactional psychological contracts, it was shown that such contract was stronger in female nurses compared to males. Limited responsibilities of staff and employers toward each other can be considered as the main feature of this contract. In other words, in this type of contract staff are committed to perform some limited responsibilities for which they are paid, while employers are also committed to involve employees in a limited way and without commitment to educate or promote them. Moreover, staffs don't have any commitment to stay in the organization and spend a limited time in the organization, while employers limit employment to a limited and specific time without any commitment for their future (11). This result means that female nurses are less involved in their work environment compared to male nurses. In other words, female nurses look at their organization as an income source and a place to work for. It should be said that, since women have heavy responsibilities at home along with the burden of their jobs, they allocate most of their energy and power to their family commitment and are less psychologically involved in their organizational affairs. This is while men are free from household responsibilities and allocate higher priorities to their jobs.

Another result of the research indicated that nurses with contractual employment had higher transactional psychological contracts while the scores of balanced and relational psychological contracts were higher in nurses with fixed term and official employment. This result indicates that type of employment can affect types of psychological contracts in nurses. In fact, when nurses have higher job security, they show stronger psychological contracts with their organization and know themselves more

committed and loyal toward the organization. This result shows agreement with the results of prior works (19-21).

Another result of the study indicated that increased work experience leads to higher scores of balanced psychological contracts in nurses. This result represents the fact that nurses are more willing to improve their skills and develop their internal and external organizational skills when they have more work experience. Moreover, over time when the nurses obtain more experience, they are more committed to their organizational objectives and try more to achieve them.

The present study had some limitations like other studies. One of the limitations was associated with the investigation of three psychological contracts including balanced, relational, and transactional types and ignoring transitional type. Therefore, it is suggested to consider this type of psychological contracts in future studies. The present study was done using cross-sectional data of nurses and it is recommended to perform the research with longitudinal data. Moreover, future works can consider the impacts of other demographic variables including age, marital status, and education on types of psychological contracts which have been ignored in the current paper.

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