

## A Personnel Foul: Violation of the Psychological Contract in Interscholastic Athletics

Doyeon Won, University of Georgia  
Simon M. Pack, University of Louisville

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Rousseau (1995) referred to psychological contracts as the "individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization" (p. 9). As such, it is reasonable to assert that employees develop certain perceptions that characterize what they owe an organization and, in return, what that organization owes them. This "mental model" outlines Rousseau's delineation of exchange relationships within organizations that vastly differ from the typical 'offer-acceptance-consideration' attributes of a legally binding contract. Since a psychological contract is unwritten, employees and employers may hold differing views on its content and the extent to which each party has fulfilled that contract (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). Furthermore, a violation of the psychological contract can have negative consequences for both employees and organizations. For example, a violation can reduce employees' levels of commitment which can ultimately increase the likelihood that an employee will voluntarily leave the organization (Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2006; Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003).

In terms of categorizing psychological contracts, this study follows the previous work of Robinson, Kraatz, and Rousseau (1994). Their categorization entailed the three areas in which employees assess whether a psychological contract has been fulfilled or violated: (a) transactional (rapid advancement, high pay, and merit pay), (b) relational obligations (job security, career development, and support with personal problems), and (c) providing the necessary training. With the increased attention recently placed on interscholastic athletics and the coaches and administrators responsible for those programs, this study aimed to uncover the various perceptual differences among coaches and administrators in regard to psychological contracts. Although the formation and development of psychological contracts is a valuable line of inquiry, this particular study focused on the impact of an unfulfilled psychological contract or a violation. Additionally, this study explored the impact of the three types of psychological contract violation (or fulfillment) on work outcomes (i.e., trust in organization, affective commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intentions) of interscholastic athletic personnel. More specifically, gap scores were calculated on differences between what coaches and administrators felt was obligated to them (obligations) versus what was actually provided (inducements).

A total of 145 high school athletic directors ( $n = 72$ ) and coaches from baseball and softball teams ( $n = 73$ ) responded to the questionnaire. The average age for both coaches and administrators was 44 years old ( $SD = 10.05$ ), with a range of 25 to 67. Of the 145 respondents, roughly 92 percent were male ( $n = 133$ ) while only eight percent were female ( $n = 12$ ). The average tenure for coaches and administrators within their respective school was approximately 18 years ( $SD = 10.51$ ). In regard to race, an overwhelming majority of the respondents were White/Caucasian (97.9%). Interscholastic athletic coaches and administrators were selected as the sample for this study because of the difference in their levels of rewards received in comparison to coaches and administrators at either the intercollegiate or professional levels. In addition, interscholastic coaches and athletic directors often engage in both teaching and coaching (Whisenant, Miller, & Pedersen, 2005; Wong & Covell, 1995). Thus, these individuals might expect to receive benefits for two jobs, but may in fact be disappointed with their overall extrinsic benefits.

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed their employer was obligated to provide 10 factors selected from previous literature as well as the degree to which their employer provided each of those obligations. Responses were on a 5 point Likert-type scale (1 'not at all' and 7 'a great extent'). Subsequently, the measure of psychological contract violation (or fulfillment) was created by subtracting the degree to which each item was provided (i.e., inducements) from the degree to which it was obligated (Coyle-Shapiro, & Kessler, 2000; Robinson, 1996). The differences between obligations and inducements ranged from -4 (strong sense of psychological contract fulfillment) to +4 (strong violation). All scales used in this study were deemed reliable based on a Cronbach's alpha above .70 (Nunnally, 1978). Overall, there was a strong sense of perceived violation. Scores for transactional ( $M = 0.92$ ), training ( $M = 0.64$ ), and relational ( $M = 0.09$ ) were all positive, indicating employees' expectations were unmet. A majority of respondents (64.8%) indicated that their transactional psychological contracts were indeed violated.

A series of regression analyses were carried out to find the effects of psychological contract violation and fulfillment on the following outcomes: (a) trust in organization, (b) affective commitment, (c) job satisfaction, and (d) turnover intentions. After controlling for age, gender, and organizational tenure, psychological contract violation explained a significant amount of the variance in trust in organization ( $R$ -square change = .23), affective commitment ( $R$ -square change = .19), job satisfaction ( $R$ -

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square change = .10), and turnover intention (R-square change = .13). Among the three predictors, transactional psychological contract violation was the only statistically significant predictor of trust in organization (beta = -.28), affective commitment (beta = -.41), and turnover intention (beta = .45) while the other two dimensions of the psychological contract (i.e., relational and training) were not statistically significant except for in the case of training on turnover intention. Additional regression analyses were conducted to find effects of inducements (i.e., what has been actually provided by high schools) on the aforementioned work outcomes. After controlling for age, gender, and organizational tenure in this analysis, inducements explained a significant amount of the variance in all four outcomes: trust in organization (R-square change = .43), affective commitment (R-square change = .18), job satisfaction (R-square change = .15), and turnover intention (R-square change = .13). Again, the transactional inducements were statistically significant predictors for trust in organization (beta = .48), affective commitment (beta = .32), job satisfaction (beta = .25), and turnover intention (beta = -.37). However, training inducement was a significant predictor for trust in organization (beta = .21) and turnover intention (beta = .25).

In summary, the violation and inducement level of the psychological contract contributed to predicting work outcomes of high school athletic personnel with transactional inducements as a significant predictor. Among the four dependent variables, trust was explained the most, followed by affective commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. The results of the current study revealed that violations in the psychological contract can bring about negative impacts on the exchange relationships within organizations (e.g., interscholastic institutions). Furthermore, the study suggests that interscholastic institutions should gain an understanding of employees' perceptions concerning psychological contracts and what makes up those contracts in order to minimize any negative effects of subsequent violations. Further practical implications for interscholastic coaches and administrators will be addressed as well as possible parallels in other realms such as collegiate and professional coaching and administration.