

Giving and Receiving: An Examination of the Psychological Contract in NCAA Coaches

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Coaches represent the fundamental pillars of success in collegiate athletic programs. Typically, a college coach holds multiple responsibilities that go beyond those exclusively related to coaching (Greenberg & Gray, 1998). Due to the high stakes involved and the high visibility in which most athletic programs operate, a coach's job has become increasingly scrutinized by multiple stakeholders and, as a result, increasingly unstable. Accordingly, college coaching contracts have become highly elaborated instruments in which the competing interests of both the institution and the coach are explicitly addressed (Lopiano, 2008). Pressure to win as well as keeping the high expectations of the program has led to a higher rate of job turnover for many (Greenberg, 2001). Thus, within the coaching profession success and, thus, continuity on the job are highly dependent upon the coach's winning record. Nonetheless, not all coaches experience the same conditions and expectations (Greenberg & Smith, 2007).

In fact, there are significant differences among coaches' positions, salaries, sports they coach, and profile of the school at which they work. Therefore, a coach's continuity at his/her current job would not only depend on the coach's ability to successfully fulfill the expectations that were set upon them, but also by other non-contractual conditions such as the opportunities to advance in their career, the level of challenge faced on their job, the quality of the working conditions and the sense of being treated fairly to name a few (Lester et al., 2002). The influences of these non-contractual conditions are commonly known as "the psychological contract" (Rousseau, 1995).

Grounded in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), a psychological contract is referred to as an "employees' perceptions of what they owe to their employers and what employers owe to them (Robinson, 1996, p. 574)." The importance of a psychological contract becomes critical for an organization's stability and continuance. A breach of the psychological contract can have negative consequences for both employees and organizations since it can reduce an employee's level of commitment which can ultimately increase the likelihood that an employee will voluntarily leave the organization (Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of psychological contract fulfillment (PCF) (or breach) on intercollegiate athletic coaches. Specifically by examining the influence of the PCF on employee-related outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, commitment, trust, turnover intention) and the influence of the perceived status and cause of the psychological contract breach on the employee-related outcomes.

A stratified random-sampling procedure was used. From a sample frame of 1,061 NCAA schools, a total of 256 NCAA athletic departments were selected. Athletic departments were stratified into four groups based on their NCAA divisional affiliation: (1) D-IA (n = 62); (2) D-IAA and IAAA (n = 59); (3) D-II (n = 67), and (4) D-III (n = 68). From each of the 256 athletic departments a maximum of 20 coaches were chosen representing 10 men's and 10 women's sports. A total of 3,758 coaches were selected and asked to participate to respond to a synchronous web-based survey (Kehoe & Pitkow, 1996).

Of the 3,758 contacted, 503 coaches responded to the survey (response rate = 13.4%) but only 439 responses were fully completed. Of these, 110 were from D-IA, 121 from D-IAA and IAAA, 84 from D-II, and 124 from D-III institutions. Average age of respondents was 41 years old (SD = 10.65) with an average organizational tenure of 8.51 years (SD = 7.40). The majority of respondents were male (n = 310; 70.6%) and Caucasian-Americans (n = 383; 87.2%) and most of the respondents were full-time coaches (n = 383; 87.2%) and head coaches (n = 336; 76.5%). The questionnaire included scales that measure two dimensions (transactional and relational) of psychological contracts (Robinson & Morrison, 1995), job satisfaction (Dunham & Smith, 1979), affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991), trust in their organization (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), and turnover intention (Mobley et al., 1979) as well as a question that asks the perceived cause (intentional or unintentional) of the psychological contract breach (Turnley et al., 2003). Both (a) the psychological contract scales and (b) a set of the employee-related outcome scales were examined using CFA. The two-factor model of psychological contract fit the data very well, with a ratio of Chi-square to DF of 2.01 (RMSEA = 0.048; NFI = .99; CFI = .99). The measurement model for the employee-related outcome scales fit the data reasonably well, with a ratio of Chi-square to DF of 2.73 (RMSEA = 0.063; NFI = .96; CFI = .98). Internal consistency estimates ranged from .79 to .90.

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To investigate the unique contribution of the status in regard to psychological contract fulfillment on various employee-related outcomes, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were performed. All of the regression models were significant. After controlling for demographic and occupational variables, the status of PCF explained a significant amount of the variance ($p < .001$) in job satisfaction (R-square change = .46), affective commitment (R-square change = .25), trust (R-square change = .26), and turnover intention (R-square change = .28). Relational PCF made a greater contribution in predicting the level of job satisfaction ($\beta = .57, p < .001$), affective commitment ($\beta = .51, p < .001$), trust ($\beta = .53, p < .001$), and turnover intention ($\beta = -.51, p < .001$). Meanwhile, the regression coefficient for transactional PCF was only significant in predicting the level of job satisfaction ($\beta = .20, p < .001$).

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to investigate the effect of the perceived status and cause of psychological contract (intentionally breached, unintentionally breached, or fulfilled) while controlling for age and organizational tenure. The results revealed significant group differences in all four employee-related outcomes, Wilk's lambda = .72, $F(8, 862) = 19.35, p < .001$. Respondents who perceived an intentional breach in their psychological contract reported significantly lower level of job satisfaction, affective commitment, and trust while they reported a significantly higher level of turnover intention in comparison to those who perceived an unintentional breach or whose contracts were fulfilled. Results confirmed the importance of the PCF in contractual relationships, particularly the relative importance of relational PC' revealing that conditions other than salary also influence coaches' intention to leave their jobs. Some of the managerial implications of these results suggest the importance of enhancing the channels of communication between athletic departments and coaches.

Overall, communication is the key aspect in an employee-employer relationship. Since relational contract' is much more important for employees, employers should consider focusing more on better communication and relation-building activities (which are less costly than transactional' items'). Future studies should consider examining perceptions of the PC of athletic directors and/or coaches' direct supervisors since the PC also acts in a reciprocal manner (Sels, Janssens, & Van den Brande, 2004).