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**PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT BREACH:  
A PROPOSED MODEL ON THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF TRUST**

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**Abstract**

*The study presents a model which shows the mediating influence of trust on the relationship between psychological contract and psychological employment contract breach. Previous literature review on related subject matter leads to the proposed conceptual model. Going by the model, it is argued that psychological contract have influence psychological employment contract breach but the relationship would be stronger when trust is maintained in an organization. Most of the previous studies on psychological contract were conducted in the Asian and western world and very scanty in African countries. This study intends using survey research design and the unit of analysis is the individual employees in the Nigeria public universities. Based on the review of related literatures, it founds that psychological contract influence psychological employment contract breach. More so, trust plays a vital role in employment relationship since perception of mutual reciprocal obligation is centred on trust, and thus, influences perceived breach.*

**Keywords:** Psychological Contract, Trust, Psychological, Employment Contract Breach.

**1. Introduction**

In today's working environment that is highly demanding, maintaining employees psychological contract is an inevitable factor which deals with general employment relation which does not concerns employee alone but the employer or organization as a whole (Guest, 2016). It is expected that employers and employees maintain a fair and balance relationship among each other, with respect to the reciprocal contributions and efforts put in place (Dantas & Ferreira 2015; Rousseau, 2005; Taylor & Tekleab, 2004). Therefore, psychological contracts plays a significant role in shaping the employee-employer relationship (Kraak, Lunardo, Herrbach, and Durrieu, 2017; Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, & Tetrick, 2012) as it gives room for clear understanding of employment relationship (Taylor & Tekleab, 2004).

Rousseau, 2004; Parzefall, 2008; Rousseau, 2001). This is crucial as the survival of any organization depends on good mutual understanding between employee and employer. More so, when this mutual obligation is maintained and enhanced, it tends to be healthy and beneficial for both parties (Fayyazi & Aslani, 2015). Studies have revealed the extent to which organizations fulfill psychological contracts forms an important success factor for the employment relationship (Conway, Kiefer, Hartley, & Briner, 2014; Restubog, Bordia, & Bordia, 2011; Restubog, Zagenczyk, Bordia, Bordia, & Chapman, 2015). This is because employees are encouraged to put in their best in the organization as a result of perceived value and sense of belonging from the employer, since perception itself has great influence on employees perception.

It is defined as the belief of employee regarding what was promised and what is being given by the employer in exchange for employee contribution (Dabos &

As much as psychological contract serves a paramount role in organizational relationship, it therefore becomes unhealthy when employers make promises to

employees, but fail to fulfill or meet up to expectation (breach of psychological contract). For example, “you fulfil your part of the agreement, and I will fulfill mine” and “you do not fulfill your part of the agreement, and I will not fulfill mine” (Alcover, Rico, Turnley & Bolino, 2017). PCB is the perception of employee regarding the degree to which the employer has failed to meet up to obligations and promises (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). This gives room for various negative behaviours such as perceived unbalanced relationship (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robbins, Ford, & Tetrick, 2012; Rousseau, 1995), perceived injustice (Noblet & Rodwell, 2009; Robbins et al., 2012), job satisfaction, employee wellbeing, intention to quit, organizational citizenship behaviour (Conway & Briner, 2005; Middlemiss, 2011; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). Therefore, studying the psychological contract breach antecedents would give an employer clear preventive measures on how to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in organization.

Furthermore, going by literature review of previous studies in addressing psychological contract breach issues, evidences have showed that most of the studies conducted are done in western countries and Asia, indicating very scanty studies focusing on African countries, specifically in Nigeria (Hussain, 2014; Topa & Jimenez, 2016; Arshad, 2016; Peng, Jien and Lin, 2016; McGrath, Millward and Banks, 2015; Restubog, Zagenczyk, Bordia, Bordia & Chapman, 2015; Fullerton & Taylor, 2015; Cassar & Buttigieg, 2015), considering the fact that scholars have questioned the generalization of western-based findings to other cultures and countries (Hui, Lee, & Rousseau, 2004; Fu & Deshpande, 2012). Hence, the present study tend to contribute to the subject matter literature through examining such relationship and variable in Africa country with focus on Nigeria.

Perhaps a more serious question is how would the perception of breach be influenced or subdued through the mediating role of trust considering the fact that fulfilling employment contract encourages trust and brings about mutual benefits for both employers and employee (Rodwell et al., 2015; Lester et al., 2002; Robinson, 1996). It was revealed that researchers need to adopt a more integrative orientation by investigating

the antecedents and outcome of employment contract breach as well as the mediators and moderators of these consequence (Lo & Aryee, 2003), as trust is rarely used as mediating variable for employment outcomes (DeConinck, 2010). It is on this note that the present paper presents a model that shows the mediating influence of trust on the relationship between psychological contract and psychological employment contract breach. It assumes that psychological contract would reduce perceived breach by employee through the influence of trust as mediating variable. The proposed model shall explain the mediating role of trust on psychological contract and psychological employment contract breach. Subsequent sections of the conceptual paper reviews psychological contract, trust and psychological employment contract breach with a view of formulating prepositions that shows the relationship among the variables under discussion. Finally, the proposed methodology, conclusions and implication of the study would be emphasized.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Psychological Contract

In trying to understand organizational behaviour, Argyris (1960) therefore became the first individual to propound the term “psychological contract”, preceded by Levinson *et al.* (1962), Schein (1965-1980), and later Rousseau (1989-1995). Chris Argyris (1960) made use of the concept “psychological contract” to explain the affiliation between the employer and the employee as well as the relationship on any other parties. He defined contract as any form of unwritten and subjective understanding among two wings putting into consideration mutual respect and norms binding them (Meybodi, Mortazavi, Poor & Lagzian, 2016). It is a person’s belief concerning conditions and terms of exchange agreement between another person or focal person (Rousseau, 1989), which ranges from factors such as advancement, growth, promotion and pay which an employer is expected to fulfil in return for an employee hard work (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Employees go into contractual agreement with the employer and having the perception that they will reciprocate by fulfilling the contractual agreements accordingly. Hence plays a crucial role in employment relationship.

The term Psychological Contract cover two major areas of psycho contracts known as the “relational” and “transactional” which has been evaluated (Millward & Hopkins 1998; Millward & Brewerton 1999). Transactional Contract concept focuses on “specific, short-term, and monetizable obligations entailing limited involvement of employee and employer” (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 229). It is beneficial to an employee because workers that have strong transactional contract perception focuses on economic exchange benefits, where responsibilities are clearly stated and they presume instant reward for their contributions in the work place (Mai, Ellis, Christian & Porter, 2016; Rousseau, 2000). While Relational Psychological contract orientations focus on “broad, open-ended, and long-term obligations based on the exchange of not only monetizable elements such as pay for service, but also socio-emotional elements such as loyalty and support” (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 229). This form of psychological contract contain both psychological and social features which are long term in nature. It relies on the value of relationship as one group influences other groups’ remunerations. It deals with both the employees and employers focusing on the future and stable affiliation so as to promote cordial relationship from both sides. A highly relational psychological contract ideology concentrates more on social exchange and lesser instrumental in nature (Millward & Hopkins, 1998).

## **2.2 Psychological Contract and Psychological employment contract breach**

Some studies found that psychological contract enhances the relationship between employees and employer in the organization, which has positive impact on employees’ behaviour and attitudes (Conway & Briner, 2005; Chambel & Alcover, 2011), since it is centred around norm of reciprocity which expected mutual respect, obligation, exchange and expectation between employer and employee. But when these obligations are not met, employees perceived breach and lost confidence in employer. The loss of confidence may degenerate to unhealthy behaviour among employees (Bordia, Restubog, & Tang, 2008), as this negative behaviour is generally harmful to the progress of the organization as a whole. The positive relationship between psychological contract and psychological contract breach has been

addressed by different studies. For example, from the review of previous literatures of psychological contract and psychological contract breach, it was revealed that there is significant relationship between the variables and that psychological contract influences the perception of employment contract breach (Tekleab & Taylor, 2003; Coyle-Shapiro.et.al, 2002; Jamil, Raja and Darr, 2013). When psychological contract is uphold, perceived breach is reduced or not felt at all.

Hence, the study therefore proposes that there is an influential relationship between psychological contract and psychological employment contract breach.

## **2.3 Trust as a potential mediator**

Employee and employer interaction serves as lubricant for the survival of organization as it creates clear view and understanding on positive outcome that enhance the survival of both parties. Such interaction ought to be sustained in order to avoid negative perception by employee concerning unfulfilled employment contract promises. This is because when promises are breached, trust is affected negatively as employees no longer have confidence in their employer (Robinson, 1996; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). How employees respond to contract breach is also influenced by the quality of the relationship that the employee has with the organization and its agents. For example, when employees have trust in the organization, it helps to lessen the undesirable consequences of breach (Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson & Wayne, 2008), as evidences have support the fact that employees have a certain level of accepting the employers conduct when expectations are breached (Rigotti, 2009).

Trust was defined by Robinson (1996) as “one's expectations, assumptions, or beliefs about the likelihood that another's future actions will be beneficial, favourable, or at least not detrimental to one's interests”. Hence, it revolves around the heart of contracts and relationships from social or psychological construct perspective, which has influence on both employee’s behaviour towards employer (Deutsch, 1958; Blau, 1964; Zand, 1972). Generally, trust serves as guideline in influencing employee’s relationship behaviour because trust in employer has significant influence on employee's recognition of a perceived breach. Trust has been

recognised as an essential element of the psychological contract due to the reciprocated perception and mutual commitment between the employer and employee which it is built on (Rousseau, 1995; Robinson, 1996). Robinson maintains that, despite the fact that breach of psychological contract responsibilities or obligations results to unmet anticipations, which alone cannot be a justification for the effects of breach, hence, understanding breach of trust is crucial to understanding employment contract breach. In addition, Morrison and Robinson (1997) discovered that when employees greatly trust the employer, the lesser the retaliation regarding the employer breaking of the psychological contract.

Previous studies conducted have used trust in association with the psychological contract breach and the findings of the research revealed that it has influence on employees perceived employment contract breach (Paille & Raineri, 2016; Montes & Irving, 2008; Bal, De Lange, Jansen & Van Der Velde, 2008; Robinson, 1996). Therefore, since it is ascertained by various scholars the role trust plays in shaping the employment relationship, employer must therefore maintain certain level of trustworthy as this will reduce employee's anger, frustration, intention to quit and deviancy resulting from the perception of employment contract breach.

Hence, the study therefore proposes that trust would mediate the relationship between psychological contract and employment contract breach.

#### 2.4 Psychological contract, trust and psychological employment contract breach

The employee "beliefs about explicit and implicit promises made to them in return of their time and effort towards the organizations" (Rousseau, 1995), known as psychological has influence on employees behaviour and trust. Due to the importance of

employee's perceived breach and behaviour towards employers, organizational researchers have picked interest in psychological contracts in the last two decades (Conway & Briner, 2005; Middlemiss, 2011). This is due to the fact when that employee perceived that employer is meeting up to expectations and promises made, they tend to input positive job behaviours such as; organizational identification, commitment, job performance, (Conway et al., 2011; Rodwell et al., 2015; Lester et al., 2000; Turnley et al., 2003; Walker, 2013). More so, reverse is always the case when employee perceived breach of employment contract (Lester et al., 2000), as this scenario leads negative attitudes that is not healthy to organization because factors such as; trust in employer, intention to quit, citizenship behaviour; commitment, organizational identification and employee performance (Epitropaki, 2013; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007; Raja, Johns, & Ntalianis, 2004; Suazo et al., 2005; Turnley & Feldman, 2000; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2007; Suazo & Stone-Romero, 2011; Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood & Bolino, 2002) are all affected negatively.

Meanwhile, trust and uprightness plays a crucial role in strengthening employee-employer relationship (Pawar, 2018). The ability to carry an employee along depends on the trust it has on the employer as it serves as mirror of perceived employer obligation fulfilment or breach. Studies have showed that employee's perception of breach is made via existing level of trust in employer (Matthijs, Chiaburu, & Jansen, 2010). Empirical evidences associates trust to intention to remain, civic virtue dimension and commitment (Liou, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Robinson et al., 2000), as there is higher risks of trusting employer by employee when psychological contract breach occurs (Matthijs, Chiaburu, & Jansen, 2010).

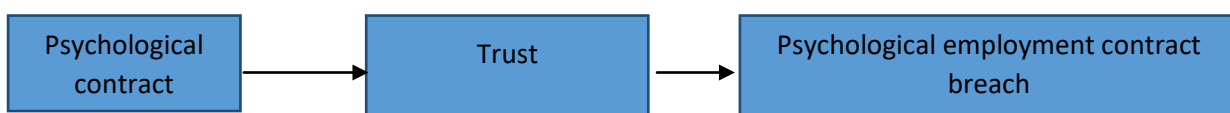


Fig. 1: Proposed model

### 3 Proposed conceptual model

Going by aforementioned, the purpose of this article presents a model which shows the relationship between psychological contract, trust and psychological employment contract breach. The model is derived from the review of previous literatures and it shows the mediating influence of trust on psychological contract and psychological employment contract breach. The arrow depicts direction of relationship that exist among the variables. The proposed model reveals that the relationship psychological contract and psychological employment contract breach is contingent on the mediating variable which is trust. More so, the proposed model signifies that trust has an influence on psychological contract and psychological employment contract breach.

### 4 Proposed methodology

From the previous literatures, it show that studies that were conducted on the variable made use of survey research design and the unit of analysis is the organization using employees of the organization as respondents so as to fill the questionnaires by providing answers accordingly. This signifies the usage of questionnaire as an instrument for data collection for the purpose of reaching maximum number of respondents which is suitable for the study when compared to interview were just a few respondents can be reached. Hence, the use of survey and questionnaire was also proposed in the present study. The questionnaires would be administered to academic staff of 13 Nigerian public universities in the North western region of the country. This is because the issue concerns them and the study tries to see ways of improving perceived breach among lecturers of these institutions. There is total number of 7,062 lecturers that are employees of these institutions would be selected through table size by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), that will result to sample size of 367. Hence stratified random sampling would be used for selection.

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The current study proposed a model that depicts and explains the mediating influence of trust on the relationship psychological contract and psychological employment contract breach in Nigerian public universities. Based on the review of related literatures,

it founds that psychological contract influence psychological employment contract breach. More so, trust plays a vital role in employment relationship since perception of mutual reciprocal obligation is centred on trust, and thus, influences perceived breach. The frame work intend to show how trust can strengthen the employee – employer relationship with the aim of ameliorating perceived broken promises among the academic staff of Nigeria public universities.

Organizations that value and maintain trust repose in them by employees tend to achieve greater output because employees tend to put in their best since they confide in the employer that promises would be fulfilled and not breached. Therefore, Employer in the Nigeria public universities should focus on making sure that the cordial and mutual obligation binding them and employee is sustained as it will not give room for employees negative work behaviours that may emanate from perceived breach. The study also tend to show the importance of trust as mediating variable in the subject matters as it may be a reciprocal source of satisfaction binding psychological contract and perceived breach respectively. The maintaining of mutual obligation and respect for employees perception is of utmost importance in any organization, hence, lecturers should be motivated to put in their best so as to avoid brain drain syndrome as witnessed in the sector due to perceived breach.

Furthermore, the study intend the fill the gap by studying psychological contract breach in Africa, and Nigeria to be specific since most of the studies conducted on psychological contract are done in western world. The implication of the framework is that employers should maintain trust by ensuring the fulfilment of contractual promises in order to avoid perceived breach and maintain cordial employment relationship.

Practically, the proposed framework and present conceptual paper would serve as a guide for research in the field of organizational behaviour in carrying out future research on the relationship between psychological contract and psychological contract breach with mediating role of trust, as the findings would guide policy makes, employers and

academicians regarding perceived breach in Nigeria

public universities.

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