

Behavioral Consequences of Psychological Contract Breach: Examining the Neutralizing Effects of Organization-based Self-esteem

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Drawing upon social exchange (Blau, 1964) and behavioral plasticity (Brockner, 1988) perspectives, we examined the moderating role of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) in the relationship between psychological contract breach and organization-directed outcomes: in-role behavior (IRB), organizational citizenship behaviors towards the organization (OCBO), and workplace deviance behavior towards the organization (WDBO). Data were collected from 304 rank-and-file employees belonging to various occupational groups based in Metro Manila. Results indicated that psychological contract breach was negatively associated with OCBO and IRB and positively related to WDBO. Moreover, OBSE moderated the relationship between psychological contract breach and organization-directed behaviors such that individuals with low as opposed to high OBSE reacted more negatively to psychological contract breach.

Keywords: psychological contract breach, in-role behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, workplace deviant behavior

At the core of employee–organization relationship is the psychological contract. It refers to individuals’ perception of the mutual obligations between themselves and the employing organization (Rousseau, 1989). It is also regarded as a mental model or schema that guides an individual in the interpretation of work events and conditions involving his/her employment relationship such as compensation, professional development, and promotions. When an individual’s expectations are not met, this constitutes a breach in the psychological contract. In a meta-analytic study consisting of 51 studies, Zhao, Wyane, Glibkowski, and Bravo (2007) reported that psychological contract breach was negatively related to a host of work-related attitudes and behaviors including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and positively associated with turnover intentions, work withdrawal, and counterproductive behaviors.

The aim of the present study is to examine the moderating role of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) between psychological contract breach and employee organizational-directed behaviors. We address two fundamental questions: What is the role of OBSE in the psychological contract dynamics? Specifically, why does psychological contract breach result in more negative outcomes for some employees (with low OBSE) but not for others? OBSE refers to a “specific type of self-esteem which reflects employees’ evaluations of their personal adequacy and worthiness as an organizational member” (Gardner & Pierce, 1998, p. 50). The inclusion of this construct in psychological contract research has both applied and theoretical values. First, current research on psychological contracts has relied heavily on the use of the social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964) as a theoretical anchor in explaining the consequences of breach (Zhao et al., 2007). However, one criticism of the SET in organizational research is its simplistic approach in describing the give-and-take process in dyadic relationships (e.g., Cook & Rice, 2003; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Research should also consider individual and contextual factors that cover the exchange relationship. To address this issue, we integrate the use of the behavioral plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988) in explaining why individuals differently react to breach. The theory holds that individuals with low self-esteem are more reactive to negative outcomes compared to individuals with high self-esteem. Hence, the negative consequences of breach are more pronounced for individuals with low self-esteem. The integration of OBSE may deepen our understanding of the implications of the perceived work environment for the individual. Fulfillment of the psychological contract

implicitly communicates to employees that they are cared for and their contributions are valued. Increased self-esteem is beneficial for the welfare of the employee, thereby encouraging employees to remain with the organization which affords them a sense of positive self-worth. In addition, if organizations contribute to increased self-esteem by providing a supportive environment, employees are likely to respond with greater job satisfaction, affective commitment, and extra-role behaviors.

Second, there is limited empirical investigation on the role of individual difference variables in psychological contract processes (i.e., Kickul & Lester, 2001; Ho, Weingart, & Rousseau, 2004; Orvis, Dudley, & Cortina, 2008; Raja, Johns, & Bilgrami, 2011). Considerable research has provided evidence that individual difference variables contribute additional variance in the prediction of organizational outcomes (Barrick & Mount, 1991). For example, personality characteristics such as conscientiousness, achievement motivation, and dependability were found to be significant precursors of job success (Barrick & Mount, 1991). In the present study, we examine the relative strength of OBSE as a moderator influencing the relationship between contract breach and employee outcomes. As a dispositional characteristic, OBSE is likely to shape employees' cognitive appraisal of negative organizational events. Indeed, previous empirical evidence suggests that individuals with low as opposed to high OBSE were more likely to be influenced by organizational uncertainties (Hui & Lee, 2000). Since psychological contracts are subjective perceptions arising from sense-making processes (Rousseau, 1989), OBSE may exercise due influence in the maintenance of psychological contracts and detection of breach because individuals with low OBSE are easily affected by threatening stimuli. In the sections that follow, we further explicate our research model, develop and formally test our theoretical predictions, and discuss our key findings and note their practical implications.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Psychological Contract Breach and Employee Behaviors

Employee performance encompasses positive and negative workplace behaviors. Positive behaviors can be classified as content performance and contextual performance. Content performance refers to in-role behaviors (IRB) that employees are required to perform as stipulated in their job description (Williams & Anderson, 1991). In contrast, contextual performance

(also referred to as organizational citizenship behaviors, OCBs) is performed by an employee beyond what is prescribed by the organization (Organ, 1988). Negative behaviors are usually described as workplace deviant behaviors (WDB) that violate the prescribed organizational norms that are detrimental to the well-being of the organization and its members (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). In this study, we focus on organizational-directed as opposed to individual-directed behaviors (i.e., IRB, OCBO, and WDBO). Psychological contracts are perceptual in nature and formed through interactions with organizational agents such as recruiters and supervisors (Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Rousseau, 1989). Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) assert that the higher the status of the organizational agent, the more these promises are perceived to represent the organization. Moreover, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Robinson, 1996; Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003), breach was more related to organizational rather than individual-directed behaviors.

The social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) provide as useful explanatory frameworks for the relationship between psychological contract breach and employee behaviors. Both theoretical perspectives suggest that exchanges between two parties are anchored on a system of reciprocity as a means of balancing the employment relationship. When one party of the exchange receives something good, the party would return the favor. Contributing to this exchange process is the norm of reciprocity which maintains that, “people should help those who have helped them” (Gouldner, 1960, p. 171). In other words, reciprocity involves the repayment of specific benefits to those who have extended help or assistance. Thus, when an organization fails to provide the promised obligations (i.e., psychological contract breach), employees are likely to withhold their contributions to the organization or retaliate by engaging in harmful acts to hurt their organization. For example, in a meta-analytic study on the consequences of organizational injustice, Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) reported that perceived injustice resulted in reduced IRB and OCB and higher WDB. Similarly, a large body of work supports the negative relationship between perceptions of psychological contract breach and favorable work behaviors, such as IRB (Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003) and OCBs (Restubog, Hornsey, Bordia, & Esposito, 2008; Turnley et al., 2003). Similarly, when organizations violate promised obligations, employees are likely to “even the score” by engaging in counterproductive behaviors (Kickul & Lester, 2001; Restubog, et al.,

2015). In line with these theoretical and empirical considerations, we offer the following predictions:

Hypothesis 1: Psychological contract breach is negatively related to IRB.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological contract breach is negatively related to OCBO.

Hypothesis 3: Psychological contract breach is positively related to WDBO.

Moderating Role of OBSE

So far, we have argued that perceptions of psychological contract breach will result in negative consequences for the organization. However, not all employees who perceive a breach in their psychological contract will reduce their organizational-directed contributions and harm their organization. For instance, certain dispositional characteristics, such as OBSE, are likely to influence whether an employee engages in favorable or unfavorable actions. OBSE refers to the belief of organizational members “that they can satisfy their needs by participating in roles within the context of an organization” (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Durnham, 1989, p. 625). It is an assessment individuals make regarding their importance and usefulness towards their organization. As opposed to general self-esteem, OBSE is context specific and a highly stable self-concept and belief that does not vary over time (Campbell, 1990). Moreover, frame-of-reference research has emphasized the predictive power of context specific personality measures. For example, Bowling, Eschleman, Wang, Kirkendall, and Alarcon (2010) found that OBSE had a stronger relationship with organization-related constructs such as job complexity, leader–member exchange, supervisor social support, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment compared to general self-esteem.

The behavioral plasticity theory (Brockner, 1988) suggests that the degree to which an individual is influenced by external factors is dependent on one’s self-esteem (Pierce et al., 1989). Individuals with low as opposed to high OBSE are more reactive to situational and environmental cues compared to individuals with high self-esteem (Brockner, 1988). Similarly, individuals with low OBSE rely on social cues to assess the appropriateness of their actions, conform attitudinally and/or behaviorally to seek acceptance and approval from others, and transpose negative feedback to other aspects of their life (Brockner, 1988). Given these characteristics, individuals with low

OBSE who experience psychological contract breach are less likely to engage in OCBO and IRB and more likely to engage in WDBO. This is because individuals with low OBSE would interpret psychological contract breach as a signal of their diminished status and importance as organizational members. Since these individuals are highly susceptible to external cues, they would react more negatively by withholding organizational contributions and engaging in harmful behaviors.

Hypothesis 4: OBSE will moderate the relationship between psychological contract breach and IRB. The negative relationship between psychological contract breach and IRB will be stronger for individuals with low as opposed to high OBSE.

Hypothesis 5: OBSE will moderate the relationship between psychological contract breach and OCBO. The negative relationship between psychological contract breach and OCBO will be stronger for individuals with low as opposed to high OBSE.

Hypothesis 6: OBSE will moderate the relationship between psychological contract breach and WDBO. The positive relationship between psychological contract breach and WDBO will be stronger for individuals with low as opposed to high OBSE.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Data were collected from various occupational groups based in Metro Manila. Participants received a survey kit consisting of a letter describing the nature of the research and a self-survey which measures demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, tenure, job classification), psychological contract breach, OBSE, IRB, OCBO, and WDBO. An orientation was conducted with the participants indicating the purpose of the study and ensuring that the responses would be used for research purposes only and that confidentiality and anonymity would be respected. Out of the 500 surveys distributed, 326 were retrieved. However, only 304 were deemed usable, representing a response rate of 60.80%. Majority of the participants were female (59.20%). The average age and average tenure were 32.92 years ($SD = 9.06$) and 5.07 years ($SD = 5.43$), respectively. Most of the

participants were working in the areas of customer service (30.50%), marketing and sales (13.00%), general management and human resources (10.10%), manufacturing and production (8.70%), and information technology (7.2%).

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, participants were asked to respond using a 7-point Likert type scale, where 1 is strongly disagree and 7 is strongly agree. Established scales from previous studies were used to measure the study variables. These measures have also been validated in the Philippine context (see Restubog et al., 2008, 2015).

Psychological contract breach. This construct was measured using the 5-item scale developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). A sample item is “I have not received everything promised to me in exchange for my contributions”. The scale yielded a Cronbach alpha of .74.

In-role behavior. In-role behavior was assessed with a 4-item scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) in measuring IRB. A sample item is “I met formal requirements of the job”. This scale obtained a coefficient alpha of .95.

Organizational citizenship behavior directed towards the organization. The civic virtue behavior subscale developed by Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) was used to operationalize OCBO. Civic virtue behavior is the only dimension of OCB that explicitly identifies extra-role behaviors that directly target the organization (Robinson, 1986). A sample item includes “I keep up with developments in this organization”. This measure had an internal consistency of .90.

Workplace deviant behavior towards the organization. The 5-item subscale for WDBO developed by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was used to measure this construct. A sample item includes “I make unauthorized use of organizational property”. This scale yielded a reliability of .91.

Organizational-based self-esteem. OBSE was measured using the instrument developed by Pierce et al. (1989). A sample item is “I am taken seriously in this organization”. This scale obtained an alpha of .95.

Control variables. Rousseau (1989) indicated that demographic characteristics may influence the formation and maintenance of psychological contracts. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Kickul & Lester, 2001;

Restubog et al., 2008), we controlled for gender, age, and tenure in the analysis. This is to “reduce the possibility of spurious relationships based on unmeasured variables” (Coyle-Shapiro & Newman, 2004, p. 157).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviation, and intercorrelation of the study variables. Coefficient alphas of scales were between .74 and .95. None of the control variables (e.g., demographic characteristics) were significantly associated with the study variables. Thus, these control variables were not considered further in the subsequent analysis. Correlational analysis suggests that the relationships among the study variables were in the predicted direction. For example, psychological contract breach was negatively related to IRB ($r = -.37, p < .01$) and OCBO ($r = -.37, p < .01$). We used the procedure prescribed by Aiken and West (1991) in testing for the main and interactive effects. Specifically, this procedure uses hierarchical multiple regression in order to maintain the continuous property of the variables. This procedure involves the following steps: The independent (i.e., psychological contract breach) and moderator (i.e., OBSE) were entered in the first and second blocks, respectively, to test for main effects. Next, the interaction term involving the independent and moderator (i.e., psychological contract breach \times OBSE) variables were entered in the third block to test for the moderating effect. In order to reduce multicollinearity, the independent and moderator variables were centered at their means (Aiken & West, 1991). Table 2 summarizes the results of the hierarchical regression analyses.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted a negative association between psychological contract breach and IRB and OCB-O while Hypothesis 3 proposed a positive relationship between psychological contract breach and WDB-O. Results suggest that breach was negatively related to IRB ($\hat{a} = -.37, p < .01$) and OCB-O ($\hat{a} = -.37, p < .01$), and positively related to WDB-O ($\hat{a} = .37, p < .01$). This suggests that individuals who experienced psychological contract breach tend to engage in lower IRB and OCB-O, and higher WDB-O. In sum, Hypotheses 1 to 3 were supported.

Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 proposed moderated relationships involving psychological contract breach, OBSE, and employee behaviors. The inclusion of the interactive term between psychological contract breach and OBSE contributed an additional variance in predicting employee behaviors. This

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviation (SD), and Zero-order correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	n.a.	n.a.								
2. Age	32.9	9.06	.01							
3. Tenure	5.07	5.43	.08	.58**						
4. Psychological contract breach	3.03	1.07	-.13*	.11	-.01	(.74)				
5. OBSE	5.52	1.08	.03	.03	.06	-.41**	(.95)			
6. OCB-Organization	5.52	1.15	-.01	-.02	-.01	-.37**	.77**	(.90)		
7. WDB-Organization	1.87	1.19	-.18*	.07	-.02	.37**	-.59**	-.53**	(.91)	
8. IRB	5.71	1.11	.03	.03	.09	-.37**	.84**	.76**	-.62**	(.95)

Legend: OBSE - organization-based self-esteem, OCB - organization citizenship behavior, WDB - workplace deviant behavior, IRB - in-role behavior

** $p < .05$, * $p < .01$

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Employee Behaviors

	Outcome Variable								
	IRB			OCBO			WDBO		
Step 1									
Psychological contract breach (PCB)	-.37**	-.03	-.04	-.37**	-.06	-.07	..37**	.15**	.17**
Step 2									
OBSE		.83**	.79**		.75**	.70**		-.53**	-.42**
Step 3									
PCB x OBSE			.08*			.11**			-.25**
<i>F</i>	47.42**	571.34**	4.80*	47.54**	349.72**	7.67**	46.69**	111.38**	27.09**
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.13	.70	.70	.13	.60	.61	.13	.36	.41
ΔR^2		.57	.01		.46	.01		.23	.05

Legend: OBSE - organization-based self-esteem, OCB - organization citizenship behavior, WDB - workplace deviant behavior, IRB - in-role behavior

** $p < .05$, * $p < .01$

indicated that OBSE moderated the relationship between breach and the following behavior outcomes: IRB ($\hat{a} = .08$, " $R^2 = .01$ ", " $F(1, 300) = 4.80$, $p < .05$), OCB-O ($\hat{a} = .11$, " $R^2 = .01$ ", " $F(1, 300) = 7.67$, $p < .01$), and WDB-O ($\hat{a} = .25$, " $R^2 = .05$ ", " $F(1, 300) = 27.09$, $p < .01$). Information from the regression equations was extracted to plot the effect of psychological contract breach on each dependent variable at low ($-1SD$) and high ($+1SD$) levels of OBSE. Simple slope analysis revealed that, under conditions of low OBSE, there was a negative association between psychological contract breach and IRB: $t = -2.17$, $p < .05$ and OCB-O: $t = -3.08$, $p < .01$ and a positive relationship between psychological contract breach and WDB-O: $t = 5.71$, $p < .01$. Conversely, when OBSE is high, the association between breach and work behaviors were nonsignificant (IRB, $t = .62$, ns ; OCB-O, $t = .41$, ns ; and WDB-O: $t = .67$, ns ; see Figures 1–3). Overall, Hypotheses 4 to 6 were supported.

Figure 1. Moderating Role of OBSE in the Relationship between Psychological Contract Breach and In-role Behavior

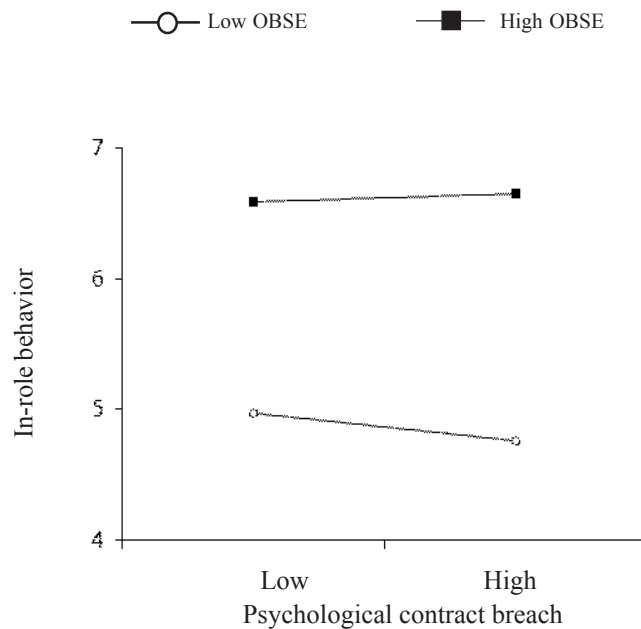


Figure 2. Moderating Role of OBSE in the Relationship between Psychological Contract Breach and IOrganization Citizenship Behavior-Organization

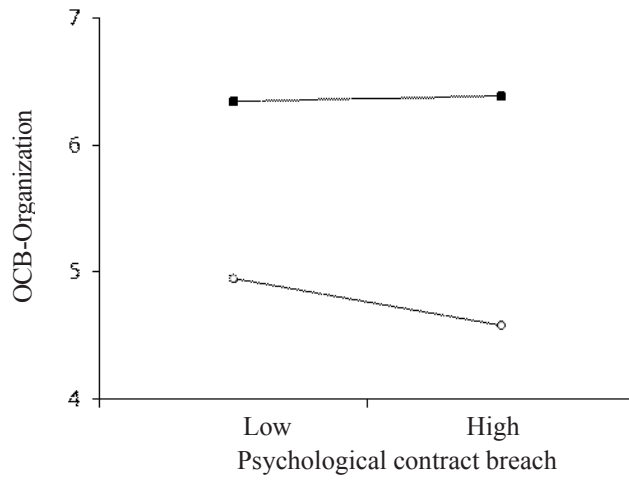
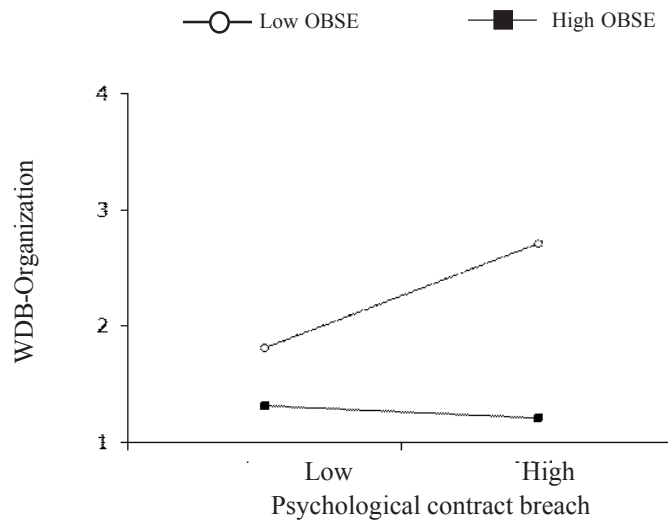


Figure 3. Moderating Role of OBSE in the Relationship between Psychological Contract Breach and Workplace Deviant-Organization



DISCUSSION

In this research, we examine the behavioral consequences of psychological contract breach and tested whether OBSE would moderate these relationships. Consistent with previous empirical examinations (e.g., Restubog et al., 2008; Restubog, Zagenczyk, Bordia, Bordia, & Chapman, 2015; Zhao et al., 2007), psychological contract breach was negatively related to IRB and OCBO and positively related to WDBO. In line with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), the relationship between the organization and its employees is governed by a series of transactional and relational exchanges (Rousseau, 1989). The organization provides the employee the terms and conditions for employment such as competitive wages, training and development, and incentives for exemplary performance. The employee, on the other hand, expends time, effort, and energy to adhere the prescribed job function and norms set by the organization in order to attain established corporate goals and objectives. If the organization fails to adequately deliver its promised obligations during the onboarding process and/or during the duration of employment, the employee reciprocates by decreasing performance contributions, withholding extra-role behaviors, and engaging in actions that are contrary to organizational norms and policy.

The findings also supported the moderating role of OBSE in the relationship between psychological contract breach and employee behaviors. That is, individuals with low OBSE manifested negative outcomes when psychological contract breach is experienced. This is in support of the behavioral plasticity theory (Brockner, 1984). Individuals with low as opposed to high OBSE tend to have higher plasticity since they easily react to threatening environmental cues. For example, Hui and Lee (2000) found that individuals with low OBSE were more reactive towards organizational uncertainty that leads to lower organizational commitment and higher absenteeism. Given these theoretical and empirical considerations, psychological contract breach is considered as a conditional threat. Unlike individuals with high OBSE who react proactively to negative situations, individuals with low OBSE respond negatively in similar situations. Hence, perceptions of breach drive individuals with low OBSE to react adversely to the detriment of organization.

Even though the results supported all our hypothesized relationships, there are a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the

methodological design is cross-sectional in nature precluding us to draw causal inferences among the study variables. It is suggested that future research conducts a longitudinal design since psychological contracts and OBSE are not static. Second, the data were obtained from self-survey reports. This may result to inflated relationship attributed to common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986)¹. It is suggested that future studies collect data from other sources such as peers or supervisors to measure employee behaviors.

The current research effort contributes to a limited number of studies examining the role of dispositional characteristics in the psychological contract breach–employee behavior dynamics. To this end, Rousseau (1989) emphasized that psychological contracts are personal and idiosyncratic in nature. Research on psychological contracts should continue to examine the role of individual difference variables in psychological contract formation and development of contract breach. For example, a person’s moral identity can mitigate the negative outcomes of breach. Moral identity refers to the self-regulatory capacity of an individual that guides him/her in exhibiting morally upright behaviors (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Hence, high moral identity serves as a moral compass to guide individuals in appropriate behaviors when injustice is experienced. Moreover, instead of examining psychological contracts using a global measure, it would be worthwhile to examine the various types of psychological contracts (i.e., transactional and relational). For example, Jensen, Opland, and Ryan (2010) found that transactional and relational contracts have differential outcomes to counterproductive work behaviors (CPWBs). That is, relational breach was related to abuse, production deviance, and withdrawal; while transactional breach contributed to abuse. Similarly, Lu, Capezio, Restubog, Garica, and Wang (2016) found that relational psychological contracts as opposed to transactional psychological contracts are positively associated with service-directed behaviors. These effects could be attributed to expressive and instrumental motivations that drive individuals in manifesting certain behaviors given various circumstances at work (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Jensen et al., 2010).

Given the results, there are a number of practical implications for management. Since psychological contracts are perceptual in nature, it is suggested that organizational agents (e.g., recruiters, supervisors) responsible for conveying and signaling employment terms and conditions have an open-door policy of communication in order for employees to clarify any

misconceptions about employment issues. Realistic job previews for new hires are also recommended since this provides potential employees a glimpse of the inner workings of the organization prior to the hiring process. This could also reinforce or dispel prior knowledge about the organization and/or its working environment. Results also showed that individuals with low OBSE are reactive to environmental cues. Organizational signals (e.g., fairness, managerial respect, self-directed jobs) of employee value increase OBSE (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Hence, organizations should offer programs that address the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of employees to enhance OBSE such as recognition programs and redesigning jobs that highlight job autonomy and task significance. These organizational efforts are likely to enhance employee self-worth as productive members of the organization.

In conclusion, the current study highlights the interaction between situational cues and personality in predicting employee behaviors. Individuals with low as opposed to high OBSE are likely to react negatively to psychological contract breach that would result in reduced organizational contributions and negative behaviors. We hope that further research will continue to be undertaken to examine the interplay among psychological contract, personality, and employee outcomes.

NOTE

¹The researchers acknowledge the high correlation between OBSE and IRB ($r = .84$) as pointed out by the second reviewer. Supplementary analysis, based on the prescriptions of Tabachnik and Fidell (1996), has shown that VIF values were below 10 and tolerances above .20 indicating the absence of multicollinearity as a threat to the dataset. Moreover, the conceptual distinction between OBSE (a dispositional trait) and IRB (behavior) has been established as evidence by a number of studies indicating the relationship between the two constructs (c.f., Pierce & Gardner, 2004).

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