

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FULFILLMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND LECTURERS' LOYALTY: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to propose a conceptual model that can help enhance lecturers' loyalty in Nigerian Universities. After critically reviewing the extant literature, the study recognized the importance of psychological contract fulfillment (PCF) in enhancing employee loyalty (EL). Consequently, the study draws from social exchange theory (SET) and proposes a positive relationship between PCF and lecturers' loyalty. However, prior studies argued that SET does not adequately explain employees' responses to PCF. Therefore, the study supported SET with social identity theory (SIT) and proposes the mediating role of organizational identification (OI). The contribution of this study lies in supporting SET with SIT and suggests that employees' motivation to reciprocate PCF with positive attitudes and behaviour is transmitted by their identification with the organization. Furthermore, the study highlights to the policymakers the salience of PCF in overcoming the problem of lack of loyalty among lecturers.

Keywords: Psychological contract fulfillment, organizational identification, employee loyalty

INTRODUCTION

Employee loyalty (EL) is believed to be a vital resource for the success of every organization (Al-twal et al., 2024) because loyal employees are more engaged and committed to the organization (Zhu et al., 2024). Therefore, organisations that secure the loyalty of their employees are more likely to be sustained, survive, and succeed (Tende & Amah, 2021). Conversely, a lack of EL harms organisations' well-being and causes problems such as loss of trust, inefficiency, absenteeism and high employee desire to leave (Darmawan et al., 2021). Therefore, creating a loyal workforce is paramount to the well-being and survival of organizations particularly universities which contribute significantly to societal development. However, a sense of lack of loyalty has been observed among lecturers in Nigeria particularly in public universities such as quitting their jobs (Akasike, 2022; Akinwale et al., 2023; Musa, 2022), missing lectures, absence from work without formal notification, lateness to work (Azelema & Osumah, 2022; Goga et al., 2023; Kareem et al., 2023), lack of dedication (Ajoghu et al., 2021), and low sense of commitment and productivity (Onukwu, 2021; Roy-Omonigbo, 2023). It is estimated that as many as ten thousand lecturers and other professionals from various higher institutions in Nigeria have left their jobs in search of greener pastures (Nnadozie et al., 2023), and 80% of those who remain in the system could leave (Wright-Ukwu, 2023).

Lecturers' exit has financial and academic implications (Vanitha, 2022). Prior studies estimated the cost of replacing departed employees in the range of 120% to 200% of their

annual salaries (Saberri et al., 2023). The academic implication includes loss of intellect, knowledge, organisational acquaintance (Charles-Leija et al., 2023), and stress (since the remaining lecturers have to bear the workload of the exited colleagues) (Saberri et al., 2023). The implication of lecturers' exit has already begun to take a toll on the performance of the universities in Nigeria. It is acknowledged that lecturers' exit is one of the factors responsible for the poor ranking of Nigerian universities (Lawal, 2021). Furthermore, the exit of the lecturers is believed to be among the factors responsible for the poor administration of the universities, a higher student-teacher ratio, poor quality of education, and poor research output (Jacob & Atobauka, 2022; Nnadozie et al., 2023).

Similarly, lack of dedication and sense of commitment (Kumar & Chinnadurai, 2023; Okoedion et al., 2019; Walbe & Gyang, 2019), absence from work, missing lectures, and lateness (Bonsu et al., 2023; Da'as et al., 2020) among lecturers affect the academic achievement of the students and the performance of the universities. Therefore, these poor attitudes and behaviours due to lack of loyalty can negatively affect the universities' ability to achieve their mandate of teaching, learning, and provision of competent manpower needed for industries and other critical sectors which can in turn impede national development. These issues underscore the need to explore mechanisms that can help improve lecturers' loyalty.

Studies attributed lecturers' lack of loyalty among public university lecturers in Nigeria to poor working conditions. For example, (Akinwale et al. (2023); Roy-Omonigbo (2023); Walbe and Gyang (2019)) emphasized that poor working conditions and remuneration exacerbated by poor funding of universities are responsible for lecturers' lack of dedication, productivity, commitment, and their exit. Furthermore, Aliyu (2022) asserts that the failure of the government to meet its obligations in terms of providing good working conditions, compensation, and adequate funding for universities is responsible for lecturers' poor attitude towards their jobs. These assertions concur with the assertion by Dutta and Dhir (2021) that a lack of EL is associated with poor working conditions and inadequate monetary compensation.

The problem of working conditions and monetary rewards are embedded in the psychological contract (Nayak et al., 2021) hence, failure to provide them signifies the failure of the employer to fulfil his or her psychological contract (PC) which has a profound effect on employee attitudes and behaviours (Bandyopadhyay & Srivastava, 2021; Naidoo et al., 2019; Snyman et al., 2022). Specifically, Pant and Venkateswaran (2020) maintained that failure to fulfil PC is responsible for employee absenteeism, low productivity, lower intention to stay, and lack of loyalty in general. In this regard, it can be argued that the lack of loyalty among lecturers in public universities in Nigeria is related to the failure of the government as their employer to fulfil its PC.

Psychological contract fulfilment (PCF) is the extent to which the employer meets its obligation (Dhanpat, 2021) which consists of good working conditions such as fair pay, benefits, training, skills development, and growth opportunities (Ogbeide & Etafo, 2022; Snyman et al., 2022). Employees who perceive that their employer fulfils its obligations feel mutually indebted and reciprocate with loyalty (Ntimba et al., 2021; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that PCF enhances EL (Bandyopadhyay & Srivastava, 2022; Braganza et al., 2021; Faraz et al., 2023; Mazumdar et al., 2023; Snyman et al., 2022). Specific to the academic context, Hammouri et al. (2022) and Ismail et al. (2021) reported that PCF enhances academics' loyalty. Therefore, PCF promotes positive attitudes and behaviours among employees (Edosomwan & Nwanzu, 2021; Liu & Zhang, 2022) hence, can help improve lecturers' loyalty in Nigeria (Akhigbe & Yakubu, 2021). Specifically, the present study intends to examine the effect of PCF on employee loyalty among lecturers in public universities in Nigeria.

According to Asante et al. (2024), social exchange theory (SET) is widely used to explain the link between PCF and employee outcomes. However, studies (e.g., Conway et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2021; Karani et al., 2022; Kiazad et al., 2019) argued that SET does not adequately explain PCF and suggested that supporting SET with another theory can provide a better explanation of when employees respond to PCF. This view is supported by the five-stage dynamic psychological process developed by Rousseau et al. (2018) which pointed out that employees are passive and do not feel intensely obliged to reciprocate PCF at the equilibrium stage (maintenance stage) due to low activation of positive affect and lower levels of cognitive effort. Therefore, the question remained, "If employees are passive to reciprocate PCF, what stimulates their strong motivation to sustainably repay their employer?" This highlights limitations in the ability of SET to adequately underpin PCF which underscores the need to explore supporting theories. To fill this theoretical gap, the present study supports SET with social identity theory (SIT).

SIT is premised on the idea of social identification and emphasizes that there is a linkage between the organization and individuals' self-concept (Salameh et al., 2023) because individuals categorize themselves with a social group to reinforce their self-concept and self-esteem (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Therefore, employees define themselves in terms of the organization they belong (Jiang, 2024) which stresses the importance of organisational characteristics such as reputation, image, and employees' perception of the extent the employer values their contribution and concern about their well-being in developing social identity (Raj, 2021; Weisman *et al.*, 2023). Fulfilment of PC by the employer enhances the reputation and image of the employer because the employees tend to believe that the organization values their contributions and is concerned about their well-being which in turn, helps them develop a positive self-concept and identify with the organization (Faraz et al., 2023; Jain et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2020). This postulation is supported by empirical evidence that PCF leads to employee OI (Feng et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2020; Weisman *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, identifying with an organisation is a source of motivation for employees (Holmes and Howard, 2022) hence, employees who identify with their organisation are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes, trust the organisation, and have a higher intention to stay (Jian et al., 2022). In this regard, the employee motivation to reciprocate PCF is due to their identification with the organization. Specifically, the present study perceived that the employee's sustained motivation to reciprocate PCF is due to their identification with the organization rather than the desire to reciprocate based on the benefit-for-benefit as enshrined in SET which provides a new insight into when employees respond to PCF with positive attitudes. Therefore, drawing from SET and SIT the present proposes the mediating role of OI on the relationship between PCF and EL.

It is worth noting that considering OI as a mediator satisfied Baron and Kenny's (1986) conditions that: 1) there should be consistent findings, and 2) the variable to be considered a mediator should be an outcome of the independent variable and a predictor of the dependent variable. A review of the extant literature revealed a consistent positive effect of PCF on EL (e.g., Bandyopadhyay & Srivastava, 2022; Batra & Kaur, 2021; Braganza et al., 2021; Dam et al., 2023; Fantinelli et al., 2023; Faraz et al., 2023; Farnese et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2021; Karani et al., 2022; Malokani et al., 2024; Mazumdar et al., 2023; Nayak et al., 2021; Pramudita et al., 2021; Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2024; Snyman et al., 2022; Stephen, 2024; Tseng & Wu, 2017; van den Heuvel et al., 2017; Yu, 2022). Therefore, the first condition is met. Furthermore, prior studies established a relationship between PCF and OI (e.g., Feng et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2020; Rogozinska-Pawelczyk & Gadomska-Lila, 2022; Shen, 2022) and between OI and EL (Al-Shalabi, 2019; Chen & Chen, 2021; Dai et al., 2022; De Giorgio et al., Dechawatanapaisal, 2020; 2023; Kim et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2022; Muchlis et al., 2022 Salameh et al., 2023; Tseng & Wu, 2017).

This conceptual study has novel contributions. First, the study supported SET with SIT and proposed that the employee motivation to reciprocate PCF with loyalty is due to their identification with the organization rather than the desire to reciprocate based on benefit-for-benefit. By this, the present study enriches our understanding of when employees reciprocate PCF which is regarded as a contribution to theory (Whelan & Turel, 2023; Whetten, 1989). Second, to the researcher's best knowledge, no prior study has examined the role of OI as an underlying mechanism through which PCF leads EL. According to Bhutto et al. (2021), scholars believe that examining an unexplored relationship constitutes a theoretical contribution. Third, considering the mediating role of OI is a response to the call for more studies. Rogozińska-Pawelczyk and Gadomska-Lila (2022) specifically suggested that future studies should verify how the relationship between PC and OI influences employee attitudes and behaviours.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW AND FRAMEWORK

Employee Loyalty

According to Masakure (2016), EL is the positive attitudes and behaviour of employees towards their employers or organization. Yao et al. (2019) defined EL as employee feelings of a sense of emotional attachment towards the organization which is expressed in the employee behaviour. Loyal employees trust their employer, develop a sense of ownership of ownership over the organization, and are more willing to stay (Dutta & Dhir (2021). Studies have shown that organizations that have a higher number of loyal employees have a higher competitive advantage and higher probability of survival than those with a lower percentage of loyal employees (Abd-El-Salam, 2023). The more employees develop a sense of loyalty towards their organization the more they act in the best interest of the organization, perform higher, create sustainable competitive advantage and reputation, accept any change that is in the interest of the organization and its progress, and believe that prosperity of the organization means well to them (Abd-El-Salam, 2023). Accordingly, the success of any organization depends largely on the loyalty of its employees (Tende & Amah, 2021).

Psychological contract fulfilment

Psychological contract fulfilment (PCF) is the extent to which the employer meets its obligation (Dhanpat, 2021) which consists of good working conditions such as fair pay, benefits, training, skills development, and growth opportunities (Ogbeide & Etafo, 2022; Snyman et al., 2022). Therefore, PC is considered the bedrock of the employer-employee relationship (Asante et al., 2024) hence, a fundament factor in managing employees in the workplace. Employees who perceive PCF by the employer feel mutually indebted and reciprocate with loyalty (Ntimba et al., 2021; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Therefore, PCF promotes positive attitudes and behaviours among employees that benefit the organisation (Edosomwan & Nwanzu, 2021; Liu & Zhang, 2022).

Organizational identification

OI is the extent to which employees identify with and believe in the organization as well as feelings of attachment and belongingness (Rogozińska-Pawelczyk & Gadomska-Lila, 2022). According to Mael and Ashforth (1992), OI is the employee's perceived oneness with the organisation as well as the belief that the organization's success or failure is the employee's own. Accordingly, employees who identify with an organization develop a stronger and enduring relationship with the organization (Ibrahim et al., 2023) and regard organizational goals as their personal goals which leads to employee positive attitudes and behaviours that benefit the organization (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2022). Therefore, OI leads to the employee's feelings of a sense of loyalty and exhibition of positive attitudes towards the organization (Yu, 2023). 08104376989

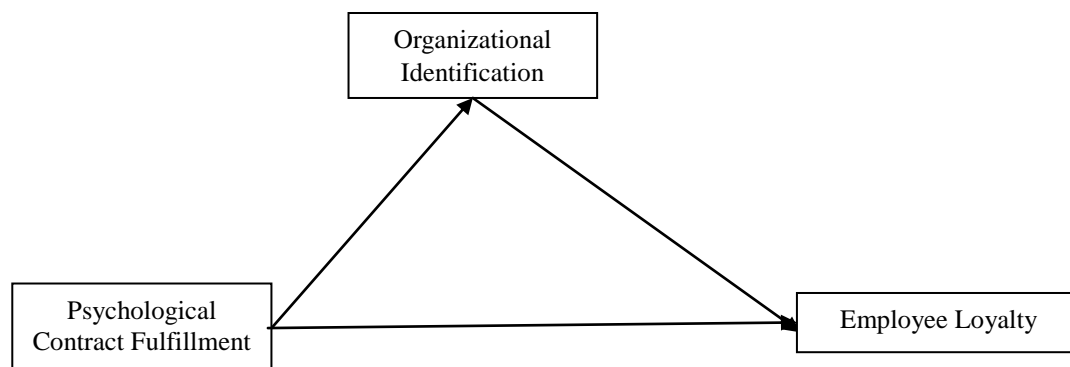
Social exchange theory (underpinning theory)

Steered by the reciprocity norm, SET postulated that social exchange relations between individuals and organizations are interdependent based on perceived benefit and mutual obligation to reciprocate (Haar and Roche, 2010). The theory was put forth by Blau (1964) and premised on the notion that individuals are self-centered such that their attitude and behaviour in a social context are guided by selfish interests. In other words, individuals evaluate relationships based on the benefits they derive and respond based on how they perceive the benefit (Yin, 2018; Mearns et al., 2010). Positive evaluation of the benefits begets positive responses and vice-versa. Therefore, the social exchange process is instigated when employees experience positive or negative treatment in the workplace (Eisenberger et al., 2004). PCF results in perceived positive benefits in the exchange relationship which leads to employees returning the favour with a sense of belonging and loyalty (Blau, 1964). According to Dam et al. (2023), employees' work-related attitudes and behaviours are strengthened by their perception of the extent of PCF by their employer. Therefore, drawing from the tenets of SET, the present study postulated that PCF will enhance lecturers' loyalty.

Social identification theory (supporting theory)

SIT, which answers the question of "Who am I" or "Who we are", is the realization that the person belongs to a particular social group as well as emotionally recognizing the value and meaning brought to him or her for being a member of that group (Dai et al., 2022). The theory postulated that individuals' self-definition comprises not only personal identity but also social identities derived from being a member of a particular social group (Inoue et al., 2022). Therefore, belonging to a social group such as an organization is a fundamental aspect of an individual's identity and this affects an individual's self-esteem, cognitive and affective reaction, and behaviour (De Giorgio et al., 2023). Consequently, SIT can help explain the attitudes and behaviours of individuals in the workplace (Dai et al., 2022) such as loyalty towards the organization. Specifically, the present study draws from the tenets of SIT and hypothesizes that the influence of PCF on EL is transmitted by employee OI.

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Literature review

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual model that can help enhance lecturers' loyalty in Nigerian Universities. The study draws from social exchange theory and social identity theory and proposes a positive relationship between psychological contract fulfilment and lecturers' loyalty through the mediating role of organizational identification. The study identified psychological contract fulfilment as an important variable that can help enhance lecturers' loyalty. However, due to the limitation of the social exchange theory to explain employee response to psychological contract fulfilment, the study draws from social identity theory as a supporting theory and proposes the mediating role of organizational identification based on the postulation that the employee sustained motivation to reciprocate psychological

contract fulfilment is transmitted by their identification with the organisation. In this regard, the study highlights the salience of psychological contract fulfillment in enhancing lecturers' loyalty which can help policymakers overcome the issue of lack of loyalty among lecturers in Nigeria.

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