

Current evidence concerning the psychological and employment contract of sport coaches in South Africa

V. PELSER-CARSTENS AND J. SURUJLAL

North-West University, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Information Technology, P.O. Box 1174, Vanderbijlpark 1900, South Africa. E-mail: 10869964@nwu.ac.za or Babs.Surujlal@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

The entire contract spectrum that governs the employment relationship ranges from being strictly legal, as governed by the employment law and more specifically the employment contract, to purely psychological, where scholars refer to the psychological contract. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between sport coaches and their employer; and their experience of employer obligations, employee obligations, state of psychological contract, violation of their expectations and its impact on sport coaches' intention to quit. A non-experimental research design utilising a quantitative research approach was adopted to investigate the psychological contract coaches experienced in their current positions. The sample consisted of 151 sport coaches in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The Psycones (employer obligations, employee obligations, state of the psychological contract) and Intention to Quit scales were used. Cronbach alpha coefficient and Pearson correlation were used to analyse the data. The findings reveal that employer obligations showed practical significant correlations with fairness and trust, but a negative relationship with violation of the psychological contract. Furthermore, the findings indicate that temporary employees tend to trust the employer more than permanent employees, and permanent employees perceive violation of their psychological contract more than temporary employees. Despite a number of serious conceptual and empirical limitations in the literature on sport and psychological contract, the idea of a psychological contract remains extremely popular. In itself, this is an important phenomenon to acknowledge in terms of both theory and practice.

Keywords: Sport coach, psychological contract, employment contract, trust, violation.

How to cite this article:

Pelser-Carstens, V. & Surujlal, J. (2013). Current evidence concerning the psychological and employment contract of sport coaches in South Africa. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, October (Supplement 2), 87-100.

Introduction

The employment relationship is a legal link between employer and employee through which reciprocal rights and obligations are established between the parties (Li, Zhang, Restubog & Huang, 2012). It defines the rights and benefits associated with labour law and social security.

Following global trends, political and legislative transformation in South Africa has led to transformation within the employment relationship (Ferreira,

2005; Smit, 2003). Employment relationships essentially involve people who have been placed in a specific relationship with one another due to their mutual involvement in a work situation (Bendix, 2010). For example, one such relationship is that between the sport coach and the sport organisation. The employment relationship, as governed by the employment contract, can be explained as a juridical concept which has a highly complex lineage, with roots in the adaptation of Roman law concepts to liberal economic philosophies in the post-revolutionary period. The exchange relationship between the parties develops from contractual ideas with legislative regulation of the service relationship (Deakin, 2006). The employment contract therefore serves as the foundation for the relationship between an employee and the employee's employer, and is the origin of the entire system of labour law rules (Basson, Christianson, Dekker, Garbers, Le Roux, Mischke & Strydom, 2009).

Nagel, Boraïne, De Villiers, Lombard, Lotz, Prozesky-Kuscke and Van Jaarsveld (2007) posit that identifying the duties and obligations in an employment contract is a controversial matter, since there is no consensus regarding the basic characteristics of such a contract. The authors view the employment contract as a reciprocal agreement in terms of which the employee renders services to the employer for remuneration, with little unanimity on the content, nature and description of the reciprocal relationship. Previous research (e.g. Herriot, Manning & Kidd, 1997) revealed that when the employer does not fulfil his or her obligations within the reciprocal employment relationship, the employee is unwilling to exert more effort than the minimum required as stipulated within the employment contract. In order to assess the future of the employment contract it is necessary to understand its past and all the sources that influence it (Van Jaarsveld, 2009).

Basson et al. (2009) define the employment contract as the foundation for the employment relationship between the employer and the employee. The employment contract is, however, not the only form of contract that governs the employment relationship. Different types of contracts exist in the employment relationship, which includes the employment contract as well as the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). The entire contract spectrum that governs the employment relationship ranges from being strictly legal, as governed by the employment law and more specifically the employment contract, to purely psychological, where scholars start to refer to the psychological contract (Spindler, 1994).

Researchers posit that the employment relationship, not only in South Africa, but also in the rest of the world, is made up of different types of contracts, namely the employment contract and the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). Kissler (1994) is of the view that the psychological contract has been created through changes in the employment relationship. Weidenbaum (1995)

therefore posits that whether employers and employees recognise it or not, they are forming new employment and psychological contracts to govern their places of work. The law therefore, and more specifically the employment contract, needs to keep up with the evolving employment relationship (Sparrow & Cooper, 2012). Despite the changes within the employment relationship, it is still a fact that the proportion of flexible employment contracts is relatively low (Issakson et al., 2003).

The psychological contract

The psychological contract is defined as the perceptions of the reciprocal expectations and obligations implied in the employment relationship (Isaksson et al., 2003). The origins of the psychological contract can be found in the work of Argyris (1960) who used the term psychological work contract to describe the relationship between employers and employees during the 1960s (Anderson & Schalk, 1998). In the 1980s and the 1990s the term psychological contract increased in popularity among researchers (Hiltrop, 1995a; 1995b).

Research suggests that psychological contract theory has its origins in traditional organisational research on exchange relationships such as Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961) and Norm of Reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Psychological contracts fundamentally emphasise the role of reciprocity in understanding exchange relationships between the employer and the employee (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012).

Recent research by Freese and Schalk (2008) suggests that psychological contract is based on the mutually perceived rights and obligations between the employer and the employee within the framework of their work relationship, furthermore suggesting that the employment relationship is constantly evolving. These mutually perceived rights and obligations lead to a bilateral view of the employment relationship (Levinson, Price, Munden, Mandl & Solley, 1962; Schein, 1965; Herriot & Pemberton, 1995).

Psychological contracts create upward as well as downward spirals, which not only affect the employment relationship, but the employment contract as well (Pelser-Carstens, 2013). While most of the research on psychological contracts has primarily focused on a specific phase of an employee's perception of his/her psychological contract (Rousseau, 1990), the literature (e.g. Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995) clearly suggests that psychological contracts continue to be formed and revised over the full course of employment. Conway and Coyle-Shapiro (2012) explain that irrespective of whether the employer or the employee is taken as the starting point, the relationship is reciprocal in that one party's contribution to the relationship rests on the prior contribution of the other party.

Models of the psychological contract acknowledge the salience of many different forms of work obligation, ranging from job commitment and career development, to hours worked and salary payable, and loyalty and respect (Maguire, 2002). These wide-ranging obligations can be thought of as falling within 'educational', 'managerial' and 'emotional' domains. In sport, the educational domain of the contract can be interpreted as obligations to instruct and learn. Sport coaches have social obligations to instruct athletes in the technical aspects of their sport, build their fitness and motivation, and enter them in competition (Owen-Pugh, 2007).

Research suggests that employees tend to lose faith in their employment relationship with their employers or managers because of perceived injustice and distrust (Burke & Cooper, 2000). This employment relationship, with its components (integrity, competence, consistency, openness and loyalty), and trust is reflected in the evaluation of the state of the psychological contract (Isaksson et al., 2003).

Research has evaluated the state of the psychological contract (Guest, 1998), assessing the extent to which employees perceive that employers have fulfilled their promises and commitments, provided fairness of treatment and engendered trust. Debate among researchers has concerned both the definition, the problem of identifying the other party to the employment relationship, and the need to do so in order to give the concept an additional value for research (Guest, 1998).

Sport Coaching

Sport organisations are experiencing an ever-changing operational climate (Moore, 2008). The proliferation of mega sport events globally has resulted in increased awareness of sport as a huge business opportunity for many sport organisations and marketers. This has resulted in sport organisations facing increased competition globally to satisfy the demands of fans, spectators and sponsors. To address the increasing demands several factors, namely location, level of competition, quality of players, quality of performance and marketing strategies adopted by sport organisations need to be considered. Among the human resources in a sport organisation a huge responsibility in stimulating and sustaining high quality participation and performance in sport rests on the shoulders of the sport coaches (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). The dynamics and employment structure of sport coaches in South Africa is little understood. This is mainly because research data specifically focussing on coach employment is sparse.

Given the fact that the number and quality of sports coaches has risen worldwide and coaching has evolved into a recognisable occupation and

profession, previous studies (Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Staines & Pleck, 1984) have indicated that there is a need for future research into the employment relations of sport coaches.

According to Fletcher and Scott (2010) developments in sport coaching suggest that sports coaches operate within a complex, ever-changing employment environment, therefore national sport organisations and governing bodies of sport have a duty under the law to protect and support the well-being of their employees within the sport environment. Research to date on psychological contract in the sport setting has been delimited to volunteer administrators and sport event volunteers (Harman & Doherty, 2011). Few studies have, however, examined the content and impact of the social, psychological and employment contract in the sport settings and research is needed to fill this gap (Grobler, 2011). The current study intends adding to the sparse body of knowledge regarding the employment contracts of coaches. Furthermore, research suggests that factors assumed to influence the psychological contract are poorly investigated and clearly the actual employment contract held by the individual is likely to be one of them. Other individual features such as age, personal time frame, tenure with the company and availability of other job options seem to be just as important. The idea of an employment contract also implies that the employment relationship can be breached or violated. Perceived breaches or violations of the psychological contract seem to be the rule rather than the exception, especially during organisational change, downsizing and mergers (Andersson & Schalk, 1998).

The results of the study may facilitate coaches' understanding of their relationship with their employer, and lay a foundation for the perceived fulfilment of obligations, state of psychological contract (trust and fairness), violation of their expectations and its impact on sport coaches' intention to quit.

The purpose of this study was therefore to examine the relationship between sport coaches (permanent and temporary employees) and their employer; and their experience of employer obligations, employee obligations, state of psychological contract (trust and fairness), violation of their expectations and its impact on sport coaches' intention to quit.

Methodology

Research design

A non-experimental design was used to assess the psychological contract of coaches in South Africa. A comprehensive literature review of the social, psychological and employment contract was undertaken. Furthermore, a quantitative research approach was adopted to investigate the psychological

contract coaches experienced in their current positions. The reliability and validity of the questionnaires were assessed by means of factor analysis and Cronbach alpha coefficients. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) were determined to describe the data. Multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine the significance of differences between different groups and analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the statistically significant differences between the type of contract (permanent and temporary contract), psychological contract, state of psychological contract and violation of psychological contract.

Sample

A non-representative subset of sport coaches in the Gauteng province of South Africa provided information for the study. The criteria used to select the coaches were: a) they received an income for their coaching services; b) they had a valid contract with the organisation; and c) they were employed by their current organisation for a period of at least two years.

One hundred and seventy five (N=175) sport coaches who were contracted to different sport organisations were approached and requested to complete a questionnaire. One hundred and fifty two questionnaires were returned. Of those questionnaires which were returned, one was incomplete (response rate 86.29%; n=151). Hence, data analysis was conducted on data collected from 151 respondents. Table 1 indicates that the majority of coaches were permanent employees (62.3%) who were 41-58 years old (51.5%). More *males* (55.6%) than *females* (43%) participated in the study.

Table 1: Demographics of the Study Population (n=151)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Contract	Temporary contract	33	21.9
	Permanent contract	94	62.3
	Missing response	24	15.9
	Total	151	100
Gender	Female (1)	65	43.0
	Male (2)	84	55.6
	Missing responses	2	1.3
	Total	151	100
Age	23- 28 years	11	7.3
	29 - 40 years	60	42.6
	41 - 58 years	78	51.5
	Missing responses	2	1.3
	Total	151	100

Instrument

A multi-section instrument was used to capture the data. The demographics section of the questionnaire requested information such as type of contract (permanent or temporary), gender, age, coaching experience, type of sport, qualification, hours of work per week, supervision and union membership. In addition the psychological contract was measured by using the Psycones questionnaire (2005). Constructs from the Psycones questionnaire was used to measure the psychological contract, the state of the psychological contract, obligations of employers and employees and violation of psychological contract.

The *Employer Obligations Questionnaire* (Isaksson et al., 2003) was used to gather data on the promises and commitments that the employers sometimes make to their employees. This scale consists of 15 items scored on a 6-point frequency-rating scale ranging from 0 (*No*) and to 5 (*Yes, and promise fully kept*). Typical questions were: "Has your organisation promised or committed itself to provide you with interesting work?" and "Has your organisation promised or committed itself to help you deal with problems you encounter outside work?"

The *Employee Obligations Questionnaire* (Isaksson et al., 2003) was utilised to determine some promises and commitments that employees sometimes make to their organisation. This scale consists of 16 items scored on a 6-point frequency-rating scale ranging from 0 (*No*) and to 5 (*Yes, fully kept promise*). Typical items in this scale were: "Have you promised or committed yourself to go to work even if you don't feel particularly well?" and "Have you promised or committed yourself to work enthusiastically on jobs you would prefer not to be doing?"

The *State of the Psychological Contract* consisted of 7 items. Responses were requested on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*totally*). Items such as: "Do you feel you are rewarded fairly for the amount of work you put into your job?" and "Do you feel you are fairly paid for the work you do?" were included in this scale.

The *Violations of Psychological Contract Questionnaire* (Isaksson et al., 2003) comprising 6 items on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) was used to request responses to six feelings concerning the perception of the psychological contract (happy, angry, pleased, violated, disappointed and grateful).

Procedure

A trained fieldworker was employed to administer the questionnaire to the participants. Participants were identified at different stadia at which they coached as well as at clubhouses of different sport clubs. In order to ensure an excellent response rate the questionnaires were completed in the presence of the fieldworker after training sessions or at the different clubhouses.

Ethical considerations

Participants were informed through a covering letter as well as verbally that their participation was voluntary, their responses would be confidential and their participation would remain anonymous. It was also stated to participants that they could terminate their participation in the study at any stage without providing any reasons.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS – version 20). Data from the usable responses ($n=151$) were descriptively analysed to provide a demographic profile of the coaches. In addition, Cronbach alpha and Pearson correlation coefficients were used to analyse the data.

Results

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha and Pearson correlations coefficients of the measuring instruments for sport coaches ($n = 151$) are reported in Table 2. As seen from Table 2 most of the measurements of the questionnaire have relatively normal distribution, except for employee obligations which shows a negative skewness and high kurtosis. Employer obligations showed practically significant correlations with fairness (medium effect) and trust (large effect), but a negative relationship with violation of the psychological contract (medium effect).

A negative statistically significant relationship exists between employee obligations and violation of the psychological contract. Fairness showed a practically significant relationship with a large effect with trust, but a negative relationship with violation of the psychological contract. A negative practically significant relationship exists between trust and violation of the psychological contract.

MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was utilised to determine the relationship between scores of the type of employment contract and the

psychological contract (employer obligations, employee obligations), state of the psychological contract (fairness, trust) and violation of the psychological contract. The Wilks' Lambda test was applied at this level.

Table 3 illustrates that in an analysis of Wilk's Lambda values, differences were found between the type of employment contract and the psychological contract (employer obligations, employee obligations), state of the psychological contract (fairness, trust) and violation of the psychological contract.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha coefficients and inter-item correlations coefficients of the measuring instruments

Test and subscales	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	1	2	3	4
1. Employer obligations	35.12	9.98	-1.03†	-0.02	0.93	1			
2. Employee obligations	60.24	7.17	-1.15†	5.36†	0.70	0.12	1		
3. Fairness	12.37	2.85	-0.07	0.28	0.74	0.46**	-0.06	1	
4. Trust	9.61	1.96	-0.33	0.08	0.67	0.51**	-0.03	0.83**	1
5. Violation of PC	13.96	4.66	0.06	-0.87	0.88	-0.36**	-0.23*	-0.71**	-0.70**

Statistically significant $p \leq 0.01$; * Correlation is practically significant $r \geq 0.30$ (medium effect); ** Correlation is practically significant $r \geq 0.50$ (large effect)

†High skewness and/or kurtosis

Table 3: MANOVA – Differences in type of employment contract levels and the psychological contract, state of the psychological contract and violation of the psychological contract.

Variable					
Type of employment contract	0.84	3.70	6.00	0.00*	0.16

$\eta^2 > 0.25$ = large effect; * Statistically significant difference: $p < 0.05$.

The relationship between the type of employment contract and the psychological contract (employer obligations, employee obligations), state of the psychological contract (fairness, trust) and violation of the psychological contract revealed statistically significant differences which were further analysed using ANOVA.

Tukey's HSD tests were conducted. Partial eta squared (η^2) was utilised in addition to statistical significance to determine the practical significance of results. A partial eta squared (η^2) > 0.09 (explaining 9% of the variance) representing a medium effect was found. The differences in means of the sub-dimensions of the type of contract and the psychological contract, state of psychological contract and violation of psychological contract are reported in Table 4.

As indicated in Table 4, a statistically significant relationship was found between type of employment and trust and violation of the psychological contract. Temporary employees tend to trust the employer more than permanent employees. Permanent employees experience violation of their psychological contract more than temporary employees.

Table 4: ANOVA – Differences in psychological contract level, intention to quit and the type of employment contract

Item	Temporary contract	Permanent contract	<i>p</i>	η^2
<i>Psychological contract:</i>				
Employer obligations	37.21	34.74	0.25	0.01
Employee obligations	61.19	59.39	0.26	0.01
<i>State of the psychological contact</i>				
Fairness	13.00	12.26	0.23	0.01
Trust	10.39	9.37	0.02*	0.05

$\eta^2 > 0.25$ = large effect; * Statistically significant difference: $p < 0.05$.

Discussion and recommendation

Since the introduction of the concept of the psychological contract by Argyris (1960), the psychological contract has offered an alternative understanding of the employment relationship outside the narrow legalistic frame of reference that expresses the subjective and indeterminate aspects of employment relations and human resource management. Guest (2004) acknowledged that there is much more research to be done if the psychological contract is to become a viable framework capable of providing an understanding of the complex and uneven interactions within the employment relationship.

From the findings it is evident that employees experience trust and fairness when the employers comply with their promises and obligations by giving challenging and interesting work by providing job security and helping them with career development. Employees also experience fairness if they are allowed to take part in decision-making and when they are treated fairly by the employer. However, if they do not experience trust and fairness they may be inclined to feel that their psychological contract is violated.

The results also indicated that temporary employees tend to trust the employer more than permanent employees while permanent employees experience violation of their psychological contract more than temporary employees. This indicates that permanent employees may be more angry and disappointed with the employer for not complying with promises made during the recruitment interview and during the indefinite length of their service.

It is therefore recommended that to overcome the problem of mistrust and violation of the psychological contract employees and employers need to reach consensus regarding their expectations of one another when the employee joins the organisation and also during the tenure of their employment relationship. If the employees and employers do not have clear expectations of one another it might develop in an unplanned way with unforeseen circumstances (Guzzo & Noonan, 1994). If the expectations are unclear it may lead to mistrust and violation of the psychological contract this can consequently lead to negative behavioural outcomes by employees.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to understand the relationship between sport coaches (permanent and temporary employees) with their employer, and their experience of employer obligations, employee obligations, state of psychological contract (trust and fairness), violation of their expectations and its impact on sport coaches' intention to quit because this is still an under developed research area in the employment relationship, especially in the sport coaching industry. From the results it was noted that in spite of a number of serious conceptual and empirical limitations in the literature on sport and psychological contract, the idea of a psychological contract remains extremely popular. In itself, this is an important phenomenon to acknowledge in terms of both theory and practice.

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