ANTECEDENTS OF THE EMPLOYEE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

Jia-Yen Lee*
School of Business, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD
Email: j.lee@business.uq.edu.au

Dr John Gardner
School of Business, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD
Email: j.gardner@business.uq.edu.au

Preferred Stream: Stream 4

Profile: Jia-Yen Lee is a Business Management (Honours) student from the University of Queensland. Her research interests are in newcomer socialisation and psychological contracts.
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ABSTRACT  The purpose of this paper is to provide an empirically-testable model to examine the antecedents of the employee psychological contract. The main propositions of this paper suggest signals from employer brands and information sources pre-socialise potential employees. Such socialisation thus forms the foundation of the employee psychological contract otherwise known as the anticipatory psychological contract. The framework is thus contextualised in the job seeking stage and examined from the individual job seeker’s perspectives.

Keywords:  Human resource management, Personnel psychology, Recruitment, Strategic human resource management
INTRODUCTION

The psychological contract in employment reflects “the belief systems of individual workers and employers regarding their mutual obligations” (De Vos and Buyens, 2004). These are beliefs regarding the terms of an employment relationship that are not set out formally in an employment contract. A substantial body of empirical research in the field of psychological contracts exists, the focus of which has been examination of the aftermath of psychological contract formation and the associated attitudinal and behavioural responses (De Vos, 2005; Rousseau, 2001; Lester, Kickul and Bergmann, 2007). The literature indicates that when employees perceive breaches of the psychological contract by their employer, this leads to poorer employee work outcomes such as decreased satisfaction, commitment and motivation as well as increased intentions to quit (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994; Robinson and Morrison, 2000). Conversely, positive psychological contracts enhance such work outcomes (De Vos, Buyens and Schalk, 2003). There has been less empirical investigation, however, of the initial formation of the psychological contract (Taylor and Tekleab, 2004, De Vos, 2005). More refined understanding of these issues is necessary, and is particularly important for new employment relationships between new hires and their employers. The costs and investments involved in premature employee departures are considerable (Darmon, 2004). It is therefore highly relevant for the formation and antecedents of the employee psychological contract to be understood, both practically and theoretically (De Vos, Buyens and Schalk, 2005).

The aim of the present paper is to examine the individual-organisation interaction-based antecedents of the psychological contract’s formation. These specific antecedents refer to psychological contract beliefs resulting from the individual’s interaction with the organisation (Liao-Troth, 2005). The extant literature suggests that processes during the recruitment/job seeking stage serve to influence the individual’s beliefs and expectations of an exchange relationship with a potential employer (Rousseau, 1995; Oddy & Grimmer, 2004). For example, the individual’s engagement with the social environment prior to organisational entry as a job seeker pre-socialises the individual to life as a member of the organisation (Louis, 1980). Furthermore, strategic recruitment undertaken by employers in the form of employer branding initiatives also serves to influence the individual’s beliefs about life within the organisation (Knox and Freeman, 2006). These facets of the recruitment/job seeking process suggest that it is worthwhile examining the formation and development of psychological contract beliefs outside the organisational context. The aim of this study is thus to examine the specific role of the employer and the role of employer brands in shaping the employee psychological contract. The study is situated in the context of the recruitment process. An empirically-testable conceptual framework is advanced to explain the proposed relationships between the antecedents and the anticipatory psychological contract. Consistent with much of the extant literature (Thomas and Anderson, 1998; Robinson and Morrison, 2000), a cognitive-perceptual perspective of the psychological contract is adopted within this study. This cognitive-perceptual perspective situates
the psychological contract beliefs firmly in the mind of the individual; that is, the individual’s perceived agreement about the employment relationship between themselves and the organisation is sufficient for a psychological contract to exist. This perspective is less concerned with the agreement of reciprocal obligations, perceived to be mutual, between both employee and employer, and is often studied from the perspective of both parties (Taylor and Tekleab, 2004; De Vos et al, 2003).

MENTAL MODEL OF EMPLOYMENT

There are two theoretical underpinnings present in psychological contract research – social exchange and schema theory. There exists a prominent stream of psychological contract research that conceptually grounds the psychological contract in social exchange theory (Rousseau, 2001, Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2004). This approach has enabled the contents and individual evaluation of the employee psychological contract to be empirically studied with much detail (Rousseau, 2001). Rousseau (2001) advanced the notion of the psychological contract as a mental model of employment, embedding the psychological contract in schema theory. However the establishment of the psychological contract as a cognitive schema has afforded amplified research efforts into the formation and antecedents of psychological contracts (Blancero and Kreiner, 2004; De Vos and Buyens, 2004; De Vos et al., 2005; Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro and Delobbe, 2006), an area in the field of psychological contract research deficient in empirical research (Rousseau, 2003). This research, in turn, has subsequently enabled exploration into the concept of the anticipatory psychological contract (Blancero and Kreiner, 2004; De Vos and Meganck, 2006). The anticipatory psychological contract is part of the employment schema containing the job seeker’s impressions and beliefs of information about the promissory obligations of a potential employer (Jablin, 2001; Nelson et al., 1991).

The anticipatory psychological contract represents the stage of the psychological contract that forms prior to the individual’s entry into the organisation (Scholarios, Lockyer and Johnson, 2003). The anticipatory psychological contract and the more commonly studied employee psychological contract share some features. They are both dynamic and idiosyncratic by nature (Rousseau, 1995; Blancero and Kreiner, 2004). However the psychological contract exists only upon formal commencement as an organisational member (Sutton and Griffin, 2004) where as the anticipatory psychological contract refers to the psychological contract beliefs created and possessed by an individual job seeker during the job seeking process (Dulac et al., 2006). The anticipatory psychological contract is therefore private to the individual. It represents a naïve schema upon which a potential employment relationship is interpreted by the individual (Dulac et al., 2006).

The notion of the anticipatory psychological contract draws reference from the anticipatory stage of the socialisation process (Nelson et al., 1991; Anderson and Thomas, 1996). The anticipatory stage of
socialisation, specifically of work socialisation, refers to the period prior to organisational entry where all learning of norms and behaviour to function as an insider in an organisation takes place (Feij, 1996). Based on this notion, the anticipatory psychological contract reflects the individual beliefs of the organisation’s promissory inducements and the individual’s expected reciprocal contributions that are formed before organisational entry (Blancero and Kreiner, 2004). Such inducements and contributions anticipated by the individual are formed as a mental contract during the job seeking process (Blancero and Kreiner, 2004; Oddy and Grimmer, 2004).

As previously described, psychological contracts are grounded in both schema and social exchange theory. Prior to the explicit recognition and treatment of the psychological contract as a mental model of the employment relationship, little empirical research concerning the formation of the employee psychological contract existed (Bunderson, 2001; De Vos, 2005). The psychological contract had previously been conceptualised as a cognitive schema by McFarlane-Shore and Tetrick, 1994. Much of the empirical research following that conceptual paper, however, continued to conceptually ground the psychological contract as a social exchange. Only two pieces of empirical research (see: Robinson et al, 1994; Thomas and Anderson, 1998) investigated the formation and development of the psychological contract before Rousseau’s (2001) paper. Since Rousseau’s suggestion, much headway has been made in empirical research recognising the psychological contract as a schema or a mental model. The specific focus of the research stream has relied heavily on the theory of socialisation and sense-making. These studies have examined the newcomer’s personal characteristics as well as work socialisation initiatives undertaken by both organisation and the individual (De Vos, 2005; De Vos and Buyens, 2004; De Vos et al., 2003; De Vos et al., 2005; De Vos and Meganck, 2006; Dulac et al., 2006; Oddy and Grimmer, 2004.)

A schema is a cognitive structure or mental model through which component events or situations are interrelated (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Rumelhart, 1980). It provides a template upon which individuals can collect and store schema-relevant information to give the abstraction or environment form and meaning (Foldy, 2006). A schema develops from past experiences and is slowly fine-tuned through experience (Rumelhart & Norman, 1978). It thus provides a guide that directs behaviour and the individual’s thoughts and interpretations of situations and problems (van Boven and Thompson, 2003). As the individual’s capacity to deal with information in the environment is limited (Kiesler and Sproull, 1982), the mental model limits its attention to encoding more salient information from the wider environment (Barr et al., 1992; Kiesler and Sproull, 1982). The cognitive structure’s formation therefore reinforces the individual’s prior knowledge beliefs and attitudes (Robinson, 1996) influencing the way individuals perceive the wider social environment (Foldy, 2006). This enables cognitive consistency (Robinson, 1996). Mental models are idiosyncratic and private to the individual (Foldy, 2006). The individual’s mental model therefore serves as a personal frame of reference used to
make sense of schema-related ambiguities. A mental model is based on the specific individual’s past experiences and prior expectations (van Boven and Thompson, 2003). The mental model is also dynamic in nature, resulting from the constant encoding and incorporating of stimuli into the model (Kiesler and Sproull, 1982).

An individual’s mental model of employment starts taking shape well before they start working (Anderson and Thomas, 1996). Work socialisation is the learning process via which an individual acquires the necessary skills, attitudes, values and behaviour necessary to function and be integrated into the social and the vocational fabric of an organisation (Feij, 1996). An individual is first exposed to work socialisation in the parental home and later by schooling and education during their youth and adolescence (Feij, 1996). At these early stages of anticipatory socialisation, the individual’s mental model of employment will be rudimentary and broad (Scholarios et al., 2003). As the individual enters the job search stage, the mental model will be significantly refined. The individual – or at this point, the job seeker – plays an role as an agent to their own socialisation, actively seeking information within the employment arena (Feij, 1996; Anderson and Thomas, 1996). Such an active role is taken by the individual in order to make sense of events occurring in the environment (Maitlis, 2005; Louis, 1980). Knowledge and information in the wider environment that is salient to the individual is subsequently incorporated into the mental model of employment (De Vos et al., 2003). Both information that reflects the individual’s existing schema as well as incongruent information act upon the cognitive schema to further refine and define it (Jablin and Kramer, 1998). The organisational reality perceived by the individual and the expectations that form as a result are largely shaped by the subjective beliefs and knowledge existing upon the cognitive structure (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia and Thomas, 1996). The accuracy of the mental model possessed by the individual can only be tested upon organisational entry (De Vos et al., 2003).

Sense-making initiatives provide for better anticipated adaptations to new task and organisational environments (Jablin and Kramer, 1998). At the time of organisational entry, individuals are equipped with limited and incomplete information about a potential employment relationship (De Vos et al., 2003; De Vos et al., 2005). Sense-making behaviours allow them to elaborate their mental model of employment (Scholarios et al., 2003). Such refinement and elaboration is enabled through their interaction with both direct and peripheral information about the organisation. As a cognitive schema, the anticipated psychological contract contains job seeker beliefs of what they can expect to occur in the potential employment relationship (Dulac et al., 2006). These beliefs are based on the individual job seeker’s perceptions and beliefs of the organisation’s promissory obligations, as well as the job seeker’s expected contributions to the organisation in return to the perceived promises (De Vos, 2005). The job seeker’s experience of the organisation as an outsider provides information about their anticipated psychological contract obligation (Anderson and Thomas, 1996). Such experiences can be
derived via socialisation by organisational sources both internal and external to the organisation, and through perceptual interpretations through the mental model of employment. It is important to note these promises are all perceptual and have no objective meaning (De Vos, 2005; Rousseau, 1995).

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The present section uses the theories discussed in the previous section to propose an empirically-testable model. The proposed model (Figure 1) provides a visual representation of the relationships between the suggested antecedents and the anticipatory psychological contract.

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**Precursors of perceived employer image**

**Information sources and employer familiarity**

Information sources refer to the informants employed by the individual in learning about an organisation as an employer and the social environment within which it exists. Organisational sources refer to the informants the organisation has direct control over, such as the company website or recruiters and HR personnel. Extra-organisational sources refer to informants the organisation has little or no control over, such as the general media and even insiders from the organisation that the organisation might not consider “proper informants”. During the anticipatory stage of work socialisation, the individual learns of potential job experiences and exchanges from a variety of sources (Scholarios et al., 2003; Garavan and Morley, 1997; Porter et al., 1998; Rousseau and Greller, 1994). Information is drawn upon largely as means of ambiguity-reduction and socialisation, particularly where the individual, as an outsider of the organisation, possesses only rudimentary
knowledge of the organisation (Maitlis, 2005; Louis, 1980). Information learnt about employment and
the organisation is admitted and accommodated into the individual’s sense-making cognition, a basis
for which is provided by the mental model. Employer familiarity is conceptualised as “the level of
awareness that a job seeker has of an organisation” (Cable and Turban, 2001: 124). Familiarity with
an organisation provides the basis upon which knowledge about the organisation, such as perceived
images of the employer, can be related (Cable and Turban, 2001). This notion is consistent with the
idea of a schema or mental model which provides the basic cognitive structure for stimuli and cues in
the environment to be attached (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). The individual’s mental model acts as a
cognitive structure where schema-relevant information can be collected and stored (Cable and Turban,
2001). Perceptions and inferences cannot be drawn where initial cognitions do not exist (Cable &
Turban, 2001). That is, the job seeker’s familiarity with an employer or organisation allows the
individual to draw associations of objective and factual attributes about the organisation (MacInnis
and Price, 1987). Such association is enabled as familiarity serves as an anchor to which other
associations of attributes can be attached (Keller, 1993).

Perceived employer image refers to the beliefs about job and organisational attributes held by a job
seeker about an employer (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003), associations derived from the individual’s
familiarity with the organisation (Cable & Turban, 2001). These beliefs refer specifically to
instrumental attributes of the organisation (such as training and development opportunities) and not
symbolic attributes (for example, the prestige of working with a company). The job seeker’s
perception of the organisation is a function of the cognitive content associated with the organisation
that is attached to their cognitive schema of employment. An individual less familiar with an
organisation will not possess the same facility as an individual highly familiar with the organisation in
attributing or recalling employment-related details associated with the organisation (Alba and
Hutchinson, 1987). The utility and salience of information communicated by the information sources
thus facilitates the construction of the individual’s cognitive schema of employment, guiding the
individual’s perceptions of the organisation. That is, information salient to the cognitive schema is
admitted and encoded to the mental schema, which is then drawn upon to inform the individual’s
perceptions of the organisation (Kiesler and Sproull, 1982).

The information provided to the job seeker socialises the job seeker and assists in making sense of the
impending work environment. The salient nature of information provided shapes the individual’s
cognitive structure of employment. Meanings are attached to events in the environment based upon the
subjective construction of the individual’s mental model, and the way information is interpreted
through it (Rumelhart, 1980; Rumelhart and Norman, 1978). Thus job and organisational attributes of
potential employers that the individual is aware of are evaluated through the individual’s mental model.
Proposition 1. Organisational and extra-organisational sources of information have a positive impact on the job seeker’s familiarity with the employer.

Proposition 2. The job seeker’s familiarity with the employer is positively related to the job seeker’s perceived image of the employer.

The affective nature of information communicated to job seekers is also capable of directly shaping the individual’s perception of an organisation. Information received from either organisational or extra-organisational sources can communicate positively- or negatively-biased, or emotionally laden, information about the organisation. The main objective of recruitment processes is often to generate sufficient applicants so that efficiency can be introduced into the organisation’s staffing systems. For example, agents of the organisation will communicate to the individual more attractive information to facilitate staffing systems (Barber, 1998). Conversely, extra-organisational sources, such as other job seekers on job forums, might communicate comparatively less positive messages about the organisation (Van Hoye and Lievens, 2005). This occurrence is likely as extra-organisational actors do not have vested interests in the company to attract other job seekers; they might in fact be communicating realistic information that reflects the circumstances within the organisation. The communication of such messages therefore shape the job seeker’s immediate and direct perception of the organisation, for example, in terms of whether or not they can expect to receive fair treatment from the organisation or whether they will be rewarded for good performance (Van Hoye and Lievens, 2005). This effect is largely related to the salience of the information’s affect on the cognitive schema.

Proposition 3. The valence of information sources provided by organisational and extra-organisational sources of information have a positive impact on the job seeker’s perceived image of the employer.

The relationships between the variables examined thus imply a partially-mediated relationship where employer familiarity partially mediates the relationship between information sources and perceived employer image. The partial mediating relationship exists to the extent that recruitment sources function partially through employer familiarity to influence the job seeker’s perceived image of the employer.

Outcomes of perceived employer image

Anticipatory psychological contract

A job seeker’s anticipatory psychological contract is said to be shaped through both implicit and explicit communication of organisational promises (Morrison and Robinson, 1997: 228). Prior to
organisational entry, the job seeker is likely to make promises of contributions to the employer based on the job seeker’s desired role and on the organisational attributes of a specific employer (Oddy and Grimmer, 2004; De Vos and Meganck, 2006). In only admitting salient information from the organisation (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), the job seeker’s mental model might not necessarily distinguish between the aspects of employment they expect from the employer and the aspects of employment they perceive the organisation to have promised them. The nature of the mental model in limiting attention to salient information (Barr et al., 1992), and subsequent interpretation of the information in relation to the individual’s current mental model (van Boven and Thompson, 2003: 388) increases the probabilities of such occurrences. This effect is particularly likely where the job seeker interprets the environment, and subsequently the events contained within it, the way they want to perceive it (Foldy, 2006: 352). This perceptual bias could explain the perpetually inflated expectations of organisations held by outsiders of the organisation (Wanous, 1977: 609). Given the subjective construction of the individual’s mental model and their interpretations through it, it is very likely the anticipatory psychological contract with the organisation is formed on the basis of perceived organisational and job attributes, and not necessarily purely on perceived promissory obligations by the employer.

Proposition 4 The job seeker’s perceived image of the employer has a significant positive impact on the job seeker’s anticipatory psychological contract. Specifically,

Proposition 4a. The job seeker’s perceived image of the employer has a significant positive impact on the job seeker’s expected inducements from the employer

Proposition 4b. The job seeker’s perceived image employer has a significant positive impact on the job seeker’s expected contribution to the employer

Organisational attractiveness

Organisational attractiveness here refers to the degree to which the organisation holds job and organisational attributes perceived by the job seeker to be highly attractive. There is an implicit argument present within this paper that employer branding initiatives by the organisation results in increased organisational attractiveness. As previously mentioned, organisations are finding it increasingly necessary to maximise the pool of skilled job applicants they have available to them (Honeycutt and Rosen, 1997). A contemporary strategy in strategic human resource management is the use of employment branding initiatives (Berthon et al., 2005; Martin et al., 2005). Employer branding is designed to establish the organisation as the employer of choice in the minds of the employee (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). The goal of such branding is to embody and communicate the functional, emotional and psychological benefits of working with the organisation to both job seekers
and current employees (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). Within an ambiguous environment, these signals communicated by employers to job seekers serve as sense-giving mechanisms. Sense-giving is ‘the process of attempting to influence the sense-making and meaning construction of a cognitive structure’ (Maitlis, 2005). This process represents an organisational strategy to influence the job seeker’s understandings of issues (Maitlis, 2005).

More likely than not, these sense-giving signals will positively reinforce the job seeker’s perceived image of the employer. Such positive reinforcement is likely to be significant given the mental model’s eagerness to admit information salient to it, and reject or pay less attention to schema-congruent information in the environment (Louis, 1980; Gioia and Thomas, 1996). As a result of the mental model’s subjectivity and also due to personality differences of individuals, different people are attracted to different attributes of a firm. An individual’s increased attraction to an attribute or multiple attributes of a job or organisation increases the salience of attribute-related information. As a result the job seeker’s perceived image of the employer might be more positive resulting from employer branding initiatives. Furthermore, as employer branding initiatives are events in the environment which are clearly communicated by the employer, the job seeker’s expectations of corresponding expectations of inducements and contributions might be significantly stronger. The following are thus proposed.

**Proposition 5. The effect of perceived employer image on the APC will be stronger (weaker) where the organisation is perceived by the job seeker to be more (less) attractive as an employer. Specifically,**

**Proposition 5a. The effect of perceived employer image on the job seeker’s expected inducements will be stronger (weaker) where the organisation is perceived by the job seeker to be more (less) attractive as an employer.**

**Proposition 5b. The effect of perceived employer image on the job seeker’s expected contributions will be stronger (weaker) where the organisation is perceived by the job seeker to be more (less) attractive as an employer.**

**DISCUSSION**

Research in psychological contracts has started to move away from systematic research in the post-contract formation arena to investigate the antecedents and formation of the employee psychological contract. The present paper presents an empirically-testable conceptual model that examines the role of employers and employer brands in shaping the individual’s anticipated psychological contract with a specific employer. This model provides a framework for examining the antecedents of the psychological contract as identified by this paper. The model draws upon the theory of socialisation as
well as sense-making. This approach follows recent calls by prominent authors in the area of psychological contracting to recognise the psychological contract as a mental model of the employment relationship, and to examine the antecedents of the psychological contract.

**Method**

In reference to the proposed conceptual model, data should be collected on the seven constructs. Potential measures that can be used include Cable and Turban’s (2003) 3-item familiarity scale (α = .82), Collins’ (2007) 8-item employer image scale (α = .90), a twenty-five item multi-dimensional scale by Berthon et al (2005) to measure ‘Employer attractiveness’, and a scale by Tekleab and Taylor (2003) to measure both the inducement (α = .92) and contribution (α = .77) aspects of anticipatory psychological contracts, containing 6-items for each aspect. Employer attractiveness is used in this study to represent a result of employer branding initiatives, as previously described. Accordingly, the Berthon et al (2005) measure of employer attractiveness is suitable for this study. The measurement items used in the Berthon et al (2005) measure represent employer branding-based formative indicators rather than the reflective indicators of employer attractiveness as a latent construct.

The sample frame that would appropriately facilitate the objectives of the proposed study are individuals who have just agreed to formal employment relations with an organisation, measured prior to their formal interaction with other members of the organisation. Such a sample frame ensures the anticipated psychological contract constructed would be employer-specific. This approach would also ensure constructed terms of the contract reflect that during the job seeking stage most accurately. The specified sampling frame is favoured over students, whose anticipated psychological contract with a potential employer might be hypothetical and less-refined, as well as ‘tenured’ new hires, whose anticipated psychological contract would have to be considered retrospectively and whose psychological contracts would have been confounded with actual and current organisational experiences.

Data would most be most appropriately collected via mail surveys. With the relevant organisational gatekeeper’s cooperation, the mail survey can be administered to the individual upon establishing formal employment relations between both parties. A mail survey would be most time- and cost-efficient in obtaining the required data. Furthermore the completed mail survey can be returned to the researcher directly without going through organisational gatekeepers.
Implications for theory

The directions taken by this paper represent on-going attempts to empirically examine the antecedents and formation of the employee psychological contract. A proposed individual-organisation interaction-based antecedent, employer branding initiatives, identified in this paper is highly relevant to the current circumstances of the labour market. Establishing its role in shaping the job seeker’s anticipated psychological contract would thus contribute jointly to both areas of research in psychological contract formation and employer branding initiatives, a new area of strategic HR research (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Additionally, the present paper also contributes to existing psychological contract research empirically by examining the psychological contract as a mental model of employment. Finally, by contextualising the framework in the recruitment process and by examining the concept of the anticipatory psychological contract, this study also provides an extension of organisational psychology into the recruitment process (Hecker and Grimmer, 2006).

Managerial implications

On a practical level, examination of the anticipatory psychological contract enables insights into the psychological contract’s formation and development. The literature indicates the anticipatory forms the basis of the psychological contract (Scholarios et al, 2003), both of which are theoretically similar. Through examination of the anticipatory psychological contract, this study attempts to provide greater insights into potential managerial control over the initial psychological contract a newcomer might bring with them into the employment relationship. Such insights are hoped to provide managers with a more intricate understanding of such subjective entities and therefore aid in the management of the employee psychological contract (Conway and Briner, 2005). Better management of the psychological contract can include better and immediate communication of organisational and job realities on the part of agents of the organisation. Second, examination of the impact of employer branding initiatives on the employee psychological contract can aid in the better and more functional design of recruitment campaigns as well as branding initiatives. Better designed recruitment campaigns are particularly important given the competitive nature of the contemporary labour market that sees organisations competing to recruit talented human resources (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Limitations

The nature of data collection may result in some common method biases such as common rater effects (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff, 2003). Given the cognitive nature of processes implied by the model, however, the respondent is the only true source capable of providing a measure of the variables (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998). Outside the limitations associated with the method
proposed for testing the conceptual framework, the following limitations are considered in light of the proposed study. First, there is no simple way of ascertaining the sources of information claimed to be used by the individual in learning about their potential employer. Second, the present study almost assumes the evaluation of a single employer by the job seeker during the job seeking stage. The various types of information sources relied upon by the job seeker might be for the purposes of organisational and job attribute comparison across various employers. However, the present study assumes only the single employer. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the proposed study constrains examination and comparison of the individual’s anticipatory psychological contract with their commensurate psychological contract. It remains unclear whether the terms of the anticipatory psychological contract would reflect the commensurate psychological contract of the employer. As articulated by Sutton and Griffin (2004), the expectations formed outside the formal employment relationship remain expectations. The ability of the present study to compare and examine differences between the two types of contracts would inevitably be of great managerial interest. Finally, the direction and motivations guiding the present study arise from the industrialised market character of the labour market. It is thus unclear whether the proposed model in the present study would satisfy cross-national perspectives to be suitably generalisable.

**Suggestions for future research**

Although the proposed study is capable of expanding knowledge of psychological contract antecedents, viable prospects for further research remain. First, a longitudinal extension of the proposed study would provide invaluable knowledge toward psychological contract theory. An extended study, such as one reflecting Sutton and Griffin’s (2004), would enable opportunities for examination and comparison of the contents of the anticipatory psychological contract with the actual psychological contract that is explicitly shaped by the employer. A longitudinal extension of this study would also enable examination of the anticipatory psychological contract’s utility. In industries with extremely high newcomer turnover such as the hospitality industry, it could be possible the individual refers heavily to the contents of their anticipatory psychological contract, containing highly inflated expectations (Kelley-Patterson and George, 2001). An examination of such reliance would contribute significantly to psychological contract theory. Finally, the scarcity of skills within some industries in the current labour market renders the consideration of the psychological contract’s construction necessary (Lievens, van Dam and Anderson, 2002). The anticipatory psychological contract expectations possessed by job seekers might be significantly inflated as employers engage in the market excessively to obtain those skills. Future research could possibly examine the differences in the anticipatory psychological contract beliefs possessed by job seekers in a variety of industries.
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