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Job Insecurity and Work Outcomes: The role of Psychological Contract Breach and Positive Psychological Capital

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Abstract

Purpose - Using insights from attributions, planned behavior and fairness theories, this study examines the effect of blame attributions of psychological contract breach on employees' attitudes (affective organizational commitment) and behaviors (OCB). The aim of this study is to understand whether employees' reactions depend on the attributions they make concerning who is responsible for the breach.

Design/methodology/approach – Cross-lagged design in which data were collected from 220 employees and their supervisors in a public company at two times. Moderated mediation was tested using bootstrapping analysis outlined by Hayes (2012).

Findings - The results supported our predictions: employees' blame attributions to the organization have a negative impact on OCBs (as rated by supervisors in time 2) through

decreased affective organizational commitment; but blame attributions to the economic context act as a buffer of the relationship between blame attributions to organization and affective organizational commitment, with consequences for OCBs.

Research limitations/implications – Attributions can also be made to concrete persons (i.e., supervisor, coworker, self) rather than to just the organization or context.

Practical implications – When hiring, recruiters should provide accurate and realistic promises to the candidates. When facing hard times, managers should provide additional information to employees and adjust their expectations to the current situation of the firm.

Originality/Value – This study makes a unique contribution to the literature by questioning the “single story” perspective about reactions to psychological contract breach, in which is assumed that employees always respond negatively to such event.

Keywords - blame attributions, psychological contract breach, affective organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors.

It is Your Fault! How Blame Attributions of Breach predict Employees' Reactions

Western Europe's current macroeconomic scenario, which is a result of the economic crisis started in 2008, still poses challenges to companies as they struggle to survive, having to layoff or downsize, and minimize promotion opportunities and pay increases. In this context, the nature of the employment relationship is changing and employees are more vulnerable to experience the non-fulfillment of their employer's promises and obligations (Epitropaki, 2013). Therefore, they can experience a breach of their psychological contract, which is defined as "the cognition that one's organization has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one's contributions" (Morrison and Robinson, 1997: 230).

As predicted by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), employees who perceive a breach respond negatively in different ways (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). These responses may encompass changes in employees' attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, breaches are negatively related to performance (Bal, Chiaburu and Jansen, 2010; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski and Bravo, 2007); trust (Robinson, 1996), satisfaction (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002) and affective commitment (Restubog, Bordia and Tang, 2006). Besides this negative impact, some authors argued that the breach-behavior link may not be as simple as it seems and they proposed additional mechanisms through which it may occur. For instance, based on the affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), Zhao and colleagues (2007) identified affective reactions as antecedents of attitudinal and behavioral responses. Other studies found that attitudes (e.g., commitment, Restubog et al., 2006; satisfaction, Bal, De Lange, Jansen and Van Der Velde, 2013) may also be a mechanism through which breach impacts behaviors.

Another line of research has to do with the identification of boundary conditions of the aforementioned relationships. Most of the studies have examined individual level moderators (e.g., self-control, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Bordia, Bordia and Chapman, 2012; conscientiousness, Raja, Johns and Ntalianis 2004; hostile attribution style, Chiu and Peng, 2008; age, Bal, Lange, Jansen, and Velde, 2008; locus of causality, Peng, Jien and Lin, 2016), neglecting the role of context in explaining how employees behave towards the organization.

Despite the accumulated amount of research on psychological contract breach, its findings only take into account a “single story” perspective, ignoring the attributional process and assuming that employees always blame the organization for the breaches. However, organizations cannot be seen as a closed system (Robbins, 1990) as they exchange information with their environment (Kast and Rosenzweig, 1972). This exchange helps individuals carry out the interpretation process of organizational events, such as psychological contract breach. Consequently, the attribution of blame can be made to internal factors (i.e., deliberate action from the organization), but also to external factors (e.g., economic context) (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Thus, attributions of responsibility or blame are key in order to understand how employees respond to breach (Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood and Bolino, 2002).

Based on these theoretical and empirical considerations, this study puts forth a model of blame attributions regarding psychological contract breach, suggesting that these explanations indeed influence employees’ attitudes and behaviors. Using insights from the theory of planned behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), we propose that blame attribution of psychological contract breach directed to the organization negatively impacts organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs, rated by supervisors in time 2), via affective

organizational commitment. Moreover, we expect that in a scenario where employees recognize that the organization may only be partially responsible for the breach, they will not react negatively by lowering their commitment and OCBs.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

The Mediating Role of Affective Organizational Commitment on the relationship between Blame Attributions of PCB and OCB

As stated previously, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) offer relevant frameworks for understanding negative reactions when the psychological contract is being breached. However, these reactions may depend on how such event is interpreted because individuals need to understand why it happened (Rousseau, 1995, 2001). In other words, “the person will try to make sense out it [event] (...) attempt to ascribe some meaning to the occurrence” (Folger and Cropanzano, 2001, p.6); that is, they try to make sense of the breach (Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro, 2011). Building on this idea and according to attribution theory, individuals make judgments in order to draw conclusions about events (Kelley, 1973), reduce uncertainty, and understand, control, and predict the environment (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967). Moreover, the assignment of blame impacts individuals’ attitudes, interpersonal evaluations, emotions, and behaviors (Iyengar, 1989; Fiske and Taylor, 1984; Weiner, 1985). However, if there is no one to blame, the event will not be considered unfair (Folger and Cropanzano, 2001) and employees will not reciprocate against the organization.

The causal attribution underlying the psychological contract breach is important since employees’ attitudes and behaviors may depend on whether the organization is held responsible for the breach (Anderson and Schalk, 1998). Several researchers (e.g.,

Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Perrewé and Zellars, 1999) highlight that more important than the breach itself is the way individuals interpret those events. In fact, Rousseau (1995) and Morrison and Robinson (1997) pointed out the importance of understanding why a breach occurred, describing three sources of psychological contract breach: incongruence, renegeing, and disruption. Incongruence is associated with an honest misunderstanding between employees and organizational agents (Cassar et al., 2013). Renegeing refers to the situation when the organization is blamed for its unwillingness to fulfill the promises made (Cassar et al., 2013). In this case, one assumes that the choice of breaching the contract is deliberate and intentional (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Renegeing is also named as the true contract breach (Lo and Aryee, 2003) that occurs when individuals blame the organization for the event (i.e., blame attributions to the organization). Lastly, disruption suggests that the psychological contract breach is a result of external factors that are beyond organizations' control (Cassar et al., 2013). Moreover, as an unintentional action externally triggered, individuals will tolerate and not blame, at least totally, the organization for the breach. Furthermore, the unintentionality of the actions produces less retaliation and reciprocity (Kelley and Michela, 1980) and it is one of the most important factors affecting the judgment of blame (Bell and Tetlock, 1989; Heider, 1958). Therefore, blame attributions to external factors such as the economic context occur when an employee assesses the situation as a breach, but he or she does not blame the organization, but the external context itself. In this sense, it is understandable that each attribution will have a different attitudinal and behavioral outcome (Rousseau, 1995).

Although there is a general acknowledgment of the potential impact of the attributions of breach, few studies examined the role of attributions on how individuals respond to such events. These studies have examined several aspects of the attribution

process, namely: the role of renegeing and incongruence in the psychological contract breach - violation relationship (Robinson and Morrison, 2000); the difference of attributions between supervisors and employees (Lester et al., 2002); the justification for violation in the managers' reactions (i.e., voice, exit, silence and neglect; Turnley and Feldman, 1999); and the attributions of breaches in pay and relationship dimensions of contract (Turnley et al., 2003). More recently, Cassar et al. (2013) examined the causal explanations for different forms of psychological contract breach (e.g., delay and magnitude) and explored the links between those explanations and employees' reactions, such as voice, exit, silence, and neglect. However, none of them were associated with these responses. In summary, on the one hand, these studies provide some empirical evidence for the importance of attributions. On the other hand, they failed to acknowledge the impact of attribution on important attitudinal and behavioral responses.

Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of planned behavior provides important insights to explain the mediating mechanism through which blame attributions to the organizations impact OCBs, mainly by two different assumptions: attitudes (i.e., affective commitment) stem from individuals' beliefs of different aspects of the environment (i.e., blame attributions); and, intentions and behaviors (OCBs) are the result of those attitudes. Aligned with this idea, we propose that attributions of psychological contract breach to the organization will impact individuals' attitudes and behaviors. In terms of attitudinal response, affective organizational commitment seems to be one of the most important aspects of the employment relationship and, specifically, of psychological contracts because it is affected by the extent to which individuals' needs and expectations are fulfilled (Bunderson, 2001; Rousseau, 1990). Affective organizational commitment refers to the degree to which employees experience an emotional attachment with their

organization (Allen and Meyer, 1996) and it has been conceptualized as a key element in social exchange theory because it requires mutual trust and loyalty in order to have a balanced employment relationship (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In addition, and according to the social exchange theory, the emotional link between employee and organization is extremely harmed in cases of breach (Restubog et al., 2006). Moreover, past research showed a negative relationship between psychological contract breach and affective commitment (Bunderson, 2001). Concerning the behavioral response, we suggest that attributions of breach to the organization will negatively influence OCBs. These behaviors are voluntary and aim to help and benefit the organizations and its employees. Therefore, the decision of not displaying these behaviors is not punishable (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine and Bachrach, 2000). Empirically, psychological contract breach has been pointed as an antecedent of OCBs (Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005).

Based on the previous theoretical and empirical evidence, we hypothesize:

H1: The negative relationship between blame attributions of psychological contract breach to the organization and OCBs is mediated by affective organizational commitment.

The Moderating Role of Blame Attributions of PCB to the Economic Context

“People can blame abstract entities for events and circumstances” (Alicke, 2014: 189). Supporting this idea, Von Sheve and Ismer (2016) found that there are different kinds of attributions targets, namely individuals, companies, governments, social events, economic development, and political ideas. Given that blame can be assigned to other factors such as context due to its property as a possible constraint to organizations’ behavior (Johns, 1991; Mowday and Sutton, 1993), it is important to take into account the context in order to understand employees’ reactions to breach.

External context and its inherent uncertainty (e.g., economic downturn, new legislation, or layoffs) trigger a more vigilant attitude from employees (McLean Parks and Kidder, 1994; Morrison and Robinson, 1997). This vigilance increases employees' ability to detect and respond to breaches, but also provides information about the organization and the context that helps to interpret the event. In this sense, the context may shape the meaning of the organizations' actions (Johns, 2006), because when an individual witnesses an effect (i.e., breach event), he/she searches for plausible factors that might be the cause of such events (Kelley, 1973). Specifically, Kelley (1973) discussed the relevance of the discounting principle in which it is assumed that a given cause in producing a given effect is discounted if other plausible causes are also present (Kelley, 1973: 113). Thus, when a breach occurs, individuals may perceive it as an organization's deliberate action that can be attenuated if the economic context also offers a plausible explanation. In this situation, the organization may be disclaimed (at least partly) of the blame.

The degree of responsibility is closely linked with the perceived intentionality and control of the organizations' actions. The assignment of responsibility is "not all-or-none inferences but vary in magnitude or degree" (Weiner, 1985: 13). This is also supported by fairness literature, in which is argued that a mitigating account demonstrates the inability of the harmdoer (i.e., organization) to exert control over the event (i.e., breach) (Folger and Cropanzano, 2001: 12). This account does not change what happened (i.e., breach), but operates as a credible justification for the event. Thus, one can suggest that two or more causal factors (i.e., both organization and economic context) interact in the explanation of a given effect (i.e., psychological contract breach) (Kelley, 1973).

H2: The negative relationship between attributions of psychological contract breach to the organization and OCB via affective organizational commitment is moderated by

attributions of psychological contract breach to the context, such that this relationship is stronger for low attributions to the context.

Figure 1 depicts our theoretical model.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

Method

Sample and Procedure

We administered a survey to 399 employees of a public water supply firm in 2013, in Portugal, where public firms were severely affected by the economic crisis and austerity measures (e.g., downsizing, pay cuts) applied by the Government. Employees were distributed for several locations: headquarters, commercial services, technical services, and laboratory. Two hundred eighty-three responded to the survey at time 1 (71% response rate). Forty-four supervisors rated employees' OCBs in time 2 (six weeks later). After the removal of invalid questionnaires, the final sample was 220 employees and their respective supervisors. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 65, with a mean of 45 years. Sixty-nine percent of the final respondents were men. Organizational tenure was on average 17 years (s.d.=10.78). Regarding educational attainment, 25.4% reported not completing high school, 44.6% informed having a high school diploma, 23.9% stated having an undergraduate degree, and 4.7% reported having a graduate degree.

Sixty-four percent of supervisors were men. Supervisors' age ranged from 22 to 62, with an average of 48 years. The mean for organizational tenure was 18 years (s.d.= 11.01). Educational attainment was as follows: 3.2% reported not completing high school, 20.1% stated having a high school diploma, 43.5% informed having an undergraduate degree, and

26% reported having a graduate degree. Each of the 44 supervisors rated OCBs of multiple subordinates (median=5; minimum 1, maximum=27), which may raise concerns regarding rating fatigue and non-independence of the ratings. In order to reduce concerns with rating fatigue, we examine whether supervisors who rated less than 5 subordinates' OCB's differ from those who rated 5 or more subordinates. The t-test results show that there are no significant differences ($t=1.875$, $p>.05$).

Measures

For all but control variables, participants rated their agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).

Control variables. We examined demographic variables as potential control variables. Given that none of these variables had a significant relationship with affective organizational commitment or OCBs (Table 1), we did not include them in the analyses (Becker, 2005; Becker et al., 2016; Bernerth and Aguinis, 2016).

Blame attributions of psychological contract breach to the organization ($\alpha = .89$) and *Blame attributions of psychological contract breach to the economic context* ($\alpha = .88$). To evaluate blame attributions of psychological contract breach, we adapted the three items from Wade's blame attribution scale (1989). We added the idea of "broken promises" to the items and then we created the targets to blame: organization and economic context. These items were introduced by the following text: "Sometimes organizations are not able to fulfill all the promises made to the employees (e.g., promotions, training, pay increases). Think about the last time you felt that your organization did not fulfill a promise. Please indicate your agreement / disagreement with the following statement regarding how you felt and what you thought in that moment". Sample items are: "I blame my organization for unfulfilled promises" (for the attributions to the organization) and "The economic context is

the reason for my organization not keeping the promises made” (for the attributions to the economic context).

Affective commitment to the organization ($\alpha = .74$). To measure affective commitment, we used the 6-item scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). A sample item is: “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career working for the organization”.

Organizational citizenship behaviors ($\alpha = .85$). To assess OCBs, we asked supervisors in time 2 to evaluate their employees with six items from MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Fetter (1993) scale. A sample item is: “This employee keeps up with developments in the company”.

Results

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations are shown in table 1.

Table 1 about here

Factor analysis of blame attributions of psychological contract breach

In order to examine the validity of blame attributions’ scales (i.e., to the organization and to the context), we first performed an exploratory approach and then a confirmatory analysis. By following these two steps, we identified a set of latent factors and then assessed whether these factors represented the proposed theoretical model (Heck, 1998). From the exploratory analysis, the eigenvalues indicate a two-factor solution with all items presenting high loadings in the expected factor (Table 2). Supporting this factorial solution, the confirmatory analysis yields a better fit for the two-factor model ($\chi^2(8) = 47.97^*$; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .15; SRMR = .07) over the one-factor solution model ($\chi^2(9) = 289.37^*$; CFI = .68; RMSEA = .38; SRMR = .15).

 Table 2 about here

Measurement Model

To examine the measurement model, we used AMOS 20 to run confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) and we compared the fit of nested models, ranging from the proposed four-factor model to a single factor model. The three-factor model equated two independent variables (i.e., blame attribution to the organization and to the context). The two-factor model separated all the variables collected from subordinates (merged into one factor) from OCBs (rated by the supervisor in time 2). The one-factor model aggregated all indicators in one single latent variable. The goodness-of-fit indices are reported in table 3. These indices include the chi-square statistic, degrees of freedom, the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

 Table 3 about here

The four-factor model offered a good fit ($\chi^2(125) = 187.81^*$; CFI = .97; TLI = .96; RMSEA = .05; SRMR = .05; Kline, 1998; Maruyama, 1998; Tanaka, 1993). The nested models exhibited a poorer fit compared to the hypothesized model. Factor loadings were acceptable, ranging from .78 to .95 for blame attributions to the organization; .79 to .92 for blame attributions to the context; .20 to .84 for affective commitment; and, .39 to .91 for OCBs. Moreover, following the recommendation put forth by Podsakoff and colleagues (2012) to test the presence of common method variance, we included a fifth latent variable in CFA, a common method factor, and loaded all indicators on this uncorrelated factor. As expected, model fit improved slightly (Williams, Cote, and Buckley, 1989; $\chi^2(107)$

=136.96*; CFI = .98; TLI = .98; RMSEA = .04), but CMV accounted for 3% of total variance, which is below the established 25% threshold (Williams et al., 1989).

Test of Hypotheses

To test our hypotheses, we used bootstrapping PROCESS macro for SPSS developed by Hayes (2012). Bootstrapping is a robust strategy for assessing indirect effects and a useful method for avoiding power problems relating to non-normal sampling of the indirect effect (MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams, 2004; Preacher et al., 2007; Shrout and Bolger, 2002). Additionally, we centered the predictor variables (i.e., blame attributions to the organization, blame attributions to the economic context) following the recommendation put forth by Aiken and West (1991).

To examine hypothesis 1, we used process model 4 which allows to test mediation models (Hayes, 2012). Consistent with this hypothesis, we found that blame attributions to the organization were negatively related to affective commitment to the organization ($B = -.243$, CI: $[-.322, -.165]$), which in turn was negatively related to OCBs ($B = .214$, CI: $[.069; .358]$). The indirect effect of blame attributions to the organization on OCBs was also significant ($B = -.052$, CI: $[-.107, -.011]$).

Regarding hypothesis 2, we first examined the simple interaction effect and it was significant ($B = .095$, CI: $[.031, .158]$). We plotted the interaction (Figure 2) and calculated the simple slopes (-1 SD; +1 SD; Cohen, Cohen, West and Aiken, 2003). The difference between slopes was also significant ($t = 3.00$, $p < .05$). These results indicated that blame attributions to the organization had a significant negative relationship with affective commitment when blame attribution to the economic context was low ($t = -5.64$, $p < .05$), but not when it was high ($t = -1.74$, $p > .05$). Thus, when employees blame the economic context

for the psychological contract breach, the blame to the organization does not impact their level affective commitment to the organization.

 Figure 2 about here

Finally, to examine the moderated-mediation model, i.e. the interaction effect of blame attributions to the organization X blame attributions to the economic context extended to OCBs, via reduced affective commitment to the organization, we used process model 7. The conditional indirect effect was significant when blame attributions to the economic context condition were low ($B = -.071$; $CI: [-.154, -.019]$), but not when blame attributions to the economic context condition were high ($B = -.022$; $CI: [-.076, .008]$). Finally, the conditional indirect effect index was also significant ($index = .020$, $SE = .011$, $CI: [.004, .049]$). Thus, when blame attributions to the context are low, as blame attributions to the organization increases, OCBs decrease, via reduced affective commitment.

Discussion

In this study, we aimed to shed light on the attribution process of psychological contract breach, by taking into account that the breach-attitudes-behaviors link may not be as simple as it seems. Specifically, we examined the interplay between blame attributions of psychological contract breach to the organization and to the economic context, and how this interplay impacts attitudes (i.e., affective organizational commitment) and behaviors (i.e., OCBs). We expected that differences in attributions should produce different attitudes and behaviors. Our pattern of results demonstrated that blame attributions to the organization are negatively related to OCBs via reduced affective organizational commitment. Moreover, blame attributions of psychological contract breach to the economic context buffer the negative influence of blame attributions to the organization on

affective organizational commitment with consequences for OCBs. That is, blame attributions to the organization only translate into poorer levels of OCB when blame attributions to the context are low.

Our study makes several theoretical contributions. First, we extend our knowledge about attributions of psychological contract breach, answering a call from several researchers (e.g., Cassar et al., 2013). Past research highlighted the importance of the interpretation and attribution process after a psychological contract breach (e.g., Morrison and Robinson, 1997), but failed to provide empirical evidence for the relationship between attributions and individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Our results suggest that when the organization is blamed for the breach, employees tend to display negative attitudes (i.e., reduced affective commitment) and behaviors (i.e., decreased OCBs). This result is aligned with the attribution theory due to the importance of intentionality in the process of blame or responsibility assignment (Bell and Tetlock, 1989; Heider, 1958).

Second, we found that blame attributions to the economic context buffer the relationship between blame attributions to the organization and affective organizational commitment, suggesting that different interpretations of the event may lead to different attitudes (Bem, 1972). Specifically, if an employee interprets the breach as a consequence of organization actions, he or she will respond by reducing his or her commitment. On the other hand, if he or she also blames the economic context, his or her affective commitment will remain the same. In addition, the negative impact of blame attributions to the organization on OCBs, via reduced affective organizational commitment, is only significant when blame attributions to the economic context are low. An explanation for such finding may be linked to the power of context as a barrier for organizational actions (Johns, 1991) as it can limit and shape how organizations act and interact. Moreover, the external

economic context prompts employees to be more vigilant (Morrison and Robinson, 1997) and they may use clues from the environment in order to shape the meaning of organizational actions (Johns, 2006). Attribution theory also offers another explanation for these results: the discounting principle. Essentially, this principle highlights the role of multiple explanations for the same event and how a second reason can reduce the explanatory impact of the first one (Kelley, 1973). The discounting principle assumes that individuals look for different factors that might plausibly explain the event and take them into account in the interpretation process of the event. When the economic context is a plausible cause for the breach, the organization may be disclaimed (at least partly) of the blame for the psychological contract breach.

Practical Implications

These results also hold important insights for managers, who see their organizations struggling due to constraints imposed by the economic crisis, by highlighting the need to be accurate and realistic in what they promise to employees, thus preventing future psychological contract breaches. Furthermore, managers should be able to monitor their employees' expectations, understand the discrepancies, and adjust their expectations to the current situation of the firm.

Moreover, our results demonstrate the need to provide credible explanations for the circumstances that lead to unfulfilled expectations. This study shows that attributions play an important role in determining employees' reactions to psychological contract breach. Thus, when managers know that the organization cannot meet the promises made to employees, it is desirable to communicate the reasons (especially if there is a legitimate reason, such as economic and financial problems) because the lack of justification produces worse reactions as employees tend to interpret the (unjustified) breach as an intentional

action of the organization. Effective communication could mitigate employees' negative attitudes and behaviors, such as reduced affective commitment and efforts (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 2000), avoiding a poorer organizational performance (Turnley et al., 2003).

Limitations and Future Research

Like any research, this study is not without limitations. Since employees provided information regarding independent variables (i.e., blame attributions to organizations, to the context, and affective commitment) at the same time, common method bias may be present. However, common method variance (CMV) is not likely to result in statistical interactions, which were the main focus of this study (Aiken and West, 1991). However, the relationship between predictor variable, moderator and mediator should be interpreted with caution (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2012). We took several steps in order to address this potential limitation. First, we asked supervisors to report employees' OCBs in order to include different sources of information. We also performed statistical remedies to examine common method variance in our data, showing that CVM accounted only for 3% of total variance. Finally, we used a cross-lagged design with a time lag of six weeks between attributions' measurement and the outcome in order to reduce causality concerns (Maxwell, Cole and Mitchell, 2011).

Another potential limitation has to do with the data collected in a public organization. As such, the nature of our sample may potentially limit generalizability. Therefore, future research can test whether the attributions to the context function as a buffer in other organizational settings, such as private companies or organizations where a large number of different stakeholders may intervene (e.g., health sector). Further research should also focus on specific dimensions of blame attributions of psychological contract breach. For instance, researchers can examine whether or not different dimensions of psychological contract

breach (e.g., pay, training, promotion/career, support, relationship) would receive different attributions. Moreover, it is important to take into account that attributions can also be made to concrete persons (i.e., supervisor, coworker, self) rather than just the organization or context. It could be interesting to examine whether there are behavioral differences when employees blame a more abstract or more specific entity.

Lastly, future studies should also test individual differences in equity sensitivity (Huseman, Hatfield and Miles, 1987), because it may play an important role in determining employees' reactions to psychological contract breach. Particularly, it would be interesting to examine how "entitleds" (individuals who are more prompt to relationships in which they receive more than they give) and "benevolents" (individuals who are prompt to relationships in which they give more than they receive) (Turnley et al., 2003) attribute the blame of psychological contract breach and respond to it. Entitled individuals are likely to report higher levels of psychological contract breach because these individuals expect to receive more from the organization than to give back; benevolent individuals are likely to report low levels of psychological contract breach because they expect to give more to the organization than receive from it.

Conclusion

In order to fully understand how psychological contract breach operates, researchers should start emphasizing the underlying attributional process as it provides useful insights to understand subsequent employee attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, our study also shows that organizations that wish to foster their employees' affective commitment and citizenship behaviors need to pay attention to the extent and feasibility of their promises and effectively communicate them, namely explaining how the organization's actions are influenced by other intervening factors.

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