

THE STATE OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND ITS RELATION TO EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

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The present paper explores the role of the state of the psychological contract in predicting psychological health outcomes in a sample of 385 employees from different Spanish companies. Results indicate that the state of the psychological contract significantly predicts life satisfaction, work-family conflict and well-being beyond the predictive capacity of the content of the psychological contract. In addition, trust and fairness, two of the dimensions of the state of the psychological contract, jointly contribute to explaining these psychological health variables, adding value to the predictive role of fulfilment of the psychological contract. These results lend support to the approach proposed by Guest and colleagues.

El presente trabajo estudia el papel del estado del contrato psicológico para predecir resultados de salud psicológica en una muestra de 385 empleados de distintas empresas españolas. Los resultados indican que el estado del contrato psicológico predice la satisfacción con la vida, el conflicto trabajo-familia y el bienestar psicológico más allá de la predicción alcanzada por el propio contenido del contrato psicológico, y que la confianza y la justicia, dos de las dimensiones del estado del contrato psicológico, consideradas conjuntamente contribuyen a explicar dichas variables añadiendo valor al rol que como predictor desempeña el cumplimiento del contrato. Estos resultados suponen un apoyo a los planteamientos de Guest y colaboradores.

The psychological contract has emerged relatively recently as a key concept for understanding people's attitudes towards work and organizations, their behaviour and their psychological well-being. It has also been identified as a crucial feature of new types of employment relations (Alcover, 2002; Guest, 2004).

Guest and Conway (2002) define the psychological contract, slightly adapting a previous definition by Herriot and Pemberton (1997), as "the perception of both parties to the employment relationship, organization and individual, of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship" (p. 22).

Although it is a construct with a substantial research tradition, recent years have seen the emergence of some critical and innovative approaches (Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway, 2002), in contrast to the traditional perspective of Rousseau and colleagues (Rousseau, 1995). Guest (1998) argues the need to construct a general theory on the psychological contract in order to overcome the restrictions of current research on the

topic. For this author, one of its main limitations is its descriptive nature, and he advocates developing theoretical models and studies that would allow researchers to go beyond mere description of the content of the psychological contract to an evaluation of its state.

The content of the psychological contract refers to the reciprocal obligations that characterize the individual's psychological contract (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). This content can be analyzed from the perspective of the employee, which has been the commonest approach in the literature, from that of the employer, or from both. Thus, the psychological contract refers to the set of reciprocal obligations that form part of the psychological contract. This variable has received a great deal of attention in the literature on psychological contract. Indeed, the classic distinction between transactional and relational contracts has to do with the content of the obligations involved in the psychological contract.

Guest and colleagues introduce the concept of state of the psychological contract. For these authors, evaluation of the state of the psychological contract should represent a qualitative leap in research on the psychological contract, rendering it more explanatory and less descriptive, and making possible the prediction of diverse variables related to attitudes, behaviour and employees' health.

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While the content of the psychological contract refers to the set of reciprocal promises and obligations that form part of the psychological contract, the state of the psychological contract refers to “whether the promises and obligations have been fulfilled, whether they are fair, and their implications for trust” (Guest & Conway, 2002). The state of the psychological contract involves a broader evaluation of the employment relationship, shaped by the promises and obligations of the psychological contract, but going beyond them. In another work, Guest (2001), focusing on the employee’s perspective, defines this state as “an integrated measure assessing the extent to which workers perceived that the organization has met its promises and commitments, provided fairness of treatment and engendered trust” (p. 7).

Thus, state of the psychological contract includes three elements with different traditions in research on the psychological contract: delivery or fulfilment of the contract, trust and fairness. Delivery or fulfilment, or the opposite, breach of the contract, have been widely studied, and some have even explored the distinction between breach and violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Moreover, relations have been found between this variable and job satisfaction (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), organizational commitment (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003), trust in the organization (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), job performance (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003; Robinson, 1996; Turnley & Feldman, 2000), organizational citizenship behaviour (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Lo & Aryee, 2003; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Turnley & Feldman, 2000), emotional exhaustion (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003), cynicism (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003), absenteeism (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003), turnover intention (Lo & Aryee, 2003; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Turnley & Feldman, 2000) and actual turnover (Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994).

Much less well established is the status of fairness and of trust in existing research on the psychological contract. Guest and Conway (2002) have argued in favour of including both variables in research on the psychological contract, as components of its state, thus reincorporating the contributions of Fox (1974) to the study of the psychological contract and employment relations.

In their proposal for a model of psychological contract, its state has a crucial role in explaining the consequences for employees’ attitudes and behaviours. Thus, Guest (1998) considers this state as a relevant antecedent of variables such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment or turnover intention, and asserts that its role in the explanation of employee attitude and behaviour goes beyond that of the content of the psychological contract itself. Nevertheless, up to now this assumption has scarcely been tested. Only Guest and Conway (1997), with a sample of 1,000 employees representative of the UK working population, found some support for a relationship between the psychological contract and employees’ attitudes and behaviours. The state of the psychological contract was positively associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation and a positive evaluation of employment relations, and negatively with intention to quit.

The present work sets out to extend such work to the study of other variables related to employees’ psychological health. Thus, we aim to contribute to filling a research gap, since although the relationship between the psychological contract and employees’ attitudes or behaviours has been amply covered, far fewer studies have explored its relation to health. Specifically, we opted for three indicators of psychological health: life satisfaction, work-family conflict and psychological well-being. Life satisfaction and psychological well-being are general indicators of psychological health widely employed in research on Work and Organizational Psychology. We also decided to include work-family conflict, given that the relations between work and other areas of life have become especially relevant in the wake of changes that have occurred in the field of work over the last 30 years (e.g., extensive incorporation of women into the world of work, employees’ demands for work that permits them to reconcile their work life with their life outside work) (see, for example, Gracia, Martinez-Tur & Peiró, 2001, for a broader treatment of such issues).

Therefore, the first question we aim to answer is as follows: does the state of the psychological contract, as defined by Guest, as the combination of three dimensions (fulfilment, fairness and trust), contribute to explaining life satisfaction, work-family conflict and psychological well-being, beyond the utility the content of that contract might have? In this regard we formulated the following hypothesis:

H1. The state of the psychological contract will predict life satisfaction, work-family conflict and psychological well-being, adding value to the predictive role of the content of the psychological contract. Specifically, we expect that the better the state of the psychological contract, the greater will be one's life satisfaction and psychological well-being, and the lower the level of work-family conflict.

Fulfilment of this first hypothesis would confirm that the state of the psychological contract is indeed a relevant variable for understanding life satisfaction, work-family conflict and psychological well-being, even more valuable in its explanatory role than the content of the psychological contract itself. However, clarification of this matter would open up another question, related to the role of each of the three dimensions making up the state of the psychological contract (fulfilment, trust and fairness) in the prediction of these indicators of employees' psychological health.

Fulfilment of the psychological contract is a classic variable in research on the psychological contract, and its capacity for predicting the attitudes and behaviours and even the health of employees is widely demonstrated (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Lo & Aryee, 2003; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Turnley & Feldman, 1999, 2000). Therefore, it is relevant to consider whether the effect referred to in the first hypothesis is actually due to the predictive role of one of the dimensions of the state of the psychological contract: fulfilment. In other words, the question is whether the other two dimensions of the state of the psychological contract contribute or not to predicting the psychological health of employees, and to what extent they add value to the predictive effect of fulfilment. In sum, a relevant question, but one which has remained unexplored up to now, is whether fairness and trust add predictive value to that of fulfilment alone.

So, the second question we shall try to deal with in this study is as follows: do the dimensions of fairness and trust proposed by Guest within the state of the psychological contract add anything to the fulfilment dimension? Are they capable of explaining variance in life satisfaction, work-family conflict and psychological well-being, beyond what is explained by fulfilment? In this regard we formulated the following hypothesis:

H2. Trust and organizational fairness will contribute to the prediction of employees' life satisfaction,

work-family conflict and psychological well-being, once the effects of fulfilment of the psychological contract are controlled. Specifically, we expect that the greater the perceived trust and fairness, the better the life satisfaction and psychological well-being, and the lower the work-family conflict.

METHOD

Participants

The present study was carried out with 385 employees from five different companies, all in the service sector. The sample included a majority of women (74.3%), with a mean age of 32 years ($SD= 6.77$), medium-high educational level (72.8% had academic or technical education to at least age 17), with a strong predominance of white-collar workers and professionals (75.1%) (basically salespersons, clerical workers, nurses and doctors) and with indefinite (permanent) contracts (65.5%), and whose mean number of years with the company was 5.03 ($SD= 5.10$).

Instruments

Control variables. The variables listed below were controlled due to their widely demonstrated relevance for explaining differences in the criterion or dependent variables employed in our study. Specifically, we are referring to age, sex (woman= 0, man= 1), years with the company and type of contract (temporary= 0, indefinite= 1).

Content of the psychological contract. This was measured with a 14-item scale referring to different promises employers can make to their employees, frequently found in the literature in this field. Some examples are: "Providing them with an interesting job", "Providing them with a relatively stable job" or "Providing them with a good salary in exchange for their work". Respondents should indicate whether or not the company has made all of these promises. The response scale is dichotomous (Yes/No). In order to obtain a score for the scale we totalled up the number of items for which the answer was "Yes", thus obtaining the total number of promises made to each respondent, with a possible range of 0-14. Cronbach's alpha was 0.88.

State of the psychological contract. This was measured with a 22-item scale covering the three elements of the state of the psychological contract: fulfilment of the contract, trust and fairness. In it, participants must indicate the extent to which they agree with a series of statements aimed at assessing whether the company has

fulfilled its promises, and how far it has done so, it has treated them well and it has engendered trust for the future. The response scale is 7-point Likert type, with 1 = "totally disagree" and 7 = "totally agree". Alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.92. Let us now consider separately the three dimensions that make it up.

Fulfilment of the psychological contract. This was measured by means of a 14-item scale on which employees must indicate the extent to which a series of promises have been kept. The items are the same as those of the psychological contract content scale. Its internal consistency is 0.93.

Trust. This was measured by means of a four-item scale in interrogative format for assessing employees' trust in the organization. Some examples of the items are: "In general, how much do you trust your organization to keep its promises or meet its commitments to you and other employees?" or "To what extent do you trust senior management to look after your best interests?" Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale is 0.79.

Fairness. This is measured with a four-item scale made up of questions that attempt to determine employees' perception about whether they receive fair treatment by the organization. Some examples of items are as follows: "Overall, do you feel you are fairly rewarded for the amount of effort you put into your job?" or "Do you feel that organizational changes are implemented fairly in your organization?" Internal consistency of the scale is 0.84.

Life satisfaction. Based on the experience of other studies, a 7-item measure was constructed. Some examples of items are as follows: "How satisfied or content do you currently feel about your life in general?" or "How satisfied or content do you currently feel about your state of health and well-being?" The response scale ranges from 1 "very dissatisfied" to 7 "very satisfied". Cronbach's alpha is 0.78.

Work-family conflict. This was measured by means of a 4-item scale based on Geurts' (2001) proposal. On this scale, participants had to indicate the frequency with which certain work situations ended up negatively affecting their family life. The response scale was four-point, from 0 "not at all" to 3 "always". Some examples of items are as follows: "Your work obligations make it difficult for you to feel relaxed at home" or "Your work schedule makes it difficult for you to fulfil your domestic obligations". Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale is 0.79.

Psychological well-being. This was measured by means of the 12-item version of Goldberg's General

Health Questionnaire (1979). This scale explores the frequency with which participants have recently experienced a series of symptoms common in different syndromes of mental disorder. The response scale ranges from 0 "less than normal" to 3 "much more than normal". In the present work the responses were inverted so that high scores on the scale indicated psychological well-being, and therefore, low probability of presenting a psychiatric illness. An example of the items is: "Have you recently lost much sleep due to worry?" Internal consistency of the scale is 0.79.

Procedure

First of all we made contact with the human resources managers of all the companies to explain the purpose of our study and to ask for their participation. Once the authorization of the human resources manager had been obtained, the questionnaire was presented to the employees, who voluntarily filled it out during working hours. In the majority of cases the participants filled out the questionnaire in the presence of an interviewer, who gave the instructions necessary for its completion, asked them to give honest answers and assured them that total anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed. Only in exceptional cases were participants permitted to fill out the questionnaire outside work time and send it to the researchers by post. Even so, also in these cases the researcher who gave out the questionnaire provided information on how to fill it out, stressed the importance of honest responses and gave guarantees of confidentiality. The questionnaire took approximately one hour to complete.

Analysis

First of all we carried out descriptive analyses. Moreover, we calculated the correlation coefficients and reliability of the variables included in the present study. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated in all cases except when the variable was dichotomous. In cases in which both variables were dichotomous we calculated the Phi correlation coefficient. When just one of the variables was dichotomous we calculated the point-biserial correlation coefficient. As regards reliability of the scales, in the case of the content of the psychological contract we calculated the Kuder-Richardson 20 coefficient. For the rest of the variables Cronbach's alpha was calculated.

The hypotheses of this study were tested using hierarchical regressions. Given that the hypotheses were formulated in one direction, one-directional tests were

used for checking them. In the case of Hypothesis 1, in the first step we introduced the control variables: age, sex, years with the company and type of contract. In the second step we added content of the psychological contract. Finally, we introduced state of the psychological contract in the regression equation. In order to test Hypothesis 2, in the first step we introduced the control variables and in the second step the content of the psychological contract. In the next step we included fulfilment of the psychological contract. Finally, in the fourth step we added fairness and trust to the regression equation. In order to reduce the effect of multicollinearity the following variables were centred on their means: content, state of the psychological contract, fulfilment, fairness and trust.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the descriptive results, correlations and reliabilities of the variables included in this study. State of the psychological contract, fulfilment and perceived fairness present positive and significant correlations with life satisfaction and psychological well-being, and negative and significant correlations with work-family conflict. The correlation between trust and psychological well-being is also positive and significant. All the reliability coefficients have acceptable values.

As far as Hypothesis 1 is concerned, the results show that on introducing state of the psychological contract into the regression equation, the increase in explained variance is significant for all the criterion variables. State of the psychological contract predicts life satisfaction ($B = .12, p .01$), work-family conflict ($B = -.08, p .01$) and psychological well-being ($B = .09, p .01$). The better the state of the psychological

contract, the greater the employees' life satisfaction and psychological well-being, and the lower the level of work-family conflict. Therefore, the results support this hypothesis.

With regard to Hypothesis 2, on introducing trust and fairness into the regression equation, the increase in explained variance is significant for all the criterion variables. Fairness and trust, considered jointly, predict variance additional to that explained by the control variables, content of the psychological contract and fulfilment. These results provide support for the second hypothesis. At the same time, and importantly, analysis of the regression coefficients reveals that perceived fairness plays a more important role than trust in the prediction of the criterion variables studied. Specifically, the results show that perceived fairness predicts life satisfaction ($B = .10; p .05$) and work-family conflict ($B = -.09, p .01$), but not psychological well-being. As far as trust is concerned, the results show that it does not predict any of the criterion variables. Finally, it should be highlighted that fulfilment of the psychological contract predicts life satisfaction ($B = .13, p .01$), work-family conflict ($B = -.12, p .01$) and psychological well-being ($B = .06, p .01$).

DISCUSSION

The objective of the present work was twofold. On the one hand, it attempted to determine the extent to which the state of the psychological contract was a useful construct for understanding three indicators of employees' psychological health (life satisfaction, work-family conflict and psychological well-being), beyond the relevance of its content. On the other hand, it aimed to explore whether trust and fairness, two of the

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, correlations and reliabilities of the variables included in the study

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
01. Age	32.29	6.77												
02. Man	-	-	.14**	-										
03. Years of service	5.03	5.10	.56**	.11**	-									
04. Permanent contract	-	-	.35**	.03	.42**	-								
05. Content PC	7	4.16	-.07	.05	-.14**	.08	(0.88)							
06. State PC	3.92	1.17	-.07	.03	-.12**	-.04	.41**	(0.92)						
07. Fulfilment PC	4.48	1.30	-.13**	.02	-.19**	-.06	.16**	.76**	(0.93)					
08. Trust	3.69	1.41	.03	-.02	-.02	-.05	.24**	.77**	.28**	(0.79)				
09. Justice	3.43	1.45	-.01	.03	-.01	-.07	.19**	.75**	.29**	.68**	(0.84)			
10. Life satisfaction	5.30	0.86	-.08	-.04	-.15**	-.01	.06	.19**	.26**	.07	.18**	(0.78)		
11. Work-family conflict	0.85	0.65	-.09	.13**	.01	.02	.07	-.18**	-.22**	-.05	-.16**	-.40**	(0.79)	
12. Psychological well-being	1.79	0.44	-.001	-.02	-.05	-.08	.03	.25**	.20**	.20**	.23**	.50**	-.38**	(0.79)

Note: values in brackets are reliability coefficients.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Hierarchical regression for the criterion variable
life satisfaction (N= 287)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	-0.00	0.01	-.03**
Man	-0.02	0.11	-.01**
Years of service	-0.02	0.01	-.17**
Permanent contract	-0.06	0.12	-.03**
Step 2			
Content PC	-0.00	0.01	-.03**
Step 3			
State PC	-0.12	0.05	-.16**

Note: $R^2 = .03$ in Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .001$ in Step 2 ($p = .27$); $\Delta R^2 = .02$ in Step 3 ($p = .01$).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 4
Hierarchical regression for the
criterion variable psychological well-being (N= 285)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	0.00	0.00	.04
Man	0.00	0.06	.00
Years of service	0.00	0.01	.00
Permanent contract	-0.07	0.06	-.07
Step 2			
Content PC	0.00	0.01	-.05
Step 3			
State PC	0.09	0.02	.24**

Note: $R^2 = .005$ in Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .002$ in Step 2 ($p = .22$); $\Delta R^2 = .05$ in Step 3 ($p = .01$).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 6
Hierarchical regression for the
criterion variable work-family conflict (N= 265)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	-0.02	0.01	-.16**
Man	-0.18	0.09	-.13**
Years of service	-0.01	0.01	-.05**
Permanent contract	-0.03	0.09	-.02**
Step 2			
Content PC	-0.01	0.01	-.05**
Step 3			
Fulfilment PC	-0.12	0.03	-.22**
Step 4			
Justice	-0.09	0.04	-.20**
Trust	-0.04	0.04	-.08**

Note: $R^2 = .03$ in Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .000$ in Step 2 ($p = .45$); $\Delta R^2 = .06$ in Step 3 ($p = .01$); $\Delta R^2 = .02$ in Step 4 ($p = .05$). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3
Hierarchical regression for the
criterion variable work-family conflict (N= 287)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	-0.01	0.01	-.14**
Man	-0.15	0.08	-.10**
Years of service	-0.01	0.01	-.08**
Permanent contract	-0.01	0.09	-.00**
Step 2			
Content PC	-0.02	0.01	-.13**
Step 3			
State PC	-0.08	0.04	-.16**

Note: $R^2 = .02$ in Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .005$ in Step 2 ($p = .12$); $\Delta R^2 = .02$ in Step 3 ($p = .01$).
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 5
Hierarchical regression for the criterion variable
life satisfaction (N= 265)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	-0.00	0.01	-.01**
Man	-0.02	0.12	-.01**
Years of service	-0.03	0.01	-.20**
Permanent contract	-0.09	0.12	-.05**
Step 2			
Content PC	-0.02	0.01	-.08**
Step 3			
Fulfilment PC	-0.13	0.04	.18**
Step 4			
Justice	-0.10	0.05	-.16**
Trust	-0.03	0.05	-.04**

Note: $R^2 = .04$ in Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .02$ in Step 2 ($p = .05$); $\Delta R^2 = .04$ in Step 3 ($p = .01$); $\Delta R^2 = .02$ in Step 4 ($p = .05$). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 7
Hierarchical regression for the
criterion variable psychological well-being (N= 263)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	-0.00	0.00	-.03**
Man	-0.00	0.06	-.00**
Years of service	-0.00	0.01	-.00**
Permanent contract	-0.07	0.07	-.08**
Step 2			
Content PC	-0.00	0.01	-.03**
Step 3			
Fulfilment PC	-0.06	0.02	-.16**
Step 4			
Justice	-0.03	0.03	-.09**
Trust	-0.04	0.03	-.11**

Note: $R^2 = .01$ in Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .01$ in Step 2 ($p = .08$); $\Delta R^2 = .05$ in Step 3 ($p = .01$); $\Delta R^2 = .03$ in Step 4 ($p = .01$). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

elements making up the state of the psychological contract, added explanatory power to the third component of the state of the contract, fulfilment, a variable with a much longer tradition in research. The results obtained provide clear support for the hypotheses proposed.

In line with the first hypothesis, it was found that state of the psychological contract contributes to explaining variance additional to that explained by the content of the psychological contract in the three variables studied. Specifically, the better the state of the psychological contract, the greater the life satisfaction and psychological well-being, and the lower the level of work-family conflict. This result lends substantial support to the model of psychological contract proposed by Guest and colleagues (Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway, 2002), which stresses the role of the state of the psychological contract for explaining employees' attitudes and behaviour. For Guest (1998), one of the limitations of previous research on the psychological contract is its descriptive approach, more concerned with explaining differences in the content of the psychological contract than in determining how these differences translate into different consequences for the individual and the organization. In line with the arguments of this author, the introduction of the state of the psychological contract makes it possible to move from a predominantly descriptive approach to a study enabling the prediction and explanation of phenomena that are highly relevant for organizations, such as those explored in the present work. The results obtained, then, are encouraging.

Indeed, research on the psychological contract has often been far too descriptive. However, an exception to this norm is research on fulfilment and violation of the psychological contract. These phenomena have emerged as relevant for predicting employees' attitudes, behaviours and even health outcomes (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Lo & Aryee, 2003; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Turnley & Feldman, 1999, 2000).

Thus, in order to be able to conclude that the contribution proposed at a theoretical level by Guest and colleagues was relevant it would be necessary to prove at the same time that the role of the state of the psychological contract in explaining individual and organizational consequences went beyond that which had been demonstrated by one of its components.

Therefore, it was necessary to determine whether fairness and trust, two of the most novel components of the state of the psychological contract incorporated into Guest's model, and whose role is much less well known, contributed to explaining variance additional to that explained by fulfilment.

This was tested in our consideration of the second hypothesis of the present study, which the results supported. As expected, employees' perceived trust and fairness, considered jointly, are capable of predicting significant variance beyond the capacity of fulfilment of the psychological contract in the three variables of psychological health explored.

These results, considered as a whole, lend support to the model of psychological contract advocated by Guest and colleagues (Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway, 2002). Specifically, the results clearly reveal the need to take into account not only the content of the psychological contract, but also its state, if we wish to understand variations in employees' attitudes and behaviours, and even their psychological health. Consideration of the state of the psychological contract should enable us to overcome one of the limitations of traditional research in the field, that is, excessive emphasis on description instead of seeking explanations why and mechanisms by which the psychological contract influences employees' attitudes and behaviours and their health states and experiences.

In relation to this challenge, only research on fulfilment and violation of the psychological contract had previously proved useful. The results of our work also point to the utility of the state of the psychological contract, a broader concept than that of fulfilment, which includes it but also takes into account employees' perceptions of fairness and of trust. In our work, fairness and trust have emerged as key for predicting certain variables related to employees' psychological health, so that the utility of the state of the psychological contract, understood as made up of all three elements, has also received support.

Future studies should, first of all, pay more attention to the state of the psychological contract, and continue exploring its utility for predicting individual and organizational outcomes. In our work it has revealed its relevance for understanding psychological health outcomes. However, research should also continue to study its relationship to employees' attitudes and behaviour – for example, exploring the extent to which the state of the psychological contract is capable of predicting attitudes, such as job satisfaction,

organizational commitment or turnover intention, and behaviours, such as performance, organizational citizenship behaviours, absenteeism or actual turnover.

Secondly, our work has highlighted the predictive validity of the state of the psychological contract, and even the internal consistency of the scale used for its measurement. However, the construct validity remains to be explored, and by extension, so does the extent to which we are talking about a single construct with three dimensions, as proposed by Guest, or rather three different constructs.

Another of the contributions of Guest's model on the psychological contract (Guest, 2001) yet to be explored is the mediating role of the state of the psychological contract in the relationship between content of the psychological contract and outcomes (attitudes, behaviours, health, and so on).

Finally, future research should also explore different sets of antecedents and consequences for each one of the components of the state of the psychological contract studied. The results of our work suggest that fulfilment, trust and fairness can make differing contributions to the prediction of different phenomena. It would be no surprise, then, if they also had different antecedents and consequences. However, to be able to draw conclusions with regard to antecedents and consequences of the different components of the state of the psychological contract there is a need for studies designed to permit the establishment of causal relationships between variables.

The main practical implication of our study is that organizations or their representatives (managers, directors, etc.) should be alert to the promises that their employees perceive to have been made (implicitly or explicitly), to their fulfilment and to employees' perceptions that the organization is being fair to them and that they trust it to fulfil its promises in the future, since all such factors appear to be in some way related to employees' psychological health.

Nevertheless, our work is not without its limitations. In our opinion, the main one is that all the measures used were obtained by means of self-report questionnaires, which prevents elimination of the problems of variance of method and common source. Even so, this error can be reduced through the use of different response scales and of inverted items, both of these precautions being taken in our study. Secondly, the data were all collected at the same time, so that we cannot infer causal relationships between variables; nor can we be sure of the direction of the relationships found. It would be pertinent to replicate these results using different

methods and sources of information with longitudinal research designs.

By way of conclusion, we should like to stress that the field of the psychological contract, despite having received considerable attention over the last ten years or so, includes research lines that have been scarcely explored. In this regard, our study has shown that work on the state of the psychological contract opens up new and particularly attractive possibilities, converting a research field until now essentially descriptive into one that is more explanatory and with greater implications for organizational intervention.

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