Special Issue: Making the (Entire) World a Better Place? Aligning theory and Practice Toward a More Sustainable & Inclusive HRM

In Pursuit of Impact: How Psychological Contract Research Can Make the Work-World a Better Place

Johannes M. Kraak[1], Samantha D. Hansen[2], Yannick Griep[3,4], Sudeshna Bhattacharya[5], Neva Bojovic[1], Marjo-Riitta Diehl[6], Kayla Evans[7], Jesse Fenneman[3], Iqra Ishaque Memon[8], Marion Fortin[9], Annica Lau[10], Hugh Lee[1], Junghyun Lee[11], Xander Lub[12,13], Ines Meyer[14], Marc Ohana[1], Pascale Peters[13,15], Denise M. Rousseau[16], René Schalk[4,17], Rosalind H. Searle[18], Ultan Sherman[19], and Amanuel Tekleab[20]

[1]Kedge Business School, France
[2]University of Toronto Scarborough and the Rotman School of Management, Toronto, ON, Canada
[3]Radboud University, The Netherlands
[4]North-West University, South Africa
[5]Nottingham University Business School, UK
[6]Aalto University School of Business, Finland
[7]Georgia Institute of Technology, USA
[8]University of Leicester, UK
[9]Toulouse Capitole University, France
[10]Worcester Business School, University of Worcester, UK
[11]University of Michigan-Dearborn, USA
[12]Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands
[13]Nyenrode Business Universiteit, The Netherlands
[14]University of Cape Town, South Africa
[15]Inland School of Business and Social Sciences, Norway
[16]Carnegie Mellon University, USA
[17]Tilburg University, The Netherlands
[18]University of Glasgow, UK
[19]Cork University Business School, Ireland
[20]Wayne State University, USA
Johannes Kraak, Samantha Hansen, and Yannick Griep are shared first author.

Corresponding Author:
Johannes M. Kraak, Kedge Business School, 680 Cours de la Libération, Talence 33405, France.
Email: johannes.kraak@kedgebs.com

Abstract

This paper is the result of the collective work undertaken by a group of Psychological Contract (PC) and Sustainability scholars from around the world, following the 2023 Bi-Annual PC Small Group Conference (Kedge Business School, Bordeaux, France). As part of the conference, scholars engaged in a workshop designed to generate expert guidance on how to aid the PC field to be better aligned with the needs of practice, and thus, impact the creation and maintenance of high-quality and sustainable exchange processes at work. In accordance with accreditation bodies for higher education, research impact is not limited to academic papers alone but also includes practitioners, policymakers, and students in its scope. This paper therefore incorporates elements from an impact measurement tool for higher education in management so as to explore how PC scholars can bolster the beneficial influence of PC knowledge on employment relationships through different stakeholders and means. Accordingly, our proposals for the pursuit of PC impact are organized in three parts: (1) research, (2) practice and society, and (3) students. Further, this paper contributes to the emerging debate on sustainable PCs by developing a construct definition and integrating PCs with an 'ethics of care' perspective.

Introduction

This project's journey began with a workshop during the 2023 Bi-Annual Psychological Contract (PC) Small Group Conference. Participants were challenged to identify key factors in producing impactful PC research, that is, research aligned with practice that informs understanding of how to create and maintain high-quality employment arrangements in the complex reality of this day and age. Today's work, and the conditions and locations affecting it, differ from the realities of work in the 1990's upon which the current PC literature is founded (e.g., Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). It is a critical moment to assess how PC researchers across the world can further expand the literature to facilitate healthy employment relationships.

Clearly, research impact entails more than the academic criterion of publishing papers in top-tier journals. Indeed, there are multiple ways in

which research impact might be achieved and assessed (AACSB, 2012). For many researchers the most obvious way to create research impact is to share research findings through practice-oriented pieces written for professional or press outlets such as Harvard Business Review or The Conversation. Other aspects of research impact are often overlooked. In the interest of expanding the reach of PC scholarship, this paper takes a more exhaustive look at possible impact for PC research. To begin this process, we benchmarked the top three management education accreditation bodies to identify key targets of research impact.

The three accreditation bodies we benchmarked are the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the Association of MBAs (AMBA), and the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD). Two of the market impact measurement tools that are used by business schools globally come from these institutions: The Business Graduates Association (a sister organization of AMBA) offers the Continuous Impact Model while EFMD has the Business School Impact System (BSIS). The BSIS was originally developed by the French Foundation for Business & Management Studies (FNEGE) and later adapted by the EFMD for the international market (Kalika, 2022).

We chose the five areas of the BSIS for measuring research impact (FNEGE, 2022) to provide a nuanced yet structured picture of the make-up of research impact. Further, BSIS identifies the stakeholders or recipients of research impact as specified in a 2012 AACSB report on business school research impact: practicing managers, society, and students. We combine the five main BSIS areas for measuring research impact (FNEGE, 2022) with these recipient targets. In doing so we provide a three-pronged strategy specifying how PC and sustainability scholars can make the work-world a better place. First, the *Research* section focuses on "intellectual production" and "publications with regional impact." Next, the *Practice and Society* section includes "research chairs and partnerships", and "public conferences and events." Finally, the *Student* section addresses "impact of research on teaching and programs."

The Psychological Contract

To frame our treatment of PC research's potential impact, we begin with a brief overview of the PC basic elements. PC scholars have long been driven to help better workplace experiences, and in particular, employee-employer relationships. The PC is rooted in Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and refers to an individuals' beliefs about the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between themselves and another party (Rousseau, 1989). These agreements revolve around the individual's perceptions of what each

party owes and delivers to the other party (or parties). Employees typically believe that their employer is obligated to provide them with inducements (e.g., a fair salary and supervision as well as the necessary tools for carrying out their work) in exchange for their contributions (e.g., helping colleagues, performing to a standard, and demonstrating loyalty to the organization). According to the reciprocity principle (Gouldner, 1960), there should be balance in the exchange process. When one party (e.g., the employer) delivers on its side of the exchange agreement (termed PC fulfillment), the other party (e.g., the employee) is likely to reciprocate positively, by making favorable contributions in return, thereby fulfilling their side of the agreement (Cropanzano et al., 2017). However, when there is a perceived imbalance in the exchange relationship because one party falls short of delivering on the obligated inducements (termed "PC breach"), the other party tends to respond with negative reciprocity, seeking appropriate compensation or retribution (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Most often, research has focused on employee reactions to breach by the employer (see Tekleab & Taylor, 2003 for an exception). Reactions are typically negative: Meta-analytic findings indicate deleterious effects of PC breach by the employer on employee affect, attitudes, and behaviors (Bal et al., 2008;Zhao et al., 2007). It is important at this point to underscore the subjective nature of the PC. This means that many dispositional characteristics shape the PC from personality traits (Raja et al., 2004), to age, work experience (Ng & Feldman, 2009), and a variety of other individual-level characteristics.

An employee's PC typically evolves through phases. The Dynamic Phase Model of PC Processes, proposed by Rousseau et al. (2018), outlines how an employee's PC is shaped, maintained, and modified throughout employment in an organization. This model identifies four distinct phases: Creation, Maintenance, Repair, and Renegotiation. Each phase is marked by unique goal-related dynamics, involving different variables and their relationships. During Creation, an employee's pre-existing employment beliefs are updated and fine-tuned by their organizational experiences. Once the employee forms a coherent understanding of the reciprocal obligations with their employer, they move into the Maintenance phase. In this phase, PC obligations remain stable and serve to guide the employee's workplace behaviors with minimal effort. When a disruption (a perceived discrepancy between obligations and delivered inducements) large enough to cause a strong affective reaction occurs, the individual shifts into either the Repair phase (in the case of negative affect) or the Renegotiation phase (in the case of positive affect) in the attempt to resolve the disruption (e.g., by seeking remedies or negotiating new arrangements). Once resolved, the employee re-enters the Maintenance phase.

Most PC research focuses on perceived negative PC deviations, commonly referred to as PC breach (Conway & Briner, 2005). The cognitive processing that results in PC breach may trigger violation feelings, which are marked by various strong negative emotions (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). According to the Post-Violation Model (Tomprou et al., 2015) there are several possible outcomes of the Repair phase that will allow the employee to transition back to the Maintenance phase. The first is *reactivation*. In this situation, the breach is effectively resolved (e.g., through remedies), and the employee's PC returns to a state identical to what it was before the disruption. The second outcome is *thriving*. Here, the breach serves as a catalyst for positive change. New obligations emerge that serve to make the revised PC even more favorable than the original one. The third outcome is *impairment*. In this case, the breach has a lasting negative impact on the employee's PC, making it less favorable than the original. The final outcome is *dissolution*. Employees who experience this fate are unable to establish a functional, stable PC. Although the employee makes the bare minimum contributions, there is no trust in the employer to follow through on any of their obligations. As such, negative affect remains salient and the employee becomes cynical (see Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018) and hyper-vigilant in monitoring the employer's actions, increasing the likelihood of perceiving future breaches.

Recent and Ongoing Developments in Employment Exchange Relationships

Although the PC literature is vast and has helped to better understand many different antecedents, characteristics, and outcomes of employment exchange relationships, the PC will strengthen its conceptual relevance for the future work world by incorporating more holistic and diverse research from different contexts. Indeed, the PC field is at a crossroads. Most of the research has been conducted in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Democratic) societies. In these countries, in particular, the last decade has seen significant changes in work (Griep et al., 2023a) and the employment exchange (Dixon-Fowler et al., 2020; Knapp et al., 2020). On the employer side, there has been a noticeable shift toward prioritizing short-term performance metrics (Marchington, 2015) and giving preference to other stakeholder interests and profits over the well-being of employees (Dundon & Rafferty, 2018). In this context, Sustainable Human Resource Management, as described by Richards (2019), often tends to be driven by the employer's objectives and is primarily focused on enhancing employee productivity. At the same time, an ever-increasing group of employees have terminated their PC by walking away

from their job (often referred to as the great resignation, the big quit, and the great reshuffle), which in turn, forces companies to propose more attractive inducements to their employees (Fuller & Kerr, 2022) and to modify how organizational goals are achieved as a means to facilitate employee retention.

The shift toward the gig economy is part of the dramatic changes of the last decade, with a growing prevalence of precarious work arrangements including self-employment, algorithmic management, platform-based work, and various forms of insecure temporary work (Cropanzano et al., 2023; Griep et al., 2023a; Sherman & Morley, 2020). This shift represents a fundamental change in the nature of work and in employment relationships, with more individuals engaging in non-traditional, contingent, and often less stable forms of work. To make things more complex, more people are now working remotely, leading employees to become isolated from their colleagues and work environment (Galanti et al., 2021), which may lead to greater divergence in PC perceptions between employee and employer, as workers no longer have social ties to provide them with PC insights (Ho & Levesque, 2005; Zagenczyk, 2009).

Another notable change pertains to the growing number of people who want more sustainable jobs and greater amounts of corporate social responsibility in their work context, both of which have been linked to more success in employee recruitment and retention (e.g., Dögl & Holtbrügge, 2014; Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2018). It follows then that employees will also expect more sustainable inducements in their PCs. Sustainable inducements differ from the ideological PC (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003) obligations, in that ideological PCs refer to an implicit understanding or agreement between an individual and an organization based on shared ideologies. For example, employees may expect their employer to adhere to certain values or principles in the workplace (e.g., caring about the environment), and the organization may expect employees to align with this mission and goals (e.g., biking to work rather than driving). In contrast, sustainable inducements go beyond short-term considerations and aim to provide stable and fulfilling work over the long term. This includes factors such as fair wages, job security, opportunities for career growth, diversity, equity, inclusion, and a healthy work environment. Sustainable inducements, and sustainable employment in the broader sense, are associated with practices that promote the well-being of both the employee and the organization, fostering a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship (Pommier, 2023).

Given the dramatic societal and employment changes since the 1990s, former frameworks comparing "old" and "new" PCs (e.g., Kissler, 1994) are inadequate guides to best align PC scholarship with practice. The speed at which work transformations have occurred has outpaced the ability of

management research to (1) accurately chart all of the changes in where, how, when, why, and with whom work is conducted (Bankins et al., 2020; Griep et al., 2019; Jacobs et al., 2021), (2) assess the impact of such changes on the PC (Barley et al., 2017), and (3) provide solutions in the form of more sustainable employment in today's workplace (Griep et al., 2023b). Indeed, very few scholarly articles address *sustainable PCs* (Kraak & Griep, 2022).

We posit one reason for this omission is the focus of PC research on professional and white-collar samples (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014) who often hold sufficient voice and power to (re)negotiate their PC to benefit their personal lives, and not that of other workers or society more broadly. Ignoring other workers and settings can overlook important insights and inadvertently reinforce social inequalities by underrepresenting voices from diverse backgrounds. It may neglect the experiences of minority groups, women, and other underrepresented populations, who may be more prevalent in other types of occupations. White-collar workers may have more channels, outside of formalized and public forums, for expressing their opinions within hierarchical structures, such as meetings or one-on-one discussion with managers. In contrast, employees from underrepresented populations may face power imbalances that make it challenging for them to individually voice concerns or suggestions. Understanding these power dynamics requires studying a broad spectrum of employment types as illustrated by O'Leary-Kelly and colleagues' (2014) study of IT workers on temporary visas from body shopping firms, Kraak and colleagues' (2023) study on self-initiated expatriates who were confronted with a destructive PC in their menial jobs in the French hospitality sector, and Aldosari and colleagues' (2023) study of precarious employment in post-crisis Greece. In this regard, we join with recent calls to incorporate social and cultural contexts in PC research to better understand how such factors, including sample characteristics, influence PC processes (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019; Griep et al., 2019).

How to Move Forward?

We next turn to how we envision the alignment of PC research and organizational practice with the goal of promoting high-quality exchange processes in workplaces around the globe. Following the Business School Impact System (FNEGE, 2022), we structure our proposal in three parts: (1) Research, (2) Practice & Society, and (3) Students.

Research

Whereas an assessment tool is typically past-oriented and focuses on established output, here we focus on the future to establish ways that we, as PC scholars, can contribute to research impact. We begin each subsection by

describing the areas of research impact that the BSIS (FNEGE, 2022) measures, and go on to discuss how these areas represent opportunities in the PC literature to help employers develop and maintain high-quality exchange relationships.

Intellectual Production

Intellectual products typically refer to recent mainstream research activities such as published papers and cases in academic and professional outlets, along with conference presentations, research reports, and the supervision of doctoral theses. Other indicators include the (inter)national recognition and reputation of an institution's faculty, the link between research and specializations in institutional programs, and the link between research and the UNs Sustainable Development Goals.

It is within these parameters that we see impactful PC research as knowledge that helps to push the literature forward. For illustration, we address two themes in PC research: (1) attention to PC context, and (2) sustainable exchange relationships, which we believe represent key contributions to the PC literature.

PC Context. People are embedded in their societal, organizational, environmental, and personal contexts, which shape how we behave. However, many academic studies do not include contextual factors in their research design. This omission reflects a variety of motives, including the search for simplicity and parsimony in models, concern for reviewer reaction to the particularity or generalizability of the research, and the bounded rationality of the researcher (e.g., Rousseau & Fried, 2001). Several calls have been made for more inclusion of context in PC research (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019; Griep et al., 2019; Johns, 2006; Solinger, 2019), however, these calls are relatively narrow, reflecting concern for a specific aspect of context (e.g., cultural contexts; Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019).

We advocate a more holistic approach to context, one that is relevant at different levels of analysis. For instance, context can be at an individual, team or department or unit, organizational, community, or societal level. We therefore suggest a more structured approach to incorporating context in PC research along the lines proposed by Johns (2006). Johns (2006, p. 386) defined context as "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables" and proposed six dimensions of context at two different levels of analysis. The first "omnibus" level refers to more general and broad context elements, and includes four heuristics: (1)

occupational pertains to the occupational and demographic context, (2) *location* pertains to the specific research site, its geographical location, cultural context, and industry, (3) *time* focuses on the absolute and relative time frames in which the research was conducted or research events took place, and (4) *rationale* delves into the underlying reasons that influence the phenomena under study; its three dimensions include: (a) task context operationalized through, for instance, autonomy, uncertainty, accountability, or resources, (b) social context, including social density, social structure, and direct social influence, and (c) physical context, operationalized as temperature, light, the built environment, and décor, among other physical features.

Incorporating omnibus and discrete contexts into the PC literature will help researchers formulate questions about the "what", "who", "where", "when", and "why" of their research. Johns (2006) and Rousseau and Fried (2001) proposed avenues for studying context that apply to PC research: (1) perform cross-level or comparative research, (2) study processes over time, (3) study and analyze specific events, (4) carry out direct observation and analysis of contextual effects, and (5) collect qualitative data that allow for rich descriptions. Such approaches could help PC researchers study complex phenomena such as the variety of changes to PCs in different industries following Covid-19, the development of PCs for employees who work from home, the reactivation of a platform workers' PC following a PC breach that was triggered by an AI algorithm, a comparison of PC processes among different types of workers (e.g., blue collar vs. white collar, different professions, different sectors) or types of employment contracts (e.g., permanent vs. temporary or full-time vs. part-time), as well as the nature of the PC in different cultural and societal contexts (e.g., WEIRD vs. non-WEIRD countries). Additional comprehensive examples appear in the section below dedicated to publications with regional impact.

Sustainable Exchange Relationships. This stream in the PC literature is recent with only a handful of publications at present (e.g., Dixon-Fowler et al., 2020; Griep et al., 2023aGriep, Bankins, et al., 2023; Kraak & Griep, 2022; Susomrith, 2020). The PC literature lacks scholarly attention to what a sustainable exchange relationship actually entails. Indeed, the sustainable PC could refer to sustainability-infused PC inducements (Dixon-Fowler et al., 2020), the quality of the exchange relationship (Kraak & Griep, 2022), the 'forgotten groups' so that they benefit from a more sustainable PC (Griep et al., 2023a, 2023b), or the results of sustainable HR processes (Susomrith, 2020).

Sustainability in Human Resource Management can refer to socially responsible and economically appropriate employee hiring, developing, and

downsizing (Thom & Zaugg, 2004), durable access to skilled human resources (Müller-Christ & Remer, 1999), reproducing the Human Resource base (Ehnert, 2009), and making employees able and willing to stay with the employer (Van Vuuren & Van Dam, 2013), in addition to expanding HR responsibilities to include the growing number of independent contractors working with the organization (Cross & Swart, 2022). More generally, there are an ever-increasing number of definitions for constructs related to sustainability.

Amid the widespread focus on sustainability, the PC serves as an important mechanism to safeguard quality exchange relationships. As such, it is critical that the literature land on a construct definition that can guide future theory, research, and practice. We propose that the *Sustainable PC* refers to ***an adaptive cognitive schema representing one's perceptions of obligations regarding a high-quality exchange relationship that is characterized by attentive, responsible, and responsive parties as well as mutually beneficial economic, social, human, and environmental goals. The sustainable PC emphasizes long-term viability and resilience in the face of changing organizational and societal dynamics***. To make an exchange relationship viable over time necessitates effort to build a more caring organization, where the employer—and by extension its managers—acts as a buffer to personal and external influences. Making a caring organization a reality entails adopting an *ethics of care* framework throughout the organization.

Ethics of care refers to a moral framework that highlights the importance of relationships, empathy, and compassion in decision-making. It places a strong emphasis on caring for others and recognizing the interdependence of individuals in social contexts. Recently, this perspective has been expanded and taken up in work and organizational studies (e.g., Bader et al., 2022; Fotaki et al., 2019; Frost, 2011; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Mumford et al., 2022). The promise of ethics of care requires an understanding of *relationships of care* within work settings as being more than adherence to roles and rules based on rationality. In fact, the ethics of care perspective departs from such rationality, and is "characterized by a concern for context, empathy, and action in which following rules is secondary to preserving relationships" (Jammaers, 2023: p. 334). Incorporating ethics of care into the workplace involves fostering an organizational culture wherein attentiveness (i.e., actively listening and being aware of the needs of employees), responsibility (i.e., recognizing and acting upon obligations towards others' well-being and the environment), competence (i.e., maintaining and developing the necessary skills to fulfill others' needs effectively, as well as creating capable teams), and responsiveness (i.e., adapting policies and practices to meet employees' needs promptly and constructively; Tronto, 1993) are paramount.

These ethics of care principles have the potential to transform the workplace where the emphasis on mutual care creates more sustainable exchange relationships. More specifically, organizations could adopt the four principles from ethics of care in their PC contracting. How would this work? First, incorporating attentiveness in an exchange relationship would require both parties to listen to each other (i.e., pay close attention to feedback and take raised points seriously) and ensure that concerns and wellbeing of the other party are considered, becoming more mindful of the needs, concerns, and expectations of others in the process (Yip & Fisher, 2022). Attentiveness via listening is facilitated through regular interactions and the implementation of feedback mechanisms. Incorporating attentiveness would therefore improve the quality of the PC because the exchange relationship would better reflect the evolving needs and expectations of both parties.

Second, adopting the principle of responsibility would add clarity to the PC by outlining the roles and responsibilities of employers and employees, increasing the sense of moral responsibility that parties feel towards the exchange relationship. In other words, there would be more emphasis on parties recognizing their duty to uphold ethical behavior in the exchange relationship, treat other parties in the PC with respect, and fulfill one's obligations. The responsibility principle would thus help both organizations and individuals to view themselves as responsible for their own interests as well as for the wellbeing of others in the exchange.

Third, incorporating competence can help expand the PC literature by focusing on building competencies that will help the parties of the exchange relationship to better understand and meet different emotional and relational needs of the other party or parties. Competence is both the ability to make thoughtful and informed decisions, and the skills needed to foster and maintain healthy, mutually beneficial exchange relationships.

Finally, incorporating responsiveness refers to the parties being responsive to each other's needs and concerns by addressing concerns, changes, and issues promptly and constructively. For instance, parties can discuss the inclusion of provisions for resolving any disruptions, should they arise. An organization could adopt more open communication channels which can facilitate responsiveness in uncertain times when employees are concerned if prior agreements will be honored due to macro-economic changes. Responsiveness also provides opportunities to operationalize scripts or procedures for managers to use in case of PC breach. Indeed, provisions for resolving negative workplace events could improve the effectiveness of attempts to repair the relationship following PC breach. We therefore believe that adopting ethics of care could help in proactively creating an environment in which PCs both protect and promote sustainable employment relationships.

Defining sustainable PCs along these lines will also allow scholars to apply the concept in their research, independent from the context in which they carry out their research. Indeed, sustainability and accompanying timeframes can mean very different things, depending on where you are on the globe and who you are interacting with.

At the same time, focusing on sustainable exchange relationships does not necessarily mean that the goal is to always 'try to save' the relationship. Sustainability is often referred to as carrying on over time without using up the available resources, and we believe that these notions should be included in the core of a sustainable exchange relationship. If employees perceive PC breach and/or feelings of violation that deteriorate their appreciation of the exchange relationship, both parties should be able to discuss these events and try to repair the PC so as to return to the Maintenance phase. However, if costs of repairing are deemed too high, the parties to an exchange relationship should also jointly consider the possibility of ending the relationship (e.g., see Rousseau et al., 2018; Tomprou et al., 2015 who recognize that some situations necessitate 'exiting' the employment relationship).

As pointed out by Thom and Zaugg (2004), sustainable Human Resource Management also refers to socially responsible and economically appropriate downsizing. The PC literature includes frameworks such as the Dynamic Phase Model of PC Processes (Rousseau et al., 2018) and the Post-Violation Model (Tomprou et al., 2015) that assess different stages of the PC and outcomes following PC breach. The literature also discusses breach thresholds (Rigotti, 2009) and zones of acceptance (Schalk & Roe, 2007) beyond which, employees accept the situation as no longer tenable and decide to depart the organization. Although the Post Violation Model (Tomprou et al., 2015) and the Dynamic Phase Model of PC Processes (Rousseau et al., 2018) both acknowledge that employees may choose to exit the organization following unsuccessful attempts to repair a PC disruption, neither theoretical model discusses the possibility of both parties jointly participating in a *PC disengagement*. If the focus of the sustainable exchange relationship is on developing and maintaining high quality PCs, then there should also be a coordinated disengagement when the parties decide to discontinue the exchange relationship. Such disengagement would facilitate the termination of ongoing exchanges and discussion of outstanding inducements. Such a systematic approach to ending the exchange relationship could prevent unnecessary depletion of mutual resources and reduce the chance of continued dysfunction (Rigotti, 2009; Schalk & Roe, 2007). This, in turn, could reduce employee grievances, even if they are in the process of leaving, and can signal to the remaining employees that the employer is serious about quality exchange relationships for the entire duration of employment with the

organization. The PC literature currently does not include any research on such cooperative disengagement from the PC exchange relationship. We suggest that future research focus on PC disengagement as this will allow researchers to study the entire lifecycle of the (sustainable) PC.

Publications with Regional Impact

In broad terms, this area refers to publications and other research activities (e.g., carrying out doctoral projects with a regional focus, research projects with local companies, consultation reports for local organizations) that aim to contribute to solving specific problems or questions regarding development of the institution's region and also refer to more general research projects undertaken in regional organizations. There are a variety of ways to link research with local organizations: (1) the research topic is chosen due to its relevance to the region, (2) the research is carried out and the data is collected in organizations in the region, (3) the managerial implications are tailored to local organizations, and (4) the research results are communicated to local organizations. We acknowledge that such narrow projects may have limited publication outlets given the lack of generalizability. However, academia (see Andersson, 2020; Griep, 2022; Pike et al., 2008) is increasingly paying attention to region-specific problems because it allows organizations to have meaningful and positive impact on their communities, build strong relationships with stakeholders, and contribute valuable knowledge to the broader field of regional development. Moreover, regions can vary widely in terms of culture, infrastructure, and economic conditions. Research that focuses on the specific needs and characteristics of a region enables organizations to tailor their strategies and interventions to the local context. This increases the effectiveness of development initiatives and reduces the risk of implementing solutions that may not be suitable for the region. Moreover, such regional work reflects the adoption of 'context' in research.

Here we see impactful PC research as that which helps to push the PC literature forward by incorporating regional, local, and organizational contexts while at the same time providing useful and tangible insights to those actors in their ecosystems. Within this discussion we would like to highlight a few contextual factors that could be relevant in PC research. According to Johns (2006), the omnibus context heuristic *location* pertains to the specific research site, encompassing its geographical location, cultural context, and industry. Incorporating the discrete context (i.e., task-, social-, and physical context) will allow PC researchers to identify concrete context elements such as resources, social influence, or built environment, that might influence the

exchange relationship. Below we discuss three examples of context at different levels of analysis to show how contextual factors can influence PC research.

First, the level of *national context* determines the reality for organizations and employees at a regional level and could include specific contextual elements such as: social system (e.g., norms and values, institutions, cultural diversity, attitude towards change), legislative system (e.g., labor laws, environmental laws, taxation), political stability (e.g., continuity of policies and ideologies), national culture, economy (e.g., stability, growth, inflation), or different kinds of crises (e.g., environmental, international sanctions, war). One such national level context factor is the working population ratios. For instance, China's fertility rate has dropped in recent years, resulting in a working population decrease of more than 40 million (Hawkins, 2023). In Russia, the war with Ukraine has led to over 500,000 young, mostly educated people, fleeing the country (The Economist, 2023). Such developments have a direct influence on age, gender, and education levels of the working population, which have all been identified as influencing the PC (Bal et al., 2010; Bellou, 2009; Blomme et al., 2010; Rousseau, 2001). Another example could be the inflation rates that Argentina (monthly inflation rate of 12.4% in August 2023) and Sub-Saharan African countries (increase of median inflation rates in the region to almost 9% in October 2022) have been confronted with (e.g., Bolhuiset al., 2022;Nugent, 2023). Such inflation numbers are likely to influence the financial situation of many employers, forcing them to forgo on promised inducements, leading to increased PC disruptions.

Second, at the level of *regional context*, specific contextual elements would include: state of the regional economy (its stability, decline or growth), availability of infrastructure (e.g., roads, access to sea or air for resources and shipping products, public transport), unemployment rate, types of industries (activities, competitors, entry barriers), local legislation (e.g., exceptions to national tax structures and laws), technology (e.g., stability of electricity grid, access to broadband internet), regional and local culture.

Regarding industry type, a recent International Labor Organisation (2022) report provided accounts of many work deficits (e.g., work-life balance, adequate earnings, employment opportunities, working times and productive work) that were often linked to the large number of informal companies such as smallholder farms that employ people without any contract, on very short-term (i.e., daily or weekly) contracts, or particular parts of sectors operating in specific regions (e.g., banana sector in Cameroon, tobacco farming in Malawi, palm oil production in Indonesia). As such, research findings on sectors will reflect only part of the situation if findings are aggregated and contextual

factors are omitted from analysis (for instance here one could use agriculture as the level of analysis).

Third, we discuss the level of *organizational context*. Here again, context can refer to many specific elements such as: activities, sector, size of organization, ownership structure (e.g., family business, public company, governmental institution), governance structure (e.g., employee union, internal workers' council, external board of directors, shareholders), stakeholder views (employees, employers, customers, suppliers), or organizational culture (e.g., oriented on people or competition). As an example, we consider the influence of unions in the governance of organizations. The primary function of the trade union is to protect employees (Damgé, 2015). For instance, in the United Kingdom, the union representing security guards of the House of Commons voted to strike, following discontent about being asked to work extra night shifts due to a lack of staff (Mason, 2023). However, if unions are corruptible by employers, governments, or other parties—for instance due to financial dependance as is the case in many African countries—they are no longer able to defend employees (Kwasi and Kwabena, 2022). This potentially leads to a deterioration of the PC as employers can dictate new terms that are less advantageous for employees.

In addition to the above levels of analysis, we argue that incorporating regional context and relevant topics into PC research is not where regional research impact ends: it involves engaging with local stakeholders. Impactful research provides useful and tangible insights to actors in regional ecosystems. Engaging in research projects related to regional development often involves collaboration with local stakeholders, including government agencies, community organizations, and academic institutions. This fosters partnerships that can lead to more comprehensive and sustainable solutions. Sharing insights and findings with the wider public through publications and conferences contributes to the advancement of knowledge and the development of best practices that can be applied in other regions facing similar challenges. Moreover, conducting research on challenges facing the organization's regional setting allows for targeted problem-solving (e.g., Abdullah, 2017; Pant & Venkateswaran, 2020). By understanding and addressing local challenges, organizations can have a more significant and direct impact on the well-being of the community they operate in. This can include issues related to economic development, social welfare, environmental sustainability, and more. Relatedly, research findings can provide valuable insights and improved understanding of what matters to enhance policy at local, regional, and national levels. By contributing evidence-based information, organizations can also influence policy decisions that impact the region's development. This type of evidence-based involvement in the policymaking process can lead to

more supportive regulatory environments and government policies, as well as better outcomes for workers and employers.

Practice & Society

As stated above, research impact is also measured by applying our research in a way that is relevant for practice and society, often defined in terms of local ecosystems. We regularly interact with representatives of the very companies and professions where the PCs that we study are developed and maintained. This can be through invited talks, workshops, research or consulting projects, executive education, and more. These exchanges therefore constitute unique opportunities to engage with our industry partners and raise awareness through knowledge transfer from our research on PC contracting, processes, and their consequences for current issues around wellbeing and employee retention.

Here we see impactful PC research as research activities that are carried out together with (regional) associations as well as public and private organizations through research chairs and partnerships. As these collaborations provide a more structured way of working together over a longer time period, they are ideally suited for joint activities and ventures that benefit both parties. For PC researchers, such research chair roles can provide access to interesting contexts to carry out research. For organizations, the knowledge transfer through these collaborations can provide new insights, providing an informed basis for organizational change at different levels. The students of our institutions can also benefit as the collaboration could also involve workshops, seminars, or guest lectures from representatives from the organization, which improves students' understanding of policy and practice concerns (Searle & Rice, 2021) and complements the more theoretical oriented lectures by faculty. A practical example for a research chair could be a three-year project that focuses on changes in the PC following Covid 19 that is (in part) financed by an organization marked by an exponential increase in the number of people working from home. Following the analysis of data, researchers could provide feedback sessions or offer an executive report. However, a collaboration could go much further. For instance, the gathered knowledge about PC changes could be scaled up and disseminated throughout the company via workshops, discussion sessions or even lecture-like events, aimed at explaining the research findings and how these could be applied to the benefit of the organization. If PC researchers can properly disseminate the knowledge that was generated by the project, it is more likely that companies will use that input for evidence-based policy decisions.

In addition to the more traditional chairs and partnerships that result in collaborations between our institutions and specific organizations, there is great potential for research impact through European initiatives, such as the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology Impact incubator (EA-WOPii). The EAWOPii's was created in November 2020 with the goal to "engage, inform, and influence policy-makers and policy-making across Europe on the basis of evidence and insights generated by Work & Organizational Psychology research and practice" (EAWOPii, 2023). This is done through translating organizational psychology science to inform, guide, and help shape policies regarding people, work and organizations, and to bridge research and practice. It involves: (1) creating exchange forums between policy and practice and researchers, (2) producing evidence-informed outputs including analyses, advice and policy briefings, animations and serious educational games, (3) building capacity and capability among researchers that inform their research topics, questions, and context of study to be more aware and responsive to practice and policy concerns, and (4) becoming a reference source and repository for those policy makers working on work and organizational perspectives.

The events organized by the EAWOPii are often at the intersection of academia and practice. Prime mechanisms for this are through small group meetings with practitioner participation, or seminars set up for practitioners with the contributions from researchers. Furthermore, the EAWOPii aims to generate practical and tangible solutions that allow policy makers to implement new policies using evidence-based tools, such as an animation on sources of counterproductive work-behaviors, or a serious education game about decent work. The current dialogues have already been helpful in moving forward the agenda of more high-quality and sustainable PCs to a larger audience compared to, for instance, collaborations between a single school and company as organized by a research chair.

Another impact indicator from the BSIS refers to the communication of research findings through public conferences and events. This includes a range of events such as conferences, seminars, round tables, breakfast meetings, etc., organized for alumni and representatives of regional associations and organizations. Here, we do not focus on events that are co-organized with the partners from a particular research chair where the goal is to disseminate the gained understanding from the research carried out in their organization. Instead, the focus here is on more general topics (e.g., PC processes) or on more specific issues and challenges that regional players are confronted with (e.g., PC processes in hospitality organizations with large groups of foreign seasonal workers who return home after the season). There are also events that could be interesting outlets to increase the impact of PC research to the wider public such as the European Researchers' Night. This event, organized by the European Union

through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, showcases the richness of scientific disciplines and how they impact our everyday lives. Indeed, there are countless possibilities for how PC research can impact practice and society.

Students: The Impact of PC Research on Future Employees and Leaders

As research scholars, faculty are perfectly positioned to serve an integral role in preparing students to be effective employees and leaders by incorporating and applying the PC concept and research findings in the context of management education. Faculty can raise evidence-based awareness about exchange relationships, as well as help students learn critically about PC processes so they are better prepared for the exchange relationships they will encounter at work. Further, faculty are in a unique position to model the navigation of PC dynamics through their pedagogical approach, using the student-teacher exchange relationship. Below we elaborate how educators can strengthen the impact of PC research on students via course content and pedagogical approach.

After more than 30 years of study, the PC concept has earned a spot in many mainstream Organizational Behavior textbooks (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2015; Johns & Saks, 2023; Robbins & Judge, 2018). Faculty can reinforce and supplement textbook coverage by providing an historical context that showcases the evolution of PC theory and research, as well as the relevance of PCs in contemporary organizational settings. Such lessons could explain the transition from simple transactional employment relationships to the more complex and multifaceted ones (e.g., transactional, relational, and ideological) that characterize today's workplace, underscoring the dynamics of PCs. Further, course content could clarify the types of beliefs that comprise PC schemas (e.g., Hansen, 2019), and could detail the known antecedents and consequences of PC breach and fulfillment demonstrated in PC research. Further, faculty can use recent research findings to integrate contemporary issues and trends such as the impact of remote work, gig economy dynamics, and the changing nature of employment relationships to help students appreciate the ongoing evolution of PC research in response to societal and technological changes. To bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world implications, faculty can integrate concrete examples into their teaching that highlight the significance of PCs in various industries and can showcase specific examples of organizations that have successfully (and not so successfully) managed PC processes. Guest speakers from industry could be invited to engage with students to share their experiences and insights related to PCs. Industry professionals are often able to provide students with

insight into the practical challenges and strategies that are employed by organizations to effectively manage their relationships with employees.

As with all course content, greater depth of understanding occurs when students engage in active, experience-based learning (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956; Kolb, 1984). As such, students will benefit from hands-on activities that allow them to explore, reflect on, challenge, and develop their understanding of PC processes. For instance, role-play exercises could be used to simulate employment situations in which PCs are formed, maintained, breached, repaired, and renegotiated. Accompanied by reflection and group discussion, such activities provide opportunities to learn and practice skills such as effective communication, critical thinking, perspective-taking, compassion, negotiation, and resilience. Further, such simulations enable students to embody the perspectives of both employees and employers, fostering empathy and a deeper appreciation for the complexities inherent in their future employment relationships. Similarly, students can be provided case studies that depict instances of PC breach and be encouraged to analyze the situation to identify the root causes of the perceived PC breach, and propose and discuss strategies to repair the damaged relationship based on PC research findings. Again, such activities could include taking the perspective of both/all parties to the exchange. In addition, mini training workshops could further develop students' skills in communication, focusing on how to deliver difficult messages, engage in constructive dialogue, and rebuild trust. Such skills will be invaluable to students in their future careers.

Regarding the pedagogical approach, faculty can model PC processes throughout the lifecycle of the student-professor exchange relationship. Just as employees and employers hold pre-existing beliefs (e.g., expectations) about what each person owes the other, so too do students and professors prior to the start of a particular course. Reading the course description, like a job ad, marks the start of the Creation phase of the PC process for students who decide to take the course. This is the professor's opportunity to begin to tweak pre-existing expectations about university courses to better fit the actual experience they have planned for their students. Likewise, during this time, professors should encourage students to share their perspectives and identify their needs as part of creating a sustainable PC. Students could be asked to create a list of their own and their professor's mutual obligations as they understand them (this list can serve as a reference point for 'start-stop-continue' feedback exercises throughout the term). An open discussion about roles and expectations at the start of the term will help students and professors solidify their understanding of their mutual obligations, facilitating the shift into the maintenance phase.

Establishing mutual obligations serves to direct the behavior of students and professors, creating a predictable exchange relationship. Potential

professor obligations include the provision of quality instruction and regular performance feedback, being prepared, being available for questions, demonstrating fairness and compassion, and maintaining a constructive learning environment. Potential student obligations include being committed to learning, being punctual and prepared for class, being inquisitive and participative in class, demonstrating respect for others, and adhering to institutional rules and regulations. Modeling respect and transparency, professors can promote open communication about mutual obligations, and provide a safe environment for students to challenge or clarify their perceptions of, changes to, fulfillment of, and breach of PC obligations.

Explicit check points to gauge progress toward PC fulfillment could be formally embedded in the course schedule. Exposed disruptions to the PC for students or the professor can be embraced as valuable opportunities for students to develop effective strategies to repair/renegotiate a PC. Open, diplomatic discussions can be used to explore and evaluate alternative approaches to remedying a PC breach. As the capstone exercise, students can review their perceptions of obligations (their own and the professor's) from the start of the term to determine how well their PC was fulfilled and how well they fulfilled their obligations to the professor, offering another opportunity for personal growth.

Educating students about PCs involves a multi-dimensional approach that combines theoretical foundations, real-world examples, experiential exercises, case studies, and industry insights. The result is a holistic understanding of PCs that upskills students with the analytical and interpersonal skills necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern workplace, thus contributing to their future career success.

Conclusion

The creative analysis undertaken here by global PC and Sustainability scholars sought to promote PC research impact that can make the work-world a better place. We advise researchers to adopt a systematic approach to characterizing and investigating the role of context in shaping and constraining the PC experience. This context can be not only societal and organizational but also regional in that employment practices affecting quality employment experiences are increasingly pertinent to regional development (e.g., WEIRD vs. non-WEIRD countries). We also contribute to the increased emphasis on sustainable exchange relationships by providing a definition for the sustainable PC. Furthermore, we call attention to the essential role played by a recognized *ethics of care* in employment worldwide and the need for attention to how employers and employees express and fulfill their duty of care across organizations and locales. In becoming more useful to practice, we

advise attention to developing both generalizable and locally appropriate assessments of PCs to further the methodological advances that often precede practical uptake and use.

Finally, we hope this article helps stimulate important changes in how scholarly work is performed and disseminated, ultimately promoting a more sustainable PC for all. Many of the proposed lines of enquiry in this paper represent new thinking in PC scholarship. As is the case with any novel idea in a research domain it is important that scholars seeking to understand and measure it adopt suitable methodological approaches. In the interests of accessing the unique nature of sustainable PCs as well as accurately reflecting the different contexts in which working relationships exist, we urge future researchers to adopt exploratory methodologies at the outset. It is likely that traditional PC methods or approaches will fall short in capturing the textured nature of new forms of emerging and evolving employment relationships.

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

ORCID iDs

Johannes M. Kraak https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9073-4208
Yannick Griep https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3508-5635
Marion Fortin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5568-875X
Hugh Lee https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1091-5066
Marc Ohana https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1698-0704
Rosalind H. Searle https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6052-7627
Amanuel Tekleab https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3163-1019

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Author Biographies

Johannes M. Kraak is an Associate Professor in Human Resource Management and
Organizational Behavior and is the director of the Centre of Excellence for Sustainability at Kedge Business School.

Samantha D. Hansen is an Associate Professor of Organizational Behaviour and HR
Management in the Department of Management at University of Toronto Scarborough.
She holds a cross-appointment to the Organizational Behaviour and HR Management
area at the Rotman School of Management.

Yannick Griep is an Associate Professor at the Behavioural Science Institute at
Radboud University and an Extraordinary Full Professor at North-West University.
Renowned for his eccentric teaching methods, such as conducting seminars in interpretive dance and issuing management advice via carrier pigeons, Dr. Griep remains
a trailblazer in the realm of management academia, challenging conventional wisdom
one whimsical theory at a time.

Sudeshna Bhattacharya is an Assistant Professor in Organisational Behaviour and
Human Resource Management at Nottingham University Business School.

Neva Bojovic is assistant professor at Kedge Business School at Bordeaux campus.
She holds a PhD from Grenoble Ecole de Management and Université Savoie Mont
Blanc. Her research and teaching interests are in strategy, innovation, and technology
entrepreneurship.

Marjo-Riitta Diehl is a Professor of Organization and Management at Aalto
University.

Kayla Evans is a teaching instructor at East Carolina University.

Jesse Fenneman is a post-doctoral researcher at the Behavioural Science Institute at
Radboud University.

Iqra Ishaque Memon is a researcher at the University of Leicester.

Marion Fortin is a Full Professor of Organizational Behavior at (TSM). Marion is the
Director of the TSM Doctoral Programme, as well as the Track Coordinator for the

Human Resources and Organizational Behavior track of the Doctoral Programme. In addition, she is the Vice President of International and European Relations at Toulouse Capitole University.

Annica Lau is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Business Management at the University of Worcester's Business School.

Hugh Lee is an Associate Professor at Kedge Business School. He teaches Organisation Behaviour, Business Ethics, Human Resource Management (HRM), Diversity and Inclusion, Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Junghyun Lee is an Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management at the University of Michigan-Dearborn College of Business.

Xander Lub is a Professor of Organisations in Digital Transition at the Applied University of Utrecht.

Ines Meyer is a Professor of Organizational Psychology at the University of Cape Town.

Marc Ohana is a Professor of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management at KEDGE Business School.

Pascale Peters is a Professor of Strategic Human Resource Management at Nyenrode Business University.

Denise H. Rousseau is H. J. Heinz II University Professor of Organizational Behavior and Public Policy, Heinz College and Joint Appointment at Tepper School of Business.

René Schalk is a Professor at the Department of Human Resource Studies at Tilburg University.

Rosalind M. Searle holds the chair in Human Resource Management and Organisational Psychology at the Adam Smith Business School in Glasgow. She is also Director of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology's Impact Incubator.

Ultan Sherman is a Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour and Human Resource Management. He is the programme director for the MSc in Human Resource Management.

Amanuel Tekleab is a Board of Visitors Fellow and Professor of Organizational Behavior at Wayne State University's Mike Ilitch School of Business.