Chapter 18
The Relationship Between Psychological Contract Breach and Work Alienation: The Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital

Engin Unguren
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7223-2543
Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Turkey

Serdar Arslan
Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

One major problem for the tourism and hospitality sector seems to be work alienation, which causes low levels of satisfaction, performance, and high levels of turnover. Work alienation has many personal and organizational antecedents. This study aims to test a model: the moderating effect of psychological capital on the relationship between psychological contract breach and work alienation. The data was collected by fully structured questionnaires from the employees who work in four and five star hotels in Alanya, one of the leading tourism destinations in Turkey. The data was analyzed via hierarchical regression. The results show that psychological capital has a decreasing effect on the increasing effect of psychological contract breach on work alienation. The hypotheses are confirmed.

INTRODUCTION

For the tourism and hospitality industry, it can’t be denied that human capital is the most important asset in terms of quality, customer satisfaction and competitive advantage (Kusluvan et. al., 2010, p. 171). Therefore, attracting and retaining dedicated and high performing employees is strategically critical.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1474-0.ch018
Since its appearance as an independent discipline, organizational behavior has been studying and dealing with a major barrier that estranges employees from their jobs: Work alienation (Clark, 1959; Frost, 1980; Mottaz, 1981; Kanungo, 1983; Hirschfeld & Feild, 2000; Nair & Vohra, 2009). Work alienation is one of the most important factors that cause job dissatisfaction and low job performance among employees (Shepard, 1969; Hofstede, 1976).

The antecedents of this phenomenon can be categorized mainly into three headings as individual, organizational and environmental (Chiaburu, 2014; Şimşek, 2006). The environmental antecedents such as macro-economic, social, cultural and legal conditions are out of scope for this particular study as the level of analysis is organization. The main organizational antecedents of work alienation can be listed as organizational structure, organizational climate, physical and psychological work conditions, lack of career advancement opportunities and lack of social support (Miller, 1967; Kanungo, 1983; Nair & Vohra, 2010; Tutar, 2010; O’Donohue ve Nelson, 2014; Shantz, 2015). Of course, alienation is an individual experience (Yuill, 2011). So it must be underlined that what an employee perceives of these organizational antecedents is the real cause of work alienation. As Mottaz (1981) states it, work alienation is caused by needs and expectations not being satisfied.

The employees whose expectations not being satisfied may feel that their organization does not keep its promises agreed on before. That’s a phenomenon which is called psychological contract breach by organizational behavior researchers. Psychological contract which defines the mutual expectations held by the organization and the employee (Argyris, 1960; Kotter, 1973) has attracted considerable attention from researchers studying employment relationships (Cassar and Briner, 2011). If or when one of the parties feels that the contract is not honored by the counter party, psychological contract breach occurs (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). So, when an employee perceives psychological contract breach she/he feels disappointed (Kotter, 1973, p. 93). Promises are not kept, expectations are not satisfied. We predict that this process leads to work alienation based on previous studies which show that psychological contract breach would cause work alienation (Vickers and Parris, 2007; Archibald, 2009; Li and Chen, 2018).

As it was stated before, work alienation is an individual experience which occurs at the end of a configurational process involving both psychological/personal and organizational antecedents. On this basis, it is argued that the experience of work alienation is altered by the psychological state of the focal person. Adapted from the discipline of psychology, psychological capital phenomenon has provided an important framework for organizational behavior researchers to analyze the psychological state of employees. Psychological capital can be defined as the positive psychological state that comprises four psychological resources: self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Past research shows that psychological capital has many organizational and individual antecedents & outcomes and it plays an important moderating role between various organizational phenomena (Cheung et al., 2011, Newman et al., 2014; Shukla and Rai, 2015). Based on its moderating role between negative organizational conditions and negative individual outcomes such as depressive symptoms and lower levels of meaning of life (Liu et al., 2012; Epitropaki, 2013), psychological capital plays a crucial role in this study.