

Unveiling Employee Voice Amidst PC Breach and Violation

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Abstract/Summary of submission

The study of organisational change remains a critical focus for management scholars and practitioners, as organisations continually evolve. Organisational change encompasses various perspectives such as organisational development and strategic management, with definitions ranging from the deliberate alteration of work processes to the execution of corporate strategies. Psychological contract (PC) plays a vital role in employees' acceptance of change initiatives, influencing their attitudes and behaviours. While research emphasises the importance of individual change readiness in facilitating successful change implementation, there remains a gap in understanding how PC type and individual change readiness interact to shape employee responses to PC breach and violation resulting from organisational change. Additionally, studies highlight the intricate relationship between PC breach and employee voice behaviour during periods of organisational change. Employees may express concerns or grievances in response to perceived breach, influenced by the quality of relationships within the organisation. Understanding these dynamics is essential for leaders and managers, particularly during times of change. This study aims to explore how PC type and individual change readiness influence employee voice amidst perceived PC breach and violation.

Track

Organisational Psychology (Employee Response to Organisational Change)

Introduction

The context of organisational change remains a dynamic focal point for both scholars and practitioners in management due to the continuous evolving nature of organisations. Conceptually, organisational change involves multifaceted work, incorporating various viewpoints such as organisational development and strategic management. Porras and Robertson (1992) define organisational change as the deliberate effort to alter work processes, aiming to enhance organisational performance while fostering individual employee growth. Conversely, within strategic management, Dunphy (2000) characterises organisational change as the implementation of corporate strategies. Irrespective of the conceptual perspective, the universal nature of organisational change is undeniable, with virtually all organisations navigating through multiple and ongoing transitions, especially after the COVID-19 era and during the current challenging economic conditions (Carnegie et al., 2022). Consequently, examining the intricacies of organisational change becomes imperative to facilitate both organisational adaptation and employee engagement throughout the process.

Existing research underscores the crucial role that an employee's PC (PC) plays as a precursor to the successful acceptance and integration of change initiatives (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Jones et al., 2005; Khaw et al., 2023; Rafferty et al., 2013). Moreover, empirical evidence indicates a reciprocal relationship between organisational change and employees' perceptions of their post-change relationship with the organisation (Schalk et al., 1998). According to Schalk et al. (1998), PC significantly shapes employee attitudes, which, in turn, influences their behaviours. Armenakis (1993) asserts that individual change readiness precedes either resistance to or support for change initiatives. This sentiment is echoed by Vakola (2014), who argues that organisational change readiness stands as a vital factor influencing employee endorsement of change endeavours. Stevens (2013) further emphasises the critical role of individual change readiness in dictating the outcomes of change initiatives (Khaw et al., 2023; Oreg et al., 2011; Rafferty et al., 2013). However, despite the wealth of research in this area, a notable gap exists concerning the interaction between PC type and individual change readiness in shaping employee behavioural responses to change, more specifically the voice behaviour. To address this gap, this paper aims to investigate the collective impact of these variables within the context of organisational change. In addition to this gap, there is also a lack of understanding of the complex interaction between PC breach, violation and employee voice.

Previous scholars have underscored the intricate and multifaceted nature of the relationship between PC breach, violation, and employee voice behaviour within organisational settings, particularly during times of organisational change (Afshan et al., 2021; Botha & Steyn, 2023). Where it is acknowledged that during periods of organisational change, such as restructuring, mergers, or shifts in leadership, the PC between employees and the organisation may be particularly vulnerable to PC breaches. In particular, employees may perceive the changes as violations of their expectations regarding job security, career advancement, or work conditions. Consequently, these breaches can significantly impact employee morale, trust, and commitment to the organisation. In response to PC breach, employees may engage in voice behaviour as a means of expressing their concerns, grievances, or suggestions for improvement. However, the nature and tone of this voice behaviour can vary widely, ranging from constructive feedback to aggressive criticism change (Afshan et al., 2021; Botha & Steyn, 2023). The complexity of this relationship is further compounded by factors such as the quality of relationships within the organisation.

Research suggests that positive relationships with supervisors and coworkers can mitigate the negative effects of PC breach on voice behaviour. Strong alignment with organisational objectives provides employees with channels through which they can express their concerns more constructively and feel heard and valued (Afshan et al., 2021; Botha & Steyn, 2023). Therefore, this study further aims to examine the combined effect of PC type and individual change readiness on employee voice in times of perceived PC breach and violation. The proposed research model is presented in figure 1.

This study therefore contributes to the literature in two ways. First, by unpacking the complex interaction between PC type and individual change readiness in shaping employee behavioural responses, particularly, employee voice. Second, by unpacking the combined effect of PC type and individual change readiness on employee voice in times of perceived PC breach and violation. By examining these elements in more depth, this study aims to contribute to the organizational change, voice, and PC literatures.

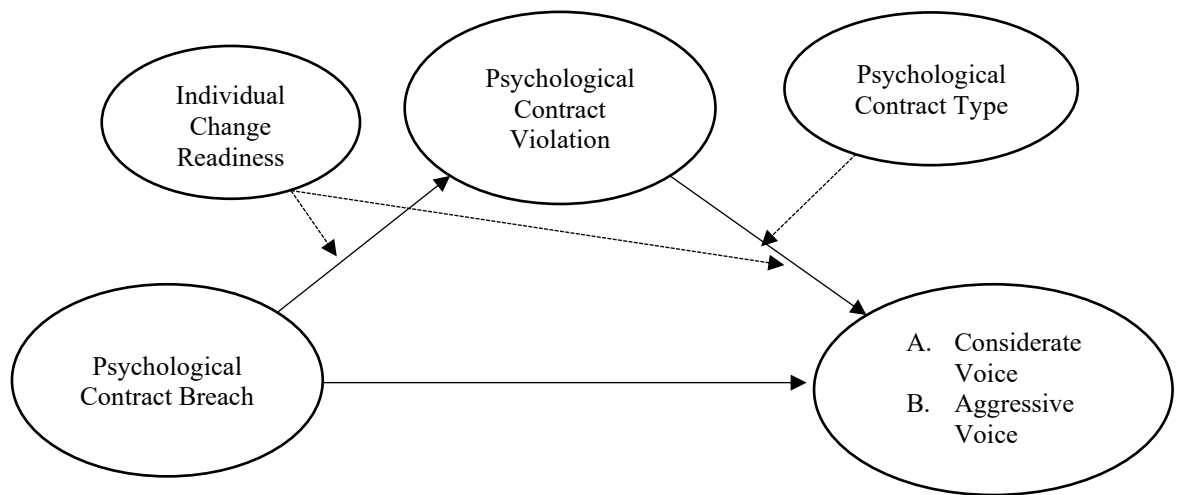


Figure 1: Proposed research model

Theoretical Background and Propositions Development

Individual Change Readiness

Individual employee's attitudes towards organisational change, particularly their level of individual change readiness, play a critical role in shaping their behavioural responses amid organisational transformations. This readiness is multifaceted, encompassing affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions (Bouckenooghe, 2010; Khaw et al., 2023; Rafferty et al., 2013). Bouckenooghe (2010) emphasises the importance of the cognitive facet, focusing on employees' perspectives regarding the advantages, usefulness, importance, and the requisite understanding to effectively manage change (Khaw et al., 2023). Armenakis, et al (1993) offer a broader definition, capturing organisational members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the necessity of changes and the organisation's capacity to implement them successfully. While Bouckenooghe (2010) highlights the cognitive aspect, Holt et al. (2007) advocate for a comprehensive perspective, integrating both cognitive and affective

components alongside contextual and individual characteristics (Petrou et al., 2018; Weiner, 2020). Choi (2011) further emphasises the significance of beliefs in individual change readiness, particularly concerning the perceived necessity of change and one's adaptive capacity (Alqudah et al., 2022). Employees' willingness to embrace change is paramount for the success of organisational transformation, as the achievement of organisational objectives relies upon the collective efforts of individuals (Alqudah et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2005).

As highlighted by George and Jones (2001), organisational change unfolds through the actions of individual members, underscoring the importance of their readiness levels. Research indicates that individuals exhibit varying levels of readiness for change, which significantly influences their responses during organisational transitions (Vakola et al., 2013; Oreg et al., 2011; Weiner, 2020). Vakola (2014) identifies a positive association between an individual's core self-evaluation—a personality trait encompassing self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability—and their readiness for change. Those with high change readiness typically demonstrate positive attitudes and proactive support for change initiatives (Vakola, 2014). They exhibit confidence in the success of change endeavours and may perceive change as an avenue for personal growth and benefit (Judge et al., 1999; Weiner, 2020).

Conversely, individuals with low change readiness may exhibit resistance to new work practices, viewing change as a threat lacking in perceived benefits or enhancements to their status (Vakola, 2014; Weiner, 2020). Consequently, they develop negative attitudes towards change and may be less inclined to adapt proactively. In essence, employees' diverse levels of change readiness significantly influence their attitudes and responses during organisational change endeavours.

This study adds to the change literature by arguing that PC and voice plays an important role in the context of organizational change. In particular, we argue that the salience of PC and voice to employee behaviour is even more apparent in organizations where there are continuous or transformational changes than those where there are only incremental changes. This relationship is particularly important to unpack post COVID-19 as we return to workplaces where many have undergone significant, transformational changes. Consequently, in order to retain and engage remaining or new workers, greater insight is needed into this complex interaction.

Psychological Contract Theory

Rousseau (1990) offers a concise yet comprehensive definition of PC as "the individual's beliefs about mutual obligations, in the context of the relationship between employer and employee" (p. 391). This definition captures the essence of PC, highlighting the individual employee's perspective shaped within the framework of the employing organisation. In simpler terms, Rousseau (1995) explains that PC represents the beliefs held by the employee, which are influenced by the organisation, regarding the terms of an exchange agreement between the organisation and themselves. These beliefs are embedded in the employee's interpretation of both explicit and implicit promises made to them by the organisation. Essentially, PC revolves around the obligations perceived by both parties: the organisational obligations, which are perceived to be obligatory for the organisation to fulfil, and the employee obligations, which are perceived to be obligatory for the employee to fulfil. This understanding is based on the promises exchanged between the employer and the employee (Stouten et al., 2018; van der Smitten, et al., 2013).

It's crucial to acknowledge that while employees may hold certain perceptions regarding the organisation's obligations, these perceptions may not always align with the organisation's own understanding. In other words, there may be discrepancies between how employees perceive the promises made by the organisation and how the organisation perceives its obligations (Rousseau, 1995). This disparity in perception underscores the importance of recognising the subjective nature of PC and the individual employee's interpretation of the exchange relationship within the employment context (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; van der Smissen, et al., 2013).

PC, as explained by Shore et al. (2004), are profoundly influenced by the context within which they operate. Context refers to the surrounding environment or setting that shapes the obligations inherent in the employer-employee relationship. It encompasses both the explicit and implicit terms and conditions that define this relationship. The significance of context lies in its multifaceted and multi-dimensional nature, which provides a framework of opportunities and constraints that impact the obligations and dynamics between employees and their organisations. Shore et al. (2004) shows this complexity by highlighting the nested contexts in which individuals in traditional jobs may find themselves (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; van der Smissen, et al., 2013). These nested contexts may include the specific job role, the dynamics within the workgroup, the structure of the department and division, organisational culture, organisational change or transformation, the broader occupational landscape, the labour market dynamics, as well as influences from family and national culture.

Given the profound impact of context on the relationship between employees and the organisation, it stands to reason that any changes within the organisational context would inevitably influence the exchange relationships between employees and their employers. For instance, organisational changes such as restructuring, mergers, or leadership changes can alter the context within which PCs operate, thereby affecting the expectations, perceptions, and obligations of both parties involved (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; van der Smissen, et al., 2013).

Psychological contract terms and types

Building on Rousseau's (1990) initial proposition, Rousseau, and her colleagues (1995) introduced the idea that PCs can be mapped along a continuum, ranging from transactional to relational, outlined by seven distinct contract features: content focus, inclusion, time-frame, formalisation, stability, scope and tangibility. Transactional terms and relational terms differ significantly in their features and focus. Transactional terms emphasise economic aspects, involve only a partial engagement with the person, have a close-ended and specific time frame, are formalised in written form, remain static, have a narrow focus, and are public and observable. In contrast, relational terms encompass both economic and emotional aspects, engage the whole person, have an open-ended and indefinite time frame, can be formalised in both written and unwritten forms, are dynamic and subject to change, have a pervasive and broad focus, and are subjective and implicitly understood. In essence, transactional terms are limited and explicit, focusing on immediate, specific exchanges, while relational terms are broader and more implicit, covering a wider range of personal and emotional dimensions.

Research highlights that the terms "transactional" and "relational" are not mutually exclusive concepts; rather, they often merge within an individual's PC (MacNeil, 1985; Rousseau, 1990; Rousseau et al., 1995). This perspective challenges the traditional dichotomy that confines an individual's PC strictly to either transactional or relational terms. Instead, it emphasises the intricate interplay of these features within the employment relationship. By acknowledging the coexistence of both transactional and relational elements, researchers can attain a better understanding of the multifaceted dynamics inherent in the employment relationship between an employee and organisation.

Rousseau (1995) identified two contemporary contract features, time frame, and performance, in shaping PC and highlighting the dynamics of the employment relationship. Time frame relates to the duration of the employment commitment, which can manifest as either finite and short-term or indefinite and long-term (Rousseau, 1995). On the other hand, performance requirements describe the specificity of performance expectations inherent in the employment agreement (Rousseau, 1995). These expectations may vary from clearly defined, leaving little room for ambiguity, to loosely defined, allowing for greater flexibility and interpretation.

Rousseau (1995) expanded MacNeil's (1985) contract typology by incorporating two critical features: time frame and performance requirements, creating a 2 x 2 framework. This framework gave rise to four distinct PC types: transactional, relational, balanced, and transitional. In explaining the four types, the transactional and relational PCs stand out distinctly and these are the two types most frequently used in current research. Transactional contracts are characterised by short-term, task-oriented relationships with clear performance expectations, leading employees to prioritise fulfilling specific job duties (Rousseau, 1995). A transactional PC centres on a straightforward exchange between the employee and the organisation. In this contractual arrangement, employees receive compensation in exchange for fulfilling their job responsibilities satisfactorily, highlighting a clear and measurable give-and-take dynamic. The onus of performance lies solely on the employee, who is expected to meet the predetermined job requirements (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Millward & Hopkins, 1998).

In contrast, relational contracts emphasise long-term, open-ended relationships with well-defined performance expectations, fostering strong loyalty and mutual commitment (Rousseau, 1995). A relational PC is characterised by a continuous and multifaceted bond between the employee and the organisation. Alongside financial remuneration, employees with a relational PC also obtain non-monetary benefits such as reciprocal loyalty, support, and career advancement opportunities. This type of contract places a distinct emphasis on the organisation's role in nurturing a sense of belonging and commitment among its employees. Here, the responsibility for performance shifts more towards the employer, who is tasked with providing support and avenues for employee development (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Millward & Hopkins, 1998).

The differentiation between these two types of PC extends far beyond contractual specifics; it deeply influences the identity formation of employees and their connection with the organisation (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; van der Smissen, et al., 2013). Employees who predominantly adhere to a relational PC tend to internalise the values of the company through mentorship and socialisation processes within the organisational framework. Their identities become intricately intertwined with that of the organisation, fostering a profound sense of loyalty and dedication (Millward & Hopkins, 1998; Rousseau, 1995; Turnley, et al.,

2003; Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). For these individuals, the beneficiary of the exchange relationship is not solely themselves but also the organisation as a whole.

Conversely, employees who predominantly subscribe to a transactional PC derive their sense of work identity from their individual skills and competencies. They perceive organisations merely as places of employment where they hold limited emotional attachment or commitment to the organisational entity itself (Millward & Hopkins, 1998; Rousseau, 1995; Turnley, et al., 2003; Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). In this scenario, the primary beneficiary of the exchange relationship is the individual employee. This distinction in PC orientation profoundly influences how employees perceive their roles within the organisation and their level of engagement and commitment to organisational goals and values (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; van der Smissen, et al., 2013).

The influence of these PC types on employee characteristics is substantial and multifaceted. Rousseau's (1995) research underscores that employees primarily aligned with a transactional contract often display characteristics such as low membership commitment, weaker organisational identification, and a heightened propensity for exercising their freedom to enter into new contracts or seek alternative employment opportunities. These responses suggest that when faced with unsatisfactory conditions or limited growth prospects, employees with transactional PCs are more likely to respond in a manner to satisfy their personal goals avoiding the organisation's goals (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998; van der Smissen, et al., 2013).

Conversely, individuals predominantly subscribing to a relational PC tend to exhibit contrasting traits. They typically demonstrate high levels of membership commitment, a strong affective attachment to the organisation, and a profound sense of identification with its goals and values. These employees are more likely to invest emotionally in their work and the company, fostering a deep sense of loyalty and attachment to their employing organisation. As a result, they are more inclined to remain engaged and dedicated, even in the face of challenges or uncertainties, contributing positively to the organisational culture and performance (Rousseau, 1995).

Psychological contract breach and violation

PC breach, as stated by Robinson, et al. (1994), happens when one party in a relationship perceives that the other party has failed to uphold promised obligations. Within the employment context, this breach revolves around the concept of PC—an implicit, unwritten agreement between an employee and their organisation. Morrison and Robinson (1997) elaborate on PC breach by stressing that a perceived breach of PC involves the belief that one's organisation has not fulfilled one or more obligations within this contract in a manner corresponding to the employee's contributions (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). This perception of a breach in the PC mainly revolves around a cognitive assessment—an employee's reflection on whether the organisation has fulfilled its duties, influenced by their perception of the commitments made by both sides. It is crucial to acknowledge that PC breach is inherently perceptual and subjective. This implies that the determination of whether a breach has occurred is highly individualised and is based on the employee's perception of the situation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Before 1997, literature on PC lacked a clear differentiation between the terms 'PC breach' and 'PC violation'. Researchers frequently used these terms interchangeably when discussing employees' perceptions of an organisation's failure to fulfil its obligations or perceived failings in PC. However, in 1997, Morrison and Robinson introduced a precise distinction between these two concepts. They defined PC breach as the cognitive response that occurs when an employee perceives that the organisation has not met its obligations as outlined in the PC (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). This perception of unmet obligations can lead to a sense of PC breach on the part of the employee following a comparison process. In contrast, PC violation is identified as an escalation of PC breach to an affective state. It involves not only the cognitive appraisal of PC breach but also an intense emotional response (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Morrison and Robinson's (1997) conception of PC violation is recognised as multi-faceted, encompassing a diverse range of emotional reactions. These emotions can range from relatively mild, such as disappointment and frustration, to more extreme emotions like anger, resentment, and bitterness. (Pate & Malone, 2000; Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Rousseau, 1989; Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Turnley & Feldman, 2000).

Organisational change often triggers perceptions of PC breach and subsequent PC violation. Various perspectives exist regarding the essence of organisational change. In the strategic management literature, organisational change pertains to the execution of new corporate strategies (Choi & Ruona, 2011). Conversely, within the organisational development literature, organisational change encompasses endeavours to restructure the work environment to enhance both organisational performance and employee development (Freese, 2007). Regardless of the specific perspective, organisational change indicates a shift in the organisational context. Given that PCs are intrinsically linked to context, it is unsurprising that organisational change can be perceived as a breach or violation of the PC between employers and employees. Freese (2007), in her longitudinal study on the ramifications of organisational change on PCs, observed that the perception of violation frequently accompanies organisational change (Chaudry, et al., 2011). Employees' behaviour may be influenced either positively or negatively, contingent upon whether the change is perceived as fulfilment or nonfulfilment of PC (Rousseau, 1995).

Individual change readiness as a moderator between PC breach and violation

While PC breach serves as a precursor to PC violation, research indicates that not all instances of breach escalate to the level of violation (Conway & Briner, 2009; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Morrison and Robinson (1997) contend that this is because, upon perceiving a breach, employees undergo a cognitive interpretation process to make sense of the event. This interpretive process is crucial, particularly when the breach is unexpected and negative, as it entails seeking an understanding of the breach and its context (Conway & Briner, 2009; Henderson et al., 2021; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). However, there are occasions when employees unconsciously interpret the breach, leading to feelings of violation without conscious recognition of the cognitive assessments that generate these emotions (Conway & Briner, 2009; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). In such cases, employees may either consciously reconstruct these assessments or remain unaware of them.

The interpretation process plays a vital role in mediating the link between the perception of PC breach and subsequent feeling of PC violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). This process comprises several key components, each

influencing the relationship between breach and violation. These components include assessing the outcomes of breach, attributing reasons for its occurrence, forming judgments about the fairness of treatment, and considering the broader social contract governing the situation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Each of these elements can either exacerbate or alleviate feelings of violation following a PC breach.

As emphasised by George and Jones (2001), the dynamics of organisational change are fundamentally shaped by the actions of individual members, thereby underscoring the pivotal role of their readiness levels. Extensive research has demonstrated that individuals manifest varying degrees of readiness for change, exerting significant influence on their reactions amid organisational transitions (Khaw et al., 2023; Oreg et al., 2011; Rafferty et al., 2013; Vakola et al., 2013). Vakola (2014) delves into the connection between individuals' core self-evaluation and their propensity to embrace change within organisational settings. The findings of this research unveil a compelling correlation: individuals with a strong core self-evaluation tend to exhibit higher levels of readiness for change (Vakola, 2014). This readiness manifests in their optimistic outlook towards change initiatives and their active participation in driving organisational transformations forward (Rafferty et al., 2013; Khaw et al., 2023). For these individuals, change represents not only a necessary evolution but also a promising avenue for personal development and advancement. Conversely, individuals with a lower level of readiness for change may harbour reservations and apprehensions towards change, viewing it as a disruptive force that threatens their established routines and roles within the organisation. Their reluctance to embrace change can result in resistance and a reluctance to engage in initiatives aimed at organisational transformation (Khaw et al., 2023; Oreg et al., 2011; Rafferty et al., 2013; Vakola et al., 2013).

Based on the literature reviewed we argue that:

Proposition 1: Individual change readiness will moderate the relationship between PC breach and PC violation (refer to figure 1).

However, to further unpack these complex relationships, we also need to understand employee voice behaviour.

Employee Voice Behaviour

The concept of voice, originally introduced by Hirschman in 1970 as "any attempt to change, rather than escape from, an objectionable state of affairs," holds profound significance within the employment dynamics (p. 30). voice refers to the proactive efforts of employees to enhance their working conditions by suggesting solutions or addressing issues (Akhtar, Bal & Long, 2016; Farrell, 1983; Khaw et al., 2023; Kutaula et al., 2020). However, the precise definition of voice varies across different fields of study. In contemporary Employment Relations (ER) research, voice functions as a mechanism for collectively representing employee interests (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Wilkinson et al, 2018). In this context, voice serves as a means for workers to pool their concerns and advocate for their collective well-being. Conversely, within the domain of Organisational Behaviour (OB) research, voice is viewed from a more individualised perspective, representing the expression of individual workers' desires and choices to convey information and ideas to management for the organisation's benefit (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Nechanska et al., 2020; Wilkinson et al, 2018). Researchers consistently highlight that voice represents discretionary and proactive behaviour at the individual level (Akhtar, Bal & Long, 2016; Barry & Wilkinson, 2016;

Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2018). It reflects the notion that employees, when confronted with concerns or problems, have the option to either exit the situation or engage in constructive efforts to effect change, thereby playing a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of the employment relationship. This study adopts the OB perspective of the voice behaviour.

The proactive nature of voice becomes evident when employees, faced with unfavourable work conditions or strained relationships, choose to engage in constructive actions. These actions may involve initiating discussions with supervisors or coworkers, taking independent steps to resolve issues, offering alternative solutions, or seeking external assistance, such as turning to unions or whistleblowing (Farrell, 1983; Khaw et al., 2023; Rusbult et al., 1988; Vantilborgh, 2015). voice represents an active and constructive response to negative aspects within the employee-organisation relationship (Farrell, 1983; Khaw et al., 2023; Sherf et al., 2021). Through voice, employees gain a platform to articulate their concerns clearly, express their desires, and convey the extent of their dissatisfaction (Dowding et al., 2000). This tendency to employ voice becomes more prominent when the Exit option is less viable, and employees feel bound to the organisation. In such cases, employees maintain hope that expressing their concerns will lead to improvements (Dowding et al., 2000; Lassalle, 2020; Withey & Cooper, 1989). In essence, voice serves as a proactive, problem-solving mechanism within the employment relationship, particularly when it represents the most viable path for employees to address their concerns and foster positive change.

Expanding on the voice concept, Hagedoorn et al. (1999) introduced a refined perspective, distinguishing between two forms of voice based on their degree of constructiveness: considerate voice and aggressive voice. Considerate voice requires attempts to address problems while considering both one's personal concerns and those of the organisation (Hagedoorn et al., 1999). In contrast, aggressive voice involves efforts to achieve desired outcomes without considering the organisation's concerns (Hagedoorn et al., 1999). Furthermore, researchers assert that employees are inclined to engage in voice behaviour because they are motivated by issues they value and care about (Khaw et al., 2023; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020). They believe that responding through voice not only benefits them but also holds significance for the organisation, as it presents an opportunity for improvement (Khaw et al., 2023; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020). In essence, the nature of voice can range from considerate problem-solving to more assertive, goal-oriented approaches, driven by the significance of the issues at hand to both employees and the organisation.

Psychological contract types and individual change readiness as moderators

The examination of PC within the employment context reveals a contrast between transactional and relational contracts, each shaping the dynamics of the employer-employee relationship in distinct ways. Transactional contracts revolve around time-bound exchanges primarily focused on quantifiable transactions between the employer and the employee (Robinson, et al., 1994). These agreements are characterised by their clarity regarding performance terms, often specifying tangible deliverables and rewards within a defined timeframe. In contrast, relational contracts go beyond temporal constraints, encompassing both monetisable and non-monetisable exchanges that emphasise socio-emotional connections between the parties involved. Relational contracts are characterised by their long-term and open-ended nature, with performance requirements often indefinitely defined (Rousseau, 1995). Instead of solely transactional considerations, relational contracts prioritise

the development of relationships built on trust, mutual respect, and shared values (Botha & Steyn, 2021; Santos et al., 2024; Topa et al., 2022).

Rousseau (1995) further explains the employee characteristics associated with each contract type. Employees with transactional contract typically exhibit lower levels of membership commitment and weaker organisational identification. They often perceive their relationship with the organisation as instrumental, with greater flexibility in seeking alternative arrangements or exiting the organisation only when necessary. Conversely, employees with relational contracts demonstrate higher levels of membership commitment, strong emotional ties to the organisation, and an alignment with its objectives and values. These individuals prioritise the relational aspect of their employment relationship, viewing their affiliation with the organisation as a meaningful and enduring partnership grounded in shared values and mutual respect (Santos et al., 2024).

As discussed earlier, Hagedoorn et al. (1999) introduced employee voice within organisational contexts, distinguishing between two forms: considerate voice and aggressive voice. Considerate voice embodies an approach where employees attempt to address and resolve issues within the organisation while taking into account both their personal concerns and those of the organisation (Hagedoorn et al., 1999; Khaw et al., 2023; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020). This form of voice behaviour reflects a constructive and empathetic problem-solving approach, characterised by a balanced consideration of diverse perspectives and interests within the workplace. On the contrary, aggressive voice involves efforts to effect change or resolve issues within the organisation with little regard for the concerns or interests of the organisation (Hagedoorn et al., 1999; Khaw et al., 2023; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020). This form of voice behaviour is marked by assertiveness and a singular focus on achieving desired outcomes, often at the expense of organisational harmony or cohesion. Employees exhibiting aggressive voice may employ confrontational tactics or pursue their agenda without adequately considering the broader organisational context or implications (Khaw et al., 2023; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020).

The choice between considerate and aggressive voice behaviours is influenced by various factors, including individual dispositions, organisational culture, and the prevailing PC between employees and the organisation (Khaw et al., 2023; Rousseau, 1995; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020). Employees with a predominantly relational PC place a high value on maintaining and nurturing their relationship with the organisation (Rousseau, 1995). They prioritise socio-emotional connections and seek to preserve the well-being of the organisation while addressing their own concerns. Given their emphasis on fostering positive interpersonal relationships and organisational harmony, employees with a relational PC are more inclined to respond through considerate voice (Khaw et al., 2023; Rousseau, 1995; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020). This approach aligns with their desire to ensure that their concerns are addressed in a manner that upholds organisational interests and promotes mutual understanding. By adopting considerate voice, these employees demonstrate a commitment to constructive engagement and collaborative problem-solving, thereby contributing to a supportive and harmonious work environment (Khaw et al., 2023; Rousseau, 1995; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020).

In contrast, individuals with a predominantly transactional PC prioritise personal gain and are primarily focused on short-term economic benefits (Rousseau, 1995). With their

emphasis on achieving individual objectives, employees with a transactional PC tend to lean towards employing an aggressive voice as their preferred response. This inclination aligns with their aim of addressing personal concerns while avoiding organisational interests and mutual understanding. By opting for aggressive voice, these individuals showcase a commitment to resolving issues through an individualistic problem-solving approach (Khaw et al., 2023; Rousseau, 1995; Vantilborgh, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020).

Considering these scholarly views, we further argue that:

Proposition 2: PC type will moderate the mediated relationship between PC breach and Considerate voice such that (a) when employees have a relational PC, this relationship will be stronger and (b) when employees have a transactional PC, this relationship will be weaker (refer to figure 1).

Proposition 3: PC type will moderate the mediated relationship between PC breach and Aggressive voice such that (a) when employees have a relational PC, this relationship will be weaker and (b) when employees have a transactional PC, this relationship will be stronger (refer to figure 1).

Furthermore, previous research also indicates that individuals with high levels of readiness for change exhibit a positive outlook towards change initiatives and actively engage in driving organisational transformations. For them, change signifies not only a necessary progression but also a chance for personal and professional development (Khaw et al., 2023; Oreg et al., 2011; Rafferty et al., 2013; Vakola et al., 2013). Conversely, individuals with lower readiness for change may resist it due to apprehensions about disruption to their routines and roles. Understanding employees' core self-evaluations is crucial for effective change management, allowing organisations to tailor strategies and foster a supportive culture conducive to smoother transitions (Khaw et al., 2023; Oreg et al., 2011; Rafferty et al., 2013; Vakola et al., 2013).

Thus, we finally argue that:

Proposition 4: Individual change readiness will moderate the mediated relation between PC breach and considerate voice such that (a) when employees have high change readiness, this relationship will be stronger and (b) when employees have a low change readiness, this relationship will be weaker (refer to figure 1).

Proposition 5: Individual change readiness will moderate the mediated relation between PC breach and aggressive voice such that (a) when employees have high change readiness, this relationship will be weaker and (b) when employees have a low change readiness, this relationship will be stronger (refer to figure 1).

Conclusion and Expected Research Contribution

This study contributes to our understanding of how individual change readiness acts as a moderator in the context of employees' perceptions of PC breach and violation, as well as the subsequent impact on voice behaviour. Identifying individual change readiness as a potential factor influencing how employees interpret PC violation resulting from PC breach contributes to the understanding of the interpretation process within the PC theory. By integrating the previously disconnected theoretical concepts of PC, individual change readiness, and voice, this study sheds light on how employees may respond to instances of PC breach and violation. While previous research has examined these concepts independently, this study fills a gap by examining the combined effects of PC breach and PC violation within the context of organisational change on voice behaviour. Particularly relevant following the COVID-19 pandemic and amidst economic challenges, where perceived PC breach and violation are increasingly prevalent, understanding the impact of PC type and individual change readiness on voice behaviour holds practical implications. Research has shown that the perception of an organisation failing to uphold its employment obligations can detrimentally affect trust, commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour, underscoring the importance of comprehending these dynamics in contemporary organisational settings. Our future research will investigate these propositions in more detail.

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