

XXXXXXXXXXXX Honors Thesis Proposal

Working Title:

A Deeper Look into the Formation of Psychological Contracts: A Process Theory

Integration

Project Purpose:

The purpose of this honors thesis is to explore, understand, and theorize the intricate psychological parts that come together to form the foundation for a psychological contract by combining psychological contracts and process philosophy theories.

Project Importance:

Prior research has shown the importance of psychological contracts in the workplace. The fulfillment or breach of psychological contracts has been shown to be related with employee outcomes such as organizational citizenship (Turnley, Bolino, Lester & Bloodgood, 2004), individual social status (Bingham, Oldroyd, Thompson, Bednar, & Bunderson, 2013), organizational trust (Robinson, 1996), commitment and loyalty (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Turnley & Feldman, 1999), work performance (Turnley & Feldman, 1999), and employee engagement in citizenship-type behavior (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002). With such critical outcomes relying on psychological contract breach or fulfillment, understanding the underlying premises upon which the contract is contrived is of crucial importance to both employees and employers.

Scholars have attempted to explain the psychological contract by relating it to several models. Specifically scholars have looked at social exchange (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2004; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994) or sense-making (Chaudhry, Wayne, & Schalk, 2009; De Vos & Freese, 2011; Morrison & Robinson, 1997) theories. However, these systems, when placed on top of psychological contracts, help us to understand the interpretation process individuals undergo within the development of the psychological contract (Sherman & Marley, 2015).

Sherman and Marley (2015) suggest adopting a schema theory to the development of psychological contracts. Such a theory suggests that the development of a psychological contract occurs in stages or units rather than as a subconscious stream of events - even though one may have developed a psychological contract without knowing it (Levinson, Price, Munden, Mandl, & Solley, 1962). What is needed is a theory that can explain the nuance of psychological contract formation and the delicate nature of balance in such formation. We can anticipate that when we come to a better understanding of the process of psychological contract formation we will not only better control such a contract so that desirable outcomes increase, and less favorable consequences decrease (Morley, 2007; Sturges & Guest, 2001), but also have a more complete theoretical background upon which to understand contract breach and fulfillment.

Project Overview:

One of my most exciting classes at BYU was a philosophy of science class. This class introduced me to process philosophy which in essence is the idea that everything is, "a matter of process, of activity, of change (*panta rhei*). Not stable things, but fundamental forces and the

varied and fluctuating activities they manifest constitute the world" (Rescher pg. 5). While it took me a long time to feel that I understood this philosophy I've come to see it as one that is highly useful in helping to explain the undergoing's around me.

I've always been interested in psychological contracts. I have done research with Dr. Bingham for the past year and we have looked at how psychological contracts affect customers, employees, and organizations. I've read academic article after article that depicts psychological contract fulfillment of breach. Throughout this process, I have noticed that the element of time has been omitted from many of these studies. I feel that something very important in these contracts is the process the two individuals or entities undergo to arrive at such a contract, whether such process and arrival is conscious or not. After thinking about it I decided that I wanted to see what the possible combination of the two theories of psychological contract and process philosophy would lead to. I believe such a union would help provide a stronger theoretical backbone to psychological contracts.

The format my honors thesis will take will be that of a theory piece that combines the two aforementioned theories. This theory piece will be of such academic rigor that it would merit presentation at a conference or publication in an academic journal. My thesis will help to expand the current knowledge of what constitutes the formation of a psychological contract and will help establish the importance of viewing the psychological contract as a process through time rather than as an event of breach or fulfillment in time.

Most of my research will be done online through various academic journals. I will be reading heavily and synthesizing current ideologies while creatively weaving in process

philosophy into psychological contracts. I also plan on reaching out to process philosophy scholars who I've worked with in the past and asking for their perspective on what I've written. I also plan to meet with Dr. Bingham at least every other week to discuss my progress and make course changes as necessary. He will also help me ensure my theory piece is up to academic standards.

Qualifications of Thesis Committee:

Faculty Advisor: Dr. John Bingham

Dr. Bingham is the chair of the Department of Management in the BYU Marriott School of Business and is the Donald L. Staheli Fellow. He conducts research in many areas including psychological contracts. His academic work has been published in top management journals including *Organization Science*, *Human Resource Management Review*, *Group and Organization Management*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Journal of Applied Psychology*. He has also received many awards for his teaching and mentoring of BYU students including the OBSA Outstanding MBA Mentor Award and the Marriott School Outstanding Faculty Teaching Award.

I've been working with Dr. Bingham for the last year as one of his research assistants. In that time we have been able to work together on multiple projects and I've come to respect his opinion and direction. I have grown under his guidance as a professor and look forward to continuing to work with him by having him as my faculty advisor for my thesis.

Faculty Reader: Dr. Jeffrey Thompson

Dr. Jeffrey Thompson has been the Director of the Romney Institute of Public Management since 2014. He is also an Associate Professor of Public Management. His research interests include, among other topics, ethics and psychological contracts. His research has also been published in top rated journals including Organization Science, Journal of Business Ethics, and Business Ethics Quarterly. He has received multiple awards for his scholarship in the academic field as well as teaching awards from the Romney Institute of Public Management.

I have had the opportunity to discuss academic articles with Dr. Thompson as he presented in a pre-phd reading class. His research is both interesting and academically rigorous. I would greatly look forward to having him read my thesis and be on the defense committee. His insights and questions would be beneficial, insightful, and constructive.

Department Honors Coordinator: Dr. Mark Hansen

Project Timeline:

Task	Time Frame
Academic Article Research	October 2 - October 16
Outline the Paper	October 16- October 30
Literature Review 1st Draft & Introduction 1st Draft	October 30 - November 13
Theory Section 1st Draft	November 13 - November 27
Introduction 2nd Draft & Conclusion 1st Draft	November 27 - December 11
Theory Section 2nd Draft	December 11 - December 26
Literature Review 2nd Draft & Conclusion 2nd Draft	December 26 - January 8
Full Paper Draft	January 8 - January 22

Full Paper Final	January 22 - February 5
Thesis Defense Information Form	Monday, February 6, 2017
Thesis Defense	February 7 - March 3

Funding:

As the culminating experience for my research project will be presenting my thesis at a conference, Dr. Bingham has suggested I request funding for travel, hotel, and food expenses related to the conference. There are multiple conferences at which I would be able to present this research. The break down of expenses below reflects the amount each expense would realistically occur according to Dr. Bingham.

Purpose	Amount Requested
Flight to Conference	\$500
Hotel	\$400
Food	\$100

Culminating Experience:

This thesis will be of such quality that it can be presented at a conference and/or submitted to an academic journal for publication. I plan, at the very least, to submit the thesis to the Academy of Management for presentation in the 2019 conference. Potential journals that I would submit this paper to include Organization Science, Journal of Applied Psychology, and Group and Organizational Management.

Works Cited

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