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Psychological Contract Breach and Counterproductive Work Behaviour Among Administrative Staff at a South African University: The Role of Revenge

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behaviour, and whether this relationship is mediated by feelings of revenge, among administrative staff at a South African university. A quantitative cross-sectional approach was utilised. Structured questionnaires were distributed to administrative employees at the selected university. The data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling through Smart PLS 4.0 to assess both direct and mediating effects. The results reveal a non-significant association between psychological contract breach and either form of counterproductive work behaviour, but a positive association between psychological contract breach and feelings of revenge. Full mediation of feelings of revenge between psychological contract breach and both forms of counterproductive work behaviour was found. Through highlighting the limited contextual applicability of some classical theories, the study contributes to organisational behaviour literature, particularly in institutions of higher learning. The findings suggest non-reliance on only one factor in understanding counterproductive work behaviours.

Keywords:

Psychological Contract Breach, Counterproductive Work Behaviour, Feelings of Revenge, Administrative Staff, South Africa

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Introduction

Counterproductive work behaviours (CWB) are unethical actions, such as sabotage, theft, gossiping, damage to property, unauthorised absenteeism, fraud, bullying and sexual harassment, directed at the organisation (CWB-O) or interpersonal (CWB-I) (Chinwuba, 2023) directed at fellow employees, customers or supervisors. The negative effects of counterproductive work behaviours, including reduced productivity (Carpenter, Whitman and Amrhein, 2021) and strained co-worker relationships (Hassan, 2021), have been empirically demonstrated. Due to these adverse effects, researchers have started focusing on its unique antecedents to identify ways to diminish its occurrence across different contexts.

A personal psychological factor that has gained popularity in human resource management studies and seems to play a role in aiding employees' engagement in counterproductive work behaviours is the psychological contract breach - a sense of broken trust between employees and their employers (Henderson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2021; Zahra & Kee, 2021). Although not much is written about its role in counterproductive work behaviours within the South African higher education sector, it is worth investigating it among administrative staff. These are employees who are at the point of contact for both academic staff and students (Clark, Chapleo & Suomi, 2020). They support the administrative aspects of the academic project at any university, mainly focusing on aspects of student administration such as admissions, enrolment, registration, sports, examinations, accommodation, and student life, among many.

Administrative staff at universities cannot be ignored when it comes to the increasing dynamics in employee demographics and digital transformation in the South African higher education sector (Stone, Cox, Gavin & Carpini, 2024). The reason is that changes in the sector in terms of, for example, curriculum transformation and increased access to education are bringing new work arrangements, resulting in strained employer-employee relationships (Ngobeni, Chibambo & Divala, 2023). In addition, there is evidence showing that the new work arrangements are sometimes viewed by administrative employees as disruptive and unfair and signal that the employer is not fulfilling the unwritten promises, often called the psychological contract (Mehta, Thanki, Panda & Trivedi, 2024). Resultantly, there are daily print and electronic media reports of counterproductive work behaviours among this group of employees at South African universities (Almarshd, 2021).

To further understand the circumstances in which psychological contract breach may affect counterproductive work behaviours among the administrative staff brings to the fore the call to examine the potential mediating mechanisms of the two variables. This study argues that while administrative staff at higher education institutions in the country may feel the employer has broken unwritten promises, engaging in counterproductive work depends on the development of feelings of revenge (FR), that is, motivation to retaliate (DiBlasi & Kassinove, 2022). Previous studies (Muhammad, Ahmad & Arzeen,

2024) have found that feelings of revenge control perceptions of psychological contract breach. Similarly, revenge is associated with perceived injustice and deviant acts (Clercq, Kundi, Sardar & Shahid, 2021). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that feelings of revenge and counterproductive work behaviour can be defined as equivalent situational behaviours in any context (Aliyu, 2023). Notwithstanding this evidence, the samples were, however, not administrative staff in the higher education sector, but in other contexts.

Against this background and to close the above gaps, this study investigates the intersection between psychological contract breach, feelings of revenge and counterproductive work behaviour among administrative staff at a South African University. The purpose is to uncover any intricate relationships in a university environment where cases of unfair labour practices are reported daily (Solomon & du Plessis, 2024) and ongoing perceptions of managerial unfairness (Mabusela, Ngonyama-Ndou & Mmako, 2024) are on the rise. The aim is to elucidate how unwritten psychological contract breach perceptions intertwine with revenge feelings to impact counterproductive work behaviour, offering an opportunity to test known classical organisational theories within a specific context.

The study, therefore, sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- To determine the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behaviour (directed at the organisation and interpersonal) among administrative staff
- To assess the mediating role of feelings of revenge in the relationship between psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behaviour (directed at the organisation and interpersonal).

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a multi-theory approach because of the multidisciplinary nature of investigating psychological contract breach, revenge and counterproductive work behaviour in a single study. Moreover, counterproductive work behaviour has been studied from multiple theoretical perspectives (Martinko, Gundlach & Douglas, 2003). Considering the three variables of the study, the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), the Organisational Justice Theory (OJT) and the Equity Theory were adopted.

The Conservation of Resources (Hobfoll, 1989) stresses that reaction is a rebound from resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001). In the work place, the resources can be psychological capital, a conducive work environment, social relationships, and work engagements beneficial to an employee. The COR argues

that employees seek to secure existing resources while looking for mechanisms to attain new ones (Hobfoll, 2001). This view is such that when employees feel resources loss (mistrust in employer), they make an effort to look for ways to attain new ones and preserve the ones they have left. Therefore, we propose that in line with (Berkowitz, 1990), perceptions of psychological contract breach can lead to frustration and then lead to counterproductive work behaviour such as coming late to work among administrative staff.

The Organisational Justice Theory (OJT) focuses on fairness in distribution, interaction and procedures in the society of group (Greenberg, 1990; Saunders and Thornhill, 2003). Within the higher education sector in South Africa, these could be fairness in the procedures for promotion, distribution or organisational benefits and treatment of administrative staff. The argument is that a perceived breach of fairness by administrative staff may affect their deviant behaviours. Thus, in tandem with Olabade and Mtembu (2023), justice perceptions can lead to retributive retaliation and enable understanding of deviant behaviour among administrative staff.

The Equity Theory (ET) (Adams, 1965) complements the above-mentioned theories in the sense that it argues that individuals assess their inputs (e.g., loyalty, effort) against what they receive in return (recognition, rewards). Thus, if administrative staff feel they are giving their best in their institutions, yet their employer has not lived up to their unwritten promise in comparison with other employees, they may retaliate by engaging in counterproductive work behaviours.

Counterproductive Work Behaviour

Early authors, such as Sackett (2002:10), Gruys and Sackett (2003:40), Sagie and Aycan (2003), Robinson and Bennett (1995), Berry, Ones and Sackett (2007) Vardi and Wiener (1996), Hollinger and Clark (1983) who have written about the concept have all concurred that it is not a unidimensional construct but is regarded as multi-dimensional. However, they offer different definitions because of the numerous disciplinary perspectives and terminology from which each defined the concept. All agree that counterproductive work behaviour is intentional, violates organisational norms, and results in negative consequences for individuals, groups or institutions (Kelloway, Loughlin, Barling & Nault, 2002).

Counterproductive work behavioural manifest in many forms in the work environment. Robinson and Bennet (1995) structured it into those behaviours that are directed at the organisation (CWBO) such as theft and property damage and those directed at individuals (CWBI) such as sexual harassment and bullying. All these behaviours negatively affect an organisation. Previous studies have found that both individual-level factors such as culture (Suseno, Chang, Hudik, Fang & Liu, 2021) and organisational-level factors such a leadership style (Ahmed, Zhang, Fouad, Mousa & Nour, 2024) can result in employees engaging in counterproductive work behaviour. Some of the resultant effects of the behaviours are reputational damage to an organisation (Carpenter, Whitman & Amrhein, 2021) and

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reduced productivity (Hassan, 2021). For example, at institutions of higher learning, administrative staff are usually the first contact with external customers such as potential students. Any behaviours that are counterproductive against the organisation, such as intentionally delaying in processing of applications or exams could harm the reputation of the institution.

Psychological Contract Breach

In the work context, psychological contract refers to expectations employees have and consider obvious to an employer or organisation to provide the employee with (Ngobeni, Saurombe & Joseph, 2022). These expectations may be associated with (a) growth and recognition, (b) benefits and control and (c) qualifications and life-balance and do not form part of the physical contract, but form part of norms, hence, the term psychological contract (Culiberg, Abosag & Cater, 2023). When the expectations are not met to a certain extent or dimension, there could be perceptions of psychological contract breach (PCB), where employees perceive that the employer organisation has failed to fulfil one or more obligations associated with perceived mutual promises (Gakovic & Tetrick, 2003; Akar & Yörük 2024). Psychological contract breach perceptions manifest themselves in various forms in the work place, such as negative emotional responses (Collins and Beauregard, 2020), mental health (Mensah, Amponsah-Taiwah & Baafi, 2024) and innovative work behaviour (Botha & Steyn, 2023). In this study, the concern was on the effect on administrative staffs' actions which are detrimental to the organisation or other fellow employees.

Psychological Contract Breach and Counterproductive Work Behaviour.

Perceived psychological contract breach is regarded as a very critical issue among employees who are highly sensitive to injustice, whether intentional or unintentional (Restubog, Hornsey, Bordia & Esposo, 2008). This is because when employees perceive injustice, perceived psychological contract breach is triggered, and they are likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviour such as being aggressive to co-workers and, in some cases, show disregard for their responsibilities (Eventus, Ekpo, Wonah, Chike, Oboko & Mofam, 2024). Within the context of this study, the unplanned student unrests at institutions of higher learning in South Africa often result in administrative staff having extra workload with no overtime pay. According to Witten (2019), unnegotiated extra workload on employees can result in the feeling of unfair treatment (breach), which might be followed by counterproductive work behaviours such as go slow, deliberate inefficiency and sabotage. Similarly, using the Equity Theory (Adams, 1965), previous studies have indicated that employees who perceive a breach of psychological contract in terms of remuneration are more likely to engage in some negative or deviant behaviours such as resigning, going on a strike, or going slow, to achieve some psychological equilibrium. This empirical evidence leads to the following hypothesis:

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H1: Perceived psychological contract breach positively influences counterproductive work behaviour directed at the organisation.

H2: Perceived psychological contract breach positively influences interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour.

Perceived Psychological Contract Breach and Feelings of Revenge

When perceived psychological contract breach occurs, retaliation through revenge is a factor which controls the negative breach feelings (Arif & Al Hassan, 2022). However, there is a gap in the literature about whether such evidence can be obtained within higher education context (Kanu, Ugwu, Ogba, Ujoatuonu, Ezeh, Eze, Okoro, Agudiegwu & Ugwu, 2022). Griep, Jones, Vantilborgh & Hansen (2017) showed that once an organisation breaches the psychological contract, for example, by disregarding corporate social responsibility, or in the context of higher education, by limiting promotional opportunities for administrative staff, employees tend to exercise punishment behaviours and feel a need to revenge towards the organisation instead of raising their concerns. This is supported by research which shows that psychological contract breach perceptions can arise in abusive supervision and toxic workplaces where a natural response is to retaliate against the organisation (Pradhan, Srivastava and Mishra, 2020). It is, therefore, hypothesised that:

H3: Perceived psychological contract breach positively influences feelings of revenge.

Feelings of Revenge and Counterproductive Work Behaviours

In universities, anger by support/administrative staff as a result of perceived injustice on the part of the institution could be a precursor of feelings of counterproductive work behaviours (Wallace & Coughlan, 2023). Faldetta (2021) support this evidence by arguing that, when feelings of revenge are developed, retaliation is the only possible solution, and this is practically done by engaging in counterproductive work behaviours. Muhammad, Ahmad and Arzeen (2024.) also found that feelings of revenge are associated with perceived injustice and deviant acts. To further justify the association between these two concepts, some previous studies have demonstrated that feelings of revenge and counterproductive work behaviour can be defined as equivalent situational behaviours in any context (Aliyu, 2023). As such, for this study, it is assumed that:

H4: Feelings of revenge positively influence counterproductive work behaviours directed at the organisation.

H5: Feelings of revenge positively influence interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour.

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The Role of Feelings of Revenge

Several studies have demonstrated the mediating role of revenge. Martínez-Monteagudo, Martínez-Monteagudo and Delgado, (2023) showed different revenge levels among gifted and non-gifted students and that it moderately or partially mediated the relationship between victimisation and bullying. Hyusein and Eyupoglu(2022) found that revenge motives towards the organisation fully mediated the relationship between perceived loafing and counterproductive work behaviour against the organisation (CWB-O), whereas it also fully mediated the relationship between perceived loafing and counterproductive work behaviours against other employees (CWB-I). Revenge mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and deviant work behaviour in the workplace (Ahmad, Dar & Rahman, 2023).

In a related study, Afshan, Kashif, Sattayawaksakul, Cheewaprakobkit and Wijenayake (2022) reported that revenge cognitions mediated the main effect of abusive supervision and the interactive effect of abusive supervision and traditionality on supervisor-directed deviance. In contrast, regarding gender differences in aggression (a form of counterproductive work behaviour) Yoshimura and Boon (2023) demonstrated that the revenge motive partially mediated between males and females. This means that the revenge motive may not be the only mediator of gender differences in physical aggression.

While the above provides some conclusive and inconclusive evidence regarding feelings of revenge, considering them in this study allows one to gain some understanding of their effects in the South African university setting. Therefore, it is proposed that:

H6: Feelings of revenge mediate the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behaviour against the organisation.

H7: Feelings of revenge mediate the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach and interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour.

The Conceptual Framework

Considering the above discussion from background to hypotheses, the following conceptual framework (Figure 1) guides the study. As priory mentioned, this study posits that psychological contract breach perceptions significantly impacts counterproductive work behaviour among administrative staff at a South African university, with feelings with feelings of revenge playing a mediating role empirical overview done above is depicted below.

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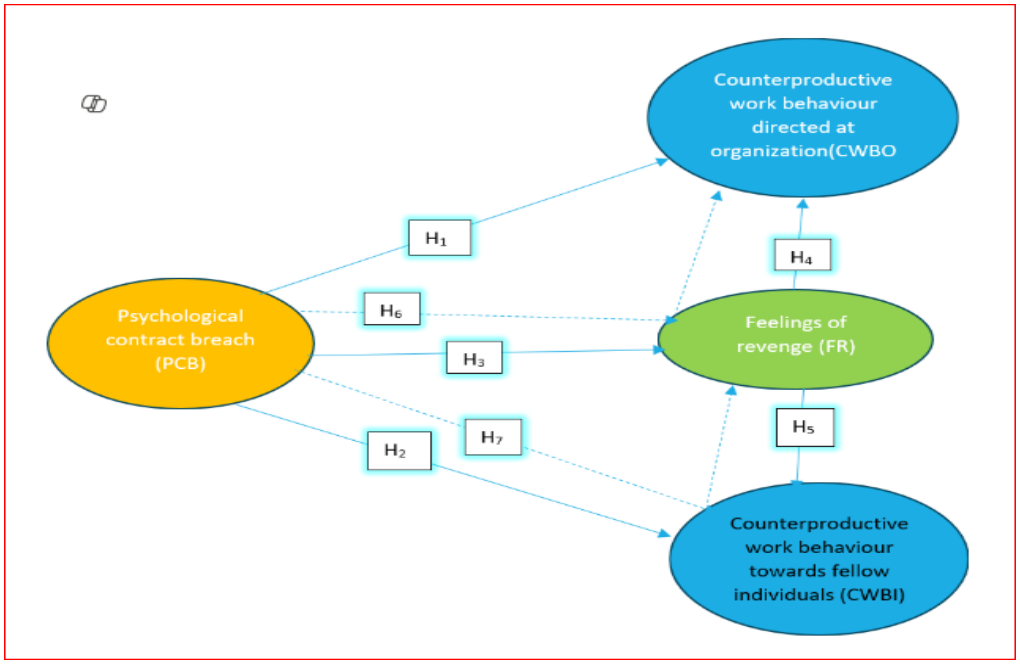

Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

Methods and Data

Methodologically, the study employed the positivist philosophical paradigm and a quantitative approach. These were appropriate to asthey enables the used of literature and theories to generate and test the proposed hypotheses. An ex-post facto correlational design was chosen becaue there was no manipulation of any variables involved. Structured questionnaires were ditributed to over 700 administrative employees at the selcted university. Respondents were convenintly seleted and given month to compolete the questionnaire. Out of the 700 questionnairs distributed, 283 were fully completed and collected, representing 40% response rate. Hair, Jr, Black, Babin and Anderson (2014), the minimum sample of 150 is adequate when constructs are less than seven. Structural Equation Modelling, using SMART PLS 4.0 was the main technique used to test both the direct and mediation effects. According to Hair, et al. (2014), SEM has the ability can execute simultaneous multiple predictions. The results are presented in the next sections.

Results and Discussion

The first part of the results focuses on descriptive statistics.

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Descriptive Statistics

The results of the analysis for demographic variables showed that out of a sample of 283, women represented 55%, men 45%. Most participants were in the 16-35 age group, followed by those in the 36-45 age range. In contrast, fewer participants belonged to the older age groups (46-54 and 55-65). In terms of work experience, the majority, 42%, had less than 5 years of experience, the same as tenure, 59%.

Measurement Model

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (CA) assessed internal consistency, while Average Extracted Variance (AVE) evaluated convergent validity. Table 1 presents the results, including AVE, composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha (CA).

	Cronbach's alpha (CA)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CWBI	0.818	0.87	0.573
CWBO	0.8	0.862	0.561
FR	0.769	0.838	0.512
PCB	0.912	0.944	0.85

Table 1: Validity and reliability results

According to Hair, Mathews, Mathews & Sarstedt (2017), factor loadings above 0.50 are considered acceptable, while those ≥0.70 indicate excellent representation of the underlying construct. In contrast, factor loadings below 0.50 suggest weak representation and were removed from the model. These results validate that the measurement scales used in this study were both reliable and valid, ensuring confidence in the interpretation of relationships among key study variables.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, with the results presented in Table 2.

Variables	CWBI	CWBO	FR	PCB
CWBI	**0.737**			
CWBO	0.705	**0.712**		
FR	0.358	0.310	**0.716**	

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PCB	-0.107	-0.131	-0.263	**0.922**

Table 2: Fronell-Larcker criterion discriminant validity

Note: The number in bold is the square root of AVE.

In Table 2, all measurement items consistently demonstrate discriminant validity. This is confirmed by the criterion that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, displayed along the diagonal, exceeds the corresponding correlation coefficients with other latent variables. This adheres to the guidelines set by Hair et al. (2018).

Goodness of Fit

The Normalized Fit Index (NFI) was employed as a measure of goodness-of-fit. This index assesses how well the proposed model replicates the observed covariance matrix compared to a null model that assumes no relationships between the variables. The standards set by Bentler and Bonett (1980) and Byrne (2008) were applied, and NFI values exceeding 0.90 were considered acceptable. The Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) served as an additional goodness-of-fit, evaluating the difference between the observed covariance matrix and the model's suggested covariance matrix. Hu and Bentler (1999) indicate that a cutoff value of 0.08 (SRMR < 0.08) is preferable for Partial Least Squares (PLS) path modelling. As sown in table 3, both the NFI and the SRMR value were well within the acceptable range, indicating a strong fit.

SRMR	NFI
0.075	0.902

Table 3: Goodness of fit results

Hypotheses Testing

Smart PLS was employed to explore the direct and mediation relationships between observable and latent variables through SEM. The analysis focused on path coefficients, essential indicators of the relationships between the variables. The results are indicated below:

Direct Effects

	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
PCB -> CWBO	-0.022	0.037	0.585	0.559
PCB -> CWBI	-0.011	0.040	0.273	0.785

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PCB -> FR	-0.271	0.074	3.670	0.000
FR -> CWBI	0.367	0.068	5.361	0.000
FR -> CWBO	0.299	0.077	3.908	0.000

Table 4: Direct effects

Table 4 results indicate that PCB did not significantly influence CWBO (β = -0.022, p = 0.559), leading to the rejection of H1 for CWBO. Similarly, PCB did not have a significant impact on CWBI (β = -0.011, p = 0.785), leading to the rejection of H2 for CWBI. The findings also indicate that PCB significantly influences FR (β = -0.271, p = 0.000), supporting H3. FR significantly influences CWBI (β = 0.367, p < 0.000), supporting H4. Lastly, the results show that FR has a significant positive impact on CWBO (β = 0.299, p < 0.000), supporting H5.

Mediation Effects

The mediation analysis results are presented in Table 4.11, providing insights into the role of psychological resources and emotional responses in shaping workplace behaviours.

	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	2.50%	97.50%
PCB -> CWBO	-0.081	0.03	2.733	0.006	-0.137	-0.028
PCB -> CWBI	-0.099	0.036	2.757	0.006	-0.163	-0.033

Table 5: Mediating effects.

The results indicated that FR completely mediated the connection between PCB and CWBO (β = -0.081, p = 0.006). Similarly, feelings of Revenge (FR) fully mediated the relationship between PCB and CWBI (β = -0.093, p = 0.008).

Figure 1 presents the complete model, including the coefficients, enhancing the clarity and understanding of the results.

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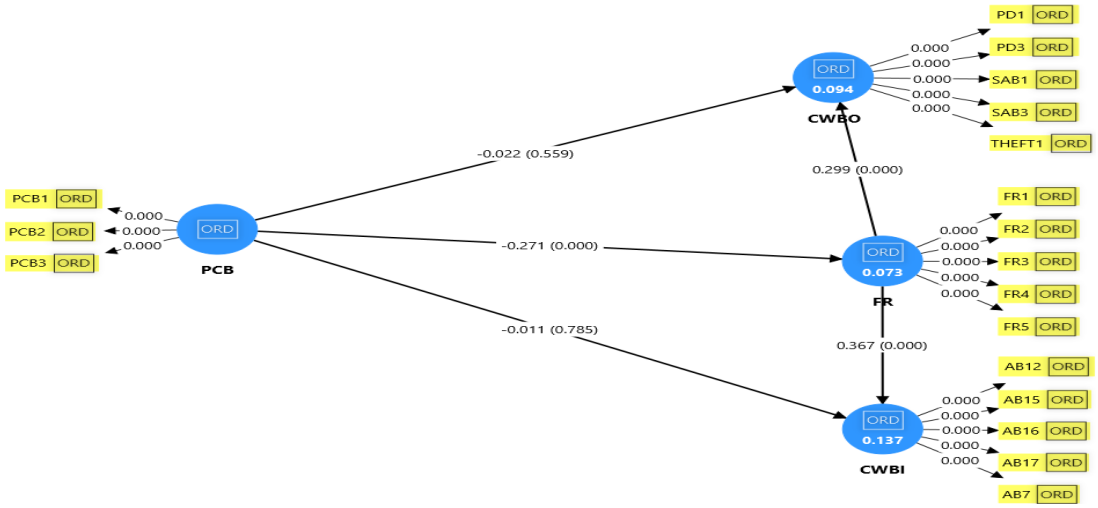

Figure 2: SEM with model parameters

The results illustrated in Figure 2 reveal that a noteworthy 56%, 5 1%, and 57% of the total variability in CWBO, FR and CWBI, respectively, among administrative staff at the South African university, is explained by Psychological Contract Breach (PCB). This finding underscores the model's effectiveness in capturing the dynamics influencing CWBO and CWBI, indicating that it provides a strong and reliable representation of the relationships among the variables involved.

Discussion

Data reveals that psychological contract breach does not directly lead administrative staff employees to engage in organisational counterproductive behaviours (CWBO), such as neglecting work responsibilities or purposely reducing productivity. This implies that administrative staff may not immediately retaliate against their organisation following perceived psychological contract breach, potentially due to some workplace norms, fear of consequences, or alternative coping strategies. These results are supported by a recent study by Yang & Liang (2025), which showed that emotional reaction as an outcome of perceived psychological contract breach may affect employees' lives, but does not necessarily incline them to harm the organisation. The results, however, contradict studies that have found psychological contract breach to be a precursor of deviant behaviour (Eventus, Ekpo, Wonah, Chike, Oboko & Mofam, 2024; Bhattarai, Karki 7 Dahal, 2020)

Results were also not confirmed for the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach and interpersonal counterproductive behaviours (CWBI), such as mistreating co-workers or engaging in workplace incivility. This result suggests that additional factors, such as emotional regulation or workplace culture, and attributional styles, may be responsible for CWBI in the event of experiencing a breach. Corroborating the assertion but at variance with the results, previous research has

demonstrated that psychological contract breach perceptions are more linked to interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour, especially when attributional style is high (Jahanzeb, Bouckenooghe, Fatima & Akram, 2024). Similarly, a recent study by Gillani, Kutaula and Budhwar(2021) has shown that employee perspectives on psychological contract breach negatively influence their emotions and contribute to unethical business behaviour.

As hypothesised there was a positive relationship between administrative staff perceptions of psychological contract breach (PCB) and feelings of revenge (FR). Naidoo, Abarantyne and Rugimbana (2019) showed that once an organisation breaches the psychological contract, for example, by disregarding corporate social responsibility, or in the context of higher education, by limiting promotional opportunities for administrative staff, employees tend to exercise punishment behaviours and feel a need to revenge towards the organisation instead of raising their concerns. The findings are also supported by Gong and Wang (2022), who found out that in retail businesses, employees' psychological resources are harmed by workplace pressures like a sense of violation brought on by a breakdown of the psychological contract, which eventually leads to their snapping at innocent customers. This supports the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). For example, when employees feel that their psychological resources are threatened by feeling of psychological contract breaches, they tend to preserve the resources by directing deviance or revenge towards customers.

The results show that administrative staff experiencing feelings of revenge (FR) are more likely to engage in interpersonal counterproductive behaviours, such as workplace incivility, aggression, or social undermining (CWBI). Previous research by Qamar, Iqbal, and Ain (2023) showed that negative emotions associated with feelings of revenge have long been linked to aggression against co-workers within the workplace. In line with Organisational Justice Theory (Greenberg, 1990), earlier studies (Jones, 2009) have associated employees' perceptions of injustice, in this case, psychological contract breach, with negative emotions such as anger, outrage, and resentment, ultimately leading to counterproductive behaviour against fellow employees. In other relevant studies, perceived loafing was positively linked to a revenge motive, which in turn was associated with interpersonal counterproductive work behaviours (Hung, Chi, & Lu, 2009). From the standpoint of ‘‘negative social exchange’’ (Glomb and Liao 2003; Liao & Chuang 2004), when employees perceive unfairness from their co-workers, they may respond with a display of aggression

Findings of the study also reveal that administrative employees with feelings of revenge (FR) are more likely to engage in counterproductive behaviours directed at the organisation(CWBO), such as withholding effort or deliberately reducing productivity. This result supports the tenets of retaliatory justice and Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958), which state that individuals who feel wronged may attempt to restore balance through retaliatory actions. Within an organisational setting, retaliatory

actions can manifest as counterproductive work behaviours that harm an organisation's functioning or reputation. A study by Akgunduz, Kayran, and Metin(2023) corroborates this when it found that supervisors' rudeness and unfavourable organisational gossip raised employees' need for revenge and eventually led to counterproductive work behaviour against the organisation, such as theft.

Feelings of revenge completely mediated the connection between psychological contract breach (PCB) and counterproductive work behaviour directed at the organisstion(CW. This implies that perceptions of psychological contract breach in isolation do not directly result in organisational counterproductive behaviours. Nonetheless, employees who harbour feelings of revenge might engage in activities intended to harm the organisation, such as sabotage or deliberate inefficiency. The Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzo, 1996) supports this observation, suggesting that negative incidents in the workplace provoke affective responses, which can subsequently affect behaviour. Additionally, the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) corresponds with these findings, asserting that when employees detect a breach in the employment relationship, they seek to restore balance by committing acts of revenge. Further support comes from Ahmed and Zhang (2024), who illustrated that the link between psychological contract breaches and counterproductive work behaviours is mediated by a desire for vengeance. Their research indicated that employees facing dismissive behaviour from the organisation feel more demoralised, angry, and partake in counterproductive work behaviours. Similarly, Ahmad, Dar, and Rahman (2023) found that revenge-related thoughts mediated the overall impact of abusive supervision and the combined effect of abusive supervision and traditionality on deviance directed at supervisors.

Feelings of Revenge (FR) fully mediated the relationship between psychological contract breach (PCB) and interpersonal counterproductive work behaviour (CWBI). This suggests that administrative staff do not immediately engage in interpersonal counterproductive behaviours after experiencing a contract breach. Instead, they re-channel their psychological injury caused by the breach into behaviours such as undermining authority, exclusion, or verbal aggression. However, some previous studies have demonstrated that revenge feelings moderated, not mediated, the relationship between psychological contract breach and negative workplace deviant behaviours directed at fellow workers (Ilyas Chaudhary, Bhatti, Cipran & Bajwa, 2022). Contrastingly, Bordia, Restubog, and Tang (2008) found that revenge mediated psychological contract breach and workplace deviance, both against the organisation and interpersonal.

Conclusion

This study concludes that counterproductive work behaviours directed at the organisation and other employees are not influenced by psychological contract breach among the administrative staff; however, psychological contract breach does influence feelings of revenge. Feelings of revenge affect both

dimensions of counterproductive work behaviour among the administrative staff and also mediate the relationship between psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behaviours. This study contributes to the literature on psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behaviour among administrative staff in a university context, which has largely been overlooked in South Africa. The study suggests that there is more to consider regarding feelings of revenge in research on counterproductive work behaviour in higher education contexts.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The focus on a single institution limits the generalisation of results to other similar contexts. There was no control of demographic variables, which could have confounded the results. Future studies might need to consider this. The study was not specific on the counterproductive work behaviours that administrative staff were involved in, and this should be addressed by future researchers. The use of self-report measures might have led to method bias or impression management. Future studies may need to consider using supervisors or colleagues to report on the prevalence or occurrence of counterproductive work behaviours of the target population. Despite these limitations, the role of feelings of revenge has been demonstrated.

Practical Implications

The prevalence of counterproductive work behaviour among administrative staff at universities calls for addressing factors that influence it. Based on the results of the study, and to reduce counterproductive work behaviour, organisations need to constantly monitor employees' attitudes and feelings toward their employer, particularly concerning unwritten contractual agreements. The policies regarding administrative staff may need to be revised and applied justly to ensure they do not violate psychological contracts. Workshops focusing on counterproductive work behaviours should be organised regularly to prevent the occurrence of such behaviours and the development of feelings of revenge over time.

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