

ROLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

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Abstract

Since the 60s, many authors used the concept of psychological contract and examined its role to better understand and manage the employment relationship. In this paper, we defended the theory that social influence, considered as an organizational phenomenon difficult to be identified, could influence the behavior of employees. We present the conceptual framework and drew up an empirical research through a case study of a Tunisian bank, namely the « SND » bank. We could analyze in depth the case of a furthest breach called the suicide. This investigation showed that employment and psychological contract are two necessary conditions but not sufficient, because at any moment the sense of organizational injustice may provoke the loss of trust and therefore the breach. The more social influence sparkes off a cognitive dissonance, the greater the break will occur with speed and scope, and will affect any contract.

Keywords: Organizational justice, psychological contract, social influence.

Introduction

The reality of business environment showed that Managers of human resources, are often unable to handle the motivation of employees. Since the 60s, many authors as Argyris (1960), Schein (1965), Rousseau (1989), Schore and Tetrick (1994) used the concept of psychological contract and examined its role to better understand and manage the employment relationship. Indeed, in return for their efforts, skills, trust, grant and commitment provided to their organization, employees expect to be treated fairly and equitably. However, in addition to practices of human resource management and even in the presence of organizational justice and mutual trust between employee and his company, some informal organizational phenomena may have a negative impact on the viability of the psychological contract. We have defended the theory that social influence, considered as an organizational phenomenon difficult to identify, could influence the behavior of employees. In this paper, we will present the conceptual framework and drew up an empirical research in which we put into practice these basic concepts through a case study of a Tunisian bank, namely the « SND » bank. We could analyze in depth the case of a furthest breach called the suicide.

It is clear that legal employment contract is more and more characterized by latent economic imbalance between staff and organization. This organizational experience may reflect dysfunctional and counterproductive behavior undertaken voluntarily by « valued employees » in order to restore the financial balance between the two parties. But in doing so, they are capable of causing harm to their company, colleagues, superiors or to themselves (such as the case with Mr. « R »). Rightly, Thevenet (1992) adopted the term « present-absent » to describe the « valued employees » who derive by adopting sometimes counter-productive behaviors, or precede « pirate remunerations » (Peretti, 2004) and squander voluntarily some resources belonging to the organization. in this regard, it is important to note that the ethical failures of the old contract has propelled the concept of psychological contract allowing to better understand and manage the **employment** relationship (Shore & Tetrick, 1994; Guerrero, 2003). As a result, companies realized then the need to formalize ethics and develop tools to ensure organizational justice in order to preserve the terms of the psychological contract. This case study deals especially with this problem while putting forward the hypothesis of the social influence on one of the aspects of this organizational ethics, which is the psychological contract.

The psychological contract, the entry in the field of honor

Certainly, the employment contract is a contract of adhesion. At the beginning, the individual committed in the relationship with a little concern of the entrepreneur powers. Indeed, organizations tend to use abilities at their disposal in order to ensure the individual investment. In this sense, the psychological contract has come to establish itself as an instrument intended to baffle ethical failures of the old contract and struggle unethical practices. Thus, this contract became psychological because its clauses came to be emotional and indefinite. The terms of the legalized and well defined old contract are abandoned (Rousseau & Parks, 1993).

Because of this, researches of Rousseau (1989) have led to a definition of the psychological contract concept which discloses a specific *perceptual* aspect. This definition describes « the assessments of individuals of the terms and conditions of a bilateral trade agreement between the employee and another interested party » (1989: 123). Moreover, De Vos (2002) did not hesitate to share this idea and said that the psychological contract is based on the employee perception of terms and conditions of its exchange agreement shared with his company. Perceptions inherent to promises that appear in an organizational configuration, lead to expectations of the company (value added achieved, conscientiousness) and the staff (remuneration, reward, promotion). Furthermore, Robinson (1996) supported this idea stating that the psychological contract refers to « the valued employees » perceptions about what they have as bonds vis-à-vis their superiors and what they must do for them (1996: 574).

It is clear that the perceptual aspect that is peculiar to the psychological contract is based on values, which are determined by national culture. These reflect the beliefs of people vis-à-vis the aims of the organization. In addition to the formal aspects of learning, individuals join the organization and spend most of their time to soak up the informal organization which is the corporate culture.

Social influence, an abstract reality, but ubiquitous

Certainly, the origin of values emanates from the personal experience or the imposition carried out by an external authority. But being seen as a system of informal control in the organization or an instrument of domination; culture is able to establish a direction for organizational behavior. Therefore, we understand by this, that a social influence (or also either obvious or latent power) is exerted by an individual (or group) who is able to introduce or impose its attitudes and behaviors norms. This social influence is in keeping with the

change of attitudes, beliefs and opinions of individuals following contact with another individual or group. Often, the response of individuals facing the objective circumstances is highly dependent on a variety of subjective comparisons with other individuals. Rightly, Redl (1968), discussed the concept of « emotional transmission » which, essentially, defined it as the propagation behavior of the central person to another or to the group itself; This « contamination » can be positive or negative (as an operational point of view), as well as direct or indirect (including proactive incentives from the part of the « central figure » or a mere presence that cause unconsciously collective effects). Impact comes to influencing others. In contrast to the persuasion power, the influence one targets the spontaneity of the parties in a relationship or even their thoughtless acquiescence. In this regard, Cialdini (1984) concluded that the influence is the power to « get people to say yes without thinking ». Moreover, Tarde (1973) described the willingness of people to undergo intentionally the social influence in order to avoid social disapproval. In this sense, social influence is liable to condition the perceptions of employees' assets as to the organizational justice, to govern the establishment and sustainability of the psychological contract and to cause changes in behavioral terms.

The organizational justice for the sustainability of the organizational relationships

Is that fair? A very important question that an individual can ask from day to day during his social or organizational life. This issue comes from a confusion that disturbs and can induce that individual to reassess the corporate relationships, the adopted behaviors, the licensed trust, the deployed professional awareness, etc. Each person has more or less an opinion on how wealth should be distributed. Indeed, no one can dispute the normative or subjective question of justice in the organizational world. Of course, any opinion may be tolerated. However, some diversities of these opinions can not serve the discussion of the distribution.

The organizational justice has been slow to appear. It is up to the late of eighties and the beginning of nineties, when the structuring of a current research, dealing with issues that directly concern the organization, had begun. The recent nature of research in the field of organizational justice is the cause of the protracted debate on the dimensionality of this paradigm. Over the years, forms of organizational justices are emerging to describe the process of justice that binds an individual to his business. There are many good summaries in the literature of the organizational justice. The favourite three fields of study of justice are, distributive, procedural and interactional (Deutsch, 1985; Greenberg, 1990; Tyler and Lind,

1992). Distributive justice refers to the basic principles of fairness when it is about equity: «did I obtain what I deserve?» (Adam, on 1965). Procedural justice means fairness of procedures used to implement appropriate decisions and policies. «*Are these rules and regulations treating me fairly?*». Interactional justice focuses on the quality of treatment received from decision-makers and on the importance that the decision-making procedures are properly represented: «Have they treated me fairly» (Bies and Mossi, 1986; Tyler and Bies, 1990).

Before entering in the heart of the topic, it should be noted that the last question of our interview guide invited the various respondents to recall the situation or the case of injustice experienced or heard by them. We conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty human resources working in the same department. Opened and grouped questions according to a well-defined order, permitted us to identify some unconscious rhetoric and to confess one of our case seemed both exciting and intriguing. It was proposed by **the majority of respondents** and concerns Mr. « R » who worked at the bank.

Mr. « R », aged in the fifty years, married and father of two children was accountant in the recovery department of « SND » bank. Described by many colleagues as a model employee: no absence for twenty-five years of service, respectful, conscientious and expert. Just for information, he has been waiting for a promotion since ten years but unfortunately he never had.

On Monday, may 29th, 2006 at 7h 50 minutes, Mr « R » empties from his office on the fifth floor, leaving a letter clung to his glasses, whose content has not been revealed. However, the various interviews that we conducted with his colleagues provide a likely explanation for the suicide: the investigation had found that Mr « R » had diverted 60,000 dinars (about 35,000 euros), of which he had made the collection. This amount corresponded to the liquidation of a debt incurred by a nonresident to obtain freehand on a mortgaged property.

However, until his suicide, nobody knew anything about this diversion. We just learned afterwards that the supervisor (*for unknown reason*) asked to have a look on the file of the credit.

Did Mr « R » act under the influence of panic, when the head requested to see that file? Had he used to use for its own account, the amount recovered before returning them? In which

case, did his supervisor has doubt about and did not give him a promotion? Were they partners? Did one of them break a promise and thus the "psychological contract" which bound eachother? Or that Mr « R », whom "found his account" in his position, preferred to be forgotten and dindn't look for a promotion. We can also assume that the first and only committed embezzlement, related precisely to the quality of non-residence of the customer, that Mr « R » considers having some months to go before the person comes to claim the freehand. Did the the investigation find other malpractices? His colleagues didn't know anything about. Have they been silenced in order to preserve the reputation of the bank and the memory of the deceased? It is possible...

We do not have answers to these questions, but asking one or another hypothesis, we could try to understand the behavior of Mr « R ».

Embezzlement was	With the complicity of the leader	Feeling of injustice (F.I)	Breach of psychological contract (B.P.C)	Reason for Suicide	
H1-Accidental	No	Yes (before and after)	yes (with himself)	FI/BPC	Social influence
H2-Repetitive	Non	yes (before)	yes (with the bank)	FI/BPC	Social influence
H3- Repetitive	yes	No	yes (vis-à-vis the bank and the leader)	BPC	Social influence.

Table 1: Hypothesis

We have summarized the progress of the drama of Mr « R » in a chronological process involving "cognition and action" that is probably followed by him (Figure). We noticed that the three dark rectangles represented the quasi common condition to any employee who received any perception of unfairness from his company. As a consequence, he responded to this unfairness by adopting an anti-social behavior, driven by the breach of the psychological contract. In the case of Mr « R », the antecedent to dysfunctional behavior (disappointment in SND bank), was an other dysfunctional behavior which is the theft and the form of leaving namely the suicide.

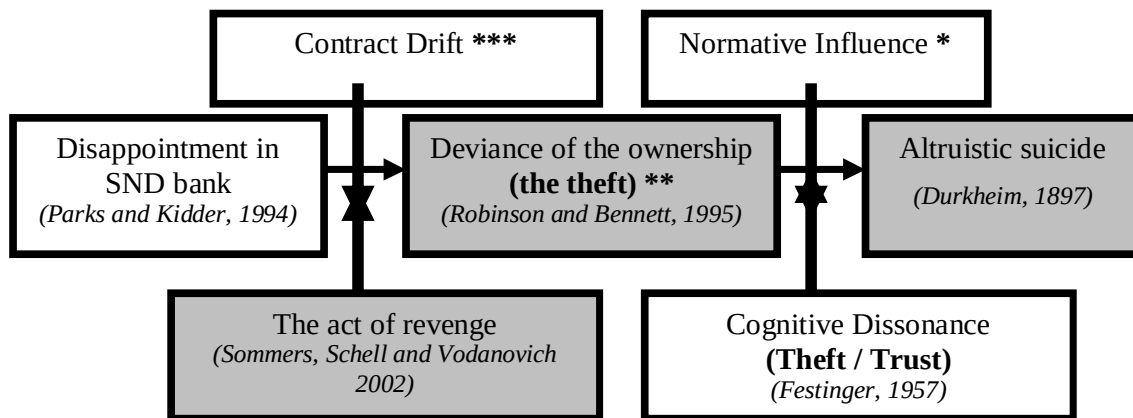


Figure 1: Chronological History of the process (cognition / action) probably followed by M.R.

- * The normative influence in the sense of Deutsch and Gerard (1955), refers to those who deviate from the group and expect to be evaluated negatively and rejected.
- ** Robinson & Bennett (1995) consider the ownership deviance, a behavior that targets resources and assets of the organization as theft and vandalism.
- *** According to Rousseau and Parks (1993), contract drift was born when terms of the psychological contract changed in the minds of individuals (in our case MR, 10 years without promotion).

- Cognition
- Actions

The dysfunctional behavior as a response to disappointment

Researches conducted by Robinson and Bennett (1995) that aimed to study more closely the antisocial behavior of « valued employees », often have identified two types of bearing, namely: *production deviance* and *ownership deviance*. The first type, refers to counterproductive behavior such as absenteeism and wasting of time; whereas the second type focuses on resources and capital of the organization such as theft and vandalism. So, if we refer to the typology made by these two first, we can see that Mr « R » has been the subject of ownership deviance.

Inevitably, considering having fulfilled his contract while the partner (supposed to hold its share of the contract) did not do it, is a predisposition to « valued employees » (Robinson et al. 1994). Moreover, the breach of that contract that is to say, the unreality of what was expected (10 years without promotion) while the other part (in our case Mr « R ») has kept its

promises may reveal echoes that go beyond the disappointment and cause exasperation or irritation. This may push employees the most honest and conscientious to think about calling the psychological contract into question which binds them to their organization, and the trust that they have given to their supervisor.

This was the case of Mr « R » whom gained antisocial personal rewards namely theft, which for him is legitimate or legal as he had to say : « *as long as it is not fair to me, I will do by myself justice* ». In this regard, Robinson & Bennett (1995) considered these behaviors as dysfunctional behaviors because they violate organizational norms and undermine the sustainability of the organization. The transgression of norms is perfectly legal, even according to the point of view of others. Indeed, Mr. « R » was so respected by his colleagues that his diversion was to them forgivable and didn't justify this death so tragic: « we could have been making a collection for him to return the amount » confirmed his colleagues.

Mr « R » has certainly behavior that can be considered as negative and antisocial. However it is important to note that according to Parks & Kidder (1994), undertaking often this kind of behavior can result from a frustration, a feeling of injustice or a sense of loss of control. Undoubtedly, through his act Mr « R » intended to punish his organization (H1 and H2) (Table of hypothesis) or his supervisor (H3 and H1), (Table of hypothesis), therefore the character of « revenge » that is highlighted by Sommers, Vodanovich and Schell (2002). Mr « R » wanted to revenge for the recklessness of the organization both persistent and annoying to him. Rightly, Vardi & Wiener (1996) put forward the concept of « Organizational Misbehavior » in order to depict the own intentional behavior of « valued employees » that could make prejudice for their supervisor, colleague or organization.

The organizational influence as a reason for dysfunctional behavior

Mr « R » has been the victim of what is called (contract drift) in the sense of Rousseau and Parks (1993). Drift arises when time or organizational influence changes the understanding of contract terms by the individual because of purely internal changes (promotion and personal growth, increased wages). Indeed, the influence of social and organizational context began probably to affect deeply Mr « R ». We can imagine that his colleagues blamed his excessive placidity vis-à-vis the indifference of the organization. Subsequently, he had surely seen that other newly hired employees, with a priori the same qualifications as his or fewer, have

attained high positions, while he was waiting for an initiative rewarding of his organization or even for a promotion since ten years (H1 and H2). (Table of hypothesis).

As a consequence of what has been advanced, groupal standards and social interdependence can really influence the behavior of staff, perception of acts and allocations of responsibility.

The suicide as a result of a dysfunctional behavior

It emerges from this unbalanced relationship, which occurred at the expense of Mr « R », with the « SND » bank, that psychological investment in the organization can drive individuals somewhere. Being attached with emotion and pulsion to the politic and to the identity of an organization, set up for some psychological profiles (in our case Mr « R ») an alienating dependence that the loss of the organization revealed it as a severe problem of behavior. This loss generates forms of expression, anxiety and fear that suggest that the individual is psychologically achieved and has no more control over himself.

Arrogant and proud, Mr « R » regretted his behavior, and, taken by the guilt, he committed the irreparable. The « SND » bank was his home, and there he killed himself. This reminds us of the concept of normative influence by Deutsch and Gerard (1955), where those who deviate from the group expect to be evaluated negatively and rejected. Moreover, paradoxically as it may seem, many colleagues have the intimate conviction that « Mr « R » gave his life to the « SND » and « SND » took it ». According to them, he was afraid of being singled out by his colleagues who trusted so much upon him. He feared prejudice and rumours that will arise from the influence of the organizational context. It could not admit that we can be disappointed in him. Mr « R » has certainly broken the psychological contract that bound him to the « SND », but has not accepted any breach of the psychological contract with his colleagues, for them, he had been the living memory of the Bank.

Starting from the premise that everyone is trying to be consistent with its beliefs, its ideas and its values, Mr. « R » was the target of the cognitive dissonance within the meaning of Festinger (1975), even a discrepancy of at least two components of information strongly antithetical, namely trust and theft. He has tried to reduce it in order to restore its cognitive equilibrium but all his attempts probably failed (Figure). Deprived of his ideal ego, Mr « R » can no longer move, tracked by an acute fatigue and facing a harsh reality, he saw in this window of the fifth floor an exit to ease his conscience and avoid the remorse of having lost the esteem of his colleagues and his reputation.

Furthermore, in order to adapt practice to theory, it has been interesting to set up the suicide of Mr. « R » in its theoretical context. The literature review of Emile Durkheim, who in his work dedicated this issue (Suicide, 1897), analyzed suicide, defined it and outlines the ways and reasons that lead a person to break its life up. The **altruistic suicide** proposed by Durkheim that seems to be the closest to the case of Mr « R », results from **extra integration**. Here, the social influence conducted by the values and norms of the group is high inasmuch that point leads the individual to sacrifice his life in order to not disappoint the group. It was the case of Mr « R », who refused to undergo a second breach of the psychological contract during his lifetime with his colleagues, for whom he was the living memory of the bank, so he was respected and considered. For this reason, he sacrificed an internalized social imperative and obeyed to the orders of group inasmuch to stifle within him the instinct of preservation.

It was evident that Durkheim (1897) weaved an important relationship in modern society, between suicides and the study of the division of labor. For this reason, he analyzed the suicide depending on the postulate that successful integration of humans relies on the accentuation of the ties that bind him to the society. Being increasingly individualistic, the society makes people feeling more and more different within each other and allowing everyone to win what they consider as their right. Based on a statistical analysis of suicide rates over time and space, Durkheim succeeded to find that although suicide is a very personal and private act, it depends on the **social facts**. However, it is important to note that beforehand, the author confirmed that if the individual is alone and desperate to the point that he is up for committing a suicide, the society would command him to do that act, rather than its individual history. Therefore, we can distinguish the importance of the social influence.

Conclusion

One of the objectives of the individual is to avoid social disapproval. For this reason, he wants to be accepted by the group and positively appreciated by their members. His gregarious instinct and need to belong (Maslow, 1943), predispose him to subdue to the influence of organizational context. This influence can reach a deeper level by positioning themselves at the beliefs of the individual. He becomes an instrument of the will of others. Thus, the social influence, animated by the values and shared representations, guides individual and collective behavior. It reflects the weight of the corporate culture (in the case of Mr « R », the look of others), especially the national culture (the look of the family and society).

This investigation showed that employment and psychological contract are two necessary conditions but not sufficient, because at any moment the sense of organizational injustice may provoke the loss of trust and therefore the breach. The more social influence sparkes off a cognitive dissonance, the greater the break will occur with speed and scope, and will affect any contract.

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