

Exploring Psychological Contract Breach of Indonesian Academics

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Abstract—This paper examines Indonesian academics perceptions on their psychological contract breaches (PCB) and the effects of PCB on their employment relationships and contributions toward the organizations. This is a qualitative exploratory study. In-depth interviews on 40 respondents in four public and private universities in Manado city and content analysis were conducted to explore the phenomenon of psychological contract breach. Findings indicate that academics perceived contract breach when (1) they are not appointed in structural position (hierarchical organizational structure), (2) they are being treated unfairly (unfair access to attend seminars, workshops and trainings paid by their university or faculty, to have projects which can contribute additional income to academics, and to be appointed as thesis supervisors or examiners), (3) lack of support from their employers in helping them to pursue their career advancement (for instances, employers signing their career advancement paper), giving information about opportunities to pursue their further studies including permitting and signing their studies document/application paper, (4) overlapping tasks and lack employer's assertiveness in their leaderships. Negative consequences are they tend to be disappointed and thus they are not motivated to work productively and effectively, not committed or devoted to their employers and organizations.

Keywords—psychological contract breach; Indonesian academics

I. INTRODUCTION

A psychological contract is a key framework for understanding the employment relationship in the organization. Rousseau defined psychological contracts as perceptions of reciprocal obligations between two parties, employers and employees [1]. Failure to fulfill any of such obligations is known as a psychological contract breach (PCB). Research indicates that psychological contract breach may cause potential negative effects on their employment relationships with employers, in form of emotional reaction of anger and betrayal, reducing job satisfaction and motivation, reducing employees trust and intention to leave. It may also lead to counterproductive behavior workplace (CWBs) in the form of absenteeism and inattention to quality which can reduce employee productivity at work [2]. This study is aimed to explore Indonesian academics perceptions of their psychological contract breaches or the cause of their

psychological contracts violations and the impacts of PCB on their employment relationships and contributions toward the organizations.

Human perceptions of psychological contract and its breach vary in different context. Research has undertaken to explore psychological contract in universities in various countries. It is also argued that PCB is probably the most important in PC research because of its negative impacts to employees, employers and organizations [3]. However, little is known of the phenomenon on PCB of Indonesian academics. Additionally, Indonesian universities provide a different study context. Its education system is low in quality, financial support, capacity, deterioration of short-staffing and weak government support [4]. In light of this phenomenon, therefore this study fills the gap. Understanding Indonesian academics psychological contract breaches (PCBs) may also help Indonesian universities to prevent such breaches and their negative consequences. Therefore, they can manage academics well, improve their productivity and improve organizational performance.

A. Literature Reviews

Psychological contract as the foundation of employee and employer relationship comprises the mutual obligations that must be fulfilled by each party [1]. Moreover, it is the perceptions of reciprocal promises and obligations of both parties implied in their employment relationship [5]. The perceptions of promises and obligations in the typical employment relationship are that employer provides pay and other compensation along with job security and training in exchange for employee's time, expertise and effort [6]. The norm of reciprocity motivates employees to return favors to their employers after the employers have done something for them and vice versa.

PCB occurs when an individual perceives that employee or employer fails to fulfill the promises or obligations in responding to one's contribution in the exchange relationship. If an employee experiences PCB, they become unwilling to fulfill their obligations to the organization and employer. PCB may lead to employee's negative reactions, work attitude and behavior [7] and may also leave the organization [8].

Research on PCB has been limited and very few empirical studies have conducted to explore how employees experience breach [9, 10]. In addition, Western management concepts and writings needs to be scientifically tested in nonwestern settings considering culture may influence the managerial practices [11]. Therefore, this study provides such an opportunity to explore the psychological contract breach construct in Indonesian academics.

B. Study Context

Indonesia's higher education system has poor quality research and teaching. The country's best institutions are even also generally regarded as poor relative to both global standards and those of neighboring countries in Asia [12]. Indonesian universities remain tormented by corruption, poor quality teaching and staff absenteeism [13]. These low quality of education and learning outcomes are mainly influenced by four factors: (1) lower government expenditure on education comparing to neighboring countries, (2) low-level qualifications held by most Indonesian lecturers and teachers, (3) low salaries of lecturers and teachers have encouraged them to get extra jobs, sometimes of a non-academic nature and outside their institutions, and (4) poor government management of public educational institutions [12].

Despite of such problems, Indonesian academics are obligated to do Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi: teaching, conduct research and do community service. These obligations and worsened by low rewards, poor academic support facilities, low research funding, a lack of information communication technology (ICT) skill and infrastructure, are likely to contribute significant pressure on Indonesian academics. Therefore, by understanding their perceptions on PCB and the negative effects, Indonesian universities are able to manage them well.

II. METHOD

Qualitative research in form of in-depth and semi-structured interviews was utilized in four universities (both in public and private institutions) in Manado city, Indonesia. The use of qualitative interviews can extend understanding of the nature and experience of breach [9]. Interviews were held with forty respondents.

Interviews were transcribed and data were analyzed by content analysis. Qualitative content analysis involves concept development, sampling, data collection, data coding, data analysis, and interpretation [14]. The purpose is to be systematic and analytic. Themes emerged through the analytic process, constant discovery and comparison of relevant situations [14].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings and Discussions

A number of interviewees perceived they experienced psychological contract breach when their employer did not keep their promises of positioning them in a structural position:

Head of Department did not keep his promises or words. He had promised me that he would choose me as a member of Faculty Senate but he did not, he chose someone else (Respondent 4, a Secretary of Study Program, Public University A).

This respondent further indicated that the Head of Department broke his promises and often worked against rules. At that time, he was not motivated and committed to work well which hamper his work performance:

Head of Department spoke with emphasis that we must work based on rules, but he often told us to do something against the rules. At that time of the drama, I was no longer motivated and committed to work well raising my rebellion against him. Fortunately, we have reconciled.

Most respondents also said that they experienced psychological contract breach when they felt a sense of unfairness at workplace, such as not having fair and equitable access to attend seminars, workshops and trainings which all expenses paid by their university/faculty, to involve in projects which can contribute additional income to academics, and to be assigned as thesis supervisors or examiners. Respondent 28 clearly said:

I have not got any SPPD (Surat Perintah Perjalanan Dinas) for more than 10 years. Those who are in higher structural position can attend seminars many times. They have travelled a lot. It is unfair. I am now lazy to do my assignments because Dean has not given any SPPD for seminars (Respondent 28, a Head of Laboratory, Public University A).

SPPD (*Surat Perintah Perjalanan Dinas*) is a letter of permission allowing government employees to travel for the purpose of work-related activities, such as attending seminars, trainings, meetings and other activities. By getting SPPD, it means the employee is getting paid for the whole trip. They can travel (airline ticket plus accommodation), earn pocket money and attend seminars or trainings which can also add points for career advancement (promotion). It is obvious that by experiencing the breach, the respondent tend to have low morale, reduced productivity and poor job satisfaction.

Other respondents such as, respondent 13 expressed her concern about her future career. She had been a lecturer at Japanese Language study program for more than a decade. However, she undertook her Masters and Doctoral studies in Education Management at an Australian university. She was informed by the staff from Indonesian Directorate General of Research, Technology and Higher Education that she could not attain the position of Professor (or become a professor), unless she moved to other field (study program) in accordance to her current expertise (education management). Her employer, Dean, had not agreed to facilitate her move. She felt stuck in career paralysis at the moment. Interestingly, although psychological contract breach was perceived, she had fostered her friendship with Dean and continued doing her jobs and tasks because of their good long term friendship:

Dean does not agree and allow me to move from current faculty to another. It is because we have been good friends since we started our academic careers. He is also proud of me for being graduated from an Australian university. He won't let

me go...I can't be a professor unless I move to other study program. I have to wait until the university changes my data base transferring me from this study program to another. Personally, we are still good friends. At the moment, I just keep doing what I can do, such as teaching, conducting research and writing up my international publications as required to be a professor (Respondent 13, a Secretary of Bureau of Foreign Cooperation, Public University B).

Some respondents indicated that they experienced breach if they were not facilitated to undertake their further studies. They perceived their employers must assist them by giving information about opportunities to pursue their further studies (i.e. scholarships) including permitting and signing their studies document/application paper:

I want to undertake my PhD study in Australia but I can't take it now because of university's policy. Dean has actually allowed me to go but Rector did not agree. Senior lecturers must go first. I am currently a lecturer and have to wait then. I must be in queue line (Respondent 37, a Lecturer, Private University C).

Surprisingly, this respondent expressed he was still satisfied with his job despite he had not got yet what he wanted (pursuing his PhD). It was because he enjoyed interactions with his students especially in music and religious activities.

Academics also saw that their employers were not assertive resulting to overlapping tasks and working not based on Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). Employers were also perceived by employees breaching their employment relationship in form of intervening them during execution of their jobs.

Head of Department has not been assertive and worked based on SOP. For instance, I have to do other tasks beyond my job as Head of Laboratory. I have to edit and upload students' journals, which actually is not my job. Based on SOP, it should have been done by journal editors, not me. Dean has also interfered in my thesis supervision. I had not approved my student's thesis because it was not good yet. But Dean asked me to sign it and allow the student to take his thesis examination (Respondent 2, a Head of Laboratory, Public University A).

Dean, as our leader, is not assertive. You can see, Vice Deans often do not attend students' theses examinations. We, as their subordinates, always attend the examinations. They are leaders but they have shown example of their bad attitude (Respondent 3, a Head of Master Study Program, Public University A).

Respondent 2 said his response to the breach was that he just performed his tasks without considering the quality of his work performance. In other words, he had performed poor quality teaching. Similarly, Respondent 3 further said Dean had not even given any warning to the Vice Deans and they still received travel funding from Dean to attend seminars, training and other activities. She indicated that she was not committed and motivated to work hard. Nevertheless, she still taught effectively for the sake of her students.

Those findings suggest that employees expected their psychological contracts were fulfilled by their employers. They perceived the breach on their psychological contracts in form

of not having positioned in structural position, not having additional pay from conducting research, attending seminars and training, supervising and examining students' theses examinations. Undertaking further studies are also considered as academics' expectations. They perceived the PhD degree would allow them to be put in hierarchical position, to become a professor, to be more advantage in getting funding and other opportunities. This is consistent with existing empirical evidence, that it is both intrinsic and extrinsic motivator factors which fulfill 'basic human needs for achievement, responsibility, recognition, status, competency, personal growth and satisfaction' [15], including pay, support, work environment, job security, training and career development, and workload [16].

In lieu of psychological contract breach, academics had shown negative job attitudes and work behaviors as the impacts of the breach [17]: a decrease in job motivation, work commitment, job performance and satisfaction. However, good friendship may eliminate the negative consequences of psychological contract breach. It supports the notion that workplace friendship can create employee's positive work attitudes [18]. Furthermore, academics still fulfilled their tasks due to their commitments to students.

IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to present the results of exploratory research which explored psychological contract breach of Indonesian academics. In depth interviews to forty academic respondents were conducted in four universities. Interview data transcriptions were analyzed by content analysis.

Indonesian academics perceived their psychological contract breaches as not getting additional pay, career development, recognition, status, competency, career advancement, and experiencing overlapping tasks and workloads. Negative work behaviors and job attitudes arise as the impacts of breaches. Nevertheless, friendship and commitment to students can reduce the negative consequences.

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