

Developing a Psychological Contract Model for Administrative Staff in a UAE-based Higher Education Context

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Abstract:

Beyond the formal employment contract, there is an unwritten contract known as a psychological contract (PC), characterised by implicit promises, beliefs, expectations, and mutual understandings between both parties. Though often complex and vague in nature, these psychological contracts (PCs) play a critical role in shaping the employment relationship and can significantly impact employee motivation, engagement, and organisational commitment. Despite their importance, many organisations fail to account for the complexities of PCs, often overlooking their influence on daily operations and long-term performance outcomes (Shi & Gordon, 2020). This oversight is particularly evident in higher education (HE), where administrative employees are vital to institutional success, ensuring smooth day-to-day operations. As the sector expands, support staff play an increasingly critical role in maintaining institutional standards and delivering high-quality services, underscoring the need for strategic talent management within higher education institutions (HEIs) (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

While the factors influencing PCs have been explored in some contexts, significant gaps remain, particularly in the UAE's HE context. Much of the earlier research on PCs is Westerncentric, with limited attention paid to non-Western, culturally diverse settings such as the UAE (Behery et al., 2016; Behery et al., 2012). PCs intersect with diverse cultural norms and organisational practices in a region characterised by its multicultural workforce and unique socio-economic context. This lack of localised understanding leaves a critical void in knowledge about what influences PCs. My research aims to address this gap by exploring the factors influencing PCs for administrative staff and developing a tailored utility model for further assessment in the UAE's HE context.

The study seeks to develop a utility model (as depicted in Figure 1) that identifies and categorises the key factors influencing PCs in the UAE's HEIs. This conceptual model will provide a starting point to assess what influenced PCs in culturally diverse and organizationally complex environments, specifically focusing on administrative staff. By bridging existing knowledge gaps, the framework aims to: