

LONG WORKING HOURS AND LESS OCB: MODERATING ROLE OF IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO WORKING CONDITIONS

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between psychological contract breach and engagement in OCB. Using data from 459 employees and hierarchical regression analyses, it was shown that overtime as example of psychological contract breach is associated with withdrawal of contributions, i.e. less engagement in OCB towards the supervisor. Consistent with hypotheses, gender and employment status were found to moderate the negative relationship between this type of psychological contract breach and engagement in OCB.

Increasingly employees are being asked to work longer hours or to work more days each week and to maintain this pace for longer periods in their working careers (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998; Feldman, 2002). This 'overtime problem' may well be a characteristic feature of today's reengineered, reorganized, and downsized organizations (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998). Long working hours are frequently taken as a synonym for commitment and ambition (Balfour & Neff, 1993; Sullivan, 1999). In some organizations, performance is measured more often by the number of hours worked than by how well the job is done (Babbar & Aspelin, 1998). However, overtime may easily result in short run drawbacks, such as work place injuries and illnesses (Savery & Luks, 2000) and in long-term effects of excessive working hours, e.g. impairment of employee mental and physical health (Sparks, Cooper, & et al., 1997).

Most frequently working long hours is referred to as overtime. A distinction is generally made between involuntary and voluntary overtime. Involuntary or mandatory overtime refers to compelling, forcing, or more subtle ways of persuading employees to work hours beyond agreed upon assignments. Voluntary overtime refers to long working hours that employees are willingly to exchange for higher income, but also to willingness to work extra hours which do not bring direct compensation (Feldman, 2002). In the present study, we do not make such an explicit distinction but emphasize that overtime refers to working more hours than preferred and agreed upon in the employment contract.

Employees working more hours than they prefer and have agreed upon in their employment contract may experience this to be an overcharge of their employer. In this paper, it is proposed that this can be conceived as psychological contract breach (Robinson, 1996; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). This is a distressing experience for employees because they put in more effort than they feel indebted to their employer. Such an experience may strengthen employees' beliefs that obligations agreed upon are violated (Robinson, 1996). Do employees who experience such a psychological contract breach reduce their subsequent contributions to the organization? In the present study, we will examine how overtime is associated with specific types of reduction of contributions, i.e. decreased engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). Further, we will specify a moderating role for gender and employment status (part-time versus full-time) on the relationship between overtime and engagement in OCB.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT BREACH

The psychological contract refers to an individual's beliefs about terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that person and their employer (Robinson, 1996; Robinson et al., 1994; Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). It specifies the contributions that employees believe they owe to their employer and the inducements that they believe are owed in return. In the present study we speak of psychological contract breach when employees indicate that they are putting in more effort than they feel obliged to their employer, i.e. working more hours than preferred and than agreed upon in the employment contract.

The perception of psychological contract breach may affect what an employee feels he or she is owed by the employer and also what that employee feels obligated to offer in return (Robinson et al., 1994). Employees can attempt to regain costs by decreasing their efforts or by trying to increase employer's obligations. Previous studies indicate that it is likely that psychological contract breach affects attempts to decrease contributions more than trying to increase obligations. (Robinson et al., 1994). The perception of psychological contract breach has been shown to be related to various reduced investments, such as dissatisfaction and turnover (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Robinson (1996) found psychological contract breach to be negatively related to employees' performance, their civic virtue behavior, and their intentions to remain with the organization. Other studies also show the greater the degree of psychological contract breach reported by employees, the more dissatisfaction, the more thoughts of quitting and actual turnover (Bunderson, 2001), the less committed, and the lower their job performance (Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood, & Bolino, 2002).

Additionally, it can be argued that efforts to reduce contributions when psychological contract breach is perceived will first affect discretionary behaviors such as OCB, since the discretionary nature of OCB signifies that these behaviors may easily be given or withheld (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). Furthermore, employees have multiple commitments and may be differentially committed to supervisors and colleagues (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Reichers, 1985; Settoon et al., 1996). The most direct source that demands reciprocation can probably be found in the behaviors of the supervisor, more than in the behaviors of colleagues (Bateman & Organ, 1983). For that reason, we differentiate between two types of job investments: OCB towards supervisor and OCB towards colleagues. It is expected that OCB towards the supervisor – as the most direct source that demands reciprocation - will suffer more from perceived psychological contract breach than OCB towards peers.

Hypothesis 1: Perceived psychological contract breach, i.e. working more hours than one prefers to and agreed upon, will be negatively associated with (a) OCB towards supervisor, and with (b) OCB towards colleagues.

Differential work centrality of men and women, and of part-time and full-time employees.

The perception of psychological contract breach may have different significance for various groups of employees. It may well be that those employees that attach more value to their work and working conditions, will be more affected by perceived contract breach and consequently will be more likely to reduce their contributions. In the next three paragraphs, we will elaborate on this issue. First, gender is proposed to be important: Men may attach more value to their work and working conditions. Second, employment status is proposed to be important: Part-timers may attach more value to their working conditions. Third, the combination of gender and employment status is proposed to be important to explain the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach and reduction in contributions.

Gender. Generally, employees may react differently to psychological contract breach. Specifically, it can be expected that for those who value paid work most, i.e., whose self-identities are based on work, will be affected more negatively by psychological contract breach than those who value paid work less, or for whom work is less central. Given that women's time commitments to paid employment is more influenced by the need to reserve time for dependent care and other family responsibilities than holds for men (Fagan, 2001) and that women spent less time on paid work than men do (Lundberg & Frankenhaeuser, 1999), it is expected that women attach less value to paid work than men do. Therefore, in the present study it is anticipated that men, will be more sensitive to violations of working time conditions such that the perception of psychological contract breach may have greater impact on their job contributions.

Hypothesis 2: Gender will moderate the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach, i.e. working more hours than one prefers to and agreed upon, and engagement in (a) OCB towards supervisor, and (b) OCB towards colleagues, such that this negative relationship will be stronger for men than for women.

Employment status. For employment status it can also be expected that employees may react different to psychological contract breach. Those who value work conditions most, i.e., part-time working employees, will be affected more negatively by psychological contract breach than those who value specific work conditions less. Previous studies often emphasize attitudinal and behavioral differences between part-time and full-time employees (Sinclair, Martin, & Michel, 1999). Recently, Conway and Briner (2002) showed that some attitudinal differences between part-time and full-time employees could be explained better (e.g., satisfaction) than others (e.g., affective commitment) by psychological contract fulfillment. Nowadays, most part-time working employees explicitly choose to work fewer hours and it can be argued that these part-time employees will attach more value to their working conditions and especially to their working hours. Thus, we may expect that the perception of psychological contract breach has greater impact on the contributions of the part-time working than on the contributions of full-time working employees.

Hypothesis 3: Employment status will moderate the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach, i.e. working more hours than one prefers to and agreed upon and engagement in (a) OCB towards supervisor, and (b) OCB towards colleagues, such that this relationship will be stronger for part-time working than for full-time working employees.

Gender and employment status. In the preceding paragraphs it has been argued that the relationship between working more hours and OCB will be stronger for men. Further, it has been argued that this relationship will be stronger for part-time working employees. To further test the predictions, we will examine the possibility that the combination of gender and employment status is associated with the engagement in OCB, such that especially the contributions of part-time working men will be sensitive to psychological contract breach.

Hypothesis 4: There will be a three-way interaction for gender and employment status and the relationship between perceived psychological contract breach, i.e. working more hours than preferred and agreed upon, and (a) OCB towards supervisor, and (b) OCB towards colleagues, such that this relationship will be strongest for part-time employed men.

METHOD

Participants

Data were obtained from a sample consisting of 521 employees (response rate 34%) from three organizations: A university (n=156), a printing works (99), and a government department (n=266). Participants were requested to complete a written questionnaire. After

deleting the questionnaires with missing values on the research variables a total of 459 remains: 280 men (61%) and 179 women (39%). Mean age of the respondents was 42.44 years (SD = 10.21), mean years of education was 15.57 (SD = 2.23), and mean tenure was 10.62 (SD = 9.37). Nineteen percent of the respondents was classified as working more hours than they prefer to and agreed upon. Fifteen percent of part-time working men, 16% of the part-time employed women, 16% of the full-time employed men, and 32% of the full-time working women was working more hours than preferred and agreed upon.

Measures

Engagement in OCB towards supervisor was measured with four items and OCB towards colleagues was measured with three items adopted from previous studies (Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). The results of factor analysis on the seven items are presented in Table 1 (available upon request from the first author). Factor 1 (eigenvalue = 2.37, R² = 34%) consists of the four items of OCB towards supervisor (Alpha = .74). Factor 2 (eigenvalue = 2.09, R² = 30%) consists of the three items of OCB towards colleagues (Alpha = .71). The scales used a seven-point Likert response format (1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree). The items were summated and divided by the number of items, thus indicating 1 = low and 7 = high OCB towards respectively supervisor and colleagues.

Working more hours than preferred and agreed upon was computed by subtracting preferred number of hours from number of hours as agreed in the employment contract. In the analyses a dummy variable is used: 0 = not working more hours, 1 = working more hours than preferred and agreed upon.

Gender was measured with 0 = male and 1 = female. Employment status was measured with 0 = working part-time and 1 = working full-time. Because jobs with long hours may be more complex and requiring a higher level of education than jobs with short hours (Barnett, 1998), education, measured in years completed, was controlled. Organizational tenure, measured in years, was controlled because employees with less organizational tenure are perhaps somewhat less willing to exert extra effort on their organizations' behalf (Feldman, 2002).

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are reported in Table 2 (available upon request from the first author). Two moderated regression analyses were performed for OCB towards supervisor and for OCB towards colleagues. To test specifically for interaction effects, the variables were entered in three steps. In Step 1, gender, employment status and the two control variables were entered. In Step 2, the dummy variable for working more hours was entered. In Step 3, the product variables, computed by multiplying working more hours with gender, working more hours with employment status, and working more hours with gender and with employment status were added. Table 3 (available upon request from the first author) shows the results of the regression analyses. Working more hours than preferred and agreed upon appears to be negatively related to OCB towards supervisor ($\beta = -.55, p < .01$) but not related to OCB towards colleagues ($\beta = -.20, ns$). Thereby, Hypothesis 1a that working more hours than one prefers to and agreed upon is associated with less OCB towards their supervisor, receives support. Hypothesis 1b that working more hours than one prefers to and agreed upon is associated with less OCB towards colleagues is not supported.

The specified interaction for working more hours and gender is significant for OCB towards supervisor. To examine if the significant interactions supports the specified direction in Hypothesis 2a, the interaction is plotted following the procedures outlined by Aiken and

West (1991) by drawing different lines for levels of the moderator and this is graphically displayed in Figure 1 (available upon request from the first author). If the lines are exactly parallel then there is no interaction effect. If the interaction is significant, then the lines are significantly different from one another. The engagement in OCB for not working more hours is nearly the same for men and women. However, the negative relationship between working more hours and OCB appears to be stronger for men than for women. Hence, Hypothesis 2a that gender moderates the relationship between working more hours than one prefers to and agreed upon and the engagement in OCB towards their supervisor, such that this relationship will be stronger for men than for women, is supported. The specified interaction for OCB towards colleagues is not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 2b, relating to OCB towards their colleagues, is not supported.

The interaction of working more hours with employment status for OCB towards supervisor is depicted in figure 2 (available upon request from the first author). The figures show engagement in OCB for not working more hours to be almost the same for full-time and part-time working employees. The negative relationship between working more hours and OCB appears to be stronger for part-time working employees than for full-time working employees. Thereby, Hypothesis 3a that employment status moderates the relationship between working more hours than one prefers and agreed upon and the engagement in OCB towards their supervisor, such that this relationship will be stronger for part-time working than full-time working employees, is supported. Again, the specified interaction for OCB towards colleagues is not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 3b, relating to OCB towards colleagues, is not supported.

The three-way interaction working more hours x gender x employment status is presented in Figure 3 (available upon request from the first author). The engagement in OCB towards the supervisor of part-time working women and full-time working men appears to be relatively insensitive for working more hours. The relationship between working hours and OCB towards the supervisor appears to be strongest for part-time working men. Hence, Hypothesis 4a that there will be a three-way interaction between gender, employment status and working more hours than preferred and agreed upon for OCB towards supervisor, such that this relationship will be strongest for part-time working men, is supported. Again, the specified interaction for OCB towards colleagues, is not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 4b, relating to OCB towards colleagues, is not supported.

DISCUSSION

The present study treated working more hours than preferred and agree upon as an instance of psychological contract breach. Results showed that this type of contract breach is associated with withdrawal of contributions, i.e., less engagement in OCB towards the supervisor, but no such relationship with respect to OCB towards colleagues was found. Men and part-time working employees, and especially the combination of part-time working men appeared to be sensitive to working more hours than preferred and agreed upon, such that the negative relationship between working more hours and OCB towards their supervisor was strongest for the group part-time working men. Apparently, working more hours than preferred and agreed upon, as an instance of psychological contract breach, is most strongly associated with the reduction of contribution for those that value work and working conditions most. Further, it appears that levels of OCB do not differ for those that do not perceive psychological contract breach, irrespective of gender and employment status.

Typically, studies of OCB consider different dimensions of OCB (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). Our results

suggest that researchers studying the engagement in OCB should treat OCB towards the supervisor and OCB towards colleagues as separate phenomena. The results of the present study emphasize that that employees indeed have multiple commitments (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Reichers, 1985; Settoon et al., 1996) and the engagement in OCB is especially associated with the nature of the relationship with the supervisor (Settoon et al., 1996). (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Reichers, 1985; Settoon et al., 1996). Moreover, the supervisor can be conceived as the most direct source that demands reciprocation (Bateman & Organ, 1983).

The results of the present study have a number of practical implications for organizations seeking to lessen the negative consequence of overtime and who want to promote OCB. Long working hours generally do not reflect employee preferences but frequently result from exigent workplaces (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001). The results from the present study make the point that it is important that managers pay attention to managing beliefs regarding mutual obligations and, in particular, to how employees may conceive working more hours as potential breach the psychological contract. Organizations are increasingly faced with decisions to produce mean and lean and rely on (mandatory) overtime, but in the long run this may turn against them (Ettner & Grzywacz, 2001).

Some words of caution regarding the results of this study are necessary. One limitation of this kind of research, already raised by Morrison and Phelps (1999), is that not all of the individuals surveyed responded to the survey. For instance, it is possible that individuals that engage less in OCB are also less likely to respond, thereby creating potential selection bias. Also the cross-sectional design precludes causal relationships. Further, the data were collected via self-report measures and common method variance easily can become a problem within such designs, although the different results for OCB towards supervisor and towards colleagues makes this less likely. Future research efforts need to consider using longitudinal and multi-actor data, for instance information from both supervisor and employee.

Even with these limitations, we believe we have achieved our purpose for this study. First, we showed that overtime, or working more hours than preferred and agreed upon as an instance of psychological contract breach, was negatively associated with subsequent contributions, i.e. less engagement in OCB towards the supervisor. Second, those who attached most value to work and working conditions - i.e., part-time working employees and men, and specifically part-time working men - were shown to be most sensitive to this contract breach and reduced their contributions most. Following Robinson (1996), it is likely that psychological contract breach and its negative consequences remain common in organizations. If this continues to be facts of organizational life, then the challenge for managers is to learn how to navigate such perceptions of psychological contract breach by effectively managing overtime for different groups of employees.

REFERENCES

References available upon request from the first author.