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PROFESSIONALISM IN A CHANGING WORK ENVIRONMENT:
EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLICATIONS OF
ACADEMICS’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS

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ABSTRACT
While research has indicated that psychological contracts can have a considerable impact upon workplace relations and employee work performance, research on the development, detail and impact of the psychological contracts formed by university academics has been limited and variable in terms of findings. This paper discusses findings from exploratory research that aimed to partially redress this relative lack of knowledge about the formation, content and effects of psychological contracts formed by academics. We argue that in the current university environment, the formation and content of psychological contracts are of increasing importance with regard to levels of employee trust, satisfaction, commitment, motivation, and teaching and research outcomes. Further, our research indicates that many of the potentially detrimental effects of psychological contract violation can be ameliorated, and even avoided, by ensuring that employer and employee perceptions of ‘obligations’ are congruent.

Keywords: psychological contract; employee performance; employee commitment; multi method
INTRODUCTION
The past two decades have seen enormous change in the number, funding, and focus of Australian universities. Such changes have profoundly affected the context and conditions of academic work. Academics work in an environment that has been characterised as increasingly managerialist and market-oriented (Marginson and Considine, 2000), freedom and autonomy has declined, and performance expectations have sharply increased (Winter and Sarros, 2000). Government funding now comes with ever more strings attached, and managers within universities commonly apply tighter conditions and controls upon faculties, departments, and individual academics as they allocate funds internally. Further, despite increased accountability and responsiveness, Australian universities and academics are regularly criticised by politicians and the press for being out-of-touch with, or unresponsive to, the current and future needs of industry and students.

Universities are increasingly commercial, and increasingly competitive in pursuing funds and students (Abbott, 2006). Such changes are, we believe, reflective of universities that Lewis, Marginson and Snyder (2005: 62) believe are ‘increasingly dominated by accountability and performance-oriented decrees from the university executive’. We have seen the practice and language of business increasingly become the practice and language of university leaders and managers (Curtis and Mathewman, 2005). Relatively alien in Australian universities in the past, we are seeing greater strategic planning and the application of user pays and ‘client’ orientation principles. These changes reflect, and have contributed to the emergence of, the increasingly dominant view of university education as a matter of private investment rather than a public good (Jarvis, 2001). Of course, many of these changes and challenges facing Australian academics and universities have also been experienced by UK academics and
universities and (Newton, 2002). Longer working hours, greater stress, and declining morale (Jarvis, 2001) is a shared experience.

In many universities staff/student ratios have reached new highs, and value conflict between principles and practices associated with managerialism and commercialisation and those traditionally associated with a commitment to teaching, learning and scholarship has become a well recognised problem (see, for example: Winter and Sarros, 2000; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Jarvis, 2001). The well-established Australian universities1 with strong financial and research resources appear better placed to survive and even prosper in this environment, while others, such as the university that is the site of our empirical research2, face more complex and challenging futures.

It is in the context of such change and uncertainty that this paper addresses the psychological contracts of academics from an Australian university business faculty. It seeks to affirm the potential of psychological contracts as a powerful means of understanding, and even managing, contemporary academic workplace relations. Indeed, we believe that in this environment, the formation, content and effects of psychological contracts are critically important for universities. We argue that understanding and effectively managing the psychological contracts that develop can help universities to meet their performance goals.

The discussion that follows is divided into two main sections. The first section briefly addresses some key features of the psychological contract, and discusses past empirical

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1 Notably the universities known as the Group of Eight: Australian National University; University of Adelaide; University of Melbourne; Monash University; University of Sydney; University of New South Wales; University of Queensland; and University of Western Australia.

2 Academics employed within a business faculty of a multi-campus Australian university were the subjects of the study. The university has strong internal, distance and international operations and has some 35,000 students.
research conducted within academia. The second section addresses our empirical research on the psychological contracts. In this second section, we address our research method and then present findings. Having applied a sequential multi method approach involving focus groups and a mail survey to understanding the psychological contracts established by the academics, we will initially discuss our qualitative research and findings before moving to discussion of the survey and its analysis.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS WITHIN ACADEMIA

The employment relationship can be conceived of as having two components: the legal contract of service, which covers the legal relations between the employer and the employee; and, the psychological contract which refers to the behavioural relations between the employer and employee that are not made explicit in formal legal employment agreement. Further, there are two main conceptualisations of the psychological contract that are discussed in literature. The first addresses the perception that there are two parties in the employment relationship who have mutual obligations to each other: the organisation and the employee (Herriot, Manning, and Kidd, 1997). These mutual obligations may have been explicitly communicated through formal contracts or they may be implied through the expectations of organisations and employees. The second conceptualisation focuses upon the psychological contract as formulated only in the mind of the employee. This approach focuses upon ‘individual beliefs, shaped by the organisation, regarding the terms of an exchange between individuals and their organisation ... A key feature of the psychological contract is that the individual voluntarily asserts to make and accept certain promises as he or she understands them’ (Rousseau, 1995; 9-10). For example, the employee may believe that the organisation has agreed to certain commitments, such as providing job security, high pay, promotion, and training in exchange for the employee’s hard work and loyalty (Rousseau,
1990). It is this second conceptualisation of the psychological contract that we utilise in our empirical research and analysis.

Psychological contracts mediate relationships between organisational factors and work outcomes, such as commitment and job satisfaction. Research has also addressed how psychological contracts influence employee’s contribution to employers, organisational decisions and planned organisational changes. It has even been argued that perceived obligations within the psychological contract are often more important to job-related attitudes and behaviour, than are the formal and explicit elements of contractual agreements (Thomson and Bunderson, 2003). Studies have indicated that violation of employee’s beliefs and perceptions of the elements of psychological contracts may influence work outcomes, including job satisfaction, participation in development activities, and intention to remain with the current employer (Cavanaugh and Noe, 1999; Freese and Schalk, 1996; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004).

While empirical research on psychological contracts has developed significantly during the past decade (see, for example: Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005; Freese and Schalk, 1996; Cavanaugh and Noe, 1999; Turnley and Feldman, 1999; DelCampo, 2007; Nadin and Cassell, 2007; O’Donohue, Donohue, and Grimmer, 2007), empirical research on psychological contracts within academia has been very limited. It is represented by the studies of Dabos and Rousseau (2004), Newton (2002), and the work at a New Zealand university initiated in the middle 1990s (Tipple and Krivokapic-Skoko, 1997). Research on the psychological contracts established by scientists/knowledge workers (O’Donohue, Sheehan, Hecker, and Holland, 2007) can be also discussed within a relatively broadly defined subject area of academia.
Dabos and Rousseau’s (2004) survey based research among academics employed by a research-focused School of bioscience in Latin America identified how mutuality and reciprocity between employees and employers can develop and result in very beneficial outcomes for both sides of the employment relationship. In this School, the understanding of the obligations resulted in positive outcomes for both researchers (career advancement and promotion) and the employers (increased research productivity). Very interestingly, there was convergence in perceptions of employees and employers with regard to psychological contracts.

In a study that explored issues of trust, collegiality, accountability and collegiality with a UK college, Newton (2002) identified limited management recognition of psychological contracts as a factor associated with employees’ perceptions of a lack of perceived reward and recognition and the poor morale and commitment that resulted.

The empirical research undertaken at Lincoln University, New Zealand, by Tipples and Krivokapic-Skoko (1996; 1997), indicated that the academics’ psychological contracts were in a very poor state. Based on qualitative interviews and a questionnaire survey, Tipples and Krivokapic-Skoko explored academics’ beliefs and expectations regarding their university as a means of investigating their psychological contracts. Only interested in the employee side, they identified low morale, low job satisfaction, disappointment and dissatisfaction. Academics believed that Lincoln university had not met its obligations.

O’Donohue, Sheehan, Hecker, and Holland (2007) examined whether or not psychological contracts adequately reflect the knowledge worker’s contracts. Their findings indicated that
scientists and knowledge workers were concerned more about ideological/societal issues (scientific contributions and knowledge accumulation within the organisation) associated with their work than the transactional or relational psychological contracts established with their organisation. Making a contribution to knowledge was deemed to be at the core of their psychological contracts.

**A MULTI METHOD RESEARCH DESIGN**

While valuable research work has been undertaken utilising such methods as interviews, case studies, critical incidents and scenarios, and diaries (Conway and Briner, 2005), most research on psychological contracts has been survey based. Such survey research has involved increasingly complex research designs and quantitative techniques in data analysis. Consequently, some experts on the psychological contract literature have recently called for the use of a variety of research techniques (Conway and Briner, 2005), a holistic approach (Pete 2006), and triangulation of research methods in order to provide more convincing and reliable results of empirical research (Tipples and Verry, 2006).

Generally speaking, the motivation for combining qualitative and quantitative is to seek ‘elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other method’ (Green et al, 1989: 258-259). Such motivation resulted in our adoption of a sequential multi method research design\(^3\). According to Morse (2003: 190) such a design involves ‘the incorporation of various qualitative and quantitative strategies within a single project’. Similarly, Creswell et al (2003: 212) note that at its simplest level, a multi

\(^3\) While we recognise the potential benefits of understanding the multiple contracts, and the specific nuances of the contracts, that may exists in relation to different managers such as Department Heads, Faculty Deans, or the Vice Chancellor, we deliberately avoided addressing such complexity in our research by focusing discussion and thought on ‘the university’ as the employing ‘agent’. This approach did not prove problematic as the academics readily understood our focus on the university as the employer, and it allowed us to address commonalities of experience and expectations in ways that would have been far more difficult had we focused upon specific levels of management.
method research design, uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis in a single study. Conducted in two phases, using a sequential multi method research design, our empirical research began with exploratory focus group discussions which were followed by a mail survey.

**FOCUS GROUPS**

A key feature of focus groups is that they provide for relatively free-flowing and spontaneous discussions which can yield information and insights that would otherwise be unattainable. They can provide a way of accessing dense subjective interpretations in which the views of the individuals are intertwined with the shared perceptions of the group. Accordingly, focus groups are an appropriate approach to discovering how employees interpret psychological contracts. Also influencing our decision to pursue focus groups is the fact that they are known to be useful in the identification of issues and themes that can subsequently be drawn upon to assist with development of relevant survey questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003; Morgan 1993).

The three focus groups were conducted in a conference room familiar to the academics on their home campus. A semi-structured format was developed to guide the focus group discussion. Potential participants were contacted by email and were provided with an information sheet explaining the aims of the study and the function of the focus group in the broader research design. The discussion was led by a research assistant experienced with group facilitation to allow for an informal atmosphere and to ensure there was no major power imbalance. The questions that were asked addressed key issues identified in literature on psychological contracts. The research assistant and one other member of the research team

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4 To the best of our knowledge, our research constitutes one of the few empirical studies which used a focus group approach to understand how academics interpret the psychological contract.
were present at each focus group. The size of the groups was small enough to allow for in-depth discussion of key items yet offered diversity and possibilities for the development of ideas. Twenty six academics (excluding the researchers) participated across the three focus groups.

While a limitation of focus groups can be the tendency for participants to deviate from their usual thinking and behaviour in order to ‘fit-in’ with group norms (Kenyon, 2004), the researchers were fortunate to be working with a relatively homogenous group of participants who regularly work with each other thereby minimising the effects of this tendency. Confidentiality can also be an issue affecting the willingness of participants to speak openly in focus group discussions (Bloor et al., 2001). To minimise the risk of loss of privacy, and perceptions of fear associated with focus group participation, first names or pseudonyms were used during the discussion and we asked participants to respect the privacy of others by not discussing participants and the views they expressed outside the focus group session. With the signed consent of the participants, each of the focus group sessions was audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

Within each focus group, the facilitator sought to elicit insights and subjective interpretations of the psychological contracts and the consequences of perceived breach. The focus group questions encouraged the academics to discuss: (a) what they feel they bring to their work that is not explicitly stated in their employment contract; (b) what they believe the university owes them in return; (c) how the University has fulfilled or exceeded expectations; (d) how the University has failed to fulfil expectations; and, (e) responses to perceived psychological contract violation.
The academics spoke to a range of personal qualities as elements of what they bring to their work and the university, frequently noting that their work involves much more than time and effort, including their creativity, integrity, values and experience. Contractual elements presented in earlier studies (see, for example: Thomas and Anderson, 1998; Kickul and Lester, 2001; Guest and Conway, 2002; Thompson and Bunderson, 2003) were exceeded by the elements named by the academics. The breadth of perceived responsibilities and obligations saw them speak to elements that extend well beyond the university.

Most of the academics spoke to a powerful work ethic and there was considerable discussion of willingness to work outside ‘normal’ working hours and flexibility in accepting various roles. For example, one focus group participant said, ‘there’s this attitude amongst a lot of staff, I find that [pause] a willingness to put a huge amount of work into what they’re doing and to take it very seriously’. Another participant noted, ‘willingness to work beyond the stated hours and a willingness to take on Faculty and University roles that are not sustained in one’s duty statement and that aren’t remunerated’.

Enhancing society and, more specifically, advancing social justice and ethical practice were raised and addressed by focus group participants. It was commented, ‘there’s an ideological underpinning of what some of us are all about. I’m a person who believes in working towards a fairer society … doing something that’s worthwhile to society as whole.’ Commitment and passion were expressed in relation to facilitating and enhancing student learning. The academics referred to feelings of giving of themselves personally, their desire to share their experience and knowledge, and their interest in stimulating and encouraging students. One participant reflected that ‘you are actually sharing a part of yourself with them’.
The academics felt that the breadth of knowledge they bring to their work is an important contribution to the University. It was consistently stated that disciplinary knowledge, teaching and industry knowledge and experience, and industry contacts and networks, are highly valuable, but are not equally recognised by management. Conscience, personal ethics, integrity and a desire to make society a better place were strong motivators for staff and represented commonly discussed aspects of personal qualities that staff felt they were bringing to their academic work. Motivation and enthusiasm were frequently discussed in terms of ‘making a difference’, ‘making society a better place’, and generally expressing a desire to advance social justice and ethics.

Building upon perceived promises of mutual exchange the academics spoke at length regarding what they were expecting of the University in return for what they bring to their job. A common theme that emerged from the statements is that academics want to be recognised and treated as professionals. Much of the discussion centred on the expectations of good leadership and management, fairness and transparency in promotion and recognition of one’s personal commitment to the profession, the university and the students.

Issues relating to trust, clear and honest communication, transparency, student advocacy, individual consideration, and respect were prominent throughout the conversations. Generally, there was a realistic acceptance of the constraints within which management must make decisions, and that such constraints can lead to broken promises and failure to meet expectations from staff. What was not accepted, and this raised considerable emotion, was failure to address such situations in an honest manner and communicate outcomes effectively.
Commitment to teaching and the desire to contribute to society emerged as powerful motivators for academic staff, and the need for academic freedom and job discretion were linked to these motivations. Staff expressed a strong expectation of autonomy, job discretion and inclusion in decision making and this was related to their professional identity. As one participant noted, ‘[t]here's an expectation that our professionalism will be respected, that we're not going to be treated as if we've got nothing to add and that we're just automatons in the machine’. Being treated fairly was an expectation consistently expressed by the academics, which included: equitable pay, impartiality, fairness in promotion, consistency in applying rules, acceptance of union involvement, reciprocity, and an expectation that family and outside commitments should not cause disadvantage. The academics perceived their role as involving teaching, research and administration and they expect to be recognised and rewarded for each, though it was frequently commented that research wins out in terms of recognition and promotion. That noted, the expectation of recognition for effort and achievement goes beyond the desire for a fair promotion and remuneration system, and addresses a basic need to be affirmed, appreciated and acknowledged by others.

Key areas where the University was considered to have fulfilled or exceeded its implicit obligations included support for research, outside activities, training and development, and support and care with regard to personal and emotional issues. Although many examples of where the university had fulfilled or exceeded expectations were reported, the university was also deemed to have failed in meeting perceived obligations. Even among the focus groups who spoke more positively about their psychological contracts, they had much to say about ‘contract violation’. Within each group, the phrase ‘changing the goalposts’ was spoken in reference to promotion and the increasing expectations that have seen many fail to meet criteria. The unpredictability of career advancement within the university has caused much
disappointment and anger amongst academics. A theme across the groups was that while quality teaching is espoused as the cornerstone of the university’s strategy and core values, it is perceived that it is only the quantity and type of research that is recognised and rewarded. This creates a double standard within the institution which in turn encourages dishonest communication. The lack of openness in such situations was made worse when a rule or policy was invoked to justify a decision that had obviously been made for other reasons. This perceived lack of honest communication had turned disappointing situations into experiences of extreme betrayal. The highly emotive issues of promotions and redundancies were closely tied to the issue of honesty and transparency in communication as these issues so frequently provided the focal point of grievance.

While some discussants were frustrated with the daily disruption to their work resulting from the need to conform to bureaucratic rules and regulations, others were more deeply concerned with the long-term direction of the institution. There appeared to be two sets of competing priorities within the university that were at the heart of most of the reports of psychological contract violation. The first priority was the issue of the encroachment of administrative systems stressing conformity, rationality and efficiency on the practice of professionals who require flexibility, personal discretion and autonomy. For some, a bureaucratic juggernaut was a threat to the core competence of the university in teaching excellence and customer focus. The second priority was the imperative to increase research output. This issue was almost unanimously noted as a source of psychological contract violation across all the groups. It was recognised that research output was an essential priority for the university in order to obtain government funding and remain a viable entity. However, it was felt that this imperative was, in effect, causing a split in the university’s focus by undermining its outstanding teaching reputation. It was perceived that the university’s management has had
difficulty in balancing the twin goals of increasing research output while maintaining excellence in teaching. Perceived tension between these goals was deemed to have caused inconsistency in expectations and behaviour which has had an impact on staffing, promotion, performance management and workloads. Research was generally seen to be ascendant, and pursued, at the expense of teaching quality. This tension, and the perceived greater reward given to good researchers, was seen as a matter ‘changing goalposts’. This was reported as leading to feelings of disappointment, discouragement, anger, bitterness and betrayal. It aroused distrust amongst academics towards the university.

Following previous studies, a key aim was to explore the impact of psychological contract violation on work outcomes such as job satisfaction, participation in development activities, and intention to remain with the current employer (Cavanaugh and Noe, 1999; Freese and Schalk , 1996; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). The data was analysed against the EVLN framework. Our findings were similar to those from prior studies but we found evidence of another response to contract violation that could be called ‘Adapt’. That is, some respondents, while initially hurt by the violation, come to change their attitude and behaviour in order to adapt to their new circumstances. Professional practice and associated identity seems critical here. For some academics, the violation event gave impetus to adaptation to ‘the new system’ and even enjoyment of the opportunities it offered. These adaptations to the new priorities and demands of the University showed that internal and external catalysts during an organisational restructure can lead to renegotiations in which the contract evolves. The adaptation response was also related to the professionalism of the academic in that when

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5 Turnley and Feldman (1998) developed the exit, voice, loyalty and neglect (EVLN) framework, in order to summarise possible impacts of contract violation. This framework suggests that an employee will respond to psychological contract violations in four ways: by increased exit (leave the firm); increased voice (in the context of PC voice is conceptualised as an intention to constructive effort to improve employment relations and taking initiative with superiors to improve conditions); decreased loyalty (the employee is less likely to engage in extra-role behaviour; decreased focus on organisational citizenship behaviour); and, increased neglect (more absenteeism, less attention to quality).
loyalty to the institution was slipping, loyalty to the discipline and the commitment to students seems to take effect:

... very few academics slacken off because of their commitment to the students and because of their professionalism [agreement from group] so it doesn’t matter how badly they’re treated, they will still perform close to their optimal level and if they can’t do this they then leave.

The violation response of ‘exit’ was mentioned only three times across all the groups. By no means was it reported as a typical response to the psychological contract violation in this situation. To a limited extent, minimal reference to ‘exit’ may have reflected the fact that several academics expressed feelings of being trapped in their situation and unable to move to a new job. As one participant noted, [i]f our mobility was real and it’s not then I think this university would have experienced more people leaving than has been the case, than has been over the last 6, 7, 8, 10 years.'

In the context of the psychological contract, ‘voice’ is conceptualised as an intention to constructive effort to improve employment relations and taking initiative to improve conditions (Turnley and Feldman, 1998). Little was directly reported that would suggest that this was a usual response for the academics. When an academic felt violated, ‘corridor talk’ was stated as a frequent behaviour. Collective organisation and speaking out was also mentioned but with a suggestion that this was futile activity.

Within the focus groups, the most frequently cited responses to psychological contract violation were loss of loyalty and neglect behaviours. Sometimes the decreased loyalty was spoken of as resulting in ‘giving up’ and feelings of helplessness. Others referred to behaviour that saw them less likely to engage in extra-role behaviour. Increased neglect,
particularly with regard to less attention to teaching quality, was a prominent feature of discussion.

Whatever the reaction to contract violation, there is no doubt that the emotional experience can be extreme. Many academics gave considerable emphasis to their deep regret and pain over violations that can be masked by the variety responses taken by employees:

. . .there has been, on the part of the university, some fairly egregious departures from equity in the promotion process . . . It has wreaked havoc with the morale of a lot people here some of whom I know have moved on as a result and those who have stayed on and coped with it because of their professionalism or had no where else to go.

Notably, the negative effects of the psychological contract violation were shown to be mediated by strong commitment to the students even when frustration with the institution was high. Very tellingly, it was said that

there is that third dimension which plays a huge part in psychological contract with the students. . . our responsibility and caring for the students that locks us into that contract do more than, than if we were only looking after ourselves, it might be a different relationship between the employee and employer. But because you have got the student sitting there and they’re very much part of this of the psychology of this that it often restricts some of the action we might want to take or some of the things we may do because we are looking after the reason why we are here.

Indeed, four key foci of academic responsibility emerged from the focus group research that greatly influenced the formation and effects of the academics’ psychological contracts. These are: the university; the discipline; society; and, students (see: Figure 1).
The focus group discussions made it very clear to us that it would problematic to attempt to understand the formation and effects of the psychological contract solely in terms of what the academic feels they owe the university. The commitment, passion and concerns of the academics were often associated more strongly with students and society that with the university as their employer. Their commitment and concerns are often directed more toward the students and society with the institution providing a means of serving those higher goals. If they are frustrated with unmet expectations and promises, it is likely that these frustrations will occur in areas that impinge upon their ability to fulfil their personal mission of attaining these higher goals. The academics remain strongly committed to social ideals associated with traditional notions of the university as a key social institution within civil society, an
institution oriented to the ‘social good’. Further, it seemed that frustration that existed regarding unmet expectations and promises were strongly felt and articulated when they negatively affected one’s ability to fulfil personal commitments to these social ideals. That is not to say that promotion and remuneration are unimportant, just that these other factors remain very strong and were often perceived to be under increased pressure and threat from bureaucratic and commercial forces.

MAIL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

As noted, our survey questionnaire was distributed to academics sourced within a faculty of business. Using (Dillman, 1978) Total Design Method, a total of 117 questionnaires were mailed out, and of these 60 questionnaires were completed and returned (51% response rate). Most of the surveys were completed in full, meaning few were discarded due to respondent error. The items used in the questionnaire came from two sources. Existing psychological contract literature provided some items and others were developed through the focus groups. Existing items were adopted from Janssens et al. (2003) and de Vas et al. (2003) but were altered to reflect the university context of the research. The focus group provided a number of insights, which were used to develop items for the research. In total, 31 items were included to measure perceived university obligations (summarised in Table 1), while 13 where included to measure the obligations of the individual academic to the university (summarised in Table 2). Quantitative analysis was completed using both exploratory factor analysis and cluster analysis.

Once the data was collected, factor analysis was used to determine the two key variables (1) academics’ obligations to the university and (2) academics’ perception of the university’s obligations to them. Principle components analysis was utilised due to its ability to identify a
parsimonious set of factors (Hair et al., 2006, Malhotra et al., 2002) and its suitability for exploratory research (Malhotra et al., 2002). A Varimax rotation was used to ensure the factors were easy to interpret through the simplest structure (Hair et al., 2006, Aaker et al., 2006). The analysis revealed eight factors that related to the academics’ perceptions of university’s obligations to them and three factors for the academics’ obligations to the university.

The findings from the factor analysis are included in Table 1 (university’s obligations to individuals) and Table 2 (academics’ obligations to the university). As can be seen in the tables, there are some instances of cross loading, however, all factors are reliable. All factors were above 0.60; which is acceptable for exploratory research of this nature (Hair et al., 2006). Further supporting the factor solutions, each had a KMO above 0.60 and each factor had a significant Barlett’s test of Sphericity, thus surpassing Hair et al’s (2004) levels of acceptability.

While the factor analysis yielded interesting results, these were limited as the academics’ characteristics (for example, sex, tenure and length of employment) were a major influence on their preferences thereby limiting results. Hence, to overcome this limitation cluster analysis was used to further examine the factors and the individuals associated with these. The cluster analysis was generated using the factor scores that are contained in Tables 1 and 2.

Based on the our analysis of the data and the items included, each of the factors were named as follows: (1) fair treatment in promotion; (2) staff development and support; (3) good management and leadership; (4) academic life; (5) fairness and equity; (6) appropriate
remuneration; (7) rewarding performance; and, (8) good workplace relations. These factors were used as the basis for the initial cluster analysis.

With regard to the academics’ obligations to the university, the factors were named as follows: (1) meets academic expectations; (2) commitment; and, (3) above and beyond. These factors were utilised for the second cluster procedure.

As the research was primarily exploratory, only one cluster method was used. Wards method was adopted as it is well suited to this type of exploratory analysis and also minimises the number of clusters identified. The Squared Euclidian Distance was used in the two cluster procedures that were run (as similarity was sought). The first cluster procedure was for the academics’ perceptions of the university’s obligations and the second was for the academics’ obligations to the university. To identify the correct number of clusters, in the university’s obligations to the academics procedure three to seven solutions were examined and for the academics’ obligations three to five cluster solutions were examined. In both cases, the agglomeration schedule, dendrogram and frequencies were used to determine the number of
Table 1: University’s Obligations Factor Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide clear and consistent requirements for promotion</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat you fairly and equitably with regards to promotion</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be fair and equitable in its treatment of academics</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include you in decision-making that directly affects you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities for career development</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support ongoing professional development</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide opportunities promotion</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide remuneration that is comparable to other universities</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a safe and comfortable work environment</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that staff act collegially</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide good management</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide good leadership</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimise the impact of red tape</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide security of ongoing employment</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow you autonomy to act as a professional academic</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain academic freedom</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect the demands of family/personal relationships</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate important information to you</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge the long hours you devote to work</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act ethically</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage the pace of change so that it does not adversely affect you</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide remuneration that is similar to the private sector</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide remuneration that is similar to the public sector</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognise your non-university experience</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward excellence in teaching through the promotion system</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward excellence in research through the promotion system</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward excellence in admin/management through the promotion system</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be honest in its communications with you</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer flexibility regarding working from home</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect the role of academic unions in the workplace</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Only loadings above 0.40 are shown)
Table 2: Academics’ Obligations Factor Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comply with university rules and regulations</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act ethically at work</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance your discipline</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publish scholarly research</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work effectively and efficiently</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay employed by the university for the next 2 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel for work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act collegially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work long hours to complete tasks</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete tasks that are not strictly part of your job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete tasks that are asked of you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide teaching quality</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance student development</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Only loadings above 0.40 are shown)

clusters to be selected. The agglomeration schedule indicated that between three and four clusters was appropriate for both cluster procedures. The dendrogram also indicated that four clusters was the most suitable solution, as did the frequencies. Using four cluster solutions, the factors and the demographic information collected in the survey, the following insights into the clusters were developed (note: the eight clusters are profiled according to the factors and the demographic details collected).

Cluster Procedure 1: University’s Obligations

As noted, the first cluster procedure was conducted on the factors included in Table 1. These related to academics’ perceptions of the university’s obligations to them.

University’s Obligations 1: Satisfied

The respondents in this cluster scored highest on fair treatment in promotion, staff development support, reward for performance, and workplace relations. This was however, the smallest group representing only 10% of the sample. They were strongly concerned with
teaching and research, indicating a traditional university employment situation. Also, they have, on average, been employed at their current institution for longer than any of the other clusters. The group was also predominantly male, to a much greater extant than any of the other clusters, and they were employed in more senior positions. Interestingly, members of this group were less frequently union members. In summary, this cohort exhibited a high level of faith in the university’s systems and indicated belief that the university will fulfil its obligations.

University’s Obligations 2: Lifestyle

The respondents in this cluster were most concerned with academic lifestyle, placing greater emphasis on this issue than any of the other groups. While the group did exhibit interest in fair remuneration, they displayed the lowest interest in reward for performance and performance based promotion. The largest cluster, with 38% of the sample, they also appear somewhat disinterested in the quality of management and leadership provided. In contrast, they highly valued, more than any of the other groups, workplace relations. In terms of demographics, the group had the second longest length of service at their current institution; however, they had spent less time at other universities than any other group. They were also the oldest group, had the highest level of females, and the lowest level of completed doctorates.

University’s Obligations 3: Complacent

Those in the ‘complacent’ cluster had the lowest interest in all of the areas that the clusters were assessed on. This is the second oldest and second largest group (32% of the sample). The group expressed the least interest in academic life, workplace equity and concern for appropriate remuneration. Limited interested was indicated in relation to reward for
performance, good management/leadership, staff development, and fair treatment in promotion. This group is characterised by having the lowest level of academic positions and having spent the most amount of time at their position level.

*University’s Obligations 4: Ambitious*

The academics in this cluster are very eager to receive appropriate remuneration and rewards for performance. They also expressed high concern for equity but place relatively little importance on leadership and management or good workplace relations. They place a moderate amount of value on academic life and promotion fairness. The youngest of all four cohorts, members of this cluster have the shortest length of service with their current institution, as well as the shortest amount of time at their current position level. Interestingly, they have the longest service with previous universities.

*Cluster Procedure 2: Academics’ obligations*

The second cluster procedure was conducted using the factors relating to the academics’ perceptions of their obligations to the university (see: Table 2).

*Academics’ Obligations 1: Low commitment*

As a cohort, this was the smallest group accounting for 20% of the sample. This group expressed the least commitment to their work and the university. While they have the second highest interest in meeting university expectations, the expressed very little interest in going above and beyond university expectations. In terms of demographics, the group had by far the largest union membership, were the oldest, had the highest proportion of males, had spent the most time at other universities, and had been at their current academic level for the longest period. Primarily, the group was interested in teaching and research.
Academics’ Obligations 2: Above and Beyond

This cluster was the second largest group, containing 25% of the sample. This group expressed the highest level of interest in working ‘above and beyond’, yet they registered relatively little commitment or desire to meet ‘academic expectations’. This group was the youngest of the four clusters, had the lowest level of union membership, and the least number of years of service with their current university and other universities. Given their limited employment duration, it is not surprising that they have the shortest period at their current level. As the youngest cluster, generational differences associated with lower concern regarding security of tenure, increased career movement, and lower commitment to employers seem to be in play.

Academics’ Obligations 3: Expectations and Commitment

Cluster three, the second smallest cluster accounted for 22% of the overall sample. This group had the highest level of interest in meeting ‘academic expectations’ and expressed the highest level of ‘commitment’. They also indicated a strong interest in going ‘above and beyond’ expectations. On average, this group held the highest academic positions and had been employed by the university for one year more than the other groups. They also possessed the highest education levels and lowest number of incomplete postgraduate degrees.

Academics’ Obligation 4: Commitment

The final cluster in this procedure is the largest with 27% the sample and the only factor that had a positive weighting was ‘commitment’. The group had the lowest level of interest in working ‘above and beyond’ and in meeting ‘academic expectations’. The demographics of
this group differed to each of the other clusters, having the highest percentage of females and the highest level of incomplete postgraduate degrees. On average, they were second highest in terms of academic positions, had been employed by the university second longest, and had the second longest period of employment with their previous institution.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In this era of tight funding, increasing competition, and greater managerial hierarchy and accountability, the formation, content and effects of psychological contracts are especially important for academics and universities. Both groups need to be sensitive to possible differences in expectations, since unrealised expectations may result in de-motivation, decreased commitment, increased turnover, and loss of trust in the organisation. That noted, as Turnley and Feldman (1999) found, our empirical research suggests that contextual factors have strongly moderated the relationship between psychological contract violations and exit, and to a lesser extent the relationships between the violation and voice, neglect behaviour, and loyalty to the university.

This is not to infer that violations of the academics’ psychological contract come without a cost, but for now these have been minimal for the university that is the focus of our research. For example, the academics expressed strong continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990) that is not fully explained by the costs of resigning. Perceived work intensification, problems surrounding promotion, and loss of professional autonomy and control did not result in notable withdrawal of labour. Declining morale and emotional distress were evident, but most academics at Charles Sturt University still expressed hope, and a degree of optimism, that the circumstances could be improved.
We identified that the academics’ commitments to society and the social good, student learning and development, their disciplines, and the institution of the University, play a prominent part in the development and moderation of the effects of their psychological contracts. Using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the survey data, eight factors were discovered that relate to the University’s obligations to its employees and three underlying factors were found in relation to individual academic’s obligations to the University. In terms of the University’s obligation to the academics, the EFA reinforces the importance of leadership and management, fairness and equity (notably in relation to promotion and provision of opportunities for career development). In terms of the academic’s perceived obligations to the university, the EFA points to the importance of role expectations, commitment to the job and student learning. The cluster analysis allowed for some unpacking of the effects of such characteristics as gender, age, position level, union membership, and length of employment upon perceptions of the psychological contract. What emerged from the analysis is that each of these dimensions is an important factor with regard to psychological contract content and effects.

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6 We recognise the limitations of our research (for example: small sample size and single context) and generalisability of our findings. It is our intention to broaden the scope of the research by surveying academics in other faculties within the same university, and academics from business faculties in other universities in Australia and overseas.
References


### Appendix A: Factor Reliability Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Cronbach score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>University Obligations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair treatment in promotion</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development and support</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good management and leadership</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic life</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness and equity</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate remuneration</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewarding performance</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good workplace relations</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Obligations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet academic expectations</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>0.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Above and beyond</td>
<td>0.69</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix B: University’s Obligations Clusters with Factor Scores

![Cluster graph showing factor scores and clusters](image-url)
Appendix C: Mean Scores for University’s Obligations Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward Method</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair treatment in promotion</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development and support</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td>-.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good management and leadership</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic life</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.70</td>
<td>.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness and equity</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate remuneration</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.44</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewarding performance</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good workplace relations</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Mean Scores for Academics’ Obligations Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward Method</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet academic expectations</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>-.58</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>-.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above and beyond</td>
<td>-.62</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>-.70</td>
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</table>