

LABOUR REGULATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP, EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS SATISFACTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

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Abstract

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This paper aims to report on the outcome of the study that investigated the cause of the ongoing antagonistic employment relationship (ER) in the South African public sector workplace, which has negatively affected employment relations satisfaction (ERS) and psychological contract (PC) fulfilment. This antagonism between management and employees has lowered the levels of employer-employee trust (Sudiarta, 2021), as well as job satisfaction (Silitonga et al., 2020) in the workplace. This study, therefore, explored the type of ER, levels of ERS, and state of PC that is prevalent in the workplace to recommend solutions for the situation. A quantitative research approach was adopted for the study because of its appropriateness for the study's objectives. Data collection was done by means of a structured questionnaire. The results revealed a prevalence of positive ER in the workplace, a higher level of ERS among employees, a negative state of PC, and a positive inter-relationship among the three variables. This led to the conclusion that although the three variables are positively interrelated, the PC influences both ER and ERS negatively in the workplace. This study contributes to knowledge and literature on ER, ERS and PC pertaining to their nature, interrelationship and collective effect in the workplace.

Keywords: Public Sector, Workplace, Labour-Management Relations, Trade Unions, Labour Market

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study has been necessitated by the ongoing antagonism between management and junior employees, which were identified through the large numbers of disputes and grievances being experienced in three selected government departments that were subsequently selected for

the study. As a result, an investigation was conducted to determine the type of employment relationship (ER) that exists in the public sector workplace; the level of employment relations satisfaction (ERS) that prevails in the public sector workplace; and the state of a psychological contract (PC) in the public sector workplace. It, however, deserves to be mentioned that a literature gap exists

with regard to the available literature that pertains to ER, ERS, and PC as a result of the limited research that has been conducted on the interrelationship among the three variables. Literature that has been reviewed seems to reveal that studies conducted earlier which focussed on or included the subject of PC, have investigated either the impact or effect of the PC on other factors or the effect of other factors on the PC in the workplace. There has been no study that has been found to have investigated the interrelationship among the three variables.

Research questions which this study purported to answer were those as the following: *What type of employment relationship is evident in the public sector? What is the level of employment relations satisfaction in the public sector? What is the state of the psychological contracts in the public sector? What is the interrelationship among the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC)?*

The large numbers of labour disputes and grievances experienced in the three selected government departments have adversely affected service delivery in the public service, to the extent that management ended up spending most of their time and energy trying to resolve these disputes and grievances instead of concentrating on the execution of their mandated duties. Since these labour disputes and grievances are obviously indicative of a relationship problem between management and employees, the study was undertaken with the aim of finding the reasons thereof. As a result, ER, ERS, and PC were examined to establish if any or a combination of the three variables influenced the large numbers of disputes and grievances being experienced in the three selected government departments.

A broader perspective of ER, ERS, and PC can be construed by examining the degree to which these variables impact the workplace as a whole. Reviewed literature has revealed that the employment relationships between employers and employees in the private sector, as well as between management and public servants in the public sector workplaces have not been positive over the years. For instance, the results of the Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018, which assessed 137 countries, revealed that there had not been any improvement in South Africa's performance with regard to employment (including labour-employer) relations as South Africa was rated as the worst, at position 137 out of 137 countries (Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2018).

The ERS among employees is also at lower levels as revealed by reviewed literature. The prevalence of undesirable behaviours in the South African workplace, for instance, is a clear indication of a supervisory or managerial employment relationship that is in a bad state, and that still needs a lot of improvement (Ehlers, 2017a). The state of PC in South Africa has also not been positive at all, as revealed by reviewed literature on the subject. For instance, Wöcke and Sutherland (2008) reveal that the Employment Equity Act (EEA) of 1998 has impacted the psychological contracts of South Africa's three social groups (black male employees, white male employees, and the middle group composed of women, coloureds, Indians, and people with disabilities) in different ways in the workplace. Under the circumstances, the psychological contract of black employees has

become more of a relational psychological contract as they expect a long-term relationship with their employers, while white employees feel that their psychological contract with their employers has been breached when their employers implement the employment equity practices in the South African workplace. The expectations of employees have further been affected by the new organisational policies, which were subsequently implemented to give effect to the stipulations of the EEA and affirmative action in the workplace (Ferreira, Snyman, & Deas, 2015).

The structure of this paper consists of the following sections. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature that has been used in the study. Section 3 analyses the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research on the causes of the antagonistic relationship between management and junior employees in the public sector workplace. Section 4 presents the results of the study as well as the techniques used to arrive at those results. Section 5 entails the discussion of the results and their implication, in comparison with previous findings in the topic area of the study. Section 6 which provides a conclusion of the study, in which a detailed encounter is provided with regard to the conclusion drawn, based on the results of the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides an overview of both the South African and global perspectives of ER, ERS, and PC in the workplace. The discussion on the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC) is premised on their definition, nature, advantage, impact, and their interrelationship in the workplace in general and the public sector workplace in particular.

2.1. ER in the workplace

Ehlers and Jordaan (2016) define ER as the relationships that exist between subordinates and their supervisors, and relationships between groups of employees and management in the workplace. This definition does not differ from the definition of ER that is provided by Smith and Diedericks (2016), who state that ER refers to the relationship that a worker has with their supervisor, which is of utmost importance in the workplace. Smith and Diedericks (2016) go further and reveal that there are two types of employment relationships, namely, positive and negative employment relationships in the workplace. A positive employment relationship takes place when there is a prevalence of positive work relationships in the workplace environment, while a negative employment relationship is found in a relationship where that is characterised by negativity between parties.

ER in South Africa for instance, interplays with and is influenced by certain factors in the external environment, which in turn impacts not only work for organisations but the society as a whole (Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus, & Poisat, 2012). Hence, work organisations in South Africa are influenced by the environment in which they run their business and have to respond positively and in alignment with these influences in order to survive (Venter & Levy, 2014).

Ehlers (2017b) state that where authors use the term “employment relationship” in literature, they are referring to the two dimensions of ER, which are primary labour relationship and secondary labour relationship. The primary labour relationship is understood as the individual labour relationship that exists between subordinates and their supervisors. Secondary labour relationship, on the other hand, occurs between employee groups (or through their representatives) and employers, or between employee groups and their representatives (Ehlers, 2017b). Rasivhetshele, Mey, and Agherdien (2020), however, argue that disagreements or disputes in organisations will always be an integral part of the employer-employee relationship because of the power-imbalance that exists in their relationship. In the employer-employee relationship, the employer yields more power than the employee does, because of the economic power that the employer has and can use against the employee.

Looking at the South African perspective of employment relationships, for example, one can clearly see a red flag in the element of trust in the employer-employee relationship. For instance, South African supervisors have been found to be unwilling to appreciate, respect or promote trust, compliance, fairness, and good faith in their relationship with their subordinates. The disregard of these determinants of quality relationship has given subordinates negative perceptions about their job security, job satisfaction, transparency, as well as their relationship with their organisations (Ehlers, 2017a).

In an earlier study by Parayitam, Olson, and Bao (2010), it was found that any disagreement or conflict that may from time to time arise between employees affect the quality of decisions, workgroup members' satisfaction, as well as their commitment. This notion is supported by Shah (2017) who states that distress and an ineffective working environment are outcomes of an organisation where conflict and negative relationships are rife in the workplace. Kang and Sung (2017) reveal that quality relationships in the workplace can be improved by ensuring that internal communication is prioritised as a remarkable and significant factor for the employer-employee relationship. This will benefit organisations as an improved employment relationship results in quality employees and behaviour that is supportive to the organisation, although its effectiveness will always rely on trust, credibility, openness, reciprocity, feedback and negotiation. Another factor that is of cardinal importance to the workplace relationship is trust. Trust ensures that social exchange continues, and its absence in a relationship engenders doubts between the parties with regard to each party's willingness to reciprocate benefits received (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007; Waters, Sevvick Bortree, & Tindall, 2013; Tekingündüz, Top, Tengilimoglu, & Karabulut, 2017). Ozyilmaz, Erdogan, and Karaeminogullari (2018) reveal that when the levels of trust are low in an organisation, even confident employees start to doubt if their efforts will be appreciated, valued or reciprocated by their employers. Consequently, employees doubt if their efforts will be recognised or whether they will receive any support from the organisation based on the lack of trust.

Respect is another factor that is of importance in a relationship, as it always enhances a positive employment relationship in the workplace (Rogers & Ashforth, 2017). A study that was conducted by Clarke and Mahadi (2017) found that mutual respect is very crucial in the relationship between subordinate employees and their managers. In organisations where respect is prioritised, it results in employee satisfaction and organisational commitment and citizenship.

If organisations truly intend to improve employment relationships, it would be advisable that they should identify and support leadership characteristics that promote positive employment relationships, if their final objective is to achieve relationship quality in the workplace (Stuber et al., 2019). These authors further reveal that factors such as fostering of innovations, team spirit development, performance development, individuality focus, providing a vision, and being a role model should be prioritised in the workplace. In support of this notion, Lee, Thomas, Martin, Guillaume, and Marstand (2019) state that leaders in organisations should not only concentrate on trying to improve positive relationships, but should also prioritise the importance of these relationships to maximise such positive relationships. According to Phuong and Takahashi (2021), good relationships in the workplace can be improved through the sharing of information between organisational leaders and staff and listening to feedback received even from lower levels of the organisation. Hence, the flexibility of both the organisation and the employee is of utmost importance in contemporary workplace relationships, as they benefit both role-players (employees and their organisation) in the relationship (Bal & Izak, 2021).

An earlier finding by Hom et al. (2009) revealed that the employee-organisation relationship promotes positive interaction among employees in work teams, cooperation, employee retention, and employees' eagerness to help and support each other in performing their duties in the workplace. This finding was supported by Biggs, Swailes, and Baker (2016), who stated that a positive relationship between the employee and the organisation is beneficial to both parties and ultimately leads to the financial success of the organisation as a whole. Financial success, in turn, contributes to the public image of the organisation.

A workplace characterised by positive ER will be identified with the type of management that has been transformed from leaders who are performing their managerial work just for the sake of doing so, to leaders who encourage others in the workplace to execute their responsibilities (Mallaby, Price, & Hofmeyr, 2017). Emotional intelligence will also be another factor of importance, which will make managers succeed in the execution of their duties, as it empowers them to “inspire loyalty, encourage innovative solutions, and build strong teams and lasting relationships” (Mallaby, Price, & Hofmeyr, 2017, p. 3). A manager or leader who operates in a positive ER environment will be more focused in the workplace with regard to areas such as monitoring, performance, inspection, competency, risk assessment, enforcement, assessment, HR, and employees' fitness for work (Tau, 2017).

Stuber et al. (2019) reveal that in organisations where there is a good relationship between leaders

and their staff, mental health will be improved which will give rise to the prevention of stress among staff members. When work organisations promote transformational leadership in their workplaces, they in turn promote one of the primary areas that positively and significantly impact the general job satisfaction of employees in the workplace (Silitonga et al., 2020).

2.2. ERS in the workplace

Earlier studies have identified the satisfaction of an employee with the work and his/her immediate supervisor as the most important feature of employee satisfaction in the workplace (Janssen, 2001). This finding led to Kreitner and Kinicki (2001) calling this feeling of employees about their work like job satisfaction and defining it as an emotional reaction of an employee arising from work. Rast and Tourani (2012) refer to this employee feeling as work satisfaction, and define it as a positive affective reaction related to work. Van der Walt, Thasi, Chipunza, and Jonck (2016) reveal that job satisfaction, employee satisfaction or work satisfaction as interchangeably called, as an outcome of ERS, is a very important factor that serves as an incentive that propels employees to continue working and contributing to the effectiveness of the organisation.

The definition that seems to be more concise is the one provided by Mahalawat and Sharma (2019) who say that employee satisfaction should be understood as the concept that is used to explain how emotionally feeling of an employee, including whether the work meets his/her needs and desires in the organisation. Another definition that reiterates the aspect of employee emotion to describe job satisfaction, is the one provided by Silitonga et al. (2020) who state that job satisfaction entails the positive feeling of an employee in the workplace about both his/her work and the organisation.

Understanding the correlation between job satisfaction and a number of desirable outcomes in the workplace is very significant so that factors that affect job satisfaction can be identified and addressed in advance. For that purpose, Sowmya and Panchanatham (2011) summarised the following factors, which they identified as determinants of job satisfaction, namely — personal growth, supervision, employee appreciation and recognition, work conditions and fringe benefits, remuneration and promotion opportunities, organisational policies and procedures, job security. The aforementioned study was used for this discussion, and the mentioned determinants of job satisfaction are discussed next to display their impact on job satisfaction in the workplace.

Supervision: The way a supervisor relates to a subordinate employee is of significance, as it will determine whether or not the employees will be satisfied with their jobs in the workplace. Supervisors should be able to constructively deal with conflict that from time to time arise between a supervisor and a subordinate in the workplace. Williams and Weyers (2009) state that conflict should simply be understood as a situation where one party is in disharmony with another party, arising from a perception that its well-being is under

threat. Any failure to deal with conflict amicably could lead to destructive consequences between parties, other than in a situation where it is addressed timeously and effectively in order to save relationships. This notion is supported by Audenaert, Vanderstraeten, and Buyens (2017) who reveal that studies have found that a high-quality leader-member exchange relationship results in more job satisfaction and less emotional exhaustion among employees in the workplace.

Supriyanto, Ekowati, and Maghfuroh (2020) reiterate that leaders in the workplace should invest more in trust as it will benefit the organisation because when employees trust their leader, they will always be supportive of any organisational undertaking, knowing that their interests and rights are always protected. This view is further confirmed by Sudiarta (2021) and Bhardwaj, Mishra, and Jain (2021) who state that the presence of good leadership in the workplace is one of the most significant factors without which the positive performance of employees cannot be encouraged.

Employee appreciation and recognition: Employee appreciation other than monetary rewards, which employees may from time to time receive from their supervisors, is of cardinal importance as employees also expect to be valued for the good work they do in the workplace. Two categories of rewards exist, namely psychological and physical rewards, which are highlighted as having a significant impact on job satisfaction (Alromaihi, Alshomaly, & George, 2017). However, while psychological rewards are of utmost importance, one cannot deny that they are always ignored. Employees need the motivation to achieve their goals, which in turn impacts positively on their effectiveness and efficiency in their performance. Secondly, employee recognition has been identified as one of the major aspects of motivating employees in the workplace to improve their performance.

This notion is supported by Mugaa, Guyo, and Odhiambo (2018), who state that where employees' excellent performance is recognised in the workplace, employee motivation is strengthened in the organisation. For instance, where one employee sees another employee being rewarded for their good performance, this employee will also improve their own performance to be rewarded too. Suffian, Rohani, and Mariam (2018), however, argue that rewards do not always have to be financial, but can also be non-financial. Where rewards are given to employees, they should be significant and meaningful. Mugaa et al. (2018) also support this argument and indicate that non-monetary rewards can take the form of gifts and certificates that are awarded to high performers in the workplace in recognition of their good performance.

Work conditions and fringe benefits: Work conditions are of utmost importance to employees in any organisation. When they come to organisations looking for employment, employees come with their "skills, desires and goals, and expect in return a decent working environment where they can use their skills to satisfy desires and attain their goals" (Jehanzeb, Rasheed, Rasheed, & Aamir, 2012, p. 273). Employees want to work in an environment that is motivating in terms of conditions, which includes guaranteed safety with regard to the work being done in the organisation. This notion is supported by Suffian et al. (2018), who state that

working conditions will affect the satisfaction of employees in the workplace if it is not prioritized because employees want to work in an environment where they feel comfortable with their physical surroundings.

Fringe benefits, on the other hand, have also been found to play a significant role in determining whether or not employees will be satisfied in the workplace. They are an extension of conditions of employment and are available to all employees of the organisation to assist them in raising their living standards (Suffian et al., 2018). Cho and Song (2018) reveal that the prioritization of work conditions and fringe benefits are soon to change as there are numerous changes that are bound to be brought up by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which will affect both developed and developing countries.

Connor (2018) supports this revelation and further states that it is expected that the developments in areas such as generic engineering, nanotechnology, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, robotics, grapheme, and additive manufacturing 3D printing will definitely result in many changes with regard to how the work is done in the workplace. There is no hesitation that skills that will come with the technological improvements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution will have an impact not only on the jobs available in the labour market but also on the nature of work, as well as the distribution of labour in the market. Djoemadi, Setiawan, Noermijati, and Irawanto (2019) also confirm the importance of work conditions as a determinant of job satisfaction and support the notion that where employees are satisfied in the workplace, there can be no doubt that their engagement levels will also increase.

Remuneration and promotion opportunities: Remuneration is of utmost importance to employees as they determine whether an employee should either stay or look for greener pastures elsewhere. Employee satisfaction is also about how pleased employees are with regard to the reward (called pay) they receive for the job they do. Therefore, it is expected that employees will contribute more when they are satisfied with the remuneration they are paid for the job they do (Othman, Mokhtar, & Asaad, 2017). In support of this notion, Suffian et al. (2018) state that employees who are happy with their work and feel appropriately paid for their efforts will do anything to help the organisation to succeed in the achievement of its goals. Studies have revealed that compensation has a significant on job satisfaction, in that it motivates employees to do their best and to see the reason to stay in the organisation (Saman, 2020). This notion is supported by Bao, Cheng, and Smith (2020) who state that they can confirm the strong positive relationship between performance and fair pay, and a negative relationship between performance and unfair pay in the workplace. Djoemadi et al. (2019) also add another factor known as promotion opportunities, which they maintain is also of the very important determinants of job satisfaction and is also of the view that where employees are satisfied in the workplace, there can be no doubt that their engagement levels will also increase

Organisational policies and procedures: Organisational policies and procedures that consider and treat employees as valuable asserts of the organisations are more likely to produce

satisfied employees who will be more likely to do their work dedication (Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2014). Djukic, Jun, Kovner, Brewer, and Fletcher (2017) further add that fair organisational policies and procedures ensure that employees' satisfaction levels in relation to their jobs remain unaffected even where employees are faced with high stressful job demands of the organisation. Employees will always support and accept organisational policies and procedures that promote organisational justice, fair treatment and provide them with a voice in the decision-making (Djukic et al., 2017).

Job security: Employees' concerns about the lack or absence of security in their jobs resulting in low levels of satisfaction about their organisations, which will always not to the benefit of employers, as production will obviously decrease. Mohamed, Asaari, and Desa (2016) warn that organisations should do all they can to prevent keeping their employees in the dark regarding their job security. Job security uncertainty will result in employees with low levels of satisfaction, which will, in turn, lead to low productivity, thereby affecting the profit margins of an organisation's businesses. Ladkin and Kichuk (2017) suggest that career planning should be introduced in organisations as a joint venture between the employee and the organisation so that they can agree on organisational needs and employee career goals that will benefit both parties.

Mahalawat and Sharma (2019) argue that although these factors are undoubtedly significant determinants of job satisfaction, employees' job satisfaction in the workplace largely depends on two factors, which include how the employee feels about his/her contribution to the organisation and also how he/she feels about the rewards he/she receives for the contribution he/she makes to the organisation.

It has become a matter of necessity that employers keep their employees satisfied in the workplace in order to be able to retain them in their organisations. This is true in view of the fact that if employees are not happy with their organisation, they will not hesitate to leave. Conversely, other employees will see the need to stay as a result of being recognised as valued contributors in the organisation (Terera & Ngirande, 2014).

An employment relationship that is perceived by both the employees and their work organisation as being healthy or positive is very significant in the workplace, as it results in improved levels of ERS. Levels of ERS are a determining factor for the behaviours and intentions of employees regarding whether to stay or leave the organisation (Smith, 2016).

Recent studies have found that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and job performance, which means that employees who are not satisfied with their work will perform poorly in the workplace (Van der Walt et al., 2016). The opposite is also true that employees who are satisfied with their jobs will be high performers in the workplace.

This notion is supported by Mahalawat and Sharma (2019) who reveal that employee satisfaction is the cornerstone of employee motivation to achieve organisational goals and increased employee morale in the workplace. Employee satisfaction results in employee engagement, which is encouraged by factors such as work security, work comfort,

reduced stress levels, acceptable working hours, and management policies in the workplace (Djoemadi et al., 2019).

Silitonga et al. (2020) reveal that job satisfaction influences organisational commitment in the workplace, which results in increased eagerness amongst employees to achieve organisational goals. Saman (2020) and Sudiarta (2021) support this notion and further reveal that factors that influence high performance among employees in the workplace include those such as the ability of the employee to do the work and the motivation that the employee receives from the organisation to want to do the work. When employees are satisfied in the workplace, they will “always stand shoulder to shoulder with the organisation even in times of absolute difficulty” (Vuong, Tung, Tushar, Quan, & Giao, 2021, p. 204).

2.3. The PC in the workplace

Authors of the concept of psychological contracts have provided a number of different definitions of the concept (Wöcke & Sutherland, 2008; Obuya & Rugimbana, 2014; Seopa, Wöcke, & Leeds, 2015; Ferreira et al., 2015; Grobler & Nicolaidis, 2016; Magano & Thomas, 2017; Maimane, Motilall, Ngqeza, Thompson, & Chrysler-Fox, 2018; Cregan, Kulik, Metz, & Brown, 2021; Herrera & De Las Heras-Rosa, 2021; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). What appears to be similar in all the definitions provided by all the different authors and researchers is the indication that a psychological contract entails individual beliefs of employees, arising from expressed and/or implied promises about what their employers owe them and what employees owe their employers in return.

The psychological contracts that are popularly found in the workplace are divided into two types, known as transactional and relational psychological contracts (Wöcke & Sutherland, 2008; Seopa et al., 2015; Cregan et al., 2021; Herrera & De Las Heras-Rosa, 2021). Although there are also numerous definitions of the two types of psychological contracts, a clearer definition of transactional psychological contracts is the one provided by Seopa et al. (2015) who state that transactional psychological contracts pertain to economic exchange such as monetary returns, and reiterate very little on timeframe or tasks.

Conversely, relational psychological contracts are characterised by elements such as commitment and trust and are based on long-term relationships, which are governed by socio-emotional obligations that bind both the employer and the employees (Wöcke & Sutherland, 2008; Seopa et al., 2015; Cregan et al., 2021). There is a third type of psychological contract which is not popularly found in every workplace, called the balanced psychological contract, which De Clercq, Azeem, and Haq (2020) describe as the combination of the elements of both transactional and relational contracts.

In an employer-employee relationship that is characterised by parties who do not have a common understanding of the obligations and terms of their psychological contract, one can expect accusations of breach and violation of their psychological contract (Dabos & Rousseau, 2004). This is true in view of the fact that employees to a larger extent expect their employers to meet the obligations and

the terms of their psychological contract, failure that always results in confrontational situations between the parties.

Where an organisation has failed to meet its employees' expectations, such behaviour will be perceived as a breach of their psychological contract and will be reacted upon in retaliation until the organisation meets the employees' expectations (Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018; Herrera & De Las Heras-Rosa, 2021; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). In support of this view, Maimane et al. (2018) and Gallani, Krishnan, Marinich, and Shields (2019) confirm that a psychological contract breach takes place when employees perceive their employer as having engaged in acts of unfairness which are interpreted as nothing else other than a breach of their psychological contract which they have with their employer to abide by. Employees consequently respond to any breach with punitive reactions, in retaliation to the employer's perceived unfair treatment towards them. It must be noted that fairness is one of the key elements in the relationship between employees and their employers.

Employees will always react negatively when they are convinced that their organisation has breached the terms of their psychological contract. Employees' negative reactions may include those such as reduction of their performance efforts, productivity, innovation, and their organisational commitment (Maimane et al., 2018; Liu, 2019). This notion is supported by De Clercq et al. (2020) and Cregan et al. (2021) who confirm that employees will always retaliate by among other things, reducing both their performance efforts and loyalty if they perceive and interpret their organisation's actions as having breached and/or violated the obligations and terms of their psychological contract, which they expect their employers to fulfil. Herrera and De Las Heras-Rosa (2021) reveal that in most cases, the perception of psychological contract breach arises where organisational interventions such as restructuring and downsizing have taken place in organisations. Cregan et al. (2021) argue that employees' negative reaction to the breach or violation does not uniformly take place, but will always depend on the type of psychological contract that shall have been breached and the severity.

Earlier studies undertaken on the phenomenon of the psychological contract have investigated very little in relation to psychological contract fulfilment and its consequences (Dabos & Rousseau, 2004). Instead, more attention has been given to the negative and dysfunctional consequences associated with a perceived breach of contract and contract violation. A breach of employees' obligations will take the form of retaliation, which take place when employees breach their psychological contract obligations, it will be because of a wilful breach in response to the employer's failure to meet their expectations or the employees' inability to honour their obligations due to the lack of resources in the workplace (Bordia, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2017).

In contrast, studies have found that where the employer and employees share a common understanding of the obligations and terms of their psychological contract, they become more committed and mutually supportive of each other, and are always willing to reciprocate any positive action of the employer. This common understanding

of the obligations and terms of the psychological contract describes the concept of psychological contract fulfilment, has many benefits to the employer, which include, but not limited to high productivity, reciprocated expectations, affective commitment and intention to remain in the organisation (Dabos & Rousseau, 2004).

Employees who feel that the treatment they receive is fair, that the rewards match their efforts and that they are respected in the workplace will reciprocate by increasing their job performance and loyalty to their employer (Dhanpat & Parumasur, 2014). This view is supported by Griep and Vantilborgh (2018) who further state that where employees feel that their expectations have been met, they will always experience a feeling of indebtedness and they too will want to reciprocate the positive behaviour by fulfilling their own obligations of the psychological contract. A concise definition of psychological contract fulfilment is provided by Liu (2019) who states that it should be understood as “employees’ perception that, overall, the organization has fulfilled its terms of the contract equitably” (p. 345). Employees’ perception of fulfilment is positively related to high performance and organisational citizenship behaviour, which is of benefit to organisations.

The value of psychological contracts, especially to management in the workplace, cannot be downplayed. Dhanpat and Parumasur (2014) further reveal that previous research conducted found that psychological contracts are responsible for the shaping of employment relationships in the workplace. Additionally, psychological contracts serve two vital roles, namely to define and describe the employment relationship, and to manage the mutual expectations in the relationship.

Psychological contracts also provide a functional framework according to which the open process of employees’ expectations can be managed (Dhanpat & Parumasur, 2014). According to Obuya and Rugimbana (2014), psychological contracts set the dynamics for the relationship between the employer and employees and define the detailed practicality of the work to be done. Psychological contracts are therefore more important than the formal employment contract, which only details the mutual duties of each party in the employment relationship.

Psychological contracts also help employees to predict the kind of rewards they will receive for their invested efforts in their work, which serves as

motivation to them (Obuya & Rugimbana, 2014). The value of psychological contracts in the workplace is further emphasised by Seopa et al. (2015), who reveal that psychological contracts help to define and understand the contemporary employment relationship. Organisations need to understand the expectations of employees in order to come up with and implement proposed strategies that will benefit both parties. Tekleab, Laulié, De Vos, De Jong, and Coyle-Shapiro (2020) state that the importance of psychological contracts in the workplace can be seen in the fact that they assist organisations to understand employment relationships, employee attitudes and behaviours.

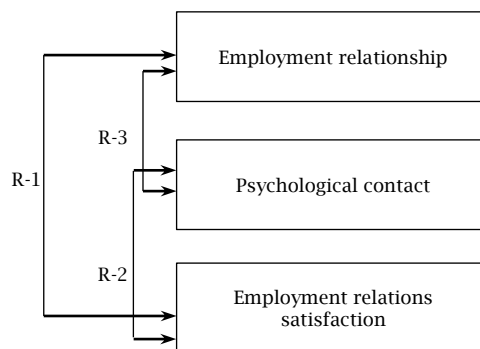
A connection has been found between psychological contracts and organisational commitment (Herrera & De Las Heras-Rosa, 2021). This obviously means that, where the obligations and terms of the psychological contract have been met, the connection will be a positive one, while the opposite will also be true, where the psychological contract has been breached. According to Zacher and Rudolph (2021), psychological contracts serve as an encouragement for employees in organisations to hold on to positive expectations rather than the limitations that exist in organisations.

2.4. The interrelationship among ER, ERS and PC

The interrelationship among ER, ERS, and PC has been confirmed through reviewed literature. Where employees and employers experience an employment relationship as positive, it results in positive behaviours and serves as a guiding force for the intentions of employees when they decide about their future in the organisation (Smith, 2016; Kang & Sung, 2017).

As seen in Figure 1, R-1 depicts the relationship between ER and ERS (Smith & Diedericks, 2016; Ehlers, Lessing, & Theledi, 2016; Smith, 2016; Ehlers, 2017a, Stuber et al., 2019; Supriyanto et al., 2020; Sudiarta, 2021). R-2 shows the relationship that exists between the PC and ERS (Obuya & Rugimbana, 2014; Seopa et al., 2015; Ferreira et al., 2015; Alromaihi et al., 2017; Mahalawat & Sharma, 2019; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Finally, R-3 displays the relationship between PC and ER (Van der Vaart, Linde, & Cockeran, 2013; Smith, 2016; Smith & Diedericks, 2016; Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021).

Figure 1. The Interrelationship among ER, ERS, and PC



Employment relationship that is perceived by both the employees and the organisation as being healthy or positive is very significant in the workplace. It impacts positively on the behaviours and intentions of employees when having to decide whether to stay or resign from the organisation (Smith, 2016). According to Ehlers et al. (2016), employees view the values and behaviours of their supervisors as having a strong influence on their employment relations satisfaction. The relationship between a positive employment relationship and job satisfaction is also confirmed by Smith and Diedericks (2016), Stuber et al. (2019). They reveal that job satisfaction, levels of commitment, job and task engagement, attachment, and organisational citizenship behaviours are known antecedents of positive employee relations. Therefore, it can be confirmed that where there is a positive supervisory relationship arising from supervisors' positive treatment over their subordinate employees, the end result will be job satisfaction, organisational trust, and many other job outcomes that will begin to prevail in the workplace (Ehlers et al., 2016; Supriyanto et al., 2020; Sudiarta, 2021).

An interrelationship between psychological contracts and job satisfaction is confirmed by studies that have found a positive correlation between the state of the psychological contract and satisfaction with the work itself, satisfaction with work-life balance, satisfaction with life, and psychological well-being (Van der Vaart et al., 2013). Studies have confirmed that there is a positive relationship between psychological contract and employee dissatisfaction where the contract has been breached (Van der Vaart et al., 2013; Mahalawat & Sharma, 2019). Such breach has most of the time resulted in employee dissatisfaction in the workplace and which ultimately compelled the employee to leave the organisation (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021).

Van der Vaart et al. (2013), however, argue that studies previously conducted have confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between psychological contract breach and intention to leave. They have subsequently found that the higher the level of breach, results in a negative effect on

the employment relationship and ultimately lead to dissatisfied and distracted employees, which accelerates their intention to leave. Supporting this argument, Smith (2016) states that an employment relationship that is perceived as healthy by both the employees and the organisation is very significant in the workplace. In turn, it impacts positively the behaviours and intentions of employees regarding whether to stay or leave the organisation. Studies confirm that levels of commitment, as well as job and task engagement, attachment, and organisational citizenship behaviours are known antecedents of the positive employment relationship (Smith & Diedericks, 2016; Silitonga et al., 2020).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study was to identify the type of employment relationship evident in the public sector; determine the level of the employment relations satisfaction in the public sector; determine the state of the psychological contracts in the public sector; and finally to determine if there is any interrelationship among the three variable (ER, ERS, and PC). By meeting these four research objectives, the study would be answering the four research questions, which prompted the need for the study, which are listed in Table 1 below. In answering the first three research questions (RQ 1-RQ 3), descriptive statistics and frequency, analysis techniques have been used to describe the set of data collected for the study, which reflected the mean and standard deviation per item on the questionnaire in order to present their frequency and identify items that require attention. The use of Spearman's correlation enabled the researcher to determine if a relationship existed among variables, while multiple regression measured the extent to which the independent variable reliably predicted the dependent variables. The results arising from both Spearman's correlation and multiple regression were used to answer the fourth research question (RQ 4).

Summarily, the study aimed at answering the four research questions (RQs) listed in below.

Table 1. Research questions

RQ No.	Research question
RQ 1	What type of employment relationship is evident in the public sector?
RQ 2	What is the level of employment relations satisfaction in the public sector?
RQ 3	What is the state of the psychological contracts in the public sector?
RQ 4	What is the interrelationship among the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC)?

3.1. Research design and approach

The study followed the quantitative research approach as it was found to be the most appropriate and suitable approach for the study, other than the qualitative approach. A survey design was used to meet the objectives of this study, and a structured questionnaire methodology was consequently adopted for the collection of data (Cresswell, 2014).

3.2. Population and sampling

The target population of a research project refers to a group of specific population elements that are

applicable to the research (Zikmund, 2003). The research population of the study, therefore, consists of the 253,181 public servants employed in three government departments, namely — Correctional Services, Police, and Justice and Constitutional Development. These three departments were purposively selected after they had been identified as hot spots after they had reported the highest numbers of labour disputes and grievances in the public service.

Martin and Guerin (2006) define a sample as the subgroup of the population that is measured in a research project. This notion is reiterated by Gravetter and Forzano (2012) who state that a sample can be understood as a small set of individuals who participate as subjects in the research project.

For the purpose of the study, the employees from the three government departments were grouped into three subgroups in accordance with their salary levels: salary level 1-5; 6-8; and 9-12. As a result, the proportionate stratified random sampling method was adopted for the study, because the employees having been divided into three subgroups (called strata). This sampling method was used in order to achieve a sample size that is proportionate to the size of each of the research subgroups (strata) in the sample. This resulted in a representative sample of 3200 public servants working in the three selected government departments, in accordance with the guidelines provided by Brynard, Hanekom, and Brynard (2014). Seven hundred and twenty-four (724) complete and usable questionnaires were received back, which constituted 23% of the 3200 sample. This was an acceptable response rate, as according to Martin and Roodt (2008) 21% would still be an acceptable response rate.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

A structured questionnaire was used for the collection of data for the study (Martin & Guerin, 2006). The questionnaire was distributed to the three selected government departments both electronically and by means of manual distribution, which took all ethical guidelines into consideration. The structured questionnaire that was used for the study, was based on existing research scales that had been used previously, such as:

- Employment relationship (ER) — the three-component worker relations scale as developed by Biggs et al. (2016).

- Employment relations satisfaction (ERS) — the primary employment relationship satisfaction questionnaire as developed by Ehlers et al. (2016).

- Psychological contracts (PCs) — the psychological contracts questionnaire was developed by Millward and Hopkins (1998).

Data is analysed by means of statistical techniques in order to investigate variables and their effects (Welman & Kruger, 1999). Data analysis techniques that were used in the study included those such as:

- Demographic profiling of the sample, which took into consideration elements such as gender, salary level, completed qualifications, and the province of employment to describe the personal information of respondents who participated in the research study.

- Descriptive statistics and frequency analysis, which reflect descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation per item on the three scales used in the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Gravetter & Forzano, 2012).

- Factor analysis was conducted to determine the construct validity of the questionnaire, in order to enable the researcher to analyse a relatively small number of factors that can be used to represent the relationship among sets of any interrelated variables (Terreblanche & Durrheim, 1999; Cone & Foster, 2006).

- Spearman's correlation coefficient, which determines if a relationship exists among variables, as well as between stable demographic characteristics (i.e., age, length of service and completed qualifications) and the three variables (Gauthier, 2001).

- Multiple regression analysis, which measures the extent to which the independent variable reliably predicts the dependent variable (Campbell & Campbell, 2008).

3.4. Validity and reliability

The researchers ensured the face validity of the research instrument by subjecting the questionnaire to pilot testing, where the questionnaire was submitted to 22 labour relations experts prior to usage, to further ensure its relevance to the study. Martin and Guerin (2006) emphasise that validation of an instrument is necessary to establish whether an instrument measures what it is intended to measure.

To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a test of reliability was performed using Cronbach's alpha, in order to ensure internal reliability, overall reliability, and reliability of each of the variables identified in the study. Reliability of the research instrument demands that if someone else retests the same data using the same instrument, the same results should be achieved (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) further states that when a research instrument has the ability to provide similar results when used repeatedly elsewhere, under similar conditions, it is considered reliable.

The researchers examined the factorial structure of the research questionnaire, the reliability, as well as internal consistency, after which the results were provided as listed below. A principal factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was conducted on the 9 items of the ER scale, 20 items of the ERS scale, and 17 items of the PC scale. Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) confirmed the following on the items of the three scales (ER, ERS, and PC):

- Bartlett's test of sphericity confirmed that variances between ER items can be assumed at a confidence level of 0.000, and a KMO test of sampling adequacy returned a value of 0.749. The aforementioned results confirmed that the factor analysis was possible, and a principal component analysis was subsequently.

- Bartlett's test of sphericity confirmed that variances between ERS items can be assumed at a confidence level of 0.000, and a KMO test of sampling adequacy returned a value of 0.970. These results were a confirmation that the factor analysis was possible, and a principal component analysis was subsequently.

- Bartlett's test of sphericity confirmed that variances between PC items can be assumed at a confidence level of 0.000, and a KMO test of sampling adequacy returned a value of 0.864. These results were enough evidence to confirm that the factor analysis was possible, and a principal component analysis was subsequently.

The aforementioned results confirmed that factor analysis was possible and a principal component analysis was subsequently conducted. The factor and principal component analyses that were conducted on the items of the three scales resulted in the following factors (subscales) being identified under each of the three scales: ER — organisational culture (OC) and relations at work (RAW); ERS — interpersonal behaviour (IB), moral

behaviour (MB), and task behaviour (TB); and PC – personal expectations (PE) and organisational expectations (OE).

When the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated on each of the subscales of each of the three scales, the results were as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of subscales of the three research scales

Research scale	Research subscale	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
ER	OC	0.853
	RAW	0.770
ERS	IB	0.958
	MB	0.937
	TB	0.954
PC	PE	0.843
	OE	0.755

The aforementioned coefficients exceed the minimum acceptable level of 0.7, as they all range from 0.755 to 0.958, which according to (Kaizer, 1970) is a confirmation that all the subscales of the three scales of the research questionnaire are more than adequately valid and reliable. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha results further confirmed the findings of the 20 labour relations practitioners who conducted a critical evaluation of the face validity of the research questionnaire, who also found that the questionnaire was more than adequate for the intended measurement purpose.

The exploratory factor analysis thus confirmed that the construct validity of the measurement was far more than adequate. The highly positive factor loadings that confirmed strong relationships between the 9 items of ER, 20 items of ERS, and 17 items of PC, also confirmed that factor reduction procedures need not be done in this instance. Confirmatory factor analysis falls outside of the scope of the current study and was subsequently not conducted.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Research ethics relate to the researchers' commitment to appropriate professional conduct and conscientious objection to any manipulation of research subjects, with the aim of giving the research its scientific character (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Kagee, 2006; Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). The following ethical factors were taken into consideration during the research:

- Participants were provided with an information leaflet regarding the purpose of the study, the potential benefits of the study, and the risks involved as a result of taking part in the study.

- Ethical guidelines and principles of scientific research were adhered to during the data collection process.

- Respondents' privacy was in all circumstances respected and protected.

- Confidentiality of contributions was ensured.

- Values of honesty, clarity, comprehensiveness, accountability, and openness to public scrutiny were adhered to.

- Respondents' right to withdrawal at any time was made known.

- The study involved minimal risk to respondents who took part in the study.

- Data collection was carried out by the researchers.

Gravetter and Forzano (2012) reiterate that ethical considerations should always be seen as a researchers' undertaking to ensure honesty, respectfulness, and caring for any person who is involved in the research study or will be affected by the results thereof. The chronological steps that were followed in this study were also derived from guidelines that were comprehensively described in the works of Rattray and Jones (2007) and Potgieter, Olckers, and Ehlers (2014).

4. RESULTS

The results of the study are presented in this section, under the following key subheadings:

4.1. Results arising from the demographic profiling of the sample

After the sample was demographically profiled, it yielded the following results when the data was ultimately analysed.

Table 3. Demographic Profile Results

Demographic characteristic	Frequency (n = 724)	Percentage
<i>Gender:</i>		
• Male	356	49.2%
• Female	368	50.8%
<i>Salary levels:</i>		
• 1-5	248	34.3%
• 6-8	379	52.3%
• 9-12	97	13.4%
<i>Completed qualification:</i>		
• Grade 12/ Matric	297	41.0%
• Higher Certificate	56	7.7%
• Diploma	186	25.7%
• Bachelor's Degree	95	13.0%
• Honours Degree/ B Tech	84	11.6%
• Master's Degree/ M Tech	6	0.8%
<i>Province of employment:</i>		
• Eastern Cape	84	11.6%
• Free State	20	2.8%
• Gauteng	364	50.3%
• Limpopo	46	6.4%
• KwaZulu-Natal	33	4.6%
• Mpumalanga	75	10.4%
• Northern Cape	20	2.8%
• North-West	60	8.3%
• Western Cape	22	3.0%

4.2. Results arising from the descriptive statistics and frequency analysis

In order to answer RQ 1 (*What type of employment relationship is evident in the public sector?*), descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were used, which revealed that out of the total of 9 items of the ER scale (4 items falling under the OC subscale and 5 items under the RAW subscale), the respondents rated 7 items positively (4 items under the OC subscale and 3 under the RAW subscale), and 2 items negatively (both items falling under the RAW subscale). The rating of the items falling under ER (i.e., organisational culture and relations at work subscales) are presented below.

Organisational culture: The items under the OC subscale that positively impact the management of the three government departments of the public sector are listed below:

- Of the 724 respondents, 66% of respondents affirmed that their supervisor respects them.
- A total of 64.3% of the 724 respondents affirmed that they are valued by their supervisor.
- Sixty per cent (60%) of the 724 respondents affirmed that positive relationships are encouraged in the organisation.
- Of the 724 respondents, 52.4% affirmed that their organisation does encourage a culture of harmonious working relationships in the workplace.

Relations at work: The items under the RAW subscale that positively impact the management of the three government departments of the public sector are listed below:

- Out of the 724 respondents, 41% did not agree that their organisation favours certain groups or individuals over others, while 40.7% agreed with the item.
- Of the 724 respondents, 54.8% did not agree that they ever find it hard to work with at least one group of workers in their organisation.
- Of the 724 respondents, 62.2% did not agree that they ever find it hard to work with their supervisor in their organisation.

The rated items below, which fall under the RAW subscale, were found to negatively impact the management of the three government departments:

- Of the 724 respondents, 56% of the 724 affirmed that there are some coworkers who are hard to work with in their organisation.
- Out of the 724 respondents, 49.8% affirmed while 33.8% disagreed that there are certain coworkers with whom they come into conflict in their organisation.

This is evidence that the relationship between management and the public servants in the three government departments is positive.

4.3. The level of ERS in the public sector

In order to answer RQ 2 (*What is the level of employment relations satisfaction in the public sector?*), descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were used, which revealed that from the 20 items on the ERS scale (8 items falling under the IB subscale, 5 items under the MB subscale and 7 under the TB subscale), the respondents rated all 20 items positively.

The following items falling under IB, MB, and TB subscales positively impact the relations between the public servants and management of the three government departments of the public sector. The ratings of the items falling under ERS (i.e., interpersonal behaviour, moral behaviour, and task behaviour subscales) have been presented below.

Interpersonal behaviour: The items under the IB subscale that positively impact the management of the three government departments of the public sector are listed below:

- Of the 724 respondents, 65% of respondents were content with the manner in which their supervisor shows respect for them and their ideas in the workplace.

- Of the 724 respondents, 64.6% of respondents were content that they can rely on their supervisor when they need support in their work.

- Of the 724 respondents, 64.3% of respondents were content with the feeling that they can trust their supervisor's honesty when they discuss their work problems with them in the workplace.

- A total of 63.1% of the 724 respondents were content with their supervisor's compliance with the conditions of their employment contract in the organisation.

- A total of 63.3% of the 724 respondents were content with the equal treatment which they receive from their supervisor at work.

- Of the 724 respondents, 60.9% of respondents were content with their supervisor's compliance with labour laws that apply to them and their work in the organisation.

- Of the 724 respondents, 63.6% of respondents were content with the objectivity that their supervisor shows when they are engaged in a discussion regarding their work ideas and problems.

- A total of 58.8% of the respondents were content with the sincere interest which their supervisor shows in their work ideas and problems in the workplace.

Moral behaviour: The items under the MB subscale that positively impact the management of the three government departments of the public sector are listed below:

- Of the 724 respondents, 65.3% of respondents were content with the general trustworthiness of their supervisor in their work relationship.

- A total of 64.5% of the 724 respondents were content with the good faith that their supervisor shows towards them at work.

- A total of 64% of the 724 respondents were content with the reasons which their supervisor gives for their work decisions and actions in the organisation.

- Of the 724 respondents, 61.5% were content with the general fairness in the work decisions and actions of their supervisor in the organisation.

- Of the 724 respondents, 59.6% were content with the way their supervisor keeps confidential work-related personal information that they share with themselves.

Task behaviour: The items under the TB subscale that positively impact the management of the three government departments of the public sector are listed below:

- Of the 724 respondents, 61.5% of respondents were content with the manner in which their supervisor complies with workplace rules, codes, and procedures in the organisation.

- Of the 724 respondents, 62.4% of respondents were content with the positivity that the supervisor shows when dealing with work-related problems in the organisation.

- A total of 62.2% of the 724 respondents were content with the way the supervisor implements organisational strategies, objectives, and policies in the organisation.

- Sixty-one per cent (61%) of the 724 respondents were content with the manner in which

their supervisor considers their work proposals and requests in the organisation.

- Of the 724 respondents, 59% of the respondents were content with the way they feel they can depend on their supervisor to keep the work-related promises that they make with them.

- Of the 724 respondents, 59.7% of respondents were content with the consistency in the work decisions and actions of their supervisor.

- A total of 59.9% of the 724 respondents were content with the way their supervisor rewards their efforts when they do more work than what is required of them.

This is evidence suggesting that there is a higher level of satisfaction among the public servants in relation to the work they do in the three government departments under investigation.

4.4. The state of PC in the public sector

In answering RQ3 (*What is the state of the psychological contracts in the public sector?*), descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were used, which revealed that out of the total of 17 items of the PC scale (7 items falling under the RE subscale and 10 items falling under the OE subscale), the respondents rated 6 items positively (2 items falling under the PE subscale and 4 items under OE subscale) and 11 items negatively (8 items falling under the PE subscale and 3 items under the OE subscale). The rating of the items falling under PC (i.e., personal expectation and organisational expectation sub-scales) are reflected below.

Personal expectations: The rated items falling under the PE subscale that negatively impact the management of the three government departments of the public sector are listed below:

- A total of 68.3% of the 724 respondents affirmed that they expect to gain a promotion in this organisation with their length of service.

- A total of 65.8% of the 724 respondents affirmed that they expect to gain a promotion in this organisation because of the efforts they make to achieve organisational goals.

- Of the 724 respondents, 66.2% affirm that they are satisfied as long as they reach the targets specified for their job.

- Of the 724 respondents, 63.9% affirm that they prefer to work a strictly defined set of working hours in the organisation.

- A total of 60.3% of respondents affirmed that they are motivated to contribute 100% to their organisation in return for future employee benefits.

- Of the 724 respondents, 56.2% affirmed that they expect to be paid for any overtime they do in the organisation.

- Of the respondents, 52% affirmed that they do only what is necessary to get the job done in the organisation.

- Of the 724 respondents, 41% did not agree that the organisation develops or rewards employees who work hard and exert themselves, while 38.8% agreed.

The rated items below, which fall under the PE subscale were found to positively impact the management of the three government departments:

- Of the 724 respondents, 47.1% affirmed that the organisation reciprocates the effort put in by its employees, while 27.8% disagreed.

- Of the 724 respondents, 66.6% did not agree that they do their job just to get paid in the organisation.

Organisational expectations: The following rated items, which fall under the OE subscale, which negatively impact management have been listed below:

- A total of 68.5% of the 724 respondents affirmed that they expect to develop their skills for growth in this organisation.

- A total of 49.2% of the 724 respondents affirmed that their loyalty to the organisation is defined by the terms of their employment contract only, while 32.4% of the respondents disagreed.

- Of the 724 respondents, 36% did not agree that their career path in the organisation is mapped out, while another 36% of the same number of respondents agreed.

The rated items below, which fall under the OE subscale were found to positively impact the management of the three government departments:

- Of the 724 respondents, 71.4% affirmed that their jobs mean more to them than just a means to pay their bills.

- Of the 724 respondents, 64.4% affirmed that they do not have a problem going beyond the call of duty even if they are not financially rewarded for that.

- A total of 52.4% of the 724 respondents affirmed that the organisation does provide employees with an opportunity to participate in decision-making.

- Of the 724 respondents, 39.7% affirmed that the organisation does show concern for their long-term well-being, while 38.4% disagreed.

This is enough evidence to suggest that the psychological contract relationship between subordinates and management in the three government departments is in a negative state.

4.5. The interrelationship among the three variables (ER, ERS and PC)

In answering RQ4 (*What is the interrelationship between the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC)?*), Spearman's correlation and multiple regression were used. The results of both techniques are presented below.

Spearman's correlation was conducted and the results were as follows:

- With regard to the correlation between ER (OC and RAW) and ERS (IB, MB, and TB), the Spearman's correlation tool results reveal that there are positive correlations between OC and ERS (OC and IB ($r = 0.563$, $p > 0.01$); OC and MB ($r = 0.511$, $p > 0.01$); OC and TB ($r = 0.527$, $p > 0.01$)). However, there were only positive correlations between RAW and TB ($r = 0.022$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, enough evidence exists to suggest that there are significant relationships between employment relationships and employment relations satisfaction.

- With regard to the correlation between PC (PE and OE) and ERS (IB, MB, and TB), the Spearman's correlation tool results show that there are positive correlations between PE and IB ($r = 0.386$, $p > 0.01$); between PE and MB ($r = 0.408$, $p > 0.01$); and between PE and TB ($r = 0.401$, $p > 0.01$). The following correlation results were also found between OE and IB ($r = 0.228$, $p > 0.01$); between OE and MB ($r = 0.274$, $p > 0.01$); and between OE and TB ($r = 0.257$, $p > 0.01$). Therefore, there is enough

evidence to suggest that there are significant relationships between employment relations satisfaction and the psychological contracts to which the public servants are exposed.

- With regard to the correlation between PC (PE and OE) and ER (OE and RAW), the results indicate significant positive correlations between PE and OE ($r = 0.365$, $p > 0.01$); and between OE and RAW ($r = 0.094$, $p > 0.05$). There were also positive correlation results between OE and OC ($r = 0.238$, $p > 0.01$) and between OE and RAW ($r = 0.193$, $p > 0.01$). Therefore, significant relationships exist between psychological contracts and the employment relationship to which the public servants are exposed.

Multiple regression was used and with regard to the level of regression among the three variables, the results showed the following:

- When multiple regression analysis was conducted to check the prediction of PC by ER, the results showed that the regression of ER on PC is $\beta = 0.240$, $p = 0.000$, which is significant.

- After multiple regression was conducted to determine the prediction of ERS by PC, the results showed that the regression of PC on ERS is $\beta = 0.513$, $p = 0.000$, which is significant.

- Lastly, when multiple regression analysis was conducted to confirm the level of prediction of ERS by ER, the results showed that the regression of ER on ERS is $\beta = 0.386$, $p = 0.000$, which is significant.

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the cause of the ongoing antagonistic employment relationship that exists in the South African public sector workplace. This led to three variables (ER, ERS, and PC) being examined, to check if any of these variables contribute to the antagonism taking place in the public sector workplace. The researchers also deemed it necessary to further investigate if there was any interrelationship among the three variables.

However, the results that have been revealed in this study differ from previous studies that were undertaken on the concept of psychological contracts in relation to other factors in the South African workplace relationships. The results of the following previous studies have been perused with an aim of comparing them with those of this study namely, a study conducted by Padayachee (2005) which investigated the "role of employees' psychological contract in the successful implementation of management tactics and achieving optimum performance"; by Pretorius (2011) which investigated "the psychological contract: personal and job-related variables and intention to leave"; by Mashigo (2012) which researched on the "impact of leadership on psychological contracts: an exploratory study of the National Treasury"; by Snyman (2013) which examined "the effects of employment equity legislation on the psychological contract in a tertiary institution"; and by Möller (2014) which investigated "managers' awareness of lower echelon employees' perceptions of the psychological contract".

It is worth mentioning that none of the results of these studies has found that psychological contracts mediate the causal relationship of other variables like those that it has been found in this study that although there is a positive correlation between employment relationship and employment

relations satisfaction, there is a significant positive influence that psychological contracts have on both variables.

The results discussed in detail below, suggest that the study has succeeded in answering the four research questions, which form the basis of the study:

RQ 1: What type of employment relationship is evident in the public sector?

In determining the type of employment relationship that is evident in the public sector, descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were used, which showed the results discussed below:

The results revealed that out of the total of 9 items of the ER scale (4 items falling under the OC subscale and 5 items under the RAW subscale), the respondents rated 7 items positively (4 items falling under OC and 3 items falling under RAW) and 2 items negatively (both items falling under RAW).

These results pertaining to the employment relationship scale, confirm that the majority of public servants working in the three government departments perceive their employment relationship with management positively. This suggests that the type of employment relationship that is evident in the three government departments is a positive employment relationship.

RQ 2: What is the level of employment relations satisfaction in the public sector?

In order to determine the level of employment relations satisfaction in the public sector, descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were used, which showed the results discussed below:

There were 20 items on the employment relations satisfaction scale (8 items falling under the IB subscale, 5 items under the MB subscale, and 7 under the TB subscale), which the respondents rated all 20 items positively. These results are enough evidence to imply that there is a high level of satisfaction among the public servants in relation to the work they do in the three government departments under investigation.

RQ 3: What is the state of the psychological contract in the public sector?

In determining the state of the psychological contract in the public sector, descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were used, which showed the results discussed below:

The results have revealed that out of the total of 17 items of the PC scale (7 items falling under the PE subscale and 10 items falling under the OE subscale), the respondents rated 6 items positively (2 items falling under the PE subscale and 4 items under OE subscale) and 11 items negatively (8 items falling under the PE subscale and 3 items under the OE subscale).

These results imply that the majority of public servants working in the three government departments do not perceive their psychological contract relationship with management positively which is enough evidence to suggest that there is a prevalence of a negative state of the psychological contract in the workplaces of the three government departments.

RQ 4: What is the relationship among the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC)?

The relationship among the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC) has been established by means of Spearman's correlation tool and the multiple regression analysis, which are discussed below:

After Spearman's correlation was used to analyse the relationship among the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC), the results revealed the following:

- After pairing ER (OC and RAW) with ERS (IB, MB, and TB), the Spearman's correlation tool results revealed a positive correlation between OC and ERS (between OC and IB ($r = 0.563$, $p > 0.01$); between OC and MB ($r = 0.511$, $p > 0.01$); and between OC and TB ($r = 0.527$, $p > 0.01$)). However, there were only positive correlations between RAW and TB ($r = 0.022$, $p < 0.01$). This provides enough evidence exists to suggest that there are significant relationships between employment relationships and employment relations satisfaction.

- After PC (PE and OE) was paired with ERS (IB, MB, and TB), the Spearman's correlation tool results showed that there are positive correlations between PE and IB ($r = 0.386$, $p > 0.01$); between PE and MB ($r = 0.408$, $p > 0.01$); and between PE and TB ($r = 0.401$, $p > 0.01$). The following correlation results were also found between OE and IB ($r = 0.228$, $p > 0.01$); between OE and MB ($r = 0.274$, $p > 0.01$); and between OE and TB ($r = 0.257$, $p > 0.01$). This means that enough evidence exists to suggest that there are significant relationships between employment relations satisfaction and psychological contracts, to which the public servants are exposed.

- When PC (PE and OE) was paired with ER (OE and RAW), the results indicated a significant positive correlation between PE and OE ($r = 0.365$, $p > 0.01$) and between PE and RAW ($r = 0.094$, $p > 0.05$). There were also positive correlation results between OE and OC ($r = 0.238$, $p > 0.01$) and between OE and RAW ($r = 0.193$, $p > 0.01$). This means that there are significant relationships that exist between psychological contracts and the employment relationship, to which the public servants are exposed.

After Multiple regression analysis was used to analyse the regression among the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC), the results revealed the following:

- Regarding the prediction of PC by ER, the results show that the regression of ER on PC is $\beta = 0.240$, $p = 0.000$, which indicates a significant causal relationship between the two variables.

- Regarding the prediction of ERS by PC, the results show that the regression of PC on ERS is $\beta = 0.513$, $p = 0.000$, which indicates a significant causal relationship between the two variables.

- Regarding the prediction of ERS by ER, the results show that the regression of ER on ERS is $\beta = 0.386$, $p = 0.000$, which is indicative of a significant causal relationship between the two variables.

6. CONCLUSION

While the results presented in this study generally support the basic premises of research, the following limitations were identified pertaining to the sample characteristics and data-collection methods:

Firstly, the data used in the study was only collected cross-sectionally. This may raise a question of whether the results would still have been the same, had the data been collected over a period of time (longitudinally).

Secondly, out of the nine provincial/regional offices targeted for the collection of data required for the study, some offices chose not to participate

in the study for reasons not disclosed to the researcher. The result was that the data finally collected and available to the researcher, could not be said to be a reflection of all the nine provincial/regional offices of each of the three government departments from which the data should have been collected.

While these limitations have not negatively impacted the findings of the study per se, they have been highlighted so that they should be taken note of, when future research is considered in the same field of study.

Generally, the study seems to have succeeded in answering the questions on which the study was premised. However, it could be of additional benefit to the academic research fraternity if future research could focus on the effects of the negative state of the psychological contract in the public sector workplace. The intention of the proposed future research would be to establish the magnitude to which the negative psychological contract affects the relationship between management and employees in the public sector workplace.

This study has made a very important contribution to scholarly knowledge in terms of closing the gap for the insufficient research pertaining to scientific information in South Africa that relates to collective and/or individual roles played by ER, ERS, and PC in the workplace. This study has further added knowledge pertaining to the inter-relationship that exists among the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC).

The theoretical implications of the results of this study, therefore, suggest that any future investigation of the effect of either ER or ERS on employer-employee relationships should advisably include PC, as the three variables are inter-related, and as a result exert a collective effect on the South African workplace as a whole.

Studies that were conducted earlier in South Africa, which focussed on or included the subject of PC, have been found to have investigated either the impact or effect of the PC on other factors or the effect of other factors on the PC in the workplace. Although these studies also yielded very significant results, which also contributed to scientific knowledge, fewer studies have been conducted that revealed findings which are as significant as those revealed in this study. Unlike studies conducted previously, this study investigated the magnitude to which each of the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC) impacts the workplace. This study further investigated the interrelationship among the three variables within the public sector.

The study has revealed the following findings: the ER that exists in the public sector is positive; there is a higher level of ERS in the public sector; there is a negative state of PC in the public sector; and there is a positive inter-relationship among the three variables (ER, ERS, and PC). The interrelationship among the three variables has also been confirmed through reviewed literature, which revealed the following. Firstly, that the type of ER that exists in the workplace will determine the level of ERS among the employees in the workplace. Secondly, that the type of ER that exists in the workplace will determine the state of PC that will prevail in the workplace. And thirdly, that the state of PC that is prevalent in the workplace will have an influence on the type of

ER (between employers and their employees) and the level of ERS (among employees).

Based on the uniqueness of the results of this research study, it is expected that it will contribute to the limited available literature on ER, ERS, and PC pertaining to their nature, interrelationship and collective effect in the workplace. It is believed that this knowledge will assist line managers in work organisations in the management of employment relations in their respective workplaces. The study has revealed that there is a positive ER and a higher level of ERS between management and junior employees and that the PC that exists in the public sector work is in a negative state. The results have further revealed that there is a positive interrelationship among ER, ERS, and PC in the public sector workplace.

To a workplace supervisor or line manager, these results imply that if he/she intends to improve the workplace relations, he/she has to focus more on the PC in order to change its negative state, which negatively impacts the relationship between

management and junior employees. Investing in changing the negative state of the PC as revealed by the study, will ultimately result in the improvement of the ER and ERS in the workplace.

It has to be noted that an outcome of an improved ER and ERS will be of benefit to the work organisation in terms of job satisfaction, which is a determinant of higher productivity, organisational commitment, and citizenship, which will give rise to workplace stability. The interrelationship among the three variables implies that every supervisor or line manager should always bear in mind that each of the three variables should not be addressed in isolation where the effect of each variable is being investigated in the workplace. It is of utmost importance that work organisations should invest more in empowering their supervisors/line managers with the necessary knowledge and skills pertaining to ER, ERS, and PC, which are prerequisites for effective interaction with their subordinates in the workplace.

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