

Antecedents of pro-environmental behaviours at work: The moderating influence of psychological contract breach[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This study uses the tenets of social exchange theory to examine employee willingness to perform pro-environmental behaviours (PEBs) in a workplace setting. The first aim of the study was to examine the indirect effect of perceived organisational support on pro-environmental behaviours via job attitudes. The second objective was to clarify whether a psychological contract breach affects the relationships between perceived organisational support and job attitudes. Using a convenience sample ($N = 449$), we report that perceived organisational support has an indirect effect on PEBs through employee commitment to the organisation. Additionally, organisational support moderates the effect of a perceived breach on employee job satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Several theoretical frameworks have been used to explain pro-environmental behaviour (PEB) in the workplace. Such frameworks include the Value-belief-norm (VBN) theory (Andersson, Shivarajan, & Blau, 2005; Scherbaum, Popovitch, & Finlinson, 2008), the cognitive theory of stress (Homburg & Stolberg, 2006) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Greaves, Zibarras, & Stride, 2013). Contrary to Scherbaum et al. (2008), Anderson et al. (2005) concluded that VBN theory cannot be generalised in work settings. Although Homburg and Stolberg (2006) reported that the awareness of environmental problems leads individuals to engage in PEB at work, they recognised that low measurement reliability might limit the generalisation of their findings. By using TPB to examine employees' behavioural intentions towards the environment in organisational settings, Greaves et al. (2013) recognised that one limitation of their investigation is explained by the cross-sectional design leading to the exclusion of actual behaviour for each scenario (switch the computer off, use video-conference instead of travelling to meetings and recycle as much waste as possible at work). These mitigated results might be explained by

the specificity of work settings that need an appropriate framework for studying employee behaviours on the job. Social exchange theory (SET) is well-established in both the literature on human resources and organisational behaviour and has the potential to examine environmentally sustainable behaviours (Craddock, Huffman, & Henning, 2012).

The primary purpose of the present research was to test whether social exchange theory may offer a framework for studying individuals' pro-environmental behaviours on the job. Social exchange refers to "the voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others" (Blau, 1964, p. 91). From the employee standpoint (such as adopted in the present research), this means that they are prone to engage in pro-environmental behaviours if they perceive that their organisation at some level demonstrates its engagement for initiating, developing and maintaining favourable work conditions. In addition, the present research aims to also provide other contributions to the environmental literature. First, despite recent calls inviting environmental scholars to undertake research on PEBs in work settings (e.g., Klein & Huffman, 2013; Ones & Dilchert, 2012; Spence, Pidgeon, & Uzzell, 2009) and recent field studies (Cantor, Morrow, & Montabon, 2012; Homburg & Stolberg, 2006; Paillé & Boiral, 2013), investigations providing results on how workers participate in environmental behaviours to help their organisation achieve sustainability remain rare (Steg & Vlek, 2009). The present study provides original data that help to fill this gap. Second, considerable effort has been focused on describing what discourages employees from engaging in pro-

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environmental behaviours (Zibarras & Ballinger, 2011). We propose to explore the plausible effect of psychological contract (PC). Recently, Anguinis and Glavas (2013) have suggested that corporate environmental sustainability has the potential to strengthen the PC between employee and employer. Typically, a PC is described as a set of unwritten agreements that shape the long-term relationships in the workplace (Conway & Briner, 2005). In the everyday life of the organisation it is often difficult to respect all prior promises (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). When employees perceive or believe that a breach occurs (lack of fulfilment), they become less committed to the organisation and less satisfied with their job, which leads to reducing extra efforts at work (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). In accordance with social exchange tenets, a perceived breach may impede employee engagement in PEBs. Whereas substantial effort has been invested in numerous areas (e.g., human resource management and organisational behaviour, among others), there are few studies examining the consequences of PC-breach which have explored the role of PC in the context of environmental sustainability. The present study attempts to clarify the extent the perception of a breach affects the individual's propensity to perform PEB.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

This paper proposes to test a research model (see Fig. 1) in which perceived organisational support, employee job attitudes (satisfaction and commitment) and perceived lack of prior promises are identified as important antecedent variables for performing PEBs.

In work settings, individuals may engage in numerous PEBs to help their organisation achieve environmental sustainability (Mesmer-Magnus, Viswevaran, & Wiernik, 2012). Based on the work from Homburg and Stolberg (2006), PEBs may be direct or indirect. Whereas direct PEBs refer to performing concrete gestures towards improving the environment (e.g., recycling), indirect PEBs refer to worker motivation about providing advice or encouragement to others individuals in the workplace to adopt direct PEBs. Unfortunately, Homburg and Solberg offered very few examples of behaviours associated with these two forms of PEBs. However, Ones and Dilchert (2012) have supplied one of the most comprehensive taxonomies for understanding PEBs in organisational settings. They defined green behaviours as “scalable actions and behaviors that employees engage in that are linked with and contribute to or detract from environmental sustainability” (p. 87). Based on the analysis of more than 2000 activities obtained from a large spectrum of jobs, organisations and industries in the United States and Europe, Ones and Dilchert proposed that employees' actions may impact the natural environment through five main behaviours. The main behaviours include the following: conserving (i.e., reducing

use, reusing, repurposing and recycling); working sustainably (e.g., changing how work is done); avoiding harm (e.g., preventing pollution); influencing others (e.g., encouraging and supporting others); and taking initiative (e.g., initiating programs and policies). Thus, it can be proposed that conserving, working sustainably and avoiding harm are direct PEBs and that influencing others and taking initiatives are indirect PEBs. Finally, in their qualitative review of determinants of PEBs in organisations, Lo, Peters, and Kok (2012) reported that recycling and energy conservation are the most-investigated green behaviours. In addition, by adding (and updating) papers not included in Lo et al.'s review, most research in work settings has focused on direct PEBs (Greaves et al., 2013; Lamm, Tosti-Kharas, & Williams, 2013; Laudenslager, Holt, & Lofgren, 2004; Lo et al., 2012; Zhang, Wang, & Zhou, 2013). Only a few studies have addressed indirect PEBs (Homburg & Stolberg, 2006, study 3; Paillé & Boiral, 2013, study 3). Given that research on indirect pro-environmental behaviours in the workplace remains less developed we addressed indirect PEBs.

We believe that it may be helpful for organisations to adopt SET principles for achieving environmental sustainability. This proposition leads to the following question: to what extent is the adoption of SET principles useful for the organisation? In the environmental literature, a major recurring theme is the influence of organisational support for the employees' willingness to perform PEBs. (e.g., Govindarajulu & Dailey, 2004; Lamm et al., 2013; Paillé & Boiral, 2013; Ramus, 2001; Ramus & Steger, 2000). According to Zibarras and Ballinger (2011), while a lack of support is one of the major impediments to green behaviours at work, supportive decisions by the employer are important facilitators for employees to engage in such behaviours. Support received by partners is acknowledged as a key construct in social exchange (Blau, 1964).

Social exchange theory has emerged recently as a relevant framework for studying PEBs in the workplace (Paillé & Boiral, 2013). SET addresses the study of the main effects of reciprocity on long-term relationships among stakeholders within an organisation. Its core tenet is the reciprocity process, which refers to “the act of giving benefits to another in return for benefits received” (Molm, Schaefer, & Collett, 2007, p. 200). Social exchange between partners in organisational settings occurs under conditions previously described in relevant literature (e.g., Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007). One of the most important conditions concerns the “goods” that are exchanged. Although these goods are not always easily quantifiable, to be exchanged these “goods” should have some degree of value. Schaninger and Turnipseed (2005) have indicated that the “exchange of ‘gives’ and ‘gets’ between the employee and employer forms the basis for exchange relationships” (p. 211). When high-quality relationships become a standard in organisational settings and contribute to a

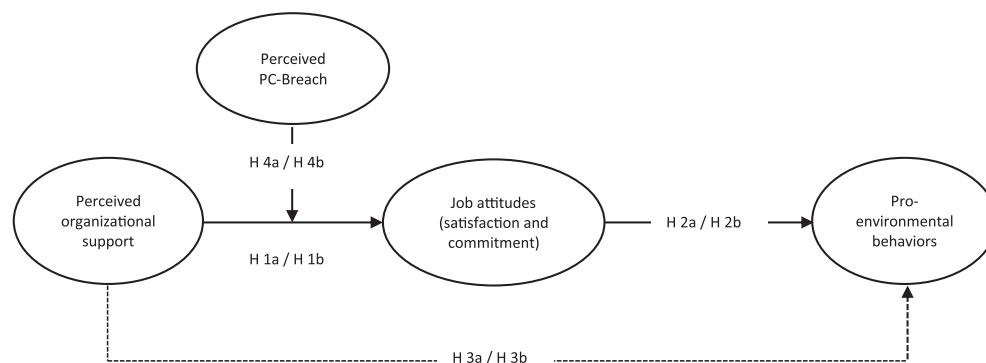


Fig. 1. Research model. Note. Dashed arrow is used to depict indirect relationship; solid arrows represent direct relationships.

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