

## Relationship between Mental Wellbeing and Sense of Humour among Workers in the Workplace: The Moderating Role of Psychological Breach of Contract and Violation

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### Abstract

This study investigated the moderating role of psychological breach of contract and violation on the relationship between mental wellbeing and sense of humour among workers of T-Man Nigeria LTD, Enugu state. A total of one hundred and seven (107) participants (44; 41.1% males and 63; 58.9% females) participated in the study. Participants were drawn using convenience sampling technique and were administered questionnaire during their break period. Three instruments were used in data collation namely; the Coping Humour Scale (CHS), Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (AWEMWBS) and Psychological Contract Breach and Violation Scale (PCBVS). Two hypotheses were tested and the results showed that sense of humor significantly and positively correlated with psychological well-being at  $r=1.00$ , while psychological contract significantly moderated the relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing ( $f\text{-change} = .000$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The findings indicate that the presence of sense of humour will always increase the levels of psychological well-being and existence of psychological contract breach will always influence the relationship between sense of humor and psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Sense of humor; Psychological well-being; Psychological contract breach; Work place; Violation

### Introduction

Recently, researchers have increased their recognition on the need to understand employees' psychological contract. The recognition has been driven by various changes, namely: economic and political environments, workforce demographics and values of individuals [1]. In any case these contracts are breached; the psyche and the overall wellbeing of the employee might be grossly affected. The above assertion is in line with the thoughts of Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau [2], where he opined that psychological contract reflects an individual's belief or perception that some forms of promise or reciprocal obligations have been made between the two parties, namely, the employee and employer. That is to say that the psychological contract encompasses an individual's perception of how he/she regards the exchange relationship in terms of promissory obligations [3]. Even though both parties seem to have a common belief that they have accepted the same agreement, more often than not, they do not have a common understanding of the terms and conditions underlying the employment relationship [4,5].

A breach of psychological contract occurs when the employee perceives that the "organization has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract in a manner commensurate with one's contributions" [6]. Although, so many empirical literatures has examined the antecedents and outcomes of psychological contract breach (PCB) [4,6,7], it does appear that very little is known about other relevant psychological constructs which may act as a buffer towards reducing the negative consequences that psychological contract breach may be posing for industries and organizations alike. That is, what is the state of feeling of the employee whose contract is being breached? Does the psychological breach affect his/her or sense of humor with coworker and immediate boss? It is at the instance of the questions above that the research topic, "mental wellbeing and sense of humor in the workplace: the moderating role of psychological contract breach and violation".

Psychological contract is defined as "individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organizations" [5]. Psychological contract is more subjective than a legal contract. The psychological contract also has been distinguished from the broader construct of expectations. The promissory expectations in a psychological contract are "only those expectations that emanate from perceived implicit or explicit promises by the employer" [8]. We define psychological contract breach as the employee's perception regarding the extent to which the organization has failed to fulfill its promises or obligations [4]. Although, the terms psychological contract violation and breach are sometimes used interchangeably, Morrison and Robinson [6] sought to distinguish between the two constructs by suggesting that breach is the cognitive evaluation that one's organization has failed to fulfill its obligations, whereas violation is the emotional and affective state that may follow from the breach cognition.

Psychological contract breach does not only elicit intense emotional reactions [3,6,9] but may also trigger different behavioral responses in an attempt to re-modify, adjust, or abandon the organization [10]. These responses are to be investigated in line with the stressing factor like psychosocial stressors [11]. The degree of manifesting one

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set of behaviors over another is said to be influenced by the way an individual chooses to interpret an episode of contract breach [5,12,13]. One study by Robinson and Morrison [7], investigated the role of causal explanations on the relationship between perceived contract discrepancies (breach) and emotional reactions (violation). The results showed that although explanations did not exacerbate the relationship, the interaction became significant upon entering "perceived fairness," such that perception of unfairness alone increased the occurrence of emotional reactions following breach, irrespective of the causal explanations. However, the relevance of the breach goes beyond the sheer non fulfillment of expectations. If reciprocity is a key element of social relationships [14], an unfulfilled expectation of reciprocity is likely to harm the foundation of a relationship. Thus, even though PCB is often considered to be the opposite of contract fulfillment, this dichotomy is not quite so clear-cut [15]. Whether the employees' evaluation of the organization is positive or negative as opined by Morrison and Robinson [6], the central idea is that the employees' mindset and general wellbeing is affected, in this sense, there is need for the concept of mental wellbeing to be explicitly manifested.

Ryff and Singer [16] suggest that health is not a medical concept associated with absence of illness, but rather a philosophical one that requires an explanation of a good life-being one where an individual has a sense of purpose, is engaged in quality relationships with others, and possesses self-respect and mastery. This is synonymous with the World Health Organization [17,18] definition of positive mental health. However, such a definition is incomplete as individuals do not exist in isolation, but are influenced by, and influence, their social and physical environments. Furthermore, people will have their own individual interpretations of what a good life is. Rowling et al. [19], defined mental health as the capacity of individuals and groups to interact with one another and the environment in ways that promote subjective wellbeing, the optimal development and use of cognitive, affective and relational abilities, the achievement of individual and collective goals consistent with justice. Mental health problems have many effects on the individual at the workplace. The productivity of individuals with unsupported mental health needs may decline while at work. Mental health problems can affect work performance in terms of increase in error rates, poor decision-making, loss of motivation and commitment, tension and conflicts between colleagues [20]. From these explanations, it can be said therefore that mental disorders affect individuals and their employment much beyond the breach of contract issues. People with mental disorders face stigmatization, social exclusion and barriers in obtaining equal opportunities at all levels of life, including at their workplaces.

More so, empirical research on the explicit association of PCB with health outcomes is still rather limited [21]. However, breached obligations generally have a stronger effect on employee well-being when compared with fulfilled obligations [22] and thus promise to be more predictive of employee health. PCB is associated with reduced psychological well-being. It also predicts teacher burnout, as well as high levels of soldier burnout during missions. Guest, also agrees that employees health are specifically threatened by psychological contract breaches, and these unmet expectations are important and should be understood for relevant employee wellbeing. Generally speaking, expectations not met by organizations are also associated with burnout and emotional exhaustion [23] and broken promises are closely related to emotions of betrayal and hurt including negative emotions such as anger, violation, and depression. Concerning physical health outcomes, Clinton and Guest [24], found that unfulfilled obligations predict increased sickness, absenteeism and poorer general health.

More research on physical health is currently not available. However, because negative psychological stress reactions due to perceived unmet obligations affect physical health as well, suggested that PCB is also likely to be connected to employee physical and mental health.

## Theoretical Framework

Frustration-Aggression Theory [25] in 1939 Dollard et al, proposed the Frustration-Aggression Theory of violence. This theory derived many of its basic postulates from Freudian theory. It explains the process by which frustration is linked to aggression. Whenever something interferes with an individual's attempt to reach certain goals or end, he feels frustrated and frustration in turn, leads to some forms of aggression [25]. Aggression includes both physical and verbal behaviors which intend to hurt someone. It is closely related to increased tension and restless movements or feelings of anger that may lead to destructiveness and hostile attacks. People become frustrated, when they are unable to reach their goals, when frustrated; they tend to strike out at others, in ways that range from tongue lashing to overt violence. They consider verbs like destroy, damage, and torment, retaliate, hurt, humiliate, insult, threaten and intimidate as action of an aggressive nature.

Aggression was thus regarded as a response to frustration, directed towards the infliction of injury. The injury may be mental as well as of physical in nature and the target of aggression may be animate or inanimate. In other words, aggression is the dominant response in the hierarchy of responses to frustration and this dominant position of aggression is probably the result of learning rather than of innate factor. Thus, the theory of Frustration-Aggression is criticized on the ground that aggression is not always directed to the source of frustration but often is directed towards some other objects i.e. displaced aggression. It is also criticized on the grounds that, (1) the relationship between frustration and aggression is not innate; that (2) a wide variety of responses may result from frustration and aggressions are not the only responses; (3) that aggression may be an adaptive response and a rational choice of behavior. Yet other criticisms against this theory are: that (i) human behavior is not an extension of animal instinctive or innate behavior but is the product of a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors. An individual's social behavior depends upon his social and cultural milieu; (ii) Responses to frustrations are learnt just like any other social behavior and what is learnt has a lot to do with socialization practices which themselves differ from group to group and society to society.

Despite the number of criticisms flooding the frustration-aggression theory, there is still justifiable evidence credible enough for this research to be hinged on it. The evidence is: even though, following frustration, aggression is not always observed, it may nevertheless be there as a 'tendency'. To put it another way, if one sticks with the assumption that "aggression is always a consequence of frustration", one can always find evidence for it if one looks long enough. A sufficiently diligent search is bound to uncover aggression following frustration and (one presumes) a frustration to which aggression can be traced.

## Hypothesis

It is hypothesized as follows:

1. Sense of humor will have a significant and positive correlation on psychological well-being.
2. Psychological breach of contract will moderate the relationship between sense of humor and psychological well-being.

## Method

### Participants

The study sample comprised of 107 participants (44; 41.1 % males and 63; 58.9% females) with a mean age of 36.8 years (SD=7.88), their age range fell between 25-55 years with an average of 39 years. 74 (69.2%) had university first degree, 17 (15.9%) had OND/HND/NCE, while 15 (15%) had postgraduate degree. On their marital status, 55 (51.4%) were single, while 52 (48.6) were married.

### Instruments

**The short warwick-edinburgh mental well-being scale (SAWEMWBS):** The short Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale (SAWEMWBS) was developed to access level of mental wellbeing in the general population with the intention to improve mental wellbeing. The SAWEMWBS is a 7-item questionnaire against the full version of 14-item. The 7-item SAWEMWBS targets the mental functionality which are positively worded with like rt type response format from 1=None of the time, 2=Rarely, 3=Some of the time, 4=Often, and 5=All of the time. While the internal reliability yielded 0.83. The Psychological Contract Breach and Violation Scale (PCBVS) The psychological contract breach and violation scale as developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000) to measure psychological contract breach and violation among test takers. The PCBVS is a 9-item questionnaire with 5-point Likert format ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Don't Know, 4=Agree to 5=Strongly Agree.

It contains items like “Almost all of the promises by my employer during recruitment have been kept do far” “I feel a great deal of anger toward my organization” “I have not received anything promised to me in exchange for my contributions” “I feel that my employer have come through in fulfilling the promises made to me when I was hired” “My employer has broken some of the promises to me even though I have upheld my side of the deal”.

### The coping humor scale (CHS)

The coping humor scale is a 7-item instrument developed by Martin to measure the degree to which respondents make use of humor in coping with stressful situations. The CHS is a 4-point Likert scale worded 1=strongly disagree, 2=mildly disagree, 3=mildly agree, and 4=strongly agree. All items are positively scored except question 1 and 4 which are scored in reverse direction. It contains some items like “I often lose my sense of humor when am having problems” “I often found that my problems have been greatly reduced when I try to find something funny in them” “I usually find something comical to say

when I am in tense situations” “I must admit my life would probably be a lot easier if I had more of sense of humor” “I have often felt that if I am in a situation where I have to either cry or laugh, it's better to laugh”.

### Design and Statistics

The study adopted cross-sectional design and Hierarchical linear regression analysis was employed as the most appropriate statistical method.

### Results

Table 1 above shows sense of humor and are related at  $r=1.00$ , and are positively interacted. Hence the first hypothesis tested which stated that “sense of humor will significantly and positively correlate psychological well-being” is hereby accepted. This implies that the presence of sense f humor will always cause the presence of psychological well-being (Table 1).

Table 2 above displayed that in step 2 psychological contract breach moderating the relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing are related at  $r= 1.0$ , also psychological contract breach contributed 100% variance to the relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing at  $r$ -square= 1.00, and adjusted  $r$ -square= 1.00 which give account of 100% shows a fitted model. Psychological contract was able to moderate the relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing at sig. F-change= .000, hence the hypothesis tested which stated that “psychological contract will significantly moderate the relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing” is hereby accepted because sig. f-change= .000 is below the threshold of at  $p < .05$  (Table 2).

### Discussion

The first hypothesis tested which state that sense of humor significantly and positively correlate with psychological well-being. The findings of this study is in line with previous studies, Arnie and Chatal [26] observed that stable affect was related to resilience and psychological well-being, and that a sense of humor that involves self-enhancing, humor, humor based on maintaining a humorous perspective about one's experience, was positively related to stable positive affect, negative related to stable negative affect, and was mediated through stable affect in influencing resilience, well-being and distress. Thus, while a good sense of humor can lead to greater resilience and better psychological health. Similarly other authors observed from their study of humor styles and mental health status of health services students in vocational schools; that the high humor behavior scores

**Table 1:** Shows correlation between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing.

Correlations		Sense of humor	Psychological wellbeing
Sense of humor	Pearson Correlation	1	1.000*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	5211894.185	5834259.000
	Covariance	48709.291	54525.785
	N	108	108
Psychological wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	1.000**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	5834259.000	6533400.000
	Covariance	54525.785	61059.813
	N	108	108

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 2:** Shows psychological contact breach as moderator of relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing.

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	1.000	1.000	4.30091	1.000	176546.401	2	105	.000
2	1.000 <sup>b,c</sup>	1.000	1.000	3.04669	.000	105.245	1	104	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), psychological contract breach, sense of humor  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), psychological contract breach, sense of humor, moderator  
 c. Dependent Variable: psychological wellbeing

suggest that students are mentally healthy.

A significant number of theoretical assertions regarding the contribution of humor to psychological health are based on the opinion that a sense of humor is an effective coping strategy regarding stress. The role that a sense of humor plays when coping with stress enables the individual in question to distance themselves from the problem and thus attain a different perspective of that problem in relation to their situation or themselves. This humorous understanding enables individual greater attitudinal flexibility and tolerance when faced with their faults and the general irrational behavior of other people. Besides Ganz and Jacobs [27], noted that exposing individuals to humorous stimuli to be been associated with enhanced moods elevated levels of secretory immunoglobulin-A, and vasodilation. This implies that engaging in humor and laughter spurs people to feel more positive, happy and energetic thus reducing the proclivity to depression, anxiety, irritability, and tension. This implies that humor tends to enhance positive moods and neutralize negative emotions. The sense of humor is crucial to mental health for it contributes to an individual’s ability to regulate or manage their emotions which is an important aspect of mental health.

The second hypothesis tested which state that psychological contract significantly moderate the relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing. Essentially, psychological contracts enable individuals to form mental representations, or schemas about their working relationship. Hence, it is central framework for understanding various aspects of employment relationships and the impact that both sense of humor and psychological wellbeing. The findings of this study show that psychological contract significantly moderate the relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing. A defining feature of psychological contracts is the belief that the agreement is mutual or that a common understanding exists that binds the parties involved in the employment relationship to a particular course of action [12]. Hence, if this agreement is frustrated, the outcome will be that sense of humor and psychological wellbeing will likely be jeopardized. On the contrary, Gianluca and Claudio [28] in their study highlighted that well-being in the workplace does not depend exclusively on external conditions in terms of the working and organizational environment within which the individual operates: so, it could be promoted not only from above, through actions by management, but also from below, influencing individual traits and behaviors.

**Implication of the findings**

The results of this study would be useful for developing training, workplace counseling, and organizational development activities aimed to support small groups, leaders, and other strategic players in the construction of the subsystems of sense of humor, psychological well-being, psychological contract breach in the workplace.

**Limitations of the study**

The research has shown that that sense of humor significantly and positively correlate with psychological well-being and that psychological contract significantly moderate the relationship between sense of humor and psychological wellbeing. However the result should be viewed within the context of the limitations posed by the method and sample size.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that employee should be educated to develop and maintain sense of humor to enable them build, sustain and keep their psychological well-being. Again it is recommended that employers and employees should seek to respect and honor the psychological contract so as to keep up sense of humor and psychological wellbeing in the work environment which in turn enhance harmonious relationship and productivity.

**Suggestions for future studies**

It is recommended that future researchers in this field of, the moderating role of psychological breach of contract and violation on the relationship between mental wellbeing and sense of humor among workers should include other personality traits like: neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, etc.

**Conclusion**

This study was embarked upon to study investigate the moderating role of psychological breach of contract and violation on the relationship between mental wellbeing and sense of humor among workers of T-Man Nigeria LTD, Enugu state. The independent variables are of psychological breach of contract and violation while mental wellbeing and sense of humor are depended variables. The participants were drawn from among workers of T-Man Nigeria LTD, Enugu state. A total of one hundred and seven (107) participants (44; 41.1 % males and 63; 58.9% females) participated in the study. The review of literature covered the areas that are relevant to the study. The self-evaluation questionnaire used in this study was without serious modification after a pilot study and tallies with the hypothesis. The findings reveal that there indicate that the presence of sense of humor will always increase the levels of psychological well-being and existence of psychological contract breach will always influence the relationship between sense of humor and psychological well-being. The findings have come from a particular data set, yet the present study gives a direction for the necessity of more integrated research in this field.

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