

Unveiling the Moderating Role of Psychological Contract Breach in the Relationship Between Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement

Ariadna Monje-Amor  ¹

1. Faculty of Economics and Business, Universidade da Coruña, A Coruña, Spain

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the moderating role of psychological contract breach on the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement among employees in the tourism and hospitality industries in Galicia, northwest Spain. Employing a quantitative approach, the research gathered data from 378 employees, with quantitative data analysed using regression analyses in SPSS. Additionally, the questionnaire included several open questions, providing supplementary qualitative insights, which were analysed thematically. The findings indicate a significant moderating effect of psychological contract breach on the psychological empowerment-work engagement relationship, particularly pronounced among employees experiencing high levels of contract breach. Five main themes emerged, explaining why employees perceive psychological contract breach. The study highlights the critical role of psychological contract breach in influencing the dynamics between psychological empowerment and work engagement. This is the first study to explore these connections, providing new insights into the psychological mechanisms involved. The results can inform strategies to improve employee well-being and organisational effectiveness in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Several practical implications for organisations and policymakers are presented.

KEYWORDS

Psychological Contract Breach, Psychological Empowerment, Work Engagement, Hospitality, Tourism.

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, work engagement has gained significant attention in the fields of management and positive psychology and has become a widely discussed topic. A highly engaged workforce is considered a competitive advantage for organisations, as it has been linked to positive effects on organisational effectiveness such as improved performance, higher sales, enhanced employee retention, better employee well-being, or customer satisfaction (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Halbesleben, 2010; Saks, 2019) we predicted that teachers' weekly job resources are positively related to their week-levels of work engagement, and that week-level work engagement is predictive of week-level performance. In addition, we hypothesized that momentary work engagement has a positive, lagged effect on next week's job resources. Teachers were asked to fill in a weekly questionnaire every Friday during 5 consecutive weeks. Results of multi-level analyses largely confirmed our hypotheses, by showing that week-levels of autonomy, exchange with the supervisor, and opportunities for development (but not social support. Finding significance and a sense of purpose at work is a priority for employees. Fulfilling employees' needs, harmonising values, and striving towards a common purpose are essential factors in fostering job satisfaction and overall well-being (Formica & Sfodera, 2022).

According to Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, and Bakker (2002), work engagement can be described as a positive and fulfilling state of mind related to work that entails vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour is associated with increased energy levels, mental resilience, and a willingness to invest time and effort in one's work. Dedication refers to finding meaning and purpose in one's work, feeling proud of one's achievements, and experiencing a sense of enthusiasm. Finally, absorption involves becoming fully immersed and focused in one's work, resulting in the feeling that time passes quickly.

Previous studies have identified several factors that contribute to work engagement, including job characteristics (e.g., skill variety, autonomy, or task significance), job resources (e.g., feedback, supervisor support, and coaching), personal resources (e.g., resilience, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism), and various leadership styles (e.g., empowering, authentic, or transformational leadership) (Xanthopoulos, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009; Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2018; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Saks, 2019; Wen, Huang, & Teo, 2023; Monje-Amor & Calvo, 2023). For example, Bakker and Bal (2010) found that certain job resources, including autonomy, exchange with the supervisor, and developmental opportunities, were positively related to work engagement among Dutch teachers, suggesting that engaged teachers perform well. Furthermore, Saks and Gruman (2018) showed that socialisation resources, such as supervisor support, recognition, and feedback, can foster work engagement through personal resources and person-organisation fit perceptions.

Psychological contract breach occurs when promises or expectations regarding job and organisational characteristics that are considered significant resources are not met, which could lead to decreased job satisfaction and performance and higher employee turnover intentions (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Manolopoulos, Peitzika, Mamakou, & Myloni, 2022). Prior research has viewed psychological contract breach as an antecedent of work engagement (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014; Karani, Deshpande, Mall, & Jayswal, 2021) work engagement and mental well-being; however, the impact of psychological contract breach on the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement has been overlooked.

The tourism and hospitality industries are considered fundamental pillars of the Spanish economy, being among the most influential sectors in terms of employment generation and economic growth. These sectors accounted for 12.2 percent of Spain's gross domestic product in 2022, below the pre-pandemic levels of 12.6 percent in 2019 (Exceltur, 2023; National Statistics Institute [INE], 2022b). In the wake of the pandemic, the hospitality and tourism industries had to take drastic measures as they were unable to provide their services, resulting in closures, downsizing, and employment contract suspensions. Additionally, compared to other service industries, these are known for their high degree of precariousness, which is attributed to factors such as extended working hours, low remuneration, and the need to deliver demanding customer service (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, & Buyruk, 2010). These features influence the engagement levels of their employees and their psychological contracts.

In fact, employee turnover and stress are well-known realities in the hospitality industry, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened this issue (Yu, Park, & Hyun, 2021). For example, Dogru, McGinley,

Sharma, Isik, and Hanks (2023) showed that when turnover rates increase across the entire economy, the hospitality industry experiences an even higher increase in turnover. They further discovered that during periods of reduced voluntary job exits in the economy, the hospitality industry experiences an even more significant decline in departures. This suggests that employee retention in the hospitality industry is better in such macroeconomic conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to the issue of employment in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Both academics and policymakers are concerned about the challenges faced by management when it comes to employee recruitment and selection, motivation, and the retention of a high-quality workforce that can meet the demands of selective and demanding tourists. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the interplay between psychological contract breach, psychological empowerment, and work engagement.

This study aimed to examine the moderating role of psychological contract breach between psychological empowerment and work engagement. Although the link between psychological empowerment and work engagement has already been investigated, few studies have explored this relationship within the tourism and hospitality sectors (Moura, Orgambídez-Ramos, & de Jesus, 2015; Alagarsamy, Mehroliya, & Aranha, 2020; Wen et al., 2023). To the best of our knowledge, such an important relationship has not been tested in the hospitality literature so far, which is surprising. On the one hand, hospitality managers aim to increase the number of engaged employees by using empowerment. For example, they attempt to delegate authority to front-line employees for rapid service recovery. On the other hand, employees may perceive a breach of their psychological contract due to a mismatch between employee empowerment and adequate support, an increased workload without corresponding recognition or compensation, and unclear or inconsistent communication about their roles and responsibilities. Given this dilemma, this study examines the moderating role of psychological contract breach in the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement.

Therefore, this study makes important contributions to the organisational behaviour and human resource management fields by exploring the complex relationships between psychological empowerment, work engagement, and psychological contract breach, particularly within the tourism and hospitality industries. By addressing a key research gap, it is the first study to examine the moderating role of psychological contract breach between psychological empowerment and work engagement, revealing crucial psychological mechanisms at play. The findings underscore the dynamics that can drive employees to remain in roles that may not fully satisfy them, highlighting how contract breaches can intensify the empowerment-engagement link and elucidating why some employees continue despite challenging job market conditions. Additionally, the study provides practical insights for managers and policymakers, emphasising that addressing structural issues such as employment conditions, career progression, and communication practices can enhance employee retention and work engagement. By suggesting strategies like transparent communication, flexible work options, and strategic HR practices, this research not only enriches academic understanding but also offers actionable guidance to improve workforce stability and engagement in these high-demand sectors.

This paper is structured as follows: the next section contains the literature review and hypothesis development. Following that, the methodology section presents the data collection, sample participants, measures, and data analyses. Next, the results are presented. Finally, it concludes by discussing the theoretical contributions, their implications for practice, and suggesting limitations and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

This study draws on two theoretical frameworks: the job demands-resources theory (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2024) and the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cook, Cheshire, Rice, & Nakagawa, 2013). These frameworks provide a better understanding of employee behaviour and their work engagement.

The job demands-resources theory posits that every job comprises both demands and resources. Job demands, such as workload, role conflict, and job insecurity, require prolonged physical or mental exer-

tion and may lead to physiological and psychological burdens (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; El-Sherbeeney, Alsetoohy, Sheikhsouk, Liu, & Kamar, 2024). Conversely, job resources, such as coworker collaboration, autonomy, and access to tools and information, can either facilitate work goals, alleviate job demands and their associated costs, or promote personal growth and development. Job demands may lead to burnout, while job resources may stimulate motivation and result in work engagement (Schaufeli, 2017; Islam & Alam, 2024).

The social exchange theory (SET), formulated by Blau (1964), is a conceptual framework that views social relations as a process of negotiated exchanges involving reciprocity. According to this theory, when parties establish relationships, such as employers and employees, certain reciprocal obligations are generated, and individuals may respond accordingly. The norm of reciprocity, which posits that individuals may assist those who have supported them (Gouldner, 1960), serves as the foundation for this exchange process. SET contends that individuals evaluate the benefits and costs of the exchange process and engage in activities when the trade-off is favourable. Costs refer to negative aspects of the exchange process, such as money, time, or effort, while benefits involve positive aspects, such as enjoyment or social support.

2.1 Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement

Prior research has explored this relationship, although studies are scarce within the hospitality and tourism sectors. Monje-Amor, Xanthopoulou, Calvo, and Abeal Vázquez (2021) discovered that psychological empowerment partially mediated the positive association between structural empowerment and work engagement, and work engagement was positively associated with task performance and negatively associated with intention to quit among service sector employees in Spain and the United Kingdom. Juyumaya (2022) showed that work engagement partially mediated the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and task performance among Latin American textile industry employees, and this mediating effect was moderated by age. Furthermore, Wang and Liu (2015) demonstrated that psychological empowerment played a partial mediating role in the positive relationship between the professional nursing practice environment and work engagement among Chinese clinical nurses. Additionally, Macsinga, Sulea, Sârbescu, Fischmann, and Dumitru (2014) emphasised the additional value of psychological empowerment, along with extraversion and conscientiousness, in explaining work engagement. Similarly, Bhatnagar (2012) discovered that psychological empowerment was positively related to work engagement, which was positively associated with innovation and negatively associated with turnover intention among managers across pharmaceutical, heavy engineering, information technology, electronics, and aeronautics engineering industries in India.

Moura et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between psychological empowerment, work engagement, and job satisfaction in a hospitality setting. They discovered that high levels of psychological empowerment among hotel staff could motivate employees, leading to increased engagement and job satisfaction. In a similar vein, Alagarsamy et al. (2020) showed that employee engagement played a mediating role in the relationship between employee psychological empowerment and employee job satisfaction among Maldivian resort employees. A study by Wen et al. (2023) revealed a partial mediation effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between empowering leadership and work engagement among Chinese hotel frontline employees. In a related study, Al Halbusi, Al-Sulaiti, AlAbri, and Al-Sulaiti (2023) found that empowering leadership positively influenced psychological empowerment and affective commitment, both of which were significantly associated with work engagement among frontline employees in five-star hotels in northern Iraq. Additionally, Meira and Hancer (2021) discovered that psychological empowerment played a mediating role in the relationship between perceived organisational support, work engagement, and service-orientated organisational citizenship behaviour among frontline hotel employees.

Drawing on the job demands-resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and SET theories (Blau, 1964; Cook et al., 2013), psychological empowerment can be considered a significant job resource. Employees who perceive their work as meaningful, possess the necessary skills and knowledge to accomplish their job (competence), have autonomy and freedom to make choices related to their work (self-determination), and believe that their work has an impact on their department are more likely to exhibit

work engagement, leading to higher levels of energy, dedication, and absorption in their work. In line with the reciprocal nature of SET theory, employees may feel compelled to reciprocate with high levels of work engagement when they are psychologically empowered. When organisations foster competence and autonomy, for instance, employees may respond with increased work engagement. Therefore, these theories emphasise that social interactions and expectations play an important role in shaping work engagement. Consequently, the first hypothesis is posited:

H1: Psychological empowerment is positively related to work engagement.

2.2 The Moderating Role of Psychological Contract Breach

According to Rousseau (1995), the psychological contract refers to the beliefs held by individuals about the terms of their exchange agreement with their organisation, which are shaped by the organisation. As a result, when employees perceive that their employer is fulfilling its obligations, they are more likely to become engaged at work. Relational contracts foster long-term relationships, mutual benefits, autonomy, loyalty, and stability, while transactional contracts are of a shorter-term nature and concentrate on economic exchange with limited employee involvement (Rousseau, 2004). The defining characteristics of the psychological contract outline its dynamics: it is concerned with the expectations and obligations of the parties, is implied and unwritten, and is mutual and bidirectional.

A breach of the psychological contract takes place when an individual perceives that one or more promises made within the employment relationship have not been fulfilled based on their cognitive evaluation of those promises (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Work engagement is not only influenced by resources such as psychological empowerment. In addition to resources, individuals may assess the extent to which the employer fulfils its obligations and promises towards employees, considering their own expectations.

Psychological contract breach may influence work engagement levels and the intention to quit. A breach in the psychological contract can lead to various negative outcomes, including increased employee turnover, decreased in-role and extra-role performance, and reduced organisational identification (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Additionally, it may result in higher absenteeism (Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2006), diminished organisational trust (Rousseau, 1990; Abdalla, Said, Ali, Ali, & Chen, 2021), intentions among employees to leave the organisation (Aggarwal & Bhargava, 2009; Santhanam, Dyaram, & Ziegler, 2017), and lower commitment levels (Rousseau & Greller, 1994). This underscores the detrimental effects of breaches in the psychological contract on both individual and organisational levels.

Individuals who perceive that their organisation is meeting their expectations and fulfilling the obligations promised in their psychological contract are more likely to feel empowered and display higher levels of work engagement. Conversely, when individuals perceive that their organisation is not fulfilling their psychological contract obligations, they may feel treated unfairly, resulting in decreased psychological empowerment and work engagement. Therefore, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Psychological contract breach moderates the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with a lower psychological contract breach.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Sample

Qualtrics administered a questionnaire to 824 employees working in the tourism and hospitality industries in Galicia, Spain. Out of these, 378 questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 45%. This region was selected due to its potential for demand growth and similarity to other European Atlantic areas, such as northern Portugal, Ireland, and western France. Potential participants were recruited from various market research panels hosted by Qualtrics. They received an email

invitation requesting their participation in the study, which involved completing an online questionnaire. Upon consenting to participate, they were provided with access to the online questionnaire and informed about the study's purpose and procedures. The study ensured voluntary participation and maintained confidentiality, with participants required to be 18 years of age or older and working in the hospitality and tourism sectors to be eligible.

Data collection took place between November 2022 and January 2023, utilising Qualtrics as the survey tool. To obtain a representative sample of the population, random sampling techniques were used, considering various demographic variables such as gender, age, and industry type, based on data from the Spanish Statistical Office. The sample included employees in frontline, administrative, and managerial roles across a range of tourism-related organisations, including hotels, tour guides, travel agencies, restaurants, and other services registered in the Register of Tourism Enterprises and Activities (REAT) in Galicia.

The sample size, calculated with the Qualtrics sample size calculator, was based on an estimated population of 10,000, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, yielding an ideal sample of 370 individuals. The estimated population size was derived from the 2022 occupancy surveys for hotels, campsites, holiday dwellings, rural tourism accommodations, and restaurants registered in REAT, conducted by the Spanish National Statistics Institute.

The questionnaire included demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, type of contract, work hours, position, organisational tenure), three scales that measure the study variables (psychological empowerment, work engagement, and psychological contract breach), and three open questions (e.g., "When you first joined the organisation, what were your expectations from your employer?"; "Describe a situation where you felt that your employer did not keep their promises or failed to meet your expectations"; "How did you feel when you realised that there was a breach in your psychological contract with the organisation?"). Table 1 reports the participants' demographic characteristics. The study sample comprised 47 percent female participants, with an average age of 41 (SD = 13.27) and a mean organisational tenure of 11 years (SD = 10.54). Of the participants, 71 percent worked full-time, while 17 percent were temporary employees.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants ($N = 378$)

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Age		
Under 30	86	23%
30-45	154	41%
More than 45	138	36%
Gender		
Female	178	47%
Male	200	53%
Type of contract		
Temporary	65	17%
Permanent	313	83%
Work hours		
Part-time	111	29%
Full-time	267	71%
Position		
Non-managerial	206	54%
Managerial	172	46%
Organisational tenure		
Less than 5 years	107	28%
5-15 years	178	47%
15+ years	93	25%

Source: Own Elaboration

3.2 Measures

To assess psychological empowerment, the twelve-item scale developed by Spreitzer (1995) was employed, which has been adapted to Spanish by Albar, García-Ramírez, López Jiménez, and Garrido (2012). This scale measures four dimensions of empowerment – meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact – with three items each. Participants rated their level of agreement on a 7-point scale, with options ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Sample items include “My job activities are personally meaningful to me” for meaning, “I have mastered the skills necessary for my job” for competence, “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job” for self-determination, and “My impact on what happens in my department is large” for impact.

Work engagement was assessed using the Spanish nine-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002), which evaluates the dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption. Participants indicated their agreement level on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. A 1-7 scale was consistently used across all measures. Sample items include “At my work, I feel bursting with energy” for vigour, “I am enthusiastic about my job” for dedication, and “I am immersed in my work” for absorption.

Psychological contract breach was measured using the scale by Robinson and Morrison (2000), using five items that were rated on a 5-point scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. This scale was translated into Spanish using the back-translation method from the English version. A sample item is “I have not received everything promised to me in exchange for my contributions”.

To isolate the potential confounding effect of age differences, as identified in previous studies (Rousseau, 1995; Bal, De Lange, Jansen, & Van Der Velde, 2008), age was incorporated as a control variable.

3.3 Procedure

First, quantitative data were analysed. A series of preliminary analyses were conducted prior to hypothesis testing, such as means, correlation matrix, normality, internal consistency, convergent, and discriminant validity. Then, common-method bias was tested. Next, hypothesis testing was performed via regression analyses using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022), and variables were mean-centered prior to analysis.

Secondly, thematic analysis was conducted to examine the qualitative data obtained from the three open-ended questions (Boyatzis, 1998; Clarke & Braun, 2017). This involved reading and analysing the responses to identify recurring patterns and themes. These themes were then assigned codes to label and organise the data (Blair, 2015). To report the research findings while maintaining anonymity, each respondent was assigned a unique identification code (e.g., R1, R2, R3).

4. Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, which include means, standard deviations (*SD*), correlations among the study variables, and Cronbach’s alpha.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	40.76	13.27							
2. Gender	1.47	0.50	-0.22**						
3. Work hours	5.76	1.67	0.02	-0.20**					
4. Role	1.46	0.50	-0.08	0.20**	-0.18**				
5. PE	3.61	0.78	-0.10*	-0.02	0.13*	-0.13*	(0.84)		
6. PCB	3.30	1.36	-0.23**	0.10*	-0.10	0.07	-0.19**	(0.94)	
7. WE	5.15	1.27	-0.06	-0.02	0.14**	-0.17**	0.71**	-0.31**	(0.93)

Source: Own Elaboration

Notes. *SD* = standard deviation. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Work hours: 1 = 10 hours, 2 = 15 hours, ..., 7 = 40 hours. Role: 1 = manager or supervisor, 2 = not a manager or supervisor. PE = psychological empowerment. PCB = psychological contract breach. WE = work engagement. Cronbach’s alpha values on the diagonal. **: $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

The correlations were statistically significant at the 0.01 level and were in the expected direction, demonstrating a positive association between psychological empowerment and work engagement and a negative association between psychological contract breach and both psychological empowerment and work engagement. The measures used show robust internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha values on the diagonal, all of which exceed the 0.70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978). These results align with prior studies that demonstrated reliability values greater than 0.80 (Abdalla et al., 2021; Monje-Amor et al., 2021; Juyumaya, 2022; Wen et al., 2023). The average variance extracted for each factor surpassed the established minimum threshold of 0.50, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Normality was present in the data, as skewness values did not exceed 2. The single-factor test performed using Harman's method showed that the single factor accounted for only 41% of the variance, suggesting that the presence of common method bias may not be a notable concern in the data (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Table 3. Regression Results

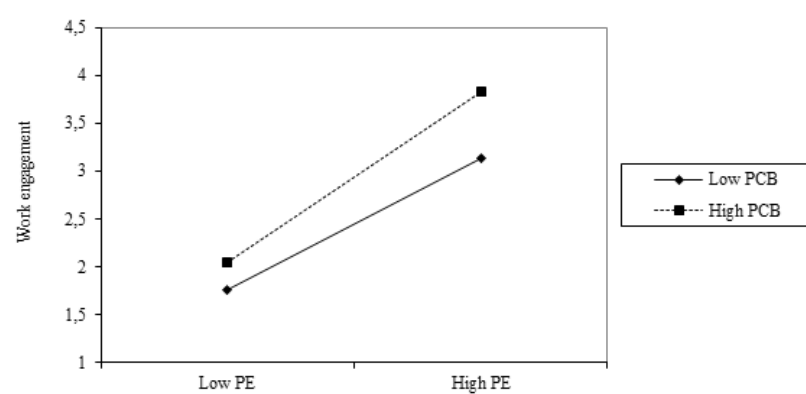
	Coefficient	<i>t</i>	Lower <i>CI</i>	Upper <i>CI</i>
Constant	-0.41**	-3.54	-0.64	-0.18
PE	0.69**	19.54	0.62	0.77
PCB	-0.16**	-4.47	-0.23	-0.09
Interaction	0.09**	2.98	0.03	0.16
Age	0.01**	3.12	0.01	0.02

Source: Own Elaboration

Notes. PE = psychological empowerment. PCB = psychological contract breach. **: $p < 0.001$. *CI*: confidence interval.

Table 3 presents the regression results. The findings support Hypothesis 1, which predicted a positive association between psychological empowerment and engagement ($B = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, a strong positive relationship exists between psychological empowerment and work engagement. Hypothesis 2 proposed the moderating role of psychological contract breach between psychological empowerment and work engagement ($B = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$). The PROCESS results show that the association between psychological empowerment and engagement varies depending on the level of psychological contract breach. The positive interaction term suggests that this relationship becomes more positive as psychological contract breach increases. This outcome will be further discussed in the following section. The R^2 value for the proposed model is 0.56. Figure 1 illustrates the two-way interaction of the moderating effect of psychological contract breach, showing that the association between psychological empowerment and engagement is positive but stronger for employees with high psychological contract breach (dotted line) compared to those with low psychological contract breach (solid line).

Figure 1. Interaction Effect of Psychological Contract Breach



Source: Own Elaboration

Notes. PE = psychological empowerment; PCB = psychological contract breach.

Table 4. Results from Open Questions

Themes	Example excerpts
1. Unfulfilled promises	"I felt demotivated and disillusioned when I realised that my employer had failed to fulfil his promises regarding a job promotion when they hired someone externally." (R87) "During and after the pandemic, the unmet expectations have become a palpable source of discontent, eroding morale and fostering a lingering sense of dissatisfaction." (R146)
2. Organisational changes	"The hotel was closed for six months as a result of the pandemic. Since then, we have had staff reductions, and I have changed supervisors three times." (R32) "The familiar landscape at our travel agency did undergo a series of transformations that, instead of fostering a sense of security, fuelled a growing sense of unhappiness." (R205)
3. Poor working conditions	"In the tourism sector, employees grapple with the collateral effects of unsettling shifts, low flexibility, and work-life balance." (R63) "The lack of work-life balance here is overwhelming. The agency expects us to be available around the clock, with long shifts and minimal time off. On top of that, management offers little to no support when we face challenging clients or difficult situations." (R312)
4. Communication issues	"I feel like my employer broke their promise to provide regular feedback and keep me informed about the things that happen around here, and now I'm left feeling uncertain and undervalued." (R189) "The absence of clear communication and support during these changes intensified employees' dissatisfaction." (R48)
5. Unfair treatment	"I feel like I've been treated unfairly because, despite putting in a lot of extra hours and effort to help the restaurant, I was passed over for promotion in favour of someone with less experience." (R136) "Despite investing considerable extra hours and effort to contribute to the restaurant's success, I feel unjustly treated. A promotion, for which I seemed the natural candidate due to my dedication, was instead awarded to someone with comparatively lesser experience." (R325)

Source: Own Elaboration

The qualitative results revealed five main themes that emerged from the data, as depicted in Table 4. Most of the respondents who experienced a breach of their psychological contract reported unfulfilled promises or unmet expectations, particularly concerning growth opportunities, pay rises, changes in position, and flexibility. Organisational changes, often tied to pandemic-related restructurings, changing roles and leadership, downsizing, and employment contract suspensions, also emerged as significant sources of psychological contract breaches. Reports of poor working conditions included challenges such as unsupportive managers or coworkers, excessive workload, low salaries, and unfavourable working hours.

Moreover, communication issues were highlighted, with participants describing a lack of feedback and information, leading to misunderstandings and unmet expectations. Unfair treatment was another recurring theme, particularly regarding promotions, pay raises, and performance appraisals.

Overall, individuals who experienced breaches in their psychological contract reported a range of negative emotions, such as disappointment, demotivation, betrayal, and frustration. Many even expressed a desire to leave the organisation.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the moderating effect of psychological contract breach on the positive association between psychological empowerment and engagement among employees in the tourism and hospitality sectors of Galicia. Although previous studies have examined the latter relationship (Monje-Amor et al., 2021; Juyumaya, 2022; Wen et al., 2023), none have explored the moderating effect of psychological contract breach. Consistent with previous research, the results demonstrate a positive link between psychological empowerment and work engagement, thus supporting Hypothesis 1. This means that individuals who feel empowered, view their work as meaningful and impactful, feel competent, and have autonomy are more inclined to be highly engaged.

The study found that the relationship between psychological empowerment and engagement is moderated by psychological contract breach, and this association is stronger when psychological contract breach is higher, partially supporting Hypothesis 2. However, the direction of the moderating effect differs from the initial hypothesis. This could be due to the significant transformations in the current hospitality

and tourism employment dynamics and contextual factors. Organisations may offer poor working conditions, such as temporary contracts or low salaries, leading to psychological contract violations. Despite this, employees want to keep their jobs in a situation of uncertainty and job instability. In Spain, temporary contracts account for 20% of employment (Eurostat, 2022), and there is a strong seasonality of demand in the tourism sector. In addition, as more than 99% of Spanish tourism and hospitality firms are small and medium-sized enterprises (INE, 2022a), organisations may struggle to modify their organisational processes to enhance work engagement while fulfilling employees' psychological contracts.

Previous research has mainly focused on the individual level of analysis and has not adequately considered contextual influences that could explain why the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement is amplified when psychological contract breach is higher (Tekleab, Lauhié, De Vos, De Jong, & Coyle-Shapiro, 2020). This is consistent with Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002), who contend that employees with a high sense of obligation towards their organisation tend to exert considerable effort towards their job responsibilities. These results are aligned with those of Dogru et al. (2023), who suggested that some specific features of the hospitality industry may buffer excessive turnover compared to other sectors during economic cycles where turnover is decreasing across the wider economy.

The study's qualitative responses showed the reasons why employers did not keep employees' promises or failed to meet their expectations. Despite their perceptions of psychological contract breaches, participants stayed in their organisation due to enhanced autonomy, a strong sense of community and collaboration, and a sense of ownership. Additionally, the limited availability of alternative career opportunities could also contribute to their decision to stay. These results suggest that the positive moderating effect could be attributed to structural problems in the hospitality and tourism sectors, such as long working hours, poor work-life balance, limited career advancement opportunities, and market demand uncertainty. These findings are in line with prior research on employee turnover and career change in the hospitality industry (McGinley, O'Neill, Damaske, & Mattila, 2014; Karani, Trivedi, & Thanki, 2021; Dogru et al., 2023).

5.1 Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

This study makes two significant contributions to the realms of organisational behaviour and human resource management. Firstly, it addresses a research gap in the literature by investigating the moderating role of psychological contract breach between psychological empowerment and work engagement. The findings reveal that the strength of this relationship varies depending on the extent of the psychological contract breach. Secondly, this study enhances our understanding of the complex relationships between these variables by identifying the psychological mechanisms that underlie these connections in the Galician tourism and hospitality industries. Furthermore, the findings shed light on the contextual factors that may influence this relationship and the reasons why employees may choose to remain with organisations despite their perceptions of psychological contract breaches.

Ensuring the contentment and involvement of employees can yield multiple benefits for an organisation, including minimising employee turnover, enhancing the organisational culture, boosting productivity, and strengthening connections with customers. Therefore, it is crucial for hospitality and tourism companies that aim to recruit top-notch talent and reduce undesired staff turnover to develop an effective talent retention strategy. To effectively address employee concerns, organisations should use feedback-gathering mechanisms such as surveys or focus groups. In addition, leveraging communication platforms, such as exit interviews, can help identify the reasons for employee departures and gain a deeper understanding of why their expectations or employer promises are unmet. This, in turn, can inform the development of initiatives to improve work engagement and retention.

The findings have implications for managers and policymakers in these industries, who may need to consider contextual factors in their efforts to improve work engagement and reduce perceptions of psychological contract breach. The success of an organisation can be significantly influenced by the employee experience, which encompasses not only the employees' perceptions of their work environment and job responsibilities but also the organisation's overall approach to its employees. The human resources

department plays a crucial role in fostering a positive employee experience by implementing policies, programmes, and initiatives. For example, managers could promote work engagement by encouraging collaboration and communication among team members and providing opportunities for skill development and career growth. Organisations could enhance career advancement through improved succession planning and internal promotions.

Several participants indicated that they perceived psychological contract breaches because of a lack of flexibility. Managers could support work-life balance by implementing flexible work arrangements, such as remote work for some head office positions, job sharing, or flexible schedules, to help employees manage their personal and professional responsibilities.

Policymakers have been making efforts to transform and modernise the tourism sector through digital transformation programmes and policies promoting sustainability, energy efficiency, and competitiveness (OECD, 2022). However, they have yet to address the structural issues in the labour market, such as the need for quality job creation and improving employee training and skills. The service sector still dominates the labour market, while the industrial sector remains underdeveloped. The lack of significant reforms to the Spanish productive system has led to persistent issues, including excessive temporary employment. Policymakers must prioritise proposals that focus on creating quality employment opportunities and wage improvements, as these are urgently needed to address these structural weaknesses in the labour market. For example, governments should encourage better working conditions and employee benefits and promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and small business development to favour job creation and economic growth.

5.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study collected data from a specific region of Spain, Galicia, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to other work settings. Therefore, future research could utilise data from countries with distinct cultural and structural differences from Spain to validate these relationships. Comparing our results with findings from countries with lower levels of seasonality or better working conditions could provide valuable insights.

Since cross-sectional data cannot establish causality, future studies could use longitudinal data or mixed-method approaches to investigate changes in the relationship between psychological empowerment, psychological contract breach, and engagement over time.

Additionally, further research could examine the influence of psychological contract breach on other job-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction or organisational commitment, and explore the factors that contribute to the development of such breaches in the hospitality and tourism sectors. These studies could help organisations understand the root causes of psychological contract breaches and develop effective strategies to prevent them, ultimately enhancing employee well-being and organisational performance.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated how psychological contract breach moderates the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement among tourism and hospitality employees in Galicia, Spain, with the aim of identifying an underlying mechanism that explains the positive link between these factors. The findings illustrated that the association between psychological empowerment and work engagement was stronger for employees with high psychological contract breach. This outcome could be due to contextual factors rather than individual factors, suggesting that managers and policymakers have ample room for improvement to ameliorate the sector's structural problems, exacerbated by the pandemic and uncertainty.

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ORCID

Ariadna Monje-Amor  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6713-851X>

Notes on contributors

Ariadna Monje-Amor holds a Ph.D. in Economic Analysis and Business Strategy, a master's degree in human resource management, and a bachelor's degree in commerce. She is an assistant professor at the Universidade da Coruña (Spain) and technical supervisor of the Spanish Global Entrepreneurship Monitor team. Dr. Monje-Amor has published her research in high-impact journals and has participated in more than 20 national and international conferences. Her research interests include organisational behaviour, human resource management, entrepreneurship, strategic employee relations, and organisational change.