

Mapping the Landscape of Psychological Contract Literature: A Scopus-Based Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract: The employment relationship between employees and organizations has changed with the advent of the knowledge economy era in the 21st century and the transformation of economic models. Psychological contracts are significant in understanding the employment relationship between employees and organizations. More and more scholars began to focus on psychological contracts. Therefore, the systematic arrangement of psychological contract literature is meaningful. This study used bibliometrics to review 2, 097 articles and conference papers from psychological contracts. The Scopus database is the source of literature collection in this study. This study used VOSviewer and Microsoft Excel for the bibliometric analysis of these documents. Firstly, this study summarized the temporal trends and primary sources of psychological contracts. This study found an exponential increase in publications and a Matthew effect in sources of psychological contracts. Secondly, eight major co-authorship groups were found and discussed the significant contributions made by these scholars to psychological contract theory. Thirdly, this study also analyzed the countries, affiliations, funding sponsors, and subject areas of the psychological contract. Finally, the hot topic of psychological contracts and suggested future research were discussed. This study systematically summarized the literature on the psychological contract and future research direction.

Keywords: *Psychological Contract, Bibliometric, Scopus*

1. Introduction

Psychological contract theory has made significant contributions to understanding the employment relationship between employees and organizations [1]. As a core element in understanding employee attitudes and behaviors [2], this theory received widespread attention among scholars as early as the middle and late 1990s [3].

A healthy employment relationship can balance the interests of both the employee and the organization. Budd [8] proposed that the nature of employment determines the quality of life, the operation of the economy, the vitality of democracy, and the degree of respect for human rights. The core goals of employment relations are efficiency, fairness, and voice. For individuals, work is not only an economic

transaction but also a respect for human life and dignity. However, it is not difficult to see that with the advent of the era of the knowledge economy in the 21st century and the transformation of the economic model, the employment relationship between employees and organizations has undergone significant changes [3]. Information technology and increasing market forces are reshaping the global economy and moving human society toward an information and knowledge-based society. In addition, from the perspective of strategic human resource management, talent management is increasingly crucial [10], and effective talent management can create long-term benefits for executives and organizations [11]. The psychological contract is formed by individual cognitive processing and is

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a decisive factor affecting employees' attitudes and behavior toward the organization[12]. The psychological contract expands the perspective to the internal factor level of employees' subjective cognition of the employment relationship. It provides an opportunity for scholars to re-examine employment relations [13].

The psychological contract has gradually become a hot topic for scholars to explore employee relations. Through combing the previous literature, it can be found that few studies have systematically reviewed the literature on psychological contract theory. Therefore, this paper uses the Scopus database to search related literature on psychological contracts. Bibliometric is a statistical method for quantitative analysis of research papers on a topic by mathematical methods [14]. The time trend, main research groups, and hot topics of psychological contract theory were analyzed by bibliometric method and knowledge mapping. Finally, this study proposed some suggestions for future research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Search Strategy

This study conducted a systematic search strategy via a single electronic database, Scopus. The keyword used to search article titles and abstracts was the psychological contract. In all, this process produced 2,330 documents. Our last search date was January 1, 2023.

2.2 Limit-to and Exclusion Criteria

Since this study examined the overall development of psychological contract theory, it is not limited to time, country, language and other factors. However, this study did not take into account the article in the press. Therefore, it limit-to PUBSTAGE, "FINAL". Secondly, only the literature which document type was article or conference paper was selected in this study. Fig. 1 show the detail of the limit-to Criteria.

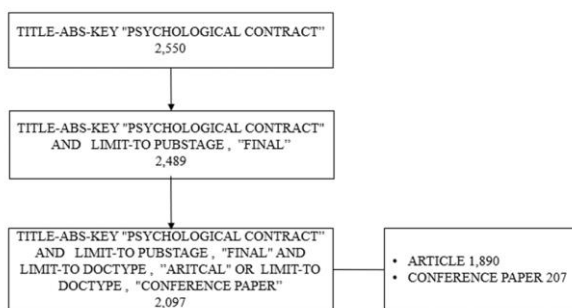


Figure.1 - Limit-to and Exclusion Criteria of the Literature Review Process

2.3 Analysis method

This study collated literature information (including:

publication, language, journal, title, author, affiliation, keywords, literature type, abstract, citation) from 2,097 articles. In this study, VOSviewer serves as our tool for Co-word. Co-word analysis is a technique that counts the number of times a group of words appear in the same document and then obtains the topic represented by these words through cluster analysis [15]. In addition, the study used Excel to statistically analyze the development trend and current situation of psychological contract literature.

3. Results

3.1 Temporal Trends in The Literature

Through the analysis of sample literature, it can be found that the annual number of articles related to psychological contract theory has been increasing year by year since. Since 2006, there have been more than 50 articles published annually in the field of the psychological contract, and even more than 100 articles published annually after 2013. Through the regression analysis of the cumulative number of documents, it was found that the number of articles related to the psychological contract has increased exponentially since 1937. The R² value of the document's growth trend is 0.9109. It is proved that the fitting degree of the regression equation is good and conforms to the law of exponential growth. (See Fig. 2.1).

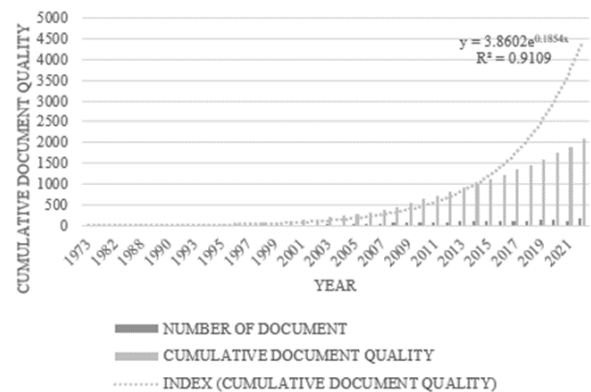


Figure. 3.1 Literature volume of psychological contract Studies (1937-2022)

3.2 Source of the Literature

It found that 2,097 articles were published in 160 journals or conferences. The number of articles published from the source meets the power function (see Fig. 3.2), also named the Matthew effect [16]. It can be seen from Fig. 3.2 that when the number of articles published in a source is below 11, the curve is flat. Thus, the threshold was set to 11. Based on this, it is considered that the source which published more than 11 articles can define as the primary publishing source, and there are 28 in total (see Table 3.1). These journals account for 32.3 % of the total literature. The International Journal of Human Resource Management

is the largest source of literature on psychological contracts, which contains 82 articles on psychological contracts.

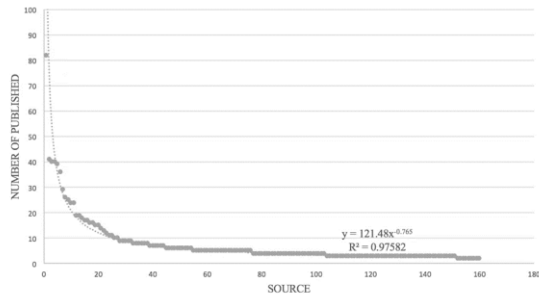


Figure. 3.2 The Frequency Distribution of Articles Published by Sources on Psychological Contract (1937-2022)

Table 3.1 Major Source of Psychological Contract

SOURCE TITLE	NO.	RATIO	CUMULATIVE RATIO
International Journal of Human Resource Management	84	4.0%	4.0%
Frontiers in Psychology	57	2.7%	6.7%
Employee Relations	43	2.1%	8.8%
Journal of Organizational Behavior	41	2.0%	10.7%
Journal of Managerial Psychology	40	1.9%	12.6%
Personnel Review	40	1.9%	14.5%
Journal of Vocational Behavior	31	1.5%	16.0%
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	26	1.2%	17.3%
Journal of Business Ethics	25	1.2%	18.5%
Career Development International	24	1.1%	19.6%
Human Resource Management	24	1.1%	20.7%
Human Relations	19	0.9%	21.6%
Journal of Applied Psychology	19	0.9%	22.6%
Journal of Business and Psychology	19	0.9%	23.5%
Journal of Business Research	19	0.9%	24.4%
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	18	0.9%	25.2%
Human Resource Management Journal	16	0.8%	26.0%
Human Resource Management Review	16	0.8%	26.8%

SOURCE TITLE	NO.	RATIO	CUMULATIVE RATIO
Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal	15	0.7%	27.5%
International Journal of Hospitality Management	15	0.7%	28.2%
International Journal of Manpower	15	0.7%	28.9%
Leadership And Organization Development Journal	14	0.7%	29.6%
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	12	0.6%	30.1%
International Journal of Organizational Analysis	12	0.6%	30.7%
Journal Of Management and Organization	12	0.6%	31.3%
Group And Organization Management	11	0.5%	31.8%
Sustainability Switzerland	11	0.5%	32.3%

3.3 Bibliometric analysis of the co-authorship and Citations

A total of 3,503 authors have published articles or conference papers on psychological contracts. The threshold was set to 5, leaving 99 authors. This study used VOSviewer to perform cluster analysis on these 99 authors to obtain the co-authorship link graph in the field of psychological contracts (see Fig. 3.3). It was found that there were eight major co-authorship groups.

This study lists the top 5 authors by the number of documents and the top five authors by citation (see Table 3.2 & 3.3). Schalk has the maximum number of articles, a total of 28. Rousseau has the highest number of citations, a total of 7,146. Robinson is the author with the highest average citation count, at 1,181. In addition, the top 10 cited articles are shown in Table 3.4.

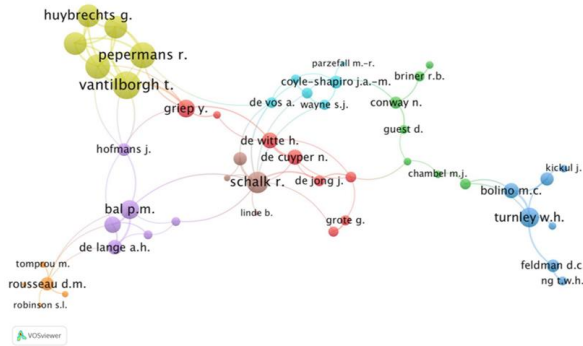


Figure. 3.3 Co-Authorship Network Graph of Psychological Contract

Note: Different colors indicate different clusters. The circle size indicates the number of documents. The thickness of the line indicates the strength of the link. The distance between the two circles indicates their correlation.

Table 3.2 Top 5 Authors in Number of Publications

Author	Documents	Citations	Average
Schalk, R.	28	948	33.86
Restubog, S.L.D.	27	1511	55.96
Rousseau, D.M.	25	7146	285.84
Bordia, P.	22	1235	56.14
Bal, P.M.	19	345	18.16
Vantilborgh, T.	19	1194	62.84

Table 3.3 Top 5 Authors in Number of Citations

Author	Documents	Citations	Average
Rousseau, D. M.	25	7146	285.84
Robinson, S. L.	5	5905	1181.00
Turnley, W. H.	14	2096	149.71
Feldman, D. C.	9	1598	177.56
Restubog, S. L. D	27	1511	55.96

Table 3.4 Top 10 Article in Number of Citations

Rank	Title	Author (Years)	Citations
1	Assessing psychological contracts: issues, alternatives and measures	Rousseau & Tijoriwala (1989)	1717
2	Trust and breach of the psychological contract	Robinson (1996)	1679
3	Psychological contracts and change	Morrison (1994)	1513
4	Violating the psychological contract: Not the exception but the norm	Robinson & Rousseau (1994)	1318
5	New hire perceptions of their own and their employer's obligations: A study of psychological contracts	Rousseau (1990)	923
6	The development of psychological contract breach and violation: A longitudinal study	Robinson & Morrison (2000)	831

Rank	Title	Author (Years)	Citations
7	Protean careers of the 21st century	Hall (1996)	613
8	Schema, promise and mutuality: The building blocks of the psychological contract	Rousseau (2001)	609
9	An emotion-centered model of voluntary work behavior. Some parallels between counterproductive work behavior and organizational citizenship behavior	Spector & Fox (2002)	603
10	Psychological contracts and OCB: The effect of unfulfilled obligations on civic virtue behavior	Robinson & Morrison (1995)	582

3.4 Bibliometric analysis of countries, affiliation, funding sponsor and subject area

Based on the statistics of published literature in the field of psychological contracts, it was found that scholars from 109 countries have published articles related to psychological contracts. Table 3.5 lists the top five countries by the number of documents. Scholars from the United States, Britain, China, and Australia pay more attention to the research field of the psychological contract. The United States has a clear lead with 496 documents. In addition, the United States has the most citations and average citations, which are 28,979 and 58.43.

Table 3.5 Top 5 Most Active Countries

COUNTRY	Documents	Citations	Average
United States	496	28,979	58.43
United Kingdom	274	10,054	36.69
China	251	1,613	6.43
Australia	199	5,241	26.34
Canada	93	3,626	38.99

Fig. 3.4 and Fig. 3.5 respectively show the primary affiliation and funding sponsor in psychological contract research. It was found that China is the country with the maximum number of funding sponsors for studies in the psychological contract. The *National Natural Science Foundation of China* sponsored 52 studies, and the *National Natural Science Foundation of China* sponsored 7 studies. That means the Chinese government attaches great importance to research in this area.

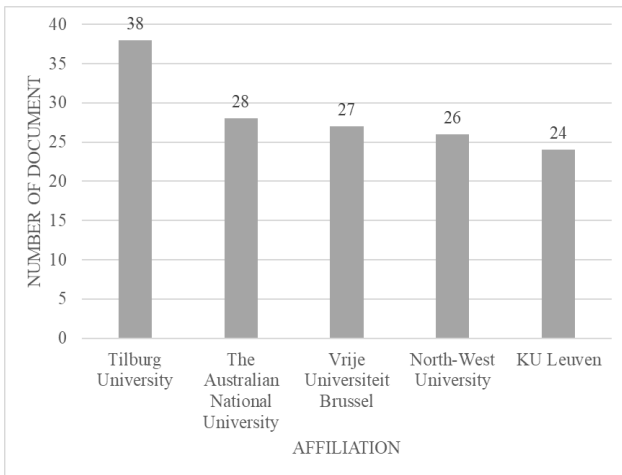


Figure. 3.4 Top 5 Most Active Affiliation

Note: Affiliation hierarchy is not included in the document counts

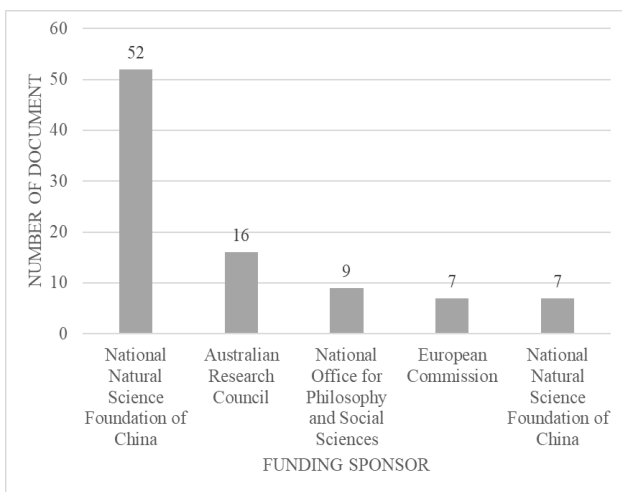


Figure. 3.5 Top 5 Most Active Founding Sponsor

The study of psychological contracts is widely applied in many subject areas (show as Fig.3.6). Commercial (Business, Management, and Accounting) is the major application subject area theory of psychological contract theory (39.62). Secondly, the psychological contract is also widely used in social science (16.54%) and psychology (15.51%).

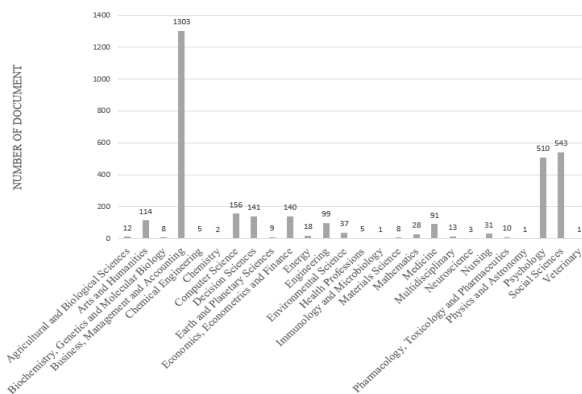


Figure. 3.6 Subject Areas of Psychological Contract

3.5 Bibliometric analysis of keywords

The threshold for the keyword was set to 5. Out of 5153 keywords, 405 keywords met this threshold. Fig. 3.6 showed high-frequency words, such as psychological contract breach, psychological contract violation, male, female, trust, psychology, organization.

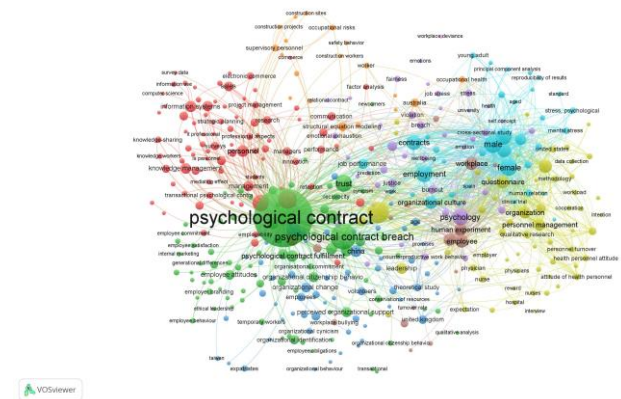


Figure. 3.7 Co-occurrence of Keywords

Note: Different colors indicate different clusters. The size of the circle indicates the frequency of the keyword. The distance between the two circles refer to their correlation. The thickness of the line indicates the strength of the link.

It found four main clusters on the map. The red areas represent job-related variables (e.g., knowledge management, knowledge sharing, and innovation). Green refers to variables related to the perception (e.g., psychological contract breach, psychological contract fulfillment, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, trust, and organizational justice). Yellow involves the method (e.g., questionnaire and data collection). Blue refers to individual differences (e.g., male, female, employment, age).

4. Discussion

Firstly, this study analyzed 2,097 articles and conference papers on psychological contracts in the Scopus database. Based on the linear regression trendlines, it was found that there has been an exponential increase in research on psychological contracts since 1973. It showed that the study of the psychological contract still attracts the attention of numerous scholars. Compared with other journals, the International Journal of Human Resource Management contains significantly more documents related to psychological contracts. The source of the literature shows Matthew's effect [16].

Secondly, 3,503 authors were analyzed, and found that there are currently eight major study groups (see Fig. 3.3). From Table 3.2, Table 3.3, and the previous literature, it was found that Kotter [17] defined the psychological contract as an implicit contract between individuals and their organizations. Kotter [17] found that higher expectations matching employees and found that higher expectations matching employees and organizations lead to higher job satisfaction and productivity. It was the earliest

quantitative research on psychological contracts. However, it is hard to operationalize the expectations of both the individual and the organization. Since no individual can represent the organization, and the expectations of the members who represent the organization are far from homogenous, it is hard to balance the expectations of individuals and the organization [12]. In this context, Rousseau and Tijoriwala [18] proposed that the psychological contract is an individual's understanding of mutual responsibility between himself and another party (such as employers). This definition emphasizes that a psychological contract is a subjective cognition of employees. Rousseau [19] argued that although organizational agents may perceive and respond to psychological contracts with employees, the organization cannot perceive them. It was quickly supported by other scholars [[3], [20]. Due to the convenience of operation, later scholars mostly followed this view of the psychological contract. Some scholars also raised doubts [[21]-[23]. In addition, Robinson has made an in-depth study of the formation and influence of psychological contract breach (and violation) [24]-[26] (see Table 3.4). Since then, scholars have mainly used the scale developed by Robinson & Morrison [26] to study the causes and consequences of psychological contract breach (or violation). Robinson and Rousseau [25] suggested that there are two dimensions of psychological contract (transactional contract and relational contract). Rousseau and Tijoriwala [18] supplemented it by proposing three dimensions of psychological contract (transactional contract, relational contract, and team player).

Thirdly, as the birthplace of the psychological contract, scholars from the United States have made significant contributions to psychological contract theory (see Table 3.5). It was found that the current research on psychological contracts is basically in the context of Western countries. In addition, psychological contract theory serves as a crucial theoretical framework for analyzing employment relations [27]. Since the beginning of the 21st Century, the psychological contract has been an extensive concern by Chinese scholars and the government. Chinese Founding Sponsor is significantly higher (as shown in Fig.3.6). With the slowdown of the economy and the reduction of labor flexibility, Chinese workers are under pressure [28], [29]. Peng et al. [30] argued that a deeper understanding of psychological contract mechanisms is helpful for organizations to be responsible for management in China. The active participation of Chinese scholars in psychological contract theory has made significant contributions to psychological contract theory in different cultural contexts. It was also found that psychological contract theory has applications in diverse subject areas.

Finally, based on the clustering analysis of keywords, there were two main lines of current research on the psychological contract, namely, the evolution of psychological contract theory (e.g., analysis of the concept and dimension of the psychological contract, psychological contract breach) and its practice in the employment relationship (e.g., job satisfaction, knowledge management, employment). In addition, combined with the previous

literature review, it was found that there are still some areas to be explored. Firstly, the current research mostly follows the psychological contract theory constructed by Rousseau [19]. Based on this concept, the studies mainly focus on the formation of psychological contracts and the process of the breach to the violation. It was gratified that some scholars have proposed innovations that extend the study of the mind to the reconstruction of psychological contracts after breaches (or violations) [31]-[33]. It further perfects the psychological contract theory and infuses it with new vigor. Then, current research mainly discusses psychological contracts from the perspective of employees. Few scholars have explored the dual role in the psychological contract [34]. Lee and Taylo [34] developed four archetypes (Juggler, Organization Exploiter, Employee Exploiter, and All About Me) that combine dual roles (agent and principal). Lastly, previous studies mainly investigated the psychological contract between employees, managers, and their organizations and later expanded to knowledge workers, teachers, entrepreneurial teams, and other specific groups. Future research can also continue to generalize the study object. The application of psychological contracts in specific groups is of great significance to the theoretical development and practical application of the psychological contract.

5. Limitation

Any study has certain limitations, and ours is no exception. Firstly, our data selection was limited to the literature included in the Scopus database. Therefore, some excellent literature will inevitably be ignored, thus affecting the rigor of the research. Secondly, research on psychological contracts continues to gain popularity (See Figure 3.1). As a result, a considerable number of articles are in the press.

6. Conclusion

With the study of the psychological contract field gradually matured. It is necessary to comb the previous literature systematically. Therefore, based on the bibliometric method, this paper systematically organized the relevant literature on the psychological contract. This study discussed the development trend of the psychological contract, the author's contribution, research field, and country. In addition, this article also discussed the hot topic and future research directions of the psychological contract.

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