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2023-10-09

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

De Clercq, D. & Pereira, R. (2023). I'm betrayed and I'm gone – unless organizational leaders convince me otherwise: Perceived contract breaches, quitting intentions, and leader-related resources. *Africa Journal of Management*. 9 (3), 232-258

Further information on publisher's website:

10.1080/23322373.2023.2232131

Publisher's copyright statement:

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I'm betrayed and I'm gone—unless organizational leaders convince me otherwise:

Perceived contract breaches, quitting intentions, and leader-related resources

Abstract

Employees' perceptions that their organization has not met its promises toward them (i.e., perceived contract breaches) might inform their turnover intentions, in a link that also could be moderated by four relevant leader-related resources—two that reflect how organizational leaders share knowledge (communication efficiency and informational justice) and two that capture the nature of the relationship between employees and organizational authorities (humility and forgiveness). Using survey data collected among employees who operate in the oil distribution sector in Angola, this study shows that employees' frustrations about broken organizational promises fuel their desire to quit their jobs, but less so when these employees believe that organizational leaders communicate efficiently and fairly, exhibit humility in their interactions with leaders, and perceive the leaders as forgiving. For organizations, these results provide novel insights into various conditions in which irritations about unmet expectations are less likely to escalate into a detrimental situation in which employees plan to leave.

Keywords: turnover intentions; perceived contract breaches; communication efficiency; informational justice; humility; forgiveness; social exchange theory

Introduction

Employees who want to quit and search for alternative employment are a real problem for organizations; these desires can disrupt internal operations, reduce work motivation, and generate significant costs if the employees actually leave, such that the firm has to find, hire, and train replacements (Joo et al., 2015; Tews et al., 2013). Even if they remain though, employees' persistent ruminations about quitting can have negative consequences, both for their employer and themselves. Distracted employees, preoccupied with their own future, likely devote less effort to productive work activities (Hilmer et al., 2004; Mai et al., 2016). They also might experience strain from reflecting on the pros and cons of leaving and changing jobs (Guo et al., 2019). If organizational leaders become aware of their plans, the desire to quit even may backfire, especially if employees cannot leave because they confront limited external employment options (Amankwaa & Anku-Tsede, 2015; Mano-Negrin & Tzafirir, 2004)

In light of these negative outcomes, it is critical to understand why employees still might form beliefs that the "grass is greener" elsewhere and actively seek an alternative to their current employment (Caesens et al., 2019). Various adverse work factors can spur this motivation, such as politically oriented work climates (Abbas et al., 2014), supervisor incivility (Potipiroon & Ford, 2019), workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2016), a perceived career plateau (Yang et al., 2019), or a lack of job embeddedness (Williamson & Holmes, 2015). All these factors can evoke disappointment; we consider another relevant source of work-related frustrations: employees' perceptions of *psychological contract breaches* (Azeem et al., 2020). Such perceptions arise when employees believe their employer has not honored its exchange obligations and failed to keep previously made promises (Raja et al., 2004; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994).

Such a situation tends to be upsetting, so to deal with their disappointment, employees might develop intentions to leave. Their employment situation is not meeting their exchange expectations with respect to earlier commitments made by the firm (Dulac et al., 2008), and this violation may be so disturbing that employees feel compelled to retaliate (Arshad, 2016). For organizations, it is important then to determine *when* employees are more likely to react negatively (i.e., develop turnover intentions) to beliefs about broken organizational promises, especially if their industries suffer labor shortages, such that actual turnover behaviors would be costly (Baranchenko et al., 2020; Virga et al., 2017). Previous research suggests a positive association between perceptions of contract breaches and turnover intentions (for a meta-analysis, see Zhao et al., 2007), but some studies are inconclusive. That is, these perceptions do not automatically escalate into a desire to quit, as informed by pertinent contingency factors, both personal (e.g., employee conscientiousness, Orvis et al., 2008) and contextual (e.g., supervisor loyalty, Stoner et al., 2011).

Another contingency factor that may influence how employees respond to perceived contract breaches is leader–member exchange (LMX), which indicates the overall quality of exchange relationships with leaders (Kimura, 2013). The influence of LMX on employees' reactions to broken organizational promises is ambiguous though; some studies show that LMX weakens the link between perceived contract breaches and negative employee responses, due to the social support that these high-quality exchanges provide (Biswas, 2016; Dulac et al., 2008; Griep et al., 2016). But others indicate that LMX strengthens the link, because employees experience a sense of betrayal in this scenario (Pfrombeck et al., 2020; Restubog et al., 2010; Sears & Humiston, 2015). One study indicates that the nature of LMX's moderating role may depend on whether employees exhibit self- versus organization-centered orientations (Doden et

al., 2018). We propose another reason for this ambiguity: LMX is a broad concept, and high-quality exchanges with leaders may feature different aspects. For this study, we consider the potential buffering roles of *two* sets of leader-related resources. The first set captures employees' sense of how organizational leaders share *knowledge* with them, such as the efficiency of their communication and its fairness. The second set pertains to the nature of their *relationships* with these authorities, as informed by employees' humility or forgiveness signaled by organizational leaders.

The consideration of how these various factors might mitigate the effects of perceived contract breaches on turnover intentions reflects a valuable contribution to extant research. These four leader-related resources have not been studied previously in relation to employees' responses to disappointments with broken organizational promises, yet they could limit the risk that the disappointments translate into enhanced turnover intentions, by affecting the necessity or attractiveness of this translation (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Notably, our conceptual focus is on the *concurrent* interplay of perceived contract breaches on the one hand with each of the four leader-related resources on the other, not how each resource might *shape* employees' beliefs directly.¹ That is, prior research has shown how employees may develop a sense that their organization has failed to fulfill its psychological contract with them to the extent that they experience unfavorable knowledge- or relationship-related dynamics with leaders (Hartmann & Rutherford, 2015; Meyer et al., 2018; Rosen et al., 2009). We add to such insights by addressing a related, untested question, namely, how the four focal resources might spur employees' plans to quit when they *already* feel disappointed with broken organizational promises. We

¹ Furthermore, and to be precise, we use the term "concurrent" to reflect that we consider the simultaneous effects of perceived contract breaches and each particular characteristic, *one* at a time, not the simultaneous or interdependent influences of these four leader resources in combination with perceived contract breaches. For further discussion, see the "Post hoc analysis" subsection.

accordingly pinpoint several boundary conditions in which the experience of contract breaches appears less likely to prompt employees to threaten to leave (Restubog et al., 2015).

Theoretical background and research context

Psychological contract breaches and social exchange theory

Exposures to adverse organizational treatments pose significant challenges for employees and undermine the quality of their work functioning, while also prompting doubts about whether there is a future for them in the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Griffeth et al., 2000). We focus on a specific, important manifestation of such negative treatment, namely, employees' perceptions that the organization has *breached* its psychological contract with them (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014; Sonnenberg et al., 2011). This failure is deeply disappointing to employees, and the issues that such interactions raise in work settings have led to significant scholarly interest in this phenomenon. Considering the prominent danger that such scenarios pose to employees' day-to-day work functioning, this critical topic warrants continued examination, especially if research can identify ways to *subdue* employees' negative reactions to contract breaches (Henderson et al., 2020).

Employees' sense that their employer has defaulted on previously made commitments can lead them to believe it does not care for their professional well-being (Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2015; Zhao et al., 2007). Previous studies reveal negative consequences of perceived contract breaches, such as diminished psychological well-being (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2015), affective commitment (Restubog et al., 2006), and voluntary work behaviors (Shih & Chuang, 2013), as well as enhanced organizational cynicism (Bashir & Nasir, 2013) and deviance (Ma et al., 2019). Other investigations indicate a positive connection between employees' perceptions of contract breaches and their turnover intentions (Chen & Wu, 2017; Kraak et al., 2017; Orvis et al., 2008),

though this connection appears buffered by employees' inclinations to work hard (Orvis et al., 2008) and fidelity to supervisors (Stoner et al., 2011). As mentioned, we anticipate a moderating effect of the quality of employees exchanges with leaders (LMX), but prior evidence is ambiguous about the nature of this effect (Griep et al., 2016; Pfrombeck et al., 2020). To complement this research stream, we investigate several hitherto overlooked resources, related to the organization and its overall leadership, that might diminish the likelihood that employees' beliefs about broken organizational promises escalate into quitting plans.

To anchor our theoretical arguments about the role of employees' perceptions of contract breaches in enhancing their desire to look for alternative employment—and the buffering effects of contingent leader-related resources in this process, which is the focal topic of this study—we rely on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The notion of a psychological contract captures expectations that employees and employers have of their mutual obligations (Robinson & Morrison, 2000), such that “the psychological contract provides a way of viewing an exchange relationship as a sequence of contingent transactions that includes reciprocal promises about what will be exchanged and the extent to which the subsequent transactions (or missed provisions) fulfill or break those promises” (Dulac et al., 2008, p. 1082). The norm of reciprocity is central to social exchange theory, which predicts that employees tend to reciprocate favorable organizational treatments with positive work responses but *retaliate* with negative responses to unfavorable treatments (Arain et al., 2020; Gouldner, 1960). When they perceive the organization has not kept its word, they experience dismay with how their employer treats them and may seek revenge (Bordia et al., 2008), such as by making plans to quit.

The positive relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions is well-established in prior applications of social exchange theory (Arshad, 2016; Azeem et al.,

2020; Huffman et al., 2022), so we treat it as a baseline. We instead leverage social exchange theory to predict that if employees can draw from positive exchanges with organizational leaders, their desire to retaliate for perceived contract breaches with quitting plans should be mitigated (Griep et al., 2016). To this end, we acknowledge that the disappointments that come with broken organizational promises are intricately linked to two pertinent challenges: (1) Employees have limited *knowledge* about why organizational leaders have not kept their side of the bargain, and (2) they doubt the quality of their *relationships* with leaders. In turn, knowledge-oriented (communication efficiency and informational justice) and relationship-oriented (humility and perceived leader forgiveness) resources should be particularly appropriate for reducing the risk that employees make concrete plans to leave, even in the presence of perceived contract breaches. That is, if organizational leaders are efficient (Jian et al., 2014) and exhibit justice (Colquitt, 2001) in their communications, and if employees exhibit humility in their interactions (Liu & Shi, 2017) and believe leaders do not hold grudges (Guchait et al., 2016), then employees may find leaving less appealing, regardless of any contract breaches.

Our focus on these four resources is purposeful; they reflect different means to resolve the hardships of unmet employment expectations. On the one hand, the buffering roles of communication efficiency and informational justice capture the value of high-quality knowledge exchanges between employee and employer (Bari et al., 2020; O'Neill & Adya, 2007). On the other hand, employees' expressions of humility and perceptions of leader forgiveness *reflect* the potential benefits of high-quality relationships with organizational leaders in such situations, as informed by employees' individual attitudes toward people in charge and their expectations about how these people address mistakes, respectively (Chen & Wu, 2017; Dulac et al., 2008).²

² Humility and perceptions of organizational forgiveness do not capture relationship quality directly, but this quality can be inferred from these features.

We propose that these two categories of resources have unique relevance for perceived contract breaches, because of their roles in diminishing employees' desire to retaliate for broken promises, as we detail subsequently. Notably, the four resources pertain to the roles of organizational authorities *in general*, instead of specific, dyadic relationships between employees and supervisors, in line with our conceptualization and operationalization of perceived contract breaches as a sense that the *employing organization* has broken its previously made promises.³

Finally, all four resources represent *distinct* facets. That is, communication efficiency implies expedient advice and feedback from organizational leaders to employees (Wang & Noe, 2010); informational justice describes the level of detail and personalization of the exchanged information (Kim, 2009). These two features do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Organizational leaders may be efficient with their communication, but its content could be vague and general. Alternatively, the shared information may be specific to the employee's situation but take too long to reach that employee. Humility is defined as the extent to which employees believe that organizational leaders deserve their hierarchical positions (Liu & Shi, 2017), whereas perceived leader forgiveness captures their expectations about how organizational leaders relate to and evaluate them (Suchday et al., 2006). A notable feature of humility, compared with the other three resources, is its closer link to employees' responses. That is, communication efficiency, informational justice, and perceived leader forgiveness decrease the likelihood that breaches result in employees' disappointments, but humility reduces the probability that employees *respond* negatively to experienced disappointments. Furthermore, the former three resources inform employees' previously developed positive *expectations* about leader behavior, and such expectations should diminish the hardships that employees experience in the presence of

³ The interactions between employees and their supervisors certainly can influence their desire to retaliate too, but we maintain that the *collective* behaviors of leaders in charge of the organization are equally, if not more, important.

perceived contract breaches. Together, the four contingency resources constitute an encompassing set of factors that arguably should diminish the chances that employees make concrete plans to quit their jobs when they sense breaches in their psychological contracts. The proposed theoretical framework and its underlying hypotheses are presented in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Relevance of the research context

As explained in the Method section, the empirical context of this study is an organization that operates in the oil industry in Angola, but it also is useful to explain the theoretical value of this context upfront. To be clear, the conceptual arguments that underpin Figure 1 are country-neutral; they should apply to a broad set of countries. Yet this study is highly relevant for understanding the role of employee–leader dynamics in organizations that operate in this specific country setting, as well as the wider African context. By going beyond a traditional focus on Western or Asian countries, we respond to calls for more studies of employee relations and leader issues in African countries (Abebe et al., 2020; Antwi et al., 2019; Puni et al., 2022). In addition, the Angolan context is compelling and relevant for countries with similar cultural profiles, due to the likely contrasting influences of two cultural characteristics. On the one hand, the high levels of uncertainty avoidance that mark Angola could lead employees to suffer greatly from uncertainty-provoking breaches of their psychological contracts with their employer (Hofstede et al., 2010; Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2015). This powerful sense of organizational mistreatment could strengthen their desire to leave. On the other hand, Angola’s high power distance scores indicate that it might not be uncommon for organizational leaders to break promises, which could prompt expectations of such breaches among employees (Hofstede et al. 2010; Zagenczyk et al., 2015), leaving them less likely to form concrete plans to leave. Studying

the Angolan context accordingly can offer insight into which of these opposing influences might be most prominent.

Furthermore, we focus on the oil sector, which enables an investigation of how employees might confront significant challenges at work, even if they are employed by companies with access to abundant natural resources (Shan et al., 2018). In particular, the oil sector largely defines Angola's economy and is marked by high levels of turbulence (Birmingham, 2015; Oliveira, 2015), so organizational decision makers might feel "forced" to break promises to employees to address changing external circumstances. In addition, Angola, similar to many African countries, suffers high levels of unemployment (32% in the fourth quarter of 2019; INE, 2020), so it might be difficult for employees to find alternative employment if they were to quit. From this angle, it is interesting to investigate how perceptions of contract breaches still might escalate into enhanced quitting plans, despite the significant risk for employees, in light of adverse national economic circumstances. By examining turnover intentions, not actual turnover, we also can meaningfully focus on how such intentions depend on employees' perceptions of *internal* organizational factors, not just the absence of alternative job opportunities, which is a pertinent issue in many African countries (Baah-Boateng, 2015; Raifu & Adeboje, 2022).

Hypotheses

Moderating role of communication efficiency

According to social exchange theory, employees respond to adverse organizational treatments in ways that mirror these treatments (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). For example, employees who find themselves in an employment exchange relationship marked by broken promises tend to experience disappointment and retaliate to cause harm to the offending

company (Arshad, 2016; Azeem et al., 2020). Social exchange theory also predicts that employees' desire to quit their jobs in the presence of broken organizational promises might be mitigated by organizational resources that diminish their sense of disappointment (Griep et al., 2016). One such organizational resource is the extent to which organizational leaders communicate efficiently (Jian et al., 2014). When employees experience contract breaches, the availability of *timely* information can reduce their propensity to develop quitting intentions, because this timeliness offers more opportunities for the employer to explain why it has reconsidered (Zagenczyk et al., 2009). That is, efficient communication might subdue disappointment due to unmet expectations, because the employees receive prompt explanations and clarifications (Doden et al., 2018), rather than having to wait for an explanation. Conversely, if communication is slow and inefficient, the long wait gives employees plenty of time to experience the breach as upsetting and dwell on it (Zagenczyk et al., 2009), thereby intensifying their disappointment (Griep et al., 2016), and thus their desire to quit.

Hypothesis 1: The positive relationship between employees' perceptions of contract breaches and their turnover intentions is moderated by communication efficiency, such that the relationship is weaker when organizational leaders communicate efficiently.

Moderating role of informational justice

In addition, social exchange theory anticipates that employees' desire to quit, as a means to retaliate for unmet expectations, diminishes if they can rely on fair organizational practices that help them maintain their exchange expectations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees who believe that organizational leaders are frank and open in their communication, without holding back pertinent information, tend to experience positive feelings in their professional efforts, in that they sense their leaders care and respond appropriately to their requests for information (Flower et al., 2015; Gilstrap & Collins, 2012). De Ruiter and colleagues (2017) find

that informational justice displayed by supervisors subdues the harmful effects of a social breach on employees' resistance to change. Similarly, positive feelings evoked by informational justice, and the associated ability to avoid disappointment with adverse organizational treatments, might diminish employees' desire to develop plans to quit, even if they still believe their employer has failed to keep some of its promises. That is, high levels of informational justice reduce their need to use contract-related disillusionments as excuses to retaliate by making quitting plans (Azeem et al., 2020). In contrast, if the information provided by organizational leaders is scarce and vague, employees already upset with the organization for failing to keep its side of the bargain may be especially disappointed with how they are treated and vent their frustrations by developing concrete plans to find alternative employment (Howard & Cordes, 2010).

Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between employees' perceptions of contract breaches and their turnover intentions is moderated by informational justice, such that the relationship is weaker when organizational leaders communicate fairly.

Moderating role of humility

Employees' desire to take revenge for broken organizational promises also may be lower if they adopt a humble posture toward organizational authorities. When employees are willing to subordinate their own interests for the good of the organization, they likely gather positive energy from finding ways to help, instead of abandon, the employer, regardless of how it treats them (Carsten et al., 2010; Haslam & Reicher, 2017). The mechanism for the buffering effect of humility differs from those linked to the two previous moderators, in that it decreases the likelihood that employees *react* negatively to the disappointment they experience, instead of mitigating their dismay (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Even if organizational leaders have not been able to keep all of their promises, humble employees likely feel less need to use disappointment as an excuse to take revenge; consistent with social exchange theory, they

accordingly should be less motivated to retaliate by exploring alternative employment (Bordia et al., 2008). In addition, employees with an inclination toward humility might enjoy the challenges imposed by organizational leaders, because staying loyal even in the face of difficulties provides them with opportunities to demonstrate their commitment (Carsten et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, employees who lack humility may feel better if they refuse to remain loyal to an organization that has betrayed them (Liu & Shi, 2017) and prefer to vent their frustrations by developing concrete plans to leave.

Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between employees' perceptions of contract breaches and their turnover intentions is moderated by their humility, such that the relationship is weaker if they are willing to obey organizational leaders unconditionally.

Moderating role of perceived leader forgiveness

Finally, the detrimental effect of employees' perceptions that their organization has not kept its side of the bargain should diminish when they have stronger beliefs that organizational leaders are forgiving (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Guchait et al., 2016). The logic of social exchange theory suggests that employees' experience of negative organizational treatments is less likely to escalate into negative work outcomes when their access to pertinent organizational resources enables them to deal with these conditions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Griep et al., 2016). Employees who perceive that organizational leaders do not hold grudges should be ready to speak up and complain about perceived contract breaches, even if those complaints might be erroneous or unjustified (Cameron & Caza, 2002; Guchait et al., 2016). The mitigating role of perceived leader forgiveness thus speaks to the increased opportunities that this resource creates for *voicing* concerns about broken organizational promises. Once employees express their concerns, leaders can provide adequate explanations—perhaps changing market conditions made it impossible to continue to maintain certain employee benefits for example (Robinson &

Morrison, 2000)—which diminishes employees’ dismay with broken promises and encourages them to stay loyal. Similar to communication efficiency and informational justice, perceptions of leader forgiveness should mitigate the perceived contract breaches–turnover intentions link by lowering the probability that they feel disappointed with how their organization treats them. Employees who are not afraid of being reprimanded for complaining also may be more forthcoming in asking organizational leaders to *improve* the current situation, to match their original expectations (Liborius, 2014). A lack of concern about negative repercussions for voicing their complaints increases the chances that employees transform the negative situation into something positive, with beneficial consequences for their desire to stay (Booth et al., 2018; Cameron & Caza, 2002). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4: The positive relationship between employees’ perceptions of contract breaches and their turnover intentions is moderated by perceived leader forgiveness, such that the relationship is weaker when organizational leaders seem forgiving.

Method

Data collection

The research hypotheses were assessed with survey data collected from employees of a large distribution organization that operates in the oil industry in Angola. In addition to the theoretical merits of examining this specific context, as explained in the “Relevance of research context” subsection, this study’s focus on a single sector reduces the chances of unobserved variation in employees’ turnover intentions, which might be influenced by the availability of external employment opportunities in different industries (Baranchenko et al., 2020; Vîrga et al., 2017). In light of the high unemployment rates in Angola (INE, 2020), this study also provides a *conservative* test of the link between employees’ perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions. If the empirical results support the theorized relationships even in this setting, it is

reasonable to anticipate the effects may be even more prominent in settings that offer more external employment opportunities.

A pencil-and-paper survey instrument was distributed among a random sample of employees, drawn from the records of the organization's human resource department. In line with established standards, a translation-back-translation procedure was applied (Brislin et al., 1973). In particular, the original English version of the survey was converted into Portuguese, the principal language of business communication in Angola, and then back-translated into English. After resolving minor differences, the survey was finalized in Portuguese. Specific measures were taken to protect participant rights and diminish the chances of acquiescence or social desirability biases (Spector, 2006). The survey instructions explicitly mentioned that complete confidentiality was guaranteed, that no individual identifying information would ever be released, that only composite summary data would be included in any research output, and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time. The surveys also emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers, that it was normal that respondents would give varying responses to the same questions, and that it was instrumental that they provide truthful answers.

From the 440 employees initially contacted, 309 returned completed responses, for a response rate of 70%. Among these respondents, 32% were women, 63% had a university degree, and their average job tenure was about 10 years. In light of our inclusion of humility in relation to authority figures, we explicitly address the potential for racial discrimination: All respondents and leaders in charge of the organization are of the same race (Black). The organization's employees are well educated on average, representing Angola's technocratic elite. In particular, in its recruitment efforts, the organization targets privileged segments of society and incentivizes employees with an organizational grant program that enables them to earn

higher education degrees abroad before starting to work for the firm. Thus, racial and social class issues should be relatively less prominent concerns for this sample.

Measures

The measures of the six focal constructs were based on previously validated scales, using seven-point Likert anchors, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”).

Turnover intentions. We assessed the extent to which employees wished to leave their current employment with a five-item scale of turnover intentions (Bozeman & Perrewé, 2001). For example, respondents indicated if “In the present time, I am actively searching for another job in a different organization” and “It is likely that I will actively look for a different organization to work for in the next year” (Cronbach’s alpha = .96).

Perceived contract breaches. To assess the extent to which employees believed that their organization had broken previously made promises, we applied a reverse-coded five-item scale of perceived contract fulfillment (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Two example statements were: “I feel that my employer has come through in fulfilling the promises made to me when I was hired” and “So far my employer has done an excellent job in fulfilling its promises to me” (Cronbach’s alpha = .89).

Communication efficiency. The measure of the extent to which organizational leaders provided information efficiently to employees relied on a five-item scale that captured the efficiency subdimension of the leader–member conversational quality scale (Jian et al., 2014). For example, participants indicated whether “With regard to getting things done, the conversations between organizational leaders and myself are efficient” and “When discussing work-related matters, organizational leaders and myself can convey a lot to each other even in a short conversation” (Cronbach’s alpha = .88).

Informational justice. To assess employees' beliefs that organizational leaders communicate in a fair manner, we used a five-item scale of informational justice (Colquitt, 2001). For example, respondents assessed whether "Organizational leaders tailor their communications to my specific needs" and "Organizational leaders are candid/frank in their communications with me" (Cronbach's alpha = .74).

Humility. We measured employees' humility, expressed in their interactions with organizational leaders, with a four-item scale of deference to authority, which captures people's modest inclinations toward people who are in charge (Liu & Shi, 2017). Due to our focus on employees' compliance with organizational leaders in general, rather than an immediate boss, we adapted the wording of the original supervisor-oriented scale to read, for example, "I am willing to obey organizational leaders unconditionally" and "I am willing to sacrifice my interests in order to fulfill the interests of organizational leaders" (Cronbach's alpha = .92).

Perceived leader forgiveness. A three-item scale of organizational forgiveness was applied to assess employees' views of organizational leaders (Guchait et al., 2016). For example, they rated: "Organizational leaders are forgiving of errors, mistakes, and offenses" and "Organizational leaders do not hold grudges" (Cronbach's alpha = .74).

Control variables. Three control variables were included in the statistical analysis: gender (1 = female), education level (1 = secondary degree; 2 = post-secondary, non-university degree; 3 = university degree), and job tenure (in years). Previous research suggests that female, more educated, and longer-tenured employees tend to be more loyal to their employer, compared with their male, less educated, and shorter-tenured counterparts (Griffeth et al., 2000).

Construct validity. A confirmatory factor analysis of a six-factor measurement model indicated the presence of convergent validity. The fit of the model was adequate ($\chi^2(309) =$

639.95, confirmatory fit index [CFI] = .94, relative fit index [RFI] = .86; Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = .92), and each measurement item loaded very strongly on its corresponding construct ($p < .001$). We confirm the presence of discriminant validity, in that the fit of models that estimated 15 constrained construct pairs (correlations between two constructs forced to equal 1) was consistently and significantly worse than the fit of the corresponding unconstrained models (correlations between constructs set free) ($\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} > 3.84, p < .05$).

Common method bias. To test whether common method bias was a concern, we performed three diagnostic tests. First, Harman's one-factor test indicated that the six central constructs—turnover intentions, perceived contract breaches, communication efficiency, informational justice, humility, and perceived leader forgiveness—accounted for only 27% of the total variance in the data, which reduced concerns about the use of a common respondent. Second, the six-factor measurement model achieved significantly better fit than a one-factor model in which all items loaded on a single factor ($\chi^2(15) = 3,395.99, p < .001$), which reaffirmed that the presence of common source bias was unlikely (Hair et al., 2019). Third, we compared four pairs of path models, in which a model that contained an interaction term was paired with a corresponding model to which we added a common method factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003). For example, for the path model that included the perceived contract breaches \times communication efficiency product term (i.e., Model 4, Table 2), we found no difference in fit between the model without the common method factor ($\chi^2_{(34)} = 428.10$) and the version with this factor ($\chi^2_{(33)} = 428.62; \Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = .52, ns$), along with only very minor changes in the size of the path coefficients. Similar patterns emerged for the path model equivalents with the three other interaction terms. These findings, together with the argument that common method bias is less

likely in tests of moderating effects versus simple main effects (Simons & Peterson, 2000), mitigates concerns about the use of a common respondent.

Results

Focal analysis

The zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics of the study constructs are in Table 1; Table 2 provides the results of the hierarchical moderated regression analysis. Model 1 included the control variables, Model 2 added perceived contract breaches, Model 3 added the direct roles of the four moderators, and Models 4–7 added the perceived contract breaches × communication efficiency, perceived contract breaches × informational justice, perceived contract breaches × humility, and perceived contract breaches × perceived leader forgiveness interaction terms, respectively. It is recommended to estimate multiple interaction effects in different regression equations, because their concurrent estimation in a single equation can conceal true moderating effects (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017; De Clercq & Pereira, 2019; Zahra & Hayton, 2008). Following established recommendations (Aiken & West, 1991), the constructs were mean-centered before we calculated their respective interaction terms.

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

The results in Model 1 show that female respondents had a somewhat lower propensity to make plans to leave ($b = -.347, p < .10$), but there was no significant effect of education level ($b = -.035, ns$) or job tenure ($b = -.019, ns$). In line with the baseline premise that frustrations about broken organizational promises stimulate employees' desire to quit their jobs, Model 2 revealed a positive relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions ($b = .221, p < .001$). Beyond the theoretical scope of this study, we found a negative, significant relationship between communication efficiency and turnover intentions ($b = -.193, p < .05$), no significant

relationship of informational justice ($b = -.136, ns$), and somewhat surprising positive relationships of both humility ($b = .102, p < .05$) and perceived leader forgiveness ($b = .142, p < .05$) in Model 3. The zero-order correlations of the latter two constructs with turnover intentions were not significant though ($r = .099$ and $r = .018, ns$, respectively, Table 1). Instead, it appears that these two features spur employees' desire to quit, after accounting for the effects of perceived contract breaches and the two leader knowledge-related constructs. These two counterintuitive relationships might indicate that employees who are humble or who count on the forgiveness of their employer are more *aware* of their own shortcomings, so they develop more negative thoughts about their organizational future. This speculative interpretation would require confirmation through qualitative research that disentangles the processes related to the direct and moderating effects of different resources.

Models 4–5 provide support for the hypothesized buffering effects of the two knowledge-related resources: Both communication efficiency ($b = -.109, p < .01$) and informational justice ($b = -.147, p < .001$) mitigated the positive relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions. The likelihood that employees' frustration evoked a stronger desire to leave was lower among employees who believed that organizational leaders shared information efficiently (Hypothesis 1) and fairly (Hypothesis 2). Figures 2A–B depict these buffering effects, according to the relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions at high and low levels of the two moderators (Aiken & West, 1991). In the simple slope analysis, this relationship was positive and significant at low levels of communication efficiency ($b = .294, p < .001$) and informational justice ($b = .309, p < .001$) but non-significant at high levels ($b = .076$ and $b = .015, ns$, respectively).

[Insert Figures 2A–B about here]

Models 5–6 similarly corroborate the hypothesized mitigating effects of the two resources that capture the nature of organizational leader–employee relationships. The positive relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions was weaker at higher levels of humility ($b = -.114, p < .001$) and perceived leader forgiveness ($b = -.105, p < .01$). The likelihood that employees’ increasing irritation with broken promises enhanced their turnover intentions was lower if they took a humble posture toward organizational leaders (Hypothesis 3) and believed these leaders did not hold grudges (Hypothesis 4). In Figures 3A–B, the simple slope analyses reveal that the relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions was positive and significant when humility ($b = .254, p < .001$) and perceived leader forgiveness ($b = .265, p < .001$) were low, but each relationship lost its significance when the two characteristics were high ($b = .026$ and $b = .055, ns$, respectively).⁴

[Insert Figures 3A–B about here]

Post hoc analysis

As indicated, the inclusion of all product terms in a single regression equation may hide true interaction effects, due to the estimation complexities that come with the simultaneous consideration of multiple moderating effects (Aiken & West, 1991; Hair et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the estimation of a comprehensive model that includes the interaction terms together can corroborate the focal results, to the extent that the signs of these interaction terms match those that emerge from the regression models that consider interaction terms individually (Arnold, 1982; Covin et al., 2006; De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). In comprehensive Model 8 (Table 2), one moderator was significant at $p < .05$ (humility), two moderators were weakly significant at $p < .10$ (communication efficiency and perceived leader forgiveness), and

⁴ The higher vertical position of the high forgiveness line, compared with the low forgiveness line, corresponds with the presence of a *direct* positive relationship between perceived leader forgiveness and turnover intentions.

the last moderator (informational justice) was not significant. However, and importantly, the signs of each of the four productive terms in this model were negative, consistent with the signs in Models 3–7. The statistical significance of the interaction terms in Models 3–7, but not necessarily in Model 8, conveys the specific meaning of each interaction term (mean-centered) if the three other moderating influences are considered simultaneously in comprehensive Model 8 (Hair et al., 2019).

In detail, the regression models that include only one interaction term (Models 3–7) estimate the relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions at non-average values of a particular moderator (communication efficiency, informational justice, humility, or perceived leader forgiveness). But their simultaneous inclusion in Model 8 provides an estimate of the effect of each of the moderators in a multidimensional space that is restricted to the average values of the other moderators (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). For example, the buffering effect of communication efficiency in Model 8 represents a scenario in which informational justice, humility, and perceived leader forgiveness (mean-centered in their corresponding interaction terms) operate at their average values. In Model 4, the buffering effect of communication efficiency instead spans the entire scope of the values for informational justice, humility, and perceived leader forgiveness. The weak or lack of significance of three of the four interaction terms in Model 8 accordingly reflects that their associated individual moderating influences are sensitive to the effects of the other moderators in that model (Hair et al., 2019).⁵

⁵ We leave it to further research to calculate multidimensional configurations to evaluate the extent to which the presence of an “ideal” configuration—marked by elevated levels of *each* of the four leader characteristics simultaneously—might buffer the translation of perceived contract breaches into diminished turnover intentions (Payne, 2006; Vorhies & Morgan, 2003).

Moreover, despite our conceptual focus on the *concurrent* roles of perceived contract breaches with the four resources in predicting turnover intentions—which led us to assess these five constructs at the *same* point in time—for comprehensiveness, we estimated a structural equation model in which perceived contract breaches served as a mediator, influenced directly by the resources. The model revealed an acceptable but not excellent fit ($\chi^2(400) = 1,080.27$; CFI = .87; RFI = .78; TLI = .85). Communication efficiency ($b = -.184, p < .01$), informational justice ($b = -.999, p < .001$), humility ($b = -.128, p < .001$), and perceived leader forgiveness ($b = -.180, p < .05$) each related negatively to perceived contract breaches, which in turn related positively to turnover intentions ($b = .273, p < .001$).

Finally, in accordance with our research objective, we ran four path models, each of which included one of the four interaction terms, in which we estimated the correlation of perceived contract breaches with communication efficiency ($-.591, p < .001$), informational justice ($-.892, p < .001$), humility ($-.599, p < .001$), and perceived leader forgiveness ($-.618, p < .001$). The path coefficients and significance levels of the four product terms in these models ($b = -.110, p < .01$; $b = -.148, p < .001$; $b = -.114, p < .001$; and $b = -.105, p < .01$, respectively) matched those we obtained from the moderated hierarchical regression analyses (Table 2). These post hoc results confirm that the four resources influence the *extent* to which the experience of broken organizational promises spurs employees' motivations to find alternative employment opportunities, *beyond* any direct relationships between this experience and the four factors. We thus find support for the relevance and robustness of our conceptual model (Hair et al., 2019).

Discussion

This study contributes to extant research by examining the link between employees' perceptions that their psychological contract has been breached and their plans to leave their

organization, with a particular focus on the moderating roles of distinct leader-related resources. Prior research has shown that the quality of employees' connections with organizational authorities makes it less likely that they form beliefs that their employer has not met its promises (e.g., Chen & Wu, 2017; Meyer et al., 2018), but it has not addressed how several focal resources might influence the likelihood that employees *leverage* these beliefs to justify their plans to leave in the presence of broken promises. Consistent with the logic of social exchange theory, their disappointment with an organization that has not honored previously made commitments can stimulate employees to quit their jobs, as a means to retaliate (Azeem et al., 2020). This process, in turn, is contingent on how appealing these negative responses are though, and such perceptions are shaped by relevant beliefs about the organization's leadership (Griep et al., 2016).

When employees are convinced that their employer has not kept its side of the bargain, by fulfilling commitments it made in the past, their dismay with how they are treated fuels a desire to take revenge (Arshad, 2016). Breaches may signal that the organization does not appreciate their hard work and seeks only its own interests, at the expense of employees, who then sense little organizational consideration for their well-being (Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2015). Consistent with the norm of reciprocity, which underpins social exchange theory, they get back at their organization by developing quitting plans (Gouldner, 1960). Such plans appear reasonable and appropriate, considering the limited respect or assistance they receive from the firm (Restubog et al., 2011). Due to their disturbing belief that organizational leaders have failed them, they develop a preference to dedicate their efforts to contemplating alternative employment instead of staying loyal.

Yet pertinent, unexplored conditions can lower the risk that perceived contract breaches escalate into increased turnover intentions. As mentioned previously, extant research offers conflicting findings regarding whether LMX, a relatively broad concept, mitigates (Biswas, 2016) or invigorates (Pfrombeck et al., 2020) employees' reactions to broken organizational promises. We unpack this concept, by focusing on the mitigating roles of four specific leader-related resources and establishing that the aforementioned risk is lower if the answers to the following questions are affirmative: Are communication practices efficient and fair? Do employees adopt a humble posture toward organizational leaders? Are organizational leaders forgiving of mistakes and errors? Consistent with social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), the desire to retaliate for contract breaches with plans to quit is lower when organizational authorities communicate in an expedient manner, provide detailed information, seem to deserve employees' compliance, and do not hold grudges against employees. These resources make it more likely that employees stay loyal to their current employer, even if it breaks its previously made promises.

Overall, this investigation of the role of four specific elements of organizational leadership, in relation to the link between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions, adds to conversations about the role of employee–organizational leader dynamics for resolving other challenging work situations, including perceived organizational politics (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017) or the nature of the work that employees must undertake (Schaubroeck et al., 2018). Moreover, by investigating their *indirect* roles in mitigating the risk that psychological contract breaches escalate into quitting plans, this study extends research on how the four focal resources relate directly to broken organizational promises (Hartmann & Rutherford, 2015; Meyer et al., 2018; Rosen et al., 2009) and turnover intentions (Ballinger et

al., 2010; Booth et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2009; Kim, 2009). These resources function as buffers that channel employees' negative energy, stemming from their disappointment, *away* from dedicated plans to look for alternative employment. They reduce the chances that one negative situation (broken promises) begets another (distracting ruminations about quitting).

Limitations and research directions

This research has some shortcomings, which set the stage for continued investigations. First, the study design is cross-sectional, which might raise reverse causality concerns. Our theorizing reflects the logic of social exchange theory, according to which disappointments with adverse organizational treatments prompt employees to retaliate, such as by making quitting plans (Azeem et al., 2020). Yet employees who make concrete plans to quit also could seek to justify their plans, by citing broken organizational promises.

Second, our conceptual arguments for a positive link between perceived contract breaches and quitting plans are based on the notion that employees want to get back at an employer that has not kept its promises (Arshad, 2016). We do not measure this explanatory mechanism though. Longitudinal designs could explicitly measure it, as well as assess the independent and dependent variables at different times to estimate cross-lag effects. Such designs could also assess alternative intermediate mechanisms—such as employees' diminished trust in the organization (Schuh et al., 2018) or enhanced organizational disidentification (De Clercq, 2022)—as well as test our premise that communication efficiency, informational justice, and forgiveness influence the first stage of the implied mediated relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions (i.e., diminish the chances that perceived contract breaches lead to disappointment with how the employer treats them), whereas humility mitigates the second stage (i.e., diminishes negative reactions to such disappointments). Yet another useful

extension might be to determine whether and when employees follow through and actually change jobs—and the influence of perceived job mobility on this choice (Wheeler et al., 2007)—as well as how these plans may inform relevant work *behaviors*, such as enhanced organizational deviance (De Clercq et al., 2014) or diminished organizational citizenship (Pooja et al., 2016).

Third, we investigate four distinct factors, seeking to provide a comprehensive view of how different leader-related circumstances—ranging from knowledge provision by authorities (efficiency and justice) to the relational dynamics between employees and authorities (humility and forgiveness)—may limit employees' desire to express their disappointment with their employer by planning to abandon it. Our assessments of three of the four factors (communication efficiency, informational justice, and perceived organizational forgiveness) capture employees' beliefs about how organizational leaders *in general* treat employees *in general*, instead of the dyadic relationship between an employee and an immediate supervisor, reflecting our underlying assertion that the effect of leader behavior at the organizational level supersedes that of leader behavior at the dyadic level. Future research could compare the relative value of pertinent leader factors at both levels for mitigating the escalation of perceived contract breaches into turnover intentions. It also would be interesting to investigate if employees' beliefs that organizational leaders treat colleagues *differently* affect the hardships they experience in the presence of psychological contract breaches.

Fourth, even if the moderators span a varied, comprehensive, pertinent set of knowledge- and relationship-oriented factors, our focus on four contingencies is a limitation that excludes other potentially relevant influences. Continued research might investigate the buffering roles of other justice dimensions, such as distributive, procedural, or interpersonal justice (Biswas et al., 2013), and other relational factors, such as goal congruence with supervisors (De Clercq et al.,

2014). It would interesting to determine if the moderating effects of the four focal resources hold even after controlling for the effects of these alternative justice types or relational elements. *Personal* characteristics also might affect the translation of perceived contract breaches into turnover intentions, such as employees' resilience (Conley et al., 2016) or optimism (Li et al., 2019). Comparisons of the relative potency of these contextual and personal resources could offer new insights, as would explicit tests of whether the buffering roles of the four resources we identify persist, even after accounting for those effects.

Fifth, we investigate one industry sector (oil distribution). We thus can account for unobserved industry-related characteristics that may influence the attractiveness or feasibility of quitting. Moreover, the proposed arguments are not industry-specific; we expect that the *strength* but not the *nature* of the hypothesized relationships might differ across industries. It would be insightful to investigate how relevant industry features may influence the proposed theoretical model though; perhaps in industries marked by limited employment opportunities, employees are less inclined to express their disappointment with broken organizational promises by making plans to quit (Baranchenko et al., 2020). Hypercompetitive external markets also might increase employees' empathy or understanding of their organization's need to alter the employment situation (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008), which would subdue their turnover intentions.

Finally, and as we mentioned previously, the high levels of uncertainty avoidance in Angola may lead employees to experience contract breaches as highly upsetting, so they vigorously respond with turnover intentions, but its power distance could make them more benevolent toward organizational leaders who generate breaches, thereby diminishing their desire to quit (Hofstede et al., 2010). The empirical support we find for our hypotheses implies that uncertainty avoidance might exert a more prominent influence than power distance, but to

affirm this implication, it would be necessary to perform *cross-country* studies that explicate how cultural values affect employees' reactions to unmet employment expectations. A parallel research opportunity would be to investigate the roles of corresponding *individual* values, such as employees' own risk aversion (Vandenberghe et al., 2011) or power distance orientation (Zagenczyk et al., 2015).

Practical implications

Organizations need to be cognizant that if they break their commitments to employees, it can evoke frustration that escalates into a desire to look for alternative employment opportunities. Employees who are upset and perceive organizational disrespect may feel so disappointed with how they are treated that they make plans to quit, which they regard as a justified response (Azeem et al., 2020). These employees also may be hesitant to voice their frustrations, worried that such confrontational behaviors might compromise their organizational standing or reputation (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Although we consider how leaders' willingness to forgive influences the effect of contract breaches on intentions to leave, we also recognize that more broadly, employees might vent their frustration covertly, such as by making quiet preparations to leave. Thus, in addition to communicating efficiently and fairly and establishing a reputation for forgiveness, organizational leaders should adopt a proactive approach to find employees who might be especially susceptible to perceiving organizational betrayal, perhaps through regular consultation and feedback sessions—which also might enhance their capability to communicate fairly and efficiently (Nathan et al., 2019). Moreover, when previously made promises must be broken, leaders need to be transparent in explaining why (e.g., pressures in external markets) and provide explanations immediately, at the moment they realize the need to breach the contract.

Unfortunately, it is relatively common for organizations to face a scenario in which, even if they wanted to, they cannot honor all their previously made promises to individual employees and still remain in business. To reduce the risk of suffering mass resignations among employees frustrated by broken promises, these organizations should ensure that their leaders communicate quickly and personally with employees. More generally, organizational leaders should establish reputations for being willing to forgive errors. A more tricky implication pertains to the buffering role of employees' humility though; even if it mitigates the translation of perceived contract breaches into enhanced turnover intentions, our study should *not* be taken as a justification for organizations to promote blind obedience. Doing so would reduce their ability to identify unacceptable contract breaches, so they still could suffer the risk that quiet employees plan to quit. Unconditional acceptance of leader directives and preferences even might be harmful to the organization in the long term, to the extent that it makes employees complicit in attempts to deny legitimate contracts (Petersen & Dietz, 2008). That is, we reveal a mitigating effect of humility on employees' quitting intentions in response to perceived contract breaches, but we recommend a constructively critical attitude toward organizational leadership, especially in combination with good leader communication practices and leader forgiveness. In such a setting, the hardships that employees experience when their psychological contract has been breached can be contained more effectively and beneficially, for both themselves and their employing organization.

Conclusion

This study, undertaken in an Angolan industrial context, tackles the important issue of *when* employees' dismay with an employer that fails to meet its promises may escalate into a motivation to get out and find better options. Disappointment due to broken promises can evoke a negative spiral, leading employees to exhibit disloyalty and develop a desire to leave. The

degree to which this risk materializes is contingent on pertinent leader-related resources. These findings accordingly could serve as stepping stones for continued investigations of how organizational leaders in African countries and beyond can prevent adverse employment situations from intensifying and encouraging negative employee attitudes and behaviors, through careful consideration of how they can interact with employees in productive, helpful ways.

Notes on Contributors

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Figure 1. Conceptual Model

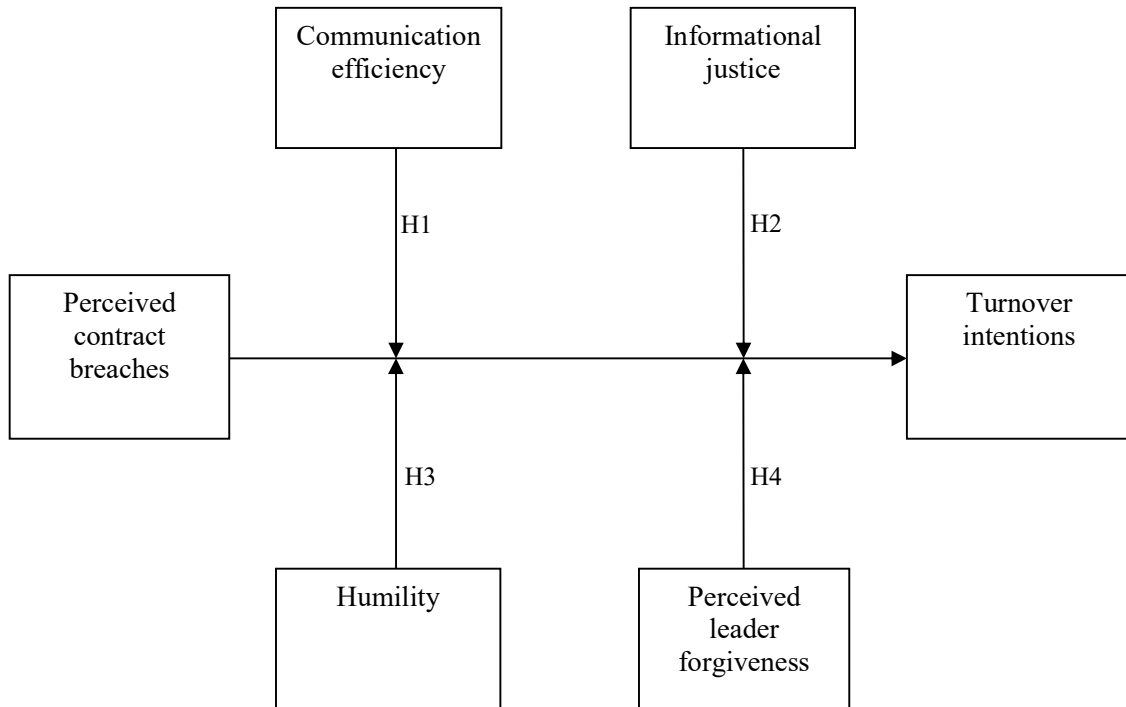


Figure 2A: Moderating effect of communication efficiency on the relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions

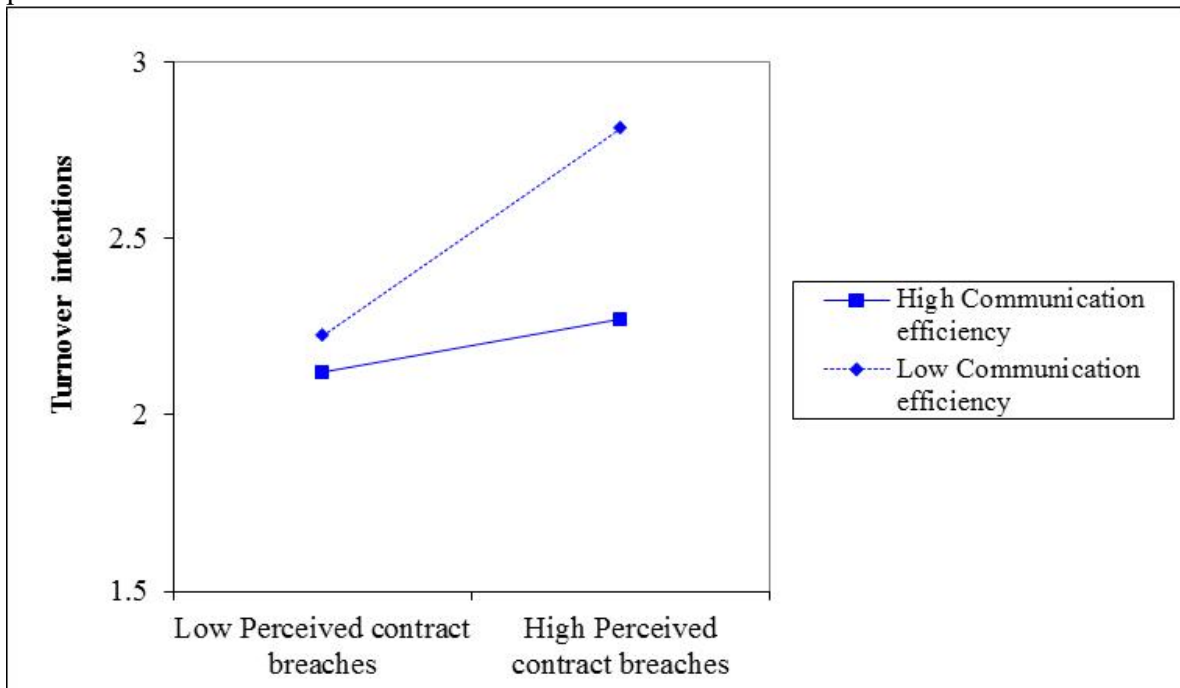


Figure 2B: Moderating effect of informational justice on the relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions

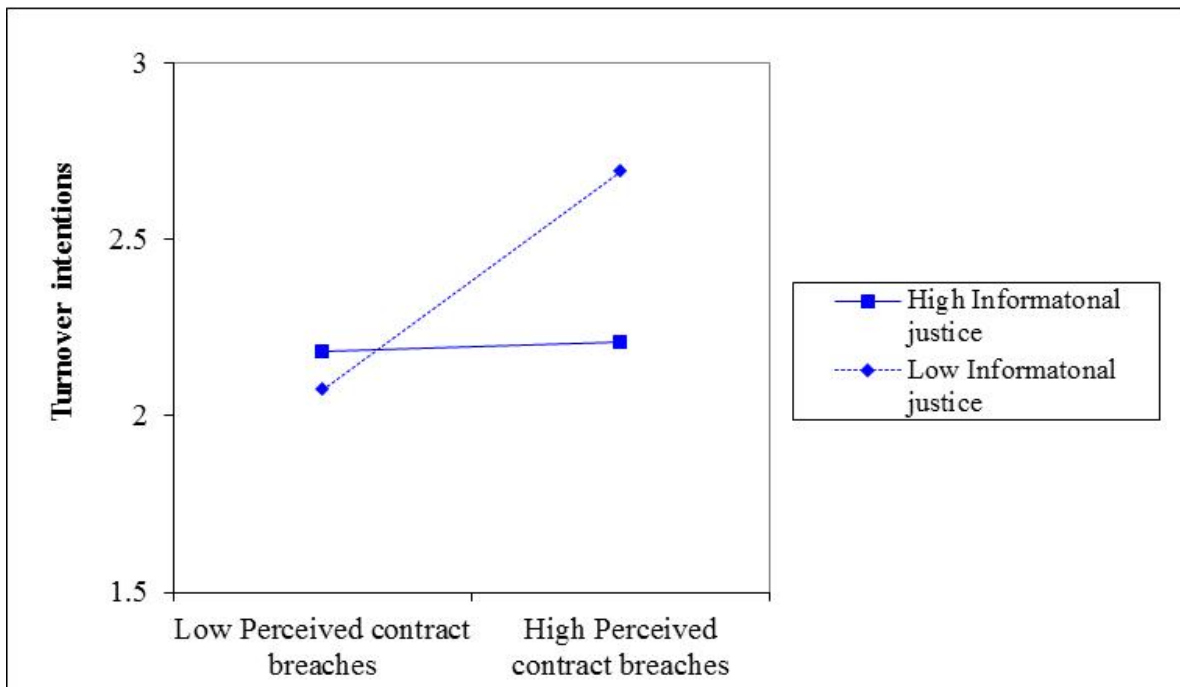


Figure 3A: Moderating effect of humility on the relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions

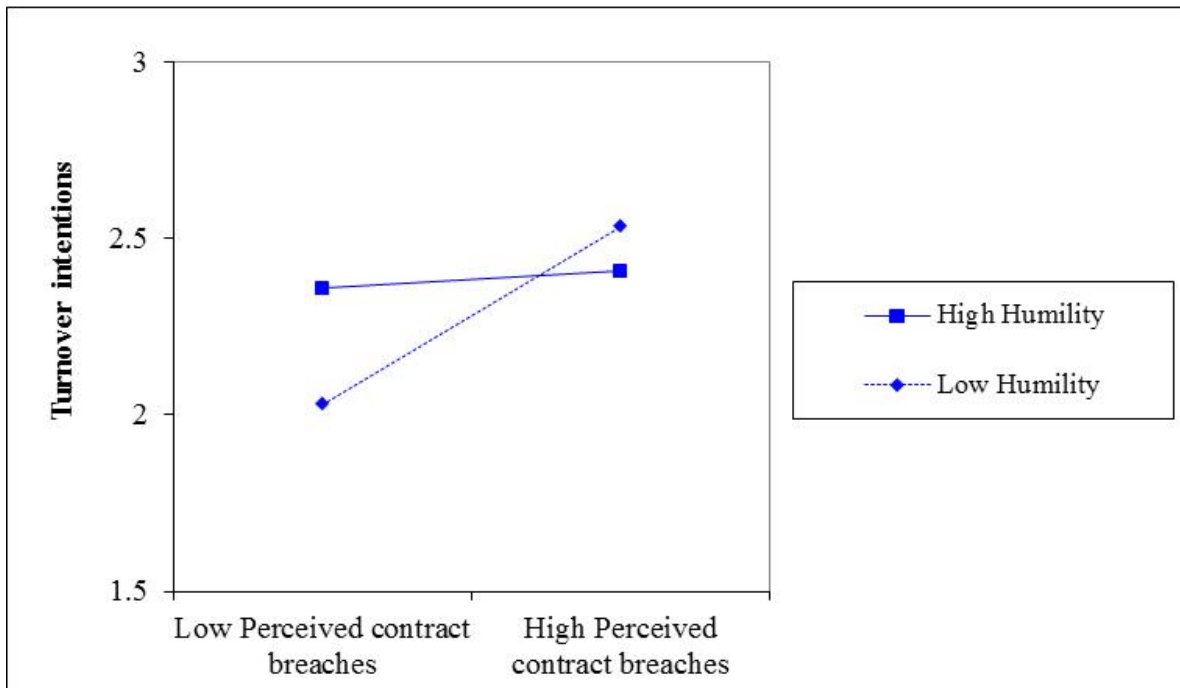


Figure 3B: Moderating effect of leader forgiveness on the relationship between perceived contract breaches and turnover intentions

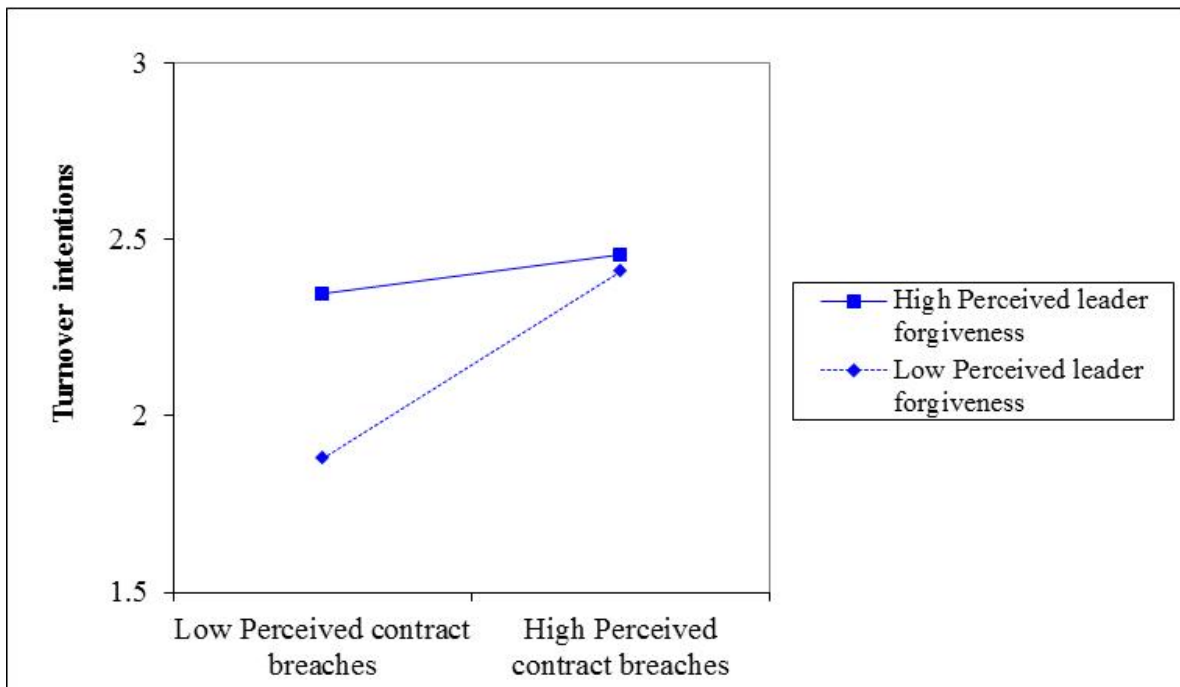


Table 1. Correlations and descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Turnover intentions									
2. Perceived contract breaches	.204**								
3. Communication efficiency	-.261**	-.322**							
4. Informational justice	-.197**	-.485**	.549**						
5. Humility	.099	-.227**	-.095	.193**					
6. Perceived leader forgiveness	.018	-.308**	.204**	.372**	.127*				
7. Gender (1 = female)	-.112	.068	.176**	-.052	-.225**	-.092			
8. Education level	.000	.214**	.025	-.151**	-.349**	-.149**	.072		
9. Job tenure	-.083	-.049	-.078	-.054	.123*	.069	.020	-.367**	
Mean	2.019	4.051	5.277	4.308	2.906	3.526	.321	2.336	9.672
Standard deviation	1.496	1.501	1.225	1.225	1.768	1.339	.468	.897	6.862

Notes: N = 309.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Regression results (dependent variable: turnover intentions)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Gender (1 = female)	-.347 ⁺	-.384*	-.188	-.118	-.101	-.157	-.186	-.088
Education level	-.035	-.117	-.040	-.037	-.037	-.037	-.002	-.013
Job tenure	-.019	-.020	-.027*	-.029*	-.029*	-.025*	-.026*	-.027*
Perceived contract breaches		.221***	.167**	.185**	.162**	.140*	.160**	.151*
Communication efficiency			-.193*	-.160 ⁺	-.181*	-.204**	-.194*	-.176*
Informational justice			-.136	-.113	-.092	-.136	-.133	-.105
Humility			.102*	.117*	.106*	.052	.119*	.082
Perceived leader forgiveness			.142*	.134*	.129*	.165**	.130*	.145*
H1: Perceived contract breaches × Communication efficiency				-.109**				-.076 ⁺
H2: Perceived contract breaches × Informational justice					-.147***			-.042
H3: Perceived contract breaches × Humility						-.114***		-.093**
H4: Perceived contract breaches × Perceived leader forgiveness							-.105**	-.060 ⁺
R ²	.018	.065	.127	.147	.163	.168	.153	.200
Change in R ²		.047***	.062***	.020**	.036***	.041***	.026**	.073***

Notes: N = 309; unstandardized coefficients.

⁺*p* < .10; **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed).