

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From promise to betrayal: A systematic review of the link between psychological contract and employee well-being

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Abstract

This systematic review examines the relationship between psychological contract breach (PCB)/fulfilment (PCF) and employee well-being, with a specific focus on mediating and moderating mechanisms. A systematic search in four databases yielded 59 empirical studies published between 1990 and 2024. The findings indicate that PCB hinders employee well-being, whereas PCF supports a range of well-being outcomes, and there is no consensus on whether PCB or PCF has a greater impact on employee well-being. Evidence also suggests that PCB and PCF are related but distinct constructs. Synthesising mediators and moderators, the review advances a contingent and process-based understanding of how psychological contract evaluations shape employee well-being. The evidence further indicates that the relative impact of PCB or PCF on employee well-being is conditional rather than universal. These findings extend conservation of resources and social exchange theories, and highlight the need for more theoretically rigorous and causally robust future research.

Keywords: well-being; mental health; physical health; psychological contract breach; psychological contract fulfilment

Introduction

Employee well-being is defined as ‘the state of individuals’ mental, physical, and general health, as well as their experiences of satisfaction both at work and outside of work’ (Nielsen et al., 2017, p. 104). Employee well-being is a fundamental component of organisational sustainability and a critical aspect of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 3, which seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all (Zeshan, Morelli, Rasool, Centobelli & Cerchione, 2024). In the workplace, well-being is not merely a measure of individual health but a key driver of productivity, organisational performance, economic growth, and social stability (Clarke & Hill, 2012; Lei, Alam & Bashir, 2024). Recognising the importance of this connection, policymakers have emphasised the need for organisations worldwide to invest significantly in well-being initiatives, including promoting mental health awareness, providing access to counselling services, and supporting mental well-being (Deloitte, 2024; Henstock, Johnson, Kinghorn, Beach & Al-Janabi, 2024). Despite these efforts, the costs associated with poor employee well-being remain alarmingly high. For instance, an estimated 12 billion workdays are lost annually due to mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, costing the global economy nearly US Dollars one trillion (World Health Organization, 2024). Therefore, a deeper understanding of the factors influencing employee well-being is needed to develop evidence-based strategies that effectively support employees.

Both individual and contextual factors influence employee well-being. For example, individual factors, such as emotional regulation and stress management, are critical to supporting well-being (Veiga & Cortez, 2020), and contextual factors, including job demands, organisational practices, working environment, and working hours, also play a significant role (Marzocchi *et al.*, 2024; Omer *et al.*, 2025). An additional contextual variable that has emerged as a determinant of employee well-being is the quality of the employment relationship (Guest, 2004). Poor relationships, particularly those marked by a lack of trust and reciprocity, are strongly associated with stress and adverse health outcomes (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Despite these findings, the complex interplay between employment relationships and well-being remains underexplored (Topa, Aranda-Carmena & De-Maria, 2022). Understanding how these relationships influence workplace health, primarily through frameworks such as the psychological contract, is critical to addressing the multifaceted challenges modern organisations face. Further research is needed to uncover the impact of psychological contract breach (PCB) and fulfilment on well-being outcomes. This is an important area of work, as promoting healthy workplace dynamics not only benefits employees but also strengthens organisational resilience and productivity (Xesha, Iwu, Slabbert & Nduna, 2014).

The psychological contract (PC) describes the nature of the relationship between employer and employee (Asante, Gyensare, El Bouzidi & Twumasi, 2025), which is a prominent framework for understanding employer-employee relationships and their influence on employee well-being. The PC refers to the unwritten and subjective expectations that employees and employers hold regarding their reciprocal obligations (Rousseau, 1989). While formal contracts define explicit terms of employment, PCs capture the nuanced and dynamic perceptions that underpin workplace interactions. For employees, these expectations may include fair treatment, career development opportunities, and supportive working conditions, while employers may expect loyalty, commitment, and performance in return (Rousseau, 2000). Therefore, PC is at the heart of the employment relationship, as it emphasises employees' subjective workplace experiences (Ma, Blenkinsopp & Armstrong, 2020).

The evaluation of the PC is particularly relevant to employee well-being. When employees perceive that their employer has failed to meet its obligations, a PCB arises, which increases feelings of violation, employee turnover intention, trust in the organisation, and job satisfaction (Krivacek, Zagenczyk, Griep & Cruz, 2025; Park, Wolfart, King, Sicam & Viswesvaran, 2025; Topa *et al.*, 2022). The subjective nature of PCs makes them highly sensitive to interpretation, and even unintentional lapses by employers can be perceived as breaches, amplifying their negative impact (Topa *et al.*, 2022). Conversely, when employees perceive that their employer has honoured its promises, psychological contract fulfilment (PCF) occurs, enhancing positive outcomes, such as organisational citizenship behaviour, organisational commitment, and reduced turnover intention (Kutaula, Gillani & Budhwar, 2020; Noble-Nkrumah, Anyigba & Mensah, 2022).

This review contributes to new knowledge as follows. First, the review helps determine whether PCB and PCF represent opposite ends of a single continuum (e.g., Robinson & Morrison, 2000) or are distinct constructs (e.g., Lambert, Edwards & Cable, 2003). Some researchers have treated breach and fulfilment as interchangeable, assuming they have similar but opposite effects on individual outcomes (Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Rousseau, 1989), whereas others have suggested that PCB and PCF are distinct constructs and should be examined simultaneously (Conway, Guest & Trenberth, 2011; Lambert *et al.*, 2003).

Second, the review explores the roles of moderators and mediators, offering insights that build upon and extend existing literature. Although some research has examined mediating mechanisms (e.g., Reimann & Guzy, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2022) and moderating conditions (e.g., Achnak & Vantilborgh, 2021; Mensah, Amponsah-Tawiah & Nana Kojo Ayimadu, 2024), the evidence remains mixed. By systematically synthesising existing literature, this review incorporates moderators and mediators to present an integrated framework that advances theory and informs practice. By synthesising evidence on the mechanisms and boundary conditions identified across studies, this review advances

conservation of resources theory (CORT) and social exchange theory (SET) by clarifying how and under what conditions PC evaluation is associated with employee well-being.

Third, this review advances theory by demonstrating that the relative effect of PC evaluations (PCB and PCF) on employee well-being is contingent. The review synthesises existing evidence on the effects of PCB and PCF on well-being to determine which has the stronger influence on well-being outcomes. Past research has argued that, compared with fulfilment, breach has a more severe effect on employment relationships and exerts a stronger impact on employees (Conway et al., 2011; Rousseau, 1989). CORT and asymmetry perspectives suggest that resource loss is disproportionately salient relative to resource gain (Hobfoll, 1998), and the asymmetry-of-effects perspective (De Jong, Clinton, Rigotti & Bernhard-Oettel, 2015; Taylor, 1991) posits that negative events elicit stronger responses than positive ones. This review advances theory by challenging the assumed universality of loss (negative event) dominance in CORT and asymmetry perspectives.

Methodology

The research question guiding this review is: ‘What is the impact of PCB/fulfilment on employee well-being?’ This review aims to conduct a comprehensive and systematic examination of the relationship between PCB/PCF and employee well-being and to determine the relative impact of PCB/PCF on well-being. The review also aims to determine whether PCB and PCF represent opposite ends of a single continuum or distinct constructs. In addition, the study explores the roles of moderators and mediators, offering insights that build upon and extend prior research.

The review employs a systematic quantitative literature review (SQLR) methodology, which is more systematic, explicit, and reproducible than traditional reviews, enhancing reliability (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). The SLR method enables the examination of diverse organisational behaviour studies to identify knowledge gaps, clarify what is known and what remains uncertain in the field, and provide direction for future research (Linnenluecke, Marrone & Singh, 2019; Paul, 2025), while allowing the inclusion of studies with different independent and dependent variables, unlike meta-analysis, which requires comparable constructs. This review follows Pickering and Byrne’s (2014) 15-step framework for SQLR and the preferred reporting items for systematic and meta-analyses statement (PRISMA; Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff & Altman, 2009).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Eligible studies met the following inclusion criteria: (a) empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) written in English (given the predominance of English-language scholarship and feasibility considerations) and published from 1990 onward (following the reconceptualization of the PC by Rousseau, 1989); (b) examined PCB or PCF; and (c) included samples of full-time or part-time employees aged 18 years or older (to ensure the focus on adult employees in formal employment relationships). Exclusion criteria were (a) literature reviews, meta-analyses, theoretical papers, and (b) studies focusing on PC violations, balance contracts, and safety outcomes.

Data collection

Data were collected in July 2024 from the ABI/INFORM Collection, EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, and Scopus databases in order to answer the research question, ‘What is the impact of PCB/fulfilment on employee well-being?’ The use of four databases was intended to enhance the comprehensiveness and robustness of the search process (Bramer, Rethlefsen, Kleijnen & Franco, 2017).

The databases were selected, and the search strategy was established in consultation with an expert librarian. Search terms included (‘psychological contract’) AND (wellbeing OR well-being OR ‘well-being’ OR stress OR burnout OR ‘occupational stress’ OR ‘mental health’ OR health OR ‘physical health’ OR recovery OR ‘job stress’ OR coping). The number of items yielded and extracted was as follows: ABI/INFORM Collection (8900/418), EBSCOhost (4110/400), ScienceDirect (2117/400),

and Scopus (435/423). The search strategy, extraction, and analysis strategy were registered in PROSPERO (ID: de-identified here for blind review).

Data screening

Following Pickering's (2016) suggestions, to identify relevant papers, at least 400 articles from each database were screened until 50 consecutive irrelevant articles were found. The retrieved articles were imported into EndNote, and after removing duplicates, the articles were imported into Covidence, a data management software, for further processing. All extracted articles were screened by first reviewing titles and abstracts, then by thoroughly reviewing the full-text articles. A preliminary screening of 10% of titles and abstracts, followed by 10% of full-text articles, was conducted independently by the first two authors to ensure consistency. This process demonstrated strong inter-rater reliability (IRR), with agreement levels of 91.91% for title and abstract screening and 93.75% for full-text screening. After meeting all eligibility criteria, 59 of 118 relevant studies were included in the final selection, including 56 journal articles, 2 PhD theses, and 1 book chapter. Studies were excluded if they did not meet the inclusion criteria, including those in which variables were irrelevant, focused on PC type rather than on breach/fulfilment, or lacked empirical findings. The quality of each paper was assessed by the research team, and any disagreements were resolved through discussion between reviewers. The screening process for identifying the eligible studies is summarised using the PRISMA flow chart in Figure 1.

Data abstraction

Covidence software, a data management tool, was used to facilitate data extraction from the selected papers. Covidence ensures systematic and accurate record-keeping and documentation. Recently, researchers have used Covidence software in systematic literature reviews, published in quality journals (e.g., Batt, Albrecht, Wilson & Du Moulin, 2023; Gardiner, Adams, Debrulle & Maes, 2024; Phillips, Reed, Zwicky & Van Epps, 2024). The relationship between the independent variable (PCB/fulfilment) and the dependent variable (employee well-being) was determined using significance tests reported in the papers. The findings and discussion sections of qualitative studies were analysed to identify relationships between variables. Results were categorised by positive, negative, and non-significant relationships, and moderators and mediators were also noted.

Results

Descriptives

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the sample studies, including the first author, year of publication, country, sample size, methodology, and journal ranking. In the results and discussion sections, we use the numbers noted in the first column to refer to some studies. Half (30, 50.8%) were published in the last 6 years, highlighting the growing interest in PCs and employee well-being. Appendix 1 depicts the development of publications on this topic over time. Most studies were conducted in developed countries (38, 64.4%), with fewer in developing countries (20, 33.9%) and only 1 study in both (1.7%). This suggests the topic is of international interest, but research is more concentrated in developed countries.

As part of the data extraction process, we documented the theoretical frameworks used in each study. Over 20 theoretical frameworks were cited, with 81.4% of papers mentioning at least one theory. SET was the most cited (45.8%), followed by Psychological Contract Theory (27.1%) and Conservation of Resource Theory (CORT) (16.9%). These frameworks are essential not only for identifying the theoretical foundation but also for evaluating their adequacy in explaining the differential effects of PCB and PCF on well-being. The sample mainly consisted of quantitative studies (57, 96.6%), with one qualitative (1.7%) and one mixed-method study (1.7%). Most studies used

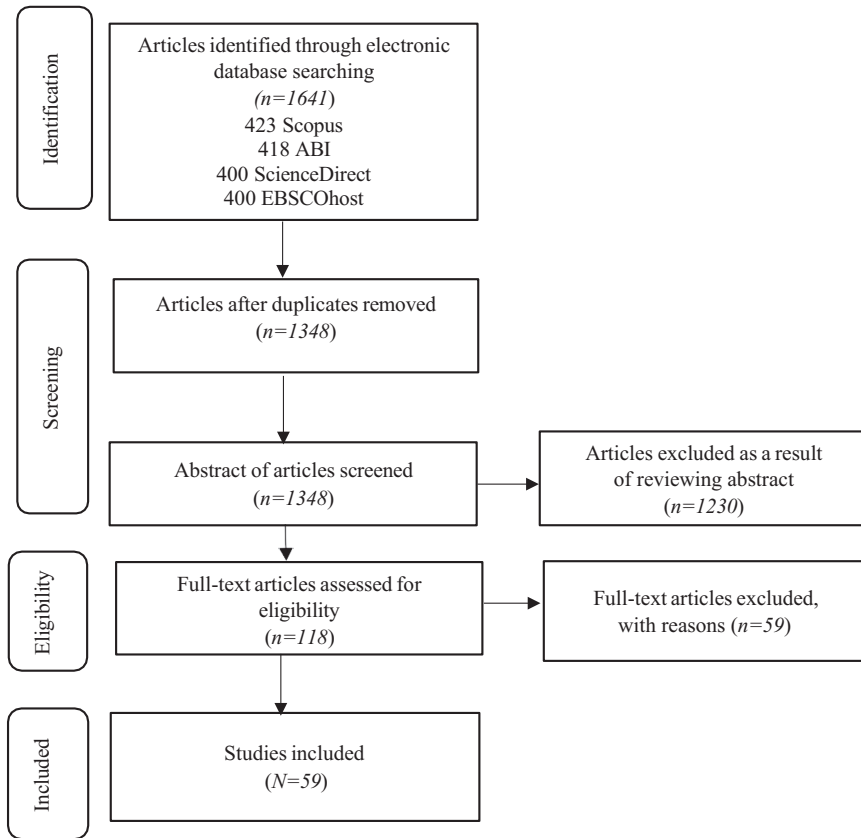


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart.

Notes: Common reasons for excluding studies were that (a) the independent and dependent variables were irrelevant to the existing study, (b) studies related to psychological contracts rather than studying psychological contract breach or fulfilment, and (c) studies with no empirical findings.

cross-sectional designs (49, 83.0%), while nine (15.3%) employed longitudinal designs and one (1.7%) employed an experimental design. Nearly all papers in the review were single-study papers (55, 93%), except for Studies 3, 17, and 20, each of which included two studies, and Study 8, which comprised four studies. For instance, Study 3, conducted in Belgium and the USA, used a cross-sectional two-study design with employees from the private and public sectors. In contrast, Study 17 conducted two longitudinal studies to investigate the differential impacts of changes in PCB and PCF over time, one with pharmaceutical company employees and another with a nationally representative sample of UK workers. More details are provided in Appendix 2.

All studies used primary data, mostly collected through self-report surveys (91.5%) and interviews (10.2%). Participants included primarily full-time employees (47, 79.6%). Most studies sampled participants from multiple industries (17, 28.8%). Sample sizes ranged from 18 to 5288, with an average participant age of 33 years ($SD = 8.8$). Both genders were well represented across the collection of papers (49% male, 51% female). Twenty studies included covariates (33.9%), with more than seven covariates mentioned across the collection. Age and gender were the most common (27.1%), followed by organisation tenure (16.9%) and education level (13.6%). The studies were published in 50 outlets, with popular journals including the *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* (6.8%), *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* (6.8%), and *Personnel Review* (5%). Over half appeared in Q1 (38, 64.4%) and Q2 (11, 18.6%) ranked journals, indicating high impact. Most studies were published

Table 1. Descriptive details of included studies

No.	First Author	Year	Country	Economic Type	N	Sample mean age (SD)	# of Time point	Methodology	SJR Rank	SJR 2023 Rank
1	Abbas	2020	Iraq	Developing	309	21 (2)	Single	Quantitative	2	0.31
2	Abdalla	2021	Zanzibar	Developing	238	28–37 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.93
3	Achnak	2018	Belgium; USA	Developed	104	38 (10.8)	Multiple	Quantitative	2	0.8
4	Achnak	2021	Belgium	Developed	1077	45 (11.8)	Multiple	Quantitative	1	2.97
5	Adekanmbi	2019	Nigeria	Developing	537	35 (9.1)	Single	Quantitative	UR	UR
6	Antonaki	2014	Greece	Developed	262	26–35 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	UA	UA
7	Anushree Karani	2023	India	Developing	241	34 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.65
8	Anushree Karani	2024	India	Developing	403	35 (7.7)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.25
9	Arunachalam	2021	India	Developing	352	NR	Single	Mixed method	2	0.44
10	Bal	2012	Netherlands	Developed	163	36 (12.9)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.2
11	Brown	2015	USA	Developed	461	NR	Single	Quantitative	2	0.48
12	Cantisano	2007	Spain	Developed	401	37 (10.4)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.78
13	Cassar	2015	Malta	Developed	420	28 (8.9)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.23
14	Chambel	2010	Portugal	Developed	387	25.2 (NR)	Multiple	Quantitative	2	0.43
15	Christy	2019	India	Developing	442	NR	Single	Quantitative	UA	UA
16	Collins	2020	Irland	Developed	277	35 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	1	2.71
17	Conway	2011	UK	Developed	659	39 (NR)	Multiple	Quantitative	1	2.97
18	Costa	2017	Portugal	Developed	220	45 (NR)	Multiple	Quantitative	1	2.97
19	de Jong	2015	6 European countries; Israel	Developed, Developing	5288	NR	Single	Quantitative	1	1.34
20	de Jong	2017	Netherlands	Developed	286	36 (12.3)	Multiple	Quantitative	1	1.8

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

No.	First Author	Year	Country	Economic Type	N	Sample mean age (SD)	# of Time point	Methodology	SJR Rank	SJR 2023 Rank
21	Drew	2024	Australia	Developed	491	43 (8.7)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.57
22	Duran	2019	UK	Developed	18	NR	Single	Qualitative	1	62
23	Flower	2015	Australia	Developed	134	42 (11.4)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.76
24	Gakovic	2003	USA	Developed	161	NR	Single	Quantitative	1	2.04
25	Gander	2023	Australia; UK	Developed	226	45 (8.7)	Single	Quantitative	2	0.39
26	Gracia	2006	Spain	Developed	385	32 (6.8)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.07
27	Griep	2021	Belgium	Developed	389	42 (10.6)	Multiple	Quantitative	1	1.78
28	Hartwell	2003	USA	Developed	94	40 (5.12)	Single	Quantitative	UR	UR
29	Innstrand	2022	Norway	Developed	268	41–45 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	2	0.81
30	Jamil	2013	Pakistan	Developing	361	34 (10.4)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.79
31	Jiang	2017	USA	Developed	400	50 (10.6)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.79
32	Karani	2022	India	Developing	258	33 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.65
33	Karani	2023	India	Developing	238	35 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.65
34	Karani	2022	India	Developing	239	35 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.65
35	Mazumdar	2023	Canada	Developed	195	66 (5.8)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.23
36	Mehta	2024	India	Developing	414	41 (1.2)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.76
37	Mekawy	2022	Egypt	Developing	437	33 (8.2)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.83
38	Mensah	2024	Ghana	Developing	484	< 40 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	3	0.35
39	Morsch	2020	Nederland	Developed	259	40 (14.7)	Single	Quantitative	UR	UR
40	Nizamani	2017	Pakistan	Developing	500	NR	Single	Quantitative	UR	UR

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

No.	First Author	Year	Country	Economic Type	N	Sample mean age (SD)	# of Time point	Methodology	SJR Rank	SJR 2023 Rank
41	Opoku Mensah	2021	Ghana	Developing	214	31–50 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.65
42	Piccoli	2015	Italy	Developed	322	41 (5.8)	Single	Quantitative	1	2.77
43	Qaiser	2022	Pakistan	Developing	401	31 (8.1)	Single	Quantitative	UR	UR
44	Reimann	2016	Germany	Developed	3667	43 (8.1)	Multiple	Quantitative	2	0.77
45	Reimann	2017	Germany	Developed	3870	43 (8.3)	Multiple	Quantitative	2	0.84
46	Rodwell	2016	Australia	Developed	459	25–44 (NR)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.1
47	Rodwell	2015	Australia	Developed	202	41 (10.4)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.23
48	Rodwell	2013	Australia	Developed	253	45 (9.6)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.2
49	Rodwell	2015	Australia	Developed	113	42 (11.2)	Single	Quantitative	2	0.54
50	Rogozinska-Pawelczyk	2023	Poland	Developed	1000	43 (10.4)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.67
51	Shin	2019	Korea	Developed	384	33 (8.9)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.67
52	Suarthana	2016	Indonesia	Developing	113	33 (9.3)	Single	Quantitative	UA	UA
53	Topa	2018	Spain	Developed	264	34 (13.8)	Single	Quantitative	1	0.88
54	Vander Elst	2016	Belgium	Developed	2413	38 (11.6)	Single	Quantitative	1	1.3
55	Wang	2014	Taiwan	Developing	273	34 (8.4)	Single	Quantitative	1	2.97
56	Yang	2022	Belgium	Developed	231	36 (9.7)	Multiple	Quantitative	1	1.7
57	Yu	2022	China	Developing	235	25 (2.6)	Single	Quantitative	2	0.8
58	Zacher	2021	Australia	Developed	405	48 (10.9)	Multiple	Quantitative	1	3.9
59	Żołnierczyk-Zreda	2021	Poland	Developed	1000	36 (9.7)	Single	Quantitative	UR	UR

Notes: Only the first author for each paper is listed in the table, and papers are categorised in alphabetical and chronological order as per the full reference listed in the references section. *N* indicates the number of participants in the sample for that study. Economy type coded as per United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects (2025). NR indicates that the data was not reported in the study. The impact factors of the journals were determined using the SCImago 2023. UR indicates that the publication outlet was unregistered with SCImago at the time of publication. UA indicates that the publication outlet was not yet assigned a rank with SCImago at the time of publication.

in peer-reviewed journals (56, 94.9%), with minimal grey literature (2 PhD theses, 1 book chapter), suggesting low publication bias and broad interest in the topic.

This research focused on PCB and PCF as predictors. Of the 59 studies, 42 (71.2%) examined PCB, 10 (16.9%) examined PCF, and 7 (11.9%) studied both. Robinson and Morrison's (2000) scale was most commonly used to assess PCB (47.5%), while Rousseau's (1990) scale was the most popular tool for PCF (6.8%). Well-being was measured using 24 different instruments, with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) being the most common (16.9%), followed by Kessler et al.'s (2002) psychological distress scale (6.8%). Some instruments were used to measure multiple constructs (e.g., the SF-36 General Health scale measured both general health (Study 19) and physical health complaints (Studies 27, 55), and multiple measures were used to measure the same scale (e.g., Studies 1 and 18 used different measures for exhaustion). The original scale development papers were reviewed by the research team to ensure alignment with the constructs, and outcomes were categorised into occupational, psychological, and physical well-being. Across 59 studies, 99 tests of association between PCB/PCF and well-being were conducted. The direct associations and corresponding study numbers are depicted in Table 2.

Well-being outcomes

In line with previous work (e.g., Martela, 2025; Nguyen, Rafferty & Xerri, 2025; Pandey, Maheshwari & Malik, 2025), the current study conceptualised employee well-being as a multidimensional concept encompassing three dimensions: occupational well-being, psychological well-being, and physical well-being.

Occupational well-being

Fifty-two studies in the occupational well-being category focus on occupational well-being, divided into two subgroups: *occupational attitudes*, which capture an employee's beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies at work, including job satisfaction and work engagement; and *occupational stress*, which reflects the extent of stress, strain, and exhaustion experienced by an employee. Consistent with prior work (e.g., Inceoglu, Thomas, Chu, Plans & Gerbasi, 2018; Mäkikangas, Kinnunen, Feldt & Schaufeli, 2016; Rahimnia & Sharifirad, 2015), the current study conceptualises stress as a sub-dimension of well-being rather than as an antecedent of well-being. Of the 60 tests of association, 43 examined PCB and 17 examined PCF.

Occupational attitudes. Thirty-two tests of association across 24 studies examined the link between PCB and occupational attitudes, with 59.4% focusing on PCB. Negative associations were most common (89.5%), with 10.5% non-significant and no positive relationships reported. PCB was associated with poor job satisfaction among banking employees in Greece (Study 6) and among health workers in Ireland and Australia (Studies 16, 49). Notably, Study 49 found a non-significant association among Australian allied health professionals, possibly due to their specialised skills and autonomy reducing reliance on PCs.

Thirteen tests examined the association between PCF and occupational attitudes (40.6%), with 76.9% showing positive relationships and 23.1% reporting non-significant results. No negative associations were found. For example, a U.S. study of female physicians found that supervisor support-based PCF was linked to high job satisfaction and enthusiasm (Study 28), and a Polish survey of knowledge-intensive workers reported the highest job satisfaction among employees who perceived their organisation as fulfilling its obligations (Study 50). In contrast, a longitudinal study of 659 pharmaceutical employees and a nationally representative UK sample found no statistically significant association, likely due to contextual and sample differences (Study 17).

Occupational stress. Twenty-eight studies examined occupational stress, with most being quantitative and only one qualitative (Study 22), which highlighted PCB's role in stress among UK police officers. Of 27 quantitative tests, 85.2% examined PCB, and 95.7% found positive associations with

Table 2. Direct associations and corresponding study number (in parentheses)

Major theme	Subtheme (<i>n</i>)	PCB			PCF		
		(+)	(-)	ns	(+)	(-)	ns
Occupational Well-being	<i>Occupational attitudes (32)</i>		17 (6, 14 , 16, 17 , <u>19</u> , 20, 23, 25, 31, 32, <u>41</u> , 46, 47, 48, 49, 54, 55)	2 (49, 59)	10 (8, 24, 28, 34, 35, 46, 47, 48, 50, 59)		3 (17 , 23, 20)
	<i>Occupational stress (28)</i>	23 (1, 2, 3 , 4 , 7, 9 [*] , 12, 14 , 18, 22 [*] , 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37, 42, 51, 52, 53, 56 , 57, 58)		1 (5)		3 (11, 24, 28)	1 (40)
Psychological Well-being	<i>Mental health (21)</i>		9 (15, 21, 27 , 32, 38, 39, 44 , 45 , 54)	5 (23, 47, 48, 49, 59)	6 (23, 26, 34, 36, 48, 59)		1 (47)
	<i>Affective well-being (8)</i>		5 (10, 13, 17 , 32, 43)	1 (10)	1 (34)		1 (17)
	<i>Life well-being (5)</i>				5 (8, 26, 34, 35, 50)		
Physical Well-being			5 (<u>19</u> , 27 , 45 , 53, 54)				

Notes: (-) = negative association between the variables. (+) = positive association between the variables. *ns* = non-significant association between variables. Bold = quantitative study and longitudinal. Non-bold = quantitative study and cross-sectional. * = qualitative study (no test of significance is provided with qualitative; the association is included here based on content from the paper). [^] = Mixed method. Italics = study was conducted in a developing economy. Underline = Study involved samples from a mix of developed, developing and/or transitioning economies. No underlining or italics = Study was conducted in a developed economy. *n* exceeds 59 because some studies included multiple variables and tests of association. PCB and PCF are positively and negatively associated with occupational stress, respectively. Unlike other variables in the table, where a positive association suggests better well-being, occupational stress is negatively scored, meaning a positive association reflects poorer well-being.

occupational stress, including restructuring-related stress and sleep problems, fatigue, and burnout (Studies 9, 14, 22). A non-significant result was found among Nigerian bank employees, possibly due to high unemployment and job insecurity (Study 5). No negative associations were reported.

Four tests of association examined the relationship between PCF and occupational stress, with 75% reporting negative associations (lower stress) and 25% reporting non-significant results. For instance, PCF was associated with reduced burnout among U.S. high school teachers (Study 11) and lower job strain in employees in financial organisations (Study 24), but showed no significant relationship with stress in a Pakistani sample of 500 employees, suggesting the value of PCF in reducing stress is limited in that context, potentially because cultural factors, power, and politics affect employee stress rather than PCF (Study 40). No positive associations were reported.

Psychological well-being

Twenty-nine studies conducted 34 tests on psychological well-being, with 20 focused on PCB and 14 on PCF. The outcomes were grouped into three subcategories: *mental health*, focusing on psychological states such as distress and depression; *affective well-being*, capturing workplace emotions, such as happiness and frustration; and *life well-being*, reflecting overall life satisfaction and well-being across both personal and professional domains.

Mental health. Seventeen studies conducted 21 tests on mental health, with 66.7% focusing on PCB. Most results showed negative associations (64.3%), linking PCB to increased depression, negative emotions, and mental health issues as seen in studies with Dutch and Belgian employees across various industries (Studies 39, 54). Non-significant results (35.7%) were reported in contexts like the Australian health sector, possibly due to the greater salience of intrinsic job motivation (Study 49). No positive associations were found.

Seven tests examined the association between PCF and mental health, with 85.7% reporting positive relationships and 14.3% reporting non-significant results. For example, PCF was associated with reduced psychological distress among Australian health employees (Study 48) and fewer mental health issues among Polish permanent employees (Study 59), though a non-significant finding among Australian nurses suggests that the high job demands inherent to their role may offset the benefits of PCF (Study 47).

Affective well-being. Across seven studies, eight association tests were conducted, with 75% focusing on PCB. Negative associations were most common (83.3%), such as decreased happiness among South Asian doctors and nurses (Study 43) and heightened negative emotions among operational workers in Malta (Study 13). A non-significant result was reported in Dutch employees with high positive affect, suggesting they may be better able to manage stress by focusing on the positive aspects of their work (Study 10).

Two tests examined PCF and affective well-being, with 50% showing positive associations, such as increased happiness among remote employees in India due to fulfilled expectations (Study 34). One non-significant result in a longitudinal study with 659 employees from a pharmaceutical company and a nationally representative sample of UK workers was attributed to contextual factors and sample characteristics, such as organisational culture and individual differences, which had a limited impact on PCF and affective well-being (Study 17).

Life well-being. No studies examined PCB and life well-being, while five studies examined PCF, all of which reported positive associations (100%). Examples include increased life satisfaction among Indian employees whose obligations were met during the pandemic and during the transition to the 'new normal' (Studies 8, 34), and bridge employees feeling more valued and satisfied due to PCF (Study 36), highlighting the positive relationship between PCF and life well-being.

Physical well-being

Five studies examined physical well-being outcomes. All associations were related to PCB and were organised into a single primary category: physical well-being, which encompasses employee health and health complaints.

Five studies examined associations between PCB and physical health, all reporting negative associations (100%). Examples include German employees across multiple industries experiencing health concerns due to long-term job insecurity (Study 45) and European public- and private-sector employees reporting increased health complaints as a result of PCB (Studies 27, 53, 54). No studies examined the relationship between PCF and physical health.

Influencing factors

Occupational well-being

The relationship between PCB and occupational well-being is influenced by various moderating and mediating factors. Moderators such as organisational change and personality traits significantly shape this association. For instance, job satisfaction was lowest among employees in departments less affected by organisational change when PCB occurred (Study 31). Similarly, employees low in openness to experience reported greater dissatisfaction when exposed to PCB (Study 41). Mediators, including PC violation, job stress, and acquiescent silence, play a critical role in explaining how PCB impacts occupational attitudes. For example, PCB was found to intensify feelings of betrayal, significantly reducing job satisfaction (Study 46), while job stress mediated the link between PCB and workplace engagement (Studies 32, 33).

In contrast, research into the mediating effects of PCF on occupational well-being remains limited. One study tested PC violation and trust as potential mediators between the PCF and occupational attitudes but found neither to be significant (Study 46). These findings suggest that either the appropriate mediators have not been studied or PCF exerts its positive effects on occupational well-being directly rather than through indirect mechanisms; both possibilities are plausible and not mutually exclusive.

Psychological well-being

PCB has a notable impact on psychological well-being, moderated by factors such as equity sensitivity, self-control, and overcommitment. Employees with high sensitivity to inequity and low self-control experienced greater mental health issues when exposed to PCB (Study 38), while overcommitment heightened vulnerability to PCB's adverse effects (Study 44). Mediators like effort-reward imbalance and job stress further explain the pathways through which PCB harms psychological well-being. For instance, PCB intensifies perceptions of imbalance between effort and reward, leading to increased negative emotions (Study 27). These findings highlight the psychological cost of unmet obligations in the workplace.

Physical well-being

PCB is consistently associated with negative physical well-being outcomes, with mediating factors playing a significant role in this relationship. Mediators such as mental health and effort-reward imbalance were found to link PCB with physical health issues. For instance, employees experiencing PCB reported poor physical health due to heightened psychological distress and perceived effort-reward imbalance (Studies 27, 45). These findings suggest that PCB indirectly undermines physical health by exacerbating workplace inequities and psychological strain.

The relationship between PCF and physical well-being remains largely unexplored, with no studies examining potential mediators. While PCF is generally associated with positive well-being outcomes, its role in physical health remains uninvestigated.

Table 3. Comparative effect

Study no.	Beta value		Correlation coefficient between PCB and PCF	Shared variance between PCB and PCF
	Effects of PCB on well-being	Effects of PCF on well-being		
17	−0.47 (Job satisfaction)	0.21 (Job satisfaction)	Data are not available	Data are not available
23	−0.21 (Depression)	ns (Depression)	−0.53	28.10%
	ns (Job satisfaction)	ns (Job satisfaction)		
46	−0.41 (Job satisfaction)	0.17 (Job satisfaction)	−0.47	22.09%
47	−0.25 (Job satisfaction)	0.26 (Job satisfaction)	−0.21	4.41%
48	−0.19 (Job satisfaction)	0.34 (Job satisfaction)	−0.34	11.56%
59	ns (mental health complaints)	−0.15 (mental health complaints)	−0.29	8.41%

Notes: ns = non-significant.

Comparative effects

Only six quantitative studies examined PCB and PCF simultaneously in relation to well-being outcomes. To understand how PCB and PCF predict well-being outcomes, Table 3 summarises key results from these six studies, including standardised beta coefficients, correlation coefficients between PCB and PCF, and their shared variances. Of the six studies that examined PCB and PCF concurrently, two reported that PCB exerted a stronger negative effect on well-being than the positive effect of PCF (Conway et al., 2011; Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2016). In contrast, two studies reported the opposite pattern, with PCF demonstrating a stronger association with well-being outcomes than PCB (Rodwell & Gulyas, 2013; Żołnierczyk-Zred & Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2021). One study found no substantive difference between the effects of PCB and PCF (Rodwell, Ellershaw & Flower, 2015), while another produced inconclusive results, as neither PCB nor PCF predicted well-being outcomes in a manner consistent with prior research (Flower, Demir, McWilliams & Johnson, 2015). Taken together, these mixed findings suggest that variations in study design, measurement approaches, and outcome operationalisation may partly account for the inconsistent results observed across studies. With respect to the association between PCB and PCF, correlation coefficients ranged from −0.21 to 0.53, and the corresponding shared variance ranged from 4.41% to 28.10%. This indicates that, although related, PCB and PCF capture distinct constructs with substantial non-overlapping variance.

Discussion

Key findings

The first key empirical finding of this review is the predominant focus on PCB, with the majority (61.2%) revealing a negative relationship between PCB and employee well-being. A larger number of studies focused on PCB than PCF in the sample ($n = 42$ and $n = 10$, respectively). People may be naturally more sensitive to negative events (breaches) than to positive events (fulfilment) (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Negative events, such as breaches, have stronger effects on well-being outcomes than positive events of fulfilment (Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2016), hence, the researchers largely focused on PCB and well-being outcomes and understand how to mitigate PCB's negative effect. Synthesising the reviewed studies suggests that PCB related to work content, lack of reciprocity from employers,

withdrawal of organisational support, organisational restructuring, and poor working conditions significantly contribute to adverse well-being outcomes (e.g., Arunachalam, 2021; Collins & Beauregard, 2020). Notably, the emphasis has been on the mental health effects of PCB, reflecting the prevalence and economic burden of mental health issues amongst workers (LaMontagne *et al.*, 2014). The PC, as both a cognitive and emotional construct, has an immediate and substantial impact on mental health, with breaches primarily triggering a strong cognitive reaction (Reimann & Guzy, 2017; Rousseau, 2016). Consequently, research on PCB has prioritised mental health outcomes, with comparatively limited attention to their impact on physical health (Reimann & Guzy, 2017). This review highlights that the relationship between PCB and well-being outcomes is influenced by various moderating and mediating factors. These include individual traits and workplace-related dynamics that either exacerbate or buffer the effects of PCB on well-being (e.g., Achnak & Vantilborgh, 2021; Mensah *et al.*, 2024). Further, the review demonstrates that the individual factors and work-related factors significantly mediate the relationship between PCB and well-being (e.g., Achnak, Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018; Cantisano, Domínguez & García, 2007; Qaiser & Abid, 2022). In sum, PCB has a negative relationship with well-being, particularly on mental health, but a complex interplay of individual and organisational factors influences its effects.

The second key finding is the positive relationship between PCF and employee well-being, with nearly all studies reporting positive associations. Employees who perceive their employer as meeting obligations consistently experience lower stress, higher job satisfaction, and improved emotional well-being (e.g., Brown & Roloff, 2015; Karani & Swapnil Abhishek, 2022). However, no studies examined PCF in relation to physical well-being. Given the established link between mental and physical health (Behan, Doyle, Masterson, Shiers & Clarke, 2015), it is plausible that PCF indirectly supports physical health by alleviating mental health concerns. The absence of mental health challenges facilitated by PCF may lessen the need to investigate physical health outcomes in this context. This observation underscores the potential holistic benefits of PCF on employee well-being, even though direct empirical evidence for physical health impacts remains limited. However, future research should focus on obtaining a deeper understanding of PCF's influence on employees' physical health outcomes and the mechanisms that drive these effects. Additionally, findings reveal no statistically significant moderators or mediators on the PCF-employee well-being relationship, highlighting a potentially more direct link between PCF and positive well-being outcomes. Further research is needed to clarify how PCF supports improved well-being outcomes, potentially uncovering indirect effects that amplify its benefits. While our first two key findings might appear obvious, they remain meaningful. The rigour of the current study's methodology and analysis provides compelling evidence of its robustness. By establishing these key findings, our work enables researchers to move beyond simply determining whether PCB negatively and PCF positively impact well-being, to explore instead the deeper, more nuanced variables that influence the PC-well-being relationship.

A third key finding is the lack of consensus on whether PCB or PCF has a stronger impact on employee well-being. The most methodologically rigorous study, using a longitudinal design (Conway *et al.*, 2011), found that PCB had a greater effect on well-being than PCF. Further, the only cross-sectional study to include a mediator (Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2016) also supports this assertion, suggesting that mediators (such as PC violation) might influence PCB's impact on well-being. In contrast, cross-sectional studies that did not include mediators or moderators (e.g., Flower *et al.*, 2015; Rodwell *et al.*, 2015; Rodwell & Gulyas, 2013; Żołnierczyk-Zred & Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2021) might not have fully captured the relationship between PCB/PCF and well-being. These studies might also have overestimated PCF's effect by relying on data collected at a single time point and failing to account for other influencing factors.

Another potential explanation for these discrepant findings regarding whether PCB or PCF exerts a greater influence on well-being is sample characteristics. The cross-sectional study with a mediator that reported PCB to have a stronger effect on well-being than PCF (Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2016), the inconclusive study (Flower *et al.*, 2015), and the studies finding PCF to have an equivalent (e.g., Rodwell *et al.*, 2015) or stronger effect (e.g., Rodwell & Gulyas, 2013) than PCB all enlisted health

workers. These roles are typically high-demand and high-stress, involving high levels of emotional labour (Rodwell et al., 2015). Health workers may be more resilient to PCB due to their strong intrinsic motivation. However, they may also be more sensitive to PCB if it violates core expectations about their work (such as PC violation, as per study 46). This dual effect might partially explain the varying results across studies, depending on how health workers perceive and respond to PCB and PCF. From a methodological perspective, these findings indicate that the relative impact of PCB and PCF on well-being is not universally consistent and may be influenced by several factors. Differences in study design, particularly the inclusion of mediators and moderators, appear to shape the observed effects. Additionally, sample characteristics, such as occupational demands and intrinsic motivation, may further contribute to variations in results. These findings highlight the need for further research to clarify the conditions under which PCB exerts a stronger influence on employee well-being, when PCF can neutralise or outweigh PCB, and how individual (e.g., demographics, personality, emotions) and contextual factors (e.g., job demands, resources, job characteristics) shape these dynamics.

Theoretical contributions

This review contributes to theory in three ways. First, the review makes an important contribution by theorising PCB and PCF as related but distinct constructs. Drawing on six studies that simultaneously examined PCB and PCF (Studies 17, 23, 46, 47, 48, and 59), all of which treated PCB and PCF as separate variables, with five using distinct measures to capture their respective dimensions. This methodological separation enables the evaluation of the differential effect of each construct on relevant well-being outcomes (e.g., Flower et al., 2015; Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2016; Rodwell et al., 2015; Rodwell & Gulyas, 2013; Żołnierczyk-Zred & Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2021). The review demonstrates that these constructs have only moderate negative correlations (−0.21 to −0.53) and limited shared variance (4.41–28.10%) (Field, 2024). This pattern indicates that approximately 72–96% of the variance is not shared, supporting the conclusion that, while PCB and PCF are related, they capture substantively different aspects of the PC (Field, 2024; Haywood, Hasking & Boyes, 2022). However, it remains unclear how low fulfilment differs from breach, or how high fulfilment differs from over-fulfilment. Measures of breach should also avoid using descriptors like ‘fulfilment’; instead, terminology should be used that more concretely targets the extent to which expectations have been ‘unmet’, ‘neglected’, or ‘disregarded’. Developing clearer and more precise operational definitions for both constructs will be crucial to advancing our understanding of the complex dynamics between breach and fulfilment in organisational settings.

Second, the review advances theory by moving beyond assumed direct effects and instead explaining the underlying mechanisms through which PCB influences employee well-being (Bergh et al., 2016; Cheung & Hafdahl, 2016). Rather than treating PCB as exerting a direct and immediate impact on well-being, the review demonstrates that its effects are largely indirect, transmitted through multiple mediating processes. Specifically, the synthesis shows that individual and work-related factors mediate the relationships between PCB and well-being (e.g., Achnak et al., 2018; Cantisano et al., 2007; Qaiser & Abid, 2022). By systematically identifying, organising, and integrating these mediators, the review deepens theoretical understanding of why PCB affects well-being (Post, Sarala, Gatrell & Prescott, 2020). In addition, the review enhances theoretical leverage by identifying boundary conditions/moderators that shape the strength and direction of the PCB–well-being relationship. Understanding when relationships form, intensify, weaken, or fail to emerge is important for advancing theory (Boyd, Takacs Haynes, Hitt, Bergh & Ketchen, 2012; Cortina, 2003). The review demonstrates that individual and work-related factors moderate the impact of PCB on employee well-being (e.g., Achnak & Vantilborgh, 2021; Bal & Smit, 2012; Mensah et al., 2024). This contingency-oriented perspective advances the theory by specifying the conditions under which PCB is more or less harmful to well-being. CORT explains that threatened or lost resources undermine well-being (Hobfoll & Shirom, 1993) and SET emphasises similar reciprocity in exchange relationships (Blau, 1964; Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012), but neither theory fully specifies the mechanisms

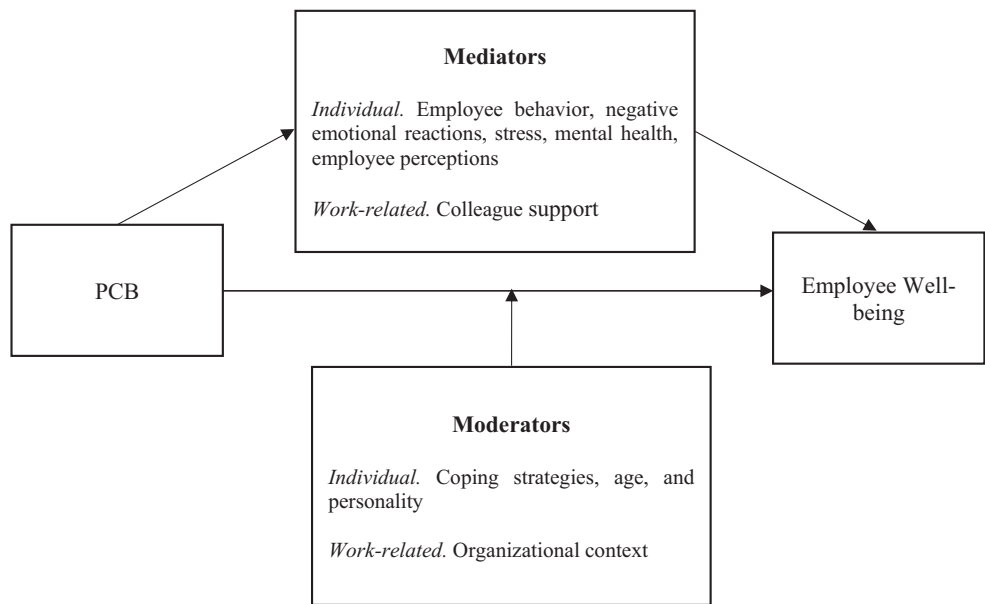


Figure 2. Moderators and mediators in the relationship between PCB and well-being.
Notes: Employee behaviour includes acquiescent silence, venting, and behavioural disengagement.

or boundary conditions involved. Extending CORT and SET, the findings suggest that resource gain (PCF) and resource loss (PCB) may be more or less salient under different conditions, though we have only evidence for moderators and mediators of the PCB-well-being relationship. In terms of SET, reciprocity is not similar, and an assessment of reciprocity may be impacted by individual and contextual factors.

Figure 2 presents a proposed theoretical model that explains the relationship between PCB and employee well-being by specifying the mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions through which this relationship operates. The model theorises that the effect of PCB on employee well-being is indirect, operating through multiple mediating mechanisms. At the individual level, PCB is proposed to elicit negative emotional reactions, heightened stress, mental health strain, and behavioural responses such as acquiescent silence, venting, and behavioural disengagement. These responses represent employees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural efforts to interpret and cope with perceived breach of the PC. At the work-related level, colleague support is theorised as a mediating mechanism that shapes how PCB experiences translate into well-being outcomes. Beyond these mediating pathways, the model explicitly incorporates moderating conditions that define when and for whom PCB is most consequential. Individual-related factors, including coping strategies, age, and personality, are theorised to shape employees' perception of PCB and their capacity to regulate emotional and behavioural responses. Similarly, work-related contextual factors, captured by the organisational context, are theorised to condition that either amplify or buffer the impact of PCB on well-being. Taken together, the model constitutes a moderated mediation framework in which PCB affects employee well-being. By integrating mediators and moderators within a single explanatory structure, the model advances theory by clarifying how, why, and under what conditions PCB undermines employee well-being (Post *et al.*, 2020).

Third, this review advances theory by demonstrating that the relative effect of PC evaluations (PCB, PCF) on employee well-being is contingent. CORT suggests that 'resource loss is disproportionately more salient than is resource gain' (Hobfoll, 1998, p. 62). Thus, loss of a given resource will have a greater impact on well-being than will the gain of the same resource. Accordingly, PCB

can be conceptualised as a form of resource loss, whereas PCF represents resource gain. In addition, this review refines existing perspectives on the asymmetry effect by demonstrating that the dominance of negative events (PCB) over positive events (PCF) in shaping employee well-being is impacted by multiple factors. While more rigorous designs, particularly longitudinal studies and cross-sectional studies incorporating mediators, consistently demonstrate that PCB has a stronger impact on employee well-being than PCF (Conway et al., 2011; Rodwell & Ellershaw, 2016), this asymmetry is less evident in cross-sectional studies that omit mediating mechanisms or rely on single time-point data (e.g., Flower et al., 2015; Rodwell et al., 2015; Rodwell & Gulyas, 2013; Żołnierczyk-Zred & Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2021). Additionally, contextual and individual factors, particularly occupational demands, emotional labour, and intrinsic motivation, shape how employees interpret and respond to PCB and PCF (Rodwell et al., 2015; Rodwell & Gulyas, 2013). Therefore, this review extends CORT by suggesting that although resource losses (PCB) generally have a stronger influence on employee well-being than resource gains (PCF), this dominance is not universal and is influenced by multiple factors. Similarly, this review refines the asymmetry effect theory by showing that the dominance of negative events is contingent on methodological, contextual, and individual factors.

Practical implications

This review offers valuable practical insights for organisations aiming to enhance employee well-being. The findings emphasise that avoiding PCB is a critical factor in ensuring employee well-being. Employees' personalities and coping strategies were identified as significant moderators in mitigating the negative effects of PCB (e.g., Achnak & Vantilborgh, 2021; Mensah et al., 2024; Opoku Mensah & Koomson, 2021). To address this, organisations could implement targeted interventions, such as training programs focusing on personality development and coping mechanisms, to reduce the adverse well-being outcomes associated with PCB. Furthermore, the importance of clear communication was consistently highlighted in the reviewed papers (e.g., Cassar & Buttigieg, 2015; Piccoli & De Witte, 2015). Organisations should actively communicate reasons for unfulfilled obligations to minimise employees' perceptions of breach and maintain trust. By actively avoiding breaches, organisations lay the foundation for nurturing fulfilment, ensuring a more positive relationship between employers and employees. Combining breach prevention with strategic efforts to fulfil expectations should safeguard employee well-being.

The review highlighted that PCB triggers negative emotions, ultimately negatively affecting employee well-being (Achnak et al., 2018; Achnak & Vantilborgh, 2021). These negative emotions contribute to the development of health issues (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2015), costing organisations millions of dollars. This review highlighted that this issue can be mitigated by enhancing workplace fairness and justice (Achnak & Vantilborgh, 2021; Cassar & Buttigieg, 2015). Sometimes, PCB is unavoidable due to the changes in the business environment, such as financial conditions (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Therefore, organisations need to provide explanations for these changes and implement organisational strategies, such as compensation, to help reduce negative emotions resulting from PCB (Achnak & Vantilborgh, 2021). Furthermore, organisations need to provide employees with training opportunities to adapt to organisational changes, such as restructuring, and to reduce negative or broken perceptions (Arunachalam, 2021). Managers can use proactive measures, such as regular employee surveys, to identify employees' perceptions of breaches (De Jong, Rigotti & Mulder, 2017). Even better, regular evaluation of employees' experiences can help identify the gap between expectations and delivery (Costa & Neves, 2017), thereby preventing the development of a perception of PCB among employees.

For the academic community, this review has several important implications. The review highlights persistent conceptual ambiguities in the PC measures, particularly regarding how low fulfilment differs from breach and how high fulfilment differs from over-fulfilment. These ambiguities underscore the need for scholars to develop clearer and more precise measures and operational

Table 4. Future research directions

Research Stream	Focus of Inquiry	Illustrative Future Research Questions
Conceptualisation and measurement	Distinguishing PCB and PCF as independent constructs	• How can PCB and PCF be operationalised as empirically independent constructs without conceptual or measurement overlap?
Joint modelling of PCB and PCF	Simultaneous effects on well-being	• How do PCB and PCF jointly influence employee well-being when examined within the same empirical model?
Relative strength of effects	Comparative impact on well-being outcomes	• Under what conditions does PCB exert a stronger negative effect on well-being than the positive effect of PCF? • When can PCF neutralise or outweigh the negative effects of PCB?
Boundary conditions	Individual and work-related contingencies	• What individual characteristics and work-related factors shape the strength and/or direction of the PCB-well-being relationship and the PCF-well-being relationship?
Psychological mechanisms	Emotional and cognitive processes	• How do emotional reactions mediate the effects of PCB/PCF on employee well-being?
Cross-cultural context	Cultural and labour-market influences	• How do cultural values and labour-market conditions shape psychological contract evaluations?

definitions of PCB and fulfilment to enhance conceptual clarity. The review identifies methodological limitations that constrain causal inference, most particularly the prevalence of cross-sectional research designs, and thus requires the adoption of more robust methodologies (Achnak *et al.*, 2018; Karani, Mall, Deshpande & Jayswal, 2023). The review outlines several underexplored research contexts, as well as key moderating factors and mediating mechanisms, that offer avenues for future research and can deepen theoretical understanding of the conditions under which PC evaluations influence employee well-being (Żołnierczyk-Zred & Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2021).

Future research directions

The review highlights several key directions for future research on PCs and employee well-being. Table 4 summarises the proposed research questions. First, more precise conceptualisation and measurement are needed to clearly distinguish PCB and PCF as independent constructs, thereby preventing their conflation in future studies. Scenario-based and experimental vignette methods that manipulate breach and fulfilment separately can support stronger causal inference and clarify how employees respond to different contract conditions (e.g., De Jong *et al.*, 2017). In addition, existing research has largely examined PCB and PCF in isolation (e.g., Abbas & Al Hasnawi, 2020; Brown & Roloff, 2015). As a result, there is limited empirical evidence on how breach and fulfilment jointly shape well-being, and findings remain inconsistent regarding whether PCB or PCF exerts a more substantial effect. Future studies should therefore model PCB and PCF simultaneously using multi-wave or experimental designs, which allow for clearer causal inference and pathway separation (Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010; Conway *et al.*, 2011) to compare their joint and relative impacts and to identify conditions under which one may exert a stronger influence than the other.

Further research is also needed to address gaps related to moderators, mediators, and research design. Although evidence consistently supports a positive association between PCF and well-being, no studies have examined moderators of this relationship, whereas PCB research has focused primarily on individual-level moderators, with limited attention to work-related or contextual factors

(Jiang, Probst & Benson, 2017; Mensah et al., 2024). Future research should therefore examine moderating dynamics by incorporating individual and work-related factors into models of PCB and PCF. Although the evaluation of a PC involves an employee's cognitive assessment of the reciprocal employer–employee relationship (Guerrero & Herrbach, 2008) and leads to emotional responses (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Rousseau, 2003), the emotional reactions through which PCB and PCF impact well-being remain underexplored. To bridge this gap, further research is needed to understand the emotional mechanisms by which PCB impairs well-being and PCF enhances it. Finally, the dominance of cross-sectional designs limits causal inference on the dynamic nature of PCs over time, highlighting the need for longitudinal research. Greater use of cross-country studies is also required to capture cultural and economic differences in PC experiences, particularly given evidence that labour market conditions shape how PCB and PCF relate to well-being across contexts.

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Statements and Declarations. We hereby declare that this work is the author's own. An AI tool was used solely to improve the English language, including grammar, clarity, and readability. The ideas, analysis, and conclusions presented in this work are entirely the author's own.

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