

# The anticipatory psychological contract of management graduates: Validating a psychological contract expectations questionnaire

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**Background:** It was proposed that if we assess an individual's mental schema, it may facilitate a better understanding of the psychological contract formation process. This will add a theoretical contribution to the anticipatory psychological contract research, as it will enhance our understanding of the specific terms of the psychological contract, which are only present during the organisation entry phase.

**Aim:** We aimed at developing and validating an instrument to measure the psychological contract expectation of university graduate labour market entrees. This information could enhance our knowledge of both the anticipatory psychological contract and psychological contract development.

**Setting:** The research was conducted on third-year students from two different campuses of a South African university. The sample consisted of a total of 316 participants.

**Methods:** We used an exploratory quantitative research approach to measure prospective employees' anticipatory psychological contract. The newly developed Psychological Contract Expectations Questionnaire (PCEQ) was administered and analysed.

**Results:** Results indicated that some of the instruments within the PCEQ are reliable and valid to measure the anticipatory psychological contract of graduates. The descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient results clearly enhanced our understanding of how the anticipatory psychological contract works.

**Conclusion:** Our research contributes to anticipatory psychological contract research by introducing the PCEQ questionnaire to effectively measure the anticipatory obligations, anticipatory expectations, entitlement and anticipatory state of the psychological contract of prospective employees' mental schema.

**Keywords:** entitlement; anticipatory psychological contract; graduates; expectations; obligations.

## Introduction

Upon organisational entry, an occupational newcomer holds an already established set of implicit expectations and obligations – a rudimentary psychological contract – based on expectations of unspecified rights and obligations that becomes more elaborate throughout their professional career as they gain experience (De Vos, Buyens & Schalk 2005; Rousseau 2001; Shore & Tetrick 1994). These beliefs by the workplace newcomer are not necessarily based on the actual employment relationship and the resulting legal contract, but rather from social, normative and implicit contract sources. A great deal of attention has been given to how the psychological contract develops once an individual is employed (for instance Adams, Quagraine & Klobodu 2014; O'Leary-Kelly et al. 2014; Tomprou & Nikolaou 2011), but relatively little attention has been given to the anticipatory psychological contract that precedes employment, with only a few publications on this topic (for instance De Vos, Stobbeir & Meganck 2009; Gresse & Linde 2020; Gresse, Linde & Schalk 2013; Linde & Gresse 2014). It should however be noted that there has been an increased call for research involving the anticipatory psychological contract in recent years (Bruins 2019; Janani 2019; Ruchika & Prasad 2019). Based on this, we aimed at developing and validating an instrument to measure the psychological contract expectations of graduate labour market entrees, which could enhance our knowledge of the anticipatory psychological

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contract and psychological contract development. To understand this proposed measure, a literature review in the anticipatory psychological contract is required.

## Anticipation and development of the psychological contract

The general consensus is that the beliefs regarding the mutual obligations of the psychological contract are formed in the recruitment and socialisation phase when an employee applies for a job (Rousseau 2001), and this phase is still regarded as a critical period for the employment relationship, since the new employee learns how to adapt to the world of work and the boundaries of the exchange relationship between employee and employer get tested and established (Deboode, Mossholder & Walker 2017; De Vos & Freese 2011; Thomas & Anderson 1998; Woodrow & Guest 2017). A crucial part of the psychological contract develops during this socialisation process; this is due to prospective employees actively engaging in information-seeking behaviour and research in response to perceived employer incentives and employee contributions (De Vos, Buyens & Schalk 2003; De Vos & Freese 2011; Thomas & Anderson 1998). The knowledge that is obtained during the socialisation period lays the foundation of psychological contract development (Woodrow & Guest 2017). Payne et al. (2008) believe that some parts of the psychological contract develop prior to organisational entry – due to the individual's pre-entry expectations, beliefs and entitlement – in the form of an anticipatory psychological contract, which acts as a precursor of new employees' involvement in socialisation activities.

Coyle-Shapiro (2006) believes that an individual's anticipatory psychological contract gets developed during adolescence and is influenced by their family, friends, media, peers, school, contact with working individual and personal experiences. Delobbe, Cooper-Thomas and De Hoe (2016) and Payne et al. (2008) studied the role of employees' anticipatory psychological contract in the socialisation process and found that the perception of obligations of prospective employees towards their future employer, prior to organisational entry, did affect their perception and involvement in some of the socialisation activities, specifically in terms of training and interactions with supervisors and peers. Other authors (including De Vos et al. 2009; Eilam-Shamir & Yaakobi 2014; Gresse et al. 2013; Linde & Gresse 2014; Ruchika & Prasad 2019) have also accepted that the anticipatory psychological contract plays an important role in the development of the exchange relationship between employer and employee and can be especially important in recruitment and talent retention (Zupan, Mihelič & Aleksić 2018). Sherman and Morley (2015) argue that to enhance our understanding of how the psychological contract is created, one should look through the theoretical lens of schema theory, which these authors consider an underdeveloped area within psychological contract research.

## Mental schemas and the anticipatory psychological contract

The anticipatory psychological contract can be defined as pre-employment beliefs and perceptions that individuals have (De Hauw & De Vos 2010), and includes the expectations and entitlement they hold regarding future employment (Gresse et al. 2013), and promises they are willing to make to their future employers (De Vos et al. 2009). Employees entering the labour market already have certain expectations about the job they will do, the organisation they will work for and the employment relationship, which together function as the foundation of the psychological contract formation process (Thomas & Anderson 1998). The schema theory is nothing new to psychological contract research as it has been implied in Rousseau's (1990) reconceptualisation of the psychological contract, from the employee's perspective. Schema theory provides a theoretical lens to evaluate how the psychological contract works, which emphasises how information is used when parties come to an agreement (Sherman & Morley 2015). Research suggests that individuals already have an established mental schema of what they expect from their future employer, even if they have no prior employment history (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall 2008; De Vos et al. 2009; Gresse et al. 2013; Gresse & Linde 2020; Linde & Gresse 2014), although it is suggested that occupational newcomers' psychological contract is constructed based on a naïve and imperfect schema (Anderson & Thomas 1996; Ruchika & Prasad 2019).

De Vos et al. (2009) have suggested that this mental schema that individuals have will be used to determine the degree that their expectations match the actual exchange relationship, after commencing employment. Morrison and Robinson (2004), as cited by Alcover et al. (2017), explain that schemas develop early in an individual's life when they learn generalised values about mutuality, *quid pro quo* rules, and rewards for effort exerted, and these value sets are influenced by their family, schools, peers, stereotypes, employment perceptions and interaction with working people. This indicates that the key to deciphering the psychological contract of a person may lie in analysing their mental schema, before organisational entry.

Gresse and Linde (2020) reported on qualitative research conducted, which explored the mental schemas of graduates who have not yet entered formal employment and found that their mental schema already included short-term and long-term career projections and beliefs. These graduates were also result-oriented (in their minds the employment relationship was primarily concerned with what they get out of the deal) and desired status and power. Gresse and Linde (2020) also established that the mental schema of graduates included a predisposition towards turnover intent (TI) due to the perception that their employer will not fulfil some of their obligations – a feeling normally associated with psychological contract breach.

## Obligations towards and pre-employment violation of the anticipatory psychological contract

A general overview of obligations and the experience of breach in the psychological contract are required to provide context for obligations and pre-employment violation (PEV) in the anticipatory psychological contract. The psychological contract contains beliefs about the employer's obligations to the employee and the employee's obligations to the employer (Bordia et al. 2017; Chen, Tsui & Zhong 2008; Rousseau 1995), which is also referred to as the contents of the psychological contract. Many researchers (Bal, Chiaburu & Jansen 2010; Kasekende et al. 2016) have indicated that the perceptions of employers and employees about the fulfilment of their unwritten expectations and obligations are important, since it could result in a perception of psychological contract breach. A breach of the psychological contract can occur when any of the psychological contract obligations were perceived as not delivered (Bordia et al. 2017). The undesirable consequences of employees' behaviour, if their employer failed their obligations, are well documented in psychological contract literature (Conway & Briner 2009; Montes & Zweig 2009; Robinson & Morrison 2000). When an individual experiences a breach in the psychological contract and the breach is perceived as significant, it will constitute a violation (Morrison & Robinson 1997; Paul, Niehoff & Turnley 2000). Empirical research has suggested a positive relationship between breach of employer obligations and breach of employee obligations (Bordia et al. 2017; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler 2002; Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman 2004). Bordia et al. (2017) explains this relationship as existing due to the norm of reciprocity, which forms the ideological basis of social exchange theory, where employees minimalised their contribution to the company because they felt their employer did not fulfil its obligations. Gresse (2018) have found that prospective employees already have a form of PEV in their anticipatory psychological contract, based purely on subjective beliefs of non-fulfilment of employer obligations.

According to the principles of psychological contract theory, the expectations that employees have automatically become the obligation of the employer, and vice versa (Kasekende et al. 2016). Kasekende (2017) defines obligations as a promise of future action, which the parties have agreed upon, even though the terms of the promise, the execution thereof and degree of mutuality open the contract to disagreements. Some of these obligations and expectations in the psychological contract develop prior to organisational entry (De Vos et al. 2009; Gresse et al. 2013; Rousseau 2012), which indicates that an individual's perception of obligations, including their obligation towards their employer and their employer's obligation towards them, can be created without an existing agreement between the parties. This can be perceived as problematic, considering that expectations and obligations existing in the anticipatory psychological contract are based only on the perception that individuals hold, even if they have never met their employer (Gresse, 2018).

Gresse (2018) confirms some anticipatory expectations (pre-employment expectations) that occupational labour market entrees hold, which include autonomy in their work, personal space to conduct their work in, a positive work-life balance, some workplace guidance to assist them in adapting in the workplace, meaningful work, status in the workplace and attractive remuneration and benefits. Gresse and Linde (2019) also identify some of the expectations that employers have of inexperienced occupational newcomers, in that they should be willing to learn, be adaptable, take instruction from their superiors, take responsibility for their actions, be committed and loyal to the company, have realistic expectations and have the necessary hard and soft skills associated with employability. Graduates' perceptions of their fulfilment of their obligation towards their future employer become the graduates' anticipatory obligations. In this study, the anticipatory state of the psychological contract (ASPC) was used to refer to psychological contract fulfilment beliefs that an employee holds regarding future employment.

To fully understand the anticipatory psychological contract of an individual, one needs to take the entitlement perception of that individual into account, which has been established as an influencing agent of a person's expectations (Gresse et al. 2013; Linde & Gresse 2014).

## Role of entitlement in the anticipatory psychological contract

The word 'entitlement' is mentioned in earlier psychological contract studies (Paul et al. 2000; Rousseau 1998), but there is no clear distinction between entitlement and expectations. Gresse et al. (2013) drew a distinction between entitlement and expectations in psychological contract research and regarded entitlement as 'psychological entitlement'. Psychological entitlement is defined as a stable and pervasive sense of deservingness, where a person expects high levels of reward and preferential treatment in the absence of actual ability and performance levels (Campbell et al. 2004; Harvey & Harris 2010). Entitlement in the workplace is a cause for concern for managers (Harvey & Harris 2010) due to their subordinates' inflated self-perceptions and feelings of deservingness of praise and recognition, regardless of actual performance (Campbell et al. 2004; Naumann, Minsky & Sturman 2002). Entitled employees tend to overestimate their performance and still expect certain performance rewards (Campbell et al. 2004; Harvey & Martinko 2009) and believe they should receive better treatment than their co-workers do (Campbell et al. 2004; Exline et al. 2004). Unrealistic entitlement beliefs in employees have been associated with unethical workplace behaviour, perceived inequity, high pay expectations, lower job satisfaction, high turnover intention, corruption and conflict with supervisors (Harvey & Harris 2010; Harvey & Martinko 2009; Kets de Vries 2006; Levine 2005). Research regarding entitlement and psychological contract breach has found that employees with a strong sense of entitlement were more likely to experience depressive mood states after the perception of



psychological contract violation due to their belief that the organisation owes them (Priesemuth & Taylor 2016).

Entitled individuals tend to arrive at their jobs with high levels of demands and expectations (Crampton & Hodge 2009; De Hauw & De Vos 2010). Gresse et al. (2013) found that the anticipatory psychological contract of an individual includes entitlement beliefs of employees, which have a positive relationship with the expectation levels that an individual holds, especially regarding career aspirations and workplace benefits (Linde & Gresse 2014). Gresse et al. also found that final-year university students' sense of entitlement was influenced by factors relating to self-perception (perception regarding organisational contribution, experience levels and self-efficacy), academic factors (the obtainment of a qualification) and environmental factors (association with a social group, labour market tendencies and cost of living).

In understanding graduate entitlement, the role of 'academic entitlement' cannot be discarded. Academic entitlement is defined as a tendency of students to have predetermined attitudes, opinions and expectations that they deserve academic success in absence of justifiable academic scores and performance (Chowning & Campbell 2009; Finney & Finney 2010; Kopp et al. 2011; Lippmann, Bulanda & Wagenaar 2009; Peirone & Maticka-Tyndale 2017). Peirone and Maticka-Tyndale (2017) reported a positive relationship between academic and pre-employment entitlement, which indicates that academic entitlement also impacts the anticipatory psychological contract.

In interviews conducted with graduates, Gresse (2018) found that they had a predisposition toward TI in their anticipatory psychological contract, which was established as being based on entitlement. It was further reported that graduates felt entitled to being successful and that they are impatient about how long it will take for them to advance in their careers.

Sherman and Morley (2015) argue that assessing an individual's mental schema may facilitate a better understanding of the psychological contract formation process. These authors add that such research will add a theoretical contribution to psychological contract research, as it will enhance our understanding of specific terms of the psychological contract, which is only present during the organisational entry phase. At this stage, there seems to be no standardised measuring instrument to measure the anticipatory psychological contract from a schema perspective. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

- **Objective 1:** To develop and validate the Psychological Contract Expectations Questionnaire (PCEQ) on prospective employees by determine its validity and reliability.
- **Objective 2:** To report on the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of prospective employees by using the newly developed PCEQ.

## Method

### Procedure and participants

We used an exploratory quantitative research approach to measure prospective employees' anticipatory psychological contract. The theoretical population of this research was university graduates who have entered the labour market and are searching for employment in their field of study but have not yet acquired any. Due to the large number of uncountable variables that impact expectations and experiences of participants from different study disciplines, it was decided to focus on a single discipline in our research. The study population was derived from the theoretical population, being graduates with a degree related to management sciences who have not yet entered formal employment but were in the final phase of entering the labour market. Due to the difficulty of getting access to a large number of such participants, it was decided that the sample would consist of students in the final phase of their degree who will enter the labour market within the next couple of months. Therefore, the sample was third-year students of management sciences who had no intention to further their studies in the following year. Ethical clearance and university management approval was firstly obtained. To get a greater representation of the South African student profile, the research was conducted on the Mafikeng and Potchefstroom campuses. A list of third-year subjects was obtained and the largest classes for management sciences were selected as potential options, although only some lecturers agreed to provide us access to the class. The students were then informed and invited to participate in the study to measure their anticipatory psychological contract by filling out an anonymous paper-and-pencil questionnaire at the end of their class; students who did not fit the criteria or did not want to partake in the data gathering session were excused, and thus participation in the research was completely voluntary. The actual sample consisted of a total of 316 ( $n = 316$ ) participants. The sample included both male and female participants, and represented African (49.7%), white (43.4%), mixed race (3.8%), Indian (1.6%) and Chinese (0.3%) participants. For the purpose of determining entitlement, it was also decided to report on participants' main source of tertiary education funding. Just over 2% (2.2%) of the participants paid for their qualification themselves; the sources of tertiary education funding of the rest of the participants included: parents or other family (57.6%), government funding (26.9%), private institution funding (4.4%), study loan (5.7%) and other sources (1.9%, including friends or acquaintances).

### Instrument

The PCEQ was developed to explore the anticipatory psychological contract of the participants. The questionnaire was based on the structure of the Psycones questionnaire (Psycones 2006), which is still widely used in psychological contract research (e.g. Kasekende 2017; Snyman, Ferreira, & Deas 2015; Surujlal & Dhurup 2017), and its contents are based on research findings from Gresse et al. (2013), Gresse

(2018), and Linde and Gresse (2014). The items that were developed under the constructs of the psychological contract framework were different from those of the Psycones questionnaire, due to the psychological contract not being part of an employment contract. The PCEQ consists of six sections or instruments, namely biographical information, anticipatory employee expectations (AEX), anticipatory employee obligations (AEO), ASPC, TI, anticipatory PEV and entitlement.

## Ethical consideration

A letter and research proposal were sent to the Ethics Committee of the North-West University requesting the approval of the research study. This research was approved by the Human Resource Research Ethics Committee, Mafikeng campus, and the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee. Once consent had been received from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University to proceed with the research study, the author continued with the research with a valid ethics number (NWU-00310-15-A9).

## Results

### Validation of the psychological contract expectations questionnaire

The first objective was to develop and validate the PCEQ on prospective employees; this was achieved by statistically analysing each of the sections of the PCEQ by using IBM SPSS (version 25). Obtaining the validity and reliability was achieved by doing exploratory factor analysis and determining the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the five sections of the PCEQ (excluding biographical information).

### Anticipatory employee expectations

The AEX refer to the expectations that employees have regarding future employment. A total of 18 items were developed based on the exploratory research findings of Gresse et al. (2013) and Gresse (2018). The main themes of these items were autonomy expectations (3 items), reward and recognition expectations (5 items), meaningful work expectations (3 items), attractive remuneration expectations (4 items), personal space expectations (3 items) and work-life balance expectations (2 items).

The participants were asked to rate the AEX questions based on whether they think that their future employer will make the corresponding promises to them and to what extent they believe that their employer will fulfil their promise, on a six-point Likert scale (1 = 'My future employer will make no such promise'; 2 = 'Yes, my future employer will make such a promise, but this promise might not be kept at all'; 6 = 'Yes, my future employer will make such a promise and it might be fully kept'). An example of some of the AEX items are: 'will provide you with the freedom to decide how to do your job', 'will provide you with interesting work' and 'will recognise you as an expert in your field'.

Referring to both AEX and AEO, 'No' (1) and 'Yes' (2–6) refer to the measurement of the contents of the anticipatory psychological contract. The scale from 2 to 6 refers to future fulfilment beliefs of the anticipatory psychological contract, after the content of the psychological contract has been determined. Therefore, the items that refer to an exclusion of the contents ('No') were not included in the statistical analysis. The rest of the scale was then recoded into a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'Yes, my future employer will make such a promise, but this promise might not be kept at all' to 5 = 'Yes, my future employer will make such a promise and it might be fully kept'. An exploratory factor analysis confirmed that all the items could be grouped together to form a single component – AEX – with loadings above 0.45 and communality values ( $h^2$ ) higher than 0.45. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.92 ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ). DeVellis (2003) states that an ideal Cronbach's alpha coefficient is above 0.7 (which confirms reliability). The exploratory factor analysis for AEX can be seen in Table 1.

### Anticipatory employee obligations

The AEO refer to the promises that employees are willing to make to their future employer. A total of 21 items were developed based on the exploratory research findings of Gresse (2018). The main themes of these items were workplace learning (3 items), accountability (3 items), employment obligations (5 items), commitment (3 items), adaptability (3 items) and subordination (4 items).

Similar to the Likert scale with the AEX, participants were asked to rate the AEO questions based on whether they are willing to make such a promise to their future employer and to what extent they will fulfil this promise, on a six-point scale (1 = 'I will make no such a promise'; 2 = 'Yes, I will make this promise to my future employer, but my promise

**TABLE 1:** Factor loadings of anticipatory employee expectations.

Items	Communalities	Components		
		1	2	3
Expect appreciation	0.67	0.74	-	-
Expect own office	0.62	0.73	-	-
Expect interesting work	0.56	0.72	-	-
Expect personal space	0.57	0.69	-	-
Expect recognition as expert	0.55	0.69	-	-
Expect medical benefits	0.50	0.69	-	-
Expect annual bonus	0.56	0.68	-	-
Expect autonomy control	0.68	0.68	-	-0.45
Expect transport financing	0.66	0.67	0.43	-
Expect autonomy in job	0.65	0.66	-	-0.46
Expect own resources	0.50	0.65	-	-
Expect additional reward	0.47	0.65	-	-
Expect autonomy flexibility	0.57	0.64	-	-
Expect field-related tasks	0.56	0.62	-	-
Expect success-related tasks	0.63	0.61	-0.45	-
Expect time for personal issues	0.47	0.57	-	-
Expect accommodation assistance	0.70	0.54	0.61	-
Expect not taking work home	0.49	0.43	-	0.43
Eigenvalues	-	7.65	1.56	1.18
Variance (%)	-	42.52	8.67	6.57
Covariance (%)	-	42.52	51.19	57.76

might not be kept at all'; 6 = 'Yes, I will make such a promise and it will be fully kept'). Examples of some of the AEO items are: 'commit yourself to skills development opportunities', 'work extra hours without compensation' and 'do work outside your job description'. These AEO items were used in the statistical analysis.

An exploratory factor analysis suggested that the AEO items should be grouped into three different components. Based on this suggestion, the first component was labelled AEO general employment (Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89), and the second component was labelled AEO additional duties and hours (Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.80). The results of the exploratory factor analysis can be seen in Table 2.

Due to a low Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the last component ( $\alpha = 0.58$ ), it was decided to split it into two single-item components; therefore, the last two components for AEO were: AEO accountability and AEO accountability for subordinates.

### Anticipatory state of the psychological contract

To measure the ASPC of prospective employees, a total of eight items were developed based on the exploratory research findings of Gresse (2018).

Participants were asked to rate whether they agree with various ASPC statements, on a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'Not at all'; 5 = 'Totally'). Examples of some of the items are: 'Do you believe that you will be fairly rewarded for the effort you will put into your future job?' and 'Do you believe

that your future manager will treat you fairly?' An exploratory factor analysis confirmed that all the items could be grouped together to form a single component: ASPC with loadings above 0.45, communality values ( $h^2$ ) higher than 0.45, and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

### Turnover intent

The PCEQ had three items that measured the TI of prospective employees and was developed based on findings from Gresse (2018). Participants were asked to rate whether they agreed with the following statements: 'I do *not* plan to work very long for my first employer' and 'I will keep applying for better positions once I start working'. They had to rate these questions using a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'Not at all'; 5 = 'Totally'). Students were also asked to rate how many employers they believe they will work for in the first 10 years of employment based on another five-point scale (1 = 'one employer'; 2 = 'two employers', 3 = 'three employers'; 4 = 'four employers', 5 = 'five or more employers'). Due to two different scales and a low Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.58$ ) and inter-item correlation, it was decided to report on the items separately in terms of *Immediate TI*, *Continuous TI* and *Long-term TI*.

### Pre-employment violation

The PCEQ had four items that measured the PEV of prospective employees. Pre-employment violation refers to a finding in Gresse (2018) where graduates already had a sense of psychological breach due to them believing that their future employer will not be able to meet their expectations, thereby failing to retain them. Participants were asked to rate whether they agreed with four PEV statements, on a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'Not at all'; 5 = 'Totally'). An example of one of these statements is: 'I believe that I will have to find alternate employment when I start working due to personality clashes with my future supervisor'.

Due to a low Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.53$ ) and inter-item correlation, it was decided to report on the items separately in terms of PEV better offer (anticipate better offer from another company), PEV field of study (anticipate that a position outside their field will provide a better salary), PEV conflict with supervisor (anticipate clashes with their supervisor) and PEV low position (anticipate lower job level). We believe that the low Cronbach's alpha coefficient might be due to the highly individualistic nature of violation experiences in the anticipatory psychological contract.

### Entitlement

To measure the entitlement of prospective employees, a total of five items were developed based on research findings by Linde and Gresse (2014), Gresse et al. (2013) and Gresse (2018). The common theme of the items was sense of deservingness of the participants.

Participants were asked to rate whether they agree with five subtle entitlement statements, on a five-point Likert scale

**TABLE 2:** Factor loadings of anticipatory employee obligations.

Items	Communalities	Components		
		1	2	3
Commit to rules and regulations	0.65	0.74	-0.28	-0.09
Commit to skills development	0.68	0.73	-0.31	-0.19
Commit to workplace discipline	0.58	0.73	-0.15	-0.14
Commit to being mentored	0.64	0.72	-0.28	-0.16
Commit to deadlines	0.52	0.67	-0.25	-0.05
Commit to office hours	0.52	0.65	-0.24	-0.12
Commit to training	0.60	0.65	-0.34	-0.15
Commit to time management	0.56	0.65	0.03	0.25
Commit to take responsibility	0.54	0.65	-0.26	0.04
Commit to work-related activities	0.53	0.62	-0.03	0.23
Commit to self-monitoring	0.65	0.53	0.10	0.29
Commit to leave procedure	0.41	0.51	-0.02	0.12
Commit to supervision	0.55	0.47	0.38	0.08
Commit to non-work errands	0.77	0.18	0.72	-0.11
Commit to work over weekends	0.70	0.26	0.64	-0.13
Commit to extra hours	0.61	0.32	0.64	-0.01
Commit to serve (coffee or tea)	0.66	0.36	0.61	-0.19
Commit to ad-hoc tasks	0.66	0.29	0.59	-0.29
Commit to take work home	0.68	0.40	0.47	-0.30
Commit to accountability	0.72	0.25	0.33	0.62
Commit to subordinate responsibility	0.66	0.40	0.18	0.58
Eigenvalues	-	6.21	3.16	1.32
Variance (%)	-	29.57	15.05	6.27
Covariance (%)	-	29.57	44.62	50.90

(1 = 'Not at all'; 5 = 'Totally'). Examples of some of the items are: 'Due to my qualification, I deserve a very good job' and 'I believe that I will be the best candidate for any job in my field'. An exploratory factor analysis confirmed that all the items could be grouped together to form a single component: Entitlement (ENT). Entitlement displayed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.61 ( $\alpha = 0.61$ ), which is lower than the ideal of 0.7, as suggested by DeVellis (2003). However, Pallant (2013) stated that Cronbach's alpha values are sensitive to the number of items in a scale, especially in scales with fewer than 10 items; therefore, it is better to report the mean inter-item correlation for the items. Briggs and Cheek (1986), as cited in Pallant (2013), recommended that the optimal range for inter-item correlation is between 0.2 and 0.4. Table 3 displays a summary of the item statistics for ENT.

Based on Table 3, the inter-item correlation mean was 0.25 with a range of 0.3, which is within the optimal range as suggested by Briggs and Cheek (1986); therefore, ENT can be regarded as a reliable instrument.

### Measuring graduates' anticipatory psychological contract

The second objective was to report on the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of graduates by using the PCEQ. The statistical analysis was carried out with the IBM SPSS program (version 25). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the minimum, maximum, mean standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis. Results of the descriptive statistics can be seen in Table 4. The table shows that, in most cases, the distribution of data is normal with a skewness and

kurtosis between the values -1 and 1. Anticipatory employee obligations general employment (-1.02), Continuous TI (-1.05) and PEV better offer (-1.25) all fall outside the barriers of what is considered normal distribution for skewness, and AEO accountability (-1.12) and AEO accountability for subordinates (-1.1) fall outside barriers of what is considered normal distribution for kurtosis. These, however, are very close to acceptable standards.

The mean ( $M$ ) provides some interesting insight into the anticipatory psychological contract of these participants. In terms of AEX, the majority of participants displayed average levels of expectations ( $M = 2.75$ ). The AEO level was also quite average for most participants, in that they were willing to make certain promises to their future employer and in most cases keep those promises. Participants were slightly more reluctant to fulfil their obligation towards additional duties and hours, but then again, they were more than willing to make up for that by keeping their promises if their obligations were related to general employment, which is supported with a much higher mean ( $M = 3.74$ ). In terms of general employment, the results suggest that graduates tend to promise more, but expect less from their future employer. It is encouraging to see that most participants have a positive opinion of their future exchange relationship, which is supported with a high mean ( $M = 3.5$ ) for the ASPC. From the results, it is evident, and alarming, that graduates do already have a predisposition regarding TI with a higher than average mean for Immediate TI ( $M = 3.17$ ) and an extremely high mean for Continuous TI ( $M = 4.06$ ). Most participants also display high levels of PEV where they believe that their future employer will not be able to retain them, especially in terms of their employer matching or beating an offer from another company (which can also be a position outside their field of study).

Overall, these participants can also be regarded as being entitled ( $M = 3.36$ ). Gresse et al. (2013) reported that various factors can influence the entitlement perception of individuals, which was confirmed when looking at the descriptive statistics (specifically the mean) based on the

**TABLE 3:** Summary of Entitlement item statistics.

Variable	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum or minimum	Variance
Item means	3.36	2.63	3.98	1.35	1.51	0.30
Item variances	1.54	1.08	2.05	0.97	1.90	0.17
Inter-item covariances	0.37	0.15	0.67	0.51	4.32	0.03
Inter-item correlations	0.25	0.13	0.43	0.30	3.40	0.01

**TABLE 4:** Descriptive statistics of the Psychological Contract Expectations Questionnaire.

Component	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	Standard error	Statistic	Standard error
AEX	313	0.2	5	2.75	1.00	0.14	0.14	-0.53	0.27
AEO General employment	305	0.5	5	3.74	0.85	-1.02	0.14	0.93	0.28
AEO Additional duties and hours	310	0	5	2.11	1.15	0.25	0.14	-0.64	0.28
AEO Accountability	314	0	5	2.39	1.65	-0.10	0.14	-1.11	0.27
AEO Accountability for subordinates	314	0	5	2.80	1.68	-0.31	0.14	-1.10	0.27
ASPC	310	1	5	3.50	0.85	-0.28	0.14	-0.35	0.28
Immediate TI	315	1	5	3.17	1.27	-0.09	0.14	-0.91	0.27
Continuous TI	312	1	5	4.06	1.12	-1.05	0.14	0.21	0.28
Long-term TI	308	1	5	2.81	1.01	0.12	0.14	-0.38	0.28
PEV Better offer	314	1	5	4.17	1.09	-1.25	0.14	0.83	0.27
PEV Field of study	313	1	5	3.62	1.24	-0.50	0.14	-0.72	0.27
PEV Conflict with supervisor	314	1	5	3.00	1.24	0.01	0.14	-0.89	0.27
PEV Low position	313	1	5	3.01	1.19	0.03	0.14	-0.73	0.27
ENT	311	1.2	5	3.36	0.78	-0.10	0.14	-0.49	0.28

AEX, Anticipatory employee expectations; AEO, anticipatory employee obligations; ASPC, anticipatory state of the psychological contract; TI, turnover intent; PEV, pre-employment violation; ENT, Entitlement.



**TABLE 5:** Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient of the Psychological Contract Expectations Questionnaire.

Component	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. AEX	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. AEO General employment	0.44**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. AEO Additional duties and hours	0.22**	0.24**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. AEO Accountability	0.13**	0.17**	0.26**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. AEO Accountability for subordinates	0.14**	0.33**	0.20**	0.41**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6. ASPC	0.56**	0.38**	0.26**	0.10	0.10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. Immediate TI	0.09	-0.06	-0.02	0.01	0.05	0.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8. Contentious TI	0.16**	0.33**	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.15*	0.18**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9. Long-term TI	-0.04	-0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.04	0.08	0.23**	0.07	-	-	-	-	-	-
10. PEV Better offer	0.09	0.32**	0.04	-0.00	0.05	0.12*	0.20**	0.39**	0.14*	-	-	-	-	-
11. PEV Field of study	0.04	0.19**	0.14*	0.13*	0.08	0.03	0.04	0.30**	0.13*	0.24**	-	-	-	-
12. PEV Conflict with supervisor	0.11*	-0.03	0.08	0.07	-0.06	0.13*	0.13*	0.03	0.19**	0.14*	0.22**	-	-	-
13. PEV Low Position	0.09	0.00	0.29**	0.23**	0.15**	0.10	0.08	0.07	0.09	0.14*	0.26**	0.30**	-	-
14. ENT	0.20**	0.15**	0.06	0.02	-0.01	0.38**	0.20**	0.20**	0.27**	0.24**	0.27**	0.32**	0.21**	-

AEX, Anticipatory employee expectations; AEO, anticipatory employee obligations; ASPC, anticipatory state of the psychological contract; TI, turnover intent; PEV, pre-employment violation; ENT, Entitlement.

\*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed); \*\*, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

different groups in the biographical information. For instance participants studying on government funding displayed considerably higher levels of entitlement ( $M = 3.66$ ) than students whose main source of financing comes from themselves ( $M = 3.31$ ), parents or family ( $M = 3.29$ ), private institutions ( $M = 3.12$ ), study loans ( $M = 2.96$ ) and other sources ( $M = 3.1$ ). Female participants ( $M = 3.44$ ) also displayed a slightly higher entitlement than male participants ( $M = 3.25$ ).

The results of the correlation coefficient between the different variables are displayed in Table 5; this correlation coefficient describes the degree of relationship between two variables (Trochim & Donnelly 2008).

The results show that all significant correlations ( $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.01$ ) between the variables had a positive correlation ( $r > 0$ ), which means that both variables move in the same direction. There is no relationship between AEX and the PEV constructs, with the strongest correlation being between AEX and PEV conflict with supervisor that only displayed a statistically significant correlation ( $r = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In terms of AEX, a relationship was established between AEX and AEO general employment ( $r = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There was no practical significant relationship between AEX and ENT ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as well as AEX and Continuous TI ( $r = 0.16$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), although the correlation was statistically significant for both with  $p < 0.01$ . The highest relationships that involved AEX were between AEX and the ASPC ( $r = 0.56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

The AEO variables all had significant relationships with one another, although the strength of the relationships was relatively weak, with the highest being between AEO accountability and AEO accountability for subordinates ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There was a relationship between: AEO general employment and ASPC ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); AEO general employment and Continuous TI ( $r = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); and AEO general employment and PEV better offer ( $r = 0.38$ ,

$p < 0.01$ ). There is no practically significant relationship between AEO general employment and ENT ( $r = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) although the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Anticipatory employee obligations additional duties and hours had a very weak practically significant relationship with ASPC ( $r = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and PEV low position ( $r = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) with both displaying a statistically significant correlation ( $p < 0.01$ ). Anticipatory employee obligations accountability displayed a very weak practically significant relationship with PEV low position ( $r = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There was no practically significant relationship between ASPC and Continuous TI ( $r = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); ASPC and PEV better offer ( $r = 0.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and ASPC and PEV conflict with supervisor ( $r = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) even though the correlation is statistically significant with  $p < 0.05$ . There was, however, a weak practically significant relationship between ASPC and ENT ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There was almost no practically significant correlation between the TI variables, although there were some statistically significant correlations. There was also no practically significant relationship between Immediate TI and PEV better offer ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Immediate TI and PEV conflict with supervisor ( $r = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), although both had a statistically significant correlation with  $p < 0.05$ . Continuous TI did display a practically significant relationship with some of the PEV variables. There was a relationship between Continuous TI and PEV better offer ( $r = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Continuous TI and PEV field of study ( $r = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In terms of the relationship between ENT and TI, there was no relationship between ENT and Immediate TI or Continuous TI. There was a relationship between ENT and Long-term TI ( $r = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), although the practically significant relationship was weak.

All the PEV variables had weak practically significant relationships between themselves, although they were



statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The highest inter-variable relationship was between PEV conflict with supervisor and PEV low position ( $r = 0.30, p < 0.01$ ), although the strength of the practically significant relationship is still considered weak. There was a weak relationship between ENT and PEV better offer ( $r = 0.24, p < 0.01$ ); ENT and PEV field of study ( $r = 0.27, p < 0.01$ ); and ENT and PEV low position ( $r = 0.21, p < 0.01$ ). The strongest relationship regarding violation and entitlement was between ENT and PEV conflict with supervisor ( $r = 0.32, p < 0.01$ ).

## Discussion

### Validation of the psychological contract expectations questionnaire

To validate the PCEQ it was necessary to analyse each of the sections or instruments of the PCEQ. The PCEQ included instruments for measuring the AEX, AEO, ASPC, TI, anticipatory PEV and ENT.

In terms of validity, the exploratory factor analysis showed that the instruments that measured AEX, AEO, ASPC and ENT are considered valid. The Cronbach's alpha results also supported the reliability of these instruments, it should however be noted that the instrument for entitlement was not considered reliable in terms of its Cronbach's alpha, due to a low item count, but was considered reliable when looking at its mean inter-item correlation (Pallant 2013). To increase the effectiveness of the PCEQ in assessing the anticipatory psychological contract, the measurement for entitlement could be further developed to include more relevant items.

In terms of TI and PEV, validity could not be statistically established, which directly resulted in low reliability of these two instruments. In this research we mainly reported on single-item results for TI and PEV. On face validity these items are related to the construct that they measure, but our statistical analysis could not support this. According to Trochim and Donnelly (2008) there can be various reasons why an instrument can display low validity, for example small sample size, faulty measuring instrument or insufficient statistical power. It can be assumed that the main reason why these items were not valid was that they are new to psychological contract research (Gresse, 2018), and the proper theoretical knowledge needed to develop valid items, is lacking.

### Measuring graduates' anticipatory psychological contract

Sherman and Morley (2015) suggest that using a theoretical lens of the *schema theory* and looking at employees' mental schema in the final stages before organisational entry may enhance researchers' efforts to understand how the psychological contract develops. Our research and Delobbe et al.'s (2016) findings largely support Sherman and Morley's perception in that we both found that the anticipatory psychological contract directly impacts the actual exchange relationship. The descriptive statistics highlighted the

collective mental schema of South African students. The first notable aspect was that these participants can be regarded as being entitled due to a high mean. Entitlement being associated with graduates has already been documented in education research (i.e. Abrahams 2017; Scully 2013), as well as psychological contract research (Gresse et al. 2013; Gresse, 2018; Linde & Gresse 2014). The second notable aspect was that these results confirm Gresse's (2018) finding that graduates had a predisposition towards Continuous TI; in other words, tendency toward job-hopping.

Previous studies have confirmed a positive relationship between breach of employee obligations and breach of employer obligations (Bordia et al. 2017; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler 2002; Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman 2004). It would seem as if the same principle applies in the anticipatory psychological contract where individuals' perception of future fulfilment (ASCP) had a positive relationship with both anticipatory expectations and anticipatory obligations. It was found that if employees held a positive belief that their future psychological contract beliefs will be fulfilled by their future employer, they were more inclined to have higher expectations and higher obligations toward their future employer. The same principle applied to them having a lower perception of future fulfilment. This relationship makes sense due to the norm of reciprocity (Bordia et al. 2017), according to which employees will have lower expectations if they think that their employer will not fulfil their perceived contractual obligations, and vice versa. There was a stronger practically significant relationship between the anticipatory expectations and the anticipatory obligations that the participants had than there was between anticipatory obligations and the ASPC. This might indicate that prospective employees' anticipatory expectations might play a bigger role in determining their anticipatory obligations. This means that the anticipatory expectation level of occupational newcomers might determine to what degree they will keep their employment promises.

An interesting relationship from the results is that there was a positive relationship between the PEV variables and the anticipatory expectations, as well as with the anticipatory obligations. The logical assumption will be that when you perceive violation, you will automatically expect less and will also be less likely to fulfil your obligational promises (Bordia et al. 2017; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler 2002; Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman 2004). From the descriptive statistics, it was clear that these participants had high levels of PEV, which was supported by relatively high means of all the violation variables, especially regarding violation due to the anticipation of a better offer, which was overall the highest-rated item of the questionnaire. The results of the correlation coefficient displayed no relationship between PEV variables and anticipatory expectations. The results displayed a positive relationship between PEV and anticipatory obligations, which suggests that higher experiences of violation are accompanied by a higher tendency of the individual to fulfil their promises, a finding that is inconsistent with literature. We believe that this correlation

exists due to cognitive sense-making in the anticipatory psychological contract.

In employment, if a breach of the psychological contract is experienced, the employee will first go through a cognitive sense-making process to determine whether the breach is significant, before deciding on action (Dulac et al. 2008; Louis 1980; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). Rousseau (2001) based her theory of the psychological contract on the schema theory, and focused specifically on how employees made sense of their psychological contracts. Our results confirm prospective employees' mental schemas already include a PEV perception, in that they believe that their future employer will not be able, or might not be willing, to match or beat another company's employment offers. During the phase leading up to labour market entry, prospective employees might get new employment information from the various sources that influence their mental schemas (as suggested by Morrison & Robinson 2004), or by actively taking part in information-seeking activities (De Vos et al. 2003; De Vos & Freese 2011; Thomas & Anderson 1998). This information might contradict their current beliefs, which already formed part of their mental schema. Therefore, it can be assumed that prospective employees might be experiencing a breach in their anticipatory psychological contract and will try to make sense of what they are experiencing, like the sense-making process when an individual experiences psychological contract breach in employment. The result of this sense-making process will determine whether the outcome will get established in the mental schema, which was the case in this study, due to a high mean of participants to always accept a better offer from another employer. The mental schema of an individual acts as blueprint for how employment information is processed (Sherman & Morley 2015) and we now add that there is the potential that a sense-making process can influence what gets established in the mental schema, requiring certain reactions. A similar situation was reported in Gresse (2018), who found that new working graduates experienced one or more discrepancies between their expectations and employment reality, even though the majority experienced a healthy exchange relationship and were overall happy with their employer; this should have clearly constituted psychological contract breach or violation. It was also suggested that the sense-making process associated with psychological contract breach was the reason for this occurrence.

Therefore, we suggest that some aspects that are established in the mental schema of an individual will directly influence their pre- and post-employment behaviour. This suggestion is also supported by our findings due to a relationship between PEV regarding anticipation of a better offer and Continuous TI, which can also be interpreted as job-hopping behaviour. In this case, violation was experienced that triggered the sense-making process to determine its significance; when the individual perceives the violation as significant, it will contribute to undesirable behaviour

(supported by the relationship between *PEV better offer* and *Continuous TI*) and if it is insignificant, it will be discarded from the individual's mental schema. If this is the case, it confirms Gresse (2018) assumption that PEV experience is actually a psychological defence mechanism used to diminish disappointment in employment.

The relationship between PEV regarding the anticipation of a better offer and anticipatory obligations exists due to the link between PEV and job-hopping tendencies. When an employee commences employment, they tend to display certain behaviours to self-manage the advancement in their career, including networking behaviour (getting to know influential people), visibility behaviour (drawing attention to work accomplishment), positioning behaviour (pursuing valuable job opportunities), behaviour related to developing themselves (pursuing training and education opportunism), validating behaviour (proving competence) and behaviour relating to controlling work-life balance (Jonker 2011). We believe that the reason why there is a positive relationship between PEV and anticipatory obligations is due to a person's perception that these career self-managing behaviours are essential in employment with their future employer in order to make themselves visible and viable for employment in other companies. In most cases, an application for a job in another company will require a positive reference (letter of recommendation) from previous employers.

Gresse (2018) established that new employees had some form of PEV in their anticipatory psychological contract, but it was never confirmed whether entitlement has a relationship with these violations. The results indicate that there was almost no relationship between PEV variables and entitlement. The only notable relationship was between entitlement and PEV due to employees anticipating conflict with their future supervisors. Harvey and Harris (2010) have confirmed that psychologically entitled employees had a higher tendency to have conflict with their supervisors. This indicates that the more entitled an employee is, the greater the chance that they anticipate conflict with their supervisor. This does not explain why entitled employees will anticipate this conflict if they have no prior work experience. The only logical explanation might be that individuals who are regarded as entitled might have experienced conflict earlier in life with authority figures (for instance parents, teachers, lecturers, etc.) and therefore it will happen again with future authority figures (supervisors).

Although entitlement only had a relationship with one of the PEV variables, it should be noted that there might exist other PEV experiences (which were not assessed in this study) in the anticipatory psychological contract of employees who may have a relationship. This assumption is supported due to the highly individualistic nature of entitlement, as suggested in psychological entitlement's definition (Campbell et al. 2004; Harvey & Harris 2010), as well as all the factors that can influence an individual's entitlement perception (Gresse et al. 2013).

Our results also indicate that there was a positive relationship between entitlement and the ASPC. Linde and Gresse (2014) confirmed that entitlement leads to higher expectations; therefore, we can conclude that entitlement impacts on the anticipation of future employment (ASPC). The higher an individual's entitlement perception is, the more likely it will be that they will have a positive perception regarding future psychological contract fulfilment, which can be attributed to their deservingness perception in terms of performance rewards (Campbell et al. 2004; Harvey & Martinko 2009) and better treatment (Campbell et al. 2004; Exline et al. 2004) in the absence of actual abilities and performance levels (Campbell et al. 2004; Harvey & Harris 2010).

## Conclusion

The schema theory approach in trying to explain psychological contract development is perceived to be an underdeveloped area within psychological contract research (Sherman & Morley 2015), especially with regard to the anticipatory psychological contract. Markovi and Stoilkovska (2015) also drew the conclusion that studies regarding the anticipatory psychological contract are quite rare. Our research contributes to anticipatory psychological contract research by introducing the PCEQ questionnaire to effectively measure the anticipatory obligations, anticipatory expectations, entitlement and ASPC of prospective employees' mental schema, with all the results supporting validity and reliability. The results however showed that the instruments used to measure PEV and TI within the PCEQ was not regarded as valid or reliable. This indicates that further research is needed to support the development of adequate TI and PEV measurement instruments within the anticipatory psychological contract framework.

A correlation coefficient confirmed a positive practically significant relationship between the ASPC and anticipatory obligations, as well as a positive relationship between the ASPC and anticipatory expectations. It was also suggested that PEV had no relationship with anticipatory expectations, although it had a positive relationship with anticipatory obligations. It was then concluded that this relationship exists due to a sense-making process that occurs in the mental schema of a prospective employee. Entitlement had a positive relationship with the ASPC, as well as with one of the PEV variables.

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All authors contributed equally to this work.

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## Data availability statement

Participant data are regarded as confidential. The data are however kept safe for record purposes.

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