



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Impact of Psychological Contract Breach on Employees' Sabotage and Whistle-Blowing Behaviors through Perceived Organizational Frustration**

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> March 27, 2022</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> June 25 2022</p> <p><b>Online:</b> June 27, 2022</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> PCB, Perceived Organizational Frustration, Sabotage, Whistle-Blowing</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b> saniaarifbutt@g mail.com</p>	<p>The objective of this study is to examine the negative impact of psychological contract breach (PCB) on employees' undesirable behaviors through perceived organizational obstruction with the theoretical support of affective event theory. PCB is the violation of perceived obligations of the company which may lead the employees to exhibit detrimental behaviors. The data were collected from the employees of private telecom companies including U-fone, Telenor, and Mobilink in Rawalpindi/Islamabad at the researcher's convenience using a self-administered questionnaire with a lag of one week. PCB was tapped at Time-1, perceived organizational frustration at Time-2 and dependent variables at Time-3. Initial screening tests on data were applied in SPSS and Amos whereas the hypothesized relationships were tested in process MACRO. The data provided support to all the direct and indirect paths of the proposed model. Limitations and future avenues are given at the end.</p>

**Introduction**

Psychological contract breach (PCB) is a prevailing phenomenon in organizational setups because of the volatile nature of the organizations. Employees decide their contribution to the organization based on their expectations from the organization in return (Guest, Conway, & Briner, 1996) but the volatility in the organization is more likely to create misunderstandings in the relationship between employees and the organization (Wiechers, Coyle-Shapiro, Lub, & ten Have, 2022; Chaudhry & Song, 2014; Freese, Schalk, & Croon, 2011). This misunderstanding may affect the employees-organization relationship, therefore employees may perceive that the organization is failed to meet its perceived promises (Mensah, & Koomson, 2021) and this is what researchers call a PCB. Psychological contract settles employees' perceived promises from their organization and vice versa (Ng, Feldman, & Lam, 2010). It makes a base for the relationship between employer and employee and promises of the organization they are working in (Rousseau, 2001). Sometimes, employees found their organization violating their perceived obligations. Such a violation is labeled as PCB. PCB is a result of the violation of perceived promises (Kiewitz, Restubog, Zagenczyk, & Hochwarter, 2009). Literature is evident that PCB has negative consequences at the individual as well as the organizational level (Rigotti, 2009; Zhao et al., 2007). Literature suggests that when the employees find their organization is failed to meet these expectations, they exhibit detrimental behaviors (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). In many research studies, PCB is studied as a negative factor that may trigger negative behaviors such as employees' destructive voice, reduced

pro-environmental behavior, abusive behavior, and reduced job performance (Lin, Wu, Dong, Chen, Wei, & Duan, 2022; Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam, & Hassannia, 2021; Ampofo, 2021; Li, Wong, & Kim, 2016; Tsui, Lin, & Yu, 2013; Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2006), increased mistrust (Lilly, 2020), increased intention to leave the organization (Arshad, 2016; Chin, & Hung, 2013), lower trust in organization (Zhao et al. 2007; Robinson 1996), lower job satisfaction (Raja et al. 2004) and similar harmful behaviors. Employees may get engaged in undesirable behaviors toward their organization when they experience PCB (Said, Ali, Ali, & Chen, 2021).

This research study is an attempt to fill the literature gaps in the area of PCB such as Gong and Wang (2022) suggested examining the impact of PCB on employee outcomes. Doden, Grote, and Rigotti (2018) suggested examining the betrayal model in which an organization is perceived as responsible for the contract breach and the target of the breach as well in the form of organization-directed counterproductive and/or undesirable behaviors. Lin et al. (2022) focused on exploring various mechanisms shaping various outcomes in respond to the PCB. A research study highlighted an avenue for future researchers to study potential mediators in the relationship between PCB and employee behavior (Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam, & Hassannia, 2021). Arasli, Arici, and Arici (2019) highlighted that some other outcomes of PCB such as frustration could be studied. Literature suggested a time-lag study to deal with the potential bias in examining the impact of PCB (Said et al., 2021, Ampofo, 2021). This study is an attempt to fill the abovementioned gaps by examining the effect of PCB on employees' experienced frustration towards their organization resulting in employees' undesirable behaviors specifically directed towards the organization in the form of sabotage and whistle-blowing. Sabotage is defined as employee behavior with an intent to subvert, disrupt, and harm the organizational operations for employees' personal interest by delays in production, property damage, destroying organizational relationships, and harming customers and employees as well (Crino, 2019) whereas, whistle-blowing refers to report illegal and/or immoral activities being conducting by the legitimate organizational members (Miceli & Near, 1985).

Employees' perception about their organization is not fulfilling the perceived promises or violating obligations (PCB) that may result in negative emotions like frustration towards the organization as a response (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Employees perceive that the organization is responsible for their PCB by violating perceived obligations therefore, their frustration might be directed towards their organization. Organizational frustration is defined as interference with goal-oriented activities as well as interference with target maintenance (Spector, 1978). Organizational frustration may result in maladaptive behavioral responses (Storms & Spector, 1987).

The proposed relationships among variables under study are supported using affective event theory (AET) presented by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). According to this theory, a negative affect/event triggers negative emotions which result in negative behaviors. Based on AET, PCB may trigger negative emotions like organizational frustration which ultimately may result in sabotage and whistle-blowing like employee undesirable behaviors directed towards their organization.

## **Literature Review**

### **PCB and Outcomes**

The term psychological contract breach appeared in literature in the era of the 1960s whereas theoretically, it began to be studied in the 1980s on the bases of the empirical work of Rousseau (Freese & Schalk, 2008). PCB refers to employees' beliefs that the employer or the organization is not willing or able to fulfill the mutually perceived

promises and the obligations (Ng et al., 2010). The result of PCB is a decrease in performance and deceleration instead of acceleration along with increased job dissatisfaction (Zhao et al., 2007). The breach of the perceived contract is related to negative attitudes of employees towards their organization such as a lower level of employee commitment (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler 2000; Robinson 1996), a lower level of trust in the organization (Robinson 1996, Zhao et al. 2007), lower level of job satisfaction (Raja et al. 2004, Robinson & Rousseau, 1994) and with more negative attitudes towards their organization (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly 2003). PCB leads to decreased loyalty and commitment to the organization along with deviant behavior (Hussain, 2014). PCB leads to worse consequences like counterproductive work behavior (Jensen, Opland & Ryan, 2010). Any unethical and unfair behavior on part of the organization leads to the negative behavior of employees that may harm the organization (Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006). The psychological contract when breached even for one or more organizational obligations there is an emotional reaction to it that leads to the feeling of violation, betrayal, anger, and disappointment (Robinson & Brown 2004).

The behavior of employers envisioned to “interrupt, damage, or create unfavorable publicity by disrupting the operation of the saboteur for the personal purpose, embarrassment, production delays, impairment to property, the obliteration of working relationships, or the impairing of employees or customers, etc” is referred as office sabotage. Further, sabotage can be elaborated as gossip and bullying, theft of equipment, and files devastation (Sprouse and Illustrator Cox 1992). Furthermore, not only social injustice but also minor economic incentives can be inspirations behind the sabotage and can further batter either individuals or the organization itself (Analoui 1995; Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002). Sabotage affects the financial soundness and inclusive productivity of the organization as a whole and employees may indulge in sabotage as revenge for their PCB. Similarly, whistle-blowing is a harmful behavior that is studied as revealing some immoral, illegal, or illegitimate practice inside the organization to authority that can influence such a practice (Near & Miceli, 1985). Vadera, Aguilera, and Caza (2009) mentioned that whistle-blowing is considered an action to harm the organization. In line with AET, PCB as a negative event may result in employees' negative behaviors such as sabotage and whistle-blowing to harm the organization therefore, the followings are the hypothesized relationships:

Hypothesis 1<sub>a</sub>: PCB is positively related to sabotage.

Hypothesis 1<sub>b</sub>: PCB is positively related to whistle-blowing.

### **PCB and Perceived Organizational Frustration**

PCB is the unfulfilled expectations and promises of the employees (Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). If the organization is failed to fulfill its obligations, employees feel betrayed and angry (Morrison & Robinson, 1997), therefore exhibit negative outcomes (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020).

Case studies revealed the relationship between resource variables and perceived frustration and dissatisfaction (Peters et al., 1980). Studies also show that frustration also accompanies hostility so an effort was made to measure the correlation between frustration and latent hostility (Buss 1963). However, it does not mean that frustration is not only a result of aggression-related response but few others like job satisfaction and feelings of anxiety at work. Reactions to frustration include behavior such as sabotage, interpersonal aggression, and withdrawal. Spector (1978) describes the organizational structure as interference with goal attainment. Some researchers have viewed frustration as an emotional reaction (Berkowitz, 1962) or a specific behavioral response (Marx, 1956).

Frustration may be defined as the interference of goal attainment and interference with goal maintenance (Spector, 1978). Consistent with AET, employees may appraise PCB as a negative event due to which employees may experience frustration towards their organization, therefore hypothesized relationship will be the following:

Hypothesis 2: PCB is positively related to perceived organizational frustration.

### **Perceived Organizational Frustration and Outcomes**

Literature gives insights into the other-directed aggression in response to negative emotions (Ugwu & Onyishi, 2018; Harvey & Harris, 2010; Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999). Employees' frustration may lead them to depression, detachment, turnover, and absence (Storm & Spector, 1987). A research study by Storm & Spector (1987) on frustration revealed that the result of organizational frustration includes wasting of organizational resources and low productivity. The worse reaction to organizational frustration is aggression, which has received considerable attention. Individuals may leave the situation entirely or can abandon the goals that have been discussed by Klinger (1975), and involve a lengthy process of anger and depression. The general principle that frustration leads to aggression has been well supported (Buss 1963; Spector, Penner & Hawkins, 1975).

Employee sabotage is a behavior on the way to the besieged organization which is intentionally planned to cause a production and profit loss to the organization by a payroll employee (Adams, 2015). Sabotage is elaborated as employee retaliation behaviors, which are those performances that are planned to disrupt, penalize, and seek out revenge in contrast to one's employer, or boss (Rupp, Shapiro, Folger, Skarlicki & Shao, 2017). Researchers elaborated that work frustration, sentiments, hostility, personal and individual behavior factors, and the organizational framework, impact sabotage behavior (Greenberg, 2010; Rupp *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, apparent injustice and mistreatment by the employee on employers increase their willingness for revenge toward the organization and fruitless work performance and sabotage (Jones, 2009).

Similarly, whistle-blowing can be defined as "the disclosure by the organization members (Current or previous) about illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices under the control of the employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to affect action" (Near & Miceli 1995). Whistle-blowing is a response to employee frustration with their managers and organization (Bucka & Kleiner, 2001) and is a betrayal decision to harm the organization (Gobert & Punch, 2000; Vadera *et al.*, 2009). Frustration, under conditions in which there is a likelihood of punishment, occurs for favorable reasons instead of aggressive and hostile behaviors.

In line with AET, an organization perceived as the source of frustration may lead the employees' to engage themselves in negative outcomes like sabotage and whistle-blowing therefore, hypotheses are followings:

Hypothesis 3<sub>a</sub>: Perceived organizational frustration is positively related to sabotage.

Hypothesis 3<sub>b</sub>: Perceived organizational frustration is positively related to whistle-blowing.

### **Mediation**

#### **Perceived Organizational Frustration as Mediating Variables between PCB and Outcomes**

Perceived organizational frustration occurs due to the anticipation and expectation of a goal rather than the actual accomplishment of the goal (Berkowitz, 1978). Spector

revealed that physical environment, procedures and policies, organizational climate, organizational structure, colleagues, and social circle can cause organizational frustration. Spector (1978) gives insights into the consequences of organizational frustration in the form of anger, physiological arousal, aggression, an attempt at alternative actions, and withdrawal. Moreover, negative behaviors including absenteeism and turnover, withholding efforts, and sabotage have been studied as the response to organizational frustration (Ugwu & Onyishi, 2018) and all these maladaptive responses cause poor performance (Lazar, Jones, & Shneiderman, 2006).

PCB is a cognitive perception of the employees about not receiving everything informally or formally expected from the organization (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). PCB is the result of a failure of the organization or supervisor in meeting employees' expectations (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). PCB has a relationship with employees' deviant behaviors (Bordia, Restubog, & Tang, 2008), mistrust and higher absenteeism (Deery, Iverson, Walsh, 2006), and employees' decreased job performance (Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2007), decreased OCB (Raja, Johns, & Ntalani, 2004), and lowered job satisfaction (Suazo, Turnley, & Mai-Dalton, 2005; Raja et al., 2004), job neglect (Turnley & Feldman, 2000), employee cynicism (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003), job burnout (Chambel & Oliveira-Cruz, 2010), and revenge cognitions (Bordia et al., 2008).

The frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939) delineated the conditions leading to aggression. If the organization is failed to fulfill its obligations, employees feel betrayed and angry (Morrison & Robinson, 1997) and are more prone to engage in negative emotional reactions (Akkermans, Bal, & De Jong, 2019) therefore, exhibit negative outcomes (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). Consistent with AET, employees' PCB (a negative event) may trigger their frustration towards their organization and this negative emotional reaction may result in negative outcomes in the form of sabotage and whistle-blowing, therefore:

Hypothesis 4<sub>a</sub>: Perceived organizational frustration mediates the relationship between PCB and sabotage

Hypothesis 4<sub>b</sub>: Perceived organizational frustration mediates the relationship between PCB and whistle-blowing.

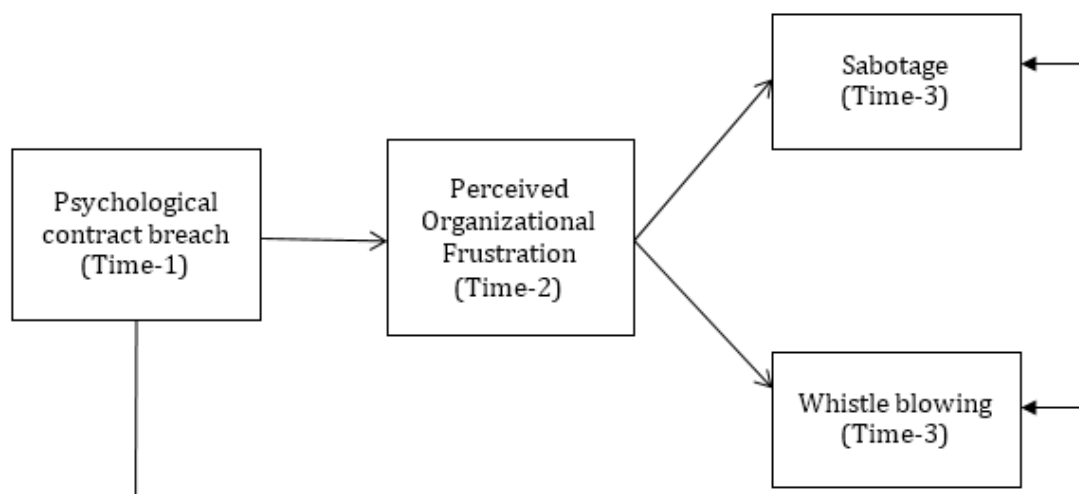


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

## **Material and Methods**

### **Research Design, Sample, and Data Collection Procedure**

This research study tested hypotheses developed based on proposed relationships among variables under study by using a quantitative method. It was a time-lag study to deal with common method biases so that the true effect of cause and effect can be maintained. PCB was reported at Time-1, perceived organizational frustrations at Time-2 whereas, sabotage and whistle-blowing were measured at Time-3. Primary data were collected from employees of the telecom sector including U-fone, Telenor, and Mobilink in Rawalpindi/Islamabad by floating 400 questionnaires using the convenience sampling technique. Respondents' identity was kept secret using some coded names just to get true responses from employees.

Approximately 400 questionnaires were administered at Time-1. At Time-2, respondents filled out the questionnaires. 256 respondents were contacted after excluding the respondents who filled the questionnaire with less than 90 percent. At the end, 224 questionnaires were usable for further analysis. The overall response rate was 56%.

### **Instruments**

Data on all variables under study were collected on a seven-point Likert scale including strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

*Psychological Contract Breach:* A 5-item scale of psychological contract breach developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000) was used for measuring psychological contract breach.

*Perceived Organizational Frustration:* A 4-item scale of organizational frustration developed by Spector (1975) was used for measuring organizational frustration.

*Sabotage:* A 17-item scale of sabotage behaviors developed by Skarlicki and Folger (1997) was used for measuring sabotage.

*Whistle-blowing:* A 10-item scale of Whistle-blowing developed by Park, H., Rehg, M. T., and Lee, D. (2005) was used for measuring Whistle-blowing.

### **Data Analysis**

SPSS 21.0, Process MACRO by Preach and Hayes, and Amos were used for data analysis. Missing values were treated in SPSS 21.0. MLM and CFA were checked in Amos 21.0. Frequency distribution, descriptive statistics, correlations, and Cronbach's Alpha reliability were calculated in SPSS 21.0. Mediation models were tested in Process MACRO by Preach and Hayes using Model 4.

### **Sample Demographics**

Data consists 224 respondents including males (79.9%) and females (20.1%) working in Ufone (21.9%), Telenor (40.2%), Zong (25.0%), and Jazz (12.9%). The age of respondents varied from 20 to above 50 years. 93.8% of respondents were lying in the age group of 20-30 years, 6.3% were lying 31-40 and 24.1% of the respondents were having matric qualifications and 62.1% were bachelor, and 13.8% were having a master's and above qualifications.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Maximum-likelihood estimation method (MLM) were carried out to check the validity and reliability of the observed variables. The

better results the four factor model shown in Table 1 revealed that the proposed model is fit to the data collected.

**Table 1**  
**Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)**

Measurement Model	$\chi^2$	Df	TLI	CFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Variables at Time-3							
Sabotage-Time theft (2 factors)	<b>1.209</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>.946</b>	<b>.955</b>	<b>.901</b>	<b>.871</b>	<b>.031</b>
Sabotage-Time theft (1 factor)	1.533	351	.862	.885	.876	.839	.049
Full measurement model							
PCB-POF-Sabotage-Time theft (4 factors)	<b>1.332</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>.895</b>	<b>.909</b>	<b>.857</b>	<b>.826</b>	<b>.039</b>
PCB-POF-Sabotage-Time theft (1 factor)	1.979	630	.691	.718	.776	.740	.066

Table 2 Indicates values of mean, correlation, standard deviation (SD), and reliability of all variables under study. Values of mean in Table 2 show that the average response of the respondents agreed with the variables under study and standard deviation values show the normal spread of the collected data from its mean value. PCB was found significantly and positively correlated with perceived organizational frustration (36.9%), sabotage (48.6%), Whistle-blowing (42.8%). Perceived organizational frustration was found positively correlated with sabotage (40.7%) and whistle-blowing (40.4%) whereas, whistle-blowing was found to be in a positive correlation with sabotage (62.2%) and these correlations were significant too. Data collected on PCB, perceived organizational frustration, sabotage, and whistle-blowing were found reliable ( $\alpha \geq 0.07$ ) for further analysis. Composite scale reliability was found 0.901.

**Table 2**  
**Means, Standard Deviation, Correlation and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Reliability Values**

Variables	Mean	SD	PCB	POF	Sabotage	Whistle-blowing
PCB	5.2902	.87655	<b>(.702)</b>			
POF	5.5033	.96882	.369**	<b>(.760)</b>		
Sabotage	5.3884	.70286	.486**	.407**	<b>(.720)</b>	
Whistle-blowing	5.4063	.76870	.428**	.404**	.622**	<b>(.700)</b>

N = 224, \*\* $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed), PCB = psychological contract breach, POF = perceived organizational frustration, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values are given in parentheses.

### Regression Analysis

Results of mediation in Table 3 show that H1<sub>a</sub> and H1<sub>b</sub> were supported because of the significant positive effect of PCB on sabotage ( $\beta = .4861, p < 0.001$ ) and on whistle-blowing ( $\beta = .4282, p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, a significant positive impact of PCB on perceived organizational frustration ( $\beta = .3688, p < 0.001$ ) showed the acceptance of H2. Moreover, H3<sub>a</sub> and H3<sub>b</sub> got support from the collected data because of the significant positive effect of perceived organizational frustration on sabotage ( $\beta = .5442, p < 0.001$ ) and whistle-blowing ( $\beta = .5037, p < 0.001$ ). Data provided the support to the indirect effect of PCB on sabotage through perceived organizational frustration (Sobel effect = .0778,  $z = 3.4638, p < 0.001$ ) and indirect effect of PCB on whistle-blowing through perceived organizational frustration (Sobel effect = .0923,  $z = 3.5809, p < 0.001$ ). Bootstrapped values having no zero in between show the confirmation of the proposed indirect effect of PCB on sabotage and whistle-blowing through perceived organizational frustration (.0096, .1910 & .0177, .2022), hence H4<sub>a</sub> and H4<sub>b</sub> were accepted.

**Table 3**  
**Mediation regression results of paths**

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	SE	t	p-value
H1 <sub>a</sub> PCB---->Sabotage	.4861	.2362	.3897	.0470	8.2868	.0000
H1 <sub>b</sub> PCB---->Whistle-blowing	.4282	.1833	.3755	.0532	7.0591	.0000
H2 PCB → POF	.3688	.1360	.4076	.0690	5.9108	.0000
H3 <sub>a</sub> POF → Sabotage	.5442	.2961	.1910	.0440	4.3355	.0000
H3 <sub>b</sub> POF → Whistle-blowing	.5037	.2537	.2264	.0496	4.5648	.0000
<i>Indirect effects using normal distribution (Sobel)</i>			<b>Effect</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>p-value</b>
H4 <sub>a</sub> PCB- POF-Sabotage			.0778	.0225	3.4638	.0005
H4 <sub>b</sub> PCB- POF-Whistle-blowing			.0923	.0258	3.5809	.0003
<i>Bootstrap results for indirect effect</i>			<b>M</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>LLCI</b>	<b>ULCI</b>
PCB- POF- Sabotage			.0778	.0444	.0096	.1910
PCB- POF-Whistle-blowing			.0923	.0462	.0177	.2022

**Notes:** N = 224, PCB = psychological contract breach, POF = perceived organizational frustration, LLCI = lower level confidence interval, ULCI = upper level confidence interval, SE = standard error

## Results and Discussion

The current study aimed to check the relationship of PCB with sabotage, and whistle-blowing. The main focus of the study was to examine the mediating effect of perceived organizational frustration on sabotage and whistle-blowing. In this study, sabotage and whistle-blowing were dependent variables, psychological contract breach was an independent variable, and organizational frustration was a mediator.

PCB is found to have a direct effect on sabotage which means when PCB increases, the employees are more likely to get engaged in sabotage (support to H1<sub>a</sub>). PCB has a direct effect on whistle-blowing which means when PCB increases, there is a likelihood that employees will get engaged in whistle-blowing (support to H1<sub>b</sub>). PCB has a positive effect on organizational frustration explaining that when PCB increases then employees are more likely to experience frustration towards their organization (support to H2). Perceived organizational frustration has a direct effect on sabotage explains that the employees experience frustration towards their organization and they will be more inclined to use organizational assets for their personal use (support to H3<sub>a</sub>). When employees experience frustration with their organization, they will blow a whistle against their organization (support to H3<sub>b</sub>). The results of the study revealed that employees experience frustration towards their organizations in response to the psychological contract breach which may result in organization-directed employee behaviors such as sabotage and whistle-blowing (support to H4<sub>a</sub> & H4<sub>b</sub>).

## Conclusion

This study fills the literature gaps in the area of PCB. This study is useful for the organization in understanding the effect of PCB on organization-directed undesirable behaviors like sabotage and whistle-blowing. Employees get engaged in sabotage and whistle-blow-like undesirable behaviors because of their frustration directed towards the organization which is caused by their breach of the psychological contract. Because they perceive that their organization is failed to fulfill its obligations and promises, therefore they experience frustration and try to harm the organization in the form of using organizational resources for personal benefits and by revealing the illegal or immoral activities being performed in and by the organization.



## **Recommendations**

Data collection from the telecom sector may influence the generalizability of findings. It examined the impact of PCB on employees' negative behavior. This study did not introduce any coping strategy to lessen the negative impact of PCB on employees' behaviors, therefore future researchers may introduce some coping strategies to lessen the negative impact of PCB on employee behaviors. The same model can be tested in different industries like the hospitality, and the education sector. PCB has negative effects so its impact on employees' other negative behaviors can be studied in the future. It is recommended to examine the antecedent of the psychological contract breach.

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