DIRECT MEASURES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FULFILLMENT: 
A METHODOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

Morrison and Robinson (1997) have conceptualized psychological contract breach as a perceived discrepancy between the perceptions of what one’s organization is obliged to provide and what one actually received in the form of inducements. Research investigating psychological contract breach suggests that failure to fulfill obligations toward employees on the part of organizations has a negative impact on employees’ attitudes and intentions (e.g., Robinson & Morrison, 1995, 2000; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). Despite these seemingly overwhelming negative results concerning psychological contract breach/violation, a major potential methodological shortcoming of this research concerns the manner in which the concept has been measured.

In an attempt to avoid the shortcomings of difference scores, many psychological contract researchers have resorted to direct measures of psychological contract breach/fulfillment. This approach has also been used in other literatures (e.g., person-job fit and met expectations) and has been criticized as being prone to many of the same problems as difference scores (e.g., Edwards, 1991; Irving & Meyer, 1995). We build on prior work by Irving, Gellatly, and Montes (2003) to examine the extent to which facet-based direct measures of psychological contract fulfillment truly measure what they purport to measure; that is, a discrepancy between promised and delivered organizational inducements. We conducted a three-wave, longitudinal study in which we regressed the direct measures of psychological contract fulfillment on measures of promised and delivered inducements. Results suggested that fulfillment was largely predicted by delivered inducements. In addition, we conducted usefulness analyses to determine the relative importance of fulfillment measures and its presumed components on measures of job satisfaction and feelings of violation. The results of these analyses suggested that predictive power is lost by using direct measures of psychological contract fulfillment and that their use might produce misleading conclusions about complex relations between promised and delivered inducements and employee reactions.

On the basis of these findings, we conclude that caution is warranted in the use of direct measures of psychological contract breach/fulfillment. Rather, we concur with Edwards (1991) and Irving and Meyer (1995) who recommend the use of separate measures of promised and delivered inducements, which allows for tests of potentially complex relations by means of regression analyses.