INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING BREACH OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, KENYA

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the influence of institutional factors on breach of psychological contract among academic staff at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. This was a case study whose target population comprised 1483 academic members of staff clustered into six academic ranks found in all the six (6) colleges of the said University. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to get a sample size of 210 respondents. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, observation and document analysis. The research has established that despite the teaching staff fulfilling all their commitments as employees, the university had not fulfilled many of its promises; thus, as an employer, the university was clearly in breach of its psychological contract with the academic staff. This was exemplified by inability of the university management to provide leadership and failure to put in place adequate mechanisms to enhance a favorable reward and incentives system for the academic staff. Furthermore, by failing to create a conducive teaching and learning environment, a majority of the staff felt that the university ipso facto failed to focus on students' success which is the starting point for sound institutional planning

Keywords: University Administration, Academic Staff, Perception, Psychological Contract

1. INTRODUCTION

The psychological contract provides a solid and broad framework for outstanding employees' attitudes and behaviours. (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2003) The term refers to beliefs that individuals hold regarding promises made, accepted and relied upon between the employment parties. It is an open-ended agreement about what the individual and the organization expect to give and receive in return from the employment relationship. (Rousseau & Wade-Berzoni, 1994; Sparrow, 1996) As has been pointed out by a number of writers, the perception that promises are being fulfilled enhances employees' commitment, intention to remain with the organization and organizational citizenship behaviour that go beyond the formal job description. (Conway & Brinner, 2002 ; Coyle-Shapiro 2002 ; Robinson & Morrison 1995 ; Turnkey, Bolino, Lester & Bloodgood 2003)

In an academic environment a psychological contract involves a set of expectations by faculty members about the promises made by the university adminstration and their agents but not formally written in their Letter of employment. This might include a collegial environment, informal mentorship, teaching load, staff support, office and laboratory space, laboratory equipment and time for professional and personal development. According to Krivokapic-Skoko, . & O'Neill (2008) in this era of diminished funding, greater competition and heightened hierarchy and accountability, the content and effects of psychological contracts are critically important for academics and universities since understanding and effectively managing psychological contracts that develop can help universities succeed and prosper. In fact, Thomson and Bunderson (2003) concede that obligations within the psychological contract are often more important to job related attitudes and behaviour than the formal and explicit elements of contractual agreements.

Failure to fulfill such employee promises and expectations lead to perception of psychological contract breach. According to Morrison and Robinson (1997) breach is 'the cognition that one's institution has failed to meet one or more obligations within one's psychological contract. Research has shown that perceived psychological contract breach reduces employees' trust, commitment to the institution, willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), productivity, job satisfaction, sense of obligation, job performance(in-rule and extra-rule) increases cynicism and enhances the intention to leave the institution as well as actual turn-over. (Bunderson 2001; Conway & Briner 2002; Coyle-Shapiro 2002; Robinson & Rousseau 1994; Robinson & Morrison 1995; Robinson 1996; Herriot & Pemberton; 1972; Sturges & Guest 2004) Breach of psychological

contract hence has the potential of destroying the employment relationship whose parties share the intention of making the organization prosperous. Because of these negative effects, it is important to understand the institutional factors that influence the academic members of staff's psychological contract at the University of Nairobi.

1.1. Leadership and Psychological Contract Breach

The universities top management and chairs of Department (the immediate supervisors) are expected to represent the university as a brand employer. This is achievable by showing interest and concern for members of academic staff, communicating to them before hand what is expected of them ensuring that they are given the job that fits their qualification and by the adminstration themselves delivering what academic staff expects of them. For instance, Krivokapic-Skoko, & O'Neill (2008) observed that academics expected employers to provide good leadership and sound management skills, fairness (equitable pay impartiality, consistency in applying rules and acceptance of union involvement as well as transparency in promotion and recognition. Leadership issues included trust, clear and honest communication, transparency, advocacy, individual consideration and respect. Academics wanted autonomy, job discretion and participation in decision=making. Research conducted on the state of South African Training Industry indicated that management style was the most prominent retention factor in South Africa. (Neswera 2005) In addition, Krivokapic-Skoko et al (2010) found out that poor management (lack of communication openness, transparency) lack of professional autonomy and lack of fairness in promotion lead to perceived psychological contract breaches.

From the fore-going argument, it is clear that university management /adminstrations and their agents are expected to manage employees' expectations to minimise any psychological contract breaches that arise due to misinformed expectations. This has to be done continuously right from the recruitment and induction stages. In this research we wanted to ascertain that poor leadership characterised by lack of clear and honest communication, fairness transparency and lack of autonomy contribute to psychological contract breach.

1.2 Professional Development Support and Breach of Psychological Contract

Employees desire to advance in their careers. This is possible through collaborative efforts with their employers who should endeavour to support them in their professional development. While working on the effects of retention factors on organizational commitment Guest (2004.) argued that people need opportunities to grow within the organization beyond the financial rewards. In a university set-up support for professional

development includes offer of scholarships to lecturers, grants for writing supports, giving them time for consultation providing training and development opportunities recognition of achievement and staff promotion.

In his work on staff retention in African universities, Tettey (2006) argues that professional development is the engine that keeps the universities true to their mandate as centres of ideas and innovation. Lack of professional development inhibits growth of intellectual capital and may diminish the relevance of universities in society. Professional development avenues provide intellectual and collegial stimulation for academic staff through national and international research meetings, conferences, workshops and presentations. According to Cloete, Bailey, Pillay, Burning and Maasen (2011) as a core knowledge institution the university can only participate in global knowledge economy and make sustainable contributions to development if its academic core is both quantitatively and qualitatively strong, hence professional development opportunities enhance the qualitative aspect.

Tetley (2006) further notes that promotional procedures in African Universities were long, stressful and cumbersome while the requirements were unreasonable for example possession of a doctorate as a requirement for promotion beyond the position of a lecturer. In her doctoral thesis, Kipkebut (2010) listed financial difficulties non-prioritization of research by government and inadequate publishing facilities as factors hindering the promotion of academic staff which is dependent on teaching, research and publications. These factors have made publishing of refereed articles a big challenge for lecturers in Kenya and other African countries. In addition, Guest et al (1996) argue that support for professional development through training and development provision of job security promotion and career maximizing differentials contribute to a positive psychological contract. According to Krivokapic-Skoko and O'Neil, (2008).academics expect staff development support and empowerment from management. These when provided positively enhance their psychological contract which is associated with increased motivation and job satisfaction.

A Republic of Kenya (2006) report indicated that public universities in Kenya do not have systematic approaches to recognizing the contribution of staff within the university which contributes to turn-over and discourages innovation. Therefore, support for professional development through promotion, training and development and recognition boost employees' morale and reduce perceptions of psychological contract breach. Consequently, in this research we posited that lack of support for professional development influences breach of academic staff's psychological contract.

From the literature, it is clear that the psychological contract breach in institutions of learning such as universities arises when employees perceive unfairness in the employment relationship as a result of them upholding and observing their part of the deal through hard work, loyalty to the university and contributing to the generation of new knowledge.; while the employer does not recognize employee efforts, fails to offer good leadership, does not support employees in their professional development and fails to provide a rewarding work environment. This relationship is captured if Figure 1.
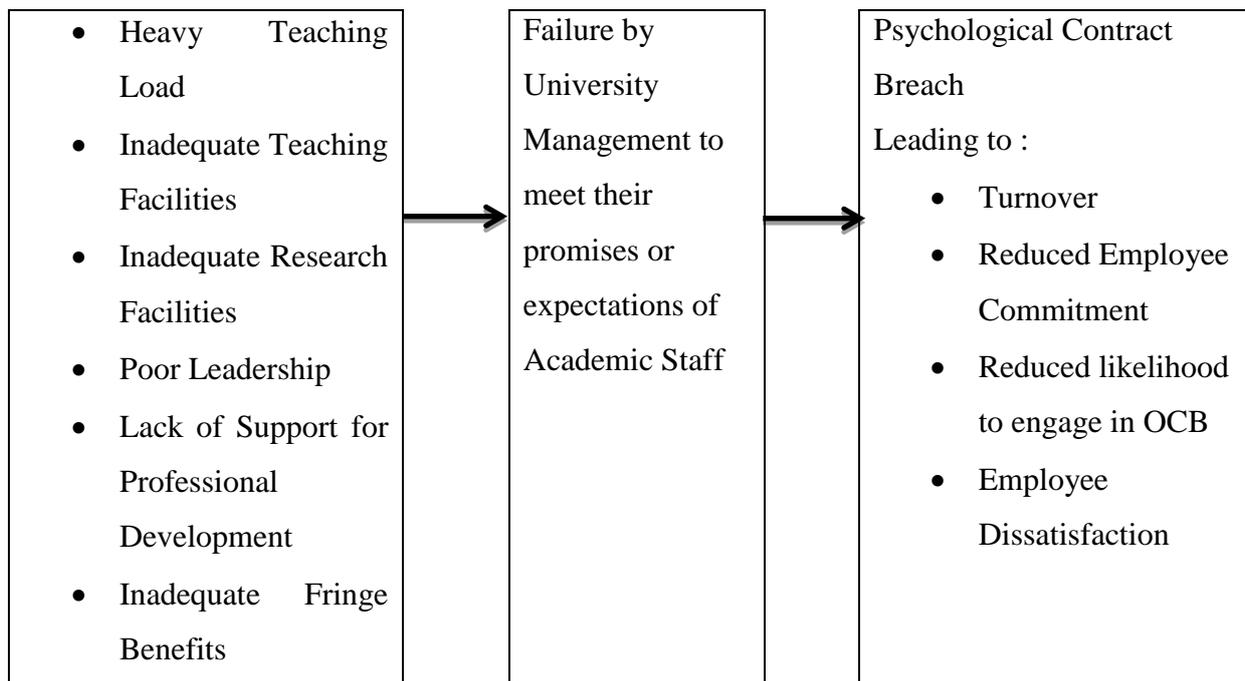
| • Heavy Teaching Load
• Inadequate Teaching Facilities
• Inadequate Research Facilities
• Poor Leadership
• Lack of Support for Professional Development
• Inadequate Fringe Benefits | → | Failure by University Management to meet their promises or expectations of Academic Staff | → | Psychological Contract Breach
Leading to :
• Turnover
• Reduced Employee Commitment
• Reduced likelihood to engage in OCB
• Employee Dissatisfaction |

Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework of the Institutional Factors and their Influence on Academic Staff's Psychological Contract Breach

Heavy teaching load, inadequate teaching and research facilities, poor leadership, lack of support for professional development and inadequate fringe benefits reflect the failure by the university management to fulfill their promises and meet the expectations of academic staff. This leads to psychological contract breach which in turn leads to staff turn-over, reduced loyalty, reduced commitment and reduced willingness on the part of the academic staff to engage in Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB) and job satisfaction.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

University education in Kenya has continued to grow amid the growing demand for higher education that is far beyond its supply. Currently there are 35 public universities operating within the recognised policy and legal framework since the enactment of the Universities Bill of 2012. In spite of the increasing number of universities, the core business of universities such as teaching and research has remained uninspiring. Universities have been in the spotlight over low standards as employers continue to niggle about them producing inferior graduates. (DN Monday 13 May 2013 Pg. 8) This is also exemplified by some professional bodies declining to register graduates from various universities (University World News , 8th July 2011) Furthermore, according to the report of the Taskforce on the Alignment of Higher Education, Science and Technology sector with the Constitution , 2012 (TAHEST Pg. 83) there was reduced research activity in public universities to an extent that research publications had fallen to just about 0.11 per full-time faculty member at the University of Nairobi by the year 2009. This does not augur well for the aspirations of Vision 2030; leave alone it being an indicator that our universities were failing at delivery of their key mandate. Yet academic staff are at a focal point in achieving Vision 2030. This raised a number of questions related to the teaching and learning environment at the public universities in Kenya. What is the work environment like in the public universities? Have university managements failed to meet the expectations of academic members of staff? Has the work environment created, therefore, led to a breach of the psychological contract of the academic staff? Despite the fact that there has been limited research on psychological contracts in a university environment, most researches have been carried out in Australia, United Kingdom, United States of America and South Africa, with very little work on psychological contract being carried out in East Africa and Kenya. This research sought to fill that gap by trying to establish whether and how the academic environment has contributed to breach of psychological contract of the academic staff at the University of Nairobi.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The research design adopted for this research assignment was a case study which according to Kumar (2005) and Yin (1984) is a design based on observation with a purpose to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the phenomenon that constitutes the life cycle of the unit and with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population in which that unit belongs. This research study used the case of the University of Nairobi to deeply analyse the

institutional factors influencing a breach of psychological contract among academic staff in public universities in Kenya.

3.2 Target Population

The target population for this research which was carried out between January and September 2013 consisted of all the academic staff of the University of Nairobi. At the time of study, there were 1483 teaching members of staff found in all the six (6) colleges which are College of Biological and Physical Sciences (CBPS), College of Education and External Studies (CEES), College of Health Sciences (CHS), College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS), College of Architecture and Engineering (CAE) and College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences (CAVS). In addition, the said staff is ranked from Tutorial Fellow (which is the lowest) to Professor (which is the highest)

3.3 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

Research was carried out in the 6 Colleges of the University of Nairobi. In determining the sample size for this study, the 20% and 50% rule was applied. Stratified random sampling was used to cluster the staff into six academic ranks. Every one of the strata was represented by sample, which is 20% of its population. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to get the actual male and female members of academic staff. Thus, the total sample size for the study was 210 respondents.

3.4 Research Instruments

The data for this research were collected using (1) questionnaire, (2) interviews schedules, (3) observation schedules and (4) document analysis. Questionnaires for the lecturers were designed to collect information on the institutional factors that contributed to a breach of the psychological contract. The close-ended questionnaire items enabled us to obtain demographic information such as gender, academic rank, terms of engagement and length of service of the respondents. Open-ended questionnaire items enabled us to obtain information relating to the respondents' opinion on issues. The interview methods provided for in-depth probing of respondents regarding the effects of perceived psychological breach of contract. Observation checklist was used to get information on the availability and state of teaching and learning resources materials and facilities. Document checklist indicated availability, inadequacy, state of documents on teaching schedules, timetables of activities and events, policy and planning documents, circulars and exam analysis, senate and academic board minutes; quantities, quality of resources and how they were used to implement academic programmes and curricula at the teaching departments.

3.5 Research Objectives and Research Questions

The objectives of the research study were:

i.   To determine influence of the university leadership on breach of psychological contract among academic staff at the University of Nairobi.

ii. To establish the relationship between level of adminstrative support for professional development of academic staff and breach of psychological contract at the University of Nairobi

To achieve the said objectives, the research was guided by the following questions

i.   How does the university leadership contribute to breach of psychological contract among academic staff at the University of Nairobi?

ii. What is the relationship between level of adminstrative support for professional development of academic staff and breach of psychological contract at the University of Nairobi?

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 210 questionnaires administered to the respondents, 146 of them were returned giving a questionnaire return rate of 69.5 percent. In addition, all the 146 respondents were interviewed while physical visits were paid to all the six colleges of the University representing a return rate of 100%. This return rate was considered representative enough and adequate for analyzing and reporting results. The low return rate was attributed to the fact that academic staff had a strict deadline for marking examinations that had been sat in May while others were supervising students who were away on attachment.

Psychological Contract Elements

Using Turnkey and Feldman (1999) response scale for measuring psychological contract breach, we asked the respondents the importance of psychological contract items to their work on a scale of $1 - 5$. Their responses are recorded in Table 1.

Table 1 . : Psychological Contract Items

Psychological Contract Items	Importance				
	Extremely Important	Very Important	Important	Less Important	Not Important
Reasonable Workload	88	58	0	0	0

Enough Resources and Equipment to do work	134	12	0	0	0
Equal Opportunities for all employees and fair treatment	124	22	0	0	0
Open and honest communication	117	22	2	5	0
Safe working environment	121	25	0	0	0
Participation in decision-making	81	49	11	4	1
Frequent feedback on work performance	89	27	12	8	0
Competitive Salary	111	31	4	0	0
Medical/Health Benefits	136	10	0	0	0
Continuous Professional Development	114	23	8	1	0
Challenging and Interesting Work	107	32	7	0	0
Collegial environment	84	45	17	0	0

From Table1 it can be seen that an overwhelming majority of respondents value these variables with only 19 out of 146 (13%) rating open and honest communication, participation in decision-making and continuous professional development as either less or not important to their work. This was construed to mean that all participants in the research study appreciated the importance of these elements to their work which consequently formed the basis of their psychological contract. Let us now discuss these variables in relation to their influence on breach of psychological contract at the University of Nairobi.

4.1. Research Question 1: How does the university leadership contribute to breach of Psychological contract among academic staff at the University of Nairobi?

Universities are the highest institutions of learning in any country. As a result, they are supposed to be role models of good leadership and management. Consequently, academic

members of staff expect good leadership and management from the university adminstration. This research was carried out to determine the influence of leadership of the University of Nairobi on breach of psychological contract. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 :… Leadership and Psychological Contract Breach

Academic staff's Satisfaction with Management's Responsibility	Psychological Contract State							
	Satisfied				Dissatisfied			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
Treats all academics fairly and Equitably	8	31	25	34	2	3	20	23
Allows one autonomy to act as a professional	10	33	43	51	0	1	2	6
Maintains academic freedom	10	31	45	55	0	3	0	2
Communicates important information to staff	8	26	38	34	2	8	7	23
Is honest in his/her communication to staff	6	28	32	31	5	4	14	26
Explains decisions that are made	9	31	21	11	1	3	24	46
Acknowledges the long hours one devotes to work	7	13	4	7	3	21	41	50
	6	25	21	24	4	9	24	33
Provides a safe and comfortable work environment	6	12	18	20	4	22	26	39
Ensures that the primary focus is on student success								

Key

A. Almost all the promises made by the university during recruitment have been kept so far

B. So far the university has done an excellent job of fulfilling its promises to staff

C. Staff have not received everything promised to them in exchange for their contributions

D. The university has broken many of its promises to staff even though they've upheld their side of the deal

From the findings it can be deduced that the majority of academic staff were satisfied with how management had treated them fairly and equitably (98 responses) ; provided autonomy and academic freedom (137 and 141responses respectively) ; communicated information to them (106 responses) ; was honest in its communication(97 responses) and had provided a

safe work environment(76responses) However, a majority of these respondents still had a low psychological contract and felt that either they had not received everything promised or that the university had broken many of its promises to them. This can be explained using Maslow's needs theory where a want once satisfied ceases to be a motivator as one proceeds to pursue higher needs.

On the other hand, the findings revealed that the majority of academic staff were dissatisfied with how management acknowledged their long hours of devotion to work (115 responses) explained decisions made (74responses) and ensured the primary focus was on students (91 responses) But for the latter, there was a clear relationship between explaining decisions, acknowledgement and psychological contract breach. The majority (40 out of 72 and 20 out of 31 responses) of the staff who were satisfied also had a positive psychological contract while those who were dissatisfied had a low psychological contract. According to Morrison and Robinson (1997) one of the causes of psychological contract breach is lack of a common understanding (incongruence) between the employer and the employee. This might be due to lack of explanation and clarity between certain items within the psychological contract. For instance, the definition of student success is the first step in institutional planning and as such the finding that 62.3 per cent of academic staff believed that management's primary focus was not on student success is disturbing. This finding might be the cause of the market dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates of the university.

4.2 Research Question 2: What is the relationship between level of adminstrative support or professional development of academic staff and breach of psychological contract at the University of Nairobi?

Tettey (2006) posits that professional development is the engine that keeps universities true to their mandate as centres of ideas and innovation. Through professional development employees re=invent and re-align not only to their goals but also to the goals of the institution. To establish how lack of support for professional development influenced breach of psychological contract among academic members of staff at the University of Nairobi, we asked them to rate their satisfaction with how management rewarded excellence in teaching and research through promotion, provided opportunities for professional development, provided sponsorship to present papers (both locally and internationally) and provided opportunities for promotion.

From the findings, 58.2 per cent of the academic staff were satisfied with how management had rewarded excellence in teaching, management and research through promotion. However, a majority of these (58 out of 85) still had a low psychological contract. Some pointed out the reason for this as being the fact that the university only recognised research and not how hard and well they taught. Presentation of papers in a conference and workshop is a key element in an academic's performance appraisal and their promotion prospects. As such academics require sponsorship which would not only enhance their morale but also job satisfaction as well as commitment to the university. This research revealed that 82.4 per cent of the respondents were dissatisfied with management's provision of sponsorship to present papers locally and internationally. This was a big hindrance to their professional development because as part of their career progression, they were supposed to attend conferences and workshops, make presentations and publish in refereed journals. These forced them to cater for these expenses from their uncompetitive salary. As one lecturer observed …" I have had to pay for myself to attend conferences…" the effect of this is that it led to a low psychological contract (95 out of 123 respondents who were dissatisfied had a low psychological contract) On the other hand 16 out of 23 ((69.6%) of respondents who were satisfied had a positive psychological contract. The few adminstrative staff such as the Chairpersons of Department who were interviewed argued that this was due to inadequate funds available at the university. However, lecturers felt that management should at least sponsor them to present papers in internationally acknowledged conferences. They argued that a lot of money was wasted on workshops organized for adminstrative staff in places such as Naivasha and Mombasa whose end result was incomparable to what sponsorship to present papers could achieve.

Using frequency counts the research investigated respondents' satisfaction with how management had provided opportunities for professional development. From the findings 68.5 per cent of the academic staff were satisfied with the available promotion opportunities. However, the majority of them (satisfied lecturers 63 out of 96) still had a low psychological contract and felt that the university had either broken many of its promises or that they had not received everything promised. Some complained of unfair policies that enhanced pyramid-like departmental structures where a department had to have few professors. This made it easy for some staff to rise up the ladder simply because of their departments while others stagnated despite meeting all the requirements for promotion. As one member of staff lamented … "I have been a Seniour Lecturer at this university for over 10 years. Students I

supervised at PhD are now professors simply because they are in different departments. I meet all requirements for promotion but for the fact that we have many professors in my department…"

Professional development opportunities turned out to be a key variable influencing breach of psychological contract as the research revealed that half (50) of the academic members of staff at the University of Nairobi were dissatisfied with management's ability to provide the said opportunities. 82 per cent of those who were dissatisfied had a low psychological contract They complained of long promotional procedures , biased departmental promotions and failure by management to sponsor them to attend conferences and present research papers at local and international fora. These inefficient practices hampered their career growth, leading to stagnation; a state which they said contributed to feelings of disenfranchisement making them want to leave the institution.

This research also tried to establish the extent to which the respondents fulfilled their commitments to the university in terms of teaching assigned hours, engaging in research and consultancy. The findings showed that 71.2% of the academic members of staff did fulfill their teaching obligation and a further 85% of them were loyal to the institution. However, only a paltry 25.5 percent had engaged in research to a great extent. This was attributed to the uncompetitive salaries which pushed them to engage in moonlighting activities, thus, leaving them with little time to devote to their duty of doing research,.

 In addition, only 19% of the said staff had carried out any consultancy; a state they attributed to lack of clear guidelines on the consultancy assignment. It emerged that those who had done any consultancies at all had their own consultancy firms and consulted on their own behalf rather than that of the university.

Finally, this research sought to establish the perception of academic members of staff towards the university's commitment to its promises. Their responses are summarized in Figure 2.
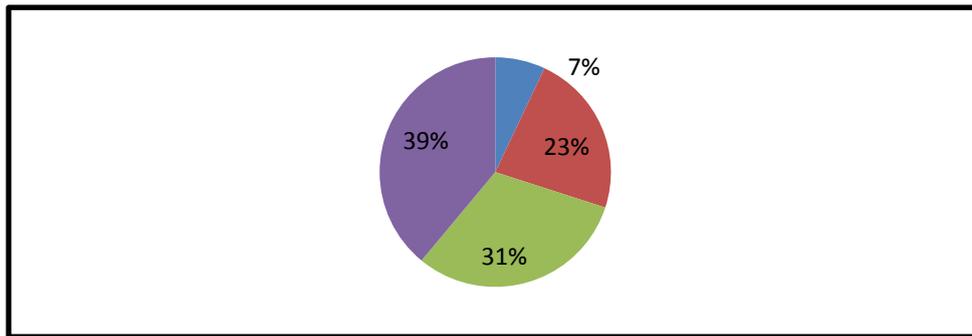
Figure 2: University's Commitment to Promises made to Academic Staff

- The university has broken many of its promises to me even though I've upheld my side of the deal
- So far the university has done an excellent job of fulfilling its promises to me.
- I have not received everything promised to me in exchange for my contributions
- The university has broken many of its promises to me even though I've upheld my side of the deal.

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From the findings it is clear that only 7% of the staff felt that the university had fulfilled almost all the promises made to them during recruitment. Therefore, a greater majority of the teaching staff had a low psychological contract compared to those who were satisfied. This was construed to mean that despite the teaching staff fulfilling all their commitments as employees, the university had not fulfilled many of its promises; thus, as an employer, the university was clearly in breach of its psychological contract with the academic staff. This finding is in agreement with Shen (2010) and Tipples, & Krivokapic-Skoko, (1997) who reached the same conclusion while researching university academics' psychological contracts in Australia and New Zealand. This state of affairs triggered feelings of inequity and unfairness as there was no reciprocity which forced academic staff to look for ways of maintaining equity.

How, then did academic staff at the University of Nairobi respond to failure by the institution to meet its promises and their expectations? This question elicited various reactions with some staff dubbing it a 'red flag' while others opted not to answer it. Some staff admitted that it demoralised them and forced them to be disloyal to the university, as others said it reduced their commitment to teaching ; while others admitted to just hanging on, waiting for a greener opportunity to arise. Nevertheless, quite a number of them responded that they did nothing

since according to them; their only reaction could hurt the students more than it would the university management. Yet still, others engaged the staff union. Take a look at some of their common reactions:

> *I work hard, build my profile and wait for a better opportunity or greener pasture elsewhere*

> *I always try to do my duties as much as I continue raising concern over unfulfilled promises and expectations*

> *To reduce the impact of the situation, I only avail myself at the university to teach at the assigned times(hours) and then disappear as quickly as I can to look for part-time jobs*

> *My most fulfillment is in seeing my students graduate*

> *I respond by working hard as my work affects other people*

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

Breach of psychological contract refers to the cognition by the teaching staff that the university had failed to meet one or more obligations within their psychological contract. From the research findings it has emerged that a majority of the academic staff felt that the university had either broken many of its promises even though they had upheld their side of the deal or that they had not received everything promised to them in exchange for their contributions. . The broken and unfulfilled promises included inability by the university management to provide leadership as well as failure to put in place adequate mechanisms that would enhance a favourable reward and incentives system for the academic staff. Academic staff expected sponsorship to local and international fora where they would present papers as this was key to their career advancement. They also felt that the university hailed to focus on students' success by creating a conducive teaching and learning environment.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations were made:

- Public universities should look for ways of sponsoring academic staff to present and publish their research in approved conferences and workshops

- University management ought to try and explain decisions that are made which have the potential to eliminate any perceptions of breaching good governance demands, such as fairness, transparency and accountability.

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