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ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ КОМУНИКАЦИИ И ИНФОРМАЦИОННИ НАУКИ

**PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT REPAIR AFTER BREACH DURING
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

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Abstract: *Psychological contract breach during organizational transformation threatens trust, commitment, and performance. This integrative synthesis consolidates findings on mechanisms, boundary conditions, and outcomes of Psychological Contract Repair. Drawing on methodologically transparent publications from OECD contexts, it identifies perceived organizational support, transparent change communication, and transformational leadership as recurring levers. It also exposes a measurement gap between breach appraisal and active repair, which constrains causal inference. Repair is typically protracted and non-linear, with wave-like trajectories and limited durability (decay) unless reinforcement is sustained. Without sustained reinforcement, early gains in retention and performance attenuate, consistent with reciprocal resource loss dynamics. Overall, the findings challenge purely technocratic change models and underscore the need for longitudinal, intervention-focused research.*

Keywords: *Psychological Contract Repair; Trust Recovery; Change Communication; Change Management; Employee Retention*

INTRODUCTION

The repair of psychological contracts during profound organizational transformation represents a priority managerial challenge. Effective repair is critical for organizational sustainability and retention. Perceived breaches destabilize the employment relationship and commonly precipitate erosion in trust and performance. Understanding when repair succeeds therefore requires examining organizational antecedents that shape perceived reciprocity. Cumulative evidence indicates that repair outcomes are not stochastic; they are systematically governed by identifiable conditions and by the credibility and design of change management interventions (Li et al. 2020; Yue, Men, & Ferguson 2019).

Theoretically, Psychological Contract Repair (PCR) must be distinguished from the antecedent cognitive appraisal of breach. Although conceptually distinct, empirical operationalizations often remain insufficiently rigorous, which complicates comparability and causal inference (Gilani, Kutaula, & Budhwar 2021). Repair is also inherently temporal. It typically unfolds as an incremental, non-linear process with recursive trajectories. A decay effect has been documented; initial gains in retention and performance attenuate when reinforcement and supportive organizational routines are not sustained, which underscores the fragility of restoration (Griep & Bankins 2020; Zacher & Rudolph 2020).

This review advances a communication-centric account of PCR. It posits that information processes, specifically transparency, consistency, and procedural fairness, are not passive vectors. They are central mechanisms for sense-making and reappraisal. In transformational settings, these signals function as critical levers for repair. The objective is an integrative evidence synthesis on PCR during organizational change. It synthesizes evidence on practices associated with repair, construct delineation, temporal trajectories, and boundary conditions. This establishes a conceptually grounded foundation for evidence-informed change communication.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This review consolidates evidence on PCR with a focus on communication as the primary infrastructure through which employees recalibrate trust and perceived reciprocity during change.

Methodologically, it employs an integrative structured review with narrative synthesis. This approach accommodates heterogeneity in research designs, levels of analysis, and construct operationalizations. It prioritizes conceptual coverage over exhaustive retrieval. The synthesis privileges studies that offer stronger inferential value for the focal claims, particularly designs that clarify temporal ordering and mechanisms. Cross-sectional findings are interpreted with caution.

Evidence was identified through a structured manual search of established scholarly databases and citation indexes. The search was organized in thematically defined clusters (organizational practices, construct delineation, temporal trajectories, moderators). Backward and forward citation tracking supplemented the search. Eligibility was restricted to peer-reviewed publications situated in organizational change contexts. Inclusion prioritized methodological transparency, conceptual clarity, and designs with higher inference potential (longitudinal, panel, experimental, quasi-experimental). The sampling frame focused on OECD settings to enhance interpretability. Implications for broader generalization are addressed as a limitation.

Study selection followed a staged screening process based on predefined quality criteria, including design suitability and construct validity. Given the literature's diversity, quality appraisal relied on explicit pragmatic criteria rather than a universal risk-of-bias tool. Conclusions are evidence-weighted. Interpretive strength is calibrated to the rigor of the underlying designs and to consistency across studies. A narrative synthesis integrates findings across clusters to identify converging patterns, mechanisms, boundary conditions, and evidence gaps, particularly regarding the durability of repair effects.

RESULTS

The narrative synthesis organizes the included evidence across several core domains, including organizational antecedents, recurring repair-related practices, construct delineation between appraisal and repair, temporal trajectories, lagged outcomes, and boundary conditions. Across these domains, the literature depicts PCR as a process that is shaped by organizational signals and routines, and that unfolds over time in ways that vary by context, design, and measurement approach.

Organizational antecedents of repair. The reviewed studies converge in describing a set of structural and communicative conditions that appear to provide a foundation for more favorable post-breach trajectories. A supportive organizational context is repeatedly linked to repair-relevant responses, including settings characterized by a positive psychosocial safety climate (Brunetto et al. 2021). Perceived organizational support (POS) is also consistently associated with more favorable evaluations of organizational intent and with reduced vulnerability to further negative interpretations, and it is commonly discussed as a signal that employees feel valued by the organization (Griep and Bankins 2020). In addition, transparent communication and higher perceived procedural and interactional justice are repeatedly connected to lower uncertainty and to more constructive sense-making during change (Chang and Busser 2020; Georgalis et al. 2015). Several studies also emphasize the role of pre-existing trust in supervisors and managers, which is described as a resource that can shape how repair attempts are interpreted once disruption occurs (Men, Yue and Liu 2020; Brewer, Dierkes and Norful 2024).

Practices associated with repair. Across the included evidence, five practices are most consistently described as being associated with more favorable repair-related responses, while the magnitude and durability of these associations vary by design and setting. First, transparent internal communication is frequently linked to lower workforce uncertainty and to coping responses that are interpreted as more adaptive within the respective studies (Li et al. 2020; Yue, Men and Ferguson 2019). Second, transformational leadership is repeatedly associated with higher reported trust, and with more favorable job-related attitudes, including job satisfaction (Boamah 2022; Men, Yue and Liu 2020). Third, empathetic leadership communication is often highlighted as salient for rebuilding affective trust, particularly when it includes emotional acknowledgement and credibility signals that reduce perceptions of disregard (Yue, Thelen and Walden 2022). Fourth, participatory approaches and informational justice are described as reducing resistance to change

by involving employees in the interpretation of events and the justification of decisions, thereby supporting sense-making and perceived fairness (Georgalis et al. 2015). Fifth, individualized agreements (i-deals) are associated with higher reported organizational commitment in settings where employees perceive negotiated arrangements as credible and supported by the organization (Davis and Van Der Heijden 2018; Prieto and Talukder 2023). In contrast, laissez-faire leadership is commonly described as unfavorable in these contexts, and it is linked to higher strain indicators in the studies that examine it (Groulx et al. 2024). A recurring limitation is that many contributions emphasize short-term patterns, whereas evidence on longer-term durability of specific practices remains comparatively limited (Franken, Plimmer and Malinen 2020).

Construct delineation and operationalization. At the conceptual level, the literature commonly distinguishes PCR from the cognitive appraisal that follows a perceived breach. In practice, however, empirical operationalizations vary, and this variability often complicates interpretation of temporal ordering and mechanism claims. Dynamic phase models are frequently invoked to articulate the sequence from disruption to appraisal to subsequent relational pathways. As summarized in Figure 1, Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou (2018) conceptualize the psychological contract as a cyclical process rather than a static agreement, and they distinguish a Maintenance Phase (stable exchange) from a Disruption that triggers downstream self-regulation processes. In this model, the transition out of maintenance is initiated by a disruption event, which is tied to a discrepancy between expected and actual inducements, or to the speed of inducement delivery relative to expectations (velocity feedback). The ensuing pathway is shaped by appraisal valence. Positive affect is linked to a renegotiation pathway, and negative affect is linked to a repair pathway. Repair is described as cognitively demanding, and it involves sense-making and active attempts to reduce discrepancies and restore a more stable exchange relationship.

When mapped onto empirical measurement, the synthesis indicates a recurring gap between theoretical differentiation and measurement practice. Some longitudinal studies apply separate measures for constructs that correspond to negative affect or violation and to repair-oriented intentions or behaviors, which is more consistent with the conceptual sequence (Griep and Bankins 2020). In many studies, however, measures overlap, or constructs are not assessed in a way that clearly distinguishes appraisal from repair, which blurs the empirical trace of the transition from affective evaluation to repair-related action (Zacher and Rudolph 2020). As a result, the bifurcation between renegotiation and repair described in phase models is often difficult to examine directly in quantitative designs. Qualitative approaches, including grounded theory designs, frequently provide richer process descriptions from appraisal through coping to repair, although these designs typically do not employ standardized measurement instruments that would support stronger cross-study comparability (Gillani, Kutaula and Budhwar 2021). Taken together, the synthesis highlights the need for more consistently validated measurement approaches that separate appraisal-related affect from repair-oriented processes, and for intervention studies that more directly test repair mechanisms.

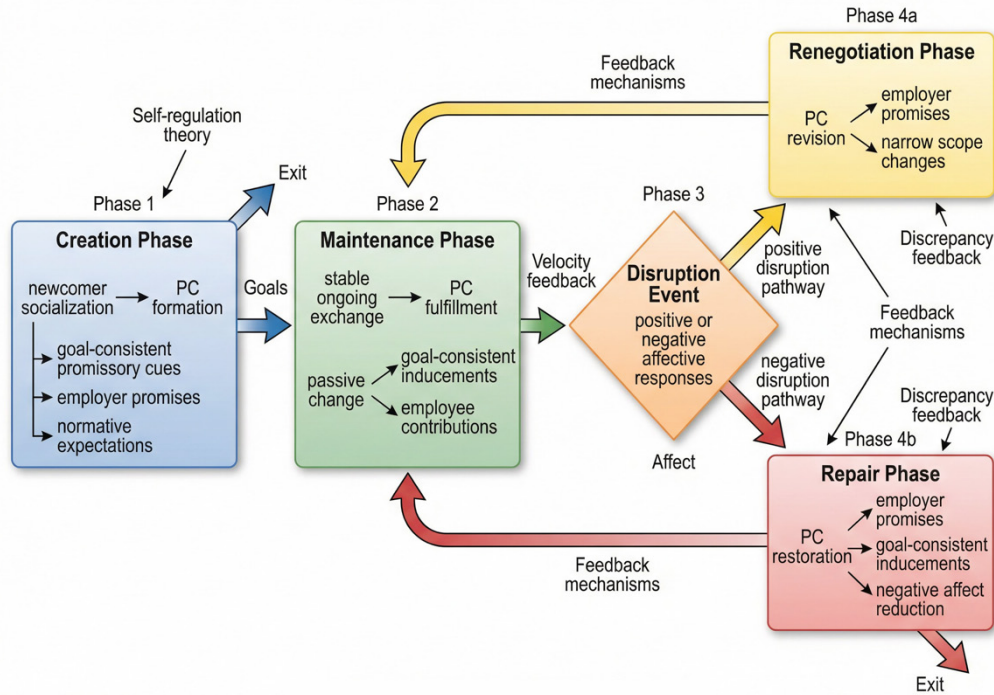


Fig. 1. Dynamic phase model of contract repair: From breach to restoration (Rousseau et al. 2018; Gillani, Kutaula and Budhwar 2021)

Temporal dynamics (trajectories and durability). With respect to temporal dynamics, higher quality panel studies commonly report that trust and affective commitment decline after breach-related events, and that recovery tends to be gradual and often incomplete within the observed time windows (Griep and Bankins 2020; Zacher and Rudolph 2020; Guerrero, Bentein and Lapalme 2014). A weekly panel study describes a negative feedback loop in which lower POS is associated with heightened vulnerability to subsequent negative interpretations, and full return to baseline is rarely observed within the study horizon (Griep and Bankins 2020). Related work similarly describes wave-like patterns of fluctuation, sometimes framed as ebb and flow, rather than monotonic recovery (Zacher and Rudolph 2020; Rodwell and Gulyas 2015). Moderators appear to shape the pace and extent of recovery. Managerial emotional intelligence is discussed as relevant for rebuilding commitment after crises in the studies that examine it (Anvari et al. 2023). Individual resources, including occupational future time perspective, are also associated with different recovery trajectories (Zacher and Rudolph 2020). Cultural variation is suggested by experimental evidence, including findings in which recovery patterns differ across national samples, although such results remain difficult to generalize without broader longitudinal replication (Eckerd et al. 2016).

Lagged outcomes and sustainability. A central limitation across domains is that many studies observe short time horizons, and longer-term data beyond twelve months are comparatively scarce. Within those constraints, the literature nevertheless describes a recurring pattern in which early gains associated with repair attempts may attenuate over time, particularly when reinforcement and supportive routines are absent, or when new breach perceptions emerge. This pattern is often discussed as a decay effect in the broader interpretation of longitudinal findings (Griep and Bankins 2020; Zacher and Rudolph 2020). Intervention-oriented studies report short-term improvements in relevant outcomes, including retention-related attitudes and performance-related indicators, although the durability of these effects varies and is not always assessed beyond the immediate follow-up period (Chang and Busser 2020; Takase, Teraoka and Yabase 2014). COR theory provides a plausible interpretive mechanism that is frequently used to explain why repair effects may erode, namely that persistent or renewed strain can prompt resource conservation and reinforce negative interpretations, thereby limiting sustained improvements (Zacher and Rudolph 2020; Griep and Bankins 2020). From an evidence perspective, the synthesis suggests that diminishing effects over extended periods appear more consistent than conclusive, largely because

longer time horizons are rarely observed. Accordingly, multi-year panels designed to model decay dynamics more precisely remain a salient gap (Flinkman et al. 2023).

Mechanisms and boundary conditions. The reviewed evidence also emphasizes that repair-related processes depend on contextual boundary conditions that shape the meaning of organizational signals. Organizational resource availability, including time and financial capacity, is described as enabling sustained repair routines, and it is therefore treated as a relevant contextual moderator in the studies that incorporate it (Miron-Spektor et al. 2017). Cultural context is likewise discussed as shaping how repair attempts are interpreted, including how justice-related signals and leadership communication are evaluated (Kingshott et al. 2020; Phuong 2017). At the mechanism level, POS is repeatedly linked to the durability of repair-related outcomes, and leadership competence and emotional intelligence are discussed as shaping trust rebuilding processes (Griep and Bankins 2020; Anvari et al. 2023). Individual resources, including resilience and paradox mindset, are also examined as potential amplifiers of more favorable trajectories, although the strength of evidence varies across designs (Prieto and Talukder 2023; Miron-Spektor et al. 2017; Flinkman et al. 2023). The evidence base does not yet support strong, systematic comparisons across specific justice intervention types (for example, informational versus interpersonal justice), and interaction effects across bundles of practices remain insufficiently tested. This leaves an open question regarding which combinations of leadership communication and HR practices are most effective under specific change conditions.

DISCUSSION

This review integrates the current evidence base on PCR following breach perceptions during organizational change, with particular attention to communication and information processes as proximal organizational levers. Across the analyzed literature, the most frequently converging pattern is that transparent communication, supportive leadership, and participatory change processes are repeatedly linked to more favorable repair-related responses (Li et al. 2020; Yue, Men and Ferguson 2019; Men, Yue and Liu 2020). These associations are theoretically coherent with major frameworks used in the field, and they align with the view that repair depends on credible organizational signals that support sense-making and perceived reciprocity during disruption.

A mechanism-based reading of the evidence suggests that leadership and communication practices operate through multiple pathways. Transformational leadership is often discussed as relevant to retention and engagement, and it is frequently modeled as operating indirectly through trust building and through the cultivation of a constructive climate (Boamah 2022; Kim 2020). Empathetic leadership communication appears to complement these pathways by supporting affective trust through acknowledgement and relational credibility, which can shape the interpretation of organizational intent after a breach perception (Yue, Thelen and Walden 2022). In communication-centered terms, these practices are not merely channels of information transmission. They can be understood as institutionalized credibility and fairness signals that structure how employees update beliefs about organizational obligations, and how they recalibrate expectations under uncertainty.

At the same time, the synthesis highlights a persistent tension between theoretical specificity and empirical measurement. While many contributions distinguish appraisal following breach perceptions from subsequent repair processes conceptually, empirical operationalizations often do not allow these constructs to be separated cleanly. This is a key constraint on stronger claims about causal sequencing and mechanism identification (Gillani, Kuttaula and Budhwar 2021; Griep and Bankins 2020; Zacher and Rudolph 2020). The phase model proposed by Rousseau et al. (2018) is particularly useful for interpreting this issue because it formalizes the transition from disruption to appraisal and into distinct pathways, including renegotiation under positive affect and repair under negative affect. When studies do not measure these elements distinctly, the predicted bifurcation becomes difficult to test directly, and this limits the interpretability of downstream claims about repair efficacy.

The strength of evidence varies by claim and by the prevalence of designs that support tem-

poral inference. Claims linking transparent communication to reduced uncertainty and to more constructive sense-making are comparatively well supported within the reviewed material, including in studies with longitudinal components (Li et al. 2020). Evidence regarding slow and often incomplete recovery trajectories for trust and commitment is suggestive and recurrent, and it is supported by panel studies, although observed horizons are frequently limited (Griep and Bankins 2020; Zacher and Rudolph 2020). Evidence on cultural moderation is less settled in the absence of broader longitudinal confirmation across contexts, even though experimental findings indicate plausible cross-national differences in recovery dynamics (Eckerd et al. 2016; Kingshott et al. 2020). Similarly, organizational support is repeatedly linked to more favorable trajectories, yet stronger causal statements remain constrained by measurement and design limitations in parts of the literature (Griep and Bankins 2020).

Several limitations of the research landscape temper strong prescriptions. A substantial share of studies rely on cross-sectional designs and self-report measures, which restrict causal inference and increase vulnerability to common method concerns. More importantly, durable effects of interventions are rarely observed over extended periods. This creates uncertainty about long-term stability, and it constrains the empirical basis for claims about decay dynamics beyond the time windows typically studied (Zacher and Rudolph 2020; Flinkman et al. 2023). In addition, systematic comparisons across justice intervention types are limited, and bundles of practices are seldom tested in ways that isolate interaction effects. This leaves open the question of which combinations of communication practices, leadership behaviors, and HR routines are most effective under specific change conditions.

Taken together, the synthesis supports a cautious but actionable interpretation. Repair appears to depend on credible, sustained organizational signals that reduce ambiguity and reinforce fairness and support, and communication and procedural routines are central to this signaling infrastructure. However, the durability of repair is best treated as contingent. It likely depends on sustained reinforcement, consistent managerial behavior, and the absence of renewed discrepancy signals that would trigger negative reappraisal. For the field to move from descriptive association to stronger prescriptive guidance, future research would benefit from designs that more directly test intervention mechanisms over longer horizons, and from measurement strategies that operationalize appraisal, renegotiation, and repair as distinct processes consistent with phase models.

CONCLUSION

This integrative evidence synthesis underscores that organizational change is not merely a technical or structural undertaking. It is also a relational and communicative process in which employees continuously interpret organizational signals and update judgments about reciprocity, trustworthiness, and obligation fulfillment. Across the reviewed literature, transparent communication, supportive and transformational leadership, and participatory change practices are consistently associated with more favorable trajectories following perceived psychological contract breaches. These practices appear to function as proximal levers because they shape uncertainty reduction, credibility assessments, and perceived fairness, and they thereby influence whether post-breach dynamics move toward stabilization rather than continued deterioration.

At the same time, the synthesis indicates that repair effects are frequently fragile and contingent. Short-term improvements in trust-related attitudes, retention-related intentions, or performance-related indicators do not reliably translate into durable recovery. Where longer observation windows are available, evidence suggests that repair gains may attenuate over time when reinforcement is not sustained, when supportive routines are absent, or when employees encounter renewed discrepancy signals that reactivate negative appraisal processes. This pattern is consistent with resource-based interpretations, including COR-informed accounts, in which repeated strain prompts resource conservation and increases sensitivity to subsequent organizational deviations. In this sense, PCR is best understood as a temporally extended process that can remain incomplete, that may proceed in non-linear trajectories, and that requires ongoing organizational credibility work rather than episodic remedial actions.

A further implication concerns construct clarity and inference quality. The literature commonly differentiates appraisal processes that follow disruption from subsequent repair processes, and phase models add theoretical precision by distinguishing pathways such as renegotiation under positive affect and repair under negative affect. Empirically, however, these distinctions are not always captured with sufficient measurement separation, which limits the ability to test temporal ordering and to specify mechanisms with high confidence. This methodological constraint materially affects the interpretability of intervention claims, especially when studies rely on cross-sectional designs or when follow-up periods are short.

The synthesis yields a clear implication. Communication and information processes should be treated as constitutive infrastructures of repair, not as peripheral contextual variables. Transparency, message consistency, justificatory accounts, and procedural fairness cues operate as recurrent signals through which employees make sense of change, recalibrate expectations, and update trust judgments. Framed this way, the review provides an evidence-grounded platform for subsequent dissertation components that examine how communicative and procedural signals shape sense-making, reappraisal, and the stabilization of employment relationships under change conditions.

Several evidence gaps remain salient. First, the field would benefit from longer-horizon longitudinal designs, including multi-wave panels that extend beyond typical follow-up periods, to model durability and decay dynamics with greater precision. Second, stronger designs for causal inference are needed, including quasi-experimental and experimental intervention studies that isolate communication and justice-related practices and test their mechanisms directly. Third, measurement strategies require further refinement and validation to distinguish appraisal, renegotiation, and repair as separable processes, and to enable cumulative comparison across studies and contexts. Addressing these gaps is necessary to move from plausibly actionable associations toward more robust, evidence-informed guidance for change communication and post-breach repair that remains effective beyond short-term improvements.

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ВЪЗСТАНОВЯВАНЕ НА ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЯ ДОГОВОР СЛЕД НАРУШЕНИЕ ПРИ ОРГАНИЗАЦИОННА ПРОМЯНА

Резюме: Нарушението на психологическия договор по време на организационна промяна заплашва доверието, ангажираността и представянето. Този интегративен синтез консолидира резултати относно механизмите, граничните условия и последиците от възстановяването на психологическия договор. Базирайки се на методологически прозрачни публикации от контексти на ОИСР, той

идентифицира възприеманата организационна подкрепа, прозрачната комуникация на промяната и трансформационното лидерство като повтарящи се лостове за въздействие. Той също така разкрива пропуск в измерването между оценката на нарушението и активното възстановяване, което ограничава причинно-следствените изводи. Възстановяването обикновено е продължително и нелинейно, с вълнообразни траектории и ограничена устойчивост (затихване), освен ако не се поддържа затвърждаване. Без устойчиво затвърждаване ранните постижения в задържането и представянето отслабват, в съответствие с динамиката на реципрочна загуба на ресурси. Като цяло, резултатите оспорват чисто технократичните модели на промяна и подчертават необходимостта от лонгитюдни изследвания, фокусирани върху интервенции.

Ключови думи: възстановяване на психологическия договор; възстановяване на доверието; комуникация на промяната; управление на промяната; задържане на служители

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