

The Effect of HR Practices on the Fulfillment of a Psychological Contract in the Context of the Polish Organizational Culture



Anna Rogozińska-Pawelczyk 

Abstract The article identifies and analyzes Polish organizations' HR practices that have the strongest effect on the development of employees' expectations relating to psychological contracts. The data were collected using semi-structured individual in-depth interviews (IDI) during a qualitative survey of 56 employees representing medium and large firms. The IDI transcripts were thoroughly analyzed to capture the details of respondents' opinions on how they felt about the fulfillment of their psychological contracts, as well as specific examples illustrating their relations with employers in cases when the obligations they had toward each other were met or unmet. The survey questions also aimed to determine which HRM practices have the strongest effect on the perception of psychological contracts as being fulfilled. The analysis of respondents' subjective narrations indicated five key HR practices that may influence employees' expectations regarding the fulfillment of their psychological contracts. Five culturally meaningful HR practices were identified, focusing on organizational climate, employees' identification with the organization, fair pay, professional development, and work–life balance. The article is a contribution to the literature on psychological contract formation in organizations. Its empirical part was designed to advance the understanding of the process in the environment of Polish companies.

Keywords Micro-Based Behavioral Economics · Organizational Behavior · HR Practices · Fulfillment of Psychological Contract · Polish Organizational Culture

1 Introduction

Domestic and international companies would certainly agree that employees are the main source of market advantages (Pocztowski, 2008; Anbuoli et al., 2016). Therefore, the use of human resource management policies and practices allowing

A. Rogozińska-Pawelczyk (✉)
Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Łódź, Łódź, Poland
e-mail: anna.rogozinska@uni.lodz.pl

companies to make the best use of the potential of their employees is of utmost importance (Anbuoli et al., 2016).

Many organizations go international to benefit from their presence in global markets. However, for the benefits of international operations to be achievable, companies must address local differences in HRM and ensure cross-border transfers of knowledge and technology (Alvesson, 2013). Understanding the nature of organizational, social, economic, and cultural factors is necessary for managers to be able to make full use of the available resources and opportunities (Eskiler et al., 2016). One of the main challenges faced by managers in transnational organizations is to make sure that their HRM is effective in different cultural contexts. The cultural context of organizations is important because it is used by employees as a framework to interpret employers' promises, especially that many aspects of employment contracts taking account of the employees' culture are tacit rather than explicitly written down. Such unwritten or informal aspects of the arrangements between an employee and an employer constitute a so-called psychological contract understood as the employee's perception and interpretation of employer's messages and promises. The content of a psychological contract is determined by the parties' subjective judgments and expectations and goes far beyond the formal requirements imposed by the Labor Code, collective agreements, or managerial or employment contracts. As a result, both parties interpret it in their own way. Moreover, the tacitness of psychological contracts sometimes causes problems with achieving their objectives. Because of all these sensitivities, all HRM activities (starting with employee recruitment and ending with the termination of employment relationships) concerning the management of psychological contracts should have a regulatory rather than reactive character.

According to Cassar and Briner (2009), psychological contracts should be studied with regard to various cultural, national, and organizational contexts, because then it is possible: (1) to understand how a psychological contract emerges; (2) to interpret the contract and the employer–employee relations arising from it; (3) to deepen, develop, and generalize this construct. This article was prepared using the approach recommended by Cassar and Briner (2009). It is one of the few works examining HR practices to assess their influence on the employees' perception of the fulfillment of their psychological contracts from the perspective of the Polish organizational culture.

In the last decade, only a few organizational researchers have conducted research into psychological contract in European Central-Eastern context (e.g., Cassar & Briner, 2009; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk, 2020; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk, 2021). There were two objectives behind these studies: (1) to generalize the concept of psychological contract among different contexts and (2) to identify the uniqueness within the context that may influence employees' perceptions, feeling, and reactions to psychological contract fulfillment or breach.

This research makes two contributions to the psychological contract literature. Firstly, the research identified and investigated the culturally relevant elements of HR practices that significantly affect the employee psychological contract in the Polish organizational culture context. Secondly, this is among the first Polish studies

to investigate employees' perceptions, feelings, and resultant outcomes of perceived psychological contract fulfillment among employees of Polish organizations, therefore, extending the psychological contract literature by applying the concept and construct of psychological contract fulfillment in European Central-Eastern context.

This article is organized into few sequential parts. Theoretical part is an overview of the cultural context of Poland, where the research is conducted, and reviews the literature on the impact of cultural context on HR practices and employee psychological contract. After that, the research design and methodology used in the empirical study is discussed. The next section presents the findings of the qualitative research. The culturally significant HR practices and their effect on employees' performance are analyzed. Each element is defined and illustrated with the help of narratives. The next section summarizes the qualitative results and findings of the study and the context that frames the background of the present research. The last section discusses the contributions of this research to understanding of employees' psychological contract in the Polish context and the consequences of fulfillment of psychological contract.

The analysis of respondents' subjective narrations indicated five key HR practices that may influence employees' expectations regarding the fulfillment of their psychological contracts. These are culturally similar HR practices focused on organizational climate, identification with the organization, pay fairness, professional development, and work-life balance. The findings will help the top management by shedding light on the way they can better manage their workforce in the Polish organizational culture.

2 HR Practices and the Fulfillment of a Psychological Contract in the Polish Organizational Culture

The cultural context of an organization has a major effect on HRM effectiveness because it is usually the product of historical, social, and political circumstances unique to the company's country of operation (Tanure & Duarte, 2005). In order to better explain its role, the Polish organizational culture will be analyzed using Hofstede's pyramid (Hofstede et al., 2010), a structure combining a high power distance ratio and a strong aversion to uncertainty. Other characteristics of the Polish organizational culture include a relatively high masculinity factor, an average level of individualism, and a short-term orientation.

Polish companies are characterized by a considerable power distance. The consequences of this are the presence of patriarchal relationships between employers and employees, "spontaneous" management, and the management's relative reluctance to delegate tasks. The distance between the supervisors (owners) and the employees is accompanied by very strong solidarity among the latter against managers. Individualism is not highly valued, in contrast with family connections (nepotism) and informal "peer support groups." Employees have a strong need for

acceptance from their colleagues, solidarity, and harmony within their group, but they perceive it as a manifestation of individualism in relations with their superiors rather than “a collectivist inclination.”

As regards the masculinity factor, it is important to note that men still have privileged socio-economic status compared with women (there are more men in employment, they have better paying and more prestigious jobs, and are promoted more frequently; women continue to be discriminated on the ground on morals). At the same time, Polish men seem to display some “feminine attributes” in the way they think and behave—they appreciate interpersonal relations more than rivalry and shun people trying to dominate others.

Uncertainty aversion among Polish men and women manifests itself as a strong need for occupational stability, security, predictability, and transparency of procedures. This attitude results in the establishment of rigid and tight rules, most of which are then disobeyed. A short-term orientation is a tendency of employees to consider the workplace relations in terms of immediate rewards and to attach greater weight to immediate, spectacular successes than to step-by-step efforts allowing them to advance up the organizational hierarchy.

According to Moszkowicz (2000), Polish organizations differ in workplace culture. The aggressive, dynamic, and unsteady private sector is culturally distant from the general government sector, which frequently lacks effectiveness and is structurally ossified, but offers stable and secure employment. Generally, however, cultural changes related to the “replacement of generations” stimulated by the need to respond to the challenges of free market capitalism cause the Polish organizational culture to evolve and it will take a long time before it takes final shape (Moszkowicz, 2000).

According to the literature, culture can and does have a modulating effect on HR practices (Pocztowski, 2019) and employees’ perceptions of whether or not their psychological contracts are being honored (Schalk & Soeters, 2008). For instance, the economic liberalization processes initiated in Poland in the 1990s led to major changes in the structure of ownership followed by the introduction of HR practices in the existing and new companies that significantly redefined management styles. The knowledge of the organizational culture is necessary for organizations to select HR practices best suited to their goals and to assess whether the culture will support their personnel policies; should it not, the knowledge of it can prompt them whether and what actions they need to take to align it with the new concept of HRM.

An organizational culture is reported to influence the way employees take in and process information (Kickul et al., 2004), as well as their experiences and personal traits that they bring into psychological contracts. Consequently, an organizational culture may have an effect on what they expect from the employer and how they perceive their obligations under a psychological contract (Kickul et al., 2004). Rousseau and Schalk (2000) have identified two cultural factors that may have the strongest impact on the character of a psychological contract:

- *society negotiations*: the degree to which a given culture allows employees to freely enter into different relations of exchange, which may be associated with

customs, rules and laws, the employees' social status (Rousseau & Schalk, 2000), and their occupational and family roles determined by their gender (Kickul et al., 2004).

- *silent cultural assumptions*: the degree to which promises are considered binding in a given culture. Traditional (rigid) cultures tend to view a promise as a contract that must be honored; in flexible cultures, however, a promise is frequently interpreted as a party's commitment to making an effort to fulfill it (rather than a guarantee of its outcome) (Rousseau & Schalk, 2000). Whether a promise is perceived as binding or tentative certainly influences employees' perception of how and whether their contracts are being fulfilled. In the more rigid organizational cultures employees expect employers to fully deliver on their obligations, whereas in the more flexible ones employees' expectations are quite modest in that respect (Rousseau & Schalk, 2000).

3 Research Method

3.1 Procedure

A qualitative research method was selected for this study as the most appropriate to advance the understanding of the role of a psychological contract in Polish organizations. Qualitative methods are recommended by Morrison and Robinson (1997). The authors point out that in-depth interviews (IDI) and focused group interviews (FGI) help identify factors that can influence employees' judgements on whether or not their psychological contracts are being fulfilled.

The data analyzed in the study were collected during a survey of employees representing firms based in all parts of Poland. The firms were randomly selected using criteria such as size, industry, ownership, and the presence of a personnel department implying that the organization uses HR practices.

The qualitative method employed involved the use of semi-structured individual in-depth interviews (IDI). The respondents were 56 employees who represented medium-sized and large-sized companies. The interviews were designed to gather respondents' detailed opinions and information about their experiences regarding the fulfillment of their psychological contracts, as well as concrete examples of their relations with employers in situations when their mutual obligations were fulfilled or broken.

The IDI transcripts were subsequently analyzed to capture individual employees' expectations, experiences, and reactions to realizing that their psychological contracts were met or not met. In particular, the analysis aimed: (1) to determine and examine HR practices that the respondents considered meaningful in the Polish organizational culture, and which had a major effect on the shape of psychological contracts, (2) to identify respondents' feelings in reaction to the fulfillment of their psychological contracts, (3) to analyze respondents' feelings in reaction to employers breaking their promises relating to the psychological contracts.

Table 1 Characteristics of firms and respondents participating in the survey ($N = 56$)

Criterion	Specification	Employees
Company sector	Manufacture	12.4%
	Banks, financial institutions, insurance	14.1%
	Education	13.7%
	Trade	4.1%
	Other services	8.9%
	Healthcare	0.0%
	Others: Outsourcing, local government	11.1%
	Innovative industries: Business services sector	35.7%
Company size	Small—To 50 employees	16.7%
	Medium—From 50 to 250 employees	50.0%
	Large—More than 250 employees	33.3%
Type of company	State-owned	17.8%
	Private	82.2%
Sex	Female	67.8%
	Male	32.2%
Age	To 30 years	27.8%
	31–39 years	38.9%
	40–49 years	16.7%
	50–55 years	5.6%
	> 55 years	11.0%
Education	Secondary	34.2%
	Higher	65.8%
Years of service with the company	≤ 5 years	38.9%
	>5 years	61.1%

Source: Compiled by the author

3.2 Sample

Employees participating in the survey represented firms that were randomly selected using a set of predefined criteria.¹ The characteristics of firms and respondents are compiled in Table 1.

3.3 Measures

IDI questionnaires had a structured component which was to ensure greater reliability of the survey's outcomes, and a component with an open-ended question

¹Firms were selected based on their region, employment from 50 to 250 employees or over (smaller employment excluded organizations from the survey), industry, and ownership.

allowing respondents to freely express their opinions, conforming to the requirement of theoretical accuracy. Each interview started with questions about the respondent's age, education, and the number of years with the company. They were followed by probing questions, which were asked to assess how the realities of the Polish organizational culture related to psychological contracts ("What made you take a job with this company?", "What do you expect from your company?"). The next set of questions aimed to establish the degree to which HR practices in the respondent's organization supported the fulfillment of psychological contracts (e.g., "Do you think your employer meets your expectations?").

The questionnaires concluded with an open-ended question about the respondent's opinion on how their employer complied with their commitments and promises. The IDI recordings were transcribed making sure that the respondents' anonymity was not breached. The transcripts were then analyzed thematically according to the procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006), which allows the collected data to be organized and described in a comprehensive manner, and to extract themes or patterns that appropriately characterize the phenomenon under consideration (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis of the transcripts was repeated over and over again until the main themes contained in respondents' answers were identified. In the first step, all transcripts were carefully read and respondents' answers to each question were written down as separate items. Next, similar items were divided into groups, and these were combined into categories. Lastly, categories were compared for similarity to capture themes. The procedure revealed several major themes concerning different aspects of the organizational culture influencing employees' expectations toward their employers.

The themes were analyzed using a narrative method. The method made it possible to identify and study culturally meaningful HR practices stimulating the emergence of workplace expectations among Polish employees and influencing their perception of their fulfillment, as well as employees' reactions to the fulfillment of psychological contracts.

The results of the qualitative analysis were validated for accuracy by two independent, competent referees, who assessed the IDI transcripts, identified themes and interview descriptions, finding no significant differences between them. The correspondence between the codes and the themes was almost 91%. The inference procedure was based on an appropriate categorization key, which allowed a comprehensive view on the problem under consideration.

The analysis of the IDI contents revealed five HR practices that are significant for employees in the Polish organizational culture. The following interpretations of the survey data are additionally illustrated by citations from respondents' answers, and explanations referring to appropriate theoretical frameworks are provided.

4 Key HR Practices in the Polish Organizational Culture: An Analysis of Research Results

4.1 *Fostering a Supportive Workplace Climate*

The importance of a workplace climate is especially emphasized in studies investigating the area of organizational practices. According to research, a workplace climate has an effect on working styles in organizations (Niculita, 2015), work safety (Tsai, 2014), employee creativity and innovativeness (Audretsch et al., 2018), employee entrepreneurship, as well as on training delivery and participation (Lubrańska, 2014). The quality of a workplace climate is closely associated with involvement and commitment to the organization, and its components (such as leadership, requirements, and conformism) determine the level of satisfaction with work and well-being (Von Treuer et al., 2014) of the employees. The workplace culture in Polish organizations is moderately individualistic, with employees exhibiting preference for peace and predictability. Most of them would like a supportive climate, clear rules of functioning in the workplace, motivation by rewarding, and challenging and responsible tasks, but also emotional and practical support from colleagues and the supervisor, who should be a person of respect. The employees' desire to work in supportive workplaces is well illustrated by the following citations:

I do enjoy working here; and I try to help the girls who are new here to somehow repay my debt [of gratitude]—because I was nicely received and everybody was very helpful to me from the start.

A friendly atmosphere at work is more important for me than money. I'd rather earn less and stay with a company where I feel comfortable, and where others will assist me in need. I've turned down several attractive job offers just because of the good climate in this company.

Thirty six ($n = 36$) out of the 56 respondents indicated that a supportive climate was a factor they would seriously consider in deciding whether or not to leave their current organization. Ten of them ($n = 10$) remarked that they had left their previous job because of the workplace climate that made them feel uncomfortable and conflicted with their expectations.

Polish employees also expect caring leadership as an element of a supportive workplace climate. The respondents emphasized its role making a stay-or-quit decision. How caring leadership contributes to employees' satisfaction and motivation to work is well illustrated by the following citation:

The superior should have the qualities of a leader. They may not let others walk all over them. Obviously, they need to show understanding to employees. When an employee comes in to talk about a problem he or she has, the superior should listen to the employee, put on their shoes and understand them. They also must be able to listen and talk with employees.

The next citation gives a clear picture of the kind of a workplace climate that most Polish employees would like to have in the workplace.

I regard my job with the company as a long-term commitment, so even if I wanted to get another one, if someone came over to me and said I would be paid four times more, I would want to finish my current tasks first. If it were to take six months, I would work for the six months to do them to my best standard. I would not leave from one day to the next. Even if I submitted a notice of resignation, I would tell the new employer that I would be available in four months because one should not burn the bridges behind them; I'd like my relations with the company to be as they are now (. . .). The climate in the company, the relations in the department are really good and motivate us to stay with the company.

The same respondent also mentioned that in the past, he (and some of his colleagues) had been offered better pay and benefits, which made him consider a change of the employer. But he could not decide to leave because of the atmosphere at work and friendly relations with colleagues and the manager. The general observation from the above is that a supportive workplace climate is very important for employees in the Polish organizational culture. Employees value a harmonious, friendly atmosphere at work, which in many cases may outweigh lower pay.

4.2 Strengthening Employees' Identification with the Organization

Empirical evidence points to work team relations, workplace atmosphere, effective communication, cooperation, a respected superior, and individual professional development paths as factors significantly contributing to the formation of ties between employees and the organization (Fatima et al., 2020). Because of the strong masculinization of the Polish organizational culture, employee's identification with the organization is largely determined by the opportunities that come with one's workplace status and by the company's image (Sung et al., 2020). This observation is supported by similar opinions expressed by 34 of the respondents ($n = 34$). One of those who had the shortest length of service remarked:

I work here because no other private company in this country compares with this one. Most business majors graduates in this country dream of working here.

(. . .) I know that I could get better job offers from other companies, but the reputation of this one causes that I don't want to leave it yet.

Employees' ties with their organization are also strengthened by the awareness that their families, friends, and acquaintances view their jobs as very prestigious.

My job is highly valued by my family. They see that I'm appreciated at work and that professional development opportunities are big for me.

Although Polish employees strongly identify with their organizations, three of the respondents ($n = 3$) stated that the public image of their employers was a burden for them and that it somehow made them less satisfied and less proud of being good employees. The following opinions were expressed by employees from the general government sector:

Most of my colleagues identify with this institution It is not easy, though, because, frankly speaking, its image . . . outside is not good This institution frequently meets with considerable reluctance on the part of the public. I experience it very often myself.

In a masculine culture people are more inclined to demonstrate their individual achievements. This survey has showed that employees in firms with the Polish organizational culture are not different in that respect. Ten of the respondents ($n = 10$) stated that their identification with the company motivated them to work harder to distinguish themselves and, thus, to secure their employment. This attitude is well illustrated by the following citation:

I joined [this firm] because I felt it was a unique opportunity for me to work for a company like this one. For an IT graduate, a job with this company is a dream come true (. . .) and a promise of a great career.

Another respondent mentioned that during the first six months of his employment he had been given the opportunity to take part in his company's meeting with the NASA scientists. The post on the event received much publicity among the media, which boosted his reputation as a software professional.

4.3 Fair Pay

Pay fairness is investigated in management studies in a broader framework of organizational fairness (Petersen, 2014). The latter is assessed with respect to a variety of factors, including the remuneration system, the division of benefits and perquisites, employee development and promotion opportunities, procedures and criteria for awarding bonuses, and promoting or discharging employees, etc.

As a result of the Polish organizational culture having developed in a moderately well-off region, it is marked by strong aversion to uncertainty and the employees' appreciation of the stability of remuneration and benefits. Fairness of pay must be considered in relation to its levels. It is especially important in the less-well-to do regions of Poland and for low-earners. Employees functioning in the Polish organizational culture place high value on stable and well-paying jobs. Eighteen of the survey participants ($n = 18$) stated that pay was very important for them and another sixteen ($n = 16$) pointed to high salaries as one of the reasons why they were satisfied with their employers.

The level of pay is one of the main factors why I work for this company.

The answers of twenty respondents ($n = 20$) implied that interpersonal relations were important for assessing a pay system as fair. In their opinion, the supervisors play a key role regarding the form and content of communication about rewards.

A good word can be very effective; for instance, you handled the case well, you did the job well. On more than one occasion, the boss also rewarded me financially.

The last factor that the respondents related to the fairness of pay was the ratio between pay and the amount of time spent at work. One of the respondents mentioned that having to spend most of the day at work (and frequently stay late after hours), he had little time left for his family. He added, however, that its members understood the situation, because his salary compensated for the time they could not be together. He also observed:

(...) when you're a manager, the demands of the job cause that it is very difficult to work the number of hours planned. Working only between the designated hours can be a hindrance to achieving one's goals, I'm fully aware of it. If not for the financial incentives I receive now, I wouldn't be willing to sacrifice so many hours [to work].

4.4 Professional Development of Employees

An effective and just employee development system can help organizations to remain competitive by promoting high-skilled employees to strategic positions (Kooij et al., 2014). The availability of precise catalog of promotion and development opportunities makes it possible for employees to structure their aspirations and has a significant motivating effect on them.

Because the Polish organizational culture is an element of masculine society, it still pays a lot attention to power and status. Hence, professional development is considered very important by employees and the public and recognized as a symbol of success, self-realization, and a source of satisfaction with work. Several of the respondents' commented on professional development as follows:

For me, professional development is simply an ongoing opportunity to be trained, to improve my competencies. I basically do it every day. I use training provided by the training department and learn on my own to upgrade my competencies so that I can do my work to the best standard possible; besides, I also share knowledge with my subordinates.

Promotion always comes with two aspects: greater responsibility ... with slightly greater splendor attached to it, and money—a pay rise. But responsibility comes first; for me at least, this has always been the right hierarchy.

Twenty-seven respondents ($n = 27$) pointed to the importance of new and diverse tasks and frequent challenges significantly contribute to employee development. The most interesting of their answers are the following:

The job I do now can help me in the future. I have the opportunity to learn many new things. [They] can help me get a better position with another company.

As for me—I was given tasks that I had to cope with and I did. After a time, they created a special position for me.

The answers show that for employees operating in the Polish organizational culture professional development is a challenge that offers new opportunities, duties, and responsibility.

4.5 *Work–Life Balance*

The individualistic orientation of the Polish organizational culture and growing workplace demands require employees to spend more and more time (and effort) at work at the cost of their personal lives. Because of the current labor market situation employers can extend working time without provoking much protest from employees, who fear of losing their jobs. The study by Walentek (2019) established that employees in many Polish organizations were more and more tired, having to reconcile family roles and regular workplace duties with frequent overtimes.

An OECD survey ranked Poles fourth in the EU and twelfth in the world for the number of hours they spend working—1766 a year in 2020 (OECD, 2021). Among the EU Member States, Poles are third among the longest average working week (Eurostat, 2019). Almost three-thirds of the economically active population in Poland work more than 40 hours per week, with almost 13% working more than 50 hours (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 2019). It is important to note here that work intensity and requirements are much higher today than they were a decade ago (Walentek, 2019).

Although working life relations predominate, the number and quality of relations within family life is also significant. Most workplace commitments arising from interpersonal relations are made within the groups of collaborating workers. Therefore, Polish employees expect their employers to offer them flexible working time, teleworking, job-sharing, part-time working hours, facilities for parents (e.g., a nursery or a kindergarten in the company premises, events for families, family insurance, extra days off work, etc.), and special work–life balance training courses under the company HR policy. Twenty-five of the surveyed employees ($n = 25$) wanted their organizations to allow them some flexibility in performing their duties. The scale of the overwork problem and the importance of the foregoing measures for employees can be deduced from the following citations:

(...) our tasks are poorly planned, I feel I have to work “like crazy” or stay after hours.

They make me complete tasks very fast, instantly, but they don’t care what time I’ll be back home

(...) the key to improving the [workplace] atmosphere is better organization of working time, recruiting more people in the new year (...), more flexible working times, e.g., an option of taking a day off without notice, flexible work start and end times, or flexible weekly working time.

The survey participants indicated that the overwhelming majority of employees affected by workload peaks and troughs felt that they worked too hard, because they could waste no time if they wanted to complete all tasks by the end of the workday.

Nonetheless, work is recognized by Poles as one of the cardinal values in life (Czapiński & Panek, 2015). Some survey participants ($n = 15$) argued that working hard was necessary to be successful and that work gave sense to life.

I guess this can’t be changed It’s simply because of my character my desire to make things as best as possible.

I'm generally the kind of person who is very stressed having to work to deadlines Also, I'm very committed to what I'm doing. Perhaps I'm too emotional about the things I do. The main reason for this is that I want everything to be done to the best standard possible and on time.

The deficit of flexible work arrangements in the Polish organizational culture is accompanied by the employees' pursuit of training and development opportunities in their organizations, which they view as a way to secure their jobs and receive promotion. The masculine organizational culture believes that hard work leads to stability of employment and better jobs. The following citation explains the value put on work flexibility in the Polish organizational culture.

The only reason for which I left my previous employer was a lack of work flexibility. I find work flexibility [. . .] in my workplace to be more important than pay. I think that work flexibility is a great privilege for employees like me. In this company, I can work from home and run my own business at the same time. If I have some important time-bound commitment, I simply send an email [to the employer] with information about it or use the platform.

5 Discussion

The above discussion clearly shows that all five HR practices are important in the Polish organizational culture because they influence how employees define their expectations and commitments under psychological contracts. The components of the practices are presented in detail in Table 2.

For almost 65% of the respondents ($n = 36$), the HR practice "fostering a supportive workplace climate" proved to be the most important. The desire of Polish employees to work in an open, supportive climate is a reflection of some characteristics of individualistic society presented by Thomas et al. (2010). Some respondents rated a supportive workplace climate and a helpful supervisor as more important than high pay and benefits. This attitude is similar to that observed by McDonald et al. (2000), who demonstrated a strong association between a workplace climate and employees' readiness to show motivation, satisfaction with work, and involvement.

More than half of the respondents (60%; $n = 34$) agreed that measures supporting identification with the organization played a critical role for employees deciding between staying and leaving it. This opinion is meaningful in masculine and moderately individualistic organizational culture, such as Polish one, where employees' identification with their employers is mainly based on the possibilities associated with workplace status and the employer's image. A similar observation can be found in Sung et al. (2020). Because one of the major sources of employees' higher status is public regard for their employer, employees in the Polish organizational culture will preferably seek jobs with more prestigious or respectable employers. As the analysis of the survey data has shown, employees in such organizations are more motivated to work and more involved in their organization (more willing to continue employment). Similar findings can be found in the study by Talib et al. (2015).

Table 2 Key HR practices and their components contributing to the fulfillment of employees' psychological contracts

hr. Practice	Components Influencing the Fulfillment of a psychological contract
Creating a supportive organizational climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear rules of functioning in the workplace • Open communication • Respectful treatment • No internal divisions • Comfort of work • Harmonious, friendly workplace atmosphere • Helpful leadership
Strengthening employees' identification with the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace status and company's image • Emphasis on the social value of work
Fair pay system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable, well-paying job • Clear pay and promotion rules • Equality of pay and benefits • Performance-based rewards • Information about pay and rewards (pecuniary and non-pecuniary) communicated by the superior
Professional development of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear career paths • Clear rules of promotion • Opportunities to learn new competencies • Increasing employees' market value
Work-life balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing flexibility in coping with family and workplace responsibilities • Allowing flexible working hours to meet individual employees' needs • Rewarding for extra time and effort spent working • Supervisor's support when needed

Source: Compiled by the author

Another HR practice that the respondents ($n = 34$) found to be important in the Polish organizational culture is fair pay. Employees' perception of pay fairness is more positive when they are satisfied with their salaries or wages and benefits. This can be achieved by ensuring transparency and objectivity of the remuneration rules. In the individualistic culture of Polish organizations, the employees' knowledge of how remuneration is set depends on their superiors, who decide about the form and content of the information about their pay. Stability of pay was also important to respondents, as a factor protecting them and their families in periods of unexpected difficulties such as a loss of a job, illness, etc. Respondents' opinions on the role of fair and stable pay were consistent with the findings reported by Khan (2018), who found fair pay to be able to promote civic attitudes among employees.

The analysis showed, as expected, that professional development was highly valued by both employees and the general public, who consider it a symbol of achievement, self-realization, and professional success. Nearly 50% of the respondents ($n = 27$) acknowledged that promotions and professional development were very important to them. They also expected employers to provide them with development opportunities matching their individual needs. Employees'

expectations regarding career paths are associated with the masculine culture in Polish organizations that values power and high status but also, because of its individualistic orientation, encourages employees to develop professional skills, to achieve, and to seek positions involving greater decision-making capacity.

HRM practices enabling employees to achieve balance between work and life were considered important by more than 44% of the respondents ($n = 25$). They argued that more flexible working arrangements were necessary for them to cope with the heavy workload and to have more time for personal development. Some respondents stated that flexible working hours would allow them to participate in training they needed to develop professionally and acquire special skills enabling them to compete in the labor market. It has been found that the availability of flexi-work options allowing employees to reconcile work, family life, and professional development increases their involvement and satisfaction with work (Walentek, 2019; Kelly et al., 2020).

6 Conclusion

The qualitative analysis showed that five HRM practices (1) creating a supportive workplace climate; (2) strengthening employees' identification with their organizations, (3) ensuring fairness of pay; (4) supporting employee development, and 5) fostering work–life balance—were especially important to employees. These culturally meaningful HR practices have an influence on how they form their expectations toward employers in relation to psychological contracts. Based on the respondents' answers, two of them—a supportive work environment facilitating employee development and friendly, straightforward relations with the superiors—were identified as contributing the most to the fulfillment of psychological contracts in the Polish organizational culture. The study findings confirm that it places a special value on practices emphasizing managers' concern for employees' well-being and communicating them that they are valuable individuals for organizations.

This study of the fulfillment of psychological contracts has several practical implications for institutions and companies operating within the Polish organizational culture and their managers, which can help them understand and manage psychological contracts. First of all, it shows that the shape of a psychological contract is not determined by the beliefs, values, imagination, and expectations of only one party (the employee), but also, at least to some extent, by the actions and promises made by managers and supervisors. Employers who understand that psychological contracts are dynamic rather than static arrangements have a better chance of predicting employees' behaviors and reactions in the workplace and of selecting HR practices that will align them with organizational goals (Schalk & Roe, 2007). Organizations and their management need to influence employees' expectations in order to make them more productive and lessen the possibility of negative consequences in cases when their psychological contracts are broken. It is also of importance that organizations inform their employees in a transparent and effective

manner about changes affecting business circumstances and all internal and external factors influencing their ability to honor the promises made to employees.

Few organizations have the knowledge allowing them to effectively manage their employees in the realities of the Polish economy and in the face of global economic trends and unexpected challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Showing which HR practices and activities work best in the Polish organizational culture, this study can serve as a reference for employers who want to improve the management of employees' expectations.

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